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Oral history interview with Judith Schaechter,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Judith Schaechter on 2011 July 19 and 20. The interview took place at Schaechter's home and studio in Philadelphia, PA, 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.

Judith Schaechter has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Judith Schaechter at the artist's home and studio in Philadelphia on July 19, 2011 for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. This is card number one.

So let's start just dealing with some of the early biographical information. We can go on from there.

JUDITH SCHAECHTER: Okey-doke.

MS. RIEDEL: You were born in Florida, yeah?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Gainesville, Florida, 2/14/1961.

MS. RIEDEL: Valentine's Day.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Valentine's Day, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, 1961. And you lived there to the age of 2, yes?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, I think before 2 we left.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I obviously don't remember—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —but my father was, I guess, a post-doc at the University of Gainesville. I'm not sure what his position was but it didn't—he moved to Boston and he worked at Tufts after that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I had—well, maybe about 1 we left.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was his name? Or what is his name?

MS. SCHAECHTER: His name is Moselio Schaechter but everyone calls him Elio. That's with one L.

MS. RIEDEL: And your mother?

MS. SCHAECHTER: My mother was Barbara Ruth Thompson Schaechter.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And did you have any siblings?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I have a younger brother, John Nathaniel Schaechter.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And what did your father do, or what—he's retired now, yeah?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, he's retired now, sort of. I would say it's semi-retired. He is a microbiologist and he was the chairman of the microbiology department at Tufts Medical School for—well, he was chairman I think 28 years but he worked there for 35.

MS. RIEDEL: And so, did you have a lot of exposure to science and scientific thinking, young post-doc, or, you know, doctoral students growing up?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I wouldn't say a lot, but definitely more than your average bear. And I like science.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And was there a lot of conversation about research and science growing up?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I would say my father wasn't home. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, yeah. I see.

MS. SCHAECHTER: He was a busy guy. So, yes and no, but not that much. That wasn't the flavor of the household per se.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: A little bit.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the flavor?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I don't know. I think that most of my childhood was really colored by my brother's disability more than anything else. But that of course would have happened several years down the line. But he's three years younger than me and he was normal at birth, but he had had encephalitis when he was about a year old.

And I think that my parents didn't realize there was anything abnormal for a while, so there was a little bit of a lag. But he had—I feel somewhat funny going on record with this. If he were to read it—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we don't have to—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, it's really important to me because it has—I mean, it has a lot to do with who I am, but at the same time I just want to be diplomatic and delicate about it.

Basically he had encephalitis and it damaged both the Wernicke and Broca's area of his brain. He's unbelievably intelligent, but there's no way to express it, or no way for him to even access it himself, in a way. It's interesting the impact of cognitive function on the whole rest of the brain.

I wouldn't call him normal, although he might not like that. [Laughs.] But I can see—he would consider it a learning disability. I think it's a little more than that. But anyway, it was his—my mother had been a pianist.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: She had studied music composition as an undergraduate at University of Kansas, and then she'd gone on to study at the University of Pennsylvania, social work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So she had a social work degree. And I think when she realized that my brother —after his illness he stopped crawling, he stopped saying "Mama" and "Dada," and basically he went backwards.

And they caught on that something was very wrong with him, and she basically used her training to address his difficulties for a good part of things. And now—I mean, if she hadn't done that, I would be his parent in some ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But he's quite independent, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, that's lucky. And then she went on and used some of that training to become a director of a school for autism, yeah?

MS. SCHAECHTER: She was endlessly interested in brains, so it's almost bizarre that—yeah, maybe our family was sciencey because it became like a laboratory, but more for her.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And, yeah, she ended up volunteering at a place called the League School of Boston, which was a school for autistic children. Now, this is the 1970s and it was way before anyone talked about an autism spectrum.

This was children who were wearing helmets to keep from hitting themselves, and children who were massively

dysfunctional and also probably developmentally disabled, in addition to having autism. So my idea of autism is a little different than other people's. I mean, these were people who had no access to sociability at all.

Yes, she started out as a volunteer, and obviously at that point my brother already could talk and was already being in the school system. He eventually got mainstreamed, although with incredibly mediocre results, I would say, in public school. His memories of that are all bad.

And he went to college in Springfield, Massachusetts with a big special ed program, and he graduated with a degree in history, which he doesn't use. [They laugh.] But he works in a zoo—he's great—and drives a car, lives in a condo. He's more functional than I am, believe you me. [They laugh.] He's very, very, very political, very, very left wing. If you ask him, what do you think is the most beautiful thing, he'll say, windmills. [They laugh.]

So he had—was already on the road to—not recovery but more or less functionality—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —which, you know, he could have been institutionalized.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: If she hadn't done this, he would not have had language at all. When he had no language, I don't think people—people think that you can pantomime; if you lose your speech you can sit there and do charades.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, only if you knew what communication was in the first place. I mean, he never had the benefit of—for all he knew, people were puking when they opened their mouths and sound came out. He didn't know what it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: He didn't know that interactions were possible. So he was like an animal. And when he was upset he would just start hitting and thrashing about and making wild animal noises. So I could just imagine, without her insight and care, he would have ended up in an institution. And I'm not saying this was all wonderful, because I was, like, the collateral damage.

Here comes my cat. She wants to be in the interview too.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm sure we'll capture her.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So once he was well on the way and in school, my mother volunteered at the League School, and within 10 years she was the director of the school.

Whoa!

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Rain, why don't you go off and do something else?

MS. RIEDEL: No worries.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay, sorry about that.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all. She's just figuring out what we're doing, or trying to.

Okay, so your mother really played a pretty heroic role, and that must have been pretty extraordinary for you as a child to have just that range of experience.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I think—I recently read a book called *The Normal One*, which is about the experience of siblings of problem children, and the problems run from emotional problems to children with cancer or, you know, whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And it was incredibly enlightening to read this book in terms of my own upbringing because I did have a lot of things in common with *The Normal One*.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And my family dynamic had a lot of things in common. Like I remember splitting open my heel and it bleeding, and basically that was not a problem.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I was very—became very self-reliant and independent at a very young age, and my mother was entirely—it seemed to me entirely focused on my brother. And I do remember spending a great amount of energy trying to get her attention.

She was an interesting character because she—I think she was a sort of disastrous mother at the beginning of her mothering career. I believe she had postpartum depression when I was a baby. Her diary and things she said led me to believe that.

And she went into therapy with a psychiatrist around the same time as my brother was—I think that was the straw that broke the camel's back, and she also felt she was mistreating him and me. And she sought help and basically became an entirely different person. No joke.

MS. RIEDEL: How forward-thinking. This would have been, what, early '70s?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, late '60s.

MS. RIEDEL: Late '60s. Interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It was—she was very forward-thinking, and it was a really wonderful, generous—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and fantastic move on her part.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It did not—the damage between her and I got covered up, and we ended up having a different relationship and a very, very positive one. But it wasn't until she died that I dealt with my feelings about my early relationship with her, which was pretty awful.

And she very much wanted to deal with that and I wouldn't. That was not— I just couldn't. But, I mean, she was brave. She didn't pretend that she was perfect or anything, although she was the world's biggest perfectionist of all time.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. [Laughs.] Interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, we'd have a lot to talk about right now if she was around.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I definitely feel her in me, but she was— she really changed and she really became a whole person. She recovered from her childhood traumas and became a really realized individual, like to the point where she had been sort of like, you know, "Miss Happy '50s housewife" for a long time. And then we smoked pot together on several occasions later, you know? I mean, she was—

MS. RIEDEL: That is pretty extraordinary.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I know, right. At one point I'd quit and I was like, "No, Mom, you just do it." [Laughs.]

And she didn't have any friends when she was younger, probably because she was repressing so much that she was, like, really tightly wound. She had a diagnosis as a borderline, but I think it's a little rough to say with those diagnoses in the '60s.

But when she got friends, all her friends were her staff at the League School and they were all basically hippies. And they came over all the time, and they were awesome. I'm still in touch with some of those people—

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and actually I've had some great conversations with them about my mother. They all still miss her. And, yeah, they all loved her very much. She was a blast.

MS. RIEDEL: You know, it's interesting—this is especially interesting because I know—we were saying at lunch you have a very, very, very long and growing list of influences, but you have talked about your mother as a significant influence in your family. So it's interesting, especially in that context.

And another thing that you'd said at lunch that I think bears mentioning here is that she—that the distinction between conscious or unconscious—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —or the border between conscious and unconscious was very porous—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: What I said at lunch was she was unable to lie to herself about herself. She had the biggest bullshit detector in the world because she could tell when anyone was lying to themselves or anyone else. But she was pretty gentle about it.

She was—the fully realized mom was a very generous and kind person who—she was really nonjudgmental and very compassionate about people's troubles and stuff like that, and foibles.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it seems like you both—and especially you as a young person—had a lot of experience and a lot of exposure to a wide range of difficulties, real difficulties, I would say, and real varying degrees of what normal or isn't or what the wide range of normal is.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I definitely want to say something about that, but I want to say something about the idea of—

It's not working?

MS. RIEDEL: It's buzzing. Let me see if there is something I can—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, maybe it's just getting feedback.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, let's try that. That sounds fine.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Is it recording okay?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it's recording just fine. It's picking you up too, so we're good.

MS. SCHAECHTER: When you said I've mentioned a wide range of influence, I think certain types of psychologists would say there's really only one influence and that's your mother. [They laugh.] It doesn't matter if your mother is your father or your uncle or your aunt or your grandparent, but whoever mothers you is going to be the big influence, and she certainly, certainly was.

But what was your—what did you say after that?

MS. RIEDEL: Sorry, I lost that train of thought completely—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, no worries.

MS. RIEDEL: —between the feedback and Rain.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Rain. She really likes to be part of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, and the wide range of pain and normal in growing up.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, you said that I had experienced such an amazing amount of—well, the way I would put it is there were a lot of freaky people around the house. No post-docs. Where were they? [They laugh.] They came over, but very occasionally. It was all my mother's friends.

And she also had a group that we called the "retarded ladies group" that would now be called "the developmentally disabled women's group," but we called it the "retarded ladies group." They named themselves the Happy Times Club, which my mother, who, for all her goodness, had the darkest sense of humor of anyone you'll ever meet.

And she was just scathingly hilarious. She would make fun of them behind their back, and it was too funny. And I would make fun of them and we would just sit there and laugh our heads off. It was terrible, but a real bonding experience. And she—I mean, she told me they named the Club the Happy Times Club, and then she'd just burst out laughing from the irony of it all, like they were so sad, these women.

Anyway, so they came over all the time. Having read *The Normal One*, I do think that I—there was part of—I was very conflicted over the value of being handicapped and ill. Part of me I think to this day believes that you're very fortunate if you're handicapped and ill because Mommy will love you a lot. And at the same time, like I said, I'm very independent and I can't imagine pretending to be ill to get someone to care for me, kind of thing.

So, I don't know if my parents expected more from me because I was the "not handicapped" one, because both of my parents had been underachievers in school who later on became really high achievers, and that's the exact path I followed.

And they never—I remember, like, I came home with a C or a D in math and a note that said, "Judith has a very flippant attitude towards mathematics." And my mother said, "Is this true?" And I had to—she had to explain what flippant meant. And I said, "Well, yeah." And she said, "Why don't you fake it?" [They laugh.] That was her advice. And I was like, "Oh, okay." They weren't obsessed with me getting A's at all, so I didn't. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: What were you interested in as a child? You drew a lot, right? You also played guitar, you built dollhouses.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like you had a real breadth of experience and a breadth of interests.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I also used to play a game where I'd take my little wagon and slam it into a tree down this incline.

MS. RIEDEL: While you were in it?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Gosh.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I rode my bike a lot. I did all sorts of things. Yes, I was a pretty active kid, but I had friends but I was very—I was a loner, I would say. I was a nerd. Not an academic exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you mean by that, "nerd"?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I was socially inept. I mean, I was the kid you'd tease. But I realize now with the perspective of age that I was not the lowest of the totem pole, although I imagined in my persecution fantasies that I was.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Like, in 6th grade, this guy ... just dogged me. And I finally turned around and—like, he bumped into me and said—[speaks sarcastically]—"Oh, excuse me," so I turned around and hit him. And he chased me through the whole school and he never bothered me again. And I was like, whoa, that was interesting, you know?

And meanwhile my friend Nancy was persecuted for many more years to come. And I think there was something about me that was like, she's a little bit risky to really go after. But I felt persecuted despite that. [Laughs.] They might as well have just teased me.

But I was introspective. I loved to read and eat candy. I think reading and eating candy—like, the whole point of Halloween to me was to get as much booty as possible. And then I would, like, get, like, the 10 pieces I was going to read with my—eat with my Nancy Drew book. And that was, like, the most pleasure a human being could possibly have.

MS. RIEDEL: I understand.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I didn't really want to be with my friends that much, although I had some really close friends. I loved art. And you said—making dollhouse stuff and drawing were two entirely different activities to me. There was—drawing was one thing, and making things was another, and making things was almost always making things for the dollhouse.

I just saw the—did you see the show while you were up in New York at the Museum of Arts and Design of miniature models?

MS. RIEDEL: No, not yet.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It had an interesting perverse effect on me. I thought I would go and want to change my field because for so long I've regretted not having a dollhouse as an adult.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Actually, I'd walk out there, it's like, I don't have to do that. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Check.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Check that one off the list. It's a fabulous show, though. But it's sort of—that kind of imitation in art is sort of a dead end to me as an expression. But it was fabulous. The Lori Nix work is amazing.

So, yeah, making things for my dollhouse and—

MS. RIEDEL: You played guitar?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I played guitar while my—I played—my mother was a pianist, so I had piano lessons, which she would smack my hands if I played wrong. So I learned to hate the piano and I insisted on guitar lessons.

And I—you know something? If my mother had not been a musician, I bet I would have—I would have maybe done that. I pursued being a musician for a while. The two things that made me—really tempted me away from stained glass were guitar playing and 3-D animation.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Those were things that I thought, oh my goodness, I would really like to actually devote myself to these. So a decision must be made because stained glass is a demanding mistress, and I quit.

Guitar, it was interesting, because as a creative person I recognized when I got to the point with the guitar where I was up against one of the first walls. It's like a video game. And I knew I wasn't going to get to the next level without, like, a real push. And I decided I wasn't going to make the push, whereas I had already done that with stained glass.

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you when that happened? Was this when you were in your 30s?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, I was an adult in my 30s, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. But you continued to—you still play, or were you—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Occasionally.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: You know, sometimes I ask my students, like, what thing do you want to do with your hands the most, like what physical thing feels great, you know, besides, like, you know, sex? And, I mean, I love to play guitar. It's actually, like, physically pleasurable to me, and I rarely play it. I don't get it but there you go.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

Well, when I look at your work—it made a lot of sense when I read about you studying guitar and playing because there is, I think, a real sense of music and of rhythm in the work, certainly—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, there is a real dialectic going on in the work of the 1990s, where I would write a song and then make a piece about it, and then make a song about that piece, and it would go back and forth and they were really informing each other.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you give an example? Do you remember off the top of your head?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, *I've Trampled a Million Pretty Flowers*, which is at the Philly art museum, is also a song.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I guess I would have to—that whole set of artwork from the sort of after—between '93 and '97, I would go back and forth between black things and white things. So there is this visual thing going on, but also they were very much inspired by the lyrics of the songs and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting, really interesting, and that was the most direct example in your work—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —of the back and forth between the two.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right, but I also did—I mean, certainly I listened to albums and tried to capture the spirit of songs that I loved in pieces, notably this one album called *Whiskey for the Holy Ghost* that I was so obsessed with, but I listened to it too much and I can't listen to it anymore. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And which pieces came out of that, do you know?

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's the same piece as in the 1990s, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, I don't know if my songs sound like those songs. I don't think I was trying for that. But I was trying to—I don't know; there was some sort of cross-pollination going on.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: And that's interesting because—not to jump around too much, but we should touch on that point now. As you've talked about now, I think more recently you've begun to do multiple pieces at once where they actually are cross-pollinating each other, yeah?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, I've had many, many different work methods over the years from many, many years of making one piece at a time, and I felt like each piece was my last, or the most important artwork in the history of art, and that any other piece would undermine that piece, and that was—that kind of focus allowed me to do it.

But I don't know; anytime I think I know something about creativity I find out the opposite is true next week, so—[laughs]—I can't make any statements about it, any committed statements about it.

So now I've—I did that out of necessity. I started all the works at once and then—but that was so exciting to see what happened when they came to completely different conclusions. I honestly don't know how anyone could stand to have someone else make their own work for them. I look at them and I think they are like a starving, deprived, neglected thing going on there.

But, I mean, I guess if your artwork is all conceptual, it doesn't matter. But to me, so much is happening in the process that—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and every time the process changes even a little bit, it's like a paradigm shift, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Right. And that's something you've talked about is how—and I think increasingly more recently, is how essential it is to be involved in the process and how much the work evolves in the process.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, I'm not saying everyone should be making their work or they suck, but—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, you know, you read these things. I just read a statement—an article somewhere about authenticity and artists making their own work and using assistants, and there was a quote from a couple who collect work who said, "We won't buy a piece unless every lick of it is done by the artist." I had just something like sawed 48 pieces of rebar myself by hand and I thought, why? [They laugh.] Why would you do that to somebody? That's just sick.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And especially for a medium, too, like glass where oftentimes people do collaborate, or working groups. I'm thinking more now of blowing work, but—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Actually, my students collaborate with amazing results.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Collaboration can be the cure for sort of what tends to happen when you work too long by yourself.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And it's just—I don't know; everyone should have nice, long careers where they get to try a lot of different work methods because I don't think there's any one way. And people often ask me, "Do you do drawings ahead of time?" I think there's this concept that I have a full-color drawing and then I just make the piece like a machine. First of all, there have been times when I've had no drawing at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And there's times when I have a very worked-up drawing. The general rule is it's in between. I start out with a drawing of a figure and I work with that, but I don't have the drawing in the background. It's fluid. You don't have to do anything. In fact, the only thing you have to do in art is obey the law of the land, you know? Short of that, as far as I'm concerned, anything goes.

MS. RIEDEL: And the land changes each day or with each piece.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, you just have to follow the laws of the country. You can't break the law. Everything else you can do.

I want to see if I can turn on a light because you are a silhouette and it's driving me crazy. I want to look in your eyes.

[Audio break.]

MIJA RIEDEL: All right, we were talking about drawing, and I just want to touch on that before we go back—before we leave childhood altogether because you said drawing and doodling were completely different than building dollhouses.

JUDITH SCHAECHTER: Oh, drawing was great. I had certain types of drawing that I did. I had different categories of drawing too.

MS. RIEDEL: Really, as a child?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, well, for a little bit.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, obviously it changed a lot. At first I was just scribbling. And I have a really funny story of my mother—my mother liked my drawings and thought I was a genius. And this is presumably because she didn't know any better. [Laughs.] But—

MS. RIEDEL: Or maybe she did.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I don't know. For someone who could—who had difficulties as a parent, she could also be very supportive. Basically they never, ever did anything to harm my art career. My love life, entirely different story, but my art career was left completely intact, which is why I am the world's most entitled artist—[they laugh]—which has been nothing but good.

So I had different ways of drawing. And I was going to tell you this story where she had this one drawing of mine that she framed and she would show people and say, "This is Judy's drawing of an angel." And I would just go, "It's a carpet." I think it's so funny. It's like my earliest battle with, like, conceptual versus crafts—no, really, you have no idea how important carpets are. [Laughs.]

I mean, I would say back then I just thought I was drawing a rug—get it right—but now I think, an angel and a carpet—to me the carpets are angels, you know? I love carpets, especially the ones in Las Vegas in hotels. Whoever gets to design those has a great job.

MS. RIEDEL: All those fabulous patterns.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, I know, they're crazy and really colorful.

So I had several ways of drawing. First was I just—

MS. RIEDEL: You would draw the patterns on the rug.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I—no—

MS. RIEDEL: Is that—one was like an angel.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It did look like an angel.

MS. RIEDEL: It did look like an angel, okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But that was just her doing like a Rorschach thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yeah.

MS. SCHAECHTER: You know, I didn't draw an angel; I drew what appeared to me to be a carpet, for whatever reason.

MS. RIEDEL: So you drew a carpet—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —as a child.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, well, I like carpets.

MS. RIEDEL: Fair enough. Well, you said you were fascinated with pattern from the get-go.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, I remember staring at someone's cabinet with a sort of harlequin check. Well, it was a leaded lights pattern in stained glass, those checks, a leaded cabinet door—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and just being fascinated by triangles. I would sit on the toilet and have an amazing time looking at the tiles, because there was, like, these Turner paintings of stormy ocean scenes.

MS. RIEDEL: On the bathroom floor.

MS. SCHAECHTER: On the bathroom floor. It was pretty satisfying, I have to say.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Active imagination at a very young age.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I know, right? Oh, my god, I love that stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I would—the glass in the house had the —it was—you know, it was the 1960s and the glass still had imperfections, and I would go look out those parts and see, like, a distorted world, and I loved that.

So my types of drawing were I liked to draw people. I just liked to draw people. I did illustrated books. I started my own library that I had to make all the books myself and I had, like, little check-out cards and I wrote all the books.

MS. RIEDEL: You wrote the books?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, but they were mostly lousy. I wrote a whole book called *The Pooh-Pooh Book*. [Laughs.] That stage—that particular phase.

I also—when I was a little older —actually, when I was in 1st grade, my teacher Mrs. Fairbanks [sp] was married to an architect, and she brought in blue construction paper and white crayons and had us do elevations. And from there on in, I was totally hooked on architecture. I drew what I called "house plans" for decades, and I still sometimes draw them.

I wanted very much to be an architect. The simple thing that kept me away from majoring in architecture was

my mother saying, "Oh, that needs math." "All right, writing that off my list."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: But I just—to this day I dream about architecture. I don't think I would like to be an architect so I'm glad I didn't become one, because I think the actual job of architect kind of sucks, but I love architecture, not modern necessarily but some. And so I drew house plans. I made dollhouses according to some of these house plans. I also—

MS. RIEDEL: So you built the dollhouses after you drew them?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I had different—I tried.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And then mostly out of tape—[they laugh]— destructible materials. I made a lot of things out of tape. And I also drew—

MS. RIEDEL: Tape and paper.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, like shoeboxes and stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And then I—when I was a little older I drew beauty contests and, like, fashion magazine stuff. And I was obsessed with beauty contests.

And I would say much as a personal fact—like, this is hard for me to bring up—I never felt pretty or attractive. I was never particularly— well, my mother would always say, "You're really unusual-looking." I remember asking my grandmother if I was pretty, and she said, "Pretty is as pretty does," which I took to mean, you're ugly.

And I was told by other children I was very ugly, so I felt very ugly. And I think this is really key to understanding the importance of beauty in my artwork, which is a real issue for me. So I bring it up on record even though I don't like it because I think it influenced my work to such a great extent.

But I really felt like—when my teachers were telling me that art had nothing to do with beauty, that that was never going to—

MS. RIEDEL: This was in RISD?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That it was never, ever going to approach the power making beautiful art was going to give me as a woman. It was like, you can't tell me—[they laugh] —that I would care. I sensed on some gut level that if I wasn't beautiful, I could make beautiful things, and that would make me seem like a beautiful person to people, and that, you're going to tell me that, like, through some quirk of history beauty isn't popular right now, and I care why?

And, no, that was just a remark that—[laughs]. Art school was just a series of things that I rejected. [Laughs.] But, I mean—

MS. RIEDEL: I think you're in good company when you say that.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I know, but I'm also a teacher and I am now on the other end of that. So I also now acknowledge that are teachers who I did not reject, who were very, very important to me.

But I think the whole sort of late-modernist 1970s idea of beauty being not the point of art was—and I actually, in my research, my informal research, I would say that their gripe was really with prettiness and attractiveness more than with beauty. But an argument like that had no sway with my ultimately.

So I did beauty contests—see, I was talking about the beauty contests—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and that's probably part of where that came from. Also, me and my friend Jessie got a hold of these giant Butterick pattern books and we turned them into, like, giant—like the world's heaviest comic

books. We defaced them but we also, you know, made them into, like, dramas where they were talking.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. SCHAECHTER: We also wrote stories together. We had this game where we would write short stories where one person would be "it" and they would be the person who took the dictation.

And so, they would write down a sentence and the other person would not get to read the sentence. And then the other person would just say a sentence like, "Mary and John went out side to play house," or something like that. And they would—she would write that down and then she'd write a third sentence that had to somehow tie them together to start working it into a narrative, but I wouldn't see that sentence and then provide another one.

And of course the person who wasn't seeing the sentences, their job was to, you know, try to sabotage any effort at making a narrative. And we would end up with these really hilarious stories. One was about Hitler getting a brain transplant. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So, Judy, sort of a variation on Exquisite Corpse as a 10-year-old—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —or 12-year-old. Were you even aware of, like, the sense of— where did the idea even come from to create that sort of nonsense narrative or nonlinear narrative?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Jessie. I'm not going to say her last name.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: God forbid she should ever read this. Jessie was, I believe, a true child prodigy in that she lost her brilliance as an adult. She was a genius, and I was her best friend for a long time. Jessie built dollhouses. Jessie came from a very, very modest family and had no toys, basically. She made dollhouses that would make [Mies] van der Rohe and Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright jealous.

She was a genius, and I knew that. I was, like, her little Salieri. She could draw like a thousand times better than me. She could write. She was also breathtakingly beautiful. This girl was something.

She was stellar, and she stood out. I mean, she was, like, the star of every class, and every teacher— [inaudible(1/37:02)]. She never did anything with it. She was a very—sort of a minor—well, she edited the *Goosebumps* series by R.[L.] Stine. So she became an editor at Random House. But, I mean, it was expected that she was going to become a brilliant writer, and she was a brilliant writer as a child and way beyond her years. I mean, freak.

And I don't know if I knew she was a genius as a kid. I just knew she was really fun. [Laughs.] And then, like, just watching her in action is really inspiring, and I was jealous, but it was worth it. So, playing with Jessie— Jessie liked to draw, so we drew a lot.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like an extraordinarily and unusually creative childhood, just full of experimentation in different media and just—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, I also made potions.

MS. RIEDEL: Potions?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Potions involved my mother's purses and my mother's old perfume bottles and, like, anything I could get my hands on that I would—I guess my mother not paying attention to me had these great benefits. [Laughs.] And so I was, like, making potions, and that was a lot of fun too.

MS. RIEDEL: We've mentioned that you were already fascinated with pattern, and we've mentioned in many other interviews or in passing your interest also in Lite-Brite as a child. Did that have any lasting ramifications, do you think, or passing—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, the reason I remember it is because I went through a phase where I tried very hard to figure out if my proclivity— is that a word—toward stained glass, if it had any roots.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And because when I discovered stained glass it was like being hit by a truck. And, by the

way, I was once hit by a truck. I can tell you that story too.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, recently too.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, no, I was hit by a truck as a kid.

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: That was an example of my mother being, like, completely out of it: "Oh, the kid was hit by a truck. Oh, well, okay, she looks fine." You know, I passed out, so I lost consciousness, but—

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, I don't know, like 10 or 11. And it was my fault. I was going down my hill on a bike and I sideswiped a truck on a major road. I was on a little road and I wasn't looking. And the truck driver got out of the car and took me home. But I thought I'd been unconscious for, like, hours, but I had only been unconscious for maybe a minute. And it was very frightening, but—

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Anyway, so getting hit by—

MS. RIEDEL: Roots of glass.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, when I discovered glass it was like getting hit by a truck, but not like that experience of getting hit by a truck.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: It was like getting hit by a really good truck —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —a truck full of chocolate and ice cream. [They laugh.] And I knew right away that this was —and it's funny because I had had a lot of sort of weekend art lessons. My grandmother was a painter, sort of. I mean, she started when she was 70, but I always said, "Grandma is a painter." And my grandma had me painting with oil paints—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, she did?

MS. SCHAECHTER: —when I was pretty young.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I went to RISD pre-college program in high school and majored in painting. I self-identified as a painter and I knew I was going to be a painter. So no one was more surprised than me when I diverted from that course in a big way and very suddenly.

And my painting teacher was very angry with me and said exactly what I would say to a student, which is, "How can you possibly know," when I said, "This is it. This is the thing." Well, I knew, and I definitely knew.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did you know?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I've had 30 years of experience—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —since that moment—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and I have a lot of theories as to why. And I think it was sort of a perfect storm of confluences—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —that made it happen. I definitely liked Lite-Brite as a child, and also Colorforms. Now, I know Colorforms—I don't know if you—did you have Colorforms?

MS. RIEDEL: I do know Colorforms, yes. I don't really remember what they are but I remember the word.

MS. SCHAECHTER: They're, like, these flat plastic things—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —that you put on a board and they would stick—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —kind of like when you can stick things to a metal surface too, just from—by being sort of sticky.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And both Colorforms and Lite-Brite had options where you didn't have to use the provided templates.

MS. RIEDEL: That's right. I remember.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Now, if there's one thing I hated as a kid, it's provided templates.

MS. RIEDEL: Templates.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I hope there are still children like this because I understand there aren't. [Laughs.]

But I—you know, provided templates, you can take them and stuff them. I remember doing things with Lite-Brite that were over the top. I mean, I just love the color. I don't think there's anything particularly different about me as a human being. I think colored light is—very few things are universally beautiful. There's a lot of things that are universally pretty, like symmetry—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and grids, but things that are universally, like, exquisitely, painfully beautiful, I think everyone is attracted to light and it's, you know, for obvious reasons. Without the sun we wouldn't be here. So we respond to it very viscerally, and I think I did as a child.

I'm also—for whatever reason I'm a color person. People look at my stained glass and my work and they think—there's this overwhelming response to it as the subject matter, whereas I've been making these pieces for over a month, two months at a time, and I'm thinking the whole time about lines and color.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I am not method acting these goals and these things, you know. All I'm thinking about is does this color look good with that color? And all I want—I'm trying to have, like, the best—I also like kaleidoscopes. I still like kaleidoscopes. So I like a very amped-up palette and a lot of bright colors.

So, both Colorforms and Lite-Brite were what I consider to be the antecedents of stained glass. I also did some of those plastic bake-in-the-oven sun-catchers.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I remember Freshman Foundation at RISD doing some projects with fish skeletons, like I made them out of cardboard and put colored acetate in them. And apparently I was—I look at that as a sort of proto stained glass project.

The reasons I'd say stained glass— should I answer that now, why it became the—

MS. RIEDEL: Sure. We're here.

MS. SCHAECHTER: You're so easy.

The perfect confluence were it—I have ADD. I've never been diagnosed. It just seems self-evident. I'd need 18

hours to accomplish five hours worth of work, and then I've got to rub that spot out of the kitchen floor right now, kind of stuff. I mean, this morning I went back and forth between checking my email and looking for that cardinal between two rooms. It was like, well, I'm getting a lot of exercise; I wish I could focus. [Laughs.] But I'm really bad.

And what happened with painting was —sophomore year you get to major at RISD. Your first semester sophomore year you declare your major in your freshman year and I declared painting. I was in the painting department. The first semester you paint—it's very structured. You paint landscapes, still lifes and models.

Second semester the teacher said, "Okay, find your voice." I don't remember if he shot off a pistol at a starting gate, but it had that effect. And that's when I remember thinking, I don't know what my voice is but I know it's fantastic—[laughs]—or I want it to be fantastic. And I knew—I guess the sort of tadpole germination sort of focused around my imagination and figuration and color.

And other than that, I don't think I had too much information about what I was about, or I thought I didn't is more accurate to say, because something happened where it was like the—I'll tell you in secret.

So, I'm casting about to find my voice, and at the same time I took the stained glass class—all right, but first with painting. When I'm trying to find my voice, the first thing that would happen is that I would set up a blank canvas. And the blank canvas bothered me. I did not like starting things. And so, therefore, the whiteness of the canvas was irritating and I wanted to get rid of it.

So I would take a brush and I would just cover it with marks, with the intention of, like, turning it into something. And this teacher was basically an abstract expressionist, so this suited him fine. And I would eventually get to a stage where there was stuff happening but there was stuff that was not good, so I'd just go over it with white and I would eventually come back to a white canvas.

And my paintings were, you know, unmaking themselves. And at the same time I was doing stained glass. Stained glass takes a long time to manipulate the material. There's a lot of procedural stuff. And I think what was happening was by the time I got it to do something, I had some emotional transference on this object and I wasn't going to throw it out, damn it. And so that—it corrected my ADD, basically, and I was in sync with this.

So where I was flitting around like a maniac with painting—and if they had only taught me how to, like, make my own rabbit skin glue and glaze like a Renaissance master, I would be a painter, but no. [They laugh.] So I got into this heavily technical stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I liked the color. I liked the fact that it—although I like the smell of oil paint, I bloody well can't stand the mess it makes on your clothes. And stained glass, I was fooled into thinking it was clean—[they laugh]—which it is not, but I—it does not make an obvious mess. What happens is you end up with a shirt full of holes because the glass dust gives you, like, Swiss cheese in your tee shirt.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And of course it cuts you, but—I was actually afraid of blood when I started, believe it or not, but so strong was my desire to work in this medium that I got over my fear of blood. That is actually amazing because I was a pretty phobic kid. So, it corrected my ADD. It was clean.

Another thing that I think would have expressed itself back then is like, wow, this medium is wide open for discovery. Like basically people painted on it, and then Tiffany did whatever he did with it, but that's it. Two things have happened in—you know, a thousand years of stained glass, two things have happened. That's awesome because I can do something with this.

What was happening sort of subconsciously was—with painting was, I have nothing to add to this history. It's just intimidating. Everything has been done that's good. I have nothing to say. [Laughs.] And my—I could do the same thing—in fact, for a while I did do the same things in glass that I did in painting, and I can just tell you, they were not good in painting. They looked stupid, whereas in glass they had some kind of integrity.

So that was another attractive thing about it. I was going to quit, by the way. I never intended to stay with glass. My whole—I was like, this is just going to be kind of like my full-time hobby while I'm in school and then I'll go back to the serious business of painting.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And that did not happen. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Was it the light of glass, the same compositions in glass, do you think that made the difference rather than a painted composition? Was it the way that you had to structure them and so that it came out looking differently? What about the image was successful in glass that wasn't in painting, do you think?

MS. SCHAECHTER: You know, I think it goes back to the very fundamentals of why stained glass itself is so powerful and why it's a religious medium. I think that what looked like stupid cartoons in painting looked like saints in stained glass.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Maybe I'm not really answering your question —

MS. RIEDEL: No, that's—

MS. SCHAECHTER: —but I am always—I am not sure exactly why, but the—I mean, I do want to go on at some point about what light means and the effect of light. If you ever interview other stained glass or glass people, they rhapsodize about it, for good reason. It's an incredibly important aspect of it.

And, yes, the light of stained glass moves me deeply, as it hopefully does anyone looking at my work and people looking at other glass objects. I mean, people just—I mean, this is why people like Christmas lights. People hate this because it's so fundamentally not intellectual. [Laughs.] But that doesn't mean it's stupid. People have a hard time grasping that difference.

And I don't ever want to sound like I'm intellectual bashing, but it's just a different kind of intelligence. "Calling Dr. Gardner [sp]!" [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting because some—one of the reviews about your work, or one of the articles, talked about your work as being emotionally intense rather than academically cool. And I mean cool as in refined.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think there is—there's an emotional intensity. There is not necessarily— there is not a sense of restraint or of cool. Does that make sense? Does that ring true with you?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I always—it was my goal to become a super-cool hipster person. So I limited that to my actual life and I kept the windows hot and passionate, baby. I'm not interested in cool, emotionless artwork—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —so I'm not going to make something that I'm not interested in.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's not the kind of work I like to look at.

You know, one thing that happened to me as a child that I now see as an incredibly important experience was when my father took me frequently to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. And this was before people protected their children from scary images and they cleaned up Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen. Hans Christian Andersen was way worse than Grimm. He was just a sick guy. I love him. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Very dense.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So this is before people protected their children, and so my father brought me to the Museum of Fine Arts and I—you know, the stained glass historian Virginia Raguin—that's R-A-G-U-I-N—she researched this image for me and found it.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It is St. Hippolyte. He was drawn and quartered. And there is a picture of it at the Boston MFA that I could not get enough of as a kid. And I also remember John the Baptist being beheaded, and wanting to see these over and over and over again.

And I know that psychologists believe the way memory is constructed is you tell a story about a story that you

told a story about, and it gets codified as words that have almost—you know, if you could actually go back in time and be there as a witness, it would not be that experience. It gets changed like a game of telephone.

So, my very imperfect memory tells me that what I saw when I saw those images was the power of art displayed in its absolute, uncompromising glory to a little girl, like this is what art can do. Art can freak you out! [They laugh.] And it's, like, not to be messed with. I mean, it's a very, very powerful thing.

And as far as I can tell, those images are not particularly—well, actually, in some way they are strangely verbal because they're based on narratives, but they—I didn't know the narratives. I wasn't a Christian. So, I just saw it for what it was. I have a very long history of not being interested in the context for anything I'm looking at, which is why I have, oh, I don't know, how many images that I like to look at that I don't care where they came from—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —or why or what anyone was thinking about when they made them.

MS. RIEDEL: And I have that sense when I look at your work. I mean, I've been thinking about it extensively for the past few months, and there is a sense of just images, the power of the image being pulled from so many cultures, from so many centuries and just reassembled in your mind and then—

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think I'm a giant waste processing plant.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: One of the things—my parents had this book of Danish cartoons. I could actually get one and show you, because I have them now. I never—they spoke Danish. It never even occurred to me to ask them to tell me what the captions said. I didn't care.

They were—actually, I did, on occasion, ask. And I found out later they were all about Khrushchev. Well, I really don't care now. [Laughs.] Oh, and Churchill. And these things were just like, whatever. I mean, what was interesting to me was the way they distorted the figures. And they were basically surrealistic. They were by—I'm not going to say it because I can't even spell it for you.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's okay.

MS. RIEDEL: It's like Beau Bjornson [sp], a lot of B-Js in there. And they were kind of like *Mad* magazine, which is one of my most important art influences.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I just like the way they exaggerated the figures, basically. And I like the fact that I didn't know what it meant. It meant that I could apply my—well, it didn't mean that I could apply my own narrative to it, because I didn't. I just looked at them.

I mean, my narratives were very, very, very superficial, I would say. I don't ever look at images and think about plot lines. So when people call my work narrative I always get confused because to me a narrative has a beginning, a middle and an end—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and a cliffhanger and, like, drama. And to me, my things are a moment that has been inevitably and indelibly frozen, and it had to be "that" moment. There is no before that moment and there is no after that moment. And that's how I tend to look at images too. So I don't know what it is that I'm getting out of them, but I sure like them.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, many of them feel like a climax moment in a narrative.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. Well, I mean, I actually think of Beau Bjornson—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —but I hope mine do too.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think—I'm trying to capture a moment where, yeah, a change happens.

MS. RIEDEL: Which is—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Sort of a transitional moment.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Now, this is when you're younger?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, this is the work currently.

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, when I'm younger—well, I think—I remember when I was younger I was not knowing—see, I had no problems because I was the normal one, so of course I didn't have ADD. I also didn't have bad eyes. I went to the school doctor and took the eye test and fluked on purpose because I could not convince my mother I needed glasses—who had such a double agenda with that one.

First of all, I was never sick. And second of all, I certainly wasn't going to need glasses because she had glasses and she hated them. I wanted glasses so bad that I flunked the test and I got myself some glasses. And I definitely need glasses. These are bifocals. I need trifocals, but—[laughs]. I need quad focals.

Anyway, so, now this had to do with —

MS. RIEDEL: Comics originally.

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, no, has to do with drawing as a child and looking at stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Narrative?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Hmm, not narrative.

MS. RIEDEL: Translating to a very simple moment in time?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, it's a much more recent thought than that. I'm sorry. I usually try to remember. I'm excited. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's good. That's good.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I know, right? When we talk about me—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, this is the wagon train. We'll move forward then we'll circle back around and we'll figure out what that point was.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I was thinking about some type of drawing when I was a teenager, and—

MS. RIEDEL: You talked about the elongated and distorted figure. Was it that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, that's true. No, huh-uh, it isn't that clearly related to glasses. But I'll probably think of it later.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that sense of those figures in those comics being distorted longer—were you clear on that even as a child that those figures were intentionally drawn?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. I was going to say before when we were talking about why stained glass was the perfect storm, one thing that happened was that because I was so deeply in awe of the painting traditions and so completely not in awe of glass and craft—I was very snotty—that it allowed me to access the information that I needed to become an artist in one fell swoop, in one moment, basically.

So, I had done some really stupid designs for stained glass windows for the class, and my teacher said, "Those aren't very good." And I said, "Oh, yeah? What I want to do you can't do." And he said, "You can do anything." And I brought in my doodles. And the thing is, is I had this high, serious abstract expressionist painting teacher. I felt that, you know, art was this sort of very complicated confrontation with one's creativity.

And all my life I had been getting my papers back from my classes in grade school and high school, and they

were literally covered with doodles, sometimes so you couldn't necessarily see what the work was supposed to be. And they would always say, "Stop doodling. Stop doodling."

So I brought in my doodles, and it was—it was a very intense moment of discovery that I would like to compare to the end of *The Wizard of Oz*—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —where there was like—I had taken, like, a tornado and, like, traveled to Oz with these characters. And I was asking—you know, I was searching for this thing that I was desperately in need: How can I get home from here? I need to get there. I need this thing. And it was there the whole time.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: I always want to cry when I say—I was so— I think about young artists trying so hard to find themselves and how hard it is. And I think when I found it, it was there. It wasn't finding it; it was just like being, oh, that, you know? And it was—it was so funny. I mean, it was so simple.

And that was another thing why I wasn't going to go back into painting, because my painting teacher did not support figurative art at all, which he called illustration. And at one point I thought I was just a mere illustrator. And I was crying and I said, "Well, I guess I'll have to be," because I wasn't going to quit making figures. And he didn't like pattern either so—he was a real bully.

So it was—because I could do my doodles in stained glass—and they seemed to be married to each other. It was like—it was perfect for that, whereas it was—it was a no-brainer. You couldn't have stopped me, like no—I became uncritiqueable because nothing—no critique was going to take away the joy I was feeling. It would just be like the—as I like to say sometimes, the tap of a dull butter knife on the heel of my boot. It's like, oh, I think I hear something.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Not really. I mean, it was too joyous. So their words didn't have any power of sway.

And I still don't remember why I brought up wearing glasses. [They laugh.] I sure do like wearing glasses, though.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So, why don't you ask a question? I actually came to the end of a line of thinking. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Is there anything more that we should look into about the doodling at this point in time, the early-on sense of that? I mean, look, I'm sure it's something we'll revisit time and time again because it is—it's such an important part of your process. Has its role, or your thoughts about it, changed over the past 30 years? Have you been more clear about what—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think my doodles have become less creative, which is really annoying to me. In fact, I've become less creative as I've gotten older. And by "creative" I mean sort of inventive and really sort of diverse. So, the upside is I'm more focused, which is sort of welcome.

But I always doodled female faces. I used to doodle a lot more other things too, and a lot more—

MS. RIEDEL: Such as?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, just patterns and scribbles.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I like—I don't know; I'd have to dig out my stuff. The more distracted I am, the better. I've said that a number of times.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But basically things that used to be good distractions don't distract me enough anymore, like *Law and Order*—not good enough. I really need, like, a podcast on—TED talks can be good, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's got to be something really—so, faculty meetings are probably the be-all and end-all. [They laugh.] And I can usually get a few good pages out of a faculty meeting. So, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And you're teaching a class now, right—now I am jumping around—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —but it seems an appropriate moment to ask— you're teaching a class about drawing and the imagination right now in New York, right?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm not teaching it anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I taught it for a couple of years. If I do that again I'd have to re-do the curriculum.

That was interesting because that was at the New York Academy, which is a very strong realist figural school. It was actually founded with Andy Warhol's money to ensure that classical drawing education not get deleted from the cannon. And so they draw from plaster casts, kind of like they do at the Pennsylvania Academy.

And they do learn very rigorously these sort of technical things, which I think is fabulous. However, I would really need to think about how to format that class so that it had more value to the students.

The first thing that happens when you allow people who are very tied to drawing from life draw from the imagination is that they start relying on tropes like cartoons. Everything starts looking like *The Flintstones* or something. And it's like, well, that's not your imagination; that would be Hanna-Barbera's imagination. [They laugh.] No can do.

Also, I don't know what it is about surrealism but it's like, isn't there anything else in your imagination, people? I just got sick of looking at it. And I was a little hard-pressed to think of how I could get them to change. So, that's why I say the course needs to be rethought.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. It seems to have worked very successfully for you, though—for years something about drawing, accessing some part of the imagination that wasn't otherwise accessed. Is that accurate?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. And I think I'm going about it in a—you see, I said earlier that I had access to my unconscious, but there's these things that I don't understand at all, like I don't know how my images get developed. It's almost a mystery to me. I look at them and sometimes I ask them for information and they tell me. This is not me hearing voices.

MS. RIEDEL: No. [They laugh.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I want the—I want the person reading this to understand it too. I just—I wouldn't say that I have visions, but I rely on these things as separate entities to inform me as to what their needs are.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it sounds like—we've talked about your interest in writing and in words, maybe not yet on the card, but writers all talk about having characters who will then begin to tell the story.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds as if in the process—

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's right.

MS. RIEDEL: —the narrative, or whatever, the image, unfolds.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It reveals itself to me. I don't—and it's slow sometimes, and I don't feel like it comes from me. So—

MS. RIEDEL: But that's the process of actually making the work versus the drawing or the doodling process.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, but it's also the process of how the image is developed. So if it's a girl, I start with just a face, and then I—I have all these Photoshop files, and the faces—I draw the faces separate from the bodies—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and attach them. I sew them on, you know? And then that starts to imply what they might be doing, or where they might be located.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Sometimes it just has to do with what colors I want to use.

MS. RIEDEL: You've talked about—you've talked at great length about your process in the way that you develop image. And it's really, I think wonderful to document, but we can work on that here too. But it almost always starts with a face. And then you've talked about having to develop a context for the face, be it a body—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —or a narrative landscape, a pattern, some sort of composition, abstract composition.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. There was a—I went through—I would say from the time I graduated from college—from 1983 to 1993, I think I worked pretty solidly on developing pictorial space. I wouldn't say that landscapes in interiors, because they were more like—like, my idea of an interior is a cube with wallpaper on it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It wasn't convincing space, but it—or tableaus, but they were something that sort of passed for the idea of an interior.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: The same with the landscape. It wasn't a real investigation of landscape space.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But it was like, wow, I'll put some trees and a sky behind the person and then it will be a landscape.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: Is that something like the *Pale Oval* piece that you're—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. Well, no. No, *Pale Oval* is later. It would be something like *Feeds on Fire*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And then I went—in the early '90s I got really interested in space that was much more abstract. So that would—*Pale Oval* might be—like, because let's say you have a—what do you call it, like a slider bar. You've got a range of possibilities, from definitely realist space to completely definitely abstract space that's very flat when you're working with a two-dimensional artwork.

And I would say in the '90s I wanted things to be in the middle. I wanted things to have realist elements but be very abstract, so like *Pale Oval* and *Swan Dive*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And pieces like that were—and, I mean, it's not every single piece. This isn't hard and fast true for everything, but just a general trend.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I got really interested in game boards late in the '90s and did stuff with that. And I was really doing a lot of sort of abstract space. I've done some more—I don't know what I'm into right now, to be honest.

MS. RIEDEL: And that would be something like multiplication tables.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, then I went through a very brief phase that was brought on by a very specific event, which was my gallery telling me that certain clients wanted pieces but were waiting for typical Schaechters.

And if she wanted me to make typical Schaechters, that couldn't have been a worse way to inspire them because it just made me question them to the absolute depths of the abyss, because I knew what she meant by "typical Schaechter." It would be sort of an anguished woman in a patterned background, perhaps a tableau setting.

And I just was like, oh, I don't want to make it just because people want them. And, I mean, I want people to want them but I don't—I'm not making merchandise, you know? Well, yes I am but—[they laugh]. But you know what I'm saying, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: The motivation has to be a little more in depth than that. So I just was really questioning it, and I stopped doing figures altogether for a very brief period of time.

MS. RIEDEL: That is 2006, 2008, something like that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, it was more like 2005 through 2008. But, I mean, I did some—I did some animal pieces, and figures came back pretty handily because I missed them.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was right around the time you did the commission for the Museum of Arts and Design, too, right?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. Yes, that was definitely part of that, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: *Seeing is Believing*, right?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we have really—we have jumped around a little bit, so before I move on more specifically let's just see if there's anything else—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Do you need more water?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, maybe let's take a quick break and get a little more water.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay.

[Audio break.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So, just to finish up early childhood through college, anything in particular that we should address about RISD? Who in particular—I know you studied with Ursula Huth, yeah?

JUDITH SCHAECHTER: Ursula Huth was my—she was a graduate student while I was there, and she was teaching the stained glass elective class.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And, yes, she was my first teacher, and then I was her TA. I mostly rebelled against everything she said, although she was pretty—she was a positive influence, basically. She was a real harsh person.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look back on that RISD experience, are there particular strengths or weaknesses that you recognize about it now?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think my experience at RISD was quite unique in that I was able to design my own major in a way that was because I sort of fell through the cracks, oh, into some coincidences.

When I was—I switched into the glass program at the beginning of my junior year, and I had Richard Harned as a professor, who was a wonderful, wonderful teacher. Richard Harned was only there a year before he was dismissed. I believe he led a teacher's strike with the union and that was the end of him.

And then Bruce Chao came in, but he had—Richard had taken apart the hot shop so there was no glass-blowing facilities. And Bruce, who pretty much insists that glass majors blow glass, did not have any facility for me to blow glass, so I was allowed to do—to continue only making stained glass windows.

I also had effectively eliminated all of my electives, including my winter session, which is a six-week session that has nothing to do with your major. You can take, you know, underwater basket weaving if you're a painter, or whatever, and you're supposed to. I mean, they encourage it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Every single elective that wasn't liberal arts I took; I took in independent study for stained glass. And I had—my education was absurdly focused on me independently studying stained glass.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary. So your two final years, really—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —junior and senior year.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. It was quite intense. I did it all the time. And then I also painted again. The minute I quit painting I began again—along with painting. I painted until—1987 was my last painting, and I think—first of all, I just couldn't smoke anymore pot. I hate pot, and painting was entirely dependent on smoking pot. [Laughs.] And it just doesn't agree with me.

Also, I could express myself more completely in glass, I believe. For what—it seemed—what happened in my experience was that it fell by the wayside, but what I think is the reason for that is glass just took over.

About RISD, I would like to mention my professor Dirk Bach, who is a liberal arts professor of enormous influence on me as a thinker.

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MS. SCHAECHTER: He was such a good professor. I took every class he took [sic], including things like history of photography and history of sculpture. Anything he taught I wanted to be a part of.

First of all, he was really good looking. Does that count as a good reason to take a class? [They laugh.] Second of all, he was dynamic. He was passionate about any subject that he taught. And it didn't matter; he could be lecturing on, you know, paint peeling and it would be the most interesting subject in the world.

So, the one class he taught that changed my life—don't laugh; you're going to laugh—it was called "Sky Father, Earth Mother."

MS. RIEDEL: I read that, yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And it was—in the semester he explained a very holistic theory of what art was to people, not unlike what Ellen Dissanayake would say, and how universal it is. His take on it—and he spent a semester on it. He was very eloquent and—I don't even want to say very convincing because that makes it sound like it's an argument. There's no argument. He was right. [Laughs.] The man spoke the truth. And he was very compelling. How's that?

In essence, and in a very feeble sound bite, he said it was like a you-are-here map. You would look at this thing and you would have—you would be in some sort of a dialogue with the maker, and it would put you in a greater context. And it wouldn't—you would see the context through the artwork and it would be a microcosmic reflection of you and your place. And—

MS. RIEDEL: Can you give an example?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Because—I mean, I could give a million examples but it's just—it's so lofty and abstract. But, I mean, let's see, I would say the simplest thing is if—I don't want to give a personal example to me but, like, if one is looking—I don't know; maybe it's better as a song.

Like, when you hear a piece of music that's so deeply moving that you are, like, held aloft on the wings of this and you understand that you were born to hear this beautiful piece of music right now, and you feel like it's talking to you and you're talking to them. And it's not like a—well, that is how stalkers are born—[they laugh]—but it's meaningful.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, it is a form of actual communication even though you don't have actual access to each other. But it's like the corporeal boundaries are completely eroded and here is, like, stardust, you know. And it's an amazing feeling, and you're at one with the universe in that moment and—

MS. RIEDEL: Right—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —entering into and participating in it.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So when I say, you are here, it's like you are everywhere.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But you get those feelings from, really, inspired works of art, and I think that's what he was trying to say. Now—

MS. RIEDEL: And did that also, then, translate to the fact that it would be—those pieces of work would be, as were saying over lunch, accessible to people from all different times and all different cultures?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, of course, and my aim was—I wanted my work to be like work that made me feel like that because, I mean, I heard songs I loved—"Philadelphia Freedom," by Elton John. ... would call me on the phone and say, "It's on, it's on." [They laugh.] And I could listen to—isn't that funny? This is when I was in, like, 5th grade.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I would listen to it and I always loved that song, and various other songs in my life.

You know what? I think of all the—I hate to name-drop U2 because I think they're kind of goofy as artists; I wouldn't hold them up as an example of, like, the best art ever made in music, but there's something about their songs where they're all anthems, they're all glorious, they all make you want to join the Army and fight for the freedom of whoever, like they're— whatever it is, whatever these chord progressions are, they're like drugs. [Laughs.] They're really good at it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But there's something—I wanted my stuff to move people the way I've been moved, and anything short of that was not going to be worth it.

And I wanted—you asked me about my RISD experience. I wanted to say that I found my painting teacher and his devaluation of figuration and narration and patterning—well, while it allowed me to define myself with much more clarity than would have been possible with anything less than a steamrolling bully, it also challenged me right out of the department. So—

MS. RIEDEL: Do you want to mention who that was or—

MS. SCHAECHTER: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's not that hard to find out. I found his—I saw his work later, and that was very helpful in me putting him in his proper place in my brain, although he still occupies space there, oddly enough. He still critiques me. But I hated his work when I saw it, and I didn't hate it because I hated him. I didn't hate him, actually. My problem with him was that I tried—I wanted to please him, and I knew that wanting to please him and wanting to be myself were two different things—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and they were incompatible, not worth pursuing. So—

MS. RIEDEL: But that's a difficult bridge to cross, especially as a young college student, to figure that out.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It was not difficult for me to cross that bridge.

MS. RIEDEL: No? Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It was easy as pie.

MS. RIEDEL: You ran across that bridge.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I ran across the bridge. [They laugh.] Like I say, the glass was beckoning: Come on.

MS. RIEDEL: When you left—when you finished at RISD you moved almost immediately to Philadelphia; is that correct?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, moved within days.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the pull here? And did you immediately set up—you didn't immediately set up a shop. You went back to painting briefly, didn't you?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, no, it's a sillier story than that. I moved here because of a guy.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I switched back to painting, which has always been my plan because I didn't—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: The main piece of equipment that I need to make my work is a sandblaster, and the sandblaster is basically—you need a really enormous air compressor, and unless you're actually living somewhere permanently there is no air compressor —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —to be had. So I didn't know how I was going to do that, and I thought that glass is for hobbyists and, you know—what do you call crafts people when you want to really disrespect them? I don't know, idiots? [They laugh.] No, no, it was for sturdy yeoman and nonthinking types. I wasn't—I was an artist, blah, blah, blah—all the stuff I don't believe anymore. [Laughs.]

And I don't know how strongly I even believed it then. I had convinced myself. I was a sort of—I think actually, as a teacher and an amateur student of creativity, I think something happens in your junior year—or it doesn't matter when your junior year happens but the—after you sort of—when you're starting to find your voice as an artist, very shortly after you make a couple of good things, you fall in love with the idea of being meaningful.

And this is a very critical moment because that can make or break you. Like many young artists I was in love with the idea of being profound. And, fortunately, my great fondness for not knowing what anything meant at all stepped in the same day. [Laughs.]

And so, I never did become a conceptual artist. There was a moment when I thought about it. I did like it. I liked the idea. And I loved the idea of, you know, meaningfulness, as I notice many of my students do. They also think, you know, the best way to save the world is to, you know, do very concrete things like actually help people, stuff like that. I'm too selfish for that.

MS. RIEDEL: You began exhibiting work, though, almost immediately after you graduated. So somehow you found a way to start working in glass again.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I was working at Utrecht Art Supply when I noticed myself making shopping lists of everything I need to make a stained glass window. I did go back to painting, and also sculpture. Well, I never was much of a sculptor, although I always dabbled.

So I started, you know, kind of getting back into this, but it was—it's such a hard year. I mean, every time my students graduated they said, "Oh, that year, it's so awful." And I had a typical awful year, although I did not know the worst was yet to come, because my mother died and all that stuff happened a few years after that, and that was horrible, horrible stuff.

But I had a normal awful time, and the boyfriend I moved here for didn't want to stay with me at all. Well, he told me ahead of time. I was in love with the idea of Philadelphia because I could not afford Manhattan or New York at all. I didn't know anyone there. And I didn't want to move back home to Boston, so, I mean, this seemed like the best option and I was hoping it would work out with this guy.

So I moved here. I got a job at Utrecht. I was going to be a painter. The guy dumped me. I wrote a lot of letters that started like this: "Dear so and so, you will regret the day you were born. You will never stop feeling sorry that you dumped me." I never sent any of them and we're friends now. [Laughs.] It has a happy ending.

So I stayed. Obviously I stayed and it's been very good. And I did get back into glass. I really missed it. And my sort of—that year was characterized by these sort of blind steps in the dark at making stuff, most of which I think was pretty lousy. I was in jail for a night in Providence, Rhode Island. I was visiting friends in Rhode Island

and was arrested for drug possession. Jail was pink. I made a lot of really bad pink acrylic paintings for about a year based on that experience, and then it was like, oh, god, let's put this behind me.

And I wanted to get back into glass, and I started very modestly. I did not have a sandblaster. Because RISD had instilled in me the need to build all my own equipment, I built my own sandblaster. I'm so sad that I don't have pictures of this because it was so hilarious. It was pure folk art, very, very, very poorly made.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't know anybody that's built their own sandblaster.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I got an air compressor, which was the wrong size, and it was a disaster, everything about it. It had, like, you know, the kind of gloves that won't give you dishpan hands. And it was made out of car mats. And it was just, like, stuff that scrounged at a hardware store. It was crazy.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It really was photo-worthy. And it was the worst thing. It didn't work at all. And I finally—I mean, it was very sort of willy-nilly at first, but I built up a shop. My parents and I bought a house, and that allowed me to get, you know, serious about this.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you had a place now where you could put a studio.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, the studio was approximately 6 feet wide by 12 feet long. I mean, it was tiny. And the sandblaster was in the basement. It was a tiny, tiny, tiny house.

And so I worked there for many years, actually. And it was very hard at first. My sense of discipline was sort of based on the school environment.

MS. RIEDEL: Where was that? Is that house still here?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, it's 1532 Rodman Street.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And then, I dream about that house several times a week, that I'm back there.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, I liked that house but I like this one way better. By the way, this house, because—what do you call it, interest rates—this house is actually the same price, and this is something like 2,800 square feet and that must have been a thousand square feet, or even 800. I mean it was nothing. A trinity is three rooms on top of each other.

MS. RIEDEL: And when does this house date to?

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's older—it's more recent than it looks. It's 1905. And it was built by a man for her [sic] mistress. It's a crazy house. It's always had a woman owner except once.

MS. RIEDEL: And most of the detail is all original?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's amazing.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, you'll have to come upstairs at some point—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes, I'm looking forward to it.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —because the upstairs is even more fabulous, believe it or not. It's an amazing house.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it is an amazing house.

MS. SCHAECHTER: How are we doing here?

MS. RIEDEL: Just great. I'm going to just check the time.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's a good answer.

MS. RIEDEL: This is a question we'll start today because we'll probably end up talking about it for two days, but

—
MS. SCHAECHTER: Or maybe not.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, right. What—and I realize in your case it's a difficult question—what do you consider your most significant influences—because you have talked at length, and written at length, about the broadest, deepest range of influences that I've heard anybody say—just incredible diversity.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Anything that begins with I-N is almost impossible to talk about: inspiration and influences.

MS. RIEDEL: Influences.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, I have a whole thing about being asked about inspiration, too, and I will say that every single atom of everything I've made had a different influence, in a way.

And it depends on what are you talking about: my life, my work, this piece, that piece. I mean, in a broad sense the answer is the material I'm working with and where I—you know, my life and my circumstances. And more focused—I mean, there's my tastes.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, I think—when I look at your work too I think of images, and I just think of a wide array of images.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, that's the problem is there's no period —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —that's overwhelmingly fabulous, like examples—specific examples from many, many, many periods.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm more interested in—like, maybe I'm influenced by emotional intensity—[laughs]—you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I'm interested in, like, how I'm influenced, or whatever, by how people cope with their pain.

And I'm certainly influenced by books and songs and—I mean, I have favorites. *The Idiot* by Dostoyevsky is a theme that I—I would say I've been in love with Myshkin many times. Where is my Myshkin? [Laughs.] I love Myshkin.

So I really—I did not like *The Brothers Karamazov*. I thought that was a stupid, sexist book, so there. I mean that's probably grossly oversimplifying it because I'm sure it's a masterpiece of language. But I really like the story of *The Idiot* much better.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems as if influences—when I think about your work, it's a range of influences that you've somehow contained and juxtaposed that somehow have strength. It's not any one thing by itself but it's multiple things in relation to each other and the attention that they—the tension that they established as a group or against each other. Does that resonate with you? Does that make any sense?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, it sounds accurate but I don't know what I would say to comment on it.

One thing I want to say—and I'm afraid of implicating myself in a crime—is that I download massive amounts of imagery from the Internet. I mean, I have what's called my "image bank" on my computer. It's I don't know how many gigabytes of images it is, and it's arranged by themes and it's arranged by category. And it's also—it's themes and means. I mean, I have whole—hundreds of pictures of boats on fire, pictures of ladders, but then I have pictures of, like, Félix [Edouard] Vallotton, the painter from France.

I mean, so there's people who I like more than others, like—you know, it's always easy to name the obvious ones like Balthus, Giotto and Breugel and Bosch. But, I mean, I like other people that you wouldn't think of, like Brancusi. Oh, my god, I love him so much he makes me cry—maybe not literally.

I thought the Charles Burchfield show at—wherever the heck that was—where was that? That wasn't—was that at—the Whitney. That was so good I really did almost cry in front of a Burchfield painting.

So there are specific artists who I tend to like more than others, and there is—you know, I have pictures of— oh, we should probably go up there and look—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —or I can actually bring down my laptop. But thousands of them, and it's very, very hard to— like, I need to hire a registrar to figure out how to organize them. But, you know, there's nothing more satisfying to the anal retentive part of me than playing around with organizing it on a boring Sunday, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So I have pictures that are categorized by themes, as I said. And I just put in a new folder there because, see, it's an organic process. It's constantly changing. So I just realized that I really needed a folder for human archetypes—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and stuff like that. But, also, stuff gets lost in there. It's so vast that it's almost like a vault, which is a little disappointing, and I want to know if they could please invent a Kindle for images so that I could just have this one thing that I could sit here in front of the TV and have the TV on and look at these pictures, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —endlessly looking at these pictures because I'm not seeing them anymore, which is sort of against the point.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But, I mean, I know—I went to see the Brancusi show at the PMA [Philadelphia Museum of Art]— I don't know when this was, like 15 years ago—and ended up—I do not like crowds of people. It was too crowded and I ended up looking at the Dutch tiles in the stairs and thinking that they were just so fabulous.

And so, Dutch tiles. I'm influenced by them. I'm influenced by everything. I mean, there is nothing I don't look at without assessing it for whether or not I'm interested in it as a potential influence. I mean, I walk down the street in a constant state of assessing things. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Early on it seems there was a real influence from comic books and from cartoon artists—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —painters that were influenced by cartoons or by outside—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think that was probably the sheer joy of finding work that was family to my work. People often ask, "Why do you distort the figure so consistently this way?" I can't answer that, although a psychologist once said, "Well, they're kind of like—they look like babies and you're a childless woman," and that's like, "Oh, there you go. There's that."

I actually remember my mother telling me that someday I would not want to play with dolls anymore, and I looked at her like, "No!" And she said, "No, honey, it will be okay because you won't want to." And I said, "I will always want to."

And I look at my things now and they bear a striking resemblance to doll play in that I put clothes on them, I choose their clothes, they are the size of my beautiful Crissy doll, who was one of my favorite dolls ever, and I think maybe I'm still playing with dolls, Mommy. [Laughs.] And that might have to do with the scale as well. But of course dolls have that scale because they're supposed to hearken to the practice for being a mommy someday, so maybe.

So, I think when I first saw those images of that kind of exaggeration, I found them appealing because we had drawn the same conclusion. I don't know how much I took from that other than more entitlement than I already needed.

I would say—you know, they have done studies of facial recognition, and people recognize characters better than actual people. So, if you saw a caricature of Khrushchev—since he got mentioned before—you would recognize it better than if, like, you saw him and he was walking down the street, you know?

So we're attuned to these peak shifts. So if, like, someone has big lips and you draw them even bigger, that helps you recognize them, and apparently artists—I would say certain artists—are probably more attuned to that. And sometimes I think I might be, like, Chuck Close, who actually has problems with facial recognition in that I think sometimes I don't recognize people when I should.

So, for whatever reason, I'm interested in exaggerating faces. I have experimented but I always change them back, ultimately, because I don't—well, I think there's been development over the years and changes, but—I think I hear the cardinal outside—I like the certain faces and I can't make them if I don't like them, so I just go back to them ultimately. But that might be another question for later.

MS. RIEDEL: You have written a long laundry list of influences—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —and I don't in any way want to just repeat those here, but I do want to maybe revisit key ones and see how your thoughts on that might have changed.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, one thing that probably has been revisited multiple times and would be good to revisit here is gothic stained glass, and how your thoughts on that have changed. I know you said you didn't see a lot of it when you were younger, but you definitely have seen more of it—more in the past 10 years. Would you still cite that as an influence—more of an influence, less?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, I would say it's much, much more of an influence. I would say I never even bothered to look at stained glass until maybe five years ago, after my marriage. I remember my husband saying, "You hate stained glass," and thinking, oh, yeah, I do. I did not even know what stained glass to look at until recently. I mean, I do love stained glass—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and the history of stained glass. And I now—I took a crash course and educated myself in it. And I have an absolute passion for post-Cromwellian reconstructed English jumble windows.

So what happened was Cromwell ordered the armies to smash all the stained glass in the Anglican churches. They did. They buried the chips in the graveyards. And there's, as far as I know, no real scholarship on this. This is a thesis begging to be written. At least I think so.

Why did they rebuild? Different reasons. I mean, they're all rebuilt different ways with different efforts at either being true to the original window or just making a crazy quilt or—has it got to do with money or—what's going on here? We need some scholarship on when were they done and—it's all different.

And some of them are really crazy. These images are not reproduced in coffee table books on stained glass—hardly ever. They might have one example because they are quite clearly examples of restoration disasters. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So were they reconstructed all recently?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, that's—who knows, but the answer is you don't need that much scholarship to answer that. They're all different times.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And for one thing, they didn't have a truck that could come board up your window and stick a big piece of plate glass in there, right? So if they were getting cold and rainy, I would imagine they were pretty motivated to do something, so they dug up the scraps and they did something, and they stuck it back in a window.

Now, some of the more recent reconstructions, they try to be very true, and if they find fragments they try to find where they go, and they do—I think those are a little more boring. The old ones are just like, "Whoa, this looks good here. Wheee." It's like they invented post-structuralism. They're just—they're crazy.

And the best ones have—say there were 10 windows in the church from 10 different centuries, like would be physically impossible—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER:—10 different eras and they mixed them all together for really crazy results. And they're wonderful and they're on the Internet.

MS. RIEDEL: And these are primarily in England? Yes, they're all England.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, Cromwell. It's a Cromwell thing.

MS. RIEDEL: And have you been to visit some of these?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Some of them. Not a lot but some of them.

MS. RIEDEL: In Lincoln, yeah?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I want to go see some more.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I want to go to York specifically. But anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: And what are the names of the churches in particular, do you remember? Or could you—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, no—York Minster, but I think you can go into—the thing about England is that they have these little parish churches and they all have these windows in them, and I think you can go to any one and see amazing stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Reconstructed?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Also, the English people—I like English stained glass better than French because it reflects the morbid, morose English mind more than the joyous French. The French windows look much more cartoony to me.

The English ones, oh, my god, could they brood any more? It's like, "Ahhh, it's too bright in here. Put more paint on the window." [They laugh.] You know, it's like yikes! They're just anguished, these windows, and I just like them. I like people to be blood, sweat and tears on my behalf. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking it's the Dean's Eye window that's a good example of this sort of thing?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, no, not the Dean's Eye. The Dean's Eye is a contemporary reconstruction. They did a really beautiful job. It looks like it originally did.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's no fun.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, that's no fun. [They laugh.] So—

MS. SCHAECHTER: That was interesting to me because I went to a lecture which included a big discussion of how they reconstructed the stone tracery.

Apparently it had pulverized to powder that was just being held together with compression. The story of how they saved it and rebuilt it—they quarried—they rebuilt it but they quarried in the original quarry where the stone was quarried. And did I use "quarry" enough in that sentence?

MS. RIEDEL: I think so.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Good. [They laugh.] It was just an amazing, like, techno-nerd exploration of something fascinating.

MS. RIEDEL: So, the glass, is that something, then, that you see exploring more? Do you see that as an ongoing influence now as opposed to earlier—is it an evolving influence?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I doubt it. I think—you know what? Maybe my problem with influence in general has to do with, like—I don't want to call it narcissism because I'm a narcissist and that would make me look bad. [Laughs.] I think that—as an artist I'm always balancing being vulnerable and open-minded and protecting

myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I don't always—I mean, everything has interesting things to me, and obviously I've got ADD. I have to try to limit things.

And also, I have taste, and that has its own limits, and stuff like that. But that makes it really hard to make any kind of generalizations about it. It's so all over the place and so vast, and at the same time so very, very, very specific. Like, I mean, I like Bosch but I only like these three paintings by Bosch, you know, or something like that.

So, I do—and influence? I'll tell you a little vignette that explains my feeling about influence. I'm doing this project at Eastern State Penitentiary. As an artist in residence there, I have full access to their archives, which I understand are absolutely amazing, and they sound amazing.

And they said, you know, "Well, make an appointment and we'll totally accommodate you." And I said, "Oh, thank you, but I'm not really interested." And they just—I mean, I was embarrassed because they were scraping their jaws off the ground like, you're not interested in our fabulous archive? He actually said, "You're the first artist who said that." And I was like, "Oh, sorry." [They laugh.]

I'm sure it's amazing but I don't want to be influenced by it for this project. And it's absolutely no disrespect to the penitentiary, but I want to make it about feelings of imprisonment that everyone has, not, you know, "Joe Bag-of-Donuts" prisoner 905. I don't want to tell his story any more than I want to tell my story. I want to tell everybody's story.

So it's not that I wouldn't be interested or that I wouldn't—I mean, I have—I did do a piece about my ancestor, John Fletcher Hamlin once—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —but pretty much specific people are not going to come into it. And also my interest in being influenced is totally selfish. It's like I'm interested in this image because it's going to improve my work. So it could be anything. It could be that color red. I remember watching the movie *Hellraiser* thinking, must work in red and orange, you know? What that has to do with *Hellraiser* I can't tell you, but I remember thinking that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, and that's interesting too because it makes me think of a point you've made about the working process, which is that you constantly have to be learning and you have to be, ideally, surprising yourself.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: There has to be something new with each piece to keep it interesting for you because you get bored fast.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right. Right. Precedents are just more things that I have to outdo. [Laughs.] They can weigh you down as much as they can lift you up. So I think one has to be very careful, but I do—I mean, I'm looking at everything all the time and it's—there's nothing I won't look at with an open mind.

MS. RIEDEL: So then, going back to the Eastern State Penitentiary project, if you're not interested in looking at those archives and you wanted to talk about imprisonment as every man's experience or every woman's experience, where do the ideas for those pieces come from?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, first of all, I wouldn't allow myself to think about it for a while because I had gotten the award and I wasn't going to be able to work on it. So I didn't want to—it would be like a stale orgasm, you know? I just wanted to be excited about it when I was actually working on it, so I didn't think about it for a while.

The first thoughts I had were, well, if I was a prisoner I one of those cells, what would I be thinking about that window? And I thought, well, I would really hope that birds would fly by because that would break the monotony. And I am sort of an amateur bird-watcher, so I thought, well, that's handy. And I thought, well, okay, birds.

Then my second thought—I wanted an excuse to visit my lover, and I wanted to use—so I said, "I need to see you and, like, draw your body." [Laughs.] It was not really true, but it became part of the piece, although I didn't actually do that. But I had the idea that these were—these are very long, skinny windows and I wanted to put figures in them and they would necessarily be confined in this very compressed-looking space. So they would be prisoners. This was actually kind of his idea but it was so good.

And then one thing about my work that I don't know if people notice or not, although I've made it—I've said it more recently a lot more often—is that I very, very rarely crop the figures. Like, to me I have some sort of object permanence issue. If I crop the edge of the page so that the feet are cut off, you might as well take a machete and hack off some feet. To me that's gross. I don't like that in an image. It just bugs me.

So when I crop, I crop for psychological effect, and I capitalize on that, whether it's true for other people. I just—I do not think of myself—narcissist that I am, I don't think of myself as that special. So I think the principles that I find true are going to be true for a certain segment of the population somewhere, so that's always my guide. It might not be a lot of people but it's going to be a couple. I can't—I mean, I'm not from Mars, you know?

So I don't like to crop. So I thought, this is going to be my experiment in radical cropping, because, you know, I could fit them into these spaces but at an artistic cost, you know? They would be smaller, and smaller—they're farther away. They kind of look like I don't know what, but —so I thought, all right, I'm going to crop them a little bit. I like the violence. And they're going to be compressed and they're going to have bird elements and sky elements, because the sky has to be part of it.

And so then I started thinking about Icarus and Prometheus, two—well, Prometheus was a prisoner. Prometheus I think came up because of the bird and because he was a prisoner. And I already wanted to do Andromeda because—Andromeda had nothing whatsoever to do with this project. She got inserted into this project.

Andromeda—poor Andromeda has been a soft-core porn character in art for so long. I like looking at her sort of gently writhing against that rock, mildly annoyed by being stuck there in the middle of the ocean waiting for her rescuers. It's just sickening.

So I wanted to, like, you know, say, Andromeda, probably uncomfortable. [Laughs.] Probably not as horny as you think. In that position I would imagine not really that sexy. So I— [harp sounds]. Well, that was a good note to end on.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Hold that thought for the next disc.

[END OF DISC 1.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: I came to the end of that thought, by the way, on Andromeda.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you had come to the—okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: All right.

This is Mija Riedel with Judith Schaechter at the artist's home and studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on July 19, 2011 for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, Card Number 2.

We were done with the Andromeda thought.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And we were still talking about the penitentiary project.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But was this in reference to a question?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Let's think. All right, so the question was, where did the ideas come from then, if not from the archives, for the penitentiary project?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right, so I'm doing five pieces in five cells in Cell Block 9. Each one will have a decorative window—decorative, ornamental, whatever you want to call it. That was—

MS. RIEDEL: These will be permanent? This is going to be—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Semi-permanent—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —but, you know, over a year. And the cells each have two windows in it, so they'll have one

prisoner at one ornamental window. There's 10 windows, five cells. Then I have—

MS. RIEDEL: You're doing all 10?

MS. SCHAECHTER: —two other areas in the penitentiary. One is Cell Block 11, where I have a very strange-shaped cell that has three windows. I'm doing three windows based on the idea of Icarus.

You know, one reason I don't like myths is often what interests me about them is, like, my own sort of blunted version. I don't like Icarus as some sort of parable against ambition. Fly to the sun. I'm all for Icarus. I feel sorry for him. He got a raw deal. [Laughs.]

And I don't know why he's really appropriate for the penitentiary, to be honest, except that he's a birdman, so I wanted to put him there. Sometimes these intuitive things reveal themselves to me later. I'm sure his fall will resonate in some way with the penitentiary. I don't mind a loose connection.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, a man with wings on a whole other level.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: Flight and escape.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think it's a sad story.

Similarly, I was horrified to find out the real story of the prodigal son. What an awful, stupid story that is. Me no like. I deleted that from my ideas for the penitentiary because that one was—I couldn't call it that. That's a—it just doesn't even ring true to, like, humanity at all.

And then I have another space in Cell Block 14 where I have a cell that has two windows and a cell that has one, and they're shorter. And I want to do the Greek chorus of daring women. And it had to be—imagining the prisoner would either be a woman or a man. So it's not the girlfriends. It's mother, daughter, sister, because there were female prisoners. You know, who cries for the prisoners?

And also, it made me think of how women who were hysterical used to get put in prison, basically, or in mental hospitals. And I thought, well, that works. In Cell Block 11, where I'm doing the Icarus windows, I have a transom nearby that's quite a large transom. And that will be—I believe it will be on the theme of *The Battle of Carnival and Lent*. That's a painting by Brueghel, and it appealed to me—these things—I like it when things resonate on a number of levels, not just like, well, that will satisfy the brief, or whatever.

But to me, I mean, it sounded like a prison riot, you know, these austere figures versus chaos, Apollo versus Dionysus, and just the idea of impulse control, which I would imagine just about everyone who ends up in jail has an impulse control issue. And so it's like the devil on one shoulder and the angel on another, which is another theme I really like and collect images of. You know, I don't like really shitty images. Excuse me. I didn't mean to cuss on this interview.

MS. RIEDEL: You're in good company.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Maybe once—[laughs]—but I already did, I think.

So I don't like bad images of things, but if I see a halfway decent one—I just like to see how different people interpret these things, and I've always like angels and devils. You know, it's interesting because as a fake philosopher I always used to try to model things as triads, but I've recently discovered the beauty of binary thinking. And—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, and I do look in your work and see a lot of what I would think of as triptychs or a lot of triads happening there. So it is interesting to hear you say that.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, Joseph Campbell made me feel a whole lot better about binary thinking.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything in particular?

MS. SCHAECHTER: *The Expulsion from Eden*. It's all about eating that apple and having to leave your mommy's womb.

MS. RIEDEL: This penitentiary project is interesting too because it strikes me as different from what you've done previously, which I know is full in the first place. But it's site-specific installation—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —which you haven't done many of. It's actually an installed window as opposed to a—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, it will have natural light.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's going to look good for a change. I do not like my windows in those light boxes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I do want that on record.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I will tell you why.

My Achilles' heel as an artist is that I am only interested in what's happening inside the picture plane, and I really have a hard time giving a damn about anything else. I'm exhausted at the end of these windows. Think about its presentation. I would rather die. I don't want to think about it. It's just—I've already thought about all this stuff. I can't think anymore. And I just want to farm it out. I can't stand it.

I know that there have been a lot of people who have criticized these light boxes and a lot of people who like them. I've seen them work in natural light. You can't compare it. Some—I won't say which windows, but some of them really suffer being in those light boxes, and some of them don't, but some of them do. Natural light is always preferable.

My new-found interest in actual stained glass made me want to do this in the penitentiary because it is—as far as I can imagine a perfect setting for my work, as far as I care, this is it. This is—I've always wanted to put stained glass in that penitentiary. I would have done every window in there if they'd let me. I'd just make it my life's work or something. It's so perfect. It's absolutely ideal.

MS. RIEDEL: So do you see yourself looking for more installations, more commissions in site-specific locations? I know in the past you really did not do commissions and you weren't interested in them, but you've done a few in the past couple years.

MS. SCHAECHTER: This isn't a commission.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, it's not?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: This place is not a penitentiary, for one thing. It's a ruin and it has an artist residency program. So you apply and it's basically, like, an award.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And you can do whatever you want—

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —once they approve you. I mean, they have to approve your proposal. My proposal, of course, was incredibly loose: I want to make stained glass windows and put them in the penitentiary. I didn't say what they were going to be of.

MS. RIEDEL: Is it a permanent installation there? No. Okay, it's a temporary installation.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And they'll be for sale someday, but not for a while.

MS. RIEDEL: They're also interesting because there are going to be specifically male figures, yes?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, except for the three crying women.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And, no, there's going to be two female prisoners because—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Andromeda is one, and I don't know who the other is. That's one of the very few windows—well, *The Battle of Carnival and Lent* has not been designed. The three weeping women haven't, and the other female prisoner. I saved the best for last. It's easy for me to identify with a woman figure because I'm a woman.

And do you know people have actually asked me, "Why do you make women?" Is that, like, a dumb question or what? I make them because that's how I identify with the world. They're not supposed to be me but I have to identify with them to make a window.

So when I make a man window, I have to imagine that it's a lover or, you know, somehow connected to me because I'm not—I wouldn't have—it would just be like—I'm not really a portrait artist, so—

MS. RIEDEL: I would think not, no.

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, right? I'm not a portrait artist. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: You've mentioned Cindy Sherman in the past as an influence.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you still feel that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Not a strong influence. I like her work. I mean, I much prefer, if you're going to talk about—I know you're talking about her because she puts on costumes. I consider myself analogous but she's not really an influence so much as, like—I like more the work of Loretta Lux. Who's that—Sally Mann. I love Sally Mann's work. She's just—and Diane Arbus.

And I like a lot of photographers. I'd like to be a photographer. I like photographing—

MS. RIEDEL: You've had at least four or five careers now.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I know, really?

MS. RIEDEL: Architecture, author—

MS. SCHAECHTER: And a ballerina! I want to be a ballerina. I was rejected as a ballerina at a very young age. [Laughs.] "No, not her." It was like, oh—I do like to dance but I'm not good at it.

MS. RIEDEL: And musician. That was another one.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, that was a real big one because—well, it always bothered me as an amateur musician that you can't get the emotional response out of people with art, visual art, that you can with music. People are—well, people are like junkies when it comes to music. I mean, they will do they do crazy things for musicians they love.

I don't know if, like, being an artist results in a lot of people who want to have sex with you. [Laughs.] What is it about music? I mean, it's like you don't just like it, you want to, like, sleep with the person. And you want to, like, do what they say. I mean, I've watched—I've cried in television commercials because the music was so good, you know? It's a really powerful medium and very persuasive. But art exists in space and music exists in time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: You know you only have so long with that song and then it's going to get snatched away from you. Thank God for recording technology. And I think that's part of its power. And there are incredibly moving experiences with art too, as I have mentioned several times already.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, one of which is probably light.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, light is very similar to music, I think —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —in terms of impact. It grabs you. So, yeah, that's why you can write a song where the lyrics are, like, boo baba di du whatip skiddy, you know, and people are like, "Yes!" [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: True.

MS. SCHAECHTER: "What she said!"

MS. RIEDEL: Thinking about ideas, we've talked about doodling. We've haven't really talked about sex, death, sentimental topics and why you're drawn specifically to that. I mean, you certainly have addressed it in the past. Anything—

MS. SCHAECHTER: We haven't talked about inspiration either, in general.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it was an "I-N" one, so I was trying to give you those in between other questions.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I want to talk about it, though. But—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, good.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'll tell you, the thing about corny stuff and sentimentality, first of all, it was an ongoing argument with my mother, who was such a sentimental mush. And I was always, like, the hard-ass. I was always bad cop to her good cop.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And we were always saying things like, "You'll see it my way one of these days," kind of things. And of course I do see it her way.

One thing that occurred to me some years ago was that I was attracted to themes. For example, there is a blog called Women Running from Houses that is entirely devoted to book jackets that feature women in nightgowns at night running from houses, you know? There is, like, a whole '70s mean of this. I love stuff like that. That's like the exact kind of stuff that—that influences me, if anything does.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you love about that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Because it's so sappy. I mean, you can just see, it's so resonant; it's so crying for someone to finesse it, because no one is going to touch it. It's like, saying, "Judith Schaechter, do me" —[they laugh] —"because all the other artists, they're too high-falutin for me, but you could do it." It's like, oh, I love that stuff.

Unfortunately I think that dog had its day, so it's becoming more popular to deal with stuff like that now—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —with kitschy themes, but for a while I was, like, I think one of the few. I just— there's this whole movement that was being called pop surrealism. And a lot of those people did wide-eyed little girls. I don't know if—I get lumped in with those people sometimes, and sometimes it's like Goth art and stuff like that.

I just want to say I predate all those artists. I'm not saying I did it first or I thought of it and they're copying me, because I'm sure they never saw me, but I do want to say that short of Walter Keane, the guy—and Margaret Keane, who painted those orphans—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —which I was aware of when I was doing this, that I believe I'm ahead of most of these other artists like Mark Ryden and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think—

MS. SCHAECHTER: No disrespect to them, but—

MS. RIEDEL: Sure. Do you think about your work in terms of Pop or in terms of surrealism?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Not surrealism. I don't even like surrealism. Pop—I don't like Pop art either, so no. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: No. Interesting. How do you think about it?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I like the Women Running from Houses stuff, and I like—well, I wanted to—I should probably finish that thought about—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, please do.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —not so much kitschy, but the thing that struck me the most was that these themes are important to people. There's a reason this image comes up in popular culture over and over again, and it isn't just because people are stupid. I mean, people are stupid but that's another story. [Laughs.] That's just annoying. I think it's because these are resonant and people identify with them and people find some sort of weird romantic thing about them and people want to look at them, and I do too.

And, like I said, they haven't been done well; they've only been done by illustrators getting paid almost nothing. You can tell that, like—you know, these people might have chops but they're not going to bring them out for this job, kind of stuff. So, it just—I mean, it seems like it's rich for mining these things.

MS. RIEDEL: Which goes back to a point you made earlier about stained glass also just being a medium that was rich for exploration still.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So you look specifically for that.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I wanted to—I wanted to make history.

MS. RIEDEL: And that is something you have said, is that you wanted to do something specifically for the field of stained glass.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right. I wanted to add to the history of the medium. And, you know, I don't know what else is the definition of an important artist? I certainly didn't want to be an unimportant artist. So, to me, you have to contribute something. So I was looking for areas where I might contribute. I mean, maybe I aim low if I'm aiming for things that have not been done a lot.

But, you know, I don't know; it seems like you've got to sort of stick within the gene pool of emotional subjects to make a difference. I didn't really want to do Jesus on the cross because I'm not a Christian. [Laughs.]

You know, it always surprises me that people look at my work and say, "Oh, it's depressing. I don't get why she would want to make depressing art like that. Oh, what a waste of talent." I've heard that enough. And it's like, I'm just going to guess that you're not Christian because Christianity is all about that. There is a several—2,000-year history of this, and I don't know what part of it you don't get.

I mean, do you—this—I know why they made those images. They made those images to help people feel their feelings deeper, to help people cope, to make something that's horrible in their lives dealable with. You think people want to think about their horrible crap all the time? Of course they don't. But if you make it really pretty to look at, maybe it's not so bad.

You know, it's not—it's very literal in terms of transformation. If you take an ugly thought and make it into a beautiful picture, I think that's alchemy. [Laughs.] Maybe I have too much magical thinking in my head, but to me on some level that makes it better.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because that makes me think of something that you've been quoted as saying a couple of different times about children understanding that one of the main roles or aspects of art is its function as a magic spell.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Do you have anything to add to that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I do think that in terms of the creative process, you have to get back to why it's meaningful to be creative. And one of the things is, as a child, you understand in the most obvious terms that it isn't about metaphor; it's about literal stuff.

But you lose that, and you also—you know, you lose your innocence, blah, blah, blah. So you have to find a way to get back to that somehow or else what's the point, but hopefully, you know, with some of the wisdom you have now sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: One of the questions on this list is, do you think of your work as having a religious or a spiritual quality, and has that thought changed over the past couple decades?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Let's talk about inspiration—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —because a lot of times I get asked in an interview, "What inspires you?" The last time I got asked this, I think the woman thought I was—this was an email interview, so I was writing. I think this woman thought I was delivering her a written slap in the face because my answer was basically a question. I did not mean it that way at all.

But the idea of ideas and inspiration, I don't know how to answer that question anymore than the thing about influences. My experience with inspiration is that it's completely unknowable. That's the whole point. It is like being possessed or channeling a higher power, where you feel like you are just a vehicle for this thing, or a medium. I like that word "medium." It feels like you're a medium, and you and the medium are in between the spirit and the object—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —that gets made. The whole point of art, in my little Luddite universe, is that you make an object—I know at this point that's old-fashioned, but I believe that art has to do with making objects. Whether those be pictures or sculptures, it doesn't matter, but objects.

And it's crazy to try to take something that's inside your head and turn it into a physical material. I don't know the processes that have to happen, even though I know them damn well, you know?

And the idea of inspiration, it's so—well, it's completely out of my control, but I am—in the sense of the word "addiction," like the 12-step program sense of it, I would say I'm very, very addicted to this feeling. I will do anything to feel it. But I don't always feel it and not all my pieces feel inspired to me. And it's very religious, I would say.

I also—I mean, some of the traditions I think that have arisen around actual religions are really beautiful, like the whole idea of Christianity is about how do you love your neighbor? It's obviously about how do you love your neighbor when you hate his guts, because it doesn't mean, what's the trick in loving your neighbor when you actually love your neighbor, right? [Laughs.] That's easy.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So it's about loving your neighbor when you can't stand your neighbor. Well, that's hard. And I think that in terms of religion being about social control, they should stick with that message and stop with all the attendant stuff that grows out of, like, "My way is the best way" stuff.

I don't really want to talk very specifically about religion and spirituality and worship and stuff like that. To me that's very personal and my feelings about it are very unresolved. Because I was raised an atheist, I don't feel like I have a real database in my head for religion.

So, like, if someone suggested to me, "Well, why don't you pray," I would be, like, "I need the instructions first." And then I would feel like a phony because it's not something that I've ever done before. I just wouldn't feel right. I'm cult-proof. I couldn't join a cult. It would just be like, "What? This is totally against my way of thinking." I could perhaps lead a cult, but that's another story. [They laugh.]

But I find it very beautiful. I like some ideas of Christianity very much, and that has everything to do with stained glass. I think the idea of using stained glass as something to focus and meditate on as a way of understanding the suffering of saints is a really beautiful idea, and very compassionate when it doesn't get misconstrued. [Laughs.]

I don't think—I've said this before—I don't think that you're supposed to look at those images and gawk at them. I do think you're supposed to be overwhelmed with the beauty of them, perhaps to the point where you, you know, can't even talk.

But I do think that the purpose of the saints isn't to, like, gloat about suffering. It's to understand how to make it meaningful and how to—how to—not to be a martyr or a—you know, a martyr in the annoying sense—[laughs]—a beatified personage is a holy thing. It's someone who has turned suffering into a force of good as opposed to a source of self-glory. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And that's a good trick too. So I think that's what those images are about, and I find that very, very appealing.

Oh, I know what I was going to say about my mother and my glasses and boredom and all that. When I was young, when I got bored, she would tell me to go draw. And I got bored a lot because I've got ADD, so I was basically bored all the time, so she would just channel me right into drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But she also—annoyingly enough, whenever I had emotional problems, she never really—even though she—I don't know if she would have dealt with them herself or since she would—I mean, she had different ways of dealing with it at different times. I remember her once saying, "I'll pay for a psychiatrist," basically, and that being a very disappointing answer, because I wanted her—HER. But she certainly told me many times to channel my pain into my artwork—

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —specifically. You know, "If you're feeling bad, go draw a picture about it." And this was something I heard a lot as a kid, so I learned that that was, you know, what art was for.

So, back to the point where people consider my work depressing. I absolutely find that loathsome. I don't feel like it's my right to dictate anyone's response to my work, and I don't want everyone to like it, nor do I care. But when I happen to overhear people—and usually it's overhearing. It's not, "I'll tell this to your face." Or sometimes occasionally people say things like this, especially family members.

I just think—it's painful to me because I actually find my work to be the ultimate in uplifting, you know? The whole purpose of it isn't so that you look at it and go, like, "Wow, I'm miserable. Woe is me." I don't draw these people who are miserable. They're not miserable. These are the—that's probably why I can't change the expression very easily. These are all people who are at the absolute moment when suffering turns into something else, something meaningful, something beautiful, something hopeful; where despair turns into hope.

"You think my work is depressing? What the hell is wrong with you?" There's nothing more hopeful than being able to take despair and turning it into hope. You know, if you can't do that, then your despair is pretty despairing. But I don't know how you can talk about hope without mentioning despair. I mean, what the hell do you need the hope for if everything is good? You don't need it.

MS. RIEDEL: So then, that's another reason, then, the face is so significant—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —why it always starts with the face and the gaze is so essential.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, I love gaze. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: There was someone, I think—

MS. SCHAECHTER: And they love me. [They laugh.] My whole life—[inaudible (3/26:45)].

MS. RIEDEL: There was someone who had written about *Body Bag*. And I thought that they had such a great interpretation of it that would have—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Really? I'd love to read that. I had— was it me?

MS. RIEDEL: It was uplifting. No, it was in *Art in America*, I think. Let me see if I can find it.

MS. SCHAECHTER: *Body Bag* has a very specific origin, which I'll tell you.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, tell us that while I look for this.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I had a recurring nightmare that I had an identical twin sister who basically was sort of sucking the life out of me. And in one dream she appeared as a sort of amorphous cloud above my body, and she was sort of strangling me to death, or something. And the dream came from that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, this—oh, let's see. Yes, *Body Bag*. "The religious art associate with stained glass enhances the spiritual power of *Body Bag*. It is as if we behold the moment when the soul departs the body and rejoins the universe."

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, I love that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Who said that?

MS. RIEDEL: I think it was maybe—it was the *Art in America* review from 2005. But I thought, that's the only—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, that's lovely.

MS. RIEDEL: —thing I've read that says exactly what you were talking about, which is that moment when the tragedy is turning to hope and there's some incredible redemption or there's something—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, see—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —when you're depressed and you listen to a beautiful, beautiful song—most of the time when you're depressed, people really love listening to sad songs—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and they never go, "Oh, wow, that's depressing. Why am I listening to that?" They don't go off and listen to, like, "Happy Birthday to you," or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: You want to have—you want to know that you're not alone.

MS. RIEDEL: That's exactly right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And you get—you feel the inspiration of the artist in you and it's like—I've said this in writing before—it completes a circuit. If you, as an artist, can give your inspiration to another person, you have disseminated your spirit into the universe, in a sense.

You have—you know, I think the "big bang" is such a great metaphor. You contract and then you just explode, and your inspiration just sort of populates the universe. You send your artwork out there and—or sperm—[laughs]—whatever, and it repopulates the universe. I feel like I'm exploding when I'm inspired back into the universe. But when I'm inspired, it's like I'm breathing in the—you know, the same particles that have Leonardo's decomposed body in it, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It has something to do with becoming one with the universe in the "Dirk Bachian" sense, the professor—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —who said that.

MS. RIEDEL: Earth sky—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Sky Father, Earth Mother.

MS. RIEDEL: Earth Mother, right. Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

So, yes, it's a really, really amazing feeling to feel inspired. Having gotten high on many different kinds of drugs, I will say the problem with inspiration is that you can't get it when you want it, and it's not the same— it's not like instant gratification. It has almost nothing to do with instant gratification, in fact. It's very, very slow gratification.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And it's very, very hard won, but it's really worth it, and it's much better. And it's also much more fulfilling. So, it's sustainable.

MS. RIEDEL: Does that have something to do with one of your goals that each piece you're always learning something new, that it's a new challenge—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —that you don't want to repeat yourself because you have to be thoroughly engaged, and that's part of the process of finding that inspiration.

MS. SCHAECHTER: There's no inspiration if you're doing the same thing you did last week.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Last week's inspiration is this week's mulch, baby. [They laugh.] That's why I didn't want to think about Eastern State before it was time.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think about social commentary in your work?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Never.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Politics.

MS. SCHAECHTER: No. I think—you know, I'm terrible. There was a time when I probably really liked Ayn Rand, for example. [Laughs.] Is anyone still listening? I'm not a political person, although I'm a liberal and a Democrat, for the time being. I think our government is collapsing right now. I don't know what I'll be next week.

You know what? I'd like smaller government, but I think smaller government is predicated on a smaller population, so I'm for negative population growth. I think more birth control and abortions for everybody, now. [Laughs.]

I'm not—you know, I never know how to vote. I have to have people tell me how to vote. I just vote straight Democrat if I haven't asked anyone. I don't think—I decided recently I wasn't a feminist because the word "vagilante" wasn't taken yet. I'm a "vagilante." [They laugh.]

As I get older I'm way more of a feminist. I think when I was younger I was too worried about not getting boyfriends—[laughs]—to be a real feminist. Now I'm much more a feminist.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think things—young women especially don't recognize how little progress was made with equal rights for women—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and even suffrage. We're just beginning. I mean, major changes were made, major changes that were devastating to our social structure and our culture, but they were not enough and more things have to happen. And sometimes I think things are going backwards.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking earlier about how each of your pieces really does feel unique and doesn't feel like there are necessarily specific series or—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, I'm so glad you said that because some people say the opposite, but I believe that's true.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, there are certain things—certain themes repeat, but it doesn't feel like they're a specific series, but there are sort of—and I think somebody had mentioned that it is every woman; that a couple of things that do repeat are the, sort of, trials of every woman and a sense of pattern.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right, "The Perils of Pauline."

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And there is a sense of those—I see two underlying themes. Well, not even so underlying—
[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I just like to play with dolls. What can I do to the doll today? [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly, Crissy.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, poor beautiful Crissy.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And does it feel—does it feel—do you think consciously about it is gender commentary in any way?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No? Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, because, like I said, when people ask me, "Why is it a woman," it's because I'm a woman. I mean, if I was a guy I'd be doing a guy.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's just—yeah. I think the issues of our day, I don't think—they're probably timeless in one sense, but the specific political issues, oh, my god, I can hardly stand it.

MS. RIEDEL: We don't have to go there because—if it's not about your work—

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm much more interested in the politics of craft and art, stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll save that for tomorrow.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And if you want to—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Nope, I'm fine.

MS. RIEDEL:—talk about that right now—

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

Working process. We've talked about drawing. And one thing that you've said that I think is really insightful is, "I let my hands do the thinking."

MS. SCHAECHTER: No one gives hands nearly enough credit for being intelligent. Someday—well, the connection of the brain to the hand is really incredible, how much of the brain is devoted over to hands.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: We have not evolved since the invention of art and since homo sapiens sapiens. We're still homo sapiens sapiens. And people—I believe very strongly that people who work with their hands are smarter. Let's just leave it at that—smarter.

I like to work with my hands. One problem with painting that probably always would have been a problem with me and painting is that stained glass is a much more full-spectrum hand experience. I do many different things with my hands with stained glass, whereas painting is very repetitious, and I like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That makes sense, yeah. And then we'll get into the different stages in a moment, but one of the things just about drawing—and I think this is another interesting insight, is "the most interesting drawings seem to be a combination of the familiar and the unexpected, the absurd and the ordinary—all wrong but in all the right ways." [Quote from Schaechter's artist's statement.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think that's true of all art—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER:—not just drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But, yes, I was trying to figure out how to explain how I know when something's, you know, worthy, and that was sort of the best I could express it.

I think—one thing that got drilled into me in art school a lot was that you shouldn't overwork your work, whether it be drawing or painting or whatever. And one thing—I took umbrage with that comment as well. One of the things I do in my sketchbooks is intentionally overwork things. Now I scan them at stages when they're still

good. But I don't know how you find out where something can go if you don't push it—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and I mean really push it. So I routinely overwork my stuff. My sketchbooks have some really awful stuff in them. Creativity is entirely predicated on mistakes. Everything else is just repeating your past success. I don't know how you repeat a future success. That's a good trick. [They laugh.] I mean, that's what I want to do.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I used to actually get angry that I wasn't able to do that until I realized one day that's absurd. [They laugh.] I mean, I feel like I'm wasting time and material because I'm doing it all over. And it's like, well, I'm finding this path. It's perfectly acceptable to do that. I mean, it is a lot of money and a lot of time —

MS. RIEDEL: Time.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —but that seems to be what's necessary, so, oh well. I try not to get bogged down with stupid regrets. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: You also have been really clear that you're not working with clear narratives in mind but you're trying for a specific moment—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —and to be intentionally there.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But I don't know what it is until I find it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think I said something about, like, it's not so much—inspiration isn't so, like, as much about pure zaps of light as, like, sausage making and wrestling. And then, like, at some point, like, you look back and you go, "Oh, that was good." But, you know, it's like—my studio, it feels like a battle-strewn corpse—although it is absolutely tidy.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet.

MS. SCHAECHTER: [Laughs.] Well, I can't think if it's not tidy—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So it's tidy. But my experience with creativity is it's very messy, it's very nonlinear, it's very frustrating, it's very—you have to trick yourself to get to the places where you need to be.

The one thing that sort of surprised me was to sort of discover that knowledge is the ultimate red herring. Knowledge is what you know. You're going someplace where you don't know. So knowledge will maybe get you to the edge of the forest and then you have to dive in. How's that for a mixed metaphor? [They laugh.]

You have to dive into that forest and you have to—you are blind and your hands are tied behind your back. I mean, the less you know, the better. The bigger the mistakes, probably the better. You have to risk real embarrassment. I mean, everyone has their own level of challenge, but you have to be challenging yourself. This is not about comfort at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So you have to be able to deal with that.

There's a great book that's quite famous by Rollo May called *The Courage to Create*.

MS. RIEDEL: *The Courage to Create*.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Where he—I love him very much. I love all psychiatrists from the 1950s like Erich Fromm

too, because I love the fact that Rollo May basically says, "You're anxious? Get used to it!" [They laugh.] It's not like, "Use your pills."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's like, "You're right where you should be as an artist." And it's like—that was very comforting to me. One thing I discovered in my informal creativity studies was the artists who were most satisfied were, by the way, the ones who I thought did the worst work. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: The ones who were pulling their hair out were the best. So it's really not about pleasure. And so I tell people all the time that it doesn't give me pleasure, and they're like, "Oh, what's wrong? That's terrible. You should fix that." It's like, you know, it's just got to be this way. It's more about love.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you need specific—what are the qualities for your working environment? Do you work to music? Do you need things in specific in order to work?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I usually have to trick myself into working. For a long time that was music. Then for a while it was talk radio. Now it's a combination. I really don't care about the economy of Burkina Faso, so NPR can be really annoying. [They laugh.] I just really wish that we've solve all our problems so NPR can go back to cultural programming. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Wouldn't that be great?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I don't want to hear the politics. In fact, I realize that for all the NPR I listen to—and I listen all day for weeks on end—I'm really uninformed. How is that even possible?

MS. RIEDEL: That is practically impossible.

MS. SCHAECHTER: What am I doing in there? [They laugh.] It's just noise.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I like to sing a lot. I sing very loud to music, a lot of music. This is one reason I'm embarrassed to have an assistant. [They laugh.] I sometimes—a lot of my work is very noisy, so I can't listen to what they're saying. I can't listen to music. I don't like that, actually.

So grinding and engraving, which I do a lot of, and sandblasting, you can't really listen to anything except for the roar of machines. I'm trying to develop a *Dancer in the Dark*-like mentality of Björk, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's just not working.

Yes, so it's in between. I wish—I need a better sound system. The fact that I am listening on a low-quality sound system annoys the living bejesus out of me. I should just—

MS. RIEDEL: Headphones maybe?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, headphones are good but I have to be able to walk around. Well, they can't be plugged into anything except me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And they also get in the way. So I want a Bose system and I want it now. And, you know, I like the—I love the invention of iTunes and iPods so I no longer had to listen to records and I could make giant playlists of things that I want to hear.

Now, I have different tastes for different times. Like, I go to the gym—I find physical exercise to be very, very inspiring, and also a real tonic for the fact that creativity gets me down and makes me—you know, perfectionism is a buzzkill and it's hard to feel like I've accomplished anything. So I go to the gym every day and I accomplish something there and it's great.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I listen to Krautrock.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Krautrock?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Rammstein and Eisbrecher. I'm actually learning German by mistake.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's so great to listen to this really harsh German rock music and exercise. At home I listen to folk music—

MS. RIEDEL: Do you really?

MS. SCHAECHTER: —like Sufjan Stevens, and classical music. I like classical now. I don't know how that happened, after all those years of listening to my mother. And I listen to—country music I like a lot and—some country. I love Dolly Parton and Pasty Cline. I like show tunes. Just like everything else, I like a little bit of everything.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I've, like, got smorgasbord taste.

MS. RIEDEL: That actually resonates.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. So, I do like a lot of stuff that is called Goth, and a lot of punk rock. Punk rock, like, I like quieter music in the studio so I wouldn't necessarily listen to that in the studio.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But at the gym I sure would

MS. RIEDEL: And does music still inspire the pieces in any way? You've talked about going back and forth in the '70s between music and work. Is that true still?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think the last music that inspired artwork might be Sufjan Stevens, but even that was sort of a fading influence. Sufjan is—do you know how to spell that?

MS. RIEDEL: No, but I'll find out.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's Sufjan.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. He's a lovely Christian boy with a banjo. Talk about weird.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And his album *Seven Swans*, which I found achingly beautiful—specifically a song called "All the Trees in the Forest Will Clap Their Hands." ["All the Trees of the Field Will Clap Their Hands," Sufjan Stevens]. I believe I tried to capture the essence of some of those songs in my work at that time. But I never do—or I rarely say, "I'm going to make a piece about that song," oh, except the piece called *The Cold Genius*. You know what? I'll tell you something about that piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, let's talk about it.

MS. SCHAECHTER: The more I look at it, the more I like it. And it was slightly disappointing when I finished it, but the more I look at it, the more I just go, "Oh, nailed it, girlfriend! Nailed it!" And I'm so proud that I did because I made it four times—four times.

I was so—you know, it's based on this piece of music by Henry Purcell. It's an opera song. I don't know the opera. I don't even know the original version of the song. All I know is the version by Klaus Nomi—that's N-O-M-I—who is a punk rock gay guy who thought he was an opera singer. And he was one of the first cases in the United States of AIDS, and so he died in, like, 1983.

He was one of the—he was a little too sensitive for this world, Klaus Nomi. And one of his dying wishes was to sing this—I don't know if it's an aria or not, but sing this song from *King Arthur* called "The Cold Song." And it was literally a couple of weeks before he's dying—and you can see it on YouTube and you can see the effort.

And I saw that and my hair stood on end, and I was like, "Oh, good god, that was amazing." I didn't—the words are a character called the Cold Genius is apparently begging someone—God, the devil—to allow him to freeze to death. And I got the impression that perhaps he had felt sort of frozen out of love in his life. And it's so sad. It's like, oh, my god, stab me with a thousand pitchforks sad, like overwhelming.

And when this dying man is singing so beautifully—he's giving it his all—and I thought, I must make a piece about this. How can I ever equal it? Well, I had made this face, and it was the best face I'd ever made. There's nothing worse for an artist. It was, like, you know, aliens made this face using my hands. And here I was stuck with having to make a piece around it. And it was like—it was so hard.

Acupuncture is the most inspiring thing in the world. I have visions when I get acupuncture. Acupuncture should be illegal. High as a kite, so high I shouldn't be driving a car high. I love acupuncture. Peace of mind like I've never felt in my life. It's great. I'm obviously very susceptible to it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So I had a vision under the influence of acupuncture of how this piece should look, but visions are really tricky because visions are not little—you can't do a screen capture—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I tried to translate this vision into matter and it wasn't happening, and it took a while. But every time I look at that piece now, more and more it—I can tell it's just going to get better, and I'm so proud of that piece for that reason. And I'm glad—I think—the piece has very little to do with the song. It ended up having to be green. Even though it's about freezing to death, it's green.

And the one thing I would say is that—an astute observer might notice that the clothing of the character is the same as what Klaus Nomi is wearing in the YouTube video. There is a sort of vague resemblance there. But I was very, very happy with how that came out, ultimately.

MS. RIEDEL: And what in particular about that piece resonates so with you?

MS. SCHAECHTER: The colors.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That is—the colors and the face. I mean, I feel like I can talk about this without sounding like an egomaniac, because I don't feel like I made it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: The face is, like, wow, what a face! It's so tender and sad and—I don't know; it's just that face. It just gets me. I mean, it really was hard to make a piece anywhere near it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I really struggled.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was 2010, right? That was a recent piece.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, and it took almost a full year to make it because I kept on rejecting stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: So, would you make a piece and then—are there four completed pieces, or you just stopped?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No. Well, almost. I made a piece—I made all—I made a majority of the parts, and that was just awful. I had made a print and the print was really good. And I tried—I attempted to make the print as—you know, use the print as a sketch.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That just didn't work. And then the print is the print and it still exists. It hasn't sold out. And then I abandoned that idea and I worked with a lot of stuff. I even polled people on my blog for design solutions. I came up with, like, eight versions of it. I got people's input. I didn't like what they said so I did what I—I went with my heart.

I think it's over.

MS. RIEDEL: No, we're fine

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay. And so—oh, you got a text. [Laughs.]

So I made that piece and I didn't disassemble it. See, the problem with stained glass is if you assemble it, you're really screwed. Taking apart a stained glass window is like sticking your hand down a garbage disposal and turning it on. So you don't want to assemble it.

So I didn't make that piece. And I saw it and, "Mm, no." And so then I had this vision under the influence of acupuncture, and I was like, "That's it." It was a little bit Gregory "Crewdsonesque," [Gregory Crewdson] who is a photographer who I love.

And so I attempted to make that piece, and I basically made it wrong. It was like, right idea, wrong execution. So I assembled that one and had to take it apart, unfortunately. I actually took pictures of the disassembly and put it on my blog. It was pretty funny with me in protective gear. And, yes, I did chop apart my hands. It's inevitable. And then I made the piece right.

The second piece I made, the one that I polled everyone for, I assembled after the fact with a different face, as a study, and that was sold. And the original piece—the good piece was sold—well, they're both good but the— the ultimate piece was sold to the Corning Museum of Glass. I'm so thrilled about that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And so I made two of them. I abandoned two of them. I have the parts for one of them. It was just a big mess. I have the torn-apart window upstairs if you want to see it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd love to see it.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's a—

MS. RIEDEL: But that final piece had the face and it had the color—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —that you were looking for. And it had, clearly, the feeling

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It has a blood-red sky. I think—see, the inspiration for that would be separate from everything else. I always loved that painting by Edvard Munch of the house with the red ivy covering it. You know that painting?

MS. RIEDEL: I don't.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, Edvard Munch—I saw that show at MoMA a couple of years ago and I remember thinking, god, that guy had, like, one— it's like what people say about John Lennon. He had this one thing that he did so well. It's like, wow, talk about maximizing your one thing. Boy, he was amazing because he just had one thing, but he was so good at that one thing.

And that house with the ivy, I've always loved that painting. I like it better than *The Scream*. It's, "Way to make a creepy house painting, dude." [They laugh.] It looks like it's covered with—oh, I had an experience as a kid where I made a papier-mâché mask, a little one, and I made it with flour paste, and I put it in the pantry to dry. And it was a very humid summer and it got a fungus on it that was blood red. It looked like spots of blood.

Now, my father is a microbiologist. My father told me what kind of fungus it was. And he told me that it used to grow on the halls in churches, and they'd go kill Jews when this happened. It would be like, "Oh, my god, Jews again! Let's go kill 'em!" And it's like a mold. And every time I see that Munch painting I think about that fungus growing on stuff. It looks like that. So it's very creepy.

MS. RIEDEL: Why don't we stop here today because I think —

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's good. Yes, it's 5:35. There's a clock over there. See, I'm just like a shrink. Have you ever seen a shrink?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: They all know to keep a clock over there.

[END OF DISC 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Judith Schaechter at the artist's home and studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on July 20, 2011 for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, disc number 4.

And just by way of clarification, I want to state that we talked for about an hour on Card Number 3. There may have been some technical difficulty there so we're going to repeat a couple of the things that we said. A lot of what we talked about was technically oriented and also dealer oriented, and most of that information can be found in other places. But we're going to repeat things that can't be found elsewhere and then move on.

So, Judith, apologies. We will—you had a couple of clarifications you wanted to make from yesterday's conversation so we'll repeat those now.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I wanted to talk a little bit about my parents' deeper background and their roots because I thought that is very important to who I became as an artist, specifically for why I'm always sort of straddling the fence between categories, like between art and craft and stuff like that.

My father's background was Jewish and my mother was Christian. And they were atheists when they raised me but I was basically never one or the other. My mother, her family had come to the United States—well, before it was the United States. They had come to America as early as the 1630s. And some parts of her family were in Massachusetts Bay Colony in the second wave of immigrants in the 1630s.

And her mother, my maternal grandmother, was Scotch-Irish, and her family came in in the late 1700s, early 1800s to Baltimore and North Carolina and quickly went West. So, my mother's family—and my mother grew up in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Her father was a geologist for Phillips 66 Oil Company and a farmer.

And my father, his family was Russian Jewish, despite the German last name. Their origins were from—the Schaechters were from the Ukraine. And they—my father was born either in Turin or Genoa. I think it's Turin. And he grew up in Milan, Italy and lived there throughout part of World War II.

Now, although he says it was a totally normal existence, he did talk about living with his cousins all in one apartment and never leaving for a year. And during this time, my grandfather was actively helping usher Jews through Germany, through Italy—because he was friends of the police—to France to escape the Nazis.

Now, late in the war they immigrated to Ecuador, South America. They were originally supposed to go to Australia but they had a problem with their visa and they were rejected. The United States was not accepting Jews at this point, and Ecuador I think was one of the last places that did. So they ended up in Ecuador.

Now, through a series of coincidences, my father ended up going to the University of Kansas. He had a friend who was from the University of Kansas who was working in a laboratory in Ecuador when my father was in high school and he basically followed this guy.

And I always thought it was interesting that in his interview at University of Kansas, they asked if he had a bachelor's degree from a college, to which he said yes because a *bachelero* from a *colegio* is a high school diploma in South America. So he has no bachelor's degree.

MS. RIEDEL: He just went straight from high school to graduate school.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Straight to grad school, yes. And he met my mother because she was playing the piano, and he was coming to her apartment building to visit some other woman there, and he heard her playing and he was smitten, apparently, right away. And he was the second Jewish person that she had ever met. So, I don't know, he must have been quite exotic. That's all I have to say. [Laughs.] I mean, he totally barely spoke English.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: He spoke—my father is fluent in almost six languages. Spanish is one of his best languages, but obviously he's fluent in English now.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But he's very fluent in Spanish, and he has a Spanish accent to this day.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, he grew up speaking Spanish, right?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, and Italian. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And the other thing that I had mentioned, which has nothing to do with my family, was about—I had mentioned yesterday Ayn Rand, and I wanted to strike that influence because I was really responding to something I heard on the radio recently. I read *The Fountainhead* in high school but it didn't make that much of an impression on me.

And I wanted to say, probably one of the most important influences in my life, Patti Smith, and I think Sylvia Plath—women. But Patti Smith was sort of a more daring influence for me because she was scary. I thought she was gay, and I was in high school and that would not have been cool.

But, also, all my friends were sort of the stoner crowd. They were all into the Grateful Dead. And I was interested in Patti Smith and Devo and the Talking Heads and all these bands that they really hated. So I had to buck the tide.

And I remember—I remember bringing the *Talking Heads: 77* album to a party with my friends and saying, like, "You've got to hear this. It's amazing! You're going to love it." And they were just like, "Eh, why do you like it?" And I'm like, "Hmm, never mind." And it was like—it was wonderful. The reason why I liked that material was because it seemed so fresh; it seemed so easy.

I know I said on Card Number 3 that might have gotten deleted—

MS. RIEDEL: So, yeah, let's repeat.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —that I have this theory about creativity, that creativity and culture both traverse a cycle that starts with primitive and moves up to mastery, like in the classical Greek or the Renaissance, and then hits a decadent phase like the Hellenistic or Baroque.

And I think music in the '70s had gotten to this sort of horribly decadent phase where we had this really overly wrought, over-ornate music like Styx and Kansas, and the new wave—this wasn't punk; this was what was called new wave. Punk was, like, one minute in England—[they laugh]—and the Ramones. It was over—by the time it even got here it was over.

But the Talking Heads were really amazing, and it was like flushing a toilet with all this, like, icky stuff. And here's this new stuff and it was accessible and you could do it yourself and it was great. So that was—I was really into that.

So those were the two points that I wanted to make.

MS. RIEDEL: Let me make sure that we've covered—and the one that I'll clarify here too is that when we were—I was talking about a reference to your work yesterday. I mean, it was emotionally intense, not academically cool, as opposed to intellectually cool.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think that's a small difference but a huge difference.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Gotcha.

MS. RIEDEL: So let's clarify that here.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. All right, so let's move on and talk about teaching, to some degree.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've taught at a few different places and I want to make sure we talk about teaching both at academies and universities, and then also all the teaching you've done at workshops.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Penland, Pilchuck—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Sure.

MS. RIEDEL: —Japan, et cetera. So, you first started teaching in the '90s or before that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I started teaching—that also was on Card 3.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I had once upon a time swore that I would never teach, that I wasn't going to be one of those artists that made a living as a teacher, but that if I got a call out of the blue I wouldn't be so foolish as to say no.

So I did get a call. The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, where I live, asked me to teach a night class, and I did. And—

MS. RIEDEL: Stained glass, was it?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, stained glass continuing education course. And that led to me teaching in the regular curriculum for regular students.

Now, for many years I had, I think, a great deal of difficulty teaching. I do not have a graduate degree. Honestly, my idea of teaching would be, say, "Here are the materials. I'll leave you alone to have fun and I'll come back for the final."

I mean, I was always there, but I honestly didn't—I never wanted instruction. I didn't want anyone near me, really. My idea of a fabulous class was an independent study like, you know, "Unlock the cabinet and leave the room, teacher."

So I was going to be that teacher for everybody and it really wasn't working. I taught the stained glass elective—although, the students who are in touch with me, they all say nice things. And I did give some instruction. Obviously you can't make a stained glass window without some instruction.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But what ended up happening was that I ended up teaching a class called Projects, which was the core of the University of the Arts crafts department curriculum. And it was a semi-seminar class wherein they would have a lot of intellectual content balanced with actual making of projects. But the projects were never focused on technique or material. It was always some sort of conceptual thing, like we did a beauty project and self-portrait, stuff like that.

And I taught that class with Sharon Church, who is an extremely important person in my life—I can't emphasize enough. Sharon mentored me as a teacher but she's also—well, she's one of my best friends and she's also one of the few people whose input into my work I can actually accept. [They laugh.]

And she's got an incredible eye. She's mastered the secret of being critical without hurting someone's feelings. There is a skill for you. And she's very rigorous. She's very perfectionistic. She will never, ever let you slack for a single moment. Every time I call her she says, "So what are you working on?" But you can tell when she doesn't like a piece. She never actually says it but, you know, if there's, like, a pause you're like, "Oh, god, no." [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right, that pause.

MS. SCHAECHTER: "I disappointed Sharon. I don't care about anyone else."

Oh, you know another thing that was on Card 3 that was important was I talked a lot about how, as an artist, you have to risk alienating the people who like your work—

MS. RIEDEL: That's right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and how difficult that is: "Oh, well, lost forever." [They laugh.] That's hard.

MS. RIEDEL: Something else actually to comes to mind now that you said at the same time. It was something about setting up a structure and then it was almost immediately obsolete—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, right.

MS. RIEDEL: —having to set up constantly a new structure for yourself as well.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I think—yes, a lot of—I've done this sort of vast informal research into the idea of creativity. One thing—I was sort of flabbergasted that my arts education never instructed me on the psychology

of creativity. In fact, I just got lucky that Dirk Bach told me what art was.

But I don't understand how you can not have that as part of art school. They should tell you—take some sort of stand on what art is, even if that's an impossible thing to do. You can always respond against it. It doesn't have to be set in stone, but something that someone can respond to.

And the same thing with creativity. The thing that I never understood was that I was going to have to reinvent myself a thousand times. I thought I was going to get the —you know, the secret elixir that—I think actually a lot of art students think this. They think their teachers are holding back on them and that if they'd just, you know, stop being so annoying and tell you the secret of art-making once and for all, you'll be set.

But the thing is, is I figured out the secret to art-making, and then I had to figure it out a hundred-thousand times again and again and again. And I didn't—I never understood what it really meant to be creative as an adult, and I think—I would love to teach a class like that, and I've done a lot of amateurish research into the subject, read Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Don't even bother to try that. Just write Mihaly—psychologist.

And he wrote a book called *Flow* and a book called *Creativity*. And I read, you know, many things. Rollo May is a wonderful source. Erich Fromm wrote an essay that is absolutely dead on the money called *The Creative Attitude*. I just read that to my students in my stained glass elective now, which has become a seminar stained glass class. I'm much better at teaching liberal arts than I am technique.

Anyways, so one of the essays in this book that I tried to write, I actually—

MS. RIEDEL: What was it called?

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's called *Treasure and Torture*.

MS. RIEDEL: *Treasure and Torture*.

MS. SCHAECHTER: One of the things I tried to do—and this is not on Card 3—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —but I tried to write sort of a master essay that would be really long that would discuss the relationship between creativity, inspiration and beauty. And this made my head explode.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It was so vast and difficult. And at one point—and I think I actually took this out of the essay—it was like blobs of mercury. At one point they would be an indistinguishable blob, these three topics. And then at the next moment they would be racing for the corners and you couldn't get them back together again.

I mean, what is the relationship of these three things, because beauty without inspiration is not beauty. Creativity without inspiration is just the 99 percent perspiration part, and that's easy enough to talk about: Work hard; have a studio that you don't hate. I mean, if you have a horrible, self-sabotaging discipline problem go see a shrink. That stuff is mechanics.

So the really interesting parts about creativity are how do you get inspired, not how does one—how do you channel inspiration into material—stuff like that, like the really ephemeral questions: How does inspiration work? How can you get more? What do you do when you don't have any? Those questions. What is it?

And I was really interested in talking very concretely about these things that I thought got very new-agey and stupid, or didn't get discussed. And then—so both beauty and creativity seemed to be—like, beauty seems to be about the appearance of inspiration, or the feeling of inspiration, and creativity would be how inspiration acts in the person doing the making.

But relating these things, it was beyond me. I mean, I tried. I wrote that—I wrote that beauty essay— I've been writing it for 15 years basically. And I started out—I was hell-bent on proving that beauty is not in the eye of the beholder, that it's in the object. And what I've decided is that the most useful way of discussing beauty is to draw a hard-line distinction between beauty and pretty.

And the real problem for artists isn't that their work might be beautiful but that it might—that someone might demand that it be pretty, because pretty is quantifiable. You can get out a ruler and measure how much prettiness is in a painting if you want to. Prettiness has to do with stuff that is concrete and exists, like measurements and proportions, color relationships.

It's all formalism and it's all the stuff that's quantifiable, whereas beauty has a lot more to do with experience

and the mind of the beholder and how they're responding to this thing, and the inspiration of the maker and whether or not that's getting transferred to the viewer, and stuff like that. And— yeah. My god, I'm exhausted just thinking about it. [Laughs.] Stuff like that.

All right, I think I've—what were we talking about?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, yeah—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Teaching.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, you asked me to talk about teaching.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That's okay. You're following a trajectory.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I did—I started teaching, and I started at U Arts teaching the glass class.

MS. RIEDEL: But just go back one second to this creativity, beauty, inspiration.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this something that you are trying to address in a class that you teach now in any way? And what would the—you wanted to teach a class like that. What would that class include?

MS. SCHAECHTER: It would include a co-teacher. [They laugh.] One thing I said that was on Card 3 was how much Sharon was a mentor. I know I just said it. Sharon taught me how to teach, so that I didn't want to be popular anymore and so that I understood how to love my students without worrying about whether or not they loved me, and that was really helpful.

And I really—I do think I'm better at teaching—I don't know if you'd call inspiration, beauty and creativity liberal arts, but discussing them in a liberal artsy kind of way in a seminar.

I asked my—I had a group of students who had me for the seminar and took my stained glass elective, and at the end of the class, the end of the stained glass class I said, "Which do I teach better?" And they were like, "The projects. Sorry." And I would say, "Don't worry. I knew it." [Laughs.] I get bored and impatient—hopefully they don't ever, ever know that I'm impatient, but it's down deep. And I get very bored teaching it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But I feel it's part of my mission to carry on the knowledge and to share—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —what I know about stained glass with people. That's really important. I don't want my knowledge to die with me. So I definitely will teach it. And, anyway, so I like—but I would like to teach a course in creativity. I planned out a sort of sample curriculum. I could propose a special topics class. And I would want to have a guest lecturer. You know, the secret to teaching is always to get them to do the work. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: The guest lecturers?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, anyone but you.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It doesn't matter as long it's students, other people—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —as long as it's not you. When I taught last semester at the New York Academy, which is my—I'm a visiting instructor at the New York Academy of Art —

MS. RIEDEL: Since 2005, 2006, something like that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm not sure when it began—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —but I started out teaching a—yeah, it would be about 2007, more recently than that. I think it's 2007. I started out teaching a drawing class called "Drawing from the Imagination," and they—I sort of—they're very unstructured there.

Oh, and I didn't say that thing about structure, so remind me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But—or did I? Anyway, so they—

MS. RIEDEL: You passed over it.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —allowed me to develop that course, and it was good, but then eventually I started teaching "Art and Culture II." And I really liked teaching that because I was allowed to come up with my own curriculum. And instead of first we're doing feminists, then we're doing French people, then we're going to do—insufferable French people. [They laugh.] Then after that we're going to do, like, what's happened New York City since 1995—just stuff, I can't bear it. So we had several weeks of neurology and art. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Because neuroaesthetics is this sort of new thing and I find it fascinating. In some ways I think the neurologists are way behind the artists. But it's still great that they're taking art seriously. And I know it's "Art and Culture II" but I did include, like, the origins of art from cave times to the present and all that stuff, and animal origins of art.

And we had—they guided the class to a certain extent in that there was what I called "shark week." And I didn't know what shark week was going to be until we actually go to shark week. And what we ended up doing was they were starting to do a research paper that was going to lead to their master's thesis.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So I said, "Bring in three images and we will discuss them as a group, and they should pertain to what you think you're interested in writing your thesis paper on." So this ended up taking, like, a month out of the class, but I'll definitely do it again because it was the most productive discussions.

And I think it got them started on their thesis, but a lot of them were doing stuff to do with kitsch, and they could not talk about Thomas Kinkade enough in this class. They were absolutely enthralled with him. And Thomas Kinkade—I'm not sure—he did go to art school. Anyway, how much is he conniving and how much is he a true artist? It was certainly—for the record, she just cringed. [They laugh.]

It was really productive discussion. I was really proud of that class because I had, I would say, about 90 percent of the students actively engaged in conversation all the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So if I did a creativity class, I would want to have a lot of class participation. I'm pretty good at getting students to participate. I mean, I would just call on them—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and make them talk.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And my favorite was, "We can't talk because we don't speak English." I said, "Oh, no one in here speaks English." [They laugh.] "I don't know what we're speaking but it's not English, so don't worry about it."

MS. RIEDEL: Jump right in; the water's fine, right?

MS. SCHAECHTER: They didn't. That didn't help.

And anyways, so that was my experience teaching at the New York Academy. I agreed to teach that class again, against my better judgment, because planning that curriculum was—it took months out of my life. I had planned all the readings. I had read each reading three or four times ultimately. I did PowerPoints based on all the readings. I then had to read their research papers, and I gave a lot of input.

And then—oh, but I came up with a brilliant idea that they would also give it to a partner that I chose, depending on—I chose the people very carefully, and they would get a lot of input from that person too.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, which class are you talking about right now?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Art and Culture II.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And that—I was excited by that class. And I think, when I figured it out, I made a dollar an hour, and not including travel, but I want to amortize [ph] that class because I've planned the curriculum; now it has to change because they're getting reviewed by NASAD [National Association of Schools of Art and Design].

NASAD—I can't say enough angry things about people who meddle with people's curriculum. I can teach someone else's curriculum—I'm sure I can—or I can teach to my strengths. What do you want me to teach? Come on, people. I know from having Dirk Bach that if he had had to teach me about Derrida, we would all be asleep. And he taught this crazy class and everyone was the better for it.

So I think in art school, a teacher should teach to their strength. Well, everywhere but definitely in art school.

MS. RIEDEL: What are the important things for you to cover when you're teaching?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, no matter what class I have, I'm going to cover something about creativity and something about beauty, and creativity having to do with inspiration. So those subjects are the ones that I think need to be openly discussed as abstract and concrete concepts in art students: What is art?

I was a really evil teacher. Before the class even met I had the, like, registrar send them all an email saying that they had to arrive at the first class with a one-to-two-page essay explaining what art was in the universal sense of the word, not like what art is today. What is art to everybody?

And I got a lot of essays citing communication. [Laughs.] None of them were bad, and it was a great way to start the class because we had something to talk about on the first day, and I could present them with my horrible, poisonous ideas on the subject without polluting them, because they had already put to paper some sort of idea.

MS. RIEDEL: And what are your horrible, poisonous ideas, for the—

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm just a clone of Dirk Bach. [They laugh.] I internalize that to the letter of what he said. I mean, to me it has to do with you are here. You know, I actually was responding to someone who was talking about mark-making recently and cave people. Why did the first cave person, you know, pick up a stick and, like, decide it was a good idea to, you know, do something with it, you know, besides idle boredom? Why was there value in this?

And to me the idea is that you make your mark, whatever it is, whether it's just a single line on a wall, and someone bears witness. A lot of what got erased on Card 3 had to do with my thoughts about the work not being done until someone was looking at it, and the idea that the work was intimate, experienced for the character in the piece and the viewer as a group of two people.

So, like, one makes their mark and you're saying, in essence, "I'm here." Like, "Kilroy was here." That's what it means to make a mark on a wall. When a child picks up a crayon for the first time—for the first time they don't use their own feces as an art material and they use something outside their body and they make a mark with it, you just have to imagine that that has to be the most amazing thing, like they have transformed the world. The whole world is a different place because they're done this.

And they have said, "I am here." And then the person looking at it says, "I see you're here and I raise you. I'm here too." Right? "I'm here to hear you; you're here to hear me. We agree that we're both here." It doesn't matter if you're in each other's presence but it's a form of bearing witness that's really important.

And I think that's the whole meaning of art. I think the scariest notion to any human being is best embodied in the really goofy saying, if a tree falls in the woods and there's no one there to hear it, does it really make a noise? I think we're scared shitless that if there's no one here to hear us, we didn't make a noise. And it's like a blow against the empire of silence to make that mark. And whether it's a good mark or a bad mark, it's irrelevant. Just—you have to do it.

And that's what art is, fundamentally, to all people. And then you can elaborate on it. I mean, I make a lot of art because I'm bored. I'm sure that it all starts with boredom and idleness. I understand the cave people, when

they were done with the hunt, actually had a lot of free time. [They laugh.] So it's a really effective way to live, apparently. And there's not a lot of germs spreading because the communities are too small for germs, you know, and you're not keeping chickens.

Anyway, enough nostalgia for that. I do want to make that point about my work being intimate. It had to do with scale, but we talked about scale yesterday, I think. I forget.

MS. RIEDEL: No, I think we were talking about it today, and it being, yeah—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Doll-sized?

MS. RIEDEL: —not monumental. Yes, I think that was today.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, if doll-sized got lost, that's a shame. But anyway, my mother told me I wouldn't want to play with dolls, but I think I still am. And I definitely—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that we talked about yesterday.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That was yesterday? Okay, good. Well—

MS. RIEDEL: But monumental—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Monumentality in commissions we were talking about, right?

MS. RIEDEL: —largest pieces, right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. That was one of the—that was the largest piece you've done to date.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, one of the things that I fretted about for many years was the fact that my work only had one figure in it, for the most part. There are other—there are examples that contradict that, but the overwhelming trend is towards works with one figure. And for a long time I thought this was some sort of mental sickness, that I was incapable of sustaining a relationship, and that if I had good love relationships I would obviously be doing pictures of two people all the time, or whatever.

And what I ultimately figured was I should shut up because it was really about the relationship of the character and the person looking at the character, and that whether—some of the characters have their eyes shut, which, of course, you know, having gone to school in the early '80s, I heard a lot about "the gaze" and who was looking at what and what direction the eyeballs were facing, and who was allowed to stare at what for how long.

[Laughs.]

And I was actually very, very, very interested in that. And so, a lot of my characters have shut eyes, which of course is an invitation to stare because the person doesn't know you're staring at them. So it's my idea of allowing someone to really get a good stare on at the character. But it is—the relationship that I'm interested in is the one of the viewer versus the person.

And that came up in a conversation about me starting to exhibit at an early age. And I talked about how students often say, "I don't care if you like it because I only make it for myself," and how I never want to make these for myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm not interested in—I've got—especially now that I'm older I've got enough stuff. I really don't want to own them. I just don't—I'm making them to be looked at by other people, and as far as I'm concerned, they're not done until that's happened. And that's very important to me.

You know, people often send me pictures that they see, like, especially at the de Young Museum. I hate that piece. We could talk about that piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Which piece is that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's called *Resurwreckage*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I don't hate it, but it's problematic for me. But a lot of people see that because it's on view a lot, and they send me pictures of it on their cellphones. And it's like, "Don't send me a picture of my own piece. I've seen it before. Send me a picture of you in front of my piece."

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's what I want to see. I love stuff like that. I like pictures of people like, you know, waving, looking at the piece. I like pictures of children looking at my work. Children, oddly enough, really like my work, for the most part.

They had a great thing at Santa Fe when I was in *Pretty is as Pretty Does* show in Santa Fe—SITE Santa Fe. They had children come in and write about the piece called *Phosphenes*. Now, a lot of people think my work is completely inappropriate for children, and I, as a childless woman, I'm not going to even venture my own opinion, but I would have no problem with it.

And these children were interpreting my piece, and my favorite one said, "This piece is about clocks and corn." Now, the piece has a sort, like, these—I can see it perfectly. There's no clocks in it and there's no corn in it, but it's like I don't know what that—that kid is so on it. It was great.

And all the kids saw that it was sort of wistful and forlorn, but most of them didn't see it as tragic. I mean, they understood the sort of nuance of —none of them said it's wistful and forlorn, but they seemed to understand that it wasn't good but it wasn't awful either. And they—there was one who maybe saw it as worse. But they seemed to be getting the tone of the piece really accurately, and I liked their interpretation.

MS. RIEDEL: Why was clocks and corn so accurate for you?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I'd have to show you the piece.

MS. RIEDEL: I have a vague mental image of it, but, yeah, let's take a—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's got a lot of yellow in it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I remember that.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And there's these petals, and the petals have a grid on them that kind of looks like rows of corn.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But—what year are we in? Okay, this is the older work. It will definitely be in the newer work. This piece has a lot of traditional stained glass technique in it because I was suddenly interested in stained glass again.

Clocks and corn. Here we go. Internet slow.

MS. RIEDEL: What year was this piece, *Phosphenes*?

MS. SCHAECHTER: This would be about 2009, 2009.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: For reasons I can't fathom, this will not support me adding a year. Do you see in there, these little spikes of these petals—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I can see something, yeah, that could look like corn.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —look kind of like corn. And they also kind of look like clock hands.

MS. RIEDEL: Clocks. They look like those roses, too on old maps. I can't remember what those are called.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Compass rose.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, exactly.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, and a lot of kids said she's having a dream or she's having a nightmare. Yes, sure, all those things. I don't ever have fixed interpretations for these pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I really, really—definitely editing for open interpretations—I mean, sometimes I have a more fixed one than others. I just want to point out something, and that is this little flash of red here—and there's another one right there—

MS. RIEDEL: On the border we're talking about.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I ran out of blue glass, no joke, and I just thought, what's the craziest thing I can do is put red in there. [Laughs.] But—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we should—let's talk a little bit, too, about the specific pieces—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: —and themes or series, because we haven't done that at all and we absolutely should.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: So, each of the—we've talked—probably not on a card specifically, but we've talked about—and you certainly have mentioned—how each piece feels unique to you. It's trying to be a stand-alone piece.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: But there's not a theme and variation that you work on for a period of time. There's not a set series per se that you're exploring. But as you were talking about them earlier off-disc, off-card, you were talking about them in small groups, and so it would be interesting to look at how you see the work over time and pieces that have been especially significant for you.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, there's two ways I see it, and one way I would say corresponds to my thinking that art and creativity are cyclical from primitive to mastery to decadence.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So I can see those faces and those trajectories in my work. But the other thing is how it relates to my personal life, like a lot of them have to do with certain men who I was in love with at the time. And so, they're sort of—I'm sad to say they sort of relate to boyfriends.

And so, yeah, I could say specifically. I mean, the pieces done in the—I wish that my website would allow me enough space to include the years, because I can't always remember, but the work from—

MS. RIEDEL: And I've got a list here too.

But I think, you know, there are certain pieces that, throughout time, have art historical references. There are certain pieces that go back to very specific grids. We were talking about the piece very early on, the woman washing her hair, dyeing her hair—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —where the pattern becomes so intense. There are certain things that reoccur cyclically in the work.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, that's certainly true. First of all—

MS. RIEDEL: Is that conscious or does it just seem to happen?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, some of them—I would say probably a combination. There's two pieces that have valentines in it: *St. Violentine* and then the piece *Tiny Eva*, from 1991.

I mentioned to you off-card that *Tiny Eva* was a watershed piece. One thing was that I had gone—I guess 1983 was when I graduated—to 1991 in a sort of clear up-part of the bell curve. And this is the peak.

MS. RIEDEL: *Tiny Eva*.

MS. SCHAECHTER: This piece, *Tiny Eva*, was by far the ringing crescendo of the bell curve. You know, it was the orgasmic moment of that line of creativity. And after that, the only choice was to, in a way, pull back and go back to the roots and the essence of what was important to me as an artist and build again from scratch. Although I don't think you can tell, looking at the work, because it's not like—

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —I suddenly started scribbling again.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But the work—I was in—it felt like a crisis, and it was very hard to get my equilibrium back. And basically what I hadn't understood about creativity was that I was going to go through this cycle many times. And even in the day—I mean, you wake up and you're primitive, and by nighttime you're decadent kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, it's an atomic structure that you experience on every level. So the first —*Tiny Eva* would be sort of the high high renaissance, and leading to a sort of decadent, corrupt phase that necessitates going back to primitive.

You asked about—and *Tiny Eva*, by the way, was based on the lyrics of an album that is—well, a couple of things happened with *Tiny Eva* as a piece. One, it was on the cover of *The New Yorker*. But I had made it to be the cover of my boyfriend at the time David E. Williams' record album, *A House for the Dead and a Porch for the Dying*.

David E. Williams is—I'm glad that we were ultimately able to become friends because I think he's a genius. And he's a very important person in my life, and I was honored to do this record jacket for him. And there's a poem in the border that is his song called "The Dead Hyman." He is a brilliant poet, really brilliant.

And he didn't want to use the piece on his cover because *The New Yorker* wanted to use it on their cover and he wanted unique artwork. He actually eventually acquiesced, which was—I told *The New Yorker* that I wasn't going to work with them. They were really difficult to work with. All I wanted to do was be on the cover of *The New Yorker* and they made it hard.

I mean, I was playing the game with the best of my ability. I would do anything they said. I was revising this piece—it was another piece—over and over and over again and finally they just rejected it and wanted to use this one. I mean, they called me up and said, "Can you do it in a different color," and it's like, "No."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Actually, Photoshop existed back then, but—

Anyway, so David didn't want to— and I made it for him. So I called *The New Yorker* and said, "I can't work with you," and they basically begged me to reconsider. And I called David and I—and he was all right with it ultimately, and it did get used on *The New Yorker* and it was his album cover—way better as his album cover.

Can I just say, *The New Yorker* cover editor took off one of the borders of the piece. The outside perimeter was removed, for reasons I cannot fathom, but you can see there's a heart shape there. I'm born on Valentine's Day.

MS. RIEDEL: That's right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's where that came from. And that piece was a real high-water moment in that creative cycle. And then I went—I had to reassess.

You asked about the piece *Voice of a Sinking Ship*. *Voice of a Sinking Ship* was based on—this was when I lived on Rodman Street. Rodman Street is downtown, and at the end of Rodman Street is a giant billboard. And for a while it was a Seagram's commercial.

And the Seagram's ad had a picture of a bottle of Seagram's, some limes and some ice cubes just floating in what was supposed to be gin. I don't know what it was. It was a beautiful photorealist illustration of water, sort of—it was a really beautiful illustration, realistic but it was sort of super-realism, in the style of super-realism.

And I would look at that, and every time I would pass that billboard, I thought, if you would just replace that Seagram's bottle with a ship and those ice cubes and limes with drowning bodies, it would be just the most awesome piece.

And so I finally—I took a picture of the billboard, and it's sort of roughly the same composition up here. I did have people in it at first, and I deleted them. And also, the figure, it had an entirely different figure. And the figure was very static. The composition was very static and very boring, very easy to ignore. One thing I think about a lot is the composition of these pieces.

I had this drawing separate, and it was basically some sort of inverted crucifixion of a female figure. And when I put two and two together, that this had to be the sinking ship, I suddenly noticed she was the shape of an anchor and, I mean, it blew my mind. I had to go take a little walk to cool down, you know. That was like—that's the moment of inspiration I'm looking for: like, wowie.

And that was—I think that's— this piece is, I think, one of my stronger ones. It's in a private collection. I'm also—I mean, I have the person's name and address. I'm just guessing they've moved. But the bottom part is very thick. She's behind about an inch or inch-and-a-half of glass, but it's very bubbly, that you can't see in images of it.

So that was a very important piece too, at the time. And—

MS. RIEDEL: Now, also that is a good example, I think, of how much the work evolves in the process. You've talked about that. And I can't remember if we've said that already and I want to make sure—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, that was on the card—the infamous Card 3. I said that I didn't like doing commissions because I don't know what the piece is going to look like when it's done.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I also can't imagine pleasing the client if I can't please myself. But, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How important it is that you not know what it's going to look like when it's done.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, yes, I—that was on Card 3, but that is—I must—I really want to be surprised, because if it comes out looking like something I can imagine, then I feel like I haven't done my job. I have to—it has to be new. It has to surprise me or I wasn't being creative enough.

I think teaching—the number-one reason students don't like their work, according to my survey, is because it doesn't look like they want it to. And I understand probably it's looking worse. [Laughs.] You have to get to the point where it at least looks as good as you want it to, but then you can aim for better. I want it to look better—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —than I can imagine.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I'm going to hold out for that result if possible. Of course, that's very frustrating.

MS. RIEDEL: In the ways that you can't imagine until you've started to do it.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: Other pieces that have been especially significant that come to—I know you've mentioned *Dream of a Fisherman's Wife* in the past, but anything that you haven't talked about elsewhere that at this point in time, in retrospect, seems seminal?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm looking—it's probably a mistake to be looking at them while I'm talking about them because they're all my babies and they're all important to me for some reason or another. That's why they exist. None of them are throwaways.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about the one that we mentioned earlier, dyeing my hair?

MS. SCHAECHTER: *Girl Dyeing Her Hair?*

MS. RIEDEL: *Girl Dyeing Her Hair.*

MS. SCHAECHTER: I just want to mention briefly *Waif and Wreath* because that had a similar thing as *Voice of the Sinking Ship*. And that was—when it was finished I realized it was a crucifixion with a crown of thorns, and I had never intended that and I was thrilled to see it.

The actual torque shape of that wreath, sort of in space, if you can call that space—I had a student at the Pennsylvania Academy who was drawing these sort of whirling donuts in space, and I think that it was

unconsciously taken from that student, not purposely.

But, *Okay, Girl Dyeing Her Hair*—I guess it's in the next series, huh? The reason that piece is important is because —oh, no, it's here. And I think that would be—

MS. RIEDEL: What year was that? Do you—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, that's a guess. That has to be about '97, '98.

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds about right, yeah.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, I would say '97. This piece is important because of the motif in the background—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —which has invaded my work and won't disappear. First of all, I had a student do a hexagonal background like that. And I said yesterday that I was obsessed with the bathroom tiles, and we had a hexagonal tile bathroom. And hexagons are wonderful.

I just—you know, artists often will rhapsodize about something goofy like, "Oh, my god, I love ellipses and hexagons," which is something I could say. I love ellipses and hexagons. And then in a critique you would say, "But why?" And it's like, is there really an answer to that?

Because one thing that's interesting about neuroaesthetics is they've discovered that some things that people automatically doodle are really just images of things that are structures in our bodies. I mean, why do —do you have to answer why you like it with words? You know, can't you just say you like it because it's like this? [They laugh.] I just traced the outline—

MS. RIEDEL: Traced a shape.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —of an octagon—a hexagon.

Some shapes just appear beautiful and you can't say why. I've always liked hexagons and ellipses. So I did this bathroom tile design, and there was six set patterns, and I was going to make them in different colors, and they all had a certain way they were going to interact. But when they came out of the kiln, I paired them up differently, just to see what would happen.

And what I found was that I had a sort of infinite vocabulary of potential designs and they all looked great. So why would I just have six repeating motifs when I could have hundreds?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And this was like, you know—this was awesome. And that's the kind of—I mean, this is like discovering something really good because it leads to more discoveries and more visual things that are interesting to me.

So this was the first piece where I did that. And, I mean, you don't have to do it with hexagons; you can do it with any shape. But that's the origin of these kaleidoscope-like pallets. And, I mean, I also dye my hair, so there's a personal element in that as well.

Speech Balloon is worth talking about because at some point I was looking at cartoons and the motifs that they use as a good way to come up with strategies for cutting glass. You always need to factor in where you're going to put these honking black lines that divide up the glass. And speech balloons and thought balloons seem to be, like, a really excellent idea for how to do an interesting composition. So there's a number of works that do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: One of them is *Donkey Ducky Dream*. That was later.

MS. RIEDEL: And *Body Bag*.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And this one, *Dreams of Cheese* has it, and this one, *Autobiography*, has it. And speaking of ellipses, *Pale Oval* has an ellipse. *Fine Example* has a whirling torus. A torus is a donut shape—T-O-R-U-S.

MS. RIEDEL: Which piece was that that you were mentioning?

MS. RIEDEL: This *Fine Example*, *Pale Oval*, and *Waif and Wreath*.

I wanted to mention *Child Bride* because, well, it's one of my favorites. It's cropped, although I can't—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: This is not cropped for psychological effect. It's cropped for compositional effect, which was actually a printmaker's idea and I just thought it was excellent.

This piece was—I unintentionally stole the idea from my friend, Susan Hagen, who is wood carver, who is interested in the Celtic tradition of the Green Man. And I—the Green Man, he is like the Jolly Green Giant. He's sort of vomiting foliage.

And I thought—I don't know what happened because I don't remember, but basically one of my rules is that I wouldn't copy someone who's alive that I can ask, "How do you feel about this?" And I didn't ask her because I forgot that I saw it, and apparently my brain sort of conveniently thought I thought of it myself—kind of like George Harrison with "My Sweet Lord." And I basically unintentionally ripped her off, but I told her I would always mention her. And Susan didn't care. Susan is a lovely person.

Oh, earlier I wanted to say that we had talked about, in terms of creativity, it's important for an artist to have structure but these structures become obsolete really quickly, and that you have to sort of keep an eye out and be very vigilant for how quickly these things that are really liberating at first and allow you to sort of freely traverse whole universes of ideas and inspirations, they just—the next day they're mulch, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: And can you give an example of that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, we were talking earlier about—I had explored using Photo Stencils, and at first I really enjoyed it but then I later decided it was sort of cheating to rely on them and I didn't want to use them anymore.

So it's actually hard to talk about that. That's a good question. I don't have rules for the images per se. I don't know; do I? I probably do. You know something; I need more lead time to think about that one.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. We'll see if something comes up with Card 5.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay. Card 5. No, not Card 5.

All right, I'm going to go to the next page of images and talk about *Voice of the Sinking Ship*—I mean *Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*. Sorry.

This piece, I just love this piece. And it occurred to me years later that this piece, believe it or not, is based on the Lars von Trier movie, *Breaking the Waves*. I know that's ridiculous because—did you see that movie?

MS. RIEDEL: No. I was thinking Japanese prints.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, yeah. Well, *Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*, if you Google that you'll get a lot of pornography of a woman—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: —of a woman being oral sexed by an octopus.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Octopus, yeah.

MS. SCHAECHTER: One thing is I would never actually want to deal very directly with my fantasies, so this, not being my fantasy, was safe. And I also want to point out that this image is tubular. You can put these octopuses together like you might the doors of an altarpiece and it makes one octopus. It's not two. And that's one ocean that is continuous.

But the reason—I never consciously made this about *Breaking the Waves*, and it didn't occur to me until literally years later, but *Breaking the Waves* is a movie—I thought—words obviously can't describe it because I'm tongue-tied. I really like the movie. I watched it a second time. I really regretted watching it a second time because it's very, very, very difficult. It's depressing to the max.

A lot of people hate Lars von Trier. A lot of women hate Lars von Trier. Lars von Trier martyrs all his women. In order to martyr a woman, you must mistreat her. But it's a parable about a girl who's sort of a holy fool whose husband works on an oil derrick. And she's very strange. She's very religious. She's part of one of these Calvinist cults.

And she prays and prays and prays for her husband to come home. And what happens is he's horribly mangled.

And he comes home and is paralyzed. And he insists that she go out and have sex because he doesn't want to, you know, ruin her life.

And he wants her to come back and describe these experiences to him, and she won't do it because she's so madly in love with him. So she fakes it but he's on to her. So she loves him so much she does it for real, and this sows the seeds of her ultimate destruction. I don't think it's ruining the movie by saying that.

But it's, like, heart-wrenching to watch this movie. I mean, not only is there waves—[laughs]—in this piece, but the character looks a lot like the actress. So I think a lot of my—for all my so-called insight, I think that I'm often the last to know, and that these things are formulated like dreams.

And I realized later—I mean, I might have been thinking about Botticelli's *Venus* and cycloramas and octopus porn and how lovely turquoise looks next to fire engine red, but the fact is, is somewhere deep inside of me I was—I needed to do my version of *Breaking the Waves*, which—and maybe give it a different ending.

It's a good movie but, ah, it's much more depressing than *Dancer in the Dark*, which is depressing enough, and *Dogville*. Lars von Trier has got a problem. [Laughs.] Anyway, it's one of my favorite pieces, and it came together very quickly. I actually drew that figure on a cocktail napkin, believe it or not.

MS. RIEDEL: That goes right in line with the doodling, so I'm not surprised.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right. There you go. So, other pieces?

MS. RIEDEL: There were a few that you—I think you've mentioned as well as being really seminal. That certainly was one of them. *Joan of Arc* is another. You just mentioned *Monument*. Before I think we started to—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, yeah, I want to talk about *Monument*.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: —*The Sin Eater*.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, *The Sin Eater* comes much later.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: *Monument* is—*Monument* is where I—well, I'll show you another piece that's called—I think it's up on here. Is it? Yes. These two figures from a piece right after it called *Mother and Child*—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —where that—those two figures were supposed to be on top of the skull pile—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —in *Monument*. And I—this piece was—*Monument*—I had spent several years researching the American Civil War. This was concurrent with our activities in Iraq.

The first Desert Storm started January 15th, 1991, a date which will live in infamy because that's the date my former lover, ..., committed suicide. He very strongly believed that if we went to war, it would be the end of the world, and apparently it was the end of his world. Now, I was not—I had broken up with him years before he died, but his death was one of the biggest traumas in my life.

So, there was a whole period of time after that where I think I was sort of doing the post-processing of my mother's death and Jim Canfield's death. And then we were back at war. And I had just researched my ancestor in the Civil War, and I had spent two years reading nothing but books on the American Civil War. And I wanted to make a piece on the theme.

There's also a Russian painting by an artist named Vereshchagin. I don't—I'm sure that's the wrong pronunciation. *Pile of Skulls*, it's quite a notorious painting and it's really wonderful, and I have a little bit of guilt about ripping him off without doing him one better. I don't mind ripping people off if I outdo them, but if I come out the loser, then I mind.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Anyway, so the original figure was this woman from *Mother and Child* who's got a— her son is sort of over her shoulders in the position of the Good Shepherd from stained glass windows, although I didn't—

I found that out later.

I was sort of thinking about how sad it was in the Civil War, and in any war, how young men, usually men, eagerly enlist, and how women—women can give life by making a new one. Men only have one life to give, the one they got, and they can donate it in a war, and that's about it, or in some act of heroism.

And so, women unfortunately have to give up their sons. And my ancestor—I have the letters and all that—I was sort of thinking about that and how sad it was. So I originally had them atop the skull pile. But one of my rules—one of my rules that has never gotten stale or outmoded is that I will not tell people how to think. And I don't want to tell them what the narrative is particularly, but I sure don't want to tell them how to vote or—

You know, telling someone war is bad strikes me as insulting. Either they know it or I'm not going to be able to convey that message. That's just a little too much for one artwork. But I did want to say something about—along those lines, and this was my piece. And I cut the figure off, and I cut the figure off at the calves.

And to me—first of all, I had a phase in the late '80s where you may notice that a lot of the heads are upside-down. I was often—an example would be *Someone to Mourn Over Me*, a piece called *Transformer*. There's a number of pieces where I have—a piece called *Cast* from 1986 or something—really early.

I managed to somehow make it look natural that a head would be in the composition upside-down. Now, in *Monument* the head is below the feet, and I got a great deal of delight out of that composition. And I thought that cutting off the live figure was very important for the message of that piece.

Also, by the way, that piece, *The Skull Pile*, was designed with 3-D computer animation software where I had one skull and I duplicated it a number of times. I made a pile of skulls. I generated that as a jpeg and then drew it and made it into a stained glass window. Talk about crazy. And I did make *Mother and Child* as a separate window.

MS. RIEDEL: And just—we talked about technology in Card Number 3—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, right.

MS. RIEDEL: —so we're not going to repeat that because that information is available online—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —but we did walk through how Photoshop and certain things in particular did evolve your process.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. That was very, very, very sad that I couldn't pursue 3-D computer animation.

So that's that. *Joan of Arc*—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we did mention too that you're thinking about doing some 3-D works in glass. I think that was what I interpreted—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I am definitely going to try some sculpture.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that in the works already?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: *Joan of Arc*—well, I did say the thing about computers was that I had some sort of strange form of synesthesia where I actually can smell oil paint, and I feel like I'm touching clay when I work with 3-D computers, or with computers, even Photoshop. It's bizarre.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's pretty wild.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm not sure what to say about *Joan of Arc* except that it's one of my favorite pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: And why was that? Do you remember?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I love the colors.

MS. RIEDEL: And I know you're always especially pleased with pieces that really surprise you. That's one thing we've mentioned.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think the interaction of diagrammatic space and model of the solar system, using that as an idea for lead lines, I just—I don't know what this piece has to do with Joan of Arc, by the way. I don't really know anything about Joan of Arc. But she is standing on a fiery pyre. This is also one of the glassier ones of my piece, like the way the light goes through this purple area.

MS. RIEDEL: In the center.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That just makes me happy. This piece, it's like it goes beyond words. And, you know, why do I like it? It makes my heart soar, but I—and that's S-O-A-R. [Laughs.] Everything about it—the colors make me happy, the composition makes me happy, the curl of her lip versus the tilt of her head and all that make me—I feel like I did it.

MS. RIEDEL: There's also a very complex interaction of patterns in this piece, it seems.

MS. SCHAECHTER: You know, the top and bottom with these spirals, were originally on the left and right-hand side, and they looked awful. And it was—I love it when it's a simple, obvious fix, like who would have thought just rotating them 90 degrees was going to be the solution?

MS. RIEDEL: And did you figure that out in the process of making the piece?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: See, if I had told someone what to do, this piece would be boring. It's related, of course, to *You are Here*—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —which, *You are Here*, I mean, if that isn't an homage to Dirk Bach, I don't know what is. But this was also concurrent with my rebirth as a divorcee. It really offended me that a friend of mine saw that as a fetus until I realized that I really was talking about being reborn. And as above, so below. And it's also sort of a crucifixion. This piece was inspired by sitting underneath a window in Scotland. We visited a wind farm.

MS. RIEDEL: We should talk about that too—travel and how that has affected your work, if it has affected your work. It's something you've begun to do a lot more of more recently, the past five years.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm not sure how I would talk about that, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. I mean, we talked a little bit yesterday I think about some of the glass windows you've seen in England. Over lunch we were talking about Japan.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, Japan is a teaching trip, and it was wonderful. And I saw beautiful, beautiful beauty—beauty things there like Sanjūsangendō, the temple in Kyoto with the thousand golden Buddhas.

And I mentioned at lunch that I have read the book *In Praise of Shadows*, which is by a Japanese author who I can't remember the name of, but a lot of stained glass artists like that book because it talks about light in a way—about dim light, which stained glass people are often very interested in because stained glass is more about removal of light than adding light to a room.

But travel—I don't think that travel is going to be a conversation that is going to lead anywhere interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Then we'll leave it.

MS. SCHAECHTER: [Laughs.] All right.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think about your work as being particularly American? Do you think about it as part of an international tradition? Do you think about it in terms of a part history? How do you think about it?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I certainly—we talked about that yesterday, how I feel like it's a part of stained glass history.

One of the most painful things I've ever had to listen to is stained glass artists telling me—well, certain stained glass artists do not feel like my work is part of stained glass history at all. And I find that devastating. I absolutely think it's part of stained glass history. It's informed by the history and I am hoping to inform the history.

Hey, I can't help it if I hit a home run at the ballpark. Is that arrogant? [Laughs.] I can see why they don't recognize it as having a lot to do with what they do. But I'm hurt by that.

You know, one of the things I decided the other day that I was going to define—make a hard line in the sand and say what craft was compared to art once and for all, and then I was going to post it on my blog, which I did not do. All right, here it is the difference between art and craft is—I've got to go to the bathroom—no. [They laugh.] Oh, my god, the card just stopped working. [They laugh.] No, the secret of life is—oh, I'm having a heart attack.

If a piece is informed more than 50 percent by materials and process, then I'm going to call it craft. Now, that of course makes Jackson Pollack a craftsman.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm willing to accept these people into—I think crafts would, you know, welcome them with open arms. If they don't like it, well, tough tits. But that—people, a lot of times when they say—[laughs]—"I consider myself a crafts person," I often meet with the response, "Oh, honey, don't say that awful, bad thing about yourself. It's okay. You're really definitely an artist."

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I think, I wasn't saying anything bad about myself. I'm proud—very, very proud—to be—consider myself a crafts person. And I say the argument for that is it is absolutely informed by its own process and by the material.

A famous glass artist ... came up to me in Florida and said, "I don't see why your work has to be made out of glass at all." And I think I would have hit her—[laughs]—if I hadn't been so busy scraping my jaw off the ground. I was so insulted by that. Now, of course she struck a nerve. I can see, especially if you look at these pieces in reproduction all the time, why one might think they don't have to be glass.

Well, they damn well do have to be glass. First of all, I will not make them out of oil paint. That's sort of a technicality. But they arise out of the process of glassmaking. They have to do with transparency. Now, a lot of European—a lot of glass artists don't like opaque glass or Tiffany glass or translucent glass and they're real snobs for transparent glass.

This is the kind of nuanced argument that I love to get into with glass people. Now, it's like, "How much of the edge do you cut off of a sheet of Lamberts?" And it's like—... was saying, "I cut off less than a quarter of an inch." And I'm like, "Oh my god, I cut off up to six inches. And then I'll give it to my students because I can't use that stuff." They were like, "Oh!" That stuff is, like, \$50 a square foot. That's a lot of material.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But, you know, I like having these funny shop-talk conversations.

So Europeans tend to really hate translucent and opalescent and opaque glasses like Tiffany glass. Europeans hate Tiffany. I can see why. My glass becomes—I use European glass and it's transparent, but when I'm done with it, it's not transparent anymore because I've done so much process to it.

In fact, one of the things Ursula had us doing with the glass was just meditating on the sheets, and then after, like, a good, long meditation we can maybe put one line in it with a magic marker.

Now, I know what I said about mark-making being like a huge, monumental effect on the world, but that sure wasn't enough for me. I want to get my marks all over everything. I'm like a territorial cat. I have to spray everything. Everything must be manipulated by me to the max, like a hundred processes on every piece of glass. So when I'm done, they're not opaque; they're translucent.

And so that's a problem for Europeans. But actually I think—I'm not popular in Europe—yet. I don't see—I've had a European artist say to me, like, "Oh, why do you fuss so much? You know, you can just scribble now, now that, you know, we've passed the dark ages of obsessive realism." And I'm like, "But I don't want to scribble." [Laughs.] I wouldn't be happy. So there's that.

How did we get onto this question?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, because we were discussing whether you thought about your work as being part of an international tradition or American tradition—what sort of tradition.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I would like to think it's very, very tied to European stained glass. And when people have a hard time with my imagery, I think about the history of cathedral glass. I'm very, very interested in that. I do like English best, because it's the best, but I like it all—or some of all of it.

And it's a very interesting medium because it died many, many years ago. And most people who make stained glass now would not—did not go to art school. It's not commonly taught except as an elective, if that. It's certainly never given any respect anywhere. I mean, it's just kind of like, oh, well, we'll do this class because we can offer it and it doesn't take up a lot of resources and, like, people from, like, illustration will take it as a hobby, kind of. It's, like, a service elective.

And it's not taken seriously as a medium. The people who make it do not take themselves seriously as artists necessarily, and they are often very apologetic about that and have low self-esteem.

Oh, I was talking about crafts, the hard-line definition between craft—

MS. RIEDEL: And art.

MS. SCHAECHTER: – and art.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I can't imagine that getting anything but a lot of contentious arguments. [Laughs.] But I thought it was sort of a useful starting point as a way to define the differences. Anyway, in terms of tradition, I sort of see myself in that tradition, and I'm very pleased to be part of it. And I consider it stained glass.

MS. RIEDEL: And that is a more recent way of thinking about the work, or more recent interest for you, because when you began working, the focus wasn't on the history of stained glass. Or was it?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, I was deliberately avoiding learning anything about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I became interested much more recently, and I joined the American Glass Guild.

The American Glass Guild is a sort of super black belt-level nerd for stained glass. They are splintered off from the Stained Glass Association of America, which is the big business association trade guild —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —because they felt that those people, they were not in keeping with their philosophy. This is a much artier group, actually. They're, I think, in dire straits. I think—they poll—every year after their conference they send out the typical conference poll, like, how can we do this—how can we, like, improve things?

My last poll response was, "You have to let anyone under 40 in free. Don't ask. Just do it. Find a way. I don't care if you don't have any money; figure this out." Because every—the magazine—the Stained Glass Association of America, their magazine is mostly obituaries. The Stained Glass Guild, they have a newsletter, not a magazine, but it's actually pretty good.

They are in dire need of young people to get involved in this. I don't care what it takes to get them to that conference. Pay for their plane fares. And they usually say, "Oh, we have one scholarship." "Boo. Waive their fee. You have to waive their fee. I don't care if it's expensive." And I don't think it's that expensive. Couldn't they do that? Why can't they do that? They need—there is no way young people can go to a conference.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's just prohibitive.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: We have to get them—I think the conferences are fun. They're so nerdy. It's like, wow, let's talk about, like, these, like really atomic-level detailed discussions of how, like restoration— I always find those the most interesting even though it's not something I do, like, you know, this kind of glue. [Laughs.]

And, you know: Here's pictures of my trip to Timbuktu and they're stained glass and stuff like that. It's really interesting. And how are you going to keep this medium alive when it's so clearly dead? Well, not by letting everyone die. So, invite young people.

MS. RIEDEL: One question I want to have before we completely move away from teaching—though we moved away from it a while ago— but you've taught at universities, you've done academies. You've also done a fair amount of teaching at Penland and—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right, Pilchuck.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So what is the value in those separate entities, do you think? Do you teach differently at one or the other?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Because it feels so good when it's over. [Laughs.] Pilchuck, it's like having a—Pilchuck is like dropping acid, even though I've only done that once in my life and it was not pleasant. Pilchuck—Pilchuck is like—you have to recover from Pilchuck.

I love those places and I will support them until—especially financially—until the day I die. Part of that is my feeling that I must continue the knowledge of stained glass that I have, and I feel very strongly that I need to impart that knowledge. And part of it is the opportunity to network.

And sometimes it's fun, but Pilchuck—I always have problems at Pilchuck where the students get upset, for whatever reason, and it's always at Pilchuck. There's something about Pilchuck and the culture. Margaret Mead should go there and study, like, the natives of Pilchuck—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: —because it's its own culture bubble. And those people don't believe in time for private reflection. They're not interested in that. Some artist brought it up and they're, like, "Reflection. That's, like, the surface of the glass, right?"

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, they're very social. They have a three-day orientation, after which if you don't know the name of everyone's cousins, you obviously slept through it. I mean, it's invasive. And the students expect you to be on 24/7. It's really hard to teach there.

MS. RIEDEL: Compared to Penland, compared to Haystack?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, Penland is easy-breezy, although the reward is less. I mean, after you— Pilchuck, you feel like you jumped off a cliff with these people. You feel like you've had sex with all of them. You feel like—I mean, it's intimate.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And when you're out of there you feel like maybe deprogramming is appropriate, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and rehab. And it's like you've really had an experience at Pilchuck. It's a full-tilt boogie, whereas Penland is a lot more like going to camp—well, for the teacher. Penland is lovely, but it wasn't like having your head blown up. And I've been to Pilchuck now five times. I don't know why.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you feel their particular—

MS. SCHAECHTER: I just want to be clear that I love Pilchuck, because I love Pilchuck.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Are there particular strengths and weaknesses to universities versus Pilchuck versus Penland versus, for example, the Pilchuck in Japan.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, don't be fooled by University of the Arts being a university. I've never taught at a liberal arts school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: University of the Arts is all arts, but they have a school of dance and a school of writing for television and stuff like that. So, I can't speak to teaching in a liberal arts environment at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: My experience teaching post-baccalaureates who have to be sort of mainstreamed into art school culture so they can get a master's degree in art is that there are advantages to going to, say, Syracuse or a big—or Madison, Wisconsin. And some of these places are great for art and you definitely end up being—having a more liberal arts approach, but at the cost of art.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: So, the problem with art school is—well, right now the problem with art school is what's happened with No Child Left Behind, and the idea of funding in our grade schools has meant that when they come into Freshman Foundation, they have never touched materials. Their parents were afraid to let them hold a scissors.

And I used to think—when they discussed getting rid of Freshman Foundation in art school, I was insane. I would just get livid—the Bauhaus model. I love the Bauhaus model. The only thing you can do is add time arts or 4-D, whatever you want to call it. Like performance, I think, and film needs to be added to that canon.

But otherwise, it's the most—it's perfect, and it's never going to be not perfect, except I didn't account for people who wouldn't be ready for it. They need to go back to nursery school for a few years. They need to make collages and learn how to hold the scissors. They need to get dirty in a sandbox. They need—you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Have you seen that? Have you seen that progression actually happen?

MS. SCHAECHTER: The thing that's happened at U Arts, teaching the stained glass elective, is that when I get students who are majoring in graphic design who aren't crafts majors—the crafts majors have sophomore year where they basically can catch up. The graphic design majors go from computers, basically, to computers. And I've seen them literally not know how to hold a knife.

And it's—the education has to be incredibly basic. They don't understand—I mentioned this on the infamous Card 3.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: There are some artists who like to carve and some artists who like to build; you know, some who like to destroy and some who like to create, and some who like hard resistant materials and some who really prefer soft materials. They don't know the difference. You know, they don't know what they like because they've never touched materials before, and they don't know how much resistance.

Like, I said in that card that I really prefer very, very resistant materials. I used to paint on boards, not canvases. I really like hard surfaces to work with. And some people really want a soft surface, so it would be a mistake for them to work in glass, unless maybe hot glass. They can do hot glass.

But my experience is that students now—and the other aspect is conceptually they're behind as well because they've never thought independently. They've never thought creatively because there was always a right answer for the test that they better get a good grade on.

So they think there's an answer to art. [Laughs.] I mean, first of all, they don't—they're creating the problems to begin with, but their thinking is that there's an answer to this problem, and they're not fluid. So you have to—they're not ready for Freshman Foundation or their major, no wonder we now have to have master's degrees for everyone, and Ph.D.s even for artists because they're so far behind when they get there as freshmen.

Freshman year should happen when they're juniors now. And they need two years of sandbox and scissors, collage with magazines.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you seen that get progressively to be the case—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —in the time you've been teaching? Interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, I think so. And they also seem to have much more cozy relationships with their parents, like their response to—I hesitate because I'm afraid I'm going to sound like a real old fart, but, like, it seems like their response to criticism is absolute indignation, to the point where it's like, "You just criticized my friend; you will not do that," in class, like you're not even talking to that person and they're like, "Whoa!" [Laughs.] You

know? I mean, that happens now. They're like a gang, and they don't like criticism.

I mean, I would say my generation is used to being criticized by our parents and they're not. And they're also—they're risk-averse in terms of creativity. And I'm not—they're certainly just as talented as anyone else, so potentially they are fine.

MS. RIEDEL: And what difference do you see, for example, when you were wanting to work on, say, the ideas you had when you were in school and your abstract professor would say, "Oh, no, you can't do that. That's not art"?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think we covered that already. I told him—well, I said—what I said was that I wanted to please him, so basically I left because I recognized that— well, I don't think I recognized it consciously, but somewhere in me I knew that trying to please him was nihilistic for what I wanted to do.

But I do—I don't think I mentioned this—I do remember going to my room and crying after some critique with him, and saying to myself, "Well, I guess I'm just an illustrator. Oh, well. I thought I was an artist."

MS. RIEDEL: That's right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I decided—you know, I didn't say, I will change and make, you know, work that he believes is art. I said, "I will do it my way and call it something else," another reason why I'm comfortable being called a craftsman, you know? I dare people to cast aspersions on that. It's just, my hunch, showing me their prejudiced little minds. Why would you do that to yourself, embarrass yourself that way in public?

It's like when I meet a man who says something openly sexist. I think, are you comfortable being an asshole in public because you just made yourself look really horrible. [Laughs.] I mean, I've lost all respect for you. And if you're fine with that, I'm fine with that. End of conversation, kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look back on all of the experiences you've had, is there one that stands out? Educational experiences; is there one that stands out as the most rewarding experience?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Teaching?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, educational, either as a student or as a teacher, I would say, or through, you know, the craft schools, Pilchuck, through the academies. Anything that stands out as—well, you mentioned Dirk Bach. That was—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, that was the most—as a student, Dirk Bach—well, I found him. I spent a long time. Every now and then I would search for him on the Internet, and for a long time he was not findable. And I found him a few months ago, actually, and I was able to thank him. And it was like a whole mission. I really wanted to thank him, and I was so glad that he was around and thankable. And his—what a gift. So that was probably the highlight of my student experience, and of course it came in a liberal arts class. Interesting.

But also Richard Harned was a very, very good teacher. Now, he was the opposite of the bully painting teacher. For a while I disparaged him after I graduated and thought he was sort of crazy. He is sort of crazy but now I think it's all good. But I felt like, oh, he just likes everything; it wasn't personal that he liked me.

And maybe there is some truth to that, but he is a very generous teacher. He is very supportive of a lot of people, and if you don't have to be egotistical and have to be the only one in the room, and just accept his love, it's there to take. And he's got a gift as a teacher. He attracted something like 30 students to the glass program, only two of whom still make glass. I mean, statistics about continuing art aside, I mean they stopped making glass that year. [Laughs.]

But he was dynamic and charismatic and sort of a mad scientist and really out of his mind, but influential. He was inspired all the time. He probably has ADD like crazy too, and just very, very positive person. So as much as the other teacher was negative, he was positive. So those are some experiences as a student.

As a teacher, of course being told by my students that my course meant a lot to them is—I mean, every teacher lives for that moment. That was one of the reasons I wanted to get in touch with my teachers and tell them that because it's so good.

Specifically, teaching with Sharon Church was—getting to know Sharon, but also having someone mentor me as a teacher so that I felt like I was a better teacher and that I could really give something to these people.

And I'm trying to think if there was any real specific experiences. I can only remember the experiences where students cry. [Laughs.] And most of the time experiences like this where students say, like, "My work is deeply personal. It's about horrible trauma from my childhood. I just can't bear to tell you."

And I'm always thinking, good, don't tell me. And then you know what happens next. I say, "Oh, that's okay, you don't have to say anything," and they go, "No, I am compelled to tell you." You're like, "No! No, don't tell me. No telling me. I don't want to hear about your rape or whatever."

Yes, there's those moments. And then there's—I'm sort of collecting the variety of techniques students have to avoid being criticized, one of course being, "I don't care what you think. I made it for myself." Another good one is, "I meant to do that." And it's like, "Yes, that doesn't make it good. And, you know, there's a lot of people who meant to do what they meant to do and it was bad that they meant to do it. That's no excuse."

And what other ones are there? I don't know. I like students now. Now that I'm not worried about what they think I really like them. I specifically like the students at U Arts because they come from a little more of a modest background. They do not have a sense of entitlement but they've got a lot of heart and they're really scrappy.

MS. RIEDEL: That actually segues beautifully into another one of the questions which we addressed about community, and is there a community that's been important to your development as an artist?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, much as I like to think of myself as an antisocial hermit in the [Charles] Bukowski mode —

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: What did he say? "I love people, as long as I don't have to, like, be with them."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I really relate to that comment.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I eventually joined the American Glass Guild, which, after years of being terrified of those people and therefore aggressively not liking them without knowing them—[they laugh]—in a sort of defensive way, like, "I don't want any part of them," I love them, and that's a great community. I've reached out to community much more now, whereas it's funny because—

MS. RIEDEL: In the past couple of years, past few years?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. No, even before that, in my 40s.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: My 30s—my 20s were marked by death. AIDS. Many of my very close friends died of AIDS and my mother died of cancer. ... shotgun to the head. And it was just a decade of death. And then I spent my 30s drinking and trying to get over it and seeing a psychiatrist. And so, as far as I'm concerned, my 30s don't even count.

I feel like Rip Van Winkle. I woke up and I was 40 and I felt like I was 19, because something happened and all the interim time just didn't count. So my 40s I started being a real human, and I think teaching was really good and really wonderful.

And I taught at the Pennsylvania Academy. It was really a comical interview there as well, where the interview went like this: "Well, Judith, we would like to hire you to do critiques with graduate student painters." And I said, "I don't like painting, I don't like critiques, and I don't have a graduate degree." And they said, "We admire your refreshing honesty. Here is what we'll pay you." And I was like, "Yep, I want the job." [They laugh.]

You know, I mentioned in Card 3 that I felt indebted to Susanne Frantz and Michael Monroe.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I would always want that, because she— Mija asked me who were my early supporters and who helped establish my career and what things were really important. I don't know why I just suddenly thought of that but that's so important that—

MS. RIEDEL: Early on.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Early on—very, very early on.

MS. RIEDEL: Michael Monroe—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, I know why I said that. Michael Moore was the name of the guy who hired me at the Pennsylvania Academy.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Anyway, so I loved teaching there. The students were very close to me in age. The woman I mentioned at lunch who had cancer is my age, and she was my first student, my first critique. And she decided we were going to be friends, and that was lovely. And I loved the students there.

I also learned how to talk about art. I mean, one thing about group critiques—which I find a loathsome practice. Group critiques for me as a student were, like, 18 hours of "Charlie Brown" parents murmuring, you know? [Makes mumbling sounds.] Then it was my turn. It was like, "Oh, my god, it's my turn. This is the best thing that ever happened to me. My turn. Attention. I'm waking up now. Woo-hoo!" And I wouldn't remember anything anyone said because it was so exciting, and then it was back to—[makes mumbling sounds]. [Laughs.]

Now, the thing I never took into account was I was going to be leading these one day. And it's hard because you have to be on for every critique. You have to say something. It has to be valuable and well thought-out. And, you know, you can't—just because you have indigestion, you're not allowed to insult the student. I mean, I have insulted students. I know this, sometimes more intentionally than others.

And then, you know, I'm always weighing my responsibility, and my responsibility to the idea of art—is it okay to let out a mediocre artist when I think they can improve? What can I say? How can I get them to improve? You know they always remember these negative things for the rest of their lives. Sometimes they have to be said.

And it's difficult to give a good critique, and I really learned that in these half-hours with these students at the academy. Of course, the first thing I learned was to get them to do all the talking: "You will now talk for a half an hour about your work."

And of course, if you're really stuck and you do that and you really let them talk the whole time and you say a few things and you smile and you say, "Keep going. I think you're doing fine," which is completely noncommittal, they will think they've had a really good crit. [Laughs.] Well, I'm sure not all of them will, but a lot of them do.

Anyway, so I got a lot out of teaching there as well. No one was more surprised than me that I was going to grow to love being a teacher, and I really like being a teacher. I would be sad to not teach.

Now, the workshops are a little different because, first of all, if you're teaching summer and—spring and fall, you don't really want to teach in the summer too. I need time to make my work, which is how I get my primary income from. So that can be a little difficult.

And the students at the New York academy are fantastic. I absolutely loved my art and culture class. We were like pals. Well, not really like pals. One of those students got expelled for plagiarism in my class. And I was instrumental in doing that and it was not fun.

But, you know, like the things you find out as a teacher—I'm sure it's even more amazing as a parent, but I'm reading this paper and I know in my heart of hearts that it's plagiarized, and my first response was, "How dare you waste my time? Do you know how much time I'm spending on this class, and you're going to give me a paper that I basically have to read all the way through and it's not yours? I could wring your scrawny little neck," you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Like, the reason not to plagiarize, besides it just being unethical and, you know, you don't learn anything, is the teacher is going to want to come after you with a hatchet. [Laughs.] I mean, it's the way to get your teacher mad. I was outraged.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you had much interaction with Glass Art Society, with the American Craft Council, craft organizations, glass organizations other than the ones we've mentioned, or—I'm thinking of community—[inaudible (5/33:12)].

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, when I first started I fancied myself an artist, and I was not going to show in any glass galleries, and I didn't really want anything to do with the Glass Art Society. Glass blowers, as everyone knows,

are just sort of dumb jocks. And I had this very argument about that sort of thing. And I've changed and done a 180-degree turn from that position.

It's a great community. I love it. I love GAS. I love going to GAS conferences. They should stop—well, they should just go have a picnic, you know? Just have a family reunion and stop trying to get glass blowers to go to the talks. Actually, they have really good talks at GAS, and they—

MS. RIEDEL: Like Maria Porges, are you friends with her?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, but I know—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: She's in San Francisco.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: You should call her. You guys would get along famously.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, she's pretty wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. Anyway, so she gave a killer good talk.

The thing about the glass community, which Margaret Mead needs to study, is talk about supportive. People keep saying, like Maria—and Bruce Metcalf came and spoke and said the same thing. People say this all the time: "The glass community needs to be more rigorously self-critical."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, no. I say no. The glass community should keep on hugging each other and loving each other and having their picnic, and invite other people to hate them, and that way we can hate them back and we can keep on loving each other.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Besides, I think—I'm not saying that we should be stupid and have no standards. I think every artist should have their own standards and they should be high, the highest they can muster.

But I don't think—the community critiquing itself, what's unique about this community is how supportive it is. Why would you want to wreck the best thing about it? I mean, it has consequences but maybe we can make up for it by inviting jerks over to criticize us. And then, you know, our love is preserved.

And I showed at Snyderman, which is a craft gallery, and teach in the crafts department, and happily on the cover of glass tradesmen magazines and stuff like that. I have no problem with that.

And I'll tell you, it boils down to this: I like those people. I like them a lot. I would be—if I had to choose between being on a desert island with a bunch of craftspeople and a bunch of—a certain type of artist that—I hate to say this in front of you, a native New Yorker, but like a New York art crowd.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: They don't even talk about art. They just talk about career stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I really would rather be with the crafts people any day. They know what they're doing. They're great. And I just—I consider them my family and my community, and I—you know, it's as simple as I like them better. [Laughs.] And so there. I think crafts people are happy—happier people.

MS. RIEDEL: Has that community in any way helped to evolve your work or affected your work? Or—

MS. SCHAECHTER: I don't think so. Nothing affects my work.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: It doesn't sound like that.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's just the overwhelming message of this two-day interview. I feel very—

MS. RIEDEL: Except for—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, no, I feel very vulnerable, like—this was a problem in my marriage was his input, and he felt that I only wanted compliments, which I take umbrage with that remark, but I can understand why he might think that, because it's—criticizing me is a very, very risky proposition. [They laugh.]

But I don't ask for criticism, right? If I want criticism, I will call Sharon—[they laugh]—or ... or various people. Don't put that name in print. But there are people that I call upon for critique, and I don't want people to flatter me. I'm not interested in being flattered.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I will tell you, the one thing about being as protective as I am in terms of influence and input and criticism, it sounds like I'm a sore loser, but I feel very, very, very vulnerable to influence.

And I feel like it's very—I'm very careful. And I ask very specific questions a lot of times about pieces because that's what I want to resolve. I usually know when I've missed already. I mean, these pieces are pre-critiqued for your enjoyment. Do you know what I'm saying?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: They are—if I have put it out there, nothing you can say should count for anything, really.

And one of the casualties of that is that I do not hear compliments either. So if someone comes up to me and says, like, "Oh, my god, that's fabulous," it's like, "Thanks, that's nice." I mean, it feels like—you know, criticism feels like the tap of a butter knife on the heel of my shoe and compliments feel like a sort of warm breeze. What really feels good is inspiration and when I know I've hit it. So it's just—it's sad but I don't take compliments either.

And that came up vis-à-vis—

MS. RIEDEL: Community and whether it had any effect on your work.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, community, right. Yes. No, so I don't let it affect my work very much, but I'm happy to be part of the community. And I'm glad I'm a glass artist.

MS. RIEDEL: Related to the whole issue of criticism, are there writers in particular, critics that you feel have been influential to the way you think, or to your work, and does it matter to you if the writer is an artist or not? Does that make a difference in the value of their words?

MS. SCHAECHTER: One community that I didn't mention was Bruce Metcalf, the artist, jeweler and critic—lives in Philadelphia—is a friend of mine.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And he, Sharon, Doug Bucci, and several other rotating cast of characters—one is Jen Zwilling, who is the assistant curator at the Philadelphia Art Museum. I don't even know what the department is called anymore. But we have a book club. I think it might be disbanded at this point, but we read a lot of craft texts and discussed them.

And, you know, Bruce Metcalf, if you're having a conversation with Bruce Metcalf, this is going to be a very high-caliber discussion.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Although I know he didn't think so. [Laughs.] But he's still more high caliber than most I have—so I read a lot of those people.

First of all, I want to say Ellen Dissanayake is one of my favorite writers about art. And she's sort of a cultural anthropologist. *Homo Aestheticus* [*Where Art Comes From and Why*] is one of my favorite, favorite books. I'll be reading that many times again, I think. I like Arthur Danto. I do and I don't. I diverge from him at some point.

The book by Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word*, which my teachers at RISD told me was a terrible, terrible book and it was awful, I love that book and I still love it. I've read it about a thousand times. I stole my copy from the RISD library and I still have the RISD library copy. It's in pieces. I feel like that's a badge of honor somehow.

I haven't read, necessarily, the typical stuff. Like, I have read a Julia Kristeva essay because I had to for my class. I felt like I had to look at that. But I found it very dense and difficult. I can give you a very—a complete list—I don't know; it's probably on my laptop—to give you a better idea.

I used to like James Elkins. I hate to say bad things about him, but I think he's a little too simple. But I don't dislike him. Hold on—teaching, business, New York art and culture. Well, we read Umberto Eco. Is this—readings. That's what I'm looking for. Well, Denis Dutton I found very—I did not like. I used to like Glenn O'Brien. Donald Kuspit.

All right, Donald Kuspit I've met personally. And I went up to Donald Kuspit at a symposium at Pilchuck when I was in my early 30s. I would say I was about 31. And I went up to him and I thought, I'm going to try something really daring. And I said, "Hi, I really love your work. You're one of my favorite critics. Why don't you make me famous? It's in both of our interests." And he looked at me like, "Ah! Get out of my face!" And that was the end of that. "Well, excuse me." [They laugh.] I thought I was being sassy. Apparently I was just being forward and obnoxious.

But anyway, I think Donald Kuspit is—his writings are always very Freudian. He used to be a psychiatrist. And I think they're really interesting. I think he's got an axe to grind. Maybe he's got some anger issues himself. But I like his writing and I assign a lot of it.

I like some Oscar Wilde stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: What about Matthew Kangas, Janet Kaplos, anyone like that?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I loathe Matthew Kangas.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think he's an evil man. And he's on the take. That's what I think about him.

Janet Kaplos I don't know that well. I know she likes my work, which is nice, but I don't know anything about her and I—her criticism of art makes sense to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Does make—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Her craft, her glass.

MS. RIEDEL: Does make sense, yeah.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, she was very critical of glass. And that's what I'm saying: "Janet Kaplos, you come in and you tell us why we suck." And people should listen and they shouldn't be so resentful. But I don't know why we have to suddenly become like that ourselves. [Laughs.] If someone is willing to come in and be bad cop, well, let them.

We read Umberto Eco about camp and kitsch and—oh, Roger Scruton. Oh, he's an English guy who writes a lot about beauty. He is just such a jerk. And he's obviously a Tory. But much as I hate him, I love what he says.

MS. RIEDEL: What in particular?

MS. SCHAECHTER: He talks a lot about beauty and he is, I would say, very conservative on the issue. I would say people need to separate the idea of conservative about art and conservative in government because I think there is a whole lot of throwing the baby out with the bathwater in the 20th century and we need to conserve some things that got lost.

On that note I say also what's his name, the famous—David Hickey. Now, David Hickey, I don't—he often is writing to hear the sound of his own voice, I think, but some of his stuff is brilliant, especially when he wrote *The Invisible Dragon*. He did an interview with Ann Wiens that's really good. The interview is better than the book, and I often assign that.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: There's a really great Peter Schjeldahl and Peter Plagens both I like. Peter Plagens wrote I think the all-time best thing about beauty called *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Remember *New Art Examiner*? Can someone please resurrect that right now? I miss that so much, and also the one from *Art Issues*, where Dave Hickey wrote all the time for that, because it was a Las Vegas magazine. That was awesome.

There's a great essay in *Uncontrollable Beauty[: Toward a New Aesthetic]* by James Hillman which is really good. And Crispin Sartwell, who is a friend of mine and a philosopher who has written about politics but also about art and craft and beauty. And he's a wonderful, good, interesting, controversial writer.

I liked—here I go. I'm always giving too many stuff. The book, *In Defense of Elitism*, I found that to be a very refreshing book. Also the—what is it, something about the fall of culture. I can't remember what that book's called but that's a good one. Oh yeah, it's *The Twilight of American Culture* by someone named Berman.

I assign *Art School Confidential*, the original comic strip by Dan Clowes because I think that's all right, sad to say.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything that's been particularly influential on your work and your career, or all of the above, or none of the above?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Dirk Bach.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I got that. [They laugh.] [Inaudible(5/46:39)]—criticism, though.

MS. SCHAECHTER: No.

MS. RIEDEL: And Sharon Church, we've covered that too.

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Huh-uh. No, there are so many people who have validated what I already felt.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I like Bruce Metcalf's writings a lot as well.

MS. RIEDEL: Were do you think American glass ranks on an international scale, or do you have any thoughts about it?

MS. SCHAECHTER: American glass? Well, you know, I wish I had a more global perspective myself, although I feel like I'm getting there. I think maybe we should just address craft in general because it seems like there are several—there's American, there is Asia, and there is European. And South America and Africa are just elsewhere. They're the third world. They're too busy trying to survive. Probably craft there is in great shape as a result, but I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right, well, it's not being preserved.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Let's just—it seems like there's three sort of domains of thinking. Like, in Asia I think craft has a lot of respect. And I don't think they make a huge distinction. And in the things that I've written and thought about, the differences between art and craft, I think it always breaks down on a mind-body split line.

We associate—well, crafts are generally utilitarian. And what we mean by "utilitarian" is not contemplation but drinking glasses and toilet bowls and stuff that, you know, has to do with stuff we don't consider glamorous. And it's not glamorous for a reason. I mean, you've got to drink all the time. Why would a cup be so important, you know?

So this—and also these things that are multiples. Well—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, we can argue that a few ways, I imagine, but this is—yeah.

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: I couldn't agree with you—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I couldn't agree with you more, and I think that if we were able to have an experience with these things that was more meaningful, then maybe our lives would be a little more enriched rather than using crap all the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But that's—I'm playing the devil's advocate when I say that.

So I think—I don't know how Asians feel about their bodies and their intellects, but they seem to have a greater merging of the idea of art and craft.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And craft seems very lofty there. Now, Europeans seem to be suddenly in love with design—[laughs]—and it's all about design, and American loves art. So you've got craft in Asia, we've got design in Europe and art in America, and we can just all go our separate ways and all our needs will be addressed.

Europeans, they're so opinionated but I'm not sure what they're saying. [Laughs.] They certainly like the finest of the fine, whatever that means, and they certainly obsess about design, but I'm not sure if they're any more comfortable in their own bodies. Maybe a little bit more than we are.

I think—I heard a great lecture at the American Craft Council conference in Houston by then-director of the Houston museum, Peter Marzio, who I believe passed away. His—I ran after him and—he gave the keynote—and asked if he had notes for the lecture, and he just looked at me like, oh, my god, a stalker.

But it was actually—they finally transcribed it and put it in a journal. He explained in very few words, eloquently, how the United States culture did not support art, and basically art in the United States is entirely literal and word-based. It's just, you know—in some ways it's just all intellectual.

And our—that's really over-simplifying. I want to take that back. But he talked about funding for the arts and separation of church and state and how there was really no support for the arts here from the get-go, and no matter how much of a melting pot and how many immigrants came in in 1880, or whatever, it doesn't matter. They end up in this culture with this Puritan inheritance, which is extremely suspicious of sensual pleasure.

And he was—it was interesting to hear him talk because I certainly agree with that point of view. And I think that we are essentially all protestant iconoclasts in American culture. And craft is going to be much more damaged by that than art, because art will always have the panache of being spiritual and philosophical—

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —whereas craft will always remain tied to the body, which is disgusting—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —or perceived as disgusting—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —and womanly, because women can't get away from their bodies like men can, apparently. That's because our hips are wider. [They laugh.]

[Harp sound.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Is it time, because I've got to go to the toilet.

MS. RIEDEL: All right. Well, we'll take a—

[END OF DISC 4.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Judith Schaechter at the artist's home and studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on July 20, 2011 for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. This is Card Number 5.

And let's start off this card with a conversation about—or a question about humor and its role in your work. Is there a sense of play in your process, in your finished pieces? Do you think about it that way?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I don't feel like I'm playing when I make them, but I definitely think about humor. I

read a quote, and I can't attribute it, unfortunately, but it speaks for me. And it was something like, "Art is too serious to be taken seriously."

It's like, you know, there is a lot of high seriousness here, and there is the idea that, you know, you're involved in, like, creating a cultural meaning, yadda, yadda, yadda, blah, blah, blah. It's like—the burden is unbearable. There must be some levity.

Now, one thing people often tell me when they meet me is they're surprised that I'm funny. I think they imagine that the author of this work is going to come in in, like, black robes and be really austere and morose and maybe, you know, cry, and just—but I'm not that way at all. I've always been funny. And I make a real effort to be funny in conversation. I mean, I like witty people and stuff.

And I have tried on purpose to make funny pieces. I tried—I thought *Autobiography* was hilarious. Some of these people think my work is funny when I just think, "You think that's funny? That's sick." [They laugh.]

But there are pieces where I deliberately tried to be funny, and I think as any comedian can tell you, comedy is difficult and it's really risky, and a lot of times you just fall flat on your face. It's hard to try to be funny on purpose, you know, short of fart jokes. They're always funny, but—to men, not to women, ever.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. I agree. Are there pieces in particular that you think of as, that was pretty funny?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think that the way I deploy humor is more irony and more tragic comic sense.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: So, like, pieces that are just laugh-out-loud hilarious, not so much—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —but maybe *Autobiography* is pretty funny—dark humor albeit, but funny.

Let's see, I'm trying to think if there's—well—

MS. RIEDEL: The funeral for your cat is one that comes to mind.

MS. SCHAECHTER: See, that's when I would say you're sick. [They laugh.] I loved those cats.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet you did—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, the first one—

MS. RIEDEL: —but the piece is pretty—

MS. SCHAECHTER: . . . But the first piece I did, I think, out of guilt for not loving the cat enough. That cat was really difficult and I never really bonded with her, and I felt terrible when he died.

The second cat—whom I was so in love with; I used to call him my "fur husband"—it was just overwhelming. Anyway, so I took those pieces very seriously. But I did try to make them sort of sweet.

And, yeah, there's many, many different kinds of humor. I mean, there's wit and there's, like, sight gags. So I think I've tried lots of different things, but I definitely tried to—I definitely just sort of followed along with, this is too serious to take it too seriously kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I don't know. I mean, I do take it very seriously, but at the same time—so I think it's—most people, if there's not a lot of funny art out there, and funny art tends to get dated and ignored and stuff like that, that's a tough one.

MS. RIEDEL: Much of the work feels—a segment of the work feels very theatrical, and with that comes that sense of tragedy and comedy that are often separated just by a very thin line.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right. There's nothing else that's interesting, is there? Tragedy. Comedy. Is there anything—food is interesting. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Cats.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Cats go under tragedy and comedy, believe you me. [They laugh.]

But when I was a child, I was a very shy child, believe it or not, and we did a production in 1st grade of "The Little Old Lady Who Lived in a Vinegar Bottle," and whoever was supposed to be the little old lady bowed out, and the teacher asked, "Who wants to play her?" And I wanted to.

Now, I was so shy I wouldn't talk and I didn't, you know, interact with other students, children, or anything and play with them. So the teacher of course picked me. She must have been completely freaking out that I raised my hand.

And I'm not going to say I wanted to be an actress, because I never wanted to be an actress, but I do think there's something about drama that's very appealing, and the idea that my pieces are just ever so slightly overwrought emotionally—

MS. RIEDEL: Ever so slightly.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm going into a swoon.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you see as the similarities and the differences between the early work and the current work?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, the early work is definitely more violent and more about gruesomeness and more in-your-face aggressively nasty and depressing—not depressing depressing but—it was more about violence and anger and things of that nature. I think now it's more wistful and forlorn. I think I said that earlier. It's more—

MS. RIEDEL: Psychological?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes. Well, there's nothing unpsychological about violence and anger, but it's more—

MS. RIEDEL: Nuanced perhaps.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, different degrees of things. I'm much more interested in virtue than vice. And I'm more interested in the gray areas rather than the polarities. I think—when I was younger I was a much angrier person and there was much unresolved in my past and in my life, and everything went wrong and exacerbated it, and I dealt with it through the work.

I don't know if it got taped on infamous Card 3 or not, but I did say that my mother always told me to work when I was bored, to go draw.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And also, she explicitly had me drawing my— you know, to draw to get my feelings out and to express myself emotionally through art. So I certainly did that as an angry pubescent—well, it was not an angry pubescent—I think I delayed it until I was in art school and was away from my family. I had felt sort of more free to express myself. And I went through a phase where the work really reflected that.

And I would say it became quieter and quieter. When I first—are you familiar with the term the picture-ground dilemma in painting?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. SCHAECHTER: That's a good answer, just in case. [Laughs.]

It refers to the fact that when you're a figurative artist, and even sometimes when you're not, you have this subject that you have in mind but there's the whole rest of the canvas that must be dealt with.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And what do you do with it? And that's the sort of central dilemma of every two-dimensional artist. This is not really a problem for a sculptor because they can just make the thing and stick it into life, and that becomes the context, for better or worse, because there's a whole different set of issues with that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: But for painters and 2-D artists, it's like if you were making a figure, what do you do with the rest of the space up to the frame? And for the longest time—like when I first started making stained glass windows, I conceptualized the box as a coffin, which dates back maybe to childhood when I did a picture of

Winston Churchill in his coffin, because I saw the funeral. I was living in England.

But it was very convenient, and I think it sort ends with that piece *Tiny Eva* that I talked about, which is the sort of ultimate figure in a coffin, and it's very, very elaborate and lots of flowery wreaths and padding and stuff like that.

And I do think that in terms of some of my themes, I've been dealing with them all my life, and I know—I'm pretty much convinced that I was interested in Winston Churchill in his coffin because I saw the funeral when I was three or four and it was probably my first awareness of death. And I was really worried that Winston was cold in that box.

So when I drew those pictures—and I drew a bunch of them—I was putting padding and blankets and pillows to keep him warm and cozy. So I just repeated this motif for a good, long time.

So my early work was like that, and I would say—I don't know; it's very, very hard, I think, for any artist to make grand, sweeping statements about the development of their work. So, in some ways I think there's been no development, and then in some way I think there's been a shift.

I've always been interested in ecstasy along with agony. Like, pieces like *The Knot*, the figure at the top of that is smiling. And that piece is from 1990. I actually have a lot of faces where I think they are ecstatic looking rather than—and ecstasy, be sort of separated from pleasure. It's sort of a little much.

MS. RIEDEL: Differences? We've talked about your work in terms of cycles. Is that something that you, in this context of similarities and differences—not so much perhaps similarities and differences but cycles that you go through from the primitive to the Renaissance to the Baroque.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, the subject stays the same. It's just different treatments—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —of a similar subject, like I'm always interested in, you know, women, girls, and how people—how they mutate pain into pleasure. What is transubstantiation? I mentioned earlier words that begin with I-N, like inspiration and—well, "ideas" isn't I-N— inspiration and intuition, imagination, all those "I" words have issues.

But I'm also interested in anything with "trans" at the beginning of it. I think there's something about art that—it has to be transformational, like the experience of looking at art should be that you are a different person when you're done. It should change you, maybe on a very small level, but it should—if it's really—if inspiration has happened, you're slightly different. And I certainly feel like I'm a different person after I've made a piece—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —to some degree.

So, in terms of cycles, the subject matter—subject matter in my piece—this is actually an interesting subject, is subject matter, because—I know I said this earlier but I'll say it again. I think people looking at my work really respond to the subject matter often—like a good portion of the people looking at my work respond exclusively to the subject matter and very little to the design and the composition and the formal aspects of it. They're really just seeing a story and not a piece of stuff, not a piece of glass.

And that always surprises me because I'm working so hard on these other aspects of it that are really important to me, and they are as much part of the narrative and the subject to me as the figures are. I would compare those figures to the ignition of a car, like you need to start the car but once the car is rolling you don't need to keep fiddling with the ignition.

So I need a subject—a person, a face and a figure—that is of great interest to me, that's going to keep me engaged in making it the best piece that it can be. But I'm not constantly thinking about some story to do with these characters, or, you know, what are they thinking kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you any specific thoughts about the 3-D work you want to make, the sculptures?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No. No, I don't. I'm not—I'm going to think it as I do it.

MS. RIEDEL: Figurative, though?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, yeah. Yes, I've always wanted to make dolls. Well, I always did make dolls. I made a lot of dolls out of tape, like winding tape around wires and stuff like that.

We didn't talk at all about light and—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, and actually I was going to ask what— the importance of glass as a means of expression as one of the summary questions, and maybe light figures in there. But, by all means, let's talk about light.

MS. SCHAECHTER : Well, I've written about light. And a lot of glass people have talked about light. And one thing is it's very hard not to just rhapsodize about it. I think— you said yesterday light is like music. I don't know if that's recorded or not, but I think that's such an— that's so important because I don't—eyeballs, as information processors, lead directly to verbal parts of your brain.

Basically, when you see something, you don't look at it for the very first time. You just go "table," which is a word. And you understand, because you have a history with tables, what it's good for. And you don't see it fresh unless you make some sort of effort to do so. And that's why you are able to get through a day. [Laughs.]

The thing about light is it's not processed just through your eyes. It's felt in your skin.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. SCHAECHTER: You can feel it all over your body.

One of the most exciting things— this is going to sound silly, but I was riding in an Amtrak train from New York to Philly and I had—I picked the wrong side of the train, and the sun was setting and it was just blazing. And I basically had to keep my eyes shut the whole trip. And it was a spectacular show. It was as exciting as having my eyes open.

Every time we passed something, it cast a shadow. The colors were remarkable. They changed a lot, although the light stayed warm colors for the most part and the shadows were cool colors. And if you squeeze your eyes you'll see stars that are called phosphenes. I mean, there's a lot going on with light inside our bodies that eyeballs are not part of. You can experience light in your toe.

So, I think back to when stained glass was first put in cathedrals, and I think it was a—I don't want to say it was a brilliant public relations maneuver because that does not do this justice. It was a meeting of everything. It just—I don't know if I said this before but it wasn't a metaphor; it was an actual physical experience of God to people who believed, and inside their body—it was coming from inside them, not just from outside them.

And the colored light, it's not intellectual and it's never going to be intellectual. And it just sounds stupid. So rhapsodizing about light, it always sounds kind of stupid, but that doesn't mean it's stupid. It's not amenable to words because it trumps that. It's amazing. And it stirs you to the very core of your being and you respond to it. Without the sun obviously we would not be here.

So, if that's a higher power—I don't know. You know, I guess I believe in a sun god. [Laughs.] Clearly the sun is a higher power. I don't think anyone would dispute that. I mean, plants grow towards the sun. I don't think we're even beginning to understand.

There's medical uses for light, but people torture people with light. You want to wreck someone's day? Mess with their circadian rhythms, which all have to do with light, and then you can give them laser surgery to cure them. Light gives us cancer. I mean, we get sick from light but it's—it's a weapon but it's also an amazing tool of healing.

So, stained glass windows in religion—I mean, in terms of the meaning of life, I don't know how you can get any closer than that. And I understand that the early stained glass windows were meant as narratives to instruct a largely illiterate population who would make a pilgrimage.

But, you know what? I've been to Chartres. The best thing about Chartres is taking your glasses off, because, yes, you can look at those and you can see stories, but more than that, you can see the glorious colors, and it affects you on a very deeply emotional and bypasses all words.

It doesn't matter what you make out of colored glass. As long as it's got some light on it, people are going to like it. And this is why glass is disrespected as a medium, because it—for this reason: It's too easy. You know, it doesn't require transformation by an artist the way ceramic material does in order to avoid it looking like a pile of dung.

An artist can do nothing to a piece of glass. You can just take the cullet that you're supposed to put in a furnace and dump it on a plate and stick it in the middle of your table and you've got an elegant centerpiece, you know? I mean, it's completely idiotic. It's not anti-intellectual; it's just—it takes also an enormous ego to want to mess with a material like this, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —because it already looks good. What are the chances you're going to improve on it, right? It's very difficult, for that reason.

So it packs an enormous emotional wallop, and those working with it are at great risk for disappointing people, because if you don't come close to what it's capable of, then you look like an idiot. And that's why people hate glass a lot, I think.

But if you do it right, then I think it's very, very moving. And I hope I've done it right, and I would say part of my thing is—my whole obsession with beauty is that in order to seduce people into looking at something they would otherwise not want to deal with, I'm going to make it as beautiful as possible.

One thing my teacher, Bruce Chao, used to say all the time was, "Glass is very seductive. Be careful you don't get seduced by glass." Well, boo hiss. I think I would amend that to say, be seduced by glass but make sure that you seduce it back because then you're having an affair and you're making love, and it's good. What's awful is when you just sit there passively and you go, like, "Wow, glass is amazing." And that's like, well, who cares, you know? [Laughs.]

And so, if you seduce it back, magic can happen. And maybe that's why I like English stained glass, because they really muck with it and they're not afraid to sort of tarnish it a little bit.

So, I think—I don't know if I can say any words in sum, but light is powerful and must be deployed with caution, or not—or with no caution. That's probably better.

MS. RIEDEL: That leads right into a couple of summary questions here, which are the importance of glass as a means of expression and what are its strengths and its limitations, what it does better than anything else, and the essence of it that appeals to you. In a lot of ways we've spent two days talking about this, from color to light.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I think we've covered it all, but I'd just go back to songs that I think—can I go get a book?

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. SCHAECHTER: It's just in the other room.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll just pause this. Sure.

[Audio break.]

JUDITH SCHAECHTER: This—this is my most important influence and has informed my art more than anything. It's a book called *Jesus' Son* by Denis Johnson. It has nothing to do with Jesus.

It's a book of short stories that apparently are autobiographical. You can read them in order, although they are not in chronological order in this person's life. But the best thing to do is read it about 50 times, as I have, and then you do know—you learn the order and you understand that there is a meta-narrative here.

But this story, which I require my students to read, contains the secret of life and the secret to making art, and it's called "Car Crash While Hitchhiking." And it's about a young drug addict who's hitchhiking, and he gets in a car with a family and they have a horrible car accident with another car and the man in that car who is driving dies. Anyway, the part I wanted to read to you was:

"Down the hall came the wife. She was glorious, burning. She didn't know yet that her husband was dead. We knew. That's what gave her such power over us. The doctor took her into a room with a desk at the end of the hall, and from under the closed door, a slab of brilliance radiated as if, by some stupendous process, diamonds were being incinerated in there. What a pair of lungs. She shrieked as I imagine an eagle would shriek. It felt wonderful to be alive to hear it. I've gone looking for that feeling everywhere."

I once read on the—I found a reference to that on the Internet, a student paper explicating that as an example of *schadenfreude*, which is the feeling of enjoying other people's misfortunes. To me this is about the awakening of someone to the idea of empathy and how extraordinary it is to realize for the first time what it really means to feel deeply. I'm going to cry. That to me is what art is all about, is if you can get that feeling into something, you've been a success.

Now, he's using a sort of—well, not a metaphor, but an example of someone hearing about someone's death. And this woman is still able to respond. The character is numb. You don't know that yet. You find that out later. But this is the moment that changes him forever, and you don't find it out until the end of the book.

But it's quite an amazing way of expressing it, that he has to witness this woman finding out that her loved one is dead. It's horrible but it's amazing because he comes to life at that moment.

So, I even forget what your question was, but to me that has to do with the power of art to be empathic and to be—as I tried to express in my big essay about creativity and beauty and inspiration, it all comes back to any kind of "pathy" except apathy, you know— sympathy, empathy, any kind of being able to understand another person.

There's also another great quote in this. That was the secret of art right there. This is the secret of life. I know you'll want to hear that. This is a really, really good short story, but now I'm just wrecking it for you.

"The man hanging out of the wrecked car was still alive as I passed." This is also the secret of art. Maybe they're both the secret of art. "The man hanging out of the wrecked car was still alive as I passed, and I stopped, grown a little more used to the idea of how really badly broken he was and made sure there was nothing I could do.

"He was snoring loudly and rudely. His blood bubbled out of his mouth with every breath. He wouldn't be taking many more. I knew that but he didn't, and therefore I looked down into the great pity of a person's life on this earth. I don't mean that we all end up dead. That's not the great pity. I mean that he couldn't tell me what he was dreaming and I couldn't tell him what was real." So, I guess art can cross that divide.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And I just—this is a really good book that everyone should read, although when I have my students read it they usually say, "That character is such an asshole." [Laughs.]

So, can you tell me your question? Sorry. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: That was just pretty strong stuff so I wanted to just sit with that for a minute—

MS. SCHAECHTER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: —independent of the question.

MS. SCHAECHTER: All right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Fine. That works for me.

MS. RIEDEL: What is the essence of glass that appeals to you, and what it does better than anything else?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I like the color.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: And transmitted light, it just comes back to that. It's as simple as it being pretty, the big bugaboo of art.

The thing about "pretty" that I find so interesting in relation to beauty is if you define pretty as sort of a lesser principle that is quantifiable, and beauty being the thing we all want because it's, like, desirable and an amazing emotional experience of the "exalted best thing," you know, then why aren't more artists using pretty as a stepping stone to beauty, because clearly they're trying very hard not to be beautiful by making stuff that's ugly. Okay, that's one strategy.

I think maybe it's just a coincidence of history and probably everyone got sick to death of making pretty things that they were trying to make beautiful. But I think that, you know, basically just like figuration, people will never lose interest in beauty.

It's easily tested for, like, do you want an attractive lover or an unattractive lover? Oh, let me guess. If you had your choice and they're all equally incredibly intelligent and humorous but you get to pick only on looks. You know, I rest my case. I think it has enduring appeal and we can't help it. And of course it has to do with biology and fitness and extra resources.

MS. RIEDEL: And for you the process itself has been extremely important as well.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Oh, god, yes. Well, the process—I do think I've really said just about everything I have to say

about glass itself, but that can't be understated—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: —the fact that it put me in sync with myself. I was able to slow down long enough so that I liked what I was doing and that I was committed to finishing it, whereas before I would just throw it out. That was critical. I definitely need a lot of process. It probably could have been other processes, though.

The thing about glass, it was also clean. I mentioned that. That was important to me, even though it's not really very clean. It's also too loud, which I don't like, in terms of drilling and sandblasting and stuff like that.

So it's got advantages and disadvantages. I think that I was so mesmerized by the colored light at the beginning that it just—I became fluent in it when I was unable to become fluent in any other medium—not painting, not guitar. I mean, I'm sort of a vaguely fiberish artist for a while, and none of those things really took but glass somehow got purchase on my soul and was—

So, even now when I think, you know, I would like to quit, there's no real persuasive argument in my mind to quit it. I mean, I don't want to—it's like we're being married, like do you really want to divorce this person because, like, do you want to go through the trouble of, like, learning how to be intimate with another person after you've made that effort?

When it comes to glass—and I actually want to touch on the idea of skill because this has to do with that. I have no interest in learning that all—well, not no interest; that's really disingenuous, but I don't— there's not enough pull. There might have been with some other medium but it's too late, like with computer animation or with guitar.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, you do some prints too, don't you?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, the prints, those are fun. Those are done in Photoshop, and I just want to say they're native to Photoshop. They're not scans of stuff.

But what I want to say about skill is I think it's—it's incredibly—I don't know; was this on Card 3? I hope not because that was important. I really dislike the idea of deskilling. I don't know how, after 30 years of experience, one would suddenly lose their skills just because it's not trendy right now.

And I think the reasons for disparaging skill are Nihilistic and cynical. And culture critics need to really examine this thinking. They think they're leveling the playing field to the lowest common denominator. That's not a good idea. And tall poppy syndrome? No, no, no, no, no. What people are capable of is amazing. I'm very, very, very grateful that I learned to express myself and became skilled at something. I wouldn't trade that. It's an amazing feeling to be fluent in something.

Now, artists who follow inspiration rather than stay committed to a medium—well, or committed to something; I don't know what it is, but I would say in my case committed to a medium itself and derive inspiration through that and through process has allowed me to get to depths that I never knew were possible. I don't know how that's available if it's like, well, I had this idea about the length of terms in Congress and so I'm going to, like, make a lot of phone calls, and then I'm going to hire someone to make this, and the next project is going to be film, you know?

It's like I don't—I know it's considered to be some sort of form of insanity to devote yourself to one material at the cost of the idea. I radically disagree with that mindset. I think you—they have no idea what's available at other levels, of deeper and deeper levels. It never ends. You can go to places that were not possible by flitting around, and that's valuable.

So, if it's not for you, it's not for you, but don't say that your way is the way. I mean, that's just insulting. So I think that's, you know, a craftsperson's way and I think it's something to be—a way to find truth and things that we value.

MS. RIEDEL: How has your work been received over the past 25 or 30 years?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I told you—on Card 3 I did say I always thought of myself as a star even when I wasn't, and I always felt very— like things were always going really good, even probably when someone else might not think that, and no one ever wanted to argue with me, so I thought this was—even though I hadn't attended it as any kind of career strategy, it really worked well because a lot of people wanted to hitch themselves to that wagon.

My feeling is that for the most part my work has been received very, very well. I know fully well that I may be editing my own brain. I've heard also bad things. I found comments on the Internet that are just scathing. I

think they're among people whom I probably wouldn't want to hang out with, like fundamentalist Christians and—you know?

I had a comment once that I had an axe to grind against religion and it really showed. And I thought, that's ridiculous. First of all, I'm ignorant about most religion. I'm not—I certainly don't have an axe to grind. I'm actually very interested in religion. And I see my work as in keeping with religious tradition as much as a sort of ignorant person can be. I mean, this person was a real iconoclast because presumably they were Christian, defending Christianity, but don't they look at pictures of Jesus on the cross and the saints? I mean, those are pretty gruesome.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, really gruesome.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I guess it has to be him. [Laughs.] But I meant no disrespect.

MS. RIEDEL: What about—

MS. SCHAECHTER: I just want to say, in terms of glass, a lot of people talk about the art and craft debate and say it's over; it's a moot point; we don't need to discuss it anymore, and I find that to be completely irresponsible. Just recently I've had a number of incidents in which glass counted vastly against me.

Well, this is not recent, but a while ago I was not—the students of Maryland Institute College of Art wanted me to come speak and their professor would not allow it without even looking at the work, because I'm a glass artist. That also happened in University of Indianan in Bloomington, where a friend of mine was trying to get me to come. That was not persuasive.

And what was the most recent? Well, when I got the Guggenheim and I went to the party, people asked what I did and I said I made stained glass windows. They were visibly backing up. That's how disgusted they were. It was like it happened several times. They would say—and then I would say, "I got the grant for computer animation," and they'd be like, "Oh, well, then you're okay." And it's like, oh, please; spare me. But there was something just recently that was really bad and I thought, oh, my god, it never goes away, does it?

So, in terms of reception of my work, I do believe there is a prejudice against craft media in general. And I don't know how that's benefiting those who are prejudiced. Is that making them feel like bigger human beings? What's it doing for them? Probably nothing. So, I don't know. I think a little—at the worst you're going to get better cups at home. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: How or where do you see yourself and your work fitting into contemporary art?

MS. SCHAECHTER: I don't think about contemporary art. I think about all of our history.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I'm much more worried about how I stack up next to the Michelangelos and—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Really, I'm competing with the big boys.

How do I compare to contemporary art?

MS. RIEDEL: Or in art history?

MS. SCHAECHTER: Well, I don't know. I think that's up for history to decide. But that's who I'm competing with, and I would never settle for anything less. Contemporary art I think is in a crisis, especially in the United States. I really don't even know about Europe. Jan Fabre, he seems all right.

So, I like my work better than everyone else's, but then again, shouldn't every artist like their work best, because if they don't, they should be making something else. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. SCHAECHTER: I mean, I do and I don't. I hold myself to these ridiculous standards so I'm often really hard on it. But I hope that it stand up, and I think it's just a chance you have to take. It's a crapshoot.

My gambits are figuration. That's not going to go out of style until we mutate. Sensual beauty—not going to go out of style until we mutate. And light —not going to go out of style until we leave the solar system and mutate. So I think I'm safe. Those are the things that I think—I think every artist, if you're going to compete on that level, you have to encode your work. It has to be embedded with orders to be preserved. Otherwise people are going to throw it out.

I think what's going to happen to Rachel Harrison's work—I'd like to throw it out right now but I—you know, let's take, for example, they drop neutron bombs so that the buildings and objects are preserved and the people go away, and then, like, 2,000 years from now they dig up our culture, and what are they going to call our art—I mean, television, assuming that survives—and objects and stuff are going to survive. And I think some art is going to be indistinguishable from the heaps of rubble that inevitably happen.

So I want my work to be preserved. I definitely want my work to be preserved. So I try to make things that people might want to preserve, and I don't care if it's the people who live in New York right now. I want it to be—I'm trying to think universally: What are the things that appeal to people universally? And that's maybe why I got interested in the idea of beauty not being in the eye of the beholder, which is not possible to prove. It's definitely in the eye of the beholder. [Laughs.]

But I don't know; I think a lot of this interview is going to sound really arrogant. I'm really arrogant. I'm sorry. My dad used to say, "And she's modest too!" [They laugh.] You know what I hate? I hate false modesty. First of all, that's really not an option that's available to me. And second of all, why go there? You know, wave your freak flag. And I don't mind arrogant people, although I do mind pompous windbags.

MS. RIEDEL: Final thoughts? Essence of the work that really matters to you?

MS. SCHAECHTER: No, I think we've come to the end. I can't believe it's only 5:00. I wanted to go until 9:00. [They laugh.] No, I have no final thoughts, unless you do.

MS. RIEDEL: No, I think we've done an excellent job of covering this from a variety of perspectives and a variety of angles.

MS. SCHAECHTER: One thing I will say is that if you or anyone else does read *Treasure and Torture*, some of these things will be repetitious, and—

MS. RIEDEL: That's your book—

[Cross talk.]

MS. SCHAECHTER: Yes, the book I tried to write that—and I think that comes from the process of writing, is—I actually have a photographic memory, and so it—well, to some degree. I can recall what I said and actually sort of read it off the page, and that's helpful in me sounding articulate as an artist, and presenting myself as an artist.

So, some of these things I say over and over and over again. I never want to be boring, but at the same time the story doesn't really change. I'm still—I'm sort of committed to a lot of the same ideas I've always been committed to.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you.

MS. SCHAECHTER: Thank you. You're wonderful. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: The same to you, truly.

[End of interview.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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