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Oral history interview with Carrie Yamaoka,
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Contact Information

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Carrie Yamaoka on 2016 July 26 and 27. The interview took place in New York, N.Y., and was conducted by Alex Fialho for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

Carrie Yamaoka and Alex Fialho have reviewed the transcript. Their 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

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Carrie Yamaoka at Carrie's home in New York City, New York, on July 26, 2016, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one. Let's start at the beginning and spend some time on how you grew up. When and where were you born?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I was born in 1957 in Glen Cove, Long Island. Actually, I spent the first 10 years of my life living on Long Island in a town called Manhasset, which is on the North Shore, and then—I'll sort of give you the broad arc until I got to New York. How about that? And then—

ALEX FIALHO: Let's do that.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —we'll go back to the childhood part, because I actually had interesting experiences of displacement all through my childhood.

So for the first nine or 10 years I lived in Manhasset with my parents. My parents got divorced when I was about nine or 10, and I then went—my mother moved into the city. I was—I went with my mother. She—but then for a year I sort of shuttled back and forth between this really good friend of hers named Wendy, who lived in Manhasset, because I was still finishing up sixth grade in Manhasset, and I'd spend the weekdays in Manhasset and the weekends in New York City with my mom. And then in 1970, when I was 12, my mom decided that she wanted to move to Tokyo, and we moved to Tokyo, and I was there from 1970 to 1975, and then I came back in 1975 to go to college. I went to Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

So it was a—the thing that's sort of—the reason why I say there's this theme of displacement is because growing up in this complete—in this—you can imagine, like, in the early '60s in this suburb on Long Island, it's completely white. I mean, there were no black people; there were no Latinos; there were no Jews in this town. I mean, we were the only family that was not, like, white, Catholic, or Protestant. So that was—

ALEX FIALHO: How did your family get there?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think because, you know, my dad was second-generation Japanese-American; my mom was half-Japanese, half-American. She had grown up in that town, and I think my parents aspired to—after World War II, obviously, which was incredibly traumatic for them and their families, they—I think this is true of a lot of Japanese-American families after the war—they kind of aspired to the most normal, sort of middle-class, white paradigm of family life that you could ever imagine.

So, yeah, I went to public school. My dad was a jeweler; he worked in Manhattan. My mom was a homemaker. She was actually pretty active, working to integrate the schools, because actually, the school that I went to was segregated up until the time I was in second grade. So all the black people in the town lived in this other village that was—and it sounds crazy that we're talking about 1965 or something, but they had their own school—

ALEX FIALHO: Of Manhasset? Black people?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. I remember in second grade, really vividly, that there were people with picket signs outside the school, black mothers and their children, picketing the school, wanting the school to be integrated. Normally you think in the northern suburbs it's, you know, not at all like the South, and it wasn't like the South, but clearly this was—it was the least diverse place I've ever seen in my entire life, for the most part.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you have brothers and sisters growing up?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, I was the youngest of three kids. My brother is 10 years older than me; my sister's eight years older than me. And my brother—you know, my brother was 10 years older than me, and he would

take me into the city when I was really little, around eight, when my parents started to fight and he wanted to get me out of the house; he would take me on the train, and it was a 30-minute train ride into Manhattan, and he was in his first year at RISD.

He had come home from RISD, and he would take me into the city to go to museums or go to secondhand bookstores and go to graphic design shops where you could find old postcards and old graphic design material, and I was completely fascinated. We would get into Penn Station, which was just so bustling and confusing for me, because I hadn't been exposed to city life, and so I would hold onto the back—he didn't want to hold my hand because I think he was sort of embarrassed to hold my hand, because he was 18 and I would be, let's say, eight, and I—so I'd just walk behind him and hold onto the back of his belt and sort of—

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —we'd work our way through the crowds, and he would take me around with him, around the city.

ALEX FIALHO: Which areas of the city would you go to at that stage?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I remember going to 57th Street because there were galleries on 57th Street, and there were also some art supply stores and used bookstores up there, and we went to MoMA, for sure—

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —many, many times. I don't remember going down to the Village until later.

ALEX FIALHO: Did he, your brother, have a particularly strong influence, of course, then on creative aspirations, or even—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, he gave me my first camera when I was—let's see, I was probably 10 or 11, and he totally did, although I will say that he was always considered the artist in the family, from a really young age, and he was going to RISD, so it was—I think my family kind of just thought of him as the artist, and not me necessarily, for the longest time.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you have an artistic family overall that encouraged the arts and creativity?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: My mom did, quite a bit, and one also really formative thing—so, as I said, we were the only non-white family in the neighborhood, the only—I didn't even grow up knowing any other Asian-Americans because there was no community of Asian-Americans in Long Island, except my parents were really good friends with George Nakashima and his family, and George Nakashima the craftsman who lived in New Hope, Pennsylvania.

So every year we'd go down and visit the Nakashimas. George Nakashima was my brother's godfather. And that was a complete revelation because I felt like they lived a complete—a life that was so opposite from the suburban, middle-class life that my parents lived. I mean, they lived like artists, and George had created—he had built all the buildings himself on this huge piece of property from scratch, basically, and he built his own studio. And that was amazing. It was totally amazing. He really influenced me, actually.

ALEX FIALHO: How often would you visit them and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: At least once a year.

ALEX FIALHO: What part of Pennsylvania did you say?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was New Hope, Pennsylvania.

ALEX FIALHO: New Hope. As a family?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Vacation? Just to visit close friends? What was the context?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: You mean, why would they go visit?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Just to visit for the day.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Sometimes we'd stay overnight. And also they were sort of patrons of George; they would go and buy furniture. So we grew up with a lot of George's furniture all over the house.

ALEX FIALHO: How about negotiating or navigating that lack of diversity growing up?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was really confusing for me because—I mean, of course, I—there was a lot of racism and whatnot that I confronted as a very young child, like on the playground of nursery school, where I remember being called names and all kinds of things. And I would go home to my mom and she would say—she had this whole way to sort of frame all that, saying, "Well, you have to remember that, you know, they only have"—she tried to explain it as, "They only have one thing; you have two things, so you're part-Asian, part-American; you have both cultures and they only have one." "Those poor people, they're just slightly ignorant and not quite as evolved," because—their horizons are narrower.

But at the same time, they, you know, my parents did fall victim to that whole typical Asian-American thing of, you have to be the best just to be equal. So I was on the swim team; my brother and sister were on the swim team all through when we were really little kids till—they were older than me, so, they had to win the medals. They had to win the races. My brother was a diver; he had to be a champion diver. You just had to excel. You had to do well, and you had to do well in school. My mother had a really—I mean, we didn't—she, being half-Japanese, half-American—her dad was Japanese; he was interned during the war. Her mom was WASP, so they were—her parents were separated basically from Pearl Harbor onwards—

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —and that's a whole long story, but I won't get into that. So she had very little contact with Japan, per se, but she had this really deep love of Japanese ceramics, so that was another thing that we had in the house, Japanese ceramics like Hamada Shoji vases and just beautiful Japanese bowls.

ALEX FIALHO: And then how about your two older siblings in terms of models, did you look up to them? Were they navigating these similar confusing childhood elements in ways that you looked to, or were they a little too old to do that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: They were a little too old, really. I mean, my sister was eight years older, and my brother was 10 years older.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: My parents had a very messy breakup that was very—involved a lot of domestic violence, and I had to call the cops on my dad. You know, it was a little confusing because I was the youngest, and my brother was away at school, and my sister was a kind of mixed-up teenager at that point, so it was almost like I felt like I was kind of the one in charge, the—I had to be the adult, kind of, in the house at a really young age. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And then you lived with your mother moving forward?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I did live with my mother moving forward, yeah. Let's see; then I—I moved into the city with my mom; I went to a private school in New York City for a year. It was very weird and very different from my experience with public school on Long Island, and then when I was 12, we moved to Tokyo and I went to an English-speaking international school.

But then again, I felt—it was also a sort of another experience of displacement because I didn't speak any Japanese. Neither of my parents spoke Japanese in the home, so I didn't speak any Japanese. I had been to Japan once as a very young child, like when I was five. And you know, I'd be standing at a bus stop in Tokyo, waiting for the bus, and people would come up to me and speak to me like they'd think—just ask me a question, like really rapidly, [. . . -CY] and I would try and answer in my very halting Japanese, and they would just look at me like, "Oh, you poor thing," like, "You're just not quite right upstairs." They couldn't figure out that I was actually kind of a foreigner, you know, because it didn't—the picture didn't fit the reality. So that was interesting.

ALEX FIALHO: What influenced your mother's decision to move to Tokyo?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, her father had been deported during the war and she had been separated from him, and then he had become this very successful businessman in the ensuing postwar years, and she thought that he could help her get work there, and she also wanted to be closer to him.

And then, because I spent, you know, five—I'd say five years in Tokyo, where I was not really exposed to mainstream American culture at all, except for music, I knew nothing at all about TV shows or movies or any sort of pop culture things—when I came back when I was 17 to go to college, I felt like I was again a little bit

displaced because my reference points weren't exactly this—at all the same as my peers when I got back here. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How about—let's stay back a little bit, actually. You said you went to galleries in 57th Street when you were younger, and then you took a while to go to the Village. What was the first time going to the Village, and if that's a relevant experience or—why the distinction for you between the Village and 57th Street?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, when we lived in—when I lived with my mom in the city, we lived on 73rd Street and Second Avenue, so the Village was just, like, way far away. Probably I didn't even come down to the Village at all then. I probably only came down to the Village when I was—by the time I got to college, actually.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How about the Upper East Side versus Manhasset?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: [Laughs.] That's a completely different world.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, exactly.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Completely different world. But one of the things I do remember—I actually just jotted this down before you came today—because one of the shows my brother took me to see—well, two of the shows; there were two shows at MoMA in 1968. One was the *Art of the Real*. There was a show of Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella and I think Kenneth Noland and Donald Judd. It was—that was such a kind of revelation to me as a 10-year-old to see that work.

And this other show, which was also wild. It was called *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, and there was a piece in that show by Jean Tinguely that—the Swiss sculptor—called *Rotozaza*, and it involved this elaborate machine that he had constructed, and it was—the way that it was activated was by viewers taking balls and throwing them into different orifices of the machine, and then it would get—that would make a particular activity happen with the machine, and then the balls would be spit out and—so I was completely—of course, being 10, I was totally enthralled by this and I thought it was incredibly amazing, and it was kind of—it was incredible to go to a place like a museum and actually be able to interact with the art in a—you know, to have your participation actually be part and parcel of the actual piece. So that was kind of a revelation.

And then when we were there, this old—this kind of middle-aged, older, kind of middle-aged guy with a French accent came up to me, and my brother was convinced it was Tinguely himself. And he started asking me questions like, "Oh, you know, you seem to like this a lot; tell me what you think about it. Why do you like it?" and it was sort of like I was being interviewed by him for my—to give him my feedback. He didn't seem like a pedophile or anything. I mean, he actually seemed genuinely interested in what I was thinking about the piece, and so that was completely thrilling. I was convinced it was Tinguely, too, since my brother told me that it was, and I thought, Wow, you can go to a museum and you can interact with the art, and the artist is there to actually talk to you. And of course, you know, later, when I grew up, I realized it wasn't always like that [laughs]. But yeah, that was sort of etched in my memory, for sure.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the *Art of the Real* show? Why was that one influential to you?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: *The Art of the Real* was fascinating because it was about not—I guess because it was about things, materials, and things being made of just what they were, you know. So rather than thinking of them as abstract painting, that there was a kind of materiality to it that it—somehow it made me understand a little better what abstraction was about, or at least abstraction at that point in time, in the '60s.

ALEX FIALHO: And that stuck with your more or less 10-year-old self?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yes, it did [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Wow, that's nice.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And I think it really influenced me, actually.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. That and the viewer's implication in the work from the second show still seem to be relevant to what you're thinking through.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: That's impressive.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And then when I was—also when I was 10, my brother gave me my first camera, which was a little rangefinder, and we—my mother took us to Portugal the day after Christmas. He gave it to me for Christmas, and so—and I bought all this color film, and she told me that we could—we were driving—we were

renting a car in Lisbon and going down to the south to the Algarve, which was a pretty long road trip—my sister, my brother, me, and my mom. And she told me that whenever I wanted to take a picture, I should just tell her; she would stop the car. Well, of course, you know, I wanted to take a picture every 10 minutes, and very quickly that—it became clear that that was not really going to happen, besides the fact that I was taking pictures of things like, "Oh, there's a windmill in the distance and I can see it, so I want to take a picture of that."

So little did I know that when I finally got the film back, you could not even see that windmill because it was so tiny, and most of the pictures that I took—because we were on the beach in the Algarve and there was nobody there; it was the winter—most of them were of the waves, because when I finally got back to New York and I took, you know, all my rolls of films downstairs to the drugstore, submitted them to the drugstore to be developed for those prints, and I went back like a week later, and the man at the drugstore said, "Okay, that will be \$150," and I was like—that was a lot of money—

ALEX FIALHO: It was.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —in 1969. So of course I didn't have \$150. I had to go back upstairs and ask my mom for the money, and she was like, "What, \$150 on pictures?! They'd better be good." And then she gave me the money; I went down; I got my pictures; and I started showing them to my mom, and I'd say, like, out of about, you know, seven rolls of film, there's five rolls of film of just the waves or the sand. And of course I—they completely teased me to no end about how funny it was that I had spent \$150 and most of it was just pictures of the waves.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you think they were good?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I did. I was totally—those were the best pictures, the ones of the waves, for sure, because unlike the windmill way in the distance that, you know, you couldn't—that didn't actually show up, they were the real thing.

So then—yeah, so actually, my first—so he gave me my first camera, and then my mom sort of fancied herself somewhat of a photojournalist. She had a job as a travel writer, and she had to take pictures wherever she traveled, so then when I grew up—well, when I grew up a little bit more, we moved to Tokyo when I was 12, I got a proper camera, and then I used to go with my mom on just little side trips and things, and that was one of my most favorite activities, was to go with my mom to a particular place, and we'd both be shooting photographs.

And then I had a darkroom. Well, first I had a darkroom at school. I convinced the school that we needed a darkroom. We needed a photo club, so we formed a photo club, me and my classmates, and then we made a darkroom at school, and I used that for a long time. And then for a while I had a darkroom in my mom's boyfriend's apartment, my own darkroom. So, yeah, I was really, really involved in photography when I was in high school for a number of years, until I realized that I didn't want to be spending my entire life in the darkroom. For, like, someone who's 16 years old and spending all that time in the dark with all these chemicals just seemed really not the way I wanted to live.

And the other thing was at that time I was sort of torn between things like pictures of the waves and thinking that I should be more of a sort of photojournalist or concerned photographer and go out and shoot people in their lives, and I felt—I had just felt very conflicted about that because I felt like, in a sense, that it was exploitative for me to take a picture of a total stranger whose life I—didn't know very much about at all. I wasn't—I was uneasy with that relationship, that sort of relationship of the photographer to the subject.

ALEX FIALHO: How about—when you were in Tokyo, your siblings were still in the United States?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. They were all kind of grown up by then.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, exactly.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: My brother—they were living in Europe. My sister dropped out of school. She was living in Amsterdam. My brother was living in London, so it was just me and my mom in Tokyo, for the most part.

ALEX FIALHO: And how was that transition?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was pretty lonely, but of course, I made friends in Tokyo, and that sort of made up somewhat for that lack, and I would see my brother and sister in the summertime. Like, I would sort of get deposited with them in the summer, like my brother in London or my sister in Holland, and they were great. They were—

ALEX FIALHO: What are your family members' names? Just to have that in this—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: My sister's name is Mira, M-I-R-A, and my brother's name is Peter.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's talk a little bit about those five years in Tokyo, how did they impact your growing up and maybe perhaps your artistic interests there? Were they fostered?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah—

ALEX FIALHO: You made a darkroom in your high school, but—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Totally. Yeah, no, I was—when I was a teenager, I was really voracious about going out and seeing things and seeing art. I was also writing experimental music. But when I gave up on being a photographer, I decided I was going to be an experimental composer, so I spent like the last two years of high school, deeply involved in experimental music. So on one hand there was this sort of really exciting contemporary music scene going on in Tokyo at that time, and then there were the traditional crafts like ceramics and—ceramics especially. After I decided I was not going to be a composer, I thought I would move to a little village in Japan and become a ceramicist. That was a very short-lived fantasy.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the ways that you were engaged in experimental music there?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So I was—you mean, what was I doing? I was writing pieces for prepared piano, and I was figuring out ways to—because I didn't have a classical music background whatsoever, I was sort of composing from the outside in and using concrete sound, so I was using reel-to-reel tape recorders and sampling different things from different sources—

ALEX FIALHO: In your teens?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. And there was a composer, experimental composer, that had come to my school—he'd done a session in music class where he stuck things inside the piano, and he's—you know, we were making sounds with the piano keys with the prepared piano, and that was like a revelation.

So then I began to study with him, like, private tutorials with him. And I wrote a string quartet, you know, based on serial—chance-derived serial sequences then using different chance-operations to determine the sequence of the sequences and how the instruments would—yeah, so, I mean, I would—I was totally involved in it. But then I got to the point where I realized I would have to go back to music school and learn from scratch, from the beginning, the right way around, and that didn't appeal to me so much.

ALEX FIALHO: When you say, "the right way around," does that mean—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Like a classical training.

ALEX FIALHO: —that you can then derive from, or move away from into experimental?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Right. But it became very clear that that's what I needed to do, and that wasn't as exciting to me. And then I also—

ALEX FIALHO: Was this in school you were taking classes, or was this experimenting on the side?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: This was on the side. But I did have an art teacher that was incredible in high school, and she was super supportive of me, and so I did a lot of projects, independent projects in high school. I mean, I was a weird kid. What can I say?

I did this one project where I took—this is sort of funny, thinking about my work now. I took a roll of tinfoil, and I covered the wall of a stairwell with it, and in the center of the stairwell—the stairwell was kind of like a spiral staircase, and there were walls, so I covered two walls of the staircase with tinfoil so that—going vertically—so there would be multiple reflections as someone went down the stairs. And I suspended on fish wire from the center of the spiral staircase a stainless steel spoon—

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —that would sort of—it would sort of move with movement up and down the staircase, and contained within the spoon itself there was a reflection of the viewer, or of the walker.

ALEX FIALHO: Where was that installed?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: In my school stairway—

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —as a project.

ALEX FIALHO: And how was the reaction to that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I don't know. I guess people—I mean, I was—I don't really remember the reaction, to be honest. It lasted for about a week. It was up for about a week.

ALEX FIALHO: Anything that stays up in a high school for a week probably isn't too negatively reviewed.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Oh, and then I also had this—I went through a phase where I—during this phase where I was making little installations in school—I don't know if you remember this; you might be too young for it. But there used to be these overhead projectors where you could put a book on there and it would project onto the wall. Well, I took a Pyrex pie plate and I put it on the bed of the overhead projector, and then I mixed up all kinds of food colorings, some oil, some water, so there was some kind of resistance between the water-based things and the oil-based things. Some was food coloring; some was paint; a lot of it was translucent.

So I would sort of start—I would set up in a particular area of the school and usually, like, something like that, where it would be through a doorway into another wall, so there would be actually a three-dimensional space that this was being projected on. And then I would just start mixing my colors and stuff, and it was, you know, a kind—not really a—there was a performative aspect to it, but it was definitely a time-based event, so it might last, let's say, 20 minutes or half an hour, the different colors and the shapes that they would make in the pie plate on the—

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: I have a vision of the stairwell installation already in my mind's eye, but I think it's actually influenced by what I know about your work—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Right.

ALEX FIALHO: —now, so I actually think I see that perhaps more than it might even have been.

How about culturally, to go from Manhasset and Manhattan to Japan, where you went from being the only identifiable Asian-American in a community to living in Japan?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: With Asians all over the place—

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —with nobody I could necessarily communicate with—

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —except people, other displaced people, like myself who were in my school. There were a lot of Japanese girls that had been at—you know, that had gone abroad with their parents because their parents had work abroad, and then they would come back to Japan and they couldn't really read or write Japanese properly enough to go to Japanese school. So I was amongst other people that were somewhat displaced as well, which was sort of a comfort, but I mean, to admit—I mean, I knew when I was high school I was queer, but I didn't exactly know how to negotiate that at all, or there weren't even the words for it, really. So that was another way of being displaced, you know.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. I didn't even open up that door yet. How did you know you were queer?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I knew I was queer because I was just—I was only infatuated with girls, you know.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How about the decision to come back to the United States and go to Wesleyan?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, I always knew I would go to college here, because I couldn't go to college in Japan. I picked Wesleyan because—well, I made a trip around to different schools and I loved—I liked Wesleyan a lot. I felt like their—at that point, their whole—they had a much more progressive kind of curriculum than a lot of other schools, and they had a great music department. And so when I was applying to schools, that's—I was still planning to be an experimental composer, so Wesleyan seemed like the perfect place to be. By the time I actually went, I wasn't actually interested in being a composer anymore, so my studies kind of took me in a different direction, but I did study art there.

ALEX FIALHO: Did your brother's art practice develop into his future?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It did. It did. He became a painter and then a printmaker. He was very involved in printmaking, and now he's a ceramicist. It's almost like we've changed positions. I had this dream of becoming a ceramicist and living in some little village, and he was a painter, and now, it's sort of the reverse, where he lives upstate in the Catskills, makes ceramics, and I live in the city.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, nice. Was your sister artistically inclined?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: She—for a while she was involved in music. She has an incredible voice, and she was singing. Other than that, I wouldn't say she pursued art in any particular way.

ALEX FIALHO: And then at Wesleyan what mediums were you studying? What were some of the influential moments that you had there artistically?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I actually took a ceramics class at Wesleyan. That was sort of my way in. But I studied—actually, I had a really incredible professor there my senior year, Jacqueline Gourevitch, who is a painter. I did my thesis in drawing, not in painting, and I actually went—I'd applied to Tyler School of Art in Rome for my junior year because I felt like I kind of craved an art school experience, and that's not what I was getting at Wesleyan, because it was more of a liberal arts school, and I thought that maybe I would have that at Tyler in Rome. But I ended up getting something really different out of it, I think. It wasn't the rigor of an art school experience, but it was Rome, and there was—it was an incredible opportunity to see—

ALEX FIALHO: How long were you there?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I was there for a year.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice. What did you study there, and what did you see there?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I studied drawing, painting. I studied art history, you know, traveled all over. I just—it was mind-blowing, everything from seeing Roman ruins and Roman and Greek stuff to, you know, Caravaggio to—yeah, no, it was incredible.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Incredible.

ALEX FIALHO: And I think you met Joy [Episalla] there?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We did. We met in Rome.

ALEX FIALHO: What happened? What was the story there? Who's Joy?

[They laugh.]

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Gosh, that's a long story.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, we met in Rome. Let's see, I'm trying to—I mean, not that I don't remember; I'm just trying to think how much I want to tell you about how we met. She was in the printmaking department, and I was in the painting department. The printmaking department was downstairs in the building, and the painting department was upstairs, but I kind of very quickly found my sort of queer folk at Tyler. So there was Michael Ottersen, who's—he's a painter that—he lives out on the West Coast now. Jean—I don't know if you know Jean Foss—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, of course.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —but she was there. She was a little older than me. She was like—she was the painter that everybody looked up to.

ALEX FIALHO: I love the thought of three of you running around Rome together in the '70s, '80s. Amazing.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Except I didn't really know Jean very well, just as—I knew her as an acquaintance, but—and she wasn't queer then, but she was friends with Michael Ottersen, and then this other friend, Brett, who was queer. So I had sort of my queer posse, and I just sort of fell in love with Joy at first sight, during orientation week and—but I just couldn't figure out how to get to know her because her orbit was so different than mine.

And there—but actually the way we kind of got to know each other was Ben Shahn's son, Jonathan Shahn, was

our drawing teacher and he was also the sculpture teacher in Rome, and he—Joy was babysitting to make some extra money on the side for Jon's little kid. And Jon and my brother, Peter, had been friends, so I kind of was really friendly with Jon outside of school, too. So in some funny way, Jon Shahn was kind of someone who helped orchestrate bringing us together.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: A couple steps back before Rome.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How was queerness developing throughout this time for you?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Before I got to Rome?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, at Wesleyan, at Rome.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: At Wesleyan it was really hard because there was a sort of queer community, but I didn't feel very comfortable with any—I wasn't—it was a very small group. There was like a gay alliance, you know. It was sort of like an organization, and it didn't really appeal to me, so I didn't really have any queer friends at Wesleyan—yeah—until I went back, after Tyler, for my senior year, and then a lot more things happened in the culture, and a lot more people were out, and there was more of a—

ALEX FIALHO: What year was that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So when I came back from Rome, that would be 1978.

ALEX FIALHO: It sounds to me like Rome was a development for your queerness—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, totally.

ALEX FIALHO: —in terms of having more folks around you and a little bit more of a community there.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, and also something about being again displaced, like, was actually sort of comfortable to me, to be in a sort of situation where I was not an indigenous person—I was a real foreigner—maybe was liberating in certain ways.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Any particularly interesting classes, either at Wesleyan or Rome, that stick?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: There were a lot of interesting classes. Let me see. Gosh, that's a hard one. I took a great class at Wesleyan on Joyce, Beckett, and Kafka—well, sort of the other order; Kafka, Beckett, and Joyce. That was incredible, incredible, seminar. That was memorable. I took a fantastic religion class, where we read the *Bhagavad Gita* and studied a lot of Eastern religions. In Rome—we had a really good art history professor named Flavia Ormond. She was excellent. She was sort of Italian culture and art history combined.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you able to make work in Rome?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I did make work, but actually, so much of my time was spent going to see things and it wasn't really a—it wasn't the rigorous art school experience that I was looking for in that way, because there was so much out there in the world.

ALEX FIALHO: And you returned to Wesleyan and finished?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, I finished. I did my thesis project in drawing, working with Jacqueline Gourevitch, and that was 19—I graduated in 1979, and then I moved to New York in 1979. But I'm kind of jumping ahead of myself, because you want to focus on the earlier stuff.

ALEX FIALHO: We're good. Why New York?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because that was the place to be if you were going to be an artist at that time.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Where did you move to?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I shared—the first summer I was in New York I shared a loft with my friend Jamie McEwan on Franklin Street, and then I found an apartment—

ALEX FIALHO: In?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: In Tribeca. And that fall I found a railroad flat on Lafayette and Spring. I mean, we're talking—rent was incredibly cheap, you know? It was like a four-room railroad flat on Lafayette Street between Spring and Kenmare. Joy was living with her friend Beverly just around the corner on Broome Street in a sort of downstairs loft, living downstairs from Jesse Murry, who I meant to mention to you because—

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing. Oh, my goodness, this is exciting.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Jesse Murry will figure in this story after this, like, in later years, too, a little bit, because—yeah, Jesse Murry lived upstairs.

ALEX FIALHO: From Joy?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: From Joy.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And then Joy moved in with me on Lafayette Street. So, 1979 to 1981, '82, we lived on Lafayette Street together, and then we moved to Hoboken into this completely raw loft that we made habitable ourselves until 1993, when we moved here.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. You moved to Hoboken in 19—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: 1982, I think.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow. And when you say "here," where's here?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: To 244 East Fifth Street, where we are right now.

ALEX FIALHO: Right. How was that transition from university to artist in New York City? What were some of the ways you made money? What were some of the ways you made work?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: My very first job was at Canal Jeans, which was—where I only lasted about five days before I got fired. Then I called on some of my brother's friends who were living New York to see if they could help me find work, and I got a job in a restaurant on Lexington Avenue called La Louisiana; it was a Cajun restaurant. I worked there, and that was really lucky because I met a couple of people there that would become really, really good friends who were artists who were a little bit older than me and who actually were really—I was very influenced by them because I was very impressionable, because I was such a young thing. Robert Bordo was one of the waiters; Adam Simon; Michele Araujo; and they all lived in Hoboken as well.

ALEX FIALHO: What kind of work were you making at this moment?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I was making drawings, because I still believed in drawing as its own medium, sort of independently of painting. I was making large-scale drawings, like six feet by four feet, with graphite. Erasure figured prominently. They were semi-figurative, semi-abstract. And then, when I met Robert Bordo and Adam Simon and Michele Araujo, then I wanted—I was also starting to paint, and they were all painters, and that was—let's say starting to paint around 1982. Yeah, when I moved with—

ALEX FIALHO: Were you doing much painting before that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: No, not at all. And the painting that I—so the painting that I was doing in the '80s, in the mid-'80s, was quasi-abstract, quasi-figurative, sort of working through the materials to find the image like a lot of abstract work at that time. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And the move to Hoboken; what inspired that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, because we wanted studio space, and we figured the only—you know, we wanted—in those days, in 1979, when I first moved here, you could wait on tables for three nights a week and have like more than enough money to live on. It was just—the city was cheap and rent was cheap, and—but we wanted space for studios, and the only way we could figure out doing that really, aside from having separate work spaces that we rented, which seemed crazy, was to find a bigger space to live in and have studios there. So we found a raw loft in Hoboken that was huge that we shared with some friends, divvied it up, and we had really, really large workspaces that were fantastic.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I mean, it wasn't very heated in the winter, and it was hot as hell in the summer, but they were fantastic spaces to work in.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you still have obviously very proximate relationship to New York, of course, though.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, yeah, because I had friends in the city, and I worked in the city and just took the PATH train.

ALEX FIALHO: What was the first time you heard mention of AIDS, or what would become AIDS?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I was looking at your outline, and I actually remember the very first time. It was a very close—well, a friend of ours, Anthony Robinson, who was actually Joy's boss then—she was working in a jewelry store downtown called Detail, on Spring Street. He had a friend named Gordon Stevenson, who I had met, you know, once or twice in passing, didn't really know him at all, and actually, Anthony was helping us work on the loft when we first moved in.

And he came out one day, and he seemed really quiet, and I didn't know—Anthony's the kind of person that would never tell you really what was going on in his private life or anything else, but he said that Gordon had died, and he was obviously very freaked out about it. And he didn't even know what it was called. This was '81 or '82. Gordon died really, really early in the epidemic. And Anthony couldn't really talk about it very much, but I remember he needed some help. We had a car, and he needed some help because he was trying to clear out Gordon's loft down in Tribeca. And we went to Gordon's loft, and we helped Anthony move some things, but I think that was back when it was still called GRID [Gay-Related Immune Deficiency] or something, and nobody really understood what it was. It was like this mysterious thing. That's really the very first person that I remember.

ALEX FIALHO: How about, as that continued, let's stay with that moment actually. How did that moment make you feel? Collectively, too?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: You know, it's really weird thinking about that moment now with hindsight, because what was then going to ensue in later years was just completely horrendous. I mean, I would say that, in terms of my own experience with people I knew and loved, it didn't really—it didn't really—the AIDS crisis didn't really spiral around and get to me, in like a very gut way, until the early '90s, I would say.

So in the '80s there were lots of people that I knew, either friends of friends, or people that I sometimes worked shifts with in the restaurant, or regular customers in the restaurant, or ex-boyfriends of a friend—people were getting sick and dying, but it hadn't actually spiraled around to be within my own circle of people until, I would say, the early '90s.

But I think, you know, it's funny, because there was a point at which I stopped painting, and I became involved in text-based work for quite a long time in the late '80s and the early '90s, and part of that—I became incredibly frustrated with abstract painting, which is what I felt like I had been doing, and I felt like there was just such an incredible inadequacy to that language, because it was also idiosyncratic, and I became way more interested in received language and inventive language and—received language, where, the connection between language that you receive and language that you invent. So I'd say like from 1987 or '88—in 1986, I went to Yaddo, and that was like the end of my—that was the end—I was still painting then, but when I came back from Yaddo afterwards, I was really changing, incredibly fast, in terms of how I was working or what I was thinking about my work.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's talk about pre-Yaddo and your work.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: You're making a transition from drawings and the Wesleyan moment to a little bit more painting that's influenced by folks like Robert, Adam, Michele. What did those paintings look like? What were you thinking through in those moments?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think I was working through—that's interesting—I think I was working through—I think I was really interested in this weird nexus between abstraction and representation, where you can paint things that kind of look like they might be real, but they aren't actually anything recognizable in your life or in your world. And I actually think, looking back on it now with hindsight, that it was a way of dealing with my own queerness, actually.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow. How so?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because I wasn't actually interested in pure abstraction, and I wasn't interested in

representation, so I was interested in something in between, where one could find a language or create a vocabulary that had very much to do with process and erasure and then—or scraping things away and revealing the things that were underneath. Yeah. Working with process to derive this language that was describing—I'm feeling very inarticulate about it at this moment. It just occurred to me as I'm sitting here that it had something to do with being queer. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And I felt like the language was, ultimately, inadequate, and that's why I ended up turning to text-based work, because I felt like that—

ALEX FIALHO: The visual language of abstraction—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: And representation, and straddling the two wasn't getting where you thought?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: And was Yaddo a moment where text became more prominent?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Text only became more prominent because I was friends with a lot of writers and poets there. I didn't—I wasn't friends with any of the artists.

ALEX FIALHO: At Yaddo?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: At Yaddo.

ALEX FIALHO: How long was that moment?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was like two months, and then my life got turned upside down, because actually my mother passed away in 1986 on like the second-to-last day that I was at Yaddo. So that was cataclysmic, and it was incredibly traumatic, and my whole life changed then, so there were a lot of—there were a number of changes around that mid-1986 point. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Was AIDS feeling like one of those moments, or did that not [factor -AF] into it immediately for you in the early '90s?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think it didn't come into play for me until the early '90s. It may have been—I mean, I was aware of losing so many peripheral people—

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —not my people in my immediate circle. I was aware of losing a lot of peripheral people, and I think on a certain level, there was this tremendous foreboding, because it seemed like it was only a matter of time before it would come closer, and to a certain extent, in those days, with a lot of my friends, it felt like—for example, David, David and David. David Nelson and David Knudsvig. They didn't get tested for the longest time, because they just assumed they were positive, and there was nothing—what was there—if they tested positive, there was nothing out there for them anyway. You know, and when they finally tested—they got tested in 1990, I remember. In the summer of 1990. So that would be David Nelson and David Knudsvig. That was a sign of how close AIDS had come, because we were really, really, really close friends.

ALEX FIALHO: When you were gesturing toward '87 and '88 being a moment of shift. Is that text into the work?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And what sort of text is becoming more prominent in the work?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I was—well, let me see. I'm trying to think. Maybe I would say it was '88 to '89. I had started—I was doing a couple of things.

I was collecting typewriter correction ribbons. This is pre-computer, of course. I don't know if you remember, but there used to be these things called typewriters, and there would be these ribbons that would collect all the errors that you would erase, so I collected them from various sources. From my friends. From places where I worked.

I was working at magazines then, and so I'd just grab them from like the copy editor or whoever. Or I'd solicit

friends of mine to collect them at their offices, and then I would transcribe the entire tape as text, so I'd just take a transcription of it, and I'd use—I'd sort of work with this transcription of error, so sometimes it was error; sometimes there would be complete sentences that were erased that there was a record of; and sometimes it would only be one word. Or sometimes it would be the chance juxtaposition of letters that would form a word. And so then I would take this, say, one typewriter correction ribbon might take one page of text, single spaced, and then I would create works out of the text that I derived from that as a source material. And I'd work them into—I was still working with paint, but I was using the text in the paint.

ALEX FIALHO: What sort of material or textual content was coming from that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Some things were about gender. Some things were "he/she, he/she, he/she," or some things were "she, she, she." Or some things were men's names. Like a whole painting of just men's names. A painting of women's names, only women's names.

ALEX FIALHO: From this found—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: From the found transcriptions of error.

ALEX FIALHO: Poetry, if you will—yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: But I had certain rules, like I would never mix up different tapes. So if I had this transcription from this tape, I wouldn't mix it with this transcription from a separate tape. I'd only work within a given—within a painting with stuff from this one particular record.

ALEX FIALHO: Interesting.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And then I started working with palindromes for a while.

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mirroring—words that, you know, read backwards and forwards. And I did a lot of work with palindromes, actually. And I got a little discouraged, because one time, Bill Arning came for a studio visit, and he said, "Yeah, but what about Kay Rosen?" And it was clear that Kay Rosen was somebody who was working with palindromes, and her work was out there and really way more visible than mine. So that kind of burst—sort of burst a hole in my balloon.

ALEX FIALHO: What palindromes were you thinking through?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So *IMAIMMIAMI*, which for me was totally about AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Just the sort of "maiming" part, and Miami being such a queer city.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And so *IMAIMMIAMI* —

ALEX FIALHO: What piece does that operate in?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So that operates in—I was doing—I was working with mirror then, too, so I would sometimes make sandblasted mirror or etched mirror, so there would be parts of the mirror that would be the text and parts that—so it'd be "IMAIMMIAMI" repeated throughout the entire mirror. So you couldn't actually see your reflection because the text was sandblasted onto the mirror.

ALEX FIALHO: What year was that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: 1989, maybe? I'm a little confused now—1989, 1988, something like that.

ALEX FIALHO: Any other palindromes worth bringing in?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: *SOREEROS*.

ALEX FIALHO: That's great. Was that AIDS-related for you?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, of course. It was AIDS-related, but it was also related to a lot of the sort of stuff around sexuality that the whole AIDS crisis brought up, or just the way—you know, those were crazy days. It felt like everybody was dropping dead, and it felt like, oh, my God. Life is short. You have to do absolutely everything

that you possibly want to do in a very short space of time [laughs], because—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: That's really distilled. *SOREEROS*. Was that also in a mirror, sandblasted context?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was not on a mirror. That was actually—it was transferred with ink into almost like a Rorschachy, kind of weird, translucent paper. So there was kind of this Rorschach thing, and there was this sort of ironed-on text: "SOREEROS," and yeah. There were mirrors. There were photographs with the text. There were drawings.

ALEX FIALHO: Made in Hoboken?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. Oh, another one is "who recommended"—I found this one phrase that I found on a typewriter correction ribbon, which was "who recommended," but it was all strung together with no word breaks, so it also read like "whore commended" [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: That's great. I like these. How were those received, and how was your work in the world during the decade of the '80s?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Oh, you know. Struggling to get my work shown. Was that work shown? It was shown at the museum in Trenton in one show. The paintings with the transcriptions I showed at Emily Sorkin in 1990 in Soho.

ALEX FIALHO: With the typewriter ribbon transcriptions?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the early shows that you had? Emily Sorkin?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Emily Sorkin was the first kind of big deal show that I had. I guess, yeah, that felt like a big deal to me, because it was a one-person show. [. . . -CY]

ALEX FIALHO: Let's talk about a few folks in particular.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Okay.

ALEX FIALHO: I'm curious about Jesse Murry.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Okay, so Jesse was—he was just—I meant to mention Jesse to you, because when I saw Hilton Al's show uptown, and not the one with Jesse Murry's stuff in it, but the third installment, and I asked the guy who was behind the desk, because I knew that Jesse's work had been in the second show, and I had missed it. And then he mentioned that Visual AIDS was doing something with Jesse.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Exactly.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So it was on my mind to mention to you. At that time, Jesse wasn't painting yet. He was writing.

ALEX FIALHO: Those paintings are sublime.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. And I didn't even know those painting, because there was a whole bunch of years when I didn't even see Jesse until he showed up in a hospital bed. You know how you share a room with two people in a hospital room with a curtain in between? So we were there in the hospital with Tim Bailey, and who's on the other side of the curtain but Jesse Murry?

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, my goodness.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And I hadn't seen Jesse in years. Years.

ALEX FIALHO: Since Joy lived in the same building as him.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Almost. I mean, I knew at a certain point when he decided he wanted to paint. He went back to school. He went to Yale.

ALEX FIALHO: M.F.A. at Yale.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And that's totally when we lost touch. So I kind of knew him when he was writing about art and he was writing poetry.

ALEX FIALHO: Was he an art critic?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. He was writing for magazines, art magazines, as an art critic. And he was just an amazing, effervescent kind of Renaissance man. I mean, he was just so inspiring, because his range of—he was so well read, and he was so—he just knew about everything, and he was just so inspiring. So I knew him in the early '80s, and then I lost track of him when he went to Yale. We moved out to Hoboken, and the person who—my friend Beverly, who was very good friends with him—she lost touch with Jesse until Joy was sitting in Tim's hospital room, and she hears a voice from the other side of the curtain, and she recognized the voice.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And she said, "Jesse?" And it was Jesse. And we met his partner, George, who was there.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, I met George.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Is George still around?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That's amazing.

ALEX FIALHO: Jesse's work was shown recently perhaps for the first time in a long time at the Artist's Institute with the show curated by Hilton Als.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And I missed that, stupidly.

ALEX FIALHO: There was only a few paintings, of Jesse's, but they were gorgeously installed next to photos of James Baldwin and the whole show was, I think, really noteworthy. And George showed us—us being myself and Jenny Jaskey, the curator for the Artist's Institute—slides of Jesse's work, so we're going to work at Visual AIDS to get a lot of that online—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Excellent.

ALEX FIALHO: —and think through how to continue his legacy because the work is really great—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —and abstract in this sort of radiant—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —way that I was only seeing slides, and I was already sort of humming and oohing and aahing, so I'm sure the objects themselves are really gorgeous too.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: So, we'll see. How about some of the other folks you were close to throughout the '80s?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Okay. So—

ALEX FIALHO: Is it Robert, Adam, and Michele. Is it Joy? Is it anybody—who else was swimming around your circles?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, David Nelson and David Knudsvig.

ALEX FIALHO: In the 1980s?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We met in 1986, because my friend Bill Allen, who I had been to Wesleyan with, who was also an artist, worked for Fred Worden Art Trucking, and he told me that he was working with David Nelson, and I just had to meet him, because he felt that David's work and my work had so much to do with each other. I remember I met him—I met David and David at—every year Fred Worden used to have this thing called the Burrito Ball down on Canal Street in a bar, and so Joy and I went to that party, and we met David and David and just kind of hit it off immediately.

And we became really close, and it was interesting because, you know, they were both artists. Joy and I were

both artists. There was this kind of mirroring going on that was really incredible. And they—we'd go to each other's studios, and yeah, we shared a lot. And then David Knudsvig passed away in 1993. And David Nelson moved in downstairs in the garden apartment in 1994. I mean, we'd actually—when we got this house, we always thought—when we got it in 1993, well, maybe David and David want to live in the garden apartment, and then David passed away. Died of AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: You were that close?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. And then David lived here until 2004. And David and Joy and I were—I'm kind of jumping ahead now.

ALEX FIALHO: That's fine. Let's talk about it.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The three of us were like, you know, it was like we were a [threesome -CY] only without the sex [laughs]. You know what I mean? We were, like, bonded. For me, David was—I mean, aside from Joy, who, of course, is like the most important person to me in terms of having a dialogue around artwork—David—

ALEX FIALHO: I was going to say, Joy Episalla.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Joy Episalla, yes. David Nelson was really key for me, and the three of us showed with Nick Debs. Debs & Co.

ALEX FIALHO: How was David Nelson key for you?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think we had just—we had a really strong affinity for each other's work, and, you know, endless hanging out in the studio talking. We had—we used to have these jokes about rules, because everybody has rules when they make their work, so there was a lot of dialogue about actually what's a rule and what you can kind of let slide.

And David used to tease me all the time, because I'm notorious for making certain shortcuts. So, for example, if I have a piece of furniture that I have to paint. Let's say I have to paint it—like a desk—I will paint the entire desk, but I might not paint the side that faces the wall. And David just thought, "That is ridiculous. That's the most outrageous thing. The entire object needs paint on it." And I would sort of argue with him and say, "But you know. You're never going to see the side that's facing the wall, so why should I paint it?" So it was things like that that were just—

ALEX FIALHO: Insider artist moments.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yes. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Where was his studio in the '80s?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: His studio was on 14th Street. In a loft on 14th Street. He had a tiny, tiny, tiny, little living space. Bedroom with a single cot, and then his collections of fossils on the walls, and then you walk through that to this tiny, tiny, little kitchen. And then the rest of it was just studio space that he shared with a bunch of other artists. He had a darkroom there, and he had a studio there.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's stay with David for a little while.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Okay.

ALEX FIALHO: How about when you moved into here? Here being—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Fifth Street.

ALEX FIALHO: Fifth Street. Three floors, backyard. Where did David live, and how did his work and your work and Joy's work occupy this space?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So David lived in the garden apartment. He had actually never had a garden before, so this—having a garden was kind of a revelation for him, and he was completely into it, and he did a lot of excavating back there. He didn't just plant things. He was very particular about what he planted, but he also did some excavating. He found a cistern that dates back to the mid-19th century. He found it in the backyard, and it was a beautiful stone structure that he dug out that became a feature of the garden with a little ladder that you could take down there [laughs] if you were so inclined, but it was more the idea of it than the actual experience.

ALEX FIALHO: There's that great photo, too, of him coming out and handing the rock—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. He dug some of his first hole sculptures back in the garden. He worked in the front room of the garden apartment as his studio. He [and Joy -CY] enjoyed—he made a darkroom in the basement that they both used, and then they also both used—they set up his studio as a darkroom by projecting images very large on the wall on large photo paper, and they made large photograms down there, and they would process them together, because it was really a two-person job to do that.

He was instrumental in Joy's video piece where she cuts up this sofa and reconstructs the pieces. He figures quite prominently in that. We went to Paris with him for his show at Tracy Williams, because that was immediately after David Knudsvig, his partner—David Knudsvig passed away in August, and the show was in September, and he needed help. He needed emotional, psychological, just support, just to have people around him, but he also just needed real help setting up the show, because he was so devastated.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How about David Knudsvig? What type of work did he make?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: He made work that was—well, there's a bunch of work that I could talk about, but the work that I know and love the best were his Cteno pieces, which were based on this sort of five-fingered form. This sort of Greek form that he would use in serial combinations, and then he would, for example, paint them in encaustic in these sequences on canvas, or he would carve them into cherry planks that would lean against the wall, and they were like exquisitely carved, and they were just amazing. They were amazing pieces. Graphite drawings with the Cteno form.

ALEX FIALHO: Cteno?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Cteno. I think it's actually spelled C-T-E-N-O, as I recall. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the moment in the early '90s when he was passing, or that transition as a group of four?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Ask me that again. What did you mean?

ALEX FIALHO: Just that moment of losing David and supporting David.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. That was 1993. It was hard. I mean, we were very—Joy and I were very involved in ACT UP at that point. David and David never were involved with ACT UP. After David Knudsvig passed, David Nelson then got involved with ACT UP. Sort of through us, but hadn't been prior to that. So I would say 1993 was like the deepest, darkest point of the plague years, because 1993 felt like so many people—so many people we knew were dying, and there was just no hope on the horizon, because the triple-combination therapy wasn't out yet.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. Extremely bleak. Extremely dark, and it's sort of—that's a whole other thing. Maybe we should talk about all that tomorrow.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because that's like a whole chapter in and of itself.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Maybe let's take a pause here now for a moment.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: So we took a little pause before I think perhaps opening up the ways in which you became more involved around the AIDS epidemic, and I'm curious. It sounded, from early conversation, that it was the early '90s that that moment sort of happened. Can you talk about that development?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: About becoming involved in activism, per se?

ALEX FIALHO: I guess. Was it ACT UP in which you became more involved in activism? And how did AIDS figure more into your life, and how did you respond?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: AIDS figured more in my life because more of my very dear, close friends were being diagnosed and becoming ill, and times were really desperate, and I feel like that was—the only option was to try and fight, you know, fight for everyone's survival. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you fight for everyone's survival?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I actually—Joy got involved—Joy Episalla got involved with ACT—my partner got involved with

ACT UP before I did, and I'm not really going to go into all the gory details, but we did have a moment where we were estranged from each other. We've been together many, many years, but you know, we were both seeing other people. I moved out. We were still seeing each other, but our lives had sort of taken us in slightly different directions even though we were still very much involved with each other.

She got involved with ACT UP, and then I—sort of through her got involved in ACT UP at the moment when we kind of started getting back together again. But in a way, even though I would have wanted to go to ACT UP prior to that, I felt like I couldn't, because that was her world. It's a long story, but that was her orbit that I was trying to stay away from a little bit.

So what year would that have been? 1990? 1991? I'm not really sure, and which is around the same time that fierce pussy started and—which grew out of—I mean, people like Zoe, Zoe Leonard, and Nancy Brooks Brody and Suzanne Wright—there were a number of—Jean Carlomusto—we were all involved in ACT UP.

Those were—I mean I don't know—those were very intense days, Joy and I were working for magazines. We were working for Conde Nast. So we were working freelance, so there was Conde Nast. Then there was ACT UP. Then there was fierce pussy. Then there was some ad hoc activist work we'd be doing with some other group, and then there was an attempt to still maintain our studio practice, which was really, really rough in those couple of years, because—and this was before anybody had cell phones or email. We were just going, going, going all the time. It's amazing to me, actually, when I think back on it.

ALEX FIALHO: How much you were doing?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. How much we were doing. And in many ways, we started fierce pussy—we got together with all of us—because it was a little bit of an antidote to ACT UP. In ACT UP, you had to sit through many, many meetings with Robert's Rules of Order and listen to a million people that you might not have the patience for, and things had to be really hashed out and talked out. It might take actually quite a while for an action to take place, and that wasn't true of the affinity groups, which acted on their own. But also it was—part of the impetus for fierce pussy was that we needed our own space separate from the guys. We wanted a celebration of our own identity. We wanted—we took inspiration in some ways from how—like there was just a lot of sexual energy in that room, but a lot of it was about the guys, and it was all finding expression that way, so we kind of just needed to create our own space—

ALEX FIALHO: That's interesting.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —for that to happen. And we wanted to address issues of visibility and identity and who we were. And we also made a rule in the very beginning that out of every meeting there had to be a work created. So we were not going to sit around for ages and debate the wording of this, that, or the other. We had to hash it out right then and there, and then produce it, get it out on the street at the next meeting.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow. The next fierce pussy meeting? So let's talk about some of the earlier projects.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, the first project was the List posters. And part of the reason why they were—

ALEX FIALHO: And that was created in one meeting?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, it kind of was actually, and part of the reason why there were three List posters is because we couldn't narrow it down to just one list, and so instead of hashing it out and taking the time to decide on the wording for just one list, we just decided to do three.

ALEX FIALHO: What did they say?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: They say, "I am a manish muff diver, Amazon pervert, lesbian and proud." I'm mixing it up for you—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —it's not verbatim.

ALEX FIALHO: And how were you displaying them, for lack of a better word?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We would all get together with wheat paste and buckets and brushes, and we'd go out on the streets, and we'd take our xeroxes, because they were all xeroxes, mostly that Joy and I had run off at Conde Nast in our spare time, so that's why Conde Nast was responsible for so much of the poster work, our early poster work.

ALEX FIALHO: Thank you.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So we had these piles of xeroxes—there'd be one or two. It was also a roving band of people, so there might be 20 women that would show up for wheat-pasting, and those 20 women weren't necessarily there when we made the poster, but they were game to kind of get it out and put it up on the street.

So there'd be two or three people doing look-out for the cops, because wheat-pasting is illegal. And then teams of us with buckets and brushes, and just wheat-paste them up all on the walls of, let's say, the East Village, because in those days, there was a lot of wheat-pasting everywhere. If you wanted to see what band was playing where on a Saturday night, it would be wheat-pasted. The poster would be wheat-pasted, because of course, it was before the Internet, and, you know, cell phones and stuff. It's almost as if the walls were kind of a bulletin board in a way.

So we really started with our neighborhood, which was downtown, we felt. We did go to other neighborhoods. We went to the Upper West Side. We went to the West Village. Chelsea. Chelsea was very different in those days, but predominantly the Lower East Side, and I feel like—who were we talking to? First of all, our means were very, very, very low-tech, so it was just a typewriter that we used. Xeroxes. Didn't cost anything. It was super cheap, super easy to do, but I feel also like we were talking to our peers. We weren't trying to explain ourselves to straight people, the straight world. We were just using the most basic means at our disposal to kind of talk to people like us.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were your peers?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Who were our peers? Other queer women living in New York.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. And it sounds like there's threads of ACT UP in fierce pussy weaving back and forth. What were some of the work for affinity groups that you were working with in ACT UP at that moment that may have been influencing and then vice versa?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, Joy was involved with The Marys, so I was kind of a Mary by marriage. I wasn't actually part of the—I mean, I was an ad hoc member of The Marys, so I would do—I was involved in all of the actions. I didn't go to the planning meetings of The Marys.

ALEX FIALHO: Which were?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The actions?

ALEX FIALHO: The Marys were an affinity group that—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yes, The Marys were an affinity group of ACT UP, and the way that affinity groups work was that affinity groups were small groups of people. Maybe 10 to 12 people who would conduct—who would initiate and execute actions that ACT UP didn't want to take official responsibility for, that usually risked arrest, so The Marys, for example, broke into *MacNeil Lehrer* on the eve of the Gulf War in 1990, 1991? The Marys later became very involved with political funerals, around 1992.

And then there were other ad hoc actions that we did. Like we—the Treatment and Data Group, which became then TAG [Treatment Action Group]—Mark Harrington, Gregg Gonsalves—they were working on an action against, for example, MicroGeneSys, which was an AIDS drug company, which was a drug company, a biotech company, that was doing some AIDS work, but the AIDS work they were doing was they were trying to work on a vaccine, but their science, Mark and Gregg realized, was completely bogus. And they'd gotten this tax write-off in the town of Meriden, Connecticut, which is right next to Middletown, Connecticut, where I went to school. An ad hoc group of us went up to Meriden, Connecticut. Michael Cunningham drove this cargo van, because Michael Cunningham was one of The Marys.

ALEX FIALHO: The writer?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. Drove us all in a cargo van. We come out of the back of the van. We have pipes that connect—we connect ourselves with pipes and carabiner clips. Block the entrance to the company. A couple of us go down and tie ourselves—chain ourselves—to the gate, and basically, we kind of shut down the company for the day, and it became also sort of a moment to raise people's awareness of sort of the bogus science and the tax write-offs that this company was getting. I mean, that's just an example of an ad hoc action that wasn't necessarily The Marys, but some of The Marys—actually, a lot of The Marys were involved in that action, but it wasn't a Marys action.

ALEX FIALHO: In being involved in the actions, for instance, can you describe one of the political funerals that you were involved in?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. That's a long story. Okay. So The Marys were inspired by David Wojnarowicz's text

from *Close to the Knives* when he talks about every time a friend, a lover, dies of AIDS, get in a van, "drive down to Washington, DC, and drop their lifeless body on the White House steps." So The Marys actually took this quite literally and decided to try and solicit people who wanted—people living with AIDS who were going to die because there was nothing anybody could do for them to see if—it was a project called Stumpf/Kane, because they didn't want The Marys' name themselves, so The Marys solicited—

ALEX FIALHO: Stumpf/Kane?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yes, Stumpf/Kane, because John Stumpf and Dennis Kane were two of The Marys that had died.

ALEX FIALHO: Got you.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So it's named after them. And so The Marys were soliciting people, saying, "Listen, if you want us to do this for you, we will." And nobody stepped up. Nobody stepped up except—so they decided that Tim Bailey—well, at first, there was Mark Fisher in 1992. That was not—that was—we didn't go to Washington. We took him on Election Day in '92 up to Republican headquarters. We carried his casket from Judson Memorial in the rain up Sixth Avenue to Republican headquarters on the eve of the election.

ALEX FIALHO: Open casket?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Open casket with umbrellas. Well, actually, we had to keep the casket closed, because it was raining, but then when we got to 43rd Street—isn't that 40th somewhere? We—actually, let me think. Did we open the casket? Now, I can't remember. Damn. I can't remember. There's actually a scene from that action in—Mark was one of The Marys. That's why I'm talking about Mark.

ALEX FIALHO: Of course.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think Bob Rafsky in one of the films—it's either in *How To Survive a Plague* or it's—

ALEX FIALHO: *United in Anger*?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: *United in Anger*. From that night. So—

ALEX FIALHO: What was that experience like? If I can open that up for us?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was kind of incredible, because—well, first, part of The Marys' desire to do this was that we didn't want to go to any memorial services, but here we were with Mark, who died on the plane coming back from Italy. Everything rolled into action. We had a memorial at Judson Memorial Church, where everybody got up and said their thing, and then I'm not even sure if everybody knew that we were doing a procession uptown, or if just we knew, and everybody followed behind with black umbrellas in the rain.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the Election Day context?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was intense, you know. It was George Bush the first versus Bill Clinton—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So it would have been his second—it was his second term. Was that '92? Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was the year that Clinton won, and basically, that followed on—there had been an action that all of ACT UP had done, which was a Kennebunkport action where ACT UP went to George Bush's summer-home town in Maine and basically took over the town. So this was that same year later. So it was like, okay, we showed up at Kennebunkport; now, we're showing up at Republican headquarters on the eve of the election to demand that the government do something to end AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: How was that received?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: You know, interestingly, we anticipated a lot more difficulty with the cops than we got. The cops were actually kind of respectful, because it was a funeral. And the procession was very orderly up Sixth Avenue. We weren't taking the street. We weren't totally blocking traffic. We were just very calmly taking one lane of traffic going up Sixth Avenue, and some of them even took off their hats when the casket went by, which was intense.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: How was it received? It's hard to know. I don't even know how a lot of the actions that we did were received. It's really, really hard to know.

ALEX FIALHO: Was a goal—of course, accountability—was the means through press? Was the means through getting on George Bush's radar, in a way? Was it through—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was all those things. It was trying to insert it into this sort of election media coverage, because Bob Rafsky was the one that confronted Bill Clinton in New York. I think that's in the film as well.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was all those things at the same time, but part of why 1993 felt so desperate and so dark is because it felt like we had pulled out all the stops. We'd taken Tim Bailey all the way down to Washington, DC, and all that, but you know, it still wasn't looking—nothing was looking up. Nothing was looking like it was going to change.

ALEX FIALHO: What was the Tim Bailey to Washington, DC, experience?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So, oh, here's the other incredible thing I have to say about the people that—in ACT UP. We told a lot of our friends outside of The Marys that we were going to do this action, that it was going to be big, and it involved traveling to Washington, and it was possibly illegal, so people were risking arrest, but there would be buses to take them to Washington. But we didn't give them a scenario, because we couldn't. We couldn't risk that leaking out, and so people just said, "Yes." You know. Friends—not only people in ACT UP, but friends of ours or friends of Tim were willing to trust that we had figured it out enough that they could put themselves on the line and go along and be there.

So it just so happened that Barbara Hughes, who's in The Marys—her brother-in-law had a funeral home in Jersey, so we took Tim to that funeral home to have him—The Marys had researched everything, like what do you need to cross a state line with a dead body in a casket? What kind of papers do you need? What kind of state does the body have to be in? We took Tim, after he passed, to this funeral home in New Jersey. They did what they do to bodies, which is embalm them and put them in a casket. And then we had a rental truck, a rental van, and Vincent Gagliastro was there, Michael Marco, Barbara Hughes, James Baggett; Michael Cunningham was there.

We all drove down to the Capitol building, where we were meeting the bus with all the people from ACT UP. We pull the van into the parking lot; we are surrounded immediately by three or four different kinds of cops, just before we even did anything. Just when we parked the van. And then—

ALEX FIALHO: Did they know?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, they obviously must have known, because they were there. They tried to wrestle the keys away from Joy in the front seat, and so then we had a standoff in the Capitol parking lot for at least five hours. Where—well, our intention was, we were going to take Tim's coffin out of the van, and we were going to process up the avenue past the White House.

But we never got out of the parking lot. In fact, at one moment, there was a showdown where we were—everyone that had come from ACT UP, the friends and everything that were there for the action, had surrounded the van and sat down to try and diffuse. They called in a coroner; they told us they had to inspect the body before anything happened. Like, they were kind of stringing us along; like we were thinking maybe we really were going to be able to get out of the Capitol parking lot with Tim's body. But it didn't happen.

At one point we decided—we just went ahead. We opened the back doors of the van, and we were starting to take the coffin out, and there's—I don't know if you've seen; there's a really—there was a photograph in the *New York Times* of this the next day, which is all of us with Tim's coffin above our heads, and the cops and the park police and everybody else are kind of wrestling with the coffin. I think this must be on film, because I'm sure that it was videotaped as well.

Everyone was—but we were really worried that, you know, we didn't want to struggle completely and have—so then put the—we put Tim's casket back in, inside the van, then we opened the back doors of the van; we opened the casket and we decided—we had a P.A. system, and we decided to just have the funeral there in the parking lot. So people got up on top of the van with the P.A. to speak. Vincent spoke; Michael Cunningham spoke; Joy spoke; and then when we were—there was a lot of other things that happened that day.

But then when we were done, they were—the cops were going to escort the van outside of—escort us out of town, basically. Because they didn't want us anywhere near the White House, of course. So we close up the van; we were driving through, you know, basically the ghetto of Washington, DC, that exists outside that Capitol area,

with police escort, sirens front and back and on the side, this huge hullabaloo. And we're throwing, out the window of the van, we're throwing these posters with this beautiful picture of Tim, saying, "Died of Government Neglect," you know, to people on the street. And we're getting the black power salute and everything, because we're just like, they don't know what's going on [laughs]. But whatever they know is like the cops have us, and we're just throwing these posters all over the street as we're going.

Basically, they took us all the way to Baltimore at high speed. It's sort of like they made cars go—there's no shoulder on that expressway from Washington to Baltimore. They were, kind of like, forcing cars off the highway so that they could escort us all the way to Baltimore and way far away from town. Finally, Barbara, who was driving the van said, pulled up alongside one of the cops, and said, "I'm running out of gas. I have to stop." And they escorted us to a gas station, where we filled up.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow. Just diffused it. And just tried to diffuse it as much as possible.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. But you know, the press was there.

ALEX FIALHO: Of course. Immensely powerful.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And it was caught on video, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: I've seen video of throwing ashes into the White House lawn.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was a different action. That was the ashes—

ALEX FIALHO: Is that still The Marys action?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: No, that wasn't a Marys action at all; that was a whole different action.

ALEX FIALHO: I see.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: In fact, I think that was a really powerful action in retrospect, but at the time we all thought it was kind of like, oh, my God. You know, it was literally like this one-upmanship where we had, sort of, dark humor about it. Oh, they're just going there with the ashes. We're going to go there with the body [laughs], you know.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. What was the intention to do with the body?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: To make it real. To make people see that people, that the people we love were dying.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And the government was doing nothing.

ALEX FIALHO: If the cops hadn't been there, what would have happened with the body?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: What would have happened is we would've opened up the back of the van, we would have taken Tim out, and we would have opened up the casket, and we would have processed with all of our people, which was probably about, let's say, 80 to 100 people, you know, processed up the avenue past the White House. Maybe we would, in our wildest dreams, maybe we would have stopped then, in front of the White House, and then used our P.A. system to speak.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. And you went back to New York, and how did The Marys continue?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Trying to remember now. The Marys, I'm trying—I think that was the last political funeral. Because there was—The Marys organized David Wojnarowicz's march through the East Village. That was [the first political funeral -CY] that was very intense.

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because we knew David Wojnarowicz was very ill, because Jean was very close friends with him, and Joy had told Jean what The Marys wanted to do. And they were wondering if David might want to have us do that for him. But he was too ill to even have that conversation at the time.

So—Jean called us the moment that David passed, and we were out on Fire Island, actually, and we rushed back into town, and Joy and I went to his, David's, loft over on 12th Street and Second Avenue. And all the friends—I mean, we didn't know David Wojnarowicz personally. We knew his work, but we didn't know him. But all of the close friends were there. And Tom Rauffenbart, who was his lover, was there. And our intention—Joy's intention

really; I was just there for moral support because I was terrified to do this; I just couldn't see how it was going to work—Joy's intention was to talk to the friends and say, "We want to do something for David. We want to have a public memorial through the East Village, because we feel like his passing is important and it needs to be witnessed by the community. It needs to be a public event."

And, you know, when we started trying to talk the friends, they were irate. They were complete irate. I mean, they were like, "No fucking way. We're not going to do that." And actually, it was Tom who really—

ALEX FIALHO: Tom?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Tom Rauffenbart, who really was compelled by the idea. And he was the one who said, "Yeah. Yeah, I think this is right. I think this is good. I think we should do this." And that softened a lot of the friends, but I feel like—what I felt like, what I witnessed in that moment, was Joy persuading this room full of really sad, angry, devastated people that maybe there was some reason that we should—this doesn't have to be private grief. This can be grief that is shared by the community that's larger than just the close circle of friends; and that in fact, that the close circle of friends would actually—it would help them with their grief.

Not that we were—we weren't interested in helping people get through their grief. But we were interested in making a statement and making it visible, and marking it for our community. So it happened; it happened miraculously. And some of the people, like Dirk Rowntree for example, who was there, he told us later, because we got to know Dirk later, and he said, "You know, I just hated you guys when you showed up that night. I hated you. I thought that was just the most barbaric idea imaginable." But then he came on the march, and he said it was—he was really glad that he did. And he felt that it was important.

ALEX FIALHO: What did it entail?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We had signs; we had posters of David, this beautiful picture of him tossing this thing in the air. So they were mounted on sticks. We had those as graphics. And people had musical instruments, like drums, so there was this kind of dirge, this percussive dirge. And we walked from his loft on Second Avenue, down Second Avenue to Houston Street. And then up the Bowery to Astor Place, where we had a projector, a slide projector, that we plugged into a lamppost. We found this sort of electrical connection. We put the slide projector on the roof of our car, and we projected an image of the White House with that text from *Close to the Knives*, where he said, "Whenever a friend or a lover, a loved one, dies of AIDS, I want you to drive their body 90 miles an hour, down to the White House." It was the text overlaid over the White House.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And that was the first, [. . . -CY] funeral action that The Marys did.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow. Was that David's memorial or funeral, or was it an action independent of it? Just curious if that function as the—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: People may have had their own private memorial, I'm not sure. But this was the public.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. That's immensely powerful, all of these stories. So thank you for sharing. What other ways were you involved in ACT UP?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I was not involved in any of the working groups or affinity groups, except for The Marys. So I would say I was sort of an ad hoc Mary. I would go to demonstrations, and I would go to actions. And I'd go to some ad hoc actions that weren't even necessarily even AIDS-related. Like that time when we closed down the Holland Tunnel, that had to do with reproductive rights. And it was organized by an ad hoc group from WAC [Women's Action Coalition] and WHAM [Women's Health Action and Mobilization]. That was actually my first act of civil disobedience; that was incredible.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's hear about it.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So, you know, in ACT UP there were—you would have C.D. training. So civil disobedience training by very experienced people in the group, that sort of guide you through what to expect, how to behave, how to let your body go limp, you know, how not to aggravate the police, how not to let anybody get arrested by themselves. All these kinds of things.

So I had my C.D. training, but my first action was to—what we were going to do is we were gathering in this loft right near the Holland Tunnel. It was an action about the access to the right to choose. So we were going to go out in waves, chained together, and run into the mouth of the Holland Tunnel. But the cops were there. So there was some—it had leaked out, and Zoe Leonard, Suzanne Wright, Joy Episalla, and myself, we were the first four. We were chained together. This was terrifying because we're chained together with these chains; we're running

from this door of this building on Broome Street, into an entire sea of blue that is, like, blocking the entry to the Holland Tunnel. We're just—we just ran into the blue.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was absolutely terrifying.

ALEX FIALHO: The blue was—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The sea of cops.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, exactly.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: In their uniforms, that were forming a human chain to prevent us from getting to the tunnel.

ALEX FIALHO: And what happened?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We were chained together. And so they were all confused, and we were confused, because they couldn't unchain us. And then there were more waves, in groups of four, so I would say there were about 200 people that came out of this building in waves, so we were all arrested. We were taken to some kind of holding facility over by the piers. And then we ended up—some of us were taken downtown also to Pitt Street.

We were arrested and processed, and we had to do community service, which is partly why what I think contributed to Mark Fisher's death, to tell you the truth. Because Mark was a participant in that action, and so we got community service, and the community service that—I was on it with him, the detail; we had to go around to the parks and clean up the trash from the ground, put them in garbage bags. And that's not something that somebody whose immune system is compromised, not something that they should really be doing. And I'm sort of convinced that that contributed to his demise, because it was soon after that. And he took off for Italy, and he came back; he was already sick.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow. How does it feel to think back on these actions, these political funerals, now and to reflect on them?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It's intense. It's very intense, because—it's very hard to convey the intensity of that time, I think. It's very hard to convey. And it's hard to let—as I mentioned before during the break, it's really hard—I don't normally get an opportunity to talk about, you know, that time and my artwork, and my activism, and my friendship with David and David. And all of this stuff going on in the same three years, basically, in one big soup. Because in my mind, a lot of those—I've had to sort of insulate different things, and keep them in bubbles to keep them intact or separate in some way. When in fact, it's all linked.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. When you try and link them, or think through your activism, your art practice, your friendships, how does that play out? Is it you who is keeping them intact in separate spheres, or is it the way that you have to think through it, the way that people are talking about your work, your activism?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think it's sort of a survival instinct, a protective instinct that makes one compartmentalize in that way. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: One thing you had noted, a little earlier, was that it was hard to make work at this time because you had so much on your plate. Were you continuing to make work?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I was continuing to make work, but it was hard. It was hard, and it also felt like sometimes it was—everything was so dire and people were dying. And there was such desperation that it felt like, you know, how important was it to be making work in my studio? It was challenging.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: What did that mean? But I mean, a lot of the work I made at that time, I didn't think about it then. Well, some of the work I made at that time was very consciously about the AIDS crisis. And some of it was just peripherally about it, sort of unconsciously about the AIDS crisis, so—

ALEX FIALHO: How about some of the works that were consciously about it; were those some of the ones we discussed?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: No, actually, the piece that's in the *Art AIDS America* show is—

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: *Steal This Book #2*. That's about the AIDS crisis. That was from a series. I'd done a series; I'd shot a series of books that were banned, either banned from school libraries or banned from import into the country, but they're kind of canonical works of either fiction or nonfiction. So in this case, *Steal This Book #2* was taken from Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book*, which is sort of an activist manual, really.

ALEX FIALHO: For you, you said, or in general?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: No, I mean just generally from the '60s. Other books in the series were *Ulysses* by James Joyce, or *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall, *Lolita* by Nabokov.

ALEX FIALHO: Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* was censored in what context?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was—sometimes it was banned from school libraries, but it was also, I think—I believe it was banned from import, at the time it was published.

ALEX FIALHO: For lesbian content?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. What else? *Another Country* by James Baldwin, *Black Like Me*, another book. And some of those works were very much about AIDS, like the *Lolita* piece that I did, which is—the only thing you can read from this page is the text that says, "Never grow up." Which is like, you know, for me, it has a double meaning. "Never grow up" was sort of a prescription in the book; just do not grow up. But it was also like, all the people that I knew who didn't get the chance to grow up, because they were—they got sick and died.

There was another artwork from that time that I was working on that was called *Archipelagos*. And it was, there were a series of photograms that form an incomplete alphabet. So there'd be—and they were text based, so there are place names that occur, that are all either places of incarceration or hospitals, or places where people are sequestered. But they all have really beautiful names; like "Angel Island" is the first entry. It's an island off the coast of, off the West Coast, where Chinese immigrants were quarantined for years and years and years on end. Names like "Bellevue," or "Buchenwald," or "Guantanamo Bay." So they're all landscape names that are quite beautiful. It's a little bit hard to describe the work without looking at the pictures.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, of course. And does that consciously or unconsciously relate to AIDS.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That consciously related to AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: In that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because, you know, there was all that discussion about Guantanamo Bay at that time, that perhaps it would be a place to quarantine people with AIDS. Or you know, hospitals like Bellevue, or places where friends of mine were. I was just thinking about the ways that we sequester the people who are either perceived to be ill or criminal, quote unquote criminal. Or just places of, yeah, sequester. And the irony that these, that they're named after places that have these incredibly beautiful names, but they're actually ways to segregate populations.

ALEX FIALHO: Even the word "archipelago" has this resonance spoken, but then sort of speaks to that sequestering, too, as a geographical form.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But I didn't show that at the time. I mean, I didn't show that till the Visual AIDS show *Side X Side* at La MaMa in 2000—

ALEX FIALHO: —'08.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Two thousand eight. Yeah, many years later.

ALEX FIALHO: How about caregiving?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Caregiving, that's a tough one.

ALEX FIALHO: Was that a role you found yourself in a lot?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, with certain friends. I mean, it depended, like for example, with Tim Bailey, yes. But with David and David, with David Knudsvig, I think that because they were in a couple, and because the way their particular sensibility worked, there was a way that they kind of protected each other from everybody else. It was hard for other people to actually be there to help. But of course, we did. We were there in the hospital with David when he passed. Or hung out with him towards the end a lot, when he was ill. I think it's, you know, people would take turns taking care. You set up a rotor with friends; you just figure out, okay, you do this; you do that; I'll do this; you know, got this covered. It was just the same thing we did with Tony, Tony Feher, at the

end, because we were so well trained from our experience. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were some of the other folks that you cared for?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Let's see, Tim Bailey, David Knudsvig; let me think who else I cared for. [. . . -CY] We tried to get, you know, when Jesse was really sick, when Jesse Murry was really sick, and George was—he needed help. He needed somebody. We weren't part of his circle of people. We weren't going to be there for Jesse necessarily, but we tried to get George hooked up with agencies and people that would give him some help, to have nurses come over and help take care of Jesse. There's also that logistical shit that you have to do all the time. Figure out, okay, how are going to get food in? How are we going to get help, somebody to wash people that can't help, you know.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It's the whole nine yards. It's the whole nine yards.

ALEX FIALHO: It's all-encompassing.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. Yeah. I was just going to say something else, but I don't know if I really want to go into it in great detail. But I will say that when we—you know, David Nelson moved in here in 1994, and I think those were still the deep, dark years of the AIDS crisis. And I feel like, in a way, we thought—well, Joy and I both thought—you know, we were so traumatized by losing so many people, we just thought somehow we needed to help David. We needed to protect him. So that's another kind of caregiving.

It's not the caregiving when somebody's really ill, but it's the caregiving you give when someone is so fucking devastated that they can barely get from point A to point B. You know, because they've lost their lover, and they've kind of lost their anchor or their compass. So you know, it's complicated, I think in that case. We were really, really close friends, but we were also taking care of David Nelson in certain ways that became complicated for us later. But I'm not going to go into that here.

ALEX FIALHO: Of course. How about home, and you said '93 was sort of the darkest moment, but I think it was also, I noted, the year you moved from Hoboken to this—East Fifth Street. Did relocating shift things for you? Did making this place your home shift things for you?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It did. Yeah, I'm trying to, let me think about how I would articulate how it changed things.

It's kind of part and parcel with what I was just talking about with David Nelson. It felt very grounding. It felt very grounding to have, like, a home. Because we had been living like in this toxic-waste dump of a loft in Hoboken where we didn't even have light switches. We just had clamp lights. So you know, it was a revelation to actually have a place where you push a button and the lights would go on. It felt like a refuge, I guess, in a way. And that's how, that's what we thought it would be for David too. And I think it was in many ways, for him, and for us.

ALEX FIALHO: Maybe let's get back a little bit over to fierce pussy again.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Okay.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the things you were all making after the Alliance project? The Family project for instance, or—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: You mean after the Lists and the Baby Pictures, and—

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly. Let's talk about the Baby Pictures project for a moment.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So the Baby Pictures were, we just decided we wanted to use—we wanted to insert ourselves into this list. And so one way to do that was to use images of ourselves as children, and apply those derogatory terms to those pictures. And so you'd have this juxtaposition of this very sweet baby picture with this derogatory name like "muff diver," or you know, "dyke," emblazoned on the image of the baby.

And then we did some other projects. Like we did another project where we named streets for gay pride, where we stenciled them on the sidewalk, and made signage that we put over the street signs. So it would be like, "Martina Navratilova Way," or "Audrey Lorde Lane." We'd rename streets after lesbian heroines.

ALEX FIALHO: How did that exist in the world? A sign over a sign?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, a sign over a sign. For gay pride weekend. Because we knew it wouldn't last, but it was kind of a way to make our presence more felt.

ALEX FIALHO: What sort of sign did you create?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, we created stencils so we could spray-paint them on the sidewalk, you know, with the lettering.

ALEX FIALHO: Got you.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Or we'd create signs with, you know, mat board or cardboard that were the size of a street sign. Very low-tech, you know.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Taped on. Not built to last.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. At the moment, there's, for instance, like Dyke Action Machine!, questions around lesbian visibility are coming, or projects that you were working on, as well as them. How did that, what was impetus there? Why did fierce pussy form?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: fierce pussy formed because we needed to have our own space, and needed to talk about our own issues, outside of ACT UP. And we weren't, you know—did you bring up Dyke Action Machine!?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Just to talk about how, in order to talk about how we're different from Dyke Action Machine!?

ALEX FIALHO: I'm thinking about Lesbian Visibility as a public art project.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. Well, it always felt to me that Dyke Action Machine! was really Sue [Schaffner] and Carrie's [Moyer] project, of a collaboration between two people, very specifically. Whereas fierce pussy—

ALEX FIALHO: Definitely.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —was this big, amorphous group of queer women that—there's actually two phases of fierce pussy.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: There was this early phase, in the '90s, when we were this big, amorphous group of women, and then there's the later phase, more recently, when it's the four of us. But Dyke Action Machine! was also using the tropes of mainstream culture to subvert them.

ALEX FIALHO: Yup.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Which is a very different language, and a very different strategy. We were kind of doing the opposite. We were just using our own very low-tech, very fast means to try and draw attention to ourselves. But really not to—I feel like Dyke Action Machine! was interested in talking to a larger audience that was not, not necessarily the audience of their peers, but could include their peers. And fierce pussy was not interested in the larger audience; we were only interested in our people, basically. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How about the name?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: [Laughs.] That was the whole evening of a meeting, where there were many other suggestions before we settled on fierce pussy. I'm really glad we did, because I'm not even going to tell you the other names that we thought of, but they're really humorous when I look back on it. Yeah, it took us about, just a couple of hours to figure that one out. Not very long.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How about the fierce pussy mobile?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was—okay, so Fred Worden Art Trucking comes up again in that because Gordy, Gordy—I can't remember Gordy's last name right now—but Gordy was basically the one running Fred Worden. And Gordy was this really sweet guy who, he—we decided to ask Gordy if we could borrow one of Fred Worden's art trucks for the weekend, for gay pride weekend.

Because one of our ideas was we wanted to have a moving billboard, because we knew, like, people advertising Absolut Vodka had moving billboards that would rove through the city on trucks; they were really high-tech. But we wanted our own moving billboard, and we didn't have any money, and we wanted to do it in our low-tech way. And, with the help of Conde Nast, we could color-xerox posters, tile them up really large so they could

cover the entire side and the entire back and the other side of the truck, wheat-paste them on the truck, and then we organized a rotor of people to just drive around the city all weekend.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the things on the truck?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: There were three posters on the truck. One was a poster that we did sort of referring to *Star Trek*, with the tagline of, "To Go Where No Man Has Gone Before." [Laughs.] If you remember that line from *Star Trek*. And it said, "Dyke" in really big letters. And there was some other text, and it was in color, which we had—we never had really worked in color before, but since we had access to the color Xerox, we just thought, Why not? And the funny thing was, when we were driving the truck around, people would stop us—we'd be stopped at a light and someone would come up to us and say, "When is it coming out?" Like, they thought we were advertising a movie. It was really hilarious. And then there was the AIDS poster on the back. That was the only work, actually, that fierce pussy ever did about AIDS until *For The Record*.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, and what did the AIDS poster say on the back?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The AIDS poster said—it was page from a diary with little boxes and check marks, and it was a to-do list. And it said, "Start an IV," "Pick out a coffin," "Bury your best friend," with little check marks.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And then the tagline said, "Be Enraged, Become Explosive."

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We were trying to address the just complete devastation that a lot of people were feeling, of just, so exhausted and so burnt out, but let's not get burnt out; let's become enraged and be explosive. Well, it's impossible to use the word "explosive" [laughs] in the post-9/11 era.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I mean, we could only have done that then. It meant something very different then. We weren't advocating—

ALEX FIALHO: That was '94?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. We weren't advocating violence; it was a metaphor.

ALEX FIALHO: And the to-do list at that moment was so dire.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. And there was a third poster, which was an image taken from the TV, shot from off of a television, which was of the Stonewall riot. And there was a list of words that, derogatory terms that gays and lesbians have been called, a whole long list of them. And then the tagline was—I'm not really remembering. The tagline involved the phrase, "Fight the real enemy."

ALEX FIALHO: I'm interested in this dance we're doing between the different forms of public activisms, the people, and then your own individual studio work.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: By the mid- or early '90s, was your studio work—of course, deep investment—what were your investments in your studio work, and then also how was it being received, displayed?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Let me see. When I had the one-person show at Emily Sorkin in 1990, shortly thereafter, she closed the gallery. There was a huge slump in the art world, in the gallery world, where a lot of galleries were closing at that time in SoHo. And, you know, then I didn't—I'm trying to think; I have to refer to my resume, but I wasn't very involved in the art world in those years, at all. At all.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So it was really hard; it was also the idea of getting my work out. I wasn't really focused on that at all. I mean, I was sort of trying to, but then—

ALEX FIALHO: The work was getting out, but other kinds of work, it seems—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: fierce pussy, ACT UP, you know.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. And then there was that weird time in the art world where a lot of galleries closed, and there was this recession. By '93 there was kind of this recession, and then galleries started to open up in Chelsea, like in '96, '97, and, and Debs & Co. opened in '97, I believe. I showed with them, then.

ALEX FIALHO: Consistently. What was the relationship of the quote, unquote, Art World, capital A, capital W, to AIDS, to groups and messaging like Fierce Pussy?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, I think there was tremendous support of, in terms of like the not-for-profit art world. People like Simon Watson were pretty involved in trying to curate things, and Bill Arning, I mean, the New Museum. Gran Fury was at the New Museum.

ALEX FIALHO: Bill Olander.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Bill Olander, all that was going on. So many people were getting sick and dying, too, so many artists. So the so-called art world, the way we—I think it's funny how we always refer to "the art world," and I'm never quite sure what it is exactly. But yes, the art world was so completely, deeply affected by AIDS in those years. Devastated by AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: Was there an art world that wasn't relating, or turning its back in any way in this?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. I'm sure, I mean, yes, for sure. Because there was—life was going on as usual, and business as usual, and you know, big galleries were going about their business as usual.

ALEX FIALHO: Were there any shows of others' work, or museum contexts that were cathartic or spoke to you at that moment? Or were there not?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Oh, I still went to look at art, for sure, for sure. Even if I wasn't actively really trying to get my work out there. Yeah, I remember an incredible show of Eva Hesse that David Nelson and David Knudsvig and Joy Episalla and I went to up in New Haven at Yale. It was probably 1992; it was amazing. Amazing show. Yeah. I was going to say something about *Art AIDS America*, but I won't go there right now.

ALEX FIALHO: We'll do that tomorrow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: With so many people in the visual art community dying of AIDS in the '80s and '90s, the landscape of visual art undoubtedly changed. Were you aware of how it was changing at that time? And 30 years later, how do you view that change?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I was absolutely aware of that change. I mean, and I think it's a tremendous—it's just a tremendous, devastating loss. You know, it almost feels like, it almost feels to me like a whole generation of people were wiped out. There's so many missing pieces to the puzzle, it's just kind of incredible. It feels to me like—not even just visual artists. Writers, artists, other kinds of artists—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, certainly.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —musicians, dancers, just complete—it's like there was a war and nobody exactly acknowledged at the time that it was a war, but there was a war going on. And even now, I'm not even sure, I'm just not sure how people see it now, that didn't live through it. I'm always mystified by that, you know.

I know a lot young people like, for example, we—Day Without Art a couple of years ago, Amy Sadao asked us to come, Joy Episalla and I, to come down to the ICA in Philly, and be at a screening of *United In Anger*. And also to talk to a group of people, like a workshop, public workshop. And that was the second time that I had seen that film.

The first time was at MoMA, and the devastating thing about walking into that room, of the audience, to tell you the truth, I wasn't sure—there were so many familiar faces, and there were so many people that I may not have seen very much in the intervening years, but it was like, it sounds terrible to say this, but it was like really, I was really glad to see that so-and-so was still alive. Because they were people that you might have worked with or demonstrated with or lost touch with or didn't even see, and you didn't even know what happened to them, whether they were still alive or not. So that was, that was a trip, seeing *United In Anger* for the first time, just because of being in the audience. And just those emotions.

So the second time I saw it was in Philly, and that was interesting. Because it felt like I could actually calm down and see the film in a more real way. And what struck was that one of the young people in the audience came up to us afterwards; he was probably about, could have been 21. Young queer man. And he said to us, "I feel like, after watching that film, I feel like I've found my family." And that was so intense. It was, that was really an

intense moment.

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because it felt, it actually felt quite inspiring to me. It felt like, well, that film was capable of conveying to this young person, who has really no idea of what went on in those years, that he was relating to a lot of the people in that film, that some of them are no longer here. So those people, like some of those incredible people like Bob Rafsky or Aldyn McKean, they're just—they're not here to, in person, to inspire younger people, but they actually are in the film. Something about their presence lives on.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. More than just inspire, but also just connect to the level of familial relation.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: I think this feels like an okay place to call it a night.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Okay. Okay.

[END OF SD01, TRACK03.]

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Carrie Yamaoka at the artist's home in New York City, New York, on July 27, 2016, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number two.

So yesterday, in talking about your childhood, themes of displacement came up throughout, and we got up to that idea of displacement, up until Wesleyan, and I'm curious if that idea of displacement was a through-line into the moment of the '80s and AIDS at all, in what ways, or if it was mostly a childhood—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think it was mostly—for sure, it was mostly a childhood experience, because by the time I moved to New York when I was 21, in 1979, I kind of found my queer community, and I was out, and I think that had a lot to do and that made a huge difference, in terms of feeling at home. And besides the fact that almost everyone that you meet in New York City is from somewhere else or has been displaced in some way from somewhere else, so that's sort of a common factor in people's lives.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the way that AIDS may have displaced so many folks?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, and that was another wave [laughs] of displacement, actually. I think during the worst of it—of those years—I think the feeling, the sense of displacement came from feeling very embattled, feeling like, you know, one's friends and one's immediate community and circle of activists or people in ACT UP, our people were the ones that—it was like an "us," and it was an "us against them" mentality.

And I think that a lot of us got very entrenched in that and got very hardened by that, and it was—it was also hard to work our way out of that, you know, in the mid-'90s. I should speak for myself, but just emotionally, emotionally, and I think some of that had to do with the fact that none of us had any time to grieve back in the day at all, because there was always, when someone died, there was always work that needed to be done or loved ones that needed to be taken care of or actions that needed to be performed or demonstrations that one needed to go to, and it somehow made the work even more urgent.

And so there was no downtime of stepping back and actually processing emotionally what one was going through, or what we were going through as a group or as a community, and that became very, very clear when—at the show that Helen Molesworth and Claire Grace curated, that *ACT UP New York: Activism Art and the AIDS Crisis: 1987–1993*, 2009] that was up at Harvard. There was a conference that accompanied the show.

ALEX FIALHO: Two thousand eight right?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think it was 2008 or 2009 [2009 –CY] up at Harvard, and a lot of people gave presentations and spoke, and it was almost like a kind of reunion of a lot of people that had not seen each other in a long time, and there was a lot of—that touched a kind of very raw nerve in a lot of us, and there was a lot of tears that were shed in that conference hall.

And I think it was shocking to all of us, and that's actually the impetus for what eventually became fierce pussy's piece *For the Record*, because after the Harvard conference, we talked about how so much of our grief was unexamined, so much of our mourning was not done, and also how to try and—how do you make that understandable to a generation of people that didn't live through the AIDS crisis, that were too young?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: You know. How to convey that sense of loss.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So ultimately, we made a piece when that show moved to White Columns. We made a piece called *Get up Everybody and Sing*, where we had derived—like we came up with the text. It was accompanied by the song lyrics from Sister Sledge, "We Are Family." It was a very different kind of configuration that ultimately ended up taking form in *For the Record* that we did for Visual AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: Yep, I think I'm going to keep us a little bit further back—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Sure.

ALEX FIALHO: —for a minute—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Okay.

ALEX FIALHO: —because we sort of yesterday finished off, more or less, in the height of the AIDS crisis, early '90s, and I think—I'm still curious just a little bit about how, in general, sort of zooming out, you personally viewed the world of art, your art, art world generally, at that moment in the '90s.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That's a big question.

ALEX FIALHO: A big question.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Can we break that down a little bit?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, sure, you obviously were deeply invested in art throughout your life. Did AIDS, in its urgency, shift the way that you viewed art and its stakes?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, absolutely. At the time what we called "the art world" seemed very unimportant for a number of years there.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think that might not be—that may not have been the case for other artists whose careers were much more developed at that point, but for me at that time—

ALEX FIALHO: That's interesting.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —I was not—it wasn't like I hadn't shown or hadn't had my work written about, but I hadn't—I feel like in the way [laughs] I'm always in the same position, to be honest. I don't feel like I'm any much more, my work is any much more out there, but I just feel very differently about it now, and in some ways, one of the ways that I worked myself out of that hole that we had all dug in the mid-'90s is that I realized that we had lost so many people, in the prime of their lives, who couldn't make the art or write the book or finish the piece of music or—and it felt almost like a responsibility to—not like I was doing it for them, but realizing that I was incredibly lucky that I was still here, and that I shouldn't waste my time, and that life was short, and I somehow felt galvanized to redirect my energy back into the studio.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, how about '96, the introduction of the cocktail. For some, for many, it has been sort of marked as a moment, a watershed moment, in which [. . . -AF] there was a treatment option for people. How did that shift things for you?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That changed everything. That changed everything. It meant, for example, we persuaded David Nelson to go on triple-combination therapy. He was kind of nervous about it and skeptical about it at first, but, you know, everything we were hearing from Mark Harrington, at TAG and everything, just seemed like this was the real deal, and he needed to get on it, and, I mean, that's just a really personal example of it but I feel like, it was strange, too, because I know people that died in 1995, just one year before that was available. I mean, so many people just missed the boat on that one, and for those people that were still alive, it just seemed like a no-brainer. It was—it changed everything.

It changed everything because, prior to that, it was—AIDS was a death sentence, you know, and I remember we did all kinds of crazy things like—I mean, of course, there were buyers' clubs and there were all kinds of people organizing to try and get treatments for people on the sly or through the back door or whatever, but, I mean, we even were so desperate at one point, I remember—I can sort of laugh about it now, but it wasn't really funny. [Laughs.]

David Nelson worked as a studio assistant for Jennifer Bartlett, and one of the people that worked in Jennifer's world was a gardener and he happened to be from Brazil, and he said that there was a rain forest compound,

from the rain forest, in Brazil that was helping people with HIV. It was helping them live longer and be healthier, and we were sort of thinking, "Oh, we should buy some of this. We should buy some of this for David." And then luckily, [Zoe said -CY] said, "Hey, wait a minute. Let me check this out with somebody that might know." [Zoe asked Gregg Bordowitz, who asked Derek Link who was working at GMHC at the time. -CY] It was a complete scam, of course, but we were so kind of desperate that we were just willing to buy the rain forest powder, you know—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That's how bad things were.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. I know Joy was invested and still is with Treatment Action Group or—I don't know what it was then.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, treatment—the Treatment and Data committee of ACT UP broke off and became Treatment Action Group.

ALEX FIALHO: Can you talk a little bit more about that affinity group, or I guess it wouldn't have been an affinity group but—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was just a working group. They were the people that were looking at all the data and analyzing all of the studies and trying to get drug companies and the government to actually do studies, and, you know, they were the ones that wanted to get drugs in—they didn't want to just get drugs into bodies; they wanted to actually look at the scientific data and actually hold doctors and pharmaceutical companies and the government accountable for all of that.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, and then come '96, come watershed, cathartic moment, how did that impact things, other than people still living? How did that impact the conversations that you were having with each other with activism?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Let me see. I probably—my involvement in ACT UP itself probably waned around 1995, I would say; maybe 1994, even.

ALEX FIALHO: And I don't think that's uncommon.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Right, because everybody's got like a little bit of a lifespan of how long they can stay involved with something like that. And actually, I'd gotten involved with Visual AIDS at that point, through David Nelson, around the time that Nick Debs became the executive director, so I think that might've been '95, '94.

ALEX FIALHO: When did he open his gallery?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: He opened the gallery in '97.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's talk a little bit about Visual AIDS then. What involvement did you have at that point?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, I was working at a magazine so I had, you know, access to different graphic design production equipment and stuff, so I was—I did a couple of catalogues for Visual AIDS. I was on the board of Visual AIDS for maybe a year. I—actually Joy and David and Barry Paddock and I made a couple of posters for Visual AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, broadsides?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: They were posters about this size, and actually, Vincent [Gagliostro -CY] helped us, because he had all the fancy equipment that we needed. There was one poster with an apple pie in a window, and there was another poster with a hazard symbol, you know, this sort of hazard icon.

ALEX FIALHO: Which was suggesting—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Gosh, I can't remember now, to be honest [laughs]. I'm drawing a blank, but we did it.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, what drew you to Visual AIDS at that time?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Oh, I also actually did archive some people's work by going over to the studios and shooting it.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, it just felt like something I could do, and it felt like, you know, this was a community of artists and so they were peers, and I felt like it was closer to the world that I knew, in a way.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, whose studios did you photograph? That's probably hard for you to remember.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I can't really remember now.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. And were you seeing Visual AIDS's impact on artists like David Nelson, or I guess in the loss of folks deserving of that legacy?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I for sure felt like the Archive Project was a really valuable thing. I wasn't sure—that I felt like Visual AIDS was helping David, per se. I think David was sort of helping Visual AIDS, just by being involved in a sense. And plus David had—he was very involved in the art world. He was very, in his own way, was very connected to the art world. Not that he knew how to use it for the promotion of his own work necessarily, but he was, yeah, very much in it, and his work was—at that point, it was getting seen.

ALEX FIALHO: How about Frank Moore? He was a central person involved with that Archive Project. When did he come into your life?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: He—I saw Frank's show at Sperone Westwater I think before I met Frank, and I was really blown away by it. I think it was 1990. I want to say it was 1992 or 1993; incredible, incredibly—it was incredibly moving, and I was so amazed by it. And I didn't know Frank at that point, and I think Nick Debs introduced us to Frank. He had a dinner party with Frank and invited us over there, and everybody—Joy and David and I fell in love with Frank immediately. He was an incredibly charismatic person. And then we became friends. And Frank, in contrast to a lot of the people that I knew in ACT UP or TAG, Frank was not an activist who was going to go out there and commit civil disobedience. He was much more of a—he was much more interested in other means, more benign methods.

ALEX FIALHO: Benign in what sense?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: He wasn't interested in harnessing his anger for constructive purposes. He was just interested in growing things and nurturing things and being constructive. I don't think he was interested in confrontational tactics. Joy always described it as like, you know, Frank was more like a love—you know, sort of a hippie.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, in the panel we just had with Visual AIDS "IV Embrace: On Caregiving & Creativity." She called him an "activist gardener," right, which was great.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, which is not to say that he wasn't an activist, because he definitely was. He just—

ALEX FIALHO: And the seeds that he sowed with the Archive Project, for which he was one of the cofounders—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —still resonates, I mean, all of 22 years later.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —at Visual AIDS. You know, it's all digital and online. So many artists' work who would be lost overall, but also lost to the black hole of the Internet, is [now -AF] Googleable—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —and, you know, for many, many artists it's the only representation of their work online which is important in this day and age.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. I think that one of the things that was so inspiring about Frank, too, was that he—his practice was completely seamless, you know. It was like the content and subject matter that he dealt with in his paintings were the exact same things that he dealt—there was no separation or compartmentalization between the work that he might have done with Visual AIDS or, you know, work that he wanted done around environmental issues or—he was just completely the real deal in one package. He didn't have many different compartments to himself. And that was kind of enviable in a way.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, how about the sort of second half of the '90s as a whole, before we zoom in on it. How did that shift, in relationship to AIDS and art, I would say?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Boy, that's a tough question. I don't know. I somehow think that that period of time was one

of incredible adjustment because all of a sudden all of our friends that were still alive were going to be alive. It looked like that, you know, and so we really had to reorient our thinking and realize, "Hey, wait a minute, no, it will be possible to survive." For me in my own work, I actually—the mid-'90s was when I kind of abandoned text and language altogether.

ALEX FIALHO: Back to abstraction?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, but I actually wouldn't even say—I mean, I don't even really think my work is abstract, to be honest.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, I agree.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think it's more concrete than that. I think I found text and language limiting or restrictive in the sense that it was limited—it couldn't address the body in the way that—not that I make immersive work, but I do make work that, since the mid-'90s, that deals with issues of perception, or subject and object, and the mutability of form, depending on sight or point of view or light conditions, and all of those things were not—I couldn't really address any of that when I was working with text. I mean, yeah. But at the same time, you know, I think I mentioned yesterday that I had abandoned abstraction in the '80s because I felt like the language was insufficient, and that may have had a lot to do with being queer in 1988, you know. It just felt like it couldn't—it couldn't be relevant in any way. In some way. And then maybe it was the trauma of the early '90s that just made me close the door on language. I'm not—I haven't totally unpacked that one. I feel like—yeah, I wanted to be able to work in a way that addressed the body more directly, that had a relationship to physicality.

ALEX FIALHO: When did you make that shift, in the mid-'90s?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: 1995.

ALEX FIALHO: And how did that look?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That's actually when I started working with reflective Mylar—

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —and resin.

ALEX FIALHO: Still a through line.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —to this day. How did you come across those materials?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, I had been working with mirror, you know, glass mirror, and I had been working, as I mentioned yesterday, with palindromes and text on mirror and sort of mirroring of text, and then also using different chemical agents to destroy the back of a mirror to distort the pure, objective representation, sort of to interrupt it. But I found that glass is such a—is a material that retains its—how can I say this? It's always a hard, objective representation that you get from a glass mirror, whereas reflective Mylar, for example, is incredibly, you know, malleable.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And I was interested in the malleability, not the actual reflection.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Or the verisimilitude of the reflection.

ALEX FIALHO: That's great. How has it changed or how is it malleable, in relationship to the amount of resin and the relationship to the color. In what ways do you play with the malleability of it?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It depends on how I work with it, whether I cast it in flexible resin or whether I mount it to wood panel. It depends on the kind of adhesives that I use to mount it to the panel, and the working conditions, and then the conditions of humidity when the resin is poured.

It's not that I'm actually molding the ground. I'm kind of setting up conditions and allowing accidents to happen within a controlled domain, kind of. But I'm interested in the relationship of the way that chance plays into the process. And I'm interested also in a kind of alchemy that happens with materials and with chemicals. I guess I've had a long-standing involvement with chemicals [laughs] because when I did the photo pieces, the book

pieces, I was using chemicals to bleach out text and working with erasure.

ALEX FIALHO: The book pieces, for instance, the piece that's in *Art AIDS America*—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: How do you use the chemicals to bleach out the text? Is it the action—the full text is rendered on the sheet and then you're bleaching it out?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, that's great. I didn't realize that.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So I was shooting spreads or double-page spreads of books or even, let's say, a close-up of a particular page in a book with a copy camera onto, you know, 35mm film, negative and then doing—making a print, a gelatin silver print, straightforward, and then using different reducing agents. Some of them were retouching pens that would erase the silver. Some were bleaches, photo-bleaches that you could use to reduce the image, so it gave you varying amounts of control over the amount of erasure.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, are there moments in those bodies of work in which text is somewhat erased, but not entirely?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yes, and that's sort of important that it's not sort of an either-or thing—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —if something's legible or illegible. There's actually just a little bit of a ghosting sometimes of —

ALEX FIALHO: —gradients and variation—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: What was your studio for you at that moment, early '90s, later '90s? With all the things happening in the world around you, when you—I don't want to say a "retreat," but when you would go to your studio, what sort of space did that hold for you?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, I—you know, it's interesting because I think that actually the world follows you wherever you go—

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —so even though on one hand —

ALEX FIALHO: That's great.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —you could say that the studio is a place where you're really alone with your thoughts and with your work, but, of course, you're bringing your world into your private space all the time. I mean, I will say that actually one thing that has been interesting is, working collectively with fierce pussy is actually a very nice balance between—you know, it's a balance between collective work and then the individual work that I do in the studio, because it's a relief with fierce pussy, the work we do; it's all, you know—we work together, and so we're not alone in our studios making all the decisions ourselves. You know, we make them as a group, and there's tremendous sort of—we share the burden and the pleasure sort of.

ALEX FIALHO: And then I'm sure there're moments where you're in your studio and you're like, "I'm glad I don't have to debate this decision."

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Exactly! [Laughs.] Exactly, and that I'm happy that the decision is all mine, for sure.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, nice. One thing that you noted as a sort of big break was the idea, I guess, of futurity.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: And that's something that I've heard from a lot of folks is, and even people now who were living with HIV, '80s, '90s, who still have a hard time envisioning a future. What was your relationship to your own future during that time?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Post-'96?

ALEX FIALHO: Pre-'96, I would say, at a moment when you were losing so many of your friends, how did you—what was the future for you?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I couldn't understand what that was because I was so involved in the moment, and even though I myself was not HIV-positive or living with HIV/AIDS, it felt like I was because everyone I knew and was close to—so in a way, you know, it's that shared experience.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So, yeah, I didn't—I actually didn't think—I did not think about the future at all. I think we were strangely all living very much in the moment, for better or worse.

ALEX FIALHO: How did that manifest?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think it's also the reason why there was a lot of—there was the burnout factor, you know.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because things were very intense when you're not pacing yourself or you're not sort of protecting yourself so that you can have your stamina to go a little bit further in this way or that way, and also we were much younger then, so we had, you know, unlimited energy.

ALEX FIALHO: And one thing that you noted that you were impressed, or was noteworthy about Frank Moore's works was the idea that it was sort of seamless in transition between the multiple threads. At that moment when you were thinking through your own art practice, your activisms, your day-to-day life—we sort of talked a little bit about how this conversation is allowing you to think through—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —those different facets together. When you were moving through the day, was it separated? Was it compartmentalized, to use that word, or was one an escape for another or, you know—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —I think it was compartmentalized. I think that only rather recently have I started to feel like everything is connected in my life, even though there's the seemingly disparate things or seemingly disparate activities; I feel like they are deeply connected. But that's something I've only kind of arrived at feeling in the past couple of years, I'd say.

Like, yeah, but, no, I think I was—I envied Frank's ability to just incorporate and integrate everything, because I clearly couldn't do that. I mean, I had worked with—well, actually, you know, fierce pussy was on a long hiatus, so between 1995 and 2008 we were not active at all.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's fast-forward to that 2008 moment. Was it Helen Molesworth's invitation at Harvard that catalyzed it?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: No, what it was was AA Bronson—this is really hilarious. So AA Bronson was sitting in our kitchen downstairs, because we lived downstairs then with Chrysanne Stathacos, I think, and Joy. Joy was having a meeting with the two of them, and I don't know what it was about really, but I was in the front room, and apparently AA said to Joy and Chrysanne that he was looking at a lot of ephemera, like gay male ephemera, on eBay, and then lesbian ephemera on eBay, and the striking thing was that gay male ephemera was very expensive, and lesbian ephemera was really hard to find, and it was really not expensive. And—

ALEX FIALHO: Even though it was hard to find.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, and somehow that segued into—I'm sort of recounting what Joy told me about this conversation, because he then said, "Have you ever heard of this group called fierce pussy?"

[Laughter.]

And Joy just cracked up and said—she called me into the kitchen—she said "Carrie, you've got to come in here." [Laughs.] That was really funny and—

ALEX FIALHO: Was it not—your names were attached to fierce pussy in the first incarnation.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, but we very much downplayed that. We never wanted to say who we were, and, in fact, the first posters never said "fierce pussy" on them. It was only in a later phase that we started to put

"fierce pussy" on the posters.

ALEX FIALHO: Interesting. Otherwise, they were entirely anonymous.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So anyway so AA had this idea where he wanted to show—he wanted to do a show at Printed Matter of *Heresies*, which was a feminist art magazine. Actually, really of a generation before us, more like the '70s, and fierce pussy, and we said to him, "I think you should do two shows. You should do *Heresies* as its own show and fierce pussy as its own show."

ALEX FIALHO: At that point you had revealed that you were involved in fierce pussy?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yes, yes [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Do you know how that reveal happened? Did you just say, "I'm involved. I was a member"?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think Joy and I said, "Well, yeah, that's us. You're looking at them, two of them anyway." [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: That's really funny.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So that's how the retrospective at Printed Matter came about, and so AA offered the show, and then Joy and I wrote emails to everybody that we knew that had ever been involved with fierce pussy and said, "This opportunity has come up. Who wants to work on it? Just get in touch with us and we'll reconvene." And it was only Brody and Zoe who responded.

So then the four of us worked on that show together, and through working on that show, we realized what we had been missing all those years and how, actually, we worked really well together. We also did a book, Printed Matter did a book, of the early fierce pussy work. But, yeah, we realized, Hey, this—and we also did a remix of one of our earlier posters for the Printed Matter show.

Anyway, that just sort of lit a fire under us, and we decided that we would start working again together, the four of us. And at that moment it was not at all on the same terms that the previous incarnation of fierce pussy had been, because we weren't really asking—it wasn't open. It wasn't open to anybody that wanted to join. It was really the four of us.

ALEX FIALHO: What was fierce pussy's working process in the first incarnation? Then we'll get to the working process in the second one, but we talked a little bit about how you would turn it around in a day.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: But what was a fierce pussy meeting like in the early '90s?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was a little chaotic. You know, although, I mean, everybody was kind of respectful and didn't really talk over each other, for the most part.

ALEX FIALHO: How often did you meet, and was the goal of the meeting, say, "Hey, let's make a new work?"

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Oh, it was always, "Let's make a new work."

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, but we didn't have a regular meeting time. It was when we could, when we all could meet, but it was fairly frequent, because we actually got a lot done in those early years. You know, we would alternate between planning a project—we'd have a meeting where we'd plan a project, and then we would execute it in the interim, and then the next meeting would actually be going out on the street and wheat-pasting.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you have any interesting wheat-pasting stories? Did you ever get caught by the cops? Ever have to run away from anyone?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We never got caught by the cops because we always had our lookouts, you know. We did have some strange reactions, I think, when we went—it was either Chelsea or the Upper West Side. We had wheat-pasted—we did what we—it was called "bombing," so we'd like bomb a wall, or we'd, you know, it means

wheat-paste posters all over, and it was when we were doing the Baby Pictures of ourselves with the terms attached to them like "muff diver" or "dyke" or whatever, and when we went back to see the posters like a week later, we realized that people had written on them, responses, most of which were—I'm assuming that they were straight people who had written on them. Like people thought maybe it was vaguely child abuse somehow to be using images of children attached to terms that, derogatory terms, that referred to sexuality. So that was really shocking to be so misunderstood [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How about among the four of you now? What's the fierce pussy working process these days?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Very different. Completely different. We have certain rules, like we—I know it sounds crazy, but sometimes instead of talking over each other, we raise our hands. It's just the four of us but—or we'll do this thing where we go around so everyone has their turn to say their thing, and then the next person—so that it's very orderly so—because otherwise we're all just like nah nah nah nah nah [laughs]. Just yelling at each other or laughing hysterically.

We always laugh a lot because there's a lot of humor in our process. Generally, we make decisions by consensus, but what that ends up meaning is that it might be a situation where three people say yes to something and one person is a holdout, and then either we just persuade the fourth person to agree, or the fourth person defers to us. It's never a big struggle, for the most part. Everybody's pretty—everybody takes turns in deferring to the larger group a lot of times.

ALEX FIALHO: And how did the retrospective turn out, in your estimation, 2008, Printed Matter?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, it was great. And actually, Maxine Wolfe came to see that show and she invited us out to the Lesbian Herstory Archives to do another retrospective out there, and then we turned it into—we kind of sort of wrote our own residency there, where we hung out at the Lesbian Herstory Archives for about a year doing research and making pieces from the archive.

ALEX FIALHO: What was that product? I've seen amazing images.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We did a project with all their button collection. We did a project with the covers of lesbian pulp novels. We did a project with T-shirts, and our biggest project that came out of that was a series called *Gutter*, which were—we spent a long time reading a lot of the lesbian pulp novels, which, at first, was—you know, we'd hang around at the archive, and we'd be reading, and at first it was sort of vaguely titillating because the stories are kind of amazing and hilarious and a little bit sexy. But then like after about, I'd say, one hour into [laughs] it, we were all getting incredibly depressed because the stories are always about, you know—who's going to commit suicide because they're queer or who has to like give up the girlfriend and marry the guy or become an alcoholic or go crazy or, you know, because they've all got really bad endings. And we decided that our project would be—

ALEX FIALHO: What was the time period on these?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Of *Gutter*?

ALEX FIALHO: Of the references?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Of the pulp novels?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: 1950s to maybe 1970.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay. So you decided—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We decided that we would go into them and redact them and make them—sort of appropriate those texts and kind of make them our own and come up with our desired, our desired narrative, not the narrative that was written in the book. So it's a sort of complicated way to say it, and then we did large-scale, very large-scale posters of that work that we wheat-pasted, I think for a show that Visual AIDS sponsored, actually at La MaMa. They were wheat-pasted on Extra [Place -CY]—there was a little alley next to La MaMa [Galleria] that had a huge brick wall, and we wheat-pasted the entire wall outdoors.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice. Do you know what show that was?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The name of the show? It was the one that was curated by Virginia Solomon and—

ALEX FIALHO: *Tainted Love*.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: *Tainted Love*, right.

ALEX FIALHO: Virginia Solomon and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Steve Lam.

ALEX FIALHO: Steve Lam.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And we ended up taking that project to Harvard when we went up to do the residency up there, in conjunction with Helen Molesworth's show.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, so what's the sequence, AA Printed Matter to Maxine.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Lesbian Herstory Archives.

ALEX FIALHO: [Speaking simultaneously] Lesbian Herstory Archives. What were some of the next invites?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: *Tainted Love* at La MaMa and Harvard.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's do Harvard for a little while then.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Okay.

ALEX FIALHO: What was that experience, and what was the invitation, and I know it was pretty involved with the student body and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, there's an interesting backstory. I don't know how much I really want to really talk about it, but that was curated by Helen Molesworth, and Claire Grace was assisting her in it, and it just so happens that Claire Grace's sister, Anna Grace, was—may have even been an early member of fierce pussy. I don't know, but she definitely knew fierce pussy's work, and she said to Claire, her younger sister, "You know, you should really take a look at fierce pussy for this show," because, as the show was originally conceived, it was really only going to be Gran Fury and the oral history project that Sarah Schulman and Jim Hubbard—

So we basically kind of talked our way into the show, because we invited Helen and Claire over to the studio, and we showed them the whole presentation of fierce pussy's projects during those years, and part of our argument was that it was impossible to kind of give a whole picture of the relationship between art and AIDS activism in the early '90s without acknowledging that there were many, many, many little satellite groups of collectives that were making art, activist art, at that time, fierce pussy being one of them, but there were many others like GANG and—

ALEX FIALHO: GANG?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: GANG. God, there were many, many, many, and so somehow when we—we were here doing the presentation and showing the slides, Helen really got it, and she was very, clearly very emotional, very moved, because it took her right back to—it took her right back to the late '80s, early '90s, on an emotional level, and so she included fierce pussy in the show.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, what works?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: There were posters. There were piles, stacks of Baby Picture posters, I think, and List posters that were in the main body of the show, and then she'd sort of designed a residency for us where we could—we did installations in bathrooms at the Sackler Center and at the Carpenter Center—

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —where we worked with undergrad students on the installations, and then we did an installation of *Gutter* at the Graduate School of Design. So it was like a big—and then we met with the students and sort of gave presentations, and Martabel Wasserman was one of the people that we met at that time.

ALEX FIALHO: The Sackler Center in Harvard or—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] In—Harvard. In fact, they put up—Martabel had a great—she was just graduating that year, but she was one of the people that, one of the students that was helping us with the installations, and it turned out that after we left, the school put up warning labels outside the bathrooms saying

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —"The material inside may not be suitable for children under the age of"—I don't know what, 12 or something, or 16, and so Martabel made other signage that—she took down those signs and put up—I think she either took down those signs or she put up another sign which said, you know, "What is it about lesbian life that is unsuitable for children?" You know, so she kind of turned—she played with the signage and subverted the institution's reach a little bit, which was very cool.

ALEX FIALHO: How about—was fierce pussy entirely New York City-based projects to that point?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How was the—was there any notable shift in the fact that the context was in Boston and the university setting that you noticed?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: No, except that it was inspiring to work with younger people, you know, the whole different generation.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I mean, I guess there had been other—I mean, for sure fierce pussy had been in different—we had—at a certain point in the early '90s we had sent a bunch of our posters down to Camp Sister Spirit in the South. Do you know about Camp Sister Spirit?

ALEX FIALHO: No.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: They were a commune of lesbians that were kind of—I want to say they were in Georgia, or they were in Mississippi, and they were being kind of attacked by the mainstream evangelical community that were sort of all around them, and they had to kind of protect themselves from attack. So in solidarity we sent a lot of our material down to them. We sent material out to shows in different parts of the country, but that wasn't a project where we ourselves went and wheat-pasted elsewhere. I think there was a billboard project in Austria where one of our posters was on a billboard or on a couple of billboards.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you find that show at Harvard, both as an exhibition in total, and then also fierce pussy's positioning in relationship to collectives like Gran Fury?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That's a tough question. Well, we were super pleased with the work that we did there. We were completely ecstatic about the *Gutter* installation at the Graduate School of Design, and we were completely thrilled about the bathroom installations. The show itself was kind of a different story. I'm not saying I was disappointed in the show. It was just that, in a way, yeah, fierce pussy was situated outside of the main body of the show, for the most part.

ALEX FIALHO: In that you were in the bathroom and residency, instead of on the walls?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, we were present in the exhibition in the form of takeaways, you know, stacks of posters.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the idea of an AIDS exhibition, historical reckoning with AIDS at that point? That's one of sort of the notable early instances, and they've only continued since then. Did it feel odd to have AIDS be positioned historically?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think that was the first instance that I can recall of that happening, and in some ways I felt like the conference was the more inspiring event.

ALEX FIALHO: In that it brought together everyone for the first time in a very long time?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, and it made us think about—it made fierce pussy think about, how do we—how do we make this relevant or understandable to a younger generation of people that didn't live through the AIDS crisis?

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the answers that you guys thought through for that question?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We ended up making that piece that ended up being at the White Columns iteration of the show, *Get up Everybody and Sing*, and then we ended up doing *For the Record*.

ALEX FIALHO: Great, let's linger a little bit then. So the White Columns was a traveling version of the show. I saw that. It was strong. What—your work was right at the front, I remember. What were some of the formal elements, and what were you thinking through with the different moves?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We really wanted—one thing we felt about the show at Harvard was that it was kind of frozen

in amber, like set in the past, and that there was nothing in the show that really brought it right up into the present. So when the opportunity came to show at White Columns, we talked to Matthew Higgs, and we actually asked for that entryway space because the thing about—as wonderful as the oral history project is, and it's all of these testimonials of everybody that lived through that time, but it's only the people that were still alive. You know, not the people that were gone.

ALEX FIALHO: No.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And we tried to—so we wanted to kind of think about how do we construct this language around loss that's—to make it palpable, to make—and to bring it right up to the minute like if she were here—"If she were alive today, she'd be texting you right now."

ALEX FIALHO: It's very effective.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Oh, I'm glad, yeah. And we wanted that show not to be sort of frozen in the past so that was—we were kind of like trying to bring it up to the present.

ALEX FIALHO: The White Columns installation had the Sister Sledge song and then taped—what was the tape component?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, originally we were going to wheat-paste those lines of text along that wall, the two adjacent walls, but we taped it up with blue painter's tape, just to sort of lay it out, and then we looked at it and we realized, no, no, no, we loved the blue painter's tape, because we don't—we don't want the fixed wheat-paste, heavy wheat-paste permanence of the text attached to the wall. We want the sort of provisional element.

ALEX FIALHO: Flimsiness.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And those were still texts from the song?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: No, those were sentences that we made up. The text from the song was just on a giveaway poster that was a song, "We Are Family," that sort of predates the AIDS crisis. It was sort of the anthem that would be playing in all the bars and clubs and during the gay pride march, you know, and it also—the lyrics felt very poignant to us with hindsight because it described a future. The song described a future that was actually not to be.

ALEX FIALHO: A possibility that was foreclosed at that point.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So all the lines of text that were pinned, that were taped to the wall were things like, "If he were alive today, he'd be standing next to you." "If she were alive today, she'd be texting you right now." "If they were alive today, they could tell you about getting arrested at City Hall." "If he were alive today, he'd have you on your knees." "If he were alive today, he'd be in this picture." So we tried to use the repetition of "If he were alive today," "If she were alive today" as a structure, sort of almost like an incantation.

ALEX FIALHO: And then what was the opportunity that moved it to *For the Record*, Visual AIDS, and Day Without Art?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, Visual AIDS approached us and—to do something for Day Without Art, but we kind of—Visual AIDS approached us with one idea that we—and the site that we didn't really like very much, so we suggested another project, which was to still work with that same text, because we felt like we weren't finished with it, but to turn it into a broadside that was printed that could be freely taken, but that could also be taped up in the window of Printed Matter, which is what ended up happening. And we made stickers, too, and I think we made postcards.

ALEX FIALHO: We have all of it, at the office still.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Were you pleased with that project *For the Record*?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, we were all super happy about that.

ALEX FIALHO: And then it was distributed as one does, as Visual AIDS does with Day Without Art.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: So other institutions were encouraged to put the broadside in windows, and throughout their space on World AIDS Day.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: What year was that, maybe 2013? I should know. How about some of these questions around nostalgia? How does that play into retelling of this history for you or more generally?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, nostalgia is a difficult topic, because I'm not at all nostalgic for those days, but I think that there is some nostalgia that I see around, and I'm not sure—certainly some of it's coming from people who did live through those days, and then some of it might be coming from younger people that didn't live through those days. I don't know. You tell me what you think. How would you define the nostalgia around the AIDS crisis? I mean, how would you sort of describe it?

ALEX FIALHO: I think of nostalgia as a longing for the past, and in that sense, I think generationally, a generation who lived during that time—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —might feel nostalgic for some of the activism or the community that emerged at that time, and I think that the generation that didn't live through that time might also feel nostalgic for the way that activism had an urgency and real stakes that may be lost on people now. But I also think that the flip side of nostalgia is, at least in this context, is that it was an immensely harrowing moment for everyone.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: So it's not a time that many would want to go back to.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Right.

ALEX FIALHO: Even if it might have felt like the most galvanized that people had felt at that stage.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It's funny because among my friends, I don't know anybody that feels nostalgic about that, and that—a lot of the people that I still have—am in contact with have still moved on with their lives in ways that they feel like they're still doing something that is important, and it's not like the activism was relegated to a point in the past. I think a lot of the people I know—I mean, some of the people that I met in ACT UP are people that I'm really, really close friends with to this day, and those relationships are incredibly meaningful because I feel like I trust those people. I would trust them with my life, because we had to back then.

ALEX FIALHO: That's something that we wanted to dive into a little bit today, this idea of the community that really formed around that early '90s moment for you, and the idea of, how do you learn to trust people, these interpersonal dynamics that really formed and the bonds that came out of that time? Can you just talk a little bit more about those bonds?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah—

ALEX FIALHO: And how they came to be?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It's really uncanny because I think in situations like that, people did form bonds very, very quickly, and it wasn't necessarily based on how much we got to know each other because there wasn't really time for that. I think that you get to know people pretty quickly when you are having—you have to rely on them. Like if you're doing an action and you know that you're going to be arrested, you have to know that the designated person is there observing the civil disobedience, and is going to be there at the police station until you get out of jail.

I mean, those are the kind—those are the kind of trust things or rules that the actions are hinged on, and those practices—I think those practices end up being incredibly—are good bonding material, basically. And the other interesting thing about it is that a lot of the people that I met in ACT UP are people that I wouldn't necessarily have met in the normal orbit of my life, and sometimes I didn't even know what people did in their real lives, in their work lives until much later.

ALEX FIALHO: Interesting.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: You know, but it turned out that there were people who brought—and all those disparate people brought all their skills to the room. So you had people that were working for magazines or people that were working in PR or people that were working as architects or people that were working in film or video in their work lives. But they were able to bring all their stuff to their activism, but you didn't necessarily know that

at the time, what they did, who they were, what they—maybe you found that out later.

And then, I don't know. It's like there are a lot of people that—from those days that, if I see them now, there's a tremendous fondness, and it's not necessarily a fondness or a love that is, you know, based on how much we stayed in touch or how much we even know about each other's lives now. It's just something that was forged in the actions that we did which is I guess, how people describe—like people who have been at war sort of describe that about people that they fought with. It's sort of similar, I think.

ALEX FIALHO: It's like you were in it together.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, but I can't say I am nostalgic for that at all.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And with the whole spate of, you know, books and films and everything else that's being produced about that time, it remains to be seen how that plays out. Because the books and the films are still coming, I guess.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, let's talk about a couple people in particular; Nancy Brooks Brody, for instance, has been, you know, central to fierce pussy, and let's just talk a little bit about Brody. How did you meet Brody and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: How did I meet Brody? I think I met Brody through David Nelson and David Knudsvig, because Brody—

ALEX FIALHO: Because Brody also was an assistant with Jennifer Bartlett—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: —too, right?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, as was Tony Feher, at a certain point. I think—

ALEX FIALHO: She had good assistants.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: At least good artists as her assistants.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Absolutely.

ALEX FIALHO: I don't know if they were good assistants for her but—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So I think—I'm pretty sure—I remember David Nelson specifically saying to Joy and I, "You need to meet Zoe and Nancy." And Zoe and Nancy were good friends of David and David and—because he thought that we would really hit it off, and he was right.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Although I'm not sure if that's how I met Zoe, because I think I met Zoe, maybe, through Gregg Bordowitz; maybe not; maybe, because Adam Simon, who was a good friend of mine, his younger brother, Jason Simon, was at the Whitney program with Gregg, so Jason Simon and Moyra Davey and Gregg Bordowitz were all friends, and they were—there was an organization that Adam and Michele founded in Hoboken called Four Walls, where artists would come and give presentations, and there would be dialogue about work, and Jason and Moyra and Gregg were a part of that scene, and I think—I didn't meet Zoe there, but I feel like I met her through Gregg or I met her—maybe I met her through David Nelson, as well. But Nancy Brooks Brody; yeah, so gosh, it's amazing. I mean, we know each other so much better now than we did in the '90s. I'll just say that. We're so much closer now.

ALEX FIALHO: Because of fierce pussy and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, because of the second incarnation of fierce pussy, but also we did all kinds of ad hoc actions in the intervening years that didn't have anything to do with AIDS. Like we did some actions around the Gulf War, and we did some actions around George Bush and the Republican convention and—

ALEX FIALHO: George Bush II? George Bush the second?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The second, yeah. Yeah, so we all still continued to work together in one form or another, and we were still close because we were all sort of around David.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, how about Zoe Leonard?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And the same is true for Zoe. I think we're—it's interesting. The four of us have become incredibly close now, because I guess—let's see, how long have we been working together, since—in the second incarnation of fierce pussy? It must be eight years.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, and 25 years, if you think about the first, you know, to now.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: What does a meeting amongst the four of you—we talked a little bit about the process, but are there ways that—does someone play a particular role and another person play a particular role, and how does that divvy out, if anything?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think that's always shifting. It's always more or less shifting, yeah; it's shifting.

ALEX FIALHO: This is a little bit of a jump, but it's something that I have been meaning to ask. Were there any sort of moving artworks or experiences or encounters in the '90s that stick out to you, either in ACT UP/Gran Fury context, or I would actually be interested in other ones as well?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work was huge for me in the early '90s, the billboards that he did of the unmade beds, for one thing, but basically just about everything he did.

ALEX FIALHO: Why is that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Very moving.

ALEX FIALHO: What about him?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think, you know, at that particular moment when Felix Gonzalez-Torres did the billboards of the unmade beds, what was so striking was that he was—you know, when you say the personal is political, it was really taking that and embodying that phrase, because there was this very, very private moment or sort of the forensic evidence of, you know, the bed that he had slept in with his lover, or the unmade bed, and there it was in a very public place with the bodies being absent, with no text whatsoever, but, in a sense, you're reading that image. There might as well have been text. I mean, the text was embedded in the image in a sense. Yeah, I found his work incredibly moving. I would say that is a stand-out from the early '90s, for sure.

Well, Zoe's installation at documenta in—what year was that—1991, I think, in Kassel. That was a standout for me. She—the site was—I think it was like—I might be getting this totally wrong, but it was a municipal museum where there were portraits of important people to the community from the 17th century, 18th century, 19th century, and they get hung in the galleries, and she removed—I can't remember if she removed all of the portraits or just some of the portraits, and she replaced them with her own images, which were images that she had taken of women, you know, crotch shots basically, of different women. So it was the same—there was slight variation, obviously, because no one looks exactly the same [laughs] from that angle, but instead of it being a face, it was just that—

ALEX FIALHO: Naked crotch shot?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, and that was quite powerful.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you go to documenta that year?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I was at documenta then, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Because Zoe was in the show or—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because I was traveling—I was traveling with my friend Bill Allen, and we were in Berlin, and then we stopped in Kassel and because documenta was going on, and then I, yeah, I did, you know, I contacted Zoe, and Linda Matalon was there. That's the first time I ever met Linda Matalon, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How about, to move back into your work. We've sort of gotten up to a '90s moment where you've moved back, moved into Mylar and resin. How was that engagement sustained over the last couple of decades and developed?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Wow, that's a long story. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: We have time. [Laughs.] What is it about the form that keeps you interested?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I'd say the thing that keeps me interested is that the relationship I see between reflective Mylar as a material where it, to me, it's kind of analogous to film, so that things can be—it's very impressionable. Like it takes impression very, very easily, so it can both record and reflect at the same time. So, you know, there's a way in which I could say that I think part of what I'm interested—I mean, all of the work that I've done over the past 20 years has a huge relationship to photography for me.

I find that really interesting because I was so involved with photography when I was a youngster, but sometimes I think about the reflective plane of Mylar being analogous to the film plane of a camera, except there's never any shutter or button to freeze the action. So it's perpetually fugitive, and I tend to work with an idea of emptiness a lot, although in my more recent work it's—I'd say it's less empty, but it's devoid of actual so-called pictures or things that might look like real objects, because I'm interested in the viewer thinking about their relationship to what it is exactly that they see, how they situate themselves in relationship to the object, and how everything changes, depending on that movement and that orientation.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I'm trying to boil it down to like really sort of essential things but it's also about a lot of other things, of course.

ALEX FIALHO: What other things?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think I'm interested in a certain paradox about time and making time more elastic, and sometimes I think I have a relationship to some of my work recently that—where I think of it almost as a time-based experience, even though painting is never thought of that way. But, in fact, the way that we look at things is always a time-based experience. So I've been kind of involved in that, and just paradoxes about stillness and movement, the way that things can change, depending on where you situate them in relationship to the light source, or the fact that they can reflect the architecture of the site in which they're viewed—stuff like that.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, what's a day in your studio look like?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Oh, it depends. I'm always working on a number of things at the same time. So it's not like I work on one piece concentratedly, partly because of the processes involved. So, you know, I might be gessoing a panel, and then I might or I—I always save pouring resin until the end of the day when I can leave, so I don't have to be breathing the stuff. You know, I might be—sometimes I manipulate the surface by sanding the resin down and making it less reflective, and then buffing it back up to create a different kind of light. So there might be sanding and buffing and gessoing of a panel, or cutting things to fit in molds, and pouring usually happens at the end, or I might just be sitting in my studio chair, looking at what I've done [laughs] for a couple of hours, you know, and thinking about it, thinking about where I'll take it next.

ALEX FIALHO: How involved is the resin pour? What does that look like?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It depends, because some pieces are just one pour. Some pieces require multiple, multiple, multiple pours, and if I'm working with color, which I actually haven't really been doing in recent years—one thing that I'd say would characterize the past five years of my work is that I've kind of drained color out of it as much as possible, but I do work with powder—I do work with things like powder pigments or alkyd solutions and all kinds of different materials that, even though it's not a lot of color, like it's not high chroma, it is still color.

ALEX FIALHO: What's the inspiration for less color, for draining the color?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: To make the viewer more aware of the color that is there—

ALEX FIALHO: Which may be external.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —yeah, which may be external, which may be sort of reflected, which may be—because there—you know, color can be incredibly seductive, and I'm just—I feel like it's sometimes a huge distraction, huge distraction, because people just end up loving the purple, instead of thinking about what else is going on in the piece.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, what are some of the titles of the pieces?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Usually they're very objective, like the size, for example, *14 by 11 #12*. [Laughs.] My titles drive me crazy because it's really hard to keep track of them, but lately they've actually become more—less about numbers and dimensions and more about an action.

ALEX FIALHO: Such as?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Such as *Crawl/Bend*, the title of one piece that starts on the wall and goes onto the floor.

ALEX FIALHO: What are some of the inspirations behind the work, for your process in general?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Gosh, that's a tough question—just about everything.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I'm not sure I can answer that.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay, how about—are there things that you say, "Aha," or are there things outside of your studio, whether it's something you read, something you hear, something you see, that you then say, "Aha, I've got to bring that into the work in this way?"

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, that happens all the time. It happens all the time; absolutely, it happens all the time.

ALEX FIALHO: What's an instance or two?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Or I'll be really stuck on a piece and I won't know exactly what to do, and then I'll be in the studio, knocking my head against the wall, and then I don't really find a solution until I'm out in the world, seeing something that has nothing to do with my studio. And then I'll realize what I need to do to make that work, so there's always—there's always a back-and-forth that way. It's hard to single anything out as—I'm very interested in error lately in my work.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I'm interested in mutations or things that happen because of a chain of sequences of error, and I'm interested in being surprised by what emanates from that error.

ALEX FIALHO: Chemical changes?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Chemical changes, changes in form, materials not acting as—not behaving in the way that they're supposed to, like using materials a little bit improperly to derive a different—a sort of unexpected manifestation of the material.

And I really don't work serially, I would say. I mean, maybe in hindsight there are things that could be grouped in series, but I kind of feel like they're all part and parcel of the same trajectory. That seemingly disparate objects are all part and parcel of the same story.

ALEX FIALHO: Good. Maybe let's take a little breather.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: So that was a bit more about the process of your work. I'm now pretty interested in where it's been shown and my sense is that Debs & Co. is an important context for your work throughout.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the shows you had there, and maybe how did—what was the trajectory of those shows with Debs & Co., from a bird's-eye view maybe?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I think I had four shows at Debs & Co. between the years 1997 and 2004, and for me it was tremendously important because Nick Debs was incredibly supportive of the work. It was sort of a commitment to represent and show the work repeatedly, and so it enabled me to have particular shows to work towards, you know, which is always an incredible opportunity. And I feel like, you know, artists need that opportunity in order to grow their work. They need the opportunity to show because decisions get made when you know that work is going to be shown that are different than when you have no idea if the work's going to be shown, which is a little bit where I am right now, to be honest [laughs], because, you know, I had a show last September at Lucien Terras, which I was really pleased about.

I felt very good about that show, but, you know, I really have nothing—I mean, I have a couple of group shows on the horizon, but there's—I'm not represented by anybody. I was represented by a couple of galleries in Europe for a while in the early 2000s, but I've severed those relationships for various reasons, although, for a while, they were quite—it was quite good, especially between 2004 and 2010. I was showing a lot in Europe, but right now I don't have a gallery in New York or in Europe.

So I'm a little bit like a fish out of water right now. In some ways that's really good for me because it means—

sometimes the pressure of having a show and a deadline means that you might not take as many risks as you can when you just really have a clean slate, so there are good things to that, but it's also a little nervous-making.

ALEX FIALHO: How about—what kind of work were in some of the solo shows with Nick?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The show that I had—I can't remember if it was actually 1997 or 1998; the first show I had with Nick was some of the very, very earliest Mylar panel pieces. Some of them had very high chroma. Some of them were just silver.

In the second show at Nick's, I took a lot more risks, and I actually started casting works, not just doing works on panel, but casting works in molds, and sometimes they would start on the wall and go onto the floor. Sometimes they would wrap around a corner. That was true of the third show at Nick's. The fourth show—oh, gosh, it's all a bit of a blur right now.

The shows were generally well received, whatever that means. Like they—there were reviews and there was press, and also it was—you know, it meant that there were curators who were going through galleries and seeing the work, you know, which was great. So it led to some other opportunities outside of New York, opportunities to show.

ALEX FIALHO: Great, how about *Side X Side*, a Visual AIDS show from 2008?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was great because it was really lovely working with Dean Daderko, and I got a chance to show work that, some of which had never been seen before, or at least had never been seen in that context, and in a context around, work around AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of those works?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I showed *Archipelagos* in that show. It was a big—it occupied a lot of the wall. I showed some—I showed a palindrome piece, I believe, yeah. I did show a palindrome piece on mirror and glass that was a sculpture. I showed a Mylar piece. I showed quite a lot of work there, actually.

ALEX FIALHO: Other artists in the show were Kate Huh, Martin Wong, Nicolas Moufarrege, [Scott Burton].

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I can't remember. I could look it up on my computer but—

ALEX FIALHO: But the context was, to my sense, was sort of around three artists who had been lost to AIDS, and then the sort of caregiving capacity, too, to some of the work as well.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I didn't see the caregiving aspect. I sort of saw it as three artists lost to AIDS and maybe three artists that—

ALEX FIALHO: Were still here.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —were still here, and absolutely completely disparate kinds of work too.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, and in interesting ways.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How about David Nelson's show at 80 Washington Square East?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was amazing. It was amazing.

ALEX FIALHO: 2015.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was amazing, and I was so happy to see a lot of that work again, and I was, you know—I wish it had been a bigger space, and I wish—you know, that was just the tip of the iceberg of David's work. There was so much more, and, you know, any person that knew David very well would have curated a very different shows around his work, but I think Brody and Jonathan Berger did a really incredible job, not easy choices to make either.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Absolutely.

ALEX FIALHO: The photograms of those—maybe, I don't know, 50—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The train man.

ALEX FIALHO: —the train man, black, in the corner was just such a revelation. Those were so amazing.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: As somebody who lived with David literally—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: He made those—he made those here in the darkroom.

ALEX FIALHO: He made the holes in the backyard.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: You know, how was it seeing some of those objects again?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was very moving. It was very, very moving, and I—you know, I was not in contact with David for the last 10 years of his life because we had a kind of parting of the ways in 2004, so I wasn't familiar at all with his—the late, late work, the paintings.

I mean, he was starting to paint when he was still downstairs. So I was familiar with the beginnings of the paintings, and those were quite shocking to me at the time because they involved pink, and, you know, that was a color that David was just—had previously been so resistant to. So that was kind of fascinating, and it was an opportunity to sort of—to look at that work that I was not familiar with, the paintings and the later work, and, for me, the killer piece of the whole show were the train tunnels and the antenna with the bone rings. That just killed me completely. It was amazing.

ALEX FIALHO: Why's that?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because of the reference to, you know, the bone ring being a reference to the body, the tunnel being completely a reference to the body, there being no train [laughs], only in the tunnel.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Only this incredibly long tunnel, and the antenna which—the thing that I think of, I mean, that I read as an antenna, which was that piece that was sort of like a receiving, like receiving transmission, was—yeah, very, very beautiful. There was also a lot of David's work that wasn't there at all.

All the stuff from his Paris show wasn't there. So there were a lot of omissions, but in the end, I think it was a beautiful show and really well done, and I don't think it would have been possible to do a really broad retrospective of his work in that space, so they did it—it was challenging, and they did a fantastic job.

ALEX FIALHO: Really tight. Distilled and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —and, as somebody who hadn't seen any of David's work before, a very eye-opening and navigatable, if that's a word—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —introduction—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —to the real formal and conceptual strength of the work.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: I was really, really floored.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: I thought it was really amazing.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: That would be amazing to see a David K/David Nelson paired show.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That would be amazing. That would be amazing.

ALEX FIALHO: Because I know—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: You've seen some of the images of David K's work—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —probably, in the Archive Project.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How about this idea you said a little earlier about grief as unexamined or not really something to be processable at that moment in the '90s? How did that grief, trauma eventually come up, if at all, for you or others over the years?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It really came up at Harvard at that conference [laughs], big time, for everyone in the room. I mean, just about everyone was in tears and, you know, that was something that you never would have seen in 1993. Nobody had time to cry. There was no time to cry. In fact, it might even have been frowned upon if one did. Do you know what I mean?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And, I mean, at least from the people that I know and I'm close to, I feel like we're all still reexamining that grief. I don't think anybody's done with it, which is why—I don't know if I want to say this, but the phrase that I find really baffling on the Visual AIDS bag that says, correct me if I'm wrong, it's something about "I want to remember my life without"—"before AIDS" or "without AIDS"?

ALEX FIALHO: "The world before AIDS."

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The world before AIDS. I want to remember my world before, or the world?

ALEX FIALHO: My world.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: My world before AIDS. Like that is—that's a phrase I can't even wrap my head around, and that may be a generational thing, you know. It might just be—

ALEX FIALHO: Why not?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I want to remember—because for me I feel like AIDS was a defining element for a whole generation of people that I'm close to. Like I can't imagine the world—I can't imagine my life if that had not happened. I can't imagine it.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, I think the sentiment of it is to go before, to a moment before, you know, the calamity, the trauma, the harrowingness—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —but it sounds like it's not something that you can even comprehend.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: No, and in some funny way it feels like, and that just might be me, reading it as like a form of wanting to be in some kind of denial, which we all do [laughs] all the time, of course. We all want to be in denial about all kinds of things. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Earlier you said there was an "us versus them" mentality that came out in the '90s. Who was the "us," and who was the "them"?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The "them" was very loosely constructed. I mean, it could be the them—it could be the government. Them could be straight people. Them could be people who did not feel that they were at all affected by HIV/AIDS. Them could be friends of mine who were artists who, you know, had no time for activism, or had no time—did not spend much time being affected by HIV/AIDS, which was virtually impossible in those years, but some people did.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I don't think anyone was unaffected, but I just think there were people that weren't at all involved in activism, and that seemed almost unimaginable—like something I couldn't understand at a certain point or think—let's put it this way: I'm not trying to say it to be judgmental, but it created distance in some relationships, and partly because, yeah, the urgency of the time made us all very myopic, too, and some of that I

regret. I regret that I sort of let certain friendships slide because our paths took us in such different directions.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the "us"?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The "us" was—the us was the us. The us was everybody that I was friends with, who I was involved with. Even the us were people who were no longer here, the people that I was close to that were no longer here, all the fellow travelers.

ALEX FIALHO: How did everyone in your immediate circle interact with each other, or engage on the level of your art practices? Are you doing studio visits with Brody and Zoe—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Sure.

ALEX FIALHO: —and Joy and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Obviously, seeing shows together—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah. Talking about shows that we've seen, talking about work that we've seen, going to each other's studios, going to each other's shows.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you feel like the word "influence" is relevant to how you—would you influence each other's practices?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Totally, totally. I can't say what that influence is, really. I mean, maybe in another 10 [laughs] or 15 years I'll be able to see that more closely, but I'd say that, for sure, and that has been more true in, let's say, the past 10 years or, yeah, eight years, since fierce pussy has come together again. But it was always true before, too, because we were always seeing each other's work before as well.

ALEX FIALHO: What other communities were important to the work or to you? You've done ACT UP and activism, fierce pussy, some of your friends. Is there any—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, there were people around the Visual AIDS—like there was Frank Moore and there was Barbara Hunt, who's a former director of Visual AIDS. Amy Sadao, Nick Debs.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, how about spaces? Are there places that felt safe, or not safe but inspiring, galvanizing, catalyzing? Are there rooms that you walk into and you were like, This is a room for me? This is a home away from home.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I could say that the room at the center where ACT UP met had a special, special character, but I wouldn't say it was—it's a little hard to describe that. It's like I felt like I was walking into a room where I—some of the people I knew from—you know, people like Tony Feher or—actually, I don't even remember Brody or Zoe being in ACT UP in those years, but they probably were. But they were also years that they really took off. Like Brody went to Alaska—no, Zoe went to Alaska in P-town [Provincetown, MA], because she just had to get away, and her involvement in ACT UP might have been earlier than mine, you know, so we might have overlapped a little bit.

But, I don't know. It's hard to say. It's really hard to say. But I would say that the room that ACT UP met in at the center was definitely an intense place, and welcoming in the sense that there were people that one was close to from disparate parts of one's life, you know, all in the same room.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, how about the big umbrella question, and we can unpack this however we see fit, if at all, of women and HIV. We had a panel with the Brooklyn Museum recently, Visual AIDS.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: "Women, Art, Activism, AIDS."

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: "Here Then, Here Now."

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: And it was intergenerational and it was artists, activists talking about their work; seven folks, diverse cross-section of practices, activisms, and I thought that was a really important panel that I've

coordinated, or worked with closely to coordinate, because of the different types of voices that we tried to have involved and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —I would just be curious how you would even approach that intersection, and we can go from there.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Well, that was super interesting for me because it was intergenerational.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That was also the key thing about it that was interesting. At certain moments I felt like three different languages were being spoken [laughs] there, and that I needed, you know, the little, the watch that's in *Barbarella* that Jane Fonda wears that sort of translates for her things that she doesn't understand.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I felt like I was, you know, having to like adjust my *Barbarella* watch, you know, because it's—

ALEX FIALHO: How so or why so?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Because the younger women were speaking in a very different way and coming from a very different experience than some of the women that were older. I mean, I hate to characterize it as younger and older.

ALEX FIALHO: Of course.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was more fluid than that.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And there was more of a continuum, but I—and that was interesting, in and of itself.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And maybe that's the reason why there—it was sort of important, because I think the information flows in both directions, right, and it's really valuable to have that kind of information, even if it's not immediately cohesive.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: So that felt important to me.

ALEX FIALHO: How about some of the stakes that were close to women's causes in HIV moments, whether it was a *Gran Fury* poster: "Women don't get AIDS. They just die from it." Some of the activism around misinformation in the large-scale magazines distributed to women. Were those some of the stakes and causes that you were invested in?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Actually, I wasn't at the time, to be honest.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: In the early '90s I felt—there was a working group in ACT UP of women who worked very, very intensively, on that and Zoe and Brody were two of them, actually, two people that did work very closely on those issues, and I thought that the work they were doing was really valuable, but it just felt to me like—I mean, this sounds really stupid [laughs]; I'll admit it. It just sounded—it just felt like at that moment, the people I knew that were getting sick and dying were men. But I think the work they did was incredibly valuable because, of course, drugs, for example, work differently in women's bodies than they do in men's—

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —so the research has to be done, and there was a lot of resistance to that group in ACT UP. I remember that. I think there was a lot of tension around that, and difficulty that that working group had. But I personally wasn't involved in that working group at all. You know, it's sort of like one has to pick one's battles.

ALEX FIALHO: Yep.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: You can't do everything.

ALEX FIALHO: How does HIV/AIDS continue to impact your work now, either fierce pussy work, which is a little bit probably more explicit, or your individual practice, or your day-to-day; maybe all three?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I suppose it's easiest for me to talk about fierce pussy's work. I feel like we did spend a good couple of years recently dealing with this notion of loss and how to communicate that to people that weren't there, and how to really bring it up to the minute, and examine our own loss in the process. And the thing that's ironic about it, really, is that fierce pussy was formed initially because we wanted some kind of other trajectory from the work that was being done around it. Not that we didn't want to do the work around AIDS, but we wanted our own space. So we actually—none of our posters and none of our work dealt with AIDS at all until one of the last projects, which was the fierce pussy mobile, and that poster.

ALEX FIALHO: I love how that rolls off the tongue.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: fierce pussy mobile [laughs].

CARRIE YAMAOKA: And so it's really ironic that, you know, sometimes we kind of chuckle about it in our meetings; like, wow, we actually—it's sort of—it's just ironic, and now, in fact, somehow Joy came across a Wikipedia entry that had fierce pussy as a—it described fierce pussy as a group that dealt with issues around AIDS, and that's not actually—it wasn't our original intention at all. So it's interesting because, in the past few years, we've done work around that. People associate us with that completely. It's a little bit odd to get pigeonholed that way—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —to the point where we have made—I don't know if I should say this, but we have made a short-term decision to try and focus on a lot of other topics, because we need to.

ALEX FIALHO: Yep, how about the installation piece in, that Greater New York, across from Joy's TV sets?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I thought that room was really beautifully conceived, thanks to Douglas Crimp. I mean, I thought that was one of the most, the tightest moments in the show, and I found it very moving. You know, when we were working on the installation—

ALEX FIALHO: Who was in the room in—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was Robert Bordo, some early paintings from the '90s, which I was familiar with because I remember those paintings.

ALEX FIALHO: Is that the same Robert from earlier?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: With Michele and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, yeah. And it was Donald Moffett on the other wall. When we were working on that installation, we actually felt that we were—that was one of the most difficult installations we've ever done, because we got there with our stuff and the way that we wanted to put it up, and we realized it was all wrong, and we had to totally change direction, and we only had like three or four days in which to do it.

And we basically had to pull that out of a hat, and it's really inspiring to me that we were able to like—because at one point we were saying to each other, "Oh, my God, here we have this opportunity at PS1, Greater New York, and we're going to make the worst piece we've ever made." It was really, really bad in the beginning. But we turned it around. I feel like we successfully turned it around.

ALEX FIALHO: Why was it bad?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Oh, my God. It was just—

ALEX FIALHO: It looked bad.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It looked terrible—well, when it was right-side round and it was like screaming bold type, it was just too much. It was just—

ALEX FIALHO: What was the color of the bold type?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was black type, except for the word "AIDS" was in red. So we went through a number of different scenarios. At one point, you know—

ALEX FIALHO: Did you install it as such, and decide it didn't work for us?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: We taped it up and the size was too big. It was too bold. It was too—it was all wrong, and we also—you know, we ran through a number of different scenarios of what we could possibly do, and some of them involved, you know, having nothing, except the broadside there. We pulled that one out miraculously. Somehow the idea to reverse the type and actually set up a different physical relationship, a spatial relationship, to the work was key. It was like, if you reverse the type, then you're on the other side of the image in some way, and then there was a doorway—

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly, from the doorway—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —that you walk through. So it's sort of like a membrane that you're walking through.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, the way the doorway played into that was really effective.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Was "AIDS" a different color?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: It was red, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And the type was blue-ish?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: The type was black, actually. And it was on newsprint, so that paper was a little bit, you know, beige, pink—

ALEX FIALHO: That's maybe what I'm thinking of.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: —kind of a reddish beige color. Yeah, I was super proud of that installation. I thought it was really effective.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the ways that AIDS, HIV/AIDS, still affects your work and your studio practice, if at all?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: That's a tough question. That's a very tough question. I'm not sure if I can answer that. I'll have to think about that. Let me think about that for a minute.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, how about how it affects your day-to-day?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Affects my day-to-day. We very recently lost our really dear friend Tony Feher, and the thing about Tony was that he didn't die of AIDS. He was a survivor. He was a long-term survivor. He'd been living with HIV/AIDS for years and years and years, and, ultimately, that's not the thing that killed him. The thing that killed him was cancer, and we've had talks within the close circle of people that were close to Tony.

You know, one of us said, but he—but AIDS—you know, it was AIDS in the end, because the real reason why we couldn't get—we researched a lot of immunotherapy trials for the cancer that he had, and one of the criteria was you had to have CD4 cells in one case above 100, and in another case above 200, another case above 300, and Tony only had like, you know, 40 T-cells or something, by the time he had done standard-of-care treatment for the cancer, which involved chemo and radiation, which totally knocked down his T-cells, and so, in a sense, you know, some of us were saying, it was—it also was about HIV/AIDS because he couldn't qualify for any of the groundbreaking treatments that are out there.

ALEX FIALHO: Around the cancer treatments?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, but that's a hypothetical thing, and who knows how immunotherapy would work if someone had so few T-cells, but our argument also to the doctors that we were trying to—we were trying to finagle some possible way that they would make an exception for Tony, because it's like he had lived for so long with—because he had never had many T-cells, ever. But he was very healthy so, anyway.

But then I felt like—so some of us said, well, he—it was AIDS that got him in the end. But I've said I didn't feel

like that. Like to me, it was important that—it just is important to think about him as someone who had survived, and lived an incredibly full life, and made an incredible body of work in that interim time. So, yeah. So what was I saying about Tony? Okay, so—

ALEX FIALHO: How it affects your day-to-day.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, so the loss of Tony very recently, and it feels to me also that, you know, while each death of someone one loves is always unique and singular, there is also a way in which each death kind of mounts up and snowballs and becomes this mass of loss that brings back all the other losses, in some way so—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, how would you like you and your art to be viewed in the future?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: I'd like it to be viewed, period [laughs], and sometimes I have my doubts. I would like it to be viewed, period, yeah. I'm not even so sure that it will be, you know, sometimes, some days but—

ALEX FIALHO: I think that's why it's important for conversations like these.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: You know, because now I know the breadth and some of the ins—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —and reference points and—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —the rigor—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: —and it's on record, you know.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: True.

ALEX FIALHO: So people who are thinking through some of these questions have a resource.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: True, true; no, that's great.

ALEX FIALHO: Have I given you enough time on the day-to-day relationship of HIV/AIDS to the original studio practice? If at all, and if not—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —then maybe it's not, and that's a space to—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Yeah, I'm not sure. I'm not sure. That's a hard one to answer. What else do you have there in your arsenal?

ALEX FIALHO: Are there things that—

CARRIE YAMAOKA: [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: —haven't been brought up that you're interested in diving into?

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Let me think. No, I think we're good, unless you think there's something that we need to discuss further.

ALEX FIALHO: I think we've gotten to cover a lot of ground.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Okay, good.

ALEX FIALHO: Thanks, Carrie.

CARRIE YAMAOKA: Thank you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]

