Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Lia Cook, 2006 August 22-29

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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 Lia Cook on August 22 and 29, 2006. The interview took place at the artist's studio in Berkeley, California, and was conducted by Suzanne Baizerman 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.

Lia Cook and Suzanne Baizerman 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. Bracketed text was inlcuded post-interview.

Interview

SUZANNE BAIZERMAN: This is Suzanne Baizerman interviewing Lia Cook at the artist's studio in Berkeley, California, on August 22, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Well, I think we'll start here with this question about when and where you were born, maybe a little bit on your family and what role they might have played in your development.

LIA COOK: I was born [in 1942,] in Ventura, California, southern California, although my family basically came from the San Francisco Bay Area - longtime Californians. My father was born in the United States, but his whole family came from Italy and settled in Richmond. My mother's family were pioneers that came to California. And my mother's father was a professor at UC [University of California,] Berkeley in Botany. So most of my life I lived in either Berkeley, Orinda, or on the peninsula in Menlo Park.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Do you have a strong sense of being a Californian?

MS. COOK: Yes. My early childhood in Ventura, we lived near the beach. And that's a very important part of my background because my mother loved to take us to the beach every single day, and we played on the beach. So that was my early memories of just a great deal of freedom to play and do what I wanted on the beach. My parents liked to camp, and we went on camping trips all through growing up, in the mountains. California is a wonderful place to do that.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Kind of experiencing the -

MS. COOK: The outdoors and adventure and fishing and swimming. And so I think the outdoors had a big influence on me when I was young.

MS. BAIZERMAN: What about your parents and your grandparents? Were there any of them in particular that you feel influenced your choice of career or your approach to life?

MS. COOK: I think my mother was a big influence on my approach to life. She, as a child, had been sort of fussed over, and she really didn't want us to be fussed over, but she wanted us to kind of grow up the way we would naturally be, which I now, as an adult, really appreciate her hands-off, basically, approach to child-rearing - [laughs] - not that she wasn't involved, but, you know, she sort of let us be our own person, and I think that was really important.

She majored in art in college, so she did have an artistic appreciation. Although she didn't really do art herself, she certainly encouraged that direction for all of us.

I think my parents came from really different backgrounds. My mother was a college professor's daughter, and my father came from an immigrant Italian family and he didn't have a college education. But they were very much of a team, and so it was a very positive family experience for me. But I think that I got something from both of them.

And my father was very creative and inventive, and he worked himself into an engineering position where he did inventions, basically, in the Silicon Valley electronic industry, inventing new kinds of electronic tubes at that time. And he always - he took certain risks, so I kind of - I think from him I got that, you know, to sort of go for what you want and not be worried about being too safe - staying in one job all my life.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And believing you can actually do it.

MS. COOK: Right. Right.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Even though you may not have the experience or something.

MS. COOK: So, I mean, both my parents were creative people, not in the conventional sense, but creative in their outlook, and inventive. And I think that they encouraged that. Although, as a woman - [laughs] - my dad wanted me to learn to type, so I could make a living. Consequently, I never learned to type. [Laughs.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: And this was the 1950s.

MS. COOK: Exactly. So he had, you know, some Italian, old school ideas about women, which, of course, I rebelled against. [Laughs.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: What about your mom? Did she hold the same values?

MS. COOK: Well, she tried to play the traditional wife that you did in the '50s. But she had been - before she got married, before the war, in the '30s she was probably adventurous, and she did encourage - and again, I have to thank my mother. My friends' parents were trying to get them married as soon as they got to college, whereas my mother was encouraging me to go out and do something interesting. Maybe you don't want to get married right away. Maybe you want to do other things. So although she became a traditional mother in the '50s sense, I think she encouraged us to be - me and my sisters - to be more independent, particularly me.

MS. BAIZERMAN: How many siblings did you have?

MS. COOK: I had two younger sisters and an older brother. And, you know, concentration was on the older brother in terms of, sort, of the "Italian influence." Although, you know, they took him to art classes, and so forth, so he was also encouraged to develop himself.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Fully.

MS. COOK: Fully, yeah. As I said, in retrospect, I really value my family background. I think it helped a lot.

MS. BAIZERMAN: It sounds like it. Well, at that age, when you were a little kid, or in high school, what did you think you'd be when you grew up? Everybody talks about that.

MS. COOK: I knew that I wanted to do something creative. It wasn't art, particularly. We had sort of categories in the family. My brother was considered the artist and writer, so even though I did a lot of art and took a lot of art all through - I never thought of it as a career. And I wanted to sing and dance, but I was not - [laughs] - it was not my thing. I couldn't do well at that, so I settled on the theater, and I was very, very involved in the theater all through high school, as an actress.

And I wanted to act on the stage in community theater. And when I go into something, I usually go in a very obsessed way, so I saw every play in San Francisco. I used to take the Greyhound bus and see all the plays and get signatures. And then I went to San Francisco State [University], a summer school program for high school students, and then I went there to study theater.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Let's explore a little bit how you got from theater to weaving -

MS. COOK: To art.

MS. BAIZERMAN: - to fiber art?

MS. COOK: Okay, so once I got to college, I found that - again, I always took art. I was always taking art along with my theater, but I became very interested and excited about philosophy, more academic subjects. I had an exciting professor from UC Berkeley. And I didn't particularly like the theater life - well, I was young, inexperienced - and the theater life just started not to appeal to me.

And so I made a very, kind of, abrupt switch. I decided to go to UC Berkeley because I was interested in political philosophy, and I went to Berkeley and I majored in political science - a huge change. But it really allowed me to pursue some of my other interests. As I said, I was interested in political philosophy; I also was interested in the politics and government of other countries. So I studied South America and Africa and Central America, and took a broad range of courses. And at Berkeley at that time, majors were pretty tight, but I found a professor who allowed me to take what I wanted, and so I was able to put together something. And I thought perhaps I would go into the Foreign Service - that was the idea.

Again, I took painting. I didn't take weaving, even though there was weaving there. I took painting and drawing and some of the more traditional art forms.

MS. BAIZERMAN: You've talked a lot about art classes. Did this just seem like part of your life?

MS. COOK: Yeah.

MS. BAIZERMAN: - not so much that you wanted to learn how to do X, Y, or Z, but that you had to keep your -

MS. COOK: I think it was part of my life, and I did draw at home, and I did watercolor at home. So it was odd, because I had this whole education in art, but I never thought of it as a career. It just didn't dawn on me that one could have a career in art. It was really -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Well, it was very limited, then. There was teaching available, like teaching art at school, but the idea of just going off and setting up a studio and becoming an artist, for most of us growing up in that era, it didn't make sense somehow.

MS. COOK: Yes. And I think that once I - there's a whole other area of interest that I had, which was this outdoor interest that I had from my family life and I got involved in at college, too. Climbing and caving and hiking and backpacking, and so when I - in my last two years of college, I worked at a ski resort in the Sierras and commuted every weekend and skied and then came back and did my course work, and the climbers that I knew also taught at the ski resorts. So soon as I finished college, I went off to be a ski bum. [Laughs.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: No kidding?

MS. COOK: So I went to Aspen and lived there, and then I lived in the Valley. I worked in the Valley - Yosemite Valley - and rock climbed and knew the rock climbers and I thought they were quite adventurous. And so I really liked the idea of being around the rock climbers, doing some myself, but it was a way of kind of being able to travel, as a woman, around the country independently and feel safe, basically. I mean, you could camp with climbers and - it was before the time when everybody sort of went on the road. So I did that. I liked to say, when I graduated from college, that when people asked me what I wanted to do, I said I want to be a waitress because I had never done that. [They laugh.] And I also had an idea that I wanted try every kind of job that there was.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes. I think - in part, do you think that reflected the era?

MS. COOK: The times, yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes.

MS. COOK: Sort of rejecting the traditional trajectory of going to college, getting a job, teaching job, and this way I could have the education, stick my nose up at it, and do what I wanted.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes. Right.

MS. COOK: But I eventually decided I needed a job - [laughs] - and then I went back to college, yet again, taking art, but getting a teaching credential. And I taught grade school for - well, a total of four years, but I taught it one year and, again, as I said, I was continuing with my art. I hadn't yet learned to weave. But then I got married. We lived together for a year, then married, and my husband was in grad school, in art, at Berkeley. And we went to Sweden for a year to study abroad, and this was obviously very influential, too, because when I went there, I had the idea that I wanted to learn to weave.

And I believe that - I guess to backtrack a little bit, when I also did the ski bumming, I also traveled to Mexico on my own, with my backpack, and traveled all around. And there I experienced weaving. I saw weaving, and I think that was the crucial thing that made me decide. I bought a lot of textiles and ceramics and carried them back on the bus. I went way down to southern Mexico, where the Lacandon Indians were, and so I saw a lot of textiles -

MS. BAIZERMAN: In Chiapas.

MS. COOK: Chiapas, yes. And I saw a lot of textiles that were made by different Mexican cultures who kept the traditions and so forth. So I think that that's where my interest in learning to weave as an art form came.

So when I went to Sweden to live for a year, then my intention was to go full-time to learn to weave. And it was a great place to go because they had all the technical knowledge that wasn't so prevalent out here in the West Coast. I mean, there was fairly simple weaving here, but I really wanted to learn, you know, intensely, of course, because every time I get involved in something, it's -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Very, very demanding craftsmanship standards. Could I just ask, was the decision to go to Sweden shaped by you, or your husband's, goals?

MS. COOK: Well, I think that, you know, because of my interest in art and outdoors and climbing, because he did that, too, it was a natural kind of mix. I think when I met him, he hadn't got his B.F.A. yet, but he applied to graduate school, and after that first year, he did a study abroad and I went. So he was at Konstfack [Konstfack

University College of Arts, Crafts, and Design], which is the state school of arts and crafts at Stockholm.

That was the official state school of arts and crafts, where he did an artist's residency in ceramics; his field was ceramics. And then I went to Handarbetets Vänner, which was more traditional - it wasn't an art school per se; it was more of a handcraft school of textiles. And so I had a great year of studying there; I got individual instruction from the head of the school, and I worked eight hours a day there. It was great. It was really great! So I got a very good education in weaving.

But also, this trip was good in terms of art because we traveled all through Europe and Russia and saw all kinds of contemporary and historical art. I got a great art history education going to all the museums. Winter of '67, '68 was the first year that Hermitage [The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg] was opened in Russia. We saw all of that. And then for contemporary art, of course, a number of galleries, Venice Biennale and documenta [documenta 4, Kassel, Germany], which I often said was a great influence on me, because documenta showed the most contemporary art being done in Europe and the United States, so it was a great education.

And so what happened to us then, after that experience, really getting an international feel for what was happening in arts and crafts, we came back to Berkeley. I taught three more years in public school. But at the same time, I started to develop my work, and I also worked with photography, and printing on fabric, and weaving, went to some summer school classes at Berkeley. I also joined a group of Berkeley graduates interested in textiles, and it was a very pivotal group. It was the time when a lot of women's groups were being formed, but this was actually a women's group focused on art and textiles. And we met once a month, and we shared exhibitions and slides of travels and -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Tell me a little bit about who was in that group.

MS. COOK: Okay. These were former graduate students from UC Berkeley, the design department headed by Ed Rossbach: Gyongy Laky and Nance O'Banion, Deborah Rappaport, and let's see - Susan Jamart. A lot of people that were influential in the early part of the textile movement. And out of that - that group met for a number of years once a month and this whole idea, which I probably will talk about later, as an influence in Berkeley of sharing as opposed to, you know, not sharing, I guess - the idea that everybody's better off if you share your ideas and your work and your sources - and so this idea of sharing was really a part of the times.

That group went on to develop into Fiberworks [Fiberworks Center for the Textile Arts], which Gyongy Laky and Nance O'Banion kind of took the lead in that, but we were all a part of it.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Maybe you should say a few words about what Fiberworks was at that time and what the concept behind it was.

MS. COOK: Well, it was really a center, you know, for all kinds of activities around the textile arts. And they had a gallery, they had workshops, they taught classes, they had incoming lecturers. It was really a center for all this activity to happen. Also there was also another group in Berkeley called Pacific Basin [School of Fiber Arts], which also had a textile center. But there was this very rich area that focused on textiles - particularly in Berkeley.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Would you want to speculate on why it happened here? What led to it? It was somewhat happening in the rest of the country, but it was very intense here.

MS. COOK: Well, I think that there was - I guess my theory about it - I mean, it wasn't only textiles; it was crafts; it was ceramics, particularly. So the ceramics and the crafts and the textiles were particularly strong here, and it grew out of, I think, catalytic personalities. I have a theory about how things like this work, you know, in science or in other fields. You have a catalytic personality to which people are drawn, and somehow, between all that mutual energy, everybody does more than they would have done individually.

So I think - you had Peter Voulkos in Berkeley, who, apparently, from what I understand now, Ed Rossbach brought to Berkeley, and you had Ed Rossbach in textiles - both of them very experimental, breaking down boundaries. So there was this attitude of breaking down boundaries - and even in the broader art world, you had the performance artists. They took the craft medium and turned it on its head. And also, attitudes of rebellion - instead of using the high art forms of painting and so forth, you would use craft materials, and the subject matter was often very rebellious.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Was this during the time of the Free Speech Movement, or a little bit later, or a little bit before?

MS. COOK: I think that it started - I'm just trying to think. Rossbach came to Berkeley in the '50s, early '50s, late '40s. He brought Voulkos there sometime - what, late '50s?

MS. BAIZERMAN: Fifties or '60s.

MS. COOK: Yeah.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Oh, it was just - I was trying to figure out where the Free Speech Movement fit in with the -

MS. COOK: And that was in the early '60s.

MS. BAIZERMAN: It was a little earlier, I think, than Fiberworks?

MS. COOK: Fiberworks was later, I think. I mean, it was in - and you would have to check these dates - but I would say it was in early '70s, possibly late '60s. I think the early '70s. And the Free Speech and stuff was in those early '60s. But the activity in art around here was certainly in the '60s, and even maybe late '50s.

I remember my ex-husband went to California College of the Arts [California College of Arts and Crafts, now California College of the Arts, Oakland] from, say, '60 to '65 - '64, or something like that. And Voulkos had been there, but they still did not allow sculptural - or it was looked down on, in a way, to do sculptural, nonfunctional ceramics. So he went to graduate school at Berkeley, where it was very free, and obviously CCAC very soon thereafter, with Viola Frey, developed in that direction.

So I would say that late '50s, early '60s, was really a time of change around here. And it coincides with Free Speech and, you know, a lot of -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Antiwar.

MS. COOK: - antiwar, a lot of the -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Women's rights -

MS. COOK: Yes. But I do think that there were these catalytic personalities here, and I think the personalities were basically Rossbach and Voulkos. And so the textile and the ceramic area was the most - it was very strong in this area, and also, then performance art, as well. A lot of new changes were happening in sculpture, Off the Pedestal and other sculpture movements, so it was really happening both in art and in the crafts.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And talk a little bit about what your work was like at this time.

MS. COOK: The early work?

MS. BAIZERMAN: Your early work. What was that like?

MS. COOK: Yes. Well, as I said, in weaving, I wanted to push the boundaries of weaving. What could I make weaving do that no one had done before? How could I push the limitations, because weaving, of course, has a lot of structure to it. I was interested in photography, and as I said, I worked with printed fabrics as well. So those sort of things came together in the early work.

I did a thesis at Berkeley, and I went to graduate school at Berkeley, then, from '70 to '73 under Ed Rossbach. And I was interested in translating ways of image-making between the printed form, the photographic form, and the woven form. And it's so interesting because you see these ideas go through all of my work. I mean, right now photography is a huge influence, but in my early work it also was an influence. And I think that the work that made the breakthrough for me was work that translated a way of doing scientific illustration using parallel lines to create the imagery, a technique which is also used in some kinds of printmaking processes on paper.

And I found a way to translate, to be able to weave that directly, structurally within the weaves, so that the imagery is imbedded in the weave. So it was just the idea of transferring usual concepts back and forth between mediums. At the same time I was doing prints, as well. But I focused on weaving, in terms of bringing it into the conversation.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Just for the record, you got your master's degree at Berkeley. Did you ever go to any of these other educational institutions, like Penland [Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC], Haystack [Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME], Arrowmont [Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN]?

MS. COOK: Yeah, I never went as a student, but I taught four different times at Haystack, beginning in - I think that fairly early on, I think I went the summer of '74 to Haystack and taught in a session on photography in the crafts. It was a fabulous session, you know, and I hauled all my photographic equipment and brown-print processing, and so forth, and we did photographic weaving. So that was the first workshop I taught. And then over the years, I taught different workshops at Haystack. And obviously, it's a valuable place to be, because you got students from all over the country who were professionals, already involved their work and very intense work environment.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So, really, you were working with people who had the basics and -

MS. COOK: Right.

MS. BAIZERMAN: - you just would help them stretch and -

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: - expand their boundaries and all that.

MS. COOK: So I think those schools are fabulous places, but I never went as a student. [Laughs.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: Well, it gives you a perspective, though, going as a teacher, I think.

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Anyway, let's just pick up here with a question on this list. Could you discuss the difference, if any, between a university-trained artist and one who has learned his or her craft outside of academia? Can you respond to that?

MS. COOK: Yes. I guess I would be considered a university-trained artist in that, essentially, I went to university first and I got my art training through a university. And so it's hard for me to actually say anything about people who didn't go through that, but one of the things that I noticed was the difference between going to an art school as opposed to a university.

So I was trained in a university and thought that was the best way to go. I was a little bit snobby about that, but I went to teach in an art college. So I remember one of the things I used to say to the students, "If you want to be an artist, don't go to art college." [Laughs.] But anyway, I've learned over the years that it's also a very valuable way of learning art, and there are people for whom the university avenue was the best - that has more in-depth academics - others for whom the art college is best. So it depends on the person; you know, it depends on what they want to do.

For me, having the education in political science and philosophy and anthropology was very helpful for my art career. And I think it - now, particularly with the interest in a much broader, cross-cultural look at art, that it really serves me well. And I think that the art colleges are also bringing in a lot more academics in a way that deal the broader culture and the context with which people are doing the art, so I think that's changing.

Then there's the whole issue of people who just learned the craft and didn't go to college at all. And I also think there's a place for that, too, but it's very - I think it's a very different experience -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Very isolated in a way.

MS. COOK: The studio craft, a person working in production, I think, could also be very satisfying, but it's a different, you know -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Choice.

MS. COOK: A different choice. Yes.

So my most rewarding educational experience was studying with Rossbach - Ed Rossbach - at Berkeley. I had never encountered a person like him. He basically did not critique work like you would normally have in an art school - heavy duty critique. It was very much on a personal basis, and his stories that he would tell, and the experiences that he would talk about in terms of, specifically, in terms of textiles, because that was his way of teaching. And you would listen and absorb these things, and then basically go out on your own and explore.

So he taught you by example how to explore and develop, how to develop your creativity, how to develop your vision and thinking, by example. It was a really interesting way of teaching art and teaching textiles. And it fit with my personality, because I never liked to be told what to do. I always said, I'm a backdoor person. If you tell me to do something, I won't do it, but I will find a way in the back door to do it - a different way to do it. So for him, you know, in a way it was like my mother, in a sense, that he basically let me alone to do what I needed to do. But at the same time, he had a great deal of influence in terms of his way of thinking about art and this way of thinking about creativity.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Do you feel like he influenced your teaching at all, or did his teaching reflect his personality or speciality?

MS. COOK: What I've come to believe is that I think that there's some things in my teaching that are reflected

from his approach. In other words, in terms of critique, I do critique, but I also want it to come from the students, and so I encourage student participation and am not one to go in and say, okay, this is good, this bad. And I think that style fits with me, too. It fits with my personality and fits with my beliefs and how you develop creatively. Not all students like that. A lot of students like you to tell them what's good and bad. I think Rossbach did influence my teaching, but I couldn't be Rossbach as a teacher. I don't teach like Rossbach. You have to teach with what you have. There are lots of ways in which I am different.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Did you feel that he recognized that you were doing something special?

MS. COOK: Yes. I think he did have opinions, so they came through. But they came through, not in a dogmatic way, but just by being around him, and the kinds of responses he would have to your work and so forth. Yes, he did have opinions. And what's interesting is that I think that my work is very different from his.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Oh, yes.

MS. COOK: You know, so here I'm influenced by someone and yet my work doesn't look like his.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And it didn't when you were a student.

MS. COOK: No.

MS. BAIZERMAN: It was totally different.

MS. COOK: Yes, to me that makes a very good teacher.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes.

MS. COOK: But it is interesting for me to think how different my work is from his, and yet he had a great deal of influence on it.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And he was the biggest influence on your work.

MS. COOK: Right.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So you never did any apprenticeship or learning in that way unless it was -

MS. COOK: No. What I did in Europe and in Sweden was to study at the school, and then I worked, for a short time, in the tapestry workshop. But no, I never did an apprenticeship.

MS. BAIZERMAN: The experience in Sweden really launched you in your work. In Mexico, too, of course -

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: - had a big influence, but has travel been part of your development as an artist in the times since those days?

MS. COOK: Yes. I think that travel is - particularly in the early part of my career. I entered the Biennial in Switzerland [Lausanne Biennale, International Biennial of Tapestry, Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne], which was the most important international venue for the textile arts. And that was a very pivotal event because I just got my degree and I was accepted into it and I made a very good piece for it and it got a lot of good attention.

But what also happened is, going there, meeting all the artists from many different countries - that's where I met Sheila Hicks, Magdalena [Abakanowicz], and Peter and Ritzi Jacobi, and those were connections that were very valuable to me. I was just thrown into this international world. It was very exciting. I traveled and stayed with different artists all over Europe. I was in the Biennale three times in the '70s, so '73, '75, '77, and I think once in the '80s - late '80s [1989]; so four times I was in that. And going back and each time meeting the artists, reconnecting with old artist friends, and then traveling, and getting an international perspective on textiles, was really great.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And, if I remember correctly, there were very few Americans who were in those biennials, at least at the early ones.

MS. COOK: Yes. There were two or three but - or maybe more - five. I'm not sure exactly. But that whole travel, which was mainly European connections and Japanese, and the connection with the Japanese. That's another travel experience. I traveled to Japan quite a number of times, and their interest in textiles in a contemporary art form was a very influential, as was the Eastern Europeans, and other Europeans. I was a juror when they

started their major international biennial. And I went three times for that, and then other times, so I was able to spend time with Japanese artists in their homes, and I think that was influential, too.

MS. BAIZERMAN: I noticed on your resume that you have been collected by museums in France and other European countries. And it seems, certainly, that you have quite an international reputation. Would you like to talk about that at all?

MS. COOK: I think that, especially in the '70s and '80s, really my reputation started in Europe from the Biennale. I was in a show at Los Angeles County Museum of Art before that, but the, sort of, major reputation started with my exhibitions in Europe.

MS. BAIZERMAN: You mean, it kind of helped your American reputation?

MS. COOK: Yes, exactly. It went the other way, you know.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So you got famous in Europe and that spilled over and -

MS. COOK: Moved back here.

MS. BAIZERMAN: - you got more attention in the United States as a result?

MS. COOK: Yes, basically. That was an interesting thing. But, like, in the '80s, I had a one-person retrospective in France that was funded by the French government. And it was big show with a catalogue, and then they purchased a piece for their collection out of that exhibition. And I had connections with Bellerive Museum [Zurich, Switzerland], and eventually they bought a piece for their collection, so that's kind of how it came about. And then the museum in Denmark, the curator of that museum was on the jury with me in Japan and purchased a piece for their museum through that.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So it was a kind of networking -

MS. COOK: Right.

MS. BAIZERMAN: - as well as an exhibition experience. You really made all these connections.

MS. COOK: Yes. And then, of course, I went back to Europe a number of different times, back to Sweden, and then, as I said, I attended most of these biennials. And, of course, every time I went to Europe, I also went to the Venice Biennale and documenta and saw what was happening, you know, in other fields and other mediums.

MS. BAIZERMAN: It sounds like your point of reference has been as an artist or as a fiber artist. You seem to have a lot of interest in what's going on in the art world, internationally, in general.

MS. COOK: Yes. Well, I think I always have those two strains. I think I'm very definitely connected to, you could call it, fiber art; you could call it weaving; you could call it textile art. I tend to call it textile art because somehow -

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A.]

- textile seems broader to me. But that's where I focused my interests.

But I'm not confined within the medium, in terms of thinking, in the kind of ideas I pursue, but I want to use that medium to express my ideas. And that's just the structure that I've given myself. Whether I paint and cut it up and weave it, you know, I bring in other mediums all the time, but I like to see the weaving as the central medium which ties things together. And I feel like there's a lot of room for experimentation and play within that structure. I'm always conscious of the way my work is being placed in the contemporary art context.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And the galleries that represent you, do they represent -

MS. COOK: A range of artists? Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: - of multiple media?

MS. COOK: Yes. I mean, my preference is to have a gallery that shows multiple media. Early on I was connected with the Allrich Gallery [San Francisco], which I think is important to mention, how important that gallery was to the whole movement.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Was that your first gallery?

MS. COOK: Yes. That was the first gallery that I had, and I believe started in the '70s with her [Louise Allrich] -

until she closed in '96. So it was a long-term relationship. And she had studied with Katherine Westphal at UC Davis - Westphal was Ed Rossbach's wife - so Allrich was particularly interested in showing textile artists, but she did show other artists, painters, and sculptors. But she had a particular love for textiles or fiber art. And she was very active in terms of selling work and putting work in museum collections. Also, as one of her major artists, she did a lot in terms of your reputation, in building an interest in the field, so that was my main gallery.

I was also with the Hadler/Rodriguez [Gallery] in New York City. They both died of AIDS during that epidemic. But they had a very important gallery in New York City, and I showed with a number of other galleries. Right now I have Perimeter [Gallery] in New York, which shows a variety of media but is interested in textiles or fiber art and in ceramics. So they show a range of work, but they're supportive of the crafts, and I like that.

[Audio break.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: This is Suzanne Baizerman interviewing Lia Cook at the artist's studio in Berkeley, California, on August 22, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Well, when we stopped recording a few minutes ago, we were talking about galleries and marketing. And maybe you could talk about your impression of how the market has changed during your career.

MS. COOK: Well - [laughs] - it depends on what market you're looking at. And the market that I'm selling my work in is basically in the fine art market, I believe, as opposed to the functional craft market.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Well, let's talk about the fine art market.

MS. COOK: Yes. And I think it's probably changed with the general art market. So I think in the '80s there was a lot of buildup of sales of artwork, and I think that I sold a lot of artwork during that time and did commissions; there were a number of commissions for buildings and so forth during that time.

It's so particular, I guess, but I think that people who buy work like mine are people that have to love the work for themselves. I don't think people buy it for speculation. You don't get the buyers that you get who are looking for the hot young painter that will eventually be an international star. Also, people who buy the work, I think, are somewhat more adventurous. They're willing to take a medium which they see as fragile or something different from the painted canvas. So that's one aspect of it.

And I think, also - I had talked about the Allrich Gallery. I think if you're selling your work through a gallery, how well your work sells has a lot to do with how that gallery owner or salesperson can communicate about the work, and about the history of the work, and all of that. I think it depends very much on the individual to develop a market, to develop an interest in the field, and to develop collectors in the field, and so forth.

And in terms of my relationships with the dealers, for the most part it's a very positive relationship with the dealers. I feel that galleries, although they take a huge portion of the price, 50 percent, well earn their money. Of all the galleries I've worked with, I can't think of any that I've had a bad relationship with. I think they're - in our culture, at least - they're a really important part of sales.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Okay. We're sitting right now in your studio, and I wondered if there's anything particular about your working environment that's important to you. Your space where you -

MS. COOK: Space. [Laughs.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes, you need considerable space.

MS. COOK: Lots of space.

MS. BAIZERMAN: There's a huge loom -

MS. COOK: There are about 10 looms. Well, I like a lot of equipment around. I'm a collector, so I need a lot of space.

MS. BAIZERMAN: One or two computers, I see.

MS. COOK: Yes. I think, for me, I like the live/work situation, where I live in the same place that I work. I think that allows for a lot of spontaneity, working in the middle of the night if I want to. It's hard because of distractions, you know, if you have your family around you, but I think the benefits of that kind of work environment, where you're so immersed in it all the time, appeals to me.

MS. BAIZERMAN: It's a big enough space so you have some very large works hanging. You could really get back from them, and see them from different distances.

MS. COOK: Right. Yes, because I work in a very large scale and then sometimes in a very small scale. I don't particularly like a decorated environment, and you can tell from my house also. So sometimes I just want everything off the walls and a white, clean space. I'm a very messy worker, but I love a white, clean space. I guess that's about my work environment.

And I also do have people help in the studio. I used to have a lot more people help me when I was doing the big commissions. I don't do very many commissions anymore; I prefer not to do them - and I like to have a limited number of assistants in the studio.

MS. BAIZERMAN: What do you tend to assign them, or how does the division of labor work?

MS. COOK: Well, I have one person that works for me, who's worked for me for 20 years, and she comes one day a week. She can weave; she can do accounting; she can do various things for me.

MS. BAIZERMAN: A jack-of-all-trades.

MS. COOK: Yes. She's a very, very competent person. And anyway, I appreciate her very much. But I'm always torn. I need more help because textiles - just backing, finishing, all these procedures take an enormous amount of labor. But at the same time, I don't want anybody in my space - [laughs] - so it has to be a very particular person, who basically can work on their own without a lot of interaction with me.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And so they sometimes will do the jobs of helping finish a piece that comes off the loom?

MS. COOK: Right.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Backing it with fabric?

MS. COOK: Yes, a lot of the finishing and a lot of the setup procedures that are involved in weaving, and also can help with the weaving as well.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So they have to be trained to your specifications?

MS. COOK: Well, or very competent weavers, yes. But I used to have somebody that worked full-time for me, and I can't support that. Well, you know, I might be able to pay them, but it wouldn't be a good situation for me. I need private time.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Right. I certainly understand that would be the case. You have your students and colleagues at the California College of the Arts, where you teach. Are there other groups that you belong to that support your development as an artist at this stage, like you had when you were back with the women from Fiberworks?

MS. COOK: Yes. I have an artist walking group, who are a group of artists, mostly in Marin County, who get together and walk and talk about art. So we've been going about 20 years, and we formed an investment club and all kinds of other activities. Anyway, we meet for exercise outdoors and for Christmas parties, and also doing activities around art together. So that's been a very satisfying experience. They are a range of artists from painters, sculptors, even musicians, so it's a broad kind of art experience, but one that's been very important to me.

And then, also, there's an international network - the kind of organizations like TSA, Textile Society of America, where you have the textile curators and historians and contemporary artists, all focused around textiles. You have European Textile Network that I have gone to - a number of conferences - European-based, but it's also focused on textiles, and textiles in a very broad sense. It could be new, innovative, commercial textiles all the way to individual craftsmen, or to contemporary artists.

MS. BAIZERMAN: But it gives you the kind of exposure to new things going on that you'd like to tune into.

MS. COOK: Well, it keeps up some of my European connections. I'm not traveling so much in Europe now or showing in Europe that much now as I was in the past, but I do keep up those connections.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Do you sense any particular trends in craft today, in fiber art, in crafts as a whole in the United States?

MS. COOK: Well, I think the whole crossover phenomena that's happening in all the arts is happening in the crafts, and is actually being promoted in the art schools. Rather than departments and compartmentalization, the schools are encouraging crossover. Of course, there's a conflict in a way, too, because in order to get deeply into a medium, you have to spend a lot of focused time. So there are advantages and disadvantages to this emphasis on crossover, or a broader, cultural look at art.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So you're more likely to have students from sculpture or from ceramics or something than you would have had 10 years ago.

MS. COOK: I would think so, yes. I think that there's more crossover now and students wanting to take something from textiles, something from film/video or something, and put together something. And the other thing is the social - the context of art-making has become much broader, so it's not just the fine arts market that students are interested in. They're interested in a range - community-based projects, performance, collaborative workings, so it's not so much that you're educating them for a broad range of uses of the textile or the craft form.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Not a linear path.

MS. COOK: Right. And there are many students that are not interested in the elite fine art market. They want to have a much broader look at art.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And you feel that this is reflected, say, in the craft magazines.

MS. COOK: I don't know about how much of that is reflected in the craft magazines. Probably, but -

MS. BAIZERMAN: It's my impression you're seeing some of that now.

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Certainly some nontraditional media sorts of things.

MS. COOK: Yes. And there's also the European craft magazine, the Textile Forum, and British and Australian magazines, too.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Are up and coming.

MS. COOK: Yes. I think craft has become a really interesting topic lately. You know, the number of people who want to study textile in art school is growing very rapidly. I think that the British and the Australians, particularly, are really interested in the dialogue about craft, in a more contemporary sense, trying to understand how craft fits in.

MS. BAIZERMAN: There's certainly more written about it.

MS. COOK: Yes, serious writing, serious discussions about it. I think it's very exciting.

MS. BAIZERMAN: What role do you think the universities play in that? Do you think they're very important, or do you think their importance is less now than it used to be or -

MS. COOK: Well, I think it's important, because I think cultural studies - I mean, things that are happening outside of the arts - there's more crossover, as well, and in a broader kind of thinking. So I don't think it's just the crafts or just the arts, but I think it's changing in the universities, as well. So it's hard to know what's propelling what but -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes, but that change is in the air. [Laughs.]

MS. COOK: Yes, and it's going to be different. I think that's the thing that you have to realize as a teacher, that it's never going to be the same. It's not going to be the naïve enthusiasm of the '60s and '70s, learning to make textiles. Yes, there's enthusiasm but it's going to be different. It's going to have a different place, and just the embracing of craft by people who come out of fine arts is interesting, too. So there's going to be a different trajectory, but I don't know what it is.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Do you have any comments on the issue of significant writers or things that you have found useful to you or -

MS. COOK: Well, I thought about that, and I really don't think there's any one or two major significant writers that I could mention. I just don't think so. I don't think there's been a great deal of criticism or historical criticism of craft, at least the kind of craft that I'm involved in. In choosing someone to write about my work, I look for some young, either artist or possibly curator - somebody who has a lot of interesting, fresh ideas, or perspectives. I try to find somebody who maybe hasn't published a lot but has, I think, some good, new perspective - I much prefer a critic or a writer, when they're writing about my work, to have their own perspective. I don't want to hear my statements restated.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Or someone who has looked at all the other articles and just kind of gives that back.

MS. COOK: Right. I like their, you know, their real perspective or some new perspectives.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes. I think there are some intelligent young voices.

MS. COOK: Sometimes it flops, too, you know, but I think, to me, I find that as interesting as having some major art critic write about the work.

MS. BAIZERMAN: What about periodicals? It's kind of the same question as writers, but do you follow some of the magazines?

MS. COOK: Not really heavily. I think that they played an important role over the years - particularly the history of crafts. American Craft Magazine, formerly Craft Horizons, I mean, obviously has been a big influence. And, you know, the major articles about my work have been in those magazines, and I think they've played a role, especially in the past.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes. You have gotten good coverage, I think.

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: I think we wanted to talk some about issues of gender as it relates to your work. You want to pick up there?

MS. COOK: Yes. I think that, well, textiles - at least in the United States or in the West - is traditionally a female occupation or craft. And I think that in terms of women and women's issues, particularly in the '80s, I was interested in embracing textiles because of that. And I think the way that I did it was, in the '80s, I did some work around what I call textile objects. So I more blatantly focused on textiles as content, and that's where my drapery work started. And so in a way, the textile itself becomes a symbol for women and women's art, and so I did these domestic objects and curtains and drapes and so forth. So that's how I approached the issue of textile as women's work. And that's also where I connected with what I would call political issues, which were much more up-front in that work. I don't think I'm so much doing that now, but at the time it was important.

And then the other issue that I wanted to say something about is the functional objects and the meaning of the work. And I think that although I don't make functional objects - I don't make blankets and things that we can use - I think that referring to functional objects in the work, referring to drapes, and referring to pockets, and fabric in that way, I was using the textile as a symbol for the functional craft object and particularly the women's functional object.

[Audio break.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: This is Suzanne Baizerman interviewing Lia Cook at the artist's studio in Berkeley, California, on August 29, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Okay. I think we're going to look at some of your work here. Why don't you explain what we're looking at and how we're going to do this?

MS. COOK: Okay. Well, what I thought I would do is start way back, is with some earlier work, to sort of show you some of the strands of ideas that have gone through my work.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Okay.

MS. COOK: They tend to repeat themselves over a period of time.

What you're looking at here [Ridge, 1978] is part of a series I call Fabric Landscapes. Fabric as subject matter and as a three-dimensional object has interested me from the very beginning, and in this case, the small piece, I used black-and-white, warp-faced plain weave. I distorted the weft to create parallel lines - basically it's a way of using a graphic parallel-line technique to create the illusion of an image. So here I have an actual fabric landscape - fabric laid over a form. At the same time, I also have an illusion that's created by the weaving itself. And what interests me is how to use the woven structure to build the parallel lines here as opposed to something that's printed or applied to the surface, so it's actually a part of the structure.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And does this have a dimension -

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: - the cloth itself has a dimension, it looks like.

MS. COOK: Yes. The cloth itself also is very dimensional because it's been cut and stuffed. So this second one

here [Landforms, 1978] is about 10 feet wide and it's in wool and it's using the same technique, which is a very, very warped-faced weaving, where you don't see the weft at all. And the weft is cut and shaped to create either thicker or thinner lines, which then creates the image. So this piece is typical of the work that I did in the mid-'70s, where I used this parallel-line technique to create the illusion of draped fabric. Or in this case, I like this one because it's landscape, so it's fabric as landscape; you would lay fabric over a landscape and it will soften it, but it also has a kind of figurative element.

So the next slide is not mine. It's a jacquard of Jacquard, and along with the technique that I developed with parallel lines, I was also looking at, in the late '70s, early '80s, at jacquard and how imagery was built by using the Jacquard loom and the punch cards. So I began some research in the '80s - early '80s, going to Europe, looking at early samples of this. I really considered it my research at that time; it really wasn't a part of my work, but eventually it would evolve into it. But it showed my interest in the constructed image, an image that was built from threads as opposed to a printed or painted kind of image.

And so then the next is a wonderful little postcard from the Victorian age [image of Joseph Jacquard, developer of the Jacquard loom; French, b. 1752, d. 1834; images of Victorian postcard depicting a jacquard weaving, jacquard cards], and there are the punched cards. This also is not my work, but it's a Japanese reproduction of a famous painting in jacquard. These are the kinds of things that I was looking at, at the time, like how image is built from the crossing of threads and how it breaks down when you get close to it [Japanese jacquard interpretation of painting by Jean-François Millet, The Reapers, 1854].

So this is a piece of work that I did in 1975 [Interweave II], and I was working with transferring a photographic image to a woven surface. And this was done by the iron-silver process, where I created a large Kodalith, or negative, of the image. And the image here is the interlacing of threads, knotted threads, again, referencing my interest in the textile as subject matter.

What I was interested in here was how the photographic image and the woven image are both made of particles, and what happens when you get closer to the image. In weaving, it breaks down into particles, and also the photographic image breaks down into particles. So I was looking at that.

And this is a slide of a three-color separation of a little fold of fabric, and on the right is a detail of a point of a pointillist painting. So just as in the black and white, in the color I was interested in how, in weaving, you could create imagery by the way that the color breaks down into particles. And so here's a piece that was done around 1980 [Two Point Four]. This series of works - I changed my technique. I started to weave what I called canvases. They had a woven dobby pattern within them. They were woven in a kind of heavy industrial rayon. After it was woven, it was put in water and it was pressed flat so that it had this sort of shiny, sensuous surface with a pattern created by the crossing of the threads.

And in this case I chose to paint every thread separately, thread by thread, using different colors in order to break down the original image and create a new image. So in here you have layers of - you have the dobby pattern that you see, and then you have the way that image is broken up by painted threads, and then it coalesces into a new image.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes. And it's so much like some of your later work on the digital Jacquard, because it's almost awesome to see this come up and how connected it is to what you are doing today.

MS. COOK: It took me about six months to do this piece because I was painting every thread separately. But in this case I was weaving completely white canvas and that the color was all applied on to the individual threads, but it was applied as a paint or as dye after the surface had been woven, so that's why I called it a canvas. Then I painted on it.

So then the next series that evolved from this was my Curtain series [Shimmer Curtain III, 1984]. These were woven of the same material, but they were painted with dyes on the loom, and the weft yarn was dyed beforehand. So all the color was put on beforehand. Then they were woven, and after that, before pressing them flat, I shifted them. And what happened with that was that it created the illusion of a three-dimensional textile object, and I called them my textile objects. So I did curtains and drapery and pockets and all kinds of different textile objects. So at that time, it was really important to me that people understood that the subject I was talking about was the textile, or the cloth, itself.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And why was that important to you?

MS. COOK: Well, I had been looking at a lot of painting. For instance, this one on the right, the portrait of Queen Genevieve there, and like a lot of painting, almost the whole surface was textile and yet it wasn't the subject matter. In the early '80s pattern painting had really come to the fore, and there was a lot interest in this idea of the textile as a subject matter, and feminist concerns.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So just like the folds in that painting, your woven cloth created the same illusion.

MS. COOK: But in mine, it's not an applied image; it's actually a part of the structure.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Right.

MS. COOK: And I have always been interested in how color can not only create image, but the way colors can break down a certain pattern and create new pattern. So even though in these textiles the weave pattern is the same all the way through, when you look at it, it's not the same, just because of how the colors in the threads interact [Through the Curtain and Up From the Sea, 1985]. And also, because of the light on these pieces, as you move past them, they change, so there is this continual kind of change that's going on within the work. As a viewer, you know, you're moving through them; the patterns are changing, so it can almost become a meditative experience if you're immersed in it.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Okay.

MS. COOK: So as part of these objects that I was making, I did a whole series based on the American crazy quilt that was an upper-middle-class quilt of the 19th century [Leonardo's Quilt, 1990]. And I had a crazy quilt that my great-grandmother made, and I remember her talking about the different fabrics within it, like my grandfather's top hat and the date and all that. So I decided to create these imitation crazy quilts.

This one here is probably a little later on in the series. This one's called Leonardo's Quilt, and it has a sense of humor about it because, again, the quilt is sort of a feminine activity, and so I liked the idea of making this Leonardo's Quilt. So in it are hand-painted images of Leonardo's drapery and Italian Renaissance patterns. They are all painted on abaca and then they're sewn together. The parts are sewn - no, not in this one, but in some of them they are sewn together.

In this one, the pieces are all woven separately. Then they're put through the washing and pressing system that I use, and then they are cut out and they are collaged together. The whole quilt, Leonardo's Quilt, has references to his drapery, drawings, plus all kinds of Italian Renaissance textile designs. That was one of my objects. These are some of the things that I was looking at, the image of the textile, cloth, in painting, such as one by Raphaelle Peale shown here, and also symbolic cloth found in the Chartres Cathedral [images of piece of the Blessed Virgin Mary's dress, a religious relic housed at Cathédral de Chartres; Raphael Peale painting, Venus Rising From the Sea, 1822].

MS. BAIZERMAN: Nice.

MS. COOK: So here's this little cloth that was supposedly a piece of Mary's dress and it's all, you know -

MS. BAIZERMAN: And it's an actual cloth.

MS. COOK: Yes. The history of it was that during the French Revolution the cloth, which was stored in the Cathedral, was taken and opened out and ripped into pieces. And this is a piece that found its way back into Chartres Cathedral. So here is your symbolic cloth.

MS. BAIZERMAN: The cloth as a relic.

MS. COOK: Yes. So these are kinds of things that I was looking at as I was making what I called my textile objects [Drapery Frieze: After Leonardo, 1992].

So this is a piece called Material Pleasures [1993], and it's an installation of six pieces. Originally it was 15 feet high and 30 feet wide and has actual drapery. This piece expressed two ideas; one was a conversation about painting, painted cloth, and textiles, installed salon style with draperies framing the paints. But it also had an idea of glimpses into a bedroom scene, where you see a hand, a leg, a foot, a drape, and so forth. A very sensual point of contact between fabric and the hand.

So each of these pieces was done in the process that I had been working with for quite a long time. And also they're all details from different paintings like the paintings by the "old masters" and "old mistresses," Leonardo da Vinci, Artemisia Gentileschi. And so I would take details from the paintings, blow them up, repaint them, paint the warp, a pattern is woven over the surface, and then they are all run through a press. So they're weavings and they're paintings, and so it's kind of a dialogue about textile and painting, the high art/low art conversation.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Remind me, now would this have been the first time you've painted images of drapery?

MS. COOK: No. The first series was called New Master Draperies. I don't have a slide of that. And I did a whole series from the old masters.

MS. BAIZERMAN: But did these relate to that?

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Those original ones?

MS. COOK: Yes, and the New Master Draperies - really this was inspired by an exhibition I saw at the Berkeley Art Museum of Leonardo da Vinci's drapery drawings, which I saw in 1984. And so I took these drawings and blew them up big and painted them and rewove them, so they became a woven, painting/weaving.

With the Material Pleasure series, I began to move toward beginning to see a connection with fabric and the body. The drapery itself I had woven in Germany, and it has got an image of drapery on it. So we have all of these layers of drapery.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So this is an installation piece.

MS. COOK: Yeah, so this is an installation piece. And there is a detail out of the drapery itself.

The next pieces are part of a series called the Point of Touch [Point of Touch: Moment, 1996]. I began to look more at the touch of fabric on the body, and particularly the hands touching the fabric. You also see reflected in the weave here a little hand that moves across the pieces. Again, I'm using the same process where now I am painting on linen with oil paints, cutting those up into strips, weaving them into a painted warp. And the painting, of course, alters the pattern within the warp, so that the image is constantly changing as we move across it. So I'm still using a lot of the same processes -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Do you feel like it's developed in a different way in this series than -

MS. COOK: Well, particularly, I like the hand image in the structure, itself, but I think, basically, the way it is developing is more the relationship of fabric to the body.

MS. BAIZERMAN: A continuation of the Material Pleasures series, really.

MS. COOK: Right, right, except that I began to focus more specifically on this point - what I call the point of contact between the fabric and the hand, so the sensual aspect of that contact point. This is another one of those pieces, which is in the collection of the Oakland Museum of California [Point of Touch: Bathsheba, 1995].

MS. BAIZERMAN: Could we stop just a second to talk about working in series, because I think as a fiber artist - I may be wrong, but you seem to have worked in series almost since the beginning. And I don't see a lot of artists doing that. I wondered, can you tell us a little bit about that?

MS. COOK: Well, I think early on, I worked with a number of different processes, so the photographic process was different from this parallel-line process, but it was all very intense, done almost at the same time. And as my work developed over time, I found that I could stay a little longer with a particular process and a particular idea and explore it more. And so I think that what you see in the '80s is that I began to take an idea and really explore it in more depth and in a more nuanced way, smaller changes, and so forth, whereas in the '70s I made very dramatic changes in the work. With the photographic pieces, I did six of them, that is all. Later I stayed with a particular process longer, making smaller changes and went more in depth with the idea.

MS. BAIZERMAN: You got more out of it.

MS. COOK: So my work always does change in terms of process, but when I find a technique or a process and a concept that works well together, I like to explore that in more depth. So that is the idea of the series.

So these are just slides of me in the studio. Just going back to the jacquard idea, over the years from my first research projects in jacquard, of course the whole technological revolution, digital revolution occurred. Instead of drawing on point paper by hand - it would take three months - you were now able to work on a computer with a computer program. But you still had to convert the point paper into punched cards in order to operate the loom. It was still in the research stage for me. It was an interesting process; I just didn't know where and how I would apply it.

But in the late '90s, I finally was able to travel to places that had hand Jacquard looms. A few years later I acquired one of my own. So this really opened up a lot of possibilities. So at this point I did also some projects where I worked in industry, and there were some projects in Europe.

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B.]

[These looms operate each thread independently. Weaving became a more spontaneous and flexible process. I

was then able to create very large-scale images.]

And I think that what happened with me is that I started working more with the body and drapery. In some of the earlier works I would take video stills of myself, and take stills out of that, such as my hand manipulating fabric, or close-ups of family portraits and faces where the color was broken down into particles. So there's a connection to some of the older work.

Here's some of the early jacquard pieces I did, and here's a show at Miami University. Here's a piece where I took portraits, or video, of myself using my hand, touching my face, and then this would evolve into a draped pile on the floor. There in the background you can see the loincloths, which were part of a former series, and here, very large-scale portrait of me as a child in black and white [Big Baby, 2000, and Presence/Absence: In the Folds, 1997].

MS. BAIZERMAN: You know, a person who's not familiar with your work might see some of these and wonder if your intent in these is self-portraiture or if it's something else.

MS. COOK: Yes. I don't think at this point the intent is self-portraiture. I mean, the work definitely became more photographic, but when I look back at the photographic work that I was doing in the '70s, to me, it really kind of connects with that. There I was doing sort of blowup of fibers and so forth, but my interests had moved from that to cloth itself. And as you can see in some of these, I am manipulating cloth, the touch of cloth. And here, although it's my face - so it gives it that sort of strong personal connection - I'm also using my hands [Hands on Spots, 1999, and Presence/Absence: Glimpses II, 1998]. I'm touching my face. So there is the idea about touch that I was working with in my earlier series, but now it's translated into different kinds of pieces -

MS. BAIZERMAN: So it's more that your face was the handy face, in a sense?

MS. COOK: Yes. But also, as I said, I evolved into working more to do with the touch - touch and the body. So, yes, I was using myself as a prop, so to speak. And then, one of the things that you could do in jacquard, which is wonderful, is you could make all these multiples. So this particular one called Hands On Spots, I'm manipulating fake fur here, of spots. And, let's see, what else here? Let's go to the next one.

MS. BAIZERMAN: What did it feel like when you actually had easier access to this technology, because your work changes quite dramatically at this point? What was your feeling as an artist as this process was going on, this change?

MS. COOK: Well, I think for me it was very exciting to be able to really use all this knowledge that I had developed over the years in terms of imagery and photography and ideas about drapery. So it was wonderful to be able to sit down and be able to create this stuff in a less tedious process. I could be more spontaneous about it. With the digital Jacquard, I could make changes right away, and it had a fluidity to it, and I was very excited about it. I did miss the very direct, hands-on part of the work where I was painting directly. Because painting was a big part of the work, either painting on the warp or painting on canvas, all of a sudden I didn't have that part of it, and I think that part may play into my work and has started to later on. But, for a while, the immediacy of this was just very, very appealing.

This piece on the right, here, is an installation piece called Handkerchiefs [2000] - yeah, what is it called? I can't remember the title. Anyway. There are 50 little handkerchiefs with the image of hands holding woven into it, and then they're draped on the wall and stacked in a pile. So, this was - it's the cloth object, it's draped, it's a real object, and yet at the same time it's got the hands.

Those hands came from a page out of an old book that I got in a flea market in France. I think etchings that were done from engravings that were done from paintings. But I really love that hand image.

And then, speaking of hands and drapes, I did a series of works - again, these come from video stills of myself manipulating different kinds of fabrics. The image of the hand is on the fabric, and then I drape the fabric. So there's this integration of the fabric object at the same time the image touching the object. I like that play back and forth [Presence/Absence: Fur, 1999]. This one with fake furs in it, and this one is called Gather [Presence/Absence: Gather, 1998]. So that's a series.

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

MS. COOK: So this, then, is some of the first color work that I did with the digital Jacquard loom [Digital Comfort: Hold, 2002, and Digital Comfort: Press, 2001]. And here, again, I'm taking these images of hands. But now it's in color, and what I do is I break up the image into small particles of color, just like that photographic image of that pointillist painting back in the '70s. And I devised a way of weaving this so that it wouldn't fall apart, so that I could break it up as much as possible. And I think that was unusual, because when you design for industry, you tried not to do this. You tried to get solid areas of color, which then could be woven and you wouldn't have any

problems. It would make consistent fabric.

But in this case, I didn't really need to do that. So I figured out a way of just breaking it all up completely. And so when you get close to these images, they dissolve into all these particles and threads. And when you get back, it coalesces into an image. And, again, what I'm using for imagery again is the hands. This one is a little out of sequence. I was looking at the history of photography, actually.

And so I was looking at how images have changed over the history of photography, and I really wanted to do some of these images that were like colorized photographs, black-and-white photographs that then were colorized. And this was in magazine prints in the '40s and so forth - you would see these black-and-white prints with the flat areas of color. Along with taking video stills of myself, I also started looking at old family photographs [Unmask: Beach Baby, 2001, and Un/mask Youth, 2001]. So I began to bring in some of that history, not so much to tell a story, but just as material to draw on. I tried working with anonymous photographs, and it didn't really seem right. So I like the idea of sort of exploring my own family photographs at hand.

This particular one does have a story. This is called The Frog Princess [2001]. And this is a Halloween costume my mother made for me. And I was totally encased in green frog, from head to foot. It was actually a very scary experience because she didn't put any holes in it anywhere - [laughs] - so it was like I couldn't see -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Could suffocate you -

MS. COOK: Yeah, it was very scary. But anyway, so I came across this photograph and I really, really liked this thing. And I also - and I started weaving really big. So everything became sort of oversized scale, and it changed the quality of the image. It made it more - sometimes more vulnerable and sometimes more powerful in terms of the impact. So anyway, that was sort of a sidestep.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Especially since the focus was on, to a large extent, children, the large-scale with the small-scale.

MS. COOK: It really makes a difference when you see them in person and interact with them.

So there are a couple of pieces done where I'm taking a childhood portrait [Anatomy of a Portrait, 2003, and Big Head Blue, 2003] - and it often is of me, but it might be of my mother or my brother - and just really cropping it down so that you see just the intense, sort of, emotional expression. And again, it's woven in this very pixilated color - particles of color - so that it dissolves when you come up close to it.

And what I liked about the dissolving is that it makes you look at the threads. It makes you look at the texture so you can no longer read it as a flat, two-dimensional image, and you begin to understand that it's a textile and it's constructed, and that material quality takes over.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And that's something that you've said is important to you, that these be thought of as textiles. They can also be seen as art, but you want people to recognize the textile-ness of the materials.

MS. COOK: Exactly. Yes. I don't mind, at a distance, if they don't know that, but I don't want the experience of them to be totally without that. I want that. So I think it does - the way these images are constructed does draw you in to look at the detail.

I took a portrait and I would dissect it. This one is Little Big Head [Big Head Blue, 2003]. It's a portrait of my brother as a child. But in it - then I have Anatomy of a Portrait [2003], the piece next to it, where I've taken sections of the portrait, blown them up, zoomed in, zoomed out - even woven them, photographed them, and rewoven them. So you have all these layers of it. I did a number of pieces related to the idea of anatomy of a portrait.

Some of the other works are very large scale. This one is - they run from 14 to 20 feet high. And again, the experience of these in person is oversized, and yet it's a child of maybe two, maybe one and a half - it's just a very startling kind of experience. And I think, again, there's some kind of sensuality about the image being this obvious textile. So I'm trying to isolate certain emotions, or certain experiences - a certain kind of rawness.

These are more photographs in that realm. [Traces: Wonder, 2002; Traces: Fracture, 2001; Voices, 2003; Half Seen, 2003.] This one is taken from the video stills of myself and broken up. So these are more of the childhood portraits - playing with how real do I want them? How much do I want of them - how mysterious and how can I bring people into the emotions?

MS. BAIZERMAN: So maybe in this work, more than some of the earlier things we've been looking at, that the aspect of emotion is even more palpable.

MS. COOK: Yes. And I think that by cropping out all the extraneous information - again, they don't tell a story,

but people tend to bring their stories to them. The absence of the detail, of the context of the images, allows people to bring their own emotions and experiences to them, I've found. It allows people to tap into childhood feelings. And so it may bring up your own memories of things, or it might be just in a physical, sensual way. Just like how aware you are when you're young of sensual aspects - before we've intellectualized everything.

I particularly like some of these that are taken at the beach. We lived two blocks from the ocean in southern California. So we just played at the beach every day. It always has this incredible feel. So even one of these earlier pictures was of the beach, called Beach Baby [Unmask: Beach Baby, 2001]. So even though there are stories, I like to keep my stories to myself and let other people bring their own experiences to the work.

So these are more in that series. This one [Sons and Daughters, 2006] is one of the latest things that I finished. This is a commission I did for the federal government in Pittsburgh. I chose four separate children from a variety of different backgrounds and did close-ups of them, and they're in this courthouse in the central area where all the courts open out, and you're confronted by all these kids.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And it's a very large-scale piece.

MS. COOK: Yeah. I mean at eight feet high, they're not that big, but 15 feet wide. But because they're close-ups - or of just basically the head - they really are confrontive in the space, which I really like. I really like the idea, so that you think about these kids.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And they're in a courthouse, you said?

MS. COOK: Yeah. It's a federal courthouse in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Hmm.

MS. COOK: This is a work I did on commission for the federal government. And I had done a number of commissioned works - very large ones - especially in the '70s and early '80s. I don't do a lot of commission work now. I prefer to just do my own thing.

So then the work you're going to see now is a little change, because I've gone back to working in black and white. Still working with this idea of the close-up of the face, which breaks down as you get close to it.

What I liked about it is - well, this is a part of the series Anatomy of a Portrait, only in black and white. But if you look up close, here, you can see - instead of having the image break down into particles of color, which you can't see structure, in this case you begin to see the pattern and the structure. So that became really important to me that when the image starts dissolving, you begin to see the threads crossing and how - you begin to understand how this image might be put together.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And it also brings you to a different level of enjoyment. Because the texture itself - the pattern that's formed by these - that's also an element of pleasure.

MS. COOK: Exactly. And you could get lost in it because it doesn't repeat anywhere. It's like maps and tracks and just getting lost in a maze.

MS. BAIZERMAN: But it's a diffused image. It's soft.

MS. COOK: Yes. So I was trying to find that balance between the realism of the image and this sort of diffused quality. And these are some of the images that I've worked with. You can see here the whole image, but then, as you move closer, how that breaks down, how the patterns begin to emerge. And also still working with images of the hand and the touch. They use some of the same experiences. Some of them are more realistic, like this one [Imbedded Digits, 2004]. Especially the things I did with hands. I really love hands and wrinkles - it's so odd. Because people say, oh, you have wrinkly hands. And I think those are interesting. I really like wrinkled -

MS. BAIZERMAN: It ties you in to the animal kingdom?

MS. COOK: Well, yes, and also the fabric quality of skin.

MS. BAIZERMAN: It gathers. It's like gathers or folds.

MS. COOK: So it's very interesting to me. And again, some more of these self-portraits with hands [Hidden Digits, 2005, and Resting Digits, 2005] and also in some cases like this one, weaving something, draping it and photographing it and reweaving it [Binary Traces: Shaggy, 2006]. So there's a sort of layered conversation that goes on. I like the idea of being able to take something and mine it, and mine it and mine it over again. And not have to go out to look for anything. You don't have to search for the right image. But keep pushing - that you can take anything and just push it and evolve something of interest to you.

I also developed another patterning. It's slightly different than the first one in black and white. This one is really very mazelike. So you really can get lost in the mazes. So there's a second level of patterning that I've created - still working in black and white.

MS. BAIZERMAN: It seems interesting that when you get up close to these, you really are rewarded with some very rich surface. Not like a photograph, but just totally unique because of its fibrous content and structure. The very minute structure.

MS. COOK: You know, I really want people who've never had any experience with weaving to be able to look at the image, to be able to move up close, and to be able to discover that that image is not created by a dot of ink, but that it's created by the way that the threads interlace. And to have some kind of physical response to that in a sense, or something that you would feel - you'd say, oh, it's cloth, and all those things that come together with that. Like your blanket as a kid - just all the things that are associated with cloth - a nonverbal, but a physically felt, response.

So anyway, some things even I moved into almost abstraction, where it looks like something figurative, looks like a body part or something, but it's not quite - you can't quite get a handle on it.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Very abstract.

MS. COOK: And then this series of work is called Face Maps. So I've taken this last kind of patterning and taken details - details of the face - again, kind of like the Anatomy of a Portrait, and isolated them out into small 8 by 10 pieces, so that you actually are forced to come up close and look at these surfaces more. To look at how the pattern dissolves and how the structure overcomes the image. So here are some details of these different Face Maps, and they are usually shown in a series. But here's some looking up close.

And then I started rephotographing details of these maps and reweaving them again. So this small piece is an example of that process. And this is a larger piece [Big Maze: Four Square Centimeters, 2005]. So I've taken that size, four centimeters, and blown it up and then rephotographed it. And again, you see connections here to my early work in the '70s of the knots and the threads and everything blown up, photographed, and reapplied to a dimensional surface. And here, they're not applied, but they're rewoven. So again, that's recycled.

This work here is where I started using this as a canvas to paint on. So again, here I'm going back into doing some direct painting. In this case it's just painted with grey. I was trying to make a "grey card" grey and this one is called Grey Girl [2005]. And that's acrylic paint in squares on top of the - using this weaving as a canvas again.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And is this sort of a double-weave, where the grey squares come forth?

MS. COOK: No. No.

MS. BAIZERMAN: You do it after the fact?

MS. COOK: Yes. There were flat areas of grey woven into the work, which were then painted grey. And then, this one here is where I began to take these details and reimpose them or reinsert them into the image. So this is an image close up, a crop of one of those portraits, but at the same time, I have taken a detail of that image or a similar image and blown it up and superimposed it so it's reinserted in the image.

MS. BAIZERMAN: It looks fully integrated.

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So you have a pattern and an image that are fully integrated in cloth.

MS. COOK: Yes. Right. So it's the macro of the micro, but it appears and disappears. And the image itself is like the painted ones that I did where the image begins to disappear behind a maze. So in this one, In the Maze [2005], you can see what it's like close up, so it still breaks down close up. The very last one is called Wove Girl [2006], and again, it's integration of the weave itself with the image.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So that's our walkthrough

MS. COOK: That's our walkthrough.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes, very good. Let's take a little break.

[Audio break.]

All right. Let's get started again. Well, let me start with this question of how your work has been received over

time. What's your take on how periodicals or -

MS. COOK: Well, I think my work has been received very well over time. I mean, my work has been written up and reviewed, not so much in the mainstream art media, but definitely in craft-specific magazines and textile-specific magazines. I think it's been received well both in terms of reviews and in terms of opportunities for exhibitions, being included in exhibitions. So I'm pleased with that.

In terms of the question about significant writers in the field of American craft, I think that there have been people who have written over time that have had significant influence, such as Ed Rossbach's early writings on textiles, and a number of other people. But there's no one person that really stands out as super significant to me. I think many people have contributed.

As far as the question about criticism written by artists, is that more valuable to me? I wouldn't say necessarily. I think an artist can write good criticism, and an artist cannot write good criticism. So I think it just depends on the person.

As I mentioned before, one of the things that I've found interesting, having something written by someone who is freshly out of grad school who may not be polished or have a professional record but who sometimes has a very different take on the work.

MS. BAIZERMAN: You mentioned before that you had done a new commission in Pittsburgh, relatively recently. And I wondered if there have been other commissions that have come up in the past. You mentioned you don't do so many anymore, but can you say why you don't do them anymore?

MS. COOK: Yes. Well, to answer that question: doing a commission involves bringing a lot of people into the decisions about your work, and I'm not particularly interested in engaging in that. The one thing I like about commissions, especially public commissions, is that the work has a home, and that you know when you're making it, it has a place that it's going to be. Every so often I feel like I want to do a public commission because I want to do something that has a place, that has a home, and is not necessarily going to be rolled up or stored in a museum or whatever, but has a public presence. So that interests me.

Early on I did a number of commissions. One of the first ones that was quite important was the one in Embarcadero Center [San Francisco, CA], which was three stories high. [Laughs.] So there was a huge piece, and the architect John Portman was very experimental in terms of commissioning textile pieces, which basically went outdoors, I mean, covered, but not an indoor space. And so, that was a very unusual piece just in terms of the scale. And I also did a piece for the federal government in the '70s, for the Social Security Building. So that was a chance to do a piece in which I had a lot of freedom.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And where is that?

MS. COOK: That's in Richmond, California, in the Social Security Building, so it's not really seen by the public. It's seen by the Social Security workers, who were a little bit aghast at what the government had to pay for a rug on the wall. [Laughs.] But what was interesting about the government commissions, at least at that time, was that you could do whatever you wanted as long it wasn't a political thing. So the artist had a great deal of freedom to do what they wanted in terms of the space and the place.

But I think for me now, I prefer to follow my own train of thought, and I don't want to get caught up in trying to please anybody, you know, whether it be a committee or to try to do something that pleases other people, and so I think that's really the issue.

One of the things that - there is a question about - what did the commissions provide for me? And I think of one early on. I had been working only in black and white and blue, and I didn't want to work in color. And I did a commission and I was forced to work in color. So I did the best I could to choose two colors that would be almost like black and white. In other words, they would be a way to create a sort of optical effect.

Anyway, I was forced to work in color, and I got involved in working with dyers and it opened up a whole new realm of work in terms of color. So sometimes when you do things that you don't plan to do or that you're forced to do somehow, then new things open up. So that was a valuable experience.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes. So it's kind of a mixed thing. You know, we looked at your work - we talked a little bit about how expressive, especially your more recent work, has become and you're exploring that phenomenon that appears, but do you find that there's any limits because you're working in fibers, because you're not working in another medium - does that impose any limits on you or -

MS. COOK: Well, I think that I chose to work in the fiber medium because it imposes limits on me. So it's a choice. I've chosen this among all other fields which I could have experimented with. But to not only choose the

fiber, but also choose weaving as a particular process that's central to my work. And I've always liked it because it imposes certain limits, which then I like to play around with and to break.

MS. BAIZERMAN: So the limits are still a strength to you.

MS. COOK: Even from the very beginning I took the vertical/horizontal of weaving and I had to make it undulate. So the structure of weaving is something to push against, to think about. And so what are some ways in which I can use weaving to express my ideas that are fresh, that are particular to what I want to say? So I don't see the medium as a limitation. If ever I want to work outside of weaving, I certainly would do it. But right now there seems to be enough within that particular process and medium that interests me, enough to explore.

[Audio break.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: This is Suzanne Baizerman interviewing Lia Cook at the artist's studio in Berkeley, California, on August 29, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

I wonder if we could just talk a minute about how you view studio assistants or involve other people as supplementary help in the execution of this large body of work.

MS. COOK: In the work. I think early on, when I was doing the large commissions, I had a number of people working with me in the studio doing all aspects of the work in the studio. I think as I started to work more on individual pieces, less on large commission pieces, I found that I wanted less help in the studio.

I've always had some studio assistants. Right now I have one person who works one day a week, and she's very compatible. She's worked for me for 20 years and she's an artist and it works very well. But I also find that I don't want to be a manager of my studio, so I like to have private time to explore and develop. And if I have many people working for me, I end up working for them basically. [Laughs.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: Yes.

MS. COOK: I mean, keeping them going, but I do think that some assistance is really helpful, especially in this kind of medium, where the time-consuming process of threading looms and backing the pieces. I do have assistants that help me, really, with all aspects, including some of the weaving.

MS. BAIZERMAN: You were saying at some point how many work threads are on this large loom, the large computerized loom -

MS. COOK: Yes, 2,640 threads.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Okay.

MS. COOK: So putting on a warp takes a couple months. Tying on a warp is even quite a long time.

MS. BAIZERMAN: And then how many yards of warp do you put on at a time?

MS. COOK: Well, it sort of depends - 20 to 30 yards now. It depends on how much I want to do in that particular series of work. It's a limitation because, you know, changing the warp is an ordeal. And yet, you know, you want to experiment with new things so -

MS. BAIZERMAN: Well, I can see why, with your teaching and production of work, you really need some help in the more mundane things.

MS. COOK: Yes. You know, threading a loom can be meditative. But on the other hand, given the limits of my time, I would rather spend it evolving new work.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Let's talk a little bit about the organizations and publications that undermine our -

MS. COOK: Underpin.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Underpin - that are underpinnings to our craft. I think there's - in the textile field I know there's a couple of organizations. I don't know which ones you've been involved in, but have they been an important part of your professional life?

MS. COOK: I think so. I've been involved - well, of course there's American Craft Council. I've been on their fellowship selection committee. I have - not so much with Handweavers Guild of America, although I've done the jurying for their awards for them. Textile Society of America has been an important group, which meets every several years for a conference, everything from historical textiles to contemporary textiles. And I also been

involved in ETN, European Textile Network, which is another international conference that I've spoken at and attended. So that's -

MS. BAIZERMAN: You've presented at College Art Association.

MS. COOK: Yes. College Art Association meets every year. There are conferences, and I've presented - yes, on panels there, too. So those are some of the organizations that I've been involved with.

MS. BAIZERMAN: What do you read?

MS. COOK: What do I read? [Laughs.]

MS. BAIZERMAN: In terms of things related more directly to your work. I'm sure you read outside that area.

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Do you read magazines?

MS. COOK: No. I usually read The New York Times, most of the art criticism and so forth from there. I get Art In America. You know, I do read some articles in American Craft, Surface Design Journal, and so forth.

MS. BAIZERMAN: A lot of times people in your situation, where you've had galleries represent you, by some people's vocabulary you are called an artist. How do you feel about that word applied to you? Is that how you see yourself?

MS. COOK: Yes. I see myself as an artist. You know, in my definition I don't necessarily see myself as a designer, although sometimes I'm looked on as a designer, but I think I'm more comfortable with just artist, and I think that's more my approach to my work than designing something for a particular space or need or function. I also don't mind being called a weaver. I don't particularly like the definition "fiber artist." I prefer, if we wanted to focus on medium, I prefer textile as a definition.

MS. BAIZERMAN: "Textile artist."

MS. COOK: "Textile artist." But I think in general just "artist" works well. And as I've said, I don't mind weaver, because that's very straightforward, isn't it?

MS. BAIZERMAN: Has that been pretty true throughout your career, feeling comfortable with that word, artist or -

MS. COOK: Yes.

MS. BAIZERMAN: You were an art student. I suppose that makes it -

MS. COOK: Yes. I mean, even though I've studied political science and everything else, but yes. I came to doing textiles as contemporary art after exploring all other kinds of media first. So I do think of myself as an artist in terms of how I think, how I approach work, how I experiment, how I play, how my ideas develop.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Well, are there any other questions that you'd like to ask yourself or that you'd like to bring up, any other areas that we haven't touched on in describing your connection with your work?

I think one last thing that we have come up with, that we have not talked in any detail about, is your life as a teacher. And why don't you talk a little bit about your experience in that area?

MS. COOK: Okay. Well, really I've been involved in teaching almost all my life, and started, I guess, on the university level at UC Davis and then at California College of the Arts. I have been teaching there for 30 years. I think teaching is an important part of my whole art process. Well, just from a practical standpoint, it's a way of making a living that kind of frees me up to do what I really want to do in terms of my artwork. I also think it's -

[END TAPE 2 SIDE A.]

- you really need to be outside of the studio, outside of yourself, and be aware of what the contemporary context is for artwork, because you need to aware of these things in order to help guide students. My philosophy of teaching is really to just support the student as much as I can in doing what it is they really want to do or they need to do.

So even though I do teach a lot technical information, and I certainly do critiques, I really see my role as a teacher to be sort of an enabler, to really get the best out of them, and hopefully that doesn't look like my work.

So it's important to me that my students' work is not an extension of me but is them developing their own work and their own individual direction.

I don't think I'm naturally a gifted teacher, but I have learned how to teach over the years. And it's extremely rewarding to see someone who has been a student go on to develop a professional life that's exciting and new and successful. And that, I think, is an incredibly rewarding thing. And also, as you get older, it makes you connected to a younger generation. And I think that's really an important thing for me to see another generation out there doing what I love to do. Being involved with a field that I love and taking it somewhere. So teaching has been an important part.

MS. BAIZERMAN: Well, thank you very much for your time and your interest in this project. We'll stop here.

MS. COOK: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...May 17, 2007