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ANNIE MACKENZIE TALKS TO BRIGIT HOWITT & ROBYN PARKER

R

No, but it's a famous name.

A I'll start off by asking, what first drew you to become interested in weaving?
B

B Well I probably go back further than you, Robyn, because you're younger than I am... I was at the Design School in Wellington when a friend decided she wanted to learn to spin so I went with her to Eastbourne, someone called Miss Stace, who you've come across, I'm sure. And there were others – you were the same?

B And there were others there spinning and they were talking about something called "weaving", and that's when I got interested. That would've been mid-sixties. Sixty-two, sixty-three – something like that. And then eventually I joined the Hutt Art Society it was at that time, the weaving group in there. That's how I got into it. There were no textiles of any sort in the Design School... nothing of that kind...

You were over at Plimmerton then, weren't you?

We learnt from each other. Trial and error and

reading and then I remember there were two or three weaving luminaries who came out from England. One was called Mary Barker and she was the first weaver who

I ever came across who did what we called "very fine

weaving" then. Sixteen to the inch. That was pretty good!

B Yes...

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_Was that the Design School in Wellington?

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Α

What sort of teaching was available to you?

that you glanced at if you really needed to. But not follow... \underline{B} They're the basics, they're not necessarily set in concrete... That was the fun of it though. And there wasn't

 \underline{B} They're the basics, they're not necessarily set in concrete... That was the fun of it though. And there wasn't much in the way of yarns available. So we were using mostly handspun for a long time.

We did, and thank goodness we did! We had to be

our own trouble-shooters. And to take rules as something

And we didn't know much about colour until people started using vegetable dyes. There were some fantastic... Was it Renee Orchard or someone lived up in Gisborne and she did a huge in-depth study of [Pseudocyphellaria coronata] sticta coronata, which is a fungus that grows on beech trees above three thousand feet and she produced a huge marvelous study of colours.

 \underline{B} It was breathtaking. I wonder what's happened to all those samples she did? She did wonderful big colour boards and they were beautiful.

B_____That's right.

B_____The first one I had, on the recommendation of someone called Oriel Hoskin...

 $\mathbf{B}_{\mathbf{England}}$ Her background was that she had trained in Bradford, England, for quite a number of years.

B There was probably quite a lot going on in Auckland. Anyway, Oriel was the rep for Weave-Joy Looms. This guy had a business on the Peninsula in Otago, Dunedin, so I went down. I wanted to get myself a loom so went down to see what was going on and he made these looms, they were counter-balance and he had a little business going where he had people, women, coming in and weaving for him. Weaving this very heavy tweedy fabric and selling it. It was all very rustic but quite impressive. I was very impressed. Anyway, I bought one of these looms and eventually it arrived and I remember putting it together and I wove on it for a bit , doing very strange things, well that's how we learned. Then I found it got more and more difficult to get a shed and found that all the shafts had actually warped.

B We didn't know enough about what to expect or what type of loom. And of course I discovered that counterbalance doesn't suit what I became interested in weaving. Counter-balance has certain restrictions. So that was my first loom then a little later I was lent a loom and it was a Dryad,

R So maybe I beat you! Because I have very strong memories of being in Standard Three [approx. nine years old, fifth year in school] and we had, as part of our art programme, looms in the classroom... I remember being growled at and sent outside to play at playtime because I couldn't stop [weaving]... But it disappeared... For ever... Til I was twenty-seven and came down here and, like Brigit, I started off with spinning and found the weaving was around as well and that was the end! That was 1977.

R It wasn't really fine but we thought "Oooh!" It was probably the first time that we ever heard that there were real rules – although we'd read in books, we discovered that there were rules that really ought to be followed. But because we'd all learned off each other and taught ourselves, we sort of went around the rules...

R Except that now when I teach I say, "You have to know the rules! You've got to learn the rules! And then you can break them." But I never learned the rules.

R She got all sorts of stuff out of it, didn't she?

R Then people started realising how precious sticta coronata was... We can't take it any more.

R She was one of the first tutors in more of a college atmosphere, wasn't she? Up at what used to be the Polytech. Now Massey University.

R I know in the Wellington area – I don't know what was happening in other areas – certainly she ran a proper weaving course.

R Well we wouldn't have asked about the wood, whether it was strong timber.

A It's a protected plant now?

And what about the looms at that stage? What kind of looms were you using?

a little Dryad floor loom from someone called Joy Service. She was around for ages, she lived in Johnsonville and she did the most beautiful work but she wasn't interested in joining any group or anything. I knew her through another connection and she had two looms – don't know what the other one was but this was a lovely little loom. Just a little one, big enough to go into the kitchen.

B It was a lovely little loom and then a few years later I discovered Mecchia's loom, a stronger loom able to do rugs, floor rugs. I bought the Mecchia loom in 1975 and actually I think it was one of the ones that his father made. His father made four or five copying one that Gerda Moller had brought out from Holland.

B She lives in Auckland now. She did lovely stuff. Jim Mecchia's father had a business – reproduction furniture really – in Hamilton and got really interested in this loom and so he decided to reproduce it himself and that's where that whole line of Mecchia looms started....

 $\underline{\mathbf{B}}$ I sold that one just a couple of years ago when I moved, so I had it a long time. And bought another Mecchia just a little one but it's a bit of a lemon.

B There's an electronic attachment to it and that's playing up and proving very tricky. You know the pedal cam – the cord goes round and the other end there's a spacer and there's another cam with wire around it. Well the pedal cam itself actually sheared its pins, sheared its screws from that spacer. Can you believe that? Screws about that length!

B Exactly! I mean I weave with a high tension.

B Its action when it works is beautiful.

A Were quite a lot of the looms being made in New Zealand?

B And there was Bartlett in Christchurch.

B Do you remember that little book of draw loom weaving? I think I gave it to you, well gave it to someone, a funny little book shaped like so and about that size and at the back it had plans, pretty thorough plans, for a countermarch loom. A group I belonged to met often for weekends up on the Coast and one weekend a couple of the blokes involved – actually it wasn't just one weekend, it was over quite a long time – decided they wanted something to do so they made up the loom. A full size loom, from those plans and we had that loom at Art Weaves Studio in Thorndon. It broke, eventually.

B_____So, they were around. And a few people imported looms – Leclerc from Canada...

 $\underline{\mathsf{B}}_{\text{and there was Poore Pippy in Auckland at the time,}}$ and he made spinning wheels as well. Those little table looms were nice.

 $\frac{\mathbf{B}}{\mathbf{B}}$ I bought a second one, from Loman in Hamilton. He was making those collapsible looms. It had crossed legs like that on either side and you could collapse it to take it through doors and so on. I made use of that quite a bit.

B In Wellington alone, there were over two hundred members, Wellington City, and in the whole area there would've been seven or eight hundred. The numbers were huge but of course times were very different economically. Young women had more time or were able to spend time in that sort of activity...not so easy now. Quite different. And it was all kind of new, and it was an activity where there was a lot of exploring going on so there was a lot of fun and everybody was contributing in their own way, sharing. The same sort of thing went on in the pottery world – the

R Occupational Therapy Departments brought out quite a lot of Dryad looms... both floor looms and table. Way back in the day... And that, I think, is how a lot of weavers came to have Dryad looms... Occupational Therapy Departments were getting rid of their looms.

R [She] was a luminary, from Hamilton, she was the weaver that we all admired.

R____And will never continue.

 $\frac{\mathsf{R}}{\mathsf{Contraption}}$ It's not so much the loom that's the lemon but the contraption that works it.

R So where was all that resistance coming from?

R You've had nothing but problems with that thing.

R It's a computer-driven dobby.

R My first one was, a dud. It was a Thorp. This was a guy in Christchurch, he was English, I don't know why he decided to make looms but he was a very good talker. Remember Anna worked for him at festivals and he must've had the prize one for Anna to work on. My first one was also a counter-balance and that was fine, the counter-balancing, but he didn't know enough so he had the beater back to front so the shuttle rail was at the back of the beater and when I pointed this out in my early days he said, "Well, what would you know anyway?"

I had Dave add on a very rudimentary web-protector so I wasn't leaning... because I thought I was probably the only person in the world who leaned on my work as I wove. You will discover this as you start weaving on the floor loom, it's not like a table loom where you're back from it, you want to be over it! So Dave made me this protector, which good looms come with, but [Thorp] said this was a waste of time. Wouldn't want that.

He was making looms, there was a company called Fred's Shed in Nelson and they made pretty good looms.

R____And there was a guy over in Eastbourne and he made Sunshine looms – they were good looms. He was the Mayor of Lower Hutt at one point, or Eastbourne... Anyway, they were good looms. Marie Harding's got one of his and they're still floating around... Not that looms float!

There were people making good looms and there were people making cruddy duds and there were husbands, bless them, who said, "Yes, darling, I will make you a loom." And you could also buy plans – no internet of course, but you could send away for plans.

R___But you would've belted it out up there! If you were working on it!

R I had a Leclerc, a jack. Dave's sister lived in Montreal and she got all carried away, was going to be a weaver, and came home and brought this loom with her and totally lost interest so offered to sell it to me because she was penniless at that stage. So I bought that little jack loom, I really liked it. A fabric loom, probably only about thirty-six inches wide, it didn't do a big width. You couldn't have done long production runs of anything on it. It wouldn't have coped. The back beam wouldn't have coped with that but it was a nice functioning loom.

 $\mathbf{R}_{\mathbf{W}}$ We still have those in our store at Port Nicholson Weavers. You'll see a little tiki emblem on the side of them.

R If we wanted to weave, we could find a loom!

	same explosion of interest. And then eventually the market changed because in those early days we were able to sell quit big works easily, a lot of rugs. A lot of people did rugs. Floor rugs, wall hangings. And then the bottom fell out of that market because the de-registration of bringing in craft goods from overseas It meant that there wasn't any tariff on these craft works being imported and of course they could come in and be	
	sold at ridiculous prices in comparison. So there was a kind of explosionwhen was it? In the early seventies, no – the later seventies when the market just changed completely because of the de-registration of imports coming in.	R Perhaps seventy-seven on.
	B And it became more and more difficult to sell pieces.	 R It was probably more in the early eighties that
		happened.
	B All around the walls were these huge big rugs. It	R Up where Massey University is now, in the old Museum.
		R And you'd be quite affronted if they didn't all sell! Corporates were buying, too. Big works would've been
	B And Foreign Affairs because they bought stuff for Embassies and gifts and things.	taken up by Corporates.
		$\underline{\mathbf{R}}_{}$ Foreign Affairs used to have a lady – Val Farmer – I remember her. She used to come around and pick out works.
A Where were you working out of? You mentioned	B She'd come into Art Weaves and she was great. We had a run going there of knee rugs and she'd come in and she'd say, "Right, I want twenty-four." Or a couple of dozen or whatever	
Art Weaves	B Art Weaves. The three of us started that up in mid-eighties.	
	B It had been the Dental Annex. There were three – Marion Scott-Rowe, myself and Lesley Nichols. And we	R In what is now the Prime Minister's house.
	 decided if we could find somewhere we could set up a little – a little, we thought – arrangement where we could have looms for people coming to use. And Lesley particularly wanted some sort of better space than her home to do her tapestry. She was working for Gordon Crook. So we looked around and found various places. One in Ghuznee Street I remember which we thought would be great and the rent was too high and Marion somehow discovered this place in Thorndon, the second floor area was available for a peppercorn rental. An absolute peppercorn rental! So we took over the whole area. 	
		R As long as they weren't developing it, which is what in the end happened.
A Were you in what is now the dining room?	\underline{B} Yes, in the end because it was of course Government property, had been used for the Dental School or whatever it was. So it was great. We had a lot of looms in there.	
/		R Not Government House – the Prime Minister's residence on Tinakori Road.
	 B I went there [on an open day] and thought what have they done – it was awful! We had the second floor, or the first floor – whatever it's called. It had been some sort of sunroom area with windows all the way around. A huge space. And we had water running there. It was fantastic, it really was. And we paid something like eighty dollars a month, a ridiculous amount. 	
	B I had two looms in there, and there were two Wellington weavers who just wanted to come and join us to weave, didn't want to do their own work particularly. One was Norma Nelson and the other was Jackie Bone. So I set up these runs of sofa rugs, mostly using What was that place out in the Hutt where you could buy all those hanks of lovely wool? Over the railway line in Upper Hutt.	
		R Wool Yarns. It's still there. I don't think you can buy hanks anymore but you can go and buy cones.
	and you'd go over the railway line and it was in behind there. You could buy all those lovely yarns – Crucci, mohair.	D
	B I don't think it was there for very long but I don't know. Those sorts of yarns became quite easily available and we got a lot of stuff from those two big mills down south Mosgiel, and there was another one but they have all packed up now.	RNobody told me about that!
	<u>B</u> Yes, we washed them and brushed them.We were pushed out [of that building] at the end	R Did you full all those before you sent them out?
		R Lesley was a tapestry weaver, wove a lot of Gordon Crook's art work. He'd design them specifically for Lesley to weave. She never got any acknowledgement for the fact
	B No, he was naughty.	that she was the weaver, did she?
		R Trish did some for him too at one point. He was very good at arguing with people
	He was a completely individual character, Gordon. Marion was doing a bit of tapestry and she worked with Lesley until that got a bit fraught. Marion's such a wonderful weaver and such a perfectionist and Lesley's daughter was with us there for a while, Fiona.	
		R Not quite the perfectionist.

 \mathbf{R} Well that's what we did, we built a family room on the side of the house and in the end the children got half!

So you see we built on a playroom for the children

R

and I commandeered it...

B Did you train in dress-maki	ing?
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B We weren't working together on that – Robyn was the one that was approached to do the work and then you got overwhelmed and were going overseas.

B_____They had no idea!

B When they, on your recommendation, came up to me...

B She said the same thing. They wanted samples first of all and then she came back and it's this, this, this and this. Ten metres of each – or more.

B I realised I couldn't do it but got about eight weavers in the Waikanae area involved.

 \underline{B} I did the samples, wound all the warps and then sent them out to the weavers... But one of the difficulties was getting the appropriate yarn... You probably solved it better than I did but in the end found yarn from Design Spun in Napier.

 $\underline{\mathbf{B}}$ When they came to me, they wanted more than a hundred metres in five weeks. She had no idea!

 $\underline{\mathbf{B}}_{\text{but let}}$ I started out with the Hutt Art Society in 1962–3, but let me think, how did it happen?

B Was Dorothea the President of NZSWWS

[New Zealand Spinning, Weaving and Woolcrafts Society]?

B Yes, yes.

B Yes, it's excellent. It's original. So were they in the Hutt Art Society rooms then?

B____Yes, that's right.

B_____They had a storeroom somewhere.

A Were they assessed on the quality of their work?

Is it unique for being a group that is predominantly

 $\underline{\mathbf{B}}_{\text{the craft of weaving.}}$ I think it was predominantly your commitment to the craft of weaving.

R Mostly sofa throws as well. There was a big demand for sofa throws. I did private commission work and fine fabrics and worked with about three different designers. These people commissioned the fabric.

R_____No, I just went to classes and learnt. I worked for somebody called Helen Barber, and for Joyce Tam, who is still lecturing at Massey University in clothing construction. And Nigel Nehru, a very flamboyant, interesting designer. And Martin Smith. Actually I went to a few classes with him because he was a superb tailor. I was lucky enough to do that... and of course we were both involved in Peter Jackson's production of Lord of the Rings. We worked our butts off for that!

R Well, it would've been overwhelming anyway; we had to share it around. They would come in and say, "Oh, we want ten metres just like this and in two different scales and could you have that done by next week?"

 $\frac{\mathsf{R}}{\text{everything ensconced.}}$ Now they've got a loom in there and a weaver and

 \mathbf{R} We were not allowed to say what we were doing, it was all very hush-hush.

R Yes, often more... And it wasn't thick stuff, you know! It was some weird thing, something like a five-eighth scale, so one was full scale then you had to do a five-eighth scale so you had to think about the weight of the fibre and yes, it was quite a challenge!

 $\frac{\mathsf{R}}{\mathsf{hey}}$ Brigit just used to work out the warps and so on and they wove for her.

 \mathbf{R} I think I was sourcing yarn from them as well and prescribing "can you find me dah-de-dah?" and they were very good.

R_____We probably worked for over a year on it.

R Brigit's been involved right from the concept, haven't you?

R Perhaps I can help you out. I'll tell you how I think it happened. I didn't join Port Nicholson until 1969, and the story that I have been told... There were some amazing people in the Port Nicholson Group and they were originally in the Hutt Art Society Group. There was Lady Kathleen Lowe, Lady Dorothea Turner – both of whom both said "Don't call me Lady". Barbara Lewis, Bev and Marie Harding and those three, Ruth Lorenz, Kathleen Lowe and Dorothea Turner were very strong women, not inflexible women, but knew where they wanted to go and they were women who didn't want to just muck about. This was going to be something that they really did properly. And I think that things at the Hutt Art Society were a bit Mickey Mouse, from what I've been told.

R I don't know if she was then but she became President. They decided that they would like to have a weaving group, solely a weaving group. And a weaving group that really thought about weaving and high quality weaving. Does this ring a bell with you?

R So that is why they decided to set up Port Nicholson Weavers but they didn't want it to have a structure where there was a President, with tiers of membership. So they conceived the idea of having twelve Trustees, a Trustee for every month, and one who was the Secretary who didn't have a month. So there were twelve but December was never involved in meetings and things. The twelve Trustees would each take responsibility for one month and organise the meeting and the programme for that month. So there was no hierarchy and that's how it's continued. It's been a really good system.

 \mathbf{R} They must've moved out to that funny building that had the rooms in it – it's gone now. Around the corner.

R____But that wasn't the room when I first went there.

R And you had to be approved. They had a ceiling of sixty members because they wanted to keep this high standard of weaving so you had to be approved as a member. As like today, you're invited to go for three meetings – and I guess they assessed you in the background and you were either accepted or not. And people were not accepted. And then of course they got a bit upset.

R The quality of their work and how they would fit into that structure as well.

 \mathbf{R} I'm thinking of one person who was never allowed in and who always made a ruckus.

 $\mathbf{R}_{crept in.}$ The whole idea was hand weaving. The felting has

Α

hand weaving?

Α

Talk to me about Port Nicholson [Weavers],

because it's their fortieth anniversary this year.

	B Spinning wasn't actually taught It was a sort of	
	subsidiary with individuals.	
		R Lots of us spun but lots didn't, as well. And I guess
		we pushed the use of commercial yarn when the Society
		would say, "O, no, no! It's got to be totally hand-made from go to woe." So we pushed that.
		And those three women were, in my mind, the
		real leaders of that. And they were involved in NZSWWS
		[New Zealand Spinning, Weaving and Woolcrafts Society], as we called it then. Now known as Creative Fibre. In as
		much, as Brigit says, that Dorothea was the President
		[of NZSWWS], Kathleen set up the importation of linen
		because it was really, really hard to get fibres like that into the country and Kathleen jumped through hoops to get
		import licences to get linen in. You don't realise now just
		how free the market is.
		Imports were just difficult. We weren't allowed foreign currency you had to have import licences for everything.
	B And that's probably why so many of us got so	carrence,, you had to have import needed for every timig.
	involved with rug weaving. Those yarns were available	
	through those big carpet factories in New Zealand then.	
		R In Foxton they had this You could dive into these big bins of leftovers but they were cops. We would be like
		gluttons, diving in there, \$4 a kilo or something.
	B I remember when I was also involved with the	
	Wellington Guild and they had a big yarn barn, huge yarn	
	store, in the YMCA at the top of Willis Street when we had rooms underneath. For a couple of years I was involved with	
	that and we would go out to Feltex out at the Hutt with two	
	big old station wagons and come back with the bumper bars	
	practically on the ground! Absolutely filled with these yarns. And the quantities that were sold I remember we were	
	stock-taking one year and we realised we had put through	
	more than \$20,000 worth.	
		R They're still turning up in these deceased estates, coming back to Port Nic! For us to on-sell.
	B And now they're dam hard to find, those cones of	coming back to rolt ivic. For us to on-sen.
	carpet yarn.	
		R And Port Nic sort of evolved like that really. And was
		considered to be elitist in the beginning, much as when we started Professional Weavers, that was considered elitist.
	B The concern was to maintain a degree of excellence.	started i foressional weavers, that was considered entist.
		R Absolutely. That was the focus. And we did, I reckon.
	B And that put a few noses out of joint. Inevitably people	
	feel rejected.	
What was the focus of the group? Education?		
social		R It was never although obviously the socialising
		came into it. It was always to foster a high standard of
		craftsmanship. So, committing to an exhibition a year is
		part of your membership conditions, that you contribute to an exhibition once a year.
	B It's all about lifting standards and of developing	to an emilitation once a jean.
	ways of working that are individual, not just reproducing	
	recipe weaving.	
		R Great encouragement for exploring techniques.
	B And they brought out some great tutors. Mary Barker as I mentioned. The lace-weaver – do you remember her	
	name? She did fantastic workshops They'd use structures	
	that we'd come across in books and so on but not to any in	
	depth so having people that could establish an understanding of these structures individually – it was great!	
		R Mind you, the Society also brought out some overseas
		tutors – because we always thought that overseas tutors were
	2	better – who were total duds!
	B Who thought they knew better themselves. That was one of the strengthens that we didn't realise we had here,	
	because, being self-taught, we were also our own trouble-	
	shooters. People weren't just interested in reproducing	
	patterns out of a book. When I went to the States and came across all sorts of other groups of weavers, especially on the	
	Eastern Seaboard, what really stood out for me was how one	
	of the approaches there – I suppose it's different now – was	
	how there were particular ways of weaving certain things. And the sense of traditional patterns and traditional weaves	
	and structures is very strong, I think because there are strong	
	immigrant patterns there from Sweden, Scandinavia For	
	example, I spent time at a workshop at Glimakra, the Swedish loom factory in Ohio, and there was this huge area with	1
	about fifty looms in it, all set up, draw looms and all the	
	rest of it but there were all these books of samples and	
	of wool and yarns that were produced, actually spun for weaving, not for knitting or sewing. These big catalogues,	
	and associated with each one of the yarns were ways in	
	which it could be woven. These are the options for how to	
	▲	
	use this yarn. And that's what they largely used. But we don't work like that here.	

now. Whereas we do that. I went to the States for weaving in 1990 and that struck me as well. Firstly, that we more than have the ability here and secondly that we are innovators because we've had to be. So many rules! The same when I went to Switzerland.

It's lucky Agnes learned to weave in New Zealand because... well, she would've rebelled anyway! Of course there are always people who rebel in these other places and do innovative work but a lot of people just mass-produce what's already there. It may be because of their history, and we don't really have a history...

But we must, to a degree. When I look back on my R family tree there are weavers and spinners abounding...

В We don't have that tradition.

Yes, but within those particular communities but В we didn't have that.

Α

Or a social...

_I don't think I was aware or conscious of carrying R on a tradition then as much as I am now. I think that's been a thing of ageing.

	B I was very aware of that, because of the books that	
	we were using	R You probably went into it with a more intellectual
	B I got interested early on in structure through stuffer	approach. Self-satisfaction was my initial
	weave – a double warp technique.	R But you came from a design background anyway; I certainly did not.
	B I doubt that it had much influence: I was a pretty lousy student anyway.	
		$\frac{R}{A}$ But it might have given you a different way of looking at things, a more critical design view.
	B I'm definitely critical of my own workI think Port Nicholson is pretty foundational really.	R We were encouraged to be self-critical. Those women,
	B Because I think the emphasis was on the work itself,	they were they could do the spade's a spade thing without really upsetting you.
	not on the individuals.	\mathbf{R} And we were exposed to good work, so you wanted to be like that, to have good work yourself.
	B You know that era in the early seventies when people like Georgia Souter were doing huge off-loom works.	
	B Yes that's who I'm thinking of. They were doing really exploratory stuff, bursting out in mostly natural materials.	R People like Jenny Hunt.
A Are you talking about more sculptural pieces?		R Jenny Hunt I remember for colour. And Joan Calvert, she did a lot of corporate work.
	B And using other types of fibre – that was pretty	R Yes. Quite 3-D stuff.
	new for us in those days.	R And funnily enough that's all coming back into vogue!
	B There were a few corporate commissions – I got that one at the Wool Board. The Wool Board was built in Dixon Street, it must've been '79 or '78 I remember that enormous one by Jenny Hunt went right down the side of a stairwell.	
	B I don't know where mine is now. It was for the Board Room and I think I'd do it differently now but that was a magnum opus. I look back and I think "How did I take that on?" It was a double warp rug technique and involved a painted warp I did that at home. It had four or five big panels, an enormous great long thing. And now I think how did I have the arrogance to take that on? but it was a fantastic exercise, actually, And that happened to be at the time just before I got to America so I was able to extend my time there. That was nice. I've got no idea what happened to it and I'm not really interested.	R Wonder where they are now!
	The other one, the other great big one that I did was for the Energy Centre in the Hutt.	
	B Yes, she did a lovely piece of hanging lengths	R Did Anna do something for that as well?
A	B Mine was weird And goodness knows where that is	R From memory, yours was pretty lovely as well.
A Do you have any idea where that interest came from? The corporates commissioning those?	B I think through actually seeing work in those big exhibitions such as Handweaving Unlimited.	R Well, it needed architects to already have an interest and I don't know how that came about – you'd have to ask
	B That's how I came to get that commission.	the Architectural Society Maybe Guy Ngan.
		R Architects throughout the world at that time were including briefs for woven or handcrafted things on the walls. They were quite austere buildings and perhaps they were thinking of ways to soften them or something? I don't know their rationale Certainly at that time it was not just a New Zealand thing, it was world wide Guy would've caught on to that.
	B Certainly Guy had quite a bit to do with that There was a little committee, which I was commandeered on to – goodness knows how – to do with the Wool Board, all the art works in it and Guy of course was dead keen to do major works himself but he couldn't be seen to just And also I got hauled over the coals by somebody because I was on that committee and I was given that commission, through Guy. And I think it was in some way to give him leeway to get work into that – I don't know – this is all by the by.	t
	B Something had come back from an Embassy overseas,	every now and then someone will say, "O, there was one of your works down at the auction," Dunbar Sloane's or somewhere.
	I saw a couple one time. Goodness knows what has happene to them.	
A How did that sort of work sit alongside the older women of Port Nicholson? What did they think, were		
they interested in that kind of work?		R There weren't older women because in those days they were all young! When I joined, I was probably twenty-nine or something like that, and they did seem older to me but in retrospect they would've been barely fifty!
	B And still weaving in their eighties!	
		R They were passionate weavers, that was what held it. They were passionate about what they did. They did it in a more academic intellectual wayBut that makes it sound like there was no innovation there – there was innovation. But people thought through what they were doing. Why does this thread do that and what happens when you do this? Whereas there were also a lot of weavers – and still are and always will be – recipe weavers – it's like getting a knitting pattern and wanting to replicate it. There are heaps of people who still do that and that's fine.

And of course there was an explosion of magazines В and books.

В There was some incredibly innovative work on the spinning side. And dyeing.

And the degree of input into a piece – the emphasis В was really on something that was really going to last and be really functional as well as aesthetically pleasing. Now function is temporary. Built in obsolescence...

I think that's the thing that always, as weavers... well,

not just weavers, any other areas of design... That's what

to be sustainable and is going to last. Produce something

make do with something cheap.

appeals about Scandinavia... the sense of design that's going

beautiful and integrated. There's a sense there that you don't

_And that would have been that whole import thing R as well. You look back and you think how we resented it because we'd look in those magazines and see all those amazing yarns... but in a way we were lucky because we thought, "OK, we've got spinning wheels, we'll see if we can make it!"

Yes, we're probably quite a nation of dyers because R of not being able to get what we wanted. But that whole 'number eight wire' thing really doesn't exist any more you can go and buy your number eight wire.

R _Do you think it is changing? For you? That whole concept of temporariness is going? I get a feeling that we're moving back a bit. Younger people are starting to get more of an interest in things that will last.

_There is still an appreciation of the hand-crafted

_Actually I was on the QualityMark committee... It was

set up by the Society and it covered in those times spinning, knitting, weaving... Felting wasn't covered then when I was on it. It disbanded and I don't think it [felting] ever got to be on it. There were guidelines where you had to produce, say for weaving you had to produce a balanced weave... I can't remember but there were prescribed things that you had to produce. And not just samples. You had to produce

and the beautifully made and designed in Scandinavia.

R

R

Definitely...

wanted to improve.

____I think that some people are looking for things Α that have more quality, more well made, but of course with that, you always have to pay more for them. You've got to see that investment and I don't know that the tide has turned enough...

__Do you know much about the establishment of Α the QualityMark?

> В To some extent I think it was based on the American Master Weavers' programme, which you could do through some of those magazines. They were very particular. I don't know that anyone here... the idea was that you came out of that as a Master Weaver.

В

В There was a drive to establish a benchmark for things that were going to be sold.

В I'm sure she would've.

В I remember that lovely story she told about the curtains she wove for that house they built in Lowry Bay. Huge drops. All handspun, unbelievable.

And wonderful bands around the bottom - I suppose it was overshot or something. It was beautiful - and down the sides. She was a guest exhibitor at some big exhibition, so she put these in with a huge price on them as she didn't want to sell them. And they sold! Had to turn around and do them all again!

enough to show that you really had mastered weaving. And spinning. You're going through the course so you know the sorts of things they would've prescribed. This twist and that twist. It was quite strict. [The purpose of it] was to lift the standards... the people who did it were the people who

_QualityMark was to improve standards, especially R things like spinning, to make you aware of fleece types, or knitting all the different styles of casting on and off.

_Yes, you could use it then as a guarantee, a mark R that you had achieved that standard. Whether the public understood that or not...

R We had that embarrassment of work that was out in the marketplace that people were buying because it looked pretty but we knew it was inferior and it would disappear in two minutes... I think that Dorothea might have had a lot to do with the instigation of QualityMark.

You would have liked Dorothea. R Kathleen her husband was a judge or something like that so she moved in circles where... I suppose she would've had connections for selling and certainly for getting the import thing. There was nothing too 'ladyish' about Kathleen - she was lady-like but she most always wore her own woven garments, superbly made. And Ruth Lorenz, her work was just to die for! Mostly fabrics, fine fine fabrics. On four shafts.

R Huge picture windows though weren't they!

All those bands matched perfectly, she was just R amazing. And they were all long lived, so this is quite a good idea to be a weaver.

A halcyon time. For craftspeople. It was the same R for the potters. We were all..

Yes, we had the luxury of playing around and learning.

R For me, I was in a transition time for that because I do remember scorn being poured on me as a stay-at-home mother... because I had qualifications and why was I not using them and lots of my contemporaries were doing things like office work and yet looking down their noses...

It didn't feel like that to me. So that was a transition R time I think when we were bringing up our family.

____Was it to do with the retailing of those goods?

Α

В

Α Why do you think the sixties, seventies, eighties were such...

> В Economic reasons for one. It was a time when a lot of young women – with families even – didn't have to work. R

В Of actually developing that side of one's own interests more.

Β Envious...

В It took some time after the end of the War of course, when there were such huge changes and I think women were looking for challenges and ways of being really productive in a creative, artistic way.

В The sudden awareness of what were these areas of expression and work going on elsewhere that people became more aware... people started travelling.

В That's right... Let me think about what was going on in Wellington itself? There were no cafes, no decent restaurants, nothing like that. It was a very closed society... I can remember when Dixon Street Dairy opened - some of the amazing delicatessen stuff... this was unheard of. Coffee was unheard of – good coffee. One of the first cafes was 'Suzie's' in Willis Street.

В And wow, as a student, that was pretty amazing. And before that it was just milk bars and things. So there was this sudden implosion of a connection of a much wider sense of potential in all areas.

В _I'd never heard of anything called looms until I came across these spinners.

Α Is teaching an important aspect of weaving for you both?

_Yes, and I think for a lot of people. It's great to share В what you know

В It worries me sometimes that a lot of work, wonderful work, was done early on, and explored and developed and learned from and is now forgotten...

A while ago I started trying to gather up records from particular rug weavers, early rug weavers, and some of their work but I just couldn't get anywhere with it... Some of these [contemporary] people do lovely work but they don't know what is possible because they haven't seen [what went before] to them it doesn't exist.

В It came out of a source of all potential, if you like. Whereas now that sense of it all being completely open or free or not developed in any sense, I don't think it's quite the same. The spirit of exploration was so strong...

It's... in all sorts of other areas of art. That sense of exploration has really taken off, it's off the wall, if you like. It's like an exploration that is almost really beyond the need for craftsmanship. I don't mean that in a derogatory sense.

В Any full-blown artist would tell you, I should think, that it's in learning about the materials that they've become free enough to make something quite different...

When I went back to do a bit of teaching at the Design School, Mandy whatever her name was said, "We don't teach craftsmanship here!" I thought, "I've come to the wrong place. I don't belong here." It hurt, almost, to see these kids actually didn't know and felt they didn't need to know about their equipment. How to care for it, what to do with it. It was about merely using that whatever it did to the thing to develop something totally immediate and new and not functional – not that that's a major thing necessarily. It was temporary, about producing things that are temporary. In a sense there's a place for that. I feel so much that we're in an age of spontaneous installations almost of what life's all about in the art world so it's an immediate fascination or shock almost. So that one's sense of self or well-being or whatever is suddenly shifted a bit. There's potential in that. It's great. But unless there's some depth that can be built on, it's waffle.

В _I find this fascinating because there's something going on, almost, which is like the sense of being in a shift that's not familiar, that's not known and sure and certain.

R Those leaders, the Dorotheas and Ruths and Barbaras and all those people who had been through that time. Because you're too young to be impacted by that. But those people certainly and I guess the creativity level was suddenly unleashed because the War...

And became part of the world... Stuff that we're now R taking for granted.

R That was still here when we came here.

R People from countries other than England came to live here and they wanted their own food. And I don't think that Auckland was all that much better. I would've been frequenting places maybe ten years after you perhaps in Auckland and we did have some restaurants and cafes. As a young student I don't think I was ever aware of weaving. It had gone out of my head from my Primary School days. My mother says that I was weaving when I was four. She said, "I had you weaving at age four!" She was a school teacher so probably she did.

R Well Doreen Blumhart was part of the Education Department and they were insistent and we were the lucky recipients of a craft-art part of the primary school syllabus. So talk to people of my generation and they will remember weaving at school... There were three of them [including Doreen Blumhart] I think in the Education Department who instigated that – how long it lasted I don't know.

R That's the reward of it.

R Those people who did all that fantastic stuff, like the Sparrows and the Spaldings... they didn't have anything to inspire them either. It came from themselves. Maybe Collingwood was one of the ones who instigated...

R There's got to be some boundary to it; there's got to be technique involved.

R Is that a generational thing?

R Jonathan Milne selected our prize-winner last night and he spoke to it and he was saying, "Look at these works with an open mind, because you cast your mind back to what you know about the Impressionists, Picasso, Cubism, all that stuff. When they were starting out, what was the world saying? Exactly what we're saying now. Some of the things they were saying those things about have long gone, they were just fly-by-night stuff, but keep your mind open..." And he's right.

Yes... what certainly older generations look for is В some sort of certain certainty, safeness.

... and when that gets shot down a bit, it's quite good. В

R Familiarity, maybe.