

# BGC CRAFT, ART & DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## *Namita Gupta Wiggers*

Writer, Educator, Independent Curator, Director and Co-Founder of Critical Craft Forum

Conducted by Persephone Allen on April 3, 2016 at Asheville, North Carolina and New York, New York via Skype

Namita Gupta Wiggers is a writer, educator, and curator based in Portland, Oregon. She is the Director of Critical Craft Forum, an online platform for discussion and resource sharing about issues in the field, which she cofounded with Elisabeth Agro in 2008. Wiggers regularly contributes to online and inprint journals and books, and has served as the Exhibition Reviews Editor for *The Journal of Modern Craft*. From 2004 to 2014, she was Director and Chief Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon. Here she curated and organized many acclaimed exhibitions, including those referenced in this interview: *Touching Warms the Art*, *Laurie Herrick: Weaving Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, and *Object Focus: The Bowl*. Wiggers also has taught in the MFA Applied Craft + Design program co-administered by the Oregon College of Art + Craft and the Pacific Northwest College of Art and at Portland State University. In 2017, she became the founding Director of the Masters of Arts in Critical and Historical Craft Studies Program at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina. Wiggers earned her BA in Art History and English from Rice University in Houston, Texas, and her MA in Art History from The University of Chicago. She has held positions at The Children's Museum of Houston, the Blaffer Gallery at the University of Houston and eLab, a Chicago-based research and design consulting group. She also trained in jewelry making at Lillstreet Art Center in Chicago.

This interview was conducted via Skype while Wiggers was in Asheville, North Carolina, to give the keynote address for the inaugural *Photo + Craft* conference. Wiggers discusses her background and training as a museum educator and art historian as well as her career as a studio jeweler, museum curator and director, and professor. She also comments upon her family history and her experience growing up as an American of South Asian origin. She addresses the importance of place to contemporary craft practices and local craft traditions, the relationship between contemporary art and contemporary craft, the future of craft, and the utility of delineating between craft, art, and design.

Additionally, in 2016 Wiggers presented the lecture "Making Space: Museums and Craft in the

Twenty-First Century” at Bard Graduate Center. A video recording of her talk can be viewed at the end of her interview online.

Interview duration: 3 hours and 4 minutes. Transcript length: 34 pages.

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This oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview. The interviewee has reviewed the transcript and made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

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**Persephone Allen (PA):** Hello, my name is Persephone Allen. I am a first-year Masters student at Bard Graduate Center, and today I am interviewing Namita Gupta Wiggers. Namita, I've written your title as writer, educator, director and co-founder of the Critical Craft Forum, and independent curator, and we're talking today via Skype for the Bard Graduate Center Oral History Project. Today is Sunday, April 3rd, 2016. Namita, I'm in New York City, where are you right now?

**Namita Gupta Wiggers (NGW):** I'm in Asheville, North Carolina, where I have been presenting at a conference, it's called Photo + Craft, it's the first time they've done it, and I presented the keynote last night. Normally I live in Portland, Oregon.

**PA:** Thank you. So I want to talk about the conference, but, we're going to start by going back to your childhood. Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what your family was like?

**NGW:** I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and I lived there until I was about seven. Then we lived in New Jersey, and then in Spring, Texas. I went to college at Rice University in Houston. Growing up in Cincinnati, we lived in a beautiful old house. My mom was very involved in welcoming new international residents so we were always involved in understanding what kind of cultural offerings there were in the city. And I grew up going to museums. My mom would take me around the city via the bus sometimes. My mom and dad both worked; my mom had a full time job as a microbiologist, and I had a fabulous babysitter who was basically like a second grandmother to me. Then we moved to New Jersey when I was seven with my two siblings. We lived there until I was almost fifteen. New Jersey in many ways is the space that I consider really shaped my identity. We lived in a neighborhood in Franklin Township right outside of New Brunswick where

Rutgers University is in an amazingly diverse neighborhood. Looking back on it I understand that it probably was very unusual. We all lived in Levitt homes, so there were three styles and you always knew where the bathroom was! Everybody's homes—even though the layouts were all the same and were mirrors of each other—every single person's home was different. It was a fascinating introduction to how people make something cookie cutter into an individual space. We spent about eight months in India when I was ten. We moved to Texas in 1982 in the middle of my freshman year of high school. We moved into an area called Spring, Texas, which is about an hour, an hour and a half north of Houston, and I finished high school there. That was not a pleasant experience. It was very challenging for a number of different reasons. I ended up going to Rice for college, for my undergraduate degree.

**PA:** Thank you. I didn't know that in between Cincinnati and Texas you were in New Jersey. So when I was trying to think about your development as a maker and an artist I was thinking, "well, Cincinnati has a really strong craft tradition." My mom's from Cincinnati. In each of those different places where you were living, did you find—you said that you visited museums a lot—were you finding creative communities of makers? Were you involved in that at all?

**NGW:** That's a good question. We were always keeping busy. I played piano from the time I was five, so music was always a part of our house. My mom and dad were of the generation where you gave kids kits, so you made potholders and baby dolls. These kits were so popular in the seventies. In terms of making, it's interesting. We went to museums and we looked at art, and we talked about art. I remember going to see the King Tut exhibition, and I remember when that wing opened at the Met that had all the Egyptian antiquities and I really wanted to be the kids in Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler's story. But in terms of making, it was really different from the public spaces we visited. My grandmother was very accomplished in terms of sewing and knitting, and things like that, so I started sewing and embroidering when I was six. We would do a lot of things at home that had to do with textiles and embellishment, a lot of decorative kinds of things. My mom is a really amazing knitter, and throughout my childhood she was knitting things, she always had some kind of a project she was working on. So it was really textile based and very much about personal adornment or clothing or gifts for people or things like that. Then I would say food was probably the other main area that there was a lot of creative interest. My father is a food chemist and my mom is a good cook, and my grandmother was as well, so there was a lot of food and a lot of parties with Indian families, with like sixty people showing up and such. But other than that I would say that the only other space where that public space of the museums and our private home in terms of visual arts connected was through my sister. My sister started painting when she was quite young. One of my closest friends' mom was a painter, and she used to give my

sister lessons. But it was always made really clear in the family at that time that that was great, and you could do that, but you needed to be a doctor. It was extra, it was always extra, but we went to museums all the time. I can't even tell you how many times during the seventies we were at MoMA [Museum of Modern Art] or the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art]. I could have given tours, we used to go so many times. It was just part of growing up for us.

**PA:** Did you have a favorite museum? Or favorite collection? Did you always go to fine the Egyptian works or something like that?

**NGW:** I remember the first painting that I really sort of remember being obsessed with was Picasso's *Three Musicians*. I just didn't understand the space and the way the flat planes connected didn't make sense to me and so I used to spend a lot of time staring at that. I also remember the Calder mobile at the airport, at the International Terminal. I remember spending a lot of hours waiting for people to show up underneath there and looking up at that. Other than that, I'm trying to think. That Egyptian wing was really special when that opened and I think that what fascinated me in the Egyptian Wing was the graffiti. That there was graffiti all over these temple pieces that they brought from someplace else and they still had these marks of the French soldiers and other people who'd been in that area. That fascinated me.

**PA:** Thank you. Another question that I was thinking about—when you came and spoke at our class at the BGC, which was amazing, I was really interested in how you talked about diversity and you mentioned that in your community in New Jersey there was a strong South East Asian or Indian community that your family was involved in. As you moved from these different cities and different states, how did you find the racial, ethnic diversity? And how much did that affect your growing up?

**NGW:** That's a good question. In Cincinnati, we were in a pretty international area, and I do remember while growing up that our close family friends in Cincinnati were from all over the place, a Dutch Jewish family, and an African American family lived next door where the father was a physician. All kinds of families, and Indian families too. In New Jersey, it was an interesting—in looking back on it and understanding it more as an adult—it was an interesting time of shifting going on with immigrant populations. My parents came over separately in the sixties and met in Florida in graduate school, and at the time they came over, immigration was severely restricted. They just did not allow a lot of Indians into the country for various reasons, which go back to political activities that were going on after the first World War by Indians that were living in the United States and fighting for independence from the British government. But in 1965, the

immigration laws changed and from that time forward and by the time the seventies hit, lots of people were coming over so there really was a difference. There was almost this generational difference between New Jersey and Texas. All of the Indian communities stuck together. My mom was Maharashtrian, but my dad is Bengali, and so, we were always in Indian groups where there might have been Gujaratis and Punjabis and people from Maharashtra and Bengal, but also lots of different parts of India. By the time we moved to Texas, the population that was in the area that we moved into in Houston had enough people from each of the individual states and regions that people could break off and just associate with people from their original region in India. So what happened for us, for me, because I was American born and I was being raised as an American of Indian origin—not as an Indian whose parents chose to live in America—which I think is a big difference. We found that when we went to Indian functions in Houston that my peers were making distinctions between us as in our being from two parts of India as opposed to just from one. There were some negative things that were being said and comments, and it got to the point where by the time I was a junior in high school I told my parents I wasn't going to anymore Indian functions, because my peer group would make comments about my Bengali father if we were in the Maharashtrian group, or the Bengali group would make comments about my mother who was Maharashtrian if we went to that group. It just wasn't that pan-Indian international environment that my parents had raised us in in New Jersey, so we stopped running around with Indian families as much at that time. But in terms of other aspects of diversity, when we lived in New Jersey, as I mentioned, it was incredibly diverse. We had forty school age children on one block in Jersey. We had: Catholic families who were Polish Catholic, Irish Catholic, South Jersey Catholic; there were many Jewish families, some of them reformed, some of them orthodox; there was a nation of Islam family, we were the Hindus on the block. There were so many different kinds of people who were from so many backgrounds all around. And when we moved from New Jersey to Spring, Texas, we moved into a neighborhood which was—now we understand—a white flight neighborhood. So there were only a handful of kids in my school who were from non-European backgrounds, and it was a very challenging, a very difficult time. There were a couple of other Indian kids in the school, of course, and then that meant that was who my homecoming and prom dates were [laughs] not because of my parents, but because of the environment. It was a challenging place to grow up, in Spring, Texas, and being in an environment where you knew that there were other parts of the country that were more mixed and diverse and offered opportunities to learn about other cultures and then you found yourself in this very narrow homogenous environment. It was really challenging. Does that get at what, is that what you were wondering about?

**PA:** Yes, definitely. Then after Spring, Texas, and—high school's already difficult and that sounds

like a lot of added challenges, you stayed in Texas and you went to Rice University. How did Rice support your development? You studied Art History and English?

**NGW:** Correct. I went to Rice, because I got waitlisted at Brown. [laughs.] I really wanted to go to Brown. I wanted to get out of Texas so badly. Rice was just a really great option, and so I ended up at Rice, and it was amazing. I cannot say enough about the phenomenal education I received at Rice and the opportunity to grow and think. I went to school thinking I was going to study Political Science and English, and that I was going to be a foreign correspondent. [laughs.] That was my ambition. At the time, and remember this was the mid-eighties, I was going to be there to report when the Berlin Wall came down some day, because at that point it was inconceivable that the Berlin Wall would actually come down in any close time period. I took my first political science class, and I hated it. I just hated it. And I think I got a horrendous grade in it; it was just awful. I can't even tell you how much I hated that class. My roommate was working to prepare herself to transfer into the School of Architecture, so she was taking Art History and I became really fascinated by her books, and by what she was studying. She would tell me what she was working on and it just blew my mind. My god, I didn't even—it had never occurred to me how the work happened in these museums that I loved. I just never had any conception of who worked there, how it worked, why the pieces were there, why museums moved things around. I just didn't even think about it. It opened up this opportunity, and so my second semester I took a drawing class, and I took the second half of art history first. That was probably the best thing I ever could have done, because it opened up this incredible world to me that I had no idea you could study. I ended up being afraid that my parents would be very unhappy that I was not going to be a doctor and that I was studying Art History [laughs] and English so I didn't actually tell them that I had switched my major for a while. It worked out just fine. Going back to making, it kind of tied in with it. I would sew for people as a way of making extra money. I can tell you that in the mid-eighties boxer shorts were really popular on campus and I made a ton of boxer shorts [laughs] for everybody, men, women, it was a great way to make extra money. I learned how to alter jackets, and I used to hem people's jeans and do all kinds of things that would involve my machine. That was a way that I made extra spending money. So sewing never left. I had started doing a lot of beading, and some small jewelry work when I was in high school and I continued doing that in college as a way of making money. One summer I didn't have enough income coming in so I started a t-shirt dressmaking business and made money on the side from that. So Rice offered some opportunities to investigate those kinds of things, but mostly it was because I happened to be in a group of friends who were willing to pay for my forays into cut-up t-shirts. My sophomore year, I started taking classes with William Camfield who writes a lot about Picabia and Duchamp. He was very close to Mrs. Dominique de Menil. I absolutely fell in love with art history. That was

pretty much it at that point. I took classes from Thomas McEvilley, and Richard Wilson taught Asian art. There were a couple of things about the way Rice was structured that shape the way I think and work through art history as well, in that, we were constantly being encouraged to go to museums. You had the Menil Collection, the Contemporary Arts Museum and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. There was no reason not to go and look at work firsthand to do your writing and research. I think that there might be a bench at the Menil that has an imprint from me sitting on it for so many hours [laughs] while I was doing my readings, but also, in going to the museums, I found out about internships. I did internships my junior year with Alison de Lima Greene at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. It was the moment when the MFAH was transitioning from this wall of drawers with little notecards in it for cataloguing the collection to computers. So I was helping them verify that everything had been transferred over into their computer system properly, and then in the process, one of the things they asked me to research was this piece by Gleizes, Albert Gleizes. It had appeared in the Armory Show. There was a group which sent letters to major museums every twenty-five years to track who held works from the Armory Show. I discovered that the museum had acquired one in that time period and brought it to the curator's attention. She sent it out to be cleaned and it turned out that the varnish had been bad on the painting. When they cleaned it, it actually was all pastels instead of browns and beiges. So it became this radical moment of understanding that art isn't static; it shifts and changes, and your experience of it can shift as you start to understand what you can do to take care of it. It was pretty cool. Then I did an internship at the Contemporary Arts Museum the next semester because I really was much more interested in contemporary art. It was with the person running PR and Education, and through that they asked me to do a children's workshop with a Rodney Alan Greenblatt exhibition, which is very cartoon-y, LA-sort of work. Through that I connected the institution with the Children's Museum of Houston. That got me fascinated in children's museums and museum education and between the summer of my junior year and senior year, I was working for five dollars an hour, wooh! [laughs] as a research assistant in the exhibition department at The Children's Museum. That was twenty hours a week, and the summer I supplemented my income with the t-shirt business because five dollars an hour was barely paying rent. That was how I became an employee at the museum through my senior year and then I worked at the museum fulltime for a year after that. So Rice offered an amazing opportunity to work, to get a fantastic foundation in critical thinking and it was a place that encouraged you to be inquisitive and curious, to test things and just try things out. I did a lot of film studies work there too. I should mention, Brian Huberman, I took a number of his classes. I have a bit of an obsession with Western films, with Westerns I mean. Brian had a whole class on that and it let me have my little moment of focusing on cowboy films. [laughs.]

**PA:** That's amazing. [laughs.]

**NGW:** For years, before we got married, my husband would come into the room. I'd be watching a cowboy movie and I'd switch it because I was appalled that anyone would find out that I was into them. [laughs.] He finally pushed me to answer, "what are you watching?" [laughs.] I admitted being addicted to these at the time. I really do think it was the internships, and the hands-on experience as well as fascination with Marcel Duchamp, and Dada, and then moving forward into the sixties from there, and just wondering why everybody didn't want to understand or get excited about how this work was challenging how you thought about art and the world is how museum education came into the focus for me.

**PA:** And you were—[squeaking] sorry sometimes the sound is bad—you worked for a year afterwards in the museum, and then what did you do after that?

**NGW:** I worked as the exhibition assistant at The Children's Museum for my senior year of college; I worked twenty hours a week. At the time, I should mention that Michael Galbraith from The Art Guys, was running the Exhibition Department, so it was also this opportunity to understand how a conceptual and object-driven artist takes on the role of education in a museum setting. They literally called me on my honeymoon and said "we have a job opening do you want it? It's the Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director/ Receptionist." [laughs.] I said yes, because it was a full-time job and it had insurance so we could go hiking. I worked in that administrative role for a year, but I really, really wanted to do museum education. An opening came up at the Blaffer Gallery at the University of Houston, which is a non-collecting contemporary art museum located on the University of Houston campus. Marti Mayo who was Director at the time hired me. My responsibility at Blaffer Gallery for the first year, year and a half was to develop the education program, and then later PR as well. I also wrote wall texts. The program had been in a fledgling state before I got there and had just received a big Warhol grant to hire graduate students from the art department to teach in the museum. I ended up coming into my position with an MFA class of people who are phenomenal artists: Osamu James Nakagawa, a photographer who teaches at Indiana University and is a Guggenheim recipient, Kelly Klaasmeyer who is a writer, and was one of the first people to receive a Creative Capital Grant for online blogging, Angie Emmett who is not making art at this time, but her student thesis work was written up in *Artforum*, and Michael Ray Charles who is at the University of Texas. So it was an amazing, amazing group of students. They became my resource for thinking through and testing ways of teaching in a museum environment. I worked for three years running the Education Department and partly through that time I was given the additional responsibilities of PR and



writing wall texts in addition to programming. I developed is a program called UHReach; the name seemed like a great way of combining the university with outreach and to emphasize that it was connected to an academic institution. For the first year I basically focused on tours, got to know what was going on in the schools, and worked closely with the art teacher at the arts magnet middle school. I used that year to test and develop ideas about how we could create a unique program. The second year, I expanded the program to include several schools, five schools, I think? I decided to focus the programming on middle schools and high schools because they were not being served by other art museums at that time in the same way. Keep in mind this is the early nineties so we're heading into the Culture Wars; it's the moment when "Excellence And Equity" came out from AAM, the American Alliance of Museums, who produced this document that established that education would be the way museums could connect with communities. It was a very exciting moment to be in museum education. The National Arts Education Association was very connected to Texas. There was a really strong bond in Houston, and. I was encouraged by others in the area to go to the NAEA conference where I had the most amazing opportunities for mentorship by leaders in the field. Kim Kanatani and Vas Prabhu, amongst other people who have now gone onto other positions. I think Kim is Deputy Director of the Guggenheim? The folks who were running the most innovative education programs in the country were there, and it opened up a connection to contemporary art. They helped me think through how I could, as a museum educator in a college and university museum, use art students as my teachers and then eventually also add students from the writing program. University of Houston has a phenomenal creative writing program. They helped me think about how we could turn UHReach into a great opportunity for students of all ages, college included, to learn about contemporary art and learn how to talk about it. The idea was to focus on middle school students because University of Houston, which was located in an urban environment, could become a way to encourage students who lived on the perimeter of the university to be on campus, to be engaged, and to potentially see themselves as future students in a university setting. The UHReach program I believe is still changing and evolving. So this was the moment when the culture wars were really kicking in. Remember, the Robert Mapplethorpe closures were going on. We had a board that was very, very contemporary in their focus and thinking. We brought Dennis Barrie down, the board raised money to support his lecture fees as a way of supporting the legal fees in the court case about the Mapplethorpe exhibition. There were people like Peter Schjeldahl who came down and gave lectures and Mike and Doug Starn's exhibition took place there. Marti had studied at American University; she'd studied painting and then she'd worked at the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston before and after the Blaffer. Marti is very much an artist in her approach to research, thinking and writing. From Marti, I learned how you must be comfortable working in an unknown space. Contemporary art needs you to create a platform for opportunity and

experimentation for artists. I remember, for example, one day when we'd left work with the Starn exhibition up. It looked good, and I was so excited to get to work in in the space, and to be able to spend time thinking about how to teach from it and so forth. I came back the next morning and the entire exhibition had come down and been reinstalled. And it looked phenomenal. It looked good the night before, but it looked phenomenal the next day. I realized that they had been up all night redoing it and that was where I learned that it's not done until it's done well, and you have to keep pushing to support the artists in making sure that it is going in the way that it needs to go. You have a responsibility when you work in museums to represent artists' work as well as you can in that kind of space. What happened is that they used the architecture of the space differently in the reinstallation. They went up very, very high on the walls. They pulled up a lot of things that were down low so it was not quite salon style, but it definitely used these areas in the architecture of the space that were not usually engaged. It called attention to the spatial aspects of curating for me. That had a huge impact on me as well. Do you want me to continue from there?

**PA:** Sure, sure, definitely.

**NGW:** So while I was at the Blaffer Gallery I received a Smithsonian Fellowship for Museum Leadership in 1992 I went to DC and spent a couple of weeks in this program with about fifteen others. It was an interesting, very challenging moment to be in DC. There was a lot of fear, the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] cuts were happening at that time. There were exhibitions, controversial exhibitions—the American Art Museum was showing “Chicano Art and Resistance” or “Resistance and Affirmation” might have been the title, I can't remember now. There was an exhibition about the migration of African Americans after the Civil War into Chicago and other urban centers. There was an exhibition that showed the relationship between indigenous populations and Mexican influences in places like Arizona. There was an exhibition about the Japanese Internment Camps during World War II for which George Takei narrated the video. So many different ethnic groups in the United States that constitute American identity were being addressed, but the internment camp one was the only one—it was the only one—that did not have a publication associated with it. That really caught my attention. In addition to that, this was the moment when Guillermo Gomez Pina and Coco Fusco and artists who were working in this very intellectual, but deeply charged cultural space were coming into focus, and I frankly got tired of people throwing up their hands and saying, [in a different voice] “we don't understand how to talk about this kind of work.” I decided that it was time to go back to graduate school, and that's what led me to The University of Chicago. At the time it was to work with a professor named Paul Rogers, who was working through stereotype and race theory at University of Chicago. Paul ended up leaving and I shifted my focus to a different area, but that was what drove me to

graduate school. It was in the fall of '93 that I started graduate school.

**PA:** That was going to be my next question. What were your impressions of Chicago coming from Texas, and how did it feel to go back to school after having worked for a few years?

**NGW:** Between 1989 and 1993, art history changed. And it changed dramatically. I had been working with contemporary artists, Mike and Doug Starn, for example. I was right in the midst of what artists were making and doing and showing. I went back to school and people are talking about this person named Derrida, and Foucault, and it was sort of understood that your paper had to have either a Foucault or Derrida footnote on the front page or it wasn't going to be taken seriously. And frankly, I had no idea who these people were, not a clue. And I was terrified that I was going to fail out of graduate school. Within the first few weeks, I went into my advisor Paul Rogers and I said "I don't know if I should be here, I don't know who these people are, I don't understand how to engage with this with contemporary art. This isn't what I've been doing for four years and what I've been writing about and working on, and I just feel really lost." His advice to me was to find a couple of texts and write through them, to literally use pen and paper or the computer keyboard and re-write sections to understand how the language was constructed. How a paragraph was constructed. How an argument was constructed. In some ways it was a very physical, tactile, craft-oriented [laughs] approach to contemporary theory. He did a classic thing. He put a stack of books in front of me by Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhaba, and all these people that he felt that I needed to read in order to do my proposed project on Asian American artists, and then picked up the stack and said "But, you're not ready for this." My reaction was "Oh yes I am. Put that down, I need to go through that." The second semester of school, he did a one-on-one independent study with me focused on getting me caught up to where art history was. It felt like I had walked into a completely different world. My first year was really about immersing myself in the language and understanding how to integrate contemporary theory and critical theory into studying contemporary art. My master's thesis looked at representations of Chinese in nineteenth-century American art. I did that because I thought "If I'm going to be looking at Asian Americans, and contemporary Asian American artists, I really need to understand how this particular population became a part of the American landscape, the cultural landscape, and so forth." It was a difficult project because—I think in retrospect, it probably would have been better done through material culture or visual studies, but I was doing it through art history. The kind of work I was looking at was Fredrick Remington, Charles Russell, *Harper's Weekly* and a lot of popular magazines and political cartoons, things like that. In 1993, 1994, doing that at the University of Chicago was not very well received. It was very challenging. But, I finished my thesis, I was accepted into the PhD program. Around the time I got accepted into the PhD program, I

found out that Arjun Appadurai, who is an anthropologist and was, at that time, Director of the Humanities Institute, was looking for a research assistant. I applied, got accepted, and I started working for him. I worked the whole summer as his research assistant, and it opened up this space for thinking through disciplinary relationships—and to work on figuring out how to be interdisciplinary between anthropology and art history. I worked for Arjun for that year, and then I think it was my second year in graduate school that I started working on a class on diaspora, helping Carol Breckenridge and Arjun develop the syllabus for a class on diaspora. Carol founded the journal, *Public Culture*. I shifted the focus of my research to looking at the question of the aesthetics of everyday life. It came in part out of a class that Katherine Taylor offered called “The American Family Home.” I thought, “What exactly is the American family home?” Growing up in New Jersey, in those cookie-cutter houses, there wasn't a single space that looked the same inside, and most of them didn't look the same on the outside either. I began to wonder if the home I grew up in, and the way we inhabited home would be considered American or not. Working with Arjun and Carol gave me the chance to think through this class taught by Katherine and to explore questions about the aesthetics of everyday life, but really thinking about it from the diasporic perspective. I was working towards my dissertation, “Producing A Place Like Home: Diasporic Domesticity in Chicago,” which you can tell from the title is not a straight-up art history project. [laughs.] I'm sure you can imagine that that went over well in a school that was focused on a more traditional approach to art history. It was challenging. I was taking a lot of classes in anthropology and South Asian studies at the same time I was working through art history. I ended up being invited by Katherine to present on a panel she did related to this topic called “Buildings as Belongings.” I think it was either '96 or '97 at College Art Association. Katherine invited me to contribute a chapter to her book from my dissertation. I came back from the conference. I had completed my graduate coursework—but let me back up for a second. One of the things that's really frustrating is that the University of Chicago requires you to have French or Italian and German as your foreign languages (in Art History). I had already passed the French exam, but I petitioned to do Hindi and Bengali instead of German because I was finding it was really challenging for me to move my project outside of a certain sort of middle and upper middle class environment. I really wanted to talk to taxicab drivers, and service workers, and find out what they were bringing over and how they were making home in a new place, because it's really much easier, it's a very easy project to go to the class where you're a peer. It was much more challenging to try to talk to folks because I don't speak any other languages from India. The department didn't really take well to my petition. I put a passage in it from Walter Benjamin's “Task of the Translator,” where he quotes Rudolf Pannwitz who says “we need to stop translating Hindi into German and start translating German into Hindi.” I think this directional shift is very, very important to understand, that knowledge goes both ways or you're only educating half the

world. Access is really an issue. The department said “you have to do German and you have to do Hindi or Bengali and we’re very concerned that you don’t understand what art history is about.” [laughs]. So it was challenging. By the third year I had finished the coursework, I had passed the German exam. There was a woman, I can’t remember her name now, who had developed a whole industry where she basically taught people in six weeks how to pass the German exam. And so I put down my money and I took the class and I passed the exam, and promptly ignored all of it. But, when I came back from CAA, I had finished all the coursework, and I was preparing my exam questions, and there were a number of different things that happened with other professors that made me really question the ethical standards in academia. I began to work for a company called e-Lab that was doing video ethnography, using ethnographic research methods to understand user behavior for designing, redesigning products or spaces for companies. I found this was a fantastic way of applying theory to real-world situations, and I ended up leaving graduate school. I’d also spent much of the summer reading fiction, and watching talk shows, and when you start doing [laughs] when you start behaving that way, it’s probably a sign that it’s time to take a break and decide what you really want to do, because if the art history department was upset about my writing about this anthropological, aesthetics of everyday life, craft-oriented dissertation, they really, really weren’t interested in the nuances of gestures between Montel Williams, Oprah Winfrey and Jenny Jones. [laughs.] I could’ve done that that summer, that’s how much I was avoiding school. So, I ended up leaving graduate school. I took a year off, a leave of absence, and I went to work for E-Lab. It was one of the most phenomenal year and a half experiences. Very, very intense, but an incredible experience in applying theory outside of academia and to real-world situations. While I was there, I was working with, with researchers from University of Chicago and Duke, and folks who had gone to Illinois Institute of Technology, and RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology], and so forth. The folks who were running the company were Rick Robinson, and John Cain; it was a stimulating environment, but I came to understand that I wasn’t interested in working 24/7. The environment was very challenging. Everyone was really young, I don’t think anyone had any kids at the time. You were excited because there was a shower at work if you needed it, there was a washer and dryer at work and if you were working late, they would bring in plates of shrimp. There was a cappuccino maker, and iced tea maker, and it was just this feeling of “wow, it’s like home,” and then it was, “wait a minute, I’m never ever home.” We were traveling like crazy and it just got to the point where it was starting to impact my health. Around that time we all got great Christmas bonuses, because we were working 24/7. So I used my bonus to take a metalsmithing workshop at Lillstreet, and at the time, it was in its original location, just a short five-to-ten minute walk from my house in Chicago. We had moved to the Northside by that point. I quit my job two weeks later, and became a metalsmith. [laughs] I didn’t leave the job right away, I did continue working for several months,

but by April of that year, I left and spent the next two years studying metalsmithing at Lillstreet. By the first fall I was selling my work in boutiques and, I had an ill-fated project with someone with whom I'd ended up getting product into Neiman Marcus for the Christmas holidays. I learned a lot about production jewelry, and a lot of the basic skills to make my own work. Then we decided to move to the West Coast. While I was in graduate school, I received a research fellowship to study representations of Chinese in American art for my master's thesis [1994]. That had been the first time I visited the West Coast, and I absolutely fell in love with it. So it was always the aim to get back, to figure out how to get to the West Coast. We ended up in Portland, because we had friends who lived there who encouraged us to come out and look at Portland, and we realized that San Francisco was just cost prohibitive and we ended up in Portland instead.

**PA:** And what did you do when you got to Portland?

**NGW:** When I got to Portland, I was still working on jewelry and it was an amazing experience coming into a city where craft is so much a part of everyday life. I immediately got involved in the Creative Metal Arts Guild, and was encouraged by a woman who has now passed on, Madeline Janovic. She immediately said, "Oh, you're new to town, great! Here's where you go to buy your metal supplies, here's how you get involved in these organizations, here are the other metalsmiths who are in your neighborhood, this is where we're finding our pearls, this is where we're finding our gemstones, did you hear that Bonny Doon is doing a hydraulic press workshop and they're looking for an assistant on the weekends? You should do that." And that's how I ended up getting my press. They immediately brought me in, "This where you go to get your stuff photographed, this guy's the best photographer." She was amazing at connecting me with everybody. We got there in September of '98, and by January of '99, my studio was set up. It was fully decked out. I had taken that Bonny Doon workshop, I had my hydraulic press, my plates were already getting out, and I had produced my first photographs. That next spring, I was on the poster for the Creative Metal Arts Guild with a necklace that I had done, so it was quite good. [laughs.] It worked out very, very well. I continued making jewelry, and then in '99, we adopted our daughter. And, I pulled back a bit. On a personal note, we had been trying to have a birth child for a long time and were having struggles with that, and miscarriages, and we realized that once my daughter came home we weren't sure we really wanted to have a lot of those chemicals in the air. My studio is in our basement, and not well ventilated. I took a little time off that fall, and ended up getting pregnant. So I stopped making jewelry while I was pregnant and while the kids were little until I was done nursing. I was a stay-at-home mom for five years, which I'm not sure a lot of people know, but I stayed home, and I thought my career was over, as you can imagine. But I had a beautiful garden, a beautiful, beautiful garden. It's like every creative impulse was poured in

there, and my kids had the best costumes and clothes. I spent a lot of time making things for them, fun things, toys and things like that. It was a great experience to be home with them, and I did continue doing jewelry on and off, writing a tiny bit here and there. I'd do small things; there were two or three galleries that carried my work and just let me get it to them when I could. They were really lovely about working with me on that. And then, in 2004, my kids were in school, and I took a workshop to get my business, to figure out how to get a proper business plan to really go forward with the jewelry. And in 2004, I re-launched my line. By that fall, I was selling in about seven galleries across the country, and selling through Guild.com, which is now Artful Home. Basically re-launched the whole business. And that fall is when the opening came about for the position as Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at the Museum of Contemporary Craft, which was Contemporary Crafts Museum and Gallery at the time, and so that was the transition from jewelry. But I was finding already, in going back to the jewelry and really focusing on it for the first time that in those five years in the interim—I had been reading *Metalsmith* magazine voraciously—I found that the kind of work that was stimulating me intellectually was not coming out of my hands. I didn't know how to do it, and so what I could do was production work, but production work for me was not a good option. I got bored. So this position opened up, and it seemed like a great opportunity.

**PA:** Before we talk about the museum, can you describe your jewelry for me?

**NGW:** Sure. My jewelry was very simple, it was very bold and graphic, I had two threads that I was working through. The first piece that I made in my class—no, the second piece I made in the class—was based on Shisha embroidery from Gujarat, you know when they embroider those mirrors onto fabric? So I was interpreting that into gold, and silver. And basically a lot of stitching of gold onto silver and creating a lot of squares that imitated that idea of these textile embroidery techniques. The other thing that I was working on, and the line that was much more successful because it did lend itself better to production was based on very graphic leaves. It was a series which I created from a whole number of different leaf shapes and then had steel plates made so that I could stamp them out, and then I could manipulate them into necklaces, and bracelets, and earrings, and, all different kinds of attachments. It gave me this sort of—these pieces were an alphabet if you will, to start rearranging and creating forms from there. And that's what I was working on, with a brushed finish and patina on them. I would oxidize the silver and then brush them off with those green steel pads, so it was a lot of finishing work to warm the metal. I didn't like highly polished work, I very much liked the brushed patina work, because I liked how it didn't show evidence of handwork if you didn't know what it was, but it dulled and warmed the metal at the same time for me. I did a lot of, I did a number of art fairs and things like that during those

years, on and off during those years that the kids were little. Philosophically, it was very important to me to have a line of jewelry that went from inexpensive, thirty, forty-five dollar earrings to six hundred, seven hundred, eight hundred dollar necklaces that were elaborate and constructed in more complex ways, because I wanted the work to be owned by people. I wanted people to be able to afford something. I also learned a lot about the power of getting a piece of jewelry on peoples' bodies, and as soon as I could get them to try something on, I could make a sale because the work graphically was interesting but it didn't come to life until you put it on. And that actually made it really challenging to sell in certain galleries, those galleries I was selling in, the gallerists would complain, "until I can get it on someone it doesn't always make sense." And so, it started me really understanding this issue of the graphic quality of an object as opposed to that haptic, tactile, embodied experience that we have with an object. So I had been thinking about that a little bit through my own work.

**PA:** And do you think, your work as a textile artist, growing up doing a lot of sewing, do you think that influenced your work in metal? Translating those different materials.

**NGW:** It absolutely influenced my work in metal. I am a fabricator. I think in flat pieces and construct in flat planes. I can look at a couch, or a sofa, or a chair, and I can tell you how to cut the pieces to create a cover for it. My mind goes there, but if you were to give me a block and ask me to carve a shape or a chair out of it, my head doesn't work that way. I don't—I can't work in that removal of material to have an object emerge. I have to start from the flat planes and build up, and so all my work was fabricated in that way.

**PA:** Thank you. Let's talk about the museum now. So you started there as a curator and then over the time, became director, and what was that museum community like in comparison to your experiences in Chicago, and also Texas?

**NGW:** In Chicago and in Texas, in Houston, I was really very focused on contemporary art, and that was what I was working through. This was the first time I was focused specifically on craft and craft practices. I had been selling my jewelry in the Contemporary Crafts Museum and Gallery since '99. So I had a relationship—I mean, basically, my relationship with Portland is completely enmeshed in my relationship with this institution. Truly. It was one of the galleries, while my children were little that let me bring pieces in when I could and didn't have an issue with that. So, I knew the organization, I knew the people, and because I had been reading *Metalsmith* magazine and doing some reading on my own, I knew some of the questions and issues about craft. What interested me, and the reason I was even interested in this position



was because I was seeing a shift in the work people were doing and what was being shown at Contemporary Crafts Gallery. It was when Beth Cavener Stitcher had her first big exhibition at that space. I walked in and there were these figurative sculptures with animal forms that were emotional and placed at really odd locations in the space, and I thought, "Oh, this is kind of interesting." Then there was a big Bob Stocksdale turned bowl exhibition that also caught my attention. I think Glenn Adamson may have written one of the essays for that, now that I think about it, or that catalogue and I was already pretty enmeshed in the creative craft community, because I served as a board member for the Creative Metal Arts Guild for a couple of years. I ran the PR and development for a big sale we did every year for two or three years. So I knew that community very well. What I didn't know as well was ceramics or how things were made and such, but, the community in Portland, there's this intermingling between contemporary art and the craft arena. There are certain places where it's just the craft arena, and it is a place where working through traditional methods as a starting place and expanding from there, or continuing to be a straight-up weaver is possible, and is embraced. There are ways to actually do that. There were a number of guilds, and we used to do a show, they still do a show, with all the different guilds each year. That was the show I helped organize earlier for the metals group that brought together guilds that were the ceramics, and metal, and glass, and fibers, and wood and so forth. Everybody was coming together so it was the kind of thing where you knew that there was this huge number of people who were involved in studio-based production. Just from going to those shows, you knew there was community out there and you were engaged. So it was a very easy step to go into that.

**PA:** And when you became director, did you continue to curate shows at the museum?

**NGW:** I did. I became curator in '04, and then in '08 is when the executive director who had hired me left, was when the museum went through financial issues with the economy and after having moved into a new building with increased expenses and so forth. So he left, and from '08 to 2012, I reported to nine different people during that period. The staff was reduced to me and Kat Perez who was the assistant curator. She started out as my intern and then moved into that role over time. So in 2012, when I became director, I was also chief curator, and we hired Sarah Margolis-Pineo as an assistant curator, and we hired Nicole Nathan back as the curator of collections and registrar. So they were doing exhibitions also, but I was also curating and overseeing all of the programming. The position was not an executive director position, it was a director of the museum. Basically, it didn't involve a whole lot of change from what I was doing from 2008 to 2012. The main difference was that because I had moved into this new role, I was able to hire two more people so that I wasn't curating everything.

**PA:** Yeah, that must have been so much work, so much.

**NGW:** It was a tremendous amount of work, we're talking about years and years of sixty- to eighty-hour weeks to keep the standards high, and keep the work where it needed to be.

**PA:** So that sort of leads into my next question, which was having worked in contemporary art and with contemporary art for so long, what did you see as the challenges, but also the rewards and possibilities of working with craft objects?

**NGW:** That's a good question. It was kind of this amazing moment to enter into the field, because things were starting to shift and change. There was between 2004 to 2006 this moment of dismay, about CCA, California College of the Arts, and Museum of Arts and Design dropping craft from their names, but at the same time, it was this moment where there were a number of people writing theory books, and publishing and discussions were shifting. So it became this moment where there was really an opportunity to address the contemporary aspects of craft, and to try to be responsive in a different way to how people were making work. I say 'making' very self-consciously, because I don't, I'm using that to encompass artists as much as craftspeople or people trained through craft. There was a big shift, it was a moment of really identifying that shift, and there was a way to use craft as a subject, as a verb, as a noun, as a lens and to really play around with what craft offers as a way of thinking through visual production or object production in a different way. And with the rise in the number of people who were doing outstanding research work, and writing, it gave an opportunity to experiment with their writing as much as with the content for the exhibitions, too. It was an exciting moment to start re-thinking craft. In terms of contemporary art, I think that having worked in contemporary art museums and on contemporary art in graduate school, there were certain kinds of, there was certain access to language and ways of discussing, and talking about visual art that I had access to that I could bring into contemporary craft in a different way. But what I was trying really hard to do was not to privilege one way over another, but to really open up space where we could figure out what craft needed in order to push the field itself into a different place.

**PA:** And how important do you think it is to use those terms 'craft,' 'art,' 'design' in terms of curating and displaying the objects?

**NGW:** I think it's very important actually, and it's important because we live in a moment where there's this risk of everything kind of dissolving into some sort of sameness, dissolving into the

same level of importance or state of being. It's a moment, then, where specificity becomes really critical. I think of craft museums in the way that I think about the Studio Museum in Harlem, it is a very specific lens, it's doing work that is important to do, to call your attention to a group that does not get represented in mainstream, large-scale museums in the same way. That's not to say that artists at the Studio Museum are not represented there, it's just that Studio Museum gives a place to focus and go deep in a particular way, and that's what I see, or that's what I tried to do with the Museum of Contemporary Craft, or that's what I see the opportunity as with having a craft-focused museum. That means, too, then that you can rethink history and making in a different way. For example, it opens up space to bring in Ai Weiwei, which we did when Arcadia University curated an exhibition that I brought in that focused on his ceramics. Because it was focused on ceramics it allowed for—and a lot of those objects had functional histories at one point—it allows for a very particular lineage to be addressed through the museum, but to bring in contemporary approaches and think it into the contemporary craft space. It also opens up a space where, for example, I remember an exhibition I saw at the Walker once where they had pulled out work by Robert Morris, and Carl Andre, and Donald Judd and so forth. I walked in and looked around and I saw metal, wood and fiber and clay. And I thought, “Wow, it would be fantastic to do a craft reading of this installation instead.” And so it opens a way for re-understanding modern and contemporary art from a different perspective and lens. I think that's really critical in this time where the market forces are really dominating things, certainly dominating the most public discussions. It's really critical that we protect noncommercial projects and work that doesn't just operate at the level of that Art Basel circuit, the biennial circuit, but actually recognizes a way of working and producing objects and thinking about the visual that is consistent, that has not really left cultural production. One of the things that I was talking about with my students recently is the question of whether this renaissance in abstraction, the renaissance perspective in abstraction, whether it is a blip, whether that's a shift away, but that craft has been constant and continues to be constant is a really important thing to understand. That's what a contemporary craft museum should be able to help people to see.

**PA:** Something that struck me also about you talking about your visit to the Walker, those were all mostly white male makers and artists, and it seems that craft also offers that opportunity to bring in gender diversity as well. So that leads into my next question: what was, if you had to pick a favorite of the countless shows that you curated at the museum, what was your favorite and why?

**NGW:** Oh! [laughs.] It's so hard to choose only one. This is the challenge, every one of those of those projects was a way to think through a different question, right? So each of them built my

knowledge and thinking in a different way. The most recent one that I think was a favorite was *Object Focus: The Bowl*, because it built on what I learned through *Gestures of Resistance*, through *Touching Warms the Art*, through *Laurie Herrick: Weaving Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, but *Object Focus: The Bowl* really allowed me to work through a number of different kinds of installation questions, engagement questions, bring in a ton of community engagement and involvement into the museum, and actually delve into a form that is often overlooked as the focus in craft. There's great writing that came out of it from scholars and writers, as much as the general public. It was very exciting to bring people into the conversation, and also a way to challenge the museum as a destination and actually flip the museum into being a hub or a node as much as it was the destination. In some ways that exhibition was this great way of putting my theories and ideas about everyday life and getting people to notice everyday life from my dissertation into action.

**PA:** That's a really beautiful way to put it. Something I was thinking about was how your work in education really attuned you to visitors and visitor needs, with your work at the museum as a curator and then director, were you cultivating new audiences? Because you talk about working through these different questions. Did you see a significant change in who was coming to the museum over the time that you were there?

**NGW:** That's a great question. When I worked there from 2004 to 2007, we had about twelve thousand people coming a year. If we had more than six or eight people we celebrated with beer on the deck, because that's how slow it was over there at 3934 SW Corbett Avenue. When we moved the museum to 724 NW Davis Street, the very first year saw somewhere between fifty or sixty thousand visitors. We were expecting twenty to thirty thousand, so that gives you a sense of the surprise, [laughs] the surprise that the staff had. Oh my gosh, there were so many people all the time that first year. It sort of evened out to somewhere between thirty, forty thousand over time. The challenging thing—it's complicated to answer your question. The museum was a standalone institution for most of its history, which meant that it was really cultivating a particular segment of the community, and building up from there. When the integration partnership began with Pacific Northwest College of Art in 2009, there was a real shift over those next five years to focus more on the students and the kind of teaching, focus and questions that were happening at the college more than working as a broader institution to serve the community. So it was always a juggling act to try to balance reaching out, and reaching in at the same time. That was challenging, but that said, that was the lens that guided which exhibitions happened in the last several years. It was very much about how do we create exhibitions that are going to serve both of those needs? To satisfy curricular questions, issues and problems that students and faculty are thinking of, as

well as reaching out. I think the problem is that there was not anyone dedicated specifically to public relations or audience cultivation at the museum. What ends up happening is you work on a project-by-project basis. Each of those projects brings in different groups and say one exhibition brings in a hundred people, right? You might have ten to fifteen percent of those people who stay with you to the next exhibition, and then you'll bring in new people and then a few of those people who carried over might drop off, but then new people will come in and stay and go to the next one. Constantly building and cultivating that would have required a dedicated person, and we just didn't have anyone at the museum to really make sure that we weren't working in a project-by-project way. We did try. We tried with programming, we tried with working with the guilds, but I don't think it was as successful as it could have been had we had a staff person just focused on cultivating that. We had someone from the college who worked on membership, but the amount of time that they were allowed to dedicate to that was quite, quite limited. It really ended up primarily being a responsive thing to inquiries or applications that came through, and not really cultivating in a way that would have sustained or grown our membership in any way, shape or form.

**PA:** Thank you. Thinking about cultivating audiences, in 2008 you cofounded the Critical Craft Forum with Elisabeth Agro. I was interested in how the two of you came up with the idea? Then after that, I'm going to ask about hopes for the future.

**NGW:** So Elisabeth and I met at the 2006 American Craft Council Conference, and that conference in many ways was invaluable for helping me make these connections, to understand the field, and to figure out when we opened our museum the following year what our programming was going to do to change the field, to really shift it and open it up in a different way. We stayed in touch, and I was in Philadelphia for an exhibition review panel with the Pew Charitable Trust, that happened to be the panel where the Ai Weiwei exhibition was up for consideration, and ended up getting funding. I said "once it's approved, can I call Arcadia and ask them if we can borrow it?" So Elisabeth was the only person who knew I was in town, because when you do these panels, you really want to stay under the radar because you will be found out. People realize, "Oh, you must have been coming down to the Bush Foundation or Pew or Artist's Trust." So you have to be kind of quiet about it, and Elisabeth and I decided to spend a day going to galleries and looking at exhibitions together. It was in walking around and looking at work we realized there was something we needed that we weren't getting out of the field at that time, which was a space that recognized how, as curators working through museums, we really were working from a pivot point where academia and guilds-type craftspeople and studio craftspeople and academics who were teaching and academically-trained practitioners were coming together

in museum spaces, and that we needed to create a noncommercial space where conversations could happen. At that time, SOFA [Sculpture Objects Functional Art and Design] was really the place where everybody would go and meet. It's a great place for collecting and focusing on certain aspects of the field, but it wasn't the place for thinking through more intellectual questions, or how all these different things come together through museums. The first thing I did is contact the American Craft Council as they were in the planning stages for the 2009 conference. We proposed doing a pre-conference session, and the timing couldn't have been more perfect. I'd had a long conversation with Susan Cummins, the founder of Art Jewelry Forum, who was the person in charge of thinking about how to address the field, and it tied in exactly with thinking that the board was doing about what needed to happen to expand the field. So Elisabeth and I organized a session. There were about twenty curators who came from all different kinds of institutions: there were media specific ones, large survey museums, small specific museums. We had a lot of really great discussions beforehand, and then during that day about the field. I also contacted College Art Association as the CAA Conference in the next year was going to be held in Chicago. I said, "Look, we are noticing that the Center for Craft, Creativity of Design and a number of other individual sessions at CAA have started to focus on craft a bit more. We don't think it's ready to be a specific society." CAA has those different groups like the Design Society and so forth, and we didn't think it was necessary to do that, but we wanted to see what the interest was. So they gave us a session at 7:30 in the morning on a Thursday morning—

**PA:** Oh my gosh—[laughs.]

**NGW:** [laughs.] And I think some seventy odd people showed up.

**PA:** Wow—

**NGW:** And it was the same year that there was a snowstorm on the East Coast. So most of the people who lived in Philadelphia, New York and New Jersey and DC couldn't make it, including Elisabeth. [laughs.] So that began the connection with College Art Association, and then what happened out of that were discussions about how we needed to create a platform. I was very frank with everyone, I said "Look, I'm working at this museum and Elisabeth's working at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and we don't have the time or space to create something unique so what we need to do is tap into systems that are already out there." This, philosophically, is really a foundation for me for a lot of what I've done in my own curatorial practice. If there is a system out there that seems to be working, can you use that? If it's free it's even better. So we created the Facebook group. That's how that started, and over time, I would say most of the time it tends

to operate as a distribution center, a place to funnel things, but then there are these moments where a research inquiry comes through from a student, or a researcher who is further along in their career, and it prompts great discussion and questions. Or there's a controversial issue that comes up that people get very engaged in. So there are these moments where it functions less as a bulletin board and more as the platform that we really wanted it to be in the beginning.

**PA:** Thank you. I have a couple questions left—

**NGW:** Sure.

**PA:** And I'm cognizant of your time. Would you like to see Critical Craft Forum going in the direction of something larger or take a different form? Or do you think right now it's serving a need? Are there plans for it or is it fine the way it is?

**NGW:** When I left the museum, one goal was really to focus my time and energy on Critical Craft Forum. To that end, I started work on developing some podcasts and some other conversations, I have a number of recordings that are completed, but need to be processed and released. One is a project I started and I'd like to continue—I called it *Talk Back*. I will admit here that I don't title things in the best way, and if anyone wants to help me title things [laughs] that's great, because I just think I'm terrible at it. We recorded a conversation where Rowland Ricketts, Stephen Knott, Sarah Margolis-Pineo and I had a discussion about Tim Ingold's book *Making*. The idea was to have it function like a recorded book group, but to compose the participants from different parts of the field. With Rowland you get someone who is an artist, and is working through a physical, material practice, but is also an educator, you get Stephen, who is an art historian, but also an educator, and then Sarah and I coming from the museum field. So it was a way to try to figure out in looking at this book together and discussing it together, how it can be used as a tool, and how we each understand it and use it. That's something I would very much like to get going, to work towards bringing people in to have those discussions, because it was a really productive discussion for all of us, and fascinating which things caught different peoples' attention and why. When I worked at the museum, one of the things that a lot of artists said to me was that they liked having recorded conversations, because they could listen to them while they were working. The art historians and curators all say, "We like to have written texts, because we don't listen to podcasts and conversations, we don't have time." So I'm trying to figure out a balance with that, in terms of offering different kinds of ways of accessing these conversations. One of the things that's happening right now, is that I'm working on a publication for Wiley Blackwell, it's a *Companion on Contemporary Craft*. The funding for that project comes from an outside foundation and is

funneled through Critical Craft Forum so that Critical Craft Forum becomes the platform for creating critical discussion and critical texts as well. I want to see more of that. I have had countless conversations with people about the possibility of doing chapters or groups in different cities, and I have to say, my hesitation with those models is that it turns me into a herder, where I'm constantly pulling people in to say, "Do you have something to report? Do you have something to share? Did you get somebody to write about this? Did you get somebody to write about that?" And I'm not sure that's the best role for me to take on, particularly because right now the work is voluntary. Moving forward, I want to create a model that is about discussion and engagement, and brings opportunities that I have to do other work into the conversation more effectively. I think that's what I need to do a better job of—when I'm in a city, making sure that I set up a couple interviews or discussions. For example, I'm going to be in Paris in May for a ceramic discussion, and I'm going to be working with Benjamin Lignel on a gender and jewelry project. There's an opportunity to maybe then set up a discussion group to talk about the field in some way, and use that moment to gain an international perspective. I'm working on thinking about those kinds of things, and then ideally what I'd like to do is have students and folks who are just getting started in the field, and thinking things through differently, to feel comfortable coming and saying, "Hey, you know what? I have these five pieces I've been wanting to write, or one piece I've been wanting to write, or this person I've really been wanting to interview and I wonder if you'd be willing to let me test that out?" To figure out how to really make that happen so that multiple, multi-generational voices are included opens up the space so that other people's ways of understanding the field, not just mine.

**PA:** I'd love to listen to that podcast so I hope it happens. Something that really struck me in reading about your biography and then talking today was your move between all of these pretty vastly different locations across the United States, and then your work with diasporic communities and identity. How important do you feel that 'place' is to your work academically, and then your own creative work?

**NGW:** I think place is absolutely critical to the way I work and the things I see. I say that with some hesitation, because I don't think everybody has to look through place and cultural, locational specificity the way I do, but for me, I really believe that the power of craft is in the fact that there are still regional differences. Those differences can be celebrated and honored and documented and recorded and challenged in ways that the monolithic cultural things that percolate up don't allow. I think that place is really important. On a personal level, it is a huge difference to go from central Jersey at a moment when Punk Rock and New Wave and AIDS is hitting, and you go down to Spring, Texas, and the girls are wearing silk dresses to school, and



you get sent home if your skirt is too short, and they're wearing their hair on the side with these ponytails. [both laugh.] It's just weird. It was like this retro fifties thing, and they go to cotillions. You're in this area where you had to be straight, there was no other option. It was very challenging for our friends who were not heterosexual, and not tying into mainstream things was very challenging. I ran around with a lot of the drama kids in high school, and that was where I found people who were different and celebrated difference in a way that was supportive. Then moving to Chicago—Chicago has a very different way of engaging—the spaces are different. In Houston, you have to have a car, you drive everywhere. It's all about individual mobility to get from place to place, and it was all very inexpensive so you could create spaces, and because it was a younger city in some ways and how it came into the art world. There was a lot of amazing work from 1960 to the present that was there. Mrs. Menil's collections shaped the art scene and what happened in the city, and that's entirely different than when you go to an older city like Chicago that had the Art Institute that was collecting very different kinds of work, and there are flavors there that shift and change. In Chicago, there was a different way of getting around the city, and it's not as visible because it's such a big city with big buildings and lots of things tucked into corners inside buildings. You have to know where to go in a different way than you do in Houston. I think just having to navigate a city changes the way that people engage with and interact with each other too. I think that that has a huge impact. When we were growing up, I remember looking in encyclopedias, and they would talk about 'product,' 'gross national products' and what mineral resources were in different places, and what countries were known for growing. I never understood why that was relevant or important as a kid, it just sort of seemed this odd thing that you stuffed into a report you had to do on a country, but as an adult, I understand it so differently. Particularly with craft, if there isn't clay where you live, or there weren't clay bodies to encourage people to make in a certain way, bringing clay in that comes from the outside takes a different direction if you live somewhere like the East Coast, where a lot of the clay that is used across the country is gathered from. There are very few places that have clay deposits on the West Coast. In fact, if you talk to people at the Archie Bray in Montana, almost all the clay comes from the east, it's not really pulled from the west, and that changes everything. It helps you understand why certain things have surfaced in different places. In Oregon, until—I don't know when it ended, but definitely through the Second World War, and into the fifties a bit— it was a region that grew a lot of flax, so weaving makes sense there because you've got flax, and some wool, These are materials that are being grown. Then flax disappeared, it's not being grown anywhere in Oregon anymore. There was a guy who was trying to grow it at Oregon State University, but he couldn't make a go of it. Understanding that connection to the land and materials is important for understanding certain kinds of craft-based practices. It's irrelevant for craft work that's coming through academic institutions in some ways, because that work is being

taught and engaged to operate in a different conversation, but these are all connected in some way, and looking at it that way is really interesting for me, but I'm a postmodern person [laughs] where I feel like it's really important that there's lots of lenses, and ways of understanding this relationship to place, and community, and production. I don't expect everyone to look at it the way I do, I think that would be really boring. I much prefer to have somebody come back and say to me, "That is ridiculous Namita, it has nothing to do with craft," and having a discussion where we can then hash it out; that's much more interesting to me than to have everyone see it in this one way.

**PA:** Great. What institutions or centers do you see that are the most innovative, or risk-taking with craft now? You're in Asheville today. Around the country are there hotbeds of craft?

**NGW:** I think that Marilyn Zapf is doing some really interesting work at The Center for Craft, Creativity and Design. She's definitely bringing in some really interesting conversations. It will be interesting to see where Perry Price takes things at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, and what Shannon Stratton will do at Museum of Arts and Design. And there are alternative spaces like Ditch Projects in Eugene and smaller venues experimenting as well. But I'm going to be frank that today I feel cynical about it, largely because of Pacific Northwest College of Art's closure of the Museum of Contemporary Craft in February of this year. I might not have felt that way about six months ago, but today I feel that there is a real shift in the field. The last ten years have been amazing for growing, and shaping, and developing things, and I feel that we are at a bit of a plateau again. I don't think that the most innovative inquiry is coming from the mainstream or the main big institutions right now. I don't think it's coming today on April 3rd, 2016 from museums. There's interest in it, ICA [Institute of Contemporary Art] in Boston has been looking at craft-based work, and there's the show that just opened in LA that Jenni Sorkin was a part of. So it's surfacing in contemporary art institutions, and there are definitely shifts and changes in contemporary craft institutions, but I can't pinpoint for you. I think the large institutions, the likely suspects, are not pushing things right at this minute. I think what we need to do, probably, is go back into colleges and universities and really look at what students are making and where that is going on, and look to smaller galleries, I mean university and college and smaller museum galleries. That is a place where ideas get tested out, before they get to the bigger institutions. I think it's a good moment to step back and see what's really happening there to see what's going to come in a few years at the bigger places, because we're kind of in this in-between space again. That's really cynical, I'm sorry.

**PA:** No, I'm actually really interested to ask about—the Renwick recently reopened and they have

this show, *Wonder*, you have this beautiful background that is contemporary art and craft, and it was really controversial that they had six contemporary artists, and I'm interested in your reading of that decision.

**NGW:** Before I saw the exhibition I was really ready to be frustrated. If I was to be honest, I was ready to walk into the space and just roll my eyes, and be frustrated because the language that was coming out proclaimed "We did this so people could take selfies." It just seemed that the way it was being discussed was so superficial, and that bothered me quite a bit. Walking into the space, I don't think that every installation works at the same level, but there are some fantastic ways in which the materials and the installations by the artists bring out the architecture. In particular, forgive me, I don't have notes in front of me, and it's been a while since I saw it, but there's the room with the woven nests and baskets and the smell in that space, the aroma of the materials is palpable. Even in a crowded, crowded room, and that was really exciting, because I think it brings another layer. It moves away from the preciousness of the decorative object to actually have that smell. I thought that the string installation in that long hallway running into the back there, where it was all the colored strings lined up, that was quite, quite spectacularly done. And John Grade's piece with the big log, that filled the space, it consumed the space and left just enough room for you to move around on the periphery, I thought that was really well installed. That said, I do have a lot of concerns and reservations about the way in which that exhibition was talked about from the institution, and the way that it was being written about it. What is going to happen next when the institution installs its collection, and returns, so to speak, to other kinds of programming? I think there is a way that *Wonder* pushed grandness of scale to an extreme that may be challenging to come back from, and it perhaps could have been negated by mixing it in in some way where it wasn't just all about grandeur and monumentality in that way. Where it could have been about mixing in small, medium, large, extra large, so to speak. That concerns me. That concerns me, because I think what it could do is push the crafted objects back into feeling retrograde now in a way that isn't fair, it isn't right, and it isn't recognizing, for example, that those large baskets come from a tradition that is about smaller objects that use those techniques and materials in a different way. That concerns me. Does that address your questions?

**PA:** It does. Thinking about your cynicism with institutions, the flipside of that would be the makers. What directions do you see making and craft going?

**NGW:** I am intrigued by how my students in the MFA in the Applied Craft and Design program where I'm teaching, I teach a class in the spring called "Theory of Objects," and this is my second one. Both semesters that I have taught this class, the students have really resisted—this is an

unusual program in that it is not a program that's a continuation of an undergraduate degree that was art-focused or materially-based necessarily. It's a program that is made up of students who are coming back or continuing school to get a graduate degree, who might come from graphic design, or writing, or science, or architecture, or an art program or craft-based media-specific program. So they are coming in with a lot of different levels of hand skills, making skills, fabrication skills, and without being immersed in art or craft or design discourse. You're dealing with bringing the students together to create community and shared understanding, and a shared platform of knowledge and connection so that they can have conversations amongst themselves, but also connect to the broader field. It's challenging when they are coming from so many different places. But what's really fascinating to me—and this is where Critical Craft Forum, and what I said about bringing students in comes back into view—what's interesting to me is that both years, in reading the materials that we in the field felt changed craft discourse and changed the conversation, most of my students feel they read almost exactly like the art criticism and art writing that I've given them. That the authors had substituted craft makers and objects into the discussion. It's a big eye opener, because I've been one of the people saying, "There's new discourse, we're looking at it differently, it's all changing." And the students are saying, "It pretty much reads like what you've given us from other people, and we're not really seeing a whole lot of difference." Now that said, because they're students and they're in the midst of graduate school at that moment where someone says, "you should do this," and someone else says, "you should do that," and another person says, "no, no, you should do this instead." Their heads are swimming with all of the voices, and shifts and changes. It's that pulsing graduate school moment where you're like, "ah! What am I going to do?" I don't think they're at a place yet to articulate what it is that is different. I think it's going to be interesting in the next few years to talk with students at different campuses. I'd really like to understand what they are thinking about, seeing and doing, as a way of thinking through where it is going to go. There was a moment a couple of years ago where you could see the rise of textiles, and ceramic-based work coming. You could see it because of who was teaching, and how things were being made. I've done a lot of campus visits, and crits with students, and you could see it coming. At the moment I'm seeing the students really still working through this moment, and I'm not seeing where it's heading next, yet. Again, I think we're in a bit of a plateau, a bit of a "let's sit here for a minute and work through these ideas and see if we can get it to their logical conclusion to then see where it can go next." So that's what I'm observing in the different studio visits and such.

**PA:** Thank you. Where would you like your own work to go next? You talked about the podcasts, and right now, you're juggling some very different creative projects. Do you have a sense of where you're going?

**NGW:** [laughs.] That's a great question. I would like to continue my writing, but I think I would like to work on writing that broadens the field and moves outside of being so specifically within the field. I feel that I want to serve more communities in a different way, that takes me into rethinking my writing and how I present ideas and objects and what I am seeing. That is my personal goal over the next few years, really examining how I am presenting my ideas and sharing that. On a personal level, I would like to figure out how better to talk about my curatorial work as a practice. I don't think it's a practice in the way we talk about art practices, but there is a way that I approach curating that I need to learn how to articulate differently. For my work itself, I'd like to do more exhibitions, I have a couple coming up this year. I love working spatially, and I love working in the chaos and mess that happens when you put together exhibitions and seeing where we can take it. I do like that very much, so it would be great to continue that into the next few years. I think for me, the thing I was talking about with Critical Craft Forum is that it has been a really interesting year and a half for stepping back and examining what I like to do, and what I do well. Conversations come easily, and it's a great way to broaden the field, and I think that's a place where I can work more over the next few years. As much as I like writing, writing is hard, and it's solitary, and it's hard. I'm not always a pleasant person to my family and my loved ones around me when I'm writing. [laughs.] I have to really figure out ways to engage that are a little more diversified, and I think the conversational aspects of building a platform. I think there are different ways to teach craft and craft history, and I would love to find some place that is willing to experiment with an approach that is more of a combination of really applied making and thinking and writing. I feel that we start to get there in this MFA in Applied Craft and Design, but because you're following this model that has been set up by academic rules where you have, this course and that course, and all courses feel discrete from one another. So the students are getting their critique class that runs through the whole year, and one set of faculty works with them on critique, they get one semester "History of Craft" and "Theory of Objects" the next semester. So history becomes a separate thing from theory, and those two become a separate thing from making. I think that there is a way that you could create curriculum where it is more integrated and that would be an exciting project to work on. To think how we are educating people in a way that combines the tactile of making and fabrication with critical thinking in a different sort of way. I think our education system needs an overhaul, I'm realizing that I'm also the kind of person who really likes to build. I'm not as good at the plateau. I think when I find that next big project to sink my teeth into, it's going to be a building project in that way. Right now, I'm working on lots of different projects, and I'm sure it's clear in here that what Critical Craft Forum will be is still morphing and changing. There's a thing that happens when I work on an exhibition where you start in this morass of, "I have a question that we're going to explore," or an artist that we're going to try to

understand, and then you do all this research and it expands into this massive amount of information. Then you start to whittle it down, and whittle it down, and you start to figure out where the questions are that you're going to get to, how you're going to present the work in a public space of the museum or an exhibition space, and in that whittling down process, it starts to show itself, and I start to be able to see what that exhibition is going to look like, and how it's going to feel. It's in my head, and this is where it goes back to what I was saying before about how it's very much a practice. I can see it in my head, and it's not always clear to other people in the way that you say to an artist, "make me an installation," and they say, "okay, it's going to have these elements," and people go, "what? How's that going to come together? Aren't you afraid? No, I need to see what it is." I'm happy to work in that ambiguous space until I see it and then when I see it, I can sink my teeth into it and get those pieces in line. That's where I'm going with Critical Craft Forum. I'm still in that big morass of what could it be. It could be all these different things. It's starting to come together into identifying a place where we need somebody in the field, and I'm starting to see where it can be shaped but I'm not there yet. That's where I want to go next.

**PA:** Talking about ambiguity, do you have any dream show you would love to curate or bring artists' work together in a way that hasn't happened yet?

**NGW:** [Sigh.] Yes, [laughs] lots of things. I like curating in museums. I think museums are like libraries, they are spaces where you get to borrow experiences. Most people do not get to live with the kinds of works we see in museums. It's a very, very rare person who gets to live with a piece like that in their daily life, so it's a privilege to be able to share those pieces and make them something that becomes part of the public experience or public trust. That said, twenty-five dollars to enter a museum is ridiculous. That becomes inaccessible to most. So I'm really interested in systems through which things circulate, and we've had lots of artists over the decade who have worked through the mail, and distributed things in that form. Or artists who have worked through the book or magazine. *Cabinet* magazine to me is a curatorial project. I'm interested in other systems, and other places and spaces where we might be able to bring art into more everyday contexts and conversations and engagements, like libraries. I don't think it's enough to just put art in coffee shops, and expect people to suddenly understand art better. That's a very passive approach. It's that idea of, "we're going to place public sculpture all over the city and then everybody is going to really get it." It doesn't work that way. I'm interested in systems where there will be space for people to have contemplative and intimate opportunities on their own with an object or an idea or a question or writing. Then they can choose ways to contribute, to continue the dialogue with that object or that writing, but that there is space within this system that they are engaging and encountering an individual, a real person to have that conversation with. I think

that's some of my hesitation with Critical Craft Forum. It can't just be this virtual online thing, it has to have this tangible, personal interaction, because that's what we crave. There's nothing that makes you feel more alone than not having engagement in some way, physically with an object or a space or a person. I want to create another way of doing this, and it is challenging to think about this through museums and libraries, because every year, we get these articles that talk about how museums and libraries are dying or changing, and it's going away. I don't think that they are. I think they are morphing and shifting, and there's an opportunity to re-think this. I also think that the internet is a place where access is shifting and changing, too. I need to understand for myself the way that museums and libraries offer personal engagement needs to come into the internet, and the internet's ability to offer lots of access needs to come into the other spaces. That's something I'm thinking through and struggling with. On a personal note, I am going to try to finish this book about my family that I've been trying to write for some twenty odd years that is kind of my monster in a box. [laughs.] I had some revelations this year through making, that's the thing. I got invited to present a talk at the Surface Design Association Conference, and I also got invited to jury their first international exhibition. They expected to get somewhere between one thousand to twelve hundred entries, and they got about twenty three hundred entries in. [laughs.] It was a little challenging. The exhibition was at Arrowmont, it's a nice gallery, but it's not huge. I had done a project with them before, so I knew what the space was like, and I was able to bring it down a bit, it still was a little bit much, but I knew the conference was coming in and people wanted to see a lot of work. The team there did a phenomenal job installing it. So when they invited me, I said, "I'm really excited that you're doing this at Arrowmont, and you're flying me out to talk about the exhibition and I want to stay for the conference, because I need to understand how you all present yourselves to each other." The conference as an object of study is an interesting thing, because there are all these media-specific conferences going on in the United States and each of them is member-driven and member-organized in a totally different way, and that's a fascinating thing to study, too. So then I said, "I know that at SDA, you do hands on workshops and intensives in conjunction with your conferences, and I want to do those, because I want to be a better curator, I want to be able to talk about making differently, and I need a refresher, to get my hands in there to think it through." Honestly, it wasn't jurying the show, it wasn't talking about the show, it was getting to take a workshop for four days with Yoshiko Wada, and doing a whole lot of different dyeing and shibori-oriented techniques that reminded me of how much I love stitching and embroidery and how it's very much like writing, for me, in particular. I'm working on the first piece I've done in years, through that workshop, but to remove myself from being in front of the computer or a book, or being in a meeting or a conversation, to immerse myself in this physical act loosened up my head in a way that allowed me to think through how to write a fictional story. It opened up a space for me the when Rowland Ricketts was starting to tell

a story about something at the conference, I immediately saw how this story can become about my interest in craft, and craft history and theory and how it can dovetail. It was the making that opened it up. It was absolutely the physical act of doing something, and it was a beautiful workshop, because it didn't matter if I did a good job or not. I was just enjoying it, and doing it for the pleasure. I actually made some work that I'm really proud, some really good pieces. So that was great. That's why I feel really strongly that we have to figure out how to combine the physical act of doing something, and it was a beautiful workshop, because it didn't matter if I did a good job or not. I was just enjoying it, and doing it for the pleasure. I actually made some work that I'm really proud, some really good pieces. So that was great. That's why I feel really strongly that we have to figure out how to combine the physical, the corporeal, the intellectual, the interactive, and the interpersonal in new ways. We have to do that going forward. That is the power of craft, and that is really important to me. In doing that, it can also open up a space. I think I have not done as good a job as I would like to have done with bringing in a more global perspective. This kind of experience has really helped me think through how I might try to tackle that down the road.

**PA:** Those sound amazing. The last question I have is, you've spoken a little bit about your family, and you're so busy, and you manage to do so, so many things. How are you able to balance having a family and your creative and academic work?

**NGW:** It would not be possible if I did not have the partner I have. My husband and I co-parent in a way that allows for both of us to do the things we want to do. It would not be possible without that partnership. Also, when my kids were really young, right when I went back to work, for about the first three to four years, Charissa Brock, who is an artist in town, she does work through bamboo as well as glass. Charissa was our partner or nanny, for lack of a better word. I don't think that word really explains what her role was, she helped us co-parent the kids on those three days a week when I was not home in the afternoons. David Cohen was director at the Museum of Contemporary Craft when it was Contemporary Crafts Museum and Gallery. David has two children, and David made it really clear to me right from the get-go that he valued and recognized the importance of family and being with children, and was willing to give me a flexible schedule because I was torn about not being home. My husband runs his own web design company, and because of the way his business is structured, it really is more of a nine to five, "I need to be at the office" kind of work. I wanted to be home two days a week, and have some flexibility, and David gave me that option. The difficulty is when you have that kind of flexibility is that then your work seeps into your evening and weekend hours and such. That was where things went wrong for some time, for a long time. When the museum went through financial distress and lost all those people in 2008, I will fully admit that I did not balance work and personal life very well for a



number of years. Work was consuming, all consuming. The college did not honor that flexible schedule, they did not do that with their employees, so that changed my situation quite a bit. I always wanted to be a parent. I always wanted to have a family. That was my personal choice—not everyone is going to make that choice, but that was my choice, and my husband's choice, and our decisions as partners in life to do this. So, there were a lot of moments where you have to make tough decisions about pulling back on things, and it's about making decisions so that when you're with your family that your family is the focus as much as you can make it. I will say that before I left the museum, I was very sick during most of 2013 I had pneumonia. It was walking pneumonia and I couldn't shake it. It was largely because I had exhausted myself. I had basically depleted all of my reserves, and I just couldn't get back on my feet from it. It wasn't listening to my husband that made me evaluate what I was doing and how I needed to be as a working person. It was my children who said, "We want you home, and we're worried that you're not going to be around if you continue working like this, you've got to change it." When you have middle school and high school students say, 'We like you, and we want you to be here, and we want to spend time with you,' you listen. You listen hard. I think that taking those five years off to be at home with them and work in a different way, I was writing articles and different things here and there. My husband and I called it the "spare change approach" back then; it was five minutes here, ten minutes there. Having had that opportunity to step out, and know that I could come back any time and do what I needed to do, well, it's a very different moment now than it was in 2000 and 1999. That experience did give me the sense that it is okay to make choices for your personal life in a different way. In terms of travel, it is crazy and hectic, and if it wasn't for laptops, and iPhones, and Skype, all of these different ways of working that are mobile now, I couldn't do what I do. It's kind of a funny thing, because I don't always feel grounded, but I always feel connected, and that's something I have to work on for the next year. Figuring how to balance that a little bit better. Really if it wasn't for Scott, it wouldn't be possible, because we work together on it, and that makes all the difference. But for women, I know that we often feel scared, and I would be lying if I didn't say that in the last twelve years there were moments where I encountered people that did not appreciate the choices I was making about prioritizing family in certain situations. Men and women. There's work we need to do on shifting those priorities a bit, and it's actually a funny thing, I think that because craft is so connected with lifestyle and a way of living. I hate to say lifestyle because that makes it sound like Martha Stewart or Kinfolk or something, but it is about understanding a way of being in the world. I've learned a lot about how to think about how I am in the world from the artists that I've met and engaged and watched how they work and studied, historically even. Betty Feves, in particular—understanding her through how she engaged her community helped me a lot in thinking through how I want to be in the world, and how I want my feet to be on the ground. It came through craft as the way of working and engaging the world

around you.

**PA:** Thank you, this has been such a pleasure, and I feel like my brain is now just on fire with ideas. [laughs.] It's really going just enhance the oral history project as a whole.

**NGW:** Thank you for such great questions, I really, really appreciated it. You got me thinking, and that's always the best part of interviews, if the questions get you thinking, too. Where you walk away going, "huh, I really need to sort that out a little bit." Thank you for asking really, really good questions, and thank you for your time.

[End of interview]

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