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# Oral history interview with Joyce Marquess Carey, 2002 June 16

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**Contact Information**
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Joyce Marquess Carey on June 16, 2002. The interview took place in Madison, Wisconsin, and was conducted by Glenn Adamson for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Joyce Marquess Carey has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

### Interview

MR. ADAMSON: This is the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art interview with Joyce Marquess Carey. We are in Madison, Wisconsin. My name is Glenn Adamson. I'll be the interviewer. Today's date is June 16, 2002. We're sitting in Ms. Carey's dining room in her home in Madison.

I guess I'll ask you to start by just describing your upbringing -- where you were born, when you were born, and your early childhood, anything that occurs to you.

MS. CAREY: Okay. I was born in 1936 in Redding, California.

MR. ADAMSON: Where is Redding?

MS. CAREY: Redding is about the last town of any size in the Central Valley in California. It's surrounded on three sides by mountains, and not too far from the Oregon border.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's relatively rural.

MS. CAREY: It was at the time, yeah. Now it's kind of a tourist jumping-off point for going to the mountains and going fishing, but at the time, it was maybe 10,000 people at the most.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's a relatively small town.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm.

MR. ADAMSON: And what did your parents do for a living?

MS. CAREY: My father was a mechanic for the state of California. He worked in the -- well, he was a mechanic. I can't remember. My mother didn't work until after my father died. He died when I was six. And then she took a job, just any job she could get, so she worked in a laundry until I was about 19 or so.

MR. ADAMSON: What were their names?

MS. CAREY: Helen Shepard and Max Shepard. And her maiden name was Hatten, Helen Hatten.

MR. ADAMSON: H-a-t-t- ?

MS. CAREY: -e-n.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So after your father passed away, was it difficult for your family to sort of make ends meet?

MS. CAREY: I think it probably was, but I wasn't aware of that. The job that my mother took was hard. She worked nine hours a day, six days a week. And I had no brothers or sisters or any other relatives in town, so I spent a lot of time by myself. But I was never aware that we might be actually poor. I think our needs and wants were pretty low, and our house was nice, so we got along fine.

MR. ADAMSON: So you actually feel like you had a happy childhood, although you were an only child with a working mother?

MS. CAREY: I'd say, yes, I had a happy childhood. I was kind of lonesome, but I don't think I was really aware of how lonesome I was either, until later when you start comparing your childhood with other people's, and they have friends and they have relatives and they have parties and they have brothers and sisters. So I learned to be alone. And I think that's probably been good in the long run.

MR. ADAMSON: Helps you in your studio, maybe?

MS. CAREY: You bet. I like to be alone.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, you must have had an extended family elsewhere, right?

MS. CAREY: I had two aunts who were my father's sisters. One of them lived in San Jose, California, and the other one lived in Long Beach, California. So we generally saw them about once a year.

MR. ADAMSON: Down south?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm.

MR. ADAMSON: And you would drive down there?

MS. CAREY: No driving. We didn't have a car.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. CAREY: No. We took the Greyhound bus, and I always got sick.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: So that wasn't so happy.

MS. CAREY: That wasn't so happy.

MR. ADAMSON: So you didn't really get a sense of overall geography of California when you were growing up, then, probably.

MS. CAREY: No, not really, except where the Greyhound bus took us, to San Jose or to Long Beach.

MR. ADAMSON: Was there a lot of nature around where you grew up, forests and all kinds of things?

MS. CAREY: Yes. We lived in a really rich area. I could see Mount Shasta out the kitchen window. And once in a while when relatives would come to visit who did have cars, we'd go up to Mount Lassen and spend a day or so.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that in Oregon?

MS. CAREY: It's in California. It's a volcanic mountain. And that was really great. We loved to go up there. And then the ocean is on the other side of the coastal range, and when we had a chance, we'd get on this little bitty bus and go over to the ocean and just be there.

MR. ADAMSON: That's nice.

What's the ethnicity of your family?

MS. CAREY: I think all Northern European. I'm not aware of any other branch of the family.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Shepard, I guess, is an English surname, right?

MS. CAREY: I think so, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And do you know when your family came to California?

MS. CAREY: I know that my father grew up in California, but I don't know where his family came from before that. They had a fruit farm in Central Valley. And my mother grew up in Indiana.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm, and moved around a fair amount, but always in this part of the country, until she and her mother moved to California to be with my grandmother's brother, who lived in Redondo Beach. So they came out here when my mother was maybe 20 or so.

MR. ADAMSON: So can you tell me about the schools that you went to when you were growing up?

MS. CAREY: I was lucky in one way. The grammar school that I went to was right around the corner, like a block,

of course, and I went there from kindergarten till, I think, about the sixth grade. And then high school was also within walking distance. That's the beauty of being in a small town. And so I went to high school there, and then I went to junior college there. They built one just as I was ready to go away to school. And I was so eager to go away to school, and then they built this darn junior college and I had to go there.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: And after that, I went to the University of California at Berkeley for a couple of years.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, when you were younger going to school, did you take art classes?

MS. CAREY: Not really, no. No. I don't think that there were as many individuated classes as there might be now. You know, you had art in your regular kind of course of the day, but it's always more of a pastime, I think, than an actual serious pursuit. And in high school I don't think I took any art classes. I only took one in college when I went to Cal, and it was for elementary school teachers. It was a very nice art class, actually, but I was just taking it because I thought I would be an elementary school teacher, which never panned out.

But the teacher in that art class said, "Have you ever considered art as a career?" I thought, "Pffff, of course not. It's too frivolous." So I was an English major. And I didn't take any more art classes because I thought, that's too easy.

MR. ADAMSON: So your first encounter with art really, then, was in college.

MS. CAREY: It was when I came here, yes. After I was married and had three children, then I started to take classes here at the university in Madison. And that's when I started really getting serious about taking art classes.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

Well, let's back up a second. So had you gone to museums or anything like that when you were growing up?

MS. CAREY: Not significantly, no. But I was always interested in needlework from the time I was really, really young.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. CAREY: So I learned to crochet and knit and tat and embroider and all of that, starting maybe age six or so.

MR. ADAMSON: Who taught you? Your mother?

MS. CAREY: My mother and my next-door neighbor, because my mother was at work quite a lot, and my next-door neighbor, Mrs. Gurlinger, took pity on me and would invite me over to her little tiny sewing room, which I think has become the model of my life, to have this little sewing room for myself. And she taught me needlework. It was great.

MR. ADAMSON: Tell me more about her. What was she like?

MS. CAREY: Hmm. You know, I don't remember much about her except that she was an older woman, her children were all grown, and I think she was German. And she had patience with me. I don't think we did a lot of talking. She just would say, "Well, this is how you do this," and then she'd show me. And I was really interested, so we pretty much spent our time, I think, in silence. The best thing about her house was that she had a wonderful goldfish pond, and I loved to go over there for that.

MR. ADAMSON: So, what kind of things would you make with her?

MS. CAREY: I think we just played around as much as anything. But I learned to tat lace; I learned to crochet lace. I think we probably made things like doilies, which none of us had any use for. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Just for the pleasure of making them.

MS. CAREY: Just for the pleasure of making them. Kind of magical to see the thread actually spin out and turn into something.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. So it was really more about the process, then.

MS. CAREY: Absolutely. Yeah. It wasn't about art.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember the first time that you actually had a needle in your hand and you were doing

the work?

MS. CAREY: I do, but it wasn't connected with Mrs. Gurlinger.

MR. ADAMSON: Is it Durlinger, with a "D"?

MS. CAREY: Gurlinger, with a "G."

MR. ADAMSON: With a "G." Okay.

MS. CAREY: It was at home, and I decided to make a teddy bear. And I don't know how old I was, but I might not even have been in kindergarten yet. I started off with a piece of brown toweling, and I cut it into these little, impossibly small pieces, and then I tried to sew them together. I knew nothing about seam allowance or ease or any of that stuff, and it was just awful, but actually it did turn out like a little teddy bear and so I was really proud of it. That was my first, I think, sewing experience.

MR. ADAMSON: And something you really just took into your own head to do.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: You were clearly fated. [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, did you keep on sewing through your teenage years?

MS. CAREY: Yes. Yes. I've always sewed. I've always made things. My mother sewed. She never used a pattern. So I think that was probably good because that was my model, that you just get an idea in your head and you start to make something. And she wasn't a very good sewer, but I started sewing really young, just things like a gathered skirt, an apron, something like that, really easy. But I think I just grew up with this sense that you sew; you can make things. And when I was in high school, I took a couple of classes that had sewing as part of them. I wasn't particularly distinguished in these classes.

MR. ADAMSON: Like home economics classes?

MS. CAREY: Like home economics. Because they wanted you to follow a certain plan, and I knew that you didn't really need to follow a certain plan. But you don't get good grades for creativity when you're supposed to be doing something right.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: So they'd have you doing, like, pillow cases and other projects.

MS. CAREY: Yes. They had us doing hand-hemmed tea towels, which I'm sure, at that time and to this day, is a really stupid project.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: But it gives people a sense of accomplishment.

MS. CAREY: I guess so. Gives the teacher a sense of accomplishment.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: I used to get things like presents of kits, sort of a kit, like, with two pillowcases and all of the thread that you need. The pillowcase is already stamped. And so I'd embroider that kind of thing. I had a picture once with two deer in a woods. And I don't know, I wasn't very old, but I embroidered on that thing until it was just a rag. Yeah, I've always made things. I made spool knitting when I was really young. My mother knew how to do that, so she taught me how to make spool knitting. My grandmother had made an entire afghan out of spool knitting. It must have taken years. I never got more than a shoestring out of spool knitting, but it was, you know, because again, you see this thread coming out the bottom of the spool and it's actually turning into something.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So, do you think that the appeal of it to you at that young age was just the magic of making something out of nothing?

MS. CAREY: I think that was a large part of it. I didn't have a whole lot of stuff, but we always had thread, string, yarn, scissors, cloth around. And I had a lot of time to myself.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

So now moving forward when you went to junior college, is that where you met your husband?

MS. CAREY: No. No, I met him later.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So junior college lasted two years?

MS. CAREY: Junior college is two years, and that was just college prep kind of stuff. I took French -- or it took me.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] It was an uneven battle.

MS. CAREY: Yes, an uneven battle. I did like chemistry a great deal. But mostly I was really eager to leave Redding and go to Berkeley. I'd always wanted to go to Berkeley. I thought it was the most magical place.

MR. ADAMSON: Had you been down there on your Greyhound bus trips?

MS. CAREY: Yeah. On our Greyhound bus trips we would go to San Francisco to visit an elderly cousin, and I liked the San Francisco-Berkeley area. I liked the atmosphere. I liked the fog. I liked the ocean. So I was looking forward to going down there and going to school. I think most people from our junior college went to a California college, and so it was natural to think of going to Berkeley. I never looked into anything else.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it difficult to get in at that point?

MS. CAREY: It must not have been, because I got in.

MR. ADAMSON: So you hadn't been lighting up the grade panel at the junior college?

MS. CAREY: Actually, starting as a senior in high school, I started to be a really good student. Somebody challenged me. Two or three of us girls were sneaking around in the counselor's office one night. I don't know why.

MR. ADAMSON: One night!

MS. CAREY: I think it was at night. I don't know, this is my checkered past. But anyway, we were looking up our own information in the file cabinet, and I discovered that I had a pretty good I.Q. I was so surprised.

MR. ADAMSON: Nobody had ever told you?

MS. CARNEY: No. These were secret records. And so one of my friends who was with me, who knew that she was smart, said, "You know, you could be doing a whole lot better." She said, "Why don't you go to the Honor Society picnic next year?" We were at the end of our junior year. And to go to the Honor Society picnic, of course, you had to be in the Honor Society, which meant you had to clean up your act a whole lot.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CARNEY: So I worked really hard in my senior year, and I think I got all A's. And I thought, "Whoa, this is kind of fun!"

MR. ADAMSON: So you surprised yourself.

MS. CAREY: I really surprised myself. And so that was the beginning of my being a good student. And I was a pretty good student in junior college. I can't say the same for Cal, but that was a different set of problems.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, one thing I notice about your description of your upbringing is that you were pretty much in an entirely female world, except maybe for your teachers in school.

MS. CAREY: That's right. That's right. I'm trying to think if there were any significant men in my family. I had two uncles, but when we went to visit the aunts, we really went to visit the aunts. The uncles were kind of adjuncts.

MR. ADAMSON: That's interesting.

MS. CAREY: I had one first cousin who is a man, but a lot older than me. And my other first cousin is a woman, and she was also a lot older than me. So every place I went, I seemed to be kind of by myself.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. The reason I point that out is because I always wonder whether artists of your generation who are women, what your perception of art was and your perception of women's professional opportunities were, that kind of thing.

MS. CAREY: Oh.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you know, these days I think it's a lot different for people growing up, because anybody can go to art school, but when you were growing up, that wasn't necessarily seen, as you were saying, as a legitimate job plan.

MS. CAREY: No, not at all. A legitimate job plan included being a teacher or a nurse.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: And I didn't want to be nurse, so that left teacher. Or a secretary. You could be a secretary.

MR. ADAMSON: And you really accepted those horizons at first.

MS. CAREY: I did. I did. I accepted a whole lot of mythology up until I was about 30.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So you went to junior college and then you went to Berkeley. And how did you find Berkeley when you got there?

MS. CAREY: Academically?

MR. ADAMSON: Just in general.

MS. CAREY: Oh, in general I loved it. I lived in a small dormitory full of women, co-op. At that time I don't think there were very many mixed dormitories. They would have been really in the minority. It was a co-op dormitory, so the women all pitched in and did the work, did the grocery shopping. We didn't do the cooking. But it was very much of a cooperative venture, and we became quite close. And I loved living in Berkeley. I still love Berkeley. There's something kind of magical about the layout of it.

MR. ADAMSON: So what year would you have arrived there?

MS. CAREY: Let me think. 1956?

MR. ADAMSON: So that was before Berkeley had any kind of political significance in particular.

MS. CAREY: I was in and out of Berkeley before that whole thing blew up.

MR. ADAMSON: What about the academic part of it? It must have been a lot more challenging than anything else you had done, right?

MS. CAREY: It was very challenging. And I had never even heard of the concept of teaching assistants before. And I was taking some pretty big classes because I was an English major, and on the undergraduate level they're all big classes. And I only fell into being an English major because I loved to read. You know, I didn't really give it any thought.

MR. ADAMSON: Growing up, you had always loved to read.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. I've always read.

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of books?

MS. CAREY: When I started out? Oh, fiction. We didn't have a lot of books in the house, but my mother occasionally would buy me something, and so I read *Alice in Wonderland* and the Oz books and *Black Beauty* and all that stuff that people read.

MR. ADAMSON: What about in college? Were there books that had a particular impact on you that you remember?

MS. CAREY: I can think more of the professors that had impact on me than the books. There was a Professor Sledd, who was one of the first English professors that I had who was not a teaching assistant. And he gave us, as our first assignment, a list of resources that we should go and find. And they were all over the campus, in every different kind of library and research collection and back in archives here and there. And it was such an eye opener to me. You know, I always thought, well, there's the library. But there were all these different places that you could go and get information, and, of course, way before the Internet, so you actually had to go and

look things up in hard copy.

MR. ADAMSON: So he kind of opened you to the whole richness of the university.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. And Sledd, he was very challenging. I wouldn't say he was a real nice guy, but he was very interested in us, and that was the first experience that I had with anybody who was actually interested in us as students at Cal, because otherwise it was pretty much very big classes where you didn't see the professor up close.

MR. ADAMSON: Impersonal.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. And I had a couple of teaching assistants that I would say by any standards were really bad.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. CAREY: And so that experience, you know, getting in there as a junior and being kind of -- I thought school was easy, and then you go to Cal and school is not easy, it's very challenging, and not a lot of help.

MR. ADAMSON: What was Professor Sledd teaching you?

MS. CAREY: I think it was just a survey course, but I can't remember whether it was American literature or American and English literature. Something like that.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you have a sense when you were taking classes like that that you were really coming into a much broader cultural world than you had known existed or you had experienced?

MS. CAREY: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, definitely. But still, I had this small dormitory of women friends so I wasn't branching out a whole lot. But just being in Berkeley, you know, with the readings going on and Creed's bookstore and coffee houses. You know, I had never encountered coffee houses before. And I wasn't a coffee drinker, but I'd go to the coffee house and drink tea. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Because that's what you do.

MS. CAREY: Because that's what you do. Yeah. Telegraph Avenue, which was wonderful.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: And we lived pretty close to the hills, so you could get back up in there and go to what that big park was up in there. I've forgotten what it's called.

MR. ADAMSON: So it sounds like your college experience was sort of simultaneously very intimate and very wide open.

MS. CAREY: I'd say that pretty much sums it up. I think I was really lucky to have the safety and comfort of my little tiny dormitory with so few people.

MR. ADAMSON: Helped you bridge the gaps.

MS. CAREY: Really. Because it was my first time away from home.

MR. ADAMSON: Can I take a sort of broader angle on these years, these growing-up years, and ask you whether the political events of those years had any impact on you? Like World War II? I guess you were too young to really have experienced the Depression in any meaningful sense.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. I think the first news I was really aware of was when FDR died. I was pretty young and it didn't impact me, particularly, but I could see that it had an enormous impact on people around me.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: So I think that was kind of my beginning of world news having any interest for me whatsoever.

MR. ADAMSON: So you would have been eight or nine then.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, that's right.

MR. ADAMSON: And you remember World War II ending?

MS. CAREY: I suppose I do, but no.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Not concretely.

MS. CAREY: No, not really. No. I mean, what a big day that must have been.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: Huge day. Why wasn't it like a national holiday in our school? Why wasn't a whole lot made out of it? I don't remember that day.

MR. ADAMSON: What about the Korean War, later on? You were in college then.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think I'm just not a very politically aware creature.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: I'm sure there were people around me who were deeply involved in it, but I was doing other things.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Just curious.

MS. CAREY: I'm afraid you're going to ask me, "What were you doing?" I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] "What were you doing when such and such happened," right?

MS. CAREY: Oh, I can tell you what I was doing when Kennedy was shot.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: Everybody can tell you that.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. What were you doing?

MS. CAREY: I was in my living room in my little apartment with my two children. And I had been listening to soap operas and doing housework and stuff, and suddenly they broke in with this announcement that he had been hit and was in bad shape. And of course, then you don't do anything all day but listen to the radio.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. It was like September 11.

MS. CAREY: It was a total shock, just total shock.

MR. ADAMSON: At what point did you meet your husband?

MS. CAREY: I met him when I was a senior at Cal. We were taking a folk dance class together. And we only dated for three months before we got married, and we got married in the middle of my senior year. And I realized right away that that probably was not the best decision I ever made.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. CAREY: So my last semester, my senior year, was pretty much of a loss.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you were too occupied with him?

MS. CAREY: I was occupied with trying to sort out my feelings, and I was pretty unhappy. A nice guy. Still is a nice guy. We're better friends now than we were then.

MR. ADAMSON: I'm sure. What's his name?

MS. CAREY: Mark Marquess. Harlan Marquess.

MR. ADAMSON: M-a-r-k?

MS. CAREY: Q. M-a-r-q-u-e-s-s.

MR. ADAMSON: I'm sorry, "Mark," the --

MS. CAREY: Oh, Mark. M-a-r-k. That was a nickname. He always hated the name Harlan.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think that the reason you were unhappy was because you felt like you had just jumped

into something that you couldn't quite get a handle on?

MS. CAREY: I realized that I had married someone because I had stars in my eyes and I hadn't married my best friend, at all.

MR. ADAMSON: Ah, I see.

MS. CAREY: And so we had very little in common and nothing to talk about. And the days can get long if you're just with somebody. The stars kind of fade in a hurry if you don't have a good, solid friendship going too.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Okay. But you proceeded to have children together pretty quickly, I guess?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. We did. Yeah, we did. In my generation, or at least in my family, if you make a serious decision, you stick with it. It would not have occurred to me to kind of sit down and have a little heart-to-heart and say, "Let's undo this." So I thought, well, you know, sooner or later the pieces will fall into place. And I can't say it was a bad marriage, really. It was bad enough that after 18 years I gave it up.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: But certainly, I mean, he's a kind person and all that.

MR. ADAMSON: It wasn't a disaster; it just wasn't the right thing for you.

MS. CAREY: It was absolutely not the right thing for either one of us.

MR. ADAMSON: At what point did you have your kids?

MS. CAREY: I had been married for about a little over a year when my daughter was born, Jenny [sp], 1959; and in two more years we had Philip [sp], 1961; and after we moved to Madison, we had Erik, 1967.

MR. ADAMSON: So what were you doing between the time that you graduated from Cal and the time that you moved to Madison? Because that's five years or so.

MS. CAREY: Yes. I was living in student housing with my family in Albany, and pretty much just being a mom.

MR. ADAMSON: Albany?

MS. CAREY: Albany, California.

MR. ADAMSON: California.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. It's near Richmond, and the student housing is still there.

MR. ADAMSON: And what was Mark doing for a living at that point?

MS. CAREY: He was a graduate student.

MR. ADAMSON: Ah. In what field?

MS. CAREY: In Russian.

MR. ADAMSON: So again, I imagine, you probably didn't have a whole lot of money.

MS. CAREY: Oh, no. [Laughs.] Our rent was $50 a month, and it was a stretch.

MR. ADAMSON: Really. And it didn't occur to you to take a job because you were too busy with the kids? Is that correct?

MS. CAREY: I can't think of a woman that I knew well who had a husband who had a job. No.

MR. ADAMSON: Things have certainly changed.

MS. CAREY: Things have really changed, yeah. Isn't that something?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. So you had been thinking about becoming a teacher in college, right?

MS. CAREY: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: But once you got married, you just sort of wrote that off.

MS. CAREY: The end. Yeah. That was the end of that. I didn't even finish at Cal.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So you were really a housewife for those years.

MS. CAREY: I was a housewife, yes. And I guess the best thing you could say about that is that I did spend a lot of time with my children, and I had very good woman friends, and I spent a lot of time knitting and doing other needlework.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, you had done that in college in some way as well, when you had time?

MS. CAREY: I did. Yeah, I did.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you take classes that involved any kind of textile?

MS. CAREY: No. No. I'm trying to think whether that was before -- what was the well-known guy out at Cal that wrote a book on basketry? Rossbach. Ed Rossbach [*The Nature of Basketry*. West Chester, Pa.: Schiffer Pub., 1986].

MR. ADAMSON: Ed Rossbach.

MS. CAREY: I don't think he was there then. Or if he was, I wasn't aware of him. And if I had been aware of him, I wouldn't have taken a class.

MR. ADAMSON: He wouldn't have been there yet. I think he was still a student himself at Cranbrook at that point. And I don't know if they even had a textile department that early.

MS. CAREY: I sure didn't hear about it.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: No. First textile department I heard of was after we had moved to Madison. When I found it all tucked away up in the home ec school, I was really happy.

MR. ADAMSON: So you moved to Madison because your husband got a job --

MS. CAREY: He got a job here, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: -- in the Russian Department. And he was teaching what? Language or literature?

MS. CAREY: He was teaching language, uh-huh.

MR. ADAMSON: So, how did you feel about moving to Wisconsin?

MS. CAREY: I felt like I was going to the absolute ends of the earth, because what little family I had was all in California. And there's no ocean out here. There's no mountains out here. There's no people out here. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: We moved to what was then almost the far west side of Madison, on Rosa Road, which of course is now practically downtown. And I didn't have a car, so there I was with my two kids again and not knowing a soul.

MR. ADAMSON: So that was hard?

MS. CAREY: That was hard, yeah. I was really, really lonesome that first year here.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. So was that part of what made you seek out the department, the home ec school?

MS. CAREY: That came a little later, actually. That came after my son was born in '67. It must have been close to 1970 before I went back to school.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. CAREY: He was old enough to leave with a baby sitter at that point, and the other two were in school, so I thought I could carve out a little time now and then to take a class.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And you naturally decided to take up sewing again as a --

MS. CAREY: I decided I was going to take something just that was fun. I had come a ways from thinking that

anything that was fun wasn't worth doing, so I wanted to take weaving. I really wanted to take weaving.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you had never done that.

MS. CAREY: I'd never done weaving and it always interested me. And you couldn't take weaving until you took basic design and drawing and a few of those other classes, so I did that. And I really loved it. I really loved it. I was really good at it.

MR. ADAMSON: So you enrolled as an undergraduate.

MS. CAREY: Well, I was actually still an undergraduate because I didn't finish at Cal. I dropped out.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. When you got married?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. I only lasted for a few months and then I dropped out. And so I took those basic design classes, and then as soon as I could, I took a weaving class with Larry Edman, who was just starting here.

MR. ADAMSON: How do you spell Edman?

MS. CAREY: E-d-m-a-n. He still lives in Madison. He's not teaching anymore.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it difficult to persuade your husband to support you going to back school in any way?

MS. CAREY: I don't think he was crazy about the idea, but I had this superwoman idea of myself at that time, you know. I thought, well, I can just sort of squeeze this in, and nobody will notice that I'm doing this as long as I keep my hours within the hours when the children are in school and I can get a baby sitter for a little and so on, not to impinge on his time or make him do anything extra that was, so-called, my job.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: So, I don't know, he might have been more supportive if we'd been more communicative with each other. But we weren't, so I just sort of took off and did that on my own.

MR. ADAMSON: Did it cost a lot of money to do?

MS. CAREY: No. At that time the tuition was so cheap.

MR. ADAMSON: It was a state school.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, a state school. And I can't remember what it was. I know it's gone way up, but I think it was well under $100 for a semester at the time.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, jeez.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, I think so.

MR. ADAMSON: And the program you were in, it was a degree-granting program once you got enough credits?

MS. CAREY: It was, but because I really changed my major violently, from English to the textile arts, I think I had something like 50 credits to make up before I could graduate as an undergraduate. But I didn't care at that time. I wasn't looking to do anything with this, you know, other than just have the fun of doing it, so it didn't make any difference to me. And after I got going and discovered that I was actually a good student -- I was surprised once again that they let me in. But I was doing extremely well with it, so I took all of those classes. I took economics and physiology and everything that you needed as an undergraduate in order to graduate from the University of Wisconsin. And my last couple of semesters, my husband was coming up to a point where he wasn't sure he was going to be rehired. I think he was just finishing his -- what do you call that? -- he was a lecturer, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So he was coming up for tenure review or something like that?

MS. CAREY: Yeah. I think he might have been a -- well, he was coming up to the point where he didn't know whether they would renew his contract, anyway, so he was beginning to look into jobs elsewhere.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: And so I thought, well, I'm not going to go away from here again without a degree. So the last semester that I was here, I took 21 credits. And I just was going all the time, was really, really nuts.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you still have the primary responsibility for taking care of the family?

MS. CAREY: Pretty much, although he really did have to be pressed into service because I was really, really busy. And it worked out okay. I just knew I could not afford to get so much as a cold. There was no slack in there at all. But I did it. I finished. I graduated.

MR. ADAMSON: So what year did you graduate?

MS. CAREY: 1971.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Now, that's when feminism was first starting to become big news in the country.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, I guess so. I'm thinking that -- was it Germaine Greer? Even when I still lived in Berkeley, we were starting to hear about feminism. But with my upbringing and my general philosophy of life, I thought, "Oh, they're kind of far out; it doesn't apply to me."

MR. ADAMSON: And you had the same attitude towards Vietnam War protestors?

MS. CAREY: Probably.

MR. ADAMSON: Because that must have been happening on campus at Madison.

MS. CAREY: Yes. Yes. Well, it was sort of outside my experience, but you couldn't be too far away from it because this was going on right there. There was tear gas when you're walking to school. So I wasn't part of it, but I certainly was in it.

MR. ADAMSON: Not in the tear gas. [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: Well, there was enough tear gas that we had to cancel classes a time or two.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. Yeah, because that whole area, you know, the bombing and all that -- Sterling Hall bombing, that was just like a half-block from the building where I was taking classes, and so the protests and so forth were right there and University Hospital was right there. And I don't know what they did with the patients, but I know that they had to evacuate some of the students because of the tear gas.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were very acutely aware of all that going on.

MS. CAREY: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I mean, if you're going to really bring something to your doorstep.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Do you think it made any permanent impact on you in terms of how you thought about politics or the rest of the world?

MS. CAREY: I've evolved into a really hard-core pacifist. And I'm sure that that had something to do with it but not, maybe, consciously. I just hate any wars and conflicts. I just think there's got to be a better way to work things out. Be adult about this, for heaven's sake, and don't shoot each other.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, it sounds like that might have had something to do with it.

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.] Yeah. If you're walking through tear gas, I guess it would have an effect on you.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me a little bit more about the textile classes you were taking? Like, what kind of design exercises did they have you do?

MS. CAREY: Oh, my textile classes were really good. Larry Edman was pretty well-grounded in technique, and so he had us start right out with our weaving to learn how to do a whole variety of different weaves. And it was just an exercise. But he also is really interested in art weaving, and so in his lectures, he would always bring in what was current or what was important among art weavers. And tapestry weaving in particular, but other weaving as well. And so he introduced us to some big names, you know, just through the slides.

And we also took trips to Chicago to meet artists and go to the Art Institute [Art Institute of Chicago] and to really see things. We would just take a bus trip, go to Rockford and see fiber shows, or go to Chicago and see fiber shows. We met Claire Zeisler, and we met some other textile artists that were doing printing and other things. So that was really good.

And I think that I already was a person who didn't like to stick with the form, so having really overt permission to be experimental was really good for me. So we'd do some weave, say an overshot or something, and I'd think, "Well, what else can you do with this?" So right from the very beginning when I was just taking beginning weaving classes, I wasn't making, you know, traditional placemats and that kind of stuff. Nobody in our class was. We were all stretching the limits of the technique. So I really thank Larry for that.

And I had a wonderful basic design teacher too, Ruth Davis. And I think I'm lucky that this all happened before computers, because you really have a sense of putting the mark on the page and handling the materials, and it's not abstract; it's right there. And I still really value that, even though I use a computer now. But I always start off with putting the mark on the page, because that's how I think. And the computer is just a tool.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you have a sense of what her design instruction methodology was? I mean, did she have you do scientific color-study type things, or was it more --

MS. CAREY: She didn't, but I did have a class from a woman in the art department, and I wish I could think of her name. She did teach the [Josef] Albers [painter] color system, which was enormously useful to me.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. CAREY: Yeah. That was maybe one of the most useful classes I ever took, in just exploring color and color relationships. Just with, you know, pieces of colored paper.

MR. ADAMSON: Because color is still extremely important in your work, obviously.

MS. CAREY: Yes, it really is. Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So again you felt like you had discovered something that was a really useful tool.

MS. CAREY: It's like discovering the key to something. When I was just knitting on my own, I thought, "Somebody thinks of these patterns. Somebody makes this up. I want to know how to do that." So finding out how color works and so forth is like, "Oh, that's how they do that!" Yeah, it's really a key.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me more about seeing the advanced weaving of the time, like meeting Claire Zeisler and seeing her studio? What was that like?

MS. CAREY: Oh, it was wonderful. She's a wonderful woman. And here we go trooping into her studio, a bunch of undergraduates, and all of her work is right there. She had a couple of assistants, I think, helping her, but everything was there, pieces that were already competed, and pieces that were in progress, and drawings for pieces. She was so generous. She'd show us anything. And she was so kind and encouraging. And somebody asked her if she wasn't worried that we'd kind of go home and copy her. I mean, is that hubris or what?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, right.

MS. CAREY: And she said she was never worried about that because by the time somebody got around to copying her, she would have moved on. And I thought that was a very good lesson too, to not be so stingy and private about your work that you don't share the methods and your philosophy and so on, because by the time somebody, if they want to copy you -- and what a flattering thing that would be -- you've moved on.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Were there other weavers at that time that you remember particularly impressing you?

MS. CAREY: Yes. Ted Hallman -- very impressive, both as a person and as a craftsperson, because he's very spiritual.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, he was teaching at Madison?

MS. CAREY: He was teaching at Arrowmont. I took some summer classes at Arrowmont on several occasions.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see. While you were an undergraduate at Madison?

MS. CAREY: I might have gone on to be a graduate student by then. I'm not sure when I took those classes.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: I might have just finished my undergraduate degree. But he was wonderful. And I only liked to work with people who were really experimental. I wasn't at all interested in learning how to make something that they were making in the '20s.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So at some point you made an enormous mental shift in the way that you were approaching this whole prospect of working in textiles.

MS. CAREY: Going from weaving to sewing?

MR. ADAMSON: Well, not so much -- that's the next shift, I guess, that we're going to come to, but I was thinking more of, you know, going from being a housewife to being someone who is interested in avant-garde sculpture, essentially.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, that is kind of a leap, isn't it?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Do you remember -- I mean, it must have kind of snuck up on you, huh?

MS. CAREY: I guess it snuck up on me. I think I really hadn't given an awful lot of thought to what I wanted to be when I grew up, because the teaching thing was just, you know, because you can do that. But I don't think I had any real interest in being a grade-school teacher. So I hadn't really given a lot of thought about what actually am I good at and what do I want to do, until I was exposed to these things. And it really resonated. I wanted to do that and I wanted to be better than that. I wouldn't say I've attained that at all, but I really wanted to explore these things and to take it seriously. I didn't want to just dabble. I didn't want to learn a whole lot of different things and be sort of good at it; I wanted to be really good at something. So, weaving was my focus, and I got to be really good at it for a while.

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of things were you making? Were they off-loom, three-dimensional things?

MS. CAREY: Some off-loom, three-dimensional things, but mostly complex-weave things. I got interested in the mechanics of weaving. And the more shafts there were on a loom, the happier I was, because it took me a long time to figure out how that worked, and it was the key again, you know? I said, "Oh, this is how this works!" So I was limited to a 12-harness loom here at home, but at school eventually I had a 24-harness, computer-driven Dobby loom, which was just a great toy.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. So I played around with that quite a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: That was while you were still a student you actually had that?

MS. CAREY: I was a student, yes. I finished my master's degree here in Madison, and then I went to study with Ruth Kao and Jim Peters in Milwaukee to get my MFA.

MR. ADAMSON: Before we skip to that, how did you come to decide to take a master's? I guess your husband realized he could stay at Madison after all? Is that right?

MS. CAREY: Yeah. Yeah. He was hired on here, so it looked like I was in here for the long haul. I looked at it like that.

MR. ADAMSON: So you decided to go ahead and get your master's degree.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. I was so into it, and I realized that I'd only just begun to -- just begun to start. There was so much more. I really wanted to learn those things. And then I began to think maybe this is a career.

[BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE B.]

So to have a career, you've got to have a degree; so then I got my master's degree here, and then I went to Milwaukee.

MR. ADAMSON: So the master's was two years?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: Still working with Larry Edman, principally?

MS. CAREY: Principally, yes, and some -- oh, let's see, who else was I working with? There weren't a lot of textile people here, and he was the only weaver.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. CAREY: So I saw more of Larry than anybody else.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it called "Environment and Textile Design" in the department then?

MS. CAREY: It was "Environment, Textiles and Design," but the school was Family Resources and Consumer Sciences when I was there.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: FRACAS. They hated the acronym. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Fracas.

MS. CAREY: Now it's changed to the School of Human Ecology, which I'm not sure is a step up.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. It's one of those names that sounds sort of like home ec.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, it sounds like home ec, and it always makes me think that it's got something to do with a skin condition.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] But when you were doing your master's here, it was really a continuation of what you had been doing as an undergraduate?

MS. CAREY: Pretty much. But then I didn't have to be taking things like economics and physiology and so forth, so I could really concentrate.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, you could really focus.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, and take more textile history classes. I had a wonderful class from Babette Hanish, who taught textile history. And she was such a good teacher. She really put textile history into the context of world history in a way that still makes sense to me. She would bring in maps of old Persia and that kind of thing, and she'd play music of the time, or talk about who was the reigning monarch of France at the time, and really put the whole thing into context. It was wonderful.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think that historical textiles had an influence on what you were making at the time?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. Definitely. Definitely. You can't beat 'em, you know, for just amazing technique and artistry and materials and genius.

MR. ADAMSON: So what kind of things were you making as a graduate student? Did you have to do a thesis show?

MS. CAREY: I did a thesis show. And I'm trying to think what it was called. I did a lot of pieces with the multi-harness loom. They were all flat wall hangings. And my specialty was starting with a motif of some sort and then gradually morphing it into something else.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: And so most of my show was based on, oh, stars turning into hearts or, you know, within the confines of what you could do on a plane on the loom, because I wasn't doing off-loom stuff for my master's of fine arts show. But I was relatively experimental at the time with materials and methods. But in my MFA show, I already had one, possibly two, big sewn pieces. It was at that point, right around 1975-'76, that I was starting to make the shift.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So were these weavings also color studies at the same time? Were you using a lot of color?

MS. CAREY: Yes, a lot of color, and especially a lot of modulated color, going from light to dark or changing from green to purple. In one direction or another, either tonally or in the hue range, I would be doing something that would be shifting.

MR. ADAMSON: So it sounds like you were quite interested in the technical aspects of this.

MS. CAREY: Very. Very.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you good at math?

MS. CAREY: Not particularly, but I think I would be if I studied it now.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: I was taking math in my bad-student days, before I knew I was good at anything.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. But you had enough of a systematic mind that you could really get control of those processes.

MS. CAREY: I do have a systematic mind. I've always played the piano, or at least from the time I was about eight, and my favorite composer is Bach. So.

MR. ADAMSON: That figures?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Now when you went to Milwaukee, was it a separate degree, like an MFA?

MS. CAREY: That was for my MFA.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. How long was that? A year?

MS. CAREY: It took me three years.

MR. ADAMSON: Three years?

MS. CAREY: I think it took three years because I was a teaching assistant here, and I still had three kids at home, and I was still trying to pretend that I could do all this and run a household.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: And commuting.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MS. CAREY: So I would make it over there twice a week and sometimes on weekends, because our graduate seminars would get together sometimes on weekends because so many people worked. Otherwise, I was Larry Edman's teaching assistant here, which was great experience, just wonderful.

MR. ADAMSON: And you really enjoyed the teaching?

MS. CAREY: I did enjoy the teaching. I was really surprised. This wasn't grade-school kids, you know, teaching them how to paste. It was people who were just discovering that they had some kind of spark. It was wonderful.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were sort of walking them through what you had just experienced yourself.

MS. CAREY: Uh-huh. Yeah. I was sympathetic to them.

MR. ADAMSON: You were going to UW-Milwaukee, is that right?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. How did you decide to do that there instead of continuing to work in Madison, because you were teaching at Madison?

MS. CAREY: Well, I was teaching in Madison, and there was the possibility that I might be added to the faculty here, and not if I got my degree here.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: So I was encouraged to go to Milwaukee, which is more of a technicality than anything, I think; it's all the same system. But still, working with different people, and it was really a good idea.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me again about the people that you were working with?

MS. CAREY: Ruth Gao [Kao].

MR. ADAMSON: G-o-w?

MS. CAREY: G-a-o [Kao].

MR. ADAMSON: G-a-o. Okay.

MS. CAREY: Jim Peters was actually my adviser, and he was actually the serious weaver over there, but Ruth and I just hit it off, and so I saw more of Ruth.

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of thing did she do?

MS. CAREY: She could weave, but she was not at all interested in technique, she was only interested in art, and she was trained as a painter. And the art that she did -- her textile art was more things like embroidery art. She'd use anything that she felt would get her idea across, so she wasn't limited to just being a weaver or just being a textile printer or just being a painter. So that was really good for me because I was pretty inflated with my idea of how much technique I knew by that time. And I thought it was the be all and end all, really, even though I was trying to stretch it, but I still thought that just learn more and more and more technique and you'll get better and better and better at what you do.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: And she kind of just very gently put a pin in that balloon. She said technique is cheap. And I was insulted and hurt that anybody could say that after, you know, I'd worked so hard to learn these things. But now I know what she means, you know. Technique is a tool, that's all. You have to have something that you want to do with it. Anybody can learn technique.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Did she have an interest in contemporary painting to speak of?

MS. CAREY: She may have, but she really didn't bring that in that much. She probably had more of an interest in it than I was aware of.

MR. ADAMSON: But you yourself didn't particularly have an interest in contemporary art outside of the textile field at that time?

MS. CAREY: Not that much, although I had one professor in Milwaukee that I thought was really amazing. Well, there were several that were very good. I can't remember his first name, but his last name was [Laurence] Rathsack. And he's a painter, a watercolor painter. And he led a seminar of graduate students across the board, not just textile people, of course, everybody. And it was an evening thing. We'd meet, I think, once a week or so and go over, and we'd talk, he'd talk. We had subjects that we talked about.

And one night we persuaded him to show slides of his own work and talk about his own work, and he was transformed. He showed slides of his work, and his work was practically invisible. He worked with just the impressions of things. A little glow of light. Practically nothing there. You had to really strain to see what was in this painting. They were elegant, almost like Oriental paintings. Not really, but that sense.

And one of the things about him was that the man was nearly blind. And he said, "This is how I see." And I thought that was pretty remarkable that somebody with such a visual disability would paint. But he hadn't always been blind, of course, just kind of worked into it.

And one of the other things that he said that really impressed me was that when he was a student, he was a house painter. And he said, "If I had continued painting houses, I would have turned into a house painter, but I chose art and I've turned into an artist." And I thought that was so interesting; that what you choose to do in your life really ultimately defines you, so you have to be kind of careful what you choose to do in your life and what you choose to take in and make your own, because you will become that. And so that really impressed me. I guess he said it at just exactly the right time.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, because you were really at a crossroads in your own life at the time.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. Yeah. So I liked Rathsack a lot. And Ruthie "Woo" was a wonderful influence in my life because we became such good friends because I was driving back and forth. Driving in the winter between Milwaukee and Madison, lots of times the weather would really turn on me, and so she'd put me up at her house. And we'd sit up late and talk, just talk, you know, about everything, her life, my life, art, what we were doing, what we wanted to do, people we were working with. And the whole thing was really, really wonderful.

MR. ADAMSON: So she was a big influence on you?

MS. CAREY: Very big influence on me.

MR. ADAMSON: What happened to her eventually?

MS. CAREY: She contracted lung cancer or -- I'm not sure it was lung cancer, but anyway, it was extensive cancer, and she died maybe 10 years or so ago. She was only in her '50s.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow. What a shame.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm.

MR. ADAMSON: So she was actually younger than you.

MS. CAREY: She may have been younger than me. Well, she died 10 years ago and she was in her 50s. We might have been about the same age.

MR. ADAMSON: And she taught at UW up until she passed away?

MS. CAREY: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And you continued to be a friend of hers?

MS. CAREY: Yeah, after she was -- after I was out of my educational experience.

MR. ADAMSON: So you finished up your MFA in --

MS. CAREY: 1976.

MR. ADAMSON: --'76, okay. And at that point you must have had kind of a decision on your hands as to what you were going to do at that point.

MS. CAREY: No, it was really easy because -- well, Larry didn't get tenure.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh.

MS. CAREY: And so they were looking for a weaving professor and they hired me. So I just lucked out.

MR. ADAMSON: What became of Larry?

MS. CAREY: He did a lot of independent work for a while. He was doing commission work. There are several big pieces around town that he's done. And then gradually he lost interest in weaving, and I think now he's -- I'm not sure where he's working right now, but the last I heard, he was a personnel person at CUNA [Credit Union National Association]. I hope I got that right. But anyway, he's out of the weaving business now.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So you sort of moved into his job.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, I moved into his job.

MR. ADAMSON: And you were in charge of the department.

MS. CAREY: Well, yeah, such as it was. There was only me.

MR. ADAMSON: So you suddenly had a lot of responsibility.

MS. CAREY: Yes, and I really loved it. Really loved it. At that time they were still teaching weaving to the physical therapy students; they're not doing that anymore. But the physical therapy students, I had two beginning classes with them and then one beginning class of people who were in interior design and art and, you know, the rest of them. And I loved the PT students. They were really sharp. They were really good. And the other students were good too, but they weren't necessarily as driven. The PT students had to get good grades, and they had to learn these things because it was part of their job, so they were really motivated, whereas some of my other students were just taking it because they had to have something in the textile area and they weren't particularly interested in it necessarily.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: I had some excellent students, but by and large I liked the PT students the best.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you follow up on what Larry had done, had taken these students to meet weavers and elsewhere?

MS. CAREY: I did, but not necessarily the beginning students because I was too busy. I don't know how he did that, but I felt like I was too busy. When I was teaching the advanced classes, then we would take field trips, and I had seminars and I'd bring people in.

MR. ADAMSON: So where would you go, or who would you have to come in?

MS. CAREY: Let's see. We had a number of people come in. We're getting back in history here.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: We had one wonderful seminar. Pat Mansfield, who was a professor here at the time, and I did a seminar for graduate students on the business of art. And we brought in a gallery person, a lawyer who could talk about art issues, somebody who could deal with things like patents and copyright, several successful -- perceived to be successful -- individual artists. I can't remember who all, but we brought in lots of people who were in the business end of art. And it was a real eye-opener for me!

MR. ADAMSON: I can imagine.

MS. CAREY: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Sounds quite progressive, actually.

MS. CAREY: It was really a good class and people really took it seriously. I don't think anything at that time was being done in the art department; there might be now. But somehow business was always kind of a dirty word, like you shouldn't be paying attention to that. You know, your mind is up here someplace. But you'd have to pay some attention to it.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MS. CAREY: Just practical stuff, like get a business card, for Pete's sake.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Speaking of that, were you selling your own work at that time?

MS. CAREY: I was afraid you were going to ask me if I have business card, which I don't.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.] I have one that's so old I wouldn't even trot it out. I think it still says "assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: Let's see, when did I start selling my work? Certainly not when I was a graduate student. Somebody might have bought a piece out of charity. But no, actually I did sell a piece at the Union. There was a show at the Memorial Union and somebody bought it. So I guess I did sell a piece while I was still a graduate student, but I didn't see that as the direction I was going.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. And you weren't selling your work systematically or ambitiously at all.

MS. CAREY: Uh-uh. No. Not at all. I didn't have a clue how to go about it. I wasn't really interested in it. I was really interested in getting into shows because as a new professor, you've got to start adding to that resume. And that isn't selling work; that's getting into shows, and getting things published.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. And were you successful at that the first couple years of your --

MS. CAREY: Yeah, I was pretty successful at it. Uh-huh.

MR. ADAMSON: You're talking about shows in galleries and museums?

MS. CAREY: Shows in galleries and museums, invitational shows, juried shows, that kind of thing. I entered everything that came along there for a while. I'd go through the back of magazines and pick things out and send in my slides and my 20 bucks or whatever, or if it's an invitational, where you don't have to send the 20 bucks.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. And were these all around the country or mostly around here?

MS. CAREY: All around the country, yeah. I think it was another lucky stroke, because weaving was having quite a little surge of revival, and especially the kind of weaving that I was doing right then. People who were doing kind of technically based art weaving were not a dime a dozen at that point.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: They aren't now either, I don't think. So I was in the right place at the right time.

MR. ADAMSON: Because your work stuck out a little bit?

MS. CAREY: Yeah. My work stuck out a little bit.

MR. ADAMSON: Didn't look like macramé, right? [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: Not at all. [Laughs.] Yeah. So I got into a lot of shows, and I got busy and wrote articles and had people write articles about me. And that's where the old English major actually came in handy.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, because you could actually control the language.

MS. CAREY: I could actually, yep, put a sentence together.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Where were you publishing?

MS. CAREY: *Fiber Arts*; *Weavers Journal*; *Shuttle, Spindle & Dye Pot*. Those three come to mind. Have a lot of articles, I think, in all three of those.

MR. ADAMSON: And you were writing mostly technical, "how to" articles, or --

MS. CAREY: Both. Both. But yeah, most of them were technical articles.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: I was good at that, so that's what I did.

MR. ADAMSON: So were there any shows that you got into at that stage that seemed particularly important to you at the time? Should we look at your [referring to written materials] --

MS. CAREY: I have to think. Boy, this is getting back.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: Oh, there was in Milwaukee I think probably the first show I got into that I thought was -- gee, doesn't this go back far enough? [Referring to written materials.]

MR. ADAMSON: "Cosmic Women." That sounds interesting. [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: Yeah, "Cosmic Women." No, that wasn't it. There was another one, at the art museum in Milwaukee. Hmm. I don't know. It doesn't seem to be on here. Too old, I guess.

Anyway, I got a piece into that show, and at the time it seemed like a pretty important show, so I was very happy about that.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you involved in any groups, like the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen, or whatever they were called?

MS. CAREY: I was a member. Yes. In fact, that was a Wisconsin Designer show.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: Here we are! 1972, '73 and '75, the Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen show in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I didn't put down the art center, but that's where they were.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Because they had been doing a whole series of shows there, I think all the way back to the 1950s, if I'm not mistaken.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. Yeah. I remember one of the first shows I saw that was really impressive to me was the Johnson Collection.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, the "Objects: USA" show?

MS. CAREY: Yes, "Objects: USA."

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, you saw that?

MS. CAREY: I saw that. That was at the museum in Milwaukee.

MR. ADAMSON: Huh.

MS. CAREY: It was fabulous. Just "Wow!"

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. I bet. I've actually done a lot of study of that show, so I'm particularly interested in it. But what was your impression of it? I mean, aside from it being important and large.

MS. CAREY: I was just so interested to see how people approach design with these different materials. All of the materials, but of course I was especially interested in fiber. And let's see, it's not Alma Lesch, but there was another fiber artist at the time who was just doing white on white. She did a series, I think they were of letters, and of course they were not legible letters but just the suggestion of words on a page. So very subtle. I thought that was just wonderful. I think the simplicity of some of the pieces in that show really impressed me artistically.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So was that the first time that you experienced the studio craft movement as a large phenomenon?

MS. CAREY: Might have been.

MR. ADAMSON: Different media?

MS. CAREY: Might have been, yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you had sort of been in the textile world, right?

MS. CAREY: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And you didn't have particularly strong connections to the people in the other departments, like metals or pottery?

MS. CAREY: No. No. There was very little connection between the art department and the home ec department at that time.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So there was that artificial division.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. Very annoying for students who really want to bridge that gap. I think it's much, much easier now for people to do that.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Okay. That's interesting that you saw that show, since it's a sort of pet interest of mine.

MS. CAREY: Ah. Yeah. Yeah, the catalogue's right down here on the shelf, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were getting into shows and writing a lot and becoming more of a professional, essentially.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: We mentioned a couple minutes ago the change from weaving to sewing.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: And when did that happen, and how and why?

MS. CAREY: It happened sort of by accident, to begin with. I was in a small group of artists here in Madison at the time that I was still a graduate student, and we just informally pulled ourselves together. I think there were 12 of us. And we decided just for fun to make a group quilt, and each one of us would make, for some reason, 24 -- oh, it was the day-and-night quilt. It was a day-and-night quilt, so we each made 12 day squares and we each made 12 night squares. And then we had a big party. We had parties all the time, but we had a big party where we exchanged pieces, and all the pieces were just in stacks, you know. We'd go around and pick up our pieces. And so we all wound up with 24 squares.

And then we had scheduled a show at the Union with this day-and-night quilt show. And we could put them together, of course, any way we wanted to. We're artists. So there were two squares in there that I knew I had to include for the sake of the show, but I didn't really want to because they were done on crummy fabric. Now I cherish these squares because the person who made them is dead, but at the time, I thought, "Gee, cheapskate."

So I didn't want those squares -- [laughs] -- so I wanted to figure out a way of making the quilt in a way that would be good for the show but then I could take it apart and put it together some other way. So I figured out a system of buttons and buttonholes so that all the pieces buttoned together. And they could be buttoned together in any configuration that you liked, but as 24, you know, it was four-by-six and that was very nice for the show, and then I could take it all apart and throw out those two squares. [Laughs.]

Which I never did, of course. But that was the first maybe fiber thing I made with an intention of showing it and kind of taking it a little bit seriously beyond, you know, just my own explorations and fiddling around. And that turned out to be a really wonderful experience. That's probably the first real, actual big wall quilt that I made. I still have it, of course, along with most of everything else I've made.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.] So I used that idea again, the button-together quilt, to make another one with puzzle pieces.

MR. ADAMSON: And this one was just yours.

MS. CAREY: This one was just mine. And I think that's the one that got into the first Quilt National, was the puzzle-piece quilt. It was just either curves or crossroads, and so it would fit together any way that you wanted.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. I see.

MS. CAREY: And that was fun to do.

MR. ADAMSON: This was a modular idea.

MS. CAREY: Modular idea, uh-huh, which is, of course, just the basis of quilting.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: But you don't usually get to take the quilt apart and put it together some other way. So that was fun to do.

And I made a third, really huge quilt. I don't know if I was still a graduate student or if I was already through being a graduate student. And it was three-dimensional. It was braided pieces or woven pieces, and this was all sewn together; it didn't come apart. But that also got into a show up in Green Bay. Yeah, Green Bay. And I think that was kind of the end of my great big, huge quilts, because you can't store the darn things, you know. I still have them in the basement. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: I didn't realize that you were quilting and weaving side by side for quite a while.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, they were kind of side by side for a while. And with that class that I taught with Pat Mansfield where we brought in all those professionals, and we started talking about doing the stationery and contacting galleries and letting your name be known and all this stuff, I began to think, "I think I'd like to do that myself." And about the time that we taught the class, I got a grant from the university. It was a nice, big development grant, $5,000 a year for five years, which I could spend any way I wanted as long as it supported my art.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MS. CAREY: It was fabulous. And so that, coupled with taking this class and already having some success doing the fiber pieces, I -- consciously or unconsciously -- decided to abandon weaving, because it's very slow and labor intensive. And the pieces I was making were getting to be smaller and smaller and smaller. I started to work with very fine sewing thread, and I was making things that were a maximum six inches square. Little bitty things. And I knew I couldn't possibly make a living on these things. They were too labor intensive; I couldn't sell them for what they were worth. So I began to look toward the sewing, which, while it's picky and labor intensive in one way, it's nothing like weaving, at least not the way I was weaving.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: So I decided to use that five years in the grant to work myself out of a job and go independent.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: And I did. It all just came out even. By the time the grant was done, I had quit my job. So that really worked well.

MR. ADAMSON: So you quit your job teaching entirely.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: And by that time, you had pretty much made the transition from weaving to quilting entirely as well.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, by that time, I think I was only weaving gifts at that point. I wove a rug for my son and his wife when they got married. That was the last thing I wove. They've been married 14 years. It's been a long time.

MR. ADAMSON: So, was quilting very different from weaving for you as an experience of how to spend your time and how to be in the studio?

MS. CAREY: Yes, although I dragged along a lot of my weaving thinking to quilting. I'm probably more systematic about planning things out in advance than maybe most quilters are. My sense is that most people who work with art quilts have a degree of spontaneity that I don't have.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: Sometimes spontaneity will get in there and it really surprises me and I really like it, but I can't count on it, so I pretty much plan things out. And I think that comes out from my weaving experience, because you had to plan everything right down to a gnat's eyebrow before you started.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: Pretty much. At least the way I was doing it.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So it wasn't a radically different thing.

MS. CAREY: Well, it's radically different in that I felt like instead of working with these microscopic elements, I could work with planes, so it's much less linear and more planar. And that's a very big difference. Even if you are planning things out in advance, that the ready component is something that you can add or you can capitalize on in some way, but it's not the essence of the thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. You know, what's interesting to me about this transition is that it doesn't sound like you particularly preferred quilting over weaving; it was just that it made more sense for you logistically.

MS. CAREY: Yes. And I think it was a new challenge, too, and I like a new challenge.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: So I hope I don't need another new challenge.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.] I'd like to stick with this one now for the duration.

MR. ADAMSON: You really came across art quilting at exactly the right time, too, because that's when it was really starting, correct?

MS. CAREY: Yeah, I really did. And it's kind of amazing because I didn't know anything about art quilters. I'd never heard of people like Nancy Crow and Michael James and people who were making a name for themselves already in that area. I just didn't know them.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: And so I backed into it, in a way.

MR. ADAMSON: You mentioned that you got into the first Quilt National with that jigsaw puzzle quilt. Can you talk a little bit about that event?

MS. CAREY: I didn't go. I didn't realize how important it was, and I didn't go. I wish I had. I didn't give it any more weight than other juried shows that I was getting into at the time.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: It just came along and I entered it and I got in. And I thought, "Well, sure."

MR. ADAMSON: "Send a quilt."

MS. CAREY: Of course. That's no longer so true, because so many more people are working in this area.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: So I can't really say a whole lot about it. Looking back on it, that was really lucky. What was that,

1989, '87?

MR. ADAMSON: No, it must have been about -- I thought it was in the '70s, the first Quilt National.

MS. CAREY: Oh, of course. We're talking '77 or '79.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes. I would have said '79.

MS. CAREY: [Referring to written materials.] '79, Quilt National. There it is. Athens, Ohio.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. And these are the famous Dairy Barn shows.

MS. CAREY: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Because they're actually held in a dairy barn.

MS. CAREY: They actually are held in a dairy barn. I have been there a couple of times. I've had five or six pieces in Quilt National. And going is such a great experience. It's so much fun.

MR. ADAMSON: Because there are so many quilters there?

MS. CAREY: Yeah! And now I know a lot of them, you know, so it's really a wonderful reunion. But the first time I went, you know, I was sitting like a kid at the adult table. I thought, "Oh, man, I've heard these names, and here they are, these famous people." It was just wonderful.

MR. ADAMSON: So you really experienced yourself as being junior to a lot of the other quilters?

MS. CAREY: Yeah. And I still feel that way to a certain extent, because there's a whole practically -- I can't say a generation, because they're probably my age, but they started working in this area before I did.

MR. ADAMSON: Started in the late '60s, maybe?

MS. CAREY: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you talk about some of the people who you really see as pioneers in the field of art quilting?

MS. CAREY: Well, certainly the two I mentioned, Michael James and Nancy Crow, come to mind immediately, because they've been not only enormously successful and do fabulous work, but they've been so influential.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: You know, they've really made opportunities for other people and put art quilting on the map. So those two I'd say come to mind immediately.

Yvonne Porcella, again another person who's a fabulous artist herself. But maybe her main significance is that she's made it possible for other people to become professionally involved. She's sponsored things and she's done a lot of writing and a lot of teaching, and she started the SAQA organization along with some other people. It's the Studio Art Quilt Association, which I think has been going now for, I don't know, 10 or 12 years.

And people like that who are willing to take time out of their studio to make it possible for other people to succeed, that's really amazing.

MR. ADAMSON: Who were the original sponsors of the Quilt National? Who got that going?

MS. CAREY: Well, I always think of Hillary Fletcher being connected with it, but --

MR. ADAMSON: She's also a quilt artist?

MS. CAREY: No. If she is, that's not what she's known for. I don't know who else would have started that. Maybe just the Dairy Barn Art Association, or whatever they call themselves. They have other shows there. I think there's a beadwork show and some other shows that they have there. So I don't know if this was, like, the beginning of the Dairy Barn. I don't know how long that thing has been an art center.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. I actually don't -- her name is?

MS. CAREY: Hillary Fletcher.

MR. ADAMSON: Hillary Fletcher. I don't know about her.

MS. CAREY: She has been the big organizer of Quilt National. And I don't think she's in that role now. She may have kind of retired from that. But for the first several years, anyway, Hillary was the name. And she has contacts all over the world.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: Everybody knows Hillary Fletcher. Yeah. She has two of my pieces.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Oh, so she's a collector, as well.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. Their house is completely full of quilts, wonderful work.

MR. ADAMSON: And does she live down there in Athens?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. The times when we've gone down there for the Quilt National party, there's a party just for the artists at Hillary's house, her and her husband, the night before the Quilt National party or the night after, one or the other. Big pizza party. Everybody crams into her rather small house and we just have a great time.

MR. ADAMSON: I think we're about to enter the stage where we're going to be talking about your career per se as a quilter, so maybe what we should do is take a break now.

MS. CAREY: Sounds good to me.

MR. ADAMSON: And then come back. So we'll do that and come back in a minute.

[Break in the interview.]

[BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE A.]

MR. ADAMSON: This is Disk 2 of the interview with Joyce Marquess Carey on June 16, 2002.

Okay, we're going to now talk about your early career as a quilter in the late 1970s, I guess we are at this point, right?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: So you didn't have a gallery at any stage, is that correct?

MS. CAREY: Off and on. Off and on. I was with the Fanny Garver Gallery here in Madison for a while. I'm not sure what the time period was.

MR. ADAMSON: Fanny Garver?

MS. CAREY: Fanny Garver on State Street. She's been in business for a long time.

MR. ADAMSON: And she's still there?

MS. CAREY: The gallery's still there. I think she's retired.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Was that only textiles, or was it a range of things?

MS. CAREY: No, all different kinds of things. Not that many textiles, actually.

MR. ADAMSON: And anything farther away from home as consistent venues to sell your work?

MS. CAREY: I was with Mindscape in Chicago for a while. And what did they call themselves, up in Minneapolis? It wasn't Textile Arts, I don't think. Can't remember the name of it. But they were exclusively a textile gallery, and they did really well for me. And right now I'm represented by the Connell [Great American] Gallery in Atlanta [Georgia].

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, Martha Connell? Really?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. I know her pretty well, actually.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. She's really nice.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, she's great.

MS. CAREY: And other than that, I've worked almost exclusively through art consultants and interior designers and architects.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think that quilters are more likely to work through non-gallery sale situations than people in other media?

MS. CAREY: Ah, that's a good question. I really don't know the answer to that because the quilters that I know generally, I think, work through galleries mostly. I don't know too many people that do the kind of work that I do, which is really mostly commissioned.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. When did you -- you had made those three quilts, right? At some point there you must have realized that you were going to be a quilter, at least to a large extent, if not exclusively.

MS. CAREY: My interest was definitely shifting away from weaving. And because of that class that we taught that I mentioned, these people came in and talked about how to go into business for yourself, and it began to sound like a really good idea, and I realized that what I wanted to do was to make work that was sold before I made it. That I didn't just want things to be piling up, because I had, you know, dozens and dozens of weavings that were kind of under the bed, and I just didn't see myself doing that for the rest of my life. So the only answer for that is commission work.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: And so I really made a conscious effort to get into the commission-work area.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you go about doing that?

MS. CAREY: I put out a mailing. I put together a nice letter and some pictures of my work and described what I do. And I put in a return postcard. You know, "If you would like me to come and have an appointment with you, please tick in this box," that kind of thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Making it easy for people, right?

MS. CAREY: Yes, making it very easy for people. And I went through the phone book and all the art consultants and interior designers and architects and galleries and anybody that seemed to be connected with art. I think I sent out something like 120 pieces of mail; just try this. And I got back a 20 percent response rate of people that wanted me to pursue it.

MR. ADAMSON: Not bad. And had you included only quilt images when you sent that out?

MS. CAREY: That's all I had. Yeah, I wasn't going to promote my weaving because it's too slow. I didn't know how to price it or anything.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: And I was just taking a guess at how to price the quilting. But I knew I could do it for a lot less than I could do weaving.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you calculate the price? Was it by hour that you figured it would take you?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. Yeah, I tried to figure out what it would take me in terms of hours and materials and what I thought was a reasonable amount to be making for that effort and time. And it came down to something really low. I'm not even going to mention the price. But it's gone up a lot since then.

MR. ADAMSON: Good. [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: Yeah. But this probably was my appeal, was that I was willing to work for so cheap.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that's how you have to start.

MS. CAREY: But I got some really nice jobs out of that almost immediately. I did a piece with Don Reppen, who's an architect and interior designer here in Madison. He was working on a site in Milwaukee, San Camillo Retirement Center. They were looking for a giant cross. And so that was one of my first really big commissioned pieces.

MR. ADAMSON: A giant cross-shaped quilt?

MS. CAREY: No, a cross as in the religious imagery and within a rectangle.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, the cross was the image within a rectangle.

MS. CAREY: And then also a man in Oak Brook, Illinois, had seen my work at Fanny Garver's. And I didn't realize that he had seen my work at Fanny Garver's, because we shouldn't have done it this way. But he was just in charge of redecorating their real estate office down there, and that included two enormous walls in the dining room. And he asked me to come down there and take a look at these walls.

And he had this idea for what he wanted on these walls, and it included things like ice cream sundaes and hot dogs with the mustard dripping off and all that stuff. And I learned right there on the spot that you don't reject a job and you don't say, "No, I won't do that." I just said, "That's interesting, let me think about that." And I came up with food imagery but in a completely different format, sort of a trapunto kind of effect, so the food's kind of invisible. And he liked the idea. He's not an artist, so you've got to kind of sell him on things.

So I did two pieces for that outfit, and they were both 20 feet long and four feet high. So between those and the ones for San Camillo, I kind of got launched in doing very large pieces. It's not an area that a lot of people do.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Right. And you've continued to do that.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, it's kind of my specialty.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you have difficulty maintaining control over the composition as you work through it because of the size ever?

MS. CAREY: No. No. I think it goes back to my weaving background.

MR. ADAMSON: Pre-planning.

MS. CAREY: Where I'm used to planning and having everything roll up in my lap, and I can't see it till it's all done. And so lots of times I don't get to see the piece until it's on the wall. And so far, so good; no bad surprises.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Right.

MS. CAREY: The middle chunk isn't upside down or something.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] That would be embarrassing. So it must be like Christmas when you unfurl the --

MS. CAREY: Oh, it's wonderful! Yeah. Yeah. It's a real high. There's usually a lot of people around because these pieces are big and they're very hard to install. Well, they're not hard to install, but lots of times they're way high up on the wall, and so I've got to have people with scaffolding or with cherry pickers or whatever. And we oftentimes get somebody like the maintenance man or the electrician or whoever happens to be around, and then sometimes the art consultant is there, and my husband and I are there, you know, whoever else is there, and it's kind of like, uncork the champagne. It's really a nice moment.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

Can we talk a little bit about the way that you go about designing? We talked a little bit at lunch about your appreciation of pattern and what's essentially abstraction as a means of working. And maybe you could talk a little bit about that but also talk about how you go about coming up with a design for a specific client once you know that you have a commission.

MS. CAREY: [Noises in the background.] My husband's coming in. I don't know if you want to stop this.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure. Let's take a quick break.

[Break in the interview.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So when you go about designing for a specific client, how do you get from the point of talking to them about what they want to the point of actually realizing the design?

MS. CAREY: It helps to have conversations with more than one person if possible. My favorite commissions are actually with a committee, because people have a lot of really good ideas and I just listen. I listen to how the space is used. It's helpful to have colors if they really think it's important to match something. I get, you know, little samples of stuff that's in the site, wall coverings and all that kind of thing. But people know more than they

think they do, and they often will come up with kind of a thread, something that I can sort of bounce off of a little bit. So I really like to just -- that listening phase is really important.

Sometimes that doesn't happen. Sometimes you just say, well, you know, you've got a 12-foot wall and a small budget, and what can you come up with in green? And that's got its own kind of liberty, but it's much more engaging and much more fun if the space is actually used for something that suggests an image of some sort. I can almost always come up with something that is either regional or it's tied to the building use.

For instance, I did a piece for Mankato State University. And they had a big wall --

MR. ADAMSON: This is in Minnesota?

MS. CAREY: Yeah, Mankato, Minnesota. They had a big wall, but it was in a hallway, a big, wide hallway. At one end of the hallway was the preschool education department, and at the other end of the hallway were the architecture students. And at the preschool end they had a display case where they had a set of -- I'm not sure how to pronounce it -- Froebel blocks. And they're very proud of these. They came from the original days of having the nursery school there. And then of course at the other end they're learning how to put these elements together.

And when you drive into town, one of the first things you see is this amazing courthouse, so I did a cityscape with the baby blocks thing, with sort of three-dimensional blocks that kind of rose up and became buildings, and with this stylized courthouse more or less in the middle, which indicates Mankato. And I just called it *Building Blocks* because the kids at one end of the hall are learning the same things, basically, as the people at the other end of the hall are learning. So that just came together really well.

MR. ADAMSON: That's great. It's very tight.

MS. CAREY: A lot of things like that really do come together very well. I did a piece in Madison for Harambee South Madison Medical Center. And this was another case where I got to work with a committee and there were lots of people involved. There was a woman from the nursery school that's there, a person from public health, a person from the library.

Anyway, at the time that I did this piece, there were seven agencies that were under one roof, and the thing that they wanted to emphasize is how they work together to make this place happen, and that they serve a very diverse population. So I designed a piece that's a seven-strand braid, and it has as much ethnic fabric as I could locate. I had Indonesian stuff, I had stuff with an African theme to it, I had Japanese fabrics. So it sounds like kind of a nightmare, but it actually worked out really well. So they've got the seven-strand braid that sort of runs across the wall for 20 feet.

That's how I get my ideas. It's much easier if I have people to work with that really are looking for something than it is if they just kind of say, "Well, you know, here's this big wall and here's our budget, just go to it."

MR. ADAMSON: Right. But it's very site-specific.

MS. CAREY: It's pretty site-specific. I did a big piece for a wall in Tallahassee, Florida. This was for a public -- Percent for Art project for the Auditor General Building, and that was a case of designing sort of sight unseen. But I got some books on the Native Americans of the area and the kinds of designs that they do, and it's the "sunshine state" and so on. So I did what really turned out to be kind of a big -- well, a sunburst. It's called *Sunburst*, and it has Seminole patterns on the bottom and then this kind of ray pattern that comes out like a sunrise. It's 25 feet long, 13 feet high.

MR. ADAMSON: So the pieces that you make are large enough that they really take a big role in the architecture, essentially.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: Do you often find yourself responding to the actual building itself?

MS. CAREY: Yes, in some cases where the building's already built. Sometimes the building isn't already built.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh. [Laughs.] That makes it hard.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. It's kind of nice in a way because then sometimes I get a special wall. You know, they'll either set it aside as far as color goes or make an inset or do something that accommodates the art.

MR. ADAMSON: They actually know a quilt is going there.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. But sometimes -- let's see, I'm trying to think what was a good building that suggested something. Well, sometimes you really are dictated by the space that's available. There was a piece I did for UPPCO, which is Upper Peninsula Power Company, in Michigan. And the space they had available for a piece of artwork was behind the reception desk, and the space was about eight feet wide and about 30 feet high. So I did a piece that was about four by 20 or 25, I think, to go there. I never could get a decent picture of it because it was a short reception area and a tall wall. So I don't really have a good picture of it in the site.

MR. ADAMSON: So you're looking up at it.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Well, it seems like the demands of the particular project, then, are a big part of what motivates your design process, the specificity.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. The most exciting was -- I did two pieces for Central Plains Clinic in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Their population is mostly Sioux, and so I could use Sioux design. I didn't want to replicate it. I couldn't possibly replicate it, but I took inspiration from those designs and made two big pieces for each end of the atrium area. So it was a great space and a good jumping-off point.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I guess what I'm wondering is, you know, apart from the circumstances of each particular occasion or each particular commission, how do you think about the style in which you work? There is a certain kind of coherence to your work. You know, all of your pieces look like they're by you, and there are some motifs that pop up with a fair amount of frequency, as well.

MS. CAREY: I like optical illusions a lot. I really think that's fun. I like it when people stand back and are surprised that something turns out to be flat. And so that's where the use of color and shading come in.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: And also -- from my weaving background again, I'm sure -- I tend to work in little narrow strips, and so those little narrow strips are almost like working with thread, in a way, except they're an inch wide instead of teensy-weensy wide.

MR. ADAMSON: Goes a little faster.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. So I sort of think in terms of color progressions that can be built up in these strips.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. And that's pretty much constant across your work?

MS. CAREY: It pretty much is constant across my commission work, not so much my personal work. I tend to work more with pictorial stuff with my own work, but for the commission work I've tended to kind of stick with that. And I like to do things that are playful. I like wordplay. I think wordplay and working with optical illusions just go hand in hand, you know, because it's kind of the unexpected thing. And I love to --

MR. ADAMSON: There are two levels of meaning.

MS. CAREY: Two levels, yeah. I always like titles that are kind of a little ambiguous and a little surprising, so that they really suggest something else beyond.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: What else do I look for? I tend to work in very bright colors. Not always. If there's a specific place where they really want, you know, puce and olive green, I'll do it, but --

MR. ADAMSON: It's not your first instinct.

MS. CAREY: It's not my first instinct, no. I tend to work in rainbow colors a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: So that's your sense of what looks good, as well as the fact that bright colors work better for a public commission.

MS. CAREY: Well, at one point I figured out that I was using colors that are available in Prismacolor pencils, and I thought, "Oh, boy, time to -- [laughs] -- time to break out of this mold." But I do. I guess I just really do like luscious fabrics and metallics and bright colors.

MR. ADAMSON: When you say luscious, what do you mean? On a more technical level, what do you look for in a fabric?

MS. CAREY: I'll sew with anything. I made a piece for somebody once that has plastic in it because she wanted this particular fabric that was used as part of her upholstery. And I thought, "Why not?" You know? You can sew it. It's a plane. And I use a lot of metallics. I use silk. I use different kinds of satins. I tend to only use polyester satins at this point because they're more colorfast. And I stay away from certain things that have turned out to be known faders, because I really would like people to be happy 20 years down the line.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Yeah, we talked about that a little bit at lunch. But you don't let yourself get consumed by the archival or light-protective qualities of the work.

MS. CAREY: No. No. For public spaces and for commissioned work in general in corporate spaces, they're always redecorating anyway. The UPPCO thing, for instance -- that whole building's been sold and they're out of there. I don't know whatever became of the artwork.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. CAREY: And the artwork still had many years left in it, I'm sure. And then for people's private space, I'm more fussy, I think, about things really lasting for a long time, because if a family has ponied up a pretty good chunk of change for an artwork, they don't want it to be disappearing on the wall.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So that doesn't bother you that a company might cease to exist and therefore your work might cease to exist?

MS. CAREY: Well, this is the first time it's really been brought to my attention. I'm sure it's happened and I just haven't heard about it. I think it would have been a nice courtesy if they had asked me if I would like to have it back if they were just going to trash it, but if they sold it, I guess it's theirs to sell.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: You know, it's not mine anymore.

MR. ADAMSON: So you don't keep track of where your works are and where they go?

MS. CAREY: I know where they went, but I don't know where they went after that.

MR. ADAMSON: It's a hard thing to keep track of, I'm sure.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, I think so. Nobody keeps me informed. I know there are things like resale kinds of things and copyright laws and all that stuff that I probably should be paying attention to as far as things being sold down the line. I think the artist is supposed to realize some percentage of that if the price has gone up, but I have no idea where things go.

MR. ADAMSON: Things will probably start popping up at Sotheby's and --

MS. CAREY: Oh, yeah, I'm sure. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Have you ever actually had a piece returned to you because the site where it was located was now going to be defunct?

MS. CAREY: Only a private collector returned a piece to me because he was moving into a small apartment and didn't have any wall space, and he thought that I would like to have it back.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: I wasn't thrilled to have it back, actually, because in my mind, it was gone. You know, I wouldn't have cared if he had given it to a friend or something.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: I might have cared if he had given it to Goodwill.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] That's a little demoralizing.

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.] Or in the composter.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Well, getting back to the design issue, we had mentioned op art, which is something that was particularly interesting to you.

MS. CAREY: That was something that was very interesting to me when I was first starting out, which was about

the right time for that. The work of Bridget Riley, for instance, and -- what was his name?

MR. ADAMSON: Victor Vasarely, maybe?

MS. CAREY: Yes. Him for sure. And I want to say [Richard] Anuszkiewicz [abstract bioptical painter], but that's a fiber artist. No, Anuszkiewicz, that's right. It's [Magdalena] Abakanowicz [sculptor] that's the fiber artist.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Right.

MS. CAREY: Slipping away. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Really close.

MS. CAREY: Anyway, I was really fascinated with his work because not only is it op art, but he uses color so well.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: Just magically. So I was really attracted to his work. But I don't know if any of that's actually translated over. I was more interested when I was weaving than now, but it did sort of open my eyes to just pattern about pattern, just doing things because they hold as a design and not necessarily as a concept. Just as, you know, pattern on pattern.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. It's interesting because op art, I remember reading some things that were written about it in the period and even today, and I think people have some trouble with it because they thought that it was too much like fabric, almost, so it wasn't enough like painting, you know, which is an interesting connection.

MS. CAREY: Uh-huh.

MR. ADAMSON: Getting into a more philosophical issue, do you ever worry about your work being seen as decorative?

MS. CAREY: I know sometimes it is seen as decorative, and I don't worry about that, particularly if it's commissioned work, because usually that's the main thing. They are really looking for something big to cover the wall and be decorative. And my own private work, I think, tends to be a little less decorative, but if somebody wants to call it decorative, that doesn't really -- so far it doesn't bother me that much, because I think people just sort of connect textiles with being decorative and are less likely to take it seriously. So you can kind of excuse them; you know, consider the source kind of thing. There's so much serious fiber that's being done now, that people who know what they're looking at I don't think dismiss it as decorative.

MR. ADAMSON: So you do experience there being a difference between different parts of your work, where some of them seem more decorative to you than others?

MS. CAREY: I think of my work as having basically three prongs to it. The commissioned work, which is how I make a living of sorts, is, I'd say, 100 percent decorative. My philosophy behind that kind of work is I want people to feel really good when they're in a space. A lot of my work is for hospitals, for schools, for clinics, a medical situation, churches, that kind of thing, and I want people to feel a little sense of elation. So it's decorative.

MR. ADAMSON: Decorative in the sense that it conditions the space?

MS. CAREY: I think so.

MR. ADAMSON: It's a better space.

MS. CAREY: Generally -- my model for doing public work, I think, was -- what was his name, [Laszlo] Moholy-Nagy?

MR. ADAMSON: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MS. CAREY: -- who did a series of pieces out west of town called *Prairie Ship*. I think it was called *Prairie Ship*. And they were huge sails on poles, like telephone poles only even bigger. They were huge nylon sails with the hardware of sails, so they kind of rang and rattled as you came up to them, and they flapped in the wind. And you could see them for miles. And people would come up and they'd approach these pieces and you could just see the joy on their faces. For me, that's what I like to see in public art. I know there's a lot of public art that doesn't address that emotion, but that's the one I like to address. I like people to feel joyful when they see my work.

MR. ADAMSON: And maybe a little amazed.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, maybe, hopefully, a little amazed. With a couple of collaborators I do banners downtown every year for the City-County Building. And that's a wonderful public art space. These pieces are 75 feet long and 15 feet high, and every year they are about pattern and color and Madison and joyful things that people like to take part in Madison, like the farmers' market or boats on the lake and that kind of thing. And people love those, and I think that's important.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: It's not what everybody addresses, but it's what I address.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. That's interesting.

MS. CAREY: So that's the public art.

MR. ADAMSON: That's prong one.

MS. CAREY: That's prong one. Then I do smaller pieces that I think of as being fabric about fabric. They're lots of times like a curl coming up off of a bias, or just little flags flapping in the wind or something like that. And they're also joyful, but maybe a little less decorative because I generally have something in mind. And besides, they're a whole lot harder to do, so I've got more invested in them as far as planning and sometimes research and design.

MR. ADAMSON: Why are they harder?

MS. CAREY: I generally -- well, not all of them are harder, but I'm willing to put a lot more time in on something if I'm just thinking about making it for myself, or to go to a show that might be coming up, or for a one-person show, or something like that. So they'll maybe have a lot more pieces, for instance.

MR. ADAMSON: So they're really harder just because you're making them harder on purpose.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. Yeah, on purpose.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: And then the third prong are pictorial works, which I've been doing more and more. And I don't believe that I've ever done a commissioned piece that's pictorial. For one thing, I wouldn't have any idea how to price it, because I don't know how much work or materials or research or anything are going to go into it. So those pieces I just make because usually I've gotten some idea or other based on travel I've taken, or I did a piece once to celebrate the life of a friend who had died. I've done quite a bit of narrative work now.

MR. ADAMSON: When you're in the middle of a narrative piece, do you find yourself changing your mind and improvising more?

MS. CAREY: Yes. A piece like that is always more of a conversation.

MR. ADAMSON: Between you and the piece?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. And the piece has its own idea.

Yeah. I think that's a fascinating thing. And I think this is one reason I've been leaning more toward doing narrative pieces, is that they are full of surprises. The other work, I have it all planned out and I know pretty much how it's going to look. And when I show a picture to a client, that's what they're going to get; it's not going to be full of surprises. But when I'm doing the narrative work, I may think I know how it's going to turn out, but the piece has its own ideas. It always has its own ideas. And things that I thought were going to work just fabulously don't work at all, and something else suggests itself. It's really a dialogue, and it's really exciting because it's kind of new to me in the last few years to be working that way.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think you're going to do more of that?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: Are you more able to work just in the way that you would like to because you don't worry about money so much anymore? Is that accurate or not?

MS. CAREY: That is probably accurate. I'm fortunate to be in a marriage where my husband makes enough

money that if I make some money, that's really nice, but if I don't, we can get along perfectly well.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. While we're on the subject of making the work, can you talk a little bit about the technical aspects of it in terms of, you know, how you think about the backing for the quilt, what you pad it with, if anything, that sort of thing?

MS. CAREY: Oh, sure. Most of my work, not all of it, especially the commissioned work, always is built around a background of Cordura nylon, which is like backpack material.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: And it's very stable. It's supposed to be insect resistant and rot resistant and mildew resistant and so on and so forth.

MR. ADAMSON: Moisture resistant.

MS. CAREY: Moisture resistant. And it just gives me a really good, solid thing to work on because I sew these little strips, and I sew those little strips right on to this nylon backing.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: And I make sure that the grain line of the fabric is perpendicular to the floor so that nothing is going to stretch and pull over time. I hate to see a wall hanging that, you know, you can see the lining, or it's hanging crooked and got big wrinkles in it and stuff. So mine doesn't do that. It always hangs straight. I don't use stuffing in almost anything.

MR. ADAMSON: They're just basically two pieces of fabric?

MS. CAREY: Just basically two layers, yeah. I've started to use bonding in some things, so you might get a third layer, but it's only because it's kind of glued on. But for the front, anything goes. I'll use anything that will bend and sew, although I pretty much stick with commercial fabrics.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. How do you do the sewing itself?

MS. CAREY: I have a commercial -- I have an industrial sewing machine that I use, and the entire front of most of my pieces is machine-sewn. The entire back has tons of hand-finishing on it so that the seams will lie flat and things like that. Sort of like making a coat.

MR. ADAMSON: So you're really pulling things taut from the back?

MS. CAREY: Not necessarily, but if the seams aren't flattened out and sewn down so they stay that way, then there's a little bulge where the seams are. So I want everything to be really nice and flat, so I do a lot of handwork on the back that doesn't show at all. Hours of it.

MR. ADAMSON: It must be very time consuming.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, but I like that part. I have an enormous capacity for boring work.

MR. ADAMSON: And you're actually not looking at the design when you're doing that because you're actually sewing --

MS. CAREY: Yeah. No, I'm just sewing down that nylon stuff to itself, mostly.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, to get the seam to rest against itself.

MS. CAREY: To lie down flat, right. Because I can't iron my work. It depends on a certain softness on the surface.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: So I never iron it. You know, otherwise I could just steam press those seams open and that would be fine, but since I can't do that, I sew them down by hand.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. Okay. Does the stitching on the front serve any kind of a compositional purpose for you?

MS. CAREY: Not on the decorative kind of pieces. The abstract work, no. It just sews the pieces down. That's it.

MR. ADAMSON: But you can see it on the front.

MS. CAREY: Not really, no, because each strip that I sew down is sewn and then flipped, and sewn and then flipped. So you never see the seam.

MR. ADAMSON: I see, because it's always on the overlapping --

MS. CAREY: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: Like shingles. No, you wouldn't see stitching. The narrative pieces, you probably see a lot of stitching and embroidery and all kinds of stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: So you have to think a lot more about what kind of thread you're using?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: What do you use when you're doing the commission work? What do you use, just your standard utilitarian thread?

MS. CAREY: Yeah. I've got big cones of gray thread.

MR. ADAMSON: That's it, huh?

MS. CAREY: Zip, zip, zip. [Laughs.] I can sew really fast with a commercial machine, and it doesn't show anyway, so I just pretty much stick with gray or blue or something, whatever I want to use up.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. How long have you had this industrial machine?

MS. CAREY: I got it about 1987, more or less. I wore out my domestic machine doing what I was doing, and took it in to be repaired. And the proprietor of the sewing machine store got kind of nasty and told me this machine was not built to be used that way!

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: So I said, "Well, what would you recommend, then?" He said, "You have to have an industrial machine." Well, I didn't buy it from him, but --

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.] But I did buy an industrial machine. It's been just wonderful.

MR. ADAMSON: Does it go faster than the domestic?

MS. CAREY: Yeah, it goes really fast. You can just really rip with that thing. And you can sew through rocks if that's what you need.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Do you have to be careful with it because it goes faster than you can control easily?

MS. CAREY: No. No. I'm really good with it. But I wouldn't let my grandchild run it, for instance.

MR. ADAMSON: Because it's too powerful?

MS. CAREY: Too powerful, yeah. I'd be on edge every second.

MR. ADAMSON: How do you finish the edges of the quilts?

MS. CAREY: It depends. Lots of times, I just turn under the sides and sort of turn it into a little hem all the way around and then put a backing on. They're not made like a regular quilt, where you quilt through all three layers and then put a binding on.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: I have a few pieces I've done that with, but they're in the minority.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. How do you go from the -- you've shown me today a couple of sketchbooks and then more finished drawings that show you a much more accurate representation of the colors and shapes. How do you go from those more finished drawings to the assembly of the object? Do you grid it up?

MS. CAREY: I grid it up. I usually start with a pencil drawing while I'm thinking, and I'll go through a lot of pencil drawings before I come up with something that I think has got some promise. And then I'll either scan it, or I have a digitizing tablet; I can just draw right on top of my drawing, so that then I've got something in the computer. And I'm pretty good with Photoshop and a couple of other programs, so then I can develop it from my sketch into something that's in the computer, which then I can scale and change colors and things very easily. The basic thing doesn't change, but I can really make easy alterations.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. You were saying earlier that's good for working with a client?

MS. CAREY: It's excellent for working with a client. You take in a drawing and -- I used to do all my drawings with Prismacolor pencils, which I still love. I like the way they smell and feel on the page and stuff. But I take it in, and it was maybe too red or too something, and then you have to go back and draw the whole thing over again with different colors. And that's very, very time-consuming, and you still don't know if you're going to get it exactly right. This way I can just go home and hit a button and, you know, select all of the orange and turn it blue or something.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: So that works pretty well. And then I draw a grid on another layer in the drawing and, just like you would with tracing paper, put it over the drawing and print it out that way. And my grids usually are designed to equal six inches of actual, real space. And then I just get out the brown paper and draw a six-inch grid on it and grid it up. I could print it that big on a billion little pieces of paper and glue them together, but it seems a lot easier just to get out the brown paper and do it.

MR. ADAMSON: And the tolerances you're working to aren't that exact because you have that overlap; is that right?

MS. CAREY: Well, I have to be careful, but what I'm drawing are seam lines. And if my drawing is a little bit different than the computer drawing, if the big brown paper drawing is a little bit different, that's okay, because within the context of that drawing, it's still consistent.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: So the seams are going to come out okay.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: If something really, really has to be exact -- like I did a clerical stole for a minister, and I was working with a design that's really small and picky. Then I actually printed the design out on my computer on Pellon interfacing and used that as my backing so that everything was exact.

MR. ADAMSON: So that actually the back of the piece was printed on your computer.

MS. CAREY: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: That's snazzy.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, that's very snazzy indeed. I thought, boy, you discovered that you can put Pellon interfacing through your printer. Yowza! That opens up a whole 'nother field there.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you teach yourself all these computer skills, essentially?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: So you didn't, obviously, use to do it this way.

MS. CAREY: No. No. This is pretty late in my career. But I was using the computer already when I was weaving. There were weaving programs that would control the loom, and so I got a certain familiarity with just using the computer as a design tool when I was still weaving. But that was at the university. And when I left my job over there and decided to go fulltime just being an independent artist, I had to buy my own computer and learned a lot.

But fortunately, when I bought my first computer at home it was like an SE-20, Mac SE-20, you know, which was just like, you know, a telephone, compared to what they are now. And so I learned with Mac Draw and Mac Paint, which are so simple. And so gradually, you know, you just keep learning and learning as things get more and more complicated, and now I can -- I don't master Photoshop, but I can do what I want with Photoshop, at least, and a couple of other drawing programs really help me.

MR. ADAMSON: You always are working two-dimensionally, right? You never do anything that has a third axis?

MS. CAREY: Very rarely do I get into the third dimension. I have done some pieces that are three-dimensional, but they're outside what I usually do.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: I've made a couple of gifts for people, for instance.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see. But no huge sculptural architecture installations.

MS. CAREY: No. I don't think I think that way. I really do think I'm more interested in making two dimensions look like three than I am in making something that's actually three-dimensional. I saw some work, oh, it was years and years ago in a show in Rockford, Illinois, by Janet Taylor. And she was doing just exactly the opposite thing. She had created large woven tapestries that fit into a corner, but if you looked at it in a certain angle, the piece was flat. And so I do just the opposite. I start with pieces that are flat, but I like them to -- not always, but often -- appear to be three-dimensional.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you know Lia Cook's work?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: She does something relatively similar in woven pieces.

MS. CAREY: Things like folded fabrics, yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, like rumpled drapery and that sort of thing.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. Wonderful work.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. A not totally dissimilar color palette to yours as well.

MS. CAREY: Sometimes. The last work I saw of hers was quite -- I wouldn't say monochromatic, but it was very subtle.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel like you're relatively unique in terms of the way that you work and the types of commissions you wind up taking on?

MS. CAREY: I think so. I think so. I don't think there are too many people that are working with the really large-scale spaces.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: And I don't think there are too many people who are working with this, kind of, what is really a very simple method, this sewing down little strips and building up color from that.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: So, yeah, I think I have a little spot to myself.

MR. ADAMSON: How do you think that you fit into the overall scheme of the quilting world?

MS. CAREY: Well, I see it just bursting ahead. I look at a catalogue of something that's just been produced, and I think, "Wow, these people are fabulous!" I think work is getting more sophisticated. I think that a lot of people are using techniques that I don't know, and using them very well. Many people are using hand dyes and terms I can't even pronounce, you know, like devoré and different methods of dealing with the actual fabric before they even start to sew on it.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: So far, I'm still just using commercial fabrics mostly. I've dyed a couple of things, but it's not what I like to do. And I think that my style may change, but you only change -- you know, your changes have to be consistent with what you're already doing. I don't want to jump on any bandwagon and decide that because work is getting much more complex and much more using hand dyes and using more textures and all that kind of thing, I don't want to just put them in. It would be gimmicky. I don't want it to be derivative at all. I'd rather just keep plodding along with my stuff, and gradually, gradually I can see it changing. Certainly in the last 20 years my work has changed enormously, but it isn't because I set out to change it.

So, how I fit in? I don't know. Sometimes I feel really like an outsider because I don't know a lot of quilters and I don't know big, big shows. Like, I don't know anything about this big Dallas show that goes on. Everybody goes to -- or it's Houston. People go down to Houston to these big quilt things.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: I don't know anything about that. And people go to Paducah and I don't know anything about that. And there are all these famous teachers that do really wonderful things and I've never heard of them, and so on. And I think, "Well, I do what I do."

MR. ADAMSON: And you're not really interested in taking a leadership role in the quilting community, either.

MS. CAREY: Evidently not. I think it goes along with not being a very political person to start with. And I did a lot of teaching for a lot of years and I really liked it, but when I was through, I was through. I don't teach workshops. I like giving lectures. But I've just never felt like I wanted to put a workshop together and have a group of 20 people doing what I do.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: So I don't do that.

MR. ADAMSON: Despite what Claire Zeisler told you.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. Yeah. But you do see this happen, you know. People will teach their technique, and then you've got six more people doing that same technique. And I think, well, mine is such a simple technique that I couldn't put together a workshop; you can learn it in five minutes. So I'd be embarrassed to have people discover how easy it is. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

[BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE B.]

MR. ADAMSON: Well, you're obviously placing more demands on yourself in terms of design rather than in terms of construction and technique, which is interesting, given where you started.

MS. CARNEY: That's true, isn't it? Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you said that you were very interested in technique.

MS. CARNEY: That's true. Yes. I think my technique is easy enough that you can just do practically anything with it. And that was one thing about weaving that I finally figured out, was that the more complicated your equipment gets, the more restricted the output is. That's not true when you look at somebody like Lia Cook, who is working with enormously sophisticated equipment, and she's continued to be really innovative with it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CARNEY: But it's not easy. You know, mostly the equipment kind of governs what you can do, and the simplest equipment in the world is a needle and thread.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. You did have a Dobby loom, though, at one point, you mentioned, and the computer.

MS. CARNEY: I had access to one at the university.

MR. ADAMSON: But it's not something you used in your own work?

MS. CARNEY: I did. I did do some work with the Dobby loom when I was at the university. I did quite a little bit with it. And I found it pretty fun and challenging but ultimately restrictive for me. I think, though, I was doing that at the same time I started to sew. And the comparison between spending days warping up a loom and programming the computer and doing all that stuff that's required to get a weaving together versus taking a couple of nice pieces of fabric and slapping them together -- you know, it began to really appeal to me to keep things a little simpler.

MR. ADAMSON: One thing you can do with a Dobby loom, unless I'm mistaken, is to make the same weaving more than once.

MS. CARNEY: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you ever attracted to doing that?

MS. CARNEY: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Production work, essentially.

MS. CARNEY: No. I never liked to knit the second sock. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: So doing a whole series of the same thing wasn't it.

MS. CARNEY: No. In fact, when I decided to go on my own and, you know, really try to work up the commission-work thing, I had this vision of having a catalogue of pieces that I could do that you could specify colors and sizes and so forth but the basic piece would be that, whatever it was. And, well, I just couldn't do it. I'm too bored to make the same pieces twice. I don't like to do that. Every piece has to have some kind of a little challenge in it or it's just too boring.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe we could talk a little bit about art consultants.

MS. CARNEY: Ah, art consultants.

MR. ADAMSON: The means by which you sell a lot of your work. We had talked about this a little bit at lunch. You basically don't sell through galleries when you're doing commission work.

MS. CARNEY: Not a lot, not a lot. I have, though. The Connell Gallery has brokered a couple of good pieces for me. And when I was with the textile design gallery up in Minneapolis that I'm getting the name wrong of -- Textile Arts [Textile Arts International]? Doesn't matter. Anyway, they really did sell a lot of commission work for me. But mostly it's done through interior designers and art consultants. And for some reason or other, they keep getting my name. I've been very bad about doing advertising lately, but the phone keeps ringing. And I'm fairly selective now about what kinds of things I do. They've got to interest me.

MR. ADAMSON: That's nice.

MS. CARNEY: Yeah. Doing something in green for over the teller's cage in the bank --

MR. ADAMSON: Not so interesting.

MS. CARNEY: Not so interesting. But I've had some really good art consultants and some that have been really disappointing. The good ones are very good communicators. They not only know what I can do, but they know what the client wants and can communicate through us. And if they really trust me, and I think the best ones trust me, I'm in on the meeting, so I can actually be there, and it's not just kind of working through this third person all the time, which is really like playing "Telephone," you know, as a kid?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CARNEY: You know, you start around a circle and start telling rumors or whatever?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CARNEY: Because there's always a misconnection if you're trying to work through a third person. The best ones have been really good about fairness of pricing. They make sure that I'm paid adequately and that they take a fair amount. I mean, they should be paid. This is a service. The most disappointing ones are the ones where I'm not in the loop on information, so I don't know exactly what the end price has been, and sometimes I find out that it was a whole lot and that I only got a little bit of it.

The best ones keep coming back. I like to keep working with the same people, so that we have kind of a rapport and you don't have to repeat yourself and start over from the beginning every single time.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Are you usually happy with the places where your pieces end up when you work through an art consultant?

MS. CAREY: Almost always. Not entirely. I've been disappointed a couple of times. And I can't blame it on the art consultant entirely, because sometimes the client will change their mind about what they're going to do with the piece. I did a piece for a hospital in San Diego. It was supposed to be on a big wall, and the client decided to put it over a doorway. So actually, you know, people could go through the door and jump up and touch this piece. And it was not flat. It just looked like, you know, they could have taken crepe paper or just any old fabric and stuck it up there. So that was disappointing, but it wasn't the art consultant's fault.

MR. ADAMSON: I guess one thing I'd wonder about with the way that you get your commissions is that a lot of your pieces must wind up in fairly impersonal-type buildings, like corporate-feeling buildings.

MS. CAREY: I don't usually think of it that way. I'm usually really aware of who's going to be in that space. I've done a lot of work with what I consider to be healing spaces, like clinics, in particular. I've done some pieces for prisons. I've done pieces for schools, universities, hospitals, and some just out-and-out corporate spaces, banks and so on.

But I'm pretty much always aware people are going to actually be in the space using the space. Either they're visitors to the building or they're people who work there; it's never just a sterile spot. The one spot I can think of that one could think of as sterile, but it really wasn't, was an office building in Atlanta where there was a black marble wall at the end of a hallway. As you came in the building, you came to this black marble wall, and what they wanted was a piece that would personalize the space and direct traffic off to the right into a larger atrium area. So I did a piece that I called *Hopscotch*, and it was a series of these little glad rags that I do sort of gathering themselves for a jump and going off, you know, visually going off into this space. And I thought, "People coming in there now are going to get a kick out of that."

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: So, no, I think more about the people than I do about the impersonality of the space.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. That's instructive. Okay.

Maybe speaking of people, we can return to the teaching part of the 1980s. You were at University of Wisconsin-Madison that whole time, as we talked about earlier, getting steadily promoted up the academic ladder.

MS. CAREY: Yes. I started off as a, what, lecturer, then assistant professor, associate professor, full professor.

MR. ADAMSON: And you worked there how many years in all, give or take?

MS. CAREY: I think 17.

MR. ADAMSON: Seventeen?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: Did it ever get stale for you?

MS. CAREY: No. Students are so varied. If it had just been teaching, I'd probably still be there today.

MR. ADAMSON: What else was it, the academic --

MS. CAREY: Yeah. You know, the farther up the little academic ladder you go, the more time is spent in administrative stuff and meetings and so on and politics. And I just felt like so much time was going into administrative stuff that the teaching almost became secondary. I didn't like that balance at all.

MR. ADAMSON: The administrative stuff was not something you were inherently interested in.

MS. CAREY: I'm afraid I was not interested in it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. CAREY: No, because of the repetitive nature of it, you know? Like you all get together and you start to put together a five-year plan, say, and at the end of the year, you've got this nice sheaf of papers and it's all, you know, ta-da-ta-da. And everybody has a copy and it goes into a file drawer, and in a couple of years they say, "Well, we really ought to put together a five-year plan."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: Wait a minute! So that kind of thing. That's maybe not the best example, but it did seem like there was an awful lot of stuff that just got done over and over again.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, that certainly rings true.

MS. CAREY: And with nothing moving forward.

MR. ADAMSON: Was there anything that you dealt with on a sort of faculty level at the university that you were particularly proud of?

MS. CAREY: I think my collaboration with Pat Mansfield was probably one of the best things that came out of my experience over there.

MR. ADAMSON: The business, art business.

MS. CAREY: The art business. And then she and I and Phil Hamilton, who was a professor in the art department, were asked to design the first banner on the City-County Building, the three of us. And that was, I think, in 1984. And we've done one every year until this year, when the state ran out of money and so we didn't have any budget. So we didn't do one this year. But in a continuous string, and that collaboration has been just fabulous.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. And that was really a UW project, essentially.

MS. CAREY: That was a UW project. And certainly some of the people that I've known there have been important in my life, just independently of the university.

MR. ADAMSON: Have you had students that have gone on to be successful professionals?

MS. CAREY: Yes, I have had. And it's so wonderful to hear from them and know how well they're doing. A couple of them are designing fabrics in New York. Some have gone to work in nice interior-design positions. I don't make a big effort to keep track of everybody, but I hear of people and I think, "Oh, way to go!" That's really great.

MR. ADAMSON: Are any of them art weavers or art quilters?

MS. CAREY: There's one woman that just surfaced in Madison who is doing art quilts and doing a pretty good job of it, and another woman who's been doing weaving on an individual basis for years and, I guess, making a go of it.

MR. ADAMSON: You don't necessarily think of the people that do what you might call studio-fiber or art-fiber work as being more true to what you taught them, do you, than people who are doing professionally designed fabrics?

MS. CAREY: No, not at all. No. I think if people have a bent to do something and they learn the tools, they should do whatever they want.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: No, I don't think there's a hierarchy there.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. That's interesting too. Do you feel like there's a value system at the university, where people coming through your program should be doing "x" when they graduate?

MS. CAREY: I think in that particular program, because it was more geared toward linking up with a commercial operation, that people were more encouraged, at least, to either design for industry or connect with industry in one way or another than to try to make it on their own as an artist.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. CAREY: It wasn't really an art department.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were actually imparting a lot of technical skills and design skills to your students consistently.

MS. CAREY: I was. Mm-hm.

MR. ADAMSON: Rather than sending them down to the Contemporary -- [inaudible] -- Chicago, say.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, I'd say so. And I really wanted my students to have a firm enough technical grasp of what they were doing so that if they decided they were going to produce coat yardage, they could do that and do it well, and not feel like they had to learn it on the job after they got out.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Well, it's nice that you have students that do a diversity of things. It shows that you're giving them the ability to do that.

MS. CAREY: One hopes. But then, so many years have elapsed now that they've probably taught themselves things, the way I've taught myself the computer. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: That's true. That's true.

MS. CAREY: I don't take a whole lot of credit. Maybe just for encouraging them to follow their inclinations.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. During the same period, you got divorced.

MS. CAREY: I did.

MR. ADAMSON: In what year?

MS. CAREY: It would have been around -- you'd think I'd know right off the top of my head, wouldn't you? It was right around 1976 or '77. It was along about the time that I got my MFA degree.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Were those two things connected in some way?

MS. CAREY: I think only because I really found my voice and felt empowered to do with my life what I wanted to instead of making do. And then I remarried. So it wasn't marriage per se. I remarried in 1980.

MR. ADAMSON: And your second husband's name?

MS. CAREY: Is Phil Carey.

MR. ADAMSON: Phil Carey, right. That's the last name.

MS. CAREY: Yes. Yes. And this marriage is a keeper, definitely.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Good.

So, what happened to your first husband after the two of you split?

MS. CAREY: Well, he didn't commit suicide. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Good.

MS. CAREY: No, he's living here in Madison. He's remarried to a delightful woman. And now we all get together for occasions when the grandchildren have birthdays or it's Mother's Day or Father's Day or something. The whole clan gets together, former husband, current husband. They think that one another is great and amusing. Who knew? [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] There's been some connection. And does he still teach at UW?

MS. CAREY: He just retired.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: From his life of teaching Slavic languages.

MR. ADAMSON: And you, after you divorced, you kept the house and the kids, you said.

MS. CAREY: Yes, I did. Had to have someplace for them to live, so yeah, I did hang on to the house and the kids.

MR. ADAMSON: How young was the youngest child when you divorced?

MS. CAREY: Let's see. Oh, he was really young.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, that's what I was thinking. Probably 10 or so.

MS. CAREY: Let's see. He was born in 1967. He was about eight. So what does that make it, 1975? That's not quite right. That must have been when we separated, but we didn't get divorced right away.

MR. ADAMSON: But he was young enough that he needed a lot of taking care of still?

MS. CAREY: Yes. He was just in kindergarten or first grade. He was young.

MR. ADAMSON: So how was that period between that point and the time that he went off to live by himself, to college or whatever? Was it difficult to --

MS. CAREY: Oh, boy. Those were tough years. Those were tough years. Fortunately, my older children were old enough to take some responsibility, and I probably gave them too much responsibility. But the young one, it was very hard on him, that period of time when his dad had moved out.

MR. ADAMSON: Although then you got remarried only four years later.

MS. CAREY: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So it wasn't like you were alone for a decade.

MS. CAREY: No, I wasn't alone for a decade. I was really fortunate. And my husband Phil is really gifted with kids, so he was able to move into a household with three children in it, which I think is the most amazing thing. Brave man.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Where did you meet him?

MS. CAREY: I met him through friends at a party. Fortunately, I knew the people he was with, and so I just walked right up and introduced myself.

MR. ADAMSON: And what does he do for a living?

MS. CAREY: He was working at the state in health and social services until he retired about three years ago.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And is there anything else you want to say about family before we leave the topic?

MS. CAREY: I don't think so.

MR. ADAMSON: You have grandkids, yes?

MS. CAREY: I have grandkids, yes, and my oldest grandson is 18. And I have two granddaughters who are 10 and seven. And they're just amazing. Just amazing.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's really been an important part of your life right up until now.

MS. CAREY: You bet.

MR. ADAMSON: Very active with the family?

MS. CAREY: You bet. Everybody lives in Madison, and it makes it really, really wonderful.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, that's great.

MS. CAREY: We get together a lot. I see the grandchildren a lot, especially the younger ones. They're still young enough to need a caretaker, and I'm perfectly happy and willing to do that. So we get together quite a bit.

MR. ADAMSON: It's unusual to have the family stay so close.

MS. CAREY: I think it's really nice for everybody. It's certainly nice for me, and I think it's great that the kids have more than one generation to fall back on.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Maybe we could talk about some of the broader issues of being involved in the crafts generally, like how you see the status of what you do compared to other artists who you've known at UW, perhaps, or just art in general. For instance, do you think of yourself as a contemporary artist?

MS. CAREY: Well, I'm alive right now.

MR. ADAMSON: So that makes you contemporary.

MS. CAREY: That makes me contemporary. I don't know. Well, when I go to a museum or a gallery or an exhibition of really what we would call contemporary art, mine is so safe and traditional by comparison that, no, I wouldn't say I fit in that.

MR. ADAMSON: Are you interested in that type of work?

MS. CAREY: It's not what I do. There's nothing I have to say or want to express that fits into what I see out there.

MR. ADAMSON: So whatever interest you have in it is more as a bystander.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. I like to see what's going on. I find it interesting. But it doesn't say, "Oh, I could see myself going in that direction."

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. CAREY: Even some of the things that are going on in fiber I find really intriguing, but I'm really aware of not

wanting to create a lot of stuff. I just don't want to keep adding to the stuff in the world. I feel like as long as I'm making these little pieces that are pretty understandable and they generally have a destination, they have a life, you know, and a purpose. But I don't want to be creating experimental things that I have to then be the curator of and store them and worry about them and maybe throw them away and stuff. There's too much stuff in the world already, so I kind of just don't want to do that. I look at a lot of work and I think, "Well, that's a wonderful exhibition, but what are they going to do with it now?" That's probably not the way to look at art.

MR. ADAMSON: It's certainly *a* way to look at it.

MS. CAREY: It's *a* way to look at it. I think if I were going to go in a completely different direction or maybe follow up on some of the things I'm interested in, I would do things that are deliberately so temporary that it would be, "Look at this, because it's on its way out," you know, like work, maybe, by Cristo kind of thing. Not that I would compare myself to Cristo in any way. But those things happen, and they're gone. And there's a good deal of work that's like that, that's environmental art or something that is created just for the moment. Sometimes I wish I were a composer or a dancer, because you have your dance performance and you throw your tights in the washing machine and you're done, and it isn't like you've got to store it or keep it or archive it or worry about whether it's going to fade.

MR. ADAMSON: Except for the tights, maybe.

MS. CAREY: Maybe the tights. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: In fact, I'm planning to make a piece -- it's down the line here someplace in my future -- called *Ephemera* because of the issue that came up in my last exhibition of light fastness and things disintegrating in the light, and the feeling I had that I don't necessarily want my -- I don't intend for my work to last for a million years anyway. Nothing lasts for a million years; it's all relative. You know, maybe if you're carving in stone and it's not exposed to the weather and nobody comes in with a sledgehammer, it's going to last quite a long time, but all work, everything, disappears sooner or later. So I was thinking maybe instead of going toward worrying more about making things last longer, I should go toward making things that don't really have much of a life. You know, you have your moment. And I was thinking of things like -- I love flowers and gardening -- thinking of things like spring wildflowers. You know, they have their moment. It's so short. It's gone. You've got to wait a year. That's it. Or dragonflies, things like that. Ephemera.

MR. ADAMSON: So, what would the piece be? This piece that you're going to make that's called *Ephemera*, what would it be?

MS. CAREY: Ephemeral. [Laughs.] I don't know. But I would like it to have more at least a feeling of being fragile and not so precious as the pieces that I make, which are sort of beefy, in a way. They're really substantial. Everything's sewed down.

MR. ADAMSON: That's an interesting thing because it seems like what you make is quite -- not permanent, but it's quite substantial. It's a lot more like painting than it is like dancing or one of the performative arts.

MS. CAREY: It is more like painting. But painting's ephemeral also.

MR. ADAMSON: True. Right. As any conservator will tell you.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, I'm sure.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think of yourself as being like a painter, ever?

MS. CAREY: More like a "collager," I think.

MR. ADAMSON: "Collager."

MS. CAREY: Yeah. There's probably a word for that.

MR. ADAMSON: Are you interested in historical collage, like Picasso's collages, say, or Matisse's?

MS. CAREY: Only because I think they're nice to look at. I'm not trying to do that, necessarily. But when you're working with fabric, just by the nature of the stuff, you're adding things to things. Some embellishments, maybe. So I think of it more along the line of decoupage or collage than painting.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: I don't apply color to my work, usually, or paint on it or add dyes or anything like that, which would be a much more painterly way of going about it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So it's more assembly than it is painterliness.

MS. CAREY: More assembly, right.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. That's interesting. It seems to me like you would not share the kind of ax-grinding that happens in a lot of studio craft arenas about the status of the discipline in general, the status of the field. It doesn't seem like you care a lot about that.

MS. CAREY: I don't really care a lot about that, no. That old argument has been going on for so long about is it craft or is it art. And I think, well, "a rose by any other name," you know. What's the difference? It's all in the mind of the describer.

MR. ADAMSON: The organizations that you're a part of, there are probably a few of them, but you mentioned SAQA, right?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ADAMSON: There are organizations that you're a member of?

MS. CAREY: Well, that's probably the one that I've had the most to do with. I belong to two organizations that I have a lot to do with. SAQA's one because it's really a good promoter and it's got some really good people in it.

And the other one is just an informal group of people that get together once a year in New York, and we call ourselves the Art Quilt Network. It started off being a group of New York artists, but gradually over time we've got people from as far away as Washington State, and we had a woman from Texas for a while; there was a woman there from Georgia. I was the westernmost outpost for a while. But anyway, every January we get together for about four days and share our work and our concerns and eat and have a good time. But it's turned out to be a really remarkable support group. Even though we're scattered all over the United States, you know, there's e-mail.

MR. ADAMSON: How does it differ from SAQA?

MS. CAREY: Well, SAQA's a much bigger organization, and it's got a lot more formal structure to it. They have an archive of slides, for instance. They send out informational packets about the members. They have a magazine. They have conferences, real conferences with conference fees and everything.

MR. ADAMSON: And you participate in those?

MS. CAREY: Yeah, I do. I find them very interesting and informative.

MR. ADAMSON: Do the conferences move around to different places?

MS. CAREY: Yeah. The last time I went to one, it was in Santa Fe, which was great. My other group is really informal, and we have a name, but that's about it. We don't do a newsletter. Well, we have a little newsletter, just, you know, information about what's going on.

MR. ADAMSON: It sounds like that's the attraction of it, though, the informality.

MS. CAREY: It's very loose. It's really about the people. It's not about the organization; it's about the people.

MR. ADAMSON: Is there a person or persons that are sort of the leaders of it?

MS. CAREY: Not really. We hand it off from year to year. Somebody finally agrees to be responsible for the next year's get-together, and they do a good job and then they say "Whew!" and pass it along to somebody else. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: And you haven't done that.

MS. CAREY: No. I offered once to have people come out to Madison, and they basically said, "What will we do in Madison in January?" I can see their point.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] January's not the time to come to Madison.

MS. CAREY: No. So we always meet in New York or Philadelphia.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you find that those two groups have an agenda of trying to do something with art quilts in terms of, you know, getting into museums or getting more high-profile coverage?

MS. CAREY: They both do, but in different ways. SAQA is much more active in that area of arranging for exhibitions in good venues. It's a professional organization; whereas my other group, individually we do what we can, and we have had some group shows, but that's not the real reason that we get together. I think the real thing about my smaller group is that we are personally very supportive of one another. And it's really, you know, "Go, go!" when somebody's got something they're doing, whether they're working on a book or a one-person show or a tour or putting together an exhibition or something. We really are very supportive. But as a group, we haven't done so much of that.

MR. ADAMSON: It's just interesting to see how the different -- you know, I'm very organized with or involved with the Furniture Society, which is a newer organization about that medium, and it's interesting to see how all the different craft media have their own organization that sort of represents the personality of the people that are involved in that medium. But it sounds like you have a nice one.

MS. CAREY: I've got a great one. I was a member of Handweavers Guild of America for years when I was more actively weaving. In fact, I guess I'm still a member, although I don't participate anymore. And that's an enormous organization.

MR. ADAMSON: They're much bigger than SAQA.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. And when you get an organization that size, you can do a lot, you know, you can really have major conferences -- oops, I just pulled out the plug. [Ms. Carey has walked away from the table.]

MR. ADAMSON: That's okay. It seems to be still going.

MS. CAREY: Good.

[Returning to the table.] You can have major conferences, you can have speakers, you can have workshops, you can have a -- not awards program, necessarily, but a certification program, you know, with a really big organization like that.

MR. ADAMSON: Where do you see yourself going in the next decade or two?

MS. CAREY: Oh, I'll probably continue to do the commission work, because I still find it exciting. But I'm getting pickier. So I'll probably continue to do that. And I will undoubtedly continue to do my own pieces, you know, that are more the narrative kinds of things. And I really thought I ought to get busy and do a book or contact a publisher about doing a book.

MR. ADAMSON: Of your work?

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] And I would like to see my work in more good collections.

MR. ADAMSON: You just had a piece acquired by the American Craft Museum.

MS. CAREY: I did. And that was very nice. I'm proud of that.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that the most notable museum that has a representative piece of your work?

MS. CAREY: It is. I would like to have a piece at the Renwick. They have a very nice collection of contemporary quilts.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: And a lot of my friends have pieces there. So I think, well, I should really write that letter of inquiry. But, you know, all these things take time.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Yeah. Why is it important to you to be in a museum?

MS. CAREY: I don't know. I think I'm feeling my mortality. And if any of those pieces are actually going to survive me, I'd like them in a good place rather than just having the ragpickers come through after I die and having somebody say, "Oh, I like this red one." [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Yeah, that's not an attractive picture.

MS. CAREY: [Laughs.] So I really would like, well, collectors. I'd like to know that these are kind of going to go to

somebody who's going to appreciate them, and a museum is great because then so many people get to see them and appreciate them and enjoy them.

MR. ADAMSON: How did the Craft Museum thing happen? Do you know?

MS. CAREY: I don't know how it got started, but I just got a phone call out of the clear blue sky that they were putting together this exhibition of their own collection, and in order to do that, they had to acquire some pieces. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] They were putting the cart before the horse.

MS. CAREY: So I was asked if I would, first of all, contribute a piece, and I balked at that a little bit. And then we came up with a little budget, thanks to one of my collectors. And I made a piece that was really big [*Blue Ribbon*, 2002]. At first, they wanted a set of three pieces, and I was perfectly happy to do a set of three pieces. And then Ursula Ilse-Neuman asked me if instead of three pieces, I could do one piece. So I did one big piece. And I'm glad I did, because it has presence that the three little pieces might not have had.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. It's a nice thing to have in a museum.

MS. CAREY: Yeah. I'm very pleased about that.

MR. ADAMSON: It feels like a major piece. Do you have collectors that consistently buy your work?

MS. CAREY: I wish I could say consistently. I do have a couple of collectors who have purchased my work more than once

MR. ADAMSON: Do they tend to be quilt collectors?

MS. CAREY: No. Well, one is. One is definitely a quilt collector. And I'm outside of the geographic range that they usually collect, but because I had a piece in the "Full Deck" collection and they purchased that --

MR. ADAMSON: The "Full Deck" collection was a show that happened.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, it was a show of playing cards that Sue Pierce organized a few years ago.

MR. ADAMSON: That was at the Renwick, right?

MS. CAREY: That was at the Renwick. And why can't I think of their name? It will come to me. Anyway, they purchased the whole -- [tape runs out].

[BEGIN TAPE 3 SIDE 1.]

MR. ADAMSON: This is Disk 2 of the interview with Joyce Marquess Carey on June 16, 2002.

MS. CAREY: And then they liked the *Communist*, [*Red King in a Black Suit*] that was in the deck, which was my piece, and so they contacted me and purchased another *Communist*. And then the man who commissioned those pieces originally down in Oak Brook for his real estate firm has purchased three additional pieces for his own collection from me. Most of the collectors have only collected one thing because usually they're collecting more broadly.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, and there's a sort of "one of each" mentality.

MS. CAREY: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: There are quilt collectors -- correct? -- of such things, quite enthusiastic ones?

MS. CAREY: There are, yes indeed, quilt collectors.

MS. CAREY: Mm-hm.

MR. ADAMSON: Do they have their organization, or do they just sort of center around SAQA?

MS. CAREY: Well, Camille Cook has an organization called Friends of Fiber Art International, and there are a lot of collectors in it. And she really promotes that idea of collectors. And I think that's wonderful. She fills a tremendous niche.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, she's a real powerhouse.

MS. CAREY: Yeah, she is. And she owns one of my pieces, too.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes. I've seen it, actually, at her house. But do you think that the fiber movement in general is heading in a positive direction?

MS. CAREY: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I think it's certainly being taken more seriously. I think that the prices are getting to be more in line with -- I don't like to compare them with paintings, but where people might have flinched a while back to buy a quilt that's, say, three feet by three feet, they would have thought nothing at all of paying a really good price for a painting that's three feet by three feet. And I think that mentality is gradually being erased, so that people really do appreciate that this is significant work and with a lot of thought and emotion in it, just like a good painting.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems like there was a kind of peak in the popularity or public acceptance of the movement in the early '70s that has been unequaled for a long time.

MS. CAREY: That's true. There was a huge burst there with major collections and so forth. And weaving was huge for a long time.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: But I just think there are more collectors. I think there are more artists. There's more work being produced. There's more exhibitions that are maybe not so specific, so you're not so ghettoized. I've known quite a few art quilters who have had good success in entering their works in multimedia types of venues, and I think that's wonderful, you know, instead of always thinking you have to enter a quilt show.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. CAREY: I don't even think of what I do, necessarily, as being quilts, because I've only made two pieces in my life that actually had stuffing and you could put them on the bed and throw them in the washing machine. That's a quilt. These are wall pieces, and we call them art quilts because nobody's ever really come up with a good name. But I know very little about quilting, when you get right down to it. I don't know much about mitering corners or making all my little squares match up. I don't know the difference between this kind of filling and that kind of stuffing. And I'm not a connoisseur of sewing threads or any of that stuff that I think of as being connected with the quilt world.

MR. ADAMSON: And you don't have any particular interest in getting more specialized in that?

MS. CAREY: No. It's a different branch of the sport. I'm just not interested in that. There are people who do fabulous work along that line, and I say good for them. And I hope they're saying good for me, because it's different. It's different work.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. It's totally nonfunctional.

MS. CAREY: Not better work, different work.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Well, I think that that degree of comfort that you have with your role in terms of the larger craft and art community is really nice. You seem very at peace with the way that your work is sent out into the world and the way it's perceived.

MS. CAREY: So far, so good. I feel really fortunate when something good happens, and I'm not spending a lot of time pining when I think that someone else is going to the head of the class and I'm not.

MR. ADAMSON: You don't feel like moving to Madison was a bad career move?

MS. CAREY: Oh, no, not at all. No. No. I think I could do what I do if I was living up in the north woods someplace. It really doesn't make any difference. I know people who live, say, in New York feel like anything west of New York is -- you know, you just couldn't exist there and be an artist, but I don't think that's true, especially not anymore. Your work just doesn't depend on being in a New York gallery to be successful. With the communications being the way they are and the Internet and everything else, everybody's everywhere.

MR. ADAMSON: It will be interesting to see what happens with the crafts in America in the next few years as everything gets more and more international, you know, see whether some of these groups start to become worldwide instead of countrywide.

MS. CAREY: That's true. You see more and more of that, like this upcoming show at the American Craft Museum is called "Six Continents of Quilts." And I like that. And Quilt National has certainly become Quilt "International." I don't know if they've changed the title, but they have entries and accepted pieces from all over the world. So

it’s a great chance to see what other people are doing.

MR. ADAMSON: And you keep tabs on that only in a sort of casual way, I imagine?

MS. CAREY: I’m afraid so. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: That’s probably good for you. [Laughs.]

MS. CAREY: I keep more track of that than I do what’s going on in what I think of as the real quilt world. I don’t keep track of that at all. But I do at least pick up the magazines that have to do with art quilts and fibers in general and crafts in general and read those.

MR. ADAMSON: And it’s something you’re very happy to be part of.

MS. CAREY: You bet. Yeah. My little voice.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Okay. Well, I think that’s probably good for the Smithsonian.

MS. CAREY: Good.

MR. ADAMSON: Is there anything else you want to address or talk about?

MS. CAREY: Boy, we covered a lot of territory.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Thanks. Say goodbye.

MS. CAREY: Goodbye. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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