

Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.

Interview with Emily Wolfson – Part I

August 21, 2007

Interview conducted by Greg Willihnganz

Emily Wolfson Part I

WILLIHNGANZ: And a, I guess first, um, I'd like you if, if you would, to just a, tell me a little bit about yourself, just a, about your craft, and what you've done over the years, your work as an artist. Now you work in two fields basically.

WOLFSON: Yes, I started out, I was going to be a portrait painter, and I found out that I didn't like to do just what other people wanted done, and that didn't suit them very well. (laughter Wolfson) So, I ended up being in painting basically, and got my degree in painting from LSU. And I've been interested in art all my life, so I had an artist teacher in high school, and I had went to Newcomb College that had a school of art, and uh, then got an MA from LSU, taught here at Murray in 1941 when the war started, and moved to Indiana after a few years, and taught at Indiana University for about ten years. And while I was at Indiana, I discovered how much I liked the fabrics of weaving and how much I liked the colors. And so, I added weaving to the menu, and, I was there about ten years before I decided to come back to Murray, and Mary got promotion, and then, I taught here another nine years. And then when I retired I had the best time to work, so I did most of my work in weaving in the next ten years. So, does that give you an idea?

WILLIHNGANZ: That gives me an overall idea. Could you tell me just a little bit about this picture that we're seeing over your, over your shoulder here?

WOLFSON: Yes, when I graduated from Newcomb College, I was lucky enough to get a scholarship to study in Paris for a year. And I studied with Leger, because I needed the influence of somebody who really composed well, who organized well. And I was all right in copying things, painting, but I, making it realistic, but I wasn't very good at organization. So, that's what I did, and while I was there I stayed in the American House (unintelligible) in at the University City in Paris. Then, the University City was organized so that the men stayed on one side and the women stayed on another. And we wanted to paint this friend of ours, which is what this is. Her name is Leslie. And so, there were several of us, men and women. So we had to go down to the grand salon (laughter – Wolfson) and use the grand salon as the background to paint the painting. So, you see, the, you see that in the picture. And I already was undergoing some influence from contemporary painters in Paris.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, has this painting always been with you then since you made it?

WOLFSON: Pardon?

WILLIHNGANZ: Has it always been with you then?

WOLFSON: Yes, so I've kept it with me then since then.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay.

WOLFSON: And it's one of my favorites even though it's one of the first. So...

WILLIHNGANZ: Who would you say influenced you in terms of style and the development of your art?

WOLFSON: Well, it doesn't show except occasionally, but I think that the painter, Leger, and I'll have to show you some work by him, was probably the strongest influence. Although I had a professor at Newcomb College, Xavier Gonzales, who was a strong influence. Then after that I think as you get to see more work all around, you pick up various influences from various sources.

WILLIHNGANZ: What brought you into weaving after focusing on painting?

WOLFSON: Well, at Indiana University I was actually teaching a course in design and crafts mostly for students who would be teaching, and one of the things that I needed to teach them was weaving. So, we had lots of little twelve inch looms, and while they were weaving, I just became fascinated with the color combinations and the quality of the weaving materials, and started weaving. And after we had been a little few years, the art students said, "We want to weave, too. Don't just do it for the teachers." And so we had a course for them, and then the graduate students said, "Well, we ought to at least do this." So, we had a graduate course for them. So I was deep into weaving by the time I moved back here.

WILLIHNGANZ: And ...

WOLFSON: And what it really means is that I - I like to translate what I know from color and stuff from painting into what I do for weaving. So...

WILLIHNGANZ: How much of your time and your energy have you actually be able to devote to your art and your craft?

WOLFSON: I had a studio at Indiana, and I was expected to spend a certain amount of time there which was so many hours a week – not specified, but expected. And after I got back here, I was really much much busier, so, it was when I retired that I got to do more work – both in painting and weaving.

WILLIHNGANZ: Are you still active today?

WOLFSON: I can't. I can't see well enough. But what I have done is I have made some collages, because I can see shapes and I can see colors, but I can't, I can't focus enough to actually paint if you know, or to weave.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mmm-hmm.

WOLFSON: It's a, it's a gift for my ninetieth birthday from my family (laughter – Wolfson and Willihnganz). We inherited this monstrous affliction. Which, which is very frustrating, but I've learned to do collages very well.

WILLIHNGANZ: You know, I, getting old for me is just a process of learning how to deal with the new limitations on what I can do.

WOLFSON: It is. It is. It's more one challenge after another.

WILLIHNGANZ: It is. And you do. And you just go on, and uh...

WOLFSON: You do, and if you want to see later, I'll show you some of the collages.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. That'd be great.

WOLFSON: But I had been doing it for a long time anyway, and just found that this just was something I could continue.

WILLIHNGANZ: Have you received much in terms of awards or recognition or patronage?

WOLFSON: A few. A few. Then I had the Governor's Award one year from - from this general accomplishment, and I have the Rude Osolnik Award for one year.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mmm-hmm. Do you consider yourself a success in terms of what you've been able to do?

WOLFSON: The success is being able to do what you want to do. And I've been very fortunate. I've had lots of help, lots of scholarships, lots of people who've helped me, and that's the reward, just being able to do what you want to do for your life.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, how long, how long did you teach?

WOLFSON: I guess about twenty-eight years in all.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mmm-hmm. And was that a joy for you?

WOLFSON: Oh, yes, of course. It's just great to, to share what you have.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you still keep in touch with any of your students?

WOLFSON: Yes, here in Murray I had several of my students join the Murray Art Guild, and I've kept up with that. I've been an active member of that since I retired, too, and we have a beautiful new location, and we are really very excited about it. We have a new director who is very imaginative, and so, that's nice, too.

WILLIHNGANZ: Terrific. Um, tell me a little bit about what your relationship has been over the years with the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen.

WOLFSON: Well, when I first came back here to teach, I started teaching in 1960, and the Guild was set up in 1961 basically. So, the head of the department, Clara Eagle, was one of the teachers, one of the art teachers from around the state from state colleges and also painters like the person who actually, probably did the most to start the Kentucky Guild, Virginia Minish, she was a painter and teacher from Louisville. But Clara Eagle was a really very active member of the Art Guild. She was one of the starters, and she was a busy woman. She was a very good administrator, but she spent long hours. And so she twisted my arm (laughter – Wolfson) to join the Kentucky Guild, and for which I am very grateful, and I got involved and was for awhile, basically involved in meeting the art train when it came through Murray. I was on the faculty in the Art Department and I was a member of the AAW that was one of its early sponsors, and I was a member of the Art Department of the Woman's Club. And, so, I got to help set up the train when it came in. And I don't know whether you know much about the train or not.

WILLIHNGANZ: I know a fair amount. I've read various things about it, and I haven't seen pictures of it, though.

WOLFSON: It was a, it was a kind of a dream in a way, because to say that the railroad would take these two cars, one of which was an exhibition car and one of which was a demonstration car, and the residence for the train director – to take them around the state at times which, basically were convenient to the railroad, but also worked out for us. And they would stay in a town four or five days. And when they came to town someone had to help them get connected with water and gas and utilities of all sorts. And arrange for visitors and for hosts and hostesses and for groups of people to go through the train. And, so, I got involved first with that, and then was on the train committee for awhile. It was, it was a wonderful experience, because they borrowed work from all over the United States for a year to travel around Kentucky and to places that ordinarily didn't get to see an art gallery or art of any kind sometimes. So, it was, it was exciting, but of course the train was losing customers and they were, stopping fewer and fewer places, and so finally, the department in the government in Kentucky, government that had paid for the train for five or six years said, "You know, we really just can't keep on doing this. It's not, we don't, it doesn't touch enough people anymore."

So, we asked if we could have a year or two, and the Kentucky Guild would start a fair and see if that would help us do what we wanted to do, instead of the train. And so I happened to be, president at that time when we switched from one to the other. And...

WILLIHNGANZ: That would have been...?

WOLFSON: That was, 1967 I think it was.

WILLIHNGANZ: Right

WOLFSON: Right around there, and the first, the first fair we had we hired Richard Bellando who had experience with the Southern Highland Guild, and it was basically a craft guild, but we had started out thinking we should include both artists and craftsmen. So, he came and directed the first fair, but they had facilities (laughter – Wolfson) that were very minimal, and I helped get things ready to take up there, was planning to go. And my mother had a very bad accident, and I had to go and leave it to somebody else. They took all of our work that we collected that was going to be in the fair, up there with lots of plastic, and it rained (laughter – Wolfson). So, the people put some of their stuff under our plastic, and then a lot of it got wet, and they had to take it in to Berea College to dry out. So, it was quite an experience to people who did get there, but I didn't get there 'til the second year.

WILLIHNGANZ: The second year that the guild was...

WOLFSON: At that time we had tents - the tents to exhibit - for each exhibitor.

WILLIHNGANZ: I see. Now, the fairs took place after the train or at the same time?

WOLFSON: Yes. Yes, they came right after the train. There had been some fairs in Berea, and they may have been called our craft fairs. I really was not familiar with that, but I understand there were some fairs before, but this fair of the Kentucky Guild was after the train.

WILLIHNGANZ: And was it – when it started was it a juried fair or...?

WOLFSON: Only juried members of the Kentucky Guild could be in the fair, and that's still true. It's still – you have to pass the jury to become an exhibiting member. You can be a member. You can be a contributing member, but you can't exhibit unless you have passed the jury.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hmm-hmm. Now, how many tries did it take you to get juried in the guild?

WOLFSON: (laughter – Wolfson) Not any. (laughter – Wolfson and Willihnganz)

WILLIHNGANZ: Not any? You got to start out in it.

WOLFSON: No, I guess when they started they were happy to have people who were teaching art. That was easy.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, Susan and Mary both have told me, I think they went through three and four times each to get finally into the Guild.

WOLFSON: Well, you know, and some juries were really very strict. I think that since I was in some of the first, absolutely first ones, I didn't have a problem.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hmm-hmm.

WOLFSON: But, I would have included more people than some juries, because I thought if people are really seriously interested they have a right to become a member of the Kentucky Guild, but there were different philosophies on that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mmm-hmm.

WOLFSON: And so we used to have, separate parts of the country where people could bring things, and for a long time Murray looked at - part of the jury convened here at Murray. And we used to meet down at the Murray Art Guild and have the jury select people who were from, basically from this area so they wouldn't have to go all the way up to Berea to get juried.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mmm-hmm. So you sat in on a lot of those juries. You were part of those?

WOLFSON: Mmm-hmm. And disagreed with a lot of them (laughter – Wolfson), but agreed with some of them.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mmm-hmm. And...

WOLFSON: And we had us several members. Fred Shepherd was a member, but Dick Jackson, who taught in the University School and also was the art education teacher, was the president at one time, and we had a large number, because Clara Eagle was so interested. She, she pushed to get members of the department to go on and to get juried in and to be exhibiting members. So, we had quite a number for awhile, but now, other interests have claimed a lot of the people who teach in the Art Department. And some of it probably is stuff that was developed partly because of the work of the Guild - some of the opportunities they have now to work. But the Guild is not foremost in their minds right now.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mmm-hmm. Now, I assume you've made a lot of friends and acquaintances and professional people who you've met through the Guild.

WOLFSON: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: Are there people who are in the Guild, artists that you have particularly admired, who you've benefited from knowing, who have helped you?

WOLFSON: Oh, yeah. You know.

WILLIHNGANZ: Where are those people?

WOLFSON: Great to know Rude Osolnik. He no longer is living, but and people like Neil Di Teresa, a lot of the people at Berea – Lester Pross. Many of the people who helped start the guild were good friends of mine. I, I really, I can't think of them all now. (laughter- Wolfson) I'm not that good. But I had, we had a list of friends, because we went every year. And it was quite a job to go, because when we first set it up, we set it up for four days – Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. So we had to go up Wednesday afternoon late and set up our tent and then stay there, these first years that is, through Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and come home Sunday night and get up and go teach at 7:30 in the morning on Monday morning. (laughter – Wolfson) But it was enough fun that we loved to do it. And then later—and when I did that, I used to meet a friend from Paducah, Bob Evans, over at the dam and I didn't drive, we only had one car between us, and I didn't drive. So, my husband would take me over to the dam, and he would pick me up and take me to Berea. And I often stayed at the hotel in Berea, but, later, we were able to, after I retired, we went up, and we had a little trailer, and you could camp out behind your tent for a long time, and people did that. And so they had a lot of fun sometimes at night after the show was over, and get together.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's terrific. Um, so has the guild contributed significantly to your education and your development as an artist?

WOLFSON: I'm sure in ways that I can't put down, I'm sure it did. But I, just the fact that it kept you doing it was the significant, for me, that was probably the greatest significance.

WILLIHNGANZ: How did it keep you doing it?

WOLFSON: Pardon?

WILLIHNGANZ: How did it keep you doing it? How did it motivate you to stay involved?

WOLFSON: Well, it was just a kind of exciting experience to think that you were involved in something that was, all the art teachers felt was so important to Kentucky. And so, for such a long time, so missing in Kentucky. And it, it was just a matter of belonging to something bigger than you are that kept you going.

WILLIHNGANZ: And was the Guild one of the first art and craft associations in Kentucky?

WOLFSON: Yes. I think so. And then some others followed, you know – The Art Foundation in Louisville, and uh, oh, a whole bunch of other things. And the Guild started some of the little, well, workshop centers around the state; especially in eastern Kentucky, in the mountains, that are, some of which, are still going. And it inspired a lot

more, which were there for awhile and aren't anymore – Paintsville and some other places like that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. Now, in addition to being president of the Guild, did you have other positions or responsibilities that you took on over the years?

WOLFSON: (laughter- Wolfson) Not anymore. No, I've been a consistent member. I'm a Lifetime Member, and a Fellow, they call it, which was granted when we had our twenty-fifth anniversary. But it's pretty far away, and although I kept going to the fairs until, I'm not sure, in the late seventies, I guess, I still, I still, contribute dues even though I'm a Lifetime Member, and I still try to keep up. And when they've had shows in this area, I try to be part of the shows. And I, I don't know how much I help, because I'm not able to do as much as I did. But Susan Goldstein was wonderful in organizing some shows around the whole state. And there would be some in Paducah, and in Cadiz. And even here that Guild members who were contributing members, could participate in, and that was a very great thing. And, but it takes somebody who's really willing to work hard, and Susan did. So, that was after Clara Eagle died. She would have helped, I'm sure she would have. But that has happened in the last fifteen or twenty years.

WILLIHNGANZ: It sounds to me like the Guild is basically a female driven organization.

WOLFSON: It's not really. No.

WILLIHNGANZ: No?

WOLFSON: We had a lot of members from here who were not female: Dick Jackson, Fred Shepherd, some of the art students who were graduating and accepted into the Guild, and we have potters, and a silversmith, and, no, I don't think so. We even had Wallace Kelly was a painter who was, and Neil DiTeresa are painters. We had quite a – I thought it was fairly well mixed. Maybe those are the only ones you heard of, but it was a mixed bunch. And Smith Ross and his wife, both, I guess he was the one who was most a part of it, because he was a wood worker. And she came to the fair because, because he came.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, the fair you speak of is the annual fair that they do in Berea. Is that correct?

WOLFSON: Well, once it was an annual fair. Now, I think there are two, but don't quote me, because I'm not sure. (laughter- Wolfson) But we, we started one, I think, in the spring, and then we decide to add a fall fair. So, there, I think there's still two. I just don't enter anymore. I can't go up there and be with the booth. So, I don't have anything up there. Now, I did try to be a part of the exhibits, the exhibitions they have around the state, but I couldn't, I can't, I can't go up and take care of a booth.

WILLIHNGANZ: The fairs that you've had in the Murray area, have, have those been a regular event or just whenever someone feels moved to do it?

WOLFSON: We had a, for awhile, we had a sort of a sub-group of the Kentucky Guild here. And, I think, I guess, for lack of leadership it did just, gradually vanished. And I don't know what happened around the rest of the state. I think Bowling Green had one. I don't know whether it still does or not.

WILLIHNGANZ: You still stay in contact, though, with the local Guild members.

WOLFSON: Yes, the ones that I know, but you know, there are an awful lot of new ones. (laughter- Wolfson)

WILLIHNGANZ: Are there an awful lot of new ones?

WOLFSON: Yeah. There are a lot of new ones in the art department that I don't even know.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I'm sure that's true. Um, historically speaking, how significant would you say the Guild is in relation to other arts and crafts organizations?

WOLFSON: I don't know that I'm able to judge, but I think it's still a part. Actually, we have more cooperation between our organizations since so many have sprung up. The Louisville always had a craft guild, and it had wonderful art education. Martha Christiansen was one person and John Begley at the Tower Association. Louisville always had – it was a leader in, in having art available. And, but since then, uh, Phyllis Brown organized the Art and Craft Foundation in Louisville, and Lexington has had a lot of activity in organization. And now, for shows the different organizations around the state cooperate a lot, and the Kentucky Guild was part of that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Have you seen any significant competition for resources or recognition among different arts and crafts organizations?

WOLFSON: I'm not aware of it. There might be, but I'm not aware of it. I suspect there is. There's bound to be. People are people. (laughter – Wolfson and Willihnganz) But I don't, I don't really know of anything. And I forgot to mention, there's another organization. Now it just flicked through my mind, and it's gone again. But, anyway, I was going to say: I think that probably the craft market – do you know the, the Kentucky Crafts Market that takes place in Louisville in late January or early February, it's nationally known. And it's called Kentucky Crafts Market, and a lot of the people who have belonged to the Kentucky Guild also belong to, also are members of the Craft Market. And they send work to the Market in Louisville, at that time, and people come from out of the state to buy things from that Market.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hmm.

WOLFSON: Which is, which is an outgrowth in a way of, the Kentucky Guild.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I'm sort of aware of that market, and, of course, the biggest thing that gets play is like the St. James Art Fair.

WOLFSON: Well, of course, and that's Louisville. I think Louisville may have had that even at the time the Kentucky Guild was started.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, it, it's very dominant in its influence.

WOLFSON: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: But I don't know how many Kentucky artists actually get in to the St. James Art Fair.

WOLFSON: Well, they probably, I don't even know if they restrict it to Kentucky, to Louisville members, or if...

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, they don't. I mean, there are artists from all over the country who come to that...

WOLFSON: Okay.

WILLIHNGANZ:...that art fair, and it's, it's pretty amazing, but it, it's so thronged it's very hard to get in to even look at the stuff, because it's so packed when, people go. It gets bigger every year. It just keeps expanding. It's terrific.

WOLFSON: Well, that's good. That's good. And then we used to sometimes participate in other fairs. The Banana Festival used to take place in a Tennessee, I'm trying to think where. Can't think. Anyway, it was the place where the Bananas used to come in from South America, and they would, there, be divided and sent out all over the country. It was their reassembly place, and so they used to have a fair at one time in the summertime usually or early spring, and at least once or twice the Kentucky Guild had a contingent up there. But that's really hard. (laughter – Wolfson) That's very difficult. It's hard to sell, we are an arts and crafts organization and we do promote both, but it's easier to sell crafts in a market than it is paint or drawing, or prints, or things like that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Why do you think that is?

WOLFSON: Because most crafts are useful objects, and people don't really see the, they don't see the usefulness of painting and drawing and print making in their lives. Although, of course, painters and print makers all think they are very important (laughter– Wolfson), but ordinarily I think it's the utility that sells the crafts.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, and I think the crafts, I don't know, this is personal opinion, but I think the crafts are easier to use as gifts.

WOLFSON: That's right. That's right. You don't have to worry about...

WILLIHNGANZ: I would never presume to give my wife a picture. (slight chuckle – Willihnganz)

WOLFSON: That's right. That's true.

WILLIHNGANZ: But I can give her a sweater or blanket or a lot of other things.

WOLFSON: Yeah, or a pot or...

WILLIHNGANZ: Pots – she loves pots.

WOLFSON: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And I know, I have a feel for what are pots.

WOLFSON: Or a silver spoon, or anything. Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, that's true.

WOLFSON: That's true.

WILLIHNGANZ: That is true. Okay. How do you feel the Guild has been doing in recent years, and how do you think it's doing right now?

WOLFSON: I don't think I'm a really good judge. Honestly. I think it's remarkable that it has survived, because it isn't a subsidized, totally subsidized organization. Now, it does get a lot of help, and it certainly got help from the beginning from Governor Combs, and from, Kentucky departments, and the Courier Journal. It was amazing how many people helped to get this started. But to keep an organization going without a foundation backing, without something like that, is extremely difficult, and it's had its ups and downs. But I think it's remarkable that it still exists, and still operating very well.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm-hmm. Do you think it has relevance to young artists who are just coming out of school and just trying to get established?

WOLFSON: I think so. Yeah, I think that's a, I think that's a good reason for it being if there were no other.

WILLIHNGANZ: What do you think it provides them?

WOLFSON: Well, it provides them with exposure, but it also provides them with the experience of seeing the work of other people and seeing a little about how people look at things and deciding for themselves what they think is important.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm-hmm. Have you yourself mentored other, younger artists who've come up through the guild?

WOLFSON: I don't think I'm (laughter – Wolfson) I don't know. I can't remember whether I might have or not. I have some here in Murray, but I, I couldn't say that I have an...and yet, in a way, I have helped. The one person I met, that I have a picture of that I think I should tell you about, was Naoma Powell, and she had taught in, I think, in New York state, but she went to, she got a scholarship to Scandinavia, and got in the folk schools there. So, she came back to teach at Hindman, and what she did was set up a weaving cooperative and eventually took it up to Vest, Kentucky which is a little community outside of Hindman. And, you know, she just was a, she's a remarkable woman. She has a different one now, out in Columbia, Missouri. But I remember her coming in to the Guild Fair and bringing a chair maker who has now become fairly well known – Chester um, I can't think of his last name. And she had brought his chair and his working materials, because he was going to do a demonstration at the fair. And she was also scheduled to do a demonstration, but his work took so much of her little truck that (laughter – Wolfson) she had to borrow a wheel to demonstrate pottery on from Berea College. Because she had brought this extra craftsman in from out in the eastern Kentucky hills.

WILLIHNGANZ: Looking back at the history of the Guild, who would you say were the major personalities who really influenced that organization?

WOLFSON: Well, I think, Virginia Minish who actually had the inspiration that the teachers and artists around Kentucky took up and got interested in. She was a painter and teacher in Louisville, and she, she really, she really started it. But then from there, when she got the grant of the two trains, the gallery train and the demonstration train. Then Berea was very much a part of it, and Les Pross and Rude Osolnik and, a couple whose name I knew very well because I knew them here. Just Berea was just loaded with people who helped with the train. Did you learn much about the train?

WILLIHNGANZ: I'm just starting to really read about it and research it, and I haven't seen pictures of it. I know people have pictures.

WOLFSON: It was a remarkable enterprise. They gathered work from artists and craftsmen from all over the United States who lent them a piece for a year, and that traveled around in the gallery that Mrs. Minish supervised the—what would you call it – the setting. She had it fixed so that the things that some of the pots and baskets and things sat on were also storage places for them to be stored between places when the train would be traveling with them. And uh, they lent pieces for a year, and those things traveled around, and then next year they got a whole new set of things to travel around.

And as we said, we met them here and helped them get set up for the four or five days they were here.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, they aren't set up for sales, per se though, it's more....

WOLFSON: No, it was demonstration and exhibition, and that was the whole principle - was to let people who would be close to a gallery or a place that would show them, tell them, where they knew a little about art, would get to see it. Murray was not as bad off as a lot of places, but it came here because it was on the route, and because they could bring school children in and other bus loads of people, too. But I think it was a remarkable experience. And one of these chairs I think, like the one I'm sitting in, was in one year's. They had, I think it was basically wood and maybe furniture, I'm not sure. And so, it left and traveled for a year (laughter – Wolfson) on the train.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. You didn't make this chair, though?

WOLFSON: Oh, heavens, no. This is Victorian furniture that my husband inherited from his family. And, he and his wife bought this furniture when they were living in Boston, which is early American, and it is much like what I would have bought had I been buying furniture. But once it was here, you know, I like, I like this too, but I much prefer simpler furniture – it's what I would have chosen in the first place.

WILLIHNGANZ: What do you see as the future of the Guild? Where do you think they should go in years to come?

WOLFSON: Now, that is, I don't know. That's a very big question. I just don't know. I – it takes a lot of dedicated people to do what they might do which is still more exhibitions and so on. But I think to continue the fair and maybe some exhibitions around the state, but I think, I think it's up to the people who are now part of it to decide where they should go.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you feel like the thrust of the guild should be towards getting ever increasing levels of quality production, or should it be in spreading the use of crafts and arts out to a broader audience and a broader (unintelligible)?

WOLFSON: (laughter – Wolfson) Both, I think, and I think they have raised the quality of crafts in Kentucky, significantly, and, it's very interesting. Now, it's interesting that this was an organization that from the beginning wanted to include eastern Kentucky traditional crafts as well as the more artists, the products of artist craftsmen which were basically college organized. So, you had in the Guild, people who were accepted for exhibition, were people who knew the traditional forms of making furniture, of weaving rugs and things like that, and of basketry, and traditional, completely traditional crafts that were not original pieces, you know, one-of-a-kind or anything like that. They were just well done pieces that were done traditionally. That was a way of conserving that, because most crafts were moving in other countries as well toward the

original, toward the one-of-a-kind artist production, in the way of pottery, and weaving, and things like that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Hmm. Interesting. So, you don't favor a one-of-a-kind approach?

WOLFSON: Pardon?

WILLIHNGANZ: You don't personally favor a one-of-a-kind approach?

WOLFSON: Oh, of course I do. (laughter – Wolfson) Of course I do. I think, that's my interest, has been my interest, but I commend the guild for also including the traditional craftsmen and preserving a traditional in good crafts, because I think it's a good influence on all of us. Does that make sense to you?

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. Yeah, I understand, and I agree with you, and I don't consider myself a craftsman per se, um, but I've built furniture uh, and a fair amount. I've built the bed we're on, and I've built the dressers and the cabinets and mirrors, wooden mirrors – frames, extensive things, and a fair number of other items.

WOLFSON: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: But I would not pretend that uh, that I could uh, I could seriously contribute to the world significantly, by doing this. I go to craft fairs, and I always go to the woodworkers shops, of course, and I'm dazzled by these guys. I mean, I watch what they do, and it's just, I can't even begin to do joinery the way they do it, and it's astounding to me to see...

WOLFSON: I think you need both. I think probably the one-of-a-kind get off on a tangent, but, they do sometimes discover things and introduce things that the traditional craftsman might not have thought of or might not have realized was possible. So, I think it takes both.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, well, I was...

WOLFSON: And you have to have good craftsmanship. We do, Murray State, I know, has had really fine woodworkers who teach, and their objects may be a little kind of humorous. They may be a little bit designed, you know, look a little bit modern or whatever, but they do stress doing things, putting things together right. So, it takes both, I think.

WILLIHNGANZ: You know, we've seen in Louisville in recent years a lot of growth and a return to the downtown area. We're having a real build up and a real resurgence.

WOLFSON: That's right.

WILLIHNGANZ: We're looking at building this rather gargantuan building, uhhh, called Museum Plaza. I don't know if you're aware of this or not, but it will be the largest structure in that geographic area....

WOLFSON: Oh, my goodness.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...like by many stories, and up on the, up on the main it has, it's like a three legged chair with a platform on it and then a shooting tower that comes out of that. And on the platform area they're actually going to put museums, and the University of Louisville is going to put their glass blowing shops on that level,

E: Ooo!

WILLIHNGANZ: So, they're going to have live glass blowing up there. And it's going to be very large and very expensive if all the funding falls in place and everything happens and it actually gets built. But looking at what's going on in Louisville, I'm wondering if other smaller areas such as Murray and what not, are experiencing the same sorts of development of crafts as a, as a, community.

WOLFSON: I don't, I think maybe, I just, I think I don't know well enough, but I'm not aware that they are. I think that some crafts are growing, but I think that others have followed the trend across the United States of dropping some crafts, like weaving, and I don't know whether they'll recover it or not. But they do still have some, I think maybe today. They may not agree with me, but I think maybe today's emphasis is on painting and print making uh, in this art department, although they still have some basic craft work in some areas.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mmm-hmm. I've been looking sort of, it's sort of curious to me, that the whole movement toward craft fairs...

WOLFSON: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...and the development of crafts. It's somewhat similar, if you will, to, to the whole movement toward Farmers' Markets.

WOLFSON: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: And you know, it used to be a hundred years ago or two hundred years ago...

WOLFSON: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: ...that crafts were what you did to live. If you needed a basket, you wove yourself a basket.

WOLFSON: You needed it, yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: You needed it. You needed a chair to sit at, and you cut yourself one and made it look as good as you could, and now, all the chairs get made in China.

WOLFSON: That's right. (laughter – Wolfson)

WILLIHNGANZ: And a few guys in the foothills of uh, of uh, Virginia or where ever, carve out some really terrific looking chairs.

WOLFSON: Yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: But they become an art form, really.

WOLFSON: Yes, they do.

WILLIHNGANZ: And uh, similarly the foods are being mass produced by these huge farming conglomerates, and we get the little farmers who are growing the stuff that doesn't have pesticides and doesn't have other things is more locally produced.

WOLFSON: But they're coming back.

WILLIHNGANZ: They are coming back, but it's a different sort of farming. I mean, my wife and I belong to a farming coop, where we pay at the start of the year, a flat fee, and then we get from the group farmers.

WOLFSON: Yes, that's great.

WILLIHNGANZ: It is. It's terrific.

WOLFSON: We have one here in Murray, too.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, yeah, they're springing up. And Farmers' Markets – there's one in St. Matthews that just opened, Lord, I think, three months or so ago, and you can't get a booth in it anymore, because every booth is filled. (laughter – Wolfson) And there are hundreds and hundreds of people there every Saturday.

WOLFSON: That's amazing.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's truly amazing, and, I see it as a very good thing, but I'm aware it's a reaction of what's happening. We've all become the Kroger nation in terms of food consumption.

WOLFSON: Yeah. Well, and also, there's, smaller farmers take better care of their land, and so, environmentalists really are interested in that, too.

WILLIHNGANZ: Sure.

WOLFSON: Because, uh, the big commercial, I don't like to call them farms, the big commercial growing places...

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah.

WOLFSON: Simply, don't have that level of interest in keeping the land. All they want to do is produce stuff, and at whatever cost.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's a very bottom line concern.

WOLFSON: Yes, it is, and I associate, I don't know if everybody does, but I associate quality of the product itself with the care of with which it's grown, and, I would rather buy from a Farmers' Market than I would from a big organization even though it might cost more, because I feel it's just, it's just, done with more care.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mmm-hmm. Yeah, I think it is, and there is so much of our food that comes to us from such a long distance away.

WOLFSON: And that's a waste, really. It's a terrible waste.

WILLIHNGANZ: It is. It is. That's the truth.

WOLFSON: Well, (laughter – Wolfson)

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, are there other things that you'd like to,...

WOLFSON: Well, I was just thinking that there's another thing that they did do, and not only did they encourage, the keeping up of traditional crafts in eastern Kentucky particularly. Although anywhere in Kentucky that could be important, but they also encouraged art forms which were just a matter of primitive having to make something that said something about the way they looked at life. Like Edgar Tolson or some of the other people who just carved figures because they wanted to, not because they felt themselves artists or not because they had to sell them or anything, but just liked to make three dimensional representations of things they saw, which I think is something that sometimes it's overlooked. But that primitive kind of, you call it primitive, but that very basic sort of sculpture has become much more popular in recent years. We've become much more aware of how much of human personality is put into it, (laughter – Wolfson) rather than just needing so called artistic standards.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm-hmm. Do you think craft work is primarily a way for people to get their inner needs met some how?

WOLFSON: Well, yeah, I think it's of several. It's to meet the need for, in the first place, for carrying or using – useful things, and I think it's important for people to make things, you know.

WILLIHNGANZ: It seems to me, I talk to these artists and I ask them, you know, "How did you get into your particular form of art, and what made you choose this particular area?" They said, "Well, you know, my aunt gave me these colors, and I sitting down playing with them, and I just got more and more involved in it, and I just got fascinated with the work and I couldn't stop doing it."

WOLFSON: Well, you are talking about the world around you to some extent, with those paints. You're, you're maybe talking to yourself, but in a way, your putting down something you think just like you might with words, or with a, I can't think what else, but (laughter – Wolfson) but, with dance or with, you know, make-believe plays that children make sometimes.

WILLIHNGANZ: In your work that you've done, what's been the hardest thing that you've had to overcome?

WOLFSON: Sometimes, it's too skillful. I-I don't say that, but you, you don't see all the things that I see that I've done. But sometimes you get so that you do things too easily. You can make things do what you want them to do too easily, and I think that's a danger. You become too slick, if you want to put it that way. It's, it's comparable to literature I think sometimes. You end up by having things that you're, just commonplace, because you're not challenged to do something that's hard and different. You have to keep your mind focused on what it is you really want to do, not whether you want to just paint something that's going to just look good enough to get in the show, and this and that and the other. Does that tell you what I'm, what I think is hard?

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. It does, and I get a censor. It's interesting, because I ask each person, I try to ask the same question at some point in the interview, and I hear such differing things. I was talking with uh, you know Marie Hochstrasser?

WOLFSON: Oh, yes. I know her.

WILLIHNGANZ: I said, you know, "What's the most difficult thing you've had to overcome in mastering your craft?" And she said, "Talking to people."

WOLFSON: (laughter – Wolfson) Well, I'm a teacher so that gets easier. (laughter – Wolfson and Willihnganz)

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, it does, and my wife, my wife was very shy growing up, I think, in a lot of ways. She was shy when I met her, and she became a teacher, and it amazed me, because she just brought this part of herself out. Now, she's the Provost to the University, and she talks to groups constantly, and, just goes into groups of

strangers and just bee lines in and meets people, and talks to them, and finds out about them and does what she needs to do to do her job.

WOLFSON: That's great.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, we really I think, adapt to some extent to what we can do. But there's, there's something about you know, I wonder, in my own case, why I've chosen to look at film making, which I consider an art form.

WOLFSON: It is.

WILLIHNGANZ: I don't know if it compares to some crafts, but, but chosen this particular art form over some other type. You have a lot of alternatives out there.

WOLFSON: It's very subtle, but it's, there's a considerable difference, isn't there?

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. Yes, there really is.

WOLFSON: ...between film making, and I was going to say, just for example, when I was in school, because I, partly because I thought I might do some other things beside painting. I took a lot of courses in perspective. Now, you know what perspective is.

WILLIHNGANZ: Mm- hmm. Sure.

WOLFSON: And I got so I was really pretty good (laughter – Wolfson) at knowing just exactly where to put things in perspective. But I got to the point where I realized I was doing everything in perspective, and maybe that was not what I was getting from what I was seeing. I was doing it just because I could, and it didn't help at all. (laughter – Wolfson) In fact it was, it turned it into something that I had not in mind.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, it's always fun to see what you've come up with that's new. (laughter – Willihnganz)

WOLFSON: Yeah. It is, and you have to always try to keep fresh if you can, and it's not always easy. In fact, it's very hard. I think the hardest thing to do is to keep a really fresh outlook - a really um, a child-like outlook if you have to say that, you know. What's important in what you see?

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah.

WOLFSON: What is it that really, what is it that you really see that you feel like you want to put down? That's sometimes difficult.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, we've run out of tape (laughter – Willihnganz and Wolfson), but it's been wonderful talking with you, and I have another tape if you'd...