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**SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL
OF PAINTING & SCULPTURE
Skowhegan, Maine
Lecture by Mary Lucier**

**Skowhegan, 2001
Transcriber: Judith Stoodley**

Linda Earle: ...lecture by a resident artist... Mary Lucier.... So welcome. I want to let you know to that we are lucky enough to have as a partner this summer Colby College Museum, which is sponsoring an exhibition of all of the resident and visiting artists' work that will open in July; so if you're interested in that... and you don't go to school, let us know and we'll let you know when that's going to open. It's a wonderful opportunity to see... the work. Tonight I'm very happy to introduce Mary Lucier. When artists first were drawn to video, when it first became... light and portable and something people could touch and hold and play with... many artists from different backgrounds were drawn to the medium; and they really *made* the medium. They developed the tools; they developed a language.... Mary Lucier was one of those pioneers, and, for my money, stood out as someone who started very early on creating work that was both gorgeous and had a sort of artistic heft... in what it was able to convey; and the layers of... meaning and emotion and thought that... she—her images contain—series of images contain in her work. She's really set a standard for installation work; her work is beautifully wrought and really has to be experienced; and I hope some of you have and some of you *will soon*. She's done a lot of thinking about... the landscape and environment... and our interaction with it—and with each other; and her work is—offers a variety of perspectives—or suggests a variety of perspectives on those interrelationships. And it's very capacious; her approach is very capacious in that way. It's one of the things that makes it so wonderful. And I would say that she is—has been—very influential in thinking... in people's thinking about landscape... artists' thinking

about landscape. Her work has been exhibited internationally; and has been part of just about every historically important program of video exhibition—or exhibition of video art. And... there was a recent very beautiful show at Lennon, Weinberg Gallery in New York, which I think we're going to see some images from.... And I remember with particular fondness a show with Shigeo Kubota at the Whitney a few years ago; and I think there's a catalog that we have from that in the library. She's gotten a lot of recognition for her work; and most recently a Rockefeller Grant... and... a Creative Capital Grant this past year... and... I'm very pleased to introduce her to you. Mary Lucier.... (applause)

Speaker: Thank you, Linda. It seems to me that Linda's been saying an awful lot of nice things about a lot of people this week. I just want to say a few nice things about Linda! In her many years at the New York State Council on the Arts, before she came to this job, in her position... as I knew her best, as... Individual Artists Program Coordinator, Linda was truly a facilitator; and a person who made life easier for artists—which is really rare in this particular end of the business. And when I told a lot of my friends in New York that I was coming to Skowhegan for the summer and Linda Earle is there, everybody said, “I love Linda!” (laughter) So... there wasn't a person that I said it to who didn't say, “I love Linda.” So... this is how people—artists in New York—feel about Linda Earle... and I certainly do. So I'm very happy to be here. And I'll try not to tax you... too... too much tonight. I decided that, you know, when you have a career that's as long as mine, and has taken so many wandering paths in different directions, that it's probably best to focus on just a few things; and I've chosen to focus on the work from the Nineties.... I often will start a lecture with something from 1975 and then catapult way ahead to the present time; but I think that for this—It takes a lot of explanation, you know—The more you talk about the older pieces, the conceptual pieces, the black and white pieces... the more talking it requires. And... as you go farther into the future it seems that the pieces are more self-explanatory. So I'm actually going to begin in 1993, with a piece that was for me a real turning point. I had been dealing largely with—in the Eighties with—issues *relating* to landscape; that is, trying to make images of landscape roughly equivalent to human internal states; and then to try to arrange them sequentially, both—one following another; and in another kind of *spatial* dimension, in an installation so that images would interact with each other... would create... another entity as they played with each other in a space. So by synchronizing images, multiple

images, presenting them on monitors or projectors, or... and often in highly sculptural configurations, I was trying to get at something that...now, of course, seems so much more usual, so much more commonplace; but in the Seventies and in the Eighties was still... somewhat... novel. And... my preoccupation in the Seventies had been largely conceptual.... The preoccupations of the Eighties were largely... about... as I said, landscape; but increasingly how the... human community works within the landscape and helps to create it; and how, in fact, we are also created *by* the landscape. So I was interested in this whole entity of which we are, of course, a part; you can't—you don't really—we try to talk about humans and nature, but it's really a false dichotomy; we are nature, obviously—not to quote Jackson Pollock, but—we are nature; and nature are us. So...this became more of a driving force for me as I went on through these series of rather large environmental installation pieces. So I'm going to start right off with a piece from 1993. If you could give me the first set of slides, please.

SLIDES

And... lights out. Could we have the lights out on the control panel as well? These are going to be a little bit awkward to look at, because, I mean, as you all know, all of you who have experienced video installations, they're—usually take place in dark rooms. So when you photograph them you are at the disadvantage of the room. But this is a piece called "Noah's Raven," which, in the left-hand slide is it's original configuration at the Toledo Museum of Art in Toledo, Ohio, where it was commissioned; and for this piece I traveled to the Amazon... to Alaska... and... also videotaped and appropriated certain imagery of human surgery... being sort of the mediator between these two extreme environments, which have somewhat ecological underpinning. That is, as you travel through both Alaska and the Amazon, what do they have in common? And the thing that obsessed me about it was that, where one is sort of this field of whiteness, this impenetrable field of whiteness, where you can only... reach, you know, the extreme communities or extreme places by airplane, by dogsled; there are no roads... by river, when the thaw is on—so they're very extreme remote habitations, and places that are *not* inhabited, like the North Slope where they're now considering oil drilling once again. And then... the Amazon, which seemed to me... on the one hand to be absolutely the opposite, and yet at the same time extremely similar... and what is it? It's like a field of darkness, right? The

forest...this vast tract of sort of primordial, dark land, which you can only access by boat, by airplane, and on foot. So these two environments seemed to me to have a great deal in common in that way, in that they were difficult to penetrate, and very, very threatening and challenging for *Homo sapiens*, particularly... white European *Homo sapiens*. There was, of course, already native populations living in both of these places, and... were living there fairly successfully... but... the piece has something to do with the way in which we invade an environment, and the way in which... there is scarring that is malign... or malignant, and there is scarring which is beneficial. And the image of the human being, as she appears throughout this saga, is an ambiguous image. It's an image of surgery... for breast reconstruction, which can be seen as beneficial, in that the scars mean the disease has been removed; but in fact, at the same time, something is being reconstructed. And of course that decision, that judgment, is up to you. The image on the right ... is from Karlsruhe, Germany, a museum called the Museum for Neue Kunst at "Zed Kayem"... Zentrum for Media und Kunst; it's in their permanent collection and was shown there in... I think... 19...99. So you have a version from '93 and a version from '99. The figure hanging over the whole installation is an actual replica of a tyrannosaurus from the Triassic era... who seemed to me to be symbolic and very representative of the dangers of extinction; and while he was not the device—or she—of her own extinction—and they had a good long run—You know, what was it? Sixty million years, I think... dinosaurs? It still can sort of stand as some kind of emblem for the possibility of pushing it too far, or being pushed too far; and finally getting to the point where you—you're so finely developed, and yet so... encumbered by your refinements that in fact you cease to be... relevant on the planet when some major thing changes.

SLIDES

Another image from Karlsruhe on the left; as you could see the piece from an aerial view. There were three stories in this atrium. And a closer view here, showing the—an alternating—pedestals, fork lifts and tree trunks... with thirty-two inch monitors placed on them. The piece is surrounded with four channels of sound; and the sound is obviously a major part of your immersion in this, when you walk into the space, and you follow this river or vertebrae of benches; and you can sit facing either side of these array of monitors... The sound really overwhelms you... kind of roots you to the spot... and... gives you various clues... not

necessarily *when*, sometimes before or sometimes after... something happens. And so your process of scanning... from left to right among these images is... enhanced and encouraged by... the sound. I'm not actually going to play you a clip from this, so I'm perhaps over-describing it a little bit. But let me go to some of the off-screen images.

SLIDES

This was the key image on the left; and that's the woman being prepped for breast reconstruction. She's obviously lost a breast... The drawings on her are the surgeon's markings... which detail where the blood vessels are... what to cut; and where not to cut. And in fact the procedure involves cutting out that sort of lip-shaped segment just below the bellybutton; and tunneling it up underneath her skin, to create a false breast... that... as nearly as possible will resemble her other breast. On the right-hand side is an image of scar—of ancient scarring, which is... entirely natural and entirely—I can't say it's entirely beneficial. This is a glacier; it's probably what?—a mere ten thousand years old. And, as glaciers age... and as they warm, they crack and break off, and pieces begin to float out into the oceans and become icebergs; and you can still find places—this was shot in Alaska—where the glaciers are still very much intact. And this kind of scarring, which I think is quite beautiful, as in a way the surgeon's drawing is also—you know, it's quite a beautiful drawing—represent two entirely different... poles of what markings on any element can mean.... And the piece, though not really trying to make a particular political point or a moral point, does throw these questions up in the air; and... hopefully each person makes their own choice about what, in fact, this envelope of meanings really suggests.

SLIDES

On the left is an image, again from the video monitor, of what was formerly a rainforest. And after being cut and burned and mined, there is so little soil in most of the Brazilian Amazon that this is what you're left with. So this is its own particular kind of scarring, this kind of cracked earth.... This is a familiar image; you see it in the American desert; and you see it all over the world. And sometimes it occurs quite naturally; and other times it occurs... through... industry.

And in this case it's the result of... sort of a kind of industry run wild. On the right-hand side is... again, the exact opposite. This is an image of a... rubber tree, which is very carefully harvested. You can see the old scars, in black, going one way; and then the new scars are filled with latex; so the *seringueiros*, or the rubber tapper, is very careful to harvest the trees in such a way that he uses the ones that he needs, and he lets the others rest until they're ready to be harvested again; and his touch is very delicate. He... cuts the tree just enough to get the latex, but not so much as to kill the provider... so it's a case of nature being in balance; and *Homo sapiens* being in balance with the rest of nature. But it's also industry. This is not, you know... a particular kind of nobility; it is also industry, though at a very low level.

SLIDES

This is the surgery as it progresses; so throughout the piece, you're first taken on this journey through Alaska... and then... through parts of the Midwest which are not clearly identified, but manufacturing and industrial sites. And finally you end up in the Amazon, in the burning forest, and with the *seringueiros*, the rubber tappers. But in between come these episodes as the surgery progresses; so periodically the screens fade to black; and these images come up as vignettes that just flash alternately on one screen or the other. So just as you've seen it flash, your eye turns to look at it; and you just catch a glimpse of one of these, and it's gone. So in—the surgical part is almost subliminal. And it's not pleasant to look at; so you don't really want—you wouldn't *want* to sit and stare at it. This is the *seringueiros* at work; he's cutting the rubber tree. And... I thought it made a really perfect... analogy to the human figure... once it's finished. This is a cut that he's fashioned out of... tin—or some kind of rusted—probably a cup... a... can. And the way he cuts the ribs so that the latex will flow into that cent—into the sternum... and right down to the delta, and collect in the cup. But it's obviously a very low yield kind of industrial practice; and slowly but surely this kind of manufacturing is being overwhelmed and replaced by our faster, more energetic production of false rubbers, and false... you know... other kinds of materials that can replace rubber. But what interested me so much about the *seringueiros* was that they made an alliance with the... with ecologists. And those of you who remember the story of Chico Mendes, who was assassinated in Brazil, in Rio Branco, about... I don't know—it was well over ten years ago, because he was the leader of the rubber tappers' union. It was one of the

rare occasions where the leader of a union of... workers was aligned with the... an ecological movement; because both of them had a greater interest in the standing forest than in the cut and burned forest.

SLIDES

And this is an image shot from a helicopter... as they make their daily rounds in the southern part of the Amazon, (laughs) giving tickets to people who are not supposed to be burning—but there is a vast amount of burning going on.

SLIDES

And this is the final segment of this piece, in which, on the left-hand side you see this mine... called, of all things, Bomb Futura, which used to be verdant rainforest, and is now pretty much a malarial pit... and people live on the side of these watery... zones and all these sort of jagged spots; and they raise children there, and they all have malaria; and... it's a pretty hideous place to be. You can't really say that it's improved the quality of anyone's life. And on the right hand... another image from—of disease—This is a friend of mine, the sculptor Nancy Fried, who had had a mastectomy for breast cancer. And she sat for me; and I videotaped her—She would cover the scar with her hand and then slowly remove it. So in the video installation what you see is—are four images of her with her hand on her breast, and then, to varying degrees and at varying rates of speed she removes her hand and reveals her scar... with no shame; and so you have the scarred body and the scarred land, which are sort of equivalent. And then the *very last* image in the piece is an image that could be a river, or some kind of landscape; they're sort of gently rolling... and there's—it's accompanied by a *breathing sound*, and it eventually becomes clear that this is someone's abdomen; and that the scar on *her* body runs from stem to stern.

SLIDES

While I was in Alaska, and was still preoccupied with these issues of landscape, and how to make... landscape actually speak about issues of human concern, and about issues of community, individuals *and* community, I went to Valdez; and in Valdez I interviewed a number

of people who had experienced both the earthquake of... I think '64... and the oil spill of... '89. And what interested me about this process; and this was a real turning point, and has influenced all of my work since then, was going directly to the source... letting the people who had experienced the trauma speak for themselves, rather than inventing a kind of... poetic narrative that attempts to portray that. I mean, I'm still interested in both ways of doing things, and I'm still *working* on both ways of doing things.... This is by no means intended to be documentary; but it does... sometimes hedge uncomfortably close to what you might think of as documentary methods. So it's a very fine line that I'm walking with this kind of work. For this I—this piece is called “Oblique House (Valdez);” and I built a house... in a building, in a showroom that used to house beautiful Chevrolets; and this was in Rochester, New York, in a festival called “Montage '93;” they commissioned this piece.... And we built this building... to... house four monitors and two projections; and its interior is—while its exterior is quite raw-- it doesn't present a finished exterior—the inside is very finished and almost chapel-like. And as you enter, going through this door... Remember now, these images are overlit for photography; when you walk into this room it's extremely dark; but overhead are these projections that were taken actually around the old site of the town of Valdez, the camera just looking at the ground for signs of life, or for wreckage, or... for whatever might indicate the city that had once been there. When the earthquake occurred they had to move the entire town of Valdez four miles... to the West. So the camera is looking, and the rocks are kind of tumbling down the ceiling; and you hear them hitting together. So you hear this music, this lightly percussive music. And on each of four monitors, in each of four corners, nestled into these slanting walls which just give a vague sensation of threat—that something is a little oppressive—even though the ceiling soars; it's twenty-six feet to the top of the—to the crest. These faces—If you're the first to walk in the room, these faces are absolutely still... until you approach one of the monitors; and then they begin to speak to you... and they tell you their story; they tell you the story of how they experienced either the earthquake or the oil spill, what these things meant to them, and what happened to them and members of their family. Each of the voices has been processed with resonance filtering and tuning; so that when they all play together, when they all sing together, you get a kind of quartet of voices accompanied by the percussive sounds from the images on the ceiling that makes an environment in which no word is actually... discernible. You can stand in the middle of the room and listen to the music; or you can walk up to one of the monitors, and

get very, very close to it, and hear an individual story; or you can do something that's a compromise between the two. You can stand in the middle, wait for them all to come to a halt; and then you can go around and activate them by—as you choose... You activate one and then you activate another; and you listen to one, and then you wait till it stops; you can go to another. So you can play these monitors... and they will make a kind of music for you; and the music is the—is the story of their experiences.

SLIDES

And that particular technique—that—the idea of *getting the people* who experienced the trauma to speak for themselves; and to letting them reminisce, letting them talk, so that the level of emotion and recollection both become very high... I decided to take... into a personal realm; and in 1995 I made this installation called “Last Rites (Positano),” which details an experience in my *mother's* life, in the Thirties, when she lived in Europe... in... Germany and in Italy, just prior to the outbreak of World War II. The story of that particular- I don't know—three or four years in *her* life was witnessed by a number of people: her brother... a friend—a comrade of hers who was also my sister's nanny, an older Italian woman... and then my sister, who was born at that time, who was the product of this peculiar union between my mother and this—the German man that she met and subsequently divorced. So... it was a whole period of family lore that I had always taken for granted... and as I got older and thought more about it, and my mother was actually dying—she was dying when was—when I made “Noah's Raven,” and that piece, in fact, was dedicated to her.... And then this piece was more *about* her.... She—I got her to retell me the story. So I recorded many, many hours of her talking—but no images of her.... And then I went to interview my uncle, who was then in his eighties; my sister, who was in her fifties... and went to Italy, to Positano, which is now a... resort community, of course. At that time, when my mother lived there, it was just a little sort of expatriate hillside town in... the Bay of Naples, without electricity and running water, and.... But I went back there, not expecting, of course, to find anything that the least bit resembled what my mother knew; and... quite remarkably, through a series of events, actually discovered and met the woman, Maria, who is depicted on that far monitor, who had been the very one that my mother had lived with, who had cared for my sister; and it was absolutely extraordinary that she was still living, and that I *found her*. So... she really helped complete this whole... saga; but the experience of the piece... with the

furniture suspended in air—This is all my mother’s furniture, the last items of furniture that were in her house when she died... things that I very much identified with her hand, because they were things that she reupholstered, things that she worked on herself.... And as you—This was a highly interactive piece; it took the ideas from “Oblique House” just a little bit further... and... everything centered around this sort of central story of... my mother, Margaret... and... Wolfgang, her husband, and... the mystery that was (laughing) their union—and it really *was* mysterious; and how these different people saw it—how Maria saw it, from her eyes—quite a different perspective; how my uncle saw it, who was... sort of supposed to be watching—looking out for my mother, and didn’t do a terrific job; and then how my sister *now sees it*—of course it’s really *her story*. And each one told quite a different version of this whole episode, and how they felt about it, and... what actually happened. At the same time, so... you can approach each of these pieces of furniture, and... a hanging loudspeaker will play some aspect of my mother’s voice, telling some part of her story; so her story, as she saw it, is present throughout the room on at least three loudspeakers.... Her image is only present in still pictures, as you see here... And the other people, the witnesses, as you approach them, each tell their different story. So as in “Oblique House,” you can get a kind of raucous cacophony going; you can go around the room and get all of these voices going—they’ve all been processed... so they all have a kind of musical ring to them; but when they’re all playing at once, it’s a din... It’s a real... din. But you have to approach each one, and get very, very—You have to form an intimacy, I guess; that’s... really the point. You have to form an intimacy with that monitor, or with that chair, in some way, to really apprehend each story. And ultimately... you know I would ask myself as I was doing this piece, “Who cares?” You know, who cares but me... and my sister—and does my sister even care? Does she want this story told? My mother’s dead; would she even want to see it? You know, who is really—Why would an audience in New York want to come to see this piece. And what I reassuringly... discovered was that... what I *hoped*, was that every family has a tale like this; I mean every family has some... story that’s either buried... or that is common lore, about which you could make such a piece.... And that ultimately, I think, what people got from this, though many people appreciated the different personalities; they... understood what people were saying... They took the time to experience it.... But I think really what most of all people came away from this with was a sense of... the sort of... enduring mystery of all families, and... the mysteries that we cherish... or those

which... remain obscure...for a lifetime. And there's a lot of literature now about this kind of—about these kinds of episodes in people's families... And so I thought of this as, in some ways, a literary piece... and—because it was entirely text-based. But the space of the installation itself was meant, not necessarily to evoke any particular *real* space, but to... combine, to layer... all of the different spaces that people were describing, and the different times that the people were talking about, from... the—from 1930...--From my mother's childhood, in fact, to... the present time.

SLIDES

And one of the key aspects of this piece was the rear wall, which was two overlapping video projections. It would have been either two of this one or two of that one; because these are actually sequences, although they really—they really do look nice (laughing) together. But they were overlapped in such a way that one would flow, and then there'd be a moment in the middle where they would converge; and then it would flow into the *next* one. So this was really... time passing; and... the sound that was played... at either... you know, end for—of this—of the room—this particular end of the room was the sound of water, rippling water, and distant bells... and nothing more. So, like the sort of percussive rocks sounds in “Oblique House,” the water sounds—and those of you who wake up in the morning next to the lake here can appreciate, you know, that *wonderful* sound of lapping water and the sort of extraordinary... relaxation... combined with a kind of tension that it... that it provides. If you walked into... “Last Rites (Positano),” and you were the first one there, the only thing you would hear would be the lapping water and the bells; and you would see this large projection at one end... that just—with the water just flowing across... the wall. And in some ways that was sufficient. And then you'd go around, and you'd visit these various stations... and with this as a backdrop, you would then gather the story of this woman's life, and... her—that particular moment of her adventure.

SLIDES

In 1997... I was invited by the Spoleto Festival to go to Charleston... to make a piece there. John Beardsley had been following my work for a long time, and was particularly interested, I think, in the devices in “Last Rites, Positano.” And Charleston is a really challenging place. I don't know how many of you know the area.... There had been a number of festivals there that

had featured a large art component in the past; so... in addition to the past history of Charleston itself, which is... really... quite overwhelming, there was the past history of previous... art festivals that accompanied the music festival. So... I thought, well, with my interest in... nature and human history—natural history/human history, natural catastrophe/human catastrophe, here—What do you have here? You have hurricanes and slavery. So in a very sort of blunt way I joined... Hurricane... Hugo with... slavery—or the history of slavery—or my take on the history of slavery... and... shot footage in the... in the famous... *one of the plantations* there that's located in town, called the Aiken-Rhett House, or Aiken-Rhett Plantation... and then in the slave quarters as well. And I built for this... I built a structure in an old warehouse, a towering brick warehouse maybe thirty feet tall... I built a structure that was a kind of house.... This is called "House By the Water," by the way. It was a kind of house, with shiplap siding, and a pitched roof, which you can't really see in this photograph.... There's a blue light inside. It's clearly not—It's not an enclosed house, but it has four sides. And on each of those four sides is a projection. There's a chain link fence that surrounds it; and you can enter that fence and walk in under the house; and you can look up and clearly see that it's... it's a stage set, or it's a... rep—It's an open cube. And on each of four sides is projected... an image that is synchronized with all the other images as though they were all presented on a wall... as one panorama; the challenge, of course, being that you can never see all four at once. So... in this case I had gone from actual interactivity... in which I used motion sensors for "Last Rites (Positano)" and for "Oblique House"—I just let the human being...and the natural... inclination to circle this structure and to see all four images—I let that be the interactivity. So people in this space were in constant motion around this house, in order to see everything; you could never see all four at once. You could stand at one corner, as we're seeing here; and you could see two of the events taking place... and you could move from corner to corner; but you could only accumulate all four by staying in motion—and even then... you know, there were times when you wouldn't—you clearly could not apprehend what was happening on all four sides. This tape I'm actually going to show you; so let me go through these slides really quickly.

SLIDES

This is a slightly better image of a close-up of the house structure itself. The projectors hang... and aim at all four sides; and... so the image is interfered with by the siding... which kind of

echoes the way—the raster of the video screen... also. And the images that were shot inside the so-called Master House were images of a young girl... dressed in white, spinning; and she eventually is dissolved into the image of the—the radar image of the hurricane, Hurricane Hugo, as it approached Charleston.

SLIDES

Two actors... Lindsay and Karen Wilson came and performed in the slave quarters for me... and... I'll talk more about what they did later. They really contributed an enormous amount; and in many instances decided what it was *they* wanted to do in the slave quarters...

SLIDE

... but that might be what you would see if you were standing at one corner at one moment. Lindsay is charging down the hall... and Karen is charging down the hall on two different sides of this; and as they approach the corner... maybe it's an escape, maybe it's an assignation; but they both sort of dissolve. They disappear... become ghosts, and... the corridor remains.

SLIDES

They both read. They chose a passage from the Bible, which turned out to be a passage from Isaiah....

SLIDES

(pause) And the page of the book gradually dissolves into an image of... the seashore during the hurricane; and... the piece finally ends with a color image of the radar of the... hurricane just making land at Charleston. So this'll be the first videotape. This is a short tape; it's ten minutes, and you're only going to see one of the channels of video... So what I would encourage you to do as you're watching it is to try to envision what it would be like to be circling that space... and to be seeing similar but different images occurring on all four sides of that house. Could you play the first tape, now? Turn the slides down.... This is, I think, Channel One of "House by the Water."

(Video soundtrack heard)

Yes, the cycle is relatively short; and it repeats seamlessly, so you kind of don't know where there is the beginning and where there is an end. Can we have the slides again, please?

SLIDES

And... But... if you're in motion around the house, you sort of never know what the beginning and the end is, even if you *knew* what the beginning and the end is... so there's this kind of circularity around the house; and then there's this kind of circularity in the imagery; and then there's this kind of circularity of dancing; and then there were these long vistas and... images coming towards you. And all that was very carefully kind of choreographed and thought out, about how it would—how it would play out on this cube. And... the two actors, Lindsay and Karen Washington (she says “Wilson” above), were... a gospel—or *are* a gospel duo, who... often perform in Charleston. And... they were contacted and asked if they'd be willing to perform in this piece; and they said of course they would. And... they appeared dressed in... slave clothing; and I was sort of stunned; and they said, “Well, this is how we perform. This is what we perform in.” So... and then we were in this completely authentic and non-restored... kitchen house, which—it *was*, in fact, the slave quarters. I said, “Well, how do you feel about being here?” And they (laughing) said, “We feel just fine.” So... they—I sort of let them take over... and... they devised—I wanted them to come down the hall—they devised the ways in which they would perform that. I asked them to read; they brought out a Bible. And so we were very much co-collaborators on that aspect of the piece.

SLIDES

This is the next to the last piece that I want to show you. For this there is no video. This is—These are images from a piece called “Flood Songs,” which was commissioned by the North Dakota Museum of Art. I mean, you may... start to notice this pattern of pieces commissioned by... places, you know, all around; well, that's... that's another discussion, and if we want to talk about that we will; but that's... certainly one way that these pieces get made is that they are commissioned... and that somebody sees “House by the Water” and asks for another piece to be made.... Somebody sees... “Noah's Raven,” and asks for another piece—of a similar sort or a different sort to be made... and I think a lot of people—probably the—many of the other resident artists here also have, I'm sure, a similar experience, where you go from site to site; and you

make pieces where you're asked to make them. And those pieces—those *places*, those entities, really help support... our careers and our work. So the North Dakota Museum has a wonderful director named Laurel Reuter, who contacted me shortly after the... catastrophic flood in 1997 that ruined Grand Forks and most of East Grand Forks; and... a great deal of North Dakota, from Fargo on, up—practically up into Canada... and she wanted to do some memorial pieces about the flood. And I went out three times; and *again* I was working with a combination of... actually interviewing people, using the real authentic voice about their experience of this... trauma, this catastrophe... and images shot in and around the landscape. But in this instance I chose to restrict my shooting to the interiors of the houses, the ruined houses, which were about to be torn down. And the wall is lined—these are two views—This is not two different rooms; these are two views of the same room. It came to the Museum of Modern Art in... a year later in 1999; and (laughs) was shown in a very, very narrow... room which had a high reverberant quality; but... it was fine. And the monitors—there are six monitors, three to a wall... and a large projection at the end.... And then at the far end is a cluster, a small cluster of furniture, of objects that were salvaged—because there were a lot of salvagers. When you have a... disaster like a flood, some people are kind of glad to see things be ruined, and have their lives start over again. And then there are other people who are rescuers, who go around and... you know, will go through the basement with rubber gloves on after the floodwaters have left, and put everything in a bottle—you know, a tub of bleach—and try to sort of resuscitate and restore things. Those two impulses seem to really exist simultaneously. So these objects were rescued from the flood... and again, the voices are processed... the sound on the accompanying projected image is also a processed bed of these voices; so it's a very, very dense kind of—not muddy, but watery—sound. And it is, if you walk into the space—this is *not* interactive—everything is playing at once. And if any of you experienced it, it was... rather as though you were, in fact, under water. And the only way to apprehend the different stories or the different voices was to get extremely close to the monitors; or if you stood there for a very long time; for example if you stood at this end looking at the projection image, and you just kind of waited and let the natural ebb and flow of the voices occur, words would pop out... phrases, sentences... and eventually you'd begun to make some sense of the overall shape in the stories, the narrative that was contained in the piece. Traveling through these houses with the camera was like being in a grave. It was in April; the flood had happened in... the year before; and these houses were all condemned, and were going

to be torn down.... And as they were thawing, all of the muck and the mold and everything was coming back to life. So we... I experienced these houses with a mask on... and... at some risk of... I don't know—infection or whatever. But they were terrifically compelling at the same time that they were revolting; it's a little bit like the surgery in "Noah's Raven," I suppose; or the burning of the forest. There's this very peculiar sort of morbid beauty in these kinds of ruins.

SLIDES

And as the camera just drifts, as though in fact it is being borne on water through these houses, and... this tape... this particular projection element—None of these are tape, by the way; they're all laser disc; but... probably lasts, I don't know, twenty-six minutes... and just continually recycles, as do the voices. So there's again no beginning and no end... Where a particular voice occurs with a particular image is happenstance and may occur once in a day, in a cycle... And every time you enter the piece it's different. But there's a certain amount of... submission that's required, because you are—you're sort of sucked in, and you're sucked in very powerfully, I think, into an environment that could repel you just as well as it could hold you. And it *did* repel a lot of people; and it did *hold* a lot of people. And I found it fascinating to watch the audiences, as I find it fascinating to watch them in all these pieces, to see how people are—those who are captured and *how* they're captured; those who become interested; those who are interested in discovery; and those who simply walk in and walk out. You know, some people are actually pushed out of the room by so much picture and so much sound—and so much destruction, I suppose.

SLIDES

And these are some of the people.

SLIDES

(pause)

SLIDES

This woman on the right, whose name is Marlene Stiles (665), there's also a short clip... of her singing... "Precious Lord, Take My Hand," which is a knockout; and she—I *think* she's... a

superb singer. And she's standing in this completely empty, cavernous... space that was formerly a bowling alley; and the natural acoustics of the space... with her voice... it was a beautiful echo chamber. She was also one of the rescuers... and here I had her... asked her to bring some of the things that she had salvaged. And on the left is her mother's wedding veil, which was virtually destroyed, but somehow she managed to reconstitute something of it; and on the right is her father's camera. And so, in showing these objects, she was encouraged to talk a great deal about both her mother and her father and her relationship to them. And this was to me what the piece was about... was how this kind of catastrophe, this sort of disaster, particularly the flood, which is an excellent metaphor for... a very powerful force that comes into your life, unbidden and unrestrained, and churns up memories and objects and things that have been long buried; and they just sort of float to the surface in this kind of dirty, muddy water.

SLIDES

And the last work I'm showing you is from a gallery show I had in New York in the fall at Lennon, Weinberg.... There were three pieces, which I put together as a kind of suite. The one on the left is a piece called "Forge;" and it's about making. It's about the making of making. The anvil... the...welding... the forge itself... its rather steady state... In the center—These are on large monitors mounted on diamond steel shelves with loudspeakers underneath, each having its own... soundtrack. And... the soundtrack is not the sound of the actual making; but it's a process soundtrack derived from the sound of the forge alone... So it develops a kind of bell-like, ringing sound. And... these are images that repeat in various sequences. And in the center... there's a device called *nesting*, where I nest one image of the forge inside another inside another inside another... each at a different rate of speed until finally you have this sort of breathing... this... image just kind of breathes at you, and then the layers, each nested layer, wipes away... and it returns eventually to its normal speed; so there's this—a bit of transformation. But even as it's transformed, nothing really happens. The center room I'm saving till the last; but the final room is a piece which I called "Nesting," in which there are various aspects of insect life and/or other kinds of natural... phenomena—of the sun in a pond, cocoons, a forest—sunlight through dappled leaves in the forest, and a wasp hive; and each of them goes through its own cycle... in which, you know, the wasps... flock into the hive—I don't think *flock* is the right word for wasps, but—anyway, they enter the hive; they leave the hive;

they gather; they act singly—and they too are making, right? They’re building the hive; they’re very, very busy. The cocoons are also quite active. You don’t ever know exactly what they’re doing; I don’t know what they were doing—They were preparing to become... moths, you know. In the forest and in the pond, I used a similar nesting device; so they again were rather steady state, and the image of *itself* was just nested again and again... within itself, until you had a kind of... abstract and very flattened, but... at the same time sort of... three-dimensional, recessed... design almost, really. And then, to bring all this into sort of three-dimensional life, I found this extraordinary twenty-piece Russian matryoshka doll, which I had originally discovered in Moscow, a smaller version of it. I did a version of this piece in Moscow; and used an eight-piece... nesting doll there, which was also unpainted... and I found this twenty-piece one which... I dearly love. And... removed each of the sort of schmoo-like (phonetic 725) forms that, when it’s painted would become—I don’t know—Yeltsin or... Putin or... Kennedy... or, you know, Jackie, or... whoever they decide to paint... --or some babushka... but unpainted just has this kind of anonymous, humanoid... quality. And then leaving all the bases nested inside each other, you get the same sort of image that you have in the pond and in the forge... And... they also bear some resemblance, I think, to dwelling... which all the other pieces I’ve shown you have been, in some way, about. So these also kind of represent... a hive, themselves, or... a cocoon, also, at the same that they are these humanoid forms. And the final piece; and I want to show you... some video from this piece... is called “Migration;” and it consists of an image of a man whose name is “John Lado Kenney”, a Sudanese refugee living in Des Moines, Iowa, who’s been deaf from birth, who’s developed his own particular kind of sign language... and pantomime. He knows some American Sign Language, but mostly he communicates through pantomime. He’s... an extremely... skilled communicator; he’s a great storyteller; he’s very charismatic; and... he... he was a wonderful subject, and he was delighted to... sit for me. And what he did was to tell his story; and... he tells the story of his experience in the Sudan... his escape from the Sudan... his arrival in Kenya—I think in Nairobi—and his... life there in a camp for about nine years before he was invited to come to the United States and to take up residence in Des Moines, Iowa. But this is not a story that anybody can really know; I mean, it’s—You’ll see when I show you the tape. It’s... both totally understandable and totally mysterious in whatever language *you* speak; because *no one’s* language is his language. Someday his story will not be a mystery, because he will speak fluent sign language and his story

will be utterly understood by everyone. Across the room from him... This is a very large projection; it's about nine by twelve; and painted—the black painted around it... makes it, you know, sort of this floor to ceiling... stripe. Across the wall—the room—from him, on a circular screen suspended in air is... a looped image of a butterfly... a monarch on a man's hand. And at first the butterfly appears to fly up and land on the man's hand, and he sits there; he flaps his wings in slow motion... and you look at him and he begins to look a—and he's beautiful, but it's a little—he's a little... old... and then you see him fall off the hand... and then it fades out and he flies back up again. So this is another example of a loop... in which... death and rebirth—or whatever—however you want to think of it... is... indeterminate; you can read it however you want to read it: He's either dying and falls off the hand; or he's alighting on the man's hand and he's like a pet... or he's a friend. So there's *his* particular kind of communication which is... I mean, one reviewer wrote, he said that the monarch is mute; so he is in some sense mute; he communicates some kinds of conventions to us. "John Kenney", on the other hand, is a puzzle to be deciphered... and he's a very willing... teller of his story, whereas the monarch, who opposes him, is just doing what he's programmed to do. So what I'd like to end this talk with... showing you "John Latto Kenney" telling his story.... So if you could please select that tape; that's the tape I originally wanted to put in, Nathan... It should be right on top. And... you get to hear and see John Latto Kenney....

VIDEO (791ff)

(AUDIO BREAK)

Speaker: John was likely to break into his story the minute he met you; I mean, he started trying to tell me—You know, he's like—He showed me how to sign his name... He—and in a few minutes he had us totally engaged. So Forrest was standing offstage behind the camera, and just... cueing him. Forrest himself doesn't know everything that John says; he understands very little of it, in fact. But they have this rapport that's extraordinary. So this is how we elicited his story... and we told him that he was going—we were going to record him telling his story and then John would give him—rather, Forrest would give him cues to which he would respond, and then tell whatever he wanted to tell... about his story. So that's how that transpired. Now *please* ask me some questions. Yes.

Question: One thing I'm curious about is... throughout the work is how (unintelligible) (laughter) (laughs)... to the point where you walk in—Thanks for mediating my voice, here. But—and then it's all blurred, so you can't even understand, unless you really concentrate on one voice or another, or one story or another. And... in this last clip, what I found so puzzling was... it was so difficult to understand him; but then this layer of visual effects and audio effects really obscured it further; and I'm wondering why you would make that choice.

Speaker: Yeah. Well I don't—First of all, all I did was... to... make a strobe effect. It's not slow-mo and it's not fast-mo; it's thirty frames per second at a three frame strobe, which is just a minor... -- it increases the sort of the agitation, the quality of agitation. And vocally... it's a multi-tap delay, which is just a little delay on the voice. And when it's played back with right—the correct—speakers, it becomes kind of percussive. I mean, the idea is to turn all of this into a kind of music. And when he slaps his thigh, it should reverberate-t-t-t-t-t. And... to me it doesn't further obscure the story. Believe me, if you saw it in its natural state it would not be less obscured for you. To me it enhanced the intensity of his presentation; and it enhanced somewhat the sense of anxiety surrounding it. And... I would say, in addition to that the desire to turn all of these voices into music for percussion... just seems to be an ongoing thing.

Question: So you would think it would be more *clear*, in a sense? Is that--?

Speaker: No. It isn't—I mean, the issue of clarity, to me, in a case like this isn't even relevant. I mean, there is no clarity. The story—I know the outlines of his story; Forrest Corson knows the outlines of his story; but there's nobody who can absolutely understand everything that John is saying at this moment. There is no way; there is nobody in *any* language; and I think—I think I made it just a slight intervention... to make—to *me* to make the work somehow more graphic. It makes it hold the space a little more intensely. And it's just a slight shift; because when you see the natural... tape played back at its regular speed and without the multi-tap delay... it's just a little more relaxed, that's all. I mean, that's really the only change. And I liked this extra degree of intensity, because to me it brought out the intensity that I felt when I was with him anyway.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Mhmm. Well also you're in a fixed position here; now if you had seen it as an installation, where it repeats, and you can choose at what distance you want to *be* to him, how close and how far away... If you want to be... way back *there*, you see him differently than you see him if you're up this close. So everybody—in the installation space everyone chooses what relationship they want to have to this image; and you're in a fixed, sort of trapped, position right now. So for some of you it might have been good; for some of you it might have been bad, you know... It was maybe—That's really about all I can say about that aspect of it.

Question: Yeah. I don't know that it's good or bad; it's just... curious. And even in the other installations... how it's obscured with the layers... of different people's stories....

Speaker: You're talking about the auditory part?

Question: Right... How they overlap, so it's hard to discern one voice from another voice...

Speaker: Well it makes you work a little bit... Yeah, it makes—But you can take it two ways. You can take it as... I mean, when you go to listen to Italian opera, do you understand (laughs) everything they're saying? It's about creating... a texture, partly, and an auditory texture that... is parallel to the visual texture. And there's information in both of them; but it isn't primarily *about* that information; it's about the textures that that information creates. So you can either penetrate them—You can work at penetrating them or not. And I find that some people do and some people don't. It isn't—It isn't instantly given to you as a fully explained thing; and it's not supposed to be. I mean, there is—it is supposed to be somewhat challenging, so that you have to do a little work... to find your way in, and... that's your choice—as anybody—any audience, you know—any viewer's choice... which is true of everything we go to see. I mean, how much do you spend with a painting? How much time-- do you ever walk out of a movie? I mean, movies these days are geared toward entirely pleasing us, and they surround us with sound. They *glue* you to your seat, you know... I mean Steven Spielberg has you *riveted* in your seat; and even if you hate it you're not going to move, because he's—he's got you. So... I kind of think that—I'd like to think I'm doing the opposite of what Stephen Spielberg is doing; and maybe using some of—very few of the same devices. I mean, almost *none* of the same devices, really; but that... you can—Those people who will be riveted *will* be riveted; but they'll be riveted mentally more maybe than... sensually. And yet there is a sensual experience to be had.

Question: Mary, could you talk a little more about... audio in your work... 'cause it is so important... and music... and the relationship between utterances, music, and how you orchestrate it.

Speaker: Yeah. Sound... in the early pieces, well I didn't—you didn't hear any of "Noah's" or see any of "Noah's Raven," but I have often worked with a composer by the name of Earl Howard, whom some of you may have heard of. Earl happens to be blind... and we work together very, very well, because it isn't a case of giving a composer your finished piece, and he puts music to it; and you either accept it or you don't accept it. It's a case where Earl and I will sit together; and I describe something to him visually, so I have to be very acute and very sharp about my descriptions... And then he says, "Okay, I think I know what you want." Or sometimes I bring him sounds; and he makes these extraordinary textures most of the—the two—Well, no, I take it back. "House by the Water" was done with Earl, and you did hear that. So Earl makes for me these textures, these beds of sound... using sound that I've recorded on site; and occasionally some... that he—which he processes; and occasionally some synthesized sound. He's a saxophonist; he's an electronic music composer. And... so we sit, and we fight and we argue... and then we also listen Country and Western Music, and we listen to Rhythm and Blues, and we... you know, have a good time; and we... enjoy some... single batch bourbons; and... you know, we work well together, and.... But when we're working, we're really working. So he'll say, "Okay, here. Take this home. I think this is what you want. This is I think—But put it with the picture and tell me if it works." So I'll go home, put it with the picture, and I'll call him up and say, "You know, Earl, it didn't work." He said, "I didn't *think* it was gonna work." (laughs) (laughter) He said, "But I think I know what you want." (laughs) So I go back. And we spend days... weeks doing this. And then *every*—I mean, in every single piece, he suddenly—He'll hit gold. And at one of the most dramatic experiences was... I was—We were working on a piece called "Wilderness," which ended with these immense icebergs sort of heaving in the... sea. And I said, "Okay, Earl, we're coming to the ice music now; we're going to make the ice music." So he said, "Okay. Next week when you come over, you know, I think I'll have it for you." So I came in, and he played me this music that was sort of light tinkling sounds; and it was beautiful—it was electronic—It was beautiful. I said, "Earl! Those are icicles!" I said, "I'm talking about ice as big as a building." He said, "Oh!" And the sound got deep and resonant; and then suddenly it was this booming kind of drone sound. But—So a

lot of things like that happened when I worked with Earl; and I've *learned* a lot from Earl; I've learned an immense amount from Earl. The experience of working with—But I've learned a lot—I learned a lot... of my interest in sound, or I acquired my interest in sound... when I was much younger, back in the Sixties and Seventies... and, in fact, I'm showing a piece at the Whitney in the fall from 1970, which is slides and tape... and... it... A lot of what I do in sound today probably trace—dates back to that... original interest in the combination of image and sound. So I do—I have always had this desire to turn these voices into music; and... But each piece has gotten progressively, I think, less musical in any conventional way, and more and more percussive. To me, and I think this is one of the reasons I'm on the edge of this sort of decision between... documentary and poetry... and... and I'm trying to walk a line... where I use a little bit of each to make something that's yet another kind of entity. And altering the voices helps me to do that. It transforms them. It takes them *out* of the documentary, and takes them out of the real world, and transforms them just ever so slightly, so that you are in a more... (sighs) fantastic, slightly more fantastic place. And...that's—I don't know if that answers your question entirely; but... I did want to give credit to Earle, who's... had a lot to do with the development of *my* interest in sound... And now that I'm doing a lot of the sound myself, I find that it's a lot easier. I'm sure all of you who've worked with computer sound, anybody who's working with an editing program, you know how easy, much easier it is now to get these... complex effects that used to be so... time-consuming, with open reel tape, and... you know, Revox recorders, and patch-base synthesizers. So... a lot of people can indulge and interest in sound, but—Yeah, that's as far as I'll go with that. Yes.

Question: Could you talk about “Journey's End?” (unintelligible interchange) Oh.

Question: I'm interested in... I heard Suzanne Lacey speak about a month ago, and there is a real connection I see with your work; and I'm wondering if you could—if you would think of yourself, or if you think of yourself as a public artist, and... in that sense... and how you feel about... Do you feel that your work is involving political-social action, and are you using... sort of, I hate to say a political agenda, but... are you using sort of... having a political agenda and aestheticizing it... through your work to make it more accessible.

Speaker: Mm. Well it is a kind of public art, in a way... particularly those pieces that end up in warehouses... and in automobile showrooms... and... even those that end up in some museums, which are... sort of non-mainstream museums, like the North Dakota Museum of Art, for example. And it's public art in that I deal with the public in making the work... an event that's been—that's a public event. I look at this list and... you know, in "Noah's Raven" you have... you have, you know, earthquakes, and... the burning of the forest, and you have catastrophic surgery and you have... you know, "Bleak House" you have... again... earthquakes and oil spills and "Last Rites" you have human drama and trauma; "House by the Water" is floods, "Flood Songs" is floods; "House by the Water" is also hurricanes, and... I talked about slavery before. I mean, yes, so all these things sort of take off from some very public... event that affects a large community. And...and then homes in on individuals who have some particular response, either similar to other members of the community or different. And so in that sense it is a *kind* of public art, in that its origins are... public in that particular way; that without this public responding to these... events, these pieces wouldn't be conceived and wouldn't happen, but... And as far aestheticizing political issues, I don't know; that's an old discussion... I am, after all, an artist... One of the things that I am working... struggling to do all the time—or *have been*, at least for the last ten years, is to deal with these very public and somewhat political ideas... in a form that is art, and that is not reportage.... I mean, the best reportage of the flood was done on NBC, you know.... So that's not my *job*, even; and it's—I am much more interested in how these events affect human beings in the long run; and how people develop their... memories of them; and how memory then affects their emotional state, and vice versa. You know, I'm much more interested in the individuals than I am in some large political context that you might... surround some of those things with. "Noah's Raven" definitely has an ecological... bias... but I think that the others don't particularly really have... a particular... a special political bias; they're humanist... I think; but I don't feel that, and I don't worry about the issue of... aestheticizing politics; I... I just—I—you know, I... This is how I work... and these are the issues I'm concerned with. And I—it's—I mean, it has occurred to me that I'm working with very issue-oriented kinds of pieces. They're—Not everyone's doing this. There are... some people who are, obviously, but there's a great deal of art that has nothing to do with issues.... I don't—You know I've just—This is how it's evolved. It has evolved this way; but what I'm searching for, and continue—why I continue to do it is to find... ever better ways of combining

those two things, so... you know, the aesthetic *and* the-- I resist saying political—communal, or... individual or humanist, or whatever you want to call it; but the interest in the individual human response to these things. And to find a way to do it that is... technologically appropriate... and... in all other ways appropriate... and that maybe... and finally, hopefully, create a body of work that could all be seen together someday... under some... extraordinary circumstance... that would really make a statement about... a view of the world; and the view of the world being mine... but not being necessarily anybody else's or out of anybody else's *book*.

Question: Okay. Mary, I was wondering... You talked about walking a line between documentary and poetics and... I'm wondering... when you know, or when you're satisfied with achieving a certain poetic in your work—

Speaker: When I'm satisfied with--?

Question: A poetic—When you know you've achieved a poetic sense in your work; and what you've learned from that, and how you take that to the next piece.

Speaker: Mhmm. Well that's actually crucial, and that has—relates to these issues of why...do I manipulate the sound, and why is the image manipulated in certain ways. And I think that's... probably that is the answer to your question. I mean, and how do I know that I've achieved it? Well, I often—I'm filled with doubt all the time, of course; you know, I don't ever think I've achieved it. So every piece is an attempt to rectify everything that didn't get done in the last one... or to do something that I didn't do—or something that I was afraid to do... or, you know... This time I'm just going to *do it*; I'm going to let it all hang out. And it doesn't just—It doesn't come out that way; but that's my challenge to myself each time, that whatever was left unfinished before, or whatever little area I avoided, or whatever trajectory I could have followed... this time I'll do that; and I'll... *expose myself*, even more. And then these little things come up that help you sort of hide again, I think, some of the so-called poetics. But I think all artists do that, whether you're... painting, or making sculpture or installations; I really do think that that's a natural thing. And how do you know? Well, the point is, you see, I always think I failed. (laughs) And so... that's why I say... That's why you go on to the next piece. And so that's why I keep looking for something that's *more* satisfying. I mean, I have a few—no, I have a lot of work I really like; and I do think that some pieces are perfect, as they were made....

For their time, and in their way they were perfect. But then there are other pieces that just seem to me like indications of a *direction* that can be further mined and explored... and requires more—always more imagination than I seem to be able to muster and bring to it. But that's just—this is just my lecture to myself, you see. (laughs) You've tapped into that.

Question: (laughs) No, I like that.

Speaker: No—Oh, God, you know... (laughs) But it's true; it's really true. So how—So I don't ever know. I mean, it's—I just get a feeling, you know. I work very hard... and very long on the projects; and I try not to toss something off quickly. I mean, I don't try not to; I'm unable to—I'm constitutionally unable to toss something off quickly; I don't work fast. I work slowly. So by the time I am satisfied with a version of a piece, I am pretty sure that's the way it's supposed to be....

Question: Thank you.

Question: I was wondering about the interaction between real objects and your videos, and what played the objects—what role the objects play... in the pieces?

Speaker: Objects such as the four chairs, and the... chairs, and the matryoshka dolls, things like that? What is their function?

Question: Mhm. Or how they interact with video. I mean, do you think that... video is limited...in terms of what you want to do with it, and therefore you use real objects, or--?

Speaker: Well, I'm not a filmmaker; and my impulses in video never came from a filmic direction. I was a sculptor. I started... my art life as a sculptor... I was a literary major in college. So those two things come in, sculpture and literature sort of feed in... and yes, and sometimes I think that I'd go back to object-making, solely; but... I'm always drawn back to this illuminated image. And then other times I think, why don't you just settle for—just make *one* big picture, and make it right; and then that should be able to do everything. But then these objects keep creeping in... because to me it gives it—it somehow adds an extra resonance... to a space, since I'm dealing—trying to deal with a space always, not just the flatness of cinema, but a real—a space that people...move around in, and that suggests that something or somebody

could live there. So the other objects that are there... to me interact with the imagery the way the imagery interacts with itself, when you put four things up together, you know... or... *seven* images up together... They create something... just by the interaction between them that wasn't there before. And so... do the objects, I think, that they add a... They add another layer of... you know, something from the real world; but maybe something mysterious from the real—I think the forklifts and the trees are not the least bit mysterious; the matryoshka doll is slightly mysterious... It's like not everyone knows what an unpainted matryoshka—What *is* that thing, you know? So that... felt very sculpturally intriguing to me, to *find* those unpainted forms, and to think, wouldn't it be interesting to make these? I mean, part of what I wanted to do in that piece actually was to fabricate nesting bowls... enormous set of nesting bowls. It was so outrageously expensive I couldn't even begin to think of doing it. But I have a set of twenty—twenty? I think it's twenty nesting bowls; it's just a little small... and I *did* show it in Moscow; but it's a commercial set of nesting bowls. And I thought, wouldn't this be great... at big scale? This would be just sensational. So I'm often drawn more to the fabricating side of things; and would like to—to—But there's something about having objects from the real world, as I said before, as opposed to making—you know, handcrafting them. And... as there's something to having objects with the moving... and auditory image. And there's also something to be said for being able to do it all in one—you know, one plane. So all these things are always at work; but how it ends up for me is usually some interaction between the two. And that makes it more three dimensional for me. Yes.

Question: How—Oh, I think I'm the last person that needs a mike. (laughs)

Speaker: You'd be surprised....

Question: How often do you feel—This might be like a multipart question—that you get to – I'm not sure how to articulate this. When you're asked to do a commission, like the commission for the flood piece, do they call you and they say, "Hey, we want you to come down and do a piece." Or do they... you know, a piece about the flood; and then you just come down and you sort of... investigate and you let the piece find you? Versus like working in a studio and... you know, sort of starting without that contextual place. How often... maybe in a percentage, like do you feel like you're doing one or the other.

Speaker: Well I grew up in the not-for-profit world (laughing) where the proposal always came first. (laughter) And so generally my pieces are written before anything happens in video. And in the case of these commissions, the director of the North Dakota Museum called me; and she's been following my work for years; and she said, "I want to make a series of commissions commemorating the flood. Would you be interested?" And it just so happened that a couple of weeks before, in the *New York Times*, there had appeared this incredible picture of the city of Grand Forks, under water and on fire at the same time... And I stared at that picture for the longest time, and thought, if this isn't an image of hell, I don't know what is. And... I'd never opened... the paper to read this whole article about Laurel Reuter; and then Laurel called me. And then I opened the paper. And I said, "Are you kidding? Would I love to work with you? Absolutely!" And... then we talked, and the more we talked, we realized that we were... very much in sync about how we felt about this issue of... the public, and... art's connection to the public. For example, one of the things she did was that... virtually all the public buildings in Grand Forks were destroyed. She opened the Museum for the dance company... for one of the churches which met there every Sunday... for... there must—a day school.... There must have been... ten communal activities that she took into the church—(laughs) or rather, into the church—into the Museum. All the while there was—She left up one exhibition, because they couldn't change exhibitions for about a year; and you know, there were these wild Sue Williams drawings on the wall, and all kinds of incredible things... and the Baptists meeting in there on Sunday morning. And the dance—you know, the dance company dancing to... Mozart or whatever. So... the more we talked about our enterprises and our endeavors, we really felt that we were... very, very closely connected, and that we should work together. In fact, we're working together again, because it was so copasetic. So... I feel very fortunate when that happens... or when John Beardsley calls me and says, "I'd like you to do something in Spoleto," I'm totally at a loss of how to think about Charleston until I *go there*; and then immediately things start happening... and it becomes a necessity to do a certain piece... So that's generally how I work. I don't start by doing something in the studio... and then following an idea. Rarely do I do that. I mean, I have a couple of single channel tapes that I've done that... came about that way; but usually it's the other way around. And sometimes it just happens that the person who calls me or comes to me taps into that. You know, they know my work well enough they just tap into something. And then sometimes I get people who are just completely... out of sync; and

they ask me to do something that's maybe related to work that I did ten years ago, and it simply doesn't work and can't happen, and... it just won't... happen. But I love the idea of these commissions... because they involve me in a whole new—a whole *new* public each time, and they present new problems, new challenges and new issues... always. So... it's very fertile.
(pause)

Question: Are there any questions to Mary? I'm sure you'll have them as the weeks progress (unintelligible). I want to thank *you* for your questions and I want to thank Mary Lucier.

Speaker: Thank for your questions and I want to thank Mary Lucier.

Speaker: Thank *you*. (applause)

END OF RECORDING