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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Harlan Butt on July 27-28, 2009. The interview took place in Ptarmigan Meadows, Colo., 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.

Harlan Butt has reviewed the transcript. His corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. 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, for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, with the artist Harlan Butt on July 27, 2009, at his summer cabin in Ptarmigan Meadows, Colorado. This is disc number one.

We thought it would be wonderfully appropriate to start with a haiku. Is this a new one? Recent?

HARLAN BUTT: Recent. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And since we're here in the San Juan Mountains:

Even these mountains one day

Will be sand and clay;

I stand here humbled.

This small blue planet.

We still don't understand it,

Thinking it's not us.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you so much for starting with those. It seems a wonderful way to begin because, as you were saying, here we are, surrounded by nature, which has been probably the primary influence in your work—

MR. BUTT: That's right.

MS. RIEDEL: —from the start. Language and text have been such an integral part of your work. I think of your work as such a fusion of metal and enamel and color, and then text, that it's an interesting way to start our interview with some recent words.

MR. BUTT: I've been interested in Asian art for a long time, and I spent some time in Japan. I've looked at a lot of work from Japan and China and Korea. And scroll paintings frequently have imagery—mountains, imagery from nature—and they have some sort of text on them.

And this sort of idea of two different layers of meaning that relate to each other but are very different in a way—the way we analyze things in terms of imagery and the way we analyze things in terms of words. They overlap; they come from the same source, but sometimes there's a tension between the two that can be humorous or can be heartbreaking, but I enjoy trying to combine those things.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that word "juxtaposition," to me, is also so much the essence of your work. I think of the juxtaposition of these absolutely beautiful, still patterns, vibrant colors, and then these serpents slithering along on top, that very kind of quiet danger. And then the juxtaposition in the text, too, of things that are just, as you say, heartbreakingly beautiful but then dangerous or potentially dangerous.

And there are juxtapositions—also in terms of abstraction and pattern in your work and then very realistic imagery. It seems to be another thread that runs through your work continually. I'm sure it's something we'll talk about repeatedly over the next day or two. Does it feel that way to you as well? Is it something that you've done intentionally over the years?

MR. BUTT: Well, I think in coming to art, of course, as a child, I drew real things—faces or people or objects. And I think that's the way most people start. There's finger painting and stuff like that, but I think that we start from there and work out.

Early on in my training Abstract Expressionism was still strong, and I was looking at people who did Color Field

paintings and so forth. And that had some influence on me. Also the whole idea of abstraction and how photography replaced the need for realism and for the artist to be a draftsman. But my interest in representational work never went away. And I think that's true of a lot of people—whether they work abstractly or not.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And when I look at your work, I think of pattern. You mention Color Field painting. Did you also look at any of the painters, or is the pattern primarily a Japanese influence, or a little bit of both?

MR. BUTT: Well, a little bit of both. One of the other faculty members at the University of North Texas [Denton], Vincent Falsetta, is strongly influenced by pattern painters. My minor as an undergraduate and as a graduate student was fibers, weaving, and I did work on the loom. And that sort of idea of pattern is—it's almost computerlike, in that you've got weft and warp and the point where they cross over. You can make an infinite number of designs with just horizontal and vertical material. So in that way, I guess, pattern, repetition was important for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. I didn't know that you had studied fiber both in undergrad and graduate. Interesting. I've never seen any of your fiber work at all.

MR. BUTT: No. [Laughs.] There isn't much. I gave it up, but I was always interested in that. The whole idea of threads and—I also did crochet and sculptural pieces with fibers. But that idea of the warp and the weft has always been fascinating. I've always been interested in that in other cultures, too, how they interpreted imagery through fibers.

MS. RIEDEL: Are you thinking of anything in particular in Japan or—

MR. BUTT: Well, there is that. Ikat and the type of dyed fibers that are then woven together and you still retain the pattern, but the pattern sort of blurs as the lines cross and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: And that makes me think, certainly, that some of the patterns overlaid are with the colors changing on the Earth Beneath [Our] Feet series [1999—].

MR. BUTT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] I also think of—in a more abstract way—the Net of Indra, which exists in Indian mythology, where the universe is described as a fishing net. There are threads coming together, and each place they cross—where the knot would be in a fishing net—there's a jewel. Each jewel is faceted with a thousand facets, and each facet reflects all the other jewels. So it's this complexity—infinite complexity, but each part of it reflects another part of it, which I think is very timely in terms of the interconnectedness of what we understand the earth to be.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. I'm not familiar with that. Is that from Indian literature?

MR. BUTT: Hindu mythology, from the Rig Veda, I believe.

MS. RIEDEL: Mythology. And then you've spent time in India as well as Japan?

MR. BUTT: Well, I spent about two weeks in India. And interestingly—well, to me—I was never that focused on India. In fact, in studying Asian art, I was always more interested in China and Japan and Korea. Then when the opportunity came for me to go to India, I was overwhelmed by it.

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

MR. BUTT: So I didn't even take advantage of a lot of it that I maybe should have when I was there, because I was just so overwhelmed. I was absorbing. And one day I'd like to go back, and maybe in a more purposeful way. But I saw so many things there, and so many interesting things. I've been interested in Asian religions, and I had studied a little bit about Hinduism and the origins of Buddhism and Jainism and so forth. But mythology has been of interest to me too.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you in India in conjunction with the enamel show that you curated—co-curated [*Colour & Light: The Art and Craft of Enamel on Metal*, 2001]?

MR. BUTT: Right. That's right. It was a conference. There was a three-day conference. We had the exhibition that I helped coordinate. And then we had a tour that went on for about 10 days, I guess it was. Which was—we saw so many things; it was amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: I imagine the color sense must have been extraordinary.

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So different than East Asia. The vibrant colors of the fabrics and what people wore, but also the flowers and everything that you saw—the sunlight itself was different.

MS. RIEDEL: And the patterns, too; I imagine they would have been completely different, but also—

MR. BUTT: Yes. That idea of the multiplicity—the Taj Mahal, where, from a distance, you see it and it's white; the closer you get, it's all covered with Arabic script. And that idea of the miniature paintings where every little—the edges are covered with all kinds of detailed pattern and so forth—a much different sort of approach than what I'd seen in Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, too—when I think about your vessels, I think of the Garden Anagogies [1988—96], which are just such beautiful, pure, almost Color-Field vibrancy, and then the incredibly detailed Earth Beneath Our Feet series, which has pattern on top of pattern on top of pattern.

MR. BUTT: I've gone back and forth. And I've thought about this a lot in terms of the simplicity of a lot of Japanese work, the asymmetry and subtlety, and I love that. And then on the other hand, there's this almost overwhelming complexity of pattern.

I tend to go one way and then back, and there and back. When I get too complex, I feel like I have to pull back and simplify. But then as I simplify, then it's like, Oh, I need to add more; I need to add more; and gradually it evolves into more complexity. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Till you take that as far as you can for a while, and then you—

MR. BUTT: And there is a balance. I think the best work of mine—or anybody else's—has that balance of the simplicity and the complexity. You can go one way or the other, but the ones that I feel best about may have a complexity, but they meld together into a simplicity.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It's interesting because many of those series were very long-running series that you worked on simultaneously for years, correct?

MR. BUTT: Yes, yes. I never really feel like a series is finished. [Laughs.] I get to a point where I don't want to do this anymore and I put it away, but I never say that's the end of it.

I did a short series called Snakes in Heaven [2005—], that I only did, I don't know, maybe a dozen pieces or more—maybe a little bit more than that. And I haven't done any more since, but I don't feel like it's over. It's just—not right now.

MS. RIEDEL: Another thing that I thought would be interesting to mention here, during the introduction, is almost the ritual quality that a lot of your objects seem to either refer to—or as a functional object that would be part of a ceremony like that or at least refer to metaphorically. Has that been something that's been significant to you from the start? It seems that way from the very early reliquaries on forward.

MR. BUTT: Yes. It was, and I guess it's because, coming from, I don't know, a lower-middle-class background, the idea of the usefulness of objects, that somehow a function was important to me. And yet I wasn't drawn to just making mugs or some sort of utilitarian object that you would use every day. I admire those things, but it wasn't what I wanted to do.

So how do you incorporate a function without it being everyday useful? And of course, in metalsmithing, as well as in many of the other crafts, there is the reference to liturgical implements, which are ritual objects. Whether it's the chalice or whether it's the Torah pointer or whether it's the tea bowl or whatever—there's a ritual element to all of those. They're functional as ritual objects.

My very early work, I was doing these—I called my “roadkill period”—where I was making these objects that were sort of pseudo-primitive. And there was a reason; it wasn't just arbitrary that I was doing that. But I felt uncomfortable after a while, because it was like I was making an artificial ritual. Just making it up. And I know other artists who do that, but somehow it didn't seem true, in a way. It was fictional ritual. Even though the things that I make may never be used, still, as an incense burner or a vase or a box, they do perform a function and that function is important.

Also, the whole idea of the vessel has been important from the very beginning. Whether it's a box or whether it's a bowl, the vessel is both historically and—it just is a basic object. The whole idea of coming from this—your hands together like that [shows cupped hands]—is one of the simplest vessels, and then how do I expand upon that?

I can make a basket, or I can make a clay bowl, or I can raise a copper vessel or something. And it all comes from that. Also, the reference to the human body—we are a vessel, and we have an exterior; we have an interior. Sometimes the interior is hidden; sometimes it's open and available.

MS. RIEDEL: Sometimes there are things inside; sometimes there aren't.

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Sometimes your work is surprising. Some of the early chalices, I think, when you think it might be just a lovely chalice in and of its own right, and then there's something inside which really makes it very un-functional or hard to use, but brings—begs the question about interior and exterior and what's hidden and what's not, what's empty and full.

MR. BUTT: In some ways, the text evolved from that, too, because the very first pieces that I used text on, it was in the bottom of a little cup. When you looked at it from a distance, you just saw the object. You had to actually get close and look down inside in order to see the text. And to me—

MS. RIEDEL: Were those, those four cups that you did, based on the—

[Cross talk.]

MR. BUTT: Well, there were three of them that were landscape cups, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Containment or something, were they called?

MR. BUTT: They were the Reflexive Landscape series [1979].

The problem with text—well, there's several problems. One is just aesthetically and visually, our types of letters—no matter what the font is—there's a tension between that and the image; whereas with Asian painting and writing, the brush and the ink are the same. The brushstrokes might be very similar or the same, the text and the painting, so they blend together. That's more difficult to achieve with ours.

The other problem is, where we see it most often is in advertising, where we've got text and image, and they're trying to sell you something. So I was trying to avoid too much of a connection to that or that type of thing. Also the idea of the label. There's a painting, and then here is the label: you've got the title and the artist and whatnot. And so you're looking back and forth between those two things.

So there's this tension between them. And by putting the text down inside the container, that allowed you to view the piece as an object first, *then* to view the text, and then to see the relationship between the two. And so that inside/outside thing of the vessel brought me to dealing with text. Now I've dealt with other ways of putting the text on, other than having it at the bottom of the vessel, but that's how it started.

MS. RIEDEL: I think of it sometimes almost blending in the middle. It's so subtle that almost you see it first as a pattern, rather than text.

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That's another way to deal with it, to make it small, so that from a certain distance, you don't see it as text, and you have to investigate closer before you'd see that.

MS. RIEDEL: That reminds me of a quote that you had—I think was written in one of your catalogues—about something recent about designing or creating work also with respect for the viewer. And that struck me as such an interesting idea. Could you say a little bit more about that?

MR. BUTT: Well, artists have a reputation for being ego-centered. And I guess we all are. But my model is the Japanese tea ceremony. I studied the Japanese tea ceremony briefly when I was there for a year. And the whole idea that the host goes to great ends to make the guest feel comfortable, but they don't want it to *seem* as if they're going to great ends. [Laughs.]

That's the respect. It's like I'm trying to create a situation where you will have this enjoyment and appreciation. It's not about me; it's about you. I know that I'm not egoless, but to take into consideration the experience that the viewer will have.

MS. RIEDEL: There seems to be almost a back-and-forth in the viewer's experience from the pattern to the realistic imagery, from the images to the text, from the interior to the exterior. It seems like there's almost a continual dance-around juxtaposition happening in your work.

MR. BUTT: Well, I hope so. I'm not trying to make a puzzle. I'm not trying to confuse the viewer or whatever, but I do think that if you go in a gallery, you look up, you see something on the wall, and you move away. Maybe someone else would be drawn to it, but I like work that pulls me in, and I have to be involved in some way with the object.

So that's what I'm trying to create for the viewer, some way they can be involved in it. So it can't be like a one-liner. It can't be just a limerick. Some people see the haiku as sort of the Asian version of the limerick—[laughs]—but to me, they're completely different things.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I would think so too. [Laughs.] Completely different sensibility, actually. Compared to most of the limericks I've heard.

MR. BUTT: I like limericks, but—[laughs].

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly—a completely different sensibility, normally.

Well, I think that's nicely established some of the themes that we'll revisit over our conversation in the next couple days. So maybe we'll now move back and cover some of that biographical information. So you were born in New Jersey.

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: In Princeton?

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. In 1950.

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have siblings?

MR. BUTT: I have a younger brother, two years younger, and an older sister, four years older.

MS. RIEDEL: And what are their names?

MR. BUTT: My sister's name is Linda. Metcalf is her last name now; she's married. And my brother is John J. Butt, although we always called him Jack.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BUTT: My father was John Joseph Butt, and he was named John Joseph Butt Jr.

MS. RIEDEL: All right. And your mom?

MR. BUTT: Lillian Lesser was her maiden name.

MS. RIEDEL: And would you describe your childhood, your background, how you spent your early youth?

MR. BUTT: Well, like I say, I was kind of lower middle class, although I didn't view it particularly like that when I was growing up. But I see it as a good childhood. My father had grown up on a farm. He loved farming, but he knew how much work it was. He didn't want to do that. So after he got out of the service, he got work repairing farm machinery.

MS. RIEDEL: Was he farming in Princeton?

MR. BUTT: No. Well, he grew up in Missouri. He joined the Navy during World War II, met my mother in Washington, D.C. She was in the USO or something, and she was from New Jersey, so they moved close to where her parents were in New Jersey. But there was quite a bit of farming.

MS. RIEDEL: There is. I didn't know that till I was actually there. It's beautiful.

MR. BUTT: So he worked for International Harvester repairing farm machinery when I was growing up. My mother was a stay-at-home mom for quite a while, but she did work as a secretary off and on when I was growing up.

MS. RIEDEL: And you're the oldest child?

MR. BUTT: No, my sister is older.

MS. RIEDEL: Your sister is the oldest. Okay.

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I'm the middle one. I actually didn't grow up in Princeton. I grew up in Hopewell, which is a small town outside of Princeton, about 13 miles outside. Population 3,000. [Laughs.] I think probably the population is still 3,000. Everybody knew everybody. We didn't have a high school. It was too small a town for a high school. But we had a grammar school that went from kindergarten all the way through eighth grade.

MS. RIEDEL: That's unusual.

MR. BUTT: And I was with more or less those same people from kindergarten through eighth grade, and my graduating class was 18 people.

MS. RIEDEL: From eighth grade?

MR. BUTT: Yes. And most of us were the same. So I grew up—I was one of the smartest kids in the class. Of course, being one of the smartest of 18 people is not all that hard. [Laughs.] But the good thing was that it gave me this sense of confidence growing up. The same thing with art. I was drawing from the time I was small. I entered some contests—it was on the television, some station out of New York that you'd send in drawings, and I won a prize or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you really? How old were you? Do you remember?

MR. BUTT: I don't know. I must have been eight or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you draw?

MR. BUTT: I don't remember. I remember the prize. It was a plastic robot. [Laughs.] But the thing is—and I think about this all the time because people tell me, "Oh, I don't have any artistic talent." But I think there's a certain innate interest in visual things that may cause someone to draw or sculpt, to interpret their creativity that way.

But then you get the feedback from people, and people say, "You're good at this." And if enough people say it, you start to believe it, and you become good at it. So I think a lot of it is—I see this with my own kids now, how they've gravitated to different things, and it's—the reaction of people around you. So my interest in art started at an early age.

MS. RIEDEL: And was your family interested in art, or did they support your interest in art?

MR. BUTT: Not really. They were supportive, but they weren't interested—they didn't really know that much about it. My dad never finished high school because he had to work on the farm. He went back when I was in high school and got his equivalency. And my mother had a high school education and that was it. So they weren't really well educated people in that way, but both were very intelligent people despite their educational backgrounds.

MS. RIEDEL: Your father worked with his hands.

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Did he have a metal shop at the house?

MS. RIEDEL: He had tools—a tool shop in the basement—and he was an excellent welder, and putting things together and parts. I think that that had an influence on me. My father and I had a period of time during adolescence where we didn't get along all that well, but I still admired the skills that he had and the type of person he was.

My mother was more of a reading type of person, more literate. So I guess I got more of that sort of influence from her. And they both thought education was important. I think that that whole generation thought education was very important for whatever reason—to better yourself. So they really wanted us to do well.

I never felt that they were pushy in terms of school, but both my brother and I did very well in school and were very interested in that. My sister was—back then in high school, you chose the academic route, the professional career route, or the dropout route. My sister was more interested in doing clerical work and was an excellent typist, and she went on to be a very successful secretary. But she didn't go to college. My brother and I both did.

MS. RIEDEL: With your mother's influence, do you remember reading a lot as a child?

MR. BUTT: Well, I did quite a bit of reading. I don't remember—

MS. RIEDEL: Poetry? Were you interested in poetry as a child?

MR. BUTT: I wrote poetry when I was very young. I found this little thing—my mother died fairly young, and we went through her stuff. She had this little booklet of poems and flowers. I'd done the drawings of flowers, then written a little poem about each one. It was on construction paper with crayon and stapled together. And I don't know how old I was—it must have been—

MS. RIEDEL: But you'd done a drawing of a different flower and then written a poem for each one. That's really interesting, don't you think, in retrospect? That's really interesting.

MR. BUTT: [Laughs.] Still doing it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And how old were you when your mother died?

MR. BUTT: I was 20.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So, yes, that was fairly young.

MR. BUTT: Yes, she was younger than I am now.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. That must have been really difficult. That's hard. Did you spend a lot of time in nature as a child, too?

MR. BUTT: Yes. Like I said, we grew up in Hopewell, which was a small town. Our house was right on the edge of town, and it was farming and woods, mixed area behind that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I think I've driven through Hopewell, and I remember a lot of farming.

MR. BUTT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] So I used to just walk out in the fields and the woods and so forth a lot. Spent a lot of time—

MS. RIEDEL: Were you reading anybody who was writing about nature?

MR. BUTT: Oh, not then. It wasn't till later that I got interested in Thoreau and the Transcendentalists and that type of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Okay. And did you enjoy school as a child?

MR. BUTT: I did. I enjoyed—well, elementary school, like I said, all the way through eighth grade was good. Then we were bused to Princeton for high school. There, my graduating class was around 350. So I was a little flummoxed there for a while, going from such a tiny, intimate situation where I knew everybody to this vast student body—plus high school is hard—

MS. RIEDEL: —anyway, right?

MR. BUTT: —for anyone. So I was a little lost there, but I held onto my art, and I could major in art at the high school that I went to.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you could choose a major in the high school? That's interesting. Was this Princeton High School?

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: And were you working primarily two-dimensionally?

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you exploring 3-D at all?

MR. BUTT: There was a lot of painting and drawing—I took metalworking, which was an industrial arts class. It was mainly learning how to weld and put things together. The aesthetics weren't that emphasized, and yet we did punch out a little copper bowl and enamel it.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. BUTT: But I didn't think about that till later. That wasn't my particular interest at that point. I also took drafting, which I can see when I go about things in my work even now. Of course, now everything is on computer, but I took several classes in drafting, and then I got a summer job working for a civil engineer doing mapping and then later in an electronics plant doing schematics. So that sort of precision drawing was in my experience. That influenced me in some ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Very technical drawing. Were those jobs you had during high school or afterwards?

MR. BUTT: Yes, mostly during high school and in the summers.

MS. RIEDEL: What sorts of things were you drawing?

MR. BUTT: Well, for the maps, I would go to the courthouse of the county and research certain properties that I needed to look up. The descriptions were written out, and I had to come back and draw them on the drafting board.

Some of them are very old. They were measured in chains and links rather than feet and inches and—

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. That's such an unusual job for a high school student.

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And translating a very abstract description—how would that be described? There's a tree here. There's a fence here.

MR. BUTT: Yes, well, it was pretty precise. They had transits and so forth, and then it would say, Northeast so many degrees, so many minutes for so many feet, or the old ones, like I say, chains and links. And you draw that line, and then you draw the next line, and if it was done properly, it all comes back exactly to the beginning. Of course, if there's one error, then you end up with this crooked line—[laughs]—which sometimes happened.

But then they would go out in the field. For one summer, I did work as a lineman for the surveyor and got an idea of how it actually worked in the field, where you could start at that point and you could go around. It always amazed me that some of these things are fairly old, and they could start at some sort of standard point and go out in the middle of this field; they'd dig down in the dirt a little bit, and there'd be a post with a nail in it.

MS. RIEDEL: How interesting, just conceptually, to think of something out in the world or something in a library that then you can translate.

MR. BUTT: I'd been interested in mapping. I was a Boy Scout and was active in the Boy Scouts and went camping. And of course, we did map orientation. So that whole idea of abstracting nature into a schematic is interesting—and bizarre, in a way. It's very practical, but it's misleading too. In one way it's very realistic, and in another way it's unrealistic. I have maps here on the wall of some of this area. And how you designate elevation on a map is interesting, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Like the topographic maps you're talking about.

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because sometimes when I look at your work, it makes me think of—for example, the Earth Beneath [Our] Feet series—very realistic images of nature on top, and then it feels like this abstraction, this vibrant abstraction of nature, through pattern and color on the vessel itself. So it's interesting to hear you describe this work from very early on.

MR. BUTT: Yes, actually, I hadn't really put the two together. But now that I think about it, that way of looking at things that—nature has been my basic theme, but reality really is what I've been dealing with all along. How do we see reality? How do we interpret reality? What does it mean?

MS. RIEDEL: And what do you mean by "reality"? Are you thinking about it in a physical sense, or are you thinking about more of a Zen sense here?

MR. BUTT: Well, both. What is real? There was a period of time when I thought that none of this existed. It was all just in my head.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] All of this around us?

MR. BUTT: And I marveled at how wonderfully I'd made it all up. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: You had such an imagination.

MR. BUTT: Not consciously. But it's that whole idea of when you go to sleep, it all disappears. You wake up and there it is again. [Laughs.] So it's all in my head. You're in my head. The trees are in my head.

I don't believe that so much anymore, but I think there's that essence. You see it in religion, and you see it in other cultures. This whole idea of what is real and what is reality and what is identity, what is the individual, what am I? How am I different from you? How am I different from the tree? That has been an interest of mine all

along.

I can still remember, at the age of 13, thinking about my own death and thinking about how could that be possible? Because the only way things exist is because I'm seeing them; I'm hearing them; I'm experiencing them. So, if I disappear, it all disappears.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MR. BUTT: And I grew up with a certain influence from religion—my religious background.

MS. RIEDEL: What was your religious background?

MR. BUTT: The Baptist church. But it wasn't Southern Baptist. It was the Hopewell Calvary Baptist church. The Northern Baptist was less rigid and less—at least in my interpretation—dogmatic than what I see in Texas of Baptists. But I rejected that at one point. I was pretty seriously into religion there for a while.

MS. RIEDEL: As a high school student or earlier years?

MR. BUTT: Yes, earlier and up into high school. When I was a Boy Scout, the highest religious medal that the Boy Scouts of America awarded was the God and Country award, and I received that.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? That's extraordinary.

MR. BUTT: It took over a year of working and reading the whole Bible, while I interacted with the minister. There was a whole series of things that you did—social action types of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: And how old were you when you received that?

MR. BUTT: Oh, I must have been 16 or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: So in high school that was a big part of your world.

MR. BUTT: Yes, until I was about 18. And then, of course, my mother passed away when I was 20. That was like a knife coming down, separating time before and after that.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Did that affect your religious views?

MR. BUTT: Yes. I think there's a certain innocence—and I'm just speaking for myself here, I guess. I thought about my own death, but it was all abstract; it was all theory. Then when someone that close to you actually dies, a lot of things change.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I understand.

MR. BUTT: And even my father was affected, so he changed a lot after that. And I was at Tyler School of Art as an undergraduate at that point. My whole home situation sort of disappeared; it changed completely. So that had an effect on me.

Also it's when my interest in Asian religion started. I had a professor from Temple University who came up to teach a class in religion at Tyler. His name was John Haule. He'd been a Jesuit priest and had left the order because he'd started to question his faith. He was teaching this course in Eastern religions.

I became very close to him. I had probably the closest personal relationship with a teacher that I ever had. And then it kind of broke apart. But the ideas that were planted there in terms of Eastern religion—that was the beginning of my interest in Eastern religion.

MS. RIEDEL: And when you say the ideas that were planted there, what, in particular, was resonating with you?

MR. BUTT: Well, for one thing, just the whole idea that, as a Christian in a small town, that was what was real. And people in other places believed these other things; we don't know why. It doesn't make any sense, but they do.

Here I saw the complexity and the history of it was just as important to the people in those places as ours was to us. They had different answers to certain questions. Just the fact that there were other answers was significant to me—that if there can be more than one answer, then maybe there's three; maybe there's 10; maybe there's a thousand.

MS. RIEDEL: So a world opened up.

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And things began to multiply.

MR. BUTT: The questions became more complex, and the answers more elusive, in terms of what was real and what wasn't.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you looking at Christian art and then looking at Eastern art?

MR. BUTT: Well, I suppose so, because at that time, in studying, the focus was Western. And then you might have a little section on Asian art in the Janson's *History of Art*. So by the time I was starting to do metalwork, a lot of what I was looking at was religious objects.

Whether it was manuscript covers, reliquaries, chalices, or other types of Western art, it's all European-focused, and then it becomes Western-focused. Still, to a great extent, I think it's that way, unless you specifically go someplace where they're focusing on another part of the world.

MS. RIEDEL: And that focus on material, too, seems to make such a huge difference, depending on how you're approaching it, culturally. The art history of various cultures are going to respond very differently.

MR. BUTT: Yes. One thing that I admired and was surprised by in Japan was how important people who made objects were. Particularly historically, someone who made tea bowls might be just as famous as someone who did painting. Someone who did lacquer work or kimono painting could be very prestigious indeed. It seemed like there wasn't as distinct a line drawn between a fine artist and a craftsman, at least from my limited knowledge of the culture.

MS. RIEDEL: That reminds me about a wonderful story Richard Notkin told me. He makes those fabulous ceramic teapots, and he goes back and forth frequently to China. He gave a lecture, and a number of Chinese artists who focused in teapots came up to speak with him afterwards. And they just did not understand what he was doing, and they spent a bunch of time talking about it.

Finally they said, Oh, well, you're not really making teapots; you're just making sculpture. [Laughs.] I thought that was such an interesting cultural perspective on turning the whole question around.

I want to move us back, before we get to Tyler, to still in high school. Were you visiting art museums when you were in high school, or before then? Were you exposed to Western art, or—

MR. BUTT: I'm trying to remember my first museum experience. I know we went to New York on a class trip and we probably went to the Metropolitan [Museum of Art]. I remember being very influenced by the American Museum of Natural History, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BUTT: And the dioramas of different animals and plants. I remember that even more distinctly than the art museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you know David Freda? I would imagine you do.

MR. BUTT: Ah, yes, sure.

MS. RIEDEL: He says the same thing. He was so influenced by the Museum of Natural History. It's interesting.

MR. BUTT: And that continued for quite some time, even after I was in Tyler. When I would go to New York, I'd go to art museums, but I'd also always go to the Natural History Museum if I could. My wife's aunt worked at the Natural History Museum and lived right across the street from it, and we'd sometimes stay at her apartment. We'd get a free pass to go in. But even before that time, I was interested in the Natural History Museum.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you have a favorite section, or was there a favorite display?

MR. BUTT: The Native American area and the dioramas of American wildlife and African wildlife—those, I always admired.

MS. RIEDEL: So, the animals?

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Did you like going to the zoo, as well?

MR. BUTT: Yes, but not as much. The animals—even though they were stuffed, it was kind of like, this is what it must really look like with different animals and plants all together. Whereas at the zoo, it's just the animal in a cage.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was almost the landscape; it was the whole context.

MR. BUTT: Right, it was the interconnectedness of all of the things that would be there, rather than just the animals.

MS. RIEDEL: And so this even more than Old Master paintings or anything like that?

MR. BUTT: Yes. I looked at those, too, and admired them. In some ways, I couldn't imagine doing that, though. I would try, but—

MS. RIEDEL: Did you paint in high school, or was it primarily drawing?

MR. BUTT: A little bit.

MS. RIEDEL: More drawing, and then also you said some metalwork?

MR. BUTT: Well, yes. I did that, but that wasn't what I did at home and on my own. It was in a school situation, I did a little bit of that.

MS. RIEDEL: So if you majored in art, did you have to choose a particular medium to concentrate in?

MR. BUTT: No, it wasn't that. We didn't have ceramics or photography. It was mostly painting and drawing. And we did a little with clay, but—

MS. RIEDEL: So primarily two-dimensional?

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: So how was it that you came to decide to study at Tyler?

MR. BUTT: Well, my art teacher there encouraged me to go to art school.

MS. RIEDEL: At Princeton?

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember his or her name?

MR. BUTT: Stetson. I don't remember first name. Maybe I never knew it. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Mr. Stetson?

MR. BUTT: Yes, Mr. Stetson. [Laughs.] Actually, back in Texas, I have my yearbook. It would have his name. I applied to Rhode Island School of Design, Kansas City Art Institute, Tyler School of Art—it was just those three, as far as I can remember. Kansas City Art Institute, since my father was from Missouri and had relatives not too far from there; and the other two because Mr. Stetson said they were good schools, so I assumed they were.

I wasn't accepted at Kansas City Art Institute. I was accepted at Rhode Island School of Design and Tyler. And I went to Tyler because they offered me more scholarship money. My brother told me this a year ago, and I didn't even know it. He said our mother called both of those schools and told them that the other school had accepted me and offered me money, and she went back and forth trying to get them to offer me more money. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Really? How savvy!

MR. BUTT: Yes, she was. But I never knew it.

MS. RIEDEL: What a lovely gift. [Laughs.]

MR. BUTT: Yes. She didn't live to see me graduate.

MS. RIEDEL: But she lived to see you get in, and that was great.

MR. BUTT: Yes, she did. So anyway, that's why I went to Tyler. And I was pretty ignorant, in terms of knowing—now I know it's a great school. And it was then. But I just went there because my art teacher told me that was a good school to go to.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you thinking at all of a major when you arrived?

MR. BUTT: No. My parents wanted me to go into commercial art because they figured I could get a job. They also thought, Well, if not that, then art education, because I could teach.

MS. RIEDEL: That was normal back then.

MR. BUTT: And I just decided, I'm just going to go. The first two years at Tyler, we had to take a little of everything. So you had painting and drawing; you had sculpture; you had fibers; you had metals. And my first metals class, I just kind of knew that this was what I wanted to do.

It was three-dimensional, and I felt more comfortable with three dimensions. There were some people there—it's funny. It was an art school—even though it's part of Temple University, it was like a private little art school up in Elkins Park, and people came from all over the country, and there were people a lot better than me. I was kind of intimidated, at that point. It's, like, Oh, my God.

So I felt like I had a handle on working in the three dimensions. And metal itself, it just suited me. I've thought about this since then—what was it, and what is it, that makes me gravitate to that material? Clay was just too plastic. I had good instructors—I had Rudy Staffel and Robert Winokur as ceramic teachers, and they were great. But it just wasn't my media. I enjoyed it, but I didn't feel like I would ever be great at it.

Like I said, I minored in fibers, and I had a finicky—

MS. RIEDEL: Who was teaching fiber, then?

MR. BUTT: You know, I can't remember.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, were you there at the same time that Adela Akers was there?

MR. BUTT: No, I don't think she—

MS. RIEDEL: No, no. I think she came later.

MR. BUTT: Lenore or Lenora—that name sticks in my mind, but I can't remember if that was my teacher or not back then. I don't remember. Sculpture, I had Italo Scanga. And he was just sort of crazy. [Laughs.] I did stuff for him like just tying things together and—

MS. RIEDEL: Does he do found objects?

MR. BUTT: Yes, a lot of found objects. And I was using a lot of natural fur and feathers and putting them together. It was fun, but I never really felt any sense of order there.

It's almost too much. There were too many options. You could do almost anything. And I needed more structure than that. And so metals supplied that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, because it was really hard, I would imagine. Does it come easy to you?

MR. BUTT: I wouldn't say it "came easy," but I felt I almost had an immediate affinity, and maybe because I'd done little bits of things before.

MS. RIEDEL: So the background playing around in your father's workshop—

MR. BUTT: Yes, and I even still have a few of those projects from my first semester or two there.

MS. RIEDEL: And was this with Stanley Lechtzin?

MR. BUTT: Yes. I had Stanley, I think, for the first couple of classes. Then I had Elliot Pujol, and he had a little bit looser sort of aesthetic than Stanley's. I got some things from both of them.

MS. RIEDEL: And how was that experience for you? How was Tyler? How was studying with Stanley Lechtzin and Elliot Pujol? Did it help you focus?

MR. BUTT: Yes, it was stimulating. I was constantly challenged. And I remember the other classes, too—design and painting. I had Stephen Greene for painting at one point, and I think Frank Stella had been one of his

students. I can't remember exactly; I just remember him.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there an emphasis on technique, on form, on—

MR. BUTT: It depended who your teacher was. Like I said, the residue of Abstract Expressionism—I know I did some big, pseudo-Jules Olitski paintings using a toothbrush to splatter paint. So I was experimenting around, trying to see where I fell in the realm of painting and art in general. It was a good experience.

I'm glad that I had Stanley at Tyler as an undergraduate and then went to Carbondale [Southern Illinois University]. If it had been the other way around, I don't know that I would have been as successful or felt as confident, because things were looser at Carbondale.

MS. RIEDEL: Some of the professors tend to emphasize rigorous technique. I'm thinking of Heikki Seppa, as an example. And then some are far more conceptual. What was your experience—

MR. BUTT: I think it was some of both. Technique was very important. Lechtzin was working on electroforming at Tyler, so there was this—for then—high-tech sort of business. And there was quite a bit of learning technique. I had to work the lathe and this and that.

And then I remember, I had Stanley one semester and I said I wanted to work in enameling. Well, enameling was not really highly thought of at that period of time in many colleges. I could tell that Stanley wasn't all that crazy about it. It was like it wasn't real metalwork, you know? [Laughs.]

And it had all these references to hobby and ashtray and that kind of thing. But I wanted color and I wanted to do enameling. So he said, "There's a cabinet over here and these dusty jars of enamel and an old kiln. Go to it." He probably gave me a book and told me to read it.

So I experimented, and I was soldering things together and putting enamel on, and put them in the kiln. And they all fell apart in the kiln. I was so frustrated by it. I said I'd never do enameling again.

MS. RIEDEL: And nobody there was able to give you any direction, or instruction?

MR. BUTT: Not really.

I still have one of the pieces from back then. I did a piece—[laughs]—it was an abstract container of sorts. It was hinged at the back like a clamshell, and it was enameled, and then inside, there was fiber that was crocheted—very '60s. It was electroformed around the edges, where the metal showed. So it had this granulation around the edges.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And fairly realistic, it sounds like.

MR. BUTT: It was an abstract clamshell—wasn't trying to look like a real clamshell, but you could tell that's kind of what it was. I might have been influenced by people like John Paul Miller who were doing the sort of sea-creature things with enamel. But I found the technique very limiting, so I stopped doing it after that semester and didn't do it again for years.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned that while you were at Tyler, you were studying with—I can't remember his name—the ex-Jesuit priest who introduced you—

MR. BUTT: Oh, yes, John Haule.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you beginning to look at any kind of art, metal art in particular, from the East as well, or were you still primarily focused on what was happening in the States—contemporary art?

MR. BUTT: I was interested in the religious and the cultural aspect of art, and how those things manifested themselves in different types of art. So I was looking at friezes and patterns on architecture in India.

Like I said, when we studied Eastern art, it was kind of brief. So you'd get little highlights of different things, but—I know that I was already somewhat interested in Zen, and I was interested in the tea ceremony, even at that point. And then when I went to graduate school, I actually did some research in those things. I had an art history class—

MS. RIEDEL: This was the '70s. You graduated from Tyler in '72 and then went to Carbondale. I'm thinking Shoji Hamada, and Soetsu Yanagi as well, began that whole Japanese aesthetic that was very much present in the States.

MR. BUTT: Yes. *The Unknown Craftsman*: *A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, 1972. Bernard Leach, Soetsu Yanagi,

and Shoji Hamada].

I remember a book called *Zen Dust*[:*The History of the Koan and Koan Study in Rinzai (Linji) Zen*, 1967. Isshu Miura, Ruth Fuller Sasaki] that I got from the library and *Zen Flesh Zen Bones*[: *A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, 1957. Paul Reys, Nyogen Sensaki, compilers]—a lot of books that talked about parables of Zen and so forth.

I'll get back to that at some later point, but I was interested in the tea ceremony and the whole idea of the samurai and the sword, and I read *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* [Robert M. Pirsig, 1974].

There was kind of a mishmash of real ideas from the East, and then they got mixed up within the counterculture. But it was a very vibrant and exciting time. I was reading about that, and in this art history class that I mentioned, I actually did a tea ceremony. After reading about it, I asked a friend in ceramics to make some cups for me. She made these little cups, and I went through the ritual.

Later on, when I actually studied in Japan, I realized how silly what I did was. [Laughs.] It was nothing like the real tea ceremony. On the other hand, the spirit that I was trying to express, even as naïve as it was, was true. The whole idea of sharing something with a group of people is the basis of it.

MS. RIEDEL: And is that how you would describe the spirit, sharing that experience with a group of people?

MR. BUTT: It is.

MS. RIEDEL: And is this something you did in graduate school?

MR. BUTT: This mock tea ceremony? Yes, in my art history class.

MS. RIEDEL: So was this part of a presentation that you gave?

MR. BUTT: Yes. Rather than write a paper, you could do some sort of project, and that's what I did.

MS. RIEDEL: And so did you set up a special space? How did it work?

MR. BUTT: Well, sort of. I had everybody sit on the floor and be quiet. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: But something about it clearly was important to you. Something about it spoke to you.

MR. BUTT: Right, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: And when I think of your work, there's a very deep essence of spirituality and ritual, even if not blatant at all, but very quiet. And so it's interesting to hear you talk about this, because, clearly, it seems it's something that's been important to you for a long time.

MR. BUTT: The word "religion" comes from the [Latin] root *religio*, which refers to meaning [*sic*]. And all the religions are trying to find some meaning, which is what we're all doing. It's just that they go—[laughs]—astray in so many ways that I'm distrustful of organized religion.

But we're all still looking for meaning, in a way. Interesting—I recently read something that Bruce Metcalf wrote about today's youth—people under 30—and how they're hit from so many different directions with so many different meanings that they're not trying to pick out one anymore. They're just bringing it all in and coming out with whatever they can. It's not exactly the same. I think of it as looking for that truth or looking for those individual things—the meaning here and there—and what can I distill it down to? And maybe that's just one way of doing it.

MS. RIEDEL: But now it is so much more completely fused that it's impossible to separate—

MR. BUTT: Yes, we're bombarded with so much meaning that you just have to pick and choose what seems good or appropriate at the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you think about the tea ceremony as an art form?

MR. BUTT: It's funny, because it's almost not any of those things. It's not strictly an art; it's not strictly performance; it's not strictly entertainment; but it is all of those things. That's maybe what intrigued me, that it was beyond categories, in a way, at least beyond the categories that we usually think of here.

If it was a performance, then they'd be doing it onstage, and you'd be sitting back and watching. If it was strictly art, then you wouldn't be picking it up and drinking out of it. But it was all of those things. The tea ceremony

spoke to my interest in ritual, my interest in the meaning—abstract concept—but also with tangible objects.

When I see a formal Mass performed with the bread and the wine—I can be interested in that, too, and I find it fascinating. It's not necessarily that I believe in anything in particular, but the implements are part of it. The ritual itself seemed important—so important to so many people from so much of history that you have to have a certain respect for it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And there's something you just said that I think is really getting at the heart of your work, to my mind at least: that whole concept of being beyond categories and what we think of here as art form versus ritual. When I look at your work, it's not straight metalsmithing; it's metal and glass. It's certainly not strictly American or Japanese. It does feel like there is a real fusion.

MR. BUTT: It feels good when you say that. Because even though I was trained as a metalsmith, when people ask me what do I do, I can say I'm a metalsmith or a goldsmith or silversmith, enamelist. It was surprising to me the first time someone called me an enamelist because I never even thought of myself as that.

The whole idea of categories, too—it almost gets back to the mapping. I understand why we have these abstractions. Because things are so complex, we have to name them, and we have to reduce them down to categories, to understand them. Then we really start to believe that there are these categories—which there aren't. And so, yes, I am a metalsmith; I am a craftsman; I am an artist—whatever you want to say—but I don't find those are limitations that I have to stay within, even though I'm sure some people look at my work and see it as in some category.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking of the Garden Anagogies. I look at some of them and I think of Color Field painting. They are such vibrant expanses of color. You have the wisteria vase, those beautiful fine, thin lines, almost defining negative space.

MR. BUTT: That was definitely the influence from Japan, and it was particularly from flower arranging—ikebana. The whole idea of the vessel and line—it was the form and the line, and how you combine the form, line, and color. In flower arranging, of course, you allow the flowers to be most of the color, and the vase sort of stays in the background. But I wasn't dealing with real flowers. This was more the feeling of movement of organic line and form, and so the vessel itself took on that idea of the color, of what the flower might do.

MS. RIEDEL: That's where I think of the more formal aspect of your work. There is certainly a very formal consideration of form and color, texture, repetitive pattern.

MR. BUTT: I find that those are probably, right from basic design, talking about those things. But then once you study these things, you let go of that, and then you see it everywhere. I see it in nature. I see it in other things—a combination of line and pattern and color.

MS. RIEDEL: How was the experience at Carbondale different than Tyler?

MR. BUTT: Well, it was looser. When I first got to SIU, there were five or six of us graduate students all in together. I think there was one undergraduate in there too. [L. Brent] Kington would sometimes put an advanced undergrad with the grads, if he had an extra bench. But anyway, I was new, and they called me "tubing man" or something like that, because at that time, I was doing a lot of stuff with hinges and stuff with tubes.

I was going to do some casting, and I asked somebody where the sprue wax was, and they just laughed at me. At Tyler, you had it all—there was a shelf with different-sized sprue waxes, and you just chose which gauge. At SIU you just took some brown sculpture wax and rolled it out. They didn't have sprue wax. And that was the difference in attitude there.

MS. RIEDEL: How so? Could you elaborate?

MR. BUTT: Carbondale didn't have all this fancy stuff and it wasn't all that organized, and yet good work was coming out of there. Kington was doing primarily blacksmithing at that point, although he still did some casting and jewelry, but primarily blacksmithing. And he tried to bring about half the graduate students in who wanted to be blacksmiths and steel people—hot-metal people—and the other half just metalsmiths working with the nonferrous metals.

But then he would encourage each group to try the other material and process while they were there. I did some blacksmithing, so that's where—both in forging some steel and seeing some of Kington's work—some of those linear, wisteria elements came from. They were a direct outcome of working with steel, and how fluid it is in a linear state when you're forging it out into a taper, and how it moves and curls. So I did some steel work while I was there, both hot and cold. And it was a tight-knit group.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember who else was studying there, at the time? Anybody who is still working?

MR. BUTT: Jan Brooks, Mike Riegel, and Rene da Martin-Lempky. I haven't heard from [Rene] since, but the two of us had our graduate shows together. There was Don Williams. There was an undergraduate whose name was Noel something. I can't think of his last name, but he was there. And then towards the end, Rachelle Thiewes was an undergraduate there in grad studio with us, but she was one of those that [Kington] brought in.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you say you were studying fiber as well at Carbondale?

MR. BUTT: Yes. Then, Joan Lintault was the fibers teacher there. And I was mainly just doing very formal studies of traditional colonial patterns on the loom. I hadn't done that much on the loom at Tyler, so I wanted to try more.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And strictly geometric work then?

MR. BUTT: Pretty much.

MS. RIEDEL: And experimenting with color and pattern?

MR. BUTT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: Scale, at all, or was it—

MR. BUTT: No, I was doing yardage, essentially. I got a job one summer—this is when I was still at Tyler, actually—at Waterloo Village, in New Jersey. It's sort of a small-scale Williamsburg [VA]. They already had a blacksmith and a silversmith, so I got the job as a weaver, but essentially, I was mowing the lawns. [Laughs.] But when people came to view, we wore these knickers with stockings and these flowing shirts. And I had long hair back then, tied back.

I worked on this big two-harness loom. There's not a whole lot you can do with a two-harness loom, but it was an original loom from the 1700s—so, very old. I would sit there and do yardage. I demonstrated how to use the spinning wheel and I learned how to spin.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. Were you able to experiment and do whatever you wanted, or did you have to do —

MR. BUTT: No, you just wove while somebody was there—you put the shuttle through and you would weave it a little bit—and then when they leave, you go mow the lawn. [Laughs.] There were vast expanses of lawns there.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like a summer job. [Laughs.] Had you narrowed in on metal at Carbondale, or were you still going back and forth—

MR. BUTT: No, at Tyler, I knew—by the time I was a junior, I knew I was a metals major and that's what I was going to pursue. I don't know if it was a requirement or an option to take a minor, but I decided to do fibers when I got to Carbondale. I was mainly spending my time in metals. The metal shop [at Carbonale], at that time, was right down the hallway from glassblowing. And so I did watch those people sometimes, but I never really tried glassblowing.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. It makes so much sense to me when I hear about your work and your interest in fiber, as well as metal and enamel, because I think of those patterns on your work—so detailed, so complex, so layered. And it's not something that I automatically, usually, associate with metalwork. It does have, not necessarily a textile feel, but I can see how your interest in pattern might have really evolved then, and then translated into the work on metal with enamel.

MR. BUTT: Well, I think that sort of grew from the more simple pieces that were in the Anagogie and the Wisteria series. I was starting to do some pieces with pinstriped patterns, but it was really more—after going to Japan and then, later, India, that—

I guess I was trying to see things in a more complex manner, in a way, and see things in terms of, as I mentioned before, the interconnectedness of things, like cell structure and stars—dust. It just seemed like there was a complexity behind the simplicity that I needed to somehow investigate.

MS. RIEDEL: A complexity behind the simplicity—that's very interesting. That sounds Japanese, even before you got to Japan. [They laugh.] Were you focusing primarily on vessel work? Were you making jewelry at this time?

MR. BUTT: At Carbondale I was already doing containers, but they were more like boxes. I mentioned the tube thing—I did this piece that was like a Chinese puzzle box. It was brass and steel, and it had some patterns on the

outside; it had a little border and central elements. The number of little crossovers on the pattern was a code as to which side to work first. One side, you'd slide back, and that allowed another side to slide over. Then it would open up, and there'd be a key inside, and you'd put that in another side and turn it, and a compartment would pop out from the inside.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. So you did start with puzzles. [Laughs.]

MR. BUTT: Yes, it was sort of a puzzle.

And I was doing other thing with hinges. I did a little box that was a half-circle, but it had a Rorschach-like inkblot type of pattern on it that I'd pierced and then filled in with red epoxy and sanded off for color. It was hinged—and when you opened it, another circle opened up inside that, and another one and another one, that were like petals. And then there was a pearl in the middle of it.

MS. RIEDEL: And these were all just individual objects?

MR. BUTT: No, they were all connected. There were all hinged together so that when you opened the lid, it exposed the next layer. It would open up and reveal another hinge. They got progressively smaller.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. These were not enameled, though?

MR. BUTT: No. I wasn't doing enameling at all in graduate school.

MS. RIEDEL: No enameling at all in graduate school?

MR. BUTT: I used some of the epoxy for color. I did patinas, but no enamel.

And I was doing the roadkill stuff then. I became very interested in aboriginal art and cave paintings, the whole idea of the primitive, although I didn't really think of it as primitive. The connection with nature was important, and I could see that it was more than just a—how do I put this—as an observer witnessing nature. This was a depiction of someone who felt *in* nature, and that really interested me, and it still does.

In Western painting—and even in the East, but to a great extent in Western painting—where you're dealing with landscape, you're not in the landscape. It's like looking through a window. You're here, and nature's out there. In aboriginal art you are part of it. In some of it, it's even like—

MS. RIEDEL: You're thinking of the aboriginal paintings?

MR. BUTT: Yes, aboriginal paintings, or carvings or ritual objects. You admire nature, but it's not something other than you. There's an element of fear and mystery in there as well, because you don't completely understand it, and you don't feel totally at ease with it.

MS. RIEDEL: But you're participating in it.

MR. BUTT: Yes. You're not apart from it.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a very interesting distinction, just to think about art where one is a participant in it, as opposed to observer of it.

MR. BUTT: Yes, that's important. I was talking about my roadkill work. I wanted to use natural elements, and rather than me making them, I was trying to incorporate them—things that I found, because I was walking in nature a lot, going out into the woods—we lived out by Crab Orchard Lake just outside of Carbondale.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think this was Italo Scanga's influence? [Laughs.]

MR. BUTT: Well, there was still part of that. There were people doing macramé with feathers during that time, still, so I was incorporating some of those things. But I took a taxidermy class while I was in graduate school so that I could preserve these different animal parts. It wasn't offered at the university; I learned it from a local person.

I did a series of reliquaries, combining that idea of the Christian reliquary as containing a bone or some piece of memorabilia from one of the saints, or the cross and thinking of it in terms of, Okay, here are these creatures that have primarily died because we hit them with a car or whatever. We don't care; we just keep driving.

But the life of a creature other than ourselves isn't so much different than us. The similarities, such as their DNA, are much greater than the differences. So why can we be so cavalier about the death of other things and feel so self-important about our own lives? I was trying to elevate these creatures and show some sort of respect and

reverence towards them. I was making these reliquaries with a cardinal or hummingbird or a squirrel, using actual parts of them.

MS. RIEDEL: And were these bones, or were these actually taxidermied parts?

MR. BUTT: Some of them were animal parts preserved by taxidermy. The cardinal box that I made actually has a cardinal head in it and the two little feet. I was casting some of them—I would take a mold of the real object. My wedding rings, in fact, were squirrel paws. My wife and I still have them, although I don't wear mine, but I still have it in a little box somewhere. They were actually taken from a mold of a dead squirrel, and then the wax is wrapped around, and it's cast. So it's two little paws coming around. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's amazing. It goes back to your earlier description of the vessel and the hands—

MR. BUTT: I was doing those sorts of things—the boxes and the reliquaries. And then it evolved into some things that I made: a rattle and pipe and other types of objects that could be used, but were, again, more ritual than real, functional objects. That's what I was doing when I finished at SIU. And then we moved to Connecticut from Carbondale.

MS. RIEDEL: So in Carbondale, the focus was primarily on reliquaries, towards the end?

MR. BUTT: Boxes of different kinds that evolved into reliquaries.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you ever make simple, functional boxes—jewelry boxes and things like that—or were they always housing something with some sort of—

MR. BUTT: Mostly housing something. I did a few things as gifts and marketable objects, things that were just boxes. But they always had some sort of a pattern on them that was similar to the reliquary boxes. I did some with the inlay of colored epoxy. But usually, I'd put something in it, even if it was small—some little fragment.

MS. RIEDEL: From the start, there was a quality of function and a quality of ritual?

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: That seems to have really been continued through.

MR. BUTT: I did some strange commissions then, too. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I was going to ask you about commissions, and if you entertained them.

MR. BUTT: Periodically, I do. I always learn something from them. Kington would send people to me if it was a strange commission. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And why was that?

MR. BUTT: Because of the whole reliquary thing, this couple came to me—they wanted a pendant that was a container to hold the umbilical of their yet-to-be-born child that was going to be born by Caesarean on her birth day. They were Jewish and they wanted Hebrew symbols on the side of it. So I did that.

I had another couple he sent to me. The man wanted a ring for him that had her fingerprint pressed in wax that would be cast on the ring, because she had cancer and she didn't have long to live.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, wow.

MR. BUTT: So that's the type of commissions that I remember back then. I don't remember ever having somebody who just wanted a ring. [Laughs.] I guess Kington gave those to other people.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting. Pretty powerful.

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Not light stuff. [Laughs.] Well, the humor comes in later, kind of subtly.

MR. BUTT: That's funny, because in a way, with some of the reliquaries—there was a sense of humor there. I knew it was absurd to do these reliquaries for animals. But it wasn't a joke. If there was humor, it was to laugh at ourselves, in a way.

I still feel that way. Some of the pieces I'm doing—a piece that I'm working on in there—not the one that I just fired, but that other one—I don't know if you saw it on my desk—I think it's funny looking.

MS. RIEDEL: I haven't seen it; I'll have to look.

MR. BUTT: Yeah, I'll show it to you.

MS. RIEDEL: So from Illinois, you went to Connecticut?

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So you graduated in '74—your M.F.A.

MR. BUTT: Correct.

MS. RIEDEL: And primarily, Brent Kington was the one you studied with there?

MR. BUTT: Yes. Now, Richard Prillaman was there—I was friendly with him; I feel like I rode into school with him—but I don't think I ever took a class with him. Elliott Pujol had been a student there, and he was the one that encouraged me to go to Carbondale.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, was Mary Lee Hu—was she still there as a grad student?

MR. BUTT: She was before my time, I think; yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, because I know she stayed on some time after she was done, but she was gone already?

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And do you feel that the combination of Tyler and Carbondale prepared you pretty well?

MR. BUTT: I do. Like I said, I think that I learned a lot of the basic skills and a work ethic at Tyler that I then took to Carbondale. Also, there were people like Eleanor Moty at Tyler when I was there; Albert Paley was there. There were people who were obviously committed to their work, and [who were] professionals, and I could tell that, and I wanted to be one of those people.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BUTT: The other students at Carbondale were also very committed, but there was a less formal atmosphere. And Kington—I don't know if I should say this on tape, but I talked to one of the other grad students, and we were talking about demonstrating for our students, and it was Mike Riegel that said, "Kington never demonstrated for us."

And I thought about it, and it was true. He never demonstrated a technique for us, and yet he was always around; he was always talking to us about his work. We saw him working, because he was working there and at his studio at home. So he was an example of somebody who was really doing it, and that was more important, really, than learning a technique. So he was teaching in the style of a Voukos or a [Paul] Soldner, where they're working and you observe it—absorb it by observing it.

That's right, and that's sort of the Japanese way, to a great extent. He was always very free with the knowledge, and he was always very honest when he would talk to you. And he would push you, at times. But it wasn't like he would say, "I want to show you how to laminate metal." I admire him to this day.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Well, clearly, it worked. [Laughs.]

MR. BUTT: But I don't think it's for everybody. People will—because of my connection to Japan, they'll say, why don't we have an apprenticeship system here? Can I go be an apprentice in Japan? And I think to myself, There's no way you would ever do it.

The way they do it in Japan—or the way it used to be done elsewhere—you start out sweeping the floor and—[laughs]—nobody's willing to do that, these days. If somebody is, they will. There have been potters and other people who have gone over there and done exactly that.

I don't know if I told you this story the last time, about when I went to Japan to live for a year, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, was this the very first time—'79 or something?

MR. BUTT: No, it was the second time. Maybe I should get to that story later. I don't know if it's out of sequence.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, if it's in your mind right now, let's talk about it, and then we'll circle back around.

MR. BUTT: Okay. At this point, it was 1984. I had already been teaching at—I taught a year at San Diego State University, and I'd already been teaching—six, eight years? Something like that. So—and I had helped organize an exhibition called *Kyoto Metal[^l: An Exhibition of Contemporary Japanese Art Metalwork, 1983—84]*. Because of the work I did on that, they offered me this opportunity to come and work in the studio of Mr. Shumei Tanaka. He was a traditional metalsmith there in Kyoto, and he had four apprentices working for him, and I was going to go in and work.

Now, I wasn't going to be one of the apprentices; I wasn't going to be doing their work. But still, I was going to be working alongside them. And when I got there, I showed them a drawing of what I wanted to do—a raised vessel.

So then I started—they helped me cut out the disc for the piece I was going to raise, and I started doing it. Well, first of all, I was used to either sitting in a chair or standing up. At their shop I'm sitting on the floor, holding the metal with my feet while hammering. And this was not a comfortable position for me, but that's the way it was done.

They watched me for a little while, and then they took the piece of metal away. And they gave me this strip of copper; it was about 14-gauge. And they just said, "Hammer this."

So I hammered that strip—just hammered it. Now, what do I do? Just keep hammering. So I hammered it down until it was quite thin. Then they gave me another strip and I hammered it down. This went on for almost two weeks—hammering pieces of metal. And at the end of that time, then they gave me my disc back. [Laughs.]

So, the humility it takes to do that—I saw the apprentices; they were doing all this great work—but it all was signed by the master. Their name didn't go on it. Sometimes, all he did was color it.

I had an exhibition of my work at the end of that year, and I am sure they were amazed that I would show work after only one year, because I should probably have done that for 20 years—[laughs]—before I had a show of my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. BUTT: So anyway, that was getting back to the point of the apprenticeship system.

MS. RIEDEL: And so you were apprenticing with the apprentices?

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] And were you trying to make a similar form by hammering, or what was the reason to have you hammer, rather than raise?

MR. BUTT: Just to get used to swinging a hammer and sitting in that position.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay, okay.

MR. BUTT: And I did.

MS. RIEDEL: And did it help? Did it work?

MR. BUTT: Yes. It was really helpful to be able to have your feet participating there to help maintain the symmetry of the piece. And I thought that I would continue to raise like that when I got home, but I didn't. It was easier to go back to just sitting in a chair and doing it.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, that is a great story, and I think it's really an insight into the whole apprenticeship situation—the way of working—and then also your experiences in Japan.

Let's go back and move, now, a little bit more methodically through, but I don't want to skip, either. So from Illinois, you went to Connecticut in order to—

MR. BUTT: Well—it was towards the end of our period at SIU; all of us graduate students were sending out our portfolios everywhere. We were making these fancy notebooks, all our slides and resumes, and sending them out everywhere. There weren't all that many jobs, and I interviewed for a couple of jobs, but I didn't get hired. So my wife and I—we were together at that point—in fact, I met her at Tyler, and we moved together to SIU at Carbondale.

MS. RIEDEL: What was her maiden name?

MR. BUTT: Weber.

MS. RIEDEL: Robin—okay, thanks.

MR. BUTT: Robin Weber. “Pip” is what everybody calls her. She was supporting me through graduate school, working jobs. She had taken a couple of classes in art therapy at Temple University when we were at Tyler. When we were in Carbondale, she worked in a nursing home there.

And then when I didn’t get a job, we just sent out our resumes. We targeted the Northeast because that’s where we were both originally from. We sent our resumes to anyplace we could think of—we’d get lists of schools and so forth—and with a self-addressed, stamped postcard to send back if they had anything. I think I got back three or four of the dozens I sent out, and there wasn’t anything. The only place that was a possibility was in Keene. In Keene, New Hampshire, they had a small college with a possible job.

Anyway, my wife got several postcards back. One of them was in Homestead, PA. We thought that sounded kind of romantic. [Laughs.] A little country place. Well, Homestead is where the steel mills are, in a suburb of Pittsburgh. We drove in there and we decided, We’re not doing this.

So we went on. She was offered an interview at a state mental hospital in Newtown, Connecticut, and they hired her as an art therapy assistant. I visited Keene—they said I could teach one metals class, but we knew we couldn’t support ourselves on that. So we went to Newtown, Connecticut.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, were you working on your own? Did you have a studio?

MR. BUTT: We ended up at this big house on 80 acres in the woods in Connecticut. It had, like, eight bedrooms—

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds pretty nice, pretty romantic.

MR. BUTT: —and it was a beautiful place. Most of the other people at the house lived in New York City and just came up there periodically on weekends. One guy who was there full-time was a writer. His name was Ken Glantz, but his pen name is Ken Chowder.

And we did a lot of late-night talking about writers versus artists and the similarities. And he eventually, not long thereafter, had his first novel published by a major publisher—great reviews. His second one, same thing—three novels, all published. But none of them sold enough copies for them to continue publishing and so he never published another novel. Now he works for public television. [He] lives in Denmark and writes for *The American Experience* and other PBS programs.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that sounds interesting.

MR. BUTT: So he’s still a writer.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, were you writing yourself at this time? When did you really begin to start writing haiku?

MR. BUTT: I didn’t really write haiku, but I did write, including some poetry.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Were you working on short stories, nonfiction, fiction, essays?

MR. BUTT: Some essays and short fiction—but mostly poetry. And I have some poetry that goes back as far as before I moved. It must have been in the ‘60s or something like that. I don’t remember exactly. But I kept some of it.

MS. RIEDEL: And all through undergrad and graduate school were you writing?

MR. BUTT: Yes, but I was never trying to combine it with my artwork. It was always a more private thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BUTT: Yes, it wasn’t until I put it in those cups, the Reflexive Landscape cups. That was the first time I actually used it in my work.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was a more private thing, but it was a way of looking at things for you, of observing, of distilling? What do you think?

MR. BUTT: Part of it was emotional. When I look back at it now, it’s teen angst and then a response to my mom’s death. So it was more a matter of getting things out that I didn’t necessarily want to share with people. But I wrote it down, and I kept a lot of it.

MS. RIEDEL: And continuously. At the same time you'd been working in metal and then evolving enamel, the writing has been consistent throughout?

MR. BUTT: Right. A lot of it was just diary type of entries or opinions and things like that.

MS. RIEDEL: But words were always there, and poetry, it sounds like, has been fairly consistent as well. Were you reading, as well? In particular, were there poets or anyone that you were reading?

MR. BUTT: Well, starting in graduate school, I guess it was, I discovered Gary Snyder, and so I was reading a lot of work by him, and I had read Ginsberg and William Carlos Williams—and others. But Gary Snyder was the one who influenced me the most, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Gary Snyder?

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] He deals a lot with nature. He worked as a forest ranger in Washington state and northern California. He went to Japan and he stayed at a Zen monastery for a year or two. He was kind of a model for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. That makes a lot of sense, now that you mention that.

[Audio Break.]

MR. BUTT: Back to Connecticut—I mentioned that we had moved there.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were working and you were doing—

MR. BUTT: Yes, I was working there and doing some work in the studio, but I needed to make some money, too, so I got a job at the *Newtown Bee*, which was a weekly newspaper.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, interesting. As a journalist?

MR. BUTT: No, as an assistant press man, taking newspapers off the press, inking the presses, changing these big rolls of paper. So it was just a job, essentially.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, though, metal and words. It's kind of interesting, when you think about it from that perspective.

MR. BUTT: [Laughs.] Yes. They called me "college boy," because the journalists were upstairs and I was down there in the print room. I had a master's degree at that point, but I was doing something that a high school kid could have done.

But it was just two days a week, and the rest of the time I could work in the studio. They were long days, but it was just a weekly newspaper.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you still working on the reliquaries?

MR. BUTT: Yes, and what I essentially did at that time was an extension of what I had been doing at school, because I didn't have a real studio. I had my own tools, but I didn't have a facility like I had at school. And I didn't have a community of people that were doing it. So I was a little bit lost, but I figured if I just kept at it—and I still entered some shows and tried to get work out. I had a little show at a library there.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you? Okay, and you did chalices at this point, too, didn't you?

MR. BUTT: No, I hadn't done the chalices yet because I wasn't doing enameling.

After we were in Connecticut about a year, a year and a half, I applied for teaching jobs again. There was an opening at Rhode Island School of Design. Jack Prip had cancer; I think he'd beaten it at that point, but he was sick and needed someone to teach there. I applied for that and a job at San Diego State.

I didn't get the job at Rhode Island School of Design, but they called me and said, "Would you be willing to teach over the summer?" And I said, "Sure." So I went there and I taught at RISD for a summer. My wife stayed in Connecticut and I was in Providence, but it wasn't that far away.

And while I was there, I heard from San Diego. Now, they were looking to fill a full-time, tenure-track position. I didn't get that job. Helen Shirk got that position. But they also needed a replacement for Arline Fisch, who was going to be on sabbatical leave for a year. So my wife and I talked about it. She had a full-time job with benefits in Connecticut. So we would have to leave her job for a one-year sabbatical replacement in San Diego. But we

decided maybe it would make me more marketable if I had the teaching experience, so we did it.

It turned out to have been a good decision, but we didn't know that at the time. We moved out to San Diego with our dog. We drove a Volvo all the way across the country. I had never been west of the Mississippi at that point.

MS. RIEDEL: This is 1970—

MR. BUTT: I graduated in '74, so it must have been 1975. I was in San Diego for a year, and it was great. I learned a lot from Helen. It was her first year there, so I think we both felt like this was a new beginning, and we helped each other a lot. But I knew I was just going to be there a year.

So I took advantage of a lot of things while I was there. We went whale watching; we went backpacking out in Joshua Tree [National Park]; we went backpacking down in Mexico. We went on a natural history trip that hiked out into the desert and trapped bats, and did lots of things like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Trapped bats?

MR. BUTT: Well, they were tagging them, so we put up these nets and trapped bats and then with heavy gloves put a tag on their ear. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: But it sounds like a lot of very nature-based activities.

MR. BUTT: Yes, yes. And before that, I'd never really experienced the desert, the Pacific Ocean, Mexico. All those things were new, and I knew it might be my only opportunity to experience them, so we did a lot of things.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were you teaching?

MR. BUTT: I was teaching metals, different levels. I even had some grad students. Randy Long took a class from me as a graduate student. There were other good people there—Thelma Coles, Sandy Green. It was almost all women. [Laughs.] It was a good year both professionally and personally.

MS. RIEDEL: And now, were these still reliquaries that you were doing at this point?

MR. BUTT: I was making rattles and pipes, different kinds of ritual objects. I did some wall pieces in metal that had some cast-animal parts, so I was still focusing on nature imagery.

MS. RIEDEL: Some wall pieces?

MR. BUTT: I did a couple of those at San Diego and a few more when I first got—

MS. RIEDEL: So, flat?

MR. BUTT: No, they were relief pieces that hung on the wall. Oh, and I did a short series of charm bracelets.

MS. RIEDEL: That's right. I remember there was some jewelry in there.

MR. BUTT: Jewelry—it's funny; I did some jewelry at Tyler because I was a metalsmith—rings and things. I did a few wearable things, although they were ritually oriented as well as wearable, in Carbondale. I've always had a difficult relationship with jewelry because I don't wear it, and I don't feel comfortable with it, and I don't have a sensitivity for it.

I admire it and appreciate it, but it's funny because I don't buy it for my wife because I always think, Oh, I could make that. [They laugh.] Not that I ever will. In some ways, the whole idea of ritual objects and wearable objects, they can be the same thing. But maybe it's that connection with fashion that I just don't feel quite comfortable with.

MS. RIEDEL: I was going to say, do you think it's cultural? Because jewelry, certainly in other cultures, has much more of a realistic quality to it, whereas here, it does feel like it's often more related to fashion.

MR. BUTT: Although you mentioned David Freda. He's done jewelry that's very nature oriented.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, absolutely. But some of it, they're also so wonderfully edgy. I'm thinking of the snake necklaces and those things.

MR. BUTT: Slugs and—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. And snails—

MR. BUTT: Yes, I really love that stuff. When you say "nature art," people think of flowers, or they think of a deer or something like that. When you start getting into snakes and slugs, people back off.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. [Laughs.]

MR. BUTT: Which is exactly why I'm sure both of us are intrigued by those things.

MS. RIEDEL: I know he really admired and was influenced by René Lalique. Is that somebody that you paid any attention to at all?

MR. BUTT: Well, yes, because of nature and the enamel and the way he and his workmen combined those elements. I have to be a little careful. I don't want to do that type of work, exactly. His designs were created at a certain historical period. And those times aren't here now—not that we can't revisit that type of work.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, though, when you talk about a nature artist, because there is a quality of beauty and danger when I think of some of his snake pieces in particular. And that [doesn't] make me think of the way we traditionally think of a nature artist, but there it is. It's the whole other side of nature that's very real that just isn't often acknowledged. And certainly not in jewelry.

MR. BUTT: Right, although you see snake jewelry and so forth in different periods as well. Yes, when I did that Snakes in Heaven series—well, snakes in particular have gotten a bad rap. The whole idea of the serpent and the Garden of Eden—it's not just in our culture, although there are cultures that revere snakes.

Still, there's always that element of fear there. And I know, because I've had a lot of personal connections with snakes, it's easy to step on something when you don't see it. But I think there's more to it than that, because there are other creatures that are [more] dangerous than snakes that you can step on. The whole idea of an animal not having legs. We can identify with certain animals because we can somehow see how they're like us.

It's harder to do with a snake. There's something about them that generates an illogical fear. And I don't know if it's an erotic connection or whatever, but there's something about that particular animal that seems over the top with a lot of people.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's certainly something that you've used a lot in the past decade, at least.

MR. BUTT: Yes, and some of that has to do with the fact that I live in a place that has a lot of snakes.

MS. RIEDEL: I wondered about that.

MR. BUTT: We have snakes. There are some around our little pond here [in Colorado], but there are no poisonous snakes at this altitude. But, yes, we've got lots of them in Texas.

In fact, there was an article about me in *Metalsmith*—there was a photographer and a person who came to interview me, and we were talking about my work. And they asked me, "Why are snakes in your work?" And as we were talking about it, my wife comes to the door of the studio and says, "There's a copperhead out here in the driveway." [Laughs.] We walked out there, and they took a picture of it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I remember the pictures.

Back to San Diego, did that job, then, in fact, lead to the job in Texas?

MR. BUTT: Well, you never know exactly why, but certainly the fact that I had a year's experience teaching at the college level made me more competitive for that job, so, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And you started there in '76, didn't you? So it was really just the next year. So that worked, really, extremely well. And this was a full-time, tenure-track position teaching—focusing exclusively on metal?

MR. BUTT: Yes. There were, I think, three jobs open that year. I remember because I applied for all of them. [Laughs.] One was in San Luis Obispo, California. The second was in Whitewater, Wisconsin, or someplace like that, and Texas. Maybe there was a fourth, I don't remember.

Anyway, I applied to all of them. And we were nervous because we'd moved and used all of our money on this one year in San Diego, and we didn't know what we were going to do if I didn't get a teaching job. We talked about moving to Alaska and homesteading.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MR. BUTT: Anyway, I remember asking my wife, if we have that opportunity to go to any of these places, which

place would you most like to go to? And she said, I don't care where we go as long as we don't go to Texas. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear. Oh, dear.

MR. BUTT: But she'd never even been to Texas. She just didn't like the sound of it. So that was the only job that was offered to me.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BUTT: And it's been a great job, really.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BUTT: There were two people teaching metals when I got to the University of North Texas [then North Texas State University], but they were both teaching a class or two. The chairman of the art department had done some metals, so he taught a beginning class.

MS. RIEDEL: Who was that?

MR. BUTT: Edward Mattill. Mickey McCarter was the other person, and she was part-time, because her husband was an art appreciation teacher there, and although she was a great teacher, there was a policy against a husband and wife both teaching full-time in tenure-track positions. So anyway, she was teaching a couple classes too. But I don't think the two of them got along too well. They had separate cabinets with tools and equipment.

There was one graduate student there in metals, so they were offering an M.F.A., but the program was small and the equipment was minimal. And the studio was on the third floor, over the slide library and a lecture rooms. So really, when I got there, to their credit, they both said, "This is your program now; we're out of it. Do what you will with it."

MS. RIEDEL: How extraordinary. That's quite unusual, from everything I've heard.

MR. BUTT: Right, and I did. I felt it was mine, and I developed it from there.

MS. RIEDEL: And that must have been just a huge change of pace and shock to move to Texas.

MR. BUTT: Yes. There was that, yes. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's a completely different part of the country.

MR. BUTT: Yes. I don't know if you've ever been in Denton.

MS. RIEDEL: Never.

MR. BUTT: It's like 40, 45 minutes north of Dallas and Fort Worth, so there are cities close by. Lots of museums and galleries, and it was a good art department, which then became, through the years, a school of visual art and then became a college of art and design.

Good people teaching there—real committed people. Not that I haven't had my problems through the years, but a very supportive administration. And I never had any real feeling that the painting department was the real department; there was never that real division. I didn't—

MS. RIEDEL: Really? I've never heard that before.

MR. BUTT: [Laughs.] Well, personally, there may have been some feeling and certain individuals might have felt that way, but as far as decisions made, like who gets resources and so forth, I never felt that I was slighted or on a lower level than the faculty in any other area.

MS. RIEDEL: How extraordinary.

MR. BUTT: One thing that we benefit from at the University of North Texas is that the most prestigious and well-known department is the College of Music. So if it was a place where the agriculture school or biology or physics departments were the most important, then the arts might be considered less significant. But at UNT, because music is so well thought of and internationally renowned—people come there to study music—the arts in general have—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BUTT: We benefit from that prestige.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Interesting. The music department is the most important, most significant?

MR. BUTT: In my opinion. I think everybody would say so.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BUTT: My sister-in-law is a musician, went to Westminster Choir College in Princeton. That's where she met my brother. She was well aware of North Texas being an important music school.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. I had no idea.

MR. BUTT: Jazz is their emphasis.

MS. RIEDEL: Looking at your work, I wondered—with pattern and rhythm, which is so important—is music significant to your work in any way?

MR. BUTT: Not really.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I thought poetry might fill the same gap in terms of rhythm and meter.

MR. BUTT: Yes. I like music, but I'm not that knowledgeable about music, and I don't feel that it has a direct influence in my work. Indirectly, I'm sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

So, you were only in Texas, it seems, two or three years before you went off to Japan.

MR. BUTT: The first time was in 1980—actually, I received the NEA grant in '79 and went to Japan in January of 1980, and took a leave of absence from North Texas.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the focus of your trip? Had you planned it out? Where were you planning to go? Were you planning to apprentice? How was it structured?

MR. BUTT: What I had applied for was something called the Japan-U.S. Exchange Program that the NEA oversaw, where they would make travel arrangements and connections for you. I made a proposal of why I wanted to go there, what I wanted to study, and it had to do with the idea of the container in the East versus the West.

I didn't get that grant; they only gave out a few each year—but when I wasn't awarded one of those, they just put my application into the pool for the regular Craftsman's Fellowships, which they used to offer to individual craftsmen back then, and I did receive one of those.

So I got this block of money, but that was it. I had proposed to go to Japan, but now there were no connections or anything involved. So I was a little set back, and I had to arrange this whole thing myself. So I contacted people I knew.

MS. RIEDEL: Artists? Academics?

MR. BUTT: Well, the Pijanowskis—Gene and Hiroko. They gave me some connections to see. And then Jan Brooks, who had been in graduate school with me, she had had a Japanese student study with her for a couple of years and had just gone back to Japan. And she said, "Write to Miyako Umemura; see if you can get some sort of help or connection with her."

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yes. You had a show with her, didn't you?

MR. BUTT: I did, but that was later. So I wrote her, and we made arrangements to meet in Tokyo. She showed up with a friend of hers, Ayumi, and I said to Miyako, "I'm interested in traveling around Japan"—I'd gotten certain suggestions of places to go and people to see—"and if you will travel with me and act as my guide and interpreter, I will pay your expenses for as long as we can do it or until my money runs out."

And she said, "Great, but Ayumi has to come too." I think it was sort of a chaperone type of thing, which was fine. So her friend Ayumi traveled with us for a month or so, and then she went home and it was just Miyako and I, but I guess she trusted me at that point. But the two of us traveled around, and I never could have done it without her.

MS. RIEDEL: So where did you go? What was the focus?

MR. BUTT: We started in Tokyo, where we met Yasuki Hiramatsu. I think he's retired now, but he was the head of the metals program at Tokyo University of the Arts in Ueno Park. He showed me the shop and so forth. We talked and had a drink together.

Then we went to Kyoto, where I met Toshihiro Yamanaka, who was later to become my sponsor. He owned a gallery called Seika-do and knew all the metalsmiths in Kyoto, so he took me around to visit with some of them. And meanwhile, Mr. Yamanaka spoke not-bad English, but Miyako was with me, and she was interpreting for me, so we were able to visit with a lot of people there. I not only visited with metalsmiths—people in kimono shops, people doing papermaking, and some ceramicists.

MS. RIEDEL: Mostly still objects?

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And what we would think of as material or media traditionally associated with crafts?

MR. BUTT: Crafts, mostly, yes.

And then from there we went to Wajima, which is on the central western coast near the Sea of Japan, an area famous for lacquer work. People suggested that I had to do this, so we visited the lacquer workers there. We went way out to the countryside and visited places I never would have been able to go on my own.

I remember one little town—it was barely even a town, just sort of a crossroad. We took a bus to get there, and we had to get off and wait. There was a bench there at this little crossroad, waiting for another bus to arrive, and this little kid on his bicycle comes around the corner and sees me. He just slams on the brakes, turns around, and goes back the way he came, and comes back in a few minutes with three more of his friends, and they're all looking at me. So it was a place that there weren't a lot of foreigners. [Laughs].

We visited some interesting places in Wajima. There's a building called the Lacquer House. It was a big place, and the whole thing was lacquered. All the walls were lacquered—everything in it was lacquered. One thing I learned was that traditional Japanese lacquer comes from the sap of a plant similar to the sumac plant, and a lot of people are allergic to it. Its like poison sumac or poison ivy; they break out in a rash from it. And apparently Asians, for some reason, are less susceptible than Caucasians, although even some of them will break out from —

MS. RIEDEL: It's the sap itself?

MR. BUTT: Yes, when it's wet. Once it hardens, it's okay. So we saw people working with that.

From there, I think we went up to Morioka, which is in the north, where they cast iron kettles for the tea ceremony. We just happened to get there at a time when they were getting ready to cast—they only did it a couple times a year—so they invited us back the next day, and there were TV crews filming it. We were there, and we watched them do the iron casting.

MS. RIEDEL: Just fortuitous timing?

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] From there, I wanted to go to Matsushima. Matsushima—the word "*matsushima*" means "pine islands." I had read a poem—I guess it was a haiku—by Basho, a very famous Japanese haiku master, and the translation I read was, "Oh Matsushima / oh Matsushima / oh Matsushima." That was it. [Laughs.] So I had to go to the place that inspired this poem.

MS. RIEDEL: That's wonderful. That's pretty impressive.

MR. BUTT: It's on the northeast coast of Honshu, the main island, out in the countryside, and it's just these little islands. It reminded me a little of Haystack [School of Crafts, Deer Island, ME], where they have islands you can see just off the coast.

The islands are covered with pine trees, and they just fade out into the fog. And it was very mystical. We got there in early spring, and it was cold, and I wrote a couple of poems while I was there. Anyway, that's why I went there.

MS. RIEDEL: I think it's pretty interesting that that haiku would inspire you to go there. You must have thought a lot of Basho—[laughs]—to have it reduced down to that and be inspired to follow through.

MR. BUTT: Yes. For someone to have been so impressed that they condensed the experience into something so simple—

MS. RIEDEL: And repetition, too.

MR. BUTT: So from there we went back down to Tokyo. We went to Kyushu, which is the southern island, to the west of Honshu.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you basically just traveling around, following leads about where traditional craft was being done?

MR. BUTT: Yes, yes. In Kyushu, there were a lot of ceramicists. We went to Oita and Karatsu and several other places, where we visited potters and towns where almost everyone in the town was doing ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Now, I think of Bob Sperry, who did a video, I think, or a film, the *[Village] Potters of Onda* [c. 1963]. Is that something that was familiar to you then?

MR. BUTT: No.

MS. RIEDEL: I think he did it right around that same time. Somehow, I think it was—might have been 1980 or so.

MR. BUTT: And if we heard about a beautiful temple—Miyako would go through these little travel books, and if there was some special place near where we were going to be, we'd go there.

I remember when we were in Kyushu, there was this Buddha head carved in the side of a cliff, and we had to take this bus out in the countryside—it was fairly remote. And then we had to climb these stairs. There must have been 100 stone stairs to get up to the top of this place, where there was a little monastery and then this face carved in the cliff—those were special times.

She had a sensitivity to what I might like to see. We especially went to temples on rainy days because not so many people would be there. It would be foggy and drizzly, and there would be a sand garden or something special there.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there many objects or many metal ornaments in the temples? Mariko Kusumoto's father was a priest, or maybe is a priest, and she talks about polishing the metal ornaments as a child and just all the different metal ornaments that were part of the temples.

MR. BUTT: I remember there would be a rosette or little architectural details on doors and things like that, as well as, of course, the Buddha statues and incense containers.

MS. RIEDEL: So was your knowledge of metal ornaments or metal vessels in terms of ritual—in terms of Japanese ritual in particular—expanded during this time? Or the tea ceremony, did you—

MR. BUTT: Yes. I was invited to a tea ceremony—Miyako knew next to nothing about it. She was more modern; she wasn't interested in that in particular—but her sister knew a great deal about it. It was a thing that a lot of young women did as a social or almost a charm-school type of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Really?

MR. BUTT: But, of course, all the high-level people were men. So I was interested in that and—

MS. RIEDEL: And the metal objects that were part of that as well?

MR. BUTT: Yes, because here was a ritual.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BUTT: It wasn't specifically religious, although it had ties to it. But the people actually used these objects in the ritual. That was of great interest to me. I made a number of incense burners then and since. In particular, this whole idea that incense is of this earth, but as you burn it, it sends smoke up to the heavens. It's a connection from this world to the next and also an offering. Of course, it has both the sight of the burner and the smoke and this aroma of the incense, and so it's an interesting ritual, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting to me, too, because I was certainly familiar with the tea ceremony, especially from a ceramic background, but I had no idea how significant incense was in Japanese culture; starting, I think, way back, but Edo and Meiji period comes to mind, that there were games invented for identifying incense.

MR. BUTT: Yes, if you could smell a certain one and the aroma, and then you had to identify it.

MS. RIEDEL: I know the Metropolitan Museum of Art has collections of incense burners, and they've written quite

a bit about how it has worked its way from the aristocracy and the noble through the samurai class and then was disseminated to an even broader audience. It was portrayed, I think, in woodblock prints and in Kabuki theater. I didn't realize how pervasive and significant to the culture it was.

MR. BUTT: Of course, it is an offering in individual homes. They frequently have a little shrine that they offer incense to—it's both Buddhist and Shinto. But in the tea ceremony, there are different types of incense. There are different ways of using the incense.

In the wintertime, when you're using the *ro*, which is like a hole in the floor that the kettle sets down into and you have a charcoal fire down there, there's a certain type of incense that you place in the kindling as you build the fire. There's a different type of incense in the summertime. The incense container, *kogo*, is just for holding and displaying the incense. The *koro* is a burner that you burn the incense in. It could be displayed in the *tokonoma*.

MS. RIEDEL: What is a *tokonoma*?

MR. BUTT: That's the alcove that frequently displays a scroll—sometimes there's a flower arrangement—and you might have the incense container or incense burner displayed there during the tea ceremony.

MS. RIEDEL: I just didn't realize how significant the incense aspect of it was.

MR. BUTT: I associate it immediately in a tea room, because the host has burnt the incense before the guests arrive so that the aroma is still there, but isn't overpowering.

And it may change during the ceremony to different types of incense.

MS. RIEDEL: So different incenses will be burned, perhaps, at different times during the ceremony itself?

MR. BUTT: Yes, because a full ceremony may last four hours or more.

MS. RIEDEL: So was this your first—when you came back, you began to make some incense burners.

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And is this when the tea caddies were inspired, as well?

MR. BUTT: Yes. That was after the first visit to Japan when I started making tea caddies. That particular type of tea caddy is called a *natsume*.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BUTT: And the shape is like a jujube, which is kind of a berry or nut. But I never really saw the jujube, so I don't know if it really looks like that. But it's a very distinctive shape, and there are lots—

MS. RIEDEL: Almost looks like a large—like a giant acorn or something.

MR. BUTT: Yes, that kind of shape. It's a little bit flat on the top. That first series was called 1,001 Views of Mount Mu, with the idea that—

MS. RIEDEL: And is Mount Mu an actual place?

MR. BUTT: No. *Mu* means nothingness or emptiness.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BUTT: So the *36 Views of Mount Fuji* by Katsushika Hokusai—

MS. RIEDEL: So as a reference to that. I wondered if you were thinking about that.

MR. BUTT: But the idea of "1,001" was like an infinite number in a series and—I tell people that I'm up to 30. Maybe 38 by now, or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BUTT: So I'm working my way up.

MS. RIEDEL: Zen came along just in time: a sense of humor.

MR. BUTT: There's also Gary Snyder's—*Mountains and Rivers Without End* [1996]. Infinity combined with the tangible now.

MS. RIEDEL: How long did this first trip last?

MR. BUTT: Six months, I think it was.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary. Did you stop to work at all, yourself, this time?

MR. BUTT: No. I was taking notes and writing, but I didn't do any actual making of objects.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you photographing, documenting?

MR. BUTT: Yes. Lot of photographs.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So you have this all documented someplace.

MR. BUTT: Well, yes, slides.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great. And was the idea of the trip purely to research and look for new inspiration for your own work?

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And maybe to bring back some ideas for your students as well, I would imagine.

MR. BUTT: Right. It was really sort of a personal journey. I don't know if I mentioned this before or not, but I didn't want to just get on a plane in Dallas and get off in Tokyo. So I flew Dallas—New York and New York to London, and spent a couple days in London. Then I flew from there to Moscow, and I spent a couple of days in Moscow, and then I took the Trans-Siberian Express across Russia, which was the Soviet Union then, in 1980—in fact, they had just invaded Afghanistan.

So that was seven days on the train. It was four days to Irkutsk, and I stayed there for three days and then took another three days on the train to Khabarovsk. This was in January. So in the summer, you can go to Vladivostok and take a boat across to Japan, but everything was frozen in January, so I flew from Khabarovsk to Niigata, in northern Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you?

MR. BUTT: This was 1980, so, 30. I turned 30 when I was over there.

MS. RIEDEL: Pretty extraordinary. What an extraordinary experience.

MR. BUTT: It was.

MS. RIEDEL: You were very young, a really young artist to have that fabulous opportunity.

MR. BUTT: When I was in Japan the next time, I wrote a novel that combined a lot of the source material from the first trip—about a guy who goes to Japan on a journey to find himself.

MS. RIEDEL: So you wrote a novel?

MR. BUTT: Yes, well, an unpublished novel.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you working on that while you were traveling?

MR. BUTT: Well, taking a lot of notes and writing things in. I really wrote it mainly when I was in Japan. Yes, sort of put the structure of it together and wrote it in between then and when I went to Japan the next time.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's pause right here for a moment. The disc is about to end.

MR. BUTT: Okay.

[END DISC 1.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel, for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, interviewing the artist Harlan Butt at his summer cabin in Ptarmigan Meadows, Colorado, on July 27, 2009, disc number two.

We've been talking about Japan in the first trip, and I wanted to talk also about a body of work that happened—did it happen right before those Reflexive Landscape cups? Was it right before?

MR. BUTT: Reflexive Landscape cups were right before the first trip to Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: Those seemed very significant. They seemed very different than anything you'd done before; I love the description of how those were done. Would you describe that so people understand the idea behind it?

MR. BUTT: Yes. Those were pivotal in several ways. For one thing, they were enamel, and were among the first pieces I did in enamel since the undergraduate experience that I had. I'd had a student at the University of North Texas working towards a doctorate in art education, but she had studied with William Harper in Florida, doing enameling. She came in, and it was almost the same situation that I was in at Tyler with Stanley Lechtzin.

She said she wanted to do enameling, and I said, "Well, there were some old dusty jars over there in the cabinet that had been there since I got here and we have a kiln." So she started doing enameling. While I was watching her, I was learning from her as much as she was learning from me.

We ordered more materials, and I was at a point where I really wanted to add more color to my work. I tried the epoxy inlay. I'd done different patinas and even tried a little painting on metal. But I really wanted to add more color that was integrated into the piece, and so it just seemed like the right time to start doing the enameling.

Now, I believe I'd gotten some support from the university to do this project where I went out to Big Bend National Park. It's in far west Texas, down on the Rio Grande and the Mexican border, and it's a very remote, natural, and beautiful area—extremely hot in the summer, but I was there, I believe, in the spring. And I hiked out into a fairly remote area of the park that had a panoramic view where I could see around.

I was on a hilltop and set up a tripod with a camera and set up my campsite. Starting the next day at sunrise, I pointed the camera at each of the eight compass points, north, northeast, east, and so on, and took a picture each hour on the hour, and during the day I kept a journal of experiences, impressions, thoughts.

I took all this home with me and designed these three Reflexive Landscape cups. Technically, they're very simple. After having had the experience of soldering things together, enameling them, and having them fall apart, I decided I was going to use a mechanical connection and I wasn't going to solder anything.

So the pieces themselves are created using seamless copper tubing. There's some raising of the tubing, flaring it, some texturing, then enameling. The bottom and top with a liner fit on, and they screw together so the whole thing is held together with cold connections.

The enameling itself was very simple. The cups refer to landscape, but in a fairly abstract way, and for the first time, I took excerpts from the journal, refined into short poems. They're etched into the bottom of the cups, and there's also a little object inside next to the poem.

So it's a circular format. It has the text of the poem and the little object, which you have to look down inside the cup to see. So in many ways, I felt they were the first successful enameling that I'd done. They represent the first time I'd used text. They were vessels, but they combined the text, the imagery of the landscape, and then the realistic object. So I've used those three elements in combination over and over again since that time.

MS. RIEDEL: There was also that blurring of the boundary between functional and ritual that seems interesting, and it seems to reoccur as well.

MR. BUTT: Right, they're cups. They're supposed to act as a triptych in the way the three cups go together and relate to each other.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BUTT: The texture on the surface of the first one is very pronounced. The next one is somewhat pronounced, and the third one is smooth under the enamel. So there's a feeling of progression. Also, the first one is morning, the second one midday, and the last one is sunset. So there's a progression of the day.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And these all took place shortly before you left—

MR. BUTT: Seventy-nine, so it was right before I went to Japan for the first time.

MS. RIEDEL: And they really were a departure from anything you'd done before in many ways. What inspired that?

MR. BUTT: I'm trying to remember if there's intermediate work that bridged the gap from one to another, but it was kind of a leap.

I'd done containers, but not really like that. It was primarily boxes. So I don't know exactly what led to that specifically.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. The process seems very different, too, that very deliberate documenting of time and light and location and place, particular place.

MR. BUTT: Yes, right, and of course, that particular location, like this particular location, is very powerful. It has that sort of influence over me; on the one hand, the landscape makes me feel insignificant because it's immense and powerful and I feel the essence of nature around me, and on the other hand, I want to communicate that feeling to someone else, to share it.

The trouble with depictions of nature is that it can never be as powerful as nature. So you have to take another tactic. How else could I come up with something that made an impression that communicated not just the physical presence of nature but what I felt lay behind it? And that's where these different layers, hopefully, help do that in some way.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Do you think about doing pattern, as well?

MR. BUTT: Pattern, to me, is like the underlying structure behind it, but, also, its microcosm and macrocosm. If you look deep enough, you can find that pattern, or if you stand back far enough, you can see the pattern. When you're in it, you don't comprehend it, in a way. It's like the cells in your own body. You're not aware of them, but they're there, and they're you. You couldn't be without them, but it's that structure that holds it all together.

MS. RIEDEL: I read something that Yanagi wrote in *The Unknown Craftsman* about pattern and I brought it—I'll read it to you later—because it made me think of your work, and I wanted to hear what you thought of it.

MR. BUTT: I've read that, but it's been years ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes, it just resonated. So once you returned from Japan—from the first trip to Japan in '80—that's when you began the 1,001 Views of Mount Mu series, and that's when you also began the incense burners.

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So those were again big departures for you, big—

MR. BUTT: Yes, and you can see the direct influence of Japan there and from seeing all those things we talked about.

A few years later when I organized the *Kyoto Metal* exhibition—one reason why I wanted to do that is because I was so amazed by the work that I saw, and I knew that, as a metalsmith, if I hadn't seen that work, then the majority of people in the United States had no idea what was going on. So it was an idea that both my students and the public in general would appreciate seeing these things. These were dedicated people that were doing this amazing work, and not that many people outside of Japan knew about it.

MS. RIEDEL: And some of them, as I read in the catalogue that you sent me, had been doing it, or their families had been doing it, for generations.

MR. BUTT: Generations, up to 14 or 15 generations.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BUTT: And that whole idea is so foreign to us. If you're doing the same thing your father or grandfather did, it's unusual here. It happens sometimes, but it may be more common in Europe, where people have lived in the same area and stay close to family, not quite as nomadic as we are here. But still, for that many generations, it's very unusual.

MS. RIEDEL: Did that show that you curated come about as a result of your first trip or as a result of the second trip to Kyoto, in '83 I think? Or what inspired that second trip?

MR. BUTT: The intention of that trip was to work on the exhibition, and that's primarily what I did at that point.

MS. RIEDEL: So what you had seen during '80 inspired you to go back and organize a formal national/international touring exhibition.

MR. BUTT: Right, yes, and I had no idea what I was getting into, or I probably never would have done it.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it 10 different venues? Something extraordinary.

MR. BUTT: Yes, nine, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: All over the country.

MR. BUTT: Yes, and it went to Hawaii on the way back to Japan. So, yes, it was complicated, and there were times when I was almost tearing my hair out, and there were times when I was so afraid something terrible was going to happen and I would be responsible. Because, to the Japanese, I was the only person they knew who was working on this. There were a lot of people involved but I was the point person.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was the first exhibition you had curated?

MR. BUTT: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: They had 40 different artists. Is that right?

MR. BUTT: Yes, there were 50 pieces, by, I think it was, 40 or 42 craftsmen. I can't remember exactly how many.

MS. RIEDEL: A huge undertaking.

MR. BUTT: Huge, and they did a lot of work on—

MS. RIEDEL: And you're teaching at the same time? What was the focus? Was the idea to introduce the American audience to the wealth of metalwork happening in Japan?

MR. BUTT: In this one city in Japan, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: All from Kyoto?

MR. BUTT: Yes, all from Kyoto.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BUTT: A lot of the art in Kyoto is less progressive than, say, Tokyo or Yokohama. I don't want to say it's more conservative, but it's tied to tradition, Kyoto having been the capital before Tokyo, from the eighth to the 19th century. They're still very proud of that history from a thousand years ago, nearly. I think it transferred over to Tokyo in—oh, I can't remember the exact date—in the 1860s.

Anyway, that tradition is very strong there. So a lot of the work is very traditional. There was some more contemporary work—some—but a lot of it was very traditional, associated with the tea ceremony or with work for shrines or temples.

MS. RIEDEL: Were they all vessels?

MR. BUTT: No, there was some jewelry—and trying to think back, there was some cloisonné work.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you curate that exhibition?

MR. BUTT: Well, Mr. Yamanaka was instrumental in that respect, because he had the gallery and knew all the metalsmiths in Kyoto. He contacted them and had them all bring samples of their work to the gallery, and then when I went over, another friend of mine from the States, Hiromi Adachi, came over with me, and she helped translate. We visited the artists, and we recorded them talking about their work.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, so is that where the quotes were excerpted, or the little bios were put together for each artist?

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And one of the interesting things about that was a number of those artists had apprenticed with one of the other artists in the exhibition, which I think for a Western, American audience, I guess it would be like a professor and his students, in some ways.

MR. BUTT: That's true.

MS. RIEDEL: But apprenticeships last anywhere from eight to 10 years, as far as I could tell.

MR. BUTT: Yes, when I was back working in Tanaka's shop, one of those apprentices had been there, I think, 12 or 13 years.

MS. RIEDEL: Did that show accomplish what you hoped it would?

MR. BUTT: By the end of it, I was just glad it was over. [Laughs.] But, yes, I think so: the fact that it went so many places and that so many people saw it; we were on a shoestring budget anyway, putting it all together.

There was some support from the mayor of Kyoto; the grant I received from the Texas Commission on the Arts, to do part of it; and the University of North Texas supported it to some extent.

Each location that it went [to] paid for the shipping to that location and supported it being exhibited there. But we had to have an overriding insurance on all of the work and the transportation from Japan to the U.S. and back. The Japanese made these beautiful crates for all the work that we could have exhibited along side the metalwork.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet.

MR. BUTT: But when it got here, because it came over by ship, the crates were too big to go by air freight. So we had to make all new crates, which were not nearly as nice. But the work traveled safely.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you teaching at the same time and continuing to do your own work?

MR. BUTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's sort of extraordinary to even contemplate.

MR. BUTT: Yes, I don't even remember that. It's all a blur, but yes. But it was because of that that I was invited to come and live there for a year. We don't call it a sabbatical. We call it a "development leave" at the University of North Texas, but essentially it was a supported leave I was on. You can take a leave of absence for a semester at full pay or a year at half pay. So I took a year at half pay and was able to spend the whole year in Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was '84 and '85.

MR. BUTT: Yes, that was 1984—85.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were based in Kyoto for the whole year?

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was more along the lines of an apprenticeship. You were in the same place—

MR. BUTT: Right, I alternated days. I went to Shumei Tanaka's metalsmithing studio one day and then I would go to the Biso cloisonné company the next. This was where they made the prototypes for objects that would go into production as jewelry and other types of enameled objects.

They had individual artists working on pieces, but the intention was to come up with designs that could go into production. They gave me a space, materials, the kiln, and assistance from the people who were working there for the year. So I would alternate between those two studios.

MS. RIEDEL: And there was actually some formal training in cloisonné then?

MR. BUTT: There wasn't formal training, but I was watching them. They would assist me when I had questions. But I would watch them and then I would do it. That's really where I learned how to do cloisonné. I had done a little bit of it that I had learned from this student, and of course, I read about it. I knew about cloisonné, but actually doing it on a three-dimensional object, Japan is where I learned how to do it.

MS. RIEDEL: And this must have been extraordinary, because you had been wanting to do this in many ways for, what, at least five years at that point?

MR. BUTT: Yes, and I'd been doing enameling, but if you look at the earlier enameling, there's almost no cloisonné, either none or very little. In a way, it was great, because it forced me to use those other techniques and try and get as much as I could from them, but then when I also had the ability to do cloisonné, it opened up a whole new array of things I could do.

MS. RIEDEL: That does lead to my next question, which is, did you learn a variety of techniques while you were there? I understand you can do cloisonné with wire, without wire, or with different types of wire.

MR. BUTT: Mainly, I did—there's a technique called "wireless cloisonné," *musen*, where you put the cloisonné wire down, and you fill the cells in and then pull the cloisonné wire out before you fire it. They weren't doing it there at the shop, and I've never really done that. But I did visit some collections of enameling while I was in Japan—in Tokyo, in Kyoto, and in Nagoya—that showed examples of that technique.

What I learned in addition to just applying the wires was the way they did shading of color, and that was a great advantage to be able to do that. I did a lot of test pieces while I was there. When I finished a raised object at the metalsmithing studio, then I could take it over and enamel it in the Biso facility. But there were periods of time in between, when I didn't have a vessel to work on; then I could do tests, and I did a lot of samples.

MS. RIEDEL: I understand from what I've read that oftentimes in an apprenticeship situation, multiple people will work on the same form, moving it through from its beginning phases to the end. Was that happening in those shops, or did it strike them as odd that you were working on a single piece all the way through?

MR. BUTT: It did strike them as odd that I would work on a single piece. Interesting that you mention it, last summer I went to China and showed examples of my work, and the same thing impressed them. They were surprised that I worked from beginning to end on the entire piece. In Japan, one person might raise the object; another person might repoussé it or engrave it; another person would patina it. Usually just one person's name would go on the piece, but there could have been three, four, five people working on it.

MS. RIEDEL: Each was really an expert in a different aspect of the process.

MR. BUTT: Yes, and that's why a lot of the work is so amazing, because it is a group effort, collaborative, whereas we come from a tradition where you had to do everything, be a jack-of-all-trades. There, it's very specialized. Probably in Europe, it may have been more like that, at least at a time. The person who engraved the object was an expert in engraving, but they didn't do the raising. They might know how to do it, but that wasn't what they had spent their life perfecting.

MS. RIEDEL: You've really worked in two very different situations then, two very different ways of working. Short of the obvious that we've just discussed, can you think of things that have struck you as being strengths or weaknesses to one way or the other, that collaboration versus that solo?

MR. BUTT: Yes, well, certainly there's a great advantage. It's like building a house. Normally you have the framers; you have the roofers; you have the sheetrock people; and each one is an expert in what they do. When you work together, when it works well, it all comes together and it's a great product.

So there are advantages to that. I really think the whole notion of the studio artist—the individual who does it all, it's all theirs—I'm like that in a way, I guess, but it is an ego type of thing. Your signature goes onto it, and you want everybody to know that you did it, whereas historically there are some fine things created that no one ever signed. That was not important.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look back—I'm thinking of your first 30, 35 years now, through undergraduate school and graduate school and all these different trips to Japan—one of the questions that's on this list, that we're using to help document your career and walk us through, is about an especially rewarding educational experience. Is there one of all these different experiences you've had that you can point to as, in the long run, really having been especially rewarding?

MR. BUTT: The most significant? Well, certainly the year in Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: The first year or the apprentice year?

MR. BUTT: No, the apprentice year. They all were important.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, of course.

MR. BUTT: But I think that even though I was there six months, I was still a traveler, or a tourist, in a way. And I felt like after being there a year and actually working and doing things there, that I somehow went a little bit beyond that tourist level. So many things that changed the way I looked at the world from going there.

Actually, this was something that happened the first time in 1980. But I remember traveling with Miyako. We went to an elementary school. I don't remember why we were there, but we were walking through the school, and we went into a classroom and there weren't any students there. They had already left.

But we were in the classroom, and there was a map of the world up on the wall, and Japan was right in

the middle, and then North America and South America on the right side, Europe on the far left. And it just struck me. First it was, like, Oh, that's wrong, and then it occurred to me that what's wrong isn't the map. What's wrong is the person looking at it. Every person in the world probably has a map with where they reside right in the middle of it. And it's kind of the way we live, like we're the center.

MS. RIEDEL: In many ways, too, it seems such a fortuitous time for you to have been able to take that group of trips, because you had already had graduate and undergraduate studies. You had been teaching for a while. You had been interested in enamel for some time and experimenting yourself, interested in Zen and Japanese aesthetics. So in many ways, it all just came together at such a wonderful time, it seems.

MR. BUTT: It's true, and to a great extent it was just chance that it happened at that time. But I probably wouldn't have had the opportunity earlier, unless I just threw a pack on my back and went over. It would have been a much different experience.

You're right. I had enough security that I knew I had a job to go back to and I had a life, but I was still free enough to be able to take that time and go away. So it was the perfect time.

At 30, your youth isn't over, necessarily, but you've matured to a level where you can look back on your life with some sort of perspective. You're not far enough along, like I am now, where it would be hard—you're set in your ways; you can't be as flexible. Especially the first time in Japan—we stayed at youth hostels and all kinds of places that weren't the most comfortable, but it was a great experience and it was worth it.

I don't know if I could still do it now; maybe, but I just think there's a different mindset at that particular time in your life, where you're still open, and you still know that you've got this long stretch ahead of you, hopefully. You've accomplished a certain amount up to that point, and you have that as a foundation.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking about two different programs that seem to have been so instrumental in helping artists evolve, the NEA grants and before that the GI Bill, in particular. Do you think you would have gone without that NEA grant?

MR. BUTT: The interest was there. Certainly I couldn't have done it without some sort of support.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BUTT: I don't think I was eligible—I think you had to be tenured to get a sabbatical leave. They would let you take a leave without pay, but I don't think I would have qualified yet for that type of support. So if it hadn't been for the NEA, I would have had to get that support from somewhere.

MS. RIEDEL: So the timing just really seems extraordinary.

MR. BUTT: Of course, at the time, you don't know. You're just doing things as they come.

And I had applied for grants for years before that and not received any of them. There were years where I thought, This is a lot of work for no benefit. Why even bother? But in the back of my mind it was, like, If you don't apply, you're never going to get it.

I just kept at it. And it was a lot of work. I admire people who apply for grants, whether they get them or not, because it's a lot of time and effort that you could be spending in the studio. Yet if that's something that you feel is important to you, then it's worth the time.

Yes, it's too bad that they don't award those individual fellowships anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: I've really been thinking that myself. It's a loss. Do they have grants like the NEA grant in Japan for artists, are you aware of?

MR. BUTT: Well, I don't know. I know students who have gone over to study, but I don't think it was with any type of government-supported grant.

MS. RIEDEL: They have the National Living Treasure designation over there.

MR. BUTT: Yes, and it's very prestigious. It's also very political. And there are lower levels of designation, too. But, of course, prestige is extremely important in Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BUTT: I haven't been there in a long time, but I'm sure this particular aspect hasn't changed that much.

I was held in high regard as a professor. Not here, but there—[laughs]. To have been a visiting professor, I was allowed to go places and see people that someone off the street would never have been able to see, and actually, I mentioned how lucky I was to have Miyako traveling with me. She would never have been able to visit those people on her own.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm sure.

MR. BUTT: They wouldn't have allowed her in, being a woman, number one; but just being a young person and having no credentials or experience—even though she had a degree from over here—she wouldn't have gotten in the door. But since she was with me, she was able to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think this is a good place to stop for today. I think we've gotten into some really significant places in terms of the work, and we've covered the major—those first three trips to Japan. So shall we call it a day and pick up again tomorrow?

MR. BUTT: Sounds like a plan.

[END DISC 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel, for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, with the artist Harlan Butt at his summer cabin in Ptarmigan Meadows, Colorado, on July 28, 2009, disc number three.

Good morning.

MR. BUTT: Morning.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a beautiful morning here on the deck.

MR. BUTT: It is.

MS. RIEDEL: A little theater of the wild with the birds and the squirrels and the chipmunks. We may get a little background soundtrack.

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So you've been in Denton for almost 30 years, right?

MR. BUTT: Over 30 years.

MS. RIEDEL: Over 30 years, since '76—I just have a copy of your CV here. And you've also had just extensive experience teaching at many lectures and workshops at a lot of the craft schools, Penland [School of Crafts, Penland, NC] and Haystack, Arrowmont [School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN], too, and then a whole range of universities. So over 30 years, what sort of philosophies have you developed for teaching at the university and then at these different workshop and lecture situations?

MR. BUTT: I suppose it's changed to a certain extent. Going through an M.F.A. program as a student, you're really not taught how to teach. I never had a class on teaching. I was a graduate assistant, and I taught a class as a graduate student, a beginning class in Carbondale, but nobody really told me how to do it. So a lot of it is picking it up as you go along.

Now, the good thing about the particular field that I'm in is there's a set of technical skills that is pretty straightforward in teaching people how to do it. In a way, that's the easy part—although not for the student necessarily, depending on how quickly they can catch on. But I think in teaching anything, whether it's music, or I suppose even poetry, if there's something tangible to start with that seems like an easy step-by-step process of going from here to there, that gets people started.

You can learn a little bit, feel confident with what you've learned, and then move on to something else. Of course, teaching art is more than just teaching technical skills. And I try and introduce that right from the beginning, little by little.

I guess I go to some extent by the example of my own professors and how they taught. I mentioned yesterday how Brent Kington never really demonstrated anything for us. Well, I did have a lot of demonstrations as an undergraduate student, and that was beneficial to have that sort of foundation of things to do and achieve.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: All right, as you were saying before?

MR. BUTT: Yes, about teaching. My first real full-time teaching job was at San Diego State. I watched Helen Shirk a lot to see how she taught. She had been trained at Indiana University [Bloomington]. She studied with Alma Eikerman, and she was very adept at manipulating metal; and I think that was something that I learned from her and tried to incorporate into my teaching.

Even though metal isn't the only material we use in our classes—there's, of course, historically, a lot of different materials used for making jewelry and other things. But metal is the primary material. Being able to actually manipulate the material, using raising, forging, et cetera, is important to me as a metalsmith. Because I think of myself as a metalsmith first and an enamelist second.

As far as a teaching philosophy, although I realize we're not a trade school and not specifically training people for a job per se, to go right out, I do think there's a certain responsibility for us to be realistic about what students are going to be doing after they graduate. So in addition to teaching skills and aesthetics and how to see in a way that they can reinterpret personally for some sort of expression, we have to teach the skills that are necessary for people to survive after they get out of school. And that's everything from how to photograph their work and present it to how to write a resume.

I sometimes assign projects where they do multiples, in case they want to go out and do production or small-scale production jewelry. So incorporating a little of the real world into what they're learning while they're in school. Also trying to introduce some of the history of metalworking. All of them get history of art, but really, it barely touches on some of the history of metalworking and the history of our field specifically.

MS. RIEDEL: You were saying you had that experience yourself as an undergraduate, taking undergraduate art history courses, that it was primarily European-focused and very little about metal.

MR. BUTT: Right, and I think it's important for students to know that we're not just an offshoot of painting and sculpture. We have our own history that at times combined with, and at times was independent of, a lot of what was going on in painting and sculpture.

MS. RIEDEL: And would you focus more skills-building, then, in the undergraduate students and then, of course, more conceptual in grad?

MR. BUTT: That's definitely true. We assume that the graduate students already come with certain skills, and although we may demonstrate or introduce different techniques for the graduate students as well, especially if they're interested in certain things, it's more about ideas, and it's more about what they're trying to express through their work. And it's more independent study and a discussion between the instructor and the student, trying to help them take their work where they want it to go, as opposed to us leading them where we want it to go.

I'm referring to "we" now because I teach with someone else, and there's two people in the program, but that was not true for the first 20 years. I was a one-person program. There were advantages to being a one-person program because I made all the decisions in terms of how the program went and how it was structured. But there's a great advantage to having a second person in the program, where they get more than one opinion, where I can talk things over with Ana Lopez, who's teaching with me, and we can come up with a plan that's more applicable to more people.

MS. RIEDEL: Someone—I can't remember who it was—described your classes as a mixing of out-on-a-limb theoretical questions with practical problems. I think that was such an interesting and evocative description.

MR. BUTT: Yes, I like that "out-on-a-limb," because if things get too comfortable—and I know this in my own work if things get too comfortable—there's a tendency to try and make things more and more comfortable. Which is okay, but it reaches a point where it becomes too predictable and maybe too repetitive, and so you need to push the limits at that point.

So, yes—there are some students that are so timid and have so little confidence that you have to give them a comfortable place in which to succeed. Once people are comfortable, then it's my job to push them where they might not necessarily want to go, to make new discoveries.

MS. RIEDEL: What, besides teaching at university full-time during the year, drew you to repeatedly teach at Penland, Haystack, and Arrowmont? Among those schools, where have you taught?

MR. BUTT: I've taught at all of them—Haystack, Penland, Arrowmont, Touchstone [Center for Crafts, Farmington, PA], Mendocino [Art Center, Mendocino, CA]—those are the ones that come to mind. It's a much

different situation in those schools where you just have one or two weeks to deal with this small group of people and somehow achieve something so that they feel that it's been worthwhile, and I've done it in various ways.

Sometimes I've taught workshops that were specifically oriented towards a technique—cloisonné or Japanese alloys or something on basse taille. And that's okay, especially for that concentrated period of time. There are people who just want to do that and just want to learn those techniques.

Also those are not necessarily college students. Some of them may be younger than college students. A lot of them are older—people that have already graduated or weren't involved with college or are just specifically interested in making work. And I enjoy that mix of people. College students are great; they have a lot of energy, but sometimes they don't have as much life experience that other people bring in.

I also like that short period of time, where you know you've only got this much time to do it. People are paying to be in that workshop, and they tend to work really hard and spend long hours in the studio and try to accomplish things. Although I think, depending on the workshop, I'm less interested in them actually coming up with finished pieces by the end of the workshop than them making some discoveries.

Maybe they learned the technique. Maybe they saw how to do it in a different way, or maybe by seeing the other people in the workshop learning something, they pick up something new. It's always gratifying if they can complete a finished object, but I think what's more important is they can then go home and use what they learned and take it from there.

MS. RIEDEL: So in your experience, these are all primarily professionals looking to add new technique or skill, or they could just be hobbyists as well?

MR. BUTT: No, not necessarily. Yes, it could be hobbyists—I think I even had a high school student take one of the workshops. Some of them are college students. Some are people who just work.

MS. RIEDEL: So it must be a really interesting range of technical skills and then interesting content ideas.

MR. BUTT: Yes, and sometimes that's challenging. For instance, when I'm doing something with cloisonné, it's difficult to be too specific about what you want people to already know, because they're trying to fill a class, and if you're too specific, you may not get enough people signed up for it.

So I tend to make it somewhat open, that I'll take people who've just done a little bit of enameling or people who've done a lot of enameling. Usually I get somebody who's never done any enameling, and that makes it a little more difficult. But sometimes those people have a lot of skills in some other area that they can apply to the enameling, and it isn't a problem. It's an advantage in some ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you find there's a fair amount of cross-pollination of artists working in different media traditionally?

MR. BUTT: Some. Again, it depends how specific the technique is that I'm teaching. If I'm doing cloisonné, then frequently it's people specifically interested in that or who have some experience in other kinds of enameling.

But if it's a looser approach to enameling, there may be people who have done metalwork, but who've never done enameling. I've had people from other media, clay or even people in painting who just want to try it—have seen it and don't really know exactly what it is or how it works—and take the workshop.

MS. RIEDEL: And what has drawn you back to do the workshops over and over again? Because it seems you've done this for 20 years at least.

MR. BUTT: I enjoy it. I enjoy the groups of people that come in, and also I enjoy going to these different locations. Arrowmont is a really nice place in the Smoky Mountains. Penland is in North Carolina in the mountains, and I can walk around when I'm not teaching. And Haystack was one of my favorite places, by the ocean and the islands.

They're just great places to be. So it's nice to have the opportunity to go. The flipside of workshops is that it does take out a good deal of time. I can rarely ever do my own work. I've done a little bit of work at the workshops of my own while people are busy at their bench a couple of times. But usually I can't do too much of my own.

So it is time out from my studio. The actual week or two spent is one thing; and as I said, that's fairly enjoyable. But usually there's almost a week of preparation before you go, and then when you get back, there are several days before you can get everything back in order and get back into the studio. It could go into two or three weeks of time out from being in the studio, and so I don't want to do it so often that it's interfering with my

own work.

Because I teach at the university a good deal of the year, eight or nine months or so, I feel like the concentrated studio time is when I'm not teaching at the university. So I don't want to use up too much of that doing workshops and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: Do they offer much opportunity for you to interact with other artists?

MR. BUTT: Well, a little bit. That's interesting, to be there in a community of other instructors that are teaching other media, and I usually go around and see what's happening in the other studios when I'm there. But there's not too much interaction with the other instructors—discussions in the evening and things like that go on. So that's interesting, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you see as the place, or the function, the role, of universities in the American craft movement? How do you see those two benefiting each other—or not—and artists and craftsmen who work in that?

MR. BUTT: That's a difficult question, and I think it's becoming more difficult. There have been many programs in metals and other craft media that have closed over the past 10 years. I think financial pressures and affording other resources—particularly when new media programs are opening up dealing with video and computers and computer-aided design and all these things, high-tech areas. To many administrators, that seems like the future, the high-tech areas, which in some ways it is.

There's a tendency to pour resources into those areas more than the crafts, which seem a little antiquated at times. So there's that, and, I think, things have changed since the GI Bill and people coming back from World War II decided to get training and learn new skills.

The generation now has different ideas of what the future's going to be and how they're going to make a living and express themselves. We no longer really have an apprenticeship system, which was the old guild system, the ancient way of passing on information about these skills, and I think the university took over for that, to pass along the skills that normally, or in the past, one would learn from a master or your father or someone who knew the skill. I think that was good and appropriate, but I don't know whether that will continue to the extent that a university would support it.

On the other hand, universities have programs in philosophy, and I don't know where the jobs are that those people are going to; English, I know those people might get out and teach the subject, but other than that, what are those people doing? There are other areas that people can go into and it may not be specifically what they're being trained in, but the sensitivity to seeing and thinking, which I feel the students learn in our classes, I don't think that's going to go away, or at least I hope it isn't.

MS. RIEDEL: I remember Mary Lee Hu saying, too, that the skill set that her students used were in some ways applicable to other fields. I think she was talking about working with a doctor who specialized in hearing aids and that her students had the skill sets to work on such small objects in such detail, that they found it incredibly helpful that those skills could be used in a variety of fields.

MR. BUTT: Years ago we had a pre-dental program at the University of North Texas, and they came to me and said, "We'd like our students to take a beginning jewelry class. They're not going to be art majors, but they get all this theoretical training and yet they don't know how to use their hands, and they really need to have developed that skill."

And it's true. I have people who've never used a pair of pliers before, employing that type of hand dexterity—it may be a minor part of what we do, but it certainly is critical in a lot of different fields to be able to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, and it's different than a skill you're going to learn doing just about anything else.

MR. BUTT: So back to the university programs, I think that there will probably be fewer of them in the future. But there will always be people interested in learning those skills. So there is room for some programs where people can go for that.

I think that some of them may have to reorient themselves to the demands that are going to exist, whether that's to do work with designers or to work with industry or whatever it might be, so that they can transfer their skill set to actually survive in the world, using them in some way where they can feel that they're being creative, but they're also supplying a need.

Of course, the majority of the students who have gone through my program, even majors, aren't going to

be metalsmiths the rest of their life. But they have an appreciation for jewelry and the making of small objects or the detail work that I think will serve them well, either as appreciators of art and craft, buyers of art and craft, or working with museums or collections or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: You've taught at university for a long time. You've also taught at a variety of these other schools. Do you see any particular differences between artists who've learned their skills or had their background in a specific university program versus ones who have learned perhaps on their own, or specifically through art schools, or in Japan through apprenticeships?

MR. BUTT: There is a difference. Essentially, if they're getting a college degree, they're taking a range of courses other than just art courses, so courses in the humanities and science, language, whatever else it might be, and that's really the idea—it seems like the original concept of the university as a collection of scholars that can pass on different types of information.

It seems like it's more important than ever for there to be some crossover. Where do artists and scientists interact? Where do musicians and visual artists interact? It seems like there's a great deal of potential for interaction there. Now, in reality there's not as much collaboration at universities as you might hope. People tend to be isolated in their own little groups. But I think if that was more developed—and I think the student who forces that, who has the initiative to make that happen, will have an advantage.

Now, if you just want to learn how to forge steel, then I think going to one of these workshops might be the best thing to do, because they're going to concentrate on that. It's not that they're not talking about ideas or aesthetics. It's just that you don't also have to take phys ed or biology or something while you're doing it, and if that's not of value to you, then the degree may not be the way to go.

MS. RIEDEL: Just the way you've described it, and thinking about your experience, it feels like a rather obvious spectrum. On one hand, weighted more heavily towards technical skills, and I think with something like the apprenticeships you just described, where it's not only just a technical skill, but it's a very particular technical skill, maybe only one that's used in the final product; and then going all the way to more conceptual, content-oriented focus.

MR. BUTT: Right. Also, at the university on the undergraduate level, we try to give people a wider range of skills, because you never know. One person might be interested in the enameling. Another person might be interested in stone-setting. Another person might be interested in silversmithing. So we try and introduce a lot of different things.

On the graduate level, we expect students to focus in more, and they can focus in different ways. It might be focusing on certain skills, or it might be just focusing on a certain conceptual direction. But that's the difference between the graduate and the undergraduate level.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems, too, that artists, then, could approach that from a couple of different ways, one being that if you learn all these different skills, then you have a toolbox from which to choose. On the other hand, if you have very specific ideas or ideas of what you want to work on or what your focus is, then you can go out and learn the specific skills that are going to drive that forward.

MR. BUTT: That's true. I know there were certain things that I didn't learn in school that later I became interested in. It wasn't that I didn't know about them or they weren't offered, but I just wasn't interested at that point. Later on I was, and so I went back and picked up those skills. That's the way I learned how to use a computer. When I needed to know how to do something, I never took a course in how to use Photoshop or any other applications; I just learned it.

And I think that's what most people do anyway, whether it's a college degree or whether it's learning in an apprenticeship system or from workshops. You have to be receptive and ready for a certain thing, whether it's an idea or a skill, and then it will sink in, and as you become more mature, you can make choices about what you want to know and choose those things and learn them.

MS. RIEDEL: You just mentioned about learning new computer skills, which certainly invites the question—there has been such a huge technology development in the time that you've been working; has technology impacted your work in any particular way?

MR. BUTT: Well, in a minor way—or I don't know how minor—but the basic metalsmithing skills go back a thousand years or more, and we're still doing things, to a great extent, the same way. And yet there are things that come in and things that I teach, even though I'm not using them in my own work, like anodizing and working with titanium.

As far as CAD/CAM goes, computer-aided design, I've not had a particular interest in it, although I've

seen some very interesting work. And of course, at Tyler, where I went to undergraduate school, that's a real emphasis. The department is called Jewelry/Metals/CAD-CAM. But that hadn't started yet when I was there.

I see that as a possibility for the future, to bringing it into our program, but in terms of our resources, at this point it hasn't really been something that we could incorporate. So we've been hesitant to go in that direction.

However, in my own work, when I first started using text, I used these press-type rub-on letters that you burnished onto the metal and then put it into acid to etch it. And of course, now I do it on the computer. I can change the font. I can arrange it in an arc so that when it's etched into metal and bent around, it forms around the piece I'm working on. So I do the text on the computer and then transfer it onto a PNP, Press-n-Peel paper. That is then burnished onto the metal and etched.

A lot of students, even some of my graduate students, do their designing on the computer. They're drafting the ideas and coming up with proportions, and they're able to turn it around on the screen so they can see things are going to fit together. Most of those skills they don't get from me, but they already know some of those things, and they're just incorporating it into how can they use these skills to create the work that they're doing in the metals class.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

Let's move on and discuss a little bit about your exhibition history, which is really pretty interesting. I want to look at how that's changed over, say, a 30-year spectrum here. One of the things that strikes me as especially interesting about your exhibition schedule is that some of the earliest exhibitions were in Japan.

MR. BUTT: Yes. I think I can remember the first exhibition I was in—when I was at Tyler, as an undergraduate student. Elliot Pujol, who was one of my teachers there, was invited to be in a show. He was invited to ask two of his students to also be in the show, and I was one of the people he invited. I was incredibly honored to have been able to participate in that. But that was my first show, and because it wasn't a juried show, I didn't have to compete for it. I could just—he told me I just needed to send work.

MS. RIEDEL: That must have been thrilling as an undergraduate.

MR. BUTT: It was.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember what you sent?

MR. BUTT: It might be just as well I don't remember. [Laughs.] Mainly my early work, I did some competent things, but I was just learning. After that, it was mostly competitive exhibitions, where you fill out a form, you send slides—back then it was all slides—and either you get in or you don't. And it's juried by someone.

For many, many years that was primarily what I did and certainly was one thing that—being an academic, you're required to be professionally active; and depending on the school, but certainly at the University of North Texas, you would never be tenured unless you had a somewhat impressive exhibition record. So it was not just a matter of choice. It was a matter of needing to be in as many shows as you could.

So I entered a lot of shows and I was rejected from a lot of them. I often tell my students starting out, I've been rejected from some of the best exhibitions in the country, so not to be discouraged.

I mentioned before, I lived with a writer in Connecticut, and he talked about trying to get published and how many rejections—I mean hundreds of rejections—before he ever got anything accepted. So you have to have a little bit of a thick skin, and that's part of the business.

Certainly you're not going to get in if your work isn't good, but that's not the only criteria. You have to have good photographs, and there [are] certain jurors that are going to respond to certain work, and it may not be yours, and it may have nothing to do with how good it is. So there was the whole range of competitive exhibitions, and I still enter one occasionally if I feel that the theme relates to my work, or somehow I feel it's an important show that I would like to be in. I don't do as many as I used to.

Gradually, I was invited to be in more shows. At the university you're given more credit for those types of shows, but also it's nice when you're just invited to exhibit. And then, of course, solo exhibitions or small group exhibitions are also prestigious—and the whole idea is who's going to see the work. The more people who might be interested or knowledgeable about work, it's always good to be in those shows; shows that are traveling, where more people will see them.

So my first solo show was in Japan, and part of that was I was a visiting professor and there's a certain prestige in that. Part of it was that my work, even before I went to Japan, had some relationship to Japanese culture

because I'd been looking at work from Asia. There was some connection there that they could see, and my sponsor there, Mr. Yamanaka, who had the Seika-do Gallery, invited me to show work there.

So things just all fell into place, and I got a really good response from people exhibiting there. Some of the responses that I got from people were interesting. A lot of the Japanese saw an influence of Asia in my work, and yet they, particularly in the colors I'd use, they said it was very American.

The first show I had there had some haiku and other poems on the pieces and they translated those and had the translation in Japanese next to the piece. There was a lot of positive response to that.

MS. RIEDEL: Was the response as positive in the States as in Japan?

MR. BUTT: No, I think it was more positive in Japan, I think just because they saw it as somewhat exotic, just like when we have exhibitions of work from Japan or anyplace else. There's a certain sense of the other, that this is different, and we might pay a little more attention to it in a way, and I think that that was true for me.

I had the advantage of being an outsider, and they were curious about how an outsider would interpret work, especially when they saw that there was an influence from their own culture on it. That was gratifying.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. At the same time, there must have been, at least among metalsmiths or people who were very knowledgeable about the field, real recognition of what you were doing, because you had a solo exhibition very early on—I think in 1983—at the National Ornamental Metal Museum [Memphis, TN; now the Metal Museum].

MR. BUTT: Yes, and I don't remember exactly how that first exhibition there came about. But a solo exhibition is always something that you're anxious to have, and it highlights your work. Not that it isn't prestigious to be there with other metalsmiths or other artists that are recognized; but when it's just yours, it communicates more of a statement about you and your work. So I'm always looking for those opportunities.

MS. RIEDEL: Were most of your exhibitions at museums or at university galleries? Did you have a fair number of exhibitions at commercial galleries?

MR. BUTT: Some of all of those. Early on, it was a lot of the competitive exhibitions sponsored either by universities or community art groups. But there were also some by galleries, and SNAG [Society of North American Goldsmiths] sponsored some exhibitions, and the Enamelist Society, and there were the regional groups, like there used to be a Texas Crafts Guild, which doesn't exist anymore, that sponsored exhibitions.

MS. RIEDEL: What about the SOFA [Sculpture Objects and Functional Art] exhibits? Have you shown with those consistently?

MR. BUTT: Since my association with Nancy Yaw at the Yaw Gallery [Birmingham, MI]. She took my work to SOFA Chicago and SOFA New York pretty much every year. I don't remember the exact year that started. I know that she organized a vessel exhibition that featured multiples, and you had to make 10 vessels. They all didn't have to be exactly the same, but they were supposed to be a series, and I was invited.

I had visited her gallery and I had had pieces in a few shows that she sponsored, but that was the first show in which we really developed a relationship, between the two of us, and then I started regularly sending work to her gallery after that.

MS. RIEDEL: That was your longest relationship with a gallery, right?

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And you said something interesting yesterday [that] I thought about. She just didn't carry your work; she really represented you.

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you just describe exactly what that meant to you?

MR. BUTT: Yes. I'd had experience in the past with galleries, most of which are not in existence anymore, where I sent them work or I took work to them. They put it in a display, and it sat there until somebody came in and maybe they would buy it, and so occasionally you'd sell something.

That's one way of doing it, and I think that if you're represented by many galleries, that can be a good way to go. But I produce work so slowly that if I put something in a gallery, and it's there for a year and nobody buys it, it's like dead space, and it's just not good for me; it's not good for the gallery; it's not good for the

gallery owner. They're a business, and if they don't make money, they're not going to stay in business.

So although my primary focus isn't making money from the work, like any artist, that's part of the appreciation and being able to keep doing it, is supporting the business of it. As well as having my work in the gallery there in Birmingham, Michigan, Nancy Yaw took the work to SOFA Chicago; she took it to New York. She had a list of collectors and buyers that she always contacted when I sent new work, and they would come in, and she sold a lot of my work for me.

MS. RIEDEL: More than any other gallery?

MR. BUTT: More than all the other galleries put together.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BUTT: That relationship was successful for both of us. She was also very honest in terms of saying, "I don't think you'll sell this work at this price; I think maybe it's too high," or, "I don't think this is high enough because people aren't going to appreciate it if you have this low price on it." She was very honest about that, and I always trusted her, because she and I knew that she was working for my benefit as well as hers. So she would be honest with me about pricing, because that's always a hard thing for artists, how to price your work.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. BUTT: I've had work at other galleries. I know Mobilia [Gallery, Cambridge, MA] has done well for me, and I've had things at some other galleries, but because I produce work slowly, I was hesitant to be involved in too many galleries because I wouldn't be able to give them new work often enough.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like she was a real advocate for your work, and there was probably a fair amount of education done on her part as well. Do you think that's accurate to say?

MR. BUTT: Exactly. Yes, I'm sure that she told people what went into the work, and unlike some media, not everybody is all that familiar with enamel, especially cloisonné, and what goes into it. So I think she did educate people in terms of what the work was about as well as what went into making it.

I think that's the way it should be. I know that I got a major commission by someone who had bought my work through the gallery and then contacted me directly, saying they wanted this commission. They worked for a medical corporation in Chicago. I did the commission, but I definitely sent a percentage of that back to Nancy Yaw, because it was through her gallery that I got the commission.

I understand it's becoming more and more tricky these days, because people will go into a gallery and see somebody's work that they like, go home and go on the Internet, contact them directly, and bypass the gallery. And it's really not good for anyone, because galleries are losing out, and gallery owners will be hesitant to carry people's work if they know they're not going to be selling, they're going to be losing the commission on it. It's a difficult situation.

Now, there's some people that don't deal with galleries at all and are going completely through the Internet, and that's another way to go. I don't know that that's a negative situation. It's just, it's another strain on the galleries that now exists, that they have to deal with.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. And in my experience, also, it seems that if the gallery is, as you say, really advocating for your work, and doing a fair amount of education, that's a lot of time that frees you up to be in the studio.

MR. BUTT: Oh, absolutely, right.

MS. RIEDEL: If the gallery is really doing that, and you're not having to interact with the client.

MR. BUTT: Right. I know that a lot of metalsmiths, a lot of artists, enjoy going to the markets and fairs and displaying their work and talking one-on-one to the people who are interested in buying it, and I think that's a really positive thing.

But that doesn't appeal to me, and I don't think I'd be very good at it; whereas if there's a representative for me that can do that for me, I'm more than willing to have them take their share of whatever profit is made on the work.

MS. RIEDEL: So it sounds like a very beneficial experience, very happy experience for both of you.

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: There was a huge level of trust, and it really, in your case, worked well.

MR. BUTT: Yes, and it certainly wasn't the experience I had with a lot of other places.

I try and communicate this to students; it isn't that there are bad galleries and good galleries, necessarily, but one gallery might be a great gallery for one person, but they just don't feel like their clientele is going to be interested in your work. And I would much rather that person say that honestly to me right at the open, rather than say, "I'll take your work," and then it just stays there and nobody really appreciates it.

So the artist has to be honest about it, and the gallery owner has to be honest about it.

MS. RIEDEL: So an authentic connection with the work itself.

MR. BUTT: Right. And I know they also have to be realistic in terms of it being a business. No matter how much the gallery owner likes your work, if they can't sell it, it doesn't do either of you any good.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

[Audio Break.]

All right, when we paused, we were beginning to discuss the pros and cons and the various merits, reasons for taking commissions. Have you taken them periodically over the years?

MR. BUTT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: On what basis do you accept or decline?

MR. BUTT: It needs to relate in some way to what I am already doing. Now, it can vary quite a bit. Early on I was in it for the money aspect primarily, so I was always interested in doing a commission, but still, it had to be something I was comfortable dealing with.

Since I started teaching, I could pick and choose, because my livelihood didn't depend on commissions; I was given a salary for the teaching. So I would talk to people about it, and as long as I felt I had the time, there wasn't a rush, and there was some relationship to the work that I was doing, I would take the commissions.

I found that I always learned something from doing a commission, because it forced me to do something I wouldn't ordinarily do. I'm thinking specifically of this time—not long after I started teaching at the University of North Texas, some administrators came to me and they wanted a university mace, which seemed like it had nothing to do with my work, and yet it was a ceremonial object, a ritual object.

They wanted some text on it—symbols and script for the university. I came up with designs, and that was before I was doing enameling, so it didn't involve any enamel. Unfortunately, dealing with the university, you're often working with a committee rather than just one person, so then the different members of the committee all felt like they wanted some input, so there were some changes to the design that I felt maybe weren't for the best, but I worked with them.

I got a lot of PR—regional and local PR—for that, so it turned out successful. When you do things for the university, something more public like that, a lot of people see it. There were pictures of it published. And then I did another one, years later, when they decided they wanted a new one when the man who was president retired. I don't know if he took it with him or whether they just sort of retired the mace. And then we had a commission to do another one.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. BUTT: On the second one, I designed it, but I had the graduate students do the actual work, so all of their names went with it. In the little blurb on commencement, whenever they talk about the mace, they mention my name as the designer and these four graduate students that worked on it.

MS. RIEDEL: What a nice idea, almost an American version of a Japanese apprentice and master situation.

MR. BUTT: Yes, and they did a great job. That's one type of commission. Actually, another school contacted me about doing their university mace, and I ended up doing three or four of them because of the first one. They were always interesting projects.

One was for Southwestern Adventist College in Keene, Texas, and it had the special symbols that had to do with

the Adventists on it and different materials. At that point, I had started doing enameling, so there was a little bit of enamel on that one.

The second mace for the University of North Texas also had some enamel on it. I did one for Azusa Pacific University in California in 1999.

You do drawings and you send designs—usually I try and do two or three different drawings to send to them. They're maybe not completely refined, but anyone could look at them, tell what's being proposed.

Then they will get back to you and either choose one of the designs, or they'll say, Well, can you do a little bit from this one, a little bit from that one, or they may have some of their own input. Ultimately, you end up with a final set of drawings, and then you start working from there.

MS. RIEDEL: Are you usually fairly happy with the final set?

MR. BUTT: Yes. I've never actually [gone] into production of one that I didn't like the design that we came up with. There might be certain things on it that I wouldn't have chosen, but [the] final design is always something that either I already presented to them or something close to that.

People like to feel like they participated in the project, not just letting you do what you want to do, so sometimes they will make certain decisions that—if it's something I don't feel I can do or that I think would be problematic practically, then I will try and convince them otherwise.

MS. RIEDEL: Are they something that you would continue to entertain—commissions?

MR. BUTT: Possibly. It would depend on the timing. Again, since I have a limited amount of time that I can spend in the studio, I don't want to give away too much of that time. But as I said, I learned something from each of those, like the mechanics of how to put it together, how to work on a different scale, how to incorporate enamel where it's not going to be so fragile that it's going to break. All of those things—different types of cold connections—I learn something from those challenges.

And there have been other commissions that are closer to my personal work. I mentioned the one for the medical corporation in Chicago. The man had already purchased some of my other work, and he just wanted a larger version for a conference table, to be a centerpiece. And so although that seemed like a very natural thing for me to do, the increase in size posed some problems that I hadn't anticipated and I had to work those out, and I learned a good deal from that.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Because a shift in scale can make a huge difference.

MR. BUTT: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Not, of course, technically—

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —but just in terms of design.

MR. BUTT: But I have a comfort level in terms of scale, and I've tried some big things and small things, but in general, they all range from the size of your fist to the size of your head or something like that. [Laughs.] There are some technical limitations, but I just like that scale.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I know I deviated us from the exhibition discussion to talk about commissions, so I'll take us back in that direction again.

You're in an unusual position, it seems, in many ways, of having had three retrospective exhibitions already, fairly early on. Were any of these particularly significant to you?

MR. BUTT: They were. Really, two of them were—the one at SIU Carbondale and the one at the University of North Texas—essentially the same work that was shown in one place and then the other.

MS. RIEDEL: At Carbondale in 1994 and at the University of North Texas in '95.

MR. BUTT: Right. So that was just short of 20 years. It seemed like a body of work that I had either in my own possession or from people that I knew who owned the work that would be willing to loan it—enough work that it would show a progression from early work to the present, at that time. And, again, because I work fairly slowly, it takes time for me to have enough work for a solo show. The work done in one year could be only six pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BUTT: So it makes more sense to have an exhibit that displays work from a wider time range. It became retrospective because it started with some of the earliest work that included enamel as well as pieces [of] the present, at that time.

And of course, SIU was my alma mater, and so they offered me this opportunity. I believe that the University of North Texas then, once they found out about it, said, "Why don't we show the work here after it comes down there?" Since we had already borrowed the work from owners.

MS. RIEDEL: Did that offer you an opportunity to really look at the similarities and the differences that had transpired over the past 20 years?

MR. BUTT: Absolutely. I have slides of the work, and have sometimes shown the different work on slides, but to actually have the pieces there, some of which I hadn't seen in years, I was impressed with a few things that I had done because—[laughs]—just the fact that I was so removed from, it in some cases, I couldn't remember exactly how I went about it, or I'd have to look at it carefully to say, "Oh! That's how I did that." It was surprising to me that they would seem that removed. But time goes by, and you don't constantly look at those pieces.

Looking in terms of how far it had come in a way but also how similar it was. Some of the aspects of the earlier work and the later work had essentially the same basic tenets of how I went about it and what I was thinking at the time and how I interpreted the subject matter.

MS. RIEDEL: What were the differences?

MR. BUTT: Well, a skill level. I think I had learned a good deal about how to manipulate the materials, so it was more refined. And yet some of that early work, as I said, was cleverly put together for not knowing a better way at that point.

Also, although the themes of nature, container, simplicity, complexity—all of those things might have been similar—I think resolution of certain ways of looking at life had changed a little bit from early on until then. In some ways, maybe I was a little less optimistic early on and a little more critical of humanity early on and maybe less sympathetic. When you're younger, you want to change things because they're not right. When you get older, you realize you're making, if not the same mistakes, equally horrible ones. [Laughs.] So you have to have a little bit of sympathy for humanity in that respect.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you feel that there was then a big difference in, I think, 2002, when you had the next exhibition at the National Ornamental Metal Museum—*Harlan Butt: Master Metalsmith* exhibition, right?

MR. BUTT: Yes. I gave them a list of people who owned my work, and they contacted them. So there was work that they were able to acquire for the exhibition that I hadn't even attempted to get earlier. Again, there were some pieces that I hadn't seen in quite some time, and it was more of a complete coverage of the various years from early on. Some of that same earlier work was in it, but a lot of intermediate work that wasn't in the other retrospective shows was there.

MS. RIEDEL: There was a project, I think in 2004, the [*Harlan W. Butt:*] *National Parks Project*, at the Denton Center for the Visual Arts, Denton, Texas, that sounds really interesting and different than anything you've done before. Would you describe that?

MR. BUTT: Yes, it actually relates back to the Big Bend series. There was a Reflexive Landscape trip in '79, where I went to a national park, kept a journal, took notes, and then came back and made pieces. The National Parks Project followed same idea. I proposed going to three different national parks and to spend about 10 days in each one, camping and observing, keeping a journal, taking photographs, drawings, writing haiku poetry, then coming back to the studio and doing several pieces inspired by that location and experience.

I specifically chose three parks that were very different in terms of habitat, vegetation, weather, rainfall. The first one was Olympic National Park in Washington State. The second one was Big Cypress National Preserve in Florida, adjacent to the Everglades. And the third one was Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in southern Arizona on the Mexican border. Three very different locations, and at each park I spent between a week and 10 days—and then came back to the studio and designed and created pieces inspired by the location. Each one included haiku written at that location that referred to the experience.

MS. RIEDEL: Really interesting. And was this funded by the university?

MR. BUTT: Yes, the university helped support this. This was a faculty grant that I applied for proposing this project. So I had a semester's leave of absence to do this.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that leads really interestingly into this whole concept of your working process and how that has evolved over time. Do you tend to find that you have very specific ways of working or a few specific ways of working? Are there any elements that are essential to your working process?

MR. BUTT: Well, the reference to nature is there, and it has to be a specific reference, even though sometimes that's abstracted. This was something that I appreciated and remembered from Gary Snyder's poetry. Nature, if you're only using it as a metaphor, then it's as if you're using it to your own benefit without taking into consideration the reality of nature itself.

So although I do work with metaphor and there is some symbolism that may be involved, I think that referring to the reality of a location, the reality of an animal or plant or habitat is important to me, not just the idea of it.

It usually starts with a specific place, event, or object. Now also, just in terms of the formality of it and the aesthetics of it, I know that I'll probably be dealing with a vessel, because that's what I make. Is that going to be a specific object? Is it going to be an incense burner? Is it going to be a vase? Is it going to be a box? What is it going to be, and how does that relate to what I'm referring to?

What is the shape? How does that shape relate? What is the color? What is the pattern? Is there going to be a frog on it, specific elements like that? Is there going to be a tree or a leaf? How does that all fold in together?

Sometimes the haiku will be the inspiration for the piece right from the beginning. Other times, like with the park project, I may have written a number of haiku, and then I'll look through and decide, Which one of these is really going to fold into the physical being of this piece and make sense? And occasionally, in cases where the physical presence and the aesthetics and the formal characteristics present themselves first, and then I'll write a haiku to go with that design.

So it can go different ways. And I haven't always used haiku. I've used text on a lot of the pieces but—this might be going back to an earlier subject, but I didn't have text on the whole Wisteria series and the Anagogies series. Perhaps a couple of them did, but most of them did not have any text at all. And for a long period of time, especially on the earlier Earth Beneath [Our] Feet series, the text was not poems but just a series of words.

To some extent, I think at some point the haiku were becoming contrived, and I didn't want that to happen. Plus, I wanted the text to be more elusive in a way. It was a series of words, and the viewers had to determine for themselves what the connection was. Sometimes the connection between the words was obvious, but frequently there would be two or three words in which the relationship was obvious and then one that seemed out of place.

Oftentimes I'd repeat words over and over, but one word would only be there once, and it would somehow not fit, or the way it fit was maybe not what you first expected.

MS. RIEDEL: I know exactly what you mean, because I've read a few of them; but can you think of any trio that you can talk about here that—

MR. BUTT: Let me think.

MS. RIEDEL: If not, I have maybe some photographs we can look at.

MR. BUTT: Yes, I have a list somewhere with those things, but—

MR. BUTT: "Metamorphosis," "transformation," "metamorphosis," "transformation," repeated over and over, and then, "devour."

MS. RIEDEL: There was something always slightly—there was a real juxtaposition.

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: They were not harmonious.

MR. BUTT: There was a snake behind the frog.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. They're very powerful. They're evocative of images and—

MR. BUTT: Well, I felt also that—I wasn't trying to exactly do a puzzle, but I wanted the layer of text to not be quite so obvious, and for the connection not to be totally my interpretation, but to leave some room for the viewer to supply their own interpretation from the series of words.

MS. RIEDEL: They strike me as a real parallel between the words and the patterns—a distillation of something very specific into its highly reduced assets, and one in a more abstract, nonliteral form, and the other in a very literal form.

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: There is a real parallel, I think, in that distillation down to the essence. It does remind me of that Soetsu Yanagi passage about pattern: “Good patterns are simple. If they’re cluttered, they’re not yet patterns.” And then talks about—the kind of pattern I’m speaking about is not primarily decorative; it comes of Zen emptiness, or *mu*.

But he also talks about pattern in terms of not at all a realistic depiction or representation but in relation to intuition and to imagination. And that somehow, to me, feels very much related to the way you use pattern as a distillation or almost a transformation, a translation of a very literal nature scene almost on the top of this Earth as you speak—Earth [Beneath Our] Feet series. Interesting slip there. And then the words that you chose. I think it’s a very compelling montage.

MR. BUTT: Repetition can be boring, but in a lot of ways repetition is ingrained in everything we experience—how cells multiply or how growth takes place. Just the way our lives are one day to the next, there’s a certain amount of recurrence, because no matter how different or diverse we try to be, there’s repetition there.

Pattern is an expression of that. And when it seems like just a mindless repetition or pattern that’s just trying to fill space, that’s one thing, but when it integrates into the form seamlessly, like in life, then it becomes a whole.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think of your patterns: one often overlays another, overlays another. You might have an abstracted landscape on one of the vessels, and then there will be almost a weblike pattern. There is a variation in colors and vibrancies. So it’s a very complex pattern—

MR. BUTT: I’ll tell you; there’s something about pattern that seems like a surface thing, and then when you overlay that with something that has more depth, it—I don’t know how to describe this exactly, but, again, it’s like the way we see life.

There’s this image before our eyes that we can flatten to be almost like a photograph but in essence it isn’t flat; it’s infinitely dimensional. And when you put pattern next to something that maybe is more of an illusion of space, it sets up the same kind of tension as text versus images.

MS. RIEDEL: I certainly think, too, of religions where you don’t have representational imagery, but you have very complex abstract patterns, and certainly that comes to mind with your work too—not directly, but tangentially there’s a sense of that underlying spirituality, that pattern or that repetition, that connectedness.

MR. BUTT: Right, and I think in some ways there’s a hesitancy to be too literal, because you’re dealing with something too powerful to truly interpret. So by abstracting it into a pattern, you can imply the beauty and complexity of it without having to be too literal.

MS. RIEDEL: That’s really nice. That makes a lot of sense. And at the same time, you juxtapose it with these various interpretations and ways of looking at it, which seems to make it all the more powerful.

MR. BUTT: After what I just said, the thing too powerful to depict realistically, to try and abstract it in such a way, and yet there is that circumstance where when we start abstracting things, whether it’s concepts into words or images into pattern, we can’t forget that that’s only part of the story. The reality is three-dimensional.

One of the first pieces I created in the 1,001 Views of Mount Mu series was blue like the sky, and it just had a streak—a sort of blotch—on it that looked like a jet exhaust across the top. That was the only pattern on the surface, and when you opened it up, the haiku—if I can remember it exactly—“A wet possum track / Pressed in the shady stream back; / The sound of a jet.”

On the one hand you’ve got this intimate, enclosed, exact experience of this footprint that’s still fresh—that some other living creature walked that way and you were there right after it—and then at the same time this experience of the outside world, what’s going on above you. That life goes on. Technology, all of this, and the juxtaposition of those two things. That same type of layering of experience and meaning is what I’ve tried to do in different ways on other pieces, too.

MS. RIEDEL: You said something a few minutes ago that I think is interesting. You were talking about specific details and how important they were to you, that it would not just be a footprint, but it would be a possum footprint—it would be pressed into a, certainly, clay or mud or—and it makes me think of how you have worked in series so consistently over decades, and long-running series.

I'm thinking of Wisteria and Garden Analogies and Earth Beneath [Our] Feet specifically, and how different those series were, but how important the details were when you do work in series, because then each piece is so specific about a certain idea, a certain place, but as a whole, then, they make a whole other statement. And clearly this is something you were exploring over years.

MR. BUTT: Yes. And I mentioned to you before that I don't feel like any of these series are over. I may have not done any work in the Wisteria series for 10 years or more, but I feel like if I decided tomorrow that I want to do another one, I could, and it would still be part of that series.

When I see students make a piece, it may be great; it's finished—now what do I do? Well, that's not the way I work—I'm not starting at zero each time I finish a piece. It's like words in a poem. You've got this one, but it doesn't say the whole story; there's more to it than that. In some ways, that earlier piece may have opened up ideas or questions that you didn't even ask before you made that piece. So it's more of incremental steps rather than individual accomplishments one at a time.

Plus, the concept of something like Earth Beneath Our Feet was so important to me that one piece just scratched the surface of it. I could keep scratching at it until I discovered more and more detail, or more ways of looking at how to approach the same thing.

So as long as the idea remained fresh, then I would keep making work in that series. If they started to become stale or repetitive, or I was artificially forcing something into that series, then it was time to move on, but not necessarily abandon it altogether.

MS. RIEDEL: You said the idea behind that series was so important to you. What in specific?

MR. BUTT: Well, Western landscape to a great extent has to do with—I think we talked a little bit about this before, it has to do with an observer and the observed—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BUTT: —and its subject/object. That's the way a lot of the philosophy is. The religion—the West—there's a God and there's you. There's heaven and there's hell. And everything is broken up into this duality of one thing versus another, and frequently, we're looking through a window at something else going on out there.

I felt that was the source of a lot of our problems in terms of dealing with nature and the environment, was that we were always separate from it. We could be good stewards, or we could take care of it, or we could conquer it, but we could do those things because it wasn't us. It's the same way the Western world has often dealt with foreign peoples, at least historically. They're not us, so we can rationalize the way we treat them.

But if there was no difference between them and us, if they *were* us, then it's a little more difficult to be abusive, and that's true of the environment, too. So Earth Beneath Our Feet, the landscape is where you're standing; it's not just someplace out there, and not only where you're standing, but it's you, too. So you're part of it, not apart from it.

In describing, it sounds relatively simple and people can agree, Oh, yeah, that makes sense. But living like that is not so easy, and I think that it has to do with the way we conceive of identity and what makes us what we are.

From the time we're infants, we develop this sense of being an individual, and it's important to develop in that way in order to exist in the world. But, again, it's an artificial existence. That identity that's you, where does it go after you die? That's where the concept of heaven or reincarnation comes in. It's some kind of rationalization of death; we can't just disappear unless we were never there to begin with. It was an artificial construct. So Earth Beneath Our Feet joins us all together and makes us not separate things but—

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting because those pieces, more than any I can think of, have those ultra-realistic top pieces with beautifully executed leaves or frogs—

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —frequently snakes, and then those words, very powerful, along the rim, and then this beautiful, complex abstract pattern in the bowl of the vessel. So there is, in imagery and in thought, exactly what you're talking about in terms of how we see ourselves as part of that.

MR. BUTT: And that kind of evolved. I remember the first ones—it's what I was trying to do, but in some ways it was, Oh, yeah, that's how I'm going to do it, and now how am I going to do it on the next one, or how can I make that better, or how can I make it more integrated, the various elements?

MS. RIEDEL: The palettes really change, too. They go from very subdued, almost—not monochromatic, but some

of them are almost black, white, and gray, and then I'm thinking [of] some of those vibrant yellows and greens.

MR. BUTT: Yes, part of the influence from Japan was the idea of subtlety and natural and organic sort of colors, and yet there are things in Japan and elsewhere where there are fantastic colors.

Also one of the things that I was fighting from the beginning was that enamel has a reputation and almost innately is flashy and glossy and brilliant. And that's part of the wonderful thing about it, but sometimes it's overdone and it takes over. It's like stained glass or—it's so flashy that it doesn't have subtlety.

So I intentionally tried to mute my color palette to more organic colors. But then I was seduced by that beautiful color at times. That piece there—

MS. RIEDEL: This is the Garden Anagogie—yes.

MR. BUTT: And the color on the card doesn't come close to the actual color of the enamel. And there's no cloisonné there; there's no basse taille; there's no fancy technique, stencil, or anything; it's just color.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BUTT: And it goes from a more orange-red down to a deeper red to almost a slightly violet-red. So that was great. I couldn't just keep doing that, but to a great extent that was a prime example of what I was trying to do at that time. The form, I feel, is still simple, and there's a certain subtlety to it, but the color is bright.

And in nature—nature can get away with things that we can't, in a way. If you wore some of the color combinations that you see, like in the wildflowers along the road, people would think you were nuts—[laughs]—but it works there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And these series feel so different from the Earth Beneath [Our] Feet series—such a profoundly strong, saturated color that just is almost overwhelming, and very delicate, beautiful lines. And yet you seem to—did you work on those series simultaneously, because they both—

MR. BUTT: The Earth Beneath Our Feet and the Wisteria, there was an overlap, so that I was still doing some of these at the same time as some of those early ones. But I knew that when I started on the Earth Beneath Our Feet, that that was something I wanted to continue on, and at that point, the Wisteria pieces had started to become somewhat repetitive, in terms of a formula. And when you start to feel like it's a formula, then maybe it's time to take a break from that.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's be clear about that. So would you go back and forth then between more complex—

MR. BUTT: At that time?

MS. RIEDEL: —or just in general over the years?

MR. BUTT: Well, there's always this tension of doing something, and then I want to do more, get even more concentrated or put more into it. And eventually it gets more and more complex. And then it's, like, Uh-oh, this is getting too busy, design for design's sake. And I need to back off a little bit and simplify. So then I'll go back and do something less involved.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: I wanted to talk briefly, too, about Snakes in Heaven because that series seems to be such a great distillation of humor and danger and beauty that we've seen run throughout your work through the years. But there's something just—[laughs]—wonderful about that. What was the inspiration for Snakes in Heaven?

MR. BUTT: I've had encounters with snakes, and we talked about snakes being hard to identify with for people—a lot of people.

A squirrel or a deer or even a bear, we can anthropomorphize that animal and identify with it. Snakes, for some reason, and even insects—some insects we can do that with—but with snakes, it's just too foreign. We can't imagine something crawling on its belly without any legs being like us. And yet why is it so different? And so the idea of Snakes in Heaven is, if we go to heaven, then they're going to be there, too. [Laughs.] There's no reason why they should be excluded.

The whole prelapsarian concept, before the fall, before Adam and Eve, before Eve was tempted by the serpent, before that time, maybe we all lived together amiably; it was those fables that set us apart, again, being the

other—the snake is not us; it's something else. And in some of those pieces, the snake was shedding its skin as it's rising up, and that idea of being reborn—sloughing off this skin that used to be us and becoming something new; something better and purer.

The snake, in some cultures—I can never remember the name of the medical symbol that has the snake wrapping around it—the caduceus—the whole idea there was that being cured was like removing that disease or impure layer and becoming new again. So there's that reference within the idea of snakes.

So, yes, I always thought that was humorous. And you know what? Some of my other work is humorous; not everybody gets that—[laughs]. We make all these rules and we pretend that they make so much sense. And yet if you step back and look at them, a lot of times, it's absurd. And it depends—if you're looking at some other culture, you can say, That looks absurd. But if you were out there looking in, Earth might be just as absurd.

MS. RIEDEL: I totally jumped over the Ten Bulls in a Quantum Field series, and I wanted to talk briefly about that, from 1989, because they were really different than what you've done traditionally over the years—much more two-dimensional. What inspired that, and do you have any desire to explore that further?

MR. BUTT: Well, part of it had to do with just dealing with a different format—having made things that always sit on the table or on a shelf or on a pedestal, what about something on the wall? I prefer three-dimensional work, and even these pieces were in relief; they weren't completely flat. But just that other format of being on the wall was part of it.

There were the 10 ox-herding pictures, which are the traditional depiction of the path to enlightenment in Zen, with the stages that you go through. There wasn't always 10; there were other versions that had more or less, but that was a common set that my inspiration was taken from. And I wanted a series of objects going from one stage to the next. I saw them all as one piece rather than 10 separate objects. And so you get a sense of transformation that takes place as you go.

Meditation is something a lot of people do, and then there are different kinds. The whole idea of enlightenment is important in Zen Buddhism and Buddhism in general, and different sects of Buddhism emphasize meditation more or less. In Zen particularly, meditation is a central element at least—whether or not it leads to some sort of enlightenment or breakthrough. That's what I was trying to deal with at that time, and somehow to interpret and to communicate without it just being a rehash of something that someone else did.

MS. RIEDEL: And there were poems in that, as well.

MR. BUTT: Yes, each one had some text. They started out lengthier and more full of angst and discomfort and doubt. And gradually, there was less of that.

MS. RIEDEL: And those poems are in that collection too. They were wonderful. And then at some point, you started making some teapots.

MR. BUTT: Yes, that started with the teapot show that Mobilia sponsored. Other people had done teapots. And of course, the teapot for both potters and for metalsmiths is kind of an iconic object. Years ago, there were a bunch of crazy guys who initiated the Vail Symposium here in Colorado, and they started this spoon-and-ashtray show because that's something metalsmiths have traditionally made, spoons and ashtrays. So everybody had to interpret that their own way.

Well, the same thing with the teapot. It's, like, how do I come up with a new idea for the teapot? It was already a vessel; it had to do with tea, in a way, which related to things that I'd dealt with before. So it was a challenge just to figure out: How am I going to interpret "teapot"? It is consistent with the work that I've been doing, but has this new form. So I have done several of those.

MS. RIEDEL: And what did you come up with? How did you evolve the form?

MR. BUTT: Well, some of it was technical. Like, how do you make something that you can pour tea out of? You've got to hold it, and it has to have a spout. There is the enameling problem, too, whereas enamel and tea don't really go together so well because [of] the acidic character of tea. Because enamel is a fairly low-fire vitreous material, it can absorb some of the toxic elements out of the enamel, so you don't want the tea to actually come in contact with the enamel. I had to have liners where the tea wasn't actually in the exterior part of the teapot. That was important to me at first because I thought if it was used, it needs to—

MS. RIEDEL: And you wanted it to be able to be used.

MR. BUTT: Yes. On the last ones, though, I think I cast that aside somewhat. It had become an object that no one's going to use—for tea. Or if it was used for tea, it would be used very briefly and there really isn't any

danger of anyone being poisoned by my teapot. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: We've talked about nature, to be sure; we've talked about aboriginal cultures; we've talked about Japan and Buddhism. Are there any other significant influences in your career that we've missed?

MR. BUTT: Well, in a way, my family. My wife, we met at Tyler, and although her career has gone in a different direction, she still paints and draws. And being in close contact with someone like that, she's been really good through the years of not only being supportive but criticizing my work. Frequently, I will take something to her and ask her what she thinks, especially if I already have some doubts about it. And she will usually confirm those doubts. [Laughs.] Sometimes she'll say, "Somebody is going to like that."

MS. RIEDEL: Right, which can be helpful, too, because it may not have been your original expectation, but it's something else that's completely whole in and of its own.

MR. BUTT: My son had an influence because he went into English and poetry and also with his extreme sensitivity to life; it's just at times been positive and at times been negative. Also, his honesty and integrity. I've never known anyone that is so honest, to a fault, even when it was to his detriment to be so honest. Just to see his example has impressed me and made me want to be more like that.

And my daughter, because she was involved in dance, and I never gave much thought to movement as an art form. I knew it existed, but with her, it was like it opened up a whole new avenue. And to see her express herself through movement in a way that was so emotional and expressive, it's just a different way of looking at beauty.

MS. RIEDEL: The Wisteria pieces remind me of that. Those lines feel so lyrical.

MR. BUTT: That's true. And I'm trying to think of what age she would have been at—she may have already been dancing at that time, but just the whole idea of time-lapse photography, when you film something in movement and then it creates a line. To look at the path of someone who's dancing and the line that it makes as the movement of arms, and to be conscious of where your hands are and your arms are, it reminded me a great deal of the tea ceremony, which isn't exactly a dance, but it is, in a way, a performance of the body, and every movement is important.

When I was studying the tea ceremony in Japan, I was a poor student, but I admired what went on. I'd go once a week on Saturdays to take lessons—the teacher's example of movement within the tea ceremony, where it's so fluid and there's no interruption. Knowing where each of your fingers is while you're doing this is important. None of it is arbitrary.

MS. RIEDEL: It's very choreographed, highly choreographed.

MR. BUTT: And to perform something so regimented in a way that looks so fluid and natural is amazing. It's like art, at least metalwork, in that you're taking this rigid, hard material, and trying to make it look so natural and fluid.

I remember when I was studying tea, there's the tearoom and then there's the little preparation area. This is just the simple ceremony. You go into the preparation room and pick up the natsume, which is the tea container, and the tea bowl at the same time. You lift them up. You walk out and you set them down.

Well, I would go back there, I'd pick up the natsume, make sure I was holding it just the right way—no, I'd pick up the tea bowl first and grasp it so I could get a good grip on that, and then I'd pick up the natsume and I'd walk out, and the teacher would say, Stop, go back; you're doing it wrong; come back in. So I'd go back and do it again three times.

Finally, I said, "What am I doing wrong?" He said, "You're not picking them both up at the same time." And I thought, He can't see me back there. How does he know I'm not picking them up at the same time? And it's because my fingers were underneath the tea bowl like this, and there's no way you could put your fingers under there without doing that first and then picking up the other one.

So every little detail was noticeable. If you're going to do it, you should do it this way. And dance is like that, too, I'm sure. There's free-form dance, but still it all has to make sense; it all has to be fluid or not, if that's what you're trying to do.

So anyway, those are the people that have had an influence on me, as well as my teachers and students through the years.

MS. RIEDEL: You've been involved with a number of different art communities, too—the Enamelist Society, SNAG; I know you are a Fellow of the American Craft Council. How significant have those communities been to you in your development as an artist, or professionally? Or are those more academic responsibilities?

MR. BUTT: No, I mean, there is that element to it. I guess I have a tendency, when I get involved in something, to want to be “involved”—not just to be on the periphery. And that can be a problem, too, because that takes away your time and energy; so you have to find a balance.

Originally, I was asked to be on the board of trustees of the Enamelist Society. I was honored that I was asked, and I agreed to be on it. There was a certain amount of involvement in work that we did on the board, but to a great extent, it wasn't a working board so much. To some extent, it was, but a lot of the actual decision making was made by other people.

Eventually, we felt that the membership should take on more of that responsibility. So we started taking on more responsibility, and I was on the board of trustees for six years, or something like that. After I left the board, a year or so later, they came back and asked me if I would be president.

I was hesitant to do it at that point, but they needed somebody, and there wasn't anybody who was willing to take it on. I'd worked with the people before, and it seemed like something I should do. And there were advantages, academically, to taking on the role of president of the Enamelist Society. You get credit for those things, but not nearly as much credit as the work that you do.

Anyway, I was involved with the conferences, and the connections led to the India experience. Organizing that exhibition, *Colour & Light: The Art and Craft of Enamel on Metal*, at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai, in 2001, was directly related to working with Veenu Shah, who was on the board at that time when I was president. That was just one of the connections that I made while on the board.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about that, too, while we're here, and then we'll come back to SNAG and then American Craft Council, because we haven't talked about that at all. You spent time in India; you co-curated that exhibition; how did that come about and what did it entail?

MR. BUTT: Well, the Indians were planning this international conference, and they wanted the Enamelist Society here to be involved, but it was really their conference. They wanted an international exhibition, and, of course, they couldn't organize everything. So I volunteered, because I wanted to be more involved and I was interested in India, and I'd said I would be willing to work on this exhibition.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm totally ignorant of this—does India have a long history of enamel?

MR. BUTT: They do, and there's a particular type of enameling that's been done that's on jewelry primarily—on the backs of stone settings—and there's a term for it called *meenakari*. But there's a fairly long history of enameling there.

MS. RIEDEL: Very different than in Japan and the States.

MR. BUTT: Yes, it is different, although a lot of the contemporary people are doing international-type work. It could be from almost anywhere, although frequently there's a flavor of India that comes along with it.

So I helped organize the artists from North America—from Canada, U.S., and Mexico—and then I just helped find other people who could get work from Central and South America, and there was a European group that worked on that, and from Australia, and from all over. So I was involved; I wasn't doing the whole thing, but I was part of the curating of that exhibition.

The work from North America was shipped over, and from the other locations it went directly to India. Then they had the conference that was a three-day-long event that had panels and speakers and the opening of the exhibition there in New Delhi, and—

MS. RIEDEL: This was in 2001, is that right?

MR. BUTT: That's right. That was a great experience; I heard a lot of different opinions at the conference. They had someone who did Indian "dance speak," which has a whole series of formal movements that related to art and the apparel you wear when you're performing the dance. There were enamelists and other artists, and some instructive history of Indian art in general and where enamel fit in.

So then Veenu organized this tour for anyone who wanted to participate. There we were, almost 30 of us, I think—Americans and Europeans and Australians—who went on this tour. Some of it was directly related to enameling; we visited enamel artists and people in workshops, metalsmiths.

Some of it was purely to experience India, and we went to some phenomenal places. We went to Udaipur and Jaipur and Agora, and I mentioned the national park that we went to. And I was just so overwhelmed by it, because I was, in a way, less prepared because I hadn't been quite as interested in India as I was in Japan.

So I went, trying to be open, but it was so amazing and so overwhelming—the imagery, the smells, the food, the people, the culture—in terms of poverty versus wealth and extravagance—people farming in a style that was hundreds of years old next to modern skyscrapers. It was just such a display of contrasts that I was somewhat overwhelmed.

But also—I don't know how to describe it exactly. I can't get it out of my mind. I know at some point I'll have to go back. Almost smitten with the culture is what it's like—the vibrancy plus just the colors and everything. So that was important. And we traveled for that period of time, and then we came back.

MS. RIEDEL: Did that affect your work in any particular way?

MR. BUTT: Well, I think it emphasized the importance of pattern and repetition and the multiplicity of elements and how they combine, because although pattern is used a lot in Japanese art, much of it is reduced to its minimal elements. Whereas in India, a lot of it is just full of as much pattern as you can fit in. It's that repetition and complexity, the whole idea of complexity, whereas in Japan, it's seen through the idea of simplicity. So even though they're not opposing, they manifest themselves in much different ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think the color affected your palette?

MR. BUTT: I think so. Not right away, but it was the idea of magenta and chartreuse and some of those combinations of color that I didn't necessarily see in other places.

Sarah Perkins went on the trip, too, and when she came back, she did this series of begging bowls, and I was impressed by the way she interpreted the experience—and again, it was a vessel, and it was just this simple element—the idea of a simple bowl and yet using pattern and color and texture there—that made it very lush and exuberant.

MS. RIEDEL: I know you've been to Australia and also to China. Do you feel that they've also had any influence on your work?

MR. BUTT: I had a great experience in Australia, and the people were so friendly and interesting, and to see the work that they were doing and the involvement. I went to this international exhibition in Canberra of craft [*Transformations: The Language of Craft*, National Gallery of Australia, 2005], and it was so impressive. They had work from all over the world, and the quality of it was so wonderful. It almost seemed like something that we would have done in the '80s, just a big conference—

MS. RIEDEL: What year was this?

MR. BUTT: Two thousand five. And yet there were people who said the public in Australia doesn't appreciate crafts like they do in the States. And I kept thinking, Oh, really? [Laughs.] But from their perspective, that was true.

MS. RIEDEL: They do seem to have a fairly dynamic art—

MR. BUTT: Yes, it seemed like a lot of energy there. And China was like that, too, in a different way.

MS. RIEDEL: That trip was very recently, right?

MR. BUTT: Yes, that was last summer. Of course, it was before the Olympics and right before the economy started the downturn. I think [the] energy in China was just—this feeling that this was an up-and-coming era for them. They had gone through a period of depressed creativity, but now they were on their way up.

There was so much new architecture and new public art and, just from my point of view, it was—to them, a freedom, even though it was a very limited. I'm sure it was a very restricted freedom from our standpoint. But still, for them, they felt it was a real time of optimism. That energy was obvious.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you see interesting work happening in metal and in enamel?

MR. BUTT: Yes, somewhat. Not as much in enamel and metal—some—but there were classes and schools starting up teaching that. They were very interested in what I was doing and what other foreigners were doing. Obviously, they were looking around to see where they fit in.

So many cultures, like Japan, where they have this incredibly strong and wonderful tradition, they don't want to just cast that aside. They don't want to jettison that, and yet they want to be contemporary; they don't want to be just doing what has been done. And that's not an easy thing to do, because repeating tradition is a difficult thing to overcome: How do you make artwork that's Chinese, but it's also international and deals with the world the way it is today?

Years ago, when I taught at Rhode Island School of Design back in 1975, they had an exchange with the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe. I was teaching a summer class, and there was a Native American student taking classes in Providence for the summer.

His name was Jay Bowen, and at that time Indian jewelry was really popular, especially on the East Coast. He could slap any chunk of turquoise on a piece of silver and sell it for big bucks. And he was doing some of that; he was selling a bunch of stuff. But he wanted to do more than that. And there were people like Charles Loloma, and other Native Americans who were bridging that gap, who were doing work that expressed their culture or reflected their culture but was contemporary work, and that's what he wanted to do. I could tell it was a struggle, and there was no easy answer for that.

The same was true in Japan when I was there. There were young artists who wanted to be contemporary, who wanted to be relevant, but they didn't want to do it at the expense of making art that wasn't Japanese. And that's a difficult thing to balance. In some ways, we don't have as much pressure, because we're such a young country and we're noted for our avant-garde; you don't want to reflect anything from the past. We have no qualms about jettisoning everything that came before us, because we worship what's new.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think of your own work as being of a particularly American tradition, or do you think of it as being part of an international tradition, or do you think of it some other way?

MR. BUTT: Well, I think it's American in that I reflect the landscape of America primarily. However, I've done some pieces that were inspired by Japan, and I've done some pieces that were inspired by China, especially places that I have been that I have experienced.

For me to make a piece about Tibet even though I've never been there doesn't make any sense. So it has to reflect the place I've been, and the place I've been most has been America. So that's what most of my work reflects. And I think it will always somewhat reflect the history of enamel and metal in this country, because that's where I was trained and that's my greatest experience.

I believe the ideas I'm dealing with are somewhat universal, so that even though my text is in English, I still think that someone from elsewhere could appreciate what I'm trying to do with the work.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, because so much of the imagery is made from baseboards, abstract and—

MR. BUTT: Yes, even if it's not a frog and a snake from China, someone from China could look at it and know what a snake and a frog is, even though it is an American frog and an American snake. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Moving back to the question of community, have you had much involvement with the American Craft Council?

MR. BUTT: No, not specifically. Being designated as a fellow was an honor that was bestowed upon me, and I very much appreciate that, but I don't really have to do anything other than someone nominated me, I guess, and I was voted in. So I haven't really participated so much in that.

MS. RIEDEL: More so with SNAG?

MR. BUTT: Yes, unlike SNAG, although my main interaction with SNAG up until fairly recently was going to conferences and reading the magazine and participating in shows. Through the years, when I was occasionally asked to serve on something, I usually bowed out because I had too many other responsibilities.

So when it finally came to the point where I was losing my excuses—my kids were older and weren't living at home anymore; I had a job and I didn't have to worry about losing it—I felt a certain responsibility, because I had been helped in my career through the years by SNAG, directly or indirectly, through exhibitions and the networking through people and reading articles and seeing images in the magazine. I felt I had benefited greatly and that somehow I had a responsibility to give something back to the organization.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned SNAG and *Metalsmith* publications. How significant to you have publications that are fairly field-specific—*Metalsmith* and *Ornament* and then also *American Craft*—how significant have they been to you over time?

MR. BUTT: Well, very significant, both as a teacher and as an artist. In order to stay somewhat current, you have to know what other people are doing, and those magazines do that. You could argue how they might do it differently or better, but they serve that purpose. And I think they've done it fairly well. *American Craft* allowed me to see not only what was being done in metal but in other media. And for a long time I subscribed to *Ceramics Monthly* as well, just because I was interested in forms and vessels, and it was full of forms and vessels.

Maybe if I lived in Manhattan, where I went to museums and exhibitions all the time, I wouldn't have as much of a need to look at the magazine, but for a lot of us that are—or even if you are in those places, many people don't go that often—[laughs]—to be able to pick up the magazine and see what other people are doing out there is important.

When you're teaching, perhaps in painting, a lot of the students have seen other paintings. But in metalsmithing, we get a lot of students who've never seen anything other than Zales or something like that. It's important for them to know that they're not the only ones doing it; it's not just being done in Denton at the University of North Texas, but there are people all over the country and all over the world doing things that relate to what they're doing.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there writers and/or critics that have been especially significant for you? And in your case, I'm thinking, of course, not only of writers for *Metalsmith* or of *American Craft*, but writers in general

MR. BUTT: Oh, I'm not really familiar with art critics specifically. I know Bruce Metcalf, and I've read a lot of his writing. And although I don't agree with everything that he says, I think he's very astute in getting to the point of things, seeing and just promoting communication, exchange, and thinking—critical thinking about ideas and directions that involve our field.

I know Jeannine Falino, who was originally with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and she's done some writing as well. I think she was the author of Jamie Bennett's new book on his work [*Edge of the Sublime: Enamels by Jamie Bennett*, 2008]. She's been important. Marjorie Simon, an enamelist, metalsmith who does good writing and worked on my catalogue for the Memphis show.

MS. RIEDEL: That was a really nice essay, I thought; really nicely done. She does bring nice insight.

MR. BUTT: Ken Chowder wrote a review of my work many years ago. Because we had talked so much, it included a lot of ideas about my work, and some things that maybe I wasn't even aware of that he mentioned. So that was good.

William Faulkner was very important to me for a time. I guess maybe it wasn't until after I moved to Texas, the whole idea of the South and the cultural differences, and just his writing style. I named my son Falkner after William Faulkner. And it's also interesting that my son became an English major. In his senior project, they assigned him William Faulkner. And he hates William Faulkner; he hates his work. [Laughs.]

But he was important to me, and there were other writers of nonfiction that were important, too. I mentioned writers on Zen Buddhism, some of those books: *Zen Dust*, and *The Three Pillars of Zen*[: *Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 1965. Philip Kapleau Roshii]. And several other books by Philip Kapleau. Also Stephen Batchelor wrote a book called *Buddhism Without Beliefs*[: *A Contemporary Guide to Awakening*, 1997], which I really appreciated.

When people ask me if I'm a Buddhist, I say I practice Buddhism; I'm not a religious person in that way. I don't believe in the supernatural or heaven, reincarnation. But the basic principles of Buddhism, I think, are very practical. And Stephen Batchelor boiled that all down, saying that there is such a thing as Buddhism without all the trappings.

[END DISC 3.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel, for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, with the artist Harlan Butt at the artist's summer cabin in Ptarmigan Meadows, Colorado. This is July 28, 2009, disc number four.

So we thought we'd move on towards the end here with a couple [of] larger-picture questions—starting off with political and social commentary and how they might figure in your work, how you see them, or not?

MR. BUTT: Indirectly, I suppose. The environment, global warming—those things have become hot-button issues, but—not that I was unique—but these have been concerns since the '70s. And particularly my close connection and interest in nature leads me to that. At the University of North Texas, we have an environmental science department. There are some people that have written some very enlightening and pertinent information, and done research on these issues.

And they're a lot more complex than I thought they might have been. We may be approaching crisis in terms of humanity versus environment, both in terms of population and in terms of resources: water, fossil fuels, so on. And I think that it is changing our attitude, in a way for the better. Whether or not that's going to happen fast enough, I don't know. Whereas I've talked about how we are one with—we are part of this thing called nature, rather than apart from it.

And of course, the environmental movement has changed in some ways. Stewardship and preservation was the way to go for a long time. But I think there's been a lot of people who saw that as somewhat self-centered, and that what we really should be talking about is not so much preservation but fitting in, becoming part of, respecting nature as if we are part of it rather than as if we are lords over it that deign to take care of it.

So in terms of politics, I'm always interested in where the environment fits into any political agenda—whether you're the Sierra Club or the National Rifle Association. I'm not knee-jerk about any of those organizations, hopefully, but I think what's most important is what is between the cracks in those issues and how, maybe, we can stop the pointless controversy over certain things and move forward. So in terms of politics in general, that's how it relates to my work.

I don't see my individual pieces as making some sort of specific political statement that has an agenda behind it, but just in terms of worldview, and also a new sense of globalism, in terms of these boundaries that we've made up. They are artificial, just like the maps that we make are artificial. And whereas they're there for certain purposes that can be beneficial, they're not the whole story, and that sometimes they cause as many problems as they do benefits. We need to be cautious about thinking about the planet, rather than just thinking about our own environment.

MS. RIEDEL: And a reexamination of humanity's relationship to nature, with nature?

MR. BUTT: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: And then as somebody who clearly spent so much time in Japan, do you feel that there is also any kind of indirect commentary on race or ethnicity in the work?

MR. BUTT: Probably. I hope not. I appreciate cultural difference. As far as race and ethnicity, it's tied in with culture; it's tied in with history. It's fine to celebrate those differences and qualities of uniqueness, but the differences are so outweighed by the similarities that it seems somewhat trivial when we talk about different races and ethnicities or gender.

MS. RIEDEL: I think of your work, often, as finding cultural similarities. When I think of incense burners and the different cultures that have used them, I think of ritual objects and how they appear in so many different cultures and the different forms they take. And it seems that's something that you've explored through your work.

MR. BUTT: I mentioned the word "celebration." In some ways, I like that idea of celebrating the Earth and humanity and how we are all connected. When there are things [that] divide us, then it becomes a much more self-centered way of looking at things. So, hopefully, I can do both—celebrate and also be careful of creating divisions through my work.

I mentioned cultural imperialism, where—am I trying to co-opt Japanese aesthetic even though I'm not Japanese? In fact, in the larger scope of things, I have had a very minimal experience and contact with Japan compared to many people.

It's legitimate to bring that up. I'm not Japanese, any more than someone who makes Indian jewelry who isn't Indian. What right do they have to do that? Why are they taking advantage of some group of people for some small advantage they have and try to usurp that? That's not my intention, and I see it less as trying to take something from that culture and benefit myself rather than to show that it isn't different—that what I see in their culture is in existence in our culture; it's just expressed in a different way.

Originally, when I went to Japan, one of my main objectives was to explore how they look at nature there. By looking at Japanese art, it seemed like they interpreted it in a different way, in many respects, than we did. So why is that? What was it about them that allowed them to see differently? And in going there, I discovered that there were ways of seeing differently, but there are also ways that were very much the same.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you notice, in terms of similarities and differences?

MR. BUTT: Differences—we seem very concerned in exactly duplicating, almost photographically representing nature. I can appreciate that, because there's beauty in that detail, and I've done it myself. And yet in Japan and in China, it seemed like they were trying to capture the essence of the object as much as the actual object. You just show as much as you need to, to get the idea across, and in addition, you're trying to capture the spirit of or the feeling that you might get being there, seeing the object.

So it wasn't that cut and dried; it wasn't that black and white. It isn't that we didn't do that and they did. There was a different way of approaching that, maybe a different emphasis on two different things there. And there were a number of things that I assumed would be so different. You read and look at pictures—and when I went

there, I expected people to be walking around in kimonos, in this sort of traditional Japanese lifestyle. And those things weren't so different. When I got in Tokyo, I could have stayed in New York and seen all that neon.

But there were other things that I didn't expect to be different, I just assumed were universal. Things like the value of the individual versus the group. I just assumed everybody felt that way. There—again, it's not black and white—but there's a different emphasis there. And there are problems, looking at both sides of this, but to sacrifice for the group was a great asset and appreciated—less so, or in a different way, over here. The individualism and doing it your way and so forth was much more appreciated here.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting, too, because certainly you learned that through the apprenticeship process, where anybody's individual strengths or gifts were part of a collaborative effort towards a bigger picture.

MR. BUTT: Right, and as expressed in Zen Buddhism, that the ego, the "self" part of it, is artificial, and so you need to get over that. And considering the group helps lower your individual ego expectations. Of course, it can lead to problems too. Total sacrifice for the larger group can also lead to kamikaze pilots. [Laughs].

MS. RIEDEL: Right. [Laughs.]

How do you see American metalsmithing ranking in an international scale? And do you see it moving in any particular direction?

MR. BUTT: I think it's still admired and people look up to us. I think the European metalsmiths also have that. But in China, I think they were specifically looking at us. I mentioned in Australia; they look at what's going on in America in many parts. Now I think the world is changing, and as China and India become elevated—their cultures and their productivity and the standard of living—things may change.

I don't think we will fall to the bottom, but I think things will even out a little bit; people will be looking in many different cultures to see what's going on. They always have, but to a greater extent. And maybe that's as it should be. For us to be world leaders is a good thing, if that's where we seem to be serving the best interest of the people of the planet. But if it changes so that the best interest of the people of the planet may be a shared leadership role, then that's the way it should be.

MS. RIEDEL: When you say they were looking to the U.S., was it primarily, do you think, for the innovation that, perhaps, comes with that individual innovation, or something else?

MR. BUTT: I guess it certainly is part of that. I think that that whole idea of the studio artist who sits in their loft and making new, innovative, cutting-edge work—that sort of archetype is seen by people all over the world, especially young people. But I think the collaborative nature of work is also growing in strength, and that that may be an equally important avenue.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

I think we've done, really, a fairly thorough job of marching through these questions. Just in summary, a few final thoughts: Looking back, how do you see that your work has been received over time?

MR. BUTT: Well, I feel more comfortable now that my metalsmithing is being noticed by some people. It's kind of like—I wish I could remember the author's name who wrote this—he said something to the effect of how incredibly concerned we can be about something that most of the people in the world feel is irrelevant.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BUTT: Who cares about it? But I feel like—I've been accepted in shows and I've had my work out here, and people in the field, anyway, know who I am, so I feel good about that, but you have to keep it in perspective. It's a tiny little field within art, and art itself is not—[laughs]—appreciated by everyone. When it comes to problems like starvation and overpopulation and pandemics and so forth, how important is what we do? So I think we need to not take ourselves too seriously.

As far as how my work has been accepted, in the early years I was just hoping to get in a show, hoping to be honored or recognized. There were times in my career when I thought, Why the heck am I doing this? Who cares? I could go to medical school or something. I could be doing something to serve humanity better than what I'm doing.

But it's what I do. And at this point, I'm resolved to the fact that it's what I am and that it's not so much a choice anymore. It's just a matter of doing it the best I can with what little time I have left.

MS. RIEDEL: Over this period of time, what do you feel is the importance of metalsmithing and enameling as an art form, and what are its strengths and limitations? And what does it do better than anything else? What is the

essence of it that has kept your attention for this time and continues to keep your attention?

MR. BUTT: Well, personally, I mentioned when I took my first metals class, I just responded to the material, the way it worked. And I still respond to it, what I can make it do and what I have to do to work with it, how I can, rather than forcing it to do something, take into consideration what it wants to do or is able to do, and work with that.

The same goes with enamel. Enamel and metal are two different materials, and to a great extent, they're incompatible materials in a lot of ways. But if you work with their properties that can exist together, then it can be successful. And when things go wrong, it's usually because you've not taken into consideration what those are.

In general, metal is all around us. From the discovery of bronze or gold ore, people have responded to that material—both in the way it works and the way it looks. "Metallic"—it's metal, and even when it's not metal, it refers to metal. So our cars, our buildings—there are so many things that are different types of metal. In terms of clay, it's a little more obvious that it's of the earth. You can dig it right out of the ground and use it just like that. With metal, it's a little bit more removed, so it's, maybe, a little easier to forget. But it, too, is of the earth; it's taken out of the ground and may return to the ground.

I think it's just a material in itself. So that the importance of metalsmithing—well, what's the importance of paint? What's the importance of photographic paper? They're just materials. But each material carries with it properties, both physical properties and cultural and historic properties that—in one way of looking at it, it's baggage. But another way of looking at it is, like all of us, it has a history. It encompasses time and what's happened with it through time.

MS. RIEDEL: All that information is there in the material from the start.

MR. BUTT: Yes. And there are some people that it doesn't matter what material they use. They come up with an idea; they come up with an image; they come up with something, and then they find out what material best makes that thing. That's a way of working, and I don't have a problem with it. But another way of working is to understand the material itself and see how you can work with that and manifest some sort of result being influenced by the material. And usually, it's because you respond to it in some personal way—whether that's psychological or whatever it might be.

MS. RIEDEL: The strengths and limitations, technically as well as visually, how it appears form-wise, what it can become.

MR. BUTT: Right. If it gives you the results that you are imagining or that you hoped would happen—or that it evolves into that. If you had one idea how to work with the material and it leads you to something else, that's also relevant.

MS. RIEDEL: And then enamel feels like a whole separate world, really, in terms of color. I don't know if we've touched on this a whole lot, but the emotional impact of color and how so much of that comes to your work through enamel.

MR. BUTT: Well, the thing that I missed in working with just metals—and I mentioned I tried patinas—is that whole idea of color. And in some ways, that helps emphasize form, where you're not confusing it with color. In nature they exist together—even if it's black and white, everything involves both color and form. So there's always texture and light and all the other things, but the ability to control the color and have so many options with the enameling really opened up new avenues for me, and to be able to deal with that color.

I wasn't that adept at working two-dimensionally and working with paint, whether oil or acrylic. I enjoyed it, but I never felt that comfortable with it. But when I went to a media where there wasn't color, or very limited color, I felt hamstrung, limited. So enamel really opened up new avenues for me. And also to look, traditionally, at how other people combine metal and enamel, in our culture and other cultures. And what techniques, what approaches? So I still find it exciting; I still find it challenging. So I'll keep doing it.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you look back on your career in terms of episodes and periods that are distinct, or do you see a continuity running through the work? And what about it, in particular, matters to you?

MR. BUTT: [Laughs.] Both. And we talked about that in terms of series. But definitely when I give a presentation, I show this picture of me standing in front of the sign at my M.F.A. thesis show and it was called *Containers from Nature* [SIU Art Gallery, Carbondale, IL, 1974]. And I say if I had a show today, I could use the same title.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BUTT: So in some ways, it's been the same all the way through. But the way I did it and the different variations have changed a great deal. And it's changed with me, because I've changed. I'm still the same person, but in so many ways have changed through the years. So, hopefully, things have evolved, and I don't mean in terms of progress but in terms of change and different ways of looking at things and even maybe, to some extent, complexity.

MS. RIEDEL: It feels that way. It's a back-and-forth between simplicity and complexity.

MR. BUTT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think that takes care of what we need to cover. But we discussed the possibility of ending with a poem that you've written here in Colorado, coming full circle. This is something written right here.

MR. BUTT: It's appropriate for here.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Is this written fairly recently?

MR. BUTT: Oh—no.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.]

MR. BUTT: Well, more recently—more recently than some things. The haiku I read at the beginning of this were written within the last couple of weeks. This is in the last few years.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, that's perfect.

MR. BUTT: Okay. And this is a longer poem; it's not a haiku. But it's called "Winning the Struggle for Enlightenment."

This is good. This is really good.

I think this is what I've been looking for.

It's strong, with a solid sense of balance, a restrained asymmetry.

Of course, it's not radically innovative.

It isn't exactly on the cutting edge, whatever that means.

I know I'm no longer an emerging talent.

In fact, it's all too clear that minute by minute, my life is ebbing away.

And I haven't any time to waste.

What I've done so far isn't bad. It's competent, even perceptive.

But it lacks any sense of urgency. There's no rage or intensity, no genius.

And I know I'm capable of that—of genius.

I've just got to stop the bullshit and the compromising and the rationalization.

An execution of form, no matter how beautiful, without any real content, without an intellectual depth and complexity, is irrelevant.

So I just have to sit down and do it. I'll meditate for a moment, here on the porch swing where I
won't be distracted and I'll clarify exactly what it is I'm trying to say.

I know I can do this. I feel good about it—like I'm close to something profound, on the verge of a
kind of enlightenment, something as boundless and universal as this sky.

And, God, it is so beautiful. Even genius seems a little trivial on a day like this.

The breeze is as warm and gentle as breath. I don't know why I feel so drowsy; it's the middle of
the day.

Perhaps I'll lie down here on the swing for just a minute. I'll try to empty my mind.

Yes, that's what I'll do.

I'll stop my thoughts for just a minute and wipe the slate clear. Or maybe I'll just take a short nap.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you, Harlan, very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]