

Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.

Interview with Walter Hyleck

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Interview conducted by Greg Willihnganz

WILLIHNGANZ: This is Greg Willihnganz and I'll be interviewing Walter Hyleck today at his home in Berea, Kentucky for the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association. Thank you Walter for . . .

HYLECK: Good morning.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . welcoming me, good morning. Let's just start by talking a little bit about your history and . . . your growing up and how you got into the field that you're in and the work that you do. So . . . maybe you can just . . . tell me a little bit about where you grew up and . . . how that affected your choice to get into the artistic endeavors that you've done.

HYLECK: I was born in Wisconsin, and raised in Wisconsin and Northern Minnesota, Duluth, Minnesota. We . . . moved to Duluth, Minnesota in the late fifties, early '60s, and . . . became quite aware at the University of Minnesota, Duluth and the Art Department there. When . . . as a high school student we made field trips to that University Art Department, I was really quite taken by the energy in the ceramic department, and the gentleman who was coordinating that department at the time, who had a significant international reputation. His name was Glenn C. Nelson and he wrote one of the very first textbooks . . . about ceramics. My high school art teacher was a . . . a, a graduate of that University and he made sure we went up there often and schmoozed with the, with the university students. Actually, I joined that University, or, or went there for my undergraduate degree after a stint in the Air National Guard and, in the Air Force in the early and mid sixties, not intending to be in art at all, actually intending to be in architecture, and found that architecture was, was really not my calling at all, and . . . I was having some success in, in the Art Department, and they offered me a scholarship to join that Department, although I had, had been quite enamored of the ceramic field initially, I actually worked in painting and printmaking and pursued painting, printmaking and art history as, as a primary endeavor, and . . . it was only at the last minute when I decided I wanted to go on to graduate school, and I wanted to teach at the un . . . university level, that I decided that maybe I should go to graduate school in ceramics instead of, you know, in, in printmaking. That story is, is really rather peculiar and, and I don't know that it has a whole lot of merit here, but it's one of those cases where . . . you do something because you're good at it and then discover being good at it isn't necessarily a life calling, and [Chuckling], and . . . when it comes down to spending your life doing something, you find that you attach yourself to people that you truly enjoy rather than . . . an activity that you're, you're particularly good at. But . . . when I made that switch to ceramics, Glenn Nelson said, "well, I know what graduate school you're going to," and, and at that time . . . students really didn't choose their own school, their mentor chose the school for them and . . . wrote recommendations and the next thing you knew you had a letter saying that that school wanted you to come. So I found myself going from the University of Minnesota in Duluth to . . . New Orleans and Tulane University where I did my graduate study. I think in hindsight that was probably not a very wonderful choice, I should have picked one of

the other ones that I was thinking of, but . . . New Orleans was certainly stimulating and, and it altered . . . life directions for both myself and my wife. When we went there in . . . 1965, New Orleans was just integrating its school system and . . . as a result was very desperate to find teachers who would be comfortable in integrated classrooms. I guess I could say tolerate into the, integrated classrooms, and finding this young woman with a quote, Minnesota education background as soon as she wrote them and said, do you have any teaching positions; my husband is a graduate student at Tulane. They immediately snapped her off, so she had one of the very first integrated classrooms in, in New Orleans for the three years that we were there. When we were ready to leave . . . Tulane and, and New Orleans, we thought of ourselves as going North and, and not staying in the South, although we had come really to love the city—we hated it at first but over the time that we were there we, we became to love the city and the people, and the culture, and the, and the uniqueness of that environment. We still felt a, a very natural affinity to, to the North. You have to understand that Duluth, Minnesota is like living in the arctic circle [Chuckling] and [Chuckling], as, as such, if you don't have two distinct seasons, that is spring for three months of the year, and winter for the rest of the year, you'd really feel shortchanged, and . . . we made every effort to, to go North without realizing that a graduate degree from . . . from a southern Harvard meant that you really didn't have a lot of connection to the North anymore, and, and there was a, a tremendous bias I found on the part of northern universities against southern education, and I could have had a degree from Mississippi, and it would have been the same, the same issue, I think we understand that certain attitude today. But anyway . . . this, this—I got two . . . real . . . interesting letters, one from the University of Tennessee and one from this very odd little college in Kentucky called Berea, which I had never heard of and . . . both wanted interviews and . . . we, my wife was, as I said, still teaching there, so she couldn't come on the interview, but . . . I flew up to Lexington and, and flew into this beautiful airport that is surrounded by wonderful horse farms, rented a car, and drove on the interstate that ended at Berea. It just...I-75 just stopped at Berea and . . . went into this little town that, that didn't seem to exist except for the college. There was just nothing there except the college. I spent two days interviewing there and discovered . . . a tremendous amount of potential, a, a rich craft history and, and art history as well as a fine . . . facility, a facility that hadn't been particularly well developed at the time, but had significant potential.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now your concerns, if I may be just break in for a moment, your concerns with Tulane...were those just in terms of it being a southern university, or with the programmatic training and work that you did there?

HYLECK: Yes, good question. Tulane is a fine school, a fine school. Tulane's art program was in the historic women's college, which is Newcomb College and . . . Newcomb College had a very rich history in ceramics. I think people probably today are aware of Newcomb Pottery through Antiques Roadshow, which was mostly run by and, and decorated by...made by women, but at the time the art department did—had no . . . mindful connection or respect for that rich history and the people who were in the ceramic department . . . were both Europeans . . . both interested in the Bauhaus approach and . . . is a matter of fact, neither of them achieved tenure after I left, and the

Department kind of rolled over and gave up its ceramic program in favor of a glass program. My, my frustration with that program was that it, it seemed to be in a transition when I was there, and it seemed to be going through a lot of those unnecessary struggles of one media versus another for square footage and budget and . . . the sculpture program was fighting with the ceramics program for square footage, even to a point that they painted lines on the floor saying, this is my space and you can't occupy it. And it was silly, just absolutely silly, but . . . it has since . . . tried to get itself back together unfortunately with Katrina and all, Tulane is, had a lot of struggles just to survive as a physical presence, let alone a, a, an endowed presence. But . . . no that was, that was my objection. It was also (Clears throat) a culture shock for me . . . academically a fine school, but just as the New Orleans public school system was going through the early stages of integration, so was Tulane. If you can imagine women's dormitories with black maids who, who cleaned the rooms, changed the bedding, took care of these young wealthy white girls, you can imagine what a shock it was to a f . . . to a fellow who had grown up in the north and, and had never seen that kind of . . . racial . . . discrimination and then segregation. So it was during the time that we were there that they eliminated this idea of, of black maids for the white women's residence halls, and the first black students were brought into the university, token students I would say, just as it was throughout the South, and you have to add to that . . . the fact that my military career had transferred over into the Na . . . Air National Guard and I was active in the, originally in the Minnesota Air National Guard, then transferred to the Louisiana Air National Guard during the early stages of the Vietnam War. So, I found myself in an extremely conflicted position, associating with people who were actively pro . . . protesting against the war, who were actively protesting against in . . . segregation, and in the, in the deep South, when I didn't have, let's say, a cultural dog in that fight, you know, I was kind of an outsider finding my own way and having a very different value-structure from most of the people who, who were there. So I would say it, it was a, a . . . growth period for me, it was a growth period for my wife. But, as I look back at the value of the graduate education to my own medium, I think I could have picked a better [Chuckling] place. In terms of growth as a human being, it was, it was worth a million dollars, and I, I couldn't . . . couldn't have gotten better.

WILLIHNGANZ: But, do you, do you feel it contributed to your, your work as an artist?

HYLECK: Absolutely, it, it did, and, and . . . you know, I have never, I had never thought a lot about that. The, the contribution I think is that it focused me on issues and ideas to drive my work as opposed to just a medium, as opposed to . . . just a collection of skills that you repeat over and over again. By the time I had come to Kentucky, the, the big discussion that went on among craft people was the relationship between art and craft, is your craft an art, or is your art a craft, and . . . all of the national conferences would have panels associated with that. Well, as I look back at my experience in, in New Orleans . . . it; I really felt that it forced me to put myself outside that debate. I was really interested in issues, and I was interested in political issues, and social issues, and how a person in the arts related themselves to those issues and how a citizen of the, of this country positions themselves related to those kinds of

issues. So yes, I think definitely it, it did form me more than my undergraduate education had, more than, more than—well I won't more than my past, I, I think . . . I was also formed by my father, my, my father was a, after he came back from the war, he had been in the Navy during the war, and in my, my youth . . . when he came home, he, like many soldiers, was very conservative. He was a supporter of Joe McCarthy . . . he saw a communist under every bush, and . . . he raised a son who had the exact opposite opinion about everything, and he and I battled with one another philosophically for his entire life. So I think he had a lot to do [Chuckling] with my formation as well, but then going on to New Orleans certainly took it out of the dinner table environment and, and put it on a much larger scale.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. When you got to . . . Berea, what, what were the factors that really attracted you to moving your life here?

HYLECK: The—my interview, the . . . during the interview . . . the two Department chairs asked a question, and, and the question actually touched the core of my interest in ceramics. They wanted to know if I could envision an undergraduate program that . . . combined . . . the academic study of the field, academic study of ceramics, along with the business of ceramics, along with living a life . . . that, that supported you as a ceramist, and (Clears throat) that's an idea that had been bouncing around in my mind from . . . my undergraduate years, as a result of my association with Glenn Nelson. Glenn Nelson was a Dane and he had a, a background that came out of the Scandinavian tradition, which was artists working for industry, and . . . he often tried to send his best students to Finland to work in the factories ca-ha the Arabia Factories of, of Finland, and they later became part of Dansk and people know Dansk better than they know Arabia. But . . . it wasn't an area that I really wanted to go to when I was an undergraduate, but it was an idea that had resonance for me, and when—during that interview here in Berea, they asked if I could envision that, I realized, not only could I envision it, I had actually discussed it with other people, had experienced discussions of the theory of, of that, with Nelson, and . . . absolutely, I saw that as a possibility, but it, it certainly would never have fit into . . . the university environment that I knew. When I left that interview, and had to reflect on whether I went to Berea or I went to Tennessee, where I had received an offer also . . . I then realized, well, wait a minute, Newcomb Pottery had existed as part of an academic environment that there, there was actually . . . a succession of these kinds of things historically that I had vicariously experienced, and there was something there that I could draw on, and, whether I could consciously draw on it, or intuitively draw on it, it wasn't clear to me, but it sure did interest me. That along with the, with the fact that it, it was a, by my standards, a huge space to be turned into a pottery, larger than my undergraduate, or graduate experience, that there was no competition for, for the space like there had been in graduate school, and compared to what the University of Tennessee was prepared to offer, which was a little bit more than three janitors' closets strung together . . . I thought, why not! You know, let's, let's give this a shot, and . . . I—it was, it was our next cultural shock, you know, going from Minnesota, to New Orleans, and from New Orleans to the Eastern Kentucky Mountains, and a school that had a tradition that at the time I was, I really didn't understand. I could read the literature and I thought to myself, educating those who have financial need,

that's no different than where I came from in Northern Minnesota, you know, the, the people from the Iron Range in Minnesota were all immigrants, most of them were out of work from the Minnesota copper and iron mines, gee it's the same people, they're just someplace else. Over time, I came to understand more what Berea was about than I, than I did when I took the job.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. This is interesting stuff. Now you . . . at some point . . . in your career, you started teaching here, and you were practicing ceramics at that time?

HYLECK: I was tea . . . I, I took the job at Berea in 1967, and . . . my first teaching job both—and it shows how naïve and ignorant I was as, as a, like I say I was about twenty-five at the time . . . Berea was operating both the college and a foundation school, and the foundation school was the equivalent of a high school. It . . . was extremely appropriate for Berea at the time, and maybe was a way to bring . . . the youth of the mountains who had had . . . let's say deficient . . . elementary education and bring them up to speed so that they could function at the college level. What I didn't understand when I took the job, is that part of my five-course assignment involved teaching in the high school, as well as teaching at, at the college level, and . . . I really had no interest in teaching in high school, had never had any interest in teaching in high school, and my only experience in teaching the youth of that age had been in New Orleans, where I did some courses in, for Upward Bound, mostly . . . for African-American students in, in New Orleans. But I really didn't like working with high school students at all, and . . . found out very quickly that, that part of my assignment was working with high school students and I just kind of struggled through that, in order to get on to the part that I was really interested in. So at the, at the beginning . . . I taught ceramics to high school students, ceramics to college students, sculpture to college students and design to college students, and then a kind of general education, art appreciation that . . . almost everyone in the arts is involved with at some, some point. The college closed its foundation school a few years after I arrived, and my teaching assignment was then almost totally, or exclusively settled in the area of ceramics, sculpture, and, and design. And over the years, pretty much remained in that area until later on; I started teaching a course in Native American art history as well, which had grown out of my University of Minnesota experience. The University of Minnesota at Duluth has, and has always, has historically had a significant number of, of Native American students who come out of the old Chippewa, Chippewa nation in northern Minnesota and some in Canada. And having gone to school with them . . . it didn't occur to me at the time that that was unique, but . . . later on, it occurred to me that I had intuitively developed an understanding of their perception of time and space, and that in fact was quite different from a westerner's perception of time and space. So when Berea was looking for faculty who could teach courses in, in cultures other than their own, I off . . . I, I proposed that I would teach something dealing with native American belief and I drew upon that undergraduate experience and, and the, the young men and women that I had grown up with there in high school, and, and in college.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now when you started a, in the '60s, looking at the, the retrospective that you gave me, the brochure you sent me, in a number of your pieces were what I would call social consciousness . . . pieces . . .

HYLECK: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . or they had a very clear message to them.

HYLECK: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: And . . . did that ever cause any problems in your [Chuckling] academic setting?

HYLECK: [Laughing] . . . problems no, and, and, I think, had I been doing that when I was in New Orleans, I would say absolutely it would have caused me problems. But I didn't start doing it until I had come here and . . . I, I never reflected on whether that was the environment of Berea, or if it was the nature of graduate school where your, you know, your studies are, are more of discovery rather than, than . . . a clear understanding of what you want to say. But Berea is a kind of community, and to the best of my knowledge has always been the kind of community that enjoys poking its finger in, in the establishment's eye, and . . . we have to understand what this period of time was. I was an undergraduate when John Kennedy was assassinated. I was teaching at Berea when Martin Luther King was assassinated, and in fact I had a, an African-American TA that I had been very close to who was so devastated by that assassination that . . . we went through about a month of, of struggling to communicate with one another, and then shortly after that, of course . . . Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. So it was a period of time when—and, and Vietnam and I had . . . lost two friends in . . . (emotional voice) I'm sorry.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's okay. Vietnam was a difficult period for all of us.

HYLECK: (Sighs) shouldn't still be (Obvious distressful voice) . . . two, two fraternity brothers . . . one a pilot, and, and the other one in the Army, both from my wedding.

WILLIHNGANZ: (Whispers) Whoa! Now, you weren't drawn into the Vietnam conflict yourself, were you? You did not serve over there?

HYLECK: No—thank you (Tapping sound). No, I . . . started out in . . . 1961, the, the . . . Air National Guard and the—actually it was 1960, the Air National Guard and the . . . Air Force had a developmental program for . . . rising high school students where you could sign up for a particular area of expertise and I wanted to be a pilot. My father had been a . . . private pilot, and . . . went to my basic training in, in flight school and discovered that the . . . the . . . pressure, high pressure suits and the kinds of things you did in flight adjusted my eyesight to where I was required to wear glasses, and they gave me the choice of, of either staying in the officer's candidate program or then just

dropping out and joining the National Guard permanently. And I did that and became a flight mechanic. I was activated . . . the first time during the construction of the Berlin Wall, and . . . then was activated the second time during . . . the Cuban Missile Crisis, and . . . those were my only active duty stints. After them I had a, I had a full assignment to . . . the Minnesota National Guard and, and then the Louisiana Air National Guard, and both of their assignments were to protect us from . . . Russian nuclear bombers. So, it, there was, there was my assignment, which had to do with flight mechanics and, and armaments, and had no application to Vietnam, and although there were numbers of people who were activated for Vietnam, my assignment always kept me . . . on the home front any time they were activated, anytime there was a crisis it was a case of . . . of manning the interest sectors to protect the home ground. On the other hand, these, these friends of mine . . . one had always wanted to be a . . . a fighter pilot, and, and . . . that's what, what he did, he joined the Air Force after, after college, and the other one . . . went to law school, and, and went to Vietnam as a lawyer.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hum.

HYLECK: But no, I had no direct association with Vietnam other than to protest the war and . . . and this was part of my conflict in, in . . . in New Orleans, is I was still a member of the Louisiana Air National Guard and, and protesting on, the war on campus . . . recognizing that where I identified I would most likely get a dishonorable discharge . . . so we wore hoods.

WILLIHNGANZ: Whoa!

HYLECK: So that, did—that is as close as my connection to the war was, and, and . . . by the time I had come to Berea I was still . . . very much opposed to what was going on with the war, and . . . to some degree felt quite betrayed by . . . by John Kennedy in, in that sense. That's a separate issue totally, but since we are leading to the kind of work that I was making, and, and at the time the work was social-political, and . . . it was interested in, in . . . the, the way we spin truth and . . . the way in which we accept truth and make it comfortable, where we accept facts and make them comfortable. It was also, I mean we have to recognize, it was also a time when everyone was experimenting with drugs, everyone was influenced by the Beatles and everything was . . . cool in rock and roll and . . . the imagery that you may have looked at had both social-political connotations as well as sexual connotations, I think the culture had blended and stirred all of that together and . . . used it as, as a way to . . . challenge the establishment. The first exhibit that I did here in Berea was just loaded with that kind of imagery, and the college did not have a large gallery to hang it in, so the art department proposed that I would put it up in the lobby of the, of the College's library and . . . it . . . I, I brought in, I brought a ton of dirt and sprayed it on the library floor and erected tombstones to . . . [Chuckles – Willihnganz] to Vietnam and . . . the people we had lost, two (Quivering voice) native Americans that I had known who had gone to Vietnam (Resumes normal tone), and these other images that . . . who were, who were political images and . . . the librarian [Chuckling], the librarians were shocked . . . and their initial res . . . was—response was there was a lot of sexual imagery here

and they didn't approve of it, but they sure did approve of the social-political [Laughing] imagery, and therefore it got to stay, because the overwhelming weight of the social-political imagery . . . shall we say, washed clean the [Chuckling] sexual imagery [Laughter – Willihnganz and Hyleck]. But I think that that was, was probably the first time that . . . the first time that I had tried to put together a body of work that was, was shown in one place that, that had that kind of social stigma. Many of the pieces have been exhibited nationally in individual shows . . . but the first time that there was a body of work that, that had that kind of thrust.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, interesting. Now, over time you moved away from those kinds of social political statements in your work.

HYLECK: True.

WILLIHNGANZ: Why is that?

HYLECK: Well I, I think that . . . you, you, as an artist . . . evolve or change with your age. The '60s passed, the '70s passed, and . . . and while they were times of, or periods of, of revolution and unrest . . . you stopped being twenty, and you stopped being thirty and . . . I had always felt that as, as an artist—I can remember coming home, my, my father hated artists and he hated college professors too, [Chuckles – Willihnganz] and I can remember coming home and telling him, on a vacation that I was no longer pursuing architecture, which he was very enthusiastic about, because he, he had been a soft-trained engineer . . . and that what I really was interested in was college education and, and the poor man tore out what little hair he had left and . . . wanted to know why, and, and I said, "well because . . . in the arts and, and in teaching, that's the sort of thing I can do until I die, and I don't have to retire from it, I don't have to quit." And I don't know if it stunned him, or if he bought into the idea, but he had no argument for it, and it stuck with me, the, the idea that as an artist, you never quit doing that, and the way in which you continue to do it is you go deeper and deeper and deeper into the issues that concern you and you flush them out in, in a richer way. And it means you keep thinking, you stay alive, and . . . you keep looking outside. Well, when you stop being twenty, and you stop being thirty, and, and the country evolves from its experience in Vietnam in the '60s and the '70s, there are different issues, and . . . you find different ways to deal with those issues. Added to that, my teaching assignments forcing me to reflect on my background and, and my experience with, with . . . Native American cultures of Northern Minnesota and Canada, I realized that . . . mankind's involvement with a place is, is as important, or part of mankind's involvement with time. So, where my initial work was more directly related to time, and the time that was impacting everybody . . . this, did this concern for place, or awareness of place, also had meaning. And gradually my work moved more toward this interest and concern for place, and how as humans we modify our understanding of place for its own purposes, whether that's to make it tolerable, or to make it magical, or to make it . . . survivable, we do things with our understanding of place, and I just kind of gradually slid over from this concern about social-political issues to issues that I consider to be more substantive. As I, as I look back at it now and I think, you know, here we are a, a

society concerned about environmental issues, I think environmental issues come directly out of an interest in place and, and the application of social and political concerns for one's place. So it's been very slow moving in that direction.

WILLIHNGANZ: It seems to me you also had a, sort of . . . interchange or a . . . dealing with the issues around functionality . . .

HYLECK: Sort of.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and structure.

HYLECK: Correct, correct. The . . . my assignment at, at Berea a, as I mentioned earlier was develop—to develop . . . a program in ceramics that coupled with the student craft program of the College. That . . . that program . . . was proposed in, in 1970 and then generally accepted by the College in 1971, and it meant that I was directing a number of student apprentices in the production of marketable ceramic ware, and . . . supervising a resident artist who was a production potter. It coupled with my undergraduate education. Glenn C. Nelson was a functional potter, and then I was really trained as a functional potter but had found that . . . my interest in architecture and my interest in social issues had pushed me closer to the sculptural end of the s . . . of the spectrum. That didn't mean that I lost my understanding of, of the functional pot . . . and in, in working with students in the apprenticeship program . . . had to be multi-facet, I had to be able to think both ways, and I guess I believed, I don't guess I know, I believed that the way a functional potter survived was by understanding the issu . . . issues associated with form and not just the issues associated with the market place. This, this is something that I had continued, or where as long as I was teaching I'd tried to instill on the students that if, if they were going to last and not be consumed by . . . bad market time and, and a weak market, or changing fad, that they really had to be driven by ideas and a clear understanding of the kinds of forms that were unique to them, and that way they would be able to develop their own niche in the . . . both the arts and, and the market place, and, and not be as vulnerable to the whims of the consumer.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, when you were dealing with these issues with your students, were you getting involved with the Kentucky Guild for Artists and Craftsmen?

HYLECK: Well, actually that involvement occurred almost . . . at the same time that I m . . . moved to Berea. The Kentucky Guild had had its first play—fair—in . . . the . . . spring, I believe of 1967. I might be off by a year there. I, I believe that was the first fair in the spring of 1967, and I arrived in the fall of 1967, or somewhere in the fall of 1967, and . . . one of the very first people I met when I arrived was Richard Bellando, because his office was a janitor's closet just down the hallway from the pottery in the same building where, where the pottery was housed, and . . . Richard and I struck it off . . . immediately and, and he said, "you know, you really need to, we've had this fair," fairs were relatively new idea coming mostly out of the southeastern United States in the east coast and I had never experienced a craft fair before and . . . he, he said, "you,

and you should become involved with the guild” and, and . . . and I was open to the idea. So . . . I had put together a, a body of work for the next spring fair, which I think would have been 1968, and, and joined, became a member of the guild at that time.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

HYLECK: Can I take a quick break?

WILLIHNGANZ: Sure.

[Pause]

WILLIHNGANZ: Perhaps we can continue.

HYLECK: I don't remember where we were [Chuckling].

WILLIHNGANZ: [Laughter – Willihnganz] well we were talking really about . . . I think about . . . the, the start of the guild and your involvement with Richard Bellando.

HYLECK: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: And . . . tell me more about that, some of the people you met through the guild and what that experience was like for you.

HYLECK: Well, when . . . I, I came to Kentucky . . . the first group of . . . artists that I met were people who had been involved in the development of the Guild. Lester Pross who was one of the . . . was my, one of my art chairman, as well as . . . one of the initial signers of the . . . I don't remember what it's called . . . developers of the Guild anyway...Rude Osolnik, another who was the chairman of the Technology Department, and that's the building that the pottery was housed in. And then of course, Richard Bellando who was the director of the Guild and, and whose office, as I said was just down the hallway. Richard was—is very close to my age, I think...we don't talk about that, but I believe that that's [Chuckling] correct, and . . . and we just had, I thought, a, a very . . . instantaneous connection, and drank coffee together, and managed to, to . . . to have long coffees, almost every morning, and . . . and his, his excitement for, for the Guild and what the Guild was trying to do . . . it just resonated with me as, as a very . . . appropriate kind of outlet for artists and, and for crafts people. The first fair that I attended also allowed me to meet people from around the state who were involved in, in the arts and . . . especially in ceramics. I then met Fred Shepherd who became a very good friend, from Murray, and . . . (Sighs) thinking of, of other people at the time . . . Homer Ledford . . . a dulcimer maker who had been a, who was a, a Berea grad and, and I had heard about him through Berea, and I had heard him play, and then met him as a person. But then the...that...the organization and actually was a fusion of, of different kinds of personalities, urban and rural, artists and craftsmen, and . . . they offered a, a very unique kind of tension, you know, the, the push and pull of, of . . . why is the organization in Berea when we have these big cities? You know, why doesn't it

move to the big city? And . . . that, that kind of push and pull I thought . . . gave life, you know, it made the blood thaw—flow through the organization and I think that . . . Richard made an, an excellent . . . attempt and, and succeeded in many ways of blending . . . all of these possibilities that Kentucky offered . . . this chair I'm sitting in . . . was made by Chester Cornett and the, the very first fair that I attended . . . Richard had gone off and found this and from the Eastern Kentucky mountains who had no schooling of any kind and he, he made this furniture with . . . I think three tools and . . . he, it's, it's what we now call green stick construction, but at the time it, it seemed phenomenal that a person could make a chair without screws and nails, and, and power tools. Well Richard...Richard had set up the fair there in the, in the woods at, at . . . Indian Fort Theater, and . . . just right next to where my booth was, he had brought in Chester, and, and Chester was sitting there making chairs, and . . . he, here I am, an AMFH framed artist with two college degrees, kind of standing there, agape, watching this bearded man who had no education make the most spectacular furniture and . . . he wasn't the least bit interested in the event. He wasn't the least bit interested in the people who were standing there watching him...had very little to say...he was just busy at his chair, and [Chuckling] I, I . . . I'd, I look back at that now and I think of the genius of Richard, the ability to bring all of these people together and try to serve all of their needs, college trained artists, people who had developed their craft or their art as a kind of hobby and, and they were trying to make a living at it, and at the same time people who had no formal education at all, that . . . Richard recognized, really had something to offer to the public as well as to the, to the other people in the organization. Now I, I think that this was part of the, the plan of the founders of the guild. But . . . you can have a great plan, but unless you, you have somebody that knows how to bring all of these things together like, like Richard did, it just isn't going to fly. And as, as I look back at my early years with the guild, my needs really were very different from the needs of, of many of the crafts people there. I mean I was, I was teaching at a college. I didn't need this income to survive. What I needed was outlets for the kind of ideas that I wanted to make, and . . . selling those things in the woods was, was not [Chuckling] appropriate outlet. Richard had, had the ability to make contacts for myself and others like me with galleries in New York City, or galleries on the country or, or people . . . who had retail outlets in other locations, so he could keep us satisfied, and he had the, the ability to provide . . . reasonable outlets for, for the people who were trying to make a living and they totally, were totally dependent on, on that, and give the exposure to people like Chester Cornett who were out there in the howler just making the work potentially vulnerable to exploitation. But, the best way to beat exploitation is to make what you do so extremely public that it will become obvious if, if you're exploited. And . . . Richard made every effort not to exploit those people but, but to give them a, a . . . stage on, on which to present their work.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, you were involved in the fairs, marketing some of your works. Did you ever get involved in the organization itself?

HYLECK: I did, and . . . so the first fair that I attended was the second fair that they, that the guild had. I'm terrible at dates, but . . . within a couple of years . . . I would guess, maybe it was within a year, I joined the board of directors and . . . served on the

board for a number of, of years, a number of terms . . . I was the vice-president of the, of the Guild f . . . for, I guess a couple of terms. I don't really remember . . . and I think through . . . the . . . urging of a number of the board members, both because I was in Berea and because of the way I approached my work. I became very active in the standards committee for the organization in its early years. The . . . philosophy of the organization quite unlike most . . . exhibitions that I was, it was acquainted with was that the . . . membership that review a potential members was to be an educational experience. So you applied for membership, and if you were accepted you received the critique, and if you were rejected you received the critique that was intended to be helpful. And . . . believe me, that was extremely challenging. I don't know how a rejection . . . can be spun as helpful [Chuckling], but it was the intent of the organization to be as helpful as possible to people who didn't get into the organization, and to be as helpful as possible to people who did get into the organization, so that they would continue to grow and . . . not stagnate, around one particular item that was, was marketable. And, for many years that responsibility . . . fell to me, and then I'm really not quite sure why, they and maybe because a lot of the jurying took place in Berea and I was here, and . . . then they could draw on, on me to pull a group of people together, and it may have been also because . . . as, as a university trained artist, I was supposed to have the words that could, could [Laughing], could go along with [audio sound brake]

WILLIHNGANZ: Well . . . how do you feel about the whole jurying process and the...is that, is that a good thing to contribute to the, the betterment of the, the individuals, or does it really stifle things . . . in some ways?

HYLECK: Well, you know, I don't know that the arts have ever managed to escape the idea of a jury and, and the difference between a jury and a critique is a, a group versus a single individual. And, and for that matter, a consumer is a jury as well, so . . . the...anyone who would argue against the existence of a jury I think is, is being a little naïve. The jury is going, going to happen at one point or another, and . . . a jury that manages to focus itself on the work as opposed to the personality of the maker is . . . more likely to have a positive impact in the long run than no jury at all. As . . . as a person who has now been involved in this for almost fifty years . . . what I have come to realize is, is that as a practicing artist, no one really cares whether you exist or not, and no one cares about how your work develops anymore than you do. Those of us that were educated . . . in our craft, or art in a university, discover that once you leave the university, it's, it's the closest thing to being hurled off a cliff. You can have...and that while you're on the precipice, you have all of these people telling you where the edge is, and how close to get to the edge, and how to flirt with the edge, and then you graduate... and it's if they, as if they all walked away, and as they left you, they pushed you off the edge [Chuckles – Willihnganz] and then what? Then no one gives feedback, unless the feedback is disinterest. So I, I think the juries are, are extremely important. A jury that gives you a, an acceptance or rejection letter that is accepted, check box, reject box, check . . . is usually met with a great deal of, of . . . hostility on one hand, or suspicion on another, or elation, and none of them are founded on anything. It's, it's just happens with, with the note. A jury on the other hand that a, that attempts to, to provide some sort of focused criticism that, as I said, is focused on the work and not on

the person, or on the choice of the person to . . . to submit, or not submit . . . eventually I can...I think can have some positive impact. And as I, as I look back at people who . . . and I wouldn't want to name names here...the people who are rejected the first time, and persisted I can only say that it was positive. And, and that...this can be positive in a variety of ways, and one is that it provided decent and e . . . and effective criticism and the other is that it made them angry enough that they went at it with greater intensity and . . . with greater intensity, they came to a clearer understanding of what it was they wanted to do and why they wanted to do it. And, and I think that that in itself can be a way to, to improve a person's work.

WILLIHNGANZ: You know, I've...now I've interviewed dozens of people who have been in the Guild, or are in the Guild, and . . . it's really a badge of courage how many times you were turned down [Laughter – Willihnganz].

HYLECK: Yes [Laughing].

WILLIHNGANZ: And you almost get into one-upping each other . . .

HYLECK: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . there, well I've been there eight times and I still came back [Chuckles – Willihnganz].

HYLECK: Yes, right, right. And I, and I think an organization like this that wasn't just accepting people who were credentialed by the university or, or . . . by a formal education . . . needed to r . . . address the fact that if people were self trained, or taking the occasional class, that that in itself was not going to be enough to sustain them. That . . . if they, if they were going to be able to sustain themselves as, as artists, they would have to go through a number of layers of learning, until they became strong enough in their understanding of what it was they were making and why they were making it, that . . . that they would be able to persist over time.

WILLIHNGANZ: We need to stop here for (unintelligible)

[Pause]

WILLIHNGANZ: We were talking about your involvement with the board . . .

HYLECK: Mm-mm.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and . . . you were the vice-president?

HYLECK: Vice-president at one point, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . at one point, and then over time you got less active and dropped out of the organization, is that correct?

HYLECK: That is correct, right.

WILLIHNGANZ: What happened?

HYLECK: Well the, the . . . simple answer is, as my work evolved, and as my career evolved, the Guild no longer served my needs. I had not joined the Guild out of . . . any sense of service to the, to the community or, or service to . . . to the field of art. I had joined it because . . . I thought that it could serve me, and . . . I really looked for ways in which it served me. I think being on the board was . . . a learning experience for me and it also was . . . part of what a person does when they, when they join an organ, organization, or join any group of people is, you make an effort to, to maintain it the way you would like it to f . . . to function, but . . . it went through a number of, of different directors and as I've mentioned, part of Richard's genius was his ability to serve the needs of people with very different backgrounds and very different needs. I did, I found that I could not sell my work in the woods, and as, it is as simple as that. For a few years . . . Richard . . . at Christmas time would try to find a storefront in Lexington and, and he . . . had established a relationship with . . . Walter Leet...a furniture store owner, owner in Lexington. And, and so we had a storefront space to sell at, at Christmas. Well, that, that kind of environment, which is closer to a gallery environment, actually suited my work better than being in the wood stick (Clears throat), and although people really like seeing my work in the woods...and I try to make use of, of the natural surroundings, in order to display it . . . people don't go to the, go to the woods to see social-political [Laughing] commentary. And even if you do, you . . . you may find that it ruins your, your pastoral [Chuckling] experience. Anyway . . . with the, with the succession of, of directors that followed Richard . . . fewer and fewer of them were able to do the kind of job that . . . Richard so keenly grasped. I mean you had to be a fund raiser...we...if I can back up a little bit about the Guild . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: Sure.

HYLECK: When I first joined it, it had an educational function as well as a commercial function. The train was, was still operating and Jerry Workman was, was the person who managed the train and, and took it off into Eastern Kentucky for the most part . . . as an educational gesture. But then, the, the part that Richard was mostly responsible for was . . . the marketing of, of art and, and craft. Well, the...I mean it, it would take a genius to be able to raise the kind of money necessary to do both of these things and, and that's really what he was, and, and, and what he was able to do. Well, the directors that followed him...I don't think had the capacity to do all of those things, so as to train . . . lost its funding and that stopped being part of, of . . . the guild's outreach. On the other end, it still had an educational mission, and . . . it never really found that . . . educational voice after the train was . . . was eliminated. That in itself would not have caused me to, to leave the Guild. But as time went on, it also lost its ability to market what I would call fine art. Unless you could sell your fine art in the woods (Clears throat), and unless you could put up with . . . foul weather . . . during the fair in the woods, which I think in, in terms of the serious painter, the extremely difficult

or serious printmaker would be exer . . . extremely difficult. In case of potters, heck, we let the water rain on in and made the work look better anyway, but . . . the kind of more sculptural work that I was doing just, just simply needed other venues. Also, at that same time (Clears throat), I had become chairman of Berea College's Art Department, and I was still directing the apprenticeship program. I had too many administrative things on my plate. I had a family, with two young sons. I wasn't willing, willing to sacrifice them as well. And, if I wanted my, my career in art to survive, I realized I had to find other ways to, to make it work, and I, and I don't believe in token membership to anything. So I'd, I found it was much easier for me to step out of the organization and let it go the direction that it had wanted to go, rather than . . . engage in some kind of conflicted push and pull with, with the organization.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, were you involved in other organizations, the Southern Guild, Highland Guild? Or...

HYLECK: No, the Southern Highland Guild . . . never really interested me at all. I was involved in the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, which is an international organization in ceramics. And I had...I was very deeply involved in administrative assignments to the college, and, and various committees that, that the college had. It became extremely difficult for me . . . for a number of years to keep my art going and do the administrative work, and the teaching work that the college demanded. In the case of the Guild...do it...at that point, it would have been far easier for me to market functional work than the sculptural work that I was doing. And, yet if you're going to market functional work, and deal with galleries, you have to be able to supply them, and keep them supplied. And you can't give them work in January, and then, when it's gone and they need more work in . . . April, say, gee, I haven't made any [Chuckling] and, you know, they, they very quickly lose interest in you. So, I put more energy into the more sculptural work . . . it evolved more slowly, and the venues for exhibiting it . . . were not as demanding (Clears throat) ...demanding in that they didn't have to have regular production every few months. And, I just felt very comfortable doing that, that kind of work. So, so the guild no longer served my needs...really is, is, is why I stopped being involved with it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm-mm.

HYLECK: It, it coincided with the period of time when the, when the girl...the Guild was struggling to survive economically, and . . . and was going through a, a lot of turnover in it's . . . in its administration, and different directors, and seeking a director who had the skills and . . . s . . . solidarity that, that Richard had provided. That really had little or nothing to do with, with my leaving the Guild, and my real reason was it just didn't serve what I was up to.

WILLIHNGANZ: What, what are your views about the, the state craft marketing program that started in the seventies, I guess?

HYLECK: Mm-mm. Well (Clears throat) my, my initial involvement with, with the arts and, and the crafts is, of course, prior to the Reagan administration. It's when the National Endowment for the Arts had . . . a belief that they could support the arts by finding the most dynamic artists and funding their, their work, and that in doing so, they would not contaminate or destroy the arts. I think that this is a commendable mission. No mission in life is, is totally perfect, but the National Endowment . . . I think created in its commendable mission two problems for itself, one was . . . when money is involved . . . we'll call it the good whole boy, good whole girl network takes hold, and . . . a lot of that funding w . . . was . . . administered on the buddy system, and the second thing that, that happened was you, was you had very controversial artists and very controversial work being funded. The kind of social-political things I was doing was nothing compared [Chuckling] to some of the work that was being produced in the, in the '70s, and . . . if anybody who rem . . . remembers the hostility in the halls of Congress over the kind of art that was being produced, and how . . . it became the appropriate whipping boy for all of the national ills, the national endowment was essentially gutted, and killed. It continued for, for a shorter period of time, but I th . . . but I, you know, I think nobody noticed when it finally died...blew away. The result was, that instead of funding the most edgy art that existed, is that the money...so that there was still money, federal money going into the arts...it went into grassroots development. And the idea that art is for everyone, and everyone is an artist, took hold. Well, I, I don't happen t believe that. You know, I, I do believe art is for everyone, in some way, but I don't believe everyone is an artist anymore than I believe that everyone is a doctor, or everyone is a lawyer, or everyone is a clergy. I think that people have specific kinds of callings, and are willing to make a professional level commitment to those callings, and that by channeling the money into the, into the grassroots, we have done something akin to developing . . . leisure time activities, leisure community centers, on a very broad basis, which, which is healthy and good, I, I have no opposition to that. But I don't know that in itself it's a way to develop the best kind of art, or fund the best kind of art. I wouldn't want it—in saying that, I wouldn't want anybody to interpret that to mean that I believe that art will disappear if it doesn't get federal funding, that isn't going to happen either. As, as long as, as there is a human spirit there's, there's going to be art developed, but that shift in funding had a profound impact on the way organizations, like the guild, functioned, the way many community organizations functioned, and . . . what we have is, is more people who are, are not professionally committed or involved, and exhibit, and, and go through all of the same kinds of . . . routines that a professional artist will go through using this, this federally sponsored money.

WILLIHNGANZ: We've had a lot of activity in the state when Phyllis George got very active . . .

HYLECK: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and started promoting basically merchandising . . .

HYLECK: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: Did that affect you and, and your school's activities?

HYLECK: It . . . it did...I don't think it affected either. And I, I will command her efforts . . . but unlike . . . [Chuckling] I'd (unintelligible), it, it hasn't occurred to me that to compare her efforts to Richard's effort . . . with the guild. What Richard seemed to grasp is that the, the same . . . approach to marketing person A's work, won't necessarily work to market person B's or C's, or D's. Phyllis George . . . Brown, had a one-size-fits-all, this, this is the way we do it and . . . around that time, there were a few people associated with the Kentucky . . . marketing program who had contacted me and tried to, to make contacts with galleries, but that isn't the way galleries work. Galleries are not interested in being contacted by the state's marketing personnel. They are interested, number one, in either discovering artists on their own, or having the artist contact them. It's a different network entirely, and . . . her one-size-fits-all approach and tha . . . and the Kentucky marketing program is, is more akin to that. I mean, yes, they have, have their . . . I would call them fairs, and it brings in wholesalers, but it brings in wholesalers for shops, for the most part, not necessarily gallery owners who, who are looking for the next thing. So it's, it, it serves one aspect if, if anything it has a, a thrust on tourism and building an economic enterprise a, akin to small business. But it, it isn't going to promote . . . art for art sake. It, it's not going to promor . . . promote edgier things, that's going to have to exist some other way, and that's, that's the reason I brought up the National Endowment. And, the National Endowment originally was trying to find, you know...where is the front edge? Where is the leading edge? And, and let's try to support that. Where is, where is the rising personality? Let's try to support that, and allow that to have an impact on, on the bigger picture. Now I think the, the support is for the masses and let, let's support the masses and assume that that will, will . . . stimulate the economy.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, and so much of this seems to be just sort of re-shifting the focus to the marketing aspect, as opposed to the creativity aspect.

HYLECK: Absolutely!

WILLIHNGANZ: And I talked with Walter Cornelison of Bybee Pottery, who said, you know, when they got approached by New York marketers, basically, they said, you know, we looked at what they were wanting to order. We couldn't possibly do that without completely changing everything we did . . .

HYLECK: Right!

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . and they just had to turn that down . . .

HYLECK: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . because it would have, they'd had to re-define themselves.

HYLECK: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And . . . it's always a, it's a fine line between, between mass production and actual individual creativity, and some organizations that I see, seem to be threading the line between there. And, you look at Louisville Pottery, where they don't actually use molds and mass produce, but they certainly have tried to get into the malls, and tried to do larger scale marketing than I would say the common potter or porcelain worker does.

HYLECK: Right, that's exactly correct. I'd, I understand the, the challenge to make something that you can reproduce to support your life style. On the other hand, with the global economy, it is extremely easy right now to design something here and then to take it to . . . I mean we, we beat Taiwan and China over the head with this, but they are not the only place...Malaysia...and build a factory there; build, build the technology there, and produce it at variable cost, and, and bring it back. And, and this can happen very, very quickly. And, it is easier for us to send our designer who has designed the product over there to oversee the production of the product, you know, once every two or three months, and stay ahead of the game, because a lot of the marketing is, is done in a very sophisticated manner. And . . . and who decides what next year's color is going to be [Chuckling] ...and I, believe me, it, it isn't a group of artists in Berea, Kentucky [Chuckles – Willihnganz]. And, and it's, it's not . . . it's not even a couple of artists in, in . . . in Chelsea or New York City, you know, the...these are professional marketing people who have decided ahead of time . . . and who are well aware of, of what one another is producing. And, look at the American automobile industry. You...Ford knows exactly what General Motors is producing next year. They all know what one another is producing next year, and ultimately I think that's what, what becomes part of the problem . . . the art of it is, is cut out. It, it just doesn't respond in, in the same way. Now, so I think that these kinds of marketing programs are . . . are healthy for tourism of a certain kind. I need to digress momentarily. I, I can remember back in the sixties, when Lyndon Johnson had an idea of, of . . . curing poverty with craft programs, and as a matter of fact . . . I conducted a few workshops for folks in Eastern Kentucky who wanted to become professional potters, and I learned very quickly that they weren't interested in the technology that I could give them. Subsequently, they wanted the bottom line: "Wha . . . what should I make that is, is going to generate x number of dollars next week?" And, you know, I, I would try to tell them, "Well, if I give you that answer, by the time you get it to the market place, it's going to be behind the curve, and, and, w . . . the best I can do is to show you how to do certain things and then you have to de, have to figure out where the market is, and where your market is. And if you're selling it right here in, in Harland, that's a different market from Louisville, a totally different market from Louisville, so you have to, you have to manage all of those." Well, they weren't interested in that. So I, I don't happen to believe that arts and, quote, "crafts", are a solution to poverty, and as soon as I start seeing . . . it's never been a solution in my pottery anyway [Chuckling]. As soon as I start seeing organizations go down that road where . . . where they suggest that it is, I want nothing to do with them. You know, I w . . . I want to get as far away from them as I possibly can because I, I feel that it, it contaminates the art. It, it lies to the artisan, if, if they are legitimate artisans, and what we're really doing is, is feeding a disposable

portion of the economy, and, and we don't need anymore disposable economy, we need something that's more substent to it than that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Whoa! I need to look through my questions here and see I've gone . . .

HYLECK: While you are doing that, I'll take another break?

WILLIHNGANZ: That will be fine.

HYLECK: Thank you.

[Pause]

WILLIHNGANZ: I get started here. Yeah, let me ask you just a couple other questions which . . . are kind of interesting that we haven't touched on. We talked a little bit about the function of objects . . .

HYLECK: Mm-mm.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . that, that play in your work. And, as I look at your work, it seems to me that it's almost gone from very specific messages to a more sort of thoughtful consideration. I look at your work with . . . with . . . teapots, and then . . . the platters and other things, which, to my bluntly untrained eye, are curious. And, I look at them and I'm saying, what is he really trying to do with this, and what is that about for you. Can you comment a little bit about the . . .

HYLECK: Sure, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . the progression work?

HYLECK: That's . . . that's a very insightful and targeted question [Chuckles – Willihnganz]. Yeah, that's good. The . . . well...we've talked about the earlier work which was focused on social-political issues and ideas, and how over time it evolved into things that relate to place. The, the platters that you're talking about or mentioned, all relate to place. But then so does the functional work. The . . . I have always used teapots as a form of callisthenic the . . . technology involved in ceramics can be extremely sophisticated or it can be very m . . . modest and, and humble. I can fire in a hole in the ground with dung, you know, and, and no official glazes. On, on the other hand . . . what interests me e . . . is the phenomenon of, of the image, and the history of the image. People have been, where mankind has, has been working with clay images now for over ten thousand years, and in each case, the o . . . ceramic object has taken on a kind of presence that either relates to something that can be, can't be spoken about in any other way, that is we could call it spiritual or religious, or it has taken on an absolutely mundane and functional presence a, a, allowing it to even be disposable. And then I think of tankards made for pubs in, in Europe where people break them and,

and so potters put a half dozen handles on them so that, as handles got broken off the thing could continue to be used until all the handles were broken off, and then you threw it away. And, and at the same time that this potter, a potter is, is making that for the, for the pub, they're also making large commemorative platters that are, are mounted on, on the wall around the edge of the room that commemorates special events in, in the communities' memory, you know, the, the birth of such and such a person, or the election of such and such a person, or, or the year of a particular crop . . . and, and the . . . it becomes a document about the people at the same time that, that this is just mindlessly used the way we—I refer to Dixie cups, which I think don't exist anymore, but you understand what I'm talking about. In, in order to bridge that gap, I have always been really intrigued by the process of making a pot, which is akin to, parallel to the formation of the earth. The, the things that, that a potter uses to make the object are the same thing that formed this earth, and the firing of the pot is the same process that the crust we walk on went through in order to be formed, and it, as I become more and more involved in trying to get the image I want, I realize I have to know more, and more, and more about the technology that goes into making that image. It's not just a case of pushing mushy clay one way or another, it's a case of then understanding that these chemi . . . (Clears throat) chemicals ultimately have to be heated up and fired, and they look like white powder when, when I apply them. But when they come out, they're red, or they're blue, or they're green, or they're bumpy, or they're smooth, or, so, so you have to understand the technology. In order to understand that technology, I have used my foundation education as a jumping off point, and that's why I call the teapots calisthenics. The teapot on one hand represents an object that assumes a place in our life. A person who uses a teapot keeps it in a specific place, puts it in a specific place, uses it in a certain way, and returns it to that place, and, and that's not just our culture that does it, so . . . other cultures do it as, as well, and some with greater . . . celebration and respect that, than we do. So it, that object fits into this i . . . idea of the importance of place, and it becomes an object that challenges my understanding of the technology. So, if I want to develop a new surface for my more sculptural things, the platters or the caldrons, I can explore that within the realm of the teapot. I can explore illusions, surface illusions within the realm of the teapot, and then bring them to the more sculptural object that evolves more slowly with a sense of confidence. I call it calisthenics because I think of an athlete. An athlete operates from muscle memory and they do calisthenics in order to tone that muscle memory. They go through their preparatory . . . warm ups in order to get ready for the real event, and then when the real event is happening, it comes out intuitively, and I want that to happen. . . I want that, that preparation to be there in those functional objects. And then, when I am making the more sculptural things it comes out in, intuitively. I also have a, have a deep respect for the complexity of, of the teapot, and, and how it has fit into, into different cultures at, at different times, in the same sense that I have a respect for the platter, which has fit into cultures in different ways . . . always doing two things, one is serving a specific function and at the other time—other time, it is, it is . . . visually enhancing the space.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. Have you traveled a lot, and has your travel to different cultures and different settings influenced your work a great deal?

HYLECK: Well I, I, I, I am, I've traveled a lot in the United States. As far as travel in, in Europe is concerned, that's mostly been limited to the, to the British Isles (Clears throat). So, I think my travel is, is in my mind...my travel has been part of a twentieth, twenty-first century person who has access to the internet and books, and, and other people who travel here...people from other cultures who, who come here. I can relate and, and, and experience, in terms of, two experiences in a way, when I travel. Two of, of, of the most influential people in, in my background...they are British potters who are now deceased, who . . . who came to Berea as, as guests, and . . . who out of a sense of professional courtesy were willing to engage in, in a dialogue about their work, about my work, about work in general. Ultimately they, they've influenced the way, the way I think. They've influenced the way I look at my own work, by bringing their cultural experiences to me. Another one, on one of our trips to the southwest, in . . . Santa Fe, one of these little souvenir stands . . . along the edge of the city, had brought in a Mexican potter, actually a group of Mexican artists who, who did different things. But this Mexican potter, to make his work mostly to entertain the tourists, and . . . I became quite intrigued watching the way he was working and, and I began to talk to him about the things he was doing, and he very quickly identified that I was a potter as well and, and . . . he, he just got all excited. All of the sudden, there he was talking to another person who had an interest in the material as he did, instead of talking to the tourist who, who wants to know how long did it take him to make that thing [Chuckling] and . . . the, the next thing I knew he, he was saying, you know, "I'm, I'm going to do this, and you ought to see that, and I'm going to do this, and I'm going to fire them and there is my kiln over there and if you'll come back in an hour and I'll show how I'm going to do that and how I'm going to fire that kiln" and . . . over a, over a two or three-day period, he was telling me when he was going to do things, and I was coming back and talking to him about it, and, and . . . the, the exchange went way beyond watching how you make that object. The exchange went on to how often do you do that, how often do you load up your truck in Guanajuato and, and drive all of that work here, and how much of it do you make here, versus how much do you make there. And, what do you expect to bring back to your family, and why do you do it here as opposed to having people come there. And, do your kids do this? And did you grandfather do this? And what did you learn from them at . . . that's where the cultural exchange comes. And, I think I would even add to it, that some of the fellows that I went to school with . . . from northern Minnesota, who came from the reservation, who rode Greyhound bus from the reservation to school, and . . . and would stay for the week, and then ride the bus back to the reservation on, on the weekend, and their work became about their life experience. And, and as we talked to one another about our work, it bec . . . it be, gradually became very clear to me that the work comes out of your life. It, it comes out of the things that concern you in your life, and not necessarily about the things you learned to do that you, that you repeat. Now I think of, of this thing very similar to a good surgeon, you know, he'll, they learn how to cut it open in, in surgery school, but then, when they get it open and they discover, hey that thing is not where it was in surgery school, it's over here. And the more they do, the more . . . I'll say efficient they become, the more knowledgeable they become, the more intuitive they come—become about the way they do it. And it's, it's that blend of things that I'm looking for in my work, and that doing the functional things, like the teapots and bowls, and, and the . . . and

small things for the house, for the table, vases, which assume a place in a person's life that becomes part of the organized routine for living. And then other things that become more ceremonial, like the painting on the wall, that if it came down now off that wall, something would have to go back up in its place in order to make the room be environment complete, or another object that you put on the wall that reminds you of something in your past that is very important and makes, makes you complete. So I'm trying to bring all of those things together.

WILLIHNGANZ: Terrific! That is great stuff, I could go on for two or three hours, but we really need to . . .

HYLECK: Okay.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . go outside and I . . .

[Pause]

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, so tell me about your, your shop here.

HYLECK: So, when, when we moved to this lot, I moved three studio spaces in...into this one. And . . . previously, one of the other studios included kilns, and one of them included woodworking equipment, and the other one had drawing equipment and books, and was an office with a computer, and so on. Now, this is the combination of those three, except I don't bring the computer out here, it's too dusty. But the woodworking—everything is, is on wheels they can be pulled out into the center space, if I need it. Woodworking equipment is, is over here...workbench and the, the potting things are over to that side, and behind the camera, and . . . the kiln, kiln down...kilns down on the far end. I have an electric kiln on the right hand side and a . . . a just recently constructed gas-reduction kiln then on the, on the left. It hasn't been fired yet, I just finished the brook—brickwork and the plumbing last month.

WILLIHNGANZ: Did you build this yourself?

HYLECK: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: Whoa!

HYLECK: Yes. I had . . . some guests in here a couple of weeks ago who had a similar reaction of whoa, and . . . wanted to know, you know, why I built it myself as opposed to buying one. And . . . I didn't have a good answer for that but . . . part of their question was well have you ever done it before, and then I realized, this is about number thirty-five. I, I built at least that many kilns before, with the . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: Really!

HYLECK: . . . either helping other people build, or for the college, or . . . for myself.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me about all your supplies over here.

HYLECK: The . . . well, the way I have it organized, at, like I said, everything pulls out, stored glazes back behind the kiln. These are chemicals for glazes. A work surface at the moment is holding a few molds that I use for vases and, and teapots, and, and colorants up on the top . . . the marble table here is, is . . . is both a work table as well as a wedging table, and . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: I'm not sure what wedging is.

HYLECK: Wedging is, is, is like kneading bread, it's preparing the clay for . . . for working, for throwing—getting the air bubbles out, as well as equalizing the moisture throughout, throughout the clay. I work in, in both porcelain and . . . and in earthenware. For the more sculptural things I, I use earthenware and for the functional things I, I use porcelain. The difference there is that the earthenware is lower temperature, the porcelain is very high temperature, and when I fire the earthenware for the most part, I fire it in my electric kiln, and when I fire the porcelain...fired in the, in the gas kiln. (Ware ax?), which at the moment include . . . storage of finished pieces as well as the storage of, of pieces that . . . have just recently been made and, and trimmed, and throwing area. Then as I said, open space here that I can pull things out in, into. I have more glazes stored underneath the workbench over to this side, and . . . clay stored in just about every nook and cranny that I can, can find.

WILLIHNGANZ: Where do you get your clay?

HYLECK: So far I have been . . . able to make use of the college's facility to, to make my clay. I have always ordered . . . powered clay from the mines and then compounded my body to suit . . . my specifications and use, either mixing equipment there at the college facility. Since I've just retired in . . . from teaching in July, we are only talking about six months or so, six-seven months of being away, so I still have the clay I made at the college before I left. But I suspect that I will continue to . . . find a way to make use of their facility to make my clay. If not, I'll just have to buy from, from a distributor in Lexington or, or Louisville [Chuckling].

WILLIHNGANZ: What are these pieces up here, this, those racks up here?

HYLECK: Oh, the, the . . . platters...oh this [Chuckling] is, yes this is, is one of my warehouses up, up here. These are platters that . . . were exhibited, and the numbers that you s . . . every platter actually has a . . . number that is chronological from the first platters that I made, and then that number becomes part of the name of the piece, and . . . so, they're just stored in those slots. But the, the other pieces that . . . either have been exhibited, and are not touring at the time are just in the boxes stored up there.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now did you design this building with this in mind?

HYLECK: Huh? Yes, the . . . when we built the house . . . I was originally trying to find an industrial space in town that I could use as a studio. As I mentioned before, I, I had had three studios and, and had to move the work...all of the stuff that was stored in those three studios into a smaller space. So, I was looking for an old industrial space, but Berea doesn't have a lot of old industrial [Chuckling] spaces, unfortunately, and I didn't want to have to drive all the way to Richmond and to find something. So we built the house, and then as time went on, I thought I would wait and see how that came out. And, when the house was finished, my wife and I decided I'd go ahead and build this, and this was as much as, of the lot as she was willing to sacrifice to, to my studio. This is, is about the size of, of one of the studios that I had before, and . . . I, I designed it with a shed roof so that I would have a good twelve feet above the kiln, and I wanted to make sure that it was . . . at least thirty feet long to allow me a work space, and that is the workspace for the clay as well as an area to have my, my power tools. If I am efficient, I don't need a whole lot more space. And that, I think most artists are, are capable, as I am, of filling any space that you give us, and, and for the most part it's probably filled with junk, but junk that will be valuable at some point down the road and in this case, I try to limit myself to the amount of junk collecting. Although, as you see over there, on that side, that's . . . collapsed cardboard boxes and packing crates and wood that . . . I have salvaged from different places that I know I will use sooner or later.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, I was looking at the, this . . . rack of wood that you have up here. That's quite a fair piece of wood up there, and . . .

HYLECK: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: . . . I'm wondering I b . . . I didn't realize you needed to be working in wood that much if you are a potter.

HYLECK: Well . . . you know that, that's interesting that you, you mention that. This has nothing to do with (Sound of a machine being turned on) my being a potter, it has much more to do with my son being a, a painter, a printmaker and a drawer, and this is framing stock.

WILLIHNGANZ: Whoa!

HYLECK: . . . so I can make frames with it. Do you want me to turn that off?

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. (Machine turned off). Thanks.

HYLECK: And . . . it's, its framing stock that I had . . . made by the, the college's woodcraft industry. Its, its oak and, and maple framing stock and then I can make frames for him, or for myself, of any size. The . . . wood on the, on the top is . . . a

variety of . . . either different kinds of cabinet woods or, or . . . things that I use just for shelving here or, or for the framing process.

WILLIHNGANZ: How much time you had . . .

HYLECK: Yeah you move in, you move into a new house and . . . and . . . your wife always has ideas of things that you can make but that house, so that's part of what that is. And the other thing is (Clears throat) in, in doing the, the more sculptural work I do, I often have to make jigs and pictures of different kinds. I have to make frames for molds, and . . . I'm, I'm always needing to access wood in, in one way or another.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hum. How much of your time these days are you spending out here?

HYLECK: Huh, all day every day [Chuckles – Hyleck and Willihnganz]. I . . . I am usually up by six o'clock, and I may read for a little while, while I am having my breakfast, and I'm usually out here by seven thirty or eight, and . . . I'll come in for some kind of a lunch, talk to my wife for a while, come back out here or, or do other things that are scheduled for the day, and then quit by around four, four thirty. And then, of course, that changes with what I'm making at . . . it's, it's common for a potter to put in a twelve to fourteen-hour day, and that's because the work, or the kiln, or something requires your attention, so if I have things that are drying out, and they have to be worked on, I'll come back out later in the afternoon, or later in the evening, and I'll stay until it's finished. If I'm firing a kiln...if the kiln chooses not to be finished by quitting time at four thirty, I'm sorry, I'll just have to stay out here until whenever it's finished, and if that's midnight or two in the morning, that's, that's the way it is.

WILLIHNGANZ: Is kiln the pronunciation? I always thought it was kiln.

HYLECK: Both pronunciations are correct [Chuckles – Hyleck and Willihnganz]. You can lay on the end, or not. I don't know where it was that I learned not to pronounce the "n". Now I think it has, I think it has to be back in undergraduate school some place [Chuckles – Willihnganz], but it goes either way.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. Well, thank you very much for sharing your, your studio with us.

HYLECK: Sure, happy.

WILLIHNGANZ: This is terrific.