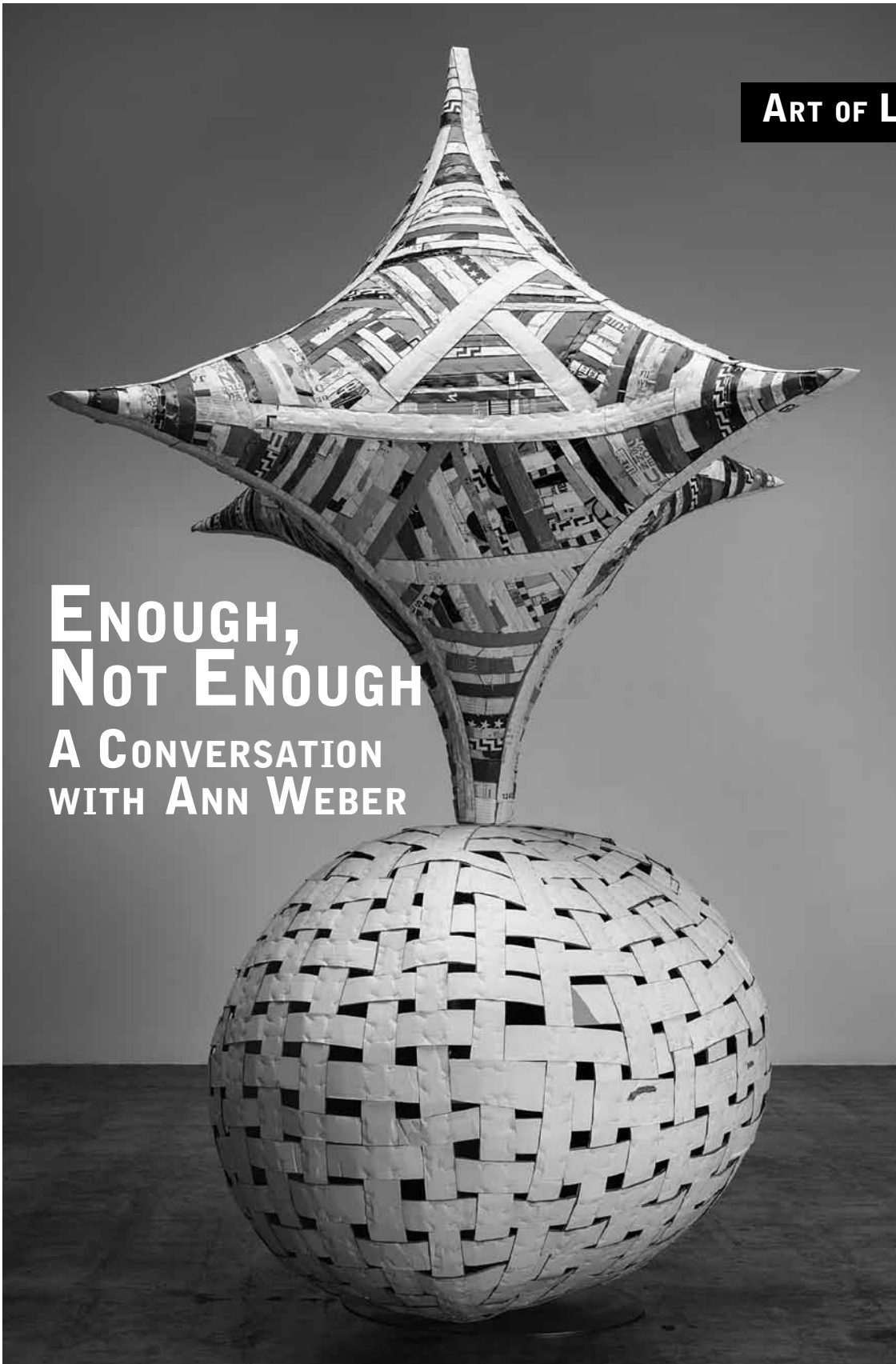


ART OF LIVING

ENOUGH, NOT ENOUGH

A CONVERSATION
WITH ANN WEBER



LEFT: WEATHER, 2017, FOUND CARDBOARD, STAPLES, POLYURETHANE, 97"X55"X54"

"Every once in a while I make something that brings tears to my eyes. That's when I know I've made the right choice; this is my path."

Sometime not so long after this magazine had been launched, I remember a conversation I had with Ann Weber. I knew her work, but if we'd actually met, the word acquaintance would suffice. The conversation began well, and quickly became quite friendly. In recollection, I was surprised by its warmth and can remember feeling emboldened. Before long a proposal was put forth—by whom, I don't recall, but I suspect it was Ann. "Why don't we begin a series of dinners with artists? We'll each invite two or three artists. It could be at my studio and I'll do the cooking." (This part I do recall.)

How many artist dinners we did I've now forgotten—several, each one a pleasure and, on another level, a revelation. Although my own journey by then had taken me a ways down the road of improving my social skills, Ann was well past me in that regard. Perhaps sitting across the table from her—putatively a co-host—I learned a few things about conversation at dinner parties.

The years rolled by. A portfolio of Ann's work appeared in issue #18, and we kept in touch. Ann was working at the Berkeley Art Center when she was diagnosed with cancer. She went through treatment and, after awhile, was back at the center. I never talked with her about it. Then two or three years later, she moved to LA.

It was more than a surprise. In some way, I recognized her move as an act of courage. Inwardly, I wished her well. And then the announcements of her shows began to appear. "Hooray, for Ann!" I thought—each time. Then one day on a visit to the magazine PO Box, I pulled out an announcement: Ann was having a studio sale at her Emeryville place. It could only mean one thing. She'd gone all in on LA. I knew it was time to talk with this courageous friend. It was easily arranged, and I began by asking about the particulars of her move.— R. Whittaker

Ann Weber: I moved to Los Angeles two years ago after a brief conversation with a friend, Josh Hagler, who's an artist. He told me he'd moved to Los Angeles and had gotten more attention for his painting in eight months than during twelve years in San Francisco. I said, "Oh, fuck! I missed the boat!"

Then I woke up the next morning and realized, "I'm 65. I have 20 years left. What do I want to do with my last 20 years?" I thought, "I want to be in a major metropolitan area, and I want to find a broader audience for my work."

So I called my friend, Joni, in Santa Monica. She said, "Come stay with me. You could sleep on the couch, check things out and see what happens." That was in December, and by February 1st I was in Santa Monica. I had a list of people my Bay Area friends had recommended, so every day I'd go exploring. Because of Google maps, I wasn't worried about getting lost. And compared to the Bay Area, I found that studio space in Los Angeles was relatively inexpensive.

Within another month, I'd gone to a show in downtown Los Angeles and seen the work of an artist I recognized, Eric Johnson. He does sort of biomorphic forms and had invited me to be in a show ten years earlier. So, I got in touch with him. He said, "Come over and we'll talk."

He lives in San Pedro, which I'd never heard of. It's where the Port of Los Angeles is. He had this big concrete block warehouse just filled with stuff. I mean it was like a swap meet on top of a swap meet. It was about 4000 sq. ft. and had a little apartment built into it with no windows. It had an outdoor yard, like a junk yard. He's a very well-respected artist in Los Angeles.

So he was sort of checking me out, because he's very particular. His wife and daughter had lived in the studio for years and couldn't stand looking out the balcony window into chop saws and spray booths anymore. So, I said, "Why don't you just rent it to me?" And the next day he says, "Fine. How about \$1,200 a month?"

works: Let's back up. You drove to Los Angeles?

Ann: Yes. Because I'd rented out my studio up here, and I had to go down there for at least a year.

works: That's a big decision.

Ann: It's a huge decision, but to go back a little bit.

It hadn't dawned on me that I would ever consider leaving the Bay Area, because I have such a strong community here. I'm single and have built very close and meaningful friendships here. I have a great art dealer. It's a beautiful and stimulating environment. But I also felt that I'd exhausted most of the opportunities in the Bay Area for showing. The big museums—the Berkeley Art Museum, Oakland Art Museum, the DeYoung and SF MOMA—weren't interested in showing my work. But I've had lots of shows outside the Bay Area in small museums in big cities. And I felt that there must be other opportunities down in Los Angeles because it's so huge.

works: How much time elapsed between going to bed that night, after thinking you'd missed the boat, and then waking up deciding to head for LA?

Ann: Two days. Because my friend, Joni, was willing to let me crash in her apartment. She made it happen for me. And within a month, I'd found this studio in San Pedro.

I always loved going to Los Angeles and I always stayed in Santa Monica, which is a beautiful place by the ocean. But the rest of Los Angeles I'd always sort of felt was difficult. I thought if I wanted to take advantage of the opportunities in Los Angeles, I'd have to be surrounded by concrete and strip malls.

But San Pedro is part of Los Angeles and it's on the waterfront. It's the kind of place that makes a sculptor drop to their knees and their heart pound in their chest, because there's industry everywhere. These huge container ships are coming in loaded. You'd think a train was going by along the horizon, because the containers are passing by over the roofs of the houses. Then there are all these cranes. It's so muscular. It's so beautiful and so elegant, with the architecture of industry—not to mention the refineries with their beautiful smokestacks and all the piping going every which way for miles and miles.

works: That whole area around San Pedro—I know exactly what you mean.

Ann: We have two major architectural buildings there. We have an early Frank Gehry, the Cabrillo Aquarium, which was built around the time he built his house in Santa Monica. It's all early chain-link fence and industrial materials. Then we have one by

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Lloyd Wright, Frank's son—this beautiful chapel called the Wayfarer's Chapel. It's glass and redwood, three miles up the coast. My studio was three blocks from the waterfront and a mile from the beach, where you can see all the way to China. There was a lot of natural beauty and a lot of parks. And the thing I loved about San Pedro (it's way at the bottom of Los Angeles), is that it's so down to earth. Nobody gives a shit about movie stars or real estate moguls. If you're a longshoreman, a firefighter or a cop—and you happen to be Croatian or Italian, an Italian from Naples or Ischia—those are the people who are the celebrities in San Pedro. I loved that, because I'm from a town in the Midwest, and we value salt-of-the-earth, straightforward, honest people. We just don't cotton to pretension or big heads trying to get through the door. So, this town really resonated with me. And after about a year, I said, “I'm going to move here.”



works: You were in the warehouse in San Pedro. Hadn't you already moved there?

Ann: Yes. But I decided I was going to see if I could buy a place there. I knew that living in a warehouse with no windows was not going to work long term.

works: How long have you lived here in Emeryville?

Ann: Ten years. That first year of being in Los Angeles was exhilarating. I started looking around the neighborhood and every time a house would come on the market, I'd go look at it. The great thing about San Pedro is that it's about 45 minutes from everything—from LACMA, from Bergamot Station, from Culver City, from downtown. There were galleries opening all the time. Macaroni moved from New York City. Venus

Over Manhattan moved to LA, and new museums were starting to open. I mean, the Broad opened while I was there. And the Santa Monica Museum is now the new Institute for Contemporary Art.

works: There's a place right across from the Gehry Symphony Hall, right?

Ann: That's the Museum of Contemporary Art—MOCA. But the big move was the Broad. They built a museum by a beautiful architect. Then the Geffen is one that Frank Gehry designed. It's just one thing after another. Then there's Hauser, Wirth & Schimmel—three buildings that have been restored and are within a mile of the Broad, MOCA and the Geffen Center. They had a show called *Revolution in the Making—Women Sculptors from 1945 to 2015*.



works: You were not in that, I take it?

Ann: No.

works: So, that's ahead of you?

Ann: [laughs] That's a dream.

works: Did you end up buying a house?

Ann: I bought a house in August of 2016. I'd moved down in February of 2015. I happened to be in Bozeman visiting Catherine Courtenaye when this house came on the market (I was watching every day) and I called up a real estate agent and said, "I want to buy this house."

works: My gosh, just like that? I mean, you looked at it online?

Ann: I looked at the pictures online. It was a three-bedroom bungalow, about 1100 square feet, in a great neighborhood in San Pedro, four blocks from

the waterfront. And I wanted to be in a mixed neighborhood, because I really believe in that. It has a detached garage that was sheet-rocked, 550 square feet. And it had an apartment above it that I could rent out for 1200 bucks. So between my social security and the rent coming in, it paid my mortgage, my insurance and my taxes.

works: That's amazing.

Ann: Yeah. So I went into escrow and three months later, the house was mine. One of the great things about moving down there was that all I took with me was two suitcases, my computer and my staple gun. I went into an empty space and started working immediately.

I've found over the years, from doing residencies at the American Academy in Rome, in Beijing and in Germany, that I just go and make the work. I photograph it and leave it behind. Usually there's a raffle or an opening and people just take the work. But I've had the experience of being inspired by making work in a completely new environment. That's great

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boots?’”

for my creative output.

So being on the ocean in a fishing town, I’d make these pieces. One was called *Conundrum* because I was still trying to decide whether I was going to stay in Los Angeles or come back to Emeryville. The sculpture also references a knot called a “monkey’s fist” and also Bernini’s *Medusa*. The piece also reminded me of the tumbleweeds I’d seen out by Lancaster, where the poppy fields are. I mean, these are places I’d never seen before and they’re right around the Los Angeles area. Everything was so different.

So the first year was exhilarating. The second year I started to be overwhelmed by the monumentality of what I’d done. I’d left my community and was really lonely. So I joined a poetry group, even though I don’t like poetry. I joined the Friends of the Library. I found a little group that meets on Sunday mornings. They just sit around and talk at this old coffee shop.

works: When I saw your announcement for a sale at the Emeryville Co-op studio, I knew something major was up. You know, I’ve been getting your announcements of this show and that show all over since you’ve been in LA. So tell me what’s going on with you here in Emeryville.

Ann: Okay. The reason I’m in the Bay Area right now is that I’ve decided to let this studio go. I had two years to decide whether or not I was going to leave the Bay Area completely. And giving this up means I’ll probably never be coming back because of the prices in the Bay Area. So that was a pretty serious decision to make.

works: That’s huge.

Ann: I really had to weigh the advantages of being in Los Angeles with the advantages of being here. I have a great gallery, Dolby Chadwick, and Lisa has been very supportive of my move down to Los Angeles. But all the action for my work has been up here. In other words, she sells my work. I thought that within two years I might have found a gallery in Los Angeles that would sell my work. But not one nickel has come in from being in the land of opportunity and big houses and multi-millionaires.

works: What tipped the scales on this huge decision to leave this place where you have a really sweet deal? I mean, buying a house sort of ices it.

Ann: Buying a house. The garage serves as my studio and I have a big concrete backyard that’s also a great place to work. I also have windows on three sides of my working space. Windows have a big impact.

works: Having windows, and the light. Say something about that. I think it’s interesting that you mentioned that.

Ann: Well, living in the Co-op has been great. But it’s also been difficult. There are a lot of people in the Co-op who don’t have a cooperative bone in their bodies. So in some ways it has not always been a supportive place to work. And also I think that being locked in an industrial building has stymied my work in certain ways. Being in this new house with windows surrounding me, and being in a neighborhood of people who are community-minded, it feels like I’ve got a world of support around me.

I feel that in Los Angeles people are curious about outsiders. They want to invite you to coffee on Sundays at the corner store. They want you to come out to the Friday night dinner at the Ports O’ Call Restaurant. They want to find out about you. They want you to have a show at the best gallery in San Pedro. They want to include me in other shows.

I feel that there’s an inclusiveness because the pie is so big down in LA. And it feels like the networking that happens in the movie industry carries over into everything else. When people go to an opening, they sometimes will stay there for two or three hours, until you’ve gone around the room and introduced yourself. Or people will come up and say, “You look like an interesting person to talk to. Where did you get

those red cowboy boots?" Or, if you're showing with someone, "Oh, I think I've seen your work before, and I'm so happy to see it here." It feels like the world is just wide open in Los Angeles. So, the windows seem to be both physical and metaphorical.

works: Nice. Now is there also something about the light itself and being able to look out into the world instead of just looking at your walls?

Ann: Well, the warmth and the light is constant in Southern California. It's like a dream. Every morning you wake up to sunshine. And this year, when it rained, you were practically out doing a rain dance.

works: I lived down there, so I can relate to that thing about the rain dance, you know?

Ann: Yeah. And here, it feels like I can't ever wear a sundress. It's like four days a year when I can wear a sundress. The coldness is almost like New England coldness. And down there, people are running around in their bathing suits, practically. There's just that kind of openness and joy. It really feels joyful to me. And in San Pedro, brown people, black people and white people are all living together in the same neighborhood. People instruct their little children to greet people on the street.

works: Wow.

Ann: When I say good morning to a man with a child, he'll say to his child, "Say good morning." It's idyllic. So when I think about where I want to spend my last 20 years, it feels like a holiday with art everywhere.

works: You said you haven't made a nickel down there, but aren't you getting shows?

Ann: I'm showing like crazy.

works: But you're just not selling stuff?

Ann: Not selling yet. I'm getting a lot of attention. You know, I've always said I've made my career on thank you notes and dinner parties. I've been having dinner parties since I moved down there, inviting curators, art dealers, writers and other artists, and creating the same kind of dinner parties you and I used to do with

Dinner and Conversations. The idea is to meet other people and cross-pollinate.

I mean, some of it is mercenary, but nothing makes me happier than when Scarlett Chang, a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, comes to a dinner party and happens to glom onto one of the artists there who's doing a series, *Slab City*, that she wants to see.

works: That's beautiful. Some of it's practical—you used the word "mercenary"—and at the same time, it's making life fun and interesting.

Ann: That's right. I've had to work hard to meet people that way, but then I found that the friendships have come easily without a lot of fanfare.

works: Now part of your story is that you went through a very serious cancer thing pretty recently.

Ann: I don't talk about myself going through cancer. I talk about going through a period of obstacles, which is what Leonard Cohen has called "difficulties" in his life. I love that phrase. I had to negotiate a life-threatening illness. I also had another life-threatening situation happen when I was in Beijing with no 911, and no ambulance system. Those two things have really sharpened the way I look at the world, and made me realize how life could be over in a second.

works: How much can you share about your Beijing experience?

Ann: I went into anaphylactic shock. We think it was from some Ibuprofen from a pharmacy in Chicago, because my host never bought any medicine in Beijing. I was there in a residency for four weeks, and one night I shut my fingers in the cab of a taxi. I came home, iced them, and took these Ibuprofens; then four hours later, I was semi-conscious.

works: And you just...? You lived through it.

Ann: My host, who I'd only known for three weeks, was totally freaked out. Here's the guest artist staying at her apartment gasping for breath! Kendra called her doctor friend in Sweden on Skype, and had him analyze me. He said, "She has to get to the hospital immediately!"

She had no idea what to do. In the ten years she'd

"I had a couple of husbands, and they didn't work out. They got jealous, or they started feeling like I was a parasite, like I'd done art long enough and hadn't been successful at it. They thought maybe I should throw in the towel and get a degree in computer science. So then I had to throw in the towel on them."

lived there, she'd never had an emergency in Beijing. Our other friend, who had accidentally slammed my fingers in the door and who lived nearby, came back over. This is like one o'clock in the morning. She had an SOS list.

So these men, they looked like fishermen, came with an old World War II stretcher and tried to get some needle into my veins and couldn't. I was in and out of consciousness and it was just a big mess. The "medics" couldn't lift me onto the stretcher, so these two 60-year-old women had to carry me. They had to tie me down in the stretcher, and slant me because the stretcher wouldn't fit in the elevator.

Then, when we got down to the street, they were putting me in this old panel van. We didn't have enough time to get a real ambulance from the English-speaking hospital that was probably about 45 minutes away, so we had to use this one. When I got into the hospital with the English-speaking Chinese doctors, they just started needling me full of adrenaline and hooked me up. Yeah. And I'd fallen. So I was bloody, and had to be stitched up, too.

works: Oh, my God.

Ann: That was the other thing that made me realize your life could just be over. These two life-threatening situations sharpened my thinking about what I really wanted to do.

So when I got down to Los Angeles, it felt like there were so many opportunities, and Lisa at Dolby Chadwick Gallery, felt that it was a great career move. Also last year, she paid to cast two big sculptures of mine into bronze, and a small 30-inch one.

She went to Art Miami, which is a very big fair, and had some of my cardboard pieces and the bronze work in her booth. She strongly believes in my work and thinks that, at some point, it's just going to break out.

I've always had another means of support. I worked at Creative Growth (in Oakland, CA) for ten years. Then there were those five years at the Berkeley Art Center. I also worked at Chabot Elementary School in Oakland as the art teacher. And years ago, I rebuilt an old house in Canyon that I bought for \$100,000. I sold it for \$600,000. I always talk about these things when I give my talks, because nobody tells you how an artist is supposed to figure it out.

I had a couple of husbands, and they didn't work out. They got jealous, or they started feeling like I was a parasite, like I'd done art long enough and hadn't been successful at it. They thought maybe I should throw in the towel and get a degree in computer science. So then I had to throw in the towel on them, in order to keep going with what I wanted to do.

works: Let's go back. I mean, how long have you been involved in doing creative things?

Ann: Well, I started making art in 1970, when I became a potter.

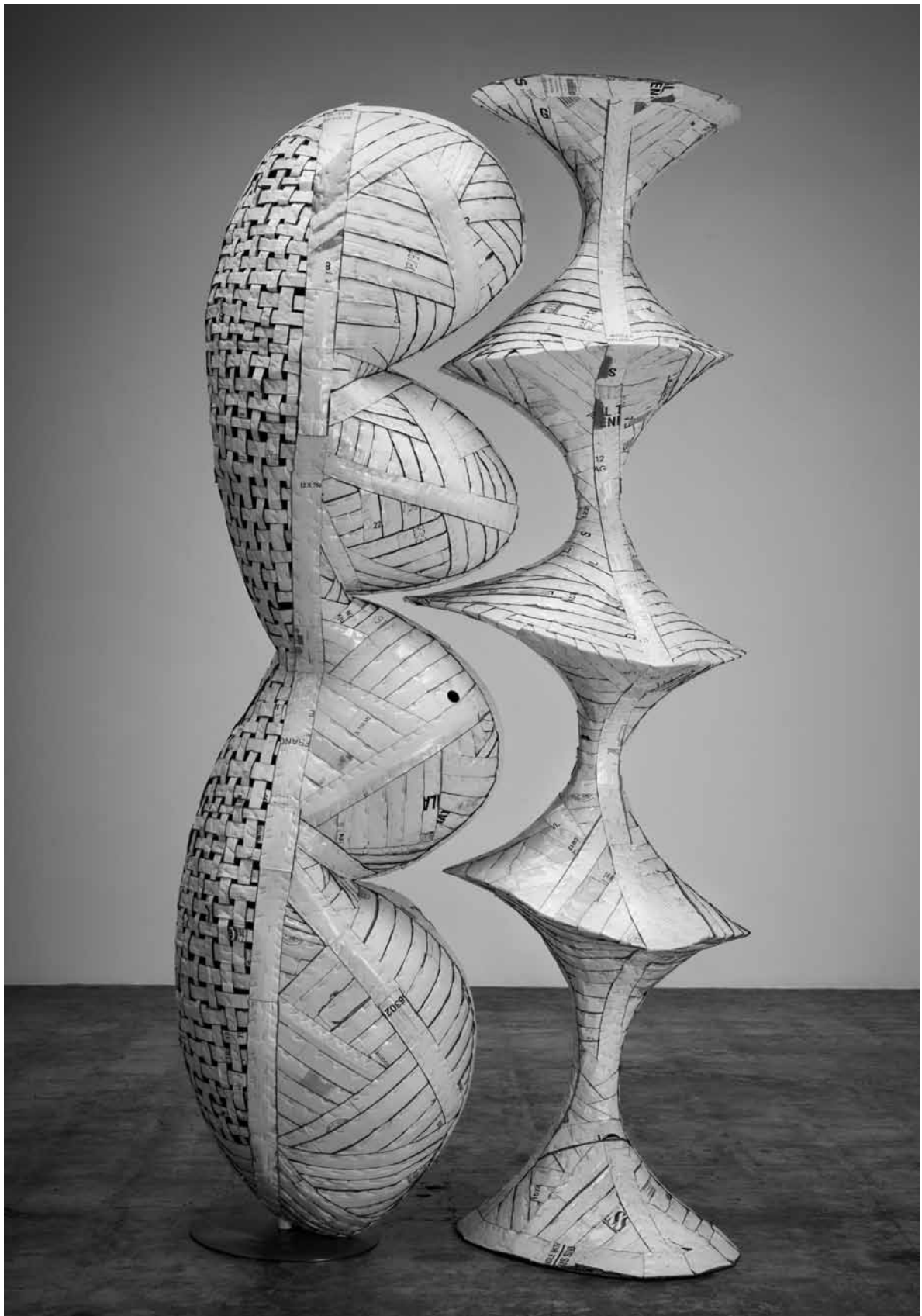
works: So it wasn't like an early thing in your life?

Ann: No. It wasn't until I was 20.

works: Really? That's unusual.

Ann: Yeah. Because I hadn't had any experience with art. I was born and raised in the Midwest, most of the time in Indiana, and I'd never gone to a museum.

works: There must have been a few creative things in



LEFT: *PERSONAGES, SAN PEDRO*, 2016, FOUND CARDBOARD, STAPLES, POLYURETHANE, 84"X25"X22" & 87"X23"X19"

"Then it became a metaphor for how connected everybody is to everyone else, because one sculpture became the partner to the next one, and to the next one. That, I think, is how we come back to, why is my work unlike anyone else's work. Or how is it most like my inner core."

your life as a kid that you enjoyed doing—playing in the water, doing something with some sticks, or something. There must have been some activity.

Ann: There was. I used to watch the Little Rascals, and they were always building carts, or staging productions. They were always doing something really creative, just as little kids. So we would make a barbecue grill out of a can and try to cook hamburgers. Or dam up the water in the gutter with sod as it was coming through. It was sort of rudimentary.

works: That's what I mean, though. When you look back on that, you were totally engaged. Right?

Ann: Yeah. And when I got to school in 1970, the new craft movement was really taking off and ceramics appealed to me.

works: What was your first contact with clay? I mean what happened?

Ann: I took a class with Marge Levy, who'd just started teaching at Purdue. She came from Pratt in NYC. She had a Brooklyn accent and was eccentric.

I loved that Marge was from New York City, and I'm still in touch with her. She educated us about ceramic artists and was very sophisticated—and also had no rules. The Ceramics department was open 24 hours a day. She showed us how to throw pots. But then, you might come in at like nine o'clock at night, and Marge would be naked from the waist up, and her breasts would be in plaster. She'd be making a plaster mold of her breasts. It was very freewheeling then and I learned how to throw, but it didn't come easy. It took me six months to learn how to center.

works: Well, come on. It's hard to learn how to throw.

Ann: I've taught it, and sometimes it's easy for people.

works: Really? Well, what was it like when you were first starting to handle the clay?

Ann: It was a real struggle, and a real pain in the ass. I didn't know if I could do it. But I *wanted* to be able to do it. And then I fell in love with the guy sitting next to me on another potter's wheel. So that was an incentive, and a real adventure. My parents freaked out because we were living together. So we got married at 21. We graduated on Saturday and had the wedding on Sunday, so people didn't have to make two trips. Then we took off in a van around the country looking for a place to live. We were going to buy land and set up a pottery studio.

works: You didn't know where you would end up?

Ann: No. We were in West Lafayette, Indiana, and we knew we weren't going to be staying in the Midwest.

works: So that was at Purdue?

Ann: Yes. Not a hotbed of artistic activity.

works: And you got a degree there?

Ann: I did. I graduated in art history.

works: Okay. So you went on this wonderful adventure. Talk a little about that.

Ann: Well, we drove out West, stopping in Denver

and Santa Fe and then driving up the coast to Oregon and Seattle. We liked Eugene, but felt that the West Coast was too crowded with potters, and the price of pottery was really low compared to even in the Midwest. We'd been up to Ann Arbor and did the big craft fair there two summers in a row.

works: You were selling your own work?

Ann: Yes. He was farther along than I was, but by that time, I'd been working almost a year. So I was getting somewhere. We had some friends who had gone to the East Coast, and they said that Ithaca, New York, was the place. A friend had been there for a summer training program, and then other friends went. There were ten of us who wanted to relocate. This was in 1972, and we were a band of brothers and couldn't bear to part from one another.

So we drove all the way back across the United States and landed in Ithaca on October 10th, 1972. It was snowing. We stayed with our friends, Denise and Arnie. Then we found a little old grocery store on the outskirts of Ithaca. It cost us \$100 a month, which was kind of the going rate. We built a kiln in the backyard with instructions from a book, using bricks we'd hauled out from a school. A hippie commune was tearing down a barn, and we helped them do that.

We brought the barn wood back and made a showroom on one side of the building. On the other side, where the meat counter used to be, we built a little counter and had our potter's wheels, that we bought with wedding money. He was Jewish, so his family gave money. My family, Protestant, gave wooden salad bowls and wine glasses [laughs]. We curtained off the back room and built a platform bed, got a gas stove and refrigerator, and lived there for a couple of years. Then we moved to a yurt, and then we bought land later on.

works: Was the yurt around Ithaca?

Ann: Yeah, right around where the grocery store was.

works: Okay. Then, what was it that brought you out to California? I mean, I know you went to CCAC as it was known in those days.

Ann: Right. That was 15 years later. I was ten years in Ithaca with that husband. We bought land, built

"One of the things I want to say is that this is a *really hard* path. To be an artist making art—there's never enough support, remuneratively. It's great when I've had exhibits. And then the work comes back. You're lonely and isolated again. Then you wonder why you do it."

a log cabin and then built a studio. Then we moved downtown. We kept the business going, and we were very successful at it. It still exists.

works: That's amazing.

Ann: My husband owned the building and built it into a beautiful American crafts place. I was long gone by then,

works: I see. So before you came to California, is there something we should touch on?

Ann: Yes. Well, then I left that husband, and fell in love with the second husband. He lived in New York City. I'd always wanted to live in New York City, so I moved there and set up a pottery studio in the meat-packing district on 14th Street. I had a very successful career there. It was 1981, and the Chicken Coop potters had established themselves as a real business. I was selling work to Barney's, Bendel's and Bloomingdale's.

works: Oh, my gosh.

Ann: In the 80s they were buying crafts. Then in

1985 the Pottery Barn arrived. People were no longer interested in handmade crafts. And by this time, the potters and weavers and glassblowers were getting burned out. We'd become so successful that the ones who wanted to keep a business going were paying people to make things.

I was totally burned out. So, I took a class with a man named Jim Makins, who said, "Go to graduate school. Go to the West Coast, because you'll find artists there who are working with clay as an art material, not as a functional material."

So I went with my husband, and we visited all the schools here. Peter Voulkos was just leaving Cal. Stephen De Staebler was at San Francisco State. Ron Nagle was at Mills, and Richard Shaw was at the Art Institute.

I knew all these artists' work, and I chose to work with Viola Frey at California College of Arts and Crafts, partly because she was a woman, and because I'd seen her work at the Whitney the year before. I applied and I got in, provisionally.

At the very end of 1984, my husband and I drove across the country. I was 35 and so was he. Viola says to me, "Well, you have one semester to build a portfolio, because we're certainly not going to accept you into this MFA program on a pottery portfolio," meaning handmade, functional ware.

works: Right.

Ann: That was traumatic. I started to go to Viola's classes for freshmen, the 18-year-olds, watching her being so creative, pulling all these ideas out of the air. She looked at me and said, "Go look at some *real* art. Go look at some Kandinsky."

I went to the library and dutifully brought back a Kandinsky book. I propped it in front of the potter's wheel and started to throw the shapes in the painting. That was my eureka moment.

works: What happened?

Ann: I went from being a functional potter throwing shapes on the wheel to throwing abstract shapes. I could throw anything. I could throw an egg, and then I'd throw another egg, and jam it on. Then I could throw a tall cylinder. Then I'd pull that over. All of a sudden, I was in abstraction. I was thinking like an artist instead of a functional craftsperson.

works: That's an interesting thing to hear you say. What was the content of that change? Can you talk about that? I know it's a challenging question.

Ann: Well in artspeak, I started to work with volume and texture and shape and form. I started to distinguish for myself what shapes I was probably going to be working on. I didn't know it at the time, but going from realism to abstraction was really important to me.

works: What was important about it?

Ann: I didn't want to make figures. I wanted to make sculptural forms that were primal and meaningful. In a way, a lot of the forms I work on today came from my history as a potter. You start with a sphere, a ball of clay, center it on the wheel, and then the first thing you do is you make a cylinder. To me, those are the most basic forms you could imagine, the cylinder and the sphere, because those are the forms of male and female. They're the forms of nature. You put a seed in the ground, and the first thing it does is make a sprout. I love those shapes. I love those seed shapes.

works: It's interesting how you talked sort of in "artspeak" until you arrived at, "I love those shapes." There's a very strong component of feeling.

Ann: Yes. The feeling that goes into a sculpture imbues that sculpture with something that's really powerful. I think it's one of the things that makes my art work accessible. People feel like there's a soul or a personality, or there's an embodiment, in the sculptures. The forms are really simple, and they're elegant. There's something funny about them, too. For me, humor is really important. I think that's in the work. I'm always trying to be as true as possible.

works: Yes. What does that mean, "being true"?

Ann: Well, for instance, throwing Kandinsky's shapes—those were *his* shapes. So how do I make them my own? The great quest is how you get your own personality into your work so that you're making a statement nobody else has made. The way I started doing that was by thinking about my life experiences.

When I was in graduate school I got pregnant and had my daughter. Graduating, I didn't even know how



to be an artist. How do you balance your life and your family? You have a relationship, you have a child, you have a job, you have to get a studio. So my life was just a series of balancing acts. So I started making these cylindrical forms, and I'd make them as tall as I could before they would fall over. It felt like I was really talking metaphorically about my own life. So I feel that a lot of these forms are about balancing acts.

Also, when I went through my period of obstacles, I had no idea how many people loved me. That was earthshaking to me. I had a friend who came and slept on the couch here every night, for four-and-a-half months, in case I needed him, or in case I had to go to the hospital. Every day I would get a gift or an email or a card. I felt like I had this legion of people, like a Roman army behind me.

So when I recovered, I started making these "personages." I would start by sort of making a shape. I'd take a piece of cardboard, and I'd draw a shape on the floor. Then I would draw another one, and then I would sort of splice them together, so that they would stand up, and they were sort of tall and stately. Then I realized the one on the floor, the negative space, was the next sculpture. So I kept making them. I made about 30 and I called them the *Personages*. It felt like they were an homage to all the people who helped me get through this.

Then it became a metaphor for how connected everybody is to everyone else, because one sculpture became the partner to the next one, and to the next one. That, I think, is how we come back to, why is my work unlike anyone else's work. Or how is this work most like my inner core. And it is.

Then after I had a love affair in Rome for four days, all my sculptures were about love and about Fernando. That went on for about a year.

works: Your sculptures?

Ann: Yes. And the love affair was only four days, but sort of continued—just through emails or letters.

works: It must have been a powerful experience.

Ann: That was a powerful experience.

works: I'm interested in what you've been sharing

about the organic shapes—the male and the female, and how there's a feeling connected there. Is it okay to say, a deep feeling?

Ann: Primal.

works: I'm intrigued by the idea of inhabiting the body. Is that related to what you're talking about?

Ann: I think the idea of making sculpture is bringing other bodies into the world, but I don't think that's part of what I think about. I mean, I've done meditation, so I'm aware of that centering in your body and breathing, and feeling connected to the Earth.

works: Right.

Ann: I think one of the things I want to say is that this is a *really hard path*. To be an artist making art—there's never enough support, remuneratively. It's great when I've had exhibits. And then the work comes back. You're lonely and isolated again. You wonder why you do it. But then, when you come and you talk to me about these things, it's so gratifying and reminds me that this is really important.

works: Let's talk about that. Why is it important?

Ann: That's the question I wrestle with a lot. Why is it important to make art? Ultimately, I think that it is, just like it's important for people to write books, and to put their thoughts down. But these sculptures take up a lot of space in the world. Most people don't have the kind of space to put these sculptures in.

works: That's true.

Ann: Some people are making paintings, and then selling every painting. Some artists get these huge museum shows, and they have a studio full of assistants. I mean, I'm jealous of that! I want a 10,000 square-foot studio. I want things coming and going. But that's delusional. That's the life of 1% of the artists. So, how does an artist keep going? I mean, here I am, years later. My whole life has been dedicated to this.

works: This is a really big question.

Ann: It's a big question, especially now that I'm

65 and making a lot of opportunity for myself by moving to Los Angeles. But when I die, it's all going to disappear. Everything will be taken from you. The idea of having a studio sale was heart wrenching, because I'm not going to have these pieces for my retrospective. But I may never have a retrospective.

So that's the reconciliation with yourself on how important your journey is. I still have burning ambition. I want to turn the television on and see me looking back at me. I want my work to be in the Whitney. I'd like to get a Guggenheim grant. I've applied every year for nine years. Those are some of the things that keep you going, that keep you making new things. I mean, I've made 40 pieces in the last two years—new, large pieces. I'm filling up my studio there. I also was in Albion, Michigan. I made twelve pieces there. I was in Hawaii. I made two huge pieces, 15-footers. So I'm really grateful that you appreciate art so much, and that you've dedicated your life to telling artist stories, and delving into the big questions.

works: And it's interesting with those big questions—in a way, an answer is not as good as the question.

Ann: And there is no answer. All you do is formulate questions. Then you make your decision without really knowing if it's going to be the right path. But then it turns out to be fine. One of my gifts is that my father is really optimistic, and I feel that I find joy. That's my job—to find the positive, or the joy.

works: I'm wanting you to say more about those special moments that can happen.

Ann: They're usually small. I think if I got the Guggenheim, I'd be happy—and I wouldn't have to come up with that \$25,000. I think having these windows, where I can make work with the light streaming in... Making my work is excruciatingly boring, but when it's done, it makes me happy. Sometimes I have to grow into it, but sometimes, seeing some of these pieces, I think, "Oh, my God!" They're so great it brings tears to my eyes.

works: What is that about, do you think?

Ann: That's a feeling of accomplishment. I got it right. It's got everything it needs! I mean, *I've* got everything I need. *I'm an artist.* I don't look back. And that piece

has—it's *me*. It references art history. (I'm talking about *Il Baccio*.) It's a simple piece and might mean more to me because it's sort of about that love affair. I realize Picasso had all those muses, and muses are really important. A lot of outside influences come together to make you feel happy with your own outcome.

works: I'm still intrigued by that phrase, "Sometimes it moves me to tears."

Ann: Often it's happened with other people's art. Like Louise Bourgeois or Eva Hesse. You just feel like you want to wrap yourself around that piece. I don't know if it can even be defined.

When it happens with your own work, that's when you know you've made something great. That's when you feel that you're a great artist. And that doesn't happen very often. But every once in a while, you're really happy with yourself.

works: I suspect there's something important about that for others, for all of us as human beings to move in the direction where we can have some kind of connection with the depth of ourselves, with this mysterious life that we have. It seems to me that sometimes one touches that in art.

Ann: I think that's when you realize that's why you're an artist. Every once in a while I make something that brings tears to my eyes. That's when I know I've made the right choice; this is *my* path. I especially felt that for the very first time in 2003 when I made that piece *Enough, Not Enough*. It's a public art piece, which is really hard to get right, because it's half-public and half-art. Most of the time with public art, it's a lot of bad art; they should have planted a tree. But this piece is all about bounty, and the precariousness of bounty. *Enough, Not Enough*—you can lose it any second.

works: That's beautiful.

Ann: Yes. The poetry is that it's balanced on that sphere, which is also about balancing acts.

works: And the sphere is black and mysterious.

Ann: Yes. And the forms all have light suffusing them. too. ♦

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