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Oral history interview with Elsa Rady, 2010  
August 12-13

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**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Elsa Rady on August 12-13, 2010. The interview took place in Los Angeles, CA, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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 Elsa Rady at the artist's home and studio in Los Angeles, California, on August twelfth, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is disc number one.

Good afternoon.

ELSA RADY: Hi.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a pleasure to be here surrounded by your garden and your flowers.

MS. RADY: And it's a pleasure to have you here.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm looking forward to this very much.

MS. RADY: Me, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Good, good.

MS. RADY: My — I was born in Manhattan —

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

MS. RADY: — in 1943.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. What was the date?

MS. RADY: July twenty-ninth.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And I went to a private school, which was dreadful —

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: — for me. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Why?

MS. RADY: It was Little Red.

MS. RIEDEL: Little Red?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Was the name of the school?

MS. RADY: Yeah. Little Red Schoolhouse.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? In Manhattan?

MS. RADY: Yeah. On Bleecker Street.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Loaded with Communists [Ms. Riedel laughs], blacklisted, and —

MS. RIEDEL: The children? The teachers?

MS. RADY: Everyone, but my parents — my mother was absolute — my — my grandparents on my father's side were very active socialists —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — and they were —

MS. RIEDEL: What were their names?

MS. RADY: My mother was Lily Mehlman, M-E-H-L-M-A-N, Rady, and my father is — was Simon, —

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

MS. RADY: — and he wanted an initial, and he gave himself one, which was Y, Simon Y. Rady [Ms. Riedel laughs], such a nut.

MS. RIEDEL: He had a great sense of humor clearly.

MS. RADY: Oh, God, and we had — so I — I — I hated Little Red. I absolutely hated it beyond all —

MS. RIEDEL: And why did you hate it? Did you start there in kindergarten?

MS. RADY: I started there when I was four — five.

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

MS. RADY: You know, I'm not a believer of "when the child is ready, that's when the child will learn."

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

MS. RADY: That is a crock, and because there isn't a child on the planet, I'd like to see that child, who doesn't need guidance and a strong hand in making things happen in their life. My parents were unusual.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. We should talk about your parents because they were very unusual.

MS. RADY: Yeah. My mother was Lily Mehlman Rady. My father was Simon Y. Rady, and he — they didn't realize how much I hated Little Red.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. What did your father do, Elsa?

MS. RADY: In New York City, my father was head of Decca Records.

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh.

MS. RADY: In Paris, he was president of RCA Victor Records. In Los Angeles, he came back as president of RCA Victor.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. RADY: Then he started his own company called Projects —

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

MS. RADY: — and he did a series of — there were 12 books. He started with *Life* magazine and —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — there were 12 books and the history of the United States.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Just a general history of the country or —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And he took one year. He was — he called a family conference and he said, “Well, how would you girls feel if you couldn’t go out and buy anything?” We said, “Well, we don’t need anything. We’ve got everything.” I mean, I came back to the United States with — I wish I had clothing like that now.

MS. RIEDEL: You came back to the United States from?

MS. RADY: Paris.

MS. RIEDEL: Now when did you go to — when did you move to Paris?

MS. RADY: We moved to Paris in 1956.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So this — so let’s — maybe we should move through Little Red and your mom’s time dancing —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — with Martha Graham and then move on to Paris.

MS. RADY: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay?

MS. RADY: My — my mother danced with Martha Graham for 11 years.

MS. RIEDEL: From when to when? Do you remember roughly?

MS. RADY: Sometime in the ’20s.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: She was — she was one of the original eight.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Yes. And she had the distinct — see, what no one really knew was that Graham was bipolar —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — and she was also alcoholic.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And she had a pianist named Louie Hearst [Louis Horst?].

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

MS. RADY: And he was, you know — and she — she turned one day and she said to Louie, “Lily’s off the beat, she’s late,” and Louie, who would sit at the piano with two Dachshunds draped over his shoulder like a stole, “Lily’s never late,” with which Graham got up and whacked my mother across the face, and my mother, being my mother, slapped her back.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MS. RADY: And she’s the only person that ever responded in that way.

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

MS. RADY: And she meant every gesture of it.

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

MS. RADY: And that evening — you know, all the dancers lived in their studios —

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

MS. RADY: — because they got \$10 a performance, and so they had to teach.

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

MS. RADY: Every single one of them taught and, you know, in that group was Jane Dudley, Sophie Maslow, Dorothy Bird and her sister who I don't remember the name of, and they had danced one dance called "Heretic," —

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

MS. RADY: — and they were performing at Radio City Music Hall.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: The stage wasn't big enough —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — for the 12 girls.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MS. RADY: Yeah. In that group was a woman named Irlis Gilmore, who was Isamu Noguchi's sister.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And they were very close. It was a very close-knit unit.

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

MS. RADY: And —

MS. RIEDEL: Did the dancers used to come over to the house when you were a child?

MS. RADY: Only one, named Sylvia Chen —

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

MS. RADY: — who my father nicknamed "Silly."

MS. RIEDEL: Was your mom still dancing when you were a child?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: She had stopped?

MS. RADY: She stopped.

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

MS. RADY: Now, as she put it, "I stopped to have you bastards."

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear. [Laughs.]

MS. RADY: And she meant every word of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MS. RADY: Yeah. Good old Lily. And Lily was a force to be reckoned with.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: She — my father was deadly opposed to my going into ceramics —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — as a profession.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: He would argue with me senselessly.

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

MS. RADY: “How are you going to make a living by selling a mug that sells for \$2, and you’ll get a dollar?” And my mother really went to town with him and said, —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — “Leave her alone,” which he had a lot of problems leaving me alone.

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

MS. RADY: When I got into Chouinard [Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA], which was an extraordinary school, —

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

MS. RADY: — my —

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe let’s hold off on Chouinard a little bit, because let’s talk a little bit more about just growing up still in New York —

MS. RADY: Oh.

MS. RIEDEL: — before you get to LA.

MS. RADY: I was —

MS. RIEDEL: Let’s talk about being — being a potter, as a child being exposed to that.

MS. RADY: I was — we went — my mentor was Else Sackler.

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

MS. RADY: E-L-S-E.

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

MS. RADY: And she had been married to Arthur Sackler —

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

MS. RADY: — and that marriage ended. He said, “I’ll be back after Marietta has my child, but I cannot have a bastard.” She said, “You’re not coming back,” and she said, “not here.”

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

MS. RADY: Now, Else would take me — she took — she made all of us go to Greenwich House.

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

MS. RADY: That’s where I learned how to pot and —

MS. RIEDEL: And did she have — they have an amazing Asian collection from early — a lot of clay.

MS. RADY: Well, Arthur had an extensive collection. Arthur married three times.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: The last wife is now a Lady Jill Sackler. She’s about as much of a lady as my left foot.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And — and Elizabeth and Carol, the daughters, are still in lawsuit with them, with her. I went up to Arthur’s apartment. He said, “Sit down, close your eyes, I want to show you something.” Else sat downstairs in the car smoking. So I closed my eyes. He said, “Now cup your hands,” and I cupped my hands, and he put this object in my lap. He said, “Now open your eyes.” It was a compote by Van Gogh or Van Gogh [pronounced “Goch”] of a —

MS. RIEDEL: A ceramic piece?

MS. RADY: Yep. He had done —

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: — ceramics in Tahiti.

MS. RIEDEL: Van Gogh or Gauguin?

MS. RADY: Gauguin. I'm sorry.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: Gauguin.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RADY: And this was a woman bent over washing herself. The reflection was in the bowl of the compote.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow! I didn't realize he had done clay. I knew a little bit about wood.

MS. RADY: He did when he went to Tahiti.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And so — I mean, I thought I was going to die. I was so taken by this —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — and —

MS. RIEDEL: What about it in particular? How old were you?

MS. RADY: About 21.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And it was — it was — I had never held history.

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

MS. RADY: You know, at — at Else's house, there were beautiful pots, and she had gorgeous Lucie Ries.

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

MS. RADY: But I never thought — you know, this is — this is something beyond my imagination.

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

MS. RADY: That to hold this piece.

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

MS. RADY: It was just an extraordinary —

MS. RIEDEL: Was it glazed?

MS. RADY: It was glazed, and there was — there were — there was ivy twisted around the compote, the stem of the compote.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And when I came back from New York, I think it was 1985, I had dinner at my — one of my professor's, Ralph Pesara.

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

MS. RADY: I said, "You will not believe what I have just held." He said, "You couldn't have done that." I said, "I did." "You couldn't have done that." I said, "Well, there is — there is the compote, the woman is washing herself. She's looking down into the water as she washes herself, and there are three leaves of ivy that are missing." So,

of course, he went into his thing, looked it up. He said, “Oh, my God, you did hold it.”

MS. RIEDEL: So he found a book that had a photo?

MS. RADY: Yes. Now, unfortunately, Sackler’s last wife is — see, Else was a milliner.

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

MS. RADY: Precise, just the precision in her work —

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

MS. RADY: — was just not to be believed.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: So she would — I — I would often stay with her in New York.

MS. RIEDEL: Even as a child?

MS. RADY: When we came back from Paris.

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

MS. RADY: So I was about 15.

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

MS. RADY: And she had purchased a pair of pants of [Emilio] Pucci, but they were plain white and she had taken them apart to make a pattern because the pants fit her so well.

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

MS. RADY: And it’s funny. When Carol asked me to do a book on Else, Carol promptly lost the contents of the book. We’re not going to go into that. [Laughs.] My sister said, “Yeah, no, Carol is — that’s Carol’s business to lose things.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And so Carol lost this, the whole content of these that I spent so much time photographing, not me. I had a professional photographer doing the work on that thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Photographing what?

MS. RADY: Photographing her collection.

MS. RIEDEL: Carol’s collection or Else’s collection?

MS. RADY: Else’s collection.

MS. RIEDEL: Of ceramics?

MS. RADY: Of ceramics. There were over a hundred pieces.

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

MS. RADY: And they were — the Lucie Ries that she had were absolutely unbelievable.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And so Carol said, “Well, why don’t you select the pieces you think that are really spectacular,” and I did.

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

MS. RADY: Well, Carol lost the content. This should not —

MS. RIEDEL: The photographs.



MS. RADY: Scratch this part. [Ms. Riedel laughs.] Carol lost the whole project.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have the negatives, though, perhaps to reprint?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. RADY: She demanded the negatives. She demanded the text.

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

MS. RADY: She demanded — I mean, she demanded it all, and I sent it all.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Now, she has an apartment, three apartments in Bordertown [Watertown, MA?], and it is probably stuck away someplace —

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

MS. RADY: — in that.

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

MS. RADY: When Else died, I remember my sister called me and said, “Else’s very sick.” I said, “I will be on that plane tonight” —

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

MS. RADY: — and I got on that plane and I flew all night —

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

MS. RADY: — and both Elizabeth and Carol were shocked when I walked through the door. They said, “My God, how did you” — I said, “I flew all night.”

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

MS. RADY: And she — it was a truly — for me, a tremendous loss.

MS. RIEDEL: Let’s talk about — she was one of your primary mentors.

MS. RADY: She was my —

MS. RIEDEL: What in particular did she teach you? What did you learn from her that was so significant?

MS. RADY: I once asked her, I said, “How come you singled me out?” She said, “When I took you to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City] and saw that little face looking so intently at a piece, I thought, ‘This is something I have got to pursue’” —

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

MS. RADY: — and she did.

MS. RIEDEL: So she took you under her wing?

MS. RADY: She did.

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you? Do you remember when you began?

MS. RADY: Eleven.

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh. So very young.

MS. RADY: Well, I used to see her in — in ceramic class at —

MS. RIEDEL: At Greenwich House?

MS. RADY: At Greenwich House.

MS. RIEDEL: And why was she there?

MS. RADY: She was taking ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: Because she was taking class, as well?

MS. RADY: Yeah. And her husband, ex-husband, decided that she was wasting her time, that she should become a collector.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: The Lucie Ries that she has are unbelievable. We used to drink hot chocolate out of Hans Coper mugs.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh. She did become a collector.

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

MS. RIEDEL: So as a child, you were exposed to the finest possible work, —

MS. RADY: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: — it sounds, on an international scale.

MS. RADY: Absolutely. When we moved to Paris, —

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you?

MS. RADY: I was just turning 12.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And when we moved to Paris, I was — I was two years behind in mathematics and four years behind in English grammar. Thank you, Little Red.

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

MS. RADY: Grammar, they didn't teach you grammar there.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the problem, was there was just no boundaries? There was no structure?

MS. RADY: No. "The child will —

MS. RIEDEL: It was free flow?

MS. RADY: — learn when the child wants to." That is a crock. [Ms. Riedel laughs.] That is one of the biggest crocks I have yet to come by.

MS. RIEDEL: I was going to say elementary school instruction I would have to agree.

MS. RADY: I hated it. I hated it and my parents said to me, "Why didn't you tell us?"

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

MS. RADY: And I said, "I thought that was the only school I could go to."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: It was pathetic.

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

MS. RADY: So my father decided when I was 11, no more private school. We were going to go to public school.

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

MS. RADY: And I flourished.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. RADY: Yeah. Joan of Arc Junior High School, between Amsterdam and Columbus [Avenues], —

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

MS. RADY: — and Dr. Bella something was the principal, and she'd come on the loudspeaker, bom-bom-bom [sings three notes], and she'd say, "This is your principal, and we are now going to" — I don't know if we had to say a prayer, you know. My parents were agnostics. There was little — you know, they — they just raised us as — as they could.

MS. RIEDEL: Was your father a writer? Was he an executive? Was he a musician? What was he —

MS. RADY: He was a fabulous musician.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. What did he play? What didn't he play?

MS. RADY: Well, he played the violin. What Jewish boy didn't? [Ms. Riedel laughs.] And my grandmother used to go out to get him with a rolling pin. "Get in the house!"

MS. RIEDEL: Practice that violin.

MS. RADY: To practice.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: And his father, Abram, —

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

MS. RADY: — wanted to — wanted my father to become a wallpaper hanger with him. My mother said, "No doing, unh-unh." So it was the war. He had gone to Wisconsin for a year that my mother paid for. Her — his parents were not about to have their darling check out and go to college, God forbid. He wanted to be a biochemist. He was two units short of getting his degree —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — as a biochemist.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: He had a very precise, methodical mind —

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

MS. RADY: — and he would always say, "If you're not going to do it well, don't start."

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

MS. RADY: He just — I mean, that was it. Do not start.

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

MS. RADY: And so here we go with my wanting to be in ceramics and —

MS. RIEDEL: So just one question. How did he get from being — wanting to be a biochemist to being a musician and then working —

MS. RADY: He was — there was a camp in Upland [CA?] called Camp Shanks [NY?].

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

MS. RADY: He was the musical director.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: It's a very funny story. Oscar Levant was on the bill to play.

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

MS. RADY: Now, I don't think Oscar Levant was quite as whacked-out as he was later in life, but Levant's passion was [George] Gershwin —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — and, of course, Gershwin died very, very young. I think he was 39 years old, and Levant used to have a television show —

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

MS. RADY: — that we would watch in Los Angeles. By that time he was picking and clicking and just really a mess.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: But interesting, interesting.

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

MS. RADY: I mean, brilliant stories.

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

MS. RADY: Anyway, so my father went to talk to Levant about Gershwin and Berlin. Now, Daddy had done something with Irving Berlin's music —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — and Irving Berlin wrote a letter back, this was to Paris, and said no one had ever treated his music as sensitively before. So, I mean, this man was a — he was — he was a tough cookie, my father, —

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

MS. RADY: — and he wanted the best. He wanted the best for his children. He wanted the best for my mother.

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

MS. RADY: He had an unusual voice.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. RADY: Yeah. And, of course, you know, he — he was ready to pack it in and, you know, he wanted to be a biochemist and that — when he came back, he was the musical director.

MS. RIEDEL: He came back from where?

MS. RADY: He came back from Wisconsin.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: The war broke out.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: Everybody was doing something.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: My mother would — they would — she did a dance called "Song to an Unborn Child."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Where you see her — there's — it's in one of the — two of the catalogs.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. I've seen photos, I'm sure.

MS. RADY: Yes. Where she's cradling a child —

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

MS. RADY: — and that — every one of them worked for the Spanish Revolution to raise money because there was such atrocities that were going on, —

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

MS. RADY: — not quite like *Evita*, but close.

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

MS. RADY: I always think of Madonna.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: [Sings tune from *Evita*, “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina.”] Dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. Get out of here. Anyway, so growing up in a household that was — they made sure to expose us to the arts.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it sounds like it. It sounds as if there was no way around it.

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: That was both their passions.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. You have one sister?

MS. RADY: I have one sister Jane, —

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

MS. RADY: — who is 23 months older than I.

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

MS. RADY: My mother actually had — for that time it was late.

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

MS. RADY: She was 32, I think, when she had my sister.

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

MS. RADY: And I once asked my father, I said, “What was the greatest event in your life?” He said, “Having you two.” There’s a wonderful picture of my father, who’s so angry at us in Venice. The look of kill [Ms. Riedel laughs] was on that face —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MS. RADY: — and he meant every — he — he was sitting. We were sitting at the hotel having, you know, juice, croissants.

MS. RIEDEL: You were kids?

MS. RADY: Hmm. And you could see the flames jumping out of his collar. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And, I mean, it was like the — we were going back for my sister’s graduation from college. She went to Bard [Annandale-on-Hudson, NY].

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

MS. RADY: And she — and they had oversold my father’s ticket and he turned to me. He said, “I’m going to deck this guy.” I said, “Why?” We sat in the Los Angeles Airport in 106-degree weather. My father went down. He said, “You’re sending us both first class.” My father, you know, he was six three. He never would sit — go first class. It’s ridiculous. Anyway, they sent us first class. So we flew overnight and got into a car and we drove out to my sister’s graduation. There’s a wonderful picture. I would like to show you this.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. We'll pause this.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So I'm turning the tape back on now.

MS. RADY: He was so pissed off.

MS. RIEDEL: And he won't even look at the camera.

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: This was Sorrento. This was Sorrento. [Telephone rings.] I'm not going to take that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: This is Jane, my sister.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Hmm.

MS. RADY: That's Josh.

MS. RIEDEL: And Josh must be —

MS. RADY: Thirty now.

MS. RIEDEL: — one of your nieces or —

MS. RADY: My nephew.

MS. RIEDEL: — nephew?

MS. RADY: And this is Josh holding my nephew.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Well, we'll get there. This looks like —

MS. RADY: All right.

MS. RIEDEL: — it's much further ahead of where we are.

MS. RADY: Okay. Wait a minute. Let me get this one — try to find this —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: — one picture.

MS. RIEDEL: So in particular, I know that Else Sackler introduced you to ceramics, but she also introduced you to Asian ceramics in particular, didn't she?

MS. RADY: Yes, she had a houseful —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: — of Asian ceramics.

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

MS. RADY: And she was —

MS. RIEDEL: What about that was so — oh. Oh, I'm looking at exquisite photos of —

MS. RADY: At age probably 24, 25.

MS. RIEDEL: She's striking, just striking.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So we're talking about Else Sackler's collection and its impact on you as a child, as a young person.

MS. RADY: It was tremendous.

MS. RIEDEL: And what in particular about — about the forms, about the glazes, the colors spoke to you?

MS. RADY: It wasn't — it wasn't about color.

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

MS. RADY: It wasn't about form, although her Lucie Rie collection just knocked me out.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: We used to drink hot chocolate —

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

MS. RADY: — out of Hans Coper and Lucie Rie pouring pots.

MS. RIEDEL: So it seems as if the arts were an extraordinary part of your childhood from the beginning.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RADY: Now, I think this is really an important part; I think, you may not. I have tried, I feel the only way you can develop, from my purposes, is to create a series. The first series I did was STILL LIFES.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: The second series on a different type of show was the LILY STILL LIFE.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: And when my mother walked in and took a look at it, she was, like, "Ooh, I'm so embarrassed," and then I did a show in Japan and for the life of me, I could not figure out what was wrong with that show.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And then I realized — I decided to paint the shelves black, not that wonderful gray, and it — it just ruined it for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.], Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RADY: But the necessity of my growth —

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

MS. RADY: — is about developing a series, one that you can — see, because to sit down and just make a pot is crazy. That's nuts. It's a waste of time.

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

MS. RADY: You know, you have to have an aim. You have to have a body of work that you've created to convey a language.

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

MS. RADY: And the truly big event in my career was Holly Solomon.

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

MS. RADY: She —

MS. RIEDEL: The dealer in New York?

MS. RADY: — took — yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: When did you meet her and how did you meet her?

MS. RADY: I met Holly in 1985.

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

MS. RADY: And so I —

MS. RIEDEL: You were living in LA, in Venice?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And she was in New York?

MS. RADY: Yes. She had seen some of my pieces that Jim Corcoran, the dealer, had purchased.

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

MS. RADY: And so I remember a friend of mine, Karen McCready, who was the head of Crown Point Press.

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

MS. RADY: Karen has since died, unfortunately, at the age of 38 of colon cancer.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MS. RADY: Yeah. But Karen went with me that night, and I went up to Holly and I said, “I’m Elsa Rady.” She said, “Go into my office right now.” So I went into the office. Holly used to wear her mother’s ring on this finger and always —

MS. RIEDEL: Index finger?

MS. RADY: — point — yes. Always she — it was the fickle finger of fate with Holly, and she would — in fact, I remember telling — I told this story at her memorial at the Guggenheim [Museum, New York City].

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

MS. RADY: I said, “I was one of the last ones in to the gallery, and Holly — I — I — I was so nervous on my first show there. I said, ‘Oh, my God, I don’t know if it’s good, I don’t know if it’s bad, I’m just — I don’t know,’ and she said, ‘Go into my office.’ So I went into her office and she said, ‘Kid, the finger, I’ll tell you when it’s shit [Ms. Riedel laughs],’ and she would, and she did.” She was such an inspiration. She was a friend.

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

MS. RADY: She was a mentor.

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

MS. RADY: She said, “I am going to pull you by your hair and get you out of this craft crap.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And she said, “And your prices are ridiculous. Four hundred dollars for a bowl? They should be 4,000 [dollars] for a bowl.” And she said, “And anyway, I don’t want one bowl, I want you to do” — and thus came the STILL LIFES.

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

MS. RADY: First —

MS. RIEDEL: So she actually suggested the concept of — of grouping things together or no?

MS. RADY: No. No, no. That was me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: But she literally yanked me by the hair —



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

MS. RADY: — and she said, “This is over, this” —

MS. RIEDEL: And by that, she meant?

MS. RADY: Four hundred dollars for a very large bowl.

MS. RIEDEL: And by this point, the pieces were no longer functional, were they? They were already on pedestals. They were — were they bolted down? Were they fully sculptural pieces?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So this is the mid-’80s?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: I started with Holly in ’85.

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

MS. RADY: And she was — one morning she woke up [laughs] and she said, “I have to have caffeine. I have to have caffeine.” So I got up and I made her a cup of coffee. She went back to sleep. I woke her up and I said, “I’m going to kill you. You’re going to drink this fucking cup of coffee [Ms. Riedel laughs] or I’ll know why,” and she — she was — she was unpredictable.

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

MS. RADY: One of our greatest pleasures was going to the Papaya King and having two hot dogs each and —

MS. RIEDEL: Where was that? The Papaya King?

MS. RADY: There’s one on 86th Street and there was —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: — one in the 60s.

MS. RIEDEL: All right.

MS. RADY: And it — it was a very tutorial time in my life.

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

MS. RADY: And extremely — you know, I did the rectilinear shelf.

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

MS. RADY: Then I did the round shelf where I took —

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

MS. RADY: — a circle and I bent —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — the back which that hung on the wall.

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

MS. RADY: Of course, I had one dealer who hung the things upside down, and I called him and I said, “You’ve got 24 hours to get my work back to me *now*, not tomorrow, not the next day.” “But I’m driving there.” I said, “I don’t give a flying fuck how you get here. That work is to arrive in Los Angeles now.” You know, I mean, you know, people that I know have homes up in Idaho and they said they couldn’t understand how come none of the pieces were fitting [laughs]. I said, “The goddamn shelf was upside down.”

MS. RIEDEL: Shelf was upside down.

MS. RADY: And I always have an inset, you know, a depressed —

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. RADY: So that the system can go in and be bolted down.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I can't even imagine how they could have been hung.

MS. RADY: I don't know, but I know I saw him —

MS. RIEDEL: Was the gallery in Idaho?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: The Ketchum, and in Idaho [Sun Valley]. I think — I don't know. Idaho, Idaho. And he — I saw him at an opening at Pepperdine [University, Malibu, CA] —

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

MS. RADY: — and I thought, "Over my dead body, I'm not walking to say hello. He can — he sees me, good, let him lift his ass up and say something to me." Not an apology. Nothing. Nothing. And, you know, one thing that Holly did teach me —

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

MS. RADY: — if you don't respect the work you do, then you're fighting a lost battle.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And if you don't — you — you work from the heart.

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

MS. RADY: And it's not 50 percent. If you're not giving 100 percent, you're going to be in a lot of trouble, and she was adamant about that.

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

MS. RADY: She just — you know, she was — she was an unusual, brilliant woman. [Laughs.] We were at the Modern [Museum of Modern Art, New York City] and there was a couple in front of us and she said, "Now you see, Elsa, that's what I'd like for you. They're a nice couple. They look like they respect each other. That's what I want for you." Get out of the museum and the woman says to the husband, "Harry, get the car." I said, "Holly, is that what you want for me?" [Ms. Riedel laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, Holly and Else Sackler and your mother were really —

MS. RADY: Oh, God, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — your inspirations or your mentors —

MS. RADY: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — throughout your life and throughout theirs.

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: And Holly was a friend, a coach, —

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

MS. RADY: — a caregiver, —

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

MS. RADY: — caretaker.

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

MS. RADY: Her artists were her own.

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

MS. RADY: And she made sure that every stinking thing that we did, if it wasn't good, it's not going to come in.

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

MS. RADY: In 1994, it was five weeks before my show, one of my shows with Holly, —

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

MS. RADY: — and we had an earthquake.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Seventy-one pieces of mine went down.

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh.

MS. RADY: And I had called Holly. I said, "We've had an earthquake, 71 pieces are down." She said, "Okay, we've got to get people to stop — give me a chance," and so, you know, she went calling, and the people that sent me money was — were John and Jill Walsh, John was the director of the Getty [J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles] and a tremendous force in my life.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: My internist, Roberta Smith, sent me a thousand dollars, and an artist by the name of Laddie Dill, Laddie John Dill —

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: — was knocking on my door at 9 a.m., handed me a check for \$5,000, and said, "If you pay me back, well, okay. If you don't pay me back, okay."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Now, Laddie is to a fault the most generous human being I know.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you know him before he arrived on your door?

MS. RADY: We went to school together.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: We went to Chouinard.

MS. RIEDEL: Chouinard.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about Chouinard, because we really haven't talked about that —

MS. RADY: What a place.

MS. RIEDEL: — at all. You started there in '62?

MS. RADY: I — I went there on a — a friend of mine said, "My mother's making me go to art school."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] How unusual.

MS. RADY: Hmm. On Saturday.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: I said, "Do they have a ceramic division?" and she said, "I think so."

MS. RIEDEL: This was when you were in LA?

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

MS. RIEDEL: And you'd moved here from New York?

MS. RADY: Yes. This was in 1958.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And I went every Saturday.

MS. RIEDEL: And was it at Chouinard?

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

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And had you — you had finished high school?

MS. RADY: Barely —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: — and why it was barely, the teacher that taught ceramics was flunking me.

MS. RIEDEL: In high school?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You were being flunked in ceramics?

MS. RADY: Yes. Her name — her name was Lucy Roberts but she changed it to Lucille Robert [French pronunciation].

MS. RIEDEL: And why were you being flunked?

MS. RADY: I would go into the class at lunch, and I would practice making cylinders.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: "Lucille Hats Roberts," I used to call her, would never let — she didn't know how to use a wheel.

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

MS. RADY: And the kids saw me using the wheel, and they wanted to learn how.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. RADY: Unh-unh. [Negative.]

MS. RIEDEL: And you had learned at Greenwich House?

MS. RADY: And I had learned at Greenwich House. All of that stopped when we got to France.

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

MS. RADY: When we came back to California — when we moved to California, that's when it started up again on Saturday for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: Otto Heino taught — well, actually, Ralph Bacerra taught the Saturday class.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: Otto Heino taught part of the Saturday class.

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

MS. RADY: Vivika [Heino] was one of the most gifted human beings I — she was a great weaver. She was a

fabulous silversmith. She —

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Yep. She was an unbelievable — her knowledge —

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: — was so outstanding in so many different fields.

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

MS. RADY: One day she said [laughs] — she was sitting with us, my sister and me, at the dinner for the show at Santa Barbara [Museum of Art, CA].

MS. RIEDEL: The Mapplethorpe show? Okay.

MS. RADY: Yeah. “In Dialogue,” it was called [“In Dialogue: The Art of Elsa Rady and Robert Mapplethorpe,” 1993].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And Otto and she came in to the room and she said, “I want to walk around and look at this with you.”

MS. RIEDEL: Aww.

MS. RADY: And I said, “It’s my pleasure.” So we walked around. We looked. She said, “Now you see, damn it, that I told you you could be one of the best people in my class, but, damn it,” and she turned to my sister, and she said, “and you know what she did when I told her that? She took off for two weeks.”

MS. RIEDEL: Why?

MS. RADY: The responsibility of a — how shall I put it? The responsibility of having a compliment was very hard for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I — and Vivika was like fire, and there was one exercise that she used to do and I would say, “Viv, you gotta get this on tape.” She’d take one — a one-pound ball of clay, and she would make 30 different shapes out of that one form, one ball of clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MS. RADY: One pound.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MS. RADY: I said, “It has to be done. This is going to be one of the most extraordinary teaching.”

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

MS. RADY: She said, “Oh, I don’t have any time.” I said, “Then make time,” and she, “I don’t wanna” — I said, “Please, Vivika, please.” She said, “Ahh, maybe next year.”

MS. RIEDEL: Never happened.

MS. RADY: No. And Vivika died in 1995.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So she must have died right after — fairly quickly after your show, yes?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I know she died fast.

MS. RADY: Well, she had cancer —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — of the liver and she said to me, “Boy, I hope this is not from all of those years that Otto and I slept

in the studio —”

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

MS. RADY: “— and breathed in all those chemicals.”

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

MS. RADY: And she — I was getting ready for a show. She said, “You’re getting ready for that show, aren’t you?” I said, “Yeah.” I said, “Vivika, I’m going to come out. I’ll be up as soon as I — I’ve got most of the work fired.”

MS. RIEDEL: She was up in Ohio?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right?

MS. RADY: And she had gone to a charlatan doctor.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MS. RADY: Yep. And she called me one afternoon. She said, “Oh, Elsa, I had an accident.” I said, “Hey, it’s called in sickness and in health. There’s nothing great about it. There’s nothing fancy about it. That is what it’s called, in sickness and in health, and so what.” And she — you know, she was erratic. I’m positive that she’d go on a roll at 4 o’clock, because she was always on diet pills.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Yeah. And it would hit at about 4, and the tirades that would start. She had a big sign over the sink: “Are You Aware?”

MS. RIEDEL: Who else — who were the other students while you were there? Vivika taught and Ralph and Otto. Now we’re talking about when you were in college.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: Suki Diamond, Juanita Jimenez, Lemare Musino [sp].

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Was Ken Price there?

MS. RADY: No. Ken was SC [University of Southern California, Los Angeles].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Was there much back and forth between Chouinard and USC and Otis [College of Art and Design, Los Angeles]?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. RADY: Susan Peterson —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — taught at USC.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. RADY: And there was a lot of competition between Susan and Vivika.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Friendly competition or —

MS. RADY: Cat fighting.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Really?

MS. RADY: Yes. And Susan was — I don’t know. I guess she was right. I don’t know. I’m not —

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

MS. RADY: — able to make a judgment call on that.

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

MS. RADY: It —

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

MS. RADY: — was —

MS. RIEDEL: Now was [Peter] Voulkos — were — had they started up over at Otis?

MS. RADY: Voulkos —

MS. RIEDEL: Voulkos and [Paul] Soldner and Mason, John Mason?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So was there much back and forth among the students?

MS. RADY: Well, Pete was a wild man.

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

MS. RADY: An absolute wild man, and there was one story that a collector told me. She walked in to his studio up in — God, I forget where he was. Not Banning. Archie Bray [Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, MT].

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right, right, right. Before Otis even. Yeah.

MS. RADY: Yeah. And he was sound asleep on a couch smoking a fat cigar. You know, one of the most talented people, and he just always looks at me like I've lost my marbles. Henry Takemoto —

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

MS. RADY: — did such beautiful work.

MS. RIEDEL: I've heard that repeatedly.

MS. RADY: And I, Henry, — I worked at Franciscan China.

MS. RIEDEL: When you were done with school, starting in '66?

MS. RADY: Well, —

MS. RIEDEL: Or even in school?

MS. RADY: — in school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And we had to do a project that I was the color coordinator for all the murals.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: They were huge murals that went into Disneyland.

MS. RIEDEL: That Franciscan China was working on?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: Mary Blair was the lead artist and, of course, every vase was round, all the eyes were round, and I had to do the traditional [inaudible]. It's a stipple and you go over the cartoon and then you take charcoal —

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

MS. RADY: — and you bang the charcoal over the stipple.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Well, we'd throw those doors open. We were in — we worked in a Quonset hut and at 4 o'clock it was murder and they'd open up the doors, and all of a sudden I'd see my cartoons blowing off. So I went and I bought every single type of tracing paper, black, blue, orange, yellow, and I did a line, a line, a line, I got a translucent glaze, sent it up to be fired, and they fired out.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Perfect.

MS. RADY: So I said, "This is the way — if I'm going to do this, —"

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: "— this is the way it's going to be done."

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

MS. RADY: And there was one guy whose name was Bob Miracle, and I always used to call him Miss Miracle. Every time I started to work on something, there'd be a phone call. "I want you to go up and dah-dah-dah. I want you to —" I said, "I'm not the scullery maid." "I want you to go wash all the mugs in the sink." I said, "No, you go wash all the mugs in the sink." Well, "I want, I want, I want," and I said, "No, not doing it," and he said, "Well, then I'm going to fire you." I said, "You don't have the authority. Elliot House has the authority," and I walked into Elliot's office and I said, "Miss Miracle's going to fire me." Miss Miracle had gotten me to go into his office and unpack the samples that had just come in from Japan —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — and every time I started to work on something, he — the phone would ring, "I want you dah-dah-dah," and so I went into that office and I unpacked the samples, and every stinking drawer in his office had wooden excelsior pouring out of it. That's what I did. File excelsior, file excelsior went into the drawers, and I said to Elliot House, who was the director, I said, "I've had it. Every time I start to do something, I am pulled away. You've got to lay off," and so, I mean, when the — when they all walked into that office, those guys stretched out on the floor, they were absolutely beside themselves laughing.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: You know, I think one of the things that my parents were very sure about teaching us, "You don't have to take crap from anyone. If there's a good reason, okay, then you take crap. You don't have to."

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

MS. RADY: Now, I want to go back to this thing of series.

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

MS. RADY: I learned very early on you have got to develop a series to engage an audience.

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

MS. RADY: And your work has got to change. So doing 5,000 bowls is gonna get ya nothin'.

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

MS. RADY: And so my sister saw a picture —

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

MS. RADY: — in the *New York Times*. I get the *Sunday Times*. I don't get the daily *Times*, which I should. I can't read the *L.A. Times*. It's impossible. So my sister sent me this little photograph —

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh. Of Cycladic art?

MS. RADY: No. Kukutani [ph].

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh.



MS. RADY: Trypillian —

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh.

MS. RADY: — culture. I called John Walsh up. I said, “John, I need you and your computer.” I’m going to be the last Neanderthal without a computer. I’m positive.

MS. RIEDEL: So when was this, Elsa?

MS. RADY: This was just about a year ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I had gotten a cactus thorn in the palm of my hand.

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

MS. RADY: I came in. I poured half a bottle of alcohol, removed the cactus thorn, and then poured the rest of the alcohol. In the morning, my hand blew up like that. Cactus thorns and rose thorns are toxic. So I was in the hospital for four days on an IV drip.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MS. RADY: Yeah. I mean, I was a sick cookie. This was septic.

MS. RIEDEL: So how — now I’m trying to figure out how this loops back to the story about the Kukutani [ph] figure and —

MS. RADY: Okay. So this is another chapter. So my sister sends me this little photograph. She said, “This was in the *New York Times* and says ‘Woman in society, a fired clay Kukutani [ph] figurine from 4050 to 3900 B.C.’ Call Jonah [John] Walsh.” I said, “Doctor, I need you.” He said, “I’ll be there in two days.” He comes, and he’s got all of this information for me.

MS. RIEDEL: So this is brand new?

MS. RADY: This is brand — look at that figure.

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

MS. RADY: Look at them.

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

MS. RADY: This is like — it’s so funny. This is like the — in the Cycladic culture, —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — they have one figure —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — which they refer to as the fat lady.

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

MS. RADY: I said, “John, that’s the fat lady.”

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

MS. RADY: Look at that.

MS. RIEDEL: What are the dimensions on these? Do we know?

MS. RADY: Like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Twelve inches?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Ten inches?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Clay?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Hmm. Interesting. Later maybe we can get photocopies of these so we can —

MS. RADY: You can take one of these.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, great. So then people will know what were —

MS. RADY: Now if Henry Moore —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: But I doubt —

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we're getting way ahead of ourselves.

MS. RADY: Well, look, I just — I want you to look at these.

MS. RIEDEL: They're exquisite. So this may be where you're headed next.

MS. RADY: Oh, absolutely.

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

MS. RADY: This is it. I sound like Michael Jackson. "This is it!"

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I can see why these would be very compelling for you.

MS. RADY: It — when John came in with this material, —

MS. RIEDEL: These are much more figurative, I think, than —

MS. RADY: I'd never done —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: I mean, with the CYCLADIC, that line —

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

MS. RADY: That bulge in the middle, —

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

MS. RADY: — I tried to capture that to be a figure.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. But very abstracted. These are much more representational.

MS. RADY: Yeah. This is all the lit on where it came from and —

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

MS. RADY: — you may have this.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Wonderful. Thank you.

MS. RADY: I have a collector in Washington, D.C., and they also have houses in Miami or, as I call it, Miami [Meeamee]. [Laughs.] Lin owns close to a hundred pieces of mine.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. What's the last name?

MS. RADY: Loughee [Lougheed?].

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

MS. RADY: L-O-U-G-H-E-E.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And he is — you know, he'll say to me — well, when I hurt my hand, I had a show coming up, and I decided to do a project in turned wood.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. This was just a few years ago, couple years ago.

MS. RADY: It was two — two years ago.

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

MS. RADY: And I named that series Chloetides [ph].

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

MS. RADY: And it definitely had that structure and figure of — I've got a couple of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Caryatides [stress on second a], yes?

MS. RADY: Pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: The Caryatides or no, this was after that?

MS. RADY: Caryatides [stress on i].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: After the Greek, the Greek female figures that are —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — the pedestals that —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — are at the temples in Athens, right?

MS. RADY: Yes. And I — so I — I mean, I couldn't do much. I couldn't work in clay.

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

MS. RADY: So I did this series in wood.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I want to go back to Chouinard and — and revisit that a little bit and discuss what — how those classes were structured, and what you were learning from who. Were you focusing on form with Vivika? Were you focusing on glazes with Vivika and —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — Otto, both?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Because I know they did extraordinary amounts of glaze experimentation.

MS. RADY: She.

MS. RIEDEL: Not together?

MS. RADY: She —

MS. RIEDEL: You said that they would both donate — they would both dedicate a day a week, Wednesdays, to just completely experiment with glazes. More her. Interesting.

MS. RADY: Yeah. The — Vivika was the taskmaster, and one day Otto was talking to her and I could hear her say to him, “You can say whatever you want at home to me, but you may not talk to me like that in class.”

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Well, she had been his teacher.

MS. RADY: Yes. They met — he came out of the Air Force.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: They met, and they were together —

MS. RIEDEL: I think he took class with her.

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

MS. RIEDEL: I think that’s how they met.

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: And there was a very Gestalt approach that Vivika had. It had to be spontaneous. It had to be fast. You didn’t labor over this, this, and this.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. But they’re very rooted in functional work, too.

MS. RADY: Very rooted.

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

MS. RADY: I know Otto hated that show of mine in Santa Barbara.

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh.

MS. RADY: Hated it.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: She just — she just thought — she looked at me and she said, “Boy, you really have done it and it” — and it was so nice to have that kind of reciprocation because we would battle. Once she said, “Is there tension in this room?” and she turned to me and she said, “Is there tension?” I said, “Vivika, there’s so much tension in this class, you can cut it with a knife.” She said, “Get out, don’t come back without your mother,” and I turned as I was walking out, and I said, “If you think my mother’s flying back from New York City to get me back in class, you are sadly mistaken,” and I walked out.

It took the dean to — Larry Carnes, who was a fellow student, it took the dean to get Larry and me back into school. You know, we would do a sale every year. We’d work like dogs, supposedly only on Sunday, which was crap. We worked every day of the week, because we had to support the department: clay, glazes, firing, and —

MS. RIEDEL: What do you mean you had to support the department?

MS. RADY: We had to provide extra money for the Ceramic Division.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So the students were requested to make, wear, and sell it, and the proceeds would benefit the department?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Hah!

MS. RADY: We had one — my parents were out in LA. I think it was the last recording session my father did, and

Bing Crosby walked into the booth and took a look at me and said to my father, "Hey, Sy, who's the broad." My father said, "That's my baby," and then Crosby said, "Well, how can I make her *my* baby," and my father said, "Bing, this is my youngest child and you don't have a prayer." Didn't faze that asshole for a second. He kept holding up the recording session. Why? Because someone from Capital forgot to say "let Mr. Crosby in and not pay 50 cents for parking" [Ms. Riedel laughs], and I could see the [inaudible] just firing out of my father's neck, and he went out into the studio. He slammed the dollar down. He said, "Here, you cheap son of a bitch. You just made a profit."

You know, that man was so unscrupulous, he slept with every wife of his four sons. Yeah. And he kept saying, "Come on, come on, gotta get out of here, Rosie and I have got something going, (Clooney), after." Well, you know, Clooney was married to a bastard, Jose Ferrer, and one of the children of Jose Ferrer and Rosie [Rosemary] Clooney married Debby Boone, Pat Boone's daughter, and she had a big hit, "You Light Up My Life," and she said, "This is about Jesus," and the composer of the song said, "Bull shit. This is not about Jesus," and — but Miguel is still married to her.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. But back to Chouinard. [Laughs.]

MS. RADY: Chouinard. Sorry. I wandered. Chouinard was a place — Miss Nelbert Chouinard was alive —

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh.

MS. RADY: — and if she saw anyone who was not clean, she'd take her cane, tap them, and say, "Go into my car and wait for me." She'd drive them back to Pasadena to her home. She'd make them take a bath. She'd give them a meal and she would then say, "If you ever enter my school again looking the way you do, I personally will expel you."

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's rather harsh for art students, isn't it?

MS. RADY: Not for Nelbert, and she was — you know, Disney supported that school for years. He was a student there and met her —

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

MS. RADY: — and felt that this was a very valid operation that she was trying to run. She was always short of funds. She was always giving students that she felt were good. She was always giving them scholarships and — but, boy, if you walked in there looking like a slob, that was it.

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

MS. RADY: You were out.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. So what were you working on at the time? It was always functional.

MS. RADY: I was —

MS. RIEDEL: It was your own work, is that correct?

MS. RADY: — working on the wheel. It was — Vivika stopped one day and she said, "You see, that's what I'm talking about. She could be the best student I ever had." I said, "What about Ralph," because Ralph —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — his shit didn't stink. "Well, Ralph is a different story." I said, "You're telling me," and, you see, Rico Lebrun had taught at Chouinard —

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

MS. RADY: — and there was a drawing teacher named Millie Rock —

MS. RIEDEL: Millie?

MS. RADY: Rock, R-O-C-K.

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

MS. RADY: Millie was terrific, and she would take us on what they call ant walks, and you would have to close your eyes and envision an ant walking around your feet, walking up your leg, walking up your thigh, circling your body, going down your arms, back up to your neck, and you had to do all of this with your eyes closed.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: She was fabulous.

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

MS. RADY: She was just fabulous.

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

MS. RADY: And I — I — I mean, she was really fun.

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

MS. RADY: You had fun with Millie, and when I got to Franciscan, man, they would go out to lunch and they were always two-martini lunches.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness.

MS. RADY: I don't — well, I don't drink now, but I — I would never drink during the day, and, I mean, they were — man, they would just come back cross-eyed.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And one of the most — one of the great parts, the most fun, I worked in the Mold Section.

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

MS. RADY: And Pinkie was the head chief mold-maker, and Pinkie adored me, and Pinkie would just — I mean, I'd just crack them up all the time, and Pinkie would say, "Come on down here, we need a joke," and learning how to do casting, mold-making. Judy Chicago came and visited my studio one day, and she said, "Where are the molds?" I said, "I don't use molds." She said, "That's impossible. No one throws like this."

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh.

MS. RADY: I said, "Judy, go ahead, look around. There are no molds." She found these rounded-out things. She said, "Well, this is a mold." I said, "Judy, that's when you — if you are so inclined to take the scraps of clay, melt them, put them in water, and then you dry them out in this —"

MS. RIEDEL: Like a bath? Like a plaster bath?

MS. RADY: "— plaster concave, bowl-shape."

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

MS. RADY: She said, "Well, do you do that?" I said, "Clay's too cheap."

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

MS. RADY: I don't do that. I don't want to do that. Let someone else do that. Vivika was very surprised when I said, "Couldn't care less." "Out!"

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. That would go against her whole way of thinking for sure.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And — but it was — you know, the time there, there was such freedom. There was — at Chouinard, there was such — there were high spirits, and there were so many students who were just phenomenal.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Who do you remember?

MS. RADY: Well, Suki and Karen Diamond.

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

MS. RADY: Juanita Jimenez, who had been married to Mineo Mizuno.

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

MS. RADY: You know, all these cats drank, and the one thing that Juanita and I got into a brawl about one night was, she said, "I want the freedom that you have." I said, "You can get it." Mineo would make her work in a tiny room. I said, "You don't have to put up with this crap," and Juanita stupidly took a third of her retirement and put it into the stock market. I said, "Oh, God, you don't do things like that. You only go into the market if you can afford to lose the money."

Now my boyfriend is in arbitrage. He said, "Have you ever been in the market?" I said, "Yeah, for two seconds." He said, "What happened?" I said, "Well, my mother invented — my mother invested in Yoo-Hoo," which was chocolate — a chocolate drink. Not in Yahoo.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: And we were laughing hysterically. I don't think I have been in love like this for years. Absolute years. You know, I had lived with a lunatic named Alfred Leslie, the painter.

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

MS. RADY: And I have never been beaten up like that by anyone. We'd leave a party and I could see his jaw tighten and he'd say, "How many of those guys did you fuck?" I'd pull my car over. I'd say, "Get out and walk." "But — but." I said, "There aren't any butts. Out." I spent \$35,000 that summer.

MS. RIEDEL: What summer was this, Elsa?

MS. RADY: 'Ninety-one. I met him New Year's Eve '90, '91. I have never been as miserable, as taunted, as tortured by anyone's soul. My sister called one day and she said, "Elsa, I've never heard you as angry." I said, "I've never been as angry."

MS. RIEDEL: I'm going to pause this for just a minute.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about the evolution of your work, starting with your graduation from Chouinard. You started to work at Franciscan China. You were there for a couple of years.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And your work during this time was pretty much functional, yes, when you first started?

MS. RADY: Very.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: Absolutely.

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

MS. RADY: And to this day, I still can't make a lid.

MS. RIEDEL: Still can't make a lid? But I've seen beautiful early teapots, not many of them, a few.

MS. RADY: Yeah. But they're flat. They look like someone went at them with an axe.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But the early forms, it seems like a lot of your basic forms that you've repeated over the years were already in place, even in the late '60s. The vase forms, the bowls with the fluted lips, bottles with narrow necks.

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

MS. RIEDEL: It seems that a lot of your sense of form was already there and —

MS. RADY: That you had drilled into your brain by Vivika.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Okay.

MS. RADY: Vivika was, you know, it was about form. It was about using all the clay.

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

MS. RADY: Not trimming.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Using all the clay.

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

MS. RADY: We had a final — one of the last assignments we had, we had to do a place setting for 12 —

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

MS. RADY: — and I said to Ralph, “I want to make sure this is fired in an electric kiln.” He said, “Oh, there’s no difference, just load it into the coffin kiln.” I said. “That’s gas.”

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

MS. RADY: “It will make a difference.” “Oh, it will not.” So I fired. I had a very cool white blue.

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

MS. RADY: And I cross-hatched the rim.

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

MS. RADY: That very cool whitish-blue turned to pink.

MS. RIEDEL: Ohh.

MS. RADY: And we are sitting at the table with this last [inaudible]. He said to Juanita, “Well, I can see eating eggs off that.” She said, “I can’t,” and then he turned to me and said, “And, oh, yours would just be wonderful with Mexican food.” I said, “Really?” There was a girl named Connie, really adorable little girl, who was — they were fleeing to Canada because her husband was called up.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I looked at Connie and I said, “Connie, you’re getting married.” “Yeah.” I said, “Good. Now you have something to eat on.”

MS. RIEDEL: Gave her a 12-piece set.

MS. RADY: There was so many —

MS. RIEDEL: Twelve sets.

MS. RADY: — plates.

MS. RIEDEL: Place setting.

MS. RADY: Salad plate, dessert plate.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: Saucer. Oh, God.

MS. RIEDEL: That’s just a nightmare. But — but it does touch on an interesting point, because I know glazes are such a significant part of your work.

MS. RADY: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you — they’re essential. Did you begin calculating glazes and experimenting with them —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — at Chouinard?



MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So that was something that you developed early on?

MS. RADY: Vivika yelled at me one day. I was at the house.

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

MS. RADY: They lived over on Hoover.

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

MS. RADY: I was at the house and she said, "How good are you at math?" I said, "Well," and then she said, "Well, you know you're going to have a lot of it in the glazing —"

MS. RIEDEL: With the glazing.

MS. RADY: — class."

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

MS. RADY: I said, "Oh, well I'm going to go out and get a little calculator."

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

MS. RADY: She said, "You always have an answer." [They laugh.] But the one thing I have to — and this is something that was extraordinary. They would take us to dinner once a week at Edward's Steakhouse.

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

MS. RADY: And make sure everyone got a steak dinner.

MS. RIEDEL: Otto and Vivika?

MS. RADY: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: And they paid for it?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That is extraordinary.

MS. RADY: And she would say, "Well, I don't know what you kids are eating at home, but I'm going to make sure you get a steak once a week."

MS. RIEDEL: That is extraordinary.

MS. RADY: And my father, when he would come out to California, he would stock my freezer with steaks. I don't know — oh, maybe a year ago, I had a piece of steak. You know, chicken, tra-la-la-la. It's boring. But, you know, my father would — he — he just — and then he set up an account. There was a wonderful smorgasbord place and he set up an account there —

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

MS. RADY: — so I could go have smorgasbord whenever I wanted.

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

MS. RADY: My parents were very gifted, forthright.

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

MS. RADY: My father was extremely demanding.

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

MS. RADY: This was — "if you're not going to do it the best you know how, don't start."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And it was a lesson. It really was a lesson, because he was — you know, there was such passion in his wanting us to succeed.

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

MS. RADY: And his greatest fear with me was making a mug that I would get a dollar for —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — and it would sell for \$2.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Did you always want to work specifically three-dimensionally? Did you do much drawing? Did you do any painting?

MS. RADY: Very little drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Vivika would never permit us to draw a shape.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Nope.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. RADY: Absolutely not.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: She was —

MS. RIEDEL: At Chouinard, — go ahead.

MS. RADY: She would say, “You draw the shape, you are going to force the clay.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: And that’s what I mean about Gestalt.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: She said, “You don’t do that. You let it flow.”

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

MS. RADY: “You let it come. You absolutely do not.” She said, “If I catch any one of you drawing,” she said, “you’re out of here.” Drawing a shape because your mind then is set, and you cannot ever duplicate that. You’re always going to have a forced piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. I see. I see.

MS. RADY: You — you — you’re killing any spontaneity.

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

MS. RADY: And when she took me by the arm and walked me around at Santa Barbara, she said to me, “I am so proud of you.” Otto hated that show.

MS. RIEDEL: I can see [laughs]. I can imagine.

MS. RADY: Well, he hated the fact that I was bolting things into the shelf. I said, “What am I going to do?”

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: “I’ve already been through an earthquake.”

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

MS. RADY: You know, there were things that had —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: [Solomon?] called me at 4 in the morning and said, "What have you lost?" I said, "I haven't gone in there yet. I still am hearing things dropping," and so she said, "You gotta go in there." I said, "No, I'm just gonna sit back here and wait and listen."

MS. RIEDEL: That was '94, yes?

MS. RADY: Boy. What a lesson, and I said, "Holly, let me bring in the shards." She said, "You think I can pay \$75,000 a month for you to bring in pieces?" She said, "I can't sell that." I said, "You want to make a bet? I'll glue them down." She said, "No, can't do that."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I loved Holly.

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

MS. RADY: I loved her for her spirit and her real wackiness, and, I mean, spending a night with Holly was like, in New York, was an eating festival.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

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

MS. RIEDEL: Beyond the papaya?

MS. RADY: Oh, yeah. We — she said, "Come on, let's go to the Oyster Bar." All right. So we went to the Oyster Bar. "Now, let's go to Howard Johnson. They have great fried clams." She always had adventure.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: She always had spirit.

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

MS. RADY: She had great dignity. Unbelievable clothing. She donated 64 Romeo Gigli jackets to the Metropolitan Museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. I said, "What's wrong with three?" [Ms. Riedel laughs.] She said, "What if I die? I will not have had the pleasure." I said, "Oh, Holly, God." She said, "No, I don't want to do that." She meant it. There's no — no great — she said, "I love to shop," and she said, "kid, come on, we can do a lot of damage at 6 o'clock in the evening." God. The clothing that woman had, and the shoes. I said, "I wish I were Chinese and they had bound my feet." And her eldest son had a failed marriage. She wasn't alive, and I think she would have been very —

MS. RIEDEL: Disappointed?

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I want to jump back a couple decades to — to the evolution of your work as it becomes sculptural. I'm thinking of the late '70s when the rim really begins to develop. It begins to be notched, it begins to be dimpled, it begins to be squared off. Would you talk about the evolution of that?

MS. RADY: I got a review that just astounded me. It was by William Wilson.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. In which paper?

MS. RADY: *L.A. Times*, which said, "Elsa Rady does these jagged-edged forms. You don't know whether, if you pick it up, a finger will be lopped off."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: We were raising money for something, I don't remember, and I was behind the ticket counter, and I saw this, like this, and I said Wilson's here, and I —

MS. RIEDEL: How could you tell?

MS. RADY: I just knew it.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I said to him, "I see you have all your fingers," and so he said, "That's right." I said, "Well, I guess you never picked up one of my pieces," and everybody when they read that review, they were screaming.

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

MS. RADY: They just said, "This is absolutely — it's so Wilson. He doesn't know what to make of you."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. And that's actually a really interesting point, is that you have so straddled that craft background with Vivika and Otto and then —

MS. RADY: It was a dogma.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And it's been difficult, I think, for people often to categorize your work, which is one of the things that John Perreault picked up on and really thought was a strength.

MS. RADY: Well, —

MS. RIEDEL: It defies categorization.

MS. RADY: [Artist's name, Sarah inaudible], whom I feel is probably the most gifted artist that we have now.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Well, no. Serra.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Richard Serra, right. Your favorite.

MS. RADY: Mine. I love that man.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: We were at dinner one night.

MS. RIEDEL: We being?

MS. RADY: A whole group in New York. Irving Blum was sitting down at the other end with Brian Hunt, and they were getting drunker and drunker and drunker, and they were getting louder and louder and louder, and Richard grabs the table and he says, "I'm gonna go over and deck him," and I grabbed his arm and I said, "Why would you do that? What for? He's an ass and a loud one and he always was and he always will be. So why would you do that?" And he looked at me. He said, "Hmm, you got a point."

Sarah, I don't have enough words of praise. I don't know of anyone who has that kind of power and who has been ridiculed and constantly belittled.

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

MS. RADY: I mean, Richard's a wild card and I — I've been at an opening where Ellsworth Kelly was there, and Richard went up and grabbed him by the collar and said, "You goddamn faggot." When I met Richard, I have to tell you this — this story. In 1985, I — hardware had not been developed yet for fusions.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And I was — my mother said, "I'm never coming out to California to watch them butcher you again. Every surgery from here on out you're coming to New York." So I went to New York and —

MS. RIEDEL: We should probably mention that you had a car accident in '69 and have had —

MS. RADY: 'Sixty-eight.

MS. RIEDEL: 'Sixty-eight. Because I don't think we've mentioned that.

MS. RADY: I was carried for four lanes by this woman who was driving an Oldsmobile who had been cited at that

same intersection a year before, and I, in the deposition, when I heard that she had been cited the year before, my lawyer had to restrain me.

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

MS. RADY: Because I — for — absolutely would have ripped her throat out, and I looked at her and I said, “You know, you’ve changed my life,” but what I didn’t know was she — it was a gift. It took me, who was extremely undisciplined — if I got to school, got to school, if I made something, I made something, if I was late, I was late, what it — it truly tamed the beast, and, you know, at the — at my show in Long Beach with the CYCLADIC pieces, Ralph Bacerra went over and kicked the pendulum.

MS. RIEDEL: Why would he do that?

MS. RADY: He’s dead, but I remember turning to him and saying, “Gee, Ralph, is this another museum show that you’re not going to say anything?” I said, “It doesn’t hurt, really doesn’t hurt,” and this moron, when he kicked, I — I had walked out of the room and I came back. I said, “What the hell is going on? This is a museum, not a recreation derby.” He said, “Well, it’s a swing, isn’t it? I kicked it,” and I looked at him and I said, “You jealous son of a bitch. I can’t believe it.” I said, “You know, Ralph, it’s only complimentary to you to have a student who forges ahead, has museum shows.” You know, I remember there was one show at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art]. I was the only one that got in, and those girls were — they were ready to kill me.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Was that early on?

MS. RADY: That was in 1966.

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

MS. RADY: And —

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember what the name of the show?

MS. RADY: I don’t.

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

MS. RADY: Juanita Jimenez, Susan Wilkie [sp], and I used to go to Edward’s Steakhouse every day at lunch, and we would have Bloody Marys, and we’d come back into Ralph’s class, and he would try to — you know, that hand would start banging the table, which was something that he got from Vivika.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: And he — he said [laughs], “I’ve never taught a class like that. Those girls just drove me crazy,” and I — when — when he kicked the pendulum — see, the swing goes back into center —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — but you have to move it from side to side. You can’t kick it head-on.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: I looked at him. I said, “You know, you’re pathetic, you really are pathetic,” and I said, “It doesn’t hurt to be gracious. It doesn’t. You’re not losing anything by being gracious.” I said, “But I guess you’re just too stupid.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: “And I guess Vivika really spoiled the crap out of you because you’re her pet, and you got away with murder,” and this is not to be recorded. We were — we were —

MS. RIEDEL: Let’s pause.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: I was flying out to New York. My mother called me and said, “Come, it’s time.” My father was dying.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And she said, "I won't be at the airport," and I fly overnight and I land, and she's at the airport.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I don't make —

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: — the connection, and she — she was like stone. We get into the apartment. My sister's on the phone. She puts down the phone. She comes out. She holds me —

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

MS. RADY: — and she said, "Elsa, Daddy died this morning." Now, my father was — he had vanity. He was a hunk, and my mother knew that if I had seen him at 135 pounds, I would have died, and all I wanted to know was did he suffer.

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

MS. RADY: Was there — see, he had a polyp in his colon just like my grandfather, and he asked the internist that we had, he wanted to go in for a full workup, and her comment was, "Hospitals are for sick people," and wouldn't do the workup, and the polyp became cancerous and he died of colon cancer. And my moronic uncle, who's going to be 102 on the thirteenth, said to my father, "Well, you do know people do die." He's such an idiot. "People do die." They told him he had chronic hepatitis. My father had had hepatitis, and he was very sick, and my aunt, oh, God, my aunt was beating the brains out of my sister, and my mother said to me, "I want you to go over" — would you like more water? — "I'd like — I want you to go over and get your sister out of that house." So I went over. I said, "Come on, Jane, we're going home, and I'm taking Bubby Rady," and all of a sudden there was quiet in the room, and I said, "I'm going in there to get her," and my grandmother said, "Shh, shh, you go in, there'll be another vetting [wedding?]."

My Grandmother Rady was absolutely a piece of work.

(Change of Interview Date)

[DISC NUMBER TWO begins on p. 99. cb]

MS. RIEDEL: This Mija Riedel with Elsa Rady at the artist's home and studio in Los Angeles, California, on August thirteenth, 2010. This is disc number three for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

Good morning, Elsa, and you were thinking about Mark Del Vecchio commenting —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — that your work is Post-modern and saying that you don't think of it that way.

MS. RADY: I do not think of — wait. Let me get over there. Let me just pour this for you.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you.

MS. RADY: I do not think of my work as being Post-modern.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you think of it as, and why don't you think of it as Post-modern?

MS. RADY: Because I think *post* implies after the fact. Now I may be wrong, but it, to me, —

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think of your work as Modern?

MS. RADY: Yes, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And why do you — why do you think of it as Modern?

MS. RADY: Well, that's a very good question. I think of it, my work, as being contemporary.

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

MS. RADY: That which is my own.

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

MS. RADY: And I also think of — I — I absolutely disagree with the theory that it's Post-modern. It is Modern.

MS. RIEDEL: In terms of lines and form?

MS. RADY: Absolutely. What's post —

MS. RIEDEL: You mean —

MS. RADY: — about it?

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

MS. RADY: It's Minimal.

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

MS. RADY: It's — and I've worked very hard to — to get that Minimalism —

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

MS. RADY: — into the dialog, into this dialog, and I — I mean, I — I've worked for years to try to convey the fact this work is Modern.

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

MS. RADY: It is — it has to me the same input that modern dance had.

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

MS. RADY: And to say it is Post-modern —

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

MS. RADY: I said — I wrote in Mark's book that he did on Post-modernism, I said, "Dear Mark: My Post-modern ass thanks you."

MS. RIEDEL: So do you find that somehow offensive —

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: — or are you going to work in Post-modern?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No. You just find it inaccurate?

MS. RADY: Absolutely inaccurate.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. So how would you classify the work? Modern? Minimal?

MS. RADY: It's Minimal. It's Modern. It's in every sense of the word mine.

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

MS. RADY: I feel I am a modern, difficult woman. I'm very demanding of myself. I'm very dedicated to myself in that that involves the work.

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

MS. RADY: And where my mother was this extraordinary force in my life, my sister has replaced that, and she said to me about the Kikutani, she said, "Do you think it would be possible that, if you do a catalog, you'd dedicate it to me?" I said, "Absolutely," and she — she was — she said, "I'm so happy."

MS. RIEDEL: Ohh.

MS. RADY: Yeah. I mean, my sister — my family — I have an unusual family.

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

MS. RADY: My nephew, who is extraordinarily talented, my sister, who is also talented but somewhere in the shuffle just could not move ahead with her own work, and it is a tragedy.

MS. RIEDEL: I want to address this point you made about modern dance in particular because —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — I think your work has been especially influenced by dance, both through your mother and I think the influence of Martha Graham on your mother's modern dance, and then I think of what came out of Martha Graham. I think of Merce Cunningham, his association with John Cage, and the whole concept of chance —

MS. RADY: Dorothy Bird.

MS. RIEDEL: — dance.

MS. RADY: Sophie Maslow, Jane Dudley.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. But chance seems especially — we talked about that yesterday.

MS. RADY: Chance is probably the major factor in my work.

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

MS. RADY: That is absolutely — that is what I strive for.

MS. RIEDEL: How do you approach that? How do you strive toward it?

MS. RADY: I do a body of work. I put it into the kiln. I make a kiln god to ward off any evil spirits, and I always say, "Dear God, deliver us."

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

MS. RADY: And the ritual, the excitement, that — that wonderful excitement of — of firing the work and waiting for that kiln to cool down, I have areas on my hands where there is no pigment because I was too anxious to get into the kiln and all of a sudden — of course, my hands would be wet, I'd hit the side of the kiln, and you'd hear "sssss." [Laughs.] The trials and tribulations of a potter.

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

MS. RADY: But it is something that, it fuels my soul. It fuels my heart.

MS. RIEDEL: That waiting to see what's in there, to see —

MS. RADY: Well, capturing something that will be new, capturing something that, you know, you've got to progress, you've got to move, you've got to do all of these things when you are creating. I once called — he shall remain nameless, and he yelled at me. "I'm composing." He's a sculptor. I said, "Oh, God, excuse me while I puke," and so he said, "Don't you feel like that?" I said, "Absolutely not."

MS. RIEDEL: How do you feel?

MS. RADY: I'm parking my ass on that wheel, and now it's time to shake, rattle, and roll.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. So it feels more like rock and roll to you than composing?

MS. RADY: Well, it's — the composition is the making of the work.

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

MS. RADY: The — the dynamic of doing the work, successfully, is something that you absolutely — I mean, that's pure dedication.

MS. RIEDEL: So you compose on the wheel?

MS. RADY: I don't compose.

MS. RIEDEL: You don't?

MS. RADY: I sit down and I make it.



MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. How do you — when you make a certain number of pots that are going to go on a plant, on a base, for example, in the STILL LIFES, —

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: — what if some of those are lost or damaged in the kiln, how does that change the composition?

MS. RADY: Well, I destroy 50 percent of what I make.

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

MS. RADY: You sign it.

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

MS. RADY: That follows you.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: There's nothing worse than being precious about your work. There is nothing — Vivika Heino once had us sit down for a crit, and her crits were mighty, and she put a hammer next to everybody's seat and she said, "I want you to tell me whether you feel that's a good piece." So I said to her, "Well, what if it isn't?" She said, "You're going to take that hammer and break it."

Learning how to edit is the most invaluable thing that I know of. Learning how to sift through and sort —

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

MS. RADY: — is also valuable.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. What was your criteria?

MS. RADY: At one point it was to make the perfect piece. That was when I was very young. I had absolutely no — I — I can't address it that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you feel like you made the perfect piece?

MS. RADY: Never.

MS. RIEDEL: Never?

MS. RADY: Never.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. RADY: Never. I have felt that I have made good work.

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

MS. RADY: I don't toot my own horn.

MS. RIEDEL: Certainly form-wise, those pieces, many of them, feel perfect.

MS. RADY: Maybe they are.

MS. RIEDEL: Do they seem that way to you?

MS. RADY: No.

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

MS. RADY: It's — it is a body of work.

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

MS. RADY: I am working on a body of work, hopefully, that will be successful, and that doesn't mean selling.

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

MS. RADY: That means that I personally will get back from it that satisfaction of knowing I have tried my very best to produce something that is good. I'm not interested nor do I care about preciousness.

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

MS. RADY: I — anything that's not up to what I feel is good, I'll take a hammer to.

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

MS. RADY: And I have been accused of being a very tough taskmaster. Fine. That's okay with me, sport, and I — I relish that opportunity. You know, my reputation is she's tough, she's a bitch, don't try to pull anything over on her because you won't get away with it. I don't care what people think of me. I know what I want to do in — with my life, and I want to produce good work, and it was something that — again, when I had that accident in '68, —

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

MS. RADY: — that probably was the most fortunate thing that ever happened.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned that yesterday. A quick question about — you say, "I want to produce good work." Elsa, can you think of a particular piece or pieces that were satisfactory to you? That was — "That was a good piece."

MS. RADY: The CYCLADIC work hit the heights.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: The LILY series just — I mean, when — that pleasure when I took my mother through, and she looked at me and she said, "Oh, I'm so embarrassed." and I said, "Well, Mom, live it up, this is for you."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Why was that series successful to you?

MS. RADY: Because it was so loaded.

MS. RIEDEL: With?

MS. RADY: Information.

MS. RIEDEL: Such as?

MS. RADY: My need to reciprocate to my mother, who had fought so hard with my father to let me be, and his fear was that I was not going to be able to support myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: No other reason than that.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was in those pieces? I think of the movement and then the form, the positive and negative space, the interior and exterior of the vessel, the dancerly quality of the pieces on stage. What about all of that or in particular or beside that was significant to that series, the LILY series? What was significant about that series to you that was successful, that made it satisfying?

MS. RADY: You see, I had never worked in one color.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] A series in one color?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MS. RADY: Pulling that off —

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

MS. RADY: Well, actually, I've done two series in white, the CYCLADIC —

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Right.

MS. RADY: — and the LILY.

MS. RIEDEL: LILY was the first.

MS. RADY: LILY was the first, —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — CYCLADIC was the second.

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

MS. RADY: And it didn't even enter my mind what, you know, are you going and just doing another white series. The CYCLADIC was — I remember I went through the Getty Villa, which is down on the ocean.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I've been there.

MS. RADY: And I remember when I saw the Cycladic pieces, —

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: — I wanted to cry.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: When I — I had very much the same experience when I was in Taiwan. I got into the Chiang Kai-shek and Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek, who I'm told was not a nice lady, built a museum. They came out of China with 24-mule pack, each side containing work, and his promise to the Taiwanese was, "I will build a museum." When I walked into that white room, white ware room, it made me cry.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] What about it?

MS. RADY: Because it was so beautiful.

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

MS. RADY: I mean, this is many, many years ago. I was young.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it objects reduced to pure form?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: It was a set of these little white sake cups.

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

MS. RADY: Or wine cups and I thought, "God, I don't know if I've seen anything this moving," and, you know, I have all of this training that June Wayne instilled in me, and I — when I called her to thank her, she said, "What are you thanking me for?"

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

MS. RADY: I said, "Because you made me pay attention in a way that I hadn't." Vivika made me pay attention but, of course, we locked horns.

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

MS. RADY: Because I couldn't stand the screaming.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I know now what that was about. It was — that was about her frustration with me that I didn't do — that I wasn't committed —

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

MS. RADY: — and it made her crazy.

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

MS. RADY: And yet —

MS. RIEDEL: She felt you were taking your talent for granted?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Not pushing it far enough?

MS. RADY: Wasting it.

MS. RIEDEL: Aha. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: Wasting it.

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

MS. RADY: And I — I remember saying to her, “I want to talk to you alone,” and we went into the back room where clay was made, and I said, “I don’t understand why you keep yelling at me.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: She said, “Because, damn it, damn it, you’re not working to your capacity.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: “You could be the — one of the best people I ever produced,” and as I — as she told my sister, when she said that, I left for two weeks.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Because that was challenging, Jesus, to have this woman say that to me, and I was like, whoa, that’s bad. You’ve got to make a commitment for that.

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

MS. RADY: And she was — you know, I — I learned so much from her. It — I learned as much from her as I did from Holly —

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

MS. RADY: — Solomon.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Yes. Holly was —

MS. RIEDEL: We talked about her a bit yesterday, Holly.

MS. RADY: Yeah. Holly just — she said, “Kid, these prices aren’t going to do.”

MS. RIEDEL: Right. What did you learn from Vivika that was as powerful as Holly, because you’ve talked about Holly and your mother and Else Sackler as three primary mentors, but what about Vivika in particular? Did she push you —

MS. RADY: Oh, God.

MS. RIEDEL: — to work harder? Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: Just like a train.

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

MS. RADY: And the more she pushed, the more stubborn I became.

MS. RIEDEL: About not working hard?

MS. RADY: Well, I worked hard but, you see, until I was in that accident, —

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

MS. RADY: — life had a different flavor for me.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did the accident change things?

MS. RADY: Because it made everything critically necessary. It made it necessary for me to get to work. Vivika was already gone by that time. She was in — they had moved back to New Hampshire.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, they hadn't come back to Ojai [CA] yet. I know they went back and forth —

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: — once.

MS. RADY: And when Beatrice Wood was selling her —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — place, they bought it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Because the school had built a home for Beatrice.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. On the other side of Ojai.

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: And, I mean, Beatrice — I was standing next to her and she leaned over to me and she said, "I'd pass all of this for one good fandango." [Ms. Riedel laughs.] I said, "Beatrice, I want to watch it."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And she always had very young men —

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

MS. RADY: — around her and she just — you know, she'd flirt, and she was so — and I do credit Garth [Clark] with pulling her out of that terrible rut, and he took her in hand and said, "Okay, I'm going to build your career now," and he did, and I think I told you I've got what she called her tacos. It's a bowl. It's in storage. It's a bowl that's been folded —

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

MS. RADY: — or pushed in —

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

MS. RADY: — and it looks like a taco.

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

MS. RADY: I think that Beatrice relished her life being a coquette.

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

MS. RADY: Playing the role of the coquette.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: Which was wonderful. Hey, I hope I can do that at a hundred and five. [They laugh.] I hope I can do it at 90.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: And when I was standing with her alone, she looked at me and she said, "Oh, so much fuss about nothing."

MS. RIEDEL: In relation to what?

MS. RADY: All this stuff that was going on.

MS. RIEDEL: Where were you?

MS. RADY: We were standing in Garth's gallery [Garth Clark Gallery] which, at the time, I think it was on LaBrea.

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

MS. RADY: And —

MS. RIEDEL: Was it a show of Beatrice's?

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

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

MS. RADY: And they didn't want her plaques in the show, and I looked at her and I said, "Are you kidding me? Get those goddamn plaques and put them in that case," and she said, "You think so?" I said, "I know so." She said, "Well, I should have spoken to you before." [Ms. Riedel laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: What happened?

MS. RADY: They went back to Ojai. They got the plaques, and they went into the show.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. RADY: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. RADY: And I — I said, "Beatrice, come on, you're smart, and you're old enough to know better than to be kowtowed or — or — or demeaned by someone saying, 'Eww, you can't do this, eww, you can't do that.' Screw that, you do what you want."

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

MS. RADY: And she said, "Hmm, who taught you that?" I said, "Beatrice, it was instilled in my brain when I was a child." Not to do what I wanted to do necessarily, but what I felt was passionate enough for me to stand behind, and I said, "You think those plaques are important, damn it, get them and make them put them in these — these shelves."

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

MS. RADY: So she said, "Well, would you like to come back when they're installing?" I said, "I don't think Garth wants me back when they're installing," [they laugh] and — but Garth did really pull her out of making — being a forgotten entity.

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

MS. RADY: And he worked very hard, and Garth also worked — and, you know, I — I've had my own dealings with Garth —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. RADY: — that have not been great, but he did revive an interest in ceramics —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: — that had not been there before.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. RADY: And you gotta hand him that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And don't you think that one of the things that Mark Del Vecchio might have meant when he talked about your work as Post-modern is the way that it does address the craft-art

discussion, straddle both, and go —

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: — someplace different?

MS. RADY: No. Mark's not that smart.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, hmm.

MS. RADY: No. Mark's not that smart.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, then why would he call your work Post-modern?

MS. RADY: Because he got a bee in his bonnet, and he felt he was being so clever. He was not being clever, and I said — as I said in his book that he wrote about Post-modern ceramics —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — and I said, "My Post-modern ass thanks you."

MS. RIEDEL: Don't you think that you have stretched ceramics in a new direction that might be described as Post-modern?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Not strictly Modern? You have —

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: You have a very refined craft in technical sensibility, but you have a very evolved aesthetic that is not contained in function or utility or traditional craft and that that might be something he might consider Post-modern, taking it beyond?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: You don't think so?

MS. RADY: He's not that smart.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, —

MS. RADY: He's not. He is not that — he is not — he is not clever enough. He got this bee in his bonnet. "Oh, that sounds like a good thing to say about her, Post-modern," and I said to him, "My work is not Post-modern."

MS. RIEDEL: You absolutely don't feel it's that way?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think about it in terms of the Finnish fetish that was so important here in LA?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think about it in terms of Color Fields?

MS. RADY: Sometimes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Let's talk about that.

MS. RADY: Well, you know, the great Color Field artist was [Jules] Olitski —

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

MS. RADY: — and I remember Jan Turner had a show of Olitski's, and Mineo and I were in the back, and we noticed that there was a little chip. It was very thickly applied gesso —

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

MS. RADY: — and then he painted over that with color.

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

MS. RADY: And I thought, “Hmm, another bubble bursts.” [Ms. Riedel laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Because it wasn’t perfect?

MS. RADY: No, not that it wasn’t perfect. I did — I just didn’t associate it with — I would — I would have preferred — I would have preferred not to have seen that chip. I would have — I would have appreciated it more had it been — had it been thick paint.

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

MS. RADY: So what it takes longer to dry? Big fucking deal. I — I would have responded to it better.

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

MS. RADY: And I — but that was a long time. God. That was so long. I saw — Jan had an Alice Neel show, and Alice Neel must have been some high-kicking babe, and her paintings are absolutely wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: They are.

MS. RADY: Just wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: Perreault sat — did a portrait. She did a nude portrait of — of Perreault and, you know, it was — it was so nice to see. I had not seen the work before.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. You hadn’t seen Alice Neel’s paintings before?

MS. RADY: No, not — not up — in books, yeah, but not up close.

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

MS. RADY: And I thought, “Man, this old coot really — she does it. She knows how to do the dance.”

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

MS. RADY: And also, I felt that she had captured a moment that not many people her age had.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the moment?

MS. RADY: That facile ability to paint.

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

MS. RADY: You know, you’ve got to — to look at something like that and go, “Wow, —”

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

MS. RADY: — that is painting.”

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

MS. RADY: You know, probably I think one of the most important living female artists today is Vija Celmins.

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

MS. RADY: Vija will work for five years on one painting, and she had a show down at the Newport Harbor [Art] Museum [Newport Beach, CA]. We drove down together. I said, “So tell me, Vija, how did they respond to your show?” She said, “Elsa, they — ‘the boys’ barely looked at it.” I said, “Well, that should tell you something.” She said, “What does it say?” I said, “Ooh, I’m jealous. Ooh, I’m jealous.” You know Vija — Vija’s a free spirit and she — she captured — I mean, I would never say it was Finnish fetish.

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

MS. RADY: I would say it was masterful painting, and so extraordinary, and again Reiko Mizuno, Vija nicknamed her “Mama-san,” and so — and, of course, I always called Reiko “Mama-san,” and again, there was no one that did it quite like Vija.



MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Absolutely not.

MS. RADY: There's no one that has done it like Ken.

MS. RIEDEL: Ken Price?

MS. RADY: Price.

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

MS. RADY: Absolutely no one.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: And Ken, you know, he worked for years before and — and when he did "Happy's Curio," —

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

MS. RADY: — the show, —

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

MS. RADY: — that I think went to the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York City], I think, —

MS. RIEDEL: I can't remember.

MS. RADY: I don't remember. It was a long time ago.

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

MS. RADY: There was one really dippy collector who got a piece, the round forms, for — I mean, they stole it.

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

MS. RADY: They absolutely stole it. The husband's a psychiatrist. The dealer was using the psychiatrist, and that was to reciprocate for the psychiatric treatment. I mean, that's such horseshit, and I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: A quick question about something you just said about the conversation with Vija Celmins and — and "how did the boys respond."

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

MS. RIEDEL: How do you feel — do you feel that being a woman has really made a difference in your career one way or the other?

MS. RADY: Absolutely not.

MS. RIEDEL: No? So you don't think that?

MS. RADY: No, not at all. I have no — I have no — I have no problem with stating I'm not a feminist.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. We should talk about that because —

MS. RADY: Not at all.

MS. RIEDEL: — these people certainly have associated that with your work.

MS. RADY: Never. It's boring. Let Betty Freidan pound her chest, and let Betty do her number, because that was the only way she could get recognized, and it's boring.

MS. RIEDEL: What's boring about it?

MS. RADY: Who gives a damn if you're male or female? Do good work. It doesn't matter, doesn't matter to me.

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

MS. RADY: You do good work, the sun's going to shine.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Inside you and outside of you.

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

MS. RADY: But, you know, you — you screw around and don't do good work. See, I guess being involved in that accident, what that really brought home to me was the fact that it was now or never.

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

MS. RADY: I had now to produce work that was good. I had — it meant — it just twisted things in my head. It made me realize there was more to my life than one day on, one day off.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And you have absolutely got to address your work that way. I mean, it's — it's critical that you get feedback from your work. To me, it's critical. It's critical that I feel I have accomplished certain things.

MS. RIEDEL: Such as?

MS. RADY: Good work. That — that to me is it.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. So you don't think of your work at all as having a strong, smart, feminine sensibility, along the line of someone like Martha Graham —

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: — or — no, not at all?

MS. RADY: Not at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Gender doesn't matter in the least?

MS. RADY: Does not. You do good work, doesn't matter what you — if you're male, female, or cross-gendered.

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

MS. RADY: It does not matter.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: What matters is to do good work.

MS. RIEDEL: Good.

MS. RADY: And anybody that has accused me of being a feminist —

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] I see.

MS. RADY: — and I have made it very clear, not gently, that that is a crock.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: No, I'm not that.

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

MS. RADY: I'm not a feminist. My — I believe in equality.

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

MS. RADY: I believe strongly that there should be recognition when someone does something that is good, pure, good, and that's when you can say, "Oh, yeah, okay, then I've accomplished something that I set out to do." But you — no one is that good to ever stop trying.

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

MS. RADY: No one is that smart to ever stop trying.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And certainly if you're an artist, you know, you can toot your horn. I'm not interested in tooting my own horn.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. The work speaks for itself?

MS. RADY: It has to.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. How did the CYCLADIC series begin? It was a real departure from the STILL LIFES to be sure.

MS. RADY: I went out to the Getty, —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — the Villa, —

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. You saw —

MS. RADY: — and I saw these white figures, and I had a phone book that had a Cycladic form, and I pulled the page. It's a — it's in the closet. I never throw out phone books. [Ms. Riedel laughs.] I don't, because if you lose the good phone book, then you're up shit's creek.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: So I was — I was looking at this page, at this Cycladic figure, —

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

MS. RADY: — and I thought, "Gee whiz, gee whiz," then I didn't give it much thought, —

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

MS. RADY: — and I don't know what the kick in the ass was that made me address it.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I do know that I detested the installation at Long Beach [Museum of Art, CA].

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: It was too much work in it.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Needed more space?

MS. RADY: I could have used twice the amount of space.

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

MS. RADY: And I could have had three times — no — three times the amount of space, and I was really miserable, and I asked the director, I said, "Please let me reinstall." "Absolutely not. We're not going to do that. It's up and it's finished," and when they came to — I had the *Cycladic* pieces at Craig Krull [Gallery, Santa Monica, CA].

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And they came there, I turned to them and I said, "You could have had this. You dumb bastard, you wouldn't let me." You know, —

MS. RIEDEL: And did — was that — did — was — did whoever this was from the museum, did they appreciate the

difference? Could they see what you were going for, or did they really think that —

MS. RADY: No. I mean, he was stubborn.

MS. RIEDEL: It was just fine.

MS. RADY: He just said, “This is it. You’re not changing a thing.”

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

MS. RADY: You know, it’s — it’s like Michael Jackson’s tour *This Is It*.

[They laugh.]

MS. RADY: Which I happen to adore. I think he — it was a great tragedy. He was truly a superstar and with a heart of gold.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: A gentle young man that was brutalized by his father.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And at the funeral when his father came, they — they put the microphone up to the father, he said, “This is my new protégé.” It was some old bag who was probably in his 70s. Not a word about his child’s death.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And, you see, that is abuse. That is abuse. Those kids were whipped with a belt buckle, you know, a belt that had a heavy buckle.

MS. RIEDEL: I don’t know anything about it.

MS. RADY: Yeah. If they didn’t do — if they didn’t practice, —

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

MS. RADY: — if they didn’t do what the father wanted, —

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

MS. RADY: — that’s one hell of a way to teach.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it would be awful.

MS. RADY: It’s the worst.

MS. RIEDEL: You’ve talked about modern architecture as an influence.

MS. RADY: Well, when I was passing this gas station that was pure California Deco, —

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

MS. RADY: — and I saw — I could see the ball coming, and I pulled my car over and I just drew the top of the —

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

MS. RADY: — piece —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — of — of what the top of the building was, —

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

MS. RADY: — and I went to my studio, and I threw several pieces, and one woman said, “Oh, these pieces remind me of the bullrushes.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I said, "Well, they don't remind me of that."

MS. RIEDEL: No, they don't remind me of it either.

MS. RADY: And —

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking of that one bowl in particular with those very carved four sides.

MS. RADY: That's exactly right.

MS. RIEDEL: That's the Deco piece. Yeah.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: And, you know, [laughs] oh, God, when I got the cover of the Newark show, —

MS. RIEDEL: Which show was that?

MS. RADY: That was, I think, "A Century of Ceramics."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. And where was it?

MS. RADY: At the Newark Museum of Art.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And Garth called me immediately. He said, "You know, you got the cover," and I said, "Oh, that piece is so ugly." [Ms. Riedel laughs.] He said, "Well, dear, enjoy it, because you got the cover," and my mother wasn't alive, and I took — I asked my nephew if he would escort me for the evening. Toshiko Takaezu was there, and I stood up and I thanked her —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — for her very quiet spiritualism. Boy. You can learn a lot of lessons from that one.

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

MS. RADY: You know, the — the pieces have small balls of clay in them and they rattle.

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

MS. RADY: Then Otto Heino was making paperweights —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: — and he was putting balls in that.

MS. RIEDEL: I saw those.

MS. RADY: Yeah. I've got one on my desk.

MS. RIEDEL: Me, too.

MS. RADY: And, you know, it's — it's really peculiar. I've had so much in my life that has made me so fortunate, and I've had so much that has humbled me to accept the fortune.

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

MS. RADY: It's not a thing to do with money, nothing. You know, I look in the cupboard and go, "Oops, that's bare." It's — it's not about that. It is about how you proceed, how you handle your life and what you want back from it.

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

MS. RADY: You know, you — you really — you do pay your dues. I have paid my dues, and I've paid my don'ts [laughs] and — but I've — I've been really one of the most fortunate people I know.

MS. RIEDEL: You're talking about Toshiko and her — the quiet, spiritual quality of her work.

MS. RADY: That's —

MS. RIEDEL: Is there a spiritual element in your work, as well?

MS. RADY: When I had my big kiln set up, [laughs] when it would go into reduction, I'd go, "You slut, fire." One night I couldn't get the kiln off.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. RADY: We had a terrible windstorm, and I called Otto in the morning. I said, "Otto, this kiln has been rolling for hours." He said, "Was the wind up?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Close the dampers completely and then pull them open again and knock out what's come down the pipe."

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: You couldn't just cut off the gas?

MS. RADY: I — I didn't know. Nothing was reaching temperature.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, okay, okay.

MS. RADY: And I was so stymied and he said, "No, the Alpine kiln, if it is windy, —"

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: "— you have to close the dampers and pull them open and then you knock out that —"

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Whatever is holding the air in place —

MS. RADY: — which is — which is freezing the air, basically.

MS. RADY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So is there a spiritual quality to firing?

MS. RADY: Yes, there is. You know, you pray it's going to be good. Quietly, one prays, you know, and when I was young, I was so crazy, when I fired, I slept on the left side of the bed. I cannot tell you why, and I normally — no. I slept — yeah. I slept on the other side of the bed, and I — I don't know why I used to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And normally I sleep on the other side of the bed.

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

MS. RADY: And it was just — it was very — you know, a life — life has very strange shifts and moves and surprises.

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

MS. RADY: And I've had a lot of surprises in my life, good and bad, and — but you've got to take it all and learn from it.

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

MS. RADY: If you don't, you're an ass.

MS. RIEDEL: I think immediately of your petaling[?] pieces and how that came out of a droop that happened unexpectedly as a surprise —

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: — in the kiln, correct? No?

MS. RADY: There's one *Lily* that really does look like a lily.

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

MS. RADY: And what I would do is once it was cut, —

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

MS. RADY: — I would coax, using a sponge and very little water, my finger would be underneath the wing and I would coax it down —

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

MS. RADY: — and cover it, let it dry, let the top dry covered.

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

MS. RADY: I had — Juanita Jimenez brought her — her girls from Flintridge School, and they all were fascinated that I covered the — the — about two inches of the rim of the pot with Saran Wrap [laughs].

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

MS. RADY: Because the bottom had to catch up with the top.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: I didn't want it to dry out.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. RADY: So Juanita called me and she was hysterical. She said, "Elsa, all the little girls are covering the rims of their pieces [they laugh] with Saran Wrap." I said, "No, it's Glad Wrap. It's cheaper." She said — she said, "It is so funny," and she said — I think Juanita is probably one of the great teachers of ceramics. She — she is so gifted and has such balls. She really does, and she has been honest to a fault.

MS. RIEDEL: What makes her a good teacher?

MS. RADY: Because she's so dedicated.

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

MS. RADY: She — she talks about *her* girls, and they are her girls, and she will — her dedication to these young kids is absolutely — it is faultless, and I said to her one day. "I want to come up and sit in on a class." She said, "Well, I think it would make the girls nervous." I said, "You don't have to say who I am or what I am. I'm just someone that you know that wanted to come see and watch how she handled the class."

MS. RIEDEL: And what about that was curious to you?

MS. RADY: Because of this absolute, unfaltering dedication to *her* girls, teaching them. I mean, it — it was — it was so extraordinary to watch her and to [laughs] — I remember Ralph Bacerra, Ralph's roommate Nat Kahn [sp], and I drove down to Tijuana, and Ralph thought it would be very funny to get — rent a film that was pornographic. So these morons were in a whorehouse, and these morons are sitting on the bed, and Ralph said, "Why aren't you sitting, Miss Elsa?" I said, "You think I'm going to sit on that bed? You're out of your mind," and then they — they — they went, "Oh, yeah," and stood up. [Laughs.] It was — it was great. It was great to watch these nuts just, you know, get, you know, clicked in. Yes, this is what — and no, you shouldn't and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Ralph took a cross-country trip with Vivika —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — when he was a student. There's a wonderful sketchbook he did of that time. It seems like they stopped at some really interesting places. I think they went all the way to the East Coast. They stopped at, I think, a Native American ceramic center. I'm trying to think where it might have been. It might have been San Ildefonso. I can't remember.

MS. RADY: Could have been.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: Well, on that trip when they got to New Hampshire, Ralph threw a wrench at her.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: So it was not a bed of roses.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. I want to talk — go back to your visit to Juanita Jimenez’s class and what about it was interesting to you, what you saw that stayed with you.

MS. RADY: Just to be so committed to —

MS. RIEDEL: How did you see that? What was it she did?

MS. RADY: She labored over these kids and she — and her life was absolutely dedicated to these young girls.

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

MS. RADY: And it still is, and, you know, unfortunately, I learned a long time ago, when you’re dumb and you invest in the stock market, you better be prepared to lose it, and she lost a third of her retirement fund, and that’s why she teaches during the summer.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: She built this mammoth studio in Joshua Tree.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I said to her, “What are you doing?” She said — and she’s an incredible cook.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Oh, my God, what cooking. And she said, “I’m doing the laundry.” I said, “You drive down there. Can’t you go over to Susie (her sister) and do your laundry there and not drive to Joshua Tree?” She was silent. She said, “This is my home.” I said, “Okay. Do your laundry, do your ironing,” and she prepares her food for the week.

MS. RIEDEL: You never had any interest in teaching full time. Did you teach at any of the — the schools that are associated with craft, Penland [School of Crafts, Bakersville, NC] or —

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: — Fairmont-Haystack?

MS. RADY: No, I wasn’t invited to do so.

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

MS. RADY: The only place that I was invited to teach was New Zealand, and I worked my way down. In fact, I went as far as the Tasmanian Sea.

MS. RIEDEL: And what — what did you teach?

MS. RADY: I would — the night before I’d go in and throw some bowls, and then the next morning I’d get in early, trim them, and then I’d walk into the audience and I’d say, “Break out a side,” and they were horrified. I’d say, “Go on, you’re not going to hurt anything,” and someone would break out a side. I said, “Now, this is going to be a lesson in the fact that you’ve got a side that’s broken out. What are you going to do with it?” I said, “I’m not precious about my work, but you don’t have to throw it out.”

So all of a sudden, as — as happened in Colorado when I taught there, —

MS. RIEDEL: Where in Colorado? Oh, Airmont? [Arrowmont, in TN? Ed.]

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No. Oh, right. I can’t think of the name either.

MS. RADY: Jesus.

MS. RIEDEL: It’ll come to us.



MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: Sam Maloof was teaching, I was teaching. Paul Soldner was — had really developed this place.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I can't think of the name either.

MS. RADY: Oh, I don't know. I hate Colorado. Rocky Mountain High, keep it.

MS. RIEDEL: There's — there was — that's a well-known school, though. We'll add the name in.

So, and what were you interested in teaching there?

MS. RADY: I —

MS. RIEDEL: Same thing?

MS. RADY: — taught what I did, and you'd see all of these little Elsa Radys springing up.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Is imperfection an important part of your process?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: That breaking of that perfect piece?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. RADY: It has nothing to do with the work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: I think when you — one of the things that I know that happened, you know, you anchor down a pot on the wheel, and then when you trim the foot, you have to remove the clay that you've —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — anchored with.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And very often a piece will come out, and as I remember always saying, "Hmm, well, you better do something with that."

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

MS. RADY: And a lot of things evolved from that and, you know, the petaling[?] of the LILY series, that was not intentional. A lot of the things happened in the firing.

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

MS. RADY: And it — God. That first studio that was mine, it was such a joy. I didn't have to call anyone to see if I could come down and work when I was paying half of the rent.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you describe your working process in that studio?

MS. RADY: The little one?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. You're — the one that was your own. What time would you arrive, what would —

MS. RADY: I lived there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And what time would you begin working?

MS. RADY: I didn't — I didn't live there originally, no. I built in — I don't know. A couple years after I moved in. It

had been the — they used to take the bums off the beach. It had been the training station to teach these men and women who were derelict to become fry cooks.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. This was in Venice [CA]?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: And the first time I fired my kiln, God, there must have been 50 years of fat in the flue that I —

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MS. RADY: — clipped into, [on audio] and it was like “Get me outta here!”

MS. RIEDEL: Did you prefer to work early in the morning, late at night?

[THIS BELONGS ON P. 120. And here starts track 5. CB] it, bring it downstairs and choke on it, but you don't get them out of here because of growing pot on the roof.” I said, “Come on, you all were young once.”

MS. RIEDEL: And how does that relate to Dumphy?

MS. RADY: Dumphy. Dumphy was our next-door neighbor.

MS. RIEDEL: And — and did he come across you in the dumpster trying to pull out the shards?

MS. RADY: Yes, and he went [clicking sound] like that to get my attention. He'd say — I said, “Earthquake,” and he went — he was fabulous. What a — what a — oh, this was one of his sayings and I think I still have it written down. “Allah loves those who believe in God.”

[They laugh.]

MS. RADY: I said, “You got that one right, Dump.” Character.

MS. RIEDEL: The LILY series strikes me — we were just talking about this in terms of the glaze. It strikes me as a real shift in what you'd been doing up to that point because they do get so quiet, the way you were describing that work in the studio.

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

MS. RIEDEL: They feel very still. There's incredible motion in those pieces —

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: — because of the flared rims, the — the dynamic between the pieces, —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — but because of that glaze, there's a stillness to them, as well, that monochromatic off-white.

MS. RADY: Well, again, I'm — I had never done a series that was all one color.

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

MS. RADY: A friend of mine in New York decided that we would do a — he would do a grisaille show and I would do my white show.

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

MS. RADY: And all Holly did was “whew,” like that.

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

MS. RADY: Well, he couldn't master grisaille.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: So he did something else out of some crap, and as much money as Holly invested in his career and, boy, she invested a potful, —

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

MS. RADY: — he was not thankful. He was not gracious. He did — he'd buy these shitty plates from secondhand stores, paint on them. It was a thing he did for Malo. Malo is an Italian sweater line, very fine sweaters, and if you think he gave one dime to Holly, you better think again.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And she was devastated.

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

MS. RADY: Devastated. You know, she had a series of artists do her portrait. [Andy] Warhol did her portrait. [Roy] Lichtenstein did her portrait. Archvarger [ph] did her portrait. I mean, there's — there's something very narcissistic about, you know, "do my portrait." I wouldn't have someone do my portrait if I fell on them. It's not something I want or need or particularly care about, but she, you know, — Holly was as narcissistic as the next guy.

But the thing with her portraits, she sold the Warhol portrait, I think to Eli Broad, and she got \$2 million for it. I think it was Eli that bought it.

MS. RIEDEL: You know, there — I want to talk about a quote of yours in the *Still Life* catalog from 1991 because I think it's — it's something that would be interesting to explore a bit further. You said, "My still life shelves take up the same space as a painting and make people look in a new way. The work is now my own."

MS. RADY: Yes. I had switched from a shelf, the round, and I actually constructed a large back —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — and Holly's comment to — she saw it, and she looked at me when I was installing this. She said, "I don't understand why people have to change something that's good." I said, "You dog, you were in my studio."

MS. RIEDEL: How is it making people see in a new way?

MS. RADY: It's confrontation. There's nothing more powerful than confrontation.

MS. RIEDEL: And how was it confrontation?

MS. RADY: You had to stop and look.

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

MS. RADY: You had maybe a light went on, and maybe you had to think.

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

MS. RADY: And sometimes you win a few and sometimes you lose dozens, but being provocative, being so headstrong, this is what I'm going to do, this is the way it's going to be done, this is how I want it, this I hope to Christ I can do it, and —

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Were you thinking about [Giorgio] Morandi at all in —

MS. RADY: Always.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Okay.

MS. RADY: Always, always. What a — you know, there's a very interesting thing with Morandi. All the flower paintings that he did, those were only for his sisters.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I went to an auction house to look at a few Morandis and I thought, "Boy, you got the world by the balls, honey," and he did. He was absolutely, unconditionally one of, I think, the most important artists that we ever had.

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

MS. RADY: I'm trying to think who it was that — [Alberto] Giacometti was hit by a bus in New York.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. RADY: And they were tending — the paramedics were tending to him, and he said, “Thank God, I’ll never have to do another sculpture.” [Ms. Riedel laughs.] Now that may be apochrophal. I don’t know, but I think it’s absolutely the best. What a note to go out on.

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

MS. RADY: “Thank God I’ll never have to do another piece of sculpture.”

MS. RIEDEL: Are you ready to stop?

MS. RADY: Never.

MS. RIEDEL: I didn’t think so.

MS. RADY: I will stop when they’re putting me in to get the ashes.

]

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Back to Morandi.

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

MS. RIEDEL: What, in particular, about that work is compelling to you?

MS. RADY: Oh, those colors.

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

MS. RADY: The seduction, the — that facile quietness, so thoughtful, and you know what’s incredible about Morandi, he worked on the same tabletop, and on that desktop, there were circles, and he would do a set-up, a still life, and then he’d make a circle in the event he had to move something in order to — I don’t know — make some pasta.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: But he was extraordinary in how he — this tabletop had circles on it, and that’s how he — in the event that he had to move the objects. I don’t think there was a colorist, I don’t think there’s been an artist that I can think of, with the exception of Richard Serra, whom I idolize, that had the gift of Morandi.

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

MS. RADY: You know, it’s deep-seated, unforgiving passion, and I hope and pray I one day achieve that. Again, there’s a quietness, and that’s something that I strive to accomplish, quietness, and it does come from creativity and it — it makes it pleasure. I am a pleasure-seeker but only in regard to my work, and I’m committed or should be committed. [They laugh.] Jane said, “Watch it. They’re going to commit you.” I love my friends. I go the full distance for them because they’ve done it for me, and only one friend did I have and I warned her. I said, “You keep hitting me up for Percocet, I need it at times, you don’t.” “Oh, it’s recreational.” I said, “I can’t afford your habit. I am going to take money from you.” Well, she stole money from me. Like it? I am going to send her a letter because they’ve treated me like shit.

MS. RIEDEL: How did the thing work with Swid Powell come about?

MS. RADY: I met Nan and — what the hell’s his name? Steven. I met them at a friend’s house. She — Nan was looking at some things that Robin [Brown] had that were mine. See, my first catalog, I had to raise the money. I was promised a catalog, and then this —

MS. RIEDEL: For the STILL LIFES, is that right, with Holly or another catalog before that?

MS. RADY: No, no, no. This was — this was the *Conjugation* catalog.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And —

MS. RIEDEL: Where was that show?

MS. RADY: Jan Turner.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: I was promised a catalog, and at the tenth hour he said, "I'm not giving you a catalog." I said, "Thanks, Dan [Saxon]," and so how I raised the money in 19 — Jesus — it was the early '80s. How I raised the money was that I did a small piece to reciprocate for a \$500 or \$1,000 donation, and I said — I said, "It's the last time you've ever going to promise a catalog. You've given catalogs to every slob that's walked through the door, and now, all of a sudden, you're getting tight?" I said, and I meant it. I said, "Man, you've got shit to learn."

My mother met him. [Laughs.] We were driving up to San Francisco. I had a show in San Francisco.

MS. RIEDEL: Quay Gallery, right?

MS. RADY: Quay [pronounced "key"].

MS. RIEDEL: Quay, right, right, right. Braunstein Quay? It was just Quay at the time.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Well, no. Ruth and — and what's her name, —

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Braunstein and —

MS. RADY: — Braunstein — oh, God.

MS. RADY: — Mama Duck [ph] — no. I don't remember.

MS. RIEDEL: I can't remember what it was.

MS. RADY: Anyway, she — so we were driving up, and Jan and Dan came for brunch before we went, and we got — we were driving up. My mother said to me, "She's very bright. He, I wouldn't buy a car from." I said, "I wouldn't either," and he started a gallery himself which went pfft, and —

MS. RIEDEL: The catalog we were talking about.

MS. RADY: Yeah. So he — he called me into the — one of the spaces. He said, "I just want to make sure that these pieces you're making in exchange for money for the catalog." I said, "Yes, that you promised me, and now have gone back on your word." He said, "Well, I want to make sure that it's not going to conflict with business in the gallery." I said, "Dan Saxon, go fuck yourself." I walked away. Conflict. You gotta be crazy. You know, they — they would give this slug, Peter Shire, numerous catalogs.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you — did you feel that it was a lot more difficult for you because you were a woman?

MS. RADY: Never addressed it.

MS. RIEDEL: Never thought about it?

MS. RADY: Nope. Only time I felt that there may have been a conflict was when I did the show in Washington, D.C., at a dump called The American Hand. Fifty-four pieces sold in 51 minutes, but Ken Deavers came out. I had sent him some work, and if they liked it, they'd purchase it and then get a better price. I sent him this one beautiful peach bloom glaze, and he sent it back. He said, "The rim is too random." I said, "Well, put it in a box and ship it back." He came to my studio again. He picked that piece. I said, "Unh-huh. [Negative.] You may not have that." He said, "Well, who is it for?" I said, "Not you," [Ms. Riedel laughs] and he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "The rim is too random." I said, "If you'll flip that over, the sticker price is still on the bottom." I said, "You've got your goddamn nerve."

Now, the same outfit called me, wrote me a scathing letter. "Unless you have a special shelf for The American Hand, obviously you've chosen to hook your star on the gallery circuit." I had gotten with Holly. I called him up, said, "What the fuck are you talking about? I have been true blue blue to you and your asinine antics." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "What I mean is, I sent something in, you send it back, you come to the studio, you pick it again." I said, "Unh-huh." I said, "I'm with Holly Solomon now, and anything you have to do in relation to me, you will have to go through her." One for the Jew. [Ms. Riedel laughs.] I mean, I have never — I have never been so insulted.

I did a show with Garth Clark in 1985, '4 or '5. I had done these plinths of granite, and Mark [Del Vecchio], Garth's partner and lover, came to look at the show at Holly's, and he became furious. Why? Because he said I had shelves and that's what I so resented at Garth's. I said, "Yeah, you pick up one shelf with a system that hooked on to the wall and you do one pot after another after another." I — it's not a grocery store. He was livid with me.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you had made shelves for these pieces?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Huh.

MS. RADY: And now she makes shelves? And my — I told my mother and she said, "Why didn't you tell him to go fuck themselves?" I said, "Ma, I didn't have you there or I would have," and I did make a star with a hook and I sent them that star and the hook, and I said, "The pleasure is all mine."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I don't like being jacked around, ever. I don't like dishonesty in people, and there have been people who have been extremely dishonest with me.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: For instance, this one piece, the first *Lily*, —

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

MS. RADY: — I have — I said to my sister, "We're going to court."

MS. RIEDEL: Right. We've mentioned that.

MS. RADY: And she said, "You're crazy. How much is it going to cost me?" I said, "I'll give Rod another *Chloe Tide* [ph]. He can put two on the table," and she said, "Well, I still think you're —" I said, "I am not wrong. This damn thing has haunted me. There's no reason why this woman should have something that was mine and that I lent to her in good faith." That was it.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Just going back to the Swid Powell work, —

MS. RADY: Yes. So —

MS. RIEDEL: — can you give —

MS. RADY: — Nan — Nan and Steven were out at a friend of mine named Robin Brown, and Nan saw some of the work. She said, "God, I'd love for you to come design for us."

MS. RIEDEL: They wanted you to design functional work?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: I said —

MS. RIEDEL: Which they would make in silver?

MS. RADY: Plate.

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

MS. RADY: I said, "Nan, I would love to."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Now what inspired you to do that? What did you find interesting about that?

MS. RADY: Well, I always am very curious about different medium.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: They were giving me the option to work in metal.

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

MS. RADY: When the person that was the director of Jan Turner's gallery called me, said, "My God, you're not going to believe this, someone's knocked your work off." [Ms. Riedel laughs.] I said, "What medium?" "Brass." I called this guy in San Francisco that I had met, his name is Win Ning, Taylor Ning. I said, "Win, I've got a problem." "What is it?" I said, "Well, my work is being knocked off." He said, "Where is it being made?" I said, "India." He said, "Don't you ever call me again." He said, "India? You'll never get quality out of India." So —

MS. RIEDEL: So were they knocking off the work that you had designed for Swid Powell?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: Before —

MS. RIEDEL: And why did you call Taylor Ning?

MS. RADY: Because Win had tremendous knowledge. It — it was Campbell Ning, and Win had tremendous knowledge about working and having people knock you off and things like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: But when he heard it was India, he was frothing at the mouth, and I said, "I didn't know I was going to get that kind of —"

MS. RIEDEL: Why did that make him so mad?

MS. RADY: He was furious.

MS. RIEDEL: But why?

MS. RADY: He said, "Because they make shit."

MS. RIEDEL: But that's not your fault.

MS. RADY: I said, "I had nothing to do with it."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And when we went, Holly and I went to Andy Warhol's house when he died, there were four bowls sitting on his table that were Swid Powell.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. That you had designed?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Holly said, "Kid, you did it again." She's so crazy, so much fun.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: Hmm. And she really knew how to encourage you and she really knew — I mean literally — I took her into a show at Jan Turner's. She said, "These prices are disgusting." Jan heard her. She said, "These prices are going up. There's only one way with you and that's up." Jan was so livid. I said, "Look, Jan, I've no control over it. She's my gallery." When I called Jan from New York, I said, "Jan, I've gotten into Holly Solomon's gallery," and this is how she greeted me. "Oh, you know, I'm busy now. I'll talk to you another time." And I said, "You fucking ingrate."

MS. RIEDEL: So the dealer experience has not been a terribly pleasant one with the exception of Holly, it sounds like, and that sounds —

MS. RADY: Holly was —

MS. RIEDEL: — extraordinary?

MS. RADY: — extraordinary. Craig Krull is — look, he's a photography gallery. That's his oeuvre. That's — that

and Mickey Mouse. When he heard I had worked at Franciscan China and had worked on those murals that Mary Blair designed, I said, “You know, they came to film me painting the mural and we [inaudible] an outline would be made in a, oh, a slip that had sand in it. You’d [inaudible] that on and then fill in and so —”

MS. RIEDEL: So we’re talking about galleries and photography.

MS. RADY: Yes. And Craig —

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe we’ll stop for today. It’s getting late.

MS. RADY: Yeah. No. Craig just — he’s not enthusiastic about the new work. So I took myself up to Shoshana Wayne. Wayne Blanc developed Bergamot Station [Arts Center, Santa Monica, CA]. I went into his — I said, “Wayne, can I talk to you for a minute, just a minute?” He said, “Sure, come on in.” Sat — he said, “Want something to drink?” I said, “No, I’m fine.” He said, “What you got, kid?” I said, “I have a new series,” and I showed him the *Kukutani*. He said, “God, I love ceramics.” I said, “God, I love you.”

MS. RIEDEL: So was he interested in showing them?

MS. RADY: He said, “As soon as you finish that series, Shoshana and I are coming to your studio and you have a show.”

MS. RIEDEL: That’s wonderful news.

MS. RADY: I said, “You know, the garden behind your desk is so beautifully done.” He said, “That’s Shoshana, not me.” I said, “It’s beautiful. It’s so soothing.” I mean, it took a lot. Wayne did that whole fucking complex himself. You know, he had a little bit of encouragement from Tom Patchett, whose claim to fame is *Alf*. Oh, boy.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we’ll stop here for the day.

MS. RADY: Good.

MS. RIEDEL: We’ll pick it up tomorrow.

MS. RADY: Oh, I can’t wait.

MS. RIEDEL: Great. Me either.

(End of Interview August 13, 2010)

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Elsa Rady at the artist’s home and studio in Los Angeles, California, on August twelfth, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. Disc number two.

When we stopped talking at the end of disc number one, we had just started to talk about the evolution of the first wing pieces in the late ’70s.

MS. RADY: Okay. I — when I moved into the — this little studio that was all my own, I didn’t have to call and say, “May I come down,” although I was paying half the rent, —

MS. RIEDEL: At your other studio?

MS. RADY: At a studio downtown.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were sharing that with someone?

MS. RADY: Who shall remain nameless. And I felt a tremendous need to, again, try to establish a different kind of form.

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

MS. RADY: I’d done this faux Chinese shit for years. It was over. It was finished. I didn’t want to do it anymore, and, you know, it’s so easy to get into a rut, and I was in a rut.

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

MS. RADY: I was starting to cut into one of the bowls, you know, this faux Chinese shit, and I’m — I missed it. I somehow — and I thought, “You know, now wait a minute.” I have — when I give a demonstration, I throw a bowl, I go into the audience and I say “rip” — I always say “rip a side out,” and my whole emphasis is there’s no need to throw a piece out. You can manipulate it so that you create another form, and people — I remember I



was invited to New Zealand to lecture, and people absolutely were aghast when I went into the audience. I said, "Okay, here's a bowl, rip the side out."

I think only through sheer stupidity or total determination was I confronted with "I am not going to throw this out. I'm going to learn how to" — first of all, porcelain is the most unforgiving beautiful, beautiful material I think that the Chinese ever invented, and so I felt very strongly about "don't dump it, do something with it."

MS. RIEDEL: Is it the translucency of the material? Is it the way it takes glaze?

MS. RADY: It is the most impossible, unforgiving, goddamn clay. It is the most beautiful clay. It has a quality that, if thrown well, can be so breathtaking, and the trick is to plug in and make it that way, make it. See, there's a problem. You go to school. You start mimicking your teachers. Then you get out of school, and you are confronted with a problem. Now what do I do? Now how do I make this my own?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And that takes many years to make it your own.

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

MS. RADY: But I didn't — I didn't care. I had time. I had tremendous support from my mother. Oh, God. And she was like spitfire. She was so quick and so supportive and loving and, I mean, I can't — I don't have enough adjectives to describe this woman. She was beautiful. She was gifted. She was talented, and she was also my best friend and my most severe critic.

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

MS. RADY: My mother was widowed at 52 years old. My father died when he was 54. Now, I am quite friendly with this one lyricist, Jerry Lieber, —

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

MS. RADY: — of Lieber and [Mike] Stoller, and Jerry said to me one day, "Do you know what a giant your father was?" When — after my father got out of the Army, he then went to Unity House and he also did the Macy's Chorale. They had it.

MS. RIEDEL: He sang?

MS. RADY: No, no. He would conduct —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: — this chorus.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And he did — there was a show during — with the WPA [Works Progress Administration] called *Pins and Needles*. It was the garment industry thing, and he put that together.

Now, when he got out of the Army, he absolutely could not understand why the American musical was seen onstage and then they put song number 1 with song number 7, song number 7 next to song number 5. He said, "This is crazy. I'm putting song number 1 and then song number 2 and then song number 3. You want it — you want to engage the viewer to be able to remember what they're hearing, and they don't — you know, Carly [Curly] comes out singing "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning," and then they would put" — *Oklahoma* was his first show.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: He said to Richard Rodgers, "I am doing this in the sequence that it is seen on the stage." Richard Rodgers said, "It's never been done that way." He said, "Well, it is in my studio." He said, "Go ahead," and it set precedent for so — for every show that was recorded after.

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

MS. RADY: My father was recording "Mr. Wonderful" with Sammy Davis. Sammy Davis came out of the booth and dropped to his knees and he said, "Your father's going to give me a heart attack," and I said, "Why," and he said, "Because he refuses to mix. You've to get it in one full take, and God help you if you don't because we will

start over again.”

Now in those years they used to record in the basement of churches in Manhattan. My sister is at a friend’s apartment, actually their sponsor, and Ellie, “Miss Ellie” we call her, Miss Ellie said, “Ooh, I just had everything put on tape of the girls when they were young, when we were sailing to Europe, and you’ve got to see it.” So she puts the tape on, and my sister says to Ellie, “Ellie, that’s my father that your little girls are playing with.” My father was sailing to Europe.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. RADY: And you can see him with these little girls. “What’s that? What’s that?” He was a wonderful teacher.

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

MS. RADY: Dedicated and kind, demanding as hell, but there was something very charming about him, and he — oh, God [laughs]. The first day he saw my mother — many of the refugees would have — they would send their children to a place where they could be exposed to the arts, and my mother walked into the class. Her hair was down to her B-line.

MS. RIEDEL: This was in New York?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: This little tiny thing, and my father put out his foot and tripped her, and she pulled herself — she — “Get your big fat Harlem feet in.” He lived in Spanish Harlem and he used to walk with her, holding her by the back of the — you’d see her, “Stop it, stop it, don’t lead me like a cat, stop it,” and, you know, it’s very difficult when you come from parents who had a very successful marriage, you know. She was 11, he was 13.

MS. RIEDEL: They had known each other that long?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Long before she was a dancer?

MS. RADY: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How interesting.

MS. RADY: And he had to come and get her out of school because she was going — they were performing in Philadelphia. He said, “You’ve got to let my sister out.” They said, “Why?” “Because she is performing.”

MS. RIEDEL: Your father was talking about your mother?

MS. RADY: Mother, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Go ahead.

MS. RADY: He went to school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: To her school.

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

MS. RADY: Said “You’ve got to let my sister out, she’s got a performance in Philadelphia.”

MS. RIEDEL: But he’s talking about his future wife, right?

MS. RADY: Correct.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Not sister?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MS. RADY: And, you know, it was kind of marvelous to see them pout, you know, the familiarity of knowing someone so intimately and for so long. They almost — God. We sailed to Europe on the *Queen Mary*. My father met us in Cherbourg. They had built this little — they had taken one of the — the structures on the property and they built it out so they could get away on the weekend and leave us in the city.

MS. RIEDEL: This is in Quogue?

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

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And my father — actually, my father really never got to live in it.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. RADY: Or he did maybe for one — one summer.

MS. RIEDEL: Before he died?

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MS. RADY: And then the Israelis came. My grandmother always hated my grandfather's brother, and my father picked up the whole bill for these Israelis to come. The guy was named Common [sp] and he used to ride with the henchmen.

MS. RIEDEL: You know, this is fascinating but I want to make sure that we have enough time to talk —

MS. RADY: Okay. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: — about your work.

MS. RADY: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: So I just wanted to get back to talking a little bit more —

MS. RADY: All right. Sorry.

MS. RIEDEL: — specifically now about —

MS. RADY: Sorry, sorry.

MS. RIEDEL: No. It's wonderful to — to sort of see how this all connects and how clearly you come from an extremely creative family.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And so I imagine that there's a constant back and forth between your early experiences and how that impacted your work later. But I did want to talk about the evolution of your work. You started to talk about the porcelain forms and how exquisite a medium porcelain is.

MS. RADY: Oh, God.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were beginning to carve into them.

MS. RADY: And it — well, for years, I did this faux Chinese stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Which was just —

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And you had had it with that.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But then you began to put — how did it come about that you began to in the CONJUGATION series juxtapose one form with another, and then really to bolt them down on the plinth or the base so they were no longer —

MS. RADY: How would they last?

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Because they had such narrow feet, they were so delicate.

MS. RADY: How could that withstand, you know, if I — in the earthquake, if I got one more telephone call —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — from a collector who had lost a piece —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — and I said to them, “You know, I can’t help you. I can give you the name of a restorer.”

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: “I am not going to track it. You will have to do that yourself. I won’t do that, and this is something you’ll have to track yourself.”

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

MS. RADY: And they were indignant. “What do you mean? It’s your work, blah-blah-blah,” and I said, “I don’t have the energy.”

MS. RIEDEL: Or the time; it’s not my job.

MS. RADY: “I will give you the name of a very, very good restorer.”

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. When I look at the pieces on bases from the earliest ones, I mean, certainly the beginning with the CONJUGATION series, they feel very much like choreographed pieces. I can’t help but look at them —

MS. RADY: They were.

MS. RIEDEL: — that way.

MS. RADY: I got so good at choosing color. How I do it is, I’ll line up. I have loose chips of glaze.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And I’d line them up and I’d say, “Gee, is this quirky enough?”

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

MS. RADY: I got so good at it, I could almost fling it behind my back and it would work.

MS. RIEDEL: And you could see a real shift in the palette, too. I mean, they started off so monochromatic and it seems sometime in the — early on in 1980 or so, they — they became increasingly matte, but then —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — in the — in the ’90s, the color palette changed and they almost became very Southern California, that the colors felt vibrant and bright as opposed to — you juxtaposed three different colored forms on a single base as opposed to the very quiet, monochromatic pieces. What was the thinking behind that? Do you remember?

MS. RADY: You’ve got to keep changing. You must in order to live, survive, and make your life enjoyable and, see, there’s nothing like that kick from creativity. Nothing. Sex, love, marriage, not marriage, boyfriend, nothing comes near that jolt when you realize, “Okay, now I’m playing with a full deck,” and it almost became a contest for me to start playing color, which was a tremendous part of my work.

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

MS. RADY: Playing against each other, and the first show I brought in to Holly was on a rectilinear shelf, and she came in, I was installing, she came through and she said, “God, color, color’s completely different.” I said, “Is that a problem with you?” She said, “Not at all. Is it a problem with you?” I said, “Not at all,” and she said, “Well, just continue.”

MS. RIEDEL: And was that because the color palette had shifted, or because you had shifted from monochromatic to color in the first place?

MS. RADY: I got tremendous — a tremendous charge out of playing with color in a different way. The odder the color, the better I liked it, the more compelling it was, and again I said I — as I said, I got so good at it that I literally — see, I would block out tiles together and then I'd say, "Well, yeah, that's okay, that one's okay," and — and it became — it became a dance, a game.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, they feel like staged, literally and figuratively, staged pieces.

MS. RADY: Well, they were.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, you can — you can almost see pas de deux. I can almost see, you know, the chorus. There is just such movement in — in the pieces, in the — in the variety of the pieces themselves, the forms, the tall narrow ones, then the splayed-open bowls with the flying limbs.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: The ones that are horizontally bolted down versus vertical.

MS. RADY: I remember Michael Chow came to one of my shows, and he had a passion for Dunon [ph], who worked in lacquer, and he took me aside. He said, "Why are you making bottles with necks?" I said, "Because they're hard as hell to make." He said, "No, you should just be doing these non-necked bottles." I said, "Okay, Michael, for you, I will, but for me, I won't," and he turned to the person that brought him to the show, and he said, "Boy, she's stubborn as hell," [Ms. Riedel laughs] and, I mean, I didn't feel stubborn. I'm very open.

MS. RIEDEL: Seems pretty reasonable. [Inaudible.]

MS. RADY: But I'm open — no. I'm open to change.

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

MS. RADY: And I seek change, and I want change because that's what fuels me. That's what fuels my loins. It is a challenge. It is a constant battle within me to change. Something new, I don't want the old. Something new.

MS. RIEDEL: So in that sense, the kiln process, the firing process, is ideally suited to your temperament, because it's all about change and unpredictability.

MS. RADY: The — my little kiln, since I can't hook up the big one, is — the glaze is 29 hours firing.

MS. RIEDEL: Is [inaudible]?

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

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

MS. RADY: Twenty-two fifty [2250].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: Fahrenheit.

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

MS. RADY: And I'm like a caged animal when that thing is going off. I mean, I'm up. I go back — I'm up, [laughs] go in and check it, up again, check it. The big kiln, boy, when that goes off, it's like a roar, and when that color of the flame comes up through the dampers, —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — that blue-green, you know, boy, is that — that's it. That's what you look for and, you know, I think Otto Heino must have had five or seven kilns.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. He had a bunch up there.

MS. RADY: Yep. And Larry Carnes, with whom I was in school, would go up, stack those kilns, unstack them, and he was never ever given credit.

MS. RIEDEL: Huh.

MS. RADY: It was coming to Otto.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Now, do you — you do all your own firing yourself, yes?

MS. RADY: Oh, yes.

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

MS. RADY: Yes. I've got the name of someone, if I want to do reduction. I don't care one way or another. If I want to do reduction firing, then I've got the name of someone.

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

MS. RADY: But, you know, that — I'm a master stacker. Boy, I can pack a kiln that things are this way and this way and up on a post and over — you know, and that moment when you open up the kiln, there's nothing like that charge. There's nothing like that feeling. It's so seductive. You wait so bloody long, and then to see what — what you've done, to see how you've done it. It's — it's a great gift. It really is.

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

MS. RADY: And again, my being in a car accident in 1968, having an unbelievably terrible surgery the first time, boy, that tamed the beast within, and I got to a point where nothing was as important as that time when I fired, when I worked. I remember Reiko was giving me a show and she said, "Oh, [inaudible, in Japanese], closed." I said, "What?" So I called my mother. I said, "She's closing. She's canceling the show." So I said, "Come out anyway." I was so proud I could buy my mother a ticket. It was such a great feeling. So my mother came out and she kept saying, you know, I took her on the boardwalk, and roller skating had just come in to — she said, "Elsa, I'm telling you the studio's not safe." I said, "Ma, get over it. It's safe." We drive up [laughs]. A roller skater had roller-skated through a window in my front door.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MS. RADY: Blood all over the place and my mother said, "You see, I told you." I said, "Shut up. I told you, this is fine."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And — and it was a big — you know, it was a big deal for me to move in to the studio because — and June Wayne was — she's the one who really — she said — I once asked her to write for a — in — you know, write a thing for me to do a grant. She said, "You are going to write it, and then I will look at it." And she called me. She said, "It's not good enough." I said, "Okay, I'll start over." June is a brilliant taskmaster, and I called her not all that long ago and I said, "June, I want to thank you." She said, "What for?" I said, "Well, you really taught me a lesson." She said, "What was the lesson?" I said, "Not to compromise." She said, "I did that?" I said, "You, your very own self did that." She said, "Well, la-de-dah," and she was — you know, I really — I respect June. I think she did incredible things when she — when she reintroduced process of lithography to the United States, Tamarind [Institute]. Tamarind is now in New Mexico.

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

MS. RADY: But that was all June Wayne's doing.

MS. RIEDEL: You know, it makes me think of an interesting juxtaposition in your work which there is this incredible precision, this drive for absolute perfection of form, but then there is the complete relinquishing of that to see what happens, especially with the cutout pieces, the winged pieces, how they might warp or petal in the fire, and how —

MS. RADY: I pray for that.

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

MS. RADY: I pray for that. There's one woman that bought a really big *Lily*. This jerk had it in her bathroom over the tub and she called me, she said, "You're not going to believe this, as I was rubbing my back down with the towel, I hit a wing." I said, "Ann, what makes you so stupid? Why would you put something in the bathroom?" She said, "Well, I liked looking at it." I said, "Ann, this is the name of the restorer." She said, "Well, you —" I said, "Absolutely not," and she — then she got the piece back. She said — called me indignantly and said, "I want to know what glue was used, I want to know when it was done, how it was done." I said, "This is the restorer's

name, call her up.” She said, “I don’t believe you’re talking to me this way.” I said, “Well, you better believe it, because I’m talking to you this way. I’m not your servant. I’m not your caregiver. I’m not your scullery maid. You have the name of the restorer.” “Well, I don’t understand. Other artists” — I said, “Don’t compare me to other artists. Other artists do what they have to do, and I now have had it.” I must have gotten 15 calls the day of the earthquake, and finally I said, “You know, I can’t help you today. I have lost 71 pieces.” It was in the *New York Times*.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. I did see that.

MS. RADY: And I said, “So when I’m feeling a little better and not as harassed, I would be interested to call you back, but you’re tracking the piece.” “I’ve never heard of anything that way, done that way.” I said, “Well, you’re hearing it now.” I said, “I’m not your maid. Get a maid if you don’t want to do it.” “Well, you’re being so unreasonable. You’re being so tough,” and I said, “Yes, and you’ve made me that way.”

MS. RIEDEL: It’s interesting, though, when I think about your process that you did routinely lose many pieces in the firing process, yes?

MS. RADY: Yes. But, look, I — I very often will destroy 50 percent of what I make.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Would you — why?

MS. RADY: Not up to par.

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

MS. RADY: Not up to my standard.

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

MS. RADY: Yet something that is up to my standard may not be up to the next guy’s standard.

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

MS. RADY: And I — you know, I like my life to be simple. I have enough going — there’s a wonderful word in Yiddish, *shpilkis*. I have enough *shpilkis* of my own.

MS. RIEDEL: What does that mean, *shpilkis*?

MS. RADY: *Shpilkis* means, you know, you’re rattled. You — you — you’re — you know, you’re always — something always going on that’s making you just — I can’t — and I have very often gone out on a limb for many, many collectors, and it has been a thankless job.

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

MS. RADY: So now that I’m 67 years old, I have learned to say NO! [Ms. Riedel laughs.] Do it yourself. I’m not the maid. I’m not your caregiver, and there’s something really wonderful about being able to say that. You know, why should I be the one that runs? Here’s the name of a restorer. Use it, don’t use it.

MS. RIEDEL: How did the LILY series come about? I think it started in the late ’80s, late ’88 or so, and that series feels very different. It goes back to completely monochromatic.

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

MS. RIEDEL: Many of the pieces are just a single piece.

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

MS. RIEDEL: What was the inspiration for that? I imagine there were multiple inspirations for that.

MS. RADY: I very much wanted to honor my mother.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: I could think of — when John Walsh, who was the director of the Getty, came to my studio; he always comes to my studio to see what show is going out, and he said, “Where are all those letters?” I said, “They’ve been relegated to the bathroom.”

MS. RIEDEL: All these letters that he’s written you that are framed and he asked you to sign, —

MS. RADY: They're in the bathroom.

MS. RIEDEL: — is that right?

MS. RADY: And he said, "Ah, what a place to be," [Ms. Riedel laughs] and they — John has been an incredible support system for me.

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

MS. RADY: And he was at the studio when I brought out this first *Lily*. I said, "You know what it reminds me of? It reminds me if you turn it upside down, it reminds me of nuns' caps."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: If you look at those postcards and see that first *Lily*, there.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Nuns' caps. Ah, sure.

MS. RADY: And Breton.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.], Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RADY: When I put a piece on its side, John looked at me and he said, "You wouldn't dare." I said, "I wouldn't? It's going on its side," and he — he just would shake his head and go, "Okay, it's on its side."

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

MS. RADY: And, you know, it's — it's an honor for me to have someone like that on my team.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. And what does — that was his response to the *Lily* piece, was it looks like a nun's cap?

MS. RADY: I said it looks like the nuns' caps from Breton [Brittany, France].

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

MS. RADY: He said, "God, you're right."

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

MS. RADY: And he said, "Well, what are you going to call it?" [Laughs.] I said, "Well, this is *Lily Number 1*," and then — well, now I'm in a lawsuit to get that piece back and I am proceeding. I am going to sue her. She did not pay for it.

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

MS. RADY: And it's not okay with me, baby.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Well, especially that's the generative piece.

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: That was the first piece.

MS. RIEDEL: And something about that glaze in particular, too, was —

MS. RADY: That is —

MS. RIEDEL: — extraordinary.

MS. RADY: — a Celadon glaze without color.

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh, okay.

MS. RADY: And I remember going up to Vivika's, and I did — there were two men who wrote books. One was Hetherington and one was Hop — oh, shoot. [A.L.] Hetherington. Excuse me a second. Stop — stop the roar.



[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Warren E. Cox?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. The double book, and it's *The Book of Pottery and Porcelain* [1944/1963].

MS. RIEDEL: *Book of Pottery and Porcelain*.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. And something about this book, was it specific to the glaze, the Celadon?

MS. RADY: What I did, I took a whole month, and I made up a palette of different Celadon glazes and I went up to Vivika —

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

MS. RADY: — and I said, “Okay, this is — this is how I spent my summer,” and [laughs] she looked at me. She said, “Oh, God.” I said, “Well, you’re the teacher,” and I had — I’ll show it to you inside. I must have — well, there must have been 35 different examples, and I do a stamp and then put — fill the stamp with copper red and then I’d glaze over with the plain Celadon, and the copper red would come through.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And it’s — you know, it’s funny. You keep on going. You keep on going. I know that at the end of one particular romance, I started to read Colette, and I’ve read every book she ever wrote and every book that was written about her, and she was a phenomenal writer.

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

MS. RADY: And, you know, it’s so funny. These people came back from France and he was just prancing around. “Oh, my goodness, look, we’ve got these fabulous plates by Cocteau.” I said, “Really?” I said, “Did you know that Cocteau named Colette’s last husband, and he went into a concentration camp? So I wouldn’t” — I said, “You’re the Zionist. I wouldn’t be tooting my horn.” I said, “Yeah, he was in a camp.”

MS. RIEDEL: And this relates to Colette and —

MS. RADY: Colette’s last husband was a Jew.

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

MS. RADY: Cocteau named him to the Nazis —

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh.

MS. RADY: — when they came in to France —

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MS. RADY: — and these people came back from France. “Oh, look at these plates that Cocteau did,” and the guy is a — just a — prides himself on being this Zionist and blah-blah-blah stick it in your nose. I said, “Oh, really? You know Cocteau collaborated with the Nazis.”

MS. RIEDEL: So I’m trying to see how this connects back to the white glazes and the —

MS. RADY: Oh.

MS. RIEDEL: — experimentation and Vivika and —

MS. RADY: Well, that was just an aside.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.]

MS. RADY: How it — how it all relates to and, you know, I — I do have a passion for glazes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: And working on glazes must — I mean, it must have been a real surprise to many people that I would just dig in the way I did. I remember I did a teapot with a sterling silver handle, and these young kids from the 'hood came to my front door, and the smallest one circled behind my wheel and went over and was looking at the sterling silver handle. And I said to him, "You gotta give me a break, kids. I'm getting ready for a big show and I don't have time now to spend with you. Come back and I'll spend all the time in the world." The biggest one, who had a cross, a malok, and a Star of David in gold, said, "Come on, let's leave her alone," and then I got a gate [laughs] and —

MS. RIEDEL: Was that here?

MS. RADY: No. This was this little romantic studio on Main Street and Venice Way opposite the post office. It was all mine. I didn't have to call a soul to say, "May I come to work today."

MS. RIEDEL: So this was the late '60s, '68—'69 or early '70s?

MS. RADY: It was '70s.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. And this was your first studio that was all yours?

MS. RADY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. And I had a little tiny apartment that was up, put up on the ceiling. It was 300 square feet, and I blossomed there. I mean, really blossomed.

MS. RIEDEL: Please describe what that was like for you.

MS. RADY: It was mine. I didn't have to let — I didn't have to call anybody. I could work. Again, June Wayne taught me this: "When you turn the lights out, that is when your day is finished."

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

MS. RADY: And I was very, very concerned about living and working in the same place. I always thought your day never ends and it never starts.

MS. RIEDEL: You're just consumed by working constantly.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: But that — that lesson about hitting the light, you are finished for the day. What's wonderful for me about living and working in the same space is that when I'm firing a glaze, firing —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

]

MS. RADY: — then I can go and check it out and see where I am. I mean, I'm like a prowling cat when that kiln goes.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Elsa, you said that — I know you worked for a couple years after graduation with Franciscan China. Were you never interested in pursuing a teaching career, because so many artists, it seems, did that? You really spent full time in the studio.

MS. RADY: I — I taught in New Zealand. How I chose to — my trip, how I planned my trip was I worked my way down south —

MS. RIEDEL: To New Zealand?

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

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

MS. RADY: Through all of the important rain forests.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I had one guide. Fabulous, fabulous. He sang opera, Italian opera all through this rhododendron forest. And I called my mother — or — yes. I called my mother. I reversed the charges. She said, "What?" I said, "If I see one more piece of mutton, I am going to puke." [Ms. Riedel laughs.] She said, "Oh, you poor thing." I

don't like mutton, never have, unless it's marinated with garlic and rosemary and olive oil, but still it is lamb and there is an *odeur* that, unh-huh.

MS. RIEDEL: You probably like Greek lamb.

MS. RADY: I don't like any lamb.

MS. RIEDEL: No lamb. Okay.

MS. RADY: I don't like any lamb.

MS. RIEDEL: What took you to New Zealand?

MS. RADY: I was invited by the Potters Association to come teach.

MS. RIEDEL: And what year was that?

MS. RADY: Do you have a resume?

MS. RIEDEL: 'Sixtiess, '70s? I think there's — yeah. There's one right here. There was the trip through Asia, Japan, Hong Kong.

MS. RADY: 'Eighty-three.

MS. RIEDEL: That was '72. Okay. So this is '83.

MS. RADY: And then they had me do this dumb-ass one in Washington, D.C., "Making It in Clay." No, '83 I went to New Zealand.

MS. RIEDEL: So you have been really for decades a full time practicing studio artist?

MS. RADY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. And in New Zealand, I did something that I never have done. These women were talking in class, and I stopped, and I said, "Would you like to share with us and tell us all what you're talking about?" And there was, you know, great flustering, and I said, "Because I want to tell you I'm outta here if there's one more peep out of you. I will not fight over your yakking, and you are making it extremely difficult for me to conduct a class. So either you shut up or you pull it out of here." [Ms. Riedel laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So teaching was not something you wanted to do on a regular basis?

MS. RADY: No. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed demonstrating.

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

MS. RADY: I enjoyed that — kind of you live vicariously to walk — to walk up to a group and say, "Okay, here's a pot, break out a side." It's — there's a certain element of, "Ooh, let's see what they're going to do, how much are they going to pull out of that fucking thing, and how hard am I going to have to work to make it work."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: But it — you know, working — working with something that is your passion is truly a gift from God. Not everyone has that. I thank my parents for permitting me to do so. I thank Else Sackler for — I once said to her, "What — why did you take such an interest in me?" She said, "I took you to the museum," and I can — I'm very — I can remember the smell.

My mother was on the left, Else was on the right. She was talking to me about a Tang Dynasty bronze, of which she had quite a few. She said, "When I looked at you, and I saw that little face and those eyes that were so captivated by what I was saying, I knew I had something that I never would have with my own daughters," and Else used to — she was my surrogate mother.

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

MS. RADY: I would come in to New York. I'd have a back surgery. She'd call me late in the afternoon. She'd say, "Okay, now tonight we're going to such and such place for dinner." We ate dinner every single night, and she was so funny. She would always — she had to go to the bathroom, wash her hands, but she'd always bring you something to read.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you mean?

MS. RADY: While she was in the loo, “Don’t get bored, here’s something to read.”

MS. RIEDEL: At her house? At the restaurant?

MS. RADY: No. At the restaurant.

MS. RIEDEL: She’d bring something with her?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Never heard of such a thing.

MS. RADY: She didn’t want anybody to feel bored.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Did you have wonderful conversations with her about art?

MS. RADY: Oh, we had — she would say to me, “What’s the moment that you wait for?” I’d say, “Getting that stuff into the kiln and then pacing for those hours for it to come out of the kiln.” You can’t open up a kiln quickly —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — because you’ll shatter everything. I have seen pieces I’ve pulled out too early just split right in half.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: You have to wait.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: My mother, when she came out in ’79, and I said, “You’ve got to sleep in the bed. I’ll sleep on the floor, on the couch cushions,” and the alarm would go off because I’d have to make a shift.

MS. RIEDEL: Adjust the temperature of the gas, right?

MS. RADY: Yes, right. And she — in the morning, [laughs] I looked over. I said, “Ma, you look so bulky,” and I went over and I pulled the covers down. She was in her winter coat. She was cold. I said, “I’ve got so many blankets here.” She said, “Well, I didn’t want to bother you. So I just got my winter coat and put it on and got into bed.” What spirit.

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

MS. RADY: What absolutely undying dedication to her children.

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

MS. RADY: She had a crummy childhood, really shitty, and she was going to make sure that her darlings never went through what she went through.

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

MS. RADY: She was alone. Her mother remarried. The father died when he was 26 from cerebral hemorrhage. The mother moved back into the family house. There were eight brothers and one sister, and she became the cook, and my mother was alone until she met Mr. Rady.

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

MS. RADY: And my father just — he said, “When your mother walked into that room, I thought I’d die, I had to meet her, I had to take her out, I had to get to know her.”

MS. RIEDEL: But didn’t he trip her the first time he saw her? [Laughs.]

MS. RADY: Yes. He did. He did. He put his big fat foot out.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that the way he wanted to meet her?

MS. RADY: Well, at the time I guess it seemed okay.

MS. RIEDEL: When you’re 13, that’s the way you did it. I don’t know.

MS. RADY: Yeah, yeah. And —

MS. RIEDEL: But we were talking about Else and your conversations with her about art —

MS. RADY: We were — we would talk. She was very curious as to what was the — what was the part of the process that I enjoyed the most.

MS. RIEDEL: You've talked about the kiln, but clearly you're also passionate about the glazing.

MS. RADY: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: That process, and I would imagine there's something about working in series which we've talked about, as well.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: The process of assembling the stage.

MS. RADY: You — yeah. But you've got to — in order to make sense in what you do with clay, you must create something that's going to cause interest, and if you don't, you're a damn fool.

MS. RIEDEL: And what causes interest in your experience?

MS. RADY: Reading, looking.

MS. RIEDEL: So when you're creating and assembling a piece that would create interest, what did that mean to you?

MS. RADY: I'm quiet. No one's in here. No one is yakking at me. Nothing is going on that I don't have total control of.

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

MS. RADY: And it's a very private time, very private time.

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

MS. RADY: I don't answer the phone. I don't — there's very little I do at that time, except concentrate. I had an accident in the studio. I was leaning under the table to pull out a glaze and my elbow hit one pot, and it started a series going down the table, across the table, and back up the table.

Now there's a rule. If you have an accident in your studio, you immediately remove that work, immediately. You do not put it in a paper bag. Well, I happened to throw the work out after the earthquake. Then I realized if I was going to be able to get a grant, I was going to have to get that work out of the dumpster. So I got a ladder and I climbed into the dumpster. I never knew so many people ate McDonald's. I never knew it. And I pulled all these shards out of the kiln — I mean —

MS. RIEDEL: The dumpster.

MS. RADY: — out of the dumpster. There was a fabulous older man, his name was Dumphy, Lewis Dumphy. I have a sign that says "Dumphy," and he was — he was really like a folk artist.

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

MS. RADY: He would have these wig, you know, heads and he very often would find wigs, put them on the heads, and he'd come around the corner to visit me, and he'd take a stone and knock on the gate, and then he'd put this thing — he had larynx cancer. He'd put this — I said, "Dumph, you sound like Darth Vader." [Laughs] He said, "I am Darth Vader." [Laughs.] He was a fabulous, wonderful man, and there was the neighbor there. These idiots were growing pot on the roof of the building. How stupid do you have to be? And they were going to bounce them out of the building, and I went up to the office and I said, "Now wait a minute. You've smoked pot, you've smoked pot, you've smoked pot, you may not have grown it but you've smoked it. They're immature, they're dumb, and I absolutely do not agree with you." I said, "So let them take the pot off the top of the building,

[Track 6. cb]

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And it was like “Get me outta here.”

MS. RIEDEL: Did you prefer to work early in the morning, late at night?

MS. RADY: I loved the silence of the night.

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

MS. RADY: I adore it. I — I really — there’s something about nighttime and working that, you know, I can — I have to shower before I sit down, although I’m going to get clobbered with clay and all the rest, but there’s a ritual, you know. Clean yourself. My mother once wrote me. I said, “Mom, I’m having such a problem getting to work,” and she wrote out, I have it, I have to go through my letter box, she wrote out a schedule for me. “Get up, get the paper, sit down, make your coffee, have whatever you have for breakfast, read the newspaper, only if you just read the title; don’t be a moron, just read the title,” and so I would do that.

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

MS. RADY: And she said in this letter, “Make sure you’re sitting down at that wheel by noon.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: “So that you can do everything in the morning. You can shop, you can do whatever it is you have — you can —” she said, “Darling, baby girl, you can only go to the cleaners so many times in a week,” and that is very true.

MS. RIEDEL: But be sure to start by noon.

MS. RADY: Make sure you start. Get everything you have to do, post office, shopping, whatever, do it in the morning.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. And if it’s not done by noon, then it gets done tomorrow?

MS. RADY: That’s right.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. And work till when?

MS. RADY: Whenever you feel — you know, I used to — in that little studio, God, that was — it was such a charming little place, and sometimes I would go upstairs and just lie down on the top stair that led into the studio and, you know, sometimes my back goes, “Hey, you’ve been at it awhile.”

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: But, you know, I’ve devised a way to work at the wheel where I don’t — I stand on the back bar of the wheel.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I am bent over, but I’m bent over in a different way.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. So you throw standing?

MS. RADY: Sometimes.

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

MS. RADY: Sometimes the seat is so high, but you’ve got to have the seat low to start and center.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Right.

MS. RADY: And open.

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

MS. RADY: And then I crank up that wheel — the — the seat, and it’s funny because that particular wheel came, it was — Jack Peterson had already left Susan Peterson, and this was a wheel that somehow she manufactured herself. That flywheel was never true.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: My neighbor across the street worked on it for a couple of hours. He got the flywheel true. He got the top of the wheel true. I mean, he's a magician.

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

MS. RADY: He really is a magician.

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

MS. RADY: And he is — you know, that takes a lot of doing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: He dismantled that whole shaft, the wheel, took it to someplace to have the wheel made true, —

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

MS. RADY: — and I know that a lot of the time — see, when you trim, very often the clay starts wrapping around —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, yes.

MS. RADY: — the bottom —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: — of the wheel —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — and what that does, if you don't catch it constantly, —

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

MS. RADY: — you can wear out the bearings very, very fast.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: And so I had a boyfriend who came in to replace the bearings, and he replaced them upside down.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: So, so much for him.

MS. RIEDEL: When did you transition from the kick wheel to an electric wheel, and did that affect the work?

MS. RADY: Oh, when I was a child.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. RADY: We had —

MS. RIEDEL: But you've had both wheels? You still have both wheels, both the kick wheel and the electric wheel?

MS. RADY: No, I don't. They're both electric.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, they're both electric now? Okay.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I thought the one was still a kick wheel.

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No. Okay.

MS. RADY: They are both electric.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And I made a decision, "When I grow up, I'm going to have two wheels."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: So that when I snap that back off the wheel, if it's a bottle, it doesn't go south.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. RADY: And —

MS. RIEDEL: So you could just let it sit, go work on the other wheel, —

MS. RADY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — and then come back when it had set up a little bit?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: Yeah.

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

MS. RADY: And there are many people that I know who, to get the top of a bottle to set up, will sit with a hair dryer, —

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Right, yes. Not your style?

MS. RADY: No, it never occurred to me. You know, usually you get warpage when you do that —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — with porcelain.

MS. RIEDEL: I would think so, because it dries unevenly.

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: Unless you just, you know, —

MS. RIEDEL: Keep spinning the wheel and —

MS. RADY: The wheel keeps going and you — and you keep going.

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

MS. RADY: But —

MS. RIEDEL: Did you throw quickly or slowly?

MS. RADY: I don't know.

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

MS. RADY: I've no idea.

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

MS. RADY: I have a metronome, and sometimes I will put it on. Now, when I throw, I always chew gum.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MS. RADY: Always. I don't want to lock my jaw.



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

MS. RADY: So I always chew Trident Peppermint.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Are you making that up?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: No. Under my big work table is a can that holds Trident Peppermint.

MS. RIEDEL: That's funny.

MS. RADY: And I — but you see, Vivika said, "Oh, I know why you chew gum. You're establishing a beat."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I said, "Well, you do it with your head."

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh, interesting. She nods as she throws.

MS. RADY: As she threw, and, —

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

MS. RADY: — you know, Otto just got wackier as time went on with the cars and the —

MS. RIEDEL: That's whole 'nother story. Has technology affected your work?

MS. RADY: Hmm. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know how to answer that.

MS. RIEDEL: Did anything in terms of the kiln development, wheel development?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Nothing?

MS. RADY: Nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. How did your sources of inspiration change over time?

MS. RADY: Well, at first it was, the perfect pot, and then it was, to hell with that, there is nothing like such as that animal.

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

MS. RADY: And, you know, I've said to you before Vivika's way of teaching was very Gestalt.

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

MS. RADY: And I really regret that no one ever got down on tape her taking a pound of clay and making 20 different forms out of that one pound.

MS. RIEDEL: From a bowl to a bottle to a plate.

MS. RADY: From a bowl to a bottle to a plate to a pitcher to —

MS. RIEDEL: Not a teapot?

MS. RADY: To she slung it around and she said, "Now I have to throw a spout and make a lid."

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

MS. RADY: She — and she winked at me. She said, "You know, Elsa, lids." [Ms. Riedel laughs.] I said, "Don't look at me for lids."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: I hate lids.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And, you know, I never — I never — I never measure anything. I never — you know, “Let it fly.”

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

MS. RADY: That has to be one’s mantra. Just let it fly. It’s like Paul McCartney had a dream, and he told his grandmother, and it was a disturbing dream for him, and his grandmother said to him, “Let it be.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And he composed a song, “Let It Be.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Let it be, let it be.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Let it be, dah-dah-dah.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Let it be, let it be, and, you know, —

MS. RIEDEL: “Let it fly” is yours.

MS. RADY: Yeah. Let it fly. Just do it. You know, I have a photograph on my wall that my sister sent me of Colette from 1938 when she was on her honeymoon at the Waldorf Astoria, and George Platt Lynes went and photographed her.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And, you know, you’d see — you see photographs of her. She always wore sandals.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Always, in the dead of winter, she wore sandals.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And always would speak to cats that would roam on the Rue de Rivoli, sitting down in her sandals in this unbelievably — see, Paris is not especially cold. It’s damp, and she named her daughter Bel-Gazou, and the daughter never could compete with the mother.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. That would be a tough act to follow.

MS. RADY: Terrible.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Did you ever feel like that?

MS. RADY: No. I imagine if my mother had wanted to pot, she could have done it easily. She couldn’t ride a bike.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Your mother couldn’t ride a bike?

MS. RADY: No. They — we — every Sunday we went bike riding. My father would rent a tandem, and she’d go with us.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds interesting.

MS. RADY: You know, as she was growing up, because tragedy had hit her life so young with the father dying at age 26 when my mother was four, her mother was pregnant, nothing was right with the child that was born, I guess because of the grieving, and — but she said, you know, “We were —” they lived on the Lower East Side, and “We were — she — Mom and I were walking home, and there was the ambulance and they were carrying my father out. He had died of a cerebral hemorrhage, and then my mother was shunted from pillar to post and we —” her mother was helpless, really. She moved back into the family home. She became the cook, the cleaner,

the bottle washer, everything.

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

MS. RADY: And she just had no time for my mom.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And then Lily met Simon Y., Simon Y.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And that's when her life took off.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I think we did cover that loosely yesterday.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's how —

MS. RADY: And, I mean, you know, to know someone so intricately —

MS. RIEDEL: Right. For so long.

MS. RADY: — for so long is really such an incredible gift.

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

MS. RADY: And he took care of her, and she lived in my grandmother's house. My grandmother said, "We're not going to have any of this. You come stay here."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And my grandpa, who was a wallpaper hanger, he hung every important [Chaim] Soutine mural on Central Park and Fifth Avenue.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: They're lined with Soutine murals. The El Dorado still has a Soutine mural. The Empire State Building still has the Soutine murals that he hung.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you — were you exploring the city a lot as a young — as a child? Did you see a lot of the architecture? I know you were in the Met a lot, but did you — were you aware of the architecture of the city?

MS. RADY: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Not consciously, it sounds like?

MS. RADY: No. No, not — it wasn't a conscious effort.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Where would you say that you get the ideas for your work, other than what we've discussed already? We've talked about dance. We've talked about choreography.

MS. RADY: Well, —

MS. RIEDEL: Minimalism.

MS. RADY: — okay. My sister sent me that tiny photograph from the *New York Times*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. This new work.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

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

MS. RADY: The Kukutani.

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

MS. RADY: And I took one look at that, and I went, “God, there’s my next series.”

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

MS. RADY: And she — my sister said, “I thought you might be interested in that.”

MS. RIEDEL: It’s interesting because a lot of your work seems inspired by figures, by figurative work. I think about the *Caryatides*. I think about your mother dancing and dancers in general. This new work.

MS. RADY: Well, when Holly came to my studio, I had a beautiful studio in Venice, and the guy sent me an eviction notice, and I was so pissed off. I was living in a one-room around the corner because this place was being built out.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: I was so pissed off —

MS. RIEDEL: But Holly came before this, yes?

MS. RADY: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. And so did she come and comment on something that was somehow figurative?

MS. RADY: Yes. She walked in. She took a look at the photographs of my mother.

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

MS. RADY: Said, “My God, the skirt, the hem is just like your work.”

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Interesting.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: All that whirling.

MS. RADY: I’d never thought of that.

MS. RIEDEL: Let it fly.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

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

MS. RADY: And I never registered that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. But did that resonate with you when she said it?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: And when I announced to her she was not permitted to smoke in my studio, she said, “Then I’ll go outside.” [Ms. Riedel laughs.] I said, “You bet you will.”

MS. RIEDEL: What do you see as similarities and differences between your early work and then the more recent work?

MS. RADY: Nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: Nothing?

MS. RADY: Nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: Just seems an evolution?

MS. RADY: It's — it's an evolutionary process.

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

MS. RADY: You work on one thing, and then you hope you have some inspiration to hit something else. I mean, it's a very strange kind of — it's — life is strange. Life is very strange. All of a sudden you think you're doing well this way or that way and then, you know, I've stepped back and looked at a piece and gone, "That is the biggest pile of crap," and just removed it and tossed it.

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

MS. RADY: And there is great knowledge in knowing, in learning how to edit. You don't know how to edit, you're precious about every stinking piece you make. You've got a problem, a big one, and I just was fortunate in that I learned early to edit.

MS. RIEDEL: Who taught you?

MS. RADY: Vivika.

MS. RIEDEL: With the hammer?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: I have an old-fashioned spatula that has the — the lead running through the handle.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I can pick up a piece with that spatula [laughs], and one crack and I've got it over with it and — but that thing about editing, you don't do it — I mean, Vivika would just pound us with "don't be precious."

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

MS. RADY: You gain nothing by being precious and, you know, she — she was tough but, God, what a teacher.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Something we haven't discussed directly yet is the whole — the importance of the vessel in your work, metaphorically, literally, the history of the vessel, the interior and the exterior. I think of other artists working with the vessel, Richard DeVore comes to mind. How significant was and is the vessel to you, and why is that something that's held your interest all this time?

MS. RADY: I don't know. Too dumb not to —

MS. RIEDEL: Certainly there's a relationship, a correlation to the human body that immediately comes to mind, skin. You've discussed the glaze —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — on the pot, the skin.

MS. RADY: A glaze, yeah. Well, I always think of the glaze that you are — as one would take skin, you are stretching that around a piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Interesting.

MS. RADY: And it has to work, or it's going to be a fail.

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

MS. RADY: But you — but you are — you've got a surface that you are literally stretching that skin.

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

MS. RADY: And I — it's an association I've always made with — you see, one thing that Vivika would — oh, God. [Laughs.] One poor slob in the class glazed the inside one color and the outside another color, and I thought it was kind of adventuresome. Vivika thought it was kind of awful.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Really?

MS. RADY: Yes. She said, “No, the inside is as important as the outside.”

MS. RIEDEL: They can't be different colors?

MS. RADY: Not to her.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

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

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. That uniformity, something about that uniformity was important.

MS. RADY: Well, you know, —

MS. RIEDEL: The interior and the exterior.

MS. RADY: Yeah. I very — I removed the throwing marks from my pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Except on a very few, yes, where you intentionally leave them?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: Well, that I don't — those aren't throwing marks. I go back into the piece with a tool.

MS. RIEDEL: Ahh. To make those ripples.

MS. RADY: To make and follow it up.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: But the inside has my fingerprints, and it does sort of gel with the outside.

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

MS. RADY: And I was — you know, I just — I've been lucky.

MS. RIEDEL: Is a vessel not complete until it's glazed?

MS. RADY: God, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: A vessel is complete when you pull it off the wheel.

MS. RIEDEL: It is — okay.

MS. RADY: Trim it.

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

MS. RADY: And then get back to whatever you're doing. It is complete.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Doesn't have to be glazed?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: No. And — but that cardinal rule of “if you have an accident in the kiln,” in the kiln, as I've had accidents, you know, when I was hoisting myself up and I knocked out one side of the series of CONJUGATIONS, you gotta get that broken mark out of your sight, put it in a paper bag, get it out of your view, and start again, you know. It's “dust yourself off, shake yourself out, and start all over again,” and no one is immune to the accidents that happen. No one is immune to not being able to make a mistake.

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

MS. RADY: Some of my greatest pieces have been mistakes.

MS. RIEDEL: What comes to mind?

MS. RADY: Well, there was one *Lily* that I realized that I cut down very far into the rim, and it torqued in the firing, and that I did not expect. I fired it in oxidation, and as it was cooling, it tipped over but, you see, the door wasn't fully open.

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

MS. RADY: I was slowly cooling things off.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And when I got out of the shower, I took a look and I went, "Holy God," and, you know, if you pull pieces out of the kiln quickly, as I have been known to do, you've got to cover it with a towel —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — or you'll have crazing and cracking and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: So this one torqued in a way that was absolutely perfect but you couldn't have foreseen —

MS. RADY: I would never have — I absolutely — I was so surprised when I took one look and I'm like, "Wow, that is really — that is a yes!"

Stop that for a second. I want to —

[Audio Break.]

[TRACK 7. cb]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So this is — which LILY is this? *Lily* — *Lily 1*?

MS. RADY: Is that — no. *Lily* — that's wrong. *Lily* —

MS. RIEDEL: *Lily 1*.

MS. RADY: Yeah. Well, *Lily 1* is the one that this woman has tried to —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — hijack.

MS. RIEDEL: So this is the *Lily* — the *Lily* piece with the extremely deep cut here —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — on the left?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: And I was just starting to learn about manipulating the cut —

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

MS. RADY: — to getting a torque, —

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

MS. RADY: — to getting — you know, much of the time I can't trim these upside down.

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MS. RADY: What I do is I get a bottle —

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: — and I anchor the bottle —

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

MS. RADY: — and then I — I make a coil and press it into the interior —

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

MS. RADY: — and will cut the foot.

MS. RIEDEL: I see. So you — that's interesting. So you invert the piece. You have the bottle secured on the wheel —

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: — and then you adhere the piece —

MS. RADY: I make a coil —

MS. RIEDEL: — to the —

MS. RADY: — and I — and I —

MS. RIEDEL: The bottle?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You put the piece on top and then trim it that way?

MS. RADY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MS. RADY: Well, —

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds precarious. Yes, I can't imagine.

MS. RADY: How are you going to —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — cut — how are you going to trim the piece that's cut?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: You have to do the cutting when the piece is wet.

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

MS. RADY: Not wet.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Leather hard.

MS. RIEDEL: Hard. Sure. Of course.

MS. RADY: And, you know, it's funny. When my sister flew out for the show at Long — at Santa Barbara, —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — and I've got the —

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about that show. We haven't talked about that show.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That was the "In Dialogue" exhibition with your work and Mapplethorpe's.

MS. RADY: Yes.



MS. RIEDEL: In '75 ['93?], right, at the Santa Barbara Museum?

MS. RADY: Jesus.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that's right. We can check. Yes, right. And who curated this? Paula —

MS. RADY: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. RADY: Diana du Pont.

MS. RIEDEL: Du Pont, right. Okay. That's pretty fascinating. That was a completely different experience for you.

MS. RADY: Diana came from, I think, somewhere, Costa Mesa.

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

MS. RADY: She was working with Connie [Constance] Glenn.

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

MS. RADY: Connie Glenn is one of the great installation people.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And Connie Glenn taught Diana how to install.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And what about the installation in particular do you think was so successful?

MS. RADY: It was magical.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: It was magical the way Diana did it.

MS. RIEDEL: And it was really juxtaposing your work back and forth with —

MS. RADY: Mapplethorpe.

MS. RIEDEL: — Mapplethorpe photographs —

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

MS. RIEDEL: — of lilies?

MS. RADY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Lilies, tulips.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And so there would be three of your pieces in a series and then three Mapplethorpe photos, something like that?

MS. RADY: Or one photo and, I mean, they just — here you get the — you can get the kid walking through — I always get — this is something I learned from Holly. Make sure you get in early and walk through and look at it.

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

MS. RADY: Go outside.

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

MS. RADY: Clear your head and go back inside.

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

MS. RADY: And if it feels right, then it's right.

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

MS. RADY: But at one point, you see, I started to cut into the interior —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — of the piece.

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

MS. RADY: And because I had this fascination with, you know, looking through it.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. What about that was significant?

MS. RADY: Just an investigation. This was one of the pieces that has a window in it on both sides. You can't see it.

MS. RIEDEL: What does that have to do with the juxtaposition of flat and dimensionality?

MS. RADY: I never thought of it that way.

MS. RIEDEL: The interior and exterior?

MS. RADY: No, never thought of it that way.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you think of it?

MS. RADY: "I'm looking through you." [Sung to Beatles melody.] [Ms. Riedel laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And, you know, I remember Vivika's watching carefully over her students, and there was one woman who took the piece that she had just thrown and she threw it on the floor. It was such hurt in Vivika's eyes. She turned away, and she said, "My God, I never taught anyone that."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I said, "Well, let it go, Joe, let it go. You're never going to teach her differently."

MS. RIEDEL: What was the difference for her in the throwing of that soft piece that had just been made as opposed to hammering it afterwards?

MS. RADY: That was the lesson that we were being taught. Do not be precious.

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

MS. RADY: Do not — every pot — you know, it's like "your shit doesn't stink" kind of thing.

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

MS. RADY: You've got to learn how to edit.

MS. RIEDEL: Was this woman not just editing?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: What was she doing?

MS. RADY: She had a temper tantrum.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. RADY: She picked up this thing and just threw it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And I could see this look on Vivika's face, and I went over to Viv, and I said, "Just don't look, don't look. That's the temperament." She said, "I can't believe a student of mine would do something like —" I said, "Well, believe it and shut up," and she said, "All right, I'll shut up." I said, "You're never going to teach her how not to handle clay like that."

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

MS. RADY: I mean, it really — you know, it — it really dug in her.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. That's interesting.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: But — so there was something — there was — it sounds almost like a spiritual or packed kind of dialog with clay that was important that had to be treated in a certain way? I mean, certainly people can be violent with clay, and that can —

MS. RADY: Yeah. I know —

MS. RIEDEL: — create interesting pieces.

MS. RADY: — Pete used to throw things —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — in the air.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. RADY: But she wasn't talking about that.

MS. RIEDEL: What was she talking about?

MS. RADY: She was talking about the violence of this woman, and it was so painful for her.

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

MS. RADY: And I said, "Don't look."

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

MS. RADY: She said — I — I could see her taking — gasping, and I said, "Vivika, just let it go."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: "You're never going to teach this woman any — any different way. So give it up." She said, "I just can't believe anyone would do that." I said, "Well, believe it."

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

MS. RADY: She said, "All right, I'll keep quiet, but I — it's hard for me to keep quiet when I see someone, a student of mine behaving like that."

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

MS. RADY: I said, "Well, that's just tough." She said, "What makes you so tough?" And I said, "I'm not tough, I'm soft as can be, but other people's reactions to what they're doing, as long as it doesn't involve me, I don't give one flying damn," and I don't. You want to behave like a jerk, go ahead. Do it on your own time. Don't want to know.

I mean, the morning of the earthquake, the '94 earthquake, when all these people — see, I had sent out a letter to everyone that — I always had an address, and I said, "It has come to my mind that the pieces that you own should be anchored on a small five-by-four plate."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: "And I will be very — I'd be very happy to come and secure your pieces."

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

MS. RADY: And, "Oh, no, I would never do that" and blah-blah-blah. The morning of the earthquake, I must have gotten 20, 25 calls. "My piece broke." I said, "Well, tough, I offered to come and anchor that work down, and you'd have no part of it. So guess what? Don't call me again, and find your own goddamn restorer."

MS. RIEDEL: What about museum wax? Just a little dot of that would solve a lot of those problems.

MS. RADY: You know what museum wax is?

MS. RIEDEL: Unh-huh. [Negative.]

MS. RADY: Embalmer's wax.

MS. RIEDEL: Is it really?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: Well, you gotta plug the holes.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear. Well, that seems to work pretty well for holding those pots down when things start shaking.

MS. RADY: Well, I mean, you know, my things were up on a shelf, and I just — just laid in bed, waited for the last piece to drop.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, gosh. Let's — go ahead.

MS. RADY: And then I got up. I think the — the funniest part was I threw everything out, and then I had to climb into the dumpster.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And pull it back out.

MS. RADY: Pull it back — pull things out, and again I never knew so many people ate McDonald's.

MS. RIEDEL: I think we'll pause this here.

MS. RADY: Good.

MS. RIEDEL: It's about to end.

MS. RADY: I'm going to make lunch.

[Audio Break.]

[TRACK 9. cb]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Elsa Rady in the artist's home and studio in Los Angeles, California, on August thirteenth, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, disc number four.

Let's start this disc talking about the one series we haven't really discussed at all yet and that, as you said, the CARYATIDES.

MS. RADY: Right. I had injured my hand.

MS. RIEDEL: In 2007, 2008, something like this?

MS. RADY: Something like that.

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

MS. RADY: I had one surgery, and my hand healed like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MS. RADY: I wasn't sent to physical therapy at all. So I then called my internist, and I said, "Roberta, I'm going to go to Myles Cohen." Myles Cohen is the finest hand surgeon in Los Angeles. Not saying that the one I went to was not a good sturgeon —

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

MS. RADY: — but —

MS. RIEDEL: Sturgeon? [They laugh.]

MS. RADY: That's what Jane and I called them, sturgeons.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And —

MS. RIEDEL: Following our caviar lunch.

MS. RADY: Yes. Beluga, you betcha. [They laugh.] And so — where was I?

MS. RIEDEL: Hand surgeon.

MS. RADY: Hand sturgeon.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: So I then — I wanted to do a show, and I approached Craig about —

MS. RIEDEL: Krull, Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

MS. RADY: — doing a show with George Platt Lynes' photographs and my *Caryatides*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And he was receptive to that.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about how the CARYATIDES came about, because they're the only series I'm aware of you didn't actually make.

MS. RADY: Look up there.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Exquisite. I mean, the form is absolutely yours.

MS. RADY: Okay. My — the — the person that I rent space to, Ken Irwin, —

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

MS. RADY: — who is one of my oldest friends, I have known him for 40 years, I bought that piece from Ken because I was intrigued by the shape.

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

MS. RADY: So now I've got this finger that's on the fritz and, I mean, it's — it's rough-tough shootin' and, I mean, you —

MS. RIEDEL: It's impossible to throw.

MS. RADY: Yeah. I couldn't do a thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MS. RADY: I mean, I could barely blow my nose, and I would — when I had to do that, I put on a glove. [Laughs.] Anyway, so I — I love that form.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: And I thought, "Okay, well, I'll execute it in wood."

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

MS. RADY: One of my close, close friends has to be one of the most brilliant woodworkers.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Who is this?

MS. RADY: David Dixon.

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

MS. RADY: We went to school together. We went to — all went to Chouinard together. And David, I don't know if

they came and visited, I don't know if I went, and I said to David, "Okay, I can't work, this is what I'm going to do." The colors were Yves Klein blue, black, and white.

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

MS. RADY: My sister saw shots of the show, and she said to me, "What the hell is that? Man, that is ugly." I said, "Well, then that relieves me of giving you one." So she goes [gesture?] and I go [gesture?] back to her, [laughs] and it's such an extraordinary volley. It really is. It's a pleasurable volley of events. So —

MS. RIEDEL: How did that — how did this work? Well, you had designed pieces for Swid Powell certainly before.

MS. RADY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was not new, but you had been able to throw those forms before.

MS. RADY: Well, I couldn't do anything because of this hand.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And I wanted to have a show.

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

MS. RADY: And I wanted Jane to send photographs to Craig Krull.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, of your pieces?

MS. RADY: No. Of George Platt Lynes. I thought maybe we would hit — open up some kind of a market on the West Coast.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And my sister told me of — well, I'm not going to put that in, but it was not a pleasant experience.

MS. RIEDEL: But how did you work with —

MS. RADY: I went —

MS. RIEDEL: — David Dixon to create forms?

MS. RADY: — to Dave.

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

MS. RADY: He came and he looked at that and said, "Well, I guess, okay," and he went home and he said, "What kind of color you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to do Yves Klein blue, white, and black," and he turned them.

MS. RIEDEL: So he turned them. Did you sketch them?

MS. RADY: I gave him that piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: I said, "I want the sizes to vary —"

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

MS. RADY: "— from twelve to fourteen —"

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

MS. RADY: "— high," and he said, "Okay," and he did it.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because it's a bottle shape, which certainly you've done multiple times before.

MS. RADY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: But with an extraordinarily expanded rim, which is —

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — reminiscent of the “let it fly” forms.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: The very open bowls.

MS. RADY: Well, you know, I was really incapacitated.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And —

MS. RIEDEL: These pieces also were not grouped together. They were single pieces, correct?

MS. RADY: Yes. There would be a run of the Platt Lynes photography —

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

MS. RADY: — and then there’d be a *Caryatide* —

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

MS. RADY: — on the end.

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

MS. RADY: And I told you my sister said, “Well, what the hell is that?”

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

MS. RADY: And I said, “That’s something I’ve done.”

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

MS. RADY: And she said, “Well, I think they’re awful,” and I said, “Well, then I don’t have to send you one.”

MS. RIEDEL: It’s interesting, though, because I think of them in relation, too, to the Cycladic forms. I mean, there’s definitely the reference to the Greek amphora.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: There’s the reference to the caryatides holding up the temples.

MS. RADY: She could not —

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, there’s a lot —

MS. RADY: — understand any of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Your sister?

MS. RADY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. Which I found really unusual.

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

MS. RADY: She’s got a very keen eye and a very discerning eye, but, unh-huh, baby. Maybe they were too large.

MS. RIEDEL: I wonder if the — the material makes a difference, too, the fact that they’re wood rather than clay, when so much of the reference has to do with ceramics.

MS. RADY: Well, you know, I wanted to do the show. I was — you know, I had a brace up to here, up to my elbow, —

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

MS. RADY: — and I was absolutely not capable at any point to sit down and execute a body of work.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]. What are you thinking about doing for this next body?

MS. RADY: Kukutani.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: Trypillian.

MS. RIEDEL: And how will you — how will you work on those? Will you design them? What do you have in mind?

MS. RADY: They'll be made out of clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Will you be able to make them?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: I already have the clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Will they be thrown or sculpted?

MS. RADY: No. They'll be rolled out first as a slab.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And then they'll be roughly cut.

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

MS. RADY: And then I will start refining the figure.

MS. RIEDEL: How exciting, completely different for you and at the same —

MS. RADY: Totally different.

MS. RIEDEL: — time we were saying earlier how important the figure has been to your work. So in some ways it comes full circle.

MS. RADY: Yes. I mean, when I saw that photograph, you know, I just went “do-ing,” I couldn't believe it. I could not — you know, and I have gotten out my really fine brushes, and I've started to do the circles that have to go on the buttock and, I mean, it's going to take a very steady hand.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: So I've got very fine brushes and I'm just — I'm now starting to do the circling and then start on the other buttock.

MS. RIEDEL: It also makes so much sense in terms of not only figure but in terms of circle, because so much of your work —

MS. RADY: Is circles.

MS. RIEDEL: — is circle.

MS. RADY: And, you know, it's so funny. The years that I worked at Franciscan, Henry Takemoto was there, and he met a woman named Katie, Kate, and they married and they had two glorious children. I just saw Henry recently and Katie. They came to that show which was at Frank Lloyd's [Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, CA], that Frank Gehry curated —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: — or selected.

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

MS. RADY: And I couldn't get — I didn't — I couldn't find Frank's studio. So I went to the house and I left it on the doorstep, and it's — you know, that's a very revolutionary house — and I called them and his wife answered. I said, “Berta, I left a piece on your front doorstep.” She said, “I know, and we are amazed.”



MS. RIEDEL: You left a piece on Frank Gehry's doorstep?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Of your work?

MS. RADY: Of the Cycladic head.

MS. RIEDEL: Of the Cycladic head?

MS. RADY: Heads. I've done a series of CYCLADIC HEADS.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I don't think I've seen those.

MS. RADY: Well, cut that off and let's go and look.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's take a look.

[Track 10]

MS. RIEDEL: We just had a look at the Cycladic heads and this was a piece you did in 2009?

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And is there an intention to show these with the new work that you have in mind?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: I may go into the gallery that's going to be showing the Kukatani [ph].

MS. RIEDEL: And who is that again?

MS. RADY: That's Shoshona Wayne --

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: -- Gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And I may see if he has -- if he'd like a few.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And these are the first pieces that you worked with slabs?

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

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And what I do -- when I fire them, I have a roll of clay --

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

MS. RADY: -- and I put that under the back of the head --

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: -- because it would flatten out.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

MS. RADY: And I don't know what made me think of it.

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

MS. RADY: I don't know. I don't know where it came from.

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

MS. RADY: Just that, you know, I had some clay and I now have some time --

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

MS. RADY: -- and there's one clay that's extraordinary that's called New Zealand Ice --

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: -- and it is -- it's murder to work with --

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: -- and it is totally translucent.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: When that's fired to temperature, it's breathtaking.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. And can you get it here?

MS. RADY: Yeah.

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

MS. RADY: Expensive.

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

MS. RADY: But worth it.

MS. RIEDEL: And from New Zealand?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Interesting.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's porcelain?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: The New Zealand people, the country, you know, they're highly influenced by the Maori.

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

MS. RADY: Very much look down upon the Maori --

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

MS. RADY: -- by the New Zealanders.

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

MS. RADY: There's a lot of snob appeal there.

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

MS. RADY: I remember going to a dinner and the son came in and he said, "Oh, Mother, you forgot to get the Jews ears." I thought to myself, "What the hell is this guy talking about?" It's a mushroom.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: It's a black fluffy mushroom.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And I said, "Don't fret. There are two here." [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Changed that conversation, I'm sure.

MS. RADY: Oh, there was a big thud. [Laughs.] I do think that going through the rhododendron forest with the man who took me through singing opera, I had such joy. It was terrific.

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

MS. RADY: They at one point referred to me as the "woman with the sad eyes."

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And so I said to my mother that's because of all that God-damn mutton. I don't like lamb.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned that.

MS. RADY: But mutton? God. And the butter would -- no one refrigerated anything. Butter.

MS. RIEDEL: Huh.

MS. RADY: And it would peel off like wax and everything -- I would come in at night from having dinner and I would have to wash my hair because everything was fried.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. In New Zealand?

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Huh.

MS. RADY: And I went to a market one day with one of my hostesses. I said, "Oh, boy. That one fish, I want that." She said, "Oh, you're so ridiculous. That's what the Maori eat." What it was was a large Pompano that had been smoked.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. That sounds good.

MS. RADY: And she got me one and I said, "I don't need anyone now. I'm happy."

MS. RIEDEL: There you go. Speaking of, that leads into a question on this list, which is about travel and if that has had any impact on your life or career.

MS. RADY: It has to have.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Not directly on the work. We talked about the Cycladic forms but that's not from travel.

MS. RADY: I never got to Greece.

MS. RIEDEL: That was from Franciscan, right?

MS. RADY: I stayed in Los Angeles at Franciscan --

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

MS. RADY: -- and, you know, I was the last one in and the first one out. The ceramic industry has a very odd cycle. You've got five years.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And then a whole new regime takes over.

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

MS. RADY: And I would walk. I did a lot of walking and I came by this pasture that has sheep and they were baa, baa, baaing, and I just stood at the gate and went baa, baa, baa back at you, and, I mean, I -- I was ready to come home. It was five weeks of traveling.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: And it was five weeks of constantly being reminded of the anti-Semitism. I don't take well to that kind of behavior --

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

MS. RADY: -- and -- but it was constant, constant, constant, constant, and I was appalled. I really was. The one hostess that I had, this is the best, I came down and I said, "What's for lunch, Jane?" She said, "Well, I'm going to make an enthusiasm sandwich." I said, "Well, my God. What is that?" She said, "Well, we go to class and then we take a break. You open up the sandwich, you decide what you like and what you don't like, and then you break it off and you throw it enthusiastically." I said, "If it's mutton, the whole thing's going."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That mutton left a lasting impression on you.

MS. RADY: The only place I ever had mutton where it was really good was in Kyoto up in the hills where they --

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: -- had these hot rocks --

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

MS. RADY: -- that they slapped the meat on --

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: -- and it truly is spectacular.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. That sounds great.

MS. RADY: I would go down. I was showing at Izytown [ph].

MS. RIEDEL: So were you over there for an exhibition?

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And when was this?

MS. RADY: God.

MS. RIEDEL: '90s? Izytown [ph]. We can look it up. It was an exhibition at Izytown [ph]?

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: The first time I went, I had a lover that I left that scene very quickly. Then I -- then the second time I went, what I would do, I was in Shinjuku, which is -- it's a nice place, nice enough, but in the basement, they had food --

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

MS. RADY: -- and I would buy myself dinner.

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

MS. RADY: One host took me to a very special restaurant, very special. Everything was fried.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And again I came in, stripped, and went in and washed my hair.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: This is in Japan? Everything was fried?

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm surprised.

MS. RADY: Everything in this one restaurant was fried.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And, I mean, they were charming. They were gracious. They were, --

MS. RIEDEL: I'm sure.

MS. RADY: -- you know, helpful. One -- two pieces were broken.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: One -- one of the girls was cleaning up the floor and she reared up and the piece slammed against the wall.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MS. RADY: Then --

MS. RIEDEL: Were these still lifes or --

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Yes, and then -- but the most interesting person I met on that trip was the guy who designed porcelain toilets.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And we -- his broken English and my not speaking Japanese had kind of a -- we were gesturing a lot.

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

MS. RADY: But we had a long discussion about porcelain.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: And he was charming.

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

MS. RADY: He was absolutely charming. You know, usually there's a hole in the floor.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. RADY: And sometimes --

MS. RIEDEL: There's no need to have that conversation right now.

MS. RADY: Yeah. No. It's hit or miss.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Speaking of, do you think of yourself as part of an international tradition or one that's particularly American?

MS. RADY: I've never thought of that.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I've never thought of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I've never addressed it.

MS. RIEDEL: Never thought one way or the other about being part of a bigger tradition?

MS. RADY: Just let it be good.

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

MS. RADY: I don't have any -- I don't have any kind of feeling about that. I -- I've never given it much thought.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] We have talked a few times about John Perrault and he certainly wrote two wonderful --

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

MS. RIEDEL: -- essays, one article and essay --

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: -- about your work. Are there any other writers about art or craft in particular that you feel are especially significant?

MS. RADY: Jo Lauria --

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

MS. RADY: -- did a flyer, I think it was called *Clay in Fire or Fire in Clay*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Fire in something.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. That was a wonderful show.

MS. RADY: That was a very good show.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And Joe is extremely enthusiastic --

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RADY: -- and wants to be in on everything --

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

MS. RADY: -- and she's kind, she's, you know, she's -- she really loves what she does.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. RADY: And it's -- it's pleasurable.

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

MS. RADY: She's charming.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And do you find her writing especially significant, too?

MS. RADY: You know, it's been a long time since I read that book.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I know there were a few essays in that.

MS. RADY: Yeah. There were a couple of people -- one person I'm sorry I never met was Ruth Duckworth.

MS. RIEDEL: Duckworth, yeah.

MS. RADY: She -- Jo did a book on her, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And, you know, it's a real Teutonic Viennese personage --

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

MS. RADY: -- with glorious work.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Sure.

MS. RADY: But my -- but the one person -- I mean, more than my Reuman [ph] chair, --

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

MS. RADY: -- I would kill to own a Meyer Grutell [ph].

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

MS. RADY: Kill.

MS. RIEDEL: What in particular about that work?

MS. RADY: She had -- you know, you could -- you could feel her soul in that work. She was big. The work was big. The work was heavy. The work was extraordinarily beautiful.

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

MS. RADY: And -- and I think to hit that height, you have to be so at peace with the world and with yourself.

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

MS. RADY: I -- I just -- you know, there's a wonderful Yiddish word, it's called "kvell". I kvell when I see her work. I -- I just go, oh, my God, how fabulous. And Ballo [ph] was wonderful.

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

MS. RADY: I loved his work. One day I was getting into a cab, I hailed a cab. The cab stopped and this weird-looking guy got out. It was Dali. He was going to have his toenails cut. He said, "Excuse me, madam. I'm on the way to have my toenails cut."

MS. RIEDEL: Is that true?

MS. RADY: I said, "God speed."

MS. RIEDEL: Where were you?

MS. RADY: New York City.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Only in New York.

MS. RADY: Yeah, yeah. I -- I think the classic line, though, is Giacometti when he was hit by the bus.

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

MS. RADY: "I will never have to do another sculpture." You know, there's something so poetic about that --

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

MS. RADY: -- and so -- boy. To do the kind of work he did, the work is just breathtaking --

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

MS. RADY: -- for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I agree, I agree.

MS. RADY: And you really feel that man's heart and soul.

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

MS. RADY: And obviously great humor.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: He could get hit by a bus and say, "Thank God I'll never have to do another piece of sculpture."

MS. RIEDEL: Did you read that book *Portrait of Giacometti*?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a great book. I would talk to you about that one time.

MS. RADY: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's see. What's -- how do you think ceramic sculpture has changed in your lifetime?

MS. RADY: Well, I think Pete Voulkos was the revolution --

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

MS. RADY: -- and I think when he taught -- I think he taught at Otis.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And he absolutely taught with gay abandonment and he gave his students lessons that they never forgot.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And how do you know this? Pardon me. Is this from -- is this from speaking with some of those students or from sitting --

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: -- in classes?

MS. RADY: I talked to Susan Peterson --

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm.

MS. RADY: -- and I've talked to Ken --

MS. RIEDEL: Price?

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm.

MS. RADY: And, you know, Pete was Pete and he was Mr. Macho and he was so distraught, so pained that he never could make it with sculpture.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: I mean, I think it probably led to a lot of his drinking.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And did that really open up the way for you, do you think?

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. RADY: I wasn't -- I wasn't --

MS. RIEDEL: They were very -- still very traditional potters.

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: What cracked that open for you to take clay in that new direction? We've talked about Holly Solomon but what cracked it open for you to take it in a new direction?

MS. RADY: I guess stupidity. Look, if you don't change, you die. So change--I remember when my mother was here and when I was in Venice. I'd finish a piece, I'd tap on the window, and I'd hold it up and she'd go okay like that and, you know, she was such an influence in my life and in my sister's.

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

MS. RADY: I mean, we had an extraordinary upbringing.



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

MS. RADY: And my mother, who was widowed at 52 years old, was so stoic and so brave and she just -- she had a job. She had two daughters that she had to see educated and that she had to make sure would be okay.

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

MS. RADY: And she got her wish.

MS. RIEDEL: And did her example inspire you to take clay beyond utilitarian work --

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: -- to a sculptural --

MS. RADY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: -- place?

MS. RADY: Unh-huh. [Negative.]

MS. RIEDEL: What inspired you to do that?

MS. RADY: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: I don't know. I know when she saw the Lily show, I told her she was very embarrassed.

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

MS. RADY: And when I -- I said, "Come on, Mom. I want to walk you through it."

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

MS. RADY: And she said, "Ooh, I'm so embarrassed." I said, "Why are you embarrassed?" She said, "Because it's about me, for me," and I said, "Well, don't be embarrassed," and I think she was very proud and very honored.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm.

MS. RADY: And, you know, the -- there were endless hours of talking and finding things out about her and, as I said, she had a terrible childhood.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RADY: And when she was 11, she met my father.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yeah. We -- actually, we did, I think, a good job of covering that.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And he just took this little girl under his wing, brought her home. Of course, the grand -- the father didn't approve and only until she had children did he approve of her.

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

MS. RADY: So take that and shove it, grandpa.

MS. RIEDEL: Elsa, have you ever entertained commissions?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Have you done many?

MS. RADY: Squid Powell [ph] was all commission.

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

MS. RADY: The murals were commission but not from me. That was through Interpace.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Those are the Disney murals you're talking about?

MS. RADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But not your own work? Nobody has said I'd like a still life that does this or that --

MS. RADY: I said -- I have always said if you can't find it, --

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

MS. RADY: -- then it's not going to be.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Okay.

MS. RADY: I only once switched out a piece --

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

MS. RADY: -- in a still life and put in a different one.

MS. RIEDEL: At the request of a client?

MS. RADY: Yes.

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

MS. RADY: And I regret it to this day.

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

MS. RADY: I -- I -- it goes against every grain in my soul.

MS. RIEDEL: And why is that?

MS. RADY: Because I felt I had betrayed myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Okay.

MS. RADY: You have to be true to yourself. If you're not, I mean, yeah, it was fine, I needed a sale, but I'll never do it again ever ever.

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

MS. RADY: And I -- I feel very, very strongly about holding true to my first instinct because usually it's not wrong.

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

MS. RADY: And, you know, you -- you can see from the books that I have up on the shelf, it's a lot about the Bauhaus.

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

MS. RADY: And there was a wonderful section in *Pentimento* that Isadora Duncan was walking with a friend of hers and she made a comment that that was where Hitler had slaughtered 20 billion people or however many and her -- I mean, this woman had a tragic life.

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

MS. RADY: And she -- my mother had said when she was young, she went to a Duncan concert.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. RADY: And she said she was so breathtaking.

MS. RIEDEL: I imagine.

MS. RADY: And so free, you know. She -- she had studied with --

MS. RIEDEL: Louis Horst?

MS. RADY: No, no. That was Martha Graham's piano player.

MS. RIEDEL: No. There's a --

MS. RADY: Cut that off for a second. Let me get it.

(Pause.)

MS. RIEDEL: Loie Fuller is who I was thinking of but you're bringing over a book now. Is this about Duncan?

MS. RADY: *Time in the Dancing Image*.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Oh, with Martha Graham.

MS. RADY: By Deborah Jowitt.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RADY: And it gives a history.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: There's a note in here. Hmm. How weird. I find a note in this book which I probably have had for 20 years, a name, Emile Jacques Del Crowes [ph].

MS. RIEDEL: You were talking about how Duncan was so -- your mother's viewing of Duncan's performance --

MS. RADY: She couldn't believe it.

MS. RIEDEL: -- made such an impression.

MS. RADY: Beautiful.

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

MS. RADY: She was, --

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

MS. RADY: -- and Ruth St. Denis was her teacher.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay. Right. That makes sense.

MS. RADY: And, you know, if Nijinsky hadn't been so riddled with syphilis, --

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

MS. RADY: -- I mean, they did get good dances out of him but he was just gone.

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

MS. RADY: Maud Allan.

MS. RIEDEL: I remember that name. And Ted Shawn, right? Denishawn. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RADY: Yeah. Dennis Shawn.

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

MS. RADY: Ida Rubinstein's Cleopatra, oh, boy.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. We'll come back to that.

MS. RADY: Well, now, here. Anna Pavlova and Michael Fokine.

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

MS. RADY: Look at that form.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Pass this around. Bless you. Okay. So I have just, I think, a couple final questions here. We've done, I think, a very good job of covering --

MS. RADY: I do think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Good. Is there a community that's been important to your development as an artist?

MS. RADY: The Chouinard [Art Institute] people are very important.

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

MS. RADY: I mean that was a free-wheeling school that -- that, you know, self-expression was the key --

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

MS. RADY: -- word --

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

MS. RADY: -- and being not too independent. They used to -- oh, God. They used to make pictures, drawings of Vivika [Heino] as the mother hen and we were the chicks.

MS. RIEDEL: Who made those pictures?

MS. RADY: We'd find them in the hall.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Oh, dear.

MS. RADY: But when you heard Vivika's heels clicking down the hallway, I tell you, your heart stopped.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: Heart stopped.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you afraid?

MS. RADY: No. There was just click-click-click and it was just like, holy shit, I better get to work.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you, in summary, discuss your thoughts about ceramic, about clay, about what its potential for expression, about what it does that nothing else can do, its strengths, its limitations?

MS. RADY: It disciplines you. It humbles you.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: You have to gain great respect for the medium.

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

MS. RADY: If you don't, you're an ass and you will be always fighting a battle and you can tell when you look at a piece about the spirit with which it was done and very often I will go to a show and say let's blow out of here. Chouinard was an extraordinary school. The fact that I, at 19, had developed this unbelievably successful bead business where I had 45 accounts across the country --

MS. RIEDEL: And this was using Egyptian paste, is that right?

MS. RADY: That's right.

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

MS. RADY: And --

MS. RIEDEL: And you made the beads? You made all the beads?

MS. RADY: Jesus me beads. My -- and I would work in -- at the -- at the table in the kitchen area of my mother. I had a 25 dollar kiln.

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

MS. RADY: And I would fire around the clock.

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

MS. RADY: I had a partner who was a misery --

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MS. RADY: -- and was very happy collecting half the profit and I finally said I cannot do this.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you making a variety of sizes and styles and shape beads?

MS. RADY: Turn this off and I'll take you back there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

(Pause.)

MS. RIEDEL: You were saying?

MS. RADY: I think that in the dance and my work, --

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

MS. RADY: -- there was always an impression, it seems, my memory may be clouded, but it seems to me there was always a feeling of great freedom. My mother -- we came home from a movie or something and my mother was dancing in the living room in the country and I thought to myself, Queen Ferc [ph], you've got the world by the balls. We used to call her Queenie.

MS. RIEDEL: I can see why.

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: How or where do you see your work fitting into contemporary art?

MS. RADY: If it's good, look-it, if it's not good, cook-it. No. I strive, sometimes desperately, to make sure that I can convey that I am a serious artist. It doesn't matter what medium I'm working in but I can put every inch of me into finding something that's new, something that is stimulating, something that--there's nothing like finishing the day and with the Cycladic forms, I sometimes didn't knock off till 2 or 3 in the morning, and I went in to take a shower and there was a God-damn peeper, yeah, looking in the window of the shower and I yelled at him, "You want to see something," and I turned my back. I said, "Now how do you feel, you jerk?" You know, because I looked like a road track with all the fusion stuff and -- but again, I do not regret a moment of the time it has taken out of my life. It only fueled the fire. It only made it better for me because I finally grew up enough to say thank you, Daddy, thank you, Mommy, for having such faith and such encouragement, and it took a long time before my father finally came around because, as I said, how are you going to make a living charging a dollar for a mug, and it was my mother's perseverance. She was a force to be reckoned with and she -- she had this innate quality to know when it was good and when it wasn't.

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

MS. RADY: I remember, you know, we'd work like dogs on Sunday, supposedly only Sunday, for the Chouinard sale, clay sale, which was bullshit because we worked every day of the week. We were in the back pricing and Ralph picked up -- Ralph Bacerra [ph] picked up what he felt was the best piece of the entire grouping and my mother walked in to pick me up and he looked at my mother and said, "Well, Mrs. Rady, how much would you price this at?" and she looked at him, she said, "I wouldn't give you a nickel." She said, "That's not good work." So I said, "Oh, Mommy." "Let the truth be known, kid."

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

MS. RADY: She meant it. She thought it was garbage.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] When you look back on your work over the past four decades, --

MS. RADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: -- what about it in significant -- what about it in particular is significant to you? What about it

matters to you? We've said that it's good work, that it has to be good, but what --

MS. RADY: You see, I think as one matures, --

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

MS. RADY: -- particularly in a chosen profession, --

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

MS. RADY: -- if you don't learn early how to edit, you're a lost cause. The only time you can learn anything about yourself, about anything that you're, you know, that you're doing is stand back and look at it, really study it hard, and say, well, does this hit my level of acceptance, and if I feel that it is not there, I take that spatula with the metal running through it, I hold the pot and whack it and it's taught me many lessons. Editing is crucial. It is crucial to good work and if you don't know how to edit, you have no business being in any of the arts or in any of the -- anything.

You know, you can -- you can be a song writer. Well, if you write crap, then you've got crap. You know, the classic story, I think, is Phil Spector. Ouch. He is so crazy and he did kill that woman.

MS. RIEDEL: We won't end on that note, but any final thoughts before we sign off?

MS. RADY: I feel privileged. I feel that I have been given a gift. I've worked hard. But I've also worked against many grain and I've overcome that and I have at least learned what I feel is good and if it's good, then it will be released. If it is not good, "hasta luego".

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you, Elsa.

MS. RADY: Oh, my pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]