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Oral history interview with Nancy Yaw, 1981 June 8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Nancy Yaw on June 8, 1981. The interview took place in Birmingham, Michigan, and was conducted by Jean O'Korn for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[00:00:03.09]

JEAN O'KORN: This is Jean O'Korn, and it's June 8, 1981. And I'm with Nancy Yaw in the Yaw Gallery. First of all, let's talk a little bit about why you opened the gallery and when, and maybe a little bit about your background and why you're interested in doing that sort of thing.

[00:00:23.02]

NANCY YAW: Well, I opened the gallery for probably the reasons that people fifteen or twenty years ago, or even today, open galleries. I think they think that there are a lot of artists who deserve to be represented who aren't represented; that, presumably, there's a lot of good work that isn't being shown because it isn't name work, and that there's a lot of good art around for not a lot of money.

[00:00:55.35]

It was funny; I was talking to two young people who are interested in starting a print workshop and print gallery. And those are exactly the reasons why they're starting. I think you find out very soon that the people who are very good, who are reliable, who are professional, have been discovered. The people who are very good are generally discovered. And so soon, the gallery changes. And I think most galleries do change very drastically within a year of their founding, unless they're founded by people who are printmakers and, therefore, carry on with prints, or maybe people don't even change what they show so much as the caliber. I think the caliber of galleries generally goes up quite substantially. We started twenty years ago.

[00:01:46.71]

JEAN O'KORN: What year was that? When did you open?

[00:01:51.29]

NANCY YAW: It's going to be twenty years this November, so it would be '60, November of '60.

[00:01:55.07]

JEAN O'KORN: Did you open in this place where you are now?

[00:01:56.59]

NANCY YAW: No. We opened as a lease department in Jacobson's, which was probably one of the luckiest things. It was one of the first department store galleries ever to be. And Nate Rosenfeld, who owns Jacobson's, was a very forward-thinking person. And it was wonderful for us because we didn't have any kind of business idea. We didn't know how to write a charge. We didn't know any of those basic bookkeeping things.

[00:02:17.72]

JEAN O'KORN: We—you mean you and Jim?

[00:02:18.68]

NANCY YAW: Yeah, which really came as part of our lease, so that all we had to really do was to gather the art, set up the shows, and to sell the material.

[00:02:29.51]

JEAN O'KORN: In Jacobson's in Birmingham?

[00:02:31.10]

NANCY YAW: Jacobson's in Birmingham, the home dec shop. We had a wonderful, wonderful space. And we did that for a number of years. And it became very evident to us that the quality level had to go up.

[00:02:45.99]

JEAN O'KORN: What did you handle in the beginning? What kind of stuff?

[00:02:47.73]

NANCY YAW: We handled watercolors and oils, and a few prints, just a general run of things. Again, it was mainly local people. There were a few people from other cities, but it was mainly a local endeavor. Then we became involved in prints. And probably the most wonderful thing that we did was we had a friend who was in South Bend, and we went off to visit. He was an artist. We went off to visit the South Bend Art Center. And there was a wonderful show of the graphic work of Picasso, which we had not seen as a body of work.

[00:03:26.35]

And of course, we fell in love with all of it, and came back and put together a very, very strong show with ceramics and with prints. And that was the one day I remember, that before the store was open, there were lines outside waiting to get at those prints. So we really began to concentrate on prints, so that at the time that we left Jacobson's, Jim opened up in the Wabeek Building in a small upstairs area, showing prints. But he also, at that time, was publishing prints as well, so that he didn't need a gallery location, because a lot of his work was wholesale.

[00:03:59.07]

At that point, I was home with child number four. Then he became interested again in his framing business, which he had stopped being involved in for a period of time. And eventually, it was too much work doing the two things, so he thought he'd close the gallery. And at that point, the little space, Relatively Light, is now opened up. And I said, "Why don't we just open there? I'll come in mornings. Jennifer's going to be at school. And then you can take it over in the afternoon, and it won't be so bad. And we'll have a storefront again. We'll

have a real gallery where people can see us, rather than the small gallery space in the Wabeek Building." So we opened there. And of course, it didn't take a great deal of time before I was there more than two hours in the morning and he less.

[00:04:48.55]

And one day, we had a very, very good print show of contemporary Yugoslav people. And it was very strong, and had just been brought into the country. And two gentlemen walked into the gallery, one little, short man and one tall, handsome man. And they looked around, and then they started talking. It turned out that it was Bob Kidd and Dick DeVore. And I think it was Dick, he said, "Why don't you carry pots in here?" And I said, "Well, I hadn't thought—" I didn't know Dick—but I had, of course, heard about Kidd. And Bob said, "Yes, why don't you carry some fiber?" And I said, "Well, there's no really good reason why we don't." So the first show that we ever had was Pillows Concept. I believe that was the first one. And Bob Kidd wrote a letter to many of the wonderful, wonderful people in the field of textiles at that point.

[00:05:45.46]

JEAN O'KORN: What year was that?

[00:05:47.26]

NANCY YAW: Oh, my. That must have been about seven years after we started the gallery. So it'd be about '67, '68. And—[clears throat] excuse me—we had Helen Bitar and we had—[Telephone ringing.]

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:06:02.26]

JEAN O'KORN: You were talking about the Pillows—

[00:06:03.98]

NANCY YAW: Right, the Pillows Concept show. We had a wonderful, wonderful group of people. And it was very, very well received. Bob Kidd actually hand-screened—you know those little bags that have a tag attached that people put tools and things in? Well, he hand-screened all of those little pillows. And we stuffed them all and sent them all out. And it was just wonderful. So that show was a great success. And soon after, we called with "Clay, Anatomic and Geographic," which was a show of Dick's class. And at that time, Dick had wonderful people—George Timock, Tommy Bonnart [ph], Margie Hughto—many people who have carried on.

[00:06:40.82]

JEAN O'KORN: All Cranbrook people?

[00:06:41.60]

NANCY YAW: All Cranbrook people. It was his class. And he had some work in, too. And at that time, he was making those torsos and faces with glasses. And everybody was doing low fire. And it was the time that really, clay was zooming. So that was our first clay show. And we continued to carry prints. And when we moved into this space, which was, at that time, three buildings put together. And then we had our, I think, our second or third show was our last painting show, which was Ronaldo DeJuan. And after that, we became devoted completely to contemporary American craft.

[00:07:21.90]

JEAN O'KORN: Why did you choose craft? Why did you decide to just do strictly craft?

[00:07:25.79]

NANCY YAW: I think craft is very, very interesting. It also was a field that we were able to, eventually, get to the top. There was no way that we would be able to have Clement Greenberg's people. It just didn't seem like a feasible thing ever be able to show Olitski, and

all those wonderful painters. However, we could show the very best of contemporary American craft. And that's what we worked for.

[00:07:53.73]

You really need, in order to do that, you need somebody that would have the stature and the respect, such as Richard DeVore, in the field to be able to do it. Because artists are very reluctant and hesitant to give their work to galleries who are showing unknown people, which is reasonable. So if you can find one person, or two people, and then you just slowly, slowly build. And you finally, then, end up with Voulkos, and and those kinds of people.

[00:08:26.97]

Of course, glass, at that time, I don't know if you remember when Jim Boatner [ph] was at the BBAA, and I don't remember what year that was. But I remember he put on the first contemporary glass show. And I remember going into the BBAA and seeing Harvey Littleton, and who was the man that made those huge, huge, huge thin forms? Kent Ipsen—and seeing all of those people for the first time. Jim was awfully good at that.

[00:08:53.44]

And then we started in glass. And we started in glass, gosh, when you got a little paperweight for $12 and $15. Those were the days. And of course, at that time, everything was so much less. Not too long ago, I was looking through some check stubs, for what reason, I don't recall. But it turned out that we had paid DeVore, for two pieces, $75, versus things in his last show, twelve pieces went between $4,000 and $6,000, and everything sold, so that it's been a long pull for these people over the course of the time.

[00:09:29.64]

JEAN O'KORN: Who were some of the real important craftspeople working in this region?

[00:09:33.89]

NANCY YAW: At that time?

[00:09:34.21]

JEAN O'KORN: At that time, in the Midwest, around here.

[00:09:39.60]

NANCY YAW: Let me see. Well, of course, Timock still was at Cranbrook right then. But from there, he went to Kansas City. And at Kansas City, there still is Kent Ipsen—no, not Kent Ipsen—there's Ken Ferguson and Victor Babu. They're still there. And of course, Timock is a wonderful foil for their type of artwork. Of course, John Glick was here, and John Glick was working. We never did too much with weaving. We did have one show of Bob Kidd.

[00:10:15.65]

JEAN O'KORN: Well, you had the Bob Kidd show that I worked on. And that was in the early '70s—'71, something like that.

[00:10:20.42]

NANCY YAW: Right. We never did very much in contemporary weaving, because, again, the very, very good people—the top of the line who would compare to Voulkos and Nagle and DeVore, were people who made enormous things. First of all, you'd have to have really proper delivery, just from a very functional standpoint. You would have to have the gallery space. And you might have had the hype for some of it, but you'd have to store the crates. And it was always something that if we were going to do fiber, we would probably do either minor pieces or secondary people. And that's why we never did contemporary fiber. We did do a couple of wonderful shows with Gary Knodel. The first show we ever did with Gary, he took the whole front large gallery, and he made a canopy just for it. And it was sensational.

[00:11:06.86]

JEAN O'KORN: I remember that.

[00:11:07.57]

NANCY YAW: Do you remember that, "A Tribute to Spring," or something like that. And he made the piece just for us. [Telephone rings]

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:11:16.50]

JEAN O'KORN: I know what I wanted to ask you. What were some of the influences on your decisions as to who to handle? How did you decide who to handle, and what particular show to have?

[00:11:24.57]

NANCY YAW: Well, I really have to give credit to DeVore. Because when I would be very excited about something, he'd come in to see the show. And if he told me that the gallery was very well painted and the white was very clean, I would know that I had made a disaster of a show. He was very, very influential. He was always very tough in terms of being a critic. And when I would adore something, he would come and look at it. And he would say, "Well, it's very nice, but there's very, very little that it really does to move your heart."

[00:11:57.94]

And he taught me just—he taught me to question everything that I thought I liked. And even today, sometimes, when we put up shows, we stand there, and we say, "Well, now, what would DeVore say about this? How would he react to this? What would he be seeing in all this work?" He steered us away from, of course, bad workmanship. And that we probably didn't even need DeVore for. We'd learned that. But he did steer us away from seductive things, from those things which appear to be wonderful, but really aren't, that don't really have true body. He taught us how you must have a good—how a show must really be not just a showing of people's work, but it must be an idea. And it must be the fulfillment and the culmination of an idea.

[00:12:49.85]

That's one of the very, very difficult things about craft galleries, I find. When you schedule a painting show, you go to the artist's studio, and you choose the work that's made. When you schedule a craft show, you say, "In two years, Mr. X, will you give us a show?" You have, number one, no idea what the work's going to be like. Secondly, when someone gives you a consigned show, you know that there are four or five good pieces in it, but you can't very well say, "Take everything else out. I don't want it." You've made a commitment to show the artist's work. You are standing behind the artist, for better or for worse, and unfortunately, many times for worse. You have a body of work that was thrown together, or that just doesn't make it. Once in a while, you have a body of work that is really worthy.

[00:13:43.16]

If you have to schedule twelve shows a year, you work on a two- or a three-year rotation. You do have to book ahead. There's no way. Also, somehow, craftsmen work for shows rather than having a dealer look at a body of work and take it as a show. And again, that's a little bit the time frame. You can't win because you can't wait. These people are busy. They have commitments. And you can't just suddenly call up someone and say, "Very important Mr. Whoever You Are, do you happen to have a body of work that I might have?" Because, again, because of the way the craft market works, it is already committed.

[00:14:25.18]

JEAN O'KORN: That brings up the question of craft versus fine art. Do you think there is—is craft fine art? Or is there a difference?

[00:14:32.17]

NANCY YAW: Craft is not fine art. I mean, there's no way to say that craft is fine art. It's like saying black and white are the same things. They're not the same. They never will be. Why?

Because one is craft, and one is fine art. It doesn't mean that craft can't be beautiful.

[00:14:45.64]

JEAN O'KORN: What about all these craft people that are trying to make it fine art, that are trying to have people relate to it as fine art, who want to be thought of—

[00:14:52.48]

NANCY YAW: As fine artists?

[00:14:53.74]

JEAN O'KORN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:14:54.10]

NANCY YAW: I think they can all be thought of as artists. You know, the very, very basis of the two are entirely different. Craft is originally and historically and—well, maybe not philosophically, I don't know—but, really, craft is something that was originally meant to function. Never, ever were paintings meant to function. They were always going to be on a wall, and they were always going to be decorative, not in the pejorative sense, but they always were going to be there to enhance your life visually. The fact that a bowl is beautiful means that it is still a bowl. It still properly belongs in the field of craft. It is not on a wall. It is not a painting. It is not a fine art. It is a decorative art.

[00:15:38.73]

And decorative, because "decorative" is now such a hard word, people are not labeling things decorative art. I have no problem with decorative art. Sometimes, also, if you were to think, really, of the value in your life of fine art and craft, you use craft. You probably, even though you have, say, you had a Noland painting in your living room, you would probably see it a lot less than you would a bowl that you would use.

[00:16:05.22]

So I'm not so sure what the big battle is. The big battle, really, essentially, is acceptance, is that the craft people be taken seriously—that their prices, if they make objects that are truly as beautiful as a Noland, or whoever it is that you prefer, that they get the money for it that these other people do. But to ever say that craft is art is, to me, just absolutely a misinterpretation of what the dictionary words mean. But you certainly can have a beautiful bowl. Again, in this whole argument, people say, well, pottery is the oldest of art forms. That's fine. I'm not saying that it can't be beautiful. But I am saying that it is not two-dimensional. And to try to worry that through seems to me sort of ridiculous.

[00:16:55.09]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah. Yeah, I see your point. What was the craft scene like then, here, in this area?

[00:17:01.72]

NANCY YAW: Oh, it was wonderful. It was wonderful. And, of course, this area is much more supportive, I would guess, than most other areas or, at least, at the time. To show craft was something that was not done in terms of a proper gallery setting. And by that, I just mean white walls and white pedestals. Usually, any kind of pots that you would look at would be down on the floor in the middle of stones with lots of plants around them, and you'd have to break your knees and your back to get down and look at them. And they were, then, when you got down, two dollars, and they all looked, pretty much the same. But at that time, there was a wonderful, wonderful explosion. I think "Objects USA" really has to be mentioned.

[00:17:35.50]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah, that was the early '70s, yes.

[00:17:37.48]

NANCY YAW: "Objects USA" was phenomenal. It brought to the whole country the idea that, my, there were these crazy people. Do you remember that little couch—I think Richard Shaw made it—with a wonderful landscape scene on it, and Arneson and all those fabulous people on the West Coast. Well, of course, that was happening, too, in this area. And Cranbrook was very alive. And everybody was doing everything. There were no restrictions. And, of course, Voulkos had had his great, great influence by taking the big piece of clay and putting holes through it, although, of course, it had been done before, too. That was not just Voulkos' first invention.

[00:18:17.44]

It was a very alive time. And when we took those pots and we put them on pedestals, it made people stop and look at them. And that was a good thing. And that's, I think, when many people started saying, "Are you saying that this is art?" And if we're going to take art as some great loose term that means something beautiful, then I suppose we can say that it's art. But, you know, there were pots.

[00:18:47.00]

JEAN O'KORN: You were just putting them on pedestals so people would notice them.

[00:18:49.57]

NANCY YAW: And many people started looking at them for the first time. And of course, glass people hadn't even seen before.

[00:18:55.75]

JEAN O'KORN: Were there a lot of craft galleries around then in the country or anywhere?

[00:18:59.17]

NANCY YAW: No. There were very, very few. I think that Ruth Braunstein [ph], probably, on the West Coast was already very big. And she was handling—of course, her main person was Peter Voulkos. I believe that Alice Westphal started with Exhibit A. Now, Exhibit A really started as a group—as a co-op, I believe, a group of women at the Evanston Art Center, called it Exhibit A. And I believe they had a little gallery. Somehow, that group fell apart. And Alice Westphal opened Exhibit A, which she has subsequently moved on to Ontario Street. Helen Drutt, at that period of time, was a very, very, very good collector, good friend of Bob Pfannebecker. And she was so interested in craft from the standpoint of being a very, very fine collector. It wasn't—gosh, I'm not sure. I think her gallery probably is ten years old now. Might be a little bit older.

[00:19:54.17]

JEAN O'KORN: Where is her gallery?

[00:19:54.56]

NANCY YAW: Philadelphia. And she opened the Helen Drutt Gallery. And she, of course, I think is one of the biggest names in contemporary craft. Theo Portnoy opened in New York. Well, the Elements was probably in existence about that time. And they were in Greenwich. That was before they had moved to New York.

[00:20:12.71]

JEAN O'KORN: This is early '70s, now?

[00:20:14.00]

NANCY YAW: Mm-hmm, yeah. So I'm not sure quite the chronology of it. But we were certainly one of the first craft galleries of the type that took craft out of the little pebbles and put it up. And it was very exciting, because there was a lot of exciting work being done. It was probably the time. Of course, there was wonderful work being done in painting. It was just an explosion of our times and of our civilization. And that's why it was so exciting. I think things have settled and mellowed now.

[00:20:42.47]

JEAN O'KORN: Who were some of the original collectors and patrons in the gallery?

[00:20:46.64]

NANCY YAW: At that time?

[00:20:47.91]

JEAN O'KORN: Who were some of the people that bought, that really seriously collected craft then? Were they just a lot of different people? Were there some people in particular that you felt were patrons that kept coming back?

[00:20:58.59]

NANCY YAW: I think Ruthie Rattner, Marilyn Finkel, the man who owns the gallery that started out with all the elephants, Mr. Young. I'm trying to think back—Kid Williams. There were a lot of people who bought out of those early shows and who have wonderful, wonderful things.

[00:21:20.37]

JEAN O'KORN: Are they the same people that collect now?

[00:21:22.97]

NANCY YAW: No, that changes. You have fewer spaces, really, for objects than you do for things on your wall. But those who did start then, once in a while, they still get things. But they have beautiful pieces.

[00:21:34.10]

JEAN O'KORN: And at great prices, too. I'm sure they bought at great prices.

[00:21:36.35]

NANCY YAW: Great prices, sure. Somebody was just in the other day, and they bought a Michael Cohen from me as a gift to someone. And I think they really worried about spending $150. And they were in the other day. They were so proud of themselves, seeing his prices today.

[00:21:49.65]

JEAN O'KORN: Did you sell to the museum, then, to the DIA?

[00:21:51.81]

NANCY YAW: No, never did.

[00:21:53.46]

JEAN O'KORN: Did they even come in and look at any of those people?

[00:21:56.49]

NANCY YAW: They might have. They might have. But I don't think that their emphasis has been very much on craft. You know who did have a good background in it was the gentleman who's now in Chicago. You know who's head of the Contemporary Museum in Chicago?

[00:22:11.13]

JEAN O'KORN: Oh, sure. Oh. Yeah, Mary Jane Jacob and John Neff.

[00:22:15.18]

NANCY YAW: John Neff. He really knew what it was all about. Because he had—part of his

MA was in ceramics, and he was very knowledgeable. Of course, at that time, the museum had the Michigan Craftsmen Show every two years, I think. And they supported it that way.

[00:22:31.47]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah, they did have it then. What kind of art sells in Detroit? What kind of art sold then, I should say, or maybe sells now?

[00:22:38.10]

NANCY YAW: I suppose it's true as it ever was and always will be. If it's good, it's gonna sell.

[00:22:42.42]

JEAN O'KORN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And people are very sophisticated.

[00:22:44.31]

NANCY YAW: People are very sophisticated. Again, I think a lot has to do with the effect that Cranbrook has on people. They're aware of pots. They used to—remember running out to the pot sale, or are you too young?

[00:22:54.82]

JEAN O'KORN: Yes, I do, in the spring.

[00:22:56.37]

NANCY YAW: In the spring, they would—yeah.

[00:22:57.08]

JEAN O'KORN: You could buy things for $15. Those days are gone.

[00:23:00.24]

NANCY YAW: Right. Those days are gone, right.

[00:23:03.24]

JEAN O'KORN: What was it like to have the gallery business in the early '70s, in terms of the whole gallery scene in Detroit, the other galleries that were open?

[00:23:12.45]

NANCY YAW: Right. Of course, there were not at all the great numbers that there are today. And again, I think they were fairly well specialized. I think people kind of find a niche for themselves and find an area that they're comfortable in, and they stay. In fact, most galleries do stay forever. I wonder how many years the Morrises have been carrying Avery [ph].

[00:23:30.45]

JEAN O'KORN: Really?

[00:23:30.99]

NANCY YAW: Probably forever. And I think many of the—let's see, now. Peggy deSalle is the oldest gallery. And she continued to carry, I'm sure, Jean Lamouroux was one of her first people. And if she is still having a painting show, it would be his. Of course, dear old Gorelick was in town at that point. And he carried forever the same people, the same prints, and the same shows. So people rather settled in, which is true of most galleries, which I don't know that it's good.

[00:24:01.18]

JEAN O'KORN: Is it hard to sell art? Or do you sell art? Or does it sell itself?

[00:24:05.65]

NANCY YAW: I think selling art is the most wonderful thing to do. People are generally pretty knowledgeable. If they're not, they're interested in learning. It's a very, very pleasant thing. Art should, I think, the true function of art is to make the quality of life better.

[00:24:23.40]

JEAN O'KORN: I agree.

[00:24:24.04]

NANCY YAW: And if you have people who are coming in to look at that which will make the quality of their life better, you already are on a wonderful plane. And we're not talking about saving time with dishwashers and that sort of thing. We're talking about what's going to enhance and make them feel good and give them some kind of a new depth of understanding about what is around them. And so selling art is always a wonderful thing. I think if you wanted to make money, you'd be better off selling other things. I think you'd make a whole lot more money.

[00:24:53.04]

JEAN O'KORN: Did the gallery support itself, then?

[00:24:56.37]

NANCY YAW: Yeah. The gallery always went along. This business, when everyone else has huge, incredibly phenomenal months, this gallery just kind of goes along. And also, when people have terrible, terrible months, the gallery keeps going on. So it's kind of a steady upward trend all the time, nothing phenomenal one way or another, which is fine. But very, very interesting.

[00:25:22.95]

JEAN O'KORN: Let's talk about the difference between the craft scene now, as opposed to what it was like then, in the early '70s, when it was a real new thing, as opposed to where it is now in the early '80s.

[00:25:33.87]

NANCY YAW: Well, I think you probably have to take it from the different areas. I think in jewelry—let's start with jewelry—I think in jewelry there were the people who were a little more avant-garde. In fact, I remember going to see Bob Ebendorf when he had a show at Fairtree. Remember, Fairtree was going then. And he had collected a group of people whose work he thought was very good. And that included, I believe, Helen Shirk and Glenda Arentzen, and a number of people who were, at that point, quite young.

[00:26:05.79]

And we walked into the gallery. And we saw a man who we presumed was Bob Ebendorf. And there were a whole lot of other people milling around who were, obviously, the artists. And then there was another woman who came in. And she was looking at a couple pieces. And she looked at one. And she turned to him. And she was obviously, a customer and not an artist. And she turned to him. And she said, "Well," she said, "how could you ever wear this?" And he said, "Well," he said, "I don't know that you really could," at which point she walked out. And he turned around after to the artists who were there. And he said, "Of course," he said, "We don't make jewelry that is supposed to be worn. We make jewelry that's beautiful."

[00:26:46.93]

And Jim and I were a little bit put off by that, and we never did introduce ourselves. Not that the work wasn't exciting, because, again, it was the work of the '60s. It was kind of—there were socially significant and politically significant pieces, and all beautifully done. But even at that point, we felt that it should function. In retrospect, I think that what Bob said is necessary. I think there have to be some people who are out there, who are doing totally outlandish and incredible and improper and non-functioning material so that the mainstream

will come along.

Again, I'm not conversant with contemporary craft as I was three or four years ago. I haven't seen metal soar after those times were over. Those people really did things. Now it's becoming, as far as I'm aware, very meticulous, very well done, which it should be. On the other hand, I don't see that outrageous life and growth that was then. Fiber, again, we didn't do an awful lot with fiber at that point. Wood—we didn't do that much with furniture, either.

[00:28:05.96]

Ceramics—I think Alice Westphal has had such a great influence on the ceramic market in this area. I'm not sure that she has had much to do with what's happening on the West Coast, because I don't think that the kind of clay she shows is West Coast clay. She doesn't have Richard Shaw and those people, although she did have a very small Marilyn Levine show. But she had that because it was cups, and it fit within the concept of vessel as container.

[00:28:33.68]

What her purpose is, is to take a group of the artists that she feels are the greatest artists of our time—and, generally, they're vessel-oriented people—to have a small group of them, to have the prices commensurate with the prices that fine artists are achieving. And certainly, if she's getting between, or has gotten, between $4,000 and $6,000 for one of DeVore's pots, she certainly has managed to do it. If anybody of the people who own galleries at the time that she started this had undertaken to do what she did, I don't think they would have done it as successfully as she has been able to do.

[00:29:20.12]

She is very, very interested in the artist, interested in the artist's work. She's not doing this for personal gain. She really honestly feels that these pieces are works of art, that they should command higher prices, that they're worthy of higher prices. And she set out to do it. And I think, as far as I know, she's very, very successful.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:29:44.32]

Yeah. Well, you were saying the difference between craft then and now.

[00:29:51.64]

JEAN O'KORN: Right.

[00:29:51.87]

NANCY YAW: She really has made quite a difference. The other person who's made an enormous difference is Habatat Gallery. Because they really have become one of the showplaces in the world—Habatat has, for glass. They work a little bit in competition with the man in New York who has Contemporary Glass Art, I believe his name is the name of his gallery, or it was. But those are the two top, top, top places in the world to go for glass. So this is certainly something that wasn't going on in those days.

[00:30:24.28]

We were talking about the difference in the quality, too, of the work. I suppose there's going to have to be a difference. In the field of glass, there were a few people. There were the ones who began it. There was Littleton. And then Lipofsky studied under Littleton. And he went out to the West Coast and started glass, there and worked in glass with Chihuly at RISD. Now there are so many new people that are doing wonderful, different, new things. It's amazing how large that field is. Glass is a seductive thing. You can make glass. You can drop a piece of glass on the floor, and it's beautiful. Glass is a tough, tough thing. It's tough to be good in glass, and it's easy to be beautiful in glass. It's an interesting thing.

[00:31:12.44]

Ceramics, I don't know. I don't see much that—I see the refinement of the work in DeVore,

and the beautiful, beautiful things that Voulkos is doing in wood-burning facilities. And I see these people mellowing and maturing and becoming more finely tuned. I don't see an awful lot that makes me want to stand around and look for a long time. Because, in a way, we know what they're doing. We know their concepts. And then we look to see how much more beautifully they've been able to execute that idea that we're already familiar with.

[00:31:56.12]

I did see a very interesting show, and that was a show that many ceramists are not very fond of. And that is New Works in Clay I and II. Margie Hughto at Syracuse University invited fine art people to come in and work with her students in clay. Now, they had no idea how to manipulate clay. They really didn't. So her students would have the slabs rolled out, and they would direct these people. What happened was a rather, in many times, a fresh new approach. Now, I remember sitting in a crit with Ron Nagle and Dick DeVore and all of his students. And they just absolutely tore that show apart, saying that various people's work was sophomoric, or look how poorly it was done, and so on and so forth.

[00:32:43.61]

To those people who were so technically competent, I'm sure that the problems with the technique loomed very, very large. I'm sure that the idea of fine art people coming in and taking over their territory, in a way, and, therefore, having a show at the Everson which supplanted the national show at the Everson that they were also used to trying for, and getting in, I really do think that there was a little bit of hard feeling that prevented them from seeing, really, what there was to see. There was manipulation of space; I found it very, very interesting what those people did. It seemed to me fresh. It seemed to me the first fresh thing I had seen in a long time.

[00:33:28.74]

JEAN O'KORN: When was this?

[00:33:32.04]

NANCY YAW: It must have been in the late '70s, maybe. It must have been in the late '70s—'78, '79. I found it very, very interesting. I found it fresh and lively. And certainly, maybe, it was sophomoric to them. But I don't recall seeing them making those forms as much as I was at Cranbrook at that time and involved in seeing people's slides. I didn't really see them manipulate clay that way.

[00:33:57.80]

JEAN O'KORN: Are there prominent people still working in this area in craft, do you think? Is it still—who are some of the people that are still working around this area that you think are doing interesting things, forward-looking things?

[00:34:11.87]

NANCY YAW: Right in this area, I don't know.

[00:34:15.06]

JEAN O'KORN: In the Midwest?

[00:34:16.62]

NANCY YAW: No.

[00:34:16.95]

JEAN O'KORN: You think it's phased out a little bit?

[00:34:19.29]

NANCY YAW: Well, I just think that when all the dust settled, the important people are not necessarily from this area. It's a little bit like saying, "who are the good women in art?" I don't know that that ever had anything to do with art.

[00:34:30.39]

JEAN O'KORN: Well, did you handle national people, then—

[00:34:31.77]

NANCY YAW: Oh, sure.

[00:34:32.34]

JEAN O'KORN: —in the beginning, too, plus local people?

[00:34:34.23]

NANCY YAW: Yeah. It was very difficult, really, to have local people. I mean, could you name 12 people, or 24 or 36 people, in this area that you'd want to show?

[00:34:44.10]

JEAN O'KORN: No.

[00:34:44.46]

NANCY YAW: No. No, you really couldn't.

[00:34:47.49]

JEAN O'KORN: What were some of the personalities like, some of the people you dealt with? Did you know a lot of artists then?

[00:34:51.77]

NANCY YAW: Yeah, you did. You got to know them. And it still is true today with the ones that we deal with. The more professional, the better they were. They knew they were good. They knew their work was fine. Once in a while, they wanted to see how the display was set up. Usually, they knew their work didn't matter—I mean, it didn't matter to their work whether or not the light was 150-watt spot or flood, because the work was good, and that didn't matter so much. They knew that when they had a commitment, they would ship it on time. They knew how to get the mailers to you on time. They knew that it was important that you went back up after the show was over. So always, the professional people were fun.

[00:35:31.06]

Probably the most fun, although I only have met him once, I think Peter Voulkos was just wonderful. He's just a great big Greek sailor, has a whole lot of fun about everything. His pots and the bowls and the dishes that he throws have that enormous life and that enormous vitality, which is present in him all the time, a little bit like Picasso, ceramics that are just—they're very well done. You have the feeling that these people don't even have to worry about making it anymore, about making the form and the shape. All the technical business is far behind them. They're not worried about that kind of thing. They just sit down. And what's in their mind comes out. And that's when you start to get important.

[00:36:13.98]

I think another person who was very, very interesting is Ron Nagle, who, of course, is, maybe, primarily a musician and then, secondarily, a ceramist—a funny, funny, strange man. In the beginning, when we started having these machines when you call on the phone and you get the answer of the machine, he would have his dog barking into it or whatever. Every time you called, he had a different one. And he was a lot of fun—very, very interesting.

[00:36:41.76]

And then there was a different kind of very earthy person, like Ken Ferguson is—certainly very, very much person in the clay. Then, of course, Bob Piepenburg, who, at that time, wanted everybody to taste clay, and walk on it, and throw it, and feel it, and that whole movement. Always, I think, Dick DeVore was interested in a very sophisticated approach and a very intellectual approach. And he demanded that people read.

[00:37:08.54]

That's another thing that is funny. You remember Garth Clark? And Garth Clark is an Englishman, or probably, properly, an Australian, I believe. But anyway, he put together a very, very good lecturing book. And I think one was *Star-Spangled Clay*. And I remember hearing the lecture first when it was given at Cranbrook. And then we went up to hear it a second time because, in the evening, he was giving it in Ann Arbor.

[00:37:33.92]

And he put slides up of older work. And then he came to one. He put it up. He said, "Does anybody here know whose piece this is?" And there was silence. And these are MFA people. And it was a Voulkos. I don't know that in schools—and maybe this is very unfair—I don't know if there was such a concentration on the history of clay and on the history of textiles, as both Gary Knodel and DeVore did make their students learn, I don't know whether they were as well-rounded. I don't know that craftspeople needed, felt that they needed, to be. I don't know how many of these craftspeople you could sit down with and discuss painting or politics or music. I'm not sure that they felt the inherent need of being a broadly and well-educated person, as well. Maybe so.

[00:38:30.03]

JEAN O'KORN: What do you think the strongest development has been in the crafts, like in ceramics and glass and jewelry?

[00:38:39.80]

NANCY YAW: I think simply because glass is easy, glass is becoming now technically more and more and more complicated. I'm not so sure that it is becoming more and more and more, really, an art form. It is so seductive. Clay, I think, came a long way. I think every—I think clay is at a bit of a standstill. But again, our culture is not the culture today. It's not the '60s, or the late '60s and the early '70s. People, I don't think, are experimenting. Look at the state of painting today. It's a rehash. And I think that's true in the whole art field. I think we're going to have to wait another 10 years, or 15 or 20 years before we have another great resurgence, or surging. And I don't know what's going to cause it. But certainly, in the '60s, it was there.

[00:39:43.72]

JEAN O'KORN: Now let's get down to the crucial question about why you don't handle craft now. Or when did you really quit handling craft and start moving into what you're doing now?

[00:39:55.91]

NANCY YAW: Well, there are a whole lot of reasons, because nothing is simple. One reason was that if you handle Voulkos and Lipofsky and Chihuly and Nagle, there is not much room for a secondary level of people. That means that it's very difficult to find 24 or 36 top-level people. That's number one.

[00:40:24.22]

Number two, it's very difficult to continue to put on these super, super shows of great merit, of enormous concern, month after month after month. It's difficult in terms of your clientele. Because they will come into a Peter Walker show, and they will want a Voulkos. Well, they barely can pick up their Voulkos before sitting in there is Ron Nagle. And then they want a Ron Nagle. And they all became relatively costly pieces at that time.

[00:40:59.55]

So it was a little bit—even though we were dealing with five mediums, it was a little bit difficult just to maneuver that situation around. In the meantime, a girl, Julie Diehl, who was working at the gallery, had been to New York. And she stopped in a gallery that was, at that time, Art We. And she became a part of their mailing list. And one day, there arrived here a little card, one of the little four-color cards, that had a pre-Columbian person. And I fell in love with it. I loved—it was wonderful, this old cloth of this happy, beautiful, intricately

woven person on it.

[00:41:41.42]

So I called them, and I said, "I would like to have a show." And they said, "Yes, yes." Well, this went on for a good six or eight months. And I think they thought, who is this crazy woman in the Midwest who keeps calling and keeps wanting to show? And finally, they said, "Well, all right, we'll ship you something." So they shipped us a show, probably 20 little textiles, both Coptic and pre-Columbian. And they were wonderful. And we suddenly realized we had to do a whole lot of studying, and we had to do a whole lot of reading. And we had that show. And we fell in love with it.

And the same thing happened there as used to happen with Dick when we had clay. Gary Knodel walked in. And I said, "Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it fabulous?" And he said, "Yes, it is. They're very nice pieces, but." So back we went to the library and back to the books. And we, who had been so swayed by these wonderful little pieces found that the world out there was very, very big. We continued, once in a while, doing a textile show, along with the contemporary craft. There were many, many other factors. The thing that we talked about before about receiving a show that you have booked two years in advance was already becoming, to me, to be an impossible situation. I just didn't want to have mystery shows arriving.

[00:43:08.39]

I think, also, it's important to say that there are different kinds of dealers. There are dealers who are concerned primarily with their artist, dealers who are concerned primarily with their clientele. Now, I think Alice Westphal is the perfect example of a dealer who is concerned primarily with her artists. She will do anything for her artists. She is supportive. She is wonderful. She ships their work. She shows their work, regardless if they're in a difficult time period. She explains about the piece. "Well, maybe the work was better in two years. However, he's having a difficult time, and it's going to be better again. But he is really a fine artist." And that is her concern.

[00:43:44.22]

I've always felt I want to offer to my clientele those things that just take my breath away. I was not having my breath taken away very often. Again, we were getting into the period of the refinement of these people's work, rather than the excitement. And I just found cloth very much more exciting.

[00:44:08.41]

I met Mary Kahlenberg about that time, through Gary Knodel. And she used to be curator of textiles at the Los Angeles County Museum. And she brought with her on her trip, to show Gary and some other collectors in town, some cloth. And I kind of stood in the lobby. And she said, "Don't be silly. She said, we're going to sit right down on the floor, and we're going to start touching cloth. And that's the only way you're going to learn." And she talked about natural dyes. And she talked about technique. And she gave me books. And we started on that.

[00:44:33.01]

And there's something very, very interesting about dealing with historic material. In one sense, you are dealing with material that has already gone through quite a selective process. It has been saved for a reason, so that you're not presented with 20 pieces in a show, three of which are good. You only have—the three good ones are the only ones that are left. Also, when someone weaves a cloth that has to do with birth, and death, and marriage, and sickness, and power, and importance, it's a little bit different than sitting down and saying, "Today, I'm going to make art." I feel that that element, that necessity, of making that art somehow comes through. If you sit down just to make something beautiful, or if you sit down because everything in your world depends upon that thing, you have a little different quality.

[00:45:34.13]

And I feel that in textiles. I feel almost a reverence about those objects and those things

which have been preserved for years and years and years and years and years, for some reason or other. They have great importance to the people who made them. They have importance to the people who wore them. They have importance to us. And even though we do, in our mounting of textiles, things that somebody in Borneo never would have presumed would have happened to their ceremonial cloth, we still are honoring it and honoring their intent and the reason for which the cloth was made.

[00:46:09.94]

I also have never felt that it was necessary to be one thing. I don't know why a gallery has to continue to do the same thing. Nobody says you have to. Nobody said I had to carry contemporary American craft for ten years. I said I had to. I don't know why. Maybe because you will then have a direction, and your clientele will know what to expect when they come in. I suppose that's the only one that I could give as a reasonable reason.

[00:46:38.43]

When we decided to go into cloth, we said, we're not just going into cloth. We're going into anything beautiful. If the day ever comes that we can have a show of Noland, we'll have a show of Noland. If it comes that we can have a show of Stella, we would. If the time comes that we can have Dubuffet or whatever, that's what we'll do. And if the time comes that we can have a beautiful cloth show, we will.

[00:46:58.86]

And luckily, our schedule allows us to do that. We did not have a specific show for next month until two days ago, when a friend of mine got back with a collection of Chocó healing idols that we're going up tonight to see. And we're going to put that show on. And that's going to be, probably, the dynamite of the year. And we don't have to say, "Well, we'll do it in two years." We can do it when we want. And there's another thing in dealing with people. When you deal with artists, it's a very, very difficult thing to do from the artist's standpoint. I remember one girl who was in Dick's class, and who I had—

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[00:00:02.76]

JEAN O'KORN: I'm sorry. Now you lost your train of thought.

[00:00:04.63]

NANCY YAW: No, we were talking about the girl who came in at the end of two years to show me her work. Because it was our policy, since we carried faculty at Cranbrook, not to carry students at the same time. And as good friends as we were, when she took those pieces out of the box, her hands were shaking. And she was so nervous. And I tried to say, "For heaven's sake, we're friends. Don't worry about it." But it was—it's a hard, hard thing to show your work to anybody. It's hard to be refused. We also came to the period of time where we took very, very few people's work that came in off the street. Because we were after—got the people with the big names in the country, and after that quality of work. And that was constantly, I found, an extraordinarily difficult thing, to deal with artists, to have to say, "your work is not suitable for this gallery, but try another."

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And very, very rarely could you say you would be better off breaking them and the world would be better off for that, which you could never say, because it's too hard on people. And also, I don't think that galleries are a place for crits. A gallery dealer knows whether or not he can sell the work. And a gallery should not have to give intellectual criticism to people's work. Now, when we deal with cloth, when the dealer comes in, we say, "For heaven's sake, where did you get that rag?" And the dealer laughs. And you pick what you want. You buy what you want. You look at the same twenty pieces, and you buy the three that you would have chosen had you had the opportunity to do that with contemporary craftsmen or artists of any kind.

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And of course, again, the people who show, and the big painter, is going to choose the work that they feel they can sell. And they make the same kind of commitment that we do now. We buy our material now. So that we feel that the caliber of work that we show is, by and large, much, much higher. We might have a show of only three pieces. And that's fine with us. If there are only three pieces in existence that we know of or that we can get ahold of across the country, that's what we'll do. And again, we're interested in showing, to our clients, things that they just can't see anyplace else. Not necessarily that they're good because they can't see them anyplace else, but that they are unique, and that they are wonderful, and that they've been preserved for these particular people to come and see and enjoy and buy.

[00:02:29.14]

JEAN O'KORN: Do you sell to the museum now?

[00:02:30.42]

NANCY YAW: No. No, we just never had done that. Museums are, I think, quite a different cup of tea. I think they like to have the work for quite a long time, and then they need to go through committees. And then it takes a while before the money comes. There is some museum in New York that people sell to, and they mark it up. Every piece that that museum buys is marked up enough to take care of the devaluation of money over the course of two years. I mean, at 18%, you tie up something for two years before you get paid.

[00:03:04.49]

I think many people sell to museums because it's very prestigious to have your material in museum collections. I'm not particularly interested in that. The textile museum has wonderful pieces. And Mary Kahlenberg has made a wonderful collection for the Los Angeles County Museum. I never have felt that was our function, particularly, to be involved with a museum.

[00:03:28.97]

JEAN O'KORN: So less and less, you got away from dealing craft and handling more what you're doing now.

[00:03:34.16]

NANCY YAW: Right.

[00:03:34.62]

JEAN O'KORN: Like what kind of direction?

[00:03:35.88]

NANCY YAW: Which really is craft, still. It still is material with a function, that's made to do something. And I suppose, really, our only criteria is that it be beautiful, that it be something that we are excited about, that we want to show, that we think is just phenomenal. The last American Indian show, that we had, had only five or six pieces in it, but they were the cleanest, most beautiful American Indian objects that I've seen, just absolutely beautiful pieces, unusual pieces, not the general run of American Indian material. And that's the kind show that we're interested in. This Chocó show is going to be beautiful, the healing models. And they are powerful, powerful pieces of sculpture. Just—

[00:04:19.07]

JEAN O'KORN: So what do you call the kind of direction that you're in now, the kind of work that you have?

[00:04:24.32]

NANCY YAW: Probably historic material, ancient material. Some of it is ancient—very old. And I suppose that relation between the ancient—because I believe ancient applies to B.C., so our material is really more historic. We do hope to have a show of Gary [inaudible], which would be a more contemporary show. We hope to have a couple of contemporary shows

here and there, but, again, of those people that we deal with easily, and those people whose work we feel can stand up next to the older work. And that's an interesting thing. It's very, very interesting to just—to position these various works of artists. And it's very interesting to see, does a pot live up to a painting? Does it live next to a painting or doesn't it? I mean, if you have to pay as much for it, as you do for a painting, is it as good?

[00:05:12.47]

JEAN O'KORN: What about that? What about the whole change in the pricings? It just escalated so over the last ten years, when we could buy pots for $10, now we buy a Richard DeVore for, what, $4,000.

[00:05:25.44]

NANCY YAW: $4,000 to $6,000.

[00:05:26.49]

JEAN O'KORN: What's happening to the art market? I mean are people buying for investment now?

[00:05:31.21]

NANCY YAW: I suppose people are just generally more used to spending more money for anything. Things were—when we were buying pots for even $75, $75 was a lot more than it is today. Or a lot—yeah, it was a lot more than it is today. But I do think that if you are presenting to your clients something that costs them $6,000, you should be very, very sure, first of all, that it's $6,000 on the world market. I mean, when you get into the thousands, you're talking about more money than you're talking about in hundreds. And I think that, as a dealer, you have a moral obligation to make a proper comparison for your clientele.

[00:06:14.32]

I think that you ought to be very sure that what you are offering for a few thousand can be sold at Sotheby's, can be sold on a world market for a few thousand. If you're talking about $100 or $200 or $500 or, in this area, even $800, that is expendable money to most people here. That's one thing. They can buy something pretty for that amount. But when you're telling them that this thing has a value of $3,000, $4,000, $5,000, $6,000, $7,000, $10,000, then it should have a value other than that which you, as a dealer, have built. And I think that's very—that is, to me, the moral issue.

[00:06:51.07]

JEAN O'KORN: Can you sell a pot for $4,000?

[00:06:53.26]

NANCY YAW: Yeah, sure, you can sell a pot for $4,000. If you're a good dealer, you can sell most anything if it's good. Sure, glass is selling for $7,000. I think you really have an obligation to say, for $7,000, this and this is also available in the art market. And I think it is important that there are wonderful works of art, two-dimensional art, that are available at those prices, and that do have a world value at those prices. And that's what I quarrel with.

[00:07:29.35]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah, I see your point. What stands out as one of your favorite shows?

[00:07:36.23]

NANCY YAW: Oh, it was funny. We were saying the gallery is going to be 20 years old. What if we did a show of the people that we've liked the best in 20 years? Who would we have? Well, it's funny that one of the first people that comes to mind is just a man who did outrageous funny, funny things. And that was Howard Kottler. And Howard Kottler was really very important on the West Coast. He did the decals. You remember, he was in that era. And he made funny plates, most of which you'd have to have a little punch line. But what was great about it was that it had something to do with the quality of life. It probably—it undoubtedly is not the greatest art statement in the world. But it had to do with why people

should buy art.

[00:08:25.14]

JEAN O'KORN: They were ceramic plates?

[00:08:26.34]

NANCY YAW: Yeah, they were ceramic plates, and they had decals on them, just funny as can be. Of course, they were extraordinarily well done. And they were, again, of that era and of that time, when people were making shocking statements. And he was doing it. And he was doing it beautifully. I think, without a doubt, if we ever did that show, Ron Nagle would be in that. Because I think he is one of the most careful, most beautiful of all ceramicists. Peter Voulkos, of course, was a person that we carried that we would like to have represented even more, naturally. Then you get into, for old time's sake, people like Marvin Lipofsky and Chihuly and those. I don't think we'll ever do that show. I don't know that it would mean anything to anybody other than to me. So I don't think that's a very valid reason for doing that show.

[00:09:12.51]

JEAN O'KORN: Have you had a really extraordinarily successful show, I mean a show that just absolutely sold out?

[00:09:21.25]

NANCY YAW: I would say that a great number of our shows sell out, but they don't sell out the first night. We never have been the kind of gallery that has openings of hundreds of people. We have small openings. The people, our clientele, is typically a 35-, 40-, 45-year-old woman, who is interested either in the art, for its sake, or for the beautification of her life and her home. And our shows eventually sell out. They don't sell out, "bang." We've had wonderful, crazy shows. That last painting show, with Ronaldo de Juan, when Bobby Short came and Helene came, and all that big, mad business from New York. That was, I suppose, one of the more glamorous shows.

[00:10:07.61]

JEAN O'KORN: That was at Jacobson's?

[00:10:08.60]

NANCY YAW: No, that was here.

[00:10:09.59]

JEAN O'KORN: That was here.

[00:10:10.19]

NANCY YAW: That was our last big painting show that was there. And those kinds of party times were the fun times. But in terms of very, very beautiful shows I think [inaudible] Wilkerson made the [inaudible] and Knodel. I think those are the very, very beautiful ones. Margie Hughto. We had a beautiful painting show of Darrell Trudeau [ph] at one time. That was a wonderful, quality show.

[00:10:36.60]

And then, of course, I think some of the textiles that we've done lately—even we had a show of beading material from the island of Sumba. They're not there anymore. I mean, they're gone. The material sold. We're never ever, ever going to be able to present it again. It's just finished. It's over. If we get one or two pieces again, we'll be buying them at Sotheby's. We'd be buying them at auction. Never again will we put that show on.

[00:11:00.03]

We had a show from Borneo. We'll never be able to put that show on again. We have some Sumatran material that we've put on. And it's too bad that when a dealer says to a client,

"you'll never see it again," it sounds like a hype. But it just happens to be true. They never ever will be in a room again surrounded by this material unless it's a museum show. Never will it be for sale. And those, I think, are the exciting shows, where we really can see a thread and a continuity of a culture. And you can see where the basic idea begins. It's carried right through. Those are wonderful things.

[00:11:34.17]

JEAN O'KORN: Do you buy most of your things from dealers, or people who come to see you, or do you seek them out?

[00:11:39.66]

NANCY YAW: We always, always, always seek them out. Once in a while, we buy at auction. You really have to see what you're buying. We've gotten stung badly, once. But then we turned out trading that bad piece for another, and we were all right. Generally, we buy from other dealers. It's difficult to go and to buy this material. First of all, it's difficult for a woman to go. I don't think that women are thought to be very serious. We have some friends, that are two men and a woman, in the business. And when she would go to Peru, she would be very well-dined and very well taken care of, but the material that she bought was never quite as good, nor the price quite as right.

[00:12:20.17]

There are also people who enjoy doing it, who love to go down the rivers in these boats, and, for weeks on end, not seeing anybody that they can communicate with, because they don't know the language. And they're always using, with their guides, a second language for each of them. I think I'm better off staying here and taking the material and working it, presenting it, than I am at going through jungles and trekking around and doing that kind of thing.

[00:12:46.76]

JEAN O'KORN: Did you ever want a larger gallery, do you think?

[00:12:50.89]

NANCY YAW: Every once in a while, somebody comes and they say they'd like to open a branch here or a branch there, and wouldn't that be great? We were very close to it, once. We were very close to opening one in Houston. And the person who was going to open it was really going to run it. And my accountant said that's a bad thing. If it's your gallery and it has your name on it, you better run it. And do you think you can afford, first of all, to do it financially and, secondly, do you have the time to fly down? Because it's your responsibility, with your name on it. And a long time ago, when we were at Jacobson's, Nate Rosenfeld once said, "If you can run two, you can run twenty." And at that time, we did open a second gallery, with the Jacobsons, in Grosse Pointe. We couldn't do it. So I don't think I could run two. And therefore, I couldn't run twenty.

[00:13:34.05]

JEAN O'KORN: You'd be exhausted.

[00:13:35.28]

NANCY YAW: Yeah. Although I think those people that have galleries in Palm Beach and in New York and on the West Coast certainly are smart, that they're able to do it. Because it sure would be fun.

[00:13:44.74]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah.

[00:13:45.30]

NANCY YAW: But think—

[00:13:45.99]

JEAN O'KORN: Financially?

[00:13:46.74]

NANCY YAW: Think of the headaches of getting the materials shipped. Oh, my lord, it's hard enough to run one.

[00:13:55.35]

JEAN O'KORN: Do you have a collection of your own?

[00:13:57.60]

NANCY YAW: Very, very, very small.

[00:13:59.70]

JEAN O'KORN: Did you ever really want to collect, or can you do both? Can you collect and have a gallery?

[00:14:03.63]

NANCY YAW: I think practically every dealer has a very substantial, very interesting collection. I think we are probably the great exception to the rule. My enjoyment is to find the piece. And my enjoyment is to have somebody else have it. It isn't the matter of collecting the dollars. It's the matter of having them say, "Yes, I think, also, that this is a beautiful piece. And this is what I want to own."

[00:14:28.57]

For me to take it home is not particularly pleasurable. Our house is very monochromatic, is very quiet, is very peaceful, is without any kind of jarring. Practically everything we have is black and white and soft and having nothing at all to do with bright color, and explosions of color, and pattern, and so on. Even when we came back from Morocco, we took the rugs home, for one reason or another, and we couldn't even live with that. I think we have too much color and too much activity around us.

[00:15:05.68]

I wish that we had kept a Picasso linocut for each child. That would have been a very smart thing to do. And I see, now, even the things that are traveling through our hands—I did take one piece home, out of a show, about two months ago. And in two months' time, it's appreciated $2,000. So you can say, gosh, we should have been doing this all this time. Jim always has felt that we're in the business to sell, not in the business to collect.

[00:15:35.43]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah, I agree. Because sometimes if you try and collect and sell at the same time, you end up taking the best pieces home.

[00:15:41.44]

NANCY YAW: That's probably true, and I think a lot of dealers do that.

[00:15:43.78]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah.

[00:15:44.11]

NANCY YAW: Or else dealers take home the pieces that they don't sell. And I think you get more into that situation when you have painting galleries, where you have to commit to buy a certain amount, and then you have it left over. So what do you do with it? So you take it home. Maybe that's unfair. Maybe people don't buy that way. We just have never had a desire to own anything, particularly. We're, I suppose, not collecting types of people. It's that simple. We don't. It's not an interest.

[00:16:16.34]

JEAN O'KORN: How did you get in this crazy business? Were your parents interested in art? Were they dealers?

[00:16:20.48]

NANCY YAW: No, it was, again—they were both professors. And it was, again, the feeling that you should be able to have art. [Telephone ringing.] You should be able to represent art that wasn't being represented at lower prices.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:16:35.86]

We got into it for just the same reasons that I think so many people do—the feeling that we could do something that wasn't being done. And we very, very soon learned that either the art wasn't good, or the artists at that level were not professional enough to deal with it—just too many gray hairs for that, which probably doesn't sound very good. I think that young artists are very upset with that attitude that many old dealers have. Many old dealers are crotchety. And it's hard to get into their galleries. And boy, it's tough. And I really feel sorry for young people. I think it is true, if any young person comes along and they are dynamite, they're going to get in.

[00:17:19.45]

But it is hard when you're starting, and you're not fabulous yet. It's hard to find a place in an old gallery. And sometimes, you're much better off, as a young artist, starting with a young gallery, because you're growing as they're growing. You, as an artist, understand that they're growing. They understand that you're growing. Everybody is a lot more even-tempered, and they're a lot more eager to forgive. And that's what you need. I think those artists that I grew up with, I will treasure forever. And the ones that came in later, probably, you don't have the same ties with them. There's nothing wrong with a new gallery.

[00:17:54.85]

JEAN O'KORN: Did you seek out people in the beginning?

[00:17:56.53]

NANCY YAW: Oh, yeah.

[00:17:56.89]

JEAN O'KORN: Or did they come to you?

[00:17:58.33]

NANCY YAW: We always, always did the seeking out of the artists whose work we showed.

[00:18:02.47]

JEAN O'KORN: But did you have a lot of people coming in, too?

[00:18:03.94]

NANCY YAW: Oh, yeah, people came in all the time. I remember, Habatat, at one point, had a night set aside to look at new artists' work. And I remember artists saying how terrible that was. And I would think, well, I suppose for them it seems very crass and very commercial that you would have an appointment, and a little bit like, okay, Harris, he looks at ten sets of slides a day, period. You could be the lord incarnate, and, if you were number eleven, you had to wait till tomorrow.

[00:18:30.55]

The problem is that when we were really dealing in contemporary craft, we would get two, three, or four envelopes a day of slides and bios and so on. And if you're going to do them justice, you really did have to shut your lights out; you did have to get out the projector; you did have to put it up on the wall. You did have to look and see, why does this person look like

a professor from Carbondale? Well, certainly, when you read the resume, they had gone to school in Carbondale, and that's exactly why they looked like it. And you had to really give proper time to each. And it was very demanding.

[00:19:04.01]

Or you would be working with a client and in would come an artist, with his boxes of clay, and wonder why you didn't drop everything to look at his work. And it wasn't that you were trying to be rude, or that you were trying to be huffy, or anything else. It was that you were busy. And all of those contemporary things take so long to do shows. This show that we were just talking about, this wonderful bag show that we're going to have, it takes probably two ten-minute conversations and one three-minute conversation to put that show together. You know the quality is impeccable. You know the material is wonderful.

[00:19:37.61]

But you don't have to spend the time listening about everything that the artist intended. You don't have to talk about his family. You don't have to talk about all of those things. You don't have to take up two and a half to three days of your time just getting to the point where you start looking at the work. You can really get a lot more done. You can show more. You can do a lot more when you deal with people to whom it is not a personal issue. And that I find very, very, very satisfying.

[00:20:05.23]

JEAN O'KORN: No egos involved.

[00:20:06.59]

NANCY YAW: No egos at all. If this man sends me a whole bunch of bags, and they're awful, I'll just say, "Sorry, I don't think we can use this material. Send us photographs next time before you ship the material." And it's as simple as that. And he is going to be very happy he chose the material, because he has a clientele for it. If we can't use it, he wants it back as fast as we can ship it back, because he has other people to send it to. So it isn't any kind of a personal derogatory statement at all. It's just a matter of business, of whether or not we feel they're wonderful, and we want to show them, and if we feel that our people are going to respond to them. And it doesn't have to do with anybody's personality or any of their problems.

[00:20:44.55]

JEAN O'KORN: Do you still have people coming in off the street with their work?

[00:20:46.80]

NANCY YAW: No. If they do, we simply say we don't carry contemporary work. Or we'll look at it and try to suggest a gallery. If I feel that they're sort of desperate, then I'll look at it and see if I can't send them someplace in town where they might have a chance to show their work. And I suppose, again, if somebody came in, who was absolutely dynamite, we would show their work. Because that's what it's all about.

[00:21:11.15]

JEAN O'KORN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Let's regress for just a minute here. You said that you thought the Objects USA show, which was a creative—that was with Johnson Wax.

[00:21:20.08]

NANCY YAW: Right. Lee Nordness put that together.

[00:21:22.30]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah, that was a real turning point—

[00:21:24.04]

NANCY YAW: Yeah, it really was.

[00:21:24.94]

JEAN O'KORN: —in craft at that time.

[00:21:27.10]

NANCY YAW: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They really gathered together and put in proper display all those wonderful things that were going on at that time.

[00:21:35.62]

JEAN O'KORN: Prior to that time, there hadn't been?

[00:21:37.12]

NANCY YAW: Not to my knowledge. There hadn't been anything as big as this, because this traveled all over and then traveled in Europe. And it was really phenomenal. And the book was used as a resource, forever, forever. In fact, still, maybe twice or three times a year, we say, "Do you know somebody?" And we go back and say, "Well, the book is terribly old, but do you remember?" And Julie Hall's book was important, because that book dealt with craft.

[00:22:02.53]

JEAN O'KORN: What was the name of that book?

[00:22:03.90]

NANCY YAW: Gosh, I don't remember.

[00:22:04.55]

JEAN O'KORN: I remember her, yeah.

[00:22:05.60]

NANCY YAW: But she did, again, that sort of a craft survey. I suppose if you took *American Craft* or whatever it's called today—is that what it's called, *American Crafts*, whatever? I suppose that they are continuing the tradition of showing new people enjoying the work that is going on.

[00:22:23.09]

JEAN O'KORN: So do you feel like craft just kind of peaked out?

[00:22:26.41]

NANCY YAW: I think it's just riding along, and getting more finely tuned. Those people who were really very good, maybe there are big explosions happening. I'm not aware of them. But again, I'm really not in that field. I don't look that much at craft anymore, at that area of craft, probably because I'm just too enthused with what we're doing now to go back.

[00:22:49.95]

JEAN O'KORN: You can't look back. You have to go on.

[00:22:51.48]

NANCY YAW: Yeah.

[00:22:52.58]

JEAN O'KORN: Do it.

[00:22:53.15]

NANCY YAW: And this field, I find, is very interesting, because you have to know geography, and you have to know history. And it was interesting when Gary Knodel allowed us to take his History of Textile course. You would move through three centuries or five centuries at

once. And the amount of reading and the amount of information—If you decided, only, that you wanted to properly about beads, think of the study that that would take—American Indian. What beads? How did they get to the island of Sumba? Why are they on those skirts? Who brought them? What did they trade them for? Why did they trade them? Why was it that, in this society, everything that these people ever received in trade, for their wonderful little horses, always ended up on their textiles, coins or whatever? Because their textiles are the most important things in their lives. And that's why their material is so beautiful. But you could just take any small tangent, any small area of textiles, any twenty years in a history's culture, and you would be busy for the rest of your life. And somehow that, to me, is just extraordinarily exciting.

[00:24:01.23]

JEAN O'KORN: But you don't just do textiles. You do you—

[00:24:03.57]

NANCY YAW: We do mainly textiles. We don't do very much pottery.

[00:24:08.90]

JEAN O'KORN: But you have beaded pieces?

[00:24:11.33]

NANCY YAW: Right. But, of course, beads as applied to textiles.

[00:24:13.81]

JEAN O'KORN: The sticks, the healing sticks.

[00:24:15.02]

NANCY YAW: The healing sticks are different. And of, course Margie Hughto's contemporary paper show now and Doug Hopper's contemporary furniture before, but I would hope that the next contemporary show would be in the fall or in the spring, would be Gary Knodel. And in between now and Gary Knodel, we'll deal with just mainly textiles. And that, again, is what becomes available. Suddenly, the phone rings and someone says, "I know you're interested in this. And I happen to have four pieces." Or, "I happen to know of six pieces." Or, "somebody's estate is breaking up, and this material is available." Very, very interesting.

[00:24:50.59]

JEAN O'KORN: So what's the future for the Yaw Gallery?

[00:24:52.60]

NANCY YAW: Whatever is beautiful, whatever's wonderful, whatever takes up—

[00:24:56.53]

JEAN O'KORN: Whatever interests you.

[00:24:57.67]

NANCY YAW: Whatever interests us. Whatever we find is really a good show to do. I think it's important, say, to do Coptic material every once in a while, because that speaks of a culture where the design continued to be very apparent and very recognizable, over the course of a number of centuries, so that, when you present that material, you are presenting to people something that they will, if they spend a little bit of time, will forever recognize. It's almost a good textile introduction. Then they will know, whenever they go into a museum, when they see that particular bold outline, flat imagery, they'll know Coptic. All right, we've seen that. They can understand that. And then it's important just to do what, as I say, becomes available.

[00:25:46.44]

JEAN O'KORN: Do you ever get tired of this crazy business?

[00:25:48.42]

NANCY YAW: No.

[00:25:48.84]

JEAN O'KORN: You want to throw up your hands in despair and say, "I'm going to quit?"

[00:25:51.52]

NANCY YAW: No. I don't think there's—I sure wouldn't want to sell airplanes.

[00:25:54.33]

JEAN O'KORN: Are you going to keep doing this until you're 80?

[00:25:57.09]

NANCY YAW: I hope so. I hope so.

[00:26:00.51]

JEAN O'KORN: What about Jim? He's not involved too much anymore in the gallery?

[00:26:04.70]

NANCY YAW: No. No, he isn't. He was really, very, very good in prints. He's very knowledgeable in prints, and always has been. And probably, I think that was really his interest. He likes this, but he hasn't been pursuing it the way I have. And again, obviously, it takes a lot of reading and a lot of talking, and a lot of feeling, and lot of work to become knowledgeable.

[00:26:31.95]

JEAN O'KORN: Do you think any of the kids will get involved?

[00:26:35.31]

NANCY YAW: Oh, I doubt it. I think galleries—you know, it's true with Kitty and Lester Arwin, when they died, that was the end of their gallery. I think a gallery is one person. That's why I don't think that, unfortunately, I ever would have a very saleable commodity.

[00:26:48.48]

JEAN O'KORN: What do you mean?

[00:26:48.96]

NANCY YAW: Well, I couldn't sell the gallery too easily, because the gallery is what one person makes it.

[00:26:54.71]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah.

[00:26:55.05]

NANCY YAW: And it's their taste, and it's their feeling. And when they're gone, it hopefully will be something different. Hopefully, everybody has their own insight into what's beautiful, and their own particular feeling. And different things give different people pleasure. So if any of my kids ever had a gallery, I hope it's their own, and I hope it's quite different. I hope they see things differently. I don't think they'd want to, anyway. I think many people start in the gallery business because they think it's so glamorous.

[00:27:24.27]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah.

[00:27:24.63]

NANCY YAW: And they think it's such a nice thing to do, which it is.

[00:27:27.75]

JEAN O'KORN: But it's a lot of work.

[00:27:28.11]

NANCY YAW: But it happens to be a lot of hard work.

[00:27:29.85]

JEAN O'KORN: It sure is.

[00:27:30.64]

NANCY YAW: Yeah, although pleasurable hard work.

[00:27:33.13]

JEAN O'KORN: What about the Detroit Art Dealers Association? Do you think that the whole group of dealers now in this town is much stronger and more supportive than when you first opened?

[00:27:42.17]

NANCY YAW: Well, the Detroit Art Dealers really opened, historically, to publicly say that the Art Institute had no right to sell material. At that time, I believe that there were prints being offered by the museum that were also offered by commercial galleries. And the Detroit Art Dealers Association was founded as a protest group. There is nothing, really, that the Art Association can do. They're not going to put on shows together. They don't have any money. It's a tax-exempt thing.

Really, what it is, is it's a group of dealers who feel that generally, they are of the same caliber, and that generally, their practices of doing business relate to each other. And those galleries that are not members would be either galleries who haven't been in business long enough, or galleries that the art dealers do not feel carry on business in the manner in which they feel is appropriate.

[00:28:46.20]

Usually, when we get together, we do a little bit of business, and find out how we're going to spend our funds, which are very minimal. And then we talk. And that's the wonderful thing. It's very good to be able to call a dealer and say, "I think I have somebody you might be interested in." And you, also, are not very competitive. Although certainly, we're not competitive. They're very, very few dealers who overlap. But it's very nice to know your fellow dealer.

[00:29:13.95]

JEAN O'KORN: There's so many galleries opening up all the time, now—

[00:29:16.02]

NANCY YAW: Aren't they?

[00:29:16.53]

JEAN O'KORN: It seems like, in Detroit.

[00:29:17.10]

NANCY YAW: Yeah.

[00:29:17.64]

JEAN O'KORN: Are they all going to make it, or can they make it? Or is there a market here?

[00:29:20.82]

NANCY YAW: Well, I think the new craft gallery is probably going to do very, very well. Because I think there's—

[00:29:26.43]

JEAN O'KORN: Which craft gallery?

[00:29:27.15]

NANCY YAW: Well, I think—is it Carol Huberman?

[00:29:29.82]

JEAN O'KORN: Oh, right.

[00:29:30.60]

NANCY YAW: I think she's going to do very well. She has—I think Detroit Gallery of Contemporary Craft, again, there is a need for a craft outlet. People do like bowls and pots and things like that. And there should be somebody to show that kind of material. So I think they're going to last. There are, of course, always the galleries that open and close within a year.

[00:29:53.79]

JEAN O'KORN: And come and go.

[00:29:54.87]

NANCY YAW: Yeah.

[00:29:56.60]

JEAN O'KORN: Come at the show and hang out.

[00:29:58.35]

NANCY YAW: Yeah. I think it's going to be harder and harder to get good craftsmen, though. Because I think people, like Habatat, obviously control glass. In the Midwest, in the vessel orientation, Alice Westphal, without a doubt, controls that. Of course, you can still show the work.

[00:30:13.17]

JEAN O'KORN: Where is she now?

[00:30:13.83]

NANCY YAW: She's in Chicago. I could still show those people's work, but I would have to go through her, which seems, to me, quite stupid, since I was showing them before she knew what a pot was. But anyway, if I wish to show that work—although maybe that isn't true, because a lot of them do still show with Helen Drutt, and they don't go through Alice, even though they are on Alice's list.

[00:30:39.58]

Again, that's a peculiar thing. Why would you want to upgrade pottery and show it with pottery? I never have understood that. If the intent is to make pottery viable as an art form, if craft is art, if pottery is art, then shouldn't it be art with art? Shouldn't pottery be with the big painters? Shouldn't it be shown in the same arena? Shouldn't it have to sit next to the same kind of art? I mean, isn't that really—if you were ever to get rid of craft and art, that whole question, wouldn't it only be in that kind of arena?

[00:31:23.20]

JEAN O'KORN: Do you think that's possible?

[00:31:25.24]

NANCY YAW: I think somebody has to do it. And I think they are. You know, Margie just opened, on Friday, at André Emmerich, with her ceramic pieces.

[00:31:31.41]

JEAN O'KORN: Oh.

[00:31:31.94]

NANCY YAW: So that is—Of course, Frumkin carries clay. And Harris carries clay. So some of the big time galleries are going to—but, of course, the big time galleries weren't going to bother with $500 items. They have to be a couple thousand before it's worth their while moving the piece from point A to point B. So that it's probably all pretty well intertwined. Now that the prices are going up, and that things are so costly, maybe, now, craft and pottery and glass will be handled by people other than women who have galleries, which is really what it was. Braunstein at Quay, Helen Drutt at Evanston, Theo Portnoy, they were all women. There were no big, powerful dealers that were dealing with craft.

[00:32:17.43]

JEAN O'KORN: New York dealers, you mean?

[00:32:18.79]

NANCY YAW: Exactly. Not the people who showed the big painters, certainly, weren't going to look at pottery. Also, the Whitney hasn't had big shows of pottery. And it isn't because the people at the Whitney are dumb.

[00:32:32.05]

JEAN O'KORN: Why do you think that is? They just—

[00:32:33.43]

NANCY YAW: They don't feel that it's as great. They don't feel that it's as worthy as the shows that they're doing. I think the reason the DIA hasn't had a national show is not because of people at the DIA are without knowledge. I think that they feel that their show schedule is strong without this—in other words, that they're not lacking.

[00:32:54.48]

JEAN O'KORN: So you still don't see craft in museums too much?

[00:33:00.02]

NANCY YAW: Not yet. Maybe some. I think there's a piece of DeVore's down in a museum in St. Louis, in a room with very, very fine paintings. I think that's happening. I'm sure Voulkos is, and I think, in the Philadelphia Museum, there is clay, and there's glass along with paintings. It's probably just beginning. It would—it'll be very nice when that all comes together. But I certainly don't think that anybody is justified in faulting museums for not having these shows. I know there have been delegations that go to them, to museums, all the time, to say that you are not showing the work of craftsmen. And terrible—and you don't see, and you don't understand.

[00:33:48.50]

I think the museum people see and understand quite a lot. And I think when the museum people see the kind of quality there, that they are interested in showing, that is a time at which craft will be shown in museums. And it's not going to be because a whole group of craftspeople went and yelled at the museum. It will be because their work is appropriate.

[00:34:09.95]

JEAN O'KORN: But they get so up in arms, all the craftspeople. And they say, "You have to look at my work as fine art. You're not thinking of me as an artist." And they seem to fight against that all the time.

[00:34:20.15]

NANCY YAW: Well, that's why it has become a good thing to say the craft is art.

[00:34:25.65]

JEAN O'KORN: Is craft art?

[00:34:27.39]

NANCY YAW: I think craft is craft, and art is art. And I think there are beautiful things.

[00:34:30.81]

JEAN O'KORN: We're back to that again.

[00:34:31.84]

NANCY YAW: We're back to that again. Yeah, I think it's just such a foolish—if you just even look in the dictionary, you see the definition of the term. The appropriate criteria is the beauty and the excellence of the piece. And when the piece is beautiful and excellent, it will receive acclamation. Because museum people, just like dealers, are very, very interested in showing extraordinary work. They're very interested in discovering people. They're very interested to be the first to put together a show of national concern. And they're not not showing this work because they hate pots or because they hate glass. That doesn't happen to be the truth. They're not narrow-minded people. They have a great deal of education. They've looked at an awful lot of art. They know what they're doing.

[00:35:29.60]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah. Did you have a background in art history? Did you study?

[00:35:31.84]

NANCY YAW: No.

[00:35:32.66]

JEAN O'KORN: What did you study in school?

[00:35:34.16]

NANCY YAW: English and philosophy. [They laugh.] It's a matter of looking. It is. It would be very helpful to have an art history education. And I suppose the dealers now—I started twenty years ago. I think more of the dealers now have art history backgrounds, the people that are starting out in this field. And I think it's appropriate that they do. I certainly would've liked to have it.

[00:35:54.94]

JEAN O'KORN: But you taught yourself so much. You read, and you constantly keep learning and growing.

[00:36:00.39]

NANCY YAW: We also have—other than when we first started, we have always been—when we started with paintings, and that sort of thing. After that initial period was over, we always have been a little bit ahead of the current interest. So whereas now, you would be very, very hard pressed to go to any university and learn about the history of textile art. If you were to do that, you would either go under Gary Knodel, or under one of his students, because it's not a subject that's offered.

[00:36:31.02]

And again, when we started in glass, there was no place that you could go to learn the history of glass. There were a few places, obviously, where you could go and learn the history of clay, because that would fall within the realm of an art history program that was set up in that direction. But by and large, what we have done has been before the interest has swelled. And therefore, the courses weren't written, so to speak.

[00:36:57.56]

JEAN O'KORN: Well, art history still doesn't want to look at too much craft. They don't really look at ceramics and glass.

[00:37:03.51]

NANCY YAW: No. But I would think, if you really wanted to do the history of ceramics, you could. There's been so much—there's also been so much written on that. But if you want to find—it's very difficult to find much material on the history of textiles. There are academic books available. But if you want to talk about a Bakuba cloth, which is a wonderful, wonderful cloth from Africa, there are maybe a few articles written. And maybe some symposium discussed the grid design, and those elements of a Bakuba cloth, but you certainly can't go anyplace and find a few books. It isn't as though you wanted to read about Rothko.

[00:37:39.88]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah, right.

[00:37:40.78]

NANCY YAW: Yeah.

[00:37:41.80]

JEAN O'KORN: How did you learn to restore all these textiles? Just kind of hit and miss?

[00:37:46.87]

NANCY YAW: A lot of that is common sense. A lot of it is reading what you can find on conservation and going to various museums and seeing how they do it. Many, many, many people disagree. We were at the Textile Museum in Washington, not too long ago, and there happened to be a program where people could bring in their treasures and talk to the head conservator and say, "This is dirty, this is a stain, what do I do?"

[00:38:08.36]

And we stood there for about an hour and a half, listening to how she solved all the problems. And a very small issue, she washes in Joy. Right? Some people will not touch anything but Orvus, which is actually a conservators soap. Other people won't. She will not use Orvus, because there are too many suds. And of course, you can't keep fabric in water. It becomes weak. The Cleveland Museum, I think, uses Woolite or Ivory soap. Everybody does something different.

[00:38:38.05]

JEAN O'KORN: So it's a process of just learning.

[00:38:39.57]

NANCY YAW: It's a process of learning.

[00:38:41.34]

JEAN O'KORN: Experimenting.

[00:38:42.21]

NANCY YAW: The Kelsey Museum in Ann Arbor does a very, very good thing we found to be

of the most help. And that is to take a very old textile and put it on glass, and never submerge it. Just get it wet, and then dry, dry, dry. And as you dry, the dirt comes out rather than submerging it and putting it in the screen and doing all that stuff. So you pick up as you go along, and talk to different people, and see how they are able to do what they can do.

[00:39:08.27]

JEAN O'KORN: Do ever have any fear of, maybe, like getting ripped off, being sold something that's not really as old as the dealer says it is? I mean how do you tell?

[00:39:20.01]

NANCY YAW: Well, luckily, there are not—

[00:39:22.26]

JEAN O'KORN: I mean, is it a reputable business? Are people really honest?

[00:39:27.21]

NANCY YAW: There are now beginning to be copies. You see, in pre-Columbian ceramics, there are a lot of copies. In pre-Columbian gold, there are a lot of copies. But if you get a very complicated textile, it's not worth anybody's time to fake it. It's too complex, and takes too much time, to weave that cloth, to make it financially worthwhile. As they become very costly, it'll be more worthwhile.

[00:39:53.88]

Now, there are, especially, one group of Sumatran textiles that are being copied. And there is a funny story that one dealer, whose expertise is in this field, arrived in Indonesia a little later than a whole other group of people. And they all came and said, "Look, we have all this wonderful material—" other dealers. And she said, "Nah, hey, wait a minute. There's something wrong."

[00:40:17.67]

So in that particular area, I would not buy unless I knew when the material came in the country, and who I was buying it from. Or if I didn't know, I'd ship it to her, and she would be very quick and very open about saying, "yes, it's good," or "no, it isn't good." And the more you handle the material, the more you know. You know fakes. Or you know bad cloth, just when it wasn't woven correctly in the beginning.

[00:40:45.36]

JEAN O'KORN: What about the sticks, the healing sticks you have?

[00:40:48.81]

NANCY YAW: They're just beautiful. Again, these people can't count above five. So if they tell you that it's very old, they don't know what very old is. They don't know how to communicate "very old." They don't keep records. So possibly, they're not old. The patina is the wear of how many times it's healed somebody. They're very, very beautiful. You have to have the spirit taken out before you can have the stick. You can't have the stick with the power in it.

[00:41:13.93]

JEAN O'KORN: Oh, really?

[00:41:14.56]

NANCY YAW: So they draw the power out, in their mouth, and they blow it into the next stick as you sit there, or as the man who finds them sits there. They will never sell you nor would you wish to have on your conscience, to have a cloth that had power, or a piece of material that had power, a fetish piece. That wouldn't be right.

[00:41:32.68]

JEAN O'KORN: As more and more dealers go to these out places and buy from these people, do you think they're going to catch on and just start cranking it out to sell to them?

[00:41:40.63]

NANCY YAW: Sure. There's a lot of material now coming out of the Indonesian islands. It's brand new, brand new, but you can tell. You can tell new material from old material. And they are not particularly good, yet, in many areas at faking it. And a lot of people will buy the new material. And that's perfectly fine if it's well-labeled, and if people know that they're not getting old cloth. But you can tell from the imagery, from the number of bands in the cloth, and the tightness of the weave, from the care with which it was done. From the standpoint of the validity of the image, is the image really the old image, or is it a new image? Is it a bastardization? Or is it sharp and is it prime? Are the colors synthetic or not? And when did the synthetic colors start? And is it all right for there to be synthetic color borders or not?

[00:42:33.15]

JEAN O'KORN: The dyes, I suppose, are a giveaway, too.

[00:42:35.28]

NANCY YAW: Yeah, they really are.

[00:42:38.54]

JEAN O'KORN: Well, can you think of anything you want to talk about, or we have left out?

[00:42:42.54]

NANCY YAW: I don't think we left out anything. Do you?

[00:42:45.44]

JEAN O'KORN: It seems, like for twenty years of having a gallery business, we must have left out something.

[00:42:50.06]

NANCY YAW: It went quickly. Yeah. I don't know that we left out anything. I'll probably think of things we left out. But I think the important thing is that each dealer determine what it is that he or she is comfortable with, that they never let themselves be too comfortable, and that they constantly, constantly look and try to expand their minds. Or, if they are the kind of dealer that is supportive of artists, that they continue to do that, and they continue to nurture their artists.

[00:43:26.18]

And certainly, I was looking at a book of Rothko over the weekend, and I was trying to find who was the first person that showed the color fields? Who was the first person who really saw what Rothko was doing? Which dealer was it who saw? And I think that's what these people are—what these dealers are doing, who take artists' work and promote them for 20 or for 30 years. They're the ones who believe that they have the Rothkos, and that they can foresee some magnificent intellect and power coming through.

[00:44:03.05]

JEAN O'KORN: You and I both love Rothko.

[00:44:04.58]

NANCY YAW: Pardon me?

[00:44:05.06]

JEAN O'KORN: You and I both love Rothko.

[00:44:06.29]

NANCY YAW: Oh. I wonder if we would have seen it? I wonder if in that period of time, if we would have seen Clyfford Still and seen Milton Avery.

[00:44:13.88]

JEAN O'KORN: In the '40s and '50s.

[00:44:14.29]

NANCY YAW: Yeah. And if we would have known. If we would really have known when those people brought their work in.

[00:44:21.03]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah, that's an interesting idea, isn't it, [inaudible] to see [inaudible].

[00:44:25.16]

NANCY YAW: Right.

[00:44:25.97]

JEAN O'KORN: People who did were certainly—

[00:44:27.35]

NANCY YAW: Were famous.

[00:44:27.86]

JEAN O'KORN: —extraordinarily insightful.

[00:44:29.33]

NANCY YAW: And Vollard first saw Picasso.

[00:44:31.37]

JEAN O'KORN: Yeah.

[00:44:32.12]

NANCY YAW: What would we have thought, being presented with that? And I think dealers often do look at work and think, "My lord, this is wild material. Could it be possible that this is genius, and that my eye isn't tuned enough to know?" Or is it really just awful, which is what you think a lot of times when you see it.

[00:44:52.79]

JEAN O'KORN: Well, sometimes that's kind of a frightening thing to think that the dealer has that kind of power to really determine whether somebody's going to make it or not.

[00:45:01.69]

NANCY YAW: Well, dealers do, but also artists do. I mean the artists who make it are not people who are very laid back. I think there are very, very few artists, that I know of, who have gotten any place at all, who are the ones that hid in the garret. I think they promote themselves. They, of course, work extraordinarily hard.

[00:45:22.69]

And that's the only thing that really matters in your life. Everything else is, honestly and truly, secondary. The fact that they make art is what's important. And those are the ones that get places. And many, many times, you hear of young people who have graduated from art school and who are considering going to New York. And I really have to admire those people who say, "I just don't want to do that with my life. I don't want to have art be the end-all. I will, therefore, do something else." Maybe they'll regret that. God knows. I'm sure the others regret everything they've had to give up, too.

[00:46:00.29]

JEAN O'KORN: What do you think about what's happening at Cranbrook now?

[00:46:02.78]

NANCY YAW: I really don't go over there anymore. I don't know enough to say. The few times I've been over, I've not been swept off my feet, particularly.

[00:46:13.06]

JEAN O'KORN: It has changed, hasn't it?

[00:46:14.26]

NANCY YAW: It's changed a lot.

[00:46:17.17]

JEAN O'KORN: In the last ten years, especially.

[00:46:18.78]

NANCY YAW: Mm-hmm [affirmative], it certainly has.

[00:46:24.01]

JEAN O'KORN: Well, okay.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]