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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Elaine Reichek,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Elaine Reichek on February 12, 2008. The interview was conducted by Sarah G. Sharp for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Elaine Reichek and Sarah G. Sharp 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

SARAH G. SHARP: My name is Sarah Sharp and I'm here with Elaine Reichek doing an oral history interview for the Archives of American Art, for the Smithsonian Institution. Today is February 12, 2008. Elaine, you grew up in Brooklyn, right?

ELAINE REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: Yes.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: Can you just talk a little bit about what your family was like?

MS. REICHEK: I grew up in a big Dutch Colonial house with middle class parents in a family of three. I'm the middle child.

MS. SHARP: And what part of Brooklyn were you in?

MS. REICHEK: Flatbush.

MS. SHARP: And did you go to public schools?

MS. REICHEK: Yes, I went to public school for primary, junior high school and high school.

MS. SHARP: I'm curious what high school was like for you.

MS. REICHEK: Well, I skipped a couple of grades and was way ahead of myself and I had an older sister. So the idea of passing and being like the other girls was important to me—and it was a large public high school, which didn't pay too much attention to you.

MS. SHARP: So you just kind of moved through?

MS. REICHEK: I moved through, but you could also, which I did a lot, easily maintain your grades and cut school.

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.] Okay.

MS. REICHEK: I spent an awful lot of time on the beach reading, and as long as I showed up. . . . I could pass myself off in my senior year as a freshman because in fact I was the same age. The freshmen were on another schedule that I took advantage of. I'd get on my bike and go to the beach.

MS. SHARP: So you kind of orchestrated your own education?

MS. REICHEK: In some ways, yes. I had found high school like prison. Just like prison. I remember watching the clock—it was insufferably dull.

MS. SHARP: And did your parents know that you were going off?

MS. REICHEK: No. I don't think so. I maintained the illusion of being a good student. I certainly didn't look like anyone who had a rebellious nature. I just managed to do as I pleased, which is not very difficult as a middle child.

MS. SHARP: It sounds like you were really able to cultivate your inner world at an early age.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, I was masquerading a great deal of the time. And I don't remember whether even my

friends knew half the time what it was I was doing. I started to go to Lower Manhattan at a very early age. I started to shop for my own clothes. I just went to the library on my bike. I took out records. I developed interests. It was just another thing that I did.

MS. SHARP: And do you think that was important to your ability to develop that alternate world, to live so close to Manhattan and have access to –

MS. REICHEK: Yes, certainly. I was aware. I think I learned through reading that something else existed. And I had an enormous appetite for the something else. There's a story about being in the sixth grade – I was a snotty kid. I had a brand-new beautiful Schwinn bike, the pride of my – it had two shades of green and a lot of chrome. It was very flashy and, of course, it was a vehicle for escape. You could get on your bike and in Brooklyn in those days you could ride anywhere, to the beach – it just gave you an enormous amount of freedom. And I remember, I was still in the sixth grade, I was about 10, and I remember looking out at a field of concrete and thinking, "Oh, dreary, dreary, dreary. There must be something else."

MS. SHARP: Oh, you remember that feeling and thinking that?

MS. REICHEK: Absolutely.

MS. SHARP: Where did you do your undergraduate?

MS. REICHEK: I went to Brooklyn College. And then I went to Yale.

MS. SHARP: Did you go to Brooklyn College for four years?

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: Right after high school when you were young?

MS. REICHEK: Yes. I went straight into it. My parents did not want to send me out of town because I was so young. I think it was a control mechanism. My sister had gone out of town and I think I worked as a buffer between my parents. I think that actually was my role.

MS. SHARP: So you felt like they needed to keep you around –

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: To keep a cushion?

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. But they said I was simply too young, which made me very angry.

MS. SHARP: I bet. [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: Very, very angry.

MS. SHARP: So you lived at home the whole time?

MS. REICHEK: Yes, but it was a godsend because in those days Brooklyn College had the most remarkable faculty.

MS. SHARP: Oh. So who did you study with?

MS. REICHEK: I had Ad Reinhardt.

MS. SHARP: At Brooklyn College?

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. I did not have him at Yale. I had better teachers at Brooklyn College than I had at Yale. Harry Holtzman was at Brooklyn.

MS. SHARP: Oh, wow!

MS. REICHEK: Jimmy Ernst was there. Louise Bourgeois taught at night.

MS. SHARP: Oh, wow!

MS. REICHEK: I did not have the sense to take her.

MS. SHARP: You didn't know.

MS. REICHEK: It was also a free tuition school. So you could stay in school from morning to night.

MS. SHARP: Take as many classes?

MS. REICHEK: And never have to go home, and although studio filled up most of my time, I almost ran into a problem with graduation because I had so many credits for majors, I could have graduated with a minor in several different fields. The faculty was fabulous. We had everyone who washed up in New York after the [Second World] War.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: New York is based on immigrant refugee culture. There were people with PhDs who came here with no resources and found paying jobs with good benefits.

MS. SHARP: And they ended up in places like Brooklyn College.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. They ended up in the city system and at Brooklyn College.

MS. SHARP: When you were studying, you studied with Ad Reinhardt, and what classes did you take with him?

MS. REICHEK: Drawing and painting.

MS. SHARP: Basic studio classes?

MS. REICHEK: I took all the studio courses. I took all the art history I could get. Whatever I could fit in. I took a lot of English lit. I took a lot of Russian and German nineteenth-century literature, classics, and economics. My economics professor studied with [Harold] Laski, in London.

MS. SHARP: Wow!

MS. REICHEK: My classics teacher was a Dutch refugee. She was simply wonderful. I went to school in the summer, too.

MS. SHARP: You did? It sounds like you did what you could to get out of your parents' house and study what you wanted to study.

MS. REICHEK: I found a life in school.

MS. SHARP: And when you were studying there, did you realize that you wanted to continue studying art? Did you know it would be that or were you interested in literature?

MS. REICHEK: Making art was something I did all my life. My uncle Jesse [Reichek] was an artist, but I never was someone who joined the art club or was known as "the artist." It was something I had for myself and it was something I knew I did well. When I got into school, I was somehow afraid to take studio classes because I thought, all those kids come from Music and Art [High School in New York], but I did and once I took the first one, that was it. I never looked back. The idea of being an artist was not what attracted me to it. I never wanted to be an artist. I just wanted to make stuff.

MS. SHARP: It was the practice.

MS. REICHEK: It was the practice, not the idea of being an artist. I knew what it entailed, but by the time I got out of college, I was choiceless. My parents always wanted me to be a lawyer. If you had been in New York, you knew what the life of an artist was, and I actually remember going to Ad's studio on Broadway. I always thought he was a marvelous teacher until I had children of my own and realized he was really quite a terrible teacher because he just paid attention to the ones he liked. [Laughter.] I had a key to all the [display] cases and put up my work. I went to Ad's loft. We had sherry. He showed me slides of things from India.

MS. SHARP: Right, right.

MS. REICHEK: It was a tiny department [at Brooklyn College] on the 5th floor, and we were the only women that were allowed to wear trousers.

MS. SHARP: Oh. So you were a girl wearing pants?

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: That's great.

MS. REICHEK: And that was fabulous. We'd be up there all the time.

MS. SHARP: You just went to the studio. So there was a real community to be a part of.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: It sounds like you were one of Ad's favorites. [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: Yes. I remember somebody coming up to him and showing him this sort of blue painting and him saying – I think of how cruel it is now – “too much blue.” [Laughter.] I mean, it's horribly cruel.

MS. SHARP: That sounds like some teachers I had when I was quite a bit younger, like some of the tradition of art education.

MS. REICHEK: He was interested in what and whom he was interested in. And he had been teaching awhile. It's an artist who's teaching. What more can I say?

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.] Well, Elaine, you mentioned for a second your Uncle Jesse, who was also an artist, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I think in your immediate family, no one else studied the arts.

MS. REICHEK: No.

MS. SHARP: No one else is a writer or a dancer or anything.

MS. REICHEK: I have cousins – the Shaws, Irwin Shaw, and David Shaw – they're writers; but no, I would not say anyone else was a practicing artist, with the exception of my father's younger brother, Jessie Reichek. He was a painter who showed at Betty Parsons. I went to my first opening at a very young age.

MS. SHARP: To one of his shows?

MS. REICHEK: Yes. Recently, when I was moving I found a poster for one of his exhibitions at Betty Parsons and framed it. It's dated 1970. As a child I got to go to art openings and be aware of the fact that there was an art world – that this world exists, even subliminally. I knew about it. I think there was a rivalry between Jessie and my father for their father's affection. They came from a very formal home and Jesse's relaxed relationship to his father was very different from my father's own relationship to his father, which was formal. Very much first child, you know. And I remember meeting Jesse for the first time when I must have been about 10, and I had a distinct memory of him coming up the driveway. It was a Dutch Colonial house, and was faced to the side. Coming up the walkway to the entrance I see my Aunt Laure, who's French, and extraordinarily glamorous, in a snood and a pony skin coat and high heels, and I look at her and I think, wow! Wow! And I see Jesse is coming up with his two boys. And we had a large German Shepherd and the boys are fearless, and Jesse is fearless and they're coming up the drive, and I think, yes!

MS. SHARP: That's great. Sort of this fantasy of how life can be, huh?

MS. REICHEK: Well, it's escape. I have a fantasy. I have some proof that something else exists outside of the kind of options and expectations that my family has for me.

MS. SHARP: It's a model of another life.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. And you have it from reading and you have it from New York.

MS. SHARP: Definitely. And Jesse, was he an abstract painter?

MS. REICHEK: Yes, he was a hard-edge painter. He went to Paris on the GI Bill, showed with Christian Zervos in Paris. Jesse knew [Alberto] Giacometti. He went to Chicago and was [Laszlo] Moholy-Nagy's studio assistant. And he taught at the Art Institute and then got a job at [University of California] Berkeley. Betty Parsons came to visit him in Paris when he was living and showing there and asked him to join her gallery. He told me his first reaction to her was that she was a debutante with an alcohol problem [Sharp laughs], which, of course, was somewhat true.

MS. SHARP: Perceptive guy.

MS. REICHEK: I don't know how perceptive he had to be. Anyhow, he did show with her and that was his main gallery until he left her. He really got disgusted with the art world. And he dropped out.

MS. SHARP: That's what it sounds like. I know that you were trying to organize some retrospectives of Jesse's work.

MS. REICHEK: He did have a retrospective organized by his family in Petaluma [California] after he died, and the University of New Mexico was pleased to do a full-scale retrospective. He was not interested in participating in the organized distribution of art. He felt that what he needed to do to make that happen was not something he cared to do. And that's the family I come from. [Laughter.]

MS. SHARP: Sounds like it.

MS. REICHEK: Well, it's a particular kind of way of being in the world. Really quite at odds with –

MS. SHARP: Do you think that your father and mother were like that? Was that part of your immediate family, too, in a different way?

MS. REICHEK: I think their definition of success was closer to an American definition of success, though I know they respected knowledge and I think they were slightly embarrassed by a display of wealth. Some people used to have a degree of self-consciousness about display. Jesse, having a European wife and living in Paris after the War, had some idea of the "European" conception of the artist's life. Attitudes towards artists differ. You're always treated sort of better in Europe. At least they feed you well. Jesse was part of this ex-patriot group in Paris after the War. You know, Saul Steinberg, Hedda Stern, Saul Bellows. I mean, this is a particular kind of milieu. It's where my cousins were born and where Jesse came into adulthood.

MS. SHARP: So, as we mentioned briefly, you ended up in grad school at Yale and you must have been really young.

MS. REICHEK: I was.

MS. SHARP: You must have been kind of a traditional age to maybe be starting an undergrad degree by the time you went to Yale.

MS. REICHEK: I was close to 20.

MS. SHARP: So you moved away finally—[Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: However, I was ill-equipped. I didn't know how to do my own laundry. I did know how to make my bed after years of summer camp.

MS. SHARP: That's a big learning curve.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. So I was very happy to be on my own.

MS. SHARP: At Yale were you in the painting department?

MS. REICHEK: Painting and sculpture. My family would only let me go to Yale if I lived in the woman's dorm.

MS. SHARP: Oh. [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: So I had a double room for myself.

MS. SHARP: Oh, nice.

MS. REICHEK: Well, yes, but I didn't understand dorm life. I didn't understand that you had to label the yogurt in the refrigerator. [Sharp laughs.] I lived in this kind of constructed dorm culture and I didn't know what it was about. I had to shower with everybody else. Then I go to school and I look around and I'm shocked because it's all boys.

MS. SHARP: In the art department?

MS. REICHEK: Right. In the art department the undergrads were all girls. It was a women's department. You get to grad school, it's all boys. So that's the first shock and then I'm the same age as the undergraduates, and I come from New York and I am wearing high leather boots, you know, suede jacket, long hair, and I'm looking around and I think who are these people? [Laughter.] And of course, it's the likes of big Chuck Close and big Richard Serra, who are a couple of years ahead of me.

MS. SHARP: So they were students there.

MS. REICHEK: Yeah, in their last year.

MS. SHARP: They were in their last year the first year that you came to Yale?

MS. REICHEK: And mine was the first year in the Rudolph Building.

MS. SHARP: Oh, okay.

MS. REICHEK: We were all putting up boxes to isolate ourselves. You had to get used to the irradiated floor. I mean heat comes up through the floor so you're like a platypus in the studio. It was physically very uncomfortable and, you know, I had this idyllic notion of what graduate school would be.

MS. SHARP: What did you think?

MS. REICHEK: Oh, I thought we would be sharing. We would have talks about our work. We would exchange ideas in a non-threatening setting.

MS. SHARP: So, maybe – it sounds like an extension of what the open studio space was in Brooklyn College for you.

MS. REICHEK: No, that was all very nice.

MS. SHARP: What I mean is, you were sort of fantasizing that it would be that and even better, right?

MS. REICHEK: Better because you'd be doing it full time. When you're an art major in college, you have all those other courses to take, too. By the time I was in my senior year [at Brooklyn College], I was pretty much hanging out there all the time. But, you know, you'd have art history classes, which of course I did take, but you could also audit. My fantasy was that graduate school would be an intellectual community of your peers, all wanting the same kind of interesting investigation of –

MS. SHARP: Yes.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, and it turned out if you didn't hide your paints they'd maraud at night and steal them.

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.] Okay.

MS. REICHEK: And then if you went to the library to prepare for an art history exam, you better hide the book because you can't get it later.

MS. SHARP: You can't get it?

MS. REICHEK: People were hiding library books.

MS. SHARP: You're kidding!

MS. REICHEK: Oh, it was horrible.

MS. SHARP: How many students were in the graduate program when you were there?

MS. REICHEK: Well, in my class? Maybe there were fifteen, twelve.

MS. SHARP: So there were like 30 or so in the whole program?

MS. REICHEK: Not a lot.

MS. SHARP: Did you find any of the camaraderie that you were hoping for?

MS. REICHEK: Well, there were very few women, you know. I had boyfriends. [Sharp laughs.] In fact, it was horrible. It was the most self-conscious existence in the world.

MS. SHARP: Because there were men looking at you everywhere you went?

MS. REICHEK: Everywhere you went and I thought, oh, just let me be able to eat a tuna fish sandwich in peace.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. Wow.

MS. REICHEK: It was horrible. It really was. And then I took a job waiting on tables because my parents, although they got me a double room in the women's dorm, kept me on a small allowance. I think they were afraid I would fly the coop.

MS. SHARP: Really?

MS. REICHEK: Paint was really expensive and I was living hand to mouth. It was an odd situation, and their checks would come late.

MS. SHARP: Which you felt like was control from them?

MS. REICHEK: They were totally ambivalent and controlling. So I thought, I can't get fed – I mean, you can see I don't require much food. [Sharp laughs.] This is absurd. So I took a job waiting tables in the law school and that is how I managed to get fed. So I could use all my money –

MS. SHARP: For paints?

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. And that's how I worked around them.

MS. SHARP: Well, it sounds like you've always been industrious.

MS. REICHEK: I had to work – you had to come up with a plan.

MS. SHARP: Well, I think even just going to grad school at Yale and envisioning that you could do that and just making the choice to do it, regardless –

MS. REICHEK: I knew I needed to get into an Ivy League school in order for them to pay the tuition, because that's really what they'd want. And also, Reinhardt said to me, "Just go to Yale."

MS. SHARP: And did he help you with that?

MS. REICHEK: I'm sure he wrote a nice letter.

MS. SHARP: So, who did you study with at Yale, or what do you remember?

MS. REICHEK: I studied with Al Held – who was awful – and Louie Finklestein. I had horrible people, except for my art history professors. They were good. I had Kurt Forster, who ended up, I think, as an architectural historian, and he was really smart. I loved my art history courses. I really loved them.

MS. SHARP: How were you treated? Did you feel like you were treated differently because you were young and a woman?

MS. REICHEK: Yes. I did, and I was making large-scale abstract paintings. And I actually overheard something devastating, and it was, "It doesn't really matter what she does, she'll just get married anyhow."

MS. SHARP: Do you remember who was saying that?

MS. REICHEK: No, it was behind closed doors.

MS. SHARP: And you know it was about you?

MS. REICHEK: Of course. "Such a little girl, such big paintings and she makes them with her hands."

MS. SHARP: What did that do to you? I mean, you were so young.

MS. REICHEK: I knew that stuff by now.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. But I just imagine you with this really earnest desire coming to this place to have this exchange –

MS. REICHEK: That whole experience at Yale can radicalize your politics without your even knowing it, because what you realize is, you don't have any women instructors, it finally dawns on you – where are the girls here, hello? It all begins to – I mean the shock, the visual shock, you cannot ignore the visual shock, Yale was not co-ed at that point. I mean, I sit in art history and there's two rows of boys, then there's me, and two rows of boys behind me.

MS. SHARP: Wow!

MS. REICHEK: And you were able to smoke in class, and I remember taking out a cigarette and putting it to my mouth and a forest fire of Zippo lighters, and my thinking "Shit, they're going to set my hair on fire!" [Laughter.]

MS. SHARP: Wow.

MS. REICHEK: Remember, these are the prep school boys and they're really uncomfortable with the presence of

women in their classes.

MS. SHARP: Even in a graduate program?

MS. REICHEK: At Yale you took art history in graduate and undergraduate classes. They were mixed. So the undergraduate boys just assumed you were the same age. I didn't look at any older than they did. And I wasn't any older than they were. [Laughs.] But I did get to choose Giotto as the question on the final exam – just in deference of my sex. Forster said "What would Elaine like to choose?" And I just go with it, I take Giotto. I know Giotto. Let's have Giotto. I'll ace this.

MS. SHARP: That's great. Well, was that kind of like post-prep school environment?

MS. REICHEK: It was.

MS. SHARP: It's really different from growing up in Brooklyn and going to Brooklyn College.

MS. REICHEK: My parents had the pretensions of refinement and they certainly had class aspirations. So I didn't look any different than anybody else. So that – it wasn't that. It was all that leather upholstery and ivy. And those large upholstered chairs. I thought, this is not upholstered for my behind. So it was impossible to ignore the structure.

MS. SHARP: I guess it was really bad, both because you were one of the few women and because you came from a place where you had figured out the system and you could skip school and ride your bike to the beach, and do what you wanted at Brooklyn College, where you sort of knew how to get by with your invisible cloak, so to speak.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: And suddenly, you must have had that sort of double-consciousness experience where everyone's looking back at you.

MS. REICHEK: Absolutely. And I'm different. Because I am Jewish. Although in the cliché, "You don't look Jewish." I'm blonde. I can pass.

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: It was not comfortable to be the center of attention, when in fact the middle child is the invisible child. It's the left-out one, but in my family, it gave me access to a great deal of freedom that I wouldn't have had.

MS. SHARP: Because you were able to kind of move around?

MS. REICHEK: Negotiate, but also, in the words of my first analyst, the less attention they paid to you, the better off you were.

MS. SHARP: Very true. Okay. So when you were at Yale, Chuck Close and Richard Serra were in their last years and you came in doing abstract painting.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: And then things started to kind of change and develop. So what was the environment like? What were people working on?

MS. REICHEK: Richard Serra was a painter. Ideas about process, minimalism and feminism were formulated slightly later than when we were in school. They were in the air, but having studied with Reinhardt, there's very little past black painting. Formal ideas that were so important to that generation – what's behind the canvas, the lie of representation – I mean, you reach a dead end.

MS. SHARP: So there's still possibility.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. There was possibility. Everyone felt that it was back to square one. And so it was the time, more than what anyone was actually doing. Nobody I knew really was that interested in Pop. American culture was dying and Pop was an elegiac movement in some way, if you look at it now. It talks about the handmade, mechanical reproduction and popular culture. It's American art.

MS. SHARP: Right. And there's a sort of sense of looking for other materials, other possibilities.

MS. REICHEK: You go back to square one. It's reinvestigation, having reached the end point.

MS. SHARP: When did you start using thread and cloth? Some of your early works that I've seen that aren't paintings look like you're still kind of working through formal investigations that Minimalism set up.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: But there is this exploration about "How can I find another material?"

MS. REICHEK: I think what happened is I had that first show at Bertha Urdang [Gallery, New York], and that's the one with the sewn canvases that you're talking about.

MS. SHARP: You use a thread to make –

MS. REICHEK: A line.

MS. SHARP: They look like line paintings, but they're actually a thread instead of a taped, precise painted line.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. I'm sewing rather than drawing. They refer to Agnes Martin's way of dealing with line. I certainly didn't know she shared a studio with Lenore Tawney and that her early work might refer to weaving.

MS. SHARP: Oh, I didn't know that.

MS. REICHEK: I came to thinking about the warp and the woof as the structure of the grid and how it refers to Minimalism, and its reliance on the grid. And I could talk about the lie of illusion by actually making the line a real thing, and piercing the support.

MS. SHARP: By making the thing instead of enacting a copy of the thing.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly, not the illusion of it.

MS. SHARP: Piercing the surface.

MS. REICHEK: Piercing the surface lets the viewer know that a drawn line is an illusion. Thread is tied to the back of the canvas – there is an unseen space behind the canvas.

MS. SHARP: And so when you were making those pieces in particular, were you thinking about Agnes Martin?

MS. REICHEK: Yes, I was thinking of a little riff on Minimalism. And I also played with mathematics. A lot of my early work had number notations that didn't mean anything. Since everybody was using Fibonacci numbering systems and doing systems of whatever, I thought, oh –

MS. SHARP: So I know it isn't like specific appropriation, but you're starting to think about it. Redoing –

MS. REICHEK: Yes, I am very much thinking about redoing something in another way that talks about its meaning.

MS. SHARP: And sort of gendering it in a different way.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: And what about *Funeral for the Grid*, 1978?

MS. REICHEK: Oh, I just thought I'd lay it to rest. [Laughs.]

MS. SHARP: That's what I think is really interesting about this work, that it looks as though you are really earnestly investigating these formal concerns and material concerns, but then, you're turning it on its head – but you're also kind of poking at it. You're making a little joke about it, in a way.

MS. REICHEK: It's part of my nature, I am perfectly sincere in my efforts, but I try to look at things from a larger perspective, too.

MS. SHARP: We'll talk about this more, but I think that shows up in a lot of your work – you're invested, but then there is a self-awareness.

MS. REICHEK: Without that, you just proselytize. You have to put yourself in the equation.

MS. SHARP: We talked about it a little bit already, but the thread and fabric and sewing – did you go to that

because it was accessible? Were you familiar with it already or was it a conceptual choice?

MS. REICHEK: It was a conceptual choice. The sewing machine was a foreign object, until recently. New York City girls do not do Home Ec.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: I have a formal education. So embroidery and knitting were a completely other language for me. These practices came without a lot of associations, but I certainly had been to the Met and seen tapestries.

MS. SHARP: You actually like sewing?

MS. REICHEK: I do. It's an activity that puts you in a state of free association, at the edge of consciousness. The pleasure of it is very real.

MS. SHARP: That sort of repetitive –

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: So around this time – we're up to the early '80s – you made a piece called *Laura's Layette*, in 1979.

MS. REICHEK: Yes. You know that those pieces were made a little earlier. What happened is somebody mislabeled my slides [laughs] – everything has the same date. There's an entire five years that's labeled 1979.

MS. SHARP: Right. [Laughs.] Let's just describe *Laura's Layette*.

MS. REICHEK: When Laura came home from the hospital –

MS. SHARP: This is your first child?

MS. REICHEK: My first child, my daughter, had a layette made for her by the mother of a friend. It was very elaborate, a little dress and sweater and booties and mittens and bonnet, to take her home from the hospital in. I kept it, of course. I was very interested in the ritual. It was sort of an interesting thing that one did. Laura was born 1968. There was a great deal of talk about pattern and decoration. Before I made *Laura's Layette*, I made *Direction/Translation/Operation* [1979] and that traced the baby mitten to the full glove, which parallels the development of thumb-finger opposition in children, a "real pattern" of development. And knitting interested me because a knitting pattern reads left to right, right to left, in a zig-zag – unlike most written language, which we read in only one direction. I was beginning to understand that the construction of any "medium" is limited by the parameters encoded in its very structure. If I had a knitted sweater, I had both a beginning object, the first object from the hospital –

MS. SHARP: Made by someone else as this sort of ritualistic giving.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. A pattern of behavior that is also a pattern of ritual, and a knitting pattern that is a "real pattern."

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: I didn't know how to knit. I went to a knitting shop and found a lady who could translate the knitting instructions from the garment.

MS. SHARP: She didn't have a pattern? She took the actual pieces of the layette and deconstructed it?

MS. REICHEK: Yes, and she wrote out the pattern, the knitting instructions.

MS. SHARP: She translated them back into a set of instructions?

MS. REICHEK: Yes, into language – physical language. Then I took those knitting instructions and translated them into a visual map on a graph so that each box represented an operation of the hand. You could knit the object from the written instructions, the graph instructions and the garment. There were three ways of transferring information and I showed all three. I showed the instructions in a book with the sweater photographed on somebody else's baby. I think it was my niece Maria. I forget, but there was a picture of a baby in the sweater, and the instructions, and the object itself, and the mapping of the object. What interests me about those pieces now is that the mapping drawing looks like something computer generated, the boxes in the drawing look like pixels.

MS. SHARP: They look like computer graphs.

MS. REICHEK: Pixel, stitch.

MS. SHARP: The grid keeps going.

MS. REICHEK: I started to knit objects on my own after the layette, but up until then, it was not my knitting.

MS. SHARP: One of the interesting things to me about this piece, beyond the translation stuff, is that it seems to deal with ideas from conceptual art from the '60s about labor.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: And Fluxus ideas about reenacting a script or creating the set of directions that creates a final thing. Then the way you display it reminds me of Joseph Kosuth –

MS. REICHEK: Broom, broom, broom. [Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Brooms*, 1965.]

MS. SHARP: Yeah. Broom, broom, broom.

MS. REICHEK: Art & Language.

MS. SHARP: Exactly.

MS. REICHEK: I was less aware of Art & Language at that point than I should have been.

MS. SHARP: But it was happening around that time.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, it was happening, and certainly “Broom, broom, broom” interested me when I saw it later. But these ideas were in the air, whether you see them or not.

MS. SHARP: They're part of the zeitgeist. So Mary Kelly ended up creating *Postpartum Document* [1974] around the same time, or earlier than *Laura's Layette*. Did you know Mary Kelly, or were you aware that piece was happening, or did it just resonate later?

MS. REICHEK: Later.

MS. SHARP: Both pieces explore the idea of mapping your experience with motherhood and taking it seriously and putting that into your artwork.

MS. REICHEK: I found my children interesting. I found their physical and linguistic development interesting. Even the experience of sitting on a park bench with a lot of overeducated ladies with graduate degrees, who don't know what to do with their lives, was interesting.

MS. SHARP: And you were involved in the A. I. R. Gallery [Artists In Residence Gallery]?

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: And this was around the same time, probably in the late '70s?

MS. REICHEK: I joined after I'd had commercial exposure; my first shows were in commercial galleries.

MS. SHARP: Oh, really?

MS. REICHEK: And then I went to A. I. R.

MS. SHARP: Can you explain that transition?

MS. REICHEK: I developed a bit of an aversion to the commercial system. It's my natural –

MS. SHARP: It's in your family, it's genetic.

MS. REICHEK: Right.

MS. SHARP: Can you explain just what A. I. R. was?

MS. REICHEK: It was the first women's cooperative and the prototype for many alternative galleries that followed. A group of women got together and made themselves a space and showed their work together.

MS. SHARP: Right. There were a lot of artist-run spaces –

MS. REICHEK: Artists-run spaces in which artists were trying to wrest control of the marketplace. It was the time for alternatives.

MS. SHARP: And what was the community of artists like? Were you with other women that were also exploring Minimalism and conceptual ideas?

MS. REICHEK: Nancy Spero, Dotty Attie, Mary Grigoriadis, Mary Beth Edelson, Clover Vail had already formed the group. I'm not an original member. I'm a very early member. I think Ana Mendieta joined after I joined. She was the next one after me. I actually joined because functioning in a group was not an experience I had had. I was already making feminist work. It seemed the perfect place to be – sort of, put your money where your mouth is.

MS. SHARP: So that was part of the conscious choice, to contextualize yourself with the feminists?

MS. REICHEK: Absolutely.

MS. SHARP: In a professional context?

MS. REICHEK: That's how I wanted my work to be seen, and so I joined and was happy to be part of the group. But the experience of working with a group was eye-opening. It was totally educational. I think it was something I was emotionally unprepared for. There were very strong personalities coming from very diverse places. I don't think I'd ever seen that much acting out in my life. [Laughter.] It was kind of shocking. You'd sit in those meetings and you'd think, what am I listening to? [Laughter.] They must have thought the same thing when I spoke.

MS. SHARP: So you were kind of figuring out where you fit in a group?

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: That was the time. Everyone was working together and opening food cooperatives and art cooperatives and –

MS. REICHEK: That's right.

MS. SHARP: – there was a dream of cooperation.

MS. REICHEK: It was a dream. I'd had that dream. But in reality, it was very difficult and it was tough for me. [Laughter.]

MS. SHARP: And so were most of the issues large things about where the organization should go or. . .

MS. REICHEK: No! My first group show experience was a total eye-opener. I think I got there 10 minutes late and three-quarters of the wall I was assigned to share was already hung.

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.] So you had to be there early to claim your space.

MS. REICHEK: I was as ambitious as the next one. Who knows what I would have done if I got there early? [Sharp laughs.] I was brought up like a nice little girl – you have to wait for the roommate to arrive to decide which bunk to take.

[END MD 01 TR 01.]

MS. SHARP: Okay. I'm here with Elaine Reichek. This is the second disc in our recording and today is February 12, 2007.

MS. REICHEK: Sounds like an autopsy! [Sharp laughs.] A police interrogation!

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.] Okay. We were just talking about you being part of the A. I. R. Gallery.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: We were talking a little bit about the community of women and learning to be cooperative in a group.

MS. REICHEK: In the end Nancy Spero and I paired off together.

MS. SHARP: You and Nancy Spero?

MS. REICHEK: And we ran the panel discussions. That was great fun. We would think up something and then we'd ask a bunch of people –

MS. SHARP: So you guys chose your own committee work?

MS. REICHEK: Everybody had to be on the committee and Nancy and I were interested in that kind of thing. So that seemed just dandy to us.

MS. SHARP: Do you remember any of the panels you organized?

MS. REICHEK: I do. Some were great. There was one where Hannah Wilke performed, where – this is really kind of an embarrassing story to tell. It was so crowded and such a fire hazard that Leon [Golub] had to get up on the desk and tell everybody to line up against the walls in case the fire marshal came. They couldn't block the door. It was a riot.

MS. SHARP: Wow!

MS. REICHEK: It was actually a riot. The feminists had to call upon Leon to get up on the desk and shout over everybody. That was one panel. Then there was something called "Old New Figuration." We found some space near Nancy's loft on LaGuardia Place. That was actually a really interesting panel about the New Figuration. Donald Kuspit was the moderator, and Eric Fischl was on the panel and his wife, April Gornik, was in the audience, and got up and said she wasn't a feminist!

MS. SHARP: Oh, wow!

MS. REICHEK: Leon was on that panel. And I remember him just being hysterically funny, leaning back and saying, "I'm an old figurator and I'm a new figurator." But some of our panels were not all that interesting, some of the topics were obscure and we didn't have much of an audience and some of them were packed houses.

MS. SHARP: Sounds pretty fun.

MS. REICHEK: It was just Nancy and me. We had fun thinking about stuff but then we had some pressure from a "funding agency" to charge admission, which we absolutely refused to do. At that particular point, grant and funding organizations began to tighten up and professionalize and they wanted you, because we had a non-profit corporation, to, you know, sing for your supper.

MS. SHARP: Was this like the late '70s, the early '80s?

MS. REICHEK: It was more in the '80s.

MS. SHARP: Right, right. The early '80s. Gearing up to the NEA stuff.

MS. REICHEK: Everything started getting really tight. And in some ways the paperwork and the professionalization of small spaces just killed everybody, they just went under from the sheer requirements of accountability. They lost their spontaneity. We used to run something in which we had a lottery, a free lottery to spend a half hour with a critic. We did get a grant for that. Nancy and I wrote it up and anyone could get a half hour with a critic. You submitted your name and Mary Grigoriadis's kid, Vanessa, chose out of a hat and then we would call these people up and say, "You won a half hour."

MS. SHARP: And who were some of the critics?

MS. REICHEK: Well, [Donald] Kuspit did it. I remember Brooks Adams did it. I remember Lisa Liebmann did it.

MS. SHARP: Wow.

MS. REICHEK: Who else did it? Oh, really everybody. Carter Ratcliff did it. I mean, people were really nice about this kind of thing. And we paid a decent amount to the critics. It was a very good thing to do, but those things don't happen anymore.

MS. SHARP: But just the selection process, getting your name pulled out of a hat versus a lengthy jury process, is really sort of populist.

MS. REICHEK: We were thinking about who didn't have access, and wouldn't it be good to filter those artists

through a non-profit space, and just by chance, critics were willing to take it on. It was a different time.

MS. SHARP: Fewer issues, probably.

MS. REICHEK: Not so many galleries. There were only a couple in SoHo, and on 57th Street, but that was it.

MS. SHARP: Less of a well-oiled machine.

MS. REICHEK: Not so many grad students either.

MS. SHARP: Not so many people just getting fed into the system.

MS. REICHEK: Well, it's like a profession now.

MS. SHARP: How long were you active with A. I. R.?

MS. REICHEK: Around ten years. I had three shows with them [1981, 1985, 1987]. The first was in the old space, which was on Prince Street, and the others were at the space on Crosby Street. I remember getting the Crosby Street space and it involved a great deal of negotiation. We bought the space. That was done according to who could pay what. Each member didn't have to buy the same amount of shares. If you had a little bit more means, you bought more shares. If you had a little less, you had less shares – there was a minimum level. It was incumbent upon those – myself, Nancy, Dottie, Mary – to buy a little bit more to help women who had less. That was a fair way to do it. In the end, that's what we decided to do and it worked.

MS. SHARP: It's amazing to me that A. I. R. has lasted for so long. The dream of giving equal access was actualized.

MS. REICHEK: We were still in the beginning of the '80s. Then the demands of money, professionalization –

MS. SHARP: Creating the hierarchy, that was more like a corporate structure.

MS. REICHEK: In some ways A. I. R. was a victim of its own success, too. There was a certain moment and then the moment wasn't.

MS. SHARP: It changed. And it was also part of a larger collective consciousness that was happening within galleries. Dialing back a little bit to the early '80s, I think in 1979, I have here that you finished *Laura's Layette*, but you showed it a lot during that time.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: And that was also the year that you had an installation at PS1 [Long Island City, New York] called *The Artist's Bedroom*.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: And this is where you really started to get into direct appropriation and you made a bunch of coverlets in the shape of different modernist paintings. They were hung on the wall, right? And it was in the janitor's closet?

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: Can you talk a little bit about that? Was that your first installation?

MS. REICHEK: Yes, it was a very nice experience for me. I really loved that janitor's closet. I had this idea of what I wanted to do in it. I sent in a proposal and they wrote to me and told me I had it. That was it, you know. It was just one of those, you know, you apply, you get it –

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: I had kids in school and so I had to go in the morning. I think the guy who was sort of the superintendent must have had a substance abuse problem [Sharp laughs], because he didn't go in until 2-3 in the afternoon, so there was no heat in the morning. So I would get there at 10 o'clock and I remember standing there on top of a ten-foot ladder, painting the room blue, and being frozen with the roller in my hand, swaying back and forth.

MS. SHARP: So the installation was in this little closet, and the walls were entirely painted a kind of royal blue?

MS. REICHEK: They were the kind of blue that signifies night. Blue, starry night blue, and there was a small lamp hanging from the ceiling with a single bulb. And I pushed a single bed with a footboard painted blue in the closet. I covered it with blue sheets and a blue coverlet and then hung the little beds on the walls. All the coverlets replicated other artists' signature works and it was an expression of the anxiety of influence that is part of every artist's thought process.

MS. SHARP: The frames were shaped like a single bed?

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: Framed like a headboard?

MS. REICHEK: They were wooden boxlike frames in a stained brown wood with the beds recessed in them with a little pillow.

MS. SHARP: That's right. They had little pillows.

MS. REICHEK: They had pillows and they hung on the wall.

MS. SHARP: And what were the works represented on the coverlets? For example, a Mondrian?

MS. REICHEK: A Mondrian coverlet and a Matisse. I had a Richard Tuttle coverlet. I had a Sol Lewitt coverlet. I'm trying to remember who else. A Rauschenberg.

MS. SHARP: Were there stars on the ceiling?

MS. REICHEK: No, no.

MS. SHARP: And did people, when they entered, climb on the bed?

MS. REICHEK: Yeah.

MS. SHARP: Really?

MS. REICHEK: They climbed into bed and were supposed to lie there like they were going to sleep, seeing all of the – how shall I say – the dream ancestors.

MS. SHARP: During the same year, you made a piece called *The Life and Times of Art* [1979] which doesn't have the bedroom motif, but there's a similarity in its use of household items, like pencils, frames, window coverings, and fabric. You're working on a small scale and you remake famous paintings, or refer to them.

MS. REICHEK: I used empty frames and then filled them in with references to ideas about framing and support and formal issues, like front, back, et cetera.

MS. SHARP: I really liked seeing those pieces. You had described them to me, but until I saw an image I didn't fully get it, because I worked with you on recent work. But I feel like this earlier work is a forerunner to your recent work, in the reproduction of well-known, modern icons, with fabric and different materials.

MS. REICHEK: I think artists have ideas and revisit them.

MS. SHARP: So for the next three years, you're still appropriating images but you start using photos of non-Western architecture. I'm thinking of pieces like *Chichen Itza* [1982] and *Temple of Heaven* [1982], where you're using a format similar to *Laura's Layette*. There's a 2-D image paired with a sewn object. There's a sort of central geometry that's happening between them, and there are multiples. I think you started with pairs and then you ended up working with groups of three. What led you to these photographic images as a source for this work?

MS. REICHEK: Well, the bonnets were really the source.

MS. SHARP: So it started with those knitted objects because you're exploring them through the baby clothes?

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: And the layette?

MS. REICHEK: But the mappings tended to look like architectural structures. It's the bonnet to the mapping, to, "Oh, my goodness, this looks like a building." It's visual association. A bonnet could equal a building because in the mapping process there was an accidental visual translation, which was just too nutty for me to resist.

[Laughs.]

MS. SHARP: So these pieces would be framed, with an object – maybe a found bonnet – and the mapped drawing on graph paper and then a photo of a structure, like a pyramid, for example, that looks like the map drawing –

MS. REICHEK: By this time, I can look at a set of knitting instructions and kind of picture everything. If you've mapped them out visually, you know what these panels are going to look like.

MS. SHARP: They're sculptural.

MS. REICHEK: So you think, "Well, my goodness, it looks like Chichen Itza." So you go and get a photograph of Chichen Itza and then you think, "That's a bonnet," and so you work back from the photograph.

MS. SHARP: So what you displayed in the piece was –

MS. REICHEK: The photograph, the mapping of the knitting, and the object. I knit the photograph literally.

MS. SHARP: So it started with a photo and then you made –

MS. REICHEK: That's right. The translation.

MS. SHARP: I see. Okay.

MS. REICHEK: What happens is this translation works both ways. I could translate at this point from written, into a knitted object and to graph, but the graph could then be translated into a photograph and you could work back from a photograph the other way. As in right left right left right, knitting instructions.

MS. SHARP: So were you using a specific source to find these images?

MS. REICHEK: I started with books on indigenous architecture.

MS. SHARP: So after this series, you start the Tepee series, right?

MS. REICHEK: At this point I'm looking at archival photographs, and they are really interesting to me. I lived so close to the Natural History Museum, which was a childhood haunt, and, you know, I like a nice library, a picture file. I used that stuff when I was a kid. I used to take out records from the Grand Army Plaza Library. You used to be able to take out seven records. They also had a picture file and I started to use that again, and the file at the Natural History Museum. I don't know, I just got interested in the photographs and the photographs led to more photographs. I began to knit early indigenous structures. If you're dealing with indigenous structures, you often deal with seeing them as a geometric form. The architecture has a simpler form, and these forms are handmade. I mean, you make a grass hut out of a bunch of grass, and that seemed related to making something from a ball of yarn. So it's very related to knitting. They're made at home, they're made out of what's available. Somehow I got into the domestic ethnographic. I also began to think about how pictures in the files are so out of context and so anonymous. You don't know where the photographs are from and they have bad labels. I began to think about the way I was looking at them and I thought about all the meaning that had been literally drained out of them, how their context is collapsed. I'm getting them out of books. There's no Internet, remember.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: No Internet. It's just library pictures files.

MS. SHARP: And there's a scale shift that happens, too.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, I think I get tired of working small and I come to the end of it.

MS. SHARP: You end up making these big works, like 60 inches or more, that pair a knitted object with a photograph. The drawing drops out of the equation and your interest in the photograph takes over.

MS. REICHEK: The part that interested me now was the buildings.

MS. SHARP: There is a self-awareness of your interaction with these images and how they're edited and controlled, or presented to you.

MS. REICHEK: I began to think about context, and then the context fed into the work. I become much more concerned with the installation. My first show of large-scale knitted pieces was a complete installation.

MS. SHARP: I just want to describe one of these pieces. There is a large-scale reproduction of this ethnographic photograph of a tepee, for example, paired with a knitted object that you call a bag or some kind of vessel.

MS. REICHEK: It's collapsed. I knit the photograph.

MS. SHARP: And you collapse it, and it's the same scale. So it's like a bag –

MS. REICHEK: If you spread out the knitted object it exactly equals the photograph.

MS. SHARP: And then it hangs in this kind of tent-like shape on the wall.

MS. REICHEK: It hangs upside-down with the support, the tepee poles, removed. The knitted tepee possesses qualities that the photograph leaves out. It exists in the viewer's space, and takes on as much presence as the framed and distant one.

MS. SHARP: And then you paint on the photo.

MS. REICHEK: The first ones I made for myself weren't painted, but I think by the time they got out in the world, they were painted. When you see a tepee, especially a tepee that has a language component – pictographs – there are messages that are intelligible to people who know the signs and symbols. That's another language, which the casual viewer may look at as abstraction or design. Circles, polka dots, stripes – they look like primary shapes, primary forms, primary decoration.

MS. SHARP: A tepee is a sort of triangle shape.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. So you're talking about an artist's vocabulary, because at this point in time, there's a degree of sensitivity to using ethnographic objects, although it's actually a little before this discourse –

MS. SHARP: Yeah. You were doing that pretty early.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: You were working in a really complicated and self-aware way that I think not many other artists were doing, not many white artists, at the time. What I really like about the tepee and the gesture of painting the dots onto the dream tepee – which look like polka dots to someone who comes out of a Western modernist culture – you are revealing your own biases, while still dealing with issues related to modernism and formal concerns that are removed from the reality of what this image represents.

MS. REICHEK: The reality is, I'm in New York. I have access to everybody's – to everything. I'm privileged enough to know where to find it. In some ways I have always been acquainted with ethnographic storehouses. I know what museums mean. So being a woman and having had a kind of formal education, also having had a graduate education experience at an all-male college, and certainly, I suspect, being Jewish, would make me aware of being politicized, make me aware of civil rights issues, which are easily translated into these kinds of issues.

MS. SHARP: One of the striking things about the photographs of architectural forms that you use is that there are often no humans pictured. In an interview you did with Therese Lichtenstein [*Journal of Contemporary Art*, Winter 1993], you talk about how these are places that we know people live in, they cook in, they sleep in, they play outside, they do whatever, and a photographer clearly came in and said, "Everyone, move over there."

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: The photographer framed this photo and isolated the building from the community of other buildings that may have been there.

MS. REICHEK: Tepees are always built in a circle. There is one final tepee piece of mine that included people [*Polkadot Blackfoot with Children*, 1990], and the second-to-last piece has two tepees [*Double Blackfoot Tepee*, 1990]. I also was making collages at this time. I was brought up on grade-B cowboy Westerns and we played cowboys and Indians as kids. We dressed up like cowboys. I read *Last of the Mohicans*. I mean, who could not be informed by the heartbreak of *The Last of the Mohicans*? People are not so stupid not to have known what happened. They didn't teach it, but it isn't that hard to find out about. So I just started to read, I had the good luck to live near an ethnographic museum and I started traveling to look at other ethnographic images.

MS. SHARP: So you traveled to get images?

MS. REICHEK: Absolutely. I began to go to ethnographic museums for images. I went to the Natural History Museum in London, which has a very good material on Tierra Del Fuego because it was explored by Darwin. For

the ethnography of Micronesia, Polynesia, for those installations, I went to France. I went to Museum [d'Histoire Naturelle] de Lyon. I went to Yale, I went to the Peabody [Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography] at Harvard. I never got to the Bernice P. Bishop Museum [Honolulu, Hawaii]. That's still a dream, but yes, I went to every ethnographical museum that I could, dozens. It's all coming back to me. On my hands and knees – dusty files. I loved it. It was great.

MS. SHARP: To dig through all the evidence.

MS. REICHEK: Remember things were still not organized on the computer. And you got to actually look through it. Oh, and I went to the museum at Teuveren in Belgium [Royal Museum for Central Africa]. That was, you know, the African loot. Oh, my God. That was just amazing. Unreconstructed Stanley and Livingston with their trunks.

MS. SHARP: Wow! Wow!

MS. REICHEK: I went to Holland, to Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

MS. SHARP: Which had an amazing cache, I'm sure, because the Dutch made it everywhere.

MS. REICHEK: Everywhere.

MS. SHARP: So you went from these architectural forms and other things that suggested a figure, but never involved an actual figure, and then the figures come. What happened? Was it just that those photos were so amazing?

MS. REICHEK: The body had been present before. The layette is for a little body.

MS. SHARP: Yes, referred to.

MS. REICHEK: We are now in the '80s, and not only does my husband die, very suddenly of cancer, but I also lose a great many of my friends to AIDS. The whole community is devastated. I spent the '80s, like so many of my friends, being a primary caretaker. We found our source of social gathering to be going to the hospital and going to funerals.

MS. SHARP: So George died in the '80s?

MS. REICHEK: George died in '86.

MS. SHARP: And the AIDS crisis was hitting New York. Oh, wow.

MS. REICHEK: I think the first show in which I include figures was the first exhibition of the Tierra del Fuegians [*Investigations 19*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1986]. I looked at these remarkable pictures as part of this same cache of photographs as the Native Americans, and something about that parallel ethnographic history – the Tierra del Fuegians had a horrible visitation and it was never the same after the boat appeared in the harbor.

MS. SHARP: And they're gone.

MS. REICHEK: Pure-blood Tierra del Fuegians, there are no more. I came into college as a history and government major. I mean, I liked those stories.

MS. SHARP: You were attracted to those kind of artifacts.

MS. REICHEK: No, not just the artifacts, the histories.

MS. SHARP: The entire history.

MS. REICHEK: Ethnographic. I mean, all of that was really stuff I liked.

MS. SHARP: So you use a similar tactic with the Tierra del Fuegian pieces as with the structures – a large-scale photograph, and you hand-paint markings that were on the bodies of the subjects?

MS. REICHEK: That's right.

MS. SHARP: And then you knitted same-scale versions of the figures from the photos, which hung on the wall?

MS. REICHEK: They have armature. They have a wire for support but the wire does not make space. It's just the knitting. The wire is just to hold the shape. It's just the skin, like the photo is a skin. Flattened 2-D. I've

knitted the photograph, not the man.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: I've knitted the shadows into the body as they appeared in the photograph. The markings are interesting because, of course, they too have meanings. The Fuegians look like fabulous dancing figures. They're quite wonderful, but the aim of their body paint was to disembodied the figure so that they could be invisible. It's not something that they did once a year. It's this thing that the Fuegians did regularly.

MS. SHARP: It was a regular part of life. So that's interesting because in a way you are saying, "I see these markings as pattern," and you are still talking about the frame – the photographer framing and making choices.

MS. REICHEK: And you know that people still have trouble with this – if you read anything about the history of photography, you know that photographers often combined photographs to make new ones. Carlton Watkins did it in early photographs of America [e. g., while printing a photograph of a landscape, Watkins used a separate plate for the sky]. So from the very beginning, there's no such thing as a documentary photograph. In fact, even with the WPA, the most sanctified body of work, which I worked with a bit later, you know those hairbrushes are arranged on the table [in Walker Evans's *Interior of Negro Preacher's House, Florida, 1933*], you know they pushed those accessories around. I mean, in the Civil War people are moving bodies around for a better shot. And this, of course, interests me enormously. You know, untold story, alternative version, alternative material –

MS. SHARP: And this is the mid/late '80s and the early 1990s. So there is this larger cultural interest in identity and dealing with how people are "seen." I'm trying to think of another good example.

MS. REICHEK: Well, how information is framed. If you do a language piece on "broom, broom, broom," you're talking about translation. That is something that is always interesting, too – translation from one medium to another.

MS. SHARP: Which is the knitting process.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. So, translation is really a kind of steady thread throughout everything.

MS. SHARP: Going back to your connection to New York in the '80s, all of these artists are dying of AIDS and there's this caretaking going on and a connection to the gay art world. I am thinking about Mapplethorpe's nude photographs of men and the discourse around lust that's engendered from these images of beautiful bodies, and how that might happen with the ethnographic photograph.

MS. REICHEK: There is something about a healthy body. There's something about the whole body, but also these diseases of visitation, something coming from nowhere and changing everything. And nobody invited these people [Europeans] in. I mean, who expected the boat to appear in the harbor?

MS. SHARP: I haven't seen these works in person, but I finally saw a really good installation shot of them and I realized I hadn't really understood the scale in relationship to the viewer.

MS. REICHEK: They're full-body scale.

MS. SHARP: When I saw that installation shot, I realized that you're still having this discourse about photography and modernism and formalism, but they're these shadow figures.

MS. REICHEK: That's right.

MS. SHARP: There's this sort of sadness to a room of these full-scale figures – and you've used this heavy wool to knit them so they look really physical.

MS. REICHEK: They have presence. They're in your space, they're tactile. The photograph is distanced, behind glass, so all the warmth of the body, the skin, is present. And you think, "Well, that was a person and that person's dead." I think photography in itself is totally death-cathected. Even in a photographic album, even when a child looks at a photograph and they say "Who's that?" "That person doesn't live anymore." The photograph is a record of times gone by, it's a document of the past, but it's a selective document. It has an "out of time" quality. It's, literally, a framed moment of time.

MS. SHARP: There's something about the attentiveness that's required to knit an object, the physicality of these figures that must bring the viewer back to an understanding that they are looking at a document of a person, of a moment, versus how they might automatically interact with those photographic images.

MS. REICHEK: Well, there's certainly an investment of time and labor. I hoped that by my translating the figure

in the photograph, using a labor-intensive activity, that I would acknowledge that although I'm complicit – at least I know I'm complicit because I know that by literally painting on these photographs, I'm showing you that I'm marking on them, and I'm showing you that I'm reading them wrong, but that I do it with some degree of respect and time and labor invested.

MS. SHARP: Did you feel like you were “re-enacting”? Because I see that these marks say, “This is how I see it, I'm showing you that.” But in a way, the marks also could be a sort of re-enactment that reinforces the fact that a human hand actually made these circles, or whatever the pattern was. Was that part of your thinking at all?

MS. REICHEK: I don't think it was. I mean that's a very good point, but I don't really think I was aware of that when I was doing it.

MS. SHARP: Because it humanizes the image and brings into the tactile world this thing that was handmade.

MS. REICHEK: It's a good point. I can't claim it as my own. [Laughter.]

[END MD 02 TR 01.]

MS. SHARP: In an interview you did a while ago with Therese Lichtenstein [*Journal of Contemporary Art*, Winter 1993] you talked about this, and I think this was a very strongly held opinion in the early '90s when identity politics and a person's identity were a big part of content, and I don't want to oversimplify that time, but people were really dealing with rewriting, redirecting histories and reinserting forgotten narratives into the larger accepted mainstream of histories, and there was a kind of strongly-held opinion – and I think this is true in some ways today, too – that one should only discuss their own personal history and not –

MS. REICHEK: That's correct.

MS. SHARP: – invoke any other history.

MS. REICHEK: Was I poaching on Native American culture? This was, in fact, something that did come up. I did get tagged. It's interesting because I'm not an anthropologist – certainly Lothar [Baumgarten] and I do very different kinds of work. There was an article in *Artforum* that Charles Miller wrote discussing this. [Charles V. Miller, “Domestic Science,” *Artforum*, March 1989, 117-20.] This is the subject of a long discussion that I had with Jimmie Durham, and of course, he's written in support of my work. The work that I was making was about white people. They were photographs taken by white people. They were a white persons' history and really what needed to be examined was white people. Native Americans knew perfectly well what they thought, but the people who needed to examine themselves in terms of these preconceived notions and ideas about other cultures are white people. That's where the looking needed to be done, and so I thought, “Well, that's what I need to do.” So that's what I did, and it was always from the very beginning – it certainly was territory I knew was fraught. It was not a surprise to me. I hoped that from the very beginning – I built this into the record – that in using materials, like handmade materials and alternative methods of presentations, that it would be the cue that I was talking about a different way of seeing. I am a white woman, and although I may not be driving the car, I am certainly sitting in the back.

MS. SHARP: You were a “passenger in all of this.”

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. And I have to account for that, but I also thought that if I retreated from what interested me, it was a form of self-censorship that was not healthy for me personally and not healthy for the discourse itself.

MS. SHARP: And did you see other artists doing that? I mean, I read this work as about your position as a consumer of these ethnographies.

MS. REICHEK: Absolutely.

MS. SHARP: And you're sort of indicting the larger culture –

MS. REICHEK: I didn't visit reservations. I'm looking at picture files; they're already a mediated source. And they're ethnographic photographs, so they've been taken a while ago and they're identified, if they're identified at all, as white photographers, and in some instances they're just totally anonymous. Most of them are totally anonymous, but there is almost no documentation by Native Americans and the pity of it all is that Native Americans often received their history the same way. And now have to live up to some ethnography that's been perpetrated. So it's a complicated history in terms of ethnography for Native Americans and that's what I chose to deal with because it is the American ethnography.

MS. SHARP: Right. Were there other artists that were dealing with identity in, if not a similar way, maybe dealing with identities that weren't their own in the way that work was read at least, or –

MS. REICHEK: I think Lothar is the other person. He's trained as an anthropologist – he actually did anthropological work. That's a very different kind of thing.

MS. SHARP: Very different. Yes.

MS. REICHEK: But I'm trying to think now if there was anybody else doing this, but I don't think so.

MS. SHARP: I didn't find a lot of evidence of anyone else doing this. It seemed like you ended up in a lot of group shows where it was maybe Jimmie Durham. . .

MS. REICHEK: And me.

MS. SHARP: And you, yes.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. And me. I mean, even in an all-women show, I always wanted a man, too. Do you know what I mean? I'm not an essentialist. Everybody should have their space for discourse, but we all live in a larger world. I'm much more interested in Homi Bhabha's ideas of hybridity. And to condemn people of "interesting ethnicities" to only make work about their ethnicity is the other pressure point. Or as Jimmie would say, "He who wears the biggest headdress gets the most attention." And then you see how it plays out. So that white people can make anything they want, but people of interesting ethnicity or skin color or from exotic places –

MS. SHARP: Right, right. [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: – have to make, you know, work about that to get anywhere, to fit into the expanded quotas.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: Probably much of this is necessary now. We're in a transition. We're not totally post-colonial. We certainly have a fully qualified candidate, soon to be, I hope, our president. . .

MS. SHARP: Talking about Barack Obama.

MS. REICHEK: Let us hope that maybe some progress has been made.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. This may be another discussion, but I think that in the art world, at least, that is starting to loosen up a little bit. I don't think you are tied to your identity. But, I wonder, during the early '90s, it was really a time when it was like was a claiming of identity, drawing lines and claiming space –

MS. REICHEK: Circling the wagons. I mean, people stopped making public sculpture – everybody was, you know, knee-deep in this stuff. It was very difficult. I know several people who had their commissions destroyed and it's a stage you need to pass through. I mean, it's part of what happens, and having been through the feminist debate, I certainly knew that. Having heard the rhetoric in and around early feminism, I certainly was prepared because it's always the same rhetoric.

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: It's exactly the same rhetoric. It's just –

MS. SHARP: Who got the bigger piece of the pie?

MS. REICHEK: Who got the bigger piece of the pie? And, you know, it's totally understandable, but I'm not poaching anybody's anything. Nobody owns the picture of a tepee taken by a white person. And if you come from a pueblo culture, it's not your house anyhow. I mean, people keep thinking all Native Americans are the same. It's a confederation of people. When I was doing research at the Library of Congress, I was sitting in the Native American Study Room and, yes, I was the only white person there, but after a while, they'd rather ask me, "Does this guy in this picture look like this guy?" Because, believe me, the Cherokee are not talking to, oh, I don't know, the Sioux. I mean, as Jimmie says, I look skinny and tall and blue eyed and shifty and he's heavy and brown-skinned and we don't have a lot to say to one another. [Laughter] And the old wars between them, you know – feminist wars are exactly the same thing. Who's married, who's sick, who's gay, who's independent, who's got money, who this, who that.

MS. SHARP: Who owns property, who –

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: That's power. So you had a show at the Gray Art Gallery [New York University] in '92, *Native Intelligence*. In that show you had some of the tepee pieces, but there were other works – was that the show with *Ten Little Indians*?

MS. REICHEK: That was the big Native American show. There were photo collages, there were tepee pieces and there were knitted figures. *Ten Little Indians* was in a room of pieces that had to do with childhood, movies, all about cowboys and Indians, really. And there were language pieces, and lots of photo works. It was a nice show to put up.

MS. SHARP: It sounds like it's all of the different sorts of tactics you'd been using to go at your content.

MS. REICHEK: It took five years to work through this body of work because there was that much research involved and I was interested in a large-scale installation.

MS. SHARP: And in the middle of that, there's the first Gulf War – we were sending troops into Iraq for the first time and you had a show at Carlo Lamagna Gallery called *The War Room* [1990]. And there's a lot of photo collage in that.

MS. REICHEK: I wanted to talk about the photographic lie, just straight up, about war photography. That show was before the Grey Gallery show. I was in the middle of working on *Native Intelligence*. And even after that show started to travel, I was still making Native American work, I had some dress pieces that I hadn't got to make, which I ended up really liking – Gray Owl stuff.

MS. SHARP: That's actually a good place to move into now because it actually was in the *Native Intelligence* show that you first started using samplers?

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: So you picked up the language of the sampler.

MS. REICHEK: The sampler language had to do with early American culture. I was interested in the text/image quality – because I was already doing text and image, I was already printing text on photographs.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: *Noble Savage, Savage Noble* [1991], things like that. Text-and-image was just a very natural extension because that's exactly what samplers are. And I thought if I could make a group of samplers where I could at least get Native Americans to speak for themselves through quotation, and apply them to American samplers, that I would have some hopeful way of representing Native American culture within the body of the show.

MS. SHARP: And you're using this form that was historically about girls. They learned the to make samplers as a way to engrain the message that was in the sampler into them – so it was about proper behavior –

MS. REICHEK: That's right.

MS. SHARP: – and cultural mores, so you're turning that on its head a little bit, by having various famous Native Americans speak through the sampler.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. What if?

MS. SHARP: And so, in 1994, *A Postcolonial Kinderhood* goes up [at The Jewish Museum, New York] and this is not a big shift because it's clear that all of your work does come from a personal experience, but it's the first time you're really directly talking about your family and your childhood. You even have quotes from family members –

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: – their voices are in it. So do you want to talk a little bit about that? The sampler starts taking off as a form that you're interested in.

MS. REICHEK: Yes. I did personal ethnography rather than looking at ethnographic photographs. I applied my methods to my own family and began to have a look at how that operated in the context of my own life.

MS. SHARP: Didn't someone from The Jewish Museum ask you "Why don't you do this about your own family?"

MS. REICHEK: Yes. Susan Goodman came to the studio and said "Got anything Jewish?" [Laughter.] And I

didn't. But it worried me. At that time, I was preparing work for the Irish Museum [of Modern Art, Dublin], talking about the relationship between AIM – the American Indian Movement – and the Irish and English conflict.

MS. SHARP: And that work had some similar imagery – you were knitting figures and pairing them with photos. So there's a similar formal language.

MS. REICHEK: I'm mixing the double history, which is really quite interesting because James Mooney, the best early Native American ethnographer, was Irish and the early ethnographic photographs in the Field Museum in Chicago are extremely interesting. There are parallels between the language used by the English to disparage the Irish and Native Americans. Sir Walter Raleigh's plan for first Virginia colony is very much like the plan executed for the invasion of Ireland.

MS. SHARP: That's really interesting hidden history.

MS. REICHEK: It has all these hidden connections to tobacco and to the tobacco trade and to the consortium of the English shipping companies, East India Company and – its world trade beginning – it's a nasty business. It's tobacco, slaves, sugar. So this Irish-English connection between colonization of the Irish, settling of the Irish and bringing them into line with the English Crown, is similar to the plan to subdue the native peoples of America.

MS. SHARP: Similar kinds of language and structures.

MS. REICHEK: Completely, completely.

MS. SHARP: Interesting. So you took the challenge [from Susan Goodman]. Were you surprised? What did you think at that point about making personal work? Was that, you know, really directly personal work? Was that something you considered before or –

MS. REICHEK: I'm not a confessional type. It's kind of interesting now because I'm going to do a talk on Louise Bourgeois for Dia [Art Foundation, New York] and Louise always frames her work in terms of personal iconography. It's not a habit of mine to do that. I don't mind answering questions. There's a degree of transparency. It's perfectly okay with me. I'm quite direct. If you ask me something, I'll tell you, answer as best as I can, but I'm far less concerned with all the autobiography than maybe other people are, so, yes. It was kind of awkward, but because I already had all these practices in place, it seemed like, you know, how come? And the "how come?" was the motivator.

MS. SHARP: You rose to the challenge.

MS. REICHEK: The "how come." I kept thinking "Well, how come? Now why haven't you done that?" And I'm a product of long years of analysis. So, of course, that's where I went.

MS. SHARP: And so you did this big installation, which started at The Jewish Museum in New York and traveled around. And you recreated your childhood bedroom, even down to the same exact furniture that you had. There's, of course, a lot of text samplers. You bring in the voice of your family by using the samplers in a really interesting way. Can you talk a little bit about the furniture?

MS. REICHEK: Yes. All the furniture in the house was sort of bastardized Dutch Colonial antique, which was very much in fashion. Maybe there were a few real antiques. Subsequently, I would tell you that the site of corn husks on the door makes me run! Three beautiful children, a German Shepherd dog, a Dutch Colonial house – a nutty asylum! So it was something about my parents' desire to pass, to have a history not their own – it's an immigration history, which is why it interested me. What does Americanization mean? Certainly, in the Native American work, there is a sense of Native Americans' ambivalence towards integration, about losing tribal ways, about reclaiming their culture. You know, what are they going to do with 3,000 pairs of moccasins? What do you give up? What do you maintain? And I think, for Jews, this has always been an interesting question. That exhibition, *A Postcolonial Kinderhood* was still made in the heat of the ethnographic identity wars.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. Right in the middle of it.

MS. REICHEK: It was extremely provocative, more provocative than the Native American work. In *Native Intelligence* the question was, you know – could a white person talk about Native Americans? In this particular show, which was not a positive identity show, a lot of buttons were pushed. One of the things that the show was about is self-censorship.

MS. SHARP: Actually, it was a little bit controversial. You had some "letters to the editor."

MS. REICHEK: Oh, I loved my letters. I got a great one from a nun that said, "You should be ashamed. Jesus was a Jew." [Sharp laughs.] I gave that to Norman Kleeblatt [the curator at The Jewish Museum]. He wanted it.

And this, of course, predates *Too Jewish* [The Jewish Museum, 1996] Most of the identity shows had to do with forming identity in public, refuting stereotypes, all of those kinds of things, and mine was much more about my own experience and about my parents' desire to pass. We were taken to Best & Co. for our haircuts. We were told not to dress like the other girls, which resulted in a bunch of very unattractive brown Oxfords [laughter] and blue pleated skirts, and we all had Easter hats.

MS. SHARP: Oh, wow! Really? Where did you wear the Easter hats?

MS. REICHEK: I think for the high holidays, not around Easter, but let me tell you, they were Best & Co. 's finest. You know, it was OK to be Jewish, but, other people weren't supposed to guess you were Jewish. The fact that I was blond and athletic – my parents were delighted. It was the only part of me that delighted them. [Laughs.]

MS. SHARP: So it's an assimilation narrative and –

MS. REICHEK: So many people –

MS. SHARP: Yeah. So many immigrant families –

MS. REICHEK: It's the same story. I don't think there's any immigrant group that doesn't have this story.

MS. SHARP: There was a great quote by your daughter in one of the samplers.

MS. REICHEK: Oh, Laura [Engel].

MS. SHARP: Do you remember what that quote was?

MS. REICHEK: "All the mothers of Jewish boys love me. I'm the closest thing to a Shiksa without being one." [Laughter.] And that truly was what it was. It wasn't that you wished you weren't Jewish, it was that you didn't want anybody else to guess.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. And I remember you got a letter to the editor, a woman said something like she basically wanted you to reframe your childhood as a happy one involving dreidel-playing and –

MS. REICHEK: There was no dreidel-playing.

MS. SHARP: – just sort of chastising you for just being honest about your own experience.

MS. REICHEK: People were horrified.

MS. SHARP: Like you'd exposed your private world to the public.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. The docents were all so dismayed, and they all wanted a back-to-the-faith narrative.

MS. SHARP: Right, right.

MS. REICHEK: They kept asking me, was I practicing?

MS. SHARP: And it was at The Jewish Museum and during the time where people were starting to –

MS. REICHEK: Oh, it was really – I mean lots of letters to the editor, lots of – you know, people found you in the phone book. [Laughter.]

MS. SHARP: There were these monogrammed towels.

MS. REICHEK: Do you know that I must confess I'm often over-prepared for a flurry of this or that, but this did quite take me –

MS. SHARP: It rattled you a little?

MS. REICHEK: It didn't rattle me but I was surprised.

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: Less rattling than – I mean, I thought, gee –

MS. SHARP: I mean, it seems like you got a much stronger response from that than from all of your other work and all of the other potential –

MS. REICHEK: Well, I mean, the criticism in and around the Native American thing was nothing. I mean, during that time, there was nobody's body of work that went up that didn't have some political fault.

MS. SHARP: Right, right.

MS. REICHEK: There was nothing you could do, if you wanted to say anything, that didn't bring comment. So everybody was used to being attacked. That's just the way it was. If your work had anything to do with other cultures, I mean, it was just part of what happened. And for those of us lucky enough to have been through the feminist battleground, we were probably better prepared than other people were.

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: But no, this one was major.

MS. SHARP: And so I want to talk about a couple other things in the show. You had these monogrammed towels.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: It was surprising to me to see that, for some reason.

MS. REICHEK: Oh, the "J-E-W" on them?

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: Oh, well, it's like the thing of F-H-B, "Family Hold Back." In my family, nobody used the guest towels, only the guests used the guest towels. You weren't allowed to touch them. So they're like, you know, not for our hands. They're for the guests.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: But they also have to do with purification, and there was Ivory Soap in there, and – there were pictures of my mother-in-law and my mother in camp uniforms, which actually looked like "Mädchen in Uniform," those bloomers and ties, and, you know, we were all kind of out there doing Americanizing sports. All of that healthy, outdoor play, many wholesome activities.

MS. SHARP: And there was a bed that was a like a centerpiece.

MS. REICHEK: It was a four-poster bed, but I exposed the structure, didn't put a canopy over it because I wanted the bare bones of the structure to show. All the furniture was cut down to a 10-year-old girl's size, slightly more diminutive, and everything was made to make you feel like it was shadowy. I was lucky enough to get a professional lighting consultant. It needed to be lit in a kind of gloomy darkness, five o'clock in the afternoon on a winter day, and it cast shadows on the bed, and almost made a skeleton on the floor. There was a headboard and a footboard with embroidered text, one quote from George Washington and one from Richard Nixon. A Procrustean bed for a Jewish girl.

MS. SHARP: So the headboard was carved?

MS. REICHEK: There were embroideries framed in ovals in the headboard and the footboard.

MS. SHARP: And then there was the coverlet on it?

MS. REICHEK: Yes. It had text on it, too. Which was in Yiddish. I don't know Yiddish but I managed to find this and it's like a Yiddish phrase that means "What do you want for my life?" [Was willst du von meinem Leben?]

MS. SHARP: Bookended by George Washington and Richard Nixon.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, exactly.

MS. SHARP: Really, really great. I would love to see that piece in person.

MS. REICHEK: The Jewish Museum was nice enough to buy the whole installation. So they own it.

MS. SHARP: And it traveled to San Francisco [Museum of Jewish Art] and Ohio, too, yes?

MS. REICHEK: At the Wexner [Center for the Visual Arts, Columbus, Ohio].

MS. SHARP: And they videotaped an interview with you at the Wexner, talking about your "Postcolonial

Kinderhood.” So you were still dealing with the exchange between two cultures, and that was a point in the other work you did –

MS. REICHEK: It was between two cultures meeting each other. That, for me, is almost like the relationship between image and text. It’s in the space between two things. The middle, as in middle child. That’s where meaning can be ascertained.

MS. SHARP: And these happened to be two cultures that you were part of, that you lived between.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly, exactly. But whose lines of collision were part of my early experience. I finally got to leave home. I had experienced it in my life. I had experienced it at Yale, I had experienced it from being able physically to pass.

MS. SHARP: That reminds me of how W.E.B. Du Bois talks about double consciousness, or living it yet being aware of it.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: I think that’s part of the work that we just talked about, *Native Intelligence* and the Tierra del Feugians.

MS. REICHEK: It is unusual for anyone to still be in the place that they were born. I still am in New York. I mean that’s very strange. Most people are on their second or third cultures, and that awareness has to be part of our consciousness, at least now. No one should be that isolated and provincial. Let us hope that American politics proceeds on that.

MS. SHARP: Well, also the culture can just change around you, too.

MS. REICHEK: Absolutely.

MS. SHARP: Because of all the transitory activity –

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. Because it’s a city in which you can’t possibly make assumptions about people. Just get on the subway.

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: That’s why I love cities with subways.

[END MD 02 TR 02.]

MS. SHARP: Okay. So we were talking about *A Postcolonial Kinderhood*. And then I wanted to talk about how, after that show, it seems like you reach back into the nineteenth century. I guess I’m thinking about the show in 1999 at MoMA, *When This You See* – [1996–99].

MS. REICHEK: Ah. That actually has to do with real circumstances. At that time I’d done one, two, three bodies of samplers, full bodies of samplers. And at this point, the thing that interests me most is the sampler. I’m showing with Michael Klein, and Michael closes his gallery. And I have a choice about what to do. I can pick up another gallery, hopefully. But the other thing I can do, since I’ve had a lot of exposure and I’m feeling fine, is to virtually go home and give myself something really nice. I’m also tired. I’ve been traveling and showing and traveling and showing. You know, it’s a very good time for me to investigate the samplers in the time it’s going to take. I know that I actually like making them, and I know it’s what I want to do and if I don’t do it now, I’m never going to do it.

MS. SHARP: So you’re just looking forward to going into a big production mode.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, and I feel equipped to do it. And I feel happy at the prospect of doing it. So I just decide, okay? And I start to involve myself in the history of samplers, what they mean and the history of embroidery and what that means. And I think, well, if I’m going to make samplers and I’m going to take this as my medium, and I’ve already defined myself as working in alternative materials, this is really what I want to do, I will trace, so that I will know, the history of women’s work. And of course, I know that it has a history to rival painting and sculpture and that it’s a historical medium. [Sarah laughs.] And so it’s not that I went back to the nineteenth century, it’s that in the same way that I traced other histories, I went back to trace the history in all kinds of written texts, because now I’m working with text and image – in the layer in between it. So I begin to do a devilish amount of reading. [Laughs.]

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.] You look so happy when you say that.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, right, yes. I get to stay home and read. And at this time, I'm in control of the medium. I've taught myself well enough, but still don't know enough. I mean, it's a huge alternative history, the history of embroidery and the history of samplers. It's huge; I still have not done samplers or embroidery around the world, which is an extremely interesting history in terms of ethnography and national identity. It's something I haven't gotten to. I don't know when I'm going to – or souvenirs and embroidery. It's funny, for *When This You See* – I didn't do Ariadne, I did other thread myths, but she was such a big, big one that – there was no sampler about Ariadne.

MS. SHARP: Oh, in the MoMA show.

MS. REICHEK: Arachne, Philomena, you know, all of these –

MS. SHARP: So you kind of peeked at the edge of Ariadne and realized it was this vast thing that you're saving for later?

MS. REICHEK: I felt that I could not say what I needed to say. There were many points I could go back to in that show. But this is the one that held on. Sometimes you just don't know what it is that's going to come out of these shows – like the MoMA show. People in the art world had used the medium of embroidery at this point. But they had never done what I felt needed to be done. And also, those who were proficient in embroidery didn't seem to concern themselves with the history. The fact that it was feminist interested some people, but the medium itself didn't interest them. Sometimes other people embroidered for them. I thought, well, you know, I'm somebody who now knows how to make, and has something to say. So this was my job, my enterprise.

MS. SHARP: So it became important at that time, for that work, for you to make it.

MS. REICHEK: Very important.

MS. SHARP: And you made it yourself.

MS. REICHEK: Oh, absolutely. I make all my work myself. I am a studio artist. I have very little entrepreneurial zeal. [Sarah laughs.] If I have assistants, I love them. You know, they're wonderful. But I make my things.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. You don't farm out your embroideries.

MS. REICHEK: No. No.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. So let's talk a little bit about *When This You See* –

MS. REICHEK: Yes. *When This You See* – is a sampler phrase: "When This You See, Remember Me."

MS. SHARP: So for the title, you left off the "Remember Me," and you left an ellipse, so that the phrase is hanging.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, exactly, to "When This You See..." What are you going to see?

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.] Yeah. Let me know.

MS. REICHEK: Yeah, let me know. [Laughs.]

MS. SHARP: So this was in the project room at MoMA?

MS. REICHEK: Yes. [*Projects 67: Elaine Reichek, 1999.*]

MS. SHARP: And then you also had a show at the same time at Nicole Klagsburn.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: And as we discussed, for several years you took some time off, you've been in production mode instead of showing mode.

MS. REICHEK: It took five years to make that body of work. It simply took that long. Between the reading and the sewing, I mean, it just took that long.

MS. SHARP: So, besides "art" as an overarching factor, and, as you discussed, the alternative history of the sampler, were there any other organizing factors or themes to the text and images that you appropriated for

that show?

MS. REICHEK: Well, each one stood for a certain kind of knowledge or a certain something I wanted to say. You have to make sure you don't repeat – it's not just expanding on one idea. Each one had a specific idea that I wished to express in the best way possible, the best text, the best image, the best scale, the best everything,

MS. SHARP: And then in the way you're using embroidery, your earlier interest in redoing modern and abstract paintings – as we touched on, the grid, the pixel and the stitch – shows up later.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: There's an institutional critique happening: here you are at MoMA and you're showing samplers.

MS. REICHEK: Yes. That critique specifically appears in the Chuck Close [*Sampler (Chuck Close)*, 1997]. There's also a Jackson Pollock appropriated by Warhol appropriated by me [*Sampler (Andy Warhol)*, 1997]. But I'm also talking about ethnography and religion and identity in some way that's a critique, too.

MS. SHARP: So in the piece titled *Sampler (Starting Over)* [1996], there is an Ad Reinhardt quote, "Made, unmade, remade." And then three of his paintings – and that's matched up with a quote from Penelope from *The Odyssey* about her nightly process of undoing the weaving she'd done during the day to hold off the suitors until Odysseus returns. And then there is an image of the Three Fates measuring, spinning, and cutting the cloth of life. So –

MS. REICHEK: What? No, no.

MS. SHARP: Isn't it? Clotho?

MS. REICHEK: No, it's three women. They're working on a warp-weighted loom, the kind of loom that Penelope would have woven her cloth on.

MS. SHARP: Okay. So, but actually –

MS. REICHEK: The reference is always there, but I haven't really done the whole Fates thing yet. This is a picture of a warp-weighted loom, the kind of loom that Penelope would have used. And it's not a personal loom. It's a loom that would have taken other people to use. And there is a lot of controversy or discussion about what it was, aside from a shroud for Laertes, her father-in-law that she was weaving. It may have been a story-cloth picturing the deeds of Odysseus – so what is she textually winding and unwinding? Is she unraveling the language? Is she the first process artist? [Sharp laughs.] So it was important to show this – you know, what it was she was doing.

MS. SHARP: Right. It was *this* physical.

MS. REICHEK: She's unraveling this *thing*.

MS. SHARP: Okay. Yeah. Well, there's that duality we talked about before, or the little bit of pun involved, where you're connecting Ad Reinhardt's statement with this sort of grand Western myth. But you're also saying he wasn't the first one to come out with it. [Laughs.] You're calling it universal, but you're also saying, you know –

MS. REICHEK: The idea – a process.

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: Okay. I mean, Ad talked a great deal about – you get up in the morning and you do it. And then you do it again the next day. And that doing, redoing – I mean, he's making a lot of black paintings at that point. And he's doing all the variations on this cross-like form. I mean, it's – how far can you go? [Robert] Ryman does this with white, takes that idea and makes a life's work out of it.

MS. SHARP: Was that an idea that he [Reinhardt] actually gave you personally? Did you absorb that from him from your personal interactions with him as well, in any way?

MS. REICHEK: I believe that what I absorbed from him is being accountable. That everything that you put out there has to be there for a reason.

MS. SHARP: Every choice is a conscious choice.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. Conscious, or if it's unconscious, does it further the meaning? Do you see that later?

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: But it's that idea.

MS. SHARP: Okay.

MS. REICHEK: You can work from the unconscious, but then it has to be vetted. [Laughs.]

MS. SHARP: Yes. [Laughs.] When you're sort of pairing these things together – you may have just answered this question, actually – but how much is a conscious choice? I've witnessed, in your process, that you do leave room for the unconscious or unchosen connection that can reveal itself a little bit later, but it seems to me that your process is very, you know, studied and astute and conscious. But there is a moment of play or intuition that allows these other connections to come.

MS. REICHEK: More than I'd like to admit. [Sharp laughs.] Stuff just, I mean, brings itself together.

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: How you lay out a body of work is, I've got *this* idea and I've got *this* idea. And what goes with this? And what goes with that? And then something else pops up. And then you go find *this*, and then you think, "Well, that's not right. That's not what goes with this. *This* goes with this. And *that's* probably the better way to do it." And, Jesus, I mean, if I knew everything I was going to make, I'd be bored to death.

MS. SHARP: It would be painful.

MS. REICHEK: I do like to keep myself amused. [Laughter.]

MS. SHARP: And that does sound a little bit like what Ad Reinhardt was doing with his black paintings. It is sort of like following something or searching down every alley until you find –

MS. REICHEK: And that's actually incredibly nourishing, that nothing is exhausted. Nothing is ever just done.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. There are always new combinations.

MS. REICHEK: There is always a new way to look at it. There's always somebody else's point of view. That is also one of the most gratifying things about installing a body of work you've already installed.

MS. SHARP: Yeah, to see it again.

MS. REICHEK: Because all of a sudden, what you thought was – oh, well, *that* wasn't such a good idea. Or this is obviously better with *that*.

MS. SHARP: So you must learn a lot about the pieces that you choose to appropriate. I mean, that's a great thing to hear coming from someone who really has recently used a lot of appropriation. You know, you're appropriating modern art and –

MS. REICHEK: Oh, I've almost never used an image that I haven't seen. I'm a real stickler for that. At least I know the work. Deliberate misreading is perfectly fine. The artist misreading something always leads to something else, creative misreading. I'm sure that's part of my work, too. But I don't think – I'm not afraid of information. I mean, really. It just wouldn't suit my nature to take something without knowing what it was.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. I mean, I think that's one of the great things about talking to you about some of your work – there are all these things evident in the work, and then there are these other back stories and connections that made them come together, that really illuminate the process.

MS. REICHEK: It can also be an emotional connection that might have a reality somewhere.

MS. SHARP: Well, the piece we were just talking about, with the Ad Reinhardt quote and Penelope weaving, called *Sampler (Starting Over)* – in your installation at MoMA it was hung above your reproduction of Andy Warhol's *Yarn* painting [1983].

MS. REICHEK: Yes. It was a print, okay? And it's multiple, and he does it a million different ways. Warhol is sending up Jackson Pollock.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: And – I think Hal Foster said this – "Oh, Kirk Varnadoe, he had more words for 'skein' than the Eskimos had for 'snow.'" [Sharp laughs.] So, I mean, by that time, it all looks like thread. Warhol is doing this,

and then I'm just making it into thread.

MS. SHARP: And then you actually sew it.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: And the thing about the Warhol print is that it's this really kind of funny joke about heroic Abstract Expressionism and popular culture.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: But then it also holds together as an abstract piece, even though it's using humor – and I think there's that quality in your work, too.

MS. REICHEK: Oh, Warhol – I love Warhol. I'm a huge Warhol fan. I mean, Warhol just takes everything he can and reprocesses it. I'm about to use him again in *Ariadne* [*Ariadne's Thread*, 2008-2012]. The thing he thinks is great about [Giorgio] de Chirico is that de Chirico keeps making his own work again and again and again. And although other people are chastising him [de Chirico] for it, Warhol thinks it's great. He sees it very differently.

MS. SHARP: Yeah, you can keep remaking. I read a review by Bill Arning ["Elaine Reichek's Rewoven Histories," *Art in America*, March 1999, 90-95] where he says that in this show you were making the case that the whole of Western culture is linked to the history of sewing. [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: And why not? [Laughs.]

MS. SHARP: He was convinced!

MS. REICHEK: He was convinced.

MS. SHARP: It's interesting, though, because this show is kind of this crux, and then you start to – I guess in the same way that you're linking sewing to Western culture – you start to look forward. And you start thinking about the pixel being connected to the –

MS. REICHEK: The computer comes into my life.

MS. SHARP: Yeah, the computer shows up. And you start thinking about the pixel and the stitch as the same unit. And early computer images are totally based on this grid, and there's this idea of pixilation and squares going together, which –

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. Remember, I'm grid-conscious. This is something I would see immediately. Because of the way in which I've been sewing, how stitches make a pattern, when I get my first computer, which is very slow, and the images start pixilating out, I think "Oh my goodness, what is this?" And that's what happens. It's from the direct experience of my first computer.

MS. SHARP: So you actually see this pixilated image, and you realize it looks like a cross-stitch image.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. That it forms itself in isolated units – the same way that a cross-stitch uses an isolated unit, the grid makes itself. And so that kind of fragmentation is something I've dealt with and recognize it and find it of interest. And then I'm working on the World Wide Web, and it's like, oh. Yes.

MS. SHARP: A web.

MS. REICHEK: A web.

MS. SHARP: One of your early pieces that were starting to deal with this was *Sampler (World Wide Web)* [1998]. And you used images from your Mac computer screen with phrases about sewing?

MS. REICHEK: Yes. I loved my first Apple, it had a beautiful plastic bubble. [Sharp laughs.] So nice. I loved that computer. And it lasted for a long time.

MS. SHARP: One of the early iMacs?

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: What color was it?

MS. REICHEK: It was blue.

MS. SHARP: The blueberry.

MS. REICHEK: It was the blueberry.

MS. SHARP: Wonderful.

MS. REICHEK: I regretted not buying the orange. I bought the blueberry – I think it was cheaper. But anyhow, that's what it came right out of. And so I just copied it. And as long as I was talking about language and image and the history, I got into the Web. I had gone to the Freud Museum [London], and I've never worked on this either – Anna Freud had a loom in her studio, and she knitted too. And she was chastised by her father because her thinking was nonlinear. It was web thinking, associative thinking. [Sharp laughs.] I really had this kind of odd reading about Anna Freud and the fact that she had this loom. And all the Freud women did handicrafts, and there was a Freud sampler in the MoMA show, but I could do more with this idea.

MS. SHARP: And then you're starting to get into using the Internet, and you're starting to think about associative thinking and how it's structured and how to navigate it.

MS. REICHEK: Yes. And of course, it's the same thing as the picture files. It's the same kind of associative thinking that goes between bonnet and building and whatever.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: And it's the same when you're going through index cards, which are no more – you have the same thing, flipping and associating. One of the great things about the stacks is you kind of get ideas looking at these titles cheek by jowl.

MS. SHARP: You go to look something up and you find things near it that are close.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly, exactly.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. That is totally Google.

[END MD 02 TR 03.]

MS. SHARP: We were talking about the connection between the pixel and the stitch, and we talked a little bit about the screensaver pieces that you made. At the show you had at Nicole Klagsbrun during this time, you also had some video. Was this the first time you were using video? You were showing videos where you appropriated and edited images of women in Hollywood movies.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, *When This You See* – [1998] went with the MoMA show. There were clips from movies with women knitting, sewing, or weaving. I showed the video at Nicole Klagsbrun and I made a long photo piece of men knitting and sewing and weaving taken from film clips, to hang outside the video space, and titled it *Men at Work* [1999].

MS. SHARP: There was Arnold Schwarzenegger. The video with women sewing had text. The images were intercut with words like "obsession."

MS. REICHEK: Yes, right.

MS. SHARP: Were you drawing a connection between the process of sewing, and film and video editing?

MS. REICHEK: Yes, I've often referred to film, and film suture, and film theory, and sewing – that does interest me. The movie camera, the sewing machine and the repeating rifle are all based on the same technology. And if you're interested in sewing at all, if you're interested in history stuff, you're interested in the history of technology.

MS. SHARP: And so then, we are getting more into technology and translation; you did a residency at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston.

MS. REICHEK: That was the second video that I worked on. It was the first interactive piece. The video that went with the MoMA exhibition was edited on an Avid with the help of a technician. This is the first time that I took advantage of digital technology. In order to shoot at the Gardner, you had to use a digital camera because of lighting prohibitions. There was no way that I could do something like a virtual exhibition and have a record of it before the digital camera.

MS. SHARP: So for this show, you made samplers.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, I actually made them for Shoshana Wayne [Gallery, Santa Monica, CA]. They were shown first at Shoshana's. [*MADAMI/MADAM*, 2002.] The timing worked out that way. I was working on both – I knew I was going to have both shows and part of the plan was to have East and West. The work began with an Adam and Eve sampler – the kind of sampler motif that was most favored by the first New England settlers. They were shown at Shoshana's and then came back east and were installed at the Gardner in a sort of reverse migration.

MS. SHARP: You were thinking about the Gardner show –

MS. REICHEK: Yes, I had already been to the Gardner. I already knew it was perfect material for both.

MS. SHARP: So you did your residency at the Gardner, where you did research – you were in the museum.

MS. REICHEK: On and off for three years.

MS. SHARP: Spread out. Oh, okay.

MS. REICHEK: It was the longest – it was the thing that went on forever. [Sharp laughs.] I thought "Is this thing ever going to get done?" Shooting the work just took forever. The first part was for me to situate the work on Mondays when the museum was closed, and have photographs taken.

MS. SHARP: So you would go into the Gardner Museum and put up your own work, your own samplers?

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: Integrate them or hide them within the displays that were already there?

MS. REICHEK: Yes, they offered me the art gallery – it's not very nice and I wanted to be in the big museum. So I circumvented Mrs. Gardner by having a virtual exhibition, because the Gardner prohibition is that nothing be moved, nothing be sold, but remain just as she left it. But given the stealth nature of the video camera and the fact that the museum was closed, I developed this plan with the curator for a virtual exhibition that would be conducted in the Gardner Museum, and I got the chance to have my work integrated into the collection. One of the things that was very nice was, since I had been there so much, I actually had an installer that was cooperative, and people in other departments were cooperative.

MS. SHARP: Oh, that's great.

MS. REICHEK: Contemporary art is not something, how shall I say, that was privileged at the Gardner.

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: These intervention things are often very vexed situations because you parachute in and you leave. This was not what happened. By the time I installed, I knew the collection. I knew it well because I'd spent so much time there and so much time thinking about this. It was an appropriate body of work to do because Mrs. Gardner was interested in all kinds of things. She was interested in textiles. She was interested in painting and sculpture. She was interested in artifacts. She was interested in religions. She had lots of interests that were in keeping with my own interests.

MS. SHARP: What were some of the choices that you made, and how did you go about planning where your work was going to go? Did it have to do with the objects that were there and the content of the text in the samplers, or was it visual?

MS. REICHEK: Everything. It's, you know – what does it speak to? Where is it appropriate? What is the room to put this in?

MS. SHARP: So, as you said, you took these digital images and then you created a virtual exhibit. You ended up with an interactive CD-ROM, and I think the Gardner Museum has it as part of their website, also.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: Did it show in the gallery, too, at all, or did it –

MS. REICHEK: Yes, at one point, they did have it in a gallery. They had a little station for it.

MS. SHARP: Oh, okay.

MS. REICHEK: Which is very nice and some people saw it there and some people saw it online, and then some people saw it later when I showed it in New York.

MS. SHARP: Where did you show it in New York?

MS. REICHEK: At Nicole's.

MS. SHARP: At Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery?

MS. REICHEK: Yeah. I projected it, which was really fun.

MS. SHARP: That's great. So you developed a project with a curator there that –

MS. REICHEK: Yes, Pieranna Cavalchini, who is a great curator. I knew her because I had already worked with her on Spoleto [Spoleto Festival of the Two Worlds, Italy, 1993]. I'd done an installation in a 9th-century hospital in Spoleto, which I dug out and filled with gravel.

MS. SHARP: Oh, wow!

MS. REICHEK: Because I didn't like the places that were assigned to me. So I just dug out this room and I did a show about tourism called *Camera Con Vista* – "Room with a View" – a play on many things.

MS. SHARP: You haven't really talked about that, actually. You did a couple of installations, I think closer to the time of like the *Native Intelligence* show, that were about tourism.

MS. REICHEK: Oh, yes. I did one at Bill Stelling's [56 Bleecker Street Gallery], and then across the street at Barbara Braathen's [Barbara Braathen Gallery], that had to do with tourism. The one at 56 Bleecker was called *Revenge of the Coconuts: A Curiosity Room*, [1988].

MS. SHARP: And there's a funny story about how you used those green coconuts. They wiggled?

MS. REICHEK: They were water coconuts that were unpeeled. And so they rattled in their shell as they were kind of dropping and drying. So the floor was littered with coconuts. There was a big palm tree.

MS. SHARP: A big palm tree in the middle –

MS. REICHEK: It was very early, these installations came before the word for it – they may have been called environments. Is that what they were called then?

MS. SHARP: Yes. And the walls were painted really dark...

MS. REICHEK: It was actually tin on the walls. Rotted tin.

MS. SHARP: Wow!

MS. REICHEK: It was fabulous. There was a skylight. I made paddle shields from Cook's exploration drawings and I hung photo collages on the rotted tin walls.

MS. SHARP: And then in *Revenge of the Coconuts*, you also had like a bunch of old cameras piled –

MS. REICHEK: No, that's across the street. In *Desert Song* [Barbara Braathen Gallery, 1988], I did the wet, and I did the dry.

MS. SHARP: And you used all these images of Islamic architecture –

MS. REICHEK: Clichés about the Middle East.

MS. SHARP: I remember looking at that, I guess, several months ago in your archives, and thinking about the idea of the desert cliché. Did you have images from movies?

MS. REICHEK: Lots of movie stills. The floor was covered with a foot of black sand and I painted the walls black. And I painted a kind of Islamic column – they actually had a column in the room – and they had a round arch to enter. So you came into this really pitch-black room with a floor-to-ceiling backlit photograph of a desert storm and camels and things like that, and then there were these photo collages. The photographic pieces were all in arched black mats and you read them like text along the walls, and then in the corners there were all these old cameras piled up.

MS. SHARP: Yeah, I thought when I was looking at your documentation of *Desert Song*, and *The War Room*

show, how much those images resonate now and what a strange sort of cultural repetition we're going through. I mean, obviously they resonate in various ways for long periods of time. And I'm thinking about our discussion of the Gardner Museum – the project titled, by the way, *MADAM I'M ADAM* – forward and backwards –

MS. REICHEK: A palindrome.

MS. SHARP: A palindrome. Why was it important to make a CD-ROM, which mimics associative ways to move forward backwards and all around, versus a series of photos of your interventions or a single video or –

MS. REICHEK: It just seemed –

MS. SHARP: – right.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. And the whole virtual idea seemed appropriate for making the CD-ROM.

MS. SHARP: And because, like you said, you had to use the digital camera, you couldn't have used analog – it would have been a really long exposure.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. And that the way in which my work interacted with the work already in the Gardner Museum, you know, made its presence felt and then disappeared, was very like an experience on the Internet.

MS. SHARP: And then, if you're a person looking at this, you can't see the work all at once.

MS. REICHEK: That's right.

MS. SHARP: You go into these virtual rooms.

MS. REICHEK: It's time-affective, the way you would actually look at art. So it mimics that experience of actually seeing it while fleeting by. So it was in some ways trying to make the appropriate vehicle for the content.

MS. SHARP: And I guess a little bit after that CD-ROM was finished is when you projected it at *After Babel Alpha Beta* [Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery]. And this is 2004, and you're really digging into language and translation in this show. The samplers appear, of course, but this show really has to do with translating back and forth.

MS. REICHEK: It's also about scale and appropriation. The language thing has always been important to me, and I really wanted to talk about that. I'd read so much Bible stuff for the Adam and Eve work from *MADAM I'M ADAM*. I was up to my ears in that stuff, and the universal library, which is a perfect subject for me. All of these things seemed to reach back to the early translation pieces. These are the kind of things I had explored at the very beginning, and now I just do it in a different way.

MS. SHARP: One of the pieces in that show was *SETI* [2004], which is such a great piece. It's pretty large, actually.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, the scale is big for me. And I had just finished the samplers. Do you know what I mean by that? That was it, finished, done.

MS. SHARP: Put down the samplers.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly.

MS. SHARP: And so for *SETI*, you embroidered these pictographs that represented universal representations of certain ideas, which were sent into space. [Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence.] Were they were on the Golden Record that Carl Sagan created?

MS. REICHEK: This is after. That's the first one.

MS. SHARP: So what was the *SETI* piece?

MS. REICHEK: It's the same thing, but it's a later computer code. They were radio waves blasted into space [in 1999, from the Yevpatoria RT-70 radio telescope in Ukraine].

MS. SHARP: OK. And what were the pictographs?

MS. REICHEK: When the radio waves got stuck, they formed pictographs with signs.

MS. SHARP: So something caught the wave, it would form these drawing-like shapes.

MS. REICHEK: Yes. When they wanted to describe the body, they had an Adam and Eve with, you know, the most clichéd poses, she's posed like a babe and he's saying "hi." [Laughter.] They just resorted to I don't know *what* kind of figuration.

MS. SHARP: It's funny that these would be their idea of what might be the universal symbol for different genders. [Laughter.]

[END MD 03 TR 01.]

MS. SHARP: And what were some of the other pictographs?

MS. REICHEK: They looked like computer code. Or they looked like hieroglyphs, but they were *lingua cosmica*, a code they developed. It's a simple number system, but untranslatable without a computer with that information programmed in it. I certainly don't have it.

MS. SHARP: Right. But the point of the whole project was to create this universal language that an alien might find and learn the history of human knowledge.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, it was an encyclopedia. It was a library of basic information about the Earth.

MS. SHARP: And, of course, it was actually totally subjective.

MS. REICHEK: Not only that, it asked for a reply. [Laughter.] They were fully conscious that nothing might be understood, but they wanted to hear back.

MS. SHARP: Just in case.

MS. REICHEK: Just in case. I mean, and this is funded by the government.

MS. SHARP: Wonderful.

MS. REICHEK: And you could download it from the Internet.

MS. SHARP: And then, in the same show you have these curtains with Morse code on them.

MS. REICHEK: What I'm talking about is pictographs, the representation of language in code and the translation from the verbal to the visual. That's why there's sign language piece in the show. Morse code, which is obsolete now, versus a kind of a new computer code, a sophisticated way of encoding information, using technology, sending it to outer space.

MS. SHARP: But all sort of composed of similar units, like –

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. Small units.

MS. SHARP: – ones and zeroes, dots, dashes.

MS. REICHEK: That's right.

MS. SHARP: Can you discuss the Morse code piece? You have these sheer purple curtains –

MS. REICHEK: They weren't purple.

MS. SHARP: Oh, was that a different one?

MS. REICHEK: No, no – no purple.

MS. SHARP: Purple's the wrong word.

MS. REICHEK: When I showed them at Nicole's, they were the sheerest hint, hint of blue.

MS. SHARP: Oh, okay. So the first ones were blue.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, the palest blue-grey. Morse's code and the translation were embroidered on the curtain. I brought the curtain to a place in Long Island City because they had an early sewing machine, one that would have been close, within 20 years, of Morse's invention of Morse code. When the Singer sewing machine became available the first kinds of stitches that could be sewn were loop stitches. My sewing machine won't make those.

This wonderful person at Penn & Fletcher in Long Island City had a real interest in early sewing machines. He had rebuilt this early machine out of sheer love, and they embroidered the text using the loop stitch.

MS. SHARP: Wow.

MS. REICHEK: I got the original transcription of Morse's first Morse code message from the Library of Congress – the original Morse code had only dashes. You can get this document online.

MS. SHARP: So this is the first message that was ever sent?

MS. REICHEK: The message is in Morse's handwriting, plus the Morse code underneath, plus a translation of what the Morse code meant. The first message sent was "What Hath God Wrought?" The curtain was sixty feet long, a scrim-like curtain from floor to ceiling. The message expresses a real anxiety about technology. It seemed really nice in a show in which I was talking about translation and information and the dream of the universal library, and whether the computer would make that possible or not. I love the fact that Morse was a painter and made the first telegraph on his stretcher bars in his studio – all of this seemed like a nice marriage of the verbal and the visual of the pictograph and the sign.

MS. SHARP: And the sewing machine that you were talking about was the contemporary of the telegraph?

MS. REICHEK: It's about 20 years after. The technology that interests me includes the Jacquard loom and the Analytic Engine, a prototype for the computer, and Morse code, the Singer sewing machine, Chevreul's color experiments and Perkin's commercial dye. That's the parallel history in the nineteenth century – very much like the period we're in now, with the same kind of anxiety about machines.

MS. SHARP: Why did you choose curtains?

MS. REICHEK: The whole show was about the way in which information flew.

MS. SHARP: Okay. And did they actually cover the windows in the gallery?

MS. REICHEK: Completely. That's what they were made for. It was before they built this wall in the gallery. Before that, you walked in and almost fell out the windows. So I wanted to contain my space. It was just about creating an installation in which everything was contained in my space.

MS. SHARP: I like the image of the air moving them, and the ephemeral quality –

MS. REICHEK: The whole tone of this show was very different from the dense tone that I'd used in the MoMA exhibition, or the ones I'd done before with coconuts on the floor, dark rooms and painted walls. I just wanted a straight show with white walls and a lot of space between the embroideries.

MS. SHARP: Then I'm thinking of the *SETI* piece where all of the images kind of sit on one plane and there is a sort of air in between each little pictogram.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: And it definitely refers to – because of its flatness – modern painting and the grid and all the things that embroidery can refer back to. So in 2006, you had a show at Shoshana Wayne Gallery called *Glossed in Translation* and then just this fall [2007], working from similar bodies of work, *Pattern Recognition* at Nicole Klagsbrun.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: And the centerpiece of this show was a series of small, embroidered versions of famous art icons, famous modern paintings for the most part, and some contemporary work. They were all really small, almost like a patch or something you could sew on your shoulder.

MS. REICHEK: I would like to go back to Shoshana's show.

MS. SHARP: Okay.

MS. REICHEK: Which was really a continuation in many ways of Nicole's show [*After Babel Alpha Beta*]. *Glossed in Translation* furthered this discussion of translation, and then somewhere in there for the Shoshana show, I began working with my own digital machinery. And that learning curve was interesting. So the piece *And Sew Well Written* [2006], which was made on a digital machine, and the Lawrence Weiner piece [*Translation*, 2006] – those are digitized pieces in a hand-sewn show. That was the first time I used digital embroidery – in Shoshana's show.

MS. SHARP: You have a mechanized sewing machine. You can make a digital file on a computer. You can scan things or create it yourself, and it has some software that translates it into a set of instructions for the sewing machine. It has a little card that then goes into a reader on the sewing machine. The sewing machine will then automatically sew based on the pattern that you've designed, right?

MS. REICHEK: Yes. Now, I've used the computer of course before, for the handmade pieces. I have a program that will print out instructions for the hand-sewn embroideries.

MS. SHARP: You lay out and print your patterns –

MS. REICHEK: Print the instructions that I sew by hand. So it's digital to hand, and I like that. The digitally machine-made embroideries are nice to combine with the handmade stuff. They have a different surface. It's as smooth as a painting surface and it doesn't refer to the fact that it is completely computerized.

MS. SHARP: Right. There's no sort of pixel revealed in it.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly. So there's something very nice about the two together. I first began doing that at Shoshana's, showing both handmade work and digital work together. At Nicole's, in *Pattern Recognition*, I had a room that was the "handmade room," and I did a reversal of scale. In the "handmade room" – the homage to Matisse and textiles room – I hung the largest embroidery in the show. The patches – your term, I call them *Swatches* – were hung in the larger room. I got into textiles and swatches because embroidery has sample thread cards, and fabric has sample swatch cards. And I had always known that Matisse had a textile collection, and of the importance of textiles for Matisse. And when Matisse's textiles were shown at the Met, I was so delighted. So I thought, okay, I will talk about the relationship of flat painting to textiles. That would be something to talk about, and pattern, and also at this point I'm picking up images from the Web. I'm scanning books, downloading images, jpegs, jpegs, jpegs, and I thought I would talk a little bit about harvesting images – the way in which I had been doing this.

MS. SHARP: So these little pieces that were made with the computerized sewing machine, you were harvesting images, as you said, you would grab things from the Internet, and from books and scan them. And you had a lot of them, and so you remade work by artists like Elizabeth Murray, Kara Walker, Chris Ofili, modernist masters like Matisse and Ellsworth Kelly, a bunch of others. And you made multiples of these images. You would redo their paintings and you would choose a new thread color. When I walked into the gallery, I think the first thing I was overwhelmed by was how all of these works that I was familiar with in some way had been reduced to the same small scale and made into these little icons, you know.

MS. REICHEK: Well, in the Matisse room, there was a handmade embroidery of Matisse with a paintbrush in his hand his color swatches pinned to the wall behind him.

MS. SHARP: Ah.

MS. REICHEK: When I began my art history classes I was looking basically at black-and-white pictures in a cardboard box, and then there were slides, and I've still got slides, but it was a different way of looking at images. When you look at images on the Web, they're all homogenized – scale, texture, everything – more so than in photographs. When they're reduced in digital photographs, the scale, by virtue of your screen, is never very big. So everybody, the famous and the not-so-famous, floats around on the Internet. You know, you want to see [Gerhard] Richter's clouds, you type in "clouds Richter." They all pop up for consumption. And in New York, fashion and design move so quickly in and out of high/low. No sooner does it get shown on the runway than it gets into the galleries – or in the galleries and then it is shown on the runway – and the line between décor and what is shown in art galleries is now completely obliterated. I mean, Gagolian is showing furniture and there's no line. Please know that it's all fine with me, it's not that I'm objecting to it. I'm simply talking about it. How quickly we consume, and digest and reconfigure, and that's a universal practice now.

MS. SHARP: One of the pieces in that show was a table with a sample book on it, where you did a series in blocks of color, so you had several in blue and then you could see how they might look in pink.

MS. REICHEK: It was magenta, cyan and yellow. Because the machine that I use, or the two machines that I use now, are capable of production and re-production. They're programmed. So they are essentially a kind of printmaking tool. They're all supposed to be the same. Of course, they're not, but – you know, glitches and everything like that. They're a means of production. It's not handmade. You slot a card in it and it sews.

MS. SHARP: The interesting thing about that – because I worked with you on those – is that, like you said, they were each a little bit different.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: Sometimes there'd be tighter thread in one part and looser in the other, depending on how the machine was feeling.

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: And that each one, though it was machine-made and definitely had that appearance at the show, required a lot of personal interaction. [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: It did, indeed. It did.

MS. SHARP: Each one had a lot of special attention.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, and each one was very different. I always said my idea of making multiples was to make five of the same thing by hand.

MS. SHARP: Right. [Laughter.]

MS. REICHEK: But you see, it's the first time that a machine this sophisticated has come on the market.

MS. SHARP: DIY.

MS. REICHEK: DIY has made everybody an artist. I mean, everybody edits their photographs and makes videos. Everybody is encouraged to make his craft. The way the do-it-yourself ethos has produced this whole generation of people making stuff at home is extraordinary. I mean, it's a whole world. Did we ever go to parties and sew together? Hello? It's amazing.

MS. SHARP: The sewing machine that you use is marketed towards consumers –

MS. REICHEK: Yes. The reason the technology is difficult to use for someone like me is the technology is not meant for me, and it has to be gotten around. It has to be overridden, used to plot, you know, the big embroideries. And I can always tell if somebody's used the program and not done an enormous amount of correcting.

MS. SHARP: Well, there is something about consumer tools – and this is the same for something like iMovie or other editing tools – there's so much you aren't able to customize. There's an assumption about who you want to be, or what you want to make, when you get these machines.

MS. REICHEK: Yep.

MS. SHARP: So I think that makes that work even more interesting, because you had to kind of work around what the company assumed you wanted to make.

MS. REICHEK: I mean, if the company had any idea – and in fact, I actually tried to get a free machine and had a great proposal for a curator – where was she? Kentucky or someplace like that. I had a whole show plan and everything, and got up to the top Husqvarna executive and they turned me down – not commercial enough.

MS. SHARP: They don't care about artists. [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: They don't care. So we never got our freebie machine. So I didn't do the show. We had to buy one. Honestly, I did try. The machine is programmed for home sewers.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: It's a machine for a sewer who wants to make monogrammed towels and also might want to embroider on a quilt, or the ambitious might want to make a vest.

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.] They had some nice vests. Well, it's interesting because you took even the technology of embroidery, or cross-stitching a sampler, or another piece of home décor, and you make your own, like in the *Native Intelligence* show.

MS. REICHEK: Frankly, it's all easier to do it by hand. It's only because I want to talk about reproduction and the digital machine that I use the machine. For me, to sit down and copy something – I mean, I just made two line drawings in a snap. It was just copying. I can do that. Everybody who's taken drawing can do that. It's the map of it.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: So, I mean, that's easy work. Everything I got to sew for *MADAMI/MADAM* or – I mean, the MoMA show was all by hand – no computer or anything like that. I don't think I used any software program until the larger-scale embroideries. The program allowed me to work on a larger scale by following the printed instructions.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: Embroidery is my medium, but I use it to talk about other things – it's a cue for the viewer. It's not a privileged medium. It comes with an alternative history and that opens a space for me to talk about things that are not in the canon. I'm not only talking about embroidery, but what I'm saying is informed by my medium.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. Well, and the sort of contemporary angle of using the computer and the digital sewing machine –

MS. REICHEK: The oldest technology and the newest technology – the thread of connection. The Internet throws up history in a non-linear way. It throws up things you would never think of. Type in a word and an amazing amount of stuff you're not looking for pops up.

MS. SHARP: Right – and who's choosing that? Well. I was going to try and finish up by talking about what you're doing next. Originally I thought you were going to take some time off. You've had two big shows recently and –

MS. REICHEK: People who know me laughed. They laughed.

MS. SHARP: You said, "I'm going to take some time and do some research," but it turns out –

MS. REICHEK: I did take, for me, some time. I mean, what's "some time"?

MS. SHARP: It was like a month.

MS. REICHEK: I think the time I needed was to come to the decision that I had finished with the swatch work. The only thing I would be interested in terms of swatches now – and I would have to be given the space or be given a museum – I could go around to the museums and look at the patterns and maybe do a swatch work out of the museum collection, and that would parallel a kind of Gardner intervention. That would probably be the only way in which – I mean, you can go on making them forever. But I've kind of exhausted my interest in them and there was something else I was interested in that I hadn't done, and that might be Ariadne.

MS. SHARP: Things that you really wanted to work out, but the sampler format just totally wasn't right.

MS. REICHEK: No, I couldn't do it in a sampler format – there's too much. It's too big a topic. You can kind of play with Arachne and Philomena – the poor, singing, sad nightingale – she could certainly fly around a little bit more, but the one that interested me was Ariadne, because that is a very complicated myth and everybody's weighed in on it, everybody's had something to say. Deleuze, Nietzsche, Heidegger, de Chirico, Apollinaire – you know, it's wonderful – Picasso. It's rich and interesting – it could also be an occasion of tracing back –

MS. SHARP: But you've been holding off –

MS. REICHEK: Yeah.

MS. SHARP: You said, "I didn't know what to do with her because it's where to stop. I still don't know."

MS. REICHEK: Myths taken out of context are always strange anyhow, because they all depend on what came before and what comes after. It's all connected and who did what to whom, you know. So do you begin in Ariadne with Daedalus? There's good material there – architect, artist, Daedalus, James Joyce – good, good, good. Or do you begin with Ariadne? So I just decided, okay, I'll begin with Ariadne and her thread, which is my basic material. I thought, let me go back to the thread thing, to my first show, which had to do with thread and line. And I suspect that the process of moving after thirty years in one place may also have affected my decision to choose a myth about thread. It's not moving yourself and clothes and furniture, it's moving the studio and the archives.

MS. SHARP: The stuff, yeah.

MS. REICHEK: It's the studio.

MS. SHARP: And the archives. That wasn't easy for you to really complete your archives.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly, and they're not finished yet. We're still in the middle of it. The dissertation thing and the interviews for that, meant that somebody's in your file drawers, and then you move your studio and you have to put everything in storage – everything's out of the house now. So you have to wrap it and pack it, get storage space and –

MS. SHARP: You're being – you're forced to look back –

MS. REICHEK: You've got a lot of sorting to do, and you know what a nut I am – it's absurd, tagging – I mean, children in Bushwick get the colored pencils. I just gave away bunches of stuff.

MS. SHARP: In an incredibly thoughtful manner you purposefully gave away.

MS. REICHEK: I mean, it's just nuts, but I do this my way and so when I moved, we had lunch at noon after we finished and I got to feed the movers. They thought they had gotten the day off, which they did because I was so incredibly organized, having done everything before. So, the move – it was nothing. I prepared, and when I got up here [Harlem], it was like, "Oh, call a locksmith, I'm in here. Don't look back." But it was the process that probably made me recall how I got started, and usually I just, like, go from one body of work to the next, what interests me next, but this time, I needed to take off. It was really about realizing I was finished with that body of work and that was this really a one-shot deal. I steered clear of Ariadne in the MoMA show, because I knew I was going to pick up the thread when the time was right.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: When you read a myth, you have to isolate the myth, you have to find the translation you like and what feels right to you. I'm somebody who loves Ovid. I like the early [A. D.] Melville translation, there are many more. I mean, that was mine, the one I grew up on.

MS. SHARP: So in this process, are you reading multiple translations to try and stitch together –

MS. REICHEK: Of course, but I'll end up with Ovid's version, because Ovid is a poet, and it's so beautiful – I mean the myths are told by different people, and then they're translated by different people.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: There are versions of the myth – and many translations of the different versions – and there are many good tellers and translators – [Allen] Mandelbaum, [A.S.] Kline. You just use the one you like, but for this show, I seem to be headed towards the Melville, the old one. I've used a Mandelbaum translation for a MoMA sampler. He was the best for that.

MS. SHARP: And so, what about technology in the work, besides plotting some of your embroidery patterns on the computer and stuff? Do you have plans for that in this series?

MS. REICHEK: Yes. The Ariadne myth includes the labyrinth. It's basically the labyrinth as puzzle-solving. Sudoku is based on the Ariadne algorithm.

MS. SHARP: Oh.

MS. REICHEK: It's not trial and error. It's more like the possibilities, you choose by process of elimination.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. That's really fun.

MS. REICHEK: There are actually two programs named after Ariadne. One is for robots, finding the shortest distance between two points in the least amount of time. The other one helps you lay out plots of writing in different ways and organize the material.

MS. SHARP: Wow!

MS. REICHEK: And that, too, is an Ariadne kind of algorithm.

MS. SHARP: Interesting. You might use that for text.

MS. REICHEK: Exactly, exactly. I remember seeing an example, which is plotting *Casablanca* with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergmann. Doing that very well-known plot and doing it in different ways and different organizing principles. So that's like a screenwriter's and a plot-making writer's tool. So that will be interesting, and I have to research that further.

MS. SHARP: That's great. And that they are called "Ariadne."

MS. REICHEK: Yes.

MS. SHARP: Elaine, as we're talking, I feel like I have a good handle on, historically, what artists you like and what excites you and what's interesting. I'm curious, who are some of your contemporaries that you feel aligned with, you know, conceptually or –

MS. REICHEK: It's hard to say who you feel aligned with. Actually, that's not how I choose who I admire.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: Who I love – whose work I love?

MS. SHARP: Yes.

MS. REICHEK: I think that's what you're asking me –

MS. SHARP: Yeah. Who do you love, Elaine? Tell me. [Laughter.]

MS. REICHEK: Well, I love Isaac Julien's work. I love Jimmie Durham's work. I love – only mention this because they're extremely well known, okay? They happen to be boys. I'll get to the girls, okay? And I love James Coleman's work. I love Jeanne Silverthorne's work. I am a deep admirer of Kara Walker. There are many women whose work I admire. I'm tongue-tied now.

MS. SHARP: I put you on the spot. I'm sorry.

MS. REICHEK: I think it's cold medicine actually, because there are so many. Louise Bourgeois. These people's sensibilities are completely different from mine. Agnes Martin.

MS. SHARP: I'm sure –

MS. REICHEK: Jenny Holzer. Barbara Kruger. I have young artist friends whose work I love.

MS. SHARP: You called yourself, as an artist – I think in two different interviews – a librarian with a needle and thread. And, I mean, I think that could account for your ability to appreciate a really broad range of whatever things, you know, work, literature, music, whatever it is.

MS. REICHEK: Well, it's work that seems authentic to me. Work that I know when I see it, I know it comes from some place which is, you know, deeply moving to me because it represents a real belief system, represents someone who is deeply engaged in their work, and no one else could make that work. My friend Jeff Perrone, who hasn't shown much, his incredible talent lies both in the verbal and the visual – he is a brilliant, mature artist. Not everyone gets what they deserve, or what I think they deserve.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: And young artists coming up, I'm trying to think – certainly interested in Paul Kennedy's work and Lisa Tan's work. I'm certainly interested in your work, and Kristin Galvin's work, and I'm certainly engaged with your generation.

MS. SHARP: And you kind of use an internal compass –

MS. REICHEK: It just feels –

MS. SHARP: Yeah. Honest.

MS. REICHEK: I mean, the three famous boys I mentioned in the beginning – because, in fact, in private you asked me about that –

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: I knew them when they weren't famous. I mean Jimmie didn't have a commercial gallery. Isaac did. I met James Coleman in Italy first and then a little bit in Ireland – I was introduced to his work in Ireland and it's really interesting. I've always liked Rebecca Horn's work.

MS. SHARP: Yeah, yeah.

MS. REICHEK: She put on a perfect show at the Guggenheim. Oh, and Yvonne Rainer.

MS. SHARP: Yeah.

MS. REICHEK: So I think I was thinking of the boys because –

MS. SHARP: We were talking about them first. Of course. I kind of put you on the spot. I was thinking about, you know, there are the things you look at that are for your work and that feed your work, and then there are the things that you just look at, and love to look at, and might not come in directly.

MS. REICHEK: It's stuff that just – you get a feeling that – even if I'm not even that interested in the project, I'm interested – I like Raymond Pettibon also.

MS. SHARP: Oh, yeah.

MS. REICHEK: I like Pettibon a lot. And that's true for Bourgeois. I remember some of that early work. You know, you just go into a show and think, "Oh, this is – this is good." It's quite subjective.

MS. SHARP: Well, is there anything else that you wanted to talk about or – no?

MS. REICHEK: No.

MS. SHARP: I think we've covered it from birth to today.

MS. REICHEK: Yes, exactly. I think we've been at it. If there's something else, we did skip over a lot of the ethnographic period probably –

MS. SHARP: OK. And did your ideas relate at all to the Pictures Generation, people like Sherry Levine or –

MS. REICHEK: My use of appropriation predates that.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: And so it wasn't so much about market ideas and a name on it. It – the use of appropriation has to do with a lot of ideas floating around at that particular point, about the commodification of art. Mine comes much earlier – it doesn't become so much about appropriation because it didn't have a name then.

MS. SHARP: Right. So you're saying that your reusing of images is really about authorship and the authorial voice, and shifting that.

MS. REICHEK: Yeah. And in a lot of ways, that's certainly informed my early use, the anxiety of influence, stuff like that. Before Sherrie became involved in appropriation and made that her subject. That is not my subject. It is her subject.

MS. SHARP: Right. Maybe the Pictures Generation people were dealing with authorship a bit. But it's very different.

MS. REICHEK: Yes. It comes from a different place.

MS. SHARP: Yeah. Were you engaged with them at all when that was happening?

MS. REICHEK: I know Barbara. And I've met Sherrie.

MS. SHARP: Right.

MS. REICHEK: Oh this is hysterical: did you know I've been called the "doyenne of embroidery"?

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.]

MS. REICHEK: Just because I used it as a medium. But shows about medium – they serve, I guess, a purpose, but they are not about what your work is about. I don't think anybody just has a painting show or a sculpture show, but then again, those are dominant art historical mediums. Although now, there are these very specific painting shows. There have been white shows and black shows and red shows. Maybe they're necessary. I mean, I always think "Who cares what we use?" I was actually shocked – I mean, I have to tell you, I was *shocked* – I think they were, too – by the Museum of Arts and Design show [*Pricked: Extreme Embroidery*, 2007]. [Sarah laughs.] I mean, the degree of attention – it's just amazing. In the art world, it's like a crafts fair these days. [Sarah laughs.] Barbara Gladstone has got pots, you know. [*Makers and Modelers: Works in Ceramic*, 2007]. Jorge Pardo, redoing Dia. Maybe, you know, we're all such ostriches, all we know about is our own work [Sarah laughs.] Nothing is more boring than a group of artists. It's like dentists talking about amalgams or something. It gets to the point where you can't hang out with civilians. It's impossible. I can't

believe how dull we all are, myself included.

MS. SHARP: [Laughs.] Well, it all depends on who you're asking, I guess.

MS. REICHEK: Well, I hope I haven't bored the bejesus out of my listeners.

MS. SHARP: No. This has been great.

MS. REICHEK: Thank you, Sarah.

MS. SHARP: Thank you!

MS. REICHEK: Thank you for asking me thoughtful questions.

MS. SHARP: Well, I tried. And thank you for answering them there so thoroughly.

MS. REICHEK: And doing research and putting your time and energy into talking to me.

MS. SHARP: Of course. It's well worth it. It was a great experience.

MS. REICHEK: I'm certainly appreciative of it.

MS. SHARP: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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