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Oral history interview with Paul J. Smith, 2010 April 19-20

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Paul J. Smith on April 19-20, 2010. The interview took place at Smith's home in New York, NY, and was conducted by Lloyd Herman 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.

Paul Smith and Lloyd Herman have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The transcript has been heavily edited. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

LLOYD HERMAN: This is Lloyd Herman interviewing Paul Smith in his apartment in New York City, on April 19, 2010.

Paul, let's start the interview by your stating your name and your date and place of birth.

PAUL J. SMITH: I'm Paul John Smith. I usually go by Paul J. Smith, but in the early days when I was an exhibiting artist, I used my middle name. I was born September 8, 1931 and brought up in Bennington, New York, a very small rural area of upstate New York, located between Buffalo and Rochester.

MR. HERMAN: And who were your parents? Tell me their names and what kind of work they did.

MR. SMITH: My parents' names were Florian and Mabel Smith. My mother's maiden name was Dersam. They were of German heritage and were part of a family community with my grandparents and uncles and relatives. I was an only child. My father had a small farm. My mother was a home-maker. Being born in '31 was during the Depression and in my earlier youth World War II took place -- so it was not the best of times, and yet I don't recall ever having experiences that were a burden.

MR. HERMAN: As a child, did you have farm chores then, and what kinds of things did you do around the house?

MR. SMITH: I was always busy doing something, being an only child. Although there were neighbors that I played with and did all the things that children do. I did mow the lawn. I did help with various things that needed to be done to occupy my time. As there was a certain amount of discipline, I think; my parents wanted to be sure that I was not just sitting around doing nothing.

MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I was really thinking about whether there were chickens or whether there were farm animals you had to care for? Whether there was a haying season, or what sort of things were happening.

MR. SMITH: It was mainly a growing farm, although we did have chickens and a few animals, but I did help to some degree with that. I have to say that it was not my favorite association. [Laughs.] I did what I was asked to do. I was always making things. I made model airplanes and did a number of hands-on activities. I liked creating in some form or another, not realizing what it was all about. The environment itself was culturally a vacuum, in that there was simply nothing that would inspire me in the arts. But my parents were always very supportive of anything that I explored or wanted to do.

MR. HERMAN: Did your father do woodworking or make anything like that at home or fix things or the kind of manual things that fathers did during that time?

MR. SMITH: Yes. He was very handy, as I think about it, he didn't have a basement workshop as such, but I know that he did build things, construct things, repair things. My mother, likewise, was sewing and doing activities that often take place in a household.

MR. HERMAN: What sort of things did you think about as a child that you might want to do as you got older? And tell me about, you know, starting school and what that experience was like.

MR. SMITH: Well, I think I was really naïve. I had no context to think about what I wanted to do. Each step was a next stage of exploration. The first important one was going to school. There was an advantage as there was a one-room schoolhouse that was within walking distance of my home. I went there being very shy, but I fit in quickly, and I was nurtured by a very dedicated and caring teacher, Magdalen George, who we referred to as Miss George. She was my teacher for a full seven years.

I was there the full time with one teacher, and the student body was never more than 10 or 12 students of all ages.

MR. HERMAN: In all seven grades.

MR. SMITH: Yes - I don't recall how all that functioned except that some things were joint learning opportunities. Obviously we would take recess breaks, we would do some sports things. Over holidays we would have school plays. I do remember learning to write well using the "Palmer Method" technique. One association with the arts that I vividly remember was a magazine called *Normal Instructor*, a teachers' magazine, that Miss George would hold up with illustrations of great artworks like [Vincent] van Gogh and Rembrandt [van Rijn]. There was an effort to expose one to many different things, as well as specific disciplines. I know that I excelled in spelling and won a dictionary for being the best speller one year. In thinking back, not having any experience in any other elementary school, there may have been an advantage of being with different age groups to benefit from what they were learning in a more advanced capacity. With a small group like that, there was a lot of one-to-one teaching.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. I would think also in a one-room school, that you probably had duties at the school, too. Whether it was bringing in wood for a furnace or pumping water. I'm thinking about my own childhood experiences similar to that.

MR. SMITH: Yes, I don't recall any specific things, but it was like a very small community. There was a certain amount of order and discipline. We would have summers off and follow the school year. We had to write papers, and do all the things that one does to get accreditation.

MR. HERMAN: In the summer months did you pick fruit or vegetables or have work like that you did either on the farm or for pay?

MR. SMITH: Never for pay. We always had a garden, and I had my own little garden within the garden. So there was that interest all along and another aspect of hands-on. I developed friends in the community that were in walking distance or a bicycle ride away, so that I socialized and did a lot of things that children do in their early years.

. .
MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, I would think then going to a school with people at all ages that you learned to get along both with younger children and older children.

MR. SMITH: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: When did you start school then?

MR. SMITH: That was in 1937. So at the end of the elementary program, I then had to move onto high school. Simultaneously, my parents moved to Attica to a suburban area not far from the well-known Attica State Prison. Then I would take the school bus which was a very short distance away, where I was involved with a much larger community. Attica compared with Bennington, was bigger - I think at that time it was like 2,000 residents.

MR. HERMAN: What did your parents do in Attica? What precipitated that move?

MR. SMITH: It was another small farm.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, oh.

MR. SMITH: So it was a continuum. It was not right in the town itself, but there were closer neighbors and a much better living environment. I began to take the usual classes at the high school where it was great to come in contact with a larger student body..

MR. HERMAN: What sort of classes do you remember that you had in high school when you started, and were they large classes or small? Was it easy to get acquainted with—

MR. SMITH: It was not a small school, but it wasn't enormous. I was engaged in all the required courses of math and geometry, but the area that I blossomed in was the art program.

MR. HERMAN: Tell me more about the sorts of things you did in art, both in grade school and then moving into high school.

MR. SMITH: Well, going back to the elementary school days, I was always drawing. I entered a Victory poster competition and won the top award that recognized my artistic instincts. It was only when I got to high school and was in the art program that my artistic talent was recognized. The art program was directed by a wonderful

and a very important person in my life - Charlotte Ranger, who was referred to as Mrs. Ranger. She had been teaching in the school for many years. .

MR. HERMAN: Oh, this was Attica High School.

MR. SMITH: Attica High School. She was very dedicated. When I became involved in her program and began to do whatever we did, whether it was drawing or creating some form of art, she was encouraging. She also recognized that I had exceptional talent. So I became a bit of a teacher's pet, and it became known in the school by both faculty and students that I really excelled in the arts. So that recognition I credit for my growing interest in art that continued to evolve later on. As there's always an important person who helps support your interests and encourages you, I credit her highly for that. Also my parents never prevented me from doing anything, but they didn't have the knowledge of the arts that Mrs. Ranger had.

MR. HERMAN: Did you in high school also have shop classes that were more kind of manual—metals or woodworking or anything like that?

MR. SMITH: I think there were some programs but in those days art programs were kind of basic. You would do drawing and simple collage type work. But at home I was beginning to get interested in doing my own thing as well. I'm not sure what inspired this, but I became very interested in decorating things. I was painting furniture, learning to stencil, and explore all kinds of traditional techniques of decoration. I learned from books that I picked up. That was something that just came out of nowhere but continued to be an attraction. So there was a continuum of my interest in the arts and involvement in creating that was strong enough that it later blossomed into much more.

MR. HERMAN: What you didn't get in school, were there magazines or other things that served as kind of a source of inspiration in the arts?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mrs. Ranger was really a great teacher, and she supplied us with a lot of different experiences. I don't recall that we ever made any field trips to museums as there was no museum in Attica -- the closest being in Buffalo or Rochester. Upon graduation, in the yearbook I was voted "Most likely to succeed." which I know was credited to my artistic achievements.

MR. HERMAN: It's interesting because you were in high school largely during World War II. How did that affect what was taught and the kind of—the economic sense. I know you told me that you'd had your own little garden within a garden. I assume that might have been a Victory Garden which I think children were encouraged to grow—well, everyone was encouraged to grow— during World War II.

MR. SMITH: In school I don't recall there was any specific program. I know that I was conscious of all the aspects of the war, having had cousins who were in the army, who would send me notes and memorabilia. I began to collect things that they would send me. So there was definitely an awareness of the war. In terms of any sacrifices at the time, I was somewhat protected living on a small farm where there was food, different perhaps from living in a city environment. I know such things as gas rationing did exist, but it wasn't anything that interfered with my daily activity.

MR. HERMAN: What sort of entertainments were available to you then? This was before television. Were there movies or plays or anything going on? School concerts?

MR. SMITH: Well, at home, the radio was a big source and the classic radio programs we would listen to like *Amos and Andy* and whatever other ones there were. At school there were some programs in music. I did take piano lessons, and we had a piano at home. I got very interested in that. At one point I had dreams of being in the school band, but I didn't play an instrument that qualified me, and that was a problem. I always had fantasies to be part of that, but I did take my piano lessons quite seriously.

MR. HERMAN: How many years?

MR. SMITH: Couple of years during high school. It was something that I liked to do. It wasn't a priority, but it was an interest and through that I became acquainted with classical music, which was a main interest at the time. So I think it was interesting that when you're in those formative years you respond to things that interest you and don't always know where they lead. But they accumulate and add up to something that enriches your later life or leads you to some new experience.

MR. HERMAN: Were you already thinking about what you might do after you got out of high school at that point?

MR. SMITH: I was in the same position I was when I left elementary school. I was always kind of naïve, and really

needed to be given some direction. Fortunately, I had cousins who lived in Buffalo and would often go to visit them, which I loved to do because I liked Buffalo as it was a big city. Even today, the bigger the city, the better. That's why I live in New York. The option of where I might go to school was a question. Jack Sturtzer, one of my cousins, had gone to art school and suggested that I might be interested in a private school called the Art Institute of Buffalo, and in fact that is what happened. So upon graduation in 1948, I then went to stay with my cousins on Seventeenth Street and enrolled in the program at the Art Institute on Elmwood Avenue.

MR. HERMAN: Before you get to the art institute era, you had shown me a term paper that you had written for a social studies class on the history of Attica, which shows that maybe you were developing a talent for writing. Was there anything else, other talents, that maybe were beginning to surface?

MR. SMITH: Well, in a social studies class I did a paper on the history of Attica, which ended up being a little book that I created. I researched it through various sources, gathered material, wrote the essay, collected photographs, and put together a composite of what could be termed my first book. I'm pleased to say that it got much recognition with a 99 grade. It was shown to the Attica Historical Society, who enthusiastically responded to it and read it at one of their annual meetings resulting in an article in the local newspaper about this excellent paper being presented. As I now look back at it, I think of that as being really my first book and did indicate that I did have interest in research. Although a very modest effort, the fact that it got recognition, I guess, was encouragement.

MR. HERMAN: What year did you move to Buffalo to attend the Art Institute? That must have been big step to be out on your own for the first time.

MR. SMITH: I graduated in June 1948 and then went in the fall to the art school. I stayed with my cousins on Seventeenth Street in the beginning, and later had my own apartment very near there and was able to walk to the Art Institute on Elmwood Avenue. The school had a faculty of local artists -- Jeanette and Robert Blair, James Vullo who were well known in the area. It was a school that I think thrived on returning GIs, as many schools did at that time. It was a very informal program—but it was professional. One of the highlights was Charles Burchfield, the renowned painter, who came to teach one day a week. That was really great for me because he was an exceptional person, and I developed a very good rapport with him. The class situation was such that one would be very much on their own to paint or draw. The faculty was roving to give opinions or help out technically, which all the faculty did very well.

But Charles Burchfield was exceptional. As such an accomplished artist, he had limited previous association with academia and teaching. He would look at what you were working on and not say anything for several minutes. Then he would very sensitively respond--"Well, have you thought about?" or "Might you consider?" I respected that so much because I thought he was so sensitive to my work, and didn't want to offend me, but in the right way to encourage me. I developed a lot of respect for him. After I left the school he would send me holiday cards every year, and I have some correspondence. When I moved to New York, he thought that was a wonderful opportunity. I have one letter where he'd seen one of my paintings at the Albright-Knox [Gallery, Buffalo, NY] annual show and thought it looked really good. These documents are in my personal archive.

MR. HERMAN: At the Art Institute were disciplines other than painting and drawing taught?

MR. SMITH: It was mainly painting, but also sculpture and drawing classes. As there was a potter's wheel that was never used, somehow or other I found some clay and began to experiment on that not very successfully. I had an interest in working in other materials, having done hobby craft in my high school years such as decorating furniture. I also became involved with hobby ceramics. I would cast forms, paint them and had a small electric kiln to fire them. I even established a little business of making wedding plates and commemorative objects. . [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Wow!

MR. SMITH: And birthday celebration plates I sold for a few dollars to make a little money. So that was another dimension of my interest in exploring other than painting and sculpture, although my painting was developing very well, and I was beginning to exhibit.

MR. HERMAN: You made a mention of a scholarship award in 1951. Tell me about that.

MR. SMITH: Well, that was a very nice honor because I was as an independent student paying tuition to attend. My parents were supporting that, but in 1951 I was one of a few students awarded a scholarship. There was a special exhibition of work to honor that recognition.

MR. HERMAN: And that exhibit was at the Art Institute?

MR. SMITH: At the Art Institute and it was publicized in the local newspaper.

MR. HERMAN: Were you already thinking about what your direction might be when you left the Art Institute? Was there a regular course of study that you expected to complete? Or did many students just go and study the disciplines that they were interested in until they felt they were ready to leave?

MR. SMITH: I didn't have any specific agenda. I think that it was an open arena. But things fell in place that directed the path that I took, one being a part-time job at a ceramics store selling hobby products that gave me some income. Then a job opening came up at a very high-end department store by the name of Flint & Kent, like a Saks Fifth Avenue in New York, a very old store, very established. I was hired to join the display department directed by Joseph Simmons, who himself was an artist.

MR. HERMAN: Was this based on your artistic ability that was in evidence from both high school and college then?

MR. SMITH: I think it came from some connection at the Art Institute, as the display department was looking for some new help and wanted students. That became a very important experience for me because in art school, while there was order and discipline, you were quite casual in many ways about what you did every day. Once I got into the rigid environment of retailing, where one has to create a bank of windows every week, a promotion next month, and a series of events that had to be realized very effectively, it really sharpened my attitude of how to get things done. Also to be involved with producing new concepts of display was very important and to make really interesting presentations of merchandise was hard work, but I was young, and I responded very well. Many of our windows got recognition in national marketing newspapers for their originality. So that was an experience that I do credit a lot. As I think back it was not just the opportunity to create, but it was also the experience of being in a very intense retail environment. There's nothing quite like that unless you've been through it.

When Joe Simmons left for another position, I was appointed the director of the display department that added another area of responsibility. As administrator, I had to hire employees and direct the program. I would go to New York to buy mannequins and props for the windows. There was a pattern in my career of benefitting from the experience that I would call "learning on the job."

MR. HERMAN: To go back just for a minute. What years were you at the Art Institute of Buffalo then? And was that a degree program or did students just come and study what they wanted to.

MR. SMITH: There was no formal degree program. I went in the fall of '48, and I was there three years. But it was not every day -- It was part time. That's why I was able to work at the ceramic store. There were other schools in the area that I was thinking about. For example, Buffalo State Teachers' College had a very strong art program. They did have a craft program that somewhat interested me as one thought I had was to explore academia with the idea of being a teacher. But then other things developed.
MR. HERMAN: If the display job at the department store hadn't come up, do you think you would have continued going to school or maybe moved to New York or another city?

MR. SMITH: I'm not sure. I was always fortunate that a door would open at the right time. [Laughs] And that doesn't always happen. So that if something came up that was an opportunity and was right, I took advantage of it, as I did with the department store. But there was an increasing interest in the crafts that we can talk about.

MR. HERMAN: How many years then did you work at the department store, and particularly as director of display?

MR. SMITH: I was there about four years. During that time the store was sold two times resulting in new administrations. As a very established store it was sold to a very enterprising new owner, a Harvard Business graduate, who had many new ideas for retailing but was not very successful. Then it was sold to a low-end existing store in Buffalo that merged the two display departments resulting in the staff in the original store being let go, that included me.

MR. HERMAN: So while you were— During the time—I'm not sure whether it was when you were going to the art institute or whether after you went to work, that you began to take craft classes and then I think teach them at the YWCA in Buffalo?

MR. SMITH: As I have indicated, I had been dabbling in hobby craft, simultaneously excelling in my painting and drawing; working mostly with oils and watercolors. As I had this desire to work with materials, there was not much choice in Buffalo. There was an art school connected with the Albright Art Gallery, the Albright Art School, but it didn't have any craft program. The teachers' college, which I've mentioned, had a program, but you had to be registered in it full time.

Then I discovered the program at the local YWCA. It was directed by a dynamic person, Jean Delius, who became another important influence in my life. I began to take evening classes. The facility was very well equipped with a ceramic area, a workshop for working in metal and jewelry, an area for the fiber arts with looms and printing facilities, and a woodshop. Glass didn't exist at that time. There was a lot of energy there because of Jean, as she really was very inspiring. The faculty was mainly local people, and the students were there part time as it was an avocational program. All of the studios were on one floor, and doors were open, so one could walk into each area. So, if you were working in one discipline, as I did in the beginning, you could learn from all other student activity. I credit this opportunity to become acquainted with all the craft skills as I had an enormous appetite and dabbled in all of them. I tried everything. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Did you begin to think about which interested you the most or which you were best at?

MR. SMITH: I began to be attracted mainly to two areas: one was jewelry, and the other woodturning and carving that I really developed. I did some ceramics, I did some weaving, but it wasn't something that interested me as much. Having had training in the arts at the Art Institute was helpful, but what I needed was the technical skills that I learned there. I then began to produce accomplished work that I started to exhibit.

MR. HERMAN: In both jewelry and wood?

MR. SMITH: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: Did you study at any other schools?

MR. SMITH: Yes At the Y there was a community of students that became good friends. We would socialize, we would have parties together, and we would take little trips from time to time. We knew, through Jean's continuous inspiration to us, that there was a program at the Rochester Institute of Technology's School for American Craftsmen [Rochester, NY] which Mrs. [Aileen Osborn] Webb had founded back in the '40s, and become part of the RIT in 1950.

MR. HERMAN: The Rochester Institute of Technology.

MR. SMITH: But it was the School for American Craftsmen, a separate school that had a very distinguished faculty -- Frans Wildenhain, Jack Prip, Hans Christianson and others. So we took some evening classes. As it was an hour's drive, we could attend a class and drive back to Buffalo in the evening. I also took two special summer sessions which were concentrated. That is when I studied with Hans Christianson and learned how to form metal. So not only did I get professional training there, but I also became acquainted with the faculty which was a connection that was very important.

MR. HERMAN: Did that end then when you started working at the department store? Or were you still able to—

MR. SMITH: This was all happening when I was still there as it was taking place in evenings or vacation time. So as I reflect on that, if there was an opportunity that interested me, I took advantage of it.

MR. HERMAN: So was that when you first began to be aware of professional craftspeople and the idea of others than just painters and people who drew and maybe printmaking and people who could make a living at art?

MR. SMITH: Well, at the Art Institute I came in contact with a lot of accomplished artists, but it was being at RIT that brought me in contact with some of the top craft professionals. Another connection that was really important was in the early '50s, was a state organization called York State Craftsmen. It was a volunteer group that got together to create an organization, patterned after other state craft organizations like the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen that had a very successful marketing program and a craft fair. It wasn't an exact copy of it, but it had membership, and it had educational programs. From the very beginning, I became involved, again credited to Jean Delius, who I think was on the board and very active with the development of its program.

One of the early programs they initiated was a craft fair that was held at Ithaca College [Ithaca, NY] every summer for a week. I would take my vacation time from the department store and volunteer to help set it up, and would help with all the logistics of the fair itself during public days. It was conducted on a very high level. They would bring in outside jurors to review the work, have a court of honor for exceptional work and would have a featured craftsperson each year. Bob Turner was one, and I was a featured craftsman in 1958. Also I was exhibiting and selling there as well.

MR. HERMAN: Tell me about some of the other competitions and the other shows that you were exhibiting in around that time.

MR. SMITH: In all my spare time, in addition to attending the Y and learning how to create work, I was also

making work. When I would go home weekends to Attica, I was always working, creating, either painting or sketching ideas of things I wanted to make. This resulted in work that had potential for being shown. In those days there was limited opportunity for exhibiting painting. My earliest showing was at the Albright Art Gallery, as it was called at the time, where they had an annual Western New York competition. I began showing there in 1950. In Rochester the Memorial Art Gallery had a similar exhibit called the Finger Lakes Show, where I began showing in 1952. These competitions would have very distinguished juries of top artists and museum people from around the country. I would get rejected, but I often got included. And in a few cases I won awards.

As my work in wood and jewelry developed to a point of having some quality I would also enter competitions that accepted entries in those areas. There was one called "Fiber, Clay, and Metal" that was conducted by the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art. I was in the 1955 show. The American Craftsmen's Council had the important "Young American" competitions that began in 1950. I was in three of those -- '54, '56, and '58, and received a certificate of merit and honorable mention. In those days these competitions were the main venues for work to be shown in the craft field. The Everson Museum's [Syracuse, NY] annual competition for ceramicists was very important.

MR. HERMAN: Were these primarily regional shows? Or were some of them national juried shows?

MR. SMITH: The "Young Americans" was national. The "Fiber, Clay, and Metal" was national. The painting shows I exhibited in were regional. But I also began to get some national recognition. I'm not sure how this evolved—but *Art in America* contacted me, and they included me in their new talent issue in 1957.

MR. HERMAN: What other kinds of recognition did you have of your place in the larger spectrum of the arts with professional artists. I would think you would begin looking at your work and comparing it then as you became more aware of what others were doing.

MR. SMITH: Of course every exhibition like in Rochester or in Buffalo, I would go to see other work. If I was in the show, it was nice to see my work in comparison with others, and it was definitely the beginning of exposure to a bigger world of activity. York State Craftsmen was especially important in making contact with other craftsmen including the faculty at Alfred.

MR. HERMAN: Alfred University [Alfred, NY].

MR. SMITH: Yes Bob Turner, and other faculty members at the time. I should point out that the "Finger Lakes Show", unlike the "Western New York Show", did include works in all media. So I could show jewelry or woodturning and did in fact do that. So, all this activity happened over quite a short period of time. We're talking about only a few years when I was going to school, I was working in the department store, and I was involved with these craft organizations. As I was developing my interest in the craft area, I was also doing a little bit of everything. So there was no one focus that I could single out. It was kind of an accumulation of a gradual widening of my horizons that was developing. I think the association with these different things was important. There was also Buffalo Craftsmen, a local organization that was very small. It was mainly an organization that would get together for a meeting periodically and have small shows. Just before I left for New York I became the president for a very short time. So these organization contacts were a means to sharing my interests, but also it brought me in touch with other people in the community.

MR. HERMAN: Were you already weighing whether or not your future lay in being a producing artist or continuing with store display work?

MR. SMITH: As I think about it, I never was sitting down and saying, -- "now this is my goal next week or next month." [Laughs] And I think that I was very lucky to always be at the right place and at the right time when something came up that offered a new opportunity that I took advantage of.

MR. HERMAN: And that leads me to your move to New York and how that came about.

MR. SMITH: That came about, again, in a very similar way. First I want to say that at the York State Craft Fair, David Campbell, who was the executive vice president of the American Craftsmen's Council in New York and also involved with the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen for many years, came to be the juror. That is where I met him. He saw my work and liked it so much -- this was work in wood — that he invited me to be in the first exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts; called "Craftsmanship in a Changing World."

MR. HERMAN: And was your world changing! [They laugh.]

MR. SMITH: Yes, that was about as high a recognition as you could get. But what came with it was the fact that Dave, having his roots in the New Hampshire League with the craft fair, was very impressed with the high quality of the York State Craft Fair. There was also a liaison where Jean played a role, as she made a point of introducing me and making that acquaintance. When my position ended at the store because of the merger that

I spoke about, it was a choice of what I might do because I did need to have a job. Joseph Simmons, who had gone to Detroit, did offer me a position. I could have moved and continued in display. But Jean spoke with David and said that I was seeking a job. I don't know how this exactly evolved, but Dave responded, "Well, we're expanding our program. I think we could use him."

MR. HERMAN: This was the program at the American Craftsmen's Council.

MR. SMITH: Yes, the American Craftsmen's Council. He saw that I had something that could be helpful, which was again being in the right place at the right time. I didn't go to New York for an interview, but there was a phone conversation, and in a very short time, I was offered a position to join the staff of ACC.

MR. HERMAN: And what was the title of your first position?

MR. SMITH: As the museum was one year old, and the council was rapidly expanding at that point, they felt there was a need for educational traveling exhibitions that were separate from the museum program, but it was also to develop related materials. So when I moved to New York, I began to explore different possibilities and then decided that with my special knowledge of wood, that would be a very good focus. So the first educational unit that I did was called "Design Wood."

MR. HERMAN: I think we need to end the first memory card with that and continue on on card two about the Museum of Contemporary Craft.

[END OF DISC 1.]

MR. HERMAN: This is Lloyd Herman interviewing Paul Smith in his apartment in New York City on April 19, 2010. This is memory card number two.

Paul, you were talking when we ended the first memory card about the exhibitions that you began to develop when you moved to New York and were employed by the American Craftsmen's Council. Tell me again the year.

MR. SMITH: Nineteen fifty-seven.

MR. HERMAN: Good. Please continue and tell me more about the exhibition program and where those shows went and how that kind of served the council. Maybe then talk more about the council as an overall organization for some context.

MR. SMITH: As I said, "Design Wood" was the first project that I took on having the advantage of working in wood and understanding a lot of the skills. It was designed to be informative not only by featuring some of the accomplished work that was being done, but also to give insight to the techniques and processes involved. So it was basically educational in nature.

MR. HERMAN: Did you select the artists for them and select the work?

MR. SMITH: Yes.

MR. HERMAN: You were actually curating the shows already.

MR. SMITH: This was a collaborative effort. David Campbell, being an architect, designed the structure which was very handsome. I did the research and collected the material to be included. It was a very great opportunity because it brought me in touch with masters at the time -- Wharton Esherick, Bob Stocksdale, James Prestini. So I was meeting all of these famous—well, at that point they were not as famous as they are today, but they were established and recognized. I went to visit Wharton Esherick in Paoli. I researched images and included a Henry Moore sculpture. It was very broad in content. We also acquired works which we purchased to be part of the exhibit designed to travel.

We commissioned the making of technical examples of different joinery for wood such as a dovetail. It was a well done and interesting exhibit that premiered at the Boston Arts Festival. I went and set it up there. It did travel to a few other locations, but one of the bad parts was large crates; it was expensive to move and not easy to set up. So it was a learning experience to realize that you need to think of designing more portable systems for transport.

The second one that I did was called "Fiber Tools and Weaves," and it featured all the aspects of weaving and techniques. For that we engaged Lili Blumenau, a very well-known weaver who had a studio and small school in Greenwich Village. She was German-born, extremely skilled and knowledgeable, and was very helpful in putting together the how-to information. I became interested again in weaving and took some evening classes with her.

MR. HERMAN: How long did these shows travel? About how many places would they be seen?

MR. SMITH: Well, they traveled not very much because we didn't have a setup to circulate the shows. They went mainly to schools, and both shows were featured at the museum under the title "Visual Communication in the Crafts." where they had a very nice presentation. One was on the mezzanine, one was on the main floor. They were short-lived, and I think it was an interesting idea that didn't develop for various reasons, one being that so many things were happening at the council. The museum was very new. The month before I arrived, the first Asilomar Conference had taken place, and there were plans for other national conferences.
MR. HERMAN: For the American Craftsmen's—

MR. SMITH: It was then called the American Craftsmen's Council, now American Craft Council. So many different things were happening, and Dave Campbell was there orchestrating all this along with Mrs. Webb, who was very active and involved. I did develop some educational slide kits and as there was no file on artists, I started the beginnings of a craftsmen's reference file. But soon I was assisting Dave Campbell with everything that was coming along. As priorities took over there wasn't time to develop more shows as there were other more urgent things to do. But other staff was eventually hired to develop what was called a Research and Education Department. They didn't do traveling exhibitions but began to develop educational materials. So the program didn't die. I became more absorbed in helping with all different things that were happening at that time, and eventually was named assistant to Dave Campbell.

MR. HERMAN: The shows you had mentioned, though, the first show, the wood show that the objects were purchased.

MR. SMITH: That's right.

MR. HERMAN: Was that the beginning of the museum's collection then?

MR. SMITH: No. they were separate purchases as part of the traveling exhibitions. I will talk later about the museum permanent collection that did develop slowly, but it was not connected. Eventually these works became part of the collection.

MR. HERMAN: I want you to talk more about the makeup of the Craft Council. But before we go into that, I just want to clarify the museum at the stage that it was opened, whether contemporary crafts were being shown at other mainstream museums. Whether they were general museums or art museums or university museums. And I think already, by the mid-'50s, the Smithsonian had started a traveling exhibition program and maybe the American Federation of Arts—I'm just not sure. So there was certainly an idea of traveling shows providing more educational information to other institutions.

MR. SMITH: There was a landscape of national things happening. It wasn't all activity generated by ACC of course, but it's somewhat complex to identify the whole network. I could single out some. I already have indicated competitions like the Everson Ceramic National shows that were important for the ceramic field. The Cleveland Museum [of Art] had an annual May show which was a selling show. There were regional exhibitions in different areas, and the American Craftsmen's Council before the museum, originated several shows, beginning with the Young American competitions. "Designer Craftsmen" 1953 was a very important one. It was a collaborative effort with the Brooklyn Museum. There's an excellent catalogue that documents it.

So the Council had a continuing interest in exhibitions as an important part of its program. But there were also other museums that were doing shows. The main difference was that when the Museum of Contemporary Crafts opened its doors in the fall of 1956, there was no other craft museum that had a continuous program. That was very symbolic at that point because it was not only in New York in a great location next to the Museum of Modern Art, but it was the only craft museum until you became involved with the Renwick [Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.] in 1972.

MR. HERMAN: I was really thinking also about the museums that had museum schools. And often they were teaching the craft disciplines, too. I don't know if they had recurring exhibitions. But certainly wasn't the kind of full-time program that you were involved in at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts.

MR. SMITH: There were definitely exhibitions all over the country, but it's a big country. Many are recorded in *Craft Horizons. But as I said* when the museum opened what was important was its continuous program and being part of the American Craftsmen's Council as a national organization with a mission to serve the country.

MR. HERMAN: I think it's important probably, before going into more detail about what the museum did, to talk about the origins of the American Craft Council as it's now known and what its various components were, and how the museum fit into the context of this national organization.

MR. SMITH: Well, it's quite a complex story, but I would begin with one person: Aileen Osborn Webb, who I

would term kind of the "patron saint" of the studio craft movement. Mrs. Webb was from the very established Osborn family. She married Vanderbilt Webb who was a descendant of Cornelius Vanderbilt, and was brought up in a very privileged life with the best education. I would put a footnote here that an important aspect of that generation of people was that they enjoyed all the benefits of living a privileged life, but also felt a responsibility of contributing to society. That was very much rooted in Mrs. Webb's motives and all the things that she developed. I met her in September of 1956, when I moved to New York. At that point, her husband was deceased, and she was very involved with the day-to-day activity of the council program not only as a patron giving financial support, but also had hands-on involvement.

MR. HERMAN: About how old would she have been at that point? And her children were grown by then?

MR. SMITH: Yes. I was 26 years old, and she was like my mother. [Laughs] I don't recall the exact age, but she definitely was an older, mature woman. In the late '20s, during the Depression in Garrison, New York, she with some colleagues in the area reflecting on the environment of the time felt the need to help market handmade products. So she started a modest program to sell local home-craft things that eventually developed into what was called Putnam County Products.

There's an analogy here with Eleanor Roosevelt who had also done pioneer work with Val-kill up the Hudson. Mrs. Webb and her husband being strong Democrats were friends of the Roosevelts. As a matter of fact, in Mrs. Webb's memoirs—she talks about Eleanor Roosevelt giving her first political speech at an event she arranged. [Herman laughs.] So it establishes that there was a purpose of helping people to market with an appreciation and respect for handmade work, but there was a desire to help people in general.

MR. HERMAN: Sales.

MR. SMITH: Her humble marketing efforts led then to the formation and the founding of America House in 1940, which was located at Seven East Fifty-fourth Street. This was historically important because at that point there were very few marketing venues. So she began to sell handmade objects, from around the country, and with staff and with help as she wasn't doing it independently.

Simultaneously she was developing a connection with other existing programs such as the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, other craft organizations in New England; and the Southern Highland Craft Guild which was founded in 1930 during the depression. There was a meeting she hosted at Shelburne Farms in 1939 for representatives of these groups to talk about their common interests and what they might do collectively that resulted in the formation of the Handcraft Cooperative League of America that eventually became the American Craftsmen's Education Council in 1943. That was then the foundation for a national organization that later became the American Craftsmen's Council and now the American Craft Council.

MR. HERMAN: I'm interested why she used the word educational. Was she thinking that she would further their education either in their disciplines or in marketing? Or was it educating the public about them?

MR. SMITH: As it was registered as a nonprofit by the state, I have no way of verifying this, but I expect that having "educational" was helpful to qualify its purpose as it was moving away from marketing to a broader area.

MR. HERMAN: Public education.

MR. SMITH: Public education. So then the following programs that developed were always focused on education. Mrs. Webb had a lot of energy and I would say, was a real visionary. She was always restless in the sense that if something had been done, we need to move on to something new, and let's think of something bigger and better, which was a real challenge. She began a mimeographed newsletter that developed into the magazine *Craft Horizons (now American Craft)*.

MR. HERMAN: But that was actually before the council was formed.

MR. SMITH: Yes, as she was exploring venues for expanding her vision. To go back to America House, I'm sorry now that I never interviewed her about this, but I think that she saw America House needing new high-quality products, thus entered the subject of education,. and how can we nurture better education? That led to the founding of the School for American Craftsmen. It was a collaborative effort that began at Dartmouth College in 1944 near the end of the war when returning GI's were offered free study under the GI Bill. So it was connected with that. The school offered a program to provide professional skills in the craft media to create original handmade objects. The school moved to Alfred University in 1946. Later in 1950 it became part of the Rochester Institute of Technology, where it is today.

MR. HERMAN: We're talking about all of the American Craftsmen's Educational Council, America House, *Craft Horizons* in the early '40s during World War II. I'm just thinking that of course crafts that were made in that period would be functional objects. But because of materials shortage like metal during World War II, I'm

guessing this should be mostly wood, weaving, and clay.

MR. SMITH: Yes. And it's revealing to look at some of the issues of *Craft Horizons* in that era, because there were some special articles written, and I recall that Mrs. Webb instigated an article about the lack of materials and source of materials. So there was definitely an identity with the environment of the time and the war. After the war, was another pivotal time in America. The GI Bill of Rights that fostered programs in schools throughout the country for returning soldiers in my opinion can almost singlehandedly be credited for the rapid growth of activity. So in looking back there's an interesting identity with the time and place when things happened and how things evolved. It is important to remember that the American Craftsmen's Council was the only national craft organization at that time, relating to the expanding and changing field and developing programs that seemed appropriate. I spoke earlier about the "Young American" competitions that began in 1950. That was a program of the council to recognize new talent. You had to be 30 years or under. They were very important when you look at the catalogs and see who was in them. Likewise, "Designer Craftsmen," the show in '53 at the Brooklyn Museum, was very important..

At America House occasional shows were presented in a small gallery space that was very limited. So with the expanding council, the expanding field, combined with Mrs. Webb's vision it was realized that more space was needed. At that point the board of trustees and Mrs. Webb discussed future planning to include a permanent exhibition facility. There was an exploration of a space at CBS that was near America House and discussions with some of the people there, including Frank Stanton, who would later became the executive assistant to [William S.] Paley, and who was a trustee. That fell through for one reason or another according to some documents I have read.

But as I understand it, they were looking at different venues. I have a copy of a letter to Kenneth Chorley, Vice President of the ACC board that Mrs. Webb wrote in 1955 where she states that Rene d'Harnoncourt, who was then director of the Museum of Modern Art and was a trustee of the ACC at the time, told her that there was a building for sale next to MoMA and wondered if she might be interested. Her response was: "I went to look at it and as I could afford it I bought it." [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: It's funny and kind of ironic that later the Museum of Modern Art bought the building. [Laughs.]

MR. SMITH: But this again symbolizes how Mrs. Webb did things. I mean she had money to pay for it. She made the decision and then wrote the letter to the board saying: "I realize I perhaps should have called the board together, but we will meet soon." And in this letter, which is several pages long, she goes on to say, "I have met with Dave Campbell and we have talked about the plans of what it could be: It will be a place where shows from abroad can be featured and that we show the best of the work in America. We don't know what we will call it, but there was some reference to titles." She had this whole vision of what this museum would be, and she paid for it. [Laughs.]

So that was the birth of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts that opened in September of 1956 in a renovated brownstone building -- five stories. Dave Campbell at that point was already working full time with the council. He came on as executive vice president, departing from New Hampshire where he had been involved to give his full time to ACC. Being an accomplished architect, having gone to Harvard [University, Cambridge, MA] and studied with [Walter] Gropius, he was really qualified to design the new museum. So the building was totally gutted down to its rafters and rebuilt as a jewel of a contemporary modernist environment that received much architectural acclaim.

MR. HERMAN: It would have been a residential townhouse.

MR. SMITH: Yes, it was like many of the buildings on Fifty-third Street, that were private residences. So this was the establishment of the museum, adding another chapter to Mrs. Webb's vision. We will later talk more about the museum but I would like to mention her ongoing efforts to expand the program. With the museum in place, then, as I had mentioned, the first national conference was held at Asilomar, California. It's the only conference I did not go to because it was just before I moved to New York. From what I heard from those who attended, it was a very memorable event because many attendees knew each other by name but had never met each other. I have heard that is where Toshiko Takeazu met Lenore Tawney and where John Paul Miller met Toshiko and Lenore. I remember Sam Maloof speaking about meeting other colleagues from the East. It was a who's who of the craftsmen's world at that time.

MR. HERMAN: Would they have known each other through *Craft Horizons*? Had it developed into a magazine with photographs during that time?

MR. SMITH: I would say through the magazine, and through other events that were taking place. As there had not been a national gathering this was a historically important event at such an important time. The conference also included designers like Charles Eames, which I found very interesting. There is a wonderful publication which documents the presentations which is now online at the ACC library. When you read it you realize the

environment of the time and the concerns. There was a lot of soul-searching about "are we justified to be a craftsman?" "Why do we do what we do?" It was a kind of group therapy in a way. Issues such as how we market and how do we deal with professional aspects of teaching were discussed. There were also media sessions.

The first Asilomar Conference was followed by a series of conferences. The next year there was one at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, which I attended. In 1959 there was one at Lake George NY. In 1960, a series of regional conferences were held. At these events many important things happened. For example, the studio glass movement has roots in it. Harvey Littleton, Michael Higgins, Maurice Heaton, Edris Eckhardt, and Paul Perrot, director of the Corning Museum [of Glass, Corning, NY] attended a session where they talked about the possibility of working with hot glass -- it's all recorded. Paul was very inspirational in talking about what could be explored. That discussion motivated Harvey to pursue research to develop a small hot glass facility. .

The conference reports provide an overview of what was taking place. But I don't think one will ever know how important they were in giving focus to many aspects, whether it be a media focus or whether it be an educational focus.

MR. HERMAN: So the American Craft Council—I'm not sure when that name was changed and dropped "educational."

MR. SMITH: It was the end of the '50s that it became the American Craftsmen's Council, and then in 1979 there was a major change of titles when it became the American Craft Council.

MR. HERMAN: But initially, the components as they grew were the magazine *Craft Horizons* and then the museum, first national conference. When then was a regional organization set up?

MR. SMITH: Well, the regional program was emerging because there was a concern about how can we develop programs out of New York or between the national conferences? So in the early '60s the board of trustees addressed this. What eventually developed was a regional structure, where there were six regions of the country: northwest, southwest, northcentral, southcentral, northeast, southeast. Within each two craftsmen trustees would be elected to represent that region and attend trustee meetings. That formed a network and a structure, where each region began to do its own thing. For example, in 1966 the first ACC craft fair took place in the Northeast. Many held conferences. There was one point where each had a regional competition that came together as a national exhibition.

Lois Moran came on the staff in 1963. She was hired by Dave Campbell because there needed to be a coordinator. So she was very involved with the development and coordination of all these activities. Lois, one of the most dedicated staff members, stayed on for 42 years to serve many roles of being editor of *Outlook*; and was later involved with the Research and Education department and the development of the library. She also filled in many times when executive directors were leaving to take on an administrative role. Her last position was editor of *American Craft Magazine*.

MR. HERMAN: Let's go back just for a moment before we get into more specifically your involvement with the museum and talk about Dave Campbell who preceded you and who hired you. And you said he was also architect of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts.

MR. SMITH: Right.

MR. HERMAN: Tell me a bit more about him as we kind of segue into your role.

MR. SMITH: David Campbell was a very important partner in all of this, and I feel that he has never had the recognition or the attention he deserves because he really was, I think, very responsible for a lot of the professional things that happened. His involvement with the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen was very important as he was instrumental in expanding their marketing program with satellite stores and the annual craft fair. He brought Ed and Mary Shire there to enrich the community. He had a real understanding of what was needed in the field. He visited studios, and knew the artists. He was a very warm and personable person, and had a great rapport with people. In my opinion he was a very good balance with Mrs. Webb, and was a visionary in his own way. While Mrs. Webb had ideas and the money to give support, there was also need for staff to help make them real. Dave took on that role, which I think he, as I said, has never been credited for. He not only designed the museum, but he had a vision as he was pivotal in forming new and expanded programs. I think that he and Mrs. Webb had a very good relationship in terms of really respecting each other. They were both on the same wavelength.

I know there were times when there was a real clash of opinion where Dave was very upset over something. I don't know exactly the detail of it—but a lot of times Mrs. Webb wanted things to happen immediately, and they couldn't always happen exactly when they were to happen, [laughs] Dave felt that we need more time.. So there was a certain amount of tension that would go on but overall, there was a wonderful, I think, mutual respect. I

do feel that had Dave not been there in those formative years, I don't think a lot of things would have happened, including realizing the museum as a very beautiful facility.

He also did a lot of things for Mrs. Webb. When I moved to New York, Mrs. Webb had just bought a new apartment, which was a merger of two penthouses on East Seventy-second Street. Dave created a beautiful modern environment with white marble floors. I would like to describe this a bit because it gives another dimension of Mrs. Webb. The living room was very large with a wall of glass looking south. It was furnished beautifully with a lot of handmade things. Over the sofa was a beautiful [Claude] Monet that her father gave her, and at the other end of the living room was a [Paul] Gauguin that she later sold for the benefit of the World Craft Council. She engaged George Wells to create a big round rug using the colors from the Monet for the front of the sofa. She also commissioned dining room furniture and chairs.

She would entertain there and have meetings. Craftsmen trustees would stay there as it was a large apartment. She also had a studio that was sky-lighted where she would do ceramics. I do recall being at many meetings in the wintertime
As that wall of glass was not insulated, it was very cold. [They laugh.] Craftsmen trustees were always complaining about how cold it was, and I remember not being very comfortable there at more than one meeting. What I'm portraying here is there were many dimensions to Mrs. Webb. She lived with a certain amount of luxury, but deep down she was really very modest. She was a member of the Colony Club where she would often have lunch, but she didn't go to social gatherings every afternoon. She was really interested in her mission and her whole life in those days was dedicated to it. She would come to work every day, and I remember on one occasion when there was a severe snowstorm, she called, and we walked down Park Avenue to open the museum. [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: Tell me about the museum staff at the time you were hired and how many staff really for the council all together there were.

MR. SMITH: It was a very small staff at the time. There was the magazine staff which we haven't spoken about. Conrad Brown was the editor, and Rose Slivka was the assistant editor who eventually became the editor. But I might first portray the environment of the building itself, because that gives an overview of the staff.

The main floor and the mezzanine were changing gallery spaces, and off the mezzanine was an area called the Little Gallery, where one-person shows were held. On the second level, in the front, was a small library. In the very beginning there was a librarian and a library with not a lot of publications, but it did exist. At the back end was a public lunchroom which Mrs. Webb directed.

MR. HERMAN: So food was prepared and served there to paying customers.

MR. SMITH: Yes, we had a cook and Mrs. Webb would buy food—I'm sure at the highest price someplace. It was a very inefficient operation. I remember that there were modular tables with Glidden dinnerware used. It was a buffet and so cheap that it was very popular. It brought a lot of people in because it was so good.

MR. HERMAN: Did people have to pay museum admission to go to the buffet?

MR. SMITH: That's a good question. In the beginning there was no admission.

I remember at one point realizing that the museum should get some form of admission, Fong Chow was commissioned to make a vessel for the entranceway with holes in it so contributions could be made. [Laughs] Continuing on the landscape of the building, the third floor in the front was Mrs. Webb's office, which was a small space with a handmade desk and furnishings. And next to it was a conference room furnished with all handmade objects. Walker Weed did the conference table. The lamp bases were by Peter Voulkos. It's where trustees' meetings would be held as well as staff meetings at times. At the back end of the floor was the business office. On the top floor in the front was the magazine office with Conrad Brown, Rose Slivka and Pat Dandignac.

MR. HERMAN: So it was four stories.

MR. SMITH: it was actually five stories if you include the mezzanine.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, okay.

MR. SMITH: The mezzanine was a partial floor with a well in the front and back. That was an advantage because it had a 20-foot height which was great for really large works that could be suspended. At the back end of the top floor was the museum office which was very small, and Tom Tibbs at the time was the director. His assistant was Robert Laurer, and there was a secretary by the name of Eileen Farrell. Next to it was a cubicle about six-by-six foot where David Campbell hung out as the executive vice president with a drawing board—not even an extra chair to sit down. I was given a little spot across from the museum office. So you get a sense that it was a

very crowded environment. But there was an advantage in that everybody, while they were doing their specialized activities, was working together and in touch with each other. So there was a certain amount of communal exchange which I'll speak about later.

I would like to mention that in the design of the museum, many craftsmen were commissioned. The front door handles were hand-carved and the front desk was a hand-created work. The big curved stairwell railing was hand-formed. In the back of the catalogue for "Craftsmanship in the Changing World" is a listing of the commissioned works that were part of the museum building.

So that portrays the working environment of the council and the museum. It is important to understand that the American Craftsmen's Council was one organization. Mrs. Webb was the chairman of the Board. Dave Campbell was executive vice president, and there were departments: the museum, the magazine, the regional program and the education program. .

MR. HERMAN: So there was a director, an assistant director, and you were assistant to the director?

MR. SMITH: Not In the beginning. I will clarify it because it gets complicated. I was changing my position all the time. When I joined the staff in 1957, I was developing educational programs. As I became more involved with other things and Dave became president of the council, I was formally titled his assistant. Then, in 1960 when Tom Tibbs left the museum to take another position, David Campbell took on the role of being director of the museum as well as president of the council. That placed me more closely with the museum program. When Bob Laurer left, I became assistant director of the museum. So in a period of a few years, I was first assistant to Dave for ACC, when I got involved with the museum, I became assistant director of the museum, all in a span of about three years.

MR. HERMAN: So Tom Tibbs resigned as director in 1960, and Robert Laurer—

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MR. HERMAN: And then Robert Laurer resigned in '62.

MR. SMITH: That's correct.

MR. HERMAN: Then when you became director, did you have an assistant or how was the staff?

MR. SMITH: Well, I should explain how I became director. Dave Campbell was taking on an enormous amount of responsibility between being president of the organization and being the director of the museum. Having a family in Concord, New Hampshire; he would go home weekends, driving his Porsche at great speeds to get there and drive back to New York to be at work on Monday morning. He was also traveling all over the country to give lectures and jury shows. He was really being driven too much, and he developed a health problem with his heart and did not take care of himself very well. Unfortunately, on March 24th 1963 he died of a heart attack.

That was a very great loss to the organization and it was a personal loss to me because I was working so closely with him. There was the question of the future and who will direct the museum as by that time Bob Laurer had left and I was the assistant director. I do not know how the decision was made, but Mrs. Webb was still active at the helm and there was a board of trustees. It was decided that I should become the director. So I was appointed director in September of '63. That was, in one word, a challenge. [Laughs.]

MR. HERMAN: Well, we're almost done with this part of the interview and the next card will be your term as director. But before this ends, I just wanted to sort of recap what the museum programs were that you inherited as director, and how did the staff function to implement those, including your role before you took up the helm.

MR. SMITH: Well, just to reflect on history. Herwin Schaefer was officially the first director in the formative stage. I do not know what happened, but I understand there was some misunderstanding and he left. So Tom Tibbs was brought in from the Huntington Gallery in West Virginia. As he was an experienced museum person I credit him for establishing what I would call a professional museum operation including planning of exhibitions, educational programs, lectures, and one-person shows. He deserves credit for establishing the museum with credentials. Robert Lauer was also helpful. So it became established in a few years.

When Dave Campbell became director it was a continuing of that, where exhibitions were organized and in the beginning I was helping with installations and soon got involved with curatorial activities. At that point it was fertile ground in that it was a new museum and a very exciting period in the field as there was so much happening. I want to later talk more about the environment of the '60s. But the museum had an image of being very professional, and the location was fantastic, being next to MoMA. The beautiful design of the museum was very complementary. Even though it was a small space, it was a personal experience to view an exhibition. So it conveyed I think, for the council as well as for the field itself, a very prestigious image.

MR. HERMAN: This is the end of memory card number two, interview with Paul Smith.

[END OF DISC 2.]

MR. HERMAN: This is memory card number three, interview with Paul Smith at his home in New York on April 19, 2010.

Paul, we were last talking about the Museum of Contemporary Crafts at the time you became director. But before that there were already some kind of forays from the American Craft Council into the international scene. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

MR. SMITH: Yes. One of the most important events that took place was in 1964. Again, credit for this goes to Mrs. Webb's vision, as she felt that having had successful national conferences it would be interesting to explore an international connection. The timing was very good because 1964 was the year of the New York World's Fair. Mrs. Webb became acquainted with Margaret Patch, who had an interest in the arts and became interested in this project. Working with Mrs. Webb she made several trips around the world to make contact with activities and to explore the possibility of bringing people together for a gathering. The concept was that Mrs. Webb felt that rather than have another national conference, it would be exciting to have a world gathering, and to bring people from all parts of the world that had some involvement with craft activity.

So through Mrs. Patch's research and with a lot of planning and involvement, this did take place. It was called the "The First International Congress of Craftsmen" and was held at Columbia University on the campus in the Teachers' College wing. It was a very important event with over 250 attendees that came from foreign lands and according to the conference report 46 countries were represented. That in itself was an amazing accomplishment, combined with the large American attendance. It was a very large gathering. Like the Asilomar Conference which was important in bringing people together in this country, this did the same thing on a global basis. Along with other staff, I was involved in suggesting programs to be presented. While a lot of the real logistics of the whole event were handled by a separate staff we had input into the program itself. I curated a major exhibition called "The American Craftsman," which was an invitational show of some of the masters to portray the accomplished work being done in the US. It also was aimed for people coming to the World's Fair.

MR. HERMAN: But it was at the museum.

MR. SMITH: It was at the museum.

MR. HERMAN: And this was several years after you had become director. ? So both go back to that.

MR. SMITH: It was 1964, one year after I became director.

MR. HERMAN: Yes.

MR. SMITH: And there was also a photographic portion shown at the World's Fair. A special issue of the magazine became the catalogue that included many other artists in addition to the show I did. The gathering itself was a memorable event because there was a lot of camaraderie among the people that came together. It's important here I think again to reflect on Mrs. Webb's mission. She felt strongly that by bringing people together with a common interest, it would be a better world. That was the underlying purpose of it, which carried on her earlier interests in helping people..

MR. HERMAN: Well, she was really creating a United Nations for craft.

MR. SMITH: Yes. Exactly, exactly. In her opening speech to the whole convention, she did reflect on that. It was a very memorable event. And I do remember one evening, many of the foreign visitors were socializing and were interchanging with whatever common interests they had. There was a point where they were singing folksongs from their home counties. It was an environment that was really hard to describe, but it was really successful in the sense of doing what it was set out to do.

MR. HERMAN: Do you remember the kinds of issues that were brought up at these conferences? What was the gist of them?

MR. SMITH: There is a conference publication that documents the total program with transcripts of speeches. It was intended to cover many different aspects, and I don't recall all the areas, but it was looking at the economic issues, but also philosophical. We had poets and people of different disciplines to speak to add an intellectual quality to it. It had a very high-level content. Built into it was the intention of forming a world organization, which in fact did happen. So it was during this gathering in June that the World Craft Council was officially formed.

MR. HERMAN: In 1964.

MR. SMITH: In 1964. Then began a process of developing a network where there would be representation from different areas of the world. A direct result was the formation of the Australian Craft Council, and Canadian Craft Council. They were formed so that they had a national identity that could have representation and be part of WCC. In some cases there were already existing organizations like in Germany. Later regional structures were established, like the European World Craft Council.

Once this was launched, there was already a plan to conduct other gatherings. At this point Mrs. Webb, who had been giving all her time to the ACC, was totally occupied with WCC and that became her main interest. They developed a staff, and eventually hired an executive director because it was such a big responsible task. A series of meetings was held in different parts of the world, some we've both been at. In '66 there was a smaller conference in Montreux, Switzerland, but the really wonderful one that I will recall was in 1968 in Lima, Peru. To go to Peru was a great experience. I want to tell a little story here. Selected ACC staff went to these events, but we didn't go without having some responsibility of having to help out in some way.

In this case my responsibility came as a total surprise, when I arrived at the conference center, which was outside of Lima, where attendees stayed and where the meetings were held. Mrs. Webb came up and said, "Can you help out because we have sent a letter to all of the foreign representatives to bring something for an exhibition." [They laugh.] Needless to say, again I was still relatively young, and had a lot of energy, but I thought, oh, my goodness, how am I going to deal with this? There was no museum and a big empty room was designated for the exhibit.

MR. HERMAN: In this conference center.

MR. SMITH: In the conference site. So I rallied around for help and found a group of volunteer architectural students from Lima, five of them which was a gift from heaven. Jim and Olga Amaral helped. We set up a system to receive work. People were bringing all kinds of objects, jewelry with diamonds and some truly tourist objects. As we had to have some means of receiving, we set up a system because we couldn't just take this work in without having some record. The second hurdle was a plain room with nothing in it, and how do you display with a few plain walls and a lot of windows. So with the students we went to a lumberyard, got cinderblock, big sheets of plywood and made low tables. We somehow managed to make an exhibit of the best of the work, but. It was not going to win any award.

MR. HERMAN: I can see where your store display background helped you improvise.

MR. SMITH: Yes, but it was a challenge. We worked all night long and as we were almost finished, I looked out the window, and I suddenly saw all this activity. There was an honor guard lining up, and here comes Mrs. Webb with the president of Peru [Fernando Belaunde Terry] [they laugh] to show the exhibit.

MR. HERMAN: Just assuming you'd have it done.

MR. SMITH: Fernando Belaunde Terry, who was the president at the time, and who was very supportive of the conference and hosted a reception at the Presidential Palace one evening, came to see the exhibit. I have a photograph where he's actually standing on one of the textiles. [They laugh.] So I gave my little tour, but it was one of those spontaneous things that I felt I had to record to indicate how things did happen, and how everyone became involved. It was a wonderful gathering. With Peru's rich culture and tradition, there were post-tours to historic sites and to museums. It was really great. Planes were chartered for groups from America. I remember when we left Peru, the plane was so loaded with artifacts that people had acquired it was overwhelming. I mean the people had spears and things that would not fit in the bins.

Unfortunately, three weeks later, there was a coup, and the president was removed. I hadn't realized that Belaunde Terry was an architect, and was responsible for some visionary expansions of Lima. When he was in exile in Boston, he came to New York. One of the students who had come to live in New York had a party one evening for him, so we had a dinner evening together. Important was that each conference important events took place. There was one in Dublin, one in Mexico, and Japan. As the host country was always dependent upon raising funds to make a conference possible, they hosted it on a very official level. I believe you attended the one in Kyoto. Do you remember when the Crown Prince and Princess came to one of the events? It was not only just that official connection, but also the fact that the master artisans were present and participated in the programming.

I was very involved with the one in Toronto in 1974 when the first world craft exhibition was assembled. James Plaut was then the Secretary General of WCC. The exhibition was presented at the Ontario Science Center and there was a publication, *In Praise of Hands* [Octavio Paz. Greenwich, Conn. New York Graphic Society, 1974], that exists. I was on the jury for that show and was very involved with the implementation of it at the Science Center, which is such a remarkable institution. It was great to work with them because they were very

innovative with the planning. The Canadian Film Board did a one-hour film that I also advised on. It was a very big accomplishment for the World Craft Council at that point. The last one I attended was in Australia. The World Craft Council still exists today in a not very active way, but they're trying to revive it.

MR. HERMAN: Let's go on to your tenure as museum director. And I'm particularly interested in how you continued—[Telephone rings.] Well, with that interruption, telephone ring, let's revisit your tenure as museum director and how the programs continued to professionalize the kinds of exhibitions and other programs which are significant that you initiated. And also a little bit about the context of the changing craft field.

MR. SMITH: When I became director in September of '63, as I said, I'd already been involved with the museum and had been organizing some exhibitions. So I had my two feet on the ground in the sense of knowing the operation. But becoming director was yet another responsible role. I know that I was very conscious of the fact that I had very limited experience and that it was certainly a challenge to continue the good work that had been done. I gave a lot of thought about how that should develop, but I think much was directed by what was happening at the time. I felt that the museum, although already established in a few years, was very new. Being in New York City which had so many things going on, one had to think about its role as a specialized museum. When one asks the question, what is the role of the museum, there was no strict mission or governing body that was saying it had to be this or it had to be that. It was an open terrain and I had a lot of freedom which was an advantage.

MR. HERMAN: Excuse me, Paul, but at that time, too, there was no [Smithsonian] Cooper Hewitt, National Museum of Design [New York City]. There was no American Folk Art Museum [New York City].

MR. SMITH: That's correct.

MR. HERMAN: So I'm guessing that you began to see—and I don't want to put words in your mouth—but those edges of contemporary craft as being important to include.

MR. SMITH: Well, having been in New York a few years, I was very aware of all the other institutions and certainly very aware of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts uniqueness. So I think there was one single focus that I would say was what I felt the most important. As so much was happening nationally, and so much exciting new work was developing, our main role was to report as much as possible on the different things that were taking place. It was really giving visibility if something new was happening.

Simultaneously, we tried to create a balance within the program. Our exhibition space had an advantage of being very small and personal, but we had a great disadvantage that every time we closed a show, we had to close the museum for ten days. That was not a great thing, and it was a real burden to remove a show and install a new one. We would have four or five changes a year in the main galleries and continue what Tom Tibbs started with one person or small shows in the Little Gallery. When the lunchroom closed, we turned that into another gallery which was called the Upper Gallery. We also had a very small staff at the time.

MR. HERMAN: How small?

MR. SMITH: Well, it was a few people really not counting the guard and reception staff. We relied upon outside help a lot for installing new exhibitions and everybody pitched in. I would like to say that it's important to understand that I had the title of museum director, which was a little misleading. In most museums directors are involved with administration, fundraising and all of the aspects of governing. With the hierarchy of ACC, the business office handled all the business affairs. Also I wasn't involved with fundraising in the beginning mainly because the budget was small, and Mrs. Webb was picking up a deficit at the end of the year if there was one. So my role would best be described as a chief curator with a hands-on involvement with exhibitions.

I was very involved with every exhibition. We used a lot of outside consultants and people to help us with shows, because there was no way we could do all of that with our small staff. One of the first shows I did when Dave Campbell was still alive was "Forms From the Earth: A Thousand Years of Pottery in America." [1962] a big survey of ceramics. We engaged specialist curators. Marvin Schwartz, at the Brooklyn Museum wrote an essay for the catalogue.

MR. HERMAN: Decorative arts curator?

MR. SMITH: Yes. And he was very helpful in lending works. Fred Dockstader, the director of the Museum of the American Indian, likewise was valuable in contributing Native American material and writing an essay for the catalogue. We also engaged Daniel Rhodes to write on contemporary ceramics. I borrowed works from the Syracuse Museum and their Ceramic Nationals and we would draw upon resources that were available. So in the beginning, as I was saying, I felt the important mission of the museum was to report on what was happening. We were at that point perhaps more making history than being involved with history. But if the occasion arose where there was a need to reflect on history as with the "Thousand Years of Pottery," we brought in the experts

to help do that.

Having been so closely involved with the field since the '50s, I was very aware of what was happening all over the country, of new work in each media, and trends that were taking place. *Craft Horizons* was reporting on this as well. We would also be receiving mailed in material all the time.

MR. HERMAN: Well, that answers one of my questions: How did you keep up?

MR. SMITH: Well, as the museum was established, we began to have artists coming to us regularly wanting to show their work. That was great and we would always see everyone. If I was available, I would always see an artist. It was very time-consuming, but it was also the way that we saw work and many times work inspired an exhibition. A good example, was one of the early shows I did -- "Woven Forms" in 1963.

MR. HERMAN: "Woven Forms."

MR. SMITH: I visited Lenore Tawney, who had moved to New York in '57. She had a studio on Coenties Slip, later at South Street, which was a small artist community where Robert Indiana, Jack Youngerman and several other artists were living. I was so impressed with her sculptural weavings that she was creating. One was suspended in a sail maker's shaft that was very long. Because it was so dramatic, I thought, well; this really is important for an exhibition. As she called them "woven forms", it became the title of the exhibition. After deciding that would be a subject to cover, we then looked at other work and finally decided to add four other women artists: Claire Zeisler, Dorian Zachai, Alice Adams, and Sheila Hicks. Historically that has become a very important show. While Lenore had shown some work, there had not been a major museum exhibition on this subject. So that turned out to be an example of reporting on the new. Erika Billeter, curator from the Kunstgewerbemuseum Museum in Zurich saw it, and liked the work so much that she created a version of it with three of the artists: Claire, Sheila, and Lenore. The showing in Zurich, was one of the first American exposures of American fiber art in Europe. It was also shown in Caracas, Venezuela.

MR. HERMAN: About that time didn't the Museum of Modern Art do some sort of a fiber arts show ["Wall Hangings." 1969]?

MR. SMITH: Later, in the late '60s, yes that Connie did.

MR. HERMAN: Mildred Constantine. Yes.

MR. SMITH: Yes and often is recognized appropriately. What I'm indicating here is that visiting a studio or seeing work, is how one developed an exhibition idea. Likewise, the same year, I saw a number of the West Coast ceramic artists getting interested in metal casting. As casting was usually done in foundries at great expense, at [University of California,] Davis they set up a foundry where there could be a hands-on activity.

MR. HERMAN: Davis, California?

MR. SMITH: Davis, California. That's where Bob Arneson was. Soon there was a group of artists casting very freely, doing very experimental work. It was related to what was happening in clay, and the Abstract Expressionist work by Peter Voulkos. Pete became very interested and eventually had his own foundry. There were other areas around the country. Jewelers were casting, like Irena Brynner and other jewelers who were doing small works. Bill Underhill at Alfred was casting vessel forms.. So we put together an exhibition called "Creative Casting" [1963]. The show came from observing activity that we thought was really interesting and was deserving of an exhibition. That wasn't characteristic of every exhibition, but it definitely was very much an opportunity for showing new innovative work.

The small spaces of the Little Gallery and later the Upper Gallery became a venue for giving one-person shows that were equally important, because at that point very few New York galleries were showing this work and no other museums. So Harvey Littleton, Toshiko Takaezu, Margaret De Patta, Fred Miller, the Natzlers [Gertrud and Otto Natzler] were given one-person shows in these small galleries. We did a little brochure to document each. They were important not only being a one-person show, but for many of these artists it was the first time they had work exhibited in New York, certainly a one-person show.

MR. HERMAN: Did you publish catalogues for both the group shows and the one-person shows?

MR. SMITH: Modest catalogues. We never had a lot of money, but we would always do some form of documentation.

MR. HERMAN: You had a record.

MR. SMITH: We would do a record. Sometimes we joined with Rose and did a special issue like the *The American Craftsman* which saved money by producing a special issue that got national distribution.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. It's important to keep in mind that the museum was part of the American Craftsmen's Council. And so you had the other components that supported each other. The magazine could report on your exhibitions. I think the other education program—I remember that there were slide kits produced that were of your shows.

MR. SMITH: Yes, slide kits were produced and sold or rented under the "Portable Museum" program, and I think that was very important. The fact that ACC had many facets and it was like a family where each staff member contributed and often worked together. For example, Rose would cover most of the exhibitions with a feature, often including a cover image on the magazine. Well, it was nice to have that coverage, but it also gave national visibility to the show. The Research and Education Department would do slide kits on the exhibitions and rent them or sell them to schools. And there was important press coverage. I think there was a great advantage for any New York museum to be at the center of press. I know that the many feature stories that the museum received over the years in *Life* magazine, *Time* magazine, *Newsweek, or reports on theToday Show* would not have happened as easily if we were in Kansas City or somewhere else. I'm not saying that could not have happened. I think we got an abundance of generous press coverage because of our location in New York. But many of the subjects also generated a lot of international coverage which I always looked at as not just an endorsement, although there was sometimes critical coverage as well, but it did extend the exhibition to a vast audience.

MR. HERMAN: During this period were any of those exhibitions that you originated here circulated to other museums?

MR. SMITH: Yes. Again, because the American Craftsmen's Council was a national organization, we definitely planned extending as many shows as we could and used touring services such as the American Federation of Arts, SITES, the Smithsonian touring service [Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service]. Eventually we did our own touring because of timing to get shows approved. We felt it an important part of our program, to extend shows throughout the country as ACC was a membership organization. If you were a member, you got the magazine and you got free admission to the museum. But if you lived in Seattle or San Diego, and didn't get to New York City, you would not see these shows. I would say the single most consistent extension was through *Craft Horizons.*

MR. HERMAN: During that period, I'm thinking about, you know, being a component of the council. And you had said Mrs. Webb would pick up the cost of any deficit at the end of the year. How did you go about coming up with an idea for an exhibition? Did you have to budget for it? Or tell her what it was going to cost?

MR. SMITH: There was an administrative structure that became bigger and more involved as the museum expanded. Yes. There was always planning as we had to schedule and come up with a budget. In the beginning, the first few years, we managed to do a lot of things with existing funds. Keep in mind there was money coming in from membership, advertising money coming into the magazine, and Mrs. Webb would give some support. Later we began to charge admission at the museum, so there was a little income. But when Mrs. Webb's was not in a position to contribute to the expanding costs, it became a very challenging time for the organization. The museum, I think, was in a vulnerable position because the magazine would get advertising revenue and at that point American Craft Enterprises, the marketing program, was earning its own overhead and costs.

MR. HERMAN: But it developed a little bit later, I think.

MR. SMITH: Later, later. The museum was a real cost and there was no way we could make money.

MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So that raises a question, whether or not with the demise of America House, whether objects in museum exhibitions were sold.

MR. SMITH: No, we couldn't being a nonprofit. Marketing at ACC is yet another subject. When America House closed and eventually when American Craft Enterprises developed the craft market in the beginning, for legal purposes, it was a separate corporation because it was a conflict to be associated with a not-for-profit organization. But lack of funds did lead to explore outside funding resulting in several exhibitions that were sponsored—which I will speak about when we get into talking about sponsorship.

MR. HERMAN: The exhibitions, though, I'm curious how you see the whole exhibition program changed from the Tom Tibbs, Dave Campbell era when you became director.

MR. SMITH: Part of it was a continuum. That's not answering the change, but in terms of change, I've already expressed that I had a lot of freedom. As I think back and look at all the exhibitions we did and all the different subjects we covered it is interesting to think about how they evolved. .Keep in mind I was not trained as an art historian as most museum people are. As an artist and a creative person I realized that creating art work was not so different from creating an exhibition. There was a process and creative thinking in not only conceiving an idea for an exhibition, but also in developing an exhibition. That's maybe oversimplified.

MR. HERMAN: No, no.

MR. SMITH: When I moved to New York in the beginning, I had a studio in a separate apartment, where I was painting, and doing my own personal thing. I did begin to find that there was an analogy with exploring and researching an exhibition as a creative process that was not so unrelated to creating an artwork. It may sound farfetched, but I do know that in my mind that it was working that way, and I think this is my interpretation of it as I look back. I know I enjoyed the challenge of new subject, researching it, and thinking of new ways of how to do it and end up with some kind of a result.

MR. HERMAN: I was always impressed by the originality of the exhibitions that you conceived and presented and your innovations in presentation. Because I think that goes right back to what you learned during your store display period. But I'd like you to talk a little bit about what you—because we're talking, we're into the '60s now, and talking about the real changes in the craft field.

MR. SMITH: I think that's really important because one must place all that I've been talking about in the context of the time and the environment. I'm going to begin with the '50s because that was a very formative time. And one can't say it was this year or that year, but there was a lot of change that was happening in America. I referred to before, the GI Bill, that had a profound effect in all areas of education. For the arts it was important, and for the craft field especially important because many of the schools began to develop programs for ceramics and other media disciplines as part of the art department that had formerly been in home economics departments or in other areas. The expansion of the school network fostered the need for teachers. So there was the motivation to go to college to get your master's degree to become a teacher as that was a career opportunity. In earlier days the market was very limited. I do want to point out that there were many craftsmen that independently earned a very modest living that was not associated with the school structure.

MR. HERMAN: From making objects and selling.

MR. SMITH: Yes, jewelers like the village jewelers, Art Smith, Sam Wiener, and others throughout the country. There were many production potters, several in New England and the south, and a network of what I call studio makers that were dedicated to what they were doing. They were able to earn a modest living from commissioned work as Wharton Esherick did, or by selling from their studios or at craft fairs. Organizations like the Southern Highlands Craft Guild and the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen had craft fairs. So there were some marketing outlets but often selling took place directly from a studio.

MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmatvie.]

MR. SMITH: I bought these coffee mugs by Karen Karnes for five dollars apiece in the '60s, and I use them every day.

In the mid-'50s and the '60s. I say the school was the patron because it was a dominant influence of creating an environment where there was an expanding faculty, expanding programs, expanding students, and a lot of sharing that was taking place between faculty and students. To be a good teacher one needed good credentials, have a good resume, and do innovative work. So really the school was the umbrella that nurtured all of these very drastic changes breaking from tradition in all media. So many exciting new things were happening. Another point I would add is that this was taking place in art schools and university art programs where a chemistry between all departments began to nurture more individual expressive forms.

So there was a lot happening. I will single out one example. At the early conferences Harvey Littleton, who was teaching ceramics in Madison at the University of Wisconsin was exploring his interest in glass. As you may know, he had been brought up in Corning [NY] and his interest led to the development of the now well-documented important studio workshop in Toledo with Dominick Labino in '62. They built a small furnace to have a hands-on involvement with hot glass. That led to the birth of the so-called studio glass movement.

When Harvey went back to the university, he immediately shared that with his ceramics students, among them Marvin Lipofsky who just gave a lecture yesterday and was talking about the importance of Harvey and his role as a teacher. That sharing gave birth to the studio glass movement that spread like a disease. A few years later there were programs all over the country. I'm using this as an example because I feel this sharing of technical information was so central to the rapid expansion of the studio movement. No secrets were kept. And I think that is a very American characteristic compared to—I don't want to generalize on this because people share all over the world—but I think Europeans were much more protective of techniques they discovered and there was not as much openness. Another example was Stanley Lechtzin. When he began to explore electro-forming of metal, he immediately did a paper and presented it at a SNAG [Society of North American Goldsmiths] conference to share what he had discovered. Likewise, John Paul Miller with gold granulation, when he found out how to do that, he did a film.

What I'm pointing out here is that this environment of the expanding educational institutions with faculty exploring new areas and sharing it with the students was very important. There was an interaction, where students were inspiring the teacher and the teachers were inspiring the students. This led to in a relatively short time a vast break from tradition and an enormous panorama of new expressions in all media.

MR. HERMAN: And these were not necessarily any longer functional objects.

MR. SMITH: No. A focus on making functional objects did exist, but there was definitely individual expression in all forms. Each medium has its own story. I'm going to add one other ingredient: Having been here in New York in the 1960s, I don't think there was any one decade in the twentieth century that was more dynamic in terms of what happened on all levels. There was a cultural revolution. There were all the challenging things of the Vietnam War, the assassinations, but there also was the "back-to-the-earth" movement, the drug culture, the new music, communal living, happenings, events and the openness to try anything. When you combine all of that energy with what was happening in the schools that adds up to a lot of activity. That's what I was enriched with when I became director.

MR. HERMAN: Do you want to say anything about your growing awareness of the international scene?

MR. SMITH: Yes, I can speak about that. From the very beginning of the museum international work was shown. Tom Tibbs presented exhibitions that were important. When I became director, I did several -- "Contemporary French Bookbinding" in '64; and "Glass: Czechoslovakia / Italy" the same year and many other shows included artists and designers from all over the world. There wasn't a rigid rule, but I felt that there was so much happening in the United States and being an American museum, that our focus should be on American work. So the criteria was that if we showed something from abroad, it had to stand out as being very important internationally or was of special interest to an American audience. The Czechoslovakia and Italian glass show was important because the studio glass movement was just developing and I thought it timely to show the great rich tradition and contemporary work from two countries that had such a long craft tradition.

MR. HERMAN: Yes. The international artists also, I think, would have presented a challenge because if the museum was paying for incoming and return transportation, that could be a lot more expensive, too. Over artists who expected to pay their own.

MR. SMITH: Well, it was. But with the glass show, we had support from the Czechoslavakia government and a Italian—Venice organization helped pay for the shipping. So that was something that developed with many future shows.

MR. HERMAN: This is the end of—I keep wanting to say disc or tape—of memory card number three, interview with Paul Smith. We'll resume on card four.

[END OF DISC 3.]

MR. HERMAN: This is Lloyd Herman interviewing Paul Smith in his apartment in New York on April 19, 2010, for the Archives of American Art. And this is memory card number four.

Paul, we ended the last one talking about the changes that you were observing in the 1960s in the craft field and how they were reflected in exhibitions that you were presenting at the museum. Now do you want to continue with that?

MR. SMITH: As I became more established in the museum director role, I became a little more adventurous and experimental, I guess. As I have already talked about the climate of the environment in the '60s being very free and very open. As the museum did not have any restricted formula for programs, I used the opportunity to explore different subjects. I felt that so much was happening in all the craft media in the '60s. The birth of the studio glass movement, new directions in fiber and the funk movement in clay, resulted in exhibitions in one form or another. There was also another dimension to the subject of craft that I thought should be explored.

So we began to explore some new subjects. Depending upon how the show was received and the success of it, it often nurtured other explorations. One of the first exhibitions we did that was thematic and became a style for many other shows was "Amusements Is" [1965]. That came about with the idea of doing a show focused on humor and play. We sought out artists, who created sculptural works or objects related to that subject. We brought together a collection of work and called it "Amusements Is?" with a question mark to provoke thought on the theme. We also began to include some participatory elements. In addition to William Accorsi and several who had works that characterized fantasy and humor, we borrowed a musical tower that Charles Eames created

for the World's Fair. It was a wonderful object.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, in San Antonio? That world's fair, Hemisfair?

MR. SMITH: It may have been. It was a like a vertical xylophone As we had the height between the main floor and the mezzanine it was installed so you could drop a ball in the top, and it would play a tune as it would descend to the main floor.

MR. HERMAN: What year was that?

MR. SMITH: That was in 1965. It was wonderful to include that work as it brought me in touch with Charles Eames and Ray Eames, but it was also symbolic of how we began to interpret a subject and to integrate viewer's involvement.

The next thematic exhibition was quite a radical change. It was ‘'Cookies and Bread: The Baker's Art." that was presented in 1966, a year later. We began research for a small holiday show and realized that it was such a fascinating subject that it could be a bigger show. Because we did not know the subject we engaged Nika Hazelton who was a cookbook author and a food expert. Through her contacts, we assembled a remarkable collection. We had wedding breads flown in from Greece. We had items from Scandinavian countries, and we went to the Lower East Side of NY and found Sicilian bakers who created decorative breads. Elsa Johnson, who was an artist, created contemporary cookie forms, and conducted cookie bakes for children. As over-the-top as it was, and "why is a museum doing such a show?" it turned out to be a great success by attracting a totally new audience of young people and an audience that may never come to the museum. Even Mrs. Webb, I think, had some doubts, but when she saw the popularity of it and the response to it she realized it was OK.

MR. HERMAN: Did it also attract vermin to the edible objects? [Laughs.]

MR. SMITH: That was a challenge because in fact Nika and I discussed this problem. The Greek wedding bread came broken and we had to glue it back together with Elmer's Glue-All. We were concerned about the mold developing in the breads and so Nika suggested somebody who dealt with preservation of food.
We termed her, a cookie doctor, when she injected the breads with formaldehyde. [Mr. Herman laughs.] We also sprayed many with lacquer to protect them. Then I had the great concern as some of these works were exposed, suppose some child tries to eat one. Fortunately, it was amazing that there was an enormous respect for the breads that were displayed exposed, and nobody ever touched them. They just looked.

One footnote I would add -- when you look at the process of kneading bread, for example, it's not unlike working with clay. Bread needs to be baked, and ceramics get fired in a higher heat. So there were analogies that were not so farfetched about the hand skills of a material. So I felt the exhibition had a serious focus and certainly broke the mold for reaching out to new audiences, and its success offered encouragement for us to do some more.

MR. HERMAN: So what came after that?

MR. SMITH: Well, there were many and it's not possible in this interview to cover all of them, but they are well documented in catalogues. One that was very popular was "Body Covering." It was an exhibition where we examined the subject of why we wear clothes in relation to the technology of our time. It was organized into three sections: a technical section, a section dealing with original clothing design, and a section of visionary ideas. We included top designers like Rudy Gernreich and Bonnie Cashin. As Rudy Gernreich was doing very unique clothing at that time I met with him when he came to New York. Bonnie Cashin, who was one of the outstanding designers of the twentieth century, did all that very innovative clothing and conceptual ideas about new forms of coverings for the body.

MR. HERMAN: She also became a good friend of yours, too, didn't she?

MR. SMITH: Yes, she was a very good friend. We also showed work from the space program, including a space suit. We had temperature-controlled clothing and fire-retardant clothing. One of the limitations was the power source that was required at that time was unwieldy in size. In the exhibition we made analogies with animals and all the advantages they have as protective covering. For example, a turtle is protected with a shell, and a furry animal with fur, etc. So we were illustrating that man is vulnerable. In the house or car you have all kinds of controls such as temperature control, but when you come out you are exposed to the environment. So the idea of a portable kind of controllable covering was interesting to research.

One section dealt with sketches and ideas for the future. One concept for a cell phone was really a visionary idea at that time. So it was very much a show dealing with ideas and design and addressed an important subject. There was always a craft connection of some sort and was rooted in some way to the human being. For another show called "The Art of Personal Adornment," we brought historical examples together with

contemporary adornment. It was organized by area of the body -- for the head, for the neck, for the waist, etc. One of our very ambitious ones was "Contemplation Environments" in 1970. These shows resulted from ideas that came to us or a subject that we discussed and thought about. We often brainstormed in staff meetings new show ideas, and then did preliminary research.

MR. HERMAN: Would you be talking about those ideas to other ACC staff like Rose Slivka at the magazine?

MR. SMITH: Yes, but It was very much within the museum staff. Sometimes I gave some workshops with museum groups and a few shows were born out of that. So there was a searching around for ideas. Some shows were realized, and some were not realized. "Contemplation Environments" was reflecting on the sixties, an era when there was a lot of interest in mind and body associations including myself, when I was doing yoga and into Tai Chi.

MR. HERMAN: TM [transcendental meditation]

MR. SMITH: TM, yes. I practiced TM, and that was very important to me, as it was very much part of that era. So, the concept for this was that we show ideas about contemplative environments that artists would propose. Here is a case where the show was totally created. We called for ideas as we would never invite or ask an artist to make something. It was always an artist's choice. We would let the subject be known, and then we would receive ideas, review, discuss them, and selected ones were created. An example in this case was Wendell Castle who responded, as he often did. He created a womblike form that was fur lined, and you could crawl into. It was a beautiful object. Alexandra Kazuba who had been exploring sculptural forms with fabric created an environment of stretch fabric and collaborated with Urban Jupena who made a large rug for a seating area. To coordinate all of this was a New York architect Gamal El Zoghby. We engaged him to create a floor plan so that one could go from one environment to the other, and it didn't look like a hodgepodge as there had to be some coordination.

So the show was totally created. It had some problems in that just the very nature of contemplation and spending time was not compatible with a lot of people coming through. So many environments did not work in that regard. But it was again another exploration that was very successful and generated a big article in *Time* magazine.

It was the growing tendency for us to explore ways of involving the public as the museum, being a small space, did not have a facility for an educational program. We just didn't have a room for it, but we felt that we had an obligation to conduct educational activities. So, many of these shows integrated some participatory activity along with educational involvement. And there were a few that I will speak about in a moment that were totally hands-on events.

Another show that we did in 1966 was called "The Objects in the Open Air," that was an exhibition where we explored the use of public space, such as monuments and use of parks. We again solicited sketches from artists for ideas. We featured Lawrence Halprin's pocket parks that he had designed in various parts of the country. Being open to ideas, we would often have people come to us with something they wanted to be realized. This became a very important part of our program that led to many different events, as well as some actual exhibitions. In conjunction with "The Objects in the Open Air," Phyllis Yampolsky and Dean Fleming came with the idea of wanting to do a public event in Central Park. The timing of this was great because Tom Hoving, who later became director of the Metropolitan Museum, had just become the NYC Parks Commissioner.

So, when we met with Tom we asked if it would be possible for us to do this event in the park in conjunction with the exhibition. He was very open and said, "Yes, let's do it." So on a Sunday afternoon 30 yards of canvas were stretched on a hill behind the Metropolitan Museum and buckets of paint were there for the public to draw cartoons. It was a very modest activity, but symbolically it was important. Up until that point the park was safe in many areas, but it was still not a friendly place all the time. So with Tom Hoving becoming the new parks commissioner, this became kind of a symbol of new life in the park, and we were very happy about that association. Later public events became "Hoving Happenings" when there were all kinds of events that took place that we had nothing to do with. It was a way that we went beyond the museum walls and into the city, which we did many times, using artists to involve the public in some way.

MR. HERMAN: Did the city help support the expense of doing that?

MR. SMITH: I think they did. I can't remember. They certainly provided whatever permits we needed. When you do something in public space you need to have security and insurance coverage. I don't remember the details, but it was, I would say, a very successful experiment.

In fulfilling our role for educational programming, a couple of times we closed the museum and opened it as a workshop with a theme. One was called "Make a Banner, Fly a Banner" in 1973. That again was in connection with the Parks Department. Karen Bacon, who was a celebration and events person, working full time in Tom

Hoving's program to develop events in the park launched "Craft Week" and wanted us to do something special. So we came up with this idea of "Make a Banner, Fly a Banner," where the main floor and mezzanine were set up with work tables and materials so that anybody could come in and make a banner with some instruction. We had instructors roaming around to help and we had blunt scissors so nobody hurt themselves. If they didn't want to make a full banner, they could make a tile for what would become a communal banner. The tiles were then sewn together to make one big banner.

MR. HERMAN: Well, they'd be a little like quilt squares, I guess, if they were fabric.

MR. SMITH: That's right. They were 12-by-12. We announced at the beginning that for those who made a banner, at the end of the week, we would we would have a parade. So we engaged Marilyn Wood, who did several things with us over the years, was an early dancer with Merce Cunningham, and went on to do public celebration events all over the world. She led the parade around Rockefeller Center that was a fun experiment. But the important thing was that the museum was open as a workshop.

The same year, in the summertime, we did another series called "DRESS UP: Make It, Wear It, Share It" when each week we had a different theme. We had Clown Week, we had Sound Week, and we had Fresh Vegetable and Flower Week. Robert Kushner, the well-known artist today, was the one who conducted that. So with flowers and vegetables participants made necklaces and adornments and whatever. Some of these events seem now quite farfetched, but what was important was interpreting the craft experience in a new way. I mean to make adornment out of ephemeral material was interesting. Also to make the museum people-friendly and allow the public to come in to create was a very, very important part of it.

A lot of this reflected the whole spirit of the '60s, of being open [laughs] and trying new things. It was very much related to the happenings and the be-ins and people connections, and I think it didn't seem out of place in the context of other things that were going on at the time.

We had artists from abroad come to us as word began to get around about the experimental things that we were doing. The Swedish Institute came to us with an exhibition that they thought we might be interested in. It was called "Feel It" which focused on a sensory association with objects. So, two artists Gustav Clason and Eric Sorling created an environment.

They transformed the main floor gallery into a total maze of hanging plastic strips for the visitor to wander through to discover objects, touch objects and have a personal relationship with the objects. As I think back, I'm not quite sure how we legally got away with that because we had no way of controlling what went on in the maze. But it was a serious idea. I mean this was not just frivolous. It was another successful event and a beautiful catalog was published. As these two artists felt strongly about sensory awareness of materials and objects. "Feel It" was a proper description about how you relate to something not just visually but tactilely.

The next year Haus Rucker, a group from Vienna were doing public events. They came to us with this proposal of wanting to live in a museum for a period of time and present their ideas. So three Austrians, Laurids Ortner, Gunter Kelp, and Klaus Pinter, brought sculptural works and were there to interact with the public. There was also a participatory element. On the main floor was a large inflated air mattress with large balls for visitors to play. As it coincided with the American Association of Museums meeting in New York, one evening there was a Fifty-third Street museum open-house. So MoMA was open, American Folk Museum was open, and we closed the street and mounted a huge air mattress outside on Fifty-third Street. [Laughs] and many of the museum people who came to the event were bouncing around on this air mattress. Now this sounds kind of extreme, and as I reflect on it, it certainly was at the time. [They laugh.] But these were serious conceptual ideas by artists who felt strongly about breaking down barriers that was related to the culture of that era.

However the museum was not totally focused on this. We had many exhibitions of fiber art like "Sewn, Stitched and Stuffed." and "Stitching," an exhibition of contemporary and historical embroidery.. One-person shows continued. Tom Tibbs had initiated the first retrospective show on Wharton Esherick [1959] that was very important. I organized a retrospective on Dorothy Liebes [1970]. and later one on Peter Voulkos [1978]. So there was a balance between serious shows that either reflected on some aspect of craft history, honored an artist, or were media focused that were presented along with these experiments that brought some new dimension to the program.

One area that was especially of interest to me from the very beginning was the design focus. Design was a popular word back in the '50s and '60s when you may remember, "designer craftsman" was used a lot. The word designer was associated with original work by a maker creating functional work, later "artist craftsmen" identified makers creating art in the craft media. But designer was used quite frequently, and it was a subject at many of the early conferences. In 1964, the year after I became director, I felt that this was an area that deserved attention as I thought there was potential in America for more craftsmen to be designing for industry for specialized areas of tableware, wall coverings and home furnishings. So an exhibition called "Design for

Production: The Craftsman's Approach" was assembled that featured Jack Prip's hollowware designs for Reed and Barton, and Joel Myers's glass designs for Blenko [Glass Company, Milton, WV]. Dorothy Liebes was included, as well as some of the production potteries like Bennington Pottery and those who were producing limited editions of work.

Rose and I worked together on a special issue of *Craft Horizons* that contained essays about this subject. The cover illustrated Joel Myers's vessel forms for Blenko. The show was designed to travel as I felt that it was really an important subject that was not being given enough attention.

Many of the design-focus shows were thematic with the underlying concept to explore a subject and report on some of the very best work being done. Many included handmade as well as mass produced or designed production pieces. There was also an underlying interest on my part as I felt a theme show, which became kind of a prototype formula for us, worked very well to draw attention to a subject. We did a show on doors and a show on the bed. As we spend one third of our life in bed; that's a really important subject. So that was an ongoing obsession with recognizing design as an important part of the handmade object, which I still have as a concern. Several of the thematic shows were put together not just to report on, but hopefully inspire the crafts community to think, I could make something on this subject, i.e., a door or whatever subject we were covering.

MR. HERMAN: Those that I remember, "Made With Paper" and "Plastic As Plastic," both kind of brought out really ordinary materials or materials that we accept and take for granted--particularly in an era when plastic was used to mimic other kinds of materials. I'm interested in your take on those.

MR. SMITH: Those two shows were very important in my opinion because they were timely. "Made with Paper" was the first one that was presented in 1968. We were very fortunate to involve the Container Corporation of America to sponsor it and to become involved. We worked with their design department, and had the great fortune of having their sophisticated staff to collaborate with us -- not on researching the contents of the show but to help present it, and they gave us financial support and published the catalogue. It was one of our first big funded exhibitions. It was also at a time when new paper products were everywhere ---. paper clothing, paper furniture. It was not in America alone, but innovative paper objects were coming out of England, Italy, Asia, and especially Japan. It was timely to do a survey honoring paper.

The collection of material was so vast, that extended it into the Time-Life Center in a satellite exhibition area. One of the interesting aspects of the installation was the Container Corporation idea of demonstrating the strength of paper by creating modular units for the main floor of the museum. Folded cardboard forms, each one different, supported three-quarter-inch glass slabs. When a visitor came to the museum, they were given paper slippers to walk through and view the show. So they were directly involved with use of paper.

MR. HERMAN: I remember how disconcerting that was because you'd keep looking at the floor because these weren't all the same shapes that were supporting the glass. You'd have to look down as well as up.

MR. SMITH: Yes. Right, right. It was again another way of involving the public. But it was beautifully designed and I must say the Container Corporation did an incredible job in helping us realize the exhibition. We had everything from traditional origami to the newest ideas of paper, including disposable clothing. We had furniture and architectural references for temporary buildings. It was a very ambitious project.

MR. HERMAN: What was the street event you did in conjunction with that?

MR. SMITH: Well, there again, we got in the habit of enjoying the use of the street. James Lee Byars, who was one of the early conceptual artists, now deceased, has become very recognized and has recently been shown at the Whitney [Museum of American Art] and the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim Museum. He came to us with the idea of doing an event outside to realize his conceptual idea, which was not an easy one to realize. He had found a water dissolvable paper. As paper is often a littering problem in the city, wouldn't it be wonderful to demonstrate the idea of a dissolvable paper that could wash away and you wouldn't have to deal with disposing of it. This was kind of an extreme concept, but then James Lee Byars was a conceptual artist. So he had this ambitious idea and somehow got enough of this paper to create a large figure to cover the full length of Fifty-third Street between Fifth and Sixth. It was glued together as one piece and came in a roll. When the event was scheduled we had to get a permit to close the street, and he suggested the need to engage the sanitation department because we needed water in quantity to wash it away.

So we got the street closed, and we got the sanitation department involved. Unfortunately it was a windy, cold day, so the wind was blowing up the paper. I remember one point when children from St. Thomas Choir School came out all in their uniforms and went horizontal on the paper to keep it from blowing away. That was one interesting aspect. When the sanitation trucks began to try to wash it away, the water was freezing, and the trucks were sliding. So it was by no means immediately disposed. [They laugh.] On New Year's Day he wanted to ascend a weather balloon a mile high on a gold paper thread, which we also did. That came off okay.

MR. HERMAN: A mile high!

MR. SMITH: Yes and we had to get permission from the Port Authority to go up that high.

MR. HERMAN: Of course.

MR. SMITH: I don't know if it was exactly a mile high; but it was certainly high.

MR. HERMAN: I wonder whether you could even get permissions to do events like that today.

MR. SMITH: Well, I don't know. As I think back, I wonder how we ever had the nerve to realize some of those events.

MR. HERMAN: It was daring. It was really daring to do those.

MR. SMITH: It was very daring, and some of the things were really risky, now that I think about it. Fortunately we had the sanitation department and the city involved. So it wasn't that we were not protected, but there were concerns. I want to come back to the design focus and to follow up on "Plastic as Plastic." which was similar to "Made with Paper." Plastic was always thought of as imitative, copying wood or fake glass and was not honored very much. It was at a point where new Italian furniture was emerging and stores were showing really wonderful plastic objects that were beautifully designed. Artists were also working in plastic and creating some interesting work. Like "Made with Paper," we researched the subject and assembled a very big collection. Hooker Chemical was the sponsor. As they had a spray foam product, an environment was created in the back of the museum on a Sunday morning when the museum was closed. That was an architectural focus. With each exhibition we would always look at the full breadth of the subject to examine the many facets of the subject, so that the viewer came away with an impression that was broader rather than narrower.

We included plastic jewelry by Carolyn Kriegman and showed work by several sculptors who were working in plastic at the time. We included concepts by architects as well as top designers from Italy. I made a special trip to Italy to go to the factories and collect material. It was a lot of research work. Staff members would also be very involved, and were very important in researching and conceiving these exhibitions. I was orchestrating the direction of the exhibition, but it would not have been realized without their help, and with the help of a lot of outside organizations such as Container Corporation. The paper show would never have been realized to the degree it was without their help and financial support.

We did other shows on food. The one that we did with you at the Renwick Gallery, was "Objects for Preparing Food." That was a joint effort where we dealt with food experts like Mimi Sheridan a *New Times* food editorat the time, but also a food scholar and Julia Child. We consulted with her and featured her kitchen. If you remember, at your end you collected objects from the Smithsonian collections. Objects both historical and contemporary were arranged according to function -- cutting, stirring, heating and cooling. The catalogue was also organized in that format.

MR. HERMAN: You also did "Portable World," which if you were to do it today, when so much more is portable, would be easier, but was really kind of groundbreaking at the time.

MR. SMITH: It was another design focus where we came up with the idea, researched it, and realized how rich a subject it was. We included portable tents and living structures, and also things related to the body, that would be compact. We made historical references such as George Washington's portable travel kit.

MR. HERMAN: I think it was like a camp kit.

MR. SMITH: A camp kit and a portable bed and equipment in a trunk. So it incorporated as many dimensions of the subject as possible. – historical and also visionary with new ideas that were not realized.

MR. HERMAN: Well, it's interesting because those exhibitions go through the '60s well into the '70s. But it seems to me that they sort of build on one of the most important exhibitions of the 20th century, and that was "Objects USA," in that it really showed an entirely new and contemporary look to craft that most people weren't aware of. I'd like you to talk how that came about and how it developed.

MR. SMITH: Before I speak to that, I'll just say one thing about the design focus. I saw a vacuum for that area and thought it was very appropriate for us, in addition to the connection with craft and handmade, to have the design connection. I also was always very sensitive to not be in conflict with another museum. When the Cooper Hewitt opened and Lisa Taylor became the director and began to expand the program, I met with Lisa and discussed our roles because they had been doing some craft exhibitions and collecting. So we had an understanding. It didn't mean that we wouldn't continue some overlap. It was also a point where the studio movement was expanding so rapidly that it was demanding more attention. So there was a period where there

was more of a design focus.

Now, "Objects USA" was a major project at the end of 1969 that I was involved with, but it did not start with the museum. Lee Nordness, was a New York gallery owner, who had a gallery in New York in the late '50s—I think it was on Madison Avenue and then moved to East 75th Street. He was showing contemporary painting, and eventually began to show some objects at a time when there were very few galleries that were showing any of this work. Lee was very charismatic, very enterprising, and established a relationship with Johnson Wax. He apparently had gone to Racine to give a lecture and came in contact with Herbert and Irene Johnson. Herbert was at that point the head of the Johnson Companies.

MR. HERMAN: S.C. Johnson?

MR. SMITH: S.C. Johnson. His association with them resulted in his proposing the idea of the company sponsoring an art exhibition which resulted in a show called "Art USA." There's two volumes documenting the collection that traveled through the United States, Europe, and went to Japan. His continued interest in showing Wendell Castle and some of the other craft artists in the gallery cultivated, I think, his awareness of the field. Obviously he saw what was happening at the museum, the magazine, and other activities that were going on. So he had the idea of doing a sequel to "Art USA." He invited me to lunch one day. This was probably late 1967 or early 1968; not so long before the show was finally realized. He said that he had interest from the Johnsons to do a collection of objects. He didn't have an exact title, but he was thinking of something dealing with craft objects. As he had limited expertise in this area, he knew he needed some association and asked if I would become involved and if our organization could be associated.

It wasn't defined totally, but he did indicate that certain expenses would be covered. Also, that there was a great possibility that the collection would be purchased and that works at the end of a tour would be given to museums. We would have first choice of a third of it. So it rapidly resolved—that, yes, this is a good association. I had to discuss it with hierarchy at ACC. My involvement was never totally defined—but I was like a curatorial advisor and was extremely involved with the development of the collection. I didn't deal with all the logistics, purchasing or shipping or any of that, but for its content, I was deeply involved. The idea was to put together a collection that would portray the vast range of outstanding work throughout the country. There wasn't any quota or saying there had to be so many from this area or that area, but the aim was to definitely portray a spectrum of activity. We decided early on to honor the established and important artists of the older generation and to include some of the most experimental new work by young emerging artists, if they were accomplished in what they were doing.

This happened in a very short time. We already held a lot of information at ACC -- we had files on artists, and a lot of material at the museum to draw upon. We had addresses and, we had contact information. There's no question that ACC's resource was invaluable.

The arrangement was that they would pay a small fee to ACC as a contribution and that all research travel costs would be covered.

MR. HERMAN: Paul, I'm sorry. This is the end of this memory disc, and we're going to have to start again and keep that thought for the next one.

MR. SMITH: Okay.

[END OF DISC 4.]

MR. HERMAN: This is Lloyd Herman. I'm conducting an oral history interview with Paul Smith in his New York apartment on April 19, 2010.

We are just discussing the seminal exhibition "Objects USA." And, Paul, you were talking about Johnson's Wax participation and Lee Nordness's role as the project director, I guess, would be the right term. And your role really as the consultant who ? need knew the field and the work.

MR. SMITH: I wanted to just clarify the arrangement. Keep in mind I was directing a museum and curating, so this was something I had to work into my busy schedule. But for my time and the council's resources, there would be a financial contribution which was quite small. All travel expenses for research would be covered. The biggest attraction of course was that one third of the collection at the end of the tour would be given to the museum for its permanent collection. That was a big incentive. Also, we would have first choice of pieces that we would like to have. At some point I'll talk now about the museum's collection, but this was a very important way we could get a number of works to expand the collection.

So when we began to do research with the existing knowledge that we had, and then made some targeted trips. Lee made some on his own, but several I did with him. At the time there wasn't SOFA and there were very few

galleries.

MR. HERMAN: Sculpture Objects Functional Arts expo.

MR. SMITH: Yes. but it wasn't like walking down the aisles of SOFA and seeing a lot of work in one place. You had to go to sources. We made targeted trips. One was to the Bay Area when we went on to Hawaii because we wanted to be sure to include work from there. As I said, we did not plan to represent every state; but we wanted to be sure we had geographical representation.

MR. HERMAN: Well, there weren't so many craft galleries then either, that you could simply go to galleries anywhere.

MR. SMITH: Yes -- so we had to travel. The main focus was on visiting university campuses where we would consult with faculty and see what they were doing. We also went to many ends of the road and top of mountains to visit studios, and Lee made several independent trips because I couldn't go on all of them. There was an extensive research effort to include a range of work, and, as I said, we wanted to be sure it presented a spectrum from those who were established to those who might be emerging and to represent all the different disciplines. The exhibition was organized by media in the book with a section on metal, ceramics, textiles, etc.

It ended up being a large collection of 308 works. A few artists had more than one work, but most had a single piece. One of the great things was that there were no restrictions as to what we could show in terms of size although there was a consideration of something that would travel well. But, if something was really large like a big bronze sculpture of Peter Voulkos, that was not a problem. Also, at that time objects were very reasonable. I was not involved with the negotiations of the business end of purchasing. Lee did that. I was simply advising on the content. So it was intense and time-consuming on my part, but it was also a wonderful opportunity for me to do research and become acquainted with all that was happening all over the country.

MR. HERMAN: Sure.

MR. SMITH: I mean it was a two-way street. I was helping, but I was always benefitting, and it brought me into direct contact with some artists that I had been corresponding with but had not met.

As I said, the collection, when it was finely tuned and brought together comprised 308 objects, really large. Lee negotiated a premier showing at the Smithsonian National Collection of Fine Arts [now Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.] in 1968 that had the space to show it well. The opening was a gala event that I went to. It was very handsomely displayed. By the way, some display props were included. There were special units designed for the jewelry with the jewelry all mounted. There were some large portable panels that came apart for backdrops. I was involved in advising on the crating because I knew a lot about crating objects. So I was always connected with many different aspects, but I was not involved with booking the tour and many other logistics.

Because it was a prestigious project associated with Johnson Wax, the company had a support network of their own. Carl Byoir and Associates, a Madison Avenue advertizing agency, was very involved in coordinating the public relations to launch it in the best way. I do recall Mr. [S. Dillon] Ripley, director of the museum did come to the opening.

MR. HERMAN: The secretary of the Smithsonian.

MR. SMITH: The secretary of the Smithsonian. Because it was an important national art event representing the whole country, on the day of the opening in Washington there was a gathering for members of congress and senators from the states where the artists were from. I remember meeting Senator Inouye from Hawaii and some others that were there at the time. Not all came, but it was a real gesture of connection with Washington. At the evening opening, many of the artists came as well as members of the Johnson Family including Sam Johnson, president of Johnson Wax and his wife. Mrs. Webb was there along with other ACC staff. It was a wonderful launch. Aline Saarinen, who was then reporting for NBC, did a report.

MR. HERMAN: Television.

MR. SMITH: Yes, and it began to generate a lot of other press coverage. So it was launched very well. Also Johnson Wax sponsored a film with a professional crew to document a few of the makers and bought an hour of prime time on ABC. It was called "With These Hands."

MR. HERMAN: Wasn't Danny Wilson the filmmaker that made it?

MR. SMITH: Yes, he was the producer of it, and Jack Oldfield was the filmmaker from San Diego. As the show was designed to travel, it went to 22 American museums.

MR. HERMAN: How many years? It must have been about three years.

MR. SMITH: It was about four years, because it also went to 11 European museums through USIA.

MR. HERMAN: After the domestic tour.

MR. SMITH: After the American tour, yes. There is a complete list of all the museums and bookings. In the US it was mainly at art museums like Milwaukee Art Museum which in itself was very important for the show. The fact that it was featured as a major exhibition in art museum, reached a whole new audience. I know from some people who have told me that they saw that show and that it inspired them to collect or inspired them to think about opening a gallery. The exhibition definitely had an effect upon creating awareness to a new audience nationally. And certainly, as it traveled abroad, it did the same thing. I have the report from Carl Byoir of the European press and the acclaims it received in each city about work of Americans being shown, which in itself is interesting. That indicates how important it was at that time to get this attention and visibility.

I did not go to most of the openings as I was so occupied with the museum in New York. I did go to the one in Philadelphia that was close by and I did go to Edinburgh at the time of the Edinburgh Festival. Tom Kyle, who was a curator at MCC who moved on to other things, was later engaged to travel with the exhibition in Europe. It needed somebody to be with it because it was such a large exhibition. A few pieces got broken along the way, but it's amazing that the majority of the objects came back intact, although a bit shopworn in some cases. Lee arranged for Johnson Wax to pay for the cost of restoration so all the works were restored. Then we made our selection for a third of the collection.

MR. HERMAN: We being the museum.

MR. SMITH: Yes, I made a first selection, and then a few ACC trustees reviewed it. We ended up getting even more than the 103 works. There were some extra pieces that Lee had not designated, as most of the other works were supposedly given to museums that showed it in the United States, like the Smithsonian. As I was not involved with that placement, it's only in the last year that there has been research done to determine where the collection is. I have been asked so many times as Lee had no record in his archives or the ACC library. So in combination with various efforts, and a consulting archivist at the Johnson Wax Company who also was frustrated with inquiries, we put together an inventory. We now know where all but 23 works are.

MR. HERMAN: Remarkable.

MR. SMITH: And it's in a database.

MR. HERMAN: Hmm. That's good. Is there more you'd like to talk about on "Objects USA"?

MR. SMITH: As it now has some distance. I get frequent inquiries from students who are asking about it. As a matter of fact, this week I'm meeting with someone who is doing a thesis on Lee Nordness and is very interested in "Objects USA." I find that there's increasing interest in this collection. I understand it because I think it was timely. The end of the '60s—'69—was an ideal time to do such an exhibition as it reported on all of that new work. It honored the Marguerite Wildenhains, the Wharton Eshericks, and craftspeople who had been working for some time, but also other artists that were less known. The tour and documentation were important. There was an excellent book published with bios on all the artists, and a slide kit that ACC did. So I think it was timely and it was incredible that Johnson Wax made a commitment to do it on such a high level of sponsorship. It would not have happened without Lee Nordness, as it was his idea and there's no question that ACC was helpful, but it takes many people to realize such a large project. I think it will continue to be an important document of that era.

MR. HERMAN: Thanks, Paul. We're going to pause now and resume in a bit.

[END OF DISC 5, TRACK 1.]

MR. HERMAN: Resuming the oral history interview with Paul Smith at his apartment in New York. It's April 20, 2010.

Paul, I think because we were—we ended talking about "Objects USA," and you had mentioned that a third of the collection of 308 objects then came to the museum. It would be interesting to find out more about the museum's collection: the policy for collection and the point of view that the collection represents.

MR. SMITH: Tom Tibbs began collecting very modestly in the late '50s by commissioning some artists to do works for exhibitions and acquiring a few works. It was never a priority at that time for various reasons. One, there wasn't any physical space to present it regularly. and it would require outside storage. Also emphasis was on current new work, and one didn't think as much about the importance of collecting for future reference. I

always had an interest, and when I became director, we did receive gifts. For example, when Margaret De Patta died, her estate made a very well-organized gift plan by assembling small groups of five or six works and placing them in museums around the country. The same thing happened when Dorothy Liebes died. Through various means we received some works.

At one point it was discussed as a policy with the ACC trustees, and there was much debate about whether we should collect or not collect. I do remember John Hauberg from Seattle, who was a trustee at the time, felt that we should not have a permanent collection, but might consider something like an evergreen collection, that would rotate and have works for a limited time. I'm happy to say that that was not approved, and that we continued to collect. The generous gift from "Objects USA," boosted the collection enormously. The collection during my era as Director was small in size, but I think high in quality. And when one looks at it today, it does offer an important document of that era.

MR. HERMAN: I'm interested in before the objects from "Objects USA" came, were the things that had been collected still largely cutting edge contemporary or did you have more traditional?

MR. SMITH: It was a combination. I remember getting a very good piece from Art Smith.

MR. HERMAN: He was pretty contemporary, though, not traditional.

MR. SMITH: Yes, it was work of the '50s and '60s, but the sources varied. Mrs. Webb was not a collector, but there were a number of works that were given to her and were in the building. When she died, I placed them in the collection including pieces from her apartment, as well as her country place where there was a wonderful Wendell Castle table that I brought in with family approval. So there wasn't an aim to collect in depth, but there was definitely an interest in continuing to acquire works that would document the major figures of that period.

MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Did the "Objects USA" gift double the collection. About how many objects had been in the collection?

MR. SMITH: Oh, it more than doubled.

MR. HERMAN: More than doubled.

MR. SMITH: I don't recall the exact number of works in the collection at the time, but it was very small. Also the collection did serve a purpose with changing exhibitions, when we could present it to give a break in our having to originate a show. So we often presented selections from the collection in various forms. When we celebrated our 25th anniversary of the museum, we showed recent and new acquisitions..

MR. HERMAN: You had talked about taking programs out of the museum because of its size and to reach a bigger audience into the street and into Central Park. But I remember in the 1960s Museum West was started. Can you talk a little bit about that?

MR. SMITH: There was always an exploration of expanding our walls because we had such limited exhibition space. Also, the fact that the American Craftsmen's Council was a national organization, there was a real consideration of how we might have a visible program not just through touring exhibitions but through satellite exhibition spaces. Museum West was realized in 1965. This came about with Mrs. Webb's visit to the Bay Area. The Ghirardelli Chocolate factory was being renovated into a shopping center, and they were offering a space for a cultural organization. That resulted in our receiving a very small upper gallery that became Museum West for three years. It was a nice concept because there was so much activity happening on the West Coast, and this was a venue to show some exhibitions we organized in NY.. The problem was the New York space, although small, was much bigger than the small one-room facility.

MR. HERMAN: And I'm sure much more visible, too, than if it was in the chocolate factory building on an upper floor.

MR. SMITH: Yes, yes. Lois Ladis, formerly with a gallery in San Francisco, was engaged as a full-time employee to manage it. We did send some portions of our shows there and originated some special exhibitions. Ultimately it was a problem of cost. There was the hope that the Bay Area community would support it, which did not happen. It was a wonderful concept, but it wasn't functioning as it was hoped to function. However it did realize Mrs. Webb's dream to have regional centers. She always had the idea and referred to them as like a Howard Johnson's [laughs] chain where ACC would have offices in different parts of the country with exhibition space, and she did speak about that with passion.

MR. HERMAN: She certainly had ambitious ideas. Starting the ACC and then the World Crafts Council and this concept, too. How long did Museum West last then?

MR. SMITH: It was three years. It closed in 1968. Then there was a continuum of changes that were generally for the better, but very disrupting to the development of our annual program. With the expansion of the Museum of Modern Arts plan for building of a very tall residential condo, we were in the way. We were forced to sell our 29 building as there was some official approved legislation that allowed it to happen. So a negotiation took place resulting in what I considered, a modest amount of money and some office space on Fifty-fourth Street. One of the good things was that in the early '60s, Mrs. Webb bought another brownstone across from the museum, which was the 44 West Fifty-third Street building. Dave Campbell had renovated it into a new facility for America House when it moved from Madison Avenue. That building was very similar in design and style to the museum with the same amount of floors and atrium. It, too, won awards for its innovative design with a metal façade that was very unique at the time.

In the meantime America House closed as ACC was developing its craft fair program and other forms of marketing. So we did have a place to move to. With modest renovation, we ended up moving across the street in 1979. At the time there was a name change for the organization. I would just mention this because it is a bit of history that I think is important. David Finn, who was on our board was a partner in the NY advertising agency Ruder and Finn. They did a study on the future of the Council. In the report was a recommendation that we would benefit from a name change that would unify the different parts of the organization which resulted in the American Craftsmen's Council becoming American Craft Council, the Museum of Contemporary Crafts becoming American Craft Museum, and *Craft Horizons* becoming *American Craft,*. It was a corporate concept that never quite worked.

MR. HERMAN: But, Paul, even before that wasn't American Craftsmen's Council changed to American Crafts with an "s" Council?

MR. SMITH: That's correct.

MR. HERMAN: So this was a further name change.

MR. SMITH: This was a further change, but the intent was that we had all these important programs, and it was the idea of corporate thinking that we need to unify our organization.

MR. HERMAN: In a way what we call branding today. [Laughs.]

MR. SMITH: Exactly. I felt it never worked, and I never felt that the names were necessarily as good as the old ones because we were American, but we were also international, but that's another subject. Another opportunity for expansion came in 1982 when the International Paper Corporation built a tower on Sixth Avenue and Forty-fifth Street. One of the things that happened in New York when new tall buildings would be developed, was a city plan to create public plazas or people space as well as provide cultural programming in lobby areas as a tradeoff for the height of the building. It was a wonderful concept, and resulted in many public spaces that developed in the city through that ruling.

As International Paper was looking for an institution, we were approached. This was very tempting and we accepted. They were very generous in designing the ground floor lobby space to our specifications and paid for that. They also gave a substantial grant for program and operating costs for three years. That was very, very supportive, and it allowed us to really double our program at that point.

MR. HERMAN: Well, it doubled your space, didn't it?

MR. SMITH: Yes. Well, doubled the space, but doubled the program. We were then producing exhibitions for both spaces. We also did several joint exhibitions, as it was within walking distance of the museum. But again, nothing is ever permanent, and at the end of the contract, they decided not to renew it because they had some other plans. Simultaneously, we were exploring a Fifty-third Street expansion in the adjoining parking lot. At the same time CBS, our neighbor, joined with the Hines Corporation to develop a new tower on our site. [Laughs.] Again, we were in a challenging position.

I must say this is when our board of trustees took a very strong position. I credit very much Ted Nierenberg, one of our most active trustees, who took the position that we wanted to remain there. We did look at other potential relocation places at the time. SoHo was a lively area with galleries. I looked at the building at Eighty-sixth Street and Fifth Avenue which now houses Neue Galerie. That was a possibility because I felt that as a specialized museum, being near other museums was an advantage.

The result was that through our insistence and our trustees' strong position, we negotiated for the exchange of our building and land a condominium space on the ground floor. That was a very big business deal for us. It wasn't a huge expansion, but it did double our space and kept us on Fifty-third Street in a wonderful central location across from MoMA and with the Folk Museum across the street as well. So that was a big achievement. We then interviewed many architects. Kevin Roche designed the building, but we had the option of choosing

another firm to design the space and interviewed I.M. Pei and several of the top architects. We ended up selecting Fox & Fowle because they had done the renovation on the America House building and we liked that relationship. I think they created an exceptional, simple and functional space that was great One of their achievements was a recommendation that by digging two feet deeper into the base, we could create a partial middle level of gallery space resulting in three levels. Later there was a question why we had that vast atrium space, but we might have had only two levels without that innovative approach.

MR. HERMAN: Was there a period then between the closing of the building for the construction of this new one and the closing of the International Paper space in which you didn't have any visibility?

MR. SMITH: Yes. There was almost a year that we were closed, and that was a great concern because I thought it was not good having no visibility. But as it turned out, we had office space on Forty-fifth Street near Museum II so we were at least settled in terms of staff functioning. Preparation for the new space entailed an enormous amount of time in working with the architects, plus developing the inaugural show which I will speak about in a moment. It turned out to be a blessing to have that free time, but it wasn't free time as we needed it to work on the future program plan and it went by very quickly.

MR. HERMAN: For the opening in 1986 of the new space, you curated a major survey exhibition. Can you talk a bit about that?

MR. SMITH: Yes. I saw it as an opportunity to do a major exhibition. The new space was much larger and made it possible to do something special. Being the 30th anniversary of the museum was a special occasion. The exhibition we assembled was like an "Objects USA 2," and I had even thought about calling it that, but I did explore many other titles. I will speak about the title for a moment. We engaged Edward Lucie-Smith, a British author, to write an essay for the catalogue. In a conversation with him discussing titles, he said, "Why don't you call it "Poetry of the Physical" I instantly knew that was a wonderful reference. I liked it very much but I felt it needed something more, so we added "Craft Today" ["Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical"]. Now some people refer to it as "Poetry of the Physical" and some people refer to it as "Craft Today."

It was a wonderful opportunity to survey the field. Having been so involved with "Objects USA," I had not done an overview exhibition since the late 60s I spent a lot of time looking at what was happening in the 80s, and thinking about the changes that had taken place. As the "Objects USA" book was organized by media I felt I wanted to come up with another approach and ended up organizing it by focus, which reflected, I think, what was happening at the time. For the catalog four categories where established – "The Object As Statement," dealing with personal expression, sculptural works, and two-dimensional works, "The Object for Use" focused on functional objects, "The Object As Vessel," which has always been a dominant area, and the "The Object for Personal Adornment"; that included jewelry and art to wear.

There were many developments since "Objects USA." For example, ‘‘art to wear'' didn't exist in "Objects USA." as well as new fiber works, basket forms, and many other areas. In the press material and my summation of the show's content talking about changes, I felt it was a period of refinement, and that the works represented a much more resolved maker's intent.

MR. HERMAN: Did you have a corporate sponsorship that enabled you to travel as much as you did selecting objects for "Objects USA"?

MR. SMITH: Yes, we were very fortunate in having Phillip Morris, which was doing a lot of corporate sponsorship of the arts and they became not only important in offering funding, but their experienced staff was very, very helpful. They hired a professional public relations firm to promote it and were very helpful in many different ways. The exhibition, when it opened, generated a lot of positive press and it then toured to six museums in the United States.

MR. HERMAN: At the time that that opened in '86, were you already contemplating retiring from the directorship of the museum? And when did that happen?

MR. SMITH: I don't use the word "retirement." [They laugh.]

MR. HERMAN: Well, leaving the position.

MR. SMITH: Well, there had been discussions with the board and interest in some new directions for the museum. We had discussions for a period of time, and so in 1987, a year after the museum opened, an arrangement was worked out that I would become director emeritus of the museum, which took effect in

September of 1987, and that I would still be involved with some projects. I planned three years of shows in advance, including the Lenore Tawney retrospective, the George Nakashima retrospective, and "Confectioner's Art," that I became directly involved in curating along with Merle Evans, a food expert. So I had a continuum although I officially moved away from direct involvement with the program. The biggest involvement was my association with the tour of CT POP renamed "Craft Today USA." At one of preview openings when representatives from Phillip Morris were present, the CEO of the corporation responded so well, it resulted in a discussion about the possibility of an international tour. Their interest led to requesting support from our government, the United States Information Agency. After being approved by the National Endowment for the Arts committee, it led to the USIA's sponsorship with Phillip Morris, for a European tour as an official cultural presentation of our government.

MR. HERMAN: How long was the domestic tour, though? How many museums showed it?

MR. SMITH: It went to six museums.

MR. HERMAN: Oh. How long was it on view in the new space here?

MR. SMITH: About three months.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, and then it began touring.

MR. SMITH: Yes, yes.

MR. HERMAN: Was it the full show that toured?

MR. SMITH: Yes, The full show toured America. But I was then leaving the museum and taking on an independent role when it was decided that the show would travel in Europe, I re-titled it "Craft Today USA" as I thought it was a better identity for translation and being shown out of the USA. I edited it a bit by removing a few pieces that I felt would be very difficult for transport, and I added a few additional works that I thought would be of interest to the European audience. So there was a fine-tuning that took place. It wasn't drastic. It was basically the same show, but there was a slight refinement of content. But even the European tour was enormous in size and it was a very major undertaking as it traveled to 15 cities of Europe over a period of four years, beginning in 1989. There was an advantage of not running a museum, and having free time. Because of the scope of the project and the logistics, the budget allowed for travel to make site visits to each location, to meet with the host museum and the local USIA staff to work out the negotiations in advance to be sure that all the requirements were resolved. I would then return for usually about a week when I would be part of the press openings and the previews and often give lectures.

MR. HERMAN: How far in advance of the beginning of the tour did you start doing this? I'm impressed in reading the final report. It looked like it was a full-time job for four years just managing that show.

MR. SMITH: It basically was, but I must say that when you have the proper support—by that I mean USIA help was very important. If it had not been for their network, we would never have been able to realize the tour. They sent an announcement to the Embassy in each European country that this exhibition was available to get feedback whether there would be interest. What was originally going to be a small tour of six or eight showings, moved to ten, then became 15, and I think could have gone on even longer, but there had to be a point where it had to end.

MR. HERMAN: It was really important, I think, that that coincidence of the time was really the falling of the Berlin Wall. And I'd like you to talk a little bit about the complications and the—

MR. SMITH: Yes. I would just mention that it did premier at the Musée Des Arts D'ecoratifs in Paris which is part of the Louvre, and that was a very prestigious place for it. For the opening, quite a large group of the artists as well as a patrons group from the museum came. So it was a very nice event with special openings and receptions. Yes, what turned out to be a wonderful experience was that when the Berlin Wall opened, it paralleled the planned tour. We had already had negotiations with showing it in East Berlin, in Warsaw, someplace in Czechoslovakia, and in the Soviet Union. I had gone to the sites to negotiate with the then Communist Ministry of Cultures to arrange for the show. As it turned out, the timing had an effect. For example, in Warsaw, having established a location at the Zacheta Gallery through the Ministry of Culture under the Communist government, it opened in a new free society. The timing was perfect because there was such openness at that time with the change that was taking place, and the exhibition proved to be very popular. The Zacheta Gallery was a changing exhibition space like a Kunsthall. They did a beautiful installation. It generated enormous interest, and attracted 40,000 people in one month, which was a record for all showings on the tour. The catalogue was also very popular. Likewise in Moscow it attracted around 20,000 people.

So at each site there was a different story. Being in Berlin when the wall was coming down was a memorable

experience because I remember seeing the East Berlin people that stood out. You could tell they were looking at everything like they had never seen such extravagance before. The wall itself was a celebration event with people chipping at it and photographing it. It had a whole aura around it. I acquired some pieces as vendors were selling chips. Even East Berliners were selling. So it was a wonderful timing to witness and experience that drastic change.

MR. HERMAN: I would think that there would have been a lot of confusion during the political changeover that might have caused some logistic problems at least in moving the show from country to country or just who was going to be responsible during that changeover.

MR. SMITH: Well, here again, I credit the staff at USIA that really did an outstanding job of negotiating and handling all the logistics. The exhibition originally was to have been shown in East Berlin. When the wall opened, it was decided that because it had already been shown in Berlin, it should be elsewhere. So it ended up in Leipzig. I went to Leipzig on one of those site visits and from Leipzig I took the train to Czechoslovakia to explore a site there. That was in December '89. I arrived in Prague the very week that Czechoslovakia opened. [Laughs] So there again, I was right in the center of the change. I met with museum people. I spent a day with the Labinskys [Stanislav Labinský and Jaroslava Brychtová] and went to their country place. There was so much excitement about the change, no museum wanted to make a commitment.. Although they knew the exhibition was important they couldn't make any decisions. I was there with the intent to pin down a venue, but realized it was totally impossible, However, I benefitted from the experience of being part of history at the time.

MR. HERMAN: Because that, as I say, it seemed like a full-time occupation, but you were organizing other exhibitions after you left your directorship of the museum. How did you manage to dovetail those various things into a very busy schedule?

MR. SMITH: It did take time. But at the USIA Arts America Washington office, my contact was E.J. Montgomery. She was so dedicated to her work, and was in constant control over a lot of the details. At each location where the exhibition was presented, the local USIA people took on a lot of responsibility for handling all the details of the show arriving, being checked and inspected, and working out plans for showing with the museum but I was always involved. In those days we had to use fax — it was before email — for communication. . But the site visit was important in working out a lot of the details in advance with the local office of USIA and the museum. So in most cases it went quite smoothly. There were a few cases where there were some problems. Like in Greece they designated an exhibition space where there were no display props or professional staff, and I had a great concern about how the exhibit would be shown and the security. The ambassador's office suggested that I meet with the Ministry of Culture. So I actually had a meeting with Mrs. Benaki, who was the Minister of Culture at the time, to negotiate logistics. It resulted in her taking a personal interest, and it was one of the best presentations on the whole tour. They spent a lot of money on hiring professional designers. She came to the press opening and the private preview opening. This happened in several cases where government officials on both sides — both the host country as well as on our side—took a personal interest in the project and helped to realize it. It was especially important in Greece because there had been an exhibition from USIA that was very unpopular. It was a very avant-garde show that was criticized. So they saw this as a show that would be more popular, and it turned out to be that.

MR. HERMAN: With all the travel you did for site visits, and then going back to actually open the show in many of the venues, how many altogether did you go to the openings?

MR. SMITH: I went to 14. The one that I didn't go to had bad timing when it was to be shown in Ankara.

MR. HERMAN: Turkey.

MR. SMITH: Turkey. The opening date was the same weekend that the Gulf War broke out. I called Washington and said, "I have a concern." I had my ticket and I was all ready to go, but I got cold feet about being in Turkey at that time. It was very good that I didn't go as it had a curtailed showing because it was not the best place and time for promoting an American image. It is interesting that this project had so many different political associations during its tour.

MR. HERMAN: Did your travels to these foreign countries, both site visits and follow-up visits, give you much time to really see the crafts of those countries? Because you'd talked about earlier going to World Craft conferences and clearly you had made friends within the international craft community. We haven't really talked about how your knowledge of international crafts evolved, and whether there was a role in the exhibitions that you've organized here for foreign makers.

MR. SMITH: Yes. At each site, I would usually allow four or five days to promote the exhibition. I also used it as an opportunity to visit studios, and go to schools to give lectures. As I really wanted to become acquainted with what was happening. I was able to get a good overview and also meet many, many artists which was a dividend as it was always an ongoing interest that I had.

MR. HERMAN: What were some of the other special projects after you left the museum that you undertook?

MR. SMITH: Because I had been with ACC for such a long time, I made the decision that I did not want to take on a full-time position with another museum or organization, although that would have been a possibility.

MR. HERMAN: How many years altogether?

MR. SMITH: Thirty years, 24 of it as director. So I thought it would be an opportunity to explore some new areas that I had not been involved in. I thought developing a consulting service to share my years of experience with various projects would be interesting. I began to explore advising collectors because at this point there were a lot of new collectors that were emerging, and I thought I had the knowledge that could be helpful. It would have been a conflict of interest when I was director of the museum. So I did work with a number of collectors and helped them acquire work. I also explored the area of working with artists and placing works in public spaces. I arranged a very big commission for Ray King at the Hines building in Atlanta and another installation for the Bausch and Lomb Building in Rochester.

MR. HERMAN: For Ray King?

MR. SMITH: Not for Ray King. It was for Larry Kirkland.

MR. HERMAN: Oh. So these were—well, Ray King I know primarily as a glass artist. Larry Kirkland as really a mixed media.

MR. SMITH: He created a floor in a new building designed by Fox & Fowle. I was able to use some of my connections that I had. It was a very interesting learning experience because most of my life I was involved with the nonprofit world and education, except for my short stint in retailing. So I really enjoyed the learning opportunity to realize what it was like to promote, market, and help represent an artist.

[END OF DISC 5, TRACK 2.]

MR. HERMAN: This is Lloyd Herman interviewing Paul Smith in his New York apartment on April 20, 2010. This is tape six. Unfortunately the last tape was interrupted kind of in your mid thought, Paul, because it came to the end. Can you resume talking about your interest in education, continuing interest in education?

MR. SMITH: Well, I was speaking about my exploration of advising collectors and being involved with the commercial world of selling work that I enjoyed and learned and benefitted from because I'd never been involved with that association. But I also concluded that having spent my life in the nonprofit world and involved with education, that's really where my primary interest was. So I then stopped that activity and began to focus on projects extending what I had been doing at the museum.

So I did independent curating. One of the first was an exhibition at the Boca Raton Museum [of Art, FL] of glass collectors in 1988. Roger Mandel, who was the director of the Toledo Museum [of Art, OH] brought me in to advise on how they might expand their contemporary glass collection as they had a rich historical collection. I prepared a list of artists that might be added, and said, you might explore contacting some collectors to donate some works. I put them in touch with the Saxes and spoke to George and Dorothy. Roger Mandel, in the meantime, left but other staff continued discussions. I was not involved with the negotiations but it resulted in quite a large gift of works to the Toledo Museum from George and Dorothy Saxe. .

Another glass connection was at the Detroit Institute. When Davira Taragin left the museum, they did not have a curator involved with the David Jacob Chodorkoff collection. As a new gift to the museum, I helped organize an exhibition representing a selection of work.

MR. HERMAN: That was both a show and a gift?

MR. SMITH: Yes. Another exhibition emerged when Edward Elson became the ambassador to Denmark in the [President William J.] Clinton Administration. His wife, Suzie, who had been a trustee of ACC and very supportive of the museum, invited me to work with her on an exhibition for the Danish Museum of Decorative Arts. It resulted in borrowing works from the American Craft Museum collection resulting in a mini-"Craft Today USA" in Denmark as that show had not traveled to Denmark.

MR. HERMAN: What year would that have been, Paul, if you remember. And I'm curious if that was sort of a mini-version of "Craft Today USA," did the museum acquire work from that rather major show as they did from "Objects USA"?

MR. SMITH: It was shown in Denmark in 1997, and at the time Janet Kardon was the director of ACM

MR. HERMAN: Ninety-seven.

MR. SMITH: That's correct, '97. When the "Craft Today" returned and was being dispersed, Janet Kardon wrote a letter to the artists to ask for pieces to be donated or arranged for being given. Many artists did give pieces to the collection. It wasn't the total exhibition but many works became part of the collection. Then in 2001, when David McFadden was the chief curator, we discussed the possibility of my doing a show, and I proposed the idea of a major survey exhibition of functional work. I felt that there was outstanding work being done that we see in the craft marketplace but seldom gets into museum exhibitions.

So it resulted in a very large survey collection and a book that was published by Abrams. (OBJECTS FOR USE: Handmade by Design) It was scheduled to open on 9/12/2001. If you recall that date, the 9/11 tragedy took place when I was actually at the museum at eight o'clock in the morning working with the installation crew to get it finalized for the opening. Over a hundred artists from all over the country were flying in for the opening the next day. Needless to say, it was an enormous shock to experience that just in the middle of launching this exhibition. I can only term it is somewhat of a nightmare not only the enormous tragedy, but the fact that artists were en route to New York. Many were stranded in airports. One was coming through the Holland Tunnel with a work to be added to the exhibition, and one of the artists was having a birthday party the next day at the restaurant on top of the tower of the World [Trade Center] There were so many stories I could write a book. The exhibition opening was postponed. For those who were in New York, we gave a private tour the next day. As the whole city was in such disarray, it was just not a time to do other than to deal with the tragedy, but it did open later, and it was a successful show at the time.

So I was always open to different projects. Some I would initiate, others would evolve. Having worked with the Archives of American Art that is sponsoring this interview, I had association with staff over the years and at the time when Susan Hamilton was there, we discussed how to expand the craft section which resulted in my doing a study for two years in the mid-'90s. I reviewed artists in the craft media who were in the collection, and identified those who were not in the collection that might be added.

MR. HERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This would be a collection both of artists' papers and oral history interviews.

MR. SMITH: Yes. And it began with artists who were born in 1940 and before; the older generation, and then the second study I did was for artists born during the next decade. So that was an interesting project. I paralleled the research with the existing Polsky oral interviews at Columbia University as well as the ACC Fellows and Honorary Fellows.. The study was used by the staff to develop some future programming, including their continuing program of interviews and [The Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America].

MR. HERMAN: Paul, can you talk about your involvement with other organizations over the years, both during the time you worked at the museum and since you've left the museum and have worked on independent projects?

MR. SMITH: Yes. I have served on several boards and advisory committees over the years, which has always been an interesting association. I was on the Penland [School of Crafts, Penland, NC] board, Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME] board. I was on the National Council of the Atlantic Center for the Arts, on advisory committees for the School of Artistry at Boston University and the Parsons School [of Design, New York, NY]. Currently I'm on the board of the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation and the Lenore Tawne y Foundation. They have been interesting associations because these organizations are important and I think benefit from trustees that can give time and contribute their expertise.

MR. HERMAN: You talked a little bit about the travel that you did during "Craft Today USA." International travel, certainly, I know you believe is very important. Can you talk a little bit more about the other trips that you had an opportunity to make either sponsored by foreign governments or US Information Agency or just on your own as the way it helped your knowledge of the international field.

MR. SMITH: I've been very fortunate, I think. Being associated with a national organization and the museum, many opportunities to travel came about. I was invited to jury many exhibitions around the country that I have always found a wonderful opportunity to see new work.

MR. HERMAN: You mean in this country.

MR. SMITH: In this country, but also foreign travel was important. I juried shows in England, Japan and France

over the years, where it offered the opportunity to see a lot of work. While I contributed my expertise in the process, it was also very beneficial to me that I would see work that added to my vocabulary of information and helped in future exhibition planning during my museum directorship. The German government in 1965 invited me and Rose, who was editor of *Craft Horizons* for a guest trip

MR. HERMAN: Rose Slivka?

MR. SMITH: Yes, for a one-month tour. It was a very lengthy and detailed tour. We went to all of the major cities to visit the schools. We went to studios. We went to the museums. It was a very inspiring experience. It resulted in an exhibition for the museum sponsored by the German government called "Metal Germany."

MR. HERMAN: This was still the era of a divided Germany.

MR. SMITH: Yes but this was West Germany.

MR. HERMAN: Oh, oh, West Germany. Yes.

MR. SMITH: But there were other events. I worked with Annalise Ohm, the curator at the Museum for Kunsthandwerkin Frankfurt, Germany. During our bicentennial year in 1976. They organized a very important international exhibition of contemporary glass that was, I think, one of the first times American glass was shown in depth in Europe -- ["Modern Glass American Europe and Japan"]. As it was part of the US centennial celebration in Germany, Nelson Rockefeller, who was then vice president, was in Germany at the time and did appear at the opening which was nice. He was very interested in the exhibition.

On another occasion, in the early '70s, the Australian government was sponsoring a lot of exchange when craft programs were beginning to develop, and they had funding to invite people from around the world to come and share their expertise. There were many artists that went including Arline Fisch and artists in other media who contributed a lot to educational programming, and gave a boost to the rapid expansion of the now vital activity in that country. I was invited to give workshops for museum curators on my approach to programming. So I gave a workshop in Sydney, one in Melbourne and one in Adelaide, to demonstrate some of the things that we had done so successfully with involving the public. I organized a public quilting bee in the main square of downtown Sydney. It was very much influenced by the "Make a Banner, Fly a Banner" event that we did. It was a huge success and it was a great opportunity as well to demonstrate how this sort of public participatory event could be conducted.

MR. SMITH: That was '74. I can only highlight a few because there were so many. But I would say that all of these in a way spoiled me because to go to a foreign country is always interesting to see new things and be a tourist. When you travel under an invitation and a sponsorship, you have a privileged experience where you meet people, and you have all kinds of contacts that the average tourist does not have, especially with interest in the arts. I think one of the memorable events that we were both involved with was when the American Friends of Art and Religion, an organization that had a relationship with the Vatican Museum was conducting conferences and arranging for exhibitions, decided to do a craft exhibition. They invited us to be involved. As you will recall, Elena Canavier, you and I selected work for a small exhibition at the Vatican. We were also invited to be part of the symposium that was held in the Vatican. With members of the group, we were entertained royally with events and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. There was even a public audience with the Pope.

MR. HERMAN: Pope Paul.

MR. SMITH: You will recall Pope Paul VI, acknowledged our group in the front row. And it was very interesting that some of the works were acquired for the collection of the museum. These are kinds of special experiences one doesn't forget. It was really well-done and really interesting to be in Rome and to be part of that memorable event.

MR. HERMAN: You made trips to Africa in the '80s. Tell me a little bit about those.

MR. SMITH: I've had a continuing association with the United States Information Agency program for sponsoring artists and curators and various people in the arts as part of their cultural exchange program.

MR. HERMAN: This is the Art American Program as it was known.

MR. SMITH: Arts America Program. As there was a fiber art exhibit that was touring in Central Africa, Rwanda and Botswana, I was invited to make an inspection trip of the exhibit because the curator was not able to do it. I also gave some lectures, so that brought me in contact with a place in the world that I had never been. Later I made an academic specialist trip to Papua New Guinea and went on to Australia for the World Craft Council

conference. In Papua New Guinea when I was consulting with the National Museum people I said, "what areas of expertise would you be interested in my sharing with you? Their response was "We want to learn how to raise money." [They laugh.] I made several trips to India, probably the highlight of my travels because I don't think there's any country that is as inspiring. I made three trips to China beginning in 1995 through the US-China Arts Exchange that had a program funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and Ford Foundation to help preserve and develop nationality culture in South China in the province of Yunnan. That again was a privilege to experience because a group of us on a first visit were taken on a tour to remote villages to visit these cultures. They're not pure Chinese.

MR. HERMAN: Minority cultures?

MR. SMITH: Yes, Minority. -- they're blends with different cultures. When we were very near the Laos border, there were people from that area; also from Burma. There are 55 different groups, and they represent a very rich cultural activity in China today which is being recognized the way our Native American culture is to us. So each trip working with anthropologists and with educational programs was a special experience to come in contact with this rich cultural activity, and to be in remote villages where Westerners have never been before.

MR. HERMAN: Other than the "Metal Germany" exhibition, did any of your other foreign trips result in exhibitions that were presented in the US?

MR. SMITH: Yes. During the Festival of India, I was invited to India with the idea of realizing a show on terra cotta, the figurative forms. I met with Haku Shah who was going to be the guest curator. But, the timing did not work out as we lost our space at Museum II, and didn't have a place to show it. So it ended up being at the Mingei Museum in San Diego. There were many others, especially to the Scandinavian countries; I was invited to Finland and to Sweden more than once. Many times it was not necessarily a show that came out of it, but I made contacts that were valuable in developing future exhibitions.

MR. HERMAN: You just a few minutes ago mentioned Nelson Rockefeller being present during one of your trips for an opening of an exhibition. You've certainly met a great many celebrities, I would say, from art and culture, politics. Do any of those relationships, those friendships or acquaintances, stand out as being particularly important?

MR. SMITH: It's difficult to single out, but often in combination with travel and through the museum itself I would meet and come in contact with many people. I always enjoyed meeting people in other disciplines. That was always enlightening and helped give an understanding of common interests but sometimes the differences. One organization I really enjoyed being associated with was the Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach Florida. It is a residency center that invites artists in different disciplines for three weeks to share and work together. For example a poet, a musician, and a playwright might be there at the same time to work independently or collaborate. Nurturing interchange of different disciplines has been a unique and interesting program.

When I was on the National Council it was made up of people from many different areas and including Lucas Foss, the composer, and Edward Albee, the playwright. To be on that committee with them was always very interesting because one would benefit from hearing their viewpoint on programming. So, one would get insight to the theatre world, to the music world, and other specialized areas of the arts. Also many of the exhibitions were opportunities to get to know the people from many different areas. For example in the design world we had associations with the masters of twentieth-century design, George Nelson and Russell Wright. Likewise in fashion, I mentioned some of those names before. In the area of food we made contact with Julia Child and Mimi Sheridan. So it wasn't that it was just a nice occasion to meet some of the people but to have an in-depth conversation, and to benefit from learning about their world. They often shared their experience by advising or contributing to our exhibitions.

Through my association with the USIA, I learned a lot about how our government promoted its programs and culture abroad. It was interesting working with their staff and meeting with the American ambassadors in several of the countries. I realized how important it was when an American ambassador had a sincere interest in the arts. It made a big difference and there was enormous respect especially in the European countries.

MR. HERMAN: And wasn't the popular American child star Shirley Temple Black an ambassador in Prague I think it was when you had objects on display?

MR. SMITH: When the exhibition opened in Bratislava, she was the ambassador and she did come to officially open the exhibit. I did meet her and give her a tour of the exhibition. She was quite shy actually and I was surprised that she was rather modest. It was yet another interesting association as everyone, of course, knows of the childhood fame of Shirley Temple.

MR. HERMAN: You've been involved with the craft field—or with the arts I should say—for nearly 60 years, starting in the 1950s. I'd be interested in your talking a little bit about changes that you've seen in the crafts field particularly, but maybe even in the arts generally in terms of the kinds of objects that have been made, the media used and how things have been marketed and promoted and shown in museums.

MR. SMITH: Before I speak about that, I would just mention one other person that I think was very important in terms of people contacts -- Joan Mondale. When her husband [Walter Mondale] became vice president of the United States, one of her first visits was to the museum. I think she stood out as an exceptional spokesperson for the arts. Her personal interest as a potter and interest in the arts made such a contribution at the time when she was in Washington. Her continuing promotion of the arts in general and especially the craft field was outstanding. For receptions at the vice president's house, she'd bring together artists, curators as well as people from government. It was a very focused effort. The fact that she also traveled constantly to visit artists in their studios was a sincere interest. She did this all over the country, and after she left Washington and her husband became ambassador to Japan, she continued that. I just wanted to single out the fact that I think that we need more of the Joan Mondales in government to be spokespeople for the arts because they can make a difference. Most countries of the world have ministers of culture that are officially promoting the culture of the country. While we do have the National Endowment and do have programs, I think that we also need an official spokesperson.

Now, onto reflecting on the past 60 years, that is a big subject.. At the beginning of the interview I spoke about the '50s, '60s era that at that time was a period of drastic change. And I used the phrase "the school as a patron" because so much activity was centered around the educational institutions, but it was also part of the cultural change that was taking place in the country as a whole.

It's difficult to generalize, but in looking back one can see how the pendulum has swung. The emphasis on education, which was so strong, is still present of course, but today I would say ‘the market is the patron." Since the '80s an expansion of the marketplace has been phenomenal. It's been very important for the artists as they are now able to earn a living independently through the venues of the craft fairs, through galleries, through SOFA's and many other events. I think it's been wonderful for the artists, and I think it has nurtured greater interest and more collecting. But it's also changed the whole context of everything a bit. The positive side I think is great, but there's also a negative side where there's a certain amount of market dominance that controls what will sell and what people make. It's inevitable as it has happened in all the arts. So I would say that there has been a big change. It is impressive to see the growth on every level: The media organizations I think are outstanding—the Glass Arts Society, the Furniture Society, NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts] and the others that conduct annual conferences and important programs..

MR. HERMAN: Which didn't exist 50 years ago.

MR. SMITH: They did not exist and they have been I think remarkable in their continuing programs, I just attended the NCECA conference in Philadelphia last week where over 5,000 people attended, and there were over 90 exhibitions. That in itself is an amazing statistic about how far we have come.

At NCECA there was representation from many countries abroad, both Asia and Europe. Expansion of museum programs has been important. Specialized museums have emerged such as Fuller [Craft Museum, Brockton, MA], the craft museum in San Francisco [Museum of Craft and Design], the Bellevue [Art Museum, Bellevue, WA.] All have expanded the network from the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York and the Renwick in the early days. But also interesting is several large art museums that are developing permanent galleries. This is due to collectors giving gifts —an example being the de Young [Museum, San Francisco] with the Saxe Collection that has a named gallery. The Boston Museum will be opening soon with a collection from Daphne Farago and The Houston Museum has received collections.

MR. HERMAN: Are you talking about a new wing of the Museum of Fine Arts?

MR. SMITH: In Boston.

MR. HERMAN: Oh.

MR. SMITH: Yes, The Museum of Fine Arts where there's a new wing that's opening in stages that will have a permanent contemporary craft gallery with the Farago collection.

MR. HERMAN: And she was one of the collectors that you helped in her own collecting.

MR. SMITH: I worked with Daphne for three years at the beginning of her collecting which was a very good relationship. She went on to be a very important collector and has been very generous in now donating her works. And the Houston Museum [of Fine Arts] has been expanding its collection. So I feel one can say there's an accumulation of activity taking place that illustrates that pioneer activity back in the '50s and even '40s has

maybe arrived. [Laughs.] Certainly I think, good work is recognized as being serious. It's hard to predict the future. but I think as we have more distance from it, I feel that the studio craft movement in the twentieth century was very important, and I think is going to have an increasing place in art history in the future.

MR. HERMAN: You started out as an artist, a working artist, and became a director of a department store and then moved into the museum world. And you said earlier that that was your creative outlet. That you really kind of subjugated carving wood and making jewelry and painting to creative work in creating exhibitions. Tell me how your creative energies are satisfied now.

MR. SMITH: Well, I've always had an interest in photography. That has escalated. After leaving the museum, I took courses at the 92nd Street Y and learned how to print photographs and set up my own darkroom in my studio office in the next block. So that is a current focus. I enjoy taking photographs, and it is a continuum of my artistic interests. I have been photographing artists since 1985 and have a big collection which has become an important documentation of the field. But also I have been photographing many other areas. Now in the digital world with digital cameras and printers, it's a continuing activity. I have a large volume of prints that have never been shown, [laughs] and I'm not sure if they ever will be, but it's something that I enjoy.

But I also enjoy the opportunity to continually explore and become aware of new things. It's just been always part of my instinct to be curious. I've always loved going to studios. I enjoy going to all of the art fairs and events in the city, or most of them. I occasionally travel to international events like the International Academy of Ceramics meetings. It is a way of keeping in touch. As I'm extremely privileged to have kept in contact with so many artists, I receive catalogues and material. So I continue to have a very rich existence of being involved with various things.

I did not quite finish on one subject -- the present. I would like to return to that. I was speaking about the growth of the field and the vastness of it. I do think there are some problems One concern is the area of education. I think back in the '60s the dominance and activity in the schools resulted in the exciting work that emerged. Today with the successful market, young people can bypass going to schools; and they don't need the degree to be in the craft market. It's easy to learn by being an apprentice or learn from somebody. As a result a lot of work is very derivative and reflects lack of training. There is an abundance of derivative work and the buyer doesn't necessarily know the difference. Today In higher education art programs there isn't the growth. In fact many have shrunk.

MR. HERMAN: You're talking about the craft discipline programs in the universities?

MR. SMITH: Yes, the craft-focused programs. Several have closed or have integrated with other disciplines -- .what I term homogenizing. I understand why that's happening. While there are outstanding schools throughout the country, with outstanding faculty certainly, my concern is that there isn't enough focus on what I would call career development. I mean the breadth of training programs that prepare a student to have a choice of where they might go once they leave school and to develop them with training of how they could fulfill that specialized area. A good example is if they're going to be interested in having a studio and a limited production facility to sell work, they need to be trained to create and design products for the marketplace. If they're interested in doing commissions or create work for special projects that is another area of specialized training.

MR. HERMAN: I think you were talking about what's known as the DIY, the Do It Yourself craft movement, or alternative or cyber-crafters. Which is a phenomenon, in a sense almost another revolution from the ground up again. Where what we have seen in the time we've been in the field has really been the growth of academic craft programs. And now we're seen in a kind of—as sort of bottom-feeders, to put my term on it.

MR. SMITH: DIY is an area that is very active today. There's no question it has received a lot of attention. I have done my own research on this to become acquainted and looked at a lot of websites. I've even visited the Etsy headquarters in Brooklyn. So I think I have an understanding. From my perspective, I see it as nothing new [Laughs] and a continuum of something that's been around, certainly during the twentieth century. Hobby craft has always been enormous with home skills and basement workshops for furniture-making and woodworking. The knitting, and quilt-making community is very large and has generated a very big market for materials. When you see statistics on the selling of yarns and selling of hobby products, it is a big business. All this is a continuum of the sixties "back-to-the-earth" movement when many young people were tie-dyeing T-shirts and embroidering jeans
.
MR. HERMAN: In a way the hobby crafts then.

MR. SMITH: Today it is hobby crafts in another context. So I look at DIY as really not something new, but as a continuum. The difference is that it benefits from being part of the technology of our time. The Internet is very central to its vast network and community that is sharing how-to and all kinds of information. If you look at the

websites, there's also many using the Internet as a venue for selling. So where it goes, I don't know. There's no question that some people will emerge and may become more professional.

But I look at it in a positive way in that it is something that is just part of an ongoing part of our culture. Having observed the '60s, -- this is theory -— that some of the people that had hands-on experience and appreciation of creating things went on to be CEOs of corporations, bank presidents and held positions where they made a lot of money. I know a few, who were really out of that culture that have become patrons, collectors, and trustees of art museums. So you have to be open to the benefits of this experience. It's not only always someone who is knitting or crocheting that is going on to be the next master artist. But it is an experience of creating with ones hands that I think is central to the whole meaning of the craft experience I've always justified as something that was basically a human instinct --. It's centuries old, it thrived in the twentieth century, and I think it continues to be an important area of activity today. As we become more controlled by technology in our society, returning to some basics, whether it be home cooking, home sewing, making furniture or gardening, all are experiences that are really important as a balance and very rewarding and fulfilling.

MR. HERMAN: You probably had more impact on the field than any other person working primarily in museums, that I can think of. How are you now continuing to share your experience over all those years?

MR. SMITH: There's not one way. I am always open when people approach me. I have noticed an escalation among young people in art history graduate programs in schools that have interest in the 20th Century studio craft movement. I can tell by the amount of inquiries that I'm receiving, and I'm very encouraged by this because I find that these young people are looking back and realizing that this is something interesting. I'm somewhat amazed that they are picking up a lot of history that I would not have thought was there with their research. I'm meeting this week with a student from the Corcoran [College of Art and Design, Washington, D.C.] who wants to do a paper on Lee Nordness. There are other programs like the Bard graduate program [*Bard Graduate* Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY] Several students have interviewed me about the museum or some artist. I think the growing interest in the history of 20th Century studio craft is important. Having been part of that, I enjoy sharing but I also continue to be involved with whatever comes along, where I can contribute knowledge that I have.

MR. HERMAN: You've been honored numerous times over the years. But the most recent honor, I believe, was the Aileen Osborn Webb Award for contribution to the field in 2009. And concluding this tape, can you say a few words about that?

MR. SMITH: This was a very big surprise, but it was really an honor that meant a lot to me. I received it in Minneapolis at the recent ACC conference this fall. In acknowledging the award, I said that it really means a lot to me personally because I hold Mrs. Webb's legacy in great esteem. I don't think there was any one person who did more to foster the so-called studio craft movement. I don't want to single her out as the only one as there were many people involved, but I think that she made such a difference in creating both national and international awareness with the many programs that she fostered and sponsored. She had a profound effect. As I think back, it is very conceivable that many things that are taking place today, including an expanded market might not exist. Obviously there would always be people working with the craft media and programs would exist in schools, but I don't think there would be the depth and the scope had it not been for programs that she made possible through the American Craftsmen's Council.

MR. HERMAN: Good. Thank you. Paul, thank you very much. Do you have anything further you'd like to add? We have just a couple of minutes left.

MR. SMITH: I would just like to say that it's been really a great privilege to be involved with Mrs. Webb's mission, so the award really meant a lot to me. Also I did not acknowledge in this interview all the people that have been so helpful in working with me. There were so many staff members that were very involved with exhibitions as well as trustees, patrons, volunteers, and interns. As there were really hundreds of artists and people that helped realize the development of the museum program. I personally appreciate all that association and friendship.

MR. HERMAN: Good. Thank you. This is the end of the interview with Paul Smith.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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