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Oral history interview with Mark di Suvero,
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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 Mark di Suvero on May 16 and 31, 2017. The interview took place at di Suvero's studio in Petaluma, CA, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This transcript has been reviewed by Mark di Suvero and Mija Riedel. 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

MARK DI SUVERO: That makes you sound like you're almost dead.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] No, I don't think so. Not at all, not at all.

MARK DI SUVERO: People love it. Some people love it.

MIJA RIEDEL: I know.

MARK DI SUVERO: Unfortunately, I prefer to have the work speak for itself.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well hopefully, hopefully this will be—add—something, some insight, the way the *Dreambook* did, you know?

MARK DI SUVERO: All right.

MIJA RIEDEL: So this is Mija Riedel with Mark di Suvero at his studio in Petaluma, California on May 16th, 2017 for the Smithsonian [Institution], Archives of American Art. This is card number one. And thank you for making time. [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Of course.

MIJA RIEDEL: We're in the middle of the studio. There's a lot going on here, so clearly, you're—this is a place you've been for 30 years, 40 years.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yes, but this is—

MIJA RIEDEL: Since '74, '75.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right, the man that I worked with, Lowell McKegney—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —he built this cabin that you can pick up complete as a unit and move anywhere.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's beautiful. It looks like half a Quonset hut.

MARK DI SUVERO: And his work—he worked with me from the time that he came—how can I put it? Not into my life, because his grandmother is the one who turned me onto working—doing sculpture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: She was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Malo.

MARK DI SUVERO: —her name was Malo.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Malo.

MIJA RIEDEL: Somebody Lowell. Mary Lowell, right?

MARK DI SUVERO: I don't know whether—everybody knew her as Malo.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: And she said to me, you—"Mark, you read too many books."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: "I'm going to teach you how to work with your hands." And there are those people in life that come in and change your life—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and she certainly did. Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mark, you know, I wanted to ask you, because I've heard that story about her saying you need to work with your hands. What did she have you do?

MARK DI SUVERO: She was—she had, ran an old Victorian house in San Francisco. We were refugees, immigrants from China, and we were living at that time in her basement, because we hadn't—we didn't have the economic means to have a house.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And she had been trained as a—as an artist, as a sculptor. And she taught children arts classes. And it was a private arts classes a—and—in Pacific Heights, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: There's—in—she was a woodworker, and she claimed to have been trained by the brother that did those monumental heads that—Mount Rushmore.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, out of Chicago.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hmm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, there's—

MIJA RIEDEL: And so what did she have you do? Did you go to classes? Did you go to art classes with her?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, no, no, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: You just worked—

MARK DI SUVERO: She just showed me how to do like—she made all the kids build an ash tray or something for the family just before Christmas. She carved—she carved. We could do whatever we wanted, but she would show us what—how we could do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: And so was this in wood? Was this in ceramic? Was it—

MARK DI SUVERO: Wood is when I worked with her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yup.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, that's interesting.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: So when you were eight or nine, you were hammering or carving, whittling.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, carving and doing whatever it was. I don't think that anything survived out of that time.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. I wanted to ask a little bit about your father. What was his name?

MARK DI SUVERO: Victor. His name—I can't even give you his full name. He had been a—he was trained in the naval academy in Italy.

MIJA RIEDEL: All right.

MARK DI SUVERO: He was the captain of a ship in World War I. He ended up—he—I shouldn't say ended up. He was part of the Navy on the Yángzǐ Jiāng—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and was the captain of a ship there. He came back to China representing industrial—my sister could tell you better—representing an industrial Italian firm. And so, he had been a Navy person, and naval officer, and he was trained in Vienna. Well, really Venezia completely. He was born in Venezia, and that's where my grandfather and that family comes from. If you cross the bridge of the Accademia with the Accademia behind you, the palazzo to the left was where he was born.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my goodness.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it was given by my—one of my grandfathers to the city and exists there as some kind of cultural thing. But my father had a lot of training in the arts—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —but mostly as an appreciator, as a—understanding the arts. And although he claimed that he was never an artist, he was capable of drawing, doing monograms, doing architectural drawings upside down. He had a great deal of capacity and understanding of the arts.

MIJA RIEDEL: Why would he do drawings upside down?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, I'm saying architectural drawings.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: He could draw a house upside down exactly in perspective.

MIJA RIEDEL: So as a child, did you watch him draw?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you draw with him?

MARK DI SUVERO: His great love and expertise was to do very complicated monograms.

MIJA RIEDEL: Huh.

MARK DI SUVERO: And so, that's what—that was one of his great pleasures besides listening to the—what was NBC—[sneezes]

MIJA RIEDEL: Bless you.

MARK DI SUVERO: Thank you. Symphony of the Air, you know, like on Sundays. He was very, very involved in the arts from the very beginning, and I think that had to do with the Viennese part of his life, which was when he was very young, very—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It was very important.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Yeah. And he was a naval architect. Is that right? So, did he—did he actually design then and build things as well?

MARK DI SUVERO: No. He was—he was trained as a—as a captain of a ship.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: He worked as—naval architecture here, but he began in Marinship, which is ships that are working [on the Liberty ships in World War II –MDS]—but he could understand the drawings and explain them to the other people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, your mother, you were reported as saying she despised her aristocracy, but she loved intelligence.

MARK DI SUVERO: Exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. And she understood that her—she was trained by the—by the Catholic church, so that she learned—the school that she went to, they—in Rome, they taught these young ladies. Everything was in French.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: All right, so that it was civilized at a certain level. And I'm the third child of their union, and she was very anti—the pretense of aristocracy. She was very pro-democracy and very—how can I put it? She was the daughter of an admiral.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: So she had exposure to this whole military glorification. And she ended up being—I shouldn't say ended up. She changed as she saw fascism—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —coming into Italy, and she became very political.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: She was very democratic in the best sense of believing that everybody should vote, and I think that she was kind of innocent about it. I mean, look at what we have now. We have this disaster of a person who is a fraudulent university maker and a—and was not elected by the majority, you know, like—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: She would've been disgusted by it.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure. What was her name, Mark?

MARK DI SUVERO: Matilde Millo di Casalgiate Levi-Schiff di Suvero.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Okay. I'll get that all later.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: I asked. Do you think that that—

MARK DI SUVERO: That's without the title.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Do you think that that profound commitment of hers to democracy had in any way affected your long-term desire—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —to make your work very inclusive to a large audience?

MARK DI SUVERO: My father was considerably more cynical, and he was more classically trained. That is, you know, like, Homer could tell us of all the—all of the things, which I was like a rebel against at that time, not knowing—not appreciating it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —which has changed, you know, like—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —when they cut off my leg, I—they made me stay in bed for—you know, to get the stump working well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And I ended up reading Homer, because, you know that it can take a long time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. It is very good.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you are one of three? You have a sister and a brother?

MARK DI SUVERO: Four.

MIJA RIEDEL: Four. Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: My youngest brother, Hank—Henry is—came out of Berkeley like I did and went on into Harvard, but was—being a lawyer and was a civil rights lawyer that was really very dedicated. And I think that that comes—really comes from my mother, this kind of dedication towards democracy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: He was ACLU first. He put the—helped people at the American Civil Liberties Union, then there was an Emergency Civil Liberties Union, ECLU. And he worked in Jersey, where he—New Jersey, where he —when they were shooting people, people of color, on the streets of Newark, he put the whole police department in federal receivership for which the police beat him up and put him jail, you know, like that kind of stuff.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. And you have an older sister and then another older sister or older brother?

MARK DI SUVERO: No, older brother.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: The oldest brother's Victor—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —who is a—Victor is a poet, an established poet, and—but he was working not in the—he volunteered for the Marine and for the—he volunteered for the Merchant Marine in—during World War II, because he was too young to go into the navy or the army. And he was there at the Battle of Leyte and things like that, but we—unarmed ships, you know, like—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —that—and when he came back, he went to Berkeley, became a poet, was part of the poetry movement in San Francisco. And right now, he's in a—he's not as lucky as I am. He's in a white box in—down in —he is in Santa Fe. My sister is in Albuquerque. And my sister went through college as a classics major—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and fluent in Latin and did Greek. And my father admired her, because she had—she could do Greek, while he was—he was—he only did Latin.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.] Oh yeah. Big difference.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Yes. What's her name?

MARK DI SUVERO: Marie Louise.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Her name is Marie Louise Martignoni, M-A-R-T-I—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —G-N-O-N-I.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. So why did your parents leave Italy for Shanghai?

MARK DI SUVERO: He had been there before.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: He had been there before as in—on the Yángzǐ Jiāng doing a—being the captain of a ship—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: —for the Italian navy. He went back to Italy. He got married to my mother, and they got a job representing and being a part of the—what are they? Corporation, industrial world. It was trying to sell things to the Chinese at the time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Okay. So, you—your entire formative life until you were eight years old, till '41, you grew up in China in Shanghai.

MARK DI SUVERO: I grew up in China. I came here when I was seven years old.

MIJA RIEDEL: When you were seven?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Okay. Was politics a big part of your childhood?

MARK DI SUVERO: We were most—we were trained—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —as anti-fascists.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Trained by your mother, or trained by both your parents?

MARK DI SUVERO: By both.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And—that was World War II.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And they're ideas of freedom and liberty that have carried over all the way to my daughter, Veri—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —that I'm proud of.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And there's that thing in the family that we were against dictatorship. We were against—and very pro-democratic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Voted and did everything that we could to become Americanized.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like, I went through all the public schools and stuff like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was important to you about your years in China?

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, how much do you remember of the years before you were seven?

MIJA RIEDEL: A fair amount.

MARK DI SUVERO: Fair amount.

MIJA RIEDEL: I had strong impressions of things.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I have impressions of things, you know, we each, because of the way that there was, you know, like, the wage difference. We each had an amah. We were raised in—

MIJA RIEDEL: An amah? Was that an assistant?

MARK DI SUVERO: An amah is a caretaker—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: —a nurse.

MIJA RIEDEL: Like a nanny.

MARK DI SUVERO: Nanny.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Each of the four children had a nanny.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I remember only—I was born in Shanghai, but I do not remember Shanghai, because I think we left there when I was two—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

MARK DI SUVERO: —two or three, you know, like in there. But what I remember is Tientsin, and one of the things that happens in China is they slightly change the names of things, and that way they can tell—it's no longer called Tientsin. It's called Tianjin.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And—

MIJA RIEDEL: Is that where you moved to?

MARK DI SUVERO: That's where we moved to afterwards.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: That's where we escaped from. I mean, we took a ship, and we made it to San Francisco in '41.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you visited the Forbidden City before you left, right?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes, I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did that make an impression?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah. It was very different than the impression that I got when I went back, I don't know, in the—10 years or 20 years ago. It was something like that. Because at the that time, when we went through, we went through as very privileged—and I remember this—very—have you been there?

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's very impressive for its scale, sense of space, the way that the—your way through it and the architecture. Very unlike the normal way that one would see.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: It was very imperial at that time. But when I saw it, you know, already the Japanese had invaded.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It was very empty when I went back now, it's—well, at that time, when I went back, they were wearing still, you know, the Mao blue coat thing, and—but it was open to people that were considered peasants, anybody.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: So—

MIJA RIEDEL: And that was not the case before?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, it was very, very empty.

MIJA RIEDEL: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Very empty and very fabulous. I remember being very impressed. Have you been there?

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, you should go.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, I think so.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I imagine too you were so small, five or six, it would've been even more so, and not like anything you'd seen before.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Nothing that I'd seen before.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sheer scale of it—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, the sheer scale.

MIJA RIEDEL: —was staggering.

MARK DI SUVERO: Even, you know, like a scale of Rome and St. Peter's, which I've seen since as a grown-up—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —somehow, it doesn't compare.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Interesting.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you think that—

MARK DI SUVERO: I'm sorry.

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

MARK DI SUVERO: I'm sniffing a lot.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Do you think that the Chinese idiograms or calligraphy had any kind of lasting impact?

MARK DI SUVERO: I was totally fluent in Chinese.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

MARK DI SUVERO: Somewhat fluent in Italian.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Not—no English at all—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —when I arrived.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But I learned English aboard the boat, because it took a couple weeks to sail across.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And the sailors liked me, so I was able to say as we came in underneath the Golden Gate—they said, "Well, this is—this is the place. Where would you like to live?" And I pointed to Alcatraz—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: —and I said, "I want to live there." And they said, "Oh, you have to kill somebody to live there."

[They laugh.]

MARK DI SUVERO: I thought, what kind of a place are we arriving at?

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: It is really like the center jewel of the bay.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's true.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: You're right. [Laughs.] What an impression.

MARK DI SUVERO: Exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was poetry part of your childhood?

MARK DI SUVERO: Not really. Respect for poetry, yes. My mother had respect. My father knew Latin poetry besides the Italian and the French. He was fluent: Italian, French, German, and English.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Before we arrived in this country, before the place became home for him—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —it was very strange, because there—you know, if you're raised in the classical tradition, a lot of Americanisms are almost incomprehensible. And the idea of values depending upon your car or things like that just didn't make much sense.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: He never—he'd listen to, what was it? NBC Symphony of the Air, Toscanini, every Sunday morning—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —but not—but he wasn't involved with, you know, jazz—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —hip-hop, or whatever was happening.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: But he—they never felt—thought to return to Italy or go elsewhere? They stayed here for the rest of their lives?

MARK DI SUVERO: They stayed for—I think my brother—my mother went when her brother died.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But that's about all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And I didn't leave until—I didn't go to Europe until the middle of the Vietnam war, where they had—I had already—they had already put me in jail once or twice. Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you conscious when you came to the U.S. and you were first here about what a multi-cultural experience you'd had of the world? Or was it—

MARK DI SUVERO: Not at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: —just childhood?

MARK DI SUVERO: It was just childhood.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Suddenly—everything changed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like instead, we—there was no amah. There was, you know, like a—there was a—wash the dishes. I did whatever, you know, whatever kids have to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I was not a bad—not a bad scholar as a student, but I didn't share the values somehow. My mother refused to let me be part of the football team in high school. And so, I ended up running, you know, long distance. And I quit high school when—in the last semester, because I saw that everybody was interested in the prom and things that didn't seem to me very important.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And I became a house painter—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —apprentice, and then I became a boat builder and learned how to use what Malo had taught me, how to work with my hands, how to live that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you think—philanthropy has been such a big part of your life, was there a strong sense of that while you were growing up, or did you get a strong sense of that from Malo—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and the experience of arriving here and—

MARK DI SUVERO: Philanthropy. I don't know what you mean. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I mean, these days you'd say, you know, giving back, but certainly there was—

MARK DI SUVERO: Giving back, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL: Watching out for the larger community—

MARK DI SUVERO: My mother certainly did that.

MIJA RIEDEL: — extending yourself on someone else's behalf. Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: My father was—I don't want to say he was cynical—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —but he didn't—there was the—his feeling was that—very much the classical feeling—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —that democracy is not the rule of the best. It's the rule of the many—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —is how he felt. And, you know, he was, I'd say, spoiled as a child, because he was an only child of a very gifted woman, and—who was part of a fortunate family out of Vienna. And so, he did not have the same passion for politics that my mother had.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And he grew up in Venice?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes. He grew up—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: —in Venice, but he also lived in Scotland and in Germany. And he was fluent in German. Now, I never heard him speak German.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But he was fluent in German and Italian, French, naturally.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And English, too, you know. But he never did schooling in English.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you think your sense of craftsmanship really goes back to those days as a boat builder?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah, you can't—you can't do the kind of work I do without—because a lot of it is hands-on—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —while work that is, let's say—see, I don't want to—I don't want to—[inaudible] I don't want to put down artists who work in a different way, but to me, it seemed from the very beginning that the artworks that are done by the artists are what are truer to the expression of the spirit rather than what has been—[Train whistle blows loudly, train passes on tracks a few yards from studio] —sorry.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Rather than people who do a design and have other work done by them. As a matter of fact, it became such a difficulty in my life that I ended up quitting at that time a blooming gallery system of, you know, Pop art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: It was just beginning, and people not doing the work was part of—was part of the new way to do art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: The young lady, who's not young anymore—with whom I was with, Bea Wheeler.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Beate Wheeler—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —who grew up in Tarrytown, [New York] came out of—was a student of Milton Resnick—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —who was very much an Abstract Expressionist—a very angry man and very gifted. And, you know, like, you're influenced deeply by the people that you love.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And she really gave me those kind of values, so that when I quit a commercial gallery uptown in New York, I took part of a group of artists that were called Park Place—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —where we believed in working with each other, sharing ideas, sharing even our works with each other, and we were not recognized then, not considered worthwhile as this other, much more mercantile, money-oriented art was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you remember the name of that gallery uptown?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh. Oh, that's the Green Gallery.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, you were with—okay, we're talking about Green. Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, I wanted to actually talk about even before Green. You started off at March Gallery, right? You—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —moved to New York in '57.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And started showing that—that was also a cooperative gallery too, wasn't it?

MARK DI SUVERO: That was a cooperative gallery, right.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it started off there for a year or so, right?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: But it was a—that was a gallery that didn't have—everybody hoped to have an uptown gallery—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: —because otherwise, you had to be the sitter every, I don't know, every day out of two weeks —

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: —or something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, it was one of those galleries.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, okay. Okay. So, it was—you were happy to get out of that. So, you left March, yeah, to show with Dick Bellamy at Green Gallery, and you would—

MARK DI SUVERO: But that's after I got—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —my back broken, because—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL: In 1960.

MARK DI SUVERO: —that's a different story. Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And do—you know, that story has been told. Is there anything you would like to say about it at this point that—

MARK DI SUVERO: I listened to what the boss said. I did what the boss said, and because of that, I got—I was put in a life-threatening position.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And—because what he asked me to do was illegal.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I had—I got—thanks to public hospitalization—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —I was treated in a hospital.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But I had no claim against—I wasn't able to have any—how can I put it? Any recompense for —

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —doing what I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

MARK DI SUVERO: The boss told me, "Get on top of the elevator box," which is illegal. And the elevator went up, and it went up too far, and it threw me into the recess, because there are two doors in every elevator, the door of the box of the elevator going up and down, and the door of the hallway.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And that is inset. It threw me into the inset part of the hallway doorway, and then I stopped the motor, which stops at 2,000 pounds. Yeah, it was a horrible accident.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, no, absolutely.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, but, you know, a human being overcomes even horrible things that happen to him. I mean, look at these people that have come out of those horrible concentration camps—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and are able to integrate into society.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like, they have reason to become crazy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And they don't.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: They're—anyway, the whole world has changed since then.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. It certainly has.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. That was 50 years ago.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Before you moved to New York, there was—you were in Santa Barbara even before you went up to Cal [University of California at Berkeley]—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and there was a show that you've talked about of—a painting show of Abstract Expressionists—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

MARK DI SUVERO: Correct.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that the initial impulse for you to shift your major from philosophy to sculpture and move to New York?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, no. It took a long time—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: —for me to know that. I—

MIJA RIEDEL: What?

MARK DI SUVERO: I liked the painting, and I responded to it, because we were trained at the Palace Legion of Honor in San Francisco.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: At that time, it had only classical paintings.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: We drew downstairs in the basement.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

MARK DI SUVERO: And—

MIJA RIEDEL: So you took art classes as a student.

MARK DI SUVERO: I took art classes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: My sister would bring my brother and myself there—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —for the weekend and—or Saturdays or whenever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And we would do art classes there, and—but when I saw that Abstract Expressionist, I could understand what was happening. It seemed to me I could understand. I had—I was taking, about that same time, I was taking art appreciation course that everybody had to take.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And I was living already in a treehouse, because I knew how to—how to live in different situations. I had lived aboard a boat. It was no—you could put the whole boat inside this little cabin. I learned a way of living that was not the normal, you know, meeting the housing, food normality.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How did you figure that out? Was that happening all around you? Was that a spirit of the times, or was the—were you doing something completely different?

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, at that time, I was doing something completely different from the other students.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I had—when I dropped out of school, much against my mother's wishes, I had to go to night school. And that's how I graduated.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's high school, right? Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: That's high school.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: But by then, I had learned how to—not earn a living, because I was still going home after work, but I learned how to work. And I think that this is one of the things that is unfortunate is that they don't—there are children all over America that are learning that. They learn how to work before they are grown up.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: But it is something that is so necessary, I think, in this society.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And, you know, like, we're evolving into a society where it seems that everything is produced by a very small percentage—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —of the society and the rest of them are—not the rest of them, but they're—there's a very large fraction of people that go off to be—become investment bankers or they're managerial. They're not hands-on. And I really like the hands-on work—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —because you get the immediate result of what you're doing, and you can't do what is impossible. You know, like, you learn what is possible—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and you have a special kind—I don't want to call it pride, but it's a special kind of fulfillment when the—between the concept, the dream that you make, and the dream that you make is really the motor of all the rest of it. And then you go through what it takes to turn it into a work of art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It is a gigantic difference in telling somebody else what to do, what you think, and they do it for you.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Well, it evolves in the process. It changes and evolves in the process.

MARK DI SUVERO: It changes in the process.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: That's one of the things you learn to do—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —is that as it suggests things, you can change them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And that's a very interactive way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And it gives you an interactive relationship to the rest of the world.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: I think that that's excellent.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you have to pay such close attention.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. As you're working—

MARK DI SUVERO: But the—

MIJA RIEDEL: —to what's—what—

MARK DI SUVERO: But the work not only demands—you know, like, even your mistakes—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —tell you something.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And it seemed, you know, like this art by design seemed to me a very distant thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Very cold.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative] So, what about this show, what about these paintings? Are there any paintings you remember in particular from that show at Santa Barbara—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —that made an impression?

MARK DI SUVERO: Because I had a been a house painter—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: What—I thought that the Pollocks were, you know, [Laughs.] totally easy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I understand the Klines right away, because that is doable by any house painter.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative] [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, he would've hated that. [Laughs.] But I remember the Gustons—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and I thought that the Gustons were very beautiful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And actually, behind the collections over there, there's a painting that I did at that time. So that's the—what is it? The '50s, is it?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Yeah, I think that was—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —'54, '57, something '50—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: You were in New York in '57, so '54 I think.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: Something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: That's when the Santa Barbara show was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —at the museum there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And I was living in treehouse, and I thought, well, I could try. But I had met people that were painters—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and sculptors, because my brother, in Sausalito, started a small gallery.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Showing painting, sculpture, art in general?

MARK DI SUVERO: He showed people like Ronnie Bladen. You know, there's that seal that if you're driving through Sausalito—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —the seal that's in the water, made out of bronze.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: And people like that. Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And he was very radical. As a gallery, it was totally pro-bono. You know, like, there was—nothing got sold. Nothing got—he couldn't make any money at it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It was—it was the leftover after his job. But to be able to show Ronnie Bladen and Wayne Thiebaud at that time was very radical—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and very good.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely. We had started to talk about Park Place, and you described it as an effort to build a gallery that did not depend on competition, publicity, or the art market.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: What did it depend on?

MARK DI SUVERO: We played music together—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —as a group and very badly.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: And loud, you know, like Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: They—those were our heroes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

MARK DI SUVERO: But we played music together, and we believed that art could be shared.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And in doing that, what we did was we would—we would work on each other's work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Like that painting that's over there is a young girl that had her neck broken when she was six years old. We're trying to get her to—well, she's nine now, and—but she's a quadriplegic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And so, we're trying to get her to get some kind of medical and much more radical medical care.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But there was a feeling of social unity between us, people like—oh, there is Tony Magar and Frosty Myers and there was—I used to have all the names. They're all in the book.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. All those in—the original members of the gallery.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And we ended up—we had a place where people like Peter Forakis and Chuck Ginnever also were kind of external to the group—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —to the Park Place group, but would show with us.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: We were considered amateurs by the uptown people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hm.

MARK DI SUVERO: And—but we certainly did—I would say, for the times, we did major work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: There were—some work was done in steel. It was done with— Abstract tended to be much more—I don't want to say classical, I want to say—they called it Hard Edge at the time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Leo Valledor was part of this group.

MARK DI SUVERO: Leo Valledor was part of the group.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Let's see.

MIJA RIEDEL: Dean Fleming, I think, was—yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Dean Fleming was and Dean is still alive.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I think I could give you a book of his to show you what kind of—and his book is very good because it not only has his work, kind of—the lineaments of his travels where he goes down to the Andes and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —lives there and travels across the ocean with a freighter and does Africa and things like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: They were very—we were very explorative people and really open to many different areas of art at a time when the art exhibition things were more and more—how can I put it? Merchant-controlled.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative]. So what were—what—you said you played music together, you worked—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —on each other's pieces.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were there big or specific goals for what—where you wanted that gallery to go?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, we wanted to change the society—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —so that people would help each other, so that there were things that were shared in a cooperative way, which doesn't make for a financially—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: —successfully, financially able kind of—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —system.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative]. Big on vision.

MARK DI SUVERO: It was really very idealistic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And some of the people really survived and went on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And—

MIJA RIEDEL: So social consciousness was a big part of the whole concept of art.

MARK DI SUVERO: You call it social consciousness—right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Because by then it was the Vietnam War.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: I was very much against it, because I knew what oriental society was like, and I mean, I think that it's generally accepted now that it was a mistake.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: It cost however—many thousands of people got killed of American soldiers. Much, much more the Vietnamese, who did not understand what was happening—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know? It was—I found it very terrible because of my previous education in China.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, napalm against people who are unarmed. Just very different.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, but I blamed, at that time, you know, Nixon or whoever it was that were—LBJ for, you know, like—it was very horrible.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: The idea of burning children with napalm seemed to me neither democratic nor American.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And—but it kept the businesses going.

MIJA RIEDEL: What about Park Place was especially significant to you? Were there events or exhibitions that were particularly significant? Was it the general way of operating?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, it was—we were going to change the world by showing an art that was made for the people in such a way that it was going to inspire them. That's what we hopped.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, but—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like, I was much more fortunate than most of the people, because I had shown with Dick Bellamy—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —at the Green Gallery, and I'd had a review that was astounding, you know, like the kind of review that one generally gets after one is dead. And—but I think that there was something that was very deep and very meaningful, certainly for me, but for other artists also that were involved, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: In Park Place?

MARK DI SUVERO: In Park Place.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was the physical space like? Could you describe that?

MARK DI SUVERO: We took—the building was a wreck, the last building left on a block.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: They'd torn down all the other ones. And there were—five floors to it. Two of the floors already were occupied, one by Dean Fleming, the other by Frosty and Tamara. And there was a top floor that we ended up renting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: No heat, no water, no gas. Yeah, well, the rent was cheap. Even then it was cheap, you know, \$35 a month, and we could show whenever we wanted to. And we would include other people that hadn't shown

like Ronnie Bladen or somebody like that—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —that weren't part of the group, that we felt had that same spirit that we had.

MIJA RIEDEL: You showed Sol LeWitt, I think, and Carl Andre both, right?

MARK DI SUVERO: Wait a minute. That's when Park Place—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: —moved.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: That was fine. Then it moved uptown—for us, uptown—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —just south of Washington Square.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And we were not the Washington Square artists. In Washington Square—I don't know whether — You've been there. They do an art exhibit that is anybody who's in the village can show there, and they're selling, you know, like, portraits of their dog or their—it's everything, landscape and whoever wants to.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And we had this other place that although John Gibson began it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: It was Paula Cooper who really ran the—ran Park Place uptown. And she became—after the gallery collapse, because we couldn't afford the rent. We couldn't afford—we were paying somebody to manage the gallery.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And the gallery was not selling anything considerable. She moved on the other side of Houston Street to—and set up the first gallery in SoHo—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —that was on an upper-level and had shows that were [inaudible]. The names. There was a show of Chuck Ginnever with a great architect who did—. She had an— incredible taste.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: She just understood what were the artists that were important. And—but she became a private dealer.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Very different.

MIJA RIEDEL: It really started out is a communal center, where—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —you could have exhibitions, but you could also have poetry readings or performances.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right. Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: You could work with alternative materials. You could maybe have an exchange of ideas, not just with artists, but with architects and engineers and physicists. I mean, they were big goals.

MARK DI SUVERO: Big goals.

MIJA RIEDEL: And to experiment with public art too, right? To think about different—

MARK DI SUVERO: There's—

MIJA RIEDEL: —kinds of billboards or—

MARK DI SUVERO: There's a piece of Bob Grosvenor's—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —that's being shown right now down in L.A. that is part of the Dwan Show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And Virginia Dwan was one of the backers—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —of the gallery.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: What—the way we ran the gallery was that we gave to these collectors a—well, there's Bruce Johnson [outside window]. You're going to meet him. We would give works to these collectors—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and in return, they paid the rent.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And each artist had to give one work per year to—

MARK DI SUVERO: Exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: —the collectors, right? Which was five works.

MARK DI SUVERO: And they were the only collectors that were interested in our work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Ouch.

MARK DI SUVERO: Not very good—not very good financing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did any of those ideas from Park Place immigrate with you to Socrates or to France?

MARK DI SUVERO: Socrates, we're going to give you a little booklet that is Socrates 30 Years.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Socrates has a show right now of Nari Ward's, big article in *New York Times*. And Nari is the first artist that is a unique artist in there. We accepted and would agree on what works would come in—it's been 30 years.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: We have had somewhere between 900 and 1,000 artists. You know, like, that's why Obama gave us a medal.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's just—

MIJA RIEDEL: It's extraordinary.

MARK DI SUVERO: And we changed the neighborhood.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: When I say we changed the neighborhood, I'm talking about real estate.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Suddenly, you know, like, when I moved into the—you haven't ever seen it, have you?

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

MARK DI SUVERO: My studio there. It used to be a ruin, a ruined pier in the river.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And when I saw it—Dick told me, "You've got to come back and see this." So I went back to New York, and I understood what it could be, and it became that. 900 to 1,000 artists. I mean, that's a level of museums—

MIJA RIEDEL: It is.

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know? Like it—and it was—and some of them have been, you know, like, fabulous and gotten all kinds of recognition, you know, like that—and it's wonderful that they have.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But it's, again, the same idea. It's the idea that art is for the people and that people should have free access to it. And they get—you know, like, I didn't want to talk spiritually, but they get that moment of emotion and spirit that the artists intended.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Unfortunately, not all of the artists have become recognized.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like—but there are some that have grown on and become in national stature, you know, like Chakaia Booker—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —or others, you know? Like it's—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: At my age, you lose your memory of—I can't give you all the names, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: You're doing better than just about anybody else [laughs] I know, so—

MARK DI SUVERO: Really?

MIJA RIEDEL: —at half your age, so there's no need to apologize at all.

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Why did Park Place close, other than it was financially unviable? Or was that the main reason?

MARK DI SUVERO: Why did it close?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: I think people were going different ways.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: There was— We no longer played music together like we did before.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And I think that although that had no profit motive or intent to it, there was a real feeling initially about it. People didn't want to—and what we saw was that some people that we would invite to show with us would immediately use Park Place as a springboard to an uptown gallery.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: There's a book, have you seen it? Did you see the Grey—no, that's New York. The Grey Gallery Show. The book is called *Inventing Downtown*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it's a terrific book about a time that is way past, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I mean, it's 50 years ago, right?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it talks about Park Place—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and all those other things that happened downtown that were not—you know, like people that became famous that got to show uptown, became, you know, like a Claes or all the others—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —that...

MIJA RIEDEL: Oldenburg, you mean?

MARK DI SUVERO: Claes Oldenburg, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And Bob Morris and things like that, Robert Morris and others.

MIJA RIEDEL: So the goal was not to use Park Place as a springboard to go elsewhere, but to develop the ideas there.

MARK DI SUVERO: What we saw was that there were artists that we would include in our own shows who would find a gallery uptown—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —which is—for many of us, was like the aim so that we could have some kind of financial work, so we wouldn't have to unload trucks and do—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —other kind of work—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —do plumbing in order—for other people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: And I think that that really caused people unhappiness.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, Forrest Myers and people like that saw that their work—the equivalent of their work—was being shown uptown, but they weren't. And the people that would show with us would end up with a show uptown with a financial gallery, reviews, and everything else—

MIJA RIEDEL: I mean, while they—

MARK DI SUVERO: —at that time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. I mean, while the original members were giving the collectors—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —five pieces a year—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —to the only people that were—

MARK DI SUVERO: You got it.

MIJA RIEDEL: —interested in buying the work—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —while the other people were then able to go uptown and support themselves—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. That's what they saw.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But I think that it's a—when one tries to—when one tries to buck a society's majority and means of economic work, it's—often happens that you don't get recognition. You don't get—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —the benefits.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. That could lead easily into talk about France, but before we do that—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —I wanted to ask about Paula Cooper Gallery because many of the artists did go on to Paula Cooper when you closed Park Place. But you chose not to. You chose to continue with Dick Bellamy.

MARK DI SUVERO: Dick changed my life—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —because he came there with—Milton Resnick's lady was—is—Pat Passlof—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —who was a very beautiful painter—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and very close to Beate Wheeler. And what happened is that she sent Dick down to look at my work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And the work was [laughs] immediately—how can I put it? It was immediately recognized.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: That is, given a very good review. And it started Dick towards a great gallery.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And he was not very interested in money—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —which is something that now amongst dealers is very extraordinary.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And so, although he gave many shows, first shows, to people that became later famous, Rosenquist and so on, he did not benefit. Partially it was because his backer, Bob Scull, was a very—a very unique person, who had been [laughs]—I have to be very careful. He was a very unique person, who, although he funded Dick— He had been trained in the arts, but was a taxicab—

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MARK DI SUVERO: —mogul, multi-cab organizer. He was also very terrible. Helpful to me to begin with, terrible with me afterwards.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: But there's—that happens to people who are—want to become an artist and don't become artists. They have both a willingness to help artists and somehow also to—not usurp them but somehow to inflict upon them what they feel has been missing in their lives.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's one of the sadder things about our society's—what are they called? The beneficiaries. No, we are—what is the word? The ones who gives.

MIJA RIEDEL: The ones who give. Benefactors?

MARK DI SUVERO: Benefactors.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Benefactors. Benefactor means a good doer.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Sometimes these good doers have a lot of resentment.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, it's more complicated than that.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's more complicated.

MIJA RIEDEL: But Bob Scull was the financial backer for the Green Gallery.

MARK DI SUVERO: Exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what I've read is that, you know, part of the incentive for him to do that was it also enabled him to connect—collect—extraordinary work—

MARK DI SUVERO: He did. He—

MIJA RIEDEL: —at very good prices.

MARK DI SUVERO: He made millions on it. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: And Dick was not the best business person, so the gallery wasn't necessarily making money [laughs]—

MARK DI SUVERO: He—Dick was no business person.

MIJA RIEDEL: —so at a certain point, the gallery became untenable.

MARK DI SUVERO: For him.

MIJA RIEDEL: For Robert Scull to back.

MARK DI SUVERO: He thought.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: No, he got captured by Leo Castelli.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Leo showed him that you could sell those Rosenquists. You could sell—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And, you know, in this society, buying and selling the work is the way that people live.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: There are other societies where you're privileged if you belong to the religious class, and they will give you the opportunity to do things. That is the dreamed of work. See, there's this huge difference in art-making between the dream, and the manufacture of the—of the work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And what is, to me, always the most important is the dream.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: The dream is what is the poetic part, the part that is emotional—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —as opposed to what can sell. You know, like, there are people who loved having the dollar bills of Andy Warhol hanging on their walls, because it was a joke.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And that—the creation of the dream is, I think, the original. And the original Park Place was what we were trying to work for.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: But you know, to work for dreams is something that sometimes fails.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: But I think is important—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —as an artist.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like, you can lose support in there, people who give up the dream in order to make a living. You know, it becomes that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It's very hard.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think it's interesting. I mean, your extraordinary long-term relationship with Dick Bellamy was extraordinary on many levels.

MARK DI SUVERO: Mm.

MIJA RIEDEL: But I think it's interesting that at that point in time when you could've gone with Paula Cooper, who in many ways was still carrying on aspects of that dream—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —right? She was coming from Park Place. You had left Green Gallery, because you didn't like the direction Bellamy was going. You weren't a fan of the Pop art. But when Park Place closed, you chose to go with Dick.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh. There was no gallery then. Dick had—didn't have a gallery at that point.

MIJA RIEDEL: But you didn't go with Paula Cooper.

MARK DI SUVERO: No, I ended up going to—I ended up going to Europe.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: So—

MIJA RIEDEL: In a little—in a little while.

MARK DI SUVERO: I'm so—I mean, after this.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: I'm so sketchy on remembering what had happened, because that's, you know, 50 years ago.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, it is a long time.

MARK DI SUVERO: I went to Europe, because there was a possibility.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And I think that the main reason was that I couldn't stand the Vietnam War.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It became worse and worse for me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I was arrested in Chicago. You know, cops threw me into a pool, because I was holding a sign. And then they maced me and put me in jail and, you know, like, I looked at that place. It was the first time I'd been in jail, and I looked through the steel bars, and everything was ridiculous. I mean, if I had my torch—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: —I'd be out of there in 15 minutes if I was slow. You know— so it was a very stupid thing. And then, you know, like L.A and the Peace Tower—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —where a lot of artists really tried. It became worse and worse, and then the Pentagon. I decided that rather than do whatever good I could do in terms of art, for this society, it would be better if I just didn't. And that's when I went. And I went—I went to France—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and found this person, Evrard, who, like—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —Dick, was—Evrard—

MIJA RIEDEL: Marcel Evrard, yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —arranged all kinds of things for me. He arranged a show where they would give the steel—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and I lived first in a trailer in the shipyard and then aboard a ship that was sunk.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: And, you know, like, it's okay. If you can find the not-usual way to do it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —sometimes the original way is really much better.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And had a show there, and then as a result of that—but that goes all the way up to '65, see. I can—but because of that, they gave me the show all the way through the city. And what it was, was a unity—where he was able to get materials from the steel makers—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —a space for me to work—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —a city to show the pieces in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And because it was such a unique way—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And Evrard and Dick Bellamy were just complementary. They knew what it was. They were into the arts.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: Evrard had run a gallery way up north in—way up north in France—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and from there, he had gone into the cultural, the multicultural museum, ended up—doing Africa and going to follow Gauguin's journey into the Marquesas—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and things like that. He had a real international vision.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: And he and Dick were perfectly united in—they had faith in me—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —but they were perfectly united in the question of their values—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —of what art was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: He showed—oh God, what are the names? [George Segal, Larry Poons, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenberg -MDS] He showed people that are extremely famous now—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —but never was able to sell pieces.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But because he had done this very strange locking together of industry, civic will to have modern art in it, it was—it became an exemplary thing for the French culture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: And they agreed to show my piece. My piece is in the Jardin des Tuileries—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: —where nobody had had a one-person show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And that had to do with the luck that there was—what is—Jack Lange and people like that that were willing to do something. And at that moment then the Whitney gave me a show and I became a—I became—after I had run away from the United States, I became an established American artist.

MIJA RIEDEL: I want to dwell a little bit on that time in France, in Chalon in particular—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —because that seems like an extraordinary confluence of factors that made that possible.

MARK DI SUVERO: It was.

MIJA RIEDEL: You talked about the steel company that would give you 25 tons of steel.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Marcel Evrard set up the whole thing to begin with.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: The city was behind it. The local crane workers or some of the steel workers—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —were engaged.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: The community in general—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, not the steel workers, because I did all the work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, I mean the cutting and welding stuff, that was all mine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. They gave you space in a shipyard.

MARK DI SUVERO: They gave me space—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and I lived inside the factory, which was unusual.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But I lived—I ended up living on this sunken barge that was above—it was—the part I was

living was above the water.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. I mean it seems extraordinary now. It was 45 years ago that there could be such communal interest in—

MARK DI SUVERO: Now they do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: —making this happen.

MARK DI SUVERO: Now they do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: In America, they'll do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like, it's rarer in Europe, but I was very lucky.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: I was very lucky to have Dick. I was very lucky to have Evrard. And, you know, like once they did the Whitney show, it was—I mean—

MIJA RIEDEL: Changed everything.

MARK DI SUVERO: I was able to show outdoor pieces in New York and that used to be very, very hard to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: In all five boroughs, if I remember correctly.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, I think so.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah. I mean the citywide exhibition—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: -in '75, following the one in Paris.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes. Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, the same year.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you think that could've happen in '71? Well, in '72 and '73 while you were working in Chalon, do you think that could've happened in the U.S. then?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: You think so?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: I mean, you had the crane by then, but you—

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, there were—

MIJA RIEDEL: —something gave you 25 tons—

MARK DI SUVERO: —there were wonderful people here.

MIJA RIEDEL: —of steel.

MARK DI SUVERO: You've seen the Virginia Dwan show, right?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. No.

MARK DI SUVERO: Well—no?

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh well, it was at the National Gallery in D.C.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And, you know, like, she had the funds.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: She built a gallery. She showed work. For instance, when I worked on the beach—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —here—

MIJA RIEDEL: In Inverness?

MARK DI SUVERO: In Inverness.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, I worked actually on Drake's Bay, building—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: —these pieces. And now, the pieces are scattered all over the world.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But she gave me a show. And it was, you know, like all wrong for L.A.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: L.A. is very—at that time, what looked good was what was very sleek—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and very—I want to say modern, but there many artists that were trying to do modern art, but they were doing a dream figurative work or something like that. And the people that were—that very movement that Dick had begun in 1960 of Pop art—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and Minimalism was just beginning in L.A.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And when they looked at my work, they were just flabbergasted. You know, like, what the hell does this guy think he's doing?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And yet, some of those pieces now are in museums and in different places.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative]. But culturally in the U.S. in '71, you think that you could have made those pieces? You think there would've been the—you could've found the support to build them?

MARK DI SUVERO: I almost had the support in Chicago—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: —until I was on the wrong side of the fence for—politically.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: There was—Dick literally gave me away to a dealer there. The guy's dead now, Lo Giudice. And he hooked me up with somebody who was supposedly—Lew Manilow—who, I don't think he's still alive, a

very wealthy person, whose father built a suburb out of Chicago. Real estate fortune. There were—there have been those people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: There are those people, I'm convinced, in the United States—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —that are capable of doing it, taking a young artist like Sean Paul, who was out here. You should meet him, Sean Paul and—Sean Paul Lorentz. And there's Bruce Johnson. You probably don't know his work, right?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Wells Fargo, up—if you drive up the 101 up to, past Santa Rosa, he's having a very large outdoor show. We showed him at Socrates three years ago or something like that. It's much different now. There is support.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Small towns will support an artist for a piece in the place.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: America is really open to art, and I think that it's great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: It has changed a lot. The cynicism that is behind a lot of Pop art and—well, Minimalism is different. Minimalism has real formalistic aims, and it's within the idea of art. The comic aspect of—or the cynicism of Pop art is only non-appealing to me because I don't do enough shopping in shopping malls and in markets.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. Exactly. One last thing, I find those places using color or something like that in a very mercantile way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I like your laughing.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] You keep saying that are interesting, funny, insightful. At that time—you've talked, you've praised the French, and the Italian, the Dutch commitment to art and culture.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds as if you feel like that has really changed in the U.S., that that wasn't always the case, but it's becoming more that way.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, before, it—art was surely, extremely outside of the normal culture of—I mean, you might have—who was it? Bing Crosby singing or something like that. But there's—there was, I think, a very blank idea about what art could be. And there are people that are very, you know, radical—Stuart Davis, that kind of person—who were trying to do something, and they were looking towards Europe. As it was, Europe was ahead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And what has happened—what happened after the World War II with the Abstract Expressionism is suddenly people looked at America as it was—how did they ever get there?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like, it was very different—has been very different.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I think that those countries that we used to admire for that classical work—you know, like Rembrandt, Holbein, whoever—painted in—even the modernists like Cezanne, things like that, they were totally admired, but they don't have exactly the same resonance now that they had then.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And I think—I hear that, and I also think that what—that I'm—I—what I understood was that you also were respecting not that art from France or Holland or Italy, but the cultural respect for it, the same way—that it would be valued, that it would be something of value in that culture as opposed to—

MARK DI SUVERO: When I rented the blank floor in the fish market—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —the guy said, "What are you doing upstairs there?" And I said, "Well, I'm an artist." And his answer to me was immediate. He says, "Oh, you're an artist. Give me a blow job."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Oh my God.

MARK DI SUVERO: And I lived with him as my neighbor downstairs.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Oh my God.

MARK DI SUVERO: Exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: That's the way it was.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was New York in the '60s, early '60s.

MARK DI SUVERO: New York, early '60s.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You got it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, but now it's all different—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know? They like to have an artist—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —in the building—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —or something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, it was very rough then.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But, you know, like there were people that admired Jackson Pollock, that admired de Kooning. And they were looking for some other thing about the United States. And look, look at this, you know, like, what it takes to build these pieces and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —have a yard like this is incredible.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that's true.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, you end up in financial competition with people who are in it for business, you know? Like, and that's—it makes it all very strange.

MIJA RIEDEL: And I think that's what I'm thinking about is the cultural difference between art that's appreciated for its market value and art that's appreciated for a cultural value.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, good.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Cultural value in Europe, you're born, you always look at that museum as something to respect.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I think that there's—because they respect their past. Our past is very short.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like my sister who did classics when this thing happened with—where a minority-elected president is now our president. There is—I asked my sister, how long did democracy last in Greece, which was the origin of it? And she said, "Oh, about 200 years."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Which is very little—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —in comparison to the time that the Greek culture spans, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Like, it's a fraction of it. And so, you know, like this—these beliefs that we have, I think are—you know, French Revolution and stuff like that are real and completely valid scientifically. You know, like, there is not much difference between one person and another. The—and everybody has a certain value, a certain capacity, and the society allows that to happen. This is a very young society—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and very crazy.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, Nancy Pelosi said to me—I didn't know that that was her. I just knew her as Nancy—at one of John Berggruen's openings up in Napa, she said to me, "Well, now we have it made." When Trump said, "Oh, I grab women by the pussy all the time," she says, "Now we have it made." And I said to her, I said, "Nancy, you know, America's crazy." And she looked at me, and she said, "Yes, you're right. America is crazy."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And, you know, to have that person elected means that it is crazy. But you've got to try—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and the idea of the possibility that everybody can vote, that everybody has a kind of an innate worth is something that is very different than what you find in recently freed colonies in Africa or something like that. MIJA RIEDEL: MARK DI SUVERO: The older fashion, not older, the more restrictive fashion is to believe that some are entitled to much more.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And unfortunately, capitalism, you know, like, I mean, if you have a bunch of money, you can make more money.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm. Before—

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: —we leave Chalon completely, I just wanted to ask—we have left it now. [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Go ahead.

MIJA RIEDEL: We good timewise?

MARK DI SUVERO: Are we good timewise?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, we're good.

MARK DI SUVERO: How long?

MIJA RIEDEL: Another 20.

MARK DI SUVERO: Another 20.

[They laugh.]

MIKE DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: You need a little break?

MARK DI SUVERO: I am sorry that I can't—I'm sorry that I can't remember all the names and things.

MIJA RIEDEL: You know, really, I've got pages of names. You remembered all of them.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, I know. No—

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, we can—that's the beauty of the transcript—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —is we'll just add them.

MARK DI SUVERO: All right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay?

MARK DI SUVERO: There you go.

MIJA RIEDEL: So not a problem.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: You were in France during—when the Maison de la Culture, if I'm not mangling the pronunciation—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —was really coming to fruition. And I'm wondering how much of an impression that made you and your thinking.

MARK DI SUVERO: They had just gotten Maison de la Culture there in Chalon-sur-Saône.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And that's why they wanted to bring a piece of my sculpture in front of it, put it all the way in

—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —through the city, which they had never dreamed of doing. And so, it was all very exciting for them. They hoped that that would continue, and that's why they gave me the show—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know, in Paris.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. And was that a completely new experience for you as well, to see—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: —to see it embraced on that level by people who hadn't normally paid much attention?

MARK DI SUVERO: It—what I didn't realize at that time was how—I didn't realize what the financial markets were.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, the financial markets for art is something that is very terrible for any artist. Every artist has to deal with it in their own way. There is no single road to it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: What happened in—because they gave me the show in Chalon, they gave me the show in Paris.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Because they gave me the show in Paris, they gave me a show at the Whitney. You know, like, it was one, two, three. It sounds like they just—one fell over the other. Doesn't happen that way. It's who you know. They tell you what they think is important, and if it fits in with the way you think, then it can be—then it can be wonderful. Otherwise, it can be terrible.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, and I—if I'm not incorrect, Barbara Rose was part of making some introductions there and perhaps—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —one of the de Menils.

MARK DI SUVERO: Barbara Rose, Cristophe de Menil—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: These were people that are—Barbara Rose, totally dedicated to culture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: And that's—it happened before she was married to Frank Stella—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —before she was such a recognized, acknowledged, important American art historian—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know? They're the people that said to Evrard, you know, like "Why don't you look and see whether you can work something out with Mark?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But I think that part of—part of the reason that they liked me in the Netherlands, where I worked in Eindhoven—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and in France was because of my social, you know—because of my social position against war.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative]. That resonated.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And they thought that I was a decent human being.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And I hope they didn't find out wrong.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] No, I'm sure.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And also, you had just had that fantastic show at Dick's in '60 with the extraordinary reviews.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, I think—

MIJA RIEDEL: So—

MARK DI SUVERO: —that the review—you know, like it's a—he was—Sidney Geist was a sculptor.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And I think that he was very moved emotionally because by then I was paralyzed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: I had been paralyzed on—in March and—not of that year, of the year before, and I was still in a wheelchair. And I think that there was a—he thought that that was going to be my last show of a life that I could no longer lead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, it was a very—it was a very traumatic moment. For Dick, it was really wonderful. But Bob Scull, who was right behind there, it was much more difficult.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did Chalon change your way of working or your way of thinking about your work?

MARK DI SUVERO: No, it—Chalon allowed me to work steel at the level that I wanted to work with.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: The reason that—I can't remember his name. [Jean Leering -MDS] The man that came out of Eindhoven. He came to Brooklyn, and he saw that I had made a 10-meter piece, a 30-footer.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And he said, "You made a 10-meter piece. We'll offer your show." And that was out of a junkyard with junkyard—all kinds of horrible stories, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —like kind of a—in Brooklyn, they stole all my tools. They—because out of a junkyard, you know, like, everything is kind of free.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Once you break in, you can take anything you want out.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. And—but that's why I got that show in Eindhoven.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that was a big citywide show too, wasn't it?

MARK DI SUVERO: That was a big citywide show.

MIJA RIEDEL: '72, I think?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yup.

MIJA RIEDEL: So that happened—

MARK DI SUVERO: Was that '72?

MIJA RIEDEL: I think that was right around the same time as Chalon, so Chalon—

MARK DI SUVERO: No, it was—it was before Chalon.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, and Chalon was '73,'74, I think.

MARK DI SUVERO: I don't know.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think it's about that.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, because '75 is the show at the Whitney.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And then Paris, yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: So that was, as you said, back to back.

MARK DI SUVERO: The movie is the one that was done by—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: —Barbara Rose and François de Menil.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: And they—

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that *North Point*? What was that called?

MARK DI SUVERO: *North Star*.

MIJA RIEDEL: *North Star*.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it's about to come out.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh. I was—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: I've been trying to find a copy of that.

MARK DI SUVERO: Really?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: I have been trying to find it.

MARK DI SUVERO: I mean, they're re-mastering it or whatever they do, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: I saw that. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it's—I can't say that. It was so terrible—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: —that they ended up—they ended up—their lawyers, Barbara and François, only their

lawyers talked to each other. And I said, "Look," you know, like, "make it happen." You know, like—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —because you start having the two parts fighting each other—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and then nothing happens.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like it doesn't get realized. Well, they made that movie and that lost me my—I was with a lady that was called Maria Teresa, who I'd met in Venezia, and the movie treated her so badly that—that wasn't the only reason, but it was the reason—one of the reasons why the marriage didn't work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, that's too bad—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. Oh, a movie can destroy one's reputation, can make you into a success, and it can also wreck your life.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Don't let them make a movie about you.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I don't think we have to worry about that.

MARK DI SUVERO: You think it.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I don't think we have to worry about that.

MARK DI SUVERO: I never thought they'd do a movie. I mean, we tried to make movies in, you know, like in Park Place with Movie 8, you know, like—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Super 8. Right, right, right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: I wanted to ask a little bit about international culture. There were some Sam Wagstaff letters at the Archives of American Art—

MARK DI SUVERO: Sam Wagstaff was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —wonderful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: He was really one of the rare supporters of art that was completely—it was just completely love of art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: He was up in—come on, where was he? He's not in New Hampshire. Is it New Hampshire? He was—but he went from there to Detroit. In Detroit he did something where he invited Mike Heizer, and Mike Heizer dumped a load of—dumped a load of dirt and rocks and dragged some steel through it and that was his piece of sculpture. And Detroit blew up.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: They just didn't—they didn't want that piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And they didn't want Sam Wagstaff, and Sam Wagstaff was so good.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: He was there in—oh, come on. You know the museum, it's [the Van Gogh Museum –MDS]—can't draw it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, these—you'd written some wonderful letters. I think they were between '62 and '66, and—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and you were—you were written—you'd written to Sam. You were talking about—you said "There's a constant storybook quality about foreign lands, as if you were half intruders and half in the category of tourist-gapers, an outsider." Did you feel like that in France?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah. You know, I mean, my French is fluent with a bad accent or something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Or was. But in Netherlands, I really even couldn't order food.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative]. I wonder if there's—

MARK DI SUVERO: But I liked it a lot. I liked Netherlands. It's—they're very—they value human life, each other—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —in a different way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it was wonderful that they took me in. [Laughs.] But they have that great museum, the Kröller-Müller. I mean, she was really a magnificent woman. I never met her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: She was before my time, but, you know, like, what is it? She bought all those Van Goghs.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But that was when Van Gogh was just barely dead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And she refused to—the museum refused to send them to the Van Gogh Museum when they just built it, because they—this is their main jewel.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And—but she did all kinds of things, Ms. Kröller-Müller.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yup.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh—

MARK DI SUVERO: Those are the people that I respect, the ones that respond to the art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: They respond completely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And that's who one works for—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —as an artist—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]

MARK DI SUVERO: —is that—you know, it's all right if you have the fire in you, but to see it light the fire in somebody else, to see them respond to it and understand what you were trying to do is really the complete worth and the central part of an artist's life. An artist's life is—now there are more and more people that enroll in art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Before it was just the lunatic fringe—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know, like in—instead, it has become something. And that means that there's certain maturity in a society, and that maturity is something that we all work for, you know? Like, one way or the other, that the children do art now—it is so good for that future generation.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, you're working for them. Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: I hope so.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right. All right. I'm almost—I—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, I can't—

MIJA RIEDEL: For—

MARK DI SUVERO: —even remember names.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Okay. Let's end with this one question for the day then. Just keeping on this international culture, we'll end up—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —with this. There was a 2012 interview you did with NEA, and you were—

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: —talking about the art. This is an interesting quote, and then I want to ask a question from that. You talk about "The artist remains very necessary to a really living society," which we've just been talking about —

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: — "and hopefully it's the unifying theme in terms of international culture. So, there are billions of tourists who've been moving around the world, searching for a different culture. Only now are people becoming aware that this is one of the really cohesive things between human beings, this symbolic structure that is art." Do you think of your work as international or as American? One or the other? Both?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, I think of it as human, you know? Like, that means, yeah—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —now they say international.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's—you use those words that are now the core of my philosophic thinking, which is symbolic

structures.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Mathematics is a symbolic structure—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —just as language is.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: My daughter is a linguist.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: And she knows Vietnamese and Russian and French and English, you know, like—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And she is working on the endangered languages that are in Queens.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Queens has more languages than any city in America, or I think maybe the world. But it—she sees a lot of languages disappear. I think that—you know, I think I'm not wrong. I think that languages exist between people all the time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: And this is a way of understanding the world.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: The art is a different kind of language. It's a language that doesn't have a tongue, doesn't speak words, but can be really essential. There are certain forms that become moving, that is emotionally moving, and emotionally moving allows one to understand the world in a different way. In a joyous way, hopefully, or maybe even an understand sadness. It is a—my reasoning is those very words you use, symbolic structures.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: This is what we live in. And you know, like, I mean, if I go into town with—wearing nothing but torn-off rags, and I can—through the clothes, you also offer a symbolic vision of what the person is. So, you're asking me—how did you phrase the question?

MIJA RIEDEL: If you thought about your work as—from—coming from an—being international or being particularly American?

MARK DI SUVERO: I would want it to be for everybody.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It's the dream.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And, you know, like, you look at the Brâncuși and they seem to resonate with a lot of people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It's a way of building what one has—look, but there's—you know, it's very strange when the art—the more you put into it, you get much more out.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right. Do you—people have often talked about your work as—in relation to Abstract Expressionism.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: My favorite was [laughs] your response that you thought of yourself more as a corrupted constructivist.

MARK DI SUVERO: I—I'm sorry I said it.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: It's pretty wonderful.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, corrupted. Because—

MIJA RIEDEL: Where do you see work in the—in the larger continuum of art? Where would you like it to be seen? What do you think of it?

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, I said corrupted, because I'm not a pure—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: —constructivist.

MIJA RIEDEL: Of course.

MARK DI SUVERO: I—where do I think? I think that I'm part of a tradition that comes from—in steel that comes from González, David Smith, and others like Ronnie Bladen and people that are more severe. But I really believe that there is a kind of a symbolism and a kind of a—I have tried for kind of a spatiality that is charged—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —charged with emotion one way or the other.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And I think that they're—they may not look symbolic, but they have some kind of a core of forms that, if I'm right, resonate with other people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: A four-legged table is something different for people than a one-legged table.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: There are things that are very simple that artists work with that can really be very emotional. You know, paint drips seem like an extra thing, but when—what's his name? The guy that... The guy that did all of those blank—a blank theater [Samuel Beckett -MDS], said to Peggy Guggenheim—he said to her—he looked at all of her paintings, and he said, "It's the Pollock that's really the interesting one." That's why she collected so many of them. It's the absurdist poet. I can't think. I can't think anymore.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: That's okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Not that I was thinking. I want you to meet this guy outside—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: —[inaudible]

MIJA RIEDEL: All right, well, we will stop this for today.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Thank you so much.

MARK DI SUVERO: Now, okay, I am—

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[May 31st, 2017]

MARK DI SUVERO: —the only way for any artist. But there are so many that die.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And they die not just from, you know, like that death that we all have on ahead of us, but they die because they—I don't want to say they give up, but they understand that it's impossible.

MIJA RIEDEL: What's impossible?

MARK DI SUVERO: To continue.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Making work.

MARK DI SUVERO: Making work, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —like not having support or things like that, support. Even being able to talk to other people, other artists, is so essential, you know? Like it's a—you're going to be taking down a lot of words, but what is really the root of the art has to do with imagination and poetry, and they are things that you can't hold. They are things that are—what is good for one person is not good for—is poison for somebody else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And that root work, that very essential beginning, you know, you look at great poets like Emily Dickinson, and I mean, her life was terrible.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: I think it was terrible. I wouldn't want my kid to have that kind of a life. But, you know, the spirit came through. And I don't want to sound like a spiritualist or, you know, like a mystic that way. I think if you're going to do original art, it is very, very difficult just by its nature. There isn't a system here. Now there is a financial system where shocking or pricy work is the essential—seems to be the essential thing for young artists. And, you know, I—we've seen it in the past. There's been artists that have done it for the market. You know, like whether it's painting, romantic portraiture, or something like that, and that seemed to be sufficient and now is considered, you know, like just some kind of a financial game—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —that it was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Very hard.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I turned this on, because I did want to catch what you were saying in the moment. But I didn't catch the part where you were saying—I'll just say really quickly, too, this is Mija Riedel with Mark di Suvero at his studio in Petaluma for the Smithsonian [Institution], Archives of American on May 31st, 2017, card number two. You were saying that what I see when I come here and see this glorious, active studio in Petaluma is that there's no sense of that just abject poverty, is what you said, when things started in New York and in Inverness probably.

MARK DI SUVERO: The one that's out in front of the Hirschhorn, which is part of the Smithsonian—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —is—was beams that I bought only because I had Dick Bellamy that was able to translate some of my steel sculpture into funds so that I could buy a dead crane, buy this steel that went into it, and it was just hopeless. I mean, do you know how to fix a dead crane?

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] No.

MARK DI SUVERO: No. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you?

MARK DI SUVERO: What? Yeah. You learn.

MIJA RIEDEL: You learned.

MARK DI SUVERO: I learned. I spent one month always going back from New Jersey, back to Manhattan where I was living in the loft with the taste of gasoline in my mouth.

MIJA RIEDEL: Why?

MARK DI SUVERO: Because I was trying to get the carburetor to work when it was—actually had to do with the balance between the carburetor and the fuel pump. And I really didn't—well, certainly not enjoy it, but I didn't enjoy those—I wasn't like the other kids in high school—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —who liked doing hot rods and doing motors like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: That wasn't my—wasn't my aim at the time.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was your aim at that time?

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, I didn't find out until I—I quit school, because I understood that the last, the last semester, everybody was focused on the senior prom and things like that. So, I quit, but my mother said, "Then you have to do something," and I became a house painter.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: I learned how to do that, and that, you know, like, in the years that came afterwards—go ahead, it doesn't matter if it ends up in the water—on the floor.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, it's okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, one can—one learns some basic trades. When I was a boat builder, I learned how to work with wood.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: House painter, I learned how to do house painting, and it became something important in New York when there were no jobs.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, I could paint somebody's loft.

MIJA RIEDEL: You had a real sense of craftsmanship that you developed during that time. Do you think that's true?

MARK DI SUVERO: I guess so. But it wasn't craftsmanship where you aim to be really perfect about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It was just straight work, labor.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it didn't bother me at all, so that when—now—today, you came at—it's not hopelessly bad, but you came on a very difficult day. The work is very difficult and then, you know, you lose—one loses a leg or gets tied up some way or another, and it becomes much more difficult than you had remembered.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: I'm sorry to talk about the amputation that way. But, you know, like they say you're alive and one is grateful, you know, the doctoring, the people who are really dedicated to life. And they are wonderful. They do what they can, and you end up with—you end up in a miserable situation, yes. But the other situation would be you'd be dead or totally incapacitated. That painting is done by a little, young girl who is nine years old, who, at the age of six, became a complete quadriplegic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: And she is—she's painting now. She goes to school. But if you—if you don't have your hands, you can't do so many things that are required, you know, like pick up a book. You can't pick up the book means that you can't read it, although you can read and do things like that. It's terrible. We're hoping that we can do something with her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But that's, you know, like handicap is very rough on—

MIJA RIEDEL: And you—

MARK DI SUVERO: I'm sorry I'm complaining.

MIJA RIEDEL: You're not. Just—

MARK DI SUVERO: I don't want to—

MIJA RIEDEL: I would appreciate the frankness.

MARK DI SUVERO: What?

MIJA RIEDEL: I appreciate the frankness.

MARK DI SUVERO: Uh-huh [affirmative]. There is—one of the people that was in the hospital with me for a year was a quadriplegic, Lenny Contino. And Lenny and I stayed friends until he died just recently. He was 70 years old. And a quadriplegic that can live that long is amazing, but he did it because he could do art. And if you can do art, it is very nourishing in a very deep, primeval way, you know? It's at the level of dreams, at the level of—at the level, I want to say, of horror, of tragedy that the world can bring you.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But it is something that we, who look at art, get fed by it. And it is a—it gives you that very funny thing that they don't—well, that I don't know of any school that teaches the course: the reason for living.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And there's so many people that really, they live because of the art or needing it, seeing it, enjoying it, dancing with it. Whatever it is, it becomes a real focal part of their life.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But it's very hard to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to ask what—I mean, I've got a whole pile of questions here, but let's just stay with—

MARK DI SUVERO: Let's try the questions.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, let's just stay with this, too—maybe for a minute—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah?

MIJA RIEDEL: —since you seem to have thoughts and it would be—I was going to ask—my first question was going to be do you have any thoughts as a follow-up from last week and [laughs] maybe that's what we're getting today.

MARK DI SUVERO: No, you should tell me direct questions that I—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Follow-up doesn't—

MIJA RIEDEL: Not—?

MARK DI SUVERO: I don't know what I said.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Well, I'll just ask one quick question—

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: —that I wanted to ask about poetry, and then I'll go back to where—

MARK DI SUVERO: All right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —we were going to start. But since we're talking about this, you have talked about your work in terms of poetry, in terms of metaphor, and how essential that is to life and to art. And you've said you want your work to be poetry, but people are weary of poetry and they don't trust it anymore. And so, I've wondered—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh.

MIJA RIEDEL: —if that's why you have to put it in thousands of tons of moving steel?

MARK DI SUVERO: I don't—I don't think that it's—that you can't trust it anymore. I think that poetry, for me, had to do with a lot of the culture that I grew up with.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: My father was a classicist and my brother, who has run and done poetry and did little chap books for other people. But you know, the—it's a—there are people who would say that it's—what is the word? Heretical to say that the major religions are based upon poetry. They explain life in ways that are not logically acceptable. And they talk about the origin of the world, whether it's—whether it's Buddhism or Christianity. They—there's the relationship of what were the mythic explanations of great civilizations like Egyptians that can only be understood if you understand how deeply the poetic spirit answers our reason for existence. You know? It's a—whether religion or the song can give a person a feeling of—beyond the normal, daily grind type of feeling.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: I don't know if that's very clear.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, when you say that you don't want to talk about the spiritual, but poet—you do think of poetry in terms of your work, and poetry is the essence or the most distilled point of religions.

MARK DI SUVERO: I have—

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you see a connection there?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, I have seen great poets in—I mean, I've read—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —great poets like Rumi or Hafiz. I've named sculptures for—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —Emily Dickinson, for Shakespeare there. But it isn't just any poetry. There's the poetry that's really completely felt, like Rilke, that catches you, because we too—I'm talking like some normal person. We too are baffled by this life, by the things that other people have said are of value that seem, you know—like the difference between riding in a jeep or in a Mercedes Benz is just like, you know, you still get there. You go across the road. That type of excess does not interest me. I think that we have, right now, a madman who is hateful, who brings hate to a lot of people as our president, and he was not elected by the majority. And I think that—I think he doesn't pay taxes. He does things like say to the people in NATO that they didn't pay their share, and of course, he pays no taxes. So, it's very hard to deal with life and find hypocrisy at the really root of what a lot of politics is. You know, which is the difference—there are people who are poets, who take the—our normal experience and show us a way that is like a—like a key in a lock. Suddenly, life has a greater dimension to it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You've done quite a number of pieces named for poets.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think you've named quite a few. I'm thinking of Rumi as well, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

MARK DI SUVERO: Look at the piece that the Hirschhorn has now is the piece that I dedicated to Marianne Moore.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative]. *Are Years What?* right?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Which is a twist of this great poem called "What Are Years?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: When you get to be as old as I am, [laughs] then you think you know, but one doesn't, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Years are just—years are just different, tilted axis of this sphere that we live on, huh?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Called the Earth. Right, seasons. Go on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Titles are really important to you.

MARK DI SUVERO: What?

MIJA RIEDEL: Titles—

MARK DI SUVERO: Titles.

MIJA RIEDEL: —I know are—have been important to you.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, I think that they allow an entry, an understanding entry to the pieces.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I think that the people who don't want any kind of literary reference in pieces, name 112693 or something like that, those are identification titles—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and don't offer any lead into the emotion of the piece. But that's okay. For some artists, you know, there's a great book by Lynn Gamwell that's called *Mathematics Plus Art*. [*Mathematics and Art: A Cultural History*, Princeton University Press, 2016]

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And she does this wonderful book about math and about the growth of mathematics. You know, like at one-time pi did not exist, at least in human knowledge. And—but she ends up doing Malevich's all black painting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, straight black painting can be—if you had a dozen of them hanging in the room at one time, you might feel depressed.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] You might. Might be interesting, though. Might feel—might feel different.

MARK DI SUVERO: Mm.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think of that Rothko Chapel in Houston, it's certainly not all black, but that is the antithesis—

MARK DI SUVERO: It is certainly not all black.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And when you see the light coming in through those skylights—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —onto the floor—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —something changes completely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: But it's also that set up there. You set up those paintings in the subway, and people would walk right past them and not get anything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: It is the setting in a lot of places. In—you know, the one at the Hirschhorn is—they have it outside now. And it was built—until they ran me out of that junkyard because the guy that was—not the real boss, but the guy that handled it, was the chief foreman there—he thought that I was unpatriotic because I was against the Vietnam War.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: He just wanted me out of there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: He succeeded.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was in Brooklyn?

MARK DI SUVERO: No, that was Jersey.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was in Jersey, okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: You've done—I can only really think of one specifically, directly political piece, that artists' piece about peace, the artists' tower for peace. Do you think of social consciousness running through your work?

MARK DI SUVERO: I wish. I think that I have, you know, like I—because I was a union house painter and a member of the Boat Builders Union. I really believe in the unity of labor just as—I believe in it just as much as the very big bankers think that the most important real thing in life is money. I believe that there's something to be said for union movements, for—something very positive to be said for ideas that one's craft deserves a kind of monetary reward and esteem in a society. Social consciousness, you know, like I think that the pieces are themselves, and you respond to the work on your own basis of knowledge and capacity to understand other people's symbolic, emotional constructs.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It's—it sounds very—it sounds very intellectual, but in actual fact, you can see it in some people. You know, like we—I speak for a population of people my age, we have seen the horrors of Nazism, fascism, and things like that so that—and since I grew up in China for the first seven years of my life, I also saw what extreme poverty is. I didn't live that, but I saw it, and it is not just frightening, it's horrifying, because people—hard to say it, but people deserve to live in a way that's humane, they feel—they feel valuable to other people and are capable of giving. Now, there are some people that are—have been trained in such a way that all that they think is how to get. And they never, or very rarely, give to the world. Now, I think that there is a consciousness. It has grown here in the States, in—with a consciousness that we are all—we are all united as human beings. We're united by language. We're united by the arts, the religion, the way that we consider other

human beings. And that's a special kind of unity. And although we talk about, you know, freedom and democracy, sometimes you see people saying those things and acting horribly like this illegal president that we have, Trump.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: I wanted to talk about some of the things that seem to have been present in the work from the very beginning. And some of the first that come to me from the start is this sense—I think we've been walking around it or talking around it—about art as experience and an engagement for people to be involved with the piece.

MARK DI SUVERO: Wait a minute. Art as experience. How does—

MIJA RIEDEL: So as opposed to a commodity or as opposed to an object, but a sense of—the participation is an essential part of experiencing the work.

MARK DI SUVERO: I desperately like the idea of participation in my work, and I've tried to build it into the pieces.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: But when you talk about art as an experience, come on, tell me the philosopher.

MIJA RIEDEL: Are you talking about John Dewey?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right. I was very affected when I was in my—when I was wandering on a bicycle, in a sleeping bag through New Mexico and southern California, you know—by a book that had to do with philosophy. And it really changed my life, because I decided to go back to school to study, to study philosophy. And Dewey is obviously looking at the world not like Aristotle or somebody like that who classifies the world and thinks that that's—that is sufficient. He was very—but it's not just Dewey. There was a guy called Alex Comfort, who talked about sexuality as something that was joyous. There are people that have gone against what were the normal mores, and they seem to reach a greater reality than this kind of classification—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —of how one knew things—knows things. Ah, there it goes. That's okay. Let them blow over.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you remember the name of that book you were reading?

MARK DI SUVERO: Which one?

MIJA RIEDEL: When you were bicycling through New Mexico?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh. It's the famous—it's the man and woman who wrote the history of philosophy. [Durant, Will and Ariel. *The Story of Philosophy*, 1926 -MDS]

MIJA RIEDEL: We'll look that up. We can add that—

MARK DI SUVERO: Come on.

MIJA RIEDEL: —when we get the transcript.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. Now, this is what happens with old age. You don't know—

MIJA RIEDEL: No, it happens at my age. [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: No, you don't notice.

MIJA RIEDEL: I don't know what happened to me 10 years—

MARK DI SUVERO: Like you forget the name of somebody that you knew and things like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Your memory is really better than most people I speak to who are 50.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh—

MIJA RIEDEL: Really.

MARK DI SUVERO: —that's not—it's awful.

MIJA RIEDEL: No, it's not as bad as you think. It must have been formidable at one point.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's called *The Story of Philosophy*.

MIJA RIEDEL: There we go.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. And Will Durant—Will and Mrs. Durant. Can't remember her name. There we go. Bad feminism, yeah. But that's one of the things that's grown, you know, like in the last 40, 50 years. Suddenly feminism didn't mean that one was chained to the White House fence, right? You know, like, it's really grown, which is a real thing that deals with freedom and democracy. You look at great religions like the Jewish religion, the—or the Muslim religion and they are tremendous, powerful, and you know, like they—but they're really very anti-feminist. It's like—part of it—just given, that's all. You know, like, and people accept that. And it's a way of thinking about people in a—how can I put it? In a half way. You only see half the people of the world. It's not—it's a blind way of being.

MIJA RIEDEL: It must be odd, or is it disheartening to be—to find the country in this state politically after 30 or 40 years?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, we went and we did the march for the Women's March.

MIJA RIEDEL: I remember that.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. And you know, were you there in San Francisco?

MIJA RIEDEL: No. I was a little young, but I remember the march.

MARK DI SUVERO: No, no, no, I'm talking about the most recent one.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Of course.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: In January.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right. But the—it's wonderful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: That part feels great—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: —about the world. Some parts of the world that are evolving just are totally depressing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But you know, like, you have to work against depression. You—it's one of the things that's given to us is, as artists we—it's true that some artists aren't like that, but I think that as artists, we work in order to make the world a better, more beautiful place. I know you look at the raw steel and it just doesn't seem very beautiful, but you came from San Francisco, right? The Golden Gate Bridge meant a lot to me, because that's the first thing that I saw when we arrived as immigrants from China. Steel is so essential to this society. You know, like you find very few wooden cars driving around. And everybody's just sitting in a car, a good part of their lives nowadays. And it's a culmination of a lot of scientific thinking. And I have a huge, great respect for science. I think that this is a way of approaching the world that has that very strange thing that is called illumination. And it really has an understanding of the world that is much, much more profound than cosmetics or whatever other things that seem so trifling. Science has that same—and, you know, like look at the—my work

is based upon a lot of capacities that scientists working on the materials the world has discovered and have thereby built tools, materials that I can work with. You know, it's a different way of looking at it. It's constructivist. It's—they have names for it, but it's not—it—the way that it's explained is not very rapturous. In science, you know, like, there are people who are—I should've been dead if there hadn't been the fine level of medicine that was with doctors who operated on me, with hospitals, with every step, you know, amputation, whatever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, and science has figured definitely in the titles of your work as well. You know, I think of *Quantum*, I think of *Galileo*. I think there are a number of them.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah. Well, when you look [laughs] at *Galileo*, that's—

MIJA RIEDEL: *Aurora*.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, they—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right up there with poetry, that is another thread that I see running through—

MARK DI SUVERO: Good.

MIJA RIEDEL: —years of work.

MARK DI SUVERO: Good. I like that you can see it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you feel—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —that way, too?

MARK DI SUVERO: Sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's—we live in a different world than the old, classic world. And yet—my father was a classicist, but mostly Latin.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And my sister took classics as her major. And I have a great respect for classics because they have built that kind of poetry that we're based on. And when I—when they cut off my leg, I—they told me, "You have to rest for two months," or something like that, which I did because that's just knowing, and doing, and forcing what is going to let you live. And during that time, I went back to read Homer. You know, and [laughs] he's wonderful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: There are things like that that one gets from a classical education, but it certainly isn't scientific. And so, it's kind of hard to balance, you know, like chemistry, physics, and poetry together.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: And yet, that is one of the things that everybody lives on, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Like whenever they step on the gas, they don't know what's happening to the pistons and why the rings are in such a way within the pistons in order to have these minor constant explosions going on that drives the car.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: All they do is step on the gas. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: I like that description of science and poetry. It makes me think of a way you've described making the work, going up in a cherry picker at midnight and looking down on it—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and then having a vision, that comes out through a drawing, that you envisioned what the work can be. And then in the morning, trying to weld and make that actually happen.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's true. This is one of the things that the—I think that the early Americans, you know, like Stuart Davis, who wasn't an—was not an Abstract Expressionist, and the Abstract Expressionist had this idea that the work can tell you the way it wants to evolve. So, if you can do that, you know, like whether it's in literature, you're writing something, and the suggestion comes that it could be and then you go with it—this is the way that one becomes original. You know, originality is not something that you can buy in a bottle and drink it.

[They laugh.]

MARK DI SUVERO: I know people—there are many people who are just doing that. They're getting it in the bottle, they drink it, and they think that they're original. And unfortunately, they're not.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I also was struck by the way you were talking about steel. And you've worked with that material for 40 years, at least.

MARK DI SUVERO: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL: Then you started using titanium and stainless.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah, but those are—they're variations of metals.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I was very—I loved—responded completely, knowing, you know, ship building, knowing how to handle steel for that kind of level, that kind of size. I was very impressed by David Smith, who I knew, who I visited. And I could see that his idea of both craftsmanship and doing original work are just—were—you know, there's a certain kind of response that you have of spirit. It's—here comes the train. [Train whistle in background.] It's a—how can I put it? It's a response to material that is understanding and full of that hope that one can make an original work that can give somebody an insight—maybe give somebody an insight into the world in such a way they would never have known it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: The man that built this little cabin is Lowell McKegey.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: His grandmother was the one that taught me how to work wood when I was seven years old. I think I told you about—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, we did talk about that.

MARK DI SUVERO: —this story already.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But Lowell came and he worked with me. That's him in the photograph.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: We were installing a piece into Oakland. And it's not a very large piece, but it's there now. And there was, come on, the vice president's wife, Joan—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mondale.

MARK DI SUVERO: Mondale.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Came, and she saw that piece and has a swing on it. And I said, "Oh, you can just get on it"—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —which she did. And as I had started swinging, I didn't realize that she had high heels on. [laughs] She was holding on there. She said, "How do I get off?"

[They laugh.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, but it's—you know, you get something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it's a special kind of a gift. They—you got people who interact with the work, are so direct about it. That was a wonderful time, because there was somebody that—and she was trained by—in Minneapolis is where they came from. And there's a great human being who built that—the Walker [Art Museum]. [Martin Friedman -MDS]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know the name.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. We'll add that.

MARK DI SUVERO: What? Come on. Yeah, you can do it.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You can—yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Inaudible.] No problem.

MARK DI SUVERO: He's the origin of the Walker. And obviously, he showed something to Joan Mondale that allowed her to go on further, you know, like—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And those are—those are people that are inspiring. Oh, come on, what's his name? You have a—Walker. The Walker Art Center.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Original.

MIJA RIEDEL: Who founded it?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes. He started in a loft, and they ended up with this beautiful museum in a sculpture park and people go there. You know, like, when you find two lovers swinging on a swinging bed, you know, like you think you've—

MIJA RIEDEL: That happened on one of your pieces, didn't?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, more than once.

MIJA RIEDEL: At Cranbrook. [laughs] I'm sure more than once. While this is searching, I wanted—

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: —to ask you about this whole idea—

MARK DI SUVERO: Go ahead.

MIJA RIEDEL: —of 210 degrees. Because I do think—

MARK DI SUVERO: What is 210—

MIJA RIEDEL: —you've talked about that ambient sense of vision that happens around 210 degrees. And I think that—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh. Oh, I see.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. And wanting that—

MARK DI SUVERO: Your— [inaudible] —of vision.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And wanting that to be part of the sculpture. And to me, that feels connected poetry and something that you glimpse out of the corner of your eye. And you can't take it—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, I like it. I like it when people walk through the sculpture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I like that you called it—has to do with poetry, because there is always that moment where things disappear, huh?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —memory disappears. It's like so much of life is no longer there. I speak like an amputee.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.] Yeah, but that's okay. It can be other ways, you know. Something can disappear, and you can find something new.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It's—you know, we live in a culture that has made—I hate to call it heroic, but has made the pioneers, and they always were leaving what was known for the unknown. And in science, you have it as a given that the—that the best work is that original work. Sure, the original work is necessary for science to advance, advance so we understand the world better. But there's so much of science that isn't just that original searching.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it's true also for painting, you know? Like, there are—these paintings—you only see half of them, because when you turn the lights off, they become something else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. It's—

MIJA RIEDEL: Is it fluorescent paint?

MARK DI SUVERO: Phosphorescent.

MIJA RIEDEL: Phosphorescent. Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes. Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

MARK DI SUVERO: And I like how these—that seems to be a little like some human beings, you know, like, they're okay and then—the normal way that they find out is they're okay, and then you go to a bar and they get drunk, and something else comes out of them that you might not like or you might discover. And it's a—I think that we also live in that dream world. And the dream world is where poetry reaches in and somehow pulls you right through. You know, why should somebody that lived—what was it? Four hundred years ago, John Donne, say things that, you know, like strike us as it is—it's, you know, like as if we have our hearts outside of us—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —he said there is that search of that dream that is part of the really essentially part of the work. Craftsmanship, one learns, some people are very gifted at it. Some people aren't. They're—but I think that everybody has a special name, a special way of being. And that is what they search for if they search, because it's much easier not to search, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Is that dream world something that you—your experience of that happened in a crane when you were improvising a little with a few thousand

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh—

MIJA RIEDEL: —pounds of steel, or when does—when does that happen for you? Is that part of—a regular part of the working process?

MARK DI SUVERO: No, I think that everybody dreams.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's, you know, like, hard to imagine, but there was a time when there was no—there was no psychology. There was no search for a structure of dreams. I mean, Freud with his Oedipal theory or somebody that looked at many different cultures like Jung looked at it in a different way. But now we really understand that everybody dreams. Everybody dreams every night. One way or another, most people cannot remember their dreams.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you pay attention to yours?

MARK DI SUVERO: I tell you, at my age, one tends to forget an awful lot.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: It's true.

MIJA RIEDEL: I bet.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. How old are you?

MIJA RIEDEL: 58.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh. Just beginning to lose memory.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: It's been going for a little while now. [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. Where were you educated?

MIJA RIEDEL: Back east, but we'll—

MARK DI SUVERO: Where?

MIJA RIEDEL: —stay stuck with you. We'll stay with you—

MARK DI SUVERO: That's okay. Give me a few moments.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, let's play pause this for a moment then.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

MIJA RIEDEL: You were saying the '60s for you were very essential?

MARK DI SUVERO: '60s. Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It's the '60s where I went from—where I went from working, you know, in desperate poverty. I mean, you know, it was questionable—sometimes not knowing, towards the end of the month, not knowing that one had the next month's rent, the food. I used to be able to sweep out the fish market downstairs where I lived in a loft up above. By sweeping it out every day, the sawdust, the thrown oyster shells, and stuff like that, they would give me a piece of fish—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —which meant that with a little bit of rice, you know, like, that was the meal.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: But the '60s, I thought, as we lived through it, seemed to change what was so entrenched. And now we find the entrenched people back in there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Positions of power. Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: You know, I want to ask—speaking of the '60s, it makes me think of Park Place. Did—were there certain experiences or elements of Park Place—

MARK DI SUVERO: Have you gotten the—that book, *Inventing Downtown*?

MIJA RIEDEL: I don't think so.

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay. MIJA RIEDEL: We might have an extra one of those. MARK DI SUVERO: You have—you've read my *Dreambook*?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, I've got it right here. Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, and then they've just turned out another book, but it's on—it's—

MIJA RIEDEL: The one that just came out of Storm King last year?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh yeah. That's a beautiful book.

MARK DI SUVERO: You like it?

MIJA RIEDEL: I do.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: I love it. Do you not like it?

MARK DI SUVERO: I think that—well, you're involved in that art criticism somehow loses the joy of having the work.

MIJA RIEDEL: I especially like the interview between you and Ursula.

MARK DI SUVERO: That's the part I liked.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was my favorite part.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, well—

MIJA RIEDEL: I thought the essays were excellent actually, but

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah—

MIJA RIEDEL: I loved that interview.

MARK DI SUVERO: No, the essays were very—I don't want to call them classical, but they were right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like—and it's not what I respect. What I respect is that strangely—you know, Ursula came to us.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: She arrived out of God knows where in the Midwest. She arrived with her daughter in New York City, and at one moment we—I'm talking about the group at—the group on the pier.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: You haven't been to the pier.

MIJA RIEDEL: Socrates, right?

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, it became Socrates.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: But the—we were able to give Ursula a studio, and she worked there. And so, I saw how, you know, like, she also was involved with a dream. And the dreams are, you know, like—well, her dreams had to do with a living nightmare as she would say. I said, "You came out of a concentration camp." She said, "No, it was a displaced persons camp."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, at displaced person camp you can walk past the fence, but you got to be back if you want to eat or sleep. And so she really went through that kind of horror. And look at the magnificent work that she's done.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: That is the part of the Athena Foundation, which we began, and Socrates, that allows other people to work, show their work, and be a part of the art world. You know we've had more than 900 artists that have gone [laughs] through Socrates.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MARK DI SUVERO: I know, but that's the kind of thing that becomes like history—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —American art history.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And of course, we don't know who will finally come out of it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know, it might be somebody who just did the floating piece that was in the river or—. You don't know where art will take you, which is the wonderful part of it. But of course, you know, like, if you don't know where it's going to go, how can you tell what to do?

MIJA RIEDEL: Did—was it clear to you when you started in Long Island City that you wanted to have both a studio space and a sculpture park, or did one lead to the other?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, because we had the studio space—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —we had equipment, we had the physical force—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —to do it. But it was like the city allowed us, because of Kate Levin and other people. Because they allowed us to rent this space—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —they required that we put a fence around it. And did I tell you this story already?

MIJA RIEDEL: [laughs] About the—about the insurance.

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay. I don't want to repeat this story, but you know, that's the kind of things you have to know how—you just cut through.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You do it anyway.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And then it—like now, everybody agrees that Vietnam was a mistake. Right? Everybody says, "Oh yeah, that was a mistake." Well, if you said that it was wrong then, they'd put you in jail. So it's, you know, something that is a jailable offense becomes like validated? No, that's not the right word. Something that they put you in jail for and later on becomes the right thing. And they only notice it—I hate to use the right thing and the wrong thing, because life is so, confused, very hard to understand, and yet offers everything. Offers you joy and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know, color or—orgasmic and delight and at the same time, despair and amputation. [Laughs.] Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Maybe—is vindication the word you were thinking of? Because it sounds to me like you're speaking of personal experience of having been jailed for the Vietnam War once—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —or twice.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, but the—that was—I mean, I knew why I was doing it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But there are people that go to jail and that don't know what they're going to jail for.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I mean they—it's like they teach children not to—they teach children—they give them candy, right? And then the kid is going through a store, picks up a piece of candy—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —starts eating. It's not allowed. [laughs] To know what the ethics are of the society that you live in is very hard to do. And there are some people that are incredible that have—that understand the real roots of what ethics have to do with—you know, like you look at Martin Luther King, you know, like gives up his life for that. He understands a word that people used all the time and then wouldn't live by: equality. You know, like—when we saw him, my brother and I, in Washington, the amount of soldiers with guns on every corner that you could see in Washington, D.C. was frightening. And we thought, or some of us thought, that Martin Luther King's speech, I Have a Dream, was not sufficient, that it—not—it was not enraged or activist enough. And, of course, it was, because he just said that thing that was equality.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was that part of what you were trying to do in Park Place and at Socrates?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: No, in Park Place for sure. We shared our work. We—because we shared our work, we would work on each other's work. We believed in this idea of a community of artists. And because of that we lost out in the monetary—how can I put it? In the economic, publicized world of Pop art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Would you talk about that first space down on 79 Park Place? We—did we—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: We—

MARK DI SUVERO: That was good. We would play music together—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —because the idea—I can't say that any of us were musicians, you know? [Laughs.] Like a musician has to be—like a painter has to know what they're doing in terms of color or have some kind of formula. We just, you know, Ornette and John Coltrane, they were our heroes—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and we played music together. We had a completely different idea of sharing. It wasn't that we were in competition with each other, which is the way that the art world was evolving. And Socrates is really a continuation of that idea, because it's an idea of—you know, like that, that the art really belongs in the community, should. And we offer to the artist a brand new, open space to work. It was really a garbage lot when —

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —we began.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know the city?

MIJA RIEDEL: I do.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, it was really dangerous.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And I told you the story about the fence and that?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: That's how it began.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But, you know, like when the city saw that it was evolving, then they were helpful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: That is, they allowed us to do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And now it's a—they are—they are grateful for the park, because not only does it raise all the real estate value all the way around, [Laughs.] which is very sad, but it does bring, you know, like the opera to the people there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It brings works that they would've never seen normally.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was the genesis for certain of those programs—I'm thinking in particular of something like the Billboard series—did the genesis for programs like that come from Park Place?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, no, no, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: No?

MARK DI SUVERO: They're—we have had people there like Enrico Martignoni or, you know, like John Hatfield now that would invent—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —the idea of bringing the Metropolitan Opera there, since, you know, [laughs] like—just loony tunes, right? And yet, somebody thought it, and we tried it, and it worked.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And I think that that's part of, you know, like the heuristics that are at the heart of my work, which is very experimental. I try it and then I learn from it what can happen. You know, like sure you can bend steel like it was taffy if it is red hot, and you have the tools, and you know what to do, but you have to have had the experience. And I'm so experience-oriented that I really— And there are other people who are much smarter and understand that money, exposure, and things like that are important in the present art world. But there's a non-present art world that is, you know, the history that we have that can be wonderful, you know? Like you can go to the Met any day and—the Metropolitan Museum—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and go through and just be enraptured by something that somebody on a Greek island that you will never know and that they don't know the name of, but it can still carry that charge of spirit, of taking a form and transforming it so that it becomes visible for that life energy, the art energy that it has.

MIJA RIEDEL: How did you all structure that very first Park Place? I think Leo Valledor had the third floor and that was also an exhibition space. What was the space like and how did that work?

MARK DI SUVERO: No, there was a top floor—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, top floor.

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MARK DI SUVERO: —floor was empty.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Dean Fleming was in the bottom floor. Not the bottom floor, because the bottom floor was a restaurant called the City Hole, spelled H-O-L-E—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: —who used—they used runaway sailors from Greek ships that would come and they'd find—and you know, like, wooden floors?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And they would build a fire in the hallway downstairs on the floor, because it was so cold. You know, yeah, things like that happened. That was rare. It happened only once. They—Dean Fleming still paints, there's—I might have a book of his. But Dean Fleming was painting there and making music.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And Leo—Leo was upstairs, a very beautiful painter who ended up—ended up, I say, because he's dead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Came to San Francisco, and not having support—I mean, you know, like we still were together as friends, but he needed to—he was working like in a burger joint. You know, like, there are people that—and Frosty Myers has become a successful known artist.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: He got a place in upstate New York. And he thought, well, I'll build a museum. He built a museum out of—I don't know if it's a barn or a large space. And he found that nobody comes there. This is one of the things about, you know—like, the idea of traffic for art is very, very difficult, very strange. When here, I came back from New York and lived with my parents in Inverness and worked on the beach. That was considered

nutty, but we were, or I was, dreaming of doing—that's before Park Place. Oh, is it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —before Park Place?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. The *Nova Albion* piece you're thinking about.

MARK DI SUVERO: Right. Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, on the beach in Inverness.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that—was that connected in any way with the Emeryville mudflats?

MARK DI SUVERO: No, they came afterwards.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. And there's a real artist, Charles—sorry. He's the guy that organized that one. And that was probably —not probably, surely seen by many, many more people at the wheel as they're going past.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. They were great.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: They were great.

MARK DI SUVERO: But out on the beach, it was totally—nobody saw it.

MIJA RIEDEL: What inspired that? Why did you cite those pieces there?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, I didn't cite them. I built them there.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: And now, you know, now that beach has become a—is part of the—

MIJA RIEDEL: So the—

MARK DI SUVERO: National—

MIJA RIEDEL: Golden Gate National Recreation Area—

MARK DI SUVERO: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —I think, right? Yes. [Actually it's part of the Point Reyes National Seashore -MR].

MARK DI SUVERO: And you can't go out on that beach with a dog except on leash. And there's nobody that drags the lumber that comes floating in and starts welding. If you started welding there, they'd stop you.

MIJA RIEDEL: And did you start there because it was a space you could work in?

MARK DI SUVERO: It was a space I could get.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I knew the rancher, or I met the rancher, who was a—not an attorney, but something in Point Reyes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I was living in Inverness, and I couldn't just make the sculpture in my parents' yard.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, I just—it was too restrained. And the ocean—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know, the ocean teaches you things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah, and working with the sand—and it moves, the sand moves, and you have to deal with it, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Like what was solid one day is gone the next, and suddenly there's a stream from—that washes right through the piece of sculpture or something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It took a long while.

MIJA RIEDEL: How long were you working out there?

MARK DI SUVERO: I figure I must've been working at least a year out there.

MIJA RIEDEL: I had no idea it was that long.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah. And there are days that, you know, I—you couldn't work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: It was raining or whatever it does. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you ever lose things completely to a tide or a storm?

MARK DI SUVERO: No. Theft. [Laughs.] You know, let's be— [ph].

MIJA RIEDEL: Theft?

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, I couldn't carry away the tanks and the torches—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: —and the welder and everything like that. I ended up learning how to hide things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, you—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —hide things, they don't steal it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: They don't steal it, because they don't see it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: That's all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, but that wasn't very bad.

MIJA RIEDEL: You've talked about an ongoing interest in topology. How has that shaped—

MARK DI SUVERO: That is—

MIJA RIEDEL: —in terms of the work?

MARK DI SUVERO: —absolutely the most important thing. Topology is a different kind of a geometry.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it has—in geometry, you know, like, the—well, you know, Euclidean geometry is very rigorous. A triangle, you know, always—all the sides always sum up. But if you have a triangle that you can bend and twist around, that cannot happen. It is a—it was part of the new way of looking at geometry. And of course, it's been so important in astronomy now. Suddenly we're seeing visions of—you and I have both lived in a time when all of the major astronomers said, "No, we live on a planet that has water, and it can't be that there are other planets out there. You know, this is very unique—" and so on. And this was the major opinion of astronomers, oh, I don't know, 10, 20 years ago. And now, and there are science magazines, they say 5,000 known exoplanets they call them. Well, suddenly it doesn't—you know, like, what is—what was knowledge, changes. And topology is a different kind of knowledge. It's a way—have you ever cut a Mobius band?

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, well, I'll pull out some tape and show you how to do it, because it's like a—in China, it was a known magic trick. And I don't remember it, but I do remember the magicians coming to our house for my birthday party, or for my sibling's birthday party, taking the Ming vase, and throwing it on the floor and shatters into piece. And then they throw the rug over, and they reach in, you know, they do the incantation and everything, and they reach underneath, and they bring out the whole [Laughs.]—

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

MARK DI SUVERO: —jar. Oh yeah.

[They laugh.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. You have to be a child to really experience that kind of wonder that they could do. You know, like it's a—but the Mobius band has that kind of—and they had them. And they amazed people that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But it isn't because of amazement that topology is so important to me. It's a special kind of freedom. As you know, having looked at the book, I claimed that we live in a world of symbolic structures. You know, like we're right now using language. My daughter is a linguist.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And so she knows how different they can be. But mathematics without symbols, it is—it doesn't exist.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: There are so many symbolic things that we live with that we accept completely, you know, like religion, language, math, things like that. And I'm really a kind of structuralist. I really believe that people respond to work and what they—when they see a certain structure, they are—they are either—they're either amazed or—no, that's wrong. [Loud voices along the train tracks behind the building] They're—I think that's track walkers.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sounds like it.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. There are structures with which—which are amazing and very simple. There's—but there's some that make you feel safe. There's some that make you feel elated. And when—and as a structuralist, I look at these—some things that are wonderful or amazing like when you look at the Frank Lloyd Wright Museum on 5th Avenue and it is very beautiful and very original and has that spiral strength that shells have. I think that it was my father's love of architecture that made me look at architecture and appreciate it, but I can't do what architects do, which is to do a drawing and then have somebody else build it. It's just not my way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: So there is great—I think that it has happened fairly recently before. You know, it was stone on stone, and that sense of gravity. And steel, instead, gives you a complete and different thing. Look at what they're building in New York now or even down in San Francisco. But they need foundations, you know? Like the

one in [laughs] San Francisco that is sinking. Horrible.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh yeah.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Is—Are there—

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: —certain pieces that are the culmination of an idea or an inquiry about topology? Or a certain series that follow a line—

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, I—

MIJA RIEDEL: —of thought?

MARK DI SUVERO: I was—I did a whole series of Mobius bands—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —that were dependent upon reflection.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: And they were very dizzying, and very few people liked them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: And it was part of it, just that it was—I think it was the coldness of the material partially. It reflected—

MIJA RIEDEL: Was it steel or stainless steel?

MARK DI SUVERO: Stainless steel—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —suspended, moving, and very dizzying.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But I think that's about the only ones. I haven't built a Klein bottle yet.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yet.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.] Yet.

MIJA RIEDEL: When you got into the stainless, was that about wanting to have more light reflection? I'm thinking of the piece *Olmaia*. That was just so brilliant.

MARK DI SUVERO: *Olmaia*. No, it's—*Olmaia* is much smaller than the large pieces.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, it's very, very expensive, stainless steel—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —in large quantities.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What made you want to work with it?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh. Doesn't rust.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.] You know, when you go back to pieces, like they were talking to me about—they were talking—a piece that I did in—I did here. And it ended up at Rene di Rosa's.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Have you been there?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Well, phone call, new director, "The paint looks bad." Okay. Well, you know, like, Rene bought the piece 20 years ago.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, houses that are painted 20 years later look shabby.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. So, there are things like that that limit you, and stainless steel is really very difficult.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is it?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah. You have to have a plasma arc, and plasma is the highest level of heat that we can handle.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Except that of course, I'm handling it at very, you know, craftsman level. Not like what they do in—when they're trying to get the next step in atomic—you've pushed me too far. I can't—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: I can't find the words anymore. [laughs]

MIJA RIEDEL: We'll back up to something simple.

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: I wanted to ask about the role of color in the work.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, I think that color is incredibly, an emotional way of expression.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like I loved Van Gogh. And going to—working in Holland, I found that the people were not—they're glad to have him, but they're not that appreciative of wild color.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And wild color is—can be a delight. Ask any flying bee.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: And they know, you know, like, they're attracted to—but Sean Paul, for instance, is color deficient, huh—

MIJA RIEDEL: Hm.

MARK DI SUVERO: —so that although he knows very well what my work is, my paintings are white and gray, huh.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: That's it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, is he color blind?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. He doesn't use—he doesn't use the word blind.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see.

MARK DI SUVERO: He used deficient.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: And I said to him, "Well, when you're driving, how do you know the difference between red and green?" He says, "Red is the—always the one on top."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.] And I hadn't even noticed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: I just knew there was red and green and yellow.

MIJA RIEDEL: And your palette on the sculptures has been very limited over the years.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Red, yellow. I think there was one or two blue.

MARK DI SUVERO: Red, yeah. One or two what?

MIJA RIEDEL: Blue.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. Right. I think only one, maybe two.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Why that red?

MARK DI SUVERO: Mm. Isn't red a lovely color? [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: It made me think of the Golden Gate when I was driving across it. It has that quality.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah. Oh no, that's a very dark red, huh. It's—I just like red. It's a—it seems to me to—because it's that contrast. I am able, fortunately, because the thing that happened to me when I worked in Brooklyn was I was able to trade welding time for crane time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: And the guy who was a junkyard worker scrap dealer—and I saw what the crane could do. And in Jersey is where I bought my first dead crane.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: But red works so beautifully with the blue of the sky.

MIJA RIEDEL: It does.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know? [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: It does.

MARK DI SUVERO: They, just—and it is, you know? You want to give life to the work and—what is it? They say that Michelangelo, when he broke the piece, hid it underneath the one that has the older version. He said, "Perché non mi parli?" Why don't you talk? [Laughs.] And I think that when it's red, it says something.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It's—but, you know, like if it's going to be paint, you have to repaint it. There's no way that outdoors it stays. You know, like good epoxy painting still. Don't you think we've talked enough? [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: 15 more minutes?

MARK DI SUVERO: A few more minutes. Go ahead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Give me your questions.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Do you think of the work in series? Should we move that? That doesn't look very comfortable.

MARK DI SUVERO: It is not comfortable.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: It's okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's pause that. [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: That's a good reason.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you think about the work in terms of series? Either citywide exhibitions or the poets or science—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh no. Citywide exhibitions, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —like I have—I shouldn't complain in life, because I've been so lucky. It's like I've had citywide exhibitions in New York, in Paris. I've done it in—where was it? In Valence, in—there have been—one in Stuttgart, one in—you know, like I've done them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: And always the hope is that they will want to keep one or something like that—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —will end up in a public place, where, you know, like school children will say, "What is it?" until they're used to it. And then it's, "Oh, that one." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: No. I don't make—I shouldn't say I don't make series, because I just finished one in—you saw the one that all comes together, and you can put it together in titanium.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: And I call them puzzles—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —but they're not, because they don't have any one right way to be.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you don't think of all the poet pieces as being of a series or—

MARK DI SUVERO: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: I just named them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: How do the names come about?

MARK DI SUVERO: That's—as you were reading me that thing about going up in the cherry picker—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —that can be a good way to do it. You know, around midnight, you're up there where the birds are, and they see it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like, mine are good landing places for them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: So they decorate them with their white droppings, but—sometimes it seems very natural.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Couldn't be anything else—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But I like naming them for poets and some seem to have that kind of poetry to them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Or at least, I hope it does, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Like you get something, like *For Rilke* and there's—I mean this is a—this is a man that, like Beethoven, you know, like, changed my life.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And it's—and you realize as you're getting your life changed, you realize that it's a work of art and that the guy is dead, huh.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: He—you know, I did one for Emily Dickinson, and she—some of those lives have been so terrible.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Terrible.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, like, you're just like oh. Sometimes one is lucky and you survive.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: That's where I am now, [laughs] survival.

MIJA RIEDEL: You've been—you've had far-flung studios your whole life. You've been in Petaluma, in New York, in France. Why was it—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —important to have these studios in different places for 30, 40 years?

MARK DI SUVERO: I had a studio on—I came from Berkeley—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —and I went—there was a lady, Beate Wheeler, who was a painter and brought me to New York and moved into—first into her apartment, then into an apartment there where you had to share the toilet with your neighbor and—typical New York—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know, like, you'd knock on the door if the toilet was full, and you have to wait. But after a year there and doing small pieces, I couldn't do anything except plaster. You know, I knew I wanted something else. After a year there, I found a place down in the fish market, which is where—well, I had my back broken up on 57th Street, which is where I lived and worked. But a year of sharing the toilet together, you know, I never met the person.

[They laugh.]

MARK DI SUVERO: That's New York, isn't it?

MIJA RIEDEL: [Inaudible] true. Really?

MARK DI SUVERO: Really. Never met him. Never saw them. Only knock, knock. "No, wait a minute."

MIJA RIEDEL: It's interesting, but, I mean, you've kept this place. You could've closed it up.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, wait a minute. This place. This place happened in 19—I don't know.

MIJA RIEDEL: '75?

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: But I rented it and then the man in front—I just rented this space, and I bought a crane, because of Diane—oh God. She ran a gallery. And I borrowed the money from her to buy a crane. That's the—

MIJA RIEDEL: The NEA grant helped, too—

MARK DI SUVERO: What?

MIJA RIEDEL: Didn't—wasn't there an NEA grant, too, that helped buy the crane?

MARK DI SUVERO: I've had an NEA—I don't think so. I think the NEA grant came—I don't even remember which year.

MIJA RIEDEL: No worries.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: But—so you've had this space for 30, 40 years. It's what, a couple acres?

MARK DI SUVERO: Thirty years. No, no, no. This is—maybe it's an acre. But it's between two railroad tracks—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: So that no matter what one says, this place is on the wrong side of the tracks.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Were there things that you could make here that you couldn't make anywhere else? Same thing in France or in New York?

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh. When I worked in Brooklyn, they allowed me to work there in return for a piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

MARK DI SUVERO: In return for a piece, they allowed me to work there until they sold it. It was the realtor who did that. But then they kicked me out, right? I mean, they sold the place. So I had to go to Jersey. I found a place in Jersey, and I found a place with a crane that was dead that I could buy. You know, like that's the way things evolve. And then, you know, like they kicked me out of New Jersey. I won't say they. Just the guy that was the—the guy that was, not the owner, who allowed me to work there, but the guy that ran it. He was an army

lieutenant, and he couldn't stand that I was against the war. So I went to Chicago, where there was a dealer who ended up—now he's dead, but there was a dealer who was not totally honest, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Like that happens.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: It's part of the thing—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —part of the—what we know as the art world.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And so I worked in Chicago until they put me in jail a couple of times. And you know, like—

MIJA RIEDEL: And—but for now, you have this studio here and in—

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —Long Island City as well.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah. I'm—

MIJA RIEDEL: And is there one still in France?

MARK DI SUVERO: No, I gave it away.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. You gave that away.

MARK DI SUVERO: It was a ship that was—because Dick, Dick Bellamy, who was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —you know, like, I mean, he's core to my work. He found somebody, Evrard, who—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: —wanted to do—Evrard did everything for me in France once he saw what I was doing. I didn't want to live in a ZUP zone. You know, [. . . zone urban populaire -MDS] housing project. They had a housing project apartment. I said no, I'll live on—in a trailer in the factory, in the shipyard outside. And then eventually I moved into a sunken ship and was able to buy a floating ship. And that's how I could work there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was it important to always have a place in New York and Petaluma? Was there a reason—a time when you thought about giving one of them up?

MARK DI SUVERO: No. I was—I was in Petaluma. I came back from Europe.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: After having done, you know, like a spectacular show there—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —they let me show in the Jardin Tuileries, because I had done an all-city show in Chalon-sur-Saône.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: In Chalon, Evrard arranged that they would give me the materials. I would make a piece for them. And they would show all of the pieces that I did. And I did so many pieces, they were stunned. And it worked through the whole city. That is, you know, one piece at one park, another one in front of the university, or something like that, all through the city. And they liked it so much that with Evrard and this guy who was the cultural minister, they thought it was such a good example, they showed it in the Jardin Tuileries, which they had never shown any single living artist—and because of that, it was, you know—and an American show.

[They laugh.]

MARK DI SUVERO: But that's why the Whitney gave me a show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: So I've been having these big shows, and it's, you know, it's crazy. I shouldn't have been able to do it all, but I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I wanted to ask—that leads, I think, nicely into the—Dick Bellamy, because we've talked—

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: —about him in passing, and you've—

MARK DI SUVERO: All right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —certainly talked about him a lot. But—

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: —you've talked about him as if that was really the ideal relationship between a dealer and an artist.

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, no, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: No?

MARK DI SUVERO: Ideal in—

MIJA RIEDEL: I know it was crazy making, but—

MARK DI SUVERO: Aesthetically.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: It was—he—in spite of—but he loved the work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And because he loved the work, I could understand what he was doing. He was one of those very rare dealers. He didn't care about money.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: He would sleep at the office. His life—they've written books about him—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: —since.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MARK DI SUVERO: But it's—it was all response. You know, and the amount of people that he showed was huge. Not numerically, but huge in the range. You know, like, he began the Minimalists. He began the Pop artists. But they would leave him, because, you know, like, Leo Castelli would or the other—there was one other gallery—oh God. All the names that go away. The other galleries would take these successful artists—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: —who—and Dick was being supported by Bob Scull, who was—who was a failed artist, who was a—I called him a robber baron. He was just—he paid Dick a pittance. And he bought pieces for the lowest possible price. And later on in his life, he sold them for millions, but wouldn't give Dick anything for it. And Dick just—Dick was great with me and unable, because this kind of level, you know, like you have no problems looking at an office building that is, you know, like five stories high. It's going to cost \$75 million or something like that. All of those—but this is the same kind of cost that it takes to build it, because those sky scrapers are built on steel. They're not bricks. They're not stone. And—but I have admired people that have taken it, the steel—what is it? The one who's dead. Zahita—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, it's—yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know her name?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, I do. Zahid Va—Fa—it'll come. We'll add that. That's easy to add. [Zaha Hadid]

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay. But, you know, like the people that can use it originally and then it's wonderful, but it costs—I'm not even going to talk about the mistakes. You know, like *Centering*, the one that is silver, was an old freeway down there and was originally planned to be part of the piece that had the ship in it. Well, when I showed them the base of the piece, they said, "Oh, our"—this is the Hirschhorn—t hey said, "Our plaza can't take it." You know, like, "Our plaza is zoned for so much per square foot." And that's why the piece is still here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: I mean, the base of the piece has become a piece, because it's just been here for so long. But you know, like, it's a—it's very, very hard to build pieces that fit architecture, and you can't do it unless there's a lot of money that goes into it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah, it's terrible—

MIJA RIEDEL: Did—

MARK DI SUVERO: —because then you have to deal with money. And nowadays—it didn't exist before—they only sold, you know, Van Goghs and Renoirs or somebody like that in auction houses.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: But now it's auction houses and people have seen that people can make money on art if you invest in it the right way. It's a different kind of a headache.

MIJA RIEDEL: It is a different—it is—

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: —a different headache. Did Dick Bellamy's [vision] affect your vision for your work at all?

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, he was very, very deep into poetry.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And we would talk about poetry. And it was—and we'd talk about different poets. And it was just wonderful. He was such a brilliant man. And in terms of business, he was an idealist. He was a dreamer. And people really took advantage of him. Not artists.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: The artists really worked with him. And, you know, like it—if you read the list of the people that he brought into—they call it the limelight—right into vision, it's huge.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: You know, there are many museum directors who would never do as much.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: And—but he was exploring the, and that exploration was just unique. He ended up—when I went—he phoned me with Dallas, who had been one of my assistants. He phoned me. He says, "You've got to come to New York. You have to see this place." I said, "No, no. I can't go to New York. I'm working on a piece here." He says, "You must come." So, I went there, and that was the pier.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And the pier—he ended up having a chunk of it, certainly with no rent. Occasionally, he would sell a piece. But with him there, it was as if it was—we were both doing it together. And that's when he did—when he worked with us doing Socrates.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: And like—

MIJA RIEDEL: That's—he had Oil and Steel there.

MARK DI SUVERO: He had—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: —Oil and Steel, right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: No. He'd love to hear this. A wonderful man with a great spirit, a very beautiful eye, and financially he was—he was a disaster.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Disaster for himself, you know, also.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I appreciate—

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: One final question and we're done.

MARK DI SUVERO: [Laughs.] Why live?

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: Go ahead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. So where do you see the work, your work, in a larger continuum of art?

MARK DI SUVERO: I'd rather answer my question. Why live?

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MARK DI SUVERO: So that you could—so that you can give something to somebody else. That's the moment. You know, they come in here and when—what is it—we've had three therapists, because they're traveling therapists now. Three therapists. And the woman that came in, the last one, she said, "Art." She says, "This is what it's all about." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay now. Your question was?

MIJA RIEDEL: That was pretty good, though. Where—what's important to you about the work after this period of time? Where do you see it fitting in the larger continuum? Where would you like it to be seen? Does that matter to you in the least?

MARK DI SUVERO: No, I'd like it to be—I'd like it being—they call it public. I like everybody to be able to interact with it, and I like to believe that I work for everybody, but I think that children often see the pieces much better than grownups.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Where would I like to see it? I've been offered such beautiful places, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MARK DI SUVERO: I mean—

MIJA RIEDEL: You have.

MARK DI SUVERO: —they've been there. And then they're gone.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: But you have to accept that they're going to be gone, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: Oh, and then they—you know, like you come back, and you're working in the junkyard, and you don't have enough money, and it's the next one. You come back, and they've cut up your piece. Sold it for junk. [Laughs] Yeah, it happens. And of course, it drives you nuts.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK DI SUVERO: You think, "I'm working." You know, like trying to climb a sand mountain. You go up and everything slides down. You go up, everything slides down. You know, I'm very lucky.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you see a thread of continuity through the whole body of work? Do you see multiple threads of continuity?

MARK DI SUVERO: Too much.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hm.

MARK DI SUVERO: Too much because you find that those are solutions that you can do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm.

MARK DI SUVERO: But I like it best when you're not sure, you take the crane, you roll it up, and now I can't even run a crane.

MIJA RIEDEL: Maybe it could be adapted, do you think?

MARK DI SUVERO: Maybe. Not—maybe. You know, so much is possible in the world.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's true.

MARK DI SUVERO: Yeah. Right. Who would've thought, you know? Like—and there was a very good museum director when I had the show at the Whitney. When I came back after Paris and the Jardin Tuileries, and he saw how embarrassed I was at the show, and he said, "I would want to offer a toast," and he looked at me, he said, "to your mother."

[They laugh.]

MARK DI SUVERO: She was there. It was worth it all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MARK DI SUVERO: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Thank you. Thanks very much.

MARK DI SUVERO: I'm sorry. Got emotional at the end. I shouldn't be. You got to be tough, you know?

[END OF INTERVIEW]