



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Howardena
Pindell, 2012 Dec. 1-4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Howardena Pindell on December 1, 2012. The interview took place at the home of Howardena Pindell in New York City, and was conducted by Judith O. Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Howardena Pindell has reviewed the transcript. Her 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 Howardena Pindell on December 1, 2012, at her home in New York City on Riverside Drive, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disk one.

Howardena, as we've discussed, we're going to begin where a previous interview for the archives left off. That interview was on July 10, 1972. [Laughs.] So casting way back to 1972, I wanted to, first of all, ask some basic questions.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Where were you living in 1972? Had you moved into Westbeth by then?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: All right—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Or were you living in—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —I was in Westbeth.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And when did you move in there? Were you one of the first tenants?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: One of the first tenants, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That opened in '70 or '71?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't remember. I think it might have been more '70.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: But I really don't remember. I was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you end up wanting to live there?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, at the time I was trying to get my work done in an apartment. I had a roommate, and it was right around the corner, actually from Westbeth. It was the Cezanne on Jane Street.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, I know that building.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes. I was living there, and working for the museum and I mean, I don't remember the application process, but I was able to get in with a studio. But they kind of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean a living space, plus a studio in a separate part of the building?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, which wasn't what they had promised. They generally promised that you would have your working and living space together. So what they did was, for people who basically had less than they were supposed to have, they had a building that was right next to them, and they used that as a studio building. You had to share a studio, and it was kind of dilapidated. You know, temporary walls, maybe up to eight feet or so. And then chicken wire, you know, it was very—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Chicken wire where?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I think it was—I think the chicken wire was along the top of the wall. In other words, you got some ventilation from whatever poisonous [laughs] material was coming from one studio to another. You could—I think the door was padlocked, but I don't remember. The person I shared it with was Harriet Korman's brother.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was his name?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't remember, I'm afraid.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Korman—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Korman, the—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Harriet Korman's brother.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The painter.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. And that's when I first started using the spray. I would spray through templates I made to have little circles. I would, you know, spray the dots and layer them—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —on unprimed canvas. Now, I was basically trained as a figurative painter—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And my works became more unrealistic [Laughs.]. Whatever the word would be—

JUDITH RICHARDS: More abstract?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —or more abstract, yes, after graduate school, because with the job I didn't have, you know, daylight. When I was finished with work, it was getting dark.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How long were you in that separate studio—how long did you have your studio in that separate space from your living space in Westbeth?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I think it was about four years.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And how long did you stay in Westbeth as a residence?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, technically I was in Westbeth about four—three and a half to four years.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So this—all the time you were living in Westbeth, you had a separate studio.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: A separate studio next—it was attached to the building. It was a—it's now being used as, I think, a health club. But no, it was kind of a little ramshackle. And, I mean, you had—it was pretty quiet. I don't remember there being a lot of people in there working.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Occasionally, when I'd work, Harriet's brother would come in and just be there at the same time.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In 1972, did you—I know you were working at MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY], and I think you talked about that a bit in the previous interview, and part of the A.I.R. Gallery.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you feel that you were part of the art world?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I'm not sure how I felt. I was from Philadelphia, and the art world was, like, news to me. I wasn't, you know, I—some of my classmates at Yale [were -HP] already trying to get a loft while they were at Yale, and make connections. And Philadelphia was pretty provincial. So I think on one hand, I mean it was a good lesson to have a job where I could constantly see really great art. But I really—I felt on one hand, here I am in a semi-curatorial position at the beginning. I mean, it was just an exhibition assistant, that's what it was called —

JUDITH RICHARDS: At MoMA—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. And then I worked my way up to associate.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: A lot of people were really mad at me for having that job [in 1979. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: People? What people?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Artists, you mean?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Artists, art critics—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were on the other side of the fence, so to speak.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. I would be seen as the sheep in wolf's clothing. Or the wolf in sheep's clothing. [Laughs.] I don't know if Robert Storr, who's an artist ran into the same thing, but there was a lot going on in terms of protesting, and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Maybe that was a few years later. No?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was—well, no. I started working there in 1967.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And it was when Carl Andre and Hans Haacke were picketing them, and there was another group called GAG—

JUDITH RICHARDS: G-A-G? G-A-G-E? No, G-A-G.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was G-A—G-A-G, I think. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Do you know what that acronym stood for?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I have no idea.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The "A" must have been "Artists." [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, they were. Yes. Definitely they were artists [Laughs.] And some of them were coming into the galleries, and I guess—I just—I vaguely remember that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. You were able to maintain your career and your work as an artist to a remarkable degree considering you were working full-time.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And in fact, that year, '72, you got a grant from the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts].

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which was a tremendous accomplishment.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What kind of impact did that grant have on you?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, I just—oh well, I was really running out of money. [Laughs.] I mean, the Modern [MoMA] pays very poorly, and art materials are, and can be, very expensive. I don't know how to answer that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, it was so—you're answering it in the sense of it was important in terms of the financial part of it—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. And it also gave me recognition as an artist for [others -HP] were angry that I was there. See, I ran into so many—

[Side conversation.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay, okay. Oh, how to explain it. Now there were black women groups, but I was in Philadelphia, so we didn't—they were all from Harlem or Brooklyn. I think one was called ["Where We At." -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was it called?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: YEC? ["Where We At" -HP], something like that. [There was also the Spiral Group with Emma Amos and Romare Bearden, Emma was the only woman. -HP] And "Where We At," and there was, like, a lot of animosity, because I wasn't really from that group, or those groups.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you—I'm sorry to interrupt you—did you seek out the job at the museum and stay there because you loved being at the museum and doing that job?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, that has many different sides to it. One, there was very little employment for either black or white women artists. But the irony is, someone from my class got a temporary job cataloguing books at Prints and Illustrated Books [department of MoMA], which is where I ended up. I think her name was something. Oh, I can't remember. But anyway, I didn't try to get a job there. It was one of these flukes where I was wandering around trying to get employment. And there was a gallery, which is still in existence, which is really like a poster gallery, called J. Pocker and Son. P-O-C-K-E-R.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I had to go to the bathroom, so I had my membership at the Modern. And I, you know, used the bathroom. Then I walked by the business side entrance, and I thought, "Well, why don't I go in and see if there are any jobs?" And I think it's because I had a real resume and also amazingly good luck. The secretary of [the department I was sent to -HP] turned out to be Victor Smythe, who became a curator at the Schomburg —

JUDITH RICHARDS: Tell me [his -HP] name again?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Victor Smythe, and it was the Department of Circulating Exhibitions, International and National. He interviewed me and then passed me on to Inez Garson, who's the one who—she went eventually to the Hirshhorn. But she was the one to make the decision, and she was really nice. She was really, really nice. When she met with me, she said, you know, how much she liked me, and they have to legally post the job. Apparently a woman had just quit. She had been there for two weeks and hated the work.

[Audio break.]

Okay, eek. I can't remember why I said—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, you were saying that someone had just quit who had been there for two weeks and hated it.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, yes, Lana Goldberg, something like that, or Lana Goldberg, or Laura Goldberg, I think. So she stayed a little bit longer to show me what she had been doing, and Bill Agee, who was head of Houston's museum, he was in New York, I assume. His wife worked in this department. I'm trying to think. There was a young Armenian woman, myself, and the [person -HP] who's head of the Rockefeller Foundation. Can't remember the names anymore. But anyway, the wife [Mary Lanier -HP] worked there. And then, [Rene] d'Harnoncourt I believe, was hit by a car and killed. He was the director, and the whole thing became, like, after him, corporate.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. When you, going up to '72 and—those—the early '70s, you were starting to talk about the fact that you were spraying through the holes that you had made.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. The water-based paint [with water tension breaker. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: The water-based paint, onto unprimed canvas.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And those canvas works were not stretched on—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Originally, they were.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But at that point, you had taken—yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Eventually, I took them off the stretcher.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The influence there was African art and seeing textiles. They had an African art

exhibition. Lowery, Sims, and I were sent to Africa to different cities to see what was going on [in the arts in East and West Africa. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, I wanted to ask you to talk about that. What brought that trip—did you hear about that trip and apply for it and—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, no. This was—Lowery was at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art], and they were giving her money to travel in Africa, to see what was going on, and I think she was really afraid to go alone. Which, I agree with her after what we went through. Anyway, and she said, "Why don't you ask your museum if they'll let you go?" So there was a woman who was really very kind to me, I think she since has died: Joanne Stern, who was a trustee, and she was head of the International—I can't remember if it was a committee of trustees, and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: I think it's the International Council.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —Council, right. So we were there almost two months, and it was—it was not easy, really not easy, because women are treated really very badly. I remember we had this one experience that was [shocking. -HP] We were invited by the head of the museum in Lagos, to an opera, *Ọba kò sa*. It was excellent.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Tell me the name again?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: *Ọba kò sa*. I don't know how to spell it. And it was really incredible. And so he, the director, volunteered to take us back to the hotel, the Federal Palace. And next thing we knew, [there was a car behind us -HP], and I guess they were going to rape us, because they took us to a house—

JUDITH RICHARDS: This [museum -HP] director was—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: After. The director of the museum—

JUDITH RICHARDS: After he dropped you off?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: After the opera, he said he was taking us back to the hotel.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And he didn't. And—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So he was in—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Cahoots.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —cahoots with [laughs] these—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. And these were, like, heads of Nigerian businesses, and the two of us kept—I don't know what—I think I may have started coughing. She was asthmatic, and we just tried to make ourselves look as sick as possible. [Laughs.] And they stopped, and took us back to the hotel.

But the belief there that women are—you know, I remember there was a woman [Roslyn Walker -HP], an African-American [historian. -HP] She was head of, I believe, the African Museum at the Smithsonian in Washington. And—oh, I can't remember her name, it's been so long. Anyhow, she was married to one of the major Yoruba families, and basically what she was told was, "You have to keep your eyes down, you don't engage in conversation." I mean, it was a total, horrible family. And apparently, there was a—the women who did marry and moved to Nigeria, the children were considered the husband's property. So they were in a dilemma. If they could escape, they couldn't take the children. So a lot of them just stayed. But apparently they helped this young woman, and got her out of the country. The children were not hers, although you know, she tried to get them all out of—you know, affection and that. I mean, it was like—for women it was a nightmare.

I remember we were in our hotel room—the Federal Palace [in Lagos -HP] was about the best, then, hotel. And fortunately [we -HP] had a deadbolt. I mean, we could lock ourselves in. If [we could make -HP] it so that no one could get in. People would come and knock on our door.

And then, I remember in Ghana—they head of the museum in Ghana. He was very flirtatious. It was like they were not men unless they were in control of women. Or relegated them to basically sex and cleaning the house and having babies, and it was very—in fact, I went to a conference—oh, gosh, maybe a couple of years ago, and some African-American women spoke. They had moved to Ghana, and they talked about having a really hard time. You know? And people trying to take advantage of them, men only seeing them as sex objects, and just dishonest stuff they ran into. And you could see how disappointed they were, because—I had not necessarily

idealized Africa as where—some of my ancestors had come from, and I think these women probably had invested—I don't know. It could partly be because these were younger women [—attractive women who were alone and had resources. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I was born in the '40s, and there wasn't that much information. I don't remember seeing, as a child, much information about Africa. So that journey, I had to take without the support of my parents [giving me any suggestions one way or the other. -HP]

Anyway, the trip—let's see, we went to Kenya. We picked up a flight out of London on East African Airlines to go to Nairobi? And it turns out that East African Airlines—and Idi Amin apparently asked or paid for them to pick up some of his diplomats in Rome. So instead of our flying to Nairobi, we got to see Rome, and then they flew to [Uganda. -HP] And that was just after the young people [Peace Corps -HP] had been, or someone had been, detained or thrown out [of Uganda. -HP] And of course, the Indian people on the plane were hysterical, because he [Idi Amin -HP] was, you know, persecuting people from India [who lived in Uganda. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: All I can remember about Uganda: The color of the soil. It was like, [very red. Amazing. My DNA by way of a National Geographic genome study indicated my mother's first DNA (80,000 years ago) was Uganda. So my first stop on African soil was Uganda. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What were the artistic influences of that trip?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I would say, I would say, Ghana—in Kumasi they had a cultural center, and you could see people weaving kente cloth.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And I liked that sort of flowing textile. That changed my work, in terms of whether I use stretchers.

[Audio break.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I was just at the point where I was—remind me what saying.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The influence when you saw kente cloth being made.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, the textile. I took my paintings off the stretchers.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When, at this same time, around that time, let's say 1974, in New York, there were—before in the '70s, there were many artists, including women and African-American artists, who were experimenting with nontraditional approaches to painting, also taking the canvas off the stretcher bars.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you know any of those people? Had you met Jack Whitten, for example?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Not at that time. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Or artists like Ree Morton—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, I did meet Ree Morton.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —or Lee Lozano?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Lee Lozano I don't know, but I did meet Ree Morton. I remember going to one opening—Hesse, *Eva Hesse*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: *Eva*, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Going to [her -HP] exhibition and seeing her [is a fond memory. -HP] The person who was really my mentor, though, was Lucy Lippard because the first show that I worked on [at the Modern -HP]

was a Max Ernst show, for travel, and Lucy was the curator.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was when you first came to MoMA, in the late '60s [August 1967. -HP]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes. So—and we also were born on the same day, except different years. We became friends and she really was my mentor.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So when you think back to the artists you knew at that time, is there anyone whose work—who was also not working on—taking nontraditional approaches to painting, not working on the wall, or not working with stretcher bars, was experimenting with African painting?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: You know, frankly I was such a hermit. I really—it's like I knew what was going on in the museum and in some cases the gallery [world -HP], but not necessarily what artists were doing in their studios. And I think part of the problem was working at the Modern, you never knew who your friend was, in that people would approach you, but it was more about them seeing me as the Museum [and not seeing me as separate from the installation. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you say, "people," you mean artists?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Artists, yes. They're seeing me as the Museum rather than me as an individual. And I understand, within the black community a lot of people actively hated me, because they didn't understand why I couldn't just walk in and buy a lot of, for the museum, works, you know, of African-American artists. And then the women artists—the white women artists were mad at me—I was in Prints and Illustrated Books [department at MoMA]. [Laughs.] I was not in Paintings and Sculpture [department at MoMA]. And even one artist said that I had actively kept her from being purchased by the collection.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Paranoid fantasies.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. They were—well, it's just that they—there was someone—there was a gallery called Just Above Midtown. It was a nonprofit. And the young man [A.C. Hudgins currently a MoMA Trustee -HP] that worked for them apparently went to some sort of event, and he said, "Oh my God, do they hate you?"

JUDITH RICHARDS: Event, where?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was of African-American artists and art historians. But I was not invited. I [was also seen as an "enemy" because at the time was abstract. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So they hated you because you were in what they perceived as a place, a position of power—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —and yet, they thought you weren't helping your fellow African-American artists.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] And the same thing about the women. The white women would come and picket, and say, "You have to come out and join us." I said, "Listen, I need to keep my job." We [the staff -HP] did go out, but as a group. I was in the picket line for two strikes. We wanted a union, and we got one, which was helpful. But still, salaries were really very low. I don't even know how I could have even retired.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you talked about in '72, you were spraying water-based paint through the—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, it was acrylic.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Acrylic through the—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, the templates—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —templates, that were actually made after you punched holes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, I would get—what I did was use oak tag. It first started off as manila folders. I just wanted something that had a little thickness to it. It was basically office supplies [Laughs.] And then I found there was this thing, I've never seen it again. They had it at Pearl, probably.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Pearl Paint.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, where you had a container where you put [in -HP] paint, and you screwed it onto something where you could just squeeze a [top section -HP] and it would spray. It was an aerosol kind of thing. I haven't seen it since. And I did eventually buy a compressor, and I never really used it. I liked the control I had

with the other. And you just layer—layer upon layer. On some of them, actually, I think the Rockefeller Foundation—no, University. They have one [of the paintings. -HP] The Whitney has one.

JUDITH RICHARDS: These are works from the early '70s to mid-70s?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The early '70s, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And these works are becoming three-dimensional, right?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Gradually, yes. There was a dealer, Carl Solway from Cincinnati, and I remember he came to see what I was doing [when I lived at the Westbeth. -HP] And he just simply said to me—I hope I'm remembering this right, "How many spots are on the canvas?" And I thought, "Oh, well, I'll count." So I just ended up—I mean, I didn't throw [them (the circles) -HP] it out. I had bags—you know, a bag of punch-outs. And that's what really started that, it started with the spraying, and then that little push, and then I just got a Rapidograph pen, and then use a nail or a tweezer [or a needle -HP], or whatever to hold these little spots down [to number -HP] and—yes, so.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you talk about the Rapidograph pen, are you talking about when you were writing numbers on the [dots -HP]—so you wrote the numbers—

[Side conversation.]

[Audio break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you said you used the Rapidograph pen on these dots after you had punched them—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —was there a numbering system that you were using? I know that you started this before 1972.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And I think you discussed it in a previous interview, but you were still doing that when we were—where we are now. Was there an evolution over the period of time you were writing numbers, in terms of what numbers you were writing, how the count—[laughs] how you made the count?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, you know [when -HP], I just really drew them. I saw it as drawing. And it started off like, you know, my doing them sequentially, and then after a while I just did anything. You know, in terms of what number followed what. And they were jumbled anyway.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I think now, maybe the first pieces were the flat pieces. I think the Modern has one, where I got—100 percent [archival -HP] graph paper—but it really wasn't—it was from Charette, the architecture [supply store (now closed). -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, the architecture store did have archival. But I noticed when it was on view at the Modern a couple of years ago, it was starting to get brown, the graph paper. But what I used, the glue was acrylic, acrylic medium. You know, for some reason it—I understand it is an adhesive, can be used that way. Yes. And then I don't know whatever got me to sprinkle them. But what I did was, I bought—you know, I had another spray can and that was of a 3M adhesive, and then I would just write the numbering and then I'd just dribble them and spray and dribble and spray a little powder. I think the influence there was a combination of—ah, what's his name? Philadelphia. Du Champ. And there was someone else. Oh—Eva Hesse. Because I didn't like the look of the spray at all, so I just tried—I tried [using -HP] baby powder. You know, just sprinkle it and then blow off the excess. And so it gave it that almost—oh, what's the word for that—not latex, but—it gave it a nice velvety [patina. Recently, the talc in the baby powder is considered toxic. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Again, there's a word for it. It's not latex.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Maybe it will come to you.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. It was—I liked the way [it -HP] looked, and it also meant I had to deal with a nice

framing bill, because they were three-dimensional. I had frames made that were maybe about that deep, [27.3 inches deep. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That—you're showing about an inch.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes. They weren't [as -HP] built heavily up, like most things are now. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Gradually, more and more color came into the work.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That was from the car accident.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, so we're talking about later than—late—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, because my colors were really muted.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Why do you think they were muted?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't know. I really don't know. When I was at Yale, I took a course that was basically Albers' color course, and that made me far more sensitive to subtle color. [It was taught by Sewell Sillman. Albers had fallen out with Yale. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: One could say that there were so many elements in the work at that point that you didn't—you might not even miss the color.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: There was the text, and the drawing, and the dots, and the configuration, and the dimensionality.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I like the dimension. I continued, I think, until '75.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In ['74 -HP] you were starting the television screen series.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Before we talk about that, let me just quickly ask you, in '74 you took a trip to Egypt.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was the purpose of that trip? And [laughs] what was the result?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was a vacation. It was a vacation. There, at the time, were groups that would form and claim they were a group, and you traveled together. You joined a club. The year before I had been to Africa, in general, East-West. And I thought it would be wonderful to see the pyramids. I was supposed to travel with one of the women at the Modern. Her name was Rosette Bakish. She was someone who was very nice to me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Tell me her name again. Rosette?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Rosette Bakish: B-A-K-I-S-H. I think that she was Armenian. She was one of the executive secretaries, and she [was a friend -HP]—right up till the end—she died maybe six or seven years ago. She would send me packets of postcards, because she knew I liked using postcard images. Well, what was strange, but I guess it was meant to be. I appeared at Kennedy, ready to go, passport, ticket. She forgot her passport, so it meant that she couldn't go. So I felt, "Oh, my God. I mean, I don't know these people."

But it turned out that one of the people who signed up for the trip was a young fellow who was working as a librarian at the Modern. So we kind of chummed around, and he knew something about archeology, so it was like having your own kind of special learning. I would say, up until about two years ago, if someone said, "Where would you like to go, if you could go back?" I would go back to Egypt, because it's just mind-blowing. Just to see the artifacts, as well as the architecture. I remember we were near Saqqara, the step pyramid, and I [dug into the -HP] sand, and artifacts just came right up. I found a scarab that was really beautiful. Anyway, and a chunk of something that looked like [a faience -HP] hippopotamus in blue?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: A friend of mine, her mother, Milstein, was working as a curator—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Her name was Milstein?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Barbara Milstein.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Barbara. Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. She was a curator at the Brooklyn Museum [Brooklyn, NY]. Her daughter was working as an intern at the Modern, so I gave her the artifacts that I had sifted up from [the sand. -HP] And [the Egyptologists -HP] really were excited about [the -HP] turquoise fragment. They wouldn't tell me why, but they were so happy about it—they weren't unhappy. It was authentic. But they were more amazed at—it was almost like a triangle, but with the ends clipped off, and it's about a half-inch thick.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So that trip to Egypt was a pure vacation trip.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was really a vacation trip. They still had Tut in his tomb. The place was [very -HP] barren. You'd go down the steps, and there they had [the sarcophagus -HP], gold and all, in some kind of plexi case. He was in his grave. [He is now in the tomb—but the mummified body is shown. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: A friend of mine went to Egypt with some friends, and apparently [there is -HP] corruption [among -HP] the guards. We didn't see that many guards when we were there. But the guards are [now -HP] selling off artifacts. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wow.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And I saw something in the group that I was traveling with. One of the women—people were apparently putting together a section of Deir el-Bahari of Queen Hatshepsut [in our group. -HP] They had all of these fragments out.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Tell me what you said, a section of what?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Deir el-Bahari.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Della?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Deir el-Bahari. I believe that was Hatshepsut's building, [which was -HP] low-lying—her architecture was so different in that period.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: They had chiseled [off -HP] her name—that's the thing [they did -HP], I asked them why [they -HP] chiseled the name off. [Laughs] You know, the cartouches has been removed. [Laughs.] [Hatshepsut was a female pharaoh. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: But anyway, one of the women on the tour—I just thought, "No wonder we're called 'ugly Americans'." She saw all these fragments that the archeologists had laid out, and she just took one.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wow.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: But anyway, apparently according to a friend of mine, they are—some of the guards are depleting the monuments if there are loose sections, or whatever.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you got back after that trip, '74, I read somewhere that that was around the time that you got to know, but correct me if I'm wrong, William T. Williams, Al Loving [Alvin D. Loving], Sam Gilliam, other African-American artists working in New York, or nearby. I know Sam Gilliam wasn't here.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I just—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And how did you do that, since you were working so long, trying to spend every minute you could in the studio. What was the context for your social [laughs]—your abilities to meet other artists?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It's hard to explain. Bill Williams attended Yale. He was in the class after mine, so that's how I met him. And I really don't remember how I met—well, there were meetings of the Black Emergency Coalition.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Where were those meetings?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't remember. [Laughs] I'm sorry.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you picture that they were in someone's home, or in a community center?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't—I don't remember.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And the person that would really have that memory would be Benny Andrews, but he's gone [now—he passed away. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: But I believe I met most of the men at these meetings.

JUDITH RICHARDS: There were no women at the meetings? Women artists?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That I can't remember. Again, I was in a car accident and I [Inaudible]. I really don't remember, but I know Bill was in a class after mine [at Yale. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So I got to know him, and I think the catalyst for getting everyone together [Black Emergency Coalition -HP]—but I don't remember where—like, Benny Andrews and William T. were kind of the [leaders. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Benny Andrews and William T. Williams.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: There were concerns mainly around the Whitney [Whitney Museum of American Art] show. There was going to be an African-American show at the Whitney, and Doty was curating it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Richard Doty [Robert Doty]?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. [Robert Doty]—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Maybe it was different. I'll look that up.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So he was curating this show and there was pressure to reject being in that exhibition?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I've heard that story from one or two other artists.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I mean, there's a side of it that I will not put on tape. But [laughs], okay. I really want to, but I just—I just can't. I was Acting Director of the department [at MoMA -HP] when my boss [was away -HP], and so it meant that I would attend department-head meetings. Oh, I wish I could name names, but I can't. I mean, I can, but I can't.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, are people still around?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: What?

JUDITH RICHARDS: The people who you are hesitant—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, they're all alive. They're all alive. [Benny Andrews died. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Laughs.] No, but what I found is that there was some maneuvering, and I don't know if it was conscious, for some people to tell other people, "Don't do this, don't do that, we'll take care of it." And then they were selling their work behind the scenes. In other words, they were getting rid of the competition, and their work would be that which was exposed, or the curators would see them first, before anyone.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Now, you're talking about meetings at MoMA—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Department head -HP] meetings, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But you were talking about a show at the Whitney?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay. The show at the Whitney did happen, and I was in it. They would say, "No, you can't be in it," whatever. I said "Uh-uh [Negative.]" After that meeting, I realized that they were doing real harm in terms of discouraging people, and I'm going to keep "they" confidential, discouraging people in terms of their being part of an exhibition, and allowing them to step forward to speak for us. And that's when, you know, it was about that time that I found that they had opened the door for themselves.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And they had made it so [that -HP] the competition was basically obeying their orders. And they were making it so—and I don't know if this was conscious or not—so that these particular museums would become acquainted to them [and the others told not to be part of the Whitney exhibition. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you friends with Benny Andrews?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Not real friends. He was just an acquaintance, yes. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Around 1975 or maybe earlier, I was—I've read a couple of different dates—you started to create imagery using the television screen. Using—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Video [drawings -HP], yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Video stills. And could you tell me how you started that group of works, that video drawings series? Where did that idea come up, to use the television screen?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, when I was numbering, it was really [becoming -HP] hard on my eyes. And I think at the time—the reading glasses [we have -HP] now—we can buy for like a dollar, [they -HP] would have helped because it would have magnified [the drawing. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So I found the best way was to [draw numbers on acetate with ink -HP]—I can't explain it. My focal length was always [very narrow when drawing on the acetate. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Very close, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So someone said, you know, "Get something that's moving at a distance." So I bought a color TV. It solved [the problem -HP], except the programs were so terrible. You know, I could do what I was doing, and I could look up, and refocus. I wasn't, like, locking my eyes to it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And I just thought, "You know, this is really not interesting." I had taken a photography course at Yale, and our courses there then, we were all in the same building—the architects, sculptors, graphic [design -HP], whatever. We [learned -HP] black, darkroom techniques. [We were taught by Walker Evan's assistant. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was the thing you hadn't thought of?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, they taught us to put Vaseline on glass, and then hold it or lay it down, as long as the Vaseline is not on the other side. You hold that down, and you push the enlarger down, to try to get whatever image you want, and it makes distortions happen to the print. The print has no Vaseline on it, it's just on the glass. And if you want to, you can mask the edge [of the glass -HP] so you don't, you know, cut yourself. Also when I was a kid, there was something called Etch-A-Sketch, which I think is still around.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sure.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I had one of those. You draw and it disappears. And for some reason, I went out and I bought acetate and acetate ink, and I started—it was out of nowhere. [The video drawings, I connect it for some reason with the Vaseline on glass process. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you were working close up. You started working—you bought a color TV to help your eyes, your eye muscles—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —and dissatisfied with what you were seeing on TV, thinking about your photography skills, you went out and—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I don't know how it happened. I really don't. I mean, I just bought acetate, and I found that acetate will attach itself to the [TV -HP] screen when you turn the electricity on. [It was -HP] the static. So I started drawing. I don't even remember where this came from—arrows and numbers, and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: But you were actually drawing on a piece of acetate attached to the front of the TV.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [I drew on the acetate -HP] while it was not attached.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: You would turn [the TV on and the acetate -HP] would stick.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And where—how did you get the image from the television onto the acetate?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, no, that's really easy. You have a tripod [and -HP] your camera, and preferably a [long -HP] cable release so that you don't need to press the button and shake [the camera -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You took a photograph of the TV screen—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Of—with the acetate—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —printed it on the acetate—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, it's all on the negative.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, so in other words, here's your TV screen, and you have your acetate with your drawing, and there's a certain setting [on the camera that captures the whole image and not the—in some case —diagonal image as it is transmitted -HP]—I was using a film that I don't think you can get anymore. It would then photograph whatever section of the screen, and I would move it around and [I would -HP], click at random. Then I discovered, if I took sections from another piece of acetate, I could just move parts of it around.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Now, this was such a totally different experience than layering of the dots, and the spraying, and the gluing, and all those other things. Do—did you—do you recall there was a feeling of excitement that you were making such a big departure, and using that thin [laughs] piece of acetate as your surface?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Well actually, no. I mean, I thought of it as being therapeutic.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, so a side activity.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: A side activity, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see. You weren't leaving anything, you were just adding—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, it was just something I was doing, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what made you—I know you did a series of these video drawings that focused on different sports. Why that focus?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Because of the action. Because the results were much better. I was photographing, you know, nutty things like *Birth*—well, not *Birth of a Nation*. *Metropolis*—the old *Metropolis*, remember that scene with the woman encircled by rings of light—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: There was a science fiction [piece. -HP] I think the Walker [Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN] has that one. That had a flying saucer in it [Laughs.] [The piece was without color, just black and white. -HP] There's one that showed a kind of spectacle. I can't remember whether it was the Fourth of July, whatever.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And then I would just flip back and forth. I don't think I [worked with -HP] soccer. The

best ones were baseball, but it's kind of interesting, because my father's side of the family, although they've kind of disowned me, they're big baseball fans, which I didn't find out until recently. I had some football. I had ice hockey, motorcycle race [images. -HP] It was the luck of the draw.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And then what were—and then, on the acetate, as you said, you would draw numbers and lines and create a kind of a pattern and movement using these lines.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. [There are arrows and numbers on the acetate. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, arrows. What was in your mind as you were making those marks on the paper? What was your—do you recall? Was it totally intuitive?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was a process. Yes. Totally intuitive.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you trying to communicate something—respond to the image?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was totally intuitive. It was the luck of the draw and intuition.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Kind of like doodles, you mean?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, not quite. I really don't know how to explain it. It was just a process, you know? I showed them mainly in Europe, and they saw it as a kind of commentary on American life.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that a surprising reading to you?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The sports [images are -HP] kind of universal in European countries. [I do not think, however, that they have football. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you think about the fact that these images had a grainy quality that might look like minute dots [laughs]? Is that relating to your previous dots?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Laughs] Actually, no. [I did not think about that. I focused the camera on the matrix of the screen which gave one the sharpest image. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did that occur to you? No?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, no. I hadn't even thought about it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay, all right. So those pieces you were involved in for a couple of years, and do you remember how you decided to end that body of work?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I did do some. I did some when I lived in Japan [in 1981 to '82. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: There were about 13 pieces in the *War Series*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In the mid-'70s, around the same time?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. I think it was in the [mid-'70s. -HP] It might have been later.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I put text on the acetate, like the word, "WAR" in caps, and then behind it would be arrows—[or arrows and numbers. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: I think we're going to—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —and then there would be [skulls -HP] from Cambodia.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Also in 1975, you made another trip at this time to France, to Paris.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] I was in the Paris Biennale.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. How did that come up that you were in the Paris Biennale?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I have no idea. [Laughs] I have no idea.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] And then there was a show called *Five Americans in Paris* that you were also in the

same year.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It was your France year.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: My Paris experience—some of it wasn't so good. I actually did not go to that show. A.I.R. Gallery was invited, and they were sending us over, and I ended up—I had had what they thought was a breast tumor, so I couldn't go. But it turned out to be benign. They thought it was a combination of birth-control pills and I was smoking then, but thank God it wasn't cancer at all. But it meant I didn't go with the A.I.R. group for our show that was in gallery [in Paris . -HP] But there was also another gallery—I think this is the one you mentioned, it's kind of vague for me. And they wouldn't return the work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is the Gerald Piltzer Gallery? This is the one I have the note *Five Americans in Paris*.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: What's the name?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Gerald Piltzer.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I have a friend there, I don't know if he's still alive, actually. He has AIDS. His name's Jack Liesveld. [He was able to get my work back. I had a problem with another Paris gallery—Gallery Entre. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Say his name again, his last name?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Jack Liesveld.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Reesefeld?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: L-I-E-S-V-E-L-D.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Anyway, he was the advertising manager for *Art Forum* and in Europe, he would, I guess, get people to take out ads in *Art Forum*. He was a really, really nice guy, and I told him that they wouldn't send my work back. So he said, "Oh, don't worry about it." He stuck it in his suitcase. He went to them—he's fluent in French and he looks very upper class, I guess—and so he brought the work back to me. And it wasn't damaged or anything. But the French are real hard to deal with. I had another situation where there was a gallery called Gallery Entre, E-N-T-R-E. It was a small gallery, and fortunately I did everything properly. I had a crate built, frames, whatever, and when it arrived in Paris they didn't pick it up because there were certain duties, fines, whatever [laughs]—duties on work coming in that was for sale.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [There were people who -HP] helped me. Pakistani Airlines, I think, is how I sent [the work because I had a person who was very helpful. -HP] I can't remember what the name of the person [was -HP], but it's someone who facilitates [foreign shipment. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: A broker.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: A broker, yes. A broker. I don't know how—I ended up having to go back to Paris. I had to find a place that would store [the crate. -HP] What I don't understand is, they wouldn't let me bring it back then. I had to go back again, some months later, to take the crate with the seal intact, and put it on the plane as overweight luggage. It was so nuts. But then, to make it even worse, this gallery decided—I guess they were afraid. They declared bankruptcy. [They used the same French lawyer that I used. I felt it was conflict of interest. -HP] Sonnabend Gallery stored the crate [for me in the meantime. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sonnabend?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Sonnabend, yes, in Paris. I don't really have a real relationship with them, but Antonio Hermem had been nice to me, so he was happy to take the crate till I could come back and get it. Anyway. So Jack brought the work back [from another gallery -HP], and I decided that after that I just wasn't going to deal with France. [A nightmare -HP]—especially with three-dimensional stuff.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Now, all this time, and shortly thereafter, I guess, you also made a trip to India, your first trip to India. But just stepping back for a second, so there were a lot of major, extensive travels. Was that just in any way related to a sense that you gained valuable experiences for your work when you travelled, or you were simply a lover of travel? [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Both. My father and mother wanted me to do international things. I was a member of an

organization, I think it was called the International House [in Philadelphia. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And they had a summer place. It was sort of based on the model of a kibbutz. I now would not mind how funky it was, [laughs] but I was from—I'm from pink carpeting and [conservative -HP] furniture. Now I wouldn't care, but you know, [the International House retreat -HP] had—I old chicken coops—and you'd sleep there, and you could garden if you wanted to. And they had an in-residence African dance and music group that were really, really good. They were from Ghana.

So my parents—well, my father I guess, partly—he was very curious. And in a sense, he was light-skinned, and so he would get more opportunities. What was interesting was, if for example, he got hired somewhere, he would want to bring along a number of his friends who were darker-skinned, who couldn't get jobs [and they would get the job. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: I'm forgetting, what was his profession?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: His first [degree -HP] was in mathematics [from Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. -HP] He went to Columbia Teacher's College [and -HP] Temple University. He had a master's in I don't know what, and he had studied statistics and, I guess, intelligence testing. He did a whole lot of stuff. It was funny, because I then was getting used to the psychological testing, so he would test me, I'd already practiced. Anyway, he was a very good cook. He was a chef type, and he was very quiet. You never really knew what was on his mind. The friction—I mean, both of my parents were supportive, even though my mother got very jealous as I became more famous. But my father took me to Yale for my interview before I was admitted there. He was [on the board of a -HP] black orphanage.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In Philadelphia?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The woman who ran [the orphanage gave me high end art supplies. -HP] She bought me the best Windsor-Newton watercolors that had the porcelain trays. She gave me a Tensor light. She [also bought me a large -HP] drafting table.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And then, my mother just—I don't know. She just was really jealous. I think one of the things that happened that hurt her a lot, was the family was like a rainbow in terms of color of skin. And her sister, her youngest sister could sit on the first floor [with the whites. -HP] and the rest of the family had to sit upstairs in the colored section. But then, when she was born, some people [thought my grandmother -HP] looked white, so she had a white birth certificate. And that meant, as a Southern person, that she could attend segregated schools. She could attend the white school, and she's darker than I am.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is your—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: My mother.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —mother, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So what she wanted to do—she hated teaching. What she wanted to do was to be a meteorologist. So sometimes, I find, I'm in front of the TV, and I'm watching the Weather—

[Audio break.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —Channel.

[They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Communicating with your mother.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Laughs] Right, right, right. So that's something that she wanted to do. Her degrees—I think one in history and geography, and my father's just sort of a mixed bag, with mathematics. He also became principal of the school in Frederick, Maryland.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In where?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Frederick, Maryland.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Frederick, Maryland.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, and the historical society honored him. I don't even know what date it was, sometime in the 1980s. [He was involved in the 1930s with Thurgood Marshall before he became a judge in the Supreme Court. The case was about black teachers' salaries being as low as white janitors. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: When he was still alive.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Obviously, so you were explaining why you had this interest in travelling internationally, and —

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [It came from him. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And I can understand that. And so you picked these wonderful, challenging—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —places to go—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —including, in 1975, a trip to India.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was—that was the first of several trips to India.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So obviously that proved to be a place that really—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, it wasn't totally positive [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Ah ha [Affirmative].

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Ah, yes, no, it wasn't. It was actually—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you go—that was a vacation, that wasn't under auspices of a museum?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Actually it was a vacation. One of my friends [was from Madras. She has family in Madras. . -HP] She was a doctor at Bellevue [hospital. She was head of neonatology. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What's her name?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Her name is Saraswaty Ganapathy Karnad [Saraswathy Ganapathy Karnad].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay, you may have to spell that [laughs] Sara—

[Cross talk.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Swaty. S-A-R-A-S-W-A-T-Y

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wait, S-A-W-A-T-Y.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Saraswaty. S-A-R-A-S-W-A-T-Y.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Sounds like—spelled the way it sounds. Okay.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, I forgot her name again. Sara—Ganapathy, G-A-N-A-P-A-T-H-Y, Karnad. K as in Kellog, A-R—K-A-R-N-A-D [Saraswathy Ganapathy Karnad]. That's her married name.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. But she was—she's like family. And, she said, "Hey, I'm going back to India to see my mother who is really difficult"—[Her mother was also doctor. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —"We would need to take a family trip—a little caravan of cars. We want to travel around

southern India to look at the places that she had gone to as a child." So I had been in the Paris Biennale and someone had purchased a piece. So I took that money and used it for the trip. It was really a very interesting trip, but—how can I explain this one [laughs], let's see. Okay, we took Pan Am, when Pan Am existed, and we [stopped -HP] all over the place. It was the 24-hour flight. [We stopped in -HP] Tehran, I think Turkey, but I'm not sure. Let's see, Tehran, Dubai, let's see. I kind of can't—oh, I know, Athens. Athens was scary. They came on [the plane -HP] with machine guns.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, a little heavy-handed. But anyway, and then when we got to Delhi, the airport blacked out. [Laughs.] The electrical grid is a little tricky there. And then we had to transfer to a plane to go to Madras. So overall, it was 24 hours. And I didn't actually mind flying in those days. I hate flying now. [On a return from Brazil, the plane's engine was swinging loose on the wing over the Amazon jungle. -HP]

[Audio break.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I dislike flying. I'm actually free of it because I've had some interesting flights [other than the above. -HP] [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: We'll get back to India, because you've made other trips there.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] [I have traveled to Europe including France, England, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Africa, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast (Uganda and Mali by default), Mexico, Russia, Cuba, Japan, Brazil, and Egypt. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it sounds like that was your first experience [non-European -HP] and it wasn't so much about art and visual experiences—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is that, though, the moment when you started collecting postcards?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That's a good point, too. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I read something about that. We'll get—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Japan—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, maybe it was Japan a few years later.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I was trying to [use postcards from -HP] India—I don't think—postcards, if I used any, were either my mother's, or I had [purchased some. Friends also sent me postcards as well as punched dots. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Japan is where I collected the [most colorful -HP] postcards. They had the most brilliant color. [Postcards from India were bleached out because of the intense sun. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay, we're going to talk about that in a second.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Around this time, I think it was, you met the sculptor Richard Hunt—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Chicago sculptor. Was that an important meeting?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was just, I think, the men were getting used to, "Here's a woman."

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: You know, it was not necessarily from New York, and, I mean, people were nice to me. It seemed like—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You met him on a trip to Chicago?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, no, I have no idea when I met him.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: You know, because he might have been going to the meetings when I was showing [Inaudible] maybe I met him through there. I don't know, it was like there was a list of people that, like, I—okay, one of the ways I think I met Mel Edwards, they were friends with my—he and his wife the poet, were—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mel Edwards.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mel Edwards, yes. Sculpture. *Iron Castle* sculpture.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Anyway, oh, I lost the thread.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I was asking about, if it was important when you met Richard Hunt, if that was—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't actually remember meeting him. There was a group of black men artists that were the cream of the crop.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A little older, but born in the '30s.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, and Mel was older than me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't really remember the exact time, but I think a lot of it revolved around the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, whether a person was a member of it or not. I became aware of the names and then the faces—[of -HP] the person showing [such as Barbara Chase-Riboud or -HP] Raymond Saunders?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. [They were -HP] one of the few to have a gallery [in New York -HP.] [Riboud creates sculpture with silver and in long braided strands of silk? -HP] She's in France. I can see the work [in my mind's eye. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It's almost like [very big elegant jewelry using silk and bronze? -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Barbara?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Barbara Chase—.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Barbara Chase-Ribaud. Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. I don't [remember -HP] whether she was with Martha Jackson, whatever. I remember she was really upset, too, because the Modern told me, "Go to this opening," so I went to the opening, and she was very upset that they sent someone black.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wow.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That, coming from a black artist.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, yes, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You have mentioned, we haven't talked about before, but in '76 you did some prints with Solo Press, Judith Solodkin. Lithographs or etchings, or both?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that your first—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I've had work—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —print project?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well—

JUDITH RICHARDS: I mean, besides school.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, you know, I'm not really sure. She did a portfolio on A.I.R. [A.I.R. Gallery] women, and I think—that was the first time I worked [with a master printer. -HP] I don't remember the date of that portfolio.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And then after that the Metropolitan Museum gave me a commission to do a print for them which is still actively sold—[it is now sold out. I was also printed by Solodkin. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that an etching or a lithograph?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was an etching. Yes, it was a mixture lithography, etching [and chine-collé -HP], it was a lot of stuff, [laughs] and it's called *Flight Fields*—

JUDITH RICHARDS: I'm sorry, *Flight*—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: *Flight Fields*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —*Fields*.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It [was inspired by -HP] flying over the grid, that the farmers have between pastures.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [It is a good -HP] print. And I did another one [with Solodkin -HP] and that one was the most popular. It was called [*Kyoto/ Positive/ Negative*. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Also with Solo Press?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: All my printing, most of it, at that point, was with her.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You said [*Kyoto/ Positive/ Negative?* -HP]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: *Momogi* means—it's a Japanese word for trees where the leaves turn really beautifully red, what [the Japanese would -HP] do if a tree does that, they worship it, or respect it. [They put -HP] stones, finding the most beautiful rocks they can, and putting them at the base of the tree. [The color of the rice paper used for *Kyoto/ Positive/ Negative* was the color of *Momogi*. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you enjoy the print-making, was it something that—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I felt a little guilty because I was in a print-making position, and so I kind of felt torn, you know. Should I be doing this? I always wondered how Robert Storr dealt with that himself. You don't see his work around. My boss at the Modern, who was very difficult, was once a print-maker, and John Szankowski [Head of Photography -HP] was once a photographer.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I guess I'm one of the few that actually survived [continuing to be an artist. -HP] [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Putting aside those issues, did you enjoy the process of print-making, or would you rather have spent your time in your studio doing your paintings?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Two different things. Apples and oranges. You know, I enjoyed working in collaboration. The studio is just kind of empty, but—you know then what I used to do is I'd have my music, and initially when I moved in, I didn't have that much stuff. And the living room was totally open. The bedroom was [large -HP]—and so I actually did some of my best work there. I had a loft in SoHo and I did some of my best work there also. [I also has a loft on Seventh Avenue and West Twenty-Eight Street -HP.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Are you talking about the same time as you were doing the prints 1976 with Judith [Judith Solodkin]? When did you had a loft in SoHo? [431 Broome Street, 1993-1987 -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: I mean, is that where you moved after you left Westbeth?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, after I left Westbeth, I moved to [322 Seventh Avenue at Twenty-Eighth and Seventh Avenue—top floor, across from F.I.T. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: In about '76, then, you said, about four years—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It might have been a little bit earlier. It was a 2,300 square-foot loft at 28th and 7th Avenue [13-foot ceilings for \$125 a month. -HP] Right at the Subway stop.

JUDITH RICHARDS: 28th Street and 7th avenue—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was well-located, long before—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Lots of artists there now.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Nobody was there—[very few people. -HP] Which was scary. There was one [other person in the building. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, there were a few artists in the '60s and '70s in that area.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. I shared the building with a guy [named Horst -HP] who is a fashion designer, but he was an ex-Hitler Youth.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A what?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Ex-Hitler Youth.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, great. [Laughs]. How did you find that space?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Through -HP] Bill Majors, his wife, Stedman. Susan Stedman, was working at the Modern at the time, and they had a loft as a result of, I guess, their relationship with this landlord or, what would you call it, commercial space person. I said, "Why don't you see if they have something?" And I mean, I couldn't believe it, we started off at \$125 including heat—seven days a week. So it was really big—I mean, it really had everything I needed—including a dark room where I made handmade paper by pulping down rice paper. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: It had a kitchen and bathroom in it already?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I put in [the kitchen. -HP] Yes. The bathroom was there. I had to put in the shower. [I had to put in a bathroom floor. -HP] I had to put in DC electricity. I mean, the things that were wrong—it had spotlights and all, I put bars on the spotlights. It was extremely noisy. Street traffic, because you had the Subway, you had, you know—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And there weren't that many people, and Horst, as bad as he was, was in the Hamptons. It was really scary—[you could hear people walking on the roof. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was in the Hamptons?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [I do not know. He would vacation there. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Horst. The artist.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Not the photographer. He's a fashion designer.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How do you spell his name? H-O-R-S-T, yep. Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] You first of all had to make sure that the doors were locked downstairs, and the door to the roof. He would get sloppy about that. And it would be scary if [I was -HP] in the building by myself.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I mean sometimes I'd think, "Ah, this is such a mess, what am I going to do?" [I had art stored in the loft, plus had outside storage space. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: How long did you live in the space on 28th and 7th?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I think it might have been about 10 years.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So even though it was noisy and difficult, you did stay—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I had nowhere else to go. [Laughs] And my salary was not that great. I looked around, and I saw spaces maybe the size of half this lobby.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: As a writer, I would have loved it. Actually, the landlord was benign.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Blind?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Benign.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Benign. [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. And when I left, it was \$600 [a month. I was naïve about real estate. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Over the years you lived there, did you find other artists living nearby?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: In time, there was a woman in the building next door. The woman who was the curator [and an artist -HP] at the Whitney, [Elke] Solomon, I can't remember her first name. Anyway, she and her family had a space on 29th street.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Elke.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Elke Solomon.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Elke Solomon.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. And then, there's Zarina Hashmi, who's going to have a show soon at the Guggenheim. She's a wonderful artist. A museum is more interested in foreign black artists, like what's his name, Anatsui [El Anatsui], from Nigeria [for example. I love his work. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Some of the African artists are welcome -HP] because either they don't know the history here, of slavery, or they ignore it and they don't want to deal with it. The galleries feel more comfortable with African artists who aren't part of any kind of group here—[and more comfortable with American Black artists who use negative stereotypes. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: As I stated earlier, the galleries are interested in a black [artists who are -HP] willing to do negative stereotypes. You know, if you're willing to degrade your own people by doing minstrel, [a sambo image -HP] or whatever. I don't know, it's kind of sad—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [This -HP] means the younger artists, I'm thinking like Kara Walker, [some -HP] want to copy her [to be successful. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, there are more and more African-American artists just doing a whole range of kind of work.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Not necessarily—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Yes -HP], but the problem is the galleries, some of them don't want [to show people of color. -HP] They only are interested in a particular kind of work, [if they do. It is getting better gradually. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When we were talking about the loft on 28th, and you lived there for about 10 years, I know this is skipping ahead a bit, but since we're on that subject, where did you move when you left there?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: From there, actually, I had a relationship with someone, and he didn't want to live there, and I, like an idiot, left just as it was being grandfathered. I did all the paperwork for that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Grandfathered to be a co-op?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, grandfathered—the lofts were being grandfathered [so the original tenants can stay and have low rent increases. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean to be legal living? Or to get it to the C of O? Or rent-controlled?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Legal living—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay, legal living. Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And I think that [rent -HP] price stayed down. [I left the SoHo loft in 1987. I lived with that person for about a year or less. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So that was around 1985?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: This would be about—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You said '80—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: '81, '82 [to 1987 -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, Okay, a little less than 10 years [on the Seventh Ave and Twenty-Eight from 1972 to 1982. -HP]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Yes. And let's see, I lived in an apartment on 8th Street, right in the heart of [the Village. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: 8th Street in the Village?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Between 5th and 6th, yes. And it was one of these things where I was just so naïve about people [and how deceitful some can be. -HP] So I looked around and found a loft on Broome Street, on Broome and Broadway—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you remember the address?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: 431 Broome, between Crosby and Broadway. And it was small, [on the second floor. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: A living and working space?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was a legal space, actually.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But, to have your studio there as well—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Everything, yes. And it was legal. But the guy who owned the building [ran -HP] Global Village or something video-oriented. He owned the building. When I came in, the rent was \$1,100 a month, and in four years it was up to \$2,000, because he would raise it \$200 every year. And I thought, "This guy's an artist." So I pestered my parents and they co-signed on [a space (co-op) on Riverside Drive. It is a 3 bedroom. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This apartment where we are now, which is on Riverside Drive—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —around 200th street.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Yes. [Behind the Cloisters Museum. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So when did you move in here, then?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It [was in -HP] '87.

JUDITH RICHARDS: 1987.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you've been here more than 20—25 years, exactly.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. That's scary.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why did you pick this location?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I couldn't find enough room.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You couldn't find enough room?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Enough room. Enough space downtown.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you picked a conventional apartment building and a conventional two-bedroom apartment.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It's a three-bedroom.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Three-bedroom, instead of a loft.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Because I couldn't afford the lofts at the time [Inaudible.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sure.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [It is a co-op and slowly goes up, plus assessments. -HP] My work is selling somewhat, so I have a pension fund from school, and I'm building up my own pension—private pension. So I can stay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: All right, that's great, so we can go back to [laughs] where we were. Just wanted to finish the living situation.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So after Westbeth where you had a separate studio, from then on you were able to live and work in the same space, which must be your preference.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It is my preference [to live and work in the same space—but it is not healthy to sleep and work in the same room. Fumes. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Okay, great. Now going through the '70s, after '75, '76, you continued to work with the punch, with the adhesive spray, with all kinds of materials to build up the surfaces, and at some point—and these were mostly small works. What was the reason why these were—was there just a practical consideration? Or did you love the scale, that you wanted them small.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I liked the scale, but also [I had -HP] the necessity of being able to afford frames. [The -HP] big frames [cost -HP] three or four hundred dollars.

JUDITH RICHARDS: At least, yes. Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And then soon, in '77, you made another trip, completely different place: Brazil.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What did you—[Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That was vacation, really. I had met this young woman at the Modern. [She was from Argentina -HP] but she married, believe it or not, a plastic surgeon doctor. And she wanted me to come down and visit. In this case, being at the Modern was helpful. It was nice to get a phone call from one of the trustees [International Councils' Trustees -HP], just saying "Hello," and "Welcome," [in Brazil. -HP] I have never been so bored in my life.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The problem was, I was staying with more or less semi-upper class.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This was in what city?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Rio [Rio de Janeiro, Brazil]. And there were [armed -HP] guards, a lot of guards around the place in front of [the apartment building. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: They had a very small apartment. I had a guest room but I had the [oddest -HP] experience. When you lie down, you feel like you're upside down. [That could have been because I was in the Southern Hemisphere. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Because it's "down" there [what is up here. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't know whether it's the gravity. It was strange. And all I basically did because they both worked. I would just kind of wander around and go to lunch.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But you couldn't wander around by yourself?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wasn't it dangerous?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No. [I did not feel unsafe. However it would be unsafe now (2017). -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Maybe not where you were.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Now it might be [unsafe -HP] because of kidnapping, but I look Brazilian. What I ran into was people saying, "Speak." You know, "Come on, say it. Speak in Portuguese." And they just couldn't believe that I wasn't Portuguese or Brazilian. But I only stayed there, thank God, about two weeks, and all we did was, go down to a resort, Cabo Frio. I mean, everyone seemed to be obsessed with being able to wear a string bikini, having a perfectly beautiful face. It was strange. It was disappointing. She worked at the museum, but I was never, she never offered to take me to the museum to see—so it was kind of [strange. The people were beautiful because of their mixtures. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you didn't go to museums in Rio?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Nothing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Nothing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, Okay. [Laughs] Cross that off of here.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I was in another culture, and one always learns from that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: This was when my airplane phobia started, because on the way back, it was a Braniff charter. It wasn't a 747. And when the pilot got on, I don't even know if there was a copilot, he tried to get [the plane -HP] started and it reminded me of an old car—[squeaking noises].

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I thought, "Oh, my God." I was sitting next to the window. We took off, and we were flying [over -HP] the Amazon, and I look out and the engine is swinging on the wing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: "Oh, my God." Then there were other people who noticed it too. We were [sure we were -HP] going to die. Amazingly, that plane landed in Puerto Rico for refueling and took off for New York, and the engine [did not fall off. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Continued to move.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —continued to swing, yes. I've had such bad airplane experiences. I was on another airplane—this was maybe 10 years ago, and there was a women's show at the Louisiana Museum in

Copenhagen, and we were sitting at Kennedy. [There -HP] was a really, really bad thunderstorm. Nothing was taking off. You could see lightning on the tarmac. They eventually gave us clearance. We were flying to London on British Air and then picking up another [plane in London to Copenhagen. -HP] So what do we do, they let us go, [to -HP] fly into the storm, which was horrible. And we got hit by lightning. Believe it or not. Some of us saw it, some of us didn't. I was on line, even though I was in the center section, I was on line at the window and it was like, "Boom!" and a bright flash of light, and here we are climbing through it. And I thought, "Oh my God," you know, "This is it. This is it."

JUDITH RICHARDS: But you survived.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: We survived. Then another one was, I think I [traveled to -HP] New Orleans for [the College Art Association Conference. -HP] I don't know when—and they couldn't get the wheels to come down. So the copilot, who looked just like Dr. Spock [in -HP] *Star Trek* pulled the rug up and went down into [the belly of the plane -HP] and hand-cranked the wheels.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Manually.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Manually. And then we were told to get into the brace position as if I was going to [crash. You take off your glasses. -HP] Whatever [Laughs.] Outrageous. Outrageous. I—I—

JUDITH RICHARDS: All right, so [Laughs]—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I have one more story.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: This is about boats. When I took that trip [as part of the experiment in -HP] International Living to Sweden, I stayed with a family. We as a group traveled to Paris. And then I stayed in Paris and took a boat [back to the U.S. -HP] I took the boat back. It was a student boat, so it wasn't that big.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Back from?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: From Le Havre [port, France. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: From Le Havre to New York.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —Paris—France. Yes. And it was all students. And you know, it wasn't Carnival Cruise Lines.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It wasn't—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Carnival.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Carnival [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was probably half the size. And we ran into a [Category 3 -HP] hurricane.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A hurricane?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: A hurricane. We had 60-foot waves, 125-mile-an-hour wind.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Speak a little louder?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Sorry. We had 60-foot waves and 125-mile-an-hour winds.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is off the coast of New England, I guess.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No. Mid-Atlantic. I think it was mid-Atlantic. Because it was supposed to take us five days to get back and it took us eight. [The boat -HP] was turning, up and down, back and forth, I think the fellow, you know, the captain—it's incredible how he knew what to do. Because we could have been rolled over. I went to see the movie *The Perfect Storm*. It was pretty much like that. Plus, there were no life jackets. And I don't think I saw any lifeboats. But it wouldn't have mattered, because we'd have died anyway.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] I don't see any of this in your work.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, but what [I found when I went on a cruise with my father, I would get PTSD flashbacks of the storm. Awful. -HP] I use water [images -HP] a lot in my work. I see it as middle passage, but when I think about it, it's just this trauma, you know. I went on a cruise with my father, and he got sick, so I

didn't really think about where I was. I just had to [take care of him. -HP] And as soon as he was back in form and fine, I sort of sat there and [thought -HP], "Oh, my God [Laughs], I'm on the ocean," and I was totally terrified. It was so imprinted. And it was a perfectly smooth trip. Maybe four foot waves, and I think I'm going to die [Laughs]. So I now can't even take a cruise ship. But the airplane stuff is [stronger. -HP] If I can't get there by train [or car -HP], I don't go.

JUDITH RICHARDS: We'll go back to talk about one more trip at this minute, and that's an important trip to Japan in 1979. This was—must have been soon before you left MoMA.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, there were two trips to Japan. MoMA [and a grant. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is this the first one? In 1979?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. MoMA sent me to escort some [Monet -HP] impressionist paintings—

JUDITH RICHARDS: As a courier?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: As a courier, and it was being shown in one of those department stores. [Exhibitions in Japan occurred in department stores and -HP] were usually sponsored by newspapers. So I think it was the *Tokyo Shimbun* that paid for my way. The flight was fine. And actually, that trip, I was treated like a queen, because I represented an institution, but one thing I learned is they have all of these protocols about if you're the closest to the door, you're of the lowest rank. Which means, if you go into a business, usually the secretary is up front near the door and the boss is way back there. So they did observe that, in terms of when we'd go out. They treated me like a queen. They took me all over Japan. It was really wonderful. But I always noticed I was near the door, and then I realized, well if that's the case, I'm the first one out if there's a fire.

[They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, there's steam, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: They took me to Hiroshima, which I'm so glad they did. It was on the anniversary or close to it. There was a museum they had just opened in memory, and it had a moat around it, of water. It was in memory of the people who jumped into the river, and the river was boiling. [I also went to the Peace Museum -HP]

Well, anyway, the experience was positive enough that I applied for an NEA. You had to apply for an NEA, and then you had to choose the country. I think it was Japan or I think Africa. Anyway, all right, when I [returned to Japan -HP] by myself, it was a whole other story.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what year was that?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Let's see. I had the car accident in '79. Sadly Donald Kuspit was driving, but it wasn't his fault. So they delayed my grant [to Japan. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, I see, 1981—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Was it '81?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, '81, '82, U.S.-Japan Friendship Commission, Creative Artists Fellowship.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. And you didn't go with a group.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were there for seven months.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. [The grant was offered for a year, but I'd have to go half of the year without pay from school. -HP] I used the sabbatical [for the half year. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was after you were teaching.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I'm sorry, go on.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, no. What I found, without the pedigree of a Modern, the way women are treated, the way non-Japanese, because they're not nice to whites, Koreans or anybody. [Laughs] And it's an irony that one of my new people, an intern, working with me, is Japanese, and she's very nice. It's hard to explain. When I arrived, I was staying at the International House in Rippongi, Tokyo. I had to get there on my own. They weren't

waiting for me. I took one of their taxis [from the airport and it took me to the USO. The grant -HP] let me have a tutor in Japanese for the year before, but I'm really bad in languages. Puryear is brilliant in languages [and one of my assistants, Jasmin Sian, is fluent in seven languages. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Martin Puryear.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Apparently he just picks it up like that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I know. And I had to try to explain—of course if you had it in Romaji, or the text that we use, that doesn't mean they'll understand it. I don't know how I turned [the taxi -HP] around, but I did finally get to my destination. At the same time, a Japanese scholar from Columbia University was [living -HP] there. So it basically was a place where either business or academic people would stay. You had to make a choice whether you were going to use your money for travel or getting a place to live where you could do [your -HP] work and really not know anything about what's around you. I decided to use it for travel, and I found at one point someone to travel with who was utterly obnoxious, but it was safer [and less lonely. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And during this trip was when you—the '81 trip—when you collected—when you took many, many photographs.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I took about maybe—I think maybe 3,200 photographs. It's been years. It may have been less.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I've read a couple of numbers, but they were all more than 3,000 [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Three-thousand, yes. And I, you know—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you were doing some work, some watercolor, some smaller—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, I gave those away as thank-you gifts. Lovely gifts. I was kind of semi-adopted—in fact, I need to get in touch with the family. A woman named Mrs. Fukushima [helped me. -HP] Wonderful woman, she looked like she was half-white and half-Japanese. She was relatively elderly and she was the wife of the publisher for the *Japan Times*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you meet her?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: She would hang out at the International House [Laughs], and I don't know, there were some people she knew who were there, and she was just really lonely. She said, "If you want to go somewhere, you want go to an opening"—because actually, the Japanese would reject her because she looked half-white and she could speak fluently, but she couldn't write. [They were -HP] getting nasty and would test her, "Would you write this here?" to see whether or not she could write. I mean, she's an elder, and they're treating her like this. Anyway, so we just—we'd go to openings. I remember I had a pair of shoes made there because you couldn't [get -HP]—my size was too big. Then when I was travelling outside of [Tokyo and Kyoto -HP] I had gotten involved in like a Buddhist group, and I—

JUDITH RICHARDS: A Buddhist group?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: A Buddhist group. I went to their temple by myself, which was at the base of Mount Fuji, and this was—I mean, it kind of sums up the attitude of maybe blue-collar Japanese, or the Japanese in general, I don't know, I have to be careful. I didn't carry a lunch. I assume I knew that there was a place to eat on the grounds. So I found the place, and I walked in. These Japanese—I would call them blue-collar—started laughing. And I was trying to think, "What's that about," What was weird, there was a woman on the train who got off at this stop, and she was having lunch at the same restaurant. And she was the only one that showed any emotion in terms of me. I ordered—I have no idea what I ordered—and someone had taken cigarettes and crumbled it into the food.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The tobacco?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The tobacco. Yes. I couldn't eat it. But anyway, so the way I was able to avoid that happening again was I would carry my own food. I always had my little thing, I had a little boiled egg, and you know, some starch and a piece of fruit. But then, a bunch of grapes was \$15. An apple was \$5. This sounds really strange—when I was ready to eat, I tried to find a graveyard. But the graveyards didn't look like our graveyards. So it didn't, you know, register as "You're in a graveyard." Sometimes there were like little [grave statues -HP] their called jizus when there's a child that they had aborted. I think they may have restriction on the number of children, and so that was the only indication, was a little thing that might have a piece of cloth. And there were benches. So I went in, I would eat my lunch. I remember once there was a young woman—I don't know if we

were the same age, but she was young—and she had a hunchback. Of course they would have rejected her. So she went over and sat on a [bench. -HP] It was kind of touching—on a bench, and we just looked at each other and thought, you know, "hello." [And we smiled at each other and were not so alone. -HP]

I found Japan so cruel. Whites would come up to me and say, "Oh my God, now I know what it's like to be black." [Laughs] Because they said "We can't find employment, we can't find anywhere to live," just in general, you know, just the xenophobic hostility was kind of hard to take. But after a while I decided I was going to travel.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You took so many photographs. Were you taking those continually throughout the time—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I must have.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —and were you taking them because you knew you'd use them for your work?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't know, to tell you the truth. I was taking slides. The place was beautiful. I didn't feel that I could make it more beautiful. And then I just started [using -HP], what are they called, cibachromes—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —which are archival, [and were used for -HP] the ones I liked. Slides have longevity. And this new technology is really terrible in terms of longevity. If you have a disc with your images or you buy a DVD for entertainment, [they last -HP] 20 years at best. They don't last. So in terms of any formal legacy, it's terrible because it means that people who can't afford to change their computer every two minutes or get the newest iPod or who have to look up something on the Web. They [only -HP] have half an hour in the library. It creates class divisions, and it also becomes racial, because more likely, the people who are fired now [are hired last. -HP] But with this new economy, I don't know if that is going to hold up. It separates the white eight percent of the world [who are -HP] white, and that's going to create this huge gap between people who have no money to constantly update and put their history out there, and then [leave behind -HP] a huge chunk of people who have to pay to go to school, where the governments are corrupt—and we're not so nice either. It's sad.

JUDITH RICHARDS: 1979 was a pivotal year, because not only did you take this trip to Japan, but that was the year that you left MoMA and started teaching at SUNY Stony Brook.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That was the year of the accident.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh. Yes, and you had the accident right after you started. Tell me, though, about the transition leaving MoMA and what precipitated—what caused you to think about leaving, maybe even thinking about leaving for a long time. And I know there were the—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: SVA [School of Visual Arts, New York, NY]. I went to an interview at the SVA and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is in '79?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: This would be probably '78 or '77.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And the head of the [SVA -HP] department was a man. When I showed up he [said -HP], "No, no. no." [He said he thought I was a man. -HP] Kuspit was the one [who suggested I apply for the job at Stony Brook. -HP] I saw him that summer, he said, "[We -HP] have a job"—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Donald Kuspit?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. He said, "Why don't you apply for it?" And I got the job.

JUDITH RICHARDS: At SUNY Stony Brook?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] And I got it early enough so I could say to the Modern, "I will be leaving in about three months. If you want me to train someone, I'm happy to do that." And it's interesting, the woman who replaced me, Deborah Wye [later became chief curator. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Deborah Wye?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, she was very nice. She was very nice. But the woman who I worked for, she wasn't very nice at all. The person that relieved a little bit of that [stress -HP]—William Lieberman, when he was

chairman of that department, or director. [He -HP] was really nice to me. [He was -HP] very kind to me. Although he had a reputation of being somewhat tedious [or ruthless. -HP] He tried to take over all of the curatorial departments and he lost. Painting and Sculpture would not deal with him. He asked me to work on the Jackson Pollack resume, which meant that I cataloged the [prints -HP] that he had, and she was furious. Because she, Riva Castleman, was head of the department. Bill had been her former boss, but he then was knocked down from being head of everything to being only head of drawings. And he was very upset about that and eventually became head of 20th Century at the Met.

What was I going to tell you? Oh yes. Thirteen years, 13 years, after I left there, Deborah Wye called me up and said, "Riva wants to know if you have the Jackson Pollack estate stamp at home." I said, "What? I have never even seen the estate stamp. If it was used, it would be the imprint on the back of the print. That is nuts." [After 13 years, she had to call me at home to accuse me of something. -HP]

[They laugh.]

[When -HP] it became the time for her to finally retire and Debbie took over, Debbie did try to integrate the shows. But anyway, there was a big museum-wide party for [Riva -HP], and I wasn't invited, but she invited people whom she had fired. I thought that was interesting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're talking about Riva Castleman?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, ma'am.

[They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So I got surly, and I called her up, and of course got the secretary, I said to the secretary, "Ask Riva am I invited to her retirement party." And the answer came back "not even on the door list." Now, I was becoming more famous, and I think that was part of the problem. She wanted to find something that would wipe me out.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: But I thought, 13 years later—[Laughs] anyway, no, she was really jealous. [I later learned she had dementia. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wow. So you started at SUNY Stony Brook, and this was—seemed like—had you been thinking about teaching as a next step in your career? I mean in terms of supporting yourself as an artist?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, it was the usual thing for graduate school people to do, and I felt it was the only thing that I could do. Unless—I was thinking of applying at the Walker, and then the Whitney—someone from the Whitney said, "Oh, we were expecting you to come here." [Laughs.] But no, I just—I mean, I realized I would have more time, although that was not the real reason. I was just tired of the politics of the Modern [and my bosses' hostility to her staff. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you felt that it would be a more welcoming atmosphere for an artist? And the politics—in terms of an artist working at a museum versus an artist on the faculty—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The artists on the faculty, are encouraged [to continue their art practice. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sure.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But that must have been a good change.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Yes. With the Modern, I had to be very careful, because some people wanted to offer me things in return for—I remember one woman, can't remember the name of the gallery—this might be early '70s—offered me a show with Joyce Kozloff, and then she started talking about how she wanted to introduce her work and whatever, so I had to be very careful as [she was -HP] a dealer, I had to be very careful with that. And also I had to be careful. If you go to an opening, it's [as if you're MoMA -HP], you're not yourself.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Right.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And it can appear to be an endorsement, which then people would build their hopes on.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It must have been a huge relief to leave all that—

[Cross talk.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was, yes. But I think the thing that was saddest for me was that [there -HP] were people who were really friendly who were not really.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see. Who were very friendly when you were employed by MoMA, but after you left they—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —weren't there.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you find, though, that you entered into another, more welcoming, supportive community of artists who were on the faculty at SUNY Stony Brook?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, see, I didn't have much time between starting there and the accident. [I teach two days a week and there is a long two hour commute. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Started off, would have been October—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —started in September.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So eventually, I imagine, there was a community, but—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I ran into hostility among men in the department.

[Audio break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Howardena Pindell at her home studio on Riverside Drive in New York City on December 4, 2012, for the Archives of American Art, disc two. Howardena, I wanted to start with the video you made *Free, White and 21*. Tell me you came to decide to do a video, and then, how you developed that piece.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well it seems as if—I'm not a video artist. I get ideas, and the medium—I'll change the medium. My standard medium is acrylic, and the only form that I [worked in was -HP] video. What motivated me? I was in the women's movement and I was kind of tired of the exclusion aspect of the women's movement. It seemed—I was a member of A.I.R., and it seemed there was a great divide between the women who had husbands, so that they could do their work if, indeed, the husbands supported them, and those people who had to work, maybe even [had -HP] two jobs.

I just thought about it. Some experiences that I had had that [were -HP] sort of bottled up in me like the minister who wanted me to literally meet him in New York and play. I didn't put this on the *21* tape, but I had had my hair cut before. Where did the Bush's go in the summer?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Kennebunkport [Kennebunkport, ME]?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Kennebunkport, yes, and it was this sort of upper class thing. They were mad as hell that I cut my hair because I had more of an afro. It was kind of curly. They were really upset. Well, my friend who was getting married was the one who was upset about it. One thing, actually—I should [have -HP] brought in the tape. There was a woman who was a guest at the wedding, and she came up to me and said, "Now, you can tell me what you really do at the Modern." So yes, yes, I was fed up. [Laughs], and also—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So this was, yes—this was what, while you were still working there, that incident?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. So I just, you know, it just got bottled up, and I had had the accident. I was in the [backseat of a VW bug. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Car accident.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Car accident, yes, and Donald Kuspit actually was driving, but he—it was not his fault. A woman drove across the median strip into oncoming traffic, yes. And he was [slowing -HP] down, but we were in a Bug, a VW Bug [on 347th and Nicholas Road. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Could you move your chair just a little bit?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Sure.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A VW Bug, well, that doesn't offer a lot of protection.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It doesn't [Laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were thinking of creating a video work, were there video works by other artists, women, or men, that it was kind of inspiring, or made you think about doing one yourself?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-mm [Negative.] I hated video. How can I explain it? The video that I had seen before that I felt, might fall into the same category. It was very narcissistic, kind of, self-absorbed. I think some of the videos that came out of the west coast were interesting, although I saw them more after the fact in that new thing that came up: *!Women Art Revolution*. Leeson was the producer. There was some very interesting [stories and pieces -HP] on that. My favorite is where—I think it was in black and white even, where a young woman is in the kitchen and she's chopping up everything.

And then, I can't remember the artist, I think it was Faith Wilding, something like that, about waiting. I can remember this whole thing about you had to sit around and wait for him to call, and the agony of that. Mine ratcheted—well, it was ratcheted up a bit more because I think most of the people [had been -HP] interested because I was at the Modern, or they wanted to experiment. They wanted to sleep with someone black, and I was basically, you know, you know, you know—anyway, in a funny way although I had to come up here, come uptown because the loft downtown was getting too expensive, in a way, this has kept me out of the mainstream in terms of your basic predators, but I don't work for the Modern anymore, so, you know, I'm not of any use at this point.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you—when you were planning the video, did you make story boards? Did you plot how many minutes long you wanted it to be? Did you sit down and write a, kind of, an outline of which incidents you would discuss?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I didn't write it down. I just had it in my memory.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you decide it was enough then to stop?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: We had a lot of film. We had a lot of—what do they call them, outtakes? There is original tape and I don't know, we might have had an hours' worth, or 45 minutes worth, and then we just went in and edited. Basically—I think her name was—oh, God, so many years—she was the one that got the camera crew and it was one of those things, like all of a sudden everything was there that you needed. Oh, I know, Marina Lino—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Marina?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Marina Lino or something like that. It's on the, on the tape, you know. I thank her. And it was an all-woman camera crew. She was part of—there was something down[town -HP] in a firehouse down near Leonard Street and that's where this group, they were non-profit—

JUDITH RICHARDS: A woman's collective?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, no, it was men and women. She was Latino and I think her crew was two white women. The only problem we had with taping in my studio [which -HP] was really high. It [is very -HP] quiet up here, but the noise level [on 28th Street and 7th Avenue] was almost unbearable [Laugh.] They were able to cut out as much ambient sound as they could.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Uh-huh [Affirmative.] You, you said you were provoked to do this by the kind of situation you felt you were in, in the art world, in terms of the women's movement and feminism, and not—how did you decide which incidents in your life, and you had to only select some—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —you would pick what you thought would fill the need you felt that was propelling you to make the video? What—because you picked some incidents from your childhood. [I created a second video called *Rumbling About War/Colonial Atrocities*. -HP]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —you picked incidents that wouldn't necessarily have to do with being an artist.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you remember the process of selecting from your memory which to include and which to —

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I think—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —put aside?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't remember writing anything down. It was just that there were certain things that happened to me that were so highly charged that I just started talking.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You thought those would be meaningful, [and -HP] would help people understand your situation?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, yes, but it's interesting—there's a twist to it that I never thought of. One of the artists, I think it was Camille Billops—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: When it was shown in New Jersey, the Black Guards were angry at it, and the reason was that they felt I was putting down black women who used blonde wigs. I know, to me that was really strange.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because you had, you were—you had this persona of the white woman listening—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —with the wig on.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When it was presented for the first time, I believe at A.I.R.—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —and Ana Mendieta had something to do with—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: She directed the show [*Dialects of Isolation*].

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it was part of an exhibition?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was—yes, it's the first time that I ever showed the tape. And I had a metronome that ticked all through it. Then, I had to exclude [the metronome -HP] because it would get lost, broken. It's too expensive to replace. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What part did the metronome play in your mind for the piece?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Kind of hypnotic, relaxing, it sort of ticked—and time, you know, but it was just I couldn't afford, you know, to keep—every show, someone [might -HP] swipe it. In fact, there was one show—it was at Cleveland, I believe—Cleveland Institute of the Arts, where someone actually stole the tape.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Stole the tape?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, there was a big conversation actually in the school as to whether I should have a show or not, and it was both a faculty and student conflict. The fellow who was in charge [of the Salle -HP] I understand, I hope my memory serves me well here, he was threatened. They threatened to beat him up. Someone stole his camera equipment. I was getting heckling calls here [in N.Y. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that the show Ana Mendieta put together for A.I.R., or a different show?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, not the show that you were interested in, [but my -HP] traveling show, but I just brought it up because it was the tape that someone had stolen.

[Cell-phone vibrates]

Uh-oh.

[Audio break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were talking about the presentation in Cleveland. Coming back to the presentation in

New York at A.I.R., it's first—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. [The second place it was shown was Franklin Furnace. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —what was the reaction? Was it surprising to you? Was it gratifying? How did you feel about it?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: People were angry about it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why were they angry?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: There was a video done about me through a private [producer/artist who -HP] videoed a [series of black women artists. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: The video that's called *Atomized [Atomizing Art]*?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It's now in DVD [and was used in museum stores and shown on United and Eastern Air Lines. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You said that it made other artists, white [women -HP] artists angry.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. [One white critic asked me to remove it from my one person show at Cyrus Gallery on 57th Street. I won the CAA award for that show. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And I asked you why do you think that is?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't know if I understand all of it. I think part of it was I was standing up and [questioning the art world. -HP] There was something Lowry said had to do with looking at someone black. There was something about my presenting myself that they felt [uncomfortable with the image of a Black person in the public domain of the art world. -HP] Maybe I called myself intelligent—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Antagonistic?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, no, not antagonistic—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Confrontational?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Maybe that. There's a word for it. Defiant? Because I remember I [received -HP] a message through the grapevine in the women's movement that I should be more "cooperative." Then there was a woman at A.I.R. [one of the founders -HP] who—she still says it, but it comes back to me, that I "don't know I'm black."

JUDITH RICHARDS: You don't know what?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: "That I'm black." I guess she felt that I had too much.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you have any direct conversations with people about the film and their thoughts and your thoughts, a conversation about it?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Actually, no. The next place it was shown was the Franklin Furnace and they were charging people I don't know how much to get in and I said, just don't give me an honorarium, just let them in [free. -HP] Because I was one of these visiting artists gigs, I forget where I was, it was so long ago, but anyway—and people were really upset, i.e., white [women -HP] were very upset.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you think about doing a second video?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Actually, no. The one that I wanted to do was more about animal rights, and I just didn't think I could handle the lawsuits because they are [suing people like Oprah Winfrey for being critical of the beef industry. -HP] I give my money to Doris Day who is involved with legislation of animal rights. I wouldn't be able to personally handle the industry coming down on me after seeing what they did to Oprah, you know, she came out publicly against beef. I wanted to have people eating breakfast—an image and then flash images of the slaughter house and [the abuse of animals. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean eating something like bacon.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Bacon, hamburger, where as much as you show—one of the things that really drives me

crazy—I can't eat lobster. Can you imagine being boiled alive? My father was very much [aware of some animal issues. -HP] He liked [and appreciated -HP] animals a lot, so that kind of brushed off on me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Are you a vegetarian?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No. [God knows I tried -HP] four years and I just wasn't doing the balance correctly. I started to feel weak. My knees were weak. I wasn't getting enough B-vitamins, so I slowly went off of it, but I do like vegetables a lot, and I wish we could survive on just eating carrots.

[They laugh.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Anyway—

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you finished—when you completed the film and you showed it, was there a difficult transition time getting back to your—the studio work that you had been doing? Did that film prompt to change the way in which you approached your work?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But it did provoke you to do—to start in a series of paintings and drawings, or works on paper that focused more on autobiography.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That's actually because of the accident. Because [one moment -HP] here I am in the back seat of a car, and I wake up in an ambulance. I had some weird—I think it was probably just brain chemistry, where I experienced the other side of the road and seeing the crash, and also saying something to Kuspit, you know, "What happened?" I mean, this is probably all the brain hallucinating, you know. I was in the back seat and it was hard because they don't have double doors, so a policeman actually got me out of the car and I've suffered encountering a lot of racist policemen, so I'm amazed I survived it. They were afraid the car would blow up, and then there were people watching. So all of a sudden in my work, I started to put eyes as witness. Just—

JUDITH RICHARDS: How else did your work change? You said eyes—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, because I realize you could be gone one minute—here one minute, gone the next, so I wanted to look at things that I felt strongly about. I have [punched out -HP] the dots. I really started collecting postcards, and earlier [in the mid-1970s -HP], I was playing with the postcards and made some collage pieces, that I actually gave away to friends.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're showing about six inches by six inches—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I would say about postcard size or file-card size. It just happened. I started working. [A lot of my work in the 1970s started with play. My current work involves research. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [I worked -HP] with a split image and abstracting the cards [by cutting them and using fragments in paintings. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [I abstracted sections of the postcard embedding them -HP] in paintings and then I used the cards after Japan, that's when it really hit because their printing was really incredible [and high quality. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were putting the cards on canvas—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was a photo emulsion process. Not photo emulsion.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, yes. On the—some of the later works, it—you're putting actual photographs, but then—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, they're not actual photographs. They're postcards and photo transfer. Its polymer photo transfer, that's what it is. [I also had my slides and photographs from my travels turned into cibachromes. The black and white negatives were printed in black and white, split and painted in-between. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes, you use that term.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So there's a way you can cover an image, but leave some of the printing processes and this allows you to cover them with layers of acrylic. You have to let it dry. Then you take a warm bowl of water

and you put the—whatever you've covered in [polymer. -HP] Then you remove the paper from the back. You end up with a kind of film. So it was nice because then you could press it into the weave of the canvas. It looked like it was part of the canvas.

JUDITH RICHARDS: At some point, you were starting to cut strips of canvas. What was the process? How did you evolve from working on a—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —traditional piece of canvas, although, not traditional in the sense of being stretched. It was just tacked up on the wall when you were working, I believe. You started to cut strips, and also then you had created a kind of basket, a weave—a woven sort of effect by cutting the postcards, or the postcard imagery. How did that all get developed?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Because of the -HP] the head injury, I felt fractured. I was trying to put things back together again. What I would do is cut the postcards, leave a gap, and then try to link the images so that they're just kind of a little weird. It's interesting, a student of mine, I can't remember whether she fell or whatever. Her painting arm that's been injured. She's been doing the work where she cuts strips. She isn't necessarily seen my work, and she said, "Actually, yes, I'm feeling like I've been fractured." So it's interesting, that may be just the reaction to the trauma is to cut and try to [create -HP] a new reality.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —in other words, you make it something else [slightly off from its original state. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And in one of the films I saw, you were very meticulously painting the space between the strips—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —adding to that other reality.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Also I read that at one point you said you [were -HP] creating works with strips of canvas—sewn strips of canvas had something to do with being thrifty because canvas costs a lot.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Hm. I don't really remember that—[but I was thrifty in general. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That you were putting pieces together instead of buying a larger piece. I didn't quite understand that.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, I—That's interesting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, you were sewing—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. [This started in the late 1970s, I believe. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —certain works in the '80s. You were sewing the canvas.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, I was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what did—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —cutting it into mazes, and all sorts of things [—configurations. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what part do you think that played in your work that you—the sewing of the canvas?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, maybe it brought back memories of home. I took, when I was young, classes in sewing from the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Years—in the '40s, '50s, probably '50s. I like the process of sewing. I used to make some of my own clothes when I worked at the Modern because the pay was so low. I couldn't afford clothing, so I would make my own. I liked the way [with my paintings -HP] it would sort of give it an odd shape [—an off-kilter shape. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sewing would give the work an odd shape?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, because you wouldn't get this perfect rectangle. It would be [slightly off. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —and I needed to take it off the stretcher to allow it for it to breathe and, kind of, change shape, I suppose [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A kind of asymmetry, if I recall, most of the corners are curved, not straight so you would—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you feel that throughout the time a kind of evolution? Do you recall what you were searching for? What the questions were that you were asking in those works?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay, the works that were abstract were process [pieces. -HP] It was just the process of making the piece that was important. The autobiography series itself just grew out of my nearly being killed [in a car accident. I had a number of close calls. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So I thought I should put out there what I feel—what my opinions are. I don't know why I needed to do that, but anyway, one of the earlier paintings, because I had been traveling a lot, was about wife burning in India [the custom of Suttee. -HP] I became really more acutely aware of it. Apparently, it continues in small towns—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [It also happens -HP] if the wife's family cannot provide a big enough dowry. I just kept thinking about it when I was traveling in India. I've been to India a total of maybe four months. Five months—four months—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: This piece was about—if you went to a Hindu temple and you saw hands that had been carved, those were the women that were burned to death. They trace the hand, and it's interesting because now a lot of hands are coming into my work. I'm cutting the hand shape out [for a piece about Columbus and his cutting of the hands of the indigenous Indians (Tainos and Arawaks) in San Domingo. King Leopold of Belgium did the same thing to the men of Congo who would not work for them. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, and I recall seeing many hand shapes in the autobiography paintings in the '80s.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And also images of your face.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That was something that always had made me really mad because they didn't want to look at my face, that's not how she put it, unless I suppose [the face -HP] fits into some kind of stereotype, but she—I remember—I think it might even be on the tape, the [Inaudible] about—and her—during the interview she may have mentioned that people were really angry. But the irony is that I got an award for the best show of the year. So it was kind of an irony. It seems as if what I run into is a lot of resistance in the commercial-based art world, and a fair amount of support in the educational because most of my shows are not in galleries, they're in educational institutions. [This has changed since I became represented by the Garth Greenan Gallery in New York City. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: University art galleries.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: In 1986, you did a painting called *African Buddha*.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh my God, it was so long ago. All right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It was what?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That was so long ago. Was it 1990?

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] But it, it—somewhere I mentioned that you remarked that you were a practicing Buddhist for a while.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: For a while, yes. You know, I just was interested in comparative kind of religion and—oh, goodness, yes. It was a Buddhist organization out of Japan, and I did go to Japan on a grant [and -HP], toured for about seven months, and I got really turned off by the way women [were -HP] treated, even in this sort of [Buddhist -HP] organization, which was much more liberal here. And I think maybe the thing that turned me away completely, I went to a—I think I mentioned this before—I went to what was called a head temple, which has since been destroyed because of in-fighting within the organization, and I didn't bring food. I should have carried my food. I went to one of the local little restaurants and there were these men who were, like, blue collar whites—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, you talked about this yesterday, yes.

[Cross talk.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —and how they put tobacco in my food.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So that really [was a shock -HP] because it was on the [Buddhist -HP] temple grounds.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you weren't practicing as a Buddhist for very long?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, no. Meditation actually, is not great to [practice. -HP] For a while after I left that organization, I was talking on occasion with Dr. [Margaret Singer from Berkeley, a specialist in "cult-ic" groups. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: With what?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I was talking occasionally with Dr.—the woman who's the famous anti-cult psychologist—Margaret, Margaret Singer, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: She's since deceased. She said a lot of people who do too much meditation have certain neurological problems.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you recall, I think toward the end of the '80s, you started cutting up your own photos rather than—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —postcards. Tell me about that transition.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, the reason why was because the postcards had a limited scale, so that I could—when I cut up my own photos, I could have the print made a specific size. It gave [me -HP] a little more leeway. Japan had beautiful postcards, so I took home a [batch of them. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] You also at some point in the late '80s, there was a major painting, a big painting called *Autobiography Water Ancestors Middle Passage Family Ghost*, where maybe not for the first time, you traced your entire body on the canvas and that would appear in different positions on the canvas along with other elements in kind of a floating space. What brought you to put your body into the painting?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, there were a couple of things. My body was part of the sati painting about [Indian women being burned alive, plus C5560 (How dare you question). -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: My body was in the—[I traced my body. I started tracing my body after the car accident. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Let me see which painting. Oh, suttee. *Fire: Suttee*. That's 1986, 87, okay.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And then the piece, *Who Do You Think You Are? One of Us?*

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Let's see what date was that.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No.

[Audio break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were talking about the figure, so it started in the '80s, late '80s. Do you remember—I mean, you had already put your face and hands and arms, what about the body?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I think what it was, was unconscious memory of mine in India and the tracing of the body [and the accident and also the tracing of the body at a crime scene such as Ana Mendieta's death. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean the crime scene?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —over the crime scene, yes, because [Ana and I -HP] were friends.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's a powerful image.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes, so I—I used that a lot, [Laughs] or had up to a certain point. Now, I don't use it. However, [there was -HP] one painting—One of the reasons why I stopped working that way is I found there were "premonitions" in the paintings. For example, I've been one of the people [who have -HP] been [Inaudible] against Kara Walker, but in 1990 before Kara Walker had been heard of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I would lie down on the canvass, and just use my arms, my head. I lay down and traced my head and it looked just like a little boy. And I painted it all black. But it wasn't, what would you call it, minstrel, it was just a silhouette. There was no emotional charge in it. And it was freaky because I don't look like [Laughs] a little boy. But when I did the tracing, it came out like a [profile of a -HP] child's head. Now the Studio Museum actually owns that painting. Then [it is titled scape goat and it was painted in 1990, seven years before I had even heard of Kara Walker. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you remember the title of that painting?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: *Scapegoat*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Pardon?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: *Scapegoat*. [Collection Studio Museum in Harlem, 1990 -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh. Oh, yes, I think that's—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was actually originally done for a show which was about child abuse. And the curator died of AIDS, so the show fell apart.

JUDITH RICHARDS: *Scapegoat*, that's 1990.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes. Anyway, so they had to just basically let go of all of the out-of-town loans, for a show that was supposed to be in Florida. So I just continued with the painting and made it about my being used as a scapegoat, [about -HP] symbolic others, also. Another thing that was in the painting that was this weird, strange blue thing. I can't even remember what it was. [It looked like a student print that was executed five or six years later. Also there is an image of me as a child holding a ball—i.e. a circle. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And I had had trouble with a parent who was stalking me at school. His father had filed a grievance against me because I would not give up his son an A-grade so that he could get into medical school. The father basically stalked me.-HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: A what? A parent?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: A parent. Yes, he wanted his son to get an A[-grade. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: No, I'm thinking of the bull's eye in the painting. That's not what you're talking about?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-mm [Negative]. No, this is hard to see unless you see the painting. Painting is 1990, this fellow's father came after me couple of years later—what is it later? Yes, it would be later. He was an art teacher from Long Island and he said that he was going to expose me in the press, drive me out, you know,

whatever; that I had no right to talk about race or sexual preference to anyone. It was all really ugly. So I got an attorney. It was just awful. But, what was interesting was when his son graduated, that blue section [of the painting -HP]—he'd never seen the piece [in *Scapegoat*. It showed up as his work. He got one of the purchase awards. -HP]

So it just sort of creped me out that there were these premonition aspects in the painting. I started to back off, and looked at themes outside of myself. I don't like that. I don't want to be like that, a soothsayer [Laughs.] It makes me very nervous.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Hmm [Affirmative.]. Around that time when you did *Scapegoat*, you did—you started working, I guess, on a commission in Phoenix?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that a commission that you applied for or someone recommended you, or—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [I was recommended by my gallery at the time in Atlanta. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —how did that come about?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —the dealer whose gallery I was in, in Atlanta, [was the -HP] David Heath Gallery.

JUDITH RICHARDS: David what?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Heath Gallery, H-E-A-T-H, but he has since died. He submitted my name. And so I wrote up a proposal and sent it to them. I was very interested in astronomy, and that Phoenix or Arizona is where people go who are astronomers to see the sky without a lot of street lights. You know, without ambient light.

So I wanted to do a sky map, something like that. And they said, no, it was too esoteric. What they wanted me to do was images of the area that people might want to take home as a memory, They paid to have me driven around to take photographs of Phoenix, and we went to Tucson. We went to an archeological site, an indigenous cultural center, etc.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I wanted to represent all of the different groups that were there. And it's interesting because when it was installed, I had a really big seal that was for the Pima, Maricopa Reservation.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sorry, a what?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Pima, P-I-M-A, Maricopa.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]. Maricopa is the county.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And, I remember there was some white, blue-collar workers in the airport. And they were very upset that I included anything that has to do with the [indigenous nations. -HP] I wouldn't take it out.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is—just to put it on the record, this is a commission from the Phoenix Arts Commission, from the City of Phoenix, for the Sky Harbor International Airport.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, actually, for the past couple of years, it's been covered, and I just got the letter from them saying they have uncovered it. Homeland Security wanted to set up all of its equipment there [and that is why they covered it up for a few years. -HP] They didn't want to get damaged. So they rolled it in. I just [received -HP] the letter last week saying that it's now available to be seen [again. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you decide what materials to use for that? I mean, it's a big, kind of a collage-like—includes many images from your photographs. What is the medium? Is it mosaic?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It's [made of -HP] Venetian glass.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [It was fabricated near Venice, Italy by Crovato Mosaics. I heard about him from the artist Joyce Kozloff. -HP]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well—Crovato. Crovato.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Can you spell that?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: C-R-O-V-A-T-O.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Okay.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yonkers was his base, but he would fly back and forth to Italy. The mosaics were fabricated in general. There was a town called Codroipo but, anyway—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Can you spell that [Laughs]? Say it again, I'll do—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Codroboi [Codroipo]? Something like that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: All right, well we'll put it—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was near Venice.

[They laugh.]

Apparently what they did was [fabricate it from my -HP] very meticulous maquette painting of the images, I would just take fragments of photographs. I [made -HP] a tracing, [also. -HP] How do I explain that? It's been so long. Anyway, basically [I made -HP] a painting for them to work from.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I guess they gridded it off, although the sections weren't exactly grid-like. And then they just parceled it out to different artists that worked in the workshop. They had a lot of space but it was like putting a puzzle together. When it arrived, I thought "My God," it arrived in crates that would maybe be [5 feet x 6 feet x 4 feet? -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did they—they had the color accurate because they matched your paintings?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, they would match the color and have glass poured [in Venice -HP] to match the color. And then it would just depend [on hammering the glass and piecing it together like a jigsaw puzzle. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were there, I assume, when it was being installed?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Yes, -HP] I was there when it was installed. That's when I got the comment about the indigenous [should not be included—comments made by white, male, blue-collar workers. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Uh-huh, uh-huh [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I did go to Italy and I saw [it in -HP] process. A friend, [another artist, went with me, [Russel Etter—since deceased from cancer -HP] which was nice [Laughs]. And everyone was very [friendly. -HP] Kurt Crovatto and his assistant seemed interested in doing more work with me, but the thing is the economy wasn't so strong. [Public art commissions at the time could not -HP] afford \$85,000. I might have gotten \$10,000 [pay from it. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —maybe \$20,000, but I think it was \$10,000.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Because you would be given money to parcel out to a sub-contractor. [You also must pay a lawyer to write up a contract for you with the commissioning organization and a contract between you and the sub-contractor. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you pleased with the results?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, it was beautiful. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You also did the commission that you mentioned in Queens.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That's the painting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The Courtroom, The Courtrooms, where you took pictures in Queens—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [No, it was in the *Social Security* [building—a commission using photos of images from Queens for large paintings. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: *Social Security*, that's right. Where you did the same process of taking photographs of the neighborhood—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, but [it was a large painting for the lobby of the Social Security building in Jamaica, Queens. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, and it's inside.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That seemed to have been very well received.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, that was my first commission. And it was kind of a painful one because I remember Mel Edwards and his wife, [who told me at the first meeting for the commission that Ana Mendieta had died (murder?) the night before. They were scheduled to meet Ana for dinner, and she never showed up. This is when I found out she was dead. It was all black artists who were given commissions for the Social Security building project. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. So Mel [Edwards], I remember, and Jayne [Cortez] came in for a [commission -HP] meeting or just before the meeting. What they said was that Ana had been killed. She was supposed to have dinner with them, and she didn't show up. Apparently everyone thinks that Carl Andre killed her.

Now in terms of, the premonition side of things, after the accident, when I was a little more mobile, Ana and Carl Andre took me out for [my birthday -HP] dinner. Well, Ana and I had one of these friendships—by then she was traveling to Rome, [I believe she had a prix de Rome. -HP] She was doing really well. What I thought was interesting—I'll try not to lose the thread—Before she died, the white women in [art -HP] critics were brutal against her work. As soon—yes, yes, the dinner.

This was at One Fifth Avenue. I remember it really clearly. Carl was on my right, Ana was on my left. Now, I was extremely sensitive at that point. [I had had a head injury—a concussion and a hip injury in the accident. I had one leg higher than the other and had to use a cane. -HP] And I remember, just a flash through my mind: He's going to kill her with his hands. And then I thought, "Oh, I can't say that to anybody [Laughs] about that. They'll think I'm crazy." You know, and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What made you think that, do you say?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I have no idea. It was out of nowhere.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How far—much ahead of when she actually died did you have that thought?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, no, I didn't know. The accident was in '79, and she always did something for my birthday, or there was communication around my birthday. I don't remember. But it's another thing I don't—the oracle side, I don't [want -HP] that. I don't like anything about that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] After the commission was finished in Phoenix, were you eager to do another commission? Where you actively seeking out other commissions?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: They were offering more public [commissions -HP]—you just looked online or they would send out mailings. [When the economy became slow, there were fewer commissions. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Lehman College [Bronx, NY], actually approached me. [I went -HP] over to Lehman and just take a lot of photographs, and then eventually put it together into a painting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Where is that painting now?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: They had a new gymnasium at the time. And so it was installed [there -HP] in the gym [and was a glass mosaic—8 and a half x 18 feet large and was fabricated by Crovatto Mosaics in Italy. Crovatto also fabricated stained glass windows. I would love to create a stained glass window. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is it still there?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh yes, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it sounds like basically you had rather positive experiences with public commissions.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, I—I've run into artists who try to cut corners. And they ended up having to do things over again. I wanted perfection with this. And Corvatto is totally perfection oriented [Laughs.]

"You've got to get it right." And he was just the kind of person—for example, who lived in a modest apartment with his wife in Yonkers, but drove a Jaguar.

[They laugh.]

He would lease a Jaguar, and when you got in the car, like, "Don't touch anything." He was one of those [who says, -HP] "This is—this has to be impeccable." But he's really reliable.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I was going to ask you, if we go back to the autobiographic paintings—one last question. When I'm imaging them, I'm seeing your face and the body and different elements floating in a kind of space. The surface has a kind of a texture that you made with, I presume, acrylic, a kind of an allover dream-like kind of texture—my characterization. How did you come to that particular kind of surface treatment? Was there, you know, what were you after and how did end up—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: You mean the—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That kind of allover pattern, as it were, a kind of a textile-like pattern?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, okay. The paintings in the '70s, I would extrude paint through a template. [When I was a child my parents had a reproduction of a Van Gogh painting of a wheat field with crows. The surface of the painting had a raised texture like his work. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —that was a circle [but, I later used oral formats. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I was cutting out what would be strips [of canvas and sewing them together. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [I had more control. -HP] I would just take a palette knife, and I used gloss gel, a lot, so it would [be thick and remain in relief. -HP] It has less a chance of cracking unless you freeze it. If [you freeze acrylic, it cracks -HP]—I already had one painting frozen.

[They laugh.]

But, anyway, I go all over the painting in different colors, and [embed paper dots covered with dye markers color that bleeds through the paint. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's the palette knife—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —mimicking the kind of strips that you—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —had used in earlier work.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Interesting.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I remember, though, when I had a show—the one that got the award [from the College Art Association (CAA) in 1990 -HP]? Someone who [came to the gallery -HP]—because it was reviewed in the *Times*. [He came -HP] into the gallery, he walked in, walked out, and said, "She's copying Jasper Johns."

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —yes. And he was ready to crucify me.

[They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That had never crossed your mind? That kind of—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No—no, because it was part of my own personal process. [Cutting photos into strips and creating templates that make 3D "stripes" of thick paint. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]. Sure.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The strips developed from having a brain injury [and feeling that I had a fractured mind. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which award? You've gotten so many. Do you recall what award that was? Oh, College Art Association: Best Exhibition or Performance, 1990.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That award, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And I'm always confused whether it was '89 or '90 because they're always a year ahead. But I think it was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That I read was 1990.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Among—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I was totally shocked—totally shocked. In the show there were the split photograph pieces. There was a small piece, it was about South Africa, that the Smithsonian just bought.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Apartheid, that piece about apartheid?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, *Separate but Equal*. I mean, I was really, really surprised.

MS: RICHARDS: Let's see what—you know this *Separate but Equal Genocide: AIDS*, that's dated 90, 92.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, that is—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because you did it over a period—and it's in two parts; each four by six feet.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's a very strong image, the two flags.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And different colors. Not necessarily a put-down of the flag, but representing my cousin, who actually died of AIDS at 35. He was a genius. He was very smart, very talented in music. He [graduated from -HP] Julliard. He had to make a living, so he designed programs for Wall Street. He was very smart. When he was in school, he kept skipping grades. And so there was some concern about his [social -HP] development—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Socially?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Social development, yes, yes. He was really pretty, we'll put it that way. His mother was beautiful. She used to be one of my parents' [tenants -HP]—we had an extra room in the house on Pomona Street, and she rented the room. I don't know where she ate, she never—she was very quiet. She—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was her name?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Quincy Hedgepeth. I think she was part indigenous. She looked white, actually. She had very pinched [and narrow -HP] features. I think she looked—if there was a hint, it would be indigenous.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what was her relationship to the cousin who died of AIDS?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay. She was his mother—ah [Negative]—she was his mother.

JUDITH RICHARDS: She was his mother [Laughs.] I see.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And she was married to my [mother's -HP] brother. So he had light eyes, very fair skin, straight hair. We would get into arguments [Laughs] because—I still feel the way I feel, I find that the happiest couples tend to be gay white men in terms of [longevity -HP]—and also gay white women, in terms of [longevity. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [I felt -HP] you don't hear [about the -HP] kind of manic craziness [in a gay marriage. -HP] Basically, the kindest people I have met have been gay. I've had tremendous support from the gay community.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Tell me the name of your cousin? I didn't write that down.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: His name, they gave him his name, which was not great. His name was Carmen.

JUDITH RICHARDS: C-A-R-M-E-N?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Carmen Lewis.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what was the name of his mother?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Quincy, it's a weird name.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Quincy Hedgepeth. [Lewis is her married name. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Peth.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Hedgepeth, P-E-T-H.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Hmm [Affirmative] okay.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I mean, I don't know. She looked the way—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And Carmen Lewis was not his last name, it was his?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Lewis was his mother's married name. And the brother, my mother's brother was—his name was Auggie, August, something like that. The whole thing was sad. It was a really bad marriage. I find [it is very bad. -HP] If someone is an alcoholic, it doesn't matter who they're married to if [their spouses are-HP] brutal—

[Audio break.]

Could you remind me of that?

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were talking about your family and Auggie and—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, yes. Actually, Quincy—Quincy had Alzheimer's and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, you were talking about marriages with alcoholics.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, yes, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, there's no good end to that.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, I [feel -HP], alcoholism is terrible. I think he actually beat her up. Part of it was he was huge. He was maybe 6'5", 6'7"? He was extremely smart. And I think what happens is there's so much a put down [of -HP] black men. I didn't even know if he worked. It's possible that she was the one [who worked -HP], because she looked white, could get a job. I cannot remember. I have no one to ask. I can't ask her. She's dead.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MS: PINDELL: I mean, I suspect that she supported him.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When—I don't remember how we went there, or what question I asked [laughs] but in 1992, there was a major retrospective of your work. Well, it covered 20 years. I don't—it should have been a mid-career survey [Laughs] rather than retrospective. And I wanted to ask you how important that was. Why you decided to include your writings as part the exhibition—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, you mean the statements in the catalog?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. And I think that, from what I understand, that was an important element in the show for you.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, you know, part of that was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And that highlights the importance of writing—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —the important role writing played in your work.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. I wanted to make sure that my paintings were clear. I remember one critical comment from the white critics was that they want more mystery. They don't want to be hit in the face with something they have to think about. You know they did not want to see my face, but they don't want to deal with the issues that I want to deal with [either. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So when you had that show come up—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, it traveled for about four years. And the incident in Cleveland was during that tour. So it was a case of just—the school wouldn't even follow-up on a missing tape, because I think they were afraid that it was either faculty or their own students. So who knows. It hasn't popped up anywhere. [The missing tape was *Free, White and 21*. (1980) -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What impact did that show have on you and on your work? So many times artists talk about retrospectives having—being an important experience either good or bad.

[They laugh.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, it was important. It was a lot of pressure, and there was some confusion in the beginning. A woman who curated the show was up at SUNY, I think, New Paltz—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was her name?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Georgia Coopersmith. She changed schools and that [became -HP] a little confusing. But she—when she could no longer continue the show, she turned it over to Exhibits USA. And they were really good.

JUDITH RICHARDS: They created the tour?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, they were really, efficient and helpful. And the catalog, my God. I mean I didn't even see catalogs like that unless there was big funding. It's out of print—I go to a good Xerox place and I have them [copy it in color. -HP]—it costs \$50 a catalog. It looks like the real thing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Color Xerox.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Color, everything, yes. It's a beautiful job and I have, the binding put on it. So I appreciate the Exhibits USA. I had an educational packet that went with [the color. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you have a role in creating that educational packet?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Yes. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you have a role in creating that educational packet?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Partial, yes. Yes. They hired someone, I can't remember her name now, [who was -HP] from California. She put the packet together, and she ran it by me.

Well, the stuff that I took out, I didn't want the kids to be get involved in magical thinking or divination, any of that stuff. I wouldn't touch that with a 10-foot pole, maybe because it can be a sort of freighting part of my life. [Exhibits USA paid for the conservation. -HP] We had one problem with damage near the end. And this had to do

with someone putting a piece on a wet pedestal they just painted

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you had the experience of seeing the show, seeing this 20 years of your work, do you recall any surprising thoughts that brought? Or was it incredibly gratifying to see all this work—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It was gratifying, but I always know in the back of my mind that two venues dropped out because of the text, I guess, in the catalog. Because I knew one of the art history people up at Michigan, I believe it was the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. And they signed on for the show, but when the catalog came out, they dropped it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was the text that was difficult—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: My statements. My statements.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what part of the statement that—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: All—the whole catalog. Do you have a copy?

JUDITH RICHARDS: I don't have it but I've read a lot of the text.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So I'm just wondering if there's any specific part of it that they—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —objected to or found difficult?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, okay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Or what you thought. Did they tell you specifically?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, but they did eventually [want the show shut down when -HP] the show went to Atlanta. At the time—I had a nice dealer there. It was in the newspaper [The Atlanta Journal Constitution -HP]—published in the newspaper that [white -HP] people wanted my show shut down because they felt that I was hostile to white people.

There was a little a section where they talked about how this kind of show was [divisive. -HP] I guess the two [works -HP] that they objected [to were -HP] *Free, White and 21* and they objected to a big painting called *Columbus*—

[Audio Break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: 1991, 92.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —how Columbus brought so much misery to various indigenous cultures. [Columbus cut off the hands of the Arawaks and Taino Indians who did not bring him gold. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.].

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [He ushered in -HP] the beginning of slavery. And they wanted that painting out.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were the people who were against it the more conservative part of the community?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Of course. It was being shown—there's a little twist here that's interesting. It was being shown at Georgia Tech. [Georgia Institute of Technology], or University of Georgia, one or the other. And, it turns out that the faculty overseer of the university gallery was Kara Walker's father. It's sort of an irony, I think, that years later I'm sort of like a big "enemy" of Kara Walker. But he [protected me—but he was oddly unfriendly. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Would you really call yourself an enemy?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes [Laughs.] I mean—have you seen the book? [Kara Walker/No/Yes? through Midmarch Arts Press. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Also the little thin one, [which has my essay. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, I'm not sure exactly what you mean, but—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. I think because I was trying so hard to make it more equal. Not only women. [Women are a little over 50 percent of the world. White women are four percent of the world. -HP] Whites are only eight percent of the world, you know? And suddenly—we're only five percent of the world in terms of the country [in the United States. -HP] I just feel really strongly about it. I think because partly I saw what happens at a big institution like the Modern. I don't know. I just feel very strongly about it.

There are many opinions and we're not taking it down." And I did appreciate the fact that he stood up against that. But then, a few weeks later I think there was a theater production in the area. I think it was Cobb County, near Atlanta, and it dealt with issues of homosexuality, and so what the funders did was they cut off funding to the arts and gave the money to the police. Yes. So I wasn't just the only one out there—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Culture wars at the time.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Absolutely.

JUDITH RICHARDS: At—later on in the '90s you did, or '95, you did a large work. I wanted to ask you, but it was called, *In My Lifetime*.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. [It was owned by a -HP] private collector.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Seven by twelve feet with—with images of nuclear explosions?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A little bit different subject matter. How did you come to do that?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I think part of it was from going to Hiroshima—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And with a log—with an actual little stool in front of it.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, it's a log. [On the log was a large print Bible with rubber-stamped text on some of the Bible's pages. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which is a kind of a departure to have that?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I wanted the painting kind of to move out [by way of installation elements. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —into space through information. I know that sounds strange.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, you had a book on top of the log.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, which was the Bible. Big [format -HP] Bible. And I had rubber stamps made and on top of many of the pages, I put the names of various Holocausts. Like, [Auschwitz. -HP] Who is protecting us, you know? I grew up in a religious family and [I am -HP] mildly religious. [They were not fanatics, although some of their friends were. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mildly Christian?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mildly Christian, yes. We have all of these terrible wars. I had two screaming heads, one of me younger, one of me older. Then the water in a sense represents a middle passage, but it's camouflaged like an army uniform. Then there was, I believe, a little strip of water. [At the bottom I painted it in a photo -HP] realistic style.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And, underneath a band of red which represented blood. And then, I photo polymer transferred images of children who had died as a result of our bombs.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Our bombs in Japan, or Vietnam?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It's [about -HP] our dropping bombs on Hiroshima [and Nagasaki. -HP] Our not supporting the removal [of land -HP] mines. We were not—we were pro-mines, so that Angola, for example, I think has the highest amputation rate from—one of the images of child—[he was badly injured by a land mine. Princess Diana protested land mines. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Land mines.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Land mines. Yes. [The child had only legs -HP] from the knees up. And how, basically, we don't hear about all these things. We have to listen to the alternative press to be able to discern what you don't know [and -HP] who's saying what, you know? Whether it's true or not [one needs to use one's critical thinking. -HP] Although, we have fortunately a lot of media, both the local media [and the international media. We used to receive Canadian cable news. No longer. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [I highly recommend -HP] *Democracy Now*. They're fantastic. Absolutely fantastic. Can I say something more about the Kara Walker thing?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Absolutely.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. When I say I'm an "enemy" of—I don't like [negative images of African Americans used for one thing, to get attention. It's my -HP] personal opinion. One woman is freezing cockroaches—making art out of frozen cockroaches, I think if I've got it right—I just remember. And there was another—it was a black artist actually—who was going through the dumpsters and the trash cans out in Brooklyn, I think, and he was finding [dead animals -HP]—a dead puppy, or—and then he was making collages out of things people threw away. But it was "sensational"—I also found it upsetting that the white dealers were more interested in black artists who did work which was negative to blacks, and so the whole racial stereotype [is in -HP] business. For example, the constant use of the nanny image, or the pickaninny image, [or sambo image. -HP]

[In -HP] one piece she has of a nude African-American, and I assume, an enslaved person. She's pregnant and she has no legs from the knees down, and there's a child somehow there. Like [using -HP] this kind of sensational image to put yourself forward, knowing that you're going to profit from putting down your [own -HP] people. Now, I don't know if she's—well, she's making a lot of money doing that, and I think—and a number of artists have done this, black artists too, to get attention, to use a minstrel whatever image. Well, I think it's—because I have—I get really angry about it, because I've seen it and how it works from inside the museum [to the public, creating opinions not based in fact. -HP]

So she's been in [many -HP] major museums [that own of exhibit works by African American artists. -HP] She's had five shows in Germany in one year, that sort of thing. But, in her writing, she takes the position of the adversary. In other words, she'll say, "Oh, blacks want to be slaves a little bit," or she makes fun of the Civil Rights Movement. Anyway, she's just like feeding on other people's suffering. Okay. If she were Jewish doing this about the Holocaust, she wouldn't walk out that door. They'd kill her. You know what I mean? Because she's making fun. In fact, *O.*, Oprah's magazine, had several individuals that they featured in one of those on a full page, and [Kara Walker was featured and -HP] said she didn't care about the consequences of her work.

All of this, I think, became more prevalent, okay, because there was Michael Ray Charles, I think that's his name, from Texas. He did all these pickaninny, and whatever, they served fried chicken, or whatever [at his opening. -HP] The NEA no longer was funding the artist—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [This -HP] meant the corporate sector stepped in. So that's when you have people like Peter Norton. You know, Peter Norton, [computer anti-virus -HP] doctor—has a lot of money. They would step in and they called the shots. And she was like right at the top. Apparently, someone asked Peter Norton. And he said the work amuses him. Now, again, I'm sort of thinking—if this [had been -HP] were the Jewish Museum what would the reaction be?

JUDITH RICHARDS: He's a—Peter Norton is a big collector of African-American artists.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: He has a stable. He doesn't bring everyone in. He told one artist when they were having a show, and the museum wanted to get funding from him, and this artist was not pro-Kara Walker, and they were told to please—by him—museum people were told to have that artist call him up, which she did. And, basically, she was told that he would not fund [her show -HP] unless she changed her position. It's really ridiculous, and I always think of [how it changes -HP] a "public policy," or it becomes a kind of brain washing thing where people see this work as being endorsed, so it must be good, and so they get all these images, these grotesque images of blacks. And then I remember reading something where a critic stated that she was showing "black life." [She depicts -HP] a little black child, an enslaved child, sexually abusing a white baby.

Anyway, it just made me really pissed off. And the first book [*Kara Walker No/Kara Walker Yes* -HP], with the 28 writers, gave other opinions. And Cynthia [Navaretta of Midmarch Arts Press -HP], my publisher, did include also some positive opinions. I think after working in the art world for so many years—for example, I had to deal with

—Long Island University canceled [my traveling -HP] show because they didn't [like my -HP] politics. I was invited by Flomenhaft Gallery to be her opening show and the piece I was working on at the time was a piece about George Bush, but it was too big for a gallery—it was like 22 feet long, although it could be scrunched. It had about Bush—baby Bush, not papa Bush. And a plus sign, although my students said "Nah. It should be an equal sign." And I crocheted a black body bag. I had never crocheted in my life. I would just sit in front of the TV. [A -HP] friend took me to a yarn store that had a book of instructions for crocheting baby clothes, so I just figured out how to do it. In it I placed a life sized skeleton, which I had painted black.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What's the title of this piece? Or the date?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, I don't know. [It took over a year to finish. The title is *Coup*. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: How do you spell it?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: C-O-U-P.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And do you remember the date? I didn't see an image of it. I haven't seen it.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It hasn't been shown that much. [The gallery has it. -HP] I think the date would be maybe like 2007. Something like that. I would have to look.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you have more to say on the story?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The full version of the little book will be [sold on the web in time, for a very modest amount. -HP] It's just [that Kara Walker's -HP] images go into your unconscious and they do indeed affect public policy. If you are someone who's borderline or negative [about -HP] people who are different, this would just probably put them over the edge, because, "Look at that. Look how they," you know. Anyway, so my aim is to get a dialogue started and it has happening more in the black community. I've gotten one telephone call from a white art historian, a white critic enraged because I did a paper for the Johannesburg Biennale, and it was about the issue of stereotypes. I didn't just mention Kara Walker. I mentioned other artists. And she calls, "And you giving out a list of ["approved"-HP] artists." They don't even want you to express an opinion, you know? It's only through [people -HP] like Cynthia Navaretta, a feminist publisher, [that those opinions could be expressed. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So—Cynthia?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Navaretta. Midmarch Arts Press [in New York. -HP] You'll find her. [She is very ill right now. Her books are sold on Amazon. I do not know if a relative is following up on orders. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: She's 87. She called me up and said, "Would you like to do a book with different writers?" I said, "Sure." So it became a grapevine thing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: People would—in fact someone sent us a manuscript from Germany that [is in the book. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is this the book *The Heart of the Question*?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No. *Heart of the Question* is just my general essays listing the statistics [relative to the art world in New York City . . . -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was from 1979.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [There is -HP] the other one was *Kara Walker Yes/ Kara Walker No*. And then the other one after that was *Kara Walker: Denial, Privilege*, something else. And she only took 42 pages of 140-some manuscript. She took out all the educational material. So this was more or less like a statement, but she didn't want—like, I have a lot of material from different psychologists who were talking about the need for some people to have a scapegoat. I had some really good stuff there.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How have you—speaking of your writing, which you've been actively doing for most of your career—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Sort of.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —have you had trouble balancing? How is it balancing the time it takes to write and to do all

of the research with time to be in the studio to make art?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay. Oddly enough, I think it was easier when I was working at the Modern because I didn't have to lose four hours a day commuting. And I was younger, I had a lot of energy. And the work was process work. [Often, -HP] the work I do now [requires that I -HP] do research. [I have an idea -HP] I want to do [a work -HP] about racism or slavery in New York, and the basic text I'm using [as a reference was published by -HP] the New York Historical Society.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: One of the things that I heard a couple of years ago from a black scholar, and I think it was on—it might have been on PBS [Public Broadcasting Station]. Or it may have been NPR [National Public Radio], I'm not sure which. It was a while ago. That apparently after slavery, what the [freed -HP] slave, [farmer -HP] owners would do is tell their former slaves, "I'll pay you. Do such and such a job for me." And then they wouldn't pay them, and apparently people were starving to death. You don't hear about that. I was like, "Oh my God." In fact, it was happening down in Katrina. People were coming in either from Mexico—or perhaps it had been some local [people. -HP] They would do the job and the whites wouldn't pay them. I don't understand what is wrong with people's minds that they see this is okay? [Donald Trump is notorious for not paying his workers. I met someone whose father had not been paid. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And it seems as if the people doing this are mostly men. What is [this -HP] about—When you hear about death squads, you hear about [rapes. -HP] Anyway. I wonder where are men's minds that they can do these sorts of things? Some women [can be -HP] brutal, too. [There were slave owners' wives who were also brutal. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. You mentioned maybe ten years or so ago that you were spending just about as much time writing as you were painting.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Right now actually—

JUDITH RICHARDS: How is it now?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Now it's difficult, because I've outlived [my -HP] apartment. In other words, I have pieces here and there that come back if they're not sold. And I was using the living room. [I have a three bedroom, so one is for storage. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, for what?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: To do the painting. Because I was painting in the bedroom, but that meant I was sleeping in the smell.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay. Actually let's talk about studios, and process and all that. So at this point in time, and maybe it's changed over the years, what's the first step? How do you begin to conceptualize a new work? Are there sketches? Are there—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I generally sketch. I [keep usual journals. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Should, meaning you don't? Or you do?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I build it in my mind, and I had some workbooks[-journals. -HP] They're buried in there somewhere. I just need to buy another sketchbook. I [date the pages I use. I have dictionaries of languages from both European-Western and Non-European cultures. They are buried in my studio somewhere. -HP] Usually I develop it in my mind. And then if I have a lot of ideas, I have a workbook[-journal -HP] where—I'm going to get another one—where you just date in the page and you leave maybe a couple of pages [on the idea. -HP] You work it out in the sketched form.

I've been very interested in DNA research, and apparently National Geographic now has an even more complex analysis process. I've already done one with them and they said that my mother's—[If you are female, -HP] you can only do the matriarchal side—that my mother's lineage began 80,000 years ago in Uganda. That's mind blowing. Then they sent me another message that they had the name of a woman who had the same mother. I don't even know how to make sense of it—1,000 years ago. And they [gave me -HP] her address in London. Very strange. Anyway, the piece of—actually there are several pieces that are haunting me right now. With the DNA, I want to [use -HP] hands [or my face -HP]—cut them out—and arms. [Since this interview, I want to cast my head and make 3D prints with text. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: But—yes. Sorry.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And then on each hand [or head -HP] list the country. It goes up on the wall. [I now see it as more horizontal so that people can read the text. I have Inuit (Eskimo) DNA. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: But the process to begin conceptualizing this you're saying is in your mind, but also in sketchbooks.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Some of these works are complicated technically, and they're large—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —and some planning is probably—have you kept journals any time during your life?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, but I'm going to destroy [some of -HP] them [Laughs]. Because I've been through so much mental agony, that I'm not going to put that out in public.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Would you consider, rather than destroying them, keeping them restricted for a certain number of years?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That's interesting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I mean keeping them restricted for 50 years?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Rather than destroy them. There are other options.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, part of it [is -HP] I have problems with depression [especially after my mother died. -HP] I've had situations where—oh my goodness, artists, and it's sad—[some -HP] artists have tried to take advantage of that. [There was an African woman artist who started a "support" group implying that you could trust her. A major art publisher wanted to contact me and she wrote them a letter as if she was my "therapist." Someone on the inside of the publishing company sent me the letter to warn me about what she was doing. I guess she wanted to hear everyone's (women) inside story and then she would use it to advance herself. -HP]

Some artists were really mad at my being at the Modern, and [that -HP] they're not being collected. They felt that I could just walk in and [the museum did not work like that. I was directly under a chief curator. They called the shots. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, if you have these journals and no one can see them right now, then they're not—there's no harm being done.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I have to think about it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. When you're working on the pieces, you've mentioned a couple times about archival issues and being concerned about that. So it sounds like you've always thought about trying to use materials that would be stable and—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, that drives me crazy.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Because I [could -HP] see the results of time on the prints [at MoMA's (Print Department's study room. -HP] The fingerprints from the oil on the skin [turned the paper sort of yellow-brown.-HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Leaves [marks, -HP] you know?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Maybe not right now because your studio space is more limited, but have you wanted to have earlier works around you when you were making new works or did you specifically not want any past work there?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I—start again.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were starting a new body of work, is it helpful to you, or the opposite, to have older work around?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [If I have a gallery show and I'm in a show I like to see the work in a new context. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Doesn't matter.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. [Some of -HP] the big paintings, apparently are owned by one person, which kind of scares me [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: How many big paintings?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh. *Who Do You Think You Are? One of Us?* I think. *In My Lifetime*. Let's see. What else? I think the two flags. *Separate but Equal Genocide: AIDS*, [Columbus. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why is it a problem that someone owns a large number?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [For one thing, the dealer that sold them to him never paid me for some of them. Some dealers are very slippery. I am very happy with my current dealer, Garth Greenan.-HP] Well, oh yes. I mean it's nice that he has them. He's a movie director. Black exploitation films [which is very upsetting. It is hard to get him to lend work. He may be hoarding them for investment—who knows. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, you can separate his art collecting from his money making [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [I guess -HP] I have to.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Let me ask you another question about process. Have you ever struggled with the question of whether a work is done? Is that ever an issue that you're working on something and it's—you have a struggle with whether you keep working on it say it's finished?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Usually what I do is if I feel cornered, in a way, by making a decision as to whether it's finished or not, I'll cover it and not look at it for a while. Then if I come to it with a fresh eye, I find I can make the decision more quickly.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Are you working on more than one piece at once?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Because of all the stuff I have, I have to. [Since the interview, I have a little more space. I can work on a piece that's up to ten feet high and twelve feet wide. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that always the case in the past?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No. [It feels like -HP] going up a sand dune and sliding back [Laughs.] My mother was ill—heart problems. I have a heart valve problem, but I'm not [worried. Medicine is more educated -HP] in terms of what they can do about it, and none of the doctors seem the least bit concerned about it. It's a heart murmur in general. I've had one silent heart attack, but I've been told by another [doctor -HP], who is a cardiologist, that, "No. You didn't" [Laughs.] So who knows?

So there've been some health issues, but then having my mother ill for a number of years, and then my father, who was phenomenally strong, then he became ill. So I was running back and forth to help him get the house in order for sale. He did not want to be there. He wanted one of those life care buildings, and he was very [popular, partly because some people thought he was very handsome.-HP] I mean people really liked him. He became the president of the organization [Lifetime Care Housing (Logan Square East in Philadelphia) -HP] twice. He had the open heart surgery in '89. He became robust, and [a group -HP] of us went to Paris with him. I couldn't keep up with him.

And then for some reason—oh, I know what it was—he kept eating food that was immediately bad for him. He felt that, you know, "I'm 97, or I'm 90, whatever, and I will eat anything I damn well please." So what does he have? Anchovies. And within 24 hours he's hospitalized.

So, I mean, he just kept doing this over and over again. And I was running back and forth [to Philadelphia. -HP] The therapist I had at the time, trying to deal with my mother's death and my father's eventual demise, said, "Howardena, stop" [Laughs.] In fact, I had to cancel a lecture I was giving at a museum, the Stony Brook Museums, near my job and it was the students and administration [I would have been talking to. -HP] Everyone, you know—or a number of people were coming. I had to cancel it, because he had swallowed more anchovies. So basically she said, "Just stop" [I could not stop easily. It was -HP] costing me also a fortune running back and forth. [I practically emptied my bank account. -HP]

Now, let's see. He was put in the nursing home section of the [Lifecare -HP] building, because things were getting bad. I had hired a [caregiver -HP]—you know someone, a student, to come in and work with him in the mornings maybe three days a week. And the place where he was living wanted me to pay for 24 hour care, and that was \$179,000. I couldn't afford that. So I did the best that I could with [the helper -HP]—we were friendly. He's kind of disappeared right now. He was an artist, a photographer. It just became too much. [My father -HP] was leaving dirty diapers [everywhere. -HP] He was starting to wander around the building in his underwear, and saying that he was dressed. On reading up on some of his meds—no wonder. There was a heart medicine that both of us were taking actually. But I was taking a little tiny bit of it and he started, I guess, hallucinating being dressed. He was also very strong, so they had to send one of the security guys [when he refused to get dressed and walked around in his underwear. -HP]

There was a nice young woman who was working with him mornings. They were trying to reason with him that [he was -HP] walking around in [his -HP] jockey shorts, or whatever. So the nurse said to the young woman, who was hired to start dressing him, "Don't say you're not dressed or what's wrong? Just dress him." And that was interesting. They were—as soon as—you know, she was helping him put on his pants and his shirt. It was like he went into like this somnambulant state, and he was able to put on his clothes without a fight.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: By December—when did he die? I'm blanking out when he died. I think—oh gosh, isn't that funny I would lose that? I think it was [2007 (Eastertime). My mother died in 1991. -HP], but I'm not sure. They moved him out of his apartment because it was a mess. They put him in the nursing home, and then I came in with [my friend -HP] Raphael, who was picking me up to take me to school. Raphael was amazing. He's very strong. We had to clean out and vacate the apartment. So we were running around with clothing for Goodwill, and his papers are in my storage unit in Philadelphia. [He was 98 when he died. He refused to eat or drink and went into a coma. He had 24 hour hospice care. They were amazing. When he died he was not alone. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Anyway.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wow. How did all this affect your work in the '90s?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I couldn't work [for a while. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. I—Well, that's not true. In the '90s I did good work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And after—Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]. Yes. When you have been in the studio, do you have a particular—do you have this situation where no good ideas are coming up? You feel stalled. And if you have that feeling, do you have a system or method for getting—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, sure.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What do you do in that situation?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No. It's a wonderful book by Julia Cameron called *The Artist's Way*, and it was originally written for writers who have writer's block. In fact, it gives you so many ideas, that you're bursting. She has [a way of dealing -HP] with one's personal material. Memories. All sorts of things.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you've referenced this book when you've had these issues—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: When I have a block, I will. I think she has other books. Part two, part three, whatever— [or workbook. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you work on a large painting, and it's just not coming together the way you imagined, do you tend to just give up on it and start something else, or try and keep—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No. I just let it go where it goes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Just keep going. So even if it strays from your plan, you keep moving.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, it's just—to me, the plan is just a basic armature, and I can change the armature, but I'm always interested in the direction it's going. So I'm an observer in a way. You know, a participant and an observer. Because sometimes there's things that happen that are lucky accidents.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you're in the studio, let's say in—over the course of your career—is there a certain kind of environment in the studio that you always want to maintain? Silence, or music? Talk radio, or TV? What is it like, and is it a—do you care about the kind of lighting you have, and if so what is the lighting? So describe the whole atmosphere that you find the most productive.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay. Well, that's a hard one, because they're different environments. There's the residency environment [like the MacDowell colony in New Hampshire. -HP] There's the studio here which is [cramped. My gallery has been very helpful and is storing some things. I now have more room to work. I have made some of my biggest paintings here. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: But in general have you—when you start working do you want silence, or do you always want music?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I use music, yes. I use music for painting, and I use television for when I'm doing the [video -HP] drawings. [Since Trump, I listen to the TV (MSNBC) a lot. My back is to the TV. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What kind of music?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Everything actually. I went on a cruise with my father, and there was the computer area, so you could send email. It was right underneath some kind of disco. It was [on the -HP] Carnival line. I started hearing, believe it or not, rap music and I became interested in rap. I like the sound of it, although the text is pretty grim, or against women. Although there's some rappers that are not like that. Who—I can't remember his name. I haven't been listening to the music lately. Common? [I think that is his name. His rap is more socially responsible. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So a variety of music.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, it's a variety. I like to hear music. It's like I'm in the music. [Laughs.] But, anyway. [I like Japanese court music, Bach, opera, Adele, rap, Eminem, etc. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is there a particular kind of light that you favor?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, it became an issue when I moved to New York. At Yale they had these huge windows. So I liked working from natural light, but then it became evident that I had to [work during the day at MoMA. I had to not have the beautiful daylight, which drove me to abstraction. -HP] I think it's quartz lighting, but I don't use it that often, partly because it's—you have to get an electrician to change the bulb. [I use quartz on halogen track lighting. I have chronically very good natural light in the room where I work. I can now find an electrician to change the bulbs in the basement. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It's an industrial thing. You don't want to electrocute anybody.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you have a clean studio space, what kinds of things do you tend to put up on the walls?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Nothing. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Nothing. Okay.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Nothing, but—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're not putting references or old sketches or anything?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No. [Recently I have put clean plastic bags with punched dots in them—sort of like a palette. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So if we looked around we would see just kind of a working space with mainly the current work—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. I traded with an artist who was in a juried show at the Pen and Brush Club, and her—the piece is really beautiful. So we [had been trading. I do not do that anymore since I joined my gallery. I no longer give my work away to auctions. I have tried to participate in the AIDS benefit postcard exhibition. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What kind of—in general, what kind of work routines have you had, as this—maybe not necessarily right now. I mean, are you a morning person, or do you—do you work nine to five, or what kind of—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That's another hard one. Okay. Because I teach so far away—

[Side conversation]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —I teach so far away, so I need to get up around quarter to six [or 5:30 a.m. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have you—you always get up early, even on the days you're not teaching?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I try to, because I find—I'm trying to get between eight and ten hours sleep. And it's really hard to go to bed sometimes. Because I generally think my best time of day is usually the evening. But in terms of work time, the room where I normally work has beautiful light. Even though it's on the ground floor, I get light all day. Yes. I mean today's kind of cloudy so it's not—but on a sunny day I get good light.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So day light is really preferable if you can have it.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: If I can have some. Or maybe I'll push up the quartz [track -HP] lights. Maybe half the amount rather than the full amount. Or, I can use clip on lights [on a dimmer. -HP] Sometimes I have to [use clip lights -HP] if I'm doing detail.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Have you had assistants in your—for your work?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Actually, yes. Over the years—oh, my gosh. I don't even remember if I can remember the names.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, besides their name, what kind of work did you have those assistants do?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, basically I would call it studio maintenance. I have two people—actually three people now, but the one who's—I have a student who's—I think she's [Korean -HP] Very nice person. She calls it an internship. The sort of thing she might do is go to an opening with me. And in case of something that's worrying me—there's a dealer that—I may have mentioned it to you—there's an Atlanta group coming to see my work, and they wanted [to see a group of work on paper. This is before Garth. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [A small private dealer showed them work and I had to get a lawyer to get my work back which she kept for over a year. It got ugly. Some dealers don't pay their artists—more than you think. Garth Greenan came on the scene and basically saved my life. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is this—we were talking about your assistant. Your [Korean -HP] assistant?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Yes. I'll tell you—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay. I asked her [Christy, my Korean assistant, -HP] if she could go to the opening with me, I had no idea that half the show was mine. Although it was [billed otherwise as another assistant's work. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. You told me about that yesterday.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay. So I had her go around and count the number of pieces she could find of mine. There were nine. So that—to me, that was an excellent service because I couldn't have done it. If I need a supply, she'll go out and buy it [for me. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: She's a current student?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: She was a student [at SVA. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Uh-huh [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, like a student. Then I have my friend Jasmine who is very, very helpful. [Jasmine has been with me for 15 years. -HP] She helps me with everything from taxes—you know, recording the tax information. I remember when the Heckscher Museum [Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, NY] bought a piece, she was here and she helped me in terms of moving things around so that the piece would be visible. They bought the piece, which was, to me, amazing. When I do mailings, I use an assistant then.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's administrative tasks.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Administrative. At one point I had an assistant. I was at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. Actually I needed him for his car. He could drive me around if I needed things. I was just working on this one painting about hunger. I was working on other paintings, but this painting about hunger was absorbing everything, and so I just had him paint a layer of black acrylic [on a large canvas about 12 feet wide, I think. -HP] It was pieces about six or seven feet by 12 feet maybe. And so he painted [the background black for me. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is unstretched canvas?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Unstretched. [Inaudible.] Now the thing that's bugging [me -HP] with this walker is it's making my painting arm not so strong, or it's redirecting the strength. I had a rotation cuff injury in the shoulder a number of years ago, and so what you have to do—you have to crawl up the wall to get to that section, or just lower the piece. [You use your fingers to slowly "crawl" up the wall which raises your hand to the right level. It was a physical therapy exercise. I am now having carpal tunnel issues from sewing the canvas. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: [. . . -HP] I wanted to ask you about your relationship with galleries throughout your career.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, let me tell you. There's some that have been okay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And I wondered what had been the best relationships, and what you were looking for from a gallery.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay. There were the alternative spaces, [such as -HP] Just Above Mid-town. She moved to 57th street. But she didn't last after that. What was her name? Rosa Esman showed me for a little while, but she wouldn't give me a one person show. And she made a kind of snide remark about how my nose looks Jewish. Yes, I do have some Jewish ancestry, "but I bet they weren't married," [she said. -HP] You get these sarcastic kind of cruel [comments. -HP] The person who I think sort of pushed me over the edge—

JUDITH RICHARDS: In a good way or a bad way?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Good way.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Good way [Laughs.] Okay.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Good way. [The gallery -HP] name was Lerner-Heller Gallery. Dick Lerner. He had troubles with money. He drove a Ferrari, and he was keeping the artist's money. But what he would do was he would come and bring you lunch, and [take out full page advertisements in the art magazines. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean come to your studio?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] [He would ask if I wanted -HP] a one person show in two places or one person show in one place? So I said two because it was a lot of work, so he arranged that [for me. -HP] He paid for the frames. He paid for full page advertisements. He was very supportive [but on the other hand he would not pay you for your work. -HP]

I was in Japan, and I was working on that body of work [when I returned -HP], and I was supposed to have a show I think in October of '82, maybe, or '83, whatever. I asked him to meet me and an attorney. I don't remember what attorney it was. And he said, "Yes." He owed me \$20,000, which seems small these days. I told him I needed to be paid before the show opens. He said, "Absolutely." And within a week he had killed himself. So, yes. I remember I came home and one of the artists [Budd Hopkins -HP] in the gallery called me and said, "Howardena, Dick is dead." Then it started to get a little tricky because the rumor was that he had borrowed money from some bad people, and they killed him and made it look like suicide. His wife tried to pay the artists as much as she could, and our work was returned. The gallery was right across from the Whitney on the second floor.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Good and bad [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. All of us were just kind of floundering after that. Some immediately got galleries.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you look for another gallery?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I backed away, I think, at that point, because I was in this strange position of being—was it '82? I wasn't at the Modern. I don't know. I think I was just shy, or they were pretty hostile then. [Dick Lewer -HP] was an exception. He had Latino artists, feminist artists. I think Miriam Schapiro was there [with May Stevens and Rudolph Beranek. -HP] I don't remember the Latino artist's name. But he had a number of the feminist artists.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So, I don't know. It's sad. Very sad.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. So over the years you've kept your own archives? Maintained that?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I did until I was in the car accident.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Until '79.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] I did a pretty good job.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So the last thirty years you haven't?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I haven't thrown anything out—

[They laugh.]

—so stuff is there. I have somewhere in there the reviews. Of course I keep my resume updated. When I was hospitalized, and when I was in the hospital—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is this recently?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Two years ago.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh. Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Ben [was my archivist and executor of my will. Garth Greenan is my art executor. -HP]—and I hired a woman who was a clutter expert. I hope to God they didn't throw anything important—but what Ben is here for, basically, is to build my archive. [My archive will go to the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you've arranged to give your papers to [the Smithsonian? -HP]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's great.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [It has changed from Atlanta to the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. So it's going to be a challenge to figure out how to divide it.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [The Smithsonian wants to put me in different sections such as art, education, curatorial, feminist, African American, etc. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Different pieces of your archive?

[. . . -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Scholars can—they can find that.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Really?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. I mean you can go through the records of old newspapers and magazines. If you have it listed on a bibliography someone can find—with hard work, they can get that. It's not irrevocably gone.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Okay. Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Irretrievably.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, my resume is over 100 pages at this point. It needs to be updated and scanned and put on a disc.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Yes, because it's great if it can be accessible.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes. I love that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you've shown at galleries—and you've had many exhibitions, some abroad and some in the U.S.—has there—how have you dealt with negative criticism? Have you just—has it really affected you, or can you just put it aside?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I think the worst negative criticism I had was in—when the traveling show was in New York[—Retrospective. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I got a very bad review in the *Times* from a photo critic. I don't know why a photo critic would have been sent to my shows. He was saying things about it being shrill. The irony—I got an award from CAA for a different show at Cyrus Gallery on 57th Street which contained some of the pieces from the show. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, yes. You mentioned—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, no. That was a different show. That was a different show. The one before that—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have you ever been compelled to reply to a critic?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is there anything that critics, even knowledgeable critics, have said about your work that was—that was a misunderstanding? That they misinterpreted—that's out there that you'd like to set the record straight now?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, that's one reason why the writing sort of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, why you've done your own writing?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, yes. I write statements that are beyond a few words to make clear what I'm doing, even if the critic is saying, "I don't want to know." I don't know. I just—I don't—I'm in the Art Critics Association, and—I know they're very big on Kara Walker. And I remember—I nominated Kelly Jones, years ago, to be in [the Art Critics Association. She is now I believe a tenured professor at Columbia University Art History -HP], and they turned her down.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh. She's very highly respected in the field.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. I was very upset with [their rejecting her. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Maybe she's a member now [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't think so.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, I think she's an academic. She's not necessarily a critic and curator. Have you been bothered at all, or possibly pleased by the fact that people can have different interpretations when you look at—when they look at your work? Is there a right and a wrong, or do you feel—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, it's fine. Whatever they feel, because it's from their personal experience.

[Audio break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Howardena Pindell at her apartment on Riverside Drive in New York on December 4, 2012, for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

So we're just talking about criticism and its effect on you, and you were talking about how you do offer texts that talk about the works that give people a way to enter into what you're thinking about. Is that the purpose of the texts that you write to open up your work?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, it's—well, it opens up my work in terms of statements, but then I like to shed some light on the art world, so that's why the other books which are more like statistical overviews of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. The writing really started with my being critical about the fact that I would be the only black in the show. They'd hang me on a column, and then the other [artists (whites) -HP] in the show would, [be on the wall. -HP] And one thing I've run into would be someone who wants to get to know me who has a dealer who wants to get through to the Modern.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well that's—still happening?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, no. No. I mean what I did was, I made it hard to find me, you know. I'm unlisted. I don't get the kind of calls like that are about racial stereotypes [—one from an angry white woman art critic

concerning my view of Kara Walker-HP

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. I don't remember if we talked about this—are you still involved in writing?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Actually, yes, but it's more—it's developing like my painting. I know what the next thing will be.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The next written work, or—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh yes, you were talking about that, yes, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, I really—yes. I think it's interesting—well, for example, Ana, [now that -HP] she's not here—[she was a dear friend even though we lost touch for a while. I went part of the time to Carl Andre's trial. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Ana Mendieta?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I even [have -HP] actually started to interview [artists. -HP] There's a black artist in Copenhagen who's married to a Danish woman, and he wouldn't come back here very often and doesn't—you know, because there was racism. But then New York's getting bad that way, too. [The idea I had for a book was to interview the artist who moved abroad and why. Ana was sent here (she and her sister) during the Cuba crisis under Kennedy. She had a very rough time. She would have been one of the artists I would interview for the book. I could interview her sister. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What's his name?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't remember his name. [I will try to get his name. I hate to fly so I would Skype the interviews. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay. But you were saying that you are interested in writing about Ana Mendieta?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Yes and in a book about artists leaving their home country to come here or to go there. -HP] First, I thought it would be about black artists who went abroad to live, but then I thought, I want to interview black and white artists, male and female [as well as Asian artists. -HP] Why would they leave? What was it about being an artist, let's say, here that they found annoying enough that they'd leave, and have they found where [things are -HP] better? Relocating is a very big deal—work papers and visas. If I ever felt the need to go anywhere, I can't think of anywhere. And I've done a lot of traveling. I can't think of anywhere to go. [Women are treated badly worldwide. I have been to Brazil, Japan, India, Europe, the Caribbean, Russia, Africa (East, South, West), and Cuba. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: At this point, I know it's somewhat difficult for you to get around, but are there—what kinds of—are you able to go to museums and galleries to see shows, and if so what is it that most interests you?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, Raphael, who [drives me around. -HP] I'll hire him for the day, and I'll go down to Chelsea. Personally, this sounds really strange, I like the Met. And [now I have Brian (burse) who is also my IT (information technology). -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, lots of artists like the Met.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes. It's just so incredible.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you go there do you find yourself revisiting the same area often?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Impressionism. But usually I think it's when they have individual shows. I'm trying to think. The African, Maori, New Guinea [collections are incredible. -HP] Oh, the Asian section, and the scrolls.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The Chinese painting.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, oh my God. And Egypt. I would love to go back to Egypt [to visit the Valley of the Kings and the Cairo Museum. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Some of the caretakers [of the pharaohs' tombs -HP] are picking it clean to sell [off pieces of it. I heard from a friend who had. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So number one, the Met, it's not so surprising.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I would say number [(1B) -HP], the Modern [and the Met (1A) -HP]—although in terms of its content [MoMA is incredible. -HP] They've been really kind to me. It's a whole new crew. I mean, they have really been kind to me. Whoever is in this new group, thank you. [Most of the people I knew were there 37 years ago and are retired or dead. Someone I miss is Carolyn Lanchner who was in painting and sculpture. -HP]

[They laugh.]

But, I don't know, the memories I have [such as the -HP] chairman of my department who didn't want me to go to her [retirement party. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Riva Castleman.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Although I was in all the brochures about being part of the acquisitions [process she would not invite me. She sent a message—"not on the door list." -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Other than the museums, are there particular kinds of work that—new gallery shows that you look for?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, no. I'm trying now [to catch up-HP]—I used to buy *Time Out* a lot, because they have nice little reviews. Right now I find that I'm more likely to go to a museum than a gallery. Partly because I feel the galleries are so tainted by commercialism that difficult work—like with Flomenhaft [Eleanor Flomenhaft of Flomenhaft Gallery, New York, NY], she [saw a recent -HP] painting, and she said, "No." She only wanted the abstract things. And then that was the end of it. I never heard from her again after I was in that show. [She agreed to show a dot painting. She wanted to avoid my political work. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Can I say something about the Modern?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sure.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: When that happened with Riva, I was telling people, "She is inviting people she fired." So it was suggested that I get some legal help or at least, whatever. And so I wrote a letter, and it went to the woman who was kind of like [the Director's -HP] troubleshooter, [Ethel Schein. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: An attorney?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, she's not an attorney. She's someone who let's say something embarrassing happens—she would be the spokesman.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A press person.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: She was more or less kind of like a press person. And I wrote her a letter which basically said, "I've been working there for 12 years. I was not only associate curator, I was acting department head," and on and on. And I sent that to her, and her response was, "We are a private institution and we can invite whoever we want." So then I went back to the lawyer and he said "No, they're not a private institution. They're what's called a fiduciary trust, and the work is in trust for the people. It is not a private club." So you know, I told as many people as I could about what happened. And I then had that 13 year period where later she says that I have at home—where she wants to check to see if I have at home [the Jackson Pollock estate stamp—how even I later learned she had dementia. So I chalk her odd behavior 13 years after I left—I chalk it up to that. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —the Jackson Pollock estate stamp.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I didn't even see one. I didn't even remember if it was a rubber stamp. I don't know what it was. But anyway, so—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. Tell me, in the last ten years, you've worked on a number of pieces—going back to the dots, I've seen images of—and in reality worked with—large dots. Tell me about the return to using this form, the dot form.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I'm trying to think what precipitated it. I wanted to get bigger and bigger hole punchers.

I have something that big.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's two inches across?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Yes. I just wanted to expand the work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: They look less autobiographical. They're more formal.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: They are formal.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And more involved with beauty.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And I think that at one point you said—quoted in some interview as talking about how creating beauty was a way of creating a spiritual presence in the world.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, right, right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is that how—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I guess I feel that I've done so many paintings that are about trauma, and I just need some space to do some other things. There's just so much happening in the world. It's just that I need to have a lighter touch.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So these paintings that I saw, 2004, 2007, called *Untitled*.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And very much an abstract—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Were the ones with the color discs?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Right, with the color discs.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Where did you see that?

JUDITH RICHARDS: In reproduction, sadly.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, okay. I'd show you here, but it's all downtown [at Ellen Sragow Gallery. I have since left her for the Garth Greenan Gallery. He is a wonderful dealer! -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you went back to these dots, you found a large hole punch, and—so the, you're finding those works satisfying. Do you continue doing those now?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I had gotten behind in my taxes by about two years. But I went through such a trauma about that, and on top of that I really went through a bad depression. My accountant either killed himself or died alone in his apartment, whatever, he was in Florida. March second is the last time I heard from him. [His death really affected me. I think I was still going through the sadness of my father's death. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This year?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, 2010. And I just—it was like he died, and a lot of us had been trying to get in touch with him. So that kind of put—I just went into this dark space over, my God, what are they going to do with me. It turns out I got refunds [Laughs.] But Jasmine's helping me with that now too. We're not getting—I mean—we're working on 2012 now. But I had just a whole lot of fear about what the government would do to me and where is the money going to come from. Anyway, so no, that's just a bad thing that happened. [I think my CPA's death was -HP] suicide, but we don't know. [I was broke because I had spent a lot of my saving on taking care of my father and his death and possessions. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were telling me this story when we were talking about your returning to the large dots, and the bright color, and that format. How did—somehow this was relating, but I lost the connection between doing those works and the problems with the taxes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Well, and what—

JUDITH RICHARDS: I think that you were talking about how you wanted a relief from the autobiographical, that you wanted to—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —involve yourself in in a more formal work.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That has to do with your state of mind.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, yes. I need to look at, at this point, beauty, and just the act of drawing. You know, using different media, and actually painting. I use ink, I use acrylic, I use water color, I use color thread. It's a shame, I had—one of my good ones is in there. It was downtown in a gallery [Margaret Thatcher Gallery, West 23rd Street, NY -HP] that was partially flooded. And it was really damp in there, and so the mat started rippling. And I have the name of a conservator that I have to get in touch with to see if she can at least get it off the mount. And then the [mold -HP] is growing on the piece, so how can she remove that fuzz, because it's water based paint. [It cost \$1000 to fix it. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Although it's awkward because they're glued in all sorts of positions. But anyway.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you're working now, I know the space is limited, but you're continuing to work.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I'm trying.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What are you going to work on next? Can you describe the next project?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I really want to do [a piece about -HP] slavery in New York. And I really want to work with the DNA.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But in artworks.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Yes, I have—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh yes, and you talked about the book from the New-York Historical Society [on slavery in New York. -HP]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, it's an incredibly dense volume.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And can you envision these as smaller works on paper, or large on canvas?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That [one is -HP] going to be big.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Will you work here on that or?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I can. I can. I mean it's a vertical piece. I would love to have my own big wall, but I have it between the bathroom and the room with the computer. [This has been solved. I have a large wall in the living room. -HP] I would love to do a piece about my father, and I have been—because he loved to play chess, and I'm trying to figure out how to express that in a three dimensional format and large.

[Telephone rings.]

I would like to be able to cut it out and sew it back together. I don't know whether that would mean a chessboard. Years ago I was in a show, where I made chess pieces out of [cast -HP] vegetables.

[Buzzer sounds.]

[Audio break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay, so tell me about the vegetable chess set.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, actually they're beautiful. What I did was use molds, rubber molds, to kind of mold the vegetables. [You create the vegetables with the rubber mold material, let it harden and pull out the vegetable, and pour in hydrocal plaster. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What kind of vegetables?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Carrots. I think mainly carrots. Some celery. Again, I don't remember everything. [The gallery has it. I am grateful to Garth Greenan of the Garth Greenan Gallery for taking such good care of my work—especially fragile work. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Carrots would be better to carve than celery.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, what you do is, [as I mentioned before, -HP] you do a rubber mold, and then you pull out whatever, and then you pour in the plaster.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wait a second.

[Audio break.]

So what prompted you to do the chess set with the vegetables? Was that a commission, or exhibition?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: This was for Exit Art.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: When they were on Broadway. I've not had a good relationship with them for some reason. [There seemed to be hostility about my having worked at the Modern. Occasionally, I run into that. I remember a woman who was getting her Ph.D. at Columbia University in Art History. She has written her whole thesis using me as the arch-conservative artist, because I worked at the Modern. I told her she was all wrong, but she kept it as she had originally written it. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You know they closed.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, I heard. I think [as mentioned earlier, -HP] the problem was that some people really hated me for being at the Modern.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, that's old history.

[. . . -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And then she didn't like my work, I think. Well, it's something I ran into in the '70s, late '60s, was that black artists were expected to do didactic work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But then there was a whole group of abstract painters like William T. Williams and Jack Whitten [when my father was dying William T. gave me a lot of support and would check up on me. -HP]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, yes, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And all kinds of—Al Loving—painters who were abstract.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I know, I know, but I remember going to the Studio Museum and Ed Spriggs—Ed Spriggs is still mad at me [because of my non-didactic work. The director really disliked me. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Ed Spriggs, huh?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, he was the director at the time. And he basically said "Go downtown and show [with the white boys. -HP]" Yes. So and the people look at me and [ask, -HP] why weren't you shown Uptown. The Studio Museum [Harlem, New York] was the only institution that would be able, at that point, to show [Black artists. -HP] They said the same to William T. Williams also—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] It sounds like you have some great projects coming up. Is there some other dream project that you hope to do that we haven't talked about yet?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I don't know. I think my goal is to—I know Ben [Ortiz] wants to help out—move stuff in my space here. I have [storage -HP] downstairs, and I have another space down[town—plus the gallery has a space for me. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: The storage space?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Storage space. How to move things around so I can get to the wall.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. You mean put more things in storage so you have more empty space in your—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: More empty space.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —studio in your apartment.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. And I do have local storage downstairs.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And the challenge is just to identify what to move?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I love books. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you have bookcases?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I did, and the floor started sagging.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So I just—before I got here, there was a bad leak. And it continued with me, too [for 15 years! -HP] I have large paintings stored down on 55th Street. Yes, 55th [(Cirkers.)] The works are now at the Garth Greenan Gallery. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's an interesting place to have storage. Far on the west side, or the east side?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: West side. And the price was really good; it was like \$119 a month. And then a company took over and jacked it up to \$300 a month.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You continue to teach now.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How many days a week do you teach?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Two. Two.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And how many classes?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Really one and a half. Really two, but [once a year -HP] you get [a graduate -HP] class, in—[The intermediate class studies -HP] the different western "isms": impressionism—[Now I teach two and two, and not 2 and 1. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: But it's a studio class, or an art history?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Studio.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's an undergraduate class?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, and the other is a graduate class. [For example there is -HP] In Process Critique—you just critique everyone, and they critique each other.

[Audio break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. So about teaching. Do you enjoy teaching?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Actually, a lot. I think part of it is it helps clarify solutions for me in terms of formal considerations. I like the students a lot. When I first came to Stony Brook, I would run into—The most hostility would be from white women students. Long Island is not the nicest place. I don't know, I don't know. [We lost a tenure track Black faculty member because of the racism he encountered on Long Island. People did not want to rent him an apartment and he ran into problems at his gym. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have there been any particular students who are really memorable? Excellent?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh yes, there's so many. There's one woman, I think her name was Cynthia Mannino? Something like that. She stayed in touch every year, you know, I hear from her. Pura Cruz [keeps me up to date concerning her shows. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sorry, say the name again?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Her name was Cynthia Marino, something like that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, and then you said Mora?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: There was another one [named I think Pura Cruz. -HP] I don't know what her married name is now. She's really stuck to it, and her work has improved. She's starting to show. Then there were two young guys who were—one was better than the other, but who have become doctors. They have [art -HP] as an outlet for themselves. It's a science school, [Stony Brook, where I teach. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —at Stony Brook.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, it has a very good reputation.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you get students who are not art majors but are interested in—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Depends on the level of course. I basically teach graduate classes and maybe upper division, like the 300 level classes. My mother hated teaching, so I remember hearing all the time how much she hated it, but I really enjoy it.

My favorite class to teach and, thank goodness, I'll be teaching that next semester, is conceptual drawing [class. -HP] You see they're using their own ideas. And you just have to make it so their formal stuff is not shaky. But I have a series of projects, and they can [really develop their creative imagination -HP] it anyway they want. There is one that you might find interesting, where they have to do two self-portraits and include both hands, and they need to write a little autobiography [project -HP] about themselves that I don't read. I tell them, "Put it in your sketchbook, tape it shut, it's none of my business, but I want you to think about just things you like and don't like, memories, whatever." And then I might give them, let's say, a project which is about something they're passionate about. And with the autobiography, one's dark, one's light, or one is color, one is not, whatever. They can put anything in the background they want. I prefer the head be not teeny-tiny. But I've gotten really good results, really good results. I wish I had had a class like that when I was in school.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. What would you say is your approach to teaching, and is it something that you created intuitively, or did you model it after a teacher you had that you thought was really excellent.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, yes. I would say I model it after Walther [Tandy] Murch. He was one of my teachers at Boston University. He had incredible respect for his students. I remember how he would sit down [with each of us. -HP] Not a whiff of racial stuff, or even sexist stuff. He would sit down and talk quietly with each student. There wasn't a sense that he wanted to overwhelm you. I find some of the male teachers want to control and overwhelm the students, and have things done their way. Anyway, I remember him [Murch -HP], I can see him clearly just sitting down in front of me just being very loving. A very, very sweet man. So I try to be concerned about my students, and I try to critique them in a way that's not like you're a dog and I'm you're walker.

[They laugh.]

You know, I just try just to let them be themselves. I do enjoy teaching. I don't know how long I'll be able to stay. Part of it depends on my ride. But I might—maybe I'll find another ride, I don't know.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You've been teaching there a long time.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Thirty-three years. [37 years as of 2017. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you've been very active in terms of the committees and—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, yes. [To some degree, my favorite was the art gallery committee and I have chaired search committees. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Administration, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, you have no choice. [I was head of the MFA Program for a while, two and a half years. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: It rotates.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: [Laughs] Right. But we have a very good situation now. We have a new chairman. We've been merged with theater, and there is something about it that has taken this edge off the department. We have a fellow named [John] Lutterbie. He seems to be pretty kind. [We are no longer with Theatre and the school administration shut down studio which is a shame. The government offers free tuition but the students now have fewer choices. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Letter-bee or letter—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Lutt, L-U-T-T-E-R-B-I-E. I mean he's very—he has a wonderful sense of humor. His demeanor is not one of punish. He must love power, but not in the sense that [he was to make everyone miserable. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's not corrupting [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: It's not corrupting, yes. Yes, no, he's made a big difference.

JUDITH RICHARDS: He's the dean?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: He's the chairman [of both Art and Theatre. -HP] Because they had, like for example, to save money, they took all of our phones out of our offices, which meant that you had a nice big cell phone bill. The one I had from before that happened was unlimited service for like \$100. Without that, my bill would be like three, four-hundred dollars. [. . . -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

[. . . -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: The last class for the semester [is soon. -HP] And then we have finals after that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Another teaching question—how do you think teaching has affected your work? I mean, you've been teaching, you said, 33 years there. Can you identify how—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Well, I would say it's in a good way because I see them struggling. And they're struggling—I guess it's given me a lot of different insights. One, my parents were really incredible. I never had to pay for school. They made sure if I got a job, that was my choice for spending change. But I think I had some small scholarships, but they never, ever made me have to take another job. And I am so grateful, because I see—my students are exhausted, you know. They have jobs, they have—well, they live in dorms, the undergraduates. But the economy is terrible. I'm grateful that I was able to get an education when it was possible, because Yale I'm sure is at thirty-five, forty thousand dollars. And I'm sure it wasn't like that then. So I am grateful for my parents making sure that I was well educated and well read. And with the art, I would say my father was the most supportive of the two, because my mother got very jealous when I started to become well known. I kind of wish she were still alive so I could talk to her to find out what was wrong. The thing that was hard for her was she had, I think I may have mentioned, a white birth certificate.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: And they had to go to court to prove [she was Black. -HP] With Social Security, it had to be that you were black and not white [to get your social security. She was not white. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. So.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. Before we end, is there anything else that we haven't covered that you'd like to talk about?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't mean to harp on the Kara Walker thing, but I really want to encourage people to have dialogue about not only her, but anything.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have you spoken to her directly yourself? Had a dialogue with her?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: No, I haven't wanted to, because when I read her interviews, she contradicts herself. So I don't want to be held to [her changing contradictory comments. -HP] She has said blah, blah, blah, when indeed a couple of publications earlier she had said the opposite. I mean she seems to tailor it, so I don't particularly want to talk to her.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Are there African-American younger artists whose work you admire?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I don't know about younger. Most of my generation—I mean, I'll be 70 next year. I like Al Loving he has a wonderful show downtown, the Gary Snyder [Gary Snyder Fine Art, New York, NY. [(Now the Garth Greenan Gallery.)] I need to pay more attention to the artists in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, I saw that.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, and he [received -HP] a nice full page [review -HP], which was nice. Younger artists, that's a hard one because what I'm trying to do now—there's artists that I found very interesting at the Studio Museum in Harlem. [They have -HP] a show on some of the artists in residence. [One -HP] person used photography. I don't remember their name, I should go back. I was with someone I think then, that's why it was kind of rushed. But it was very nice work. And I think as more young people go to our schools, young people of color, we're going to see a wide range of work, and what I'm hoping is that the new head of the NEA is able to arrange for funding for the visual arts, because I think that will take the corporate edge off of it, and you will see things that are not the same. In other words, that you'll have a variety of visual images rather than sort of sensationalism [as we see in Kiwi. -HP]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you know the work of Leonardo Drew?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh, I like his work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, I thought you might.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes, no, actually I [curated -HP] a show out at school [(Stony Brook). -HP] Lawrence Alloway used to teach there. [Our gallery space that was designed by him -HP] is beautiful. Just beautiful. And so I [curated -HP] a war show, which was a damn good show, and it got panned unfortunately, but again, Long Island is a very conservative community. I had Leonardo Drew [included -HP] in it. I'm trying to remember who else. It's been again, too long.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How many years ago?

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Let's see. Probably 20 years ago, something like that, because they made these little catalogues then. Hopefully I have a copy somewhere. But it was a very, very good show. I like [Drew's -HP] work. Some people don't. They feel that the white dealers only want to support people who are digging in the trashcan.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, [Laughs.]

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Or, oh, you know.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I think that's—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I mean—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —I don't get that sense from my perspective.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes. Well—

JUDITH RICHARDS: He's—

HOWARDENA PINDELL: I use detritus on the other part, also, in the work. I don't know, I'm trying to think. Is there anything else—I wish that the artists could talk without a corporate mind behind them, where they know if they say something, the corporate sponsors will not be happy, and it will be hard for them to show their work. I have to have a job, and I think in terms of white privilege, the white women artists have a better chance at it because they don't have to work. Now I can say I'm jealous. I never thought of it actually that way, because I really don't want to retire. I enjoy it so much and I don't know. I'm trying to think one of the things I want to get involved in when I retire is literacy issues in terms of reading. It's something my mother did. And who knows? People could show up from nowhere saying, "Oh, we want to show your work, or we want you to"—so you know, I just don't know, what the world will be like then [when I retire. -HP] But I would like to get involved, [with -HP] reading for the blind.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That sounds satisfying.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: That's satisfying to me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: In terms of art, I really feel badly about the way the art world, like K.O.S.—K.O.S., Kids of Survival, something like that. To me that is typical art world, "cover up for racism and feeding on these children," because I invited them to be in the War Show—and—Tim Rollins, had them do a piece for it, which he was willing to do, but it took hell to high water to get him to name the children. I said, "Listen, your name is out front as if it's your work. These are young people, and you feel you're doing something nice for them. You go to the Bronx. You're perhaps working with young students who haven't been downtown, whatever. But you are the network. They will remember you, you know, the art world. And there is no proof, ever, that the children have any involvement [with the project. -HP]" That made me really [angry. I felt blind rage. -HP]

And then a couple of years ago one of his acquaintances was doing a thesis on him, and he wanted to meet me, and he just started attacking me, saying, "You've done nothing for anyone. Look what he's doing for these kids." I said, "Listen, give me the name. Name one child." I did get the names out of him eventually, and they were listed, and then I heard of another exhibition where they had trouble getting the names. Suppose one of these children wants to be an artist, and they say they were part of the Kids of Survival. How can you prove that? Your name is nowhere in print, but Tim Rollins is. So I start to get irate about some of the practices that—the art critics association are perfectly happy with, and consider me a nuisance for bringing it up. I mean,

[They laugh.]

I don't know. The way I reach out to [the art world -HP] is through [a few -HP] books, the publications.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Some of them read them, some of them don't.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Anyway.

JUDITH RICHARDS: All right.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: So I just hope that the NEA comes back to life and can fund even traditional arts within the Asian community. It doesn't have to all be what you show in Chelsea—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: —or [57th Street and the Upper East Side -HP], I mean—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: All right. Sounds like a good place to stop.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh good.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Thank you very much.

HOWARDENA PINDELL: Oh sure. [Now is the age of Trump! And we must start from scratch. -HP]

[END OF INTERVIEW]