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Oral history interview with Herta Loeser, 1989 June 6-15

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Herta Loeser on June 6, 1989. The interview took place in Cambridge, MA, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

RICHARD BROWN: I thought we'd just start out maybe you could talk a bit about childhood, what family you were from, about what your interests were and then we'll steer it eventually towards your great accomplishment in the crafts here in Boston.

HERTA LOESER: Alright. I was born in Berlin and had to leave, my family had to leave when Hitler came to power. My father was both a photographer, it was a hobby for him - photography - but he also worked in AGFA photo firm. He had very good taste and we had in Berlin in one of the big department stores a department for ethnic art and folk art. He would go there and bring presents to us. So he had a very good eye and I think probably whatever I have of that I have inherited from him.

RICHARD BROWN: Were there brothers and sisters?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I have one brother. I finished high school but not as far as one can go because I had to leave and I was the first to go to England. It was easier for children to get out than for grownups and I was at a school for refugee school in Surrey. And since we didn't have any money to pay for my further schooling, I had to work and I worked as a secretary for the school, and I was all of sixteen, which was quite hard because I was with my peers and yet I had to keep all the secrets. It was very confidential. But I learned a lot and looking back on it I am amazed what one can do and sometimes when we admire young people you have to remember what we ourselves did. My parents did come out a year later. I came in 1937, they came in 1938. Had a very tough time in England as most people who came out without any money did. My father really never did get back into his profession. My mother worked - she was really trained as an economist and never really could do the work that she was equipped to do. She did anything menial that she could do just to keep us going. My brother who came to the same school was put in the farm department which was quite unsuitable. He had a really rough time in England, he was a real victim of Nazi persecution. He's still in England and quite happy there. I always thought I would live in Cambridge, England and believe it or not I ended up in Cambridge, Massachusetts and perhaps that's just as well. I sent to school ---

RICHARD BROWN: Who sponsored that school?

HERTA LOESER: The school was Quaker sponsored. Yes, a very interesting school. They were almost all refugee children with a few English children sprinkled in between and just now I had a visit of a Swiss student. We are still all in touch and, in fact, my husband and I who met there did a small book on what happened to these students who went to the school and we called it "Since Then..." and it's been very interesting because the majority of the people who replied have ended up in some kind of helping services. Very interesting. Or artists. And I stayed at that school for four years. I met my husband there. It was a coeducational school which was unusual and, of course, we were sixteen and seventeen and no way would we get married at the time and he came to the United States long before me in 1940. But we kept in touch and we fully intended to get married and it's too long a story. We did. He came back with the American Army to England and then stationed in Berlin and I got into the American Army as an interpreter and translator and was stationed in Munich. We did get married in England before that in the middle of the War, in December, 1944 between the air drop into Arnheim, Holland and the Battle of the Bulge. So it's quite amazing when you look back at it, the things that you have lived through and you did it. You just did it because you had to. So you are somewhat disciplined by that kind of thing.

RICHARD BROWN: Did you stay in England until after the War?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I stayed until 194...as soon as the War was over I applied to go to Germany with the American Army. A lot of refugees did that. And it was an interesting time. We were in Munich, we were there together. I think we were the first married couple in the ETO. We weren't supposed to be in one place. And we had an interesting time. For the first time a somewhat carefree time because England during the War was rough. At the same time, you were in the middle of devastated Germany. We felt strong feelings about it serves them right and my husband then became in charge of de-nazification of Bavaria and I think he completely had a big investigation office and cleared out the entire university of Munich except for three professors; one music, one art and I forget the other. They were all tainted. Of course you know what history did later. Most of them slowly

but surely trickled back.

RICHARD BROWN: Had he had his law training by this time? No?

HERTA LOESER: No. He was also very young. He had been in the 82nd Airborne Division. And then he decided, somebody who knew him very well - in fact his father's lawyer - worked with him and he said he absolutely should go to law school. He hadn't really thought of it and also the kind of work he did. So to make matters very brief, he did apply to law school and he didn't even have a full undergraduate degree and he got accepted both to Harvard and Columbia, which was rather unusual. I think he's only one of three people accepted into Harvard Law School without an undergraduate degree. And he did very well at Law School and it's been absolutely the right profession. He's really enjoyed his professional life.

RICHARD BROWN: Did you stay in Germany very long? In 1946 or so?

HERTA LOESER: We stayed one extra year to the Army to finish the work with de-nazification and then we came right here to Cambridge really without a penny to our name. I think we had $1000. So we lived in Harvard housing and we went from, you know the Occupation Army life in Europe was fairly comfortable, to absolutely the minimum. He went to school on the G.I. Bill. At the end of the month we sometimes didn't have quite enough money to buy food but we lived in student housing near the Divinity School and since everybody was in the same boat, it was very encouraging and it didn't seem hard at all. And I had my first child then and since we had no money I couldn't even hire baby sitters. I think I would do that differently today. I would have stolen the money or borrowed it.

RICHARD BROWN: What was you reaction to America?

HERTA LOESER: Well I came once before. I came once to be in New York, once in the summer. I hadn't really wanted to come to America. I was also very worried that Hans had been corrupted by America.

RICHARD BROWN: In what way?

HERTA LOESER: Well, you know, consumerism, materialism, spoiled.

RICHARD BROWN: At that time you thought you might want to stay in England or even Germany?

HERTA LOESER: No, no. Never Germany. England, yes. I felt very much at home in England. But I think it was a good thing we came and then he did awfully well in law school and made the Law Review which puts you in a completely different category and you can take your pick where you want to practice and we looked all over the country between the second and third year and really decided between San Francisco and Boston. My family was still in England and that really was the major moving point.

RICHARD BROWN: You'd be closer to them?

HERTA LOESER: Yes. Complicated enough. And the societies are really equally close between San Francisco and Boston. You know it's a pretty , too. So we settled down and lived for one year in Newton, which I hated - I just hated it and I spent my whole first year sort of looking for a place back in Cambridge and found a little house across the street. It was quite an adventure. Bought it sight unseen with permission of my lawyer husband who thought I was crazy but I could go ahead and do it. And we moved in there on Washington Avenue and really liked it a lot and stayed there for two children and when Tom was born, the third, it became too small and the house we live in now, in which you are interviewing me, is the old Cleveland Amory house. And at that time his brother, Robert Amory, was a professor at the Law School and living here was going to Washington to the CIA and he had been a professor of Hans's and when he heard that we might be interested, he said well you can have the house and they very gentlemanly-like made an agreement between them and that was 32 years ago, and we've been here ever since. Later you can remind me...

RICHARD BROWN: Those were times you were having children - you were very busy - did you have any outside activities you were beginning to develop?

HERTA LOESER: I did some part time work when we absolutely needed to have some money. I worked for a professor at M.I.T., I did some work at home doing a monogram for him. And then I couldn't do anything for awhile when I had the first child. When we moved there I guess...

RICHARD BROWN: Across the street?

HERTA LOESER: Washington Avenue - I took a course in enamelling at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education. Got very intrigued with it and really started to produce. And I made mostly jewelry because I had a very small kiln. It fact my kiln was a hot plate and silver paper but...

RICHARD BROWN: Did you always draw and things like that?

HERTA LOESER: No.

RICHARD BROWN: You mentioned earlier doing a monogram for someone.

HERTA LOESER: No, no. That was...a monogram is not what you think. A written document. Okay? I did some secretarial work. So I liked that a lot and I started to make enough jewelry to sell it. So I sold to some shops and whenever we travelled anywhere I would take my box along and I usually managed to sell it. And I guess, even at that time, it was apparent that I had an artistic streak as well as a certain reliability. When I promised people that I would deliver, I did. People weren't just used to that. So that was quite successful. And at one point my first contact with the Society of Arts and Crafts was that I sold some enamelling on silver to them and also, I don't know if you remember there was the Arts Festival?

RICHARD BROWN: The Boston Arts Festival?

HERTA LOESER: Yes. Trapetti, who is a really good enameller demonstrated in the Common. That was a lot of fun, I really enjoyed that. But he is in a different league. I stopped enamelling when I noticed that my demand for certain colors where "make red not blue" and I found that I was producing and I felt I was prostituting myself. I stopped completely.

RICHARD BROWN: It had been sort of fun.

HERTA LOESER: Fun and it brought it some money. No question about it.

RICHARD BROWN: Would that have been in the late '50s or so?

HERTA LOESER: It was before Tom was born because it was in the old house.

RICHARD BROWN: Do you recall the Boston Arts Festival at that time?

HERTA LOESER: Yes I do.

RICHARD BROWN: What did you think of it?

HERTA LOESER: I was very excited by it. We went religiously. We looked at all the paintings. I still remember some of the painters. Meigs, I remember. Ruth Cobb. Do you remember her?

RICHARD BROWN: Yes.

HERTA LOESER: And various others. I can't now immediately think of the names, but we found that very exciting. We looked both at the art, but we also participate in all the free performances and I think looking back on that whoever wants to do something about public art should be encouraged. You know at that time we couldn't pay to go anywhere. It was all available for free.

RICHARD BROWN: There's been nothing like it since then, really has there.

HERTA LOESER: Well, there has been Summerthing, but it's not like that. But I think it was also a good idea, Summerthing

RICHARD BROWN: Late '60s early '70s.

HERTA LOESER: But we also participated in that. I remember we were taken behind the scenes. One day we were taken around and shown how, in a little car, how these productions were put on and how it was all pulled together and I was fascinated by that. And after that, after Summerthing collapsed, Eli Goulston came along and did Winterfest.

RICHARD BROWN: Yes.

HERTA LOESER: And that was a small takeoff on Summerthing. We were highly involved in that.

RICHARD BROWN: You were.

HERTA LOESER: Highly involved, yes we were.

RICHARD BROWN: Again, that was a community-based - community-directed...

HERTA LOESER: But directed by the genius of Eli Goulston.

RICHARD BROWN: Of Boston Gas Company.

HERTA LOESER: Yes. And Tom, who was then 10 or 11, was an official photographer. He got a badge and in fact I gave him just now in his album some of the pictures he took. You'd be amazed - Mayor Collins - Whitehead or Whitehill?

RICHARD BROWN: Whitehill.

HERTA LOESER: Whitehill. All those people. Perry Rathbone. And it was very nice. I spent the whole week there. We did nothing else, he and I. I guess he got early exposure to...

RICHARD BROWN: What, more or less, were you doing? Were you ... help to organize...

HERTA LOESER: No I was really still bringing up children and I did some special things that I enjoyed like working at the International Student Center to help provide housing but by and large I was very busy just taking care of three children. I didn't really go back to work until Tom was ten, that's my youngest, or eleven and not until we had taken our first trip back to Europe. And then I went back to work.

RICHARD BROWN: Did you go back to Europe to see family?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, my brother.

RICHARD BROWN: No other reason, just to...?

HERTA LOESER: No. And I wanted to show the children.

RICHARD BROWN: Oh, the children went with you.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, yes, yes. In fact, Tom and I spent the most wonderful time. We had a place all to ourselves in Sweden I think, and we didn't miss anything. There is nothing like going with an enthusiastic eleven-year-old. I remember he took in everything from the Museum of Modern Art to the Opera.

RICHARD BROWN: Was this partly done to show him the heritage you had?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, of course.

RICHARD BROWN: And how do they view that now?

HERTA LOESER: Well...

RICHARD BROWN: Do they ever talk about it?

HERTA LOESER: ...it's hard to tell. They all have spent time in Europe. Helen spent time - they all have spent time in one way or another. Partly placed with friends, partly Germany, partly France, Belgium. Tom has spent time in Salzburg. Most of the other kids speak both German and French and Tom isn't awfully good at that. He doesn't really speak any German or French to speak of but he has learned some Spanish. He is not a language child. My oldest daughter is. But how the heritage is going to be carried on remains to be seen because none of them, well Tom has just married and a very different culture - Texas - so I don't know. They can't escape it completely. There's no question about it. And Harris married a Californian and Helen married a Canadian. Now they are going, for instance, this year, in July, on a one-year sabbatical taking their children. But we have tried hard to keep up the tradition but if you look behind you there is a whole German library of German books which I think none of the children will really probably ever use.

RICHARD BROWN: Have you kept up contacts? I mean of some roots in Germany. I mean it's a place you wouldn't live...

HERTA LOESER: I wouldn't live there. We have kept up some contacts, particularly kept up contacts with a German woman who was with our refugee school who was not Jewish but who came out because she felt she couldn't be in Germany and she wanted to do something to make up and she was the matron of our school. She's an extraordinary woman. She's 89 now. We are very good friends and maybe five years ago we went and spent a whole week taking her oral history.

RICHARD BROWN: I remember.

HERTA LOESER: Right. I mean she was a real inspiration. She is to this day. She's working with Turkish children.

RICHARD BROWN: Well you began, as Tom got older, you did go to work.

HERTA LOESER: Well I tried to decide what I would be good at. Actually at first I decided - since I liked beautiful things, I asked Marika, who was at that time a neighbor of ours and one of the leading antique dealers in Boston...

RICHARD BROWN: Oh, Marika _____?

HERTA LOESER: Yes -- if I could work for her and she said sure. I worked for her for about 6 to 9 months and particularly I enjoyed working with the jewelry but I decided I couldn't do anything with antiques and I tell you why. I was very upset at the way when new things came in they would always sell right away again. And they would go usually to another dealer and the dealer would sell to another dealer and I felt that they became objects to make money with rather than objects to live with and be enjoyed. And I thought that I couldn't do that and also I would have too many things that I didn't really like if you wanted to do it as a business.

RICHARD BROWN: Simply because they moved -- you would carry them -- related to your customer's of enamel --

HERTA LOESER: It is the same. You are very perceptive. It's the same. So, I began to think -- no, I know what I did. I went to see a career counsellor, a very good one. I wrote to Washington to find out -- no, I asked to get a recommendation from somebody I knew and he wrote back and said there was one guy in Boston. To make a long story short I went to see a very interesting person. He was at that time at Boston College and he interviewed me and he was very, I guess, perceptive and I was debating whether to go back to school because I never really finished school. I never went to college and I always felt very badly about that because I love going to school. I loved being a student. I was always a good student. But he very searchingly and finally convinced me that whatever I wanted to do I had a lot of abilities I could do and why would I want to go to school at that time. And so I decided to use a faculty I have, I am a very good catalyst. I am an enabler of people and I could have done any amount of volunteer jobs. By that time our financial situation had certainly improved and I did not need to earn money and I am not a person who depends at all to define my own ego strength on the basis of what I can earn. That is completely meaningless to me and most people don't understand that. So I thought I would like to professionalize that. I was the sort of person people called up when they wanted a house or where to get their curtains or where to get a nanny for the summer or whatever. And whatever I recommended it almost, like 85% of the time it worked. So I thought that was a special gift that should be used and I investigated what existed in Boston. I thought if I do one volunteer job I could make an impact but if I could place people in jobs that needed to be done I could make a much bigger impact. And so I went around to see what existed in that way and I came across a small place, one man called John Putnam, and he ran the Civic Center Clearinghouse and he placed people in volunteer work, mostly older people. Well, I made inquiries about him, I got some mixed reviews and I finally decided to go and work with him. That was extremely difficult because although he had wonderful ideas, he was not at all a good administrator. He had preconceived ideas about what people could do when they came to apply for a job. So it eventually I was able to convince him to move out and start a small environmental group and I took over the Civic Center Clearinghouse and I ran that for about twelve or fifteen years and I enjoyed that enormously. It was right up my alley. I was in a very nice building on Beacon Street overlooking the old burial ground. So my place of work was in a very different environment from Newbury Street where I ran the Society. Very different.

RICHARD BROWN: You expanded the Clearinghouse?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I expanded that greatly. I turned it upside down and used it both for all ages, starting from sixteen - a lot of school children - and eventually I ran an internship program for seniors in high school. I got myself some funding, several times from the Trust, and it was all done on a shoestring. When I came to the Society of Arts and Crafts I was very used to running an organization on a shoestring and have it in the black. And then I used that internship program for seniors in high school as a model for an internship program for women who wanted to go back to work who had been at home and had no working experience, no references. And although everybody thought I was crazy, I did put that into effect and that helped a lot of women. It went for maybe six or eight years. Now it wouldn't be so necessary because at that time jobs were much harder to come by.

RICHARD BROWN: How did you develop, in lieu of a professional track record for these women, how did you develop a profile of them so that someone would employ them?

HERTA LOESER: Well, you find out what they were interested in. Some knew, some didn't, and then you found an internship for them in the field, whether it was in public relations or in the health field or in historic preservation. Whatever. Very often, and we gave supporting courses, and they were very well supervised in their internships. It was a small program but I very much believe in small but good. I don't believe that bigger is always better at all. So, I had a very small but very able staff to do that and very often the agencies in which we placed them for internships were so delighted with these people after they were trained that they hired them. You know there are some people you would recognize who are now in this (I wish I could remember names; one of them is

running the van - the Caravan - transportation so that people don't use cars); another one is doing public art and they just stayed in that and became very successful. I felt that it is very hard to measure your success in life but if you look back to have been able to make it possible for so many people to find a niche, I suppose is very gratifying.

RICHARD BROWN: And the idea of service is uppermost came from the school that you went to?

HERTA LOESER: Well I think not necessarily from the school but from our early, early life experiences.

RICHARD BROWN: Where you depended so much --

HERTA LOESER: You had to give back.

RICHARD BROWN: You developed courses for some of these people?

HERTA LOESER: We gave supporting courses.

RICHARD BROWN: Did you get volunteer teachers, people who could

HERTA LOESER: Well I had some volunteers but also small paid staff. It worked very, very well. It was usually a six months affair and every six months we took in a new group, about 10 to 15 people every time.

RICHARD BROWN: Now you stayed with them into the late

HERTA LOESER: I stayed with them -- I turned that place eventually from an all volunteer placement to placement in both volunteer and paid work because I realized quite quickly that when somebody came to see you, and I loved to interview someone to find out what they really wanted, that if they told me they wanted a volunteer job sometimes it wasn't really that and they wanted a paid job or the other way around. So I joined a network of agencies that placed people in paid work and we met quite regularly. We even published a joint job list for several years. It was quite an accomplishment. Things like that which you bring to life and you leave and the times change, they just stop until they get reinvented someday. But it was interesting, very interesting.

I got somewhat disabused of the volunteer thing first when Nixon came in and thought he could substitute volunteering for things that the government should be underwriting. And I think we still have the same tendencies today. So that's a very doubtful thing.

RICHARD BROWN: What was your objection then?

HERTA LOESER: I think that volunteers can do all kinds of things but they certainly must not take away from the obligation the government has, whether it's the homeless or environmental or whatever, it's very easy to say let volunteers do it. And then I got into a bit of a philosophical discussion when the women's movement became very strong. I was interested in it very early and I felt it was too narrow-minded for the women's movement to say that women could not volunteer. That would hurt them professionally. I thought that was too narrow a view and I got myself into - I applied to and got into the Radcliffe Institute, which was supporting women who had a special project and no place to work and needed the support. Sometimes it was financial and sometimes it was an office, the company, inspiration, library and all kinds of privileges at Harvard and there again I was a maverick because all the people who got in there were either accomplished academicians or some of them were artists. They always took a few artists. So I was rather a maverick but I had the idea of writing a book on this subject of women and work. I was right in the middle of it. And the subject of volunteering. And I remember that I took a course at the Cambridge Center and Gino Bellotti who was the Associate Editor of Dedalius taught the course. And I told him what I wanted to do and he looked at it and he said I absolutely had a book, I knew what I was talking about and he helped me pace it. He said you have a year to do it and you have to do such and such and it did get born and Beacon Press published it.

RICHARD BROWN: Then there was a very concrete outgrowth of your year at the Radcliffe Institute?

HERTA LOESER: A very concrete outgrowth of my work at the Civic Center.

RICHARD BROWN: Did you have a year off then when you were doing that?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I took a year off and I had, by that time, a most wonderful co-director, Marion Chase, and we are still the best of friends today. And she said you go and do your book and I'll run the Civic Center for a year. We ran that together in a very interesting way. She worked two days and I worked three days. We had one desk and it was true job sharing and we made it work. But it does depend on your personality.

RICHARD BROWN: And yours worked very well.

HERTA LOESER: Very well. We had slightly different interests and she, for a long time they staffed the tourist information booth at the State House with volunteers, and she loved it. She very much enjoyed doing that. I wasn't as interested in doing that, but we worked very well. She's a very thoughtful woman who had a lot of experience herself and worked for the New England Board of Higher Education. Very organized and very smart woman. She has moved to Virginia. So two of my older friends, mentors if you would like to call them, one is in Germany.

RICHARD BROWN: What was her name, by the way, you didn't give it to me.

HERTA LOESER: Nore Astfalck and two of her brothers are architects. She is quite artistic. Then Marion Chase who is also still working to this day at age

RICHARD BROWN: So Women, Work and Volunteering came out in '74.

HERTA LOESER: Yes. I was at the Radcliffe Institute in 1972 to 1974. It came out in hardback first and then they thought could I do a, nowadays you sometimes come out in paperback right away but at that time you still came out in hardback.

RICHARD BROWN: So you were a published author, something quite substantial.

HERTA LOESER: I guess --

RICHARD BROWN: This gave you a real . You must have been quite proud.

HERTA LOESER: Right. I was pleased. My dear husband was saying, he's an excellent editor, and he tried to help me edit but it was too close to home. So he didn't think it all hung together and wouldn't make a book. And he said look you get somebody else because I am not objective enough. And it worked very well. But you know, nothing ever happens very easily, at least not in my life. When this book was finally published, Beacon Press was in a big mess and the president left and my editor left and so they were merging with Harper, Rowe at the time. I loved working with their art editor and the illustrations in the book are done by a very good friend of ours who went to the same school in England.

RICHARD BROWN: That was Inge Pavlowsky?

HERTA LOESER: Inge Pavlowsky and we are still the best of friends. She just was here. We see her two or three times a year. She lives in Paris. She came here to do the drawings. But anyway, when it was time to market the book Beacon Press fell flat on its nose and I really did a big push so the hardback edition sold out and then I had to convince them that we needed to go into paperback.

RICHARD BROWN: You did a good deal of the marketing yourself.

HERTA LOESER: A good deal of it. Yes. All over the country. It went to libraries, it went to organizations. It was a very topical book at the time. One of the places - maybe this is a very good transition - that I used to send volunteers to, you asked, was the Society of Arts and Crafts. And in fact I sent, later I took an intern out of my program there and hired her.

RICHARD BROWN: Had you known the Society before -- you must have, when you were doing enamels.

HERTA LOESER: I did then and I always went in when I was on Newbury Street. I always dropped in. But I have to admit to you that I wasn't so very pleased at what I saw, the crafts that I saw. I felt that it had come down in the world. It had of course been closed. When I did the enamelling and sold them some of the silver enamelling, they were on Newbury Street opposite what was a Science Museum, Bonwit Teller and now Louis. In a very beautiful store which had some steps going up and I remember, I think I remember, Mr. Emory although I never really

RICHARD BROWN: Humphrey Emory? In charge for many years.

HERTA LOESER: Humphrey Emory. And I remember a very nice lady, two older ladies there but I don't remember their names. Then they were closed completely for awhile because things didn't go very well.

RICHARD BROWN: I think they were out of money then.

HERTA LOESER: Completely out of money, which had to do with the fact that they opened a branch in New York which didn't work out but put them into considerable debt. At that time I think they owned that house didn't they? They owned that building?

RICHARD BROWN: Somewhat earlier they had, during the '50s, then they sold it.

HERTA LOESER: Sold the building which is what we are still suffering from today because if that building hadn't been sold, the major, major trial and tribulation of how to pay rent would be solved. In fact we could probably earn considerable income because all that real estate has become so valuable. So I've always been very sad about that. That that was done. Well, then they moved to where we are now, 175 Newbury Street, and that all happened thanks to Mardi Perry, my immediate predecessor as president and Sy Lipsit. And Sy Lipsit was the Director.

RICHARD BROWN: He himself had been a potter, I think.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I think he was a potter but I remember him mostly in the store and I always like talking to him. He was there for many years but I think he finally burned out, never having any money, never being paid what he should be paid and eventually I think one of the reasons it was really decided maybe he should go is he did not work very well with volunteers and that's where my contact came. Because I would send him wonderful volunteers and somehow they didn't stick which was not my experience in other places. So, it usually is a personality question and really the Society at that time could have done with an influx of good volunteers. It always can even to this day.

RICHARD BROWN: Was it a personality ?

HERTA LOESER: It seems to be

RICHARD BROWN: problem at that time?

HERTA LOESER: It seems to be. That's what I have been told. I don't know that first hand but that's what I've been told.

RICHARD BROWN: The Society though, at that time, until the late '70s had a pretty low profile.

HERTA LOESER: Very low, I would say, very low. But I think when they moved to 175 Newbury Street they had two auctions - I found all that material - that enabled them to raise enough money to move and I think they were very lucky to have found the landlord which is Richard Nemrow who is

RICHARD BROWN: What's his name?

HERTA LOESER: Richard Nemrow. He's the landlord of 175 Newbury Street. And in all the time I worked there, I had the most wonderful, cordial relationship you can have with a landlord. That's not the usual. I tried very hard and he tried very hard and he is interested in crafts and was supportive and somewhat subsidized us by giving us a below the market rent.

RICHARD BROWN: About 1979 Cyrus Lipset resigned - or left - went to the Crafts Center in Worcester as I recall and you mentioned that that year a young man named Glenn Sheeley came along whose interest was - was he a collector

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I think they supported him in the shop because - I think they told me that he admired (Jerry) Williams' pottery and they watched him a bit and then Mardi Perry must have fingered him for president and they asked him and he said he would do it. He's a trained lawyer and at that time he had left his law firm and he was a bit at loose ends and he was able to give that about a year of his time and I think the financial records must have been in pretty big turmoil and I do think that he and a friend who was an accountant did straighten out a lot of that. I found quite a lot of correspondence. Sy Lipset was paid off, all the debts were paid off and from what I gathered several of the board members made substantial loans which eventually, while I was there, they were all forgiven. We managed to convince them all to forgive us the loans. And, I got asked to be on the board, it must have been because of my volunteer referrals, and...

RICHARD BROWN: You were known to them through that?

HERTA LOESER: Must be, must be.

RICHARD BROWN: Mardi Perry?

HERTA LOESER: Not even that much to Mardi Perry at that time. But I think they knew me from coming in to the shop and Sy Lipset knew me because I dealt with him when I sent volunteers and Glenn. Glenn Sheeley, I think he was very happy to get volunteers sent. I remember he even made a contribution to the Civic Center where I also had to go begging for money all the time. He said why did you never ask me to make a contribution. And I said "Well, nobody has every asked me that to me." His wife very much wanted it. Anne Richey wanted him to work for the Society. And then he became president after Mardi Perry and somehow Glenn and I ended up as co-presidents.

RICHARD BROWN: You were on the board by now.

HERTA LOESER: Yes. And then we were co-presidents for awhile and not for very, very long and he decided he needed to go back to professional work and I think his wife decided that too. So there I was all of a sudden, president. I was warned, the accountant I had at my old agency looked at the financial statements of the Society and said you are absolutely crazy. There is no way this can be pulled through.

RICHARD BROWN: Even though Glenn had begun to straighten things out.

HERTA LOESER: Well they had just straightened out the paper. The income was unbelievably low, the sales were - amounted to very little. So after a while, actually Glenn and I were still co-presidents, and we had a search committee, Mardi, Glenn and I and somebody else, to hire a new Director. And we hired Ann Beane who was a young potter. A lovely person. I had misgivings. I didn't think, given that financial situation and that business problem, that a young potter could possibly handle it. And it turned out she couldn't. There was no way she could juggle twenty-one balls, if not twenty-four at one time.

RICHARD BROWN: You said that the treasurer felt the financial situation was very dire.

HERTA LOESER: He called Glenn and me in one day for lunch and he said, he was a very pessimistic man, who always at every meeting presented just the worst possible picture, and he said to Glenn and me there was no way we could go on; we would have to dissolve the Society, we would have to bankrupt it. And I was so upset with that. It seemed to me that something that had started in 1897, so many people had worked at it, that at a time when crafts were coming into there own again it seemed very irresponsible. And I said "We can't do that, we shouldn't do that." And he said that the director had to go, we couldn't pay the director. And I said that I did agree with that and I didn't think she was the right person in the first place, we didn't seem to agree and there was no other choice. There were two people we would like to have had but they both got other jobs at the time. And I said alright I will take a sabbatical from my organization and I will give this six months of my time, hands-on. And they said fine no risk, I didn't have to be paid except a dollar a year. And I honestly think that if I had known more or sometimes if you know a lot you couldn't possibly do these things. My inner sense was so great that I stepped in there very optimistically and I think my optimism really carried it. I knew that one had to cut down on all expenses, spend as little as possible and take in as much as possible and one way to do it was to greatly increase sales. And of course I had a lot of experience in volunteers and so I could rely on finding very good volunteers, I knew how to go about that, it was a great help at that time. And the other most important problem I recall was to immediately improve the quality of the crafts that were then being shown. Because I found very quickly that the good people, the good crafts people, wouldn't come near the place. We had much too much inferior work and they didn't want to be seen in the company of that inferior work. That was something that was very hard to face because there was a lot of rejection and I had to decide then and there, it had nothing to do with me and I did take a lot of hostility, I had to sell up and down. I had to sell the good crafts people on the idea that indeed they should give us their work and it had to be on consignment, we didn't have a penny to buy, and then I had to sell the work that we liked that was good to the public. And I guess the secret is that I am probably a good salesperson and I succeeded in both of these directions.

RICHARD BROWN: It was a formidable task. The Society as you found it had a reputation for having mostly knickknacks, certainly not very serious objects.

HERTA LOESER: It was very spotty. There was some good work. But it was very spotty and slowly but surely the good people had fallen away. And you know, at that time, the Program in Artisanry at the Boston University had started. That was very interesting to me and very helpful. I made very good contacts there and I got to know the Director and I got to know all the heads of the departments and I would spend quite a lot of time seeing what came out of there and support what looked promising. I felt all along that it was one task of the Society to encourage young and promising artists, the emerging artists because once you were really famous you didn't need the Society that much. And since the Society was non-profit and it's mission is educational I felt that that was a very important part. As part of that I also took a look at, I broke down what was most popular in sales. And of course the history of the Society points to silver and silversmithing and metalsmithing and, in fact, when I took over there was an exhibition planned in silver and quite expensive metal and I was very worried because one of the things I found out very quickly was that Newbury Street was very unsafe. There were holdups, there was stealing and my staff was not that well trained. They didn't really believe that that could happen or would happen and I couldn't get everybody to use their eyes in back, in front, on the side. And I felt it was not the time to give a major metal exhibit in silver and invite a stickup because we had several very hairy experiences and I felt that it wasn't worth endangering the lives of the young staff. So I cancelled. It was the only exhibition I every cancelled. So I thought, if we go away from silver, and expensive silver, what could be the focus? Because it had been very much the focus of the Society in its early days. Our family had always been very interested in furniture and design and in the early days when we furnished our house we got some of our pieces from Design Research and we were interested in Scandinavian furniture and Design Research was gone and there was really not any major place in Boston where you could find good modern furniture let alone lamps, so I saw that there

was a good furniture department at the Program in Artisanry and I thought it would be wise to put some emphasis on furniture. It so happened, and it was a sheer coincidence, that my own son Tom started at the Program in Artisanry with Jere Osgood just at the same time. It made it actually a bit more complicated because we tried to stay away from each other. In no way did we want to have it appear that he was being patronized. It was somewhat embarrassing. All his friends were coming to see if they could exhibit at the Society. But we worked it out. It did not become a problem and now that I am gone from the Society, Tom, the next furniture show we are going to have in December of '89 which is in conjunction with the Museum of Fine Arts furniture show, will be curated by Tom Loeser and Roseanne Sommerson, something he wouldn't have done whilst I was there. From the first furniture show, I think I have all the invitations upstairs, I can go and look, I really ran a furniture show every year of some kind.

RICHARD BROWN: You said you found that they were popular and profitable.

HERTA LOESER: Well they were certainly popular. Profitable is something else again because in the early stages people didn't know what to make of handmade contemporary furniture. So we did a big educational job and as in cases of other artists, when you have a good idea like that, other galleries have picked it up. Now there are several galleries that show contemporary furniture.

RICHARD BROWN: What did you mean by doing an educational job. How did you convince people to buy.

HERTA LOESER: By showing and explaining. I also started a furniture slide file of about fifty furniture artists from all over the country which didn't exist except at the Museum of Contemporary Craft in New York. I don't think it was that much of an emphasis on furniture. And you just slowly had to get people used to seeing that one could even consider handmade furniture because if the prices seem to be high, of course as they should be, if you have to work on one piece of furniture and have to make a living doing maybe twelve pieces of furniture a year, it took, and still does, take some convincing, that if you go to Peabody and buy your office furniture there production-made, sometimes it isn't that much cheaper. But most people don't really believe that and I don't think we have ever had anybody who could completely concentrate on that. I would have like to have a person who would have had time to do nothing but that because I think a lot of executives instead of buying furniture in these office furniture places could afford to buy handmade desks, handmade credenzas, handmade bookshelves and have something that not everybody else has. But that takes working at and in another life I think I might have been able to do that but I don't have another life. And I think there is still a big market for that. I also think that for the furniture its too scattered. For instance, Hans', my husband's, office has all handmade furniture. He has a desk by Jere Osgood and slowly but surely he bought some pieces and had something made, but unless you know where to go, you have to spend too much time. If you were to say you wanted to furnish a dining room and a living room, you would have to pick up a piece in one gallery and another piece someplace else. I think the time has come, I don't know that the Society can do it, it would be my vision for it, but somebody else has now taken over, to have a big enough space so you could show furniture that hangs together. So you don't have to pick up a piece here and a piece there. And it could, I have suggested it to some furniture makers if they would not like to start such a place, but most of them don't have the business experience or they are even afraid of trying it.

RICHARD BROWN: But you see it for the Society, for example, and even for the furniture makers, there is a huge market that's not really been tapped.

HERTA LOESER: I do. It's not huge, but it is there. Yes, it's there. Especially if the economy doesn't collapse completely.

RICHARD BROWN: There would be thousands, I would think, of potential customers, at least when you are speaking nationally. In scores.

So, the Society is non-profit?

HERTA LOESER: Yes.

RICHARD BROWN: And has a membership? How - you've mentioned that in, I think, 1979 or 1980 there were almost three hundred members but what do they do. Do they pay a nominal dues, do you tap them as you tried--

HERTA LOESER: Actually three hundred, it was even less than that and that's a very low number. It was much less, I think it was 180 when I took over. They do pay a membership and it's $30 for a single membership, $50 for a family and anything above that. I did a lot of nurturing of that and we have about 500 or 600 members now. And yes indeed special events are arranged for them, they get mailings for every exhibition that we have they get an invitation, and they get a discount - a 10% discount - on what they buy except on exhibition pieces and furniture. Our markup is usually 50-50 even when it is consignment. And I had to get everything on consignment because I had no money. And slowly but surely I was able to buy some things and some things did

very well and then I could mark them up a bit more.

RICHARD BROWN: 50% markup means 50% went to you?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, half and half. Now anything over $1000 we usually give the artist 60%. It seems only fair. You know, if you make a big piece of furniture, you certainly have put a lot of work into it and so we did that.

RICHARD BROWN: Your hope for putting the Society in the black didn't rely particularly on the members for increasing it did it?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, that was part of it because membership income and gifts. I started to solicit gifts and also while we are on that subject, when I first came there was no way I could write a grant proposal to the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities. We really had no leg to stand on if they came to look.

RICHARD BROWN: What do you mean, you had no leg to stand on?

HERTA LOESER: Well it wasn't up to scratch. I mean, it wasn't really good enough. So it took about two or three years before I could write the first proposal and from then on we always got some funding, up and down, but they always got some funding. It was a pretty close inspection and they want to know what you are doing and they go into great details and sometimes writing the application takes more time and energy than it is worth but at the same time you have to be part of it. Last year we got nearly $10,000 and with the current budget I am very pessimistic. Now the membership should be greatly increased. I think the more members you have, the bigger base you have of members, the better off you are. My personal opinion is that even though we are educational, I tried some special programs for collectors and would-be collectors, special lectures, slide lectures, studio visits even taking them to the craft fair in Springfield, arranging a trip to the opening of the Craft Museum in New York, the response to that is very disappointingly low. My theory is and I am sure the new board and the new president will try all these things again because you have to is that the kinds of people who join the Society of Arts and Crafts are very busy people like ourselves. You are a member. How many times have you come to a program. Hardly ever. And they have a lot of things to do and they join because they want to support the crafts. All the same, I think one should continue doing that. I also reached out to various educational institutions and we gave some workshops and lectures for artists - how to make their lives plausible, how to make a living.

RICHARD BROWN: Business advice.

HERTA LOESER: Right, right.

RICHARD BROWN: Were those fairly well attended?

HERTA LOESER: Well attended and they are very useful and could be greatly expanded and I think Henry Shawah who is one of our goldsmiths and one of our crafts members is going to do another one this coming Fall. I also introduced to the Board some crafts people. We didn't have very many crafts people on the Board and we --

RICHARD BROWN: Did you feel they should be on the Board? No conflict of interest if they were on the Board?

HERTA LOESER: No. I think you have to hear from your constituents and

RICHARD BROWN: How to avoid their insisting they have something in the shop?

HERTA LOESER: That's never been a problem.

RICHARD BROWN: Historically, there had always been craftsmen on the Board.

HERTA LOESER: Yes. And a long time ago they were master craftsmen and we don't have that category anymore. When you ask someone to be on the Board they usually respected recognized craftsmen and you would be happy to have their work. In the case of Henry Shawah who is a goldsmith we occasionally have a special exhibit but he falls into the category of let's not have expensive jewelry and invite security problems. Somehow people come to case the joint and it's quite obvious and when they know you don't have things, jewelry particularly, seductive for would-be thieves, it's not worth it to hold you up if things are less than $500. Right now, for instance, Andy Magdanz is coming on the Board who is a nationally known glassblower. We actually don't have his work but if he's going to give us something we will be very happy. So that has never been a conflict. The membership too is one big sales pitch. I did this very much myself on a very personal basis and a lot of members joined because they knew that I was doing a good job and that they wouldn't be wasting their money.

RICHARD BROWN: What about retention of members? You tried taking them on trips - you said their were small returns there.

HERTA LOESER: But the retention of members was very, very high. I think as high as 87% on renewals which is very, very unusual. But we were also very persistent. If somebody didn't renew after the first request, he got a second request and maybe a third and maybe a phone call. You are in that category yourself.

Also, for Board meetings, we made sure that people came. We called them up. But I have to admit to you that when I took over as president and said I would give it six months of my time, I knew that I also had to be the Director. I couldn't possibly have lots of committees and ask lots of questions. We were so desperate that I had to just go ahead and do what I thought had to be done. Slowly but surely we brought on other people to the Board but largely while I was there I was the moving spirit and for some time during the last two or three years I kept telling the Board that it was time to look for a successor. That everything couldn't depend on one person and that it was very unhealthy in a non-profit organization and so they didn't quite believe me. So I had to give them an ultimatum. Eventually it was decided that we needed a much bigger Board. I find it quite hard to work with a lot of committees. On the other hand, if you don't involve people and committees they don't feel responsible.

RICHARD BROWN: In your thinking, that through this involvement through committees you are going to get from a number of people a heavier commitment than if they were out there in the general membership.

HERTA LOESER: Even on the Board I didn't have lots of committees. I just worked with people individually, like I would work with you on archival matters, work with Rudy Talbot (I forgot to say at some point)

RICHARD BROWN: Rudolph Talbot who developed a great women's wear mail order business?

HERTA LOESER: Yes. He and his wife and Hans and I went on a trip to China and got to know each other. And he had just sold Talbot's and had some time and liked beautiful things, although his taste did not run necessarily to completely contemporary. So I asked him to be my co-president and he agreed. And I have to tell you he was quite helpful to me in merchandising. I really had to do it by common sense, and by my nose and fly by the seat of my pants. But he gave me some elementary lessons. Later on he was not at all well and couldn't really do very much and he always wanted out and I didn't quite let him out until maybe a year before he died. When I eventually, see when I first started we had not much staff and I had staff that was pretty demoralized from what had gone on before.

RICHARD BROWN: Were they partly paid?

HERTA LOESER: Partly paid, very badly paid, not very well trained, but always some very interesting ones amongst them. Imaginative, creative. But somehow, I have a son who was a business school graduate and he gave me some cases on turnaround management and he said yes never mind what everybody tells you, you can do it. But, he said, you cannot...you have to let all the stuff go and start from scratch. And I didn't quite believe him and I always left, maybe one person and that person would then in fact be hired. Eventually I had to have a complete turnover of staff. And I had some very interesting people. I had a lot of volunteers. The trouble was that when they were very good volunteers, the usually either came to train to start their own gallery, or I had the most wonderful volunteer from the art world who was here from Australia who was here for a year and they gave me a lot of help and expertise and then they are gone.

RICHARD BROWN: But you found that until you completely cleaned house that that one person remaining you said would

HERTA LOESER: Very often. Discontent and grumbling. This isn't done right.

RICHARD BROWN: That took a few years?

HERTA LOESER: That took a few years.

RICHARD BROWN: Well the sales went up, they marched right up despite all these problems. You said they were $97,000 gross in 1980 and its risen through 1986 figures to almost $290,000.

HERTA LOESER: And its higher now.

RICHARD BROWN: It's a pretty solid growth.

HERTA LOESER: And that's something that when Rudy Talbot looked at that he said well, you are on the right track, and most retailers would confirm that. I have always found, this is very interesting, that the Society by being in the sales end of crafts and yet being an educational outfit with non-profit status was straddling, is straddling two worlds. You have to fulfill your educational mission which means you have to occasionally put on exhibitions which you know will not sell, which you can hardly afford if you have to pay the rent, and you have to compete with the private sector which by now is pretty sophisticated. When I started there was very little. Now

there are sophisticated galleries, art galleries, craft galleries, craft shops who are doing a landslide business and maybe a bigger business than the Society because they will at times do what we try not to do. We have a jury, a very strict jury and nothing is taken into the shop that isn't juried and the shows are strictly by invitation or juried. So that we cannot always consider the commercial point of view first. You can see where this is quite a difficult situation.

RICHARD BROWN: Have you maintained the juries even during the leanest period when you first came in? Was there something of a jury system in place?

HERTA LOESER: That's a very good question. There wasn't. The very first thing I did was I asked a very professional jury to help me because I knew that if I threw out all of the stuff that would be the end of the Society and probably me. So I got some very good professionals and we juried very hard and then I found that in the long run I could neither ask these busy people to come regularly nor did I have the time. It takes a lot of time to jury regularly. So we then did our taking of new artists by internal jury but much more informally. I did influence it a lot. I went to some of the crafts fairs but I have to tell you that I much more enjoyed finding crafts in unlikely places. Because everybody goes to the big crafts fairs and then you were just another one who carries the same work. In fact it has now come to the point that if you see something you really, really like, there is a woman juror who does beautiful work with stones, if you don't get them right away somebody else will have them and then they say you can't sell in another place in Boston. So we are in a strange situation. Here we are the leading educational outfit and yet we have to compete for some of the things that we know will sell because they are good. So I found that I did quite a lot of personal travelling and I always enjoyed finding people that wouldn't go onto the craft fair circuit. You know, that's where some of my most interesting people came from. But the turnover of crafts people that show in the shop and in the galleries is very, very high. For years I kept track of the numbers of artists in each field and when I took over there was a high concentration of ceramics. Too high. Just too many ceramics. So I made a very conscious attempt to bring in wood, metal, very little glass because, I don't know if you remember but there was the Glass Veranda on Newbury Street that sold very good handmade glass.

RICHARD BROWN: It was useless to compete.

HERTA LOESER: Yes.

RICHARD BROWN: Fabrics you brought in.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, fabrics. Fiber. And personally, apart from the furniture, I think that wearable art is a very, very good field because for some reason people are willing to buy something that they can hang on themselves more likely than what they can hang on the wall. And sometimes you can hang something on the wall and occasionally also wear it. You know, when you are not wearing it you can hang it on the wall. I think that's another very promising field. I found an artist called Ellen H_____ly. She works in California. I think it took me three years before I could convince her that we would like some of her clothes. I first bought some myself in a Washington, DC gallery. And I kept pestering her and finally we have gotten her clothes. They sell extremely well and we are now one of her favorite customers. It takes actually enormous stubbornness and stick-with-it-ness. Some of the experience that I have gathered I have tried to pass on and I think some of it I have. I think our staff that I have left behind who I hired is extremely able. Julie Mansfield. I recruited her from the Westminster Gallery which was a gallery of British crafts. None of the applicants really had, was as good as she. She never applied so I had to go and suggest that she apply. She has excellent taste. She is an organized young woman, very personable. But of course, she's a young person and she has a life of her own to live. With me it was an absolute 100%, 110% commitment. I worked at night, I did a lot at home. I even went in on Sunday mornings to see what went on on Saturday. I went in early in the mornings so I could have all the work distributed and I kept a very close eye on what went on in the shop. Now Julie for a long time, at the end at least, I had somebody of Julie's caliber who worked with me so that I was able to do a lot of that and go out and make contacts. Julie, now, doesn't have -- there were sort of like two of us. Julie now has to do all of the things I did and she has Stefanie Ehret as her assistant Director who is simply superb. She is a Vassar graduate, art history, able and can do everything. She can write, she can hang, artistic. She is not and will never be a business person, you see.

RICHARD BROWN: But Julie has something about her...

HERTA LOESER: Julie has some of it but not as much.

RICHARD BROWN: But she at least frees Julie to go out...

HERTA LOESER: Julie can go out. She can but when she does it leaves an emptiness in the place. It wouldn't hurt the shop to be much more closely looked at. Also, what customers come in. Collectors come in and I would know who they are. And they would come to say hello and we would talk to them. It's incredibly important.

RICHARD BROWN: And follow through...

HERTA LOESER: Very personal touch, yes.

RICHARD BROWN: A great deal, despite what you might say, did depend on you. What about the matter of the Society continuing with a sales outlet as opposed to not having one at all. If it doesn't have one at all it's going to have endowment or people simply giving or what? An educational mission of the Society. That could lead into some of the current thinking that's going on.

HERTA LOESER: You know, when I looked at the history at some point when they first started it they had a sales room and then they decided to discontinue the sales room and they quickly found that alas, alas they couldn't live or die. So ever since way back, since the beginning of the century, they have had a sales room. I personally think that it will be very hard in this climate to maintain it just from contributions of people who believe in the crafts. Very hard. However, when I left, or before I left, first of all I appointed a very good Nominating Committee to find a successor to me as president. That was much harder to find than a successor as a Director. I also encouraged a much bigger Board and I started a long range planning committee and I told them to go ahead and dream, which is always a good thing. And they have dreamt and they have dreamt very hard. And they would like to start a permanent collection. The Society does not have a permanent collection. We do not have a permanent home. I renewed the lease twice, three times in fact we renewed it. Our current lease runs for the next four years. We just renewed it again. And, beyond that, they are dreaming of starting a Museum of Contemporary Crafts in Boston. Which of course would be wonderful and would be very much in keeping with an educational mission. There is a committee that is working very hard on that. Two of the people who are on that are the Markses, Elaine Marks and her husband

RICHARD BROWN: Paul Marks.

HERTA LOESER: Paul Marks who started the Danforth Museum. And they started that from nothing. And they are very hopeful that one can do maybe the same with the Society. I think for me it is a good thing that people like that have appeared because I am no longer as innocent as I was when I started and I realize what a difficult financial climate it is. I think it is even much more difficult than when they started the Danforth Museum. And I think you know something about fund raising for your archives.

RICHARD BROWN: It's much more competitive now. There's not the large areas that are untapped.

HERTA LOESER: I wouldn't think so. Especially if the federal and the state funding of the arts goes down, people who need to raise money just to keep going for operating costs. However, I think when you dream you have to dream big and you are going to come to the annual meeting this week which will take place in a most wonderful new satellite gallery which we have been dreaming about which is an outcome of the dreaming. The City has come through now that there's a lot of planning for the mid-Cultural District with a space in Arch Street which is at the Downtown Crossing, upstairs. It belongs to the Metropolitan Life Insurance and there is a restaurant called Dakota's on the first floor and a beautiful space opposite it. They wanted something to liven this up and introduce some culture or art and they thought of us. And we actually managed to negotiate a lease for having the space completely free for the summer although its not ready and may not be quite ready by the Fall, and then for a very nominal rent starting September for a year. And one of the Board members has made a major contribution to meet the expenses. There will be some more money needed because somebody has to be paid to be there and do a good job. But the meeting tomorrow, the annual meeting, will take place there and its a step in the right direction. If that works, it could be a place where we can show furniture. It could be a place where maybe one could show a collection of crafts by collectors, not for sale, sort of the first seeds of the Museum. It could be that the Museum of Fine Arts could lend us some of their crafts that Jonathan Fairbanks has no room to exhibit. He has many, many, many of them stashed away in a vault.

RICHARD BROWN: He has said that it is appropriate for there to be a museum even though they collect contemporary crafts?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, he is a great believer. He's a very generous man and he says the more of that kind of thing exists it all helps, you help each other, he says.

RICHARD BROWN: Sort of the retailing principle.

HERTA LOESER: It's the same principle, yes. I find it quite hard to believe. I don't even believe it in the retail principle. So he will be involved with that and people are working hard on it and I am very optimistic about that. It's the first time that that has happened. It could never have happened when I first came. I think it's a direct result of good financial and artistic health and Ellen Grossman who is the new President is very energetic and very good at conducting these kinds of negotiations. She comes out of the private sector, out of the business world. She has good business experience. She is learning that the non-profit world and the educational world doesn't work quite the way and cannot work quite the same way as a business.

RICHARD BROWN: You have some doubts about going into the museum.

HFL: Well I have no doubts.TAPE NO. 2

RICHARD BROWN: You still have - you have some doubts about going into the museum?

HERTA LOESER: Well, I have no doubts. I think it's the most wonderful thing to do.

RICHARD BROWN: But whether it might succeed?

HERTA LOESER: But I do know that in order to have a museum you need a very big endowment. It isn't just that you have to have space. You have to have insurance, you have to have staff, you have to have, if you do a museum, a strong education department and, in fact, a scholarly part of it, I think.

RICHARD BROWN: For example, curator.

HERTA LOESER: Well you certainly need a curator. Yes, yes. But I think that you need a library, you need slide files, you need people who can write scholarly catalogues. You need people who can give scholarly information. Some of the historic archives that you are so well familiar with should be at the fingertips of the staff of that museum and I think one of the things I hear about the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York is the complaint that they do not have a collection and they do not have that scholarly component. And you know very well, they have a beautiful building now, and you know very well that that kind of thing costs money. That's my only concern. There is an endowment fund now that has been started by Mardi Perry. It is in my name and she started it so that the interest of that endowment would pay the salary of a Director, because I worked for so many years as an unpaid Director. Well that endowment fund is at about a little over $100,000 and it's not going to grow unless you have a professional fund raiser. There is just too much competition.

RICHARD BROWN: That still does not address the matter of having the museum funding yet.

HERTA LOESER: No. In fact once you start looking for money for endowment for the Museum, it would be hard to get that other endowment funded, keep that going.

RICHARD BROWN: Do you think - are you suggesting possibly they'll work at cross purposes then, at least in fund raising? That is, funding the Director and

HERTA LOESER: Well not at cross purposes but I think it's important that we don't lose the base for the Museum. I mean the Society, if it's to keep going, has to keep going well. I do think that eventually perhaps it isn't necessary for the Society to have a shop. I mean theoretically it isn't. It may no longer be the function because there are now, as I told you, and you know yourself, good craft galleries. So, if you could run a museum as an umbrella of that you might not have to have a shop, although I am sure you would have a museum shop. I talked to the director of the Museum of Fine Arts recently. You know their museum shop is a big part of their income. Of course, the whole income tax problem of non-profit plays into that. You have to be quite careful not to get all your income from sales. And that's why membership is important and that's why gift giving is very important.

RICHARD BROWN: You are suggesting, you said this earlier, you need a really professional fund raiser for full time.

HERTA LOESER: I think so. I don't think anybody else can do it.

RICHARD BROWN: Particularly if you say gradually downplay the shop.

HERTA LOESER: If you want to, yes. But we have tried two and one of them was a fund raiser that Mardi brought in who did work for the Society before and it was a disaster before and it was a disaster again now. We didn't get a penny out of him. But Mardi had some old loyalty to him. She was very disappointed. Then we tried somebody who came highly recommended from WGBH who completely let us down. And on checking back with the people who know at WGBH, they just didn't really tell us and I guess people are very much afraid these days to give a negative reference. Even if it's not in writing. So that was very disappointing because we put a lot of effort into that. But part of that effort, by the way, was to put all our records on the computer so we were given a computer, a MacIntosh, and all the membership, all the customers, that's all on computer now and we may even go on computer for the shop for all the merchandising. They are not at the moment; that's still all done by hand. But one reason for that I didn't do it before, I checked it twice, was that I needed a lot of people in the shop, at least I thought so for security reasons. And you can't just let them stand there and do nothing. So that doing the inventory and doing the sales slips, sorting them, finding out how many people from out of town buy every month as opposed to people from Boston as opposed to members, as opposed to volunteers and staff.

RICHARD BROWN: You found that about one-third of the buyers were from out of town?

HERTA LOESER: I found consistently that about a third of the buyers each month are out of town buyers which says something about our location, because it's a very preferred location for visitors, and not far from the Hynes Auditorium with many conventions. Also, I found that they bought that was the number of customers but they also - the figure, the amount of what they bought - was about, very often was as high as a third. The only time that isn't true is in November and December, which if we were a commercial outfit entirely I might have said we shouldn't have a place all year round. We should just be open for November and December. A very large amount of business is done in those two months. But then, you know, it becomes much more of a commercial operation.

RICHARD BROWN: Do you see the Society as resuming a national role ever because they are quite different from 1897.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I do think that during the time that I was there I certainly brought it back into the national spotlight, awareness--

RICHARD BROWN: And artists of that quality--

HERTA LOESER: Artists as well as people who are the leaders in the field. I did make a great big point of getting to know them all whether that's Carol Sedestrom the American Crafts Enterprises or the Director of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York or Michael Monroe of the Renwick or Lloyd Herman before him, and the editor of the Crafts Report and the editors of the good crafts magazines like Ceramics Today.

RICHARD BROWN: Metalsmithing?

HERTA LOESER: Yes. Definitely. And also, for instance, Haystack in Maine. At first they really practically, I won't say spit on me, but almost. I mean, they were really very down and it was very, very hard to handle. By now I think the Society is again recognized as legitimate and knows what it is doing. But you know, it has to be cultivated constantly. It won't just stay that way. You have to be in touch. Ellen Grossman, the new president, is good at it. I have tried very, very hard to introduce her. We went to Washington together and she likes that. She handles herself very well. She makes good contact with people. She is not - I had the great advantage of being at the gallery every day --

RICHARD BROWN: But she's not?

HERTA LOESER: -- which she cannot do. She is a person who operates very much on the telephone. She runs everything on the telephone, committees, the staff and so on. Which is remarkable, but it can't replace the fact that you are there. And collectors come like the Saxes from California and if you are there long enough, and I was there eight years, they do get to know you so when they come in they come and say hello, they buy something, they stay in touch and every time they come into town they come by.

The national picture. Now you see, the Board has decided and the President and the Executive Committee and particularly the Museum planning committee have decided to let it be known that they want to have a Crafts Museum. And you will see they will talk about it tomorrow. My way of working is very different. I first do something and prepare it and then if I'm fairly sure it's going to work, then I announce it. They say, and it's another way of doing something, that if you announce it, it will happen. And there is something to that.

RICHARD BROWN: But your way would be to practically have it set up before announcing it.

HERTA LOESER: I certainly would, yes. But that's my temperament.

RICHARD BROWN: I would with you. To a degree there's already an actively collecting department at the Museum of Fine Arts. How distinctive can the role in the same city be?

HERTA LOESER: Oh, I think so. So far it's a very small little tiny space. I don't think that's any problem. The people in Boston, if you were to ask them, wouldn't even know how to find that gallery. Have you been down in that gallery?

RICHARD BROWN: No, no.

HERTA LOESER: Well you know you walk through the entire Museum, all the furniture department, all the European and American Decorative Arts and finally down in the basement there's a small, small gallery. Maybe they will eventually listen and have more space. Jonathan has a wonderful collection of American Indian pottery. No space to exhibit it.

RICHARD BROWN: Do you think - you have mentioned that the Board of the Society of Arts and Crafts have set up an advisory group, they are in the process of forming that.

HERTA LOESER: Yes.

RICHARD BROWN: Is that partly done with a group to advise on the formation of the Museum in mind?

HERTA LOESER: No. I should show you what we decided. The Nominating Committee just completed its work and we have now rotating membership. We didn't have a rotating membership - just always something to be discussed, it has its pros and cons. We had some vacancies which we filled for the Board. I am still on the Nominating Committee, I was this year. And Hans is actually, my husband, who is a very sane and supportive and very reasonable and practical man is the head of the Long Range Planning Committee. He is doing the same for Harvard Law School so I figured he could do it for the Society of Arts and Crafts. And he is also the head of the Nominating Committee. And as we were discussing names and asking people it appeared that even though we have a big Board for a small non-profit organization, there were still more names who would be willing to work with us and we could accommodate as directors so we have in our by-laws the possibility to form an advisory council. And we decided to take up that option this year. And on it will be people like two collectors for instance, one of the people who is a trustee of the Museum of Fine Arts and has been on the Board for a long time but doesn't really attend meetings. The Advisory Council members will not have to attend meetings. Two nationally known - Wayne Higby is coming on as a ceramicist, Michael Monroe of the Renwick Gallery is coming on. And no way he could come up here -

RICHARD BROWN: So its more of a nationally focused thing than the operating board.

HERTA LOESER: Much more. Which I am very pleased. I have to tell you - maybe that is quite good for concluding that. I was absolutely thrilled as we threw out the names that we would ask we decided who should ask these people to come on and, really, to our utmost joy almost everybody accepted. Which is really something that couldn't possibly happen when I took it over. Now my great concern is that I know how fragile non-profit organizations are, how very fragile, and my great concern is that it continue. It's very easy, it took three or four years of hard work to bring it from red into black and then I have kept it solvent for the last six years but I know how easy it is to slide back and I would absolutely be very sad if after all that hard work and investment of life's blood if that were to happen. That's my great concern. I know that Nina Nielsen who is one of the trustees is also going on the Advisory Committee. Nina, as you know, is one of the more savvy gallery owners of contemporary art in Boston. And she's a very practical woman. She knows, as I do, that you spend as little as possible and you bring in as much as you can. That's really the bottom line. And it's very tempting to print catalogues and materials and hold parties and it all costs money and to be sure that it also brings in.

RICHARD BROWN: But you have some very savvy business types very heavily represented on the Board now.

HERTA LOESER: Yes.

RICHARD BROWN: Who if they keep their feet on the ground

HERTA LOESER: That would certainly be my hope but I don't think anybody is quite as tight as I was. I mean, we used recycled paper, we used recycled old envelopes. I mean, really we asked people to do our xeroxing for us, we had asked our printer paid for by somebody else. At the beginning it was absolutely the only way to get through. And it's very easy to decided you have to spend a little more on this and that and I see that the climate, the economic climate, is a bit or a luxury. It's not something that people must have. It's for your spirit, right? And that's, incidentally, why I did it. And why I invested so much in it. I think I should tell you that. I felt that it was important in our very strange and difficult world to do something for the spirit of man. One thing that does something for the spirit of man is to live and use and enjoy and be surrounded by beautiful handmade objects. And there is an eternal discussion about whether the crafts should be for use or whether they should be objects of art just to be admired. I personally think there is room for both. I think it's - I am very inspired by Scandinavian habits of living every day with beautiful handmade things even if they are production pieces. And I certainly think there is plenty of room to have one of a kind pieces of craft art. And I don't like at all the discussion about what is art and what is craft. I think it's a useless discussion. I feel that we have talked, during the time that I was there, we have many more production pieces of course and it's been our aim to go from so many production pieces to having individual pieces of art and I was very slow at this. I did that very carefully because I knew it was a big financial risk and in the last year or two we are going more in that direction. It will be interesting to see because if you sell one big item you don't have to sell a lot of production items but the big item is harder to sell and the markup is as I told you 60/40 so the cost of sales is much higher. You will - I don't know - you don't come in that often but if you came in now you would see there is a change. Julie is very deliberately moving in that direction. It's much to be encouraged and we have talked about it. But it is a trial period. For instance, if it doesn't work, you have to have the guts to pull back from it. You say that I worry about the fragility of it all.

RICHARD BROWN: But you have flexibility.

HERTA LOESER: I have a flexibility.

RICHARD BROWN: You could pull back if things didn't work out.

HERTA LOESER: We can, yes. But I don't know whether people will want to. I personally am quite good at reading trends. I mean I was in my other profession and I could see the trends in the crafts too. I can go with that and I can very quickly switch when necessary. But you know, as soon as you have a bigger Board and committees it gets much more complicated.

RICHARD BROWN: And cumbersome.

HERTA LOESER: Yes. We discuss it and --

RICHARD BROWN: What do you see your role will be in the future with respect to the Society or

HERTA LOESER: Well I promised them when I left which is really just a year ago as president, just exactly a year, I would stay involved with membership. I did three years - I did the auction really pretty much ran it myself. I passed that on to Barbara Adler one of the very capable vice presidents. I said I could help but I think they are doing it very nicely and they will do it differently. I felt when Henry Shawah and I did it, it was really his idea, that we did it in somebody's home, small with very lovely things. We asked all our artists to contribute and we had very good responses. I think this year they will make it a bigger audience. They will keep it in a home which I am pleased about. I will help them if they want me, but I don't think they really need me. On the bigger picture it is very difficult because I have purposely stayed away. I have passed on what I possibly could, although Ellen thinks I sometimes didn't tell her this and I didn't tell her that but that's really hard to imagine what I might have forgotten or what would have been more useful to her. There's a lot of material - there's more material than anyone can handle. You know I still follow what goes on in the literature and pass it on but if you work there all the time you know from your own experience. You hardly have time to stay on top of it. I will continue to look at the membership. It's very important, very personalized. Every month I still go with them through their sales slips. But sooner or later I think they have to take that over. I am on the Museum Planning Committee. I haven't been on it all the time because in the beginning it was very much a brainstorming and I am not very patient in long brainstorming sessions. But I am on it now and I will see how it goes. If I feel that I might be too realistic I might decide not to stay with it and let them fly. If I were to feel that I might put any kind of a damper on it, because it certainly is worth trying. I think it is possible to have a collection, to start a collection, and we have been given some money to start one. It could be done on a very small scale. In San Francisco they started this small craft museum. It's very, very small. It's in Port Mason which is federal government owned so they don't have to pay any rent. If one can find something like that you could start very small. But that is entirely feasible. So that I would say is my role. Hans is very involved. I feel that as long as he is in charge of long range planning I feel very confident that nothing will go off the deep end. But I think even his role I think should taper off because it shouldn't be a Loeser affair.

RICHARD BROWN: --particularly about plans for a crafts museum in Boston. How would you compare the climate here say with New York for contemporary crafts?

HERTA LOESER: I think that's a very good question. It is very much more difficult to interest the public in contemporary art or crafts or handmade furniture in Boston. We have done, I must say in almost eight years, quite a lot of educating and particularly with furniture. Because furniture was something I decided to focus on. And so when you do a good thing and people recognize it, they pick it up and run with it. I think I have seen that galleries in Boston even have picked up the idea of contemporary furniture.

RICHARD BROWN: Was that something no other group had been stressing, no other crafts group?

HERTA LOESER: Nobody. That was absolutely my introduction into the Boston scene. It was ripe and came at just the right moment and, as always, when you start something like that and other people take over, you feel a little sad but on the other hand since the Society of Arts and Crafts is an educational organization I think that is exactly what you should expect to happen and is exactly what should happen.

RICHARD BROWN: So that imitation--?

HERTA LOESER: is the sheerest form of flattery. But in this case you want the artist to be out there and one place can do so much but if other galleries pick it up the help to the artist is bigger and of course the more exposure the public gets the better off everybody is. Now the Museum in New York, the Crafts Museum, has had a very, very difficult time from others. I think one of the problems has been a big turnover of directors and there is always a reason for that. They have the rather beautiful building, you know they had the real estate so they were able to work a very good deal and have it built to their specifications. The opening exhibit was exciting. I think what is missing there is they do not have a permanent collection and they don't have a scholarly component which I think a museum really has to have especially one with such a beautiful building, opposite the Museum of Modern Art in New York. So we've had some echoes that a museum in Boston would be very welcome. Even some collectors here who are involved in New York feel that they haven't been pulled in enough. People before we even had the idea said to go one step further. But when the idea of a museum first surfaced I had a real long talk with Jonathan Fairbanks of the Museum of Fine Arts and he is all in favor. People who hear

that we may want to do that immediately say that this will compete with the Museum of Fine Arts trying to collect contemporary crafts. Jonathan doesn't think so. In fact, he is very enthusiastic. He thinks a little bit the same way as I have just described to you about the furniture being picked up by other galleries. He feels the more exposure you have the more people have a chance to see things the better it is for the whole. Which is very good. So he promises to be very helpful.

RICHARD BROWN: He feels that even the institutions in this case will profit from competition.

HERTA LOESER: That's what he says.

RICHARD BROWN: Do you feel that too?

HERTA LOESER: I am never sure because this is the same theory retailers have. They say the more you have of one thing in one good store the better off you are. I am not 100% sure about that. You have to convince me. I think as long as the economy is good, yes. But if the economy should go down I don't think it holds because people have only so much money they can spend.

RICHARD BROWN: At the recent annual meeting on June 7th, did the Society particularly deal with some of these questions and issues?

HERTA LOESER: Well that was a very exciting meeting and I am very, very pleased that you brought that up because actually you missed a very good meeting. It took place at 101 Arch Street which is at the Downtown Crossing in Boston and is to be the alternate gallery which is being made available to the Society of Arts and Crafts with the help of the City and Metropolitan Life at a very, very reasonable rate for one year. We can have it this summer for free but it won't be quite ready. It has no door yet. It is upstairs in the old Kennedy building which has been completely renovated and has an art deco flavor. There is a restaurant on the first floor, Dakota's and Metropolitan Life who owns the building has asked that there be something attractive opposite that restaurant and there's a glassed-in gallery and you come up the elevator and that is where the Society will have space to display and a salesperson. We will do some selling there. That's the current plan. But also, given the idea that we are aiming at a permanent collection and the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in Boston by the 100th anniversary of the Society, they would like to try during this year, it's a fairly big space, to use half of the space for just museum-quality exhibits. Maybe loans from collectors or even, we have even talked about a loan from the Museum of Fine Arts there and I think that's quite possible. The whole thing is to be a kind of trial balloon to see if it can fly and the meeting took place outside the gallery in the hall, upper lobby. Almost all of the Board members were there. It was the biggest Board meeting we have had in years, maybe twenty-eight or so Board members attended. Also, we had some food given by the restaurant who hopes to have us across and the report by the President, Ellen Grossman, was very upbeat and she had things prepared but then people asked a lot of good questions. So there was a lively discussion. There is always a request for money has been given to staff the gallery and I think we're counting on $30,000 expenses to run this for a year, at least, and $10,000 has been given outright and some Board members have pledged $1000 each and Ellen is just hoping very much that there will be more of that. Without it it's a bit of a financial risk but the Executive Committee decided that it's the first chance that anybody had given the Society a helping hand that you had to take the risk and we have on the Board now the chairperson or manager of Saks Fifth Avenue and she is an excellent retailing person and she was highly delighted by this and took a look at the space and said I don't see how the Society can loose here. You can certainly break even and quite frankly she thinks the Society can bring in some income and that might even support the base on Newbury Street.

RICHARD BROWN: Through sales of certain items?

HERTA LOESER: Sales. It's a different clientele, you see. We are in the middle of, or close to the Financial District and if you have the right person there, that person can reach out to the CEO who goes to lunch at the restaurant who doesn't even know the Society exists on Newbury Street. And he is just a skip and a hop from downtown.

RICHARD BROWN: So most people are very optimistic?

HERTA LOESER: Very.

RICHARD BROWN: And there questions were easily answered.

HERTA LOESER: They were answered. Easily answered but whether it's easily done remains to be seen. I think for something like that you have to have a great deal of optimism and then you'd be surprised sometimes you can pull it off. A little bit like I told you when I took over the Society and it was in such abysmal financial shape, my accountant - my personal accountant from a previous organization - that I was absolutely made. There was no way this could be turned around. And I just innocently said well I'll give it a try. If I had known everything I would have also would have said it can't be done. So I think sometimes one has to let the people go who think they can undertake a scheme and have them fly. And I have always said that I made the Society walk again and

pulled it back from the abyss and then I have always said I wanted someone to come along and make it fly. And I have the distinct impression that Ellen has the energy and enthusiasm. She's certainly going to try and make it fly and she's pulling a lot of people along. When I ran the Board I had to run it very differently. There was no time to ask many questions. It was a question of life and death and now we have a much bigger Board and a working Board and she uses various people on the Board to head committees and always as on all non-profit boards there are certain people who do a great deal of work. Fred Fiandaca is one of them.

RICHARD BROWN: He is a designer locally.

HERTA LOESER: He is a designer. He is the driving force behind the Museum and Mrs. Marks is on the Board and her husband. They started the Danforth Museum. They are very anxious to get behind that. Steve Alpert who is a collector who I brought on the Board is also very interested. He was also on the Board of the Rose Art Museum. He is a great crafts collector and if we have a few people like that and then it becomes the thing to do, and to join and to be involved with, I think

RICHARD BROWN: Well the location now. There's no other cultural institution right near there is there.

HERTA LOESER: No. But you see the planning for the Mid-Cultural District. That's all part of it. Larry Murray has come on the Board who is one of the big planners for the Mid-Cultural District.

RICHARD BROWN: So that in time will

HERTA LOESER: And he was instrumental in making the connection. At the moment it's very good that nobody else is there because you come in there and are utterly taken by surprise. Even as we were sitting there that night people just stopped in their tracks. We had put some things into the gallery and they were interested in us sitting there discussing it. Jack Lenor Larsen came from New York for this and he, although he sometimes said we didn't know what we were doing which I have since heard he has a habit of doing occasionally, he got up and said he was very impressed but he had to leave now. And the other person who has come on the Board - I have pushed to get more crafts people on the Board. I think it is important to have people with money and people with energy and people with backup staff to get things done but I also felt that we needed more actual top notch crafts people so Andy Magdanz has come on the Board. He's a glass blower who lives in Cambridge. He was on the Board of the American Crafts Council. He can bring a lot of - he is going to share his experiences there. And he was involved with the Museum in New York and he would like for us, if we try this, not to make the same mistakes. Which is always helpful.

RICHARD BROWN: They hope to inaugurate it this fall, then? September?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I think this will open in September. I think so.

RICHARD BROWN: Publicity will be an important ingredient, I would think.

HERTA LOESER: Yes publicity will be but I think the Metropolitan Life has already given it some publicity and they will help with that.

RICHARD BROWN: Well this is possible really because of the track record you made for the Society, right? Particularly through these exhibitions.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I think you are generous to say so but I do accept some of the

RICHARD BROWN: Because there hadn't been much until you came on in 1980.

HERTA LOESER: Right.

RICHARD BROWN: Years and years before there were

HERTA LOESER: Well there had been some exhibition but it was fairly spotty and I inherited some planning. You always have to plan for some exhibits beforehand and I think I told you I had to cancel, I felt I had to cancel a silver show because I was so afraid of the security problems. I thought hard about where we could put the focus and I thought there was very little support for the handmade furniture and so we did begin to focus on that. Now I have the, I have given you here for your archives, all the invitations starting way back in 1980 or '81.

RICHARD BROWN: Perhaps you could make a point about many of these exhibitions.

HERTA LOESER: As I look at them, there's a good one here. We had a cooperative of ceramicists called The Clay Dragon and I gave them a show. It was their first show outside of their studios. It was very successful and some of the people who then exhibited and that was in 1980 or 1981 are now really nationally known. David Juddleson is certainly known. He's taken over the Brickbottom. He was very instrumental in starting the Brickbottom.

RICHARD BROWN: In Somerville?

HERTA LOESER: Somerville, the artists cooperative. Judy Modskin is still working as a ceramicist and she's just sold a piece to the Museum of Fine Arts. Ann Smith is probably the best known one of them all. She's nationally known and is now back in graduate school at (which is an interesting experience for her. There is Rick Felice Ojanen who is of Finnish origin and she's still working and the Society is still showing her work today.

RICHARD BROWN: This show, did a good many people come to see it?

HERTA LOESER: A great many people.

RICHARD BROWN: And sales. Were there sales?

HERTA LOESER: Oh there definitely there were sales. You see, my experience was that if I had a show of a number of artists like this and particularly in this case they were almost all local, they bring their own audience, you see. And they do and that is very useful. Another thing I did which was a fun thing to do - I knew a young man and this was a summer exhibit in August, 1981, who hand builds boats. That was rather an unusual thing for him to do. I think his family thought he would go to college but no. And he's enjoying it. He's still doing it and I had the idea that maybe we could bring one of his boats to the gallery upstairs and we did that. And of course it was a very different feel and it brought a very different audience. Along with it we showed some photographs which we sometimes show photographs by Olive Pierce who has since done a book on teenagers at the high school in Cambridge and published the book. So that was a fun show. We barely got the boat upstairs.

RICHARD BROWN: But thereby you attracted another kind of audience. Who was the boat builder?

HERTA LOESER: The boat builder is Peter Kass. His father is a judge in Boston. Then I also might point out that Christmas shows - this was August - I figured out pretty quickly it was good - I didn't do it right away - to start just before Thanksgiving and to have many different things. At Christmas time I concentrated more on beautiful things that would be saleable then to have, say, an exhibition that made an artistic statement as a whole. Because it is the one time if

RICHARD BROWN: It's your major sales month.

HERTA LOESER: Major sales month - November and December. I think I have said that before. If you were not running an educational institution which needs to be there year round it would make much better sense to have sales months only in November and December. You need much less personnel, it's much less work and the income from those two months carries most of the year.

RICHARD BROWN: There are some examples aren't there. Isn't there a Cambridge Christmas crafts sale which merely sets up for that season?

HERTA LOESER: Exactly. Then we go into 1982. I decided it was important to give artists that normally showed in the shop downstairs the exhibition space upstairs. So we invited them to pick very special pieces which they felt were exhibition-type work.

RICHARD BROWN: That was a device to keep them loyal and happy?

HERTA LOESER: Yes.

RICHARD BROWN: Early furniture exhibitions - you said a little bit in passing about them.

HERTA LOESER: Well I have the invitations here and the first one I mounted was in March and April of 1980.

RICHARD BROWN: You had just barely come on hadn't you? Oh it was 1981.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, March and April 1981. I have to say that I just went out - I went to the Program in Artisanry and I enlisted

RICHARD BROWN: At Boston University?

HERTA LOESER: At Boston University. I enlisted Jere Osgood's help who was the head of the Program in Artisanry for the furniture department and I got Seth to help me who is the head of the furniture design program at the Rhode Island School of Design. I did not have a curator. I don't think I would dare do that these days. I had a young man working in the office who is very artistic and he coordinated the mounting of the exhibit. I had people like Wendell Castle in the show. I had something of Jere Osgood's. I had Paul Roman who teaches at one of the local schools. Richard Tannen, Michael Williams, who since then has stopped making furniture and for awhile he did the designs for the museum up in Salem, all the museum installations. And then I included wall

hangings and rugs to soften it and I just went after people I knew or who were showing downstairs.

RICHARD BROWN: But you got people of the Rhode Island - Wendell Castles?

HERTA LOESER: Yes. That was really very nice. I am quite impressed with myself.

And then we called that Interiors. Contemporary Handmade Furniture. Wall hangings, Rugs and Lamps. And then a year later it was such a success and people were so excited about it, I ran a second one. In February through April 1982. I called it Interiors II. You can see we had no money. These were the invitations. Very simple. It just told you the facts. And I had people like Ed Zucker, Mitch Ryerson. I had a piece of Judy McKee's at that time. Alfonse Mattias. Peter Deane. Tom Loeser. Penny Gebhardt. All of these people are still working in the field. Robert Shaheel. Gary Wright and Roseanne Somerson. And Janice Smith from the Rhode Island School of Design. So many of these people had their first pieces exhibited at the Society of Arts and Crafts.

RICHARD BROWN: You had that in a separate area upstairs?

HERTA LOESER: I had that upstairs and if you know the gallery, as you do, upstairs, it is not a very big space. So it was really hard to put it up and I have always been jealous of, for instance, the NAGA Gallery on Newbury Street has picked up on the furniture theme and once a year they show furniture. And they have this wonderful big floor. And you can really approach it.

RICHARD BROWN: So you had to design it. It had to be compact but not crowded.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, it had to be compact.

RICHARD BROWN: Did the furniture - did the craftsmen come to the opening usually?

HERTA LOESER: Oh absolutely, yes, yes. That was mobbed. A lot of these people are local. Furniture is hard when it gets sent from far away because we have no shipping room, no nothing. They come in big crates. They have to be unpacked. If they don't sell they have to be packed again and shipped back. Yes. If you have an exhibit like that - and in the case of the furniture makers - I had to learn very quickly that they all knew each other. So you had to be very careful if you took people in that were not up to standard. The good people would say I'll have nothing to do with the place. But I had to learn all that. But it didn't take too long.

RICHARD BROWN: And were they developing loyalty or interest in the Society. I guess it was a little too early for loyalty but interest?

HERTA LOESER: Interest, yes. But the loyalty has come along now but it took a lot of building up. And I will say that the Museum of Fine Arts has been very helpful with the furniture part. Jonathan has done got himself a grant once for the Museum for furniture and called it "Be Seated" and he distributed hand made furniture throughout the Museum of Fine Art. Many of these artists we show and he has bought furniture that we have shown in these exhibits for the Museum of Fine Arts which is always very helpful. Whenever we have been able to interest the Museum of Fine Arts in buying something for the collection, it does a great deal for the artist. And, again, that is what we are all about.

RICHARD BROWN: And you are, conceivably, in the future with the Society having its own Museum, it will occasionally be buying in for its collection.

HERTA LOESER: We have at the moment, we have been given a gift to start it all off that is sitting there trying for some jury to decide how to use that first money, whether to commission something or whether to buy something that already exists. A commission is always a bit of a chance. You might end up with something you don't really want. But we will leave this up to the, there will be a very good professional jury to decide that.

RICHARD BROWN: At this point, you wouldn't jury these particular

HERTA LOESER: No. I did consult and these two were not juried. Later furniture shows I had juried. Once I had Jonathan Fairbanks and another time I had Judy Cody from the Workbench in New York who has been very instrumental in getting furniture makers known. The Workbench run a very good program in their commercial establishment on the ground floor in New York of all handmade furniture. They have to be given a lot of credit for making the public aware of handmade furniture. It didn't hurt their business either, but it was a good thing to do.

Now another fun thing, I decided, there's an interest in pewter and there hadn't been any pewter show and

RICHARD BROWN: You mean on the part of crafts museums or crafts organizations?

HERTA LOESER: Right, right. So we did a pewter show, first, actually, I did two and we invited a lot of pewter

people. I see Fred and Judy Danforth and Shirley Sharon who has written a book on pewter, Barry Cliff.

RICHARD BROWN: Most people didn't even know they were making pewter.

HERTA LOESER: I tell you, the interesting thing -

RICHARD BROWN: So pewter - it wasn't shown as an antiquarian form, was it? Rather people were doing innovative, individualistic things.

HERTA LOESER: Yes. And you know it was great, great fun because many of those pewter people have never met each other. So you asked if they would come to the opening and they did. And that's another service that the Society can do. To bring the artists together and have them exchange ideas and even help each other with tools, it turned out. Now that exhibition I did because there was so much interest in the pewter in October/November, 1983 and I asked Robert Cardinale to be a juror. He was then heading the Program in Artisanry and he is a metal smith. And John Pripp. And James Seavey who has since given up. He just decided he couldn't keep his family fed on making pewter, which is one of the things I have spent a great deal of time on working with my artists. I had really interesting people. I think we had even more interesting people in that show. We had Shirley Sharon again. By that time we have Charles Crowley who is going to be, I mean now already he is nationally known, you see that piece up there.

RICHARD BROWN: A coffee pot.

HERTA LOESER: Which he made for me as my goodbye present from the Society of Arts and Crafts. We had Fred Fenster in that show. Pat Flynn. Jack (Rout).

RICHARD BROWN: These people, they weren't that well known at the time?

HERTA LOESER: Yes, those people - Fred Fenster and Pat Flynn are very well known. But we mixed them with people who weren't so well known. I mean, Charlie Crowley was just coming out of the Program in Artisanry. But he is nationally known. Ron Abramson has him in his exhibit, his work, in his collection and he's gone from making only small objects like this teapot to making furniture in pewter, which is quite something. Ron Abramson has one of his sofas, which I have seen in his home.

RICHARD BROWN: Have most of these people doing things in pewter come out of conventional crafts backgrounds? Were they treating it as a medium that had not really been explored that much?

HERTA LOESER: I would say that, I can only tell you in the case of the two people here that were at Program in Artisanry they were in the metalsmithing department but they used pewter is much cheaper to work with and less of a chance to have it stolen these days. That was another thing. I guess to have this beautiful piece worked in silver and then, you know, all the effort that goes into it and then it gets stolen and melted down is very disconcerting. Now pewter if you notice can look like silver. Today, very often, the crafts people won't keep it a dull matte finish but they polish it. Particularly Barry Cliff does. Barry Cliff came out of the computer world. Gave that up. Went into pewter making and has been very successful. And I think it's very interesting because he had a business background and he has handled his crafts work and the distribution of it in a very business-like way. And he, I think, is making a good living and enjoys it a lot more than the computer world.

RICHARD BROWN: It certainly is popular because it was affordable. Thereafter, or even by that time, you were keeping quite a lot of pewter in the shop.

HERTA LOESER: Yes. We always have some. I have urged Julie Mansfield, my successor, to have another pewter show. It hasn't happened. But you can only make a suggestion and once you are retired that's all you can do. It gets picked up or it doesn't. But I think it would be the time to have another. People like it and I think it's very pleasant. We had some salad servers out of pewter, some candelabra. We even had some religious ornamental pieces for temple and church. I think there's a real interest and there is also a market for them.

RICHARD BROWN: So those are two areas - furniture you sort of put on the map the way you described and now pewter. Probably those two shows you gave a prominence to it it did not have.

HERTA LOESER: That's true. Now another show I really loved doing was a show - I noticed I spent a lot of time at 175 Newbury Street. That was the only way I could tell what went on, whether what we picked to put in the gallery and in the shop was what people wanted to see and that was very exciting when they did want to see it and when they bought it, which confirmed it, and I noticed that every now and then a blind person would come in with somebody and the companion would take the blind person around and explain what was on the floor. That gave me an idea. There is a sculptor in Cambridge. His name is Peter Haynes and he works in bronze. I just love the feel of it. As you can see, I have a little piece of his and I had the feeling that you could really get an appreciation of that work of art. You don't have to have your eyes open. You can feel it. You try it out yourself. I

asked him what he thought of putting on an exhibition which would be particularly for the visually handicapped. And he thought it was a great idea and he said there were two friends, one who worked in wood, Joel Wheelwright, and another one who was Dorian, who worked in stone. I don't have first names here and of course I can't remember the first name right now but we can look that up. So, we asked all three to think of mounting an exhibit in our two rooms up there that would be for people who can't see. And then we asked a person at the Museum of Fine Arts who works in the department for handicapped visitors and she in turn brought a blind person who helped us visualize the exhibition, helped us set it up and then taught my staff how to show people around who were blind. And we set it up in such a way that you could find your own way and the three artists made a tape and we had a cassette and if somebody listened to the tape they knew exactly how to go and they explained each piece. It was a huge success and you can see we printed an invitation and we had some braille on it. And we called the exhibition "Do touch". And I think of all the exhibitions that I did, apart from the furniture, that's the one I was proudest of. And it, again, fulfilled a educational mission. Because after I did that other institutions set up exhibits just for the blind.

RICHARD BROWN: Yes, yes. It's wonderful. February/March of 1984.

HERTA LOESER: That's right.

RICHARD BROWN: So that's an accomplishment that you are very proud of.

HERTA LOESER: That's right. Now we have. I don't know if you really want to know but then we did another Interiors III in 1984. Again, we had a great many artists. And there I told you that I had for jurors Judy Cody, Jonathan Fairbanks and Seth Stemp. So by that time we juried all the work from slides and I count them but a great many furniture artists really from all over the country. We even got things from California which was a big job from Gary Knox Bennett who is another nationally known person. It was a big job to bring it in and to ship it back when it hadn't sold or ship it on to another gallery.

RICHARD BROWN: In all exhibitions almost all the things are for sale, right?

HERTA LOESER: All the exhibitions had to be for sale. The only time that wasn't true was when I did, much later on, maybe I'll tell you about it, a kimono show, a Japanese kimono. I was approached here by a Japanese graduate student at Harvard whose aunt was a fabulous kimono maker in Japan. And she does everything herself. She dyes yarn, she weaves it, she designs the kimono and the mandate of the Society is to show American crafts. However, I felt by this time we were doing a lot of exchanges with Japan with a great deal of sensitivity to art and to crafts in particular in Japan. And I thought I could bend the rules for some international understanding and I agreed to give that show. And the curator-emeritus of the Japanese Folk Art Museum came over with the artists. They came for the whole time of the exhibit and they hung it. That was the only time things were not for sale. Although, if a museum had wanted to buy a piece, they would have been willing to. I think there is still some fallout from this. I think they may have actually sold one piece. But those were, each kimono was like $20,000. You don't have too many people who just waltz and buy that. And you have to have the right place for it.

RICHARD BROWN: You sometimes then took a strictly practical path. Is that the case--

HERTA LOESER: Yes I took both a practical tack and I believe my philosophy is I often get asked why do you think crafts are so important to today's life. And I think that it is important to live with beautiful things every day. And to use them. I mean, you can look around my house and there are plenty of objects, art and craft objects, that are just there to look at but I do believe, for instance, that you can eat off handmade plates, you can cook with handmade utensils and I carried out a show, it was actually before Christmas which again combines the practical with my philosophy, and I called it "For Your Cooking and Dining Pleasure". I had the help of one of the gourmet food stores. They gave us some of their food. And we put some of our handmade things into their store. And we had laid tables and a lot of casseroles, glasses - handmade glasses. Pewter serving pieces, handmade table mats. I think that also worked very well because it was something people could buy for Christmas. I learned that during those Christmas months people don't buy great big works of art. They like to give something that's special and unusual.

RICHARD BROWN: So in a sense that exhibition was in a way of rearranging and emphasizing certain things at a particular season. These for the most part were things that were in the general shop.

HERTA LOESER: Many of them. But I particularly called on people to give me extra work. Most people were showing their work all the time but also I picked up some extra people.

RICHARD BROWN: You've had an exhibition of fans.

HERTA LOESER: Yes. And I tell you we did that because in 1985 the Fan Association of North America had their annual meeting in Boston. And we knew about that. And so we mounted a show of fans. It was juried and

invitational. You can sometimes do that. You can mix the two. Some people were so famous we just asked them. And others we had to use a little discretion. We asked contemporary fan makers and artists using fan imagery. And I know we got the slides and Pam Perry was one of the jurors. Pamela Perry who herself does very beautiful work and we went to her studio with all the slides that came in and it was the snowiest day of the year. But still that show's you how determined we were. We just got there. We got stuck We had to be towed. But we juried it and then this was a show in May/June and I remember we juried the show like in January or February in the middle of a snowstorm.

RICHARD BROWN: What attention did that exhibition get?

HERTA LOESER: Tremendous attention, particularly all the people who were in town for the Fan Association annual meeting. They all came. And of course it got very nice coverage in the paper. There were about twenty invited artists and thirty juried artists. That's a lot of artists.

RICHARD BROWN: I noticed, the last furniture show you talked about, a great deal put in those rather small quarters.

HERTA LOESER: Right. It's not only the small quarters but for each name that you see here, you have a personal relationship with each artist. You have many phone calls, letters, sign-outs, inventory in, inventory out. So its very, very easy to see all those names on the piece of paper but what is behind it is something else again.

RICHARD BROWN: You have mentioned several times Boston University's Program in Artisanry which is now defunct but which in its brief history was of national importance.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, I did.

RICHARD BROWN: You saluted that, in a sense.

HERTA LOESER: Well when, unfortunately, they had to leave B.U. I felt very, very badly for them and I though the least we could do is help their morale and I offered them very quickly an exhibition. That was a key for being able to do it - you had to be very flexible. I very quickly had to rearrange something and I made space for them July 15 to August 31, 1985. And we asked them to choose the pieces because they were in the middle of moving and Barbara Eckert from the fiber department was the liaison. I have to say to you that they were in such a muddle at the time, and even though they were very grateful, they couldn't take as much advantage of it as they have just recently. Just a couple of months ago Julie Mansfield gave the Program in Artisanry which has been merged into the Swain School and from there into SMU.

RICHARD BROWN: Southeastern Massachusetts University.

HERTA LOESER: An exhibition. Again. And this time we all went down to New Bedford and they are settled in their new quarters. It's not too well known that they are there and every department head was ready. They took us around. They pulled out the pieces that they thought would be good to exhibit. And that exhibit only happened about a couple of months ago. It was a joy for me to say because when I first went to the Program in Artisanry I had to let them know who the Society of Arts and Crafts was. Then in 1985 when I gave them that show they were very grateful but they weren't able to take as much advantage of it and now this show has been a real success and it, so to speak, put them on the map again.

RICHARD BROWN: We want to talk a little bit about this exhibition called "Threads", which is quite elaborate. You had part of it at a hotel here in Cambridge.

HERTA LOESER: Right. I do believe in cooperation. Not everybody always does. But I think that life for an arts organization is so difficult that sometimes its easier on one or two organizations to work together. And I was very much aware of the excellent direction at that time under Chris Connaire of the Cambridge Arts Council. And she had put on a benefit called "Threads" which I went to and enjoyed immensely. It was a fashion show of handmade clothes. And they didn't do it again. So I said, Chris, why don't you put it on again. And she said, oh we lost money. So I said, well why don't we put our two heads together and perhaps we could do it together. Well, it took quite a few meetings and we did decide to do it together. We persuaded the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Cambridge to give us free space. We had one of our Board people who was working at MIT do a lot of the organizing. The Cambridge Arts Council has an excellent business person who helped figure out the costs and we were able to do another Threads show in September, 1985. However, as luck would have it, it was the biggest hurricane for many, many years and we had to decide very reluctantly that we had to cancel it. We had at the same time a show of the clothes of the artists at the Society at the gallery. So what we had to do is we had forty people's clothes and work and models, for models we used people like Maud Morgan the artist, not professional artists but people who were known in the community. We had to cancel all of that. We had to reschedule it all. We had to ask everyone of the forty artists if we could keep the clothes for another three weeks. We had to reschedule. We did finally do it and because it all had to be rescheduled and people had to be

refunded who couldn't come the second time we cleared very little money between the two organizations but we created a great deal of good will. So it wasn't the fund raiser that we had hoped it would be but it was lots and lots of fun. And if people have enough energy at the Society of Arts and Crafts and before we knew that we were going to have the second gallery which takes a lot of extra work, Ellen Grossman was planning on repeating Threads. You will see it is a particularly attractive invitation. We had a designer who donated her work and I think they did a wonderful job.

RICHARD BROWN: What is the attraction in Threads. You can have a festive occasion? You can have models walking around?

HERTA LOESER: Yes. We served a meal and it was a very big hall and we had a stage and we had the models and we had a show of each artists piece of work and we had a commentator. And I think Chris Connaire was the commentator and since she had the theater background it was very - were you there - it was a very refreshing evening.

RICHARD BROWN: You did, then, some cooperative things with the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen which is, I believe, the oldest public crafts group. Did you have collaborative exhibitions and other programs with them?

HERTA LOESER: Yes. Along with that philosophy of cooperation, we did a show in October/November 1985 that were juried members of the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen Foundation. It was really one of the first times if not the first that they had a chance to show their work on the gallery street in Boston. And they were very, very pleased. It is lots of fun to do something with another organization. It is not half the work. It is sometimes double the work because everything has to be discussed. Everything has to be approved. The printing, the costs, the reception. Still, I think it is worthwhile.

RICHARD BROWN: Was the quality what you had hoped? Mixed?

HERTA LOESER: Well, the quality is a little mixed. It wouldn't be quite the quality that we would usually show.

RICHARD BROWN: Because the organization itself is very public. People from all over the state dabble and then are shown in the shops of the League.

HERTA LOESER: Right. But to prevent it from being too spotty, they did jury their own people that they admitted to the show. And then in 1988, I think we gave them a second show.

RICHARD BROWN: The League of New Hampshire Craftsmen?

HERTA LOESER: The League of New Hampshire Craftsmen. And then in March, 1988 to April Julie Mansfield picked up on this cooperation and this time she called in the Maine Crafts Association, the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen Foundation, and the Vermont State Crafts Center at ( ) Hollow, and the Society. We did it at our place, at our gallery and she called the exhibit "Art East, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Maine". And what she did what was a very good idea she assigned to each state a media. She gave the Society of Arts and Crafts furniture, Maine Crafts Association textiles, the League of New Hampshire glass and jewelry and the Vermont State Crafts Center ceramics. That was a very good idea and it worked very well and I should tell you that when we have a show like that it's a wonderful way of picking up some new artists for the shop. I remember that New Hampshire jewelers there was a person in there whose jewelry we couldn't keep enough of it. So of course when that happens we ask the crafts person if they would like to show downstairs permanently. And that's a very good way of discovering new crafts people.

RICHARD BROWN: Major established craftsmen, do they hesitate about being shown downstairs in the shop? Would they rather be on display, on exhibition?

HERTA LOESER: They sometimes think they do. I just met a young woman called Karen Malloy and she does handmade paper and also some weaving and she's been an artist of the Society and I met her at another art organization where she's a Board member and I said Hello it's nice to see you. And I said do you have any work there now and she said well I want to see how I can have my work upstairs. Which answers you exactly. There is more to it. If you are in an exhibition like that you can of course put it in your curriculum, which is always nice. You know, all artists have long curriculums showing where they have shown. However, some work like Karen's, if she has a piece downstairs, it's almost sometimes -- this ties right in with your question. Right now we have an exhibit June, July, 1989. Contemporary floor coverings and tapestries. Nothing but that upstairs. On the wall, hanging free and also on the floor. And you know, that takes a very special audience to appreciate it. So that if Karen had her work in there she'd to sell it. That's a very good question. We also do something, we will choose one artist and call him artist of the month and he or she gets a cabinet downstairs.

RICHARD BROWN: So it straddles both.

HERTA LOESER: It straddles both and we often have thought we would like to put the exhibitions downstairs and the shop upstairs and we have thought about it many, many times but it's too difficult. You have to ask each person to go upstairs. The space we are in now is not ideal so that the experiment with Arch Street, you'll see the exhibit space is much more easily run and much more inviting to see the whole work. You don't have to have someone ask you to please go upstairs there's a wonderful exhibit upstairs.

RICHARD BROWN: You must have winced when you saw the newly rebuilt American Crafts Museum because it splits things on three levels.

HERTA LOESER: It does but it has an open floor plan.

RICHARD BROWN: It does.

HERTA LOESER: If you are curious and you peek through you do want to go and seek what that quilt down there looks like. That's very different from us. We have a closed door a brownstone house, a private residence.

RICHARD BROWN: You have also done some cooperative or some looks back in a sense, a couple of retrospective exhibitions of furniture and then on what in the old days what were called metalists of the Society. A look back at some of their work.

HERTA LOESER: Right. When we had our 90th anniversary which was in 1987 in May of 1987 we gave a show to celebrate that 90th anniversary and we called it "Masters Past and Present" and we put on the invitation the medallion made in glass.

RICHARD BROWN: Made at the Charles Koenig studio.

HERTA LOESER: Especially for the Society. We had that, we still had that and we put that on the invitation and we decided to invite to show from private collections work of the past of the silversmiths. I told you that was what the Society was all about in 1913 and 1917, 18 and 19. And we had work by Arthur Stone, by George Gebline, Kathrine Pratt, that's a bit later, Herbert Taylor. Those were silversmiths. Then we had jewelry makers, Frank Gardner Hale, Edward Everett Oakes. I think his son is still a member of the Society. Margaret Rogers and we had some work by Charles Koenig, actually. We had a curator for that show and she was helped by Edith Alpers and Dale Pollock who know a great deal about the old work. And we had ( ) Chickering who has been doing a book on the work of Arthur Stone. She came to lecture.

RICHARD BROWN: Did that exhibition attract some interest or make all the members pleased?

HERTA LOESER: It made all the members pleased and we had all the masters past in one gallery, the back gallery, and we had masters present and we did not necessarily have a silversmith. We did have Henry Shawah's work who is an associate of London's Worshipful Company of Goldsmith's, and you know he is a Board member, and we had quilts by Michael James. We had wood, we had some furniture, never want to forget furniture. We had very good ceramics people. We had (Marik Secula, Gretchen _____,?) who is another ceramicist who we've really helped along. I have a piece next door. We had Mark Cuzeo. He had Marc Mokotoyabi who now shows at the ( ) Gallery, and again Ann Smith. She was already very well known. And we had Jody Klein who shows, who has a piece at the Renwick Museum. She is a textile artist. That was a very interesting exhibit and as you will remember you wrote the introduction on the invitation.

RICHARD BROWN: Somewhat related to that then was the furniture past and present.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, we did that too. American Furniture September/October 1986.

RICHARD BROWN: Was that your idea? Because those are pieces much older than the Society. You showed some very old pieces.

HERTA LOESER: Yes, that was called "American Furniture Past and Present" and when I talked to the Museum of Fine Arts about it they were at first a bit reluctant. I didn't quite know why but it turned out that they had had a similar idea but their preparation takes much, much longer because it is a bigger institution. There's much more money and many more resources at their disposal. So they decided that it was not a conflict of interest and they went ahead and helped us with our show and we did get some pieces from the Museum, old pieces. Also some pieces from the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and some pieces, like the piece that is shown on the invitation, the John Townesend High Chest of Drawers 1760 from the Karolik Collection, we didn't dare put in Newbury Street. It wasn't only a question of insurance. Even if anything had happened and we would have gotten insurance money, you could never have replaced it and we simply couldn't guard it in the way you should. So we had very beautiful blowups, photos, on the wall.

RICHARD BROWN: And you also had contemporary furniture makers.

HERTA LOESER: Right. We had a takeoff, you see it on the invitation, by Dale Broholm. It's a tall cabinet. We asked all of these people to do something that would be a kind of takeoff. I know that Tom Loeser had an etagere.

RICHARD BROWN: How much lead time did you have? You must have had to have quite a bit for them to do these special pieces.

HERTA LOESER: You do see the point. Furniture is very hard to exhibit. Not just for this. You do need a lot of lead time. Especially if you ask them to make a particular piece for a particular purpose. That is exactly what happens.

RICHARD BROWN: But their volume is very small compared to that of a ceramicist or any other --

HERTA LOESER: Or a jeweler, right? Now for that show we had curators. I see here Jonathan Fairbanks and Edward Cook from the Museum of Fine Arts and myself. You can see, I just told you about that we use an artist of the month and I see on the exhibition announcement that the upstairs exhibit will be accompanied in our downstairs display area by the resist dyed and hand painted garments of Brenda Macomber. She will be the third designer of wearable art to take part in our highlight artist series. I said on the exhibition here on that exhibition through the juxtaposition of old and new furniture we hope to demonstrate the aesthetic compatibility of works from different periods to encourage the viewer to consider the American furniture tradition as a whole and to impress upon the public the fact that the studio furniture of today will be the highly valued possessions of tomorrow.

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