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Oral history interview with Nancy Hoffman, 2015 July 15-16

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Nancy Hoffman on July 15, 2015. The interview took place in New York and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Viola Frey Oral History Project.

Nancy Hoffman and Artists' Legacy Foundation have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Nancy Hoffman in her gallery in New York, on July 15, 2015, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is card number one.

[Inaudible background conversation.]

Okay. Thank you for making time for this interview. Well, as I said beforehand, we're going to try to accomplish two things here, which is to do an interview about you and your gallery in the New York art world for the past 40 years, as well as a special emphasis on Viola Frey, for the Artist Legacy Foundation [ALF]. Today we'll start with some just basic biographical information, get that out of the way, move into some early information about the gallery, and then go straight to Viola. Does that work?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Fine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Great. Okay, so when and where you born, please?

NANCY HOFFMAN: In New York. I was born in New York; I grew up on Long Island.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And—

MIJA RIEDEL: —and the day and date?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Do you really need to put that in?

MIJA RIEDEL: If you prefer not, we can pass.

NANCY HOFFMAN: [Laughs.] Okay, pass.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Would you describe your childhood and your early family background, if there was an emphasis on art in your family? What were your parents' names?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I don't think there was really an emphasis on it. We went to museums a fair amount. And when we traveled with my parents when we were a bit older, we always went to churches and museums and all of that. My mother claims that the first time I was in Venice, I walked up the steps and saw [a] Tiepolo, and I said, "Oh, my God." She said that was the "aha" moment. And she also claims that when she was pregnant with me, she was stripping a frame of its gold leaf, and she says that was it. She, of course, takes all the credit—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: —for my interest in art. But they weren't really particularly interested in art. My father was a businessman; my mother was involved with education, was [with] an NGO at the U.N. up until a few years ago.

Culture was part of their lives: museums, theater, all of that. But they weren't involved. They didn't really collect. They had things at home, paintings, sculptures, but they were things that were picked up along the way, if you know what I mean, in travels.

My father [. . . had a rare –NH] enthusiasm for life; he was a real character. Very different from the Michele Pred character. But he was a real character, and so if he was traveling someplace and he saw something he liked or thought my mother would like, he would buy it. So a lot of the pieces had memories in them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. And when you say he'd buy it, were they paintings, were they objects, were they collections?

NANCY HOFFMAN: All kinds of things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: All kinds of things. One time he bought a necklace in Venice that he thought she would like that was not particularly fancy. But it was pretty, and it reminded him of the sea, which he absolutely loved. He was a sailor; he loved the sea; and it was blue glass with some clear, worn beads in between. And so he, at that time in his life—he was probably in his 60s, and he was a runner, and he was running through the streets of Venice, got lost, saw this necklace, said it was the scene for him. He bought it, he gave it to her, and then after he died, my mother took it apart. I said, "Why don't we separate it and make pairs of earrings for each of the kids and the grandkids?" So that was a sort of objet.

They liked objets; they liked paintings; they liked drawings. They were friends with an artist who came from Poland, by Russia, who was Jewish and came to this country. I don't know exactly when; his name was Ilya Schor. He made paintings and also made jewelry. And they helped him to sort of get established here, and they had some drawings and some jewelry that he made.

But they liked everything. My father is no longer alive. Mother is alive at the age of 98. And they loved things of beauty. They didn't have to be expensive, as I said, but it's something that fit into their universe. They weren't gallery goers, I can tell you that. They definitely didn't have a history of going to galleries, such as we know them, until my gallery opened, and then they would come a fair amount. And there were certain artists whose works they would buy. But again, it was—but they would buy and respond to what was a part of their universe.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: But not as sophisticated, educated, art buyers.

MIJA RIEDEL: Two things that you say seem very interesting. One is the diversity of media that they were interested in. And the second is this concept of beauty, which is one of the first things I think of when I think of the artists you represent. There is a real sense of beauty to a lot of the work. Does that resonate with you?

NANCY HOFFMAN: It does, and I think that the issue of beauty—and also more, the concept of living with work that enhances one's life. That often incorporates beauty, but it is that life enhancement—global feeling. And it isn't always beautiful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But it could be evocative and provocative. It can make you think, and it can enhance your life by taking you to a new place mentally, emotionally, physically, psychologically. [Inaudible.]

I think that a lot of people don't really understand what we do in terms of the work we show. They think maybe it's all about beauty. One of my artists that was working on a show that we were going to be having asked how I would feel about it, because everything—some people had said that the gallery had just shown work that was decorative. I don't believe that, that we show just simply decorative work. That's just somebody trying to knock us down, frankly. But that life-enhancement thing is an aspect that pretty much incorporates everybody. Interestingly about beauty, Joseph Raffael has a show coming up in September. David Pagel also did an essay on Joseph's work for this upcoming publication, which is called *Moving Toward the Light* and—

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm a little concerned about the background. I'm going to pause this for a moment.

So we were talking about Joseph Raffael.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I actually met David Pagel by a correspondence nine years ago. I sent him, as they say, a flyer. Basically, I sent him a message, and I said, "Would you be willing to write an essay about Joseph Raffael?" He said, "Yes," he would love to. And he wrote the most extraordinary essay on Joseph Raffael.

David Pagel is like some kind of seer. He sees into the work. He doesn't just get it; he gets it on every single level. So since that time, not that we've been in regular correspondence, but he has written a number of things for us, for the gallery, mostly about Joseph Raffael. I also asked him if he would write an introduction to a book on Robert Zakanitch. And he did that also, just totally nailed it.

Then I asked him if he would write about Viola, which was very different from the work of Joseph Raffael and Zakanitch. And he said, "Yes," and I said, "David, oh, my God." There's never been anything—I told him prior—I said, "There's never been anything written on Viola that's worth anything." And I said, "It's just an opportunity to have something really to contribute." And he did the most amazing job.

So, that was a little digression, but it was all to tell you about my connection to David Pagel, [how] I finally met him. And I'll tell you what happened; I said to Joseph, because we'd been working on this book for three years, called *Moving Toward The Light*—it's coming out; we should have it, if all goes well, on September 7—I said, "Maybe you and David want to do a conversation." Because Joseph doesn't travel anymore. It's not that he's not well. He's perfectly healthy as a horse, but he doesn't like losing the few days before, and the week after. Ten days in the studio are 10 precious days in the studio. He doesn't want to lose them. So I said maybe we do a brochure in conjunction with the exhibition and call it *Talking Beauty*. So that's what we're doing. And they were supposed to do a certain number of words that would have been appropriate for the brochure, like 1500 to 2000 words. It was 29,000 words.

MIJA RIEDEL: I bet.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Anyway, I read it; they sent it to me when I was in San Francisco. I didn't have time to read it because I was at the art fair. So I read it at about five o'clock in the morning when I was at the airport waiting. And I said, "Oh, my God." I said, "This is not just a conversation; this is a disquisition on beauty that has to be published."

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I got back; I wrote them both a message and said I was going to show it to somebody. So I think there will be a book, which will be called *Talking Beauty*. It is this dialogue—email dialogue—over months and months, about beauty and creativity.

And that's the sort of nucleus of what I feel the gallery contributes. The creativity that goes on, in what I called my single-minded, obsessed artists. That there's a single-minded focus to each of the artists in the gallery.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's a single-minded—sorry?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Focus.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And it's not just about beauty. But it is a single-minded vision that often is expressed in what people will say, "Wow, that's beautiful." But it's so much more.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So anyway, that's *Talking Beauty*. I just proofed the brochure earlier.

MIJA RIEDEL: I can't wait to see that, actually. That sounds compelling.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I can send you the edited. What I did is, it took me a week to edit down 29 pages to a size that would fit onto a one-fold brochure, because we were not about to do another book. We had just been working on this book. This is a brochure; this is for people who come to the exhibition, for collectors, for us to have at art fairs, for people who are interested in Joseph's work. And because he's not here, it is his voice. And it's really his voice, and it is the—as a result of the intimacy of conversation back and forth, going deeper and deeper and deeper—you'll see it; it's fascinating. It's really fascinating. I mean, it's clearly an acquired taste, like caviar.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: It's not something that would interest everybody. This is not popular literature. But when the book comes out, it will be like a book of poetry. So anyway, to address your issue of beauty.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: There is that thread that runs through the gallery, no question.

MIJA RIEDEL: And also just to build on this idea of David Pagel's, as saying this conversation is—that you have been committed to publications and to bringing a scholarly view, multiple points of view onto a number of artists that you carry, and that's been true for the gallery for quite some time as well. You have had a real commitment to publications, many of them—that many galleries can't. They don't have time; they can't afford. But that seems something you've made a real commitment to.

NANCY HOFFMAN: That's true. Even if we can't afford it, I feel sometimes it's really important to do it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —because what the public sees and perceives is very different from the whole picture, and there are times that you really want that out there. You want them in print. We've done a few catalogues that I think are really [excellent –NH].

We did one catalogue on Michael Gregory. I feel we are very heavily weighted with artists from the West Coast. Not just because—I'm not a West Coast girl, not at all, but slow and steady, each of these artists is unique. We have an extraordinary essay by Ann Lauterbach in the Michael Gregory catalogue. We can give you those catalogues with the essays. And every once in a while, something, a revelatory essay, comes your way, and you realize, this is a gift. Anyone who's interested in Michael's work and anyone who gets that catalogue recognizes that, and same with David Pagel.

Joseph said when we did the catalogue on his last exhibition—which was called *JR@80*, with a David Pagel essay —he said he had never gotten so many emails about the essay, because people read these essays; they're not just [. . . –NH] fillers. There are a lot of them that don't count for anything, I think, but we aim, as you say, to address the issue of scholarship, of examination of the work in a way that illuminates. I feel that's really important, and I knew that David would do something with Viola's work that no one had done, and he did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, Pauline Shaver must have told you, she cried when she read it the first time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, it was goose-bump material. The number of different angles that he brought to it, and the number of different levels that he used to discuss it, the writing, of course, was just absolutely gorgeous. But I wonder if it would have been possible to even write that essay 20 years ago, or if it comes with time, do you think?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I have no idea. I don't know if it would have been possible. I think 20 years ago, Viola was in a different place. And hindsight and being able to look at her work as an oeuvre is very, very different. David is, I don't know, I think he is in his 50s, I'm not sure, maybe late 40s. Also he is in a place in terms of his writing and his ripening [. . . –NH] to take on that material. I don't know, that's an interesting question. But I think if an artist is still working, he would have written a different kind of essay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Really different kind of essay.

Oh, I'll tell you how I met David [in person]. I was going to Los Angeles for one day. I was in San Francisco for the art fair this year, in April, and I was going to LA for a day to take a client to an artist's studio. And literally, I took the 8 a.m. flight from San Francisco to LA , the shuttle, and I flew back on the 9 p.m. flight. So my primary focus of the day was to see one of our artists who is in LA, take the client to the studio. And then I said, Gee, I'm going to be in LA; why I don't I write to David? I said, "I'm going to be in LA for 12 hours. Do you have any time we can get together?"

I met [my client] at my artist who lives there and said, "Where can we meet that's between your studio and the airport?" He suggested one of the Marriott hotels with a restaurant café, which was quiet.

So we were going to meet there, and I had seen a picture of what David Pagel looked like, but it's not what he looks like. [Laughs.] He has long hair and looked quite thin. He said, "Well, you probably read this in the brochure"—he's an excellent cyclist. He has won some awards and everything. And so at one point after he told me that, I said "Well, I don't do any competitive biking, but I, too, am a cyclist, and I ride for an hour a day, and I ride it when I'm in France. I put my puppy in the basket, and that's how I go to the marché and do all that stuff." He said, "Well, that's why I knew I liked you."

So anyway, we get to the hotel. I was there at the restaurant, and he was 15 or 20 minutes late. I guess he called me, and he said, "Are you here?" I said, "Yes, I have been here for a half hour." "Well, so am I." I wouldn't have recognized him, not in a million years. He had come from school; he was wearing Bermudas and a T-shirt, and you know LA.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Anyway, we sat there for three hours. [Laughs.] He's really fantastic. He's just such a lovely person, so smart. Only in the first catalogue essay [did we have –NH] a lot of revision, but after that he just nailed everything.

So anyway, that was way more than you wanted. But I am committed to scholarship, and I studied art history. I was going to go on to get a Ph.D. and decided not to.

MIJA RIEDEL: And why was it—you were at Barnard?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I was at Barnard. I was also taking graduate courses at Columbia when I was at Barnard. They had this accelerated program where you could do your master's and your Ph.D., and get it all done really quickly. They identified the people they wanted to do that; you do it. I took a year off to work at a museum, and after that I just said academia is not for me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It just wasn't for me. I loved working with objects; I loved being surrounded by them. The, what shall I say, the scholarly part of—and education aspect—was for me, in terms of what I do with artists and what I convey to the world. I feel that's a really important part of what we do at the gallery. We always try to educate, and we always try to tell people as much as possible. And build our little library of catalogues. We can't afford to do catalogues on every show. We can't afford to do it at all, but we do it because I really believe in it, and I think it's an investment in the artist over the long haul. So I just made that decision that I wasn't giving up education, quality education. I didn't think a few more years studying art history was what I wanted to do. So I didn't do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. A quick question circling back to childhood. It sounds like you traveled frequently and fairly early, and that your experience with art was fairly international, or certainly at least in New York and Europe, New York and Italy.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. Well, when were kids, little kids, we didn't travel too much. We went to California once—[laughs]—that kind of thing. We stayed close to home base. But as we got to be older teenagers, then our parents took us to Europe. From time to time, not all the time. But we were exposed early; trips were not to go to the beach [. . . –NH]. They were to take the kids to see not just the sites, but to really experience the culture. As I said, my parents were very interested in culture, and I would use that word for more than just the arts. They were interested in culture and exposing us. That included everything from opera, ballet, art, the food, the gondoliers—the whole thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: They were interested across the board, and so they exposed us to that. And then I guess we went, probably went a few times, with them to Europe before we all went off to college.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, okay. Aesthetics and culture seem to be the foundation of that educational background from the start.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, and also, when my parents were on their honeymoon, they were kids. They were 20 when they got married. And they went on a cycling trip on their honeymoon to Europe. My father got sick. He got really deathly ill in the Netherlands and was in the hospital, and then they said, well, my mother had to find a warm place for him to recuperate. He had something like pneumonia, but it was really bad—really, really bad. She didn't know what she was doing, but somebody told her to go to the south of France. There she went, at the age of 20, with her woolly, woolen suit, and saw the sun and the mountains and the sea. So then that's where their sort of love affair with that part of the world began.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And so they wanted to share that they loved that. My father loved the sea; as I said, he was a sailor. I could sail before I could walk.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: So there you have it. And we were like little fish. He loved the water, so they threw us in the water and we learned to swim before we could walk, practically. What they loved, they shared with their kids. And as you said, the aesthetics traveled. The incorporation of culture as one, in one's life, as natural and natural to your fiber. They really instilled in us.

MIJA RIEDEL: When you were in college, you worked a couple of years in Asia House, is that right?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes; correct.

MIJA RIEDEL: And then went on to French & Company.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Why a gallery direction rather than a museum direction?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I worked for Asia House for a few years when I was in school and then after, and funnily, I loved all the, what shall I say, I loved doing all the research for the acoustic guide. I loved that, because it was akin to what I did in school. During the time I was at Asia House, I started to go out to the galleries and became friends with artists, and the vitality and unexpected of what happens when you work with living, working artists really appealed with me. So, that's really why. I loved being around the objects at Asia House. I mean, I knew Asia House wasn't going to be for the long haul for me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where is that located?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, it was located on 64th between Park and Lex, and now it's located [. . . –NH] on 70th and Park Avenue. It was a wonderful place to work, but I got fired after taking two days off to get a divorce. The director became jealous of the fact that I was writing the acoustic guides and everyone said they liked [my info guides –NH] better than his, so he got furious.

MIJA RIEDEL: But that's fascinating that you were writing the Acoustiguides back then. So there was already a huge interest in scholarship and elaboration in the arts.

[Cross talk.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: When you go to an Asian art museum, so many people go without knowing anything. Sometimes they just go and look, and sometimes they go and look and want to learn. Yes, it has been a thread. And based on my study of art history, it has been a consistent thread of interest.

MIJA RIEDEL: Have you spent time in Asia as well?

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, not yet. [Laughs.] I'd like to. We show Hung Liu's work, and I'd love to go to China someday. And I've always wanted to go to India.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Me too.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Someday I would really like to do that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Well, you opened the gallery in '72, right?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: In SoHo? And very early on, was there a gallery scene down there?

NANCY HOFFMAN: There wasn't what you could call a scene. But there were a few galleries. OK Harris was there; 420 opened the same year I opened; Paula Cooper was there. That was just about—oh, Warren Benedict, I think, also opened the same year. And I had been working at French & Company uptown, and uptown was not the place. And SoHo—SoHo wasn't even really beginning, but all the artists were living there. It was the only place I could find space I could really think about affording. And I took a business course called "How To Start Your Own Small Business" for a year, and put together a prospectus, got a lawyer, and then went about getting backers.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was a different time. It was the early '70s. There were people who had money. I knew it wasn't very much money at that time to open a gallery. It was nothing like it is now. Now it's, you know. And I was young and crazy, figured if this didn't work, if I couldn't raise the money, if I couldn't open a gallery, I would get a job. There was no downside to try.

And I had never been to California. So in the summer of '72 I went to California for the first time. And met Joseph Raffael. I was with Mel Ramos, whose work we had showed at French & Company. Mel drove me to see Joseph, and we were sitting on the couch in Joseph's house, and Joseph is holding this tiny little six-month-old baby. He was sitting at one end and I was sitting at the other and Mel was in the middle, and he said, "Are you a Pisces?" I said, "Yes, double, aren't you?" And we started to talk. But I couldn't really talk to him about anything too much because Mel Ramos was there and I didn't want to show Mel Ramos's work. So I called—I was heading to LA that night, so I called him when I got to LA and said, "Could I come back on the weekend, because I'd like to talk some more?"

So I went back on the weekend, and we basically talked for 48 hours nonstop. And then I asked Joseph if he would like to have the opening show at the gallery. And he said, well, he had to think about it. And that was Sunday—because I was leaving Sunday. Saturday night, they asked the guests to cook dinner, and there was an Italian couple and me. So we had to cook dinner. They cooked the antipasto; I cooked the main course and dessert; they cooked the risotto, and, you know, whatever. Anyway, Joseph said that he decided, when he saw me working in the kitchen, he decided he would show with gallery, and have his show. He would have one show.

MIJA RIEDEL: What did you do?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I don't know. At that time I was eating chicken. I made chicken, and I made some kind of blueberry crepes or something, I don't know. And we had this wonderful, as I said, ongoing conversation, so he agreed to have one show. And here we are, over 40 years later. The relationship continues to blossom and become richer and richer.

So anyway, there wasn't a scene. But I opened with a show of his work and a show of Natalie Bieser's work. She had never had a show, ever. She was a young artist who had one piece at documenta. I saw it, and I was completely intrigued. It was a drawing on the wall, in balsa wood and thread and beads, and I just thought it was beautiful and interesting and different. So when I was in LA, I went to her studio and I offered her a show. She didn't even know what that meant. She was just a kid, just out of school. So I opened with those two shows; we got a rave review from John Canaday.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sorry, John?

NANCY HOFFMAN: John Canaday. And you probably don't even know him. But he was the critic for the*New York Times,* who had a lot of power. And that really—

MIJA RIEDEL: Your first show was reviewed. That's extraordinary. In '72 this was?

NANCY HOFFMAN: '72, yes. So that really put us on the map.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm trying to get a sense of what was it that inspired you to just head out on your own, start a gallery; you didn't think that was [impossible].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Craziness in youth. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: You were early 20s at the time?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. I was in my 20s, and also I had taken this course, as I say, "How To Start Your Own Small Business"—which was kind of an experimental course, but it taught me the steps I had to take. And also, I had been at Asia House; I had been at French & Company; and not that those—what shall I say—necessarily trained me, but I felt I had a few years experience under my belt. I'd loved what I was doing, but I didn't love doing it with French & Company.

I just decided I had met artists along the way during my time in the art world that I could do this. That basically, you have one thing in this business, and one thing alone, and it's your integrity. I was not going to be a gallery that would take backroom trade, resales, that kind of thing, by artists other than gallery artists. People who do that make a lot more money than I do. With what I do, you're lucky if you make a living. But I decided right away, and told my backers that what I wanted to do was support the artists and really grow their careers and work with them over a period of years. It's worked out that way. I'm very loyal, and the artists have been very loyal to me.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was looking at the list of artists that you've carried for 20 years, and there have to be at least a dozen of them.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. It's been a blessing; it's worked both ways. I remember, like it was yesterday, the conversation I had with Joseph, that first weekend, and he said it has to be a new kind of relationship, because he had been with Reese Paley. Reese Paley, I don't know how much you know about them, but they closed abruptly. They did not return work to artists, and they didn't pay them. It was a disaster. So he had been badly burned. And he had been with Stable Gallery [ph], and it was not a good situation. And he really—as a result of the Reese Paley debacle—he had no trust in dealers, none.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that's certainly a common thread through many conversations with many artists. Just about everybody has at least one bad story—

NANCY HOFFMAN: One horror story. It's no wonder dealers get a bad rap. Really, no wonder; some of the behavior is really unspeakable.

MIJA RIEDEL: So would you describe that space and that initial exhibition, and just create that [inaudible]?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I loved the space. When I found it, it was on West Broadway between Prince and Spring, and had landmark columns.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It was a big space, too, wasn't it?

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was a big space. It was actually bigger than here. And it also had—

MIJA RIEDEL: So was that 7,500, 8,000 square feet?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, ground floor and basement, yes. We had 4,000 square feet in the basement. So we could store anything and everything, and ended up doing that. Some artists didn't want their work back for 30 years. So when we moved here, it was a brutal awakening.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, but I liked the space. Something appealed to me about it. It had five windows on West Broadway. It had been a heavy-duty sheet-metal manufacturing factory. It was a mess, a total mess. The people who owned the space were away for the summer when I found it, and I had to wait something like five weeks for them to come back. But I was pretty fixated on that one space.

So I got it, and I found a contractor. One of my clients recommended a contractor who was really reasonably priced, and basically what we had to do was strip the space. And I saw in the basement that there were old, original, big beams. So I said, Well, I want that on the ground floor, too. The tin was falling down, so we thought, No big deal. And I had a package price for the renovation. The whole thing—

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow, that's great.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —$30,000. To put in a new floor, to put in a new windows, to put in new everything, bathrooms. So the tin looked like it was falling down, no big deal. But the fact it was tin and plaster and lathing—and it was a disaster. But I said, Sorry, we have a price. And even the contractor got to like the job so much that the weekend before the opening, he was there himself hammering in floorboards.

But it was very simple. It had—it was not unlike the gallery here, with two distinct gallery spaces, and then we had a sort of side room, where ultimately we started a project space program. And the office was in the back. It was a very simple space. And the basement was absolutely bare bones. We built racks in the middle, lifted off the floor. We just built them—the guys, the gallery built them. We painted [the floor –NH]. We had one long continuous wall for viewing and showing [work to clients –ALF]. And that's where we did most of our business, in the basement, really, because if clients wanted to see anything other than what was in the show, we went downstairs.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So now we have a really nice situation where [clients –NH] can come upstairs, where there's daylight. We have sort of the reverse of what we had in SoHo. In SoHo, the storage was in the basement; here the storage is upstairs. And also we have double office side storage because we didn't have as much space.

But it was a wonderful space. And it was a really—it was simple; it wasn't architected—I didn't have an architect. I had a contractor, and I sort of drew up this space, and the columns—because of the columns that sort of were processioned down the center of the space, it was obvious what we had to do to divide the space. So there were two exhibition spaces, with an office in the back, and a front desk, very simple, elegant. It lends itself to all of the shows. It didn't need to be gussied up in any way.

MIJA RIEDEL: I read an early interview where you said you just worked five, six, seven days a week, that you worked until—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Seven.

MIJA RIEDEL: —10:00, 11:00 at night, that you didn't take a vacation for five years. Is that fairly accurate?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you have anyone else working with else you?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I had one other person working with me. But I had to work, really, pretty much 24/7, and I didn't take a vacation until my health collapsed. I was just working myself like a little machine, and the doctor said, "If you don't take a vacation, the writing is on the wall." So he said, "I want you to make plans, and pay for it, so that you can't afford not to do it."

So then I started to take vacations. We didn't close the gallery, really, in August. One summer we closed, and we had a little, a minor flood in the basement, and thank God nothing too much happened. There was no email, no

one to process things, so that the mail was like this. It wasn't worth closing. But it's true, yes, the first few years of the gallery were tough. They were very, very tough.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were there early collectors that came around to support you? Was there an immediate community of artists from the area? What was the gallery community like?

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was a combination. We had a nice community of artists, some of whom lived in and around SoHo. And people, other artists would always come for their shows, and they'd be around for a while and all of that. So we had a really nice community of artists, and over the years I had met people who became clients of the gallery and backers of the gallery; so that they would support us.

It was a time where it was easier to sell work, and there was much less competition. And there was great enthusiasm, and the whole realist thing was just starting. So that was a positive because we were showing Joseph Raffael, Don Eddy, Ben Schonzeit, and David Parrish, and those were artists who were really part of the whole realist movement. Whether they were or were not Photorealists is irrelevant, because other people grouped them under that umbrella.

MIJA RIEDEL: So was that really your intention from the start, was to focus on realism or Photorealism?

NANCY HOFFMAN: No. Not at all. It just happened, sort of slowly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there an initial vision for the gallery?

NANCY HOFFMAN: No. The initial vision was, as I said, a single-minded, obsessive focus of the artist that was unlike anybody else's work. That kind of uniqueness of statement is what interested me. So it would manifest in all kinds of different ways.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Like Natalie Bieser really was a drawer, but she used different materials to make her drawings in space. So that I wouldn't say, "Well, gee, I decided to do X, Y, and Z." One thing I did decide was that I didn't want all the work to look the same. I wanted to have a wide range of work. I wanted it to be exciting for people to walk into the front door. I didn't want them to predict what they were going to see. And I think the same thing is true now. We show a wide range of work, and it's hard to know what you're going to see.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I like that. I like that surprise factor. When we started this project space program, I guess over 12 years ago, I suddenly realized, "Oh, my God, all my, what shall I say, all my top artists are approaching their 70s. I just can't keep showing the same people over and over. I've got to start with some new youngbloods. And so I started to go to graduate shows and look at a lot of work.

A lot of the people to whom we gave a show just to sort of try it on for size joined the gallery. So we have this really nice contrast of young artists, who are all having babies now—the next generation of babies—and senior artists, who are in their 70s. It's really fascinating. Joseph is 82. And as I say, I realized we have to do something, because it's Joseph Raffael, Viola Frey, and a few people approaching [a certain age –NH], Carolyn Brady [. . . –NH].

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And you asked about community now. There was one question about artists and community, et cetera. Now what we do is, we always have a Christmas party for the artists. We all cook it here. Everyone thinks it's catered, but we do it here, and it's a beautiful spread of stuff. And all the artists come together, and it's a wonderful gathering of humanity, because there is no competition. They're really friendly. The older ones are interested in what the younger ones are doing. It's really fantastic. So they see each other over the years; we only do it once a year. Otherwise they see each other at openings or whatever. Some of the artists attend other artists' openings more regularly than do other artists.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: That wasn't very eloquent English, but the fact is [the artists –NH] love to come to the Christmas party. They love to see each other. They hang around. It starts at 1:00; I like it to be over by 3:00, but this time it wasn't over until 5:30 because there were so many conversations going on and so many connections.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's fascinating. I'd love to hear some more about that because I think that interaction between gallery artists isn't necessarily that common.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I don't think it's very common. I think the gallery is unusual in a lot of ways. The staff has lunch together every day. I sit down at the front desk when they have lunch. We have a budget [. . . –NH] for lunch, and so we have what we call a "chef of the day" program. So they take turns and go to the market. They make everything from scratch, so that there's a real sense of camaraderie, and it's a familial sense here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

NANCY HOFFMAN: One person has been here over 30 years. And the other one started at—Chris, who I just talked to—he started as an intern in college, and he's been here ever since, and he's in his 50s. One other person, let's see, has been here, oh, I don't know, 25 years. So we're really an unusual team, because we work together as a team. I don't give commissions. I felt that would create a competitive, unpleasant atmosphere.

But we really care about each other. And there is that sense of real connection. Time to unwind when I'm not around, because I sit downstairs and answer the phone. Actually, I like to do that, just to see what people are saying about the show, people who don't know me. Sometimes people will say, "Are you Nancy Hoffman?" and I'll say, "She's upstairs."

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So every day you sit downstairs for half an hour, an hour, while they sit up here and have lunch.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yep.

MIJA RIEDEL: That they have cooked.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yep.

MIJA RIEDEL: That is extraordinary. I don't think I've ever heard of such a thing.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And—no, I don't think so either. Like, sometimes I'll answer the phone, and I have what I call my "junior league" voice.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: Answer the phone, and someone would say, "I'd like to speak with Nancy," or whatever, and I'll recognize the voice, and I'll say, "Hi, it's me." They'll say, "What are you doing answering the phone?" I'd say, "Well, actually, I don't want there to be two shifts for the lunch program because otherwise it'll take two hours."

I sit downstairs and I have my finger on the pulse of what people are saying and how they feel and how the show is going. Because I'm down there. It's not like I'm up here in an ivory tower, but I work when I'm up here. I have my lunches sitting at the computer. But it serves me in good stead, and often it serves me in good stead because if I'm down there, I can cast my rod and catch somebody.

I said—and this isn't necessarily true—but if I sat down there all the time, I'm sure I could double the sales of the gallery, because it's a question of making a connection. I'm not tough sell; I don't believe in that. But you make a connection, and then somebody wants to buy something; you're there, and you facilitate it.

So anyway, yes, that's unusual, and the community of artists, I think, is very unusual. People who care about each other. One of the artists came in—we had a show recently of Lucy Mackenzie's work. Fabulous show. It was her first show in eight years. I don't know if you read about it, but she only makes between one and three paintings a year, and she works all day every day. One of our artists came in—and he's an abstract painter—and he says, "I love this painting. This is exactly what I do. I would love to know her."

I think the artists here are more open, and much—I shouldn't say much less competitive, because some of them are competitive: Why is he selling for this, and I'm selling for that? Because I get that too. And my line is, every artist creates his or her own market, and his or her own price structure. So you can't compare your work to—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —et cetera. But I think that that community thing, that's important to me in the way that education is important to me. It's important—I love to come to work; I love to come to work every day. I don't know if everybody else here does, but I know that they sense that there is community and a supportive community. And it is, I think, unique in the art world. Because people in the art world are so much more dog-eat-dog competitive, and not so interested in those kind of things. So I think we're very unusual in that way.

And I think I'm also unusual in the way that I have not—and I'm sure you read this in the other interview—I have not blown with the tides of fashion. It doesn't interest me. What interests me is the way someone's work grows

and develops, and changes over time. That's what really interests me. As I said about Joseph Raffael, the relationship just gets richer. I can't have the kind of relationship that I have with him with all of my artists; I don't have the time of day. I mean, I don't have that much time. And some of the artists are much more difficult in terms of, what shall I say, personality. But there's a real caring, and I think that everybody—all of the artists here—whoever they will be working with, whether it's Matt about the website, or Chris about the installation, or Mary about whatever, they all know that they will be seriously considered, attended to, all of that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I can't stress enough the teamwork that goes on here. It's really important. Like this project—well, we were working on the Raffael book. So one person—like Chris was working on the photography; Sique was working on the credit-line list; Mary was working on something else. I was working on something else. So everybody was involved; everybody was working on it for weeks on end [. . . –NH]. We were all working on it together. So there is cause for rejoicing when it's finally finished. And for the, sort of, mutual contribution, I think people appreciate that everyone is working on it that hard. It's not just one person's arena.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's fascinating, because what you're describing sounds like the antithesis of how many people describe the evolution of the art world over the last 10 to 20 years, which is too much—[inaudible]—an art, business, and market. This profound real long-term sense of community, among the artists, among the artists and the staff, among the staff itself, it seems quite unique.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I think it's pretty unique.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Do the artists feed off of each other, do you think, in any way? In a positive way? In a difficult way? Or [does] this long-term holiday celebration enable them to have some long-term relationships, because they're back and forth in terms of—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Definitely long-term relationships that might start out just as a superficial conversation and then become more consequential over the years. I think that they do feed off of each other, but I'm not sure that they would say that they do. Because you can tell when somebody has been looking at the work of X or Y. You just see it; you just can't help it. Artists are so visually taken in everything. Somehow they process it, and somehow it comes out. There's not a lot of cross-pollination, but sometimes—like someone will say to me, "Well, gee, did he look at this?" We'll send out an e-vite with an image—artists will send back a comment to me, "Oh, great piece," or whatever—that kind of thing. And then six months later I'll say, "Oh."

MIJA RIEDEL: Aha, interesting. How long has this been going on—the party?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, I don't know. I'd have to go back in our records and see, a long time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Twenty years, 30 years?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, yes, at least 20, 30 years.

MIJA RIEDEL: And so many of your artists are not from New York. There are quite a few that are from New York, but so many that are not. Do they come for this?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Some come in. People don't fly from California or whatever, but there are many from the New York area. So they come if they're in upstate New York, that kind of thing. And this year, one of our artists who lives and works in Seattle happened to be in New York. Every once in a while something like that happens, or if we know somebody is going to be in town, we'll try to schedule [our party in conjunction with their trip –NH]. I'm just trying to think. We were definitely doing it in SoHo for years. I'll have to look back in records and see if I can figure it out. I just thought it would be a nice thing to do for the artists.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it's strictly artists. No collectors, strictly artists?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Strictly artists. We started out also inviting—we still invite them from time to time—like the truckers, the framers, and we started out by including art consultants, but not collectors. But now it's really the artists, and every once in a while a trucker shows up.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds very much a spirit of the times. Do you think that's true from when you began?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: This is—it was a different zeitgeist, and this has carried forward.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I think it's a combination of carrying forward something—a tradition that has so much validity today. I'm a big believer in rituals. And I think it's a really healthy ritual on so many levels. Because

that's sort of the only time we get to celebrate in that way. And I think you're right, it's just a carryover.

But also it's the underlining of how important a relationship is in this day and age when everyone is tuned into their device and so non-relational, and they don't even look at you; they don't even talk to you. They'd rather text and do whatever. I hate that. I'm very anti—I use my device and all that, but I'm anti—if you were sitting here texting, I would go back to work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I think it's a combination of things, and as far as I'm concerned, there is so much merit to continuing it. Also, I take the staff out for Christmas dinner, and we go to a great Chinese restaurant near here. We go there together for dinner every year.

MIJA RIEDEL: So as you say, ritual and tradition.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I really do believe in that. I think that life without that is an impoverished life. Mother Teresa said we were the most impoverished country she had ever seen because the impoverishment of the human spirit here is so profound.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I just think that you don't have to go to church or temple or whatever your persuasion is, but if you observe somewhat the rituals of life that celebrate either family or being together, whatever, I'm a believer in that. Too much passes us by, and we pay no attention to that.

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems that there's almost a subtext of not a religious sensibility, but some kind of a spiritual sense.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Spiritual, definitely. Definitely, and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Your mom was involved with religion and peace work through the U.N., right?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. Definitely spiritual, and much less than religious, but sort of universal spiritual. That is often what draws me to an artist or the work or whatever. And sometimes people pick it up, and other times they don't. But interestingly, when I moved here, it was hell; it was four years of H-E-L-L-L-L-L. We moved in one month after Lehman Brothers went belly-up. After working on this move project for four years, which was supposed to take two years, somebody came—one artist came into the space and said it was noble.

MIJA RIEDEL: Noble, interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And someone else came in and said it had a sort of sacred feeling to it, because it's so high.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I thought that was really interesting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I have been so involved in all the—in getting here. [Laughs.] If you know what I mean. All the —stress

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure. Of course, the details—

NANCY HOFFMAN: —the details. The loan, and the stress, the everything. That, while I loved it, I couldn't see that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, of course.

NANCY HOFFMAN: We opened one month after Lehman Brothers went belly-up, and then two months after we open, they started to build the hotel next door and I was told I couldn't use the sculpture garden.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was just wild. So it hasn't been easy since we've moved, as you can imagine. It's been a real challenge. I love the space. We had a wonderful space in SoHo, but I love this better. Now there are these two building projects [across the street –NH], but we have daylight.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: All day, every day.

MIJA RIEDEL: The ceilings are—how tall are the ceilings?

NANCY HOFFMAN: They're 27 feet high. And the architects of the building—this building was built by Flank, which is an architectural firm, and Chris and I designed the gallery based on the SoHo gallery.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: With their sort of intern junior architect. We told them what we needed, and we needed as much storage space as you could possibly cram into the space. And so they designed the whole building. They, and a few partners, financed the building. I didn't finance the building or anything. I bought my space because I bought my space in SoHo. And I looked for a long time. I looked for years. I came over to Chelsea, and I wasn't convinced. Finally, I spent one year doing a study of traffic in SoHo and sales and everything, and I realized I had to move for my artists.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I couldn't stay in SoHo. I loved the space. And we were very lucky; we were a destination point. We had been there for such a long time. We maintained a really high level of activity, but I had to move for my artists.

So I took my bike and I spent a summer riding, snaking the streets, from 10th to 11th Avenue from 14th to 30th Street. And I came this close to about eight deals. It was going to be my space, it was going to be my space, and then they all fell through, because the people in the real estate business are [somewhat –NH] sleazy. So finally I found an agent I liked and I felt I could trust, and I said, "I'm going away for 10 days. If you don't have anything real to offer me, I can't look again until next summer, because I've been doing this for three months, and I won't have a business to run because I'm just out on my bike. So I need something real soon." So in 10 days I came back, and she had three options for me. One of them was this.

It was going to be a new building—demolition of an old building—new building, two-year building project, space ready in 24 months, blah blah blah. Anyway, long story short, I opted for this one, and it took four years rather than two years.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you stayed down in SoHo while this was renovated and built out, and it took four years.

NANCY HOFFMAN: The building took four years, yes, because this architecture firm was all youngbloods, and they had never built an entire building, so it took four years. It practically killed me. I'm not in the real estate business. It was so stressful, I got shingles. It was just horrible. Horrible. And that's when I got my puppy, because I needed some help with the stress factor—meditating and exercise weren't enough.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I needed him. It was just awful, and I don't want to go into detail, but SoHo turned—I had been there for 35 years; I was the best tenant, never late, never anything; and they tried to—I shouldn't put this on the tape, but they, they tried to screw me. [. . . –NH]

MIJA RIEDEL: We can cut that out.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Awful. But anyway, we finally got here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's talk about something to cheer you up. [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, that's fine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, let's talk about Viola and take some time to—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: We've moved now to Chelsea. Let's go back—so you started to represent her very early on, mid-'80s, '87.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

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MIJA RIEDEL: Some of these questions come directly from the Artists' Legacy Foundation, so we're just trying to

address them straight on.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where and when did you first see her work? What interested you? Was it color; was it form, scale, materials, something else?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I had seen her work over the years—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —at museums and fairs and et cetera—

MIJA RIEDEL: Of course, the Whitney show, right?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I went to her show at the Whitney and I was just blown away, because I'd never seen so many of her figures. I remember the gallery—Patterson Sims did the show in the gallery on the ground floor, which was a sort of semi-circle of figures, and I was wowed, but I was even more blown away by the two-dimensional works.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because I hadn't seen any of them—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and they were so spectacular. They were rich and layered and filled with iconography and wild and woolly and like nothing I had ever seen. I thought that they were just incredible and—

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm just going to repeat that just to make sure, "rich and layered and filled with iconography," just to make sure that was clear, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I found them so exciting and unlike anything I had seen.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: That's when I got really actively interested in the work, because I knew she was already out there and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —people had her work—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —not any new discovery or anything. And then I went to the studio and—well, I don't know if you ever went to the studio, but it was extraordinary. Even before she had this new studio, which is like an airplane hangar, she had a fantastic studio. First, she was making art in her house, as you know, and filled the whole backyard, and then had a wonderful studio in Oakland, and then moved to this humongous spot.

And talk about a unique—she was just totally a unique. And Viola, though there were art interviews with Viola, [she] was never what I would call a highly verbal person. Everything—every aspect, every fiber of her being—went into the art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She was incredibly generous. Years ago, in the '80s, when the art fair was going on in Los Angeles, she would use her salary, pay the tickets for her students to go to the Los Angeles art fair, and basically set them loose on the floor of the fair.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, so that they could see what was going on in contemporary art, because it was a very good fair at that time. Marcia and Fred Weisman were sort of, what shall I say, at the helm—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and it was a really good, quality fair, and Viola would just let them loose, and then they would talk about what they had seen after the fair.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: At Viola's memorial, someone said she wasn't entirely verbal, and they said, "Well, sometimes she would come around and look, and she wouldn't say anything to me for two months, and then she would say three words and it would change the whole course of my art." Because she just—it's not that she couldn't talk or anything; she could do that; but she had no time for small talk. She wasn't that kind of chitchat person.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She made up her mind early on that she wasn't going to get married or have kids or have that kind of a, quote, conventional life. Everything was going to go into the art, and I loved that quality about her.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's, some—I think it was in an interview with Garth Clark, where he said something very similar, that she would—she would not—or maybe it was, might have been Patterson Sims, I can't remember—but she wouldn't have a lot of words to say, but she would just throw out a few words, and what she would say—I think it was Patterson Sims—would change the way he looked at work that he had been looking at for ages. So I think from what you're describing, she just had that incredible visual and art historical vocabulary in her head.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No question.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No question. And I went with her once. You know, she was a collector of everything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She had Fiestaware; she had antique jewelry; she had books; she had Indian miniatures; she had—you name it, she had it. She didn't believe too much in cleaning the house, but she had these collections under the bed, wherever they were. One time, I went with her to this gallery she liked, an Indian gallery [in New York] and—

MIJA RIEDEL: An Indian gallery?

NANCY HOFFMAN: An Indian gallery where—

MIJA RIEDEL: East Indian?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, yes, and he had paintings and such. He had everything, jewelry paintings—everything. So she went to look at paintings. She sat down like the queen in a chair, and he just kept bringing them. "I'll take that. I'll take that. I'll take that. I'll take that." Basically, she took almost everything, and she said, "Just ship it to me." It was incredible. But she did look at everything. I don't know if she ever looked at it again once it got home.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I have no idea.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: But she did—

MIJA RIEDEL: Where was this, Nancy? Was it here in New York?

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was here in New York. It was on—the East Side in the '60s in one of those antique buildings—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And it was on a lower level, and she knew the man. She had been there before. He knew her and he—it was an amazing phenomenon, and I didn't say a word. I just watched this happen. It was fascinating, but she had that in her head. She could say whatever she wanted to say, very concisely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I'm sure you know from Garth that she read trashy novels at night.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you see them as well?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I just knew about it. I didn't see them. I didn't ever go into her bedroom, I don't think.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you talk about them or how—

NANCY HOFFMAN: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: —how did you know, just from hearing Garth say it?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, and other people say it. I know Viola read the *New York Times* cover to cover. She read the *New Yorker* cover to cover. She read anything and everything. She was a voracious reader.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And unless you engaged her on a subject, you would never have known.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And you would have never have known anything about Viola's personality or character by looking at her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because she didn't have an expressive face. Some of us wear our sleeves on our face. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, absolutely.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, but she didn't have that. And she always had the television on when she was working, always.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Background music, and she always had dogs and always had cats. Sam worked with her for 17 years.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: One time I called Viola and she was sick, and she was telling me that the doctors had said the cancer had gone into her brain. We were talking, and I said, "Viola, we're gonna fight this." And Sam said he had never seen her cry in all the 17 years except when she talked to me. And I went out there; the last six months of her life, she was working on our final show of her work, called *The Lasting Legacy*—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and she was working on finishing the work before she went to the other side.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And so I would go out there every 10 days to two weeks for a day or two. I said, "Viola, I'm going to be your shot of vitamin B-12. I'm going to come and see you every other week. [. . . –NH] But I did it, and oh, I wanted to tell you something about that, but I lost my train of thought. Anyway, she finished the last piece in her show.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you said to Viola, "How are you doing?"

NANCY HOFFMAN: No. Sam said when she got home—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —from working on her last piece, "How are you doing?" and she said, "Barely." And she was gone in a half hour. She had just finished the last piece for the show.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sorry. The door was sliding. She had barely—

NANCY HOFFMAN: She had just come home from finishing the last piece for the show—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and he said, "How are you doing?" And she said, "Barely." And she was gone in a half hour.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, that is profound story. I hadn't heard that before.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Just amazing. Viola was so dedicated to her work. Even the last time I saw her. She died of an inoperable tumor on her liver.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She had already had a tumor on the liver that had been operated, and she started to jaundice, and I said, "Viola, I've never seen a golden goddess, but you are a golden goddess." Because she was gold.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She wasn't yellow; she was gold.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she would go to the studio every single day. And she stopped talking quite a while before she died—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —because any ounce of energy had to go into the clay—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Pinching the clay or glazing the clay, and she knew that she would not have time to glaze everything she had built.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She had always, always wanted to have a show of white figures, because [she] loved the figures when they were white.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

NANCY HOFFMAN: She loved them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But she never let herself do it because she was known for her color—

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and people loved her color and loved her gesture in knowing this sort of joyousness. And she also loved abstracting the human figure through color, and she loved the figures when they were white, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: That's—

NANCY HOFFMAN: —for the final show—

MIJA RIEDEL: —sorry, go ahead.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —she had a woman, a man, and an urn, all white, and she left them white by choice.

MIJA RIEDEL: A woman, a man, and an urn?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's interesting because I read someplace that she didn't at all like the white. [Inaudible.] She loved them.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She loved them, and we had a show in the '80s that had some of the small bricolage pieces

that she had left white. [They] were beautiful and she loved them, but the ones we didn't sell—that we sent back to her—she glazed, well—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I heard that too. That things would go back for repair and come back completely different, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. She couldn't help herself. She was such a creative factor. Everything surrounding her was just—every touch—everything was bubbling with creativity. If you sat in the studio—she had one room where she did her drawings, and she would draw from a model once a week—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and everything surrounding that nude the figure was from her vocabulary of images.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: If you sat there, the vibration of the energy was powerful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And then in the studio, my God, between the figures and plates and bricolage pieces, it was—it was dazzling that one person could do that with the help of only one assistant. It was really dazzling. Anyway, I got off your question—what first attracted me to Viola?

MIJA RIEDEL: But that's fine. Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I got off the question.

MIJA RIEDEL: But that was worth it. [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: She really was something truly special.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Truly, truly special, and those conversations that we had, sort of end-of-life conversations, were quite extraordinary, because as I say, Sam said that she would never—I don't think she ever let out much emotion—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —to anyone.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —except maybe Charles, her partner.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And really, they were intellectual companions more than anything. Viola and Charles could dialogue about anything, and I didn't ever know him except on the phone, but I knew—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, you never met him?

NANCY HOFFMAN: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: They were real partners in their depth of knowledge of art history.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you interact with him at all on the phone?

NANCY HOFFMAN: On the phone.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, and the ALF would just love any details, any light you can shed on Charles Fisk.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I'm probably not the one—probably Sam, because I only ever talked to him on the phone, and we didn't have long conversations. He was always charming and always—whenever I asked if Viola was there, he was very proprietary.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was charming. It was almost more on some level, not that it was paternal, but it felt a little that way, you know what I mean?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I didn't ever meet him, but I know when he died, it was a huge blow to Viola. She wasn't the same afterwards.

And she loved Sam. She loved Sam like a child, and Sam was her everything. He dressed her wounds. He picked her up at the hospital. He saw her at the hospital. He did everything. He rigged up this—I don't know if he told you this, but the way she regained strength in her arms is, he created a pulley of a bucket, and every time, put in it a glaze pot, and when she was strong enough, he put in two glaze pots, and that's how she built her strength again. He did everything for her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she loved him, but she wasn't verbal. It wasn't like, "Sam, you're the love of my life. You're the son I never had." She would never talk like that. Not ever.

MIJA RIEDEL: That did seem an extraordinary relationship. He would get her into her wheelchair and get her to the studio. There was a special contraption—some special lift that went up and down so that she could work on anything. He definitely made it possible for her to work. I don't know how long that went on for, but—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Until the day she died. From the time she came home from the hospital until the day she died.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: He figured it out. It meant he really couldn't have his own life—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —because he was so devoted to Viola. And then the good news is that after she passed away, he met someone; he got married and has a baby now. It's wonderful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It's fascinating that Viola identified Sam to be her assistant, and [. . . he is very much like Viola, focused]. He had another job on weekends where he worked. I'm sure you know that, for the Rosenkrans—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —for the sculpture garden—

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —but really, his focus was Viola. That was what he did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And for a young man to be that dedicated was really extraordinary.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think so.

NANCY HOFFMAN: He's an extraordinary human being, absolutely extraordinary. It helped that he didn't have family close by and all of that. He always went skiing and went surfing and went to see the family in Hawaii and stuff, but—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —he was just always there for Viola.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you remember the first time you met her?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I remember her—[laughs]—I'm not sure I could relate the first time I met her, but I did go to the studio—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I have so many, what shall I say, images of visiting Viola in the studio over the years. And Sam was there, of course, and the studio tour would often be Sam taking you around. I can't remember the first time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I really can't remember it clearly enough.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's fine.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Muddled with all the stuff over the years, and the end was so intense, because no one could believe that I would go out there every 10 days to two weeks. No one believed that, but I did it.

MIJA RIEDEL: What compelled you to do that?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, Carolyn Brady and Viola died the same year, and I knew that the loss was coming and the end of her life was coming, and I knew she was working on our show. And I wanted to help her, what shall I say, get through as much as she could before she died.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I also knew that she enjoyed it when I visited. Viola loved sweets, so I would bring something with me—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —for her. I knew it wasn't good for her, but it wasn't going to kill her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I just felt that—and it wasn't about, "Oh, well, she'll do one more piece or whatever." I just knew I would miss her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I didn't have the opportunity to say goodbye to Carolyn Brady, who was very close to me and to everyone in the gallery. She was really part of the family.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I missed that. I really missed it, because she'd had an operation [. . . –NH], and it was a miracle, and, of course, it turned out not to be. But she spent a month fighting for her life, and then she didn't want me to come and see her all intubated, and I just wanted to say goodbye.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: These relationships with artists are so intense, and they are so close, and, really, the dealer knows more than anybody else about the artists and their lives that I think that that was part of it. That I wanted to give it my own sense of closure, and if I could help in any want to bring her a little good cheer—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —every 10 days or two weeks, I was going to do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, and you said you wanted to help her through as much of it as possible. Could you elaborate on that?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I knew she was wrapping up the work for the show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was almost finished.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: So basically, I said, "Well, if you need a shot of vitamin B-12, I'll come out and help you finish

it."

MIJA RIEDEL: And that mattered to her. It's interesting because we're talking about two different things. One is she didn't want any distraction from the work, but clearly, she didn't discourage you from coming either.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, she didn't, and I didn't take away from the time. It's not that I spent that much time there. I would never spend more than an hour and a half or two hours, because I knew it would be exhausting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I also knew that she had a limited amount of time during the day when she would work. So I would always come after that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: So that she could get in what she could get in, based on what her energy level was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And then when she stopped talking, I still came and chatted away. [. . . –NH].

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But I think she appreciated that I really cared about her and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Also there's a strong mutual bond just through the art.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No question. No question.

MIJA RIEDEL: Especially through the art. You got who she was and what she was doing, and that was more than enough, and maybe [inaudible].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yep. Yep.

MIJA RIEDEL: Just that presence and that affirmation.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she loved doing her installations at the gallery. She just loved it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did she?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Quite the queen, again; she'd sit down and say, "Put this here. Put this here. Put this here." And she all—she loved it. She really loved it, because we gave her pretty much free rein to do whatever she wanted.

MIJA RIEDEL: So she did her own installations over all the years?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, pretty much.

MIJA RIEDEL: Pretty much—[laughs]—okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But she would have an idea, because there would be a body of work—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —three years of work, and she would have a concept for how it would look in the space and all of that. [. . . –NH]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: [. . . –NH] It was like an archeological dig in the gallery, [inaudible] along the periphery of the walls and then [Viola –NH] would sit on a bench and say, "Okay, let's put this there. Let's put this there." Just really put legs for starters—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —[inaudible]—so we wouldn't have to move whole pieces, and she just loved that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: She also enjoyed—though she wasn't so highly verbal—she loved having lunch with the whole gang.

MIJA RIEDEL: She loved having lunch with the whole staff?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, she loved that. She really did, and we always—she and Sam were always—when they came, they were part of the group.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: So, she really enjoyed that. I wish I could remember. I'll think about it tonight, if I can remember back to the first meeting, but as I say, I know that one of the very early meetings—now that I think about it, I'm not sure it wasn't the first—I was going to see her, and I had been to Hawaii for the first time, and my daughter had gotten sick.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hawaii?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, and she was a baby—she was a year old with 103 fever, so I couldn't go see her and I know she [. . . was not happy about that –NH].

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: She didn't like that. She didn't like that there was a distraction over that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But then I brought my daughter to the studio, and, of course, she loved it, because my daughter was the same size as her Wedgewood bronzes—

[They laugh.]

So she loved that. She's such an interesting contrast. I don't think—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —she had any time for—she had no relationship, as you know, with her family.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She didn't have time for them.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's such a profound sense of juxtaposition, I think, that it comes across in multiple stories about her. And, of course, it's obvious in her work, but just the incredible intellect, the incredible commitment to work, the incredible visual sensibility, but then the lack of verbal communication, just reduced to the absolute essence occasionally, except, I hear, when she was communicating with people.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, it's really fascinating. I don't know if in the beginning, when she made up her mind that everything was going to go into her work, that she was going to be an artist then, that's what she was going to do with her life.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I don't know if at that time, she said to herself, I don't have time for—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Anything else.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —right, I don't have time for cocktail-party conversation. I'll put it that way. I don't have time—I don't want to waste my time. It wouldn't surprise me—because Viola was so no nonsense.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: It wouldn't surprise me if she had made the determination that too much time is wasted on this stuff. She was teaching, and that was enough communication for her. That was enough interaction for her. Charles was enough. She didn't need any.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It wouldn't surprise me if it was a conscious decision, and not, what shall I say—I don't know

that she even had to hone her verbal skills—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —but as a result of the decision she made in her life, I think her verbal communicating took a certain course.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's an economy of everything.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it seems that somebody described her as exceedingly practical—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And perhaps that came from growing up in Lodi on the farm. It's [a] very practical, pragmatic, nuts-and-bolts approach to reality, whether that was artmaking or a vineyard, and that she focused on what she wanted to focus on, and if you were interested in that, that was interesting, and if not, then she didn't have a lot of extra time.

NANCY HOFFMAN: That's true. I think it's absolutely true. I think if you weren't interested in what interested her, then there was no conversation. There was nothing to talk about.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And—yes, go ahead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Can you describe the process of bringing her into the gallery?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL: How, in particular, her work related to what else you were—the other artists?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, it's interesting because after I got together with her, I think that the California gallery would have preferred that she show with another gallery, and I'll—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —just leave it at that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. I know Garth said that he asked her, and she said no.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, the California gallery would have preferred that she show with someone else. Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there someone else in particular in mind, or just somebody else [inaudible]?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, they had someone in mind.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But I told her I wanted to show the work, and we got together, and I had a fantastic show. Every show was fantastic that she did.

MIJA RIEDEL: When you say "fantastic," what—do you know what I mean?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I mean it was so much impact. These huge figures, these fabulous—I was the first one really to deal with the two-dimensional work. So we had drawings and sculptures, and one show, we put a whole frieze of drawings, sort of hanging quite low, so that it—you could really understand the two-dimensional/three-dimensional—the relationship. No one ever did that with her work, but I loved the two-dimensional work. And I think that she appreciated that I liked all aspects of her work. I didn't really care too much about what the other artists thought.

What's interesting, now that you bring that up, is that in the Art Dealers Association art fair, some dealers didn't like that I would have a big figure of Viola's in the stand. They didn't want me to have it. I didn't get it. [. . . –NH] I really didn't understand that. I thought it was—is that because it's getting attention? Is that because it's, There, look. People are looking at Viola Frey and whatever. I let it go, frankly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was this early on, when you mean they would carry on?

NANCY HOFFMAN: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, later.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, later, during the—

MIJA RIEDEL: '90s?

NANCY HOFFMAN: —when the show was at the Armory on Park Avenue.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: '80s, early '90s.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was very odd to me. It was odd that they would make that—well, "You can show if you don't put this"—

MIJA RIEDEL: So, they made that a stipulation of you being in the fair, or tried to?

NANCY HOFFMAN: They tried to.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it was okay to have the 2-D work, but not the large figures?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I thought that was really interesting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that is interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: And were you able to show them anyway?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I sometimes showed them anyway. I did what I wanted to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It depended always on an installation, because it's a small space.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I didn't get any resistance from any of the artists of the gallery. It was so different from anything else. It was so unique—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —that people really—it was sort of—it was another dimension coming into the gallery.

And I never was part of this conversation about craft. I never bought into that. To me, Viola is an artist who used clay to make her sculptures. Nicolas Africano was another artist who uses glass. He's not a glass artist. She wasn't a clay artist. I never subscribed to that. C-R-A-P.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: She was not a craft artist. She was an artist. She was a giant. Really, she was a giant. What she did—if you look at those Sèvres pieces downstairs—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —that she could do those beautiful small pieces—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —with the verve and gusto, and the life of her drawings, it's astonishing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: She could do anything, and she was uncompromising, and I loved that. And so I didn't really care what—[laughs]—if other artists were offended, and nobody was offended.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Early on, maybe the first decade or whatever, there would be times I would get feedback from some artists about other artists, but I said, "Well, you're entitled to your opinion," and that's that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: What else is there to say? There's nothing else to say.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Anyway, I don't mean to be digressive or—

MIJA RIEDEL: So, was it overly negative or overly—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —positive? Was there a response from the other artists?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, in the beginning, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Because it was so different.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was so different. It was much more positive than negative. I didn't get much, I don't think—remember any negative and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —of course, a lot of artists don't say anything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But the silent treatment, you know what [it] means.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: [. . . –NH] A lot of people thought it was—because Viola had had the show at the Whitney—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She hadn't had a big show in New York.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So people thought it was really gutsy—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and strong, really strong. So, and we were lucky because we had all this space, the basement and so on. If we didn't sell everything, we put the figures in the basement.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: That was amazing.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was it, ultimately, for you that you said you had been looking or worked for a number of years—was there a moment, was there a particular body of work that tipped things over the edge and made you decide, "Yes, I want to represent her"?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, it was seeing the circle of figures, the semi-circle and the two-dimensional works. And there was this incredible triptych painting that just really knocked my socks off, I thought.

MIJA RIEDEL: At the Whitney?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So, I thought, "This is really phenomenal." I had no idea that Viola did this as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I think that was the moment, and then I went to visit her, and then—I'm reluctant to talk about this on the tape, but a little unpleasant stuff from the gallery in California, [they] wanted her to go with someone else. But Viola made her own decision.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Yes. That's become clear in pretty much every conversation I've had, is that she did make her own decisions.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. And she also was very clear. Nothing would obfuscate the vision.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: She knew what she wanted, and I think that she had a very close connection to her gallery in San Francisco for a very long time.

MIJA RIEDEL: For a long time. Absolutely. Multiple generations, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Because you are talking about how powerful the 2-D as well as the 3-D work was for you, and that isn't some[thing] that I've heard that frequently. I certainly hear more about the impact of the larger figures or the ceramic work. But can you offer any specifics about the different way that she worked and how those—the drawing, the painting, the large sculpture, the constructed pieces—influenced each other?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, I think there's no question they influenced each other. If you look at the drawings and you see—we had a show called *Echoes of Images,* and it juxtaposed the same image in two dimensions and three dimensions, and you saw how one informed the other. And I believe that was true throughout her work.

There would be an image of an urn in the drawing; there's an image of an urn in clay, in glass, in bricolages. These objects that became a part of her iconography were examined in all kinds of mediums, and that's what I loved about it, that it's so exciting that it's not just one or the other; it's all of it, and it all informs. And if you sat in the studio when she did her drawings and you [would see –NH] a reclining figure, sculpture, and [. . . –NH] a reclining nude, how can you not put those two together?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I have always loved the two-dimensional work. It is slower to catch on with collectors, but I believe it's every bit as important as the three-dimensional work, and it still hasn't had its just desserts. I said to Pauline, I think that one thing that the foundation could work on is a travelling show of Viola's two-dimensional works, because they're so extraordinary. And when we do the San Francisco art fair, which we do consistently because we have so many Bay Area artists and Bay Area collectors, people say, "I never knew Viola did drawings," because the gallery out there never showed them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But they're so fabulous. They are so fabulous. And so I think that the dialogue back and forth between 2-D and 3-D was ongoing all the time—all the time. Nothing was more important to Viola than that dialogue, though the public viewed the most important as her statements in clay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I don't agree. I really don't agree. I think that the two-dimensional works are equally important. The problem is, Viola was this creative fountain, and there were too many of them. And they have to be edited.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And the good ones are as good as anything you'll ever see, just as good as the sculptures. They are in pastels, so they are not as—what shall I say—dazzling, in terms of different media, but they sure are fabulous.

MIJA RIEDEL: I've heard her talk about the tondos as sketches, and there is a looseness, and I get that there is almost a conversation that seems to happen between those and the more refined, more thought out—of course, they'd have to be those larger works. It's much more architecturally and structurally specific than the sense of density, the sense of color, the sense of line. It's interesting to me how some of the—you have an oil painting on paper downstairs—how profoundly textural that piece is.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, she did—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —a few pieces where she built up the texture like that, with modeling paste. Those are the ones that are closest to the sculptures, and 99 percent of the time they have the standing man, everyman —[inaudible]—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —in that creative swirl of her studio. I think that's a really beautiful piece, that one with the texture thing. It's really emblematic of so much of Viola and her work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Somebody was talking about her work in terms of three main components: material, color, and texture. And I just have been struck by how profound texture is in her work. You see color in many pieces, many works and material also, that in some ways clay really enabled her, and she enabled it. There's a material to do something that I don't [inaudible] to think of anybody else taking to that direction.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Nobody else uses it the way she uses it. She defied all the rules of glazing. Everything they say not to do, she did, so that this crusty, pock-marked—

MIJA RIEDEL: Dry, crawling—

NANCY HOFFMAN: —irregular surface. She loved that—everything should be cleaned and dusted: "Oh forget it!" She loved that—defying the rules—and the pieces came out so fantastically, and she loved color, she loved—

[Side conversation.]

So she did do something with the material that was unlike anybody else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Absolutely.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She really was [creative and original –NH], and it wasn't so much that she was an innovator, because she just did her own thing. Nobody else could do it, would do it, no one. There are people who have tried to imitate her figures, but they haven't succeeded. And so that issue of texture is very important.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: No question. And the texture and the paintings, and even with the pastels, you feel that hand at work. It's so muscular, and so that muscle—every single piece that she hand-built was built from the toes to the head. Viola said she had to be able to sustain the same kind of energy and good mood and all of that in a piece. Otherwise, if she came in and saw that she had had a bad day, she would have to get rid of that section of the piece and start over. It had to have a sustained energy and tension and all of that. So I think the materials and the texture and color—she was a sublime colorist; she really was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. We'll get to that, but that what you just said—we'll definitely come to that color bit.

I want to talk—that was fascinating that she would just take out what she'd done the day before that didn't have that tension or that energy that she was looking for, and there aren't too many materials you can that in other than clay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, and she said some days, if she knew she didn't feel quite up to it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —she wouldn't work on the piece because, you know, she would do something else. But it was very interesting when she told me that actually, when you look at the pieces, you look at them as total pieces; you don't think about them that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it is fascinating to think about it, because when you also—you see them as whole pieces, but you can see the segments, and I hadn't thought about it. But each segment does have that muscularity, and for her to be that conscious of maintaining that all the way through—it wasn't okay to have a few fingers that didn't hold up.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It definitely wasn't okay, no. She was very demanding of herself, as you can imagine.

Now I have a question to ask you. I know it's not quite two hours, but I'd like to read my dictation so I could send

it out today.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure, of course.

NANCY HOFFMAN: [Laughs.] And it's about 10 of 5:00; do you mind if we—

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure. We can pause for—or yes, so we'll just stop for today.

[END OF hoffma15_1of2_sd_track02.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Nancy Hoffman, in her gallery, on July 16, 2015, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is card number two.

Okay, before I jump in with a question that I have based on what we talked about yesterday, I just wanted to ask you if there's anything that came up for you overnight. Memories, or thoughts that—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I tried to think about the first meeting, and I would say it was so commingled with years of being with my own work that I just couldn't get the first meeting. And it was also infused with the discovery of the Whitney—of her two-dimensional works. So I have all these different colors that impact that first meeting that I can call to mind, sometimes with the first. An artist I can easily call to mind—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —but I just can't, because there were so many, and at the end of her life I saw her so many times, that that's my most intense visual of meeting with her. Because over the six months, the last six months of her life, I saw her so much.

MIJA RIEDEL: You said once every 10 days or so, every two weeks?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Every 10 days to two weeks, I would see her.

MIJA RIEDEL: That is extraordinary.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I watched what was happening. I saw her before that, when she was in the hospital. We were very lucky to have Viola as long as we had her, because she'd had those strokes, and came back from the strokes, and started to work again, and came through one liver operation. I think she had an extra two years, and she put them to good work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely.

NANCY HOFFMAN: If she couldn't work—Viola was one of those artists, if she couldn't work, she couldn't live. There was no way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I had another artist like that who, sadly, died of AIDS at the age of 54, and he had said if he couldn't work, he couldn't live. He got the thing in his eye; I can't think what it's called now, but he knew that his time was limited.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that Juan Gonzalez?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: He did a wonderful, beautiful piece called *Ay Mis Ojos*, when he got that—

MIJA RIEDEL: *Ay Mis Ojos*? "These Are My Eyes"?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Sort of like, "Oy Vey, My Eyes."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: Where my eyes are going, on some level.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes. *Ay Mis Ojos*.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because he had such a beautiful eye. Everything he created was really like a vision from a

dream.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Anyway—

MIJA RIEDEL: That makes me think of—something we talked about yesterday was that you've mentioned going to the gallery, the Indian gallery with Viola, and just looking at, watching her look at things and pick things. Did you learn anything from that? Did she talk with you about what she was looking for, what she was looking at? Did she reject anything? Did she take it all?

NANCY HOFFMAN: She pretty much took everything, and she didn't talk much. She would nod, yes, yes, yes, yes. But she didn't talk about it afterwards. It was sort of—it left me somewhat taken aback [. . . –NH] because, "Okay, I'll take it all." Whoever does that?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She didn't explain it. Viola wasn't the kind of person who—she didn't immediately offer it up, like, "That was really fun, Nancy. I really liked everything. I didn't want to leave somebody out. I didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. It was all so interesting." She wasn't that kind of person. So if she didn't offer it up, sometimes I would ask her questions and try to get information from her. But when she wanted to, she was forthcoming. She didn't communicate it, but I think that's the way—she looked at things in a very inclusive way, if you know what I mean.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She wasn't judgmental, though. She had an extraordinarily critical eye.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's interesting. Can you say more about that? That's very interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I think she was very generous of spirit, so that she would approach anything—like the Indian paintings, the work of her students, exhibitions she would visit, she would approach in a very open, generous fashion. However, if you asked her about someone's work, she would say, "Well, this one is a good artist, because X, Y, and Z. This one is not a good artist."

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: In general, she would be very openly generous.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I think that's the way she looked at the world. I think the Indian paintings filled some, I don't know if I could call it a "void," but filled some interest of hers and enthusiasm of hers and excitement of hers. Like, Viola could be wearing her normal outfit at the studio, which you know was not too glam. It was perfect for working clay. And then she would have on the most extraordinary antique Egyptian scarab ring, and you would be staring at it, or she would be wearing some extraordinary antique thing on her neck. She was very careful about what jewels she bought.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's fascinating, because I've talked with a couple of her friends and collectors, Peggy and Bill Foote, who talked about her buying jewelry, but they didn't remember her wearing much jewelry.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, definitely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She didn't wear much, but she wore it as a stage set. When she came to New York, she would wear her costume, normal Viola costume, because she was a little bit square.

MIJA RIEDEL: And the costume was the smock and the cowboy boots?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, mostly she wore Arche shoes—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —for comfort.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So she wore Arche shoes, a smock, and working pants, basically, whatever you call them. And in New York, she would have a ring and a bracelet, and a necklace, and a brooch. And she always had changes of jewelry. One day she'd be wearing one thing; then one day she'd be wearing another thing.

And one day I went to the studio; she was wearing her normal smock and et cetera. She had on this extraordinary gold bangle Indian bracelet. I said, "Viola, that's beautiful. I've never seen you wear Indian jewelry." So she said that she found it on one of these shopping networks or whatever. She loved to wear the jewelry, and I think she loved it when people discovered it and commented on it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And after she died, a few years later, I said to Squeak, "I'm so sorry I didn't buy one of Viola's pieces of jewelry. I should have worn it today, actually." She said, "Well, we should have given you one as a thank-you." Anyway they gave me the Indian bracelet, which I absolutely treasure, and [. . . –NH] I wear them to dress up, or to art fairs as my good-luck bracelet.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But I wouldn't—because I carry my dog on the subway, so I can't have him leaning on that, but I was amazed. I was just so moved. And I loved the way she loved beautiful things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She really loved beautiful things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, Indian miniatures, fantastic. All that sounds like primarily ethnic or cross-cultural jewelry.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. And she loved the Fiestaware, I think for the color, because she was such a colorist.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I don't know what else she had, but those were some of the collections. They sold a lot of the things. You can ask Squeak, but they sold much of the stuff when the house was sold.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But she was a little bit of a pack rat.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she didn't have to display them; she just had to have them. I don't know if it was like some collectors who have a possessive thing. I don't think that was it. I think she loved being surrounded by beautiful things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And maybe she'd take them out; maybe she wouldn't; but they were there. She knew they were there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. When she came to New York, there were certain places that she would go to frequently. Did you go with her often to these places?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I didn't go often. Sam usually went with her, but she went to Strand, and she went to the Indian place.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She loved, loved, loved books.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Absolutely loved them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And the amazing thing is, she read them all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. That is amazing.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She had this broad spectrum of interests.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: But I didn't go too much, because she was so independent.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you ever travel with her at all? No? Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, though we did the LA art fair when she came with her students, and so I got to see her with the students. That's when she told me, "Well, basically I let them loose on the floor, and then we talk afterwards." I just thought it was so extraordinary.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Did that happen more than once?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, it happened multiple times?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That she would bring a whole class?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: The graduate students, perhaps, or—

NANCY HOFFMAN: I don't know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I really don't know. But these kids had a ball. How could they not? They had 100, 150 galleries under one roof, from all over the place.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she was their leader. She was responsible for them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did she talk with you about the meaning of teaching, or her approach to teaching? Do you think it was important at all to the development of her work?

NANCY HOFFMAN: She never really talked to me about it. I think that she enjoyed it, but that's from my point of view. I also think because she had made this decision early on that work was where she was going to live, that's her whole life—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —that was enough of an interaction. And she loved young artists; that I know. She loved that dialogue with younger artists.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She loved seeing their work, and she loved seeing it develop. But she didn't really talk about her approach or anything. I learned more about that from the students and meeting people who had studied with her, and at the memorial, people who came up to me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: But she never really talked about it, because when we were in the studio, we were in the studio, and I was there to see, basically, her, her work, a body of work for a show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: To talk about a show, so that it was more focused on what we had to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she kept that pretty separate.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I just have a question for the—given what I've heard about her over time, I have this image of her being very interested in research, in art history, in the intellectual and research aspects of art. And then I have her interested in studio and working. But I can't imagine her being overly interested or engaged in the academic sides of her work, or the academic sides of working at CCA [California College of the Arts]. Do you think that's true?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Absolutely true.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I think it was the interactive and dynamic part, the creation part.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: That engaged her. I never heard her talk about a committee meeting. That was not for her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. That was my impression.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Politics and committees and stuff were not for her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I can't imagine she would have been interested in that. I think it was because, as I've said over and over, her studio was this creative hub. When she was at CCA, I have a feeling that people who were in her class and her studio environment felt a sort of spark of creativity, and I think that's what she really brought to teaching.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Some people are good teachers because they impart knowledge about art and art history and technique and this and that. I think Viola could impart whatever she wanted, but basically, what she gave to the students was something they couldn't get from anyone else, which was this real inspirational, "You want to be an artist; this is what it takes."

MIJA RIEDEL: That strikes me as an example that was maybe set in California during that time and earlier, which was artists working, and the students observing by watching them, more than necessarily a whole lot of formal instruction.

NANCY HOFFMAN: That wouldn't surprise me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she certainly let her students work. She let them work, and inspired them to work. A lot of them did work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Did she ever talk about her work with you? Did she describe it?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, when I would ask her about a piece, or what she was thinking, or what she was planning for a show, she would talk about the work. But she didn't talk that much about her work.

MIJA RIEDEL: No meaning, no significance?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, yes. Her theory of "Man is more powerful in a blue power suit; woman is more powerful in a birthday suit." But she always talked about her love of the human figure. She loved the human figure, and she also loved abstracting the human figure. She loved that. And she talked about—I told you when she had wanted to do a show of all-white figures, and when she did these white bricolage pieces, some were just this big, and some were larger. They were absolutely enchanting. They were like fairy tales. And she loved them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Just 20 inches or so, right? Not even?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, that was the smallest.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But it would go up to three by four or five feet.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: They were enchanting. And so you could see that her mind was at work on, How do I deal with color? Do I always want to be known for my color? Can these pieces succeed as pieces without the color?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: But she would not pose that question.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she wouldn't talk, but—

MIJA RIEDEL: She wouldn't talk with you about it? What did you think, or—

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, she didn't do that.

MIJA RIEDEL: She didn't want your opinion on it? [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, it just wasn't—

MIJA RIEDEL: She had her own—

NANCY HOFFMAN: It wasn't part of who she was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Most of the artists, you dialogue about the work and talk about all kinds of things. But it's interesting because Viola never—it's not that she didn't welcome it. It wasn't the way she related, to me or to the work. The work spoke for itself. She didn't have to explain it. She didn't have to describe it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She just didn't have to do that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: If you didn't get it, you could get out of the studio.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

[They laugh.]

Did she ever discuss with you what she was reading? Lévi Strauss, structuralism, feminism, feminist art theory, science fiction, or romance novels?

NANCY HOFFMAN: She never discussed what she was reading.

MIJA RIEDEL: Never?

NANCY HOFFMAN: It's so interesting—

MIJA RIEDEL: It is.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —because I know she read a lot. Oftentimes she would refer to things that she had read.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Rather than, "I'm reading this, this and this," she would refer to what had been said, and she would refer to things she had read also in the *New Yorker*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And not for discussion, but to make a point in a conversation and then move on, move past it. I think that most of that intellectual reading that she did was really part of her ongoing conversation with Charles.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: That's what I think. And that's where she really engaged in depth. Because she didn't talk to me a lot about it. Also, I wasn't there. I wasn't in California. I wasn't in her backyard so that I could come and go.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She was used to me coming and going, especially at the end of her life, but I think she also knew that I never required her to tell me anything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was enough for me to just be there to see her and be with her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I never required that over our years of association. Whatever she wanted the studio visit to be, that's what it was. And when I would say, "Well, would you like to go out to lunch?" Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Because mostly, she just wanted to be in the studio, working. It's not that she was anti-social—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —or asocial. It's just that, Well, I'll lose an hour or two in the studio, and I think that was more important to her, to be in the studio. So I would stay awhile longer in the studio, and then I'd leave.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And with Viola, I never felt I wanted to overstay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I would devote the day to the studio visit, and then if I finished in two hours or three hours, then I would do something else. But I never put a time on it, if you know what I mean.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I would say, "Well, I'll be there at X time," because I knew that would be a good time for her. And I didn't also want to deprive her of her work time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was interesting, because it's very different from how I interact with most of the artists, because most of the artists want to tell you about the work, want to explain their work, want to really talk to you. Whereas I don't think Viola ever really wanted that, because she really did feel, and she's right, that the pieces spoke so loudly and eloquently, about—

MIJA RIEDEL: What were—please.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —about what she wanted to say. She didn't have to talk about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: There was never any discussion about curating the show?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: We did talk about that, but basically when she was doing shows, in New York and in San Francisco, she'd make a body of work for our show, a body of work for their show, et cetera. And we did talk about that, in a show that I told you [about]; we did the frieze of drawings along the wall. We had many, many drawings. I said, "Viola, I want to include a lot of drawings, and I want to show them." It was around that time she did the wallpaper.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And when she was working in Philadelphia, I said, "I don't want to do the wallpaper, but I want to do drawings, so that people can start to have an understanding of how the two-dimensional relates to three-dimensional, how each feeds the other and it's an exchange and an interchange; it's not just a one-way street."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So she loved that idea, and so often when I would come, there would be figures in the studio where there would be six sets of legs, and only up to the hip joint.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: A few on the floor, but—and then I would come back, and then they would be up to here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: For that particular show, I told her I really wanted to include a lot of drawings, and she was very happy about that.

MIJA RIEDEL: I bet. Was that frequently a goal of yours, to always have both the 2- and 3-D work?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Pretty much. We always had it, always. And in some cases—in that case, we have mostly the diptychs, but in some cases, I said, "Well, I'd really like to vary what we have, in terms of works on paper." So, "I'd like to have a polyptych, one of the ones that's like this size. At least one," and if there wasn't one, she would make one.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She knew that I always loved those two-dimensional works.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that was consistent, for the entire time you represented her work.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was the reception of your collectors and your clients to her work? Did it change over time? Was it fairly consistent? And how did it start at the beginning? Was there equal interest in both the 3-D and the 2-D?

NANCY HOFFMAN: There's never been equal interest. There have been the people who get the 2-D and buy it immediately.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But mostly, because she had become known as an artist of clay, that's what appealed to people. And it was so different than [what] anybody else was doing. We had a great response to work. We did really well with it. Up until the time the prices [. . . –NH] went up and up and up. The ceramic pieces are now expensive.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I mean, big figures, $175,000. Five minutes ago, it was $28,000.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So it went from 28 to 45. And so that price structure change has thinned out the market.

MIJA RIEDEL: Of course.

NANCY HOFFMAN: There are still people who love the work and buy the work, but it's—and it's not necessarily something they'll buy during a show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because Viola is here every day of the year.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I would say, the way the market has changed has been, the price structure change has impacted our ability to sell—

MIJA RIEDEL: And is that price structure coming from the Artist Legacy Foundation, or—so it's not—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: You're not setting the prices? That's [inaudible]?

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, no, [ALF] sets the price. We work with them, and we advise them from time to time about what price [to put on a –NH] piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: They'll ask, and we'll consult. But there are no more big figures [being released –NH]. And so I totally understand.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: There are no more, and the only big figures that will appear will come on the secondary market.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And as I've said to other people, Viola worked in clay: it's inevitable that all of her pieces at some point are going to require some maintenance.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It's just an inevitability. And so over time, the pieces that are pristine and perfect will be fewer and fewer.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: When we first started to show the work, it was so fresh and so affordable and so joyful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Steve Wynn once said—Steve Wynn loves Viola's work, and he once said to me, "Viola's in the same business I am, making people happy."

MIJA RIEDEL: Really? That's a lovely thing. That's a lovely quote.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And Viola said, if somebody had one of her benches outside in the garden, they didn't have to plant flowers, because flowers would be blooming all year round on her bench.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you think Viola would have agreed with his comment?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I told her his comment.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She said, "Oh, that's nice." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: In this way she had, just, "Okay, now let's talk about something else," or, "Let's not talk." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So in the beginning, as I said, it was fresh and new, and so appealing, and we did very well with the work. And we did very well over all the years with work. Now as the prices have gone up, we've done less well with big pieces. Slow and steady, we sell a few pieces here, a few pieces there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Primarily plates, or 2-D, or—

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Bricolage?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Bricolage, figures. We sold some drawings in the last few years. A little bit of everything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, it is interesting. At one point a number of years ago, we sold four plates to somebody. It

depends. You never know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is it primarily still an American clientele?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Pretty much, yes. The prospect of shipping is a little bit daunting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Which actually leads into—well, did you have other thoughts about how the collecting has evolved over time, or does that pretty much cover it?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, another thing that's impacted collecting is that so many things have changed in the art world since the '80s. Since we started to show Viola's work, so many more, quote, movements, trends, styles, artists, sensations have come into the picture, so that—Viola's not hip, cool, or chic; she is Viola.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: People who like her work and like what she has to say will continue to buy. And new people will continue to join the bandwagon. But I think there's so much noise out there in the art world about other available options. So if you're going to spend $175,000, you can spend it in a lot of different ways.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I think now people who are spending that kind of money make choices.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And that's very different from spending $28,000.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Not that $28,000 is a casual purchase, certainly not for you and me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But for people who collect, it's not so consequential as $175,000. And I think that the change in the art world has impacted her collecting public.

I also think that there's been a renaissance of interest, particularly—it's funny, because she hadn't shown in California in so long, but when we appear at the art fairs in San Francisco, there's been a real renaissance of interest. And the fact that we've focused each year on both 2-D work and 3-D work has brought new people in. One collector I'm thinking of who bought two two-dimensional works became familiar with them at the fair. And he comes here every time he's in New York, to see what we have.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I think that there's still a growing audience for Viola: people who are interested in something that is really outside the box, outside the norm, not trendy, but lasts forever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I don't know if that answered your question.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think it did. It's interesting to see how it has evolved. It seems like it has gone through different cycles, and it is going through a new stream of interest, which is actually wonderful to hear.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I do think when [. . . –NH] we have a good book on Viola, and perhaps a museum show to accompany it that's a dignified and appropriate museum show [. . . –NH]. They borrowed pieces from the East Coast when the show was at MAD [Museum of Art and Design], so it was much better than it had been [at other venues –NH]. But there's an opportunity to do a great Viola Frey show, and it hasn't been done yet.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I think that it will happen.

MIJA RIEDEL: So how does ALF figure into the equation? And are you working with them—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —on a catalogue raisonné?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, no, we're not doing it. They are doing it. They have someone working on a catalogue raisonné, and I think there is someone who's been working on it for a long time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: There are a lot of committees now at ALF, and I am not that familiar with all the committees. We work with Pauline Shaver—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and have worked with each of the directors, and each one has been excellent.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: We have had the privilege of working with Diane Frankel, with Sharon Tanenbaum, and then with Pauline. And each has brought something different to the foundation, which is just great. And now I think the foundation is expanding, with all these committees and their dedication to doing the catalogue raisonné.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I think for scholarly purposes, they have to do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And it must be humongous, because Viola has made so much work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: So it's a huge task. I think they have somebody exclusively devoted to that task. You can ask Pauline, I don't know. And I don't know if it's just one person, or two people, or whatever.

MIJA RIEDEL: How do you maintain interest in the work of an artist who's no longer working? And I was thinking about it; this is an ongoing issue for you. It's become even more of an issue for you. I can think of at least four artists that you represent that have passed away.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. Well, with Viola it's easy, because there's so much work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And Viola, in her generosity of spirit, left a generous estate. I will always be interested in her work, because I find it so full.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It never leaves you hungry, if you know what I mean.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: There's so much to look at. It functions on so many levels, so that, for me, it's the work. And if there were a paucity of work, like with Carolyn Brady—Juan Gonzalez died, and essentially he left nothing. There were a few pieces; they were taken by his two daughters. There's nothing. If anything of his comes our way, we offer it to the daughters first. I loved him and loved his work and will always be interested in it, because he was a visionary of a really high order, very spiritual.

With Viola, even if there's only one piece around, I [. . . –NH] feel her presence, if you know what I mean. Some artists are less announcing, in terms of their presence, but Viola's presence is active. We always have at least one or two of her pieces around. We have that seated woman; the seated man was up here; we have a bronze in the back; we have plates hanging on the back wall. So I think the work will always engage, and that's how you remain interested. And for me, what has been interesting and a challenge is the posthumous shows. Each one has had a theme.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And the theme has been educational, going back to what we talked about yesterday.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But it's really been educational, like in this show. It's really three aspects of who Viola was.

For people to see that, people who really look at the work and get it, it's a real education.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you're talking about the plates, and the figures and the two-dimensional work?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: The *Echoes of Images,* I told you yesterday, with the 2-D and the 3-D. So I have no sense that I would lose interest in Viola, ever, because her work is so rich.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Well, there's such density; there's just such density to it that I—literally, I think you can look at it many, many, many times, and literally see things you just didn't notice before. And then the complexity of those pieces—something about that thing goes with you when you look through the simpler pieces again. There seems even the simplest somehow have a powerful juxtaposition. And I think it's hard sometimes to put your finger on exactly what it is, but I think David Pagel talked about the "doubleness" of her work.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that seems to permeate even the simplest pieces. There's a sense of doubleness and relationship.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. Yes, it's absolutely true. Viola always said about her drawings, she liked the black-and-white ones best, because those were perfect.

MIJA RIEDEL: They were perfect? Ah.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Those worked perfectly; they came out perfectly when she drew from the model. She didn't need color. She didn't have to add to it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. That's so interesting, coming from somebody who was so committed and engaged with color.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: The black-and-whites were perfect.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She loved them. And every once in a while, she captured something. About the body, about the pose, about the expression, whatever. She loved those. And that sense of doubleness is—I think that for me it's that rich—as you said, the richness. It's like you never can see everything. It's not that it's a bottomless pit, but it is sort of a bottomless pit, that you just—you feel very lucky to be able to look and look and look and look, and discover, and continue to discover. So that keeps you going with an artist for a long time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. Has your relationship with the work changed at all since her death? Do you see things that you didn't see early on, in a way that's different, or pretty much along the lines of what we've been talking about?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Pretty much along the lines. I look at some of the plates that have triumph-over-death figures —

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and think about how she really triumphed over death. She worked until a half hour before she was gone. Who do you know, in your life, who has done what Viola did? Nobody.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I think of her often. How strong she was, and how she never complained. She never complained of pain. She just wanted to get out of the hospital every time she was in the hospital. She was like a caged animal when she was in there. [. . . –NH] I guess the way I feel about her is the way I feel about other people whose estates we handle. It's like they're still here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Yes, absolutely.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because they are.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: They are really present, in the work. That hasn't shifted. I think Viola's work really sort of exemplifies life force. And it isn't among the continuum of our more spiritual people, other than the fact that the life force is the most important aspect of spirituality.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: That's what her work is about, to me. It doesn't fade; that life force doesn't fade. It just gets better and better.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's beautifully put. Was there anything about her as a woman, or a woman artist, that affected you?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I know this was the big conversation in California, with the boys who were working in clay and everything. But I always looked at her work as the work. It could not have been done by a man, I don't think. But I never really engaged in that. It just wasn't interesting to me.

She was such a strong character. I wouldn't say—she wasn't cocky; she wasn't confident. She knew herself thoroughly. And not that she was a person you meet and you would say, "Wow, she's a really aware person." She just knew herself so thoroughly, and knew what she wanted, and that was her path. So when I met her for the first time, I sort of felt like, Well, I would be privileged to be on this path with her. Because here's someone who knows who she is.

I have never been hung up in this gender thing. You know: This is a woman artist; this is a man artist. As it happens, we have a number of women artists, and I'm happy about that. But I just didn't get into that, because it wasn't interesting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she never talked about it. She never talked to me about her feminist approach, or being a woman, or what she had to go through. She just did what she did, and she just plowed through all of what she viewed as ridiculous.

MIJA RIEDEL: Never mentioned it? Just worked?

NANCY HOFFMAN: No. No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. A few nuts and bolts: How was packing and shipping handled? Who handled photography and labeling? Did Viola have her own database?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, packing and shipping, when Viola was alive, Sam and the trucker would blanket-wrap the pieces.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So there were no crates. And everything would come in single-usage trucks. So it would just be Viola's show, on an Air Ride truck.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So nothing could touch the pieces or interfere with them. Since she died, everything ceramic has to be crated.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: That's the edict of the ALF.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Sam packs the pieces in California. My guys, who have been here for years, have packed them here. We've had a lot of experience; both Chris and Matt have had experience putting the pieces together, packing pieces, taking apart, all of that. So we pack, and for the most part, everything is crated. When the sections are really strong, we sometimes use—if they're not going far, we could use a commercial bin with lots of blankets. But any fragile section gets crated.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And the flat works are no problem.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: They don't have to be crated. It's pretty easy to ship, because we're used to it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But as I say, shipping overseas is so expensive that they would have to go by boat. [. . . –NH]

Viola never had a database. And I don't think she was too good at keeping track of what was there. She was very good at, Okay, your show's coming up next, so I'm going to work on that show. And no one in San Francisco could touch her pieces. So that body of work went to me. If there's a show in San Francisco, that body goes to them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she would know exactly what went to them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So she did keep track, but in her own aleatoric fashion. And I would say it was not as organized as some of the artists today. There was a third question I forgot; what was it about?

MIJA RIEDEL: About photography.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, yes, photography. Well, we've always had—well, I shouldn't say always, because in the early '70s, we had an outside photographer. But we've always had somebody who was trained to photo in-house.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So we do all the photography here, and we moved from slides to transparencies to digital. Chris now does the photography, and before him the person who was here also had been trained by a professional and did—but we do so much photography. It's our main tool to sell pieces. We have to have good photographs. So we do that in-house, and then if something is required, something different, special, whatever, Chris can still do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: You don't photograph the catalogues in-house, though?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, we do the photographs for the catalogues.

MIJA RIEDEL: You do? Interesting. Okay. And has that been true since your earliest days in SoHo, pretty much?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, my earliest days, we had a professional photographer, in the '70s.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: The most recent catalogue we did was the Lucy Mackenzie catalogue. But the best way to control the photography is to do it here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Let me just pause this for a second.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Okay, excuse me for a sec.

[Audio break.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So, for purposes of controlling great images and great angles, it was best to do it in-house?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, here. So this is the most recent one, and everything in this is life-size.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And it took—

MIJA RIEDEL: You don't hear that very often.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No. But that's because they're teeny-tiny.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It took Chris a few weeks, because everything was up on the wall, and mirror-hooked to the

wall, because they were tiny. So he had to photograph everything—

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Lucy Mackenzie that we're talking about at the moment?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: The *Quiet* catalogue.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So you can see, the images are really quite beautiful. In some cases, I can—let's see. Some of them are good, and in some cases they're not great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because everything is digital, it just works out better for us to do the photography.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: This has some pretty bad images in it, this one.

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Joseph Raffael. I would imagine those can be pretty difficult to photograph well.

NANCY HOFFMAN: This series is—really, they're bad images.

MIJA RIEDEL: But *April Moment,* in the Moments series?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, those; that's terrible. But here, these are pretty good.

MIJA RIEDEL: So beautiful.

NANCY HOFFMAN: These we took.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, Michael Gregory. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: This is the catalogue for Viola's last show, and we took all of these as well. Chris took some of these in her studio, so you can see—

MIJA RIEDEL: How wonderful for him.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Or not. [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, absolutely. And it gives people the flavor of what the environment was like.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Fantastic. Fantastic.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Otherwise, you see these pristine, perfect, finished objects.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There's a wonderful *Spark* segment on the public television station in California; I don't know if you saw it, [K]QED. That was wonderful, showing her working there toward the end, on the lift, and Sam securing the wheelchair on the lift and sending her up into the air. It also captured that spirit of commitment, and the spirit of the studio, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And the fact that she had that lift, she could make figures taller than ever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because there was no stopping her, and so she did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, she was really amazing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you know anything about her relationships with other people, or other artists?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I really don't know too much about her relationships with other people. But I know she and Squeak were good friends.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And she used to go there for Thanksgiving. But I don't know anything about—I don't think she had a lot of friends. I don't think she had a social life. I don't think that was part of who she was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I think that she went to work; she came home; she was exhausted. She read; she ate, read; she went to sleep.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: That's, I think, what her life was. And that's what she wanted.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So she didn't discuss other Bay Area artists?

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, every once in a while, she would say, "Oh, I went to Manuel's birthday party," or, "I went to this party."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But then she wouldn't elaborate.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So that actually is perfect. So there was no discussion about—or do you, independent of a discussion with her, from your own opinion, did she discuss, or did you see, the influence of Neri, Manuel Neri, or [Lucia] Fontana, Dubuffet, any other artists, art historical references?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, she was in that Bay Area at a very fertile time, with other people working in clay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I think she always followed her own voice; I really do. I don't think that she was heavily influenced by anyone. She looked at their work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But I don't think she was really heavily influenced by anyone. I think she knew what she wanted to do and she just did it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: We never talked about it. We never talked about possible influence, possible overlap. Just—she didn't talk about that. At least not with me. And I didn't really bring it up with her, because it was always so Viola to me. And of course, there were times that, how could you help but think of Dubuffet?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: That saturation of imagery, and et cetera.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It was just impossible not to. So—but she didn't really talk about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: And I notice she looked at so much work, and so much different work, constantly.

NANCY HOFFMAN: She did.

MIJA RIEDEL: But I can imagine it would be hard to pinpoint, perhaps, even consciously, where it might have come from.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I think that's true. Because I know she loved to look at work. She loved it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But she never really talked about influence, or trying something because she had seen something. At least she didn't—as I said, she didn't talk to me about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you think of her work as particularly American, or particularly West Coast, particularly Bay Area figurative? Or just particularly Viola in and of itself?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I guess particularly Viola. I think it is very American.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: You can look at Viola's work and look at Niki de Saint Phalle—they're worlds apart.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I think there's an American sensibility in it. Whether it's the Wild West, I don't know, but there's definitely an American sensibility in it. No question.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: But I think it also appeals to a European. Europeans often come in and are kind of dazzled by the work, and discovering it, and they love it, and "Oh, dear, how much would it cost to ship it?" That kind of thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: But they do ask?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: But not much goes, and do you think it's shipping that really sort of stops that?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I think it's a big commitment.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Big financial commitment, big space commitment. If you're going to put it outside, if you live in a climate where you can put it outside, you have to make a foundation, a concrete pad. Or cement pad. And that's another commitment. So it's not easy. The work is not easy. It's not meant to be easy, and it's not meant to be beautiful. It is what it is; it's a strong statement. And I don't know if it has a West Coast feel. To me, it's just very American.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I think the way she uses color is very American, too. It's so primary and charged. Very—I don't see it as European.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How did your relationship with her change over the years?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I would say that it was pretty consistent over the years, until she got pretty sick. Then I had to do more of the talking, though she never talked a whole lot. And I tried to express concern for her in a way that wouldn't make her uncomfortable, because I know that she wasn't comfortable with any kind of caring, emotional commitment. So I became a little more careful in terms of how I would talk with her, and I guess I felt like I had a good handle on what her tolerance was for concern.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Viola was somebody who would basically say, "Okay, I have this; now I got to get rid of it, and that's it." So I think that over the years, especially the last maybe five years past, she became impacted by her health issues. That changed a bit, and as I said, I would express concern. There would be less conversation, and no less frequent visiting. Not at all. But it's interesting because with some people, there's a real dimensionality to the relationship, and the opportunity to converse about many things and continuing dialogue. Whereas with Viola, it wasn't that; it was this connection, [. . . –NH] and then, until the next time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. So not a lot of interaction when you weren't physically together?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I would call her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: In the last six months, I called her every day.

MIJA RIEDEL: Every day?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Every day.

MIJA RIEDEL: How did that work if she didn't talk very much?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I would talk.

MIJA RIEDEL: You would just call and talk?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes? Every day?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Every single day. You can ask Sam. Every day. He was amazed. [Laughs.] I just called and I chatted about this or that. Not for long. Say, I'm thinking of you, hoping you're feeling okay. Looking forward to our show, and I know you're going to do it, and that kind of thing. Every single day.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you do that with all your artists who are ill?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I couldn't call Carolyn Brady because she was in the hospital the last month of her life. And David Bierk I did call, every day, and Juan Gonzalez, also. These are all people—David Bierk, Juan Gonzalez, Carolyn Brady—they're all very, very close to my heart. I knew Juan from the time he was a graduate student. I met him as a graduate student.

So, yes, I called them every day. It just happened. Because I loved them and cared about them. David Bierk was talking to me about his next show, and—David Bierk was 6'6", with long red hair and big red beard, and talk about generous, and so full of beans. And he was telling me about his next show. He said, "I have this great idea," and he was always coming up with a great idea. "I have another great idea." And one of the most beautiful obituaries talked about, "This was a man of great ideas."

These are people who did not lose their verbal ability. As Viola slowly—not that she lost it, but she must have known that to conserve any ounce of energy for working, she wasn't going to talk. Because that takes energy. So yes, I guess it evolved over time that I just did that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Just because of who I am.

MIJA RIEDEL: This does seem to tie into what we touched on yesterday, which is a spiritual underpinning that runs through the gallery.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Can you talk about that a little bit? I know it's in no way blatant. It's in no way obvious, but what your thoughts about that—

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, I think it's definitely part of how I respond to work. There has to be a spiritual component that I would sense, get, understand. If something is—here's a good example—if something is technically beautiful, and done so well, and this and that, but there's no soul in it, it leaves me absolutely cold. I don't respond to work like that. And I've always responded to work where I can sense the soul. That's part of that unique, single-minded, obsessive—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. I love that description. [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I think it's definitely part of who I am, what the gallery is. Though, as you say, it's not blatant; it's not announced; it's not anything other than the import to me of what the work is. It has to have that soul. Call it soul; call it spiritual. And I was thinking about what you said yesterday, about how different this—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Thank you.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —this place is from other places and most places of business. Well, we have to sell work to make the rent.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It's not like it's not a business. We do have to do that, but there's another quality here that other people don't have in their places. And it has to do with that sense of the soul. [. . . –NH] After 9/11—[. . . we were –NH] a mile from the Towers, and people came running up West Broadway, didn't leave until 4:00. We all stayed there together. There was a show called *I Love New York*, where the proceeds went to the victims of 9/11, and I said, "At some point, people are going to have to buy art to feed their soul." And that's how I view the work at the shows. Work that does feed the soul. And as I said, life-enhancing. There will be the show *I Love New York*. We have to give the proceeds to the victims, and soon they'll be *I Love NHG*, too.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is this something that you set about intentionally, to create at the beginning, with your staff and at the gallery? Because clearly it sounds like it was, from the beginning, part of your relationship with art, and artists. Is it something that you intentionally thought about creating here in the gallery? No, it just grew out of that?

NANCY HOFFMAN: It grew out of that. It's how I relate to art, and what's important to me, and that this feeding-the-soul aspect of the art is really important me. That something that is soulless and just a slick whatever, holds no interest. And I think that it grew almost in an unconscious way. It was important to me, so I just went about doing it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And it's interesting when I think about the variety of work that you carry. Some of it doesn't immediately feel very soulful. But I think of some of the more abstract work, some of the more pattern-related work. Soul wouldn't be the first thing that comes to mind, but it is interesting that somehow that speaks to you in that way.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, somehow it's woven into it, and how it's different in each situation. It wasn't like I said, "Gee, I'm going to have a soulful gallery." It didn't happen that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes. You've done an excellent job, I think, of covering these ALF questions. A couple final ones here: How do you maintain public interest in the work of an artist who's no longer producing? Is it, again, different ways of installing different kinds of exhibitions that are educational?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, we always have a Viola piece at the top of the stairs.

MIJA RIEDEL: Always?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Always, because we always have one.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So that it's a really—it's like a magnet, and it pulls people up. And so that's much easier, in terms of maintaining interest and introducing people, than other artists where we have very little work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So Viola is kind of a unique case.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because we do have the work, and we make it visible. There's no way to hide it, and we don't want to hide it. In SoHo, we were lucky—because we had this big basement, we could have a few figures; whereas, here, we can have two figures up here. But we always have it, and it's a conversation piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: For people who come to the gallery and don't know Viola's work, it's a great way to get started talking about whatever it is.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: You can't walk by a Viola piece and not notice it.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you notice it immediately. When you're walking down the stairs, you even catch a glimpse of it, just from the corner of your eye, and it draws your eye upstairs. It was one of the first things I noticed when I walked in the door.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So that's—it's hard. If you don't notice it, something's the matter with you.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: Something is definitely the matter.

MIJA RIEDEL: Are there any issues with representing an estate versus a living artist?

NANCY HOFFMAN: The only issue is that it's not direct, with the artist, and that was very easy. Now we work with ALF, and we've had the good fortune, as I said, to work with all three directors, and they've all been excellent, and they've all been wonderful to work with, and it's a real—I feel we're a very good team. We really complement one another. They know I'm totally straight and direct with them. So I think we're really making

progress.

I also think that ALF, in the beginning, wasn't totally formed. I don't think that Viola and Squeak had the time, before Viola died, to figure out what they wanted out of the ALF, other than to have their legacies continue. But now ALF is really putting so many protocols into place about what they want. And doing the catalogue raisonné, and being scholarly and all of that.

So that's the difference. The difference is really working with a foundation, as opposed to working directly with the artist. But we're really lucky, because it's easy to work with this foundation. They're very reasonable and very straight. So we are having a good time together, I think. It's a real mutual admiration society.

MIJA RIEDEL: Good. [Let's] move on to a few other, more general questions, and then if Viola comes up in the course of that, of course we'll be sure to include that. Do you associate yourself or the gallery with any kind of particular art movement or style?

NANCY HOFFMAN: No, I saw that question, no. Because we show such a wide range of work. This really refers back to what I said yesterday, that I wanted to show a wide range of work, so that there would be a discovery unexpected.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I don't like galleries that just show abstract, or just show representational. I like this wide range, and I don't associate the gallery with anything like that. I think that we are unusual. I think there are [. . . –NH] few galleries that would conceptualize what they do as wanting to show work that's life enhancing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I think that that's probably rare.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

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NANCY HOFFMAN: —and as a result, we have the collectors we have—[laughs]—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and get new collectors, but we're not part of the local business.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think it's fascinating that you've said twice now that it's important that there's almost an element of surprise when collectors come into your gallery. And I think that relates to the other ways you've talked about art in your personal relationship with art, is that [it] seems that sense of unexpectedness and surprise is an important part of an encounter with art that does feed the soul. Does that feel accurate to you?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, I think so.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No question. I think it's really fascinating to watch people looking at art. It's really fascinating. You see the people who look, and then you see the people that just walk by. And that's why it's so valuable to me when I sit downstairs and answer the phone at lunch hour, because I see what people are doing, which shows they really look [at].

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: There are shows that people come in and they spend an hour or two, and they come back.

MIJA RIEDEL: That actually reminds me of something we talked about right when I arrived, which was a number of groups that are coming to see Viola's exhibition. Let's talk about that a little.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I did tell Pauline that a day does not go by that a group doesn't come in to see the show with a leader. It's fascinating to me, because of all the years I've been doing this, we've never had a show that has been so well attended by groups and their leader. So it's on the must-see list, obviously, of all these tour guides of galleries. These are people who take women, or people, around every week or every other week and lecture about art. These are not just people who don't know about art. These are people who really comb the galleries, and I thought that was quite extraordinary, because it means that what the *Time*'s critic said about Viola after a MAD show, that she was one of the great artists of the 20th century, that word is out.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: [. . . –NH] I [. . . NH] view [art –NH] fairs as three-dimension advertising, seed-planting events. We get thousands of pairs of eyes in front of the object; you're planting seeds for the future.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: People come here; they have a lecturer or tour guide; he's planting seeds.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: They're thinking about the work. They're looking at the work. They're learning about the work. It's incredible, and it's almost every day now. And now, it's stopping every day in July, but you can see from today, we're still getting the groups.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well—and the show is extended. It was supposed to end—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Right, but we extended it through the summer—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —because we had so many people who wanted to see the show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is that different, Nancy—do you think that's a change in the past few years, increasing interest?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, it does feel somewhat different.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: [. . . –NH] It feels like there's a renaissance—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —sort of the bubbling of what—and it feels like it's beginning, and my best hope is that it will continue to bubble and blossom.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I'm amazed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I can't explain it. I don't talk to these groups.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: They have their own leaders. So I feel very good about that aspect. I told Pauline. She's just thrilled because the show—I keep referring to Lucy's show because it's just prior to this—we had lots and lots of people coming to that show—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and coming again and again. And we had some groups, but not every day.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And this is really good. It is a phenomenon that's new.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: It's definitely new—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —because we used to [get groups –NH] once a week. We're not used to every day.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Not that we can't process it. There's space for the groups, and we're happy to have them, but

I would say that's new.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's wonderful to have that much of an in-the-moment update of this kind of response to the work.

NANCY HOFFMAN: [. . . –NH] Some people look at the brochure and I tell them they can take it, and it's, "Oh, I love this work." Oh, it's very nice to hear that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because it's not—if you walk around Chelsea, you get a sort of feel for what's being shown. It doesn't look [like] what's being shown at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So, the fact that people say, "I love it"—it's a great thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Makes you feel really good, and this show—well, the last show I saw before that—I feel looks very much like a museum show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. That was an intentional effort on the—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —for the installation. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Really, it looks really serious.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I love that aspect of it, because Viola's works are not always that serious.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: They're not meant to be funny.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I think the installation points out the crossovers—

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. I found myself crisscrossing in one of the plates—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —just looking at them, because the relationships were so beautifully set up that I wanted to go back to this one and then over to that one. It is beautifully done.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I think that the fact that it has a sort of museum-like appearance, it also appeals to the group leaders—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —because they can bring people here, and whether they say it or not, this is [a] really serious show. This show you can learn from.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Look at the overlap of the media—sculpture, drawing—it wouldn't surprise me if that's why we have so many groups also.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: But I think that Viola's uniqueness just will continue to stand out in a crowd.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You've done a lot of art fairs.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Seattle, Miami, New York, San Francisco—have you been doing them for a long time?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you know when you started?

NANCY HOFFMAN: We—our first art fair was maybe in Chicago, over 25 years ago.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: We did one art fair in Paris. We did the first FIAC [Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain]. We did a first art fair in Miami, a first Miami Basel, and I realized as the art world was changing and that art fairs were becoming part of the landscape to reach out to new collectors, you could no longer sit in the gallery and wait for Godot. It just wasn't going to happen that way, because collectors were wising up that they could go to art fairs and see 150 galleries under one roof in one day, rather than going to 20 different cities. So my feeling was that we had to spend money to make money.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And that was really essential.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And so we started to do [fairs –NH]. [. . . –NH] In the beginning [. . . we did –NH] three or four art fairs [. . . a year –NH], and I wish we could get to the point where we could do four art fairs a year, but I don't think it's going to happen like that. I'll have to continue to do more, and there's—

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you normally do four or five a year?

NANCY HOFFMAN: More. We do Chicago in September; we do Miami in December; we do New York in March; we do San Francisco and New York in May. We do a lot, and we're doing a new fair this summer in Seattle—we've done Aspen.

MIJA RIEDEL: That is a lot.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It's a lot, and it's a huge amount of work, but you have to reach out to a new public. Also you want to keep things moving. Like, the Aspen art fair, which we've done in the past in summers—really, it's been a big bounce for us in the summer. There's a lot of activity, and the art fairs create activity both at the fair and here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: People discover things at the fair, and then they come here.

MIJA RIEDEL: And has it drastically changed—your collector base?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. It has.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Because we sell a lot of art [to new people –NH].

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I don't know what the percentage is. Some years it's bigger than others, but we meet new people, and we make new friends, and they come here, and it's stimulating part of the business.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It's exhilarating to talk about the art that you love. It's absolutely exhilarating, and ultimately, after you do it for five days, you're exhausted. [Laughs].

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. [Laughs.] And then you turn around and do it again—

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —the next month, right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. That's how it goes.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'd read that you were part of a small group that was going to start a new art fair here.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, we did that last year—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —the Downtown Fair. I was actually on the committee—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and I've been on the committee for Chicago. I've been on the committee for New York. But this was a fair called the Downtown Fair—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —that eventually was [. . . –NH] sold [. . . –NH] to Art Miami.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I was on the selection committee to help them get the thing going.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: But it was a little bit of a misconstrued notion, and now they have it on the piers and they've —they're going to change the name, and I think it's a good thing in conjunction with Frieze [New York] [. . . –NH].

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And they have the person who used to be head of the Armory Show [directing –NH] it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there a reason you thought it was important to have another art fair in New York?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I didn't think it was important, but somebody else had made the commitment. They got the downtown Armory, which is a good venue. So I was willing to give it some energy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And time and help to get it going.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: [Side conversation.] Thank you.

If they were going to be serious.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: So, I did that.

MIJA RIEDEL: What do you see as the relationship between museums and the gallery?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well—

[Side conversation.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: We have a relationship with a few museums that we've had over the years, and they've had shows of our artists' work. We continue the relationship with them, and it's been a nice thing for us and a nice thing for the museum. I'm always looking to expand our museum exposure. [. . . –NH.] We're not part of the media hype, and that's a problem, but people who are interested in the work ultimately—I mean, we have this new Swedish artist who does photography, Nathalia Edenmont. The catalogue is over there—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and she's going to have a show at an American museum. So we've had the good fortune of having—

MIJA RIEDEL: Which museum, sorry?

NANCY HOFFMAN: At the Arkansas Museum.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: The Joseph Raffael show will travel to a few museums [. . . –NH]. One museum shows video, and they've done a few video projects of our younger artists, and that's a good thing. So we're always trying to make those connections—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. You have done a number of traveling exhibitions.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: You did one for Viola's plates in the mid-'90s.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And when we go to fairs, we meet a lot of curators, and that's a good thing too.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: We're not the kind of gallery, like a Gagosian, where any museum would want to do whatever, but there are small museums that are really interested in [our –NH] artists, and so that works.

MIJA RIEDEL: Are there any in particular that you've had long-term relationships with or multiple exhibitions with?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, the kind of long-term relationship with the Butler [Institute of American Art], with the Flint [Institute of Arts]—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —with Arkansas—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —those three in particular.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where there's a similar sensibility between the curator or the venue and the museum and the kind of work you're representing.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, and even like the Flint—which has that similar sensibility, the director [. . . –NH] was talking about his class [of directors –NH] and that his class was going to be graduating. So all the directors of his, quote, class will be "A" trained, will be graduating, will be a whole new young group.

The Flint [. . . has –NH] a media space where they now do videos. They've done two of our artists in the video space. So not only does he like some of the oldies-but-goodies works—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —but he's also interested in the video.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what's his last name, sorry?

NANCY HOFFMAN: John Henry.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I thought that was interesting. It's the first time I've heard anyone talk about their class graduating from the directorships. He said, "There are so many jobs available. So many director jobs available right now because [his –NH] class is graduating." Quote, unquote.

MIJA RIEDEL: You mentioned video, and that is a new field that you branched into. Is that fairly recent for you, or is that something that's—

NANCY HOFFMAN: —something like eight years. When we started [our –NH] project space—two [of] the artists actually worked in video, and I have seen lots of video over the years, but little of it has engaged me. I then

went to a graduate show and saw the work of one artist whose work we've shown, and I was just mesmerized.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: And then slowly I—

MIJA RIEDEL: Which one was that?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Asya Resnikov.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And then shortly thereafter, I saw the work of Purdy Eaton, and she inserts videos into her paintings.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I'm definitely open to this medium.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I've seen so much of it that I don't like, but now I've seen more that I do. So, I like it. I like that dimension in the gallery. I think it's important and I think it's exciting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it really does expand the range.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, no question.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: No question.

MIJA RIEDEL: What drives you to continue your work after 40-plus years?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I love what I do. I think that's—you probably figured that out already.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I love what I do. Expressions, new, every single day working with creative people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I love building careers, helping to build careers, and blossoming careers. And I love the educational aspect. It's a challenge all the time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Work is never done.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Go home; it's never done. And I love waking up and coming to the gallery. I know—it's just exciting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Being around the art, changing people's lives as a result of living with the art. What could be more fulfilling?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: Not much.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: It's true. Okay, do you collect yourself?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, and I only buy works from artists in the gallery.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. Okay.

NANCY HOFFMAN: [. . . –NH] I try not to buy until the end of the show, so I give other people a pick.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's an enormous self-restraint.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes. Sometimes I can't resist.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: [. . . –NH] I have a Viola reclining figure in my living room, and I live in a New York apartment.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Sometimes people say, "Well, how can you put one of these in a New York apartment?" And I said, "Well, just move the sofa 12 inches." I don't have a sofa, but I mean, I move my furniture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, that's the answer. You don't have a sofa. [Laughs.]

NANCY HOFFMAN: Right. So that's what I've done. Buy works by artists of the gallery, and now that we don't have the storage space [. . . we used to have –NH] in SoHo, I have to be careful. [. . . –NH]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: —and I have to rotate or whatever. But I love being surrounded at home also by works from the gallery. I love it.

MIJA RIEDEL: And has that been your rule for yourself from the start?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, yes, before the gallery opened, I had already started to buy some contemporary work of people, or artists I had met, et cetera, but yes, that's my rule. That has been my rule since the start. I realized once I opened the gallery that, first of all, I didn't have a lot of money to spend on art, so that whatever I was going to spend, I was going to spend on gallery artists. And sometimes [. . . it takes –NH] three years to pay for one painting [. . . –NH].

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. We have just a final question.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: How would you like your work in the gallery to be viewed in the future?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, I saw that question.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I have no idea how to answer that question.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, what do you think your contribution has been to the New York art scene and the broader contemporary art scene?

NANCY HOFFMAN: Well, I think the contribution is really in the area that we've been talking about.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: There's a unique voice in this gallery, and I think that's what I'd like the imprint to be in the future—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —to continue that uniqueness, and that undercurrent or spirituality—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: —I would like that. I don't think that's obvious to most people, but I think that the gallery's contribution has been this kind of loyalty and commitment to artists over the years. It's not so often that artists work with a dealer for 40 years. It just doesn't happen.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

NANCY HOFFMAN: And I think that that's a rare contribution.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I guess I don't really think a whole lot about that, what the future will say about what we've done here. I don't think so much about that. That's a hard one for me to answer.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

NANCY HOFFMAN: So I'm not going to be too helpful with that. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: That's fine. Do you anticipate doing this for as long as possible?

NANCY HOFFMAN: I'd like to drop in my boots here.

MIJA RIEDEL: You and Viola have something in common.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yes, and I feel so lucky to love what I do. It's really my life. It's like Viola: making art was her life. This is my life.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: I've spent years building it. Why would I want to give it up? I have no interest in retiring. What would I do if I retire?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY HOFFMAN: I would want something to do. I'm not someone who sits still. Like on vacation, I'm always doing something; I'm always in motion. I really love working. If it gets to the point where I feel I'm losing control of whatever, then I would think about [it]. Well, basically, I'd like to do what Viola did, just drop in my boots.

MIJA RIEDEL: It is extraordinary, too, because you show a fairly small group of artists, 20, 30, 40 tops, yes? And many of them probably have, if not more, have been with the gallery for 10 or 20 or more years.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Oh, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

NANCY HOFFMAN: Yep. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it has been a pleasure. Thank you very much.

NANCY HOFFMAN: It's been my pleasure too. And I'm sorry about the interruptions.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]