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Oral history interview with Betty Woodman, 2003 April 22 and 29

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Betty Woodman on April 22 and 29, 2003. The interview took place in New York City, New York, and was conducted by John Perreault 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.

Betty Woodman has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JOHN PERREAULT: This is John Perreault interviewing Betty Woodman at the artist's studio in New York City, on April 22, 2003, disc number one.

So Betty, the first question is when and where were you born?

BETTY WOODMAN: [Laughs] Do you know you're not supposed to ask women that question? [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: This is for history!

MS. WOODMAN: Okay. I was—

MR. PERREAULT: Lie! [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: [Laughs] I was born in Norwalk, Connecticut, on May 14, 1930.

MR. PERREAULT: Okay. And then they want you to describe your childhood and your family background. What was your father—what were your father—what was your father's name and your mother's name, and a little bit about them, what they did for a living, things like that.

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, okay. My father's name was Henry Abrahams, and my mother's name was Minnie Koffman Abrahams. And I have one sister, who is four years older than I am, Dorothy. And both my parents worked. And we moved—I would say my childhood was characterized by very frequent moves. We lived—

MR. PERREAULT: All within the Boston area? Is Norwalk [CT] near Boston?

MS. WOODMAN: New England.

MR. PERREAULT: New England.

MS. WOODMAN: Within New England. And we moved—well, the most we lived at one place was two years, until I went to junior high school in Newton, Massachusetts. I did junior high school and senior high school in Newton.

MR. PERREAULT: I see.

MS. WOODMAN: And then they continued moving after that.

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Why did they move so much?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, they got married during the Depression, and they had no money. And they moved to Connecticut from Lawrence, Massachusetts, because there was an uncle who was willing to hire my father in his grocery store business. So he started off somehow with that. He ran a roadside stand for a while in Westport, Connecticut, when I was an infant. And then he got a job working for Stop-Shop grocery. It was a chain of supermarkets, what became supermarkets. And every time he made a little bit more money, we would move to a little bit nicer place.

MR. PERREAULT: I see. But you said your mother also worked.

MS. WOODMAN: My mother also worked. She worked at various jobs. She worked for many years for the Associated Jewish Philanthropies in the Boston area. And then when I was in high school, she was—became the secretary to Abraham Sachar, who was the first president at Brandeis University [Waltham, MA]. So for the first, I think, probably four years of Brandeis's existence, she was the secretary to the president.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, that's interesting. Was there—did either one of them have any interest in art? Do you

remember at all?

MS. WOODMAN: They had—they were very liberal, forward-thinking people, and had interest in art and in music, dance. They had interest in things contemporary. And they—my father was a—had a passionate interest in woodworking, and was a skilled cabinetmaker.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh. Was that sort of a hobby?

MS. WOODMAN: It was kind of a hobby.

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] So, did he have a lathe, or was that mostly joinery?

MS. WOODMAN: He didn't have a lathe, but he had saws and, you know, things like that.

MR. PERREAULT: Joineries—and did joinery—

MS. WOODMAN: So he built sort of bookcases and cabinets and did paneled rooms and made furniture.

MR. PERREAULT: Ah! But your mother didn't have a—

MS. WOODMAN: No. But she was a very good cook.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh. That counts! [Laughs.] Yes, that counts as an art factor.

MS. WOODMAN: And they were interested in food, and they were interested in, generally, in culture—I think that they were.

MR. PERREAULT: Were they born here in the United States?

MS. WOODMAN: They were born here. My grandparents came from Russia as immigrant Jews.

MR. PERREAULT: On both sides?

MS. WOODMAN: On both sides. I think my mother's family were from the part of Russia that had been Poland.

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] So, the next question is to describe your childhood and family background. We've covered some of your family background. What are some of—do you have any early memories of art? I mean, obviously, you remember your father's cabinetry and woodworking. Is there anything else that you can recall that might have influenced you in your subsequent path?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, yeah, I have a memory, John. It's—I was sent to camp at a very young age in the summer because my mother was working. And they had a young friend in Springfield who was a counselor at this camp, so they sent me up—I think I was between four and five years old.

So the first thing that I really remember making was a tablecloth, and it was a small square of white fabric, and we colored it with crayons and then ironed. I don't know why I have this memory, but it's very distinct. We set the color of the crayon into the cloth with iron—with a hot iron, which probably I wasn't allowed to touch, but I watched it. And then I—we made a fringe that went all around by pulling out this—

MR. PERREAULT: So, the crayon was, you mean, like a drawing, or was it, like, flowers, or—

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. It was a drawing.

MR. PERREAULT: —a drawing of some kind.

MS. WOODMAN: A drawing of some kind.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: But anyway, so, I think—and then I remember, also, I went to camp every summer. I was a Girl Scout, and I went to Girl Scout camp, and I—my parents could usually afford to send me for just a one-, two-week session.

MR. PERREAULT: Was it a day camp, or did you sleep there?

MS. WOODMAN: No, no, no. You slept at the camp. And I was—you know, I made all the things. I took—you know, arts and crafts was a big deal for me, and I made endless lanyards—remember, with whistles, you know?

MR. PERREAULT: What are lanyards?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, maybe it's lariat. Maybe it's—I don't know, maybe it was lanyard.

MR. PERREAULT: Describe it.

MS. WOODMAN: Maybe I have the wrong word. It's where you braid with four strands of leather—

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. WOODMAN: And you can braid something—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, sure—

MS. WOODMAN: —and then it goes around your neck, and you attach a whistle to it, which of course—[laughs]—everybody needs a whistle attached hanging around their neck. [Laughs.] But anyway, I made hot pads, I made—[laughs]—all the things I was supposed to make, and I got—I got all my badges—

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Was there any clay?

MS. WOODMAN: I don't think there was much in clay. I don't have much memory of clay.

MR. PERREAULT: So, this is preschool, in other words, before you went to kindergarten or first grade?

MS. WOODMAN: No, it was preschool and school—I mean, through—Girl Scouts was—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, continued all the way up.

MS. WOODMAN: Brownies, you were seven or something like that.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, I see, I see. Did you have art classes in the public schools? I assume you went to public school.

MS. WOODMAN: I went to public school. Oh, we must have.

MR. PERREAULT: But nothing stands out?

MS. WOODMAN: No. I had a lot of sewing classes, and—because every time we would move, we would move into a little bit, sort of, higher level of housing, and a higher level of public, kind of, awareness. So, I took sewing in the second grade and the—beginning sewing—in the third grade and the fourth grade—

MR. PERREAULT: Over and over again. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: —because it began later. But—and then, when I was in junior high school, then it was cooking. I mean, there were the subjects for the girls and then there –

MR. PERREAULT: So, what did they call that? They called that domestic arts, or something—

MS. WOODMAN: Home economics.

MR. PERREAULT: Home economics. And the boys got shop.

MS. WOODMAN: They got shop.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: But when I was in the seventh grade, I petitioned the principal of the school to take shop instead of cooking or home economics, because I had done all that sewing already. [Laughs.] And so, I was allowed—I was the first girl allowed to take shop.

MR. PERREAULT: Wonderful, wonderful.

MS. WOODMAN: And we also had to petition to wear pants to school in the wintertime, because it wasn't permitted for women to—

MR. PERREAULT: But the petition worked—

MS. WOODMAN: It sounds like the Dark Ages. Well, somehow, the parents objected to the fact that the girls—in the cold weather, the girls had to wear skirts, so we were allowed—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, so the parents were behind you?

MS. WOODMAN: —for the first time, allowed to wear pants.

MR. PERREAULT: So, tell me about this shop class. Were you the only girl in the class?

MS. WOODMAN: The shop class—oh, yeah. And I made—I learned how to turn wooden bowls on the lathe. And we glued boards together. And then I made a bowl, which my parents used for nuts all the rest of their life.

MR. PERREAULT: On the lathe?

MS. WOODMAN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. PERREAULT: Have you ever tried to work on a lathe since?

MS. WOODMAN: No.

MR. PERREAULT: You have not been tempted?

MS. WOODMAN: I think I would be terrified, because the chisel sort of chatters when you go in—[laughs].

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.] Right, right, right.

MS. WOODMAN: [Laughs.] It could—you know, it could come off.

MR. PERREAULT: Things fall off if they're not attached correctly.

MS. WOODMAN: Then, I made—I had a big project to make a window box. And it was very cold—I had to carry the lumber to school, and it was cold. We lived not so close to the school. Anyway, I made a window box, and then, I—it was during World War II, and we made model airplanes for the air raid wardens to identify the German planes that might be coming over—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, that's interesting.

MS. WOODMAN: —that they were in the tower watching for. And so, I made a Messerschmitt. And that—they were painted black, you know. It was sort of like identifying birds, how you sort of—

MR. PERREAULT: Right, right. Silhouette is the important thing.

MS. WOODMAN: —out of the bird guide. Anyway, we made all of these German planes. But I made the Messerschmitt, and then I remember it wasn't a very interesting plane, so I made a Dutch biplane, which I don't think was expected to come over with bombs. [Laughs.] But it hadn't penetrated my head very much what these things were being used for; I just liked making them. And the Dutch biplane had, you know, double wings, and it could—it had pontoons, and it was very—

MR. PERREAULT: Right, right, right.

MS. WOODMAN: And the teacher just said, "Oh, go ahead and make it." [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: What did the other students in the class, the boys, think about having a girl in the class?

MS. WOODMAN: I have no idea.

MR. PERREAULT: They didn't care, or anyway, probably.

MS. WOODMAN: You know, I don't know. It was no—you know, I don't remember that as being any kind of—

MR. PERREAULT: An issue.

MS. WOODMAN: —of an issue.

MR. PERREAULT: And if it happened, I'm sure you would have remembered.

Now, you mentioned you had an older sister?

MS. WOODMAN: Yes.

MR. PERREAULT: Was she interested in the arts at all?

MS. WOODMAN: No. No.

MR. PERREAULT: Not at all. So—

MS. WOODMAN: No, and I really think that I was interested in craft.

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh [affirmative], because of the woodworking first and the Girl Scouts—

MS. WOODMAN: And I was interested in everything that I thought about and had a function, so it was—well, maybe the Dutch biplane didn't—[laughs]—

MR. PERREAULT: That was your art part. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: —maybe that was my first inkling that it could be something other than function that determined what one did. But I think—you know, it was like making the bowl on the lathe or making the window box for the flowers to go outside of the house, or—I made—[laughs]—in sewing class, I made a black apron.

MR. PERREAULT: A black apron?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I thought it wouldn't show the dirt. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: Well, that's creative. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: It had little flowers. [Laughs.] And in sewing class, we had to make a cooking outfit to wear in cooking class the next year. [Laughs.] These are—

MR. PERREAULT: Very interesting.

MS. WOODMAN: You know, it's interesting. But it is interesting, and I think that I don't have memories of making art. They really were all things that were related to function.

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] So, when you went on to high school, did your interest in functional objects and craft continue in any way? Did you have art classes in high school?

MS. WOODMAN: I took art classes in high school, and I took an art appreciation class, and I took a music appreciation class. And then, that was high school where I first got interested in clay—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, okay.

MS. WOODMAN: —and it was very important for me. I had a teacher who had gone to Cranbrook [Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI] and taken a summer class, probably from Maija Grotell, and then had—she was the art teacher in the high school.

MR. PERREAULT: Do you remember her name, by any chance?

MS. WOODMAN: My teacher?

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, your teacher.

MS. WOODMAN: I certainly do, but I can't remember it right this second.

MR. PERREAULT: Well, we can add it when we get the transcript.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, okay. Ms. Meyers [ph].

MR. PERREAULT: Ms. Meyers, okay.

MS. WOODMAN: And Myles.

MR. PERREAULT: Myles [ph].

MS. WOODMAN: Myles, that's what it was. And she had taken a class from—you know, the teachers all had to go off in the summer and do extra studies to get more pay. And so, she talked the high school into letting her teach a pottery class. And I went to Newton High School. It was a big high school; there were 1,000 people—students in my class. And there were three buildings, and one of them had an attic. And we cleaned up the attic and put some tables up there, and that's where she taught this class. And they had no equipment for doing pottery, so she got the clay, and then we made things.

And then we took them, I suppose, with parents in cars—and you know, this was before there were field trips and things like that in school—and we took them into Boston on D Street. The person who later developed what became Newton Potters, which was a very big pottery place, had a—he had a garage down there; he had a kiln and he was making pots, and he fired the pieces that we made. And then, we had to go back there and glaze them. And I just adored doing this. And it was like magic, because we painted—it's funny, I have never forgotten it—we painted this sort of, you know, rusty-colored-looking liquid on this piece, and then when we came back to get it, it was green and black and shiny.

MR. PERREAULT: And that seemed very magic.

MS. WOODMAN: And it was a glaze with iron in it and copper, or something like this.

MR. PERREAULT: Right, right.

MS. WOODMAN: Anyway, it was like, you know, some magic thing. And I made a pitcher, so I'm still making pitchers. And I just thought—

MR. PERREAULT: So, did they have wheels? Or was this hand-formed? This was all hand-formed, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: It's hand-formed, yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: So, it was this—basically, this teacher's initiative that got the clay class going?

MS. WOODMAN: It was the teacher's initiative, and I just—that was all there was to it. This was what I wanted to do. And so, with the help of the teacher—the high school had a placement office to help you choose, you know, which college or which kind of school or training would be appropriate for you. And I knew I had to make a living, and I thought that I wanted to, you know, go to art school, but I wanted—I decided to go to commercial art school so that I would be trained to do something to make a living. And I did that for a semester in Boston. I don't remember the name of the school.

And then, you know, I remember that it occurred to me that I didn't just have to stay in school—you know how you go to school because you're supposed to do that, and then suddenly, you realize, well, I don't have to go to school. I could just stop going to school. [Laughs.] So, I did: I stopped going to school. And I didn't really want to be a commercial artist; I really wanted to be a potter. And I went back and talked to Ms. Miles, and we—she wrote—we got catalogs from schools, and she—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, that was nice of her.

MS. WOODMAN: And it's interesting, because everybody said, "Well, you'll have to go to Alfred University." But it was the New York State College of Ceramics, and it taught a class in—the undergraduate program was industrial design. And I didn't want to be an industrial designer, I wanted to be a potter, so—but along with sending her the catalog for the New York State College of Ceramics, they sent her the catalog for the School for American Craftsmen, which was at Alfred University for a short while of its existence.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, I see. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Then it moved to Rochester?

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: And so, you know, we pored over these things when they came, and we both decided that, you know, what I really wanted was the craft school. I didn't want to go to New York State College of Ceramics, the ceramic college. I wanted to go to the School for American Craftsmen, part of Alfred [1948-1950]. So, that's what I applied to.

MR. PERREAULT: Was that school one of Mrs. Webb's projects?

MS. WOODMAN: That was Mrs. Webb's project.

MR. PERREAULT: That's Aileen [Osborne] Webb.

MS. WOODMAN: And it was not a degree-granting institution. It was a program that was set up like an apprenticeship program.

MR. PERREAULT: Okay.

MS. WOODMAN: And it was a—you know, it was a very experimental kind of thing. And—

MR. PERREAULT: For how long were you expected to stay?

MS. WOODMAN: You went for two years—

MR. PERREAULT: Two years, uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. WOODMAN: —and two summers, and you went to school 40 weeks of the year—50 weeks; 40 hours a week, 50 weeks of the year. You got a two-week vacation. It was like a job. And there were—you studied either clay, or fiber, or wood, or metal. And there were two teachers in each of the disciplines who were working craftsmen; they weren't just teachers. And they were given a lot of time to do their own work, as, in addition to their teaching, they were expected to continue working and producing.

And we were, the second year, taught marketing. And by the second year, every—you know, when you've developed enough skill, you made what was accepted as a production item by somebody—and I don't remember whom—and that was—you produced this, and it was sent to America House, which was also Mrs. Webb's project —

MR. PERREAULT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] In New York City.

MS. WOODMAN: —in New York City, and it was sold.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh. And who got the money?

MS. WOODMAN: And the first thing that I made was custard cups. They were six custard cups in a set: two green, two blue and two yellow. And they sold for $1.50. And I got 35 cents for each one. And that was my time, and that was because each one, all of the time that it took me to make it, was 35 minutes, because you got $1—let's see—I got $1 an hour for my time. So, we had to keep track—when we did the production item, we had to keep track of the materials and the cost of everything—

MR. PERREAULT: So that was really good training. And if you didn't do it, you didn't get your money, you know.

MS. WOODMAN: —and how much time we put into glazing, how much time it took to put it in the kiln, to fire it and take it out of the kiln—

MR. PERREAULT: That's business training.

MS. WOODMAN: It was absolute, total business training. And it was $1 an hour that we were paid. And we were taught that you, of course, could make more money; as you got more skilled, you could make twice as many in the hour, and what was taken for granted was that you could sell twice as many, which is, of course, the fallacy of the way we were taught. [Laughs.] But anyway—[laughs]—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, right. Very interesting, the way of doing things. And did the teachers work alongside of you, or did they segregate their own work? Do you remember how the studio was set up?

MS. WOODMAN: You know, I don't think they did work alongside of us. I think if they needed space there, but I think they tended to have their studios at home, and it was felt that they shouldn't have to have people interrupting them while they were working.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, that's good. Yeah, I can see that.

MS. WOODMAN: Working was a serious thing. It was not—

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: —it was not something that was also part of teaching. I think it was very separated.

MR. PERREAULT: And the teachers were all production potters themselves, or had been?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, or fabric makers or—yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: Fabric makers, yeah. But, I mean, the ceramics area.

MS. WOODMAN: And then in the summer, they had extra people come in, and we had a class—in ceramics, we had a man named Earl McCutcheon came from Georgia, and he was wonderful. And he taught glaze technology, so in the summer we had that.

MR. PERREAULT: So, a visiting teacher.

MS. WOODMAN: And I know that the weavers in the summer had someone come who taught them about silk screen, you know, printing, and the woodworkers had, you know—each of them had—

MR. PERREAULT: Do you remember who your teachers were?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: Who were your teachers?

MS. WOODMAN: Linn Phelan and a man named Olin Russam. Linn died—I don't know, probably—maybe ten years ago. I think I learned a great deal from him.

MR. PERREAULT: And by this time, you were already throwing, because you probably had picked that up somewhere along the way before you got here—before—

MS. WOODMAN: No I learned throwing there—they taught me how to throw.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, there, at Alfred—at the School for American Craftsmen.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. They taught me. They taught me everything. And they taught me—I think that Olin Russam and I didn't particularly get along, but I think Lynn and I—we had a lot of sympathy for each other. And it's interesting, when I went back to teach at Alfred—whatever it was—'74—for a semester, the school—at the end of my education, the last summer, the school moved to Rochester –

MR. PERREAULT: Right, right.

MS. WOODMAN: —and we all went up there. And this school was very small; there were 54 students and faculty together in all the disciplines.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, wow. How many were in ceramics, roughly?

MS. WOODMAN: There were sixteen.

MR. PERREAULT: Sixteen.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Eight in each year. It was a very—you know, it was a very small, intimate, kind of intense education. But Lynn—when the school moved, he decided not to move with it. So he stayed in—living in Alma, New York, which was the next town, and became a high school teacher.

MR. PERREAULT: Ah. When you went back in '74, was he still alive, or did he—

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, very much alive, and working. And we became friends again.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, that's nice.

MS. WOODMAN: And it was—I found it fascinating—George and I both did—how much he resembled my father.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, really?

MS. WOODMAN: [Laughs.] And I thought, this is—you know, this father figure had appeared in my life, because he was dogmatic and sure of himself and, you know, sort of laid down the law, and yet was, you know, for me, a very appealing person. And his—

MR. PERREAULT: And you had some kind of empathy between the two of you?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: Do you think he was a good potter?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, it's interesting. I just think he—I mean, I think I went to school at an interesting moment. He broke all the rules. And he used a wheel, but he didn't have things as they were when they came off the wheel, you know, with perfection. Olan Wassen, they were—you know, that was—he was looking to Scandinavian art in some way; they were all sort of firm, hard shapes. But Lynn's—I mean, Lynn made what we used to call his "garbage"; he made fruit—he threw these forms, and then folded them up and made apples and oranges and funny things, and then he would sell at America House, you know, baskets of ceramic fruit.

And I have a teapot of his, where he has taken a thrown form, and he's thrown the foot separately, thrown—cut

the lid out of it, thrown the handle as a separate piece, sort of put it on its side so it's like a bird, and made a teapot of it.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, wow.

MS. WOODMAN: So, you know, these are things that—you can see he was my teacher, and I admired what he did.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. It's very different from Binns [Charles Fergus Binns], who was from an earlier period.

MS. WOODMAN: Absolutely. No, it wasn't Binns. Now, Elsie Binns taught us art history—Binns's daughter.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, really? Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. WOODMAN: She was there and she was very sweet.

MR. PERREAULT: Did they—did she teach you a lot of Asian history, because he was very interested in Asian ceramics himself.

MS. WOODMAN: In Asian—she just taught everything.

MR. PERREAULT: Everything? Oh. So, you had art history, too, as part of the program.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. We had art history and we had painting. And, you know, I did lots of painting.

MR. PERREAULT: Was this a—mainly by scholarship that you got into the school?

MS. WOODMAN: No.

MR. PERREAULT: Or was it—did they try to make it self-sustaining through the product sales, was that the idea? You don't remember.

MS. WOODMAN: I think it was, you know, my parents scraped and saved to send me.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh. So there was tuition.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. Well, it was, and then I worked—well, the first year, I lived in a—I went to the dorm, and in about a week, I thought that I didn't like that. And so, I applied to get into a co-op house where we all did, you know, cooking and cleaning, and it cost less money. And then the second year, I lived with a family and worked for my room and board.

MR. PERREAULT: In town?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, in town and took care of them.

MR. PERREAULT: Is the Alfred complex adjacent to the town, or is there a distance? I can't remember.

MS. WOODMAN: It's right there.

MR. PERREAULT: It's right there. Okay, so in town.

MS. WOODMAN: The town has 700 people.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, right, right.

MS. WOODMAN: And it had the New York State College of Ceramics.

MR. PERREAULT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It was mostly industrial—mostly industrial.

MS. WOODMAN: On one side of the street—on one side of Main Street, and then it had the craft school on the other side of Main Street, and then it had Alfred University, which is a liberal arts—one a New York state school. The other Mrs. Webb supported. And then, it had the Alfred University, which was a liberal arts university, but it was a Seventh Day Baptist University and it had the Seventh Day Baptist Theological Seminary.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, really? Oh, wow.

MS. WOODMAN: And the family that I lived with were the Sibleys, Pat and Mike Sibley. He was—he taught philosophy of religion and was a minister. And—I don't know why I'm forgetting his first name. Anyway, he died

quite a few years ago. They were very close friends. We became very close friends and very—you know, big influences in my life. And Pat, after Mike Sibley died, she married—she remarried. She married a Bill Parry, who was a sculptor. And she—

MR. PERREAULT: In that area. In the Alfred area.

MS. WOODMAN: He taught at Alfred and did ceramic sculpture, but did other sculpture. And she and I still correspond and we're friends. So—

MR. PERREAULT: And what about the other students?

MS. WOODMAN: The other students I went to school with—you know, I really have lost touch with all of them, and it's too bad because we were very, very close.

MR. PERREAULT: I would think, in such a small community, yeah. But people run off in different directions.

MS. WOODMAN: And yeah, I think that I continued to see Aile [Gabriella] Hale, who lived in New Mexico, but I haven't seen Aile for 25 years, I'm sure. I'm still friendly with people from Alfred, because we lived together in that co-op dormitory.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, I see.

MS. WOODMAN: So, I see my roommates—

MR. PERREAULT: Who weren't at the same school.

MS. WOODMAN: They were across the street at the ceramic college.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, I see.

MS. WOODMAN: So, we had lots of discussions and arguments. And the students were all very friendly, but they had a different point of view.

MR. PERREAULT: They were specifically tracked to design for industry?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. The graduate students were artists, but, yeah, they were supposedly doing that. I don't think many of them did that.

But I think that—one of the people who I went to school with, we roomed together, was Bacia Edelman, who lives in Wisconsin in Milwaukee—not Milwaukee—where's the University of—Madison.

MR. PERREAULT: Madison.

MS. WOODMAN: And, I mean, we see each other. If I go to an NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts] meeting, she's usually there. And she's working and she's making sculpture.

And then, Rosemary Lax [ph] is—lives in California, is married to an architect there. And she's still working. Rosemary and I see each other. And her daughter lives in New York, and Becky is—

MR. PERREAULT: Was there any interchange with the—between the ceramic students and, say, the weaving students?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, sure.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. Would it be hard—

MS. WOODMAN: I had a boyfriend who was a weaving student.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, okay. I would imagine that would be the case—I mean, not that you had a boyfriend, but that there would be some interchange because there's so few students.

MS. WOODMAN: There was all kinds of interchange, yeah. Oh, we did all kinds of things together. We did collaborations. I mean, I did—I made a punch bowl and somebody in the metal shop made the ladle for the punch bowl, and somebody in the woodshop made the handle for the ladle.

MR. PERREAULT: Now, what time are we talking about? When is this?

MS. WOODMAN: We're talking about 1948 and '49.

MR. PERREAULT: So after the war? After the Second World War?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, right.

MR. PERREAULT: Were there GI students there, GI Bill students?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. I was the youngest student in the school. And I think when I went, I might have been 19, 18.

MR. PERREAULT: Would you say the majority of the students were on the GI Bill, or not?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: So it was more men than women, probably?

MS. WOODMAN: Yes, but there were women, too. People who had been WACs [Women's Army Corps] and stuff.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: And the school started—I mean, I'm not sure this is what you want to be talking about, but we can edit it.

MR. PERREAULT: Let's see. Let's see.

MS. WOODMAN: The school started—Mrs. Webb was a visionary and an amazing person. I mean, she didn't want, you know, the idea of handmade, of crafts, to die out, which nobody ever does. And everybody tries to figure out how do we not lose a tradition.

I'll stop talking with my arms. [Laughs.]

Anyway, so, you know, essentially, that's what the school was about.

MR. PERREAULT: To save that tradition.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. But then, that it couldn't just be that people were taught to make reproductions, because that wasn't a very interesting thing. I mean, you know, it doesn't—that's not alive. So, you know, we were supposedly being given the skills that it took to be able to make your living. Because if you could make your living, you know, something continues.

MR. PERREAULT: It's continuing.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. So, but it was primarily a GI, and it started in Dartmouth, New Hampshire, as part of Dartmouth College. And when they started to have women students, Dartmouth was made very nervous, and they didn't like that. They felt that it was a men's school, and you know, bringing women up to that small town in New Hampshire was not a good thing.

MR. PERREAULT: Mrs. Webb was involved with them, too.

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It was her idea.

MR. PERREAULT: That's amazing. That's great.

MS. WOODMAN: It was all her idea: the American Craft Museum, *Craft Horizons,* and America House. And she tried to take care of not just one thing, but every facet of what—

MR. PERREAULT: Certainly making an income.

MS. WOODMAN: —one needed to create something that would be valid; so that you had a store to sell it, a school to learn how to make it, a publication to—

MR. PERREAULT: And eventually, a museum to study the past, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: —and a—yeah. To preserve it and value it and so on.

MR. PERREAULT: She was certainly was a visionary. Did—so this was, I'd say, after the war, so were you aware of the [Bernard] Leach and [Shoji] Hamada thing at this point?

MS. WOODMAN: Leach came to teach at the school.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, okay. And you were there.

MS. WOODMAN: So, I was a student of Leach's for two weeks.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, really? Oh, wow. And what was he like as a teacher?

MS. WOODMAN: He seemed ancient to me.

MR. PERREAULT: He seemed ancient—[laughs]—when you were there. Teenager, right?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. [Laughs.] And it was his first trip, and he went to Boston. He gave a talk at the museum, or the museum school, where he said that we in America, those of you in America, could never make a decent pot, because we were—it was too new a culture, and so on. [They laugh.] But he came to Alfred—and he came to the ceramic college, but you know, we were—you know, it's a tiny town—

MR. PERREAULT: Right, right. I've been there. [They laugh.]

MS. WOODMAN: Right. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: It still is a tiny town.

MS. WOODMAN: And we—you know, we were certainly invited to watch him, and he demonstrated and talked. And I mean, he was—you know, that was the only book there was.

MR. PERREAULT: His book.

MS. WOODMAN: His book, *The Potter's Book* [London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1940]. And that was our textbook and it was our aesthetic standards, and we read and we discussed and we made all of those glazes, and—

MR. PERREAULT: In spite of the fact that he said that no pottery could be made in America. [Laughs.] In a sense, it's very British.

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, we were going to prove him wrong, that's all. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: So it was clear that he was also doing a kind of synthesis between British traditions and Japanese traditions—

MS. WOODMAN: Right. Both of which were island, and you know—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, right. Right. And was [Shoji] Hamada around? Did he come to Alfred?

MS. WOODMAN: Hamada came—he didn't come to Alfred when I was there, and that was Leach's second trip. And then they had that—where he, Yanagi [Soetsu] and Hamada, and they all—and they went to Archie Bray [Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, MT], and Peter Voulkos was a kid—

MR. PERREAULT: And seeded all that stuff.

MS. WOODMAN: —and you have those wonderful photographs when, you know, with all.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, that was the second trip.

MS. WOODMAN: That was the second trip. And I didn't, you know—I didn't go out there. I didn't have any money at all.

MR. PERREAULT: Right. Did he have an impact? Did Leach have an impact on your fellow students?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, I think Leach had a tremendous impact on the ceramic students.

MR. PERREAULT: And I suppose he underlined the idea of pottery as a viable art form?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, yeah. It was—I mean, that was the thing. What do we do? Do we set up a pottery like Leach's pottery? Do we try to do this? And of course, I think that my feeling—whether it was then or later, was that—of course, the fallacy of this is you have this master, and he tells the others what to do. And I didn't really want to be told what to do. That's my American—

MR. PERREAULT: Well, that was his—was that his—

MS. WOODMAN: That was my American, you know, sort of—

MR. PERREAULT: Did he present that as his system of apprenticeship? You learned by copying the master.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah, but you had, you know, somebody who made the aesthetic decisions in that system. And—

MR. PERREAULT: So, there was still a kind of division of labor?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, kind of. Yeah. I think that what we learned from Leach and from reading about that is that, you know, it's not practical to have your own studio; that a group of you can get together, and that if you build a kiln, you can share this kiln. You're not going to be firing it all the time, so that you do this as a—you know, it's more efficient to do it with a group of people, so that you have the building and the wheel and so on. You don't need—everybody doesn't need their own wheel. You can, you know—somebody else can throw when you're not throwing, when you're doing other parts of the labor. So—and that you could then get together and fire; you could, you know, divide the labor of these things. It was more—

MR. PERREAULT: Or share the labor.

MS. WOODMAN: Share the labor. It was more efficient. So that was something that we were taught. We were taught how to set up a studio.

MR. PERREAULT: Really?

MS. WOODMAN: We were taught—oh, it was a very practical school, and I'm a very practical person. So, it really—you know, it just hit the—

MR. PERREAULT: You liked it.

MS. WOODMAN: Oh I just—I adored it. I, you know, I worked terribly hard. None of it came easily to me. But I really loved it. There was no question about what I was doing. It was just—

MR. PERREAULT: Now, when you were there, didn't you—I think I remember you telling me that you once worked for Glidden Pottery.

MS. WOODMAN: No, I didn't work—the Glidden was there, though.

MR. PERREAULT: Glidden was there.

MS. WOODMAN: Glidden was there, and they sold their seconds in a little building.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, that's what it was. You didn't work for Glidden [Parker].

MS. WOODMAN: And I—yeah. No, I didn't work for Glidden, but people did. But those people were, like, at the New York State College of Ceramics. They weren't us craftsmen.

MR. PERREAULT: Right. And he was doing injection molding at a certain point too, which would now be—

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. He made that casserole that won the prize, and so on.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. Right, right.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, you have one.

MR. PERREAULT: I have several. Yes. I do have several.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. No, and I knew Glidden. I mean, I met him and so on. But the—I don't know what I was going to say—oh, the school had—the practical parts of it were interesting, because we were taught things like you don't have your studio in your house. It's not a good idea. You should have a separation between your studio work and your life.

MR. PERREAULT: Is that for safety or aesthetic reasons?

MS. WOODMAN: No, I think it was that you're not supposed to do this all the time; that you're supposed to have a normal life, so you didn't burn out. So you could—

MR. PERREAULT: Right, right. So you would, like, do your eight hours, and then go home.

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: Rather than having it—

MS. WOODMAN: Right, right. I mean, that has never been true for me, so I didn't follow what I was taught. But—

MR. PERREAULT: It's hard—that's very hard to do, to keep it all separate.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, it is. Yeah, I think it is hard to do. Well, particularly for a woman—

MR. PERREAULT: Right. Who has children and—

MS. WOODMAN: —who had a family and stuff. Because, you know, obviously, if it's at home, you dash in there and do something.

MR. PERREAULT: How odd that they would—I mean, in the folk tradition in the South, it's very—from what I can observe, what's left of it there, and there are, you know, hundreds of potters in North Carolina, in that—still working in sort of that tradition—it's not separated at all. I mean, the kids play while the parents are making clay, and learn their first things with the clay, and it's more mixed up. So, I'm wondering about the—I guess it was an attempt to make it more professional, that you had the separation.

MS. WOODMAN: I guess so.

MR. PERREAULT: And that you're like an artist who goes into a studio and—

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, right. And then you come home at the end of the day.

MR. PERREAULT: I wonder if anybody knows that. Are there any schools now that one can go to where this kind of practical plus aesthetic training—can you think of? We're leading up to talk more—about the schools and things.

MS. WOODMAN: I don't think so. I don't think so. I think that the School for American Craftsmen changed greatly when they moved to Rochester, where at that point, Mrs. Webb endowed the school and sort of got out from under it, because before that, it was all—she was just totally supporting it. But at that point, it began to teach people. It gave degrees, and it taught people to be teachers.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, I see.

MS. WOODMAN: And we weren't—we didn't have any degrees. I don't have any degrees.

MR. PERREAULT: You weren't being taught to be teachers. You were taught to be potters.

MS. WOODMAN: We were being taught to be—

MR. PERREAULT: Ceramists.

MS. WOODMAN: —yeah, right, or woodworkers or—

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] That's extremely—that's very different. It's more like some summer schools, but much more intense, because you were there full time.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I just don't—I think it was just there isn't anything like it. I think it was a school before its time, and, you know, a little bit like Black Mountain [Black Mountain College, Asheville, NC] in a way. I mean, it just—it happened, and then it got watered down, and I don't know what it is. It's a school today, but—

MR. PERREAULT: You know, I don't know either. I've been to Alfred, but—so, can you—this is a nice lead in to one of the questions I had coming over here. Can you discuss the difference, if any, between a university-trained artist and one who has learned his or her craft outside academia? So, in a way, the School for American Craftsmen was outside academia.

MS. WOODMAN: It was outside of academia.

MR. PERREAULT: So what would be the difference between what you learned there and what you know students are being taught now? Or students at that time were being taught in universities? I guess it wasn't as practical.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I think this is interesting in terms of, you know, where I feel I am today in a lot of these questions, which I feel just don't really relate to me.

MR. PERREAULT: We're trying to get the history here. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: No, I realize that, but I did come from very—what was very strongly an understanding of craft and a desire to be a craftsperson and not an artist, and I don't think there are many schools that do that today. Now I think there was a program at Harrow College of Art in England—

[END TAPE 1SIDE A.]

MS. WOODMAN: —for a while, but it's changed. Many, many years ago that was—

MR. PERREAULT: —had that emphasis.

MS. WOODMAN: —a program that had that attitude. I—whether it did in wood and fabric and metal as well, but it did in ceramics. And it was—I think it was probably a two- or three-year course.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: And it was supposed to teach people, you know, how to make a living doing this.

MR. PERREAULT: How to make a living at it, yes.

MS. WOODMAN: And I think, in many ways, art schools today try to teach their students how to make their living—[laughs]—how to have a strategy, how to meet a gallery—

MR. PERREAULT: That's true.

MS. WOODMAN: —how to get yourself—how to do the right thing that the critics are interested in—

MR. PERREAULT: Your slides, your slides—

MS. WOODMAN: —how to make slides, et cetera, et cetera. So I think that our schools are more or less involved with the practical—

MR. PERREAULT: Trade schools, uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. WOODMAN: —but that the practical that I was taught was really from a—it was a different kind of practical.

MR. PERREAULT: Well, wasn't there also more of a chance of making a living out of what you were doing than there are for the many students who are in art programs now? You know, painting, painters and sculptors very rarely make a living out of what they are doing.

MS. WOODMAN: Right. Just the few that really make a huge living, that, you know—

MR. PERREAULT: Superstars. You know, that everybody hates—

MS. WOODMAN: —and that you read about in the paper. Right. [Laughs.] But no, I think—oh, I think that—I mean, I still feel that is true.

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] It still is true.

MS. WOODMAN: —if you want to. I mean, I would say that to my students. You know, if you want to really learn how to be a potter, and that's what you want to do—

MR. PERREAULT: Then why don't—do it—

MS. WOODMAN: —then it's also a way to make a living.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: And they can see it immediately, because the other students and the faculty members and the school come around and say, "Can I buy that? Will you make me some dishes?"

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. WOODMAN: You know, it's—[laughs]—

MR. PERREAULT: Of course.

MS. WOODMAN: So the—they may say what you're doing isn't art, but then they want it; they want to take it

home, you know.

MR. PERREAULT: They want it anyway.

MS. WOODMAN: [Laughs.] So—

MR. PERREAULT: That's true. Now, we have talked a little bit about how you got—first fell in love with clay, and this is—may be flashing ahead a little bit, but I don't know. The question is have you worked in other media, which I know you have, and what motivated your interest in these other media? For instance, let's take fabric, because I know your most recent works are wonderful pieces, I think, that include fabric wrapped around the bodies of the vase—

MS. WOODMAN: Well thank you, John. I'm glad you think they're wonderful. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: —and that before that, you've done some things with the Fabric Workshop [Philadelphia, PA]. So let's talk about that a little bit, this area of other media outside of your love—

MS. WOODMAN: Okay. I think—

MR. PERREAULT: —your most-loved medium—

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: —outside of clay.

MS. WOODMAN: I have worked in a fair number of other media, I mean, starting with my turned wooden bowls at—

MR. PERREAULT: Right. Right. Glass you have done, you know, and porcelain.

MS. WOODMAN: —when I was 12 years old. Interestingly enough, many of them have come about through invitations to do so—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: —so that I was invited by the Fabric Workshop of Philadelphia to come and work with fabric and to design some fabrics.

MR. PERREAULT: Right, which is what they do. Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: They try to get people outside the fields to work there—

MS. WOODMAN: That's right. So I accepted the invitation. I went nervously, not knowing what am I supposed to do. I asked friends like Bob Kushner, well, what do I do, how do I do this stuff?

MR. PERREAULT: He had already had a residency here.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Who had some knowledge of it, who explained to me about things called half drops and stuff like that, or George explained—

MR. PERREAULT: I'm sure George could explain what a half drop is in a pattering—

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, right. Right. And the pattern and so on, so that I could do some fabrics, and then became interested in what I could do with the fabric, and so that—I mean, with the first time at the Fabric Workshop, I made three different fabrics, and then I sort of cut and paste them together, collage them, almost, to make doorways.

MR. PERREAULT: Now, these fabrics are—for those who don't know, they're printed fabrics. They're silk-screened.

MS. WOODMAN: Printed. These are printed fabrics. Silk screen on fabric.

MR. PERREAULT: Right. Right.

MS. WOODMAN: And—

MR. PERREAULT: So it's not weaving, just so we get that clear—[inaudible].

MS. WOODMAN: No, I've never done weaving.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: Then I started—I've done quite a bit of glass. And the same thing—I was invited—

MR. PERREAULT: That was at the South of France?

MS. WOODMAN: In Marseille, at a place called CIRVA [Centre International de Recherché sur le Verre, International Research Center on Glass, Marseille]. And I'm just starting a new project with them. And again, you know, I was invited to do this, so I thought, well—

MR. PERREAULT: But some people wouldn't accept. You must have had some—

MS. WOODMAN: I don't know how to say no.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: No, I said no, actually, to the glass. I think I said no because I don't really like glass and I think it's a material that's very difficult to make art with. I mean, I think my attitude was it's too beautiful.

MR. PERREAULT: In itself. The material itself.

MS. WOODMAN: In itself.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: But then when I was lured, you know, urged to come and visit Marseille and see what it was like, and I liked Marseille, and I tried to do something. And as—glass is difficult because there's a time lag between what you do and then being able to see it. Anyway, they cast something I made in clay in glass, and then they shipped it to me in Colorado. And it was so awful looking and ugly—

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: —and I thought, well, I guess it's not that beautiful, is it. [They laugh.]

MR. PERREAULT: So then there was hope—

MS. WOODMAN: So then there was hope that maybe this material was so hideous—[laughs]—anyway, and I think—

MR. PERREAULT: But they turned out beautifully, particularly the stamps, once you got the swing of it, you know.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, no, I think they did, and—

MR. PERREAULT: I think you—

MS. WOODMAN: Now I'm there with a whole new project, and it looks horrible.

MR. PERREAULT: You worked with Lino Tagliapietra, right?

MS. WOODMAN: He was the glassblower who did the blowing for me in the beginning.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: And then Jeff Zimmerman did it at the end. But Lino—well, yes, and I think I was very fortunate when I did work with him, because he's an incredibly skilled glassblower—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, yeah. He is, probably—[inaudible].

MS. WOODMAN: —and he was able to sort of capture the feeling of grace and beauty that I really want my work to incorporate. And it's interesting, because I went there in October this year to start a new project, and they have a glassblower from Canada, I think. Anyway, I'm sure he's a skilled glassblower, but he didn't capture beans. It was—you know, these things are—they look awful.

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: And so, I'm sort of hoping that he has moved on and maybe somebody—you know, you don't realize how lucky you are to have someone—making collaborations is very interesting, and I've done a lot of collaborative work, but there's a kind of sensitivity towards each other that makes it work well, and when that isn't there, it's really awful. And when it is there, if you have never experienced it not being there, you think it's you, and you think, oh, well, this is what I do. And then you end up working with somebody else, and you realize it isn't just me, it's us, and it's this understanding of each other's kind of aesthetic judgment.

MR. PERREAULT: So when you work, did you have a different attitude to glass if you were doing it yourself? Because in this manner, which is one of the traditions in glass—there's the master craftsperson or—

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Right.

MR. PERREAULT: —or the gaffer—

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: —and then the artist, who is the designer—

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: —who tells him—it's usually him—what to do within the parameters of glass history, basically. Would it be—is that—does that put you off, that it's once removed?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I think it puts me off in theory. I'm not sure it puts me off in practice. I think it's—

MR. PERREAULT: When you get good results. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: If I like the results. If I don't, it's all their fault, you know. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: Well I think that's a good—that's a blessing if—

MS. WOODMAN: No, I like to like the results.

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: It's interesting. It's an interesting question.

MR. PERREAULT: Has there been any—let's see. I know you've worked in bronze, because you have those wonderful garden benches and you first did some—the wall fountain—that was your first project with bronze.

MS. WOODMAN: One of the first, yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: So glass, fabric, bronze; early on, wood. And you, of course, do works on paper and drawings and paintings and other things.

Now in the areas that are material-specific in their own discipline, through their own groups of artists, like glass let's say, or fabric, do you feel like any feedback into your work in ceramics, because you are primarily someone who works in ceramics? Do these four ways—adding other materials—how do they affect you, if at all? Or is it just another way of getting across something you would do in clay, using another material?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, no.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: No, I think it's a challenge. And I think it affects—I think everything I do affects me and—because it just feeds back in. I don't know as you can put your finger on it. But I think all of these things have been—

MR. PERREAULT: Is there anything you would still—any material you would still like to experiment with—beyond what you've already done? Not weaving, apparently. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: No, I don't think I want to weave.

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: That's—that—it's—I think that—and then I really want to do some more bronze pieces. But—

and I am—you know, I did initiate this new glass project. So I thought I wanted to do it until I had seen how ugly they look.

MR. PERREAULT: Well, maybe it'll work out through another person—

MS. WOODMAN: You know, I'm—I mean, I would be very interested in doing sets for the theater, costumes.

MR. PERREAULT: Ah. You've never done that.

MS. WOODMAN: No, but I would like to do that, and I have done some, you know, site-specific installations, and I'd like to do more.

MR. PERREAULT: That had a certain theatrical element to it, in any case.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. You do.

MS. WOODMAN: And I mean, I think you could say that the figures with the clothing, with the fabric, the recent pieces, are—I mean, they're not related to the work that I did at the Fabric Workshop. I think that's a step in a very different direction for me, to—

MR. PERREAULT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It's—they're found fabric, to begin with.

MS. WOODMAN: They're found fabrics, or they're acquired.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: I mean, they're really sort of dressing—they're changing the ceramic pieces; they're personifying them. And it just is leading me someplace else. So—

MR. PERREAULT: Well, certainly foregrounds, the metaphor of the vessel as the body by having the cloth wrapped around them—

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: —and the inspiration for this was from your trip to India?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. It was sort of seeing shrines, where—

MR. PERREAULT: Well, later we're going to talk more about your trips that are related.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: So let's see, now. Where are we? Apprentice. You talked about the teachers that influenced you. Oh, and then they want your various experiences at these other craft schools. So let's see. Have you had any involvement with Penland [Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC]?

MS. WOODMAN: No.

MR. PERREAULT: None with Penland. Haystack [Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME]? None with Haystack.

MS. WOODMAN: No.

MR. PERREAULT: Arrowmont [Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TNe]? Pilchuck [Pilchuck School of Glass, Stanwood, WA]? Archie Bray?

MS. WOODMAN: I've been to Archie Bray. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: Went to for one day. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: I've been to Watershed [Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts, Newcastle, ME]—[laughs]—for one day. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: But not as a teacher or anything. No. So the institutions that you've been involved with in this grouping would be Fabric Workshop; the place in the South of France, which was government-supported, I think, is it—

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. CIRVA, which was—

MR. PERREAULT: Urban Glass [New York]. You had some little project there. I'm trying to think if there are any other places that would be—

MS. WOODMAN: Where I've done—

MR. PERREAULT: Done work or taught and—[inaudible]—

MS. WOODMAN: —where I've done projects—

MR. PERREAULT: I think what they're getting after is the nonacademic craft schools.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: And that's things like Penland and Haystack, et cetera. Well, when you were teaching in Boulder, that was a two-year college at first? No, that was at the university.

MS. WOODMAN: No. I taught at the University of Colorado—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh. Okay.

MS. WOODMAN: And that was a nonacademic situation. But I've also worked at other—well, the European Ceramic Work Centre [Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands].

MR. PERREAULT: Oh. All right. So let's—

MS. WOODMAN: —and Bellagio [Study Center, Como, Italy].

MR. PERREAULT: All right. So let's talk about those a little bit.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: What did you do at the—

MS. WOODMAN: The European Ceramic Work Centre in Hertogenbosch [Den Bosch] in Holland—when they first started it, they invited me to go and work there, to be one of the first artists. I think they had a project, and they had Russian architects working. They had invited a bunch of people. And I couldn't go then, but I went maybe a year or two later and worked there. And I sort of thought through why would I want to go there and try to work, because I had a studio in Italy, a studio in Colorado and a studio in New York—

MR. PERREAULT: And you get another studio—

MS. WOODMAN: —and why did I need to go to a strange studio to do my work?

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: So I decided that I needed to have some specific thing that I was going to do there and that I couldn't do in my other studios. And that was to do something that was large-scale. So I—but I thought that if I was going to do something large-scale and which was made with fragments or segments of things, that it would be nice if I had a place to put it up—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: —if I was going to do it, because otherwise it's just so many little pieces in a box.

So I wrote to Yvonne Joris, who is the head of the museum there in Den Bosch, the Kruithuis Museum, where I'd had a one-person retrospective show. And I said I was going to come to Den Bosch, and I was going to work with the European Ceramic Centre, and I'd like to do something large, and did she have any ideas about where I might put it, if I did it. And she wrote back and said, okay, you're all set to have a show here, in such-and-such a room; it opens June so-and-so. And I thought, ah, you know, what am I going to do with that because I don't even know this place. I don't know the clay, I don't know anything; what happens if it doesn't work out? And then I thought, well, if it doesn't work out, I won't have the show; I will just cancel it at the last minute.

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.] Right. Right.

MS. WOODMAN: So with that invitation and that knowledge, I wrote to the European Ceramic Work Centre and said I need a studio that has a wall that's 10 meters long. I'm going to do a piece 10 meters long for this

museum. And so they gave me a studio that had a wall that was 10 meters long, and I certainly didn't have a wall that was 10 meters long in any other studio.

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Great. So that worked out.

MS. WOODMAN: So that's the way—you know, I made good use of my time, and in a month I produced a very large piece, which has just found a home at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum [Providence, RI]. So that's nice.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, good. Good. Very good.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: That's excellent. And—

MS. WOODMAN: And I worked at Bellagio, at that foundation. So—and some of these I have applied for—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: —and some of these I've been invited to. But to get back to the nonacademic—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: I did for many years do workshops, so I did them at many different places.

MR. PERREAULT: No, we still have three more minutes here.

MS. WOODMAN: Okay. I did usually two- or three-day workshops in many of these places, many ceramic centers; that's what I did at Archie Bray. And—you know, where students come and they watch you work for a day or two.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: You demonstrate and you talk about what your ideas are.

MR. PERREAULT: Are those fun for you or—

MS. WOODMAN: I don't do them anymore. I think they were very interesting for me to do. And I learned a lot about myself, having to articulate my ideas to a group of people as I was working.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, sure. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. WOODMAN: But I think at a certain point it became repetitive, and I began to question the validity, certainly for me to do it and, in a way, the whole idea of it. I would say you always learn when you watch somebody else work.

MR. PERREAULT: That's true. Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: There's—you pick up something.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: It's interesting.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: But it seemed to me that no painter ever sort of stands on a stage and does a painting—

MR. PERREAULT: True.

MS. WOODMAN: —and that there was too much in crafts or in ceramics that was just copying without thinking, and that this had become kind of laying out your bag of tricks and then other people could pick up your bag of tricks and do them.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: And I don't think I approve of it.

MR. PERREAULT: You didn't like that—Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: Would that go for Peter Voulkos's demonstrations and the—

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, I think absolute—

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Did you ever see any of his? You must have.

MS. WOODMAN: Hmm?

MR. PERREAULT: Did you ever see Peter Voulkos do a demo?

MS. WOODMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: I stopped doing it years ago.

MR. PERREAULT: Right. I follow why you're—

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: —follow exactly why you're stopping here.

MS. WOODMAN: Right. But I also will say that it certainly is valid and interesting to watch somebody else work.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: So—

MR. PERREAULT: But there—isn't there—is the—I mean, now there are so many departments where you can learn clay that there's less need to—when Peter Voulkos was doing it, Leach was doing it, I think there was more of an educational need—

MS. WOODMAN: I think Peter Voulkos had his own personal need—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, okay. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: —for an audience, too.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, that's true. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: And maybe I did, too, at one point. I mean, I think it's part of it.

MR. PERREAULT: Well, I know—

MS. WOODMAN: I think it's—you know, it sort of goes both ways.

MR. PERREAULT: I notice, in the wood turning field, that a large part of the way those skills are passed on and styles are expanded is through their conferences, which are largely demonstrations, largely demonstrations. So people will just sit there in absolute awe of someone chiseling away at something.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. No, it's—and you know, I'm not putting it down totally, because I think it is valid. But I think it isn't valid for me.

MR. PERREAULT: But not for you. Right. Right. No, I understand that. Yeah. So let's see, we've covered—

MS. WOODMAN: Well, is there—is there—

MR. PERREAULT: Just two more minutes. [Laughs.] I'm afraid to start your travels. So we'll just end it right there. [Laughs.] Okay, now how do I do—

[Audio break.]

MR. PERREAULT: Okay. So here we are again. This is the second disc of an interview by John Perreault with Betty Woodman on April 22, 2003, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and we are in New York City.

Okay, Betty, now we want to cover a little bit about your travels, and we know you travel a great deal. And first

we could start with—I suppose this is related, but maybe that's another topic. Let's just keep to the script here. We can talk about, you know, your living in Italy and in Boulder and in New York simultaneously at some other point. They seem to be—you know, tell us about your travels to Japan, Czechoslovakia, England, whatever. I know that you've been to North Africa, to India; certainly to Italy, where you have a house, but that's another issue; to the Netherlands and to other places. Have you ever been to Japan? I'm trying to remember.

MS. WOODMAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. PERREAULT: Just recently you were in Japan.

MS. WOODMAN: No, I have been there twice.

MR. PERREAULT: You have been there twice. So let's see. We can talk about, I guess, India. Would you like to start talking about India? It's the most recent.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, do you want me to start with the recent and move back, or start—

MR. PERREAULT: Of course—oh, no, start with the back—your earliest trip. [Laughs.] Okay?

MS. WOODMAN: My earliest. To camp. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: Outside the United States. Outside of the United States. I think that might have entered into—[inaudible]—

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I think that was the first trip, to Italy, but we're going to sort of let Italy go at this point.

MR. PERREAULT: Well, you didn't live in Italy at first, right?

MS. WOODMAN: Hmm?

MR. PERREAULT: When you first went to Italy, was it for just a trip? You didn't go there to stay—

MS. WOODMAN: No, I went to work there.

MR. PERREAULT: You went to work there?

MS. WOODMAN: When I finished school, having been taught how to make my living making pots, of course I had no money to set up a studio—

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: —didn't know what I was doing. I mean, I knew what I wanted to do, but I had no means to do it. And so—

MR. PERREAULT: This is good. It's chronological. You're right, we should do chronological.

MS. WOODMAN: I came—I went back home to my parents' house, which was, certainly, as far as I was concerned, absolutely not what I wanted to do, and got a job being an assistant to a woman who had taught a pottery class at the Y [YMCA] in Boston that I had taken. And she had a studio in Cambridge, and she said I could – in exchange for helping her, I could use the studio – and she paid me $5 a week.

And at a certain point, I—I didn't pay my carfare, because I had to go from Newton to Cambridge. And so I said I just had to make some money. And she said, well, I could teach a class. So I taught an evening class, and George was a student in my class, and—this is not talking about Italy at all, but anyway—

MR. PERREAULT: But it's getting there.

MS. WOODMAN: It will get there.

MR. PERREAULT: So this is in Boston?

MS. WOODMAN: This was in Cambridge.

MR. PERREAULT: Cambridge. Okay.

MS. WOODMAN: Cambridge. And her studio was in the basement of what had been a Harvard dorm, right where the subway went under the ground. And in the basement—and it had been the swimming pool. So the studio was tiled all over the walls—the shape was the shape of a swimming pool—and then it said things like "12 feet, six

inches." [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: That's funny.

MS. WOODMAN: It was sort of a funny studio. Anyway, and I met George, and—because he was a freshman at Harvard, and he wanted to take a pottery class. And my mother was a student of mine. Anyway, that's a different story.

But things weren't going very smoothly, and I had no sense that I was doing what I wanted to do and didn't know what to do. And I got a letter from the Tagliabues, who had been close friends of mine at Alfred, and John Tagliabue is a poet, and he was Italo-Americano. He was born, actually, here, in Jersey City, and then taken to Italy as a very young child—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh.

MS. WOODMAN: —and his family was from the area around Como—and then came back and so on.

Anyway, they had a Fulbright—he and his wife and their two small children—and they were in Florence. And they wrote to me, urging me, saying wasn't I going to come. At that point, I thought, well, I don't know what I'm doing, but I don't think I like what I'm doing.

So I stopped working for Barbara Ladd in this pottery and got a job in a hospital, Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, being a darkroom technician. I developed X-rays. And as an aside, I was—I became a darkroom technician because I had a boyfriend who was a photographer, who taught me how to develop film in the darkroom. [Laughs.] Anyway, my next job on my list of jobs advertised in the paper was for cake decorating, which I thought I should—certainly had talent at, too. But I got the job in the darkroom.

Anyway, I worked for six months, and I lived with my family, and I saved my money, and I had $900, and I went to Italy for a year, including my—the boat trip, with my $900. And I stayed with the Tagliabues, who were living up in Fiesole. Grace was interested in ceramics, and she had found a place that was in Fiesole. We went to see them and said, "Can we come and work in your studio?"

MR. PERREAULT: Who is the "we" here?

MS. WOODMAN: Grace and I.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, Grace.

MS. WOODMAN: Grace and I. But she had two small children.

MR. PERREAULT: Okay.

MS. WOODMAN: So—but anyway, together we—she spoke Italian. So we went and knocked on the door of this pottery and said, can we come and work here? And they looked at these two young American women—and she was a little older than I was—I was 20—and said, sure, come right in. [Laughs.]

Anyway, so I worked there for most of a year. And it was a very interesting time in Italy. It was just after the war, and the people running this studio were two artists who had set up a pottery studio. One was a painter and the other a sculptor. And they knew nothing about clay, but they thought that it was an interesting material and that maybe they could make a living doing this.

So all together there were five of them sort of working. And so, Grace didn't do very much, because she had two small children, but I really went every day and worked there. And it was a tremendously important experience for me because they hadn't been to school, they didn't know the rules and know what you were supposed to do and what you weren't supposed to do, and they were making really wonderful stuff.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh they were.

MS. WOODMAN: I came out of school, I knew all the rules, I knew how to do everything the way—only when you're fresh out of school you think you know so much. And they were just not following the rules. So it taught me to break the rules. [Laughs.] Which I think—

MR. PERREAULT: What kind of things were they doing?

MS. WOODMAN: Do you know Gambone's work?

MR. PERREAULT: No, no.

MS. WOODMAN: Guido Gambone?

MR. PERREAULT: No, no.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, you know, he should be known in this country. He was from—actually from a town near Salerno called Vietri sul Mare, where they had a tradition of ceramics. And—but he was living in Florence, and he was making kind of—oh, they were things thrown on the wheel, but they were all off-center—bottles and vases that were all so wobbly, and big platters. And there was a low fire with a fairly bright color palette of sugary glazes.

And in Vietri sul Mare all the buildings are tiled, and it's a ceramic place. But the glazes—I think, technically, because they use a fairly rough, not finely ground, silica, they tend to be with a lot of almost air bubbles in the glass. And so it gets sugary—

MR. PERREAULT: Almost volcanic? Oh, sugary. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, kind of sugary-looking. Anyway, Giorgio Ferrero [ph] was a painter, and he was making, essentially, vehicles that he could paint on. Leonello [Fallacara] was a sculptor, and he was doing the throwing.

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. WOODMAN: They did things, they fritted their own glazes, they read what they could read, and they were just doing it. And then they melted the ingredients, and then they scraped them out while they were hot, and we ground them in a hand coffee grinder to make – and I helped them in exchange for their letting me use the studio by—I did know more technically than they knew, so I made suggestions like maybe if you don't pile all the plates up there, the bottom one won't crack. [Laughs.]

I don't remember what I did. I learned Italian. I had just an incredible experience. And I had it also with John Tagliabue and Grace, who were—are still friends of mine. John has a way of seeing the world and every experience as a kind of dramatic, exciting, interesting thing. So it was a wonderful way for me to be introduced to Italy and things Italian. I—you know, I fell in love with it.

MR. PERREAULT: So then you came back to the United States?

MS. WOODMAN: Then I came back to the United States because I was in love with George. And things were not going very smoothly with the two of us, but I came back to Cambridge and I worked. He was then a junior at Harvard and majoring in philosophy, and we started living together, he had a studio because he was a painter; he had a studio in Boston. I lived in his studio and I had jobs teaching at what were called settlement houses in Boston. So I taught children's and adult classes and sort of used the studios where I was teaching—

MR. PERREAULT: So you were teaching pottery or ceramics at those? Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: I was teaching pottery to—I taught nursery school.

MR. PERREAULT: Whatever. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: —whatever for the 50 cents an hour I was being paid. And then, at the end of his junior year—when he was 21, we got married. We went to Mexico for a honeymoon, for the summer, and George's parents gave us a thousand dollars as a wedding gift, and we went for three months. We drove—

MR. PERREAULT: Traveling around.

MS. WOODMAN: —from Boston to Mexico City. Well, we drove as far south as Mitla, which is where the road stopped a little bit below Oaxaca.

So that was my second foreign travel, and it was for three months. And I didn't do any work, but we bought—we had to count them, because we made a list for coming back—we bought 97 pots, and we came back to Cambridge, where we had rented an apartment, and unloaded our 97 pots.

MR. PERREAULT: Ninety-seven pots. [Laughs.] Oh my! These were all various kinds of market pottery, hmm?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah. From Mexico. So that—

MR. PERREAULT: So George was interested in pottery, too?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, he had been my student.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Right. So he—well, yeah, he was. He was. He was. And I mean, George is a painter, and—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. Right.

MS. WOODMAN: —but he was very interested in pottery. Yeah. Well, he was interested in me. That—

MR. PERREAULT: So what happened to these 97 pots?

MS. WOODMAN: I have some of them still. I moved one the other day because we just emptied our kitchen. So I took one of them off the shelf—right off the shelf.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, over there.

MS. WOODMAN: It's a very pretty boat-shaped pot. It's got a green copper lead glaze. And we didn't die of lead poisoning. We ate out of it for a long time. Then, at a certain point, I realized I shouldn't be cooking in it. So I hung it on the wall and look at it.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: But it's a beautiful pot.

MR. PERREAULT: So was there any influence—

MS. WOODMAN: And many of them are at Charlie's house, our son's house.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh.

MS. WOODMAN: So it's sort of interesting.

MR. PERREAULT: Was there any influence from seeing all that pottery?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, sure. Sure.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, absolutely.

MR. PERREAULT: Can you—

MS. WOODMAN: You know, John, I had a whole life of being a functional potter.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: So no, I made a casserole that had two handles that came up. That was directly from—

MR. PERREAULT: The Mexican—

MS. WOODMAN: —those Mexican pots. And I made pots from Italy—from my Italian—I have a beautiful Italian bowl that I brought home.

MR. PERREAULT: One of the things you saw there—

MS. WOODMAN: In that—yeah. Yeah, yeah. Oh, use? The whole idea of making wide handles that were sections of thrown pieces came from—

MR. PERREAULT: Is that Mexican?

MS. WOODMAN: No, it's Italian.

MR. PERREAULT: Italian.

MS. WOODMAN: It's Italian. But a braided handle is Mexican. A way of decorating might be—that sort of casual way they can make a few brush strokes and have it be so beautiful.

MR. PERREAULT: Right. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. WOODMAN: I think the kind of freshness is, you know, important to me in those Mexican folk pots. I mean,

they're very—

MR. PERREAULT: They're done very fast, aren't they?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah. They have a kind of freshness, and I think it's involved with their being earthenware, too—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: —which I think I tried to do this in stoneware, because I was making stoneware at a certain—

MR. PERREAULT: You were—[inaudible].

MS. WOODMAN: I wasn't. In the beginning, I was doing earthenware, but I did, you know, then. And I think then when I really started making earthenware, I started looking at them again or realizing how much—the kind of breath or air that's in these pieces is the fact that they haven't tightened in the kiln; that they stay there where they're put.

But I went to Mexico, and I wonder what I did for three months, because I usually I don't want to not work for three months.

MR. PERREAULT: Lolled about, relaxed, ate chocolates—

MS. WOODMAN: —I had diarrhea or something like that, I mean—[laughs]—had my honeymoon. And then—okay. The next trip was to New Mexico, where George went to graduate school –

MR. PERREAULT: Oh. Okay.

MS. WOODMAN: —because we thought that that would be like Mexico.

When we were in Mexico—this is an anecdote; maybe it's amusing—we got to Oaxaca, and I saw all these black pots. And I remembered a book I had sort of looked at, at a friend's house, called *Maria: the Potter of San Ildefonso* [Alice Lee Marriott, *Maria: the potter of San Ildefonso*, with drawings by Margaret Lefranc; Norman, University of Oklahoma, 1948]. And I thought that I was in the right place for Maria, so we asked—in the market in Oaxaca, they had the black pots for sale. And we said, "Well, where are they made?" And they said they were made in such-and-such a village. So we set off, and we were there with our Jeep beach wagon that we'd driven from Boston. So we set off to find this village, and when we got there, we asked somebody for Maria. And they said, "Well, everybody's Maria." [Laughs.] So then we said, "Well, Maria who makes pots." And they said, "Well, everybody makes pots." [Laughs.] But they finally said we must mean Maria so-and-so. So we went to Maria so-and-so, and she was making pots, and she had—in a kind of a hut. And we squatted on the floor, and she was making these beautiful pots, and they were handmade; she didn't have a wheel.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: But they were kind of big pinched pots, and the clay was very soft, and she was—

MR. PERREAULT: [Inaudible.]

MS. WOODMAN: —there were these beautiful jars. And then George bumped into one of them, which was wet, that she had just made, and it just collapsed because she got the walls quite thin, and we were mortified. They thought it was funny, and they laughed and were very sweet about it.

Anyway, when we moved to New Mexico, I became aware that the Maria I was looking for was in San Ildefonso.

MR. PERREAULT: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. WOODMAN: So we found her and met her and talked to her. And—but it was very interesting to— George graduated from Harvard in '54, so this was in the fall of '54 that we moved there.

MR. PERREAULT: Where was it? Where was it in New Mexico?

MS. WOODMAN: Albuquerque.

MR. PERREAULT: Albuquerque.

MS. WOODMAN: The university. He went to the university to study—because he had a degree in philosophy, but he really wanted to be a painter. So he went to graduate school in painting in New Mexico. And the reason we went to New Mexico was not that he knew something about the school, but we wanted to get out of New

England. And we had been to Mexico for our honeymoon; we figured New Mexico would be like Mexico, so we set off—[laughs]—and I was pregnant, and that's where Charlie was born. So—

MR. PERREAULT: In New Mexico.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, he was.

MR. PERREAULT: So were you doing pottery there, or did you have teaching jobs in –

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, yes. No. Well, of course, in Boston, there were these things called settlement houses.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: They were programs. Albuquerque had—was not so enlightened, and it had no such thing. But I set up a studio, and I rented a little storefront in Old Town, and I built—we built a kiln. We built our first kiln, in our backyard of where—the building we had rented some rooms in, and it was built of adobe brick; it was a bottle-shaped kiln. It came out of Leach's book. We followed Leach's plan. And George was very interested: it was George's kiln. I sort of did the labor with him, but it was his—he figured it out.

MR. PERREAULT: He supervised the whole thing. Engineered it.

MS. WOODMAN: It was a wood-burning kiln. It had a red brick liner and then adobe brick as the insulation. And it cost us $15 to build the kiln.

MR. PERREAULT: Wow.

MS. WOODMAN: And then it cost us $2 or a dollar to fire it, because there was a place that made molding, wood molding—you could fill up the back of a station wagon with scraps. And that's what we used. It was pine. It was sort of very thin, and we used that to fire.

And I was very interested in Indian pots, and George got a job working for a trader, and we acquired a great many Native American pots while we were there. But I was never inspired by them.

MR. PERREAULT: Hand building—

MS. WOODMAN: I never tried to do them. And I think I was always sort of smart enough to move a little bit away from what I was trying to emulate. So at that point, with that kiln, I was very interested in Hispano-Moresque tradition, and I was trying to do lusterware.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh.

MS. WOODMAN: So that's what I was doing in that kiln. And I'm not sure you'd call Albuquerque a foreign country, but I'll just finish that part of my life.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: I had a business, and it was called Roadrunner Pottery. The second year we were there, I taught an extension class at the university, but the first year I opened up my pottery. And I had a partner, Elenita Brown, who was the wife of a graduate student in anthropology and religious studies, Joseph Brown. And Elenita and I—Elenita was Swiss, and she was a dancer, but she was interested in pottery and had studied it. And she and I opened this business, Roadrunner Pottery. We dug our own clay from the Rio Puerco and we made—we fired to Cone 01. We fired earthenware.

She made her pots and I made my pots, so we didn't sort of exchange what we were doing. But we had a little stamp—it was a roadrunner. And hers had a B and mine had a W, so people could distinguish what we were doing.

MR. PERREAULT: And did you make money at the store?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, yeah. Yeah, we sold them. And we sold them to shops. There was one shop in Albuquerque that was very supportive and very interested in Old Town, and they gave us a show, and we moved the wheel—

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B.]

—over there and did demonstrations, and they bought all of our pots.

Then we tried to sell them in Santa Fe. We filled the car up with pots and we drove to Santa Fe. And I think this

was after Charlie was born. Then we separated and I went to a bunch of stores in Santa Fe and she went to a different bunch of stores, then we met and we compared notes. We didn't do very well. We went home with all the pots that we went with. Both of us went to the same place by mistake, and there were two partners, and one of them said it wasn't his cup of tea, to me, and then he said something else to her. [Laughs.] We laughed over that on our way home. Albuquerque was where we had our first sale. So in the spring we put them all outside in the courtyard of the building she was living in and invited people to come and buy things. And they did—we made an average of 50 cents an hour.

MR. PERREAULT: Fifty cents an hour? Very good. [Laughs.] That's less than you made at the—when you were at Alfred.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, right. Well, it's what they were paying me to file books in the library. And I thought, "I'm just not going to file books in the library for 50 cents an hour. I can figure out a way to save that kind of money."

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. So, how long were you in Albuquerque?

MS. WOODMAN: Two years.

MR. PERREAULT: Two years, because George was in school.

MS. WOODMAN: Two summers. And then—

MR. PERREAULT: Then you moved to Boulder?

MS. WOODMAN: Then George was suppose to, you know, go in the Army for the Korean War, but he was from New Hampshire and they had enough kids from the farms who were volunteering because they wanted to get away from the farm. And also, Charlie had been born and they didn't want to have to support me and Charlie. So they said they weren't going to take him in the Army. And so then he applied for the job in Colorado. We moved to Colorado.

Anyway, 10 years after my first trip to Italy, George and I and the two children went for what was my second trip and their first trip. So we went back to Italy and spent another year there, and then went back—

MR. PERREAULT: The whole family?

MS. WOODMAN: All of us, in 1960. And I worked with the same potter I had worked with for—

MR. PERREAULT: These two guys that had been there—

MS. WOODMAN: Well, by then they didn't have their studio in Fiesole and Giorgio had a studio in Florence, and I worked—

MR. PERREAULT: So they had split up?

MS. WOODMAN: —yeah—I worked with him. And George was painting. And then we went back five years after that. I had a Fulbright and George had a fellowship from the university, and we had a house and studio just outside of Florence. And I built a stoneware kiln then, because I wanted to show Giorgio what it was like making stoneware, and he came and worked with me. And that was a very important year for my work. It really changed a lot.

MR. PERREAULT: Because of being in Italy or working with Giorgio—

MS. WOODMAN: No. I think—I—I think I just, you know, became much looser about what I was doing. So I made —see those two brown pieces up there? Those are from that era. And they're collaborations with George in terms of they're his decoration on my forms. But they weren't particularly functional pots. In fact, they're just sort of made of—they're made of sections which are loosely slapped together. They're made looking at Etruscan pots.

MR. PERREAULT: So that is an important time when you were there—

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, yeah, it was very important.

MR. PERREAULT: —because you got the assembling thing and the—

MS. WOODMAN: Right. And of course, you know, I had—one does that with clay.

But I think that I had—I wanted to do stoneware, and there's no stoneware clay in Italy. And I heard about a clay

from France, from the town of La Borne, and so I tried to find stoneware clay in Italy because I couldn't believe there wasn't any. And finally, I went to La Borne by myself. I left the kids with George and I went off and I tried to find this potter that I'd heard about there, a woman named Ann Falacarra. She's Danish. She had studied with Leach and she was working and living in France.

And, oh, it was a big adventure. I took the train to Paris. And then on Wednesdays it was market day in Henrichemont and I got the train from Paris to Henrichemont and then the bus that was—because there was a bus one day a week that took you to La Borne. And when I got to La Borne—I'd written to the mayor and he told me I should go and see so-and-so, because it was a town of all artists who were potters, and they came from France, but also from Germany and England. I went to see these people because they could speak Italian and I could speak Italian. And they said, I needed to see Ann Falacarra, who hadn't answered me. But—so somebody drove me over there and I stayed with Ann. Then they arranged for me to buy clay. So—

MR. PERREAULT: She was using stoneware?

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. Everybody does. It's a wonderful—it's a very nice stoneware clay that's from that region. I mean, historically they have wonderful things.

So I went back to Italy, and then there was a phone call and I was told that they wouldn't ship less than a freight car full of clay. And so I said, "Okay, go ahead." And what happened? No, I didn't say, okay go ahead. No, I didn't—obviously, I didn't—15 tons of clay. And they had to send it somehow to the Mediterranean, and then it went on a boat, and then it went to La Borne.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, my gosh.

MS. WOODMAN: It was a—it was this thing. By then—it seemed to me it was Easter and—I mean, I was working with some Italian clay. There's a big white piece there that was made with the clay which I was getting in Italy.

MR. PERREAULT: In the back here.

MS. WOODMAN: But Richard Serra had a Fulbright at the same time, and he was married to Nancy Graves, and they were very close friends of ours. And Nancy had had a Fulbright in France the year before and she'd left a trunk there. So we ended up—I know, this is the story of the clay. We rented a truck and Nancy and Richard drove to Paris and got her trunk and then went to Henrichemont—or La Borne and got the clay, and then they drove it back to Italy.

But this is before plastic bags. So by the time—the clay was wet, but by the time we got it, it was hard. And Wayne Higby had been a student of mine and George's at the University of Colorado, and then he had married Donna. So they had gotten married in Versailles and then they had come to stay with us in Italy, but we'd gone off for Easter with the children to Spain. And so anyway, we got back from Spain and Wayne and Donna were there, and so was this pile of hard lumps of clay. So Wayne and I stayed up all night with broomsticks and made holes in the clay and poured water into the holes.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, my gosh.

MS. WOODMAN: And, anyway, it's a funny story.

So, part of the reason why these pots got so loose was that—eventually, I had somebody mix the clay up for me so it was soft. And then—I mean, this was Easter already and my Fulbright was over in June. I had made a big fuss about how I had to have this stoneware clay, and I had to make it go away. So every day I would go to my studio and try—

MR. PERREAULT: And use up the clay. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: —to make the stuff—[laughs.]. Anyway, so maybe it was just, you know, a fortuitous experience. But—

MR. PERREAULT: And did you use up all the clay by the time it was over?

MS. WOODMAN: The Fulbright people were very nice and they gave me an extension for the summer, and I used up the clay.

MR. PERREAULT: Wow. Good for you.

MS. WOODMAN: I did all right. Then I brought it home, all these wonderful pots that I thought were so extraordinary and of course someone would want to show them. And, of course, the best place to possibly show them was the American Craft Museum—

MR. PERREAULT: Yes.

MS. WOODMAN: —but they weren't interested in showing them. They didn't think they were so wonderful. So they kind of sat around. But they are wonderful and—

MR. PERREAULT: Well, maybe some day they'll show them.

MS. WOODMAN: I did show them. George and I showed them at the Wadsworth Athenaeum [Hartford, CT] when I had a show there.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, well, good.

MS. WOODMAN: And it was very satisfying. There's a picture someplace on the wall. Because Andrea Miller-Keller, who was the curator then, I said to her, "They're inspired by Etruscan pots, and the Etruscan pots are not shown as if they're works of art; they're simply archaeological artifacts and they're all piled up in these old glass cases." In Florence that was—so she went to the basement of the Wadsworth Athenaeum, came up with a glass case that was—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, for your pots?

MS. WOODMAN: —and we stuck them in and we showed them, the two of us. So, anyway.

MR. PERREAULT: So, you're wandering now—

MS. WOODMAN: All right, so we went to—

MR. PERREAULT: You went back to Boulder after—

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, then our lives got complicated because we eventually ended up buying a farmhouse in Italy. So we started living in the winter— in the school year in Colorado, and in the summer in Italy. I built a kiln there and I started working there. And George had a studio there, and he was painting.

MR. PERREAULT: And that's in Antella, is it called?

MS. WOODMAN: Antella. And then, at a certain point—now, I'm not positive what year it was—we decided that there was a movement called pattern and decoration going on in New York. George had been working with patterns in his paintings for many, many years, but he wasn't part of what was happening.

MR. PERREAULT: At places like—[Holly?].

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. And then there was the show that you did.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: So he was in contact with some of these people. He was in contact with Amy Goldin—

MR. PERREAULT: Ah, right. She was—

MS. WOODMAN: —who was very interested in his work, and she'd come out to Boulder. So George and I looked at each other and thought, "Well, why sit in Colorado and be bitter that you're not included, because you should be part of this? So why not try going to New York and just showing people what you do, because of course they'll want to have you." It's about as naive as my thinking that of course the Craft Museum would want my wonderful—[laughs]—Italian Etruscan pots.

Anyway, we had some friends who were living in New York, people like Joyce Kozloff—

MR. PERREAULT: So this would be '70s—late '70s?

MS. WOODMAN: I guess, yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, late '70s, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: So we figured out a way to trade George's job and our house in Colorado for a place—for a loft and a studio for George and a place to live in New York, and we came for a semester. And I think George had tried to interest Holly in his work, and she was interested in his work. And then Amy died of cancer.

MR. PERREAULT: And then the Pattern and Decorative movement didn't last very long, if I remember.

MS. WOODMAN: It didn't last very long, particularly at all.

MR. PERREAULT: One show killed it off, I think. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: And also that—well, you think so? That was at PS 1 [PS 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York], right?

MR. PERREAULT: PS 1, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: And then—

MR. PERREAULT: Bob Kushner had his entire year's output purchased by that Swiss dealer. That's what ended it, I think.

MS. WOODMAN: What?

MR. PERREAULT: That's what ended it.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: But anyway. Sorry.

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, that's interesting. Who was the Swiss dealer?

MR. PERREAULT: Hmm.

MS. WOODMAN: Anyway, obviously you didn't just march into New York and say, "Here I am; aren't I great?" It was not so easy for George to break into the New York art world.

But people had asked me—the people—I will remember his name. Somebody had called me, and they found out I was coming, and would I like to share their studio? It was a studio on Mulberry Street. And so I had a studio. I was really just tagging along for the ride and keeping George company. So I had a studio—I shared a studio with these other guys on Mulberry Street, and it turned out to be, for me, a rather easier entree into something that was happening in New York because people in the art world were really just getting interested in clay and thinking about what new material can we look at and what's interesting here? And people were starting to have galleries that showed clay.

[Audio break.]

MR. PERREAULT: So, let's see, we left off last time in our chronology that you had arrived in New York and at that time there was an interest in clay. And I assume, from what you said, this was all to the good for you.

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: Now, if I remember correctly, you began by collaborating with artists. Is that how it began? You—

MS. WOODMAN: When I moved—when I first moved to New York.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: You are remembering correctly. I came with George and realized that I would—I didn't have a studio and I'd heard about Susan Peterson's place, which was called Clayworks [Clayworks Studio Workshop, New York]. And so I asked about that, and was informed that it was about collaborative projects. So I asked two of my friends if they would be interested in doing a collaboration, two separate collaborations, and they both responded very positively.

The first was Joyce Kozloff—

MR. PERREAULT: So you had already known her from Colorado?

MS. WOODMAN: I knew Joyce and her work from Colorado. And she had just fairly recently begun to work with clay. And they had been teaching for a semester, I think, in Albuquerque, and she had done clay there. I think she became—

MR. PERREAULT: Tiles, I assume, right?

MS. WOODMAN: Tiles, she was doing tiles. And she was very interested in Islamic decoration; she was one of the

Pattern and Decoration artists. And I think she was interested in clay—and she might not agree with this—I never really talked to her about this—but she was—I think she was interested in clay partly—she thought clay was something that women did. And she was also, I know—and this we have talked about—interested in clay because the color was so much more beautiful, of glaze than of paint. So she was interested from two points of view.

Her work had been tile and, of course, continued to be tile. And she and I did a collaboration at Clayworks, and the collaboration—we worked out that I would make the forms and that she would decorate them. And so there was—we weren't on top of each other; we each had a role to play in the production.

The forms that I made, I made specifically for Joyce and knowing what I knew about her work. So I tried to create forms that were plainer so that it would be like painting on tile to paint on these forms. And then as we got into it we tried a little bit to go back and forth, so that I made some pieces that were perforated—and I used a metal, like a pastry tip, to cut out shapes. Then she saved those shapes and she stuck them back on the clay.

MR. PERREAULT: So there began to be a kind of interaction?

MS. WOODMAN: A kind of interaction. But I think there was a lot of interaction just in getting to know each other and in making me realize, or become aware of the differences in the way, say, that a potter looks at making something and that an artist looks at making something. And this was an interesting exchange.

MR. PERREAULT: Could you characterize the difference?

MS. WOODMAN: I think that the potter is looking at more how something is made and—perhaps the craftsman—but the how it's made, whereas the artist was looking at—I'm not sure I would even say that—the conceptual thing behind it, but just at what you were making rather than how you were making it.

MR. PERREAULT: And who was the other person? You said there were two friends.

MS. WOODMAN: And then, after Joyce and I finished our collaboration, then I did a collaboration with Cynthia Carlson. And that was also—I mean, both of these things were very—they were very important to me and very interesting. And Cynthia and I did a collaboration, it was a wall installation, our first one. It was a small wall at the Clayworks Gallery. And Cynthia had been making kind of wallpaper with extruded paint pieces as the elements in the wallpaper.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, I remember those.

MS. WOODMAN: And so I—we decided that what we would do, we would mimic and copy each other and not make a clear line of between what was mine and what was hers. And so I extruded clay onto tiles and she extruded clay for pieces that went on the wall.

And we ended up—both of these collaborations ended up with exhibitions. The one with Cynthia was at a Fashion Institute of Technology, and it was a huge installation, a giant corridor in a big room. And we painted the walls and then applied this pattern-extruded clay to them and extruded paint. And finally, I think we had in one of the rooms—I had pots that I had made, like a pillow pitcher and some other pieces that were mine, and she made paintings of those and put them on the wall.

It was very successful. It was more difficult for the two of us in a way because it wasn't clear and it didn't all go smoothly, I would say, whereas Joyce's and mine went smoothly. And Joyce's and my collaboration—they were shown at Tibor de Nagy Gallery [New York], sort of as an adjunct to a show that she had there.

But, I mean, Cynthia certainly introduced me to the possibility of using—really using the wall in my work. And—

MR. PERREAULT: You had collaborated before with your husband, George.

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: Anybody else—

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, I've done a lot of collaborations, actually. Yeah. No, for many years I made the forms and George painted on them—

MR. PERREAULT: Painted on them, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: —decorated them. And we did that with raku together a long time.

Then—Paul Georges.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, really? The realist painter—or the wild realist painter? [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah. He came to Colorado to teach for—it was the first Visiting Artist program, and I think they came for about three months. And so I—he wanted to do pottery and he took a class with me. I was teaching for the City of Boulder Recreation. That was a long time ago. And then we made—I made dishes and he painted the dishes.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, wow.

MS. WOODMAN: And I did that with another artist, made pornographic plates.

MR. PERREAULT: Really? [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. And—[laughs]—and I'm trying to think of who else. Well, I mean, I feel that the work I did with Bud Shark, the printmaker, is a collaboration. And I did some collaborative prints with Judith Solodkin.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, yeah—

MS. WOODMAN: But with Bud Shark, I've worked for over 15 years doing prints.

MR. PERREAULT: So those woodcuts, they made those?

MS. WOODMAN: Those are with Bud, yeah. And—

MR. PERREAULT: So did this interaction—something seemed to make a change in you in coming to New York, because you had interacted with artists before in Boulder but somehow it changed in New York. Why, do you think? Because they were women? Do you think that had anything to do with it?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I think it was important. I think so.

MR. PERREAULT: The particular projects—

MS. WOODMAN: Well, yeah. I think that one of the very interesting, nice things about moving to New York for me was meeting—knowing—and I knew both Cynthia and Joyce before this. They had both come as visiting artists to Colorado. I mean, living in Colorado is not, you know, living in a vacuum—

MR. PERREAULT: Right. I know it was—

MS. WOODMAN: —it was an exchange. But I think that I became friendly with women who were artists who thought of themselves as artists and who were professional in their attitudes about themselves, and who were not 16 years old compared to my 50, or something like that. I'm older, of course, than Cynthia and Joyce, but not that I feel I'm totally in another world.

MR. PERREAULT: So it was like meeting up with some of our peers.

MS. WOODMAN: So I think that I've always enjoyed meeting mature women who are artists because I simply didn't know that many of them. And there's information and exchange that is—

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, I never thought of that. So did this—how did your ambition change? Or did it change? Or did it not change?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, my ambition changed. [Laughs.] No, I think—

MR. PERREAULT: Because you suddenly were no longer a potter, in a way.

MS. WOODMAN: In a way. In a way. I mean, it was a gradual shift. But I think New York made that, definitely. It was a conscious change, and it was—and it happened not because essentially I went out looking for it but I was fortunate to have people come to me and ask me if I would show, and if I would this, and if I would that. So I think I have been—I was a beneficiary of the women's movement, of the early women's movement, and then, as we started this conversation, of the—

MR. PERREAULT: Pattern and Decoration movement.

MS. WOODMAN: That, and the fact that people were sort of playing with other, non-conventional materials to make art, and clay was one of these materials.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: As I said to Joyce, I thought she was really wrong to think that clay was a women's material because the ceramic world was totally dominated by men. So women—clay was a very macho thing.

MR. PERREAULT: At least at that point, but maybe earlier.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Right. But that—you know, forget it; if you're a woman you just never got in a show, you never got a job, you never got any of these things. It was all men.

MR. PERREAULT: They got the teaching jobs, too, I guess. Do you think that's changed?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. I'm not sure it's changed about clay being accepted in the art world so much. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: But the gender thing.

MS. WOODMAN: I think that was a flirtation that just didn't get consummated very much, except for a few of us. But—

MR. PERREAULT: Do you think being a woman has affected your work?

MS. WOODMAN: Yes.

MR. PERREAULT: How?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, it's just what I am, so I affect my work—

MR. PERREAULT: I see.

MS. WOODMAN: —and I am a woman.

MR. PERREAULT: Now here's—

MS. WOODMAN: I mean, it's not in a self-conscious way. I just think it's simply me.

MR. PERREAULT: Right. This one is—I don't know, we probably touched on it already. Does the function of the objects play a part in the meaning of your work?

MS. WOODMAN: Yes. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: How could it not?

How has the market for American craft changed in your lifetime, if it has? I mean, they're assuming that it has.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I think it's changed a great deal in my lifetime, but I think it's had its ups and downs in my lifetime. I think that—

MR. PERREAULT: The craft fairs, I think, used to be much more important, small shops, than it has—

MS. WOODMAN: I think there were—I mean, first there were very few places that sold them, but there were. I mean, there was America House and there was, you know, the Scandinavian Bonnier and then things from Japan were sold. There were these beautiful so-called craft objects that were available in New York certainly, some in Boston. And then they're what grew up. And I think partially through the American Craft Council, that they—I mean, people—there were these fairs and there was Rhinebeck.

MR. PERREAULT: Rhinebeck, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: And everybody went to Rhinebeck, and I never did any of these, so I never participated.

MR. PERREAULT: Why was that? Well, you had your—

MS. WOODMAN: I participated in one fair. When I first moved to Boulder, there was a fair in the park downtown that has the bandstand. And they took all the picnic tables and everybody got a different table, half a picnic table. And you dragged your stuff down and you moved it—and you put it on the table. And on the other half of my table there was a man who had a mold and made polar bears, you know, cast these polar bears. Now they'd be, you know, in a good gallery. [Laughs.] Anyway, he sold everything he had and I sold one cup for $2. And that was the—

MR. PERREAULT: That's a little discouraging.

MS. WOODMAN: [Laughs.] I said, this is not what I'm ever going to do again, and I never did it again.

But I think these fairs came up, and they got to be very professional and they got to be that people—you know, the hope was that you, as a craftsman, would participate in the Rhinebeck Fair. And they had a section of it where maybe—I'm not positive in my memory. Since I've never attended. But I think they had it for a few days. It was wholesale and then it was retail. And so you, as a craftsperson, could get orders, and then you would have your income secure for the year; you would fill these orders.

It seemed to me that the fallacy of this was, what happened if you didn't want to make blue cups, how could you change them? What happened if you wanted your cup to have a handle? You know, not that that handle wasn't good, but that you were thinking of a handle that came up instead of going down, or the glaze having, you know, green speckles on it instead of being all blue. If you've taken orders—

MR. PERREAULT: Then you're obligated—

MS. WOODMAN: —you became a kind of machine. And that's not what being a craftsperson meant to me, to be locked into that. So I steered away from that. And I think, basically, it's been the downfall of American crafts rather than the support. So I think it was intended well, these crafts fairs that the American Craft Council had—

MR. PERREAULT: So they were turning into a wholesale-type thing, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: —but I think they destroyed something and turned it into something which I have no—very little interest in. Now, as I said, this is me from a distance; I've never been to one. But—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. So, so you only sold on your own or you had that shop in Albuquerque, and then at a certain point you began to be represented by dealers.

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: So, maybe you could describe some of that?

MS. WOODMAN: Okay. Let me—let me just back up a little bit just to sort of put a few—a sentence into what—you know, what I actually did to sell my work, I mean, as it was—

MR. PERREAULT: As opposed to the craft fairs.

MS. WOODMAN: Right. And that was I had first one show and then two shows a year in the house and the studio.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, okay.

MS. WOODMAN: And we would empty the house and the studio and clean it; take all the furniture out and put in shelves and tables, and I would arrange my work there before—Thanksgiving weekend and then in the spring, when it was warm outside in the garden. And I had made hanging planters and bought four-dozen geraniums—I mean, it was a big deal. I had lots of people helping. I had lots of students helping. And it went on for two days. And I was able, essentially, to sell what I made in that way and to make an income doing this. And so it—and what happened was—

MR. PERREAULT: This is in Boulder?

MS. WOODMAN: Hmm?

MR. PERREAULT: This is in Boulder?

MS. WOODMAN: This is in Boulder. And I did a beautiful poster with George, who would do a wonderful photograph. And I had a big mailing list. And people were very loyal. I built up a loyal following, and people would just wait and come and buy things for themselves and they—they might start off with a mug but then they'd get a casserole and then they'd get a cookie jar.

And then, as I started doing things that were really not so functional, like a pillow pitcher or something, eventually these same people, some of them, would go ahead and—one year, one time they would look and the next time they would think, well, it's time I was ready for something like this. So that in a sense, my audience kind of grew with me, and it was very gratifying and for me it was a successful marketing ploy too, I guess.

MR. PERREAULT: Did you ever—did you show with Hadler-Rodriguez [Galleries, New York and Houston] at all?

MS. WOODMAN: I did. So—and then to go on to the rest of this question is that when we moved to New York, what happened was—first—well, I was invited to have a show at Greenwich House, and that was very nice. I

mean, people were very nice to me when I moved to New York. You know, somebody lent me a wheel from—what's her name?

MR. PERREAULT: See, New York isn't so evil as people—[laughs]—

MS. WOODMAN: No, no, I had a very nice, warm reception in New York. And—I keep thinking of the one ceramics of New York and Jersey, any—Baldwin Ceramics. She offered to lend me a wheel and I gave her a piece in exchange for it. I mean, people were really very sweet.

And Greenwich House invited me to have a show, which I did. And then Rodriguez—Nicholas called me and asked me—and came to see us and asked both of us, actually, if we would like to have a show with him, both George and myself. And so I had a show with Nicholas. And Warren had already, I think, gone to Houston. They had two galleries, one in Houston and one here. And the one—the first one was on 20th Street, and I had a show with Nicholas. I did an installation there, actually, a piece from the Fabric Workshop, the room and stuff. And then they moved to a space on 57th Street and I showed with them a couple of times. And George had a show of watercolors. And so this was when I was collaborating with Joyce, and so on. This was that first year we were here.

And then, after a couple of years, I had a letter from Max Protetch [Max Protetch Gallery, New York] one summer when I was in Italy, and Elsa Weiner had become the director there. And she had heard of my work from somebody, and so Max—anyway, she told Max about my work. Max wrote and asked me if I'd like to join the gallery. And at that point I was more interested in being in an art gallery than in a ceramic gallery. And Nicolas, though he showed some other works, was primarily a ceramics gallery—because I felt that my work was addressing issues—see, I had changed—[laughs]—that really were broader than just the ceramic ones. And they were ceramic—it was ceramic, but my work was about other things, too, and I wanted it to be seen in a broader context.

MR. PERREAULT: And so you've been showing with Max for—

MS. WOODMAN: So I wrote back to Max and said—I mean, look at how fortunate I was. I mean, I never was dragging around trying to interest people with my work; they came to me. And I don't—I mean, I'm sure it's because I'm such a wonderful artist and deserve it, but I think I was just lucky.

MR. PERREAULT: I think no doubt talent has something to do with it, Betty. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: I think it absolutely had something to do with it. But I think there are many talented artists that are not represented by galleries, and I was.

MR. PERREAULT: No, that's true, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: You know, in a sense, I think it's interesting because I was fortunate in being a woman and being in the right place at the right time.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: And I do feel that I owe the people who really worked hard to get this to happen. I owe them a thank you. I'm not saying I don't deserve what I've gotten, but I think I have—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, that's right. That's quite true.

Now, they seem to want to know about the qualities of your working environment. This is hard for me to grasp because I've seen at least two of your studios, so I assume they mean—I mean, we were talking last time about you had advice when you were a young student that you should separate your studio from your living quarters. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: And you certainly don't do that that I can see, here nor in Italy. But maybe it would be interesting to talk a little bit about how working in Italy is different from working in New York or Colorado, because at one time you were working at all three places. And I know the clay was different in Italy and the works have a different look to them that nobody has really gone into. Like I've seen—you know, was it being wood-fired? Was that part of it? Because—

MS. WOODMAN: No, you know, they weren't wood-fired; they were kerosene-fired.

MR. PERREAULT: Kerosene-fired.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. That's a mistake that we should dispel with this thing.

MR. PERREAULT: They were not wood-fired.

MS. WOODMAN: They were not wood-fired. I have done wood-fired, but I did that when I taught at Alfred.

MR. PERREAULT: In Italy they were kerosene-fired.

MS. WOODMAN: It was a very primitive kerosene kiln that you saw when you came to—

MR. PERREAULT: Right, I remember—

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I mean, the studios are very different. And I think that for a while the work was very different, consciously so. I was in Colorado doing a lot of production work, a lot of functional work; in New York doing no production work, no functional work, though I was also doing so-called nonfunctional work in Colorado. In Italy I was not particularly interested in making functional work, but I also was trying to make the Italian work be different because the kiln was so different and the clay was so different. So I was trying to exploit those materials while I was there.

So I was making—well, let me go back. For a while, New York wasn't part of it. For quite a long time it was Colorado and then three or four months in Italy in the summer, with an occasional year or semester off from teaching and we were in Italy, and New York wasn't part of the picture. And then I wanted the two things to be different, and I certainly wasn't making work in Italy that was functional. They were vases—they were functional—they weren't vases but they weren't—I wasn't making dinner sets and mugs, other than things that we wanted to use to eat off of. And I was trying to exploit this particular clay and kiln. So—but it's in Italy that I first—I really started doing earthenware, because my work in Colorado was primarily stoneware. And then in Colorado I was doing salt glaze, and I did some porcelain in Colorado. And I did some earthenware, but very little.

MR. PERREAULT: I didn't realize that.

MS. WOODMAN: The earthenware was in Italy because that's what the Italian clay was. And it was in Italy that I started using earthenware and using colors and—because George and I stopped our collaboration—

MR. PERREAULT: So you had to, if you wanted anything—

MS. WOODMAN: Well, it was an interesting thing, this collaboration, and it—we just decided that we'd done it enough. And, you know, it became a bone of contention in our marriage and figured we'd stay married and we wouldn't collaborate.

So as at the point we stopped collaborating, he really was painting all my pieces. They were stoneware or salt. And I found myself, when I tried to do something, making kind of a bad imitation of George's painting. So I stopped decorating anything and started doing porcelain that was just white, and it was just about that material.

And then, in Italy, I timidly started decorating things. And because they weren't stoneware, I didn't have a memory of what George might have done with them. So I made rather small vases and I started looking at T'ang Dynasty and the Italian majolica and using a palette of colors that were used. I started decorating using a sponge that looked like the spongeware. So by shifting to the earthenware, by working in Italy I got going at something that obviously became terribly important to me—

[END TAPE 2 SIDE A.]

I think over the years—I mean, at this point I'm not working in Colorado. I'm not doing any stoneware; I'm only doing earthenware. Oh, I did the porcelains at Sevres, or at the porcelain factory—I'm really working in earthenware. And I don't make a huge difference between what I make in Italy and what I make here. I know it's different, the clay's different, the materials are different, the temperature's even different. But I think it's not so easy for anybody else to see.

MR. PERREAULT: Do you think of yourself as part of an international tradition or more of an American tradition in ceramics?

MS. WOODMAN: That my work comes out of this?

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: No, I don't think it comes out of an American tradition.

MR. PERREAULT: Do you see yourself as more international then? I mean, I'm thinking of your being in Italy so

much.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I certainly think of it as being—that's a very strong influence in my work, European tradition. But I would think that—I mean, what would you call an American tradition in clay? It's an interesting question because I think perhaps as an artist I come out of an American—I mean, I'm an American artist, certainly.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, right, right. But you—

MS. WOODMAN: There's no way I could—you know, even though I lived half my life in Italy, I'm an American artist.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MR. PERREAULT: This is, you know, within a craft context, they're thinking of internationalism of craft and trying to get some inkling of that, because there are some people within craft media who think of themselves as maybe earlier being more allied to the British and Japanese traditions than to Rookwood [Rookwood Pottery, Cincinnati, OH], let's say.

MS. WOODMAN: Yes. Yes. I think today people are looking at Rookwood perhaps.

MR. PERREAULT: But in a different way.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. The students are looking at Rookwood as an inspiration.

I think what I was offered as American was salt-glazed jugs and things. It was really, I would say—those all came from Germany, Austria, to America. America is such a melting pot, to make a—it's sort of hard. But I think there's a kind of American slipware, pressed things and so on. That's not what I was looking at. I was looking at Italian and Persian and Greek and Etruscan and so on.

MR. PERREAULT: Do you have any feeling about how American craft ranks on an international scale in comparison to other countries? I think it's talking mainly of not sort of the kinds of things—maybe things you've moved away from, not the kinds of things you do now, but things that would be shown in what was once called the craft museum.

MS. WOODMAN: Right. Well, I think you're asking me, does American craft rank high in the rest of the world? Is that—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. How would you rank it in comparison to—

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, how would I rank it?

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: How would the world rank it? I thought—

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, compared to things you've seen in Amsterdam or Italy or in Great Britain or in Japan.

MS. WOODMAN: Oh. I think American craft ranks very highly. And I think that now other countries have come up to—there's a lot of interest in Holland in ceramics.

And I can't really talk about craft, John. I really think—

MR. PERREAULT: In general.

MS. WOODMAN: —in general, because I just don't feel I'm informed. I don't know about jewelry—

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: —or making furniture, to making wood—turning wood bowls and so on.

MR. PERREAULT: Well, maybe we should just talk about ceramics.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, I think we should make the question be ceramics.

MR. PERREAULT: Do you think the ceramics field, then, is moving in any direction or not?

MS. WOODMAN: I feel it's difficult for me, particularly since I'm not teaching anymore, to say. But I think that

it's healthy and it's moving in all kinds of directions, which is good for it. And I think that there's a lot of interest, again, in the ideas of function and in making things for use. I think there are a lot of interesting people, not just making junk for – crude mugs for craft sales, but hoping for—they may be crude mugs, but they're made with a sense of touch and refinement. You know, I just think there's a lot of good work being done.

And I guess that I've become less naive about the necessity for marketing to accompany making, and that the stimulus of the market—I mean, you've got to have someone who buys it; otherwise, you can't afford to be making it.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: So I would say that this must happen, too. And I don't think it just happens in New York. I think it primarily doesn't happen in New York, because I don't think that's the problem of – essentially the art world is here. And yes, it exists elsewhere, but it's here, that's it; whereas I would hope that that's not where crafts are consumed.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: And I don't think it's necessarily where they're made. I think they're really made in your backyard with a kiln or in—

MR. PERREAULT: —or in the country.

MS. WOODMAN: And I think that in a way, people not living in New York may have a little more time to appreciate what goes onto their table and to become the consumers of this. I find it not a bad moment. I think it was a much worse moment.

MR. PERREAULT: Teaching. You've taught—

MS. WOODMAN: I have one more sentence.

MR. PERREAULT: All right, go ahead.

MS. WOODMAN: No, I'm sorry. It's just as you raise these questions. I think in the beginning, it was involved with lifestyle, to be a potter, and you were sort of a hippie and you lived in the mountains, then you made pots.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: And you didn't care what they were like, you didn't care about the lip or the handle or the – you just cared about sort of the—

MR. PERREAULT: The lifestyle.

MS. WOODMAN: The lifestyle, yeah. And that's not true. I mean, it may be true for some people, but I think now there are people who really care about the way the cup swells out or the way the lip might be turned over or how you can bend it in or what the colors are or what it feels like in your hand and so on.

MR. PERREAULT: You've taught a lot in your life. Do you miss it at all now?

MS. WOODMAN: No. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: Not at all. Did it influence you at all? This is my question, not their question. Did teaching influence you?

MS. WOODMAN: Yes.

MR. PERREAULT: How?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, what I would say I miss, except that I really don't miss it.

MR. PERREAULT: Right. Well, you have more time to do your own work.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. The students are just very challenging. And what they're doing is challenging: looking at it and trying to understand, why are they doing this, where is it coming from, what are they thinking about? So I think there's a kind of questioning and not a blind acceptance when you work with students. It also—

MR. PERREAULT: You have to keep on your toes.

MS. WOODMAN: It keeps you on your toes. And it helps me to somehow realize and articulate what I think about something and why.

MR. PERREAULT: Because you have to explain things to people that don't know.

MS. WOODMAN: Right. Right. And as I've always said, I really like doing what I do, and it is thrilling to have somebody else catch on to liking it.

MR. PERREAULT: What do you think the place—since you've worked in the university, I'm sure you have something to say about this. What do you see as the place of universities in the American craft movement?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I think it's difficult.

MR. PERREAULT: Why is that?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, do you think—I guess I always thought that the art departments were not teaching people how to make a living, they were teaching people about some higher thing called art.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: I don't think this is true anymore. I think kids come out of graduate school with—

MR. PERREAULT: With a list of what galleries to go to—

MS. WOODMAN: Exactly. They've already got their contacts. [Laughs.] And if you don't go to the right graduate school, you won't get the right contacts. So I think it's all become—you know. But because of my age, I have a sense of what art was about; whereas I really felt that craft, or making pots, was also about the practical parts of making a living. And I'm not sure that that seemed to belong in the theoretical institution called—

MR. PERREAULT: The university.

MS. WOODMAN: —the university. I think it probably does. You go to engineering school, why not go to art school.

MR. PERREAULT: But from your knowledge, do departments of ceramics in universities teach that part of it to people?

MS. WOODMAN: No.

MR. PERREAULT: Typically they don't. I don't think they do.

MS. WOODMAN: No, I don't think they do. I think we're kind of in a limbo situation. No, I don't think they do, and I don't think graduate schools do. And do I think a school that just taught the practical aspects of ceramics would be appropriate and good? I think my experience is that it's not enough just to worry about the lip of the cup. You have to look at other art. You have to somehow see—the school should give you a broader education. You should be studying sculpture. You shouldn't just be making clay sculpture; you should be making sculpture.

MR. PERREAULT: That's the advantage of an art department at the university.

MS. WOODMAN: That's the advantage of the university.

MR. PERREAULT: So what you lose in terms of the practical, you gain in a broader aesthetic approach.

MS. WOODMAN: Right. But I had an experience teaching last year in India where the students were all prepared that came, and nobody had ever discussed with them, I don't think, somehow, very much about what they were doing, just about how to do it.

MR. PERREAULT: So it's all technique.

MS. WOODMAN: They all were terrific in terms of technique. They really were. I was blown away. And I don't usually do this, but I thought, "Oh, I'm here in India, this is what these people want, this is what their education has led them to expect from me," and they wanted me to demonstrate. And so I demonstrated and, I would say, two days later they all were making my pieces.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh.

MS. WOODMAN: And they were doing it wonderfully, much better than a group of my students at the University of Colorado could have done it.

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: They just watched me and they knew how to do it. [Laughs.] They were incredibly skilled. So then I started rethinking all this stuff and thinking maybe I'm wrong, maybe we should really teach people how to do it very well and then try to teach them what to do.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: Whereas my theory has always been you have to teach them how to think about what they're doing and they'll figure out how to do it higgledy-piggledy. But maybe I'm wrong.

MR. PERREAULT: Hmm. Well, I think that's an age-old debate in educational circles.

MS. WOODMAN: Right. And I asked somebody, "Well, what are these students doing with what they learned from me in India?" I asked the man who invited me to come and teach, and he sort of shrugged and said he didn't know. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: They probably went on to the next visiting teacher.

MS. WOODMAN: They came from all over India; they went back to all over India. So you may see my oval platters in India the next time you go. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: Okay.

Let's talk a little bit about how your work has been received over time, which I think means how you've been received in terms of art criticism and things in the art magazines.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, you know, it's never enough.

MR. PERREAULT: [Laugh.] That's true. That's very true.

MS. WOODMAN: Yes. But I think I've been fairly well received. I think that I have obviously—I haven't had a lot of people write strong negative articles, so—they may feel like it—

MR. PERREAULT: I really doubt that.

MS. WOODMAN: —but they're not putting it down. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: But you've had articles in *Art in America*, certainly.

MS. WOODMAN: I've had articles in *Art in America*.

MR. PERREAULT: So that sort of breaks out of the ceramics ghetto, in some ways—

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Right. Right. No, no, no, I have. And I've had shows reviewed in *Art in America*, and the *Art Newspaper* and—what's that magazine—another European—an European art review, an Italian one, actually. And then I've had them in *American Craft* magazine and *American Ceramics* magazine.

MR. PERREAULT: Is that important to you?

MS. WOODMAN: To be in *American Ceramics* magazine?

MR. PERREAULT: Or any of them, all of these magazines.

MS. WOODMAN: Any of these.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: *Artforum*. You talked about my work in *Artforum*.

MR. PERREAULT: I did?

MS. WOODMAN: You did. You put a picture in.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh. Okay.

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, I think it's very important to me.

MR. PERREAULT: Why?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, I mean, everybody wants acknowledgement and appreciation. I think that's it. And then when you get something, you always want the next thing, it seems to me. So it's a way of people noticing what you're doing, that you're doing something.

MR. PERREAULT: Present company excepted, of course, who are people writing in the field that are doing things that are meaningful to you? Not necessarily about you but, I mean, do you read criticism at all?

MS. WOODMAN: You mean not writing about me, but just writing in general about other people?

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. I think that's what they mean, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I've certainly enjoyed what Nancy Princenthal has written about other things, and I've enjoyed Arthur Danto's writing and found it challenging, interesting, at times. I find Peter Schjeldahl both—I mean, sometimes you read these people and you think they're absolutely wrong; other times you read them and you think, "Oh, it's just so enlightened; look at that!" You know; it shows you a new way of looking at something, or you go off to see it and think about it in a different way. So I think that I don't tend to read the likes of Benjamin Buchloh and a lot of esoteric art criticism.

MR. PERREAULT: What about criticism written by artists, or statements written by artists?

MS. WOODMAN: I think that can be very interesting. I think sometimes artists are not articulate and other artists are very articulate, and it's most interesting to read what they say because if you respect and like what they're doing or they have a kind of insight that's different, perhaps, from the way a critic looks at something.

MR. PERREAULT: Right. [Pause.] Halfway done. [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: I can't talk about you in this?

MR. PERREAULT: No, no. I said present company excepted.

MS. WOODMAN: Okay.

MR. PERREAULT: Okay, now I think this is—

MS. WOODMAN: Jeff Perrone.

MR. PERREAULT: Jeff Perrone was very interested in—

MS. WOODMAN: Well, Jeff Perrone, I reread something he wrote about my work, an essay he wrote for the catalogue for the show at the Albright—the Friedman Gallery at the Albright College. And I think it was just absolutely brilliant. I mean, he wrote a wonderful essay.

MR. PERREAULT: Yes, he did.

Let's see. Have the various craft publications, like *Craft Horizons*, *Studio Potter*, fiber, glass, et cetera—whatever, played any part in your development as an artist? [Pause.] Let's say it this way: When you were at Alfred, did you look at—I guess that was before *Craft Horizons*, but after that?

MS. WOODMAN: No, *Craft Horizons* sort of came—when did they—I think that was Mrs. Webb too.

MR. PERREAULT: Did you—

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, yes, absolutely.

MR. PERREAULT: Did it influence you?

MS. WOODMAN: I suppose. I imagine it must have. You read it and you saw what was there, and you must have —

MR. PERREAULT: Had some impact.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, and thought about it.

MR. PERREAULT: Has that continued over the years? Do you look at *American Craft* magazine?

MS. WOODMAN: No. I mean—

MR. PERREAULT: So you'd be more likely to look at art from *Art in America* than in *American Craft*.

MS. WOODMAN: I don't think I look at a lot of art magazines anyway, to be honest. And I think that we subscribe at the moment to *Studio Potter* and to the *New Yorker*—[laughs]—I'm trying to think—to *The New York Times*. I don't think—I think this is partly me and it's partly the life we lead. And since we live in different places, we just—there was no point in getting magazine subscriptions. So when you're faced with four months of—

MR. PERREAULT: Of the piles of piling up magazines.

MS. WOODMAN: —of these things, you know, you don't look at them, and that's it. So I think I've gotten out of the habit of looking at them. They irritate and depress me or I look at them—if they get put under my nose, I certainly look at them, but I don't wait every month for them to arrive, no.

MR. PERREAULT: This is a big one: your most important commissioned works. What do they mean by commissions? Well, you did an airport piece, I know that.

MS. WOODMAN: I did the Denver Airport piece [1995].

MR. PERREAULT: Right. When was that? That was five years ago?

MS. WOODMAN: We can fill that in. No, it was more than that. It was probably a good ten years ago. It took them five—it took them seven years to put up the protective wall. No, it was a long time ago.

MR. PERREAULT: That was the *Balustrade*?

MS. WOODMAN: That was the *Balustrade* for the airport.

MR. PERREAULT: Were there any other ones that you could think of?

MS. WOODMAN: That is, to date, my only really public commission.

MR. PERREAULT: You've had some private ones.

MS. WOODMAN: I've had private commissions. And I had a big commission from Al Shands, who's a collector in Kentucky. And I did their bedroom. I did an installation that's in the bedroom. And that was very important and interesting.

MR. PERREAULT: But commissions don't seem to be things you actively go out and seek. Were you cured by the one in the airport?

MS. WOODMAN: Oh, I do—well, occasionally—yeah, right, I was. It took a long—yeah, that was it. No, I just tried for something last month but I got turned down. I never get them. I wouldn't mind.

MR. PERREAULT: They're difficult. They're very competitive, and they have—[inaudible].

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah, I don't know what I do that I do wrong. But I also—it's funny, by the time you're through applying you're so sure you're going to win. But we used to take boats to Europe, and in the evening, the entertainment was playing Bingo. And I'm always sure I'm going to win. Or if you went to the matinee at the movie and you got a number, and then the lights would come on and the guy would have this big wheel, and he'd wheel it around and pick, I was always sure I was going to win, and I didn't. I never did. [Laughs.]

MR. PERREAULT: You're just a cockeyed optimist.

MS. WOODMAN: I get convinced my ideas are wonderful. I tend to go ahead and do them anyway.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. Oh, really.

MS. WOODMAN: Try to talk somebody else into it, you know, or something like that. [Laughs.] Anyway, I mean, I think it might be interesting to do another big public commission.

MR. PERREAULT: Have another stab at it.

MS. WOODMAN: I have done commissions for individuals that have been very exciting and very important to me. Certainly the size and scope of Al Shantz's commission took me someplace where I hadn't ever been, and it was very interesting. And I did, for the de Rosa's [Paul and Libby de Rosa Collection] a bronze wall fountain, and that really brought me into making bronzes.

MR. PERREAULT: The whole bronze thing, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: I was interested in bronze before that – I showed them what I'd already experimented with.

That was a wonderful commission for me. And I just finished a huge commission, which is sort of amusing to me, to make a dinnerware set. And I haven't made a dinnerware set for 25 years, so I got pretty—

MR. PERREAULT: This is a private commission.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. Right. Service for 18.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh, my God.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: But over the years, though, through all the changes that you've gone through in your work, starting with the aesthetic and the whole way of life of being a functional potter, and then moving gradually into, well, the art world, or whatever you want to call it, you still maintain your commitment to clay. Most of the things you do still are clay. What is it about clay that keeps you so fascinated?

MS. WOODMAN: You know that, John. It's clay!

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah, but they don't.

MS. WOODMAN: I mean, sometimes I think it's just because I have little imagination.

MR. PERREAULT: No, come on, you have a huge imagination.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, no, and then I give you an answer like my students or people give me, and I think, you know, forget it, when you say, "Why are you doing this out of clay?" "Well, that's what I know how to do"—which is not—when you're a student that's not an acceptable answer, because you're learning.

MR. PERREAULT: What do you think of it in terms of its expressive potential compared to some other materials?

MS. WOODMAN: It's very expressive. Obviously, I really like doing things myself with my hands.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: I'm not the kind of an artist, a conceptual artist, who thinks out an idea and then the challenge is to find who can do it.

MR. PERREAULT: Right.

MS. WOODMAN: The challenge is to find what can I do with this material. So I really like working directly myself with the material. I think that clay is difficult, and obviously, as you learn how to use it, it's less difficult. But it's a tricky material, and I think I like that difficulty. There's some kind of challenge, and can I—take the clay a little further than I think I could take it.

I think that it offers me both the opportunity to make something physical that's three-dimensional and then to paint. And so it's incredibly rich. And it's periodic: you do this at this moment and that at that moment. So if all artists knew how great this was, they'd never work with anything else.

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.]

MS. WOODMAN: I've never really painted, say, with oil paint on canvas. I have a few times, but I don't. I think that people who do that—I've watched George. I mean, he likes the way the brush feels against the canvas or what you're doing. But I think the thing I wonder about is—I'm beginning to try to think of myself as a sculptor because I think that's what the world would call me, and yet it seems to me the difference between myself and a sculptor is that sculptors tend to conceive of different things in different materials and I really conceive of things in clay. And so I may work in different materials, but the reason why I like working with the bronze is that I can do it in clay. The bronze—you never do in bronze.

MR. PERREAULT: Right, right. The first thing is the clay.

MS. WOODMAN: So I do it in clay, and then it is translated. And I think where I'm not doing this is in the prints or drawings. But in a way, what I am doing with that is using my own work as the subject matter.

MR. PERREAULT: The imagery, yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: The imagery. And for instance, for the show this year, for making the little catalogue that I had, the little—

MR. PERREAULT: Souvenirs.

MS. WOODMAN: —souvenir that I gave everybody, those drawings, they're not preparatory drawings; they're all drawings of the pieces after they existed, so that I'm drawing my own work.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah.

MS. WOODMAN: And it's very related to the other drawings I might do, which is to go to the museum and spend a day in the Etruscan stuff and draw the pieces there. But I'm drawing, you know, what I see, and in this case I'd be drawing what I see, though the piece—this piece—we're not looking at things in this interview, but the piece may well have an image on it which is drawn from a different—I'm drawing the figures from a Japanese screen or a Japanese woodcut onto my pot.

But, you know, I simply find that clay is infinitely challenging and infinitely variable, so that you can work at a low temperature with bright colors, or you could work in raku, or you could work in stoneware, or do porcelain, or —I mean, it's got—within itself. And then the history of it is so—you know, it's gone on for so long. So there's a lot.

MR. PERREAULT: You have a lot to draw on.

MS. WOODMAN: Yes.

MR. PERREAULT: History seems to be very important in your work. You make a lot of references to history.

MS. WOODMAN: I think it is important to my work. I think I—

MR. PERREAULT: It's very inspiring for you.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I think I'm interested in the idea of memory.

MR. PERREAULT: Oh.

MS. WOODMAN: And I think that looking at art, it seems to me, has to do with memory and what you recognize, and then seeing what you don't recognize, but somehow against what you do. And I think it might be the memory of a Brillo box or it might be the memory of a Japanese woodcut, and they're very different things. Or it might be the memory of a foggy morning. But I think it has a lot to do with my appreciation and my passion for, you know, why is it that this work of art really gets to me and, you know, that one—

MR. PERREAULT: Leaves you cold.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah. But then the leaving you cold, you know, you may come back to it and then you have a memory anyway.

MR. PERREAULT: Yeah. Later it will haunt you.

MS. WOODMAN: Yeah.

MR. PERREAULT: We've pretty much covered all of their—

MS. WOODMAN: Questions.

MR. PERREAULT: —areas.

MS. WOODMAN: Good.

MR. PERREAULT: One way or another. Not exactly the same order. [Laughs.] But I'm wondering if there's anything that you would want to add to what we've talked about. Have we missed something that's important to you that you're eager to add to the mix, to the historic document?

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I talked about sort of the situation of, you know, sort of essentially George's support. Did I talk about that?

MR. PERREAULT: No.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, I certainly want to add that. I think that for me—I mean, it's interesting, we're about to have our 50th wedding anniversary, George and I, and we had been together for a few years before we got married. I think that if we're discussing the issue of women and how they—how I got to be an artist and the way of how I got to see myself as an artist, I think that I was very fortunate to meet George when I was very young

and for the fact that he took what I did seriously. Well, he was my student when I met him, so he was interested in pottery. He didn't think that to use clay was some lesser thing. And he was supportive of what I did.

But, I think, beyond that, I think the hardest thing for people—for anybody, but perhaps particularly for women my age, was just having somebody who looked at and talked to you about what you did and a sense of isolation when you're not in school. And I think that we did this for each other, but he certainly did it for me.

MR. PERREAULT: You had sort of an ongoing dialogue.

MS. WOODMAN: We had ongoing dialogue. And George has written a lot about ceramics and ideas of decoration and these things. And so there was just a constant, you know, back and forth conversation about what I did that was very important for me.

And I think that's it.

MR. PERREAULT: That's it?

MS. WOODMAN: That's it. Cut.

MR. PERREAULT: [Laughs.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]