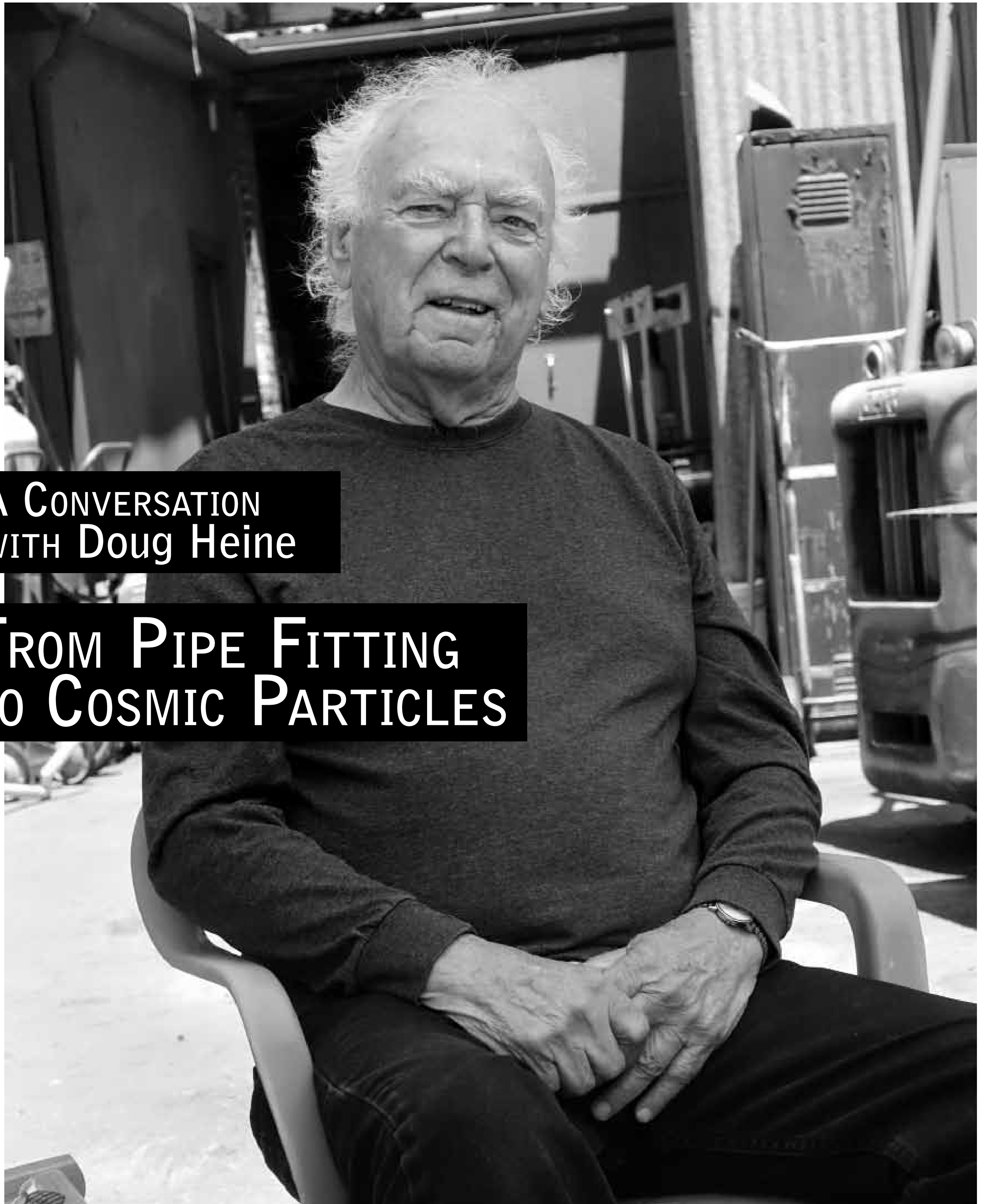
A Conversation with Doug Heine

From Pipe Fitting to Cosmic Particles



"I came across a page I wrote when I turned seventy-five. I'd had cancer and I thought I might still have a couple of active years left. I asked myself what is it I feel I need to do? So I thought, I need to do something profound. I thought about that and realized I'm not a very profound person. So I asked myself what is my nature?... What I came to is: it's making stuff—be it sculpture, paintings or an artistic gate or fence. So I thought, 'If making stuff gives you pleasure, do it!'"

It was thanks to sculptor Gale Wagner that I met artist Doug Heine. Gale included me in one of the artist breakfasts he's hosted at his Oakland studio for years. It's an intimate affair; I think there were six of us. It was a long time ago and, to be honest, I've forgotten the other names. A few days after that morning, Doug followed up by subscribing—one of those small gestures one remembers. Then time rolled on, several years, until one day I got a note from Heine. It touched me. Was he open to a visit? I asked.

This was well into the pandemic and it wasn't long before we were sitting outside in his work area chatting. It was one of those easy conversations full of laughter and deep sharing.

Heine is eighty-five and, as one can see in the photos, vibrantly alive. Fifteen or twenty minutes into our conversation, one thing was clear: I wanted to inteview this man.

When I made the proposal, Heine was flattered, but gently declined, "I don't belong in your magazine," he said. "I'm not an artist of that caliber." It was an interesting moment—a kind of shock, really, and now I was doubly touched.

"I'm not going to twist your arm," I said. Why don't you think about it? And before I left that day, it was agreed that, in any case, we should have more of these conversations. "I'd love to introduce you to some of my friends," Heine said. "I think you'd like them."

Two or three weeks later we touched base.

"I talked with Joe Slusky [w&c #19]," Heine said. "He thinks I should accept your invitation for the interview. And so does Bonnie." [Bonnie Thomas, poet and Doug's partner]. *That settled it, and a few days later, as we sat again in Heine's outdoor work area, he began by reflecting on some memories that were sparked by the interview with Milan Rai in issue #38.—R. Whittaker*

Doug Heine: I was thinking about some things that Milan Rai and I have in common around trees. I've never talked about this. Years ago, I went through a difficult divorce. I was thirty-seven and I took myself car camping. I was up by the Navarro River, camping under the redwoods. I'd smoked a little weed, which I'm sure had something to do with it, but I honestly felt that they said to me, "It's okay, little brother, we'll take care of you." And on other occasions, I've had things like this with trees that are almost like a communication. It's kind of a bizarre thing.

works: I guess we say it's bizarre because it's outside of what we think of as being normal. But if we were really open, we might experience other things like that.

Doug: Absolutely.

works: Listen, I think it would be interesting to focus a little on your early life. You grew up in sort of a hard-core blue-collar, working-man environment. I'd say you have serious credentials there.

Doug: [laughs] Well, yeah. I think that would be true.

works: You grew up in Vallejo, California, and there's a big shipyard, Mare Island, that was very important in WWII. Your father worked there.

Doug: My father, my grandfather, my uncle, my cousin, my mother, and my grandmother—nine people in my family worked at various times in that shipyard. It was difficult work; it was hot, it was dirty, it was noisy—it's part of the reason I've lost my hearing.

works: When did you start working there yourself?

Doug: I was sixteen. They had an apprentice program. You'd work three weeks with a master mechanic and then you would do a week in school. It was eight hours a day with a lot of homework and actually quite a good school. An old British schoolmaster ran it. You did that for four years and you'd get a junior college diploma or a high school diploma if you hadn't completed high school.

works: Was your dad proud of his work at the shipyard?

Doug: I think he wanted to be an artist, but he started out as a ship fitter. These are the men who roll the steel for the hulls and do all the steel work. But somehow, and I'm not sure how he did it, he ended up in the design department. I think he was quite proud of that. He only had a 10th-grade education. He was orphaned. His mother died when he was two and his father died when he was nine. Then an uncle who was a doctor took him in. This was in Nebraska. He ran away and joined the Navy at 16. And when he was in the navy, he got stationed at Mare Island. He met my mother at a dance.

works: So that was home, growing up next door to the shipyard. When you really started working at the shipyard, what were you doing?

Doug: I was an apprentice pipe fitter. In the beginning, I worked on converted WWII submarines. One was converted to an attack boat. They put in 100 bunks, spaced this far apart [very close together]. It was for a group of marines to do a secret attack. Then another one of them was converted to, I guess, the first missile submarine.

Not many years later, they started building nuclear subs there. You know, nuclear reactor plants are, for the most part, just a series of pipes and pumps. I worked on the building of four of them. When they started to repair nuclear subs, I switched over and worked on the repair of their reactor plants. I worked there for three years. Then, for a few years, I was sort of back and forth between working there and trying to finish my schooling.

works: Okay, so with the nuclear submarines, the reactors are mostly pipes and pumps, you said. So what were you doing in there exactly?

"I was an apprentice pipe fitter. In the beginning, I worked on converted WWII submarines."

Doug: For the most part, the reactors are all stainless steel. But there are a lot of different systems that use copper pipe. The way copper pipe is joined is by a silver solder joint. Well, they lost a submarine, the *Thresher*. The investigation's conclusion was that it was lost because of a faulty silver solder joint. And because of that tragedy, they started to do ultrasound testing to make sure that the joints were totally bonded. So I ended up having a crew of five guys that only did the joints for nuclear subs.

works: So you'd proved your skills.

Doug: I guess I got pretty good at doing those joints. But a year later I went to radiation school and learned about radiation in general, but in particular in regard to reactor plants.

works: Now, I remember reading in the draft of your memoir that you had to squeeze into tight spaces to do some of the jobs. It sounded downright scary. Would you describe that?

Doug: Yes. That was in the WWII-type subs. There was a space 3 or 4 feet wide and 40 feet deep and they had batteries in there all connected with a small plastic tube. So someone had to crawl all the way in there and connect those tubes. The guy who sent me in said, "Here are your beryllium tools."

I said, "Beryllium. What's this?"

He said, "They don't spark. If you set a spark off in there, and there's any gas from the batteries, it's all over. Be careful of the buttons on your bib overalls." So I crawl in and I do this. It takes a couple of hours. I'm sweating like a hog, but I crawl out and I'm walking along the seawall in the fresh air when the loudspeaker comes on and says, "President Kennedy just got shot."

That's what ties those two things together for me. Everyone our age remembers exactly what they were doing when they heard that JFK got shot.

"Bonnie calls it my Barbary Coast days. Vallejo was a very tough town. Some of that was reflected in the first 3 blocks of the city where there were many bars and whorehouses."

works: That's true. Well, you must not have had any issues with claustrophobia.

Doug: Oh no, I did. And later on I had to work in submarine tanks. Well, things like that are why I kept quitting. Once I had to climb up a mast at night on this cruiser to make a repair. I was working with a former professional football player. This guy was telling me a guy was climbing the ladder and a weld broke. But he was just passing through a transition guard and his elbows caught, so he didn't fall. Well, I got halfway up and came down. I was scared shitless and said, "I don't think I can do this."

He looked me dead in the eye and said, "I guess you can't help it if you have shit in your veins." Insulting. But it felt real.

I was married and had a couple of small kids, but I thought the guy was doing his job and I needed to do mine. So I went back up and did the job. But no, I was, and still am, very uncomfortable with heights and I can't do an MRI. The last time I tried, I got halfway in and I crawled out.

works: Well, your story of squeezing 40 feet into that little space with those batteries is powerful. But the shipyard must have been an awesome place. I mean, as you were describing in that manuscript, they bent huge, thick pieces of steel, gigantic things. It must have been epic.

Doug: Like many things, there was a yin and a yang to it. Some of the things they made there, like gigantic bronze propellers—you'd look at those things and, my God, how did they do that? And the hulls were two inches thick. They'd roll those huge plates and weld them together into a pipe that was the main body of the vessel.

works: What would the diameter of those hulls be?

Doug: I'd guess forty feet. They're pretty comfortable. The old WWII subs were not that big. And because I was claustrophobic I asked one of the sailors, "Does anybody ever freak out in here?" He said, "It happens." With the nuclear subs, they're out there sometimes for three months. I can't imagine living in a pipe for three months.

works: Right. Now I've read that as a teenager, you learned how to box and got into fights. Would you say something about that?

Doug: Bonnie calls it my Barbary Coast days. Vallejo was a very tough town. Some of that was reflected in the first three blocks of the city where there were many bars and whorehouses. The sailors and marines, when they'd get off, would go there and get drunk and get into fights with each other. As kids, we'd go down there and shine shoes and play pool, that sort of thing. And sometimes when we were older, there was a spillover of fights and we'd be involved, and it also carried over into street fights.

But alcohol was a huge part of my growing up—and my friends. We all played sports—baseball, basketball, football—and on the weekends, we'd drink. I got thrown in jail once because they would park the

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boxcars behind the liquor distributors, and on Friday night we'd take a crowbar and break into a boxcar and take five or six cases of beer. We'd hide them somewhere and that would fuel us until we needed to do it again. [laughs] Now if we'd been a little more criminal, the boxcar was full of cases of whiskey and vodka and gin. We never touched them, but we got caught stealing the beer and put in jail.

That's actually kind of an odd story, because when I was 17-18, I went to join the Air Force, thinking I was going to be a jet pilot. The recruiting officer asked, "Have you ever been in trouble?"

I said, "As a matter of fact, I'm on probation at the moment."

He said, "We can't take you, but just go to court and tell them you want to join the service, and they'll let you off. Actually, you can't get drafted while you're on probation."

I said, "What? I can't get drafted?" [laughs] Needless to say, I didn't go to court.

But let me ask you, your claustrophobia—you can do an MRI?

works: I've been through a couple of them, not fun. My wife and I were in Florence a few years ago and went to see the *duomo*. I'm not quite remembering the name of the architect.

Doug: I think it was Brunelleschi.

works: Right. Well, you can climb this little stairway from the street. We'd just happened on it and had no plan to do that. It's 450 steps, and you can look into the nave below. The space is about three feet wide between the two shells of the dome. People are in front of you and behind you all squeezed in and climbing up. I got over halfway up, just doing my best not to freak out, but finally I had to turn around and literally squeeze down past people to get out of there. I wasn't happy with myself and was determined to go back the next day and complete it, which I did. But I stay away from such things.

Doug: Yeah, I hate it. Oddly enough, when I took the job in Italy, [at the National Laboratory of Gran Sasso], I struggled with that. You had to drive in this very long tunnel and then go into this cave. But the cave was so big, it wasn't too bad.

works: Well, I want to get to that, but let's talk about your experience with your high school teacher, Dorothy Herger, who was a student of Marguerite Wildenhain.

Doug: She's one of the reasons I quit the shipyard. By the way, she doesn't want to be interviewed. She said, "I'm 95. I don't want to be famous." I told her she should consider it, because you don't know what might come out of your mouth.

works: That's beautiful. In a real conversation, things can appear.

Doug: I'm seeing it that way.

works: Now, you're eighty-five, and you've learned some things.

Doug: Yes. Going through my papers, I came across a page I wrote when I turned seventy-five. I'd had cancer and I thought I might still have a couple of active years left. I asked myself what is it I feel I need to do? So I thought, I need to do something profound. I thought

about that and realized I'm not a very profound person. So I asked myself what is my nature?

The Epicurean philosophers thought you needed to live your life with pleasure. It's not about extremes like eating pheasant every day. But you have to look and ask what does give me pleasure? What I came to is: it's making stuff—be it sculpture, paintings or an artistic gate or fence. So I thought, "If making stuff gives you pleasure, do it!"

In a way, it was kind of a profound awakening! Because now, at 85, I've asked myself a second question, "Doug, you've got a couple of years left. Is there someplace you need to go, something you want to see or something you want to make that will be lasting?"

works: Interesting question. Another thing I think I'm hearing is how it's important to be present here in this place where I am.

Doug: It's true, Richard. This is the only moment we have. It could be having a good conversation, making something, or whatever. But you're right. It's about being conscious.

works: Hearing you say that is a reminder, and now I'm more present here in this chair. It's a gift, just to be here. You remember the hippie days and that book by Ram Dass, *Be Here Now*.

Doug: I do remember that book.

works: I'm always forgetting to remember that *I'm here.*

Doug: And me, too. But especially in this pandemic time, I wake up and look out the window and think, "My God! I've got one more good day here!" I better take advantage of it.

works: Say more.

Doug: I've been doing these paintings using industrial dyes. It forces me to be absolutely present. Making these paintings, when I pour the dye and move it to make it run together with other colors, it requires extreme focus. And that sort of thing gives me a great deal of pleasure.

But I've got a question for you. You've done poetry, you've done ceramics, you write, you paint—okay, when we think of those kinds of creative activities, is there a marriage in following all these different forms that all have a basic root in harmony and beauty? So I'm wondering what your thoughts are about beauty and poetry on different planes.

works: Well, the title of my last newsletter pops up: "Poetry enters life in endless forms." To me the essence of poetry has to do with that rare thing that touches a particular place in the heart. It's like receiving a necessary food. I'm thinking of a line from William Carlos Williams: "It is difficult to get the news from poems, yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there." All kinds of things can penetrate into this hidden place. At the same time, most art, and most things in life, fall short of that.

Doug: Yes. Yes. When I say I strive for that in a painting and fail, it's immaterial that I failed. It's the striving for that. I guess that's what I was getting at. I've seen photos that can make you cry. It comes in a lot of forms, doesn't it? It reminds that Milan Rai talked about thinking with the intelligence of his heart. That resonated with me, because I've made decisions based on my intellect and regretted them, but I've never regretted decisions based on my heart.

I used to have a girlfriend who was a ballerina. I saw her do some things on the stage that could bring a tear to your eye. It was just poetry.

works: You know it when it happens, and it's always a surprise.

Doug: Exactly. Okay. Now you're 77 and you've asked yourself this very same question that I've asked myself: what's left? And what is your answer?

"I'd come to the Lab from Mare Island as a pipe fitter, and suddenly I was having lunch every day with Louie Alvarez and all the physicists."

works: I must say I get a lot joy out of doing just what I'm doing right here with you. So I hope to continue having these kinds of conversations. I do think there can be something valuable in them for others. I could say more, but maybe later if you want.

One of the things I find so interesting is how in your life's trajectory you ended up over at UC Berkeley working at the Lawrence Berkeley Lab, right? [yes] You got hired to build things for their experiments, and you worked for Luis Alvarez. Is he still alive?

Doug: No. He died. I worked for two Nobel laureates during my years with the Lab.

works: Were you ever around Robert Oppenheimer?

Doug: No, but I knew his brother, Frank, who started Experiments in Art and Technology, which is how I got my job in the art department. There was one in New York and one in San Francisco. The Exploratorium came out of that. They wanted to invite artists and scientists to do collaborations.

I was interested in both sides of it. I also met Harold Paris. I won't bore you with the details, but he was using vacuum-formed plastics to make sculpture and I was vacuum forming plastic to make mirrors for cosmic particle experiments.

So Harold and I talked, and he invited me to come to the art department and make a plastics shop at UC Berkeley. When I got there he said, "By the way there's another guy who might want you to do something."

Well, they didn't have a nickel to build a plastics shop. But the other guy was Pete Voulkos. I met Pete,

"I met Pete [Voulkos], and he asked, 'You ever run a foundry?' [mimics very deep voice] I said, 'Mr. Voulkos, I've never been in a foundry.' He said, 'Well, you've done all that science shit. You should be able to run a foundry!'"

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I said, "Mr. Voulkos, I've never been in a foundry."

He said, "Well, you've done all that science shit. You should be able to run a foundry!" [laughs]

works: [laughs] Tell us about your experiences with Pete Voulkos.

Doug: Oh, he was a lovely guy. He was funny, and I learned a great deal. I used to go to all of his critiques. There was one where a kid had made one of the ugliest ceramic lumps I'd ever seen. I expected Pete to call him on it. Pete said, "You been workin'?" [deep voice]

The kid said, "Oh, Pete. Yes, I've been working."

Pete looks at it for a few seconds and says, "Well, keep on workin."

I took that as a Zen koan. It was like, you don't know where that kid will go if he keeps working. Anyway, Pete did not kill that kid's spirit.

You know, you can do nine mediocre paintings and the tenth one will click. But you can't skip over the first nine paintings. And art schools are terrible in that they often kill that spirit. Actually, schools in general can kill that spirit.

works: Oh yes. That's a whole topic in itself. You would see that in the critiques sometimes, right?

Doug: Yes. And it gets back to kindergarten where every kid painted. In first grade it started to drop off. By the third grade, the teacher held up Johnny's dinosaur. It was somewhat realistic, and you'd made an abstracted dinosaur, and it didn't fit. You might have been the most creative kid in the class, but "Oh no." Yours didn't stand up, and you quit pursuing art.

works: It's a common experience, I'm sure, and it's why most people will tell you, "I'm not an artist." It's because their dinosaur didn't measure up. But let's make a jump here. Tell me a little about this experience you had going to Italy.

Doug: I'll try to make it short. Here's the background. There was this young woman who was an art student when I was running the metal shop at UCB. She was separated from her husband, and we dated for a while. Then later she went back to her husband, Steve. So there were two cosmic particle studies going on at Berkeley. These involved high

altitude balloons, and the Lawrence Berkeley Lab was running these studies. So I was going back and forth because I worked in the art department and at the Lab.

So some years later, I got a call from her. She told me that Steve wanted to hire me to go to Italy. Would I like to go? Well, he was in Italy involved in this project, surrounded by young physicists who couldn't make anything. And it happened that I was going to Italy to teach a marble class. So when I'd finished that, I could go take a look at their project.

At the same time, I was having relationship problems. We would separate, and I would end up going back. And I thought, "A year in Italy—that would do it." So I agreed to take the job.

works: Would you say something about the project?

Doug: It was called MACRO—the Monopol, Astrophysics, and Cosmic Ray Observatory. How to describe it? The object of the experiment was to study muons. There's a seven-mile tunnel going through a mountain. In the middle of it, at a right angle, they excavated three giant caves. The Italians are amazing at making tunnels. Anyway, these caves have barrel vaults, all finished with white ceramic tile—we're talking the length of a football field and probably fifty

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feet high. And they'd made a rolling crane to travel the length of the cave. It was yellow and was a perfect fit for the arched roof. It looked like pure sculpture.

works: So there were heavy things to be moved.

Doug: Boxes that were 40 feet long, 2 feet wide by 2 feet high. They were stacked twenty deep and twenty wide—four hundred of them. Each one of those boxes was full of pure water. So when a muon would pass through this water, it would make a track that could be seen electronically. So there was a lot of peripheral stuff that had to be made.

works: So you took the job and…

Doug: I made a deal that if I could work half time, I'd come. They agreed, and so I set up a studio in L'Aquila and it worked out pretty well.

works: How much creativity was called for in your work with this project in Italy?

Doug: Not as much as with the Lawrence Berkeley Lab, because this thing was so well engineered. With the cosmic particles study there was a lot of room for creativity.

works: And what were you doing at the Lab?

Doug: I was making, physically making, the interior portions of balloon gondolas, super-conducting magnets, spark chambers and what we laughingly called the bracket racket. All of those components had to be held together very, very closely and supported somehow. So we had to make intricate brackets to hold all those components and the electronics.

works: And who designed these things?

Doug: We had engineers, and the physicists themselves. We all worked together. Sometimes a physicist would come and show us something he wanted and we'd ask him, "Do you want it engineered or can we 'technician' it?" Often they'd say, "Okay, technician it." So we'd design it and make it. That was the creative side of Lawrence Berkeley Lab.

works: You must have enjoyed that.

Doug: I did. I did. When we went to fly a balloon we'd be gone for two months, so we'd live with these people.

works: There must have been some memorable moments…

Doug: There were, yes. I'd come to the Lab from Mare Island as a pipe fitter, and suddenly I was having lunch every day with Louie Alvarez and all the physicists. It was a real eye-opener for me. I was awestruck, obviously—I mean, these are powerful folks. One day I was in the hall of Building 50 when I overheard two Nobel laureates arguing quite loudly about who had the best parking space and who had the best desk and desk set that matched their wastebaskets. It was an opening moment for me in recognizing that our human nature is in everyone, regardless of knowledge.

You know, Richard, I've thought about this. There are people in this world with tremendous creativity, tremendous knowledge, but there are not so many with wisdom. So I think there is a division here between accumulated knowledge and wisdom.

You know, you'll read something from some Native American elder, that says for us to make this decision we must think seven generations ahead and you'll think, "Now that is a wise statement!"

works: Indeed, it is. Now I wanted to go back to the project in Italy. You remarked on the elegance of its design.

Doug: I was very struck by that.

works: And you carved marble there, too. Would you say something about that?

Doug: Do you know the artist Manuel Neri?

works: I know of him, but I've never gotten to meet him.

Doug: Well, once I went with the San Francisco Ballet on a tour of Italy and a friend told me, "You should look up Neri. Here's his address in Carrara. Go see him." So when the ballet continued on to Israel, I stayed behind and went to Carrara and found this address. Neri lived on the second floor on this little,

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funky street. I knocked on his door and he stuck his head out the window.

I said, "Hi. I'm from Berkeley. I'm an artist."

He said, "Come on up and have a glass of wine." So we got together. I showed him some slides of some metal work I'd done and asked, "Do you think I could make things like this out of sheets of marble?

He said, "You could make these out of solid blocks."

I asked him how, and he said, "Go down to Studio Nicoli. They've been there 150 years. You can rent a space for $40 a month. If you watch the artisans as they're carving, after a while you'll pick it up." So I did that, and I still make fairly simple forms.

The owner, Nicoli, was a real character. He said, "Why don't you bring a group of students over?" So when I came back to Berkeley, I found out about UC's travel abroad programs. I made a proposal and ended up taking twelve students over there. I rented a hotel. We all got over there and did a three week class. When the time came to pay the hotel, I hadn't gotten a check from Cal.

Well, long story short, I decided I could do the whole thing on my own. I advertised in *Artweek* and *Pacific Sun*. And I ended up doing six of those workshops in Cararra over six years.

works: How was it for you working with the marble?

Doug: I did like the marble, and I've made some pieces that were pretty well received. When you are carving something with a hammer and a chisel, you can't be thinking, "Okay, now I'm going to hit this, now I'm going to hit this." You get in a zone, like an alpha state. It seems different from other things like welding. There you're more focused on the act of what you're doing. But marble carving, it can put your mind in a different place.

works: And there must be a whole world of stone carving.

Doug: There is! I met some wonderful artisans. In this other studio, SGF Scultura, there was a full-sized Cadillac that was carved in marble for an Arab prince, and he never picked it up. The detail was down to the word "Cadillac" where it appears on the fender.

works: Oh, my gosh.

Doug: A lot of times a sculptor would have a studio, like Neri, and he would hire an artisan to come in and do the roughing out on a piece. Then the artist comes in and makes the final finishing up on the elephant, or whatever. I'm sure Michaelangelo had people who did that for him.

I saw a group show of a variety of sculptors and their artisans. One guy did a Rolls Royce engine. Even the nuts that held the valve covers on had the threads carved in. Another artisan made a full-sized bathtub out of marble and it was a half-inch thick. I don't know how he did it. But I was told, "Don't ask the artisan when is he going to make his own work." They are quite sensitive to that question.

I saw a sculptor bring in a maquette about 18″ tall and order a copy to be made fifteen feet tall.

GATE 13
AGAIN!

DOUG HEINE'S HOME IN BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA.

I questioned that, and Carlo Nicolli said, "The way I look at it, this is a symphony. My artisans are the players and he is the composer." Carlo asked me how long I thought it would take the artist to carve the whole thing. I guessed two or three years and thinking about that later, I felt a little more okay with it.

One day I walked into Manuel Neri's studio and he was carving a figure of his wife. He was standing there with a chunk of marble in his hand and there was a piece missing from the head. His wife said, "What did you do?"

He answered, "I must have hit it wrong." It was one of those Zen moments. He was staring at it and finally he said, "I think I can work with this."

For me, there's often a "happy accident" that wouldn't happen if you farmed out all that work. Those accidents can actually lead to a much better piece. And Neri did have those opportunities to let the creative juices flow because he did all of his own carving.

works: Okay. That brings me back here. I'm sure you've had to tell about it countless times, but there's an airplane that appears to have crashed into your house. It's sticking up out of your roof. So tell me about that. Just to see it is a laugh. It's like, "Holy mackerel, that makes me feel happy!"

Doug: Well that's pretty much what it did for me!

works: How did you come up with that?

Doug: I honestly don't know. Oh, that was another thing I had in common with Milan Rai. Butterflies. I made a twenty-foot-tall piece that the city of Orinda

"You know, it's a cliché, for sure. But it's so true; it's all about love. It really comes down to that—in almost every aspect of what we do."

bought, with a butterfly on top. I think I have a sort of goofy sense of humor. I love jokes. It's an old guy thing.

Now, can I ask you one? [yes] Often when I was working with clients, I'd want to do a collaboration instead of just designing something for them. So I'd ask them to think back to when they were, say, five, and tell me what had impressed them—you know, before anyone told them what *should* impress them. Then maybe we could take off and collaborate from there. It worked pretty well.

One woman told me she remembered going to the seashore when she was about five, and so we did a big marble wave. Her husband remembered lying down and looking at the stars. So we did stars in gold leaf and made a marble fountain. I did a baptismal font once for a priest, and I asked, "Did you ever have a baptism that really stands out in your mind?"

He said, "Yes. One time there was a beam of sunlight that just came through and hit the child while I was baptizing it. It was just so magnificent." But the only thing I could think of was how to locate the font so it could happen again.

I was trying to interact with people to try and get to their essence and incorporate that so the piece became their piece. And that brings me to the question for you. Have you had an interview, or more than one, that hit you like that? That got to the heart of the matter?

works: Oh goodness. There are many. In a way the whole idea could be summed up as an inquiry into "the heart of the matter." So the most memorable interviews for me are those where a natural resonance gets going between that deeper part of myself and its counterpart in the other person. Then sometimes, an interview stands out for some other reasons, like the one I did with Paolo Soleri, or when I interviewed James Turrell.

But most recently, two interviews come to mind. One is with artist Pat Benincasa. We really got on a deep wavelength right away and just rocked out. Then not long ago, I was the one being interviewed. This was for a little publication called *Apraksin Blues* It's published in Russian and English and was founded by the Russian artist and writer, Tatyana Apraksin. Her English is a little spotty, but her partner, James Manteith, is a linguist fluent in Russian. They're both remarkable. I couldn't believe the questions I was being asked. It was a remarkable experience to feel seen that way, and I think it's exactly what you were describing in searching for that other person's essence.

Doug: Yes. I would have to agree with you.

works: You know, Doug. We've only touched on your life. It's a fascinating journey. And here you are in this little house in West Berkeley. You have a studio and all these artworks sitting around that you've done, and you have the tail end of an airplane sticking up out of your roof. [Doug laughs]

So what am I saying? I'm just thinking, it's all kind of a declaration that says, here lives someone who has not done things according to the conventional script. Here's someone who has gotten a little bit out of the box—or a lot out of the box. [more laugher] And you have a lot of joy to share. You have gained something from your life, wouldn't you say? So tell me about this.

Doug: You know, it's a cliché, for sure. But it's so true; it's all about love. It really comes down to that—in almost every aspect of what we do. And for you this is true, too. You do something you love. You meet people like Gale Wagner who you love. And that's the bottom line. I know that sounds stupid, doesn't it?

works: I'd say it's as far from being stupid as you can get.

Doug: For me that's what it's about: the love of humanity and animals and nature and the act of doing and physically interacting with the world and interacting with each other. It damn sure isn't about owning marble Cadillacs [laughs]. ◆