JT Noh. It was Noh drama, not Kabuki. The music of course comes from Noh drama. First we considered the film's setting: we went to the ghost town in Colorado and decided to do a ghost story with dramatic devices taken from Noh and the Western. Oedipus is outside of time, he's atemporal, because Oedipus came from the Greeks but he's still with us and I hope he will stay with us. We can also see him as an archetype. In the film it's hard to know at what point the action is taking place, because you could say that the characters are rehearsing their tragedy for all eternity… That's why the Noh masks were the most effective tool. The mask is basically a connector between Greek tragedy and the Western, that allowed us to photograph ghosts.
MA Well, I'd just like to thank Javier and Ivo Mesquita for giving us the opportunity to talk here. And of course the people at SITAC.
JT Thank you.

Translated by Michael Parker Stainback.

Conversation
Allan McCollum and Lilian Tone

Lilian Tone One thing that I would like to point out is that I think Ivo invited us here to show how Allan's work transits into and out of these two models: studio practice and the more collaborative model. And I'm going to ask Allan to very briefly tell us the story of his work, which stretches over thirty-five years, concentrating on the lesser-known projects and on recent projects that he has developed in the last ten years. And I think that it's going to become clear that the history of his work has covered quite varied terrain while remaining the same exact project. I was very fortunate to hear Allan give an overview of his work and it was a wonderful thing to see how in the same project, there are continued attempts to look for a bigger picture of the world. […]
Allan McCollum Thank you, Lilian. As Lilian said, I have thirty-five years to discuss. I don't know how I'll describe thirty-five years in twenty or thirty minutes, so I'll try to only say one or two sentences per project, and I apologize if I don't give you enough information but this is the nature of the situation. I'm going to start in the 1960s. During that period I considered myself a painter, in the sense that I wanted to be an artist, and what is an artist? A painter. That was the stereotype in my head. But I wanted to include the ideas of making, production and mass production. So I produced paintings using mass-production techniques in my studio, mainly gluing two-inch-wide strips of canvas together with boat caulking, and eventually created a painting that was little more than the demonstration of how that painting was made. That was in 1969-1970.

In 1975 I invented—I like to say "invented" because it sounds so silly—a "kit" for producing an artwork. These little grid paintings were made using mass-production techniques from offset lithography. I printed sixteen little shapes over and over, tore them out, and glued them together like tile-work or knitting or weaving. You could come up with any possible number of small paintings or large paintings, depending on what you wanted. And this kit would produce paintings, colors, watercolors, whatever you wanted to put on the paper.

One of the reasons for this was that I was trying to be a little humorous about the formal description of a painting as being something flat, hanging on a wall. The American painters said "The first four lines of your composition are the edges of the canvas." I decided to make art using only edges—that was part of the humor.

I was very young, but I did get tired of hearing people talking about art in terms of the history of art and the history of painting. What I wasn't hearing often enough in those days, I thought, was people talking about the art object as an object that existed not only in relation to the paintings that came before it but in relation to the couch that was underneath it and the lamp that was next to it, and the people walking around

looking at it. So I decided to create a kind of painting that was basically a sign for a painting or something that was going to function as a theatrical prop, so that if you installed it in a gallery my hope was that the viewer would become more aware of himself or herself as a viewer, walking around looking at the paintings which weren't really paintings—they were symbols that stood for paintings like props in a play.

I developed this idea in a number of ways. One of the offshoots of this idea was a series called *Glossies* in 1980. These were imitations of photographs. The subject of this work was meant to be more how it felt to go through photographs as opposed to actually looking at them, because all they were was watercolor and ink on paper with plastic laminate adhered over their surfaces. They looked and felt like photographs but in fact they weren't. I would leave them on a table during exhibitions.

Another series was called the *Surrogate Paintings*, so I'm going to keep referring to it that way. A supplement to the *Surrogate Paintings* was a series of photographs—*Surrogates on Location*—that I did, not as an artwork but as a kind of a supplement that I would sometimes send to magazines if they asked for photos, or that I would hang on the wall wherever I was asked to exhibit. They were just pictures that I had taken of the television when I saw an object in the background that reminded me of one of my surrogates.

Connected to this habit of taking pictures of images on television, I developed a series called *The Plaster Surrogates*—this was in the early 1980s. These were the same as the *Surrogate Paintings* but cast in plaster. I could make hundreds and hundreds of them if I wanted to. The work's topic included the idea of looking for the differences between the individual works. I used many different colors of frames, different colors of brown, so that each one was unique. I made over a couple of thousand of them—not that each was sold individually: they were usually configured and sold in large groups. They were always unique: they had all the characteristics that a painting was supposed to have except that they were sort of a cross between a mass-produced object and the kind of painting you'd see in a gallery.

During the same period, I was doing a series called *Perpetual Photos*. All the while I was trying to reinforce the idea of a prop that could stand for an artwork. There weren't really any prior models for these types of things. I mean I don't think anyone had ever done that in exactly the same way—maybe some Pop artist did caricatures of paintings, like Roy Lichtenstein. But it was hard for me to get the idea across that people weren't looking at minimal paintings or abstractions, but rather at signs or props. So I did a number of projects that were meant to reinforce this idea. One of them was called *Perpetual Photos* and what I would do was take snapshots of the television whenever there was a picture on the wall in the background. Then I would copy it from the photograph, using a close-up lens to rephotograph the background picture, and then put it in its own real-life frame. So, you could have the same picture that you saw in a film or on television, in your home or gallery or wherever.

LT Maybe you could talk a little bit about them, because so many of these works relate to your background in theater.

AM I have a small background in theater. My father was an actor and my parents were often in plays, in local amateur theater groups. My father was even in a few movies, sometimes only as a walk-on. I was used to noticing the backgrounds of movies when watching TV because sometimes my father would walk by. Growing up in Los Angeles, it is not an atypical experience to see people you know in the backgrounds of movies.

I didn't go to art school but I did take a few theater classes in high school and was in some local plays. I remember being influenced by the thinking of Bertolt Brecht as I understood it, about the importance of recognizing that you are presenting a play, and then in the mind of the audience, the importance of recognizing that the play is a play, not reality, and that you are a viewer—not to disappear into a sort of fantasy of identification with the performers, but rather to be aware of the entire social situation. So his plays had constant devices to remind you that you were watching a play. This stuck in my mind.

When I first began learning about art—I learned mostly through reading—I read about Alan Kaprow and John Cage and the Fluxus artists, who were very concerned with calling attention to the conditions of the gallery, the performance, the experience of the artwork. That was very important to me from the beginning. That, and mass production—the latter probably because my parents worked in factories and my friends' parents worked in factories and I found a pleasure in factory work, in group work, team work, this sort of thing.

LT About your family, you had an uncle [who influenced you, in terms of] making kits on how to produce artworks.

AM I had an uncle who made kits on how to draw, Jon Gnagy. They were sold nationally in the United States and he had a television show on learning to draw. I didn't know him very well, but since he was my uncle I somehow identified with him when I saw him on television. One thing I liked about him was that he never drew anything unless he could tell you how to draw it yourself. He thought that anyone could be an artist and I was influenced by this, too. I think I have never done any project that I couldn't explain to someone else how to reproduce it in about ten minutes. I have never designed a project that couldn't be mass-produced. I don't actually know why I think like that, but I do.

I worked on a project in 1983—*Ideal Settings*—in collaboration with the artist Louise Lawler, a good friend of mine. We were asked to do a magazine project—magazines sometimes ask artists to do a page—so we did an ad. But to do an ad we had to come up with a product, so we made this little object that looked like a sculpture base. The following year a gallery asked us to do a show together—*Ideal Settings: For Presentation and Display*—so we made the gallery into a showroom, with the price projected on the wall and a slide presentation. It is hard to explain, but back then, in the 1980s, people didn't talk about art as being for sale—it just wasn't a topic of conversation. You walked into a gallery as if it were a kind of shrine, and it was considered

rude if you asked about the prices. Because of my background, I was constantly aware that these things were expensive. It was a big issue with me, and I didn't like that it was never talked about. I considered that offensive. It seemed very bourgeois and snobbish, hence this particular project with the price actually on the wall.

Louise and I did another collaboration the following year—*Fixed Intervals*—in which we made objects designed to take the place of artworks that happened to be missing. There were many ways in which they could be used. We talked, as friends, about how she would never do something that looked like my work and I would never do anything that looked like her work, because when you are an artist you are meant to be an individual and have your own signature. Louise didn't want to do something that looked like an Allan McCollum, and vice versa. So we thought, "Isn't it sad how many artworks might have existed but don't because they look too much like somebody else's work?" These were like memorials to that idea. The other use that we found was that museums could hang them when they took the original artwork for cleaning. Like if a museum had another artist's work on the wall, and if they took it down to lend it to another museum, they could put one of our objects up in place of it.

To my mind, in those days, a lot of people were thinking about the function of the institution, the function of the gallery. I don't know if I can call it thinking, but certainly a lot of obsessing about how if you take an artwork out of the gallery, it was no longer an artwork. One of the things that I began to think about was not only comparing artworks to other artworks, but also comparing them to objects that had a high value but weren't artworks. They were shown in galleries, museums, institutions, but not art museums. How did this interplay define what I was doing?

I began a series that was a sort of three-dimensional version of the *Surrogate Paintings*, called *Perfect Vehicles*, and it played on the sacred idea of the autonomous object. I chose a very well-known symbol, one that is seen over and over again in the world, in movies especially: the ginger jar from Asia. It symbolizes so many things: the womb, life and death (they put ashes in this jar), civilization, culture, the exotic… If you do not live in Asia, owning an Asian vase means that you are in touch with the exotic. The *Perfect Vehicles* were like signs for a symbol. They were not real vases at all—they were solid plaster "shapes" that could never possibly be used as real vases. The gallery reference was more to the craft gallery or the decorative arts museum which was similar to a museum but not quite. So I was making references to other kinds of showplaces and other kinds of showable objects. These were valuable, showable, collectible objects. Taking a found object into a gallery and claiming that it is art is one thing, because there is an interesting drama there: a bicycle wheel isn't art, but an artist brings it into a gallery and says that it's art, and suddenly it is art. It is another thing entirely to bring in something that is already expensive and valuable, something already considered beautiful. Where is the artist's role in saying that it is art, when it was almost art to begin with? It was a strange distinction. This was in the early 1980s, too. […]

I'm thinking about collectibles that are not art, and how art's value is conditioned by other kinds of valuable objects. This is why I was very interested in a famous collectible object, the Fabergé egg. I've seen a Fabergé egg—I worked at a museum part-time—and I thought they were so stupid: they had no other purpose than to show how much money you had, because they were just expensive jewels on an eggshell. They didn't have any other aesthetic value, in my opinion—others may disagree. To me, they were the most useless objects I'd ever seen, but with my interest in mass-production I began to think, "How could one mass-produce a Fabergé egg, in a way that each was special and unique but cheap?" As a kind of fantasy I designed a project called *The Individual Works*. This involved making thousands and thousands of totally unique objects, about the size of an egg, using a system. What I would do was find little parts of mass-produced things lying in the streets, or in drugstores or supermarkets, or sometimes in my friends' homes. I made a collection of parts—a vocabulary, so to speak—and glued the parts to around 300 disks, which became a vocabulary of "halves" of a shape.

One thing that I didn't say about my past was that I didn't go to art school, but I did attend five months of restaurant management school and I enjoyed restaurant work very much, particularly working in industrial kitchens. For two years I worked for Trans World Airlines (TWA), making meals that were served on the flights. So I'm very used to these things called bun pan racks: they are racks found in every kitchen in the United States where there are cookie sheets. So I based my system on bun pan racks and made molds of each of my little shapes, and then made a series of notebooks outlining the order in which to combine them. This was not done by computer because I didn't know what a computer was in 1987. I had a system of numbers and we combined parts. I've done 35,000 of these little fake Fabergé eggs called *Individual Works*. My fantasy was to sell them individually, but my dealer at the time said, "No way." We argued about it, but in the end he was right. We kept them in a huge box and sold them as one piece. It's in a museum in Denmark now. I've done three groups of these and they are all in museums. I never could sell them individually because the world doesn't work that way, though maybe I can change it, over time.

LT Is it a project that you are currently involved with?

AM I think it was a very important project for me. We talk about the unique object as a benchmark of what an artwork is supposed to be. I don't come from a wealthy background, so in our home we didn't have any objects that had any value outside the house. We had souvenirs, mass-produced objects that had a sentimental value to us and nothing more.

Now, I don't know what the term unique meant in medieval times, but today it means "not mass produced." I thought that there was something dishonest in a community of art lovers that looked down their noses at mass-produced objects but valued unique objects, without recognizing that the unique is defined by the mass-produced.

I wanted to resolve the question by designing a project where it was hard to separate objects in this manner. I also think that it is difficult for us to think about and recognize large numbers.

I don't understand why we don't produce unique objects in huge numbers, if we value them so much. I spent about four American dollars on each of these pieces. If I wanted to sell them in a store, even with a twenty-dollar markup, everybody would still make a profit and it would still be cheap. So I asked myself, why hasn't anybody done this before, since I was basically able to do it in my kitchen, not even in a factory? It could have been done 2000 years ago, when they invented plaster.

I think there must be an ideological reason for claiming to like unique objects but not making them. Maybe it scares us to think about large numbers of unique objects. One of the things that I can give to the world as an artist is a new way to think about larger numbers and not be frightened by them, or at least to recognize that this is an issue. We have categories for thinking in smaller and smaller groups, but very few ways to talk about everything, except in religion.

This project led to another one with the same numerical system, intended to produce symbols. This project was called *Drawings*, each produced by hand with stencils that I designed. At one point I had almost twenty-eight people working for me, producing these drawings. I was influenced by rummage sales, trade sales, chamber-of-commerce displays, situations where communities put things on folding tables. I've used folding tables in a number of projects.

At this point I realized that I had never worked on a synthesis of "time," or a way to create something that was a "copy" but also signified "the past," and it occurred to me that fossils were collectible, valuable objects that you found in a certain kind of museum—a natural history museum—but they are usually not the object itself. They are traces: mineralized replacements for actual bones. So in collaboration with the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh I made copies of dinosaur bones—the *Lost Objects*.

The second collaboration with a museum was in Pompeii, Italy, and I asked the dealer to see if he could get me the rights to copy the figure of a dog. After a lot of negotiation, he did. It was my first collaboration with the museum and it was the first time that I became interested in local communities and in what objects meant to that community.

This led to a more elaborate project, related to dinosaur tracks, called *Natural Copies*. In Utah, there is a museum, the Dinosaur National Monument, which houses a lot of dinosaur bones. It's nationally funded and the place where tourists go to look at dinosaurs. What was interesting to me was that the small town nearby, called Vernal, considers its identity to be related to dinosaurs. This is a very American thing: we who are the descendants of immigrants don't have any pre-colonial history, so we look for geographical and geological things to give us identity. I told a woman at the motel that I was there to look at the Dinosaur National Monument because I was working on a project with the Carnegie Museum, and she said, "Oh, that Carnegie. He came here around the turn of the century and stole our heritage." Now, I'd never heard anybody call dinosaurs "their heritage" before! It tickled me: that people would choose this kind of thing as a substitute for history.

Another part of the project was done in a small town in Utah called Price. There is a beautiful small museum connected to the community college. They are happy to have a museum because that way they can keep some bones without them being taken to the Carnegie. This is a coal-mining town, and on the ceilings of some mines they found naturally-formed casts of dinosaur tracks. The miners would work late because they weren't allowed to remove the tracks during work hours. They took the tracks as souvenirs to display in their front yards, homes, offices. They became popular local artifacts, symbols of the coal-mining industry and a connection with history.

I contacted the museum myself, and we spent a summer making molds of all their dinosaur tracks. There were forty-four of them. I was getting more and more interested in how history gives artworks meaning. Most tracks were given to the museum in memory of a miner who had passed away or something like that. There was also a kind of allegory there, of how we look at art. One of the typical ways in which people describe artists is that they have this deep and crazy subconscious, and that they go down into their subconscious and discover some kind of image which they then create three-dimensionally, and then it winds up in a museum. But this is exactly the same thing that these coal miners had done: they went deep, found something beautiful, took it out and it wound up in a museum. And I liked the parallel, even if curators say that you can't learn anything about a dinosaur from a track once you have removed it from the trackway.

And what I did was supplement the tracks with educational material. I created a website with the help of a web designer. It had twenty different downloadable explanatory texts about dinosaur tracks. This site has become a popular site for high-school teachers. Thus this project was divided in two: one part was useful, for people who had nothing to do with art, and the other part was involved with selling art objects, in the hope that that would pay for the website. It didn't work that way, but I still keep it online.

The next project was a similar one in Florida, entitled *The Event: Petrified Lightning from Central Florida*. I was driving through the state and found a little museum that claims to have 20,000 mineral samples. There was this little object called a sand spike, created when lightning strikes sand, melting it to make that shape, so said the museum label. Little museums sometimes get things wrong and after I did some research it turned out that it wasn't an object created by lightning, but rather, a sand concretion from the California desert. Objects created by lightning striking sand are in fact called fulgurites and look quite different. They are also very interesting objects.

Coincidentally, I was invited to do a project at a Science and Industry Museum in Florida. Because I'd done research into this before, I knew about a man who collected fulgurites and worked at a research center in central Florida which used rockets to trigger lightning. Lightning is very closely associated with Florida—there is more lightning there than anywhere in North America. Even the area's hockey team is called the Tampa Bay Lightning. So I thought about doing another regional project that involved collaborating with this group of engineers who were also college professors and very interested in fulgurites. They love them and collect them as a hobby, but don't consider them scientifically important.

They send a rocket into the air and when the lightning comes down it hits their instruments and that's how they learn about it. They let me design a rocket launch in a collaborative effort between the art museum and the science museum in Tampa, Florida. We filled a bucket with sand, sent a rocket up and shot a movie in slow motion. Then the lightning hit and created a fulgurite in the bucket. I made over 10,000 replicas of it, using local sand and epoxy, and a great number of informational booklets that you can download from the internet. There was not much written about fulgurites but I managed to come up with sixty-six items researching in libraries, magazines, etc. The museum now maintains the site and they have more hits on this part of the site than any other.

The fun part of collaborating with this group of people was that everyone was interviewed, so there was a booklet containing interviews with the curator, the geologist, the engineer, the photographer, etc. The other interesting thing was that a local geologist, Dan Cordier, had done a model of what fulgurites look like and how to dig them up. The museum hadn't planned on showing it, but we were able to convince them to do so. So my art project helped them, and ultimately became an educational project. This project had a dual, secondary outcome, contributing to another field that had nothing to do with me or my interests.

I did a second project, which I consider the sister project to the fulgurite project, called *Signs of the Imperial Valley: The Sand Spikes of Mount Signal*, based partly on the mistake made by that small mineral museum in Florida. I discovered that the sand spikes come from a border area between Mexico and the USA. In Mexicali there is a mountain called Mount Signal, ninety-nine percent of which is in Mexico, but there is also a small part in the United States. It's practically an icon for the people that live there. At the base of this mountain there are sand spikes. Sand spikes are concretions created by the action of water underground, and interestingly their shapes are a condition of the site. Sand spikes only exist in this particular place. They are like an allegory for this place.

In another area of California there is a place where they have circular concretions, called the Pumpkin Patch. Or like a type from British Columbia, where they look like ceramic discs. Or some that take the form of spirals, in a certain part of the Colorado River delta. So sand concretions can be like siteworks—they are specifically emblematic of a specific area.

Mount Signal is also an emblem of the area: it is depicted in nineteenth-century etchings and it is also part of the county logo. It is used on souvenirs, in restaurants, hotels, etc. Local artists and photographers are constantly taking pictures of the mountain. I once asked a person who worked at the local Arts Council, "Are there many artists here who paint the mountain?" and she laughed and said, "Allan, it's the only vertical thing in the desert, of course they do!"

It was around this time that I heard about inSite, a very famous project in Tijuana and San Diego. I went to inSite with the idea that this was a border project, because it is about how people from Mexico and the United States treasure this mountain. I spoke to the people there and asked them if they could include me in the project. Finally they said yes. I think that there was an initial hesitation because my project was not in San Diego and Tijuana but in Calexico and Mexicali. It was a project parallel to theirs, but from a lesser-known county. So I was pleased when they decided to help me.

I made arrangements with a tiny natural history museum in Mexicali and with a university extension art museum in Calexico, open one day a week. InSite helped me obtain a map of the mountain from the Mexican government, and with the help of the museum from Mexicali, I did a large model of the mountain, which was shown at the museum there and at the San Diego University Museum. We later used that data to make souvenir models of the mountain with the American name on one side (Mount Signal) and the Mexican name on the other side (Cerro Centinela). I showed these souvenir models in different situations: three of them in the local area, one of them including paintings by local artists and sand spikes from local people who collected them.

LT You also developed a pretty complete website that is still up.

AM I made a large version of the sand spike, a smaller version that you can buy in the souvenir shop and a website that still exists, with stories of the mountain, photographs, the history of the sand spikes.

LT I want to say that I loved the press release that you wrote for the sand spike show: "Maybe the meaning of an artwork is the sum of all meanings given to it by the sum of its viewers." It is wonderful in terms of criticism, because so many people were puzzled by your interventions in the area.

AM Well, many of the local people were pleased in the end because many of these artists had not shown in San Diego before and we were able to make it happen. It was clearly a project that was not just for the art community: it had its own value and continues because of it.

I'm going to skip several projects to go to this one, just because I think it's relevant. I was invited to do a project in a new part of Malmö, Sweden, called *The New City Markers*. They had built about twenty-five new buildings and had funding for art, so they invited me. Instead of making a single art object to show in the town square, I designed a system like my drawing system—the equivalent of an "address" system.

Every apartment would have its own shape on the door, and every building had its own shape. My idea was that as children grew up, they would learn to recognize each other's shapes and use the system as a secret code, or possibly lovers would send each other notes based on the secret code… Because if you knew the bottom of the shape you knew which building it was, so even though each apartment had its own shape it also signified the building that you were in.

I also did a similar project about objects that had no meaning unless they were exchanged. These were objects that you would give to people to say "thank you." They were called *Visible Markers*.

I'll turn now to a more recent project: another kind of border project which involved the border between Kansas and Missouri: *The Topographical Model Donation Project*. An art gallery in Kansas City offered me $15,000 to do an art project, so I said "Ok, I'll spend half on an art project and half on a community giveaway project." We made models of both Kansas and Missouri, rubber molds, and from the rubber molds I produced silicon casts. Now the project was split into two: using the silicon casts we made ceramic models for people to buy. We also made drawings of every county in both Kansas and Missouri, by hand, and showed them in the gallery, as artworks. At the same time, I used the molds again to make plaster objects, and in the side room I had reports on these plaster objects. They were the same objects but not finished: they were painted only with white primer. I mailed letters to 250 little historical museums in tiny little towns—the population of these towns was as little as twenty-seven people—offering to give them a topographical model of their state, which they could then paint in any way they wanted, according to their museum's program. I sent them the images and 120 people responded. A new friend from the area and I packed them up and drove around for a month delivering the models to all of these small museums. It was probably one of the nicest experiences of my life, because I met so many people. Each person was very proud of their community, very happy about the gift. All different kinds of museums: a doll museum, a geological museum, a library… even the major museum in the capital took one.

There is a map online of where each one went, personally delivered by me and my friend. Everybody thanked me and sent me items out of little newspapers about how they had received their gifts. They didn't even know me as an artist—the fact that I was an artist virtually never came up. I would never mention it. One person out of 120 asked, "But didn't you sign it?" I replied, "Oh, I forgot," and signed it, but all in all, they didn't think of it that way. My goal is to one day complete this project by going back to each of these 120 museums and seeing how they have painted the maps, because the geology museum would show where to find different kinds of rocks and copper on it, the agricultural museum would show corn and wheat, and so on. They each told me what they were going to do and each one was different.

For the project *Each and Every One of You*, I did prints of the 1200 most popular names in the United States. It is very strange to walk into this gallery because it is like walking into your high school annual and beyond—it is very emotional.

There is another project I'm working on at the moment—*The Shapes Project*—and it involves little parts, little parts that I'm creating on Adobe Illustrator. There are two systems here: one that creates two hundred and fourteen million shapes, which are constantly different; the other system creates billions of shapes for everyone in the world. It is a project that I'm designing to create unique shapes for everyone on the planet. I'm not going to finish it in my lifetime nor obviously am I going to be able to drive around in a truck and deliver them, so it's more of a fantasy. The works can be made in any kind of material. At the show I'm doing in the coming months, I'll be exhibiting over seven thousand little framed prints, just printed off the computer. So, that's what I'm doing now. It is not finished yet so you are getting a preview.

LT This is the show you're starting in October, isn't it?

AM November.

LT Do we have any time at all? I just wanted to ask you two big questions, about use and reception. You seem to be constantly trying to find new ways to implement your work, some other kinds of uses, multiple uses, and we have spoken a lot about your annoyance with the way people tend to deny the usefulness of art.

AM I think one of the reasons I feel that way is because of course art has its uses and it is surprising to me that people describe it as having no use. On the other hand I don't want to think of it as only having function. But in my generation, at least, it was generally spoken of as having no use. Of course my take on it—because of my family background—is that one of its most significant uses, beyond beauty, is that it separates one class from another, or one group of exclusive people that understand it from all the rest. I think that in order to recognize we are doing this, we also have to recognize that the very fact that other people don't understand it is a part of why we do it and enjoy it… or we wouldn't be constantly coming up with more and more complicated ideas and more and more complicated artworks that nobody understands. I mean, it is a very good question: by doing projects that have other uses besides the so-called "art-world use," I'm hoping that this will force me to remember the kinds of uses that the artwork has as an artwork, because I have to compare it to the uses it has in other contexts. So I have to say: "Ok, it's useful to schoolteachers, but not to me." I don't know if that answers your question. That is one of the trends in my thinking.

LT The other thing that I wonder about is, you seem to have moved away from a typical art viewer to a more varied audience for your work over the years, so you have enlisted other kinds of communities. Who is your audience? Who have you enlisted as your audience? Who do you think of as your audience?

AM To me, my audience is a fantasy. I have a website, so I never know how many people visit it—zero or a million. When we speak of all, everybody, one million people,

audience—these are very abstract terms and I don't think that I have a very smart answer, but I hope that the audience can be just anybody, that anyone might like it… I don't think I have an answer to that question.

LT Well, when you think about it, it seems like you have worked with certain kinds of communities—in Utah or in Florida—but now it seems like you're working with the world.

AM First, I want to correct you: nobody in Utah has ever seen that work, except online. They never invited me to do a show in Utah—it was always New York, Paris, Germany, the Imperial Valley. Early in my history I began by identifying myself as an artist in relation to a painting and made a sign of that—the *Surrogates*—and then I kept expanding it to the gallery, the viewer, other galleries similar to the art gallery, museums similar to art museums, but what defines a museum? The community. But what defines the community? The State. But what defines the State? And so on. Then I ended up doing something for everybody in the world, but I don't know where I'm going with that.

LT Does anyone want to ask Allan any questions? We could take two or three questions.

Joshua Decter I wanted to ask Allan about the issue of industrial design, which hasn't come up here, like automobile design. I'm a little troubled about the distinction between the unique and the mass-produced, which is a discussion that has been going on for at least a century, or much longer. The automobile industry in the United States, at least since the 1950s, has had the idea of a kind of conflation of the unique and mass-production. It seems to me that your practice is in some sense analogous to the practice of industrial design. The way in which industrial design has worked in the United States since the 1950s has been precisely the conflation of the unique and the mass-produced, in which the automobile industry, for example, is able to sell a particular model as unique, and establish a relation to the consumer as a unique kind of experience. Recently we have had situations in which the internet has been coupled with industrial design, such as Nike, in which consumers can actually modify their sneakers. The question is: do you consider that an art form? Is that an issue?

AM I think this is new and I have to deal with it. When I was doing this in the 1980s, the industry wasn't doing this and I wondered why. Wasn't it economical? I think it is also ideological: we don't like to think of thousands and thousands of unique things. I think it is a little nonsensical when they sell you a "unique" thing, because there are only twenty types, fifteen types or maybe a thousand types, so it is never completely unique: it is a sales device. I'm not sure what you are asking me: it is something the industry could do, but won't.

Joshua Decter I guess what I wanted to say is that there is an increasing tendency to conflate the idea of the individual and mass-production, within commerce and consumerism. This is an issue that has evolved from the manufacture of automobiles as a sales device, but it seems to me that in some ironic way, mass culture anticipated this issue which is what you are after.

AM Maybe I'm already obsolete.

Joshua Decter No, no. It is interesting how issues of mass production, uniqueness, authorship have evolved in a parallel way to your own work. I'm curious about the consideration that you are giving to that.

AM Well, I don't know how to answer this except to say that I do enjoy the fact that industry is doing this more and more, and I think that it is a good thing.

Related to that, it seems to be that the entire twentieth century and the end of the nineteenth was devoted to coming up with new ways of considering the individual versus the social, the unique versus the common. The work of art has been paced with technology. I don't want to sound overtly McLuhanistic, but I think that with radios, railroads, telephones, television, airplanes, internet, the world seems bigger and bigger and bigger, and the question of what is unique becomes more and more complex. I don't know if I have a double walking around in Ireland: these kinds of questions probably didn't even occur to people one hundred and fifty years ago, because back then when you said everyone you meant the town where you lived.

The other evening I was listening to a fashion designer on TV and he kept saying thing like "Well, in the 1980s, everyone was wearing blah blah blah, and everyone went to discos and…" And I was thinking, "What??? Who is he talking about? Who is everyone? Is he talking about farmers in South Africa? What does he mean? What does he think when he says the word everyone?" Luckily I was only listening, so I don't know what he looked like. Trying to imagine everyone is a very important issue and we all do what that designer was doing: I'm not excluding myself.

LT So your last project is an attempt to visualize "everyone?"

AM It is an attempt to exercise the imagination, I think: to look for it with joy. We do it with passport numbers or social security numbers. I don't think I'm quite that ambitious, but I'm trying to think that it is a good thing to expand our thinking about mass-produced objects, the small versus the large, because it is a challenge to our imagination. We've only had a hundred or so years to think about this so deeply, really. It is a slow process. I don't think I've answered your question.

LT Thank you all so much.