

# **STORM KING ART CENTER**

## **ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

ALYSON SHOTZ  
November 11, 2017

Interviewed by Sarah Dziedzic  
Storm King Oral History 001  
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**Interview with Alyson Shotz**  
**Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic**  
**November 11, 2017**

**Storm King Art Center Museum Hill**  
**Video with 8 audio files**  
**Open for research use; some restrictions**

#### **Audio File 1**

**Dziedzic:** Today is November 11, 2017, and this is Sarah Dziedzic interviewing Alyson Shotz for the Storm King Oral History Program, here at Storm King Art Center. So, Alyson, can you start just by talking about how your relationship with Storm King began?

**Shotz:** I had known about Storm King since I was an undergraduate at RISD, but I didn't have any relationship of course with it, personally, until I met John Stern at a benefit for Socrates [Sculpture Park]. We met through a collector, Al Shands, and had a nice conversation, and maybe a few months after [00:01:00] that, David [Collens] called me, or emailed me or something, and asked me if I might like to participate in the *5+5: New Perspectives* (2010–2011) exhibition. And I had been up here since RISD, of course.

**Dziedzic:** Can you just talk a little bit about your—maybe, if you remember the first time that you came up here, or, what your thoughts were about this place before you had kind of considered having your work here?

**Shotz:** I don't remember my first visit specifically, but I remember feeling like Storm King was the place to see outdoor work, outdoor sculpture, and that there was no better place that I knew of in the United States to see it. It has a really magical feeling to it, and I always just loved it. [00:02:00]

#### **[Side conversation]**

#### **Audio File 2**

**Dziedzic:** Can you talk a little bit about your thoughts about outdoor sculpture and public art, maybe some of your experiences showing your work outdoors, leading up to the exhibition at Socrates Sculpture Park in 2003?

**Shotz:** I have a lot of experiences with the landscape. So, when I approach the [00:01:00] idea of making outdoor sculpture, it's with a lot of care and trepidation. I had grown up with seeing a lot of public art and outdoor sculpture that I really didn't like, that I felt like was just adding garbage to the landscape, for no good reason, just to have a kind of "outdoor sculpture." And so, when I started thinking about outdoor

sculpture, I was trying to think of it in a way that would enhance the landscape, or bring a kind of focus to the landscape, a different type of focus. And what I was going to say about my experience with the landscape is just that I lived out West for, I guess, half my life, and some of those locations were places where there's a lot of land, like Wyoming, or Utah—a lot of open space—and that made me very attuned, I think, just to the shape of the [00:02:00] landscape, in looking at it. Anyway, so, I started to think—and I think I wasn't so conscious in the beginning about how I was thinking—but now I can look back and say, “Oh yeah, that's what I was doing,” and now I'm doing it more consciously. But I wanted to think about how to make outdoor sculpture differently than what I'd seen before.

And public art is a whole other thing, and outdoor and public can overlap, of course, but I think of public art in the city as different than outdoor work in the landscape.

**Dziedzic:** And then, how did you become involved with the exhibition at Socrates Sculpture Park?

**Shotz:** The exhibition at Socrates started—I'd been showing around New York, and Alyson Baker, who was the director of Socrates at that time, knew my work and invited me to [00:03:00] participate in this exhibition, and it was quite a learning experience, actually. It was the first time I had any kind of budget, any money, and it wasn't a lot, actually, but it really made a huge difference in terms of how I could think about making my work. So that's when I first conceived of this piece. The show was called “Suburbia,” or something like—or “Yard,” it was called “Yard.” And, I had been working with mirrors, and I thought about making a mirrored fence. The two kind of came together, like the white picket fence is a symbol of suburbia and American yards all over this country. Then I thought about, well, what if I combine the two? And went from there.

**Dziedzic:** What other kind of mirrored work had you been doing before?

### **[Side conversation]**

**Shotz:** *Reflective Mimicry* (1997) was a piece in which I made a suit covered in mirrors, a kind of Lycra suit, and I was trying to dissolve the boundary between myself and the [00:06:00] outside world, or blend that boundary, and I was thinking a lot about space and where we determine it starts and ends, and that became a piece really about space and light, because—it became a piece about negative space in a lot of ways, and that negative space idea led to this, the *Mirror Fence* (2003, refabricated 2014) piece, because I was then exploring the way that, in the artistic sense, we think about negative space, and in the scientific sense, there's space, and what is it, and I think my whole—all of my work has come out of that exploration of what is space, in those two senses though, artistic and scientific.

**Dziedzic:** Can you just kind of talk a little bit more [00:07:00] about negative space as it relates to *Mirror Fence*?

**Shotz:** Yes. Once I made *Reflective Mimicry* and I saw that mirrors were a way of kind of emptying space, or redefining the boundary of space, I wanted to explore it in a different way. When I thought about making the *Mirror Fence*, I was very aware of the spaces between the pickets, and the pickets themselves. So, there is space, and there is solid, and those two things are kind of exchanged in the viewing of the fence, especially as one walks by it, so the negative space becomes positive, the positive becomes negative, and those keep switching, and in that way, I hope, it allows a viewer to start to think about space in a new way.

**Dziedzic:** Also maybe, can you talk about the differences in the boundaries that this work and *Reflective Mimicry* [00:08:00] explored? This seems to me so clearly a symbol of boundary, as well as—

**Shotz:** That's true. Well, the boundary in *Reflective Mimicry* was certainly about the body and the self, and it was also about inverting a reflection. There were also some feminist overtones to that in terms of thinking about mirrors, and women, and how involved we are with mirrors, and turning that outwards, so that the person became more of a mirror, instead of being looked at. With the fence, when I was thinking of it in terms of suburbia and white picket fences, I was very intent on not making this fence into a boundary. That was very important [00:09:00] to me. It came up again and again somehow, and continues to come up where people want to build a picket fence that actually encloses something, and I have to continually say, "No, it's a line." It's a line in the landscape. It's not a fence; it doesn't enclose anything, and in fact, it kind of dissolves the boundaries, so instead of being a boundary, it's a dissolver of boundaries. Yes, I mean, it's come up again recently in terms of the border fence, and thinking about all of these fences and borders that we create in our society, but most importantly, I really want it to be a line.

But I suppose it has—it's a very American line. You know, being this picket fence. And I'm trying—I know I have more to say about that—

**Dziedzic:** Let's—

**Shotz:** —think about it.

**Dziedzic:** Yeah, we'll come back around to the—some more [00:10:00] questions about *Mirror Fence* later. Let's talk a little bit about 5+5. So, you mentioned that David had contacted you, and invited you to

take part, and I just wonder if you could talk a little bit about that process, in terms of deciding which work would be—you would show, and also, a little bit about your response to that invitation.

**[Side conversation]**

**Shotz:** David invited me to be part of 5+5, and I was very thrilled to be invited. I had actually always wanted to see *Mirror Fence* here, [00:11:00] and I suggested this piece for the exhibition, and he agreed. I guess I also must have suggested--maybe they wanted a second piece as well, and we—I think I had *Viewing Scope* (2006) available. But I had secretly always wanted to have *Mirror Fence* here, so I was thrilled that they agreed to do that. Then, and I guess this must have been for that show, when we sited the work, I met David here on a day, not exactly like today, but similar in a way. It's a freezing day, and there was snow on the ground, and we walked all around and tried to pick out sites. I was really interested, it sort of came—there were a bunch of sites all over the landscape, but there was—[00:12:00] I'm not sure who had in mind to put the fence out there to our left, but I really wanted to put it in the trees, to have it weaving in and out of the trees, and this was also an option that was available. But, I'm really happy that we placed it here. It was always intended to be somewhat hidden, and not right out in the open.

**Dziedzic:** And, when it came here, the original construction of it—was it something that was meant to be re-fabricated every time, or did it come apart and then get reassembled?

**Shotz:** It always came apart. It comes apart in eight-foot sections, but the original fabrication of it was for the Socrates show, and it was really a temporary summer show. I had a certain budget to work with at that time, and I couldn't make something out of [00:13:00] stainless steel or even glass, and I did investigate glass at that time. So I made it out of plexi, mirrored plexi sandwich, and it definitely only lasted a certain amount of time outside, so it has to be re-fabricated every year, or two years, something like that.

**Dziedzic:** Let's actually go back to talking about *Viewing Scope* a little bit, since we're going to talk in depth about *Mirror Fence*.

**[Side conversation]**

**Audio File 3**

**[Side conversation]**

**Dziedzic:** Was *Mirror Fence* originally intended to be outdoors?

**Shotz:** Yes, it was built for a temporary outdoor exhibition that was only going to be open from maybe April through September, so that was all that was in my mind at the time, and I didn't have the budget to make it last longer than that.

**Dziedzic:** Let's talk a little bit about *Viewing Scope*. You [00:01:00] mentioned that it was one of the works that you had available. I'm wondering about any kind of—was there any kind of intended connection or overlap with the scope that we have in the permanent collection, John Knight's *87°*?

**Shotz:** No, there was no intended overlap. It was a piece I made for an exhibition at Rockefeller Center originally, and I was thinking about the viewing scopes that are around in those kind of locations, generally—like probably at Top of the Rock, they may have that, those sort of pay-per-view viewing scopes. But I was also thinking about, just my thoughts about seeing at the time, and all of those tubes have lenses of different focal lengths, so when you're looking through them, you're kind of seeing things at different distances, and combining all those things, so you're almost seeing things with many different eyes at once. [00:02:00] It also relates in a way to my experience looking at things through microscopes and telescopes. And also, I had been doing artist-in-residency, and actually, I made it during my artist-in-residency at Yale, and I had been doing a lot of looking at their collection of historical telescopes, so I was inspired by those, and wanted to make a telescope for the land, and for people, really—sort of a way of looking at people at different perspectives, the landscape at different perspectives, all in one telescope.

**Dziedzic:** Yes, I wanted to ask about the viewer participation element, too, and were there other works of yours that had that kind of interactive aspect, and just, how that work kind of fits into your—the work that you're making at the time?

**Shotz:** I think all my work has that. It's sculpture, and so sculpture is meant to be walked around, [00:03:00] and, a lot of the work I make probably specifically is really—it gets engaged by movement. There's natural movement that happens anyway, but—you know, the movement of the sun, but then there's the person's movement around it, which changes it. *Mirror Fence* is a perfect example where you see it from the top of the hill and it's kind of like, maybe you don't even see it, or maybe you see something and you don't know what it is, and then as you move closer to it, it becomes clearer, but yet it also is still mysterious. And then you get a different view from close up, and I really hope and want my sculptures to have that different kind of feeling, or just seen really different from different viewpoints.

**[Side conversation]**

**Dziedzic:** Did your decision to put your work here—the closest work to it is Nam June Paik's *Waiting for UFO* (1992), and—

**Shotz:** That's another one that's—you know, I really, I could talk about the Richard Serra, absolutely, and the Andy Goldsworthy fence, and maybe these Calders; Mark di Suvero, only kind of in my reaction to Mark di Suvero and Richard Serra, but—

**Dziedzic:** Let's just kind of keep laying the groundwork for those kinds of questions, and then we'll [00:07:00] come back to them.

**Shotz:** Yes, but I didn't really think about Nam June Paik because my work doesn't have that much relationship to his, although I really like him, and respect him, but it was more like the trees, and this kind of winding, but yet visible location, seemed like a good—

**Dziedzic:** It struck me as interesting knowing that this work was made for the—an exhibition that was about suburbia, and kind of thoughts about American identity, and then we have these works that are made of televisions, and it's like the—

**Shotz:** Oh yeah, that's true.

**Dziedzic:** It seems to me like the only two works that are—

**Shotz:** Technology, I guess.

**Dziedzic:** But if that's not a strong connection—

**Shotz:** I think the American thing was definitely—I sort of already talked about that though, but I could think of a little bit more about it. Yeah, mainly, I mean, the other thing I would say about the *Mirror Fence* and [00:08:00] picket fences, and this particular fence, is that it also, because it's a sort of dissolving picket fence, I had thought about it as a symbol of the American dream, of course, and a sort of dream that is flickering in and out of grasp. So it's there, it's almost like that Gatsby-esque, you know, something that you grasp towards, and you can't necessarily have, and I think the fence does flicker in that way. And I guess in terms of Nam June Paik, there is a connection maybe, in that this has this kind of digital quality as you walk by it, and it seems like some kind of digital effect, when in fact, it's an analog object, but maybe it relates to TV in that way. It definitely has a digital [00:09:00] quality.



**Dziedzic:** So, I want to talk about *Light + Landscape* (2012), and I just would like to know how that invitation came about, and also, how *Mirror Fence* got kind of folded into that, and physically, what the fence was doing between those two exhibitions?

**Shotz:** I think that during those two exhibitions, it was just up. I believe that what happened was, there was a really good response to it, and they just asked if they could keep it up, and I said, “Sure,” and then when *Light + Landscape* came around, Nora Lawrence asked me to be part of that, and I was really excited to be part of that. It made a lot of sense for my work, since those are two things that are really important. And I think she said, “Can we include *Mirror Fence* [00:10:00] in the exhibition?” and, it makes so much sense because it is—relates to the landscape and it reacts to light.

So one of the things about my work in this piece, not in particular but as a very good example, is that it reacts to light, and a lot—well, something I’ve been very interested in is having change happen in the work that is not mechanical change, so it’s just a change that happens through the changes in light, and the change in seasons, throughout the day. So this is very responsive, and constantly changes, and every time I see it, it looks different, every time I visit, depending on the season, and depending on the time of day.

**Dziedzic:** Do you want to talk about your thoughts about it this morning when we walked down to it?

**Shotz:** This morning, it looked different again, yes. There was some kind of light on it that was hitting the back in a new way that [00:11:00] made it light up in a specifically kind of different way than I had seen before. Really, every time, parts of it dissolve and parts of it appear, and I really like that about it, that it’s just always new, and I want my work to have that quality of never being completely knowable. I guess if you saw it every day, every year, it would be knowable, but if you’re seeing it once and then again—on the other hand, I also want people to be able to sit with it for a long period of time and not get sick of it. So that change aspect lets that happen. It lets people be involved with it for a longer period of time.

**Dziedzic:** As you mentioned, so many of your works deal with light and landscapes, so I’m wondering how you made the choice to include the works that you did.

**Shotz:** Well, the *Mirror Fence* was here, and we thought it should definitely be part of the show. [00:12:00] I also had recently done an exhibition at Espace Louis Vuitton in Tokyo, and that space is just a cube, a glass cube, on the top of a building with tons of light, and so it was very much about light. I had made these pieces called *Transitional Objects* (2011) that were plexi with dichroic film put together in a kind of three-dimensional puzzle-like way, that the two pieces are kind of figurative—in a way, the most figurative thing—well, there’s one other work that I’ve done that’s kind of figurative. But, I thought that

might be a perfect thing to also include in the show, because they're so about light and they're so about change and light together. When those pieces are shown indoors, with sun, they kind of act as a sundial because [00:13:00] they create these shadows that change through the day, and lengthen and shorten depending on the time of year, and they also are color shadows, because the material has a kind of color that changes with the light. Anyway, so I suggested those to Nora and she agreed, and we built a special room in the Museum Building.

### [Side conversation]

#### Audio File 4

**Dziedzic:** I have a few more questions about your *Transitional Objects*. You were talking about them as a kind of sundial, and I think you had written about them that they're not a clock-based time, but a sun-based time, and so I'm just wondering if you could unpack that a little bit. I guess my questions were sort of about whether the—for you, the interest is about its relationship to the past, or different kind of seasonal changes, daily time. What sort of—what was the scope of that?

**Shotz:** I was thinking more about the relationship of the earth to the sun, and the way that I think we all forget that we're on a planet that's orbiting the sun. It's very obvious, but yet it doesn't feel like that. So, making these pieces that show so clearly the movement of the sun on the floor—basically, [00:02:00] the shadows were right underneath the work, and they were just very obvious shadows. More, they are colored shadows, so they become more obvious to the viewer, but they move very frequently. You see them move hour by hour, and shrink and grow depending on the season. So, I think, to me, if you went there, you could say to somebody, "You should go at 12 o'clock tomorrow, that's when the shadow looks the best," or, but that might change, then. It will change, obviously, by like ten minutes or something each day. I don't know the exact frequency, but each day that would shift slightly, and that would make one more aware of that change, the planet's rotation and the orbit around the sun, together. So, I was thinking about that, and of course, the relationship to sundials in general. [00:03:00] But yes, the sun, and time, and light, and our relationship to light and time.

**Dziedzic:** And I know that you use a lot of different kinds of materials in your work, and that you've talked about the form dictating the materials for a work, or, at least the idea behind the work dictating the materials. And so, I'm just wondering if you could talk about the materials that you used for the *Transitional Objects*.

**Shotz:** There's a lot of stuff involved with those, and a lot of things to talk about, but in terms of the material, there's been a whole relationship I've had with color, which is an almost like a difficult

relationship, or—I've never understood how you could—and this isn't to say that other people shouldn't do it, but for myself, I've never understood [00:04:00] how you choose a color for a specific piece, like, why would this be red and not blue, or green? And so, I've chosen to have the color—in fact, everything I do, I like the material to be the thing, or the color to be expressed through the material. So, I hadn't really used much color, and then I found this material wherein the structure, there's a nanostructure on the film that reflects the light. It lets some light transmit through and reflects other light. It has a little nanostructure in it that's made by vaporized metals being deposited onto the film, and it works something like a butterfly's wing. Most butterfly wings don't have pigment; they have this structure that creates the color. So, when I discovered this material, I was like, oh my God, this is perfect for me. This way [00:05:00] I do not have to choose a color, and it's not just about, "Oh, I just can't choose"; it's about why. Why am I choosing this? And, in this way, the structure is determining the color, and so I was really excited about that idea, and it changes all the time. So, depending on the angle of the light and your angle and relationship to it, it's always going to be shifting and changing. And those works, the *Transitional Objects*, really are quite responsive to the light, and I don't think I realized how responsive they were until I showed them at Espace Louis Vuitton at Tokyo. There was so much light there. There are no real walls, there's just one back wall, and every time a shadow would pass, that would be shown in the work. The sculpture would slightly fluctuate with a cloud, and that made them seem kind of alive in a way that was really interesting to me.

**Dziedzic:** And you painted the—you did [00:06:00] choose a color for the gallery space and the pedestals, right? Can you talk about that decision?

**Shotz:** Yes, it came from the show at Louis Vuitton, but I had been thinking about how to really show off that idea of the light changing, and I realized that a gray floor or wooden floor or whatever, it would just be kind of distracting, so I thought to paint the whole space white. And I chose the white based on a bunch of testing of different whites, and I don't remember specifically why that white anymore, but it was a white that worked well and was kind of neutral, and so at Storm King, we painted the floor. We had to add a new floor, a subfloor—or maybe it's a super-floor, [laughter] because it's not below—a super-floor, and paint that white, and the pedestals, which were the same color. And then we had a thing where you had, to sort of maintain the whiteness, people had to take their shoes off and wear little booties [00:07:00] inside, which was interesting. I've never actually done that before, but it does allow people to kind of change their mindset I think. Something about changing—taking off your shoes just puts you in a different frame of mind.

**Dziedzic:** So, I have, from our own records, that it was painted an ice blue, so—

**Shotz:** Right, that's right.

**Dziedzic:** Is that—

**Shotz:** That's true, but that's just the name of the color.

**Dziedzic:** But it's actually a kind of white.

**Shotz:** It's white. It's like an icy white, with a hint of blue, yeah. It's not blue.

**Dziedzic:** Okay, okay. These might be good works to kind of—to me, they seem to illustrate your interest in figuring out how to create volume [00:08:00] without mass, so I'm just wondering if you could talk about that interest generally, and maybe how that came into play with these works.

**Shotz:** Well, in thinking about sculpture, generally, again, the sculpture that I knew when I was an undergraduate, and even a graduate student, the sculpture that I was aware of was mostly heavy, steel sculpture, welded, made by men. And that's all fine, but I think, because of my interest in space, I was interested in showing space. How do I show what space is? What is the shape of it? What does it feel like? What does it look like? And, the only way I can think of to do that—you know, that it changes through the years, different ways of trying to do it, but it's kind of making a very light enclosure for it to let the [00:09:00] space speak for itself. So a lot of my work is, there's no inside or outside to it, pretty much all of my work. I really don't do casting, in that way where there's like a shape that's, there's air inside of it. If the air is there, it's showing. The air is always showing. So, there can be a very large-scale work, but it has very little mass.

And the *Transitional Objects* come out of that, and they also come out of an idea of making drawing into sculpture. So those start as drawings in the computer, and actually, yes, they're three-dimensional drawings on the computer—but they're drawings. They're line drawings. They're linear, and the lines have no dimension, actually, in the computer until you give them a dimension. I always found that kind of interesting. So, you're really looking at a completely virtual object that's kind of whatever it is that you want to make of it. [00:10:00] But I, really, I loved those linear objects and I wanted to keep them linear and not give them a surface, and so, I gave them dimension and that's—but kept them as a line at the same time, and that's how those *Transitional Objects* get created. [laughter]

**[Side conversation]**

**Audio File 5**

**Dziedzic:** So, I want to go into more depth about *Mirror Fence*, and first, I guess I just wanted to ask you about where, other locations where it's been put up, in between Socrates and here.

**Shotz:** I believe that it was only at the Aldrich Museum. I had a one-person show there, and the Tang Museum also, for a one-person—different one-person exhibitions, and then it was in storage in my studio for awhile, a couple of years anyway, in a big pile.

**Dziedzic:** [00:01:00] And you talked a little bit about this, but let's just see if there's anything else that kind of comes to mind. In the sense in which it's a very representational work—it's a fence—and I guess I'd just be curious to hear about how you think about that. I mean to me, most of your work is not representational, but your other mirrored work that you mentioned, *Reflective Mimicry*, in a sense, is. It would be useful to hear from you about that aspect of the work.

**Shotz:** I'm not sure how much I want to include, only because I worry that it has too much to do with Socrates, and not about Storm King—but because it was a work that was made for a specific [00:02:00] exhibition about suburbia, it came out of that, so it came out of that idea; whereas, a lot of my other work just comes out of my own exploration. So this is a sort of combination of somebody giving me this idea to work with, and my own work combining. It's interesting in that it's been resonant for so many people, probably more so than a lot of my other work, but I guess it's something that people can recognize and identify with, so it gives them something to kind of grasp. And I have, I guess—I'm so thrilled that people love it, I really am, and that's always wonderful for me to hear people say, "Oh, I saw it and I loved it, and we had so much fun, looking at it, and walking around it." I really love that, so I guess that, maybe that's saying [00:03:00] something to me that I should do more things that are more concrete like that. But, yes, it's different from my work in that way, because everything else is more an abstract exploration of space.

**Dziedzic:** You mentioned it meaning a lot of—having meaning for a lot of people, and being recognizable, and I guess, if you could talk about maybe the discussion around this becoming part of Storm King's collection, and maybe the relationship of its presence here at Storm King leading to its recognizability in a way. Or what you think that relationship might be.

**Shotz:** Well, I can first talk about—we had the piece in exhibition here for 5+5, [00:04:00] and then *Light + Landscape*, and it became pretty popular, and David and John asked me if I was interested, and I think I had also indicated, "If you want to keep it here longer, that's fine." And they said, "Yes, we'd like to keep it here longer," and we started into a discussion about how that might come about, and I told them and they knew also just from having the work here for a year or two, however many years it was, that it would have to be rebuilt. So, we started to talk about how that might happen. We might have to fundraise for it, and rebuild it in another material that could last for a very long time.

**Dziedzic:** Well, let's talk about that process of kind of figuring out what materials the fence would be ultimately made out of. And so, [00:05:00] just what kind of considerations went into, or how did you go about that process of kind of the trial and error that went into that?

**Shotz:** When we started talking about—I guess always in my mind, I had thought, well, we'll make it out of mirror-polish stainless steel because we know that that works well outdoors, and we started in talking to various fabricators and various steel polishers to see what we could get. We got a bunch of samples from different people, and it was actually kind of interesting—because of the width of the pickets, it's hard to get a really flat surface on stainless steel—it always has a little bit of a wave to it—or steel in general. And so, there was a wave, and a kind of distortion, in almost every sample we had, and it was like different types of distortions and from different [00:06:00] fabricators, and it just wasn't really working out that well.

I had forgotten about my original glass idea, and actually, it was Mike Seaman who had the idea that maybe we should think about glass. And I came up here, and he had a glass sample made already. This was over many, many months though. I mean, I had been looking at samples, and getting samples made, for months and months and months, and finally they called me up here and said, "Oh yeah, we have a new sample for you." And, it was glass, and it was like, "Right, of course, yes! Let's try that." Then we started in on making glass samples, and, because I had actually by that time had some experience working with glass—I'd done a few public works in glass indoors—I knew that we had to get a low iron glass, which is not green. So, we looked for [00:07:00] that, and finally settled on this Starphire glass, which is very clear, and not green. The green definitely created a cast.

**[Side conversation]**

**Audio File 6**

**[Side conversation]**

**Dziedzic:** So, can you talk about—Storm King has a lot of educational programming, and just imagining a tour happening and this work being included on that, some things that would be—maybe some important distinctions to make about the work for an audience of people that would be just visiting for the day and might be inspired by your work—ironically, some boundaries that you may want to, [laughter] to draw around its interpretation.

**Shotz:** I definitely would want to talk about, you know, it's a fence, but yet it's a line, it's a line in the landscape, and how a lot of fences are a line in the landscape, a demarcation. But it's a boundary, but yet it's a boundary that's dissolving, or it's dissolving the foreground and background, or kind of [00:02:00] making those two exchange with each other. Yes, I think it's important that it has that relationship to the American dream, and what we think of as—

**[Side conversation]**

**Shotz:** So, it's designed on pretty much the exact proportions of a picket fence, as a regular white picket fence would be built, so it has that relationship to the American dream, and the white picket fence, but yet, it's not a fence that encloses anything. It's not a boundary, it's a line. That's very important to me. It's [00:03:00] a line in the landscape. But I guess it straddles both. It has a kind of symbolic iconography, and this linear demarcation. I also feel like it could go on forever. In my mind, I can imagine this just going on and on and on. But yes, I would like people to think about borders, and fences, what those mean, why we have them. It's a symbol of the American dream—it's an interesting symbol of the American dream when you think about it, like, I have this thing, I have this house, and these are the borders of my house, and why is that border there? Why doesn't this house blend into the next house? Why doesn't this yard just kind of combine and why don't we both combine our yards and have yards together? But we don't have that here. The idea of private property is so inherent in American culture, actually. [00:04:00] The other thing I would say is that, because it's mirrored and because the negative and positive space exchange with each other, it creates a kind of digital effect as one walks by it, which also relates maybe to the digital technology of today, and it's kind of flickering, flickering idea, and it's like a flickering idea of the American dream. It's there and it's not there; it's kind of coming in and out of grasp.

**[Side conversation]**

**Dziedzic:** How has this work being installed permanently at Storm King [00:05:00] affected your understanding of it?

**Shotz:** I wanted to answer this question in two different ways. Having anything installed in a permanent way definitely changes your understanding or my understanding of it, because typically, when I have a work that's either in an exhibition, or outdoors, or whatever, it's there and then it's gone, and I usually install it and then leave. And it may be in another part of the country, and it may be across the world, whatever it is, so I just see it for the very brief time that I'm there installing it. But having this here and being able to revisit it, at different seasons and different years, it is interesting. I'm more able to see the change. I think it's made me understand better how much that's important in my work, and how much [00:06:00] I need to kind of make that happen in my work even more, or allow for opportunities where that

can happen. So, instead of showing something in the gallery that's completely without any natural light, I've been trying to have exhibitions in places where the natural light can play more of a part. So that's actually been a huge benefit to me, to really understand that. And it helps me understand the piece more. Just to be able to see it over time helps me understand it better. It's very different making something in your studio, or wherever, and seeing it in parts, and then, seeing it indoors and then seeing it outdoors over time, it's very different.

**Dziedzic:** And, is there any kind of—to think more maybe about the materials of it, is there any kind of weathering, or wear and tear that is kind of consistent with your vision for the work? [00:07:00] What sort of elements of maintenance are significantly important to you?

**Shotz:** Well, this piece is pretty sturdy outdoors. It gets taken in, in the winter though, in the depths of winter. When Storm King closes, it gets taken apart. A lot of my work is sort of modular in that way, in that it can be taken apart into pieces. It's again, it's not like a giant welded thing that has to be moved on a trailer, so this can get packed down pretty small, although it's still pretty heavy. But, in terms of weathering and having weathering be part of it, that's not really part of it, so, I've hopefully made it, and together we've made this so that it can last. They're replaceable parts though, so each picket can come off and be replaced if necessary. That's all I would say about that, I guess.

**Dziedzic:** [00:08:00] Well, I want to ask about something that you've touched on a little bit, which is just your work in relationship to other work at Storm King. What other work here do you feel like your work is in dialogue with, or maybe is resisting in some way?

**Shotz:** I think that my work is definitely in dialogue with so much of the work here in different ways. Because this place kind of encapsulates modern sculpture as I knew it as a student and as a young person—this was what I knew—and then I was making my sculpture in response to this. In fact, when I made *Mirror Fence*—and I had forgotten about this until recently—I was really thinking about *Schunnemunk Fork* (1990–91) that's here, which I think is just one of the most beautiful Richard Serra pieces that I know, outdoor. [00:09:00] I love the way that piece responds to the landscape, and I was thinking about that in terms of, it's a kind of straight plane in response to this curving landscape. So, when I was making the *Mirror Fence* I was really thinking about that work, and I think that *Mirror Fence* has relationship to that. I hope it does.

And also to the Andy Goldsworthy [*Storm King Wall* (1997–98)]. So, it's some sort of strange—what's the word for that—daughter of the two. So, the Andy Goldsworthy is obviously also a fence. It's sort of a meandering fence, and I don't think I was thinking about it specifically, but of course I see the relationship now. And then the way that this is a kind of very geometric plane, it's similar to the Richard [00:10:00]



Serra, and I was thinking about—in fact, the first time I installed this, it did kind of penetrate into the land, so the height stayed the same, and the landscape changed around it. But I decided not to do that again because too much of it got buried into the land. But, I like that idea and I like that idea of something geometric as opposed to the organic way that the topography is. And I started to explore that more in the next version of this, but maybe we don't want to talk about that right now.

**Dziedzic:** Is that *Break Line* (2015)?

**Shotz:** Yes.

**Dziedzic:** Well, first I want to ask about the kind of topographical issues of this particular site, and what sort of strategies were at play to make it aesthetically what you were—within your vision?

**Shotz:** Right, I wanted to keep it even, [00:11:00] like a straight line at the top, and that was a bit of a challenge. And to be honest, I can't even remember—you know, so I can't talk about that that much because Mike really figured that out for me, and that was one of the big challenges. In this case, I wanted it to be a straight line, and we figured out—I guess it changes underneath to maintain the top line, and I should talk to Mike before I continue more about this, because I don't remember what they did.

**Dziedzic:** I think that the way in which the posts are installed now allows them to be basically rotated maybe an eighth of an inch difference between all of them—

**Shotz:** Oh, up and down.

**Dziedzic:** —so that it can—so I'm not sure how much higher that end is than this end—

**Shotz:** It's definitely a lot higher.

**Dziedzic:** —which end is higher, but it has to do—

**Shotz:** [00:12:00] Yes, there's a pretty big difference.

**Dziedzic:** —with this kind of slow rotation of the height and the angle.

**Shotz:** Yes, that's what I thought, I don't think it's so much the angle, but it's more the height, changes slightly, so that the top appears to be the same, or is the same. I don't remember. Originally, I guess I

installed it so that the bottom was all the same height, and the landscape changed around it, and this time, we made the piece change with the landscape.

**Dziedzic:** So, at Socrates, it was, part of it was kind of submerged?

**Shotz:** Yes.

**Dziedzic:** Oh, I see. Well, I think I'm getting to kind of the end of the things that I wanted to ask you about, so, now might be a good time if you want to just check your notes and see if there's anything that you really wanted to cover that we didn't touch on. And then I think I have [00:13:00] just one or two more questions about Storm King in general.

#### **Audio File 7**

**Dziedzic:** So, in the context of the *Light + Landscape* exhibition, I wondered if you wanted to talk a little bit more about the origins of your interest in working with light, and some of the earlier works that incorporated that as an element.

**Shotz:** Yes, you had asked me whether I had experimented with photography, or something like that.

**Dziedzic:** Right, either photography or something that was outside of sculpture.

**Shotz:** Yes, I did!

**Shotz:** Yes, so I think—I started as a painter, by the way. I didn't get trained as a sculptor. My—in undergraduate and graduate [00:01:00] school, I was doing painting, and I kind of eased into sculpture sideways. But one of the things I was doing a lot in graduate school was photography, that interest in photography and printing my own photos, and spending tons of time in the darkroom. And, I think that definitely had an influence, and again I would say that, the origin of my working with mirrors and lenses is that—looking through cameras, and microscopes, and telescopes.

This idea of looking through something and through an instrument is really interesting to me, and the *Mirror Fence* in a sense is like that. You're looking at the landscape through something, and I think that that's—maybe sometimes the mirrors are misunderstood, but really, it's almost like—it is like that. It's like a little bit of a microscope. There's something different about looking through a mirror, and looking at something. I don't know what that is, exactly, although I did read recently that [00:02:00] a particle of light or wave of light, depending, that passes into a mirror, into a reflective surface—the light goes in, but the

light that comes out is not the same light. That particle has been changed; it may even just be a different particle completely. So, I think that's still somewhat of a mystery, but that's a really interesting mystery, because I always thought it was the same one just going and being reflected back, but that's not true. You're seeing something very differently through a mirror than the way you see it naturally. So yes, actually until now, I don't think I thought about the *Mirror Fence* being a kind of microscope, or some different way of looking at the landscape.

I thought I had something else to say about that.

**Dziedzic:** [00:03:00] Yeah, why don't you say again what you were just saying about the—thinking about it as a kind of microscope or something, just sort of phrase that again, and then maybe you'll see if you remember the other thing you were going to say.

**Shotz:** Yes. So, a lot of my interest in light came out of looking through microscopes, and looking through camera lenses, and telescope lenses, and seeing things differently through those instruments, seeing through an instrument is just a different way of seeing, and I believe that a lot of my work using mirrors in the landscape is sort of making a lens in the landscape, or creating this instrument of seeing in the landscape, and so the *Mirror Fence*, in a sense, is an instrument to see the landscape through this structure.

**Dziedzic:** [00:04:00] Another thing that you mentioned that I had kind of triaged because of the temperature was just what you mentioned about the *Transitional Objects* in terms of starting out as a drawing, so, if you want to, to just talk about that kind of element of the technical process, the evolution of processes, whether it's with that work, or other works more generally. I guess it would be interesting to hear, too, in the context of, like you said, you did painting in the undergrad and grad school, so we have painting and drawing and still sideways to sculpture, so, maybe if you want to incorporate that.

**Shotz:** Yes. [00:05:00] I'm just thinking about negative space. I think a lot of my interest in negative space came out of my drawing classes as an undergraduate, and we were asked to draw the negative space as a way of drawing the positive space, which I'm sure everybody does, but that was really interesting to me. And I became much more interested in the negative space, and the substance of that, and Morandi was really important to me at that time and still is, just because his negative space is so solid. But in any case, yes, maybe drawing is my way of understanding—although I really don't do a lot of drawing. And the way I make my sculptures, not through drawing, but—the *Transitional Objects* happened through kind of sculpting in the computer. So, I sculpted a shape that's a linear shape made of lines that have no dimension, and [00:06:00] then, I create. I give them a dimension in order to make them have a life as a sculpture, but they should still be a drawing as sculpture, so they're linear. They have no inside or

outside. There's no surface. The negative space and positive space in a sense are really just equal. They're very equal in the *Mirror Fence*, I think. But even in *Transitional Objects*, they both play an equal part.

**Dziedzic:** You also mentioned that your *Transitional Objects* were figurative, and I wondered if you imagined a conversation between some of the figurative work that's in Storm King's collection, and your work.

**Shotz:** No. What figurative work?

**Dziedzic:** I guess that it's a kind of a conversation about David Smith's work in a sense, being somewhat figurative, and then there's some bronze sculptures, some of the earliest acquisitions, those kinds of things.

**Shotz:** Figurative work is really tough for me. My interest is more in these forces of nature: What are they? How do they shape us? So, I'm not so much interested in the figure itself, but more how forces shape us, shape the land around us. In fact, I was thinking about recently how space shapes the land itself, or gravity shapes the land itself. We've got this landscape, and it's shaped by geological forces, which everybody knows, but it's also shaped [00:08:00] by the pressure of the gravity on top of it, and all the ways in which the forces of the universe are working, or working to shape this land that we're sitting on right now. So that's really my primary focus, and when I was thinking about making those particular *Transitional Objects* sculptures, I think I was trying to make a smaller sculpture, trying to make something that's not so massive, and maybe something that related more to a body. In fact, I guess I was thinking about movement, a little bit, and dance, and those, just the way a body moves. But I haven't revisited that in awhile. Maybe I will, but I haven't.

**Dziedzic:** Well, speaking of bodies through space, my last question is just, if there is anything that you want to add about working with the people here at Storm King that you've worked with closely, whether it's John or David or Mike Seaman or Nora.

**Shotz:** Yes. My relationship with Storm King has been one of the most important relationships I've had in my career, and everybody here is so wonderful, but even beyond that, I think we share an interest in art and nature together, and I think that that's why it's been so great for me. I have a really abiding interest in nature, and some of the art world is not oriented that way, but here, the two combine, and so I feel like I found a home here. I should also say that David Collens had a huge part in helping me site the sculpture, and he brought me to different locations, and together, we picked this location. And so, I really credit him on finding a great location for me. [00:10:00] My relationship with Nora and John has—they've all been

just incredibly important to me, and we have friendships as well as professional relationships. What else can I say? I love them, but that [laughter] sounds too goofy, but they're wonderful people. Yes, I think that interest in art and nature is something that's kind of rare in the art world, and I really appreciate.

**Dziedzic:** And it's also art in nature, too.

**Shotz:** Art in nature, and combining those two, preservation of the landscape, and preservation of nature, and. John and Nora and I are all vegetarian, so, you know, that's also good.

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**Dziedzic:** [00:11:00] Well, I think that's everything that I wanted to ask within this space out here by *Mirror Fence*, and just, if there's anything else that you want to add?

**Shotz:** I can't think of it right now.

#### **Audio File 8 [view video file for images corresponding to descriptions]**

**Shotz:** Okay, this is the original picket design that I designed, and that I built for the first iteration of this fence. It's a sandwich of clear plexiglass with two eighth-inch mirror plexis on top, and I had originally adhered all that with Mirror Mastic, thinking about bathrooms and moisture, and I thought that would be the best solution, but it was [00:02:00] still not a long-term outdoor solution. The way that the pickets attach to the crossbars was through these bolts that are countersunk into the surface of the plexi. So, all that had to be done. I'm trying to think how I did that. I think I glued everything together and then got it countersunk and drilled, but to be honest, it's been a long time.

Once we then were thinking about *Mirror Fence* as a permanent piece in the collection at Storm King, we started to think about more permanent materials, and our original thought was stainless steel, mirror-polish stainless steel, and we had a bunch of samples made, and these are a couple of them. This, you can kind of see, it's heavy, but it's also warped, or the steel itself has a ripple in it from the way it's cast, or rolled, and it's impossible to kind of get that ripple out, and I didn't want [00:03:00] that distortion in the fence. I really wanted it to be a flat reflection. And then we had another kind of distortion in this one, which is harder to see when it's flat like this, but as I remember it, it was kind of a rounded surface. So, it just didn't give that nice, flat reflection, which really is sort of important. In a way, this was better, so, strangely, the acrylic, was better.

And then, we decided on glass, which made the most sense of all because glass has such a clear optical property. So, this was maybe one of the first versions of glass, making a sandwich with that and foam tape in between. This was interesting, very interesting, but I didn't like the green glass, and once you get

a bunch of pickets together, that green really becomes pretty prominent. So, I suggested a [00:04:00] low iron glass. I think this one's also green, and this was a test of just different edge-finishing techniques; so this is without a sanded or beveled edge, and this one has a beveled edge, and of course you get a different reflection with those, too, the way the light reacts with this and versus like a clear, but we definitely wanted something safe for the public as well.

We also, I guess, and I forgot about this, but we experimented with a kind of steel edge, sealing the sandwich together, but that didn't look good. Oh, and this was also—I had considered making it taller, and yea, I had thought about that in my mind for awhile. But, when we actually made a test of it, it just didn't look right, and it made sense to keep it at the original proportions of a real picket fence. [00:05:00] So this becomes something more, almost like a caricature, whereas the other thing is more of a real object.

And this one looks pretty close to what we have, as the final. This is the low iron glass, and foam tape in between. Oh, and we also decided, since we're remaking it, do we still want to keep the bolts on the surface, or do we want to hide them? And I was like, "You know what? Let's hide them, because if we can, it'll just enhance that illusion even further." So, we decided to do that, so then the bolts went on the back to attach to the crossbar. And then we also did—the original structure had, I guess it must've been—[00:06:00] originally, I know there were wood posts, and I guess there were maybe wood crossbars and the plexi was attached to that. In further iterations, we definitely changed that to aluminum, maybe the second iteration before all this—so, we used aluminum structure for the crossbars, and for the posts, and, what I was going to say is that we then decided, we don't need to have space in between where the mirror hits the post, or whatever. There was a little bit of space before, so we sealed up that space with mirror, and so the whole thing becomes much more thoroughly reflective than it was before, and I think it's an improvement on my original, original design.

That's all I can think of to say.

**[End of interview]**