



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Christy Rupp,
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Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Christy Rupp on July 16 and 17, 2012. The interview took place in Rupp's summer welding studio in Saugerties, New York, and was conducted by Judith Richards 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.

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

Interview

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Christy Rupp on July 16, 2012, in her welding — summer welding studio in Saugerties, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

Christy, I'd like to start out by asking you to tell me about your family background, your — as far back as you want to go, especially including people you know when you — your grandparents, your parents, where they came from, what they did, where they lived.

CHRISTY RUPP: Oh, interesting. Nobody ever asks that.

Well, my mother's side were Irish Catholics [fleeing -CR] the potato famine. They came over [... at the end of the 1840s -CR]. They were really survivors, they had a huge Irish family with, maybe 10 kids [that survived -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: What was their name?

MS. RUPP: O'Neil. And he died [about -CR] two weeks before the boat left, and she came anyway, Catherane O'Neil came as a widow with — I think eight kids on a boat.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell "O'Neil?"

MS. RUPP: Well, they spell it O-'N-E-I-L. And I have one famous relative, who's Rose O'Neill, which you probably never heard of, but there is a Rose O'Neill society. And she invented the Kewpie Doll. [Rose O'Neill's Kewpie imagery was wildly popular from ca 1912 until the Great Depression, which she lost favor and all her money. - CR] She was an artist. In fact, she was a [... female -CR] graphic artist, which — [...-CR]. Okay.

Just — it was based on Cupid, you know, but she was the one that spelled it K-E-W-P-I-E.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, right.

MS. RUPP: And made it into a —

MS. RICHARDS: You'd be well off if you owned a lot of those.

MS. RUPP: Yeah, well, we find them occasionally. There was one or two in the house that my parents lived in.

MS. RICHARDS: So when they came from Ireland, where did they first live?

MS. RUPP: Well, the Irish people came across the top of New York State. I think they landed in New York, but they came up through Albany — I guess they came up on the Hudson River. Probably right past here. And got on the railroad going west, because I know they had family in Utica. And then — I don't know if you know this, but around here in upstate New York is where the poorer immigrants came. Wealthy immigrants went to Virginia or places where they could actually farm — where farming was viable. But the poor ones came to upstate New York and tried to farm. And most of them moved on because it was just too hard. They couldn't make a living. So they did start out in upstate New York, but didn't stick around, and ended up out in St. Louis as the — [background noise] — that's the train.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I thought so.

MS. RUPP: Goes right through the house, practically.

They ended up in St. Louis where all the immigrants were flocking in. And I wish I had these dates for you. But every single week, there'd be more people flooding into St. Louis, which was the gateway to the West, because it

was developing out there. And as Catholics — they always were needing more churches, constantly, and so my great grandfather was in the lumber business and he built Catholic churches and made a bundle.

MS. RICHARDS: What's his name, your great grandfather?

MS. RUPP: Joe O'Neill.

MS. RICHARDS: Joe.

MS. RUPP: Yes. And once in a while we'd have family reunions and go visit all the churches, and you'd think, why is there a church on every corner, and why are they all Catholic? It's because some are Polish, some are German, some were Irish, some were French. They needed all these churches. And of course the church needed them, because — it worked both ways. It gave the immigrants a community, but it also made the church really powerful to create a community for the immigrants. It really made the church important in everybody's lives.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RUPP: So he was a combination builder and a lumber [merchant -CR] — he had a lumber mill and I think they made some real money in those days when the West was opening up. The river was the way that they moved goods. So that's why St. Louis prospered. And it was a very Catholic city, I guess, at that point.

So my mother was from there, and my father is from upstate New York from Buffalo —

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to your mother's side for a second. And then, what did your — so your great grandfather built all these churches, and what about your grandfather? Was —

MS. RUPP: He had O'Neill lumber too.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. And that was still in St. Louis?

MS. RUPP: Yes. And he was a landscape painter. [... -CR] I think all his life he wanted to be an architect and a painter, but he had a big Irish — my mother's family, five kids, and they were hit with the Depression. And he did design finally his dream house, out in the country —

MS. RICHARDS: And what was your grandfather's name?

MS. RUPP: Joe O'Neill. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Also Joe. Okay. Joe Junior.

MS. RUPP: Yes, they're all — yeah, or something.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

So now we can go back to your mother's. I just wanted to get to your grandparents.

MS. RUPP: Well, so he built his dream house out in what's — [... now Clayton. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Of St. Louis?

MS. RUPP: Of St. Louis.

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: And it's all — [... -CR] all shopping centers now, but it was farm land. And he build it and it was just kind of a white Colonial — it wasn't a palace or anything, but he was really proud of it and he designed everything. In the barn, he said, someday somebody will live in that barn, it's such a fine barn. And of course now it's a lovely little house for someone, when we went back.

But the Depression hit him and he had a big family, and he only lived in that house briefly. I think, couple of years, which must have been just a heartbreak. Even though he had a lumberyard, I'm sure it wasn't easy for him to build that house. And one of the vivid memories about that place is it backed up to Charles Lindbergh's house. You know, Charles Lindbergh [... was St. Louis's favorite citizen with his airplane, -CR] the "Spirit of St. Louis." My mother and her brother [often told us a story that they -CR] would go knock on Charles Lindbergh's door. They were — they weren't friends with my grandparents, but he knew the kids and there was some kind of swimming hole where they could sometimes see him and invite him to go fishing with them, and — so that was — that's a really strong memory. I used to point out to my mother — this is for the Smithsonian — that, you know, well, you know, Charles Lindbergh, he did some pretty weird stuff in World War II. He wasn't — [a]

complete hero. [Laughs]

But anyway, that was St. Louis. It was — it sounded like a pretty charmed life, except for the Depression, and then they moved into town. And —

MS. RICHARDS: So when your father was born, they were living in town?

MS. RUPP: Well, that was my mother's side.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I'm sorry. Right. When your mother was born, they were living in town.

MS. RUPP: Yes, and then I think they moved out to — it was called Denny Road. The house was called Denny Brook. It was — [Denny Road was later renamed Lindbergh Boulevard. Although years later the Lindbergh kidnapping occurred in New Jersey, my mother would still have been very young. Maybe that's why she was fearful that a powerful person could be so vulnerable. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: D-E-N-N-Y?

MS. RUPP: Yes. But I'm trying to — it would — it's [... Clayton/Webster Groves -CR]. It's all suburbs now, but then it was the country. And so I think they lived out there in the country for a few years and had all those memories of the cow and the horse and the farm life. Which probably was fine that they only had a couple years of it, you know? But anyway, I know he had to sell it and move into town. And that's where he — then they had a huge — one of those huge apartments that just was [... enormous -CR]. It was in town, and we always thought — it looked pretty fancy to us, coming from the suburbs. You know, we always thought it was pretty gracious where they grew up. But they — they really grew up, both [of my -CR] parents, in the Depression, very aware of that, the downsizing that had happened.

MS. RICHARDS: Did your grandmother ever work? Or was she interested in art?

MS. RUPP: I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: But your grandfather was doing the landscape painting.

MS. RUPP: He was a painter, yeah. And there are plenty of his landscape paintings. And actually, you know, they were married very young. They were married — I don't know how many years. Certainly maybe 63, 65 years. And she got cancer and died [in 1963 -CR] and he died three weeks later, a healthy man, painting a landscape painting by the road. He just didn't — he wasn't aware and he got hit by a truck. But he died making a painting right after she died, which is kind of poetic. It's sort of nice way to go.

So that was their side. And then they had — there was a George O'Neill that's a playwright that you might see sometimes. I think there's another George O'Neill that's more famous. But he did a lot of screenwriting and stuff and he hung around with Rose O'Neill, and they had a very gay kind of — I mean, literally gay, but very fun, gay kind of Depression experience. Festive, you know, cultural — they would drop in on the straight relatives when they were out of money, and the kids loved them.

But this Rose O'Neill was — she was the highest paid woman graphic designer of her time. Not really graphic designer; more illustration. And if you Google her, you can find out all kinds of thing — there's a Rose O'Neill society. It's [... collectible -CR] stuff that it turns up, like little — well, the Kewpie doll was something you won at the fair. So she [... -CR] had a patent on that and a lot of her drawings show that little Kewpie doll, with wings sometimes, and just really these sort of idiotic Roaring '20s kind of endless poems about cocktails and martinis and going to bed, and — you know, just a world — just a world — a different world completely from the Irish Catholic family that they all were raised in.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. And how about — and how about your father's side?

MS. RUPP: So he was from Buffalo and —

MS. RICHARDS: Did your great grandparents come to Buffalo? Were they there for —

MS. RUPP: They did, but they don't really know — it's funny, because the Irish side does really know, and there's a Bible [... -CR] — and I actually have it written down, too — all the grandmothers. We know them all, names. And on my dad's side, after they came to Buffalo, there seemed to be absolutely no interest.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know where they came from?

MS. RUPP: No, we don't. It could have been Austria, where there's a Rupp cheese, or it could have been Alsace-Lorraine, where there are Ruppss, or it could have been Holland. And it also could have been part of a larger — a

longer name, because Rupp does show up as a syllable sometimes in those long German names.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: There's no interest in that side of the family on any of this. No relatives that are curious. But I guess that's the advantage of having a big Irish family, is that somebody, you know, has always got the Bible and the family history. Somebody's curious. It — my father's family didn't have that.

MS. RICHARDS: So they were in — your great grandfather and your grandfather were in Buffalo?

MS. RUPP: Yeah, they were [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: And what are their names?

MS. RUPP: My father's dad was William Albert, and I believe his father was Charles something Rupp. And Charles Rupp, if I'm not mistaken — one of them was a police commissioner when McKinley was shot, so that's how we know about that, because we do have clippings about the assassination at the Pan-American Exposition. Do you remember any of this? That would have been 1905 or '07. Buffalo was quite a town then because of Niagara Falls. [... -CR] Before there were batteries, GE was there, Thomas Edison was there.

[... -CR]

All these big corporations — Dow Chemical — were up there at Niagara Falls dumping into the Niagara River, because they hadn't developed the battery yet and they could harness the power but they couldn't store it or move it. So for a few years [around 1905 -CR], Buffalo and Brooklyn were the same size. They were both huge cosmopolitan cities. And I know it sounds crazy, but if you read the Tesla books and things, he was being courted by all these backers that were up in Niagara Falls.

MS. RICHARDS: And what did your —

MS. RUPP: What did they do?

MS. RICHARDS: — your grandfather and father do? Your grandfather was the deputy —

MS. RUPP: Great grandfather.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MS. RUPP: Well, my grandfather was hit by the Depression. He was an accountant, and he was very resourceful. And there are photographs of him, which — I guess my brother is the family historian — in a straw hat, in a white linen jacket. You know, all through the Depression he looked great, with his bow tie. And it turns out he was like a bookie. To supplement his income as an accountant, he had this way with numbers, and so he assisted people at the racetrack. And he also had another job as a bricklayer. So he did all three of these things. But we have these pictures; my brother's going, like, that was the Depression — why are they in some fancy car out in Arizona, in 1931 smoking cigars? What's that about? And I think they just really knew how to have a good time. I think that side of the family was really partiers.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about your father?

MS. RUPP: So he grew up in Buffalo.

MS. RICHARDS: And your father's name?

MS. RUPP: Richard Rupp. Richard — William Rupp. And he was born in Buffalo and his mom died pretty young, and he had a couple of siblings. But Buffalo's kind of an interesting town because it was built, very opulently considering that it turned into the Rust Belt. It really had this very [... prosperous -CR] spurt in the early 1900s before the battery and before the Great Lakes were opened up. The Erie Canal would come up there. So you can see— it would prosper from New York once they connected the Hudson River to [the Midwest via the Great Lakes -CR] —

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

[... -CR]So anyway, they all grew up in this gorgeous — and to this day, if you know anybody that goes to college in Buffalo, [... there are -CR] great apartments and houses. The housing stock is gorgeous because it was all built by immigrants [, crafts people -CR]. Really nice old houses that I think were cut up into apartments then — even then, they were multiple-family houses. Not all of them, but —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: That's why it's a great university community, because — the quality of life is [... rich -CR]. And it was laid out like Washington, D.C., with the same parkways and things, and —it was a pretty city to grow up in. Really big old trees, which we [... watched die of Dutch Elm disease, all cut down -CR] — it was all monoculture, we had Dutch elm trees there, and then they all one day [in the mid-1960s -CR] were gone. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Because of the disease?

MS. RUPP: Yes. It was all monoculture. And I actually did a [... memorial to -CR] it, that it was when you think of a green cathedral, the city was [... lined -CR] with these 100-year-old elms, and then one day there was a chainsaw and suddenly it was really sunny. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: What did your father do?

MS. RUPP: What did he do? He went into the Navy [in 1941 -CR] — met my mom in St. Louis, and then came out and sold oil. He was an oil salesman for [... -CR] Standard Oil. [... -CR] And they moved around, and then he had a chance to come back to Buffalo and return to his home town, so he came back to Buffalo and started a box company. He designed shipping containers, cardboard boxes for companies in Buffalo. You wouldn't think that that would be a lucrative business, but I guess if —he was small enough — like [... to package things made in Buffalo, like Mentholatum, and Robinson Knife Company. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Custom boxes.

MS. RUPP: Yes, for those things that were being manufactured there. These were relationships that you could count on.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

So you were born in Buffalo.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] I was born in Rochester. Sorry.

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Exactly when were — when was your birthday?

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: July 30, 1949.

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: Yes. And then [dad's -CR] company moved him to Chicago, and then I think by the time I was 7, he — the paper business brought him back to Buffalo. [Gaylord Paper Company -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: So you basically grew up in Buffalo?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were growing up as a young child, did you have any interest in art, or what were your main interests?

MS. RUPP: Well, the funny thing is that, you know, I made a lot of cardboard art. A lot, as we all did in the Lower East Side. And Kiki Smith actually coined the term "cardboard consciousness," but I felt like [... -CR] Dad was always obsessed with [cardboard possibilities -CR] — he'd come home with a cardboard box that would hold a goldfish. It was always the next big thing, and he kind of always wanted to take it retail. Did you ever have those corrugated blocks as a kid, that would be about the size of —12-inch — and you'd build a fort and then knock it over. He always wanted to do things like that, but he never [made consumer products -CR] — but he was strictly shipping containers.

MS. RICHARDS: So it sounds like you started to make sculpture very young.

MS. RUPP: Yes, and I always — had this — and then when he started his own company called Armor Boxes, he was obsessed with the knight on his horse and how his boxes were going to protect the products.

MS. RICHARDS: Good name, Armor. [Laughs.]

MS. RUPP: Well, that's what he thought, it was such a great name, and he really — he liked the creative aspects of that. So [... -CR] I was always making him little knights and things that he could put around the company. You know, anything to get my work out. I was a hustler even then.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in elementary school, were you known to be an artist, or were you particularly interested in any other subject?

MS. RUPP: No, I had a lot of academic issues. It was difficult. And —

MS. RICHARDS: You mean like dyslexia, or — did that make you —

MS. RUPP: Who knows why. Probably, you know, some combination of the '50s [... cultural realignment -CR]. [Laughs.] Just like everybody else, you know — pre-'60s anxiety. [... Small -CR] school, no diversity.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do anything special every summer when you were a child?

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: Buffalo people [used to -CR] go over to Canada, to the lakeshore, so we did that. We'd rent a house and learn how to sail and swim. But Buffalo's [... -CR] identity is connected to Canada. I don't know if you know that. Like the hockey culture is — really rules Buffalo, and — I always thought, especially after I moved away, it's Canada that makes Buffalo unique, because otherwise it would just be another Midwest town.

MS. RICHARDS: With great architecture.

MS. RUPP: Yes, and just having had this legacy of [wonderful architecture -CR] — the post office in Brooklyn is fabulous, it's a gorgeous old — I think it's H.H. Richardson or somebody. It's very large; with giant arches, big arches and it's a whole block. And there's a duplicate of that in Buffalo. And that just sort of shows you the two cities were on a parallel as far as growth and financial [promise -CR]. Buffalo had a lot of Frank Lloyd Wright buildings and Pierce-Arrow was made there, and [... Bethlehem Steel -CR] was there.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were growing up, was there any particular religious affiliation, religious practice in your household?

MS. RUPP: We were Catholic.

MS. RICHARDS: So your — based on your mother.

MS. RUPP: Some of us. Not our — not Dad, but we were raised Catholic. And that was really — that was really important then, to be — to not go to Hell. I was really worried about going to Hell. I really bought the whole original sin, Purgatory, Limbo — I wanted to be a nun because I was so worried about going to Hell. I just couldn't see any way to avoid hell.

MS. RICHARDS: Until what age did you — was that —

MS. RUPP: I think I was 13 when I realized that probably wouldn't be my path, that wouldn't — probably couldn't work.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were 13, or right after that when you were in high school, could you describe most important aspects of your high school experience? Or anything particular that related to your becoming an artist.

MS. RUPP: Well, I went to a girls' high school in — in a small city [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Near Buffalo?

MS. RUPP: In Buffalo, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, when you said small city, I was thinking it was not Buffalo.

MS. RUPP: For Buffalo to have a small private girls' high school was very isolating and I think we didn't know what to make of that, as it was —

MS. RICHARDS: Did you — did you have a choice, or is that where your parents —

MS. RUPP: No. No, there was no choice.

And I think pretty quickly the art department became my refuge from that environment.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there teachers, or a teacher, who were very influential?

MS. RUPP: Yes, Jean Henrich.

MS. RICHARDS: Henrich? How do you spell that?

MS. RUPP: H-E-N-R-I-C-H. It was such an insecure environment. I remember thinking to myself, I want to go to college and study art, but I don't want her to know that because she might say no, you can't do that. I was a pretty uptight — the '50s [were conformist -CR] —

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean, she might say no?

MS. RUPP: The '60s didn't come out of nowhere.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean she might persuade you that it was a bad idea?

MS. RUPP: I was convinced I was an underachiever. It was that kind of educational system where — it was a lot of conformity and — today, schools like that know that the art department is really important because that's what gets girls to open up and be happy, but then it was kind of — a little adjunct to your English and your languages and getting into college. Nobody went to college to study art from there. I mean, that was unheard of, art school was unheard of.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you — do you remember what kind of artworks you made?

MS. RUPP: I do. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me what — tell me about that.

MS. RUPP: I do, I remember — of course, *Seventeen* magazine was — I don't know what year you were born or if that was an important one for you, just looking at the graphics in that — it was sort of moving into the Warhol period. [... -CR] I don't know when his first public exhibition was, but very, very early on that caught on with young girls. And we did have the Albright-Knox there.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Did you — did you go?

MS. RUPP: It was really close to my house. Yes, I went a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: Did your parents go with you, or just —

MS. RUPP: Yes, but I was within walking distance, so it was a huge, huge influence.

MS. RICHARDS: What were your favorite things in that museum in high school?

MS. RUPP: Well, Anne Arnold was huge. All the Pop artists. I guess it was Seymour Knox, although now it just seems like he would have been too young, but he had really gone in heavily for the Pop artists. And [... -CR] Buffalo had, for its size, one of the best — [... collections of -CR] of Pop art.

MS. RICHARDS: So that was the early, mid-60s.

MS. RUPP: Rosenquist, Jim Dine was really important, Rauschenberg, all those guys. Jasper Johns. They had really major works —

MS. RICHARDS: That's kind of advanced — that was kind of advanced for a high school student, whoever — who might be more conservative, you might —

MS. RUPP: Well, it was close to the high school. [... -CR] But don't forget, this is the Jackie Kennedy era, and little girls — young girls are looking for role models in ways — I just wanted to be Jackie Kennedy, you know? And when I heard that she had size-10 feet, I just thought, there is a god. She represented a way, if you lived in a really narrow, quiet little world, she seemed like some kind of alternative. I'm sure today it would seem really different, but — she was different,, and my parents were very Republican, very right-wing. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: I was thinking the Irish and the Kennedys, they might be big fans.

MS. RUPP: No, my dad was very, very, very conservative. Always a Republican. Who knows what he'd think today about the Republicans, but he always prided himself on being super, super conservative. And Mother just kind of went along to go along. She definitely had a more — a bigger picture from youth, from her family probably — I wouldn't say they were progressive, but they were certainly more progressive than [dad -CR] —

MS. RICHARDS: Was there any art in your house, on the walls?

MS. RUPP: Well, Granddad's, and we had some Rose O'Neills, and — nothing in my parents' house was purchased. It was all from their families.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. When you were in high school —

MS. RUPP: Maybe it's how it was then, people [... -CR] never bought anything, including clothes or vacations or dinners out, and then other people had — it was like *Mad Men*, you know. Other people had very design-y houses and their mothers had hairdos and lives and —it was really — I think that was a lot of where the '60s came from, was that it was really like two cultures. And to be a teenager then was just really torture, because you wanted so badly to grow up and be part of that. And your parents hadn't even matured, you know? They got married so young [during the war -CR] — growing up in the Depression, [... -CR] I'd often ask my father if all this working made him happy, and he would say, no [... -CR] — happiness isn't really something I would expect.

Which I always thought was kind of stingy, when I look back on it. That's not really what you want to tell a 7-year-old kid. [Laughs.] [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: But as you said, they were children of the Depression.

MS. RUPP: Yes. So there were those two things in Buffalo, you know. There was the whole Pop art thing that was moving in, and then there was the old kind of immigrant one that was really rigid, super rigid.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Since you went to this small, strict girls' school, I guess you didn't have much space for rebellion, that teenage rebellion.

MS. RUPP: Well, I did my best, you know. I was the middle child. [... -CR] I didn't get kicked out but I came really close. I just really didn't like it at all.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you —

MS. RUPP: And you can understand why the art department would become really important, because it was one place that [some of us -CR] really enjoyed being and — I think everybody that hung around the art department then really thought of it more as therapy than anything. We didn't think of it as a career.

MS. RICHARDS: When you started thinking about going to college, were your parents very supportive and did you — did they — and did they have a say in where you went, or were you able to pick that on your own?

MS. RUPP: No, I wasn't allowed to pick it. My sister and I both went to all-girls' schools [... -CR] —

MS. RICHARDS: So — you went to Colgate.

MS. RUPP: After a while.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. That wasn't the first one you —

MS. RUPP: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you go first?

MS. RUPP: Bradford Junior College. It was a finishing school in Boston, it was all frustrated girls.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that right in Boston? Or a suburb?

MS. RUPP: North of Boston, Haverhill, Mass. I only interviewed at junior colleges, only girls' schools. My parents said, you don't have the grades to [go to college -CR] — my sister went to Wells College, which at least was a four-year college. [... -CR] But they wouldn't even let me apply to anywhere interesting or big. It was just unheard of. You wouldn't go to a co-ed school in my family.

So [... several -CR] of us went to Bradford from Buffalo —

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go in thinking you knew what you were going to major in?

MS. RUPP: I was majoring in leaving home. [They laugh.] I mean, I'm just trying to think what was happening then. That was '67. So we had the Beatles, freshman year of high school.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure, and the Rolling Stones. The Beach Boys.

MS. RUPP: So that gave us some kind of sense of the horizon.

MS. RICHARDS: How long did you end up staying at Bradford?

MS. RUPP: One year. Like, myself and all my good friends. I mean, you know, after two weeks we were just, like —

MS. RICHARDS: Were you staying in a dorm?

MS. RUPP: Yes, of course. Yes. No freedom, no — we would have these mixers. None of this has to do with art. I don't — nobody cares. But you'd have these mixers where 60 girls would get on a bus in rollers. Maybe you had this experience. And you would ride in a bus for hours, in rollers, and be dropped at some —

MS. RICHARDS: Boys' school.

MS. RUPP: Boys' school. And you were on your own, you know? Everybody would get drunk. Who knows what else happened. Nothing bad ever happened to me. It was before — it was before date rape was a [reported -CR] thing [... -CR]. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you escape and get to —

MS. RUPP: Everybody knew that this type of education didn't work, it was just horrible. We did have [... -CR] a lot of art at this college [, conceptual artists as full-time resident faculty with careers in New York City -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: [... -CR] Who? Sorry.

MS. RUPP: Donald Burgy and Doug Huebler. Both of whom you would read about, you know, years later in *Artforum*. They were in *Artforum* all the time. This is afterward. But they were these frustrated artists. You know, they had a gig — they had a real teaching gig and they all had — [... -CR] all the students [frustrated and eager -CR]. [... -CR]

And the good thing about that was, yeah, again, just like the Albright-Knox, how fortunate. If I had to land somewhere super repressed, to land in this little pocket of — what did we call it then? It wasn't conceptual art, it was —

MS. RICHARDS: Advanced thinking? Minimalism?

MS. RUPP: There were minimalists, totally, but they were into objects. You know, they had something to teach us, they weren't just [into -CR] theory. I guess you'd call it minimal. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So you did take art class.

MS. RUPP: Yes. Oh, yeah. That was the only way to survive at that place, was to really jump into the art thing. We could tell that the teachers were really young. The school had a gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point, you weren't thinking of yourself becoming an artist.

MS. RUPP: No. No, I was trying to escape the middle class. I mean, I — it just — art was more fun. Art was — they accepted you.

Those teachers were harsh critics. [... -CR] You would spend a lot of time on a painting and it's not like they would accept it or anything, or think that you were a serious artist. They were really— they were thrilled to have jobs, and —the school gave them a lot of support and we were really lucky to have them as teachers, but it was a boy's club, that minimalist thing was a boy's club, and it was clear that there was no access that way. But it was really great to spectate, you know. Just like the early days of SoHo.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you — but you said you all agreed that wasn't the place to be. And how —

MS. RUPP: We all knew we had to get out [or die trying -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: And did you all decide where you —

MS. RUPP: Even if it meant, like, moving to the street in New York and being a — whatever, a street urchin or something.

We all [... -CR] made our way out to Colorado — in '68, '69. Which, '69, to be in Denver — it was good. That was good. My life was getting back on track at that point.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to school there? [... -CR]

MS. RUPP: Yes, I went to University of Denver. It was full of people from Long Island that wanted to be skiers.

[... -CR] In Denver. It wasn't University of Colorado; that was hard to get into, that was in-state, those were good schools. Denver was a party school for skiers. And I was, wow, co-ed school. I don't know how I talked my parents into it. I said, "I'm not going back to Bradford. I'm not going to college. I'm just going to walk out the door and that's it. [... -CR]"

So I — I don't know how — I don't know what changes prevailed on them, because my older sister that went to the girls' school was fine there. She never — she finished all four years; she never took time off; she just went straight through. But I was, after two weeks, this school is horrible; this is no way to go — college is more than this

MS. RICHARDS: So did you like the University of Denver?

MS. RUPP: I loved it. And again, the art department was wonderful. They were all minimalists.

MS. RICHARDS: Again, you focused on art.

MS. RUPP: Yes. I still wasn't really thinking of myself as an artist. It was still more like art was where the fun was. Art was more interesting. I wasn't a writer, I wasn't good with languages. But art, I got it, and so gradually I was starting — but we didn't really have a model for becoming artists. It's not like today where art students can imagine themselves as a career. We didn't have that.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any women on the faculty there?

MS. RUPP: Yes. There was this one person, Barbara Locketz [... -CR] —

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell her last name?

MS. RUPP: L-O-C-K-E-T-Z. And the reason I remember her name is that I have two friends who also had her. And one was Andrea Blum, who's a pretty well-known sculptor today. She and I were in our first art class together, [with -CR] Barbara Locketz. And the other person, who's a little bit older than me, is Mierle Ukeles, she was from Denver, that's how come she went —

I mean, to think of Mierle at that party school's a little hard, it's a little stretching. But — because her family was really progressive and supportive and everything. I didn't know her until I moved to New York. But it was really fun to find out years later that we had all these same teachers. She could name them all off.

So yeah, we started to [... think seriously about art. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: And you were living in an apartment?

MS. RUPP: I was off campus. I had a little hippie house with my roommate and we had lots of pets, dogs and cats. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So that was the first time you were actually living on your own, without — not in a dorm.

MS. RUPP: Right. And that was [in the -CR] acid years, and we all know how well that worked with art school. [Laughs.] It's really easy to be taken in by the whole world changing around us at the end of the '60s, and to be in this gorgeous landscape where people are all — all levels of freakiness. And to be in school and to have access to school. I was really lucky [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Were your parents — was your parents — were your parents paying the tuition and your expenses?

MS. RUPP: Yes, they were.

MS. RICHARDS: So you didn't have any summer jobs to help support yourself?

MS. RUPP: Well, I did. I did. I remember the first [summer -CR] between [... sophomore and junior years -CR]. I came back to New York in — would that have been '69? And I had a job at the phone company doing credit check, where we'd call up.

[... -CR] The phone company. And you'd call up the past landlord, [ask -CR] and has he paid? We would do all these credit checks on the phone, and —

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have —

MS. RUPP: And that didn't really work out for me. I wasn't so good at that. But the boss — it was this giant office of women, and he let me — he said he wanted to rearrange the office, so he took me off credit check and let me build a scale model of all the desks and the plants and the water cooler.

MS. RICHARDS: Because he knew you were an art major.

MS. RUPP: I guess. So my recollection of that is that job actually worked out really well.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have other jobs in the summer before that?

MS. RUPP: Yes, we always worked for Manpower. Do you remember Manpower? It was for temporary.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. Mm-hmm. So you always did administrative kind of jobs?

MS. RUPP: Yes. Well, no, that's not true. I worked at a florist, actually, very early on. I'm trying to remember what year that would have been. I think that was when I was in high school, building animals, life-size animals for parties. You know, doing party decorations. I built things, and I remember thinking, yeah, this is where I'm going. This works. They like it, I like it.

MS. RICHARDS: So how long did you stay in Denver?

MS. RUPP: That summer I came home was [when -CR] Woodstock was happening.

MS. RICHARDS: 1969.

MS. RUPP: Was that '69?

MS. RICHARDS: Think so.

MS. RUPP: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Summer of Love was '68. I think it was the summer after. We'll check on that.

MS. RUPP: So I remember talking to the other secretaries, because it was this huge room full of desks. And some people were young like me — there weren't that many summer people, just a few summer workers. But people were talking about going down to this music festival down in the Catskills.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, down — you mean you were — oh, I see, you were in Buffalo. Okay.

MS. RUPP: Up in Buffalo. And I thought, nothing cool happens in New York State. That — it's just going to be a lot of people and traffic and —

And people are saying, oh, you know, Crosby, Stills and Nash, and all these —all the names that we were hearing. But then we were hearing about the crowds, the mob scene, that it might not happen. There was a lot of — even then, the establishment was really trashing Woodstock. They didn't want you to do. "Don't go!" It was all over the evening news: Don't go to this. It's illegal. If you don't have a ticket, don't go. Don't even get on the [road. Stay home! Stay away! Nothing happening here! -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Which of course encouraged people — [laughs].

MS. RUPP: Yes. But I didn't go because I was too straight, bottom line. I didn't have the cojones to go. And of course that probably was a mistake, long term, but whatever. Here I am, a few miles away now, [living my life] —

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Missed wallowing in the mud.

MS. RUPP: That was that kind of summer. It was really like living in a straight world — that was my last summer at home. It was really a battle. It was hard —

MS. RICHARDS: So you decide not to go back to Denver?

MS. RUPP: So I went back to Denver for my junior year and I sort of quickly realized that all I would learn — I would be out of college in a year. I knew college was really great, but I wasn't really having the deep experience that I wanted to have, mostly because it was a party school and we were all taking acid, going skiing on acid, doing all this kinds of black-light things in people's back yards, and just really the whole hippie thing — I never had any trouble with the law, but lots of people did. [... Much of the activity, although cultural and fun, was

motivated by anger at the Vietnam War. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. RUPP: But we didn't — I didn't know that. What did I know about the Vietnam War? I mean, I did know a few people — so I'm '49, people probably born in '46 that had been killed in Vietnam that were — [... -CR] they had been in high school when I — I had certainly knew their brothers and sisters. But I didn't know why they were there. And then gradually as the draft, we started to hear more about the atrocities and —we knew Nixon and everything was crazy, but we didn't really have any interest in the whole underlying —

And Students for a Democratic Society didn't really either. I mean, they were — they were, you know, radicals, organizers, but we didn't have any kind of a big picture on what it was to be a movement, you know. We just really loved to rebel. That was the whole thing.

And so that spring, after Kent State, which was — '70? Yes. [... Many -CR] college campuses erupted. I don't know if you were in school then?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] We just stopped having class. Being at a party school already, there wasn't much of a leap. It's not like we were worried about grades, you know. [They laugh.] I had my own little tribe of people that we all [... -CR], saw a lot of, and we with a lot of people, we took back — liberated the campus and built shelters and lived on the campus and really were hippies in the mud that we weren't at Woodstock. You know, it was our chance to have Woodstock that we missed.

And I remember one incredible moment where we were in somebody's truck and we went to the lumberyard to get the supplies for our shelter, and we checked it out and the guy had the whole bill and they're adding it up, and it was a phenomenal amount of money. I mean, it was like \$80 or something. For then, it was like a huge amount of money to just be building the shelter. And I remember the guy said, "Just go ahead, you can go. I'll just tear up your receipt." And I thought, Woodstock nation, you know? This is really — nothing had ever happened like that before. I mean, there were free drugs, free love, but nobody had ever, like, from a lumberyard said — just torn up the receipts, said, go ahead and do that. And I just thought, like, you know, the world really is changing.

But I realized I was in a little bubble. There was people dying and getting drafted, but it wasn't until later that we really knew what that was.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. So that summer after your junior year —

MS. RUPP: So there was no school; there were no exams. I think they gave us grades just to save face, because it would have been too much trouble for the college to fail everybody. We stopped college, like probably a lot of colleges. And I just said, there's no reason to go back to college there, because all I'll know how to do is — [... -CR] hard-edge painting. Stretch a canvas and paint a hard edge.

MS. RICHARDS: And a masking tape.

MS. RUPP: That's all we knew how to do. And we — some of us did it better than others, but, you know. I remember doing — making sculpture then —

MS. RICHARDS: Did you — so at that point you were an art major?

MS. RUPP: Yes, I was an art major and I was really investigating plastics and found objects and just — really trying to — very similar to what I'm doing now, which is taking icons and working with them. I remember distinctly my first plastic piece was called *A Knuckle Sandwich* because of the riots and the police and everything. And it was a [... painting -CR] of a sandwich, a big — maybe like as big as this table, with a — a fist, with the lettuce — and I was so proud that I had [... -CR] gotten a perfect size bag for it, so it had a baggie on it, and the teacher really liked the plastic on top of the painting.

It was sort of working. I was sort of figuring out —

MS. RICHARDS: Were you using oil or acrylic?

MS. RUPP: Acrylic. Yes, I'm sure.

But yeah, I was gradually getting content and —

MS. RICHARDS: So that — there's obviously a(n) influence of Pop art in that.

MS. RUPP: Yes. Oh.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there other artists whose work you were looking at? I mean, obviously through magazines.

MS. RUPP: Well, people in Denver had collections. I remember our teachers taking us to some collectors and seeing Andy Warhol paintings in their kitchen and thinking, like, why would you put an Andy Warhol in your kitchen? I recall they were all the different kinds of soup. It wasn't just the tomato soup. Right?

MS. RICHARDS: Right, right.

MS. RUPP: How many kinds were there? Like nine or 10, maybe?

MS. RICHARDS: More, more.

MS. RUPP: She had all of them. And she thought it was so great, this collector. And of course we thought it was great too, but we didn't know why she — why they were there. And you know, in retrospect, you think, this is — this is 1970 and she's got 10 —

MS. RICHARDS: You could probably figure out who that was, if — I mean —

MS. RUPP: Ten Warhols right in her kitchen. And we thought, the world isn't such a big place, you know? And we would go — go to New York on breaks. I still visited my parents; I had moved out by then. So we would always try to schedule a trip to New York and go see the galleries that we'd read about in *Artforum*. We were reading all the art magazines, of course. But it wasn't really like we were engaging the art world. We didn't know what the art world was. We certainly knew the Pop artists.

And then — and then another really important milestone from that period was, when we liberated the campus, I remember my sculpture teacher, who I really liked, this guy Reed McIntyre —

MS. RICHARDS: Reed McIntyre?

MS. RUPP: Yes. I'm sure all these people are passed on now. He was up in a tower above the library — Condoleezza Rice's dad was the chancellor. He was — Dean Rice, he was the bad guy. He was the right-wing head-basher.

And you couldn't be an outside instigator. If you were — if you were a student, you could take acid and sit in the student union and be as crazy as you want. But if they carded you and found out you were from the University of Michigan there to rabble-rouse, they would throw you in jail. It was really getting to be crack-down time.

Because they were so worried. They were worried — we didn't realize how close we were on this whole draft issue, the sensitivity. We didn't realize the impact that, yeah, you can protest and get noticed. We didn't have any idea of that.

But anyway, I remember going up to his tower to bring him a sandwich or some cigarettes or something and seeing him there with —

MS. RICHARDS: Dean Rice?

MS. RUPP: No, my sculpture teacher.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay. [Laughs.]

MS. RUPP: And he was a real authority figure, and I thought, you know, if he's — if he's liberating the campus, this is a good thing. I really looked up to him — I never questioned that it was a bunch of hippies. It really seemed just. I had none of the political thing behind us, but just the anger. But it suddenly started to all make sense, like, what it was about. But it took years later before I really realized what any of it —

So I didn't go back to Buffalo that summer. We all moved basically to Aspen to be like Hunter Thompson and take acid the right way and live in the woods and be real hippies instead of college hippies. And then for a while I was a ski bum into that year, and I was a bread maker. That's what I did, I made bread in —

MS. RICHARDS: Were you trying to support yourself in some way?

MS. RUPP: Yes. Yes. That's what I would do; I would make bread, deliver it, and go hit the slopes. It was sort of half the day. I'd make the bread in the morning. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So this is the following winter?

MS. RUPP: No, this is — well, this would have been summer of '70 into —

MS. RICHARDS: But then the ski slopes would be —

MS. RUPP: '71. And Aspen was a different place then. [... -CR] More of a hippie enclave than a Hollywood thing. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: But your parents probably didn't know what you were doing.

MS. RUPP: Probably, and better there than in Chicago actually getting my head cracked open, you know? There were plenty of people that were in the cities. And Laura Nyro was a huge — do you remember her, from the —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: And I remember specifically important women, like Barbra Streisand — and that would have been in high school — because she was a little different. And the first time I ever saw *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off* — probably don't remember it. I don't really remember —

MS. RICHARDS: I didn't see it, but I remember.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] It was about — it was about cultural mores shifting. It was about thinking about the crack in the wall. And it was the first time any of — because we were watching Ed Sullivan, you know? [... -CR] We all knew New York was full of — because if you grow up in Buffalo, they tell you that from the first step, is that everything bad happens in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. RUPP: And you can get anything in New York. And so immediately, you're headed to New York. You know, your parents are going like — no, no, no. But you know, eventually, you're going to be there.

And so people like Laura Nyro that were really poets, and Joni Mitchell — they were leaders, they were real cultural leaders. They showed us a way out of our — our play culture [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: How did you — what made you eventually leave Aspen?

MS. RUPP: Well, it was just so crazy with the skiing all the time, I had my fill of. I kind of got bored after a while. I couldn't really do it for very long. Some people could make a life out of it. But —

MS. RICHARDS: And then how did you choose where to go?

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] My parents lured me home, saying, "You could go [... -CR] — we will pay for your ticket to go with her [your aunt -CR]." Because, you know, that's kind of the aunt's — every aunt's fantasy is they're going to take their niece [... -CR] — but that turned out not to really work, because when I arrived home, they just took one look at me with all my bells and my embroidery and my blue jeans and they realized that my Europe wasn't the same as Aunt Martha's Europe. That it probably wasn't — it probably was a really bad idea. So that lured me out of Colorado back to Buffalo, and I was just stuck. I didn't know what to do. Because I realized Aspen was a dead end. It was a total dead end. It was impossible to make art there.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you — did you feel you really wanted to go back and finish your bachelor's degree?

MS. RUPP: Well, I didn't want to be in college, because everything was opening up, like all this hippie world was kind of unfolding these possibilities — the Beatles, Europe —

MS. RICHARDS: But that's not what you would be doing.

MS. RUPP: Well, I wanted to do it. I didn't have the money to do it. I didn't have the money to just go off and travel. I couldn't do it. I wanted to.

MS. RICHARDS: So you didn't want to do artwork.

MS. RUPP: But I knew — no, I knew if I stayed at Denver I wouldn't know anything. I'd be out of college. I'd be graduated with a degree in painting, I wouldn't know anything about anything. And I just said to myself, back out, back off, this experience can be better. I want to find a better college situation where I can really learn something from people that are really in love with their work and — it was really clear that hippie thing was wonderful, was a great experience, but there was no way it was ever going to lead anywhere. [... -CR] Just running on the fumes of youth and whatever crumbs you could —

We lived in communes and we supported ourselves, but we had no mobility. Nobody had a car. Nobody even had a bike. We just — we had our dogs [... -CR]. It was like — so no future there.

[... -CR] So I ended up using my knowledge of the ski [... culture -CR] to become a ski salesman for that winter, stay home and work in Buffalo and sell skis [... -CR]. I had my goal of making enough money to go join my friends in Europe. Which is what I did. I think I was at home for maybe six months working [... -CR]. Nineteen-seventy-one, living in Buffalo with Republican parents. It did feel like hell. I knew it wouldn't be forever.

And I also felt I'm lucky I even have a place to come. A lot of people couldn't even go home.

MS. RICHARDS: Their parents rejected them?

MS. RUPP: Yes, or they just were so crazy with their hair and stuff that they — their parents wouldn't let them in the house.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were going to go — so you did, you said, join your friends in Europe.

MS. RUPP: Yes, so I worked all winter and then joined them, and they were in England. [... -CR] Renting an apartment, so I lived with them and then we traveled — I had never been to Europe, and we traveled and went to places like Morocco and did crazy things, stupid stuff, [fun -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have an itinerary that was related to great museums or great works of art, or was it —

MS. RUPP: No. No. By then, I had no faith in the — anything established or mainstream culture.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you studied art history?

MS. RUPP: I had no faith in mainstream culture at all.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you studied art history?

MS. RUPP: Well, yeah, you know, the core courses. I'd taken a history of art [... -CR] — I liked contemporary, but — I didn't really connect with —

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't want to go see the Piero della Francesca in Janson? Or whatever?

MS. RUPP: You know, I wanted to see the big museums, but it wasn't like I wanted to sit in front of a Monet or anything like that. I just figured, somebody else will appreciate that; I'm glad it's there. So yes, I went to the Victoria and Albert; I went to all those things — barefoot, by the way, which freaks me out because — not only that you'd walk around London barefoot but that you'd go to museums barefoot. Isn't it inconceivable?

MS. RICHARDS: You remember for sure, that's what you did?

MS. RUPP: I do, I remember — you know, Fortnum and Mason is the fancy [department store -CR] — where you go to buy or stare or look or whatever. I remember going into all those places barefoot and thinking, like, I'm like a dog. I wonder why they don't just throw me out. But also just looking down at the sidewalk, walking across the street barefoot. But I guess that's what everyone did. I don't know. At some point I stopped doing it. But it seemed perfectly acceptable. And there was a very international community in London and that whole —the Beatles had broken up, [... -CR] people were saying the economy's really bad, and — there was a sense of it being a kind of fragile moment, even in Europe. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: You were there in 1971?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: That was the big coal miners' strike.

MS. RUPP: '72 — yeah. It felt fragile. It felt like, America's at war and we're going to take everyone down and nobody cares because everyone's got problems and —I was sort of getting more of a class awareness, but as a hippie I didn't really have a lot of exposure to other kinds of people [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Moving on to — the next step was you ended up at Colgate.

MS. RUPP: Right, and so my sister decided to get married and they kind of begged me to come home and be part of her wedding after I had been in Europe for a little over a year maybe or so. And I — when I got home, I said, "Yes, I should be back in college. This is kind of silly."

I was trying to learn about the Arts and Crafts movement in England. I was very interested in clay, making

things.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you spend most of that year in England?

MS. RUPP: Yes, when we weren't traveling and working with potters and helping —

MS. RICHARDS: Near London?

MS. RUPP: Yes. Helping them clean up their studios and —

MS. RICHARDS: Making money that way?

MS. RUPP: Well, it wasn't exactly making money, you know. My friends had an apartment, I didn't. I don't know how I survived. I remember one time I had a paper route in England which paid nothing, really nothing. And it was [... -CR] a lot of work. Or I tried waitressing. I didn't need a lot of money, I didn't — certainly didn't have a lot of money. Very marginal. Not really a plan for the future. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Anyway, your sister got you back.

MS. RUPP: So I came back to Buffalo and put on a bridesmaid's dress, very obvious that her life path is really, really different and mine was something else. [... -CR]

So Dad said — I was painting up in the attic [... at home -CR] and trying to get back into art — the art that I kind of left in Denver — and doing — and doing pottery in Buffalo too. And he suggested — he had gone to Colgate and he said — this is January, you know, which — I don't know if you've ever been to Colgate, but it's gray there. It's a — the — it's a cloud shadow there. It's really one of the [... hardest winters -CR]. And we went down there [... and decided -CR] this is really great. Because I was older then, they said, "You can live off campus."

They showed us this building where we could have studios and I could live in the country with my dog and just take art classes. [... -CR] I didn't care [... where it was. -CR] It was just a place to have a studio. So it all worked — I got in and — the real reason I got in was that Colgate had been a boys' college, and in '71, they went co-ed, started taking women in freshman and sophomore year. But [... no juniors and seniors -CR] dedicated to art. By then, I really knew I wanted to be an artist. That was what being out of school had shown me was that it was really hard to be an artist, and I needed training.

So they let me in as a, a junior and there were no other — there weren't a whole lot of women but there weren't — there weren't women my age that really knew they want to be artists, so you could see why they let me in because I certainly didn't have the grades. It was hard to get into Colgate. It was a jock school.

But again, it was like the faculty there was like the faculty at Bradford and the faculty at Denver where these — these hipsters had jobs and they needed the students to make them feel alive, to really validate the fact — to give them an audience for being outrageous crazies. You could really see why they needed the students, so [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So you studied there for two years? [... -CR] You had already been through your junior year, mostly.

MS. RUPP: Yes, but I lost some credits, and — to get out of that place, I needed — [... -CR] maybe five semesters instead of four. [... -CR] I think I had to repeat my junior year or something.

But the difference was at Colgate, I remember distinctly at registration talking up the professors and you were only supposed to take three studio classes. But getting them to give me those registration cards and getting five studio art classes, and that was my life at Colgate. I just took studio [... -CR] history or language or something. But it was all art. It was a total immersion. [... -CR] That's all I did, was make art.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any particularly influential teachers?

MS. RUPP: Oh, there was — well, Sidney Tillim came. You probably don't know him, do you?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure I do. Yes. I mean, not personally. It's really — I know his work.

MS. RUPP: He was a huge — he was such a great teacher. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: I've heard that he was a great teacher.

MS. RUPP: Yes. And he did this sort of really [... constricted -CR] historical narrative. And of course, I didn't know anybody that did narrative work — we were all [... thinking -CR], "He's a nice guy, but he's somewhere else."

And his paintings looked — they looked so forced and — he was really exploring flatness.

MS. RICHARDS: Absolutely. Kind of Italian.

MS. RUPP: Yes. I don't know that much about the history of painting, but he sure had all this information about it, why he was there. And then he had this other [... practice, -CR] always making abstract work at the same time as he was choosing these subjects for historical narrative. And I loved the narrative and I guess it's his fault that I got on that path of always having the didactic part. I think I might have to blame him for that.

And then I had a sculpture teacher named Alan Paulson. He was the one that they said — when I came down there in January with my father right after New Year's, they said, "Do you want a student to come in here? She hasn't taken any of the entrance exams [... -CR] — she's not your typical Colgate student. She seems to really like art." He said, "Yes. Definitely." And that was always his way. He was the first real guru I ever had in that sense. Straight ahead, you know.

And I think — I think if he hadn't let me in, I think that was a really important period because Colgate was a small environment, where you could go down to New York, you could meet serious artists and you could just define yourself. I always felt — later on when I got to RISD and all these places, especially Maryland Institute in the '70s later, these kids that had gone to art school really hadn't been given a chance to think for themselves.

And I really felt like that experience in Buffalo, going up to the Albright-Knox — for us, classical art was Anne Arnold and Lucas Samaras, that was classical art.

MS. RICHARDS: Lucas Samaras?

MS. RUPP: Yes. They had a lot of — he [Knox -CR] had collected a lot of his work. You know, the *Mirrored Room* was there and all his little experiments with pins and broken glass and — that was the first art I ever saw, really, was that stuff. And I felt the same way at Colgate, was like I could just figure out what I wanted to do and do it.

There was no history there, there was nobody teaching you how to draw.

MS. RICHARDS: The department didn't have one specific orientation everyone felt they had to follow?

MS. RUPP: No. There was no life drawing. There was no life painting.

MS. RICHARDS: No models.

MS. RUPP: I think — I think we got together and paid for our model ourselves. [... -CR] I'm not really interested in rendering things, just — but anyway, I felt I was lucky that I didn't get that first year of college, that really academic training.

MS. RICHARDS: Foundation.

MS. RUPP: I never had any foundation.

MS. RICHARDS: When you — you said you were going to New York at that point. What kind of work was most influential for you while you were at Colgate? Do you recall?

MS. RUPP: I guess still the Pop artists and the — and the color field people.

MS. RICHARDS: And what was your —

MS. RUPP: We loved the bigness of it, it was still before — Earthworks. I know Earthworks were [... being constructed -CR] then, but it wasn't on my radar screen then. Maybe we had seen pictures in textbooks of the lightning field probably not that early. [... -CR] Do you know what year that was? [... -CR] I'm trying to think of who [was important -CR] Dennis Oppenheim was big in New York then. [We were interested also in Vito Acconci. -CR]

The Kitchen was big, the whole media thing that was happening —

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: — the work that you were doing then was — would you define as primarily painting?

MS. RUPP: Yes. I was doing soft sculpture. I would paint things, cut them up and sew them together. And then — I did that a lot [... -CR]. A lot —

MS. RICHARDS: At Colgate.

MS. RUPP: — very super, super productive. Night and day, all over the place, just, work, work, work. And they had taken over a science building that was there. [... -CR] Colgate's [... conservative -CR]. This seems to be the history of my — it's always from the right-wing culture.

And the Olin [... corporation built -CR] them a new science building with the stipulation that this [lovely Romanesque -CR] building had to be removed, and [... word had it that it was designed by a student of H. H. Richarson -CR], but it was brownstone with lovely arches and it had been an old bio building. And when the Olin science building which was built, 80 percent of it was underground. It was a classically hideous building, and it just had this little turret and they — it was in the way, this little bio — this little brownstone building was in the way. And that was the stipulation behind this fancy new science building was that [the graceful, historic building that defined the quadrams -CR] was going to be removed.

So it had been left empty for, like, 10 minutes and the art students just flooded in, grabbed it and made studios. [... -CR] It was the equivalent of an old schoolhouse. Really high ceilings, really generous rooms. And maybe there were — maybe there were 10 or 15 of us that were really dyed-in-the-wool artists and we knew that we were — we defined ourselves as artists. And so we had these studios and nobody had ever given us a studio.

We'd had cubicles, but now we had rooms with locks on them that we could do anything we wanted. And we felt like we were taken seriously. The art faculty said, "This is such a unique thing; you've created these really serious students in a jock school where there really wasn't an art department just by giving them this building." No, you're taking the building down. Sorry.

Plus, it's historic, and so we got involved with [... the struggle -CR] to save the building, which eventually ended up with all those really good faculty members not getting tenure. They all got canned, every single one of them. And they had to go back to Podunkville, which — Colgate was kind of Podunkville. Brooks Stoddard was [... -CR] a medievalist and so Brooks was the art historian on faculty and he was also the chair and he got in Ada Louise Huxtable [to come speak in defense of the building -CR]. It was really a coup, like, we got her invited for graduation to get a — an honorary degree, and nobody really expected that she'd go on this tirade against the jock school for wanting to remove the building, in front of everybody.

So there was revolution —

MS. RICHARDS: Did it work?

MS. RUPP: It worked. You know, when you go back today, that building is gorgeous. It's renovated. It's a treasure. The whole quad would have been so ruined without it. You know, it was one of the original buildings. And they love that building and they've spent probably more than they ever spent on that ugly science building. They spent more renovating that building. It's got a new name [Haskell Hall]. But if it hadn't been for the art students really with our pickled frogs and our body charts, all the stuff that they left that was, you know — if it hadn't been for the artists [... the campus would be less interesting today -CR].

But that was another kind of realization that you could make a change. It was maybe the first time that I realized that people working together could really make changes in right wing-ville.

MS. RICHARDS: When you graduated —

MS. RUPP: The Colgate — just — just a really quick aside. They had money for speakers, and we would have Allen Ginsberg and we would have —lefty people would come there because it was the '70s, you know. And remember, in the '60s, everything was an experiment, and the '70s was kind of hunkered down. It was actually a very good time to be living in Europe because there wasn't a whole lot going on. Academics would be so grateful for a job where they could pursue their research.

So to be at a place like Colgate when — it was almost like the Ice Age people weren't really sure what happened after the '60s, but it was a great place to be hunkered down in the homeland with all the tools and with the smart people coming through. It couldn't have been a more fortunate, you know. And my father always said, "Oh, you've missed so much at Colgate, because you never went to the football games and [... -CR] the hockey games." [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: No, no, no. It was great.

MS. RUPP: Everybody came through it. The beat poets came through Colgate and —

MS. RICHARDS: Well then, your father would be happy that you really had a terrific experience.

MS. RUPP: He never saw it that way. He always thought Colgate was football.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] I never set foot in the football stadium where I went.

MS. RUPP: Why would you?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Luckily, my father had no interest in football either, so it wasn't a problem. When you graduated, I saw that you did something at RISD but I wasn't quite sure what it was.

MS. RUPP: Yes, right after Colgate — [... -CR] I spent two summers there and maybe — three semesters during the school year. I had enough credits to graduate at the end of August, and so I went to RISD [... because RISD was offering a MAT in one year -CR].

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: What is that?

MS. RUPP: Masters of Art in Teaching.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. And that was a one-year certificate program.

MS. RUPP: Yes. And RISD was really unique in the sense that — I don't know what's happening today in art ed but even then, art ed was [... not for "serious" artists -CR] But RISD's whole thing was you're not giving up your practice — you're just figuring out how to get a job. That was — that was their thing from Day One. You're really an artist but you're learning how to support yourself and not give it up, whereas most art schools were [... saying -CR] you'll have an art practice but you'll be a teacher. And RISD was sort of the opposite.

And it was kind of a crash program. We didn't have a lot of education class [... -CR] —

MS. RICHARDS: Was it geared toward teaching at a college level or high school?

MS. RUPP: No. High school and elementary. Absolutely. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: You lived in Providence?

MS. RUPP: — there was a lot of discrimination from all the art students and the art ed people. They didn't think we were serious artists.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a program that's specifically for those who've already gotten their MA — their BA or BFA?

MS. RUPP: You could get your art ed degree as part of your painting degree then too.

MS. RICHARDS: Part of your masters?

MS. RUPP: No, your BA. Just taking enough of these student teaching and a couple of education, you know, theory. But the nice things about the masters is that you were certified permanently for the rest of your life. And Rhode Island was reciprocal with New York. And at that point, I still thought I'm going to live in the country, [... -CR] I still wasn't urbanized mentally. But anyway, that was the appeal of that program. It was — very centered on you being an artist and I had a show that year. A lot of people didn't in that program, but I hustled shows and I was exhibiting around Providence and in the college.

[... -CR] So I went to RISD and I did get a pretty good high school teaching job the following year, but I didn't know what to do with myself that summer, so I thought, okay, one more time. I'm going to try going back to Buffalo because I heard about Artpark. Do you remember Artpark —

MS. RICHARDS: Sure. In Lewiston. [... -CR] You got your — in '74, you finished at RISD.

MS. RUPP: Okay, so that would have been the summer of '74, which was the second or third year of Artpark. And if you know anything about the history of that place, you know it opened with a really huge budget and really ambitious and then gradually, the state figured out what they were doing. [Laughs.] And so it was just fine to [... support conceptual artists' experiments -CR].

Or I worked with Alan Saret, [Vito Acconci, -CR] and Dennis Oppenheim made a giant fingerprint of his grandfather's finger and five-acre — you know the history of Artpark? It was a toxic waste site which was so fortuitous if you think about how lucky I was to have experience because given where I ended up, with all of these [... -CR] toxics and pervasive pollution.

Really to even [... learn about -CR] Love Canal was kind of wonderful. And Niagara Falls. And the steel industry was just winding down when I was in high school. And there was [... a road -CR] called the Skyway that drove over — all the mills, and [... -CR] you'd roll up the windows and you couldn't see anything because the city was so polluted. [... -CR] The river was polluted, the lake — you couldn't swim in the lake when we had those houses

in Canada. It — Lake Erie stunk. Lake Erie's very shallow so it couldn't really digest pollution or move it on. It just really was in bad shape in the late '60s and early '70s. It stunk and the fish were all dying. So that's how we kind of heard about pollution in the beginning was direct experience.

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: You were at Artpark in the summer.

MS. RUPP: To be able to have that experience of working on a toxic spoils pile, working for all these men that were making these modernist, minimalist, formalist Earthworks just completely ignoring it. It was fascinating. Just to see the amnesia was fascinating. And the star system, it was all run by — Alanna Heiss [... and featured artists -CR] like Gordon Matta-Clark [... Max Neuhaus, Alan Sonfist -CR] —

[... In the beginning there was great funding for those who did siteworks, -CR] were players in the beginning at PS 1 [... and -CR] there were so many men. [... -CR] I worked for him and still a friend today. These guys were giants in SoHo at that time, even though they were just kind of making these uncommercial things. They had patrons and they had reviews and they had galleries and they were big deals. So to be their helper was a really good job [at that moment -CR].

[... -CR] We were called [... grunts. Helping -CR] the big important artists. And I remember just watching Robert Longo be a grunt and thinking about my experience as a grunt. And I loved it and he didn't love it, because he [... -CR] and Charlie Clough — that was the whole Hallwalls thing that was — had happened there. UB had all this money. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: I think it was SUNY —

MS. RUPP: Maybe both, because they found space downtown, so maybe they were both. [... -CR] I'm not really sure. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: You're talking about Hallwalls?

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] The artists are the Hallwalls artists. The Cindy Shermans, [... -CR] Nancy Dwyer, [... -CR] Sherrie Levine, were there. [... -CR] But a lot of them had gone to UB and they had really good teachers.

[... -CR] A lot of them were working at Artpark, and so we were all pretty excited about touching the rocks and the dirt of these important artists and thrilled to be their helpers. I mean, really. And, you know, I just remember thinking the whole process of assisting another artist, a famous artist, is so weird because you really see them when they're infantilized and you're helping them blow their nose and you're helping them fix a speeding ticket, and you're just thinking to yourself, how did he ever get to be on the cover of *Artforum* if he can't even zip up his pants. That's a really interesting little intimate snapshot of the Earthworks movement that I never would have had if I had just lived in New York.

You know, I never would have known those people. [... -CR] I was their helper or their chauffer. So that was really an exciting period to come out of RISD and hit the ground as a grunt for these famous people and be — and know Dennis Oppenheim's phone number.

[In that fall of 1974 -CR], I taught high school for a year in Massachusetts. [... -CR] It was a good job in the sense that they really understood art there. They had five art teachers. It was a huge mid-Cape [Cape Cod] high school which, of course, meant —

[... -CR] This giant high school that had five art teachers. It was almost like teaching college. People understood art. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: It wasn't like an alternative shop class.

MS. RUPP: Yes, it was really cool. These kids were — their parents were all artists. They knew about art. It was really arts and crafts. But still, [... -CR] I could tell that wasn't my niche, and by then, [... -CR] I had a friend [... -CR] who had moved to New York to be in the Whitney program, Charlie Ahearn. [... -CR] Charlie had gone to Colgate and [his twin brother -CR] John had gone to Cornell.

MS. RICHARDS: John?

MS. RUPP: Ahearn.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. RUPP: They're twins. Do you know John's works?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: They were [... -CR] my oldest serious artist friends. A couple other people from Colgate did go on to make serious work. Don't ask me their names. I could probably come up with them if I had to. But Charlie and John have remained lifetime friends.

So by the time I was teaching high school art, I also had a foot in New York and I could go see Charlie regularly and we would go to artist space. With the Whitney program, and so he was sort of finding his way and he had a lot of hip friends that lived in New York. So I was off there teaching in the Cape and trying to — trying my very best to make sense of living in the country and making art in the country, and I didn't really have any community. How much nicer it felt when I went to New York.

And Charlie lived down on East 3rd Street, that block where the Hell's Angels lived. Remember that? We used to — did you ever see that block in the '70s?

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. RUPP: It was rough. I mean, it was junkies everywhere and guns and — guns going off. And his next-door neighbor was Jack Smith, and I remember the first time that Jack came in in high heels and lipstick and sat in Charlie's living room. [They laugh]. I didn't know his work then, I just knew his persona. I just knew him as Charlie's neighbor. But it was really like, wow!

So it didn't take long to realize I wasn't really cut out to be a high school art teacher in the country, and by the fall — I think it was by October — probably after teaching for three or four weeks, I had my applications all on my kitchen table for grad school to go get a — this time, I was going to get an MFA. And I knew I had to do it on my own steam, that my parents weren't going to pay for it. [Laughs.]

So fortunately, I got into Maryland Institute when they still had [... -CR] a free ride for sculptors called the Rinehart School of Sculpture. It's not free anymore, but it was subsidized differently in those days. [... -CR]

By the time I made it down to Maryland, I was [at home with -CR] my life. That was really the light bulb moment where there was no going back, that I was really going to be an artist. Because for a long time, visiting Charlie, that world, that Jack Smith world and the Hell's Angels and the [... darkness -CR] and just the crime and all that was really scary coming from out of the city. I just wasn't ready for it.

MS. RICHARDS: And you didn't know any other segment of the art world.

MS. RUPP: I sure didn't know any women. I mean, I felt that's fine if Charlie wants to walk down the street in the middle of the night and even get mugged. It happened to everybody then. But I couldn't see any way that I could do that. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't know any other women artists in the city?

MS. RUPP: I didn't see any way I was going to do that, so when I went to grad school— I could gradually start to see how I could get myself into a full-time artist's world. Maryland Institute was fantastic, it was wonderful, it was free. And it was a small program of 12 artists, and we had shitty studios but we had one really big [... space -CR] in an old train station.

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: [... It was before MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art) had a fiber program or traditional handmade techniques involving textiles. -CR] It was still formalist. [... I wondered if -CR] I had gone to art school from Day One, if I would still be painting interiors or still-lives and I'd be obsessing on form. I never had a teacher that taught me formalism. I think that's really a blessing. That was the singular blessing of [... my youth -CR] — I went straight to Pop [Pop art]. [... -CR]

Maryland was interesting because it was post-war and it was the GI Bill, and the people that wanted to study sculpture were — a lot of them were Vietnam vets and it was really gothic. [... -CR] Not that they weren't nice people, they just weren't [... -CR] — they weren't fellow travelers. They had seen it all. They'd been there. They were disillusioned. They were trying to make art as some way to repair what they knew.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any particularly influential teachers for you?

MS. RUPP: It was still a boys' club, and particularly in the sculpture department. And the only person I gravitated toward then who actually was in the boys' club was Lila Katzen. Do you remember her?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. RUPP: And she really thought like a boy and she was tough and she was a great role model. But she made that kind of work, and her husband did a lot of the moving and the rigging and he made it — you know, they were a team and it was Lila's work.

MS. RICHARDS: By the time you graduated, you had your thesis show. Describe the work that was in that, because I haven't seen pictures of that before — that early.

MS. RUPP: So it was very — it was very — Rinehart at that time [... -CR] was a foundry, it was for fabricating huge things. And that was the thing about Rinehart, was that we have all of that equipment — really big, huge hoists. [... -CR] Stone carving, polishing.

[... -CR] I had this sculpture that I really wanted to do about fish in the Niagara River. Where did I get those fish? [... -CR] They were called the fish-in-residence, and I got them off a program for Artpark, some of the fish that were coming back to that dirty river. At Artpark, you couldn't put any footing — sorry to digress, but you couldn't put a footing in because there was toxic waste in the soil.

In fact, the soil was all stabilized. All kinds of different stabilization with cloth and metal and ways to keep it from degrading. That's why it was an artist's place. Did you know that?

MS. RICHARDS: I vaguely remember that, yeah. Because they couldn't — [laughs] —

MS. RUPP: Because it wasn't — they couldn't do anything else. And Buffalo was the most economically hurting place in the — with the highest population because it's off on the West side [... of the state -CR], it's more like Ohio.

So anyway, I had — I had really wanted to engage with the [issue of -CR] fish returning to the Niagara River.

[... -CR] It took me a year to get this piece materialized, and I was cutting out little paper fish and making each one its own little spring, hundreds and hundreds, and sticking them on the wall and then putting a fan and so it would look like the whole wall is swimming.

MS. RICHARDS: Were the — were the fish painted or just —

MS. RUPP: Printed. Printed. Xeroxed.

MS. RICHARDS: With a fish image.

MS. RUPP: Yes, cut out. You know, a silhouette. And they all sort of bobbed individually. I don't know what it was about [, swimming at your own speed -CR]. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: — you were dealing with environmental issues? You knew you weren't dealing with formalist issues. You weren't doing it in narratives.

MS. RUPP: I was working with animal issues. I was — I was interested in animals.

MS. RICHARDS: Animals.

MS. RUPP: But I hadn't really connected it to the environment yet. But the whole time I was at Maryland, it was always animals.

MS. RICHARDS: In thinking of animals, you mean in terms of their welfare or their connection to humans or as a metaphor for something else?

MS. RUPP: I was interested in behavior. Animal behavior. I read a lot about Konrad Lorenz and anything I could find about behavior because I thought that conceptual art made no sense and that it was presented like science. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Doug Huebler?

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] A lot of work was shown on graph paper presented [... as -CR] information, what you'd see on a video screen or the running videotape, the sort of live video feed as information. And I thought, it's not information. There's no information. Give me some information. People walking by the window is not information.

[... -CR] And it was all presented like science. And so I thought conceptual art is not really science.

MS. RICHARDS: So it's a pseudoscience. It seemed like a little bit fraudulent.

MS. RUPP: It's not really science. So let me look at real science and present it as conceptual art that — I remember that distinctly. If the — if they could do it [... lines on a wall -CR] that I can do it about geese or cows or birds or fish. So it was taking what I didn't understand about conceptual art and knowing that it was a fraud, I thought, because it was a boys' club.

You remember Lynda Benglis then had her big kind of — she was like the only woman for a long time that they even would put in the magazine. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: I have to sit down and look it up, but —

MS. RUPP: There weren't that many women really in that club. Certainly of that really graphic kind of detached presentation, there weren't that many women doing that. Really. I don't think — you know, Eva Hesse certainly was really important to me. I think she still is to every young sculptor. But she wasn't presenting work like that [... detached data. -CR]

That's how I came to animal behavior, I thought this is information. [Laughs.] You know, artists are scientists, and I really got interested in the whole relationship of art and science. And nobody at Rinehart School of Sculpture wanted to hear that. They all thought I was a lightweight. They loved to tease me. They loved to come next to my little drawings and grind so that I'd come in the next morning and there'd be shavings all over my drawings or — that was how it was then. Or accidentally they'd walk next to your thing with a torch and set it on fire. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Pretty juvenile.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] Somewhere in there, there was a — I went to Skowhegan. That was '74. That was the year — [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So someone from RISD nominated you. Is that —

MS. RUPP: No, I didn't get in that way. I couldn't get myself nominated, so I said well, I'm just going to apply because I had been showing and I had all these slide. Yes, so that was '74, so I guess Artpark was '75. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: No it's not.

MS. RUPP: But I know it was after RISD, and so that would have been the summer of '74. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So when you went to — the summer of Skowhegan was right before you started at MICA?

MS. RUPP: No, it was before I started teaching high school [art -CR] full-time.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. Well that must have been — made teaching high school full-time even more difficult, having spent the summer in Skowhegan.

MS. RUPP: Yes. That's why I knew — that's why I knew. Because once I had been at Skowhegan in '74, I said, you know, these people live in New York, I could live in New York. To this day, that's the gift of Skowhegan.

MS. RICHARDS: So you knew there were other women and there were other artists besides John and Charlie Ahearn.

MS. RUPP: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: So there were — there were other pockets that weren't quite —

MS. RUPP: Well, they just went for it. They moved to the city, to the hard knocks city and lived as frugally and crazy. But yeah, the Skowhegan thing, I met Janet Fish there, I met Ann Arnold and Fairfield Porter. I'm trying to remember who else was teaching, but Ann Arnold had always been [an inspiration -CR], they had a lot of her work at Albright-Knox.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. You mentioned her.

MS. RUPP: And when I saw that she was teaching there, I said, "Well, I don't care if RISD's not going to send me as their nominated candidate, I'm going to get myself there if it kills me." [Laughs.] So I applied and got in because I — I guess my work just looked different because I had been doing all these animals. I was really involved in cows at the time, the soft sculpture. [... -CR] By the time I got to grad school, I knew that you could live in New York and that you could work light, you didn't have to grind steel. But my reality wasn't there yet. I

didn't know anybody like that. I had just seen that.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. So after you graduated, did you come straight to New York?

MS. RUPP: Yes, that day. We had the van loaded that day.

MS. RICHARDS: When you say we, did you come with other people?

MS. RUPP: Yes. I had a roommate that was a grad student in painting, Nancy Pierson. And we had — do you remember Babe Shapiro? Does that name ring a bell? He was a Color Field painter. [... -CR] He was really generous. He ran the —

[... -CR]

P-I-E-R-S-O-N.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. RUPP: She was from Colorado.

MS. RICHARDS: So the two of you planned to —

MS. RUPP: [... Several -CR] of us knew we were coming to New York, and this would've been '77 — this was '77 [... -CR].

I knew that if I wanted to make art, I had to [find my -CR] own studio, I had to have a job, I couldn't just wing it. It was okay for guys to wing it [... -CR]. It was different for women.

We started coming every week looking for lofts, [... -CR] Babe Shapiro, head of the painting grad school, was really generous. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I have heard about him when I spoke to another artist who taught at — was at MICA.

MS. RUPP: He was there forever.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: I don't even know if he's still on the planet or not. I haven't seen him. But he let us crash there. He'd get us a *Village Voice* and we'd sit around his table and drink real coffee in the darkness and circle [... ads -CR] and go see lofts. And if we found something, we'd show him the lease and he'd say no, that's bad or that's a good location.

One building he told us not to get. We were really — I'm talking too much but —

MS. RICHARDS: No, go on.

MS. RUPP: — this is '77. You could actually choose — you could actually live in Baltimore and choose a loft in New York. Imagine that, having a selection, not having to just come with cash. You know, there were options. And we had found this place on Thames Street. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: On 10th Street?

MS. RUPP: Thames, T-H-A-M-E-S.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, all right. Thames.

MS. RUPP: Near where the Occupy — in Zucotti Park.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, downtown.

MS. RUPP: And there was a bunch of people that were in the Philip Glass Ensemble. And Joel Shapiro lived down there and Ellen Phelan. And so, famous artists were trying to sell us their fixtures. It was sort of the — everywhere we went, there was famous artists trying to sell their fixtures to young grad students. [Laughs.] I think our fixtures were a couple of thousand dollars or something —

MS. RICHARDS: Or sometimes a lot more.

MS. RUPP: In '77?

MS. RICHARDS: Not sure.

MS. RUPP: I don't know. Yes. Maybe those were the ones we looked at, were the ones we could afford. But I remember Babe Shapiro looking at that lease and saying, "You don't want that place. That's dangerous; that's bad for you. I can tell that that's a bad landlord." And ironically, that building burned to the ground. I don't know if you were in the city then, in '77, but that — all those artists lost everything.

MS. RICHARDS: No, I don't remember that.

MS. RUPP: There had been a fire down there and — but of course there's a skyscraper there now. But Babe was really helpful and he had a lot of [... patience -CR] — [... And generous friends -CR] and they were painters. I didn't really know them. I'm trying to think of what sculptors did I even know? [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Hermine [Ford] taught at MICA.

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't know if maybe after you were there, I'm not sure.

MS. RUPP: She was certainly a visitor for when Babe was there. That was always the beauty of Maryland Institute, was this access to visitors to come down. And I taught there two years, many people have done gigs there, and it was great. These people were really generous and they really helped us get set up in New York. Not that they were really socially our friends, but you know, they took us to McGoo's; they said, "This is where you want to hang out if you want to meet the artists." They were really generous, [... -CR] really generous and they helped set us up.

MS. RICHARDS: And so where did you end up?

MS. RUPP: Right on Walker Street, two doors down from —

MS. RICHARDS: What was the address? Do you remember?

MS. RUPP: Fifty-nine Walker, 79 Walker? It was on the north side. I've been by that building, it's really dark. It was a gorgeous old loft building in the sense that really high ceilings, it was a cast iron building.

MS. RICHARDS: So did you and Nancy share that loft?

[... -CR] And you lived and worked in there, both of you.

MS. RUPP: Yes. [... -CR] I was sort of figuring out who I was, and [eventually moved further downtown -CR]—

MS. RICHARDS: When you first got to the city, did you have a job to support yourself?

MS. RUPP: We were all starving. There were about three — Nancy had some friends. It was easy to make friends then, too, because you would just hang out at McGoo's and then, boom, you'd have seven friends. And then you'd go down maybe to Puffy's, or maybe Puffy's was later, I don't know. But it was so easy then, partly because we were young and partly there [... were fewer artists -CR], it was really easy to be part of something. We all mourn that to this day. Why is it so hard to find time to hang out anymore? But then it was easy. Tribeca was just like college. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: I was asking how you supported yourself.

MS. RUPP: Did I have a job? No, I didn't. I was really struggling, and that was the summer —

MS. RICHARDS: You mean you had saved money?

MS. RUPP: That — yeah, I had saved money. I was a security guard at Maryland Institute. They gave everybody jobs, mostly as security.

MS. RICHARDS: So you came with a little bankroll to —

MS. RUPP: I think I probably had like \$1,500, which I felt really loaded. And —

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, did you imagine you were going to find a job in New York to support your —

MS. RUPP: Yes. Yes. And Babe said, go — "You will go get a job at McGoo's. That's what you will do. And I'm introducing you to Tommy, and if he won't give you a job, then he'll take your artwork and you'll have food." [Laughs.] [... -CR] What timing. Today, it's so hard.

MS. RICHARDS: Impossible, yeah.

MS. RUPP: So yeah, I think I did — I was briefly a really bad waitress at McGoo's and then Nancy and myself and another woman whose name is Georgia Marsh — [... -CR] all got jobs — I don't know how we ended up at this place. It was in the Gift Building.

MS. RICHARDS: On 23rd?

MS. RUPP: Right near where I now live. [Laughs]

MS. RICHARDS: And 5th, 23rd and 5th. The Toy Building, I think it was the Toy Building.

MS. RUPP: Well, it was the — there were two Toy Buildings on the west side of 5th and on the east side, it's now condos, but it was all, like, dishware and it was giftware.

MS. RICHARDS: East side of 5th?

MS. RUPP: Right above —

MS. RICHARDS: You mean the other side of the park?

MS. RUPP: No. Right above the park, there was a giant — you know, those huge, huge office buildings.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, sure. On 25th Street or 26th Street.

MS. RUPP: Well, I think the park was 27th, so it could have been 27th and 5th.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. RUPP: And I think it was called the Gift Building, because everybody had showrooms. So somehow we knew this guy who was importing plastic ware from Europe and we would take orders for him and show up at the gift shows and organize the displays and work in the back office. And he was nice to us. He gave us jobs — we'd have to get in the [crowded -CR] subway every morning. By then I had moved on to Fulton Street, and —

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so after — you stayed at — on Walker for a couple of years?

MS. RUPP: Yes — no, just for six months. I didn't want to share. Nancy was a figurative painter and very academic, and she didn't have the same nightlife style as I did and I felt like, you know, I'd really be better off living like a cockroach than living in a gorgeous loft with a figurative [artist -CR]— I didn't get it.

MS. RICHARDS: So where did you move next?

MS. RUPP: I moved down to a tiny little loft, a one-room — office lofts were opening up down in the Financial District.

MS. RICHARDS: On Fulton Street, you said?

MS. RUPP: Yes. It was a big artists' building then.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the address?

MS. RUPP: It was called 93 Nassau. But today it has a different building because they — it — I think it's called Fulton Landing or something now [it remains named the Bennett Building but has a renovated real estate brand name now -CR]. They made it fancy, fixed it up. But we didn't have bathrooms.

MS. RICHARDS: So it really wasn't a legal live-in. It couldn't have been.

MS. RUPP: The landlord was [okay with us -CR] — there were a lot of empty offices.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, but — okay.

MS. RUPP: And it was the kind where people had these [accordion (folding) security -CR] gates, these guys sat — these really huge guys setting diamonds and fixing watches, and they'd have a gun and sit in a muscle t-shirt. And they'd have all these diamonds and they'd take them home at night and — it was very high-security [or low security if each person has a gun -CR]. And there were [... small printing companies -CR] in there, and I guess it was all changing then, so there was a lot of empty space and the landlord was happy to rent to us. Even gave us the super's connection to build our lofts. The super of the building put in our hot water heaters and our showers and — so if it was illegal, it certainly was with the full blessing of the landlord. He was thrilled to have the spaces

[occupied -CR]. He knew artists weren't going to stick up anybody in the elevator. You know, we were going to populate the building.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RUPP: So no bathroom there. I lived there for eight years. It had — when I first moved in in '77, it had a view of [... -CR] both rivers, and they were just topping off the Trade Center. And we did all that Art on the Beach stuff, before the Trade Center was [... finished -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Well, the Art on the Beach was for the new land made from the dirt that they excavated to build the towers.

MS. RUPP: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: The beach was actually a new piece of land.

MS. RUPP: Right. Was it really called — I don't think there was an Art on the Beach.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes —

MS. RUPP: There was — there was a creative time, but I'm not sure if there was Art on the Beach in '77. Maybe there was.

MS. RICHARDS: Might have been.

MS. RUPP: But I remember this thing that was really cool then, that was — you know, people were figuring out ways to borrow video equipment, black and white half-inch videotape from — I don't know if it was downtown community television or anthology or — there were all these little organizations that you could borrow, sign out, and — of course nobody had a credit card. I have no idea how it worked, because nobody had any money or a credit — what collateral was there?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

[End of disc]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Christy Rupp on July 16, 2012 in her studio in Saugerties, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

You were talking about —

MS. RUPP: I was talking about the summer of '77, when I came to New York, and a loosely-organized group of artists Collaborative Projects was starting to get rolling. Do you know about them?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: Okay. They did a lot of video projects that were collaborative, and we would just sort of meet down there, and in those days, Willoughby Sharp was really active, and he and Liza Bear had a video program, and Colab had actually talked some big corporation into giving them a modem — an early modem, which — I don't know that they did. They tried to make that —

MS. RICHARDS: Now, when you say Colab — were you actually a member of Colab at that point?

MS. RUPP: Yes — at that point? [... — CR] There was no formal Colab membership

MS. RICHARDS: That's what I meant.

MS. RUPP: But I had —

MS. RICHARDS: But you said "they," so there was some kind of —

MS. RUPP: Well, the media people — Colab was always about — it always worked collaboratively better around the media stuff, because the visual arts and the objects and the paintings isn't — we would do installations. We'd do one-night shows and things, but the media people had TV programs, they had scripts — they had casts, they had location shots, they had, you know collaboration.

And it's funny, because that year — well, I guess they got off the ground in '75, and that was about the year that Hallwalls, too was hatching, and it's directly a result of the state council on the arts making funding available to groups. And Colab always talked about that, how if it wasn't for that group funding, there never would have

been a Colab — [laughs] —because it wasn't like we ever really collaborated in the sense, critical art ensemble collaborates or the way people long-term with patience and respect for each other. Colab was about media and tools and equipment.

MS. RICHARDS: In '77, I noticed on your resume that you had a show at artist's space in the project room.

MS. RUPP: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me about that, and how did it happen and — you mentioned artist space earlier.

MS. RUPP: Yes, I was really lucky to have a show at artist space —

MS. RICHARDS: It was in '77?

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] — no, but even before —

MS. RICHARDS: Aggressive geese place?

MS. RUPP: Yes. I'll tell you about that, but even before I moved to New York, they pulled my work out of — a file, and — I got to be in a show there and send my work up to New York, and I just thought that was —

MS. RICHARDS: Down to New York? Oh, up, from Maryland.

MS. RUPP: Well, I was in Maryland. So I just thought, like, wow I can't believe it. And so, I had been [working -CR] with animal behavior — you know, I was really interested in geese. Why did I — I don't know. I guess because Konrad Lorenz was the father of animal behavior; he was what was available to read about, and geese were so demonstrative with their behavior — visually with their behavior. This is — we were talking a little bit about conceptual art and science and how it's presented and how I got interested in animal behavior. [... -CR] He had delineated, with photos or with drawings — [... -CR] what a geese was feeling by its posture, and whether it was fight or flight.

So I thought it would be interesting to make all those positions of geese life-sized. And why did I want to do that aggressive geese piece? So, why the geese? The geese were — it was about — [... -CR] you could tell their emotional state by their posture. I made a dozen of them — life-sized, papier mâché geese, and — just trying to think of the whole context, if I — what was doing for a day job then —

MS. RICHARDS: Isn't that what you've described already, that you were working in the —

MS. RUPP: The Gift Building?

MS. RICHARDS: Gift Building?

MS. RUPP: Yes, I think I only stuck around there for — through the summer. And then I was working in a camera factory after that with some photographers, but why the geese? [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: How did you? Tell me about the development you worked, because the next thing I know about is the *Rat Patrol* poster campaign in '79. So that's about two years later.

MS. RUPP: Right. So it was about animal behavior.

MS. RICHARDS: It's still animals — [laughs] — yes?

MS. RUPP: Charlie Ahearn and I shot some footage of aggressive geese. We were interested in peoples' aggression, and just living in the city is the genesis for that, and being able to read peoples' behavior. That was what people were interested in then, this endless video footage of people coming and going, walking down the streets. You remember that particular time? It was kind of, like, boring.

And collaborative projects was really at that point — I don't even know if we were a group yet, but it was — it was all about film, and we would go sit in peoples' lofts, really every weekend and just watch hours and hours of things that people had made that week. Or sometimes you'd watch everything they had done before and then, at the end, it would be the new part — [laughs] — but you would sit there for hours, and — so anyway, we made a film of my sculptures, and that was —

MS. RICHARDS: When you say, "we," who —

MS. RUPP: Charlie Ahearn and I, because he was interested in —

MS. RICHARDS: Were you still a couple at that point?

MS. RUPP: Probably, yes. It was kind of on-and-off for a long time. And we did some shooting at the Holland Tunnel, of watching cars behave aggressively, honking like the geese, and we shot up at the Bronx Zoo, watching the geese running around in the petting zoo, and then, at artist space — I had the geese all lined up, an actual goose that I got from a meat market — remember there was that poultry market [... on Broome St. - CR].

[... -CR] But there — remember the live poultry market that was there? My goose cost \$12, and I [... adopted him -CR] for the picture — for the card, I rented [... a goose from an animal handler -CR] — and I was still on Walker Street because I remember that — he showed up with this rented goose, and that cost \$50 for three hours, and I realized I could buy a goose for \$12 and own it, and then I would have him for every weekend [and forever -CR].

I would take him up to artist space, and he would be in the room, and the room was all dark except for my sculptures and Charlie's film, and the goose [... would -CR] kind of charge at the visitors and make a big mess and make people think about how they approach situations. And it was really fun, because I remember the goose — always spilling water [... -CR]; it was a nice installation. There was a lot to look at, [... -CR], now it seems a little lightweight, but then that was some way of interacting with people.

So anyway, after the goose, I was really broke, and I had no money at all, and it's funny, because I don't remember having a goose that early, but I guess, because he was so inexpensive, that was my pet. I didn't have a cat or anything. And I lived with him in that tiny little loft on the 10th floor of Nassau Street for six or eight months he had a little enclosure, and a pool and I tried to tame it and just get to know it. And finally, I found a home for it. But I had no money, so I really wanted animals, and I wanted to study animals, and I realized that for five cents, I could buy a cricket at the pet store. It's a food cricket, for a frog or a snake or something. So I had a whole bunch of crickets over, maybe, a period of six months.

MS. RICHARDS: In a cricket cage?

MS. RUPP: In an aquarium. If you put Vaseline around the top, they can't crawl out — it keeps them in. And I was really interested in Muybridge photos at that point, and just looking at the anatomy of the — [... -CR] his kicking donkey one? So his — the crickets cage was lined with the donkey sequence with the little — [... they were -CR] the same size [... -CR].

And I remember, I worked with the crickets for a long time, [... -CR] I had a wild mouse in my studio [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: House — you mean the apartment on Nassau?

MS. RUPP: Yes. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Rooms?

MS. RUPP: It was really rough. [Laughs.] I wanted to know more about this mouse, and at some point — [... -CR] — I had this idea it wanted to know me, and so I went to the store, and I bought a white mouse, and I had an installation with it in an aquarium with its food and its water, and I would shoot it all the time, making little — I was always making little dioramas for it to live in and colored paper, and ironic things like my lease or — loved showing it the *New York Post* — just sort of fantasizing about all of these ways of interacting with a larger microcosm or making it bigger, and — then I realized -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you know any — did you know any other artists? I mean, this is '77, '78 — who were - you felt a kindred spirit at that time?

MS. RUPP: Well, the Colab people were my friends.

MS. RICHARDS: But they weren't working with animals or thinking about aggression or those kinds of issues —

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: A human behavior.

MS. RUPP: No, I don't know offhand. I'm trying to think —other than people that were interested in the street — using real-time —remember Scott and Beth B? They were really interested in — sex, basically, was their thing; they were always trying to come up with new ways to make movies about sex. And Eric Mitchell was interested in the terrorists in the Baader-Meinhof gang and —

MS. RICHARDS: These were people who you were friends with at that time?

MS. RUPP: Yes, they were all in the Colab orbit — Robin Winters — it's hard to name names of Colab, because

whoever you name, you're leaving out the other people. So I hate doing that, because it's — [... -CR] Becky Howland was very close, but she was working on — what was she doing then? I don't even remember what it would look like. I know she was studying the fiddle. She was doing work about [plumbing -CR] — everybody had loft-jockey jobs, and somehow, that interacted with their artwork in these weird ways. If you were doing electricity as a job, you might be doing drawings about electricity. People managed, somehow, to make it all [work together -CR].

So I had this little white mouse, and then I saw the house mouse, and I documented their interaction, and it took a lot of time. I had a tripod over a period of months just set at that — at the thing, and I realized that my house mouse had something that this wild mouse didn't have, and — and I started studying about spatial intelligence and territories; spatial intelligence is interesting, because it meant that in the mouse's case, that the [wild brown -CR] house mouse would jump in and out of the aquarium, basically, to get food. I specifically got a female from the pet store that was not pregnant.

But eventually, she did get pregnant, because the house mouse —

MS. RICHARDS: Because the wild mouse was male?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you realize that?

MS. RUPP: I was sort of hoping it would happen that way. I mean — I figured, if it was another female —the only way it's really going to jump into her cage and eat her food is if it's another sex. It's probably not going to tolerate that [... -CR] because it's defenseless. It's spatial intelligence, you know. The house mouse knew it could come and go, but the little pet mouse didn't know anything outside its aquarium. So I was just curious in writing this script [... -CR] — what that meant for us, getting — succeeding in the city or not getting into fights on the subway, or what was spatial intelligence for people, and how did that relate to the whole other real estate and the art world and —

MS. RICHARDS: Did this connect at all to the rat patrol?

MS. RUPP: Well — so I didn't [... watch -CR] the rats yet. I wasn't there yet. And really, the mouse work went on a long time, and during that time, I was [... -CR] reading about its behavior. And then gradually I realized [... -CR] it was happening for the rats, and they were really interesting, and I started watching them. And down on Fulton Street —nobody really thought of it as a residential neighborhood, so there wasn't a [perceived -CR] threat to human safety; nobody was really interested in them. And everybody went home at night anyway, so it didn't really matter. And the rats would come out, and nobody really cared. [... -CR] In '77, that the city was overrun.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RUPP: I guess we were into '78 by now — I think the mice must have largely been '78, after the geese and after the — couple of other little creatures. So anyway —at one point I just realized I had to engage these rats, and I had to figure out a way to make their behavior relevant to us and what it was they were doing in the city and how they were surviving, and what did they, exactly, need from us. And then I realized [... the information -CR] about home ranges and territories was really relevant to people, because home range — [... -CR] is your larger area — where you go to school and where you shop and a library and a town, whereas your territory is your house. You don't share your territory unless it's with someone that you live with.

And there's a real difference. So you don't defend a home range, but you do defend your territory. I was curious about how the rats survived, and reading about them mostly and learning. A mouse, in its lifetime, really only goes a couple of feet from its range — where it's born — even in an apartment it will only go about three to six feet. It's hard to believe.

A lot of this is probably really old research, I would just get books. There was no Internet then. But rats had a larger home range and a larger territory, but mostly, rats had community that mice didn't have, and they took care of each other, and they survived as a unit, and they were aware of poison; they would appoint one — usually an old one or a sick one to eat food that was suspicious, because they knew, culturally, that humans wanted to poison them, so they would actually appoint one or get one to eat it and watch it for 24 hours. And if [... that individual rat does not die, they could all eat the food -CR].

They had ways of testing the perimeter of their safety zone so that it would benefit the community. And I thought, wow, that's so interesting; why aren't people like that? Why aren't artists like that? And so I got really fascinated with the way they lived in the garbage and realizing that they didn't make the garbage, and people thought the rats were dirty, but really, the city was dirty.

And so I never wanted to defend rats, but I did want to think about the city as a living organism. And so that's when I started making the rat posters as a way to say, this is habitat. It wasn't — to be a punk rocker and say, rats are cool and we want to be like rats, but it was really to call attention to the garbage as habitat and the fact that we make the garbage — that the rats didn't make the garbage; we invited the rat to come live with us. And historically, that's why we have rats — it's because we invited them.

MS. RICHARDS: And this — this was — this project was magnified or pointed at during the garbage strike?

MS. RUPP: Well, yeah. When the — when the garbage strike was really boiling over — I know we had three weeks without pickup, and that was in May of '79. [... -CR] I think what happened was, during the strike, it just became so blatant — they were everywhere. They had been visible on Fulton, mostly because — where J&R Music World is?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] Behind it, there was a triangle where Ann Street came in — just some awkward spaces where there were some diners and — I don't know what other kinds of office buildings were there, but there was really unused space, and there had been fire, and the building had been taken down, but they left the lot excavated — I think it had been 17 years, which, if you read about — the Bambi syndrome, I was reading a lot about nature, of course — [... nature abhors a vacuum -CR], every space becomes a niche for something.

So it became really obvious. The rats were there because we had excavated this space, and then, during the garbage strike, people were using it as a — as a big dumpster, because there was a construction fence, which — [... -CR] but in those days, it was just funky old plywood — a lot of times rotting — a lot of times old doors. If you watch *West Side Story*, the opening scenes are so amazing, because there's those doors [used as construction fencing -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Right. In 1979, there were a lot of exhibitions. You were involved in lots of things. It seemed to be a really important year. [Laughs.] And I wanted to ask you if you recall — I mean, there was this show — animals living in the cities, there was a Fashion Moda — show, there was a *Times Square Show*. There was a *Real Estate Show*. They all took place in 1979. Tell me about that time and your involvement in those activities and how that came to be and what were the most important things you took away from that. That's a lot of different questions in one, but —

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: He's [Alan Moore] an art critic — an art writer. We were just talking about this, because — there's a show at Hunter coming up in September about this very period. [... -CR] There have been [... many shows about -CR] *Times Square Shows* lately. [... -CR] There's one up right now. There have been a lot of [... produced and funded -CR] shows. One is at the Walker right now, it was at — it was in Chicago [at the ICA -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes that — right.

MS. RUPP: It's a really nice catalogue. I love how they organized it with the little caps.

MS. RICHARDS: Beautiful, yeah.

MS. RUPP: I've always been included as part of the politics section.

MS. RICHARDS: Actually, I saw this on their website. I saw the image of your work — and the whole book, unfortunately, isn't on the website, but a good representation of the book. *This will have been* — it's called —

MS. RUPP: *Art, love and politics in the '80s*. But there have been —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Launched at Chicago MOCA.

[... -CR] First it was the '60s, then it was the '70s, and now it's the '80s.

MS. RUPP: Then it'll be Bushwick. [They laugh.] Okay, so —

MS. RICHARDS: So talk about your involvement with the Fashion Moda.

MS. RUPP: Okay. I had — I had done this rat poster and gotten all this amazing feedback when it hit the news — it was in the *Post*, and it was on the *Daily News* — and — on the TV news —

MS. RICHARDS: These were — these were printed — offset printed posters that you made?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And you pasted up — and did you go out with a bunch of people or in the middle of the night [... -CR]—

MS. RUPP: I printed 4,000—

MS. RICHARDS: There it is. It's about six inches by 15?

MS. RUPP: I think it's 17 x 5 and it was the life-sized — there was a poster on the subway. Remember when the subway ads used to be free — everybody was swiping them and making art with them? And this was a really nice one called starve a rat today, or learn about your neighbor. And I just had to have it — [laughs] — so great. It was the most beautiful picture of a rat I had ever seen. It was full color. And so I grabbed it, just because I had been studying rats. And then I realized, after I looked at it long enough, I could make actual art out of this.

So I printed it — I took it to a printer, and they made it running left and running right, and then was so I could do it architecturally, wherever the opportunity presented itself. And then, with friends, I actually made these sort of things that you could strap onto your knees, that you could have your right and your left hand in there, and so you could ride around [on a bicycle. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So, like an apron with big pockets, you mean?

MS. RUPP: Well, no. Just two big pockets that you could tie around you that were the size of —

MS. RICHARDS: The posters.

MS. RUPP: And then you'd have the wheat paste in your basket with the brush, so you could do it really quick and just be on your way. And, you know, in those days — [... -CR] we did them all the time for —

MS. RICHARDS: Well, of course, the Guerrilla Girls did it after that.

MS. RUPP: Everyone did. So I had help sometimes; there were 4,000 altogether, and I don't know how many we put up; several thousand. Not all of them.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel like you were doing something illegal to put them up?

MS. RUPP: Yes. And once in a while, they confiscate your wheat paste or something, but it wasn't like today where they [... arrest you -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: so you're saying that it got a lot of publicity or visibility in the newspapers —

MS. RUPP: Well, because the woman was attacked on the site of them — right on Fulton Street. [... -CR] That was why it got on the news, is because the situation was so out of hand. They saw all my rats on the wall — a whole line of them — [... -CR] I put all the rats on the wall jumping [... -CR]. And it looked so bad that they brought a big dumpster — they rented a big dumpster —

MS. RICHARDS: The city?

MS. RUPP: Yes. Whoever was in charge of that lot. It really was crazy on that side, because it was an empty lot, and it was just [an excavated -CR] lot — the Lower East Side [... had empty spaces also -CR], but the difference was, nobody lived down there [on Fulton Street -CR], so nobody cared.

[... -CR] When they put the dumpster on the other side of the sidewalk, [... the rats had to cross the sidewalk - CR] — what had been their home range became their territory, because they lived in the dumpster, [... -CR] so the sidewalk became their territory, whereas, when they were just eating in the — in the empty lot, it was their home range — that was shared space. But when [... people were walking -CR] between the dumpster and the empty lot, [... they -CR] were actually [... trespassing on -CR] their territory. And that's when the woman was apparently jumped on. I wasn't home, but it happened at the site of 60 or 70 of these posters.

And when I came home that night, the whole street was blocked off, and it was a full moon. And it was a 90-degree day in May, which doesn't sound that unusual, but then it was. And, you know, it felt like one of those times when the energy was crazed. And they never found the woman that was [... attacked -CR]. But apparently, she went to get into her car, and there are all these rats on her car [... -CR], and she was attacked, and there was a witness, and she ran off, and they never figured out who she was, but [... -CR] the witness is the one that called the *Post*.

It happened on the site of my posters, so I felt like I was involved. I felt like those were sort of my rats. And so

they [the sanitation men -CR] came — for weeks, they would come, and they were excavating the lot, and they were digging [... -CR] and trying to clear out the garbage [... -CR]. [They laugh]

And wherever they would find a rat's nest, [... -CR] and they'd find all these babies, and they'd say, bring in the camera, and they'd slam the nest with the [... shovels -CR] and — just this violence, and pesticide. And so I was there saying, the rats are the symptom, and the [... -CR] organisms that will be harmed by this are people — all this pesticide. And you may kill a few individuals, but you're really killing us.

And so I realized, I could be a voice for the environment and a public artist — [laughs] — and kind of do it through the experience of being an observer of animal behavior. So that was what happened in May [1979], and the *Times Square Show* [... was in 1980 -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: [... -CR] Who curated the *Times Square Show*? Who put it together?

MS. RUPP: Colab.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, that's right. Okay.

MS. RUPP: John Ahearn had the — was the one that actually signed the lease on the building. He's the one that got the \$4,000 water bill, but it was the group of us doing —

MS. RICHARDS: And what was your work in that show?

MS. RUPP: Well, I did have some rat [posters -CR] running up the stairs, and I made a — I had been making all sorts of sculptures of rats by then. [... -CR] I made a fountain of garbage — it had a circulating fountain, and it was just — you know, a lot of wrappers and cans, and a bunch of rats. It was kind of like a [classical -CR] Italian fountain with rats and garbage, and then I had a seagull that had its foot caught in a coke container. I was really interested in airports and landfills — you know, once in a while, we would hear about these gulls getting ingested by the turbines.

And actually, [... -CR] some time [... around then -CR] — I did make a plane crash [sculpture -CR] at [... -CR] 26 Federal Plaza — of a [downed -CR] engine that had ingested seagulls. [... -CR] Actually we know that airports are where they put the landfills, and [... it's dangerous -CR].

So — now, if you wanted to make an airplane crash at 26 Federal Plaza, they'd probably give you a lot of trouble about that. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Probably.

MS. RUPP: But then, it just seemed to make perfect sense. You'd want to connect animal behavior to the sighting of airports. It just made sense to me. And you'd want people to know that.

So that was what was in the Times Square show, a seagull — all this wildlife that lived around garbage.

MS. RICHARDS: And then the animals living in the city show [the first *Animals Living in Cities*, Fashion Moda, 1979] —

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] You remember the —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I know the CETA program. What was your job?

MS. RUPP: Fashion Moda. I was curating a show about peoples' opinions about wildlife, because I got so much unsolicited feedback [... after the posters. -CR] [... -CR] I thought, we have to do a show about this. And I really was noticing a difference between kids' opinions and adults' opinions of wildlife, and the idea of the Bambi syndrome, which was something that always fascinated me. Do you know what the Bambi syndrome is?

MS. RICHARDS: Why don't you explain it?

MS. RUPP: Happy to. [They laugh.] Most Americans — our first encounter with wildlife is through Walt Disney [... -CR] — Bambi was a huge [... -CR] — certainly, Mickey Mouse [... -CR]. Bambi is the prince of the forest and he's sort of like the Lion King. He's — even as a fawn, you know he's going to be the king of the forest.

Why? Why is he the king of the forest? You know — if you really look at the way deer overpopulate, they all have the same father. They have the same alpha male impregnating all the females. That's what their rut is about. So there's no prince. They're all related; they're all brothers, they just have different mothers. And part of the Bambi syndrome is that there are people among us that are better, that are royalty — this whole justification — it's this whole Darwinian thing that some people are stronger and deserve to be leaders — unquestioned leaders.

And of course, this was a Disney thing, because he was a real racist.

And if you remember Bambi meeting Thumper, which had a Southern accent — was the skunk — was clearly meant to be African-American. [... -CR] This idea that predators are bad — like, all predators are bad — which is completely not true in the wild; you need the predators. That's why you have coyote [overpopulation -CR], because their predators are gone. That's why they're overbred — because there are so many deer [and predators have been eliminated -CR]. But more important than that, I was interested in how people like deer, and they hate rats, and yet, more people die because of deer every year. Hundreds of thousands of people die in car crashes with deer.

And if you have a few people getting bitten by a rat — nobody really dies from rats now. I mean, they did in Europe — but people hate rats and they [... are less threatened by -CR] deer. So why is that? It's because we've been culturally programmed to hate the things that we [... share our habitat with -CR]. [... -CR] We like the megafauna even though they're unsustainable.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were — when you were — came to curate this show for the CETA job, how did you — tell me about your relationship with Fashion Moda — we can talk about that?

MS. RUPP: Well, Fashion Moda preceded, of course, the *Times Square Show*, and probably [several -CR] of these group shows — Stefan had that space Three Mercer, way before Colab. I don't know when he opened that space, but —

MS. RICHARDS: His last name?

MS. RUPP: Eins? Stefan Eins. Be interesting to know when he actually opened 3 Mercer Store — it's a clothing store now, but it was just kind of a drop-in place where you could go and there'd always be some weird installation or artist or — it was very informal and very engaging and living performance — kind of real-time performance or film. And I don't know when he lost his lease there, but — we thought he was nuts when he got this space in the Bronx. So this would have been — I don't know when my first encounter up there was — in '79 but —

MS. RICHARDS: [Inaudible] — '79 is the first time — [inaudible] —

MS. RUPP: But he was open — I know he was open in '78 — maybe in '77 too. Anyway, so, why there? I don't know. I gave him a proposal; [... -CR] I really got interested in from the very earliest — and it's stayed with me is, "What's our opinion of wildlife?" Because, really, if we kind of knew how we related to wildlife or to vermin or to living things in general, maybe we'd have a clearer sense of our relationship to it. [... -CR] The other thing with the Bambi syndrome, is that people were always on top, and with Disney, it was always a male — a male thing on top.

So anyway, I've always been fascinated by peoples' opinions of wildlife, and the — lots of behavior people have studied peoples' opinions, but I wanted to do it visually. And so I thought, this is perfect, we'll do it at Fashion Moda, and I will do art classes, and I'll ask people — kids to make pictures — I went around and taught volunteer for a while — like, typed up letters, because there was no Internet — to all the urban ecologists I could find who had documented feral dogs or bats or mice and rats, and I went through all the police photos that I could get my hands on — in those days, [... -CR] you could go to the city of New York and see old pictures of vermin-infested tenements.

You remember the picture collection — you could take pictures out [... -CR] — I was really curious to understand [at that time -CR], what's our opinion of wildlife, [... -CR] the people that give to the Sierra Club and Greenpeace are generally college-educated females living in urban centers. [... -CR] So I thought, well, that's me. [Laughs.] I just wanted to find out how people felt about vermin, and did anybody really think it was science, and is there a correlation between the amount of knowledge and their behavior — animal behavior?

And I noticed that kids were more interested in behavior, and adults are just interested in killing, so I thought, this is a good reason to have a big group show. So that was in the pipeline — that was the summer before — *Times Square Show* [the first *Times Square Show* was 1980; *Animals Show* was 1979 -CR]

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: But anyway, it was [works by -CR] scientists, artists and kids. That was the idea, and then I did at again at No Rio [... *Animals Living in Cities II* was at No Rio in 1998 -CR]. [... -CR]

There were three animals living in city shows, and I started this organization called City Wildlife Projects [... -CR]. I was always writing to scientists. I remember one time [... -CR] — I asked everybody, would they be in my show, as — with the artists, scientists and kids. One time, these two biologists showed up from Delmar, which is

near Albany, and they really thought I was connected to the city, just because I lived on Fulton Street.

And they came in, and I'm showing them my brook trout and all these sculptures, and they ask, "You're part of the city?" And I go, "No, it's City Wildlife Projects." They couldn't believe it. [They laugh.] They come all the way down here — you know, my stationery had a little squirrel on it — I did a bunch of things in parks, the food chain piece was about the squirrels — all this is before the rats.

MS. RICHARDS: What do — and then, when did the real estate — the real estate show came up right at the same time.

MS. RUPP: '79, and that was New Year's Eve of 1979. That's why that date is always confusing, because it didn't get locked up until 1980. It happened — a lot of stuff was happening then, and it's kind of dizzying.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes — yeah. So tell me about your involvement in that show?

MS. RUPP: *The Real Estate Show*?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: You know, we were, by then, hanging out a lot —

MS. RICHARDS: On the Lower East Side — [inaudible] —

MS. RUPP: We had this video show. The dog show was at Robin Winters's [as well as -CR] the doctors and dentist show. There were lots of theme shows in peoples' apartments.

MS. RICHARDS: Were those apartments generally in one neighborhood?

MS. RUPP: No, Lower Manhattan. Some were Lower East Side; some were in [... SoHo or Tribeca -CR]. The manifesto show was at 45 Bleecker. So how did we get started on this?

MS. RICHARDS: *The Real Estate Show*.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] People were living in substandard housing; there was a squatter movement, and we were aware that entire blocks were being [... systematically left to decay and burn down, the city was -CR] letting them empty naturally with drugs [... -CR]

MS. RUPP: [... They were -CR] letting a drug dealer kind of take over a building, and then everybody would leave — then it would be empty or the landlord could torch it and sell the land. We were aware that this was happening, [... -CR] and we wanted to make a show about the fact that the city was hoarding all the space.

They were letting it fall apart until it was too late. Nobody, I'm sure — [... imagined -CR] then, the kind of development that they had in mind, like razing entire blocks. At the time, we thought, oh, they'll come in and renovate a unit or a building. We never imagined entire blocks — [... -CR] would be razed. Nobody could have — maybe [... -CR] if you were Robert Moses, but it seemed like New York was too feisty and out-of-control for that to really happen.

Adam Purple had his giant garden there, which we just thought was blessed. We thought it would always be there; I knew people that had goats on the Lower East Side. Remember those times — chickens?

We wanted to make a show about the fact that people didn't have heat, [... or -CR] hot water or — they were using drug dealers to empty buildings. So we identified the space that was [... at 123 Delancey -CR]. [... -CR]When you come off the Williamsburg Bridge, it was an old [... appliance -CR] showroom.

MS. RICHARDS: Right there on the corner of Delancey and Bowery?

MS. RUPP: No, it was — it was much further east. It's pretty much right where [... Williamsburg Bridge started -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, right where — [inaudible] — okay — way over east, near the river. [... -CR] Oh, right. Okay. I can picture that.

MS. RUPP: It's that interesting [... area -CR] where you can really see the difference between the Lower East Side and Alphabet City, because the Lower East Side was not on a grid, and Alphabet City was on a grid. It was an older part of town. [... It -CR] was rather unique at the time; it was very orthodox and religious, like a lot of that area was.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think the project was successful? I mean —

[... -CR]

MS.RUPP: Very successful. [...-CR] We — did we ask for the building. I think we asked the city — we pointed out to the city, you're hoarding this real estate, and we want to make an art show; we want to use in this space. And they just said, "no, that's locked; you can't go in there." We said, "Come on, please?" "No." So we went in —we just got bolt cutters and went in and hung a show. I think we visited the space three or four times [over a few weeks -CR]. Breaking and entering was really common then, because there was so much empty space. It didn't really matter. A lot of things were empty that weren't even locked.

So what's a bolt? You just cut it. People had those skills. We went in and hung a show, and — I don't know, maybe 20, 30, people, and it was open on New Year's Eve; it was really, really, really cold, and it was a lovely opening. We had glass wax on the windows while we were installing the show, and then, when it was done, we cleaned the glass wax off so you could see the show.

And there's one really wonderful videotape — I don't know who made it — where the cops are standing there facing traffic, and you can see the hand behind them taking the glass wax off right behind them, and they don't even think about it, because the Lower East Side then was so out of control and crazy —they were looking for something. They weren't looking for artists — who would have thought that would be their problem, you know?

So we had the show, and we publicized it heavily and got people out [... to see it -CR]. It was one of those weekends where New Year's Day came in the middle of the week. [... -CR] There's a whole week where nobody does anything; everything's off. So they locked up the space; [the next day -CR] the city came and locked up the space. We were on the front page of the *Post*; we got it into the *Times*. We came back with another set of bolt cutters and tried to get in, and they wouldn't let us come in.

And by then, we had circulated press releases and Joseph Beuys was there with his dealer, and notables were there — Hans Haacke came down, and they took our art off to a warehouse and locked it up. And for some reason, they invited us downtown to negotiate with them, because they didn't really like this being on the front page of the *Post*. The city was really sensitive to the fact that there actually people — it wasn't just artists who didn't have a place to live. It was families. You know, it was real people that were systematically being torched, burned out, thrown out — and these were nice buildings. If you recall, they were really beautiful brick buildings. Even if they weren't sound at that point, they were built beautifully. So they didn't — they wanted to shut us up — we had a series of meetings, and there was another storefront across the street which — [... -CR].

The nice thing about the original, it was a — it was a showroom, it was all glass, and everyone did work about that topic. And then there was another space that they gave us for a month or two, also on Delancey [142 Delancey -CR], that was just a storefront, but it wasn't a showroom. And then, after that, why they were still talking to us, I have no idea, but they offered us 156 Rivington, and we said, sure, signed a lease — free lease — it wasn't even a dollar. It was just to shut us up. I'm sure they thought we'll go home. And the backyard was full of garbage, and the building was full of [... families and abandoned apartments as well -CR], and the storefront was empty and downstairs, there was an upholsterer, and he eventually abandoned it at some point. He just stopped coming there.

And at one point, there was a whole into the next building — [they laugh] — and that became a video set. There was this giant other — I don't know — [... photo studio -CR]. It was huge, that building next door, but you could only get there through the basement, through a whole.

But, you know, even up in the Bronx, then, it was really common to go into abandoned buildings and do performances or do installations. People were doing that a lot; it was very fashionable, and it wasn't — like, I remember collectors in their fancy clothes going up and down ladders and going past the junkies and the guys with the knives and — you know, I guess you were safe in a group. I don't think it was really —such an issue then to go to these places then.

But so — anyway, that was — that was No Rio, and that was '79, and they're still there — you know the story, because they were given title eventually, and the building [... morphed -CR], and a whole different cast of characters — I think there have been — it depends on how you draw the lines, but at least three incarnations of people that ran No Rio, many of whom lived there.

But the guy in charge now, Steve Englander, has been there for — God, he must have been there 13, 14 years, and he's the one that's really shepherded it. You know, there was, at one point, a Chinese association that was bidding on the building, that claimed they need it for a community center, and that incarnation of No Rio actually followed the money and went into their books, and found it was just a real estate deal. I mean, it was really their vigilance. It had nothing to do with us anarchists in the beginning, us self-involved — not that we didn't have fabulous shows, because we did. We had really wonderful, participatory, fabulous interactive events

and exhibitions, and that's all in the book — [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: For the record, what book is it that you're talking about?

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] [*ABC No Rio Dinero: The Story of a Lower East Side Gallery*, edited by Alan Moore and Marc Miller, 1985]. It's a huge tome. [... -CR] And it shows a lot of the posters and the documents — a lot of the different phases — not just the original crowd of the Colab people, but how it went from being really an artist center to being a community center with — have you visited it lately?

MS. RICHARDS: Not lately. Maybe last year.

MS. RUPP: Yes. So you know what it turned to; it's like a community darkroom and a library [soup kitchen performance space -CR], and I don't know what else they've got going, every time I go over there, I feel so fortunate that it's there, that it survived and that it just had this incredibly positive — of all the ways it could have turned out — like, it could have just been somebody's studio, you know? [... -CR] But it ended up being the best of all possible outcomes. It is just miraculous, really, when you saw [... Charas close, fall to developers -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: No. Charles [Charas -CR]?

MS. RUPP: *Chares* — C-H-A-R-E-S [Charas -CR]. [... -CR] Was an actual old public school that was vacant —one of those monster — U-shaped with the courtyard, and they had every space — either it was an artist studio or a community project [Charas, El Borio Community Arts Center, PS 64 on 10th St. -CR] —

MS. RICHARDS: On the Lower East Side?

MS. RUPP: City took that way. [... Many wonderful -CR] deserving organizations than ours bit the dust, and No Rio was just somehow miraculously spared. It's so important — what an amazing history.

MS. RICHARDS: After this — around this time in 1981, I noticed that you started a connection with *Heresies* magazine, that there were different levels of collaboration, and there was a — *The Rat Patrol* was in one issue. And I just wondered — and then there was a — there were other contributions you made to a couple of other issues. Were you close to those people — the women who were running that, or were those just happenstance things, or did you — were you involved?

MS. RUPP: It was a generation a little older than me.

MS. RICHARDS: Absolutely, yes.

MS. RUPP: So I didn't really know them [... well -CR]. I certainly know the names, and, you know, Lucy was a good friend of everybody's. She was in on everything, and I think it changed with the [issue -CR] topic. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, every issue had a different topic.

MS. RUPP: So no, I wasn't directly involved with the magazine —

MS. RICHARDS: You were just invited to participate in those —

MS. RUPP: Friends with people that did the magazine. It was topical; it was like a college-age magazine. So if one had work that fit in and they wanted it [... -CR] — I never really worked [in editorial -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: In 1981, I saw on your resume that you got a grant from the NEA and a fellowship in sculpture — one of those grants to artists that existed then. [Laughs.]

MS. RUPP: That used to exist.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. How — I imagine that was really meaningful and important to you since you were struggling and that gave you time to work. Was there a particular project that you were able to launch because of that, or did that mean that you just could not — did not have to do some other jobs for a little bit of time?

MS. RUPP: Well, I was really lucky to have the CETA job, and that was about a two-and-a-half year [... job -CR]. So there was probably a three-and-a-half year period where I was doing that. We were so fortunate to have that; lots of really, really great artists went through that project. A lot of us really stayed friends, and it was such a really cool thing, because the writers and the dancers and the visual artists and musicians —we were — we were really thought of as one group, and we got to know each other. That was such a wonderful opportunity.

But — so I had that, and then I was always teaching either high school or [... -CR] —

MS. RICHARDS: You were teaching in New York City?

MS. RUPP: Yes, but I didn't have a regular gig. I would apply for programs — like these grants that they'd get for [... -CR] underperforming schools —

MS. RICHARDS: To have artists come and teach?

MS. RUPP: Yes. And it really was hard work. I mean, it was like art on a cart on the subway, you know? Going to a different place and —

MS. RICHARDS: But you survived with those kinds of jobs.

MS. RUPP: Well, who — I mean, that's what we all did, you know? We didn't have expensive rent, and we made art out of garbage. Nobody bought art supplies that I recall. And we sold work. When we — it was easy to sell work then. As the East Village started to heat up, there were entire years where I sold everything that I made —

MS. RICHARDS: Are you talking about in the early '80s or later?

MS. RUPP: I think, as the East Village got going — yeah —

MS. RICHARDS: So there was a show —

MS. RUPP: Yes, the commonly accepted [... dates of -CR] Colab are that it was over by [1983 -CR]. You can dispute that — and that's because the East Village galleries had materialized, they were artist-run, so we didn't need artist collectives in the same way. And then they became something else.

But yes, art was cheap. There were lots of patrons, lots of activity. We had [... artist-run pop-up stores that we did with the multiples — [... -CR] and I was doing public art. I was teaching and I was selling, and that's how I managed in those years. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Why don't we — actually, we're at a — in the early '80s, and I wanted to ask you next about these shows in the East Village, but let's start that subject tomorrow.

MS. RUPP: I'm sorry, I know you thought we'd get to '90 today!

[End of disc]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Christy Rupp on July 17, 2012, in Saugerties, New York, for the Archives of American Arts, Smithsonian Institution and this is a continuation of disc two.

We were in the beginning of the '80s when we left off. [Train whistle.] There's a train. And I wanted to ask you about the public projects that you did in the '80s, particularly *Social Progress*. You could mention the two previous ones too, *Poly Tox Park*, which you did for New Langton Arts, or earlier than that, the piece at the Dag Hammarskjold Plaza.

So I guess, to begin with, your interest in becoming involved in public art projects and why were those particular ones meaningful, one or all of them, and how they worked out?

MS. RUPP: Well, to do it chronologically, I guess the Dag Hammarskjold Plaza one was the first.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. That's first, in '83.

MS. RUPP: Actually, the *Poly Tox Park* one was first.

MS. RICHARDS: In '83.

MS. RUPP: That was — that was a direct response to working at *Artpark* and having worked in a toxic waste site, and realizing that you can't really do much else with those places. At that point they didn't know what to do with them to cleanse our memory of the toxic history. So I thought [for New Langston Arts -CR] — this area of San Francisco was slated [... -CR] to come down. And it had all kinds of weird stuff happening, like dumping, a lot of toxic dumping, and right in the city.

And one of the things that I heard about when I first got out there was it wasn't uncommon in the south Mission district for people to rent office buildings and just bring in all this toxic waste. They'd take out a long-term lease right within the city limits, and just leave their barrels rotting in these locked buildings. And then the corporation would disappear, and then years later people would walk in and find all this toxic waste. Because it was actually cheaper to do that than to go dump it by some river or in some farmland.

So the combination of within-the-city dumping and the history of a toxic legacy, I just thought that's really interesting [... -CR]. I built what looked like a hastily buried toxic waste site, and basically got a bunch of old barrels and some sod and we kind of moved some earth to make it look like the barrels were popping out of the ground.

And I called it *A Seething Heap of Tumbling Corrosion*, and it was supposed to be a monument to our legislators and scientists that were the experts, that were supposed to protect us, as in the case of *Artpark*, where that's all they could do with the toxic — they called it the spoils pile, actually, in the *Artpark*, where much of the work was — the commissioned work was sited.

I tried to make it look like it had been hastily buried, and it had ooze coming out of the ground and it had a couple of — it had a lizard eating its own tail, kind of living-in-the-muck sculpture. And it had lots of those [... -CR] rubble rats that I cast into the brick, the remnants of buildings that were there.

And I knew it was a success when a news crew did pull up with their microphones, and they thought they had discovered a toxic waste site. They thought they were the first ones to discover it, so that made me really happy. I felt great; the piece had had a little bit of impact. So that's what that was, a part of an art show, we all had different sites around downtown.

And then the *Higher Intelligence* [... -CR] — at Dag Hammarskjold [Plaza -CR] is right at the U.N., and it was a commission by — Linda Macklowe, who was commissioning things at the time. And she raised the money to have that space programmed, I think, four times a year.

I specifically asked for the winter months, which is a little crazy for public art in New York, because nobody goes out, but I wanted to make it about the Cold War. I just wanted everything about it to be chilly and cold and isolating. And so that was the idea with *Higher Intelligence*. As the Iron Curtain was coming down and we were learning more about Russia, it just seemed like what a waste, all this time we'd been spending spying on each other.

And I had wanted to do something more directly about Central America and how we were chasing communism there, but it was impossible to be any more pointed than just choosing this metaphor of bears that were rummaging through filing cabinets, which was kind of the solution to the old way that secrets were kept.

MS. RICHARDS: And did the bears represent — Russia?

MS. RUPP: Sort of Russia. But they're also a native to New York. I wanted a species that would have been native to New York, so they looked sort of at home in that environment of file cabinets in the — really thoroughly alienating U.N. landscape there.

So it was a playful look at the stupidity of not trusting and the curiosity of finding things.

MS. RICHARDS: A question — sort of a general question, but that's a site-specific work. What could you do afterward? Did you just destroy it?

MS. RUPP: The piece?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: No, it all broke down; it goes in an elevator. And eventually it was purchased by Colgate University.

MS. RICHARDS: Great!

MS. RUPP: Yes. It actually has a home. And recently they renovated it, and it's indoors. It's in a dorm [... -CR] I'm thrilled that it's out of the elements, because — the bears were fine, but the files were really rusted. And they raised the money [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: They're infinitesimally different. And so they were able to find them [the files -CR] and redo it. Pretty amazing, actually. There was a program called — [... -CR]. SOS, Save Our Sculpture, that goes around the country and looks for deteriorating public art? And they write you a letter and say, do you know your piece is falling apart? How do you feel about that?

MS. RICHARDS: That's great!

MS. RUPP: [I said -CR] I'm really glad you noticed, because I've been telling them that it's falling apart, and I was up there a few times to repair it. So they had a different director of a gallery, and they did eventually move

it and restore it. So it has been —

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that's a happy ending. Yes.

MS. RUPP: So that piece broke down, and then —

MS. RICHARDS: *Social Progress?*

MS. RUPP: *Social Progress* came right after that, and that, again — that was about the return from Nicaragua. I had been there in '84, and I really wanted to make a sculpture out in public that brought it into our living room, so to speak. Because nobody was really talking about Nicaragua; it was all Cold War rhetoric.

And having been down there and — we had an artists — a group, a support group that supported — it was largely the writers down there that were really active, the poets, but we got to meet a lot of visual artists. It was a very young revolution, young people leading it, and they were poets and artists, and they felt that was important [for art -CR] to be part of [... the popular culture -CR]. So you can see why artists in this country would have felt that was an important revolution to learn about. But everybody talked about it in terms of communism. It was so — it was just such a one-sided conversation.

So looking at that site, which was the triangle of 5th Avenue, Broadway and 23rd Street, which is the north —

MS. RICHARDS: Side of that.

MS. RUPP: — the location where the term "23 skidoo" came from. And actually, if you go there now, in the subway they actually have murals. The MTA murals are hats blowing in the wind.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, right.

MS. RUPP: And the term came from the wind that was created by just the resistance of just the way it was all built. So when you go there, Broadway and 5th Avenue are rushing down — it was hard to get across. And that's probably — it was — the term "23 skidoo" was women's skirts would blow up, but it was also impossible to cross. It was dangerous.

And so I just thought, there's all this energy, it's like a stream running down, and I want to activate the site by making something that's struggling to go up, go the other way.

So I made a snail trying to pull a large ear of corn that had a few bugs that were eating it. And it was a metaphor. A snail can pull 10 times its weight, and it was a metaphor for the Nicaraguan revolution working hard to bring literacy and food security to its people at the same time as it was involved in a counterinsurgency war that we were paying for. And Ronald Reagan was saying that the people blowing up schools and raping nuns were the equivalent of our Founding Fathers. Do you remember any of that?

[... -CR] I was actually in the country when that — they [the Contras -CR] blew up a news conference in a different part of the country. But the rhetoric around Nicaragua was really nasty. They [the US government -CR] really wanted us to not care about them. And then you remember Conragate, that —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: — where he was actually selling weapons and giving the money to the Contras, selling weapons to Iran, our ["enemy" -CR]—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: It was just amazing that Reagan never had to answer for any of those things.

I wanted to make a sculpture about that and put it out in broad daylight and hope that people would talk about [... -CR]. I did get plenty of the chance to talk to the [... -CR] the press. And everybody [... speculated -CR] it's about the place of women, or it's about food security, or it's about genetically engineered food, which in '86, I'm not sure people really knew about that much.

But nobody would say it was about Nicaragua. And in fact, one newspaper, one TV person with a mic who said, if you tell me that, I can't say anything about it. So you just tell me — you just figure out what that sculpture's about.

[They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Now, I remember seeing that piece there, and I don't recall if there was any signage. Was there?

MS. RUPP: There was a little plaque with the title.

MS. RICHARDS: Just with your name and the title. So how did you feel about people's — the people interpreting it themselves and possibly not understanding the ideas that you were trying to convey?

MS. RUPP: Well, you know, sculpture's always about context. And you can't, particularly if you're making — working in permanent materials, you can never predict the course of social discourse around it. People, when they stumble on a sculpture like that, they just always think that it was put in place by someone powerful. It's always the [perceived -CR] voice of the state, more or less, that's my opinion, having done these things.

And so if people — if people came away with this? [... -CR] Why is a snail — why is this lowly snail being made beautiful and powerful? I wanted them to come away with the context of struggle. And also, to not know is almost the same things as telling them what I want them to know, because then it makes people think. And I love — I love that people really interacted with it without really knowing specifically what it was about, and if people did want to know more, they could find more.

But yes, the Public Art Fund didn't really support — [... fundraisers -CR] really want to support the politics of public art. Not really. There's so much politics just getting it there in the first place.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: So I think that it's always going to be about context, and the artist at some point has to just say I've done my best— hopefully, you've created some discourse and that anybody that's curious or reading or wants to ask you will get the full story, more than they want to know.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that or hear that people thought the piece was humorous at all?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that deliberate?

MS. RUPP: Same thing with the bears. I've heard that a lot, actually. And I think it's a way to engage people. It's a good way to work in the public sphere, is to —

MS. RICHARDS: So would you say you consciously —

MS. RUPP: I didn't make it — funny, no.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't make it —

MS. RUPP: I didn't set out to make it humorous at all.

MS. RICHARDS: But you allowed it to go in the direction, if that's the best —

MS. RUPP: I'm not sure why people thought it was humorous. Or the bears, for that matter.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, one, the corn and — not the bears; the corn and the snail, because they were way oversized reality that immediately is an element that could create a humorous reaction, blowing something up in scale. So that alone might have explained why.

MS. RUPP: I wanted it to be sort of creepy, with those ants that were eating the corn. They were supposed to be the counterrevolution eating away at the —

I was [... thinking -CR] about *The Old Man and the Sea*. You know how he catches this big fish, and in the struggle to bring it in it just gets devoured? That was kind of how I was thinking about the revolution, with all the things that it had to contend with. It was rather [... impossible -CR] for them.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: They weren't giving up, but it was really a struggle for them.

MS. RICHARDS: Later in the decade you did another public project that was a *Tidal Filter Fence*, right?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: In 1989, for the Coney Island Water Pollution Control Plant, which is the beginning, or perhaps represents the — you were in the midst of dealing with issues of water pollution? Do you recall when you began thinking about that problem, and if this — was this the first — [inaudible] — project?

MS. RUPP: Well, that piece did not get built. I worked on it for 18 years, and it was never built.

MS. RICHARDS: So I'm imagining, from the images —

MS. RUPP: I specify in my resume that it was a design team, and certainly the plan was approved. They were going to build —

MS. RICHARDS: So I assumed that it had been built, if not permanently.

MS. RUPP: No, it was not. It was never constructed. It would have been permanent. There was — okay, so briefly, it was — there is a water pollution [plant -CR] — it was called the Knapp Street Water Pollution Control [plant -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Knapp, K-N-A-P-P?

MS. RUPP: Yes. It's in New York, Sheepshead Bay. And it was sited on a waterway, a wetland that had a lot of recreational boats. And the city was really bothered by people emptying out their [... waste -CR] — you know, the boat — the boat head would be dumped out in the bay, which was creating a lot of [... -CR] coliform in the bay.

And so what they proposed to do was take — and most of our water treatment plants are on waterways. [... -CR] North River and Newtown Creek and all over Brooklyn, pretty much they're on water. They're on bodies of water. Here they are, in Saugerties. Not that they're dumping right into the river; there's usually an outflow pipe that dumps in the middle of the river.

This plant [occupies] both sides of the street in a huge — a couple thousand feet — of wetland on the — on the creek, and it wasn't open to anybody. So they kind of suggested that one goal of the public art could be to open up access [... -CR] — to have pump-out station for their heads [boat bathrooms -CR] that would be free, because normally you have to pay for that. So they were envisioning a pump-out station and picnic tables and kind of a gathering place. And then we also kind of pushed it a little bit to become a public fishing pier where people could enter as pedestrians.

MS. RICHARDS: So you said we. It was — this was a collaborative —

MS. RUPP: There was an architect at the DEP that was a real idea guy.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you apply for this commission, or did someone select you?

MS. RUPP: Well, the way they did the percent program back then was they would short-list a few people, and see who stuck on the wall longest. So in this one, because it was the 1 percent program — any federal expense of construction, they were supposed to spend 1 percent — up to 1 percent. There was a cap of 1 percent on public amenities. Now it's more like amenities than art, actually. They've really scaled it back.

This was DEP, which is — because they're in charge of the sewers, they have a ton of money, and so 1 percent for them was still a zillion dollars. So they had capped it at 400,000 (dollars), but they could afford to do a lot of \$400,000 projects. And they also had access to government money. So it was like a dream in the sense that the sky was the limit budgetary-wise, and they —

So they interviewed myself and Ned Smyth, and they hired both of us. And Ned did a perimeter fence called *Wave Wall in Green*, which was [foretelling -CR] the coming tidal wave of the metaphor. [... -CR]

It turned out that they didn't really want to let the public in, and that's ultimately what the battles were about and why it didn't happen. Because once we had been through all the processes and the Art Commission and their reviews, and choosing the contractors and doing all that work, for some reason — it wouldn't get started. And at some point they sent the contractor home with his 20 percent profit. And they never officially killed the project. So it was very — it was a huge amount of expectation on my part.

And at one point they were going to build an environmental learning center, so I had done a lot of studies on ways to get the kids closer to the creek without actually getting into the [tidal and not swimmable -CR] creek. They were going to have a water-testing lab, and focus on what species were native, and how it was all changing.

But anyway, to just be — really, to wrap up, because I can talk about this all day, the figure, the shape of *Tidal Filter Fence* was very long beams — I think they started at 12 feet and they ended up 150 feet long — that kind of came at different diagonals that would gradually — both in the angle would change and the height would change.

And it was just supposed to be visually a depiction of the tide, what it felt like when you, as a little human, would be in the middle of a tide that would start really small and manageable and then quickly that sensation when you're over your head. Little did I know the whole thing was a little over my head.

[They laugh.]

[... -CR] — It had barnacle light fixtures and a catch-my-drift picnic table and muscle benches and ways to draw water out of the creek. I did a lot of educational elements, so it was really fun. It was fun to play with and I did get paid for my time, but the piece didn't get built. And the last time I was out there, there was still no access to the creek.

But the — but what I wanted to [... -CR] say is that a healthy wetland is what a sewage treatment plant aspires to be. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: At that point in time, thinking back on the work you had done to date, did you feel that — could you — could you define yourself as an artist who was most interested in dealing with environmental issues?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that sort of come on you gradually, or did you — or did you kind of determine, Okay, this is what my work is going to be focused on, unconsciously?

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] *The Rat Patrol* obviously was a real breakthrough for me, because I didn't really know what I was doing. I was just observing animal behavior. And I hadn't really studied politics before that, just like I hadn't studied figure drawing in art school. And I was really fortunate that my passion for watching creatures drew me into a crash course on politics. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So you're equating environmental issues with politics?

MS. RUPP: It became one thing. It became clear that the issues with the environment were political, just like the issues of which [... ecosystems are worth saving -CR] is a political question.

But I felt lucky that I stumbled on it by nature, instead of looking for a political way —

MS. RICHARDS: And it seems that if you are dealing with those kinds of issues, that one of the key ways of presenting your work would be in public projects.

MS. RUPP: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: However, at the same time, I imagine you wanted to have gallery representation, have exhibitions that the art world would see primarily. Is that correct? And that in the '80s —

MS. RUPP: Well, this is kind of the —

MS. RICHARDS: Or was that a secondary —

MS. RUPP: — problem of my life, is that I really liked being in the studio. That's — I just — I've accepted it now, that I'm a studio artist. I love to make things. And I've always felt a little guilty that I wasn't more of a project person or a community artist, because that's where environmental art is today, is really about projects and education. And — that's how people work in the public sphere, is conceptually or digitally or with advertising. And yet my calling is clearly to work with my hands.

So it's the dilemma of my life, how to be effective. How to do what you need to do and use it as a way to make the world more open and —

MS. RICHARDS: So what would your reasons be for wanting to show in a gallery?

MS. RUPP: Well, if you're an object maker and your studio's filling up with objects, you'd better get them out of there, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: What was your approach to finding gallery representation in the '80s?

MS. RUPP: It wasn't hard at that point, when the East Village was young, because there were plenty of galleries.

MS. RICHARDS: I think your first real representative was PPOW?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did that connection come about?

MS. RUPP: Someone said, call them up, and they came over and offered me a show. I mean, it really wasn't —

MS. RICHARDS: Was that 1986, or was that 1988? I was looking at your résumé and wasn't sure which —

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: There was a group show with me, Sue Coe and Nancy Spero [*Nature and Revolution* (1984) -CR]. It was — it was really a fun show.

MS. RICHARDS: And I think that was — was that — was that *Nature and Revolution*?

MS. RUPP: Maybe. [Yes. -CR] What year was that?

MS. RUPP: That — '84.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, I see. *Nature and Revolution* at PPOW.

MS. RUPP: And then maybe the first show, solo show there was '86.

MS. RICHARDS: I think altogether there were — yeah, at one point I saw a reference to an '86 show, but it wasn't on your resume. Or one place. So you think your first solo show at PPOW was in 1986?

MS. RUPP: Yes [work about the Rust Belt -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: And then there was another one in 1988, *The Permanent War Economy*, right?

MS. RUPP: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: So while you're doing your studio work, you're also doing the public projects. Were you actively seeking commissions all the time for public projects? Were you really —

MS. RUPP: I think in the beginning I was. I was applying for a lot of things.

MS. RICHARDS: At that time there was more money and more —

MS. RUPP: And just this idea that you could make them by hand. I really resisted fabrication, mostly because I didn't have the expertise and I didn't know how to navigate that world, not that — I don't now, either, but I really wanted to make things by hand.

And after you've done it — I think I made about five or six pieces like that, by hand. And just seeing the whole experiment and the whole — the finances and the — kind of the logistics of it, I realized that it was just — it was more than I could [... -CR] handle at a certain point. Just the economics of it gets so crazy. Storing the work, throwing it out, or finding a home for it — the making part was really fun, but the rest of it was really a struggle.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you — you've done — and we'll get to it — other commissions. We've been talking about this in general. Do you find that commissions are basically more satisfying than — I mean, ultimately, because you're reaching such a much more, a broader public than studio work?

MS. RUPP: Well, I think it's — I think sculpture's about context, so if you're lucky enough to do a piece that's in an environment where people are receptive to it, that's a really good opportunity to do it. That doesn't come up that often, so often you get requests from places that, for various reasons, don't have the support or the educational focus to really frame the work that well. And I think that success really has a lot to do with the context.

MS. RICHARDS: Have all of the public projects you've done been funded publicly, rather than private commission? Private with a university or somewhere else?

MS. RUPP: No, they've been all over the place. Well, I guess — what do you call the Public Art Fund? Was that private funding? Probably.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. So rather than government —

MS. RUPP: In Hammar skjold Plaza, it was probably private funding. The piece I did in Central Park — well, actually, there were two of them [the other was: food Chain Piece, *Sculpture as Prey and Predator*, sponsored by Daniel Wolf Gallery (1978) -CR], but —

MS. RICHARDS: *The Fish?* [Inaudible] — *Fish in the Water?*

MS. RUPP: *Insufficient Data Fish*.

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: That was in 1989.

MS. RUPP: Right. That sounds right.

MS. RICHARDS: Commissioned by the Department of Parks.

MS. RUPP: So I suppose that's somewhere between private and public.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. It's hard to draw the line.

MS. RUPP: And there's one at University of Washington in Seattle. I guess that you'd call that public funding.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

[... -CR] That's the *Rollback Bench*, 1992?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: That's permanent, right?

MS. RUPP: Yes, it's permanent. I don't know how it's being maintained. Someone — my cousin lives out there and sent me a picture, and the landscaping had gotten a little crazy.

[... -CR] It was [to celebrate 20 years of the Endangered Species Act and *Roe v. Wade* -CR]. [... -CR] The Endangered Species Act and *Roe versus Wade* were in 1972, under Nixon. And —the National Endowment for the Arts was growing 50 percent every year. [... -CR] It was doubling every year under Nixon? [... It started small -CR], so doubling wasn't as much as —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: But it was a lot more proportional than it is today and has been in years. [In 1992 -CR], 20 years later they were trying to get rid of *Roe versus Wade*, which they still seem to be doing —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: — and the Endangered Species Act. And so what I had gotten really interested in was, how do you prove something is endangered or disappeared? How do you prove that? Just because you can't find it doesn't mean it's not there.

The climate deniers, for instance, will always tell you, like, oh, you know, we have these historic shifts in climate, so you can't really blame Exxon today. Or, you can't blame cutting down the Amazon rainforest or Equatorial Africa with global warming. So it's hard to prove something. It's very hard to prove it, particularly for humans, because we — our snapshot on Earth is very short.

So the *Insufficient Data Fish* was directly addressing that, that it's very hard to prove something to people that don't want to [... wake up -CR]. You can wake someone up when they're asleep, but you can't wake them up if they're pretending to be asleep.

[They laugh.]

And that's been a real theme of my work, this invisibility and idea of terra nullius. Just because you can't prove that there's particles in the atmosphere, or a lack of diversity or habitat diminishing —

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe this summer of record-breaking heat and drought will go some way to convincing another slice of the population.

MS. RUPP: If they're interested in that, if you care about rising sea level, there's plenty of indicators.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, your personal — people have — this summer are having a personal experience of record-breaking heat.

MS. RUPP: There's plenty of climate deniers. They still say, oh, you can look back historically and find periods like

this. How do you definitively prove it to them? [... -CR] I don't know how you actually prove it to someone that doesn't want to know it.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, no, you can't convince someone who's not listening to reason.

MS. RUPP: And then —how do you turn the train around when it's in motion? When everything is set up, for instance with fracking. Everything is [... presented by paid sponsors -CR]. Every day on the radio we're hearing, oh, energy's so cheap now, and fracking is so much cleaner than coal and —

They've got all this information for us. They're spending so much money on the PR. And maybe natural gas does burn cleaner than coal, but getting it out of the ground is dirtier, or as dirty. It's worse, because it contaminates forever ground water.

Another invisible thing, very, very hard to prove.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RUPP: And they're doing a really good job at marginalizing the people that are complaining. And so it's probably not appropriate to skip 30 years into the present, but where I'm at right now is this curiosity about mineral extraction — [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Well, we will get — we will get to — yeah. I am going to move a little bit just in terms of the public projects, since we're on this subject, from the *Rollback Bench* to 1996. So that was '92, '96 the project called *Time Flies*, a series of six wall clocks that I'd love to hear more about.

MS. RUPP: *Time Flies*. I guess it was called the *Time Flies Wall Clock*. And the School Construction Authority was sponsoring a lot of public art in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Yes.

MS. RUPP: At one point, when the public art money did dry up in New York, it really was pretty much the School Construction Authority.

MS. RICHARDS: I know a lot of artists have done terrific projects in New York City Public Schools.

MS. RUPP: Yes. The budgets were not huge. And the School Construction Authority, depending on which architect you got, was really motivated, because they were trying to finish new buildings. And so they were really doable and a lot of them were really successful, and not so much decorative.

This was an interesting project at the Early Childhood Center 2 and 3, I think. It was two of them that were coming on —

MS. RICHARDS: Number two. Early Childhood Center 2, in the Bronx.

MS. RUPP: So what that meant was young families could drop children there when they were still needing daycare, before they were in Kindergarten, and the child could continue to go there until junior high. And what it meant was continuity for families. You could bring a three-year-old and an eight-year-old to the same place and pick them up in the same place.

And it was a really new idea of — I don't know if it's commonly done now, but it was presented as like a full-service, a family support, and because so many families have a lot of children, and they grow up really fast. And I was [... interested in how -CR] the schools are changing and the after-school programs are really complicated and parents are just so stressed out, traveling to work and two parents working [different schedules -CR].

This school [... -CR] — this project originally started as the *Time Flies Snail Clock*, because I really loved the snail as a public art icon, and I hope there'll be more in the future. Or the future of the public sphere. Because they have too much to teach us. They're really the best metaphor for the environment, I think, because it's this idea of —

With the school, the idea — I wanted to use the snail was stay in school, don't drop out, just stick it through. And it might seem like school's not that relevant, but just give it a few more years and see — just be patient. That's what the snail is, slow but steady. Powerful.

They had a clock tower they were going to build as part of the architecture of this new building, and they wanted to put a clock up there. And I said, well, why don't you just embed the clock in the — the two-sided clock in the shell of the snail? And then with the tile going up, we'll have some — the tower is matte tile, and then we'll have some shiny tile behind the snail, looking like it's a slimy trail. And it'll look really naturalistic and funny and

remind people about the environment. And remind them of time and how quickly children grow up.

And they hated that idea, because they thought that it implied that the children were slow. They were worried that it would imply that there was something slow about the children at that school. And we fought about it for a long time, back and forth, and finally decided that — they convinced me to put the clocks inside and that they weren't going to put a snail climbing up the side of school, which I thought was too bad.

But, so what — I think the school had three floors, and on each floor there was a depiction of fast time and slow time. There were rabbits [fast: rabbit, jaguar, comet -CR] and fossils [slow: sloth, fossil, turtle -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: I read there was a jaguar.

MS. RUPP: A jaguar.

MS. RICHARDS: There was a sloth.

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: Always a turtle, yes. Yes, so it was fast and slow time on each floor. It was very tame, actually. But I liked the idea that kids could look at them and think, am I that one, or that one?

MS. RICHARDS: Or neither?

MS. RUPP: Yes. But just this idea of how quickly kids grow up, and they're looking back and going, wow, I can't believe three years goes —

MS. RICHARDS: As a — as a public — as an experience for you, how was it? As —

MS. RUPP: It was fun. It was a lot of fun. It was a very small-scale project, kind of decorative, but I liked the idea of continuity, to think about continuity in school. Yes. It was [... successful -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Were you — when you've done the public projects, were you — I'm thinking about this one. Did those projects and the images and the ideas that you were working with then connect to what you were doing in the studio at the same time, or did — were they very separate?

MS. RUPP: I think they were connected conceptually. But the time frame is so different; it takes years to get a public project done. So just because you're on the same page when you start doesn't mean — I think all the work is really connected. I'd have to say yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So in a way then, that's another reason why the experience is positive, because it feeds — it's — sometimes artists doing public projects are forced to be doing works that, well, because of time or for whatever reason, are disconnected. And it's frustrating to feel like you're in a very slow place with the public project, and — as opposed to what it feels like working in the studio.

MS. RUPP: That's the best reason to have a studio practice, so you don't tear your hair out. You can just keep working.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

Going back to the public — I mean, the studio practice and the objects, and we were talking about PPOW and you getting — becoming represented by that gallery. Your expectations at that time for being represented was, as you said, to show your work and to sell, get it out of the studio and sell it. And were you represented by PPOW until it closed? Or there were other — I mean, not that they're closed. It's not — it's still going.

MS. RUPP: Oh, no. They're — yes.

MS. RICHARDS: But until it left the East Village? Or what was the history of that?

MS. RUPP: Why am I no longer showing there? Is that what the question is really?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you — yes.

MS. RUPP: We came to blows about the public art question [1992? -CR]].

MS. RICHARDS: It's hard for a dealer when you're spending all your time on — or a lot of time, because they don't realize any income.

MS. RUPP: Yes, or— in the case of in *Higher Intelligence*, when it sold, they thought they should get 50 percent of

it. And by that time, I had moved it a hundred times and paid crews and renovated it and I was certainly in the hole on it. And I just — we couldn't come to an agreement about the [... financial balance -CR].

And, you know, public art is fraught with questions like this. You're always — the people that really succeed at public art — and I'm not really; I'm not working in the public sphere anymore — a lot has changed about it. Even people that were working in it very recently, it's kind of like Hollywood; it's always exfoliating. It's — the numbers thing has really changed, the availability of money and —

But you're always — the people that succeed at it are not always reinventing the wheel, you know? They know exactly how to price things. They have a contractor that they work with that can give them a number. They know how to price in their profit margin, and they know how to figure in for the help that they need. And so as the budgets got a little bigger with my work, I realized that I was just being a middleman and I was paying everyone. I was paying the architects and the landscape people and paying for samples and paying for studio help, and I just couldn't — there was just —

I think you can lose money a few times because it's not — first of all, it's not a lot of money, and secondly, you're young. But then after a while you just kind of think to yourself, this isn't sustainable. It becomes clear that it's not sustainable. And I remember Mary Miss saying that too, in the beginning, that she just willed things into being with her own energy.

But after a while, I think you realize that you can't do that anymore. And particularly with — today with public agencies and all the liability questions, it's just really hard. It's a very hard struggle, so you'd better be super committed to it, which —

It raises a lot of questions again about context. Why would you want to do something enough that you'd go into debt and give it a year of your time?

[Inaudible.]

MS. RICHARDS: — many years of your time.

MS. RUPP: Perspective, after you've done it several times and seen it done, you have this feeling like yeah, I can do this. And then you go, sure, yeah, you can do it. Why would you do it?

[They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: You're talking mainly about permanent projects.

MS. RUPP: Yes, or just anything in the public sphere. I mean, nowadays you really have to think about —

This show that I'm curating right now, it's been a really interesting revisiting of all that, because we have a lot of visiting artists coming in, and site-specific installations. And it's really been fun being an administrator and talking to the artists and helping them get their ideas —

MS. RICHARDS: You did that in the '80s with the show that you curated for Fashion Moda.

MS. RUPP: Yes, I think everybody has curated shows. Many people have curated shows, certainly different — you probably curated shows. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm.

MS. RUPP: Really different since the advent of the computer. And we were just talking about this recently, about why did it get so much more complicated? I guess it's just like everything got more complicated.

But the computer has really just — the back and forth. In the old days, you liked an artist's work. You said, I'm doing a show; do you want to be in it? They'd say yes. You pick a work, and you'd see them at the opening. Now, it's like you're back and forth. Is that piece available? Well, it might be; I have to check, and then you check back with them and — no, it's not. Do you have another one? Maybe. It's just — different.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think it's in part that you were dealing with artists who were younger and at the beginning of their career, and that life was just less complicated?

MS. RUPP: Probably.

MS. RICHARDS: And when you're older and have lots of works and you don't know where all of them are anymore — some are at different stages of availability and —

MS. RUPP: Yes, and people's willingness to —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. [Inaudible.] When you're young, you're more open to a —

MS. RUPP: But I can't help but feel like the email thing has made things — there's more — there's less tone in the discussion. You can't — in an email it's very cut and dried, so you have to be really careful what you say, because you want to — you want to extend the invitation and you don't want to hurt someone's feelings by minimizing — you just don't really have the same freedom that you have in a phone call.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Yes.

MS. RUPP: And the person receiving the request is also dealing with a lot of variables too. I think maybe it's something about complexity, something about age, and something about just the barrier that the computer puts up between people. I mean, it's good that everything's written down, but you'd better be sure that you've written it down correctly. Because if somebody comes back later and says, oh, you didn't — you know. You have to sort of remember stuff better. We all need help. We need help. We need more assistance than we can do on our own.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Going back to the question of galleries, after you left PPOW, am I correct that the next gallery that represented your work was TZ Art? Was there something —

MS. RUPP: Yes, a couple of years later.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did that connection come —

MS. RUPP: Well, I had known Frederieke Taylor from ages ago, when she was head of Lower Manhattan Culture Council. And I lived downtown and worked downtown. And she did a show [*Art Lobby* (1982)] [... with four artist installations -CR] in the financial center. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Was it in the '90s?

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] It was four artists. I remember Jenny Holzer was one; Peter Fend was one, me. I'm not sure — there was another artist.

And my site was the World Trade Center. And I had started to get really interested in the food — the food web and the food cycle. I guess this was '83. I remember starting to look at farming in '83. Is it possible?

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: I had done this piece called *Food Farming and Foreign Policy*, because I started reading Frances Moore Lappé. And her [... analysis in -CR] *Diet for a Small Planet* was there's enough food on the planet. The cause of scarcity is distribution, not availability, not that there's not enough resources to grow food, it's that there's intentionally scarce resources because people need to make a profit. And we only see this becoming clearer day to day as we move into the age of genetic engineering.

I had done a project up in Massachusetts at the county fair. I got a booth and made some big cows that looked like TV snow; they kind of were gray and mottled. This was back before digital TV.

[... -CR] This is the piece that was at the World Trade Center called [... *Food, Farming, & Foreign Policy*. It was in a show Frederieke curated called *Art Lobby*, 1982. -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] I wanted it to be a dialogue with the producers of food, with the farmers that had come to the fair [... -CR].

And I remember it was two [life-size -CR] passive cows, and they were watching a cockfight. And the idea with the cockfight was neither one of the cocks has anything to gain, except living another day to have a fight. They don't profit from who wins the fight. And that was like us playing off Guatemala with United Fruit Company against other countries that were growing bananas or pineapples or anywhere. It was the race to the bottom. It was before we really talked about the race to the bottom, but it was — [... about -CR] ways to squeeze out the farmers and bring things to the market cheaply.

So the idea was that we were like the cows. We were these passive consumers that were just kind of watching it, but actually we're really powerful, with our choices. But the cows don't know they're powerful; they're just cows and they're treated — passively. And their heads were TV sets, and one had a commodities exchange — a ticker. These were painted. They weren't electric. And the other had import crops, coffee and chocolate, luxury export crops that we imported, that displace staple crops like corn and potatoes, things that people really need — rice [corn -CR] — to survive. [Show title: *Art Lobby* -CR]

So I did this piece and then we brought it to the World Trade Center, World Trade Center number 6. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: I didn't see it in your resume.

MS. RUPP: [That's because I call it by the name of the installation, *Food, Farming & Foreign Policy*. -CR] [... -CR] Frederieke had secured [... big lobbies in the belly of Wall Street. We sited it at the commodities exchange, 6WTC (World Trade Center), in the lobby. -CR]

MS. RUPP: I wanted it to be, instead of a dialogue with the producers of food and me at the fair, I wanted it to be a dialogue between the producers of food and the sellers of food, the people that create scarcity by market-driven forces.

And so accompanying my sculpture was a questionnaire asking the commodities trader if they thought they had anything to do with world hunger, or were they part of the solution, or how did — how did they see prices heading and what about climate change, what about fertilizer, the cost of seed? Just in general, how farming was a money game for bankers.

And they were — and then I changed that to *Commodity Cash Cows*, from *Food, Farming and Foreign Policy*. [... -CR]

First they said, sure. And then they said, no, no, no, no, no. You can't have any discussion here about the selling of food or food security, hunger. We don't want to talk about hunger at the commodities exchange. Nothing to do with it, they said. It's just not the right place. It's completely inappropriate.

So Frederieke and I put our heads together and said, well, okay. Can we have the sculpture there if we call it *Sculpture*? And they said, sure. They said, just — no questionnaire, no politics, just give us those cows with the tickers on their heads and everything'll be fine.

[They laugh]

So we did, because I thought it was more important to go ahead with it, just conceptually, than to withhold it. So that's what it was. It was — it was sort of like the idea that you really couldn't have that conversation with the growers and the sellers of food. Actually, it turned out you couldn't have that conversation, which to me was a statement in itself. [... 1982 -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Going back, so you —

MS. RUPP: And that was Frederieke. So I met Frederieke there.

MS. RICHARDS: Even while you were showing at PPOW?

MS. RUPP: Well, she was in the public — she was in a non-for-profit. She also had done a show that was really fun called *Downtown Uptown*. Do you remember that? Back when DCA was in —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] It's now MAD Museum. Used to be — the Gulf + Western Building.

MS. RICHARDS: The Huntington Hartford.

MS. RUPP: Thank you! Remember they had a gallery there on the seventh floor?

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RUPP: And so Frederieke's idea was to have all the downtown spaces like Group Material and ABC No Rio and — I don't know who the rest of them were. Printed Matter. That's — maybe that was where I met Frederieke.

And her assistant at the time was — [... -CR] So Ann Philbin was Frederieke's assistant, and she was supposed to be the referee/curator to sort out all this downtown energy in this very small gallery space. And I remember really loving working with both of them. And that was probably the first time I met Frederieke.

[End of disc]

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, I'm going to start this.

This is Judith Richards interviewing Christy Rupp on July 17, 2012, in Saugerties, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

One other question about gallery representation, I know you showed with Frederieke and you still do, even though she has — sort of works privately now. You also had a few shows with Nina Freudenheim in Buffalo, wonderful gallery. And do you still have an affiliation with her?

MS. RUPP: We're still friends but I haven't shown there in a while.

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: It's my hometown. [... -CR] It's hard to sell my work. [They laugh.] She was so supportive —

MS. RICHARDS: It's hard to sell sculpture to begin with.

MS. RUPP: Through the years, she would, she'd come up and pick it up herself and return it herself.

MS. RICHARDS: She was very dedicated.

MS. RUPP: Very dedicated. That's the issue with sculpture. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes. Great.

After you — we were talking about the works you did — you're doing. There was a project — let's see — that started — the Clean H2O project. I guess you have it — you have it as a project, and I'm not sure if you really call it that, if I'm using the right terminology. But you did a number of works that dealt with water.

MS. RUPP: Oh, there's a page on my website about clean water, I think.

MS. RICHARDS: And it started out, I guess on the website, with the Tidal Fence — that didn't —

MS. RUPP: *Tidal Filter Fence*.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, that didn't really get made.

And we talked about that a bit, and then in the end, it comes up to a subject I wanted to ask you about, which is the water glasses you made and the idea of making multiple objects for sale, which obviously are also artworks, multiples, and which carry a message that you want to convey. How did you decide — what were the circumstances — what was your thinking about doing those kinds of objects?

MS. RUPP: It's really fun to make multiples, and that was really an outgrowth of a lot of the collaborative projects, activity that we did, because we had stores with a lot of our shows.

MS. RICHARDS: Colab?

MS. RUPP: Colab did. The *Times Square Show* wasn't the first time we had a store for souvenirs. It probably was the most fun because we were riffing off Times Square and the things that you could buy in Times Square — the sex toys, the souvenirs. So the gift shop was really fun there, but it wasn't the first one and it wasn't the last one.

MS. RICHARDS: And talking about gift shops and souvenirs, then, when — where — what did you do after that in the same —

MS. RUPP: For multiples?

MS. RICHARDS: In — gift store. I mean, I know you did one that ended up at Documenta a number of years later. So talk about that, that piece of your practice, the store, the multiples.

MS. RUPP: Well, in the beginning, it was because we were making work for each other. There were a bunch of us that loved to make little objects or many objects. It was before we were old enough to have carpal tunnel. People really liked to just manufacture things. It started with making posters together and — I'm sure that energy of doing video shows together and hanging — it was — it definitely came out of that collaborative energy and just exchanging work, trading it or buying things for \$25 with each other. And a lot of them were seasonal, we did a lot of them around Christmas and made really funny — people would make underwear, or I remember

Bobby G made cruise missile socks. People just made really wacky stuff, fun stuff.

But I guess for me, some of my first multiples were acid rain fish, and they were probably from the early '80s. Don't hold me to that. [... -CR] Think of them as individuals or think of them as a group, either — it doesn't really matter to me. Just fun to have a little factory working. So there were the fish, there were lots of rats, there were lots of things about species, like perception of what was clean and what was dirty, lots of things about little — multiples about roaches and mice and rats. And —

MS. RICHARDS: Did you actually number them? Were — was it an edition —

MS. RUPP: No, no. I mean, I think at some point maybe when you drop off to some little show, you might number them — you know, 12 of them or some completely ridiculous number that had to do with how many you threw in your backpack. But not officially, not like that. Not like you would do today if you were making a print or something. No. I don't know how many are out.

And it's funny when you hear about the rat poster, because it's for sale on a couple of websites including my own, and people will say, oh, I noticed the price has changed. Or they'll comment — somebody bought one for something, and I go, like, yeah, I — you know, there's a lot of them out there. I have no idea where they're all at. Who knows what happened to all those multiples that sat around in stores or were donated to benefits? How many artists have given hundreds of things to benefits? Some people keep track of all that.

But usually objects, often prints. But the glasses were really fun because having worked at the DEP for so long, those 18 years, and sat in on all those meetings with the engineers, you know, their biggest fear — do you remember the filtration argument about [... -CR] watershed towns up in the Catskills. And this is a long story which I will try not to yammer forever on, but the city recognized that it was growing, back in the '20s, growing beyond its borders. And they had no idea how big it would get, but they knew it was going to get big really quick. And they knew disease was an issue and the history of water quality is the history of disease.

So I got very interested in the whole watershed politics, particularly because I lived in the watershed in Delaware County. But they hate the city up there because the city condemned five towns. And if you think about it, in a vertical landscape, in a farming landscape that's vertical, well, the reservoirs are going to be in the valleys. That's where the towns are. So when you flood the valleys, you're basically tearing the economic heart out of the region because the towns aren't up on the top. You're basically saying to everybody, oh, yeah, you can have a farm, but you won't have any neighbors anymore. And the — that's how agricultural America was built, by going into town and sharing skills and sharing labor and — it didn't grow up by itself individually.

So when they — when they flooded the valleys of these places, they ruined the economy of that region. Intentionally, by the way. To this day in the watershed it's very hard to open a hardware store or a car repair place. Even to sell refrigerators or sell new things, it's really, really hard to get a permit. There's entire stretches of Route 28 where you can't use a public restroom because the restroom's only for employees. And the economics of that — if you're selling gas but people can't use the restroom, they're just going to keep driving. I mean, it's a way to depopulate the area.

And — okay, so I'm rambling. But particularly with [tropical storm] Irene, you saw a lot of these towns getting washed out. And the cities always have this buy-out plan where they would buy, if you had more than — 80 acres — they would buy it — buy your place outright. They didn't care about where it was or what your buildings were like or what your agricultural potential was. But now, they'll buy you out if you're in a town, because they're trying to depopulate the towns too.

MS. RICHARDS: Which towns?

MS. RUPP: Well, Margaretville is the poster child for it, but Prattsville, Lexington, Blenheim — these are just the ones that I'm intimately connected with, but you can multiply that.

MS. RICHARDS: The story you're telling now —

MS. RUPP: I'm coming to the water.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. [They laugh.] Connect it — I'm forgetting —

MS. RUPP: [They laugh.] I know; I'm sorry.

So the biggest fear of these engineers was E. coli. It wasn't — they didn't want to have to build this filtration plant, which is why they had to keep all this land out of the public domain. You can't even hike on this land. And they put all the dairy farms out of business because they didn't want the cows pooping in the streams. They made every barnyard have to have a concrete floor instead of a mud barnyard, with a drain in it, which is very

different from how you think of the old farms. And so their biggest fear was that people would suspect that there was E. coli in New York City drinking water, which was only one of the things, like pesticides or radiation or sarin gas or poisons or all the terrorist things. Their biggest fear was E. coli contamination.

[... -CR] There were four glasses that I really thought, people need to hold this in their hand and really think about tap water as a great resource and stop buying water and stop throwing away plastic bottles and really treat it as something really precious, because it's threatened; it's — we could lose this. But there was also this real shadow that — is the city really going to tell us if somebody dumps some poison? Are we really going to know, ever? I mean, it's about public confidence [... -CR]. Again, economics and the environment just knitting themselves into one complicated little package.

So I thought, if people would hold this in their hand and see — there's four glasses. One is E. coli, one is giardia, one is chlorine and [... fluoride -CR] and the other is a duck that's pooping into the reservoir. Because one of the biggest problems is that, you know, it's all flyways for migrating birds.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, for Canada geese.

MS. RUPP: And they had a plan at one point to put covers over the reservoirs, cement covers, and have the water be 18 inches deep so that geese could come and land and it would look like a reservoir, but the reservoir is actually capped.

So anyway, I just thought I needed to make drinking water glasses to promote the idea of [... -CR] tap water.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned at one point living in Delaware County, which reminds me to ask you, when did you move from that one room on Nassau Street? You said you lived there eight years.

MS. RUPP: I moved in '85.

MS. RICHARDS: And where did you move to then?

MS. RUPP: 24th Street.

MS. RICHARDS: Ah. And that was your working and living, 24th between 6th and 7th?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Living and working there.

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you pick that location?

MS. RUPP: How does anybody pick a home in New York? It was available, it was big, it was cheap. It was totally illegal. [... -CR] — nobody in the building had ever lived anywhere legally, actually. We were all artist, and —

MS. RICHARDS: So the building didn't have a C of O?

MS. RUPP: Well, this is another tangent which I will spare you, but when they made SoHo okay for residential in the early '80s [... -CR]. They wanted to keep the manufacturing base specifically in Chelsea, where are the garment jobs. So these neighborhoods will always be manufacturing neighborhoods. They were going to call them M-1 neighborhoods, priority is manufacturing to save the garment jobs.

And that sounded plausible for about —

MS. RICHARDS: Five minutes.

MS. RUPP: Yes. It was a good plan.

MS. RICHARDS: But there are a lot of artists who have studios, have for decades, in Chelsea, yeah.

MS. RUPP: Yes. But it was just another one of those city-speak things, like, we're really —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Were you living on your own then at that point?

MS. RUPP: On and off.

MS. RICHARDS: You had moved from the space — the first space on Walker to — because you didn't want to have a roommate — and then when you moved to Chelsea, were you — was that your own space?

MS. RUPP: Yes, it was. And then I was married later, in the early '90s.

MS. RICHARDS: While you were still living on 24th Street?

MS. RUPP: Right, for about 15 years.

MS. RICHARDS: And is that when you started having a studio also in the country?

MS. RUPP: No, I figured that out really early.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. RUPP: I loved New York when I first moved here and I could never imagine leaving, and then [in 1979 -CR] I got this grant [... -CR] from America the Beautiful, to go live in Bear Mountain State Park, where I made *The Deer Museum*. [... -CR] Opening up the door the first day in this humble little cabin that barely had electricity. It didn't have a kitchen or a refrigerator. I mean, we were really camping. It was a Boy Scout camp. Thinking to myself, it was like *The Wizard of Oz* when it went in color, that part. Like, oh! I remember this. You know, it was just — I have to do this. I have to really do this. So I never — after that, I resolved, how poor I was, it didn't matter; I was going to get out in the summer.

MS. RICHARDS: In the summer.

MS. RUPP: And I really made a commitment, I guess, after '79. So I think I spent three summers in the city and then after that, I didn't care if I had to quit a job, I didn't care what I had to do. I was going to get out in the summer.

And so —

MS. RICHARDS: And so the Bear Mountain area was the first location. What followed that?

MS. RUPP: I think Massachusetts, Cummington. For a while I went to artists' colonies, and then I discovered the Catskills that was a ski area. I was working at the New York State Council on the Arts. They used to have a three-year visiting art — a visual arts panel. And it was fun for me because I was from Buffalo but I had moved to New York, and — but the fun thing about the visual arts panel was there were people from all over the state, so you could really ask them, like, do you know of a cabin in the woods somewhere where I can go weld? [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is before you were married?

MS. RUPP: Yes. Oh, yeah. There were plenty of men in and out of my life but I was only married once. So far.

MS. RICHARDS: Can I ask you who you were married to?

MS. RUPP: Mark Bunnell, landscape architect.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell his last name?

MS. RUPP: B-U-N-N-E-L-L.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

MS. RUPP: But yes, so after that, I discovered the Catskills and I basically never looked back because I loved the Catskills. It's a ski area, so summer was completely empty. You could always find a house where they didn't mind if you welded right in the house, or more likely in the basement or the barn or the garage. And really, I fell in love with the Catskills that year, the early '80s.

MS. RICHARDS: When you went, spent the summer in the Catskills in different locations, did you find places, did you particularly find places where there were other artists around, or — otherwise you'd be isolated for three months.

MS. RUPP: Well, yes. Right, which I loved. That was fine. [It was a nice mix of friends and quiet time. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, you wanted to be. Okay. [Laughs.]

MS. RUPP: The place I landed really consistently in the early part was Art Awareness. [... -CR] In Lexington, New York, where [...-CR] Camp Lexington for art used to advertise in the back of *Seventeen* magazine [... -CR]. And they had an art camp that was kind of like a Borscht Belt hotel for progressive kids, and the whole family, big Russian Jewish family, would cook and do — social director, and singing waiters, and swimming counselors, and the nurse, and everybody in the family —

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what town that was in?

MS. RUPP: Lexington.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, you said that. Sorry.

MS. RUPP: Judd and Pam Weisberg were running Art Awareness, which had been a Boy Scout camp somewhere before or after it was Camp Lexington for art. And they were just wonderful — are wonderful, wonderful souls, every generous, the camp had long since gone bust, leaving them with two theaters, a bunch of cabins, a silkscreen shop, a giant wood hotel with about 30 rooms which had not been maintained but miraculously, to this day — it was just really built well. It's been through a lot. It's seen better days, but it stands. It was old, and the family was just super, super generous and they loved artists, so that was the first place I went, and I think that summer was '84. And then — friends came back in '85, and — different manifestations of these groups stayed around there for about 10 years.

By then, [...-CR] I needed my own place.

MS. RICHARDS: How did — how did being in the country for three or four months in the summer impact your work? And did you start projects there that you would continue in the country — I mean, in the city — or vice versa? How did that work, to have two studios in two completely different environments?

MS. RUPP: Well, basically, it was economic, because I realized I could rent a studio in Brooklyn for welding. I couldn't really weld in my loft. Certainly couldn't weld when I was — on Nassau Street. I realized that for the cost of keeping a studio in Brooklyn, if I just could consolidate my dirty work to the summer months, that I could afford to live in the country. Sublet my place, rent a place in the country, and it was a wash — would be the same thing as getting on the train and going out to Greenpoint every day. And that was really a light bulb moment. I said, yeah, I could — this is a compromise I can make.

So I —

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't have trouble subletting?

MS. RUPP: No.

MS. RICHARDS: I guess as long as the price was right.

MS. RUPP: Yes. I never lived in places that were expensive. That's a sort of a euphemism. But I figured out this way of — I would weld in the summer and come home and finish things in the winter. And I always thought of myself as a farmer, you know; I'd pack it all in the car at the end of the summer and I'd think, this is my crop. I had a very productive summer.

And I loved the isolation. To this day I can't really read in the city. I would spend the mornings reading and —

MS. RICHARDS: Because of distractions?

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: When you are in the city — I wanted to ask you this — have you — this is going back to the '80s and '90s; we're still kind of in some way in the '90s — can you recall who was — what other artists were in your circle of friends and what kinds of artworks were most — you were most interested in seeing, what was most inspiring to you?

MS. RUPP: Well, specifically the '90s, I'm trying to remember. But at some point — you know, I always had this sort of love-hate thing with the art world. And —

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, you felt like you were part of the art world.

MS. RUPP: I did, but I didn't think —

MS. RICHARDS: Or did you feel isolated?

MS. RUPP: — the art world was the destination for the work.

You know, the Lower East Side was really important and No Rio and the friends that we all made in No Rio. And collaborative projects was kind of on the wane, actually, in the early '80s, but we all remained friends.

And then I would say, mid- to late '80s into the '90s I got very involved in Central America and more —

MS. RICHARDS: And so taking a step back from the East Village and the whole involvement with the collaboratives and those.

MS. RUPP: Well, it kind of died.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. At the same time.

MS. RUPP: It kind of — you know, when — it was nice for a while with the small galleries that were run by artists, or PPOW thought of themselves as artists. But then when the economics shifted and it sort of came back to SoHo for a little while, and then I don't know what happened. Up to 57th Street, right, and then a little bit more downtown and then over to Chelsea. And by then the scale was so crazy. It wasn't — it just wasn't even that much fun anymore. Not that we didn't hang out there, but it just didn't seem like a plan. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Maintaining connections to the East Village, that's what you mean?

MS. RUPP: No, the — Chelsea as an arts center didn't really — it seemed to reflect a culture that was just about money. It didn't really reflect ideas at all.

So anyway, I think there was a whole culture of — I'm trying to remember what some of those organizations were. You know, group material was very important. Lucy Lippard was really important. We did that show called *Artists Call against U.S. Invasion in Latin America* [*Artists Call against U.S. Intervention in Central America* (1984)].

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RUPP: And those were my friends then. The muralists that were in Artmakers.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's see when that was.

MS. RUPP: I think that was '84, but you want to know about the '90s.

MS. RICHARDS: That's right. You're right. No, no, I mean, I'm glad — I wanted to close the chapter of the East Village —

MS. RUPP: [Laughs.] Yes, wouldn't that be nice.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, in a way, I wanted to make sure we covered it as much as you wanted to.

MS. RUPP: But I think that group — like, Lucy Lippard was really — you'd have to call her a nonstop party person. And her friends, you know, we had a mural group — I was never a muralist, but I was very close to all the people in — that used to be called Artmakers. And I remember thinking, like, we work together, we play together, is this too much? We all thought that, we all questioned that. But wonderful people that really were interested in global politics.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the — what about Fashion Moda and your involvement with them and that entity?

MS. RUPP: I don't know when Fashion Moda actually [closed -CR] — he lost the lease on that place. And Stefan kind of disappeared for a few years. He's around now.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, but you just stopped.

MS. RUPP: But there was a good 10 years where he just wasn't around. I don't know what happened; I think he went back to Europe. I'm not sure where he went.

MS. RICHARDS: So gradually your involvement shifted, your interest shifted to Latin America.

MS. RUPP: And overtly political work. Ronald Feldman had [several group shows -CR] — Leon Golub was very generous and Nancy Spero. There was a whole crowd of people around Artmakers and — oh, PAD/D, Political Art Documentation and Distribution [and Group Material -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: P-A-D?

MS. RUPP: P-A-D-D. And those were my friends, mostly. People that were really interested in overt political stuff. I'm just trying to think besides that.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, now, I wanted to ask you about teaching. That's a whole subject that we haven't touched on. I mean, obviously you started out teaching high school and you've mentioned visiting lectures, you've mentioned you went back to MICA. But when did you start teaching art — yeah, on the college level.

MS. RUPP: I don't know. I mean, I was traveling a lot. I remember —

MS. RICHARDS: For your work, or traveling to give talks, or visiting lectures?

MS. RUPP: Yes, and somebody said, how often do you do this? I said, oh, about once a month. I said, I'm really getting bored with it. And they said, yeah, once a month is too often to show your slides.

And at the time I just thought, well, that's — I need to, and I get invited, so I'll go.

MS. RICHARDS: You need to because of the fees?

MS. RUPP: Yes. That's what I do. And then now in retrospect, I realize, I don't really do it anymore because I'm really bored with it. I mean, I like topics, I like ideas, but I do not like to — I don't do it anymore. Someone — if a college asks me to come give a slide lecture, I say it's a zillion dollars because I don't want to do it. I price myself out, deliberately. I just stopped doing it.

But I did like very much teaching in the CUNY system, and I taught at Brooklyn —

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know — remember when that started?

MS. RUPP: It started when Anne Arnold retired. We became really good friends. She's in my neighborhood, and we had sort of a dialogue —

MS. RICHARDS: Your Manhattan neighborhood?

MS. RUPP: Yes, Chelsea. And she retired and I wouldn't say I took her place, but I was sort of channeling Anne Arnold's energy of Brooklyn. And Lee Bontecou, who is another hero, had retired. They all retired the same year because they got a buy-out and hired a bunch of us for a lot less.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you say what year that was?

MS. RUPP: I would guess it was the early '90s. But maybe it was the late '80s.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. And you were — but what were you hired to teach? Was that —

MS. RUPP: Sculpture.

MS. RICHARDS: And was that a permanent position or adjunct?

MS. RUPP: No, adjunct. And I remember teaching adjunct in three places. There were semesters where I was in three places in one week.

MS. RICHARDS: This is in the '90s.

MS. RUPP: With just a huge —

MS. RICHARDS: So MICA was one?

MS. RUPP: MICA was one. I had a gig in Chicago, I had a gig in —

MS. RICHARDS: Chicago? That's a long commute.

MS. RUPP: Not a full-time job but just a — I think I was in and out a few times in one semester. RISD I had a sort of semi — you know, for a semester I was back and forth every week. I just had a handful of keys to the supply cabinet and to all the doors, and at some point —

MS. RICHARDS: Teaching undergraduate sculpture.

MS. RUPP: Yes. Sometimes graduate. Just whatever. But I kind of zeroed in on Brooklyn College, which I really liked because it was so interesting and it was so —the legacy of that place was so fascinating. They have a —

MS. RICHARDS: Was Pearlstein still teaching then?

MS. RUPP: No. He was one of those people that —

MS. RICHARDS: Left when Bontecou left.

MS. RUPP: Yes, I think — I mean, I don't know what year he left, but I assume that somewhere in there, he left before. And then Bard, I was teaching at Bard and Brooklyn, and then I was teaching at Bard and Brooklyn and Lehman opened up. Remember Sally Webster, art historian?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: She was always really great, calling me up for jobs here and there, shows here and there. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So by this time, when you were doing this, you had stopped doing all those other odd jobs that you were doing to support yourself early on.

MS. RUPP: Yes. Still doing the multiples, still selling work if I could.

What did I do for a living?

MS. RICHARDS: So you were teaching sculpture. Was there any particular — or how could you have described the approach you took to teaching? And did it come from a particular teacher you had?

MS. RUPP: Well, I think it came out of Colab. I think it came out of that workshop mentality of getting everybody to kind of imagine objects that — it sure wasn't formal, and I always had a lot of trouble with the formalists. [... -CR] It was never my approach. And if anything, I was always trying to be like Phil Donahue or something, like, I would get everybody working and then I'd bring up a topic. Which is so distracting. I would never do that today. But that to me was a successful class, when you really had a dialogue. I loved the discussion. Now I would never do that, because it's too distracting, but we always — we would start with big objects, like big cardboard objects, and try to focus on a theme. And it was always environmental, pretty much, or political.

MS. RICHARDS: What impact did you feel teaching had on your own studio work? Positive or negative.

MS. RUPP: Honestly, I don't know. I liked to teach. It was clear I didn't have other job skills, you know; it was clear that I really didn't have the temperament to be in an office for very long. I could get hired, but I couldn't keep those jobs. I had a series of interesting jobs at little creative companies and I would always get really bored and they didn't really want an artist — and CETA actually had been really important, educating me that I didn't have to have a shitty little job. So I was kind of spoiled after that and really focused on —

MS. RICHARDS: How long did you — maybe you still continue to teach. How long were you teaching at those three or four places?

MS. RUPP: Well, everything came and go — went and overlapped a lot, and you were always about to get fired, so maybe you'd miss a semester and you were trying to get your health benefits. Like, CUNY actually would give you health insurance if you could keep three classes. The problem was keeping three classes filled was really hard because they made the classes really big — I think I had a class of 30 people at the end. And we're talking welding —

MS. RICHARDS: Thirty?

MS. RUPP: — woodwork, plaster, plastics, found objects — I encouraged everybody to do everything.

MS. RICHARDS: Thirty people in one college sculpture class?

MS. RUPP: They kept making the classes bigger. They kept — that was how they cut back.

MS. RICHARDS: Obviously. So they would only offer one class instead of two, eliminate one teacher, you get the same pay but you have twice as many students.

MS. RUPP: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And —

MS. RUPP: And they wouldn't run the class unless it had like 15 people. Whereas in the old days, if you had four people, that was a class, because it was important for them to get their credits. But then that was — that was how they sort of cut back, and they stopped buying supplies and you had to start — it's this whole thing with CUNY: Could you charge a materials fee? The school used to provide that. And I used to kind of under-the-table say, it's going to be \$25 materials fee, pay it to me. [Laughs.] And people did it, people were okay with it, but

it's kind of obscene that they had to pay me and I had to schlep the materials. But we were all doing it. And they did — and you know, in a painting class when the teacher hands out a list of materials the first day, everybody goes and buys their whites and their reds and their canvases and they don't think anything of it. But for sculpture, not everybody can buy a five-pound bag of plaster; it makes more sense to buy a hundred-pound bag of plaster.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RUPP: Or chicken wire. Try to find a place that will sell you 3 ½ feet of chicken wire. Some people can and some people can't, they just don't have that hardware store.

So you really, just as when you step back as a teacher, yeah, it's a lot more easy — it's a lot easier for me just to order it. It's there; they can use as much as they want —

MS. RICHARDS: Gets delivered, yeah.

MS. RUPP: You know. But it just got to be, I'm taking my own tools in, I'm hauling plaster on the subway, and it really — I did it for a long time before I realized, this is crazy. I mean, the adjunct head is so crazy. You probably know this. You think you can make it work, that's all it takes is you light that fire and you're really nourished by the fire. But it's —

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it's particularly challenging for sculpture.

MS. RUPP: It's ridiculous. And then there was an accident in — at Brooklyn. It didn't happen under my watch, and actually I had, I think, moved on. But Lehman sort of opened up as Brooklyn was closing down, and they had a welding accident in the welding room where a student set himself on fire because the torches weren't shut off correctly. And he was injured; he survived but he will be scarred for the rest of his life. And I started to really think about that, you know, the permanence of that and how lovely it is to have everything whizzing and everybody excited about their work and coming in early and staying late. And they're cutting back the studio technician. That was one really bad thing about working at night, is I had to really fight to have that technician around because his — he was getting more and more onto a 40-hour week, and they didn't really want him to be overtime. You know, it just — everything was drying up.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yeah.

MS. RUPP: And as I stood back from it and then — by then I was married; I was living much more sustainably, showing an income. I borrowed my husband's car so it was not so stressful. And we were transitioning our life upstate and I said, you know what? This is really stressful. I don't know if I'm going to have classes or my health insurance. He said, oh, you can be on my health insurance.

So when that happened, when I realized I could be a spouse on the health plan, I really started looking at the whole adjunct thing and saying, is this in my interest to really set up my life — as much as I love CUNY and I love the whole anticipation and I love making the syllabus, and I really think it's art, is it really worth it? And you know, and gradually I started to think: I either have to get a job where there's a commitment or I have to realize this isn't a good deal for me. And it's certainly not sustainable long term.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: So gradually I sort of got out of it, you know. I think my last class at Lehman was right before 9/11. I think I stopped in the spring of 2001 because I remember when the subways all stopped running and Lehman became more — remember there was no subway service for a while on some trains —

MS. RICHARDS: After 9/11, yeah.

MS. RUPP: Yes, for a couple weeks, three weeks. And I sort of had access to a car but not always. It just was — everything got really complicated that way. And my life was easier; I was a married lady, I had a dog to support, you know? I was busy with — I don't know what I was doing, but it was enough. Whatever I was doing made the edge on things seem, you know, not such a good deal anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Well, moving back to the studio, then, it seems like you've always had your studio where you lived, whether it's —

MS. RUPP: Not always.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, yes, you mentioned the welding studio in Brooklyn.

MS. RUPP: We had this thing called the Women of Steel workshop that was really fun. And it was me, Jody Culkin,

and there were other people — Becky Howland was kind of in and out, and Ann Messner for a period, and —

What I noticed in CUNY that I had noticed in my own life was that women really like to learn how to weld. Welding is something I started doing in college in the '70s and I just loved it, I just took to it. And I noticed that women really like to learn how to weld. If you could take away the beer drinking and the — you know, the roughness of the studio, that women love to weld. And I really became fixated on teaching women to weld, and a couple times we got grants, my friends and I, to have the Women of Steel workshop. And to this day I still think it's really a shame that we never really pursued that.

MS. RICHARDS: So did you form the Women of Steel with these people?

MS. RUPP: With these other people, yeah, we all did.

MS. RICHARDS: So you said Jody Culkin, Ann Messner. Who else?

MS. RUPP: Becky Howland — I'm trying to think who else. Those were the sort of the main —

MS. RICHARDS: And where was it?

MS. RUPP: It bounced around. It was in Brooklyn, it was upstate.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the years it existed?

MS. RUPP: No. Mid-'80s to late '80s. After I moved over to 24th Street, at some point I stopped having a studio in Williamsburg. Oh, Heidi Schlatter was another one.

MS. RICHARDS: So how do you spell her last name?

MS. RUPP: S-C-H-L-A-T-T-E-R. Heidi had a whole floor in Greenpoint and everybody was a welder. It just worked out that way. And everybody was on the same page. It was very cool. And it went on, that little bubble —

MS. RICHARDS: And that was in Greenpoint, you said, or Williamsburg?

MS. RUPP: Greenpoint. Don't ask me the street. It was that really big street near the sewage treatment plant that smelled a lot. Near Newtown Creek, right in North Greenpoint.

And you know, these things don't last forever because it's all — it's a floor that's all cut up, and — but I think it went on like three or four years, and it was just really great. We all shared equipment.

MS. RICHARDS: So obviously when you're thinking about welding, you can't live where you're working.

MS. RUPP: Not really. I mean, now I can because I work in a — because I live in the garage. But it was also this thing about summer as a time to set up the welding studio or — I don't know when it actually —

MS. RICHARDS: Have you — do you —

MS. RUPP: But I know — but just let — in the CUNY system I realized that women really wanted to learn how to weld, so I would zero in on these women, and women that had never, like, picked up a hot glue gun. And they just took to it and I just loved teaching them. I just loved it. It was so much fun for everybody. It was really a great experience and I was really into that for years, of just finding the most timid, scared people in the class, saying "Wouldn't you really like to weld if you had a chance?" And I remember the department chair looking at me and saying, "You know, you've got a lot of people in that class. Are you sure that it's safe? You comfortable with this?" And I'd say yeah, totally. Then over the years it sort of wasn't so much anymore, but in the beginning, that was really part of it. It was getting people to work heavier than they ever really wanted to or needed to, it was really fun.

And if I'd had a job at SVA or something where they really had a studio, it would have been a very different experience. But in those days, SVA was formal. They didn't want people that were only interested in the Nicaraguan revolution as a way to make art. They really couldn't care less. You know, there was a price to pay. And CUNY loved that stuff, CUNY was really behind it. They loved — at least the little bubbles that I fell into were very anti-formalist and very nurturing for everybody, the students and faculty.

MS. RICHARDS: When you — in terms of the studios that you had yourself, did you have a certain studio routine? Have you always had a routine that — when you worked and the kind of light you wanted to have, and the sort of sound? Can you describe the atmosphere that you — that you create?

MS. RUPP: Well, I like the — I like the summer thing where there's really — I mean, now I sort of work with the

doors closed, but I liked working in a barn. The dirtier the better. [...-CR] The more close to nature. I really like that a lot.

But yeah, the rhythm is kind of real — get up at 5:00 in the morning and read for three hours and then try to have a studio day that ends in the early afternoon and resumes in the late afternoon and goes till about 9:00. So somewhere in there it might be like seven or eight hours in the studio, but it's certainly not continuous. But you can't — I can't do that in the city. I just can't. I — it's just my energy isn't there, I'm too distracted. [... -CR] I need the isolation.

[... In the country, -CR] I really don't have a social life during the week. [... -CR] And I socialize on the weekends. It just works for me. People think I'm crazy. My kayak group goes out Tuesdays and Thursdays right at dusk; it's a really nice, quiet time to go out, but I just can't. It's my think time. I really like it.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there any times when you've had assistants, when you've wanted to have assistants in the studio?

MS. RUPP: Yes. There are plenty of times. [... -CR] I'm really distracted and I don't like having another person in the room.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you especially want or not want past work around in the studio when you're doing new work?

MS. RUPP: I can't live with my work in general.

MS. RICHARDS: So if it's not owned, in exhibition, it's stored, it's put away.

MS. RUPP: Yes. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So what might you have on the walls, if one were in the studio typically?

MS. RUPP: Other people's work that I like. Lots of pictures of animals, posters, announcements. Try to — I always try to keep an office, a really organized office that's part of the studio. I don't separate the two. Yes. Whatever I'm working on has to be out, but very few pieces — I don't know how much work there is that's come out of my hands, but really, you could count on one hand the stuff I can live with. That's probably typical of a lot of artists, that they just can't look at it.

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me about —

MS. RUPP: When I was building this house, the architect said, "Oh, I've got it, I've got it for you. You're going to make a piece of work for the pediment over the front door." And I said, "Why would I do that?" You know, every time I drive up I'd be thinking, like, it's too big, it's too small, I've got to fix it. [They laugh.] [... -CR] That would be really oppressive to have to look at your work every day.

MS. RICHARDS: You're very critical.

Some people do find it positive.

MS. RUPP: Yes. Not me.

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking about your process, and you can — maybe this applies forever or maybe more recently, but can you describe the process from thinking about an idea to thinking about how to create a visual work form it? Does that include drawing, does that not include drawing? Thinking about the materials to make it and actually making it — how does — and you can use a particular work as an example or just speak generally.

MS. RUPP: Okay. It always starts —

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, obviously the question of — well, maybe I said this. You have an idea; is this going to be a small piece on the wall? Is this going to be a piece on the floor? Is this going to be a part of an installation? And what was it going to be made of?

MS. RUPP: Okay. I think that we have to think in terms of series. That's just my particular little rigid dictum is that I've noticed if things aren't part of a series, they don't really make any sense. The work really has to talk to itself.

[For media, -CR] I bounced around a lot and I plan to continue to bounce a lot around with materials, but welding is always the thing that is present in all of it. And a couple of recent things that I was interested in is — well, one thing is collage. I love cutting up paper and layering it. But that's very sculptural, actually.

MS. RICHARDS: True, and that goes back to the very beginning of your work.

MS. RUPP: Yes. But that's actually like building an image, kind of, the way I work. I don't really draw.

And I like to compare that to the amnesia of the culture that we live in — we like to erase and just obfuscate. But recently I had a little foray into glass, where I was thinking a lot about sweatshops and globalization. We haven't talked about any of this, but since I've been traveling more and looking around the developing world, it's opened up a lot of fertile ground —

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you know, I wanted to talk about travel and its impact on you. Would you like to go into that?

MS. RUPP: Well, let's just — let's just finish with the material a little bit, because it made me think a lot about sweatshops and Walmart and commodification and just money. I think economics and the environment is really central to everything, ever since the beginnings. If you had to put me into some category it would be where economics and the environment —

So I was interested in globalization and thinking about China. This is now, gosh, a long time ago, maybe eight years ago or maybe 10 years ago. And how all these products were just flooding in from China and they're made by hand so that we don't see. And of course we've heard a lot more about this recently.

So I decided that I had to make hands that were invisible and I had to learn how to do frameworking with glass. Do you know what frameworking is?

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. RUPP: It's a little bit like welding, where you have oxygen and it's propane instead of acetylene. But you melt things — and of course I probably don't have anything handy. It's all packed up.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, this is an audio recording, so there isn't —

MS. RUPP: So I made hundreds and hundreds of these sets of little glass hands that were holding everything that you could get from China, like cleaning products and —

MS. RICHARDS: When you say little, you mean smaller than reality?

MS. RUPP: About an inch width, connected to — they were little sets of hands, arms, a right hand and a left hand that went on the wall. And I envisioned it — it was an installation at Frederieke's called *GloboLoco*. Which was sort of a pun on craziness as well as local.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: It was everything you could get in China, living things, dead things —

MS. RICHARDS: Did you get these in Chinatown, or —

MS. RUPP: I got them everywhere. A lot of them were miniatures from dollhouses, yard sales [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: I see that show was in 2004.

MS. RUPP: Okay, so we're — nine years.

MS. RICHARDS: And was that this series, Made in China?

MS. RUPP: Yes. And the idea was [... that so much is -CR] made in China. [... Made in China was horizontal around the gallery at eye level -CR], hundreds of little sets of hands with objects. And then Made in USA was the [altered -CR] flags [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Paper and fabric.

MS. RUPP: Yes, I was looking at the American flag thinking, oh, stars and stripes, it's the same thing as a lot of the iconography from the Islamic world. We're not really so different. We really actually have a lot in common. But I thought that should be vertical. [... It seems like -CR] the only thing we were exporting was war. I remember when they said, George Bush wants to redesign the Middle East, it sounded really crazy. But you look now, 10 years later, [... -CR] American blood has been spilled in just about every country in the Middle East as we've tried to remake in our image. If not our image then [through -CR] oil companies, and it really isn't any different.

So [... -CR] the American flag was redesigned to fit into Islamic iconography, and that was vertical. And then all the objects, the real actual things, [... we import. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So you were talking about the fact that as you're — [inaudible] — an idea, you're not drawing, you're collaging visual elements and from that you decide what material to use, whether found objects or something you've made. And how do you — and can — is there a moment when you connect that to a scale, to the size of a series, the size of the works? You said the — they were small.

MS. RUPP: And invisible, that was really important, that I wanted to make something [visible which is -CR] invisible.

Another example was I had a little foray into felting, which is really fun. And I made a [... series -CR] of oil cans portraits of some of the oil vessels that I'd emptied in the last year. I just started saving them.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean, oil vessels?

MS. RUPP: You know, cans of household oil or [motor oil -CR] —

MS. RICHARDS: You mean cooking oil?

MS. RUPP: No, like 3-in-1 oil [, petroleum based -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] Motor oil, gasoline cans, products that you use in the studio like solvents. And those had to be felt. They just had to be some archaic way of showing the end of oil. [... -CR]

Now I'm in love with encaustic, wax, because I was looking around for a material that was stable. I was really playing with this idea of oil for a long time but I didn't really have a material for it that I liked, and — you know, here I am, living near Kingston and there's a factory here that makes artist's encaustic called R&F Encaustic. And now they've got all the artists in the Hudson Valley working in encaustic, but I like it because it looks like oil. Or you can make it look like oil, but it's stable, it's not toxic if you learn how to [... work at the correct temperature -CR]. And so I'm really thinking a lot about wax, which has really been wonderful for me because I like to weld and I've been using paper over metal for a long time. There are a lot of series of germs and toxic molecules that were paper and steel. But now I can use the steel to draw the images and the wax really is some combination of surface and structure. That's why it's so cool.

MS. RICHARDS: But you're — when you're starting out a new project and you're thinking of it as a series, do you plan to some extent the series in advance? Okay, this is going to be 10 works, or 20, or three, and — or do you just start and the series takes you along? One piece leads to another?

MS. RUPP: Well, I think the idea has to hold up. The idea starts with reading and [... -CR] I've always got my sketchbook there and I just start scribbling little ideas. And at some point it become clear.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned — maybe I misunderstood. I thought you said you didn't use sketchbooks. You said you didn't do drawings, but sketchbooks —

MS. RUPP: I do scribbles. I do little doodles and scribbles.

MS. RICHARDS: Ok, that's a drawing. [Laughs.]

MS. RUPP: Or ideas.

MS. RICHARDS: So it's starting with reading and sketching, and —

MS. RUPP: I have about a zillion notebooks that are scribbles. And —

MS. RICHARDS: Have you always had that process? Drawing — notebooks —

MS. RUPP: Yes. That's the way I drew in grad school. [... -CR] It's conceptual.

MS. RICHARDS: So you have by now a big shelf of sketchbooks

MS. RUPP: Yes, I do. And sometimes I look at them. I did dispose of a bunch of them not long ago.

MS. RICHARDS: Dispose?

MS. RUPP: Yes, I just got sick of looking at them. Like the ones from grad school, back in the old — I know it's

kind of weird, but I felt good about it and I still feel good about it. Isn't that weird? I felt I'd looked at it enough. I was done — I was done [with that time -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: And nobody else would find it of interest in the future?

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] I didn't want to see them anymore. I felt strongly that it was some kind of break that I needed to make. I know, why would anybody — I just was tired of looking at them. And I always did this with the students. I said, sketchbook! Much more important than finishing the sculpture. Keep the sketchbook; that's what I'm going to grade you on. I'm not going to look to see if your piece falls over. I am going to look at your ideas. And that just drove them nuts. Some people [... asked -CR] — "What criteria are you using? That doesn't make any sense."

But anyway, that's what the sketchbook is to me. It's kind of your map.

MS. RICHARDS: But — so as you're going along, I was asking how the series is developed. Is it — is it kind of growing on its own intuitively or have you planned it in advance?

MS. RUPP: Well, there's the reading, right? And then there's all the information, about — it could be about pesticides, it could be about the military-industrial — or the food-industrial complex or the environmental-industrial complex. You know, any of this stuff. I love myths; I love advertising. I write, I have all the information on the right hand and the left is always drawing ideas or collage ideas. And then at some point I stop with all the information and I start sketching out a series.

And usually it takes me months to get to actually building the series, and by then I've thought, oh, there's about 20 ways I could take this. Like with the — both the rats and the extinct birds sculptures. I mean, that was another foray into materials, like archival materials that were delicate. It just started with a little idea and then you could sort of imagine a whole series coming out of a little idea. So it all — it starts in the sketchbook.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you find yourself, as you're working, deciding that one particular piece is just not going to work and you destroy it, or do you always find a way of saving it?

MS. RUPP: Well, there again, it's the series. You know, and clearly — this is another thing about teaching that I found really useful, because they'd always say to me, like, "How do I know if a piece is good?" And I'd say, "You have to make a bunch of them, and then one or two will be really good and some won't be so good. [... -CR]"

MS. RICHARDS: So if you're making a whole series, do you then —

MS. RUPP: Not use them all? Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Destroy some of them, consider some of them failures? Keep them for spare parts?

MS. RUPP: I think if you're as compulsive as me, you can — you can keep working on them till they're useful, and then if not, you ditch them. And there's a lot of materials experiments too that you would never show, that probably would look like sculpture but they're really just experiments.

I think for me it starts with a little idea and then there needs to be a reason to keep doing it.

MS. RICHARDS: And how do you decide that you're finished with a series? Is there a particular —

MS. RUPP: Because I go crazy. Yes. You're just, like, done. [They laugh.] I'd never — I have no plans to ever use another chicken bone.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] After the — after that series.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] Enough.

MS. RICHARDS: What — is there ever a time when you feel at a standstill, that new ideas aren't coming, and is there something you've found that works for you to get you out of that?

MS. RUPP: Reading. Yes, there's never enough time to do all the reading you want to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Is all the reading that you're talking about nonfiction?

MS. RUPP: Usually that's what jogs me. And then if I'm really working hard and I have stuff going — if I have enough physical work, then I'll start reading novels. But generally I read thing about politics and the environment. Science.

MS. RICHARDS: It's feeding your work at that moment, informing your work?

MS. RUPP: Yes. And it's not like I'll try to read a lot of it. I'll just read as much as I need to do — it's a process, probably a lot of artists work like this, where your mind is clearing as you're reading this stuff and your mind isn't totally shut down, but it's giving you ideas. Now I'm trying to get through this book about Exxon. It's a bestseller.

MS. RICHARDS: What's it called?

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] It's called *Private Empire: ExxonMobil and American Power*.

MS. RICHARDS: By?

MS. RUPP: Steve Coll.

MS. RICHARDS: C-O-L-E?

MS. RUPP: C-O-L-L. And it's a 600-page book. And it is — it's not like it's about Dick Cheney or stuff like that. I mean, he's certainly in here and it's critical of Exxon, but it's really dry. I mean, this is a guy who's reported in — I was looking at his other books and thinking, he wrote — he wrote a bible about the bin Laden family and Getty Oil and — he's interested in extraction issues.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

When you begin a work do you know what the title of the whole piece is going to be at the start?

MS. RUPP: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Does that come at the end, then? Does it bear any importance to you, or do you just do it to identify —

MS. RUPP: Again, on the left-hand side there's always lists of interesting words or phrases that'll either be titles of works or might work its way into a title of a series or might just come into a press release.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you — I mean, as far I know, all your sculpture work is unique. Have you ever done — besides the small pieces, but major pieces that are actually conceived as something you do an addition of three or an addition of five?

MS. RUPP: Not really. No. It's very hard for me. With these turtles that I was doing last year, I think there are [about -CR] 20 of them, but I just kept making them, because I was learning how to use the encaustic. At some point I think you need — you need material challenges. I don't ever want to be like a craftsman who knows my material so well that I'm just trying to bring out the beauty of the material. I just can't imagine why you would keep doing that [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: You say that you're starting out using a new material — encaustic?

MS. RUPP: Yes. And it's always [for the love of -CR] new materials. That's what's really interesting is engaging material. That's why I'll never be a painter.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, there's a formal issue, though, material.

MS. RUPP: My next series that I want to do is a family of lemurs, which is going to really be a challenge, because —

MS. RICHARDS: So this is a question I was going to ask you: What's your current challenges?

MS. RUPP: Well, this summer I had to hustle a series — I had been working for a long time on filter-feeding organisms from the Gulf of Mexico that were digesting all the oil and Corexit [following the BP oil spill in 2010 - CR] — the dispersant — because I read a lot about how that chemical works in the water and in the water column, moving up and down. And just the whole — again, this idea of invisibility of trying to make the oil disappear from the camera, but it didn't disappear chemically. And that, of course, is also connected to all the work I've been interested in with garbage and how we make that disappear.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. RUPP: But — so I'm in a show right now that Linda Weintraub curated called *Dear Mother Nature*. And she kept trying to get me to say that these microorganisms digest the oil and make it clean. And I said, no, they

don't digest it. They do digest it, but they don't — just because they're digesting it doesn't mean the water is clean. It just means that they are moving it up the food chain. And she kept trying to put a happy ending on my series and I said, no; it just get more complex. I'm just trying to make it visible that they're digesting it and then they're going to get eaten by something a little more complex. And sooner or later, it will hyper accumulate into us, you know? But it doesn't mean that it's gone, just because something digests it. Everything has to go somewhere. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So how did you end up with her?

MS. RUPP: With Linda? [... -CR] Her show, *Dear Mother Nature*, asks what would you offer Mother Nature? And I kept saying, well, I would notice her. I would notice these little microorganisms doing their best to — this [... goes -CR] back to the animal behavior, that things — don't get to choose where they live. If you're a whale and you have to get back to your spawning ground, you will swim right through an oil slick. It won't even occur to you to [... -CR] go around it. It won't even occur to you; you'll be in the middle of it gagging before it will occur to you that you should not be there. Not that they don't know — of course, they know it's hazardous and bad them, but they don't choose where they go like people choose where they go. And that's [what is -CR] so interesting to me, that this idea of home range and territory states that most species don't choose. So even if you're a little piece of algae or a little protozoa, you're part of a habitat that's dynamic. [We all are. -CR]

So okay, so what she has in her show is plankton — of animals and plants, microscopic plant that are then eaten by things higher on the food chain — each other or digested by the bottom of the ocean. And what I didn't know before this is that plankton is a lifestyle. It's not a phylum or genus. Like a lot of things — most things that are plankton are just on their way to either settling on the bottom of the ocean and putting in roots, or leaning how to swim. A shrimp starts out as plankton, a snail does. Clams, for a while, are just little cells that are swimming.

Do you know the difference between a clam and a mussel?

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. RUPP: [...-CR] A clam has a foot, which it uses for navigation, whereas a mussel just hooks onto a dock, or in a mussel farm they have posts that the mussels live on. But they all start out floating around, swimming around. So plankton is just —it's like teenage [lifestyle -CR]. It's undeveloped life?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Think of —

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] The definition of plankton is their locomotion is the tide or the current. They don't swim on their own. And once they're swimming on their own, navigating, then they're not plankton anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking about this conversation with Linda, and the subject that you're addressing in your work, you find yourself being asked to be part of a number of different thematic exhibitions.

MS. RUPP: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Some of which you may feel comfortable with and others you may have questions about. How do you deal with the issue of curators, even without asking you — that's probably less common — putting you into an exhibition for which you don't think your work is really suited? I mean, do you have — do you stop that or do you just let it happen?

MS. RUPP: That's a good question. I mean, I guess every show's different. Sometimes you just say you don't have enough work; you don't really have anything.

MS. RICHARDS: As a polite way of saying no thank you.

MS. RUPP: Yes. I would always say that, before I'd say no thank you.

But usually if [... it concerns -CR] politics and the environment and economics, I can always find something for somebody? I can always — I can usually find something that works.

MS. RICHARDS: When you're thinking about this field, which is really expanding, obviously there are other artists who are engaged in similar — not identical — areas. Do you see, after all these years, an influence that your work has had?

MS. RUPP: No.

MS. RICHARDS: People write to you, say — young artists saying that your work is —

MS. RUPP: I think we all do now with the Internet. We get a lot of feedback and it's charming.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you find yourself —

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: When you're going to museums and galleries mostly wanting to see work that relates to your work, or quite the opposite — wanting to see something totally different?

MS. RUPP: Well, again, it's about context.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, when you're in the city, let's say, in the winter, when you're taking the time, I guess, to go to galleries and museums.

MS. RUPP: When I'm traveling, I like to see little regional museums, much more than big famous ones. I really like the presentation; I like the way the information is conveyed, much more than I like the object. [Laughs.] Is that bad? I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. RUPP: I'm not a formalist; I can't help it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, speaking of traveling, you know, you mentioned all the traveling you did to Central America, Latin America. What about in the last few years, have there been — or just as far back as you want to go — trips other than the ones we just — you've already discussed that were important to the development of your work?

MS. RUPP: Yes. I'm getting — getting a longer and longer list of places I want to go. This spring I went to Bolivia where I had wanted to go forever. [... -CR] It was on my list of extreme climates — I'm very interested in the developing world and indigenous culture [... -CR], just because I'm going to learn something when I travel. I don't really travel for pleasure. I travel to learn.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you always travel with someone else or always alone?

MS. RUPP: Just if I — find someone that shares an interest. But [... -CR] not that many [... friends -CR] want to go hang out in some little Guatemalan village and watch people weave every day.

MS. RICHARDS: That's probably true.

MS. RUPP: You know, weavers would want to do that. But I don't have any friends that are weavers. I can say that: I don't know anybody that's a weaver that's a friend of mine that lives in New York. Honestly. I mean, for that I would just have to go do it.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you went to Bolivia, did you go on your own?

MS. RUPP: Well, I had been looking for a good [... way -CR] to get there. And I had read about the water wars. That was the first awareness that I had. And then Evo Morales, an indigenous president that was trying to stand up to globalization. [... -CR] Bolivia is a very interesting — you know, it's got jungle; it's got very, very high mountains. And it has glaciers that are melting. And it has a high number of [... -CR] — different indigenous cultures and different languages.

And they really worship water. A lot of cultures do, many cultures — except ours — do worship water. But they actually had a war over it, [... corporations tried to privatize the water by making -CR] it illegal to collect your own rainwater. [... -CR]

[... -CR]

MS. RUPP: Yes. And there have been books written about the Cochabamba [struggle -CR] [Bolivia] there was a movie about it. Actually, there's a new dramatic movie about it coming out. And I think it's called *Even the Rain*. [... -CR] It's a close look at the water wars in which the indigenous people closed all the roads and fought for the right to keep their own water [... -CR] — this is why we need artists. And I actually felt, the whole time I was there, the situation was so dire that I was really glad I was an artist.

[... I went with -CR] a group of gardeners to see the high meadows [... -CR] — the high plains where they grow quinoa.

MS. RICHARDS: And you went there with this group of gardeners?

MS. RUPP: It was four of us. It was a group, but it wasn't like a big group. [... With -CR] Food First — it's the same organization that Frances Moore Lappé had started years ago [Institute for Food and Development Policy] — [...

they lead -CR] trips to food places [food heritage sites]. But this was Bolivia and this was to look at quinoa production, which now is all over the health food store. It's a no-carb grain.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. High protein.

MS. RUPP: Yes. Very nourishing. And it's a heritage grain and it grows in these very cold extreme arid altiplano conditions. And the Spanish had always told them it as peasant food; they looked down on it. The commercial forces at work in the culture — it never used to be in the supermarket, but everybody grew it. And now that there's a commodity value to it, and particularly the organic stuff, because it is a health food and people want the whole organic it's a really interesting question [... -CR].

So what this trip wanted to look at was the [... relationship -CR] between food sovereignty and food sustainability. Do you know what that is?

MS. RICHARDS: Why don't you explain it for everyone. [They laugh.]

MS. RUPP: Food sustainability means you can go to McDonald's and fill up, you know, and have that feeling of a full stomach. Or you can buy potato chips or white bread or [... -CR] you can fill up, but it isn't really nutritious. And it's not really a choice, because it's really all you can afford; it's cheap. It's fast food. Junk food is made to be inexpensive. It's not really that cheap, [... by the way. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: No, no.

MS. RUPP: It's cheaper than food that's —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. There have been studies and you can eat healthily for the same or less as junk food.

MS. RUPP: Right. But you have to have —

MS. RICHARDS: Knowledge to do that.

MS. RUPP: You can't live in a food desert to do that.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RUPP: Which many people do [... -CR]. A lot of people in New York live in a food desert.

And so food sovereignty means you get to choose what you're growing. So now that there's a commodity value on quinoa, this idea of fair trade means that there is an [economic -CR] number — [... a value monetized -CR] assigned to the value of their crop. So people can sell it and buy white rice and pasta and not be eating these grains that they're growing. And in Bolivia, there are hundreds of varieties of potato. Not so much with the corn in Bolivia, lots of varieties of corn in Peru. But there's many more varieties of corn than we think of in this culture, which we sort of know this from having indigenous Americans point that out.

But anyway, once your food has a commodity value, you are motivated to sell it — particularly if you're impoverished — and countries like Argentina and Chile and Brazil will buy it [quinoa], because people want it. So there is a tendency, now that it is a cash crop, for people to sell it and then just eat less nutritious [, less expensive -CR] things.

[... -CR] They're trying to get agro-tourism off the ground there, but it's hard, because there were some droughts in the last 20 years and a lot of these regions have been really depopulated. There's a lot of houses that are empty — stone houses that have just fallen into ruin. And they're trying to make them places — trekkers go there, extreme adventure travel happens, but that's not a big money maker. They want people to come and stay in the farmers' houses. And they've got a whole slate of things that the farmers have to do to get international travelers. They have put in an outhouse. They have to have a table where you can all sit together. It has to be within the village; it can't just be one farmer. You have to be able to accommodate a group. But it's really rustic. It's not comfortable travel at all.

MS. RICHARDS: What are you — so you just made this trip?

MS. RUPP: Yes, in the spring. It was really interesting. It was physically hard. I think we were at 13,000 feet. You can't really sleep normally at that, because your lungs [... are used to different pressure, -CR] we're so much made out of water that we weigh differently if we're lying down. The way to sleep there is actually in a comfortable chair. But who has a reclining chair, you know, when they're traveling? No one. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: So have you — do you know how that trip is going to impact your work; what's going to come out of it?

MS. RUPP: [... In Bolivia, they produce chunõs. -CR] It's a way to grow potatoes in a frost zone. They dig them up and then they rebury them [... -CR] eight inches deep. And they spend weeks stomping on the dirt to push the moisture out and bring up the protein content and it stores better that way. And they've been doing this historically for hundreds of years [... -CR].

We've all seen on TV techniques in the Amazon where they dig up a root and they mash it and they put their own spit in and bury it in a leaf and, you know, they come back in three weeks and it's nutritional. And this is all really important wisdom that's, of course, getting lost.

To frame this a little bit: Monsanto really wants [... to commodify quinoa -CR]. They don't want all these varieties — there are hundreds of varieties of quinoa and they want to own it all. And they want to sell the seeds. It's shocking, right? These are little farmers. In Nebraska where you're talking 100, 300, 500 acres in one crop. Okay, you could see why Monsanto, that would be profitable. Why are they hassling people with a quarter of an acre to buy seeds and make them dependent on pesticides? [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Is it working? I mean, is that effort working?

MS. RUPP: Well, people don't have all that much choice.

MS. RICHARDS: But they've had seeds all their — they've already had seeds of their own.

MS. RUPP: But they haven't had cash [... -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: So you're saying if they don't provide the seeds, they won't have a product that is marketable, because the plants that grow from their old seeds won't produce the quinoa that —

MS. RUPP: Well, you need to be in a cooperative. You know, you need to pool — no farmer is growing enough to make it exportable, to make it sustainable. It was — it used to be grown for home consumption. There wasn't a market value to it. And now that it's trendy, there is.

Indigenous cultures can [... survive -CR] floods, earthquakes, drought, disease. [... They cannot move to a cash economy rapidly without losing the sustainability that has kept them vital nutritionally. A cash economy destabilizes indigenous tradition in one or two generations. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Does this interest come — grown from the body of work you did in the earlier last decade — the genetically engineered food?

MS. RUPP: Yes. It's all related.

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Do you speak Spanish?

MS. RUPP: A little. I can talk about two things: art and revolution, that's all. I can't —

MS. RICHARDS: That requires a pretty big vocabulary.

MS. RUPP: [... -CR] Where your heart is there, you can sort of do it.

In Guatemala, the textile tradition is [... very -CR] important, [in that] it identifies you with the village that you're from. And during the war that was raging there in the '80s and the '90s, people were identified by their cloth. It's like skin, and sometimes you would change that just so you wouldn't [be harassed -CR] — because they wiped out entire villages, as we know, according to where they lived.

[... I was able to visit the oil spill region in Ecuador. -CR] When they were drilling [in the 1970s], they found oil very close to the surface on the equator. So the big oil companies went in there [... -CR] and they made deals with local governments. [... -CR] You need to prime the pump with some other liquid [formation water] that brings it up. And that was just dumped on the Amazon floor. And this is a region that floods, [... -CR] basically broadcasting it and it ends up everywhere. [... -CR] You can't contain it. And they used byproducts to spray on the roads to keep the dust down. So it's a huge issue and there has been lots of great [... resistance to the ongoing threat of the spills from the 1970s on -CR] Ecuador oil spill.

I just couldn't understand how a place like the Amazon could have oil and water so close together, because— we know the Amazon's this rich treasure trove of life forms that everybody wants to patent and steal and make money off of.

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: I meant to ask you about — this is connected — you said you were starting to experiment with encaustic. Did I ask you exactly what you're making with encaustic, or are you still on the experimental stage and you're not quite sure?

MS. RUPP: No. I can tell you that. We're sort of skipping around.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, maybe it relates to what you were just talking about. These travels —

MS. RUPP: Well, I wanted a metaphor for oil.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. So that relates to what you were just saying.

MS. RUPP: Because oil is so much about money and the environment. That's really where I've been for a long time. I'm trying to think if it was some of the land grab situations we've seen up where in the Catskills, maybe about energy issues [... -CR] and now it's fracking. And then learning it's the same story in the Amazon. It's the same people; it's the same pollution. It's all about money; it's all about weak zoning and people that are off the grid. It's the same thing. And then I got interested in mountaintop removal, now the tar sands. It's all the same [... -CR] issues [... -CR].

I was looking for a metaphor for oil, [... really since the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 -CR] and we saw those birds struggling.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: And we also saw Saddam Hussein burning oil wells in the desert in the Persian Gulf. And you know what? Those birds that you saw on the evening news were actually from Alaska. They weren't from the Persian Gulf. They were the same species, which is the cormorant, which is a really aggressive fishing bird and it performs really well when it's stressed. It will just sit in the oil and flail and it's really strong. It's the same bird that Chinese fishermen use that has a ring around its neck — you've seen pictures, maybe?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MS. RUPP: Where it sits on the bow and they train it. And it's a really important part of not only their livelihood, but their culture of training these birds. So the bird goes in, gets the fish. The fisherman pulls it out. And there's a ring around its neck, so it kind of — you can remove the fish and the fisherman puts it in his basket and the bird goes in again for more and comes back. And that's the bird we saw at the Exxon Valdez and in the Persian Gulf. And you know what? It was the same bird and it was the same footage. They didn't even bother to shoot the Persian Gulf. They just had stock footage of cormorants flailing in the oil and they thought, oh, nobody will notice; it's a cormorant.

I got interested in oil and habitat and it really is the same story [everywhere -CR]. The BP spill is our little visitation of this. It's happening in Nigeria and happening in Indonesia and happening everywhere else. So I wanted to make [... -CR] turtles. There was a huge issue with the turtles getting set on fire in the oil slick there. They [the company] were trying to make the oil disappear, but they had surface-dwelling species trying to escape and they burned thousands of endangered —

MS. RICHARDS: Are you talking about BP?

MS. RUPP: Yes, in the Gulf. BP and the Coast Guard and government and whoever else — Halliburton was out there burning. The encaustic just seemed like [... an oil surrogate -CR], and be able to paint and drip and melt and it has a structure as well as a surface. [... -CR] And then this year I was looking at the microorganism — the filter feeders — of course, turtles are also filter feeders — of all the little creatures that are food for everybody else that are doing their very best to digest the oil.

[... -CR] I curated this show called *Whale Oil to Whole Foods* —

MS. RICHARDS: *Whale Oil to Whole Foods*?

MS. RUPP: Yes, which I always thought was kind of — it was going to be the name of a drawing. But then when they asked me to curate the show, I thought, it's a show; it's an idea for a show. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: This is slightly tangential, but does curating an exhibition help you develop an idea that will be going into your work?

MS. RUPP: Turns out it did. I wasn't planning on it. I had never done anything with whales. And I [was] just curious, because people were asking me more and more about the whaling culture. Why is it here? And I can go into that for you, but in thinking about it, I was thinking, god, the whaling industry has changed so much. You know, it used to be like mortal combat and these boats would be out — a whaling mission took five years and it was really cold and miserable and dirty and ecologically awful and cruel and —

MS. RICHARDS: Dangerous.

MS. RUPP: Dangerous and expensive and not a whole lot of profit. Some people made a lot of money, but the average person that went out for five years didn't.

I was looking at all these remnants — these scrimshaw and remnants of whales — and trying to understand, how does a whaling ship actually process a whale? Whale's a big — a pretty big animal and a valuable animal. And it's oil; it's oil. It's so interesting that catching a whale is like striking oil in the plains. It's really very similar. I started [... -CR] thinking of all the parallels of a giant mammal as a producer of oil.

What I'm doing now is making these; I looked at lots of pictures of whale teeth and the size of them. And then, of course, that led me to all the other, [... large mammals with tusks -CR]. And learning about [... -CR] the assault weapons trade that follows oil. [... -CR] Where there's oil, there's weapons now. It's all very connected [...-CR]: 200 elephants taken out in one day with an assault weapon [... is not uncommon anymore -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: African elephants or Indian elephants?

MS. RUPP: African. Rwanda. [... -CR]

I'm trying to connect elephants and oil. The series is [... called *Fake Ivory*. Made in wax, it's tusks of elephants, walrus, hippo, and some whale teeth with scrimshaw patterns of hydrocarbon molecules. -CR] Encaustic is a way to [... -CR] create ivory [... and -CR] tortoise shell. The amazing thing about encaustic is that it's a surface; it's filler, but you can [... simulate any surface -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: And you put something in it to make it stronger and less fragile and scratch-able? And mean, encaustic is —

MS. RUPP: Well, now they have —

MS. RICHARDS: Basic encaustic is very sensitive.

MS. RUPP: Well, the way it's made today, it's got resin in it. And the resin, when it dries, gives it a lot more rigidity and gives it a harder surface.

MS. RICHARDS: Because earlier artists using encaustic, it was very prone to damage.

MS. RUPP: It's fragile.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: The resin keeps it from collecting dust in the same way [... -CR] it does make it stable. [... It is still fragile, however. -CR]

But with the metal to support it, I'm finding it works. I'm using paper over the metal to hold the wax and build up the wax surface.

MS. RICHARDS: As your — as your work has developed over the years, and you're dealing with issues of international importance, that however, may not be known to many people who look at your work, has your approach to explaining your work evolved in any way — changed? And has your — the importance of their understanding changed?

MS. RUPP: Well, I think you're asking about the whole didactic nature of political art and where does the artist enter that discussion. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: And how much control you need to have versus —

[... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Right — versus the curator, if they, in fact, do know what to say about it that you would want to have said.

MS. RUPP: It's a huge issue, if you're working with content, of being understood. And we know how much patience the art world has for anything that it doesn't really know already. [Laughs.]

I think the Internet has really helped a lot. You can present your work in your own voice. And you may have a really supportive dealer who's never going to quite [...-CR] the way the artist does about globalization or health issues, molecules, water pollution. So the Internet's really helpful.

It's a problem. I think using content is a huge problem, but why make art if you're not engaging ideas? It's probably a good problem to have.

MS. RICHARDS: When you are having a show, then, does that mean that you take great care to either write or edit the press release yourself?

MS. RUPP: Yes. And it causes a lot of [... discussions -CR], because the dealer — if you're lucky, they're behind you all the way. But more likely than not, they're looking at their needs, which is survival and they know what works for them. And I don't blame them. [... -CR] But I understand it better, because I understand, as we age, that people have to — to be sustainable, it's got to work for everybody. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. When critics have written about your work, are there any issues that they get wrong that you'd like to correct for the record or?

MS. RUPP: Oh, never, never. No, they never get it wrong. [They laugh.] They always understand. And you know what proves it is that you thought my — you thought that social progress was about genetic engineering. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yeah.

MS. RUPP: They always get it wrong inevitably.

MS. RICHARDS: And what do you do? Do you react in any way when they get it wrong?

MS. RUPP: You talk; you write press releases. You make sure that your website is updated [...-CR].

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, do you contact a critic to correct them or do you write a letter to the editor? Or do you get upset when you get negative or questioning reviews? I mean, so how does that all work for you?

MS. RUPP: Well, it's complicated, because as somebody that likes to make objects, I appreciate it when my work is seen visually. That is important. And I guess I think what I need out of it is, I need a good reason to make it. And the people that really are curious about the ideas — this isn't rocket science. This is nothing new. And I tend to pick up things — like the genetic engineering or the oil or the mountaintop removal or the fracking. I mean, it's all in discourse later, within months. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-Hmm. (Acknowledgement.)

MS. RUPP: It makes its way out really pretty quickly.

So what's the discussion? I don't know. As I say, it's about context. And maybe what it's really about is you're making objects that you think are important for people that are noticing and curious. And if you're lucky, they find [their way -CR] out into the world. And I guess I'm not that invested in the fight about it — that old fight about didactic work.

And it's so interesting, I was just in a show in Italy. And the way they [use -CR] didactic there — it's a good thing. The resource room there [in the exhibit] was called the didactico. We [Americans -CR] think that's a bad word, just as we think political art is a ghetto, but not all cultures dismiss it that way.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to pinpoint what exhibition you're talking about right now.

MS. RUPP: Oh, it's a really fun show. It's just coming down now, called *American Dreamers*.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. RUPP: And there's about eight or 10 Americans.

MS. RICHARDS: And where is it, exactly?

MS. RUPP: It's in Florence. And you know, [... -CR] they don't have a lot of contemporary art. And they do have a lot of art schools; they have a lot of young artists. But they don't really have many venues, considering how

many museums they have, how many treasures. And it's really interesting to think that the Medici had so much of everything, but it was all over the place. And one of the things that [the city of -CR] Florence has been doing is just getting it all back together so you can see things in one place. These people had all these palaces and they were all acquiring and getting documented. And now that's one thing that Florence has really been working on, is on identities like context.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're saying they do didactic in a very positive way?

MS. RUPP: They don't think it's a bad thing.

They have a lot of old palazzos that are not used, that are not functional. [... The recently renovated Palazzo Strozzi is in the center -CR] of town. And somebody convinced them that they really needed a contemporary art center. And it is really only about five years old. And so it's a giant building and not all of it is museum, but upstairs they have more traditional [exhibitions -CR]. Almost like the Met. It's very formal, very velvety, very beautifully lit. And they had a show there called *American Dreamers* and it was their influence — they've had really great content-centered shows. But the show up there now is the influence — How Florence was influenced by the Americans that came there like Mary Cassatt and Sargent, Whistler, and a whole list of other people — a lot of them are writers — that came through the last 100 years. A lot came after the war when these places [were empty because they -CR] were too expensive and they [the Americans] bought them up [... -CR] — some people [Americans] never came back [to the United States -CR]. They just found their place there and they were influenced and they — how much did they influence Italian art, I don't know, but that's the premise of this is that dialogue.

So in the basement gallery, the contemporary part — the really kind of more edgy one — they have about eight of us that had different manifestations of American culture that they thought the Italians should know about.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, for the future, that you hadn't influenced them yet?

MS. RUPP: Or that were comments on American culture today.

MS. RICHARDS: And what was your work?

MS. RUPP: And a lot of [... the ideas resonate with -CR] Italy, in that Italy had kind of a golden age of prosperity, you know, which they're — they'll always have, it isn't the same as it used to be and same as us. So they were interested in that.

And I think I was included because of the food system. They were interested in American [consumption -CR] — I had the extinct birds made out of fast-food chicken bones.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: But there are [... several -CR] artists that paint American [Post-Industrial] landscape or that showed the humor of our commercialized culture either through architecture or through pleasure. [Will Cotton] directed Katy Perry's music videos has been painting a lot of portraits of her — very, very academic, lush [...-CR]. Of course, he's a brilliant painter, [...-CR] it's about celebrity [and pleasure -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MS. RUPP: The lushness of it.

MS. RICHARDS: Bodies, yeah.

MS. RUPP: And we listened, probably 300 times, to that music video of Katy Perry squirting whipped cream out of her breasts. I don't if you —

MS. RICHARDS: No, I don't know that. [They laugh.] But I mean, I know who Katy Perry is and I know Will Cotton.

MS. RUPP: Yes. So it was — you know, he was one extreme.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds a little like the Murakami pieces of squirting — the squirting milk.

MS. RUPP: Humor. You know, it's a really fun show.

MS. RICHARDS: You know, talking about the work in Florence — and you had also a work in a group show a few years ago in Vienna and Grenoble, France, both in 2008, I think, and other times when you've had works in shows outside the U.S., and particularly in Europe, is there a difference in the response, the public response, the curatorial response, the critical response to your work there as opposed to here?

MS. RUPP: Yes, totally. They're much more interested [in ideas, I think -CR].

MS. RICHARDS: Is it better?

MS. RUPP: They're interested in the content there more, that's been my experience.

MS. RICHARDS: Toleration for intellectual —

MS. RUPP: But that could just be the people that have wanted my work enough to ship it over there. I don't know. I really don't think that the New York art scene is very involved with ideas right now. [... -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever had a — I don't recall — work in a gallery in Europe, a commercial gallery? Have you wanted to?

MS. RUPP: I have, sure. I have, but it was more during these East Village group shows — they would get a batch. No, I don't have like a gallery over that —

MS. RICHARDS: You know, if they're more responsive to — I think you said content. It could very well be —

MS. RUPP: It's about context. And quite often they just need a rat or something. You know, they just need some whacky little — you know how group shows are put together? It's like a family. Everybody has their own little edgy weirdness that the curator thinks tweaks the idea in some way.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: It's pretty arbitrary, really.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yeah. So in the present and in the past, what would you really want your work to do? What power do you want it to have?

MS. RUPP: Well, I think we all know that the climate is changing. And there's a difference of opinion how quickly it's happening. Some people think we're really in a crisis state and I would subscribe to that. When I go places where people are really living on the margins. And one — one place you can really see this is Brazil where they are damming up the Amazon [and clearing the forests that we need so badly -CR].

So I think that when that happens it sets in motion other things that we don't really know about, like species extinction or a lot more release of greenhouse gas or a cycle of poverty of people who are left out. And that's my territory; that's what I'm interested in is just being part of that transition and framing that in some way that draws in people that wouldn't normally have access to it. People that think, oh, water pollution. Yes, that's really bad; or water scarcity, I should turn off the faucet. [I have a part in that issue. -CR]

But you know, I really want to — I want to use my work as a way to document right now and what choices we do have — if we even do have choices — we certainly have choices about what we're curious about, what we want to learn about. And I think art is probably the best way to engage people in a dialogue about stuff they don't know. People are used to not knowing what art is about.

MS. RICHARDS: When you speak about art, do you include filmmaking and other visual —

MS. RUPP: Yes, sure. Yes, any cultural stuff. And probably sculpture is not the best mode to do that. But what do you do if you really like to make objects? Do you stop making objects and become a filmmaker or become a shaman and just go rattle at a tree and hope that it rains?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, objects have a much longer history of being powerful than film, so far. Just go to the Metropolitan or any other major museum and you see these amazing objects that are thousands of years old.

MS. RUPP: Well, those are — yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: They still have power.

MS. RUPP: That somebody thought was important enough to get up on the wall there.

But I think that we're documentarians. I think that's what artists do AS teachers and storytellers. And we don't have to be right. A lot of my work has been about the parallels and the differences between art and science.

And I should tell you that a huge influence in my work right now is my group of eco-artists, which is a giant, burgeoning crowd of people. Not that I even know that many of them, an online dialogue called *Eco-Art Dialogue*.

MS. RICHARDS: *Eco-Art Dialogue.com* or just — is it a blog?

MS. RUPP: [It's a collective, with maybe a blog or a Facebook page. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: *Ecoartspace*.

MS. RUPP: It's very informal and people will just say stuff like I am [... looking for a soil resource, or a scientist. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: Are these artists U.S. artists or international?

MS. RUPP: They're all over the world. And it's partly sharing resources, partly talking about public art problems that people have. It's just anything that comes up. It could be personal; it could be health. It's a lot about economics, a lot about survival. A lot about this discussion of how do we be the most effective? We all feel this. Even people that are really, actually, reinventing the wheel feel that they're not productive enough.

MS. RICHARDS: They're not making enough of an impact?

MS. RUPP: Yes. Their work's not — it's just falling on deaf ears. I mean, that's really how a lot of —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. I mean, there's the whole issue of —

MS. RUPP: You don't have to be an environmental artist —

MS. RICHARDS: — preaching to the converted when you're —

MS. RUPP: Yes, right. That's always the problem.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RUPP: So to have a group that resonates and people are all over the [... world -CR]. And you know, really, it is so much about digital work and projects that making sculpture is pretty archaic today, but maybe that's a good reason to do it, you know?

We're all artists on the *EcoArt Dialogue*, except the ones that are scientists, which we really welcome — scientists that like artists. But few people are really making paintings and sculpture anymore. The earth doesn't need it; the earth doesn't want it. You really have to have a pretty good reason to do it now, because nobody wants it.

And like you were mentioning about legacies and what we leave behind, if people don't want it now, they're — I don't think they're going to start necessarily wanting it, just because you die. Maybe a few pieces will find their way out, but we're just churning out all this stuff that hopefully isn't going straight to the landfill, but then, what is the purpose if we're making it, if not the dialogue and the learning?

That's how I see it. I just see it as about education; and it's available to anybody that wants to read about it or come see it.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, this is a very positive development. And you were talking about negative, the realities. But the eco-art [... dialogue -CR] and everyone who's participating in that and sharing ideas is a very positive development.

MS. RUPP: And also just, the realization that art's not about stars, you know? And that seems to be something that we all really do share. That if the planet is going to survive, if artwork is going to have any relevance that it really is not about being a blue-chip artist. That really has nothing to do with it and it's a whole other dialogue.

And I'd love to hear your opinion about the artists in the movement — the ecological movement — that are really visible and do become really sought after and collectible and does that really help anything? You know, what is our context really about? That's a good question.

[...-CR] The nature of the art world is there has to be a few people that are really well-known and highly sought after and they're really, really busy and they're doing a lot of work [commercial exhibitions -CR]. And what really is that about? Is that just the same old collecting? Maybe for a different motive, but the work is just as valid, but it has this cache to it.

It's a terrible problem, I think, the whole art market. It's never been a simple question. But when you're — when you're laying issues of survival on it, you really do think, this is a potent force; how can I use it to make things better? And that's the curse of it is just feeling like, wow, I am just doing something that I really like doing? And

what's the point? I might as well be painting portraits of cats.

MS. RICHARDS: Well —

MS. RUPP: So — but I think — I think what I'm — I guess what I'm really focused on right now is habitat and this really, really delicate transition. Things that are really disappearing in our lifetime. Most bird extinction has happened in our lifetime in the last 70 years. And yet, when you think of something disappearing from the earth, you really think history and time. You think the dinosaurs. We always think about the dinosaurs when we think about extinction, but we don't think about that turtle, you know, that died last week in Galapagos.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RUPP: Louie, I think his name was?

MS. RICHARDS: A hundred years old.

MS. RUPP: So —

MS. RICHARDS: So are there any other thoughts you'd like to add or should I include?

MS. RUPP: [... Art for me is about ideas. Learning. Noticing. -CR]

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] I think we've covered a lot of territory.

MS. RUPP: I feel like you were so thoughtful in coming up with the questions and I didn't really give you a chance to ask them.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, no, no. There's no point in asking when you present all the information you did. Yes.

MS. RUPP: Blather on and on.

MS. RICHARDS: It needs to go in the direction that your mind takes it.

MS. RUPP: Do the artists go crazy? Do you have to reel them in?

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Sometimes, but not often.

MS. RUPP: Do you ever fall asleep in the interviews?

MS. RICHARDS: Never. [They laugh.]

MS. RUPP: I think it's so cool the way you haven't really — you've really been like a radio person. You haven't been focusing on the visual that much.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it's an audio experience.

MS. RUPP: Yes, yeah. That's different; it's hard.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Well, thank you very much.

MS. RUPP: Oh, thank you.

[End of interview]