

# Interview of Ned Smyth

Interviewer: Samantha Wert, Museum Studies, University of Pittsburgh  
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**First prompted question:** "What does your studio look like?"

**Ned:** I started working in New York in the early 70s and I had a studio in the Lower East Side, which was a pretty funky place back in the day. Yeah. And then I switched from that to, well, now it's very hip place, but it wasn't when I was there. Um, and then I switched, I got a studio or a space in what was called Washington Market which was, it became Tribeca.

Um, so, but back in the day, it was buildings that had been turned into, what do you call it? Um, Refrigerators. And all these big trucks would pull in with eggs and cheese and butter and unload into the buildings that had been made into refrigerators. And my building had been like that, and some had bought it and, and kind of tore out all the insulation.

You know, you could look out the windows again finally. And I rented a space. No one lived on the block, no one lived down there. No one was in my building when I started. But it was a kind of great big 4,000 square foot space. I worked there. I mean, I lived there in that space till 94.

And I was kind of tired of New York. I'd done it, I'd gone to everything openings. Uh, and so, I decided I needed a, I was doing mostly public art, and so I thought I needed a much bigger space. So, I wanted to move out of the city. I had also two young kids. So, um, in the end we, we ended up moving out to, um, Sag Harbor, which was a funky town in the Hamptons.

I rented a potato barn for a studio. And, um, but I got really allergic in it because there's probably so much mold from these places that stored. Potatoes and probably, you know, the potatoes were covered with DDT, who knows. Um, so I needed a space to work. Very little kind of commercial space in the Hamptons.

And, my son, my older son's best friend lived on a shelter island, which is the Hamptons is the South Fork, and then there's a North Fork. And this island is right in between. So, uh, we asked, you know, do you know anyone who has a real estate license? And, uh, the kid's father had just gotten one, so anyway, I found land. I bought the land. I bought about eight acres for nothing back then. And with the idea of building a studio because I had a kind of cool old house in St. Harbor.

These friends of our mine, um, or friends of my sons were farmers and had hundreds of acres and they had set up a riding ring, an interior riding ring for people to ride. And she told me, you should come over and look at the building. And I did. And it was, you know, 60 feet wide and 200 feet long, no columns.

And I went, Whoa, what a perfect studio. And so I, she told me who built it and they came from Ohio. And so, I called them, asked them how they build, and then said, If I design something, would you engineer it and build it? And they said yeah. So, I did do that, although when I presented the drawings to the town, they said, you can't build a studio on that land.

You, if you had a house, you could, but this is residential land and a studio is commercial anyway, so they made me put in at one end, kind of some bedrooms and bathroom and living room, kitchen, which I did thinking, well, you know, we could come over for the summer. I have a cool house in Sag Harbor.

But my kids and my wife, all their friends were on the south for that. All wanted to swim in the ocean. They didn't wanna swim in the bay. And so, we didn't really do it much. But, uh, I built this big studio, which was a big barn space.

**Samantha:** *How long have you been there?*

**Ned:** Well, I bought the land in 2000. I probably finished the building at the end of 2001. And then, um, When I got separated in 2008, I moved in and I went, Oh great. I have a house. Yeah. So even building that part of it worked out great. Definitely. So, so that's the deal. I mean, at some point if you needed it or whatever, I could, um, you know, send you a picture or whatever of it. It's a pretty cool open space. But yeah, that's, that's kind of my dream now, like living on an island with a studio.

**Samantha:** *Sounds wonderful*

**Ned:** Yeah. And the Hamptons, I would never go out to the Hamptons. My friends always would invite me, and I go, you know, I don't wear pink pants and play golf. I'm not going out there. I thought it was really conservative. Eventually I got talked into visiting a friend who, their son was the same age as my oldest son. And I went out and we went to the beach, and I knew all these, I mean, there were so many artists living there I kind of, and we decided to move there.

**Samantha:** *My next question is, how do you usually begin working on a piece of art?*

**Ned:** Well, that's an interesting thing, and it is different than a public commission. So, working on art, I, I didn't go to art school. Um, I probably started, the first kind of art I made or was aware of making was probably the end, the last semester of my sophomore year. And I was an athlete and hung out mostly with that kind of person. Um, and I thought, Oof, I'm gonna take an easy course. So, I signed up for an art course, which was, uh, it was a color course and teacher had gone to Yale and had studied, um, with Albers who kind of came up with this course and um, and it was amazing. And I kind of met a whole new group of people. We would be working until one at night kind of solving these kind of color problems.. And it was really cool. So it kinda got me into doing something very different than I'd ever done. And, um, I then took more art courses. You know, two years later when I was graduating, I had done a whole series of art out of wood.

And, um, they asked me to put the work up in the museum at college and I did. And the day before graduation the head of the art department, uh, kind of called and said, you know, there's a guy getting an honorary degree. The president called me, asked me to give him a tour of the college and when we were up in the museum, he saw your pieces and he really liked them. He'd like to meet you. Would you join us there? So, so I went over and was this Asian guy. I didn't, you know, I was introduced, but I didn't know anything about art or, or contemporary art really. And it was Isamu Noguchi.

And, um, he, you know, he really liked the work and, what are you gonna do? And, uh, he said, what are you doing after you graduate? And I had never even thought about it. But, um, I said, I had two friends that I had met who were a year above me. One had gone to Yale graduate

school and one had gone to New York. So, not knowing what to answer, I said, well, I don't know, maybe I'll go to Yale or I'll go to New York, and he looked at me and the first thing he said to me was, You wanna teach? And because my father was a Renaissance scholar and ran an elitist grad school in New York, uh, I said, no! What? You know, my, that's my kind of reaction to your father, kind of.

And he said, well, if you wanna teach, you're gonna go to Yale. If you don't wanna teach and you wanna be an artist, go to New York. If you're any good, uh, it'll happen. If you're not any good, you'll get on with your life. So that was my introduction to, uh, or beginning to leave college.

And, and I did go up and stay with this friend of mine who was, um, and I stayed for about three months, kind of living in a house on, on the water and commuting there with him. And, you know, we were, he was working with Walker Evans, the photographer, which for me, fascinating. Everyone was so competitive at Yale and they kept their studios locked. And I had kind of grown up at a place where we all kind of worked together and talked about it, our work. Anyway, I thought, eh, I don't wanna do this. So, I ended up going to New York.

And, um, but so pieces, um, well as soon as I was born I, you know, we moved to Italy cuz my dad, you know, was writing about renaissance artists. And so my first year, two years were there, but then we would go back summers when I was 10 and 11. We went back for another two years. And, um, I was dragged kind of to every church in New Zealand. And as a kid I wanted to be home playing ball and swimming in the summer. But I, you know, I'd be following my mom and dad around to these little towns.

So, um, but on another level, you know, walking into a cathedral in August, you know, when it's super hot outside and bright sun and you walk in and you can't even see, uh, because it's so dark. And then slowly you get used to it, it's cool air. Uh, and then, you know, you become aware of, you know, the size of the columns and the kind of emotional weight of the architecture.

And again, the, you know, the light coming through, stain glass paintings, all this kind of stuff was kind of as a little kid, not, and we weren't a religious family, so it wasn't even about that, but I just was there. Going, you know, to Greek temples in the south of Italy or in Sicily. Uh, I, or being at the, in the Roman Forum in Rome.

Um, it was so cool to climb on all this stuff as a kid. So, it was kind of, so when I started making art, well when I was in college, none of this really even resonated. When I got to New York, I had spent a summer in college, uh, in the Virgin Islands with three friends casting concrete for, you know, for hotels and for runways. And so, I learned how to use concrete, which I thought was kind of magic. And so, when I got to New York and started making things, you know, everything that I experienced, most things that I experienced growing up in Italy of value or of culture like temples, buildings, ruins, cathedrals were made of stone that lasted, even though they fell apart, they were there. So, I thought, oh, I should work in stone. But, you know, in the seventies to work in, I mean, that was ridiculous. So, because of my experience with concrete, I started to, uh, pour concrete. And when I came to New York, it was kind of minimalism.

And so you had Frank Stella black paintings, so stripe paintings with raw canvas making a line between the black and, um, so there was that kinda work going on. So, what I began to do is cast concrete two by fours, because I'd been building houses in Aspen. I was asked by a guy who was four years older than me that I grew up with, who had gone to Yale Architecture

School, and he had graduated and was already building houses in Aspen, Colorado. So, he asked me to come out, um, and I would hitch out at the end of, uh, May and build all summer and hitch back in September, back to New York. And, uh, but because of learning how to build and use two by fours, I thought, Oh cool, So I cast these concrete two by fours, eight foot, four foot, one foot, and I would lean them against the wall making these kind of orders.

But it made me think of, you know, so architectural, you know, a 12-foot wall of eight foot, uh, two by fours put right next to each other and leaned against the wall. So, then I went, Oh! So, I started to pour concrete archs, six foot high, four foot wide, but all this kind of, it kind of came out subconsciously, because of things that I had done rather than, I was never an artist that go, oh, this is what's going on, do this.

And I had so many friends that depending on, as, as style changed in the art world, their art totally changed just to be hip. And a lot of times I would go, I wouldn't even know why I was doing it until about two or three years after I'd finished and then I'd go, Oh, that's because of, you know, seeing this or you know, when I was in there or whatever. So, the art was kind of intuitive. It just grew one thing, grew out of another. Um, but, and I met these guys, well hitching back from Colorado. I got picked up in, um, New Jersey and a pickup truck pulls up, where you going kid? And I said, I'm going to New York. They said, we're going to New York, hop in.

So, I got in and they had these weird accents, um, kind of French accents, but they were talking about Leo Castelli, the gallery, and um, so I was kind of all ears. And when I, when we got, and they kept saying, where are you going in New York? And I said, well, you wouldn't know it it's way downtown. Well, that's where we're going, where downtown? And I'd say, well, it's below Houston. We're going below Houston. Anyway, they let me off in what became Soho, but at that point it wasn't Soho and there were no, there was no lighting, there was nothing, almost nothing there. And I got out and they, the guy turned to me, and he said, So what are you gonna do? And I said, well, I need a job. And they said, well go to the corner of Prince and Wooster.

And, and I was walking that way to go to the loft that I had over in the East Village. And um, there at the corner, there were these windows all soaped up, but it had in a busboy, waiter, dishwasher, and I, oh, I could do that. So, I walked in and this woman came out and said, you know, can I help you? And I said, well, do you have any more? Do you have jobs left? She said, yeah, you wanna be assistant chef? I had never cooked and I kind of went, well, what do I have to do? And she said, well, you know how to boil vegetables? That seemed pretty easy, water, vegetables. You know how to make a salad dressing? Oil, vinegar. Anyway, I got hired and this was a restaurant called Food Restaurant. It was started by a guy named Gordon Matta-Clark. I don't know if you know who he is.

**Samantha:** *I don't think so.*

**Ned:** He, um, his father was Matta, the famous painter. He, he'd gone to architecture school and then he came to New York, but instead of doing architecture, he started doing what was called an architecture. And he would, he, anyway, he started this restaurant because all these musicians came up to play with Phil Glass. Um, and the guy who picked me up in the truck was a guy named Keith Sonya, who showed at Leo Costelli and did these neon pieces. And the other guy was a guy named Richard, uh, Dickey Landry, who was a saxophone player who's played with everyone you could ever heard of. Uh, but when he introduced him to uh, um, Phil Glass, they went up to his studio and Phil played him a piece on the piano. And he said, well, that's really cool, but you can't just play a piano, you need a band. And Phil said, where do I get a band? And he said, I'll get you one. And he brought up all these rhythm and blues players

from New Orleans. So, they were Cajuns, that's why they had that accent. And all these guys being Cajuns were amazing cooks, making gumbos and etouffees, all these Cajuns cooked.

So, Gordon, when he met all these guys and, and Soho, you know, barely existed, but there were artists kind of beginning to come in there, uh, because of all the food. He thought, oh, let's get these guys to cook and we'll have a place to gather and eat and hang out. And so, I got in on the beginning of that and I cooked Cajun.

Um, but there I just met everybody. And they showed that a gallery called 112 Green Street that was started by artists. Uh, and so many people had their first shows there. And Gordon was supposed to do a show and he had seen my concrete work and he said, you know, Ned, I'm not really ready to show, so you take my space. Really generous. And so, I had my first show, um, a big dealer, saw the work and bought a piece. And then a number of years later she opened her own gallery. And we, a lot of us went to, that was called Holly Solomon Gallery. And Holly Solomon kind of it, you know, her gallery changed things from kind of post minimal to a whole new kind of art that was called Pattern and Decoration. And, and there were guys, you know, painting on fabric and stitching them together. Uh, all sorts of kind of, and when I saw it, I was kind of like, yikes! Cuz I kind of came out of Postminimal. And, um, All the guys I came with, uh, because of the fashion change with her gallery, they couldn't sell anything in America. So, they showed in Austria, Germany, and Sweden to stay alive. Um, but I was, they connected me with pattern and decoration cuz at that point I was casting these columns. And, um, cause columns were peak they, they said it was patterned. And I at the time, I went, I don't do pattern. Um, but I didn't, you know, I'd already taken minimalism and made it into environment and architecture, which wasn't going on at that time at all.

Anyway, um, that's how kind of all that stuff started. And how pieces, but because I was doing environments, back in the, first of all, you know, I got written up about, I was in museum shows, the Venice Biennale, the Museum of Modern Art, but my dealer couldn't sell anything cuz they didn't sell environments really at that point.

And, um, but because I was doing environments, uh, you know, mid-seventies was the kind of beginnings. I mean, there was some, um, commission work going on, but usually it was a corporation in Chicago whose CEO was a collector. And so, he would get the corporation to buy an Oldenburg bat and put it in front of the building in, in Chicago or whatever. And, um, but it began to change. So, um, in about 75 there was a percent for art. And, um, usually the CEO's wife or a CEO's wife in a city, because they collected art, became art consultants. And so, if the city wanted to do something, they go, oh, so and so's wife, she knows about this and they would hire them to present art and she might, they might, you know, show, you know, 50 different artists. They didn't care really who got it. Uh, and then out of that they might go, oh, I like those 10. And they may even fly a bunch of them out to interview and then maybe they choose three to compete and make proposals.

Um, and so that kind of was the beginnings of kind of art commission. But also, um, you know, when I was asked to do a commission, you know, you'd go in, you'd talk to 'em. But also, I think it really helped being brought up in Italy because, you know, if you sat in Piazza Navona in Rome, there was incredible architecture, beautiful facade of a church. And in front, front of it was a Bernini fountain with sculpture and water and all this kind of stuff. And art was either in churches, I mean, yes, it was in museums, in kind of cultural institutions, but it was also in the street everywhere. So, when I, when I first got called up to do a public commission it made total sense to me because that's where I saw art, you know, living in Italy.

And, um, so what would happen is someone would call, you know, I'd get called for a commission like an early commission was Prudential Life Insurance. They were building a, a new headquarters, uh, in California and in Thousand Oaks north of LA and it was a very modern building with two wings, but not a right angle in the building. And so I got brought out to look at it, and they said, look, we'd like you to make a proposal, but when people come in, they don't know where to go in the building. And, um, and they don't know where, how to find the door to get out. Um, so they said, can you work with that? And so, I did. And you know, it was a couple of, it was an atrium, like two or three stories high that went down these wings that went off at different angles. So, when you came in kind of in a low ceiling with a desk and you walked out and you had to know whether where to go in, in, in the building, um, I did this mosaic floor, and you could see it from anywhere on the other floors looking down into the atrium.

And I had these two, uh, mosaic columns. And so, some of the desks would say, oh, go out on the floor and go towards the right, the red column or whatever. So, a lot of times, yes, I was using my imagery and stuff, but with the particularly public art, um, you know, they, a lot of times they had certain criteria that they wanted to have taken care of when, when they brought you in. So, for Piazza Lavoro, I was one of the people who was looked at and, um, I came out there and they said, look, would you mind making a piece of sculpture about labor? Because Pittsburgh is a labor town. And I went, okay. And, um, and I had been making, uh, facades and um, and I, you know, growing up in Italy, you see these temples ruins, churches, uh, museums. All of them are made by labor and these things were symbols, some of them falling down, others nod to culture and the heights of culture. And so, I figured, you know, labor, uh, built culture. And so, I showed on, you know, on one of the facades, men and women building on scaffolding and then on the other two narrower ones, uh, I did men and women, um, men, kind of the suffering. So there, there's a positive side of labor and the negative side, which is, you know, abuse or how they're treated. Uh, so I thought I'd show that. And then on the big facade that looked across at downtown Pittsburgh, um, I thought there, the biggest facade or symbol of culture I wanted to balance it with nature because for me, uh, you know, the, the balance of nature and culture was becoming really important as, as an issue even back then. Um, and the other thing is, wherever I went, Sicily, wherever, um, a lot of times the temple was up on a hill looking down at the coastline where there was a port or a village where the fishing was, and the, and so I thought, well, this is cool. I'll make this rotunda, this piazza kind of up at the top between, you know, at the end of these two buildings. And, um, and it's an Acropolis, but it, you know, so it's a sim symbol across from the real city. And at the same time, when you walk up to the port, the arches in the big facade, you look down at this mosaic, well, like the mosaic floor used to be down there.

Uh, and the idea of mythic source was kind of where food and myths and everything came out of the ocean, you know, in historical times. So, um, I kind of wanted to make this connection down to the water because also one of the deals was that, you know, there were these two buildings being built. One was a corporate headquarters, the other one, uh, was, um, had a big restaurant in it and pe they wanted people to come.

And before they did those buildings, the Allegheny Bank had had all the railroad tracks and all this kind of stuff to take stuff in and out of town. They that had kind of died and it had been taken over by homeless and the place was, at best, a mess. And, um, so this was the first step of reclaiming that the Allegheny Bank. And, um, but they also wanted to have people be able to come by boat, dock, walk up and eat at the restaurant. So that's why I kind of wanted to connect the thing down below. While they were building the stadium next door, they all their, construction trucks and, and trucks that had dumpsters full of crap and cement trucks over the mosaics and destroyed the mosaics down below.

**Samantha:** *Oh wow, that's horrible*

**Ned:** The piece is owned by the Carnegie Museum. Uh, and I, and I would, I got a kind of an email from the, the one of the conservators saying, you know, the piece has gotten damaged. We, uh, we think it, you know, was from water freezing. And, and I went out and it wasn't water freezing. You could see the tracks of these enormous trucks come across the lawn drive right across the place. And where they drove, they tore up all the mosaics. And so, I said, you gotta stop that. And they didn't. And until it got kind of really destroyed and, and I said, you know, the builders of the stadium did it, they should pay to have it redone. And they didn't do that. Um, but years later, um, Alice got involved and they raised money, but we decided because they wanted to be able to drive cars or, or vehicles to unload things. So, we moved the mosaics up and put it inside the upper circle. But it, it was always down below.

**Samantha:** *Having it down there kind of makes more sense to me.*

**Ned:** Well, you know, with the idea of, you know, a temple that looked down on the town and people from the town would go up to, to whatever. You know, pray or whatever at the thing. But, you know, um, and it was, you know, you asked me about power spots, whether it was a temple, uh, a church, uh, even, even museums that had all the Roman sculpture in it, you know, they were reverence places. And it, you know, some were reverent to an emperor, some were reverent to art and history. Some were reverent to a god. Um, and they were all made most of 'em outta stone. Um, so there was something about reverence, um, that was stuck in me from a kid. And again, we weren't religious, we didn't go to church, but it just seemed to me that these incredible structures were made to revere something. So, um, that's kind of how I got, um, kind of into that kind of thing.

**Samantha:** *Now that you've talked a little bit about the piece, could you share anything else you remember about working on Piazza Lavoro?*

**Ned:** Well, uh, they told me that there were other artists gonna be placed there. There was a, there was a landscaper who was involved in it called Jack Seay. And, and he had kind of laid it out a little, and then I came up with this idea of this kind of plaza space at the top, and he liked that. And then he had, uh, kind of walkways that curved around, and there was a George Sugarman on one side, and there was, oh, I've forgotten the name of the other guy who did the aluminum piece.

**Samantha:** *Isaac Witkin?*

**Ned:** Yeah, you know, there were other pieces set in it. But the really, the, in the end with talking to Jack and Alice, um, kind of the structure of the park was set up by this plaza above and the circular place down below where you'd walk across and down to get into boats. So that it, on a certain level, it, it my, what I was suggesting cuz it wasn't an object. I was really, I had been making spaces. I've done, you know, six-acre parks in Fort Lauderdale and, you know, rooms and places in, uh, Philadelphia, you know, kind of all over the place. They, you know, a lot of it had to do with, and I would design the landscape with a landscape architect and, um, so they were usually like the work in galleries environments rather than a piece of art dropped in front of a building. I just, I mean, certainly the idea of, you know, could you do something in honor of labor? That was a, a big starting point that they wanted me to work with. Um, and the fact that there were, I mean, normally there's one artist chosen to do a space or, or to make an object. Right? Um, so it's interesting to be, and I kind of knew George Sugarman. Uh, Isaac

Witkin. I didn't really know. I knew I'd seen this work, but, um, so it was kind of interesting to be, you know, try to develop something that worked with the other pieces.

**Samantha:** *So did you have contact with the other artists during that process?*

**Ned:** No. I was just, I was just told once I had done mine, and then Jack, you know, placed, made these places where the other two objects would go. Cause the other ones were objects. Um, you know, that was it. So, um, not much, much beyond that. Um, I mean, you know, trying to get it all back together again after, you know, and the, the funny thing is, an old friend of mine who had been a curator at the Whitney, uh, Richard Armstrong had left the Whitney and was a curator at the Carnegie. And he was there for a while, and then he was made director of the Carnegie.

And I had already built the piece out there, but, um, when it started falling apart, I thought, well, you know, he's an old friend of mine, he, they'll take care of it. And they just never did. And it turns out I found after the fact, you know, it was paid for by Heinz Company, Jack Heinz and his wife. And they had also left money to, to maintain it and repair it. It was never used by the museum. And, um, eventually, uh, Richard left and became head of the Guggenheim, all the Guggenheims. And that's when, uh, the Carnegie decided to do something. And, and I found out that there was all this money because they're talking, saying, well, we have to raise money. Well, it was being, I think the money was being used for the Carnegie International, which they felt was gonna get them more attention than fixing a piece of sculpture, but I was so kind of upset, you know, I, if it wasn't someone I knew and a really good friend of, you know, I would've gone to the paper and said, why would anyone donate art to the Carnegie if this, if they allowed this to happen? But I didn't wanna hurt Richard and stuff like that, so I never did. But when he left, um, they got it together. They raised money and, um, and they resolved it and we decided, they said, you know, trucks are gonna be going along that lower thing, so maybe we should move it. And I said, fine. So we redid the whole thing up at the top.

**Samantha:** *When do you think that was? If you recall?*

**Ned:** I'm terrible with dates.

**Samantha:** *That's okay.*

**Ned:** Uh, I mean, Alice would know, for sure. Because she was, you know, she kind of really got that to happen. I don't quite remember.

**Samantha:** *So, it seems as though you had, um, a lot of freedom with creating your piece.*

**Ned:** Um, well, I mean, they choose you because they know kind of what you do, they've seen your work before. You know, they've been shown, you know, my first pieces, I was in the first show at a place called PS1 in New York, which was started by this woman. Um, and she used to rent for a dollar empty buildings owned by the city and then do, uh, exhibitions in them. And she rented, uh, PS1, which, uh, in Brooklyn. And she had the opening show, and I knew her and had done some things in other spaces she had.

So, she called, she said, Ned, I want you to be in the opening show. And it was, it was a national show, people from all over the country. Uh, and so I went out and looked at it, but I hated school as a dyslexic. And, uh, and they were all classrooms with linoleum floors, fluorescent lights and blackboards. I said, Alana, I can't work here. And she said, well, look in the basement, go in the attic. And the basement was rougher, but you couldn't do anything



there. And I went up into the attic and the attic had this peaked roof, really high peaked roof with raw wood underneath it, and then three arched windows that faced west on the wall in the middle. And I looked at it and I, and it was kind of like, Oh, last supper. So, I cast, I cast a big concrete table with 12 posts and 12, uh, concrete plates, and we carried it up into the attic and, and set it up.

It got so much attention that, um, when Alana was asked to be on a commission for a federal courthouse building in St. Thomas. Um, and again, Noguchi had been given the commission, but it was too small for him, so he turned it down and, um, and she brought up my name and I got it. Um, but from then on, as soon as you do one, you know, the more public commissions you do, you're known. And then, you know, the person from each city, and mostly women, um, you know, would show a whole bunch of your commissions and, um, it would go from there, you know. So it was, it, it, they weren't really pushing an artist or three artists. They were just presenting 50 artists. And out of that, the, the, uh, committee would work it down to one artist.

Okay. So last one here. New work. Okay, so new work when I, um, wanted to have a big studio out on, in, in, when I bought the land in, on Shelter Island, one of the big deals is at, one is a sculptor, and two, uh, you have so much storage. So, I had storage in New York. I had storage upstate at a farm that I'd owned back in the day. I had storage in South Hampton. Um, and, you know, you're paying rent in all these places. So, I thought, well, if I build a studio, I'm gonna build a big storage area. And because there was a flight slope in the land, half the building has 12-foot square doors that you can go under.

And, uh, so I built that so I could put all my molds and art and stuff down there. So, when it was built, I, you know, had all these trucks bringing stuff in and there were these milk crates filled with rocks. And I went, what, what are these? I had, I had no memory really of it. But, you know, if you, on my honeymoon, I went out on Lake Powell, uh, and had a houseboat and, and you know, I would, I pick, obviously picked up some rocks and brought 'em back or, and people do that. And I kind of took them out and there were two stones, probably five or six inches high. One looked exactly like a female torso again, growing up in Italy, most of the Greek things that were left had no arms, heads, or even legs. But when you looked at it, it was a very feminine shape body.

And one looked so much like that, that I couldn't believe it. And another one looked like a male torso. And it was, they were so shocking to see. And this, but, and I had started to also, when I saw those, I started, when I walked my dog, I would walk on these beaches, um, and Long Island is a Marine. So, glaciers started way up above Canada, came down, breaking mountains, pushing, carrying dirt, but stones, and then it stops at the Marine. So Long Island is, was one of the stops where it pushes all this stuff and where the rock fell near, particularly on the Bayside, not the ocean side. Um, sand washes in, washes out, so some rocks get very smooth and around, uh, and other ones that are deeper don't.

And I started walking the dog along those beaches and staggering back to my truck with all these stones and, um, because of making models for commissions for so long, when I brought these stones, it might be anywhere from six inches to 18 inches. I saw them because that was the scale kind of, that I had made models in. I saw them being, you know, 15 feet tall or something like that. And so, I had always had little figures that I could put in the model to show the scale.

And so, I started putting the figures near these stones and I would cut the stone, you know, as small, a little cut as possible so that it would stand in a certain, uh, angle or, you know, and, um,

set them up. And I had, you know, I had like, I don't know, a space 40 by 55 covered with stones on the floor. And I would just sit in the middle and look at them and then kind of connect stones and do stones.

And I got a commission and, and they didn't want me to do facades or anything like I had done in the past. They wanted something very natural. And because I was, had been just looking and studying these stones, I thought, oh, I'll do a commission out of these. And when I first had the stones, I kind of carved them myself in full and they look good, but what I realized, um, that these were broken, carved, rounded by nature, by, uh, by glacier and then by tides coming in and out. And I thought, you know, if my other work was kind of reverence of nature of culture and things like that, kind of, and maybe with a lot of Judeo-Christian, uh, references, even though, you know, the columns I designed and they weren't, didn't come from anything existing.

But, um, I thought, well, wow, these stones are more paleolithic and paleolithic, Reverence spaces were made by kind of erecting a stone vertical or something. And I thought, well that's cool. That gets rid of my dad and the history of art. And so, um, I thought, well this is really cool. Uh, and this is reverence to matter cause, this is stone and, you know, matter congealed in the universe formed a globe on earth. Uh, and on that earth, eventually life grew. And, you know, so the early work with stones and then at a certain point I couldn't find stones, which kind of totally surprised me cuz there, you know, there are more stones than you can think of. But I, there was just none that were popping out after having collected so many.

But I began to notice twigs that it washed up on the shore. And so, I began to, um, collect those. And so those became kind of monuments to life. So. I just saw the, you know, the stones and the twig pieces were uh, kind of the next level back in kind of, you know, power spot or reverent, uh, situation. But it's more, you know, it was kind of leaving culture and going back to, you know, the idea of matter and, and what, what forms, like life forms on matter. So that's what those were about. Right?

**Samantha:** *You had talked about the balance between nature and culture, so it's, it seems as though you're kind of transitioning more so into the nature aspect of that.*

**Ned:** Yeah. And, and with global, I mean, it, it seems more, you know, it's more and more in your face now. And before nature, you know, was made architecturally with columns that were palm trees rather than, you know, a more kind of architectural top. Um, and so that referred to nature when I saw that they became almost, instead of a cross, some of the palms were almost like, uh, a reverent image of nature.

Uh, but still it was, it was coming at, you know, it was developed architecturally. And, um, so this kind of gets, you know, unloads that and works and, and, and instead of me carving them, what I ended up doing because it was formed by nature, and they were so amazing, beautiful and startling that I stand them and made a 3D model in a computer, and then I would hook that 3D model up and carve them out of foam at 12 feet tall or something, and put all those carvings together and blow it hard urethane over it to protect it. And then I would cast off that. So, stones were, were made that way and cast, um, the twigs I had, I've, I've blown up one to, it's about eight feet tall.

Um, and I've cast the other ones where I did a 3D model. I did a 3D print of it and then burned that out and cast them, you know, at, at actual scale with what they were originally. But, you know, that's probably the next level of beginning to, you know, you can blow those up to any size you want.

**Samantha:** *So with your art, do you, you usually start with models? Was this, the process that you did earlier in your work?*

**Ned:** No. Um, when I was making art for galleries, you just made the object. And it just kind of came out of, oh, I had worked in cement. That's a cool thing. I wanna make something that has that kind of lasting feeling that everything that I experienced as a kid had made outta stone, but I'm not gonna work in marble. So, what's the new stone to cement? And I know how to do that. So you can make any mold and it'll fit into whatever you make. Um, so it just evolved from one thing to next. Not, no models for it. Models started when you had to show an idea for a commission.

**Samantha:** *Um, I think that's it for my questions. I was gonna ask if your art is still based on power spots, but you kind of, you answered that with the idea of reverence.*

**Ned:** I think it's about reverence. I mean, the funny thing is I left the gallery world, uh, I think the last show I did in New York was 1985, long time ago. And I had shown in New York, I'd shown in the Venice Biennale. I was, I showed with this very hip gallery in London and in, in all in, uh, Switzerland with Bruno Bischofberger major kind of power dealer back in the day. Bruno saw this show in London. He said, oh, I love that show. I wanna do a show. I said, cool. And it was an environment, you know, of objects that made a space, and he said, he told me, you know, in the little room in the back, that piece hanging on the wall in the corner, I want 10 of those.

And again, I didn't think of Art one as an object and two as a, as something you sell. And I, and I kind of, in my mind, I didn't say this to 'em, I, you know, but I, my reaction was, I don't make shoes. What do you mean you want 10 of those?

And, um, but I did do the show and I did drawings and a couple of objects, and he sold the two big column pieces. And I said, cool, that's great. Who did you sell 'em to? Oh, Rothschild. And I kind of said, Wow, okay. And where is it? Is it in his place in Paris or is it down at his place in the south of France?

And Bruno said, no, no, it's in storage. He's gonna sell it in three years. Oh, and that would, all, that was already happening in 1980, 81 because there'd been a, uh, a crash in the end of the seventies. And the stock market guys, um, realized that if they bought 10 unknown artists for 1,500 bucks, and one of them struck, they made a lot of money.

So, they began to see art as an investment. Now it's a whole nother world now, all the big galleries, um, like it goes in and, you know, if they're gonna show a Diane Hurst from London before they do the show, they put, they take one of the paintings and they put it up for auction at Sotheby's, they buy it back under a false name at overprice. And all these investors go, oh, and they buy 'em and they know that it goes in, or any of these big international galleries, if, if anything came up for auction, they'd buy it. So, it's a manipulated market, whereas in the stock market, you, that's illegal. You can't, you can't have insider trading, you can't do anything.

But in the art market, you know, they, they can't lose. If they buy what they're told to buy and they, they spend millions on it, but, but they know that, you know, I'm gonna sell it in three years and make money. Do you think that, like, does that make you more cautious of who you create or sell work to? Well, I've been out of the gallery world for so long and in, and, you know, making big commissions for so long. But in 2008 there was another crash in August and I was, you know, had two or three commissions and they all dried up. One of 'em came back. But, um,

pretty much everyone I competed with nationally in these big commission, everyone dropped out cause the amount of money that they were even offering now. It wasn't enough. It, it wasn't about not having enough money to make money. You couldn't even build the piece. I mean, it was about the same amount of money that they gave you in 1985, but the cost of casting bronze or whatever is so expensive now.

So, most of us all just don't do that work. So, now what I, and I don't really, you know, I've shown a little with, with galleries that kind of came and went. But you know, recently commissions have come from architects who really like my work. They're building a big house in Fort Lauderdale, in Florida somewhere, and they say, can I bring the client? And I say, of course. So it's been coming from there. The fact that I'm making objects now, kind of on a certain level, I feel like, yes, you should be back in the art world and in galleries, because that's what galleries do. But another level, galleries always were reticent to deal with sculpture because to place it, to move it, to store it, to ship it to some, it, it all costs a lot of money.

So, so many galleries don't, unless they have something that's gonna sell for hundreds of thousands. So, we'll see. I don't know what's happening. It's funny there at the beginning of COVID, I got a call from a friend of mine who's a successful, he's the big graphic designer in DC and, um, he does all the catalogs for the museums in DC but he also did the Democratic Party, the Republican party, the post office. He started out doing the posters for Ringling Brothers Circus. Uh, anyway, he called. You know, right at the beginning of COVID thinking it's, you know, business is gonna drop off. And he said, Ned, isn't it time for you to do a book? And I went, Oh, that's a cool idea. He said, Well make an outline. Let's start.

And you know that, So we're now, what, two years later? A little bit over mm-hmm. and finished and it was just sent to the printer. Um, but you know, that's, that has all the gallery shows, it has all the commission pieces, and it has all the work I did while doing commissions, which, you know, like the stone and twig and, uh, all this stuff.

I would, and I did this whole series of concrete paintings, which had just begun to be shown. Um, so all that worked too. So I kind of thought, oh, this would be great to do because it's got this enormous body of work, probably 90% of it available except for the commission work and stuff, um, because the dealers never sold or barely sold it. Um, so maybe it's a way to get back into that world. I don't know. It's a very difficult role though now.

**Samantha:** *Well, I'm excited to read the book when it comes out!*

**Ned:** I'll get you a copy.

**Samantha:** *That would be wonderful. I think we definitely need a copy here. I was, um, I was researching you and saw that you didn't have a biography, so I'm glad to see that something like that is in progress.*

**Ned:** Yeah. And you know, biography, it shows the work, kind of that, how it all developed in, you know, I mean, it's presented that way as the development. But, and then everyone said, well, who, who's writing the catalog? Who's writing it? And I said, well, you know, I had people write for all these shows, major, uh, you know, Linda Nolan? [Linda Nochlin] Famous art historian, feminist. Um, you know, she, I mean so many people wrote, uh, so I just, you know, contacted and said, Can I put it in the book? So, there is nothing written specifically for the book or about my past or growing up in Italy, really. But, um, uh, but you know, there's kind of really good written pieces.

**Samantha:** *That's wonderful. Is there anything else you think is pertinent to your art or art process that you would like to share before I leave you?*

**Ned:** Not that I think of offhand. I think I've probably talked enough. If in fact you think of something, you know, send me an email.

**Samantha:** *Okay. Thank you so much. I appreciate that.*

**Ned:** All right. Good luck with it.

**Samantha:** *Thank you so much for your time. It was wonderful to talk to you.*

**Ned:** All right, bye Samantha.