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Oral history interview with Carol Eckert,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Carol Eckert on June 18 and 19, 2007. The interview took place at the artist's home and studio in Tempe, Arizona, and was conducted by Jo Lauria for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Carol Eckert and Jo Lauria have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JO LAURIA: This is Jo Lauria, interviewing Carol Eckert at her studio at home in Tempe, Arizona, on Monday, June 18 [, 2007], for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

So Carol, could you pronounce your name for us?

CAROL ECKERT: Carol Eckert.

MS. LAURIA: When and where were you born?

MS. ECKERT: North Carolina, in 1945.

MS. LAURIA: And how did you come to live in Tempe, Arizona, from being out there in the Southeast?

MS. ECKERT: I came here to go to school at ASU, Arizona State University.

MS. LAURIA: And you came here from - at some point, in one of the articles, it said you lived in New York?

MS. ECKERT: As a small child, I did, yes. We lived in the Bronx. So when I was little, I had something of a Southern accent with overlays of Bronx on top of it.

MS. LAURIA: And your heritage is Scandinavian?

MS. ECKERT: Mixed-up Scandinavian, Irish, and English.

MS. LAURIA: Were your parents first-generation immigrants or second-generation?

MS. ECKERT: Second generation. It was by and large my grandparents who came here from other countries.

MS. LAURIA: And do you think that you gravitated towards the arts - I know that you studied painting first at Arizona State University. Was there anything in your childhood that would lead you to this career choice?

MS. ECKERT: My parents didn't have any kind of backgrounds in art. But I was one of those kids who was always making things, so I made dolls and doll clothes, and I did spool knitting and potholder weaving. I drew a lot. And it was the '50s, so it was the era of coloring books and paint-by-number painting, so I did a lot of both of those things. I never thought of myself as particularly good at those things. I colored really hard; I didn't stay in the lines; and I mixed up the colors in the paint-by-numbers and didn't pay attention to the outlines. So I never thought of myself as a child who was good at art. Also, I couldn't draw horses, which seemed to be a benchmark of being good in art when you're little. And I thought that people who were good at art were the ones who were neat and followed the rules, which wasn't me.

But my mom always valued the things I made. She was one of those moms who saved all the little projects I brought home from school and used them. I guess what I did think of myself as being good at was reading and writing. So I made books and I read constantly. Saturday was library day, so I'd come home every Saturday with a big stack of books. And I'd spend hours stretched out on my bed immersed in storybooks.

MS. LAURIA: At some point, you say, in the pieces that have been written about you by other writers, that it was this reading that brought you to the place of wanting to fabricate and visualize myths in your work. You want to talk a little bit about what kind of stories that you tried to tell about in your weavings?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I do work a lot with mythology and legends now. And when I was a child, it was fairy tales. I was fascinated by fairy tales, stories like Baba Yaga and Peter and the Wolf. So I think that early interest sort of stayed as part of my being, and it is an interest that has continued. I'm still reading a lot of mythology.

I have a lot of books in the studio. I've been in this studio for a long time, and, actually, later in the summer, I'm going to move to the front room, which is a little bigger. I've resisted because I like the view out the window in this studio, but the main problem I have is I need more room for books. So I'm forced to make a move to a larger space.

MS. LAURIA: And I get the impression that the legends and the myths that you are most drawn to tend to be of other cultures.

MS. ECKERT: I think I love stories and myths from a whole variety of cultures. One of the things I love about mythology is the universalness of it, because you get themes throughout many different periods of history and from cultures all over the world that are similar in so many ways.

I grew up with the story of Noah, which is from an earlier Babylonian story, but so many cultures have a story of a great flood. There is a Latin American story of a flood where a man leads all the animals to the top of a high mountain. There is an Aboriginal Australian story about two brothers who fight over a bag full of water and cause a great flood. So I think that it's the essential humanness and the universalness of myths and legends that appeal to me.

MS. LAURIA: And living here in the Southwest, do you find that at times you feel very close to the American Indian creationist myths or any of the origin myths that come out of the American Indian legends?

MS. ECKERT: Not particularly, not any more so than any of the other legends. And most of the legends that I love come to me from books rather than through my local environment. So I'm wide open to all sorts of myths, but not particularly related to my location.

MS. LAURIA: And I know that the present work that you're doing now, which you refer to as coiling, it's a self-taught skill. But you started out taking painting at Arizona State University, and then you tried ceramics. Can you talk about what the choices were along the way? In what way and how did you become impassioned with what you're doing now, which is a form of basket weaving?

MS. ECKERT: Well, when I came to college, I decided to be an art major. And I'm not quite sure why, except that it seemed like a nice way to live your life. So I started out in - well, it was called commercial art then - graphic design. And I didn't last too long in commercial art. What finished me, really, was lettering, because you used a straight edge and India ink and it was all about neatness and staying in the lines. So I realized pretty fast that wasn't for me.

But I was really fascinated by painting, and I took painting as part of my general art education, or just general art requirement, so I switched to painting. I loved painting; I spent hours painting very happily. I'd get up early on weekends, and go, and pretty much have the painting studio to myself. It was a big old art building and the windows would be open; there would be birds outside. I'm still very nostalgic for the smell of oil paint.

But I never really found my way with painting. I never found a personal voice. But I loved painting and I spent a lot of hours in painting. And I never - the ceramics and the basketry came much later, after I'd left college.

MS. LAURIA: And do you feel that the needle arts - because in a way what you do, the coiling and the sewing together is very much handwork like quilting or embroidering - do you feel when you do this that it has a relationship to what you did when you were a child, learning some of the needle arts?

MS. ECKERT: Probably, because as a little girl those were things that were a natural part of your life. And because I felt comfortable with them, then later on I felt comfortable teaching myself how to coil, because they were just all areas I felt comfortable working with.

MS. LAURIA: And I think I read at some point that you came to this coiling art because you were teaching children at a community center. And you thought that giving them the assignment to make a basket would be an interesting kind of experience. Can you describe that experience?

MS. ECKERT: That's true. Actually, it was sort of a series of events before I got as far as the children's art center. But when I first graduated from school, we did a variety of things. We managed apartments. I'd gotten married at the beginning of my senior year. And so when I first graduated, I worked in an art supply store; we managed apartments; we did a variety of things. And then I ended up substitute teaching.

At that point, the only thing I was really qualified in was art. But as a substitute, I used to get everything. I taught home ec and biology and all manner of things for a while. And it was a hard job, because I had junior high school students in pretty rough schools.

MS. LAURIA: And that was here in the Phoenix area?

MS. ECKERT: That was in the Phoenix area. Yeah, we lived in a little old house in Phoenix on what had been a piece of old farmland. It was the '60s, late '60s, and it was the era of the Whole Earth Catalog, when a lot of people were trying to do things for themselves. So I had a big vegetable garden at home, and I did a lot of things for the house. I hooked rugs and I made quilts and I batiked wall hangings and did card weaving to make belts. There wasn't much that I didn't do at that time.

MS. LAURIA: And that was all self-taught?

MS. ECKERT: That was all self-taught. I did knitting. It was a way of making a life, making things for the house. I refinished and upholstered furniture.

And after the substitute teaching, I got a job working for a community arts center that was run by the city of Phoenix, and I taught painting and drawing there. It was just such a relief to be teaching something I loved to people who really wanted to learn it. So that was really a very happy time.

And all around me there was a wonderful staff. I had a great boss. And they had wonderful programs. There was a terrific ceramics program, a good jewelry program. There were people teaching weaving and knotting. So I got really interested in some of the things that were happening in the other studios around me.

And I began to teach resist dyeing. It wasn't too much of a move from the painting into resist dyeing. I taught tie-dyeing and batik, and then I found - I wish I could remember the name of it, but it was kind of an encyclopedic book about various fabric techniques and a little history on each one. And so I learned from that basic information about paste resist - and rather than wrapping rubber bands or ties around a tie-dye, to do stitching, to cause the resist - so I taught all of those things. And I enjoyed that.

MS. LAURIA: At what age level?

MS. ECKERT: That was adults, mostly. We did teach children's classes in the summer. But most of those classes were for adults.

MS. LAURIA: So you sort of transitioned from painting oils on canvas to painting silks with dyes and resists?

MS. ECKERT: Right, and then people around me - I had an interesting boss. He was a man who had been to Cranbrook [Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI] and had a degree in painting. But he was doing really serious knotted pieces. And he used to do - on his vacations, he would do things like take workshops from people like Walter Nottingham. So that was my first exposure to that kind of fiber work.

MS. LAURIA: Do you remember your boss's name?

MS. ECKERT: Yeah. Steven Covey was his name. And it was really an interesting introduction to that whole world of fiber art.

MS. LAURIA: And he viewed his position there, and also probably tried to show the faculty that this was something that could be very professionalized.

MS. ECKERT: Right, I mean, it was a very - even though it was a community art center, there was a very professional approach. And some years later, I ran into Rebecca Medel, and she said to me, do you remember when we used to teach at the community center together? And somehow, I hadn't made the connection. You know, I knew her as a fiber artist, and she was working in Philadelphia. But I hadn't made the connection to the same person who I worked with in Phoenix. And I've always meant to ask her if she thinks that place had any impact on her interest in fiber. I don't know.

MS. LAURIA: Then, after - I know there are other studios around you. And at some point, you tried to see if ceramics might be a way from painting to use your color sense and your love of detail. But you found that the clay wasn't malleable enough for you, or maybe too malleable. And it wasn't the kind of material that you felt you could really explore?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I'd always been interested in clay. When I was a student, I used to always try and sign up. But the classes were always full. I could never talk myself in. And then I got real interested - watching what was happening in that ceramics studio was really interesting.

So several years later, when we moved to Tempe and bought a house, one of the first things we did was build a ceramic kiln in the backyard. We built a small gas-fired catenary arch kiln, and we both - Tom and I both - started working with clay. And I loved the clay. I was doing hand-built, vessel-based things, and the animals were a part of that work. But I did struggle technically. The color, I had trouble controlling the color. Since it was a gas-fired kiln, the glaze colors were never what I expected them to be when I pulled it out. And I had a tendency to make things with very fine projections, so things were always breaking off.

MS. LAURIA: So you were working with animals, you said, even with the ceramics. And when you were doing the painting, and you said that you saw birds outside the window of the studio - the painting studio - were birds a major motif for you in your paintings? Does your love for creating animals and animal narratives hark back to this very early period in your art career?

MS. ECKERT: No. I never found a personal direction with the painting. And I was very eclectic. If my professor was a surrealist, then I was sort of doing surrealist work. If he was an abstract expressionist, that's the way my work tended to go. But I really didn't do imagery. I think I was probably more influenced by people like Rothko than anything else when I was trying to be a painter.

MS. LAURIA: So you went from nonobjective to doing very specific imagery, only in the sense that your pieces in the coiled fabric or the tableaux, I guess - sculptures - are very recognizable as animals. But it also seems that the compositions are directed by your training as a painter.

MS. ECKERT: I think definitely. I mean, the whole training - the color, composition, and I'm quite aware of negative space. Sometimes consciously; more often, it's sort of subconscious. But I'm sure that comes from the days of painting. And one of my professors - the abstract expressionist - the way he had us paint was he had us do a series of oil sketches and then pick one of those sketches and develop it into a painting. And when I picked one, I would always sort of overwork it and overdo it. And he would frequently come up behind me and say, Carol, don't ruin it.

And I still work that way. When I start a new piece, I do a whole series of sketches. And I pick one that I really develop. And I still say to myself, Carol, don't ruin it.

MS. LAURIA: Well, that brings us to the sequence, the process of how you do work. And we're sitting in Carol's studio here in her house in Tempe. And laid out on the table is what I would call a scale cartoon, in the sense that you have drawn out what you will be following as the composition for your animal characters. So could you explain the process of how a piece comes to fruition?

MS. ECKERT: I do start with a series of sketches. And I take the one that I develop, and then I do a full-scale cartoon that I lay out, and I do all the pieces. I work directly on top of that cartoon to control the form. But I have another, smaller drawing that I choose all the colors on. I make all my decisions before I start working.

So on this particular drawing, the numbers, those are all DMC [Dollfus-Mieg and Compagnie] embroidery floss color numbers. So I make all those decisions before I start. And then it's simply a matter of going creature by creature and making each piece. And then the final step is to assemble everything, sew everything together.

MS. LAURIA: And when you are making each piece, you work from a wire armature onto which you coil the embroidery thread?

MS. ECKERT: Well, yes, when coiling, you have a core. I'm using wire as the core, and the embroidery floss is wrapped around it. When I first began coiling, I was using embroidery floss, but I was wrapping it over a waxed linen core. And so the pieces I was doing were fairly small, and they were soft. If you picked one up and then put it down again, it would sort of get out of shape.

And Tom said to me, well, why don't you use wire as a core? And my first reaction was, no, no, no. Wire is not fiber; I can't use wire. But then, the more I thought about it, the more I said, well, why not? And it was a real breakthrough, because once I had the wire core in there, I could make things that were a lot larger. And I had much better control. So I work with needle-nose pliers to shape the wire, as I coil. And the forms are built up stitch by stitch, joining each row to the previous row.

MS. LAURIA: Now, you do talk about being sort of a minimalist, in the sense of the fact that it's very low-tech, what you do, and you seem to love that about the art, that there's not a lot of equipment necessary, not a lot of materials, that really the exploration is much more cerebral than it is technological. Can you talk further about what draws you to this material and this process?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I like it because it's very, very simple. And I even make a very simple form of coiling; I only use the figure-eight stitch, so the process is always the same. Occasionally, I have things to work out structurally, but I like not having to deal with any technical problems, so that I can put all the emphasis onto the imagery that I am making.

MS. LAURIA: And when you talk about your early marriage, this is to Tom Eckert, your husband, who is a woodworker, a furniture maker. Is that correct?

MS. ECKERT: Yes.

MS. LAURIA: And would you say that you were almost on the opposite ends of the spectrum, that Tom is very much a person who likes technical challenges, who likes equipment, does very detailed work with tools, and that you find that your creative voice doesn't require all of that type of equipment or process?

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, we're absolutely opposite in that regard. I mean, I have a pair of needle-nose pliers, a pair of scissors, and needles, and Tom has a shop full of equipment, so very much. And he does constantly, every piece, he has some kind of technical challenge to deal with, and I don't. Mine is just very straightforward and very simple.

I think maybe another reason that this process appealed to me is the way it fit into my life. Because at one point, when I was working with clay, I had kids at home. And I lived a really interrupted life. And with clay, if you have to leave it at the wrong time, it's just - it gets ruined.

MS. LAURIA: It's unforgiving.

MS. ECKERT: Right, it's very unforgiving. And with the coiling, I could pick it up and put it down. And often, my days were interrupted. I wouldn't have huge blocks of time. Now I do; I can work for 12 hours at a stretch in the studio. But in those days, if I could grab 30 minutes here and two hours there, I could still make progress in a day, and it was so much less frustrating.

And the coiling was also very portable. So I spent plenty of time sitting in cars while kids were at lessons, making pieces; I can get work done on airplanes. So it fit into my life; it's also my kind of coiling. It doesn't need water; it's not messy, so it fit very nicely into the studio space I had and into the whole fabric of my life.

MS. LAURIA: Did you ever apprentice with anyone or take any specific classes on basket making or fiber sculpture?

MS. ECKERT: No, I never did. I was just totally self-taught. And it's been kind of an advantage in a lot of ways, because since I didn't know the proper way to do anything, I would just do what worked. I didn't know that you couldn't coil backwards. So what I do is coil backwards - since I have the wire core in there when I'm making a creature like a bird, I start with the outside outlines. So I'm basically drawing the outline of the bird and then filling it in.

MS. LAURIA: And that's considered the opposite of what a basket maker would do, which would be starting from the bottom.

MS. ECKERT: Right. Ordinarily, you would start with the center and then build out from there.

MS. LAURIA: That's interesting. So you invented your own way of working.

MS. ECKERT: Of using coiling, right. And I don't know - I really know very little about the whole history of basketry. What I've learned, I've learned since then. If I'm teaching a workshop and there are other people who know more about the history or whose process is coming out of the history of basket making, I learn a tremendous amount from them. But I don't know other ways of making baskets. I've never tried to twine or plait or those kinds of things, because I didn't come out of that sort of background or history of basket making.

I really came out of clay, because when I had been working with clay, the other thing I had been doing simultaneously - I had been doing a lot of tapestry weaving. Tom had made me a simple frame loom. And I was doing fairly traditional tapestry weaving that was more related to what I had been doing in painting because it was abstract. All the creatures were in the clay work, the three-dimensional clay work. And the flat work was abstract. I really loved the materials and the process of the tapestry weaving and kind of, the way it fit into my life. But I didn't have exciting ideas.

And so, later on, when I discovered basketry, I realized that it kind of combined those two things I'd been working with. I had all the three-dimensional possibilities, sort of vessel-based possibilities of the clay work, without the technical problems. And with basketry, I could control the color; I could make tiny projections. And I had this process that was very related to the tapestry weaving, where I'm working like you would with a tapestry cartoon by drawing it all out full-size first. And the building up of layer, row on row. And the materials were so much more related to the tapestry.

MS. LAURIA: How would one categorize your work? I mean, it is difficult in the sense that it's not flat like a tapestry. And it isn't a basket either, because it's not about a vessel. And they are sculptures, but if you said to someone they were fiber sculptures, I think that would conjure up a whole different image in someone's mind, because when I think of fiber sculptures, I think of those, sort of, soft sculptures that maybe Lenore Tawney, or the harsh, ropelike ones that Claire Zeisler did. What do you call your pieces?

MS. ECKERT: It's not an easy fit anywhere. When I first started doing these pieces, they were vessel-based, so I fit more neatly into the contemporary basketry field because I was using a very traditional basketry technique. And many times, they were container or vessel-based.

Now, I've moved in - I still do vessels - but I've moved in a couple of other directions, such as the staff pieces. Most recently, I've done some flat wall pieces. So I don't fit as neatly into that area, but I still consider it - it's my home base. It's the world that nurtured me and supported me. So I still consider myself a basket maker, even though I've sort of left home. It's like being part of a family. I've left home, but I do come home to visit occasionally.

MS. LAURIA: And when you show your work in a gallery or a museum setting, or a writer has to describe it, do they refer to it as basket making?

MS. ECKERT: Well, my opportunities as an artist have always come from within the world of basketry. So I tend to be invited to basketry exhibitions, to exhibit in basketry exhibitions. And the field itself has really expanded to encompass - I'm not the only person who began vessel-based in basketry and expanded out. There are many other people doing the same thing. And the field has sort of expanded to include all of us, so that most basketry exhibitions are not particularly rigid about insisting that something be vessel-based. Once you sort of - once you're accepted into the basket world, there is a lot of flexibility allowed in what's exhibited in a basket exhibition.

MS. LAURIA: Well, you more or less answered a question that we often ask artists, which is how do you see the craft that you're in has changed over the years. And obviously one of the changes is that it's become a much larger, expansive field.

MS. ECKERT: It has. It has expanded quite a bit. And I've been lucky to be working in that field at a really wonderful time for contemporary basketry. The field has just - there're so many interesting people working and doing so many exciting things. And it just keeps building and building, and people keep coming in. It's really a wonderful field to be working in.

MS. LAURIA: And do you think that the market for American craft has also changed? Have you seen any kind of response to your work from the marketplace that has been different now, 20, 30 years, later than it was when you first started out? Well, specifically for you, obviously you've become much more recognized as a master of your field and your technique, but in general, are the same opportunities available to you, or are there more opportunities for your work in the marketplace?

MS. ECKERT: I've been in this field at just a particularly wonderful time, so that when I started out, which was probably the early '80s, the whole contemporary basket field was just beginning to really blossom. There were wonderful dealers like Barbara Rose Okun, who started out as an independent dealer in St. Louis, and then she opened a gallery in Santa Fe several years later. She brought in a whole lot of people and made wonderful connections between collectors and basket artists, so that the collector group - the people who collect contemporary baskets - has expanded as the field has expanded. There has always been an incredible group of collectors who are interested in acquiring contemporary baskets.

When I started, most of that collecting, that marketplace, revolved around invitational basket exhibitions at galleries. Craft Alliance did an invitational basketry show regularly early on. Sybaris Gallery in Royal Oak, Michigan, did. And then other galleries like del Mano [Gallery, Los Angeles, CA] have done regular basket shows and Mobilia Gallery in [Cambridge,] Massachusetts.

But from that base of invitational basket shows I began to sell from those invitational shows; then it became more solo shows. There was a time when so much of what you sold was based on the solo show and opening of a solo exhibition at a gallery. Collectors would come and you would often sell a lot that first night. Now the field seems to have moved away so much from solo exhibitions to the SOFA shows, so that it's SOFA New York and SOFA Chicago where I think the most collectors see your work and where most of the sales are based.

MS. LAURIA: Did you ever participate in the craft shows like the Smithsonian Craft Show or any of the ones that they sponsor, or any regional craft shows where you would go and set up your own booth and meet buyers - direct market your work?

MS. ECKERT: I never did. I considered it, but I could never get enough inventory. It's a very time-intensive process, so I could never build up enough. Plus, from early on, I was fortunate that galleries were always selling my work, so I really didn't feel like I had a need to go anyplace else.

MS. LAURIA: I know that you are self-taught and that you didn't take any specific classes in learning the methods of how you work. But do you have people who come to you and want you to teach your process, or do you teach them in workshops, or do you attend any of the summer schools like Penland School of Crafts [Penland, NC] and

teach what you do?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I have taught at Arrowmont [School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN], and I've taught at Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME]. I'm fairly regularly asked to give workshops around the country, so I do that. I probably do one, sometimes two, workshops a year.

MS. LAURIA: And how do you feel when people look at your particular work and then they go off and produce similar work - not that they imitate or appropriate it, but that they're influenced by it. Do you feel that is part of your giving back to the craft community?

MS. ECKERT: Actually, most people - when I do a workshop - they're usually from two days to a week - and I just try and tell people everything I know about working, about how I work, and how I think. And I haven't really seen too much that I could call direct influence. At the end of the time, people usually say to me, well, that was interesting to learn, but I would never want to do it. My work is fairly small in scale, and a lot of people who have taken workshops would like to have something larger in a faster period of time.

But I haven't worried too much about that sharing part of it. I think basketry itself is just an incredibly sharing field. The first conference I ever attended - there was a basketry conference at Arrowmont in the early '90s, and it was one that Jane Sauer and Sandy Blain put together, with the most incredible group of contemporary basket makers you could imagine teaching.

MS. LAURIA: And what year would this be?

MS. ECKERT: I think it was '91. There were people like Pat Hickman and Lillian Elliot and Joanne Segal Branford, John Garrett, John McQueen, Leon Niehues. Norma Minkowitz was there. Just all these incredible people who freely shared their information and their ideas. And, sort of, just becoming part of that contemporary basketry world, there is just that feeling of sharing. And people don't jealously guard particular ways of working. And so it's really a very nice world to be a part of.

MS. LAURIA: So it sounds as if there is almost a community of artists.

MS. ECKERT: Definitely a community of artists. People know each other. And I first met a lot of people at that first conference in '91. And then, in the late '90s - I think '99 - Arrowmont did another basketry conference. This time, it was Sandy Blain working with Michael Davis. And again, it was a great bringing together of some of the leading people in the field.

And there have always been a lot of connections. Craft Alliance [St. Louis, MO] did a series of basketry invitationals. They would do basket weekends that would bring together collectors and artists from all over the country. Sybaris Gallery did a similar thing in Michigan, where people would come in from all over. I made a lot of friendships, friendships where we keep in touch, especially now, with e-mail, where I keep in touch with a whole network of people.

MS. LAURIA: So craft has become very integrated into your life. It has established a foundation, a community, an educational outlet, and a way for you to learn from others and others to learn from you?

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, absolutely. It's really - basketry is a wonderful world, and there aren't a lot of egos and there is not a lot of nastiness. It's just a very wonderful group of people by and large. And it's still - people have a tendency to go to exhibition openings as a way of connecting to each other. Maybe almost two years ago now, the Arizona State University Art Museum did an incredible exhibition of the collection of Sarah and David Lieberman. So a number of basket artists came in for that exhibition. And that kind of thing happens fairly frequently in this basket world.

MS. LAURIA: And isn't that exhibition slated to travel as well?

MS. ECKERT: Right, yeah, they published a beautiful, beautiful catalogue. And it's doing a two-year tour around the United States to a really nice set of venues.

MS. LAURIA: So that will then reach even a wider audience of people who may or may not know of the basket arts?

MS. ECKERT: Right. And it's an incredible exhibition, because it really does show the huge range of things that are happening in contemporary baskets, from some Native American basket makers who are doing Native American traditions in their own contemporary interpretations through vessel-based things and extremely sculptural things. There is scale from very small to quite large, so it's a very exciting exhibition.

MS. LAURIA: Now, I know you mentioned a location is not necessarily an influence on your imagery. But have you had any travels in your life where you've come back from a trip - let's say to an exotic locale - that you've

returned and been terrifically inspired to do something, or jump-start a new composition for your sculptures?

MS. ECKERT: I haven't really traveled anywhere exotic. I love art history. I took a lot of art history when I was a student. And so many of the books in my studio are art history books; it's been a huge influence on my work. So when I travel, it tends to be looking at historical pieces in museums. So it might be ivory altarpieces at the St. Louis Art Museum or carved stone pieces at the Chicago Art Institute. Those kinds of things feed into my work.

And I was just at an amazing little museum in Mississippi called the Walter Anderson Museum [of Art, Ocean Springs, MS]. He was a local artist - early 1900s - and he painted; on their community center, he painted these incredible murals of animals and plants of the Mississippi area. I really came away from that feeling like he was a kindred spirit. And I think, probably, that will have some influence on what I'm working on next.

MS. LAURIA: And I've also read - it's early on, maybe when you first started working with animal motifs - that the Arts and Crafts movement, the way in which some of the artists like Batchelder, the tile maker, approached this type of imagery, also influenced your work. Do you still feel that that is part and parcel of your direction?

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, I really love Arts and Crafts work. There is, sort of, a constant conversation between me and that period of history, so that some of the ceramics we collect - the, kind of, muted color palette of some of those ceramics - I'm attracted to because of the kind of color I use in my own work. And with the tile work, some of the animals - again, some of the Batchelder tiles - some of those animals find their way into the work that I do. I did a staff piece that made a direct reference to a deer that was a part of the Batchelder tiles.

MS. LAURIA: And William Morris, obviously -

MS. ECKERT: Right, the birds, again, the animals.

MS. LAURIA: - used a lot in his textiles, the intertwining, the beautiful integration of vegetation along with animals.

MS. ECKERT: And then some of the symmetry of his fabric work. You know, I have a tendency to work symmetrically, and that is related to the way he worked with the printed textiles, or woven textiles, because of the repeat patterns. So I do relate to that.

MS. LAURIA: How would you describe to somebody who may be interested in your work what the emotional resonance of your work is? I feel it's serious on one level, but that there is also - there is a little bit of irony perhaps - but a sense of wistfulness and whimsy. What would you say about the emotional content of your work?

MS. ECKERT: I think that's all true. I think maybe there is sort of a joyful quality to a lot of what I do. And I love doing it. Some of my happiest hours are sitting here in the studio making these pieces. And also, when I go through hard times in my life, I find refuge in this work.

And I think it's like some of the historic pieces that I love - like some of the tribal pieces or some of the Egyptian pieces where the object itself - it's a deadly serious ceremonial object, and yet it has sort of a whimsical quality to it. I'm thinking of things like the Egyptian cat mummies, where there is a very serious ritual purpose to this cat mummy, and yet it has a smiling face. I think it's that spirit, and being inspired by those traditional pieces, that has sort of wound its way into the kind of imagery that I use.

MS. LAURIA: And that brings up the next question about dualities. Dualities are very prevalent in your work - a good/evil, the sense of seriousness and playfulness - and maybe this is something that you've gleaned from these historical, ritualistic objects.

MS. ECKERT: And I think it's seeped in sort of unconsciously. It wasn't something that I was that aware of, that the duality does work in a lot. I use snakes a lot. I love them as a formal element, just the line you can draw with a snake. But snakes stay a powerful image with people. And I have had collectors request snake-free pieces.

I was doing a lecture one time where someone was sitting in the front row, and she kept closing her eyes. And I was sort of puzzled. She came up to me after the lecture, and she said, I hate snakes. And every time you showed a piece with a snake in it, I had to close my eyes. So she missed an awful lot of that lecture because so many things I do have snakes in it.

But it's an image - you know, even though we live in such a technological society, some of those animal symbols have stayed with us - things like snakes, even though they can be symbols of regeneration; they're often symbols of evil. And some of the other things, like storks, that are still part - you know, the symbolism of storks or black cats. And then I think on sort of a subconscious level, a lot of that symbolism - animal symbolism - has been around almost as long as there have been human beings. And so I think somehow it's almost a part of the DNA of human beings, that sort of response to animal symbols.

And so much of the symbolism sort of stays the same across cultures, like birds are usually benevolent symbols or good luck symbols, even though some things like crows can be an evil symbol. And I read one time that in the Middle Ages crows were a symbol of everything that is wrong with women. So I really love to put those crows in there from time to time [laughs]. And the shorebirds, I love the symbolism of shorebirds, because they're so humanlike with their wings that are sort of arms and long legs. It's very much a human form. So I do try and work with that duality - symbols - birds that are benevolent symbols and then perhaps a vulture that is not so benevolent.

MS. LAURIA: So when you are composing a piece, are you consciously putting together not only animals that work well in compositions but their inherent symbols that will be translated by the viewer into a story? Or are you leaving it more of an abstracted, or less identified, type of narrative?

MS. ECKERT: It works both ways. Sometimes I might be doing something specific.

MS. LAURIA: Could you give us an example; perhaps discuss Noah's Ark or a biblical story?

MS. ECKERT: Well, this particular piece in the studio is called Promises and Dancing [2006]. I did that for - it was an exhibition with the theme of communication. So on this piece, I specifically chose two fables that had to do with communication. And it's the animals from those two fables that are present in this piece.

Sometimes, the animal symbolism is a lot more general, where there's not a specific reference to a specific story. I am reading constantly. I am reading art history; I am reading symbolism; I am reading legends and mythology. Sometimes, all those things sort of fuse into my work in a very unconscious way. And the piece, sort of, just comes out in the drawings in a way that I don't particularly understand. But later on, like months later, I might spot something in my reading and say, oh, this is where that came from. So it works in all ways - sometimes the animals are more specifically chosen.

Occasionally, I'll do a piece that's a specific reference. I made a shrine piece when my husband was in chemotherapy. We used to walk along the riverbank in the evening as a way of dealing with the chemotherapy, so I did a piece I call Rio Salado Altarpiece [2003]. That piece began with the animals that we'd see in the evening as we walked along the river. So that was a specific reference to the environment, but that's fairly unusual in my work. More often, it comes sort of more indirectly.

MS. LAURIA: And one of the writers who was reviewing your work said - asked a question - and you replied that it was a Yoruban headdress that led you to this path of working with this method and also with the playfulness. And I notice here in the studio, you have these two beautiful sculptures. One looks like a headdress with birds sort of affixed to it. Could you talk about that influence?

MS. ECKERT: Right, these are pieces my husband gave me not long ago. But when I first began to do this work, I was working in a children's art center. And I came across this very simple article about coiling and taught myself to coil, with the idea that it might be something that I could do with the kids. And I did one or two baskets just to get the feeling of the coiling.

And then I came across a photograph of one these Yoruba headdresses. It wasn't labeled; there was no real information about it. It wasn't a very good photograph. And I thought it was a coiled piece. It was one of these Yoruba crowns with birds dancing crazily on the top. The patterns on these are actually rows of beads - glass beads sewn onto a fabric ground. But it looked coiled to me. And I said, hmm, I wonder if I could coil a bird. So that was, I think, the third basket I ever made, and it was a simple little lidded container several inches high with one bird on the top, which was how everything began from that.

Then I began to do vessels that were a little bit larger with groups of birds on the top. And then I began to use the wire core, and they got much larger and more elaborate, and everything else sort of built from that beginning.

MS. LAURIA: Well, those are really interesting pieces. I can imagine how impactful they would be if someone wore them in a ceremonial ritual. But the colors are very bright and saturated and totally colorful; the feeling is very far afield from the kind of colors you've chosen.

MS. ECKERT: Well, these pieces aren't historic really. But the very old ones tend to be a little more muted and a little bit more variety in the color. But I think my color does come from other directions, more so than from this influence.

Perhaps the environment is an impact on the color, because in this kind of desert light, colors seem to be washed out. You don't get intense greens or vibrant, sort of, orchid colors. Color in the desert tends to be muted, and that probably has some kind of an impact. Plus, in art history, so many of the historical pieces I love, they may have been bright when they started out, but by the time I'm seeing them, the color has muted. So I think

that probably impacts as well.

MS. LAURIA: And have you ever used the human figure in your work, or do you intend to ever incorporate that element? Or do you see - this is sort of a two-part question - or do you see your animals - do you ascribe to them human qualities as if they were anthropomorphic qualities?

MS. ECKERT: The only human thing I've ever done is I did a piece once that was a reference to Icarus. It was basically a bird with human feet. But that's as close as I've gotten to human. And I think the reason I like animal symbols as stand-ins for humans is that they're so much more universal. My animals don't really have a gender; they don't have an ethnicity. They're much more universal. But I do think of them as human symbols a lot of times, or symbols of human qualities.

MS. LAURIA: Do you think that there is a part of the work that is like a morality play, or do you feel the work is not particularly about moral codes, so to speak, nor about any specific religion, but maybe has a spirituality about it?

MS. ECKERT: So many of the things, like the fables, like Aesop's Fables - and those even go back to more ancient fables - there is a series of stories called Kalila Wa Dimna, and they're Arabic stories that are similar to Aesop's Fables. I think they were originally written in Sanskrit. So those kinds of fables go way, way back. And in those fables, the animals are stand-ins for humans, and they are telling, sort of, morals.

They're like guides to how to live in the world. So the same sorts of ideas that might be in an Aesop's Fable and be in the teachings of Moses, might end up in our world as advice from a psychologist. But they're sort of like ways to live in the world, guidelines of ways to live in the world, and sometimes they're fables; sometimes they become incorporated into religions. But it's all about being human. And I guess one of the things that intrigues me about those early fables is that human nature never really changes. The same lessons they're teaching in those very early days, humans have not learned. We're still doing all the same things.

MS. LAURIA: The piece that you pointed out here that is in your studio that is about communication - let's say that I am a viewer at a gallery and I see this piece and I approach it. And there are several levels of communication when you view an object. And maybe we could talk about those kinds of levels that you hope a viewer might interpret from your pieces - I mean, formally, aesthetically, and also the symbolism. Do you want to walk me through some of that contextual meaning?

MS. ECKERT: It's not important to me that people know the specific fables, like this one does have the specific stories, and it's not important to me that people know them; and I don't think they need to know them to appreciate the piece. But I always tell the galleries what they are, so that if someone wants to know, that information is available.

These two particular fables - the one on the left is a story about two birds, a kite, and an eagle. And the kite really wanted to be the mate of the eagle. And the eagle was saying, no, no; you're not a good enough hunter. And the kite said, oh, I'm a terrific hunter. I can catch an ostrich for you. So the eagle agreed to be the kite's mate, and the kite couldn't catch an ostrich. All he could bring was a pitiful little mouse. And when the eagle objected, he said, well, I knew I wasn't really going to be able to catch an ostrich, but I was willing to tell you anything to get what I wanted.

The other story is about a monkey who was a wonderful dancer. And so all the animals in the jungle elected the monkey to be their king. But he turned out to be a really foolish leader. The dog played a trick on him, and he was proved to be a really foolish leader, and the dog said to the rest of the animals, well, you should have known better than to elect a king because he could dance.

So I think, you know, it's an example of how humans don't change. Those two sorts of ideas are just throughout history; those are still things that people are doing. And this is really - these are very old - Aesop's Fables.

MS. LAURIA: So if I were interested in purchasing this piece, and I asked the gallery, would they give me a written explanation of the piece that you'd given them, or just let me know what the fables were and I could go research them?

MS. ECKERT: I always tell them what the specific fable is, so I think they could probably print out a fable for somebody who wanted to know. And some people care, and some people don't.

MS. LAURIA: Because what I particularly like about this piece is the sense of scale. First of all, it's small in terms of contemporary art scale today.

MS. ECKERT: Right, everything I do, it tends to be small. Large for me is pretty small for everybody else.

MS. LAURIA: This is intimate; I'd have to get close enough. But I really like the interaction of the animals. They're all communicating somehow by looking at each other or looking to the next one. They're placed fairly close together and they're also in this wonderful - what I call - display cartouche. Can you explain that sort of strategy, how you get the viewer to zoom in on the story contained within your borders? Is that a painting strategy?

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, it's unconscious; but it probably comes from that old painting background. And the idea of the arches - it was a lot of shrines that I was looking at, specifically, like the ivory altarpieces is when I first began to do these pieces. I did shrines for a long time. I think it was probably those altarpieces that pointed me in that direction.

And then I was doing a piece similar to this, and a friend came into the studio, and I was referring to it as a shrine, and she said, Carol, it's not a shrine; it's a book. And it was. They were two rectangular frames attached, and it was very much a book. Since then, I've done folding, five-panel books. I've done a series of those. And in some ways, I was just surprised it took me so long to make books, because so much of my life has been about books and about telling stories. So much of my work is about telling stories, but it actually - recently, I have been doing this series of books.

[END MD01 TR01, BEGIN MD02 TR01.]

MS. LAURIA: This is Jo Lauria interviewing Carol Eckert at the artist's home studio in Tempe, Arizona, on June 18, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Carol, can you discuss the difference, if any, between a university-trained artist and one who has learned her craft outside academia. What has been your most rewarding educational experience?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I'm not sure if I know the answer really, except that in my own personal life, part of my learning came from a university experience - I did get an undergraduate degree in art, so all of the formal training about things like composition, color, the art history, all of that came as part of the university education. But in fiber, I am totally self-taught. The advantage of that for me has been that I didn't know the proper way to do it.

And I also think - I worked in isolation, so it was good for me in a way. I didn't ever have anyone looking over my shoulder or critiquing; I was free to experiment and find my way. When I was a painter, I always felt - I'd stretch up a canvas and stand in front of it and say to myself, now I have to paint a really important painting. But when I was on my own learning about basketry, I would say things to myself like, I wonder if I could make a bird. I wonder if I could make a wolf. So I didn't have that pressure of making an important statement, so I think I was able to develop work that was much more personal. So there were advantages in both ways for me.

MS. LAURIA: And one of them was being liberated from an environment that could be critical and also liberated from the established traditions so that you could invent your own way.

MS. ECKERT: Right, I think those things were important for me.

MS. LAURIA: Do you see yourself as part of an international tradition, or one that is particularly American?

MS. ECKERT: My imagery is very much part of international tradition, and it's the reason I use it, because it doesn't pertain to a particular culture or a particular people, and it comes from this really broad base of legends and mythology and spiritual traditions that come from all over the globe. So in that sense, it's a very universal thing, and I draw on all kinds of periods of art history that have influenced my work.

In terms of basket making itself, contemporary basketry really has had an American focus - there are some interesting people working in England and Australia, and there are some very interesting Japanese basket makers doing contemporary basketry and some Canadian, but the essence of the contemporary basket movement seems to be American. It's very much based on an American movement and a core of American artists.

MS. LAURIA: And do you feel that the Americanness of your work is the - is the fact that you can be adventuresome, that you're not so rigidly tied to any one particular type of basket tradition, for instance, if you were a Japanese basket maker having to do particular vessels made in certain shapes the way the Japanese potters always do, shapes that are historically based.

MS. ECKERT: I know there is that in Japanese basket making, that incredible tradition of basket making and studying with the master. But I don't know if my work is particularly American. There are very traditional strains within American basket making, like Nantucket Lightship baskets are always made the same way. So there are some very traditional ways of making American baskets. So I'm not sure that it is American as opposed to another country, but just that my own approach has been more experimental because I didn't come - I never

had the exposure of that traditional basket background; I came at it sideways, and it was almost like I was doing the imagery that I had in my mind when I was working in clay, but I had found a better technique for doing that imagery with. So it wasn't exactly related to basketry; it wasn't related to the tradition of basketry, anyway, even though it happened to be a very traditional technique.

MS. LAURIA: I know when you first started, you mentioned that you came to this form of coiling through the vessel, and vessels always are loaded with, metaphorically, anyway, the idea of being related to - or referencing - function. And now as your work has moved away from the vessel, it certainly is not tied to the idea of function anymore, but could you explain for us what your feelings are about your sculptures having some very loose connection to function?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I think things that have influenced me have always been functional but in a different kind of functional way. When I was doing vessels, it wasn't like a vessel to hold soup, but it might be a vessel to hold special objects used for divining, or a staff that had the function of indicating power, a powerful person. So it is that kind of function. The original Yoruba crowns were definitely functional; they were a way of signifying who the king was. So it's a different kind of function that I'm inspired by, and it's sort of more - it's a ceremonial function or a spiritual function that a lot of these pieces have had.

Like some of the African pieces that I had admired so much had definite function - maybe it would be the function of warding off an evil spirit, and so it's that kind of functionality that ends up in my work, and I did think, like some of these powerful tribal pieces, I thought, wouldn't it be wonderful if I could make a piece that had some kind of power. It was at a time when I was doing a lot of juried exhibitions, and so I had this idea that - what if I could make a piece that would actually influence the jury to accept this piece into the exhibition. But I did do a series of pieces where I hid objects inside, completely sealed objects inside. And I have done a lot of containers, sometimes, that I would put things inside, make other animals to go into the container. I have done pieces with drawers.

One time a friend said to me - it was one of the pieces that was a container with drawers in it - and she said, well, if I had this piece, I would put my wedding ring in it. I thought about that and I was a little disappointed because I thought, well, she is sort of seeing this differently than I am seeing it. She is seeing it as a jewelry box, where I'm seeing it as a container for something ritual and special. And then she told me she was getting divorced. So all of a sudden, she was seeing that piece the way I was seeing it, as a container for a very potent object.

MS. LAURIA: That is interesting. When you put these, let's say, hidden or secret pieces in your sculptures, did you tell the person who purchased them that they had this internal ritualistic object inside, or was it only your secret?

MS. ECKERT: Usually it was only me that knew. I did a piece one time where it was a steer and he was carrying a rolled up scroll on his back, and I had written a secret inscription on the scroll. A man came up to me at the opening exhibition to ask me what was written on the scroll. And it was coded, so even if you had unrolled it, you couldn't have - you wouldn't have known. And he said, what does it say, and I said, well, it's a secret. He said, you would tell the person who bought the piece, wouldn't you? And I said, well, no. He said, but what if it is something bad, which I loved. Because he was giving this piece power.

MS. LAURIA: So that is the kind of functionality that you would like to communicate to the viewer, is the feeling of ritualistic and fetish, the kind of power that a fetish could hold over a person, based on their cultural beliefs.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, it's that kind of function more. And like the book pieces I'm doing now, I mean, books are definitely functional, and my book piece sort of tells a story. So there is a function in here and in those pieces. It's just sort of a different function than people often think of. And so much of art history, the objects were functional. There were spiritual functions for most of the history of art until fairly recent times, but all of the old Egyptian and Minoan pieces, there was always a function of some kind with those, but it was a ritual function most often.

MS. LAURIA: And also a function could be to put the viewer into a state of contemplation or meditation. Do you see that as something that your pieces might do?

MS. ECKERT: Hopefully. You know, I hope that they work on a lot of levels and that they are the kind of pieces you can keep looking at and discovering more and more about, and making more and more connections with.

MS. LAURIA: And in the last disk, we were just getting into the idea of talking about display issues, compositional strategies. Could you talk further about that? I mean, obviously, when you have a staff or something linear - how should that be displayed? How should these wall pieces be put in an environment to their best advantage?

MS. ECKERT: I personally like them when they cast shadows. I actually made a piece fairly recently where I designed it to cast a specific shadow. So I do - I'm very aware of that. It's not like they have to be displayed so

they cast a shadow, but I think it enhances the pieces when they do that.

MS. LAURIA: And the smaller pieces that seem to be able to stand on their own, you see them as pedestal pieces?

MS. ECKERT: Most often. And there are a lot of basketry collectors who have shelves in their homes, and so they - I mean, baskets tend to be fairly small in scale, so often people will display baskets on a shelf. One time a gallery did call me and asked me to measure - they had sent a slide of the piece to someone, and they asked me to measure exactly, because it couldn't be taller than 13 inches, and they needed to know whether it would fit, and the collector was wondering if it could be smooshed - [laughs] - to fit in that 13 inches. And I think baskets do - they do display nicely on shelves. There are several people who own my work that have groups of my work together on shelves.

MS. LAURIA: So although you can say that they are freestanding sculptures, a lot of your work seems to be very frontally oriented, like a painting.

MS. ECKERT: It is. And, you know, I read a thing that Janet Koplos wrote one time when she was talking about vessels, ceramic vessels specifically, but she said a vessel is essentially a two-dimensional form - I guess if you think of a pot, no matter which direction you look at it from, it's always the same. And I thought, you know, that really resonated with me, because it's sort of how my work works. When I'm using symmetry, it has a front and a back, so it is more - most of my work is more two-dimensional in concept than three-dimensional. And probably it goes back to those painting beginnings. And the way that I work from drawings and cartoons, that obviously has an impact on them, too.

MS. LAURIA: So if you were to see this two-arched piece here that you have in your studio from the other side, would it read just as well, since the wiring and the embroidery, the fabric and the colors are the same, or do you see it as a progression, like reading a text from left to right?

MS. ECKERT: No, the left to right usually doesn't enter in. And I always finish both sides. To me, there is a front, but they can always been seen from the back. And I have taken them to a photographer and had him accidentally photograph them from the back, because it's not completely clear. Even some of the wall pieces I have done, the backs are totally finished, so that a person could free - instead of hang them on a wall, could hang them free in a middle of the room so they could be seen from both sides.

MS. LAURIA: Have you ever done any ceiling pieces that would hang freely from the ceiling, almost like mobiles?

MS. ECKERT: No, I never have done that.

MS. LAURIA: Have any of the pieces ever been kinetic?

MS. ECKERT: No, nothing kinetic, no.

MS. LAURIA: So they are more stationary tableaux, almost like still lifes.

MS. ECKERT: Right. And some of the book pieces do have a little bit of left to right in them. I did a five-panel book called The Five Books [2004], which was based on animals that were specifically referenced in the five books of Moses. So each panel is actually animals from one of the books of Moses, starting - working left to right, the first through the fifth book. But you could see it from the other side and it wouldn't make a difference.

MS. LAURIA: And the staff pieces, how does one display those? Are they anchored onto a mount of some sort?

MS. ECKERT: They all have a base that they slip in and out of. And I guess in terms of your question about kinetic, well, the first time I ever made a staff, I took it out to the gallery, and the installationist took it from me and did a little dance with it, which made me think that maybe I should try to make them move in some way. So I did begin to do a series where I tried to put movement in things that would swing or -

MS. LAURIA: Swivel.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, like the birds' wings, I weighted the wings so that they would sort of move. And it was really a structural challenge because for so many years I have been trying to make them as rigid and as stable as possible because I am always thinking about archival. And when people own something, I want them to have it forever. And it was a real challenge to work it the other way, to get movement back into it. But I did do some things that would move - they were kinetic in the sense that if you carried them, they would move.

MS. LAURIA: And I think I recall seeing some of your sculptures that perhaps some of the animals were at the end of a dangling string, so it would -

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, that was probably part of that same series, because I did do that kind of thing for a while in those staffs.

MS. LAURIA: And that brings me to the next port of entry - at some point you said you might like to get into the idea of wearable art, seeing these possibly as ritualistic costumes or accoutrements?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I think it's because of that first Yoruba headdress. I could see something crownlike or tiara-like, and I think the process would lend itself to that. It's something I've been thinking about for a while, and I've never gotten to the point of pursuing it. People have asked me about, say, neckpieces, and I think it would lend itself to that, but I haven't gotten there yet.

MS. LAURIA: All right, you're probably aware of Joyce Scott, the artist who uses beading and quilting in her work -

MS. ECKERT: Yes.

MS. LAURIA: Her beaded necklaces, is that something that you think your work might translate into - a narrative, possibly sculptural adornment for the body?

MS. ECKERT: Possibly, yeah. Except I do think the idea of, like, a crown or headdress appeals to me more than a neckpiece. But I think it could - you know, I think I could do that, and I may at some point.

MS. LAURIA: Or as part of - what about costuming? Has anybody ever approached you to do part of a piece for a stage set or a costume?

MS. ECKERT: No, no. It could be an interesting possibility, but I've never -

MS. LAURIA: A lot of work.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah.

[They laugh.]

MS. LAURIA: And it'd probably have to scale up a bit for an audience in a distance, but it is a textile, fiber-based kind of art that could lend itself to other forms, and certainly wearable art could be one of them.

MS. ECKERT: Especially something that you see close up, and so wearable art is something that you would see. I think, sort of, the texture and the pattern that's created by the coiling - it is nice to be able to see it close up.

MS. LAURIA: What we need to ask - although you've touched upon this in different ways, but maybe you could just describe in one long sentence, what are the qualities of your working environment?

MS. ECKERT: Well, it's not real big. It's a small studio and just filled with things I love. I keep my drawings - I pin the working drawings up on the walls so that I can refer to them. It's full of family photos and pictures of things that I find interesting. I have a really nice view out to the garden, and so I watch birds out my window constantly. This time of year, there are a lot of hummingbirds in the garden, and I listen a lot, as I work - I listen to public radio a lot. I'm a great fan of the BBC [British Broadcasting Company] and I listen to WNYC [New York Public Radio] in New York, and when I listen to music, it's world music from all over. I'm a reggae fan and I listen to - my most recent CD is a Spanish singer. So my taste in music is about as broad as my taste in art history, I think.

MS. LAURIA: Well, I noticed, too, walking out into your backyard that you're very attuned and a wonderful gardener. Obviously you have a love for fauna and flora.

MS. ECKERT: I do. I'm an avid gardener, and I think it's between my garden and my work that I stay sane, but I spend - you know, one of the nice things about working at home is that when I take a break, I can go out and do something in the garden and move around a bit and then come back in. And even though not much from the garden directly ends up in my work, there are some little blackbirds with pink feet in my garden that have occasionally shown up in my work.

MS. LAURIA: And what about the plants? Do you inhabit your still lifes with native plants from Arizona, or are they more mythical, like some of your animals?

MS. ECKERT: The plants tend to be more mythical or symbolic, but you can definitely see some of those sort of agave or aloe forms. I have a garden full of a lot of succulents, and so you can see some of those forms in my work. And my earlier work used to incorporate more of that, where I have done pieces with some sort of cactus forms in them, and a javelina, which is a wild pig that's not in my garden but is native to Arizona. So some of my

earlier work had more references to that - rattlesnakes and things like that - but I've sort of moved away from that for the last several years.

MS. LAURIA: Have you ever used a hybrid or mythological beasts, such as those we know about through Egyptian or Assyrian art?

MS. ECKERT: More so the kinds of animals that were in fairy tales, and especially when my daughter was little, some of those fairy tale animals would creep into my work. So I did things like dragons and griffins for a while. But now it's become more these symbolic animals that are based on actual birds and wolves and other animals. I do have sort of a cast of characters that keep turning up - the shorebirds, a lot of deer, wolves. Those things find their way into my work frequently.

MS. LAURIA: And there's a dog animal that seems sometimes to look more doglike, other times to look coyote, sometimes like a wolf, and sometimes it looks menacing and other times it looks very benign.

MS. ECKERT: Right, that sort of wolf-coyote image does end up in a lot of my work. When I was really little, one of my recurring nightmares was wolves, and "Peter and the Wolf," I thought, was just about the scariest story I'd ever heard. So the wolves have been a part of my work for a long time. And I think also they're a part of a lot of Scandinavian legends.

MS. LAURIA: What are the most powerful influences in your career? Would you say it has been the people you've met, or art movements that you've gone through, or technological developments that have occurred?

MS. ECKERT: People. Definitely people in terms of my career. The first person who really had an impact on my career was Jane Sauer, and it happened as a result of being rejected from a juried exhibition. Craft Alliance was having a basketry show. This was very early - I think maybe around 1980, early '80s - and I entered. It was one of the first juried exhibitions I had entered, and I got a letter back from Craft Alliance saying the juror had rejected my work. It was a nice letter, but it was a rejection letter, and it said your work does not fit the juror's concept of basketry, and I have no idea - I don't remember who the juror was.

But it turned out that Jane Sauer was working as a gofer that day, and she was running coffee back and forth to the juror, kind of helping organize slides, and she saw the work, and so a couple of years later, Craft Alliance asked me to be a part of a three-person show as a result of Jane's influence. Jane bought a piece out of that exhibition, and then I began to get these mysterious invitations to exhibit in various invitationals, and I knew, you know, Jane was recommending me for things. So she was -

MS. LAURIA: So Jane, at that point, was a gallery owner?

MS. ECKERT: No, she was an artist, but Jane has been a person who has helped so many basketry people. She's just been so sharing and taken such an interest in helping other artists. So she was quite established herself at that point, and she recommended me to Barbara Rose Okun, who was working as an independent dealer in St. Louis then. So Barbara was my first gallery.

And then it kind of built from there, and other people who've been - there have been so many collectors who have been supportive of my work, just really wonderful people. And some people own groups of my work - Marcia Docter has quite a few pieces, and Doug and Dale Anderson, Karen Johnson Boyd. There are people who've, you know, bought my work more than once, and Bruce Pepich at the Racine Art Museum [Racine, WI], early on, supported my work. So it's the people who've really made a difference in my career.

MS. LAURIA: So these would be people or institutions that have your work in depth; so if somebody wanted to see a very comprehensive body of your work, where would you recommend they go? To what institution? Would it be the Racine Art Museum-

MS. ECKERT: The Racine, yeah, the Racine Art Museum has more of my pieces than anyone at this point. And from the very beginning he supported my work, real early on, so I feel a real debt to him. And he's supported contemporary basketry; he has a wonderful collection of contemporary basketry at the museum.

MS. LAURIA: And Karen Johnson Boyd, of course, being from the Johnson Wax family - they did that great exhibition, "Objects: USA" in 1969, and many craft artists refer to that as the beginning of their careers, you know, that being invited to be part of that show -

MS. ECKERT: Seeing that show, for me, was really significant, because it was when I was working at the Phoenix Community Art Center, which was a couple of doors down from the Phoenix Art Museum, and probably - it was probably 1970 when that show toured to the Phoenix Art Museum, and I spent a lot of hours in there looking at it by myself and with my classes. So I'd take my classes over, and the poor guards went crazy, because when my classes would come in, everybody wanted to touch. But that was an amazing exhibition and it really had an

impact on me.

MS. LAURIA: When I sometimes give talks about crafts, I always cite the two - what I think were the two most important early shows - and one is "Objects: USA" and the other is the "Eloquent Object," which was organized by Marcia and Tom Manhart. The "Eloquent Object" came out of the Philbrook Art Museum [Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK]. And this brings me to my next question: do you think that objects like this have a great power over people who can see them on display?

MS. ECKERT: Well, they sure did for me - [laughs] - I can say that. And, you know, our local museum, the ASU Art Museum, has been wonderfully supportive of the crafts, and it started with the founding director, Rudy Turk. I think he came here late '60s or early '70s, and he'd been in Northern California, so he was aware of the things that were happening with clay and fiber at that time. When he came here, he established a ceramics collection, which has since become the Ceramics Research Center, which is just the most amazing collection of ceramics, maybe, in the United States. I mean, that is an incredible collection, and they have - the museum has a turned bowl collection and they're collecting contemporary baskets.

And the first exhibition I ever entered was a fiber competition that Rudy organized. I think it was in '78, and he brought Kay Sekimachi in to jury it. So we've had the good fortune, in this area, of having a museum that's been supportive of crafts for many years.

MS. LAURIA: So exhibitions are definitely a way to get people aware - it makes them aware of different kinds of art and craft and design, and it also is educational, and I think it can incite passion in several viewers who might take from that experience and go home and want to learn more about a particular field or technique.

MS. ECKERT: I think so, and when they did the Lieberman basketry exhibition a year or so ago, they said they had tremendous response to that from all kinds of people - people with art backgrounds, without art backgrounds, they had really wonderful enthusiasm about that show.

MS. LAURIA: A lot of people say that the difference between having a show that includes craft objects is that it tends to be much more accessible to the public - that the public can understand or have a connection - immediate connection - with craft. Do you think this is true of craft objects as opposed to maybe other objects that are more conceptual?

MS. ECKERT: Probably. I think my work has been pretty accessible.

MS. LAURIA: Pretty accessible?

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, pretty accessible. I think people respond to it - people can respond to it without any kind of background in art, and I think it's because of that connection to animal symbolism that humans have.

MS. LAURIA: One could say that they might respond the same way to animals in a painting, but some people feel intimidated by paintings that, to them, might feel very formal, whereas a sculpture, and especially sculpture made out of fiber, which has an immediate tactile sensibility about it, tends to invite people in a little easier.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, it could be. And I do think people respond to technique in a way - you know, they want it - when they look at it, they sort of want to know how it's done, and maybe that's an entry point into appreciating it.

MS. LAURIA: That's an interesting way of looking at it, because I think technique definitely is something people want to know about. When you go to an art exhibition or a gallery show, I always hear somebody ask, how is that made?

MS. ECKERT: Right, and the question people ask me so often is, how long did it take? [Laughs] And I know that some people are offended by that question, but I never am. I mean, when I was starting out, just from a practical point of view, I was curious about how long it took people to make things. Even though it's not really important in terms of your final appreciation of it, I think people are curious about that.

MS. LAURIA: I think a lot of artists do get offended, because they feel that the people equate time and process with money or in terms of end product, and for an artist, it's not about the time or the money, or the end product. It's about the getting there, the journey.

MS. ECKERT: Right, absolutely. And my process is very time intensive, but it's meditative. I really love doing it, and so sometimes, if I'm working on something like a vessel or the outside frame - on that day in my life, if I need just a complete meditative sort of process, I'll do that part of the piece I'm working on, and if it's a day when I want more of a challenge, then I'll figure out how to make an ostrich. So I sort of trade off those two kinds of processes in my work.

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MS. LAURIA: How do you see the place of universities and the American craft movement, and specifically, for artists working in fiber or basketry?

MS. ECKERT: It's a hard question for basketry, contemporary basketry, because a lot of people in the field have come out of university backgrounds, but basketry itself is hard to teach in a classroom setting. People working in basketry are working with so many different processes, so many different materials that it's really not so teachable as a subject, and the people that end up in the field come from a variety of backgrounds, sometimes fibers, sometimes there are other painters, like myself.

So it's not exactly teachable, and I think - at least my experience has been - where the university has been so important to the field of basketry has been the university art museum and its support of basketry and basketry exhibitions. So in that sense, by exposing everyone, including students, the university community, to basketry as an area, it means that people can come to the area from any number of different backgrounds.

MS. LAURIA: And I know there are organizations, or very specialized organizations, actually, and not so specialized ones, such as the Basketry Organization that has its own guild and its own membership and has certain events that it does for the members, and then there are others like the American Craft Council, where you can belong. Have any of these organizations been helpful to you in your career or for any kind of educational or resource benefits?

MS. ECKERT: Well, the National Basketry Organization grew out of the conferences that were at Arrowmont, and so it's a fairly recent development, but they've continued to have - and I'm a member of that organization - but they've continued to have conferences every two years. They have a conference and they do a newsletter, which has been really wonderful for the field, and I think it's wonderful for people who are just entering the field. It sort of came along later for me and it hasn't had so much of an impact on me, but I'm very supportive of it because of the connections it opens for people who are coming in now.

MS. LAURIA: And what about the role of specialized periodicals for your area, such as Fiber Arts or Surface Design journal, or maybe, if there's one, American Craft magazine?

MS. ECKERT: Actually, the most influential, for me, is American Craft, because back when I worked at the Phoenix Art Center, in one of the back storerooms, I found a whole stack of Craft Horizons, and I used to spend my lunch hours with a sandwich reading magazine after magazine, so I got a complete course in the history of contemporary crafts by reading those magazines, and it was wonderful.

Then, for many years I didn't subscribe. We were poor in the beginning - [laughs] - and then on limited income, so I didn't subscribe and I just worked in isolation, which was probably good for me because I wasn't really influenced by anyone's idea of what a basket was or what was popular or what was being successful. I just was able to make very personal work, and then after some years, I did subscribe, and I look forward to it now, mainly to see what my friends are doing and what's happening, so I think it's been an important thing for the world of crafts.

MS. LAURIA: And how has your work been received over time in these publications, and who do you see as the most significant writers in the field of American craft?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I know specifically basketry better than anything else, and I know Janet Koplos has done some interesting writing. Beverly Brandt writes - she writes primarily about the history of craft. She's a specialist in the Arts and Crafts movement, and she has written some wonderful things, including some of the essays that - the series of books that the American Craft Museum [now Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY] put out under Janet Kardon. She wrote for some of those books. So she's done some wonderful writing, and she wrote very thoughtfully about my work.

But in contemporary basketry specifically, we haven't had a lot of writers. Like in ceramics, you write extensively in ceramics, and Garth Clark, and Susan Peterson writes about historical things, but basketry as a field hasn't had that kind of writing, or scholarship particularly, connected to it, which is unfortunate. I wish we did.

MS. LAURIA: Do you think it's just because it's a newly established field, and especially since so many people in the area of basketry now are really making great leaps and bounds experimentally? Maybe it just hasn't - the writers haven't caught up yet.

MS. ECKERT: That's possible, and also it's smaller. I mean, compared to the world of ceramics, ceramics is such a huge area. So I think that's part of it, too, that it's just a much smaller area.

MS. LAURIA: Do you feel that it's helpful for writing in the crafts in general, and specifically about your work and

about basketry, that it be constructively critical, or do you think it's okay if it's just informational?

MS. ECKERT: Well, so much of it has been informational, and I don't mind informational writing. I learn an awful lot about people's work reading informational things, and then I probably have my own critical opinions, so I guess that's not a huge issue for me. I know it's been an issue that's been talked about a lot, but personally, I've never felt that it was a huge problem. I suppose it would be good for the field, but I'm content just to read about all the things that people are doing.

MS. LAURIA: And also, I think one of the greatest importance of periodicals is the imagery that -

MS. ECKERT: Right. It's the visual.

MS. LAURIA: - to see the reproductions.

MS. ECKERT: Right. So much of what I do when I look is look at the images. It's very true.

MS. LAURIA: Do you feel, though, in the area of crafts, there's been some discussion that a hierarchy of the arts, that one of the reasons why crafts seems to be on a lower rung on this hierarchy, is that it's so much tied to process and there's so much discussion of process? Do you think that is a fair assessment of what the discussion or the dialogue is about crafts, or maybe that we shouldn't tie it so much to process?

MS. ECKERT: I'm not sure I know the answer. Process has been an important part of what I do, and yet I don't think my work is about process. Maybe it is just sort of intrinsic to crafts that the process is in there. I don't think it should be the first, most important thing. One thing I think that's been good is more writing about the history of crafts. I think that's really valuable for the field, and that's fairly new.

MS. LAURIA: And how do you see what you do in terms of coiling and basketry as a means for expression? What do you think the strengths or limitations are of your chosen medium?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I guess what I like about it is I haven't found too many limitations. If I can think something up, I can usually make it, and my limitation - you know, I do have some challenges as I'm getting bigger, and I could never get - there are some limits to how large I could get altogether, I think, so that might be a limit, but since I like the intimacy of it, I don't think I'm going to be too constrained by size. I think I'll be able to work as large as I want to.

MS. LAURIA: Do you ever see a point in your display strategy as wanting to include your wonderful colored drawings to go along with the piece? Or what do you do with the drawings? Do you save them as part of your archives?

MS. ECKERT: I save them. I have them all. Galleries have asked me before about showing them, and I thought about it, but then I found what I did, if I thought the drawing was going to be shown, I really tightened up when I was doing the drawing, and I don't think the drawing worked as well. They worked better as objects when I wasn't thinking of them as finished projects. So I've only shown them once. The Kohler Arts Center [Sheboygan, WI] did a three-person exhibition where they specifically asked three people who worked from drawings, and so I did show a small group of them in that exhibition, but that's the only time I've ever shown them.

MS. LAURIA: Well, your drawings to me seem really playful, and I don't want to say childlike, because that seems like a pejorative to some people but -

MS. ECKERT: No, right.

MS. LAURIA: - they could very easily be made into almost a children's book in a sense. Have you thought about ever putting them together with words to make a child's story or any kind of - it doesn't have to be a child's story but any kind of fable on your own?

MS. ECKERT: I haven't, no, but they do, they come out of that tradition, so that's probably why they have that feeling, but I've been content to let the work tell the stories, to this point, anyway.

MS. LAURIA: Without having any text -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - associated with it, although you probably could coil text in there, too. There is a Jane Sauer basket that we're traveling in "Craft in America," the exhibition, and it's called The Knot-Magic [1991], K-N-O-T, and it's all about the significance of what knotting means historically and especially to women, because knotting is something that has certain suggestive and magical powers in certain cultures. Do you think about that when you are developing your work?

MS. ECKERT: Well, the only time I've ever used anything close to text is one time I used some runes, rune symbols, on a basket to say something, to sort of encode a message, but only once, and I haven't really thought of any more ideas that went down that -

MS. LAURIA: Down that path.

MS. ECKERT: - that followed that - down that path, that's what I'm trying to say, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Although you did do that little scroll for the -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: I know you mentioned that you like working with the animals because they are not gender specific, they don't have an ethnicity about them, but do you think the process of knotting and working with what we traditionally call women's art, needlework, as providing some empowerment to your gender?

MS. ECKERT: I hadn't thought about it particularly in those terms. I've always, all my life, done things with my hands. I talked about how I've done things for the home, like embroidery and sewing, so all of those things have just been a natural part of my life, so it was easy to move into the coiling as just one more natural part of my life.

MS. LAURIA: But I think it is probably universally thought of, basket making, as being a female-gendered art.

MS. ECKERT: Well, there are some traditions that it's men's, like the Nantucket Lightship baskets, and I think some of the Appalachian heritage, it's the men that make the baskets. But it is true in many cultures it's women who make it, and you often hear of that reference to the vessel as a female form, but it isn't something that's consciously entered into my work.

MS. LAURIA: What are the similarities or differences between your early work and your most recent work?

MS. ECKERT: My work has gradually gotten larger and more complicated and more complex in terms of the stories it tells, in addition to more complex in the form, even though the technique stays the same. I'm doing some more complex things with the technique in terms of letting it create texture. But essentially that's - everything has gotten more complex, the stories and the work, the technical work itself.

MS. LAURIA: And the scale has increased.

MS. ECKERT: And the scale has increased. And I noticed that's something that's happening in contemporary basketry with a lot of makers. The work seems to be getting larger.

MS. LAURIA: I think, when one becomes a master of one's art, the inclination is to scale up, because it's always a challenge, no matter what medium -

MS. ECKERT: That could be.

MS. LAURIA: - one is working with, like for instance, pottery. Potters seem to want to see who can make the biggest -

MS. ECKERT: That's true, right.

MS. LAURIA: - the biggest pot.

MS. ECKERT: A gallerist one time told me that she thought I worked backwards from most people in that she thought it was more common for a person's work to become more simple over time, that they simplify over time rather than making things more complex. I've been trying to figure out ever since then if that's true. I don't know. It's certainly not true for me, but in a general sense, there are definitely people whose forms become simplified over time, but I'm not sure it's true across the board.

MS. LAURIA: No, I think there are other types of art, too, where working small is much more difficult.

MS. ECKERT: Right, right, that's true.

MS. LAURIA: So it just depends, I suppose, on the materials and the medium.

When did you begin exhibiting your work, and how would you say that that experience influenced the way that you work, based on the reaction that you were given from being exhibited; like being accepted into the invitationals, did you notice that you changed in any way because of the acceptance of your work?

MS. ECKERT: I started exhibiting in the late '70s, and I don't think the work itself changed in any way as a result of being accepted or not accepted. I don't think that had an impact. But it is encouraging to have your work out there, and if you don't have to make something and put it on a shelf, you're much more inspired to make more pieces.

So I think it made me work harder and spend more hours; so in a practical sense just working harder, being more focused, it was encouraging in that respect, and of course, you always get thrown out of exhibitions, too, it just comes with the territory. But even though I'd be disappointed, I don't think it seemed to have a really bad effect long-term.

I'd be disappointed for a few days, and then I'd get right back at it, and I exhibited - and one fortunate thing about that time period is there were a lot of competitive shows, and it was wonderful for people who were coming up, and also, if you sent work out, you knew that it might get rejected from one thing and accepted in another thing, so you sort of learned not to be too devastated.

MS. LAURIA: But recognition, obviously, is an important benchmark in anyone's career.

MS. ECKERT: It's encouraging. It makes you want to just work harder. And I've always put in a lot of hours. My theory has always been to spend every available minute I can in the studio, and in the beginning, it was those, sort of, chopped up periods of time, and now I can work - I can get up early in the morning and just work straight through without interruption. So that's nice.

MS. LAURIA: You mentioned early on in the interview, as well, that you chose to be an artist because you thought the lifestyle appealed to you. What is it about the lifestyle that you found so appealing or so seductive in the beginning, and has it continued, has it rewarded your first assessment?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I think in the beginning, I just had this vague idea that it was sort of a different, unusual, sort of, not typical thing to do, and that's probably what appealed to me. I didn't know artists; I didn't really have any practical experience or exposure to tell me that. It was sort of just a romantic idea that - it has been a really nice life. I'm very happy doing my work, and there's a flexibility about being an artist that's been nice for me. I could be flexible in terms of my children when they were growing up, and that's just - it has been a very nice way to live life. I'm not getting rich, but you know - [laughs].

MS. LAURIA: But you could commune with others, as well, who are also -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - passionate.

MS. ECKERT: And right, I've made so many good friends. I've had a chance to travel around in relation to my work, and that has been really good.

MS. LAURIA: Do you ever do commissioned work?

MS. ECKERT: I have. I haven't done commissions like large-scale commissions for corporations. I've never done anything like that. The commissions that I get tend to be when someone sees a piece of my work that's no longer available and they would like something related to it. So I have done commissions in that way, but I don't do too many.

MS. LAURIA: Could you describe some of the difficulties or opportunities that might be presented by commissions?

MS. ECKERT: Since the commissions that I've had aren't too different than my regular work, it hasn't presented any extra challenges, and often, if somebody is interested in a commission - I work in series, I do a series of related similar pieces, so often I'll say, well, why don't you just wait and the next piece that I have that's related to this, I'll let you see it first? So it's not too often that I'm making a specific piece for someone based on anything, any specific requests on their part. So it doesn't present any unusual, any challenges that are different than my regular work.

MS. LAURIA: Would you consider doing something like a public art project, such as doing a large-scale piece for a lobby of a government building or something similar, or would you find that to be too far afield from what you normally do?

MS. ECKERT: Someone has talked to me recently about the possibility down the road of doing a large wall piece for a children's hospital, which I find really appealing on any number of levels. I think that would be something I'd be really interested in doing, so I hope that works out.

MS. LAURIA: And I know that when you have pieces in an exhibition or that are collected by a museum, it is the hands-off, as it has to be, provision, but do you find that people often want to touch your work, that there is a great tactile seductiveness about it, and would that bother you if, for instance, if people wanted to handle the work, who owned it?

MS. ECKERT: It doesn't bother me at all that people who own it handle it. On a practical level, if something is out and it is in an exhibition, there's a practical side that if too many people handled it, it would be damaged, but I often do things with drawers and things that can be opened, so I understand why people want to open things and touch things, and it's actually nice when they can, because I think it enhances the experience, but on a practical level, a lot of times they can't.

When I first started exhibiting, I used to ask that they be put into vitrines, and then one of the exhibitions I was in, someone talked to me about that and said, you know, it really puts a barrier between the viewer and the piece, and that we really shouldn't have anything in between them; it should be here and we should risk it. And I think that was a good point.

Since then, they have never been exhibited behind glass or under vitrines. They're out so that you can really have that connection to them and perhaps touch when no one's looking - [laughs].

MS. LAURIA: Well there is a - more immediacy to a sculpture that is not contained within a box -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - even if that box is transparent, because transparent boxes do create borders, boundaries, restrictions, but they also create sightlines.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, I can understand that.

MS. LAURIA: So if you try to move around a piece, you're always interrupted by the corner of the cube, so -

MS. ECKERT: I understand the wanting to touch because I myself am a toucher - [they laugh] - you know, I always want to touch things when I see them. Even though I understand all those issues about oils on the hand, I want to touch. I think it's just a natural reaction.

MS. LAURIA: And also, because they're made out of fiber, do you feel there are particular light issues or archival issues that are important to preserve your pieces?

MS. ECKERT: I tell collectors not to put them in sunlight, but this DMC floss, I've found it to be very, very colorfast. It's really a wonderful material to work with, and I haven't had any archival issues with it.

MS. LAURIA: Great.

Do you see that your work is political or social? I mean, do you input any political or social commentary into your work, or is it much more about the myth or the legend where the commentary might be located?

MS. ECKERT: Well, occasionally I do a piece where, like the communications piece, where I'm specifically choosing fables to say something that I think is important, but a lot of times, it's a more subtle thing. I mean, social commentary, political commentary is embedded in the legends and in the fables, so the very subject matter I'm working with just intrinsically has some social commentary in it, which is probably why some of those old stories appeal to me like they do. But usually it's not specifically political.

MS. LAURIA: And I notice you very seldom deal with the motif or landscape of fish or oceanscapes. Is that because that's too loaded of an image for you or just would be too difficult in the way in which you work because you like the negative space?

MS. ECKERT: I have used water some. In this particular new wall piece that's not titled yet I have water and fish, and I did - when I was working with vessels, I did a piece that had a crocodile on it on the top, sort of swimming in water, the coiled forms indicating the water, and when you opened the top, the bottom of the crocodile was sticking through to the bottom, his feet were underneath, and there were fish in the container. So I have worked with those some, but I think just in a formal sense, I don't get the same kind of formal line or shape with an image like water that I do with, say, the wings of a bird, so it's probably more a formal consideration.

MS. LAURIA: What would you say are the greatest sources of your inspiration for your work outside of the - I know there have been the myths, but you also mentioned going to look at objects like the ivory shrines, I think you said, at the -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - St. Louis Museum. Are there other particular objects from history that may have nothing to do with fabric or animals that have inspired you in a different way to approach your work?

MS. ECKERT: I've been looking at medieval manuscripts a lot, and I think since I'm interested in books and book imagery, it sort of fits with that, but I'm pretty fascinated by those manuscripts and the Book of Hours, the kind of imagery that's in those books, and that's something recently that I've been looking at a lot.

MS. LAURIA: Have you gone to the Getty Center in Brentwood, California, and looked at some of their collection of the Book of Hours and -

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, I have seen some of the things at the Getty. It's a wonderful museum.

MS. LAURIA: And the way in which they render - oftentimes they render drawings of bestiaries -

MS. ECKERT: Right, and that's very much the kind of imagery I like. I've used that as a title before. So that has entered in. And then I read a lot of poetry, too, so some of the poetry influences some of the things I do.

MS. LAURIA: And what about large-scale sculptures of animals? Just to throw out something, when I was at Cranbrook, they had these two - which are still there - two beautifully restored lions that flank the fountain that is situated outside the art museum. Do you look at any sculptures or sculptors who do really interesting animal forms?

MS. ECKERT: Not in the contemporary sense. As a child in New York City, there were the two big lions, I think, is it -

MS. LAURIA: The main New York City public library on 42nd and 5th Avenue.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, at the library, so those are embedded in my mind forever, and we used to go to the Natural History Museum, so things like the elephants and all the display cases at the Natural History Museum sort of became part of me at a very early age, so those sort of things. But in terms of contemporary animals and sculptors, I can't really think of anything.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. Do any of your still-life sculptures have themes, such as one on Asian animals or African animals or South American aviaries, or anything thematically linked, or are they intermixed totally?

MS. ECKERT: Pretty much they're intermixed totally. At one point some years ago, I did some that focused specifically on African animals, animals of the savanna, but more typically things are completely mixed up.

MS. LAURIA: And are any of the images about the hunt and prey, or are they much more generalized or universal themes? Since you're dealing with animals, it's hard not to think about the Nature Channel that we've all watched -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - or National Geographic, and it seems like the food chain figures very prominently into animal life. Is that a topic that you deal with?

MS. ECKERT: In some subtle ways, yeah. A lot of times I do think of that, and the kind of tension that it sets up in a piece, I like, so I do think sometimes of prey, and I might have a piece with a wolf and a rabbit and that kind of tension. This new piece, the one bird has a fish in its mouth. So I do kind of think of those sorts of the interactions in a piece.

MS. LAURIA: But it's much more benign. You feel like it's part of the natural process, but it's not a menacing act -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: I know other works about the cruel realities of the animal kingdom, particularly David Regan, who is a ceramic artist from Montana. He did a whole series of work - in one artwork, it featured a deer birthing a doe, and right as the doe was coming out, there would be the mouth of a snake waiting for its next meal. And that posed some serious issues to talk about, the hunt and the prey; but I think yours have much more of a gentle sensibility to them.

MS. ECKERT: I think maybe it's the fairy tale sort of jeopardy. Like the sort of fairy tale tension of prey and hunter is a little different than the actual snake eating a doe or - so it's channeled through that other direction so it's not quite as scary. And then a lot of those old stories, like the old fables, are about the lion and the mouse helping each other, so that whole issue of prey and hunter is subverted in some of those old stories.

MS. LAURIA: But there are definitely fairy tales that are grim -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - and the undertones are very dark and macabre -

MS. ECKERT: Right, they are.

MS. LAURIA: - so I think it depends on your choice of tale as well.

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: Have you ever visualized or used inspiration from a poem? Not necessarily a legend or a myth, but something that you were inspired by reading, a poem, and wanted to do -

MS. ECKERT: Well, I did a staff piece titled Return of the Key [2003], which is influenced by Billy Collins's poem about a bird and a birdcage and a key, so it occasionally has entered it. Usually, it's not that specific, it's usually a little more general than that, but I do love poetry, and it sort of seeps in.

MS. LAURIA: So the Bible, of course, would be a great source of material and -

MS. ECKERT: Right. That comes in, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: - and legends from other cultures, like Celtic myths -

MS. ECKERT: Right, Celtic myths, old Buddhist stories. The Mayan Book of the Council, which is the Mayan creation story, I've done a five-panel book based on five scenes from the Mayan book of the council, so a lot of those things, and the creation stories all have found their way in.

MS. LAURIA: So your art really has been a way to launch a great body of knowledge for you because you -

MS. ECKERT: It's wonderful, because I keep reading, and I love to read and I've learned so much that eventually ends up in my pieces.

MS. LAURIA: It would be, I think, a great process if you sat down someday just to archive your inventory of work - where you started and how far it's come and what different cultures you've touched upon, and you'd probably find that it's very wide-ranging and broad-based.

MS. ECKERT: I think so. I've tried to keep records, notes about each piece, just very brief, general notes about each piece, and it is, it's pretty broad. And part of the inventory is right here on the bookshelf. Almost every book has fed in in some way.

MS. LAURIA: Do you find that there is one culture that you keep going back to, something that is so rich that you feel you could never fully explore? I know for some people, it's Egyptian, for whatever reason -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - because maybe we all grew up during that time when the big show [of] Tutankhamen came.

MS. ECKERT: Right. That was an incredible show. We saw that at L.A. County.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: So is there one area of legends and myths that you really like to go back to, time and time again?

MS. ECKERT: You know, I go back to all of them. They're all such incredibly rich traditions that there isn't one. I go back time and time again across the board to all of them.

MS. LAURIA: And do you intermix them? I mean, do you take - not take them so literally sometimes, where you might take, let's say a Celtic myth and intertwine it or interweave it to use something -

MS. ECKERT: Not consciously, but because there're so many parallels between these different stories, there're natural overlaps between stories from different traditions.

MS. LAURIA: Like the creationist myth.

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: It has similar motifs to it or -

MS. ECKERT: Right, exactly.

MS. LAURIA: Have you ever thought of writing any of them yourself?

MS. ECKERT: No. [They laugh.] I think them, but I haven't written them, no.

MS. LAURIA: And you, Carol, since you stopped teaching at the community center, you've never wanted to go back or never have gone back to teaching as a career?

MS. ECKERT: No. I just do the workshops, but I haven't done continual teaching.

MS. LAURIA: Because you want to devote more time, or all the time that you have, to your work.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, I'm just completely immersed in my work, and I like the contrast of working in isolation and then going out to a place like Arrowmont or someplace else to do a workshop and having that community. I like going to these different basket-making conferences and having that connection with other people, and then coming back and having the big, extended periods of isolated working.

MS. LAURIA: And how do you feel being married to another artist? Is it either advantageous to your work, or can [it] sometimes be detrimental?

MS. ECKERT: Oh, well, it's like anything, you know? [Laughs.] Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad, but I think overall, it's a very good thing. When we were first starting out, we were careful not to enter the same exhibitions because it was just - we were just first both beginning and neither of us feeling really confident yet, and it's hard enough to be rejected, and yet put yourself in a position where your spouse gets in and you don't, you know, just sets up a dynamic you don't want, but now that we've both been at it for so long, it's just simply not an issue anymore. And our work is very different, but it's fun, because we're interested in the same things. We can enjoy going to the museums together and art galleries.

MS. LAURIA: But do you find sometimes that it's a great support system to have a sounding board, somebody that you can discuss these very specific issues with and -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - someone who understands?

MS. ECKERT: We can discuss what we're working on. We can discuss business issues a lot. We probably do that more than talk about the work itself, you know, give each other, sort of, practical business advice. It's also nice to have someone understand when you want to be in the studio for extended hours. Tom works out in his studio until late, and I work in, and neither of us is nagging the other to come in for dinner or anything or expecting the other person to stop and go out somewhere. We're both happily working away. So our lives mesh nicely in that way.

MS. LAURIA: So even though you don't necessarily collaborate on any given work, you see yourselves as collaborators in spirit, as being artists who can live in tandem and understand the lifestyle.

MS. ECKERT: Right, right. We're very compatible just in terms of living our lives, even though we don't have too much impact on each other's specific work.

MS. LAURIA: Could you see someday that you might show together? I mean, separately, each of you might have your own body of work but be together as a partnership in an exhibition?

MS. ECKERT: It would depend on how it happened. We've been reluctant to show together based on the fact that - if someone asked us because we were a partnership. If they wanted us to show together because we were husband and wife, that seems like sort of an artificial connection, so we've been reluctant to do that kind of thing. If it was an exhibition based on a theme that both of us -

MS. LAURIA: Explored.

MS. ECKERT: - happened to explore, right, then it wouldn't be a problem to show together, but the showing together simply because you're married seems like an artificial construct.

MS. LAURIA: But you both do still lives, so that could be an obvious connection -

MS. ECKERT: Right. If it was another kind of link, that wouldn't be a problem. We have been in exhibitions before, not two solo shows alongside each other, but we have exhibited our work together in exhibitions where it fits together.

MS. LAURIA: Whose work would you say that you admire? It doesn't have to be a basket maker, but another artist working in another medium, or someone who does fiber that you feel the work really excites you and inspires you.

MS. ECKERT: There's so many good people working that it's hard to think of any one particular person, and most of the things that I really get excited about tend to be historical, because they're the things that influence me. I know there's a lot of people that I find personally inspirational, you know, women who have lived incredible lives and made great contributions to the craft world that I look to as wonderful examples, but I can't specifically think of work itself that's had an impact on me.

MS. LAURIA: But if you go to a museum, you might find something in their permanent collection, let's say if they have a great Egyptian or African or Oceanic -

MS. ECKERT: Right. Oceanic is one that I just jump up and down about - [laughs]. I love the Oceanic work, you know, all of those, and the Egyptian, all of those. That's the work that I just get so excited by.

MS. LAURIA: And it's not fiber work, necessarily, it's -

MS. ECKERT: No, it's usually not fiber work.

MS. LAURIA: Usually wood or stone.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, or ceramic. It's usually other media, except that some of the little fiber pieces that they found buried in the sand in Peru - I think it's early Inca work - there's some little figurative things that I find really exciting. And then this is an Oceanic piece, this crazy little bird here on the wall. I'm not sure how old it is, but this is actually a basket piece. It's a coiled basket piece. I believe that's from New Guinea.

MS. LAURIA: And you like this so well because of its immediacy, its whimsicality.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, it's just such a crazy little thing.

MS. LAURIA: And you'd like to communicate this sort of sensibility in your work?

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

MS. LAURIA: I mean that it's very approachable, but yet it also has a real unique expressiveness about it.

MS. ECKERT: It does, yeah, very much so.

MS. LAURIA: And I think it's the shell that sort of gives it away that it's -

MS. ECKERT: The little shell eye, right? [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: Right, that it is of a different culture.

MS. ECKERT: And that's like with my own pieces, I always do the eyes last, because once you put the eye on, they sort of come to life, and you don't want to keep sticking a needle in them, so -

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. ECKERT: - that's always my final thing, is to put the eyes on.

MS. LAURIA: Or you don't want them to follow you around -

MS. ECKERT: Right. [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: - when you're making them. Was there anything else you'd like to talk about, specifically, about your process or about - where do you see the future of your work going? That's always a good way to think about, you know, what's your next step, Carol, in your work?

MS. ECKERT: Well, my work has flattened out recently, so I've been doing these wall pieces, and I've been sort of thinking in the back of my mind, maybe a large screen - something much bigger. I was looking at a picture of an Arts and Crafts era screen, it was a British piece - and I thought, that's sort of interesting.

So I was thinking about - maybe something that would be sort of a combination of the wall pieces and these book pieces I've been working on, something much larger like, say, a folding screen. And some of the pieces I'm starting to draw recently are more staffs, staffs and wall pieces.

It seems to be the direction I'm moving in at the moment, but I'm sure the vessels haven't disappeared completely. They'll come back in. And I always seem to have another idea, and that's what I'm always interested in, is what the next piece is, not the piece that I'm working on or that I've finished, but always what's coming next.

MS. LAURIA: And have you considered the possibility of maybe incorporating your sculptures into another material? Like for instance when you say a screen, you could conceive of it being these beautiful tableaux encased in a wooded frame, so that the structure of your wire and your fiber isn't the absolute edge of the piece, or do you see them ever as being a framed element and something more conventional than fiber?

MS. ECKERT: You know, I haven't gotten that far with the process of it, but my approach has sort of been whatever works, so I wouldn't be opposed to doing something like that if it was what I felt I needed to do for the piece.

MS. LAURIA: Or if it could structurally help you -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - to scale up -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - because obviously the wire is going to always have some limitation.

MS. ECKERT: Right, and as your wire gets larger, it gets heavier, so that's a limitation. So it just depends on what I could work out, technically, and whatever it takes to make the piece I want to make is what I would do.

MS. LAURIA: And we've talked about how the books are such a great source of visuals and cerebral inspiration, but do you ever go to zoos or other places, wild animal parks or botanical gardens that also have aviaries, to actually observe animals in their natural habitat?

MS. ECKERT: It's very rare that the animals come to me directly from nature. In that shrine piece that I was talking about, the animals came from walking along the river. Now, that one was an exception, but most of the time the animals come to me filtered through stories.

MS. LAURIA: Are they mediated through two-dimensional elements?

MS. ECKERT: Right, right.

MS. LAURIA: And I meant to ask this earlier when you were talking about the Book of Hours or bestiaries: have you ever done or do you want to do an animal alphabet? Because I know that's a rich tradition.

MS. ECKERT: I've never thought of that. I don't know, I think -

MS. LAURIA: You know what I mean.

MS. ECKERT: I think I'm more drawn to stories than I would be toward that, but there is that kind of tradition.

MS. LAURIA: And have you made the specific pieces for family members of - we talk a little bit about how a crow has this different symbology, I mean, in the American Indian legend, a crow represents your ancestors -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - or your history or your life before in other cultures. Have you made specific pieces for specific family members that, to you, relate their individualism or their tale of their history?

MS. ECKERT: No. I haven't. My family doesn't have any of my work, but at some point, I'll have to do something about that.

[They laugh.]

MS. LAURIA: Because they're not your collectors. Your collectors are outside, having come to you by your gallery associations.

MS. ECKERT: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And what would be the one exhibition that you've been in, Carol, that you think really made an impact on you personally - being associated with other people in that exhibition, or just for career reasons - that was very important to you? And if you can't think of it now, we can cover that in the next -

MS. ECKERT: Yeah, let me think on that one.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. All right.

[END MD03 TR01, BEGIN MD03 TR02.]

MS. LAURIA: This is Jo Lauria interviewing Carol Eckert at Carol Eckert's home studio in Tempe, Arizona, on Tuesday, June 19, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Carol, where we left off last time on the previous disc, we were just getting into a discussion about what significant exhibitions that you might have seen or have been in that had a great impact on you as an artist.

MS. ECKERT: Well, we already mentioned the "Objects USA" early on, I think; that had a big impact on me, and in terms of one that I've been in, probably "The Art of Craft," which was selections from the [Dorothy and George] Saxe Collection [of Contemporary Craft] at the [M.H.] de Young [Memorial] Museum in San Francisco. That was an important exhibition for me, I think, and they published a really nice book that went with it.

And then other exhibitions for me, I think, are two that are currently coming up. One we talked about before was the Lieberman exhibition of baskets from their collection. It's called "Intertwined," and that's traveling now around the United States. And then the upcoming "Craft in America" show.

MS. LAURIA: And do you prefer to be in exhibitions of single-focus on materials, for instance, baskets or on fiber, or do you think it's better for an artist working in craft materials to be integrated with other kinds of objects?

MS. ECKERT: I guess I don't really have a preference, because I think there are strong exhibitions both ways, both as groups and as individual media, so I just like a good, exciting exhibition.

MS. LAURIA: I know you mentioned the one that was very intriguing for you about the interweaving of varying approaches: the exhibition of the Sara and David Lieberman collection. You got to see so many explorations of basket forms, and that excited you. And probably, we will assume, that excites the public.

MS. ECKERT: Yes, I love that exhibition for the great variety of approaches to basketry.

MS. LAURIA: So iterations on a theme, variations on a theme, is a very, I think, good way to seduce the viewer into thinking, and it's a good way for the artist to see a variety of work.

MS. ECKERT: I think so. It was nice to see the pieces contrasted beside each other, you know, very large ones, very small ones, and just the great variety.

MS. LAURIA: And did the catalogue discuss any techniques?

MS. ECKERT: I don't think specifically, just in a more general way, but nothing that was too technically oriented, no.

MS. LAURIA: And we were also talking a little bit about color and how you arrive at the colors for your various components of your pieces, the animals, the vegetation, and you were saying that you use DMC floss, embroidery floss. Now, how - there must be just an enormous range of colors. How do you decide - by looking at your sketch, whatever; if you use colored pencils on paper, how does that translate into using embroidery thread?

MS. ECKERT: Well, actually, what I do is lay out my full-size drawing on my work table, and then I start actually with the floss itself, the skeins of floss, and I keep laying them out on top of all the various sections of the drawing and shifting those around until I find exactly the right colors that I want to go together, and then when I do the drawing that I keep pinned up on the wall that I do in colored pencils, I make the colored pencil match the color of the thread as nearly as I can.

And with the DMC floss, there's such an incredible range of colors that I can usually find what I want just from the skein, but if I can't, I can mix, because each embroidery thread is actually five single threads, so I can separate them out and perhaps use three of one color and two of another color to blend exactly the shade I want.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, so you do some interweaving yourself?

MS. ECKERT: Yes. Right.

MS. LAURIA: So you could get almost an infinite variety of colors.

MS. ECKERT: You can, right. I can get anything I want, really.

MS. LAURIA: And we also were touching upon a little bit about the dimensionality of your work, is that some of it is very frontal. Other pieces have the idea of being put next to the wall, but with the shadows becoming part of the dimensions, but that you've also thought about doing pieces that were multi-sided.

MS. ECKERT: Yes, and actually, like with the book pieces, the five-panel book pieces, even though when I make them, they're actually flat panels, there is sort of an accordion fold, so when they're displayed, there actually is a lot of dimensionality to them because they're displayed accordion-folded, sort of.

MS. LAURIA: So there is a -

MS. ECKERT: But they're not quite - I don't know quite how to describe that without using my hands.

MS. LAURIA: Right, they're not so two-dimensional. Right.

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: And also, the collector or the gallery who places the pieces can manipulate them to be -

MS. ECKERT: That's true.

MS. LAURIA: - more dimensional.

MS. ECKERT: Right. More or less dimensional, right, that the depth can be varied depending on how deep the folds are.

MS. LAURIA: And you are working, the piece that you now have on your studio work table, I noticed that you've done a wonderful thing with one of the wings, which is you've folded back one of the large bird's wings, so it, in and of itself, has that dimension, because you're seeing two folds in the front.

MS. ECKERT: Right. And I have some flexibility. Sometimes I make things fairly flat, then after the bird is made, I can bend its wings or bend its legs in various ways, so that I can add dimensionality to them after they're constructed.

MS. LAURIA: Do you see these tableaux as being sort of stilled animations in a way, because all of the characters feel like they were just about ready to take off, or fly off, or walk away?

MS. ECKERT: I think that's one thing that's developed in my work. The earlier pieces were a lot more static, and the more recent pieces, there's a lot more movement in the animals, and that's conscious. I'm trying to make the compositions more dynamic and put more movement into the animals themselves.

MS. LAURIA: They would probably lend themselves very well to an animated program.

MS. ECKERT: [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: Of course, I remember Heckle and Jeckle as a kid.

MS. ECKERT: [Laughs] Right.

MS. LAURIA: Not always a great association. We did talk a little bit about, and you wanted to think about this for a while, who are some of the artists whose work you admire or feel like it has had an impact on your development?

MS. ECKERT: I couldn't really think of any artists who have had an impact on my development, and I think because so much of the work that has influenced me is historic and they're artists whose names were never recorded. In terms of a contemporary artist whose work I admire, even though I'm not influenced by it, I think Petah Coyne does some wonderful things. They're so massive. I'm thinking particularly about the wax-covered pieces that are so massive and yet so delicate and work on - have so many layers - actual physical layers and layers of meaning. I think that's really interesting work to me.

MS. LAURIA: And that's what you feel a successful piece for you is, also a sense of having many layers of

meaning, or at least that the viewer would understand some of those layers.

MS. ECKERT: I think so, because the things that appeal to me in other work are qualities I would like to have in my own work.

MS. LAURIA: Or you go home and think about them a little bit.

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: More in depth. And then I asked Tom as his last question - this may not be a fair question for you but you can say so, because he has done portraits of people by using symbols, visual representations of still lifes. If you were to do a portrait of yourself and your attributes, what kind of animals might you use or what would be your myth? Do you see yourself as more of the free, the birds, who have the benevolence that you talk about?

MS. ECKERT: Well, I don't think I'm mean - [they laugh] - so I probably wouldn't choose, you know, something vicious.

MS. LAURIA: But being a mother and being a wife, I mean, a creation myth might be appropriate.

MS. ECKERT: Right, and I do love all of the birds, and birds have so many characteristics. They're complex, and human beings are complex, so I would probably be a bird. [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: And it would be, as you said, you have a - you like your life and you like your work, so it would be a sense of that kind of freedom, but passion with the tableaux, I think would come through. [Laughs.] All right. Did we cover everything? Anything else you want to talk about?

MS. ECKERT: The only thing I can think of - I don't know if this is important, but when we talked about galleries, we talked about when I first was starting out with Okun Gallery in Santa Fe, but we never went beyond that, and another gallery that was really important to me a little bit later on was Joanne Rapp and The Hand and Spirit Gallery [Scottsdale, AZ], and I think she was so important to a lot of different craft artists, and we had the extra added benefit of she was even here in this area in Scottsdale. So she was really important in my career, and that gallery, since she sold it, after she sold it, it became Gallery Materia, and today it continues as Cervini Haas, and I've worked with that gallery all this time.

MS. LAURIA: And Joanne was in the business for about 20 years?

MS. ECKERT: Probably, yeah, and she was so influential in crafts and she carried the work of so many important people. So it was really nice to have her in Scottsdale, because it gave us an opportunity to see a lot of work we would never -

MS. LAURIA: As well as being part.

MS. ECKERT: Right, but before I was ever part of that gallery, we used to go there to see the work of other people, which was very interesting.

MS. LAURIA: And she also was very active in a lot of craft organizations -

MS. ECKERT: Right.

MS. LAURIA: - and I think she did some of the craft shows, and so her artists got a national exposure.

MS. ECKERT: They did, and she had a lot of impact on the Phoenix area, too, and continues to have. She's still very active in this area.

MS. LAURIA: She's involved with Arizona State University on some level, too, isn't she?

MS. ECKERT: She is. She's worked with the museum there, so she's had a lot of contacts with the university and just continues to have a big impact on this area, and she was an important part of my career developing.

MS. LAURIA: She's a great advocate, and I think it is a very significant thing to mention people who have had a long-standing advocacy in the craft field, and her -

MS. ECKERT: She's definitely -

MS. LAURIA: - as a dealer and now as a private - I don't know if she deals privately anymore, but I know that she's still very active.

MS. ECKERT: Very active and influential, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And I know that painters always cite their dealer so - [they laugh] - so we have ours. I mean, ceramic artists often cite Garth Clark Gallery [New York, NY, and Los Angeles, CA], too, just because it's a way for artists to have a venue by a dealer who wants to help evolve a career.

MS. ECKERT: Right, and not all galleries are like that, and when you find those special people that are involved at so many levels, they're really important to the whole craft world, I think.

MS. LAURIA: And it was so fortunate that it was here -

MS. ECKERT: Yes, we were really lucky.

MS. LAURIA: - in Phoenix. And Cervini Haas has carried on many of the same artists that Joanne -

MS. ECKERT: Yes, some -

MS. LAURIA: - developed.

MS. ECKERT: - people, right, have stayed through Gallery Materia and now Cervini Haas.

MS. LAURIA: That's great. Well, I'm going to go right over there and see the exhibit they have now.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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