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Oral history interview with Emma Amos,
2011 November 19-26

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Emma Amos on 2011 November 19-26. The interview took place in New York, NY at Amos' studio, and was conducted by Patricia Spears Jones for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Oral History Interviews of American Photographers Project.

At the time of this interview, Emma Amos was beginning to exhibit signs of age-related memory loss. This interview was reviewed by Natalia de Campos, Amos's Studio Manager. Her corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. Some facts were corrected while others may need to be fact-checked, and we recommend that names be confirmed. Notes marked with an asterisk (*) indicate passages wherein Ms. Amos may have experienced a memory lapse, thus fact checking is recommended. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay. Today is November 19th, and I am Patricia Spears Jones. And I am meeting with the painter and artist Emma Amos in her home at 21 Bond Street in New York City. Good afternoon.

EMMA AMOS: Good afternoon. [Laughs.] Patricia.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Let me just check to make sure the levels are okay. I think they are. Oh yes, I can hear quite well. The last time you were interviewed, the interview ended in October of 1968, and so many things have happened since then.

So I would love to know what happened in your life. At that point, you were already married. You had two small children, and you were getting more and more—you were part of the Spiral group. And then what happened from, say, 1969 to 1970 or so, or '71, if you can remember?

EMMA AMOS: I don't think I can do it that way because I don't have a cheat sheet in front of me that tells me what I was doing in '71. I think that my biggest charge was to take care of the children and try to continue to be an artist. And shortly after, I think, this—the original dialogue that I had with the Smithsonian—for the Smithsonian—I think that the thing that I did next was to do a television series. And I had gone to a group of people.

I was trying to get the Museum of Modern Art or some other institution in New York to work with artists in a television show. And it was my idea to have a television show about art and craft because I was a printmaker and a weaver and a painter and God knows what all else I might have called myself at that time. [Laughs.] And I took it around to a bunch of people in New York, and nothing happened.

And I then went to public television and went up to Boston and gave the idea to the people who did Sesame Street. Now, that's WGBH, WGBH. And the director of the whole project at WGBH was interested. They had never had a Black person doing anything, apparently, there, as far as I know. And so they wanted to get a white person to work with me.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Really?

EMMA AMOS: Yes, indeed. And they gave me Beth Gutcheon. Now, my idea was to do this [... - NdC] television show—was to be about being an artist and being a craftsperson. And I wanted to do different kinds of things. And when I met Beth because it was a fait accompli—it was not going to happen unless they gave me this person—it turned out she was fabulous. And that was a lucky thing.

She hadn't done weaving. She'd done some other things. But she was a writer and very much involved in the arts. And I'm sorry I haven't gone and looked up her resume to see what it was that she had done for such a long time. But she was a writer, and she did a lot of things. So it turned out it was great. It was a great duo. And the show was done in Boston, and we used to drive up and try to do two episodes on every trip.

And then we'd come back, and we'd start thinking about what we were going to do next, and then we'd go up the next month and do more episodes. And so it was—maybe we had six in the can before they started showing them. I'm not sure—I don't remember. I really don't.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So you selected the artists and—

EMMA AMOS: Yeah.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay.

EMMA AMOS: Sometimes they selected the artist because they didn't want us to bring a whole bunch of New York artists in because this was Boston. So they presented us with choices, and out of the large range of very competent people that we found, and it worked. And I think it went on for about a year-and-a-half. And it was syndicated out of town somewhere, but I never knew—I never got any royalties or anything like that.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So does it ever show up on YouTube?

EMMA AMOS: I doubt it. I mean, I've never seen it. I've never seen it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, I looked it up, and it was called *Show of Hands*.

EMMA AMOS: That's exactly right.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: All right. So you were working on *Show of Hands*. You were raising your children and being a wife. What were the other ways in which you were trying to stay in the game as an artist at that time?

EMMA AMOS: Well, I certainly was making art. I wish I had thought about pulling out some of those things. Let's see, I'm looking at my resume trying to figure out what all I was doing, and the year that I was doing *Show of Hands* would have been—let's see, I needed a cheat sheet here. Hmm, 1977—*Show of Hands*—1977 to 1978.

In 1980, I started teaching at Rutgers [University]. And I had a show, I think, at the Studio Museum [New York, NY] with Richard Powell as curator. And it was a solo and a group show, 1969, 1979. I'm looking at my notes now. I should have looked at them before, but I wouldn't have remembered them.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, I met you when you were in that show at the Studio Museum.

EMMA AMOS: Is that so?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And I remember that one of the things about that show that was very interesting was that one of the things I know about you is you are both a printmaker and a painter, as well as a weaver and all this other stuff. So it seemed like the beginning of the culmination of those particular two areas of your work.

EMMA AMOS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: During the '70s, you were also—weren't you involved with Bob Blackburn and—

EMMA AMOS: Oh, yeah.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay, can you talk a little bit about him and how you got involved with him? Was that through Spiral?

EMMA AMOS: No, it wasn't through Spiral. It was that I really wanted to make prints. And I had made some prints at Antioch College. And then I went to art school in London, and that's where I learned to be a printmaker. So when I came back to the States, I was very hungry to continue printmaking, and so I marched over there, and he was just so fabulous. And there was nobody he would turn away. And he just wanted to see what my prints were like, and he liked them.

So I think I worked there for anywhere from eight to 10 years, yeah. It could have been more than that. And it was a wonderful place to be. I mean, I think I moved with him from one place to another as he left one studio to get to another studio and then—you know, so I followed him and met so many wonderful people there. And of course, I didn't sit and try to make a note of who

those people were, but it certainly was a rich environment to work with Bob.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Now, I know that Heresies started in the '70s. Were you in the original collective, or one of them? Because I'm trying to remember that, too.

EMMA AMOS: I believe I was in the original collective of Heresies. And I did some other work with underground artists whose names I cannot give you.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's okay. They were underground.

EMMA AMOS: And that group still operates across the country, and in fact, it was such an important group of women doing mischief that we went to Europe and energized women in the arts in several countries. So but that, I can't really tell the Smithsonian about.

And then I think as my children got older, you know, it was tough. It was tough having a studio. It was tough doing all the night work that I had to do with the clandestine group. It was tough going to meetings. It was tough everywhere. But I did it, you know. I just felt it was necessary.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you have a network of friends beside—you were married, so you had a husband—but did you have a network of friends who were helpful in this period?

EMMA AMOS: No.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Helping you to take care of your children?

EMMA AMOS: No, no. We always paid to have somebody be there for them when they were little. And as they got older—I remember India walking to school by herself and—[laughs]—getting mugged, and it was her graduation day. And they had stolen something that she really wanted, and when we got there, she was just as cool as a cucumber. She was used to being on her own. And she didn't cry, and she didn't, you know, weep or anything.

And we were so mad, and we were really ready to find this person and [laughs] kill him. But it was—the kids managed. And I grew up in Atlanta, where my parents had a drugstore. And I marched up and down the street, along with my brother. Nobody would harm us in any way, but I felt, always, that I was in charge of me. And I think my kids got it, too, that they were the bosses of themselves. And they were very independent, and I was proud of them.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: When you were working, did you also—who were some of the other artists who you were looking at as you were working on your prints, working on your paintings? Who were you influencing? Who was influencing you around that time so that by the time you get to the '80s and you go to work at Rutgers, you have this—because there were a lot of women doing things in the '70s.

EMMA AMOS: There were women doing things, but I think that I had been tutored by Hale Woodruff from a very early age, and it was—he didn't want to teach me when I was little, but my parents tried to get him to do it. But later on, when he was at NYU, he's the one who put me up for Spiral. And it was Norman [Lewis] who was my absolute, absolute favorite.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Was this Norman Lewis?

EMMA AMOS: Norman Lewis, who had to, you know, almost crush you at the very beginning with, "What do you do? Why are you doing it?" whatever. And then the next time you saw him, he had all these wonderful ideas, and he was so helpful. And he was such an important person in my life—much more than almost any of the other guys.

Norman was just very outgoing and very social, but he had to chew you up when he first met you. And that was true with everybody that ever knew Norman. And he was a wonderful, wonderful artist. And I can't say that any of the members of Spiral ever tried to talk about—to do anything except talk about each other's work. But they never tried to critique it. They didn't. They didn't. They didn't do that.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you feel strange being the only woman in the group?

EMMA AMOS: I didn't have the sense that it was unusual for me to be there. I did question why they didn't have Vivian Brown. And I brought that up a couple of times because Vivian was a friend of mine, and she was a crackerjack artist. I understood that they did not want Faith Ringgold. They did not want two or three other artists of, you know, great note.

They just didn't want them. Vivian wasn't invited—I just don't know [why -NdC]. And so what I thought of at the time was, well, they wanted somebody who was going to go and, you know, bring them coffee and run errands and stuff like that. So I put my foot down from the first day, and I just yelled and screamed and cursed just like they did. And I did not do any of those things.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Good. I can't imagine you would. [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: I was as close to being one of the boys as you could get, you know. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, I guess so. So I guess the other side of it—one of the questions I asked was since you were involved in some of these feminist actions, were you involved in the sort of feminist—I mean, I also remember the feminist consciousness-raising sessions and stuff like that, and were you involved in any of that? Was there an art world equivalent?

EMMA AMOS: Well, the whole time that I was doing Spiral—I'm not ever supposed to say this. Where does the Smithsonian print this stuff?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, it goes everywhere, so if you don't want to say it then don't say it.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah. So I was a member of a very famous clandestine women's group that worked at night and did not ever go out without masks on our faces. So that was one.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: We can figure that one out, okay.

EMMA AMOS: I was busy doing that. And there were other feminist groups that I was a member of as a cover because everybody knew that I was involved in a lot of things.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And I guess I'm just trying to figure out, you know, did this in some way—as you were moving through the '70s, did this start to inform the way you were going to start—because you started teaching in 1980 at the Mason Gross School [of the Arts, Rutgers University]. Was that part of what was informing the way in which you were going to carry out your pedagogy? I'm just wondering.

EMMA AMOS: I don't think it had anything to do with it. I think that being female faculty was—at Rutgers, Mason Gross—was a privilege and a real challenge. And I was pretty young, but I had been to such great schools, from Antioch to London to all those things that I had learned.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And you had been teaching before that, right?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, well, I'm not sure what you mean there.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Because you have something that's on here that says you were teaching in Newark in—you taught weaving in Greenwich Village and at the Newark School of Fine Art.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I had almost forgotten that. [Laughs.] That's bad. It's good to have that. It's good to have that. I had forgotten that.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I do my homework. [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: Oh, good. I was doing what I always wanted to do because I grew up in Atlanta, you know, really making art from the time I was three in kindergarten because I would make paper dolls and exchange them for something else. And it would have been very hard to exchange anything because mine [laughs] were so good.

Nobody else knew how to make the doll and then make the paper thing, but people would ask me to do it as a little girl. And they would ask me, and I would say, "Do you want me to color it, or are you going to color it?" And so you know, I figured out ways of doing it, and it was fun. It was really fun. But I was—I had my nose in art all the time. And I think a lot of it probably had to do with nearsightedness. And it was a while before I got my glasses.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Were you also writing or—I mean, I know you said you weren't critiqued, but were you also writing to help represent what you were trying to do, as well?

EMMA AMOS: No.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: At that time, or were you doing any—

EMMA AMOS: No. I always kept a diary, but I mean, it was so stupid. It didn't have anything worthwhile in it. You know, it was like, "Today, I'm going to music." You know, I didn't have anything to write, not a darn thing.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: When you were working, say, with the Heresies collective or with some of the other things, you were suggesting article ideas, editorial things? What were you—how were you mixing it up with your fellow—

EMMA AMOS: I was the editor of Heresies for a while, and it was a lot of work. The most fun was doing the covers, choosing who we would write about, who was going to do the writing. And when I got—I can't even really remember so I'm being—you know, not being elusive. I just can't remember how I stopped doing Heresies. It might have been about the time that I was doing the under-the-cover things.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So you were just a little overwhelmed.

EMMA AMOS: But I don't know. I mean, how much could I have done with, you know, two growing children and trying to work and trying to do all that? I really don't remember.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's understandable. Do you want to take a break? Do you want to take a break, or do you want to keep going?

EMMA AMOS: We can keep going.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay. So in the '70s, you'd done—you're raising your children, very much married. You've taught in Greenwich Village and in Newark. Did you do any traveling during that time besides with clandestine people? [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: Yes, I did, yeah, because we—the clandestine people went all over. We were in Germany, and we were here and France and all over.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you go to Africa? Did you go to South America?

EMMA AMOS: I've been to Africa, but not at that time. And South America—I've been a little bit, but it wasn't at that time. It was later.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay, all right. So mostly, you were just really focusing on trying to stay an artist while raising your family and doing all this other stuff.

EMMA AMOS: And energizing the state of women was a big deal. It was a big deal. And having been with Spiral and seen that, you know, they thought that I was going to, you know, make peanut butter sandwiches and run out and get tea, and I just sat there. You know, I wasn't going to do that.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So were you also involved with the—I know A.I.R. [Artists in Residency Gallery] and some other women's art collectives were—

EMMA AMOS: Shortly—just for a tiny bit when A.I.R. had gone to another [space -NdC]—not the fancy group. The original group was very, very chic and included very, very hot artists.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I didn't know that.

EMMA AMOS: And then it turned into—those women went off and who knows what they did. And it became a lesser group, and I was in the lesser group. And I said, "Who needs this?" So I, you know, sort of jumped out of my seat.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So did you have a gallery at that time?

EMMA AMOS: I don't remember. I don't remember.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, okay.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, we could figure that out, so we could add it. But I don't remember.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Because I know you were doing a lot of group shows, but I didn't know whether—

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, yeah.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: How did you feel about doing the group shows?

EMMA AMOS: I like group shows. I think it's fine. I think women in galleries have a really hard time, and having a gallery does not mean you're going to have success. And gallerists—I don't exactly know. I think my favorite gallery was my first gallery, and that was in Atlanta when I was just in college or just out of college. I don't know.

I know I showed my work to Judy Alexander, and she had a gallery [Judith Alexander Gallery in Atlanta, GA]. She was from a very wealthy family in Atlanta, and she had a gallery. She was white. And she looked at the etchings that I brought, and she said, "Oh, yeah." And so she worked with me for about six years, but at that six-year period, I think I had already moved to New York.

So it got a little tricky, and it was hard to send work down there. And I think I—you know, we sort of split, but that was the best. I loved that gallery. Yeah, I thought it was really brave of her to have me in her gallery because it was so white in Atlanta at the time.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did people—when you would show your work to gallerists, did they just not understand what you were trying to do, or would they just—

EMMA AMOS: Well, I didn't—I never—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Or if somebody was repping you on those trips—

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I never really walked the pavement trying to sell myself to galleries. And I should have, and I should do it now, but it's—I had so many other things that I was doing. I was raising children. I was trying to teach, and I was trying to paint. And it was just too many things, you know. It was too many things. I was juggling too many things, you know?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So the '70s sounds like it was a time of some art world activism, raising children and tending to your marriage, I assume. That was one of the things. Were there also things going on with your family or your parents? I mean, they were aging. How were they—Were you staying in contact with them and the whole Atlanta scene at the time?

EMMA AMOS: Yes, I tried to get down to Atlanta as much as I could. And I can remember my mother coming to visit me the last time, when she was 70. I am now 73. And she went home, and she died about four days later.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Wow.

EMMA AMOS: I was very lucky to have seen her then. And then my father, who was quite a bit older than she was, lived to be 97. [Laughs.] But he was in a nursing home a lot of that time. And I haven't—I miss Atlanta, but I don't have any—you know, I don't know who's there anymore, don't have friends anymore. I've shown at Spelman [College, Atlanta, GA]. I've been down there to be on juries about things. But they've pretty much forgotten me, you know, I think.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, I don't know about that. So now, you had a brother?

EMMA AMOS: Yes, I have a brother.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And is he still alive, or—

EMMA AMOS: Yes, he is. He's only 18 months older than I am. And he is a retired lawyer, and he has three children—one who is a super-genius. The girl is the super-genius and the two boys [... -NdC]. Anyway, and he's a lovely person, and he has a wonderful wife. And he lives in Louisville.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh. So have you shown a lot of work in the South? I'm just curious about that.

EMMA AMOS: No, no.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's interesting.

EMMA AMOS: I don't think anybody down there remembers me at all. And I have thought, lately, that I should go down and bang on the windows of the High Museum. When I was a little girl, I

was given a special tour because I was a prodigy—a special tour of the High Museum when it was closed.

And at that time, I don't think they even let Blacks in there. But there was a European director, and somehow, my parents had a very important friend. She took me to meet this man, and he gave me a tour of the High Museum when it was closed.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's pretty good.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, and I was maybe 6.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: When you showed at Spelman, what was that like?

EMMA AMOS: You know, I always loved Spelman and Morehouse—Morehouse more because there were boys. But Spelman has a beautiful campus, and there would be no Morehouse if there were no Spelman, and vice versa. It is such a treat to know that, that place is still there, and Morris Brown [College], too. When I was 8 or 9, one—oh, now I can't remember her name, but she's been dead for a long, long time—a teacher at Morris Brown allowed me to come and work with her art students at Morris Brown College.

And that did not happen at Spelman or Morehouse when I was little. And what else do I know about Spelman and—so many friends went to school there. My brother and I were kind of way ahead of other kids, and he went to Morehouse as—I'm trying to remember the name of the scholar thing that they did. They took—some do-gooder group took a whole group of young, Black kids to put them in school when they were 11 and 12 and 13. And my brother was one of them. David Levering Lewis was one of them.

My mother wouldn't let me join that group because she said, "Well, you're almost two years younger than your brother, so forget it." And so Larry went to Morehouse for that first year, and then he changed out of it and ended up going to—oh, dear, now I'm not going to remember his school—Lafayette College in the North. And he started again as a freshman because, I think, he was 11 or 12. [Laughs.]

And it was a funny thing for whoever this group was—I think it was a whole bunch of white folks—who said, "Let's see if we can find the smartest kids." And they found the smartest kids according to our IQs. "And let's see, if we put them in school earlier, how they will do." And the boys did extremely well in these things. The girls didn't because girls, when they're 11 to 13 years old, look like grown women. And they can look like grown women and act like grown women. So a lot of them got knocked up. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, no. Oh, God.

EMMA AMOS: It was one of those things that had not-good consequences. [Laughs.] And I think that only a few of them really suffered from it, but it was a learning thing. And I don't know whether the people who sponsored it knew what was going on, but it was not quite right. [Laughs.] Nobody wants to date a 13-year-old boy, but a 13-year-old girl is a whole 'nother subject.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So when you—and how did you come across the job at Rutgers, and how did that come about?

EMMA AMOS: This is kind of—I can't really remember. Oh, I remember going into a pack of 140 people. okay, that's the number that I remember. And there had been a call for faculty, and we all showed up. And we all had to do something. And I don't know what we did. Did we jump through hoops? [Laughs.] What did we do?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: You mean 140 people showed up at one place?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, at one place. And we were interviewed, and then they narrowed us down to a group of whatever, and then somehow or other, I got the job. And how many jobs there were, I'm not sure. There could have been three or four out of that group. But I got the job, and it was before Rutgers—Mason Gross had that wonderful campus that they have now. So the campus was in downtown New Jersey—whatever the name of our city is. I'm losing it altogether.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: It wasn't Newark.

EMMA AMOS: Not Newark.

MS. SPEARS JONES : New Brunswick.

EMMA AMOS: New Brunswick, thank you.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay, downtown New Brunswick. So you were commuting?

EMMA AMOS: I was commuting, and I commuted for all those years. I think it was 27 years or more. And by the time I left, I had become chair, but my husband was very, very ill, and I just quit. I couldn't deal with being chair. And chair is such a kind of scuzzy job, you know. You're working with faculty who I adored, but we had the dean from hell, so it was difficult and I was glad to get out of there.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: What did you enjoy about working there, and what did you dislike besides the dean from hell?

EMMA AMOS: The kids are tremendous. The campus is so beautiful. The commute out there was—you know, it was a difficult commute. I mean, you had to get on the subway and you had to go to the train and whatever. And when my son, Nick, got his first big job, he gave me a Lexus. [Laughs.]

I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. That thing was the cutest, smartest, sharpest little car you ever saw. And I drove like a maniac back and forth, and it was just heaven. I loved it. But when Bobby [Robert Levine] was basically dying, I just couldn't not be there. And I just sort of bolted, you know.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: When you were there, what were you teaching?

EMMA AMOS: I taught printmaking at first and then Judy Brodsky came, and there was no reason to teach. You know, she—Judy was the queen of printmaking there, and there just wasn't any need for me to be there. It's not that she ran me out of it. It's just that there was just no need. But I had adored teaching printmaking because I'd learned it so well. And Kathan Brown and I had learned it in London and, you know, we were really good about it. So I was happy to be teaching painting, and that was it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Do you have any students that you remember who've gone on to do—

EMMA AMOS: Oh my goodness. I get calls from my students all the time. And some of them are really good, close friends, and they are still artists. And it's just wonderful. I just love that they keep in touch. I think it's very important.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Anybody that I may know of or I should know of?

EMMA AMOS: Well, I think Jackson Lenochoan. There's an African student who I have to return a call to.

[Side conversation.]

EMMA AMOS: Oh, dear. I just—it's a blank.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay. I mean, you had a lot of good students. In your pedagogy, what were you trying to get them to understand?

EMMA AMOS: Well, we always had figure models. I insisted on having figure models. I wanted people to be able to work in pencil, charcoal and in watercolor if they wanted to because if I was teaching in a drawing class—and this would be in a drawing class, not in a painting class. And in painting, we pretty much used acrylic because I was allergic to oils. But if they didn't, you know—if I didn't have to stand around with them too long, I could stand it a little bit.

But I think a good teacher in painting and drawing and any other kind of making and doing is so much how you treat the students and how you try to make them feel that you are not above them. You are working with them, and you're trying to make sure that they don't stumble on things and get, you know, to feel that they can't do something. They should be able to do anything they want to do. And it should be a challenge, and it should be fun.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you ever get—did any of the students you worked with or other artists, you know, declare that they came from some other space, like conceptual art or something like that? How did you deal with those aesthetic issues, if at all?

EMMA AMOS: People knew who was working with what, whether you were working with the figure or whether you were working with abstractions. I can't really remember the names of the courses. And they were the clues as to what somebody wanted to do that semester. So you know, you didn't really come up against anybody that was going to say, "I hate this," because they were the ones who were choosing.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So you didn't have like a David Hammons-esque person saying, "Painting is dead, and therefore, I don't have to do that."

EMMA AMOS: No, no, no. Oh, hell no. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But did you come across some of that just as a painter? I mean, I know I remember Elizabeth Murray was talking about that at one point.

EMMA AMOS: I don't think so. I mean, what takes the place of painting? Television? I mean, film is fabulous. Film school is great. But there isn't anything else like painting. It's like saying, "Well, we can all read, but do we need books?" [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Alas, there are people who say that. [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, there are. That may be true.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, one reason why I was asking is that I'm wondering if one of the issues for a lot of artists, both women and artists of color in the '70s and '80s, is that many of them were working with the figure, many of them were working with abstraction in ways that the critique of art hadn't caught up with. And did that ever—did you ever feel like that was impinging on you in some way?

EMMA AMOS: Yes, I know there was a split between whether you could be a minimalist or you were going to keep doing the figure, whether it was going to be deconstruction. All kinds of, you know, -isms came up.

But for me, having been a figurative artist from the time I was 6, I guess, there was no choice, for me. I want to do the human figure, and I want to invent the human figure. I don't usually work with models. I haven't had a model in I don't know when. And for me, it's a challenge to do the figure without seeing the figure, you know. It's kind of fun.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, well, I do remember in the earlier thing, you were talking about the kind of models you wanted, and at one point, you said you were interested in a male model, but then you said, "Well, maybe not." And I always wondered, "Well, did she ever find a male model?" [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: No, they're hard to find. And all you have to do to find them is go up to, you know, the open schools around where—the one I can't think of. And I went to some of those so that I could, you know, just be in a room with models of all sorts and run from one place to another place. But yeah, no, I don't know. I know the body, and I try very hard to get it right. And then when I see big, muscle-y people, I say, "God, it would be really nice to do some of them." [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Because I know you often—or that in your practice, you were using yourself as your model in a certain kind of way—did you change the way you modeled your body over time in your work? Or did I get that wrong?

EMMA AMOS: The only thing I need to know about my body is what does it look like when you look up; what does it look like when you look down because inventing the body has just been something that I learned at a very young age, you know. And when I do one and then I look at it, I hold it up to the mirror or I work on translucent paper. And I turn it around and I say, "Oh, are you nuts?" you know, when you see your mistake. And I like doing that because nobody is perfect.

And you know, you think, "Oh, I can just draw anything I want to draw out of my head," and then you look at it and you turn it over and you say, "Good God, that's awful." [Laughs.] So it's always a learning situation. It's no such—I mean, I don't know. I have all these art books, and I look at some of the drawings in the art books and they're wrong. But that doesn't keep them from being beautiful, you know. Nobody was perfect.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: When you say they're wrong, what do you mean?

EMMA AMOS: There's something wrong in the proportions. The feet are too—you know, they didn't do the feet; they didn't do the hands; they didn't do the neck right; they didn't do this right. But the thing is, overall, great, and it's worth being in the art book.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: When you're working on the figure—one of these I was looking at from reading this material was that you talked about the figure. What about, what were the colors? How did you come up with your particular—because you have a very vivid palette—how did you come up with your palette?

Because you studied at Antioch, and you went to London. What were you bringing back from all these places? And also, you grew up in the South, which—you know, I've been to Atlanta, so I know how visually green and yellow and all those colors are. So where did the palette come from?

EMMA AMOS: Well, I love color, and as a weaver and, you know, a textile person, I worked for seven years for Dorothy Liebes and—well, maybe even more than that. I've just always loved yarn. I've loved paint. I've loved anything that could rely on color or just line. I'm not sure that I'm answering your question.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, you're answering. Just keep talking. [Laughs.] Did you see—because you said Norman Lewis was one of your favorite men, and his work is incredibly colorful.

EMMA AMOS: It's so fabulous.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: You know, I'm wondering if some of that was—I'm just trying to figure out where your influences were coming from.

EMMA AMOS: Well, Hale, Norman and Romy [Romare Bearden] were the best. And there were other guys that were there, but I don't remember their work, really. The stars were those three people. And Norman was a best friend and came to all my parties, and he came to the house and I visited him and whatever. I was not that close to Romy except when we were in Spiral. And Hale, of course, was like grandpa, you know—very, very quiet and serious and willing to help at any time.

But you know, I didn't see him that much. Norman Lewis was and is my idol for being a great artist, a great host. He was very social. He gave parties, if you remember his wonderful wife, Ouida. Well, he'd been married maybe once or twice. And his anger, if he didn't think you were up to what you should be doing—you know, he'd just say, "What are you doing? What is this junk?" He was terrific.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So you have your figures. You have your color palette. I also noticed that many of your paintings are in panels, often in triptychs. Where did that come from?

EMMA AMOS: I think it came from the size of the canvas that you're using where you wanted to have more space but—I have some big rolls of canvas, but I can't handle them. So working in a studio without a lot of assistance is kind of tricky, right? Yeah. Here comes one. Here comes Jackson, one of my students. [Laughs.]

[Side conversation.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: All right, I'm going to stop this for a minute, you know.

[End of disc.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: All right, okay. So I have a question. How did you meet and how did you get to know Vivian Brown? I'm always curious about women's friendships.

EMMA AMOS: Oh my goodness. It's hard to remember how I met Vivian, but she would have been—she was such a wonderful person. I went to visit her in her fabulous apartment in SoHo [Manhattan, New York, NY], and I remember thinking, "That's what I want is a big studio and a nice place to be," and everything. And how we met—it's been so long that I can't remember. All I know is that when I went to Bellagio [Italy] as an artist in residence, [Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, 1993] that was when she died.

And somebody called me and said—and she'd been very sick—and they called me and said she had died. And I think I just—I was just so broken up. It was just so sad to me that this wonderful woman had died. And she had a friend who I think was taking care of the work, but I've never seen it again. I don't know where it went.

So that kind of is scary for me, that artists—and particularly women artists—don't get a lot of attention. And when they pass away, what happens to the work? And unless it's somebody like—who's the little white-haired woman who died a bunch of years ago? Just any woman who dies is in the hands of people who may not do anything with the work, and you worry about that. [* - NdC]

And there ought to be kind of—not unions but people who sort of look at it before it goes down, before it happens, and try to really work it so that these people are not forgotten, that the work doesn't just go dump. I think Camille Billops has been one of the most important people in my later years because she's an archivist. And she makes it her job to know some of these people who are being forgotten. And she is a treasure. The only people I know who know that she's a treasure are the people down in Atlanta at—what is the white university?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Emory [University, Atlanta, GA]?

EMMA AMOS: I think it is Emory. And they support her, and I mean, they try to make sure that everything that she's doing—her films, her recognition of other artists, all of that—is going into their archive. And she's leaving everything to them. But she is the most important artist that I see now—you know, that's in my milieu. [... -NdC] It's her being there. She just is a major person in my life.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you ever think about doing—I mean, I know one of the things she's also done besides her artwork and doing this was that she's done film and other media.

EMMA AMOS: She's a filmmaker.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Had you ever thought about doing that?

EMMA AMOS: And then she does those—what is it, about once a month, she has an audience of about—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, I've done those interview things.

EMMA AMOS: I don't know what you call them. They're interviews.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, they're public interviews.

EMMA AMOS: And she's done them, and of course, she's made all those films, which are fabulous. I feel like I'm nothing compared to her. She's such a winner in what she does and how she thinks, yeah.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But I think a big difference between the two of you is that she also gave up her child for a while to—do you know what I mean—sort of, she said, to focus on—

EMMA AMOS: That was interesting. *Finding Christa*, you know? And she's never apologized for it. She gave that child away when she was 4 years old. She walked that child into a whatever you call it now.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: An orphanage?

EMMA AMOS: An orphanage—and left her. And when she came back and found her mother, they get along, but Camille says, you know, she still has to take care of herself. "I'm not going to do what I didn't do then. I can't be pushed into it," you know. And that's the strongest woman I've ever seen. Most women won't come up to that. They might do something awful, but they run. But she just stands there and says, "I'd do it again." [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's her and not you. Let me just go back—one reason I was asking about Vivian is—and I guess also about Camille, too—was what do those—you started talking a little bit about Camille—but what do those friendships, not so much with the activism stuff but just the friendships, mean for you? You talked about Norman Lewis and—so I'm just curious about what did Vivian, as a fellow artist, give to you, in terms of friendship?

EMMA AMOS: It was the friendship. It was the being able to talk and to know so many people in the world of art and to be able to commiserate about—the only difference between us was I had children and she didn't. But that didn't change, really—didn't make us that different because being artists was what we were and what we felt we were.

I read a lot, and I read about women writers. And they have the same problems that I think that women painters have, which is that they're kind of underground and people can not know them. I wonder who—you know, if we did a straw poll—who would come out as being the most important—women artists or women writers.

I guess, to me, it would be women writers because books are not as expensive as paintings. They're harder to find, you know. They're harder to find the publisher. But once they're out there, everybody can have them. You know, they're within ownership terms. They're cheaper. Whereas women artists—you know, you can just stumble over them. You really can.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Do you think one of the reasons why lots of women artists did things like book art and things like that is to be able to have that?

EMMA AMOS: I would think so, yeah. And also being scholars, being scholarly, working on different things. I have a really old friend—Mira Schor—I haven't seen her in a long time—who is an artist, but she's also a writer and, you know, all the things that she does. And yet still, she's not famous, you know. And it's like, I don't know. I think you have to write novels to get famous. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And that doesn't work sometimes.

EMMA AMOS: Maybe even that is not going to do it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But is it also just that this is the generation—there's just some—I mean, how small and then how much bigger has the art world become since you first came here?

EMMA AMOS: It still seems kind of small to me. Here I am at 73, and I wake up in the morning and say, "I have one piece at the Museum of Modern Art. I wonder, is it still there?" You know, I wonder if I've been deaccessioned. And I wonder how come there's nobody who knows who I am. In other words, you know, I am not the top artist in this city at all—woman artist. I would have thought that I would have done better, you know. I really thought that I would have done better.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Could that be because of the lack of gallery support and stuff?

EMMA AMOS: Well, I don't want to malign my gallery, but I have to because they don't sell anything. And why that is, I don't know. I don't think the work is bad. I just think that there's not that—I don't know. They don't push it in any way. And there are a lot of crooks out there, and I think about some of them who are so successful, and I say, "Well, maybe I should go with a crook." [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: The pirates. [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I know. You're sort of in a quandary. You just don't know what to do.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Is that the quandary about the commodification of art and how do you value—how are you valued? I mean, what do you say to your students when they get into that conundrum?

EMMA AMOS: Well, luckily, I'm not teaching anymore.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, but when you were—

EMMA AMOS: But when I did teach, I was their role model. And I couldn't knock it. But I always told the truth, which is, this is not an easy thing. Nobody is sitting around waiting for you to do anything, and they're not going to run out and buy it just because you made it. And it's a hustle. It's a hustle.

The young man who just came in a few minutes ago was a student of mine at Rutgers, and he is doing very well in the art world. But even very well in the art world doesn't mean anything because it's within what group are you talking about. You know, are you talking about near

where you live or maybe a little bit of New Jersey [where he lives -NdC] or a little bit of here? It's very, very difficult.

And I have books all over, as you can see. I love books. And I look at Jane Smiley and Barbara Kingsolver and people like that, and I say, "I think that success in book writing is a little bit better for women than being an artist." A dear friend of mine is bell hooks, and she did *Art on My Mind*. I can't even pick up—[inaudible, off mic]—*Art on My Mind* [Art on My Mind: Visual Politics, 1995] and other books. And I haven't seen her in a while because she moved out to God knows where. But you know, she's written about me in her books, and things like that.

And I wish that, in a way, paintings could be as small and as able to go into other people's houses as books are. They just aren't. People don't want to spend the money. They don't know that they have space for it. They don't think about it. They have tchotchkes, but they don't have art. So it's not a practical thing for me.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But you must have some serious collectors, though.

EMMA AMOS: No, I don't think so.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Really? Not one or two that buy your work or have bought your work over time? No?

EMMA AMOS: I can't think of anybody who's standing in line to buy anything.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Because it's interesting to me. One of the people I work with is Carolee Schneemann and I know that when I was at the—when I was working for Heresies, we did the auction. I think somebody bought her piece, and it was the first time anybody had bought her artwork. And that was in 1980-something, and she had been around for, already, over 20 years back then. And then another 30 years passed before somebody else bought something, which makes no sense to me.

EMMA AMOS: No, well, that's not surprising. I think that it's unusual to be on a bandwagon where you're going to sell out in an exhibition. I just can't imagine it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But you have been able to have some real, I think, connection with the larger art world. I mean, you do have—as Natalia [de Campos, Studio Manager -NdC] pointed out, you know, you do have all these awards, the Skowhegan [School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME] and—I mean, so that came from somewhere, some levels. I mean, how do you connect those kinds of levels of recognition with your ongoing issues around trying to sell work?

EMMA AMOS: Well, Skowhegan has always been a great—that's the summer camp for young artists, and it's not so young anymore. It's usually around anywhere from 27 to 50, and when they first started, there were—I mean, when I first went there, there were kids there who were 18, and the age hadn't gone up so high.

But artists now, sort of, you know, have to slug it out to get somewhere, and they can't be thinking about it when they're 18. They're trying to finish college. But I've lost my train of thought. What was I talking about?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, when you were sort of saying that you've always sort of had difficulty selling your work, but you have sold some of it, I presume, over time?

EMMA AMOS: Yes, I have, but your dealer—I really don't know. You know, I don't want to malign my dealer, but I do have a feeling that for this particular dealer, it's a hobby. And it's not necessarily anything other than something to do with the status that they're in. And that if I had known that ahead of time, I would have just jumped, but I didn't know that.

And actually, I needed a dealer. Trying to think if there have been dealers that have actually done something for me, and it's a hard—I'm just gazing at my shows. It's very hard. I don't know. I don't know. I feel like I should light a fire under my behind and run down to Atlanta and say, "Hey, hey, hey, you know, come on, let's do something at the High Museum or let's do something here or let's do something there." But you know, at 73, I don't really have that much steam.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, yeah, because I'm wondering—you know, I was looking at the wonderful canvases in your studio, and—so I'm going to go a little bit back to process—when did

you start to—you said you went to Africa. When was that, and how—and was that when you started to collect fabrics?

EMMA AMOS: No. As a weaver, I had always been interested in textiles. And even the canvas, to me, is a textile. And wanting to use the right kind of canvas and wanting to have the right kind of borders—and it's always been my thing not to worry about stretching canvases, anymore, because I always needed help to stretch a canvas properly. And the ones that you see on the walls here are stretched, but now I don't do that anymore.

So I stretch the canvas on a board in my studio and staple it, and then give it three coats of gesso going in different directions so that everything is going to be even and wonderful. And then I paint on it and then put these borders on it, and I like the idea of the canvas being what it is, which is fabric. It's not a stretched thing, and especially when you think about how some people stretch things and then you look at the corners and ew, it's disgusting.

There's something about the integrity of the woven linen canvas—and that's what I prefer to use, instead of cotton—that it does what it wants to do once you put it on a rod at the top and a rod at the bottom and you've got a little border on it that's made out of something really gorgeous that you love.

And that has been my joy, is to have something that I don't know that anybody else does. And that's the way I work. And so that's what's unique about my work, and it's been that way, now, for, wow, I'd say about [30 -NdC] years that I've been doing this unstretched canvases—you know, without the big, wooden doohickeys around them.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And when did you start to use the other kinds of fabrics?

EMMA AMOS: I used to weave the fabrics that I used on the borders. And I still weave a little bit, but not as much as I did because I have so many bits of weaving that I've done and, you know, why do I need to make some more? But I collect African fabrics to use, and I'm very much interested in texture and stuff like that for the borders. And I think that the paintings work better by looking like they are almost flags.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Where do you get the African fabrics?

EMMA AMOS: Lots of places. Sometimes I go uptown to those markets that are sort of out, and it's a lot of African guys selling stuff. There are places downtown that I can get African fabrics. There is a group that I used to—and they were two white guys, and they're still around, but I've kind of lost where they are now, and they are importers of African fabrics.

And I used to get all my African fabrics from them. But there's no shortage of them. So to go find them, you know, you just have to go to a fair or go up to Harlem or go to some of the places that you would think you—you know, that are still going in Midtown.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Are you more interested in, say, Nigerian fabrics as opposed to Ghanaian, or does it not matter?

EMMA AMOS: No, no. No, it's always about what is the quality of it. And do I know the difference? No, I don't think so.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Now, do you have a lot of African artist friends who might come and see this and go, hmm, or—just curious?

EMMA AMOS: I'm trying to think. I don't think I know any African artists—one that I taught at Rutgers, and he calls every now and then. But he's not in a position to tell me anything. He wants to be taught, always. No, I don't think I have any real African friends, no. I don't think so. We are all Africans, but we're not pure. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, when I was reading the background, the funny thing is it sort of went into, like, incredible detail about the various cultures that came into your being from your mother and your father's side. How does that play out, in terms of the way in which you—I mean, and you were married to a white man during a time when it was still illegal, in some parts of the country, to be married to him. How have you dealt with racial issues, personally and in your artwork?

EMMA AMOS: I haven't run into a lot of negative anything, being me. And being with Bobby, my

husband of 30-some-odd years—it was 40-some-odd years—was a piece of cake. I mean, it was—he was just a terrific man who everybody admired him for his brilliance.

He was extremely smart and could build anything and could make anything and could invent anything, and whatever. And he was just so supportive of everything I did. And the kids are smart because of him, I always think, but of course, my parents were smart, too. And my brother is fabulous. I don't know. I guess I think I just got lucky. I think I just got lucky.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Because if you had been not in New York and somewhere else, it might have been—so the New York that you—the community that you were involved in, who else were your friends and—besides Vivian and Camille, who were some of the people that you guys hung out with? Give us a feel of the '60s.

EMMA AMOS: I know a whole—you know, because of school, I have the school friends. So I have the school faculty people. I could make you a list of people that really helped me. I'm trying to think of—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: In your artist statement, you mentioned Holly Block and Camille and—

EMMA AMOS: Well, Holly Block, for sure, and Camille. But I'm also trying to think of the big, tall guy who was head of Lincoln Center [for the Performing Arts, New York, NY].

MS. SPEARS JONES : Gordon?

EMMA AMOS: Gordon, Gordon Davis. Gordon and Peggy [Davis]—they bought a lot of my work. And they've been very, very kind and generous in buying.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So you do have collectors.

EMMA AMOS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And oh, dear. [Inaudible.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: You just know too many people.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's why Natalia is here.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah. My lovely friend whose husband was also a part of the Gordon Davis crowd, and she is—oh, dear, I'm lost. I can't.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: It's okay, it's okay. I'll come back because I'm just trying to get a sense of who you were hanging out—I mean, if you say you went to parties, besides Norman Lewis and Vivian, who else was there?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, right. No, well, that was so long ago, I can't remember. And I probably wouldn't have known all those people because I was so young. I was younger than Vivian and Norman and all of those guys. And then when they were no more, it was so sad, you know. There isn't anything quite like that group.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you have gatherings here?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I'm a big party person, but I usually only have a party once a year. And I'm trying to think. Last year's party, the great dancer came. What is his name? I mean, his wife is still really dancing, but he—very tall.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, you mean—

EMMA AMOS: [Laughs.] You see there, we're both having our senior moments.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: The [coconut ?] man [Geoffrey Holder -NdC].

EMMA AMOS: Yeah.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Aha, okay.

EMMA AMOS: Exactly.

[Side conversation.]

[End of disc.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: All right, we're going for the second of the wonderful parts of this interview. This is Patricia Jones, and I'm speaking with Emma Amos on November 19th here in New York City in her sun-filled loft. And we're going to talk a little bit about friends. I want you to talk about your friends.

And I'm looking at this beautiful piece of paper with various and sundry portraits of everybody from Kathy Caraccio and Clarissa Sligh to Josely Carvalho and India Amos. So how did you meet these women? Howardena Pindell, I see. How did you meet them? How did you get to know them? How did they get to know you?

EMMA AMOS: I did this project for myself as an homage to my women artist friends. And so I wanted as many people as I could get to come and pose for me. And they came, usually, by themselves and sat for not more than 40 minutes. And so these were watercolors that are about—I wish I had one in front of me—that are about 20-by-something [inches]. I hope it says there somewhere.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: 26-by-20.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, okay. And so they didn't have to stay still for too long. And I don't know which were the first ones. So I think—because I was trying to figure out if there were some that were better than others. But they were just very good sitters. And they didn't have to sit for more—nobody sat for more than an hour. I think I did most of them in about 30 to 45 minutes. So that includes my daughter.

And the name of the project is *The Gift* because I gave them to her. And it includes Camille Billops and Howardena Pindell and Faith Ringgold and, well, let's see, who else? Mimi Schapiro—Miriam Schapiro—Lucy Lippard, Mira Schor, Josely Carvalho, May Stevens, Marina Gutierrez, Kathy Caraccio, Fern Logan, Linda Peer. Elizabeth Catlett was in town, and so I got her. Claire Khalil, Petah Coyne. So I'll give you a list, so you'll have all the names. And if you like, you can have a copy of this.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Now, were you talking to them while they were doing this, or talking beforehand, or what?

EMMA AMOS: I think that I could talk to them, but it wasn't a—you know, if I'm painting, I don't really want to have them moving around or running their mouths. So there would be a chance in the sitting for them to go to the john or have a glass of water or something like that, and we could chat a little bit.

But it was really about recognizing these women and trying to get this portrait—portraits of them sitting for me, which was—it was tremendous fun. And why I decided to do it, I have no idea. I have no idea—don't remember. But I have the pieces, and I think that's all that matters. It's a wonder that I even have the date on them. I'm trying to see.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: On most of them you do.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I do—'91, '90. 1990 to, it looks like, 1993, it took to do them all.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And Howardena has had a long career, like you. Did you also know her in the '60s and '70s, as well, or was she kind of away from you?

EMMA AMOS: I am trying to think when I would have known Howardena.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you know her when she was at the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York, NY]?

EMMA AMOS: Oh, yeah. I mean, I knew about her, but whether I knew her then, I don't know. And I didn't really know all of these women. I knew most of them. And for instance, someone like Lorna Simpson, who's much younger than I am, I just called her up and said, "Would you come pose for me?" And she said, "Sure." You know what I mean? It was really nice. It was really nice to get people that I didn't know.

I knew Lucy Lippard; I knew Martha Wilson; I knew Joyce Kozloff. And Shirley King was married to Bill King, and we'd been friends for years. So most of the women were artists of some sort. And to call it *The Gift*, because I gave it to India, they belong to India. She keeps them right here in

my house, but they belong to India, my daughter.

And I don't know—it was just a challenge to do. I'd love to do men, but I don't know how to do them, really, because I don't—you know, that would be a little bit hard, especially since if I didn't put Bobby in that thing, what would be the point? [Laughs.] He's dead now, so I can't.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, when you said that your party had Geoffrey Holder and Carmen de Lavallade. I loved that. And they're also longtime downtown people.

EMMA AMOS: Yes, they're downtown people. She did not come. She was working. But he came. And he was just happy to be here and, you know, talked to everybody and stayed late to talk to everybody, which was cute.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, one of the things that I was going to ask you because I remember this, too, is that I was a downtown person when I first came to New York, and there were not that many folks of color downtown. So you're one of those people who, like, would be called a pioneer. How did it feel to be down here in the '60s, '70s and '80s, when mostly, everybody else was kind of not?

EMMA AMOS: Well, on Bond Street, Betty Blayton had lived in that building. And this was—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Now, who is Betty Blayton? I have no idea.

EMMA AMOS: Betty Blayton is an artist, an old-time artist. She's at least my age. And she had worked—she was the first person I know who worked at the Museum of Modern Art. And she was living in that building. Probably, at the time, she was working at The Studio Museum. So down here, there were lots and lots of Black people. This had been a Black person's haven, and it was not—there were not that many white people left.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: On this particular street?

EMMA AMOS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay, so Bond Street was—

EMMA AMOS: And I don't really know the history of it, but I'm sure that historians—you know, that it can be found, why.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay. So there were lots of artists. So did you know—obviously, since you knew Geoffrey Holder and Carmen de Lavallade, who were some of the artists—not visual artists—

EMMA AMOS: Well, I didn't really—Carmen did not come to my apartment.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Right, no, no, no. I got that part.

EMMA AMOS: But I knew him, and I would run into him on the street. And I just was having this party, and I called him up and I asked him if he'd come. And I hadn't ever been to his house, and he'd never been to mine. And he said, "I'll be there." [Laughs.] And he came. And he's a delightful person, and everybody knows he's a great conversationalist and he's overpoweringly big. [Laughs.] He is big.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yes. He's probably smaller than he used to be, but he is big.

EMMA AMOS: He's big and a wonderful dancer.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So do you know people from theater, music? Who were the people that —

EMMA AMOS: Gordon Davis and Peggy Davis are collectors of mine, and they are really significant New Yorkers because Gordon was head of—I'm trying to remember.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Department of parks?

EMMA AMOS: The parks department [New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, New York, NY], exactly. Yeah. And he's a lawyer and, you know, prominent in New York. What other people do I know? You know, when I get to putting together my guest list for when I'm going to

give my New Year's party, which is the only real party that I do, that's when I have to get out the list and say, "Oh, yeah. Let's have this one; let's have that one."

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Do you know George Wolfe?

EMMA AMOS: I used to know George Wolfe, and I haven't seen him in a very long time. You know, after he left the theater up the street, he disappeared. You know, I haven't heard anything about him lately.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah. He was also not well for a while, too.

EMMA AMOS: Oh, dear. Oh, dear. But yeah, the people that I know in New York—it's kind of hard to say—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, I love the fact that you knew Kenny Clarke, and that was who you were going to see in Paris. So I'm like, is there—

EMMA AMOS: That was the best. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, so are there any musicians that you know now kind of like that?

EMMA AMOS: There probably are, but you know at 73, can I rattle off the names of the people that I know? No, I don't think so.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay. So if you go to hear some music now, would you go hear—

EMMA AMOS: Oh, I like to take myself to the Blue Note [Jazz Club, New York, NY] by myself.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay, well, tell us about that, Missy.

EMMA AMOS: And I like to go and see—now, there was somebody I wanted to see.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you go see Chick Corea?

EMMA AMOS: No, I didn't go see Chick. I wanted to go see the big bassist—tall, tall, tall, tall, tall—because I've gone to see him several times, and I just love it. Oh, dear, and he's about to be at the Blue Note this week, I think. I think it was in *the Voice* [*The Village Voice*] or something like that. And I like to go—and if you go by yourself, you can sit—they put you right in front of the band.

And if you're going with a date, they put you up, you know, kind of in the back. It's really funny. They put single people—and I think they do that because they have so many Europeans who are coming in, and so they just look at these one or two couples who don't look like they know what they're doing—[inaudible, laugh]—put them in the front.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, have you gone—this year, this was something that you really liked?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I really like it, but I haven't been this year, yet.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay, but you're going for the bassist.

EMMA AMOS: I'm going to go.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And I'm trying to figure out who that must be.

MS. NATALIA DE CAMPOS: We saw Toni Morrison's piece.

EMMA AMOS: Toni Morrison? Oh, yes, we went to see the Toni Morrison—that's true.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, okay. How was it?

EMMA AMOS: It was fabulous. And it was with the other director.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, Peter Sellars?

EMMA AMOS: That's exactly right.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, because I read about it. I didn't get the chance to go.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, and it was really—it was wonderful.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Do you go up to the Lincoln Center?

EMMA AMOS: Mm-hmm, right.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Do you go to the Dizzy—to the jazz at Lincoln Center?

EMMA AMOS: No. Everybody went after—because I was hoping that they were going to go there and we could have a drink. But instead, they walked us several blocks away to another place, and I got to go over and shake her hand.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, Toni's?

EMMA AMOS: Toni's hand, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And they had champagne or something. They gave it to everybody.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, so you went to a reception?

EMMA AMOS: Who would schlep over to this other part of Lincoln Center. It was a very, very nice occasion.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Have you ever done big collaborations like that with people?

EMMA AMOS: No. No, I can't think of any that I've done. And if I have, I'm being very forgetful, but I just can't think of any.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Would you like to have done something like that?

EMMA AMOS: Well, I don't know what a visual artist would do. You know, if you're a writer and you've got a stage play—and it's a stunning stage play—it's a different thing. It's a different thing. I don't know that painters get to move around in the theatrical world very much. I think that some of them do. Just off the top of my head, I can't remember any names anymore. This is so awful.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, did you ever do anything with or meet up with Anna Deavere Smith? Did she ever—

EMMA AMOS: Yes, yes, yes.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: What was that about?

EMMA AMOS: Well, Anna was—I think she posed for me once. And she has interviewed me. And I'm trying to think why.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Was it for one of her pieces?

EMMA AMOS: I don't think so. I can't imagine.

MS. CAMPOS: It was for your video—*Action Lines*.

EMMA AMOS: What is it?

MS. CAMPOS: The documentary on your work. She was interviewing a documentary of you—

EMMA AMOS: For?

MS. CAMPOS: *Action Lines*.

EMMA AMOS: *Action Lines*. Oh, God, yes. I have the tape of that, but I don't know—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: What was *Action Lines*? Just a documentary of—

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, that's the documentary. And I think it's in the back in the studio, up in the little book thing.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And was it a series of—just one of you or a series of documentaries?

EMMA AMOS: I really don't know. The one that I have is just about me.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay, well, that's good. So you're not totally not known. [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: I'm known, but you know, it's not like I've been a great star or anything. I feel that it hasn't been that. I'm not complaining, but it hasn't been that jazzy. Now, I have seen those for sale at the Museum of Modern Art and other places.

MS. CAMPOS: [Off mic.] [Ms. Campos showing it to Ms. Spear Jones. Linda Freeman documentary on Ms. Amos. -NdC]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: 1996, okay. Well, it has a lot of really interesting—so how about you and Miss Ringgold? How long have you all known each other?

EMMA AMOS: Let's see, I know that I went out to one of her lawn party things, once, she gives in New Jersey. And I can't figure out who took me because Bobby would have been alive then, but I don't remember him being there. So could he have dropped me off and somebody else took me or—you know, whatever.

But she gives a good party, and of course, her daughters are there and lots of wonderful people are there. But we have not been, you know, close friends. I went to see her do—when she lost all that weight once and she looked like a million dollars in one of the galleries in her gallery, she came out, after everybody was standing around talking and looking at, maybe, artwork—I can't remember.

She came out dragging a very big bucket of stuff that was—it weighed what she had lost. So she said she was dragging 125 pounds or something like that of the former Faith—[Laughs.]—which was really theatrical and funny and really nice.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Good lord—very Oprah-like.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, it was before Oprah. [Laughs.] Probably.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And who else was I thinking about? So when George C. Wolfe was down the street, do you still kind of try to go to things at—

EMMA AMOS: Not anymore, and I used to go to almost—you know, because it was right up the street and it was wonderful to go there. And I haven't been there in years.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you know Joseph Papp at all?

EMMA AMOS: Well, I met him, but I didn't really know him.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's why I was asking about how the art world has changed so much because when I first came in the '70s, lots of people seemed to know each other. And now it's almost impossible to.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I know. There are so many new people.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, well, or just lots of different kinds of people. And so when you were living down here on this street and there used to be all this loft jazz stuff, were you—did you go across the street and hang out there?

EMMA AMOS: No because that was before we moved here, and I think that—yeah, I'm not exactly sure when we moved here, but I think it was in the late '70s probably. I really don't remember. I really don't remember.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: All right. So talk a little bit more about—then you left, your husband passed. And then so you had to—you left your job. So how have you been taking care of your life, your art, your families and stuff?

EMMA AMOS: It's different because—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And what year did your husband pass?

EMMA AMOS: It's been about five years.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So 2005, 2006.

EMMA AMOS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], it's not very long. And he was my backbone, and we were married for over 40 years. So it was—he could do anything. He was a genius. He could build anything mechanical. Computers—he could build a computer from the ground up and did. And as a hobby, he helped through—I think it was through Gordon Davis because Gordon had so many friends who were New York Times editors and newspaper editors and whatever—and he met them at parties, and they would be grumbling about, "My this broke down."

And pretty soon, he had all these people who were calling him after—he had a job. He was an advertising executive. They said, "Can you come over, Bobby, and fix my whatever"—you know, some computer parts. And these were the guys who had old computers and never wanted to change because they didn't know how to use anything new. And so he would go over wherever they lived and fix their computers so they could use them and find out what parts were missing. He enjoyed doing that. And I miss him terribly.

And then, of course, the kids do come over and, just like my great former assistant Jackson, whose little girl is here now—is visiting—I've had one and another young person come and help. And now I've settled on—I can't do my stuff at the desk. And so then I have Natalia. And I have, sometimes, two studio assistants, but right now it's only one because I don't have a big show coming up. Well, actually, I do, but it's all ready.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And what is this big show?

EMMA AMOS: It's my annual show with Flomenhaft Gallery [New York, NY]. And what else is there that's fabulous? Not much.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, have you been traveling? I know you went to Mali, right?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, that was a little while ago. I went to see Elizabeth Catlett in June. I try to see her once or twice a year, and at 96 or 97, you know, I feel like I should go now, you know. I always want to go down there.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And she lives in Mexico?

EMMA AMOS: She lives in Cuernavaca, Mexico, right. Yes, and she was here for a big anniversary, but she got sick shortly after that. So she's been—so I went in June, and I hope to go right after Christmas.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: What's her house like?

EMMA AMOS: She lives in a beautiful house in Cuernavaca behind a big, stone gate thing that goes around the whole thing. And then when you get inside, it's green grass, and there's her small house where she and her husband—which she and her husband built—and then a mansion on the property that they own now.

But she and this friend of hers had bought the land, and the friend had built the mansion and she had the lovely art house. [Laughs.] And then there was a swimming pool in the middle, and it's all green grass and gorgeous plants and, oh, it's just divine to go there. But she is such an important person in my life, and I just want to be there, you know.

And she's pretty much bedridden. She's not coming down the stairs anymore. And so the last time I went there, I went with all kinds of diagrams for how you can just get a thing on the outside that would just take her up and so that she could go right into her bedroom and she wouldn't have to walk the stairs. But she said no, [laughs] she didn't want to do it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: When did you meet—how did you meet—was she a teacher?

EMMA AMOS: I met her when I invited her to be in this list of women artists. And we had not known each other. And so she came and she posed, and so brought her husband. And he sat off on the side and just watched, you know. And you know, I never spent more than 45 minutes in doing one of these watercolors. So that's when we became friends.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, that's one way to get a good friend. [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: I know. I know. I don't know that she knew who I was. I think she probably didn't.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, now she does. So did you meet other people like that? You said you met Lorna Simpson that way, too?

EMMA AMOS: I probably did. Well, I mean Lorna would have known who I was, just like I knew who she was. And then some people were my friends. Petah Coyne had been my friend for a long time. And Moira Roth, the art historian—I had known Moira for a long time. And just—Kathy Caraccio and Carol Sun.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Who is Kathy Caraccio?

EMMA AMOS: She's my printer, my etching printer, and has been for 30 years. I met her through Bob Blackburn's. She'd been a master printer there. And when she set up her own studio, I went there because, you know, she could just—there was nobody else making a mess, so she could just concentrate on what I was doing or what whoever she was working with at the time was doing.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: What is it like to have that kind of relationship with a—I'm always amazed by printmaking and multiples, because it just seems like there are so many ways in which it could all go wrong.

EMMA AMOS: Well, right, yeah. I taught printmaking for years and learned etching in London and—well, started learning etching at Antioch, but when I went to London, it was completely different. It was much stronger and much more, you know, precise, and it was very good. And then color etching—they had not really heard of that in England.

So coming back and using multiple colors—I'm trying to think, did Bob Blackburn really help me with that or not? I'm not sure. I forget who started me on color etching, but it became the thing that I like to do, you know, with maybe several plates, each one with its own color, or you could do it a la poupée where you're scraping the inks along inside the design or whatever you're doing.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And so working with somebody who does that with you is really a key?

EMMA AMOS: Really good. I like to make the plates, but I don't particularly want to roll the thing. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, one of the things I find interesting about the whole idea of London is that, you know, you're going back to the whole idea of the book person. I'm always thinking of [William] Blake because he's great. And did you see any of his work when you were in London as a young artist or a student, or any of the other sort of master—Paul Hogarth or any of those guys?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I did. I mean, I hung out at the museums. And I still—the last time I went to the museum that I'm thinking of—and of course, I can't remember the name.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Was it the Tate [Modern, London, England, UK] or what?

EMMA AMOS: It must have been the Tate. And I remember going up the stairs and saying, "Where are my friends?" Because we all went there all the time, and so I'm looking to see if I can find one of my old friends sitting there, and of course not. Why would they be there 40 years later, you know, or whatever?

Anyway, yeah. I feel that I've had a charmed life—that it's been very exciting to know the range of artists—first, the male artists—you know, Romy and Norman Lewis, my great love. I just thought he was the greatest. And all those guys—Hale, who I knew before I knew any of them. And then to meet women artists who are spectacular and don't get their due—you know, they just don't. They just don't.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, so you're on the East Coast, and then there was this whole other group that were happening, like Betye Saar and people. Did you guys have correspondences between you—

EMMA AMOS: The people in the West?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah.

EMMA AMOS: Not really. Saar's daughter, Alison, I knew pretty well. But that California group is different from us. Don't ask how. I feel that they're different. I don't know their galleries. I don't know how they manage to be in that group and also in the New York group, which is, I think, good, and I wish that I could do the same. But I don't know anybody out in California, really.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Because I don't remember, were you ever involved with the Just Above Midtown crowd?

EMMA AMOS: Mm-mm. [Negative.] I don't know who they were.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, that's when I saw Betye and David Hammons and all those guys.

EMMA AMOS: No, I guess I didn't know them. And I only saw David Hammons once, and that was when I was with Camille. And they started talking, and I got bored and I just went upstairs. [Laughs.] They were never going to shut up. It was lovely.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, you know, you said that there are some—what are some of the things you want to try to do now? You know, you said you're working—you just finished working on a show for your gallery, and are there other things? I mean, I know you're probably slowing down in some ways, but do you want to do more travel? Do you want to—what do you want to do?

EMMA AMOS: I would like to have a little bit of a presence in Atlanta, and I feel that I've missed—because I haven't kept up with friends in Atlanta, but they were not artists, you know. They were kids that I grew up with. So I'd like to have something to do with them. I've never shown at the High because they didn't show Black artists, but now they do. I would like to have shows in other places. I have so much work, and it's not being seen.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Do curators come and visit?

EMMA AMOS: Every now and then, every now and then. But it's not overwhelming. I don't think women artists get the same amount of attention as male artists. That's just being redundant, but still, we don't. We don't. What else? I'm applying for a couple of fellowships or whatever I could get my hands on. I've had a few. But as a retired person, I mean, I need as much help as I can get. Money is not rolling in, and in fact, it's rolling out. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Are you an emeritus person at Rutgers?

EMMA AMOS: No, no. I haven't talked to any of them forever [Three years -NdC].

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So do you have a—you know, I was wondering because I know that some people use that as a way to at least have an office, you know—a free office and a telephone.

EMMA AMOS: It's too far away. And now that I don't have that cute, little Lexus.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And then Natalia has like turned your page—

EMMA AMOS: She did, and for here, she's talking about the doctor of fine arts from Wooster College [College of Wooster, Wooster, OH] in Ohio—an honorary degree in 1998—and a lifetime achievement award from the Women's Caucus for Art. That was in '09.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Were you one of the people that helped create the Women's Caucus for the Arts?

EMMA AMOS: No.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So it was just already there?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, it must have been already there. I got a Pollock-Krasner Award in 2010. And I'm trying to get a couple of other awards. I went to Brazil with Holly Block.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, wow. What was that like?

EMMA AMOS: Through Art in General, and it was wonderful.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Where did you go in Brazil?

EMMA AMOS: She took us around to see Brazilian artists. They were stunning, and they were showing all over the world. They were mostly men—young men. And they had to—I don't know how they got these gigs, but they had been showing in Germany, in England, in this place and that place, and their work was stunning.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, were you in Rio or were you in São Paulo, or where were you?

EMMA AMOS: We were in São Paulo and Rio. So she took a group of New York artists there. And Holly does good things, but I don't know that she has time do that now that she's at the Bronx—you know, the Bronx Museum [of the Arts, New York, NY]—but maybe. I had a gig at Bellagio, in Italy.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: What were you—what did you do while you were there? I mean, I know you said your great friend—

[Cross talk.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Because I've heard that Bellagio is the perfect place to go.

EMMA AMOS: It's killer. It's a big mountain, and you're up on the top of it. And in order to get down, you've got to walk down through the greenery, and it's just beautiful. And there's a village underneath the mountain. They feed you. There are all these fabulous people from all over the world who are coming to do their art, whether it's painting or whatever, writing.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Was there somebody there you met that you liked while you were there?

EMMA AMOS: I met so many people that I liked. I don't know that I correspond with them, but I really, really liked—there were just tons of people that were fabulous.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: What year was that? It must have been in the '90s.

EMMA AMOS: 1990-something.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, because that's when Vivian died.

EMMA AMOS: And she died while I was there, right.

MS. CAMPOS: [Off mic.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So here's a couple things: Do you focus so much on your own work when you're at these places that you just sort of—what did you want to bring back with you from when you travel? You've been to Mali. You've been to Brazil. Does any of that—do you think of that as stuff that winds up in your work in the way that, you know, things wound up from when you went to London?

EMMA AMOS: It's like landscape. It's like, if you lived in a place with all trees all the time and then you went somewhere where there were all roads everywhere or all cars everywhere, these things just sit in your mind in different clumps. And they add. If you're in green grass all the time, and then you go into gravelly things where it's going to twist your ankle, you remember the lushness of whatever that was, the difference.

And it feeds the—I think it expands the width of your knowledge and makes you a better person and makes you have better memories. And you feel good about this concrete and stuff, but then every now and then, you remember the sand or the color of the earth or the smells or what was flying through the grass or, you know. It's just such a wonderful thing to be able to travel, to be able to be somewhere else.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So I'm going to go way back in a little bit because there's one question I didn't get to ask and I wanted to. Given that you've said you lived a charmed life and that you were lucky in finding your partner, do you think that because you were here at a certain time and because the Civil Rights movement was also happening at the same time, that, that had some deep connection to your capacity to be able to have this relationship and move forward? Did the outside world help feed into that?

EMMA AMOS: The relationship you're thinking about is my husband or my family or—all of that?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But you were in an interracial relationship during a time of, you know, great upheaval.

EMMA AMOS: Mm-hmm, but I went to a college that was mixed—Antioch. And I came from the South, where you could expect to be pushed off the sidewalk, you know. I remember when I was a little girl and a teenager in Atlanta, and my mother and I would go shopping. And if people were coming toward us, they sort of expected you to get off the sidewalk and walk in the street. And that had stopped. It stopped.

Maynard Jackson was—I grew up with him. And we used to go to parties together. He was never a boyfriend, but he was the youngest son of that whole clan of wonderful people. And it was—we all felt very privileged, and we were privileged because we were from very well-educated parents. And this was not like the slums. This was the real deal. This was people who'd come from Texas or they'd come from Florida or they'd come from New York and they wanted to be in Atlanta. And it was really exciting.

And my family, of course, had been born in Georgia. And my grandmother was as white as anything you'd ever seen, only she was part Black. She had bright, blue eyes and white hair and white as snow, and nobody could ever believe that she was not 100 percent white. And my brother is very dark-skinned. And this is true of so many families that I know. They come out looking like everybody that's ever been in the house. [Laughs.] And it's very exciting. I think it's wonderful.

And I think that people who don't know about this should know about the way Blacks live and how they've flourished or how they haven't flourished. Really, we hear a lot about who hasn't flourished, but maybe there's not enough about, yeah, but there are people who strive and try to get to something, and they do sort of make it. And my friends are the ones who always sort of made it. And we were just lucky.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So then you had a sense of being able to be here, to be yourself in as many ways as you could manifest?

EMMA AMOS: Right, right, right. I've lost a lot of things. I'm not playing the piano anymore, and I was really a good pianist. And I'm thinking about banging on it, and then I can imagine the neighbors saying, "What the fuck—" [inaudible] [Laughs.] But anyway, if their children can yell, I can play the piano. I don't know. I just think New York is wonderful. I love it. I love it. And you can always escape, you know. There are so many nice places to go and so many nice friends.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: All right. Want to stop?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, this is good. Thank you very much.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: You're welcome.

[End of disc.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: All right. This is Patricia Jones. I am speaking with Emma Amos on November 26 in New York City in her lovely loft on Bond St. And we're just following up on some of the things we were talking about last week as part of the Smithsonian's Archives of the American Artists [sic].

So we were in your studio looking at many—whoops, let me just make sure this is—we were in your studio looking at various works over, say, the last 20 years or so. And you have several series. One is called *The Falling Series*. Can you talk a little bit about how that came about?

EMMA AMOS: I liked the idea of using the sky instead of having everybody just standing. So I also had a feeling that we were going into a bad period. And I'm not sure whether that was the proper metaphor, but it seemed to be right because I could use the figures as escaping or use the figures as going to a better place, depending on the color or who was holding who or whether it was two or three characters going by.

I liked the idea that if you were falling through the air, that there would be somebody who was trying to catch you or there was somebody holding onto you, so there was two of you together. It just seemed to be an interesting idea, and also to think of the body, as to how you would turn it, where was it going. Were the people afraid? Did they look unhappy? And in general, nobody ever looked unhappy in this series.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Had you seen that wonderful painting by Frida Kahlo of the suicide of Dorothy Hale that shows the—

EMMA AMOS: Unfortunately not. I don't think I had seen that. And I don't know. But I'll have to find it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Because it's sort of a famous—and then the figure is falling because she threw herself out the window, but all her things are around her as she's falling. It's a very interesting and odd and very compelling image.

EMMA AMOS: I can imagine.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, so I thought that was maybe a possible influence. But I know that you go to see Mrs. Catlett, Elizabeth Catlett. And when you visit with her, are there—because I want to go back again to your wonderful palette, your color palette, which is so vivid—and I'm wondering, as you have been going out to, say, South America as opposed to, say, Europe, or if you went to the Caribbean, were there ways in which the blues were bluer, the greens greener? I'm just curious.

EMMA AMOS: When I go to Elizabeth's, it's in Cuernavaca, which is not too far—it's about an hour away from Mexico City, but you're climbing up into the mountains a little bit. When I go to visit her, it's so idyllic. The people in her group live behind walls, mostly, and they have these wonderful walls and then you have to ring the bell and a servant comes and lets you in. And at 97—and she may even be a little bit older than that, let's hope—she is in heaven. You know what I mean? It is just a wonderful, wonderful place.

She had shared it with a friend for years, and the friend had built a big, fancy house. And Elizabeth and Pancho had built a small house that was two stories. The big house was even bigger. It just went on and on and on. And then there's a little guest house between the two owners' houses, and that's always—I've stayed there. I've stayed at Elizabeth's. I've stayed at all those places. And she has a swimming pool.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Nice.

EMMA AMOS: And the trees are loaded with fruits, and they can just go out there and plunk down various pears and apples and whatever is in season. It's splendid, and she looks wonderful there. But when I went there this year, she was really not able to go down the stairs.

And I had gone loaded down with things that I'd collected from how to cope with, you know, not being able to do stairs. And I had pictures of how you could do an outdoor elevator that they would take to her balcony or—I had a whole lot of ideas. I went to a lot of people and asked what there was, but she just wasn't interested. She just wants to be where she is.

And when the boys are not there—you know, she has three sons. One lives here in New York. The eldest son lives here in New York. And David lives in Germany with his young family. And who is the other one? And the youngest lives in Mexico City, and he is able to come every week or anytime that he needs to be. He is a professor and an artist and—well, all the children are artists. She's well taken care of.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: One of the paintings you made many, many years ago was *Will You Forget Me?* [Painting about Amos's mother. -NdC] And so I know that you are very invested in trying to make sure that your art continues long after you are gone. And you may be around for many more years, hopefully, like Mrs. Catlett. So what are you seeing other people doing, and how are all of you trying to figure out ways to make this happen for each other?

EMMA AMOS: I don't put myself anywhere near the class of Elizabeth. She has been in the eye of the public for years and years and years. There are so many books written on her, so many wonderful lectures, so many things at the Museum of Modern Art. My career hasn't been quite like that.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, yours is more—she is—

EMMA AMOS: She's an icon.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, yeah, at this point. Probably, if she stayed in Chicago, she might not have been. So you never know. I mean, that's—you know, but one of the things that I

remember when I first came to New York City in the '70s was that there were a lot—there were many, many artists here, obviously, and doing different kinds of things. And they all sort of had very—I mean, it was a smaller art world and it was a less commodified art world.

And so people had, you know, real jobs in the public school system. They had actual things they could do. So they had many—and they had, like, smaller collectors, people who were all over the place. So I know for a fact that there are lots of African-Americans who collect African-American artists, if not exclusively, just so that the Black artists could flourish.

And so I don't know what the pressures have—how the pressures have changed—in terms of the market—have changed for you and others who also were part of that wonderful stew of artists. Because you obviously have had, you know, this career. You've been a teacher, and you've been presented in many places. And you have these great series. You have *Falling*. Now you have *Dive*, which—can you talk a little bit about that, too, because I loved what I just saw—in your studio?

EMMA AMOS: Well, *Dive* is like going back to *The Falling Series*. I think that *The Falling Series* was so much fun because it meant that you had to see the body in different kinds of ways—not a standing figure, not a lying-down figure, but a figure either in a kind of anxious position but also there could be some joy in flying through the air.

I love the idea of flying through the air. And I never did one with a parachute because I thought, "Why bother?" You know, there are parachuters all the time. So it was just a way to be a little more free and not so grounded with the floor.

The last two paintings I've done have been—no feet in them, so they're like three-quarters figures and big canvases. I think I showed them to you. And that also felt sort of right because certainly in the first one that I made, I had her looking out the window. I invented a window with greenery. I think that, that's the most fun I have is figuring out what I want to paint next.

And is it going to be a rich enough idea to keep me going for a while because I don't want to have one of these and one of that and one of the other thing and not have them kind of connect. It's important to me not to just be drawing and painting any old thing. I want some—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So you have a narration going, maybe?

EMMA AMOS: Well, narrative kind of stuff is always there. I hope it will be there. I'm a big reader, so—you know, and I do admire so many writers. And I don't want to do the same thing over again. I like to find something that can make a kind of a series, but otherwise, I don't want to do the same thing again.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So with that particular series, were those—once you've sort of closed the book, as it were, on that series, were they shown all together, or how were they installed?

EMMA AMOS: Generally, if I'm having an exhibition somewhere, I do try to put together things that can group, you know, so that people can see—"Oh, yeah. Look at that. All of those are related in some way." And I think that's a practical thing. It's like if every page that you turned in a novel had a whole 'nother thing, you know. So you want things to sort of connect, and you would like them to feel that they grow in meaning as they begin to connect.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, what's the response to *The Falling Series*?

EMMA AMOS: *The Falling Series*, I think, had a good response. Nobody bought anything. [* Gives the wrong impression of Emma's history. -NdC] I don't sell anything—nothing. Do I have people standing in line, you know, dying to buy them? No, I don't. And I don't know whether—I don't know what that's about. I really don't know what that's about. But I've never made anything to sell, and by all means, they don't. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, I guess one of my questions is are you encountering or working with, you know, younger curators? Are they finding you or—I mean, because there seems to be a huge curatorial class now that's sort of running around the world, and are you in contact or dialogue with them?

EMMA AMOS: No. The only person I've seen in the last couple of years, I believe, is someone from The Studio Museum.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: [Thelma Golden -NdC] was, I guess, the head curator.

EMMA AMOS: This young woman—I'm going to have to look it up and give it to you. She came, she looked, and then she came back. And she asked if I would give a talk at The Studio Museum. And I did that, I think it was, last month. And it was a big audience, and it was like over 400 people.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Wow, that's amazing for The Studio Museum.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I know. Well, they have a new downstairs. Yeah, right. So that was nice.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Was that in connection with the Spiral exhibition?

EMMA AMOS: I'm trying to think. It might have been, yes. That might have been the thing because I think I'm it when it comes to Spiral. Who else is there? Oh, Mayhew—Richard Mayhew is still alive. But anyway, it was very exciting to get that little bit of attention because it was nice. I was very lucky in that the black-and-white paintings that we had done at Spiral—and we did it because we wanted to look like we talked to each other sometime and we just didn't go about our own business and never put together a show—and so we had put together a black-and-white show.

This was a long time ago. And everybody did it, and it was a wonderful show. And I had sold the two pieces that I had done, and those people didn't want to lend them. So I put an older piece that was all color, and so it really stood out in that show. And I think that's why they put it on the cover. The curator was very, very smart and very good, and I think she just decided, "Okay, everything else was black-and-white, but Emma's is in color, and we're going to use it."

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Now I understand why—because I was looking at all the other things and going, "This is"—you know, besides the fact that you were the only woman in the show and one of the few people that had female figures of any sort in the paintings. And I was going, "Well, what's the difference?" Good, now I understand.

EMMA AMOS: Now you understand. It was because the boys—you know, everybody had said, "We're going to do black-and-white things," and my black-and-white things were gone.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So that's where the *Conjure Woman* wound up for Mr. Bearden?

EMMA AMOS: I forget who owns that. Yeah, that's why they did all those, exactly.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's very interesting. So obviously, you guys were really influencing each other in very powerful ways.

EMMA AMOS: Well, it was—I don't know whether you ever talked to Norman, but during the time of Spiral, Romy came in and said—he had a whole bunch of papers with figures in them that he'd been collecting. He said, "I wish that we could do something together with these." And he put all these kind of cut-out things that he got out of newspapers, out of magazines and whatever, and he threw them on the floor.

And he said, "Is there anything that we could do with these?" And people sort of glowered. [Laughs.] "Well, why don't you do something with them because we don't want to stop doing what it is we're doing to do this. So you do it." And he did. [Laughs.] And he really—it changed what he did. That was the beginning of, I think, his top period.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So he wasn't doing collages beforehand any?

EMMA AMOS: I don't think so, no. We'd have to look that up.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: With that level of intensity, maybe.

EMMA AMOS: Right. Yeah, he must have done it but, yeah, right.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, you know, that's one of the reasons I was asking you earlier about if you ever got a chance to do, you know, more collaborations or work with other artists. And then I realized that one of the other things you sent was this, which is the *We Shall Not Forget* [sic] Ralph David Abernathy memorial that you designed. Can you talk a little bit about how that came about and what you had to do to make it happen because it looks like a big piece, a big project?

EMMA AMOS: It was a big project. It took a couple of years. I'm hazy. I'm trying to think. It was a combination of a white curator and another group that decided to ask me to do it. Now, why they did it, I don't know. What does it say on the—what's the date?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: It's 1996, designed by Emma Amos for the Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta. And so it has a photo, text, engraved stone, paths, plantings, bronze chair and lectern in some kind of group. And it looks amazing. I mean, is it like a quarter of an acre or something like that?

EMMA AMOS: I can't say how big it is, but it's probably something like that. It was in a neighborhood that had been a slum, and it was very close to Atlanta University [Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA] and those places but also very close to Five Points—not Five Points, to—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Downtown?

EMMA AMOS: Downtown, yeah, right, and near the Olympic stadium. And I'm trying to think where the Olympics was. It might have been somewhere around that time, yeah, that it came into it. So anyway, they were willing to do that, and price was nothing. So everything that I gave them in the way of drawings—that I wanted a bench and I'd love it to be a bench that people could swing in—and I think we ended up not having a swinging bench, but we have a permanent bench under a gazebo that's covered with flowers and things like that.

And then we have the oval that has the bench, and it has references to Martin Luther King embedded in the wonderful Georgia clay-colored ovals. So there are three ovals in the park. One has greenery; one has the bench and all the references to Martin Luther King [Jr.]; and the other one is a spot where there is a king's chair. And I had a student from Rutgers who designed the king's chair with me, and he was working for the great ironworkers in New Jersey.

And he made the king's chair, and he understood it because he was African. You know, he really wanted to help me do this. And oh, just his name is just going from me, but I will get it for you. He came down, and he worked on—he worked on this bench in New Jersey at the foundry, and then he came down and installed it. And it is a king's chair.

And the last time I was in Atlanta, which was quite a while ago, there was a man with his family. And he was a big, fat, corpulent Black man. And he was sitting in his chair, like this, and the women and the children were all around him. And so this, I think, has become a place for people to go and get their photographs taken in this chair. It's such a wonderful thing. There's also a lectern sort of to the left of it when you're sitting there. And I'm sure that somebody has stood at it and made, you know, a lecture. I'm sure, I'm sure because it's there. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And how did the Abernathy family—because this was the Ralph David Abernathy memorial—what were their responses to that?

EMMA AMOS: She was so excited. Mrs. Abernathy was so sweet and so excited. And I'm sure they go and do things there, and I hope they do. It's just a marvelous thing.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: It's very colorful, and it seems to honor your Atlanta roots in many kinds of ways. And it looks like the mosaics are like your little mini-paintings. Is that what they are?

EMMA AMOS: The mosaics are a quilt. So it's supposed to be a quilt that's flowing over the bench. So you're theoretically sitting on a wonderful quilt. And there are scraps of "quilt" that are embedded in the wonderful Georgia clay cement.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So have you had a chance to do other sort of 3-D things?

EMMA AMOS: Never. [... * Amos did other public artwork commissions, such as "The Sky Is the Limit" (New York City Public School, 1994) and 3D installations. -NdC]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Wow. I hope you'll get to do something else because this is quite beautiful.

EMMA AMOS: That was very important to me because it was Atlanta. And I'm not sure—my mother probably had died by that time, and my father lived to be 96. My mother died when she was 70, so I think he knew about it, but I don't know that he saw it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Was he in a home?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, by that time, he might have been in that home.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But other family members, I'm sure, were—

EMMA AMOS: Well, I don't know that. You know, I didn't take the kids down there. Bobby came down. My husband came down.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So this was in '96, and so you haven't had those kinds of opportunities.

EMMA AMOS: No.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Have you seen other of your friends get a chance to do these kinds of things, or is it just that they just sort of are once in a lifetime?

EMMA AMOS: I don't think I've seen anybody else have that, but then I don't know—you know, I don't know what other goodies other people have done. I would imagine that—hmm.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I mean, if Faith Ringgold or Camille Billops or somebody had one of these things, you would know?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, right. Right. I don't think Camille has ever done anything like that, but I would wonder about some of the other, younger artists. And I think that Faith probably gets a lot of commissions. I think she does, yeah.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I know you retired as a teacher, but do you still sometimes dabble with teaching?

EMMA AMOS: No.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: No? Not even privately?

EMMA AMOS: No, no, no. I taught at Rutgers for many years. I'm not able to say it was 30, but it was somewhere around there. And at the end, I had become chair, which is not fun. [Laughs.] And so my husband was dying, and that was my excuse for leaving. You know, it was just too much. I couldn't be in the same place, and I remember running to—my son had given me a gorgeous, little Lexus, and I was able to go out there. And I was so glad to give him back the Lexus so that he could sell it and make some money back. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Aw, you didn't keep it?

EMMA AMOS: No, I didn't have any need for it. You know, once I wasn't at Rutgers, what, was I going to drive it to the garage and pay all that money every—you know, so it was over. [Laughs.] That little thing was over.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's funny. What are you looking at—I know you're working on these things—what are you looking at now? What kind of work are you seeing that—you know, if there are younger artists whose work you kind of enjoy, are you in contact with them?

EMMA AMOS: Yes. I know a number of young artists, and I try to keep up with them. My closest friend worked for me for many years, and his name is Jackson Lenoan. And now Jackson is teaching, and he is showing his work all over.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: He's the young man with the lovely child—the little baby?

EMMA AMOS: Yes, the beautiful baby.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay. It is a really beautiful baby, for the record.

EMMA AMOS: Right. [Laughs.] And so I'm very proud of him, and there are others. But Jackson actually comes over to make sure that I'm alright, which is sweet. You know, it's very, very nice. Are there other students? Because of Skowhegan—being a governor of Skowhegan—I have met the cream of the crop of young artists.

And young, nowadays, goes all the way up to 35, and every now and then, we take a 40-year-old. I'm on the board of Skowhegan, and the board gets together and we look at the works of all

the people who want to come. So it's 65 people in the summer get to come out of a group of around 4,000 applicants.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Wow.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, they know that it's serious business when you get there and that you're going to be taught by these really amazing people. And the people who are teaching them are not me, anymore. I mean, I have taught there. But we choose a range of people to be there every summer for these young people. And young people—we've had as old as 50. We're not too thrilled about that because when they first started Skowhegan, it was 18 to maybe 20.

But now we have 29-year-olds who have finished Harvard [University, Cambridge, MA] or wherever, and we're trying to keep the age below 40, although if we get a 40-year-old or even a 50-year-old who is an artist who hasn't gone to school and he gets to show his work in that big competition too, who gets to come, and the work is fabulous but he's obviously not ever had any push or anything, we'll take somebody like that. They may feel lost, though, because the kids now average between 24 and 30.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Do you think that this crop of emerging artists are maybe almost too well-trained?

EMMA AMOS: I don't think so. I think what they learn is humility. They come in so happy that they got in, and then when they see the competition, their eyes kind of roll. And there's a kind of a feeling of, "Damn, I'm so lucky to be here," because wherever they had been—they might have been at Yale; they might have been at Morehouse; they might have been, you know, all these various places—but when they get there, they're no better than they were.

They have to strive to be as good as they can possibly be, and it's very nice to see them not taking advantage of other people but taking advantage of, "Oh my goodness. I really have to make some leaps," you know. It's very nice.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So is Skowhegan—I mean, did you ever go to any of the other artist colonies, or is Skowhegan the only one you—

EMMA AMOS: I have been to—now I'm going to have a senior moment, and I might have to—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Like MacDowell [Colony, Peterborough, NH] or Yaddo [Saratoga Springs, NY]?

EMMA AMOS: I've done Yaddo. I haven't applied to MacDowell, and I should. I have done Bellagio, now.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: You know, which is really—that's like top of the line.

EMMA AMOS: That was wonderful. That was just killer. I loved that.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did somebody just say, "You should apply," and you just said, "Okay?"

EMMA AMOS: Well, when I heard about it, that's when I decided that I would apply. And when I went there, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. I mean, it was just this beautiful mountain in Italy and so many scholars. It was more interesting because there were scholars and artists and musicians, and you all ate—we all ate dinner at the same time and lunch at the same time, and then we went off to our little caves and did what we were doing. It was just heaven.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Is there somebody from that particular adventure that you are still in contact with?

EMMA AMOS: Yes, there are a number of them, and I can't call any names because—I can't remember their names. I'd have to go through my book.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I know we were talking about it last time. Well, one of the things that I said to you that I knew people—actually, I know somebody who is there right now. And I told him, you know, that I know 10 different people who have gone to Bellagio and I envy every last one.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah. You should apply.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, I did, and I didn't get in.

EMMA AMOS: Well, don't stop. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, maybe I'll apply and now that I'm really old, maybe they'll take me. But what is it about [Cough.] artist colonies that—I mean, I know that Yaddo was—I went there, and it was interesting. [Cough.] Excuse me. [Cough.] Let me turn this off for a second.

[End of disc.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay, I think we're all right. Hello?

EMMA AMOS: Hello.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: All right, that's talk. All right, back to Bellagio. And I hope this is not covering something else. And if it is, well, there you go. Well, you were in the monastery.

EMMA AMOS: I was in the monastery, which was down by the water. And so Lake Como is all around, and when you're up at the mansion, you can see all these other mansions around at night—you know, twinkling little lights everywhere and these big things. So this had been—Bellagio's spot had been owned by a very rich American.

And she—when the Germans came and they wanted to take everything, she and her servants hid as much of the beautiful stuff as they could. And then they got out of there, and then the Germans inhabited this space for a long time until they lost it. And I think the story was that the villagers down at the bottom where the water is, where the lake is—they massacred the Germans as they were fleeing.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Ooh.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah. They got them. They got them. They said, "No, no, no. You've mistreated us. You've shot us. You've done all these things. And you're not going to be able to flee." So they ambushed them coming down the mountain. But anyway, it was a wonderful, wonderful place to be, and I met a lot of writers, opera singers, pianists. How many painters were there? There were one or two. It was ideal for people writing books because they gave them wonderful spaces and lots of privacy. And the food was divine. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: All I hear was just all about the food and the wine, you know. I think Ruth Maleczek still talks about that to this day. And I think she's still at the table. [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: She's still at the table, exactly. I couldn't go down, though, because of my knees. But it never occurred to me to even try. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, now tell me a little bit more about your social life. I mean, I know we were starting to talk a little bit about your annual parties. And Janet Goldner said that she used to go, and I said, "Oh, I wish I could have gone."

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, well, you can. This year, we'll get both of you to come. I like to have one party a year, and that's about all I can do. And it's fun. It's fun when it's over. [Laughs.] I don't know. I was thinking about parties and how I think my age group is kind of petering out. You know, I'm not going to as many parties as I used to. And I think people are tired. But I'm definitely going to have my party—definitely.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, now, do you cook, or is it catered?

EMMA AMOS: No, I try to get it catered now. I mean, I think I might have been dumb enough to try to cook for some things. I will try to have a little bit of a down-home feeling. So there might be black-eyed peas and greens, but there will be all these other things because people look at black-eyed peas and greens and say, "What is that?" [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's what you're supposed to have on New Year's Day.

EMMA AMOS: A lot of people know, and all I have to do is say, you know, the greens are for the money. That brings you money for the rest of the year. And the black-eyed peas are for good luck. And then they sort of start nibbling, and I say, "You've got to try it." [Laughs.] And they'll tell me how it worked out the next year.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yes, that's fun. So you said last time you had—Geoffrey Holder came. So you have, like, a mix of performing people and artists and—

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, well, that was the first time he came, and he stayed longer than anybody. It was hysterical. He had a little group, you know. It's mostly artists, a few musicians. But it's mostly artists and friends, you know. They're just good friends, and if I don't invite them, they think I've died.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay, so you have to invite them. Well, who are some of the musicians?

EMMA AMOS: Let me think, now. I probably can't name a single soul. And I can't. I just can't.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Are they jazz players or classical musicians?

EMMA AMOS: One is a classical pianist—and of course, then I have to worry about my piano being in—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: In tune?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah. I used to invite—oh, what's her name? Oh, goodness. A young woman who was teaching me jazz piano because I studied piano for years and years and years—Sudhalter. And her brother is a famous trumpeter, and she has a band—Carol Sudhalter. And so maybe I'll try to get Carol to come because that would be fun.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So do people like Butch Morris or Greg Harris or any of those crazy guys?

EMMA AMOS: No, I don't know them. I don't know them.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: My generation.

EMMA AMOS: Right, right, right. I don't know any really famous musicians.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, you know Kenny Clarke.

EMMA AMOS: Well, that's true. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So as far as I know, that's pretty—I assume that you probably knew Abbey Lincoln. I have no idea—

EMMA AMOS: No, I wish I did. Gosh, she was so great.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did you get to see her often?

EMMA AMOS: No, I only saw her once, once, once.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Now, did you ever see Alberta Hunter when she was—

EMMA AMOS: Yes, indeed, I did. [Laughs.] I ain't crazy.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay. I wrote about her for *Essence* magazine.

EMMA AMOS: Did you really?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I did. It was my last column before they finally—[inaudible]. And I just said, "I'm just going to write about Alberta Hunter. I don't care what you guys"—"No, you should do this." "No, I'm writing about Alberta Hunter. She's 73 years old, and I'm going to write about her." They were like, "Okay."

EMMA AMOS: How old was she when she died?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I think she was 77 maybe—something like that. But you know, and then she didn't perform for a couple of decades.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, yeah. Well, she was magnificent.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So did you know, like, Thelonious Monk or any of those guys?

EMMA AMOS: Well, I went to see him all the time. I have a wonderful photograph of Thelonious. I think my favorite was the big, fat guy. Now I'm not going to be able to say his name.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oscar Peterson?

EMMA AMOS: No. Well, Oscar Peterson, of course. He had a band, and he was killer. Okay, we'll have to come back to that because how am I ever going to find his name? And he was very famous.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, it wasn't Count Basie because he wasn't very big.

EMMA AMOS: No, no. This was a younger man, but he's been dead for, what, 15 years or more.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh, I wonder who that was.

EMMA AMOS: He had a big band, and he had wonderful—he played the piano. Is that all he did? And he had—oh, God, it was right there and then it went.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: You'll remember later.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I'll come up with it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So you saw Monk a lot. And did you know those guys who used to perform in a loft on 23rd Street back in the '70s?

EMMA AMOS: I don't think so. I don't think so. This was—oh, there was—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, there was Joe Louis's place.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, there was. Everybody was in that place.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, I know. I know, I saw them.

EMMA AMOS: No, I didn't know about Joe Louis.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But he was over there. He was right across the street.

EMMA AMOS: Mm-hmm. And this was a junkie street, you know? It was nothing good.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I know, but everybody made it to it. And we also made it to Ali's Alley to hear Rashied Ali's stuff. And did you see 'Trane—Coltrane?

EMMA AMOS: Yes. Yeah. This was a big, fat guy playing piano.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Big, fat guy playing piano. Okay. I have no idea. I don't know. I'm trying to think of all the piano players I can think of and none of them are big and fat. That's the problem. But it doesn't matter.

EMMA AMOS: We went to see him on—what was on Bleecker Street? There were so many bars on Bleecker Street.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: The Five Spot?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah. Well, yeah.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: The Five Spot was kind of all over the place.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, right. Okay.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Now, did you know Zake and all those—you know, because she's a little bit older than me?

EMMA AMOS: Ntozake?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah. I had met her. I wouldn't say that I really knew her. Right, yeah. I think I have her book up there somewhere.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, you probably were in the audience for *For Colored Girls* when it first hit.

EMMA AMOS: Oh, absolutely. Definitely.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, because we were all sitting in the public theater going, "Oh, wow. Oh, wow, oh wow, oh wow." So you have musicians. You have artists. And you talked a little bit about bell hooks. How did you guys get together, and how did that book come about?

EMMA AMOS: Oh, now, how did I meet bell? I hate being old and forgetful, but I've forgotten how I met bell. And I miss her something awful because when she moved back to Kentucky, that was like, you know, terrible—just terrible. Because she kept her house here for the longest time, and whenever she came, she would come visit and we would hang out. How did I meet her?

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Did she contact you?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, she would call me whenever she was coming into town, and we would do whatever we could. We would go to dinner, or we would go to see something or whatever. We were really, really tight. And now, when she went back to take care of her parents, that was the end of it. We corresponded a little bit but not a lot.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But she did do this book, so how did you feel about that?

EMMA AMOS: Well, it wasn't a book about me.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, I know, but you're in it.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I'm in it. Yeah, I know. I thought it was great. I think that I thought it was really, really great. She's so bright, and she's very kind of closed unless she really knows you.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, I met her a few times. She's funny. Do you see—I'm going back to that whole curatorial thing—do you see, now that you've had the sort of contact with The Studio Museum and, possibly, that might build from something else, the idea the maybe younger people will start to look at the '70s and '80s in a way of, I mean, sort of maybe connecting some of the kinds of activism—cultural activism—that was going on with what's going on now? Do you think that might happen?

EMMA AMOS: I wonder. I don't know what things hinder them. You know, I don't know whether they feel it's an open field now or do they struggle a little bit like we had to struggle a lot. They are different from us. I mean, I grew up in Atlanta, where David Levering Lewis and my brother and a whole bunch of girls—I was too young to be put in this thing—were sent to college, and when they were, like, 13. And my mother and father said, "You're not going to do it." But Larry did it for a while—my brother.

And there was a period, you know, where young, Black people were being pushed to make it go faster. And in Atlanta with all those universities, colleges and whatnot, it seemed that people like David Levering Lewis was not going to go—I think he might have gone to Morehouse for a year or something like that. My brother did, too. And people were doing things that would lead them into another big school. Either they would get to Yale or they would get to Harvard or they would get to wherever.

And they all were just going to make it really big, and they did very well. And we were so proud of them. And I sort of did the same thing but in a different way because I was 16 when I went to college. And then when I went to London and all those other places, it was the equivalent, but you know, it was a little bit different. It was a little bit different.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, when I think of—I mean, I just read that article in today's Times about how Atlanta is becoming the Black celebrity capital. [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: I don't believe that. I saw it and then forget about it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But it has been a major—I mean, when I was at the New Museum, we put up the Thornton Dial exhibition, and so I already knew that there was a significant number of collectors and a lot of things were going on there.

Do these young people sort of see that critical mass—I mean, I'm thinking about Kara Walker and her, you know, very quick rise. And does it feel like the activism, the work that you and other

people did in the '60s, '70s, and early '80s—it has sort of paid off in that way? Or does it just mean that every once in a while, somebody just kind of—

EMMA AMOS: I think that you're onto something in that it's a rolling ball that's picking up more and more people. And they are learning. It's kind of sweet to see it. I don't remember being in that rolling ball, but I must have been, you know, in a funny kind of way. I think all of us in Atlanta or in Mississippi or in whatever—anybody who felt like they wanted to get out and move—we were privileged.

My family was an old Atlanta family, and we could go anywhere. We went to camp. We went to this. I remember my brother went to a communist camp, and we didn't—[Laughs.]—we didn't know it was a communist camp until he got there. And his best friend was the son of one of the big Chinese generals. And it was just like, oh.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Oh my goodness. Lord have mercy.

EMMA AMOS: But my godmother, my mother's classmate from Fisk [University], had suggested that Larry go there. And I think she knew it was somewhat red, but she didn't know it was that red. [Laughs.] And it didn't hurt him one bit. You know, kids are kids.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Hey, if he knows people from China right now, he must be doing quite well.

EMMA AMOS: He would. That would be great, but no, I don't think he has any contact with that lovely guy, whoever he was. [Laughs.] But yeah, we were special. We thought we were special, and it's not really true. You know, we're just huffing along now like everybody else. I think that superior knowledge and access is open to everybody now. It's just that they have to be smart enough to know that, that's where they should be going. And that's not always the case. So there needs to be a lot of mentoring, and I try to mentor as much as I can.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So that's the connection with Skowhegan and—

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, that and Rutgers. I mean, the kids at Rutgers were not—you know, not rich kids. They were not rich kids.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's a public university, right?

EMMA AMOS: That's right. And you know, trying to lift them up and make sure that they got everything and learned everything and whatever was very important to me.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, it seems that—I guess I would go back again to that question I had a little bit earlier about how, then, are you preparing to keep this legacy going? Are you working with your children on being able to—I mean, I know that—because you know, I think one of the things you said is you didn't know whether—what was happening with Vivian Brown's work.

And she's an extremely important member of the arts community, especially the women's community. So you know, I know that Michele Wallace is sort of taking care of Faith's stuff, but how are people—you know, because also, I know a lot of people who died from AIDS, and so I know that one of the things that Visual AIDS did was start a legacy project. But what is that—is there some version of that for African-American artists?

EMMA AMOS: Not that I know of. I don't know of any special projects for that. It makes you want to figure out a way to have people make lists. And in a way, I'm not sure if this project that you're working with won't help that. I think it will help that.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I think it will. I think it will.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, I think it's very important, what you're doing.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: You know, one of the things that—when I was talking to Betsy about this is, you know, because when—one of the things that I think is going on in the art world right now is a rewriting of modern art history.

I was talking to people about the Roberta Smith review of the Pacific Standard Time exhibitions that were going on right now in California and the fact that, you know, in the New York Times, there's this room that has Maren Hassinger, David Hammons, Senga Nengudi and somebody

else—I can't remember who—Mel Edwards, yeah—all in one, you know. That would not have been there 20 years ago. I know it wouldn't have been there 20 years ago. There might have been a picture of David. There might have been a picture of Mel. There might have been, maybe, a mention of Senga—maybe, probably not.

And so I think that's why I was asking about the younger curators because I think what they're trying to do is to find out what was really—who were talking to each other so that, you know—because the kind of way in which downtown New York is framed, especially in the '60s, is that there were like, you know, 20 people in the Bowery. They all knew each other. Eva Hesse, like, you know, killed herself working on her art. And somehow, I don't think she ever knew any other women, sort of.

You know, if you read the—and I'm like, "I don't think that's true." You know, the part about her killing herself with the materials is kind of true, but then not knowing other people? No. And so when you read, like, Hettie Jones's memoirs or you read some other people, you realize that there was this incredible connection of especially women because people had to deal with things like they were raising their children. They didn't have strollers. They didn't exist, in a certain kind of way. I mean, so that there were all these kinds of practical things that, literally, women artists had to kind of work with each other to figure out just so they could take care of their children, their husbands, their boyfriends or whatever and do their work.

EMMA AMOS: You know, when my kids were little and I was running off, doing that television show, I felt guilty. And at the same time, I felt this was the first time that Boston show had ever had a Black person. And it was—they were scared to do it, and they gave me that wonderful—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Producer?

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, right—person to work with. But they just hadn't thought of it. They hadn't thought of it, you know? And it was really a very special moment. And I've had moments like that many times but nothing as big as that. I think that, that was the best. That was probably the best. And when we went to WGBH and, you know, the guy had just never thought of having a Black person, you know. And it worked. It worked. It really worked.

So I don't know. I think I've been very lucky, and I try to be open to younger people and try to help them, but now that I'm not teaching anymore, it's a little hard. You know, I've lost that connection, mostly—mostly. But when I hear that one of my students is having an exhibition somewhere, I take my little behind there. I want to see and I want to support them. And that might be all I can do with them, you know.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's a lot.

EMMA AMOS: Because I don't have a great, big crown that says, "I can take you with me," because I'm not going anywhere, myself. [Laughs.] It's not all that big.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, you know, I think that I guess what I sense from all of this is that what you represent and what a lot of people represent is the long haul. You didn't come here—well, who knows?

You may have come here to have fun and then wound up doing all kinds of things, but you know, it doesn't strike—I think there are a lot of people who want to be celebrities or they want—or they think they have the most amazing ideas about art, and they push that. And they do—they try. But I think a lot of people don't ever think about, when they're in their 20s and 30s, "Where will I be in my 50s and 60s and 70s with this?" I think musicians do, especially composers because they live long lives.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, they do. Yeah, they do.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: But I think everybody else—I don't think they have a sense of that.

EMMA AMOS: Well, I wonder because I think musicians and artists are so much similar. But they have to play every night. We don't. We don't have to perform that way. So I think we're a little bit slippy [ph] in that way. If we had to perform all the time, we had to get gigs all the time—actually, I would recommend that we had to. [Laughs.]

I would recommend that we should—you know, that we should be trying to be out there a little bit more. And that's what having a really good gallery helps, but we never know whether a

gallery is going to be a good gallery or a real pain. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, sometimes, you have to—I'm just making sure that this is still recording. Yes, it is. So I guess that's one of the reasons why I'm sort of thinking about—when I'm asking you about some of these people, you know, like I see Mel Edwards and Jayne Cortez, and I see Jayne really pushing *Yari Yari*, you know, trying to make that connection with African women writers, you know, I know that you did a lot of work with people in the '80s, especially with Heresies and the clandestine women's activist group that you cannot name.

And so I guess to me, what does it feel—I guess the question, then, because I've had this myself—is what does it feel like to have done all this stuff, to be, at this point, a figure in history, but you're still working?

EMMA AMOS: Hmm. I feel that I must work. I feel a little disappointed because I am not known throughout the country, and I don't quite know what to do about that. I have a little niche here in New York, a tiny niche in Atlanta. Well—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: You have some collectors—the Davises and—

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, but nobody comes in and buys. I haven't sold anything this year at all. I don't know whether the economy is bad or people's walls are covered. You know, the last time I was in the Davises' house, they don't have any room. [Laughs.] And they don't have a major collection, either. I would like to have a list of people who are good collectors, and I don't. And I don't know how to get one, anyway.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Has people from, like, the New Museum—any of those guys—come through here?

EMMA AMOS: Mm-mm, mm-mm. [Negative.] [...-NdC]

No. And I was a member of the New Museum for the last couple of years, but I don't go in there. You know, I find it a little cold.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, it's strange.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah, it's a strange place.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: I mean, I used to work for it, obviously, and it's just different. I mean, I think it just has, you know, a Marcia—somehow when Marcia died, the soul kind of went with it, which is interesting when you think about it—which is a funny, odd—

EMMA AMOS: The Museum of Modern Art is kinder to me, but they haven't done anything for me lately. And even what they've done for me is to just have a piece. But have they ever come here? No. No. So I feel that we are in a—that Black artists are in a second-class position, if not even a third-class position. We are not—we don't get what we should, whereas I think that musicians do because everybody loves music.

Everybody loves music, and music is cheaper. You can go. You can buy albums. You can go see them. It's like partying, whereas art is not the same. I think it's difficult. It's a difficult decision to become an artist if you're not going to teach. And once you're through teaching, it's even more difficult. [Laughs.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: So the issue then becomes that idea of having that great gallery or a gallerist or a series of collectors.

EMMA AMOS: Having better galleries, and having—

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: And some Black artists now do have that.

EMMA AMOS: Yeah. Oh, some do. Some do. And I have talked to Natalia, my assistant, as to what could we do to find somebody in Nashville? What could we do to find somebody in, you know, other cities? And I guess it's really up to me, you know, to do that.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Well, at this point, all artist are entrepreneurs—and I mean, that's not just visual artists.

EMMA AMOS: They should be.

[Cross talk.]

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: The only reason I get my poems published or get gigs is because I try to find people and network and social media myself to death. It's boring sometimes, but you have to do that, I mean, because we're not in Europe where artists—you know, you get a stipend if you pass through the gates and stuff. But it is sort of sad to think about, you know, given the kinds of—I mean, I was reading The Studio Museum's catalog about the birth of the museum—you know, that exhibition a few years—*Tradition and Conflict*, I think.

EMMA AMOS: Oh, God. I didn't see it.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Yeah, and looking at, you know, what some people were talking about—Benny Andrews's comments, Lucy Lippard talking about women, all the stuff from the '60s and the '70s—and thinking, you know, there clearly are things that have changed. And you're right. One of the things I think Quincy Troupe said to me about younger poets was that he didn't—he says, "They're just confused."

And I thought that was an interesting way of thinking about how people are dealing with issues of identity and position. And I think it is a very—it is a confusing time because, you know, we haven't overcome, but we're not at the back of the bus, either. So where are we? You know, and I think a lot of your work, looking at *Falling*, looking at *Dive*, looking at the pieces that are about musicians—the one that what's her name—*Nina Simone is Blue*. [Artwork title incorrect; possibly "Billie Holiday"? -NdC] I love that.

EMMA AMOS: Oh, yes, loved her.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: The heroes—there are several things that you're trying to do around issues of identity.

EMMA AMOS: Oh, absolutely, always. And I try to make a painting resonate in some kind of way, and I've started working on a new series of just men because I've done so many women. And women are fun to do, you know, and they're so colorful. And I sat here for the last 10 days with tracing paper and white paper and this and cutting out and doing things, and I finally decided that I'm going to make the men just silhouettes because I didn't want to do—I don't want to do Black men and white men because they are not equal.

Black men are so—they're not as—I can't even say what it is. They're in more trouble than Black women. Black women have so much to hold them together. It's that they have babies and they often have to take care of them by themselves, and so their self-esteem is just better than male self-esteem. Because when a man has a baby and he can't take care of it, he scoots. That's what Black men will do. And I don't know whether white men do it, either, but it's a problem.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: That's why there are laws about getting men to pay their child support.

EMMA AMOS: Absolutely. It's so difficult. It's really difficult. And you know, I don't know where I'm going with this, but I feel like somehow or other, I want to do better. I want to make a little more of a trail than I have. And so by taking the power—I've just been making all these sketches—I've been going through newspapers; I've been going through books; I've been going through—of men and trying to figure out how to make them look strong, powerful and sexy and all those things. And that's my newest hope to do.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay. Sounds good to me. [Laughs.] Are you tired, darling?

EMMA AMOS: I'm tired, I guess. We can stop anytime.

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES: Okay. Why don't we stop there? I think that's a good place to stop. Stopping with sexy is always good. [Laughs.]

EMMA AMOS: How about that? That's good. That's good.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]