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Oral history interview with Marianne Strengell, 1982 January 8-December 16

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Marianne Strengell on January 8, March 18, and December 16, 1982. The interview took place at the artist's home in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview was transcribed as part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, my family was really what shaped my life I guess, in lots of ways because my father was an architect and an excellent critic, and my mother was a completely self-made interior designer—not decorator, designer. She had excellent taste and a beautiful sense of color. [Inaudible.]

My childhood was very unlikely for anyone, much unlike my own children. I was a tomboy; I was absolutely left alone most of the time and did what I liked.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I had an older brother and a younger sister. But anyway, it was very different from my own children.

ROBERT BROWN: And you grew up largely in Helsinki, in the city?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes. Mostly in the winters I was in Helsinki and the summers I spent with my grandfather, who was one the greatest influences in my life.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? In what way?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, he was just a wonderful, beautiful man. He was very poor and very musical. He wanted to become a concert pianist but he couldn't afford it, so he became a banker, and quite rich, which was nice. And he had a sister and a mother to provide for, and so forth and so on. But he was absolutely wonderful, and I think he had a lot to do with my upbringing.

ROBERT BROWN: What are some of the things you remember that he might have said to you, or the example he set for you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: You know, he didn't really say very much, but I mean—well, the music was number one. He was part of a quartet of beautiful, lovely older men, and they

used to—I actually lived in the house, in his house; we had part of his house—and I used to creep downstairs and hide in back of a red curtain and listen to these gentlemen, you know—playing. So that really is part of me, entirely. I'm not musical, not in the least, but I appreciate it enormously, and I think it'll—[inaudible]. Later on when I got old enough to drive a car I used to drive him to concerts in our little old car and take him back home, and he used to open his little pouch and used to give me ten Finnish marks for the trip.

But he was a lovely person. He never interfered—he never said anything much, but he was always there.

ROBERT BROWN: You were very interested in music. Did you play anything?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they give you—did you have lessons or anything?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, I had lessons. I was—

ROBERT BROWN: But you didn't respond?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I responded, yes, my knuckles did. I was hit on my knuckles over and over again. Really, I had no talent in that at all, but I do have that appreciation.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, when you were very young, what were some of the talents as you look back? Did you draw or do anything?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, Yes, I did lots of drawings, you know—I mean, like most kids do at a certain time. I did very well, then I got terrible, then I grew up a little bit and—

ROBERT BROWN: You got terrible? You mean your drawings declined?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, they did. I think that happens to almost every child.

ROBERT BROWN: When they get more self-conscious?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, exactly. So—

ROBERT BROWN: Now, with your parents, your father an architect, did you ever go watch him work much?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: He didn't do very much actual architectural work, as a matter of fact. He was mainly a critic. He was a brilliant critic.

ROBERT BROWN: Which meant what, he was writing or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, he wrote numerous books and—well, he was always just there, looking at things and deciding what was good or bad.

ROBERT BROWN: What was his name?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Gustaf Strengell.

ROBERT BROWN: And did you remember going around with him to look at buildings?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no. No, that sort of thing didn't exist in my days at all. I had,—as a matter of fact, we had little to do with my parents, but they were there.

ROBERT BROWN: They had their own life, so as a child you were kept apart.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. I mean, it's nothing like what's going on now at all. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Would he travel in his position as a critic? Would he go to other countries?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: I mean, Finland being a small country, there would be only so much he might want to write about.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, he traveled a lot, and he was a great linguist. And he spoke numerous languages.

ROBERT BROWN: That was a time when Finnish art, architecture was reaching some prominence in Europe.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Exactly, that was the—well, altogether that was the year when Finnish art, architecture and so forth came through four—there was Sevelius, whom I knew well, there was Saarinen, and there were numerous painters—[inaudible]—and so forth. And they thought—it was a revolution.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose it came about at this one time, the first quarter of this century? Why do you think that may have happened at that time?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: A great deal of excitement?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, indeed, indeed, and a lot going on.

ROBERT BROWN: So you knew Sevelius?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: He was charming.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a friend of your grandfather's?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, my father and Saarinen, you know, mainly to Saarinen at that time, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, Saarinen, Eliel Saarinen, his family were good friends of your family?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, yes. Well, I guess my father and Eliel—well, they went to school together. In other words, they grew up together. But they went to school together and they had lots of competition work that they did together, and they were part of this group, and they took—a wild group, believe me. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Wild?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, quite.

ROBERT BROWN: How so?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, they just could stay on forever and talk, talk, talk. There was this wonderful story about—oh, my goodness, I can't remember the name of the conductor. They went to—[inaudible]—and this conductor had to go to Russia to conduct a concert. Well, he was gone for a day or so and he came back and they were all [laughs] still there, you know. It was a very intense group; they just talked and talked and talked, and they did.

ROBERT BROWN: In other words, they'd have a party or something—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no party.

ROBERT BROWN:—or a discussion going and it continued right on until their friend came back a day or so later?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, they were still there.

ROBERT BROWN: And it was still going?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes. [Laughter.]

I'm terribly sorry about not remembering names.

ROBERT BROWN: But were they also very hardworking, as you remember, your father and

these people?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I wouldn't say my father really, no. He wasn't very hardworking. My mother was very hardworking. And, as I say, she was extraordinary.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, had she had some formal training?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: None, absolutely none. I don't know where she picked it up but she just had this beautiful inborn taste and sense of color and form.

ROBERT BROWN: What was her name?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Anna—[unintelligible].

ROBERT BROWN: And she began—when you were small do you remember her? Was she designing at home or did she—what was her involvement, the first that you remember?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I think she started at home, yes, and then she became head of the Interior Textile—[inaudible]—the director of it. And—

ROBERT BROWN: What, something that she had founded or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes. Now, she felt very strongly about people in the country who—I mean, she was very warmhearted—people in the country who really needed work and needed some extra income and so forth and so on, and so she started this thing, and it was a cottage industry which I followed up much later on in my own life. And she dug out all these little girls in the country, you know, who needed work and who had two hands and good sense—didn't want to design, they wanted just to work. And they wove for her for the firm that she was director of.

ROBERT BROWN: Would she provide the design?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I provided the design.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, as you got older you provided the design, even when you were quite young?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, I started young anyway. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: What kinds of designs were you—did you have them do in the early years?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, mostly just yard goods: upholstery, draperies, so forth and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Just with geometric patterns in them?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, mostly very simple. I never followed any of those bold things at all. As a matter of fact, when I first got my first job in that firm, I closed my eyes every minute, going into it because I didn't want to see anything that would be done that way. I just wanted to do it my own way.

ROBERT BROWN: When your mother began by going out in the country to get people to weave things, did those country people still have a traditional decorative form, or had that been pretty well lost?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think it had been pretty well lost.

ROBERT BROWN: And she didn't attempt to revive any—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, no, no.

ROBERT BROWN:—kind of peasant traditions?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, partly because of me because I didn't want to do that at all. I mean, I felt very strongly that this was a little different era and we could do something different.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the clientele for your mother's firm?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, partly it was a shop.

ROBERT BROWN: A shop in Helsinki?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: In Helsinki, and people looked, came and bought yard goods; there were other things there too, embroidery, but part of it was that, the country weavers, and then there was the very exciting other part. Finland was a small country, and—it still is very small—and there were lots of people with money. I mean, in industry—I mean, people who really could afford things and wanted things, you know, that whole strata. And for them we did special things because they all knew each other, they all had cocktails everyday together [laughs] so they each wanted to have something special. And that was—and I liked challenges, because I had to provide each one with something. But at the same time, we were practical enough to do it possibly on a common work—[inaudible]—for instance, you know—instead of setting up everything new every time. I did lots of rugs and special things.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, that's jumping a little ahead of my question about your childhood still, so can we get back to that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Okay [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: One thing you've mentioned during that time was when your—in 1923 when your father went with Eliel Saarinen and came to this country.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, right.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you just talk a bit about that? Did you hear about him at the time, or at least later you—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think later. I really don't think, you know—I was, let's see, 23. No, I don't think that it was discussed with me particularly at the time. I just heard it.

ROBERT BROWN: What happened? Can you recall what happened or tell me what happened on that trip, what it amounted to?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, sure. Eliel got the second prize in—

ROBERT BROWN: That was in Chicago.

MARIANNE STRENGELL:—*Chicago Tribune* thing, and he didn't speak English. I don't know if he spoke anything else, either, [laughs] but he didn't speak English. My father was a great linguist and they were great friends, so Eliel asked my father to come with him and be his spokesman, so to speak. So they came over, and it was all very beautiful and very gay and lots of parties. My father gave beautiful speeches and Eliel had some long, cool drinks, [laughs] and that was that.

After that tour my father came back to Finland but Eliel stayed on and got his family over, I would say, about half a year later.

ROBERT BROWN: By then had Eliel decided he would make a career over here?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't exactly know if he did or not. He was offered a job, I think, first in—[unintelligible]—and then somewhere else—and then in Ann Arbor.

ROBERT BROWN: Teaching at the University?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Teaching, but I really don't know much about that.

ROBERT BROWN: And you said he made connections there with—well, some of his students were—the Booths [George and Ellen] and all were setting up Cranbrook [Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan].

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right. One of the Booth sons, his youngest son, Henry, and Bob Swanson, who ultimately married—[unintelligible]—they were the ones that did the whole thing. And that's how we got to Cranbrook, and that's how Cranbrook was started, because Mr. Booth had had—he wanted to have immortality, I suppose, [laughs] and he had money and he had a beautiful, enormous piece of land in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and he thought he would just start a museum. And I think Eliel managed to talk him out of that and say that

a living person is more important. There's lots of museums, and why don't you start a school?

So that's how Cranbrook started. And Booth was tremendous. I mean, he had lots of money and he was very—he was a wonderful person, the older Booth.

ROBERT BROWN: You got to know him later, didn't you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, and I came—[inaudible]—of course.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, your father then came back to Finland, and you went on then to a school, industrial art school.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you describe that a bit, your schooling?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I had sort of some stupid dreams about going to the university, which I would have been entirely unsuitable for.

ROBERT BROWN: Why, because you didn't have an academic sense?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not that kind of mind at all. So they just shoved me into art school, and I thought that that was very smart of them, actually. They took me out one year early. I never took my little white thing, you know, that little hat.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean from high school, you didn't quite finish that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No. One year—

ROBERT BROWN: And you'd been a rather indifferent student?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, average student. I mean, I just didn't care. So I went to art school, and that was quite an experience. And that actually has influenced me in lots of ways for what I've done after that because the art school was terrible, I thought. I don't know what they wanted to do with us, but it was not to make us magnificent teachers or artists or something like that. It was actually boring, but of course I was 17, 18 and I had a glorious time otherwise: dancing, sports.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you describe the way they taught—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I can indeed.

ROBERT BROWN:—and what kind of courses you had?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I can indeed, because that's why my students are better off in the long run.

Well, I got up to the weaving department and there were about five looms, and they were all set up with little white—[inaudible]. And I was told, get a shuttle and weave little towels in white. So, okay, I did that. And then I had done that; I said what do I do now? So, I was to weave towels with little borders, so I did that. And then I was supposed to weave some more towels and I said, thank you, no, and I just left because I just—it didn't do anything for me. I mean, imagination, inspiration, fun—

ROBERT BROWN: None of that.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No. Well, anybody can move a shuttle back and forth.

ROBERT BROWN: So what happened when you walked out that class?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, then I decided that the only thing that I could do was to go to a design class. Well, that was a little bit better, but not much because that whole school operated on the idea that the teachers would leave rather 3 in a half p.m. and not have to bother with students. So I got assignments that were supposed to keep me happy and unhappy for three weeks, and I was done in two days, so I was not very well liked at all as a matter of fact [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you were able to master what they wanted you to do very quickly.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I mastered them in two days, but not in three weeks, so I was bored—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: What kind of problems did they set you in design?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I can only remember a wallpaper [laughs]. I was supposed to make a wallpaper, and I made something with enormous birds in wild colors. And that's the only thing I can remember.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that liked by the teachers?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, as a matter of fact my design teacher was very pleased [laughs]. Nobody else had done that before, so she was a little shocked.

ROBERT BROWN: This was really an applied art school then. Was it mainly weaving wallpapers?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, it was fine arts, sculpture, painting, ceramics. That was a good department, but I didn't go there.

ROBERT BROWN: Ceramics?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that much more forward-looking and better instruction?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think the man at the head of it was much more interesting, but I didn't take it so I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, what did you do since you had all this free time, because you finished your project in two days and you were given three weeks. Did you just do more design?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I worked pretty hard. I mean, I did what I was supposed to. But after school—and this has been worn out later on because some of my students who got fellowships to Finland felt very much felt very much the same, and the school has not changed at all. I mean, you would just get the job, get your paycheck and to heck with the students.

ROBERT BROWN: So you really couldn't talk much with the teachers at all?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Absolutely not.

ROBERT BROWN: They weren't even there all the time?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, they were there but, I mean, they weren't [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: Did any of them amount to much as artists?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Some must have, I think, and some good people came out of there. Maybe I wasn't good enough. For instance, there was a girlfriend of mine, Dora Jung, who did some beautiful, beautiful things, but after school, not in school.

ROBERT BROWN: What did she do?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Textiles.

ROBERT BROWN: Textiles.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: So,—well, anyway, that influenced my teaching at Cranbrook.

ROBERT BROWN: You decided you would be more with the students?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Not only that but just the family group—just a lovely, lovely time, even the 25—almost 25 that didn't get to go over.

ROBERT BROWN: The family group? Do you mean—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Not if you go very close.

ROBERT BROWN: At Cranbrook?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, at Cranbrook, and I let them go. As a matter of fact, I didn't let them into the library for half the year because I didn't want them to copy me. I made them cry. They did, too.

ROBERT BROWN: You made them struggle to develop their own—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I said, you go ahead and do this yourself, and some of them did cry [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: You finished—the Central School of Industrial Art, you finished there in 1929.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, and then I got a job. My father, as a matter of fact, took me to Sweden on one of the big boats at the time and introduced me to Sweden. And I got the job with Svenska Slate [ph] Training.

ROBERT BROWN: And what sort of a place was that, Svenska Slate [ph] Training?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, that was actually mainly an office, but working with this industry and working with designers, and very, very much with the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition.

ROBERT BROWN: And what kind of a business was it? Was it a design firm?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No. I really don't know. I just know what I had to do, and I had to do everything. I was farmed out to designers to do working drawings, and when the buildings finally got up I was on the ground all the time doing everything, just everything. If somebody slacked I had to tap them on the head and say, stop it, you know—that sort of thing. I did everything.

ROBERT BROWN: So you designed working drawings? You had skill in draftsmanship so you could do the—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I didn't have it, but I developed it, you know. I just said, well, hey, if that's what I have to do, I will do it.

ROBERT BROWN: These were working designs for—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Tapestries, rugs, you know, things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: This is textiles mainly then?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes. There was a quite famous person at the time, her name was Elsa Gullberg and she had a big textile thing, but it was all very much Swedish and it was very traditional, mostly traditional.

ROBERT BROWN: But the Swedish were very different from what you were heading toward.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, definitely.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? They were more interested in traditional—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Traditional patterns, very simple materials: linen mostly, wool, felt.

ROBERT BROWN: You found it dull?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I did.

ROBERT BROWN: But this work in 1929 and '30, getting ready for the exhibition in 1930 was exciting because—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it was very—

ROBERT BROWN:—you were so busy?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I was busy 21 hours a day. I had to get up early in the morning and I took typewriting and what have you and so forth, and then I went to the office and I worked all day on various projects that were handed out. Then I—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: But most of your work then had to do with fabric, with textiles.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I wouldn't say so. I'm not sure because I really had to do a lot of other things too, which I did ultimately in some other jobs later.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean other types of design or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, no, just really odd jobs during the exhibition. After all, I was only 20 and I hadn't had any tremendous, you know, responsibilities.

ROBERT BROWN: What the purpose of the exhibition, do you recall, the "Stockholm Exhibition?"

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, that was, I would say, the first thing that ever happened in Scandinavia—in Europe as a matter of fact, those modern architecture, modern design and so forth and so on, to gather them together. But I did every kind of job, manual and—

ROBERT BROWN: Is there anything in the exhibition that particularly stands out in your memory?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, the atmosphere was very, very, very exciting because it was completely different, you know. It was all simple, and the situation—[inaudible]—with lots of planting and stuff, so it's exciting, and the people I met, of course, you know. The architect, Asplund was wonderful, and everybody I worked with was fun, but I was a little green maybe.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, sure, you were pretty young.

What was Asplund like, Gunner Asplund, Swedish architect?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I can't really tell you much about that. I mean, he was—

ROBERT BROWN: He was the really modernist Scandinavian, wasn't he?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, absolutely. He was a very serious man. I don't recall him having any great sense of humor or anything. He was good.

ROBERT BROWN: So this work continued through the summer of 1930, or something like that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I came back in June, or something like that.

ROBERT BROWN: And you came back to do what?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I came back to be the head and only designer of this—[unintelligible]—which was my mother's shop, and this was all sort of tailor-made for me. But when I got there I had not really designed anything beforehand, nothing. The only thing I wanted to do was to be myself, and I didn't want to look at anybody else's work. And I actually closed my eyes when I had to go through the shop. They had a good designer before me but I'm actually very different. She was more traditional; no idea about color, which of course I loved.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you attempt to introduce into your designs? Did you do breakthroughs in color, brighter colors?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah, definitely. Brighter—well, I had two sorts of lines. One was how to use whites and beiges and blacks well together, and the other one was color and texture. There was no texture in anything.

ROBERT BROWN: No variations?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Nothing, and also in raw materials. I mean, it was terribly dull.

ROBERT BROWN: And you began introducing a broader range of raw materials.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That's what I did immediately. And that of course shocked everybody because I guess I have never had any compulsion about not mixing anything I like. I used everything, from rags to riches—[inaudible]—whole business.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe we can go through each of those things. Now, the combination of beige, whites and blacks, what was the problem there? What were you trying to do with that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I think you can do a lot with those colors if you use them right, you know, if you strengthen them. I mean, it doesn't need to be dull, you know, you can be very dramatic. But I had—as I've said before, I had special clientele, you know, and that was interesting to me because they all wanted something different.

ROBERT BROWN: Would they talk with you privately about what they wanted or would you say, you're going to get what I—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, they didn't discuss it with me; with my mother, yes, but not with me.

ROBERT BROWN: Perhaps fortunate for you is the fact that each one of them wanted to have something so different that they would accept something—if you did something utterly new that was all right, wasn't it?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: They were an unusually perceptive—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, they were pleased, they were pleased. They were happy; they were best, different than the next door neighbor. That made it fun.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] And in terms of color, did you introduce brighter colors than had been used?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, definitely. You know, the old Finnish—[unintelligible]—had beautiful colors, but that had sort of disappeared in the meantime. But they had texture and —

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, they did?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, well, they had, you know—[unintelligible]—and they had beautiful colors.

ROBERT BROWN: But you weren't consciously trying to revive that were you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, absolutely not.

ROBERT BROWN: Many designers or craftsmen take crafts as a very serious vocation, don't they? Did you do your mother's frame in a rather playful spirit, would you say? You were just going to experiment?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I frankly don't know much about how other people do it, but I want to experiment, and I want a challenge.

ROBERT BROWN: Did your mother encourage you at that time?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: At all times; she was magnificent about it. And we had a very close relationship because of that, not just because she was my mother, but we worked together, you know, and that made for a very ideal situation.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, did you find fairly soon that her clients liked your work quite a lot?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, apparently, but she might have been a very good saleswoman too. [Laughs.] I mean, she really could convince people, and she always convinced them the right way. And she was critical, but really, she didn't have too much reason to be critical of

me because I did things she liked.

ROBERT BROWN: You had to work on a pretty large scale, didn't you, if you were doing drapery and upholstery, rugs?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I did everything, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you mind having to do the very large things? Weren't those long, long projects?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No. I don't know what you mean with the long—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, I mean, it took a good long time to do a great big thing.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, of course I didn't weave it myself; I had weavers.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you had weavers. You would get the thing and—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I have always been a designer, not a weaver. I mean, I don't do the manual part of it. And I had excellent weavers. You know, the Finns—all of us talking about the Finns and Japanese and the—[inaudible]—and there's a lot to be told about that because my weavers, they had a sense of what I wanted to do. I mean, they did beautiful work. And I did a lot of work in Japan later on. It was the same thing.

ROBERT BROWN: But in your mother's shop, then, you would show—tell them—you would bring out the fabric you wanted or the thread you want to use.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, or I make a sample or a drawing for certain things like a hanging, you know. I had to make also make a drawing, of course, but never working drawings. I just worked with them. I mean, we just talked, you know, and they did it.

ROBERT BROWN: And the same thing if you went out to the cottages in the country; you'd just sort of get them started.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, actually, I never did go out.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, your mother really—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: My mother was the one. That was her—

ROBERT BROWN: You had not only, then, these custom commissions, really, but you had an open—a line.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, right.

ROBERT BROWN: And work, was that sold mostly just in Finland, or did your mother export?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, she didn't export—right in the shop.

ROBERT BROWN: There wasn't then the competition as we have here from huge textile firms.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, you see, this was all hand-woven, for one thing. I mean, we made it different.

ROBERT BROWN: But there was a fairly large market for that in Finland at that time?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it was, because you couldn't get anything else. There were one or two factories that turned out stuff, you know, and not very good, and a couple of places that did prints, but that was about all. So she really had the market. There wasn't much else.

ROBERT BROWN: At that time would that have been a market that would have extended to lower-income people too? Would some of them be buying?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, prices were reasonable, you know. This was not a high-priced place at all. I mean, certain things cost more that others, of course, but normally, anybody—I mean, I have always believed in low-cost fabrics, for instance. I mean, I can see why you have to go—

ROBERT BROWN: And the shop could turn out quite a large volume, could it?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes; oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You had how many weavers?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, there must have been at least 50 of them in the country, you know. And we just sent the yarns to them and sent all the facts about the whole thing, and they went to work, and then they shipped it back. So it was a good cottage industry.

ROBERT BROWN: You stayed with it six years, until 1936.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Until I left.

ROBERT BROWN: During that time, I've talked about a couple things: in 1933, your trip to Milan, to Italy. How did that come about?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I have no idea. I can't see why I was picked, but I was picked as assistant to the architect who was going to put on the *Triennale* show [*V Triennale of Milan*, Palazzo del'Arte, May to September, 1933], the Finnish Pavilion.

ROBERT BROWN: The *Triennale* was an important exhibition at that time.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, very. Oh, indeed, it still is I think. I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was the architect, do you recall—a Finnish architect?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: A Finnish architect. I can't recall his name right now, I'm sorry.

ROBERT BROWN: When you got there, what was the task that had to be done?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, actually, when I got there—I went by myself. He came later, and I came first—it was Easter. And I came on the train from Berlin down to Milan, and I met a young German girl and German boy, and they were going to Venice. And they said, "Why don't you come to Venice." So I said, "Oh, that sounds great, why don't I go to Venice?" [Laughs.] So I went to Venice at Easter, and everybody was in Venice.

So, the best I could do was I slept in a bathtub, [laughs] and I had a wonderful time. So, then I got from there to Milan. And what I had to do was, again, more or less like the things—I had to do everything: I had to feed everybody, I had to run around, I had to unpack, I had to translate.

ROBERT BROWN: You were sort of the manager of the whole thing.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I was just—yeah, all-trade.

ROBERT BROWN: But the building was going up, the Pavilion?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, that was in the big palace. It was not a special—

ROBERT BROWN: Not a special building.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, it was in the palace. And the next-door people were the Hungarians, as I told you, and they were delightful.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you mean you would chat with them quite a lot?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They would—[inaudible]—or cry all the time. No, no, we had a very good time.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of things were represented in the exhibition?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: As a matter of fact, it was textiles, because that seemed to be the project at the time, so it was mostly that—none of mine.

ROBERT BROWN: None of yours?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: None of your mother's?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, it was mostly—well, it was some old things and some new things, but mostly textiles and some tapestries, and things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you recall, what was the reaction of the public, of the critics and all to the exhibition?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think it was very good. It was very good. And I think the press was good. I had to talk to them in the most mysterious language, half German and a little bit of Italian, and it was all right.

ROBERT BROWN: You did some writing during that time, didn't you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I did.

ROBERT BROWN: On the exhibition?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not on that. No, mostly afterwards, you know. My favorite writing was done in Rome. And I was in hospital for 10 days after that because it was such a tremendous, tremendous thing. It was a Mussolini, a show on Mussolini and his march to Rome, and it was a grisly thing. It was all the bloody things hanging around, and the flags, and it was pitch black. And there was this sound effect going, saying, "Proscenta [sp], proscenta, proscenta." It was a very, very eerie affair. It really got to me, so I wrote it for my paper in Finland and then I ended up in hospital. No, not quite right away, I went to Capri first. But that, of my writings at that time, is the one I like best. And unfortunately, I can't get it. It disappeared.

ROBERT BROWN: It might be in the newspapers' files.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, it isn't, I tried. I couldn't get it.

ROBERT BROWN: But that was a horrifying aspect of the trip, the Mussolini presence.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It was absolutely fantastic, the whole thing regarding Mussolini at the time. You know, you'd just go out and sit in Piazza Venecia, you know, and you'd practically get shot through the heart because you were even there, because he was so close. It was really quite something.

ROBERT BROWN: But your time in Milan was different, wasn't it? I mean, that wasn't the capital.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, no. I didn't like Milan, particularly.

ROBERT BROWN: No?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, it's very commercial. I mean, a lot of places in Italy are like that.

ROBERT BROWN: But you had to really be in charge because the architect left, you said—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I had to.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, you didn't decide to go back?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, it was a very funny situation. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: This was government-sponsored, wasn't it, under the Finnish government?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I presume so, yeah, I'm sure. That's something I didn't have anything to do with.

ROBERT BROWN: Then the next year, 1934, you had your first exhibition, didn't you, in the Swedish National Museum?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that come about?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Again, I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: You were just simply contacted one day?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, somebody—I was contacted. I think what happened was that they had something lined up and it didn't really come through, and for some reason or another, just asked me. And I got two other people in on it because I didn't feel that I could really carry it by myself, but I had most of the stuff. And one of the big weavers at the time doing mostly pictorials, or tapestries, was called Maya Kunsonan [sp], and I got her in. And I got the ceramic from Arabia,. A-RAB-I-A, you got me into Arabia [Laughs]. But it was a tremendous success, and it rocked the Swedes.

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It really did. Here I was with my rags and riches, you know, in all the colors and all the stuff: crazy rugs, what have you, and so forth. I mean, they'd never seen anything like it. But I think I did influence them a little bit.

ROBERT BROWN: Was their criticism rather puzzled, perplexed?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, it was completely positive. It was amazing, like—well, you don't speak Swedish, but I—it was very, very, very good. I mean, they were astonished, they were shocked, and they admitted it, you know, which is something for a Swede to do, admit that maybe there is something outside Sweden. No, I think it was a good thing.

ROBERT BROWN: You had been in Sweden before, hadn't you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I was there that year, and Venice.

ROBERT BROWN: You found they were fairly self-satisfied.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, very stuffy.

ROBERT BROWN: They were interested in—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, they were amazed at the—[inaudible]—very shocked.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there random patterns in it too? They weren't the patterns they were used to; they were random.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, there was nothing like—nothing traditional, no. Oh, there were lots of stripes, and I can show you some of the things I had in it. And then, it went on to Malmi and to Gutenberg, and so forth. And everywhere it was extremely well, you know—

ROBERT BROWN: So you found after that exhibition in Sweden you were quite renowned, weren't you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I was, suddenly. I don't know how it came about, but that was when I got the job in Denmark, because of this show.

ROBERT BROWN: And how did that come about? What was the name of the place in Copenhagen?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: [Unintelligible]—it means "how to live" in Danish. [Inaudible.] I was in Copenhagen, and the man who started it was a magnificent designer, interior designer mostly, and fabulous taste, really fabulous taste. I don't think I ever met anybody who had such a good taste in everything: glassware, textiles, anything. And the place was right on Stroget, which is the main thing—the main street.

ROBERT BROWN: The 5th Avenue of Copenhagen.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What was his name?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: His name was Kye Desau [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: And had you met him before you went to Denmark?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, he came to Finland and he saw my things, and then he actually held a show in Stockholm for me. And after that he asked me to come down, so I went down every year for three years—twice a year, six weeks at a time. And at the time, they had really no textiles in Denmark at all. Now of course it's very different.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose they didn't?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: They didn't import anything?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't know why, but they didn't have anything. So he opened a studio for me, and I had to train the weavers.

ROBERT BROWN: So he had a shop himself, which sold various things: glassware, metalware.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, furniture, all interior things.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, you've used the word several times, but maybe here would be a point for the first time to explain, what do you mean by good taste? You said Kye Desau was a man of fabulous taste. Can you put that in a few words, what you mean by, in your opinion, fine taste?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Everything was beautiful. And it was not just beautiful, it was also practical, it was everything that you could ask for. Can I explain it better?

ROBERT BROWN: Okay. And there your job was to design lines of textiles for him to sell?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, right.

ROBERT BROWN: And did he have weavers there, or how was it carried out?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes—well, he didn't have any weavers but we got a studio started with weavers, Danish weavers, and I worked with them directly.

ROBERT BROWN: Does it take very long to train weavers?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It depends on the weavers.

ROBERT BROWN: But I mean, in that case, did it take long?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I don't think so. I think they did very well.

ROBERT BROWN: In a few weeks, they could begin?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, well, simple things, yes, but nothing very difficult.

ROBERT BROWN: You still had, at that time, the Scandinavian artisan class, didn't you? I mean, these would be perhaps younger people who would be perfectly willing to just work in repetitive artisan tasks.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, actually, I'm surprised that happened even right here, you know, in Pontiac, Michigan. I had all these weavers that did not want to design; they wanted to just work. And they loved the actual manual work, and that was it.

ROBERT BROWN: But there were a number of people in Scandinavia, when you were young, who were perfectly willing to simply do that.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, and even here.

ROBERT BROWN: But that was an exceptional group too, wasn't it, in Michigan? Weren't they Swedish?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, they were Swedish, yes. They had the background of that, but I think there is always—there is still a group of people who just like the manual work and the money.

ROBERT BROWN: So, you stayed with Desau. You stayed in Copenhagen, or at least part of the year for several years?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Six weeks twice a year for about three years. And he also had a big exhibition after—at the end of the time, and a big huge dinner party. It was very glamorous.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you like Denmark?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes I did, very much.

ROBERT BROWN: That was the time—the beginnings at least of a lot of their very influential furniture design, wasn't it, and architectural interior—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, well, many of my best friends were architects.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were some of those?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Kay Fisker was the number one architect, and he was a very good friend of mine. His daughter lives in Cambridge, or in Lexington.

No, the architecture was just starting up at the time. And of course china, porcelain, that whole field was going, but no textile.

ROBERT BROWN: In Europe, as opposed to here, a fine design will be taken up by industry, won't it, or many designers work for industry, which industry supplies the mass market, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: There's a very large market for very good things, isn't there?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, right. Well, in textiles it didn't happen at that time, but now, of course, it's completely different. I mean, there's lots of very good textiles in the market. But I would say mostly pottery was the number one thing at the time.

ROBERT BROWN: But that too was for production, wasn't it—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I think so.

ROBERT BROWN:—as opposed to, say, here, where the artist-potter, say in the 1930s, was doing a pretty small production for a few—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, at the time it was like that, actually.

ROBERT BROWN: It was.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Now of course everything's changed.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you also, back at home, were either a cofounder, or you partly owned a shop.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And this was, what was that, "Koti Hemmet [sp]?"

MARIANNE STRENGELL: "Koti Hemmet." Now, that means "home" in Finnish and in Swedish. And actually, it was rather a crazy thing to do. There was an architect, a woman architect, and I decided to just do something about furniture and interiors—

ROBERT BROWN: You became partners with this—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was her name, your partner?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Move on.

ROBERT BROWN: And she was an architect, who was interested—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, she was—

ROBERT BROWN:—and she did design of other things as well?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: She designed furniture to some extent, and she did interiors. And actually, we opened our shop above the one where I worked in Hemfrid—

ROBERT BROWN: Your mother's.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah—and we paid in 1,000 Finn-mark at the time for the entire thing. You don't start that way anymore.

ROBERT BROWN: That was a fairly small amount of money then, wasn't it?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It was very tiny. But we opened it up and it was very successful, but of course it was extra work.

ROBERT BROWN: And did you commission various furniture makers and others to make things?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes. We had ceramics, we had glass, we had it all. It was a tiny little buoy, you know, but it wasn't—it wasn't in that class, but it was good. And I finally sold out when I left to come over here because it was—I had too much to do.

ROBERT BROWN: What led you to come over here? You came over—you traveled here at least in 1937.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I had friends, and I felt I needed a refresher. You know, I needed a change because—and I also was curious. And mainly, I had friends. I took one of the Swedish—well, it wasn't exactly a fruit boat, but it was a—

ROBERT BROWN: A freighter.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: A freighter. There was—oh, I think we were only 12 people, passengers, and went all the way to the Caribbean and all of Japan and Okinawa, and so forth and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: And you went up to the Western United States—California?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I landed in Hollywood.

ROBERT BROWN: In Hollywood.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. [Laughs.] That's where my friends lived, so it's not all that strange.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they in the film industry?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, as a matter of fact they were not, but they lived in Hollywood. So I lived there for a while, and then I went to San Francisco, and then I got an offer to come to Cranbrook.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that happen? Did Saarinen know you were here?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Of course, and he had wanted me to come for years, but it had never really been finalized. So here I was, and they needed somebody, so they just said to me, "Come, come," and I was very happy to do so.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you were a little tired of wandering by then, were you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I don't know. I was offered to sing in a nightclub in San Francisco but my voice is not quite right, so I didn't. I said, thank you, no.

ROBERT BROWN: But you'd been heard, apparently.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not really. It was just the accent, I suppose, or something. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: But Eliel Saarinen had been in touch with you over the years, since he'd been in America?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes. Well, they came every summer; they came to Finland, you know. There was a famous place, Hvittrask—I don't know if you know about that—that they built long ago, and every summer they came, so we always had a reunion.

ROBERT BROWN: And he talked very favorably of what was happening at Cranbrook?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, he wrote me about it, you know, what was going on, and he wanted me to come. I think he felt that that I was the right person for it, so it all worked out beautifully. I didn't have a cent then to—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: Well, when you got there in '37, what did it seem—what was it like? What was built, what existed at that time?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Actually, quite a lot. Have you been there?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, actually, Academy Road was more or less built, and the Saarinen House was built and the Milles House was built, and the girls' dormitory was built, and the studios: the weaving studios, ceramic studios, and the—[inaudible]—and the office, you know, and all that. It was all there.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Eliel Saarinen quite a warm man? What was his relation with you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: He was a lovely man, a very lovely man; extremely warm and sweet. No, no, we were very good friends. As a matter of fact, he visited our house—we were just across the street—one afternoon, and we had, oh, at least a two-hour talk, and then he went back home to listen to the news and he died. So I was one of the last people to see him.

And he used to drive an absolutely fantastic old Buick, enormous—and he was not a good driver, believe me—and he used to ask us out for Sunday lunch with champagne cocktails—that's the only thing you could drink in Michigan on Sunday—and that sort of thing, you know. It was very close. We spent Christmas with them.

ROBERT BROWN: What was his wife like?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Quite different. I mean, quite, you know, stiff and very quiet, but very dominating. She knew what she was doing.

ROBERT BROWN: And she was the one who was introducing textiles to Cranbrook, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, she was.

ROBERT BROWN: So, when you came, were you to be her assistant, or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, well, I was supposed to take over the studio—not her studio; she had her studio separately down below. No, I was to take over the classes. She never interfered with me once, not once.

ROBERT BROWN: Had she been trained in weaving in Finland?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: She must have, but actually she started out as a sculptress, you know, and that was actually what she was doing. And I don't know just when she started weaving, I really don't know. And, of course, her weaving was quite formal, you know. And part of it, I suppose, was actually designed by Eliel too. I mean, they worked together on it.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you were quite an instructor in weaving and textile design in '37.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you find there to work with? Had they been teaching weaving

before you came? Had Mrs. Saarinen?

MS STRENGELL: No, no, not she, but there was a Swedish girl who had been fantastic.

ROBERT BROWN: Who had been there?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, she had to go home to Sweden because her mother was ill, I think, so I took over from her. And the material I had to work with was very sad at the time. I mean, there were the looms, sure, but the people, the students were a very low category.

ROBERT BROWN: Where did they come from?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think mostly they actually came locally, house wives and stuff like that, and a little below par.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, they were just dabbling in it, were they?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, but that was changed, believe me.

ROBERT BROWN: You found that they really weren't very good students, and I think you told me that the previous teacher mainly simply set them to do copy work, or something of that order.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, frankly, I can't recall anything else, and it was awful, and it was technically difficult for them. You know—

ROBERT BROWN: They couldn't even conceive the process very well, as far as you could tell?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, and they certainly didn't design anything themselves, which was, of course, the number one thing that I insisted on.

ROBERT BROWN: So you then started out with design, and with this first group of students there wasn't too much you could do, I suppose, in terms of design.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, that first half year there was nothing much I could do, yeah. But then we got much better students and I started them in on materials and colors and stuff, and, oh, just piled lots of yarns on the floor and sorted out and picked colors, and do things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that a frequent working method of yours, or had been for you, just laying yarn down?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, just play with it.

ROBERT BROWN: At that point just getting ideas.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, way before I start a design, actually. And also, what I got them to do was to make sample—I mean, instead of starting on a huge piece that they wouldn't know how it would come out. We had sample works for everything. They were not allowed to do anything unless it had a sample work. So, they put it up and then they tried various things on it, you know, and then we picked the best one. But it was all their design. It was not mine. And that way they got into the fact that you have to try out things, you have to experiment.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you give them any kind of discussion, or did you have discussion beforehand on design, or did you talk about what is good design, things like that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not very much. We had lots of very informal—at least once a week we had wonderful sort of informal discussions about things, you know. But no, I never told them what to do.

ROBERT BROWN: You said here's the way you do it and here's the material you're working with, and here's the—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, and you are it.

ROBERT BROWN: You are it, and here to create what sort of thing?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, something personal. That's why I've said they couldn't go to the library. I bet somebody slipped in there anyway. And that was my number one rule: you can't copy anything. You have to just work it out by yourself. And I think that was fun for them, you know. It became fun for them, and it became personality.

ROBERT BROWN: These students, they at least had shown some aptitude before they were admitted to Cranbrook?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not necessarily, not to start with. After we got accredited, yes, then they had to because they had to be admitted, you know, but not the first years.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I see, people could just come who would pay the fee.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: They could come to the art school.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, right. Well, that was just the first year.

ROBERT BROWN: So it worked out quite well fairly soon; as soon as you were through with, rid of that first group of rather casual students.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. I hope to forget those, please. [Laughs.]

No, no, you know, I just feel that's the way to do about—during the war I fought—I went to Washington three times—to be allowed to do something for, you know, the veterans, you know, in the hospital, so forth and so on. I was not allowed to.

ROBERT BROWN: Why was that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Because I was not a nurse. I didn't have a nurse's degree, so I was not allowed. So the poor guys, you know, there, without legs and what have you, they got the little loom and they were told, throw a shuttle across it, but they had absolute no joy, and no creative things. Now, I could have provided all that and they would have adored it, I know it, you know, because I know because of my own experience when I went to school, but I wasn't allowed to.

ROBERT BROWN: And it certainly worked with some sculpture and some experiments in ceramics in such hospitals, in metalwork, but they did not allow you.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no. Dorothy Liebes, she was there; she wasn't a nurse. But, I mean, that was a different story.

ROBERT BROWN: Dorothy Liebes? Was she much more ingrained in the art establishment or something?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I suppose so. But that was very sad because I wanted so much to do something, and I know what I could have done, because that's one thing I did: at least I inspired my students. They were all joyful, and they were experimental, and they did their own thing.

ROBERT BROWN: When you were at Cranbrook, now, the Saarinens were there; who were some of the other people you met right away and worked closely with?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, of course, Milles was there.

ROBERT BROWN: Carl Milles.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Carl Milles was there.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you become fairly close to him?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, yes, I think so, but I mean, I really never liked him very much. [Laughs.] But, of course, it was a terribly small group, you know. And there was Zoltan Sepeshy, a Hungarian-born painter, and his absolutely charming wife, Dorothy.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Sepeshy quite a good teacher?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: What about Milles? Was he considered a good—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I think that his students loved him, yes. I didn't like him because he was very overbearing and pompous, you know—Swedish. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: But Sepeshy was another matter. He was not—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. No, he was a very good teacher too, and I think everybody liked him very much. Let's see, who else was there? Maija Grotell came from Finland.

ROBERT BROWN: About the same time?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: A couple years later than I did, and she was excellent. She was really—kept to herself very much. She wasn't really part of the group. But the students were wonderful, and we had a good time.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned some of these students in '38, '39 or so, as a banner year, in your memory, in terms of the students you had.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, it was.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe we can talk about some of them now.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, there's Charlie Eames, for one thing.

ROBERT BROWN: You had met him before he came to Cranbrook.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I was the one that got him to Cranbrook—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, you met him in St. Louis.

MARIANNE STRENGELL:—when I suggested he should apply for the scholarship. And he did, and he came and he stayed until he went to California in 1940.

ROBERT BROWN: He came in not simply as a student, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, he came as a student, but then he stayed on as a—well, he had a student-teacher sort of situation. And Harry Bertoia was the same. He came as a student—as a matter of fact, a student in painting. I have something of his here. And then, he also knew about metalsmithing, and so he took over that department. And there was, as I said, Ben Baldwin, who was an architect—

ROBERT BROWN: Ben what?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Baldwin, yes—who was an excellent interior designer. And there's also—well, quite a few of them—

ROBERT BROWN: But several of these people then stayed on to be teachers, or at least fairly—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Now, Wally Mitchell, for instance, came up as a student.

ROBERT BROWN: In what?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Painting. And then he stayed on, and then he became president. And—

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like when you first knew him?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, very nice, very warm, very sweet. I liked him very much. We did a lot of things. We used to go up to northern Michigan and paint together, for instance, things like that, yeah. He was a good man, very thoughtful, loved music, and a good painter. And I haven't got any of his things, but he was a very good painter.

ROBERT BROWN: You were doing some painting then too?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I did some pottery, remember? I don't think I did much painting—yeah, like that, yes, going up to northern Michigan and painting. I don't call that real creative painting. [Laughter.]

ROBERT BROWN: So, it was very small. How many students would there have been, say—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I would say 25 at the most. And we all had our meals together, you know, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you all have anything to do with the boys and girls schools?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: You didn't teach at those or anything?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Or was the museum a separate? Was that under a separate curator?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that relate to the art school?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: The museum—well, it was part of it very much, but Albert Christiana [sp]—if you know him—we have one of his paintings here too. He was one of the people who headed the museum at the time. No, no, he at least tried. He gave Lily her first show.

ROBERT BROWN: Lily Saarinen. Well, She came about '39 too, didn't she?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And she taught for a while, I guess.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Taught?

ROBERT BROWN: Did she?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, she was a student.

ROBERT BROWN: So, during World War II, was there a shortage of students, or how did that change things?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, the, you know, for one thing, I think that was about the time we started summer school to get, you know, to even out the curriculum a little bit. And that was quite a strain because summer school was long and there wasn't very much time in between school. No, we had a lot of students.

ROBERT BROWN: We you, in the '40s, trying out new things as a teacher? As you look back, do you remember trying to introduce new ways of approaching weaving or new materials?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, new materials, you know, they were fortunate there because I was working with industry all throughout, so I had new materials all the time. And so, they had the benefit of that.

ROBERT BROWN: You began working on the outside, then, fairly soon.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Almost right away, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What were some of the early ones you worked for? I know you listed some that were fairly early on. Well, one of your first industrial jobs was with Knoll Associates.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, Yes. And I was quite a natural of course, because Florence Knoll was—we shared a dormitory. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: She was at Cranbrook.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: She was at Cranbrook. She was more or less an adopted daughter of the Saarinens. Her parents died early, and she was in Kingswood School, and they took her

more or less as a kid, you know, and took her to Finland, for instance. Actually, I met her first in Finland. She came over with the Saarinens. And I suppose that had something to do with it, but no.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you do for Knoll, design, upholster—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Prints—

ROBERT BROWN: Prints?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, printed fabric.

ROBERT BROWN: Printed fabric.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, at that point, I didn't do any—[inaudible]—at all.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, how early did she setup, in the early '40s or so?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think so. I can't remember exactly when, but when she married Hans Knoll.

ROBERT BROWN: And it became—

[Audio break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Okay, we're continuing these interviews in Wellfleet with Marianne Strengell. Bob Brown, the interviewer. This is March 18, 1982. The last time we spoke, you had said a bit about your coming to Cranbrook, talked a bit about the way it was there in World War II, and at the end were talking something of Florence Knoll and Knoll Associates. But I was wondering if we could begin today going back a bit, and then forward, talking further about some of the people with whom you worked at Cranbrook, and then later maybe about some of the students.

For starters, what about the Saarinens? You have mentioned them, to some extent: how you knew them and your families knew each other back in Finland. When you came to Cranbrook, which was what, in the later '30s—'38 or '37—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Thirty-seven.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. What did the Saarinens provide for you? Were they very welcoming hosts? Were they the leading people there or were there also—the Americans who financed it, were they also involved, the Booth family?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right. Well, actually, the whole thing started way back in Finland, with Eliel and Loja, who were very good friends of my parents. And Eliel, for some reason, wanted me to come work to Cranbrook. And he wrote me some beautiful letters about what he was doing, what the philosophy was, and what he wanted to accomplish, and his philosophy about the whole thing.

So, actually, it took quite a few years before I managed to do it. But then, in 1936, I came to America and, like everybody else, ran out of money. Fortunately enough, at the same time, almost a day after this financial thing, I got a wire from Eliel and Loja saying, won't you come and teach? So, I took a—[inaudible]—which took me six days, seven nights, something like that, across the continent, and I was welcomed in Bloomfield Hills.

Eliel picked me up, as a matter of fact, and I had a lovely dinner with the Saarinens and the —[unintelligible]. He was the secretary at the time. And Eliel had always been a great influence on my life. I mean, he was the most lovable person, warm, sweet, and we saw very much eye to eye.

So, I think I fitted in very well in the situation, partly because my education, in weaving for instance, which I disliked very much, and Eliel's feeling that everybody who was teaching at Cranbrook should do something on their own, they should express themselves, they should look into things. And of course that's what I'd been doing all my life. Loja was my boss for the first year, but she never interfered with me at all.

ROBERT BROWN: She was the head of the weaving department?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: She was the head when I came. I was just an instructor until '42. But we had an extremely lovely—what do you call it—life together, very close.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you see that the school was going very well?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: At the time, frankly, I didn't think so. You know, at least my own department was in horrible shape, I thought. I mean, there were inferior people, and so forth—students. And the equipment was all right and all that, but I wasn't too happy about it and I was all out for changing it.

ROBERT BROWN: And was Mrs. Saarinen backing you in that, which she taught—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: She left a me completely free hand.

ROBERT BROWN: She felt perhaps there needed to be changes too?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I think she probably did.

ROBERT BROWN: She designed for weaving, didn't she, but didn't—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, she designed but she had her own department. She had her own place downstairs and her own weavers, who later became my weavers. But there was really no connection at all.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, really? She was sort of an artist on her own?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. No, she had nothing to do with the education business at all.

So, that's that. Now, would you like to know about some other people I—

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. Well, I was going to ask briefly, the Booths, people who provided for this art school, did you have some contact with them, and what was their attitude? Were they—say, compared with Eliel Saarinens?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, actually, they did whatever Eliel said because, I mean, he had them convinced completely. But later on, there was some strange things. I mean, they didn't want, for instance, a husband and wife work in the same place. My husband was asked later on to take over the architecture department, but Mr. Booth didn't like that. He even kicked out Eero because he was the son of Eliel. I don't know, that was just a little quick—

ROBERT BROWN: But you saw there was probably no problem in a husband and wife or a father and son being there.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I can't see why if they're both—[inaudible]—and talented and brilliant. But anyway—

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe I haven't asked this: what do you think was Eliel's conception of the school? Was it going to be something different from any other school?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I think very much that he felt what I always felt too, that it shouldn't just be somebody coming in and sitting down and saying something, you know, year after year after year. He wanted people who were active; who were doing things. And that's I think why he liked me, because he had seen that I had done that in Europe. I mean, I was digging in and I was in everything, you know, and I wanted to find out, I wanted to do things. So, that was his philosophy, that people who are teaching should also be doers.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this true perhaps of the painters as well? They were supposed to be at least active and exhibiting?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, absolutely, everybody, yes. But not like them. You know, you had to write a book every year.

ROBERT BROWN: No, but I mean, a painter had to be actively exhibiting, perhaps have a dealer, and so forth.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Didn't want what we'd call ivory tower conditions there.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I don't think it was ever—at least I feel it was never an ivory tower, at least not in my department. It might have been in some others, but I don't want to talk about them.

ROBERT BROWN: You've talked a bit about Carl Milles, but I don't know if there's anything more to be said there. He was sort of the most renowned artist brought in, wasn't he?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, he was a very, very good old friend of Eliel Saarinen.

ROBERT BROWN: And he was given special status, perhaps?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes. Eliel built a house for him, and so forth. I'm sorry, I was never terribly fond of him. We didn't have any communication. But of course he was a cult, you know, and I have never been a cultist.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you think you never follow cults?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't think I have. I like to be myself; I prefer that.

ROBERT BROWN: Make your own judgments and have the right to change them?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What about some of the other colleagues you mentioned?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I can mention many. There was Albert Christiana.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, what did he teach when you first came?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, he was not teaching, he was in charge of the museum, and then he went to various places, you know, to Pratt [Pratt Institute, New York].

ROBERT BROWN: You mean the person in charge of the museum? What was the relation of it to the school, to the art school?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it was part—it depended on who was the head. And while he was there, he did a great deal. For instance, he arranged Lily Saarinen's first show, you know, and gave her a chance to show, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: What was, as far as you can remember, the purpose supposed to be of the museum?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, that was—you know, Mr. Booth had always loved the idea of having a museum, and he picked up all this dilapidated stuff elsewhere, somewhere and other, and he wanted to show it. And that was the start. When Eliel came in, Eliel talked him out of that, said—[inaudible]—let's have a living museum, something people are doing.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean of contemporary artists?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, not just that, but something that means something, you know, not just puff—

ROBERT BROWN: Apparently, Mr. Booth's collection wasn't very good until Eliel came.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, it was quite dreadful, as a matter of fact.

So the museum tried very much to do that. They had traveling shows, they bought things when they could, and some of that was rather fun. I have to try to remember to tell you that when I speak about the next guy, who was William McVey, and he's a sculptor in Cleveland. And he was teaching for many years in Cranbrook, a next-door neighbor to us. And he talked them into—I wish I had—[inaudible]—into buying one or more sculptures.

And he went to New York and he sold his thing, and he thought that that should go into a museum. At that point, Christiana was gone. He was not there any longer, it was somebody else. So for nothing, $6,000, something like that, they bought this enormous and beautiful—[inaudible]—sculpture, which finally, the museum, when they needed money many, many

years later, sold for something like $300,000, $400,000.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this a large outdoor sculpture?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It was wood thing, so it was kept inside.

ROBERT BROWN: So, what was the relation to the students? I mean, were they expected to look at the museum, go there regularly? Was it supposed to be a teaching collection at all? Did your teachers or, say, did Christiana, did he—would the students come in and he would talk to them about what was there? How closely related was it to the education?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, you know, truthfully, I can't answer that because I told my students for the first half years they were not going to go to the library, because I wanted them to dig it out of themselves and I didn't want them to go and copy something.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, you wanted them to come out with ideas from their own feeling or intellect.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Absolutely, absolutely. They cried, they groaned, but they did it, and they did awfully well. So I can't really say. I never looked into that aspect.

ROBERT BROWN: For you, the museum was simply there.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it was for my own enjoyment, but I never beat my students to go there, which I know is rather unusual.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Christiana like? Did you become something of a friend of his?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, indeed. Well, he died, you know, drove down—in a coma. Oh, very, very good friends, still good friends. No, no, we went to all his shows. We have some of his things.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like when you first knew him? What was his personality?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Quite suave, a little dandy, very handsome, but not rich, though. He had been in Chicago for a long time doing—I can't just say what he was doing there, but he wasn't on top, you know. And no, a wonderful person, terribly good taste, and I think a very good painter, actually. And his wife was one of my students, and we still write back and forth. No, unfortunately, he died very tragically—was never a good driver and just went over a mountain.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, William McVey you've mentioned. Was he a close friend too?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes; oh, yes, very much. He was also a neighbor. He took over the Christiana House.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he come in about the same time you did, or a little later?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, no, later. He took over, actually, from Milles, then he got sent to Italy. And he has done some very great work and now it's everywhere.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, the sculpture people and the painting people, was that considered a different kind of art, I mean, fine arts as opposed to crafts?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: At the time.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there ever any kind of strain between—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, no strain, but it was definitely considered fine art, and we were definitely considered crafts at the time. You know, it was before everybody started doing—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, was more status given to the fine arts? Not really, was there, at Cranbrook?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I would presume at the beginning that it was, you know. I mean, craft was craft. I mean, they had pottery, and we had metalwork, and we had

weaving, textiles, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: But what about in the mind of, say, Eliel Saarinen?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he give equivalence—they were equal?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Eliel's philosophy was that anything, from the ashtray to a city plan, should be given the same input. I mean, he stuck to that. But the other ones, I don't know what they felt.

ROBERT BROWN: But still, that must have had an effect.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it did. That was his absolute—

ROBERT BROWN: It helped to counteract the normal—or the usual attitude, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was an especially healthy place for a craftsman to work.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, absolutely. Well, of course, Loja helped because she was in textiles, you know, and so forth and so on. But no, that was—I think from childhood on that was his philosophy, and my father's too. Well, [Berthold] Tex Schiwetz—

ROBERT BROWN: Tex Schiwetz—

MARIANNE STRENGELL:—he helped Milles through all his last years. You know, he went to Italy with him, and he was also teaching at Cranbrook, and he was a great, great man. I liked him very much, great friend. I'm only talking about friends, I'm sorry. That's why I don't talk to—[inaudible]—Milles.

ROBERT BROWN: But Milles, did he come in sometime after you'd been there or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah, quite a lot afterwards. I think he came—actually came to study with Bill McVey, and then he started working with Milles, helping Milles out. And then, he went to Italy with Milles and was there for many, many years.

ROBERT BROWN: What kind of work was he doing when you knew him?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think very good work; very simple but very expressive—animals, things like that, mostly. And I don't know what more I can say. I liked him very much, and so did my husband. And unfortunately, he died of heart failure quite young. So, that was that.

Now, if you come to the painters, of course, there was Zoltan Sepeshy, who later took over after Eliel as president of Cranbrook Art Academy. And I admired him very much in various ways, and he was brilliant. He was born Hungarian, married a very charming person. As a matter of fact, two people—one was more charming. [Laughs.]

[Audio break.]

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, as I say, he was an Hungarian, and very Hungarian: his face, in his outlook, his paintings, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean when you say very Hungarian?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, Hungarians and Finns have a lot in common.

ROBERT BROWN: Another language, or that sort something.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, no, it hasn't. I only find two words that are even remotely alike. No, I mean, he was brilliant, he was a very good talker, he lived well, he drank well, he had a second wife that's very different, and the first one has been very helpful. They worked together, the two.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they both Americans, the wives?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And they had children that were the same age as my children, you know, so that also was another part. And Zoltan painted my portrait, and so forth and so on. He was especially good, I thought, in watercolors. He loved northern Michigan things, and he did a lot of stuff there. I think he was a very good president. I mean, there might be different views, but mine is that he was very good, because he let us do what we wanted to do, he listened to us, which some don't, and he also got, you know, the school —they finally allowed us to give degrees. That was one thing. I mean, he was efficient.

ROBERT BROWN: Perhaps he could combine being an artist, a man of very personal work—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, he did.

ROBERT BROWN:—with being an administrator.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, he did because—I mean, after all, that was no easy matter to get that degree thing, you know, and he worked on it very hard.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that thought to be important, to get the degree?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, it was, at that time because, you know, nobody could get the job unless they had a degree.

ROBERT BROWN: You're speaking now of, say, the 1950s, or something like that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Around that time.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, after. Well, Eliel died in '50, so it was after that. And of course I never had a degree of any kind, and I still got along.

ROBERT BROWN: So, he was very good at working with a variety of people.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: And under him, say in the—he was president of the school into the 1960s or so, I suppose.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I can't think of just when he finally stopped.

ROBERT BROWN: But under him, were very many new people brought in? There was some change, wasn't there?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, there were changes, but in a way, you know, Cranbrook was inclined to get all students in because they had been brought up in this whole atmosphere, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you think of that? Was that a good idea, do you think?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think so, I think so. Well, for instance, Wallace Mitchell, who took over the—when he finally ended up as president he took over the painting.

ROBERT BROWN: He'd been a student in the late 30s, when you first—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: When I first got there, yeah. And Fred Mitchell, who's—I have all of their paintings around here, I can show them to you. No, I think it was a good idea, because to get somebody completely different in at the time would have been very difficult, you know, because we were trying to build up to something, and we thought alike, and I think all that was very good.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you trying to build up to?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, we didn't want—a unity, let's say that. We wanted to—we thought the same way, I mean, all these people I'm referring to. I mean, we thought the same way and we wanted to do things, not impose ourselves, please, but we wanted freedom for the students. I think that's the number one thing.

ROBERT BROWN: And what do you think the shared outlook was? What did you share in common in terms of what you wanted to accomplish?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I think just that. I mean, let the students have freedom and develop themselves, not be impose upon, but guided when needed.

ROBERT BROWN: And do you think that if you'd brought in, say, a strong personality from the outside, that that person might very well have—there was a risk that that person might not understand, and that they might try to impose their way of—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I think, frankly, that that's what's happening right now with Slade, you know. He is, indeed, imposing himself on everything. I haven't been there for a while, so I—

ROBERT BROWN: But in your day, you allowed, and most of the teachers that you knew there allowed the students a good deal of freedom.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. You know, that was one thing that—well, as I said before, I was brought—the little education I had in weaving was so dreadful, and I wanted—[inaudible]—I wanted them to develop themselves, I wanted them to have joy out of it, and I also wanted very much to unite the whole thing. So we used to have open house. We were—the weavers were the only ones that did that. Oh, about once a month we had a sherry party, and we asked all the other studios in and they looked around, and you know, we got something going. So it was quite uniform.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you might get ideas from them? At least they'd know what you were doing?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They were,—Yeah, they had a feeling of companionship and understanding, and it was fun too.

ROBERT BROWN: There was no hiding of what you were doing.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, no, absolutely not.

ROBERT BROWN: You welcomed them. Did some of the other departments also—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, they didn't do it.

ROBERT BROWN: But would they mind a student from your department—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, no.

ROBERT BROWN: They wouldn't mind that, but—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, some people minded when the students, painters, came over to weave, I know that.

ROBERT BROWN: Of course they couldn't—well, that would be jealousy, they didn't want to lose them to weaving.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: In a way, they had to. That was Eliel's idea too, you know, that you had a major and you had a minor or two. You had to have an all-well-rounded thing. I mean—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: It was sort of a total art.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, total picture.

ROBERT BROWN: Try, at least—try out the various forms.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Sure, learn a little bit, understand a little bit.

ROBERT BROWN: Of course, no doubt, your various aesthetic—your various styles or ways of doing things must have rubbed off on the students a bit, I suppose.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I think so, it did, but I generally let them loose. I think I inspired them, and I think that we covered an awful lot of ground in the teaching, in the weaving. For

instance, that was something I was thinking about. We had, for instance—oh, twice a year we had a big, big party. And once, we had,—I made them design an outfit, clothing, weave it, make it, and then finally model it, you know, at the party—it was very glamourous—[inaudible]. So it was very much fun. [Laughs.]

I mean, that sort of thing. We'd pick one thing at a time and we'd just do it. And otherwise, it was very informal. We sat around a big table having coffee and just talking, you know, and chatting away, and I was telling about what I was doing and, of course, I knew what they were doing. Yeah, it was very informal.

ROBERT BROWN: But in a way, though, these open houses you spoke of earlier, plus the once-a-year modeling their weaving, forced them to have their things seen.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: That's exactly it. They had to get something done. And when I left Cranbrook that was completely destroyed.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah they were allowed to sit down in their room and do a little knitting or something, you know. I mean, there was absolutely nothing at all of that spirit.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean it became more rigid.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I would say less rigid. They were allowed to do whatever they pleased. I mean, there was a guy who knitted two bodies on a slab, you know; one was black and one was white. He crocheted it, as a matter of fact. I mean, that's in his field. I mean, there was absolutely no discipline. I at least get better, but not by beating, just by making them interested in it. I think it was good years.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, in the classroom, how would you begin them? Maybe we could go through that a little bit—in no great detail.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, no, that's very funny. Well, okay, most of them—practically everyone who came had never done any weaving at all, you know, at least most of them, in the summer school especially, or in the beginning. So the first thing I did, I put them on the loom. See, I was brought up to just do this on something that was already there.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you mean just weave back and forth.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, right. So they had to learn how to make it work. And actually, what I did was I got one or two and I showed them in detail what to do, and how to setup the loom, how to make it work, perfect work, and then I let them teach the next two, and so on. And I criticized, of course. I mean, I was there, I watched out—[inaudible]—their mistakes. But boy, in the first day practically everybody was on the loom. Of course, all the sample little things, you know, with not too many ends to an inch and all that.

ROBERT BROWN: Very small on the end.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. But anyway, they were on the loom and they knew what they had done, and—

ROBERT BROWN: And then they had to teach another—a beginner.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: So they forced them to know the—learn the basics right away.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, absolutely. And then—of course then I got into materials and all—well, they learned the basic weaves, you know: two harness, four harness, what have you and so forth. But mainly they got materials; they got the feel of materials, of the arms, the textures.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you go about that? You would have them look at the various materials and feel them, and you would maybe tell them a little bit of their properties, and then you'd have them try it out and see how it worked.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, right, and play—just play, have fun. And they did; they did

wonderful.

ROBERT BROWN: I know in your own work, and I suppose in theirs too, you introduced new fibers as they came along—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN:—in the 1940s and—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, all along, I did that. I mean, that's one good thing, because I was working with industry I knew about materials.

ROBERT BROWN: Because I recall in the '30s you objected to, for example, the Swedish weavers who insisted on, I think, natural materials, folk art patterns.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Especially—not so much—

ROBERT BROWN: You felt that they should try out things—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I like natural materials too, but old patterns, no, absolutely not.

ROBERT BROWN: But you also introduced manufactured fibers.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I did.

ROBERT BROWN: And you tried them out.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: And I spun them myself, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You would get like the basic nylon or the basic filament?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, various things and combine them—[inaudible]. I did that in the Philippines, in Jamaica and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: So, as the students they were allowed freedom, they were allowed to play a bit—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN:—but they were also told they had to have—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They had to do something.

ROBERT BROWN:—something, because they were going to model it at some point, or there was going to be an open house; they'd better have something out there for others to see.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right. They were spinning; they were doing all kinds of things.

ROBERT BROWN: For example, did your department then—would the students have an exhibition at the museum at least once a year?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: The museum wasn't for that, huh?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not for that. We had exhibitions in the studio, you know, but not in the museum.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you think of, say, exhibiting student work? Did you think it was premature, it shouldn't be done until they're more—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think that whatever was good was—I mean, showed something of the students' work, and taught them to see some other things.

ROBERT BROWN: Were some of your students getting recognition fairly early? I mean, were

they being shown by museums?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, to tell you the truth, I can't think really—oh, I still wanted to talk about this.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I know, that was just a general question and then—well, we'll talk later about—why don't we then go back? You want to talk a little more of some of your other colleagues.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you were talking about Wallace Mitchell.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, who became president after Zoltan.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you gone by then; by the time Wallace Mitchell became president?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Wallace Mitchell like, as you knew him? He was your friend.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah—no, I think he really was very good. He was sort of a small, pale, blond man, not very outspoken. But I think he was very good with his students, who at that point started being quite difficult.

ROBERT BROWN: At what point? You mean in the—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, you know, I mean their general lifestyle.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean after World War II—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh yeah, this was—

ROBERT BROWN:—or somewhat later?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, much later, because—I can't think of when Zoltan died. Eliel died '50, and then Zoltan took over, and then there was somebody else in between. And then, Wally, he was acting president, and he became president at that point in the '60s, '70s.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. But what about—as you knew him as a colleague when you were still at Cranbrook, what was he like, Wallace Mitchell?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, first of all, as I say, he was a friend, and we used to take trips and paint, you know, together, and so forth. And it was at the same time there were the architects that I will talk to you about later. And he was a very good painter. He started with watercolors, a little bit in Zoltan Sepeshy's style, but then he became very personal, and he did tiny little squares—[inaudible]—but very beautiful, subdued colors, and he was good.

He did a lot of painting on driftwood, for instance, which was interesting. He picked it up in northern Michigan. And, well, he was a good guy—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: Quiet, but—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Quiet, very quiet.

ROBERT BROWN:—in his way, probably a good teacher, and an influential teacher?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I think so. And—no, I think so, definitely.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned also Fred Mitchell.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Fred Mitchell. Well, we have a painting of his here.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he come along about the same time as Wallace Mitchell?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, but he was a student to start with. I think he did some teaching afterwards, but he's one of the—and Harry Soviak is one other, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: Had he been a student at Cranbrook?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, he didn't teach; he was a student.

ROBERT BROWN: A student. Harry—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Soviak.

ROBERT BROWN: Soviak. And he was a student who then became a good friend of yours.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, very much—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: What was your relation to him or with him?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Just a friend.

ROBERT BROWN: But after he'd been—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, but he did weaving. See, he was one of my weavers. The painters and the architects all were weavers too, and they added a tremendous lot to the studio, to the spirit, and to the—you know, because they fused the two things together, painting images and weaving. It was fun.

ROBERT BROWN: A painter coming to weaving is not used to such a demanding framework, is he? But he brings sort of a freedom.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, a lot of freedom was what I wanted.

ROBERT BROWN: And he tried—a painter might try to force into the—[inaudible]—some rather free patterns and forms—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN:—he does in his paintings.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, of course, that was exactly what I wanted, you know. I wanted people to force themselves into it, and they did.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he stay around? He didn't teach there, you say.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he stay in the area?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, he's been teaching in Philadelphia, I think, now, and so does Fred Mitchell. Well, the architects were the other ones that did weaving. And actually, Eliel almost threw them out of his class because he got so mad because they were weaving more than they were doing architecture.

ROBERT BROWN: And how were they as weavers compared to the painters?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They were great, but they had a different approach, you know. Well, maybe a little less color, you know. And also, they took pottery. They tried to get the really well-rounded picture, which I think was good. Well, there was Charlie Eames.

ROBERT BROWN: When you met him, he was a student, one of your—well, you got him to come there, you told me that already.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah—[laughs]—and I'm very proud of that. I really discovered Charlie.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he fit into the Cranbrook education very well?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: He fit in very well. But of course, at the time, you know, when he came, about '39, '40, and we were very informal. I mean, there was no formal thing at all. He came down in his pajamas to have breakfast, you know, and stuff like that. And he had a studio next to mine so I saw a good deal of him.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, he concentrated in architecture, didn't he, under Eliel?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, and also furniture. Then he started furniture with Eliel, and they did things together in that, then he got more and more into that line. Actually, his architecture, as I saw it in St. Louis, was not—but he had this thing about construction and furniture, and he did all that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he become a pretty close friend of yours while he was there?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah; oh, absolutely. He was to his death. We saw Ray, as a matter of fact, in California.

ROBERT BROWN: Recently.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, she was my student. But of course that was until she left in 1940; they got married in 1940.

ROBERT BROWN: And they left about then.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: He wasn't there long, in other words.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: He was there a couple of years, first as a student and then as sort of a student instructor.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were later associated with him in various projects later?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, not really in projects, no.

ROBERT BROWN: Just friends.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: He got into movies, you know, and the furniture, and he was living on the coast and I was still there in Cranbrook. But we never lost contact, and he was a very good friend. But Benjamin Baldwin, I don't know if you know him; he was an architect the same year. This was the famous year in Cranbrook.

ROBERT BROWN: Benjamin Waldmen?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Benjamin Baldwin.

ROBERT BROWN: Baldwin, yeah.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: And he is an excellent interior designer, just super-class, you know, I mean, also super expensive class. He has done some marvelous, marvelous jobs. And he lives in Sarasota in the winter, and in the summer he has a beautiful place on Long Island, East Coast—East Hampton. He's a gardener.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, he was a student, one of your early students?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, it was only that year.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, obviously—what was he interested in when he came, when you had him as a student?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, he came as an architect, you know; he got a scholarship as an architect. But he just wanted to know about everything there was to be known. He was one of those people. So was Harry Weese—you know him, of course—in Chicago, also a very good friend still. And, well, Henry Heyburn I did a lot of work with, but he was killed on the Cape on the way to come to see us. He ran into a sand truck.

ROBERT BROWN: Not too long ago?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, quite, quite a while ago.

ROBERT BROWN: But what did you know of the way Eliel taught? Did you ever go to watch his classes?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No. I can't tell you anything about it, nothing. But I presume he treated them like he treated me, you know, talked to me. Olav could answer more about that, because Olav worked with Eliel. Mostly they talked dirty Finnish jokes.

ROBERT BROWN: But do you think he was—was Eliel was sort of a father figure, or was he fairly formal? How do you think he was? I mean, what—from these friends, these architects, what do they say?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I could ask them.

ROBERT BROWN: But you don't remember there ever—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I never investigated it, no, no, because that was his field and I had mine, you know. And after all, I was an underling and he was the boss, so I didn't. But I would say that he would have treated them much like he did me, you know, with understanding, warmth, and just trying to lead them into some good directions.

ROBERT BROWN: There was probably a lot of freedom, I mean, in terms of expression.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I can't even remember what kind of things they did, but they did everything. They did city planning, they did, you know—[inaudible]. No, I'm sorry, I can't recall that, but you ask Olav. Now, Henry Heyburn was mostly doing residential work, and I did a great deal of work with him, to all his textiles and so forth. Once, I did a dog-proof house for him. [Laughs.]

Well, that's more or less that, but then he had the weavers.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, these are mainly your colleagues and students, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, these were colleagues and the two kinds of students.

ROBERT BROWN: But as weavers, you're going to talk about students, for the most part.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, whatever you say.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. I don't—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: If I can just take them one by one. Am I talking too much?

ROBERT BROWN: Fine, this is good. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative.] Yeah, why don't we begin talking about some of your students?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: All right. Are we on? Oh my God! [Laughs.] Well, actually, as I told you before, the students prior to 1940 or so were really not very good, and the material I had was sort of difficult. Then it started with all these great people who came over and picked up the atmosphere, and myself, and everybody. But I want to just talk about some of my top students who have done a tremendous lot, I feel, in the world.

But one was Neli Maher [sp] from India. We met her when we were lecturing in Bombay; and a tiny little girl in a beautiful sari, and a very ambitious girl.

ROBERT BROWN: This was somewhat later. This was after World War II, of course.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, no, this was, as a matter of fact, '67, I think. I'm not doing them in order.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, these aren't necessarily students at Cranbrook.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, okay.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Because she wanted very much to come to Cranbrook, and I managed to get her a scholarship, which was really a feat in itself because at that point it was really quite hard to get a scholarship at Cranbrook. You had to have a lot of material, and you had to present yourself, and so forth. Well, she had done some prints in England, and they were not more than average, I would say, but I was very impressed with her

personality. She had a tremendous feeling for—she wanted to do something. She had ambition; she had all that, you know, drive.

So, I really got her in—I faked her in as a matter of fact. I never showed a thing that she did, but I talked about India and about what happens in textiles in India, how necessary it would be to have something fresh and different, and so forth, and talked about ambition.

ROBERT BROWN: You don't mean fresh for Cranbrook, to have something new.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, for India.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, to have her have the Cranbrook experience.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, and she got in.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, what had she done in India?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, nothing. She had gone to England and done some prints, which were no good at all.

ROBERT BROWN: Prints—printed textiles.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, they were, you know, just blah.

So, anyway, she got in. Well, I judged right, because she's the number one weaver in India. She does fabulous work for everybody, all the big things, you know: airline offices, this and that and so forth and so on. So I can't say enough about it. I judged right, and I was very happy about that, because it was a little, you know—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, you were pulling strings.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I was deceiving everyone.

ROBERT BROWN: You were taking a great chance.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh yeah, I did, I did, but I really was sure it would work, and it has.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she have—How would you characterize her sense of design and all? What was it like when she came to Cranbrook?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, she didn't bring any Indian designs; she wouldn't have been allowed to. I started her like everybody else here. I taught her some basics and some techniques and said, you go ahead, you do what you want to do.

ROBERT BROWN: What did she start by doing? Do you recall some of her early designs?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, as a matter of fact, I do. She started—I was teaching her how to do a double-weave, for instance, and she did a black and white, very beautiful, stark tapestry, and that, that's quite tricky.

ROBERT BROWN: She showed technical facility from the beginning, then.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, they all did, more or less, you know. But no, she was different. I mean, she didn't try to do anything that anybody else had done. Really, truthfully, I got a lot out of that girl.

ROBERT BROWN: She was very original.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Very, very. And she had, of course—at the same time she had a background of the saris, and this and that, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Of the saris. You mean of their tradition, their color, their quality.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, yes. Mostly, she worked in black and white to start with. I guess she tried to get away from the colors. And actually, I haven't really seen a great deal of color in her work.

ROBERT BROWN: By the way, did you ever try to ask students to work in neutral colors in

the beginning, or you allowed them to—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN:—whatever they would—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Absolutely. I never told them anything like that, no.

ROBERT BROWN: This is the third cassette of the interview with Marianne Strengell in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. This is Robert Brown interviewing. This is March 18, 1982.

We've been talking now about Neli Maher, one student of yours who was very ambitious and who has done very well back in India you said. I think you want to talk about a few more of your students who, for one reason or another you feel are notable or there's something significant about them.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, it's quite a hard choice, because I have so many. Anyway, as long as you talk about different countries, Neli Maher in India, I'd like to talk about Yuneko Youkota of Japan.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you spell that, maybe?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes. Y-U-N-E-K-O Y-O-U-K-O-T-A. She now has a married name which I can't recall for the moment. She has done more or less the same thing for Japan that Neli Maher has done for India.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, had she had any experience? Did she come over here, or did you urge her to come?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, she came on her own. But anyway—

ROBERT BROWN: Had she had some art school experience, or what was her background?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think some, but not really very prominent. There's not much I can say except, of course, she brought with her a great history of techniques, you know, like various kinds of weaves that are very Japanese, and so forth, which was good for all of us, including me.

ROBERT BROWN: There were things you hadn't really known about that you learned from her.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I did.

ROBERT BROWN: When was she a student of yours?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: About the same time as Neli Maher and these other girls.

No, I learned a lot from her, I really did. And, of course, we went twice to Japan and visited them, and so forth and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: And in Japan, she's become a prominent influence?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: Working on her own or working with industry?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Both, I think—both, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: With your students, you encouraged them, when they went home or when they went on their career, to work in industry?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You didn't say you should be pure and stay on your own.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I did not. I think industry, because I've always been interested in having more people have more things, you know. And so, industry has always been one of the things that I like to do.

Well, I think she's been very successful. I haven't heard from her for a few years so I can't really give you the very latest thing.

Okay, then we have a girl called Annie Sanders [sp], and she married an architect from Cranbrook by the name of Peter Bowen [sp]. And she has done an awful lot of beautiful work in rugs right here in this country, designing them, and she has a studio.

ROBERT BROWN: With Annie Sanders, what was she like as a student? Was she a very precocious student? Were most of these people ones that were out of the ordinary as students?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Is that what you mean by precocious?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, were they very quick learners, and were they very imaginative?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, very, extremely. No, she was a wonderful student. I'm not very sure about what you call them, but anyway, she was a great student. She was a young girl and she got a Fulbright to go to Finland, as a matter of fact. And she didn't actually like it because she had the same treatment as I, in my day, in the same school, and so she did work on her own.

ROBERT BROWN: So she found that the teaching was as narrow as you had found it, as strict?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I'm afraid so. She was tactful enough not to say so, but I mean—

Well, one of the very, very best students I ever had was Robert Kidd. And he had no experience at all, whatsoever; he just got the basics, and he went full-hilt and did a beautiful job, experimenting with all my fibers, doing everything, everything possible—very handsome. And he now has an art gallery, and he has a weaving outfit that does things: sells yarns and so forth in Birmingham, Michigan. And he was the top, really. He also helped me with the power loom later on.

ROBERT BROWN: He was particularly good on the technical side, then, the new materials?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Not only that, he had great inspiration, and he had wonderful taste, and he was different. I really feel that he was very good.

Now, next—well, Ray Eames really just was there only for a short time because she married Charlie afterwards and she didn't want to stick around while he got his divorce, or something, so she left early. She didn't do very much, but she was my student.

ROBERT BROWN: She was. But as a student, I mean, she wasn't extremely notable.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: It was later that she found her career.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, because of Charlie, I think. Charlie was absolutely the person, was the leading one in the nation, and she did everything possible to help him, and she did very well. Now that Charlie is gone, I think she has a problem because she can't carry that ball alone. As a student, I don't think she was outstanding in any way.

Then we come to Jack Lenor Larsen.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, that's surely a very well known name there.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, that's the name; that's number one, one, one. And I have to tell that I didn't think much of Jack as a student.

ROBERT BROWN: He didn't seem imaginative?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, he didn't do anything. Well, he did a couple of things. But he wanted to go back to San Francisco and write a book for a thousand bucks, and instead, he went to New York, and of course—

ROBERT BROWN: He wanted to write the book—he wanted to be a writer, you mean?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: He wanted to write a book about textiles. But he didn't; he went to New York, and just at the right time because Dorothy Liebes was old and not working terribly hard.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean it was a time where a new person could take over the—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, he was just right, you know. He was good looking, he was blond, he was gay. Yeah, I mean—

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a very persuasive sort of person?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not really, but he had his own ways. I admire him for a lot of things, but I can only say that he wasn't my best student. No, no, it turned out that he had a marvelous mind for economics, you know, and he got along with people. I mean, he's very charming, and, as I say, he's good looking. The fact that he was gay helped him a lot at the time. And well, he's done beautifully. He's certainly the number one name in the country at this point.

He also got lots of people—good people, with some money too, which was very nice. He took quite a few people from Cranbrook with him; you know, people that really would not have made it by themselves, but he sort of boosted them. One was a cripple, and so forth. But really, truthfully, I admire him very much for that.

ROBERT BROWN: But as far as you could see as his teacher, when he left you at Cranbrook there wasn't much sign of progress—or promise, rather.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, he actually didn't do anything.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, really.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: One thing he said, which was bears out nicely what I was trying to do with him—he said at one point, at least you left us alone. [Laughs.] Well, I did, but I also—not just that. I tried to steer them a little bit, but I didn't prod them, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: As far as he was concerned, he stayed to himself sort of?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Very much, very much.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it a pretty close-knit community, these various students of yours? Were they close to each other, or were some rather reclusive? How would you characterize their life?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think it was close-knit because the studio was very close. And, as I said, every day we had a talk for about a half an hour or so.

ROBERT BROWN: And most of them—or all of them lived right there, didn't they, in the dormitories?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah, everyone. We didn't have any outside students at all at the time. So, it was close, sure.

Well, let's see—oh, another person, or two others. Helena Perhan [ph] was a Finn, and that was sort of a little problem in a way because, you know, Finn and Finn.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, we were both Finns, and I thought maybe she would, in a way, resent the fact that we were both Finns and I was trying to tell her something. Well, anyway, she turned out to be a beautiful weaver and a very, very nice person. And she ended up in India at the design institute in Ahmedabad, which Charlie and Ray had started. We were in Ahmedabad before then, but they were really the ones that set up the thing. And she has been there now, it must have been 18 years or so, and it's very interesting what they're doing there, altogether.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, she acts as an advisor in design, or in marketing, or everything?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I think everything.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you say in the beginning that one Finn teaching another might cause tension? Are Finns very independent minded?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't know. Maybe it's because, you know, I was a Finn and I came to Cranbrook a year before Maija Grotell, who was also a Finn, and I think she resented me for some reason. I don't know why. I don't think I injured her. But there was that sort of thing, you know. So, when I had suddenly a Finnish student—she was also a scholarship student—I just worried just a little bit because I had had a previous experience. So, it worked out beautifully. She was a great friend. I have lots of her things here.

ROBERT BROWN: But maybe Maija Grotell, you felt—at that time maybe she felt that one Finn was interesting, but if you had several she would lose some of her uniqueness as a student.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't know what she thought. Maija Grotell was a very strange woman—very strange woman, but very talented. But I only know that she resented me.

ROBERT BROWN: You never really got very close to her.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I did a couple of pots and pans in her place, you know, but no, never.

ROBERT BROWN: Nothing other than—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, she just plainly didn't like me. There might be all kinds of reasons for that, but I think the fact that I was a Finn had something to do with it.

ROBERT BROWN: She was also one of the best known. In terms of exhibiting—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, indeed.

ROBERT BROWN:—she did it very widely.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, indeed. I mean, she did beautiful work, and she was a wonderful teacher. I can't say anything else, but I did not get close to her.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you exhibit outside quite a lot while you were a teacher there?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: You regularly would submit to, what, America House?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I had a lot of traveling exhibits, and, well, Crafts Museum [American Craft Museum, New York, NY] and Museum of Modern Art [New York, NY], stuff like that. Oh, sure I did.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you travel to New York very often, or once in a while?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: As a matter of fact, I did. I mean, I went about twice a month because I had work, you know, with the industry and with the architects, and stuff like that.

ROBERT BROWN: So even when you were teaching at Cranbrook you very frequently went to New York?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes; oh, yes. No, from scratch, almost, starting with no—and then I worked with Skidmore, for instance, and I had to go quite often for that. And—no, I did. And I took part in exhibitions, surely. I have a list of them if you want them, not quite as many—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, some of those other students you mentioned—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Well, let's see. Did I say Helena Perhan?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, you spoke of her, but Olga—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Olga de Amaral, well, she came from Bogotá, and she is a great—

[inaudible]. She does a great deal of stuff. She was more or less at the end of my session there.

Oh, yeah, we had Hawaii; we had three Hawaiians. And Toshiko Takaezu, as you know, is a great name in pottery, but she also was very, very good in textiles. She was my student, and she wrote a lot about Hawaiian natural fiber, stuff like that. And I even gave her a prize in something, at one point, when I was richer. And she now has done mostly pottery. I don't think she's done any textiles recently. But she was a wonderful person.

And Alice Cagaver [sp] was another one. They all came together the same year. And Alice, you know, she married a museum director in New Mexico, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: But she stuck with her weaving too?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, yes. She's doing mostly pictorial things, you know, wall hangings. I tried to get them all to go through some kind of things so they would know the score, but that we can talk about later in some other—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, some of them knew more or less what they wanted to do?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I tried to just have a short thing of basic things, you know, that they should do, and then I let them loose.—Let's see now—yeah—

ROBERT BROWN: Would you say that most of these top students were with you in the '50s, or were they sort of sprinkled throughout your time at Cranbrook?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I would say—let's see, I left in '61 and they were before then, in one way or another. Marguerite [sp] I can't tell you about.

ROBERT BROWN: But were your last years at Cranbrook less rich in terms of students than—or can you generalize like that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: That's hard. Maybe a little bit. I would say that the middle '50s were the best of these students, you know, but I had other ones, I just can't recall them.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, by the late '50s were there other schools that were rivals to Cranbrook? There must have been others where they could go for weaving: California, or Rochester, or other places.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah, California, for instance. Yes, I went out there once.

ROBERT BROWN: But there was more rivalry to Cranbrook than there had been earlier.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, but Cranbrook still had a name of being the one, you know. But California, yes, and, oh, I guess—

ROBERT BROWN: But particularly in weaving Cranbrook was well known. Would you say that was probably—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It was called the lead school for—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: For—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: For weaving and for textile design.

ROBERT BROWN: I think it was probably more prominent in that than in the other crafts, I mean, because there were other places for silversmithing. Well, Dick Thomas was there by then, wasn't he?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, right, he's been there forever.

ROBERT BROWN: But you knew him, I guess.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Of course, of course. He was there when I got there.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, he was?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: He was one of those other student teachers at the time.—And—

ROBERT BROWN: What did you think of his work?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Very immaculate. Not very inspired I don't think, but he knows what to do.

ROBERT BROWN: But also in ceramics too there were a number of places, so that Cranbrook was but one of several, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I think so, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: So it would be predominantly weaving then that you feel that Cranbrook was the strong place while you were there.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think pottery very much.

Now, what I wanted to talk to you about, speaking about metalwork, was Harry Bertoia, and that I can talk for hours about—no, not for hours.

ROBERT BROWN: Let's hear a bit about him.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, anyway, he had a studio next to me too. And he came as a student—first as a student and then as student instructor and then he became head of the—I mean, he had a lot to do before Dick—

ROBERT BROWN: Thomas came?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But Bertoia came as a student about the time you came as an instructor.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, yes, right. But then, so, we worked together on lots of things. And, you know, he came as a painter, as a matter of fact; he came as a painting student to Zoltan, and then he developed from there into these other things. And, well, he made, I don't know if you remember, but he made these printed things. I have one. And, then from there he went to three-dimensional metal. And we had the very first one of those, and that was the one that really inspired—well, Olav got him to do the big screen in Detroit.

ROBERT BROWN: At the Technical Center?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, in the Technical Center.

ROBERT BROWN: The General Motors Technical Center.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right. I mean, that's the first big thing he ever did, and it was inspired from this thing. I can't show it to you because I sent it to Birmingham to be sold at the Kidd Gallery, so I have—I think I could find some pictures.

ROBERT BROWN: But Bertoia, was he someone that you felt close to from fairly early?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Very, very, from the first moment. He was the sweetest guy, really. He was just lovely, wonderful. So, I was surrounded by Charlie Eames and Bertoia, and myself. We were all in this little circle.

ROBERT BROWN: And you were all very imaginative, exploring many different things.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, we all were, and we all took part of each other's enterprises, because I remember that when Harry started doing these printed things on paper, he was terribly excited. He had never done anything like that. I don't know what gave him the idea, but he just felt very strongly that he could express himself. And that's the only time in my entire life when I was very discouraged and quite disgusted with Eliel, because Harry came to my studio and he said, "Look at this. I mean, I want to show this to Mr. Saarinen," and I said, "My god, yes, you should," you know. He had never done this kind of—so we went to Eliel, and Eliel threw him out. It was very much against anything I'd ever known about Eliel, because—I don't know what he did, but Harry came back practically in tears.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you suppose Eliel thought they were trivial?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They weren't.

ROBERT BROWN: They were prints. [Inaudible.]

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They were prints, yes. And he said, "You stick to your pots," you know. Well, Harry fortunately didn't, and I certainly didn't encourage him to. As a matter of fact, I took a lot of his later prints to New York and tried to sell them for him. And then from there he went into the three-dimensional.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? Was he a very confident person?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Just a sweet little Italian boy, you know, just wonderful. No, he was certainly not a positive person.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he strike you as very gifted?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, what I saw was very gifted, you know. I mean, I didn't particularly care about the things he had to do when he came, because that was, you know, shapes and pots and techniques, and stuff like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, he'd had some training in pottery, or that's what he was specializing in?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I don't think so; no, metal. I don't know where he had his first training. I think he went to some kind of training school in Detroit for a year before he came, and then he came as a student. But he was absolutely a wonderful person, really; I think one of the sweetest in Cranbrook, really.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, by and large, you liked your time at Cranbrook, didn't you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, I did. Do you think I would have stayed 24 years?

ROBERT BROWN: How did it relate to Detroit and the museum in Detroit?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: We had really no contact with them.

ROBERT BROWN: I know they had, beginning in—at least by the '50s they had some craft exhibitions and the like. Did they show you people very much?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, they probably did because they had some of my—[inaudible]. I don't think it was anything that really excited us.

ROBERT BROWN: In other words, you feel perhaps that Cranbrook could have been almost anywhere; it was the community itself that mattered.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I didn't—

ROBERT BROWN: It didn't matter too much that you were in Bloomfield Hills or in Detroit, or —

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, it just so happened, and there was money and there was setup and there was Eliel Saarinen, you know. No, no, I'm sure that there must be other places like that that do well.

ROBERT BROWN: But yeah, it was irrespective of its location.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think so; I really think so.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, when Saarinen died in '50, did you sense gradually a change, a good deal—a considerable change came over the place?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not immediately, not at all. As a matter of fact, not before I left, because it was just all right.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, Sepeshy had been there some time, hadn't he?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, but as I told you, I liked him. I think he knew what he was doing and he knew what we were doing, and so forth.

Okay, so I left '61, and after that I nominated one of my students—not on this list—to take over. And then I came back a couple of years later and I was very disappointed in what he had been doing. And he left, and it was sort of a mess, generally speaking. And you know, they sold the looms, they did things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: What happened within two years? You mean the training of the students had fallen down?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think definitely, yes. Because, let's see, I left '61, and I think '66 I was called back because this guy had left and they were in a mess, they didn't know what to do, and they wanted to have some name there, you know. So they called me back, and every month I went for three days over there, and I made a program. And when I got there, as I say, everybody was either absent or something or other, or they were doing something that had nothing to do with weaving at all. So I put them on what I called an architectural program, and this was just—I beat them into doing actual architectural interiors, starting with rugs—we started with rugs.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, had them rough-sketch them out, or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Weave them. They cried; they didn't like it at all. I was very unpopular. But anyway, they did a beautiful job, and I had a show of that in Cranbrook, not elsewhere, and lots of them got very, very good jobs, you know—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: In other words, you made them apply themselves to a real—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Exactly, program.

ROBERT BROWN:—problem, as you had done always while you were there.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: [Inaudible.] But this was rougher because they had been let loose. You know, they were sitting in their bedrooms doing knitting or something, you know, so it really hurt them. I bet they really hated me. But they did a wonderful job. I mean, you can if you want to.—So—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, in teaching you feel that—you have said before, at least, that you must make it very exciting—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, yes, I think you have to.

ROBERT BROWN:—and that you have to make them put their feet into a real situation such as architecture or some of the other problems you mentioned.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Clothing, yeah.

No, no, I think excitement is the number one thing. I mean, that was the reason I was terribly unhappy during the war, because I tried so hard to get into therapy, and I was not allowed to because I didn't have a nursing degree. What the heck did that mean? Nothing. I mean, I could have made those poor guys have some fun, but that was not allowed. So that was a great disappointment to me. And I think I made my students have fun too. And, you know, they respected themselves.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the summer schools work out that you had? Did you have them throughout your time or just during World War II?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: For quite a few years. Well, I don't think they were that successful.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they too short?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, people were tired and materials were hard to get, and so forth. I enjoyed more doing—which I did very often—just, say, a three- or four-week thing, very intense. I did that in Connecticut and various other places in Michigan. And that I enjoyed because that was, again, you know, it was a challenge—[inaudible]—we have this time, and get them going. So, that was my teaching.

ROBERT BROWN: Continuing the interview, this is December 16, 1982.

Before we move from your teaching, you'd said that all along you tried to set specific,

concrete problems for your students, and you've just mentioned in the previous interview that when you came back after you had left, and you were asked to help out, I gather that you found that the students were sort of floundering; they weren't given specific things. Why do you think it's important that a student be given very particular work? Is it necessary at an early stage of development; they need a lot?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think it's—I do think it's important, yes. I mean, they were floundering. They were just doing whatever they pleased, and none of it led anywhere. There was no discipline, and I was against that so I did give them some extremely specific things that they had never heard of before, as a matter of fact.

ROBERT BROWN: Right. What would be an example?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, mostly I made a program that would deal with architecture or textiles; textiles that make a framework for your life, and practical things—rugs, what have you and so forth—which we would not only do that for them but it also gave them a chance to earn a living, which they certainly did not have when I got them. Well, I started them with rugs, and they did very well. They didn't like anything about it, but they did very well.

So, it can be taught and it can be disciplined. And we just started with rugs and went into upholstery fabrics and draperies and so forth and so on. We did not do anything outside of that; it was all architecture, and I believe very much in that. And a few of my students got extremely good jobs because of it.

ROBERT BROWN: But you say that at the time, those students, they don't like it necessarily.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, they did not.

ROBERT BROWN: It's too rigid, they want to express themselves.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Exactly, they want to knit or crochet or stay in their bedrooms for a longer nap, I don't know. But anyway, they did not want to go to class, they did not—so at least they got some discipline into them.

ROBERT BROWN: You were always, I guess, concerned with that, because in this recent article in *American Craft*, he mentions that small samples of things to be used in interiors were what the students were expected to do, as opposed to expressing themselves.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no. First of all, they could express themselves there too, you know. But I mean, it was a little more limited; they were not just daydreaming, you know. So, yes, I did start them on that.

ROBERT BROWN: I want to ask one other thing. This recent article by Ed Rossbach—I guess a former student—in *American Craft*—he doesn't really make clear—he mentions when he was at Cranbrook as your student you had handlooms and you worked on a small scale, and yet you would always encouraged them to think in terms of industrial or commercial work, which would require eventually going to manufacturers working with power looms. How did the student make that transition? Eventually, you got a power loom at Cranbrook, and I gather from Rossbach's article that eventually that was put into use as well. But most of the time when the students were there they worked with the hand weaving.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, that was the way I worked myself, because I worked for industry for many, many years, and I had certain guidelines for that. If I was approached by a factory and mill, then I worked with the mills, A, number one, their equipment, their power loom, and with their own yarns and with their own limitations. And I felt that the students should be able, for their own future, to be able to work within this limitation.

So, it's very true. Well, we had handlooms, and everybody had to design on the loom, not on paper; not get something out of books.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you make them go directly to the loom, and not to do any—rather than work things on paper?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, because I felt that actually the loom was their tool, the materials were their yarns, and if you put those together and a little bit of imagination, I mean, you got something that you wouldn't get out of a book.

ROBERT BROWN: Did some people work more from books; did some teachers rely more on drawings?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, indeed, books, books, books.

ROBERT BROWN: People in this country?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, everywhere. But I just didn't allow them. I told them they couldn't go to the library for the first half year; they couldn't look at anything. And they cried, they were angry, and so forth, but just the same it got them there. You can't believe what some of those people do. It was wonderful.

ROBERT BROWN: They were forced into—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Forced into digging into themselves, no?

ROBERT BROWN: And you had them work on a handloom as opposed to a power loom.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, yes, you couldn't. I mean, a power loom is really quite a difficult instrument. You couldn't start there. They started with the handloom, and then there was a handloom that was semi sort of a power loom in operation.

ROBERT BROWN: The shuttle was mechanized or something.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, that had nothing to do with it, but dissecting of patterns. And I got that one from Finland, as a matter of fact.

ROBERT BROWN: And there, they could work out their ideas and make their mistakes—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, right.

ROBERT BROWN:—and receive your critique.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: And then, from then on, they went to the power loom.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you give them critiques fairly regularly? Would you have them put things up for you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, very much so. I mean, for instance, that session when I went back to Cranbrook and we had—

ROBERT BROWN: In the mid '60s—

MARIANNE STRENGELL:—we had big shows, and it was all—[inaudible]—big discussions about it, and I think it was very, very good. They did a good job, but they were certainly beaten to it. [Laughs.] They didn't want to do it at all.

ROBERT BROWN: But you had a high percentage of your students that went on to be influential in their own right.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Absolutely, absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: And you think part of the reason is because they had that sort of discipline?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, they knew what it was all about, you know. They had the basics, which they didn't. And after I left Cranbrook, I mean, it was left entirely to the students to do whatever they pleased, and I don't think that's right. Partly, this goes back to the fact that when I went to textile school in Finland, you know, I had no encouragement to use my brain, or my heart, my intuition, my color sense. It was just doing mechanical things.

ROBERT BROWN: You were just a little cog in a wheel, or given very over-simplified exercises?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I would say so.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas you found, when you came back to Cranbrook, it was the opposite in some ways. They were just allowed to do what they pleased.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: But in a way, it was the same effect. They didn't grow, did they?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I don't think so.

ROBERT BROWN: That's why you rebelled as a young woman against your education.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: Although, it was much more rigorous.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, that was even worse. It was dreadful.

ROBERT BROWN: I know you've said earlier, you exhibited pretty early on in this country. Were there really very many places to which you could send examples of your weaving, say in the 1940s? Were there many shows or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, frankly, I never pushed anything because I really don't feel that—I didn't feel that that it was important. That's why I worked with people, with architects, with mills. <

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think, in fact, the exhibits at that time really weren't very important —design exhibitions?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Maybe for some people, but I didn't feel it was that for me. I mean, I knew what I was doing.

ROBERT BROWN: There were a series of design shows at the Museum of Modern Art.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And from those, did you—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: And Metropolitan [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City], and so forth and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get some response from those that you recall?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think so. But, I mean, I didn't aim for it that way—[inaudible]—because that wasn't the way I was working.

ROBERT BROWN: But do you think that things changed later and that exhibitions became more important?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I presume it always has been that way, but I just didn't work that way, that's all.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, your emphasis was toward application of your designs too, wasn't it, by industry or by architects?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, right.

ROBERT BROWN: And the route to go was not necessarily through exhibitions, therefore.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not at all. I don't think I got a single job through that.

ROBERT BROWN: You mention in your resume one important show—you say it's important—the one at the Brooklyn Museum in 1961, "Masters of Contemporary American Crafts."

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It was a very nice show, and it was the worst snowstorm in New York. I don't think that it particularly did anything for me, no. I mean, I think they wanted me to be there to represent what I was doing, but I don't think I got a single job from it.

ROBERT BROWN: By then, you were an established figure.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I was very established in New York.

ROBERT BROWN: So, exhibitions, by and large, have not been a very important thing in your career.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No. I had fun, you know, I mean, San Francisco World's Fair, New York World's Fair—

ROBERT BROWN: And Russell, you were in.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, and the House and Garden, you know, that [Marcel] Breuer did in New York at the Museum [Museum of Modern Art]—

ROBERT BROWN: You were involved with furnishings in that.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Textiles. I mean, that sort of thing it was a great boost to me, but I don't think that it really did anything for me otherwise. I love meeting new people; I love working with them.

ROBERT BROWN: But otherwise, not really much of a factor.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't think so.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you leave Cranbrook? Were you through with teaching, really, about in 1961?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Look, I had 24 and nine-tenths of a year, and our son was gone to college. It was the logical time to quit.

ROBERT BROWN: They would be leaving—your children would be leaving anyway.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. One had already left, and our son was leaving to go to college. And it seemed that that was the best way to do it. I mean, it might have been a little hard on him because he couldn't come back to see his friends and so forth, but it was the logical thing to do.

ROBERT BROWN: And teaching, I mean, although it had been important to you, and as we know you were very pleased with your many successful students. Still, throughout practically all of your teaching career you've had at least as active a parallel career on your own.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: Commissions and freelance.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, Cranbrook was—Eliel Saarinen, that was his philosophy, that you should be active outside of school. And so, he liked me for that.

ROBERT BROWN: Were most people at Cranbrook, on the faculty there, actually—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Not all of them, no.

ROBERT BROWN: They weren't all really—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, some of them just came and did a little job.

ROBERT BROWN: But some were really, weren't they? Maija Grotell, didn't she—she worked outside as much as inside?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, she worked mostly for museums. She didn't really sell a lot of her art. She didn't have any commercial ties.

ROBERT BROWN: No, but she still had a lot of work she was pointing outside of the school.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah, sure. But generally speaking, no, I would say very little of it. So, I think I was number one in that.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think it had a detrimental effect on your students, the fact that you were spending so much time—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: On the contrary. No, for heaven's sakes, they shared with me. I told

them what was going on—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: Right, and they saw what was potential.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, of course, they did, and that was part of the whole philosophy. Now I think that they would have been a good deal worse off if I hadn't done it.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe we ought to think now of talking about some of that outside work you've done.

Okay, well, you came to Cranbrook in '37.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, February.

ROBERT BROWN: And apparently that same year you had some work with the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, beginning about then. How did that come about, through Eliel Saarinen?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, nothing. It absolutely was all my own doing. [Inaudible.] I don't remember; I really don't remember.

ROBERT BROWN: And you worked on a hotel in Cincinnati.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, Terrace Plaza, which was very exciting.

ROBERT BROWN: Why was it exciting?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It was exciting because I was in three years before it was built. I grew up with the whole thing, the architecture and stuff like that, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: How many instructions did you have? Were you given some idea of what they intended?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I could see the drawings, and we had meetings in New York. It was back and forth—going back and forth. And I was in from scratch, which I think is a terribly important point.

ROBERT BROWN: Certainly.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: And there wasn't even a hole in the ground when I got there.

ROBERT BROWN: What did they have in mind, do you recall?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, they had a special problem because they had a place that was—the hotel was really on the eighth or ninth floor, or something like that. It was on top, and below was other things, offices and stuff. So you really had the hotel up above. And [Joan] Miro was doing something there, and I was doing something with Miro, and it was fun.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was quite a sophisticated project.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, very—extremely. That was my very first one with Skidmore. After that, I did quite a few other things.

ROBERT BROWN: And what sort of things for the Terrace Plaza Hotel did you do? Do you recall what those fabrics were like?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes. First of all, I did all of the printed fabrics for the rooms. They had printed curtains and stuff. I did all the things for the restaurant, you know, table mats. I still have one.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, these prints were of what sort? Can you describe—remember what they were like?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, they were rather bold and colorful, shapes and simple shapes. I don't think I have—

ROBERT BROWN: So, rather abstract shapes? These weren't—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah. No, no, flowers.

ROBERT BROWN: And you had rejected folk things—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yep, I did.

ROBERT BROWN:—even before you came over here.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, in Finland too, for god sakes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: So patterns these were, and repetitions?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Different colorings. But I mean, it was, I think, one pattern. And I don't think I have anything—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work these out right on the loom, or did you—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, these are prints. I did those on paper.

ROBERT BROWN: You did drawings for them, and then they were sent to the manufacturer?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right. And the wovens I wove. And I had George Royal [sp]—

ROBERT BROWN: George Royal?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Royal Company, who wove them. And that was just after the war, so it was really quite a problem to get anybody to do it. He wove them, and then I did hand-woven things for certain very special areas like upstairs, you know, special rooms.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work closely with the George Royal Company?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you go to their plant and help them to translate your drawings into the power loom?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Are we on?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, actually, Dorothy Liebes, you know, did hand-woven things and hand them transplanted—or translated. I never did that. I always used the fabrics that were at hand, and I wove the samples according to that and according to the equipment, so they could do it without any change at all. And I think that was very important.

ROBERT BROWN: Certainly. So there was little if any alteration—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Absolutely—

ROBERT BROWN:—other than what you'd done and they ran off.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, absolutely not.

ROBERT BROWN: So, this led to work for other architectural firms then, I'm sure, didn't it?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes; yes it did.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the reaction to what you'd done there? Probably very favorable.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think it was extremely favorable. It was right after the war; it was a very difficult situation of getting raw materials, getting everything, you know, so I had quite a struggle. But it was an excellent setup. The architects did a beautiful job. Miro was doing his drawings on the walls, and this and that. It was great company.

ROBERT BROWN: And you worked also on the Manhattan House in New York for them.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You described that as very exciting work.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, it was.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean by that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it was a challenge, you know. Any challenge to me is exciting, and it was a challenge. I mean, it was a certain situation.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the challenging situation?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I can't really recall anything.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it maybe just a great big, bare building interior?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, it was that, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And you had to enliven it, then.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, right.

ROBERT BROWN: I know Liebes has been described here as having really garish colors. Were yours—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think—not at all like Dorothy Liebes. The materials—she liked to mix materials too, you know, but I did it differently. And my colors were either pure or very natural—very pure, strong ones but very natural. So far as I remember, Manhattan House was a great deal of greens and things, plus curtains and those rugs and so forth, and upholstery. No, you can't compare us in that respect at all.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd mix materials if you wanted a certain texture or a certain reflection, or something like that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that why you would use a new material, for example?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, first of all, I liked new materials. I like to experiment with everything I can lay my hands on, from fiberglass on. And it of course depends on the architectural problem too; I mean, how much light, how much, you know—[inaudible]—whatever you have.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, by the time you came in on the Skidmore Owings buildings, they were up, were they, so you could get a pretty good idea of how much light there would be—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, indeed.

ROBERT BROWN:—the orientation of the building to the sun.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I insisted on that.

ROBERT BROWN: So you had all of that.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I insisted on it. Now, I also did, you know, the fiberglass building for them. That was not the one that exists now; it was the first one. And that was extremely interesting because it had never been done before. Fiberglass was just brand new, and it was terrible. It was glossy and slick, and it was hard to handle, and your face broke out, and what have you. Well, anyway—

ROBERT BROWN: How'd you overcome those problems?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I had them. Three years after that I had to quit because I broke out all over. Yeah, well, that was one of those early things. Now they have licked that problem, so that's all right.

ROBERT BROWN: But aesthetically, how did you respond to fiberglass?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, actually, I changed it very much, because I made them spin it differently and make novelty arms. I also had a dull fiber thing, which I made into tweeds and stuff. And that all went into that building.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you feel that material fiberglass has much of a future? Was it potentially, as far as you were concerned, an important material? Was it an important change, breakthrough?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, look—Well, obviously, yes, but I just felt it was a great challenge, and I live by that always: a challenge, I was there.

ROBERT BROWN: So, if you've done something once, you don't really want to repeat it or do anything too much like it.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd prefer to jump into something new.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, absolutely. And I like to start with—this was a new fiber, you know. It was a tremendous challenge. Well, actually, what was interesting, they went along with me, you know. I made, as I said, tweeds, you know; I mixed it with asbestos a little bit here and there, and so forth—all very dangerous nowadays. But actually, they didn't think it would stand up, but it stood up for 10-15 years.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean they thought the material would deteriorate?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, they were not sure about it, or my approach to it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work closely with its executives, with Owens Fiberglass, Owens Corning?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And they were interested in innovation and that sort of thing?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I went down quite a few times to the mill, and they were not doing very well at the time, because at one point we had lunch, I remember, and they had these curtains made out of fiberglass. And they said, "Look, this is fireproof." So one executive just took out a match and lit the curtains, and bingo, they went all the way up. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: You had a fire, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: A fire. [Laughs.] But anyway, they licked all that. But I think I had a great deal to do with the fact that fiberglass looks like it does now, because of the—A, the texture, you know, we tried to introduce, and—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean to get away from the fact—the early fiberglass used to get embedded in the skin, didn't it, and cause irritation?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, well, it's also slick, and it was—

ROBERT BROWN: And you got them to work toward a matte finish.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, and a texture.

ROBERT BROWN: So I assume these executives, they were very excited, but you were very interested in taking a new product—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN:—and enlarging its possibilities.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: That must have appealed to them.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I did that many other times after that.

ROBERT BROWN: And you were working sort of on prototypes, really, weren't you? In their terms, those were prototypes for something that they might want to go on with.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, they did; they did. Look at fiberglass now. But they fired me.

ROBERT BROWN: Why is that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: You know when they fired me? On my honeymoon with Olav. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Ow, really?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, that really was something.

ROBERT BROWN: Why? Did they think that you were a luxury or something?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't know what they thought. They thought they had enough. I had done my little bit.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, when you came back after your honeymoon, of course you were still at Cranbrook. Did you have other commercial or industrial clients?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, I had that. No, no, this happened right in the Cape, you know, because we were married on the Cape. And they called me up to Providence, Rhode Island where one of the mills was, right in the midst of the whole thing. So, I had to go, just to fire me. They could have done that one the phone, I thought. [Inaudible.]

ROBERT BROWN: Were there other clients at that time that you could mention?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there any others you could mention?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: You know, I can't remember when and what.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe you were already working with the Saarinen firm in Michigan, for which Olav was also working by this time.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Well, no, it must have been before that because I was married in 1949.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, right afterward I think—at least, you were working there.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: And maybe we can talk a bit about your work with Eliel Saarinen Associates.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I'd like to.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you must have also, of course, known—were you working with the firm when Eliel was still alive?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, indeed.

ROBERT BROWN: And what are your recollections of Eliel and the firm? I mean, we've talked about Eliel earlier, but now can you talk about him as a colleague in the practice? Could you say a bit about that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Well, first of all in Cranbrook—I mean, I think that he picked the right person when he picked me because of his philosophy: somebody who would want to do things on the side and show what happens in the world, you know, not just read out of books. And of course he was a lifelong friend, because the family became very close. And as a matter of fact, the day he died, he came over to—we had a two-hour talk at 3:00 in Cranbrook, just he and I. And then he went back home and listened to news and died. I mean, we were very close. And, no, no, he appreciated what I was doing, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: When you—On projects for the architectural firm, would he discuss them extensively with you? How did he work with you on that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Actually, no, at that point it hadn't got to the point where I could do

anything—[inaudible]—he was observing. Olav was working.

ROBERT BROWN: So you really—So when you first started doing things for the firm, it was when Eero was in charge.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, they were both in charge, but it was later. I don't recall any particular discussions.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, your first large project with him was for the General Motors Technical Center [Warren, Michigan]?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, and I was great.

ROBERT BROWN: At what point were you brought in on that? I know Olav's talked about when he—of course, he was in on the drafting of the buildings.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: All the buildings had not been built at the time. The first one I was in on was the engineering building, and that was really mostly Eero, because Eero felt very strongly that everything was glass, it was marble, it was metal, so on, so on, so on, a little human thing. He wasn't very human, but just the same he realized the idea of introducing something else.

ROBERT BROWN: You found he wasn't too human. He was a driven sort of a person.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, he was very driven. No, I don't think he was very human.

ROBERT BROWN: But he seemed to, or somebody seems to have recognized the need for some human—[inaudible].

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think Eero did. Really, he was the one that started the whole thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he propose or discuss with you what he had in mind? Or how did it come about?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, he just showed me the materials and said, "Why don't you go ahead and see what you can do?"

ROBERT BROWN: What materials? You mean those—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, there was some huge rugs, for instance, on this terrazzo floor, which were really very bare and very cold looking, and there were curtains to be made. And this was in the lobby. That was the first job I had.

ROBERT BROWN: He showed you some examples of the kind of material, the textile—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, I did that.

ROBERT BROWN: Okay, you had steel and glass and marble, and what kind of fabric did you —

MARIANNE STRENGELL: And me. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: And you. And what kind of fabric did you, therefore, think might be appropriate?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, one thing, it was a very sunny place, so the curtains I did mostly in grays, blacks and whites.

ROBERT BROWN: To counteract some of the—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: To counter the sun. And the rug was equally quite dark and fluffy, and so forth. And that was certainly a problem right there with the people who took care of the building, because they were scared to death of that rug.

ROBERT BROWN: They didn't think they'd be able to maintain it?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: That's exactly it. They'd say, "What do we do?" You know, I was

calling it a special thing. And I gave them a broom and said, "This." Of course, they died because, I mean, they had all this machinery and stuff like that. Anyway, we all got along.

ROBERT BROWN: And what kind of fiber did you select for it?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Mostly wool for the rug; and for the other ones, certain synthetics and cotton, linen, right, so forth. That was a problem because it was so sunny, you see. I mean, you had a problem, maybe disintegrating fabrics.

ROBERT BROWN: So you selected ones you thought would be most durable.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah.

Well, that was just the beginning. And after that I did every lobby there was in the whole place, and that was quite a few lobbies.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, what was your challenge in those lobbies? They were big lobbies.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They were huge lobbies.

ROBERT BROWN: And what did you attempt to do with your rugs in those lobbies?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I tried to do something that would go with the architecture and go with the—go, be practical, and so forth. I wasn't trying to be flashy. I was flashy in one place, and that was in the—I forgot—Harley Earl's office.

ROBERT BROWN: Harley—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Harley Earl. He was, at the time, the number one in the design department, and he was the boss. And in there, I let myself go a lot more. But generally speaking, I just provided texture and warmth, practicality.

ROBERT BROWN: And by practicality, what do you mean? You've used the word several times here.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, something that, A, doesn't dirt easily, that can be cleaned, can be fluffed out; you know, just stay as it was designed.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, what was the rug supposed to do? You had a terrazzo floor. It's fairly handsome in itself.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, the rugs had to join groups too, and that was terribly important.

ROBERT BROWN: Had to join groups—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, they had to make groups, groupings, you know. I mean, that's what I feel very strongly. It was a room divider on the floor.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean there were groups of furniture—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN:—that would be put on the one carpet, and then another group would be on another carpet, so to speak.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, right. Now, one thing that I don't think anybody had ever done before was I combined the two in one carpet—done in Puerto Rico, as a matter of fact. I had a floor covering of a kind, and then I had built-in area rugs for the groups, and it was all in one carpet. I have some—

ROBERT BROWN: Really, all in one thing?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. I have some photographs.

ROBERT BROWN: And you did that just to see whether it could be done or it seemed the most practical?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, it was not practical from that standpoint, but I felt it was. You

know, I felt it was a way to solve it instead of having some flat floor covering and shoving some rugs on top of it, so I built them all in.

ROBERT BROWN: It sounds like you—Who had made the decision that there would be areas of furniture and the like?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, that was quite architectural.

ROBERT BROWN: Because it sounds like these were immense spaces—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN:—and they wanted to break them up by putting the furniture in various settings, and your rugs would—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Defined it.

ROBERT BROWN:—define that. And you mentioned, to give warmth. So in some areas you moved away from the grays and blacks—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes; yes, I did. Oh, I did. It wasn't all gray and black. It was just the first one.

ROBERT BROWN: Were the clients themselves—did they work closely with you? Did they look in frequently at what you were designing?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They were very good, as a matter of fact. I mean, their buying office wasn't always crazy about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you mean the purchasing—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: The purchaser, because they just felt that—funnily enough, they felt that I was expensive, which was not true. They sent their wives down to Hudson's, you know —

ROBERT BROWN: The big department store.

MARIANNE STRENGELL:—and they priced rugs at certain prices, and they came back and said that, my god, she's asking too much. Of course, mine was all hand-woven, it was that high, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: An inch and a half or two inches.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Didn't I ever tell you that joke about it?

ROBERT BROWN: No.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It's a wonderful one. Well, this purchasing agent really didn't like me. He said, "That dame gets a trip to Europe every time we get a rug." It was not true, but anyway. He—He—Well, there was this big meeting—Olav was in on it. I was not, but Olav was in on it because they didn't even know really that we were married at the time, so he was there. So they said, well, all right, here we have the Hudson rugs and we have the Strengell rugs, and here is this difference in price, you know. So the boss, whoever it was, I don't remember, said, all right, what's the difference? Well, it turned out to be $1,349.50, you know, something like that. So he said, that's just shabby, he said. So from then on I made all the rugs, every one. Yeah, that was a funny relationship, but it was all right.

ROBERT BROWN: It was funny with the purchasing agents, but it worked out all right because—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it did, it did.

ROBERT BROWN:—the bosses had a good deal of money to spend. This was to be a bit of a showcase, wasn't it, this Technical Center?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It was a tremendous showcase. But you know, actually, what was interesting was I did all the upholstery for all the offices in some of the buildings, and they

were all different, but I did them on a common warp. In other words, I had one warp that went on, and each office had a different, individual—I mean, I was not famous at all. And actually, I think my fabrics are cheaper than what you could have got in a market. They were hand-woven.

ROBERT BROWN: They were hand-woven?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Hand-woven, and they were individually designed for each office.

ROBERT BROWN: Who did the hand weaving?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I had marvelous weavers: Swedish girls in Pontiac, Michigan. They did all the weaving.

ROBERT BROWN: For the upholstery.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, and the rugs.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, the rugs too?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, they weren't done in a large commercial mill?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, no, in Pontiac, Michigan on a little handloom downstairs in the basement. Oh, they were great gals, really terrific. Unfortunately, they've retired so I can't do it anymore.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were able there—you didn't have to make that—you didn't have to align up what you were doing with what a power loom would do.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, no, no. No, it couldn't have been on a power loom.

ROBERT BROWN: This was a very special, almost a luxury commission, wasn't it, the Technical Center?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It was. But as I say, really truthfully it didn't cost them any more money than they would have paid otherwise at all, and it was individual.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, this was—your big project under Eliel Saarinen was the Technical Center.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Well, I did some other things for him too.

ROBERT BROWN: And the restaurants you did too. And you've mentioned, I think, earlier about Harry Bertoia, whom you'd known as a student at Cranbrook, and he got his first big commission, didn't he, in the great metal screen at that time?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Thanks to us, really. Yes, because—well, Harry was also student when I first met him, and he had his studio down below. And he became a student teacher, and then he became head of the metal thing. And he was a wonderful man; just a lovely, lovely man. Did you ever meet him?

ROBERT BROWN: No.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Lovely man. I mean, sweet, marvelous, what have you. And well, he got from there into painting, and I have a print. And then from there he got into the three-dimensional screen, and because of that—we got the first one, Olav and I—because of that, Olav got him the job to make that big screen, which was the first big one he ever did. And then he went on.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Harley Earl the man you worked closest with at General Motors?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not at all. I didn't work with any of them, really. I worked with Mr.—I showed things to the architects. I didn't work with them. I met them—afterwards of course I met them, because I did a lot of overtime, but that was a different thing.

ROBERT BROWN: So, that followed from that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I don't know if it did or not. No, I don't think so.

ROBERT BROWN: You've described Harley Earl as a character. What do you mean by that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: What do you mean as a character? [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: He seemed sort of eccentric in some ways?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I can't really tell you, really. He was just a character.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, another commission known to me, when you were with Saarinen, was the Kresge Auditorium at MIT.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: That was a great curtain you did, that stage curtain. Can you describe, was that an interesting project, anything in particular?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it was a very difficult one.

ROBERT BROWN: Why was that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: First of all, it was an enormous thing and, well, it was done out of diamonds that were sewn together. It was just very difficult; it took a lot of time.

ROBERT BROWN: And was that mass-produced down to commercial?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, we used mass-produced fabric, and then it was cut into these diamond shapes and then it was sewn together. That had a lot to do with—you had to design it on paper with the samples.

ROBERT BROWN: And then, you knew what the manufacture product was?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I knew the fabric, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: And then you had it fabricated, put together by—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: By somebody. I didn't do that.

ROBERT BROWN: You had lots of contacts with weavers.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah. Well, no, this was not a weaving project; it was strictly a design project.

ROBERT BROWN: But you liked designing on paper. Would you prefer, if you had your choice, to work right on the loom?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I always did that, but I can do both. I mean, prints you have to design one way or another, but in the case of prints I did all kinds of methods you know, photograms, potato prints, whatever have you. But otherwise, I certainly think that for a textile, for a woven thing, you have to do it on the loom.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you finding by the early '50s that in America your idea of design, your interests, your kinds of colors, really sort of natural colors, or primary, right—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN:—were becoming the predominant taste? Or would you say there was still a lot of interest in other things; in, say, folk designs?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, of course there was.

ROBERT BROWN: There was.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: A few that—Dorothy Liebes did some things.

ROBERT BROWN: And others did too.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: And I did. I think ours was in a very different—

ROBERT BROWN: But you did some folk things.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, never.

ROBERT BROWN: No, you didn't. But Liebes did.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, she didn't.

ROBERT BROWN: No?

MARIANNE STRENGELLS: I don't think so. But I mean, we were closest together because we both liked texture, we liked color.

ROBERT BROWN: And you both worked extensively with industry too, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Now, ours was very different. I mean, this was brainwork, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: This was brainwork? Did you get to know her a bit when you moved back to Connecticut?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, we saw her quite often, both of them.

ROBERT BROWN: Was she quite approachable? Did you talk about weaving much?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not really. We talked about other things, I think. I mean, I think we both realized that we were not doing the same kind, you know. I mean, she was very—[inaudible]—very much so, and beautiful, beautiful stuff. But no, we were just friends.

ROBERT BROWN: When you say beautiful, you mean the sense of composition or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I think in what she did, I think she was very, very good. She's still alive.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you see the Bauhaus design sort of becoming predominant, or not?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Here?

ROBERT BROWN: Did you think it would?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: You mean now?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, then. Did you think it would someday sort of sweep the field?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No—well, it wasn't my field at all.

ROBERT BROWN: Why not, do you think?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, because I just liked other things. You know, I didn't like rigid things. I like texture and I liked color. She had very little color in her stuff.

ROBERT BROWN: But you like to take, like, for example, a new fabric or a new fiber and see what effects it would have, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Of course.

ROBERT BROWN: You were more interested in how that might carry you, rather than pre-thinking out everything and making everything conform to—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Look, I had one rule, and that was I don't care, I mix everything and I see what comes out, and I test it. I mean, I wouldn't just throw it at somebody without knowing what it would do. And she worked very simply in wools, linens, and really was very different, fortunately. But I do admire her; I think she's a lovely, lovely person.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe we could talk now a bit about some of the commercial and industrial clients for which you particularly worked. You've emphasized a few of them; I

thought maybe now would be a good time to continue on with some of this, and then in here, maybe a couple of these—or maybe there are others as well.

Let's do talk now about some of your work with industry. And you said that Knoll Associates was one of the first. How did you come to know them? Did you know Florence Knoll?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Florence Knoll and I were the first ones to share a dormitory in Cranbrook. So I met her first and then of course I met Hans, and from there on we just went on doing things. So that's how; the introduction was really from Cranbrook, because—

ROBERT BROWN: What was their strength, would you say, the Knolls, what was their—were they—their business sense, their—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, Hans was a wonderful businessman.

ROBERT BROWN: And Florence, what was her contribution?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, she was a great, great designer. I mean, she had sensitivity, color sense, so on and so forth. No, I knew Florence from before. She was actually almost a daughter to the Saarinens. Her parents died, and she was in Kingwood School, and she spent a lot of time with the Saarinens, and she came to Finland. So I first met her—

ROBERT BROWN: You'd met her even before you came over.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I did. I know it was very funny because she came over and she busted her leg, and Eliel was carrying her around, arms all over the place. And they came to my summer place, and so forth and so on. So I knew her before, yes. And then we were fairly close because we were the only two people in the dormitory, you know. So we got to know each other well.

ROBERT BROWN: And Knoll Associates was formed in the '40s, I guess, or something like that.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, in the '40s, but I don't remember when.

ROBERT BROWN: And this was one of your first jobs. What sort of things did you do with the Knoll—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Printed fabrics, at the time.

ROBERT BROWN: Printed fabrics.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, no wovens at the time; later on, yes, but just printed. Something called *Shooting Stars* was the number one thing. I haven't got—

ROBERT BROWN: Have you got an example of that? Were these fairly abstract designs?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you get some instructions from Florence Knoll?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: She just thought that what you did she would want to show.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: And were these to be—were these sold separately as fabrics, or were these sold also as upholstery?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Most of them were drapery fabrics to start with. And, no, they were just shown and sold in the shop. No. No, actually, I have never had much instructions from my clients, you know. I mean, okay, I do something and I show it to them; if they like it, fine.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Knoll Associates fairly quickly a success?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think so; I think so. You know, as I say, Hans had a good background, you know, because Knoll—in Germany, parents, grandparents—I don't know.

Anyway, he was a good businessman and he had very good sense, and the combination was good.

ROBERT BROWN: So you became very well known, in a way, through this work, didn't you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, partly, I suppose. I was the first one. I can show you some samples later on.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, other industrial clients that you've emphasized before—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, George Royal was the one that did all the things for in Terrace Plaza.

ROBERT BROWN: George Royal was the company which you—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Now, I did things for all of these, but they were smaller things. Now, Chatham Manufacturing Company was one—the top one. They did automobile fabric. They came over in 1954, and at that time they started going into suit jackets, and their suit jackets were terrible, believe me.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? What do you mean, they looked terrible?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah, they were shiny, glossy. Oh, they were gruesome, you know. So I got them—I worked for them for six years, and I got them to accept texture again, tweedy things instead of this horrible gloss.

ROBERT BROWN: Sort of uniform things they'd done before.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, they only did one thing, only different colors. It was all glossy, and it was probably all right, practical and so forth, but it was awful, really awful. So I got them onto this other thing. I can show you samples of that.

ROBERT BROWN: And the result was what? Was it very favorable for them? I mean, this was much more popular.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You were using artificial fibers.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh yes, entirely, because I had to do that. But I, again, made them spin it up differently, do different things—[inaudible]—instead of having this one single-strand, horrible glossy thing. They made tweedy arms—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean they made them rougher, ones that would break a bit as they were spun—I mean, as they were twisted?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah. Well, they were bigger yarns.

ROBERT BROWN: And not—[inaudible.]

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I can show you some samples. It's hard for me to just explain it.

ROBERT BROWN: Okay, now we're looking at several samples of the work you did for Chatham Manufacturing Company, automobile upholstery.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: And I think you want to make a few comments. I'd like to ask some questions, maybe, as you talk about various ones.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I would like to. When I was approached by them, to start with—

ROBERT BROWN: You were approached by Chatham itself.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Chatham itself. And actually, the guys in Detroit, they were in contact with the manufacturers of cars. Well, I was approached, and at the time they had to go into synthetics, and they did—[inaudible]—all very glossy, very slick, very dull, and you skidded along; if you sat down you couldn't stay in your seat—

ROBERT BROWN: They were too slick.

MARIANNE STRENGELL:—and so forth. So, okay, so I told them at the time—there were two very, very nice guys, Gordon and Ralph Getzinger [sp]. Gordon was working with Ford, Getzinger was working with—

ROBERT BROWN: General Motors?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: General Motors, and so forth, in Albany. So I told them I'd be delighted. It was a terrific challenge, seeing those things, what they had done, you know. I said, yes, but I would like to have your own yarns, your own materials, I want to see the mill, and I want to know just what the equipment is, what the personnel is, and how you sell it. And I want to weave up samples on my handloom out of this, with all these limitations in mind, and then I want to go down and see, with you, with Gordon and Ralph, to see the people who are in charge of the styling for the various cars.

So that's the way it came about. And it was the only way it could be done, really, from my end, and I think from theirs too, because they were quite flattered, you know: okay, I came down with samples—[inaudible]. And I said, look, I mean, okay, how do you like it; what do you say, you know? So they felt that they had designed the things, which they really did not. But anyway, they felt very strongly they were a part of the thing, so we worked it out. I met some very interesting characters.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, I did. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Like, for example, do you remember?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I won't tell any names, but it was fun. It was crazy, but it was fun.

So anyway, from that very slick beginning I got them steered into this sort of thing that I'm showing you now, which is—if there is a pattern, it's discrete, it's all over. One reason for that is because, prior to this deal I did an upholstered fabric for somebody, I forgot who it was. It was a glen plaid sort of thing, very subtle in itself, but it was still a big plaid. And they put it into a streamlined car with—every line was rounded; there was not a single straight line anywhere, and it was a nightmare.

So, whatever patterns I did, it was discrete. So you can see here, either a small pattern that would fit in, or a bigger pattern but in less contrasting colors so it would still be an all-over effect. And that was one end of it, and the other one was tweeds. That, I really think, was the best thing for the cars.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas a very contrasting, or a large pattern—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, indeed. I mean, you have to always think about the fabric, the way it's used. You can't have a curtain that has some certain patterns, if you fold it, it will look completely different. You have to think of those things. And especially in this case where you sit for a long time in the same place, you have to have a nice atmosphere, you have to have—

ROBERT BROWN: A fairly—[inaudible].

MARIANNE STRENGELL: That's true, and a background for the people. That's one of my pet things: I want textiles to be background for people.

ROBERT BROWN: You don't want them to compete with them and their personalities.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, certainly not.

ROBERT BROWN: So you devised, then, a small patterned type of upholstery. We see some examples here, three at least. There's one that's quite formal. It's sort of a hexagonal, ringed in black—blue ringed in black.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It's very simple, but I mean, it will fit and it gives an overall color picture, you know. And then, this one is a little bit fancier, but on the other hand it's all in

one color, you know, and you can use this either way, depending on the design of the car.

ROBERT BROWN: This is in distinct registers, this one. Yeah, it's almost like a thumbnail pattern, but rather looser and more open than that. It's not so rigid as the other, the scale pattern.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Now, this one is my favorite.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, this is more of a tweedier—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, that's a combination of tweed and—it's like stripes.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, okay, this is tweed, which we think of as associated with the traditional, sort of almost craft—tweed we do—but into this you've introduced black, a very strong color, and metallic thread.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't think of it as traditional.

ROBERT BROWN: Tweed?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, but I think—

ROBERT BROWN: Not the overall effect. No, I'm saying, in this context certainly it isn't, but I'm saying the nubbly—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, the texture.

ROBERT BROWN:—texture of tweed. And then, why do you introduce the metallic thread as well?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, because actually that was the era of the metallic. Everybody wanted something metallic.

ROBERT BROWN: To suggest the future, up to date, do you think?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Up to date, yeah. This was made '59 and, of course, everybody wanted to have Lurex.

ROBERT BROWN: Lurex, which was, what, a metallic product of that time?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right. And here it's rather—as you can see it's rather discrete, but still there.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, it does not shine the way the fabrics had before you came in on it.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think it's very handsome.—So. Okay.—

ROBERT BROWN: So that work with Chatham, then, was exciting.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Very.

ROBERT BROWN: I mean, it opened you up into the mainstream of public taste; what people were going to sit on and look at.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, not only that, but it was a tremendous challenge to me. You know, here were all these new materials, different mills, and all these characters, as I said before, all these personalities, let's call them that.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean they were all very strong-minded?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, yes, they were strong-minded, and they didn't always have very good taste.

ROBERT BROWN: No, I was going to ask, did they think that they were designers? You said that sometimes they thought they were.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No. Oh, they thought they were, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: But until you came along, for the most part had they not really ever employed a sophisticated designer?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No. I don't think very much, no.

ROBERT BROWN: And the auto industry itself had also just more or less picked out from their samples?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I know, and they put things together.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: This, then—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: This was very personalized.

ROBERT BROWN: This now meant Detroit was beginning to think more and plan more deliberately, and create custom fabrics for almost each model.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, they did, they did. Well, it was a person-to-person thing, which was good, because I think that's why we did so well.

ROBERT BROWN: And these did do very well.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, very well, for six years.

ROBERT BROWN: You also—another major client, at least in terms of innovation at about that time, the late '50s, was Alcoa in Pittsburgh, the Aluminum Company of America.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: I know you've shown me some of the prominent advertising they did for it. This was your—it was a challenge there, wasn't it?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it was indeed.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they come to you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And what did they say?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They said they had a program—I had that downstairs, but I—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, I've seen some of them.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They had a program and they wanted to have these fibers used.

ROBERT BROWN: And these were aluminum.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: All aluminum. And they had—well, Charlie Eames did something with the aluminum, I know that, and I did something—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean he did a textile, or something else?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: He did a structural—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: He did something with—the toys. You know, he was good at toys. I was the raw material person. No, there was a Frenchman who did a beautiful evening dress in this material.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it a difficult material? When you saw it, what did you think?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I was horrified.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? Why?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, it's glossy—I can show it to you, you can see there—glossy. The colors are very good, a great range of colors, but glossy and slick and, you know. Well, they wanted me to make a rug out of it, and I couldn't believe them. I said, "A rug out of that? But anyway, I did, and I still have the picture of that.

ROBERT BROWN: Tell me, you've mentioned several times, whenever you say glossy you sort of reject it. Is that a problem—do you have a problem in a woven fabric, a glossiness?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think a little bit is all right, but this was supposed to be—

ROBERT BROWN: Entirely glossy.

MARIANNE STRENGELL:—all in a rug.

ROBERT BROWN: And what would the problem have been, just—would the effect have been distasteful?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, it could be very garish, you know, and it was. The colors were brilliant all over. They were good colors in themselves—

ROBERT BROWN: Good colors.

MARIANNE STRENGELL:—but I had to put them all together, you know, and that was quite a little challenge there.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean by putting them all together? You were supposed to use them all, or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Would you like me to go and get that?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you just said that for this Alcoa commission of a great rug, you said it was rather frightening because you didn't even make a sketch for it.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN: There wasn't time, or you just thought you wanted to—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I just couldn't, for one thing or another. I don't know why. But normally, I might have made a sketch. But I had all these 30 different shades of aluminum, which was a very shiny material, and I had to make it into a rug. And I was appalled when I was first approached by this whole thing. But then, of course, being myself, I thought, aha, here is a new challenge.

ROBERT BROWN: Here is a challenge, and you love challenges.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I love challenges.

ROBERT BROWN: And you didn't bother to sketch; you decided that you'd just plunge right in.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I plunged in. So I made a piece, a little different color yarns, and I played with them, and that's all. And I took it down, and I never was so scared in my life.

ROBERT BROWN: Took it down to what?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: From the loom. And it turned out really quite wonderful, because it was subtle and it was sturdy, and it draped, as you can see from this drawing. And this was one of the first when I was still not going all the way up. See, I was using some other materials.

ROBERT BROWN: You introduced it into other materials.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, a little bit of linen or a little bit of something else and so forth. But this one I did up with practically—

ROBERT BROWN: You retained, though, on the final rug, some of this heavy pile. You relieved—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I did that—yes, I divided it up.

ROBERT BROWN: And you did in the aluminum as well to a degree, didn't you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, this was not aluminum.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you did alternate the aluminum.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I did.

ROBERT BROWN: You did introduce, what, linen or wool or what?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Wool. No, I had to because it was just too much, and it also emphasized Alcoa, see?

ROBERT BROWN: And what did Alcoa think of that, the fact that you introduced other registers?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, they loved it.

ROBERT BROWN: They didn't mind that you'd introduced a little wool?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I think they saw my point, that this really enhanced their material, because it was a contrast.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think it also maybe gave a little prestige to aluminum, that it could be in company with wool?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Hopefully.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe it did, yeah; the traditional, admired, sturdy material.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, they were terribly pleased with it, so that's all I asked. And I was pleased too.

ROBERT BROWN: What pleased you so much about what the aluminum could do? What do you think it was?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, just to get the material and conquer it, you know. It was what I did.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it difficult to work with as a fiber?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not really that bad. I mean, it was like having a Philippine harsh fiber, you know. Every fiber works different. No, that wasn't the problem. But I think I managed to conquer it. I didn't think that to start with.

ROBERT BROWN: But then did Alcoa proceed to do quite a promotion of this?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, and I had quite a lot to do with it after that too.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you travel—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No.

ROBERT BROWN:—or what did you do to help them out?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I just experimented and made samples and stuff. And then I worked with Dow—

ROBERT BROWN: Dow Chemical.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, and with their new materials, and led into that whole field. That was good too. But as I said before, I never approached anybody for a job, ever, in my entire life, and Olav hasn't either.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do they keep coming to you? Because they knew you would accept a challenge, and they knew that your—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I hope so, and that I knew how.

ROBERT BROWN:—your prototypes would lead to production.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I hope so. I didn't read their mind.

ROBERT BROWN: Would they pay you a retainer, or did you have some kind of royalty arrangement, or how was that done?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, a retainer. I had a couple of royalty things, but I didn't believe very much in that. No, I asked for a retainer, and that's usually what happens.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, in the '50s and all, when so much of this was getting underway, you were very prominent. You were one of the leading people—artist-weavers being employed by industry, weren't you, in this country?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, I would say so. I would say number one then. I mean, Dorothy Liebes, sure, but she worked with—[inaudible]—but I think I had the wider appeal.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, she was principally with one, yeah.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: So, no, I think so, and I'm very proud of it.

ROBERT BROWN: And this must of—Did this gradually have quite an effect on younger weavers coming along, that they could see by your example?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, as our friend Ed Rossbach says, osmosis. [Laughs.] Well, anyway—okay, no, I think I had an influence on them, I do, and I think many of them were very successful.

ROBERT BROWN: Does industry continue—did it continue into the '60s coming to you, and into the '70s, or were the '50s the heyday of this?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, of this particular thing, yes, because that was 1960s stuff, this one stuff. But then I did Field Crest and Karastan, and then I got into designing yarns, which I think was interesting because that was part of my deal too.

ROBERT BROWN: That was with whom?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Darworth—Darworth. Well, I designed yarns for them; different twists, different novelties, and so forth and so on. I did that for quite a few years.

Have you got that in—

ROBERT BROWN: No, I don't.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I can't find it—

[Audio break.]

ROBERT BROWN: So, Darworth, was in the '60s, or something you worked with them?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And you designed yarns themselves, so that meant you got into the initial process before the fabric was even—I mean, the yarns were made.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, which is important.

ROBERT BROWN: You had not had that opportunity before, really.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I had done some of it in the Philippines, where you had to make your own yarns.

ROBERT BROWN: But that was a special project, which we'll talk about later.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But otherwise, working with the textile industry, they'd say, here are our fibers, see what you can do with them.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: And what did you attempt to do with Darworth?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I attempted to—as I said before, I love texture, I wanted to utilize different fibers and mix them. And then, I wove up samples for them out of them out of those—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: What were they aiming toward? What sort of clients did they have that you would have—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, they were, in a way, rather experimental themselves. We are talking about Darworth Incorporated in Simsbury, Connecticut; a marvelous, marvelous outfit—actually run by idealists, I think—interested in yarn, construction of yarns, what to do with them, how to combine them, and so forth.

I worked with them for quite a while and developed various textured yarns, combinations of fibers and so forth, and finally, just wove them into samples of upholstery, drapery, and so forth, for them, just to show what can be done. And I felt—to me, it was a very great thing because, I mean, everything in textiles starts with yarns or fiber, and I got to the very beginning of it this way.

ROBERT BROWN: You worked also, by the early '60s, with Field Crest.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And was that much of a challenge, or was that simply—[inaudible]—work?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Actually, it was a challenge, but not a very great one because it was all a question of price. I started working with them on bedspreads, inexpensive bedspreads, but then I got into the rug department, and that was a great challenge and a great joy. I worked with them for many years.

ROBERT BROWN: What about—I think it was a Hong Kong firm, but with an office in New York, Tai Ping.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, well, Tai Ping actually did things in Hong Kong, but they also had an outfit in Japan called Joto, and I did about 100 rugs for Joto in Japan. And I did rugs in Hong Kong, and I also did some other things in Hong Kong, which interested me very much. I think I saved some people's lives, or livelihood anyway.

It was a small outfit up very close to the Chinese border at the time, run by an Irish priest, and he got some of the people coming over from China, and he employed them, and they wove, and so forth. But they had terrible equipment. Everything was wrong about it. The looms were small and the yarns were miserable and very thin, and it took them forever to do things.

Well, I did design some lines for them, mainly in napkins and so forth, because the looms were narrow and they couldn't do anything big. And actually, they had a tremendous success here. This was all imported to USA.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that job come about for you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Just going up there. We had an artist friend in Hong Kong, and he lent us a car and we went up there. And we found this priest and found the place, and we could see the hardships, you know, so I just volunteered to do this.

ROBERT BROWN: It just happened like that.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, just like that, lots of things do.

ROBERT BROWN: You also worked with this large, I guess, American company, Karastan.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, that was delightful too; that was really delightful. Well, I designed rugs for them for numerous years, and quite a few of them were executed. Again, I got the yarns, I went down to the mill and could see their problems, their production thing and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: What was their problem?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, the market—that market—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: And so, you're working within those constraints. By then you knew—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: This would be the 1960s, or so, and you'd know—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, later too, up to '75.

No, no, that's one thing I feel very strongly about: I like to work within limitations. I like to know what's hard and what's difficult, and I start with that. I don't just go up in the blue sky and do something.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You described that with Chatham, how you asked them exactly what for, what—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Every time, limitations; I mean, machinery, labor problems, raw materials, markets, climate. For instance, in—well, that goes into the next one, the Philippines.

ROBERT BROWN: The constraints of climate as well.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, these jobs we've just described, they were presumably the chief ones. You also—we talked somewhat earlier when you were working with architecture; you've also worked, however, worked with industrial designers.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: I don't know if you want to say a bit about that. Is there anything in particular you want to—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, it was—look, when you come to Russell Wright and the Saarinen Swanson Group, I mean, that was always interior design. I mean, they did the furniture, I did the textiles. So, we worked as a unit on those things.

ROBERT BROWN: Those people were used to working with a single person and with a designer, because they were designers themselves, weren't they?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, well, I don't know how it came about. Again Saarinen Swanson of course was practically in the family, but Russell Wright—I forgot how that happened.

ROBERT BROWN: What about Raymond Loewy?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I don't know how that came about either.

ROBERT BROWN: For United Airlines.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, at the time, you know, it had to be lightweight and fireproof, and all that. So I had lots of things to think about. The General Motors Motorama was fun because there was tremendous yardage shown in their cars.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean these were sort of back—drapery that is background for the automobile?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, all around the top and bottom.

ROBERT BROWN: And you had to think, what, designs that would show off the cars?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: Therefore, it had to be not too blatant.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, no. But on the other hand, they also had to have texture, they had to have a little—we had a lot of Lurex in those because it set off the cars. No, it was fun. I did that for a couple years.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, while you were still at Cranbrook in the early '50s, you were recently married and you were doing a lot of work with Saarinen and others. You also, you and Olav as well, I gather, in1951 worked on—through the United States, and then later with the United Nations, on craft, I guess as an advisor in the Philippines and Japan, Southeast Asia. Maybe you could say something about that, and how and why you got into such a project.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, how, number one. That was 1951, and that was because of a friend of mine, Irene Murphy. Irene Murphy had been in the Philippines many years ago because her brother in law was the governor at the time, and she was his hostess. So she got very involved with the Philippines and their health program, and so forth and so on. So she came up with this deal about trying to help the Philippines by doing a crafts program. Now, that had not existed for 30 years because of the fact that 30 years ago some senator, nameless as far as I'm concerned, had decided that it should be discontinued, that they couldn't work, there was a child problem—

ROBERT BROWN: Child labor problem?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, child labor problem.

ROBERT BROWN: So in the 1920s this had been abolished? There had been a former—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, 30 years before we got there. So this was a completely new thing. So I was asked by USA, and my husband was asked by U.N., and there were three other people from Cranbrook that formed a group, and we went over there to start a program for crafts. And the Huks were around.

ROBERT BROWN: The Huks—the communist terrorists.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, and the economy was terrible.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, how did they select a group of you from the Cranbrook area? Was it Irene—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I think it was all thanks to Irene Murphy.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was from that area.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah, she lived right in—[inaudible]—next door, and she had previous experience with the problems, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Who else from Cranbrook went out with you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, there was a guy called John Risley and his wife, Mary Risley, and one of my students, Elizabeth [inaudible]—and Olav Hammarstrom and myself.

ROBERT BROWN: And what was your job supposed to be? Was it fairly spelled out?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, the idea was to just start up a new craft program—[inaudible]—start by just doing things and earning some money, and so forth. We were, I think, very well picked, and I think that the third part—U.N., USA, and the third part was the Philippine government, they were all together in this thing, and I think that the Philippine government had some marvelous people in it, and they did a very, very good job.

ROBERT BROWN: They were anxious to have such a program.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They did. They did. They needed it.

ROBERT BROWN: They did? For what? For employment, income?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: For employment, exactly. They had actually got down to—they established a minimum labor—monetary thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Wage.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Wage, yeah. So, okay, we got there, and first we went to Japan, more or less for studying what could be done, I mean, because of—you know, there was no machinery. All they had was still a little remnant, from 30 years back, of some people that knew how to weave, for instance.

ROBERT BROWN: You first went to Japan, you said.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, we went to Japan just for a study trip.

ROBERT BROWN: Because they were doing similar things?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, well, they were doing some things. We studied for a while and then we went to the Philippines. But the whole program was extremely well planned. We got there, we had a group of, I think, nine or 10 people from the biggest villages, and they became our students—my students in weaving and Olav's students in doing other things. And we trained them for about a month and sent them out to their villages. And they, in turn, trained people, 10 more people in the village, and they went out. It was just like a stone in a pond, and it worked very well.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the Philippine government have any preconceptions as to what they wanted to be done?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I don't think they had any idea at all. They just wanted something.

ROBERT BROWN: You said that you—at one time you told me that you had to overcome the Philippine desire to use artificial fibers.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes, because they had nothing else. It was all artificial. Everything—Everything was imported.

ROBERT BROWN: Imported. And you overcame that because you saw it would cost them too much to import?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Not that. They had lots of natural fibers that could be used, you know, and I felt very strongly—

ROBERT BROWN: Why not use what you have?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, of course, I mean, it's ridiculous to get some sleazy stuff, rayon —

ROBERT BROWN: But they probably thought that that would sell better.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They did, because we had a great deal to overcome like that. I mean, they just felt, you know, that that was the thing to do. Everything was imported, every scrap of fabric.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think it was a matter of pride; they didn't want to appear old fashioned in what they were going to sell?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, I don't think that.

ROBERT BROWN: They just were naïve. They were ignorant of international market conditions.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, whatever it is.

ROBERT BROWN: So you went down to the villages, or they came mainly to Manila?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, we started in Manila, but then we also went to the villages. But we started in Manila, and we had a very closely-knit thing there, and very successful. Right

now, they are millionaires; all my students are millionaires because they supply stuff to the whole of Asia.

ROBERT BROWN: I see, they continued this cottage industry—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They did, on their own.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it mostly hand weaving, or entirely?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, no machinery. As a matter of fact, I mean, they tried to get some semi-machinery in from Japan, against my absolute wishes because I had seen them. They were all iron on things, you know, and obviously not for the climate in the Philippines. So, they were dumped—[inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: So, the wages were low enough in the Philippines that you could compete worldwide with hand weaving.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not worldwide to start with. I mean, we tried to sell in New York, for instance. We had shows in New York, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: How did they work out?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: So-so, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Why didn't they sell, do you think?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, to start with, you know, you have to have a great campaign—[inaudible]—and so forth and so on. But the main thing was they knew that they had something, that they could do it. And for instance, Chrysler—[inaudible]—Chrysler had an assembly plant there in the Philippines, so I designed this fabric for them, which was breathing, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: For a hot climate, yeah.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Sure, it was wonderful. So I got them into that sort of thing. They also had this fabulous fabric, husi, a silk thing that they used for all their very elegant dresses, you know—[inaudible]—and embroidery—of course, embroidery was one of the things—and terribly, terribly expensive, so I got them into screen-printing. We had the husi fabric and we screen-printed it instead of making the embroidery.

ROBERT BROWN: How do you spell husi?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: H-U-S-I.

ROBERT BROWN: And so, this would sell more widely, this screen print, as opposed to embroidery.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it did, it did. I think I gave you some of those samples.

ROBERT BROWN: And they did find an export market for that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: To start with, it started around right there, locally, but I think right now, all of Asia is interested in it. Every hotel has it, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the plainer fabrics, such as linens and the like? They've done a lot of that, haven't they?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, they didn't really have a good linen.

ROBERT BROWN: But they've done some plain weaving—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN:—which is exported, and they sold it quite widely, didn't it?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: After a while, Olav and I designed a loom for them. That was the beginning of their—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, they didn't have a proper loom.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They just had little things this wide, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Little things they put in their lap, or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, more or less. So, we designed a loom, and we took that with us when we went there first. And, oh, they have hundreds and hundreds. It could be done for 10 dollars in a village, and it was 48 inches wide, and it had a fly shuttle. And, you know, they all have very short arms, so it was really—it really helped an awful lot. So that was part of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, now, you and Olav worked closely in the Philippines, as you frequently do in the United States. What form did that collaboration take over there? I know that he worked on some furniture designs and the use of rattan and other native canes and wood things. How did you work with him; in what respects?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, it's very hard to pin down, I think, in a way, but it combined textiles with wood projects, and so forth and so on. And we had an all-over pattern we followed that we made up ourselves, and we worked very hard. We worked all day long, and at night we worked again.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, was this part of the general idea of getting some cottage industries going?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, absolutely, that was the only thing we—

ROBERT BROWN: And you saw that you cannot simply be with weaving, but that they can also work in—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, no, you had to combine it, obviously, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Both of you—you already mentioned that Olav developed a labor-saving and larger loom that they could use. Did you both work toward things that, after you left, would be simple and that they could carry out without much expense?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I think that actually what we did while we were there, you know—I mean, in regard to material and so forth and so on—was there to stay, which it's proved out to be. I mean, it grew, and grew, and grew, and they're all millionaires now.

ROBERT BROWN: It seems that they've done very well.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, they did much better than we did.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, this was in '51 and '52, something like that, but you, a number of times, have gone both to Europe and Asia, lecturing. And how did you and Olav decide, and what led you to go into some lecture programs, some of which I think were sponsored by the American government, weren't they?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, to start with, we were supposed to go to Samoa and do the same sort of thing we did in the Philippines, but something happened. There was a change of presidents or something, you know, so it did not come off. And after a while we thought, well, we'd like to do it ourselves, and we did. We spent a year mostly on trying to prepare for this thing, and we were going to go to the Far East and we were going to lecture, and we were going to also try to bring some of the USA to them.

ROBERT BROWN: And what were you going to lecture on?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, we were going to lecture on architecture, fine arts, crafts, and so forth. And we decided to just limit it to the last five years here.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean what was going on within the last five years in the United States?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, what was the aim of this, to entertain people, or—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No; tell, exchange.

ROBERT BROWN: And did you begin by going to Europe? Your first tour was in Europe.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, only in Finland because of our parents. And then we went to Turkey, and then we went to the Far East.

ROBERT BROWN: When you went back to Finland—and neither you nor Olav had been back there for quite a while, had you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, we had, but we hadn't done anything professionally.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you find it, professionally, in Finland? When you went there, it was about 1956, I think.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, quite a lot of things going on, I mean, no doubt. I mean, the Finns are very good.

ROBERT BROWN: And the mid-'50s were a high point of the influence of modern Scandinavian design, weren't they?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I think so. Well, it's really been going on for a long time. Actually, I had a show in 1956, and I think that started some things going in Finland; color, for instance, which has not been their number one thing.

ROBERT BROWN: No, they were more interested in texture and natural—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, not texture, just patterns.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they still, did you find, still somewhat caught up in folk designs, or was that a thing of the past?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, no, it's still there. Now, I think it's different—today.

ROBERT BROWN: Then you went to Asia.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: You went to India in '57.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that your first visit there?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And you went there to lecture or, what, to observe?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Lecture—oh, both. Everywhere we liked to say what we had to say, and we liked to learn what we could learn.

ROBERT BROWN: Under what auspices did you go to India?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Actually, our own. Oh, we had a blessing from the State Department. They thought we were wonderful, but they did not do much, certainly no money. And—no.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you secure sponsors in India, people who would—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, we actually did it ourselves.

ROBERT BROWN: But did you have contacts there?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, we had contacts, some contacts, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of contacts were these? You'd had a pupil who was from a prominent Indian family. Was that an—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes, I know, but I got her there. I got her when I was there.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I see.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no, it was really our own doing. I don't know how we did it, as a matter of fact.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, you mentioned a little earlier to me that in Ahmedabad there was this Textile Training Center. Did you go there, or did you lecture there at that time?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, that was not there yet.

ROBERT BROWN: It was not there yet.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, no. Charlie Eames started that whole thing later. No, we just met—I'm terribly sorry, I can't think of his name now. We met them here, and so we visited them there. But they had nothing to do—this whole thing was really self-made, you know. We did it. I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the effect of this? You must have gotten some reaction in subsequent months and years to your lecture tour.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, indeed. It was great from our point of view, of course, because we got there and we offered what we had to offer, which was, okay, the last five years of architecture, fine arts, and so forth, here, and then they all wanted to tell us that they did much better. So we learned a tremendous lot, but nobody—I'd say nobody has ever heard that much.

ROBERT BROWN: So, you learned what they were doing.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you make notes and so forth of that?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Not on paper, no; in our minds.

ROBERT BROWN: But you learned a great deal.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: We did, we did.

ROBERT BROWN: This was a good way of soaking up what was being done—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, it was fabulous.

ROBERT BROWN:—in unpublicized places, right?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I know, absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you notice thereafter any effect on your own work from what you were seeing they were doing, some of the things you were learning?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, you know, my inspiration has always been nature and color. Now, color, yes, in India, my god, beautiful, the saris. No, not directly, let's put it that way.

ROBERT BROWN: That lecture tour, you only held them really in the '50s, didn't you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Fifty-seven.

ROBERT BROWN: And you did some work similar to that you'd done in the Philippines in Jamaica in the '60s.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, somewhat similar, yes. That was, again, started off by Seaga.

ROBERT BROWN: Edward Seaga, who became, later, prime minister, didn't he?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right, right. He looked us up. We were staying on 50th Street in New York, and he came over to see us, and he wanted very much to—that was a political thing at the time, I am quite sure, and he wanted to inspire people to do more, villages and so forth. So he engaged us, and we went down at first for a few months, under the Jamaican government, then we were sent back by U.N., both of us.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the situation like in Jamaica, say, compared with the Philippines?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Terrible.

ROBERT BROWN: There was no traditional cottage industry?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: None whatsoever. And of course we were working right in the slums, you know. No, it was quite difficult. I think it was harder because the government didn't really do as much as they did in the Philippines, but anyway—

ROBERT BROWN: Did anything much, do you think, result from that in Jamaica?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I think so; I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: They were also aiming toward income producing through export markets?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They did indeed. And as I say, okay—well, we started out. I had to get a place and looms and weavers, and what have you and so forth. I had 15 weavers to start with, and I got all the equipment from the USA, and we started working. And then we came back under the U.N., and I think it was very successful, very.

ROBERT BROWN: It eventually did produce a program by then.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yes; oh, indeed. Well, not so much here, as they had hoped for, but I think locally and tourists and stuff like that. It had a great deal to do there.

ROBERT BROWN: You did something analogous to that in Appalachia; you proposed a program.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, let's just say that I proposed—

ROBERT BROWN: In 1968.

MARIANNE STRENGELL:—and it did not come through.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that simply because they decided it wasn't worth—the government decided it wasn't worth promoting?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't know what happened.

ROBERT BROWN: It just died.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It just died. Well anyway, it was a good program. It was a difficult program, because if they wanted weaving, I mean, all right, so we had to get looms out in the country, we had to have mobile units doing that hard work, you know. No, it didn't work out. I'm sorry. It could have.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think so? They could have competed with imported things or with mass industry?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I don't know about that. They could at least—a living, you know. No, I don't think they could have competed. No, I can't see that because, after all, they are not well educated, and the whole setup, but they could have earned a living.

ROBERT BROWN: Well now, not well educated—you mean there weren't any supervisors nearby who were well educated either, unlike the Philippines, let's say, where you had sophisticated people who could run the program.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, it was a different scheme, but it was basically the same. But it had to be done by people going out and picking up things and selling things, checking things, and so forth. Well, it was not approved, let's just put it that way. The program was okay.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, this was really sort of a side thing for you, though, wasn't it, because by the '60s, you had moved back to Connecticut and to Manhattan.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: I know, but I still was—you know, my mother did a wonderful job in Finland. She got people involved in doing weaving and earning some money when they were

not necessarily putting up potatoes, or putting out potatoes. And so, I had a little background of that.

ROBERT BROWN: When you were a girl, your mother sponsored things like that.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yes. Oh, yeah, I had nothing to do with it, except later on when I designed stuff myself. But it was in my blood, in a way. I do feel very strongly that I like to help people and want to, but the programs are far between.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, the real—in the last 20 years, most of your time was spent before with clients and industry, wasn't it, once you'd left Cranbrook—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Right.

ROBERT BROWN:—except for going back there that one time to consult on their programs.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Oh, yeah, I did things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Most of the time you spent with your clients in industry.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, but I had some short programs, you know, trying to teach somebody something.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you primarily live in Connecticut and New York City until fairly recently?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, then we went to Cambridge.

ROBERT BROWN: In Cambridge you lived?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, '64

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have particular roots in any of those places, or they were simply new bases for you?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: They were a new base.

ROBERT BROWN: And then you had your clients; that continued.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, sure. But I liked the bases, all of them.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, I suppose New York would be, particularly, the good base for—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: It was. It was.

ROBERT BROWN:—clients.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, for instance, right now, you know, there's no chance in the world that I can get a contract with anybody because I'm not there. And you have to be there to go up and down the street, you know, you have to. So, I mean, I've given that up. It was a little rough, but I gave it up.

ROBERT BROWN: You're happy enough to be here.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, I'm doing other things. I'm doing photography, I'm doing painting, I'm doing this and that and so forth. I'm not exactly idle.

ROBERT BROWN: What is Wellfleet? First the house that Olav built, and now, here in the village of Wellfleet, has that meant a great deal to you, Wellfleet?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I like Wellfleet. You know, I don't mind leaving our Olav house—that Olav house was—[inaudible]—but I think this is all right. And we still can move, we can do things, you know. There's no question there.

ROBERT BROWN: Has Wellfleet had some attachment for you, or was it simply that you came here 30-some years ago—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Just about that.

ROBERT BROWN: It was just sort of an accidental thing, or rather, through friends—

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Yeah, I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: How did it happen you came here?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Very funnily enough, I had lunch with a girl who was working for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in New York, and she had a spin out here and she had some photographs, and she showed them to me, and I said, wow, that looks great, I'd like to go there this summer. And Ward Bennett, you know—we have one of his pieces out there—he was here, and I wrote Ward and said, look, we'd like to stay somewhere in Wellfleet, and he got us a place. So that's how we got here.

ROBERT BROWN: And you found there were a number of other designers and so forth living here.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: There are lots. You can't imagine how many, but they are all in the woods.

ROBERT BROWN: No, not that they touch base with each other, do they?

MARIANNE STRENGELL: No, they don't, they're very subtle. Well, Serge [Sabarsky], you know—[inaudible]—is okay. He's over in the woods.

ROBERT BROWN: But you did like this kind of place where you could be to yourself if you wished.

MARIANNE STRENGELL: Well, we did, and we thought very hard, where would we go, what should we do, you know, and so forth. But we decided no, no, we'll just stay here, and then we'll go traveling.

Have you got any more questions?

[END OF INTERVIEW.]