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Oral history interview with Evangeline  
J. Montgomery, 2021 June 15 -  
December 7

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with E.J. (Evangeline Juliet) Montgomery on June 15–December 7, 2021. The interview took place in Rockville, Maryland, and was conducted by Claude L. Elliott for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

E.J. Montgomery and Claude L. Elliott 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

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. This is Claude L. Elliott with Evangeline J. Montgomery at the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington in Rockville, Maryland, on June 15, 2021, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, card number one. Good afternoon, E.J.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hello.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Let's begin with some biographical information, so tell me about your early life, you know, where you—when and where you were born, and something about your family.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was born in New York City, and I'm an adopted child. Now, I was adopted shortly after birth in New York, Roosevelt Hospital.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, Roosevelt Hospital.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And, uh, my mother—oh I think—do you mind shutting me off.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what were your adoptive parents' names?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Carmelite Thompson and Oliver Paul Thompson.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He was a Baptist minister.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what did your mother do?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, she was basically a housekeeper, and they had several children that they had adopted or reared—and in that Paul Thompson was in New York, a pastor, he had a church, when he met Carmelite.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what were your—what were the names of the other adopted children?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, there was two men who became actors, and they acted in the early plays that Blacks were in on Broadway.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so they were—they were a lot older than you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, they were older enough to be my parents, you know, and they would have married. They each married twice and had one boy and one girl each one of them. Their names were Warren Coleman and the other brother was Ralph Coleman. And they were like in the WPA project and things like that. But they were tops in their acting, and they're not really written up in a lot of things except where somebody specializes in Black actors. Warren made some movies too, he was in—on the play circuit. He was—um, I want to get rid of this business, so.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so you were pretty much an only child then in the house?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What was that like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: There was another young woman and then the Thompsons brought in two girls that were in high school, finishing high school.

[00:05:15]

Those girls were—I forget what you call, but they were foster children.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, foster children, okay. But you were adopted, and the other two girls—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was adopted—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —were foster—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —children? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Probably around three years old.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so were they younger than you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they were older—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —older, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —much older.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. So what was it like growing up in New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, it was lots of fun. I—I moved to New York from Rhode Island, and I had lived in Boston, Massachusetts.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so let's go back when you were adopted, you moved to New York? Okay. [E] was born & lived in NY as a child. -CLE]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, right.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and then—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I lived in Rhode Island. Just as I told you that I just lived in a whole lot of places—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —lot of places, okay, well let's talk a little bit about Rhode Island, where did you move to? So from New York, you moved to Rhode Island?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and, uh, why—why did the family move to Rhode Island?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, because the minister got churches. He belonged to the City Missions Society or something like that, it was called, and he moved from place to place, kind of developing the church, getting it on its feet, and then he'd moved to another church. And he did that, you know, for a number of years.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so what was it like living in Rhode Island to—where you in school at that—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —at that time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I started school in Rhode Island in [Pawtucket -CLE] Westerly, Rhode Island, and Reverend Thompson was—his name was on the cornerstone of the Black church right there at Olney Street, and, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now, do you know if that was Olney Street Baptist Church?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, and we found a cornerstone and everything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and how long did—were you—how long did you live in Rhode Island?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Probably until I was seven. I went to elementary school—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Uh-huh mm-hmm [affirmative], and what was the name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —there. I don't know.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You don't remember? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I'd—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —it's something that I could find out real—over a period of time.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So, uh, from Rhode Island, you moved where?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: From Rhode Island? My mother and he divorced by the time I was nine, so. And, uh, we moved—my mother and I moved to New York then, and it was—we were—I was nine, so.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, what part of New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: New York City. My mother had a daughter [Dorothy -CLE] who was older. She—the daughter was right along with Ralph and Warren [Coleman], and she—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So where you—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: She—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Go ahead.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: She [Dorothy -CLE] lived in New York in Harlem, and we lived on St. Nicholas Terrace, and I went to [junior high -CLE] school at PS 43, which is on Amsterdam and 125th or—no, above 125th, about five blocks above.

[00:10:10]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So New York is very different than Boston and Rhode Island, so what you think of—what was that like for you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, [Harlem -CLE] was all Black—[In Rhode Island -CLE] there's a little, little pocket, right, and the only time you saw some Blacks was going to church on Sunday, something like that. There were no Black kids in the school system, I was the only one in the whole school system, and there were two little boys that came to church that were around my age, and I saw them, right.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And was New York different?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Was New York different?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In what way?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: New York was all Black, I was living in Harlem, and it was quite a trip.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so you were about what age in New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I was 10 and on, and, uh, the school system was—it was mostly all-

white teachers. I only had one Black teacher, and he taught French. And as I look back now, I'd say he probably came from a Haitian family background. And the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So how is your French?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How is your French?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It was good for a while.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. Now did you study—were there any art classes in your school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I went to—in the junior high school that I was in, my art teacher was a Jewish lady, middle aged, and, uh, she liked me and encouraged me in my art and always gave me little projects, painting bottles and stuff like that. And she also—there was the art school, high school of art in New York, and I was encouraged to go to that school, but I didn't go because my mother didn't quite understand a school that had all art primarily, and she said, no, I should go to the regular school, but the school I went to had quite a bit of art anyway.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. What was the name of the high school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Seward Park High School, and it was downtown in Bowery. The old Jewish section was on one side, Chinatown was on another and then the main—main, uh, section that we functioned in was the all-Jewish section that had, oh, [inaudible] [Orthodox - CLE], and like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now what kind of—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —commercial.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, what kind of art classes did you take in high school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, there was a lot of technical stuff on—it was during the time that the Second World War just ended, and my school had special courses for those veterans.

[00:15:09]

And they had kind of courses like today.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like design classes?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And a lot was offered to those men, and they were right along in the class with us, which as I look back now, I don't think it was a good idea.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Why? Why didn't you think it was a good idea?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, for instance, the girls were caught up with those men, things like that. Now, I was very athletic and so I was in a roller-skating group and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, this is in New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, and in Seward Park High School after I got into high school. And I was in the swimming club and basketball.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so there was a swimming pool in your school or in the neighborhood?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In your school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and the pool, a nice swimming pool, it wasn't an Olympic size one because—but some of the schools had Olympic-size swimming set up.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. So your mother wanted you to major in something else other than art? What—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —what was her dream for you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, she didn't quite understand. Her daughter [Dorothy -CLE] did art. She went to Bennett College, and she did hand painting on silk cloth. That's all I can really remember about her and her art.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah, what was—what was her name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Dorothy.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And the last name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, she got married—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so she—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —for a while and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So she was married at—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —she was married not too long. And—well my mother's maiden name was Lee, L-E-E, and she was born in Washington, DC, and her family was large but not real large. They never discussed it with me, but I guess that it was around four to five or so people, the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And after your parents divorced, did you have a relationship with your father, your foster—your adoptive father?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so it was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —never.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —you were basically raised by your mother?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, everything centered around my mother.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what was that relationship like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Very good, she was very religious and so my early years, a lot was spent in the church and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what religion was that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was Baptist. When I was in New York, I was a member of Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, which Mt. Olivet was quite large the—[knocking on door] Yes?

[Side conversation.]

[Tape stops, restarts.]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: [Wooster, Wooster, -CLE], let's see, that was in between.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How old were you in Cleveland?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In [New York -CLE], I was in junior high, I was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what were the schools like there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What were the schools like in Cleveland?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In Cleveland, it was nice, mostly all Black, the one I went to.

[00:20:03]

I lived on Quincy and East 79th and then I moved down East 79th a couple of blocks or so, and I was living in another minister's home, which was friends of the Thompsons.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and were you—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —studying in art in school at that time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, that was younger, you know?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was—really I went from [Pawtucket -CLE] Westerly to [Wooster -CLE]. That's what happened.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and so after New York—in New York, you were in high school, so what happened—what happened after you graduated from high school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: This went dark.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, well, that's—it's off, it's off.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. Yeah, so after graduating from high school, where did you work?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I worked in a doll company.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In New York. I worked—I was doing hand painting of doll faces on all kinds of materials and things.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like for example?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Cotton cloth, I—most of that work went to the Ideal Doll Company.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and how did you get that job?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Just went to unemployment, and they gave you tests and whatnot, you know, like your first job out of high school. And they determine that you are artistic, so let's try to see if we can find something in the art business, and they just sent me there, and I sat down and started working and it was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How long were you—how long did you work there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, about a year or a little over.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and how much were you making an hour?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I was making about 30—about \$30 a week.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Thirty? Okay, okay—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Something like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And that was full time, that was a full-time job?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, that was full time, and I worked with two old, white ladies and a Black fellow who had worked in Hollywood, he said, and he was an artist. And the owner of the company, well, she was a widower and then there were two men that they pressed the shapes, yeah, and do—did all kinds of hard jobs like that. And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I was—and I turned out to be pretty good. The work was piecework.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, you got paid by the number of faces you could paint?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, that's true.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah, and so after working there, what was your next job?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: After working in there, I moved to Boston.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, that's when you moved to Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. So, yeah—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I finished high school, and I didn't have money to go to college although I got a small, you know—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like a scholarship or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Actually, yeah, like a scholarship, but it was too small to do anything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It wasn't enough? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. Now what took you to—what reason did you go to Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, that's where the Colemans lived. Warren [Coleman] lived in New York, and in fact, he lived for a while at this Theresa Hotel but—

[00:25:16]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In Harlem?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and he was married to his second wife, and I told you he had two kids. Now, we don't know really what his kids ended up doing, but Ralph [Coleman] had five kids, and, uh, they were gifted and as, you know, were interested in the theater. And Richie, his son did quite a bit in training theater people. [Leona -CLE], his daughter, she danced and she went to art school too.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Do you know what kind of dance, was it ballet, modern?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: All of that. She danced with Elma Lewis and other thing—other groups, and whatnot, and she took [modern -CLE] dancing. And I used to dream about this what I want to be—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: To be?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —but of course, my mother was so religious that I had to stay away from her. And I was just thinking recently that I didn't know anything about the modern music that was being played, you know, like Sam Cook and people like that that were coming along because I had to go to church and do other things.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so once you moved to Boston, what was your life like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I had a full life, very nice [life -CLE]. Now because the southern colleges couldn't admit the Black students, not many of them, and so the few that were brought up into the northeast and, uh—better—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —got scholarships and things. They were the—and, you know, all the medical students were at the medical schools in and around Boston. And Martin Luther King and his crowd, they were at [Boston University School of Theology -CLE] because the ones that were going into ministry or what not, that's where they were mostly. And then the ones that were—had the highest scholar level were, you know, at Harvard and those schools.



CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so what were you doing in Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Running around with them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, in terms of work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Huh?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In terms of work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Work, I went to work in—in the industry where they were making plaster, religious statuary and that's what I got into, and most of it was run by Jewish and Italians, and there was me, the only Black and whatnot.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And these were like the statutes, the religious statues in churches?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, all types, but I didn't do many of the great, big, bigger than life sized.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, now, were these done by hand or machine?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: By hand, they were hand cast and they—there was about 30 or so in the factory, it was like a factory and—

[00:30:08]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Is that where your interests in ceramics developed?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, yes, all of that, but I also worked in a jewelry company—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —in [Los Angeles -CLE]?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in [LA -CLE]. When I got to [LA -CLE] and went out to look for a job, I was in a beauty parlor, and this Black fellow came in there, and he knew the beauticians and they talked and whatnot. And he ended up saying he was looking for somebody to come work with him, and he had a whole studio set up in his home, anyway I said I was interested.

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E.J. MONTGOMERY: And I had gone to several places not in jewelry but, you know, where they were making other things in an artistic nature.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and what was his name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: His name was Thomas Usher, and he came out of Cleveland.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what kind of jewelry did he make?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He made fine jewelry, yeah—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like out of silver and gold?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, gold and diamonds and, you know, things like this that I made. He took me in and started to train me, but he worked in a big jewelry factory line, and they were making all kinds of jewelry. And there's a section big as this room making certain kind of diamonds or stuff like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And so I was fortunate to see all that being done, but I didn't work on that. I worked on enamel, that was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like enamel rings and necklaces?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. And a whole line of jewelry and the line of jewelry was called Cellini [ph]. And I worked until Christmastime then they, of course, they do the layoff, they did. So I didn't get laid off, but I was encouraged to do some samples, things like that for them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And then I—you know, I worked in the jewelry business, and I kept going to school for that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In Boston.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and what was the name of the school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Grant Beach Arts and Crafts, and it was Peter Voulkos used to be there making pots, big pots and whatnot. So I had the experience of meeting a few artists in the people that I studied under. I studied under—what was the girl's name—I can't think of any—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It was someone at the school, you're talking about you [studied -CLE] under?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And I'd go on Saturdays and Sundays if I felt like—yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, now were you also making your own jewelry and doing enameling?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I would make something.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So was this at beginning of that interest?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, but I started school, college, and I went to Los Angeles City College.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, so from Boston, you moved to California, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, that was a little later.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so why California?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: My husband, I was married.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so you got married in Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I married in Boston—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and your husband's—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in '52.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Your husband's name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Ulysses Montgomery.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so you—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he was going to MIT.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay. So after he graduated, you moved to LA?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I got married, and we moved to LA after a while, we didn't—not right away. But we moved to LA, and he was in that crowd of guys that I was talking about that had been in the service and whatnot, and I met him.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so he had gotten his—he had—he left the military and with his GI Bill, he went to MIT? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well he was from New York, he went to New York for a while and then he went to MIT and he finished there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he's—he has a license to be a structural engineer, that's why he carries that kind of—

[00:05:07]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So did his job take you to LA?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Did his job take you to LA? Is that why you moved to LA?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, he went to LA. He read about Williams, the Black's architect, Paul R. Williams, and he went not even knowing Williams or anything. He just said, "We're going to LA." He got sick with pneumonia and was in the hospital, and he read about LA while he was in the hospital, and I said okay because people didn't believe in that kind of travel then. But we went, left my mother in Boston because she was there with her friends and whatnot. And he just—he got a job in two days from somebody who taught at MIT, and we did all right.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—and what were you doing during this time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I looked for a job, but I got the job making jewelry and so I was doing that. And he had a brother who came out the army, Air Force, something, and he encouraged his brother to go to college and helped him, filled out all his papers and everything you get in—and they just left me stranded, you know?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, oh, I'm sorry.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And so you mentioned that you did go to college in LA.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, where did you go?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Huh?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Where?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: At Los Angeles City College.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what did you study?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Art, but the first semester I was there, I didn't get in any art classes because everything was filled up, and I didn't know how to work the system. And like I said, those two men didn't help me, but I got in and then—and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So after the first semester, you started studying art?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what did you—what were some of your classes?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, the main thing was weaving and textile design.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so was that the beginning of your interest in textiles?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Had you done any weaving before?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm? No, when I went to those other places, you know, I just—I mainly took some metals there and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You were mainly, primarily working with metals?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so now, you started working with textiles? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And then all kinds of classes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so were there any particular teachers that were really influential in terms of your interest in weaving, [and] textiles?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, yeah. I had one, she went to Cranbrook, and she was very interested in encouraging me. She had worked for American Crayon Company and so that's why she would push me in that direction. And there were three of us that were good [students-CLE] and interested in fabric: And one was [Gerhardt -CLE] Knodel, and he actually became director of Cranbrook, and he's retired now and another was Mary Shitotomi [ph], and she was Japanese, born in America, but when the war came, she happened to be in Japan, and she got stuck there.

[00:10:14]

And she [Mary Shitotomi -CLE] was older than [Gerhardt -CLE] and me, but we used to—three of us would hang out a bit together. And she went to UCLA and so did [Gerhardt -CLE] eventually. And, uh—but the one Black person that was in class with me was—he's a sculptor in New York. His name is escape—escaping me at the minute— [Melvin Edwards -CLE]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —but—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —that art training was a very good experience for you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, it was, and I—all of my training, you know, even when I was going to Grant Beach and going to other places that had classes, I met people that were influential now in the art field.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, who are some of those?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, I don't know. My one teacher in the art school was—oh, his name is [Webster] Anderson, and my main person in LA was Hudson Roysner, and he was an ecclesiastical artist. He made all the trimmings and stuff for the Catholic churches and, you know, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. So you were there for like two years?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Right, in the art school?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I went to school there, I guess, about four or five years, you know. I was married, and I had my commitment to marriage at that time, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You earned an associate's degree there, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and—and then—so were you also working at the time or primarily a student?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was just a student.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and after you left there, where did you—where did you go?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I went to Africa part time.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what took you to Africa?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: My husband was going back and forth and engaging in business and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So what countries did you live in?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Nigeria and—mainly Nigeria, I've spent some time in Liberia.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what was that experience like? Did it influence you—your art?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I hung out with some artists a bit. My husband was there, and he taught for a while, and Jacob Lawrence and his wife were there, and they were friends and—but like some of the important Nigerian artists especially.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And these were mainly sculptors, the artists—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —Nigerian artists, were they mainly sculptors?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Right, they were everything but mainly teaching. And there, it's just like here, you know, the top artists have to teach to make it.

[00:15:04]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, did you get involved in the music while you were in Nigeria?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, no.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: I understand you were a Fela [Kuti] fan.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, who told you that? [Laughs.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Tell me that experience.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. Well, I went to a lot of shows and things, but my husband [preferred -CLE], he's—he liked music and went to—but it's like going to bars, you know, something [ph], so.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So it's not like going to a—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —concert.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —a concert, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So there are a lot of drinking and dancing?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and we were in the top people, went to presidential parties and things like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. And how long were you in Nigeria?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, off and on for two years—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah, what period—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —or so—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —was that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That was—1965 was when we came back.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, okay and you—you came back to San Francisco?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, yeah but, it was—it was off and on. He was there, I went over.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, as he was working on projects, you would go back and forth?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, and what were you doing in San Francisco once you came back?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I went to school.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, now where'd you go?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I went to California Arts and Crafts.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what was that experience like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That was—it was good in that they had about 20, 25 Black students, and the school is right next to Berkeley, so they were—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Quite an atmosphere.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. They were engaged in all of Berkeley's activities and the [Black - CLE] Panthers and everything, you know, like that, but they had now merged with the art school in San Francisco.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, so what were your art classes that you studied toward?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I studied mostly metal, metal arts. I took the classes I needed to graduate.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what types of metal you were working with?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Everything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: For example?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: For example?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You had silver?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What else?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Wood, all kinds of metal and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Were you doing anything with gold?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, but not much.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what were you—what were you making, what were you making out of metal?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I made little rings like these. [E] shows the rings on her fingers -CLE]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, both of those rings?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, they're very nice.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I liked just lumping it together, metal, in abstract ways but—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now is the—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —the—yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —were you making the ancestral boxes then or was that later?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I made those later on.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Later, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But during that time, yeah, because I've started making those boxes in '68 or '6—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Late '60s?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —7, yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So while you're in school, you were making rings and what other?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And bowls.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Bowls, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: — [cross talk].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like silver bowls?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And okay, were you doing any sculpture?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: A little, I made some sculpture of things even in Boston, but they were just small.

[00:20:00]

I never really—because of the problems with my marriage—hi.

[Side conversation]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Thanks. But I started having problems with my husband not too long after we got married.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: But you did go—you did manage to graduate?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh yeah, yeah, I graduated.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, did you enjoy art school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I loved it. I would stay there, go in the morning and stay until ten o'clock at night.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, were there some classmates that you were close to who either influenced or you influenced them?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: What? I was—what do you say?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No, I was asking you in terms of your classmates, where there some that you really spent time with, hung out with?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh yeah, a little, not too much.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and how about teachers, there were some teachers that you—were—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —influential? No?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Not—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No? okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, well, I joined the Metal Arts Guild of California, which was all your noted metal people, jewelry—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah, I would—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in that side.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —yeah, I would imagine they would not have had a lot of Black artists who were members then? Is that true?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: What did you say?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, when you joined the guild, were there many Black members?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. There was one fellow, the head of jewelry shop in Berkeley, Bob Jefferson, and he made fine jewelry like this, you know, or more like this than just diamonds setting. And he did a lot of work for people around the Bay Area. And there was another man—I can't think of his name right at the moment, but he was—you know Gump's, did you know that store?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh. Well, Gump's was a design outfit, and they had jewelry and all kinds of crafts, so, you know, good quality stuff, and this guy made all kinds of art for them. And they were located in downtown San Francisco right on the square and so those—Bob and him were like the ones really making fine quality.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, and are you still active with the—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —craft? Are you still active with the craft—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —society?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I do a little bit, but no I'm not in that society anymore because they're located mainly in San Francisco and these outlying communities, there's one here, one there, and whatnot. And it's kind of expensive to go to those things because you're expected to exhibit with them every time they have an exhibit, and when you exhibit, you've got to have something pricey.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So let's end this session. And so we, kind of, covered a lot of information about you growing up and moving to different areas and your art training and so we'll end this session here, and we will continue.

[00:25:04]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Okay.

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_1of3\_sd\_track04\_m.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, this is Claude L. Elliott with Evangeline J. Montgomery at the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington in Rockville, Maryland, on June 22, 2021, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, card two—card number two. Good afternoon, E.J.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Good afternoon.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so today what I would like to do is talk about the various places that you've lived and, kind of, describe what opportunities were available to you to make art and supports that were available to African American artists. So you moved to Los Angeles in the '50s, and you were in and out of different art schools taking different courses, and you—now this is what you explained the last time we talked, that you graduated in 1969 from the California College of Arts and Crafts with a [BFA -CLE]. So I'm—so let's talk about after moving to Los Angeles, how you began to meet new people. You moved from Boston and living on the West Coast is very different, so how did you begin to meet people like Ruth Waddy?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, I met Ruth Waddy at a social gathering shortly after I arrived in Los Angeles. And she right away asked me if I'd like to join a women's social club that she was



in, which it happened to be women who worked in the LA County Hospital as social workers in various positions. It was a small group, about 12 women, and one of the things that they were interested in was art. None of them were artists except Ruth.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what kind of art did Ruth make?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was figurative mostly, and it dealt with social themes, you know.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Was she a painter, a printmaker?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: She was more of a printmaker, but she painted also, and she went to art school off and on. And at one time, she even studied with Charles White who's a famous studio artist in LA at the time and Black.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so it was through her that you began to meet the African—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —American community?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I met them, and Noah Purifoy was a neighbor of mine. You know, LA has a lot of little alleyways between housing developments and whatnot. And Noah was just down the alley from me, and I could go knock on his back door and talk to him, so. She introduced me to him, I can't remember, but I think he worked for the hospital too.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What kind of work did Noah Purifoy do?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, he did printmaking and design work and also he made—I'll say it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah go ahead.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he made furniture, beautiful furniture, handmade furniture, and they were single pieces of art. And I was intrigued by those things like record players, things like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and it's at this time that you also began to go to professional art conferences, for example College Art Association?

[00:05:06]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I went to the College Art Association for the first time in 1968, and Ruth and I went to that, and she introduced me to a few pieces—people, but she didn't know the people that I got to know, all of them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Let's say she didn't carry out a relationship with them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and some of these are people you've continued to have a relationship with throughout your career?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And around the same time, you began to go to the National Conference of Artists—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —NCA. What year was that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, that was 1968 also that I went to the National Conference of Artists, the first conference for me.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, was this their first conference or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The National Conference of Artists was a Black artists organization. As you know at that time, Blacks still could not go to the southern colleges, so to speak, and many of them got—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: [Inaudible.] You was—many of them—so they formed their own national support—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: They formed their own—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —group.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —national conference.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and so who were some of the artists that you met there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, Margaret Burroughs—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and who was she?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —was a key person in the organization. She helped start the organization, and as she was from Chicago and taught in the Chicago schools, so. She also served as a past president of NCA. I use the initials because they use them all the time.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah, now wasn't Margaret Burroughs the founder of the DuSable Museum?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, she and her husband were founders of that, and DuSable Museum still exists today.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and who were some of the other artists you met?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, most of your leading artists in Chicago have been a part of it at some time or other. But there are people like Richard Hunt who was the sculptor who's probably made more independent sculptures around the city than anyone. And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, his sculptures are also on the campus of Howard University.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, they're at Howard University and other places now, and his sculptures are usually bronze and sometimes the concrete kind of mixture.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: At that conference, Hoyt Fuller was there. He was a keynote speaker, and Hoyt was editor of *Our World* magazine, a small magazine that was put out by, uh, by Johnson Publications of Chicago. They published *Ebony Magazine* and a few other items like that. And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So how did you move from attending this first NCA conference to becoming a regional coordinator?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well in 1973, I was elected to their board of regents. They had, uh—yes.

[00:10:02]

Well, I was elected to the board as a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Regional coordinator?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Regional coordinator.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and was this a—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And I was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —paid position?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —for the West Coast. It was not a paid position, none of the officers were paid, and, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what was your job? What were you suppose—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —what were you doing?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —part of my job was to organize chapters, and I sort of had a way of getting around the country a lot. So some people were pretty pleased that I had taken on that position, and I had tried to do something where the past membership did very little to increase the membership at that level.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So were you establishing different chapters?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was establishing chapters and the regional or annual conference—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I was responsible for developing that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what were some of the chapters that you helped organize?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, for instance one at University of Wisconsin—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, what—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in New York City, one in New Jersey. I picked the larger cities to try to organize—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —but it didn't always work out, Philadelphia—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —were there chapters in LA and San Francisco or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —there were no chapters really, but the chapters were formed—were called chapters sometimes when it was meeting for its annual convention each year. Like New Orleans say, the New Orleans chapter, it didn't exist, but they brought together many artists and had a nice conference. But then a lot of times, they dropped out right after the conference. It was just too overwhelming for them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, I remember going to the in-state conference in New Orleans and also Detroit. Okay. Now, I'm interested in a lot of your research projects. Can you talk a little bit about grants you've gotten to do the research and how that led to some of your exhibitions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I guess the main one that I got, you know, the first real big grant for me was through the Smithsonian, and it was through the Smithsonian and the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So were you researching specific artists or kind of—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I was researching Sargent Claude Johnson. He was an artist from the Bay Area, and, uh, a lot of public murals and sculptures were available in and around California by Sargent Johnson. And the Oakland Museum was going through a stage where it was picking up many of the artists in Sargent's age group and position who had been in major shows in California. And so I picked Sargent Johnson as my artist to develop a major exhibition around. He never had never had a one-man show and so I took that on, and it became a retrospective.

[00:15:05]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And I understand that exhibition was in 1971?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. Now, did you know him personally?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I met him and hung around him for a little bit. He—there was a Black-owned store, and it was a bookstore, and also connected with it was a print gallery

that printed [radical -CLE] press. They had a press there, and they were developing books for organizations and things like that. And Sargent was there and he had—much of his work at the time was made of—much of his work was in powdered glass, enamel work that they called, and it was enamel on metal, similar to the materials that are used for a car and whatnot.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Anyway, I too had worked in the jewelry industry where I was using enamel on metal and so I talked to him one time in the bookstore, and he said, "Well, I'd like to see some of your work," and, "I've got some work right here," so—[phonetic]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Enamel.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: So Sargent had enamels of his in the window of the bookstore, and I hadn't realized it when I went in but—that day. But anyway, he brought it to my attention, and they were wonderful pieces. They were 16 by 20 size something on that order, and they looked like paintings. So anyway, to make a long story short, Sargent went on to tell me about how his were made and where he had made them and so forth. And I agreed to meet him at the bookstore again, and I did and so I had an ongoing talking relationship with him about enameling and showed him a couple of my things, and that was how it developed with him. But I ended up curating a show for the Oakland Museum called *New Perspectives in Black Art*, and that was made up of members of the NCA chapter in Northern California.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, there's—there's several other exhibitions that I would like to—for you to talk about because this period, the '60s and the '70s was a time where there were very few opportunities for African American artists to exhibit.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Sure.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And so—and there was very little written about these artists. So another one is one that you were involved with called *19 California Black Craftsmen*. You know, who was that for and how did that come about?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, the *19 California Black Craftsmen* was organized for Mills College, which is located in Oakland. And it had an ongoing exhibition program, and also, it had connected with its gallery the, uh—it has—the organization of—

[00:20:22]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: That Mills College—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, connected with Mills College Art Department or gallery is the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Wait, wait.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Connected with Mills College is also the Western Association of Art Museums organization. And that organization was administered by the head of the art department from Mills College. And when she heard what I was interested in doing, it was at the same time that the students at Mills College were demanding some attention, and they wanted a show in their gallery that represented Blacks in some way—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Make sense, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and so. And which this was several of the colleges in the community were demanding that. And the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So this was the same time that—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —that I was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —students—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —doing the show of Sargent Johnson at the same time. And so they got in touch with—the students got in touch with the head of the organization of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, this would be at the same time that on college campuses,

students were protesting for Black [studies -CLE] programs and Black history programs?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, well another important exhibition that you were involved in the 1970s is *Dimensions in Black*. Now who was that for and how did that come about?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That was in San Diego, the University [of CA-] down in San Diego again demanding some attention to Black art and history. And they got in touch with the department head there in San Diego, the students—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and so—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —she [Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk -CLE] developed a fantastic program for her students, which was where they had private study and went around even to Europe to—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So the exhibition traveled?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —exhibit. No, the exhibition didn't travel to Europe, but it was—she involved collectors, big collectors of African art and then the African American artists from here in the United States, involved them in getting them to loan their works to the—to the museum in La Jolla, which was right near San Diego.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and was Ruth [Waddy -CLE] —was Samella Lewis involved in this —

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, Samella was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —project as well—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —called yeah, as a consultant, and I was called in also.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and you knew Samella?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I knew Samella—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and I knew the director of the museum.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. Now, how did you meet Samella?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I met Samella through Waddy also. They were friends, and Samella lived in Los Angeles and had opened a small gallery.

[00:25:07]

But—and but her first person that she exhibited was, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, it said here—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The—one of the first people that she exhibited was Betye Saar who had begun to develop quite a reputation and exhibiting her work in and around Los Angeles.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, you want to talk little bit about what you did with the Rainbow Sign and what it was?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, well at the same time that I was working with the Oakland Museum and other places, I ended up working with a place called the Rainbow Sign in Berkeley, which was owned by several Black women, and it was a former funeral parlor. It owned three properties in the area that it was located in Berkeley, and what they developed was a cultural center for Black people. Anybody could join, it was open membership and rather expensive I think when it first opened, but it went down in rates eventually when—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You said it was very expensive?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, it was \$300 I think when it first opened and—and then it went down.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And they did primary art exhibitions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, it was open to anybody.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, but I mean people would come there for—to see art exhibitions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, to see art exhibitions, performing arts exhibitions, and programs, and they had a restaurant, so, a first-class restaurant.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what were some of the exhibitions you curated for them?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I curated an exhibition a month, and believe me that was a hard job—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And were there—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —for—for free, I was a volunteer.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And were these primary local artists?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they were—I started out with Howard Smith who was located in Finland, but he was American-born and American educated, and he was from Philadelphia originally. And then—let's see—there were, oh, all types of people like Howard, which I met. Howard was teaching temporarily at, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Wait, wait, wait. Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Howard was a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —visiting.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —visiting professor at one of the local colleges, state colleges in the area, and he was a designer and well known in Finland. And it was really strange, my phone rang on Sunday morning about nine o'clock, and I had met Howard a few weeks before at an exhibit opening, and he said, "This is Howard Smith," and with a strong British accent and whatnot and so I said, "Yes?" And so he said, "Well, I would like to visit you, you said I would be invited." So I said, "Well yeah, we can arrange that," he said, "Well, I'm down here on the corner [They laugh.] on the telephone." And it was right, I could see it, the phone booth from my apartment.

[00:30:07]

So I said, "All right." So he came over, stayed the full day and whatnot. He was so interested, and I told him about Samella, and he said, "Yes, I've heard her name, and I would like to visit her." So I said, "Well, please make an appointment, don't wait until you get there and think you're invited." But anyway, he and Samella became great friends, and she was teaching at Scripps College at the time in San Diego—down in the San Diego area and so she invited him to come down there, and he did some teaching and even took one of their empty houses—

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_2of3\_sd\_track05\_m.]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —moved in for a while, and the students could come in and watch him work, which was wonderful, and stop and talk to him about things. And of course, he had been all over Europe and whatnot and so that developed Howard. But in the meanwhile, I was able to make contact with that program that he was in, and they were—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: The program in Finland?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In LA.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, in LA.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But just the various programs that the College Art Association people who were visiting professors and whatnot went to. So I got to know a lot of those people because I followed Howard [Smith -CLE] around and Samella [Lewis -CLE] and other people,

but I wasn't a college student at the time. I was—I had graduated from the BFA [California College of the Arts -CLE] and whatnot. But in the meanwhile, I [inaudible].

And meanwhile, I added still another organization to my list that I have been working with, which was the Rainbow Sign. And it—Rainbow Sign had a gallery, which we worked, the gallery set up—out at the dining room, the room that was the dining room there. And we made some unique setup for hanging art in the dining room, and it was for sale, most of the art was for sale, and it worked. People would come in and buy art from us, and we let the artists make the money. There was no money set up or a percentage to go to the Rainbow Sign.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So no commission.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, no commission, no, so that was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, well, let's talk a little bit about the Ark Urban Systems. You had worked there, and what were some of the things you were doing?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, Ark Urban Systems was something that my husband developed, and it had to do with providing housing, reasonable housing for people in the community. And all of the shows and things that I was involved in no matter what organization they were from, they were free to the public to come and view them. And there again if anything was sold, it went all to the artists, and I was not paid for my services. But I organized shows, themed shows, and they were very successful. But we didn't get very much newspaper coverage because it was a private club and things like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But the community was very pleased, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. I understand that you were a commissioner for the city of San Francisco Art Commission and that you were the chair of the art committee.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What are some of things that you accomplished that you were really proud of?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, we purchased so many thousands of dollars, I can't recall—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So the—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —the amount right now.

[00:05:03]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So San Francisco had an art collection, they bought work from local artists?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. Sargent had, for instance, a mural set up at one of the high schools, and it ran the whole retainer wall of the high school. The mural was made out of San Francisco—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like granite?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, something like that, and it ran the full length of the football field.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Hmm, and this was a commission?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, it was a commission. He did some work in hospitals, he was in a major show that was on the island down at the waterfront. And he just—he did a commission of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Ready?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The Art Commission of San Francisco had many active programs. In fact, I think they had the biggest and best program all around the country, it was so active with a variety of things. And one of areas was they developed crafts projects, and some of them employed professional artists to lead the programs in the centers that they created and to also take part, not just leading or teaching the program—in the programs, but they—they took the programs themselves. They studied it, and it provided instruments and tools and things for them to use to do this. Sargent Johnson was able to get commissions that way, which I don't think he ever would've anywhere else.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And the artists also taught classes—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —and—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I've met many artists since then who said, "I studied with Sargent Johnson" and I—when I was researching him, I couldn't find these kind of answers.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. So what we've been talking about is your very active life as a curator, art historian, arts administrator while you were on the West Coast. Before we move to DC, is there anything else you want to talk about in terms of what you did on the West Coast? For example, did you have any exhibitions while you were on the West Coast? For example with the—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, for one thing, I was also involved in the organization called the Metal Arts Guild of California, and in the Metal Arts Guild, I became president after a while. I didn't stay in that position very long because I moved, but—I moved out of town. But I—while I was in it, I was also exhibiting my work on regular—in regular shows that we had.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what kind of work was that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Bowls, things—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: These were metal—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —jewelry—

[00:10:00]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, made out of—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —metal.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —yeah, silver?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Silver, gold. It was a first-class organization, and people who owned shops and things like that were in it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So you moved to Washington, DC, around the early 1980s, and what brought you to DC?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I was looking for work, and someone told me about John Kinard who was director at the Anacostia Museum, which is part of the Smithsonian chain. It was a Black museum set up to display Black art [and -CLE] history. And so I heard about the position, and I called John and said I'd like to apply for it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Position where?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: At the Anacostia Museum. And it was something to do with organization of exhibits and projects there and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: From there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I got a job at Howard University and working in their new—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You got it?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. I applied for a job at Howard, which was working at their new



television station.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what were you doing?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was community affairs director. They called it something else, but that's what it was. And that meant that I was checking on things that were going on in the community and planning ideas of future projects that could be done and that lasted for a year.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and then what was your next job?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The next job was—was senior—no, no. The next job was cultural programs in the state department, the division that handles education. And I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I was working where I would be planning exhibits and lectures so people to go out all over the world to share America's culture and experiences.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and about how many exhibitions did you do?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I worked on about 50 exhibitions in all—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and those exhibitions—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in 25 years.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, wow, and those exhibitions were to what countries?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, Venezuela, France, I—my major region of the world was Europe and East Asia, so I was doing Russia, Japan, Indonesia, South America—South Africa rather, and many other places.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and are there some exhibition—I'm sure there are lots, but what were some of the exhibitions you were really most proud of?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, *Crafts Today* was one, which was in Europe, and it played in something like 14 countries.

[00:15:03]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, *Crafts*?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, *Crafts Today*—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The finest crafts of America. And Sam Gilliam—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And where did he have his exhibitions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —he was an independent artist.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And who is Sam Gilliam?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: There were four exhibit venues that he was in.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Where were they, where were they?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In south—no, they were—

[Tape stops, restarts.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Ready?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. Sam Gilliam is a painter, and he did what is known as—

[Tape stops, restarts]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Sam was involved in draping the canvases, and he was painting on the floor, he was painting anyway he could to make it exciting for the audience and a new experience and, uh, which he was at the stage of kind of new experience for him. He was not only a printmaker but a painter, and as a printmaker, he went to the biggest print houses in the United States and worked for instance, in—yeah, he painted all over, but one of the most exciting projects that I saw was that he was—he—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Was it an installation?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: What was it?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: A German cathedral, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It wasn't that, yeah. Sam Gilliam went to Germany of course, and he was—he draped the interior of the building monastery, I'm sorry.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —of this monastery in Nuremberg that's—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, uh—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And—and in this, it took him two weeks in this trip in Germany, and he visited with many artists and medical people in Germany. And he draped this building with cloth—not cloth but materials that were painted in abstract paint throughout.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now, did you go with—did you go over with him?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I went over there, and I got to see the whole operation. And he worked with several German—older German women who helped him cut the drapery and materials and mount—mounted them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It sounds very exciting.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It was, it was. And then he was, well, invited by the people that owned the building and whatnot to a organ recital...

[00:20:00]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, in the building?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In the building.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, good.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And it was the most fabulous experience that an artist could have I think to have a major organist perform for them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh great. One other thing I wanted to talk about is your travels in the '60s to Nigeria and Liberia and how that experience affected you on a personal level and also your artistic leanings?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I went over with my husband who was doing some work in Nigeria, and at that time, I had a chance to travel around and visit some of the major artists in Nigeria. I went to Oshogbo. That was one of my major spots that I went to because I had heard of Twin Seven Seven, and Twin Seven Seven lived there and—with his wives. He had seven wives, and I got to visit with some of them and some came to the United States at one time and visited with me.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now, he was a painter?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He was a painter, he was.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And did his work influence your work?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Did his work—did his paintings influence your—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: My work?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yes.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes and no. I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In what way?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I didn't paint like he did or consider myself in any way—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What did his work looked like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it's—it was figurative but not—but more abstract, not as the figure as we know it, and—uh. But I did look at some of the historical sculptures that were around, and I made one picture—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: A painting?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, yes, it was a painting, mixed media, and I used some of the shapes and format that he or some of his people used in the war.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And were these geometric shapes or—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —kind of African iconography?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: African. They—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: [inaudible], okay?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Wait, wait, you—okay now.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: They were [inaudible] that are covered with cowrie shells or various fabrics and things—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —to—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: This is the end of tape two.

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_2of3\_sd\_track06\_m.]

[Discussion about equipment -Ed.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. Ready? Okay. So this is Claude Elliott with Evangeline J. Montgomery known as E.J. at the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington in Rockville, Maryland —on December 7, 2021. This is an oral history for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number three. Good afternoon, E.J.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Good afternoon, Claude.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: E.J., we've had two conversations; however due to the pandemic it has been difficult for us to schedule this third interview until today. You mentioned earlier that as a California College of Arts student, you designed your own studio program with a concentration in textile design, metalwork, and photography in addition to studio classes in drawing, painting, and printmaking. In our prior conversations, we discussed aspects of your 50-year career as an artist, art historian, curator, and arts administrator. So today, we want to reflect on you as an artist, and we want to talk about your aesthetics, your inspiration,

themes, influences, and anything else that you want to talk about. So I want to begin within the 1960s and [19]70s, you designed and screen-printed on fabric and made ancestral boxes. I would like for you to describe the source for inspiration and the process for creating the ancestral boxes.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, the inspiration really came from Africa. I observed works of art that were metal mostly, in their museums and private collections and was inspired by those shapes and the marks within those shapes. And those things were—many of them were ancestral pieces that were acquired for various reasons within a family or an altar setup. And they were—there were also a lot of funerary pieces and, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You want to talk about how they were made?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Go ahead. So how were they made?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: They were made from metal and clay and solid pieces of wax, the same wax that may be used for—for your teeth, making teeth, things of that nature.

[00:05:09]

I use that wax because it comes in layers, quarter inch, eighth of an inch or as thick as two inches. You could get any thickness, you could get it in shapes of round shapes, square shapes, you name it, and it would be easy to work with, yeah, already cast in size and thickness that you want and then you could cut it very easily with your little X-Acto knives and points.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And how was it cast, how'd you cast it?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I cast it by placing mine in some type of casting material like Plaster of Paris. I placed my wax molds in that and then it's—well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and you mentioned that sometimes you did—you inlaid precious stones.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, precious stones and inlay of various materials that could withstand the high heat used for casting. These were placed in molds and furnaces and they were—oh.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, I know that you lived in Nigeria and Liberia in the '60s, and I was curious in what ways did African cultural traditions and identity influence your [aesthetics - CLE] in the creation of the ancestral boxes?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, as I say, I saw them in people's homes and places, and I would ask about them. Or I went to a wedding, had a little box and that little something was passed from one person to the person getting married, and it was given as a gift and so it—and also, in the homes of some of the cultures, they had something placed in their doorway, which was some type of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Had an ancestral connection?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, used in ancestral beliefs that it would bring—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —the spirit's good luck.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah. What was the—when you created these boxes, what were the intentional use?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: For Americans?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. The intentional use for Americans, or non-Africans especially, was to bring good luck and good understanding.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. You had mentioned that your mother often used Chinese incense burners, um—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: My mother had an incense burner, and the incense burners, you found them often in many people's homes and in different cultures. And I hadn't noticed them before. I decided to accept that expression that I was going to use for my work. And I wanted—I wanted them to be connected with people's culture in some way.

[00:10:05]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. E.J., you lived in San Francisco and Oakland during the Black Panther, Black Power, the anti-Vietnam War, and the women's movement.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And I found it interesting this period is reflected in titles of some of your ancestral boxes. For example, there's one called *Justice for Angela*, and it had the Ashanti symbol for justice on it, and there was another one called *Red, Black, and Green*, also known as the *Marcus Garvey Box* and that has—it was cast in sterling silver with inlays with colors of the Jamaican flag and so I saw that kind of cultural connection that you were trying to make. I was curious, did you participate in FESTAC either in 1966 or—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes I did.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —1977? The one in 1966?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You want to talk a little about the significance?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, not the one in 1966.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: One in—you were too young?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. [They laugh.] I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: The one in 19—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I wasn't too young there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, one in 1977.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was just leaving Africa.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I went over there but didn't see the festival because I—it was just finished.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and it was in Dakar in '66, so it was in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1977, and you did participate in that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You want to talk about a little bit about that experience?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was a fabulous experience. I don't think that you'll ever see another one in life like that. I become emotional just talking about it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, I understand, I understand. I understand that, um, just the number of African countries that participated in it and African American artists who came and perhaps for the first time made a cultural connection with the motherland. And there were over 16,000 participants, represented about 56 African nations, so it was very emotional experience. Did that influence your work?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, not really because—well, in that, maybe I took on more African subjects or attempted to find out more information about them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, okay, okay. One of the things I wanted to ask you about is your first exhibition that you organized in 1970 called *19 California Black Craftsmen*. Tell me how that exhibition came about and why it was so important.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, that exhibition was held at Mills College, which is in East Bay or in Oakland. And it was—it happened, took place because Mills College students wanted to have a festival of some type on their campus. They wanted to be a part of something like that. And it was going around to a number of campuses that they would try to have some type of African connection on their campus. And Mills College student body decided to protest if they didn't get it so that's what made it a bigger demonstration than they had planned on.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], but it's interesting that you focused on crafts.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I focused on crafts because crafts was an art form, a major art form for Black people I felt, more so.

[00:15:00]

They made quilts and they made things like that at home craft. So that it not only took in the artist that was working at home and just designing things for themselves and their family, didn't even call themselves artists. But they were able to make things inexpensively and all kinds of things. And then they realized that they could also—they had learned to do these things through their mother and grandmother and whatnot.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Passing on that tradition.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and I'm sure that many, this was their first time ever exhibiting their work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Right, right, and so—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So, are you the person who went out and, kind of, collected the objects?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, somebody else—someone else did that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, many people collected pieces.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay. So you went to the collectors?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I went to the collectors. They didn't even think that they were doing anything of any importance in some cases. I went to speak to a women's group one night in Oakland, and I looked in their faces, and I said, they don't know what they got or what they're doing, how important it is. That's what I—was flashing through my mind as I stood there looking at them. And I said to them, "Take down those Renoir dance photographs and of dancers in [inaudible]." And you know, like some [inaudible], I knew I wasn't [inaudible], but they had received them mainly when they bought their furniture.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: If they bought furniture from a furniture company—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Back in—yeah, back in those days, you got—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —they would've given you a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —you got some poster or prints.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and they would sell them, so—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So they had no idea of the value of some of the things they had collected through their families?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, but I know that was a very important exhibition especially in the 1970s, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, there was this exhibition that was created by UCLA's Art Department. And the head of the art department, I think he was, and he collected from museums around California and galleries. And he just—they had no connection really, so whether they were symbols of African or African American stuff, just stuff that was made by Blacks, and that was shown in Oakland.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and you said at Mills College?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes—no, that—not at—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —that was a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —we're talking about two different exhibitions or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, okay. But your exhibition was shown at Mills College, correct?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, that was an earlier—I'll go over that one. But that exhibit that I—that I was a part of was later, it was the second year.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In 1970s.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That first year that UCLA created the exhibit—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, I see.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and it went to four sites in California.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, all right.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And I didn't have anything to do with that. But the director of the Oakland Museum got in touch with me, and he said could I plan an exhibit for Mills College, in other words, those kids who were getting out of hand, and they had to have one right away and so—

[00:20:10]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Because they were really putting on the pressure to have more of a Black cultural presence at the college?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. So they did take on a first-rate show. They didn't object to any pieces that I asked to be in the show and nor did they—with costs.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Great, okay, okay. Now, you emerged on the art scene at the height—the heightened period of Black consciousness in literature, the visual arts, and performing arts, yet your work has remained abstract, primarily a non-objective imagery. Who were some of the interesting—who were some of the artists that you found interesting during this period of time that really influenced your abstract vision?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, Sam Gilliam was a Black artist, Richard Hunt was another Black artist, Arthur Monroe. These were artists that were in the Bay Area that I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And also—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I associated with.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Arthur Carraway.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So these were artists that you knew personally?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I knew personally, hung out with them to some respect, went to them to talk about art.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], okay. So these were artists you were—yet you—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Artists of some note.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And would bounce off ideas and talk about aesthetics, et cetera? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And they also created some art similar to things that I wanted to do.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, great. Okay, let's talk about your creative process and artistic vision. I'm interested in your exploration of color, geometric shapes, and nature, and you know, especially since you worked in a wide range of media. And I want to reference a quote for an exhibition catalogue *Rivers and Memories: The Art of E.J. Montgomery and Lillian Thomas Burwell* at the Brentwood Arts Exchange in 2012. I quote, this is your statement, "I use non-representative—non-representational imagery, spontaneity, and improvisation to convey the idea of memory reflecting on the passage of time and memory along the California coastline." And I want to talk about a couple paintings that illustrate this point. In the exhibition catalogue, you stated, "My paintings are instantaneous responses to color and environment describing nature in its brilliant shapes." And, uh, so I wanted to find out what is the inspiration for *Dialogue with Nature*, the painting *Dialogue with Nature*?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_3of3\_sd\_track10\_m.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, we were talking, um—we were talking about *Dialogue with Nature* and how you texture your paintings.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, in that, I love texture, I don't like the plain, smooth surface, and I see it in everything. You know, like this spread, and I don't try to copy it, but I—I just apply it to my surface. Uh, does that makes sense?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It makes sense, yes, yes. So another painting, um, again, you were talking about, you know, the fact that you were an abstract painter, but it's not void of personal, cultural references, and historical events. So another painting that's very textured is your—your *Homage to Garvey*. This was painted in 2010. Can you talk about—a little bit about the use of colors and how you build texture?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I just move the color around. I don't let it stay in one place—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. Well, it's very impasto, and it just seems to—the paint just seems to relax in that really lush, black surface. And what are the little gold circles?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: At the bottom?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, at the bottom.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Just a means of holding it together, not—it doesn't mean anything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah. Well, it's a very beautiful gold, and it's only used in that area of the painting.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I need [inaudible].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So let's continue to talk about the importance of, um—how color is an important element of your art, and, uh—read that right there.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In selecting colors for paintings, I prepare for [inaudible].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, I thought it was interesting that when we were talking about color that you go back to textile, and you have all this yarn, and that you have to then go through



your—the yarn in terms of all the brilliant colors. And that you really like to have variation of colors and how you—how that really influenced your paintings and how you tried to create colors that are kind of vibrant like that, uh—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Like the cloth—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yes, yes.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —yarns.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So you see that, the relationship between the textile and the painting, the African designs and the brilliant use of colors. So I wanted to talk about a little bit about your prints. For the past two decades, you have continued to push your work by exploring a variety of printmaking techniques such as offset lithography, screen printing, etching, and digital printmaking. So you printed at Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia, at the Michael Platt Studio in DC, and Lily Press in Rockville, Maryland. And I want to talk about a little about the different artistic explorations you pursued working with master printers. So between 1996 and 2010, you printed at Brandywine Workshop.

[00:05:07]

How did you meet Allan Edmunds?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Uh, I just went to Brandywine to look at it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So you had heard—you've heard of the workshop?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I've heard of it, and he was inviting artists.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and you were living in DC at the time, correct?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. He was inviting artists to come there and print. He said to pay to use the press or inviting and then they would make a print, and it was such that you could make any number of prints that you wanted to make in that one [image -CLE]. And he was encouraging you should do a hundred prints and giving you the paper and so forth and that he was getting funding from—city and state funding.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So he had money to invite artists there to make prints?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, and to encourage the community to be able to buy a print reasonably.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, one way of making art affordable to—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, to the public.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —to the community was through limited edition prints that would, um—okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And an artist could experiment. He can make a hundred copies [of] something and not feel he was going in the hole and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: The artist was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —it would take him 10 years to sell them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Or get your money back. So you printed there several times, okay, and what were you trying—what were you exploring?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Were you using different approaches or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I knew how to print, I had—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You guys take printmaking—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —printing—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —in—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Some of the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —art school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. And so I was ready to go there and work, and I gave myself a birthday present of going up there and working, and it was quite an expensive birthday present to—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How long did you stay the first time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: How long?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: A week.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so that's what made it—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That's what—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —expensive.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —he encouraged a week, and he paid for—he paid for some of the expenses in the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: A lot of the materials?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: All of the materials and meals while you were there, going out for sandwiches, stuff like that. Not expensive but—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm, right.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —right—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And this was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he took—the more he got to know you, the more he would take and spend on you, so to speak.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, now was this pretty—was this early at the very beginning when Brandywine was established or was this a little later?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: This was all later—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —it was going on.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So the artist residency part started late—a little later?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. No, it was there the artist residence.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, did he have a gallery then?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, it was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: The gallery was open as well?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —it was three buildings.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, three buildings.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, that he had in his—it had been—a few years later, it had been a jazz club, jazz musicians, it had been established for them, an area. And they had a regular club where they would go and rehearse and that kind of thing.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And perform?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And perform but not a great performance, but they did quite a bit, and those musicians made good.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. I'd like to talk to you about a couple prints that you did at Brandywine.

[00:10:06]

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_3of3\_sd\_track11\_m.]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: A little fine line.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So, yeah because—so let's talk about *Autumn Breeze*, how was that created?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Pink, yellow came into it, green, and those were—major colors came in and you lay them on in thickness and size of the brush.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So this an offset litho, and you began drawing on the Mylar with black ink and oil-based pencils and then that Mylar is burnt on to an aluminum plate. And then you were talking about the different colors that are applied and are passed through the press one color at a time, so you're building on those colors. And there's a separate stencil for each of those colors that you mentioned, pink, blue, and yellow.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And so the color is very layered, and that was printed as a horizontal.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So then when we move to—if we start looking at, uh, so, *Sanctuary* is the same concept using—but it's a vertical format.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, that's to apply more color—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Additional colors.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in one area, in a vertical, and that balanced it out and became heavier as a vertical.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yes. And for me, the textural surface is reflective of your interest in African textiles. Okay. Is there anything else you want to mention in terms of your experience of working at Brandywine?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How many times did you go there? I know it's more than—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, I went there many number of times.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, over the years?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But I worked two weeks really the first time. I worked my week that was given me as an artist, you know, the reaction.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And then you stayed another week?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I stayed another week because the guy that was to come in there on Sunday didn't come and so I just kept on—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Working?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —printing around, working. Allan [Edmunds -CLE] didn't say anything, I wasn't sleeping in his quarters, I was sleeping in a hotel, and he just never said anything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, great, great, great.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And—and Fred [ph] or whatever his name was— [Bob Franklin -CLE]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now were there other artists working at the same time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, there was a printer.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, oh no, but I'm—I was curious if there were other artists who might've been—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they didn't—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —there the same time. So you see—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they didn't come there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —you see only one artist at a time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And in fact, most of the time, it was only one artist at a time and, oh—but I have—people would drop by.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, people were curious and wanted to see the artist at work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, and they were curious about me because they hadn't—didn't know me.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: They didn't know you, okay, okay. Now is that because you weren't a Philadelphia artist, you were a DC artist?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. No, just another artist.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. All right, let's explore how digital printmaking presented another aesthetic to explore memory.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, I'm sorry, was there something else you wanted to say about *Sanctuary*?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. That digital work was just coming out anyway and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So you were—you began working with Michael Platt in 2009.

[00:05:07]

And I would like to discuss the role photography in your prints—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —because you've had a large collection of photographs. So let's talk a little bit about that because, uh—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I had always felt that I was creating photography to do something else with it, but I didn't know what it was going to turn out to be, and I didn't see it as my major area of work. I didn't see it as, oh gee, I'm a photographer and let me show that. The first photography that I showed as an exhibit was of the riot scenes in Washington, which was just a little bit. I've showed them to this guy who was up at Arts and Crafts teaching. And I don't even know why I even showed them to him except that he was a photographer. Maybe I had them with me for some other reason, so.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, these were—these—this—the subject, the rebellion was where? Was it in San Francisco?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The subject was the riot going on in [Washington, DC -CLE].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh yeah, riots were going on everywhere, yeah, I'm from Detroit, so.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And it was still going on, and I was in the car with [Lois Mailou -CLE] Jones, and she was driving me from Howard [University -CLE] down to her house. And we were looking at the scenes, and there was like an area at 10th and K or something like that in there—right in there. A policeman was starting the traffic to go one way and the other and so I just casually got the back of him and—where he was directing traffic. And then I, just that one day, snapped some pictures from the car, and [Lois -CLE] was frightened that I did that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh. Do you recall what—where this exhibition was or what gallery it was?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. The exhibition—he was having a—putting together a show at Arts and Crafts. And so he said, "I'd like you to put those pictures in the show."

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Great.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: So at that point, I claimed myself a photographer.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, [laughs] okay, okay. I think maybe one good example in terms of how you use photography for your work might be *Sur at Dawn*. And why don't you talk a little bit about the digital process for creating that with—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —with Michael Platt?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I made photography—photograph one on top of the other, you know. And I didn't even think about whether that was an acceptable process or what, you know, but I was experimenting with it for myself and didn't know what actually to be looking for because I didn't develop these. I had them developed by a regular house that does that kind of work. But I didn't even think in terms of what I could get out of it, till after I saw, you know, and I said, "Oh, that's nice, that's a painting."

[00:10:11]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, it does look like a painting, it does look like a painting.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And so I did—now, they're all gone. They—I didn't have sense enough to take them out of that whole thing that—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_3of3\_sd\_track12\_m.]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I think Doris Washington, you know, she's not an artist and she—she was interested in buying the sets. In other words, like if—if a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You mean like a series?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, if I printed a series of this and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And she would be interested in the series?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and it really would be nothing but a bunch of lines or something, you know, be uninterested—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, what is—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —to other people to look at but then she might take it and sit and look at it every night, you know?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Like—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And really study it—yeah, really study it because your work is so layered that there's—you know, you got to go below the surface.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. But I think it's interesting when you look at *Sur at Dawn* that this was an image that you took in 1969. The photograph or the photographs were taken in 1969, and you held on to those until you started working with Michael Platt, and you produced this image that is made up of many different images, uh, over 40 years later. And that, you know, you really get the sense of these earth tones, you get a sense of a very particular palette. You get this sense of this texture, this hardened sand, hardened seaweed. You get the sense of a fisherman's net and texture of the beach or rock formation. And, you know, working with Michael, you know, embracing new technology, it appears that you were exploring different processes of ways of thinking and printing that it really just, kind of, opened up your, kind of, vision in terms of possibilities. So what was it like working with Michael?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Weird because Michael—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, with Michael Platt, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Michael would be cooking meat on the stove and looking at the football game.

[Side conversation.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Go ahead. Michael would be cooking?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He'd be doing two to three different things, and he wouldn't be printing these at that moment because he was printing down in the basement and working upstairs and—but he—it's like he kind of—he had a feeling. He knew what you were looking for.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Even if you didn't know what you were looking for, he knew what you were looking for?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. And would you have a series of photos laid out? How did that work?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Not with him. I maybe laid them out a couple of times at home before I went there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and you would bring in exactly what you wanted to work with or —

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —or that would change?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That would change. I'd bring them with me or leave them up there with him.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. So the color might change, the scale will change.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And Fred his printer, he was wondering all along what the hell I was doing and what was Michael doing, and he wasn't getting nothing done. [They laugh.] And it's that I had mixed some color and Michael had mixed some color, and they were laying on the side. Nobody knew which was going to go first.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So what did—usually the way you worked, did you make—did you do several visits with Michael before the actual print was finished?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And were there a lot of variations that you worked on and worked

through?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Or everything pretty much laid in the computer until at the very end where you got it the way you wanted it to look?

[00:05:16]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. I would say—let's see—that was like that and then—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. This is called *Celebration III*.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And then—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah. This was another one I think that you printed with Michael.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: This one is *Green Echoes*.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. What's his name? Michael? Not Michael, Richard Mayhew picked—he and his wife picked separately some prints and they—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: They both selected that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Go like this, in this order.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay, did they say why?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. He just picked and there were—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Do you think—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —borders—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —that—does that remind you of Richard Mayhew's paintings?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, yes and no, his paintings blend, the colors blended. They don't sit up like—this is orange and this is yellow.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, okay. These colors blend more; they don't stand out as a kind of isolated color.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. I would've made a great teacher with these samples.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It's not too late.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, it's not.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and what makes you—what makes you say that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Because I was experimenting all the time.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. Oh, so you would encourage students to really explore?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, go out and explore. I mean I had—my first painting teacher, he—he told us to go out and make some copies of some marks of the, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —the buildings?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, the cement, cement mark.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Now, kids would go behind the fresh cement and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and go tell your friends, "Hey, there's cement down, such and such and such street." You go down there and take your little—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So he was telling you to draw on wet cement?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, not on wet cement. It would have to be kind of dried.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, right, okay, right, right, right, right, right, right.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But, you know, we would get that done, and it may take that same thing and layer on another set of lines, and before you know it, you got a painting.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, all right. Okay, now you—anything else you want to talk about in term of working with Michael?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, Michael—Michael didn't necessarily, didn't take this piece and say, "Now, let's do so and so." No, it wasn't something like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: He would ask you questions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. He just, "You want, you want that on this, fine?"

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So he kind of had a vision on what you might want, and he was checking in to make sure that's what you were thinking?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And what's her name, Susan. Susan [Goldman] would say, "Oh, this is great, oh, look at that." You know, we'd look at them together.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Well, okay, well, let's talk about Susan. So you made prints with Susan Goldman at Lily Press in Rockville, Maryland, I believe, beginning in 2010.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Some—some time —

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_3of3\_sd\_track13\_m.]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Now what—you were going to ask me about Susan?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yes. Okay, so, E.J., we're talking about you experience working with Susan Goldman at Lily Press, and were going to talk about the first plate that you did, which is called *Percussion*, okay. So how was that plate created?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was a separate plate, and I just picked up a [scrub -CLE] brush and swooshed it over the plate.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So it's an engraved plate, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, I'm sorry, it's an etched plate.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Etched?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It's an etched plate.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Etched plate. It just had a little, light etching across the plate.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so give it a little texture.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And then you just put in acid and just a light, uh, formation of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It gives you a little texture.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —of texture and then just stop the etching there and go ahead and print it and then you see what you've got.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. So for example, what colors were in the first plate? This is the first one.



E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, pink.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and there's a little blue.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then just go back in and put another color and another texture, and it begins to erase out that first texture that you had there, you know. In other words, the *Percussion*, whatever it is. You can just erase that out, and you put something else in, and it eats up because you put some more block—[blocking liquid asphaltum -CLE] to block out the color, see.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. Yeah. And so then you take the same plate, and you were able to create, uh—I think the next one was *Letters to Mom*, yeah?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So it's the same plate as *Percussion*, but so what's—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Right.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —what's the different approach?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And you just put more color.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, but this is a rainbow roll, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, this is a rainbow roll versus—okay, a rainbow roll but different colors. And what else is different about that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, you got this—this uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It's kind of a very—a gradation and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —marks.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —marks, okay, you had different kinds of marks, okay. This is also where you're beginning to create your own unique language.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And, um, that reminds me of calligraphy. What was your—so can you talk about—a little bit about your interest in calligraphy?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was Skunder Boghossian, the Ethiopian.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Skunder?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. Who was doing his own Ethiopian language. He was making marks with that and etching them and whatnot. And I looked over and saw what he was doing, and I just took it and [smears -CLE] a couple of lines around with my brush and color. And also, um, what's his name the guy from Kenya?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Artist from Kenya?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: He was doing the same kind—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —of mark making?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He wasn't. He was—had marked, but he was carving in wood.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, you talking about Victor?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Victor.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Victor Ekpuk.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And I bought his first piece, but I let it go [inaudible], unfortunately.

[00:05:02]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Right, yeah. Well, I see your calligraphy kind of like a written language that just seems to communicate your feelings, a sense of recall, a sense of memory.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that's what I was talking about.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and many of these marks or symbols are created through the use of stencils, correct?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. And they're very—if we look at a variety of prints, they're very different in terms of the kinds of symbols you use and the kinds of stencils you use. So would you—are there some things you like to say in terms of your interest in printmaking and what the experience of working with different print workshops, how that has either inspired your work or allowed you to work in different ways?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It allowed me to work in different ways, and one thing people don't know about me, when I started printmaking, it was Tamarind Printmaking [Tamarind Lithography workshop -CLE] was in—uh, up on the hill here in San—in—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, in San Francisco, or was it Los Angeles?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It was Los Angeles.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Tamarind, okay, okay. Because I think they eventually moved to Albuquerque I think.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, oh, it was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Had you been there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Had you gone to Tamarind?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I went down there when they first got going [in Los Angeles -CLE], and I mean those old ladies were down there fiddling around, and I fiddled with them, you know, I mean—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: These old ladies were visitors you're talking about?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they are big name artists. no.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, these were artists, these were?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh okay, okay, June Wayne.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And they were down there working.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, so you—so the fact that they were printing and creating work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And I was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So you—did you go down there to print?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, but I didn't have the money and the time. My husband didn't drive me when I wanted to go, when I was ready to go, you know. Nobody understood what my needs were, and they were more than I expected them to really stay with me on it. And I was like doing this printmaking and enameling on metal at the same time and trying to learn

to shape the metal. So all of that was going on in one day.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay. So you were constantly working with different materials throughout your career?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So I wanted to ask, what advice would you offer to young artists?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What advice would you offer—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —to young artists.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —to young artists? What would you tell them just based on your experiences?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I'd tell them to get in to as many things as they can.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In terms of the art?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, and that they should make up their mind what it is they want to do, what area of the art do they want to settle in. Do they want to be—draw and sell drawings, or do they want to print and make productions?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Limited edition, signed prints.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, stuff like that. And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Do you think you need to really experiment with a lot of mediums to really find out what your passion is?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, they need to do that at the beginning, take an all-around general course that opens their eyes to a lot of different techniques and materials and things like that and then—[phone rings]

[00:10:15]

[Side conversation.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: That's Pam [ph].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: They need—that's what I feel they should do. Now, I think that Stephany's [Neal] granddaughter has done some of that, and she has settled on film.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, now she's—is she a student at Duke Ellington [School of the Arts -CLE]?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. She's in her—she's got another year.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, what's her name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, [Ryan Camille Turner -CLE].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: [Ryan -CLE]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And—but she's moved along pretty fast. She's opened her eyes any time somebody said, "You can make a film or we're going to shoot a film, do you want to see it?" She's there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: She's there to work on it?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, she's volunteered a lot, you know.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Great, great.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And got her mind set on what she wants to do.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So your suggestion is to really explore all the different mediums, to immerse yourself in as many techniques as you can so that you can be really well rounded, and you can—you could have control of technique?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So in closing—first of all, is there anything else we haven't talked about that you would like to mention? If not, I wanted to ask, so what have you been—how have you kept yourself engaged since you retired from the state department, and—you've continued to exhibit, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, you've had the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities fellowship.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You participated in the Art Cart, which is at the Research Center for Arts and Culture. Your personal papers are at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. And I want you to mention your scholarship, the E.J. Montgomery Scholarship.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I've offered scholarships to young people. Really, I'd hope that more of them would attach themselves to me to open their eyes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —as a mentor?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and this scholarship is through the Carl T. Rowan Chapter of Blacks in Government.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in Government, Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So I had hoped that by now that that group would be more sup—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —portive—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —so more supportive of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Of the scholarship?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, they—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But they aren't.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —they should've graduated by now and beginning to establish a career and give back to the community.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. I mean it's—they've done a lot, it's a lot of money in it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, I know it's been over \$40,000 that has been given out in scholarship money over the years.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But they didn't do as much as they could've and should've.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah, it seems always to be the case, yeah. Well, E.J., this concludes our conversation. I wanted to mention that the Printmaking Legacy Project has a video entitled *Portfolios: Evangeline J. Montgomery*, and it can be seen online at printmaking

—at [www.printmakinglegacyproject.org](http://www.printmakinglegacyproject.org).

[00:15:17]

E.J., it's been my honor to be able to spend some time with you talking about your very exciting career and your contributions to the community. And I want to thank you for all that you've done and for all the joy that your work has brought into our lives, so—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Thank you.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —Thank you, E.J.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Thank you, Claude, and I feel the same way about you.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Thank you.

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_3of3\_sd\_track14\_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Smithsonian

## ***Archives of American Art***

**Interview with E.J. (Evangeline Juliet) Montgomery**

**Conducted by Claude L. Elliott**

**June 15-December 7, 2021**

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The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with E.J. (Evangeline Juliet) Montgomery on June 15-December 7, 2021. The interview took place in Rockville, Maryland, and was conducted by Claude L. Elliott for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

E.J. Montgomery and Claude L. Elliott 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.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. This is Claude L. Elliott with Evangeline J. Montgomery at the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington in Rockville, Maryland, on June 15, 2021, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, card number one. Good afternoon, E.J.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hello.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Let's begin with some biographical information, so tell me about your early life, you know, where you—when and where you were born, and something about your family.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was born in New York City, and I'm an adopted child. Now, I was adopted shortly after birth in New York, Roosevelt Hospital.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, Roosevelt Hospital.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And, uh, my mother—oh I think—do you mind shutting me off.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what were your adoptive parents' names?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Carmelite Thompson and Oliver Paul Thompson.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He was a Baptist minister.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what did your mother do?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, she was basically a housekeeper, and they had several children that they had adopted or reared—and in that Paul Thompson was in New York, a pastor, he had a church, when he met Carmelite.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what were your—what were the names of the other adopted children?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, there was two men who became actors, and they acted in the early plays that Blacks were in on Broadway.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so they were—they were a lot older than you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, they were older enough to be my parents, you know, and they would have married. They each married twice and had one boy and one girl each one of them. Their names were Warren Coleman and the other brother was Ralph Coleman. And they were like in the WPA project and things like that. But they were tops in their acting, and they're not really written up in a lot of things except where somebody specializes in Black actors. Warren made some movies too, he was in—on the play circuit. He was—um, I want to get rid of this business, so.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so you were pretty much an only child then in the house?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What was that like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: There was another young woman and then the Thompsons brought in two girls that were in high school, finishing high school.

[00:05:15]

Those girls were—I forget what you call, but they were foster children.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, foster children, okay. But you were adopted, and the other two girls—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was adopted—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —were foster—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —children? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Probably around three years old.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so were they younger than you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they were older—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —older, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —much older.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. So what was it like growing up in New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, it was lots of fun. I—I moved to New York from Rhode Island, and I had lived in Boston, Massachusetts.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so let's go back when you were adopted, you moved to New York? Okay. [E] was born & lived in NY as a child. -CLE]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, right.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and then—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I lived in Rhode Island. Just as I told you that I just lived in a whole lot of places—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —lot of places, okay, well let's talk a little bit about Rhode Island, where did you move to? So from New York, you moved to Rhode Island?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and, uh, why—why did the family move to Rhode Island?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, because the minister got churches. He belonged to the City Missions Society or something like that, it was called, and he moved from place to place, kind of developing the church, getting it on its feet, and then he'd moved to another church. And he did that, you know, for a number of years.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so what was it like living in Rhode Island to—where you in school at that—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —at that time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I started school in Rhode Island in [Pawtucket -CLE] Westerly, Rhode Island, and Reverend Thompson was—his name was on the cornerstone of the Black church right there at Olney Street, and, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now, do you know if that was Olney Street Baptist Church?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, and we found a cornerstone and everything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and how long did—were you—how long did you live in Rhode Island?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Probably until I was seven. I went to elementary school—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Uh-huh mm-hmm [affirmative], and what was the name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —there. I don't know.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You don't remember? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I'd—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —it's something that I could find out real—over a period of time.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So, uh, from Rhode Island, you moved where?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: From Rhode Island? My mother and he divorced by the time I was nine, so. And, uh, we moved—my mother and I moved to New York then, and it was—we were—I was nine, so.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, what part of New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: New York City. My mother had a daughter [Dorothy -CLE] who was older. She—the daughter was right along with Ralph and Warren [Coleman], and she—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So where you—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: She—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Go ahead.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: She [Dorothy -CLE] lived in New York in Harlem, and we lived on St. Nicholas Terrace, and I went to [junior high -CLE] school at PS 43, which is on Amsterdam and 125th or—no, above 125th, about five blocks above.

[00:10:10]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So New York is very different than Boston and Rhode Island, so what you think of—what was that like for you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, [Harlem -CLE] was all Black—[In Rhode Island -CLE] there's a little, little pocket, right, and the only time you saw some Blacks was going to church on Sunday, something like that. There were no Black kids in the school system, I was the only one in the whole school system, and there were two little boys that came to church that were around my age, and I saw them, right.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And was New York different?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Was New York different?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In what way?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: New York was all Black, I was living in Harlem, and it was quite a trip.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so you were about what age in New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I was 10 and on, and, uh, the school system was—it was mostly all-white teachers. I only had one Black teacher, and he taught French. And as I look back now, I'd say he probably came from a Haitian family background. And the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So how is your French?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How is your French?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It was good for a while.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. Now did you study—were there any art classes in your school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I went to—in the junior high school that I was in, my art teacher was a Jewish lady, middle aged, and, uh, she liked me and encouraged me in my art and always



gave me little projects, painting bottles and stuff like that. And she also—there was the art school, high school of art in New York, and I was encouraged to go to that school, but I didn't go because my mother didn't quite understand a school that had all art primarily, and she said, no, I should go to the regular school, but the school I went to had quite a bit of art anyway.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. What was the name of the high school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Seward Park High School, and it was downtown in Bowery. The old Jewish section was on one side, Chinatown was on another and then the main—main, uh, section that we functioned in was the all-Jewish section that had, oh, [inaudible] [Orthodox - CLE], and like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now what kind of—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —commercial.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, what kind of art classes did you take in high school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, there was a lot of technical stuff on—it was during the time that the Second World War just ended, and my school had special courses for those veterans.

[00:15:09]

And they had kind of courses like today.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like design classes?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And a lot was offered to those men, and they were right along in the class with us, which as I look back now, I don't think it was a good idea.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Why? Why didn't you think it was a good idea?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, for instance, the girls were caught up with those men, things like that. Now, I was very athletic and so I was in a roller-skating group and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, this is in New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, and in Seward Park High School after I got into high school. And I was in the swimming club and basketball.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so there was a swimming pool in your school or in the neighborhood?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In your school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and the pool, a nice swimming pool, it wasn't an Olympic size one because—but some of the schools had Olympic-size swimming set up.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. So your mother wanted you to major in something else other than art? What—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —what was her dream for you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, she didn't quite understand. Her daughter [Dorothy -CLE] did art. She went to Bennett College, and she did hand painting on silk cloth. That's all I can really remember about her and her art.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah, what was—what was her name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Dorothy.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And the last name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, she got married—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so she—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —for a while and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So she was married at—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —she was married not too long. And—well my mother's maiden name was Lee, L-E-E, and she was born in Washington, DC, and her family was large but not real large. They never discussed it with me, but I guess that it was around four to five or so people, the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And after your parents divorced, did you have a relationship with your father, your foster—your adoptive father?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so it was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —never.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —you were basically raised by your mother?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, everything centered around my mother.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what was that relationship like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Very good, she was very religious and so my early years, a lot was spent in the church and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what religion was that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was Baptist. When I was in New York, I was a member of Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, which Mt. Olivet was quite large the—[knocking on door] Yes?

[Side conversation.]

[Tape stops, restarts.]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: [Wooster, Wooster, -CLE], let's see, that was in between.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How old were you in Cleveland?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In [New York -CLE], I was in junior high, I was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what were the schools like there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What were the schools like in Cleveland?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In Cleveland, it was nice, mostly all Black, the one I went to.

[00:20:03]

I lived on Quincy and East 79th and then I moved down East 79th a couple of blocks or so, and I was living in another minister's home, which was friends of the Thompsons.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and were you—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —studying in art in school at that time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, that was younger, you know?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was—really I went from [Pawtucket -CLE] Westerly to [Wooster -CLE]. That's what happened.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and so after New York—in New York, you were in high school, so what happened—what happened after you graduated from high school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: This went dark.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, well, that's—it's off, it's off.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. Yeah, so after graduating from high school, where did you work?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I worked in a doll company.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In New York?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In New York. I worked—I was doing hand painting of doll faces on all kinds of materials and things.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like for example?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Cotton cloth, I—most of that work went to the Ideal Doll Company.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and how did you get that job?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Just went to unemployment, and they gave you tests and whatnot, you know, like your first job out of high school. And they determine that you are artistic, so let's try to see if we can find something in the art business, and they just sent me there, and I sat down and started working and it was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How long were you—how long did you work there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, about a year or a little over.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and how much were you making an hour?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I was making about 30—about \$30 a week.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Thirty? Okay, okay—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Something like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And that was full time, that was a full-time job?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, that was full time, and I worked with two old, white ladies and a Black fellow who had worked in Hollywood, he said, and he was an artist. And the owner of the company, well, she was a widower and then there were two men that they pressed the shapes, yeah, and do—did all kinds of hard jobs like that. And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I was—and I turned out to be pretty good. The work was piecework.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, you got paid by the number of faces you could paint?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, that's true.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah, and so after working there, what was your next job?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: After working in there, I moved to Boston.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, that's when you moved to Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. So, yeah—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I finished high school, and I didn't have money to go to college although I got a small, you know—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like a scholarship or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Actually, yeah, like a scholarship, but it was too small to do anything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It wasn't enough? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. Now what took you to—what reason did you go to Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, that's where the Colemans lived. Warren [Coleman] lived in New York, and in fact, he lived for a while at this Theresa Hotel but—

[00:25:16]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In Harlem?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and he was married to his second wife, and I told you he had two kids. Now, we don't know really what his kids ended up doing, but Ralph [Coleman] had five kids, and, uh, they were gifted and as, you know, were interested in the theater. And Richie, his son did quite a bit in training theater people. [Leona -CLE], his daughter, she danced and she went to art school too.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Do you know what kind of dance, was it ballet, modern?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: All of that. She danced with Elma Lewis and other thing—other groups, and whatnot, and she took [modern -CLE] dancing. And I used to dream about this what I want to be—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: To be?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —but of course, my mother was so religious that I had to stay away from her. And I was just thinking recently that I didn't know anything about the modern music that was being played, you know, like Sam Cook and people like that that were coming along because I had to go to church and do other things.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so once you moved to Boston, what was your life like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I had a full life, very nice [life -CLE]. Now because the southern colleges couldn't admit the Black students, not many of them, and so the few that were brought up into the northeast and, uh—better—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —got scholarships and things. They were the—and, you know, all the medical students were at the medical schools in and around Boston. And Martin Luther King and his crowd, they were at [Boston University School of Theology -CLE] because the ones that were going into ministry or what not, that's where they were mostly. And then the ones that were—had the highest scholar level were, you know, at Harvard and those schools.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so what were you doing in Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Running around with them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, in terms of work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Huh?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In terms of work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Work, I went to work in—in the industry where they were making

plaster, religious statuary and that's what I got into, and most of it was run by Jewish and Italians, and there was me, the only Black and whatnot.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And these were like the statutes, the religious statues in churches?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, all types, but I didn't do many of the great, big, bigger than life sized.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, now, were these done by hand or machine?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: By hand, they were hand cast and they—there was about 30 or so in the factory, it was like a factory and—

[00:30:08]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Is that where your interests in ceramics developed?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, yes, all of that, but I also worked in a jewelry company—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —in [Los Angeles -CLE]?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in [LA -CLE]. When I got to [LA -CLE] and went out to look for a job, I was in a beauty parlor, and this Black fellow came in there, and he knew the beauticians and they talked and whatnot. And he ended up saying he was looking for somebody to come work with him, and he had a whole studio set up in his home, anyway I said I was interested.

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E.J. MONTGOMERY: And I had gone to several places not in jewelry but, you know, where they were making other things in an artistic nature.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and what was his name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: His name was Thomas Usher, and he came out of Cleveland.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what kind of jewelry did he make?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He made fine jewelry, yeah—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like out of silver and gold?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, gold and diamonds and, you know, things like this that I made. He took me in and started to train me, but he worked in a big jewelry factory line, and they were making all kinds of jewelry. And there's a section big as this room making certain kind of diamonds or stuff like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And so I was fortunate to see all that being done, but I didn't work on that. I worked on enamel, that was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like enamel rings and necklaces?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. And a whole line of jewelry and the line of jewelry was called Cellini [ph]. And I worked until Christmastime then they, of course, they do the layoff, they did. So I didn't get laid off, but I was encouraged to do some samples, things like that for them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And then I—you know, I worked in the jewelry business, and I kept going to school for that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In Boston.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and what was the name of the school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Grant Beach Arts and Crafts, and it was Peter Voulkos used to be there making pots, big pots and whatnot. So I had the experience of meeting a few artists in the people that I studied under. I studied under—what was the girl's name—I can't think of any—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It was someone at the school, you're talking about you [studied -CLE] under?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And I'd go on Saturdays and Sundays if I felt like—yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, now were you also making your own jewelry and doing enameling?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I would make something.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So was this at beginning of that interest?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, but I started school, college, and I went to Los Angeles City College.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, so from Boston, you moved to California, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, that was a little later.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so why California?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: My husband, I was married.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so you got married in Boston?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I married in Boston—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and your husband's—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in '52.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Your husband's name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Ulysses Montgomery.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so you—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he was going to MIT.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay. So after he graduated, you moved to LA?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I got married, and we moved to LA after a while, we didn't—not right away. But we moved to LA, and he was in that crowd of guys that I was talking about that had been in the service and whatnot, and I met him.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so he had gotten his—he had—he left the military and with his GI Bill, he went to MIT? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well he was from New York, he went to New York for a while and then he went to MIT and he finished there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he's—he has a license to be a structural engineer, that's why he carries that kind of—

[00:05:07]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So did his job take you to LA?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Did his job take you to LA? Is that why you moved to LA?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, he went to LA. He read about Williams, the Black's architect, Paul R. Williams, and he went not even knowing Williams or anything. He just said, "We're going to LA." He got sick with pneumonia and was in the hospital, and he read about LA while he was in the hospital, and I said okay because people didn't believe in that kind of travel then. But we went, left my mother in Boston because she was there with her friends and whatnot. And he just—he got a job in two days from somebody who taught at MIT, and we did all right.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—and what were you doing during this time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I looked for a job, but I got the job making jewelry and so I was doing that. And he had a brother who came out the army, Air Force, something, and he encouraged his brother to go to college and helped him, filled out all his papers and everything you get in—and they just left me stranded, you know?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, oh, I'm sorry.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And so you mentioned that you did go to college in LA.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, where did you go?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Huh?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Where?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: At Los Angeles City College.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what did you study?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Art, but the first semester I was there, I didn't get in any art classes because everything was filled up, and I didn't know how to work the system. And like I said, those two men didn't help me, but I got in and then—and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So after the first semester, you started studying art?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what did you—what were some of your classes?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, the main thing was weaving and textile design.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so was that the beginning of your interest in textiles?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Had you done any weaving before?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm? No, when I went to those other places, you know, I just—I mainly took some metals there and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You were mainly, primarily working with metals?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so now, you started working with textiles? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And then all kinds of classes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so were there any particular teachers that were really influential in terms of your interest in weaving, [and] textiles?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, yeah. I had one, she went to Cranbrook, and she was very interested in encouraging me. She had worked for American Crayon Company and so that's

why she would push me in that direction. And there were three of us that were good [students-CLE] and interested in fabric: And one was [Gerhardt -CLE] Knodel, and he actually became director of Cranbrook, and he's retired now and another was Mary Shitotomi [ph], and she was Japanese, born in America, but when the war came, she happened to be in Japan, and she got stuck there.

[00:10:14]

And she [Mary Shitotomi -CLE] was older than [Gerhardt -CLE] and me, but we used to—three of us would hang out a bit together. And she went to UCLA and so did [Gerhardt -CLE] eventually. And, uh—but the one Black person that was in class with me was—he's a sculptor in New York. His name is escape—escaping me at the minute— [Melvin Edwards -CLE]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —but—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —that art training was a very good experience for you?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, it was, and I—all of my training, you know, even when I was going to Grant Beach and going to other places that had classes, I met people that were influential now in the art field.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, who are some of those?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, I don't know. My one teacher in the art school was—oh, his name is [Webster] Anderson, and my main person in LA was Hudson Roysner, and he was an ecclesiastical artist. He made all the trimmings and stuff for the Catholic churches and, you know, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. So you were there for like two years?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Right, in the art school?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I went to school there, I guess, about four or five years, you know. I was married, and I had my commitment to marriage at that time, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You earned an associate's degree there, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and—and then—so were you also working at the time or primarily a student?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was just a student.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and after you left there, where did you—where did you go?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I went to Africa part time.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what took you to Africa?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: My husband was going back and forth and engaging in business and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So what countries did you live in?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Nigeria and—mainly Nigeria, I've spent some time in Liberia.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what was that experience like? Did it influence you—your art?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I hung out with some artists a bit. My husband was there, and he taught for a while, and Jacob Lawrence and his wife were there, and they were friends and—but like some of the important Nigerian artists especially.



CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And these were mainly sculptors, the artists—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —Nigerian artists, were they mainly sculptors?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Right, they were everything but mainly teaching. And there, it's just like here, you know, the top artists have to teach to make it.

[00:15:04]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, did you get involved in the music while you were in Nigeria?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, no.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: I understand you were a Fela [Kuti] fan.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, who told you that? [Laughs.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Tell me that experience.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. Well, I went to a lot of shows and things, but my husband [preferred -CLE], he's—he liked music and went to—but it's like going to bars, you know, something [ph], so.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So it's not like going to a—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —concert.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —a concert, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So there are a lot of drinking and dancing?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and we were in the top people, went to presidential parties and things like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. And how long were you in Nigeria?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, off and on for two years—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah, what period—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —or so—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —was that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That was—1965 was when we came back.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, okay and you—you came back to San Francisco?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, yeah but, it was—it was off and on. He was there, I went over.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, as he was working on projects, you would go back and forth?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, and what were you doing in San Francisco once you came back?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I went to school.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, now where'd you go?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I went to California Arts and Crafts.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what was that experience like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That was—it was good in that they had about 20, 25 Black students, and the school is right next to Berkeley, so they were—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Quite an atmosphere.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. They were engaged in all of Berkeley's activities and the [Black - CLE] Panthers and everything, you know, like that, but they had now merged with the art school in San Francisco.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, so what were your art classes that you studied toward?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I studied mostly metal, metal arts. I took the classes I needed to graduate.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what types of metal you were working with?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Everything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: For example?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: For example?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You had silver?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What else?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Wood, all kinds of metal and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Were you doing anything with gold?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, but not much.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what were you—what were you making, what were you making out of metal?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I made little rings like these. [E] shows the rings on her fingers -CLE]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, both of those rings?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, they're very nice.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I liked just lumping it together, metal, in abstract ways but—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now is the—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —the—yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —were you making the ancestral boxes then or was that later?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I made those later on.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Later, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But during that time, yeah, because I've started making those boxes in '68 or '6—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Late '60s?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —7, yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So while you're in school, you were making rings and what other?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And bowls.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Bowls, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: — [cross talk].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like silver bowls?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And okay, were you doing any sculpture?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: A little, I made some sculpture of things even in Boston, but they were just small.

[00:20:00]

I never really—because of the problems with my marriage—hi.

[Side conversation]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Thanks. But I started having problems with my husband not too long after we got married.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: But you did go—you did manage to graduate?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh yeah, yeah, I graduated.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, did you enjoy art school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, I loved it. I would stay there, go in the morning and stay until ten o'clock at night.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, were there some classmates that you were close to who either influenced or you influenced them?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: What? I was—what do you say?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No, I was asking you in terms of your classmates, where there some that you really spent time with, hung out with?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh yeah, a little, not too much.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and how about teachers, there were some teachers that you—were—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —influential? No?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Not—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No? okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, well, I joined the Metal Arts Guild of California, which was all your noted metal people, jewelry—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah, I would—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in that side.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —yeah, I would imagine they would not have had a lot of Black artists who were members then? Is that true?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: What did you say?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, when you joined the guild, were there many Black members?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. There was one fellow, the head of jewelry shop in Berkeley, Bob

Jefferson, and he made fine jewelry like this, you know, or more like this than just diamonds setting. And he did a lot of work for people around the Bay Area. And there was another man—I can't think of his name right at the moment, but he was—you know Gump's, did you know that store?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh. Well, Gump's was a design outfit, and they had jewelry and all kinds of crafts, so, you know, good quality stuff, and this guy made all kinds of art for them. And they were located in downtown San Francisco right on the square and so those—Bob and him were like the ones really making fine quality.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, and are you still active with the—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —craft? Are you still active with the craft—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —society?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I do a little bit, but no I'm not in that society anymore because they're located mainly in San Francisco and these outlying communities, there's one here, one there, and whatnot. And it's kind of expensive to go to those things because you're expected to exhibit with them every time they have an exhibit, and when you exhibit, you've got to have something pricey.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So let's end this session. And so we, kind of, covered a lot of information about you growing up and moving to different areas and your art training and so we'll end this session here, and we will continue.

[00:25:04]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Okay.

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CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, this is Claude L. Elliott with Evangeline J. Montgomery at the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington in Rockville, Maryland, on June 22, 2021, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, card two—card number two. Good afternoon, E.J.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Good afternoon.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so today what I would like to do is talk about the various places that you've lived and, kind of, describe what opportunities were available to you to make art and supports that were available to African American artists. So you moved to Los Angeles in the '50s, and you were in and out of different art schools taking different courses, and you—now this is what you explained the last time we talked, that you graduated in 1969 from the California College of Arts and Crafts with a [BFA -CLE]. So I'm—so let's talk about after moving to Los Angeles, how you began to meet new people. You moved from Boston and living on the West Coast is very different, so how did you begin to meet people like Ruth Waddy?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, I met Ruth Waddy at a social gathering shortly after I arrived in Los Angeles. And she right away asked me if I'd like to join a women's social club that she was in, which it happened to be women who worked in the LA County Hospital as social workers in various positions. It was a small group, about 12 women, and one of the things that they were interested in was art. None of them were artists except Ruth.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what kind of art did Ruth make?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was figurative mostly, and it dealt with social themes, you know.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Was she a painter, a printmaker?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: She was more of a printmaker, but she painted also, and she went to art school off and on. And at one time, she even studied with Charles White who's a famous studio artist in LA at the time and Black.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so it was through her that you began to meet the African—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —American community?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I met them, and Noah Purifoy was a neighbor of mine. You know, LA has a lot of little alleyways between housing developments and whatnot. And Noah was just down the alley from me, and I could go knock on his back door and talk to him, so. She introduced me to him, I can't remember, but I think he worked for the hospital too.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What kind of work did Noah Purifoy do?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, he did printmaking and design work and also he made—I'll say it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah go ahead.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he made furniture, beautiful furniture, handmade furniture, and they were single pieces of art. And I was intrigued by those things like record players, things like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and it's at this time that you also began to go to professional art conferences, for example College Art Association?

[00:05:06]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I went to the College Art Association for the first time in 1968, and Ruth and I went to that, and she introduced me to a few pieces—people, but she didn't know the people that I got to know, all of them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Let's say she didn't carry out a relationship with them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and some of these are people you've continued to have a relationship with throughout your career?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And around the same time, you began to go to the National Conference of Artists—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —NCA. What year was that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, that was 1968 also that I went to the National Conference of Artists, the first conference for me.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, was this their first conference or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The National Conference of Artists was a Black artists organization. As you know at that time, Blacks still could not go to the southern colleges, so to speak, and many of them got—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: [Inaudible.] You was—many of them—so they formed their own national support—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: They formed their own—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —group.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —national conference.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and so who were some of the artists that you met there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, Margaret Burroughs—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and who was she?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —was a key person in the organization. She helped start the organization, and as she was from Chicago and taught in the Chicago schools, so. She also served as a past president of NCA. I use the initials because they use them all the time.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah, now wasn't Margaret Burroughs the founder of the DuSable Museum?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, she and her husband were founders of that, and DuSable Museum still exists today.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and who were some of the other artists you met?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, most of your leading artists in Chicago have been a part of it at some time or other. But there are people like Richard Hunt who was the sculptor who's probably made more independent sculptures around the city than anyone. And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, his sculptures are also on the campus of Howard University.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, they're at Howard University and other places now, and his sculptures are usually bronze and sometimes the concrete kind of mixture.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: At that conference, Hoyt Fuller was there. He was a keynote speaker, and Hoyt was editor of *Our World* magazine, a small magazine that was put out by, uh, by Johnson Publications of Chicago. They published *Ebony Magazine* and a few other items like that. And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So how did you move from attending this first NCA conference to becoming a regional coordinator?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well in 1973, I was elected to their board of regents. They had, uh—yes.

[00:10:02]

Well, I was elected to the board as a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Regional coordinator?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Regional coordinator.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and was this a—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And I was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —paid position?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —for the West Coast. It was not a paid position, none of the officers were paid, and, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what was your job? What were you suppose—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —what were you doing?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —part of my job was to organize chapters, and I sort of had a way of getting around the country a lot. So some people were pretty pleased that I had taken on that position, and I had tried to do something where the past membership did very little to increase the membership at that level.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So were you establishing different chapters?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was establishing chapters and the regional or annual conference—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I was responsible for developing that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what were some of the chapters that you helped organize?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, for instance one at University of Wisconsin—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, what—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in New York City, one in New Jersey. I picked the larger cities to try to organize—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —but it didn't always work out, Philadelphia—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —were there chapters in LA and San Francisco or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —there were no chapters really, but the chapters were formed—were called chapters sometimes when it was meeting for its annual convention each year. Like New Orleans say, the New Orleans chapter, it didn't exist, but they brought together many artists and had a nice conference. But then a lot of times, they dropped out right after the conference. It was just too overwhelming for them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, I remember going to the in-state conference in New Orleans and also Detroit. Okay. Now, I'm interested in a lot of your research projects. Can you talk a little bit about grants you've gotten to do the research and how that led to some of your exhibitions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I guess the main one that I got, you know, the first real big grant for me was through the Smithsonian, and it was through the Smithsonian and the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So were you researching specific artists or kind of—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I was researching Sargent Claude Johnson. He was an artist from the Bay Area, and, uh, a lot of public murals and sculptures were available in and around California by Sargent Johnson. And the Oakland Museum was going through a stage where it was picking up many of the artists in Sargent's age group and position who had been in major shows in California. And so I picked Sargent Johnson as my artist to develop a major exhibition around. He never had never had a one-man show and so I took that on, and it became a retrospective.

[00:15:05]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And I understand that exhibition was in 1971?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. Now, did you know him personally?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I met him and hung around him for a little bit. He—there was a Black-owned store, and it was a bookstore, and also connected with it was a print gallery that printed [radical -CLE] press. They had a press there, and they were developing books for organizations and things like that. And Sargent was there and he had—much of his work at the time was made of—much of his work was in powdered glass, enamel work that they called, and it was enamel on metal, similar to the materials that are used for a car and whatnot.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Anyway, I too had worked in the jewelry industry where I was using

enamel on metal and so I talked to him one time in the bookstore, and he said, "Well, I'd like to see some of your work," and, "I've got some work right here," so—[phonetic]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Enamel.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: So Sargent had enamels of his in the window of the bookstore, and I hadn't realized it when I went in but—that day. But anyway, he brought it to my attention, and they were wonderful pieces. They were 16 by 20 size something on that order, and they looked like paintings. So anyway, to make a long story short, Sargent went on to tell me about how his were made and where he had made them and so forth. And I agreed to meet him at the bookstore again, and I did and so I had an ongoing talking relationship with him about enameling and showed him a couple of my things, and that was how it developed with him. But I ended up curating a show for the Oakland Museum called *New Perspectives in Black Art*, and that was made up of members of the NCA chapter in Northern California.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, there's—there's several other exhibitions that I would like to—for you to talk about because this period, the '60s and the '70s was a time where there were very few opportunities for African American artists to exhibit.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Sure.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And so—and there was very little written about these artists. So another one is one that you were involved with called *19 California Black Craftsmen*. You know, who was that for and how did that come about?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, the *19 California Black Craftsmen* was organized for Mills College, which is located in Oakland. And it had an ongoing exhibition program, and also, it had connected with its gallery the, uh—it has—the organization of—

[00:20:22]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: That Mills College—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, connected with Mills College Art Department or gallery is the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Wait, wait.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Connected with Mills College is also the Western Association of Art Museums organization. And that organization was administered by the head of the art department from Mills College. And when she heard what I was interested in doing, it was at the same time that the students at Mills College were demanding some attention, and they wanted a show in their gallery that represented Blacks in some way—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Make sense, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and so. And which this was several of the colleges in the community were demanding that. And the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So this was the same time that—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —that I was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —students—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —doing the show of Sargent Johnson at the same time. And so they got in touch with—the students got in touch with the head of the organization of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, this would be at the same time that on college campuses, students were protesting for Black [studies -CLE] programs and Black history programs?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, well another important exhibition that you were involved in the 1970s is *Dimensions in Black*. Now who was that for and how did that come about?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That was in San Diego, the University [of CA-] down in San Diego again demanding some attention to Black art and history. And they got in touch with the



department head there in San Diego, the students—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and so—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —she [Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk -CLE] developed a fantastic program for her students, which was where they had private study and went around even to Europe to—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So the exhibition traveled?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —exhibit. No, the exhibition didn't travel to Europe, but it was—she involved collectors, big collectors of African art and then the African American artists from here in the United States, involved them in getting them to loan their works to the—to the museum in La Jolla, which was right near San Diego.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and was Ruth [Waddy -CLE] —was Samella Lewis involved in this —

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, Samella was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —project as well—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —called yeah, as a consultant, and I was called in also.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and you knew Samella?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I knew Samella—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and I knew the director of the museum.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. Now, how did you meet Samella?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I met Samella through Waddy also. They were friends, and Samella lived in Los Angeles and had opened a small gallery.

[00:25:07]

But—and but her first person that she exhibited was, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, it said here—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The—one of the first people that she exhibited was Betye Saar who had begun to develop quite a reputation and exhibiting her work in and around Los Angeles.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, you want to talk little bit about what you did with the Rainbow Sign and what it was?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, well at the same time that I was working with the Oakland Museum and other places, I ended up working with a place called the Rainbow Sign in Berkeley, which was owned by several Black women, and it was a former funeral parlor. It owned three properties in the area that it was located in Berkeley, and what they developed was a cultural center for Black people. Anybody could join, it was open membership and rather expensive I think when it first opened, but it went down in rates eventually when—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You said it was very expensive?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, it was \$300 I think when it first opened and—and then it went down.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And they did primary art exhibitions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, it was open to anybody.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, but I mean people would come there for—to see art exhibitions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, to see art exhibitions, performing arts exhibitions, and programs, and they had a restaurant, so, a first-class restaurant.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what were some of the exhibitions you curated for them?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I curated an exhibition a month, and believe me that was a hard job—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And were there—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —for—for free, I was a volunteer.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And were these primary local artists?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they were—I started out with Howard Smith who was located in Finland, but he was American-born and American educated, and he was from Philadelphia originally. And then—let's see—there were, oh, all types of people like Howard, which I met. Howard was teaching temporarily at, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Wait, wait, wait. Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Howard was a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —visiting.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —visiting professor at one of the local colleges, state colleges in the area, and he was a designer and well known in Finland. And it was really strange, my phone rang on Sunday morning about nine o'clock, and I had met Howard a few weeks before at an exhibit opening, and he said, "This is Howard Smith," and with a strong British accent and whatnot and so I said, "Yes?" And so he said, "Well, I would like to visit you, you said I would be invited." So I said, "Well yeah, we can arrange that," he said, "Well, I'm down here on the corner [They laugh.] on the telephone." And it was right, I could see it, the phone booth from my apartment.

[00:30:07]

So I said, "All right." So he came over, stayed the full day and whatnot. He was so interested, and I told him about Samella, and he said, "Yes, I've heard her name, and I would like to visit her." So I said, "Well, please make an appointment, don't wait until you get there and think you're invited." But anyway, he and Samella became great friends, and she was teaching at Scripps College at the time in San Diego—down in the San Diego area and so she invited him to come down there, and he did some teaching and even took one of their empty houses—

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_2of3\_sd\_track05\_m.]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —moved in for a while, and the students could come in and watch him work, which was wonderful, and stop and talk to him about things. And of course, he had been all over Europe and whatnot and so that developed Howard. But in the meanwhile, I was able to make contact with that program that he was in, and they were—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: The program in Finland?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In LA.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, in LA.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But just the various programs that the College Art Association people who were visiting professors and whatnot went to. So I got to know a lot of those people because I followed Howard [Smith -CLE] around and Samella [Lewis -CLE] and other people, but I wasn't a college student at the time. I was—I had graduated from the BFA [California College of the Arts -CLE] and whatnot. But in the meanwhile, I [inaudible].

And meanwhile, I added still another organization to my list that I have been working with, which was the Rainbow Sign. And it—Rainbow Sign had a gallery, which we worked, the gallery set up—out at the dining room, the room that was the dining room there. And we made some unique setup for hanging art in the dining room, and it was for sale, most of the art was for sale, and it worked. People would come in and buy art from us, and we let the artists make the money. There was no money set up or a percentage to go to the Rainbow

Sign.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So no commission.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, no commission, no, so that was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, well, let's talk a little bit about the Ark Urban Systems. You had worked there, and what were some of the things you were doing?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, Ark Urban Systems was something that my husband developed, and it had to do with providing housing, reasonable housing for people in the community. And all of the shows and things that I was involved in no matter what organization they were from, they were free to the public to come and view them. And there again if anything was sold, it went all to the artists, and I was not paid for my services. But I organized shows, themed shows, and they were very successful. But we didn't get very much newspaper coverage because it was a private club and things like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But the community was very pleased, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. I understand that you were a commissioner for the city of San Francisco Art Commission and that you were the chair of the art committee.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What are some of things that you accomplished that you were really proud of?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, we purchased so many thousands of dollars, I can't recall—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So the—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —the amount right now.

[00:05:03]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So San Francisco had an art collection, they bought work from local artists?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. Sargent had, for instance, a mural set up at one of the high schools, and it ran the whole retainer wall of the high school. The mural was made out of San Francisco—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Like granite?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, something like that, and it ran the full length of the football field.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Hmm, and this was a commission?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, it was a commission. He did some work in hospitals, he was in a major show that was on the island down at the waterfront. And he just—he did a commission of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Ready?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The Art Commission of San Francisco had many active programs. In fact, I think they had the biggest and best program all around the country, it was so active with a variety of things. And one of areas was they developed crafts projects, and some of them employed professional artists to lead the programs in the centers that they created and to also take part, not just leading or teaching the program—in the programs, but they—they took the programs themselves. They studied it, and it provided instruments and tools and things for them to use to do this. Sargent Johnson was able to get commissions that way, which I don't think he ever would've anyplace else.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And the artists also taught classes—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —and—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I've met many artists since then who said, "I studied with Sargent Johnson" and I—when I was researching him, I couldn't find these kind of answers.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. So what we've been talking about is your very active life as a curator, art historian, arts administrator while you were on the West Coast. Before we move to DC, is there anything else you want to talk about in terms of what you did on the West Coast? For example, did you have any exhibitions while you were on the West Coast? For example with the—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, for one thing, I was also involved in the organization called the Metal Arts Guild of California, and in the Metal Arts Guild, I became president after a while. I didn't stay in that position very long because I moved, but—I moved out of town. But I—while I was in it, I was also exhibiting my work on regular—in regular shows that we had.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and what kind of work was that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Bowls, things—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: These were metal—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —jewelry—

[00:10:00]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, made out of—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —metal.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —yeah, silver?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Silver, gold. It was a first-class organization, and people who owned shops and things like that were in it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So you moved to Washington, DC, around the early 1980s, and what brought you to DC?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I was looking for work, and someone told me about John Kinard who was director at the Anacostia Museum, which is part of the Smithsonian chain. It was a Black museum set up to display Black art [and -CLE] history. And so I heard about the position, and I called John and said I'd like to apply for it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Position where?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: At the Anacostia Museum. And it was something to do with organization of exhibits and projects there and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: From there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I got a job at Howard University and working in their new—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You got it?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. I applied for a job at Howard, which was working at their new television station.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And what were you doing?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was community affairs director. They called it something else, but that's what it was. And that meant that I was checking on things that were going on in the community and planning ideas of future projects that could be done and that lasted for a year.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and then what was your next job?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The next job was—was senior—no, no. The next job was cultural programs in the state department, the division that handles education. And I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I was working where I would be planning exhibits and lectures so people to go out all over the world to share America's culture and experiences.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and about how many exhibitions did you do?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I worked on about 50 exhibitions in all—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and those exhibitions—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in 25 years.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, wow, and those exhibitions were to what countries?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, Venezuela, France, I—my major region of the world was Europe and East Asia, so I was doing Russia, Japan, Indonesia, South America—South Africa rather, and many other places.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and are there some exhibition—I'm sure there are lots, but what were some of the exhibitions you were really most proud of?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, *Crafts Today* was one, which was in Europe, and it played in something like 14 countries.

[00:15:03]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, *Crafts*?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, *Crafts Today*—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The finest crafts of America. And Sam Gilliam—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And where did he have his exhibitions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —he was an independent artist.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And who is Sam Gilliam?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: There were four exhibit venues that he was in.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Where were they, where were they?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In south—no, they were—

[Tape stops, restarts.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Ready?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. Sam Gilliam is a painter, and he did what is known as—

[Tape stops, restarts]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Sam was involved in draping the canvases, and he was painting on the floor, he was painting anyway he could to make it exciting for the audience and a new experience and, uh, which he was at the stage of kind of new experience for him. He was not only a printmaker but a painter, and as a printmaker, he went to the biggest print houses in the United States and worked for instance, in—yeah, he painted all over, but one of the most exciting projects that I saw was that he was—he—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Was it an installation?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: What was it?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: A German cathedral, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: No?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It wasn't that, yeah. Sam Gilliam went to Germany of course, and he was—he draped the interior of the building monastery, I'm sorry.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —of this monastery in Nuremberg that's—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, uh—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And—and in this, it took him two weeks in this trip in Germany, and he visited with many artists and medical people in Germany. And he draped this building with cloth—not cloth but materials that were painted in abstract paint throughout.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now, did you go with—did you go over with him?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I went over there, and I got to see the whole operation. And he worked with several German—older German women who helped him cut the drapery and materials and mount—mounted them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It sounds very exciting.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It was, it was. And then he was, well, invited by the people that owned the building and whatnot to a organ recital...

[00:20:00]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, in the building?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In the building.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, good.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And it was the most fabulous experience that an artist could have I think to have a major organist perform for them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh great. One other thing I wanted to talk about is your travels in the '60s to Nigeria and Liberia and how that experience affected you on a personal level and also your artistic leanings?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I went over with my husband who was doing some work in Nigeria, and at that time, I had a chance to travel around and visit some of the major artists in Nigeria. I went to Oshogbo. That was one of my major spots that I went to because I had heard of Twin Seven Seven, and Twin Seven Seven lived there and—with his wives. He had seven wives, and I got to visit with some of them and some came to the United States at one time and visited with me.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now, he was a painter?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He was a painter, he was.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And did his work influence your work?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Did his work—did his paintings influence your—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: My work?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yes.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes and no. I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In what way?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I didn't paint like he did or consider myself in any way—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What did his work looked like?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it's—it was figurative but not—but more abstract, not as the figure as we know it, and—uh. But I did look at some of the historical sculptures that were around, and I made one picture—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: A painting?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, yes, it was a painting, mixed media, and I used some of the shapes and format that he or some of his people used in the war.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And were these geometric shapes or—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —kind of African iconography?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: African. They—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: [inaudible], okay?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Wait, wait, you—okay now.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: They were [inaudible] that are covered with cowrie shells or various fabrics and things—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —to—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: This is the end of tape two.

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_2of3\_sd\_track06\_m.]

[Discussion about equipment -Ed.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. Ready? Okay. So this is Claude Elliott with Evangeline J. Montgomery known as E.J. at the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington in Rockville, Maryland —on December 7, 2021. This is an oral history for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number three. Good afternoon, E.J.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Good afternoon, Claude.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: E.J., we've had two conversations; however due to the pandemic it has been difficult for us to schedule this third interview until today. You mentioned earlier that as a California College of Arts student, you designed your own studio program with a concentration in textile design, metalwork, and photography in addition to studio classes in drawing, painting, and printmaking. In our prior conversations, we discussed aspects of your 50-year career as an artist, art historian, curator, and arts administrator. So today, we want to reflect on you as an artist, and we want to talk about your aesthetics, your inspiration, themes, influences, and anything else that you want to talk about. So I want to begin within the 1960s and [19]70s, you designed and screen-printed on fabric and made ancestral boxes. I would like for you to describe the source for inspiration and the process for creating the ancestral boxes.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, the inspiration really came from Africa. I observed works of art that were metal mostly, in their museums and private collections and was inspired by those shapes and the marks within those shapes. And those things were—many of them were

ancestral pieces that were acquired for various reasons within a family or an altar setup. And they were—there were also a lot of funerary pieces and, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You want to talk about how they were made?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Go ahead. So how were they made?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: They were made from metal and clay and solid pieces of wax, the same wax that may be used for—for your teeth, making teeth, things of that nature.

[00:05:09]

I use that wax because it comes in layers, quarter inch, eighth of an inch or as thick as two inches. You could get any thickness, you could get it in shapes of round shapes, square shapes, you name it, and it would be easy to work with, yeah, already cast in size and thickness that you want and then you could cut it very easily with your little X-Acto knives and points.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And how was it cast, how'd you cast it?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I cast it by placing mine in some type of casting material like Plaster of Paris. I placed my wax molds in that and then it's—well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and you mentioned that sometimes you did—you inlaid precious stones.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, precious stones and inlay of various materials that could withstand the high heat used for casting. These were placed in molds and furnaces and they were—oh.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, I know that you lived in Nigeria and Liberia in the '60s, and I was curious in what ways did African cultural traditions and identity influence your [aesthetics - CLE] in the creation of the ancestral boxes?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, as I say, I saw them in people's homes and places, and I would ask about them. Or I went to a wedding, had a little box and that little something was passed from one person to the person getting married, and it was given as a gift and so it—and also, in the homes of some of the cultures, they had something placed in their doorway, which was some type of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Had an ancestral connection?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, used in ancestral beliefs that it would bring—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —the spirit's good luck.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, yeah. What was the—when you created these boxes, what were the intentional use?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: For Americans?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. The intentional use for Americans, or non-Africans especially, was to bring good luck and good understanding.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. You had mentioned that your mother often used Chinese incense burners, um—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: My mother had an incense burner, and the incense burners, you found them often in many people's homes and in different cultures. And I hadn't noticed them before. I decided to accept that expression that I was going to use for my work. And I wanted—I wanted them to be connected with people's culture in some way.

[00:10:05]



CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. E.J., you lived in San Francisco and Oakland during the Black Panther, Black Power, the anti-Vietnam War, and the women's movement.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And I found it interesting this period is reflected in titles of some of your ancestral boxes. For example, there's one called *Justice for Angela*, and it had the Ashanti symbol for justice on it, and there was another one called *Red, Black, and Green*, also known as the *Marcus Garvey Box* and that has—it was cast in sterling silver with inlays with colors of the Jamaican flag and so I saw that kind of cultural connection that you were trying to make. I was curious, did you participate in FESTAC either in 1966 or—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes I did.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —1977? The one in 1966?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You want to talk a little about the significance?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, not the one in 1966.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: One in—you were too young?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. [They laugh.] I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: The one in 19—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I wasn't too young there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, one in 1977.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I was just leaving Africa.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I went over there but didn't see the festival because I—it was just finished.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and it was in Dakar in '66, so it was in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1977, and you did participate in that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You want to talk about a little bit about that experience?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was a fabulous experience. I don't think that you'll ever see another one in life like that. I become emotional just talking about it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, I understand, I understand. I understand that, um, just the number of African countries that participated in it and African American artists who came and perhaps for the first time made a cultural connection with the motherland. And there were over 16,000 participants, represented about 56 African nations, so it was very emotional experience. Did that influence your work?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, not really because—well, in that, maybe I took on more African subjects or attempted to find out more information about them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, okay, okay. One of the things I wanted to ask you about is your first exhibition that you organized in 1970 called *19 California Black Craftsmen*. Tell me how that exhibition came about and why it was so important.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, that exhibition was held at Mills College, which is in East Bay or in Oakland. And it was—it happened, took place because Mills College students wanted to have a festival of some type on their campus. They wanted to be a part of something like that. And it was going around to a number of campuses that they would try to have some type of African connection on their campus. And Mills College student body decided to protest if they didn't get it so that's what made it a bigger demonstration than they had planned on.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], but it's interesting that you focused on crafts.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I focused on crafts because crafts was an art form, a major art form for Black people I felt, more so.

[00:15:00]

They made quilts and they made things like that at home craft. So that it not only took in the artist that was working at home and just designing things for themselves and their family, didn't even call themselves artists. But they were able to make things inexpensively and all kinds of things. And then they realized that they could also—they had learned to do these things through their mother and grandmother and whatnot.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Passing on that tradition.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and I'm sure that many, this was their first time ever exhibiting their work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Right, right, and so—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So, are you the person who went out and, kind of, collected the objects?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, somebody else—someone else did that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, many people collected pieces.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay. So you went to the collectors?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I went to the collectors. They didn't even think that they were doing anything of any importance in some cases. I went to speak to a women's group one night in Oakland, and I looked in their faces, and I said, they don't know what they got or what they're doing, how important it is. That's what I—was flashing through my mind as I stood there looking at them. And I said to them, "Take down those Renoir dance photographs and of dancers in [inaudible]." And you know, like some [inaudible], I knew I wasn't [inaudible], but they had received them mainly when they bought their furniture.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: If they bought furniture from a furniture company—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Back in—yeah, back in those days, you got—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —they would've given you a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —you got some poster or prints.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and they would sell them, so—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So they had no idea of the value of some of the things they had collected through their families?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, but I know that was a very important exhibition especially in the 1970s, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, there was this exhibition that was created by UCLA's Art Department. And the head of the art department, I think he was, and he collected from museums around California and galleries. And he just—they had no connection really, so whether they were symbols of African or African American stuff, just stuff that was made by Blacks, and that was shown in Oakland.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and you said at Mills College?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes—no, that—not at—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —that was a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —we're talking about two different exhibitions or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, okay. But your exhibition was shown at Mills College, correct?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, that was an earlier—I'll go over that one. But that exhibit that I— that I was a part of was later, it was the second year.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In 1970s.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That first year that UCLA created the exhibit—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, I see.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and it went to four sites in California.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, all right.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And I didn't have anything to do with that. But the director of the Oakland Museum got in touch with me, and he said could I plan an exhibit for Mills College, in other words, those kids who were getting out of hand, and they had to have one right away and so—

[00:20:10]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Because they were really putting on the pressure to have more of a Black cultural presence at the college?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. So they did take on a first-rate show. They didn't object to any pieces that I asked to be in the show and nor did they—with costs.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Great, okay, okay. Now, you emerged on the art scene at the height—the heightened period of Black consciousness in literature, the visual arts, and performing arts, yet your work has remained abstract, primarily a non-objective imagery. Who were some of the interesting—who were some of the artists that you found interesting during this period of time that really influenced your abstract vision?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, Sam Gilliam was a Black artist, Richard Hunt was another Black artist, Arthur Monroe. These were artists that were in the Bay Area that I—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And also—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I associated with.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Arthur Carraway.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So these were artists that you knew personally?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I knew personally, hung out with them to some respect, went to them to talk about art.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], okay. So these were artists you were—yet you—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Artists of some note.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And would bounce off ideas and talk about aesthetics, et cetera? Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And they also created some art similar to things that I wanted to do.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, great. Okay, let's talk about your creative process and artistic vision. I'm interested in your exploration of color, geometric shapes, and nature, and you know, especially since you worked in a wide range of media. And I want to reference a quote for an exhibition catalogue *Rivers and Memories: The Art of E.J. Montgomery and Lillian Thomas Burwell* at the Brentwood Arts Exchange in 2012. I quote, this is your statement, "I use non-representative—non-representational imagery, spontaneity, and improvisation to convey the idea of memory reflecting on the passage of time and memory along the California coastline." And I want to talk about a couple paintings that illustrate this point. In the exhibition catalogue, you stated, "My paintings are instantaneous responses to color and environment describing nature in its brilliant shapes." And, uh, so I wanted to find out what is the inspiration for *Dialogue with Nature*, the painting *Dialogue with Nature*?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_3of3\_sd\_track10\_m.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, we were talking, um—we were talking about *Dialogue with Nature* and how you texture your paintings.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, in that, I love texture, I don't like the plain, smooth surface, and I see it in everything. You know, like this spread, and I don't try to copy it, but I—I just apply it to my surface. Uh, does that makes sense?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It makes sense, yes, yes. So another painting, um, again, you were talking about, you know, the fact that you were an abstract painter, but it's not void of personal, cultural references, and historical events. So another painting that's very textured is your—your *Homage to Garvey*. This was painted in 2010. Can you talk about—a little bit about the use of colors and how you build texture?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I just move the color around. I don't let it stay in one place—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. Well, it's very impasto, and it just seems to—the paint just seems to relax in that really lush, black surface. And what are the little gold circles?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: At the bottom?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, at the bottom.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Just a means of holding it together, not—it doesn't mean anything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah. Well, it's a very beautiful gold, and it's only used in that area of the painting.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I need [inaudible].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So let's continue to talk about the importance of, um—how color is an important element of your art, and, uh—read that right there.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: In selecting colors for paintings, I prepare for [inaudible].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, I thought it was interesting that when we were talking about color that you go back to textile, and you have all this yarn, and that you have to then go through your—the yarn in terms of all the brilliant colors. And that you really like to have variation of colors and how you—how that really influenced your paintings and how you tried to create colors that are kind of vibrant like that, uh—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Like the cloth—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yes, yes.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —yarns.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So you see that, the relationship between the textile and the painting,

the African designs and the brilliant use of colors. So I wanted to talk about a little bit about your prints. For the past two decades, you have continued to push your work by exploring a variety of printmaking techniques such as offset lithography, screen printing, etching, and digital printmaking. So you printed at Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia, at the Michael Platt Studio in DC, and Lily Press in Rockville, Maryland. And I want to talk about a little about the different artistic explorations you pursued working with master printers. So between 1996 and 2010, you printed at Brandywine Workshop.

[00:05:07]

How did you meet Allan Edmunds?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Uh, I just went to Brandywine to look at it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So you had heard—you've heard of the workshop?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I've heard of it, and he was inviting artists.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and you were living in DC at the time, correct?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. He was inviting artists to come there and print. He said to pay to use the press or inviting and then they would make a print, and it was such that you could make any number of prints that you wanted to make in that one [image -CLE]. And he was encouraging you should do a hundred prints and giving you the paper and so forth and that he was getting funding from—city and state funding.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So he had money to invite artists there to make prints?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, and to encourage the community to be able to buy a print reasonably.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, one way of making art affordable to—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, to the public.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —to the community was through limited edition prints that would, um—okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And an artist could experiment. He can make a hundred copies [of] something and not feel he was going in the hole and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: The artist was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —it would take him 10 years to sell them.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Or get your money back. So you printed there several times, okay, and what were you trying—what were you exploring?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Were you using different approaches or—?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I knew how to print, I had—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You guys take printmaking—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —printing—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —in—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Some of the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —art school?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes. And so I was ready to go there and work, and I gave myself a birthday present of going up there and working, and it was quite an expensive birthday present to—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How long did you stay the first time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: How long?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: A week.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so that's what made it—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That's what—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —expensive.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —he encouraged a week, and he paid for—he paid for some of the expenses in the—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: A lot of the materials?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: All of the materials and meals while you were there, going out for sandwiches, stuff like that. Not expensive but—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm, right.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —right—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And this was—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he took—the more he got to know you, the more he would take and spend on you, so to speak.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, now was this pretty—was this early at the very beginning when Brandywine was established or was this a little later?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: This was all later—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —it was going on.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So the artist residency part started late—a little later?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. No, it was there the artist residence.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, did he have a gallery then?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, it was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: The gallery was open as well?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —it was three buildings.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, three buildings.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, that he had in his—it had been—a few years later, it had been a jazz club, jazz musicians, it had been established for them, an area. And they had a regular club where they would go and rehearse and that kind of thing.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And perform?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And perform but not a great performance, but they did quite a bit, and those musicians made good.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. I'd like to talk to you about a couple prints that you did at Brandywine.

[00:10:06]

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E.J. MONTGOMERY: A little fine line.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So, yeah because—so let's talk about *Autumn Breeze*, how was that created?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Pink, yellow came into it, green, and those were—major colors came in and you lay them on in thickness and size of the brush.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So this an offset litho, and you began drawing on the Mylar with black ink and oil-based pencils and then that Mylar is burnt on to an aluminum plate. And then you were talking about the different colors that are applied and are passed through the press one color at a time, so you're building on those colors. And there's a separate stencil for each of those colors that you mentioned, pink, blue, and yellow.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And so the color is very layered, and that was printed as a horizontal.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So then when we move to—if we start looking at, uh, so, *Sanctuary* is the same concept using—but it's a vertical format.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, that's to apply more color—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Additional colors.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in one area, in a vertical, and that balanced it out and became heavier as a vertical.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yes. And for me, the textural surface is reflective of your interest in African textiles. Okay. Is there anything else you want to mention in terms of your experience of working at Brandywine?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: How many times did you go there? I know it's more than—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, I went there many number of times.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, over the years?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But I worked two weeks really the first time. I worked my week that was given me as an artist, you know, the reaction.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And then you stayed another week?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I stayed another week because the guy that was to come in there on Sunday didn't come and so I just kept on—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Working?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —printing around, working. Allan [Edmunds -CLE] didn't say anything, I wasn't sleeping in his quarters, I was sleeping in a hotel, and he just never said anything.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, great, great, great.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And—and Fred [ph] or whatever his name was— [Bob Franklin -CLE]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Now were there other artists working at the same time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, there was a printer.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, oh no, but I'm—I was curious if there were other artists who

might've been—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they didn't—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —there the same time. So you see—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they didn't come there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —you see only one artist at a time?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And in fact, most of the time, it was only one artist at a time and, oh—but I have—people would drop by.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, people were curious and wanted to see the artist at work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, and they were curious about me because they hadn't—didn't know me.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: They didn't know you, okay, okay. Now is that because you weren't a Philadelphia artist, you were a DC artist?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. No, just another artist.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. All right, let's explore how digital printmaking presented another aesthetic to explore memory.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, I'm sorry, was there something else you wanted to say about *Sanctuary*?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. That digital work was just coming out anyway and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So you were—you began working with Michael Platt in 2009.

[00:05:07]

And I would like to discuss the role photography in your prints—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —because you've had a large collection of photographs. So let's talk a little bit about that because, uh—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, I had always felt that I was creating photography to do something else with it, but I didn't know what it was going to turn out to be, and I didn't see it as my major area of work. I didn't see it as, oh gee, I'm a photographer and let me show that. The first photography that I showed as an exhibit was of the riot scenes in Washington, which was just a little bit. I've showed them to this guy who was up at Arts and Crafts teaching. And I don't even know why I even showed them to him except that he was a photographer. Maybe I had them with me for some other reason, so.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, these were—these—this—the subject, the rebellion was where? Was it in San Francisco?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: The subject was the riot going on in [Washington, DC -CLE].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh yeah, riots were going on everywhere, yeah, I'm from Detroit, so.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And it was still going on, and I was in the car with [Lois Mailou -CLE] Jones, and she was driving me from Howard [University -CLE] down to her house. And we were looking at the scenes, and there was like an area at 10th and K or something like that in there—right in there. A policeman was starting the traffic to go one way and the other and so I just casually got the back of him and—where he was directing traffic. And then I, just that one day, snapped some pictures from the car, and [Lois -CLE] was frightened that I did that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh. Do you recall what—where this exhibition was or what gallery it



was?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. The exhibition—he was having a—putting together a show at Arts and Crafts. And so he said, "I'd like you to put those pictures in the show."

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Great.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: So at that point, I claimed myself a photographer.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, [laughs] okay, okay. I think maybe one good example in terms of how you use photography for your work might be *Sur at Dawn*. And why don't you talk a little bit about the digital process for creating that with—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —with Michael Platt?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —I made photography—photograph one on top of the other, you know. And I didn't even think about whether that was an acceptable process or what, you know, but I was experimenting with it for myself and didn't know what actually to be looking for because I didn't develop these. I had them developed by a regular house that does that kind of work. But I didn't even think in terms of what I could get out of it, till after I saw, you know, and I said, "Oh, that's nice, that's a painting."

[00:10:11]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, it does look like a painting, it does look like a painting.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And so I did—now, they're all gone. They—I didn't have sense enough to take them out of that whole thing that—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_3of3\_sd\_track12\_m.]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I think Doris Washington, you know, she's not an artist and she—she was interested in buying the sets. In other words, like if—if a—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You mean like a series?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, if I printed a series of this and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And she would be interested in the series?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and it really would be nothing but a bunch of lines or something, you know, be uninterested—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, what is—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —to other people to look at but then she might take it and sit and look at it every night, you know?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Like—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And really study it—yeah, really study it because your work is so layered that there's—you know, you got to go below the surface.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. But I think it's interesting when you look at *Sur at Dawn* that this was an image that you took in 1969. The photograph or the photographs were taken in 1969, and you held on to those until you started working with Michael Platt, and you produced this image that is made up of many different images, uh, over 40 years later. And that, you know, you really get the sense of these earth tones, you get a sense of a very particular palette. You get this sense of this texture, this hardened sand, hardened seaweed. You get the sense of a fisherman's net and texture of the beach or rock formation. And, you

know, working with Michael, you know, embracing new technology, it appears that you were exploring different processes of ways of thinking and printing that it really just, kind of, opened up your, kind of, vision in terms of possibilities. So what was it like working with Michael?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Weird because Michael—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, with Michael Platt, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Michael would be cooking meat on the stove and looking at the football game.

[Side conversation.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Go ahead. Michael would be cooking?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He'd be doing two to three different things, and he wouldn't be printing these at that moment because he was printing down in the basement and working upstairs and—but he—it's like he kind of—he had a feeling. He knew what you were looking for.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And he—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Even if you didn't know what you were looking for, he knew what you were looking for?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. And would you have a series of photos laid out? How did that work?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Not with him. I maybe laid them out a couple of times at home before I went there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and you would bring in exactly what you wanted to work with or —

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —or that would change?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: That would change. I'd bring them with me or leave them up there with him.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. So the color might change, the scale will change.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And Fred his printer, he was wondering all along what the hell I was doing and what was Michael doing, and he wasn't getting nothing done. [They laugh.] And it's that I had mixed some color and Michael had mixed some color, and they were laying on the side. Nobody knew which was going to go first.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So what did—usually the way you worked, did you make—did you do several visits with Michael before the actual print was finished?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And were there a lot of variations that you worked on and worked through?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Or everything pretty much laid in the computer until at the very end where you got it the way you wanted it to look?

[00:05:16]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. I would say—let's see—that was like that and then—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. This is called *Celebration III*.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And then—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah. This was another one I think that you printed with Michael.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: This one is *Green Echoes*.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. What's his name? Michael? Not Michael, Richard Mayhew picked—he and his wife picked separately some prints and they—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: They both selected that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Go like this, in this order.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay, did they say why?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. He just picked and there were—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Do you think—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —borders—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —that—does that remind you of Richard Mayhew's paintings?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, yes and no, his paintings blend, the colors blended. They don't sit up like—this is orange and this is yellow.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay, okay. These colors blend more; they don't stand out as a kind of isolated color.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. I would've made a great teacher with these samples.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It's not too late.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, it's not.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and what makes you—what makes you say that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Because I was experimenting all the time.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. Oh, so you would encourage students to really explore?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, go out and explore. I mean I had—my first painting teacher, he—he told us to go out and make some copies of some marks of the, uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —the buildings?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, the cement, cement mark.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Now, kids would go behind the fresh cement and—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —and go tell your friends, "Hey, there's cement down, such and such and such street." You go down there and take your little—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So he was telling you to draw on wet cement?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, not on wet cement. It would have to be kind of dried.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, right, okay, right, right, right, right, right, right.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But, you know, we would get that done, and it may take that same thing and layer on another set of lines, and before you know it, you got a painting.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, all right. Okay, now you—anything else you want to talk about in term of working with Michael?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, Michael—Michael didn't necessarily, didn't take this piece and say, "Now, let's do so and so." No, it wasn't something like that.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: He would ask you questions?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No. He just, "You want, you want that on this, fine?"

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So he kind of had a vision on what you might want, and he was checking in to make sure that's what you were thinking?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And what's her name, Susan. Susan [Goldman] would say, "Oh, this is great, oh, look at that." You know, we'd look at them together.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Well, okay, well, let's talk about Susan. So you made prints with Susan Goldman at Lily Press in Rockville, Maryland, I believe, beginning in 2010.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Some—some time —

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E.J. MONTGOMERY: Now what—you were going to ask me about Susan?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yes. Okay, so, E.J., we're talking about you experience working with Susan Goldman at Lily Press, and were going to talk about the first plate that you did, which is called *Percussion*, okay. So how was that plate created?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was a separate plate, and I just picked up a [scrub -CLE] brush and swooshed it over the plate.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So it's an engraved plate, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, I'm sorry, it's an etched plate.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Etched?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It's an etched plate.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Etched plate. It just had a little, light etching across the plate.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, so give it a little texture.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And then you just put in acid and just a light, uh, formation of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It gives you a little texture.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —of texture and then just stop the etching there and go ahead and print it and then you see what you've got.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah. So for example, what colors were in the first plate? This is the first one.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, pink.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and there's a little blue.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then just go back in and put another color and another texture, and it begins to erase out that first texture that you had there, you know. In other words, the *Percussion*, whatever it is. You can just erase that out, and you put something else in, and it eats up because you put some more block—[blocking liquid asphaltum -CLE] to block out the color, see.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, okay. Yeah. And so then you take the same plate, and you were able to create, uh—I think the next one was *Letters to Mom*, yeah?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So it's the same plate as *Percussion*, but so what's—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Right.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —what's the different approach?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And you just put more color.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, but this is a rainbow roll, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, this is a rainbow roll versus—okay, a rainbow roll but different colors. And what else is different about that?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, you got this—this uh—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: It's kind of a very—a gradation and—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —marks.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —marks, okay, you had different kinds of marks, okay. This is also where you're beginning to create your own unique language.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: And, um, that reminds me of calligraphy. What was your—so can you talk about—a little bit about your interest in calligraphy?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, it was Skunder Boghossian, the Ethiopian.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Skunder?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. Who was doing his own Ethiopian language. He was making marks with that and etching them and whatnot. And I looked over and saw what he was doing, and I just took it and [smears -CLE] a couple of lines around with my brush and color. And also, um, what's his name the guy from Kenya?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Artist from Kenya?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: He was doing the same kind—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —of mark making?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: He wasn't. He was—had marked, but he was carving in wood.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, you talking about Victor?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Victor.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Victor Ekpuk.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And I bought his first piece, but I let it go [inaudible], unfortunately.

[00:05:02]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Right, yeah. Well, I see your calligraphy kind of like a written language that just seems to communicate your feelings, a sense of recall, a sense of memory.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that's what I was talking about.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, and many of these marks or symbols are created through the use

of stencils, correct?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. And they're very—if we look at a variety of prints, they're very different in terms of the kinds of symbols you use and the kinds of stencils you use. So would you—are there some things you like to say in terms of your interest in printmaking and what the experience of working with different print workshops, how that has either inspired your work or allowed you to work in different ways?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It allowed me to work in different ways, and one thing people don't know about me, when I started printmaking, it was Tamarind Printmaking [Tamarind Lithography workshop -CLE] was in—uh, up on the hill here in San—in—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, in San Francisco, or was it Los Angeles?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: It was Los Angeles.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Tamarind, okay, okay. Because I think they eventually moved to Albuquerque I think.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, oh, it was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Had you been there?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Had you gone to Tamarind?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, I went down there when they first got going [in Los Angeles -CLE], and I mean those old ladies were down there fiddling around, and I fiddled with them, you know, I mean—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: These old ladies were visitors you're talking about?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: No, they are big name artists. no.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, these were artists, these were?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh okay, okay, June Wayne.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And they were down there working.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, so you—so the fact that they were printing and creating work.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And I was—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So you—did you go down there to print?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, but I didn't have the money and the time. My husband didn't drive me when I wanted to go, when I was ready to go, you know. Nobody understood what my needs were, and they were more than I expected them to really stay with me on it. And I was like doing this printmaking and enameling on metal at the same time and trying to learn to shape the metal. So all of that was going on in one day.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh, okay, okay. So you were constantly working with different materials throughout your career?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So I wanted to ask, what advice would you offer to young artists?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Hmm?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: What advice would you offer—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —to young artists.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —to young artists? What would you tell them just based on your experiences?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I'd tell them to get in to as many things as they can.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: In terms of the art?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, and that they should make up their mind what it is they want to do, what area of the art do they want to settle in. Do they want to be—draw and sell drawings, or do they want to print and make productions?

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Limited edition, signed prints.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes, stuff like that. And—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Do you think you need to really experiment with a lot of mediums to really find out what your passion is?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Well, they need to do that at the beginning, take an all-around general course that opens their eyes to a lot of different techniques and materials and things like that and then—[phone rings]

[00:10:15]

[Side conversation.]

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: That's Pam [ph].

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Oh yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: They need—that's what I feel they should do. Now, I think that Stephany's [Neal] granddaughter has done some of that, and she has settled on film.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, now she's—is she a student at Duke Ellington [School of the Arts -CLE]?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. She's in her—she's got another year.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, what's her name?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Oh, [Ryan Camille Turner -CLE].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: [Ryan -CLE]

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And—but she's moved along pretty fast. She's opened her eyes any time somebody said, "You can make a film or we're going to shoot a film, do you want to see it?" She's there.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: She's there to work on it?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah, she's volunteered a lot, you know.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Great, great.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: And got her mind set on what she wants to do.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: So your suggestion is to really explore all the different mediums, to immerse yourself in as many techniques as you can so that you can be really well rounded, and you can—you could have control of technique?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay. So in closing—first of all, is there anything else we haven't talked about that you would like to mention? If not, I wanted to ask, so what have you been—how

have you kept yourself engaged since you retired from the state department, and—you've continued to exhibit, right?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Okay, you've had the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities fellowship.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: You participated in the Art Cart, which is at the Research Center for Arts and Culture. Your personal papers are at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. And I want you to mention your scholarship, the E.J. Montgomery Scholarship.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: I've offered scholarships to young people. Really, I'd hope that more of them would attach themselves to me to open their eyes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —as a mentor?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, and this scholarship is through the Carl T. Rowan Chapter of Blacks in Government.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —in Government, Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So I had hoped that by now that that group would be more sup—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —portive—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: —so more supportive of—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Of the scholarship?

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yes.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, they—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But they aren't.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —they should've graduated by now and beginning to establish a career and give back to the community.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Yeah. I mean it's—they've done a lot, it's a lot of money in it.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But—

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, I know it's been over \$40,000 that has been given out in scholarship money over the years.

E.J. MONTGOMERY: But they didn't do as much as they could've and should've.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Yeah, yeah, it seems always to be the case, yeah. Well, E.J., this concludes our conversation. I wanted to mention that the Printmaking Legacy Project has a video entitled *Portfolios: Evangeline J. Montgomery*, and it can be seen online at printmaking—at [www.printmakinglegacyproject.org](http://www.printmakinglegacyproject.org).

[00:15:17]

E.J., it's been my honor to be able to spend some time with you talking about your very exciting career and your contributions to the community. And I want to thank you for all that you've done and for all the joy that your work has brought into our lives, so—

E.J. MONTGOMERY: Thank you.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: —Thank you, E.J.



E.J. MONTGOMERY: Thank you, Claude, and I feel the same way about you.

CLAUDE L. ELLIOTT: Thank you.

[END OF TRACK montgo21\_3of3\_sd\_track14\_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]