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Oral history interview with Katherine Westphal, 2002 September 3-7

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Katherine Westphal on September 3, 5, and 6, 2002. The interview took place at Westphal's home in Berkeley, California, and was conducted by Carole Austin 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.

Carole Austin and Katherine Westphal have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

CAROLE AUSTIN: This is Carole Austin interviewing Katherine Westphal at her home in Berkeley, California. Today's date is September 3rd, 2002. This is for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Katherine, can you tell me when and where you were born?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I was born in Los Angeles, California in 1919.

CAROLE AUSTIN: January 2nd, right?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Mm-hmm.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Can you just describe a little bit your childhood and family background?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think I don't want to go into this because it has been gone into in the Harriet Nathan oral history and the Paul Smith, and I don't think we should spend time doing—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Time on that, no. Okay, we'll do that. Okay, can you discuss your early education and career choices? For instance, what motivated your interest in your art? I remember that ironing board story, so—

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: [Laughs.] Yes, that's—I mean, I've always been involved with visual things more than other things.

CAROLE AUSTIN: One of the things that interested me about you, Katherine, that you haven't talked about a lot, and that is your rather astounding ability to draw. Could you talk about a little how that developed? It hasn't been in the other interviews very much.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I draw constantly and always have.

I think we've got Suzie [pet Beagle] getting in the act. [Laughter.] Go outside. Go.

I've always drawn, and I draw every day. I fill up constant pieces of paper and notebooks, and when I go to museums I draw. When I was teaching at [University of California, Davis] Davis in the faculty meetings, which were pretty boring, I would grab a bunch of paper towels and draw, which was a little upsetting to the meetings because everybody was trying to see what I was drawing. [Laughs.] But I've always—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, did you draw as a child?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, constantly.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Now, did it come naturally or did you have drawing lessons?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I suspect it came naturally. I don't think I take very well to instructions and how to do things and how to draw or—I can remember in college in drawing classes—I mean, I wasn't doing the kind of drawing everybody else was. I was doing things

that were mainly linear, they weren't charcoal. I can't do that. I can't do charcoal. Dark and light drawing is the standard rule.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It seems that most of your drawings are very fine pen and ink line that I've seen. Has that mainly been the way you've drawn?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah, either pen and ink or pencil, but it very often is just very simple lines.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So you're not one who does shading, that kind of thing. I've never seen that in your work.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. I think that if something has color in it or value, it tends to go from line to line. It doesn't modulate from light to dark within a shape, it is a shape completely.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I'm looking at your drawings, some of them.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, I just think it's a very integral part of your work. And it's interesting that this is just a natural talent that you had. Can you—I'm going to skip this question on, have you worked on other media, because you have and I want to go into that in detail later on. Okay?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Could you discuss the difference, if any, between a university trained artist and one who has learned his or her craft outside academia? What has been your most rewarding educational experience?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: To a certain extent I don't believe that people can be taught to do things with directions. What I'm interested in is what motivates people, that they get a commitment to doing—so fascinated by this that they keep on doing it and doing it and doing it. It's like the Energizer bunny, keep going and going and going. And it isn't something that you turn on to go to a 9:00 class and draw for an hour or something; it's constant—a constant involvement and a working over this idea of what if or why, but questioning attitude rather than following the instructions.

It's not the little advertisement—when I was probably in high school or something like this, there were little ads in the paper of draw me, and you could take a correspondence course and all that. I don't believe that works.

[Dog barks.]

Hey, shut up! Susie, come sit down here.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Have you had the opportunity to teach people who weren't at the university level?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No, I don't think so. I don't know. I did some practice teaching in junior high school but that wasn't satisfactory. I couldn't keep control of the little monsters. [Laughs.]

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, for yourself, what do you think has been the most rewarding educational experience in your life?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Probably going to college and also maybe teaching at Davis in a department that was called Applied Behavioral Sciences, where I met people who were social scientists, psychologists, Native American, Asian-American. We were all in the one department, the odds and ends that the university put together. And you learned about—through interaction with them you learned about their view, they learned about yours. And so it was a constant teaching on each side to broaden your views.

And I think this is what going to the university did. I was exposed to other ideas and other people. Certainly my interest in travel came from going to Berkeley and finding out that the people who were teaching art history had actually been to Europe and seen these things, it

wasn't just learning them from a slide, and that I wanted to see the real thing too.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Now, in high school did you have any mentors or teachers who encouraged you?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I hated high school. I was very glad to get away from it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So college was a very different experience?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It was very different because I was able to major in art, which I was interested in. And it wasn't—there were many different kinds of art in the program at Los Angeles City College, and so I was exposed to all these things.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. So you went to Los Angeles City College and then where?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Then I went to UCLA for a summer session to pick up some science classes, earth sciences—paleo. Then I went to UC Berkeley as a junior.

CAROLE AUSTIN: As a junior. And was that a good experience?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah. It was fun, yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Did you have any particular teachers that you thought were outstanding?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, probably the one that was most outstanding to me was Worth Ryder. And I was his reader for a while so I really got to know him on more than just a person sitting in a classroom.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Did you apprentice with anyone?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Now, have you had any involvement in any of the craft organizations or schools across the country?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No, not—let's see. American Craft Council, of course—I went to some of the conferences and I did a project on "Wearable Art" for the World Crafts Conference in Vienna in 1980. And let's see, I went to some art school in San Antonio. I was an artist in residence in papermaking and I was there for a week and had a technician to work with me, and I just played around with what they could do.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And you went to the California College of Arts and Crafts, didn't you?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Oh, I went there to—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Ceramics, isn't it?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: —take ceramics and did that for a while. And I had a kiln and a wheel at home. But then when I began teaching at Davis I felt I should be working in the area of textiles, since that was what I was teaching, that it made more sense then. And to divide your time between teaching and working in your studio, when you're in ceramics you have to work every day. You can't let it go on this on and off. The clay just doesn't cooperate with that sort of thing and it's hard enough to do it with textiles but at least you can fold up the textile and take it with you.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And actually work on it in other places rather than in front of your wheel.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, Katherine, do you think—what do you think about art schools such as Penland, Haystack or Arrowmont, those places?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't have any acquaintance with them. I think I feel that they're a little too rarified atmosphere.

CAROLE AUSTIN: How's that?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, you are moving to this community for a short period of time

and you're working with people who are interested in the same thing, but your life experience from then on isn't going to be the same. You're not going to be in that rarified atmosphere. And I suspect that if you—when you get away from there, my feeling of it is you no longer have the support group. And maybe this is why people drop off. They haven't made a lifetime commitment to themselves and to this thing that interests them the most. It isn't to the group, it's—you see, I think that—I don't know, since I have had no experience with that sort of thing.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. There's a question here—this is a leading question. Tell me about your travels and have they had an impact on your life and work?

[Laughter.]

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. As I said before, when I went to Cal—I came in contact with professors who had really seen these things, so then I wanted to see them for myself. And Ed's first sabbatical we went to Europe. We were going to stay a year and we stayed probably nine months simply because it got to the point where we felt we had to go back. I don't know why we felt we had to go back but we did. Maybe the weather was getting too cold or something—or too hot, probably too hot, in Rome.

But I think all my work is related—very much related to travel and what I'm doing, which may seem completely eclectic, is I'm trying to point out to somebody else what I see and is interesting and put it together in a way that it's disassociated. Very often in some things I am in the picture, the thing, as well as my idea about things. And in the Egyptian things, the quilts, some of them have an image of me and this is from a photograph that Ed took in Basel, Switzerland, where I was running across the top of the opera house roof that has glass pyramids. And I—so the glass pyramids of Basel, Switzerland move to the stone pyramids of Egypt.

And they all came together and some of them have things from Hawaii and leis because I went—after I went to Egypt I went to Hawaii for a lecture, talk, exhibit or something, and there were images that I used of Hawaii and flowers and leis and camels and pyramids are all mixed together. Nothing is isolated. And everything—I think it's a collage. It is a collage of ideas and it's almost a visual journal. This is where I am, where I've been. And it's—I can look at these things, the artwork, and I can relate it to almost the year that it was done, not because it has a date on it but because what is pictured in it.

In the late probably 1980s I got intensely—late 1980s I got intensely interested in China and using China images, but they were related to Tiananmen Square. And so this was my one foray into protest art, and those things are all gone now. Various collectors have bought them. And I don't know if they knew what they were all about, but you know and I know that in 1970 approximately, in that time period or later, we went to Egypt a couple of times and there's a lot of Egyptian stuff. And they're mixed up. I did a whole series of Xerox collages of travel in Egypt. They're just black and white things with pyramids and each stone on the pyramid has an ushabati image on it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: What is an ushabati image?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: They are the little clay figures that go in the tombs in the boxes and these are the little workers that help you in the afterlife, and so every stone on this thing. And, I mean, I incorporated into this the tour group photograph that one always has on a tour, and so that's in these things. And acrobatics at the pyramids, various things like this.

CAROLE AUSTIN: When you've talked about your travels before you haven't talked a lot about your travels in the West and Southwest. And I know you did some beautiful quilts from this, at least one because I saw it. Do you remember that?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No, I don't remember that.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Don't you? Well, can you talk about your travels a little bit in this country.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: They're mainly—they're fairly recent. I wasn't very interested in things in America. I wanted to see what was outside the boundaries. Then suddenly we—I'm trying to think how this came about. I guess we didn't want to take the long flight and a tour brochure came with something that sounded kind of interesting about going to Wyoming and Yellowstone and to—and I think on that trip we also went to the Cheyenne Frontier Days.

And I was interested in this because the year I lived in Wyoming when I was teaching at the University of Wyoming I didn't do anything traveling around. I had gone as far as Denver and once I had driven with some friends from Laramie, Wyoming, to Los Angeles and back, and that went through the Southwest.

But then we suddenly got very interested in cowboy country and I was fascinated—in cowboy country—at the rodeo at the Cheyenne Frontier Days. With the tour there were tickets to a rock concert and I had never been to a rock concert and this was absolutely fascinating. It was Alan Jackson. I didn't know who Alan Jackson was and I didn't know any of these songs, but everybody there knew them all and they all stomped the beat and they all sang right along with Alan Jackson. And actually this little thing started me on doing a whole little portfolio of heat transfer collages of Alan Jackson.

And this is the way my mind works. Here is Alan Jackson in the middle of a bunch of cowboys with his white hat in a drawing. I don't know whether these are drawings, collages, paintings, whatever they are, they're part heat transfer, part collage, part watercolor. Just a drawing mixture. And these things have never been exhibited. Most of this work that I do on paper has not been shown, other than the few things that had been shown in San Francisco, the drawings.

I don't fall into that category. I'm put over in this pigeonhole that says I'm a textile artist. Well, I'm an artist; whether I'm—it isn't what material I'm working with. And I think too often people associate crafts with a use. And they decide that what you're doing is based on use, not on the visual impact. And to me, the visual impact is all. There's no difference between art and craft. It's one; it's visual.

CAROLE AUSTIN: When you're traveling I know that you take photographs as you go. Are you drawing all the time also when you travel?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah. Sometimes in notebooks they're funny little sketches. Sometimes these develop into something, sometimes they don't. But sometimes it's a mixture of the photographs. I had the fortunate thing of having a university research grant and so I could take my photographs and have them printed 8 x 12, which is much better to work with than a 4 x 6 or a 3 x 5. And so these things then got transferred into sometimes printed textiles, sometimes just boxes of photographs.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Katherine, have you ever thought about, let's say, the desire to have a show of your drawings ever?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: People aren't very interested in this. I don't—you see, I don't have the right contacts. One of the three galleries that Ed and I are represented in came out and looked at a group of these things and they have arranged for a show for I guess it's December of next year, or maybe it's '04, I can't remember. And they sent the contract and I haven't responded to it because the drawings are quite small and they are unframed, or the larger ones are unframed. I don't want to—I'm so cheap on this. I don't want to pay for the framing of all these things and the idiocy of spending all this money to ship them across the country. If this was going to—somewhere locally that they could just go in a car or van, but to ship them by air freight across the United States seems ridiculous to me.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It's very expensive.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Very expensive. And if this gallery should sell them, and I question this, the person who buys it isn't going to put—they're going to take off that frame that I put on and put on one that will go with their house or whatever they're going to do with these things. And others, the drawings are portfolios of maybe eight to ten drawings on a theme. And some of them are very personal. And nobody knows what these are about. I mean, I know one of these portfolios is sort of a memorial to my dogs, of many dogs, and the palm trees in the front yard. And it also has a little Egyptian stuff thrown in.

Or I have another group that are little drawings that I did just sitting around on scrap paper of these little toys. And the little toys in some of them are action toys. And so I would show the toy in all its movement. But they were just on scraps of paper so I stick them in my color copier with heat transfer paper and then print them on good rag paper and they're in a little portfolio. It's that sort of thing. Or the drawings, the Chinese things are collaged and they're on rice paper.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, you know, I think probably that these portfolios would probably be most effective in a museum situation. So perhaps that will happen someday.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't know. This is—it gets—I think I do my art for myself. I don't think I'm doing it for a gallery to sell. Although when I did baskets I got going on the baskets because of Barbara Okun in Santa Fe, or she was in St. Louis at that time. She was representing Ed and one day she was talking to him on the phone, she said, "Do you ever do baskets?" And I said, "Oh, yes." And so I sent her a couple. Well, that's how I started doing baskets.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I want to get into this a little more later on. Well, actually a lot more later on. Katherine, anything else—okay, I'm just watching this time here now. Is there anything else that you want to say about your travels?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I like to—I realize when we first started out we had this idea we had to do the whole thing ourselves and figure this out. And eventually—and of course we were doing it on a very low budget and we were staying in crummy hotels and that sort of thing. But then gradually we took a cruise with a British group that is called the Hellenic Society. And we went through Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria on a ship and then went off. Well, this, it had lectures—and so every night before you went to a site you saw slides, and somebody lectured to you about what it was. Well this was very convenient. You didn't have to find your hotel yourself—You didn't have to find the hotel or where to eat. It was all presented to you, you know. All you had to do was manage not to fall off the ship as you were getting down to the little conveyer to take you to the shore. And then I began collecting all this tour literature and reading about these various ones. And we started taking tours. When we went to out of the way places, as—now let me think, where did we go. We went to Tunisia with a Tunisian tourist office group and went all over Tunisia. And we were the only English speaking people on the tour, everybody else was speaking—was French. So we got a little—we finally told the tour director just say it in French, we'll try and figure it out.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Were you able to do that?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Pretty much, yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Really? Had you had French in school?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Sure, but not enough to speak it or understand it the way the French do. But when we went to Egypt we took tours. I wouldn't attempt any of these things—however, we did go to Iran, Afghanistan and India on our own, which was foolish but it happened.

CAROLE AUSTIN: You survived.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: You survived, but you didn't see very much because you had to dig it all out yourself and there wasn't very much written about these things. And then so since then, mainly when we went out of the United States, we took tours.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Tours.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: We've even taken them in the United States because you're seeing a lot more with a lot less effort than the horrible thing of trying to get—even pick your bags up and put them on the bus. Somebody else does it. And somebody points you to the dining room. And certainly this was the case in China, this was—you saw a lot. And it was a tour. We went to Indonesia on a tour.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Now, I haven't read any material. Can you talk a little bit about Indonesia?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: We went to Indonesia in 1979. Ed and I had both retired from university teaching and we decided to take a cruise to Indonesia. And this was on, I think it was Holland America Line. They had one small cruise ship that could go into the Indonesian archipelago, because it didn't need as much water or whatever, draw, I don't know what they call it. And we started in Singapore and we were in Singapore and at that time I was very interested in Tiger Balm Gardens. And so we went to see Tiger Balm Gardens and all the stuff in Singapore. And then we got on the ship and it went from Singapore up to Malaysia to—can't think of the name, a beach resort in Indonesia [Penang, Malaysia] with

marvelous Buddhist images around, and orchids.

After we stopped at Penang, we got back on the ship and all the tables had great bunches of orchids on the table, which they had gotten. And the gift shop had wonderful kaftans from Malaysia. And it was interesting. Wherever you stopped then the gift shop would have these things. If you didn't buy it when you were on shore you could always have a second chance at the gift shop.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Actually that's nice.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: You know. And of course with clothing it was nice because you could take it to your cabin, try it on and see if it looked all right before you purchased it. Big difference than going to a market and holding it up.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Looking at—yeah, holding it.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Then we went from Penang, we went to Sumatra and went to several places in Sumatra. One of them was a little village on the top of a mountain that the people were still in the stone-age culture and they were all dressed in feathers and beads and did little dances. And one of the men with great boar tusks and fiber costume was terribly interested in watching me change the film in my camera and his head was down there next to me watching this. And I didn't get the film in right because I was so taken aback by being so close to a stone-age warrior.

And then we went down to Java, to Jakarta and around and to Bali, and then back to Java and back to Singapore where we spent two days getting another visa so we could go back to Bali for—but you had to have two visas and you couldn't get them at the same time. So we then went back to Bali and spent a week or so in Bali. And then that wasn't a tour, you know, so we just hired drivers from the hotel and took us to various places. And then we went to Hong Kong and Hawaii and back home. It was kind of a long, extensive trip, but very good.

CAROLE AUSTIN: How did this end up in your work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I'm trying to think. It ended up in some little artist books and some textiles that were a combination of dye and heat transfers of Indonesian puppets. I think because this textile went to an exhibit somewhere and it never came home, it got ripped off somewhere along the line. For a while more things of mine were being stolen than I ever sold.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, that's interesting. Well, people certainly must like your work.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, at least they were—either they didn't want it to be around that they took it so they could destroy it, or that—I don't know. But that was one—and then I could have done that one again but I was afraid to—because I had all the raw material, I had all the drawings that I had done heat transfers from. But the insurance company was absolutely convinced I was trying to collect on insurance.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh my goodness. Well, did you ever get paid?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah, but not much, you know. But it was just this funny feeling that I could have done it again but I really couldn't.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Katherine, anything else you can think of about your travels that you'd like to say before we move on?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No, I can't think of anything right now.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Because I hadn't heard anything about your Indonesian trips. Do you think of yourself, because of your travels, as part of an international tradition or one that is particularly American? It's a tough question.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I would rule out international completely. I think the international scene is something very different. What I think I'm doing is something very small and pretty private. I have only done one very large printed textile, which I still have folded up. Nobody is particularly interested in this thing. When Louise Allrich had a gallery and was selling things she saw this and she had a client that had a wall space that was big enough for this.

It has some quilting and some dyeing and some embroidery on it. And then—and it's based on the Porch of the Maidens in Athens of monuments falling. And I had seen a graffiti in a classroom at the University of Washington fairly recently that said, "When smashing monuments, save the bases." And I thought, that's wonderful, so I lettered this across the bottom of the textile. And the clients saw this and they said, "We can't have that. We can't have that." What did they say? It's subversive or something. "We can't have that." This must have been in the late '60s that I did this.

CAROLE AUSTIN: How interesting. What happened to that piece?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I have it in a chest at the condo. And it's done on a king-size sheet, a white sheet, so it's big.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It's big.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: You see, but this was very amusing. And from then on I very often put lettering or a little message and things, because people don't get the message visually, they only get the message from words. And I think maybe I've learned my lesson about messages of words because in the show that is currently at Davis of Ed's and my printed textiles from the '50s through the '70s ["Retro-Hand Printed Textiles: A Visual Remembrance from the Studios of Katherine Westphal and Ed Rossbach," Design Museum, UC Davis, July 15—September 27, 2002], I wrote quite a lengthy statement to go with this—I like to write—and of what this was all about or something.

Then I—my mind has gone fuzzy on this right now. Somebody from the office up there sent a Xerox copy of a review that was in the Davis newspaper. And I read it and I realized that this person was, instead of looking at my work or Ed's work, they looked at what I had written. They were commenting on what I had written.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, that's interesting.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And I was insulted by what they said about my textiles. And I just folded this up and stuck it in a drawer and I haven't looked at it since. But it really—in this article they compare printed textiles. I said something about in the '50s, '60s and '70s textiles were thought of as three-yard lengths. And everybody did everything, printed or woven, they were three-yard lengths. And one of the places that had yearly shows of textiles was the Rotunda Gallery in the city of Paris and San Francisco. And I said we all did three-yard lengths.

Well, this person took exception to this and she said, "Would anybody ask Rauschenberg or Wayne Thiebaud to paint paintings three yards in length?" Then she went on—I'm really taking this women on, it insulted me—that if a certain textile that was in there, the drawing was very beautiful and all, but it would be worth much more if it had been done in oil. [Laughs.]

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's quite some review. That's astounding.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: You know, I was upset about this and I jammed it in the drawer and I then talked to Dolph Gotelli, who arranged this show, and I said, "Who is that person that wrote the review?" Well, he hadn't seen it. He was away on vacation or something and the office had just sent it to me. And I said, "Well, if you had read that review you wouldn't have sent it to me."

CAROLE AUSTIN: What did he say? Did he read it?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't know. He moved on to a different—I mean, Dolph, much as I love him, is kind of fluttery at times and going in a million ways at once, and he wouldn't have sent anything to hurt me, you know. It just happened accidentally. And I shouldn't be so thin-skinned about it, but I thought how stupid for a reviewer to compare printed textiles to some of the top sellers in the money market art game.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, also and that time period versus contemporary art, you know. Things were done differently then.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And I mean I could challenge this because I know a very long, narrow Robert Rauschenberg painting that he has a patchwork quilt glued onto the surface.

You know which one this is. And that's a very long—it may be three yards long.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's true. And that's a contemporary artist, too, doing this. I'm looking at the time here.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't—I'm going to say something right here. I am a great admirer of Rauschenberg's work, I think he's terrific—and how he crosses all boundaries. I saw the show in Washington DC at the National Gallery and I was fascinated. And it was the one that he went around the world and had artists from around the world work on things, and there are videos of that and movies of it in addition to all the paintings that were in the show. And this mixture of layering of images of unrelated things—it's what I'm interested in and I respond to this in Rauschenberg's work.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I can see that very much, though. Of course you have that same kind of visual—at least in this period of work that you did.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Would you care to explore issues of gender, race, ethnic as it relates to the artist's work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I am fascinated by outsider art and I am fascinated by the black artist, the black women quilt makers and the folk artists of the South, these religious things with messages and images. And it's all the art that I think comes from the heart rather than the art that has been trained like you train a dog. And I think that's related to my feeling about art school and university. I think university you go there for an education so you can live the rest of your life in peace with yourself, that you know about the world. But it doesn't—I don't think it's training you for a specific thing like a dog jumping through a hoop.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That makes me think, Katherine, about a university-trained person giving their art reflecting on the South. What do you think in this respect of Eleanor Dickinson's work? Her painting on velvet and she did the tent, pictures of the people in the tent, congregations, you know.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't know this.

CAROLE AUSTIN: You don't know this? Okay, well maybe we'll have to get you acquainted with her.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Is she a black artist?

CAROLE AUSTIN: No, she lives in San Francisco.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't know her.

CAROLE AUSTIN: You don't know her, okay. So in other words, you enjoy the outsider art or the folk artists because they do work from the heart and not from academic training?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Mm-hmm.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I think you've already answered this, but does the function of objects play a part in the meaning of your work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. [Laughing.] I don't think my things are functional. Even if you could put it on, I don't think it's functional. Or if it is a basket, I don't think you can put fruit in it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's true. Do you think that religion or a sense of spirituality plays a role in your art?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, but I don't think it's standard.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Then how? In what way?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think it plays a part in that I am very willing to put a Buddha figure in something. This doesn't mean that I'm a Buddhist or even—you know, I'm fascinated by things from the Southwest that have all the Catholic symbolism in it. And I know in the past I

have done things with Madonnas in them and collect little things of that sort, but that doesn't mean that I'm involved—I respect people's religion but I don't practice it as such. It's maybe more a spirituality, the mystical quality.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And also the imagery of religious work interests you?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. Again, it's this from the heart, not the academic training.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, I think also that you talked a lot about Giotto when you were in Italy and what a sensation it was to see that work.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Now, I think we're just about running out of tape out of the disc, so let's see if there's anything we can squeak in. Well, the next question is a little more lengthy. Okay, so let's stop here, Katherine, and change tapes, okay?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Okay.

[End of tape.]

CAROLE AUSTIN: For the disk, this is Carole Austin interviewing Katherine Westphal at her home in Berkeley, California, on September 3rd, 2002, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Okay, Katherine, let's continue now. Can you tell me how you think the market for American craft has changed in your lifetime?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I guess I am not as involved in thinking of craft to sell. I know that when I first got involved with the American Craft Council, I was very critical of Mrs. Webb because she thought crafts were going to save the Third World, build their economy or something and I felt that this was kind of a narrow view of craft. Then I realized I was out of step with the rest of the world. The rest of the world was interested in going to craft fairs and galleries and selling their work and they were interested in the amount of money that they got for the craft.

And recently, I feel the whole world has gone nuts over glass. Every magazine, everything you pick up, some magazines I don't even get any more because I'm so tired of seeing glass, glass, glass. And I don't think the people who are doing it are doing it for a reason other than the money and the prestige they get from it.

I mean, this includes [Dale] Chihuly. I mean, these extravaganzas which are fun to watch, the video tape of the exhibition and the Citadel in Jerusalem, I think that's what it was, was fascinating to see and the trucks coming up with all these things. But that isn't what doing craft or art is to me, it's a business, that's a business. And although recently within the last 10 years or so, Ed and I have sold things and suddenly it made me, instead of an artist, into a bookkeeper, keeping records of how much I spend on materials and how much postage and all and then I had to send in sheets to the IRS. You know, this became ridiculous and it was a very small business. It took the fun out of it and I think I just like to play with this. I'm serious but it's serious play. It isn't business.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, also I think that for both you and Ed, your art has been a very personal thing for you, for both of you. It isn't something that's just, you know, been out for the world to see.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So the craft market isn't something that is of great interest to you?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No, I can't imagine going to a craft fair and nor could I imagine ever participating in one. They've just had the Sausalito Art Fair and it has been on television and I think, what are these people doing? It's a circus. They're entertaining the masses.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I think that's an aspect of it, definitely. Do you think that the market has changed over the years from when you first began? Or do you think the part of the big business is part of that change?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think part of the big business—well, these textiles that are at Davis now, most of them were exhibition pieces, they never sold. I mean, I have boxes of them and at one time I designed textiles and Ed designed textiles for industry and we had an agent in New York.

CAROLE AUSTIN: What was his name?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Frederick Karoly and the company was called Perspectives [Perspectives Inc., New York] and we designed textiles for industry but that was a separate thing, these things at Davis, some of those commercial things are in the show at Davis, swatches and little bits about them but they aren't the exhibition pieces. They weren't selling, and for example, most of my wearable art has never sold until about a month ago a man from Los Angeles came who was preparing a show for Barney's in New York of vintage wearable art—he had seen some of my things and then he came out, he wanted to meet me and he wanted to see some of these things. And I put out a few and he said, "Do you have some more?" And I opened the closest and dumped the whole thing out. Then he said to me, "How much is the whole collection?" And he bought all of it. And he carried it away, too; I didn't have to pack it. And now it is in New York.

CAROLE AUSTIN: How do you feel about that?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I'm glad not to have the responsibility of trying to figure out where it's going to go. Whether it's going to—you know, what do I do with all this stuff because both Ed and I have been very prolific, and since most of it did not sell, we have tons of it jammed into a 10-room house and a four-room condo. You know, this is ridiculous. It's insanity.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So do you have any ideas of how you want to disperse this?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. I have absolutely none. [Laughter].

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay, well, back to your agent in New York. I know you've talked about this in other interviews but do you feel that designing, which I know you both enjoy doing for this company, had an impact on your personal work or the other way round?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. I think it did because certainly until I made this contact with the agent in New York, I didn't know what a half drop was or a straight repeat or any of those things of putting images together. Well, then, later on, these textiles that are in Davis now, a great many of them are in some sort of repeat, but they were hand done and the ones that were silk screened were not done with a mechanical device of the rail that the silkscreen people use now, where the screen is clamped onto a rail—this is using the silkscreen as you would a block print. You just see the place and you put it down and it's all eye judgment. It's a different kind of printing. It isn't mechanical.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Explain the rail.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: The rail fits along the side of the printing table. The printing table has some sort of tacky surface on it that the fabric will stick to it and not move around and the rail fastens along. It's like a track and it has a module marked out with clips and so the screen clips into this and the silkscreen printer prints every other image. So they print here and then it moves over and then the next time around they go in between, this way you don't drag the wet dye on the cloth. But when I print, I print—if I'm doing a long that goes very tight together—I cut a little window in a piece of craft paper and put a tissue paper, drafting paper flap over it and I print on that. And then when the brown paper goes on the cloth and you place the image to meet the others. You lift up the paper. You put your screen down in the marks and you screen it, or you can do it completely by eye without the brown paper. But when I was teaching at Davis, I tried to get the students to print in this way without the rail on the table.

Francis Butler was up there at that time and Francis is a terrific technician and designer but she used all the mechanical elements and printed huge—she had a huge studio in Oakland near Emeryville and had long tables and would print lengths of yardage but she used the rail. The students evidently knew what Francis was doing. They weren't going to do this kindergarten stuff that I was doing. They only wanted to work with the rail.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's interesting. Okay. When you did these designs for your agent you

did them on cloth?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Now, did they use mechanical means to make yardage from them?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Oh, yes. They were roller printed and there was some difficulty when I first sent the designs because the agent thought I had cut them out of a piece of cloth. They weren't acquainted with people who printed on cloth. The designs for industry are mainly painted on boards, on illustration boards, you see.

CAROLE AUSTIN: The man, say his name again, Karoly?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Karoly.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Is this the only experience that you've had with agents?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It was. And how about—like, you've worked with galleries, I know that. And has that been an easy relationship for you?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes and no. You know, it's involved with the gallery personnel and personal relationships and what they can sell. They're not going to have things in their gallery if they can't sell them, and the galleries we work with are all on the East Coast. No gallery in California except, I guess, last summer. Braunstein/Quay [Gallery] one of the curators, did a show and she had some of my things in it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Louise Allrich also showed the work didn't she?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. Louise Allrich was a student of mine.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh, she was?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And when I was first up at Davis, Louise Allrich was a student in my classes and we got to be very friendly and then eventually, she moved down here and opened a gallery that showed textiles. But she did not show my work nor did she show Ed's.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, that's interesting. Do you know why?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No.

CAROLE AUSTIN: You made a comment the other day that I would love you to say on the tape and maybe explain it more. You talked about when showing in museums that usually the curators picked out the work and you felt that the artist should really participate in this because they often showed pieces that weren't as important to you as other pieces they didn't show. Can you talk about this?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, this is in relationship to Ed's work because it was when they were doing the show, the retrospective at the Textile Museum. They had a curator come up from the East who looked at everything and made a selection, and I thought it was a conservative collection and I tried to stay—I stayed out of this and of course, Ed never—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Should I let her in?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah. The key is under the plant.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Keep talking about this. I think this is an important subject, I think.

Sorry—and Ed wouldn't say anything?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't think he said anything.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Has this happened to you in any shows?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No, because I don't think I've ever been in a position that a curator has selected stuff for a show.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That you've done most of your own selection for your shows?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah. The things I've done are small, you know. The only show that has had a catalogue is this one from Daphne Farago and those were her choices, those were the things she bought. Everything in that catalogue she owns plus more. And so I haven't been in that position of having somebody come in and select.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. I think that we don't need to talk about your relationship with dealers because you really don't have a relationship, right?

Katherine, can you describe the qualities of your working environment? Your studio is here at home, upstairs?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. I have a fairly large—it was a bedroom in the house and I have a large 4 x 8 table in there and a color copy machine and a light table and boxes of all sorts of things and a sewing machine. I also had a large table like this down at the condo. Well, I could move around easily and when I was driving a car, I went to the condo and worked almost every day which was lovely because it was very quiet down there. The students were all—it's close to the university, so it has a large student population and they didn't get home until later and so, by the time they came back, I was gone. So it was a very—and I was away from things and I—but then I work all over the place. I mean, it drifts all over and—

CAROLE AUSTIN: In the house as well?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: In the house, in the backyard. If we go on a trip, I always have a sanity bag along which holds scissors, embroidery hoops, embroidery thread. A lot of the embroideries I did some time ago were things that I did on the airplane. I would embroider on the airplane or when we were on a trip in the hotel rooms. The little hands have to keep busy all the time.

CAROLE AUSTIN: [Laughs.] That's great.

So your condo in Berkeley is also a place where you store a great deal of work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. We got it mainly because we were having a storage problem and I went out and investigated how much all these storage places are and they were pretty expensive. And then I didn't feel they—I didn't know what would be in the unit next to me, what kind of little critters they might have that would come in and eat my paper and my cloth. And so, I suggested to Ed that a condo might be the way to go and he did not think so.

Well, I went out and looked and found this condo that we have. There were two available, a one bedroom one and a two bedroom one. The one bedroom one was on a lower floor and I felt it was too accessible over the balcony, that anybody could break in. I didn't think it was secure. The two bedroom one had much more room and was up higher in the building. So—

CAROLE AUSTIN: It had the advantage that you could work there as well?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. It was big enough that there was plenty of room for storage for our things and there was a big area for me to work. And also, I could, when I had people from the galleries come selecting things, I could set up the work on the wall. It became like a little gallery with things on the wall. So they could come down and they could make their selection and we could write up the sheets and put them in piles for me to pack.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, Katherine, did you ever find a problem, for instance, of working at the condo and having materials that were here that you needed or needing to use your copier? Did that ever cause a problem for you for the continuity of your work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No, because when I was teaching at Davis, I was a teacher one day and I was an artist in Berkeley the other day, and I had to remember where things were and what the continuity is. And I think I have a pretty good visual memory and so I could, you know, I can finds things that look like chaos in this house but I pretty much can go around and find it. I know where it is. And I could, if I was working on something at the condo that required heat transfers that I didn't have, I could go home, next day—I could make them that night, take them back of what I needed.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Now, another place that you used as a studio was Davis when you

teaching.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So was it at a time when you had three different studios?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. I didn't have the condo. The condo is, let's see, we bought it in 1991, a month before the fire in Berkeley.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh, my gosh.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And we were evacuated from this house and we didn't have power, so we couldn't get the cars out of the garage and so we each put a dog on a leash—Sam and Molly—and we walked down to the condo which was half a mile and the condo had shelves in it and wall-to-wall carpeting. Well, it wasn't very comfortable sleeping on the wall-to-wall carpeting but at least—

CAROLE AUSTIN: You had a place to go.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: We had a place to go because it was a problem. What do you do with the animals, you know?

CAROLE AUSTIN: Of course.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: The most precious possession, your dogs.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Of course. Well, was this a very fearful time during this fire?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Oh, yes. It was, you know, you could see it and the sky was black and the sun was bright red and we could see the smoke moving and since we didn't have power we couldn't connect with television or radio. Of course we didn't have batteries for it, a battery radio. When we were down at the condo, we went up on the third floor and could watch the fire moving across the hills. And we knew approximately what buildings were burning because we had lived up there for approximately 20 years and knew the shapes of the houses and we could see the dark shape against the red flames and you knew which house was burning. Both houses that we had lived in up on the hill were completely destroyed. The first one, three people were killed on that street, they couldn't get out.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Katherine, you said two of the houses were destroyed. Now, you talked earlier in your interviews about having designed a house. I couldn't tell if that house was actually built.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It wasn't built.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It wasn't built?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It was too big a commitment monetarily for us to take a chance on. So we hired an architect and he did the perfect house except it was so perfect there wasn't any way of expanding it. We had land but we couldn't expand it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I see. So how did you come about buying this house? It's a wonderful house.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: When I was at the university, I lived about three blocks from here and I had a room in a house and I would walk this way to the university. And as I would walk down the street, I would look at all these houses and decided which one I had liked the best and this was the house I liked the best. Well, it was around Easter time in 1972, we were going to have an Easter egg hunt for some friends with children. We'd walked down the street and there was a for sale sign in front of this house and I said to Ed, "I want to go and see the inside of that house." And so eventually I got in contact with the real estate man and he took us through it on a Wednesday morning, I think, and by Wednesday afternoon we had purchased it.

We decided we would have all this space, you know. Well, after we got it, we thought, what have we done, you know. But it has worked out very well and of course, it's modified. Everybody remodels and repairs.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Did you do that?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. We remodeled and the latest remodel is the elevator which is a wonderful thing. There's nothing like a glass elevator to ride up and look at your garden as you're going up or watch your neighbors. It's great for watching the neighbors. And it's also good for them watching us going up and down the elevator.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, I think that your house has to be very important when you both have your studios within the house. Your environment has to be absolutely conducive to you and your work.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Let's move on here. Is there a community that has been important to you or to your development as an artist?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I suppose there are two. One is UC Davis in the design department. While I was there it was a terrifically congenial group. Everybody enjoyed this idea of playing or, you know, let's take it one step farther. It wasn't restricted in a little box. There were some people who were more box oriented but the community was very good. And the other one was Fiberworks [Center for the Textile Arts, Berkeley, California] and I loved Fiberworks when it was just a workshop place and a place for people to get together and talk. After it got to the point that people decided they needed credit and a degree, as far as I was concerned, it disintegrated. It no longer had—people tightened up and they were interested in the credit and not so much in what they were learning or discussing. It was too structured.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Now, many of your undergraduate students became its graduate students?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: That's right.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And then a number of these students founded Fiberworks. Is that correct?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. That isn't quite correct because the people that founded Fiberworks had never been students of mine.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh, they hadn't?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I only knew them at Fiberworks and they were students of Ed's but not of mine.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Do you remember who they are?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, its Gyöngy Laky and Chere Lai Mah and I think maybe Susan Wick. I don't know. I know Ginger was part of it and I think Chere Lai Mah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: This became a very important place, didn't it, Fiberworks?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. It was—you know, the fact that you could go there and have contact with someone like Yoshiko Wada Wada who bought her Japanese culture to the United States and not only talked about the techniques but of what textiles were and the whole spiritual thing of Japan. And you came in contact with it and the people that were down taking these classes—they weren't taking them for credit. We were all stitching and dying our hands blue in indigo and it wasn't this emphasis on credit or making things to sell, it was learning something.

Nance O'Banion may have been one of the people who founded Fiberworks. I learned how to—after I retired, I learned how to make paper from Nance O'Banion. And since that time, I've found that I like paper better to work on than cloth and not only paper that I made myself but handmade paper from other parts of the world, machine made paper and you know, I just respond to paper.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It also provided a networking system, didn't it?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Which I think is so important for artists.

I think that your situation at Davis with the faculty in your department was quite unusual—you know, and I think it was a fortunate situation not only for you but for the students as well. Can you elaborate on that and who some of the teachers were that worked in the team with you, or sort of a team?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, it was Jo Ann Stabb, Dolph Gotelli, Debra Rapaport and brief periods of time when Mary Winderbaker was up there teaching for a while—Susan Sternleib.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Pat Hickman?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. Pat Hickman wasn't teaching up there.

CAROLE AUSTIN: When you were there?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: When I was there. Pat Hickman came after I retired because I retired. I had had it and I retired in the middle of the year. I said, "That's it." And they—what are we going to do about teaching your history class. I said, "Oh, get Pat Hickman to do it. She can do it much better than I did." So that's how Pat got up there. And let's see—Lia Cook was up at Davis for a while. Nance O'Banion was there.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh goodness. I didn't know all of these people had taught at Davis.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, they were there as T.A.s because you see, Berkeley didn't have places for T.A.s to teach but we had them and so they did a, I don't know, a semester, I mean a quarter or a year or something as T.A.s.

Greg Lynn was one of Ed's students who—and then Greg Lynn, they kept him on. He was a wonderful teacher. The students adored him.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Can you spell his last name?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: L-y-n-n. He was one of these people who, you didn't have to ask him. If he saw something that had to be done, he did it and it wasn't, "Is it in my job description?" He just did it. Very much there was with this group of people that were up there—not everybody that was teaching up there was part of this little group. They felt outside a little. And I'm sure I've forgotten people that were teaching there. But Davis was a difficult place because of the hostility with the art department.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Is that still going on, do you think?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I have no idea.

CAROLE AUSTIN: You probably don't want to know either?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: The day I walked out I never looked back. It was their baby now. But it was a hostile environment. I knew some of the people but they didn't particularly want to share their students.

CAROLE AUSTIN: But they had a fine department in painting anyway. But there was antagonism?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah, there was antagonism because some of the people who are in the art department there were in what was called home economics at Davis, and they closed them out and they moved them to the art department. And then because they had students that had to finish, they got a few more people to teach. One of them was Helge Olsen, one was Helen Giambruni. I was there. This was before Jo Ann Stabb was there. They had a contessa from Italy teaching costume. And these people, we were all on a temporary basis, just to finish up these few students and the students didn't want to be finished off and miraculously the few handful of students grew to hundreds.

CAROLE AUSTIN: You mentioned that it was about 300 by the time you left which is astounding.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, it's way down now simply because the administration has cut the funds. They don't want to support this. Better when it was part of applied behavioral

science because it was part of a large group, and the chairman was one of the old boys on the Davis campus and he protected his little nestlings.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I want to go back for just a minute. You spoke about Helge Olsen and two other people and I didn't get their names.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't know who I could have mentioned. Oh, Helen Giambruni.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Can you spell Giambruni?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: G-i-a-m-b-r-u-n-i. She taught history of design. That's Tio Giambruni's wife. You know, peace now?

CAROLE AUSTIN: Yes. Of course.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And you see, Tio was in the art department. Helen was in the other.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And they allowed that at Davis, for husband and wife to teach on the same campus.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I guess so because—They did it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So you have found that community, a community of artists has been important to you?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. Lillian Elliott and her husband were good friends of ours. We would see them every other week or something. So that was sort of a small community. Particularly Lillian and Ed were all involved in making baskets. I was maybe making baskets, I don't know, but anyway—

CAROLE AUSTIN: So you're talking about a community of just friends as well as colleagues, so to speak, or artists?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. And that is important.

Where do you think American fiber ranks on an international scale, right now at this time?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I can't tell you that. I don't keep up with it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Do you see that the field is moving in any obvious direction, because you haven't kept up with it—

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. I don't keep up with it. I don't take the magazines. I have become very isolated from it. I read the *New York Times* constantly but the magazines—I think I've said this before, that I don't understand art-speak. It doesn't communicate to me and that might be my fault.

CAROLE AUSTIN: No, I agree with that. I have a very difficult time with that, too, Katherine.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I feel that when you're writing about art, you have to make it so simple that people don't have to sit there with a dictionary and find out what you're saying and I find that—I have done some writing for magazines and all but the ones that I believe in most basically don't get published in the magazines because they aren't on the same wavelength, and well, the one that I'm very pleased with is the one that is in Harriet Nathan's thing on Fortuny in Venice and also the keynote address from Vienna from the World Crafts Conference. I feel that they're saying things—I'm saying it, that I'm communicating in a very simple narrative way.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, the other thing that I liked about—especially your writing about Fortuni is that you have the courage to say that, you know, you didn't understand or had no interest in his work in your younger years and how that evolved. I thought that was interesting and I think that's important to readers.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I think it's important. We change very much as we grow older but we get more experienced. When I think back when I was in college, I only knew paintings

from slides and when I was there, they didn't have colored slides so they were black and white.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I was astounded to read that. You know, I just always assumed that all art classes had colored slides.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: You had a few reproductions but you never saw the real things. Particularly on the West Coast, you didn't see real paintings or you know, you saw things in black and white photographs. Now, well, even the colored things on the newspapers, the color photographs are so marvelous, you get feelings of textures of paintings from things that the *New York Times* have, or they'll blow a little detail up and so you really can see it, but that didn't happen. And so, if you were in the 1940s, one was just living in the black and white world.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So it was terribly important as an art historian to travel to see these things?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: To travel. But you couldn't travel. It was—the first time we went to Europe it took 24 hours from Los Angeles, 24 hours flying time. The cost was probably very relative to what it is now but it wasn't the thing. One just didn't hop over to Europe on the weekend.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So this was a big thing to go to Europe.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It was a big thing, yes. You know, now they advertise, go to London for a weekend. And I have friends who do this.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Katherine, back to the black and white business. Now, when you were taking your history classes early on, did you have books that had colored pictures of the paintings in them? Did your textbooks have this?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Did you have textbooks?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: We had textbooks, Helen Gardner, *Art Through the Ages* and—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Janson? Did you have Janson?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Was that later?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It must be later. I can't even think of the other one but mainly it was Helen Gardner.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And that was black and white, too?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: That's black and white. I think there were large size folders which are probably somewhere down here that had color reproductions and I have a few that I bought in museums or something like that probably at that same time, but I don't know.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So there was very few?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Very little.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Yeah, very little in color. That's interesting. Okay. You have mentioned that you were more influenced by objects than by people. Now, this question says, what are the most powerful influences in your career, people, art movements, technological developments and then—I would add—art objects or objects. Can you talk about this a bit—the influences of your career, what they were?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I can't—[laughs] my reaction to this is everything.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Everything?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Everything.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's very important.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It isn't one select thing. It's everything, and I try and put everything in one drawing or painting, you know. It may have people or it may have objects, it has color, it, you know. I think I have said this in one of these things, and I said it to my class I was teaching once, and it came off so good I'll use it again. My mind is like an egg beater. Everything gets mixed together. And everything I do I think is a collage of ideas, of objects, of materials, all sort of whipped together.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Now, you use the world around you as inspiration for your work and I think Ed has done this in his work. Is this something you've developed together or are you two people that just happened to be influenced in this manner?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think it's the latter. I think it's two people. I don't think we consciously try and cross the line and pick up what the other person is doing. Pretty much we try and keep things—have always tried to keep things separate.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, that must attract each other's art to you then because you're pulling from very similar resources?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah. I don't know. It's hard for me to look back five years to what went before—I just can't think back to this.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It's hard to look back and think about these things?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Now, in recent years, I think Daphne Farago's show, now that's the show that was organized at Rhode Island [Rhode Island School of Design]? Okay, now that's a show of both of your work and was the textile museum both of your work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Just Ed's?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Just Ed's.

CAROLE AUSTIN: How do you feel about this?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think our work works very well together because we see it together but it's difficult to be in a position of also-ran.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's what I wanted to know.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: This happens very frequently. You can't have two people from the same family exhibiting or something like this. It's this nepotism or whatever you call it but it's basically rude of audiences. When we were in Washington, DC, Ed had the show at the Textile Museum, the big one. And then there was a small gallery in Washington, DC and they had baskets of Ed's and I think baskets of mine—I can't quite remember—at the same time. And then the Textile Museum had a lecture set up that both Ed and I would talk at the lecture, which we did, and they didn't have any questions for me. All the questions were for Ed, and I was furious, and I said I will never do another lecture, a joint lecture. You either get one or the other but you don't get both.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's interesting. Do you think it would have been different if both of you were in that show?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. This was not a new experience, but at that point I had it and I wasn't going along with this any more. I wanted to be as important.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, of course—known for yourself. So this has not worked really satisfactorily for you, this joint talking, exhibition?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. And I think, well, I'm not going into it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I think you also mentioned that you really—I don't know how to put this in the right words but I know you'll do it—that you also stay out of each other's work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Can you elaborate on that a bit?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I suppose unconsciously you influence back and forth because everything you see influences you. I mean, it isn't that you're sitting around with blinders, I'm not going near you. And for example, when Ed and I are both making baskets, he was using heat transfers on the baskets but because Ed isn't mechanically inclined, I wouldn't want him to use my copying machine.

He would give me the thing and I would go and make the heat transfer and put it on the rice paper because technically, I can do these things but he had great difficulty. Some people have great difficulty pulling the heat transfer off. Why, I don't know, but this is something that I can do and so I would do the thing and he would take it off from there. But in the baskets that I made I did not use any of the techniques that he used and so my baskets were coming out looking very different because I was using a completely different technique that he wasn't using.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Did this happen right until recently or was this always like this, even at the end when making baskets for Ed?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. Well, I never stepped over this. I mean, much of this stuff I know how to do and I could do it but the concept would not be there. Technically I know how to do these things but they aren't things that I chose to use and the baskets that I make I use a crochet hook. I'm crocheting and it's a very mechanical thing but you can do it while you're watching television or whatever. It's like embroidering, you're—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Like knitting?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah. It's repetitive action but—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, tomorrow when we begin, when we have a good long time on the tape I want to talk to you in depth about your baskets. Okay? Because this is one area that hasn't really—you know, recently enough that it hasn't been on your interviews.

Have you found that it's been stimulating or difficult or a combination of things to be married to an artist working with the same kind of materials that you've worked with?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think it's very stimulating because you never know what the other person is going to be doing with this and also when you're traveling you're interested in the same things, you know.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I was going to ask you that. So you and Ed were really very interested in the same things when you traveled?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, but this is, well, interesting to me because Ed would look at these things but he would never tell me at the time that he was interested in something and maybe then much later and I said, "Well, why didn't you tell me so I could have looked at it a different way." But I have a tendency, I think, to talk too much and to impose my views on other people. I don't know.

CAROLE AUSTIN: What do you see—this is jumping a bit from what we were talking about—but what do you see as the place of universities in the American craft movement? What do you see as their role in this at present or even when you were teaching?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I suppose the role of the university is to make it—no, that isn't the right word—to enable students to recognize that this is a universal thing and this is a magic that hands down from generation to generation. It is a mystical link between yourself and the man who did a bar relief on the wall in Egypt. You're not isolated and your vision doesn't start from the moment you are born; you inherit a feeling of a culture and not only your own but everybody's. You can assimilate little things from everybody because they're all human activities. I've lost a train of thought right now.

CAROLE AUSTIN: We were talking about—we're running out of tape, so that's fine. It was the powerful influences, no—that you see the place of universities in the American craft movement. Okay? So, I think we'll stop here.

[End of tape.]

CAROLE AUSTIN: This is Carole Austin interviewing Katherine Westphal at the artist's home in Berkeley, California. This is September 5th and this is for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Now I want to preface this interview this morning with the fact that we have spent over an hour in Katherine's studio looking at her most recent work and Katherine was feeling uncomfortable with the questions from the Smithsonian because they didn't really relate to her or her work. So we're going to change the format a little bit. And her new work is very exciting and we're going to talk about that, but I'm going to get just a wee bit of background in here, Katherine, okay?

[Technical direction.]

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Katherine, before we start so we can lead into this amazing, fabulous work, I want to get a kind of chronology. You talked about that a little bit this morning—about the chronology of your work, and I think in the 1960s this is when you were doing quilts. [MS.WESTPHAL: Mm-hmm.] And you were using heat transfer on your quilts at this time, too? No?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. The quilts of the 1960s are using textile designs that didn't sell and cut up and they're patchwork and applique with embroidery. And at the time I did those I was doing a bed cover for my beds, and Jack Larsen happened to be drifting through and saw it and he wanted it for the Triennale [1964] in Milan. So I sent the quilt to—I can't think of the magazine—that they were collecting things in New York. That's where the central area was, and somebody broke into the magazine office and stole all the cameras in the magazine office, and as they took them off they needed something to put them it. So they put them in my quilt and carted off—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Took care of that.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: That took care of that. And so Jack phoned me apologetic and told me about this and he said do you have another one? And I said, well, I have one that is almost finished, I'll finish it and send it to you. So that was the quilt that was in the Triennale and I don't know what year this was. It was the one that Jack set up and Ed had some textiles in there, too.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Triennale, where?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: In Milan. And that quilt now is in the collection of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. And then I did other quilts and smaller ones and larger ones. None of the quilts ever got on the bed. I still have one that is hanging on the wall in the house. But they never made it to the bed. So much for function, you know. As I said to you the other day, I don't do things that have a function.

CAROLE AUSTIN: A function, of course not. Okay then. From quilts I think you went into making paper kimonos. Was that the next—

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It wasn't?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No. The paper kimonos are 1980s. You see, we're in the 60s and then in '66 I started teaching at Davis and I was teaching printed textiles and I thought, well, if I'm teaching this I should be doing it, and that's when I did a lot of printed textiles that are now in the show that Dolph has up at Davis. Then my work seems to go—I do a certain thing and then suddenly a time period, something happens, and I change directions completely, and I printed textiles and did mainly textile designs and wearable art and all, up to 1980.

In '79 I retired. We went Bali, and when I came back I took some workshops down at Fiberworks in Berkeley. It was when before it was giving credit, it was just a workshop place and people went just because they wanted to learn something or whatever they were doing. And I took a class in Shibori from Yoshiko Wada, a class in papermaking from Nance O'Banion and bookmaking from Susan Wick. And then I elaborated what I was doing in the past into all this involvement with the Shibori, the paper kimonos which were patch worked together but heat transfers on tiny pieces of paper, modules, each module different than the other. And I did paper kimonos then. Let's see. And I was working on all these things.

Then—I'm trying to figure out where we're going here. We're traveling at that time mainly in the United States. We got very interested in the West and we were going to New York lots and looking in the museum and I did a series of things on paper—they're heat transfer collages I guess you'd call it. Drawing, watercolor all together and this is involved with classical pots from the Metropolitan with white shattered pots and they all have white shapes, you know the way the archeologists put the pots back together again.

And the other group is from Wyoming, Cody, Wyoming, and frontier days in Cheyenne, Wyoming, where I went to a rock concert where Alan Jackson was performing.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Yes, you talked about that yesterday.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And this created a lot of visual material for what I was working on. But all this time I'm not doing these things for anything. It's very much an ego trip. I'm doing it for me because I have to express my interest in this or calling someone else's attention to the wonder of a light show and a rodeo all at the same time where all the young people knew every word of the songs and clapped all along with them. These were things I didn't know anything about. And so it was an awakening, almost, of this whole western pop culture.

Then approximately, I guess it was—the last trip we took even in the United States was when the Cézanne show was in the Philadelphia Museum and we went to Philadelphia to see the Cézanne show which—most interesting thing to me in it were the drawings and the watercolors—the tiny little things in the Cézanne show that you don't see reproduced all the time, and these were hard to see because the mobs were all going around with their little walkie-talkie listening to everything and they would stand in the front row with their eyes closed and their little machines on standing in front of all the work. Because I'm short, I couldn't see.

Finally some man observed what was happening and he just pushed the people apart and pulled me through and put me in the front row. So I saw the drawings beautifully.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's a nice story.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: You have to be thankful for small favors that somebody else saw somebody else was interested but couldn't get to it. But that was the last trip. Shortly when we got back, we were without a dog, and this was the first time we didn't have a dog since probably the 1950s. We always had a succession of dogs, and Ed said to me, "Well, do you want to go to Paris or shall we get another dog?" And I thought about it and I said, "Well, we can always go to Paris at some other time but we can't always get a dog." So we got Suzie, who is a difficult beagle, and the vet said to me you don't learn from your past lessons because we had an absolutely impossible beagle before.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Was that Molly?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: This was Molly and the dog trainer who is a behavioral psychologist was teaching dogs and he blew his cool with Molly. He was a friend of the vet that I went to, and the vet said to me, "What did you do to Ian? Because Ian said he's never going to have another beagle in his class."

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh. How funny.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: But Molly calmed down and became a number one pet and so then we got Suzie, and shortly after that Ed came down with e-coli and was hospitalized for quite some time. They weren't even sure he was going to make it but this completely changed our lives. I think at that point Ed never made another basket or drawing. He just stopped and he stopped in conversation or traveling. He closed down completely.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It's so sad.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: To a certain extent it's interesting because I then had to have home health care here, and I met the most wonderful people in the home health care, completely different people than I would ever come in contact with. I knew a few blacks, but the home health care people are mainly black. I had one woman was from Afghanistan and another was from Eritrea but mainly African-American. And I just enjoyed these people, learning about their culture pattern, what they wore to church, that no black woman goes to church without a fancy hat. And I didn't know this. This was a revelation and it goes on constantly

now.

And one of the people that came up to work was Raymond Hickey and I mention him because he has been working now for five years. He's been very important to both us. He's important to me because he's interested in art and he's interested in all this stuff. And for a while he was collecting wildflowers and pressing them, and I would take his pressed wildflowers and put it in my copy machine and I was using it in my collages.

And then when I was doing the spirit houses, Raymond was walking around and collecting all these paper shapes that people throw away. You know, toaster comes in a paper shape and I had a collection of them around here that I just loved. And pretty soon I was getting a big mound and I began making spirit houses out of these and all the little gold and patterned papers, and heat transfers, color copies from my machine and all the little collection of animals and all little, tiny miniature buttons. And all these little images came together and I began making little shrines.

And this all started because Ed's sister wanted a little Peruvian retablo. And I went down to the ethnic art store to buy one for her for her birthday and she—I had gone down to look at them and I saw them down there. And then her son came down for a visit and said he had gotten his mother one of these for her birthday. And I thought, "Oh, I can't do this. This will ruin the impact for him." So I decided to collect some of these little tiny Peruvian animals and various things that they had down there. And I made a retablo for Jane. And this got me started on spirit houses. I made, I think, 18 of them.

And then—but again, this was just a compact thing—I stopped and I didn't make any more spirit houses. And Dolph Gotelli took them up to Davis for his exhibit. Dolph responds to almost everything I do. And so I have had a lot of shows in the gallery that he's in charge of at Davis; more than other people and it's beyond my share. But this is something he enjoys arranging. He likes to arrange exhibits and he likes to put together my work. So that's how the spirit houses got going.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And then it ended? You had done this—group and that was it.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I did it and then I got a big box and I put all the old pieces in and we recycled them. Let the recycler take them off. I kept some. I still have my favorite pieces of pressed paper and they'll probably appear again but I don't know how.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. I saw that show and it was just wonderful, Katherine. It really was. So from here, where did the baskets come in?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, that started some time in the '80s. Ed was in Barbara Okun's gallery in Saint Louis and Santa Fe. She liked his baskets and she was selling a lot of his baskets. And one day on the phone, she said to me, "Do you ever do baskets?" And I said, "Oh yes." And she said, "Why don't you send some to me?" So I sent her a few and she loved them and immediately sold them. And then I began making baskets for Barbara to sell. And almost everything that I sent to her at that time, she sold.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Describe your baskets, will you?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: The first ones I did—they are all crocheted—and the first ones I did were of these plastic candy wrappers, long tubes. It's a linear element and they put little tiny candy for kids and sell them a foot of candy or something like this. Well, Ed found a source of buying the material and so it was around and I crocheted baskets out of it and they were completely clear, no color. And then I also had some plastic raffia, scraps of this, that I think Ed had been using, synthetic raffia. And he didn't want to use that anymore. So I began using that and these baskets are—the first ones I did were quite soft. They weren't rigid like the baskets I do now.

And in order to make the basket fairly rigid as I was going around in a circle, I would put pleats in, points on it to make the circle smaller and give it some stability. Well, these baskets disappeared very fast. But then when I learned to control it and make them round, they didn't go as fast. People weren't interested. They were interested in these misshapen things which, because I couldn't control the material and the main interest was—my interest was in color and pattern and changing the color and patterning a dark against the light or inlaying patterns.

And then I became very good at cutting a little shape out of paper and I could hold it up to the basket and inlay a picture as I went along. I would do, say the basket was yellow and it would have a green figure on it. I would do the yellow, put the paper against the basket, do the number of stitches for that part of the figure that's on it and then go back to yellow. Well, then I discovered in the toy store these little plastic animals, soft plastic dinosaurs. So I did baskets incorporating the plastic dinosaurs in the little cavities in the basket. And these were still quite mis-formed baskets. They weren't regular.

Then I did a group where I was doing small baskets and fastening them together into kind of an elaborate shape. So they were—I don't know how to—they were no longer round but they were a component of a group of objects like a bunch of rocks piled up or seashells or something like this. And somewhere along this line, I tried putting a core of natural raffia in and crocheted over that and suddenly I was getting baskets that had a stability to them that I could do tall ones and they wouldn't collapse. And that's what the recent ones have been and I stopped doing baskets. I think the last one I did was about a year ago. I have arthritis in my hands and crocheting doesn't help. And also I was running out of material, the synthetic raffia seems to have disappeared from the world.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh, that's too bad.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: At least, my source can't find it. And that's okay. I'm through with that phase because I'm off on heat transfer collages. I am working flat on paper or in books or in—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Portfolios?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: —portfolios.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay, now before we go into that, Katherine, would you just take a minute here and talk—when you're talking on tape, people can't see your work and they don't see this splendid color in your work. It's just—it's unbelievable. It's joyful. Talk to me about color in your work from the very beginning. Why and how?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I'm attracted to color, and let's flip it over to the painting world. The painters that I am most attracted to when I go to Europe or New York are the ones that use color. I don't care too much for the ones that are grays and blacks. This isn't a color, a range of color that appeals to me. And mainly my work is in color, some is in gray and black, but mainly it's color and very close relationships of color. So it has little changes. If it is a red, it isn't the same red over the whole thing. It changes maybe every quarter inch, every half inch. And the painters that I enjoy are Bonnard, Monet—who else?

CAROLE AUSTIN: Do you like Vuillard?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. And these intimate scenes with lots of color, I like. When we went to Vienna, we climbed three or four stories in some palace to see the Gustav Klimt in the Belvedere Palace. All these rich exotic color appeals to me in painting and it's a color I like to use. And I love boxes of color pencils and oil pastels and everything, the biggest box of colors appeals to me most. And so I use a large range, but they don't photograph well in black and white because they're pinks and reds and oranges all together.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So there's not a lot of contrast for photography—subtle.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No contrast. It's all very subtle change from one kind of color to another kind of color and so—

CAROLE AUSTIN: And I think another thing that also goes through your work from the very beginning to now is your use of pattern. Can you talk about that just a little bit?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I suppose that's very related to printing textiles with block prints or silk-screens. You know, when we first did silk-screens, you had to cut Rubylith to make a screen. They didn't know the business of the photography on the things. And so you cut Rubylith and you cut patterns, lots of little tiny patterns in the Rubylith because it was easier to adhere a small amount than a big amount. And Rubylith is a piece of red plastic with a paper on it and when you do these things, you cut through and wherever the red is, it blocks off the emulsion going on the screen. So it makes a hole. So you—I don't know that I can explain this in words. It's something that you know when you're doing it and it makes very

much sense when you see it happen. But I can't describe this right now.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Hasn't the copy machine also encouraged your use of pattern? You can manipulate—

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, and drawing does too. You know, I sit around with a pen and do little grids and then I put patterns in the grids. I like stripes changing direction.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, there are certain things that you've been interested in like the point paper, that kind of thing.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: The point paper involves you and you're working on a grid and that is—again, it's the grid that is controlling the pattern because you're filling in all these little squares. And I, for one, love point paper and now point paper is out of the window because of the computer and everybody, where I would spend two or three weeks doing a point paper for a Jacquard pattern, now people can do it in ten minutes on the computer. But I don't think it's as much fun and it is too regular. It becomes too mechanical. These little mistakes don't occur on the computer as they do when you're doing point paper. You make mistakes. Those little mistakes enhance the Jacquard from this rigidity.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I agree with that very much.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And the opportunity I had to go to Rhode Island School of Design [1980-81, Artist in Residence] and work with a technician on a Jacquard loom was wonderful because I didn't have to do the weaving. I just had to stand next to him and tell him which weft to put through and if the machine broke a thread, he had to fix it. I didn't have to fix it. I hate weaving, the linear elements and trying to control that awful machine of a loom. But the Jacquard was fascinating because I could draw it on a piece of paper. And then I could weave it, I could have it woven in various colors and sizes and textures. So the textile looked very different than the point paper.

And that was interesting to me. I also took the textile and took it down to the blueprint company and had them print it on a black line from the cloth and also from the point paper and to see the contrast of the two together were fascinating.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That is interesting. I'm looking here at the tape for a minute to see where we are. I think we're okay. It's still moving.

Katherine, let me look on this list a bit. I want it on the other side of the tape when we talk about your recent work because it's so exciting I want to have a lot of tape space for that. I think, when looking at your work, you've talked about your interest in kitsch and also unlikely combinations of objects or of images. Can you talk about those two things a little bit, your attraction to that?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think I am attracted to it because I have a tendency to jump on the other side of the fence. When somebody can't stand that airport art, I can see great delight in airport art and I am very interested in the—I don't know whether we call it outsider art or what—but in this area there are several places who are working with mentally handicapped young adults.

CAROLE AUSTIN: You mean here in the Bay Area?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: In the Bay area.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Like Creative Growth?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes and there is one in Richmond. And I'm very interested in what these people are putting together. It's like Salvador Dali, taking disassociated objects and putting them together. That is probably the most important part of what I do. I do not make plans or sketches or drawings for anything. I never know where something is going. It's very spontaneous and I never know how much I'm going to do on the piece, when it is finished. Something tells me it is finished.

And I think I talked to you this morning, probably not on the tape, about a paper piece that is done with the little modules all stitched together—you know, hundreds of them—and I found this and I pulled it out and I looked at it and I was no longer happy with this piece. So I was

going to tear it up and put it in the garbage. And then I saw all the work that went into it, all the stitching and putting all those pieces together and putting those heat transfers on all those little pieces of paper and dyeing them and all. And so I decided to cut out the parts I didn't like and I reorganized it. And now I'm very happy with it. But I didn't know where that piece was going to go when I cut it apart and it was without a plan. Right now it looks very organized, but I had no idea where it was going to go.

CAROLE AUSTIN: But you knew that you wanted to save it.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

CAROLE AUSTIN: And work with it?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. And so Ed asked me once on one of these things did I have a sketch for it. And I said, "Oh yes, here is the sketch." And he said, "You call that a sketch?" It had a few lines on it of the shape of what this was and I put a grid over it and I did this because I had to know how many pieces of paper, how many hundreds of these little 2 x 4 inch squares I needed. You know, it goes up into the thousands in one kimono and you have to know how many pieces of paper you have to cut up and put patterns on. And so when you have the patterns on the pieces of paper and you lay them on the table, you would have a big stockpile to work from. And it's like the heat transfer collages that I showed you this morning. I have boxes of heat transfers all on their 8.5 x 11 sheets with various images on it and I flip through this and find things and then I put them together. But they are not planned to go together. They're just like a collection of postcards.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh, which reminds me. Tell the tape about the postcards. These are wonderful.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: When we travel, I buy lots of postcards. I probably—other than Jo Ann Stabb, I probably have more postcards than anybody in the world. But I buy postcards and then in the evening in the hotel, I look at these things and then I began cutting up the travel literature that is always in the hotel rooms. And with my little sanity kit, I get out the scissors and the glue stick and I put all these disassociated images on the postcards. So we may have a tunnel in Scandinavia that has a truck going through one side and the other side of the truck has a large head of a man poking through. Or I did a whole series in Vienna with the Lipizzaner horses running through the palaces of Vienna or things like this.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And it's private work? Very private?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It's private. These aren't postcards that I even send to anybody. I just put them in a little bag and write Scandinavia or Geneva or Berkeley or Vienna on the outside of the envelope and then sometime later, I find these as I did this morning and I look at them or show them to somebody else.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, it's kind of a funny, humorous kind of remembrance of your trips too. With the combination of objects, I think it's great fun. Okay, now, one thing before we get into the drawings, you showed me your journals, one of your journals on Afghanistan. You mentioned that since you've been confined to home, you've brought the world into you. Can you talk about this journal a little bit? It's very interesting, Katherine.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, everybody supposedly has changed since 9/11 and I was very indignant before 9/11 at the knocking down of the beautiful Buddhist image in Bamiyan. When I was in Afghanistan, I had only been in Kabul. I hadn't—I guess I didn't even know about it that—or I wouldn't have been able to know how to get there because Afghanistan was not set up for a tourist either with a tour or independent ones. It was sort of insanity just because the airplane went there and you could make a stop to go there. But we went to Afghanistan in 1970.

So I felt indignant about this and the television has become my window on the world. So I was watching television the morning the twin towers got banged into and I watched this with fascination. And then one of the stations showed a drawing that a child had made of the airplane hitting the twin towers. And so I told Ed about this. You know, I just took a piece of paper and said, "This is what the child drew." And you know, showed him this because he hadn't seen this on television and then I thought back of the time in Afghanistan. I had wanted to photograph the Afghani women in their burkas but I was afraid to. The people seemed very hostile. There were no women around. I would see them out my hotel window

walking up a path and if they saw me, then immediately the burka would go down over their face.

And so I decided I just couldn't photograph them but I was fascinated. I bought one in the gift shop and I brought it back. I wanted Ed to photograph me in the garden at the hotel with it on. We decided that wasn't a good idea. We would probably offend somebody and so I was interested in this. And then the newspaper came with all these pictures of the Afghani women and the men. I had wanted to photograph the turbans the men were wearing. Each man wrapped his turban in a different way. It was a different—it was fascinating to see what the people were wearing. So I began collecting—well, clipping up the newspapers and then I said, "You know, Raymond, I've got too much stuff." So Raymond went down and got a sketch book for me at Office Depot and with my glue stick I began putting it together and writing in it what I remembered of my experience and drawings in it.

Well, rapidly I finished book one and then I got volume two and I got volume three, all photographs from the *Chronicle* and the *New York Times.* And it has a few other hot spots in the world in it. There are some—I added a few from Africa and a few from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And then it got so gruesome. The pictures were pictures I rejected. I didn't want these things. So I stopped. When it really heated up and got violent and everything was destruction and suddenly the emphasis in what was going in my books was not what I wanted, so I stopped. And now I am finding a few little pieces that I'm cutting out. But I don't want to start another book on this. I don't want—in my unconscious way, I don't want this to continue, you know.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, it just makes me think about how personal and how very intimate your work is, Katherine. And also that what you keep for your own and then that what you're willing to share with the world.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Right now, I have started a group of drawings. I don't know whether they're going to be in a—whether it's going to be a book or whether it's going to be on a big piece of paper. It's going to be on the women of Afghanistan and just the pleats and folds in these burkas and the different color relationships, but no faces, just this little dark thing. It's fantastic to think women are so enclosed in these things that they can only look through the world through a little grid.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It is amazing.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And it—

CAROLE AUSTIN: And yet you use that kind of grid in the drawings too, which is, you know, quite fascinating. Okay, now, before—I keep putting off going to your collages. Now just tell me one little bit about your dog books.

[Laughter.]

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: This is also involved with Raymond. Raymond had a large Springer spaniel, an old Springer spaniel that he'd had for 22 years and the dog's name was Taxi. And he lived in Alameda and he was telling me some dog stories of Taxi, how Taxi would go to the stores and sit outside and wait for food, or one day it went and turned itself in at the SPCA [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] and one day, it just sat outside the door. They had to call him to come and get his dog. Evidently, everybody in the area in Alameda where he lived knew Taxi. And Taxi liked to ride in cars and he went down to the auto dealership one day and the man was just about to sell this car to a couple. And he opened the door and Taxi jumped into the car and wouldn't jump out. So they had to call Raymond to come and the dog doesn't—

[Laughter.]

So he would tell me those stories and I would tell him the funny stories I knew about my dogs and about dogs I knew. And so then I began writing these down, called "More dog stories." And Raymond put them on the computer and I did illustrations to go with them. And I don't know—I just found these this morning when I showed them to you. There are more but I don't know where the pieces are in my clutter. But—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, I liked the one about the dog going to Marjorie Annenberg's gallery and carrying off a basket, I guess it was, too. Marjorie would like that very much.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I used both Marjorie and Tex's names in this because I thought this would amuse Tex. And the other story about Fast Flood and the Slow Loris was also a story Tex told me about.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Tell me who Tex is. Tex who?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Tex Gieling. She is a jeweler but she used to teach at San Francisco State but I've known her years, you know, like 40 years or something like this or maybe longer. But then I thought about this and I realized the real common denominator between people. You can break the ice when you sit down at a table on a tour with somebody else and nobody knows what to say to each other, if you start telling them about your dog and dog stories, pretty soon the ice is broken. Everybody has a dog story and this is how people communicate with each other, instead of what is a polite thing to talk about.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's great.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: You bring it around and the dog becomes the bridge between people, the people who are too shy to talk when they come in the house, very often these home health care workers, you know, and I have all these idiotic dogs around and I'm talking about dogs and the dogs are sitting up and saying, "Cookies, please" and all these sorts of thing. When people send me a gift, they very often send something with a dog on it or a book about dogs. So, I sat down and wrote "More Dog Stories," but I haven't gone anywhere with it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So your animals are a great impetus for your art?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, they occur in it. I like to make birthday cards for people or Christmas cards. I always make Christmas cards. I don't send purchased cards. I feel this is something I can do, a little bit of me goes with the card I make. And I usually make birthday cards for people and very often I will put a heat transfer of the current dog on it doing something ridiculous like the one that's sitting on top of the television set which was a Valentine's Day card for Ed. But I think it's important to give a little bit of yourself to each person you come in contact with.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's a very generous attitude and not all artists have that, Katherine. So that's really lovely.

Well, shall we get to the most recent work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Most recent work?

CAROLE AUSTIN: Your collages.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Oh, the ones that—are the cowboy ones?

CAROLE AUSTIN: Let's start with those.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: This is all because in 19—oh goodness, what year was it—1945, I think, I spent a year in Laramie, Wyoming. My first university teaching job was at the University of Wyoming in Laramie and I was a product of Los Angeles and Berkeley, a Californian and at that time, one didn't go up to the snow. I had never seen snow until I went to Wyoming and boy, was it a shock? You know, it snowed every night and it melted every day in Laramie. So it never was sloppy but it was dry and it was cold and it was white.

Then, in—I can't—this is sometime in the 1980s or maybe 90s, I got some travel literature and there was a tour that went to Wyoming and it went through Yellowstone and along the Oregon Trail. Ed was interested in the Oregon Trail and then it ended up at Cheyenne Frontier Days. So we took this tour and I got involved completely with the West, with Cody, Wyoming, with the native American things in the museum, terrific—just the whole thing of being in the West and this time I liked it. But I was there—when Ed and I were there, we were there in the summer. When I lived there it was the winter.

This was a completely different thing and then we went to the Cheyenne Frontier Days and sat in the grandstand for a rock concert and it was Alan Jackson. I didn't know who Alan Jackson was. But everybody else there knew who Alan Jackson was and knew every song and they sort of sang it and clapped along with him. There were light colored lights flowing

around the audience and they had a most marvelous thing. They had a camera that they photographed the audience and they projected it on one of these huge television screens. So you saw the audience and you saw Alan Jackson, at least this little silhouette down in front with his little troupe and it was a wonderful experience.

Well, it all came out in some drawings and things I did of Alan Jackson, not really using his photograph but the shape of Alan Jackson, the silhouette, which is very distinctive of a cowboy hat that he wears. Each cowboy hat is a different shape, although they are basically made the same, but how the person puts it on his head and manipulates this thing, it makes it an individual. Well, so, there was a bronze elk sitting next to a traffic light, a full size bronze elk in Cody, Wyoming. I photographed this and that has occurred along with teepees and other things, native American forms in some of these drawings.

And then in the last, next to the last group, when we were in Rome in 1956, each orange that we bought had a tissue paper wrapper on it and each one was different. Many different kinds and I was fascinated by these. I had a flat box of probably nine inches square or something like this and each day, when we got a new orange, I would flatten out the wrapper and put it in the box. And I sent all those things home.

Well, in cleaning out a cupboard, approximately seven or eight years ago, I came across all these orange wrappers and I was going to give them to Dolph who collects all sorts of things and then I decided before I give them to him, I have to put them in the color machine and make a record for myself. Well, then I didn't want to give them away. And I began putting them on pieces of paper as heat transfer images and then I got the things, almost the whole series finished and I decided I had to put the real wrapper on. So they are glued on top so you have a real wrapper next to a color image of it. And it got fascinating in that way.

So there are—and I used piles of rubble from China in these things and a Sprite can that is crumpled, feathers from birds, flowers, all sorts of things and again, heat transfers of Raymond's pressed flowers. And then I—the last one I did down at the condo before things got too involved here was one that I did just a collection of Greek pots, painted wall decorations that I cut out in the shape of pots and one of Ed's baskets and a silhouette of one of Ed's baskets with an orange wrapper over it and some various heat transfers and just arranged on a sheet. And that's the last one of them I've done.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Before—we're running out of tape, I wanted you to explain these works of paper that you do. Can you just explain the processes involved on these works on paper? What is color transfer?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. Heat transfer. Some have water color on them, some have just drawings on them, ink drawings, colored pencil—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Collage.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Collage. You know, bits of Chinese gold paper, just anything that's around gets put on them. Only the orange wrappers seemed to be the real object put on. Usually it's the colored heat transfer of the object. But the orange wrappers are different because that's the real wrapper is put on top of the image of it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I have a question, a technical question for you. You take images of photographs or drawings and you put them—you copy them onto a heat transfer and then you put that on the paper?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Why do you—I'm curious—why do you heat transfer it on the paper instead of just gluing the image that you copied on the paper? Is there a difference in the way it looks?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, there's a big difference. The heat transfer has a slightly waxy quality. It's from the chemicals that are on the paper that are printed—that the heat transfer prints into and I don't like the kind of bond paper or inkjet paper. I don't like those surfaces is why.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Good point.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And it's harder to glue something and make it stay on than it is to iron on a heat transfer, when you learn how to do it. But that is tricky. Some people cannot peel a heat transfer off of another piece of paper or cloth.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It's difficult, Katherine. I've tried it.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Some people cannot do it and you have to—your fingers get very tender because of all this hot stuff that you're pulling and it has to be done. You develop a knowledge of how the angle to pull the paper back from. You can't just jerk it off. You sort of roll it off. And some papers, you can't take it off of. It just is bonded there permanently.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. We're going to bring this to a close now and then we'll start tomorrow on the most recent work on paper. And if I didn't put this on the tape before, this is September 5th, 2002. So thank you very much, Katherine. I just think seeing the things in your studio this morning was very thrilling.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I decided it was difficult to talk about these things if you hadn't seen them.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Since it's very recent works, of course, I hadn't. So that was wonderful.

[End of tape.]

CAROLE AUSTIN: This is Carole Austin interviewing Katherine Westphal at her home and studio in Berkeley, California, on September 6th, 2002 for the Archives of American Art.

Katherine, yesterday, we were talking about your newest work and we didn't quite finish that. So I would like to have you talk about your works on paper that you've done and anything else you think of. You know the portfolios that you showed me, that kind of work. I'd like to have you talk about that, the piece on the wall, the little toys, the sketches. Those were earlier though, weren't they?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: The toy sketches are early; they're probably 15 years ago.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: But I just got around to putting them on the rag paper. They were just on little scraps of paper and I found them in a portfolio, you know, along with all this other junk. And I thought, well, I like those now and they are going to—the paper is going to disintegrate because it wasn't acid free. And so I stuck them into the color copier with the heat transfer and then heat transferred them onto rag paper. So they are fairly stable now. And I did them all in a uniform size with a little white around the edges and I think I did this—I may have made three copies of each because I then gave some of these as Christmas gifts.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And I noticed also, the portfolios, you put them on a regular size.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, somehow or other, when I got around to putting them on this, I went to the art store first and found the portfolios and then I cut my paper to the size that would fit in the portfolio because unfortunately, I don't like the format of rag paper. I like a squarer shape to work in. But then if it's going to be framed, it has to be custom framed because the frames don't—this isn't standard size. And I don't know why I can't modify the piece of paper to standard size instead of just hacking off a piece. It seems idiotic but that's—I don't vision these things with frames around them. I like the things, an embroidery or a textile just pinned on the wall or a paper just pinned on the wall. I use an awful lot of binder clips across the top edge so that does not make holes in the thing but I can hang it up on the wall and look at it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It's interesting because there's a number of artists now in the Bay Area that are showing their work that way, you know. So you're a little bit ahead of the times in doing this.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It seems ridiculous that you then spend so much time and money putting frames on and that makes it harder to store than just a bunch of pieces of paper or some textiles folded in a drawer. If you do a lot of work, you really have a storage problem, if you have framed everything.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh yeah, that's true. You almost need a whole room for your storage.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, pretty soon, it becomes pretty ridiculous.

CAROLE AUSTIN: What were the subject matter of some of these folios? Or themes, I might say?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I'm trying to think. The first one I think of is the one that is based on Egyptian memorial caskets and this is, it's sort of a memorial to the dogs. And one of them has—several of the images in there have little dogs drawn sort of Egyptian style. But it's all in combination with my grove of palm trees in the front yard. The photographs of the palm trees and the little Egyptian type drawings are all cut up and collaged together with pattern strips and what have you. That's one. One is on Alan Jackson, the country singer and it's just the silhouette of Alan Jackson with his very distinctive hat shape. But Alan Jackson becomes —the way I put it together, he is just a shadow of—a shadow of it like a silhouette or the negative space may be put down on a photograph of crinkled paper or crinkled Mylar, or something like that. So it's a different pattern. It isn't showing his clothes.

Then, let's see, what else? There is one about black and white and these black and white images from colored photographs of Greek pots that I photographed in the Metropolitan and then I broke down the black and white image by putting the color photograph into the black and white copier and then taking the copy and copying it again and doing it in a series of generations. Each time you put it in the machine, it breaks it down in a funny way. And you may get …

[Coughs.]

CAROLE AUSTIN: How about I just get some water?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: There's a glass on the table.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. If I stop this here, it won't start again.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: All right.

Let's see. Where were we? The black and white images.

CAROLE AUSTIN: How do you break it down?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: If I break it down, they become very grainy. Then sometimes I move the black and white image so it gets some movement to it. It's a lot of manipulation before I put it on the heat transfer and then print it.

Now, let's see. One of them is on manipulations of a little textile that I did of Mayan codex and I did a batik, a little textile of this a long time ago. And then I put this in the copy machine and then I began cutting it up and reassembling it with other color forms.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And so doesn't that about bring us up to date except for the kimono that you redid? Just about?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think so. The kimono that I redid, I pulled it out of storage, didn't like it and I was about to cut it, tear it up and put it in the garbage. And then I couldn't do it. I thought, oh, all those little pieces of paper that I put heat transfers on and stitched together. I then began cutting out sections that I didn't like out of it and when I had to make more sections to fit in and I reorganized it in a different way. It changed shape, outlying shape and it is longer than it used to be.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It's a big piece. You have a number of large paper pieces.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. One of *Japanese Women Make Waves* was done at the same time as the—there's another one on a Japanese subject that was in Brown/Grotta's paper show two months ago and these were done, oh, I suppose they were done about 1990, something like that. I'm just guessing at the date and suddenly now I began tearing up the Japanese handmade paper into the small 2 x 4 inch modules and cutting up other heat transfers and I started printing them. I'm going to do another one but I get bogged down in having time because this is very labor intensive.

These things have about 1,000 pieces of little pieces of paper, 500 to 1,000 and you have to prepare everything ahead of time. But because I don't work from a drawing or a sketch, I just make piles of little patterned paper and then I began laying them out on the table and then when I stitch it together, I have to stitch them in order because there's only a certain amount of space that you can put these pieces of paper on the sewing machine. So you have to start at one side and then go down. After you've got it on the table, you hope that a great wind doesn't come through and blow all the pieces away because you're taking off one row at a time, stitching it together and then the next row and putting that onto the first row. And it takes a long time to do these things.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Especially as large as they are.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Because they're large, they tend to be large.

CAROLE AUSTIN: About 4 by 6 feet?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Now, as a conclusion to this. You made an interesting statement yesterday, I think, that maybe you could elaborate on a bit and that was that you felt that when you were teaching you felt obligated to be doing what you were teaching, which is quite a dedication and I agree with that. But then you said that when you retired you felt freed from having to do textiles, so that allowed you to go back to works on paper relating to your early background in painting. Can you just talk about how you felt about that, going back to this?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: All the time that I was printing textiles I was always constantly drawing and doing little things on pieces of paper that were sketches or as I think I said the other day, I liked to make birthday cards for people or individual greeting cards and so that was—it's related to the textile, it's surface design but it isn't surface design on a piece of cloth.

When I was teaching, I wasn't teaching just printed textiles, I was teaching textile history and sometimes I taught drawing, once I taught weaving and that was a disaster because the looms had been left in such nasty condition and I could not put them back together again. I had to get some help from Greg Lynn who knew how to put looms together after somebody had put them together wrong. So, I never taught weaving again or attempted it, even though they needed somebody to teach it, I didn't feel I could fill that slot.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I understand that. Now, the one thing we didn't talk about was your book, *Dragons and Other Creatures* [*Dragons and Other Creatures: Chinese Embroidery of the Ch'ing Dynasty*, Berkeley, California: Lancaster-Miller Publishers, 1979].

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I feel now it was a very superficial little thing. I didn't know enough about it but these were all photographs that I took from the Chinese textiles that the decorative art department at Berkeley had. They had a large collection of Chinese textiles and I was interested in these because I just really responded to the imagery in the Chinese textiles. So I photographed them and a friend saw these things and her husband at that time was into publishing and they wanted to do just a little book that was going to cost $5 or $10 or something and they did various subjects, and they asked me to do one on Chinese textiles and I talked about the imagery in the textiles a little bit. But it was very superficial and I'm not particularly proud of it but it exists.

CAROLE AUSTIN: But you know, I have that book, Katherine, and it's delightful. I mean, it really is. You know what it does? It gives inspiration.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, this is, I think, what I was involved in but I think everybody, the reviews—it's, again, these reviews that get to me. It wasn't academic enough and this, I think, is constantly a dragon that haunts me, that what I'm doing is not academic enough. It isn't what people think I should be doing. It isn't serious. It's poking fun at things and this is, unfortunately, it's just me. It's what I am that is coming out in the work and I'm not trying to fulfill somebody else's image of what I am.

But I'm trying to be me which is, I think, a little hard in this world to constantly fight the battles of what everybody thinks you should be doing. It's the way you live your life or it's the way you draw. Everybody has an idea of what somebody else should be doing.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And you do pay a price for being different. It's hard, it's very hard. But on the other hand, Katherine, your work serves to inspire other artists who don't want to go along with the crowd. It says, oh, maybe I can go my own way, too. That's very important.

I just wanted to name a couple of the shows that you've been in. You were represented at "Objects: USA."

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And then "American Crafts at the Vatican [1978]."

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I'd forgotten about that show. That's a while back.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Those are a long time ago.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And then you received a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship [1977] and what did you do with that?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I went to—actually it coincided with a sabbatical and I think we went to Egypt and then I did this whole group of textiles that were called "The New Treasure for Tutankhamen," and this had these quilted quilts that were on shining material. It had books. It had scrolls. It had wearable art, dalmatics. It was a fairly large group of things and they were in a show up at Davis in the Memorial Union Gallery.

It was, again, a show that Dolph Gotelli installed. I wasn't very happy with some of the installation but he took pieces of plywood and put the quilts on the pieces of plywood and had them suspended from the floor, so when you walked in it was like a number of caskets in there. [Laughs.] I don't think he saw it this way but I saw it this way. It was funny.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And you became a fellow of the American Craft Council in 1979.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, in 1979.

CAROLE AUSTIN: I didn't read far down. Then we talked about your wearable art program for the World Crafts Council. Let's see. Your show at the Museum of Craft and Folk Art in San Francisco ["Paper to Wear" 1984], I have to say that because I curated that show and that was important to me. Are there any other shows that you felt that were—

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Certainly the one at Rhode Island, the Daphne Farago Collection [*Ties that Bind: Fiber Art by Ed Rossbach and Katherine Westphal from the Daphne Farago collection*, Providence, Rhode Island: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1997] and then I've been in a lot of exhibits that go to universities. I don't know them, you know. I don't keep track of these things. I did while I was at the university, and one of the delights of retiring was I didn't have to write down every year what I had done the year before. So I just haven't kept records.

When I was at the university, I would see people's list of exhibitions and it was idiotic, you know. You don't need that many pages of all these little exhibitions. So I just—when I send out a résumé rarely, it will have maybe about 10 things on it and that's it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's it.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I believe it's more important to look at the work than to look at the written list of where you've exhibited.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. I agree with that. Okay, in ending, I'm just going to go down some of these questions that we didn't talk about on the Smithsonian list and if you feel like not answering them, just tell me so. Okay, because we've actually answered some of them. This is a bunch of questions.

How do you think your work has been received over the years?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I think it's received well by some people and rejected by others and that's normal. I can't expect everybody to like all these little whimsical things. You know, as I said before, it's just me.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's your art.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, and I don't like to always be compared to somebody else. I would like - again, this goes through it, it's a terrific ego. I want to be me. And—

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, thank goodness for that.

In your opinion—or do you know who you feel are the most significant writers in the field of American craft?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No, I can't answer that.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Do you prefer criticism written by artists or by critics?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't like criticism.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Period?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think this follows. I mean, I think I gave some examples the other day of recent criticism, and I felt the person didn't know the difference between a textile that was produced 40 years ago and a painting that was produced two years ago.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That was pretty astounding?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, it was all judging it on money, and I think that because both Ed and I had university jobs, we didn't have to depend on selling the works so that became not important. And I still feel this. I would rather give something to someone who liked it than charge for it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's unusual, Katherine. Again, that's quite generous.

What role has specialized periodicals for fiber arts, for instance, played in your development as an artist? Have these magazines been—

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, the magazine that—*Fiberarts* did this thing that they picked 10 fiber artists or something and they sent each one a similar box of materials and they asked you to do something with it. When the box came, I laid it all out on the floor and looked at it and there was only one piece of cloth in it. At that time, I was printing and I touched the cloth and it had some sort of a filler on it. So it wasn't even a piece of cloth that would have accepted my dye and I just rejected the whole thing.

And then in order to do something with it, I had to construct textiles and I did maybe four or five samurai figures of—this is well documented in that *Fiberarts* issue because along with this, you had to give a verbal thing of what you were doing plus photographs. And in order for me to do it, I kept a journal of what happened every day and how I manipulated these cords, shoe laces and washers into pieces of textile. I had laid them out on the floor and then at the same time, I was interested in the death—cartouche masks of mummies, papier-mâché with the painting on top. And so I did a series of masks of Sam—Sam was a Springer spaniel, and I had—those were in the house. Then I decided what I was doing was samurai armor but it didn't have a dog head on it at that time.

And I had to put it on something. So I took a tomato frame and bound it with telephone wire in all these colors and hung these various things on it and I put it on a stool in the living room and was fastening this thing. And Sam came racing in and saw this thing and decided it was time to attack. There was a stranger in the house and so I took the dog with these heads that I was doing and I put it on the top and they then became "Sam the samurai."

[Laughs.]

CAROLE AUSTIN: Oh, great.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And there were about four or five of those and it's all documented in that issue of *Fiberarts* magazine and don't ask me what issue.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Can you tell me the decade? Was it—because that would help the researchers, to think of the decade.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Maybe the best—it's the *Fiberarts* magazine on creativity and it must have been after 1980. Ed was in this, Debra Rapaport was in this and it was when Debra Rapaport, I think, was doing jewelry by the pieces of stuff she found on the streets of New York. So it must have been in the 1980s.

CAROLE AUSTIN: 1980s. Okay. That's good. Did you feel that the other magazines such as *Surface Design* and *American Craft* were of interest to you when you were teaching?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, the magazines were around. I tend not to look at art magazines too much. You know, there's just a limited amount of time you have and when I read, I love reading novels and books on travel or things like that. And I not only read them once, I read them over and over again. Right now, I am again reading *A Passage to India*. [CAROLE AUSTIN: That's E.M. Forester right?] Each time I read it because I have changed in the period of time. There's different meaning in the book and I find things in it that I didn't know were there. And so—

CAROLE AUSTIN: So these are the things you prefer to read?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. That makes sense. Could you discuss your views on the importance of fiber as a means for expression and what are the—well, fiber and your paper work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, paper is fiber.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Yeah. Well, that's true. That's true. You don't think—they categorize it—

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I mean, everybody puts everything in little boxes and this—if it has a box around it, my tendency is I'm getting out of it. I don't want to be in the box—[laughs].

CAROLE AUSTIN: What do you think the strengths and the limitations are of fiber as a medium?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: That's a difficult question to just spontaneously think of an answer to.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, you know, one of the criticisms that you always hear about fiber like in galleries, people buying, is, oh, it won't last.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah. But why does everything have to last forever? Maybe the most ephemeral things are the most important thing in our society. The story I was telling you about the mosaics in Rome—they're there, but I don't think the Romans, when they did little black and white stones that they put on their floors, were worrying about how long they were going to last. And I know, because I walked in when they were reassembling all of these things, that they don't last and they probably are not lasting in the same way they were originally put down.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Explain again for the tape how they were reconstructing these because it's really interesting.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: The first time I was in Rome in the museum that is fairly close to the railway station. I don't know exactly the name of the museum. It's a big museum of historical things. There was a wonderful fresco in one of the rooms and it is a garden with birds and fountains and this was from the House of Livia. And when we went back to Rome maybe 10 years later, one of the things I had to go and see was this fresco on the wall. Well, I went to where I thought it was and I couldn't find it. So I asked the guard and he shook his head, no, this didn't exist.

So I went down to the gift shop and found a postcard of it. Got the postcard, bought the postcard, took it up to the guide and showed it to him and he still looked perplexed and then I saw he was moving his hand in his pocket. And I thought I didn't get the clue, so I reached into my pocket and pulled out a few lire and thrust it into his hand and then he said, "Oh, follow me." So he went through the whole thing and we went into a gallery that was being worked on and what they were doing is they were working on the black and white mosaics on the floor. And they had cleared all the little stones out and just piled them in a pile at the side and then they were setting them their way in the floor. And this was terribly interesting

to me because I didn't see that they had a photograph next to them. They were just putting stones back. And I thought, I wonder how many times those particular stones have been rearranged.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It makes you think about all the works of art, that early on were, you know, reconstructed this way.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah. Well, I am sure that Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* never looked the way I saw it or the way it looks now and I'm sure we can say the same about the Sistine Chapel ceiling. I'm not sure I'd want to see it now that it's all colorful—cleaned. The dirt of the ages helps things. Patina is wonderful.

CAROLE AUSTIN: It is. That's good. Okay. Now, we're not going to deal with commissions, right? Okay. What are the similarities and differences between your early work and recent work?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It changes. It changes completely, the things I do and the way it looks. But basically if you look at things, the weight in anything I'm doing is high and it is not symmetrical. Something may look symmetrical but if you really check it, it isn't. Each thing changes.

CAROLE AUSTIN: But the compositions are fantastic, Katherine. For all the elements that you put into your work, they could be amiss and they are not.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I want to go back. What was our question about commissions? I want to talk about commissions. I don't do commissions but once I got talked into doing a commission—one of those paper kimonos and this was for, I think it's the Sheraton Hotel in Beijing, Beijing or—no it must be Tokyo. It's in Tokyo. And it was some outfit in Los Angeles and they sent up the art director, and he was very excited about this and then he told me there were certain things that I shouldn't put into it. They wanted to be careful of symbolism and that was all right. So I did this thing and he came up to look at it in progress and, "Well, we have to have it two degrees darker and something else and the color should be this way." And I looked at him and I said, "If you want it two degrees darker, you do it yourself. Why did you ask me to do a commission?" Well—

CAROLE AUSTIN: What happened?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, I finished it. I sent it to Tokyo. I think it was Tokyo and it was a big one. It was approximately the same size as the one that Carol Sinton has in her dining room. But it was a front and a back because they wanted to put it in a glass case and it was going between the lobby and the bar. And I went along with this, but he was just astounded. You know, "If you want it that way, why didn't you do it?"

CAROLE AUSTIN: Did they accept it?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Oh, sure. But I would never do another commission because I can't satisfy somebody else. If they want it after it's finished then that's okay, but I don't do it to fulfill somebody else's idea.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. That's a good point. Are there any of the exhibitions of your work that you would find interesting to talk about? Davis has been an important place.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. As I said before—

CAROLE AUSTIN: We have a little interruption here, so we're having a little pause in the tape.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Do you want to just stop for a minute?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: No, that's all right. Let's go on with this. Oh, the exhibitions at Davis. I think I said before that Dolph Gotelli likes what I do and he's in charge of the gallery, so I get a lot of space there—far too much—but nobody else is doing very much and whenever he has a blank spot or somebody falls through, he can come and get something here for an exhibition. And it's fun to have an ongoing place like this. I think to a certain extent when Fiberworks existed in Berkeley, you know, if you had something you had done,

you could go down there and they would put it up for a weekend or something. You could look at it in that little gallery or share it with other people. But then when Fiberworks got organized to give degrees, they also organized their gallery and it became this ridiculous thing of everything scheduled was years ahead.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Like all the other galleries?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah, and this becomes a little idiotic because why should you be holding something for two or three years before it can be shown. In the meantime, you've been doing other things and gone in a different direction. This is why I say I don't like to look back. I only want to look forward. I don't know what I'm going to be doing next week. I may be doing something with these little pieces of paper and putting these together or I may be doing something with those drawings I showed you of the women of Afghanistan. Since Afghanistan has come up again in the news, I may be working on those and figuring out exactly what kind of a form it's going to be.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So it seems to me in your career, Katherine, that you'd like the more casual way of exhibiting rather than a very formal gallery schedule, that kind of thing? It fits your style more.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: It fits my style and the one at Rhode Island was interesting because these—I didn't know that a lot of the things that Ed and I had been selling were going to Daphne Farago. It was maybe four or five years into her collecting that I even knew of Daphne and then it was interesting to see that this was the work this woman had—you know, she was interested in this and she had bought it all and put it together. This was her choice and this in interesting that you can pinpoint what somebody else liked and pretty much she liked what I liked. You know—

CAROLE AUSTIN: That's quite interesting.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I'm very pleased to have things in her collection because she loved these things. And I met her. She came out to visit us once, and this one must be in 1996 or '97, somewhere in there—may have been a little later and she was interesting. I took her up to the condo and showed her what I was doing there. She understood. I didn't have to start at square one.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Which is wonderful.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: She didn't buy anything directly from me. She bought it always from a gallery, not always the same gallery but from all over.

CAROLE AUSTIN: So even though you hadn't had much contact with her, she was about as close to a patron role in this society, as you could see?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Absolutely. Yes. And of course, I—when you are on the west coast, you don't know who the collectors are on the east coast unless you're involved with selling all the time. And these relationships that we had with the galleries were pretty casual. We would just send them something. An exhibit that I didn't mention—we didn't ever mention was when I was doing the things out of tapa cloth—they were based on native American customs.

CAROLE AUSTIN: No, we certainly haven't discussed that.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And this exhibit was at Sybaris Gallery in Royal Oak, Michigan, and I was—they were heat transfers on tapa cloth with fringes and it happened after I had been on a trip to Arizona, Grand Canyon, Wyoming and I—this tapa cloth was lying around. Ed was doing things on it and I thought this looked like the deer skin that the Indians—so I began making Native American shirts—they're just things that hang on the wall.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Have they been shown anywhere?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes, they've been shown at Sybaris Gallery in Royal Oak, Michigan, and some of them have been shown at Brown/Grotta Gallery and I think Brown/Grotta still has some of them.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Some of them. That's interesting. A lot of these questions we've covered

earlier on because they're very interesting questions. In what ways do political and social commentary figure into your work? I think of Tiananmen Square as one.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I think that's almost the only one. And now these volumes one, two and three of the Afghani newspaper pictures. And I'm sure it's going somewhere, but I don't know where.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay, let's see. What impact has technology had on your work? Has it had any impact at all?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, of course it has.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Of course, the Xerox and copy machine.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: The copy machine.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Boy, that's the basis of your work.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yeah. Copy, copy, copy.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Copy, yeah. So your work would have been very different without this, wouldn't it?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Mm-hmm.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay. Now, those are the questions, Katherine. So are there any other aspects that you'd like to—

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I'm going to say something more about the copy machine. I think if you look in either the University of California Bancroft Library oral history and in Paul Smith's you will find reference to the black and white Xerox machine that first appeared—I think in one or the other, I think I went into great detail how the office machine became an art tool, and the tolerance of the chairman of the department to let me play with his machines, which were always metered then. The university was very money conscious. And they were very tolerant of me bringing all this junk in and putting it on their machines.

And then I moved over and discovered the color machine and used that. Then eventually I got one of my own because I was having difficulty using the machines that were out in the commercial world. They didn't want me to put heat transfer papers in their machines because their machines caught on fire or something. I don't know.

CAROLE AUSTIN: One thing that interested me about the machines, Katherine, is that your first color copier was much larger than the one you have, and you said it was about $6,000.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I've worked on three different ones. The first one I worked on was a Xerox and that was at the university, and that had liquid poured into the three color vats. And the kind of color was very dependent on the technician that was putting the liquid into the machine. The second one—when that one wasn't available for me, I then found a second hand one that I purchased from, I don't know, one of these companies. And that was $6,000. And that was a Sharp and it worked with color tape. Well, that was so much better than the Xerox—

[Audio break, tape change.]

—the point where laser jets, jet things came in. And Sharp wasn't making the tape anymore. So my machine was dead because I didn't have any color tape for it. And then I went to Office Depot to look at see what they had and most of the things they had all worked with a computer, but I didn't have a computer at that time and I didn't want a computer. And I still don't like the computer; I can't learn how to use that machine. But I looked around and they had color copiers. And so they demonstrated all these color copiers and they—at that time when I bought this one, which maybe three or four years ago, they were down to about $600 from $6,000.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Isn't that astounding?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. And I don't know how much they are now. It's very small. It is about 25 x 25 x 18. And it works on cartridges and it's a wonderful machine. If I put a textile

in it, the copy looks more real than the textile. The little shadows between the weaves show. And the color is very accurate and the—I went down when I decided—I said, well, I'm going to bring one of my things down and put it in each of your machines to see which one I want. So the Hewlett Packard is the one I bought, because it gives a good, vigorous orange. I love orange. And it did the orange best. And it also—it does heat transfers, it enlarges, it reduces, I can change the quality of the color, lightness, darkness, intensity. It will print on several kinds of paper, it will print on transparencies and it will print on heat transfer paper.

CAROLE AUSTIN: And it takes such a small space in your studio, which is really nice.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: And so far I've been able to get the cartridges and the paper for it. But I realize, you know, in time they will have invented something else and this one will be obsolete and I won't be able to get the things for it. Well, then if I still want to use it, I'm going to have to change to whatever their system is. I have to accommodate what I'm doing to what I get. And anything I get—

CAROLE AUSTIN: To what the technology is?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Yes. Anything I get I can figure out something to do with it. It may not be exactly what I had in mind, but I'm flexible.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, it's been an extremely important tool. I mean, it's just been your whole life.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I know.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay, Katherine, are there any other things that you would like to talk about?

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: I don't think so. I think we've done an awful lot of talking, but it's been a very good exchange. It's not just answering questions; it's two people who love art as friends talking about it.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Well, I think that when you're able to talk about your work, you know, it just really—a lot of life comes in the conversation. So, Katherine, I'm going to end this now and I just want to tell you thank you. It's just been so enjoyable for me, too. And I just think this will be wonderful research material, especially for a young artist coming along the way.

KATHARINE WESTPHAL: Well, we'll see.

CAROLE AUSTIN: Okay, so thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]