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AN INTERVIEW WITH RITA DEANIN ABBEY

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV

University Libraries

University of Nevada Las Vegas

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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of Dr. Harold Boyer. The Oral History Research Center and its students and staff in work together with community members to collect, transcribe, and archive oral histories. The participants in this project thank the university for the support given them allowed an idea for opportunity to flourish.

The manuscript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of longwinded, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the narrative. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the original. In several cases, photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White, Project Director
Director, Oral History Research Center
University Libraries
University Nevada, Las Vegas

Produced by: The Oral History Research Center at UNLV – University Libraries
Director: Claytee D. White
Editors: Maggie Lopes, Stefani Evans
Transcriber: Kristin Hicks
Interviewers and Project Assistants: Barbara Tabach and Claytee D. White

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by Claytee White
in Las Vegas, Nevada

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RITA DEANIN ABBEY

RESUME

Updated through September 2015

Rita Deanin Abbey/Short Resume

Rita Deanin Abbey is an Emeritus Professor of Art at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

She taught drawing, painting, and color theory and innovated interdisciplinary courses with the sciences at UNLV from 1965 to 1987. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Marjorie Barrick Museum and the Palm Springs Desert Museum (presently Palm Springs Art Museum), Palm Springs, CA collaborated to present the *Rita Deanin Abbey 35 Year Retrospective*, which was held February 16–March 5, 1988 at UNLV and March 25–June 5, 1988 at the Palm Springs Art Museum.

Abbey received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1952 and her Master of Arts degree in 1954 from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM. She also studied at Goddard College, Plainfield, VT; the Art Student's League, Woodstock, NY; the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts, Provincetown, MA; and the San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA. She was an artist in residence in the studios of Toshi Yoshida, Tokyo, Japan; John Killmaster, Boise, ID; Methow Iron Works, Twisp, WA; Tamarind Institute, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM; the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ; Shidoni Foundry, Tesuque, NM; Bill Weaver Studio, Chupadero, NM; Savoy Studios, Portland, OR; and Carlson & Co., San Fernando, CA.

Abbey, who works in the areas of painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, porcelain enamel fired on steel, stained-glass, and computer art, has had 60 individual exhibitions and has participated in over 200 national and international group exhibitions. She is represented in private and public collections in the United States, the Middle East, Europe, and South America.

Abbey has published several articles in journals, and six books: *Rivertrip*, Northland Press, Flagstaff, AZ, 1977; *Art and Geology: Expressive Aspects of the Desert*, Peregrine Smith Books, Layton, UT, 1986 (co-authored by G. William Fiero); the *Rita Deanin Abbey Rio Grande Series*, Gan Or, Las Vegas, NV, 1996; *In Praise of Bristlecone Pines*, The Artists' Press, Johannesburg (presently located in White River), South Africa, 2000; *Isaiah Stained-Glass Windows*, Gan Or, Las Vegas, NV, 2002; *Seeds Yet Ever Secret, Poems and Images*, Gan Or, Las Vegas, NV, 2013.

She has been the recipient of many commissions and grants and has won several awards, including the Bicentennial Commission for the State of Nevada, 1976; the Governor's Seventh Annual Visual Arts Award for the State of Nevada, 1986; and the Chairman's Award of Excellence at the 1987 *International Exhibition of Enamelling Art*, Ueno Royal Museum, Tokyo, Japan.

From 1988–1990, Abbey fabricated *Northwind*, a steel sculpture (17ft. x 27 ft. 5 in. x 25 ft. 10 in., 7 tons), installed in Las Vegas, NV. Abbey was invited by the Gallery Association of New York State to exhibit four of her works in its 1989–1991 traveling exhibition, *Color and Image: Recent American Enamels*. In 1992, the Markus Galleries, Las Vegas, NV, and the Nevada Symphony presented an exhibition of art by Abbey, which inspired

Virko Baley's *Piano Concerto No. 1*. The world premiere performance of the concerto was held in 1993 at the National Opera House, Kiev, Ukraine. In 1993, Abbey constructed *Spirit Tower*, a cor-ten steel sculpture (20 ft., 11 tons), which was commissioned by the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District for the Summerlin Library and Performing Arts Center. Abbey was invited by the Pacific Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science to lecture on *Art and Geology* at San Francisco State University for the 75th Annual Meeting, on June 19–24, 1994. She was one of three artists from the United States invited to participate in the exhibition, *Enamel Today*, at Villa am Aabach, Uster, Switzerland, June–July, 1995. Additionally in 1995, Abbey completed a series of cast bronze sculptures at Shidoni Foundry, Tesuque, New Mexico. Commissioned in 1998, Abbey completed the *Isaiah Stained-Glass Windows* in 2000, sixteen 10 ft. x 2 ft. stained-glass windows for the main sanctuary of Temple Beth Shalom, Las Vegas, NV. Also in 2000, she completed *Holocaust*, a stainless steel sculpture (14 ft. 3 in., 4.5 tons), installed in Las Vegas, NV. In 2003 her bronze sculpture, *Ner Tamid*, was installed in Temple Adat Ami, Las Vegas, NV. *Snakewash*, a cor-ten steel ground sculpture (62 ft.), was completed in November 2003. Abbey fabricated steel sculptures and cast small and large bronzes from 2004 through the present. In 2006 she completed and installed *Guardian of All Directions*, a stainless steel sculpture (14 ft., 1.5 tons). The Guggenheim Hermitage Museum and Young Collectors Council visited the studio and home of Rita Deanin Abbey, Las Vegas, Nevada October 15, 2006. During March 2008, Women's History Month, Abbey was recognized for her contributions to the Arts by Mayor Goodman and Members of the Las Vegas City Council. *Hidden Pass*, a 2-inch steel plate sculpture (16 x 28 ft. 8 in. x 13 ft., 22 tons), was installed in 2010. Between July 16–December 23, 2011, Abbey exhibited in *Blast from the Past, '60s & '70s Geometric Abstraction* at Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, California. The City of Las Vegas Office of Cultural Affairs, Las Vegas Arts Commission presented Abbey the Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in the Arts on May 25, 2012. *Balanced Arc*, an outdoor bronze sculpture (8ft. 8 in. x 9 ft. x 7 ft. 4 in., 1600 lbs.), completed in 2012, was installed in April 2013. The *Western Museums Association 2014 Annual Meeting in Las Vegas, NV*, toured *The Art of Rita Deanin Abbey* at the Desert Space Museum October 5, 2014. Abbey participated in the fall group exhibition *Macrococosm/Microcosm: Abstract Expressionism in the American Southwest* at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, October 2, 2014–January 4, 2015. Her artwork was also shown in the *Recent Acquisitions* exhibition at the Marjorie Barrick Museum, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, June 19–September 19, 2015. Currently, Abbey is working on new sculptures, paintings, and enamels.

[This version of the interview has been revised and expanded by Rita Deanin Abbey and it replaces the recorded interview.] (2nd revision of Feb. 26, 2015 (final))

It is November 29th, 2014, and I am with Rita Abbey in her home here in Las Vegas. And this is Claytee White.

You have shown me such beautiful art today. So take me back to the beginning. Tell me where you grew up and what that was like, how the family was formed.

My father, Joseph Deanin, came to the United States from Russia when he was sixteen. My mother, Frieda Osman, came from Poland when she was fifteen. They met in New York. I grew up in Passaic, New Jersey and went to public schools. That's the beginning.

How many brothers and sisters?

I had a brother who died when he was four months old, then my sister Sylvia was born, followed by my brother Daniel. I was the fourth child.

What did your parents do for a living?

My mother was a homemaker and she was always there, cooking and taking care of us. She had a lot of talent: she did embroidery, knitting, crocheting. And she was a seamstress, so she was always making clothes and repairing them. My father worked in a clothing factory. He was on the job at seven o'clock in the morning and came home when it was dark. He was a cutter in the factory, working on layers of cloth with a rotary blade and had to stand on his feet ten hours a day, maybe more.

Did he ever own his own business?

He did eventually. He became a partner in a large group. During World War II they had contracts from the government to make military uniforms.

So who influenced you at that point? It sounds like both your mother and father were creative.

My father was a creative businessperson. My mother enjoyed opera, music in general, and art. But she didn't go out very much or have the opportunities to study, so I don't know how she satisfied those interests.

My sister was out of high school when I started first grade and my brother was five years older than I. My sister had an interest in painting and drawing and she used to let me use her art materials when I was a child. When I was eleven she bought me a box set of oil paints and brushes; I still have the box and cherish it. Sylvia was interested in my work and encouraged me as I was growing up.

Is she the first one that saw your talent?

I don't know if she saw me as having talent. She just saw my interest in working. I never had special help at that point. It was just something I did and felt compelled to do.

Tell me about when you knew that this was what you were going to major in in college and this would be your life work. How did you then pattern your life?

I started patterning my life a long time before college, because I wanted to learn as much as possible. I couldn't pursue art in depth in the public schools that I went to. So very early on I arranged to go into New York City. I lived on the outskirts of New York and I would take a bus into the city. I walked from the Port Authority bus terminal on 41st Street and Eighth Avenue, through Central Park. One day in my wanderings I found the French Institute on 60th Street. Since I had dreamed of studying art in France, I went into this building and followed the directory to the Naum Los School of Art on the top floor. I was fourteen years old.

And you were traveling alone?

Yes. I walked everywhere by myself. I showed Mr. Los some of my work, and he encouraged me to

attend his Saturday classes even though they were for adults. I drew from the model and also reproduced classical plaster busts with plastilene. The training was academic. I had a natural ability to work representationally. I didn't go in every Saturday, but a few times a month. That class was the basis of my learning process as a teenager. Actually, that was the only professional instruction I ever had at that point.

And when was the next time that you had some formal training?

I went to Goddard, a small college in Vermont, for two years. My first year art teacher was Al Mullen, and the second year it was George Fuller. They would come to the studio (that I shared with three other art students) to critique our work. Mullen and Fuller had both been students of Hans Hofmann.

So is that why you chose the school?

No. I didn't know much about the school except that it was a small liberal arts college (about ninety students at the time) with an experimental curriculum and educational philosophy based on John Dewey. One of my father's younger brothers, Sam Dinin, had studied at Columbia University with John Dewey. Also, one of my cousins had a friend who was attending Goddard and spoke very highly of their program. The freedom and informality at Goddard allowed me to develop my interests. They used to have a program that encouraged students, after their second year, to study elsewhere for a year in order to have a broader experience in their chosen discipline. I applied to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. I remembered a trip I had taken when I was sixteen, on the way to California to visit my uncle and aunt; the train stopped in Albuquerque, and I knew I would return there one day for some reason or other. I was mesmerized by the view of the desert from the train window. After my year in the art department at UNM, I was encouraged by the chairman of the department to stay in that program for my senior year. I stayed, and after graduation I was offered a graduate assistantship to

work for my Master of Arts degree. I had my thesis exhibition at the Harwood Foundation in Taos, New Mexico.

What did your parents think of you traveling across country? So you were probably, what, nineteen or twenty after your first two years?

Yes, nineteen.

How did they feel about that?

They were permissive. If I wanted to do something strongly enough, they encouraged me. I don't know if my father ever related to what I was doing, but he always allowed me to do what I really wanted to do. My parents weren't restrictive that way.

So were they unusual as parents at that point? So we're talking about...I don't know when you were born. So tell me what time period we're talking about.

I was born in 1930.

So we're talking about the early 1950's?

Yes. We're talking about 1950. But I had a lot of independent interests and I was off on a tangent, I guess, in relation to my brother and sister because I always wanted to go to college and I was the first one in my family to do so.

And you were the baby.

I was the youngest, yes.

I love that story. I love the independence. So I'm going to jump to today and then we're going to go back. So today you have shown me your studio, your home here in Las Vegas, and it is simply amazing. How did this come about?

Well, it didn't come about when I first came here and I never had a goal or inkling that it would come

about. It is something that just developed. Although my husband Robert Belliveau and I had our independent lives, interests, and professions, we wanted to share everything, and we built this home.

In this day and time how does the public get to see your work?

Through private invitation to our home and studio. My older son, Joshua, at one time arranged for groups from different parts of the country and for local residents to see my work. Since I'm in the studio on a daily basis and live in a rural area abiding by neighborhood laws, it is necessary to limit the visitation schedule. For years much of my work was exhibited annually at UNLV's Donna Beam Art Gallery and other venues in the community. On display now in Las Vegas are *Spirit Tower*, a 20-foot tall cor-ten steel sculpture at the Summerlin Library, the sixteen *Isaiah Stained-Glass Windows* in the main sanctuary of Temple Beth Shalom, the bust of Flora Dungan in the Humanities building at UNLV, and a plexiglass mural in one of the University Medical Center buildings on Charleston Boulevard.

Okay. So let's go back to college. So after the two years you moved to New Mexico.

Yes.

Tell me about that period.

On holidays I went back to New Jersey to visit my parents and my family. While still at Goddard I attended the Art Students League summer program in Woodstock, New York. While enrolled at UNM I spent two summers studying with Hans Hofmann in Provincetown, Massachusetts. I went to school all day and worked evenings and weekends waiting on tables, as my schedule allowed. But I was seriously working creatively making art, and attending classes, and getting exposure to people and ideas.

I want to know what happened when you discovered that you had this great talent. When did it dawn on you?

It still hasn't dawned on me.

Yes, it has.

I never thought that way. It was always daily life that I was living and work that I was driven and committed to do. I can't explain it to you. I had a lot of questions, but I never questioned pursuing what I felt I had to pursue. I had a natural discipline and a drive to work hard.

So how did you begin your career? You were talking about the schooling and what happened there.

What was the first professional job?

The first job I had was in graduate school. I was a graduate assistant and taught classes at UNM. At the Hofmann school in the summer I had a monitorship, which meant that I set up the classroom, posed the model, and swept the floors at the end of the day. Then I returned to Albuquerque because I had gotten a letter inviting me to teach at the new Highland High School, and I did that for two years.

At various other times, I rented storefronts that I converted to studios, and I was able to give private classes to help pay the rent.

In 1965 I moved to Las Vegas, and with my master's degree I was able to get a job teaching part-time in the art department at UNLV (called Nevada Southern University at the time). Later I was hired full time and I taught there for 22 years.

Good. So you've talked about when you studied art and with whom. Can you talk about the type of art, the various types that you engage in and how you learned all the different techniques?

I didn't always learn them through academic means. As a child I had done small sculptures in clay and hammered metal, in addition to painting and drawing. And later I started carving wood more aggressively, making heads and figures from fallen tree trunks. When I was in college in Vermont, I started to carve mineral blocks. These were easily available to purchase because they were used on the farms there for livestock. That was my preview to carving stone, actually, because you go about it in a

similar way. Most of that work has been lost. I have some photographs of works from that time.

So work getting lost, how does that happen?

I moved many times. Some things were lost, some damaged in floods and other disasters. I've had many works stolen.

But with regard to materials and techniques, I have always had curiosity about materials and tools and finding out different things about form and space. I'm very attracted to diverse media that I don't know about because I see potential and I'm always eager to try things. So whatever seems challenging to me, I explore.

At the University of New Mexico, I became interested in welding. I had to work in the engineering department because the art department didn't have welding equipment at the time. No females were welding, so I was largely ignored. A few people gave me some advice, but mostly I experimented on my own, and I made all the mistakes I could make before I caught on. I also took classes in printmaking, different aspects of printmaking. Drawing from the model is something I did from a very young age, and I continued to do a lot of figure drawing. Even before UNM I had started to transition into painting and drawing abstractly.

So for an artist, even a very young artist, fourteen years of age, the human body never intimidated you?

Drawing the human body, drawing it or sculpting. No, I just saw it as a part of nature and as a way to develop my visual perception and my understanding of space, form, and color. When I moved west I became very involved with the desert and was very influenced by geology and the landscape – from large-scale vistas to small-scale fragments, plant growth, and wildlife. It was all-encompassing for me, and it still is. And now you see I'm doing work that combines animal form with human anatomy and

geological forms. I'm attracted to arroyos, valleys, cliffs, canyons, rivers.

So I sent you some of the questions that I was going to ask.

Right.

It did not have anything about art and the Jewish community. I am very interested to know about art and the Jewish culture. It's so important as part of the Jewish culture. I don't know how to even ask the question, but I want to know why art has always been so important. I want you to talk about the one piece we saw today, the Star of David piece, if you will, and I want you to talk about the stained-glass windows. So I want you to try to do all that in some way.

In the sculpture called *Holocaust* I tried to express, through abstraction and symbolism, a catastrophic historical event. It evolved with my knowing that the event is painful for the world, not just for people in the culture and religion. I wanted to express a hope for unity and faith for collective peace. The Star of David is split, so that the upper triangle hovers above the base triangle; the floating fragment awaits reuniting with the base triangle. Inside the triangles I used brushed stainless steel so that when the sun hits directly, it produces an intense glowing light. A stepped plane causes an aggressive interruption that symbolizes the catastrophe. But since the other part of the star still hovers, it offers the hope that the disruption will be overcome and the Star of David reunited.

I did two commissions for Temple Beth Shalom. The first, *Wall of Creation*, I made for their synagogue on Oakey Boulevard. It was made with polyester resin and fiberglass. It was a twenty by forty foot mural consisting of twenty-three panels, with a quotation in Hebrew from Psalm 104 along the bottom panels: "O Lord my God, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with glory and majesty. Thou coverest thyself with light as with a garment; Thou stretchest out the heavens like a curtain." I built the mural in an airplane hangar that I rented in Las Vegas. The hangar was being used at the time to build

model homes and stage sets for shows on the Strip. I rented one of the sections of the airplane hangar. It was adequate because the medium I used created toxic fumes and I needed a big space, a high ceiling, and an exit door for ventilation. I had to wear a respirator and be completely covered for protection.

So twenty by forty feet.

Yes. The work was divided into two sections so that the ark that holds the Torah scrolls could be placed in the center. The individual panels were made from polyester resin, catalyzed, and poured into a mold with fiberglass that I painted with resin dyes. The surface receiving the resin had to be completely flat when doing the pours, so I had to build a false floor and make sure its base was perfectly level.

Otherwise, the panels would have warped and would have been impossible to install architecturally.

So when you're building something like that, you have to build a false floor; who does that kind of work for you?

I had a carpenter help me. He became a friend during and after this project. He was very curious about what I was doing. After the initial layout for the mold, I worked by myself.

And so tell me about the second piece of art for the second location of the temple.

That project was for the new Temple Beth Shalom. The commission was for sixteen stained-glass windows on two walls in their new main sanctuary. Before each of these Temple projects I had had vivid dreams about different materials and different images spanning a wall of bright colors, light, and texture. And so I start drawing and working and experimenting with these materials not knowing what the results would be. It doesn't make sense, but the dreams urged me to further explore the transmission of light, with polyester resin and then glass.

Yes, it does. It makes perfect sense.

So I did twelve glass windows on my own early on, before there was any commission. I was totally

captivated by the glass process and the variety of glass products available. When I actually started the second project for Temple Beth Shalom, titled *Isaiah Stained-Glass Windows*, I discovered glass from all over the world. I was fascinated by the different techniques and the different types of glass, the variety of textures and colors.

And what kind of glass did you decide upon?

Well, I used about ten or more types of glass from different manufacturers. I started with the glass from the local factories where I was working on the project, in Oregon. I visited the Uroboro and Bullseye factories in Portland and I saw how they made the glass. In fact, one of them was in the very next building where I was working. It was a pretty exciting and interesting process. I also used glass made by Lambert in Germany, Krosono in Poland, Fremont and Spectrum in Seattle, and Kokomo in Indiana. The finished work contains over 7,000 pieces of hand-cut glass in about 80 different colors.

So tell me why art is so important to the Jewish community.

I don't know if I can answer that question.

I just want you to try.

You want me to try.

Yes.

I don't know. The same reason that art would be important to anybody.

Yes, I know.

I mean, that's a question.

Yes. So last Saturday I attended a panel discussion of African and African-American art and I was surprised—I guess it made me remember how important paintings, African art, African-American paintings are in the black community. And then today to have the privilege to come out to see you

and to see your art that is for everybody and then certain pieces geared to the Jewish community, it's just...I guess I've just been thinking about art recently. So let's leave it there. I'm just curious now probably about art more than I've ever been curious before.

Well, that's good. With regard to art appreciation, my interests are very diverse. I have been exposed to a great variety of art through travel, studying art history, visiting museums. African art, Asian art, and most indigenous art expand my heart and mind. And I feel very lucky, by the way, that I've been able to learn about and appreciate the artistic endeavors of many cultures, because I think it helped me as a teacher – it gave me an appreciation of individual approaches and sensibilities. I tried to get into that aspect of each student so that I could encourage them to find their own voice and their own creativity. Simultaneously I taught methods to develop skills so the students would have the ability to use tools and media in a way that would help them realize their goals. An important part of my teaching was creating interdisciplinary courses with the sciences, and exploring nature, and so I started to team teach with the geology, physics, and botany departments. I did that for many years. And the students were very open to experimentation and the field trips we took, and their excitement showed in the art that they were exhibiting in both the UNLV art gallery and in the science department. They were just very much into discovery of themselves and their environment. Our investigations and the interdisciplinary resources helped to develop visual perception and stimulate creativity.

Earlier you mentioned one student, only because the studio that I happen to have been in last Saturday was Vicki Richardson's studio and she was one of your students.

Yes. And she could either confirm or negate what I'm saying. She would be a perfect person to talk to about this. I know she took my drawing and color theory classes, and I believe she took some of the interdisciplinary classes. She was an impressive, memorable student.

Tell me about the work that you considered your first success whether you were three years old or thirty. What piece was that?

You're going to be very disappointed.

No, I'm not.

Yes, you are, because I don't think of my work that way. I mean I have completed works all my life without judging them as successes and failures. I don't read them that way; I just read them as "onward." I want to explore, challenge myself, be constantly changing and discovering.

Good. But today is there a piece that's more memorable, more meaningful than other pieces?

In the sense that it may have taken me the longest or it's the heaviest. So I would say in that case *Hidden Pass* would be the most challenging one, because it weighs twenty-two tons and it's made of two-inch steel plate and took five years. It necessitated working in a steel plant with overhead cranes.

Twenty-two tons.

It's the biggest so far. So I would not have said that if you didn't corner me into saying something.

Good. I'm glad I did. Tell me some of the major changes, those periods where you made a major change, something in the evolution of your art.

It's ongoing. I think you can see that from the work. And it's still happening. I also always wanted to work in bronze as opposed to fabricating steel or some other metal. The bronze takes a long time to do: the initial form, then casting, metal pours, finishes, and patinas. It requires foundry equipment and specialized workers' participation in the technical aspects. A lot of traveling back and forth to foundries. It has been a whole new experience because I usually work by myself and it's a form that requires a group or at least two or three people to enter into my purpose. It has been very challenging. I have learned a lot from the people I've worked with, especially Bill Weaver, and I'm still learning.

Talk about teaching art. Can you teach art to someone with no real artistic talent? What does a teacher in a classroom do?

The teacher in the classroom—and I can only speak about my own experience. I don't know if you can teach somebody how to teach. It has to come from the personality and commitments of the individual who does have training or experience; it has to come from them. To answer for myself, I try to observe each student's direction and development, and at the same time introduce them to diverse media and tools, and help them develop, above all, visual perception. They have to be able to see what they're looking at. I mean see it, not just look at it, but to learn what's happening spatially, to study and envision relationships. Drawing from the model allows you to see relationships and recreate space, form, and depth, and the dynamics of movement. I always enjoyed beginning classes because I could see that light emerging in the students' work in six weeks, and it was a joy to be able to trigger that kind of perception, and see skills developing using different media. I also taught painting classes and color theory.

So even if I'm not a talented artist, there's probably something in the classroom I could still do and do well.

Because the classroom environment is not going to be threatening to you. It's not going to be critical. It's just going to be encouraging. There's no such thing as making a mistake. That was an approach that I learned was a necessity in order to stimulate the students to experiment, explore, and gain confidence.

So explain your process of creating a new work of art. Whether it's a painting, a sculpture, what is your process?

I'm quiet because I don't think there's just one process. It always has to do with conditions; if I'm working outside, if I'm working in a building, if I'm tired, if I'm sick, whatever. Everything has an impact. I

think probably it does on all activities in life. I'm always trying to reach something I haven't experienced before. I don't like repetition for myself. I don't like to rely on what I've done before. Often I don't know what I'm going to do when I walk into the studio. So there is the dichotomy because you can't ever work in a vacuum. What you've done is always going to have an effect on what you're going to do, but I try to repress that and I try to make discoveries and take risks, a lot of time with materials and process, just to enter into that new experience to create a work. Within a work, problems arise that need to be solved; it's a process of creation and destruction and inventing solutions. Even with commissions, so far I've been very lucky and I've had creative freedom in that regard. I'm not avoiding struggle or spontaneity. In fact, I learn a lot when I'm creating a work while I'm in the process of doing it and it helps me find new meaningful directions; it's not static. I don't know if that answers your question. I'm not sure.

Yes. Are we going to, in the next year or so, be able to go to an exhibit of your work someplace here in the city?

Probably, hopefully.

How does a person who is not an artist, not exposed to good art or to art, how do we learn how to appreciate good art or art?

Try to get the exposure: visit a lot of art venues, art galleries, museums—I mean if there's an urge there—just to look at a lot of art and familiarize yourself with whatever interests you. Exposure is a really good teacher, even if it's only through books and catalogs and reproductions of any kind; I know it's a good way. Art history is a wonderful source. Or enroll in a drawing class. Or just take a sketchbook to the desert and try to draw a cactus or rocks or the outline of a mountain range.

At this point in your career what do you need from the public?

I'm not a very good person to ask that question because I don't market my work. I don't have the

personality for it. There was a time in my life when I thought I could be more active in that regard. A group of us from the Hofmann School started a gallery in New York called the James Gallery, just Hofmann students. When I used to go back east to visit my parents, I would participate. I was part of that initial group. I had two exhibits there and helped run the co-op.

I was always making art, and the best place for me was being in the desert. I couldn't live and work in a metropolis. I just didn't feel it was right for me. For marketing you need people around for contacts and you have to enjoy that interaction and understand the world of the art business. I'm self-defeating in that regard.

Tell me more about the Hofmann School.

Hofmann started out in California when he came from Germany. They have a collection of his art at Berkeley. He started his own school in New York on Eighth Street and then he held summer sessions at his home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. The head of the department at the University of New Mexico, Lez Haas, had studied with him in the thirties, and some of my fellow students at UNM had been Hofmann students. Before I ever even heard of Hofmann, I was doing work that prompted people to say "Oh, you've got to study with Hofmann," because I had started doing abstractions and they thought I would benefit from that interaction.

His classes were very challenging. I found him to be an amazing teacher: his exuberance, insights, and kindness. He used to conduct open critiques that were attended by people in the community as well as his students, held in the studio where he taught classes. It was a big barn and everybody would pile around and the master would come in. It was very thrilling. The students would display their work on easels and he would embark on his critiques. At times he was critical of my work, but ultimately he was encouraging and his criticism was constructive. I often reacted emotionally, but

later I realized he was trying to give me the confidence in myself to keep doing what I was believing in or doing at the time.

As we were walking around today, you used the term *color theory* often. Just talk a little about color and using color. I saw some black and white things and I saw vibrant colors. Just talk a little about color for me.

I wrote a poem about red. "I love red. It does not caress or lead one to guess. Its nature is never uncertain. Oh, to be so unashamed." But I'm not telling you about color; I'm telling you about my reaction emotionally to one color. That's just an isolated incident. Color is a language in itself. I got very involved in the color theories of Josef Albers, Hans Hofmann, and Goethe. Most of Goethe's color theory has not been translated; I used one text in my Color Theory class for reference. For his works on color, I don't think he got the attention and credit that he deserved from the scientific community at the time.

The experimental projects done in my color theory classes were mostly based on the work of Albers. I was able to visit and attend some of his classes at Yale. I had a friend that went to Goddard College who decided to get an additional bachelor's degree and she invited me to attend a few classes with her at Yale, with Albers' approval. I'm lucky to have had that exposure. I got captivated. Not knowing that years later I would draw on that experience for developing and teaching my own class, exposing students to color experimentation. Color Theory was a very challenging course for me to teach, and I think most students had lasting impressions that affected them as well, enhancing their creativity and appreciation of nature. Through the years, many former students have told me of the lasting effect that class had in their lives and the development of their art.

Tell me a little about some of the materials that you use. I've seen wood, bronze, stainless steel. I've

seen everything today. So just tell me about a few of the materials and why you have chosen to use them.

During my first sabbatical, because of my ongoing interest in Asian art, I went to Japan and studied woodblock printing with Toshi Yoshida. He is designated as a National Treasure in Japan. During my second sabbatical I was pursuing a quest that I had for porcelain enamels. I had seen a mural on Route 17 near the George Washington Bridge that at one time made it in *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* The mural was on the façade of Alexander's department store in Paramus, New Jersey, and I went in to the building to inquire about the artist and his technique. I was told that he was Stefan Knapp from Poland, but they didn't know much else about him. At any rate, seeing that mural—it was all fused glass on steel, with blazing color—I never forgot it. From then on I had to study enameling on metal for large scale work. One of my students at UNLV, who was from Idaho, told me that at Boise State she had had a teacher, John Killmaster, who worked with porcelain enamel. I went there to study with him. In his workshop he taught me the methods of grisaille and sgraffito, and I was totally fascinated with these processes. Although I didn't approach work the same way he did, I learned and worked with those techniques. In addition, I used a painterly technique, which comes more naturally for me from years of painting on canvas. Enameling is challenging and exciting, and the colors are stable -- less reactive to ultraviolet light.

To make a finality to that story: I was invited to participate in an international enamel exhibition in Germany at Kunstverein, Coburg. During a dinner reception, I started talking to the man sitting next to me, and he turned out to be Stefan Knapp, whose mural I had seen on the exterior of the New Jersey department store. The coincidence was just so amazing to me. He was living in London and he had come over the channel with his work for the exhibition. I was thrilled and overwhelmed by this

serendipitous meeting. He invited me to work in his studio in England the following summer, which I was eagerly planning to do. But he suddenly died that year, of a heart attack.

You have taken advantage of so much freedom. Most of us when we have the opportunities to do things, we really don't take advantage. You took a sabbatical; you go to study here, and another sabbatical to study something else. And I guess that stems from that independence when you were fourteen years old.

Well, I don't know if I was always independent that way. I think I was curious, driven to work hard, eager to learn and discover things. I don't know how else to explain it. Does anyone really know all the reasons for the decisions they make, or where they are led in life?

Yeah. I just think more of us should do that and we don't.

What is your ideal place to work? What is the studio like that is your ideal?

I almost have that now, but it came much later in my life. For many years I worked out of doors and I had to fight the wind and the sand and the dust and hauling water and the lack of storage, stuff like that. For a while I used an old horse trailer to store materials and paintings. I mean, I think I have run the gamut. A lot of times I rented places. My first studios in Las Vegas, before I had a small home, were a bedroom, then a garage, and then I rented a loft in downtown Las Vegas, on Hoover and Las Vegas Boulevard. That was my first studio that looked like one. But I had to haul water from an adjacent building, until I found a sink in the alley which one of my students installed for me. That was my first comfort, followed by a small wall unit air conditioner. I worked there for many years. I had a huge east window, which I covered with a white bed sheet, letting soft light through. The upstairs of the building had previously been used by Anderson Dairy and currently was being used by a lawyer for file storage. I could only enter the building through the back alley staircase. So I didn't work at night. It was a little

too risky at the time.

Exactly. But now you have the space to do all kinds of things.

I didn't know my work was going to expand and diversify the way that it did. And so I have a mixture of techniques and materials in close proximity, in ways that are not ideal.

Tell me a little about...you have two children. And you have one son who is in the art world in a different kind of way. Tell me about his film festivals that he does.

Joshua started the Las Vegas Jewish Film Festival fourteen years ago. He got a master's degree in production at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. His graduate film project was called *Monkey Park*; it starred Amanda Plummer and Tim Roth.

His first film festival project was CineVegas, appealing to a wide community audience. He could describe that project more accurately. He has also brought the touring version of the Banff Film Festival to Las Vegas. But fourteen years ago he came up with this wonderful idea, and founded and produced the Las Vegas Jewish Film Festival. The films are international, and the depth and the power of them for all these years that I've been attending this festival are outstanding. They are diverse, ranging through intense dramas, documentaries, experimental films, and comedies. The festival greatly contributes to the culture of this community. He has had a variety of venues on both the east side of town and the west side. His main venue now and for the last several years has been the auditorium at the Adelson School in Summerlin. I think it has been tremendously important for the Las Vegas community to have the opportunity and the exposure to the high-quality films that he consistently selects. He has a loyal following and hopefully it will keep growing. Joshua is dedicated to this project.

I think that we have to get the word out.

Well, we are grateful to the people in this community who experience the importance of this project and

do participate. I also wanted to mention that Joshua majored in theater at UNLV—I think that's an important part of his training—and then went to New York and acted in Off-Broadway theater before moving to Los Angeles to attend the American Film Institute.

And tell me just a bit about your other son who's also an artist in another kind of way.

Aaron started playing guitar when he was eleven. He took courses in English and Astronomy at UNLV when he was still in high school. He was and still is interested in almost everything. He got a bachelor's degree in music composition at Pomona College, and studied guitar two summers at the Aspen Music Festival. He went to the University of Southern California for a master's degree in professional writing, but while he was at USC he also participated in their dance department and performed in dance productions. At one point he had a short story published in *Playboy* magazine. Years later he got another master's degree, at UNLV, in biology. For many, many years he danced in Las Vegas in many community and professional productions, though not on the Strip. He also worked as a cytotechnologist in a medical laboratory for eleven years. And he still composes and performs his beautiful music.

I just love it. How did you find this place, this piece of property that we're sitting on today?

Robert and I searched for property for several years. We had actually purchased some land on the other side of town, near Frenchman Mountain. But I had a prognostic dream and I knew that the dream had to do with the land that we purchased. Well, maybe this is not the point here to discuss this.

You may if you like.

An intuition anticipating reality. The dream was about a big body of water that was threatening; I couldn't get rid of the image. We sold the land because of this dream, and a few days later we received a letter from the Water District that they were building a giant reservoir tank for the community directly uphill from the land that we had purchased.

So I think that shows how important intuition is.

I don't know how to explain it.

Yes, that's what I think. So yeah, talk about the power of the desert.

I respect it. I had lived in different national parks and monuments for many years and I learned about flash floods and quicksand and torrential everything. I learned a lot, so that wherever I wanted to really do something I would call a geologist and ask for help in terms of planning anything, which is what we did with this land where we are now.

Oh, great.

But there are always circumstantial things that happen that are not foreseen or intuited, that are beyond one's control.

Yes. I mentioned while we were walking around that the Oral History Research Center/Special Collections at the library is doing a special project in the Jewish community—oral histories, collecting manuscript collections, photographs, newspapers. And this project will probably be ongoing for I would say three, maybe four, even five years. If you're comfortable tell me what role the Jewish religion has played in your life here in Las Vegas.

Religious education was very limited for females at the time I was growing up, but when my sons were small I wanted to give them the choice of whether or not they wanted a bar mitzvah. And they both did; they both studied and they each had a bar mitzvah. Joshua has had an ongoing interest in the Jewish community and has participated in ways that also benefit the general community. I was focused on creating art and also teaching full time, so I didn't actively participate, not in the way that I did when both of my sons were involved. So I don't know. That doesn't sound very helpful.

It does. We find that there are people in the community who participate one hundred percent;

others, none. And we're talking to just everybody about these experiences with Jewish religion, Jewish lifestyle, cooking, all of that here in Las Vegas. So I appreciate that. I appreciate it so much that you gave your sons a choice.

I did. They made their own choices.

And then that you worked. You were actually commissioned as an artist by the temple.

I took that very seriously. I did a lot of research and reading to resolve my designs and the quotations that I incorporated into the art. Everything was done with a searching mind and an open heart. I wanted my projects to work—I mean for everybody—religiously and artistically, spiritually, the whole range of feelings. I felt dedicated to each project.

This is perfect. Thank you so much.

Claytee, I want to thank you. I want to thank you for being so generous with your time and for the feeling that you communicated to me by just being here and having the interest in my work and my family. That's a precious gift.

I want to come back. I want to come to an art exhibit. I want to interview both your sons. I just think that sometimes we forget how much we give to a city and I think you've given a great deal.

Thank you again.

[End of interview]

What and who have had the greatest influence on your work?

Nature has had the greatest influence on my work. I have explored desert landscapes and have been deeply affected by rock formations, vistas, sunsets, plant and wild life, rivers, the colors and textures of canyons. These places communicate and resonate with my own nature.

As a child I studied with Naum Los at the French Institute in NYC on Saturday mornings. He provided most of the materials and the models for drawing and sculpture and was very encouraging because I demonstrated an ability to do representational work. I became aware of Hans Hofmann when I attended Goddard College in Plainfield, VT because the teachers I had there, Al Mullen and George Fuller, talked about Hofmann. When I transferred to the University of New Mexico, Lez Haas, the chairman of the art department at that time, and several of the students, had formerly studied with Hofmann. I became more aware of abstract art and had an opportunity to study with Hofmann in Provincetown, MA during the summers of 1952 and 1954. He was the most remarkable and memorable teacher I ever had.

What was Hans Hofmann's reaction to your work?

Although he was an encouraging and approachable teacher, I found many of his critiques of my work penetrating enough to bring me to tears after class. Nevertheless, I was eager for his criticism and years later interpreted his directness as his way of strengthening confidence in my own vision. I have always felt dissatisfied with my work, but an underlying driving force to make art has kept me on course. Hofmann showed sincere interest in his students and generously communicated his concepts. He once wrote a very flattering recommendation for me in his own hand. His magnanimity in taking the time and the trouble to do that had a major impact on me and I continue to treasure that letter.

What was your experience studying in Japan and traveling in China like?

I have always had a fascination and an interest in Asian Art. During a sabbatical, in 1977, I had an opportunity to study in Setagayaku, Tokyo, Japan with Toshi Yoshida, a National Treasure. He was an exceptional artist and gentle human being. I worked in his studio at his home where Mr. Yoshida instructed traditional wood block printing. A family master printmaker was present to run the studio press. This experience expanded my appreciation and understanding of the medium. While in Japan, I was able to visit many museums and travel to extraordinary temples and gardens. Unexpectedly, I came across a retrospective exhibition of Shoji Hamada's pottery. In Kyoto, the holy building, "Hall of Thirty-Three Bays" contained some of the most powerful and mystical sculptures I had ever seen.

My husband was lecturing in China in 1988, and although I didn't have an opportunity to personally connect with an artist in China, I spent time traveling and visiting museums. The most memorable experiences were visiting the Forbidden City museums in Beijing, the bronze

treasures in Shanghai, the terra cotta warriors of Emperor Qin Shi Huang in Xian, the Great Wall, taking a river trip on the Lijiang River amidst the Karst formations, exploring the caves in Guilin, and getting lost often and for long periods wherever I went by myself. Visiting China and Japan, as well as my trips to Hong Kong, were dreams come true.

When are you the most productive?

I try to work every day while juggling the necessities of daily living. There are always several projects in my head, developing in my studio, at a friend's studio in New Mexico, or a metal fabrication plant in California. I work in diverse media and although I stay focused on a work in progress, periodically, I may take breaks to work on another piece in a different medium. For instance, after many hours of going up and down a ladder working on a large clay sculpture, I will then sketch or carve wood. When I fire up the kiln to do vitreous enamels, I work without interruption because of the nature of the technical procedures.

Why do you work with so many different media and which medium do you prefer?

Through the years other artists have told me that I needed an easily identifiable style in one medium to achieve recognition. At my present advanced age I have to acknowledge there may have been truth to that advice, although very early in my career, I knew that "style" was not and would never be the basis of my quest. I'm not sure I understand my need to work in diverse media. My curiosity has always led me to experiment since I am strongly attracted to textures, colors, the surface resistance and pliability of materials. Although I never formally studied many of the techniques that I use, they interest and challenge me and I continue to explore and to learn new skills. I often feel self-conscious about the diversity when it's brought to my attention since it is just natural for me to pursue demanding challenges and to keep expanding my vocabulary and search. It would be very difficult for me to say which medium I prefer. Perhaps, it's just the one I find myself currently using.

How do your moods affect your work?

I have not worked when my sons or I have had medical problems. When my children were small, by some miracle, I found ways to accommodate their needs and schedules, teach and continue to work in the studio. It was all done one day at a time. There was no other choice but to keep working on projects. I can't honestly tell you how moods, illness, headaches, grieving, devastating or happy experiences affected the outcome of individual art works. The process seems mysterious and predetermined. Inexplicably, I have produced some exuberant, colorful images when I remember being depressed and I am surprised to hear life affirming interpretations of these works. The finished work, independent of the artist, makes its own statement and evokes its own moods.

Please explain your creative process.

My approach to making art is predominantly intuitive rather than analytical. While exploring the intrinsic nature and possibilities of the materials, images begin to emerge with the act of creation. During this process of developing the work, I then go back and forth between critical analysis of

organizational relationships and introspection. Much time is spent in identifying and solving problems and alternately allowing creative forces that feel "right" determine the direction. There are those magical times when the work harmoniously comes together without me, my hands by themselves following unknown dictates and knowing what to do. This flow of energy is devoid of self, effortless, yet in control. I am more interested in the search and discovery aspects of making art than I am in repeating what I have done and already seem to know. Even large scale works change to evolve in a more vital rather than mechanical way. Since artists are the product of their times, have predecessors, and do not work in a vacuum, the self-conscious realization that to feel "free" in the creative process is an illusion, forces me to grapple with my limitations and strive harder to reach my inner voice.

What are the greatest challenges associated with being an artist?

For me it was and still is to keep working. The demands and distractions of every day can consume creativity and can lure one into making excuses not to work. It's especially difficult when you want to live a full and responsible life involved with family and close friends. I can only speak for myself, but I believe that inclusive life experiences, especially raising children and being in a loving relationship, enhanced my sensibilities, not only to others, teaching, and my environment, but especially to my work.

Another challenge is to be honest with yourself. One has to have creative space and self-discipline in order to pursue a path with intrinsic meaning. We are all products of history, culture, the educational dictates of our time, and the innate limitations of our abilities and genetic make-up. But the deeper pitfalls are the influences of established expectations and self-limiting compromises on one's creativity. With luck the art scene can reward one's own direction, or take an artist way off the search for his deeper originality and individual course.

One of the biggest and most difficult challenges is to find a way to stay focused in order to continue to pursue personal creative goals in a world that is full of conflict, hunger, and disasters that pull you into chaos and sadness. The realities and sensationalism of daily news cannot be ignored and how to remain connected in a positive way, individually expressive, and validated in the pursuit of self-interested accomplishments are daunting tasks. How to live your life meaningfully and sanely?

Is recognition important?

Every productive individual wants to contribute to society in some way and to be accepted. As for art, so much that gets seen and is "out there" has to do with marketing rather than quality, so this becomes a very complex issue. Personal compromises can be made, but not every artist has the promotional skills or drive, the time, the personality, choices, or opportunities to do what is required to gain personal acclaim and commercial success. On a more personal level, my energies have always gone into teaching and making art rather than promoting it. My personality and the level of comfort I need by working anonymously dictate being an "outsider." My goals were to live in the desert, raise my sons, become the best teacher I could possibly be, and make art unencumbered by current trends. Having had a University teaching position allowed me the opportunity to pursue these goals. Perhaps, in the long run, I may have been on a

self-defeating course as I feel badly that my family will inherit the burden of a large body of my art work.

How would you like your work to be received by the public?

While making a work of art, I don't think about the effect it will have upon others. However, if I am commissioned to do a public work I consider all aspects of my responsibility without compromising my integrity and vision of the piece.

The question implies that I may have an underlying purpose to the art that I am making in order to channel or evoke a specific reaction. The works do not have one meaning or literary or political intent. They exist only in the realm of an aesthetic experience, hopefully stimulating familiar or new conscious and subconscious ideas and feelings. The way things form, develop, and work together physically and imaginatively are part of an individual artist's identity and contribution. It's a wondrous thing if a viewer can discover new experiences and relationships from an art image and become excited, joyous, haunted, saddened, contemplative, more perceptively alive to his/her sensations and the surrounding world.

Did teaching art affect the evolution of your work?

Did the evolution of my work have an affect on my teaching? There has to be an advantage and valid interchange in the artist/teacher role. I felt that the ongoing development of skills and perceptions in my own work enabled me to become a better teacher. I more readily recognized and understood developmental differences in others, encouraged and respected the process of each individual's creative growth and self-expression.

Introducing students to new ways of seeing their environment through the development of interdisciplinary courses was an important challenge and basis of my teaching. At the same time we were investigating the fields of botany, geology, physics, color theory, and anatomy, colleagues in the sciences with whom I was team teaching, were exposed to new experiences and relationships to art. These courses captivated student interest and stimulated their creativity and perception. By giving them new resources to explore for subject matter, they became more self confident in their own vision and developed deeper insights into themselves, their art, and their environment. Art became a more intrinsic and meaningful part of their daily lives. Although, the research I did for my classes expanded my students' knowledge base and my own, in my studio I was always on a course unrelated to classroom projects. Many of the experimental materials that I worked with, such as resins and fiberglass, were health hazards and too risky to use in the classroom.

In general, teaching enhanced my organizational skills and ability to verbally express esoteric feelings and perceptions about art. It also motivated research and writing for publication.

How do you relate to other artists' work?

I feel fortunate to have an appreciation and attraction to a multiplicity of styles and media in art throughout history and in contemporary movements. I already spoke about Asian art. I am also

strongly attracted to Cycladic, Etruscan, African, Oceanic, and the art of the Northwest Coast. The list is extensive. In college, Botticelli, Mantegna, Brueghel, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Rodin, Rembrandt, Hals, Vermeer, La Tour, Zurbaran, Van Gogh, Kollwitz, The Impressionists and Post Impressionists, the Expressionists, the Suprematists, all became life-long sources of admiration and aesthetic appreciation. I have always had a fondness for Gorky, Kandinsky, Miro, Tamayo, Soulages, Rothko, Kline, and Hofmann and the sculptures of Maillol, Manzu, Lachaise, Noguchi, David Smith, Lippold, Chillida, DiSuvero, Serra, Bontecou, and Goldsworthy. When I see an artist's work that I may not personally relate to, the teacher in me looks at technical execution and for other aspects of composition and self-expression. I can be accused of indiscrimination, but I embrace and examine differing concepts and possibilities.

What makes a work of art interesting?

I may have already answered this question to some extent when mentioning an art object that can awaken familiar or new conscious and subconscious feelings and ideas. A work that can expand your world, your vision, and appreciation of life would obviously be more than just interesting, it would be an extraordinary achievement. Sometimes, discovery and insights come from small, sensitive, unassuming, intimate renderings, as well as from monumental works which can strike formidable blows of cognition. Also, an original, sincere, personal expression, executed by either someone who is naive and untrained or highly skilled and educated, can have an equal aesthetic force and impact. So much of what determines an interesting work of art has to do with the individual receptivity and experience of the viewer. Personal tastes are strong determining factors.

How do you distinguish representational from abstract art?

In college we were taught that the appearance of recognizable subject matter, such as a figure, tree, etc., is considered representational. As the object becomes more simplified, flatter, less obvious, by stripping away the form to its essential structure and by merging it within the picture plane, it becomes abstracted. A work is considered non-objective when movement, form, shape, color, texture, geometry, the language and elements of visual composition, are treated as the subject matter. The plastic possibilities of the elements and materials are explored and experienced through intellect and/or imagination. The magic of light, space, and intuition can be infused and interrelated in dynamic and unexpected ways to erase academic divisions. There is a spirit that transcends categories and judgments and each artist has to search and pursue his own.

What is the purpose of art?

Theorizing the purpose of art enters the realm of aesthetics, philosophy, art history, culture, psychology, art criticism. I think about the purpose of life, which is the same question for me because art is the context of my mind, my heart, and daily life. It seems to be in fragile balance, since what is vital for the importance and meaning of life for me is obviously not a necessity for individuals deprived of food, shelter, medical care, and the individual freedoms that are taken for granted in affluent societies living in peace. Feeding the body and the spirit should be everyone's right.

The vast variety of edifices and art objects that have luckily survived throughout time bestow beauty and enrich our lives, which are two strong purposes of art. Artistic expression and talent have endured to elevate our aspirations, have documented knowledge gained from growth and defeat, and have communicated feelings and visions shared by all humans regardless of national and linguistic differences. Altruistically, I feel the cultivation, the sharing of all the visual and performing arts have and will continue to foster understanding and acceptance. Through an emphasis of our common needs and communication of our creative abilities, our love of nature, and dependency on the environment, we can save the planet in our own time and for future generations.

When is a work of art complete?

There is a struggle in the development of a work which enables deeper involvement and experience. This process develops with the factors of risk taking, construction, destruction, and reconstruction. Choices can be painful and are made at many levels of awareness. It's difficult to move from subjectivity to objectivity with certainty especially when reflection offers a multitude of possibilities. In working this way how does a work stabilize into its final most meaningful statement? It's a rhetorical question because every work in terms of its time frame contains the artist's limited imaginative abilities and the limitations of his materials. These realities characterize and complete a work. I have often spent two to four years on individual sculptures and paintings, or on a series of engravings or drawings. Some works, which stand on their own, may also seem to require the components of several related works to arrive at a more complete or satisfying statement. After several weeks of intensive changes on an enamel, I might begin to see the light or blow it because of a technical miscalculation or bad judgment. Process and materials speak loud and are forgiving up to a certain point. I am reaching for some quality out of range in each piece, some new perception that I believe is lurking beyond my immediate ability or understanding. It's a very difficult and frustrating confrontation. If I listen, the work speaks to me and tells me when to stop. Then there will be no further place to take it physically or emotionally and my mind begins to ready me for the next piece. The current work may be finished, but the process is ongoing.

What is the relationship between color and form?

Optically, color has intrinsic and multiple characteristics that can sometimes be deceptive. Its interdependence with shape and placement in a composition are determining factors for the interactions and dynamics of the space that is defined. Individual anatomical differences determine ways of seeing and there are discrepancies in interpreting the physical "facts" and psychic effects of color experience.

Although I have done research and have taught the color theories of Hofmann, Albers, and Goethe, I have not consciously applied these theories in my own work. In painting, my color choices and approach to mixing colors are intuitive and experimental. I develop form and space through the use of color and emphasize movement to enhance the plasticity and unity of compositional relationships.

Adding chemical colors to bronze sculpture is often a problem for me. Ideally, patinas will retain the look and feeling of bronze, accentuate the depth and volume of the forms, and enrich the textures on the metal. The forms themselves, without added color, interplay with ambient light to create color gradations of light and dark. Patinas first applied to heated metal can successfully achieve the integration of form and light. But when hot or even cold waxed, the patinas alter unrecognizably, become muted, or may even disappear. It's very frustrating to see your efforts and the colors vanish while they are so vividly still held in your memory. It's a learning curve that requires perseverance and skills gained from experience.

What role if any does symmetry play in your work?

Asymmetry is more important to me than symmetry. I am fascinated by the challenge of integrating opposites, contrasts, contradictions, etc. This concept applies to textures, light and dark juxtapositions, size, divisions of space. The counter positioning of qualities creates tension, enhances the dynamics of relationships, stimulates optical forces, reorders structure to transform space. The projection and recession of planes, the positive and negative space, become more interrelated and alive. Harmonious compositions arrived at through the interaction of dissonant features elicit new responses and break through familiar boundaries into new realities.

Even though asymmetry is a preference for my own work, I find the symmetry in Mandalas, Islamic art, and American Indian art interesting and aesthetically appealing.

How do patterns in nature influence your work?

When I introduced microscopic examination of plants and rock thin sections to my classes, most of the students stayed true to the appearance of the patterns and colors they observed in the microscope. With the increased scale of the canvas, instead of recording what they saw, some were able to invent and focus on more creative interpretations of color, shapes, and texture. These results were exciting.

As yet, I have not used a scientific approach for my own work. I can hardly absorb the infinite variety in nature with my naked eye. Going on a hike is replenishing because I am bombarded and surrounded by new shapes, forms, textures, colors, the endless relationships of objects and vistas. Everything is animated in repose, yet dynamically relating and changing depending upon your position and perspective in the moment. Even the footprints of animal tracks in sand contrast to the components of scattered rocks with a sense of necessity and belonging. I absorb these experiences and take them with me as expanded sensibilities which I hope enter into my projects.

What is the difference when painting outdoors instead of in the studio?

For many years I did paint and sketch outdoors. I was living in trailers in National Parks and hauled horse trailers to the areas I designated as my "studio" in order to store my canvases and paints. I kept one eye out for snakes, the other on my babies, a foot on the easel and a hand on the canvas to stabilize them in the wind. There were adversities, but the light and space were

inspiring and overwhelming. Even when sketching, which is logistically a little easier, it is impossible not to be humble and conscious of your own unimportance in the larger space of geological time. Nature is the ultimate artist. So, it was necessary to observe, absorb, and then look away to focus on the canvas or the paper and work from the feeling of the experience and the materials. Everything in the landscape changes again when you look up because your vision is more acutely startled by the vastness and complexity until the selection of a particular form begins once more to humanize the possibilities. Often now, when I return to my studio after a hike, I hold the memory of my experiences to create a series of drawings or images based on those impressions. They come from deep feelings, forces of energy, and moments of awe and quiet. I try to find and shape the rhythmic connections.

After many years of working outdoors, in "extra" bedrooms, porches, rented rooms, garages, and in the storage areas of office buildings, I finally have the studio of my dreams thanks to my generous husband. I treasure the space and the opportunity to have my tools out and ready to use. Separate areas in the studio are designated for different media making it easier to go from one project to another. Also, I can work large scale on paintings and sculptures and have only to consider the height of the exit doors. After living through a devastating flash flood coming through my studio in 1990 and since then, even after having protected the property with a flood wall, I don't know as yet how the creature comforts of a studio have affected my art. Nothing can ever be taken for granted. I do know that I have my own space for now to use for solving problems and concentrating on my projects. Since I am not a conceptual artist, it's important to me to have an interior space that protects my materials, art work, and sustains my search.

How have you grown and what have you learned as an artist over the years?

I don't believe I can get into a definition of what constitutes an artist's "growth." Only the art itself, not words, can define the reality. It's easier to observe change without value judgments. And over the years my work continues to change. I haven't resolved feelings of failure and still try to understand what constitutes success. My hard work hasn't supported my livelihood, but it has defined who I am, what I do and love, and has nourished my spirit.



Family Photos

Left: Aaron Abbey performing classical guitar, 1973. Below: Aaron Abbey, Rita Abbey, Robert Belliveau, and Joshua Abbey at the Dedication Ceremony for Spirit Tower.





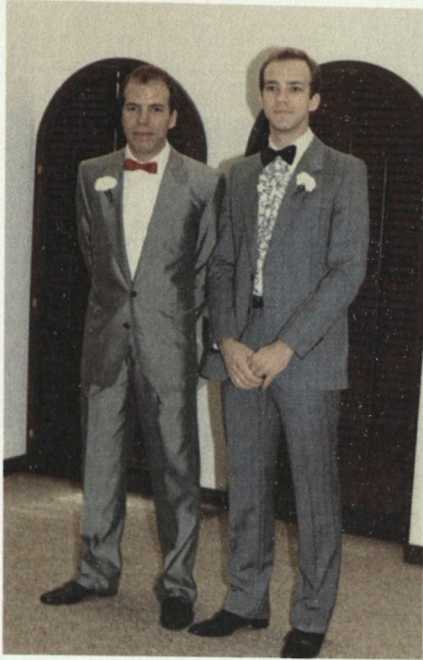
Above: Rita and Robert's Wedding, April 28, 1985: Joshua Abbey, Aaron Abbey, Rita Abbey, and Robert Belliveau. Below: Aaron Abbey rehearsing *Sunrise Song*, that he composed, for Rita and Robert's wedding.





Above: Joshua and Yve's Wedding. Below: Joshua and Yve's Wedding: Robert Belliveau, Rita Abbey, Joshua and Yve Abbey, and Aaron Abbey.






Joshua and Aaron at Joshua's wedding.



Karen Kita and Aaron Abbey.



ARTWORK



Rita Deanin Abbey © 1971

Wall of Creation

Polyester resin and fiberglass

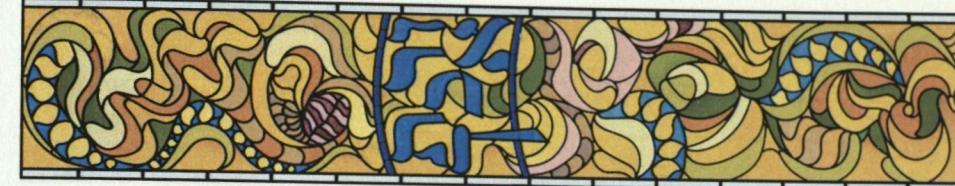
1970-1971

20 x 40 feet

Installed in 1971 at the former location of Temple Beth Sholom on Oakley Blvd., Las Vegas, Nevada
20 ft. x 40 ft. (H x W) resin and fiberglass back-lit translucent mural, using resin dyes, polyester resin, and fiberglass.

Rita Deanin Abbey © 2000
Isaiah Stained-Glass Windows

“Then will break forth, as dawn your light,
And your healing will grow quickly,
And your justice will go before you...”
Isaiah 58:8

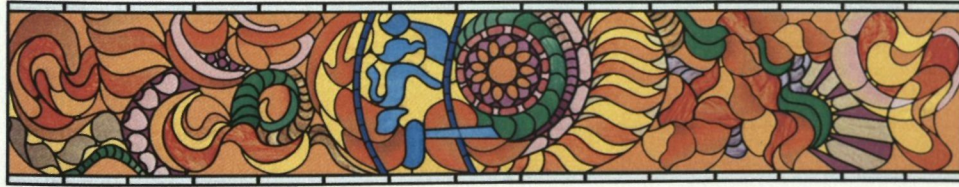


Isaiah Stained-Glass Windows 1-8 (read from right to left), 2000, 10 x 2 feet (East Wall in the Sanctuary of Temple Beth Sholom, Las Vegas, Nevada)

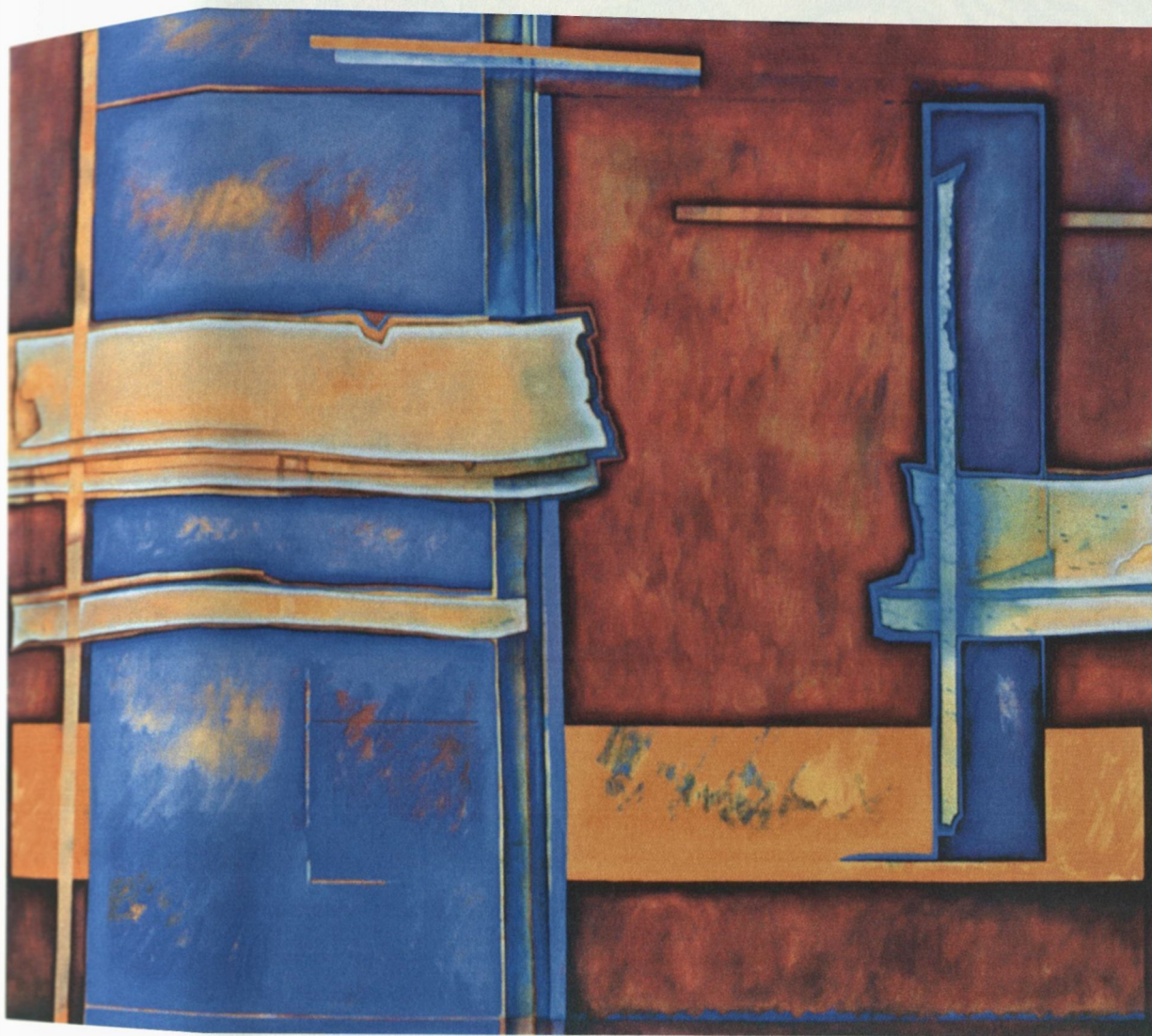
Rita Deanin Abbey © 2000

Isaiah Stained-Glass Windows

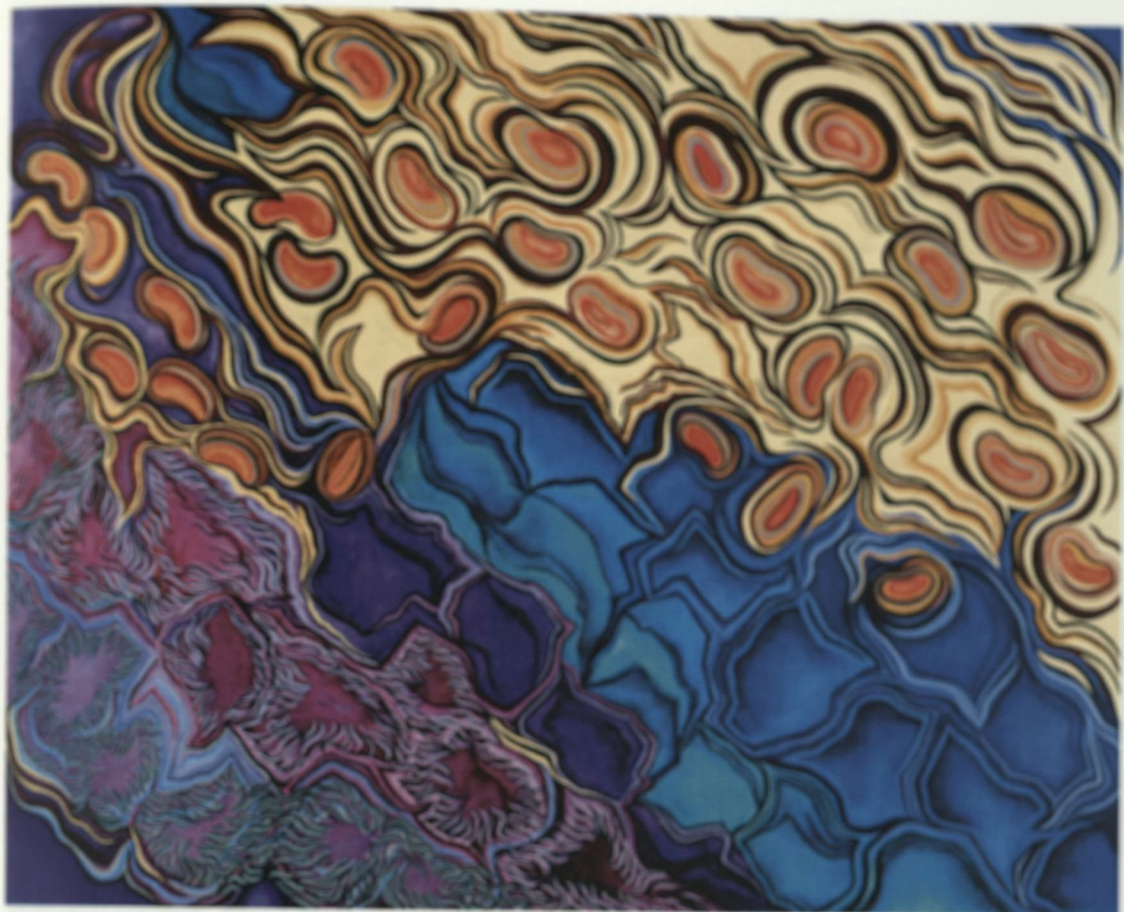
“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
And the honor of God has risen upon you.”
Isaiah 60:1



Isaiah Stained-Glass Windows 9-16 (read from right to left), 2000, 10 x 2 feet (North Wall in the Sanctuary of Temple Beth Shalom, Las Vegas, Nevada)



Temple of the House Acrylic on canvas 70 x 78 inches Rita Deanin Abbey © 1981



Regeneration Acrylic on canvas 76 x 96 inches Rita Deanin Abbey © 2007

My Heart 4-75 Porcelain enamel fired on steel 24 x 24 inches Rita Deanin Abbey © 1996



July Flood, A -75 Porcelain enamel fired on steel 24 x 24 inches Rita Deanin Abbey © 1990



Fossil Transitions, B-10 Porcelain enamel fired on hammered steel, black walnut carving
32 ½ x 65 5/8 x 2 inches (each section 16 ¼ x 65 5/8 x 2 inches)

Rita Deanin Abbey © 1996



Spirit Tower Cor-ten steel (plate and boxed plate) 20 ft. x 12 ft. 10 in. x 15 ft. 3 in. (H x W x D)

Concrete base: 2 ft. 8 in. x 14 ft. x 14 ft. 11 tons

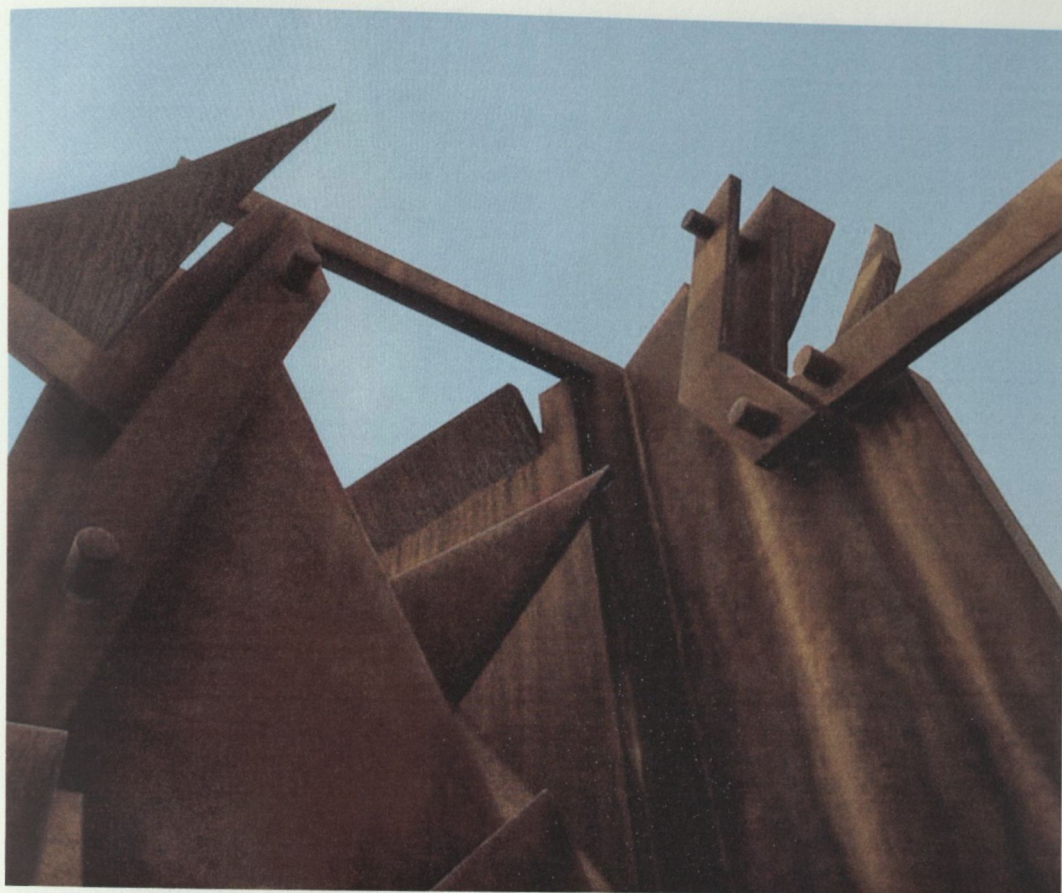
Rita Deanin Abbey © 1993



Spirit Tower (detail) Cor-ten steel (plate and boxed plate) 20 ft. x 12 ft. 10 in. x 15 ft. 3 in. (H x W x D)

Concrete base: 2 ft. 8 in. x 14 ft. x 14 ft. 11 tons

Rita Deanin Abbey © 1993



Spirit Tower (detail) Cor-ten steel (plate and boxed plate) 20 ft. x 12 ft. 10 in. x 15 ft. 3 in. (H x W x D)

Concrete base: 2 ft. 8 in. x 14 ft. x 14 ft. 11 tons

Rita Deanin Abbey © 1993



Balanced Arc Bronze (fabrication) 8 ft. 8 in. x 9 ft x 7 ft. 4 in. (H x W x D) 1600 lb.

Rita Deanin Abbey © 2012



Balanced Arc (detail) Bronze (fabrication) 8 ft. 8 in. x 9 ft x 7 ft. 4 in. (H x W x D) 1600 lb.

Rita Deanin Abbey © 2012