

So, how are you?

I'm fine. We're down here enjoying ourselves, hiking around, looking for dinosaurs and taking river trips and that sort of stuff.

That sounds perfect. So what are you up to these days? Pretty much that. We have a home down here in Moab that I built about 8 years ago, and we spend a lot of time over here. This is red rock country – you know, with the red towers and rocks and cliffs and things. It's just beautiful. In the meantime, I help a friend of mine with his art projects, some pretty big stuff.

Paul McCarthy?

Yeah.

What do you do for him?

I've known him almost forty-five, fifty years. We went to school together, went climbing together and skied together so we have a lot of common interests. About 6 years ago, he had a big show coming up in Munich, Haus der Kunst, and they gave him pretty much the whole building. He had the idea of turning that Hitler's art museum (it has a history of showing his screwed-up art if you recall), which is kind of a rectangle, into a Bavarian window flower box by putting 250 ft. wide, 40 ft.-high inflatable flowers on the roof. I thought that was a wonderful idea, but he didn't have time to get them manufactured and installed before the opening. So I said, 'Oh you just have to do it' and he said, 'Well, if you help me, I'll do it.' So I agreed to do it and from then on, for a number of years, I was kind of responsible for installing and overseeing all of the inflatables. We did them in Bern, Antwerp, and uh . . .

Utrecht.

Utrecht, yes, exactly.

How old are you now, if I may ask?

I'm 70. I just turned 70 last week.

Congratulations!

(Laughing) I don't know if 70 is such a big deal. All you have to do is hang around and you'll get there.

Is it true that you were involved in the skiing industry?

Yes, I was hired as Executive Director of the Utah Ski Association, which is an industry association of about 14 ski resorts all over Utah. From there I started a marketing arm called Ski Utah, and expanded the company to a pretty large degree. I left after a while and ended up being involved in the national and international marketing for Ski USA, which brought skiers from abroad into this country. At that point – about 25 years ago – people went abroad to ski and nobody was coming here, so we expanded the US market for skiing and made it pretty impressive. I ended up as the Vice President of marketing for several ski resorts back East. After that, I worked on a publication that I published for a number of years in the skiing business and a company that consulted ski businesses that wanted to be sold or re-financed. I went around the country to trade shows and conventions, and talked about booking skiing and how to book skiing and how to make it more profitable and what-not. Just business, basically. And of course, I skied a lot!

Amazing! How long did you do that kind of thing?

I started immediately after Rosendale, in fact.

So that's like '80/'81?

I think I came to Utah around 1976. And that's when I just walked into this job.

When did you stop doing this job?

I pretty much retired almost twenty years ago, just working on my own. I actually only worked for companies for maybe ten years.

How did you get so interested in skiing?

Oh, I'd always been interested in skiing and climbing. I climbed in Yosemite Valley and the Tetons and back East on various crags and rock-climbing. Skiing and climbing kind of went hand in hand. So when I left the East, after Rosendale, it just seemed like a natural thing to gravitate towards. I wanted to try to make a living at the stuff that I enjoyed doing. Also I met my wife here, back in 1961, so it seemed natural for us to return.

When did you move to New York?

I grew up in New York.

Oh, you're a New Yorker! I didn't know that. Where did you grow up?

In Manhattan. We moved around a lot. When I first came to America, we moved to 33rd Street and 1st Avenue.

You lived in Estonia before, I presume?

I was born in Estonia. When I was two and a half, my father died in the war and my mother and I moved to the DP camp in Auxberg, Germany. I lived there until I was seven, and then when we emigrated to America in 1949. We moved to 33rd Street and 1st Avenue and after that to 124th Street and Broadway. Then we went up to Inwood and Dyckman Street, around 200th Street. I don't know if you're familiar with that?

Yes.

And then to Washington Heights. And that's pretty much when I hitchhiked out West and started climbing and skiing. That was around 1960/'61.

And when did you move back to NYC?

I moved back to New York around 1966.

You said you studied with Paul McCarthy. Where was this?

At University of Utah, in Salt Lake City.

Okay, so why did you decide to move back to NY?

By that time I had graduated with an art degree and felt that I needed to be in New York to have any kind of impact or chance at making anything happen. And this turned out to be true.

And what were you producing during that time?

Those pictures I sent you on disc – I was making a lot of that stuff. At that time, I was also looking for contacts because the climbing and skiing people that I knew had nothing to do with art. They didn't even know that I was an artist. So I was looking for feedback or some kind of a group to get involved with. I saw an ad on a little poster for a group called 'Museum'. It seemed interesting, so I contacted them. They had regular meetings and got together and went out to bars. I wasn't quite sure where it was going.

How did this group come about?

There was a guy named Smith, I don't remember his first name, and another one named Eddie Harris. I'm not sure but it ended up about 30 or 40 people. Joe Pap from the Shakespeare was part of that and at some point a graphic artist was involved. The premise was that these were artists who weren't able to get shows, though they deserved them. I mean, I was naïve, and at some point this graphic artist ended up contacting the Mayor's office and there was a cultural affairs administrator there named Doris Freedman. It was Mayor Lindsay at the time, and we talked to her about the group. We met her and a group of business people at a big Sheridan or something on 6th Avenue, and said 'Look, we've got this group of artists, and we're just dying to show so what can you do for us?' She offered us an unused BMT subway station under 57th Street and 6th Avenue. It was a huge space, maybe 40 or 50 ft. wide, quite high, and 200 or 300 ft. long.

Had you exhibited your work before that?

No, so I got pretty excited. Because at that time I was making stuff but also had lots of things on the drawing board. I just didn't have the facilities to store it all so I wasn't making anything, just sketching things. Anyway, we left that meeting and decided that the best time to use this space would be somewhere in the fall. So then we went back to the group, totally ecstatic, and reported this. But instead of excitement, what we ran into was all kinds of excuses for why it couldn't happen. That it was too soon, it was too big, and all kinds of reasons why people couldn't get their art ready in time to show. Meanwhile, I was just bubbling with ideas. I was going to hire people, and have them perform useless tasks, all through the show. Not necessarily even labeling them as pieces of art but just a guy changing a light bulb continuously – all day long, on a ladder, changing a light bulb. That's the kind of stuff I was thinking of.

Can you elaborate a little bit more on why you had these ideas? What inspired them?

I don't know.

So its has nothing to do with the idea of maintenance and labor in art, for example, or . . .

No. It was just . . . I wanted to show the expanse somehow, and make people look at people doing things as art. I'm not even sure what I was thinking at the time, but it seemed a worthwhile thing to pursue. I had another idea, I don't know if you're familiar with the NY city subways. They have these four-inch square tiles on the wall, white tiles. And sometimes, they have a black line somewhere around shoulder height that runs along the entire platform. This wall was lined with tiles, so I was going to start at one end – maybe at shoulder height or eye level, about 6 ft. or 2 meters – and paint the tiles black for maybe 15–20 feet. And then drop one line down. And then paint 15–20 ft. And the effect would have been to basically tilt the entire 400 ft. platform, so that when you look at it from one direction it feels like you're walking uphill and from the other direction it feels like you're walking downhill. And you know, those are the kinds of ideas I was having. There were so many of them; I was excited to get this space because I could have filled it with all kinds of stuff going on. I was disappointed when the group basically backed off and decided not to do it. And that's what made me realize that a lot of these people maybe didn't have ideas, and maybe they didn't deserve to be shown.

So basically the whole thing didn't happen because the group didn't want it.

Yeah. Exactly, they weren't ready to show.

So you weren't able to show with your friend.

That's right. The two of us wouldn't have done the thing by ourselves. So I basically retained a couple of relationships with that group – personally with those names I mentioned – and then I left. But in the process, I realized that the shortage of ideas meant that people were fishing for ideas, and I felt that maybe I could influence people by giving them ideas – so that when their piece was either shown or published or whatever, that's when my piece was done. And it kind of became a convoluted thing and I actually did that a number of times. There were a number of pieces where I suggested putting up a barricade at one point . . . you know those police barricades or Con Ed barricades, when they dig a hole. I wanted to put one up on a very busy intersection sidewalk, and force people to walk around it, even though there was nothing in it, just to change their pattern and somehow show the proclivity of mindlessly obeying nonsensical obstructions. And that actually got done. Now, I can't 100% prove that it was my idea, but it occurred to me that I could really do that. Most of my stuff at that time was phenomenal – you know, phenomenology – just visual effects, perceptual effects, things that I noticed that I wanted to show. A lot of it was driven by acid.

Were there any other artists or non-artists that you looked up to, or who inspired you?

Oh, when I was a student yes. But after that, it was mostly inspired by LSD visions. Not visions but just physical visual phenomena . . .

But if you talk about replacing a light bulb or re-positioning perspective in the subway station, etc . . . Do you think any of these ideas might have been driven by other colleagues involved in conceptual art?
No. I didn't know anybody who was doing anything like that.

Okay.
I was just kind of exploring the ideas. And later I kept pursuing it. I would notice something and then I would go about trying to show . . . other people, what I had noticed. I had that parabolic disc, that came out of a ship's arc light. It was a two-foot diameter, perfectly polished front surface disc. The reason I had it was because I was going to put a generator with that on the back of a pick-up truck, pointing straight up. It gets foggy and misty in upstate New York, so when you shine the light straight up it just looks like a pole. Like a 200 or 300 ft. pole. And I wanted to drive around the countryside with this pole aiming straight up in the air. And I thought that would be pretty spectacular, but I actually never got the light working. So I took the disc apart and one day I was sitting there at the kitchen table with this disc. I had a hanging light above it, and I suddenly realized that the light was being focused about a foot above the disc in a very intense white spot. It just looked like an illusion, almost like a hologram where you could just reach out and touch it and it was hot – so that became a piece. And it was a really beautiful piece. And at some point, watching water rippling, I decided I would try to make a tray that would let me ripple water by putting a rheostat with a controllable speed and vibration underneath it, and that became a piece. Once I was hiking, actually it was with Paul McCarthy, down from a ski resort called Snowbird. It was a jeep trail – a very steep jeep trail – and the sunlight was to our right. It was shining at about the same angle as the hill slope, and looking downhill to our left was an aspen grove. It was hundreds of feet wide and a hundred feet long, but also deep. Our shadows were larger in the closer trees, and as the trees went down (it was very dense) our shadows got smaller and smaller. So that is where the Plexiglas or reflecting pieces came from. So then I immediately went back and started producing those things, just to explore. Then I noticed one day that I could project. This was before computers so I would use Kodak slide projectors. I could take slides of a surface – any surface, like a wall with bookshelves and stuff on it, for example – and I would take pictures of it, from four different positions and make slides out of it. And then get four projectors, and project those images back on the original surface. What happens is that the surface becomes transparent, and when you walk in front of the projectors, the shadows do strange things . . . It literally looks like the whole world is shimmering – it's just a spectacular effect. And at some point, I was trying to get to project the front of the New York Public Library on itself from across 5th Avenue, and that didn't work.

It's really quite interesting to hear you talk in such detail about those works, because I don't see any exhibitions listed on your CV from that period. Did you have any at that time?

No.

So of all these works that you produced . . . have any of them ever been exhibited?

Yes. The next step was that I continued producing these things, and I finally said, 'Shit, I've got a lot of this stuff. I'd better show it'. So I took slides, in fact a lot of the slides that you have copies of. I took those slides and put together a little transparency sheet and I went to five of my favorite galleries. A friend of mine was an engineer, and he had just acquired an office on lower Park Avenue. He needed it renovated with sheet rock and track lighting and stuff like that to make it an office, so I agreed to do that in exchange for a month's rent. Anyway, I went to all these people – Ivan Karp, who was the head guy for Castelli, Howard Wise, the Whitney – with these slides and I invited them to come to this studio, or this office after I had finished it, because I had set it up as a gallery. I hung all my Plexiglas multi-pieces, I had the vibrating water, I had the disc – I had a whole bunch of stuff there. And I had two people come: Howard Wise and Ivan Karp. And they both gave me group shows. Karp was so interested that he got me into *Elements*, the Boston bicentennial show, which was actually one of the best shows I've ever seen. Still. It was totally full of phenomenal and earth and elemental art. But by then, quite frankly, I had lost interest in making objects – these were things that had been generated over the course of 2 or 3 years, and in fact I never even went to the Boston Museum to pick up my piece. I just told somebody that if they wanted it, they could just go and get it. So I basically just lost interest in making objects, because by then I was pretty interested in this influence stuff. And that's when Rosendale came about.

Okay, but before we get to that part, how many exhibitions have your objects been exhibited in?

I guess four. There were other shows too. Here in Utah, people had stuff like the carburetor piece, which was shown in Jackson Hole and in Salt Lake. It was shown a number of times.

Let's say I wanted to show these works now – do they still exist?

No.

So none of these works exist any more? Only in slides?

Yeah. I gave that disc to a friend of mine he used it for a birdbath. But the Plexiglas can be replicated anytime. It's just sheets of Plexiglas, suspended.

Exactly.

So some of those things could be shown, obviously, it would just be a question of fabricating them, which is just a chore. But they're really beautiful. Just looking at those multiple transparent layers – it gets pretty interesting.

I think so, too. So you were exhibiting these works, and then you decided to move upstate. Why was that?

Well that's where climbing was. And that's where I'd already been based, to a great extent.

So you were already based there? When did you move?
'67 maybe.

On paper . . . I mean, in everything I've read regarding to your work, it says you were teaching at a local art school. Is that true?

Yes, that's right. I moved up there and had been pounding nails, basically, working construction when I was doing this other stuff. Then I became acquainted with a local artist, though I don't know if he's an artist so much as an art teacher at a public school. He taught high school. He figured that it would be good to bring me in (even though I wasn't a certified teacher) part-time to teach these kids art. And that was fun. We did that for 2 to 3 years, part-time. That job eventually ran out, and then the local college – Ulster County Community College – hired me as their instructional resource director. So I set up production for auto-tutorial labs and a video studio and made videos, historical videos and various things for a couple of years. At some point I got tenure, and this coincided with the Rosendale thing.

But you were not living in Rosendale.

I was living near Rosendale.

Okay, so the relationship with you and Rosendale was that you would visit it sometimes.

I lived two miles from Rosendale, and at some point bought a farm there. And that's when I was approached for this political thing. Rosendale was just a really weird mix. I mean, it was either the hippies or the pigs at that time; there was a conflict. There was the old guard there and they couldn't stand hippies. They saw the new generations coming in and they did everything they could to hinder it, including just harassing people. Anyway, at that point I started thinking about what could be done. I wasn't sure, and then somebody approached me about running for mayor. I thought about that for a while because I had never been political; I had never voted even at that point. And suddenly the more I thought about it, the more I realized that it was kind of a good opportunity to see what could be done.

But why did this person approach you to run for mayor?

I guess I had a pretty nice farm, and I had a respectable job at the college. The community at that time was being pretty much run by a small clique of very conservative, backward-thinking people.

And how many people were living in Rosendale then?

I think it was somewhere around 1,800 or 2,000 people – a little community. But the main thing is that there was this little clique running it. And it became clear that there was a division in town. There were two bars, for example, one across the street from the other. The old guard would drink in one of them, meaning the mayor and volunteer firemen and cops, and then on the other side you had a place run by this crazy dude named Bill Guldy, who he wore a big top hat and ran for president and things like that. But he had blues people that he brought in there on weekends, and the college just down ten or fifteen miles away in New Paltz. People would just come in and pack the place on the weekends to listen to blues and live music. It was a pretty nice place. Well one night, while I was mayor, the cops were in their car drinking beer just across the street from the Guldy bar. They were pissed off at all these hippies running around, and at some point when the bar let out, they figured they would just start busting people. The situation ended up with over 400 people in the street, turning over cop cars and burning tires. All the state troopers were called . . . it was a real riot. That's the kind of climate that was going on there.

Sorry . . . I have to recap a little bit. So you lived close to Rosendale. You bought a farm, which I assume was not so expensive back then . . .

No. It was \$45,000.

Which you could afford with your job as a teacher at the local art school.

Exactly.

Did you still think of yourself as an artist?

It's hard to say. I just kind of walked away from it, or from the object stuff anyway. I was thinking about things a lot. I mean, the other thing is, I started looking at this Rosendale thing more and more as a piece of art. It was a strange thing to do, like living a dual life. On the one hand, I was doing this thing, but I couldn't tell people I was doing it because they would think I was using them or kind of manipulating the whole thing.

But was it always intentional for you in the sense that running for mayor would be an artwork?

I think it evolved. I was intrigued by the possibility . . .

So you started thinking of it as an artwork halfway through?

I was interested in the influence aspect of it. I was doing that with the 'seed plants' and had been wondering how far you could take that influence element. As it evolved, it became clear that I could take it pretty far – to the point where I could dissolve this whole goddamn community!

But that was what you proposed when you were elected, wasn't it?

No. It wasn't.

I mean, it wasn't your proposal to dissolve the community, but to improve the reigning hierarchy in the town.

Yeah. It became clearer as I got more into it. I started out pretty naïve, and I didn't know about the financial and legal obligations or anything. But the more I got into it, the more I realized that you could really do a service by eliminating this whole tier of the political structure. Taxable structure, political structure . . . and in some way, benefit people. But before I could do that, I also felt obliged to ensure that a lot of the structural problems in that community were repaired, so we ended up installing a whole new sewer system, treatment plant and water system. A lot of things had to be done;

I had to reconstruct the entire police force, because after that riot it was clear that it was not working.

How did you manage to get elected? What was your strategy, what was your campaign? I mean, nobody really knew you in that town, did they?

No they didn't. I found a running mate, who is still my friend today. I think people were just so pissed off at the power structure in that community and nobody was able to really confront it. So when we showed up (I mean shit . . . I was in my early thirties) we presented ourselves as an option and could actually speak coherently, which was a remarkable change. I think people were just sick and tired of the old guard, wanted something new and nobody else had offered them a viable alternative. And that's why we got elected.

Was it a full time job?

No, no it wasn't. I'd have meetings once a month, the town meeting, and sometimes I would be called for specific legal or financial matters, or issues with the fire or police or sewer departments, or the snow ploughs or the road department. Those people were full time.

What did you get paid every month?

Oh - \$50, maybe \$100. Something like that.

A month?

Yeah.

So it was sort of a volunteer position. More like being a sheriff?

Exactly.

And you did it for about three years.

Yeah.

And you were still teaching art at the local high school?

No, that stopped when I took the job at the college as instructional resource director. The TV studio I mentioned before.

So that was your main source of income?

Yes.

So while you were running for mayor, you got into more local politics and figured that the best way to serve the town would be to dissolve it into a larger municipality?

Yes.

And how did you set up that structure?

I did some research with an attorney. Every town and municipality has a legal advisory board of people. And I started looking into the possibility of dissolution. It really hadn't been done, so we started looking into it and outlined a legal procedure. It had to be a referendum where people in the town had to vote to do it. And of course, having been a community for a number of centuries, there was a lot of opposition and emotional attachment to having this. But once we outlined the whole procedure we just had to lobby it, campaign it, push it, convince people and ultimately it passed by popular vote. It was a pretty exciting time. Once the vote was taken, the town dissolved and there was some clean-up to be done. And at that point my job was done, even though my term hadn't expired, and we moved out West. Another complication was that my wife was allergic to mold, and the Hudson Valley where that town is has an incredibly high mold count because of all the humidity and dampness. So at that point, after my job was finished, we had no reason to stay. So we just moved to Utah.

How far is it from Peekskill?

That's further up. This is south of Kingston, about 15 or 20 miles.

So if I were to go now, to upstate New York, I could go to Rosendale if I would just get . . .

You'd go on the throughway to New Paltz and get off there, then drive west to the main north/south road there, and then drive north for another 10 or 15 miles and you get to Rosendale. The road between New Paltz and Kingston passes right by Rosendale.

So Rosendale became part of a larger municipality called?

The Town of Rosendale.

Exactly. And the village?

A village is a voluntary incorporation, a township and a county are mandatory divisions.

Okay, but if I wanted to go to the same Rosendale where you served as mayor, does it still exist?

It's a main street - a really picturesque old main street. With buildings right up to the sidewalk.

How do the locals define it now? As part of the town of Rosendale?

Yeah.

No one really sees it as a separate, small town anymore?

No. The town of Rosendale is a large area, without a focal point. The old village of Rosendale is the focal point for the town. So that's where the bars and shops and things are.

So if I were to visit, the only difference would be that there is one mayor instead of several mayors.

Exactly.

Going back to your thoughts on this as an artwork - when did this become more apparent?

It literally started out as an interest that grew out of the influence pieces. That was always in the back of my mind, and I wasn't sure how it would manifest itself. But as I started getting into it, I realized that this thing could really become something. I didn't talk to many people about it. My wife knew I was doing this and Paul knew I was doing this - actually, Paul was kind frightened by it.

And Allan Kaprow also knew of it.

Yeah, well he heard about it after the fact. I didn't know Allan at the time at all. You see, I started documenting this pretty early on, every step of the way with the intention of publishing it. I made copies of a lot of the documents, kept correspondence and minutes and meetings and what-not, just so that I had it intact.

But that means that you were super aware. So there was always this agenda.

I wasn't sure when I started exactly how it would unfold, but shortly afterward, I realized that this was going to become something.

Could you talk a little bit more about your influence pieces? What do you mean by that?

The influence pieces grew out of that museum group, where I realized I had a shitload of ideas and some of these other people did not. I realized that there's a fine line when you see another piece of art . . . sometimes it's hard not to be influenced by it one way or another. And it's not necessarily plagiarism. But there's a fine line between being influenced by an artwork and copying it.

But did you actually title it 'Influence Pieces'?

No, I would just give people ideas in conversation - at a bar, at their home, somewhere I would just mention things and 'oh you know, that'd be pretty cool if you did that, and it's that' and you know, as they would do things, I realized that you could influence people and get them to make things. And that also came from teaching.

You know the work of Lee Lozano right?

No.

Because she was in New York around the time you were in New York, in the sixties. She had something called 'Party Piece', which reminds me of your influence pieces in the sense that it's the same idea. She would mention one of her ideas to a failing artist, or an artist that was not successful, and she would see if this artist would copy her ideas.

That's what I was doing. That's what I call my influence pieces.

She always documented or wrote them down. Basically they're instruction pieces.

I guess what it shows to a certain extent is that these ideas were in the air at the time.

For sure.

And so by no means is my stuff unique, I'm just surprised that nobody's done more political stuff. I'm quite surprised that somebody isn't doing more of it. It's hard.

What I find so interesting about this project, and what I'm kind of trying to grasp (I know it was forty years ago) is your intensity. I want to know if it's really about proving a political act as an artwork, or that you are really part of a political system that is incorporated as an artwork later on. You know, these are two different trains of thought, or two different positions that you can take as an individual.

I'm not sure, quite frankly. But one way of looking at it is that they were two divergent streams that merged.

Because later on, you made this publication. Looking at the publication, it's actually not that elaborate. I'm curious as to your selection process, or why you only had these few documents after three years of collecting . . . why only these?

Because it was a chain - a chain of events, and a sequence. So it was only the things that were relevant to the outcome, I think, that were included.

And how many copies did you make?

Oh, not many. I had a little print shop print it. Maybe 100, or not even. It might have been 50.

Really? Because you presented it at LACE art (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions).

What I did was present the boards that I shot to make the film to give to the printer. That's what I showed at LACE.

Sorry, what did you show?

When you do a publication, at least in the old days, you would paste the document onto a white board and then shoot it with large-format, black-and-white, high contrast film. And then you get a negative to take to a printer. You lay the book out, and then they print it. And what I showed at LACE was the boards that I had shot for the book.

And did people show up? Was it an interesting discussion?

Oh yes, I had to give a presentation one night. There were maybe 40 or 50 people at the gallery asking questions, and we talked. It was a lively discussion.

Don't you think it's interesting how your project has led a very intimate life, thinking about how Allan Kaprow wrote about it in his book?

I can see it now. I worked with Kaprow a number of years after that, just trying to help him to get back into the mainstream a little bit and to get some more recognition for his accomplishments. I could see why he was interested in it. It kind of baffled me because I did it and it was done, and I thought it was kind of fun. At some point I said to Paul, 'What's the point of this?' and he said, 'Well you know, not many people are going to see it but it will be talked about in grad schools and stuff, and there'll be people who know about it.' And I said 'Oh, cool!' I'm still surprised that nobody's done more with it.

Do you consider that your last artwork?

Well, yes. I sent you pictures of the two things I've done since. But I kind of got sucked into doing those.

Because you were working with Paul?

Well, yeah. There was the one in Leiden . . . Paul got asked to do a piece there and he said 'This is not me, what would you do?' And so I came up with the burial piece and they really liked that, so they paid me to do it. But again, it's a similar non-art thing.

So it's never been like a real . . . because it's kind of double in a sense. Thinking about it in terms of withdrawal . . . you often talk about consuming and presenting within the context - in this case the market or the art

market – the context that kind of consumes you or presents you, and from which you can withdraw. But in this case, talking to you now, it seems that you were mostly producing. At one point, you were showing in maybe 6 or 7, I don't know how many exhibitions every year or year and half, and then you moved to . . . well you were already staying there, but you decided to become mayor of a town that you were living in. And that became your profession, but at the same time, you had an agenda as an artist. So that's kind of a complex way of dealing with the idea of what an artist's practice is and what withdrawal means, if you see what I mean. Like Lee Lozano, who I mentioned before. She withdrew from the art world as an artwork, though she was very successful as an artist in the sixties in New York. She was really all over the place, so there was a context to withdraw from, and in your case the context had yet to be defined.

Exactly.

So it's more like the idea of withdrawing from a practice as an artist, though it's not black and white in the sense that it's a practice, it's an income, it's a job. Maybe you never withdrew from the idea of being an artist. You, just . . . after your project you went on with your life and then sometimes, when something came up, you continued with it by doing something like this burial piece with Paul. Even though there's maybe a twenty year-gap in production.

Yeah.

If I were to commission you to do a piece now, would you consider it?

It depends. You know, I keep thinking, I've been gravitating back to the phenomenology stuff more and more – visual effects and things. For a while I thought of providing tours to spectacular places around the world, places I felt people needed to see before they die – that kind of thing, but . . .

That's the thing! It makes so much sense that you would do something like that – even regarding your being in the skiing industry, with its relationship between man and nature, and the micro and macro and how one can influence that . . . I mean, why not?

Since moving back to Utah twenty years ago, I've gotten very involved in geology – it's hard not to be. I mean, if you could see where I'm sitting right now . . . I'm sitting about 400 ft. up from a valley floor. The valley is about 10 miles long and 3 miles wide, and I'm looking at 1500-foot towers and red rock cliffs and buttes. Right behind my house is a 10-mile-long cliff, and it's just this Wild West country, that John Wayne movies were made in. All these great places and you can't help but get into geology because the earth is bare here. There's a lot of desert and plants and stuff, but what it does for my experience is that I have learned to deal with time. I do a lot of paleontology, and we go to Wyoming and dig things up that are 45 million years old – early mammals. Then we dig up here, right outside of Moab, and we find 145-million-year-old stuff. I've found footprints that are 250 million years old. So somehow over 20 years I've been able to get my mind around time spans, so that when I say 250 million years or 2 billion years or 4-and-a-half billion years for the solar system, all that makes sense to me and it's not just abstract. So I kind of feel like I'm part of the earth a little more. I know where these rocks came from, and I know where they're going. I know what formed them; I know what the conditions were like when they were formed. It's an understanding that I've really become very aware of and I just appreciate having. And it just takes time to develop that, and that's where my head is now.

And do you think that – or is it just me, because I find myself in the art context – that would invite you to think about those ideas as an art practice? Is that something that you would consider or is it just something that I'm imposing?

I'd have to think about that.

I'm very intrigued by what you just said, you know that you've thought about the idea of having people travel to spectacular places or have them see something in the world phenomenologically that they have to see before they die. If I were to be really practical and say 'Let's do it, I'll advertise it and see if I can find 10 people that want to be on the trip with you,' would you consider it?

Maybe!

And would you consider it an artwork or would you just consider it?

Well, again that line is blurred. I mean, when you look at it from the phenomenal point of view, there's not much difference between making something as a piece of art to show a phenomenal aspect, and taking people to a phenomenal place.

No, but it is an interesting discussion in terms of these things that you're involved with, as to whether they belong to your work as an artist or if they are just things that you're involved with because you've moved on . . . you know, that you're not an artist anymore.

I don't think I'm an artist anymore. I mean, I appreciate good ideas.

But can you explain to me why you don't consider yourself an artist anymore?

I don't know.

Because you're not selling work? Because you're not showing? I mean, does the reason you don't consider yourself an artist have something to do with the market?

No, just at this point if I were going to be making art, it would probably be stuff similar to what Olafur Eliasson is doing. That kind of thing. Nature outdoors stuff – not so much making something, but looking at it through a perceptual twist, almost.

Well I'm still very intrigued by your proposal. Also as a mix. If I look back on the project you did in Rosendale, for example . . . I mean you create a community, and the community agrees to be part of an arrangement. In this case the dissolution, but in the other case it could be that we all agree we're on a Raivo Puusemp roller coaster that's going to show us important parts of the world that one needs to experience.

Yeah.

I can't help but make very direct links to these ideas.

Well, I guess it has always been difficult. Ever since I gave up objects, it has been difficult to think of it as separate. The line's blurred I guess.

Yeah, well clearly.

But I mean, good ideas are still . . . Take Allan, for example. That ice piece I showed you pictures of . . .

Yeah.

Allan described an idea he'd had and he tried to do it in a soccer field in Poland or something I think. And as soon as he said the idea, it just was like a bolt of lightning – I just thought it was one of the cleanest, most beautiful ideas I had ever seen or heard. But he did it and didn't quite understand the physics of it. He constructed this ice thing too tall, and it fell over, so he dismissed the idea. And I said 'No, Allan! This is one of the best ideas I've heard you have!' So I went out and bought blocks of ice, and re-created that piece in his back yard just to show him. And it was absolutely like a Zen piece – I mean, just think of it. A square meter of lawn, and you cut that out and roll it up, and then fill that space maybe two blocks high of ice, and put the lawn back on top of that in its original position, and as the ice melts over the course of two weeks or a week and a half . . . Anyway, the point is that it was such a clean piece; it was almost like a Zen piece. It just settled back and when it was done there was no visible sign of anything having happened there. Beautiful concept.

I'm really quite interested in this idea of, as you said, good ideas.

What they mean as an artist and what they mean for someone that doesn't consider himself an artist anymore.

You know the funny thing is that Paul has a gallery in LA. It's called the Box. And he's had some pretty major shows there. And he's already told me that he wants to give me a show. He'll pay for all the materials; he'll pay for any preparation. He wants to give me a show. It just . . . it's not that there aren't opportunities to do stuff, but I don't know. It just somehow doesn't fit the time right now, or something.

But maybe it shouldn't be a show in that sense. You know, maybe it should be an event, or it should be an experience, or a conversation. Like in the same trend as what you did with Rosendale. It doesn't have to have that white cube aesthetic, or a straightforward presentation aesthetic. That wouldn't make any sense to me. It makes more sense hearing about you skiing all over the country and you know . . . talking about bigger things in life than just a gallery.

Yeah, I agree. When he was telling me about this, I started thinking 'What would I do', and one of the things I came up with, for instance . . . I bought a bunch of Geiger counters. I was fascinated with cosmic rays and corner particles and the fact that they pass through us without even knowing we're there . . . and I was thinking, 'how do you do that?' I wanted to set up a wall of amplifiers around the perimeter of a room and hang a ball of Geiger counter sensors the size of your head in the middle of the room . . . and of course these particles will be passing through there, kicking those things off no matter where you are, and of course the amplifiers would be deafening, and of course the concept – or the fact that most of you, one trillionth is actual mass the rest is all space so we are totally illusion anyway – but the fact that you'd have this ball the size of a head, hanging there and the sounds would just be coming . . . all these particles coming. It would make you realize somehow that there is something bigger . . . and possibly that what we're looking at is an illusion. I mean, all these ideas kicking around out there. It's crazy.

Well, that's good. At least you're still inspired.

Oh yeah. I mean, I think about stuff but whether I actually get around to making any . . .

Well, that decision is up to you.

Yeah, I know.

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Raivo Puusemp (EE/US), with Ben Kinmont (US)

Curated by Krist Gruijthuisen (NL)

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