



**Artists Documentation Program
Video Interview Transcript**

**SARAH SZE
JUNE 30, 2008**

**Interviewed by:
Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Founding Director,
Artists Documentation Program, and
Associate Director for Conservation and Research, Whitney Museum of American Art**

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This interview is part of the Artists Documentation Program, a collaboration of the Menil Collection, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums.

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About the Artists Documentation Program

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, artists have experimented with an unprecedented range of new materials and technologies. The conceptual concerns underlying much of contemporary art render its conservation more complex than simply arresting physical change. As such, the artist's voice is essential to future conservation and presentation of his or her work.

In 1990, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection for Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, then Chief Conservator, to establish the Artists Documentation Program (ADP). Since that time, the ADP has recorded artists speaking candidly with conservators in front of their works. These engaging and informative interviews capture artists' attitudes toward the aging of their art and those aspects of its preservation that are of paramount importance to them.

The ADP has recorded interviews with such important artists as Frank Stella, Jasper Johns, and Cy Twombly. Originally designed for use by conservators and scholars at the Menil, the ADP has begun to appeal to a broader audience outside the Menil, and the collection has grown to include interviews from two partner institutions: the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums. In 2009, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection to establish the ADP Archive, formalizing the multi-institutional partnership and making ADP interviews more widely available to researchers.

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[Speakers (in order of appearance): Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Founding Director, Artists Documentation Program and Associate Director for Conservation and Research, Whitney Museum of American Art; Sarah Sze, Artist; John Silberman, Collector and Owner of *Migrateurs*.]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:42]

CM-U: There we go. And you go to that side [sounds like].

Sarah Sze: The bottom part is actually quite good on this box. I can have the person who builds boxes look and then see what he thinks. 'Cause the actual foam part I like. This should also come off.

CM-U: Okay. Good. Okay.

CM-U: Today is June 30, 2008, and we are in Sarah Sze's studio. Thank you for having us.

Sarah Sze: I'll just move this.

CM-U: And we are here to discuss various of her pieces, but we are going to start with *Migrateurs* [1997]. Okay. So can you just give me a little bit of history about where it was installed, and when, etc.?

Sarah Sze: Sure.

[00:01:19]

Sarah Sze: This is a piece that was installed at the Museum of the City of Paris ["Migrateurs," Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris / ARC, December 4, 1997–January 18, 1998]...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: ...in Paris. And at the time, this – it was installed directly on the exit signs that were in the museum.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

- Sarah Sze: And there were a series of them that I made, actually – it was made on site, but I actually made the sculpture, you know, upstairs, and then brought it down and put it on top of the exit sign.
- CM-U: So this was the actual piece that was put on top of the exit sign...
- Sarah Sze: Yes.
- CM-U: ...in the location of the exit sign?
- Sarah Sze: Yes.
- CM-U: Okay.
- Sarah Sze: So then afterwards we got exit signs...
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: ...that were exactly the same, from the same manufacturer, so that they could be then installed elsewhere and feel almost like they were an exit sign in the space where they were installed...
- CM-U: Perfect.
- Sarah Sze: ...but also have this character of being sort of very specifically French. You know, unlike, you know, any other exit sign you would find somewhere else.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: But also kind of a universal symbol. So...
- CM-U: So much about the space is going into the space, and seeing the characteristic of the space, one that inspires a certain kind of work. So, in that sense, you are sort of taking some of the space with you.
- Sarah Sze: Yes.
- CM-U: Is that the idea of this?
- Sarah Sze: Absolutely. And the idea was to create – often the idea is to create a piece that, no matter where it goes, it feels site-specific.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: But also it might have a trace of where it's traveled from. So objects that have an identity – you know, if you look at this piece, you'll see things from Italy. You'll see things from Japan. You'll see things from America. So that the objects that are in there, if you look closely, they have a feeling of being collected over time...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...and space. So, again, this piece was supposed to be – you were supposed to – if you install it in this space, you might install it in a place that actually it would function as an exit sign, but at the same time it's clearly from another place.

CM-U: And what about the materials that are in the piece? Are they also from that place?

Sarah Sze: So I would say usually about fifty to seventy-five percent of the materials are brought with me to that location.

CM-U: Okay.

Sarah Sze: And then there's always certain things that are specific to that location. And then if the piece I had done historically – if the piece was reinstalled somewhere else, there was often something added that was – so a piece would actually have this kind of accrued history of where it was installed. That was sort of one of the ideas that I had about, you know, how you could add or take away from a piece.

CM-U: And have you done that?

Sarah Sze: I have done that. Yeah, I have.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Sarah Sze: I mean, I think it – when you said in the beginning about how, you know, ideas about conservation, and the work over time is really something that evolves and changes.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: It was really important. When I was an undergrad, I did my thesis on the life of work over time, and I looked at a few artists very closely. And I think the person who helped me the most was actually Felix Gonzalez-Torres...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: ...because one of the things that he did was, he – as you probably know – was extremely precise, but each piece had a different set of instructions. So two pieces that almost seemed, you know, seemed very, very similar, would have very different rules about what you could do with it. And sort of giving that kind of freedom to each individual piece, I think, was important. You know, important while you're making the work, so you actually have this freedom to make the work in the moment and not think about a set of rules it has to apply to over time.

CM-U: Right. Okay, we're going to come back to that topic.

Sarah Sze: Okay.

CM-U: Because that's a big one.

Sarah Sze: Yes.

CM-U: But let's talk specifically about this one.

Sarah Sze: Uh-huh.

[00:04:41]

CM-U: So how has this changed over the years that you've done – since you made it, would you say?

Sarah Sze: Well, it was brought – so it was brought back from Paris. The top section. So they wouldn't let us – you know, the pieces really depend on the institution, you know, how long you have in the space...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...and – is crucial. And how much time you can be on site. So in this museum they wouldn't let us install on site. So to make it seem site specific, it was done on a plinth. You can see there's a small plinth.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: In the museum, they are very high, so you never saw the plinth. As I said, it was done in the museum, but upstairs; and then after hours we would go and test it and see, you know, how it worked on site. And so the plinths were taken off where it

was – they were brought back to the States. These were ordered. And then they were – this was sold from my gallery at the time [Marianne Boesky Gallery]. And I haven't seen it since. So how it's changed over time, the glue has yellowed.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: There are objects in it that are organic, and they have – so they're Tic Tacs...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...that have sort of dissolved slightly. This is an aspirin, which has held up quite well. A piece of soap...

CM-U: This one's amazing. Did you see where it was just the skin of...

Sarah Sze: The skin of the aspirin? Yeah. It's funny that that one has held up so well, and this – this one has held up so well, and that one has disappeared.

CM-U: I know. Isn't that interesting?

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Who knows?

CM-U: Quality control on medicines. (laughs)

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Exactly. Maybe that's the generic.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: And then the gum. This is gum, which has obviously melted and sagged.

CM-U: Well, I just – I was just pointing out these aspirin, which are one condition; and then we have one over here where the ingredients, or the material of the aspirin has desiccated. And then we were looking – we were just talking about the gum wrappers.

Sarah Sze: The gum wrappers. The gum, actually.

CM-U: In there.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. And the wrappers. I mean, there's actual gum in there.

CM-U: Okay. Which originally actually projected straight out into the space.

Sarah Sze: Straight out. Yeah. And then this cotton has yellowed...

CM-U: Yeah.

Sarah Sze: ...there. There are also pills. They are in pretty good condition.

CM-U: Oh, yeah.

Sarah Sze: And the cotton. The cotton – one of the cotton balls also has become fuzzy.

[00:07:04]

Sarah Sze: And this was – I guess this piece was done in '97, '98?

CM-U: That's '97, is what I have – what I was thinking...

Sarah Sze: Was it '97 or '98? I think it's '97, '98.

CM-U: So almost ten. Ten, eleven years.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah. It's been quite a while.

CM-U: So what's your take on it?

Sarah Sze: So it's interesting. We – John and I had a number of conversations. My take on it has actually come closer to John's. I actually think he's absolutely right. I've been used to having collectors who wanted me to do a lot of work on their pieces if I could.

CM-U: Wanting them to continue to look new?

Sarah Sze: Yes.

CM-U: Okay.

Sarah Sze: And so I sort of had that expectation that was what John would want. But I think he's correct. And that, what's interesting about this to me is – for me, it is almost as if I were looking at, you know, a painting, I think, you could mark this much more clearly. The marks in it, and the decisions, are dated for me. And that's interesting.

CM-U: Hmm.

- Sarah Sze: You know, if I were to have the same opportunity to do this project, the piece would look different.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: You know, my touch has changed. And I think that's actually an interesting thing about it. Probably the most relevant artist, in terms of some shows I've seen recently, was the Rauschenberg, you know, retrospective at the Met ["Robert Rauschenberg: Combines," Metropolitan Museum of Art, December 20, 2005-April 2, 2006]. That was really incredible to see how his use of materials and how his mark, you know, changed and evolved, a; and b, that it also – it was beautiful to see them, to see them sort of age over time. And what I usually say to the conservators and the museums when I do an install, and they are sort of doing the upkeep on site, is that the work should look aged but not neglected.
- CM-U: Correct. Right. I totally – I phrase it in a different way. I say "kempt." Not "unkempt." You don't want to have this feeling that it's neglected.
- Sarah Sze: That's nice. It's sort of...
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Sarah Sze: ...it's more like personifying the work.
- (laughter)
- CM-U: Yes. We become very intimate with these things. Well, what I find particularly interesting is your saying that you were making this at a moment in your own development...
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: ...and your own thinking.
- Sarah Sze: Yes.
- CM-U: And so, as you have aged and developed...
- Sarah Sze: Yes.
- CM-U: ...so has that.

Sarah Sze: Yes.

CM-U: But now at what point – I guess the question then becomes, at point is it too far? Can you imagine...

Sarah Sze: Is it too far to restore?

CM-U: No. Not that...

Sarah Sze: Oh, how – yes.

CM-U: It's never too far to restore, but at point do we say, "Okay, this is baseline. We want to now preserve it."

Sarah Sze: Right. Right.

CM-U: Because we can make that glue, the gum go out straight.

Sarah Sze: Sure. So I think that the elements that are really organic – so, the Tic Tacs. My personal feeling is that the Tic Tacs, the cotton – you know, this cotton – those things could be replaced. I would leave everything else. You know, I would dust and clean everything else, but I think that, you know, the glue, the way the glue has yellowed is fine. And I think that's the main thing. It's – you know, I think inevitably if you put food into the work, it's something that you assume is going to be replaced. You know, food, or aspirin. Things that are, you know, so obviously going to wear so quickly over time.

CM-U: Those would be okay to replace?

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: Do you choose the cotton because it's taken the yellowish hue and it doesn't look fresh new? Or what made your eye go specifically to the cotton?

Sarah Sze: Well, I think the cotton is going to eventually – I mean, it's one of those things also where eventually – well, inevitably – you are going to have to replace it. So it's really just a choice. You know, it's really just a choice of at what stage. So, you know, at a certain – you know, you could let it go a little bit longer, but after five more years, I would think it would be almost – you know, it itself would start becoming its own being, and that – I think when the piece itself starts to grow organically, it's probably when you want to switch it out.

[00:10:46]

Sarah Sze: You know, I think this idea that the piece, that those organic elements, any time you come to the piece, are going to be at a certain stage in their development is interesting.

Sarah Sze: I don't know if you know – another thing that has sort of affected my thinking on work evolving is a place called the Ise Shrine. Have you ever heard of it?

CM-U: No.

Sarah Sze: It's this incredible shrine in Japan that, for Japanese, it is very important. Where they have two – it's two shrines right next to each other; and they are made from raw wood, and they get rebuilt – one gets rebuilt, and the other gets rebuilt every year. So at any time you go to see the shrine, one is being built, and the other one is aging. And it's happened for literally centuries, and they train a person who is, you know, a national monument, the person, the craftsman. So there has been this lineage of a person who knows how to make the shrine for centuries, and it's actually that person, that skill, that is the value. But when you go, it has this incredible feeling of this process that's happened over this immense time. And any time you go, you are going to see one decaying and one growing.

Sarah Sze: So, in the same way, I think, you know, inevitably any time you come to this piece, those certain elements would be fresh. They would be, as you said, what's that point. But at the point of where, you know, they are neglected or unkempt, or somewhere in between. And that's part of seeing the piece, is that, when you come to the piece, you know that you are seeing it at a time in its life cycle because you've realized there are elements that are in that process of decay.

CM-U: So you are comfortable with that dichotomy of some things – yeah, the glue will always be getting yellower.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: But the aspirin can be getting whiter, and the cotton will, too.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. I think – well, I mean, I think that the point of putting in some of the really ephemeral elements is that what you think about time in the work – you know, in some – in a work like – you know, in some works there will be fresh plants. You know that somebody is watering them, you know. Less this work, but in other works there'll be things, you know, like a humidifier. So you know that they are being tended to daily. So that when you look at the work, there is – you think

about this span of something that has to be, you know, kept from being unkempt daily, hourly, to, you know, ten years, a hundred years. So there's that range in the work. I think there always is.

CM-U: I find it interesting that you have that attitude, which I think I understand, and I appreciate and agree with. It's a natural thing. We can't really fight it, although that's what I'm hired to do.

Sarah Sze: (laughs) Right.

CM-U: I find that interesting vis-à-vis your choice of just kind of mass-made materials. They are all new when you buy them.

Sarah Sze: Yes.

CM-U: It's not like you're buying aged materials to begin with.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: There's nothing sentimental about the materials you are using.

Sarah Sze: Absolutely.

CM-U: And yet you have now understood – or you accept that certain things will age and they can be – that's okay.

Sarah Sze: Right. I mean, I think it's really important that – I mean, the idea, I think, in the work about, you know – I think when I started doing sculpture, the first thing I was thinking about was, "How do objects accrue value? You know, how do we place value on an object?" And I wanted to get objects that actually had very little value. And the way I was defining value was, they had no romance to them. They had no memory. They had no history.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: They were easily accessible. They were mass made. They were made in bulk. If you lose a match, you can replace a match. You know. They also had practical use. Not necessarily considered aesthetic use until they are put into this context.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: So that when you went to a work, you really felt like the value came from a kind of touch, and a kind of location, a kind of juxtaposition...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: ...and not in – nothing that was inherent in the material. So also this idea, which is interesting in the context – I hadn't really thought about it in the context of talking about this – is that one of the ideas was that – very, very rarely, maybe there's an exception here and there, have things that were used. So it wasn't trash, 'cause trash has this kind of romantic history to it...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...you know, that it was completely impersonal. And so that this, you know, this titration between something being extremely impersonal and then being very personal, was constantly like a see-saw, you know. So you sort of became attached to something as very intimate, and then you'd pull back and realize that it's, you know, it's actually entirely attainable and "throw away-able." You know, discardable material.

Sarah Sze: So that was really important. But interestingly, is, here there is now – there's a romance to the work because it itself has a history. But I think that's something that I hadn't really figured out when I was first making it.

CM-U: Good.

[00:15:26]

Sarah Sze: I think that's actually probably why John's point is really important, is that then there's a kind of new level of – like preciousness – to the work when it isn't upgraded all the time. You know, and this idea of sort of preserving a moment where those decisions were – that were in the moment. Like, one of the things that I think is interesting about this piece is how quickly the glue was put on. You know, it's almost like a painterly mark.

CM-U: You mean the speed with which it was done?

Sarah Sze: Yes. The glue.

CM-U: Um-hum.

- Sarah Sze: Because what happened in the – you know, for what it's worth, what happened was, we had – literally had two days to do the show. It was – I had done a show with Hans Ulrich [“Cities on the move: Contemporary Asian Art of the turn of the 21st century,” Curated by Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist, November 26, 1997-January 18, 1998, Wiener Secession, Vienna] at the Secession in Vienna, and he had patched it on, really, in his wonderful way. He said, “Oh, you know, you should just come and do this.” And so it was incredibly, you know, fast. I went there and made the decision. And, you know, it was totally done in three days. And in some ways that's the strength of the piece 'cause it has this kind of frenetic, desperate quality to it.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: And the kind of slight patheticism to it, too, I think is actually important to the piece.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: So cleaning it up, again, is – it becomes an entirely different piece. I think that's absolutely right.
- CM-U: That's a very interesting question, isn't it? I mean, that's something, of course, I spent my whole life dealing with. I mean, how do we preserve that instant, that moment, that creative moment...
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: ...that was so important to you?
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: And yet, you know, it's going into a museum. Or it's going into a private collection, and it's going to be preserved.
- Sarah Sze: Right. Well, I think, you know – I mean I think it's interesting to think of it in terms of painting because for some reason, in painting, we would never change a mark. Right? I mean, well, that's always an issue of how much you clean them up. But you wouldn't ask an artist to redo the painting.
- CM-U: Right.

- Sarah Sze: If, you know, you might have someone, a conservator, get it to the same level. But you wouldn't ask an artist to, you know, change the mark. So in some ways, I think the way I work in terms of this idea of time, and intuition, and spontaneity, in terms of the mark in the sculpture actually is – it has a kind of painterly quality to it. So the mark in this is, I think, important to the work at the time.
- CM-U: Oh, definitely. I think that's true. The difference being that – I mean, I wouldn't ask – I mean, were this to enter a museum...
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: ...or John's collection, I wouldn't expect you to go back into it to do any of the changing...
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: ...because that's way too hard, and you're into something very different right now. Just like in a painting, it's a conservator who should do it.
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: Which is why our challenge is to understand what it is that you would dictate.
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: While you're here, that's fine. We can work together.
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: You can say, "Oh, Carol, I don't like the cotton. I don't like this. I don't like that."
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: And I can take care of it. But it's when you're not here that we have to make those sort of decisions.
- Sarah Sze: Sure.
- CM-U: So that's why it's helpful...
- Sarah Sze: Sure. Absolutely.

CM-U: ...to understand that.

Sarah Sze: Most of my – yeah, so much of the body of my work are things like the Whitney, that they have acquired, and not objects like this that have been acquired. So a lot of the time they are de-installs, so they are merely taken apart...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...and then there's instructions to reinstall.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: So it becomes a little bit of a different issue. Because the glue – like a lot of the glue just gets remade in the moment. So I think that's also why my thinking on this was, "Oh, you know, you sort of reinstall it." But I think that that's actually, after spending time with it, not the way to deal with it.

CM-U: It's so wonderful in the way it is. It really is.

Sarah Sze: Thank you.

[00:19:01]

J. Silberman: Can I ask a question? About the gum?

CM-U: Yeah. Please do, John.

Sarah Sze: Yes.

J. Silberman: Would your thinking be to get new gum, you put it in, and then a few years from now it will also collapse; or would you think of doing something that would keep it permanently the way it was supposed to look?

Sarah Sze: You know, I might – for the gum, I might just put something in it that will keep it permanently stiff. Because I think...

CM-U: Something else? Something stiff?

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Because I feel like, as a – you don't see it as an element. You don't actually see the interior. So this idea that it's not so important to me that it's decaying over time – I think, you know, the gum. It's an interesting question because there's always – it comes back always to the central question. The work is

– you know, if it's a formal gesture, then it's just a straight line. So you make it straight.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: But if it's really about this gum...

CM-U: That's right.

Sarah Sze: ...then it should, you know – there's gum in here, too. It's doing something, but we don't see it. You know, so...

J. Silberman: Right.

CM-U: It's working over there. It's resting there.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Exactly.

(laughter)

CM-U: That's easier.

Sarah Sze: Right. So my feeling about that might be just to make it straight there, because you – it's the sense of it. It's not actually as a material. We are imagining it anyway. We're not seeing it.

J. Silberman: Carol, what do you think?

CM-U: Yeah. If I can jump in on that. I would agree with the way you're thinking because the way it is now, I'm thinking there's something about it that you wanted to connote aging, limpness. You know, you wanted to connote a state that's different from what it was originally. And I don't think that is your intent necessarily. That can happen over time, but if that wasn't an intention of yours – maybe like as in _____ [word inaudible], for example...

Sarah Sze: Right. Right. Right.

CM-U: ...you know, one could imagine putting something stiff in the wrapper.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: Just to kind of buoy it up a little bit.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: In the same vein that one would replace the tablet that's completely missing.

Sarah Sze: Right. I think that's fine.

CM-U: I think that holds.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: You know, it's...

J. Silberman: You mean something in place of gum? Or something _____ [phrase inaudible].

CM-U: Yeah. Yeah, something else. I mean, it wouldn't matter because it doesn't – it's the wrapper, and we can't see the gum anyway. So if we could put something a little stiff – you don't want it, you know, totally stiff, but kind of suggesting what that might have looked like. It seems to me that it would make sense, mainly to counter the kind of tired, aged look that it has now, which is unintentional.

J. Silberman: Rather than every five years...

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

J. Silberman: ...adding more gum.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: Right. And I think with each piece there are essential things that are nice about conceptually this idea of aging, and there are other things that, you know, as you said, it wasn't the intention that this part of the aging would be so dramatic. I mean, this really becomes like the most aged part of the piece...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...and that was just – that was not the intent. So you have that in other places. Like I said, with an install, when I put up plants – you know, a live plant – that's the intent, that this thing is going to constantly be watered. And there might be something in another location that there wasn't the intent, that's not wearing well, then we'll replace it, I think. So I think not everything in the piece has to be

decaying. There should be locations that you know this piece is tended to. I think this idea of breathing life into objects is very important.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: And it's interesting that a lot of the vocabulary you use about describing the object is like you are personifying the object.

CM-U: It is. It is.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. And I think that that's – you know, I think that the object, that this as a whole object should have locations that seem to, in their nature, and need to be taken care of. And in other locations, that might not be as, as you said, as the intent.

CM-U: I understand that.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: Well, the other thing. It's interesting. Of course you're making it much harder for us, but that's – but what's interesting about it is – what I like about what you're describing is, we are not just sort of “accepting aging.” Which is this phrase that we always use, you know; we just have to accept inherent vice, accept aging. We are really saying, “No, there's a spirit about this piece that we are trying to – or, there's an intent about this piece that we are trying to keep...”

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: ...“and it's necessarily about aging, but we're recognizing that parts of it age, and those that jump out are aging in a way that are really distracting, that we have to do something about.”

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: Does that sum up more or less what you're thinking?

Sarah Sze: Yeah, that's right. Yes.

CM-U: Well, I think that's fair. I think that's right. Of course I want to talk to you about the living parts of other things. We can do that later.

[00:23:32]

- CM-U: Is there anything else specific to this that we might want to talk about? Does it have meaning to you when it's not lit? I assume from the cord that it plugs in...
- Sarah Sze: It plugs in, yeah.
- CM-U: ...so it's generally on?
- Sarah Sze: Yeah. I mean, I think it is like – I think it is what it is. It's a sign, you know. If the sign's on the shelf, it's a sign.
- CM-U: That's true, sometimes. Right.
- Sarah Sze: So right now it's a sign that's not being used as an exit sign or a light. It's a light off.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: So, for me, it totally works – you know, if it's on the table, that's what it is. If it's on the wall, and it's lit, then it's providing direction. So, yeah, I think it functions as an object even without being lit.
- CM-U: Just one other practical question. If you had a glue that – if I could give you a glue that didn't yellow, would you be intrigued by that? Or does it – again, it's important that it's just a store bought regular glue.
- Sarah Sze: This is all glue gun glue. I mean, we tend to use – you know, some glue gun yellows very, very quickly.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: So we tend to use the glue guns that don't – you know, that yellow less quickly.
- CM-U: Uh-huh.
- Sarah Sze: I mean, I think, you know, this being a ten-year-old piece, you know, you don't want like that piece to be yellow in a week.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: So I think that part of it is – I mean, there is no glue that never yellows, is there?
- CM-U: Uh, no, nothing ever stays the same.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: But there are some that have retardants in it that definitely slow the yellowing.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: But they don't have the properties of a hot gun glue.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: Not that instant...

Sarah Sze: Right. Usually it's the longer they dry – the longer-drying...

CM-U: It's like an Elmer's Glue. We have the substitute for Elmer's Glue that doesn't yellow.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: But we don't have...

[both voices speaking at the same time]

Sarah Sze: I think the glue, particularly at this stage. I mean, even like here, I was letting the glue really be part of the piece. You know, the way you see – you can see. I mean, these will be easily...

CM-U: These wonderful really little webs.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. It would be easy – it would have been easy to clean those off. I mean, this piece, the more I look at it, is, you know – and especially when it was in the museum – you have to imagine it in a museum, too – had this real quality of, you know, something colonizing this tiny, tiny space, and sort of desperately trying to make use of this very, very small surface.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: Uh, of space. And sort of piling up to the very edge, and this cantilever coming out. So I think the glue, all of that, is important to the piece. It's not a pristine piece. It does have this sort of frenetic quality to it.

CM-U: Very well said. That's the way it looks to me.

Sarah Sze: And the glue gun, is really part of it. As you know, a glue gun has this – again, if you think of it...

CM-U: Yeah. Yeah.

Sarah Sze: ...even as in a painting way, it has a quick mark.

CM-U: Yes. You do. That's exactly right.

Sarah Sze: It has a very fast mark. Whereas it changes your whole process.

CM-U: Yes.

Sarah Sze: Because you can make decisions really quickly. Whereas if you change that to like an Elmer's, it just wouldn't be this same piece.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: Not just because of the look, but because of the process.

CM-U: Correct. Well, I understand that completely.

[00:26:29]

J. Silberman: I have one more question.

CM-U: Good.

J. Silberman: Is there anything that could be – I'm not sure this would be a good idea, but is there anything that could be put on it to preserve it at this stage? To keep it from deteriorating further?

Sarah Sze: That's a good question.

J. Silberman: From the glue yellowing, or the paper box, or the raisin boxes deteriorating or – is that a good idea or a bad idea if it was _____ [phrase inaudible]

CM-U: What – well, it's...

J. Silberman: Is that a possibility?

- CM-U: Okay. I'll explain what I think would happen, and then I think we'll make a decision about that. The best one could do would be put some kind of synthetic coating over the materials. And you would want something with an ultraviolet absorber to try to keep the green greens and the blue blues over time. What happens is that everything changes over time, including the coatings; and my experience with this is, you are in much worse shape if you put a coating on something, and then it yellows, and then – it's a mess. I would rather we kept this, and we kept it in a box when it's not on view – you know, we protected it. You know, you have it in this space, and you look after it, and so on, and extend it that way rather than try to do anything artificial to it. Also, it changes the look. And there's something kind of wonderful about the shiny wrapper of the gum, but not on the raisins. Or you know, like different kind of reflectance, which may not have been in your intention. Or maybe not have been in the front of your mind when you were doing it.
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: It's just something that's in the front of my mind when I think about coating it. And the same thing goes like varnishing a painting. We are so reluctant to do it if the artist didn't because of giving this even coating to something. So that's my gut response. What is your feeling about that?
- Sarah Sze: I mean, that's my own experience with materials, is that, you know, you would read it as a coating, and that the surfaces – you know, they are important, the matte surfaces, the shiny surfaces. And also that inevitably it will, you know. And it's like anything – any intervention, you know, it may over time do certain things to, you know, certain surfaces. You may not know – we don't know, we don't know the history of these things. My husband is a doctor. He's an oncologist, who, as an oncologist, you know, he recommends the least intervention possible.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: Like every, you know – 'cause it's just these things that are – you know, and I'm sure it's true of your profession, too, these things that people come up with, and then a hundred years later...
- CM-U: Not even...
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: They are problematic.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Exactly. So it's really – you just don't know. You just never know.

J. Silberman: And this is soap here? Is that a bar of soap?

Sarah Sze: Yeah, that is a bar of soap.

J. Silberman: Which is also yellowed.

Sarah Sze: Yes.

J. Silberman: Similar to the cotton?

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

J. Silberman: Would you think of replacing that, or not?

Sarah Sze: I don't...

J. Silberman: I'm not suggesting it – I'm asking...

Sarah Sze: No, no, I don't – well, my feeling about it, again, is, this is obviously – it's an experiment, so we are looking at it ten years later, who would have known? But it doesn't look like the soap's doing much besides yellowing. So my feeling is, if the – you know, the cotton is going to actually start flaking out and deteriorating, and – like dusting – and deteriorating. So it eventually – this, the soap, I'm not sure. What are your thoughts on soap?

CM-U: I would feel the same way. I think it looks fine at this moment.

J. Silberman: Um-hum.

[00:29:41]

CM-U: At this very moment, if John hired me to do something for this box...

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: ...this piece...

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: ...is there anything that I should do? Or not?

Sarah Sze: Should you do nothing? Is that what you're asking?

CM-U: No, I'm just – right now, you're seeing it. And I am the conservator.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: What do you think should be done? Just to kind of sum up.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Uh, let's see. Well, this has fallen off, so this should go – it goes right here.

CM-U: That needs to be glued back. Right.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. And this goes back, too. I'll show you in the picture.

CM-U: Okay.

Sarah Sze: Again, it's about when John wants to deal with it. I mean, since he had – if he were to hire you right now, I would probably replace – because you have to replace them eventually – I would probably replace the Tic Tacs...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: ...in the front. The cotton, because in five years I think you will have to.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: And I think the idea – again, isn't that sort of – it's a hard thing 'cause there's that overall feel of a piece...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...but if you – if these were straight, I feel like the whole level of the piece would be raised.

CM-U: I agree.

J. Silberman: Yeah. Right.

Sarah Sze: You know. And then you wouldn't even look at a lot of other stuff...

CM-U: Gives a different feel. Exactly.

J. Silberman: Uh-huh.

CM-U: That's exactly right. As soon as one thing draws your attention, then you see age everywhere.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: If it – no, that's absolutely right. You're _____ [phrase inaudible].

Sarah Sze: And I would dust, I think, the whole thing just slightly with, you know, with a cotton tip.

J. Silberman: And replace the one aspirin. Was that an aspirin on top of the red _____ [phrase inaudible].

Sarah Sze: Yeah. I mean, that aspirin's kind of great, actually, too.

J. Silberman: Oh? Oh.

CM-U: It is kind of great in its own way. How did that happen?

Sarah Sze: I don't know how it happened.

CM-U: I think we'd leave that until it totally goes, and then we worry about that.

J. Silberman: Now which are the Tic Tacs, the green or the white? Or both?

Sarah Sze: The green, I would replace. 'Cause I think that – but, you know, like I said, if this happened, it might do enough.

CM-U: Yeah. That's where I would start. I think it's always a question of degree. The two things to say, it's a question of degree.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: So you'd start there, and then see.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: And you might just decide, "This is fine for now."

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: “Let’s look at it again in three years. Or four years.” That kind of thing. The other thing you mentioned that’s so important – and John – and this is true of the museums, too – are photographs. It’s really, like you said, “Well, look, I’ll show you in the photograph how that went.”

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: Photographing it is really important...

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: ...every year. Just to have a document of how it looked originally, going through the books. Or even calling the museum and asking for installation shots. And then going on. And you will find in your career that museums will be calling your studio all the time about installation. The original installation, or second installation, you know.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: So those kind of records are really important.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: And in my field, as we are dealing more with time-based media, it’s those documents that are now becoming so important.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Absolutely. I would probably replace these because you are doing it, and it’s so easy. The two green ones.

CM-U: Put new ones in there?

Sarah Sze: Those two greens. I’ll say the two greens would *Pfttt*...

J. Silberman: Hm.

Sarah Sze: ...just the color would – you know...

CM-U: Are important?

Sarah Sze: ...pop it up. Well, it would just – again, it wouldn’t look neglected ’cause part of it would be new. You know what I mean?

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: It would just freshen it up.

CM-U: Your balance – it's very interesting.

J. Silberman: There's another one there though. Is that one also a Tic Tac?

CM-U: Right. Yeah.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: So would we just go get any other new green ones?

Sarah Sze: Yeah. That's what I – I mean, that's what I would do. Again, see, for me, it's hard to – because it's for me. You know, for you, it's much more – for me, it's like, you know. You've had this with artists, I'm sure. You know, I could pick those off right now and put on some Tic Tacs.

J. Silberman: (laughs)

Sarah Sze: So it's very immediate. But if you didn't do it, I don't think it would be a problem. Do you see what I mean? Does that make sense to you?

CM-U: Yeah, it does.

Sarah Sze: If I were the one conserving it, I would do this, and I would do that, 'cause it's easy to do.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: It's simple. And I'd probably do the cotton just to save John from calling someone in five years.

J. Silberman: You.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: And then I think the whole piece – that's right, you'd be calling me in five years!

J. Silberman: Exactly.

(laughter)

CM-U: That's right.

Sarah Sze: So, yeah. And then I would put these two things on.

CM-U: That sounds reasonable to me.

J. Silberman: When you clean it up, you said you dust it or whatever, that might have a big effect also.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah, it would definitely...

CM-U: So just dusting it, though. Straightening those out. And the cotton.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: That sounds reasonable to me. Well, it's wonderful. And it's minor repairs, really, right? So if you restrict yourself to that, I think it's fine.

(laughter)

CM-U: The risk is that the artist reworks it.

Sarah Sze: I'm giving you work.

CM-U: Right.

(laughter)

J. Silberman: Well, aren't you going to do it?

Sarah Sze: What? I'm sorry?

J. Silberman: Aren't you going to do it?

Sarah Sze: No. I mean, in the larger picture...

J. Silberman: Oh, right.

Sarah Sze: ...yes, I'm happy to do – I'm happy to do it. Yes, absolutely. Yeah. No, I was thinking, her profession in general...

J. Silberman: Ah, yes. Yes. Yes.

CM-U: No, but it's great...

J. Silberman: It's interesting how you come full circle. Because we started with thinking maybe everything. The Q-tips, the whatever. The glue...

[00:34:16]

Sarah Sze: Well, see, I've had – but this is actually with installations, when I say – I have collectors who have installations, and I think their feeling about it is, while I'm alive, you know, keep it fresh till I'm alive. And then give them elaborate packages that say sort of what can be done, what can't be done, which we should do with this. 'Cause this is early – like, that early I was just out of graduate school. We didn't do any of that. Now we have – especially it's great with digital cameras; you just put it on a disc.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: Literally, for any piece, we'll have – like, for this piece, we would have a hundred photographs.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: So, you know, for this, we could do a package that had photographs for you and said, you know, these are the thoughts on the piece, about where it would be installed, how it could be installed. Obviously this is, as I said to Carol in the beginning, one of the ideas for this is that it could be installed anywhere and would look site-specific. A sort of portable site-specific idea. You know, for something like this we would say does it need a window, does it not need a window, does it need to go through a wall there? You know, how much can you break it up? It's all in there. So now when we do a piece, the idea is, I don't exist, and it can be reinstalled. You know, a major piece got reinstalled at the MCA, Chicago [*Proportioned to the Groove*, 2005] just now that was at Marianne's. The one that has the – you know. And I didn't go. And they are very, very elaborate. It's the second time they've installed it, and both times – the first time, they did it without me. It looked great – so I didn't even go out this time.

Sarah Sze: But this – at this stage in my career, I had just graduated from graduate school – we did not do that. So we should do one for you.

J. Silberman: Hmm.

Sarah Sze: Again, not as crucial as something like this, but...

CM-U: Right.

J. Silberman: Right.

Sarah Sze: So people who had more elaborate – private collectors had more elaborate – not all of them, but a few of them had more elaborate installations – would hire me to come and totally clean the piece up completely. And they would want, you know, all of this cleaned up. They'd want it to look fresh. And that has been my experience with a few collectors. So when John asked me, you know, that came to mind because that's what people had wanted.

Sarah Sze: When I went to clean one of his pieces, I put a postage stamp in it. Partially because I thought it was interesting. It would be dated. It would have this time, that was different, and that (laughs)...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: ...and also these – a lot of collectors liked that when I would do it, and they would want a little more. You know, they want an addition. And in my mind it was sort of the same way that you talk about work. It was like, when I go see a piece, I would have this reunion with it, and I would think about it slightly different, and I would sort of add something. So I added this little postage stamp to John's piece, which he later admitted to me was a very traumatic event.

(laughter)

Sarah Sze: He was not so sure about it. So now we should – we can take it out.

J. Silberman: (nods head)

(laughter)

Sarah Sze: He wants it out.

J. Silberman: I want it out.

Sarah Sze: Isn't that hilarious? Every day, you must be – I'll come take it out. I didn't know you...

J. Silberman: Well one day, when this comes back.

Sarah Sze: Okay.

J. Silberman: When this comes...

Sarah Sze: That is – isn't that interesting? So he wants it out.

CM-U: Or at least have it documented as what it was – that it was added.

Sarah Sze: As what it was, before.

CM-U: Because what happens is, you go. John goes. I go. And then the conservator looks at this and goes, "No, that isn't the date of the piece. You can see right here on the postage stamp the date..."

Sarah Sze: Right.

J. Silberman: Right.

CM-U: ...there's some big mistake. Or, this isn't the right piece. Maybe this is a fake."

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: "Maybe somebody made it. Let's go find the original."

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: You know, it gets very complicated.

J. Silberman: It will drive people crazy.

CM-U: That's where our photographs and documentation are very important.

Sarah Sze: Right. Right. Right. Yeah.

[Break in video]

[00:37:47]

CM-U: So this is a – it's a site-specific piece for the Liverpool Biennial [*Just Now Dangled Still*, 2008 / "International 08: Made Up," Liverpool Biennial, September 20-November 30, 2008]?

Sarah Sze: Yeah, right.

CM-U: And you know the space it's going in?

Sarah Sze: Um-hum.

CM-U: But you create it here, and then recreate it there?

Sarah Sze: Yep.

CM-U: Is that right?

Sarah Sze: Yep.

CM-U: And you will go with it? To recreate it?

Sarah Sze: Yes. Yes. For – I mean, for an initial install, I would always be – something like that, I would always be on-site. Then afterwards, once it's installed, you know, on a site, then afterwards we – when we deinstall it, we do a detailed, you know, deinstall/reinstall...

CM-U: That makes sense.

Sarah Sze: ...um, set of instructions. But this is – you know, this is basically to work [sounds like] – again, it really depends on how much time I have onsite. So, you know, the more you get done in the studio – we want it to feel like, when you get to Liverpool, it happened on the site.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Even this, you feel like, “How can you move it?” But you want that feeling. So the more you can sort of get in terms of, you know, detailing done beforehand, the more it even feels like it happened there. So we will actually have three weeks to do it. The piece is actually – the space, I can show you, is actually a four-story space.

CM-U: Oh, wow.

Sarah Sze: So what you are seeing is only the bottom part of it. And there are sections that go up the side of the building here...

CM-U: Wow!

- Sarah Sze: ...right there. So, yes, it's a very different space than you see here.
- CM-U: So when you get there is when you'll actually work out the other stuff [sounds like]?
- Sarah Sze: Do the upper part. Yeah.
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Sarah Sze: So that part of it also will be much more made on site, by necessity.
- CM-U: Now what about the materials like the oranges? Will you take these oranges? Do the oranges...
- Sarah Sze: These oranges are fake.
- CM-U: These are fake?
- Sarah Sze: Uh-huh.
- CM-U: Okay. They do look very good.
- Sarah Sze: I know, don't they? They are very good. They are fake oranges. And so, you know, I play around with having real oranges, fake oranges. I think on site, maybe like the pile right there will be real.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: I've always sort of done that. There'll be real plants, fake plants, and so you have this question...
- CM-U: _____ [word inaudible]
- Sarah Sze: It's conservators. You want to make everyone a conservator. So when they come in, they are sort of wondering, you know, what's going to happen to certain parts of the piece. So, you know, at the Cartier Foundation, the entire – it was a very large piece where everything was fake except for one small plant that the water system sort of – this massive water system supported. This was a very small drip. So, you know, that's the conscious move.
- Sarah Sze: So these are fake. That will probably be real onsite...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: ...and be replaced.

CM-U: And the plants?

Sarah Sze: The plants, right now, are all fake except for that one. And onsite, I think I'll have real plants that need to be tended to.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: And, you know, I sort of play with this idea also. That plant actually looks quite fake, you know, so...

CM-U: It does. Yeah.

Sarah Sze: ...and some of the fake ones may look more real.

[00:40:33]

CM-U: There's a real – you know, there's a real connection, I'm realizing – which makes sense – between your use of aging materials and materials that don't age, and your attitude toward the restoration of *Migrateurs*.

Sarah Sze: Maybe. That's why – why are you thinking? What specifically, do you think?

CM-U: You know, it's very – which is very real. Because it's you. It's the way you think about things.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: Which I find so interesting. And it's a very interesting directive, an important directive, for conservation.

Sarah Sze: And what do you think the attitude is, specifically?

CM-U: Uh, you seem to like the play...

Sarah Sze: Yes.

CM-U: ...of what's dying and real...

Sarah Sze: Sure.

CM-U: ...and what's not.

Sarah Sze: Sure.

CM-U: And you accept that.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: And so you're okay with restoring parts of this...

Sarah Sze: Yes.

CM-U: ...and not other parts of it.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: Whereas most – many artists feel the balance is important. That it all be the...

Sarah Sze: The same. Yeah.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: But, you know, absolutely I think that – I mean, this idea of trying to figure out how we place value on things. I mean, ultimately value is based in things that are temporal. You know, living beings are more valuable than things that aren't – inanimate objects. So I think I also liked – the way you talk about objects, because you talk about them as if they are living beings...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: And so the idea in the work was also to make things that seemed like they were alive. And that when you came, when the viewer came to the piece, they felt like it was in some ways a live event, the way, you know, seeing live jazz has more value than a recorded, you know. That subtle thing of seeing something that you actually – it is invigorating because it's in a life process. So the idea for the work is to make it feel like it is – it will have an end. That that part of it is, that you see, you know – when you come to it, you think about how was it made and how will it die. You know, how will it decay. So that in the piece you see different stages of a life process.

- Sarah Sze: Even in the gestures in the piece. And this is less, probably, important to your work specifically, but to have things that feel like they happen very quickly. You know, that feel like there's this sort of rush that came through the window. And then things, you know, here you see a kind of gesture with objects that looks more like something that accrued over time...
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: ...that's, you know, dug down, almost like the layers of the earth, you know. Something, a slope that came as the result of, you know, a storm, for example.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: So that you have these different senses of time.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: So I think that's right. I hadn't really thought about it; but in the conservation, too, you know, at any time you come to the piece, whether it's ten years old or one hour old, when you look at it, you should be experiencing the sort of range of time.
- CM-U: So in that vein, when this piece is not installed in Liverpool but is sold and installed somewhere else...
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: ...there'll be some living plant, but not necessarily that one?
- Sarah Sze: Absolutely.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: So with any install instructions, there's a list of things that will be discarded when it's deinstalled and should be replaced. And, you know, I think any artist sort of thinks of their work all as one body of work.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: So the idea that there are living and nonliving things in the work is important in general, but in any one piece it's not so crucial to have – I think, for example, a plant. So if this were installed, say, in a museum where they couldn't have that, I would make it a fake plant...

CM-U: Okay.

Sarah Sze: ...so it wouldn't be – you know, it's – the idea is that you have this sense that something is maybe living, something is maybe dying; but the location does make the piece for me in some senses. So if it's a place that can't have water, then we don't do the water, you know. There's enough going on in the work that you just have to make the balance. You know, in any piece I do, there's usually so many elements that, you know, you can turn the volume up on what's fake and what's real in different ways. So if that needed to be a fake plant, then it could become a fake plant. You know, if you couldn't have real oranges – like, if they don't have people to change the oranges, then that's okay, too.

[00:44:44]

CM-U: Is that foamcore, the white parts on the upper? Or is that ply – thin wood?

Sarah Sze: Yeah, it's foamcore.

CM-U: Foam core?

Sarah Sze: Yeah. What do you think of the foamcore?

CM-U: Foamcore is great. It's quite – it discolours, but it tends to hold its shape. Not unsupported, it may not. But, again, that's something that could be reworked, right?

Sarah Sze: Right. Yeah.

CM-U: Obviously the planes are important as you build around the window.

Sarah Sze: Right. I mean, this is – the larger issues that people have are, “Okay, well, when you move this, how do you restructure that?” And in some ways I think it's interesting what you said. I think that actually the aging of the work is very interesting conceptually.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: You know. And the work is young enough so that hasn't been completely introduced. The idea...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: But in some ways I makes that piece more rich...

CM-U: Yes, I think so too.

Sarah Sze: ...than something like this. You know, in some ways this piece will be more interesting in ten years, where you see the aging...

CM-U: Yeah.

Sarah Sze: ...over time.

CM-U: I'd like to interview you again in ten years.

Sarah Sze: That'll be great.

CM-U: I think it would be really interesting to do that.

Sarah Sze: We'll reinstall this just as-is.

CM-U: No, we can – no, we'll talk about whatever it is you are working on.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: No, really, I think that that's what happens.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Have you found that with artists _____ [word inaudible]...

CM-U: Yeah, I have.

Sarah Sze: ...that they see the work...

CM-U: Well, what I have found is, generally – but again, I think that you're in uncharted water here. What I've found that, generally speaking, as artists age themselves, preservation of their work is more important.

Sarah Sze: Right. Sure.

CM-U: So when they are younger, they feel, "I can remake it," or, "I can restore it," or, "I can do it, I can do it, I can do it."

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: But then as they get older, they don't want to do it. There's more problems. There are more problems.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: And they are into their own, other kind of work.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: But you are already setting up a dichotomy in terms of the aging and care of the work that reflects your own art.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: So I'm not sure that you are going to have that trajectory.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: So we'll see. We'll see.

Sarah Sze: It's interesting.

CM-U: It will be very interesting.

[00:46:44]

CM-U: I obviously want to ask you – well, the obvious question is, we have all these little parts now...

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: ...and so much of it has to do with the installation...

Sarah Sze: Sure.

CM-U: ...and the site-specific nature of that installation.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: How do we now, as caretakers of this, deal with that?

- Sarah Sze: Right. So that – I mean, that piece was a very, very – I think that is a very important piece for me.
- CM-U: Yes.
- Sarah Sze: It was really, I think, in some ways the first time I started making sort of mature sculptural work. And the idea for it was that the piece would almost be like a weather in an existing space. So that it would be almost like you went in – the way it was installed was, it was an existing space. It was an abandoned closet. And everything that was in the closet remained in the closet. So, you know, so this was – all of the objects in this, except for this light, were existing just as, as – you know, they were “as-is.” And then...
- CM-U: So this was the closet you went into?
- Sarah Sze: Yes, this was the closet.
- CM-U: Okay.
- Sarah Sze: I think there’s a – is there a further back image? No, there are only two in this one. Do you want me to get you the further back ones, so you can see the doors?
- CM-U: Sure. Yes. I would like to.
- Sarah Sze: Hold on one second. So this piece was actually first installed in my studio. I probably have some very bad shots of it when I...
- CM-U: Good.
- Sarah Sze: ...it’s actually my first year in graduate school. And then, when I brought it to an...
- Sarah Sze: Actually, when I brought it to this space, they originally said, “Well, don’t you just put it in a square in the middle of the room?” Which, you know, entirely didn’t make sense for the piece because it really was supposed to be as if this had happened. Again, this idea of kind of an event that had happened in an already existing space. Let me find the other.
- Sarah Sze: So the way that this would, I think, ideally would be reinstalled, would be in a nontraditional art space in the museum.
- CM-U: So, like in a closet in the museum?

- Sarah Sze: Yeah. Or, you know, maybe like across a part of the bookstore or, you know...
- CM-U: Not in a gallery with a specific space.
- Sarah Sze: I think in a gallery – well, you know, the whole idea was that it was not in a white box. That it was in a space where you were – where the piece would be discovered, you know. I don't have it in a book.
- CM-U: Okay.
- Sarah Sze: I thought it was in here. But, uh, this is just a doorway that you stood in, and you couldn't go into.
- CM-U: So you just stood here and just looked at it?
- Sarah Sze: Yes. You just looked into it.
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Sarah Sze: I mean, what would probably make sense for the Whitney is for me to go there, choose a few locations in the building – in the existing – obviously you are getting a new building, too.
- CM-U: I was thinking about that, right.
- Sarah Sze: And say, you know, these are places that would make sense for it to be installed.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: And then there would be options for it to be installed. But it was supposed to have, you know, a mix of natural light and tungsten light. And it was supposed to feel like a happening...
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: ...that you tripped on. That you discovered. It was also this idea that is really still in all the work, that, as a viewer, the work was a discovery. That it's not presented to you. There's no frame that says, "This is important." That you feel like you find it, and you get drawn into it...
- CM-U: Um-hum.

- Sarah Sze: ...rather than it telling you to come and look at it.
- CM-U: So where did you say you first installed it?
- Sarah Sze: It was first in my studio...
- CM-U: In your studio?
- Sarah Sze: ...my first year at SVA. So it was 1995 was actually when it was first installed.
- CM-U: And then did you make more pieces to add when it went to this?
- Sarah Sze: I think when I was there I did make more pieces to add. I'm sure I did. It was bigger.
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Sarah Sze: And how it was made in the studio from the beginning was, I took one square of toilet paper, and it was this idea – which we talked a little bit about value, finding something that was aesthetically not thought of as valued, but we used all the time, it was very, very familiar – but to displace it, to treat it differently, and then give it a kind of life that you'd never imagine it would have. So the idea was, as I said, this sort of rule where you took one sheet of toilet paper and made an object. And then I would repeat it, and put it down immediately in the space – you know, as I was making it – until I was sort of bored with that. And then I would make another one. So you had these small collections of different objects that were all sort of – they felt handmade, and they were sort of the scale of the finger or scale of the hand.
- CM-U: Were they just twisted? Or...
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: ...and glued? Or not?
- Sarah Sze: They are – it's all – it's just water.
- CM-U: Okay.
- Sarah Sze: So it's water and toilet paper. That's it. Yeah, they're wetted.
- CM-U: Okay. They say "saliva," I've read.

Sarah Sze: Yes. Well, there was – that was part of it, yeah.

CM-U: But also water? I was trying to figure out – that's a lot of saliva!

Sarah Sze: That's a lot of saliva, yeah.

CM-U: Okay. Okay.

Sarah Sze: In the beginning it was saliva 'cause I would just like, you know, roll things like that.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: And then for other things, you know, like – some of them are, you know, really squeezed on. They almost feel like clay.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: So that, I would dip it in.

CM-U: That makes sense. Okay.

[00:51:32]

CM-U: Okay. So, uh, we now have these in bags...

Sarah Sze: Uh-huh.

CM-U: ...as they are cared for.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: And over time, they will – I don't know. I don't know. They may discolor. They may not. We don't know.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. I don't know, either. I mean, we tried to use a certain, like, grade of toilet paper so that they would be, you know, less apt to – there could be – it would probably be worthwhile if we reinstalled it and made – you know, if we chose a place where it should be reinstalled, and there needed to be more made, either replacing ones that had gone yellow, we thought that should be replaced. Or to extend the piece.

- CM-U: Yeah. Just adding more.
- Sarah Sze: We'd probably do some research on toilet paper and how long it lasts. I mean, obviously it's not supposed to last, so...
- CM-U: Well, that's interesting because, I mean, the materials you choose are all the same. They don't have any personal characteristics. One roll is the same as another.
- Sarah Sze: Yes. Yes.
- CM-U: And they were made with a certain shelf life in mind.
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: And toilet paper doesn't have a long shelf life. There's no reason to think it would.
- Sarah Sze: Right. Right. Right.
- CM-U: So we sort of have to accept that.
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: And yet other things, maybe plastics, have a longer – you know. I don't know.
- Sarah Sze: Yeah. This is such an early piece that we don't have, you know, deinstall/install instructions. Which, we'll do them. But, I mean, the other way you could do this piece is to have – is to document the different forms.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: You know, there are probably thirty at most. And there could be instructions on how they were made. I have made – when I made this piece originally, it was just me, obviously.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: But when I – recently I made some extra ones; and so I told an assistant how to do them, you know, and had them remade. So there could be, you know, just instructions on how each of them are made for reinstallation.
- CM-U: It's an interesting idea.

- Sarah Sze: 'Cause they are really – you know, they are just – they are not – for me, they're not so complex, but with instructions I think they would be – you could just remake them.
- CM-U: And it doesn't matter, as long as it's toilet paper, it doesn't matter if it looks like the toilet paper of 1996...
- Sarah Sze: Yeah.
- CM-U: ...or 2009?
- Sarah Sze: It doesn't. Absolutely. Well, what we found is that you have to use toilet paper that's sort of tissue-like, that's not sort of padded...
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: ...not the thick one. Because it has this kind of nice diaphanous quality to it.
- CM-U: Right. Right.
- Sarah Sze: Which is probably also potentially the cheaper kind.
- CM-U: It's wonderful. Wonderful. And the color? This was the color of the floor, the gray, was just the way it was?
- Sarah Sze: Yes.
- CM-U: Okay.
- Sarah Sze: In my studio, it was white.
- CM-U: Oh.
- Sarah Sze: So it was different, you know. The piece that just got reinstalled in Chicago, the floor was totally different. It's like a black floor and actually looks really nice.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: Often it doesn't matter. It just changes the piece, but it doesn't hurt it.
- CM-U: Right. Well, it would be great to have any early photographs you have, just to keep the history of the piece...

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: ...and keeping the history of your work as well.

Sarah Sze: It was funny because I did it in – there was a competition. They used to have a show called the SoHo Annual...

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Sarah Sze: ...in the early Nineties, where they'd had a sort of competition for the area graduate schools, and then they'd do a show.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Sarah Sze: And this was in the SoHo at the time. And Simon Watson was one of the people on the – and he, he looked at the slides, and he said he had no idea what they were. They were so – and he said he had to go see it. So he actually came into the studio to visit and saw them, and then he had chosen it. But the slides from my studio are very – they are very sort of, uh, disorienting. Which is actually – all of the photographs of my work, I take myself, and on purpose have them seem as photographs to be interesting. Not necessarily as installation shots.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: So the ones in my studio are like – almost look like landscapes, and you know, you really can't tell what the piece is.

CM-U: But that's part of the aspect. That's one aspect of it.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: Disorienting...

Sarah Sze: Yes. Yes, exactly. The disorientation is important.

CM-U: So it was originally installed in your studio?

Sarah Sze: Yeah. And it did not have any windows.

CM-U: Oh, it didn't?

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: Okay.

Sarah Sze: It was a white box, the studio at the time. But it had, you know, it had shelves with storage things in it. You know, similar to the piece. Actually this is sort of similar to that piece, the way it goes into the office...

CM-U: Right. Right.

Sarah Sze: So it started on the floor, but then it went onto the shelves where the supplies were, and over the books, and, you know – so it could be in a space that is primarily, that feels like just, you know...

CM-U: So it could be like in the bookstore on the main level?

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Yeah. I like the conservation room, though. That's great.

(laughter)

CM-U: Uh-oh. Okay. Well, we can think about that.

Sarah Sze: You could have a vacation!

CM-U: It could be kind of a great final exhibition for us, when we are moving.

Sarah Sze: Right. When you're moving. That would be great.

CM-U: It could be great.

[00:56:17]

CM-U: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about *Strange Attractor* [2000, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Marianne Boesky, Ed Cohen, and Adam Sender, 2001.1].

Sarah Sze: Um-hum.

CM-U: Talk to me a little bit about placement, again.

Sarah Sze: Let's see. So, the idea for the piece – there is no overall image of it, but this one probably is the closest to show you, is that it almost had this kind of centrifugal force that spun it into this – I wanted to play off the dynamism of this, of the...

- CM-U: The window.
- Sarah Sze: ...the window. The Breuer [sounds like] window. So it is supposed to sort of spin into the window and then smack up against it. That felt almost like a larger force had brought it to that location. I mean, it went up and came out sort of from the ceiling and into the space. Yeah. So, specific questions? You want just general?
- CM-U: I want to know – well, let's talk a little bit about – are there any parts of it that are living? And, if not...
- Sarah Sze: We had a – there's a live plant right here at the very bottom.
- CM-U: Uh-huh.
- Sarah Sze: And then there's one here on top of the humidifier.
- CM-U: Okay. So there are two live plants?
- Sarah Sze: Yeah. And they're both reachable. So these were the two that we watered.
- CM-U: Okay.
- Sarah Sze: And then there was a humidifier right here that needed to have water in it.
- CM-U: Okay.
- Sarah Sze: There was a pile of salt right here. And there's a glass of water here that's being sort of leveled. You know, it's sitting on this...
- CM-U: Oh I see. Uh-huh.
- Sarah Sze: ...and being leveled. And this was actual moss as well. This is all live right here. I – you know, generally what I do is, in any piece, just out of practicality, you'll find that anything that needs to be tended to is reachable. So...
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: ...you know, everything is on the base here that's...
- CM-U: So in reinstallation, it would be desirable to try to have live plants there, and moss if possible?

- Sarah Sze: Yeah. If it's...
- CM-U: If it's impossible...
- Sarah Sze: ...you know, if it's – I mean, if it can be tended to, yeah.
- CM-U: Okay. Now what happens when we move from the Whitney, and we don't have this window?
- Sarah Sze: We have to look at the new space.
- CM-U: Okay.
- Sarah Sze: And, you know – again, this piece right – this is basically 2001, 2002, when we started doing really elaborate packages. This piece does not have it. So, you know, with a piece like this, I would say, "Here are the conditions that are ideal."
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: "Here are the conditions that are necessary."
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: "Obviously this window is not – it can be reinstalled without it." In the beginning, I was very concerned that these things wouldn't work in other places, and then they actually – what's interesting is, they actually maintain – even though they feel so site-specific, they actually maintain an extremely strong personality in an entirely different location. So, you know, there are certain things you have to be sensitive to. For example, you know, what height. Making sure that this is the right height so you can walk in at a certain level. This piece, I think, was strong because the whole space of the Whitney was open then. I think a lot of the time the pieces are strong – they are designed so that they have an overall composition, and then a very detailed composition. Sort of something that I was really interested in in Asian landscape – these are these very majestic landscapes, and then you have these tiny, tiny windows into really pedestrian life, usually.
- Sarah Sze: So also it would be nice to have a distance, and then, you know, a space where you could see it from far away. What was really great about this was, as you got off the elevators, you turned, and it was there. And then it sort of drew you in. Again, not ideal; but – I mean, not necessary, but ideal in this situation.
- CM-U: Right. Right.

- Sarah Sze: Just structural things about how you would hang it would be necessary. But this piece, against a white background, I think would also be very strong. This piece came right after the Cartier piece, and it's based on a similar structure.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Sarah Sze: And this piece had five sections to it, and they've reinstalled just sections of it.
- CM-U: Hmm.
- Sarah Sze: Which, in the beginning – and also, obviously, this space is so specific. Also with windows. And it was really strong, reinstalled. And it was reinstalled in an entirely raw wood space in Sweden.
- CM-U: Hmm.
- Sarah Sze: And I was, you know – I had no idea what it was going to look like. It was reinstalled without me. They had very good deinstall notes, actually, and reinstall notes. So it was installed without me there, and it worked. So I think the Whitney piece, even in a white box, would work.
- CM-U: Okay. But it would be helpful to have your instructions for that piece then.
- Sarah Sze: Absolutely.
- CM-U: That's something we should work on.
- Sarah Sze: Absolutely.
- CM-U: Especially as we consider moving that to a new space.
- Sarah Sze: Yeah. And the old building is going to be for collection only? Is that the...
- CM-U: Well it's – we're not sure yet. We haven't designated everything _____ [phrase inaudible].
- Sarah Sze: It's very exciting for you.
- CM-U: Yes, it is very exciting. But I like what you're saying about seeing it overall and coming close, and the idea of the swirl with the window and so on. It makes a lot of sense.

[01:01:01]

Sarah Sze: Yeah. I mean, this – I was thinking at this time a lot about also the Italian Futurists. About creating speed...

CM-U: Yes.

Sarah Sze: ...but only through gesture, not actual movement. So this is supposed to be – have a very quick movement to it, you know. And also in this case, you know, the window is often covered; and it's just a remarkable architectural element.

CM-U: I know. It is.

Sarah Sze: And, as you said, I love the story of seeing the boxes behind it. Over your office window. The same thing is to really reveal this window, and to draw you to it, you know...

CM-U: Yeah.

Sarah Sze: ...was the idea. But, again, I think the piece would work even in a corner. It pulls on the architecture because it's also big enough so that it competes with the scale of a room.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Sarah Sze: And that sort of speed can happen without the window.

CM-U: Time and speed is such an important part of your work.

Sarah Sze: I think so.

CM-U: It's a word you've used a lot as we've talked.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: Both in terms of material and in terms of effect.

Sarah Sze: It's important to your work, too. Especially the time.

CM-U: Absolutely. Absolutely.

- Sarah Sze: I don't know about the speed. You probably slow it down, right? And it would probably take you five times as long to do something like a _____ [word inaudible] because you have to.
- CM-U: Yes. And I might not even – well, that's an interesting question I should ask with regard to *Migrateurs* because I – one could imagine, looking again at the Tic Tacs and saying, "Well, I can paint them green."
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: "I can make them green. I don't have to take them off and put..."
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: Is it important that it be a Tic Tac?
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: Or is it just important that it be green there.
- Sarah Sze: Right. That's a good point. Particularly with those Tic Tacs. You could get exactly the – you know, with something like – I don't know, with something like the, uh, like, you know, the yarn on the – or the thread. The orange thread...
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Sarah Sze: ...would be harder. It would look fake.
- CM-U: Right.
- Sarah Sze: But the Tic Tac would look entirely...
- CM-U: Right. No, I could make it look exactly...
- Sarah Sze: That's a good point. If it were me, I would do the Tic Tac; and if it were you, I would say, "Go ahead and make it a permanent..." Like I think it would be fine to do it that way. It's a really good question. I think it would be fine to do it that way. Because I think that the viewer – it's like the oranges. The whole – this is a good – it's very interesting talking to you because it's clarifying my own process...
- CM-U: Good.

Sarah Sze: ...is that, you know, there is this play of some things being real and some things being fake.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: So it would be exactly like the oranges. It's funny to see this piece and have it be exactly like the oranges in this case. So it would be something that is mimicking something that would decay, but it's not.

CM-U: So it kind of gives us a license to do that?

Sarah Sze: I think that that's right in that piece. Particularly because it's – the reason I was wanting to restore them was actually a formal reason, right? It's this, the popping – the popping green is the...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...I think that they lead your eye through the piece nicely. So if you had those, and then you had white ones that were decaying, I think it would be fine. Because it becomes this question, again, of what is real and what is fake in the piece. I mean, in many ways the work is about conservation, right? I mean, it is. It's essentially about, you know...

CM-U: After it leaves your hands, it is.

Sarah Sze: But also even when, in my thinking, that is. You know, my thinking is about, you know, what is monumentality? How do things last? How do things disappear?

CM-U: That's true.

Sarah Sze: So even in the choice, from the very beginning, I am really thinking about what things will last, what things don't last, you know, in the work, to start. So having a tension in the work, I think, is what's interesting. You know, to bring...

CM-U: That's a very good word that we haven't used, that I think does describe – does embody what we're talking about, in terms of materials that are aging and those that don't.

[01:05:08]

Sarah Sze: Can you think of another artist who likes to have a range of a lifespan of the materials in their work?

- CM-U: I can't think of that off – well, I know that – I am thinking, one of the artists that I've been thinking was a contemporary of yours, who has a very interesting – who piques my curiosity about materials the way your work does – is Dario Robleto.
- Sarah Sze: Um-hum.
- CM-U: Because he chooses materials that have meaning themselves before he uses them. So he takes hair that's been used as jewelry in the Civil War, jewelry, and uses it in his work. Or he'll take letters that people have written during the Civil War, love letters, and then, you know, reshape the paper and extract the ink and use it to make something. So the actual material has importance.
- Sarah Sze: Has the meaning.
- CM-U: So I would say to him – he made an element out of a record, a James Brown record...
- Sarah Sze: Hmm.
- CM-U: ...*Sex Machine*. And I'd say, "Oh, you know, Dario, if I were to restore that, I would just find a plastic that looked like that." And he was just horrified. "Oh, you can't do that, you know." Because the material itself had meaning.
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: I can think of artists that used – like [Tom] Wesselmann – might have used a magazine image, even a part of it...
- Sarah Sze: Hmm.
- CM-U: ...as part of the work.
- Sarah Sze: Um-hum.
- CM-U: I'm thinking of a piece at the Whitney that has red lips, and over time, they weren't red anymore. The magazine had faded.
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: And he felt it was really important that they be red.
- Sarah Sze: To have the magazine.

- CM-U: That it would be new. Yeah.
- Sarah Sze: Oh, they'd be new?
- CM-U: Yeah. That they'd be bright red and new.
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: It's difficult – it's fine when he's alive.
- Sarah Sze: Right. Right.
- CM-U: It's just difficult. I can think of an instance where I'm still kind of haunted by this treatment I did, although I still maintain – I maintain the logic of it intellectually.
- Sarah Sze: Um-hum.
- CM-U: It's a – I'm not sure, though. It's an Ed Kienholz piece. And it's *Jane Doe*, who's – it's a sculpture that's a partner to *John Doe*.
- Sarah Sze: Hmm.
- CM-U: And I restored *John Doe* while Ed was still alive.
- Sarah Sze: Hmm.
- CM-U: He was in the studio and could talk to me. He then died, and then we did an early Kienholz show. Or maybe it was the retrospective. And *Jane Doe* was brought in. And *Jane Doe* has a white wedding dress on.
- Sarah Sze: Hmm.
- CM-U: And she's on a sewing table, and she has a white wedding dress. A mannequin. But the owner had birds flying around the house, and the dress was no longer white. It was yellow and stained and all that sort of thing.
- Sarah Sze: Hmm.
- CM-U: And the curator said, "We can't show it with that dress because it gives virginity a tawdry feeling. It's a very – the aging of that material is giving, is suggesting something that was counter to what the artist intended."

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: Just because of the aging of the material.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: So I made a new wedding dress for it. I copied it exactly.

Sarah Sze: Um-hum.

CM-U: But – I didn't throw away the old one, but I made a new one.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: So that was putting a new part on something that was old. That was thirty years old.

Sarah Sze: Yep. Yep.

CM-U: Feeling that I was retaining its original spirit. I don't know.

Sarah Sze: Right. What about people who are – that's hard. I remember reading Duane Hanson was very hard because he also wanted, like, a seventies Frio-Lay bag...

CM-U: Yeah.

Sarah Sze: And how do you do that?

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: But I'm also thinking, what about people like Jason Rhoades, or Rachel Harrison. What are their – how do they – they are so young. They are – you know, Jason was so young – that you probably don't have as much history on the work. What do they...

CM-U: Well, I have spoken to Rachel.

Sarah Sze: Um-hum.

CM-U: It's, again, there's certain acceptance of aging, to a degree. In the case of cans of soup, for example, or cans of vegetables, something like that...

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: ...we've emptied the cans. What's important is the appearance...

Sarah Sze: Right. Not the tin's contents [sounds like].

CM-U: ...you know, not that there's stuff in the cans.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: People who didn't empty Warhol's soup cans had them explode later on.

Sarah Sze: Oh, really?

CM-U: Um-hum. So we know, from conservation, that that's not a good idea to keep the food in there. She didn't have a problem with that. It was what she had done to the labels, and the labels themselves, that had the importance.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: She's very reasonable in terms of, you know, what we can do to keep that appearance.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: So I think it's an individual decision...

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: ...and it's wonderful that there are artists of your age that are thinking about it so early on.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: You know, instead of being hit with it...

Sarah Sze: Sure.

CM-U: ...when something changes in an irreparable way.

Sarah Sze: Sure. Yeah.

- CM-U: So I think your work, though, I mean, it so embodies, as we've discovered today...
- Sarah Sze: Hmm.
- CM-U: ...you know, it's so – I mean, these ideas of time and conservation, as you say, are at the heart of your work throughout.
- Sarah Sze: Right. Absolutely.
- CM-U: Okay. We've talked a long time.
- Sarah Sze: Thank you very much.
- CM-U: Yeah. I've really – I'm not going to let you go, though. There's one other thing...
- Sarah Sze: Oh, no problem. I'm fine. I don't have anything till two, so...
- CM-U: Okay. Good. And _____ [phrase inaudible].

[01:10:37]

- CM-U: These are some quotes from you, which is always terrible. I hate when people bring me back my quotes, which is why I often don't agree to interviews, but anyway, this one I love, that you said. You said, "The pieces are often teetering on the brink of existence, built just to the edge of their ability to sustain themselves structurally." And I think it's that tension...
- Sarah Sze: Right.
- CM-U: ...that I see as the hallmark of what we should do to try to restore things. In restoring them. Is that right?
- Sarah Sze: Absolutely. Yeah.
- CM-U: Okay. Excellent. Good. And then I think other quotes are wonderful. You've already discussed the lifeline, beginning, middle, end, as all part of the work. Which I like.
- CM-U: And then this question about installation, which is really true. This came from Arthur Danto when he was making the point about, that it's hard to install these pieces just in a temporary exhibition, in a retrospective. That's sort of not the

nature of them. It's so related to the space. And then how do you make it just seem like it just happened in a space?

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: How do you imagine a retrospective of your work?

Sarah Sze: It's an interesting question. I mean, I think, you know, it's a dilemma for a lot of artists. Like, I saw the Tadashi Kawamata exhibit recently in Tokyo. The Olafur Eliasson retrospective. You know, when you are dealing with work that does have this quality of being an event in time, having four of them can really undermine that, you know.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: And I think there are things you have to be very careful about in terms of spectacle, which you are always, you know, with a large installation, you are always walking a fine line with how do you deal with that. I think that for a retrospective, I think that I would think of the entire space as an installation...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: ...and, you know, one of the things that I often have done, pieces in large group shows or biennials. And a lot of what I think about in terms of making the work successful is, you know, literally the experience of buying the ticket, walking through what they're seeing. You know, even knowing with who the other artists are in terms of, you know, what is – how do you make your – the experience of seeing the work, a crescendo, or a lull, a pause. You know, even here, when you walk in, the first thing you see is the oranges. You don't see – you turn the corner, and you have this kind of very quick movement to the window, you know. Or you come in, and you first notice it in the office, and you're not sure what it is. You don't realize what that is until you leave.

Sarah Sze: So, you know, I think – I was trained also in architecture. Just thinking about circulation. Thinking about narrative through space. Choreography.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Sarah Sze: So, you know – well, whenever I go to an exhibit, I am really thinking also about, you know, people really, as you know from being in a museum, I think viewers really underestimate the power of how any – you know, for example, the "Louise

Bourgeois” at the Guggenheim, versus at the Tate, is really a phenomenally different show.

CM-U: Oh, I haven’t seen it at the Guggenheim yet.

Sarah Sze: But any show at the Guggenheim is very specific...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...because, you know, it has this timeline quality to it. So, you know, a retrospective for me would really be about seeing a space, and creating an experience of a show so that each of these works would be part, in my mind, of a larger experience; and figuring out, okay, when you first – you know, for example, the second [sounds like] toilet paper piece, where would that be in your experience of the retrospective? You know, to make sure that you had – this is the crucial thing that you see go wrong in shows, that you have like shifts in scale, shifts in anticipation.

CM-U: Um-hum.

[01:14:17]

Sarah Sze: Again, it’s a time-based idea about seeing work, that any show is this movement through space and time where you discover things. So a retrospective is really just about – for me – about really working closely with a curator and figuring out how to make the entire experience of moving through that space. And each of these installations, or whatever choice of installations, being like a chapter in a book. You know, it’s really like – for me, and I probably would think of it, it’s like being a poet or a short story writer, and then making a novel. And you see that all the time, that you see people who are incredible with short stories, and they can’t pull off the novel. And that’s really the crucial idea, I think, of a retrospective, is, you know, how do you bring together those moments in a way that one leads into the next and makes that experience of seeing them leading into an inseparable – that you don’t want to see them individually.

Sarah Sze: You know, when you think of something like – you know, you can’t have it be something like Olafur Eliasson’s Tate piece [*The Weather Project*, 2003]. That was one, you know, it was very different than having, you know, the four, you know, the five or six or maybe twenty pieces that are at MoMA. The key to doing the twenty pieces is figuring out how you make it an even better experience than seeing just one.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: You know, especially when, you know, an artist who often does just see one. You know, how do you go to a room and just have – how do you discover a *Migrateurs* like in a totally off space, or go to a room and just see one of the tabletop pieces, you know, alone. Like maybe you have a totally white room with just that? So you have these kind of – again, this idea of like shifting into a detail and shifting out. You know, how do you get people to slow down and then, you know, spread out again. I think – so it would be exciting that way.

CM-U: It would.

Sarah Sze: I would really think of the whole thing...

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: ...as a large installation, and be really, really precise about things like lighting. About how long it takes you to get down a hallway. You know, to architecturally create the space, so when you turn a corner, so that it didn't – I think really crucial to larger shows is to be very careful that it doesn't have this sort of art fair, or like graduate student. There's this mistake of trying to, you know, trying to cover every base. I mean, you have like the same size room. You see that, I think, a lot in biennials. You know, not knowing to have – that a viewer, it's tiring to go through a show. You know. And that a viewer needs to have these surprises, these elements. There's a theater to, you know, setting up space around a show.

CM-U: That's very good. And that can happen, if it's one artist, I think.

Sarah Sze: And it's done right.

CM-U: And it's done right.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. Absolutely. And to know that you don't have to show everything, too.

CM-U: Right. Oh, that's absolutely right.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. That you really...

CM-U: It's like writing a paper.

Sarah Sze: ...that it has to be. Exactly. Or like making a catalogue.

CM-U: Right.

Sarah Sze: You know, you have to figure out where, you know, exactly – the precision of exactly what's needed or not needed. And I think there's a range of work, things that are very, very subtle. You know, pieces that are just a string that lead you through space, that, you know, that could be one thing, as opposed to some – there's a range of the small to the large. I think the larger pieces, they photograph better. So for my books, and for my slide lectures, I always sort of think anything, any medium, what does it do best? So for a slide lecture, for me, it's all about the images. So I choose the pieces that have the best images. But I think that in a retrospective, what would be interesting is you'd see the pieces like this, that are less known. You know, you'd see the subtler things, you could play with more.

Sarah Sze: So you could really have spaces – you know, you might imagine a retrospective of mine being all these large moments; but you could really have very quiet, very subtle moments within the whole range.

CM-U: Um-hum.

[01:18:14]

Sarah Sze: You know, it's an art in itself, the retrospective, I think. And it's really my favorite kind of show because it's so interesting to see what decisions an artist made over time. Look at any one piece, how they could have gone in ten directions...

CM-U: Right. Right. Absolutely right.

Sarah Sze: ...and then to see it evolve is fascinating. Yeah.

CM-U: That's very interesting because that's the way artists think, and that's the way conservators think. It's not what was final – well, anyway, I should make it more personal. It's the way I think, which is what is most interesting, what a conservator can bring to writing about art. You know, it's not the final, which is what the art historians or curators take, you know. They did this piece, this piece, this piece...

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: ...but it's what they didn't do. What they could have done.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: Knowing the materials, and knowing where they were going with the materiality of it.

Sarah Sze: Right.

CM-U: And I think that's an aspect of art that just is shared with the artist.

Sarah Sze: Yeah. That's fascinating. Right. 'Cause you're...

CM-U: As a conservator who thinks about those sort of things.

Sarah Sze: That's really interesting. Thinking about the things they didn't, wouldn't – because you are also thinking, “What would they not do?”

CM-U: I often do.

Sarah Sze: And that sort of defines what they do.

CM-U: I often think about that, yes.

Sarah Sze: Yes, that's fascinating.

CM-U: Well, this has been great.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: Are there any other – is there anything that you'd like to say that we've missed...

Sarah Sze: I don't think so.

CM-U: ...for our first go at it?

Sarah Sze: Yeah. I – it would be really great to do it over time. I think it's amazing, it's an amazing collection of information you're getting. No, let's do it again.

CM-U: Good. All right.

Sarah Sze: Yeah.

CM-U: Thank you very much.

Sarah Sze: You, too.

[END RECORDING]

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