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Oral history interview with Judy Kensley McKie, 2004 November 22

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Judy Kensley McKie on November 22, 2004. The interview took place in Medford, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Edward S. Cooke, Jr., 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.

Judy Kensley McKie and Edward S. Cooke, Jr. have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

EDWARD COOKE: This is Ned Cooke interviewing Judy McKie in her studio in-it's in Medford?

JUDY MCKIE: Medford.

MR. COOKE: Massachusetts. And the date is November 22, 2004, for the Archives of American Art. This is disc number one.

I guess, Judy, what I'd like to start off with is just talking a little bit about-you grew up in the-now is what's called the Metro West area of Boston, but-

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: Talk a little bit about your environment growing up, in terms of what it was like out in Lexington, and what you were exposed to, what you were thinking about at that point, I guess, in terms of arts, arts education, your parents, your siblings.

MS. MCKIE: Well, I suppose in terms of what I was exposed to by my parents, since my parents were both artists on some level-they both had gone to art school.

MR. COOKE: Whereabouts had they gone to arts school?

MS. MCKIE: My father went to art school in Boston. He went to the-what's it called?

MR. COOKE: Mass Art [Massachusetts College of Art, Boston]? Or-

MS. MCKIE: No. The Art-it's the Art Students League.

MR. COOKE: Okay.

MS. MCKIE: And my mother went to RISD [Rhode Island School of Design, Providence]. My father studied painting and my mother studied graphic art, but my father eventually became an art director for a greeting card company. And my mother worked for him and made greeting cards and did graphic art at home, so, you know, when I'd come home from school, my mother was in her studio, working at her easel.

And my father would come home and talk about what he did at work. And they would take life drawing classes, so they had their life drawings hanging up around the house, which was embarrassing as a child-

MR. COOKE: Right. Of course. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: -when your friends came over. But clearly, it was something I was used to and then was shocked to find that it was unusual for other people to be around those things for-

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: -people my age. My parents, they were active at the DeCordova [DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA]. My mother used to do decorations for the-

MR. COOKE: In the summer program or during the school years or-

MS. MCKIE: They were active as members, and my mother participated when they did their big fairs, doing all kinds of decorations and things like that. They went to shows out there and belonged to museums and had friends who were artists, but we also grew up in a very suburban environment, and so most people in my

neighborhood were not arty.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: We had a neighbor who taught at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge], who was an artist. They had a combination of friends in the business world and friends who were artists.

MR. COOKE: It wasn't like you were in Moon Hill in Lexington with all the Architects Collaborative people or anything like that-

MS. MCKIE: No, no. Although, my roommate at RISD was from Moon Hill. At home there were always art materials around. And if I came home from school and was bored, my mother would put out some colored pencils and say, you know, "Make something," or-

MR. COOKE: No video. This is it.

MS. MCKIE: Right. Turn the TV off.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: Turn the TV off and do something constructive, and so that was the environment. And my sister was probably the one who showed more creativity as a youngster, but eventually I was the one who really was interested and wanted to pursue it as a career.

MR. COOKE: Were you the oldest, then?

MS. MCKIE: No, I was the middle.

MR. COOKE: The middle.

MS. MCKIE: I remember coming home from school. And I had friends who liked to draw, and we would come home and play these games for each other, which was to make hidden pictures. We'd sit there and make pictures with hidden pictures in them.

MR. COOKE: So pictures within pictures.

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: So there's layers of-

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: -of detail?

MS. MCKIE: And then-

MR. COOKE: This is before *Where's Waldo*? [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: Right, exactly. I mean, this was in place of TV. Afternoon activities. There was also a lot of running around.

MR. COOKE: Did you-even at that point were you interested in animals and characters? Can you think back to some of the images you were working on?

MS. MCKIE: I can't say that specifically. I wasn't necessarily only engaged with animals. If I try and remember what one of the hidden pictures looked like, it was something that had to be complicated enough to hide animals in it, probably, but it might not have been an animal to begin with.

MR. COOKE: But sort of a density to-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: That's one of the things I find so interesting is that it-the notion of parents in graphic design, instead of just layering and texturing. Maybe it's just because I'm looking at William Morris's designs and seeing his early drawings and thinking about the layers in which he comes up with, and it's evident early on within his work.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Yeah, I don't remember being aware of that, but it probably existed. Although, as you go from

childhood to adolescence, what the art program in the school is about doing still lifes and then doing other things. And then, you know, I remember a whole period of time when my art was very imitative of other artists, so-

MR. COOKE: That's natural.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. But it was always something that was just comfortable. And the other influence, which probably affects what I do now, is that my father liked to build around the house-liked to just do work on the house, and he was also someone who always wanted your help or wanted to show you how to do things, so-

MR. COOKE: And this was not gender specific. This was your brother, your sister, you? Anybody was involved?

MS. MCKIE: Well, it would have been my brother, but my brother wasn't that interested, so-

MR. COOKE: You were trapped. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: I was the one who ended up holding the plane while he used the hammer, and then he always wanted to instruct you on how to use the tools, and so the idea of building things was never something I thought, because I was a girl, it was something unnatural. It was something that I'd, you know, done as a kid, too.

And I remember when we were assigned in elementary school to do a project around something we were studying, like the history of the frontier, I remember building a fort-it was probably the Alamo-out of matchsticks. And carefully building this whole little village out of matchsticks. And that was the kind of thing I loved to do. It was little-little tiny-

MR. COOKE: It was constructive.

MS. MCKIE: -log cabins. Each matchstick was a log. And so that's where my natural abilities lay, but I didn't really-

MR. COOKE: You didn't see the interface between color and-

MS. MCKIE: It never occurred to me that I would use these skills later on, so-

MR. COOKE: What sort of stuff-I mean, so he was doing house renovations? And then you at one point you said something about a summer-

MS. MCKIE: Then we had-yeah. Then we bought a little shack up north when I was in junior high school. The family bought a little shack up in Vermont with another family, and it was a falling-down boathouse. Just a stripped-down, tiny little 30-by-15-foot building, but we used it as a ski shack, a place to stay, because we were all learning how to ski at the time.

And we had to renovate that and insulate it, and put floors in, and build a loft. And so both families went up there on the weekends, and we were all given tasks to do, and, you know, I remember-

MR. COOKE: So what was your task?

MS. MCKIE: Well, my task was to make the railing-well, one of my tasks was to make the decorative railing for this little Alpine shack's loft space. And so to make a pattern and cut all the pieces of rough wood to the shape that would make it decorative.

MR. COOKE: So you're using a-some sort of a jigsaw or something like that?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, exactly.

MS. MCKIE: And doing it all by hand, because there was no electricity up there. There was no running water. There was nothing. So this was all, you know, with a saw cutting shapes out of pieces of wood.

And I loved doing it, so that was-

MR. COOKE: Again, sort of the meticulous, slow-moving kind of work.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Building.

MR. COOKE: And-yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And then very satisfying. Put it all up and see it and-

MR. COOKE: But your dad was encouraging you to use a variety of tools and-

MS. MCKIE: Oh, yeah, absolutely. And by then, it wasn't that uncomfortable. And as I've said before, he used to always give little pieces of advice, like, "Let the saw do the work."

MR. COOKE: What was his background? How had he gotten involved in some of this? Was it just sort of shop in school or something like that?

MS. MCKIE: Probably, because he didn't really have-I mean, he grew up without a father. He was raised by his great aunt, and he went to art school, but he just had this natural instinct and ability to make things. He liked building things. And he liked designing and he had aspirations to be a designer, but ended up-

MR. COOKE: Did he ever talk about frustration of not being able to do something like that and-

MS. MCKIE: Not being able to design?

MR. COOKE: To just sort of design and build? Because in the '50s that would have been an option. Because of the decor even at that point, I think, had a fairly active engagement with the craft field, I thought. I know in the '60s it did, so I was curious whether there was anything floating around that he-

MS. MCKIE: Well, I think he became a little bitter about the arts. He couldn't make a living at it early on, and he ended up doing something much more commercial, and he never really turned back. So he wasn't somebody who was making art at home. I mean, he did it for entertainment-to keep a hand in it, but he had really given up art.

And when I wanted to go to art school, he said, "Really think about that, you know. You might want to go-you might want to apply to other schools." And he really encouraged me to apply to liberal arts schools.

MR. COOKE: Not to go to a specific art school?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and-

MR. COOKE: So-

MS. MCKIE: But the minute I got into RISD, I was thrilled, and that's where I really wanted to go, so-

MR. COOKE: So he wanted to sort of pass on the enjoyment of this, but not necessarily reliance on a living?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. You know, from his experience, it hadn't been a viable way to make a living.

MR. COOKE: Did he have a shop?

MS. MCKIE: And he ended up being a salesman instead. Something happened to the greeting card company, and he ended up changing jobs and becoming a salesperson for a printing company. He was always very involved in art directing.

MR. COOKE: Quality of the printing job.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, exactly. So he was good at that, but-and he was a very sociable guy, so he loved traveling around and chatting with people. [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: With his woodworking, did he have a separate shop, or was that just sort of-

MS. MCKIE: The garage.

MR. COOKE: The garage?

MS. MCKIE: He was just in the garage. He wasn't a woodworker. He just would, you know, fix the cabinets or build new cabinets in a room or do a project outside. He repaired things and it wasn't-he wasn't a serious woodworker.

MR. COOKE: No, but it was intuitive-

MS. MCKIE: He liked doing it.

MR. COOKE: In some ways as well, too, it sounds.

MS. MCKIE: He'd putter.

MR. COOKE: Yeah, in the best sense of the word.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Right.

MR. COOKE: So you knew the whole process, going through junior high and high school, that you had this interest, possibly, in art? That was something that you felt comfortable-a level of comfort, even though you were being imitative or looking through different-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I really enjoyed my art classes and always felt sort of confident, like it was something that I could excel at, but it wasn't like I was a great artist. I didn't think of that in that way. But it was something that just came naturally that, if somebody said, "Oh, could you make me a little card?" I could whip something off. It was easy. It never felt like hard work to me. It felt like something that I did naturally.

MR. COOKE: Was it primarily watercolors and drawing, or was it the full range of oil painting or-

MS. MCKIE: I didn't do much oil painting as a kid. There weren't-my parents had oil paints around, and I experimented with it. My father was actually a pretty good watercolorist, and so every once in a while he'd take me out and we'd do landscapes and he'd show me a few tricks, that sort of thing, but there were never really oil paints in the house and I never really painted till I got to RISD, and I went to RISD with full intentions of becoming a graphic artist.

MR. COOKE: So you were really coming out of your mother and father's background-

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: -thinking graphic arts and, sort of, color and patterns and-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and I didn't really know a lot about painting at that time. But when I got to RISD and got into the graphic design program, I was a little-maybe because I didn't find it exciting and I didn't feel like I was learning about something that I didn't already-

MR. COOKE: It was too familiar in some ways?

MS. MCKIE: Sort of; maybe it was too familiar. It felt like I was going to be bored doing it, and-

MR. COOKE: Or apprehensive, because your dad had switched jobs at this point, whether there was some of that in the background or-

MS. MCKIE: I don't know if there was-yeah, maybe I thought, you know, maybe that this is not going to be-I don't know. It just didn't excite me once I was there, and what did excite me was painting, because I think I didn't feel like I really understood it or knew very much about it, and that it would be more of a challenge. And so that's when I ended up switching into the painting department.

MR. COOKE: Because you went there in what, '60?

MS. MCKIE: I went there from '62 to '66.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. So at that point, what was the campus like at RISD? Was it really wide open and people just trying different things, so that your notion to coming in in graphic design and switching to painting-

MS. MCKIE: That wasn't a big problem.

MR. COOKE: No?

MS. MCKIE: No. It didn't seem that you had to have figured everything out before you chose a department. And I think I was a little confused at the end of my freshman year, because you get a taste of everything-

MR. COOKE: You get the foundation program, right?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: A sort of 2-D, 3-D, and various other things?

MS. MCKIE: I thought learning how to paint seemed very exciting, as opposed to graphic design, so-

MR. COOKE: Was that the program that was the most dynamic at that point, as opposed to industrial design or architecture or anything else?

MS. MCKIE: I didn't even know there was an industrial design department-well, no, no, no. I did know there was an industrial design department, but I did not know there was a furniture department. I didn't know.

MR. COOKE: Well, it was kind of buried at that point.

MS. MCKIE: It was within the industrial design department, but there was-

MR. COOKE: It was actually new.

MS. MCKIE: -a whole building. And one day at the end of one of my school years, I saw somebody walking through the cafeteria with a chair, an unusual-looking chair. And I said, "What's with the chair?" He said, "I made it. I made it in the wood shop," or "I made it in the industrial design department." I said, "What wood shop?" I didn't even know one existed.

MR. COOKE: Well, it just had started in '62, when Tage Frid came down there, so I mean, in some ways-

MS. MCKIE: That's when I was a freshman.

MR. COOKE: But it may have been so new in terms of-and within the confines of industrial design-that it may not have-it's a whole subset at that point.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. No, it wasn't anything like the program now.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Being broken away and in its own-as its own entity was-there was nothing like that.

MR. COOKE: Even when you start a new program, it takes awhile.

MS. MCKIE: I'll tell you something, even if I'd known about it at that time, I had no interest in it. That wasn't-

MR. COOKE: Did industrial design seem too impersonal, or something like that?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I just wasn't interested in it. I wanted to do something that was more visual. And I don't know whether, if I think back, it had to do with-I don't think it had to do with being female. I just think that it was-I don't know. Maybe I was attracted to the people who were in the painting department, and learning-you know, learning about painting was exciting because I had been more connected to the commercial art field through my parents, and I saw that there was a real difference in the way you approached the work when it wasn't commercial, and that interested me.

MR. COOKE: I'd be curious in terms of, because you had to take a 3-D course instead of-what did you end up doing in some of your 3-D exercises? Did it strike a chord or-

MS. MCKIE: You know, I loved the 3-D stuff. And it was easy for me, and I don't know why I wasn't drawn to the sculpture.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And I actually remember being assigned to build a structure out of straws or something, and getting completely carried away in building something that went all the way up to the ceiling that was very strong, but thinking really nothing about it. I wasn't really looking around and seeing what other people were making. And the instructor came over, and he was this little guy, and he got all excited and he just gathered everybody around, and it was like, "This thing," you know, "look what you've done," and I looked around and everybody else had the-

MR. COOKE: A small, little-

MS. MCKIE: Little tiny things. And I was up on a ladder and-[laughs]-you know, so doing that stuff that was somehow built into what I already knew how to do. Somehow I had-

MR. COOKE: Like the Alamo, sort of the next logical step.

MS. MCKIE: It-yes. It didn't seem particularly-

MR. COOKE: Next logical step.

MS. MCKIE: -like a challenge. That surprised me. I was almost embarrassed by the attention. And so that may be why the idea of doing a building thing just didn't occur to me. It's like, that's what you do in your spare time or-

and that's actually how I got into furniture making otherwise, so-

MR. COOKE: Yeah. But at that point painting was the real pull. It wasn't-you know, because the ceramics-

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: -program was up and running at that point, as was fiber, I think. So, I mean, there were-and the industrial design, but painting was the real-

MS. MCKIE: And I guess because I just didn't know about it or really understand it, and I thought, you know, I could learn something in that department. But truth be known, I never learned how to paint and I was always a terrible painter. I was never very good at it. I didn't get it. I didn't know how to do something three dimensional on a two-dimensional surface. And my paintings were very flat, and I-when I think about it, I was really doing outlines of things, and not really being able to put three dimensions onto the surface of a canvas.

I knew that I was good enough to be, you know, better than some of the people in the class-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: But I knew that I wasn't somebody who really understood painting and-and also, my practical nature.

MR. COOKE: Did any of this stuff come up in crits at all? During painting, all of a sudden people said-or instructor was saying, you know, "You're flat on this," or anything like that?

MS. MCKIE: I'm sure it did. I'm sure that what I do remember instructors saying is, "You're still doing an outline. This is still an outline. This isn't-you're not inside the figure." But hearing that didn't make me understand the difference-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -between, you know. Now I think I know more. I would understand better as I spent more time looking at art and not trying to do it.

MR. COOKE: Because at that point, the whole painting education, it's not so much looking at as much art, you know, historical art or anything like that. You're just-as far as I know, it's sort of in the mid-'60s that you're just sort of-it's a personal-

MS. MCKIE: In the studio.

MR. COOKE: -sort of expression, you know, almost tabula rasa.

MS. MCKIE: Well, we did have light-we did have models, and we did work from still lifes-it wasn't totally free-form. It was-my senior year in Rome was where-

MR. COOKE: So you spent your whole senior year in Rome?

MS. MCKIE: In Rome. That was the European honors program thing that, you know, lucky people got selected to do. And I mean, I was a good enough-

MR. COOKE: Just painting? Was it just painting?

MS. MCKIE: -painter to be able to be chosen for that, but certainly of those who were chosen, I was probably the least talented of the painters.

MR. COOKE: So how many people went to Rome?

MS. MCKIE: Ten or 12.

MR. COOKE: And all painters?

MS. MCKIE: No. It was a mixture.

MR. COOKE: No. So it was a mixture of-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, mixture of the different departments, although there were probably more painters than people from other programs, because it was more conducive to having what you needed; all you really needed was a studio to work in.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And so-

MR. COOKE: Don't need a glass furnace or-

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: -potter's wheel and kiln, and things like that.

MS. MCKIE: Yes. Right. And so that was-and that was an eye-opener, too, in terms of what was out there. I feel like that was the first time I really traveled and had an experience of really being able to look at a lot of things in museums and churches and places that -

MR. COOKE: What do you think-in terms of what you were processing at that point, was there anything significant that you feel came out later on in terms of either architecture or paintings-imagery?

MS. MCKIE: Well, I think what's interesting is that I was pretty lost in my work. You know, left to my own devices, I was really struggling and not feeling as though I had a handle on painting at all. And at one point, Friedrich St. Florian, who was the person who was accompanying the students and the teacher over there, he encouraged me to think about, other than painting, what you might do if you weren't-you could make something. And I ended up doing a box construction with an optical thing inside it; it was pretty boring and not very interesting. But it was breaking away from actually thinking about just painting on canvas.

MR. COOKE: Right. Giving a three-dimensional quality?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and I really enjoyed doing it because I enjoyed the process of putting something like that together. It still didn't occur to me that somehow I was working against all my natural talents all the way through RISD, you know, trying to do something I didn't really have an aptitude for and ignoring what I did have an aptitude for, and it wasn't until I got out of school-

MR. COOKE: But even at that point, no one's commenting on it to you or anything like that? I mean, that's just something-

MS. MCKIE: Not really, no.

MR. COOKE: -you're starting to feel without articulating-

MS. MCKIE: I mean, people were commenting on what I was making. But it's only in retrospect that I can see that I was barking up the wrong tree, because I wasn't using what came naturally. I was really trying to do something that wasn't an innate talent of mine.

MR. COOKE: Right. Was there anything in Rome that was also, sort of, encouraging you just to think about a longer tradition of artistic practice?

MS. MCKIE: Well, I knew I was always going to be an artist and I was always going to be making something, and I assumed at that point I was going to still be trying to paint, but I figured when I got out of school that in order to be able to make a living-and nobody thought about making a living from their work back then-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -that I would be teaching.

MR. COOKE: So the aspiration is not necessarily, you know, getting one-person shows or anything like that?

MS. MCKIE: Not at all. Not for me, no. I don't think-I didn't have a great ambition. I was not ambitious to be a well-known anything.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And that even made me uncomfortable, but I lived with somebody who was more ambitious that way, and we had a lot of friends who were all out of RISD and trying to make a living doing something and painting and showing their work. We would find variations on how to do that. For a long time, Todd and I were making cloth wall hangings because we thought we could sell those, even though we knew we couldn't sell our paintings.

MR. COOKE: So you had met Todd even in your first year there or second year?

MS. MCKIE: At RISD, yeah. And we were married a year out of school, but we had known each other from freshman year on.

MR. COOKE: And he also was-went to painting major, as well?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And he was living in the apartment next to mine, because we all lived in apartments after freshman year, so he was in the apartment next door, and we were just very good friends and did a lot of things together, and then eventually did more things together. [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: Yeah. Did he go to Rome as well?

MS. MCKIE: He went to Rome also, as well as two of our very good friends who were painters, who are still painters.

MR. COOKE: Who is that?

MS. MCKIE: Well, that's Phyllis and Lee Palmer, Phyllis Gay and Lee Palmer. Also, Karen Moss, who is a Boston artist, was on that program and went to Rome, and her husband, John Moss, who was a painter then, but then went to work at WGBH [Boston Public Radio].

So we had a number of friends who-and Martin Mull also was on that European honors program, although he was in the year ahead, and he's-then he switched and did the entertainer thing.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: This group of couples all lived in the Boston area and we were all painters and we all got together and spent time together. So my real background-

MR. COOKE: Both when you were at RISD and then even afterwards?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Exactly. A lot-and Fred Brink and Elise Brink. She now does painting restoration, and he does-he was always a photographer. But we had a big circle of friends who spent a lot of time together socially, and we'd go to openings together. So my influences came out of the world of painting, and I didn't-really wasn't aware or looking at anything else particularly. Looking at visual arts and-

MR. COOKE: And what kind of furniture did you grow up with?

MS. MCKIE: Well-

MR. COOKE: Do you remember anything at all?

MS. MCKIE: You know-

MR. COOKE: In terms of-

MS. MCKIE: We had Russell Wright chairs in-

MR. COOKE: Did you really?

MS. MCKIE: -our living room, which Todd and I now have in our living room with zebra-

MR. COOKE: With the zebra upholstery or-

MS. MCKIE: -upholstery, right.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And my father did make some of our furniture. He made the very simple, straightforward table we had in our living room, and built-in couches, and things like that. If there was nook in the corner, he would build something in.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: You know, nothing fancy-simple, nice things influenced by designers like Russell Wright, but I never

really thought about the furniture.

MR. COOKE: There wasn't anything that sort of-

MS. MCKIE: No. And, in fact, then they shifted all of the really wonderful furniture they had to-they built a little guest house off one end of the house, and rented it, and the good furniture, you know, really nice stuff-

MR. COOKE: What you thought was the-

MS. MCKIE: It went out there, and they got Danish modern and it was kind of generic, Danish modern stuff for the house, so it wasn't as if furniture moved and like-

MR. COOKE: No.

MS. MCKIE: You know, there weren't precious antiques anywhere in the house or things that we had to be careful of.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: It was the Bauhaus era, and it was a time when Danish modern was-

MR. COOKE: Reigned supreme.

MS. MCKIE: -where to be.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: So-

MR. COOKE: But did you know-did you meet-did they say it was Russell Wright at the time, or is that only after the fact?

MS. MCKIE: They knew it was Russell Wright.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: But it wasn't-

MR. COOKE: It wasn't drummed into you?

MS. MCKIE: No, no. I bet I didn't learn that till later-until I was interested in furniture on some level. I mean, I may have known, but it wasn't something that was a big deal.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: It was just the chairs they liked and so, yeah. You know, I didn't have serious-I mean, commercial artists as parents who didn't-I wouldn't say they were serious art-had backgrounds where they could have really given me a clear-cut history of painting.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: In that sense. It was just that there was this making things going on.

MR. COOKE: So you find that you came-you were in Rome that '65-'66, your senior year, and then came back?

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: And you were thinking of teaching, I guess, at that point?

MS. MCKIE: And when I came back, I got a teaching job at a private girls' school. I didn't have teaching experience and I didn't have any degrees that would allow me to-

MR. COOKE: Certificate.

MS. MCKIE: -teach anywhere but someplace that was looking around for an art teacher in a private school.

MR. COOKE: In private schools, yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And so I taught at St. Anne's School in Arlington Heights, which was an Episcopal girls' school. And

teaching, for me-even in a simple environment like that-was an around-the-clock job.

I mean, I really-if I didn't go very, very well prepared with a really clear idea of what I was going to do, the class would just fall apart. I really had to be very organized and put slide shows together, and do everything that teachers do, and as a result I did nothing else. And I realized I'm a real either/or person. It's like, I can either do my work or I can teach, because whatever I do-

MR. COOKE: You throw yourself into.

MS. MCKIE: I have to-yeah. I feel terrible if I'm not teaching well, or if I would teach up at Haystack [Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME] for 10 days, it'd take me a month to prepare.

MR. COOKE: To get ready for that?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, yeah. And it was just crazy, and it made me very nervous as well.

MR. COOKE: Because you had always envisioned that this was just going to be the income that you're-

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: That would allow you to do your own stuff?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I was only teaching three days a week, but I was working five days a week full-time to be prepared for teaching, and I wasn't doing any painting or any other work at all. And I really missed it, because what I was meant to do was make things.

MR. COOKE: Right. [Laughs.] And probably that was helpful in making that very obvious to you, right?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Well, I'd be very jealous of anybody that was home painting. Todd and I would switch off, and decided early on, well, we can live on very little money. At first I was very nervous about that, and I said, "I just can't-I can't-I get too anxious thinking about how we're going to pay the bills." And he said, "Okay. Well, you don't pay the bills. I'll pay the bills, so that when we don't have enough money to pay the bills, you won't have to be worrying about it."

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: "You don't-just don't think about it." He said, "And what are they going to do? They're not going to come and kick you out of your house the first time you can't pay your rent. You know, we'll get by." And so between the two of us, we always did-when I stopped-I only taught for one year, but when we tried to make a living from our work, we would each have to sort of trade off doing some kind of work. I would rather work in the art store five mornings a week and be able to work in the afternoon, because I didn't have to bring any work home with me.

MR. COOKE: It was-it was discrete enough that-

MS. MCKIE: Until-yeah.

MR. COOKE: -it would be separate from teaching-

MS. MCKIE: Absolutely.

MR. COOKE: Just sort of is all-encompassing.

MS. MCKIE: Well, teaching, you bring home with you, and any time I ever taught, I'd correspond with the students for years afterwards. I felt like I had to give myself over completely, and maybe you can't teach that way if you're going to try and do anything else. So-

MR. COOKE: So was it after that one year that you ended up doing the wall hangings?

MS. MCKIE: It was pretty soon after that. I mean, we did all kinds of things-we'd paint, but we'd be making beaded necklaces or doing something and trying to find outlets for them. And then-

MR. COOKE: What were the outlets around here at that point for something like that?

MS. MCKIE: It was a little gallery called St. Botolph's Gallery, that showed Sister Corita Kent. It was on Newbury Street, and they showed some paintings, and they had a lot of crafts around. And then there got to be all kinds of places in Harvard Square. I can't remember. I think mostly we took these things to St. Botolph's Gallery, and we showed the banners there, too.

MR. COOKE: Huh.

MS. MCKIE: But, you know, we showed them wherever anybody would show them. Somebody, I guess, had seen them and wanted to do a show up in Maine, and we showed them at the Barn Gallery, and little places.

MR. COOKE: This was, what, too early for Ten Arrow in Cambridge?

MS. MCKIE: I think so. Yeah. Because Ten Arrow-

MR. COOKE: But Design Research [Boston, MA, Ben Thompson, director] was-

MS. MCKIE: Ten Arrow came a little later. Design Research, yes, was-

MR. COOKE: Because they seemed to be-

MS. MCKIE: You know, but they didn't show-you know, they didn't show-

MR. COOKE: I was talking to Charles Webb, and that he got his start by being shown in Design Research, actually, some of the trundle beds that he was making.

MS. MCKIE: Well, I showed a couch at Design Research. I had a couch-

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: -there, but that was not-I mean, this was way before I was building anything.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: In fact, you know, when we were doing banners and painting and we were so poor that we couldn't afford furniture, that was when I started, you know, building things-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -that we needed. I started by just building shelves for the bathroom, and then a little tricycle for Jesse and things. And a coffee table, and a couch, and-and whatever we needed, just by going to the lumberyard and picking up some wood. This is already stuff that we've talked about, I think. And I probably talked about-

MR. COOKE: In previous interviews?

MS. MCKIE: Probably, but that was when I started building things, and I just did it because-

MR. COOKE: You needed them around the-

MS. MCKIE: Because that's what my father would have done, or that's what-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: You know, if we needed something. And it was-and-

MR. COOKE: Did you bring him [your father] in and work with him on anything?

MS. MCKIE: No. And at one point he really wanted me to, and he was-he would always come over and look at it.

MR. COOKE: Give you a critique?

MS. MCKIE: He'd give me some pointers and some criticisms. You couldn't-nothing was ever right in his mind. And I used to joke that if he was looking at the Taj Mahal, he'd have to move a couple of the towers just slightly, just to make it right. [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: So what'd you use for tools? Did you borrow his or-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, I built the first things that I built in the garage at home. Actually, the first thing I ever made was when-before Todd and I got married, and he was living in a completely bare apartment. I built a table for him as a present.

MR. COOKE: What'd it look like?

MS. MCKIE: And it was a kitchen table. I still have that table. We still have it in our house. We cut the legs down, and now it's in the bedroom. But it was a top and four legs. That's what it looked like.

MR. COOKE: [Laughs.] You're being charitable.

MS. MCKIE: I'm serious. It was-it was a round top, and it had the braces under the top that were holding the pieces of pine together. I cut holes in and stuffed the legs up. I tapered them slightly, and tapered the holes slightly; I did it with files like this, that my father had in his garage. I drilled a hole, and then I just went like that inside and then filed the edges of the legs and stuck them in there and glued them. And amazingly enough, the thing is still-

MR. COOKE: It survived.

MS. MCKIE: -sturdy after 35 years-however long it's been. And we still use that table. And it was very rough-hewn. I just, you know, took a plane around. And we used it as a kitchen table for years. And then-

MR. COOKE: Just all pine?

MS. MCKIE: It was-yep. Pine from the lumberyard. You know, when I first started, I would just, for everything I made, I'd go to the lumberyard and tell them to cut it to length, because I didn't have cut lengths; I'd think about what I wanted to make, and I'd draw a picture, and I'd get something as close to those dimensions as possible at the lumberyard, and then have them cut it, and then just figure out a way of putting it together with a drill, which was the only tool I had, and do it in the basement.

And so that was how I made a whole bunch of things. And then one day when I was at the lumberyard, I ran into somebody who asked me, "What are you doing here?" and I said, "Oh, I'm going to make a couch or a coffee table." And they said, "Oh. Could you make one for us?" And I said, "I guess so," and-

MR. COOKE: So this is without even seeing a drawing or anything?

MS. MCKIE: Right. I don't think they-or maybe they asked if they could come see what I made, and when they did, they asked me if I could make one for them. And I-at that point, I had some friends who had table saws in their basement who used to let me use them. You know, after I made a few things, I found I got access to friends' table saws, which is kind of amazing people would just let me use their saws.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And made some other things. I wasn't really thinking about doing it for any other reason, other than be-then I realized, well, when people started asking me to make things, I started reading some books on furniture making, and it was just completely by chance.

MR. COOKE: Just sort of fell into it?

MS. MCKIE: And a friend came along, who was connected to the New Hamburger Cabinetworks when it was in Roxbury.

MR. COOKE: In Roxbury.

[Audio break, tape change.]

So what other stuff have you made? You've made table-

MS. MCKIE: What did I make?

MR. COOKE: At this-

MS. MCKIE: Before?

MR. COOKE: Yeah. On your own. You've made tables, couches?

MS. MCKIE: I made a couch for myself. I made a coffee table. I made a cabinet. I made a little bike for Jesse, a little wooden tricycle, taking his baby carriage wheels and making it into a little bike. And made a kitchen table, made a coffee table, couch, made a bed. I guess I made a bed. I made a structure for a bed.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: You know, whatever.

MR. COOKE: Sort of a platform for a bed or something?

MS. MCKIE: I mean, I think I made all our furniture. We didn't have any. I made a sling chair. That was one thing I

made early on. That was one of the first things I made, because we didn't have any chairs, and I made that way back before Jesse was born. I made that when we were right out of school.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And that was four posts and eight dowels and a piece of canvas.

MR. COOKE: You've been painting, not on canvas, but on cotton, for the wall hangings?

MS. MCKIE: No, I hadn't-we weren't painting them. Those were all sewn.

MR. COOKE: Okay.

MS. MCKIE: The thing was, with the wall hangings, at first it was hard to sell them, but then we started getting some commissions. We got a commission from Architects Collaborative to do something for a school somewhere. It was huge, big ones, and we got asked to make banners for that big music festival in the '60s. The-oh, what was it?

MR. COOKE: Woodstock?

MS. MCKIE: Woodstock. Yes.

MR. COOKE: Wow.

MS. MCKIE: And so we were getting these jobs that were paying money, and we were actually starting to be able to make a living doing that, but then it was actually taking all our time.

MR. COOKE: Were you doing the sewing, or were you just doing the design work?

MS. MCKIE: I was doing the sewing. Todd and I were both cutting the cloth and doing the designing; he'd do some, I'd do some, and sometimes we'd work together on them. But I did all the sewing. And pretty soon, making those wall hangings, because we were actually getting shows and getting commissions, was becoming a full-time job. And all of a sudden we had to say, whoa. This was not what we intended. We thought this would be a little part-time job and we'd still be able to paint and do our other work.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And suddenly-so we decided we're just going to stop. We're not going to do this.

MR. COOKE: So you never even though about subcontracting out-

MS. MCKIE: No.

MR. COOKE: Have somebody else do it?

MS. MCKIE: No, it never occurred to us.

MR. COOKE: That was just the dead end?

MS. MCKIE: Because we couldn't have paid them anyway.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And we probably-you know, because a lot of them were speculative, and the reason the banners came up as a way of making a living was I had worked one summer for Norman Laliberte and he made banners for the World's Fair; he did banners for years, and he had been one of my teachers at RISD, and I worked for him making banners one summer, so when it came-when we were thinking about what we could possibly do-I think I made some for presents to give to people and then somebody said, "Hey, you could sell these."

MR. COOKE: How did people at the Architects Collaborative learn about you doing this?

MS. MCKIE: We put a banner in the bank window in Harvard Square. We put a couple of banners that we had made in the bank window where people still put displays up.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. A sort of local-

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: Local people. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Yes. And they saw it and called us, and asked us if we would be interested in designing one or two for these big, long spaces in a school they were designing. So-and, you know, then I had the experience of once I decided I wanted to make furniture-

MR. COOKE: Using the same window?

MS. MCKIE: Doing the window. Putting some little models-

MR. COOKE: So what you-

MS. MCKIE: I made a little model of the sling chair with a leather seat, and I had pictures of a bed that I'd made for somebody and, you know, some of the very first-the table that I'd made, some things that I'd made for around the house and-

MR. COOKE: So what year was that that you-I mean, because you did-

MS. MCKIE: This might be-

MR. COOKE: The banners-

MS. MCKIE: Right-this is probably, yeah. I'm skipping ahead, because the banners probably were done early-late-late '60s.

MR. COOKE: Because '69 would have been Woodstock.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And that's when we were doing it, so '69, '70. And then in-but I was making furniture at home at the same time.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: You know, all during that time, I was just building things for our house.

MR. COOKE: For yourselves?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, but I'm never thinking about doing it in any other way. But I realized, after I stopped making banners, that instead of painting when I had more time, I would find myself building something. I would find myself making something that we needed, and I finally discovered, this is what I like doing, and-

MR. COOKE: So was there a particular moment of epiphany that you can remember, or was it somebody at the lumberyard saying, "Can you make us one?"

MS. MCKIE: It wasn't-I mean, that led me into doing it for other people, but I had been doing it for other people, because people had come to my house and they'd see the couch and they'd go, "Can you make one for me?" And so I'd go down in the basement and make one for somebody, and then I, you know, decided maybe I should take one of these to Design Research, and I took one there, which they sold, but I couldn't ever really-I didn't have a-I wasn't working anywhere-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -but in the basement, so I couldn't really even place it or make more.

MR. COOKE: Was that Ben Thompson's wife who was the person who was buying things for Design Research?

MS. MCKIE: I thought it was Ben Thompson. I don't know if it was-

MR. COOKE: Okay.

MS. MCKIE: I don't know who I spoke to. I don't even remember.

MR. COOKE: I'm just curious. Who-

MS. MCKIE: I thought it was Ben Thompson.

MR. COOKE: Would have been, sort of, the procurer.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: Because there was somebody who sort of had an eye, not just for Marimekko and things like that, but actually what was going on locally. And to try to buy local-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. COOKE: -people's work as well.

MS. MCKIE: I don't know. I don't remember specifically who I spoke to. I think I went in there and I had pictures. I must have called and asked them who I should-

MR. COOKE: I mean, had you been-

MS. MCKIE: -talk to, and I must have known. Well, see, because my things were influenced by Danish modern, and they were very, very simple, because that's what I was interested in, and that was what I could do. And I felt like designing was not-it was easy to make something simple that was the right proportions and things.

MR. COOKE: Had you been going to Design Research at all?

MS. MCKIE: I-yes, I went there all the time to look at their things.

MR. COOKE: Because it just seems like it's such an important icon here.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, I went to Design Research. And then all those stores, like Bowl & Board, started popping up. And all those stores had very simple, straightforward wooden furniture, and I thought, hey, I can make that. I mean, why would I buy it?

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And so those were definitely the influences. Design Research was a big influence at the time, because I thought the work was beautiful and simple and well crafted, and, you know, there was not a curve in the place.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And so that's what everything I made looked like, and it was at about that time that this friend came along and told me about the shop [New Hamburger Cabinetworks], but not as a place where-

MR. COOKE: So who was this friend who came along?

MS. MCKIE: That was Henry Stone. Somebody-

MR. COOKE: So it was Henry?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, Henry was married to Julie, who I had gone to RISD with, so we knew Henry and Julie, you know, socially.

MR. COOKE: Yep.

MS. MCKIE: And Henry was aware that I was making these things at home, and he thought I'd just probably like to go take a look. I don't think he was-had the intention of having it be a place that I would become a member of, but, you know, I'd-

MR. COOKE: Right. Because he wasn't at that point either.

MS. MCKIE: -be curious and-no. And-but they did have this policy of letting people come in on Saturdays. And that-I had just visited that place, so I knew about it.

MR. COOKE: Was it Sam [Clark], Nick, and Ernie [Russell] at that point, or had it-

MS. MCKIE: It was Sam, Nick, and Ernie. And Ted Dodd owned all the machinery and had advertised for people to come rent. And Sam, Nick, and Ernie, who were working in a basement in Roxbury, had checked-come to check it out and moved in. There were a couple of other members and-who came and went, and it was a very-

MR. COOKE: So this was 1970 or '71? Something like that?

MS. MCKIE: Oh, my goodness. It would be the early '70s. It was probably 1972, '73.

MR. COOKE: Even that late.

MS. MCKIE: I don't know. I suspect it was sometime in the early '70s because-

MR. COOKE: I was just wondering how long you had gone making stuff on your own after banners sort of phased out, sounds like, around '69 or '70.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. At least. And so that's why I say '72 or '73, because I worked there for, I would say, two or three years doing very, very-

MR. COOKE: In Roxbury or-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, in Roxbury-in the shop in Roxbury doing really, really straightforward work. And I would say in 1975 I started to realize that if I was going to continue to work in wood, I needed to change it in some way. So I'd worked long enough to be able to build things using heavy equipment, but I'd never had any experience with any hand tools at all. I could barely use a plane.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: I mean, so to change the work and meant to think about adding a curve here and there or using other than machinery, and think about using more than machinery to-

MR. COOKE: So when you first went over to Sam, Nick, and Ernie-or actually, it was New Hamburger, because it would-if it's in Roxbury in the old Narragansett Brewery by that point, it had the identity as New Hamburger with Ted and Sam and Nick and Ernie. And I'll put their names in the transcript, because I do have-because Sam-Sam Clark.

MS. MCKIE: Sam Clark, Ernie Russell. I don't even remember Nick.

MR. COOKE: Were basically people coming out of liberal arts backgrounds-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, yeah.

MR. COOKE: -who, you know, were thinking about making furniture.

MS. MCKIE: Sure.

MR. COOKE: You know, sort of the-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Want-wanting to do-

MR. COOKE: The gentle revolutionaries.

MS. MCKIE: -menial labor. Right.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: Rather than blue collar-I mean, rather than white collar work.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. And so they oftentimes allowed the shop to be used by people on Saturdays, you said?

MS. MCKIE: On Saturday there was a policy of allowing people-anybody-to come in and use the shop. This was nuts, but for a $1 an hour. And it was after I had visited that shop that I ran into these friends in the-

MR. COOKE: In the lumberyard.

MS. MCKIE: -in the lumberyard. And when I think back on it, it was a total coincidence, but when they asked me if I wanted to make something for them, I thought, oh, well, I could use this shop on Saturdays and I could give them a design and then I could build it on Saturdays for them, and so that's what I did. That's what I ended up doing.

And then they commissioned more things, but what they wanted after I made them a coffee table was a-they wanted a baby changing table. They were about to have a baby, and I thought, how impractical to hire a woodworker to make a baby changing table, something that you're going to use for like-

MR. COOKE: Couple months, right.

MS. MCKIE: -six months and throw it away. And so I proposed that they make-that I make it as a fold-out desk, and they could use the desk as a baby changing table, store the diapers inside, and then have a cabinet underneath that they could put things in, and then later the baby could use it for a desk.

MR. COOKE: Right, exactly.

MS. MCKIE: And they loved that idea.

MR. COOKE: And so that's what you ended up doing for them?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, so that's what I ended up doing for them.

MR. COOKE: When you-how did you negotiate your entrance just beyond the use on Saturdays, with New Hamburger Cabinetworks? Did you go to them? Did-were they welcoming to you, after seeing you come in for some Saturdays?

MS. MCKIE: After coming in for enough Saturdays, they said, "Well, seems like you're not going to leave. You want to join?"

MR. COOKE: [Laughs] What about the other five days of the week?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. "You want to join?" So I was thrilled, because then I-

MR. COOKE: So wasn't daunting at all, sort of thinking that all of a sudden you're going to be part of a larger group?

MS. MCKIE: No, because it was so informal anyway, everybody was learning and teaching each other. It wasn't as though I was going into a woodworking program where everybody was experienced and knew what they were doing, and be the one who was having the table saw accident.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: It was a very-the whole cooperative spirit back then was that we'll all work on things together, and we'll all teach each other what we know, and whoever has experience in one area will show the rest of us how to do it, and nobody had much of any experience.

But, which meant, if you were using a machine for the first time, there was always someone there who is happy to show you how to use it, what to be careful of, or if I didn't know how to use a jig, I knew that I didn't have to feel badly about asking somebody to show me how to do it, and then when new people came in, I felt the same way; it was that kind of an environment, and so it fit right into the way people worked, and the way they thought about their work, and-

MR. COOKE: And you were sort of-

MS. MCKIE: -it was a very comfortable environment.

MR. COOKE: And you mixed around with different people in terms of, you know, sometimes you're making furniture; other times you're building, you know, interiors or-

MS. MCKIE: Well, in the beginning I would-yes. But in the beginning, I was in there trying to learn how to make furniture, and so I would work-you know, if somebody had a job. And that was the other thing we did, was people shared jobs and-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And we also shared our wages.

MR. COOKE: The money. Yep.

MS. MCKIE: But if you were in there and didn't have work of your own, you were always hired to work for somebody else in some-whatever capacity you were able to work at, so, you know, in the beginning if you were just sanding, that was-you were being eventually paid, a $1 an hour, probably, to do it.

MR. COOKE: Right. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: And that was all a learning experience. And then, eventually, if I had a big cabinet job, there were plenty of other people to work on that.

MR. COOKE: How did work come into that? I mean, was it through the individuals or was it through-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: When you say you had a cabinet job, does that mean that someone approached you for a cabinet job or-

MS. MCKIE: Well, sometimes people came into the shop. They knew there was a shop over there, and especially when we moved to Cambridge, we had a big sign that advertised that it was a woodworking shop. And people would walk in off the street and say, "Would you"-or one of the most amazing jobs that came into that shop by somebody who walked off the street was some girl who worked-she was a stripper.

She worked down in the Combat Zone [district in Boston known for adult entertainment clubs in the 1960s], and she wondered if somebody could build her a shoeshine box that she was going to use on the stage somehow, and then doing shoe shines at the bar. And the guys were all completely-you know, she made them so nervous that I ended up doing that job, and she paid me with $100 bills. [Laughs.] That was an unusual job, but a lot of people were coming in looking for a table or-

MR. COOKE: Even when you were in Roxbury, the people would be coming in?

MS. MCKIE: Not so much there. Not so much there.

MR. COOKE: Because I've always had this impression that somehow you were doing, you know, women centers and doing sort of socially-

MS. MCKIE: That's-yes. That was-

MR. COOKE: -redeemable sort of projects.

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: Because it was much more of the-

MS. MCKIE: Well, there was still that. Even when people were walking in and hiring us to do jobs, we would do the social, redeemable-

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: -you know, socially redeemable projects for a day care center, and then charge normal rate for somebody who is having kitchen cabinets done. And then we'd pool our resources and everybody would make the same amount of money. So it meant that, you know, all those jobs together-

MR. COOKE: Gave you sufficient income-

MS. MCKIE: It gave us-well-

MR. COOKE: Of sorts.

MS. MCKIE: It gave us pathetic incomes, but incomes. [Laughs.] And we could live on $3 an hour back then or $2 an hour.

MR. COOKE: So what were you thinking of? Because I remember you were saying Ernest Joyce was one of these-you know, the *Encyclopedia of Furniture Making* [New York: Drake, 1970] was a bible for-

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: -everybody in that shop and that Ted was fairly skilled-

MS. MCKIE: Well, Ted-

MR. COOKE: -at that point.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Ted-I don't actually know where Ted learned woodworking, but then he worked for Molly Gregory.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: After maybe doing a woodworking program somewhere, but they didn't exist the way they do today.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: What were we-

MR. COOKE: Sort of what-how do you learn, other than-you know, you said before you were looking at books and magazines.

MS. MCKIE: Trial and error.

MR. COOKE: Mainly trial and error?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, it really was trial and error. I mean, I never took a class anywhere, and I probably should have. And I don't think-Ernie was the first one who left the shop to go take a turning class in London. And I can't think of anybody who was in there.

MR. COOKE: Yeah, my impression has always been it's sort of the self-taught, trial and error-

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: You know, look at the occasional books or-that are still out there in press-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: Or, you know, even *Popular Mechanics* as opposed to-

MS. MCKIE: Right. Which is, I think, the way a lot of people learn woodworking.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: It's-I mean, people-

MR. COOKE: Prior to the '80s.

MS. MCKIE: -learn woodworking in a very different way now, but-

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: -back then, that was-there weren't schools around that anybody really knew about or that one would necessarily choose to go to, because most people doing woodworking might learn how to do woodworking in high school and go to a night school or go to-

MR. COOKE: A vocational-

MS. MCKIE: A vocational school.

MR. COOKE: -type of school. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: That's the word I'm looking for, yeah.

MR. COOKE: In some respects it makes it easier, as a woman, to do this as well in terms of it's self-taught. It's primarily college-educated guys in New Hamburger Cabinetworks-

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: -and so it sort of helps break down some of those potential barriers.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And I think in the beginning some people had a problem, but I think for the most part it was a very open-thinking group of people who almost welcomed that there was a woman trying it out.

MR. COOKE: And you weren't alone, because soon Carol was-was there shortly-

MS. MCKIE: Not Carol first, but Jones. I want to call her Margo. My mind is really bad for remembering names and dates, so-but anyway, there was another woman working in there even when we were still in Roxbury, and she was actually doing more carpentry work and working with a crew-working with Henry and working with-

MR. COOKE: With some of the architectural work that was going on at that point or-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I think we'd call it architectural work. [Laughs.] And-but she'd come into the shop and use the table saws to, you know, do built-in things. So she was in there. And then when we moved to Cambridge, Carol [Neville] joined the shop, and then Ainsley [Donaldson], and then-

MR. COOKE: Might want to provide their names-

MS. MCKIE: Sarah and-yeah, they were-

MR. COOKE: -so at least we have-what-so Carol's last name was?

MS. MCKIE: Carol Neville.

MR. COOKE: Neville. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And Ainsley Donaldson.

MS. MCKIE: And Sarah, whose last name I'm blanking on. I'll remember-

MR. COOKE: We can always add that later.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Yeah. But, you know, then there were a lot of women-that's proportionally and-

MR. COOKE: Yeah, which is a point I'll bring up later. So when you were in Roxbury, you were spending most of your time actually in the shop, not out in the field on site?

MS. MCKIE: Right. Learning.

MR. COOKE: So there was a possibility-

MS. MCKIE: So I wasn't really making a living doing it, except I was doing these funny little jobs, like the one that I was making the couch that I had made for other people who wanted it, and-

MR. COOKE: So there was a pooling of profit, or income, shall we say?

MS. MCKIE: And I was working on other people's jobs for them.

MR. COOKE: But I always had a sense that somehow people-everyone was sort of doing every type of skill, but I didn't know that some people were sort of staying more back in the shop and-rather than, say, sometimes out on site, sometimes in the shop.

MS. MCKIE: Oh, no. There was a-Ernie, and there was one other guy and myself, worked mostly in the shop, not-I didn't do much-well, I worked for Henry, and I worked for Sam, you know, on occasion. And that was both before and after, but they would bring work into the shop, too.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: You know, they would have things that needed to be-like, bookcases or something that they were then going to install; so there were those things that those of us who were in the shop would do. So there was always work, but I'll have to say that a good portion of the day was spent really fooling around and chatting, and wasting time, and-

MR. COOKE: More of the error than the trial.

MS. MCKIE: -sharpening our tools and doing things that were not that productive. They were-things happened very slowly. It was a very social place, in a way. We spent hours meeting and discussing interpersonal relationships and how we would work together, and what was working, and what wasn't working. We would go away for whole weekends and do that.

So there was a-that was the element that was more political and-

MR. COOKE: Idealistic?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, very.

MR. COOKE: In many ways.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: So what precipitated the move to Emily Street?

MS. MCKIE: We had to-

MR. COOKE: The lease was out?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, the lease ran up, and so we looked for a building and found an empty building on Emily Street, which was ideal, and everybody wanted to move across the river, where most everybody was living.

MR. COOKE: Most everybody lived on this side?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, yeah. And that place was the rent we could afford, and there was a group move.

MR. COOKE: But was Ted a real presence?

MS. MCKIE: Ted Dodd was a very real presence. I mean, he owned everything.

MR. COOKE: Yeah, he owned all the major equipment.

MS. MCKIE: Right. And he was a very skilled, frenetic builder of things. He moved so quickly, and he was so sure-footed. He was pretty amazing. He-in terms of his skills and his abilities, so-and he was the one who had the most experience.

MR. COOKE: So was he based in the shop, as well, in terms of helping you and Ernie and-

MS. MCKIE: No.

MR. COOKE: -those people who stayed behind or-

MS. MCKIE: See, when we were in Roxbury, New Hamburger was a separate entity. There were some other people-Ted Dodd had set up the shop. It was way too big for one person to work in, so he had advertised for people to come rent space, so New Hamburger rented a little bit of space. And then some various other woodworkers had rented space in the same shop.

MR. COOKE: Okay.

MS. MCKIE: So New Hamburger was just one-

MR. COOKE: One of several?

MS. MCKIE: -little-yes. But the politics was so strong in New Hamburger. I think when we moved to Emily Street, the pressure was on to have Emily Street become a large co-op instead of one person. And so we tried to convince Ted to sell the equipment to the shop, and have it eventually be owned equally by everyone, so that we weren't-we wouldn't be quite so beholden to one person for-and he, I think maybe reluctantly, agreed to that, but did agree to it.

But eventually-he was really way more of an independent. You know, not-he was, first of all, a few years older than the rest of us, so he wasn't locked in the '60s thing in the same way that we were all-

MR. COOKE: Well, he said that his life cycle had moved along-

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: -before yours had.

MS. MCKIE: Yes. And he was married with a couple of kids, I think. And we were all fresh out of school, and living the ideal lifestyles, and so he eventually left and set up his own shop in Vermont-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -where he was from originally, and I think he was a lot happier than he was in a co-op.

MR. COOKE: Right. But meanwhile, the-

MS. MCKIE: He made it all possible for the rest of us, so we were lucky.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. I mean, he's really the foundation.

MS. MCKIE: Absolutely. Yeah. No, he was-and everybody really-he was the one person who really knew what he was doing, so everybody went to him for a lot of building advice, and he was very, very competent, but not a great designer, so I think it was hard for him to make a living doing what other people were trying to do.

MR. COOKE: But I know you and Henry and Sam have sort of talked about the work that you were doing in the early '70s as just sort of Design Research, butcher block sort of-

MS. MCKIE: Absolutely, yes.

MR. COOKE: You know, it's trundle beds.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: You know, couches that are real, sort of, squared-off frames and-

MS. MCKIE: Absolutely the simplest possible solution to the problem.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Whereas I think Ted was interested in making something a little more interesting at that time. And using more-

MR. COOKE: Yeah. Laminations and-

MS. MCKIE: Better quality, more expensive materials, and making pieces of furniture that took more time. And-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And we were interested in furniture for "the people" back then, and that was-if you can put it together with bolts, that's better than joinery, and-

MR. COOKE: Was he the one that took you out to Mary Gregory, or you-or was it later-

MS. MCKIE: Yes. No, he-

MR. COOKE: -that you went and met her?

MS. MCKIE: No, he took us out there. He took the group.

MR. COOKE: So he took the whole group out there?

MS. MCKIE: Whoever wanted to go, yeah, to her-to see her studio and-

MR. COOKE: So that was in the early '70s as well?

MS. MCKIE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And that-

MR. COOKE: So do you remember being amazed at this woman living alone in this secluded area in Lincoln?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and what amazed me most was the simplicity of how she did everything. I mean, since my introduction was to a totally, fully equipped shop with jointers and planers, and not little ones, big ones. And I saw her hand planing boards with this method that she had invented, really, for keeping everything level and even, and it was just-it blew my mind, but I don't remember thinking it's so odd, because by then I think maybe Carol was working in the shop, too. I didn't think it was so unusual that there was a woman doing this.

MR. COOKE: Or had been doing it-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Right.

MR. COOKE: For so long.

MS. MCKIE: Or, yes and no, I thought that-I mean, it was very impressive what she was doing, but what I didn't see at that point-I saw her shop and I saw her methods, but I didn't see her body of work. I didn't see things that she'd made, and so in a way, to see the things in the museum in the show at the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston] was really fascinating, because then I-

MR. COOKE: So you'd never really seen-because I thought you'd said something about you'd seen a table mechanism that she was working on or something like that that was unusual. Maybe it is what-the piece she was working on at the time.

MS. MCKIE: It may have been this way that she was planing boards. Maybe that was-

MR. COOKE: Okay.

MS. MCKIE: -what she was planing at the time, and maybe that's how I described it, but that's what-I remember

being most struck by that. But I don't remember seeing pictures of her work or seeing-I knew she made kitchen cabinets and-but I don't know why I didn't return there or establish a friendship or a relationship. It was something-

MR. COOKE: She tended to work on her own, anyway. So, I mean, one wouldn't have.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, yeah.

MR. COOKE: But it's-I just remember being struck by-

MS. MCKIE: It was a nice experience to go see that and see a woman who was doing it for a living and had been for a long time. And I'd heard about her from-Ted mentioned her, you know.

MR. COOKE: With a high degree of-

MS. MCKIE: Oh, absolutely.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. He was very respectful.

[Audio break, tape change.]

MR. COOKE: This is Ned Cooke interviewing Judy McKie at her studio in Medford, Massachusetts, on November 22, for the Archives of American Art. This is disc number two.

So, Judy, we were just talking at the end of the first disc about some of the pivotal changes that took place in the mid-1970s, as New Hamburger Cabinetworks went from Roxbury and moved over to Emily Street. And it also was 1975, about the same time that the former, sort of, cooperative nature of the business started to take on a little bit more flexibility, in terms of you pursuing some of your own work individually. I thought it might be worthwhile just talking about that a little bit.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, the cooperative nature of the co-op-I was at that point in a cooperative within a cooperative, because New Hamburger Cabinetworks was a cooperative in itself. And the shop that we moved to took on a cooperative nature. We owned the tools together. We set up a way of buying the tools from the original owner.

MR. COOKE: Ted Dodd?

MS. MCKIE: Yes. But in terms of New Hamburger Cabinetworks, which I was part of, as people gained experience, various members of that cooperative started to go in different directions. Some were more oriented towards doing house renovations and cabinet work, and others were oriented towards making furniture. And I, at that point, was interested in teaching myself how to carve, and trying to change what I was making to make it more interesting for myself. And I knew that if I were to pursue what I was very interested in, it would drag down the wage of people who had decided to do more lucrative work.

And so, you know, we-the cooperative as we knew it really started to disband or collapse, because it couldn't really accommodate people's gaining experience and wanting to move in different directions.

MR. COOKE: So it really became much more cooperative just in terms of the tool ownership and space ownership, not so much on the-

MS. MCKIE: That's right, and then-

MR. COOKE: -wage sharing or-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, so that our little cooperative within a cooperative became a group of individuals sharing space and machinery, rather than sharing even as much of a philosophy about what they were doing anymore, or politics about it, as had happened in the past. And some of them left and moved out of the shop and moved to other shop situations, so, you know, it was still an ideal cooperative woodshop, but not so much of a political entity as it had been.

MR. COOKE: And the learning experiences were slightly different in some ways.

MS. MCKIE: Yes, and so now people were pursuing ways of working that they had-that they felt comfortable with. And because I felt as though the way I was working in the shop was almost becoming automatic, the way I designed and thought about my work, I started to get bored with what I was doing and wanted to kind of add back the element of art that was missing from my life. Or, because my background was so steeped in pursuing

sort of a visual element, that concentrating only on the building process and the design process was no longer really satisfying my need to be creative, I guess, and-

MR. COOKE: How did you decide about carving? What was it that-

MS. MCKIE: Well, I really didn't know quite how I wanted to change my work. What I knew was that everything I made was machine-depended on pushing boards through machinery. And I didn't-but I thought if I were going to add an element of interest, I needed to at least add some curves to my work.

MR. COOKE: Right. You've mentioned that.

MS. MCKIE: So in the beginning, to make a curve I needed to learn how to use some hand tools and-I mean, I could still use the band saw, and use-but if I were to going to-but the curve led to wanting to carve, and what I really wanted to do was animate the work and bring it alive, and that's a whole other story, but-

MR. COOKE: Because that was what you started doing right in '75, was these boxes, which were very-

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: -rectilinear, sort of machined out in some respects.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: But then would have carved tops to them.

MS. MCKIE: Yes. And so I once again decided I needed to learn how to carve, but didn't bother to go to school or learn how to do it right. And in the beginning, I was trying to carve maple tabletops with an X-Acto blade knife, so it took a little-

MR. COOKE: [Laughs] Many broken blades later.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, it took a while before I gained any experience with the carving tools. And I'm still pretty much of a hacker, but I-

MR. COOKE: So did you just teach yourself? There was nobody you could-

MS. MCKIE: I just had some carving tools, yes, and start-and got some softer wood than maple, and I decided to make those boxes and teach myself.

MR. COOKE: Which were made out of basswood or-

MS. MCKIE: And they were pine.

MR. COOKE: Pine.

MS. MCKIE: Little pine boxes. And the very first ones were just lines, and then gradually they got a little more three-dimensional than that, but that was a-that was the way I tend to work. I don't do much research. I just decide.

MR. COOKE: Because those boxes really coincided directly with you moving over to Emily Street, and sort of really going into furniture, in some respects.

MS. MCKIE: Well, what-yes. But I was doing-I was making furniture before I moved over there.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. No, but I'm thinking of the carving-

MS. MCKIE: Carving with-

MR. COOKE: And sort of went with that sort of transition.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, it was a while-I did a lot of cabinetwork over at Emily Street, too. But when I decided to carve, I couldn't afford to suddenly just be carving, so what I tended to do was take a block of time. Say, okay, I'm going to give myself a week, and I'm going to carve for a week, and then I'll work on a cabinet job, and-or work for somebody like Henry, who was doing house renovations, and just get paid an hourly wage, and then once I've done that for a month, I'll take out a week and try and do some more carving. So that was how I began to be able to add elements of decorativeness to the work.

And then somebody came in, and then with this other thing I did-

MR. COOKE: And were those boxes just-did you sell them to friends? I mean, did you-

MS. MCKIE: No, no. They were just-I just made them to make them. And really, for the first five years anyway, or something close to that, I was just making things with-I wasn't making them to-I was just going to have a houseful of this stuff, I figured. I had no real intentions to show it. There was no place to show it. It was completely out of character, you know. There weren't any places to show it, really, that I knew of.

MR. COOKE: Right. Other than Design Research. And this stuff wasn't going to be sold there.

MS. MCKIE: But it was-no. It was definitely not in sync with what was going on necessarily, but I was compelled. And then, to be able to continue to do it, if somebody came in and asked me for, you know, a jewelry cabinet or something, I would say to them, "How about a carved jewelry cabinet?" and I would basically make the cabinet for whatever price it would cost to make the cabinet, but carve it and decorate it or paint it.

MR. COOKE: Or paint it.

MS. MCKIE: I wasn't painting it back then, but do it, and that part was free. But that was how I gained experience. And I had somebody who I had made-I'd made a lectern for them, and then they wanted me to make some benches, and I said, "Well, you know, I'll make the benches if I can, you know, carve the bases," and people were definitely in favor of that, since I was not going to be charging them for the carving.

MR. COOKE: "Whatever you want," they said. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: Right. But that was how I began to be able to carve the work.

MR. COOKE: But it was at this point, initially, you were just really carving panels in terms of being able to draw things on the wood, and then carve backgrounds, instead of having real relief carving, for the most part?

MS. MCKIE: In the beginning, yes, although I made a table for my own kitchen table that was a very simple carving of the apron of something. That was still-I mean, it was more three-dimensional, but not a whole lot more three-dimensional. But then gradually I carved a couch that had real figures on either end.

But the animal imagery evolved because what my real purpose was-I had been doing this cold, impersonal stuff for so long, I just wanted to make things that had some life to them. Things that-that would-and it occurred to me as I looked at things for inspiration, the things that really appealed to me were animal forms, and I wanted to figure out ways of incorporating live imagery into the work I was doing, to really bring it to life.

MR. COOKE: So what were you looking at for inspiration at this time?

MS. MCKIE: I looked at all kinds of things, but I was very, very drawn, eventually, to African artifacts and-because simple tools would be carved with a snake wrapped around them, or into the shape of a figure, and would suddenly be very, very animated. And those things were a real inspiration to me. But it wasn't limited to African art, although that I found to be very inspirational.

I found that same kind of liveliness in Eskimo art, and in South American, pre-Columbian pottery, and it wasn't furniture objects. It was all kinds of other objects and other kinds of images that inspired me. And that's sort of been the case more than-I mean, I never looked at other furniture particularly for inspiration, except when I first started building furniture. And then I was very, very drawn to very, very simple Shaker-I thought Shaker furniture was beautiful, and loved the idea of things being pared down but still maintaining their integrity and-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -so I was never drawn to decorative furniture until I-and still I'm not particularly, unless it fits.

MR. COOKE: Yeah, the forms are a backdrop.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: So you started off in Emily Street. At that point, who else was in Emily Street? Because Henry had moved over there-Henry Stone had moved over there. Ernie had moved over there.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, Ernie was there. All the same people: Hadley Reynolds was there and Sam Clark; all the people who had been in the original shop came to Emily Street, but one by one people either-you know, the population changed. New people came, old people left, and some continued to do woodworking or carpentry. Others changed professions entirely.

MR. COOKE: That's one of the things that obviously occurred at this point across the river, was BU's [Boston

University] Program in Artisanry that Jim Krenov was initially in charge of, and then Jere Osgood and Dan Jackson, in that '75-'76 school year, and then Alphonse Mattia taking over for Dan Jackson after the '76-'77 school year, I believe.

Perhaps, talk a little bit about the sort of the connections across the Charles at that point, since the BU bridge sort of was that connector between these two different worlds. I mean, the idea of the academic program in furniture making and then a cooperative across the river.

MS. MCKIE: Right, I wish I could have a really clear memory of when those interactions first happened. I know that Ernie Russell helped set up the shop over there, but then he went off to learn how to do turning.

MR. COOKE: London, for turning.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, so I don't remember really being that aware of what was going on over there until Alphonse started teaching there. I never met Dan Jackson, and Jim Krenov came-you know, he was there very, very briefly.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: He came one time to show his slides at our shop, and our shop represented something so different from what Jim Krenov was doing that people were aghast. I mean, the people who were-

MR. COOKE: Did you oftentimes have people come in and show slides, or was that a first?

MS. MCKIE: No, that was a really unusual event. It was because Ernie had met him, and I think he might have set it up, and people just thought it was-

MR. COOKE: It was a cultural clash, right?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, it was, and the reaction of the general population at the shop was that this was just a very, kind of, exclusive way to work and didn't-it was the antithesis-

MR. COOKE: Elitist. It was elitist, right?

MS. MCKIE: It was very, very elitist and the antithesis of what we were about, and there was quite a bit of scoffing. And really nobody had a relationship with BU until the students started coming out of BU and either looking for work space in our shop or working for people in the shop. And then gradually the population became-

MR. COOKE: So who were some of the leaders in terms of coming over there and working for you all or trying to get space?

MS. MCKIE: Well, I know that Jonathan Wright rented space in the shop, and he worked for me early on, for a couple of years anyway. And Jim Sagui came over, Michael Hurwitz came over, Tom Loeser came over, Mitch Ryerson, although Mitch had worked in the shop before going to the program and then came back. John Everdell rented space.

MR. COOKE: Did Wendy Maruyama?

MS. MCKIE: Wendy didn't rent space there. You know, she was-did she?

MR. COOKE: I though she might have worked over here for a little while.

MS. MCKIE: Her presence was very much felt in the shop, and she probably did work there; my memory is people would come and spend time there sometimes in the summer when I was away. There was a long period of time when I spent, well, six months out in New Mexico and went back and forth, so, you know, some of the students-

MR. COOKE: Some of the students might have been coming in the summer?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, could've been working, but of course Wendy-you know, a lot of those students who were at BU started showing their work at Pritam & Eames when Pritam & Eames came around-

MR. COOKE: In '81.

MS. MCKIE: -in '81 and that whole group of people got to know each other very well because of the connection of showing our work together.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: But, before that-

MR. COOKE: Did Rosanne [Somerson] have space over here, too?

MS. MCKIE: Rosanne-

MR. COOKE: Or was she at her own shop?

MS. MCKIE: She had her own shop, but she would come over and visit a lot, and we got to be good friends. I know that she didn't actually rent space in the shop, but she occasionally came in and did things in our space, and we spent a lot of time together. And she did an article about the shop for *Fine Woodworking*, I guess, and she had-she was actually my introduction to the Program in Artisanry, because we became friends, and Alphonse was teaching there and-

MR. COOKE: For you to actually go over there, rather than having the students come over to Emily Street.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and so I would sometimes go over to crits, and that was a little later on.

MR. COOKE: I remember that sort of in the early '80s, it seemed.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: I mean, obviously I was struck by-in that period starting around '77 or so, that there was a sense of Emily Street becoming a very important, almost fellowship experience for some of these students to get different sorts of experiences.

MS. MCKIE: Well, it was just the shop, you know? It was a place where they could find something that was set up that would have the same kind of machinery that they were used to being able to use at BU and the Program in Artisanry, without having to set up their own shop. So it was ideal and it was nearby and-

MR. COOKE: But at the same time it gave them a certain amount of practicality as well. I mean, there's some interesting sort of dynamics, I think, between an academic institution and a cooperative, and how each could sort of fuel the other. There's a real synergy.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, no. You know, it's funny because I don't-I think of these as people who came and went. I sometimes don't make that distinction between whether they went to PIA [Program in Artisanry] or came from somewhere else. And so looking at it from the outside, it's more of a-probably more interesting to have watched that happen. And I know there were students coming from PIA, and they were bringing a new character to the shop. But my-

MR. COOKE: Sort of, new levels of learning with Ted-

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: -out of there, but now you've got a different technical base that's coming in, and design sense and aesthetic sense. It starts to bubble over in interesting ways. As well as what they get from you.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, but, you know, in a way it did and it didn't. There were the PIA students, and then there were people who had been working at Emily Street their whole lives, doing cabinet works, and they didn't really influence each other.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: I would have to say. I mean, the PIA students came over and did their work. It was a perfect shop for that. People like Nathan Rome, who always did kitchen cabinets and always will. He does really fine work-is going to do work in that way. Now he's building boats, but that was something that he took up because he has an island that he lives on in Maine in the summer. So I-you know, I don't see that-I mean, I see it as this-I see the shop became an ideal workplace-

MR. COOKE: Got it.

MS. MCKIE: -for students, but I don't see that there was a big exchange between people who worked there, aside from maybe myself, in that I was working in a more similar way -

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -when people started coming in there. So it was more a convenient workspace than a-I don't know;

it's hard to describe.

MR. COOKE: No, I think that's fair. I always thought that they actually got a lot out of it, just having you as a role model in some respects: somebody who had come in and made a living, in essence, doing this.

MS. MCKIE: No, but I didn't start making a living until-

MR. COOKE: Well, but you were starting to at that point.

MS. MCKIE: But the thing that turned the tables for me was something that the PIA students and I were in together, which was the show at the American Craft Museum [now the Museum of Arts & Design, New York].

MR. COOKE: The "New Handmade Furniture" in '79.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, because I had never shown my work before that, really, and I wasn't selling my work. I was convincing people that they maybe wanted something that was carved, but I wasn't selling my furniture to anybody. And I had-I mean-

MR. COOKE: You had said the Giraffe Gallery had-

MS. MCKIE: Yes, but they didn't sell anything.

MR. COOKE: Talk a little bit about the Giraffe Gallery.

MS. MCKIE: The Giraffe Gallery was the gallery that one of the woodworkers [Stanley Dolberg [sp]], who was actually a dentist, started on Martha's Vineyard. And I think it was only in operation for a couple of years, but-

MR. COOKE: What was his name?

MS. MCKIE: His name was-you can't keep asking me-[laughs]-

MR. COOKE: Okay. Sorry. I just always think-we can add it in later.

MS. MCKIE: Yes, we can because-oh, man. I'm having a real problem with this right at the moment, and it's making me a little nervous-[laughs]-so-

MR. COOKE: Anyway.

MS. MCKIE: Anyway, I'll remember it when I'm not being-you know, when you're not asking me the name.

MR. COOKE. But he was a dentist who had space at Emily Street?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, he had space at Emily Street, and he decided to open this little gallery and asked me if I would show some work, and so that was the first time I ever put my work in a gallery. I guess I had a-you know, a piece here and there. There was a gallery on Huron Avenue briefly, the Van Buren/Cutting/Brazelton Gallery, that had shown some furniture, and I had a piece in that. So every once in a while one piece would appear somewhere. But, you know, this was the first time it was, like, a show of my work.

MR. COOKE: Was it like '77 or '78? Somewhere in there?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And I can probably-oh, no-it's probably not even in my résumé because it was so early on. But, you know, I carted it all down on the top of my car and inside my Volkswagen bus.

MR. COOKE: So what did you show there?

MS. MCKIE: I showed a table with-a couch with dogs that I made-

MR. COOKE: And that was the one you were referring to with figures on the ends for the first time.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And a-I probably showed my own kitchen table, which had fish. I showed-I had done the dog-the first version of the dog table, and I had made a chest that's at the Providence museum-at the RISD museum, that chest with birds-

MR. COOKE: Oh, the box that's carved?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and those were about the only things I had. And I guess-and anyway, we went down there for the opening, and it was just me and the owner and my dentist, who goes to-[laughs]-goes to Martha's Vineyard. It was three of us at the opening.

And then, you know, at the end of the show I carted it all back and it was-

MR. COOKE: So no nibbles even?

MS. MCKIE: No, although my dentist-I ended up eventually exchanging dental work for furniture because of that show. So-you know, if that counts.

MR. COOKE: Yeah, it does. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: And then-let me think-Carl Belz put my work in a show out at the Rose Art Museum [Waltham, MA]. That was pretty early on.

MR. COOKE: The premise being just local-

MS. MCKIE: I don't know whether that was before or after-

MR. COOKE: I thought that was after the "New Handmade"-

MS. MCKIE: I think that was after-yeah, that was after "New Handmade"-new furniture. Well, anyway, it was about that time, and I had these three things and some boxes. I had the boxes and three pieces of the furniture-the things that I brought down to Martha's Vineyard. And-you know, but I knew I wanted to make more things like that. And I saw-I got a copy of *American Craft* magazine, and this is how out of it I was-

MR. COOKE: This was the first time you'd seen it?

MS. MCKIE: -I had never really read or seen *American Craft* magazine and didn't know really-I guess I knew there was a museum in New York, but I don't know if I had ever been in it. And I thumbed through it and I thought, this is interesting. These are people, you know, who make craft, and who-

MR. COOKE: So names like George Nakashima? I mean, none of that?

MS. MCKIE: I had heard of him, and I'd heard of Wendell Castle. But I really didn't know much about-I knew Nakashima because Todd had grown up in New Hope, Pennsylvania, so I knew of this guy, but I didn't really know what his work looked like.

Somebody had mentioned Wendell Castle-somebody had a catalogue, and we passed it around and thought-everybody thought it was pretty nutty stuff. And-but I was very, very out of touch with the craft world.

And so at the end-last page-of that magazine there was a little block with a little announcement for a show that they were going to do called "New Handmade Furniture," and I said, "Oh, my goodness. That's what I do." [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: Ding. Light bulb goes off.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, so I said, "So maybe I should send them some slides." You know? And so I took slides of the things that I had.

MR.COOKE: Things that you'd shown at the Giraffe Gallery?

MS. MCKIE: Yes, and I had pictures taken of the boxes that I carved, and I sent them. And that winter, everybody did the Christmas store every year, and it was the-

MR. COOKE: In Cambridge?

MS. MCKIE: Yes. It was when that store first started. Clara Wainwright had gotten people that she knew to all participate, and so we'd done it one year, and then they were going to do it the next year. And that year they had a little space, which was on Boylston Street, kind of next to the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston], and everybody brought their stuff over and filled this empty space. And so I put those three pieces of furniture in that space, and I had sent slides of those things to the American Craft Museum, and I got a call from Smith-

MR. COOKE: Paul Smith?

MS. MCKIE: Paul Smith, and he said, well, was there anywhere that he could see that work? And so, he came-he came to this little Christmas store where everything was just all crammed together and there was stuff all over the table. And he was having to move things off the table to be able to get a look at it. And then a week later he said "I'd like to take all three of those things and put them in this show." And I thought, hmm. Amazing. You know? So I went from never having really shown my work-

MR. COOKE: So that was the box, the dog table, and the couch? Was that it?

MS. MCKIE: It was-yeah. It was-and he chose all three things. And I think he wanted to see if they were actually well made, because he liked them in the picture but he didn't-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -know if they were put together in a way [laughs]-

MR. COOKE: And that was important criteria. Can they last?

MS. MCKIE: Would they-yes. And so he showed them in that show, and that was a thrill for me. But I had no idea-he put three of my things in that show. Nobody else had more than one thing. I think Wendell Castle might have had two things.

MR. COOKE: Yeah, he had two things.

MS. MCKIE: And there were three pieces of mine in the show. I'd never seen work-anybody else's work before. But then there were things from PIA and all those-you know, some of the people at PIA-and people like Anderson and-

MR. COOKE: Joyce and Edgar Anderson-

MS. MCKIE: -yes, Joyce.

MR. COOKE: -and Garry Knox Bennett was in that show-

MS. MCKIE: Yes, yes. And that's when I first met Garry, was at the opening of that show. And it was just suddenly I went from not knowing what to do with my work and not knowing how to possibly-

MR. COOKE: You and two dentists at a gallery. [Laughs.]

MS. COOKE: -ever be able to sell it, to having, you know, these galleries calling and asking me if I wanted to show. And suddenly-it was overwhelming. It went from like, having to really do a lot of cabinet work in between when I got to make a piece, to suddenly having people wanting to buy it. And it totally changed my life. It went from completely-and then-

MR. COOKE: And you knew it right away.

MS. MCKIE: And it was partly because back then, even with the program-the work coming out of the Program in Artisanry was different, but it was still very conservative and very-more in keeping with things that people had seen before. And the work that I was doing was coming from some other place, so it attracted a lot of attention and got a lot of press. And *Life* magazine was-I don't know, it was just-[laughs]-it was overwhelming. And I was very, very happy and at the same time a little bit confused by it. But it changed my life, overnight.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. It would've.

MS. MCKIE: And suddenly I was able to make the work I wanted to, full-time. And actually be able to sell it and start to make a living from selling that work instead of doing other work.

MR. COOKE: So you sold those pieces that were in the show and-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And took orders.

MR. COOKE: -you got commissions, and-

MS. MCKIE: I mean, people-and I had to decide sort of then and there, because I could have made the dog table for the rest of my life probably, because I had so many inquiries about that table, and I decided, oh, my goodness, I don't want to become a production company in my own work, but I did want to be able to sell enough work to keep working. So I decided, okay, I will make six. And this is what I have always done since then. But not necessarily six, but I decided I'll make this table-I'll make six of them. And I'll make them all at once, and never make it again.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And-so that I don't end up, you know-

MR. COOKE: Being known as the dog table woodworker-

MS. MCKIE: -doing one thing for the rest of my life.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: But that was a big change for me and it allowed me-suddenly gave me the opportunity-and also everything happened at the same time, because the Museum of Fine Arts commissioned something. And-

MR. COOKE: And Jonathan wrote you a letter to do some "Please Be Seated" furniture ["Please Be Seated: Contemporary Studio Seating Furniture." Yale University Art Gallery. New Haven, CT, 1999].

MS. MCKIE: That's right. And I also got a Massachusetts grant-I got a grant from the Mass-not cultural council-but-and I got an NEA [National Endowment for the Arts], well, maybe the next year. I got a Mass council grant. And so suddenly I decided, I have this chunk of money and I have galleries that have asked me if I would be interested in doing a show, so I can take the time it would take to be able to use the money from the grant to make enough furniture to do in a show. And I did a show at the Elements Gallery, and the show did very well. So that basically gave me another grant.

MR. COOKE: It was self-perpetuated at that-

MS. MCKIE: Which has allowed me for the rest of my life to be able to work-you know-to really do my work and to be able to show it.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And then Pritam & Eames came along later, but that was, you know, just this amazing lucky break and it changed my life.

MR. COOKE: Well, I think that was an important show for a lot of people and for the field in general.

MS. MCKIE: Well, it was-yeah, but I wouldn't have known to-I just sort of happened to pick up an *American Craft* , and I think that when I, sort of, really got to know the people at PIA was when our work went down to that show.

MR. COOKE: Was collected over at PIA to go down.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Although I know why it was-I got to know Alphonse and Rosanne before then.

MR. COOKE: The dog table was also important because it was-that was your first use of glass for a tabletop, too, right?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Well, when I had decided that I wanted to change the way I worked, I did a lot of-I just stopped and I started drawing. And I didn't really worry about whether I was drawing furniture or not; I just decided I needed to learn how to draw again, and so I was looking at a lot of things, and I knew that I wanted to incorporate animal imagery, because I liked drawing animals. And so I drew these two dogs and put a line across the top and I realized that you could put anything under a glass top. And that I could use any kind of imagery I wanted to as long as I was using glass, so that you could see through it or see under it.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And that opened up the possibilities enormously, and it meant that the structure only really depended on four points hitting the glass and hitting the floor, whereas other pieces of furniture are much more complicated, but-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -it allowed me to do something that was much more sculptural.

MR. COOKE: Although at first you were drawn because of the times in some respects, I think, because of Jere Osgood doing all the tapered laminations and things like that. But weren't some of your first dog tables, and they have sort of complex laminations for the tail-

MS. MCKIE: Well, the first-

MR. COOKE: -or cat tables? I remember some of those that were quite intricate in terms of some of the way in which they were weight-bearing parts.

MS. MCKIE: Well, yeah. I did a lamination for the tails of the first table, and it supported the glass, but it didn't support it very well; there was too much flexibility in the lamination, which was something I didn't really

anticipate. So even though it held it up, it didn't feel like a table that you would really trust. [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: It could tip a little bit, right.

MS. MCKIE: Right. So then I had the dog bones in the dog's feet-

MR. COOKE: Right. And then you switched them around to have the dog bones at the end.

MS. MCKIE: Then I decided to-yeah-put it up-yeah-it was a little stronger. And then the-and then I didn't need a lamination, because the tail didn't have to do any supporting work.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. I just remembered sort of thinking that the laminations were so much a product of, sort of, the woodworking in the late '70s as sort of-that was one of those really exciting techniques used for a variety of different purposes. So it's almost as if, you know, you wanted to do this and then said, "Oh, that's what's going on now and that's the way I'll make it."

MS. MCKIE: But it wasn't-

MR. COOKE: But it wasn't at all?

MS. MCKIE: It was the only-because that was the only way to do that.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: I mean-I can't-I mean, I don't-I shouldn't-see and-

MR. COOKE: Anyway. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: Because if I wanted to make a table that was really an animal that had enough support in the top-and there are not enough parts of an animal to make four points on the top. I had to use a lamination; it was the only possible way of doing it.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And the other table that had a laminated tail was a cat table that was commissioned by a friend at the shop.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And I don't remember-I probably was being influenced by the work at BU.

MR. COOKE: I'm not saying you're wrong.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. No, no.

MR. COOKE: There was so much in the air at that time is what I was struck by, in the fact that when you first started to go three-dimensional, sculptural things, that would be a natural way to problem solve-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: -some of the technical basis.

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: To realize your vision in the figurative.

MS. MCKIE: No, I mean, I think it's probably true. I guess I felt like, you know, I was not very aware of what was going on in the program until a lot later.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Until after that show-

MR. COOKE: A little bit later than that.

MS. MCKIE: But I'm all-but things do sort of mesh for me.

MR. COOKE: It's just one of those curious things.

MS. MCKIE: [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: Because the other thing that I thought was so interesting at this time-when you did your fish table that had a little bit of pigmentation, a little bit of coloring in it, right around this same time, too, right?

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: Because it had a wooden top, but then you had fish along the rails that were actually-that was your first experiment with color, in some ways.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: So you were doing all of this stuff at this-

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: -color and figure at the same time.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Well, I just-I sort of felt like I had wanted to add color to something but never really dared to do it. And I thought I would like to try it on that table, but I didn't know whether I would wreck the table by doing it or not. And there wasn't very much color being used in anything and I thought it could make it a garish mass, and so I ended up doing something that was pretty subtle, that was just a rubbed in color.

I've used a lot of color in my work, but I never used bright color anyway, and I don't like brightly painted furniture. Some people do it better than others. But I was drawn to milk paint very early on because it has a natural way of blending with the wood color and you can get the color of the wood coming through it and things like that. But, you know, I still think painting furniture successfully is difficult.

MR. COOKE: It's hard.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: When you went to the opening in '79, what was your sense of-you know, all of a sudden you found sort of, wow, I'm part of something bigger here-but what was your sense of the field at that point?

MS. MCKIE: I didn't like it.

MR. COOKE: You didn't like it?

MS. MCKIE: I didn't like it. No.

MR. COOKE: Because it was too conservative at-I mean, was the phrase that you'd used before.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. It was all about the woodiness of wood, which didn't-I could care less about the wood. I happen to be a woodworker, but wood wasn't very much what my furniture was ever about, in fact. You know, the couch I had was made of poplar, just because that was the cheapest. That was the only thing that I could afford.

MR. COOKE: And was decently carve-able, right?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And the other things were pine. And, actually, the dog table is mahogany, and that was as exotic as I ever got and ever have gotten really.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: So all this furniture that was all about wood and the beauty of the wood, it-I hate to say it, but most of it, I did not-I wasn't that interested in. And, you know, why I almost don't like to be recorded saying these things is that I always have been more drawn by other things than by furniture.

MR. COOKE: By other genres?

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: Yep.

MS. MCKIE: And I obviously do see furniture that I like and that interests me, but it isn't a big influence in how I work, generally. And I think the things that I like to look at, I see all over the place; I love to travel because I'm influenced by objects when I travel. I have to say, I don't go look at furniture per se.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: But I look at a lot of stuff.

MR. COOKE: Do you go to museums, or do you actually go out-

MS. MCKIE: I go to all kinds of museums, and I go to every museum under the sun. And the museums that Todd and I actually love to visit the most are these crazy, funky little museums like, you know, if you're in France, there's a bread museum on one street and there's a corkscrew museum on another street and there's some crazy person who's been collecting toys or unusual things for their whole life, and those are the things that totally fascinate me. And that's why artifacts and, you know, African tools, are things I'm very much drawn to, and early primitive things. They're very sophisticated. They aren't really primitive at all.

MR. COOKE: Right, exactly.

MS. MCKIE: In my eyes, they're the most sophisticated art there is, in my opinion. And those are the things that fascinate me. So, you know, as much as I was sort of curious about what the field was all about, and interested to meet the makers, and I-and loved the makers, and, you know, we have a lot in common, and we work the same way, but it's not my influence. That's all.

MR. COOKE: Right. No, I mean, that's very clear.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: You've also said that the-it's at this point galleries start contacting you. And it's fairly early in terms of sort of a gallery scene about furniture, in some respects. So you mentioned Elements Gallery or somebody who came and wanted you to show?

MS. MCKIE: Yes. I was so naïve; I didn't know anything about any of the galleries that showed. There weren't really many galleries that showed furniture, but-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: I didn't know any of the craft galleries. You know, if I went to New York, I went to see art. I didn't go to see craft. And so after several people approached me and called me, I was so confused. I-you know, Paul Smith was the only person that I'd ever met. I called him up and I asked him if I could just come over and ask him a few questions, because-

MR. COOKE: What is the scene? Right.

MS. MCKIE: I said, "Who are these people?" You know, "What is Elements Gallery?" and, "What is this other gallery?" and, "Are these-are these places that I should-are these people I should talk to or not talk to?" And he was very, very-when I think back on it, he was just so generous and nice to give me some advice and say, you know, "Don't bother with this one," and "This is a good place." And so I pursued or called Elements, because he said, "that would be a good place for you to show your work." And they arranged to do a show, and-

MR. COOKE: A one-person show?

MS. MCKIE: A one-person show, yeah. And so, that's what I immediately sort of began thinking about, what I could put in a show, and what I could make, and-

MR. COOKE: Start building up?

MS. MCKIE: Started building and, yeah. I had no idea what I was getting into, and-but, you know, it was very exciting, because it meant that suddenly I could really do the work I wanted to do, so-

MR. COOKE: And you've maintained a very strong presence, subsequently from the '80s, in terms of Pritam & Eames and-yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Well, I've done that ever since. Ever since I've just been able to do my work for shows, it's meant that I've avoided doing commission work and things that get complicated, and put me in a very, I would say, lucky position to be able to just-

MR. COOKE: It's curious. Some people will take commissions, because they say there are parameters, and, you know, they'll problem solve within certain constraints, and it sort of gives them some ability to try out different things.

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: But then you-

MS. MCKIE: Well, it's actually true. No, I do do some commissions.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Every once in a while, a commission comes along that I think sounds really interesting and would force me to think in a certain way, and would be a chance-you know, would be sort of a fun thing to tackle. But a lot of commissions are based on things we've already made and somebody wanting you to repeat it. They say they don't, but if you really stretched the limits of what you had already done, they would be very unhappy. And part of me really wants the person who owns my work to really enjoy living with it and like it and want it, as opposed to, oh, my God, this is not at all what I had in mind.

MR. COOKE: I'm sort of stuck with it.

MS. MCKIE: And, yeah. And in the same way, I don't want to be forced to do something that I don't think is going to work. And so I can sense when I think it would be-when the person is someone that would be really exciting to work with and it would be a chance to do something different, and when it's like definitely going to keep me locked in a place-

MR. COOKE: The repeat.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, yeah. Something that I've done before, and that it's clear that that person doesn't really want something different, so-

MR. COOKE: And it does seem to me that in some ways the Pritam & Eames Gallery has been this wonderful vehicle for you to try different things each time. It's not a gallery that's saying, "Can you produce?"-I mean, there's some galleries who act almost like commissions-"Can you do something like this again?"

MS. MCKIE: Right. Yeah. No, that's one of the reasons I have loved working with them so much, is that they are very, very tolerant of what the people who they show need and how they want to work. And they're willing to work that way with people, and know that they're never-you know, they don't even tell me if somebody asks about a commission, because they know often that I don't want to work that way.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And so, you know, I really felt like that was also a lucky thing, because they sell the work and they have a very interested clientele and they're easy people for me to work with, and we've had a really good working relationship for years.

MR. COOKE: And you've done group shows, as well as one-person shows there, too?

MS. MCKIE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I started out only in group shows and then, you know, would be in a combination of-could do a show. I can't ever do a show more often than once every two years. It takes me two years to be able to have enough work for a show. But if I have an extra piece-

[Audio break.]

MR. COOKE: This is Ned Cooke interviewing Judy McKie in her studio in Medford, Massachusetts, on November 22, 2004. And this is disc number two, still, being continued.

Judy, we were talking about the influence of "New Handmade Furniture," the '79 show, both in terms of the sudden interest of galleries in your work at that time, few that they are initially, but certainly there's some people who are interested in sales. But I was just curious in terms of other ways in which, all of a sudden, you discovered that there are other people making objects that are of the furniture realm, and how this might have had an impact on your own work, or not, as the case may be, in the 1980s.

MS. MCKIE: Okay. Well, it definitely had an impact on my life. And it certainly impacted my work in terms of there suddenly being an audience, so it made it possible to continue to do it and to actually, you know, start more or less full-time making the kind of work I wanted to be making.

And it also introduced me to a community of people. I mean, the Program in Artisanry did that, because it was nearby, and suddenly there were a group of woodworkers who were doing their work and showing their work, rather than-you know, I wasn't working in a shop where people were mostly working in other people's homes or working on entirely a commission basis, but suddenly there were people from the Program in Artisanry, who

were in the shop, who were making speculative work that could be shown in galleries. And suddenly there were some galleries that were very interested in showing the work that was popping up that looked new and different to them.

One of those galleries was Pritam & Eames. It was around that time that they came to our shop, as well as to visit the Program in Artisanry, and look at what was being done there and pick some artists to open their gallery show with. And suddenly there was a gallery in the world that was exclusively showing furniture, which was a totally unique thing.

In the past, it had been a craft gallery that might have a furniture show every once in a while, and then this meant that there was a place that was going to devote its entire space to furniture and show it on a full-time basis. Eventually they expanded to include other things, but when they first opened, they just showed furniture. And suddenly there was a community of friends. I mean, people-we all-all of us who were in the first show that Pritam & Eames ever did became really good friends and showed work in other shows together and spent time together and talked about the field and, I mean-

MR. COOKE: So it was a real moment of-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: Sort of in the '80s.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. No, it was-that was really fun, because it was a lot of like-minded people who were experimenting. And the other friend that I met at the show at the American Craft Museum was Garry Bennett, who became a close friend and who was the person who introduced me to the Foundry [The Artworks Foundry, Berkeley, CA] eventually. But he was the first furniture maker I ever met, and he was very easy to get chummy with because he was so open and so interested in what other people were doing, and-

MR. COOKE: One could say, actually, you were the two outsiders, in some ways, from that "New Handmade Furniture" show?

MS. MCKIE: I think maybe in his work, you know, I loved the things that he had in that show. They were among my favorite pieces of Garry's, because they were very different, and they used-they combined metal and wood in very creative ways. And I had-at that point, I sort of knew what I was going to see from the Program in Artisanry.

MR. COOKE: Yep.

MS. MCKIE: And so there were less surprises in that area than seeing his work. But anyway, that-

MR. COOKE: Because that was the first time he'd been shown on the East Coast, really, so-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Yeah. And we became good friends, and he was the person who introduced me to the Foundry. Garry has a unique ability to, kind of, see what would work for other people, as well as would work for himself, and his taking people under his wing, and he did that for me.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. Now, he's generous in many ways-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. COOKE: -in terms of also just trying to get people in touch with one another, so it made sense for him to talk to somebody-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Really. He's done that many times, and-yeah. So, you know, I didn't know-

MR. COOKE: So did he just tell you, this is what you had to do? What was his strategy in terms of getting you to think about translating-

MS. MCKIE: To the Foundry? Well, that-

MR. COOKE: Translating your wood objects into bronze objects.

MS. MCKIE: It-well, the way it happened, I mean, it wasn't from that time that we met at the show.

MR. COOKE: No.

MS. MCKIE: We became good friends and would be at other group shows and run into each other and

communicate. And because Garry also-you know, he was running his metal business, and he was investing in handmade furniture himself; he was a collector of sorts, and-

MR. COOKE: Yep.

MS. MCKIE: -and we did some exchanges and acquired each other's work. And one of the things that he acquired was a table that had dogs that were eating each other's tails, and-

MR. COOKE: Right, chasing tails.

MS. MCKIE: But I had-when I made that table, I had painted it having in mind that I wanted to make it look as though it was made out of iron or some other material, and I painted it black.

MR. COOKE: Black.

MS. MCKIE: And-

MR. COOKE: Matte black?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And it was supposed to not look like wood, but look like iron. And Garry, I guess, in looking at it at one point, said, "You know, it might make sense to have this cast in bronze," you know. And so he took it to Artworks Foundry, which is a foundry in Oakland [Berkeley] near where his studio was. And he knew Piero [Mussi], the owner, and he said, "What do you think, Piero?"

And I didn't know anything about it. He just-he did this. He says, "I put it up on the dumpster and then I got Piero. I said, 'Hey, Piero, come here. What do you think?'" He said, "What do you think-how do you think this would look in bronze?" and Piero apparently liked it and said, "I think it would work well." And Garry called me, and knowing at that time I would not have been able to afford to do it, he proposed that there would be some way where, if he paid for the mold, then Piero would be willing to cast it, and Piero would get one, and Garry would get one, and they'd give one to me.

MR. COOKE: Right, because it was three.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: You were going to do three, I remember, in the first-

MS. MCKIE: Right. And-but anyway, I thought, well, I don't want to cast that same table, because I've already made that, but I would love to think about bronze. So I designed that other table that you had in the show, in which I thought about bronze shapes and tried to make something that I thought would work better with the material than that original table. That ended up being just an incredible opportunity, and the gallery that I was showing at was able to sell them, and when they sold them, then I was able to afford to-

MR. COOKE: Do it again.

MS. MCKIE: -begin the next one. Yeah. So-and-

MR. COOKE: Because at that point, you're also showing at a couple different galleries.

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: You don't have exclusive Pritam & Eames, although that's where you've had a number of one-person shows, but-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I was mostly only showing there, though.

MR. COOKE: The occasional park or NAGA [Gallery NAGA, Boston]?

MS. MCKIE: No, NAGA-I didn't really start showing furniture there till quite a bit later.

MR. COOKE: Okay.

MS. MCKIE: So at that time, Pritam & Eames-I was showing most of what I made at Pritam & Eames except being in other group shows other places. That's what I could afford to do. And I guess when NAGA and Clark [Gallery, Lincoln, MA] started showing, they first did group shows, and so, yeah, I did have bronze work in those shows sometimes, and-but-

MR. COOKE: I think that was '87 or somewhere in there that you started working in bronzes.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Yeah. And I thought also because-I've talked about this before, but there are materials that I feel work well for the way I work and others that wouldn't. For example, bronze, because it has a quality of age just built into the material, and I'm always trying to get that quality into the work that I'm making. Like the chest needed to look as though it had been-the chest at the museum-

MR. COOKE: Yeah, the leopard chest.

MS. MCKIE: -needed to look like it's been around for a long time, and it takes a long time to get that quality in a brand new piece of furniture, and have it look-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -not look phony. But bronze has that built into it. And I thought, not only that, but it's appropriate for the kind of shapes and forms I use, so I, you know, was thrilled at a chance to do it. And then it gave me an opportunity to make things in editions and have more than one available, which really freed me up to be able to do more work, but still have work available. And so it really did change my life, in terms-

MR. COOKE: And initially you did make the prototypes out of wood.

MS. MCKIE: Yes.

MR. COOKE: Initially, and then later on you switched to what kind of material?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. [Laughs.] Well, I made them out of wood in the beginning, and then I made some out of plaster, like that model there. And, you know, for years I did them in-in whatever-I did a lot of them in plaster. And then-

MR. COOKE: You used that sort of Styrofoam-

MS. MCKIE: Well, then a few years ago, somebody came up-one of the advantages of working in a building like this was somebody came upstairs from a sign-making business downstairs in the building, and they were looking at the way I was making the molds for the bronzes, and they said, "We have something we use in the sign business that you should try for model making," and he showed me this dense foam material called signboard, and gave me a little piece. And it was perfect for carving, because if you get a dense enough form, it holds very fine detail and it's grainless, so that it was very easy to carve, but would hold the kind of detailing needed. And so I started using it, and have been using it ever since.

MR. COOKE: So that's been-that's your preferred material now-

MS. MCKIE: That's what-

MR. COOKE: -in terms of making the models?

MS. MCKIE: For making models. Can't use it for anything else, unfortunately, but-

MR. COOKE: But, I mean, it's got sort of-

MS. MCKIE: But it's wonderful for that, and it eliminates so much time and effort in terms of just making an accurate model in another material. And I can block it up-originally I would have to make whatever I was making, like a piece of furniture, with all the joinery. And this way, I can just laminate until I get the form, and-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: So it's very expensive, but what I pay for the material, I save in time.

MR. COOKE: Because then it goes into replication as well.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. COOKE: And then you've-in addition to casting work in bronze, you've also worked in stone.

MS. MCKIE: Right, because that was another material.

MR. COOKE: How did that come out of-

MS. MCKIE: Well, I-

MR. COOKE: Garry didn't tell you you had to do this?

MS. MCKIE: No, no. But I had a design for a polar bear bench that I wanted to make. And I thought, ideally, because it's a polar bear and because it's an icy cold kind of animal, I'd like to use something that's white and icy and cold, and I thought ideally it should be a kind of marble with a little snowy fleck in it, you know, because that would be-each object has an appropriate material. And to do that in wood would have been okay, but to do it in marble would have been perfect.

MR. COOKE: Right. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: So I thought-to do it in bronze wouldn't have worked at all. It would have just been the wrong-I mean, it could be done, but it would have been the wrong material for the ideal work.

MR. COOKE: Would have been cold, but that's about it?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, yeah. So I started asking around, and I started looking through *Sculpture* magazine, and Johnson Atelier [Mercerville, NJ] had just opened its stone division. I called some places, and I went and talked to some people in New York, but they had very small studios and weren't really set up to do something quite that scale. And so I found out that Johnson Atelier was opening their stone division. And this was actually one of the first projects they did, right as soon as they opened their doors, because I contacted them just at that time, and so that's where-

MR. COOKE: And that was, what, about four or five years-five years ago? I can't remember.

MS. MCKIE: Probably longer.

MR. COOKE: Longer than that?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, but-

MR. COOKE: But you did it in-again, you did the prototype in foam for that one, right?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: And then they take measurements off of that, and then do it in stone or-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. What they do is, at the stone division they had just purchased a new machine. You know, in Italy, they use a lot of electronic equipment to rough things out. There was somebody who had worked in Italy for years and was hired by Johnson Atelier, and he came over and set up the shop and bought this Italian machine and brought it here. And all it was able to do with the polar bear was do an outline in two directions. It's a huge machine, almost like a band saw on edge that will cut through the block of marble and cut-

MR. COOKE: According to the contours, like a replicating machine?

MS. MCKIE: Yes, it'll-yes.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: It will cut the-well, not even-they digitally feed the information into the machine-

MR. COOKE: That's true.

MS. MCKIE: -and then it cuts the contours and only does the outline, so it couldn't-it doesn't actually carve, but, you know, for the polar bear, it would get the outside shape, and then the outline, which saves a huge amount of time, so-

MR. COOKE: And then-

MS. MCKIE: And then it's cut. The rest of it is done old-fashioned-what is it called?

MR. COOKE: Point?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Point system. And is carved until it-

MR. COOKE: And so you basically-

MS. MCKIE: -matches the model, so I provide the model. And then go down at certain points to see whether it's looking right, and-

MR. COOKE: So did you end up correcting them at all, the different things, or-

MS. MCKIE: Well, it was a little bit-it was a little lumpier than I would have liked it in the beginning. And it wasn't an exact replica, but it was close enough that only I would be able to see the difference between what I did in my model and what they did in the stone.

MR. COOKE: But you feel comfortable enough to try it again? I mean, the-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, I do.

MR. COOKE: That the idea of stone is-

MS. MCKIE: Yes, because-

MR. COOKE: Because you did it again, yeah.

MS. MCKIE: I mean, it-in a way, it's like casting in bronze. I send them something, and if I know I'm going to get what I sent them, then I'm comfortable with it. This was a trickier thing. This is, like, resin casting.

MR. COOKE: This is the sofa-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: -that you've got on horses here.

MS. MCKIE: Yes, we're working on this and fixing it, because I didn't get exactly what I sent, and so I don't know if it's possible yet.

MR. COOKE: So that's your third material. You've been working with this resin.

MS. MCKIE: And that's the third-yeah. Yeah. Well, I was starting to say, because I did some smaller things in resin, I had felt like that was an interesting material to work in if I could get it to look like glass.

I did some other things and I wanted them to look like ivory, and I was able to get something very close to the feeling I wanted in that material, whereas there are certain kinds of plastic that I would not want to work in because I feel that they're inappropriate to the kind of work I do, because they're too shiny. A material that doesn't appeal to me is aluminum and shiny metals, because they don't work for my ideas, you know, and it always feels like the material has to somehow augment your idea. If it's the wrong material, obviously, it detracts.

MR. COOKE: Right. You can't force the material into an unnatural relationship. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Right. And I couldn't make that in wood. That's something that needed to be transparent.

MR. COOKE: It's the sconce.

MS. MCKIE: The sconce, which was made of resin, but it's also sandblasted, so that it looks more like, you know, sandblasted glass, and it's not-you don't see the light through it, so it reflects-but it-you know, that had to be that kind of material.

MR. COOKE: And then you tried it with large platters, chargers, and things like that?

MS. MCKIE: Well, I tried it without success. I was trying to do that image of fish, and I thought, okay, there's another instance where, because of the image I want to get, this watery, you know, kind of look, and it's fish. You know, that could work in resin, but what I didn't realize is that it only works in resin when there's light behind it, because if you put that down-so that wasn't really fortunate. That was a little unfortunate. It wasn't a successful project in my mind because it required that you put it in a window or display it in a certain way for it to work, and so anyway, rack that one up to- [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: Well, but I mean, part of the larger resin experiment, right?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, exactly. And then, when I made this couch, which is resin, what I was thinking was that I wanted to do something on a large scale that would be reproducible-that I could do more than once.

Because I loved that ivory look that I got with the smaller objects, I wanted to see if I could get a large object to look like ivory. And unfortunately, that scale is so tricky to do in resin that there were a lot of problems, and he couldn't get a consistency of color, and he ended up having to paint it and it, took on a sheen that, you know-

MR. COOKE: You're getting further and further away from the desired result.

MS. MCKIE: Yes, and it was very lumpy, and so it ended up not really working in the way it was intended. But I'm going to experiment with it and-I mean, I still don't know exactly what I'm going to try and do with it, but-

MR. COOKE: So probably it's not going to be reproducible? This'll be-

MS. MCKIE: Well, he's trying a second one because it-apparently it's so hard to do that it often will take more than one try to get it. I don't know if it's going to be possible, and it's very tricky, because the person who is doing it is in California, so I can't go over and take a look and talk about it. So that was a hard thing sometimes.

The person who did the sconce only works on that scale; we worked very well together, and I was able to go down there and see things and talk to him and-but this was a little harder because of the distance, so live and learn, but, you know, we might make it work.

MR. COOKE: Yeah, the idea's to keep working on this.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: One of the things that I'm kind of curious-when you talk about working in bronze and, sort of, making more work available, is that also one of the ideas behind working in resin? Because I noticed-you know, offering salad servers and different sorts of objects-because somehow you're working on lots of different scales in terms of a potential audience.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, well, I mean, the salad servers and things come out of sometimes working on a large scale for so long I just-at the end of a show, I just want to work on something small, something kind of friendly. I actually made the salad servers as a present for my nephew who was getting married-for him and his wife. And I made them in wood, and then I thought, well, this is something that I might see what it would be like to-that's when I got the ivory idea.

I thought maybe I could make them in resin in this ivory color and they'd be kind of a nice object. But it didn't come-it sort of developed out of just making a gift for somebody. So sometimes-often, like right now, I'm working on this because I need to figure it out, but-

MR. COOKE: [Laughs] You've gone this far. You got to take it all the way. Right?

[Audio break.]

MR. COOKE: This is Ned Cooke interviewing Judy McKie at her studio in Medford, Massachusetts, November 22, 2004. This is the beginning of disc three.

So, Judy, you were just talking about some of the small-scale objects coming out of the end of gallery shows, sort of getting down to something smaller, and we were talking about some of the ivory projects that you're working on right now made out of resin.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. What almost always happens is, after working for two years on a show, at the end I'm usually sort of exhausted and taking care of a lot of details and glitches that I didn't anticipate, and I'm just ready to take a break from the big projects and want to think on a much smaller scale and make things that are kind of intimate and friendlier, and so I made those resin handles.

I made the little helping-hand bowls in wood first as a present for Todd, and then decided to cast it later, because it seemed like a nice little object to cast, but-and since I have this ongoing relationship with the foundry, it's a nice way to-

MR. COOKE: Well, that's what I was always struck by. It seems like you sort of start working through problems with wood, and then that's almost the beginning in some respects, now that there's all these multiple choices in terms of continuing in wood and casting and taking molds of them and working in a variety of media.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: -playing with color, opacity, and various other surfaces, which seem to be so important to your work.

MS. MCKIE: Yes, well, also seems like every time I have a chance to work in a new media or try something different, it feels like I'm moving, or I'm, you know, not-I'm trying something that I-it's a little scary, because I don't know if it's going to work or not, and that's what keeps the work exciting. I did pieces in wood, as well, but I almost felt like, well, I've kind of done this before and it doesn't feel quite as interesting as seeing if I can make something like this work, and knowing that it could be a complete disaster. In this case it was. [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: Well, it's not complete yet.

MS. MCKIE: Well, no, we're still working on it.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: But it could end up being something that never works out, because it could just be too complicated to be able to do the way I imagined, but maybe I can cast them and paint them individually, and work on them that way.

This one-first, I'm getting that paint off, and I will probably figure out how to patch and sand and smooth and paint this one and do something completely different from what I originally anticipated, which was this very light, white ivory thing, and try and make it into something else. And sometimes my worst disasters end up being things that lead to better work next time or-

MR. COOKE: Like what's a good example of that?

MS. MCKIE: Well, I wish I could think. You know, I know I've had many of these experiences, and naming specific ones-I mean, obviously this one-I've done wooden pieces that I didn't intend to paint, and then because I didn't like the way the wood looked-it didn't match well or something happened when I put the finish on and then it looked very dark in places, and I would end up painting it instead or doing something to alter it.

I've had things that I removed the paint on and repainted five or six times before I got what I wanted, and people watching go, you know, "Why do you think that is better than what you did the last time?" But-[laughs]-I remember I had one idea for something; ended up filling it all in and painting over it because the last few marks I put on didn't look right and there was no way to get them out. And so there are a lot of things that end up having to change the idea, because it's the only way to make my original idea work.

MR. COOKE: In some respects you've never been about the wood anyway. Wood was just a convenient medium for carving and you-when you started looking at some of the boxes and stuff-

MS. MCKIE: No, I never have-

MR. COOKE: -and it's sort of whatever wood is grainless, and then you bleach the wood in the-

MS. MCKIE: Well-

MR. COOKE: -mid-'80s, and paint and various-I mean, you're really about the form and the profiles and shapes and things like that.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. It's almost ironic. I mean, I'm a woodworker. I use wood, but it's never been about the wood. And I learned early on that, with my work, I can't use an interesting, exotic wood and carve it afterwards, because then the carving and the wood are working against each other and one is camouflaging the other. And so if I really want to carve, which is what I'm more interested in doing, then I have to pick a really bland wood, which is why I used a lot of, you know, pine in the beginning.

MR. COOKE: Yellow poplar and basswood.

MS. MCKIE: And basswood, mostly because it's easy to carve, and it's a rubbery, beautiful carving wood, and it's also soft enough to carve easily. But mostly it's grainless and completely bland. So my choices are not based on what the wood is about, unless I want, you know, a specific kind of color or texture. I made a bed for my last show that was made of pear [wood], and I never use anything as exotic as pear. That's the most exotic wood I've ever used for anything.

And in the end, I ended up putting a paint finish-it was a stain that I added a pearlike color to, because there were just enough places where the grain or the change of grain pattern was bothering me and I wanted it to be more consistent, so even with an exotic wood I still have to mess around with it to get what I'm after.

So, yeah, my work has never been about the wood, which is why sometimes I think there's probably a time in the near future where I'm just not even using any wood anymore.

MR. COOKE: Well, it seems like, though, you still work out some of the initial ideas.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: And if there's something about, sort of, the exploration process that oftentimes still is rooted in wood because of the familiarity that you've got with it.

MS. MCKIE: Right. Yeah, and it's lovely to carve.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And, you know, there are a lot of things. I just think it's possible to combine woods.

But if we're going to jump to what's going on in the furniture world now, what's really exciting is that furniture makers now are being very experimental and using all kinds of combinations of materials to make interesting surfaces and to expand on what's possible, you know, colorwise and every other way by adding other elements to the-

MR. COOKE: Juxtaposing and adding other materials, yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Absolutely. Yeah, so it's very much going on in the field.

MR. COOKE: It has been one would say actually in response to what you and Garry have sort of set a whole different agenda in some respects about what people are looking to as freedom from the tyranny of wood figure. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: Well, yeah. And that really started to kind of disappear as an only way of working quite a while ago, but it definitely was what, back when I probably was first working, and Garry were first working was what drew people to furniture making, was the wood itself and the possibilities of wood.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And now that's not what necessarily attracts students. In fact, students are the most willing to experiment and try new kinds of things.

MR. COOKE: Found objects and mixed media.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. COOKE: Do you ever-I mean, we talked a little bit earlier about fear of teaching or-because you are a rarity in some respects. A lot of people have ended up choosing to do the teaching and making-for furniture. What do you see as some of the trade-offs? You spoke in terms of it didn't suit your own rhythms on a personal level, in terms of total absorption in teaching, but what do you think you benefited from in terms of being out on your own?

MS. MCKIE: I think there are benefits to both.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: I feel that-because I'm outside of the teaching world, I think students are an inspiration to everybody. You know, that what you see kids in your class doing-even with my limited-highly limited-experience of teaching. The most amazing thing was to throw out a project and expect-in my own mind know what I would do with that problem and imagine what I'd get back, and then find out how differently everybody responded to the same set of problems and how amazingly creative and how much beyond my own concepts the student could take an idea or a problem, and I think that's really stimulating. You know, so I think I miss out on that by not teaching, but-

MR. COOKE: Having the assumptions constantly tested.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And watching-

MR. COOKE: Finding the next Judy McKie who built straw towers up to the ceiling. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: Well, just watching what kids do and how great it is and what you can learn from that, you know, in terms of how you were limiting your own idea of what that problem was about. So, you know, and I think that's clearly a big benefit.

I feel like I'm kind of-I have a lot of friends who teach, and in different parts of the country, and I feel like I'm out of the loop. They are a community and they communicate with each other and I feel a little bit like an outsider, and I obviously set that up myself, because as I explained, I'm kind of allergic to [laughs]-

MR. COOKE: Appearing in public in formal situations.

MS. MCKIE: And very uncomfortable in that, and I know I could overcome it, but then what I would have to give

up is full-time building, and because I'm in the lucky position of being able to do that, which Garry Bennett is also, which is why he gets to not teach, although he is a very sociable being, so he loves to do workshops and go to conferences and things like that.

MR. COOKE: Different kinds of teaching, right.

MS. MCKIE: And I'm a little bit of a recluse and quite more uncomfortable in my skin, so I'm not-you know, and also I have a little bit of-because my work is out there first, always feel uncomfortable, because I walk into a place where I don't know people, but they know my work, so they know me. And I've had people say such strange things to me sometimes. Like somebody once walked up to me and said, "Oh, you're Judy McKie. I understand you sell your work for $500,000 apiece." And I'm saying, "What? Five hundred thousand dollars for a piece of furniture? I don't think so." So then you start-you know, because you're something, you know, it just makes me really uncomfortable.

MR. COOKE: And that makes you retreat back to the studio.

MS. MCKIE: Yes, exactly.

MR. COOKE: And not even answer phone calls. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: Sort of, but also I just love to make things and to be in here, and if I don't have to teach as a way of making a living, then-you know, then I'd be happier not to.

MR. COOKE: One of the things that I was thinking about as we talked over lunch is, well, in terms of talking about the idea of school-based training and making, in some respects you were the beneficiary of a particular moment in the late '60s and early '70s of idealism and cooperative learning and learning away from academic in some respects.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Right.

MR. COOKE: And now oftentimes I'm so much more aware of, sort of, the credentials of academic training on résumés and things like that. What's your take on alternatives to the academic sort of training? Because in some respects you don't have the same sort of idealism for some cooperative shops, or whether it's-whether it's because of woodworking magazines and videos, whether there's a whole other way of training, and, sort of, people taking what they think is an avocation into another domain.

I was just curious what your take on the field has been over the last 10 years, as someone who's come up through an alternative system, but then has been very much embraced and welcomed within the academy as well.

MS. MCKIE: What has?

MR. COOKE: You have. Your work and you have been.

MS. MCKIE: Oh.

MR. COOKE: I mean, you've got an amazing vantage point, in some respects, as someone who lives in both-of both worlds.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, I don't think I know very much about the education world, though, because, you know, I don't really-I don't get a firsthand look at it.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. But that's why I was curious whether you had any sense of-I mean, just-

MS. MCKIE: I used to feel that I was lucky in some way not to have the baggage of woodworking education because I wouldn't have been anywhere near as experimental, because I didn't know and I still-you know, it's almost as if I continue to keep myself ignorant about a lot of things; otherwise I won't try them.

And Piero, who used to run Artworks Foundry, said, "I don't want you to learn anything about bronze casting," he said, "because you'll change the way you work, and because you'll know what's easy and what's not easy, and then you'll make the things that are easier for us to do, but your work will not"-you know, he said, "Don't learn-you know, promise me you won't learn anything about"-

MR. COOKE: Sign here. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And I think in a way-I have these disasters because I don't know anything about resin casting really. I don't know what's possible, but I think if it's possible, it's worth trying, and maybe we can make it work.

But I feel like if I knew all about resin casting, I would never have done this, and if I knew all about woodworking, I wouldn't have attempted a lot of the things.

When I first started out, I knew so little, working on my own, that everything was going to fall apart, because I was literally putting things together with screws. But, you know, with just enough other people around to watch and help out, and I still have a very limited knowledge of woodworking in some ways, although I'm not putting everything together with dowels anymore. But now I can-now I have more than a drill.

MR. COOKE: Right. Exactly.

MS. MCKIE: But it means that I'll maybe try something that anybody else would say, "Well, that's stupid. That'll never work," and then try and make it work. Maybe it will and maybe it won't.

MR. COOKE: Whereas sometimes, if you've come through a woodworking program, you might not be able to question that.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, well, that's what I'm thinking, is that if I had gone through the Program in Artisanry, I would have assumed everything had to be held together with dovetails or mortise and tenons, and I would have-and one of the things that I don't want to have show in my work is the joinery. So even if there are dovetails in it, they're hidden, because I don't-you know, it's not about dovetails. And I don't want them to detract from the object itself.

But I would have felt, I'm sure, much more like showing those things off, because it would be about furniture making and woodworking rather than more about ultimately what I want the chair to look like. I always want it to be furniture. The only thing I've ever made that wasn't was the sculpture that's down in the park really. And it is furniture. I always want to do furniture, unless it's a present for somebody or something.

MR. COOKE: And even then, it's derived from that.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And yet, at the same time I want to be doing other things that are just images that I use as preparation for my work but maybe don't have anything to do with my work. Like if someone asks me to do etchings, that's a great opportunity, and I might use the images that I made doing the etchings in my work, but I will make things that aren't furniture, but I don't want to make sculpture.

MR. COOKE: Right. You see a separation between, sort of, handmade paper drawings, watercolors-I mean, some of the preparatory two-dimensional aspects of what then gets incorporated within some of the furniturelike forms.

MS. MCKIE: Right, so-but I don't think I really answered your original question.

MR. COOKE: I was just curious about your vantage point of the notion of you see some of the benefits of that kind of open, self-exploratory sort of learning, in some respects, in a supportive environment. Alternative-I really view it as alternative learning as opposed to the academy.

MS. MCKIE: Right.

MR. COOKE: And just sort of seems to me that some of the idealism that fueled that and the possibilities for that are drawn-

MS. MCKIE: Came from the-yeah.

MR. COOKE: And, you know, what's replacing it now? Are there alternatives that are viable today?

MS. MCKIE: Boy, that's a tough one, because it's a really different world. We could afford to live on practically nothing when I started working in furniture; it made it possible to be much more experimental and to think about-I really think, in the same way, the only way that it's possible to be experimental is to do something else totally unrelated while you do your work.

I chose not to do teaching because that would-if I didn't do that full-force, then the students would have suffered. But I could go work at the art store for an hourly wage, or I could, you know, just get some menial job that I didn't have to think about and then do my work and put all my creative energy into my work, but I couldn't teach without putting all my creative energy into teaching, because that's something you want to-the only way you can stimulate other people to be creative is think of creative ways of getting them interested.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: So I couldn't do both at the same time, and I feel like-you know, I think people when they get out of

school have to make careful choices. If they really want to be able to do their own work, then I think it can be compromised by teaching, if teaching becomes something that takes up too much of your time, whereas-

MR. COOKE: Time and energy.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, because you have to bring teaching home with you, and you have to plan, and teaching really is a full-time job to do it right. And I think it's very hard to also be able to do shows and put your creative-make that switch because, for me, even making a switch between design time and building time is very hard. That's why I try to do all my designing at once.

MR. COOKE: Do you?

MS. MCKIE: And then build.

MR. COOKE: For days on end?

MS. MCKIE: I do all the drawing for a show, yes, for months. You know, it can take a couple of months or more sometimes, and the traveling time that Todd and I take is good design and idea time and drawing time, but really I have to isolate myself, and I have to do it at home. I can't do it with distractions around-the designing-and I have a room that I work in, and I draw on the wall and I do a lot of sketching and I look at what I've done and throw most of it away and save the things that I think are okay. And if I have a few things that I think are okay, then I-in the beginning I don't even draw furniture. I just draw, you know, so-but then things get culled down, and then when I have something that I really think is worth building, then I do a-

MR. COOKE: You do a full-scale drawing or-

MS. MCKIE: -full-scale drawing. Yeah, so-and I have-you know, it's like I have a file there that's filled with drawings that I can measure off of and-I mean, they are the full-scale drawings with all the details. But if I try to make one piece beginning to end and then design and make another piece, the time that it takes me from shifting from the building to the drawing-it's so hard to get into a drawing mind where I can really focus. Getting into the building is no problem.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: That's like just-you know, and you're ready. You've got everything you need. Get what you-

MR. COOKE: And do you build one object at a time? Do you ever-

MS. MCKIE: Not always. Not always. Sometimes I'm working on other things, and mostly if I have to hire help, then I'm working on several things at the same time. But yeah. No, like right now I was working on those two things at the same time, because when I-you know, this was involving and that's just-you know, I did two. I made-when I cut the piece for that, I made two, and so I just finished that one.

MR. COOKE: It's a mirror.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, I do shift around. Ideally it's the perfect way to work on one thing at a time, and I do that as much as possible, but sometimes if something has a long drying time, I move to something else, this was a step, step, step. You know, one coat of paint every day for two weeks, and so you do that.

MR. COOKE: And you go back to the sofa.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. That's just that practical way of working. If I can draw for a solid period of time, I get somewhere, but even if I'm drawing and I stop for a weekend-it takes a kind of focus to get back in and actually be in any way productive.

MR. COOKE: One of the other things that you've been undertaking the last 10-plus years are, you know, not only casting in bronze, but even doing some architectural features in terms of handles and fountains and things like that.

What's the relationship to either, sort of, architectural detail or this idea of public commission for parks, whether they be benches or, most recently, the monument or the peace park [*The Garden of Peace: A Memorial to the Victims of Homicide*, Boston, MA]?

MS. MCKIE: Well, the peace park is a totally different thing, but the other things often come out of a request that comes from somewhere.

MR. COOKE: What was your first public art project? Was Seaport [Seaport Boston, Eastport Park] your first?

MS. MCKIE: I'm trying to think of-Seaport and-I mean, I did something for the Cambridge Arts Council recently. That was funny because, you know, I have not had a desire to do public art you know, because Todd did a public project many years ago and-

MR. COOKE: The South Station murals?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, the South Station murals, and that was, like, more than 13 years in the process. It took so long from beginning to end, and I know a lot of people who have done public projects and the schedules are always-they come and go. It's really tricky to do it, because you'll be in the middle of something else and all of a sudden, well, we need this by such and such a date, and so it's kind of hard to work that way. And I don't know; I never had big desire to see things necessarily in public places, and I also make mostly indoor furniture, but the bronzes are, you know, conducive to being outdoors.

And I guess I'm trying to remember what the-the first time I got asked to do something public-I guess it was this-

MR. COOKE: The Seaport-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: The gull chairs and fish benches?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and it wasn't-you know, public art that is really public is different. This was really private. This was more like a commission or a-

MR. COOKE: That's true. It would be an outdoor commission.

MS. MCKIE: A private project. Yeah, I think really the only public art project that I've ever done is for the Cambridge Arts Council, because this came through Fidelity, and I was suggested to the landscape architect by Fidelity because they knew my work from private collections. And so at that-I mean, the public art process I've never really gone through, and even with the Cambridge Arts Council, when Hafthor [Ingvason] called me and said, "You know, there is a project that we'd like you to do a proposal for," I said, "Well, I'll tell you something, I have really never done public art, because I find the process really difficult to deal with."

I said, "And I always feel as though what the public ends up with is something extremely watered down and nothing like what the original idea might have been all about because so many people have to have a say in what gets made. And that's not the way I work, and so I don't think I'd be very good at it." I said, you know, "The way I work is to maybe give somebody three choices and let them pick one, but then it's a take-it-or-leave-it kind of proposition because"-

MR. COOKE: Right, and it's the last of your involvement, right? [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I mean, because I know it can go on forever, with a little change here, and then you get something so bad in the end, nobody's happy. And so I just was telling him that on the telephone, and he said, "Well, here's something." He said, "Would you mind doing a proposal and just saying that?" [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: This is your final offer, right?

MS. MCKIE: No, he said, "I would just like the committee to hear that." And he said, "If you would be willing to just do the proposal, you know, if you're interested in the project, and just say all those things that you just told me and tell those people how you would like to work." And I said, "Well, okay. I'd be willing to do that." And in the end, the committee liked it. They were happy to-because on the committee was, you know, someone from the Arts Council, somebody from the landscape architects, somebody from the neighborhood committee, somebody-you know, it's like somebody from public works project.

And I said, "I would-you know, if you are interested in something like what I have to offer, I would only do it if I could work with one person. I'll work with the architects or I'll work with the Arts Council, but I can't"-but I-and I said, "But I can't go to a whole bunch of meetings about it," because I knew from the very first-that there were endless meetings in which the project was being discussed.

MR. COOKE: Reviewed, tweaked, or whatever.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and it had nothing to do-you know, you'd sit there and waste the half a day because-and they might have one question for you or not even one question, and I just said, so, I'm not-you know, I can't go to meetings, because I've got a job-something else.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And so if somebody wants to go to a meeting in my place and then just give me a summary, that's-and they went for it.

MR. COOKE: So what did you propose? What was this for?

MS. MCKIE: I did three benches that are going in a little park next to the library that's connected to the Longfellow School on-is it the Longfellow? There's a little library on Cambridge Street, and they're doing a whole renovation of Cambridge Street, you know, with this new light-new lamps and wider sidewalks and more trees, but-and then they're-the only green space on all of Cambridge Street is this one little park.

Actually, it was fun because I met with the architects, and they wanted to know how I would design the park if I could. You know, like what I-and I had all kinds of my opinions about what I would do if I could, based on beautiful parks in Paris. You know? And like, oh, I said, what I love about walking in a park in Paris is you're walking on this beautiful, crunchy, white sand, not a brick sidewalk, and you can-you know, you can hear people walking.

MR. COOKE: The sound of walking, right.

MS. MCKIE: And there are lots of trees and these things that need shade and little comfortable places to sit and-I don't know, they accommodated, and instead of having a reliable fence around the outside, you know, that-

MR. COOKE: A chain-link fence.

MS. MCKIE: -there has to be a fence, kind of a wooden-not a farm fence, but something that doesn't feel so much like the city. It makes you feel like you're in a green space.

MR. COOKE: It's a little warmer.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and so they really wanted that kind of input, so it turned out to be a really, really fun thing without it taking over your life for six months.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And I got to do what I wanted to do. And actually, I made these benches, which they wanted three benches, but the budget was so small and couldn't see this is what's going in there. This is the reason I made this model, because-oh, this is totally off the subject, but I could do it in bronze, but I couldn't do three different benches in bronze because it would have been way out of budget. So we made it so that one of the animals could be facing out in a certain location and one could be looking back in another one, which was over here, which is looking front with its tail up, and the other one's looking back-

MR. COOKE: So heads and tails kind of changing.

MS. MCKIE: So I ended up making three variations on the same bench for-instead of three different benches. And that-so that was a fun public project. Sort of unusual. It wasn't public in the normal sense, but that's the only thing that I've ever done.

MR. COOKE: Real public art.

MS. MCKIE: And I don't know why, but people do have the impression that I do a lot of public art.

MR. COOKE: I think they probably see the range of materials and think of bronze and stone as having that kind of application.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And this Garden of Peace was actually a private thing in a public place. It wasn't something that went through the public art process either, so-

MR. COOKE: One of the other things I was thinking about was the 1979 show being so instrumental for you and for the field, one would say, in general. What it did in terms of bringing a whole lot of work to the public's attention.

That was in 1979. It seems to me that the American Craft Museum had "Poetry of the Physical" in '86. That was another, sort of, large collection of lots of different media.

Were there any other moments of public awareness being increased about the field or other moments that sort of had a shot of energy to the field or that somehow had that catalyst sort of an influence?

"Poetry of the Physical" didn't seem like it-you know, it sort of got some people aware of it, but it was more of a

cosmetic sort of thing.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, I don't think it did for furniture anything like what the show at the Museum of Fine Arts that you organized did. That was a major, very well-received public introduction to handmade furniture.

MR. COOKE: So that was '89, "New American Furniture" ["New American Furniture: Second Generation Studio Furnituremakers." Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. 2000].

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I really think that was what gave furniture a real shot in the arm.

MR. COOKE: So has it been sort of these questions about whether it capped-was it the end of a certain cycle, or was it the beginning of another cycle or-probably you're too close to it to know.

MS. MCKIE: I know. I really am. And I just-I somehow don't think that way, because I get to participate. But shows are opportunities that come along, and I don't have invested what someone who plans a show has and-but I can certainly see the result of the public exposure and people saying, "Oh, I saw that show"-

MR. COOKE: So you saw the real effect of that show in terms of people's interest in your work and-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, people responding and just being more aware of the field and having it be a museum show that really garnered a lot of interest from museumgoers who really, I don't think, were aware that there was a field out there that quite so many people were participating in. They might have been-they might have heard of somebody doing furniture-

MR. COOKE: One or two.

MS. MCKIE: -or wondered what the bench that they saw at the museum was all about. But actually putting that work in a real museum context and out of the craft world-that was one of the major advantages of being in a show at the Museum of Fine Arts, which had never really done a show with contemporary furniture, even though they'd been collecting it through Jonathan for public seating. It really allowed people to see it in a new way, so I think-

MR. COOKE: So did you feel that, with your Pegasus bench, maybe some people have seen it, but not everybody, so that you sort of-

MS. MCKIE: Well, I suspect people saw it-

MR. COOKE: Not quite as visible?

MS. MCKIE: -in a different way afterwards in terms of sort of recognizing various pieces of furniture around the museum that were made by people that had been in that show.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: I mean, they might have been aware of the bench as an object in the museum, but suddenly they could see a movement that they might not have been aware of as anything other than something to sit on.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: To see as, you know, something that's happening around them, and furniture being looked at in a different way.

MR. COOKE: Pat Conway had done two books in the '80s: the *Ornamentalism* book [Patricia Conway and Robert Jensen. *Ornamentalism*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1982] at the beginning and then *Art for Everyday Life* [Patricia Conway. *Art for Everyday: The New Craft Movement*. New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1990] towards the end that-in which you were-actually you were a cover feature for the second.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: Did you get the same sort of sense that there was that kind of broadening of awareness of the field through those publications? Or-it's hard to quantify.

MS. MCKIE: I would say that those-well, see, I can say individually those books affected my career, because people saw my work in the books that might not have known about it before. And for people whose work was featured, it allowed an interested audience or a curious audience to see a field that they might not have been aware of, but-or see how things were changing in more than architecture, which is readily visible to the public because it's outside and everybody knows who's building that building.

MR. COOKE: In the public domain-yeah.

MS. MCKIE: But to see that, along with those changes in architecture, were objects that were changing, as well, that were reflecting, you know, a new era in furniture design, as well as other kinds of objects. And so, but I don't think a book can have the same effect that a museum show can have. Interested people will pick it up. People who are into it, people who know people who are doing that kind of work-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS MCKIE: -will see it, but I think when it's featured in a legitimate way in a museum, then the general public becomes aware of it, because not only is there a catalogue or a book often in conjunction with it, but also, you know, people are wandering in not expecting it and being affected by it because they weren't aware before.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: So I think it's-having a show and a book serve different purposes. Books are great for remembering and doing research if you're not already-and happening onto. But I think shows actually promote the field.

MR. COOKE: Especially this sort of material where scale and size and depth and all these things are so important parts of it-seems to me that seeing the real thing is important.

MS. MCKIE: And to see-yeah, absolutely, because furniture is very tactile. You know, other than-only because in a museum you can't touch or sit; you're removed in a slightly similar way then-but you can see the scale. Not-

MR. COOKE: So it's better than nothing.

MS MCKIE: Yeah, it's a lot better than nothing. [Laughs.] No, but really, you can sense that you want to touch something when you see it in a museum. When you see it in a book, you don't get the same kind of-nothing is the same as actually being in a room and visually see something; if you can touch it or if you can sit in it, even better. But-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -that's-you know, so those people can go sit on the benches that are in the museum.

MR. COOKE: Well, that was the idea. To get them out into the "Please Be Seated" program as well.

MS MCKIE: That's right. Yeah. So that was-

MR. COOKE: I've always been struck-it's been curious that there was so much more of a buzz in response to the "New American Furniture" than there was to "The Maker's Hand," although in some ways "The Maker's Hand" was much more of an introduction to the field, in some respects. Whereas "New American Furniture" was just, sort of, of the moment, in some ways. I was just-maybe I'm too close timewise, as well as working on it, that "The Maker's Hand" ended up not getting that same sort of feedback as "New American Furniture" did, and what that said, or whether it's too soon.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I think that-also, because the field has been around a little longer, and some of those pieces were more familiar to people than when the first show was done. People were literally seeing that work for the first time.

MR. COOKE: First time. Yeah, true.

MS. MCKIE: It had more impact than seeing-because I think a lot of the pieces were similar to ones that had been in the previous show, so it wasn't as mind-boggling.

MR. COOKE: As bold. And it was their earlier stuff that ended up getting people's attention in some ways. So that it is Mary Gregory or Wharton Esherick, or something like that, that get people to go see it for the first time.

MS. MCKIE: Well, that's what was really interesting about the second show, was being able to see that work in-being able to see the progression of work. It was more educational-it was more of a look at where the other work came from, what it was influenced by.

MR. COOKE: Where we come from. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Whereas the first was sort of the shock of the new. And I also think seeing it in the context of objects from the museum that-

MR. COOKE: The inspirational objects, too. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I think that also was a new idea that caught people's interest, too. And you know, were always interesting, because people always wonder, where'd you get your ideas?

MR. COOKE: Right. Exactly. Sort of-it's a handle. It's a hook into the whole subject, in some ways.

MS. MCKIE: That's right. Yeah. Whereas the other was more of a survey and more of what people might expect to find in the museum. The first show was a real first look at-you know-I think people saw that furniture-contemporary furniture-for the first time.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. That's true.

MS. MCKIE: And then became aware of it because it also-galleries had started showing it, and other smaller museums, like Fuller [Fuller Museum of Craft, Brockton, MA], started collecting them-

MR. COOKE: So what is your prognosis now in terms of-

MS. MCKIE: The future?

MR. COOKE: Well, not even the future, but thinking about museums and galleries. Because it seems like there have been some fluctuations. The galleries-the Fuller's collecting, sort of, New England work at the same time that the American Craft Museum had reinvented itself as the Museum of Arts and Design and-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: And sort of-what your sense, whether as an outsider-somebody in the field, but not necessarily in the museum field-how you observe some of that, as well as thinking about galleries. Because it seems like there's a constant sort of struggle for some of the galleries.

MS. MCKIE: What I'll respond with first to is-ever since I got my first issue of *American Craft* magazine, I've subscribed and continue to get it. And now when I open it, I know the work is way more sophisticated than what I used to see. And people have really experimented, but I feel like it's a different-it's not craft anymore. It's something else. I don't know what-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: What to call it, you know? Which is probably why a museum like the American Craft Museum renames itself, because even though-the line between what makes something art and what makes something craft is getting trickier to define. And people who consider themselves craftsmen are maybe people who-at some point in time people will say, that's not craft, that's art.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And-or vice versa. So I see craft moving away from craft, which kind of saddens me, because I love that. I love the idea that you can make a useful object beautiful. For me, that's the ultimate challenge. That's why I prefer making furniture to making sculpture.

MR. COOKE: Sculpture.

MS. MCKIE: But I see that as a trend, and that's what I see happening to the Museum of Art and Design now, is orienting itself towards this next step. Then, I think, craft invents itself all over again in some way. And what I think is in store for the future in some funny way, because it's almost impossible for a young person to be able to get out of school and do what we have gradually been able to do over time, market our-

MR. COOKE: Right. Build up a career.

MS. MCKIE: -build a market for our work. Now there aren't-I mean, the craft galleries that exist already have a roster of-

MR. COOKE: A mature stable.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, a stable. So they aren't looking-they can't support new people unless something that just grabs them comes along; it's not as if they can continue to take on new artists and be able to support their work. It just doesn't work. And so-and because a lot of craft galleries are closing down now, instead of new ones opening-and for a while they-[phone ringing in background]-that's all right. I'll just let it ring.

I see the craft world as we know it dying a natural death. And I see the decorativeness in furniture as being like any movement in the fashion industry, which it is part of-as having a 30-year life span. I don't think-you know, there's not a movement that lasts much longer than that. So I think it's at the point now of reinventing itself. And that's for students to do, who are coming out of school.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: And it will probably happen in computerized ways, because that's the new technology and that's what students are good at. And probably through industry first, too, because I also see-you know, we had Art Deco, and then we moved into the Bauhaus in reaction to that, and then we moved into ornamentalism in reaction to less is more, and now, you know, it's like enough already. We don't need any more decoration.

MR. COOKE: Right. Supersaturated, right?

MS. MCKIE: Yes, it's like too much now. It's like, this is almost too much, and nothing compared to-

MR. COOKE: To some of the other things that are out there. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: -that are out there. And so I see it's a natural progression and a natural shift, and I can't predict exactly how that will affect furniture; maybe through industrial digital methods, ornament will stay there. But I don't know whether people will continue to be interested in that. It's just-it's had it's time. It's had its day in the light.

MR. COOKE: Well, in this current guise, yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: And whether the galleries end up being replaced by the web and-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Yeah, I don't know.

MR. COOKE: And it's-there could be a lot of interesting transitions here. And how to prepare people who are going into the field for the first time.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And I think that's got to be a difficult thing for people teaching now because, you know, the way furniture is taught has to shift and change, too. And the way students want to do it is inevitably going shift and change. And so that's where I think you would see changes happening, and if I were teaching, I might even see it already starting to take shape in certain ways. I don't know.

MR. COOKE: Well, certainly what Rosanne's doing at RISD in terms of trying to think of it-have people think about industry and thinking about furniture in sort of a very open-ended way-certainly is one tactic that's going on right now.

MS. MCKIE: Right. Yeah. And I think it's necessary and smart because, I think, you know, it gives kids more options and that-

MR. COOKE: Yeah, I oftentimes think of that in terms of my own students, that it's actually preparing today's students for multiple careers, in some respects, without knowing, that there is an exact track that everyone will be going out into. But it's actually, how do you set yourself up for taking advantage of changing circumstances on a constant basis almost?

MS. MCKIE: And when you think about it, how many people end up actually pursuing what it was that they studied in school in-

MR. COOKE: Where they started.

MS. MCKIE: I'm one case in point, but it's all the time. I used to remember thinking, well, you know, pick what your interested in now, but that's not necessarily what your going to end up doing.

MR. COOKE: It's all means.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And so I think whatever kids get in school is useful and can be directed toward what they decide to do, but it's not necessarily going to be done the way they thought they were going to do it when they decided to take it-I mean, to pick it as an option.

MR. COOKE: One other question-a more specific one that I'd be just curious with your response. I always, sort of, break down furniture in a couple of different categories-seating and storage and tables, and then maybe more,

sort of, sculptural objects. And you seem to be equally at home in all four. There're oftentimes people who favor seating, that somehow they grab onto chairs and sofas and things like that, and somehow are never able to translate the success they've had in that type-that genre of furniture-into another one. But you seem to be equally at home and interested in all the different types.

MS. MCKIE: Well, it's probably because I'm always looking for something different to do. I would get bored if I just made tables-and I love making glass-top tables because you can do anything under a glass-top table-but then I'm afraid they're all going to start looking alike somehow. And so if I want to keep myself interested-

MR. COOKE: So you do a run of tables and then turn?

MS. MCKIE: -then I'd change my mind. I don't really do a run of tables. I actually-I don't do a run of tables. I hadn't done glass-top tables for a while, so I ended up doing more glass-top tables for this show. I don't think I had any in my last show, unless it was an old one from a previous show. But I always think that, you know, if I'm going to do shows, I also would like to have a variety of different kinds and sizes and shapes and objects. I don't want to have everything look alike. It makes it more interesting for me.

I love the work that Eric Byers did in the show, but there was a little bit of a sameness about the surface treatment that I thought made it less interesting than if it-I mean, I'm sure it was sort of fun to just really concentrate on the shapes and the different ornaments.

MR. COOKE: And the patterning, right?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. But see, I think I would've had a hard time, because I would've felt like, wait a minute, this is all going to be sitting in the same room. I'd like to, you know, have some color in the room, because maybe I think about the room, too. I think about what would make an interesting show instead of only just what would be fun to make in a series. So I actually have these-but I do make more than one of the same format-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -and do it in different ways. But I would-I still have two tall cabinets and I-there were six in all, and I put two in a show at Pritam & Eames and two in a show at NAGA, but if I'd have done four, it would've been too much of the same-even if they were all different on the surface, it would be too many of the same object in a way. I don't know; I like more variety, you know? It makes it more fun. And besides, I would've gotten bored myself. See, that's the other problem. I can't do the same activity for too long-

MR. COOKE: Repetitive activity syndrome. [Laughs.] Right.

MS. MCKIE: -for too many months in a row.

MR. COOKE: I think it shows that there's always a freshness to what you do as you shift between these different genres of furniture.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, see now, maybe if I taught, then I would come to work and it would feel fresh. But if I'm coming in here every day-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -then if I'm going to be making the stuff continue to be fun, I would be doing-trying different things.

MR. COOKE: You're not a teacher, but yet I'd imagine that there are a fair number of people who come into your studio to see you and Mitch and John who are asking for advice in terms of, you know, "I'm interested in this field; what do I do?" What's your current bit of advice, as somebody who benefited from appearing in a cooperative shop around 1970, and sort of getting some support in what you're interested in? Do you offer encouragement to people trying to break into the field now?

MS. MCKIE: Well, certainly encourage them to do it. I don't know as I have any kind of foolproof advice that I can give to anybody, because it always depends on how committed somebody is anyway and what their motivation for coming in is, and whether they were sent by their parents or came on their own. Whatever the reasons are. And actually, I love to have students come in here. I don't know about love, but I really think it's one way I can teach, is to have people bring groups of students through here, because this is real hands-on-this is they are seeing. It's not, you know-

MR. COOKE: It's the practicum.

MS. MCKIE: -seeing that I've finished, everything all, sort of, cleaned up and finished. And I think if kids come in here, they'll actually see what the shop looks like, what it takes to set one up, what is needed, how you can

make one work by having-by-you know, I always explain to them how this shop is set up so that-having come from a cooperative, we set it up so that there would be enough people working here that the machines would be used to capacity and that would be practical, and there's a lot of exchange. And people learn from each other and they get information from each other and they learn where you can get things-

MR. COOKE: Supplies.

MS. MCKIE: -from each other. All that stuff which is-and it's the one way that you can end up with a lot of space for less expense than you would if you tried to set up your own shop. So, you know, if a group of students could do that when they get out and work-I mean, I think this is an ideal place to work for all those reasons, and so I like to take them around the shop first so they can see the setup.

And then, since a lot of people in here work very differently from the way John and Mitch and I work, I can sort of do a little stop and say, you know, "This shop encompasses all different kinds and ways of working." So-which is one of the reasons it works and one of the things I really like about it, and feel like it would be much harder to work-actually harder to work with a bunch of students that you went to school with who all ended up at the same place, who are all trying to do the same thing, and have the same audience, and be in the same shows. This works, in a way, because some people have no interest in that whatsoever; other people have a little bit of interest and-

MR. COOKE: Some people are doing built-in; some people are doing reproductions.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, some people are doing, you know, Hanna's doing something which is sort of moving more towards something more sculptural, and John is more interested in really working-doing commissions and working in people's houses, and maybe Mitch and I are the only two working in the most similar way, like making things and doing gallery shows, but Mitch does more public art. And there's-there just is a variety, and I like that better than a group of people who are all so much alike.

MR. COOKE: And that was one of the things that really became possible as you moved from Emily Street in 1990 as, sort of, protracted negotiations over that lease.

MS MCKIE: Yeah. Right.

MR. COOKE: And that was a smaller area; it was more central in some respects to what was going on in Boston, but yet moving out here to Medford in 1990 just gave you a whole different-it seems like there's more space, there's more diversity of people. It is part of a larger endeavor.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. Partly because we've had the Emily Street experience, we knew what we wanted and what we didn't want in a way, in terms of, you know, a community that would work or not work. And one thing that got really cumbersome was having 15 or 16 people trying to make decisions-you know, really important decisions. And we are just four people, who set up the shop, and here we sublet, but we made the shop big enough so that it could be-have a communal feel, and yet the four of us are basically the landlord.

MR. COOKE: Right. You don't have your weekend retreats to go talk about feelings and-[laughs].

MS. MCKIE: No. No. Actually it's gotten a lot simpler. But it still is nice because-and one of the things that I always tell people is the best thing about this shop which we did was to build a lunchroom communal area that people could gather in and eat together, and get away from their work and have some quiet if they wanted to-

MR. COOKE: Or social practice if they want.

MS. MCKIE: -read the paper or talk to each other, and, you know, have a refrigerator. So that there's-so there's a little communal area that's conducive to everybody being friendly with each other. Because even in the other shop, which was a real commune, there was the front of the shop, there was the back of the shop, there was New Hamburger, there was-you know, there was sort of factions within the shop. You have people who worked in different ways or got along better than other people. And actually there's much less of that in this shop. And we were able to, sort of, design it-because it was a big empty space-so that the machinery-we would close the machine and the noise off from people's private workspace-

MR. COOKE: From benches, yeah.

MS. MCKIE: So it works more on a practical level that way. But it is the numbers, also, that make it-with the number of people here all sharing everything. That makes it work.

I think that's off track from your question, but that is one thing that people are curious about and come here to see, because they've heard that this is a shop that-

MR. COOKE: And it's successful.

MS. MCKIE: -works. Yeah.

MR. COOKE: Yeah. No, I mean, I see it down in Providence. I see it in lots of different places, where this model has served a purpose.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And everybody, no matter what, because it's a community, everybody has a job that they do that keeps the shop running and so not one person has to fix every machine or sweep the entire shop, or clean the kitchen and sweep the shop and fix the machine-you know, it's all divided, so that makes it work, too.

MR. COOKE: The governance works.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And it's amazing that we don't have to have-we rarely have a meeting. I mean, it just runs itself here. It just-

MR. COOKE: Even when new people come in, or do you have-is that when you have to have a meeting of some sort?

MS. MCKIE: No, even when new people come in. It's now-you know, it's kind of obvious. Often the new people are people who were in here working for somebody.

MR. COOKE: They've got some experience?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. It's almost rare. And we've also, from experience, kind of figured out what's more likely to work and, you know, if we interview people or people come in, we almost have a sixth sense now about who will work and who won't, and for what reasons. And the biggest concern is usually that people respect each other's space, you know, that the kind of person who spreads out and tries to take up common space doesn't work-

MR. COOKE: Doesn't last long.

MS. MCKIE: -in a space like this. Yeah. So-

MR. COOKE: Do you constantly look for-trying to get younger people, as well, so that there's-it's one of those things that I keep thinking about, the graying of the field in some respects.

MS. MCKIE: No, we have talked about that, yeah. We aren't always lucky to have a perfect age person, but, no, we have-the two newest members of the shop are the youngest. And they just happened in here. One worked for John for a while. But anyway, yeah they-

MR. COOKE: There's hope with replication.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, yeah-

MR. COOKE: Get the experiences to be passed along.

MS. MCKIE: But I see how hard it is for them to be able to do their own work, too-

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: -in this, and think it's going to work. And I have a hard time giving them advice because I don't-I see that I can't tell them something that's any sort of guarantee, or-

MR. COOKE: Foolproof way, or "Follow these steps" and, yeah.

MS. MCKIE: -that it will necessarily work. Yeah. Because everything is shifting now, and I sort of see that the field as I know it, or knew it, changing so rapidly that, you know, it's hard to be really optimistic.

MR. COOKE: Hard to be-anticipate. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I can't-

MR. COOKE: Maybe one other question that-have you felt comfortable in terms of being sort of lumped in with furniture makers? Sort of as a category?

MS. MCKIE: Well, yeah. Absolutely. That is what I am. I love furniture makers.

MR. COOKE: It's always the semantics.

MS. MCKIE: I think the way I've presented myself is to separate myself from furniture makers today somehow, in this interview. But that's not how I feel. I feel like I am a furniture maker, and my work-this is the world-this is my world. And furniture-we are one kind of happy family, and actually unusually so, because I think in the art world to have people who are all on the same field really enjoying each other's company and looking forward to being together is unusual, and many people have commented on that.

MR. COOKE: Right. I mean, I was just asking, I wasn't being adversarial in terms of your definition. Semantics have oftentimes been of interest to me, as well. And I found for a while there when people used the term "woodworker," you know, that sort of spoke of a particular moment in time in some respects. And I would always hear "craftsman," and I always thought "furniture maker" was one of these things that was nondenominational-[laughs]-in some respects.

MS. MCKIE: Well, I did call myself a "woodworker" up until I started using a lot of other materials. And now I call myself a "furniture maker."

MR. COOKE: It just seems to me it's the more open-ended term. And one that-there might be a few people who sort of shudder at-"but I'm something else." But it seems to me that somehow that "furniture maker" is actually a very comfortable term.

MS. MCKIE: Absolutely.

MR. COOKE: It encompasses a lot of people.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah, and it is a perfect description of what I do. [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: Everything is a table, a chair, a cabinet, or-

MR. COOKE: A sconce or-

MS. MCKIE: Exactly.

MR. COOKE: It all relates in one way or the other.

MS. MCKIE: Every once in a while I think, gosh, I wish it didn't have to be furniture, because then I could make the tail stick straight up in that direction where it's not going to support anything. But, you know. [Laughs.]

MR. COOKE: You can still try it-[laughs]-as long as it's supported somewhere else.

MS. MCKIE : That's what I really chose and wanted. And I really wanted to separate myself from the art world, because I didn't feel like I thought like an artist. I'm a very practical thinker.

MR. COOKE: It's a discussion I had a lot with Garry, too, is that I felt like "artist" wasn't a term. I mean, there are some people who might have wanted to have that term, but it seemed to me that there was something else going on here that, you know, it wasn't just the new art or something like that, but it was actually furniture, and it was really sort of bringing people together.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And I'm curious because I wonder how the people getting out of school want to view themselves, whether they see the idea of furniture as being limiting-

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: -rather than kind of freeing.

MR. COOKE: Right. I think it does take different types of people. Some people think it's pejorative or restrictive to be mere furniture. I want to be a "designer." That seems to be the way some people are going now, whereas in many respects I think there is a comfort level with many who have been successful, as well as people who are just coming out. I think "furniture maker"-it's fine by me, because it doesn't lock you in to a certain thing.

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. And it's the whole art versus craft-

MR. COOKE: Conundrum. Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: -conversation, you know, all over again, which gets just a little worn out after a while.

MR. COOKE: It's much better to just go ahead and make stuff.

MS. MCKIE: But it's an interesting time for this field because I think it's a time when it switches-

MR. COOKE: Do you think we are-time-

MS. MCKIE: I think we are right on the edge of-people who have established themselves as furniture makers will probably have a market place, but I think it's going to be something that's very hard for young furniture makers to break into, in that they're going to want a new way of being able to do their work, and because the field for furniture makers like ourselves is drying up. I mean, the possibilities of being able to show it and sell it. So I'm just very curious to know what's coming next.

MR. COOKE: People are always asking, "Can you anticipate the future?" I haven't a clue. [Laughs.] You said you have a sense that things could be in transition or in flux right now, but who knows?

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I just don't think our economy is going to be able to support-we've been in some very good times, and I think, depending on what happens, the war-it's going to change how people live their lives.

MR. COOKE: How they consume or spend. Right.

MS. MCKIE: How they spend their money, or don't spend their money. But I think even before that-obviously the economy affects this business and the way we do it, but I don't think that the war-

MR. COOKE: Might be as direct to-

MS. MCKIE: Yeah. I think it's really that-I feel more that this field is kind of at the end of an era, because that's a natural time span. I don't think a furniture style can last indefinitely.

MR. COOKE: Right.

MS. MCKIE: And I feel like if I had started-if I had been doing the work I was doing 10 years earlier, I wouldn't have been able to break into the field, because there wasn't a market for it then, because people weren't interested in it. So, you know, that's going to happen at the other end if things change.

MR. COOKE: Yeah.

MS. MCKIE: So I will certainly be affected by that too.

MR. COOKE: See what happens. [Laughs.]

MS. MCKIE: Yeah.

MR. COOKE: Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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