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Cynthia Schira

Oral History Project
KU Retirees' Club
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Q Cynthia Schira, professor of design, on September 21. Professor Schira retired in May 1999. We are speaking in her studio in Lawrence, Kansas. Why don't we just begin at the very beginning. Tell me where you were born and in what year, if you don't mind.

A I don't mind at all. I was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1934.

Q What about your parents. What did they do?

A My father was a manager of a bank in New York. He died very young, he died when I was nine, so I don't remember him all that well. Cancer, of course, which everybody has. My mother was a housewife.

Q How did she keep the family going after he died?

A She went back to Massachusetts where she had family and went on from there. Sort of averaging everybody's advice, as women did in those days.

Q My father died young, too, and, my mother struggled for a number of years to keep us all going. Did you have brothers and sisters?

A I have a sister who's five years younger than I am. She's out in Portland, Oregon.

Q When do you think your interest in art began? Was it very early do you think? Or, was this something that developed over the years?

A Actually, all of the young girls at that point always did drawings, or you had books of drawings. And, we did Petty girls, which nobody would know about now. I went to a girls' boarding school, Northfield School for Girls. It was very restricted. My mother had great thoughts of my going to Smith or Vassar or some place like that. I was totally sure that I did not want to do that. Art school seemed to be the thing. I applied to and got into the Rhode Island School of Design.

Q Now, when you were Let's go back a ways before then. Do you remember elementary school as being a place where there was any fostering of artistic interest?

A I don't remember anything about that. I don't think it had anything to do with anything. But, I'm not sure.

Q I remember being given handouts of things to color, and that was about the extent of my artistic...

- A I don't think there was that much. Certainly, there wasn't at Northfield. There was an art class, but I don't think I could take it for some reason. I think I took sewing or something like that. To be proper.
- Q So, all through boarding school you really didn't do very much in the way of design. Why were you so determined not to go to Vassar or Wellesley or Smith or one of those schools?
- A Well, I felt that those schools were going to program me to be the proper woman for New England. I thought that there might be other things in the world.
- Q Where do you think that independent spirit came from at that point. I know that plenty of women had them later on. But, to buck the trend is hard to do.
- A I don't know. And, I didn't even know that it was independent spirit. All I knew was that probably art school would be more interesting than a school that was very similar to the boarding school I had gone to.
- Q Was this an unusual step among young women that you know?
- A I came from a very small town. It was Stockbridge, Massachusetts. I don't remember all that much about who went where. It was also after the time when polio was so prevalent. Many people were dealing with that. I think some of the schooling was put off for a while. I know afterwards they went to schools.
- Q When did you enter Northfield?
- A I graduated in 1952. So, I must have gone to Northfield in 1950. I think it was 1952 because I graduated in 1956 from the Rhode Island School of Design.
- Q I read up on some material about you in the university archives just so I would have a sense of a little bit about your career. It said you took a degree in 1956. It said you took up weaving because there was an extra \$500 scholarship. Is that true?
- A It's absolutely true. I never heard of weaving. My mother didn't have very much money, and she was a widow. We had some family who had connections. So, I got some money from a metallurgical society, and we found a relative at the DAR for another scholarship. Then, somebody else had some money. But, still I was short \$500. Then, there was this textile scholarship. So, I thought, why not?

- Q What did you think you were going to do when you entered the Rhode Island School of Design? Did you ...
- A Just art, in general. I don't think I really thought very much until I was about 25.
- Q You took this scholarship that was for weaving.
- A Textiles, not weaving. Not really knowing, I guess, what that even meant. The first year at RISD the students take a foundation program so there was nothing to do with textiles at that point. Then, the second year you started into it. At that time, the textile field within that particular school was more oriented towards industry. So, they had a lot of the big looms and various things in the textile building. We were taught how to use some of those industrial, mechanized looms.
- Q You mean there would be like industrial sized looms?
- A Industrial looms, right. There were academic majors for students who would become textiles managers, people who were going into industry not to design but to work in management or textile chemistry. So, probably those looms were given by industry to the school.
- Q That surprises me. Somehow, I thought that an art school would not be geared toward industry.
- A It was just textiles, and it was in a separate building. I mean the buildings were all close together, but, it was in a separate building. It isn't anymore. There is one loom remaining, a jacquard loom. And, that is going to be updated this fall with a computerized jacquard loom. Other than that, none of the other looms are left. I'm just remembering. I don't think about it very often.
- Q So, that second year when you actually started into textiles, what sorts of things did you start doing right away?
- A We started learning how to weave, learning how to print and understanding the textile field. That was always coupled with the drawing and painting, so that you didn't have just textiles. It wasn't vocational in that sense. It was applying what you learned in basic studies and the academics to your designing.
- Q Were you working on small looms, then?

A We had small looms that were perfectly horrible downstairs in the design area. Then, we would go upstairs to the floor where the big looms were. We would be told by very traditional textile men what we should do. It was very much learning up there by recipe. They told us what to do. Actually, they gave us lots of really good information. It was pre-Xerox. There were some mimeograph notes. One of the teachers dictated to us and dictated all of our notes. He said, "You're hating me now, but, you'll love me later." I'll be damned, those things are still valid.

Q What sort of things would he be dictating?

A It was all technical kinds of information. How do you figure out how many yards you need if the diameter is such and such, the takeup is such and such, and all of this kind of information. There's a lot of math in textiles.

Q Did you feel like a fish out of water at that point. Or, did.....

A You're asking me things that I would feel, would know, and, certainly, the students would know now. Then it was different, or I was different, and probably a bit of both. I didn't question, I accepted everything a lot more. And, we accepted authority. I mean, it was a really big difference.

Q So, you just did it.

A You did it, and everybody was completely involved. Everybody worked like crazy, which is not necessarily true. Nobody thought that they were entitled to anything. We thought you had to work for it. We would stay up all night working on projects. That just isn't so anymore.

Q Beginning with that second year, did you concentrate on textiles the rest of the time?

A Yes.

Q Did you feel at that point that probably this was going to be your life's work, that somehow you'd be working in textiles. Or, were you still unsure at that point?

A I just assumed. But, I didn't know where or what. After I graduated, I got the scholarship to go to France and study tapestry weaving.

Q How long were you there?

- A Actually, I was there only six months. It was during the Hungarian Revolution, and that was a bit difficult. Some of the people at the Atlier School in Aubusson (France) thought we were going to be taking the information and techniques out to America, and we'd do them in, which, of course, would never happen because you'd never get Americans to spend the amount of time for the wages they paid. In American wages the tapestries would be too expensive to sell anywhere.
- Q Aubusson does carpets.
- A No, have you ever heard of Goblein? Goblein is like Aubusson. Only, the Goblein tapestry works use vertical looms, and weavers at Aubusson are on horizontal looms. But, otherwise, they're essentially the same.
- Q Did you find that year or that time in France useful for your work, or was it a difficult time. Did you speak the language when you went?
- A No, a little bit. But, I was with a woman who did speak it very well. That didn't seem to be that much of a problem. There were six of us who were apprentices. Mainly, we got yelled at for not doing it right, and you can always understand that. We learned all of the weaving techniques. Then, when I came back to the states I realized that, I didn't enjoy working in that way. It was too restrictive. The more interesting part was making the cartoon or the drawing, rather than the actual weaving. Historically, other people did the weaving. The weaving is very, very slow, and it's predetermined so you don't have the interest of playing around and discovering.
- Q So, you enjoyed actually doing the designing more than the actual weaving. The physical process of weaving.
- A Right, because it's incredibly slow.
- Q It seems to be, and it seems as though you'd need a tremendous amount of patience to actually keep in your head what this thing is going to look like. At that point, you had been through four years of college and you had done this apprenticeship, were you technically skilled enough at that point that you would draw something and you could actually make it?
- A Oh, yes. Sure I could. With those tapestry techniques. Yes.

- Q So, you were learning different techniques of how to weave, or just that one technique.
- A There are specific techniques for tapestry weaving. There's a set of them. It isn't like any other kind of weaving. Actually, weaving is the interlacing of vertical and horizontal sets or elements. With traditional tapestry weaving, what you're doing is hiding the vertical elements, covering them totally with the horizontals. The different colors that you see in the beautiful tapestries are the wefts. In much weaving, the wefts or the horizontals go selvedge to selvedge. But, in tapestry weaving, the many different colors weave sections only their color. You have to physically interrelate those sections to have the fabric hold together, and that's what takes weavers so long. It's a very specific set of techniques. I have used those techniques in various situations and in various configurations since then; worked with them in non-traditional ways.
- Q What is a definition of tapestry?
- A A tapestry is a weft faced plain weave using sectional wefts. In order to make cloth, you have to have a horizontal that goes (edge to edge) selvedge to selvedge, or, else, it's going to fall apart. So, in this case, many wefts work together to make that single line of horizontal elements. In the weave of blue jeans a single thread goes all the way across the set of verticals edge to edge. Is that making any sense to you?
- Q It does make sense, I think I understand what you're talking about. I was wondering before what a tapestry was as compared to weaving a hunk of cloth?
- A It's quite different. But, the term is thrown around like every term is thrown around. Nothing is all that specific any more.
- Q Right. When you were talking about going to this particular place in France for tapestry, you only learned a certain kind of weaving. So, you come back to the states after this six months and get married. Was that in the cards before you went?
- A Well, I was going with him. The woman I was with wanted to come back, and we both felt that we had learned all of the techniques that we could learn, and that we would be just sitting and weaving other people's cartoons (designs). It was not

sensible to stay and it was incredibly cold. It was like January or February. So, there were multiple reasons that made us come back. And, when I did come back, I just got married.

Q Is this someone who you had met at RISD?

A Yes, my husband of now. Forty-two years later.

Q He's also been on the faculty as a painter.

A Professor of painting. And, he was also director of Graduate Studies in the Art department for some years.

Q So, you get married, then what?

A Then we stayed in Providence an extra year because he needed to finish his degree there (RISD). He was a Korean veteran and had the GI Bill. He was a year behind me. He was supposed to be taking industrial design the whole time he was there. But, he wasn't. He was taking painting. So, before he went into the Korean War he was working summers at these jobs he had. They said he could have a job when he graduated. He went to interview when he graduated. But, they refused to take him because they realized really he wasn't interested. So, he was wandering around trying to find something. I was visiting with the president of our school. John Frazier said, "Well, there's this job out in Kansas. Dick might like it." So, we came out here.

Q And, that was in what year?

A 1957. Summer of 1957.

Q Did you feel like you had come to the end of the earth at that point?

A That heat. We came out in a little MG TD arguing about what was corn and what was milo. Never had seen those things.

Q Who would know who was right?

A Nobody would.

Q I know Lawrence was a very different place.

A It was incredibly different. It was very, very segregated. It was totally different. All around. It was just the center part of town. That whole way out towards Alvamar and everything was dirt road. When did you come?

Q 1972. In fact, I can't even remember it now. But, it was so different from the way it is now. You got your master's in 1967 from KU. So, you came out, and, at that point, had you thought you would go back to school?

A No, I hadn't really thought about that at all. I came out and I had a small loom, and I was working on tapestry things and it wasn't all that interesting to me. I went to some of the faculty women's clubs, and that was very different then, too. All the women were shuttled over to one corner, and we were to go away when the men had their meetings. I didn't like it very well. I met a really good friend there. We still see each other. Lynn Rothwell who started the Visiting Nurse's Association here in Lawrence. After three years here in Lawrence, we went to India for a year. Dick had a Fulbright, and that was 1960-61 because Marcie was born in 1961. When she was three I started back to get my Master's. I took her with me, which was not quite the thing to do at that point. People did not do that. I took her with me in the mornings. She went to the KU nursery in the afternoons so I could work. I'm not quite sure of the dates, but it's very close.

Q Why did you go back, did you go back to graduate school because you were bored with life in Lawrence?

A I wanted to do something other than the kind of tapestry weaving that I was doing which was not fulfilling to me. (I didn't want to fill my life with only social activities, although I loved the University French play reading group.) So, graduate school seemed like an option to do.

Q What kind of design or textile department did KU have at that point.

A They had a fairly good one. In terms of all of the changes. It was very specific, you took a semester of rug weaving, you took a semester of double weave, and all that kind of thing. It was technically oriented. And, there was Miss Evelyn DeGraw who, I think, started the department in 1940. It's one of the oldest departments in the country.

Q I didn't know that. Was she a weaver?

A She was. There was no such thing as surface design, so you had to be a weaver. There wasn't anything else taught at that point. Then, I guess it was 1976-78 they had another woman come in, Elsie Schrenevaseo, and she started talking about

surface design, which would be like screen printing, and tie dye, all that kind of thing. That didn't come in until the '70s.

Q So, you learned just more weaving techniques.

A Yes, As well, designing, and that kind of thing.

Q What did you do for your thesis work?

A Ancient Peruvian textiles. We had just discovered this book. It's very well known, of course, now. So, I learned all of the techniques in the book, and then I interpreted them.

Q On your own?

A Well, I taught them to myself. That was my thesis. Then, I interpreted them. My thesis consisted of about 200 pages.

Q Two hundred? That's a lot.

A It was a lot. It was very interesting. I had a marvelous background from boarding school on how to do a proper research paper, so I could enjoy writing it. Then, the rest of it was the studio work where I would do a sample of a technique, then I would interpret that technique into an art work. So, I probably did ten pieces in all.

Q Part of your presentation is not just the written, but you have to show examples. Would that be true of everybody that you would have to actually demonstrate something as part of the thesis.

A Yes. Now, you write one or two pages, and the whole thesis rests on the exhibition of your work. So, that's really quite changed around.

Q Here you are armed with a master's in 1967. You said you joined the KU faculty in 1976?

A Right. I worked on my own a lot in the house – my children were young.

Q You didn't have a studio at that point?

A The dining room. Right after I graduated from KU with a Master's, I got a Tiffany grant which was a very nice grant to get.

Q Tiffany, as in lamps and that sort of thing?

A Well, no. It's a Tiffany Foundation, and then it was \$3,000. Now, it's \$20,000. Big difference, yet \$3,000 was a great deal then.

Q A nice grant.

A It was a very nice grant, and it helped me, it gave me time to do a whole pile of things. After I had done all this work, I felt that I should do something with it. So, I made contact with a woman who was an art agent in Chicago. I sold through her for quite a few years. A lot of things were sold to Marshall Fields for store décor, which was rather interesting.

Q Store décor means they wanted it to decorate their store?

A Yes. They would design, the designer would decorate a shop area for young cosmopolitans, for instance, and want something to hang on the wall. He would buy something that I had already done. I never....

Q You didn't design to....

A No. But, I did quite a few commissions for her, too. I worked with Christa Thurman Mayer, who is the textile curator at the Chicago Art Institute. She bought some pieces at that time.

Q How did you know how to market yourself like that? How did you know who to get in touch with?

A I can't remember how I first contacted Marna Johnson, the agent in Chicago.

Q Here you are, in Lawrence, Kansas, with one small child at this point, working in your dining room.

A I think there were several magazines that had information about exhibitions and galleries in them. I can't remember how I got in touch with her. And, there were some exhibitions. I entered every exhibition I could get into and started that whole networking thing. But, I don't remember exactly how I did it.

Q At this point in your life, teaching was not in the cards, right?

A No. Marcie was ten and Eric was born in 1969, he was in school. I'm glad I had a chance to be with my kids and didn't have to work as hard as other people do when their children are real young. Actually, that's how I met Ann Yetman. We both had young children. She had Doug at that point, and I had Eric, and we were both going crazy being with them all of the time. I was walking down the street and I saw her, they lived down on New Hampshire Street. We started talking and

- set up a three morning a week play group, because they didn't have day care then that they have now. Jane Morse was involved with it with us.
- Q A long time ago. In 1976, you joined the KU faculty. How did that come about?
- A I met Peter Thompson who is Dean of the School of Fine Arts. He was on the art faculty at that point, I think he was chair. I had talked about teaching, or wanting to do something. I probably had ideas about what the teaching should be like and talked about it at a party or something. It was so much less formal than it is now. I probably said something and he said, "Why don't you do something about it? Do you want to teach a class?" That's how it began. It began with just one class and then it became a couple of classes. Eventually, I became 60 percent of a full-time position which is totally different than being adjunct. It is much, much nicer.
- Q From there you kept adding on to your role at KU?
- A Yes. I have a lot of energy, and I generally just keep going. I probably had ideas and then somebody left and "well, I can do that." You know, it just sort of added. But, I never taught full-time. I mean I have, but I've never been a full-time appointment.
- Q Even though you were promoted to full professor, you were never on a full-time appointment. Is that possible now?
- A Yes, I think it is, but I'm not tenure track. You can be promoted as long as you're part of a full-time position.
- Q Did you like teaching?
- A I loved teaching. I liked it a lot.
- Q Did you think you would when you started?
- A No. Those are the kinds of things that I should have been thinking about, but I tend to jump in and get wet. So, I don't necessarily preplan or think things through, which has gotten me into trouble sometimes.
- Q At this point as you were becoming more involved in the KU scene, how was your weaving being integrated with all of this? Were you still working at home?
- A Yes. I've always worked at home.
- Q You've never used KU as a studio or anything like that.

A No, because of the children. I wanted to be here when they came home from school and all of that kind of thing. So, I always tried to make my classes so I would be home in the late afternoon. It worked out fine. That was one of the reasons I never wanted to teach full-time because I never wanted to feel guilty that I wasn't doing enough at school. So, if I did half-time, then logically you should have the other half to work. Of course, it doesn't really work out that way.

Q In one of the articles that I was reading about you, it said that basically you were instrumental in making the KU textile department really internationally well known and establishing it. From what you said earlier, it had been a long standing department. How do you think it changed?

A It was my input, but it was also the times. The fiber art movement started in the '60s, and I was part of that. We were all starting to connect across the country. There were three people who were essentially the founders of the movement – as well as Jack Larson in New York was instrumental in the development of the field. He has written several books as well as curating exhibitions. The thing is that the movement was developing and getting well known at that particular time, and I was very active within it. I was also writing articles in magazines.

Q This is a national movement?

A Yes. Actually, it turned out to be international. But, mainly national. I was writing articles in magazines and I was showing in a lot of exhibits. Some of these shows were international that I was in, one that was very important was in Lausanne, Switzerland. My name got well known as part of the second generation of the movement. Of course, that brought more attention to KU. Eventually, the students started going back out and doing more themselves. But, it really was that, my being very active in the field and the field developing at the same time. The field was small enough that we all knew each other so the whole thing could come together. People would start to say, "Well, you know." Now, I think the textile area of the design department at KU is one of the best five or six in the United States. It has a very good reputation.

Q What about some of the students that you've had? Are there any in particular that you're proud of in the sense that they have really gone on to make this their life's work as well?

A The most famous student that I have had is Ann Hamilton who was the U.S. representative at the Venice Biennale this year. And, she is in Newsweek and all the art magazines, do you know her work at all?

Q No, I don't.

A She does enormous installations. Really big installations. She's done about 60 or 70 installations. All around the world. Very, very big. She's very well known and has been written up in many books. She always credits her textile background (BFA at KU) before she went to Yale for her Master's, which is really sweet.

Q And, satisfying.

A Oh, yes.

Q I know you have exhibited all over the world. Your pieces are all over the world. Is that a source of great satisfaction to you? Or, do you not think about that and just go on and do what you want to do?

A I like it. I like their being in really nice museums.

Q Do you go visit them? I mean, have to been to see where most of your stuff is?

A No. I've seen it sometimes, but, no I've never gone to particularly see.

Q Wouldn't that be kind of fun?

A No. You always would see what you should have done.

Q You can see those things that you're particularly interested in. I was talking to a musician recently and she was saying that she envied non-musicians the ability to go to a concert and sit and enjoy it. She can't do that.

A Because she hears everything.

Q She hears everything. I guess I hadn't really thought about it like that. I thought they could be critical, but not hear everything. I suppose the same would be true that you see it up there for all the world, and you're starting to pick it apart.

A Actually, there's a funny thing. I had a really lovely show at the Museum Bellerive in Zurich in 1979, and it was a one person show. Anyhow, they did

these great big posters. They were every where in Zurich. They were enormous. I really wanted to stand and look at them, but I didn't dare because somebody would see that I was being vain. Of course, nobody knew who on earth I was, but I just couldn't do it. It was such a lovely poster!

Q That's our upbringing, proper young ladies. Somehow, we're not supposed to trumpet our own horn or be proud of our own achievements. Going back a little to the teaching, there was one quote in this article that I was reading that I really liked where you said, "It was a combination of rigor and nurture." I don't know if you remember making that comment, but I thought that would also be a very appropriate comment about parenting, as well. I thought that was such a nice way to put it, very concise, but, to the point.

A I don't think the students respect somebody who doesn't ask something of them. They get really irritated at that. Without their respect and without their feeling that they have done something, you're taking something away from them. You're not allowing them to have the kind of fulfillment which comes from actually having done something very difficult. I think that's too bad. There are a lot of these kinds of courses, especially in high schools.

Q In 1983, you won a whopping big NEA Fellowship grant, \$25,000. That must have been tremendously exciting.

A It was. It was fantastic.

Q It said you're worthy of such respect and it gives you a lot more freedom.

A Yes, it was wonderful.

Q Were there no strings attached?

A No. I bought a really big loom, which I recently sold. It was one of the first computerized looms. It cost about \$8,000, which was an enormous amount of money then. I decided that I would take a year to experiment and I wouldn't show at all for that year. I would work with the loom and try and develop some valid work. It turned out to be two years to get to something that I thought was reasonable. I didn't stop teaching, but, I really concentrated on my work. Then, I also bought a lot of things that I needed for my studio that I had been doing without. Part of the studio was rebuilt. Physical things. Supplies.

Q I know that you've probably talked about this computer stuff until you're sick of it, but it was all new to me when I read about it. I didn't even know such things existed. When did you get interested in computer design, or the computer. How would you describe it, computerized weaving?

A I became interested in the computer for its possibilities. This computerized loom allowed me more options than I could have physically with my treadle loom. When you have a hand loom you have only so many options that have to do with the size of the handloom and the pedals that are underneath. There can only be so many pedals because that's as many as will fit within the frame. So, by computerizing it, you have more options and you can play more.

Q A lot more pedals.

A Exactly. Virtual pedals. You could try a lot of things that you couldn't try otherwise. At that time when I received the NEA money, it all sort of came together at the same time, I had the money from the NEA and then I got this newly developed handloom computerized. I had to learn how to use it and to use a computer for a weave software program. At the same time, I bought the Atari computer.

Q That's a blast from the past!

A It was horrendously expensive. I think it was \$3,500 for all the parts, and I tried to learn the language. The Basic language, etc. All of my involvement with computers started. After those two years, the computer became very important to me because I was doing very complex structures and I needed it in order to remember the sequences I was using and just even to make the structures.

Q Would you still just draw a design the way you normally would do, the way you had done in the past.

A Sort of. It isn't so direct. I would still have an idea of the images that I would want to use. This was after I had really worked for a long time. I had to make a new vocabulary. I couldn't say anything without this new vocabulary. When you use a different vocabulary, you end up saying things differently, even though the source might be the same. Does that make any sense? It's getting too complicated to explain in that sense. I would start with something that I had used

for many years, the land and the landscape, and a lot of that had to do with being here and being touched by the land. Feeling very strongly about the sense of place, family, being, grounded in a sense. I was always working with that. But, it would get expressed in a different kind of a way because of these options that I now had. That's a round about way of saying it.

Q The computerized loom, the computerization of your work just enabled you....

A It's not a computerization of my work. It's a computerized loom. It just means that my tool was more complex than the tool that I had used before. That's a big difference because it's just a tool. There's nothing else that's different. It allowed me more options. I mean, if you think back to the printing press, that was a tool and it changed what the monks had done before. So, you had those kinds of changes. The Jacquard loom that I work on now when I go to other places, was a precursor to the computer. It's all sort of connected.

Q Do you use the computer now for almost all of your work?

A I'm working on a computerized handloom in Montreal, and then I've gone to Germany and Philadelphia. If I did not use the computer and computerization of it, then I would be having.... If you're weaving on the computerized loom that I had in my studio or this loom that I have right here, what I'm doing is working on a harness loom. I have harnesses which means I control groups of threads that I am raising and lowering. You can only be so specific when working with groups of threads. So, on the Jacquard loom that I've been working with for the last five or six years, each individual thread is controlled rather than groups of threads as in a harness loom. You can have something much, much more complex. Men's ties, tablecloths, all the very elaborate brocades can be done because each thread is being raised or lowered individually. So, you can make all sorts of decisions. In order to convey those decisions, traditionally you had to fill out graph paper to tell each thread, "Now you are up, now you are down." It would take hours and hours to mark each intersection. When you had the graph paper done, you didn't change anything much because it was so difficult to change anything. When you got all that done, they cut cards reading the lines of the graph. Those cards were threaded onto the loom. That was how it was done traditionally. It looked like a

player piano roll. All of this worked well, except it took a very, very long time, and you never made changes. By doing it through the computer, if you don't like what's happening on the loom you can go back to the computer and change something. You have so much more flexibility. It's really, really interesting. Now, I am working mainly with the computer. I do a lot of the designing on the computer. I add in all of the very technical information. After I have finished my design, I take the disks with all the information and go to Montreal and weave it. I make decisions there, and if I don't like it I change things.

Q Do you do a fair amount of traveling?

A I have done.

Q Do you give workshops?

A I've done a lot of workshops.

Q I know you've had shows and exhibitions.

A I've also done a lot of the lectures. I was on the board of trustees at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts for nine years. That was four times a year that we met.

Q Do you anticipate that falling off some?

A Oh, yes. I think it will fall off some. I'll do some of the things. I'm going to teach at Haystack in August. I've been invited to Korea to do a lecture and workshop next fall. I'm a member of the Textile Society of America which is really interesting. I've presented papers for that. It meets in Santa Fe this coming year in September.

Q Sounds like you've still got plenty on your plate. Do you enjoy that?

A I love that. I like the people.

Q I assume that it's not a small community anymore.

A But, it's smaller than some. It's smaller than accounting.

Q Small enough that you feel that you get to know a lot of people.

A Certainly, my generation of people. Less so, probably, as time will go on because that's just natural. I really love all of this. I find it just incredibly interesting. I was in a show in Kyoto, an international show in Japan with this friend of mine who was also in the show. We both got prizes. She got \$6,000, I got \$1,000, but that's all right. Anyhow, we decided we would attend the opening. Why not?

So, we went for ten days. Neither of us had our husbands or our children with us, and we did just textile things for ten days. It was incredible. It's really, really fun. We all do a lot of talking on the telephone, back and forth. E-mailing. I just went to Montreal, where we were working with some new techniques. This woman who's the director there has written a general book on textile techniques. She was interested in possibly doing another book on our experiments. So, I went up to try some samples just because I was interested. I know after doing it for three days, even though I was very interested in the premise, the concept that I'll never use it. But, it was fun.

Q Yes, but it was fun just to find out about it.

A Yes.

Q Do you still draw most of your inspirations from landscape?

A No. That has changed. I'm doing a whole series that I call "Drawing on Tradition." What I'm doing is using images from traditional textiles, maybe birds, plaids, checks, etc., and gesture drawing from traditional contemporary art. Trying to integrate the two. I've lived my whole life with a painter, and there's always been this separation between the textiles and the fine arts.

Q Are you satisfied with what you're doing?

A I'm very interested in what I'm doing. Really interested in what I'm doing. Sometimes, I think it works really well. Sometimes, it doesn't.

Q When you were doing landscape designs, I was thinking about this last night just in terms of if you're interested in landscape, how do you incorporate perspective into a weaving? Does that make sense?

A I know what you're saying, and you certainly can do it. You can do it. But, I was never interested in doing a realistic drawing that used a perspective. I wanted much more to deal with the essence of the place, give more of a feeling of what it might be like in that place. I didn't want to do any pictures or any illustrations.

Q So, it wasn't a literal sort of representation.

A No. But, many artists do create literal representations. I'm sure you've seen some of those tapestries.

- Q Is there any, do you have any input at all from Haskell? In terms of anybody there who might be interested in traditional?
- A They don't have anything to do with the weaving. There's something happening at the Arts Center, which I don't know about right now. But, I did try to contact Haskell a couple of times. At that time they weren't teaching the traditional weaving at all, or any weaving. When I was chair at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, I got scholarships for about four years in succession for Haskell students to go to Haystack. Which was nice, I was very pleased to do that. Then, that changed.
- Q Do you still see the textile side of art as a flourishing thing, like it was when it first started?
- A I think it's quite different now, and I think that actually the students now are interested in a different kind of way. And, mainly because of the use of the computer in both the textile art and industry. It's much more of a Bauhaus attitude now where both aspects co-exist; one off and then the industrial design. I like that. I don't see why it has to be one or the other. I don't think one is higher than the other. So, I'm really delighted that it's both. All of the students last year graduating from textile got jobs. Fantastic, and good ones, too. They were all really surprised that they knew so much. Ten years ago, nobody would have thought of trying to get a job in industry. It was below them, it had to be the fine arts.
- Q Why do you think that changed?
- A I think it changed in the '80s when people decided that jobs weren't so bad, when things got so expensive. Also, their student loans. It just wasn't like it used to be in the '60s and '70s. Somebody had to pay all of that off.
- Q So, it was mainly driven by necessity and practicality.
- A I think that they have found that some of the things that they might do for or within industry really can be very interesting.
- Q Like what, for example?
- A Well, there was just an exhibit in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, structural textiles by the Japanese designers. A whole show with just textiles.

Fantastic things can be done now with all of the new technologies. And, it's really interesting. But, you can't do all of them in your own little individual studio. It often needs to be a collaboration.

Q In one of the articles that I read, it said that at some point neither of your children was interested in art. Is that still the case?

A No. Eric, actually, is doing computer graphics in San Francisco. He's freelancing doing animation, video type editing. They didn't used to care about art.

Q They weren't that interested when they were growing up?

A No. Somebody called and said, "Well, do you want to show the Brownies your loom and demonstrate to the Brownies." This is when Marcie was really small. She wondered why would anybody be interested. Because it was so much a part of their life, it didn't seem really special.

Q You have some pieces at Spencer, don't you?

A I have one piece. I think it's up. It was up in June.

Q In 1998 you got the Chancellor's Club career teaching award.

A That was nice.

Q That was, I would think, winding down your teaching career.

A It was lovely. Then, I had an exhibit at the Sherry Leedy Gallery in Kansas City. A big show. Everybody came, and all of the students came. So, it was really fun. Mainly, it was lovely that Mary Anne Jordan, whom I taught with for the last 10 or 11 years, did all the work to put me forward for that, which it turns out to be an enormous amount of work. It was really nice that she did all of that.

Q I assume that as an artist you will just keep working until you can't work anymore. And, that's one of the nice things about having such an all consuming sort of passion, I guess. You're not bored. You still find your work exciting, or your chance to do work exciting. You still feel like you're learning new things, especially with all of the computerized stuff.

A I just went to Montreal and learned a lot of new things. I really enjoy it. I can't think of any problems. We're probably going to move to upstate New York. We have a house there in summers and have gone up there for many, many years

because we originally visited Petey Cerf. Did you know her. We went up there and stayed with her for years and years and years, like 30, I think.

Q Wow.

A Our kids sort of grew up going up there for a month in the summer. Then, about ten years ago, we thought we'd like to stay longer. You can't stay longer as a guest forever. So, we bought a house up there. Now, we go up for three months in the summer, sort of like what you're doing, and a month in the winter. I think we're going to move there.

Q Your husband is retired, too?

A Yes, he retired in 1991 or so.

Q Oh, so he's been retired longer. Is he still painting?

A Some, but not as much.

Q Do you think we've covered most of the things that....

A Yes, I think that we have.

Transcriber:
There is a little bit at the end of this tape where the interviewee asked that the conversation not be recorded. I mentioned that she was the active artist in the family now (her husband is a painter), but she does not want that included.
Thanks