Jim Acord
Starlight Hotel, August 20, 2002
T78
Acord interview about project at Oxford
TC starts @ 050030

Timecode	Description
050100	Art and science are two parallel paths to truth and beauty and an understanding of who we are and why we were born and what our lives are about. And it should always be like that. But in the last 50 or a hundred years, science has been more arrogant about art. That art wasn't important. It wasn't as important as science. And in all the years that I spent at the Hanford Nuclear reservation and my artist in residencies at Imperial college and stuff that is genuinely the most common response that I get. It is rare to find a scientist who buys tickets to the symphony, who takes their kids to an art museum on weekends you know. And I think this is terribly unfortunate. We live in a time in which our society is so fragmented, so chaotic that with art and science coming together and working on commonalities it can only help everything and everybody. And that is one of the reasons I want to make this project a joint art science endeavor. And incidentally, as an aside, everybody says "science/art", and I want you to know my mother was and English teacher and she told me when all else was equal you alphabetize and it should be art/science and so I always use "art/science".
050303	Here's what I would like to have people come away from…. The understanding, now you gotta realize that nuclear issues are controversial and most people don't feel they understand them. I would like to have people come away from the 4th reliquary going "well it's not that hard to understand…here's an artist working with it, here's a sculpture hanging on a wall in a museum." By gaining control of our understanding of nuclear issue, we all become empowered to make the right decision. You gotta realize.. Read the newspaper, we got a zillion tons of radioactive nuclear waste to deal with you know. This morning's NPR was worried about the number of nuclear weapons that may be missing in Russia; you know it just goes on and on and on. Nuclear issues are affecting our lives and we've only been in the nuclear age 60 years. If people have an understanding that wow "this artist can work with it and I just helped him turning some cranks and levers and I was participating with this sculpture, that means I can go to the local public meeting, I can write a letter to the editor, I can write my senator or prime minister or counselor and try to get things fixed, try to make things better.
050506	And this is one of the things that art can do. Art has the capability to give meaning and understanding to things that are not fully understood. That

	is part of the power of art. And It has been since the stone age And that is what I would like to have my sculpture do.
050537	I certainly had very poor luck in the United states with the Dept of Energy And the people at the Hanford nuclear reservation. There was a lot of animosity towards me; there was a lot of resistance toward an artist utilizing nuclear technology to create art. I think the reason for my greater acceptance in Europe is that people get more, people that go into sciences get their PhD's in nuclear physics get more culture-based classes in their educational systems. I mean you can get a PhD in nuclear engineering here in the United states and never take one class in French poetry or one class in art appreciation and in England or Slovenia or France or Germany or the other people that I've been involved with. There people have a much clearer understanding or art and art history. I mean they can sit down and talk to you about the Italian Renaissance you know. I think it's a difference in the educational process. That people get a more cultured education even if they are going into the hard sciences. So that's my take on it. I think it's the specialization of the US education systems that produces people who, brilliant as they are that have no understanding of art and culture.
050730	He's a great guy, his name is David Wark. He is going to get the Nobel Prize for having discovered that neutrinos have mass. He has two laboratories, set up. One is in a nickel mine in Canada; one is in a nickel mine in Siberia. He and his colleagues have been looking for the missing neutrinos. 80% of the neutrinos predicted by Einstein's theory have not been found and he found them. And it turns out that neutrinos do have a little bit of mass. When I took introduction to nuclear Systems we were told neutrinos had no mass.
050810	In any event he caught one of my lectures once and invited me out for a beer and we sat around and we chatted about and we talked and we talked about art and we talked about his science and he was looking for neutrinos and we got involved in a far ranging conversation and we really hit it off. He's probably 10 or 15 years my junior. He reads at Oxford and that's a name for a being a Don there. (?)I'm not quite sure what that means. And he's attached to Rutherford Appleton Labs and the EU…ahh what's the name of it it's on the Swiss French border? Cerne . He's at Cern, linear accelerator. And he likes art.
050903	So anyway we applied for a grant. A science/art grant is what it was called. I would prefer to say art/science. And we did a brilliant application and it was just too controversial. And I have since sort of heard some of the behind the scenes stuff. We short-listed you know, but using a Russian nuclear reactor was a little too much for the Welcome Trust Foundation. In any event he has helped me with the math. And of course you have to realize that the math involved in a sculpture project like this is really quite behind me. And if I do do it with smoke detectors and the bee source, David crunched the numbers and I'll get a thousand atoms a

	minute. I mean it'll be working. But in the end I'm gonna get to use a bigger machine.
051007	I had met with him a year ago. And I said: it's not working out at Imperial College. And I've got this application in with British Nuclear Fuels—who I'd really like to have had as my sponsor for a number of reasons-and he said "well you know there's artists in residence at Oxford, Why don't you apply?" So I sent him an application and he sent it on and I got it. And he's very supportive of art and science working together and that has been so rare in my experiences. You know one scientist in a hundred maybe believes that art and science should work together as peers. So yeah, so he was very instrumental in setting this up and he was also associated with Rutherford/Appleton labs and he patched that together too. He and I wrote the application, he passed that on and made sure that it got approved.
051119	Well, you know…. I know this is a hard thing to understand because so many of my friends have long term plans—you I mean they are going to raise their kids, pay off the mortgage, buy a new car, get a new yacht. I focus on the sculpture that I'm trying to make right now. And I don't really think about anything else. And when that sculptures' done, then I think about the next thing. So no I don't really have any plans. I suppose artist in residencies are probably what's in my future you know. I don't seem to be able to do anything else. But the 4th reliquary is my only goal right now. I'm not looking beyond that to anything in any way. When that's done, I'll think of something else. I may go back to being a cowboy in South Dakota.
051245	*Who you admire? Blah, blah blah…long story here*
051333	The artist I think that I appreciate the most is a guy from the German Renaissance, Tilman Reimenschneider. He was wood carver and ah eventually ended up being thrown in prison because he back some peasant revolt and died in total obscurity. But he did absolutely lovely carvings. And 3 of them are in the Metropolitan Museum of in New York's', the cloisters gallery. And when I was doing a lot of carving in Vermont I would often go and visit those sculptures because of the wonderful way in which he handled the folds in the robes and stuff—very abstract, very beautiful.
051421	As far as scientists go, I guess I would like Verner Herzog or Heisenberg the most. He came up with the uncertainty principal, which as far as I'm concerned applies to all life on this planet certainly mine. I mean I like Schroendinger also. And of course Newton and Galileo and all the guys who are hero scientist. COUGHS. And of course Albert Einstein, gotta admire him
051505	And of course I like Michelangelo. That's just such a cliché to say. But you know his best work is the Pieta. It is the best example of 2-figure composition that has ever been done in sculpture. Now it's easy to do a single figure, and it's easy to do 3 or more figures, but to do 2 figures

	together and have them balance it's just unbelievable. The Pieta is one of the great masterpieces of all time.
051533	And probably the artists that I admire the most are the ones whose names I will never know. They are the ones 30 and 25 thousand years ago working in those caves in France and Spain. They had to go in and clean out cave bears with sharp stick in order to have a place to work. They couldn't even build their own fire yet; they had to carry it with them. And they left those beautiful paintings and beautiful sculptures behind. And as far as I'm concerned that's the birth of civilization
051614	We don't know what language they spoke. We don't know very much about their lives at all except that it was tough. And left us so much beautiful art. So I take my inspiration a lot form prehistoric art.
051708	The Venus of Wilendorf is a common figure in that it was, that you can find it from the Mesopotamian basin all the way in to Finland. She was a fertility Goddess that people created a small mobilary statuettes and carried with them. And she's beautiful in her, in her fertility look. And I want my sculpture to address the fact that there is fertility and ability to engender solutions to nuclear issues. So that was an important element to put into it. And I think that I've done a good job in the drawings in incorporating that figure into it. The second figure is one, or the second element I should say is one of violation and an armor against transgression. And that is the reason for the sharp spiky part of the interior portion of the sculpture. And that was based on a sleazy drawing in a men's magazine from the 1950's of a chastity belt that I saw when I was in fifth grade or maybe 4th grade and couldn't figure out. But the idea stuck with me. It was a spiky thing that you couldn't get into it and that was as much as I understood at the time. And the third element of course is the nuclear element. And the sculpture will in fact address the actual physics of what is going on. And that will probably be etched onto the lid; gold foiled and will be supported by drawings that go with the sculpture. And so those are the three elements. An ice age piece of sculpture, a medieval concept of chastity belt and todays' nuclear physics. And those were three hard things to pull all together, I tell you, but I'm really pleased with the job that I've done. It's gonna be quite a sculpture.
052027	I'm not good with words, but when I use them on my drawings, I want to make sure they're spelled right. And some of these words, I actually made up. But I went to the dictionary to get to the root words so that I could do it. Like. Let's see, What's a good example of that…. "To Neutronize…" As in to change something with neutrons, that's not a word, but I made it up. And when I said, "die" I rechecked the meaning I was looking for the term as in "Die", as in a stamp that stamps metal. And I was wondering if it's the same word as in death. So anyway, so checked, and that's why it says, "it is all". All the meanings are the same.
052125	And "dolor", that's another word I've been using. -- Pain, mental suffering or anguish. "Dolorific"- causing pain or grief. "Dolores"-occasioning pain.

	That is the value of the key drawings. The keys reducing half-life every time that I draw them, I lose one ”dolor” from the pain of having lost the house, and the studio, the pickup truck, and all that stuff. And one of the toughest words that I’ve had to find …and “progenitor”…and that actually might be on the drawing that I just gave you.”progenitor”… as a way of producing something and this goes back to the Venus of Wilendorf…you know I mean it’s a creation…and utilizing fast neutron capture to transmutate one elemental substance to another is a way of “progeniting” things.
052254	It’s actually as simple as simple can be. Americium 241, found in every smoke detector in America, is a big alpha omitter. And that’s how it works. It sends out an alpha source that if the smoke gets thick enough, it breaks the beam and the alarm goes off. So it’s an alpha source. I need neutrons. If you put an alpha source next to Beryllium, the Beryllium, element #3 has an extra neutron to give off. So what you do is you put Americium and Beryllium together and you get a stream of neutrons coming off. Simple as that. The beeswax is a way, and any hydrogen would do… In the nuclear reactors that we use for power in the United States we use water. Ah, most of military reactors used to produce plutonium use carbon. What you need is something that will moderate the neutron source. Beeswax will work perfect. It’s Hydrogen. Just right. And what happens is the neutrons coming off at about 200 million electron volts, go through the beeswax and slow down to about 80 electron volts, 80 million electron volts. And then are captured by the elements I’m transmuting. That’s how it works. You can think of the beeswax as a filter. L like a lens or something, it just slows them down long enough so that the probability of capture…
052440	I mean there’s four things that can happen with neutrons. I mean they can escape, they can bounce off, they can be captured or they can pass through without doing anything. So what you want them to get em to just the right speed so the probability of them being captured is the highest. So that would be the reason for the beeswax. It’s actually quite simple.
052525	I tell my students this when I lecture in London and stuff you know. The best art is always the simplest. You know. Take your idea and cook it down to the simplest level. You know leave the complexity out of it and that will make the best sculpture. More people will understand it, perceive it, conceive of it and connect with it than if you are doing really esoteric stuff that is so complicated and conceptual that they need a manual to understand it. And I think that’s particularly applicable to sculpture. Sculpture should be simple. It has been for 30,000 years.
052619	DW: Have you ever thought of what might end up on your headstone? JA (laughs) Art Martyr Brigade, Yeah…. that would be just right. No no I haven’t. I’m running without family. I think I’ll get Mozart sand you know. Ahh buried in an unmarked paupers’ grave. And that’s fine with me. I mean in a way I carved enough headstones to last me all my life when I

	was in Bary Vermont. I must have done 5 or 6 hundred anyway over three years.
052740	DW: Do you think part of your piece is a performance piece as well? JA: Actually more and more ah critics and reviewers have been describing me as a performance artist. And I mean if you look at the fact that I'm going over to England just to make one sculpture that's only going to take me like a week and a half to do and I'm going to be there 9 months, than I guess I am a performance artist. And I don't feel very comfortable with that. I've always felt that I was a sculptor 1st and foremost. That I actually love making and creating real physical tangible objects. Things that you could touch, be a part of. But we live in a different world than we did 40 years ago when I was in art school. And performance has now become a part of it. More people learn about your artwork through reading about it. --the newspaper articles, the magazine articles, the reviews and the catalogues--than actually get to the museum or gallery to see your work. So in a way it has become important to be partially a performance artist. But I do have to say I'm not real comfortable with the term. I still think of myself as a sculptor 1st and foremost.
052917	I'm gonna store some stuff that's for sure. I mean basically I'm gonna take my suit, three white shirts, my set of ties. I think those Carharts or are so worn out, I'm not gonna bother to take them with me there. I'd get arrested for indecent exposure if I wore em. And you know I got a couple books I'm gonna take and that's basically it you know. One thing I've found is I travel lighter every time I do this. I mean the 1st time I went to do an artist in residency at Imperial College; I had a suitcase that weighed 70 pounds. I packed books and papers and everything…You know, hey the libraries work. If I'm getting a stipend I can go buy some art supplies. I don't need to pack a set of Breck colored pencils over to England. I can get em there just as easy. So, I'm taking less and less stuff all the time. And that also is a statement on sort of how my life's going right now. I'm divesting myself. What I have, what I really need is in my head. I really don't need anything else. I mean I might not even pack my Introduction to Nuclear Systems textbook this time. I think maybe I've got it memorized well enough. 053050
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