Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Fiber Arts Oral History Series

Kay Sekimachi

THE WEAVER'S WEAVER: EXPLORATIONS IN MULTIPLE LAYERS AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL FIBER ART

With an Introduction by
Signe Mayfield

Interviews Conducted by
Harriet Nathan
in 1993

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

****

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Kay Sekimachi, "The Weaver's Weaver: Explorations in Multiple Layers and Three-Dimensional Fiber Art," an oral history conducted in 1993 by Harriet Nathan, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1996.

Copy no. 1

Kay Sekimachi with some of her work, 1992

(Photograph by Tom Grotta)

Cataloging information

SEKIMACHI, Kay (b. 1926) Fiber artist

The Weaver's Weaver: Explorations in Multiple Layers and Three-Dimensional Fiber Art, 1996, xi, 154 pp.

Family, San Francisco; Berkeley public schools; paper dolls, dress; WWII relocation camps, art study; California College of Arts and Crafts, Carol Purdie, design, water color, silk screen; Pond Farm, Marguerite Wildenhain; Black Mountain College, Anni Albers; Trude Guermonprez; Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Jack Lenor Larsen; techniques of loom weaving in two and three dimensions and layering, and of off-loom weaving, folding and stitching, twining, two and three dimensions; photographing fiber arts, life-span of materials; adult education classes, workshops; Fiberworks, Gyöngy Laky; Pacific Basin School of Textile Arts; UC Berkeley, Katherine Westphal, Ed Rossbach, Lillian Elliott; Palo Alto Cultural Center joint exhibition with husband Bob Stocksdale; Signe Mayfield, Ted Cohen; Japan, and artistic heritage; galleries, museums, Lausanne biennial, invitational shows.

Introduction by Signe Mayfield, curator, Palo Alto Cultural Center.

Interviewed 1993 by Harriet Nathan for the Fiber Arts Oral History Series. Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Kay Sekimachi

PREFACE

The Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library selects as memoirists persons who have played important roles in the development of the western community. Since the beginning of the oral history program, artists in many fields have taken their place among the memoirists. When the art of handweaving went through an upheaval during the 1950s, fiber artists gained new recognition, and developed novel ways of using fiber as a means of individual expression. The creativity of fiber artists has won them a significant place in the complex of artistic activity, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area, and has established the importance of their development and history. Under the leadership of the late director of The Bancroft Library, James D. Hart, the Fiber Arts Oral History Series was begun in 1983.

The emergence of the Bay Area as a center for fiber arts was stimulated by a number of influences including those of faculty members at the University of California at Berkeley and at Davis. Departments of Decorative Arts and of Design at Berkeley were led for many years by Professor Charles Edmund (Ed) Rossbach, now Emeritus, who was the first memoirist in the oral history series on Fiber Arts. The second memoirist was Katherine Westphal (Rossbach), Professor of Design, who gave strong and innovative leadership in the Department of Applied Behavioral Sciences at the Davis campus from 1966 until her retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1979. The third memoirist in the series was fiber artist Lillian Elliott. She worked with students in a number of Bay Area centers, with extended periods in the Design Department at the University of California at Berkeley, and the California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC) in Oakland. Significant leaders in the Bay Area also included, among many others, such renowned fiber artists as the late Trude Guermonprez, who taught at CCAC; and the late Dorothy Wright Liebes, whose San Francisco studio generated innovative fiber concepts and designs for industry.

Kay Sekimachi provided the fourth oral history memoir in the series on Fiber Arts in the San Francisco Bay Area, a series designed to include artists whose work indicates some of the variety the fiber arts movement has generated. Although her work includes off-loom techniques such as split-ply twining, and folding and stitching paper to create boxes or stacked columns, and more recently paper bowls, the loom is her primary instrument. She prefers to be called a weaver, and one of her accolades is that of "The Weavers' Weaver."

Kay Sekimachi credits her mentor, the late Trude Guermonprez, with teaching the logic of weaving, and the ability to think independently.

As a consequence, Kay Sekimachi's meticulous and innovative work includes three-dimensional monofilament hangings, room dividers, gauze weaves, woven "rivers," woven books, woven lidded boxes with different designs on the lid and on the box's base. She has taught at California College of Arts and Crafts and other schools across the country, adult education schools, as well as intensive one-day workshops.

A number of influences have played a part in her development. They include Trude Guermonprez and the Bauhaus approach, the Japanese esthetic and weaving tradition that San Francisco-born Kay Sekimachi recognized as an adult during a visit to her family's village in Japan, and the weavers and art world of the San Francisco Bay Area. In her hands they have helped to produce a unique art, distinctive in its elegance, restraint, and power.

Members of the Fiber Arts Advisory Committee have provided valuable advice in the development of the series. The committee includes Hazel V. Bray,* Curator of Crafts, Oakland Museum; Gyöngy Laky, Professor of Design and more recently chair of the Art Department, University of California at Davis; Cecile McCann, former publisher and editor-in-chief, Artweek; Frank A. Norick, Principal Museum Anthropologist, Hearst Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley; Ed Rossbach, Emeritus Professor of Architecture (Design), UC Berkeley; Carol Sinton, fiber artist, San Francisco; Katherine Westphal, Emeritus Professor of Design, UC Davis; and James D. Hart*, Emeritus Professor of English, and Director of The Bancroft Library.

The oral history process at the University of California, Berkeley, is based on tape-recorded interviews with persons who have contributed to the development of the west. The purpose of oral history memoirs is to capture and preserve for future research the perceptions, recollections, and observations of these individuals. Research and preparation of a topic outline precede the interview sessions. The outline is prepared in conjunction with close associates and other persons in the memoirist's field, as well as with the memoirist, who in turn may use the suggestions as aids to memory, choose among them, or add new topics.

The tape-recorded interviews are transcribed, lightly edited by the interviewer, and reviewed and approved by the memoirist. An index and other materials are added. Final processing includes final typing, photographic reproduction, binding, and deposit in The Bancroft Library and other selected libraries and collections. The volumes do not constitute publications, but are primary research materials made available under specified conditions for the use of researchers.

---

*Deceased during the term of the project.

The Fiber Arts series is supported by grants from the Mina Schwabacher Fund and a donation from the Friends of The Bancroft Library. The philanthropies of the late Mina Schwabacher have included support for hospital programs that serve children, as well as scholarship bequests to Whitman College in her birthplace of Walla Walla, Washington. The Mina Schwabacher Fund was a gift to the University of California at Berkeley in honor of her brother Frank, who was a loyal alumnus and supporter of the University. The Regional Oral History Office acknowledges with appreciation the generous and essential support for the project.

The Regional Oral History Office is under the direction of Willa Baum, Division Head, and the administrative direction of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Willa K. Baum, Division Head
Regional Oral History Office

Harriet Nathan, Project Head
Regional Oral History Office

June 1995
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

INTRODUCTION--by Signe Mayfield

I first met Kay Sekimachi through the 1988 exhibition "Vessels: Variations on a Form" at Miller/Brown Gallery, San Francisco. The exhibition featured contemporary fiber work by Kay Sekimachi and Lillian Elliott, as well as ceramics by the young Agelio Batle. At that time I was the gallery's new Director. I had experience curating exhibitions in prints, paintings, and sculpture. The rich mix of contemporary fiber art at Miller/Brown Gallery offered an entirely new focus to explore.

During research for the press release for the exhibition, I became aware of Kay's prominent place in contemporary fiber art. Informative publications included the landmark *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric*, 1973. Here Jack Lenor Larsen's essay made it apparent that Kay pioneered new forms and opened up a way of working in sculpture through weaving. Her work in the 1960s and 1970s coincided with an explosive energy and activity in the field of contemporary fiber. Books by Ed Rossbach and exhibitions such as "Poetry of the Physical," and "The Eloquent Object," gave additional insights into the meaning and variations of vessels. They offered a valuable visual compendium of works in craft, or, in André Malraux's words, a marvelous "imaginary museum" to traverse.

The press release for the Miller/Brown exhibition cited a passage from Rose Slivka's "The Art/Craft Connection," in "The Eloquent Object," "The basic function of craft is implicit in its original Saxon, from Kraft, meaning power and strength. The Craftsman, a man of eminence, made objects to emanate and invoke power and magic--the amulet, the talisman, the charm. Not until money replaced objects as the symbol and means of power did the craftsman lose his original eminence." The quote had resonance for me, as I thought of the creative impact of Kay's work. The quiet power and magical quality of the work held me then, as it does now.

I first met Kay when she came to see the installation of the exhibition. I can remember her clearly in front of the "Ikat Box," 1989, as seen in the catalogue *Marriage In Form: Kay Sekimachi & Bob Stocksdale*. Kay approached the piece in her focused manner. After contemplating the piece for a moment, she quietly shifted the box. Remarkably, the light then hit the piece, revealing a transparency of the weave. Next Kay lifted the two long threads from the top of the piece with a deft and elegant movement. The strands arched and were permitted to fall in a flowing shape, perfectly contrasting to the crisp sides of the elegant box. Kay gave an additional pause and then a nodding gesture. I have seen that nodding gesture many times since. It affirms that this is correct to her immaculate eye.

The exhibition was reviewed by Charles Talley in *ARTWEEK*. Talley was an adept writer in the field. He is sorely missed in the Bay Area today along with other writers in contemporary craft. The stockmarket crash in the 1980s coupled with the earthquake in 1989 and the Gulf War, are events shadowing the contemporary art scene in the San Francisco Bay Area. The loss of the Contemporary Craft Museum in 1994, Miller/Brown Gallery in 1990, as well as the earlier loss of Fiberworks, Pacific Basin, and publications including the magazine *Visual Dialog*, represent some of the many dwindling resources for the support for contemporary fiber. At the same time, area colleges graduated more artists in the field. Contemporary fiber artists continued to produce excellent work on a more intimate scale than work in the 1960s-1970s.

In December 1989, I left Miller/Brown to curate exhibitions for the Palo Alto Cultural Center. Kay's work was featured in my first exhibition "From Vessel To Tapestry: Contemporary Fiber Art" July 22-September 30, 1990. In preparation for the exhibition I visited Kay's studio and home for the first time. Bob Stocksdale gave me a tour of his basement studio and the new work "on the shelf." I was regaled with wonderful stories about exotic pieces of wood. It seemed impossible that Bob and Kay, two talented pioneers in their respective fields, could create equally beautiful works under the same roof. Whitney Chadwick's recent book *Significant Others* is proof positive of the rarity of artist couples achieving the same level of excellence.

During the visit I saw how Kay formed her paper vessels around Bob Stocksdale's turned wood bowl. The concept of a dual retrospective, "Marriage In Form" was formed. For Kay's work I tried to select works depicting her range of her innovative forms, reverence for materials, and exploration of transparencies. Kay is an artist who influenced generations of artists. Despite all her contributions and influence, she has not had many one-person exhibitions. Contemporary fiber art is still a marginalized art form. For these reasons, I felt that it was crucial to include pieces from museum collections. Fortunately, The American Craft Museum, New York; Renwick Gallery of The National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California; and Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona all loaned pieces to the exhibition.

I know that "Marriage In Form" will always have a special place in my heart. One cannot always love the work and the artist. But two artists and their works! Two artists that still hold hands and take delight in each other as well as their work. I was touched by many things, but in one aspect in particular. At the time I thought I was ready to go to press with the catalogue essay in April 1993, Kay called from the Wedgewood Inn, New Hope, Pennsylvania. After countless interviews, spanning over two decades, she had just remembered "something." The exhibition had tapped her memory. She now remembered to

cite her grandmother's and mother's work as weavers. Kay's internship as a Japanese American during World War II had up to that time obliterated this relevant part of her identity. There is no published information previous to the catalogue *Marriage In Form*, indicating her heritage as a weaver. In retrospect Kay connected her immediate, wholesale captivation by the loom with this heritage. During her youth Sekimachi was "busy being Americanized." Aspects of her own culture were suppressed in memory and in material presence. During the family's internment, a friend in Berkeley stored baskets of kimonos and scraps of cloth woven by her grandmother. A silk sash woven and tie-dyed by "Mama Sekimachi" was included in these belongings. Mama had raised the silkworms for the sash. Kay did not appreciate "Japanese things" until her restorative visit to Japan in 1975 as a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts grant. Here she gained a new dimension of self as she first saw the loom of her grandmother, a fine weaver and designer.

There are so many things I admire about Kay, as a warm and giving individual and as a disciplined artist. She has a remarkable resiliency of spirit, intuition, and creative eye. Kay continues to work each day, slowly evolving new forms or nuances. Her most dynamic contributions to contemporary fiber are her large monofilament hangings in the 1970s. Her other contributions have been more modest, but no less significant. She is, in Jack Lenor Larsen's words, "The Weaver's Weaver."

Signe Mayfield
Curator, Palo Alto Cultural Center

April 1995
Palo Alto, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY--Kay Sekimachi

Kay Sekimachi is an acclaimed Bay Area artist, answering both to the designation of fiber artist, and to her preferred term, weaver. From the beginning of the Fiber Arts Series of the Regional Oral History Office in the early 1980s, Kay Sekimachi's name was high on the list of recommendations made by the series advisory committee, and by other knowledgeable artists and writers who spoke of her and her work with admiration, respect, and unusual warmth. Kay and the interviewer had met occasionally at fiber art and other exhibits during the 1980s, often in company with other artists. On April 13, 1991, an East Bay studio tour sponsored by the San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum included the home and studio of Kay Sekimachi and her husband, Bob Stocksdale, a noted wood turner. In a quiet moment, Kay stepped into a corner for conversation, and agreed to talk further about providing an oral history memoir when her time permitted. Some two years later, she became the fourth memoirist in the Fiber Arts Series.

The interviewer's background research on Kay Sekimachi's work included such publications as *fiberworks*, journal articles on fiber arts and crafts, reviews of exhibits and art shows, and such volumes as *The Art Fabric: Mainstream* by Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen, 1980. The interviewer was also able to see Kay Sekimachi's work in the Berkeley gallery, Textiles by Design; in other collections; and at the September 1993 opening in the Palo Alto Cultural Center of the retrospective show, "Marriage in Form: Kay Sekimachi & Bob Stocksdale." After the show had traveled to the Arkansas Art Center in Little Rock, and the Forum in St. Louis, the interviewer saw it again, this time in the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery in Washington D.C. The setting lacked Ted Cohen's touch in installation, but travel had not dimmed the show's freshness or elegance.

In the fall of 1993, when the schedule was being set for the tape-recorded interview sessions, Kay found herself busier than ever: the "Marriage in Form" show, originally planned for January of that year, had been expanded to a full-fledged retrospective and moved to September 1993. She chose not to delay the interviews, and moved ahead as planned, with sessions on the 9th, the 14th, and the 15th of September, and the 17th and 19th of October. She scanned the proposed topic outline the interviewer had prepared, and got to work.

Interviews took place in the serene and sunny Victorian house she shared with her husband Bob Stocksdale. The quiet glow of wooden surfaces and the proportions of the rooms were handsome in themselves. His wooden bowls and Kay's weavings and folded paper structures shared space and openness with the work of other artists, and arrangements of objects on counter surfaces, floors, and wall spaces. The dining table accommodated the tape recorder and interview papers, the top a softly

polished heavy wooden circle made by Bob Stocksdale because their friend Sam Maloof, who has chosen the term "woodworker," and is noted as a creator of beautiful furniture, had got as far as making the elegant base, but was so overloaded with work commissions that he could not finish the table on time.

Kay was at ease, fresh and trim, dressed casually, Berkeley style. In her well-fitting blue jeans and crisp white shirt, she was clearly ready for work in her balcony studio as soon as the interviews were over. It took a moment to notice that each detail was flawless: her shirt-sleeves were turned up precisely below the elbow, and the collar stood correctly, flipped up into position at the back of her neck. She often took time to think about the question; when she answered her low, pleasing voice tended to bring the listener closer, the better to hear every word. She said, "I know I'm a slow learner. I think very slowly." In fact, however, she seemed not slow but deliberate, searching for clarity and precision.

When the taped interviews were transcribed, the interviewer inserted heads and subheads, cut out occasional repetitions, and provided a few questions for clarity. It was agreed that Kay would then review the pages, writing in new material as needed, and adding supplementary memories as they arose. She did so, responding to queries and enriching and developing some accounts she had offered earlier but wanted to explore more fully. These inserts and additions appear in square brackets in the text.

This method of review suited the way she could engage in free association, sometimes stimulated by the questions, sometimes by her own flashes of memory. At first she expressed concern that the discussion might lack continuity, but her candor and spontaneity were true expressions of her style, and needed no change. She and the interviewer agreed that where necessary, some sequences of the transcript would be shifted to more logical areas, either in the original statements or later supplements.

As one aspect of her work, Kay spoke of her attraction to layering, from her early monofilament hangings to the later paper bowls, she liked being able to see through one layer to another, and still another. The sort of depths and revelations that intrigued her in her work could also describe her layered growth as an artist, pursuing levels of understanding, and learning what she needed to know. As a little girl she had created exquisitely posed, fashionable paper dolls that were inspired by the British royal family, as a vehicle for dreams. A mature artist, she struck out boldly with three-dimensional weavings, hangings, woven books, and boxes with lids, fully in control of the loom as her preferred instrument.

From her great mentor, Trude Guermonprez, she learned about "weave constructions, and the relationship between the draft and the harness." She also learned how crucial intellectual grasp and independent thinking are to the development of an artist. In Nakaishizaki, as an adult visiting her family's ancestral home in Japan, she recognized the emotional power of tradition and heritage. She saw her grandmother's treasured woven samplers, and remembered the mystical advice, "To be a good weaver, you have to feel like a thread."

She has come to terms with her own early naivete with respect to the art world, and the reticence that conflicts with promotion of her own art. When she refers to the acclaim and invitations from galleries, museums and collectors that have nevertheless come her way, she seems gently astonished that such attention has found her even though she did not know how to seek it.

She sees herself as one to whom good things happen rather than as one who makes them happen. When Kay could not afford college study, Berkeley's Fritzi Zuckerman, a friend, decided that Kay should be able to attend art classes and helped pay her expenses at the California College of Arts and Crafts. During summer classes at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine, the influential Jack Lenor Larsen commented that a sample she had woven was one of the most beautiful stripe patterns he had ever seen. Larsen's assistant invited Kay to come to New York to design for his firm. She cherished the compliment, even though she says she was too scared to accept and had to turn them down.

It was Kay's own eagerness to learn that unexpectedly brought her to the attention of Trude Guermonprez. She found it a great privilege to work with Trude, whose philosophy and mastery of the loom strongly influenced Kay's development as an artist, her boldness and elegant precision. In addition, there was the gift of mutual respect and friendship. Finally, Kay's marriage to Bob Stocksdale in their mature years was a gift she had not anticipated, but it has become source of mutual delight.

In the interviews as Kay spoke quietly of her work and the logic of problem solving, of her disciplined restraint and control, it is something of a jolt to realize how bold her solutions are, and how daring in originality. Whether the work at hand measures only a few inches, or rises to a height of several feet, the black, white, and natural of her chosen palette of materials does not clamor for attention. But as the viewer stands before the work and looks deeply, it is hard to turn away.

This memoir has benefited from the contributions of curator Signe Mayfield of the Palo Alto Cultural Center. She wrote the insightful introduction, created the "Marriage in Form" show, and wrote a major essay for the catalog, based on her understanding and appreciation of the

fiber art of Kay Sekimachi and the unique wooden bowls of Bob Stocksdale. Her research and comments also provided valuable background for the interviews.

Kay Sekimachi has also made an additional contribution by gathering materials to supplement her memoir. They will be submitted to The Bancroft Library for deposit there.

Harriet Nathan
Project Head
Fiber Arts Oral History Series

October 1995
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name KAY SEKIMACHI STOCKSDALE

Date of birth 9/30/26 Birthplace SAN FRANCISCO

Father's full name TAKAO SEKIMACHI

Occupation GARDENER Birthplace IBARAKI-KEN, JAPAN

Mother's full name WAKURI SEKIMACHI

Occupation DOMESTIC Birthplace IBARAKI-KEN, JAPAN

Your spouse BOB STOCKSDALE

Occupation WOOD TURNER Birthplace WARREN, INDIANA

Your children STEP CHILDREN - JOY STOCKSDALE & KIM STOCKSDALE

Where did you grow up? BERKELEY, CA.

Present community BERKELEY

Education CALIFORNIA COLLEGE OF ARTS & CRAFTS, OAKLAND, HAYSTACK MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF CRAFTS, LIBERTY, MAINE

Occupation(s) DESIGNER & PRODUCER - SILK SCREEN CARDS, WEAVER, TEACHER, FIBER ARTIST

Areas of expertise WEAVING

Other interests or activities SHELL COLLECTING

Organizations in which you are active

I FAMILY AND MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD

[Interview 1: September 9, 1993]

Nathan: If you would like to, we could begin with your family, and memories of them in their early years. How far back would you like to start?

San Francisco, Japan, Berkeley, and Wartime Relocation

Sekimachi: [Well, I guess the easiest place to start is just to say I was born in San Francisco on Post Street (Japantown) in 1926. My older sister Yae was born in 1924 and my younger sister Kaz in 1928. There was a brother, Koya, who would have been the oldest, but he died when he was five years old and I didn't know him at all.

At the time my father was working in a laundry, and probably my mother (she married my father and the two of them came over to this country in 1922) was still trying to adjust to life in San Francisco, motherhood, and being a housewife. We had a distant relative, a wonderful woman who was helping all the young women--brides and newcomers--cope with their new life. I think she got my mother to go to English classes and sewing classes. I can't imagine that there would have been much time for either.][1]

We were still living in San Francisco and at that time, about 1929 or '28, in that period, it was the custom for

[1]Square brackets in the text of the interview indicate significant rewriting and expansion of the passage, or the insertion of new material.

Japanese immigrants, or for the young couple, when they had kids, to take the children back to Japan and have them raised by their grandparents and then themselves stay in this country. The plan was to make a lot of money and then go back to Japan. Well, anyway, in my parents' case, my father apparently had to borrow money to send my mother and the four of us children back to Japan. This was in 1929.

So, anyway, we lived there a year and it turned out that my older brother got dysentery and died. My mother refused to come back without us, and so my father had to send money and bring us all back. That's when we came over and moved to Berkeley, and lived in Berkeley ever since until the time of evacuation. I did go to Berkeley public schools.

Nathan: Which schools, do you know?

Sekimachi: Went to Longfellow and then went to Burbank and had one year of school at Berkeley High and then Pearl Harbor happened and the evacuation came along. We were first sent to Tanforan and then to Topaz and I guess all in all it was three years. I graduated high school in Topaz, Utah.

Some family friends were relocating to Cincinnati, Ohio. My mother actually worked for the Ziegler family here in Berkeley and Mrs. Ziegler's mother lived in Cincinnati. They were desperate, at that time, for household help. And so, Mrs. Wherry, Mrs. Ziegler's mother, said she would take us in if we came. That was another reason for going to Cincinnati. We did go and we spent the last year of World War II there.

Nathan: The whole family?

Sekimachi: The whole family. My mother and now three girls. My father died in 1937 when I was ten years old, and so at that time, my mother's family in Japan said, "Come on back to Japan, bring everybody back with you." But she just decided that she would try to raise us here and she somehow managed to. All she could do was housework. I think she started out at fifty cents an hour but of course Bob [Stocksdale] says that he started out at twenty-five cents an hour. It was the times.

Nathan: Do you have any memory of being with your grandparents in Japan?

Sekimachi: I don't, unfortunately. The only memory I have is (I think, and I don't know whether I heard it or whether I actually remember it) but we were walking down a hill and at the bottom of the hill was a lake. I know that the lake is there in

Japan. My mother's family home was very close to this Lake Hinuma and so it is there. All I know is I was just scared to death because I thought we were going to roll down the hill and fall into the lake. And that's what I remember.

Yet I remember hiking up in the Berkeley hills and coming down from the Big C and maybe having the same experience. So, as I say, I don't know whether I remember it or whether I've heard.

But, let's see, we returned from Japan when I was three years old. In fact, I don't how my mother did it; my younger sister was six months old when she took us. So, she laughingly told the story about tying us to the bedpost because she [laughter] was so seasick. In those days the crossing took fourteen days.

Nathan: That was quite a decision. When you were in these different relocation centers, I guess at Topaz where you were most of the time, were you a teenager?

Sekimachi: Yes, because I was in high school.

Art Instruction, Tanforan and Topaz

Nathan: And did you continue any kind of studies there? Was anything available for you?

Sekimachi: Yes, actually, in Tanforan, Chiura Obata who was an art teacher at the University, well, he started an art school. And then some of the older--well, they were not really older but the Niseis who were already in Cal felt that they should organize a school for the kids. So, they did organize a school. We had the choice of either going to art school or to the regular school that was formed. My younger sister and I chose to go to art school. I must say it was kind of fun because for one thing, in Berkeley my mother went out every day to work and so my younger sister and I stayed home after school and worried and just waited for her to come home every day.

We really grew up in a lot of insecurity, and so for that time in the camps, we were together and we were fed. Although I must say, the first day in Tanforan, I thought, "Were we going to survive?" Because the mess hall hadn't been completely equipped and they weren't prepared to feed masses of people that were sent there. We had to stand in lines with a tin dish

and a tin cup and we just had to eat what they gave us. But anyway, we were together and so I must say I don't feel that it was all terrible.

Nathan: How would you judge the sort of art instruction that you got?

Sekimachi: Well, I don't really remember the instruction but all I could remember is that we went out in the camp and just painted and drew every day. That was the first time in my life that I was free to do that. The government was taking care of us and so we had time to play. I do remember Professor Obata demonstrating for us.

[There was another teacher there who made a big impression on me, Miné Okubo. She had gone to Cal, graduated, got a scholarship to go to Europe for a year, and had just returned when Pearl Harbor happened. I studied with her, learned to do egg tempera, which she had done while she worked with Diego Rivera at the San Francisco World's Fair. She became a friend and role model for me, and I still keep in touch with her. She also sketched every day in Tanforan and Topaz. I could still picture her with sketchbook in hand, drawing everybody. These drawings were first published in 1946 in her book *Citizen 13660*. I still think it is the best book to come out on the evacuation.]

Nathan: Did you mostly draw or mostly paint?

Sekimachi: I did both. In fact, I still have my drawings from Topaz and my watercolors from Tanforan.

When we got to Topaz, I did have to go to school and there, I guess, my art classes were my best classes. Actually, I really hated school. I was not a good student.

Nathan: Did that set you on your course early?

Sekimachi: I think so, yes, I think so.

Nathan: Thinking again of your family, in what part of Japan is Hinuma Lake?

Sekimachi: It's in Ibaraki-Ken, not far from Mito. My mother and father both came from Ibaraki-Ken. The capital is Mito and that's about sixty miles northeast of Tokyo. There is a charming book called *Memories of Silk and Straw*, written by a doctor. Anyway, he lived in Tsuchiura where my father went to school. The doctor decided since his patients were mainly people about my mother's age, he felt that their stories were going to be

lost and so he started interviewing them. In fact, he put all these interviews and stories that they told him into this really charming book. At first, it was loaned to me several years ago and then I got copies for myself and for my sisters. Anyway, as I read it, I thought, "Gee, some of these stories sound familiar," and so I don't know whether my mother told them to me and whether they were real stories or whether they were just sort of folk tales. At least some of them seem like little folk tales.

Nathan: I see. Now, by 1929, you would have been aware of the Depression or at least by the early thirties.

Sekimachi: When we came back from Japan, I think in 1930, I was three years old, I guess. All I know was we were living first on Stuart Street and then on McGee, right here in Berkeley.

Nathan: So, by the time that you were in high school, art had already become very important?

Sekimachi: Yes.

Nathan: Had you given any thought to going to college at that time?

Sekimachi: No. Not before the war. All I know is I knew the California College of Arts and Crafts was right over there and I guess it was a dream to think of even going there.

After-School Paper Dolls

Sekimachi: Drawing and painting were my main interests. After school, my sisters and I would play with paper dolls. It was the only thing we had to do for fun, and I still have them. There was one doll that I cut out of the newspaper; she's only about so high, about maybe six, seven inches. I think the doll was actually Jane Arden. I don't know whether you remember the comics?

Nathan: Oh, I do.

Sekimachi: Yes, and I think it was Jane Arden and she was my favorite doll. I drew thousands of dresses. Not thousands, it seems like thousands, but I still have, I think hundreds of dresses that we would draw and we would paint or color. It was the time of the abdication of King Edward the Eighth and Wally Simpson and so I copied her wardrobe.

Oh, actually we were living on Parker Street with a family, another Japanese family. This happened after my father died that Mrs. Kawakami said, "Come and live with us," because my mother at first had no source of income. So, we lived with the Kawakamis.

The girls were older and there was one daughter who was just crazy about clothes; that's where I got introduced to *Vogue* magazine and Wally Simpson's clothes. And I also remember Claire Booth Luce's "The Women" which was made into a movie with Norma Shearer and I know I just copied all of the clothes out of that movie.

Nathan: You had very good taste. [laughter] Elegant.

Sekimachi: Anyway, yes they were but I think we were just sort of fantasizing with the paper dolls. I know I made houses and we made up stories about these characters and well, I still have them.

Nathan: I hope you'll be willing to deposit a few of them with the other things we put in the deposit box to go with your memoir. That would really be delightful.

Sekimachi: Well, I will certainly think about it because they are in a box right at the moment and occasionally a friend will say, "Let me see your paper dolls," and I'll pull them out.

Nathan: Were they always in western garments? Did you do any Japanese clothes?

Sekimachi: I know my favorite one does have a Japanese kimono but that is just one outfit.

Nathan: Moving on to the College of Arts and Crafts, you decided to try it. Did you have a scholarship or any financial help?

Sekimachi: No. In fact, I didn't go to Arts and Crafts until we came back from Cincinnati.

Working in Cincinnati

Nathan: In the meantime had you worked at all?

Sekimachi: I graduated high school in Topaz, Utah. We relocated to Cincinnati and my first job in Cincinnati was that I worked in

a home for a friend of Mrs. Wherry's. My younger sister, Kaz, was still in high school so she finished, I think, her third year there.

I was out of school and so the first thing my older sister and I did was to go to the Quaker Hostel in Cincinnati. The Quakers were just wonderful because they tried to help place the Japanese Americans who were coming out of the relocation camps. I know a lot of people went to work for whatever. Gee, there was a stocking factory and I think, if I remember, Proctor and Gamble was there and there was something about, I not sure now but were they sort of prejudiced against the Japanese Americans and wouldn't hire them? Yet, I love Ivory soap, you know, [laughter] and every time I smell Ivory soap, I think about Cincinnati. It's strange.

But anyway, so my mother went as a housekeeper for Mrs. Wherry and my younger sister lived with her. My older sister and I had to find places to live, and so we both worked in homes for about six months each. Then I worked for Rookwood Pottery; that's the famous old pottery. They did arts and crafts style pottery.

Nathan: Did it appeal to you?

Sekimachi: Yes and no, but I think I just thought of it as a job. I worked as a glazer. The one thing I remember about Rookwood Pottery is that the girls who were working there were so rough and tough. We had lived in such a narrow little world and were kind of sheltered from the world. There I was thrown among these, what I called rough, girls and maybe they were just perfectly ordinary. So, that just sort of sticks in my mind about Rookwood Pottery. There was one Japanese man, from Japan, who was a designer there and I do remember looking at his work and I sort of admired him because I knew he was Japanese and he had made it.

II STUDIES AT CALIFORNIA COLLEGE OF ARTS AND CRAFTS (1946-1949), JOBS IN THE BAY AREA, AND BECOMING PROFESSIONAL

Nathan: So, then you came back to California?

Sekimachi: Then we came back and again, all the Japanese Americans were living together in homes. I did have relatives who had a big house here and so they just sort of took in anybody who needed a place to live. I went to work in a home in San Francisco. Maybe I worked there for about a year and I saved every cent I could so that I could go to CCAC.

[Art work was the only thing I liked to do and it was the same for my sisters. My older sister went to--I think it was called the Academy of Fashion Design in San Francisco. She sewed beautifully, as did my mother and my younger sister. I went to CCAC. A relative thought my mother was crazy letting us go to art school--we should be studying nursing or going to secretarial school.]

But, I quit working and moved over here to Berkeley and worked in a home on Lewiston as a school girl, and went to CCAC. That was about 1946.

Learning Watercolor, Design, Silkscreen

Nathan: How did you pick what you wanted to study?

Sekimachi: Well, all I know is I loved watercolors and design. I couldn't go as a full-time student so I just picked and took a few classes. So, I took watercolor, design, and silkscreen. I know that I really enjoyed the silkscreening, and somehow maybe it came easier, although I really loved watercolor, too. I know that my favorite teacher was George Post. I really loved

his paintings. I think, by the time I got through, there was a show down at Jack London Square and one of my watercolors was accepted. I felt good about that and now I feel really stupid because I think I gave it to the Goodwill. [laughter]

Nathan: What was George Post's teaching style?

Sekimachi: He would demonstrate and then he would just let us go off and work.

Nathan: You found your own style then?

Sekimachi: More or less, but I know I was really sort of copying George Post. In fact, even in Tanforan, I know that we were doing a style that was popular at that time. One of the teachers there was Mas Yabuki who had studied at Cal and I think he must have studied with John Haley. We've since become acquainted with John and Monica Haley. He died a few years ago and I think there's going to be a retrospective of his work in Richmond opening this month. But anyway, when I looked at John Haley's paintings when he had a show in San Francisco, I thought they reminded me of things that we were doing way back in 1945 or earlier.

Nathan: You didn't meet Trude Guermonprez until later, until '51, when you went to hear her speak?

Sekimachi: Yes.

Four-Harness Loom and a Weaver's Heritage

Nathan: You were then out of school?

Sekimachi: I didn't finish. I was at CCAC just as a part-time student. I did take a few classes like lettering and layout thinking maybe I could become a commercial artist. And then in the fall of 1949 I went up to the weaving room with a girl I had befriended at CCAC and watched them weave and it just fascinated me. With the last $150 I had, I decided I wanted a loom. My older sister got married in 1950 and so of course moved out. My mother, my younger sister, and I were living in three small rooms, still down on Stuart Street and I bought this loom, this four-harness loom which I still have in my weaving room.

Nathan: That takes up a fair amount of space?

Sekimachi: It does, and I literally had to almost climb under the loom to get into bed. That's how tight our quarters were. It just fascinated me and so with that investment I guess I committed myself. It wasn't until much later that I found out that my mother wove when she was a young girl in Japan. My grandmother wove. In fact, all the women in the village wove. My grandmother was apparently a good designer and so all the women in the village would come and copy her patterns. And I still have a sash that my mother actually prepared the silk for and wove the fabric.

Nathan: She spun it?

Sekimachi: She spun the silk, wove the sash, and tie-dyed it; it's in bright red and pinks. Of course, they lived on a farm and they were farmers but come silkworm season, I guess they turned the house into a little factory and they raised the silkworms, reeled the silk and sent the silk off to the factories.

Nathan: Have you worked with silk in your own work in later years?

Sekimachi: Not very much. I just wove some stoles.

Silkscreen Christmas Cards, and Small Weavings

Nathan: When you left school, because you had to, what did you do then?

Sekimachi: At that time, I think maybe my younger sister and I had already started our silkscreen Christmas card business.

Nathan: How did that go?

Sekimachi: Not great, having no business sense or experience. We lived on very little. But we designed, which was the most fun, and we silkscreened the cards and we made little catalogs. Fraser's up here in Berkeley sold them for us and quite a few shops, I think even around the country. Actually my younger sister had a job at Cowell Hospital. She had a part-time job, so she was bringing in some income. I mainly took care of the card business although she certainly was my partner and assistant. I was weaving small items trying to learn out of a book, but realized I needed weaving lessons. A friend said, "Oh, I'll show you how to weave," and so she started to teach me a little bit but I realized I needed lessons. I heard about the Berkeley Adult School which was up at McKinley School on Dwight Way and I went to classes there.

Nathan: Who taught you? Do you remember?

Sekimachi: Walter Houle.

Nathan: He actually taught you then to thread and--

Sekimachi: To thread and to, well he just taught us what he knew about weaving which I don't think was very much. We were learning by rote. But anyway, I was weaving placemats and hand towels and belts, salable items.

Nathan: So, did you feel that doing the cards and placemats, towels, and belts, was going to satisfy you for a while?

Warping and Threading, Working as an Apprentice

Sekimachi: Actually it was at that time. I just kind of fell in love with weaving and so I really enjoyed it. And then at the Berkeley Adult School, I did meet a woman who became a wonderful friend to me. Her name was Claire Weaver. Anyway, she was, I think, in her early fifties, and I was about twenty-three. And, anyway we became very good friends and I would go over and help her warp and thread looms for her and we just sort of became buddies.

Then I also apprenticed out at Ahrens Weaving Studio. Jim Ahrens was a fine, still is a fine loom builder. His wife was a weaver and she was weaving placemats for Gump's. They also gave lessons. So, I went out there and I made warps for her and she would have some students who would need help threading looms and also having warps made. They would pay me a little bit. And so, I did it and actually it was wonderful experience.

Weavers' Guilds, and Exhibitions

Nathan: Is warping a particular skill?

Sekimachi: Yes. You have to warp a loom before you could ever start weaving. But anyway, I was doing the cards and weaving all these things.

Also at that time, some weaving guilds were established; anyway they were certainly going, like the Golden Gate Weavers and the Contemporary Handweavers of California, which was a very prominent group. Dorothy Liebes had her studio in San Francisco. The Yarn Depot was where, I guess, a lot of the weavers sort of hung out. There was also another group called the Loom and Shuttle Guild.

Claire Weaver got me to join the Contemporary Handweavers and the Loom and Shuttle Guild. They were having exhibitions but we were still doing three-yard lengths at that time. Whatever was on display would be a three-yard length. One of the first things I exhibited was a printed textile over at the Rotunda Gallery in the City of Paris department store in San Francisco. I remember it was Beatrice Judd Ryan who was a curator there.

Then, Elizabeth Moses put on exhibitions for the Contemporary Handweavers at the De Young Museum and so Claire and I got together with a decorator, or maybe it was John McGuire, the furniture maker. I wove some upholstery fabric and Claire wove pillow fabrics and a casement fabric. Claire's husband was Rene Weaver, who was a fine watercolorist. In fact, these are his watercolors. [gesturing toward the wall] He displayed a painting and so we had a little room, a little setting. I guess that was maybe one of my first shows where I displayed a woven fabric.

The Richmond Art Center was also going at that time and putting on maybe the first exhibitions of craft work.

Nathan: When you did the upholstery weaving would this be in wool?

Sekimachi: This was, gosh, I've got a picture of this little room but I think it was cotton and rayon. That's how I remember it.

Nathan: Did you feel that you were picking up influences from other weavers, other artists?

Sekimachi: Yes. Actually, Kay Geary was a weaver in the area and she was, I guess, sort of a protegé of Dorothy Liebes, and she would give classes to these guilds. I know I took one of her classes, and at that time it was popular to use something shiny, something smooth, and something dull. So anyway, I came up with really acceptable pieces but I think we were all sort of doing the same things. I know we just sort of followed what the teachers were doing, and actually not really understanding. It wasn't until I met Trude and had the first summer session with her in 1954 that I began to understand.

Trude Guermonprez, Pond Farm Lecture (1951)

Nathan: You mentioned that you heard Trude Guermonprez for the first time in '51?

Sekimachi: In 1951.

Going back to my first meeting with Trude, well, weaving was really just sort of burgeoning at that point and then, of course, there were a lot of women weavers, but not very many young people. I think they were all fairly well-to-do housewives who did it for a hobby. I know some of them maybe started out as occupational therapists or they worked after the war in the hospitals.

Claire Weaver and Helen Pope and I went up to Octagon House at Pond Farm to hear Trude and I think all the weavers from around the area came. I guess it was a lunch and then Trude spoke.

I was really impressed. I mean, no one had even talked about drafting, or no one said to make a weave draft. I don't think we even knew what it was all about. But there she was with a grid on her board and she explained the weaves and talked about materials and I guess even just about hand weaving and the place of hand weaving in society. It was wonderful.

Nathan: You were ready for something like this?

Sekimachi: Yes, I think that was it. I was ready. All I know is afterwards, since I was with these friends I had to go back, but someone said, "You know, Trude was asking about you." I'm sure I stood out because here I was the only Oriental and I was, I think, the only person maybe in the early twenties. All I knew is she certainly would be a person that I would want to study with. It wasn't until, well, a few years later that I had the opportunity to actually study with her at CCAC.

Friendship of Fritzi Zuckerman

Sekimachi: I had met another person who was wonderful to me, too, Fritzi Zuckerman. Fritzi was a single woman who started and owned the Black Sheep Restaurant up on Bancroft Way. I guess Fritzi was in her sixties. She had taken up weaving because she wanted something to do in her spare time. She was acquainted with all

the design faculty at UC Berkeley. Anyway, I got to know Fritzi; we just became friends. Fritzi said, "I'll pay your tuition." And so she paid my tuition to go to CCAC to study with Trude.

Nathan: What a wise investment she made.

Sekimachi: Yes, she really was a wonderful friend. I guess her parents were immigrants, too. I'm sure she had a hard early life. I could still remember that she wanted to teach me how to drink because I guess she felt that to become sociable you had to know how to drink. To this day, I still can't drink because I'm really allergic to alcohol. But I know that [laughter] she was just being kind and saying, "You know, Kay, you really should learn how to drink a little wine." I know other weavers were very kind and supportive, too, and they would say, "Practice on us, practice on us." I started to give classes and workshops at home in our living room. (My mother, sister, and I bought a little six-room house on Milvia Street, Berkeley, in late 1950. When the old garage had to be rebuilt, it turned into my weaving studio.)

Understanding the Loom, Two Summer Sessions (1954-1955)

Nathan: How did you find your own way and not follow some of the more established styles? You mentioned that you were austere in your artistic sense. How did you get in touch with that?

Sekimachi: Well, I think it was actually studying with Trude. She was the strongest influence. Anyway, here I was weaving from the fall of 1949 until 1954 and doing it but not really understanding what I was doing and what this was all about.

That summer session with Trude, things just sort of became clear. She made us see the relationships between the parts of the loom. All I know is I threaded but I really didn't understand what the harnesses were doing, but she sort of clarified everything. And maybe, again, I was ready for it. Maybe it just took that long, because I know I'm a slow learner. I think very slowly. It just took a long time. I saw some of the wall hangings that she was doing, and then, of course, she introduced us to the work of Anni Albers and the Bauhaus. Suddenly I realized that we don't have to be doing three-yard lengths and handtowels. It was while studying with her that I started my first wall hangings and little tapestries.

I studied with Trude two summers. Then, I remember her asking me, "What do you want to do with weaving?" I'm sure I still didn't know what I wanted to do with weaving. But I thought I really should study a little bit more, and I said, "Maybe I should go study with Anni Albers." And so Trude said, "Well, why Anni?" Because I really didn't know at that time that Trude was influenced by Anni Albers and that their teaching would have been very similar. I remember Trude saying that if she wrote a book, her book would be very much like Anni's book. Yes.

III HAYSTACK MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF CRAFTS (1956)

Lessons with Jack Lenor Larsen

Sekimachi: I thought, well, I still ought to broaden myself a little bit more, and so decided to go to Haystack Mountain School of Crafts. So I applied there and I actually did get a scholarship. Jack Lenor Larsen was teaching. This was 19--was it 1956?

Nathan: Yes. Haystack, summer of '56.

Sekimachi: I was still at that time, well, I'm still not comfortable going anywhere alone and so my younger sister came too. She was interested in art, but I think she came along with me just to be a good sport [laughter] and to sort of support me.

Nathan: Did she study as well?

Sekimachi: Yes, she studied as well. It was the first time we had gone anywhere, and so we took the train all the way across to Maine and then we came across Canada on the Canadian Pacific and came back. Before that we hadn't been anywhere except to Cincinnati and back.

Nathan: Can you tell me about how Jack Lenor Larsen was as a teacher? Did you have classes with him?

Sekimachi: Yes, I had classes, I think about two weeks. It wasn't quite the three weeks that I should have had. We didn't stay for the full six weeks. He assigned some very interesting lessons. I know that I still have the samplers from both. The first one was a lesson that he called "emotional stripes," and so it was all in color. We were to do as many stripe patterns as we could think of, using as much color as we wanted to. I guess

he did talk about some of the different stripes that there are in the so-called design literature, Roman stripes, et cetera.

But anyway, I came up with, I think, a fairly good sampler and he paid me a high compliment because he said that one of my samples was one of the most beautiful stripe patterns he had ever seen. I just let it go. I didn't really take it that seriously. It just sort of went over my head but I realize it really was a compliment, and encouragement.

Afterwards, his assistant, Wynne Anderson, asked me, would I be interested in coming to New York and working and designing for them. I guess I was flattered but I couldn't think of going to New York and living by myself and working for someone. I was just too scared. But I do know they asked me and I had to turn them down.

Nathan: That invitation certainly was another compliment.

"Summer Camp" and Art

Sekimachi: As I said, my sister and I took off across the country on the train and got up to Haystack. At that time it was still at Liberty, Maine, which was about thirty miles from Augusta. I guess, after we got back, someone asked me what a day was like at Haystack. I just said it was sort of like being in a summer camp. Meals were served in a common mess hall and you had to show up at a certain hour for breakfast and then for lunch and for dinner. We had nice little cabins that we were assigned to, and it seems to me the classrooms were kind of bungalows but certainly adequate.

Nathan: How was the equipment?

Sekimachi: As far as I could remember, I guess it was okay. I know we started kind of complaining about meals towards the end of the session. [laughter]

Nathan: That does sound like camp.

Sekimachi: Yes. I can't remember whether it was when we were at Haystack, in Liberty, or whether it was when I taught there in the summer of 1973. But I do remember Jack Larsen, I guess, was teaching a class. Anyway, after the meal, which was a very simple meal,

he stood up and said, "Is this dinner?" [laughter] I think we were all just horrified.

I am still in touch with June Campbell who was from Wilmington, Delaware, and now lives in Campbell, California. I think her mother is still living, and she sent me the samples of monofilament. June was one of the girls I met at Haystack. Let's see, I do remember another a girl who was there, Barbara Markey. I've heard of her but I certainly have not kept up with her.

Nathan: Would you like to compare your experience in learning at Haystack with what you learned at CCAC, the methods or anything else?

Class Monitor

Sekimachi: Well, I guess it was just very different because all Jack did was to give us a lesson, although it was a really interesting one. He took it for granted that we all knew how to weave, how to make warps. I was the class monitor. I was supposed to help anyone who did not know how to make a warp. He assigned a problem and everyone got to it.

Nathan: I see, and when he gave a lesson, that was assigning a problem? That was it?

Sekimachi: Yes, that was it. As I said earlier, the first problem was called "emotional stripes," and it was stripe patterns in color and as many as you can think up. Then the second I found even more interesting, because he called it "intellectual stripes." You could only use one color in the warp and one in the weft. And, all I know is I limited mine to black in the warp and just one material and a natural linen weft. By golly, we did come up with stripes but you really had to think about changing the weave pattern. So, it really was, I thought, a very good lesson.

Nathan: Right. When you mention the use of two colors, could you have used different kinds of thread in a single color?

Sekimachi: This is what I don't remember. But all I know is that I chose just one material for the warp and I used another material for the weft. Although I do remember doubling the weft thread for some of the stripes because that made the weft a little bit heavier and it stood up. I remember getting some wonderful

effects where you did a warp-faced twill and then a weft-faced twill. It would buckle up and it almost made pleats because it would, well, sort of collapse. It really became sort of three-dimensional, just following a warp-faced twill by a weft-faced twill, the twill direction, and I guess that was it. It made the material hump up and then the second stripe did the reverse. So, anyway, I thought that it was a really good lesson or problem and made you really think.

Nathan: Did you gather that that was his point in making these assignments?

Sekimachi: I suppose so. Seems to me he wasn't terribly communicative. I think I still find it hard to really talk to him. [But maybe it's me. I find it hard to talk to a lot of people, especially if they are in authority. When we were in Connecticut for the opening of our show at Brown/Grotta Gallery, Jack did invite us for a weekend at Longhouse. We weren't able to go, but hope to someday. It would be so nice to be able to have a real visit with him.]

Nathan: It's so interesting because looking at the essay he did for that beautiful catalog in your upcoming show, he could not have been more interested or more respectful. It's interesting how he evaluated what you did.

Kay, do you have more comments about Jack Lenor Larsen?

Sekimachi: Yes. Yes. Anyway, you asked me about Haystack. I sort of put Haystack at the back of my mind. I hadn't thought about it for many, many years.

As I mentioned, Trude had asked me what I wanted to do after I worked with her. And so, I thought about Anni Albers first and then she said that their teaching was very similar so I should think about somewhere else. Jack was sort of the rising star. In fact, I think he had already made a name for himself because everyone thought of him as The Jack Larsen.

The studios we had were separate from the central building. And, again, they were very simple buildings, bungalows. Seems to me I remember tar paper and decks. It was really in the woods and I remember afterwards, thinking about Maine, that it was so beautiful and so green. In fact, I had never seen so many ponds in my life or so many pine trees. And that really inspired me. I thought, "If I didn't live in California, I'd love to live in Maine." And then of course,

people would ask me, "Well, what about the winters?" [laughter] not having ever lived in snow.

There we were and I was, of course, Jack's monitor. I know you had asked me how he was as a teacher and all I remember is that he came into the class and gave his lesson and then he disappeared. I do remember him saying to the class that I'm the monitor and I will help the students with problems, but that I am here to work, too. He just disappeared and all of us accepted it. We figured that he was off working on his own business, which he probably was.

Nathan: So would this be a lecture that he gave?

Sekimachi: Yes. He came in in the morning and he presented the problem and then as I say, he disappeared.

Nathan: There was no demonstration?

Sekimachi: There was no demonstration or anything. As far as I know, we'd all had some weaving. In fact, I don't remember if there were any beginners. And also, he was sort of unapproachable, although he's younger than me in age but he was still, as I said, sort of The Jack Larsen. So, we let him disappear and I don't think we bothered him.

Nathan: And you were the approachable one?

Sekimachi: The students got their samplers done and so I guess I helped them through problems if there were any. But all I remember is the day that we were supposed to have a critique. Quite a few students from the other workshops came and everyone hung their samplers on the wall of the studio. There was a deck and so we all sat around and we were anticipating some great words, but I don't think any really came. Again, we were sort of all in awe of Jack and I still find him that way. Here, this is years later and we do have periodic contact but I don't feel like I really know him. His letters are, you know--. He just starts off, "Kay, da da da da da--" and it's sort of, kind of demanding.

Larsen's Essay on the Retrospective Show

Nathan: It's interesting in light of your feeling and experiences that the essay he wrote for the catalog of your show in Palo Alto

was, as we said, very appreciative, very serious, and very admiring. How did you feel about that?

Sekimachi: I felt good about it. And I feel that he did catch, what, the essence of my work? I think you're right. He sort of understood me, I think. He told me he woke up at five in the morning to work on this and he worked very hard, I think he did. I do believe he did a good job. So, maybe it's just on the social level that it's hard to be sort of completely natural with him. I don't know.

Nathan: Was there anything that was left out of his essay that you felt might have gone in?

Sekimachi: At first when I read the first draft, I was kind of sorry that he didn't know me personally, that all the personal stuff was left out, there was none of my background. Signe said it was her job to catch whatever Sam Maloof left out of Bob's and whatever Jack left out of mine, and I thought she did a very good job of doing that. I did feel that, you know, here he just spoke about my work and nothing about me personally. Well, we really don't know each other personally.

Nathan: I see. About the technical aspect of your work, how did that come across to you?

Sekimachi: It seems to me there were some minor errors, but other than that, I think he covered it.

Nathan: Clarity requires great care?

Sekimachi: Yes, yes. I really do know that he put a lot of work into it and I am really appreciative, too. Signe said that *Shuttle, Spindle and Dye Pot* will be doing an article and they want to use his whole essay. She says, "I don't want to let them have the whole essay."

Nathan: She doesn't have to, does she?

Sekimachi: Right. I guess she'll let them have parts of it and add what she wants to.

Nathan: That's an interesting way to do it. How does it feel to you when someone is giving you this sort of in-depth critique?

Sekimachi: Well, actually, I think he did a good job and I thought he was very flattering. But I wish he hadn't used so many "big" names. He wrote the little bit about the paper bowls where he feels that they were sketches. He wrote that he had to do a

little criticism in order to be believable. That's what he wrote. But no, I really agree with him for the paper bowls, I really enjoy doing them because they're fun to do. But I think he's right, that they are more sketches than really serious things.

Some Teachers at Haystack

Nathan: I see. When you were at Haystack, were there other students or faculty members who were of interest to you as well?

Sekimachi: Let me think. David Weinrib was there teaching. Was he there teaching sculpture? Just, I think for a last three-week session. Karen Karnes, his wife at that time, came and spent the weekend. Of course, you're sort of impressed by the people with names and she already had a name at that time. Others--. To tell you the truth, I don't really remember. It's been a while. The Merritts were just wonderful people. Fran and Priscilla Merritts. He started the school and was the director. Or maybe he didn't start it, because I think a woman by the name of Mary Bishop did. But he was certainly the director for many, many years. Priscilla I think started out as the cook. They're wonderful people. Let's see, I had something else in the back of my mind. Lost it already.

Nathan: Well, we can come back, or just think of it now. Was it something connected with the school?

Sekimachi: It was something connected with the school.

Nathan: Let's try this, don't try to think of it. And when it comes to mind, we'll pop it right in.

What was your working day like when you were there?

Sekimachi: All I know is breakfast was served at a certain hour and we all marched in and had our breakfast and then did whatever we had to do afterwards. I think class must have started about nine in the morning.

Now, I know what I wanted to say. It was because of the new book *Women's Work, Textile Art from the Bauhaus*, Marli Ehrman is mentioned in it. I studied with her at Haystack. In fact, she was the teacher before Jack came and so I had three weeks with Marli. She, again, was a wonderful person, both she

and her husband. I think the son was still young, maybe he wasn't even a teenager at that time.

Maybe I could consider myself being almost an advanced student and so I didn't find her teaching as interesting because I had the wonderful summers with Trude before. Marli let me work on my own. Well, she gave me suggestions and said, "Go on and work on your own," and so I did. I played around on the eight-harness loom, which I hadn't done that much work on, so I feel I got something.

Marli, as I say, was a wonderful woman. I'm sure in Chicago, did she teach at the Institute of Art or was it the School of Design? But she's, I think, still very much respected in that area and she still has, I think, a following.

IV BAY AREA SCENE; LEARNING TECHNIQUES; TEACHING

Nathan: Did you have any contact particularly with people in the Design Department at Cal (University of California, Berkeley)?

Gauze Weaves and Room Dividers

Sekimachi: Not really, but I heard about them from Fritzi. So, I knew about Lea Miller, her lace, her gauze weaves, and I became fascinated with gauze weaves. I did a very short series of room dividers. I think I ended up using brooks bouquet, which was a wrapping technique. But I loved leno. I really loved gauze weave.

Nathan: What was brooks bouquet? As in flower bouquet?

Sekimachi: Yes, that's the way it's spelled. But it's a wrapping where you just go through the shed and come out and wrap around some top threads and pull so the threads come together like this. Leno is where you pull threads from the underside and over and you lock it in with the weft thread. But I know I became very interested in Peruvian textiles from just seeing Lea Miller's, what she had done with them.

Nathan: This is an interesting place for an artist to be. I gather that there was a lot of interesting activity in this area. Did you feel the presence of other artists and other weavers?

Sekimachi: Yes. There were a lot of weavers. I knew about Ed Rossbach, and his work certainly must have been in the shows that were going on around here. There were a lot of commercial weavers. There was one in Walnut Creek, I think her name was Vesta Vetter. There was another weaver in Richmond who did some

beautiful things, Ressa Jacobson. I don't think she was a commercial weaver but she did some beautiful things. [There was Mama Gravander, a Swedish weaver who taught in her wonderful studio on top of Summit in Mill Valley; and Margery Livingston who taught at San Francisco State and had a shop/studio called Weaver's Alley in San Francisco.]

There was a group called Designer Craftsmen of California; it was a group of local craftsmen. I think maybe Trude was one of the first to get the group organized. But before that I think there was another group of weavers called the Professional Weavers Association. And I know that Trude certainly was instrumental in getting this group going. The teachers were Trude and Ida Dean Gray, and maybe Margery Livingston. Maybe even Hal Painter. In fact, Hal Painter just died in April and this coming Sunday there will be a memorial service for him at the Art Institute where he went to school.

Weave Drafts

Nathan: I see. You spoke of Trude explaining about drafting a weave. That is essentially making a plan?

Sekimachi: Yes, a weave draft is making a drawing of the weave on paper.

Nathan: And that was something that you have followed? You do this?

Sekimachi: After finding out what it was all about, yes. [In fact, from a weave draft, you would make a threading draft and follow it in threading a loom. This is done on grid paper. The first line of the threading draft represents harness number one, the second number two and so forth.] And then, of course she explained how to draft and how to analyze woven fabrics. She just opened my eyes to so many aspects of weaving.

Nathan: I don't know if this necessarily follows but I'd like to ask about those beautiful stitched and folded boxes made out of very thin wood that's bonded to paper. Did you do a mathematical plan, showing size and where to fold? Do you do this in other aspects of your work?

Sekimachi: I think I do.

Trude's Classes, and Teaching at the California College of Arts and Crafts

Nathan: Then, a little later in this era, you began to teach not so much in your living room, but more at CCAC?

Sekimachi: Yes, and I had never planned on being a teacher but Trude asked me to substitute for her one summer session because she was taking off for a trip to South America. She asked me and I felt I really should try it. So, I did. Anyway, I think I really patterned my teaching after her because I felt that she did it so well and I tried to give to my students what she had given to me. I don't know how successfully but anyway, that was what I tried to do.

Nathan: Was that a little scary?

Sekimachi: Yes, for sure. Anyway, I'm just not good with words and so it really was hard. I don't like to talk. [laughter]

Nathan: You sound like a wonderful teacher. How big were the classrooms? How many would you have in a summer?

Sekimachi: Maybe about fifteen to twenty people.

Nathan: Were these mostly women?

Sekimachi: They were mostly women.

[Actually, now that I think of it, it was a mixed group, mostly women, some teachers, but a few men. I remember because the late Bob Arneson, the famous ceramic artist, was in one of the summer session classes that I taught. He needed a class in weaving to complete his course in education.]

When Trude taught the class I think my friend Claire was in one of the classes. I do remember the class met from nine to twelve and Trude gave her lessons. Everyone went home after twelve but I stayed on and I made my samples. Somehow I was able to work when everyone left. Again, I do remember Trude saying to me one time when she was leaving the classroom for the day, that she looked at what I was doing and she really liked what I did. I still have that sample.

For some reason I didn't develop it although I could still see that it was the beginning of something that could have been developed into a room divider or a wall hanging that could hang in space. It was a double weave with the brocade threads

coming out on both sides. I still have it and I still think maybe one day I might get back to it, but I don't know that I will.

Nathan: Is that a difficult thing to know what to develop or when to move off to something else? How can you think through what you want to do?

Eight-Harness Loom and a Double-Weave Wall Hanging

Nathan: Is there a way in which you decide, "Although this looks interesting, I'm going to go in a different direction"?

Sekimachi: The sample that I did for Trude was on an eight-harness loom. Of course, it was with Trude that I learned about the eight-harness loom and so I guess I wanted to do as much exploring on it as possible. I think that's what stopped me from developing this particular double-weave warp brocade any farther.

As a sort of a class project, I did an eight-harness double-weave wall hanging. I did two because I always try to put enough warp on for at least two because I always think with the first one, "You're just going to get acquainted with the warp and maybe the second one might turn out." Anyway, I did put on a warp and I did a white on white double weave. Again I think what was fascinating to me is that you could bring up so many different combinations on the surface when you have eight harnesses. You could use harnesses, like one and eight to weave a cloth on top or one and two to weave on top. So, if each harness has a different thread on it you could make all kinds of combinations.

Even before that time I was looking a lot at the work of Paul Klee and Kandinsky and that whole group of painters. I really loved Paul Klee because I loved some of the square compositions or the ones with sort of a grid. This was also very geometric. Anni Albers had done a triple-cloth wall hanging and that was certainly at the back of my mind, too. So I did come out with two of these wall hangings. Anyway, just understanding a double weave and then from that, double-weave pickup which was, I guess, a very well known technique in the Scandinavian countries.

In that period a show came from Sweden called "Design in Scandinavia." It was at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. It was just fascinating to see the simple things that the Scandinavians had done like their Rya rugs and linen hangings and curtain fabrics. And then there must have been some double-weave pickups which is a technique used for weaving wall hangings. One warp would be dark, the other light. So, you could have a dark design against a light background and the other side would be just the reverse.

Teaching Workshops and Classes

Sekimachi: To make a living I was still doing the Christmas cards and still giving workshops. Well, the women in the guilds would ask me, "Kay, give us a workshop in double-weave pickup." And so I would do it and that helped me to understand it even better.

Nathan: As you gradually got into teaching, did you have any preference between workshops and regular classroom teaching?

Sekimachi: I really enjoyed the workshops because there was a beginning and an end. I enjoy concentrating on a certain subject. The workshop students know that it is short and so they feel they have to produce. So you do see some results. Whereas in the classroom, like Berkeley Adult School where I started to teach in 1964, they just sort of rambled on. It was a source of income so I think I continued to do it until I married Bob in 1972.

In 1965 I also started to teach for the San Francisco Unified School District. These classes, I think, were first taught by Kay Geary and then they went to Britta Kyrk. When Britta retired I fell into teaching these classes. Anyway, these adult classes just sort of went on and on and on. At one point I was teaching, if I remember correctly, around twenty-two hours a week.

All I know is I really did not do my best teaching in the adult school program. Well, one thing, I had no training as a teacher. I guess I just didn't really know how to say, "You guys have to come and work with me for a certain period and I really have to get you to start working on your own." I knew I've got to let these people go. But, instead it turned out that they stayed with me and stayed with me and they kept

coming back and coming back. So, we were all friends more than teacher and students. [laughter]

Nathan: It probably filled a different need for different people.

Sekimachi: Yes. For sure.

Nathan: I can just see you trying to beat them off when they won't go. [laughter]

Sekimachi: I don't think I did a very good job of beating them off. That was the problem.

Nathan: Did you feel there was any real talent or serious work involved?

Sekimachi: Gosh, I'm really sorry to say I don't think any really serious work came out of those classes. [By serious, I mean that I don't think any student went on to become a nationally exhibiting artist. But some excellent and beautiful work was done and is still being done.

Most of the students were wonderful people--loyal, generous, and great cooks. (We used to say all weavers were great cooks.) And there were a few exceptional ones, talented, gifted, and bright young women like Yvonne Cannon, who for various reasons did not continue. Others chose to stay active in classes and workshops, the guilds, and the weaving conferences. When the San Francisco adult classes moved to the Fort Mason Art Center, we called ourselves the "Fort Mason Weavers," and participated in many conferences along with other school exhibitors.

I served on many juries--a hard job--for the conferences, did a few post-conference workshops, and would still be going to them if I had the energy. They have terrific programs, exciting exhibits, and the commercial exhibits are fabulous. The last Convergence (the national conference) I went to in San Jose was so big all I could do was see a few exhibits in the time we had. In fact, no way could you see it all in the two days of the conference.]

All I know is I did substitute for Trude at CCAC when she got sick and that was in 1975. Sheila O'Hara was in my class. I think I really love Sheila because she is the only person who still claims me for being her teacher. [laughter] She says that I'm responsible for her continuing to weave, because she was about to give it up until she came to my class. Actually she was in Trude's class and Trude was hard on her. She has

been doing some wonderful witty wall hangings and doing a lot of commissions for corporate offices. She exhibits internationally and is internationally known.

Nathan: Are these of interest to you, your teaching classes: at Sonoma State, San Francisco Community College, and when you went back to Haystack.

Sekimachi: Yes, I went back to Haystack.

Nathan: Were any of these especially important to you?

Sekimachi: Yes, the class the summer of '67. It was credited through Sonoma State College but the class was held at Mendocino Art Center. That really was a good group of people and I enjoyed them a lot. I guess I like the informal atmosphere of the classroom. On a beautiful day you could see the ocean. Yes, it was a really beautiful, inspiring place to be in. They were certainly a mixed group of people and I would say, younger, with a number of teachers.

Nathan: More stimulating?

Sekimachi: Yes, yes. For sure they were more stimulating. Then I do remember a good group at the Mendocino Art Center in the apprenticeship program in '87. That was also a good group. Most of the students were in the apprenticeship program, and so were young and energetic.

Fascination with Multi-Layered Weaves

Nathan: At this time were you essentially incorporating what you would learn from Trude as well?

Sekimachi: Yes, and then, I guess, my favorite subject became multi-layered weaves because I just loved plain double weaves and all that you could do with double weaving. Given enough harnesses you could weave as many layers of cloth as you could handle, you know, one right on top of the other. That's just fascinating and it's still fascinating to me.

Nathan: Do you have an eight-harness loom now?

Sekimachi: I do, I've got an eight-harness loom. I've got a twelve-harness loom which was given to me by Fritzi Zuckerman when she died. And then, more recently in 1982, I acquired a forty-

harness dobby loom thinking that, my gosh, with forty harnesses, the permutations would be absolutely infinite, and they are. That's when I started the paper bowls. [laughter] Or, you know, with forty harnesses, if you wove layers you could accordion them like this. [gestures] So, anyway, double weave or multiple layered weaves became fascinating for me and so it was a subject that I really did enjoy teaching.

Nathan: When you have these many layers, are they attached to each other?

Sekimachi: They could be attached to each other or they could be completely separate. They could be woven or they could be left unwoven. They could weave through each other. More recently, I've been doing the paper-bowl-making workshops because, actually, I must say they are a lot easier, there's less preparation. It's just easier to do.

Nathan: Yet, they're so beautifully complete.

Sekimachi: Yes, and they could be completed right there and then, too. The results are much quicker. I was supposed to teach at Penland School of Art in the summer of 1987. My mother was sick and dying of cancer and I just couldn't leave her. So, I canceled out of that class and I don't think I've taught a class since, in weaving.

Nathan: Well, let's see, we are still looking at some of your teaching locations.

Sekimachi: Yes. A comment on the first one; I did teach at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in 1973 and I must say that one was a hard one. It was just a year after we were married and my first trip driving across the country. It was wonderful seeing the country, I mean, I hadn't realized how big and how different the areas were and I wished at times that I could have brought my niece and nephews along with me because I really wanted them to see all this. [But the teaching was difficult, maybe because I was ill at ease in an environment like Haystack. It was on Deer Isle by then, a beautiful location, but you were among too many people morning, noon, and night, and I don't think I do really well in that kind of situation. Bob saved it for me by taking me sightseeing after class hours. I have a feeling that some of the students resented my going off, as I know some of the instructors were in their classrooms morning, noon, and night. However, I must say the teaching in '83 at Haystack went much better and I guess I was getting a little bit more comfortable with myself by then.]

Learning with Students

Nathan: Did you learn anything from the students?

Sekimachi: Yes, I certainly learned, in fact, a lot. That's one of the parts of teaching that I miss because it is stimulating, thinking about projects to assign the students. Well, it would just start me off on something that I'd want to do myself. And then, of course, sometimes you do have exceptional students and you almost wish, "Why didn't I think of that myself?"

I know that certainly happened at the University of Washington in Seattle. I had a number of really good students; they were students at the university and I think they were students of Layne Goldsmith. They were really good and very open, so they came up with some wonderful results. I know one student said that she had given up weaving and had gone into graphic design but after the course she decided that she wanted to go back into weaving, and she even sent some slides of work she had done afterwards. So, it is gratifying when you think you've touched a few students.

From Weaving to Baskets, Paper, Wood

Nathan: In general, does the interest in weaving continue at the same level?

Sekimachi: Gosh, I feel like I'm sort of getting away from weaving. From what I hear, maybe there isn't as much interest in loom weaving. All I know is the galleries tell me that they are selling very few wall hangings and right at the moment the corporate commissions have certainly fallen off. So, I have a feeling that maybe a lot of would-be weavers or even students of weaving feel that there maybe isn't a future in it. I really don't know what's been happening with the guilds. Well, certainly right now I would say that there's more interest in basket-making, paper-making. Maybe those are the two, and certainly wood. Wood-working has become very big. Or maybe what's happening in the field of wood-working and wood-turning, well, is that it's probably sort of peaking right at the moment, just like weaving peaked, I can't say in what years, but certainly there was a point when, gosh, weavers were just trying to do everything with wall hangings. You know, putting sea shells and sticks and just, you know, beads and everything on a wall hanging. But that's what's happening in wood right

now. They're trying to make lace out of wood, just showing off their skill at turning rather than really bringing out the beauty in a grain of wood.

Nathan: That's an interesting image. If you have any other thoughts about this, certainly we can do more about it. Would you want to comment on places like Pacific Basin, Fiberworks, Straw Into Gold, some of these non-university centers?

Sekimachi: I would say they happened at a time when I guess there really was a need for schools such as Pacific Basin and I think they were just wonderful. A lot of us still miss them and maybe we miss them because it was a great place to go to hear someone talk, just to see your old weaving friends. And maybe that's what I miss about them, because I was not connected with them very much. I taught an occasional class for Pacific Basin and for Fiberworks but I wasn't really affiliated with them. But I do know I do miss them.

Nathan: Are there any such centers now that fill that function?

Sekimachi: Not that I know of. Although, I've just been so involved with working with paper that I really have not kept up, so it's hard for me to say what's going on at CCAC [California College of Arts and Crafts]. I know the Design Department at Cal closed quite a few years ago, but I do know the Design Department is still going at Davis and I hear good things about them. [telephone interruption]

Possibilities in Paper Bowls

Nathan: Maybe this is a good time, if you'd like to talk about how it was that you were intrigued by the possibilities of paper.

Sekimachi: Okay, anyway, I guess what started the paper work is the fact that I had acquired this forty-harness dobby. When it got all put together with the help of Jim Ahrens, who actually built the loom, and I got it going, I put a warp on it to weave a sampler. I did a sampler and it was very fascinating and I did get some results that I was very interested in, but it took so much time. I came up with too many interesting things that I didn't know what to zero in on. So, one day I was taking a nap and thinking about what can I do that would go a lot quicker than weaving. Suddenly, I thought about all my linen thrums. Linen is one of my favorite materials and--

Nathan: Thrums?

Sekimachi: Thrums. They're warp ends. So, I would save all my thrums because the threads are so beautiful that I just kept them.

Nathan: How big are they?

Sekimachi: At the most, a half a yard long. And at the front, sometimes it could be just six inches long. They're just short ends. Then I thought about Stitch Witchery, which is a fusible material. It's a material that is used for instant appliqué and I used for my woven books.

I had that material around, so I thought, "Gee, I'll just take my linen thrums and throw them around a ceramic pot and then put some Stitch Witchery on top and throw, again, some more threads on top of the Stitch Witchery and then touch it with a steam iron and see what happens." So, I did it and lo and behold, I came out with quite a charming little bird's nest. So, that's what started my so called basket--making or bowl-making.

Nathan: How did you get the thrums to adhere to the pot? I can see throwing thrums on it but why didn't they fall off?

Sekimachi: Okay, the pot was upside-down on a stand. I just laid the thrums over the base of the pot and then put a layer of the Stitch Witchery and then another layer of threads and then to support it I would even take threads and go around it. So, in a sense the threads crossed each other but they weren't necessarily woven. They did cross each other. Then I took the steam iron and just touched it and the glue on the Stitch Witchery would melt and adhere the threads together. The Stitch Witchery, even if I didn't melt it completely, was kind of interesting because it was very, very webby or it turned cobwebby.

So, I did a few bowls that I really liked in that technique and then from these bird's nest baskets, I thought, "Well, I've got Japanese papers, why don't I try taking one of Bob's bowls and cutting paper into little pieces and pasting them together around the bowl and see what happens?"

It's the outside that I'm working around. And also, I had worked with paper in that when I was weaving my series of miniature books that were in double weave with an accordion fold, I was doing what was called transfer printing. So, I would paint an image on tracing paper. And then I would take a hot iron and iron the dye onto the threads.

Sekimachi: The warp would be stretched out taut on top of paper--newsprint. Then I would take my painted image on the tracing paper and put it down on the warp threads and press with a hot iron and where the dye did not go onto the linen threads, it would go onto the paper. [Of course the main purpose was getting the image on the warp threads. The image on paper was a bonus. A result of the transfer printing was an interesting print on the paper of a range of mountains, most interesting because the warp threads created horizontal lines across the whole piece. I replaced the newsprint with good Japanese papers. The woven book was titled *One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji*. I just imagined putting this paper/print around a bowl, and having a paper bowl with Mt. Fuji going around it. It didn't happen, but anyway it was a thought.]

Nathan: You did continue to do this transfer printing?

Sekimachi: Well, yes, actually that was a number of years ago that I did the transfer printing. In fact, I think a friend of mine has one of the prints framed over her fireplace because they are kind of interesting. But, anyway, for that reason I did have paper around, too. For the paper pots, I realized that I would have to cut the paper in small pieces in order to go around a curve. So, that's what made me decide that my paper needed to be cut into smaller pieces and I would be working this way from the top down.

I would select papers that I thought looked good together. They were mainly Japanese. So, anyway, I did cut pieces into little squares and rectangles and pasted them together and then took linen threads and just went around them like the spokes of an umbrella and then put a layer of paper on top and let it dry overnight. Then we removed it from the form and I came up with a paper bowl.

Nathan: Did you have to slit it to lift it off?

Sekimachi: Yes, some of my first bowls had to be literally cut off the mold. Later I learned a few tricks--to work the paper off the mold as the work progressed, to be sure that the paper wasn't stuck to the mold. I did not want the linen threads to go across the bottom because it made a little hump here in the middle as the threads wound around. And so, when I did this, after the first layer of paper, I would cut a piece of cardboard the size of the base of the bowl and then just hold that in place on the base and then wrap. Then I would paste the second layer of paper, start at the top edge and go up to

the bottom or base. When I got almost to the base of the bowl, I would cut the threads away so that there would be no threads going across the bottom. To take it off the form after it dried I would have to cut the threads as they crossed across the top. That left threads dangling which I treated as fringe and would usually just let the fringe fall inside the bowl.

Anyway, after doing the first one, it looked pretty good and so I thought, "Just try some more." I tried all kinds of variations on making bowls using paper and sandwiching hair nets in between and then using a material called Fiber Flex, which is used in basket-making. It's paper rope. In fact, I did some big bowls out of the Fiber Flex. I used a great big bowl of Bob's, covered it with the first layer of paper, and wrapped the Fiber Flex around, just coiled around the form pasting as I coiled and then slapped a layer of paper on top.

Nathan: Is there any limitation to the size?

Sekimachi: Not really.

Nathan: They're strong enough to sustain the big structure?

Sekimachi: Yes, especially if I used a material like Fiber Flex or if I used many layers of paper. I think maybe my best bowls are the bowls where the light comes through, because I really love translucency. And I love the effects that you get when you paste one paper over another piece of paper and the fibers are in between, or sometimes no fibers. Maybe that comes from my double-weave period, too, because at one point in my double-weave hangings, I was doing wall hangings where I would have a dense weave on the bottom and then an open weave on top. Then when it came to the period when I was doing the monofilament hangings, it's purely a see-through material, absolutely clear and transparent. I love the effect of looking at one layer through another, and that happened when they overlapped.

Nathan: But that was really a breakthrough, wasn't it, when you decided to try the paper and the thrums and not be on a loom at all?

Sekimachi: Yes, I guess it was. Though I feel like it just sort of happened, like in all my work it just sort of happens.

Nathan: You were speaking of using Japanese paper. Are these, in some cases, colored, not just natural color but painted or stained or colored in some way?

Sekimachi: Actually, I love using natural papers. I love using white. Well, maybe the main part of the bowl could be all kind of a

natural paper with maybe little bits of bark. And then I would like to throw a piece of solid white paper in as an accent. It makes it a little more interesting to have that contrast.

I have used colored papers. In my experimental period, I even took paper, really looked at the quality of the paper and if it was very cloth-like, I felt that rather than cutting it, it should be torn into pieces. I tore the paper into little circular pieces. Then I wanted to use color and so I actually used watercolor and colored each piece and then patched them together. It did make kind of an interesting bowl, but I think maybe I tried one or two that way and that was it.

I know that I loved to experiment. Maybe that's the most fun part of all this work. When you get an idea you want to try it. So, I did another bowl; I was going to wrap it but I wanted the thread colored. I decided that by wrapping it while it was still wet after putting it into a little dye bath, the dye might bleed onto the paper and that might make an interesting effect. So, I tried that and it was kind of messy but kind of fun. [laughter]

[Family Crest Story

Sekimachi: Bob and I were having a show at Purdue University, Bob's wooden bowls and my paper ones. The chairman of the Art Department was a third-generation Japanese American, Dennis Ichiyama. He saw the mark under my bowls and asked me if that was my family crest: a circle with two lines  . I said, "Yes." He said he did his master's thesis at Yale on geometric crests and asked me if I knew the history. I shook my head, "No." He said, "Do you want to hear it?" and I said, "Sure."

So the story goes: it was in the feudal times when the lords were still waging wars. This one lord was losing the battle; all his men killed, and he was fleeing. He came upon a shrine, and went inside. There someone had left a bowl of rice for the gods as an offering. He said to the gods, "Please forgive me, but I'm starving and have to eat the rice, but I'll replenish this many times over." He ate the rice, put the empty bowl down, and placed the chopsticks across the bowl. He looked down and saw the circle and two lines, and said, "This saved my life. This will be my family crest."

I didn't know how to sign my bowls, and so remembered my family crest. My sister made a drawing of it, and I had it made into a rubber stamp.]

Choosing Trude's Style

Nathan: When you, yourself, were doing teaching, did you consciously follow, say, Trude or Jack Larsen or other people as mentors?

Sekimachi: I know I followed Trude because I thought she had explained things so beautifully and I really enjoyed her teaching method. So, I know when I started to teach at the adult school, especially the San Francisco Adult School, in fact, Trude said to me that you'll probably make something of the adult school program over there because up until then, it was these ladies who were sort of teaching and I know that they were letting these women weave projects.

I went in with really high hopes and I started out by trying to present a lesson, and they did not respond. They didn't want a change. They just wanted to go on and weave things, and so that was a real disappointment. I guess I just sort of quit. I mean, I gave up at that point, and so we went along doing projects, one after the other.

Certainly for San Francisco with that first group of women, I couldn't do a thing. But Berkeley was a little bit better. Maybe the group was more mixed and they seemed a little bit more open to learning.

Workshops' Focus on Techniques

Nathan: Did you find that attitude in some of the many workshops in summer classes that you did? Did you find any students that were especially responsive?

Sekimachi: I would say that in most of the workshops, the students were very responsive because actually they were there to learn a specific technique. I think that was probably what I was best at. In fact, I enjoyed presenting a technique and getting the students to explore it to its fullest possibilities. Most

workshops were either one week or two weeks, so they knew that they had to work as hard as they could to get as much out of it as they possibly could. They worked very hard and for that reason, I really think I was much better at these short workshop sessions.

I know that another thing I hated to do was to so-called "critique" or "criticize," not that you wanted to criticize the students. Well, number one I wasn't any good at critiques and so I think I shied away from them. All I know is I tried to encourage most of the students to keep going and I know I made suggestions, thinking how things could be improved or if there was a weft that might be changed to improve the piece.

Teachers at CCAC

Nathan: When you were speaking earlier, reminiscing about CCAC and the name of Carol Purdie came to your mind, did you want to say something about her?

Sekimachi: Yes, I certainly do because I guess I had a class in lettering from her. She was beautiful and charming. Oh, some time in that period when I was a part-time student there, I know that I had a class with Mr. Lederer and Louis Miljarak and George Post and Alton Ribley and life drawing with Mr. Batchelor, the whole group of teachers who were teaching at that time. It wasn't a big group of people.

[But anyway, Mrs. Purdie was absolutely wonderful. When I arrived to teach my first day of subbing for Trude, I went to Mrs. Purdie's office first as Trude told me to do. Mrs. Purdie walked me up the steps to the weaving room and sort of pushed me in.] [laughter] I know she knew I was nervous and I know my knees were shaking. Somehow I got through it and then after that I guess I taught maybe two other summer sessions there.

[In 1964 I started to teach at the Berkeley Adult School, and in 1965 for the San Francisco Adult School, now part of the community college. The income from teaching freed me to concentrate on my own work. I was able to give up the card business.]

V MEMORIES OF JAPAN

Nathan: I wondered about the "Eloquent Object" show that was in Kyoto and Tokyo. Were you a part of that?

Sekimachi: Yes. Yes, I was. Actually, before the "Eloquent Object," there was another show.

Family Reunion at Nakaishizaki (1975)

Nathan: Was it when you went to Japan for the first time?

Sekimachi: The "Eloquent Object" came later. Now that you mention Japan, it does bring memories of Japan to me now. In 1974 I had applied for an NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) grant saying that I would love to go to Japan because I had never been there other than as a child and I didn't really remember a thing. And so, since I wrote that I would go to Japan, I had to do it. This must have been in the spring of 1975. Bob and I decided that we would make a trip and my mother decided that she would like to go with us because she hadn't been back since 1959, and so the three of us went.

When we got to my mother's village and started walking towards her family home where she was actually born and raised and where, I guess, all of her ancestors lived, I felt like I was coming home. It was hard to explain how I felt, but I had heard all the years we were growing up about my cousins. I had seen pictures of them and I felt like I knew them, that this was well, my home.

Nathan: What was the name of the place?

Sekimachi: It was called Nakaishizaki.

Nathan: So you walked in this place that you could have seen only as a little person.

Sekimachi: And as I say, I felt like I knew all these people and that this really was home. And actually, it coincided with my grandfather's thirty-third year of his death, and they have a ceremony called a hoji. They invite all the relatives and the neighbors to this ceremony and feast. My mother was sitting there with her younger brother and her younger sister. I guess all her other siblings had died. I still remember looking at my mother and thinking that I had never seen her look so happy in all my life. You know, she just looked absolutely radiant. I do have photographs of her between her brother and sister and I know she must have felt that this was where she really belonged.

Generations of Weavers

Nathan: Yes. And did you either know or discover that the women in the family had been weaving in earlier generations?

Sekimachi: I guess, well, my mother must have told me that she wove. But I think that I was too busy doing the monofilament hangings and just doing my own thing to want to even listen to her stories. [One story I do remember is that my grandmother used to say, "To be a good weaver you have to feel like a thread."] But I know my aunt started pulling out samplers that my grandmother had woven. She said, "Take these. You know, you're a weaver. Take these."

Nathan: Did you?

Sekimachi: Yes, I did. I brought them back with me. I went up into the barn which was the kura where they store things, and there was the loom that my grandmother had used. It was all taken apart but the pieces were all there and we did consider bringing it back with us. But then I thought, it would be just such a big task getting this all down to a shipping company so we didn't do that but we brought back this tansu and my mother brought back a tansu that belonged to her.

Nathan: I see. Now, could you tell how many harnesses that loom was?

Sekimachi: I'm sure it was a four-harness loom, or maybe only two.

Nathan: Did it look enough like what you had used so that you could have woven on it?

Sekimachi: For sure. I know it had a hanging beater and I, of course, was used to a standing beater. But hanging beaters were used. We had them in this country as well as in the Scandinavian countries, and they certainly have them in Japan where the beater just swung.

Silk Cocoons and Banana Fiber

chi: I did bring home a shuttle. I brought back a silk reeler and the little spools that hold silk, and a home-made swift. I brought back silk cocoons. I can't remember whether it was before or after, but my aunt sent me skeins of silk that they prepared at home, and also, skeins of a material that I didn't know, I really didn't know what it was. It turned out to be banana fiber. I was so happy that I had saved these skeins, because I later incorporated the banana fiber into my paper bowls. I used very little of the silk that she had sent me because it was so fine. I still have it in my basement storage room. But, banana fiber, I used it all and I haven't found a source for it since.

Nathan: How long were the individual threads in the fibers?

Sekimachi: Actually the banana fiber was in small skeins about maybe twelve inches long.

Nathan: Was it strong?

Sekimachi: It was very strong and quite stiff. But it was just the perfect material to incorporate in to my paper bowls. You see through the fiber, the paper, right to the material that I would sandwich between the layers. And then, of course, the banana fiber was stiff and so it stood up and would sort of curl and made kind of an interesting finish on top.

Nathan: So, it brings your past and your present together beautifully?

Sekimachi: Yes.

Art with Japanese Names

Nathan: When did you start giving Japanese names to your pieces? Did you always do that?

Sekimachi: No, in fact, I'm not very good about giving my things names, although I would make an attempt and then I would just give up. I've always been very bad about numbering my pieces and keeping track of where my things have gone, which, I guess, is a big mistake. I don't know. I'm not very orderly that way.

Well, maybe the room dividers did not have names but certainly the monofilament hangings had names and they did remind me of, well, one of the last ones I did reminded me of a cloud so I called it Kumo, which is cloud. And they reminded me of falls and so Nagare would translate into flow. And then, I guess, when I started the box series, I called them Hako, my Hako series and that translates to box.

The woven books, actually, I really was inspired by a book that was given to me. The Metropolitan Museum had put out a book of butterflies and it was an accordion fold book that was, I guess, published in Japan in 1910 or '11. It was very beautiful and so that inspired me. Also, then that reminded me of a little tiny miniature book I had since childhood, it was a tiny book of prints of Hiroshige.

Nathan: And that's *One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji*?

Sekimachi: Yes. That gave me the idea of doing, I guess, one of my first books and that was *One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji*. And before that, I'd loved the print of Hokusai called The Great Wave. I did a wave book; maybe I did several of those. The wave book, I think, is one of the books I sent to the miniature textile exhibition in London.

Kiriwood Tansu

Nathan: You connect all of these things. Well, as you were sitting here, I couldn't keep my eyes off of your tansu. Does it come from Sendai?

Sekimachi: I know the Sendai tansus have a lot of the iron work on them. I have a feeling that maybe this was made, maybe in my parents' area. It is signed and it's a double tansu. It was made in

the Meiji period which would be 1868 to 1912. The wood is kiriwood.

Nathan: Is that quite rare?

Sekimachi: No. The story goes that every time a girl is born, a kiriwood tree is planted and by the time she is ready to get married, the tree should be big enough so that a tansu could be built for her and this is to hold her wardrobe.

Nathan: You were just describing this tansu from home and showing how the iron handles with an opening pull up so that it can be carried on a pole. So, it is a traveling case. It looks too beautiful to travel with.

Sekimachi: I know it. This is really a storage chest. They don't really have them in their homes but they have these put away in the kura, which is the barn. It's so hard to understand. All I know is my father's home, which we of course visited, isn't really too far from my mother's. They had built a new home and it was a lovely Japanese style house. But they had one sitting area in which they had western sofas and a horrible plastic, imitation wood grain, cabinet, and [laughter] yes, I just wanted to shake my head when I saw this but I think all the young people try to have a little Western style sitting area in their homes.

I think the Japanese homes are so beautiful. There is something so tranquil. I guess I love the tatami floors and the bareness of the walls and having the one tokonoma where you would have your flower arrangement and maybe a hanging scroll. I would love to have a Japanese-style house but I don't think I could do it here. Nobody wants to take their shoes off, number one, and it just makes so much sense to me because you do keep dirt from coming into the house.

Nathan: Exactly. Well, you have managed some of that serenity in this Western-style house, it seems to me. And it is a little amusing that while we are discovering the beauties of Japanese design, the young people in Japan are not taking the best of what we have. Another generation will pull back these wonderful objects that give so much pleasure.

Father's Drawings

Nathan: Just a word about your father. Did you find some drawings that he had made?

Sekimachi: Yes. In fact, it was on this trip to Japan in 1975. I guess it was my uncle who had saved this one drawing that my father had done when he was still in high school. It was a profile drawing of his father. I was told it was a very good likeness. My younger sister has it today. The teacher had marked "excellent" on it, I guess as a grade, and apparently he had done a whole bunch of drawings. I have a feeling that maybe during the war they needed to use everything they had for fuel and the chances are they just burned them up. But this was of their grandfather and so they saved it.

Nathan: I'm glad you got to see that.

Sekimachi: Yes. Yes. I certainly am glad. And my younger sister does remember him drawing when we were growing up, but that I do not remember.

Nathan: When you say drawing, was he using a brush or a pencil?

Sekimachi: This was a pencil drawing.

Mother's Taste

Nathan: Maybe it does suggest there is something genetic that helped you be an artist possibly? What do you think?

Sekimachi: Well, yes, I think so. All I know is my mother actually had very good taste. She was often my best critic, and gave me real support. She held warps for me every time I put a new warp on the loom. She really was because I know that if I thought something was good and she thought it was good, I figured it was okay. Anyway, she was critical. I do still have a kimono that she maybe wore and brought with her. It's in one of the pictures, maybe her passport picture. It was a beautiful striped pattern, eggplant and gray and maybe there was a blue in it. It was very subdued and maybe you could even use the word "shibui." And for a young woman of twenty-two to pick a very quiet pattern like this, I thought was very unusual.

"Fiber Works: The Americas and Japan" (1977)

Nathan: And then did you get back to Japan in later days?

Sekimachi: Yes. We got back to Japan in 1977. Okay, you know, the Japanese love to keep up with what's going on in the rest of the world and certainly weaving and fiber art hit Japan. And so the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto organized an exhibition called "Fiber Works: The Americas and Japan." And, I think the year before they had done one called "Europe and Japan," but this was for Americans.

Nathan: So, that would include, say something like South Americans?

Sekimachi: Yes, the South Americans as well as the Canadians. So, anyway, Mr. Fukunaga, who was the curator of the exhibition, came to this country and visited. I'm not sure that he decided that he wanted a monofilament hanging but I certainly sent a monofilament hanging, and I know I sent my three card woven tubes with the monofilament incorporated into these pieces. And maybe that was it. We certainly attended the opening event and afterwards they had a dinner for us and it was all done very beautifully in the Japanese style. It was a lovely large room and we all sat on the floor and there were trays set in front of each person. The meal came out on these trays.

Nathan: These were lacquer trays?

Sekimachi: Lacquer trays. And I do remember that Neda Al-Hilali went, Barbara Shawcroft, Marian Clayden. Maybe we were the four from California and there was a woman from Argentina and from Canada. And so it was, again, kind of an exciting time and I guess one of the more important exhibitions to be in and to attend.

Nathan: Did the Japanese press cover the event?

Sekimachi: I'm sure they did. I'm sure they did, although I don't remember having copies of the articles but I'm sure it was covered.

Nathan: What did you wear? And can you sit on your heels or do what you need to do when you're sitting on the floor?

Sekimachi: I just wore what I would wear to an opening here, which was like a blouse and a skirt. I could manage. My legs are short so I could manage sitting on my legs, but really not for long. Soon, your legs just sort of sprawl under you. I know it was

very hard for Bob. All I know is my cousins always prepared for him and had one of those things you take to the beach with a backrest, a seat and a backrest attached to it. I do remember the woman from Canada. She was a large woman and I know she had a very difficult time sitting on the floor.

Nathan: The elegance of the occasion must have soothed everybody.

Sekimachi: I should say. Because I do remember that they sent us home in taxis and, of course, Marian Clayden came over to me and said, "Kay, can you say a few words in appreciation for the Museum of Modern Art to do this?" because there was a ceremony where the president, or the director of the museum spoke and I'm still not good at things like this and so I said, "Oh, gosh, let Barbara do it because she's really good at it." And so, Barbara made a few remarks, which was just fine. [laughter]

Nathan: Well, to spring this on you unexpectedly would be awfully hard.

Sekimachi: Yes, right. She said you could do it in Japanese, and my Japanese just wouldn't come.

VI EXHIBITS AND SHOWS, STIMULUS TO EXPERIMENT

[Interview 2: September 14, 1993]

Ideas for Weaving Small Boxes

Nathan: We were talking about the opportunity for you to evaluate and perhaps to see what sorts of experiences open doors for you and how ideas develop. Is this of interest?

Sekimachi: Yes. I will try. I think maybe what happened was that there were a lot of exhibitions going on. I know that when there was a need to do something for an exhibition, sometimes an idea would come to mind and that's what would get me started. I certainly know that this was true with my woven boxes, which started in about 1975.

At that time the British Craft Center in London decided to have an exhibition of miniature textiles because the Lausanne Biennal in Switzerland was getting so much press. I guess it was considered the important show and everything had to be enormous for Lausanne.

So, anyway, I was still fascinated by loom weaving with the multiple-layered weaves, meaning that you could weave one layer on top of the other and have them separate or you could have them connected. Also, I've always loved boxes and the maximum dimensions for these entries were eight by eight by eight inches. So, I thought, "Why not try weaving a box?" Bob had gone off to Los Angeles for the weekend and so I thought, "This is a good opportunity. I'll just go down into my basement workroom and get on my twelve-harness loom to weave a box." And so, by golly, I made the warp and did my sample and by the time he came home, I actually had a box that just had to be cut off the loom and opened up and tacked in a few places

and it became a lidded box. That started the whole series of the small pieces.

For these boxes, I was still using black and natural, which I loved. I think since it was a three-dimensional form, I felt that black and white was appropriate because color is so strong that I think when you see color, you almost see color first rather than the form. I also loved geometric designs and so the lid of the box had a design as well as the bottom of the box. It would be a geometric design like squares or a checkerboard pattern and that would be the lid of the box, and in the bottom of the box, as you would open it up, you would see an echo of the design that was on top.

Nathan: It wouldn't be reversed; it would be the same?

Sekimachi: It would be the same, only slightly larger scale or just a little variation. Then, of course, I thought, "Gee, one could go on and do all kinds of designs for the top and the bottom. You could do a landscape on the inside and do a skyscape for the cover." But I never got around to doing those. I really loved the geometric designs that fit in the square. So, sometimes it would be a diagonal pattern with black and natural, black and natural. Anyway, as I said before, just geometric patterns.

Nathan: And was it with linen?

Sekimachi: This was linen. The technique for arriving at the design was double-weave pickup. After studying with Trude, I guess all the weavers around here got interested in double-weave pickup and I think Trude, herself, did a number of things in that technique and so did I. So, anyway, that technique carried over to these woven boxes. The Mexicans used the technique and called it Mexican double-weave pickup. The Scandinavians called it Finn weave and they did large tapestries and sometimes in brown and natural and on the front, if the design was in dark, it would be the reverse on the backside.

Miniatures and Woven Baskets (1978)

Nathan: The pictures of some of these boxes often show a thread coming from the corners. Is there a reason for having those long threads?

Sekimachi: Yes. I think these miniature textile shows went on for at least four years, biannually. For one of the exhibitions I decided I needed to do a different form so I decided, "Well, why not try weaving a basket form?" That meant, to get the basket to come down to a small base, I had to drop some warp threads.

I was working on my eight-harness loom and I think that was about 1977 because I know we were having the house remodeled. My mother moved in with us (we live in an 1895 Victorian duplex) to what was to become her side of the house. Bob and I were in the back bedroom and I had a card table set up with my little eight-harness table loom. So, there I was in that room weaving my first basket. It's called Basket With Brown Lines. Anyway, I planned it out on paper and as I worked I could see that threads needed to be dropped; I would weave a quadruple weave which meant the weft went across the top, through the shed and then it wove second layer, then third layer, and fourth layer and it was one continuous weft thread that just went this way, this way, this way, this way--

It got progressively smaller as the weaving progressed; meaning on loom, I was weaving the top, or the widest part up here. And then it progressed to a narrower width. So, I had warp threads hanging at the sides and I had to tie them away and then I came down to the next level where it made the jog down until I came down to the base which was about a two-inch square.

When I took this piece off the loom, I had all these warp threads hanging. I had to do something with them, so what I did was, I braided them and secured them and they became fringe. On some of my other woven boxes I would have black threads on the corners. I guess I needed to do something with them and so I just braided them and let them hang as a decorative element.

Nathan: There is something aesthetically happy about that, you know, the formality and the straightness of the box and then the softness and the way the fringe falls. It came out of a kind of necessity and it worked.

Sekimachi: Yes. Yes. Well, that makes me think about my monofilament hangings, your saying that about the contrast between the woven part and then having the threads just sort of fall kind of easily. At first, I was really stingy with my materials because I didn't have money to buy a lot of materials. So my monofilament hangings did not have long fringes, and afterwards I realized that they were so much better with a long fringe

because short fringe, of course, made it look kind of stumpy; that's as good a word as any. The long fringe, as my friend said, let the energy flow out of the piece. I thought that was kind of a nice description. I think it certainly needed that.

Sequence of Fiber Forms

Sekimachi: I was still doing the monofilament hangings which began in 1963 and before that I was weaving. I did a series of small tapestries. Well, wall hangings came before that and then a series of small tapestries. And then, I did room dividers which were see-through using lace techniques.

I really wanted to do a wall hanging that had dimension, that maybe had three layers, one on top of the other and yet one could see through the top layer through to the next layer and through to the bottom layer. So I decided, "Well, I must try a sample." I got busy and did a little tiny sample. When I took it off the loom, I saw that it opened up and made these very nice spaces. I decided that if I had used the right material that I could make a three-dimensional woven form that would balloon out and hold its form.

At that time, I did have nylon monofilament. As I said, it was sent to me by the mother of a friend (a girl we befriended at Haystack) who worked for Dupont in Wilmington, Delaware. And so, again, I quickly put a warp on and this was maybe a yard long. I put it on my loom about twelve inches wide and on my eight harnesses so that I could get four layers. The layers were crossing in the middle. Anyway, I did it and that became my first monofilament hanging.

California Design Shows (1962-1972)

Sekimachi: So, since 1963, I just continued doing these and there were exhibitions going on all over the place. The California Design shows were flourishing and Eudorah Moore, I guess, was the organizer of these exhibitions. This was to showcase the work of the best craft work and industrial design that was being done in California, and California was way ahead of the rest of the country. More experimental work was done here. I think that was one of the first places that I exhibited.

Nathan: Was that by invitation?

Sekimachi: I'm not sure now whether it was by invitation or whether it was by competition. I'm not sure, but certainly all the craftsmen were exhibiting in the show at that time. These went on from 1960 to about 1972.

The California Design shows were held in Los Angeles and I think the catalogs were put out by the Pasadena Art Museum.

Nathan: So, you were showing monofilaments at that time?

Sekimachi: Yes. This is a little catalog from an exhibition called "California Craftsmen" and it's in 1963 and again you'll see a lot of the work of local craftspeople.

[telephone interruption]

Nathan: The objects that you were exhibiting there, were these very large?

Sekimachi: They started small, about maybe thirty-six inches in length and then they did get bigger and bigger and bigger and more complicated.

"Deliberate Entanglements"; and the Lausanne Biennal (1973)

Sekimachi: I think I really did my best one, which actually went to the Lausanne Biennal. It was immediately bought by a lawyer in Lausanne and so since 1973, when I shipped it off, it was the last time I saw that piece.

Nathan: Did it have a name?

Sekimachi: It had a name. I think it was called Nobori. But prior to that, I did exhibit it at, I think, a very important show called "Deliberate Entanglements."

Nathan: Was "Deliberate Entanglements" also California based?

Sekimachi: It was California based. It was organized by Bernard Kester at UCLA. This brought the Europeans to California and they were doing these enormous three-dimensional pieces, some very heavy. It brought Magdalena Abakanowicz and Jagoda Buic to California, also Olga de Amaral and well, I know that Sheila Hicks was on the program, and Claire Zeisler, too.

[Along with "Deliberate Entanglements," Bernard Kester and Eudorah Moore organized a week-long symposium, "Fiber as Medium." I do believe that maybe that started the term "fiber art." They got a number of schools and museums in and around the Los Angeles area to participate in it. There was a wonderful exhibition of Peruvian textiles at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art that brought Junius Bird out from New York. There was a terrific show of Japanese baskets at San Fernando State College.

Besides being in "Deliberate Entanglements," Magdalena Abakanowicz had a one-person exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum. She was also one of the main speakers. There were also many more talks and exhibitions.]

Anyway, it was very lively and stimulating. People came from all over for the symposium and for the exhibitions. I must say it was all very exciting. In fact, maybe that was the first exhibition I went to outside of this immediate area. Actually, I went with Trude and that was the last big adventure we had together, because we flew down together and stayed in the dormitory and attended most of the events.

Nathan: Did I understand then that it was Nobori that you showed there at "Deliberate Entanglements?" And that also went to the Biennal in Lausanne?

Sekimachi: Yes, in Lausanne. I knew of the Lausanne exhibitions but, you know, did absolutely nothing about them until I had a note from Jack Larsen saying that he wanted a lot of Americans to participate. This was in 1973 and he said he was going to put together a container to ship over to Lausanne and so the shipping shouldn't cost too much. I decided, "Well, I really should do it," and so I packed my piece up and sent it off.

Nathan: Did this constitute his invitation to you?

Sekimachi: Yes, yes. I felt I really should do it since he did write and say, "Do it." As I say, it was the first piece to sell. I think Barbara Shawcroft must have had a piece in the exhibition because she went to the opening and immediately wrote me a note saying my presence was missed.

It didn't dawn on me that one should go to these openings to be seen, I guess. It's just been very recently that I've been going to more openings of my own shows. Actually, I don't think I ever asked for an exhibition. I must be a very passive person because I let things just happen to me. Well, number one, I never planned to be a teacher and it just happened; then

there were all these things which I guess turned out to be good things. As I say, I was invited to exhibit at all these places so I did it but I never pursued it.

Nathan: You didn't promote this.

Sekimachi: I didn't. No promotion whatsoever and had no idea how to do it.

Nathan: Well, it does suggest that your work was so eloquent that it spoke for you.

Sekimachi: I hope so because I still hate to write statements. [laughter] I do like to say maybe my work is my statement.

Off-Loom, Cardweaving, and the Board

Sekimachi: Of course, I think it was the time too when fiber arts, or this weaving, especially the three-dimensional things were burgeoning. People were interested in it. In fact, maybe they were crazy about it. They really wanted to do off-loom things and this, I guess was before the end of the sixties because I know I was doing the cardwoven tubes by then.

I don't know exactly how I got interested in cardweaving except I know that Lillian Elliott who was a good friend had done cardweaving years before and I had seen some of hers. I always had a problem in finishing the so-called panels or tails of my monofilament pieces and so the idea of cardweaving the ends came to my mind. I know that Candace Crockett was doing cardweaving and maybe Martha Stanley, and so I certainly knew about cardweaving. I guess I picked up some cards myself and started playing around with it.

I started reading the literature on it, and I guess it was Virginia Harvey's book, or maybe it wasn't Virginia Harvey. Well, actually, Mary Atwater wrote what I consider one of her bibles. When I started to weave, Mary Atwater's book was one of the only books there was. There was another book of hers called *Byways in Handweaving*, and there was a nice section on cardweaving. I certainly read it. I'm not sure whether it was in her book or in another publication that I read about rope being woven with cards, and this was in Tibet.

Nathan: It was woven and not twisted?

Sekimachi: Not woven; it was warp twining. It was actually woven with cards and then pulled into a tube. So, I tried it and I could see where, by golly, all you do is go through the top shed and then you let the weft thread go across the bottom, under all the threads, not in the shed at all. Then again through the shed and then just across the bottom and then through the shed and down across the bottom. And after the piece is woven, it gets pulled.

Nathan: When you said the shed, you're not on a loom now?

Sekimachi: No, we're working with the tablets. I must have done a whole bunch of samples and I realized if I wanted to do long things, I would have to work on a board. This was before Bob and I were married but we were certainly acquainted and friends and he made me a long board to work on. And it looked like a cribbage board.

Nathan: About how long would you say it was?

Sekimachi: It was at least six feet long and it had a row of holes down the sides like a cribbage board, an enormous cribbage board with holes at both ends and a lot of holes at the bottom end so that as the weaving took up the warp threads, I would be able to move my threads so that tension wouldn't keep building up. To do these, I knew I couldn't work with the warp tied to a doorknob and with the other end wrapped around my waist like a backstrap loom. So, I guess I sort of invented this board and started my series of the woven tubes.

Nathan: Are those the ones that were called rivers?

Sekimachi: Yes, they're rivers. Marugawas or rivers. Before I started to work with them in linen and before they became tubular, I did a very short series of cardwoven strips in nylon monofilament and I know I did three that I like quite a lot. I think Barbara Shawcroft bought one out of the exhibition that I had at the Anneberg Gallery, and this was in 1971. I think two other friends right here in Berkeley have the other ones. They were black and clear nylon monofilament. I thought of them as rivers because they were narrow and long and sometimes the warp threads were twisted and sort of hung free, and then they came together again. Then I would weave slits and I could see sort of calm areas in it and areas that would look more like rapids. Anyway, to me they were very much like rivers.

After that, I decided that I would try working with linen, which I really do love, and I started the round woven tubes. I still had monofilament in my mind because in three pieces that

I still very much liked and that are going to be in the Palo Alto retrospective, I actually incorporated the monofilament into the tube along with the linen, which was the main part of the pieces.

Nathan: What was there about the monofilament that attracted you particularly as material?

Sekimachi: I think, well, the material certainly had body. And then, I love the fact that even after it was woven, it was almost like a screen. You could see right through it. I loved to see the layers as they overlapped, seeing one through the other. Sometimes it would create a moiré pattern. Also, the material did hold its shape because these were very sculptural pieces.

Nathan: Did the effect of light interest you on the monofilament, particularly?

Sekimachi: I think that everyone else feels that light is very important but somehow light wasn't so much in my mind as the form.

Split-Ply Twining, a Miniature Basket, and Three Dimensions

Nathan: Are you still interested in this ability to see behind and through?

Sekimachi: Yes. I'm still very interested in layers. I love the idea of one layer of fabric opening up into two. And in fact, the last thing I've done was a split-ply twined miniature basket, and this will be in our retrospective. It was a little tiny basket which is just about maybe two inches by two inches. It started with just black cord at the base. It wasn't woven, the technique is called split-ply twining and you actually pull the threads through plies. But anyway, the bottom is an open, loose weave, and then I added gray threads to build up the sides and so the sides of the little basket made a little pattern, almost like a check and it was, of course, gray and black. Then I wanted it to close at the top. Using the gray and the black together wouldn't do it. So, I decided I would separate the two materials. I worked with the gray first and brought it to a close and ended it. Then, I worked with the black on the outside, and so it ends with black on the outside with the gray material on the inside. It is a double-layered top.

Nathan: So you can use more than one technique in a single art object?

Sekimachi: You certainly can. You certainly can. And with the split-ply twining, you could use split-ply twining technique and then you could do just the plain double weave or you could, actually, you could just leave unwoven areas. It's again, just a fascinating technique and I know that in my cardwoven tubes, I loved the idea of again, starting with a narrow neck or top and then adding threads so that it would become a little bit wider.

Nathan: That swelling?

Sekimachi: Yes, and then adding a few more threads, and a few more until it got towards three quarters of the way down when it would become the widest part and then I would start dropping threads, and then end with it very narrow at the bottom. Then the fringes would have maybe, the colored threads on the inside, and the outside would be like blue and natural.

But I think I still like this idea of adding, subtracting, doing as many layers as I can. I don't know where this last basket is going to lead me next, but, I am at this point kind of interested in it. I just hope my eyes hold up because I'm going to have to do something about getting some kind of magnifying glass to work through, because at this point I have to take my glasses off and work very closely and I know that my eyes get very tired.

Nathan: Does extra light help?

Sekimachi: Yes, for sure I need good light to do anything. I wore glasses practically all my life. At one point, I used to love to read and so I was doing a lot of reading, I think maybe the first year of high school. I've been near-sighted all my life.

Nathan: When you were describing the way you shape the silhouettes and you had earlier used the word "sculptural," in a sense you are creating sculpture. It's an interesting way to think about it.

Sekimachi: And now I'm beginning to think that I think in three dimensions. After the tubes, I did the boxes which are certainly three-dimensional. Then I did the baskets, a small series.

Woven Books

Sekimachi: Then I did a series of woven books and I know that they were done at the time that we were going to Santa Fe every summer to work for Mary Woodard Davis in her textile workshops program.

Before we take off on any trips, I would always like to leave something on the loom for me to pick up as soon as I got back. Often in the past, I would come home and not know what to get started on and it would take me so long to decide.

I came back and I had a warp on the loom, all ready to weave. It was the book that turned out to be Rainbows and I know I was inspired by the wonderful rainbows in Santa Fe that we saw every afternoon. So, I started weaving it. But then I realized that I was weaving the darn thing way too loosely and that the pages would never form. This was done in double-weave. The book was a double accordion fold. The Japanese books would have single accordion fold and this would have a double so that I could have two images. One on one side and one on the other. So, anyway, I got about halfway through and I realized my pages were going to be way too long and I would never be able to fold it and it just wouldn't work. But that's how anxious I was to get back to work. I must have spent a number of days doing this but I decided it's not going to work, so I just cut the weft out and started all over again.

Nathan: Did you weave it more tightly, then?

Sekimachi: I certainly wove it more tightly. I was very careful in measuring my pages.

Nathan: In the pictures, that looks virtually solid.

Sekimachi: Yes. I would say the weave is what we would call a fifty-fifty weave, meaning if there were twenty threads in the warp, there would be twenty shots in the weft. And this was with twenty-one linen. And I guess, very crisp.

Clay and Fiber Gallery, and Southwest Workshops

Nathan: When you were in Santa Fe, did you see very much of the native American art?

Sekimachi: Yes, as much as possible. Let's see, these workshops were one week long and Bob and I drove. Anyway, I just love the Southwest. It takes me back to when I was growing up, and we made scrapbooks. I remember, I have a picture of a beautiful Indian woman in her native costume and then a Caucasian American woman standing next to her. This was one of my favorite pictures.

So anyway, when Mary Davis invited me to teach down there, I decided I had to go. But before that, Trude went the year before I did and she said it was wonderful so I really should do it. Also, this was 1975. I was invited to have a show at the Clay and Fiber Gallery in Taos and so we were able to go for the opening of this show in Taos and then I did my first workshop for Mary. That year, Alice Parrott, who was an established weaver in Santa Fe, also had this wonderful shop called The Market right on the plaza. She asked us to stay with her and so we stayed in this wonderful adobe.

Nathan: This was in Santa Fe?

Sekimachi: This was in Santa Fe. Anyway, the first years teaching there were absolutely wonderful because, I guess, the classes went on in the morning and the interest was still very high at that time. The classes were at least twelve students. Then in the afternoons, Bob and I would take off and go to visit the pueblos and do as much sightseeing or playing around as we could do.

Nathan: That must have been an adventure. How would you describe the people who took part in the workshops?

Sekimachi: Again, they were mainly women who belonged to the guilds. I guess many of them were school teachers who wanted to study a certain technique. I think one of my first subjects I taught was basic weaving plus a concentration on a particular threading called group threading. It was something that Trude had introduced me to and I just loved it and if I were going to weave something I would thread my loom in this group threading.

We were still, in 1975, doing woven samples. And then later on I know that students became interested in three-dimensional things and so towards the end of the textile workshops, I was doing my three-dimensional multi-layered weaves. We were all weaving books, weaving boxes, and having a great time. I don't know that any of the students went on and did anything with these techniques. But anyway, it was just fun to teach.

Nathan: And were there other teachers?

Sekimachi: Yes, yes.

Nathan: Did you have a chance to get acquainted there? Did you know the teachers, too?

Sekimachi: No, because there was just one workshop going on at a time.

Nathan: Oh, one week at a time.

Sekimachi: One week at a time. Although I did get acquainted with Michelle Lester who was a tapestry weaver from New York and she came to do a workshop, so I guess we overlapped a little bit. She's the only person that I remember.

Nathan: Were you at all interested in the rugs that some of the local people wove, the Navajo rugs?

Sekimachi: Yes, I love the Navajo rugs and I love the pots, especially the geometric designs. And, with the rugs, I loved the old chief blankets.

Techniques for Rugs, for Gauzes

Nathan: When I think of your things, I think of a certain lightness and I wondered whether you were ever interested in weaving something like the blankets and the rugs and those heavy woven objects.

Sekimachi: I don't think so. All I remember is years ago weaving one rug and that was in a technique called imitation flossa. This was probably in the late fifties.

Nathan: Would this be in Sweden or Finland?

Sekimachi: Flossa is certainly a Scandinavian technique. Flossa, or is it Rya? And of course, a lot of people were interested in the rugs and really specializing in the Scandinavian rug techniques. I was never really interested in modern rugs. But there was a technique called imitation flossa where it was woven with great skips so that afterwards when you cut the part that made the float, it would stand up and make a pile. Actually the technique is the technique used in weaving corduroy. Of course corduroy would be woven very fine but this was just an expansion on that technique.

Nathan: I see. When you were talking a little earlier of your pleasure of seeing through one layer to another and what the layers did together, I wondered whether some of the Peruvian weavings had intrigued you, some of the gauzes.

Sekimachi: Yes. Actually, oh this was in the fifties, too, and I must have given the Loom and Shuttle Guild a workshop. It was probably either group threading or maybe double-weave pickup. They gave me as a gift a book, *Gauze Weaves of Ancient Peru* by Lila O'Neale and I think that sort of became my bible for a period. I really love leno, or gauze weave, and I really wanted to do something in it. In fact, I know that I even have a sample using nylon monofilament, again, thinking that some day I might do something with it. But I guess something else would come up that would grab me and I would pursue it before I would have the chance to develop a sample like the one of leno in nylon monofilament. I think it could have been something.

Nathan: You must have a lot of very interesting side roads that you could take.

Sekimachi: Yes, there certainly are and I guess, one just needs a few more lives. There isn't time to do all the things that you want to do.

Poland (1981)

Nathan: I don't know if it interests you enough to talk about, but then there was a show in Łódź, Poland, I guess, The Fourth Triennal in '81.

Sekimachi: Yes.

Nathan: Was that important to you?

Sekimachi: Well, I was glad to be asked to participate in that show. And I did send a black tube and, again, was very happy to be in the catalog and all. I guess we just didn't even consider going to it. I'm still sort of timid about traveling in foreign countries. I guess not knowing the language bothers me, and the fear of getting sick. So, anyway, I didn't think about it.

It was a very hard time in Poland at that time. They weren't able to offer much in the way of discounts on accommodations or anything. So, I do remember getting a letter

from them saying, "We're sorry that we can't do more for you," if you came but they would still love to have people come.

I think Lia Cook had exhibited there before and had won an award in Poland. She said that she could not get her money. I guess there was a monetary award but she was never able to get the money out of the country.

Nathan: That seems particularly hard on artists who always give more than they receive anyway. So, you really sent your entries and that was--

Sekimachi: And that was it.

"Wall Hangings," New York (1968)

Nathan: Were there other shows that were important to you and that you enjoyed being in?

Sekimachi: Yes. You know, in the late sixties, there were just exhibitions one after another. Well, in the late fifties we were showing three-yard lengths and then finally the tapestries. And then in the sixties I started the room dividers and the monofilament hangings.

But one, I guess, important show was the one called "Wall Hangings," and this was curated by Jack Larsen and Mildred Constantine. This was at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1968. Maybe at that time, Mildred Constantine was still connected with the museum. I must say it probably was a landmark exhibition because it was one of the first to show three-dimensional pieces.

Nathan: It was relatively early for you?

Sekimachi: Yes. Yes. I noticed that Magdalena Abakanowicz was in it and so was Jagoda Buic and well, certainly Sheila Hicks, and Mariette Rousseau-Vermette, who is Canadian.

Nathan: What was the last part of her name?

Sekimachi: Vermette. And what is interesting is that I have become reacquainted with Mariette, but I first met her at CCAC in the late forties.

Nathan: Were you both students?

Brown/Grotta Gallery, East Coast

Sekimachi: We were both students. She had come from Canada to work for Dorothy Liebes in San Francisco because Dorothy Liebes was the eminent weaver. But Mariette decided she wanted to take a few classes at CCAC. Then, of course, I saw her work in these various shows and she was one of the weavers in Jack Larsen's book called *Beyond Craft*, which was again another very important publication. And just recently, Bob and I had a show in Wilton, Connecticut. This was last August, at the Brown/Grotta Gallery.

Nathan: Oh, yes. There were some pictures that came out of that.

Sekimachi: Yes. They are now our gallery on the East Coast. We don't have a gallery other than the Brown/Grotta and we just became very good friends with Tom and Rhonda who own the gallery. They carry both the work of Mariette and her husband. Gosh, is it Paul Vermette? I'm not sure, but he is a painter. And actually, Mariette and Paul think of Tom and Rhonda as their children. So, anyway, it just happened through Tom and Rhonda that I had the chance to talk to Mariette again. And then at Jack Larsen's sixty-fifth birthday in New York, which followed our opening in Wilton, we met and so we had a chance to just get reacquainted.

Nathan: She is a weaver?

Sekimachi: She is a weaver and she does large, woven hangings. I guess she's done a lot of corporate commissions.

Nathan: I wondered whether, when you spoke a bit earlier of Larsen and Constantine, did you know Mildred Constantine?

Sekimachi: I didn't know her at all. I knew Jack, of course, since I studied with him at Haystack. That was when I first met him. But I certainly didn't pursue a friendship with him of any kind. All I know is he certainly has promoted many fiber artists, many weavers by just organizing all these exhibitions, so I think he and Mildred Constantine should be given a lot of credit for this.

Miniature Art for Jack Larsen's Sixty-Fifth Birthday

Nathan: That's interesting. I had gathered, just from reading some of what Larsen had written, he has generosity and great appreciation for the work of other artists. It's wonderful that you were involved with that. Did you want to say a word about Larsen's sixty-fifth birthday? Were there a lot of weavers and others?

Sekimachi: There were, yes, I would say quite a few weavers. There were over three hundred people there and so it was hard to talk to all of them, of course. But anyway, I guess, his friends organized this event for him and then they decided that it would be wonderful to commemorate it with sixty-five people, some friends and others that he helped along the way, to give him a present and to weave or make something for him, whether you're a potter or a wood worker or so forth. The dimensions were to be eight by eight by eight inches, so these were miniatures. I guess most people who were asked certainly did something. [They were on display and so it was fun to see these pieces. I remember a few outstanding pieces: Gyöngy Laky's, John McQueen's, and Dorothy Gille Barne's, and am sure they each made their pieces especially for Jack.]

Nathan: Were you one of those invited?

Sekimachi: Yes, and so I did one of my first kiriwood baskets (or boxes).

Nathan: That was exciting to be able to pull something new out of the hat?

Sekimachi: Yes, yes.

Nathan: Of course, we have many other things to talk about, but this seems to come to a pause, if that's all right with you.

Sekimachi: Sure, sure.

Nathan: This is marvelous and I'll just stop right here.

Photos of Fiber Art

[Interview 3: September 15, 1993]

Nathan: Either now or later, you might want to say something about the issue of photographing fiber art and the way photographs look. Is this of interest to you?

Sekimachi: All I know is that for exhibition and announcements, the galleries need photographs. They want to do publicity and so photographs are absolutely necessary. At first, my younger sister was interested in photography and so she took some slides for me. I know that my first tapestries were on slides that she had taken.

But, if you want the photos to appear in publications you certainly need to have them taken by professionals. I did have some made and I still have some to this day, and maybe some of them are still good.

The expense of having photographs made was the biggest problem, because it's always been expensive. And then of course, having the piece shot at the angle that you liked is also another big problem. Now, I do have a photographer and I take my work to him. In fact, I'll even make a sketch of how I want it to appear. He's very good. But I'm very lazy about it, you know, keeping all my work photographed so that I really do not have good records.

Nathan: Would that make it easier for you to have your records in order, if everything were photographed?

Sekimachi: Absolutely. And I guess when I started to weave, it just didn't seem to be that important to have a portfolio. But now, I know that for the students, there are probably courses in presenting your work. They are given lessons on how to prepare a portfolio and make a presentation of your work. But that just never came up when I was in school. So, up to this day, all my things are really disorganized.

Nathan: How do you find a photographer who is going to suit you?

Sekimachi: You just ask around. I know that Charles Frizzell, whom I liked very much, came to me or I went to him because of Nancy Selvin. Nancy and I had a show at the Palo Alto Cultural Center a number of years ago. Someone was going to do an article for *American Craft*, and so she decided that we should

have the same photographer and I did have Charlie take pictures for me. He is very good.

Unfortunately, I don't think he's as busy doing photography as he would like to be because I know that in the last few years, he has bought into the Cheese Board and he works there just doing everything from baking to, I guess, whatever needs to be done there. I know he did tell me that he would like to keep his hand in photography, and I even called him up about taking some pictures for the catalog for our retrospective because I really didn't know Christopher Dube and maybe even now, I kind of regret not having Charlie take the pictures for me.

Nathan: Do you consider that your work has sufficient contrasts to photograph well? Is that in any way a problem?

Sekimachi: I think one of the difficulties in photographing my long, narrow pieces is that, well, the woven tubes for one, just look like ribbons. It's very hard to get good sharp details. You just take them as a group and then you have a detail shot made. But still, they are very hard. I do believe that my black and white boxes would probably be just as good in black and white because they are black and natural. And the same with my paper columns. In fact, all my paper work, I think, would reproduce in black and white, I think very nicely.

Trove of Japanese Paper

Nathan: You mentioned that someone found, I guess it was in Japan, this trove of antique paper, stencil paper that had been treated with persimmon juice to make it strong.

Sekimachi: Yes, it wasn't in Japan but it was right over on Channing Way. Actually, relatives of mine were in the import/export business and apparently their business started with art supplies. I have a feeling that maybe art supplies didn't go over way back in the 1920s and so they just changed over to Cherry brand products; they imported rice, and the company was called Mutual Supply Company. Later on they did sell karate uniforms and equipment. But anyway, this distant cousin of mine found just reams of wonderful Japanese papers in their basement. By that time I had already started the paper bowls. Of course he knew about the paper bowls and so he thought, "Who could use this paper better but Kay?" He brought over two truckloads of this wonderful paper.

The paper that was treated with the persimmon tannin came in this wonderful black that was indigo dyed. And it was also in marvelous browns and oranges and tans. Then there were reams of a beautiful white paper with sort of fibers going through it. And then, reams of the kiriwood paper, which was actually two veneers of kiriwood laminated to a piece of paper. The kiriwood paper came in two forms: one was two-sided and the other was one-sided.

Folding Box Forms and Stitching Paper

Nathan: That's what you used to make that whole series of stitched--

Sekimachi: Stitched and folded paper vessels. But anyway, when this treasure trove of paper came, when I saw the sheets of the black and brown papers that were persimmon treated, I thought, "What a waste to cut them up into little tiny pieces and put them around a bowl."

I thought, "Well, why not try folding them into big box forms?" Already I had done a lot of folding because prior to weaving for instance my Basket with Brown Lines or my Hako series, I would make a little tiny paper model. I had a lot of these little paper models around and I felt that some of these forms would work better in paper than woven. I think I already had a pretty good start.

So, I tried folding the first box, which was too light in weight, and so I decided that I would try laminating the paper to another piece of paper. To me, it worked fine but it became kind of stiff and I felt that it lost its quality. So I thought, "Since I'm folding, why not try stitching two pieces of paper together on a sewing machine and use some of the fold lines as my stitching lines and then add a few more stitching lines as sort of a decorative element as well as to add a little bit more strength to the form?" That's how the stitching of the papers came about.

After I folded one, I could see that I could fold many and stack them and they became the paper columns. Then I folded other shapes and put one on top of another. That two-unit piece looked sort of like a shrine, and so that's when I called them shrines. And then there were other vessels where I made cutout areas. The black paper would be on the outside and in the cutout area that's where the brown would come in, and so I made the first one with just black and brown.

Then I decided that it would look attractive with more little cutout lines in the area that I made the cutout. It needed a third layer of paper. After drawing all the fold lines and the stitching lines, and the cutting lines with pencil, I would do the cutout with a stencil knife. Then I would stitch the papers together and then do the folding and the little pasting that it needed to hold it together.

Nathan: So, you were still seeing through layers?

Sekimachi: Yes, I was still, yes.

Nathan: And also doing architecture?

Sekimachi: Yes. And of course, people right away said to me, "Kay, why don't you put a light in a column or a vessel? It would just make a wonderful lamp." I still have that to do but I may have an opportunity. There's a show coming up at the Berkeley Art Center and Bob Hanamura thinks he wants me to do a lamp. I just may fold one of my box forms and turn it into a lamp, and we'll just see what happens.

Ideas for Techniques and Materials

Nathan: What medium might come along next? You've got all kinds of fibers and paper. Is there something that calls to you?

Sekimachi: Well, actually, after Jack Larsen wrote the essay on me for the catalog, in the series of the split-ply twinings that I did, he thought the most successful piece was the little sea-grass basket. I know that I always kind of liked that piece, and yet, I didn't pursue it because, you know, it really just came so easily and I thought, "Well, I'm just not going to pursue it." Although I did kind of like it, and I saved the piece all these years. Anyway, it just dawned on me that maybe I could try a basket using another material. Gosh, it is going on to six years that we have been going to Hawaii right after Christmas, and I knew that split-ply twining was a technique that I could do anywhere because it didn't require a loom.

Nathan: So, you were saying that with this split-ply work, you needed a crochet hook and some heavy yarn.

Sekimachi: A plied material. Well, we were there this January, so it was just before January, after Christmas '92. I did a little tiny sample. First of all, I ran down into my basement storage room to see what I had and I came across macramé cord, which was three ply and the plies opened up very easily, so this was a perfect material. Also, I found some lovely charcoal gray cord, which again was a bit finer but also the plies were very easily found and so I decided those two materials would just work fine and so I tried a little tiny sample before we went to the islands. While there, I did actually make one of the first little miniature baskets and this will be in the Palo Alto show.

Since that time, I have made others and I think I would like to pursue it a little bit more because I could see doing more things with it; I could have double woven areas. Also I still want to do one where I could have a stripe pattern and maybe a diagonal stripe. Anyway, the possibilities, again, are sort of infinite and I would like to carry on with this a little bit longer.

Nathan: These are baskets that would be made not on the loom but just with your crochet hook?

Sekimachi: Just with the crochet hook.

Nathan: And the split-ply work also is what you use for the camel girth group?

Sekimachi: Yes. Actually, split-ply twining is a technique that was used in, I think, Gujarat in India to weave; the men wove these narrow camel girths. I guess it was in the early seventies when there were a lot of people doing all sorts of research in really exotic techniques. If it wasn't a known technique, they would unearth a technique. There was the program at UC where they had an exchange program with India and so a number of girls went to India. I think it was Virginia Harvey who did a monograph on split-ply twining. And then two girls, Betsy D. Quick and Judith A. Stein went to India and did a great deal of research and published this excellent book on the technique. I think later on it got to be called braiding.

Anyway, I had done very small hangings in rather coarse material. In fact, it was mopstring and I think it was the only material that I found that was available in which the plies were again visible and one could manipulate it rather easily. They were really all too clunky, so I don't think I was really pleased with the results. Yet, I know that I did exhibit one or two at one of the miniature textile exhibitions.

Anyway, that series ended with the basket and so now here, years later, I find myself picking up the same technique again, but in much finer materials.

As with everything, I know that when I first started playing with the technique, I did try using a lot of different materials.

I have a little tiny sample of split-ply twining in knitting worsted, which is a three-ply wool. I even tried it with a three-ply linen but it was so hard to work that I just gave up. I'm just sort of happy that Jack Larsen made that comment, and that I thought about baskets and I found the macramé cord.

Nathan: Does it seem to you that there are more different kinds of materials available now than there were in the past?

Sekimachi: I'm sure that there are many more materials available today. I have such a stash of yarns that I don't think I've had to go out to buy any in years, and it's because the weavers, like the women in the guilds, are so generous that a lot of them, when they find that they're not going to be weaving any longer, would say, "Kay, do you want this material?" And I would find myself the recipient of boxes of yarns. That's how I came to acquire a lot of materials.

I really should say no to some because I do have, not tons, but it seems like tons of carpet wools, used for weaving flossa rugs. I know I'm never going to be weaving a pile rug. I really should give it to someone who is into rug weaving, and maybe when I make up my mind I'll find someone who could use these materials.

Nathan: When you speak about going down into the basement, I imagine it like Aladdin's cave with all these wonderful things around. [laughter]

Sekimachi: Well, it does have a lot of different things in there.

Nathan: Do you ever use artificial fibers, manmade fibers?

Sekimachi: Well, the nylon monofilament was certainly manmade. I've used maybe a little rayon, but not a lot. I think most of my work is in linen. I know I did place mats and they were cotton warps and linen wefts. I also like jute. I love the texture of jute and so I know I've used it. And then I know I've used wool because there was a point when we were weaving stoles and ponchos.

As we were looking for material for the retrospective, Signe Mayfield, Bob, and I went over to the Oakland Museum as she definitely wanted to borrow the woven book and a room divider from them. The conservator took us into the room where they stored these things and she pulled out a stole that I had woven, I guess way back in the early fifties. It was pink and made in a two-ply wool called a fabri; that was the material that we were all using in those days, weaving stoles and baby blankets. [laughter]

Nathan: Earlier we had talked a little about man-made materials and what I probably should have said more clearly was, do you use anything that catches the light that is not necessarily glittery but that differs from the general earth tones that you usually use? Is that a deliberate choice to avoid the glittery materials?

Sekimachi: I think it is. I just, in general, don't like shiny things. I guess I sort of stay away from it, although I do very well remember a wall hanging that I did in double-weave pickup. I wanted to use metallic threads because Lurex was very much in at the time, and so I used silver Lurex and gold Lurex. I'm sure the warp was black and it was in double-weave pickup, and where the gold appeared, it was covered by the weave on top, which was the black linen so that the gold showed through the black mesh. And the same with the silver.

Nathan: You tamed it?

Sekimachi: Yes. Another early piece, and I know that my friend June Campbell still has it, was a piece that I did because I was inspired by seeing the fishermen on the coast of Maine with their fishing nets. This was the same summer, the first summer at Haystack. We made excursions to Penobscot Bay. Anyway, I was just fascinated by all these nets. I came home and I designed a tapestry which would be done in double-weave pickup and I would call it Nets or Fishnets. Anyway, for the background, I did use a shiny material; it was fiberglass. Maybe I chose it and maybe someone said it to me, but it reminded them of the shiny surface of the water. But I think that was the only time that I actually used this fiberglass material.

Nathan: You were speaking of experimentation and I was reminded of painting on warps. Did Trude paint on warps?

Sekimachi: She certainly did. And all I know is she was very innovative. Because I know it was way back in the 1950s.

Nathan: So, Trude suggested collaborating?

Sekimachi: Yes.

Nathan: Was that exciting?

Sekimachi: It was very exciting. We were still weaving placemats and so she said, "Let's try printing a design on warp and try weaving placemats." And so I think I actually made a stencil following the shape of a maple leaf and printed it on a warp.

Nathan: What color was that, do you remember?

Sekimachi: I kind of remember it as being maybe sort of a rusty color and --I can't imagine using green but green comes to my mind. But anyway, we made a stencil and actually printed the leaf pattern onto the warp threads. Of course, nothing came of our collaboration or our thoughts of maybe making a commercial venture of these placemats. But anyway, it was fun trying it.

Nathan: Now when it was woven, could you actually see pretty much the leaf shape?

Sekimachi: Yes. You could see the shape of the leaf. But, the edges, of course, would be fuzzy and it would have sort of the effect of ikat.

Nathan: It sounds like such an interesting idea.

Room Dividers in Ikat

Sekimachi: I know. When I started the room dividers, all I know is that ikat wasn't all that popular but I knew that I wanted to add something more to these room dividers and so I actually did ikat. This was in the early sixties.

Nathan: You prepared the individual threads?

Sekimachi: [No, the warp was tied and dyed, and then the threads were shifted to make the ikat pattern. I made a warp about a yard longer than the finished room divider was to be. I tied the

warp off in groups of five threads, knowing that the groups of threads would have to be shifted in order to make the ikat pattern that I wanted. I was able to dye the warp all at once, because of this shifting. I tied it every five or more inches.

No one was giving classes in ikat then, and so I just devised my own method. I can't remember what I used to tie the warp with, but I think I used plain old black Rit to dye with. When the warp came out of the dye bath and dried, I cut away the wrapping and the warp was five inches of black, alternating with five inches of natural, the part that was wrapped. Then the warp was spread in the raddle, and the warp threads shifted to make the pattern that I wanted. It was a lot of work.] Actually, I thought they were okay, and I think maybe they even still hold up today, which I'm sort of pleased about.

Nathan: That would be brave. It seems like so much work.

Sekimachi: Yes. Yes, it's a lot of work.

Anneberg Gallery (1971) and Others

Nathan: I see. You have made some collection of other people's work.

Sekimachi: Yes.

Nathan: I just recognized a Calico Cat by Trude.

Sekimachi: I guess it was shortly after Bob and I were married that I, as I said, I thought well, "Since this was going to be it I could start buying things that I really loved because I'm going to keep them forever." I certainly wanted something of Trude's, Calico Cat was at the Anneberg Gallery and so we bought it right from Margery's gallery. I think it was one of the first crafts galleries, certainly in this area, and not just crafts, but Margery was very interested in folk art. She must have had exhibitions of folk art as well; yes she did. [In fact, she personally had a fine collection of Japanese folk art and maybe other things that I didn't know about. I do remember a wonderful exhibition of Mexican masks, and another show of African objects.] I know that we bought a wall piece of June Schwarcz's also from a show that June had at Margery's.

Nathan: How did one get into that gallery as a producing fiber artist?

Sekimachi: I suppose you could certainly have approached Margery because she's very approachable. But, I think, for myself, I just waited for her to ask me to have a show, and I did have a show there in 1971. It was just of my monofilament hangings and three rivers, just the card-woven rivers. I definitely remember that. She did a wonderful job of displaying them and it was a roomful of these monofilament hangings.

Nathan: That must have been a wonderful feeling, seeing them there. Did you feel that attention was paid when people came to see?

Sekimachi: Yes. I think Margery had Barbara Shawcroft review the show for, was it still *Craft Horizons* or had it changed to *American Craft* by that time? Maybe it was still *Craft Horizons*. There was a review. And I remember Barbara saying that they left out the most important line which was something about the rivers. The three narrow card-woven monofilament rivers was sort of the direction that I was going in. And they didn't even mention those. [laughter]

Nathan: Were there any other places that exhibited crafts? I guess weaving is either an art or craft depending on how you define it.

Sekimachi: I think in those days it was still a craft. Of course, in the eighties, I guess many craft shops started to open. It was a big boom in all the crafts and so, I'm trying to think, Elaine Potter Gallery on California Street. Or was she on Bush Street first? I guess it was Bush. And then Miller/Brown on Hayes. And then I guess Elaine Potter moved over to Hayes Street. Virginia Brier, which was later. And then of course, maybe before all those, the Allrich Gallery, which was, I think, strictly devoted to weaving and painting. Louise and her partner, Mary Jane Place, maybe they were the first ones to open besides Margery's. I know that Margery's was definitely the first because she was there before the seventies. I think Allrich Gallery probably opened, well, I guess in the early seventies, too.

Nathan: I see. And did they survive, these galleries you're speaking of?

Sekimachi: Margery closed maybe about fifteen years ago.

Nathan: That would be the Anneberg?

Sekimachi: Anneberg, yes. And I think her closing was partly due to her ill health. As far as I know, Allrich Gallery is still there. Miller/Brown has since folded, and Elaine Potter has folded. I

know quite a few galleries that came upon the scene rather late; this is across the country, have also folded. There's Bellas Artes I think, still going in Santa Fe. They tried a second gallery in New York but they certainly folded there. The Elements, which was one of the early ones in Greenwich, Connecticut folded just recently and they had expanded and had a gallery on Madison Avenue. They even tried opening a second gallery in Tribeca which did not last very long. Actually, it's kind of sad to see these galleries closing but it is the times. The economy just is not able to support these.

Nathan: There's a gallery in Connecticut that just had a show, is that one still going? What's the name of that one?

Sekimachi: It's called Brown/Grotta. They are mainly tapestries and baskets and Bob's bowls.

Nathan: Let's hope that they flourish.

Sekimachi: [Yes, they all are unique in that the gallery is in their home--a New England farm house--and open only by appointment. Tom is also a very fine photographer and graphic designer, so he's able to do all the photography of the work and produce show announcements and catalogues.]

We are hoping that they'll flourish and I think it is the baskets that are keeping them open at this time. I think of all the weavers of tapestries, especially people like Helena Hernmarck, she's certainly one of the most prominent, and I think even Sheila Hicks is affected. I have heard that the corporate market has just dried up. I know Helena is going to have a show at Brown/Grotta but she is doing much smaller things now, scaled down for the private homes.

Nathan: Yes, that's understandable. It's too bad to have to deal with the bread and butter issues after you've already created something.

Sekimachi: Yes, yes.

Nathan: At one time, I believe that Trude had spoken of the influence of Paul Klee, and of course, you had mentioned him too. What was the quality that appealed to you?

Sekimachi: I just love his work. It's terrible that I can't put it into words. I bought books on Paul Klee because I loved his work. Of course, later as I read more about him, I found that he taught design for weaving at the Bauhaus. Yes. Well, maybe some of his things that are almost on a grid. His color sense,

I think is absolutely wonderful. And some of the drawings are almost child-like or naive. And then the scale of his work, you know. Well, the prints are about so big. [gestures] And I know Trude had a number of originals. And again, the composition is absolutely wonderful.

American Craft Council's Fiftieth Anniversary (1993)

[Interview 4: October 7, 1993]

Nathan: I might ask you to tell me again about what's going on in Chicago at the show.

Sekimachi: All right. Congress designated this year as the Year of American Crafts and also it's the fiftieth anniversary of the American Craft Council, and so the American Craft Council is having their big to-do in Chicago along with the annual Navy Pier Show. Well, for the Navy Pier Show, many of the top dealers and galleries in the country and from abroad take booths and showcase the work of their favorite so-called artists, and then collectors from all over the country I suppose come to make purchases. So, anyway, this is a big weekend for Chicago. Also, there's a textile conference going on at the Textile Art Center.

The American Craft Council is having a number of programs, they are presenting their Craftsmen Fellowship awards and also their gold medal awards at a gala dinner and dance. I think Thomas Hoving is giving the keynote address and Jack Larsen is introducing him. There are also panel discussions of craftsmen in all media.

Nathan: It sounds festive.

Sekimachi: I think so, lots to see and do. We know a lot of people who are going and so at the moment we really are kind of feeling left behind.

Nathan: Right. In the American Craft Council, how does fiber art rank in these craft shows?

Sekimachi: Since Jack Larsen was the president of the American Craft Council for so many years, I think he really pushed fiber art and so I would say fiber art did all right. I think maybe right now it's glass and wood.

Nathan: Of course, the Textile Art Center would still emphasize fiber art?

Sekimachi: Yes. Anyway, the Textile Art Center there in Chicago will be having this symposium and they are bringing textile artists from all over the country. And it sounds kind of interesting.

Friends of Fiber Art International

Sekimachi: There is another group, called Friends of Fiber Art International, organized by Camille Cook in Chicago. Maybe not that she has that many pieces of my work but she may be my biggest collector. She started the organization at this time when textiles I think have already peaked. But she wants to keep it alive because I think Alex's, her husband's, mother did quilting and I think they were drawn to textiles for that reason. So, they're trying to keep textile arts alive. So far, it seems like they're doing a very good job. They take groups to Europe to see textile exhibitions, visit artists and collections, and attend conferences. And anyway, they give scholarships to different textile organizations and they even helped fund our show at Palo Alto.

Nathan: Right. I think I saw something from the Cook collection there. Do you remember which pieces they are?

Sekimachi: Yes, two of my woven boxes.

Wood-Grain Paper as Fiber

Nathan: Would some of your recent work that has used very thin wood applied to paper be considered a textile as well? You're moving a little more into wood?

Sekimachi: It's certainly wood-grain paper. It's just laminated to a piece of paper and I think paper is still considered fiber and of course, maybe wood is, too, because wood is, what cellulose? So, in that sense-- [laughter] I think, actually, I've had this wood-grain paper for a long time. I've had it since well, about '87. And I always felt that it wasn't for me, that I wouldn't do anything with it because, well, number one, it wasn't transparent and I still love seeing through things, and

seeing through layers. I think at one point, I did take a crack at it and then just put it aside.

And then, I started again and this was maybe late last year. Anyway, as I mentioned earlier, when I started playing with it, I saw some possibilities of maybe, again stitching it and folding it. And so I did a small series. [These baskets or vessels differ from my other series of folded "washi vessels" in that they are folded from a square piece of paper, more akin to origami.] A few of these are going to The Hand and the Spirit, which is a shop gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona. In fact, Joanne Rapp may be taking a couple of these to the Chicago Navy Pier Show.

"Marriage in Form" Show, Palo Alto (1993) and the Catalog

Nathan: When you agreed to do this show in Palo Alto, what did you want to accomplish?

Sekimachi: The way it started was that Signe Mayfield approached us. She's the curator at the Palo Alto Cultural Center and she said she'd love to do a mini-retrospective, because she had an opening in January of 1993, this year. At first the exhibition was to be just in the foyer gallery. That's the entrance and in the glass gallery. So, we thought, okay, mini-retrospective. That's fine.

Nathan: Was that for both of you?

Sekimachi: Yes, it was for Bob and myself. Actually, Bob and I, I don't think we've ever asked for a show, certainly never approached galleries. That says, maybe we just let things happen to us, and so, again, we were just letting this show happen. Actually, we did get started, thinking that it was going to be just a mini-retrospective. I know someone we talked to didn't even like the idea, or they didn't like the word "mini".

The Cultural Center did not have a director at that time and shortly thereafter, Linda Craighead, who was at the American Craft Museum in New York for about three or four years, came as director. She did come with some very good ideas. The first thing she decided was that we should have the main gallery and if the exhibition were moved up to September, that would be possible. It would still be in the Year of American Crafts. She also said that they could apply for a

grant and so we thought, "Well, gee. Fine." It would just give us a little bit more time.

I was kind of disappointed because we had already started working on it and started on the photographs, and collectors were sending their work. So, there was a little more work involved because of this change. But anyway, we did agree to it and I think, for the better.

I guess it was in 1992 that I did get my $20,000 which was given to Japanese Americans.

Nathan: The reparations?

Sekimachi: The reparations, the redress and reparations. And so, I thought, "What can we do with this money?" We never did have a catalog, ever, put out on us. I thought, "Well, why not donate $10,000 towards this catalog?" So, that's what we did. And then the other half we gave to the American Friends Service Committee because I felt that they were so helpful to the Japanese Americans when we were sent to the relocation camps, well, first the assembly centers. Then they helped everybody relocate after the war. All along Bob's been donating to the Quakers. He always felt that they were doing the best work. So, anyway, I felt good about that, too. Anyway, I don't think $10,000 covered the catalog but certainly it was a good start for them.

Nathan: Is it the usual thing for the artist to pay for the catalog?

Sekimachi: I don't think so, although I've not talked to other artists about this. Certainly, I was just looking at Mark Adams's catalog which is more of a book than a catalog, but it did say that it was printed or published by Mark Adams and Chronicle Books. So, I'm sure that means that he must have contributed towards the publication.

Nathan: Interesting. This is "Marriage in Form", which was the name of the show and of the catalog. It's quite breathtaking, I think. How do you feel about these photographs, and the color and printing?

Sekimachi: I think, on the whole, Ron Shore, who was the designer did a wonderful job. He is a person that Signe had worked with before and he has done a lot of work for Harcourt's Gallery, and putting out straightforward catalogs. So anyway, she said he could do the job. We went over with Signe to discuss it with him and anyway, we came to this format. He came up with the layout and he chose the photographs from the photographs

that we had, even our portrait. He thought I would probably like it really small but he wanted it big and so that's how it appeared. [laughter] But anyway, the one thing that did disappoint me was the background color of the photographs. Christopher was shooting against a gray background. The paper was gray, and in the catalog it turned out blue.

Nathan: Yes. We're looking at the catalog now. As you mention the color, I hadn't thought about the background, but I see what you're saying.

Sekimachi: And especially, I think, in my work, just a few of the photographs appeared to me very cold. That was my one and only objection. On Wednesday, I was talking to Hugo Steccati, a photographer, and he took some of the photographs for us many years ago. They're in the catalog. He said the color change happens in the printing. He said, "Did you see the color proofs?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Did they look blue then?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "That's when you should have spoken up, they could have changed it. They could have added whatever it took to make the blue a little bit warmer in color, well, make it grayer than it appears." Because I'm pretty sure in the transparency they looked good to me, they looked gray. So, apparently it's just a real touchy process. This four-color process where you just use dots, I guess it's very, very difficult because it depends on the size of the dots whether they'll become bluer or whether they'll become grayer or darker or redder or bluer or--

Nathan: Until you've had this experience, it's not something that you would know.

Sekimachi: Exactly, exactly. I think now we know and maybe if there's another opportunity, I'll certainly know what to look for.

Nathan: Your work does have definition and contrast because you use black and natural or black and white. I gather that's obviously not always true of fiber arts. Here it seems to me that the detail came through.

Sekimachi: Yes. Actually, I was complaining and telling another photographer friend and he says it didn't bother him at all. In fact, Hugo said that the blue didn't bother him. So, I think it just depends on who's looking at it. Tom said, "You know the work comes through very clearly," and he thought that was what was important.

Nathan: Who is Tom?

Sekimachi: Tom Grotta, who has the Brown/Grotta Gallery where we had our show in Connecticut.

Nathan: Oh, yes. And what was it he thought?

Sekimachi: He thought it was fine; the color didn't bother him at all. He said the work showed clearly and that was what was important.

Nathan: Yes. But it's different when it's yours.

Sekimachi: Yes, it's different when it's yours. And I know that I'm very critical. Anyway, I hope more people feel like Tom does.

Nathan: Well, certainly, it seems unusually handsome to me and very effective.

The people who came to the opening, can you characterize them, describe who they were, roughly?

Sekimachi: A lot of them were old friends, I guess maybe half. Then the other half were a few former students and other craftsmen, and let's see, others who were connected with the show. The center people thought there were about 300 people there, and I think we knew about half of them. I guess I was just so overwhelmed at the numbers and just so delighted that everyone came I felt, "Gee whiz, I wish I could give each of them a catalog." [laughter] I was very pleased that you came, too.

Nathan: It was rewarding. Also I liked it so much that, since it was a warm day, some of the local people came in their T-shirts and shorts with their children. Wonderful. It was inviting, and they all seemed to enjoy it.

You were telling me that Ted Cohen had done the installation. Could you tell me a little about what the installation does?

Sekimachi: Yes, well, Ted is a master at installations. We have known Ted for a long, long time, I think since maybe the fifties, when he was working at the Oakland Art Museum. He really does know our work and he likes to work with three-dimensional things. He also collects a few of my things. And anyway, I think Signe said that he was delighted to do the show and well, we were delighted to have him because we always say about Ted that he could make anything look good. [laughter] And so, I think he did.

At first, I was concerned that maybe we didn't have enough material. That was my concern, although Signe had made the

choices and I think we sort of accepted her choices. She said one thing, if we do not like something that she picks, just let her know because she will not show it, but everything she picked was okay. I think behind Signe's back, Ted and I were saying that if there's not enough material, we'll just sneak a few things in. So, I kept hinting at Signe if there's not enough material, we've got a few things lined up. She said, "That's not professional. You can't do that." [laughter]

Anyway, I think it turned out all right because I do like space, I don't like things to be overcrowded. Anyway, I thought Ted did a beautiful job with installing both our things. I was worried about my smaller pieces because they are so different, like the paper bowl and then the woven book and the baskets, and somehow he put them together in a case and they did go together. That was a really pleasant surprise to me.

Nathan: He had some intuitive sense?

Sekimachi: Yes. Yes. And he said, "Well, you know it's the colors that really did it," and I think maybe the size of the pieces. They just sort of went together.

Nathan: And the lighting, then, is an important part of the whole?

Sekimachi: Yes, and the museum has to keep the lamp wattage at a certain level and so, some people thought, "Gosh, it's dark." But it's one of the rules that the museums have to follow that they can't use high-voltage lights.

Nathan: Would that be to prevent light damage?

Sekimachi: It might burn the fabrics, I guess. So, anyway, I thought that was all right with me because it just made it look so dramatic and yet you could still see the things.

Nathan: We did walk all around the cases so we could see the back, the side, and the front. What did you and your husband want or hope to accomplish through this show? What made you say yes?

Sekimachi: Neither of us had a retrospective and as mature artists it was about time we did. I guess we just felt delighted that Signe wanted to do this. I hadn't thought about what we would accomplish except that we would be able to see pieces together that were never put together. I think this was also a very nice surprise to me because I thought, "Gosh, the things did look good together," and I don't think there was a time when I

saw the monofilament hangings together with my current, or my more recent work. So that was very nice to see.

Nathan: So, that gave you a new perspective, as it would to everybody.

Sekimachi: And a lot of people at the show told me afterwards (I guess they were newer friends) that they had never seen the tubes or the monofilament hangings. So, that was an eye-opener for them and gave them a chance to see more of the range of my work.

Nathan: It struck me that this was almost a parallel to your oral history in which you can see the perspective and see how things fit together.

Is insurance a problem in setting up such a show?

Show's Travels and Associated Programs

Sekimachi: The Cultural Center is taking care of the insurance, in fact, they're taking care of everything. I almost want to tell them that if they have any debts after this on the catalog that we should pay for it but we'll see. I think they're still trying to ask for funds. They did get an NEA grant of $10,000 to travel the show. They've been working very hard on it. As for the venues, they've been very successful, although I worry about the length of the traveling part. It will travel for two years. I think the first venue, after it closes in January of 1994 is in Little Rock, Arkansas in August at the Arkansas Arts Center, which I understand is a very nice center. I had never heard of it until now. Then it goes to the Forum in St. Louis, and then to the Renwick in Washington, D.C. Signe was so happy when they said yes and signed the contract. I think she's been on a high. The Renwick is part of the Smithsonian.

Nathan: Yes. I noticed, too, that there are programs associated with this show. You're going to do a paper vessel workshop on November twenty-first?

Sekimachi: Yes, and I have done it before and so I think I have it down pretty much. I think I continue to agree doing the paper bowl workshops because it's much easier and much more fun compared to weaving. It's really like child's play.

Nathan: Is it partly the element of time?

Sekimachi: Maybe, yes, it just goes fast. Well, certainly this is going to be a hands-on workshop so everybody will go home with a paper bowl. I think maybe it's more spontaneous so that one could just do it and it doesn't take the preparation and planning of a project in weaving. It's more immediate.

Nathan: These associated programs like your workshop, are these common in connection with exhibits?

Sekimachi: I think so, especially at a place like the Cultural Center where they have classes and I do know that we've been there before, when Mark Adams had his exhibition there. He did give a slide lecture. The first thing Signe asked us was, "Do you want to do a slide lecture?" and I quickly said, "No." [laughter] So, she said, "How about a workshop?" And I said, "Fine."

Nathan: Tell me about your quickly saying no to a slide lecture.

Sekimachi: Actually, I'm very uncomfortable standing before an audience and so whenever I'm asked to do a talk, now I'm learning I could quickly say no. Before, it used to be the hardest thing for me to turn people down. It was just hard to say no to anything. But now, I've learned that, and maybe it's because I remember once having dinner when Bob Turner was here, having dinner with Dorothy and Fred Weiss. Dorothy Weiss said that she is often asked to be on panels and it's something that she just cannot do and she said, "Why knock myself for not being able to do this? I just concentrate on something that I could do better." I thought, "Boy, if Dorothy Weiss can't speak in public, well, why feel so bad that I can't do it?"

Nathan: And you can do other things that other people can't do.

Sekimachi: That's true.

Nathan: There is a workshop with Sam Maloof and Bob Stocksdale on December the fifth?

Sekimachi: Yes.

Nathan: That must take more equipment?

Sekimachi: It does, and I think Bob just sort of dreads this because he doesn't mind doing demonstrations in his own shop because his equipment is there. You know, everything is set up, and he uses different tools as he's working on a piece. So, down

there it's sort of going to be like play, too, where he'll give people an idea of what turning is about. I guess he'll just have to take samples down and talk about what's going to happen and what he does, what the process is. But, it is hard because the lathe may not be firmly secured to the floor and it could rattle and the lighting may not be good.

Sam is one of Bob's very best friends, and he, of course, is a very noted furniture maker. So, I know that a lot of people are saying, "We're going to go down to see your show when Bob and Sam are on." [laughter] I'm guessing that there's going to be a mob. So, I told Signe and she said, "Well, tell everybody to make a reservation because space is limited. The auditorium could only hold so many people."

Nathan: You have handsome furniture here. Do you have any of Sam Maloof's?

Sekimachi: Yes, we're sitting at a Sam Maloof [dining] table and we're sitting on Sam Maloof chairs. The orange leather upholstered chair is Sam's and the rocking chair is Sam's and that's certainly one of the signature pieces. It's an early one and I really like it better than, maybe his later chairs because I love that gentle curve of the back. Some of his rocking chairs have sort of a straight line at the back and I do like this gentle curve better.

Nathan: What sort of wood is this on the surface of the table?

Sekimachi: Actually, Bob made the surface of the table because when Sam gave the table to us, actually it was a wedding present and we were living on the other side of the house. The table top was only four feet in diameter and I think this is five. Sam is about ten years behind in orders and so when we did the remodeling, we realized we needed a bigger table top. So Bob, rather than wait for Sam to make one, just made one himself and I don't think Sam really approves of it because it's been pieced and he likes to use solid boards. The base is Sam's, and it's walnut. It's eastern walnut. Anyway, the table top is California walnut.

Nathan: Are there any other things about this retrospective exhibit that come to your mind? Or you could talk about it later.

Sekimachi: It's kind of hard to talk about your own work but I was really pleased to see that the things didn't look dated.

Nathan: And they covered how long a period?

Sekimachi: Thirty years, since the sixties, from 1960 to 1993. Yes, the room divider was 1960.

Materials, Weave, and Form

Sekimachi: A friend of mine said that looking very closely at my work, she thought what was good was that the material, the scale, and the texture were perfect for a particular form, and the weave went with the form. I guess she meant that it was suitable material for whatever I did. That pleased me because that's very important to me that the material be the right one for whatever I do.

Nathan: That's an artistic judgement that you make for each piece?

Sekimachi: I think so because often I think, "Gee whiz, sometimes my things look so simple." And so I think, "Shall I just throw a few things on?" And yet I can't do it.

Nathan: When an art piece works, it looks inevitable? The image might be in your mind, but it is the material that has to come first?

Sekimachi: I don't know who it was, whether it was Mies Van der Rohe, or whoever, said that something is good when you can't take anything more away from it, and certainly you can't take anything more away from my pieces. [laughter] There wouldn't be anything left. Just recently, there was a new book that came out, *Women's Work: Textile Work from the Bauhaus*. Trude's in it, so later on maybe when we talk more about Trude, I could come back to this book. But I recall something that Anni Albers said. She was prominently in the book since she certainly was a Bauhausler. (I think that's the way you say it.) [laughter] She said that simplicity is clarified vision. It was put better and maybe I'll find it again. That something really simple wasn't just simple-minded or whatever, but that it was clarified vision.

Collectors' Interests

Nathan: I see. Are there pieces that are special favorites?

Sekimachi: I don't know that there are special favorites but I wish I had kept some of them. I don't have a single woven box, the lidded

ones with the geometric designs. I let them all go. I didn't keep one in the card-woven basket series and that was so much work that I was just crazy to let them go.

I do not have a really good monofilament hanging, and now people are asking me, "Are there any available?" These are collectors. I don't know what will happen. In fact, a gallery even got in touch with me and asked me, "Is there one?" I know that my young friend Sheila O'Hara may have some free time because corporate commissions have just dried up. I asked her if she would be interested in doing a monofilament hanging, because again, a friend who did see the show said, "Gosh, Kay, you could start in on your monofilament hangings and just take them to another level."

Nathan: Are you tempted by that?

Sekimachi: Yes and no. I'm tempted that if I could give Sheila work, I would love to do it, and so that kind of tempts me. I did stop when I had sort of resolved all the problems and so I thought, "Well maybe they would be easier now since I know what I want to do, and while it took me ten or twelve years to really get to that point, I did get there."

Nathan: If you had to choose between developing more on monofilament hangings or going on with something new, which would interest you more?

Sekimachi: I suppose going on to something new.

Nathan: With the risks and the problems?

Sekimachi: Yes. Yes, I would still prefer to do the new. And yet, as I said, if I could provide work, and there are people who are seriously interested, and if I could improve upon what I've done before, I wouldn't mind trying a monofilament hanging again.

Nathan: Would you rather do it in that sort of clear transparent form, or do you prefer the black?

Sekimachi: I really like the black, which I dyed myself. So, I would have to dye the material, I'm sure. Although I'm sure there are new materials on the market, new industrial materials that maybe I don't even know about, so if I started looking, maybe I would find something new.

Nathan: Are the folded, laminated boxes the newest?

Sekimachi: In the paperwork, it's the kiriwood sort of origami folded boxes. My latest are those little miniatures using the old Indian technique of split-ply twining. I kind of found them fun to do, but very slow.

Nathan: We had mentioned Sam Maloof, your friendship with him and his beautiful furniture. I have noticed a few pieces of artwork by other fiber artists, the Dominic di Mare in the plexiglass case. He's doing different things now, isn't he?

Sekimachi: Yes, and maybe he's doing more since I saw these last few pieces but the last ones were kind of an intricate wooden form at the top with horsehair--

Nathan: With holes, yes.

Sekimachi: Holes, lots of little holes and horsehair. Oh, gosh, maybe strands of horsehair about five feet long, very delicate and beautiful.

Nathan: Yes. Are there other artists that you collect?

Sekimachi: I don't really think of myself as a collector but I do enjoy having work that I really love by other people because it makes me feel like they're kind of close to me. And yes, I really love the Cynthia Schira that we got.

Nathan: Which one?

Sekimachi: It's the piece on the wall, the big piece.

Nathan: Oh, yes. So, is that a tapestry?

Sekimachi: Yes. And I think this is, to me, her best series, it's called the woven field series. I loved what she was doing with weft brocade when she was doing those pieces. But then, along came these woven field works and this one I just loved and so I guess we negotiated with Cynthia and we got it. [I have two baskets of Lillian Elliott's, one a recent one, very strong and bold and beautiful, and three of her early wall hangings. Emily Du Bois thinks of me as a collector of her work since I have three of her pieces, too.]

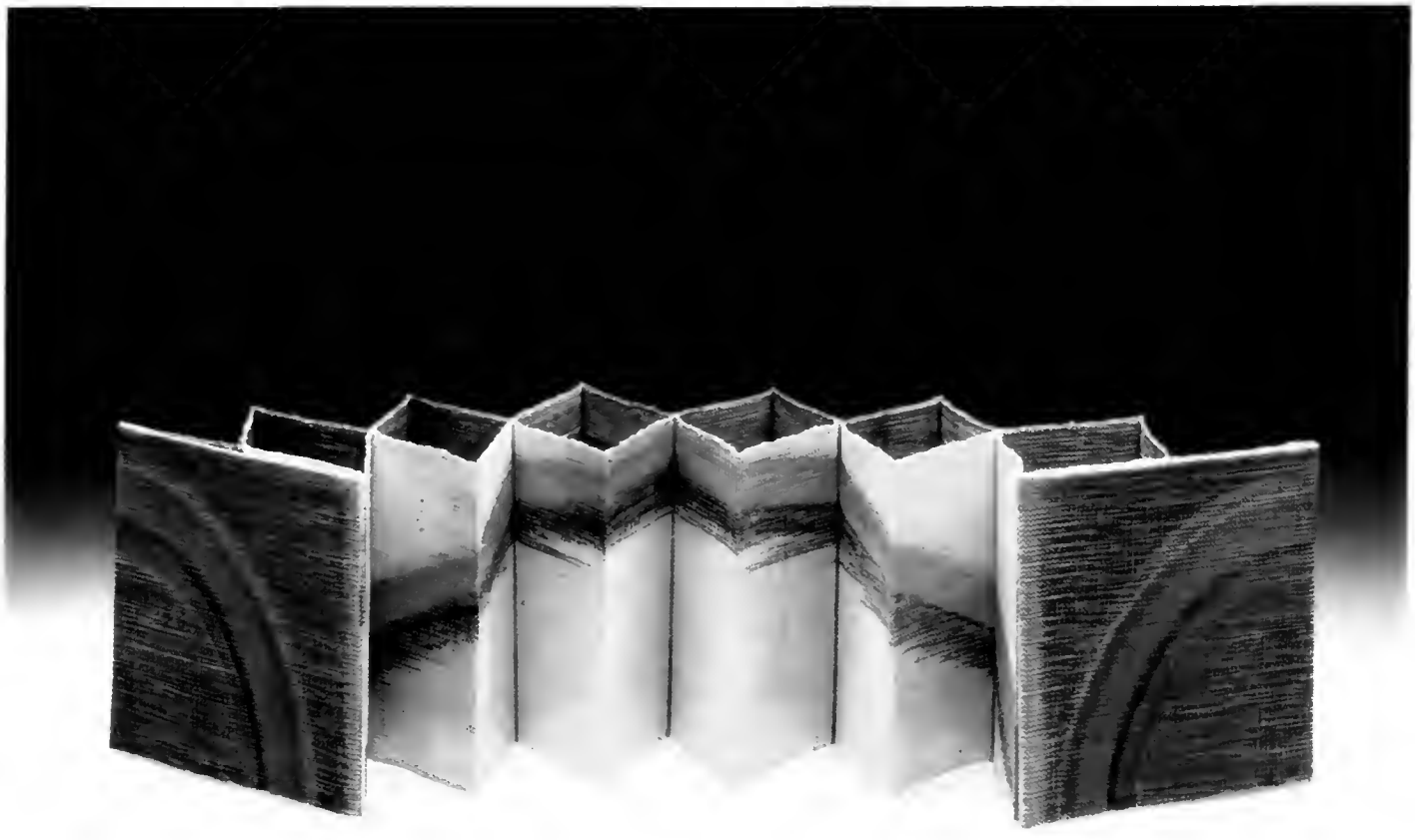
Nathan: Do you do swaps or exchanges with others?

Sekimachi: Sometimes we do swaps. I don't think I've ever suggested a swap. But if someone else does, I'm certainly willing.

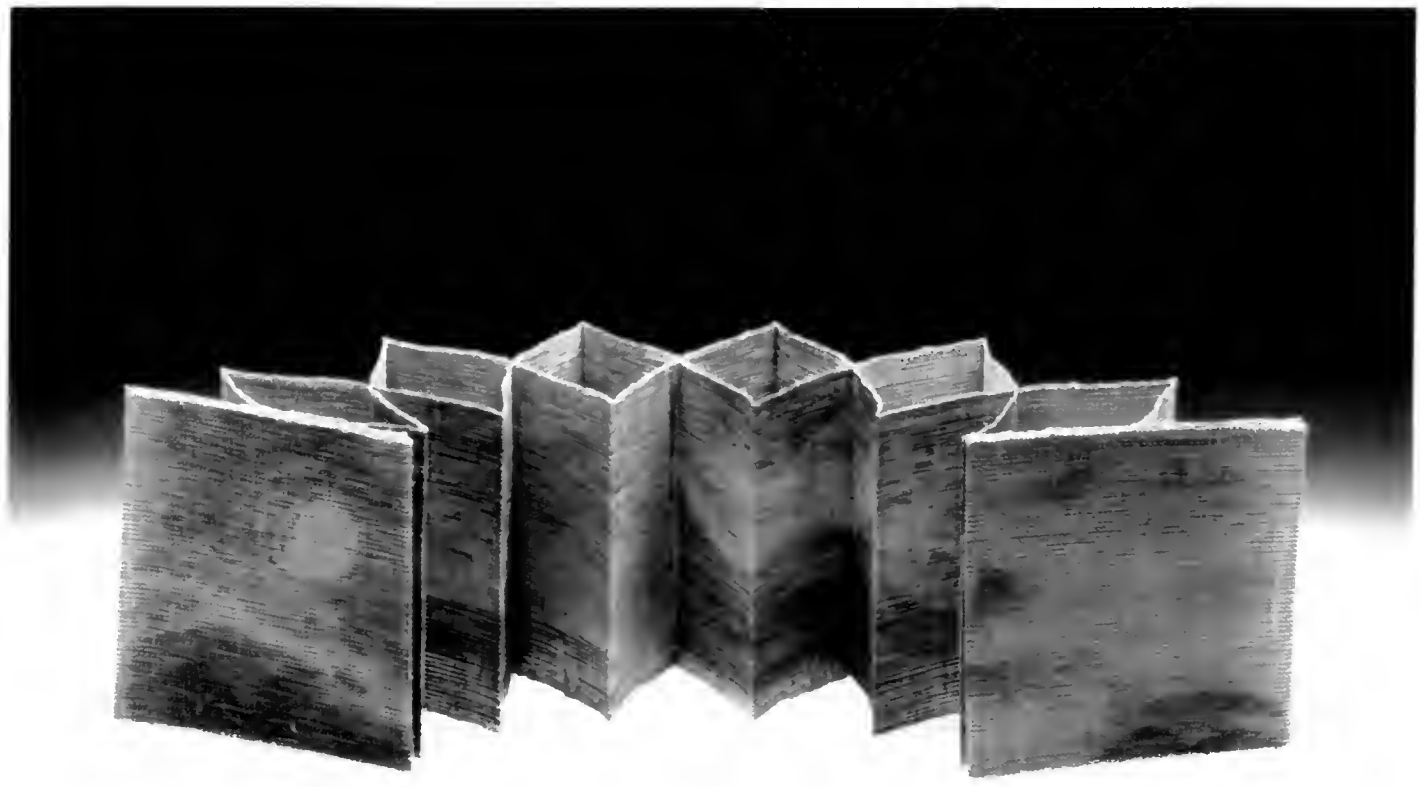
Nakaishizaki, 1929. Front row: first child in kimono, sister Yae; middle, Kay; Mother holding Kaz.

Paper doll with a few outfits, c. 1938-1941
Watercolor.

(Photograph by Bob Stocksdale)



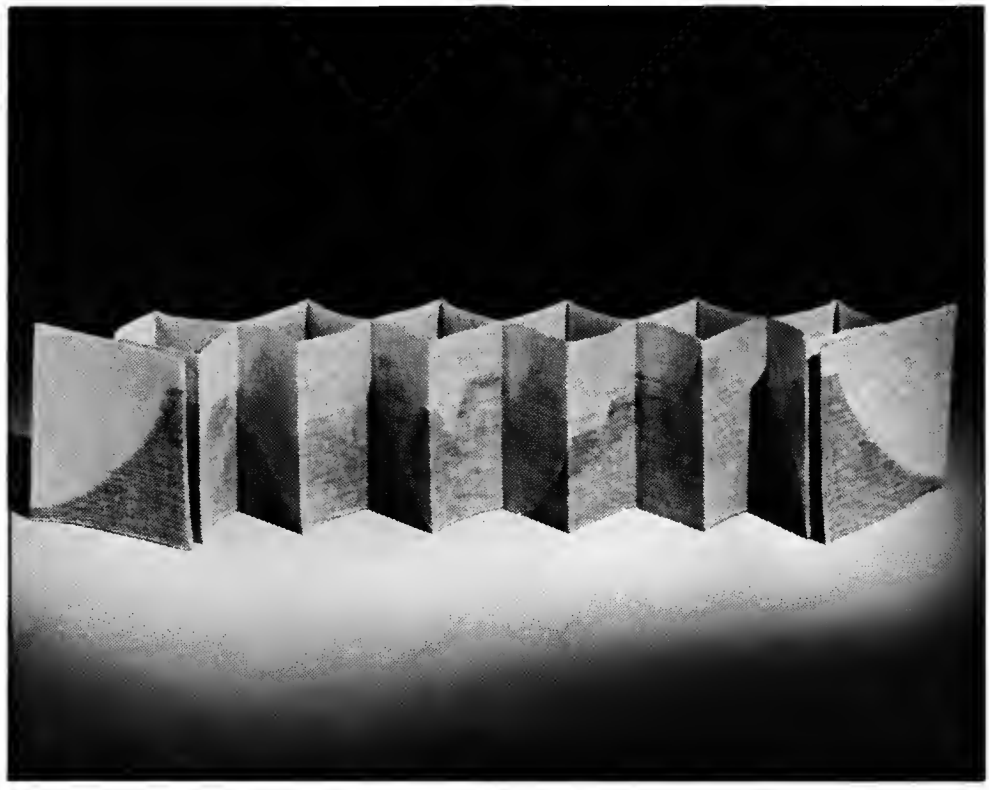
Rainbow, 1981
Linen, double weave transfer print. 4x4x20". Collection, Amaury St. Gilles.
(Photograph by Charles Frizzell)

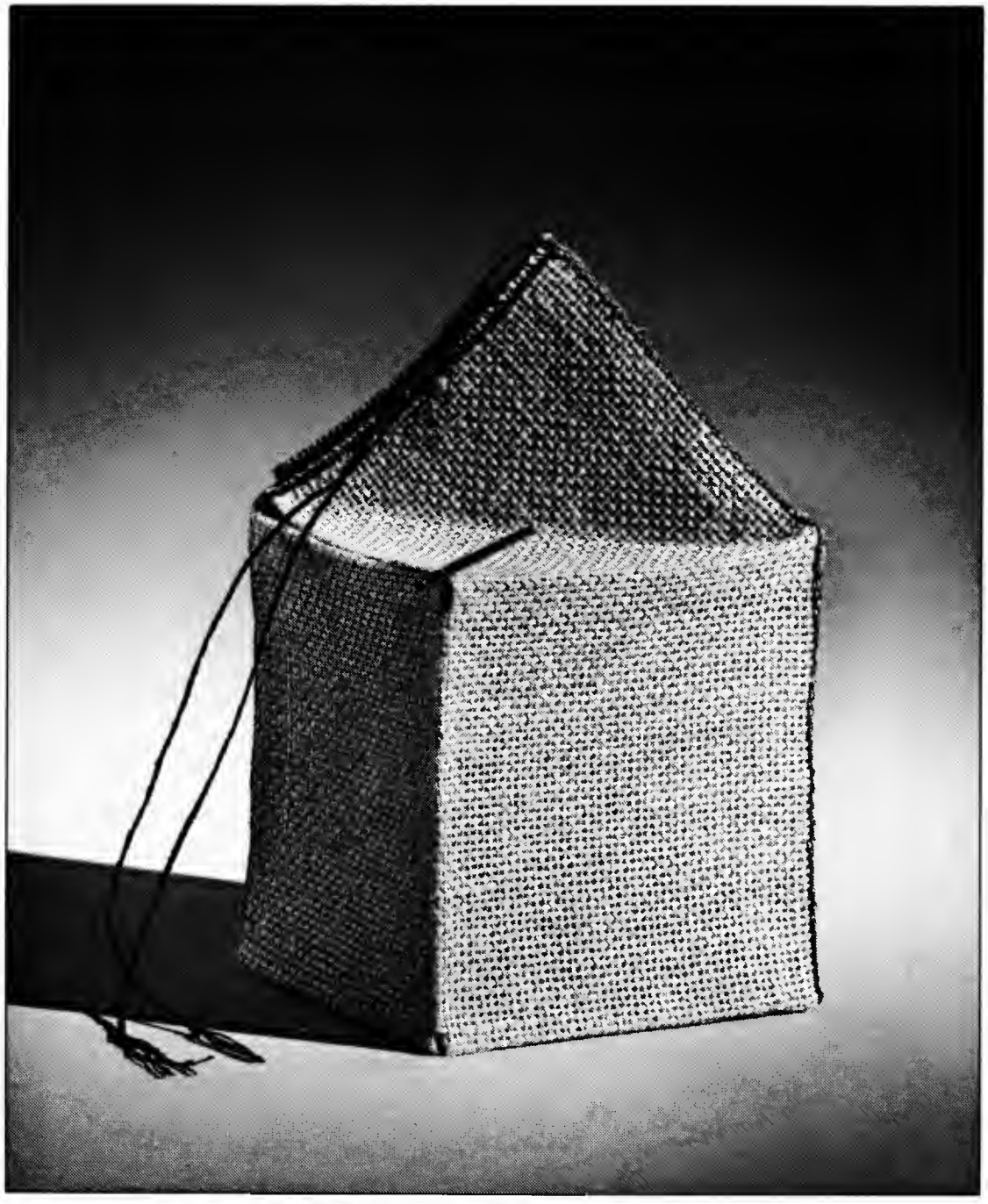


Moon and Fog, 1981
Linen, double weave transfer print. 4x4x20". Collection, the Oakland Museum.
(Photograph by Charles Frizzell)

One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji, 1980
Linen, double weave. 4½x20". Below, book shown with covers together. Collection, Jack Lenor Larsen.

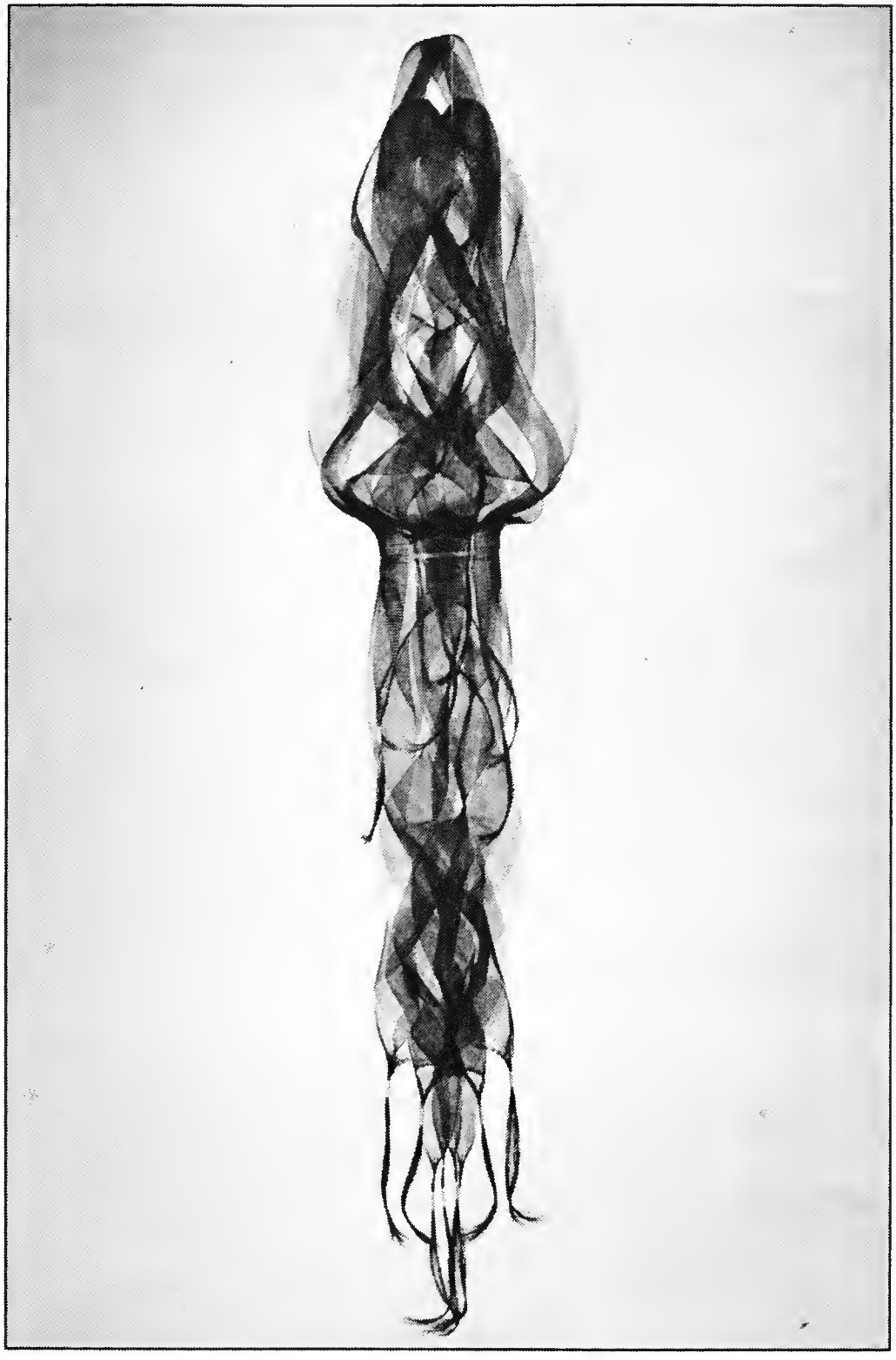
(*Photograph by Stone and Steccati*)





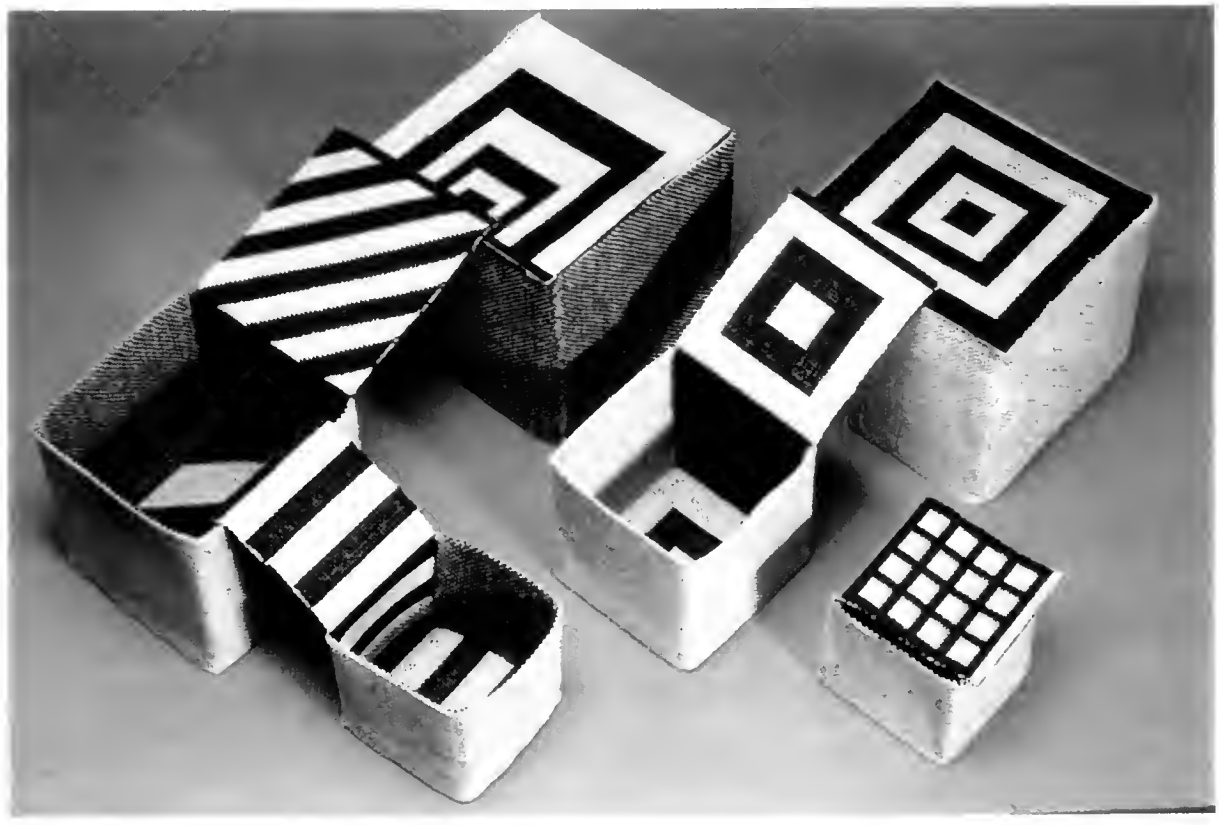
Hako 1, 1980
Natural and black linen, quadruple weave (body woven with a single continuous weft). 9x5x5". Collection, Daphne Farago.

(Photograph by Stone and Steccati)



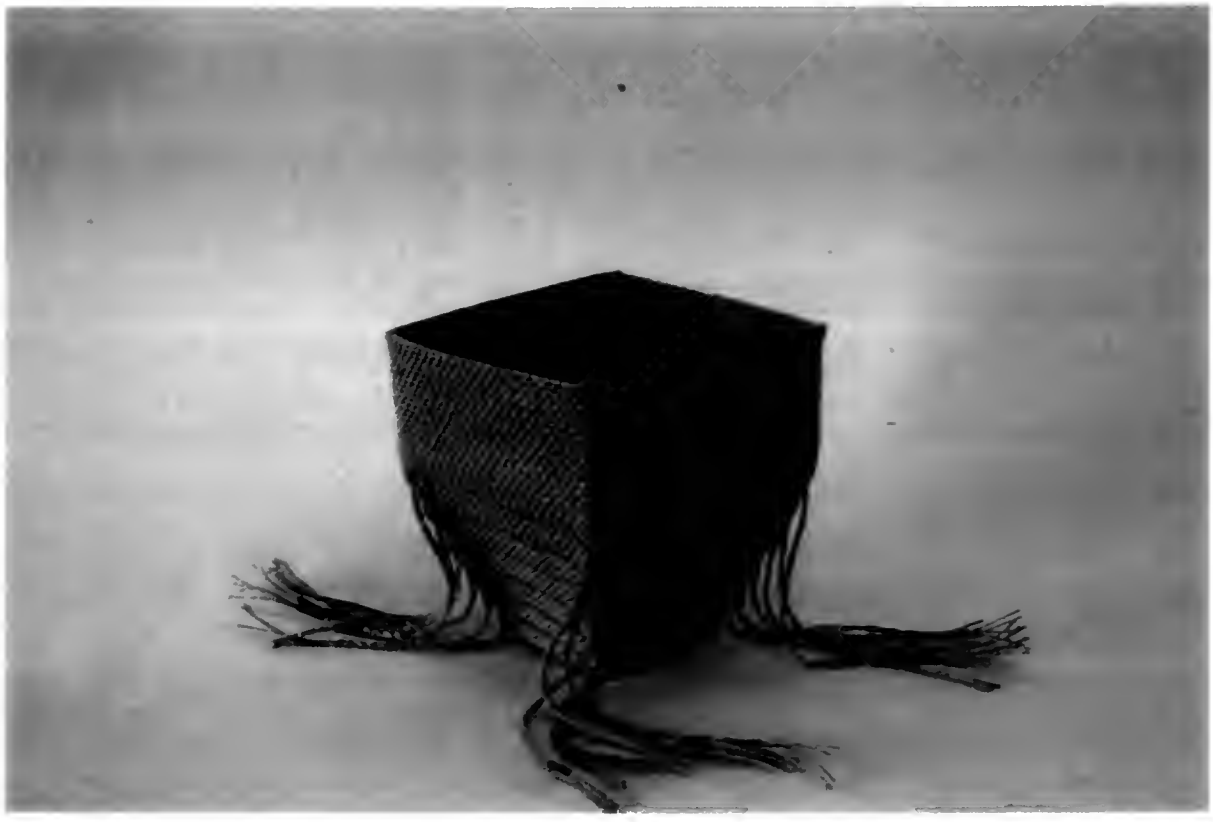
Nobori, 1971
Black nylon monofilament, tubular and quadruple weave.
90x20". Collection, Gilbert Baechtold, Lausanne.

(*Photograph by Stone and Steccati*.)



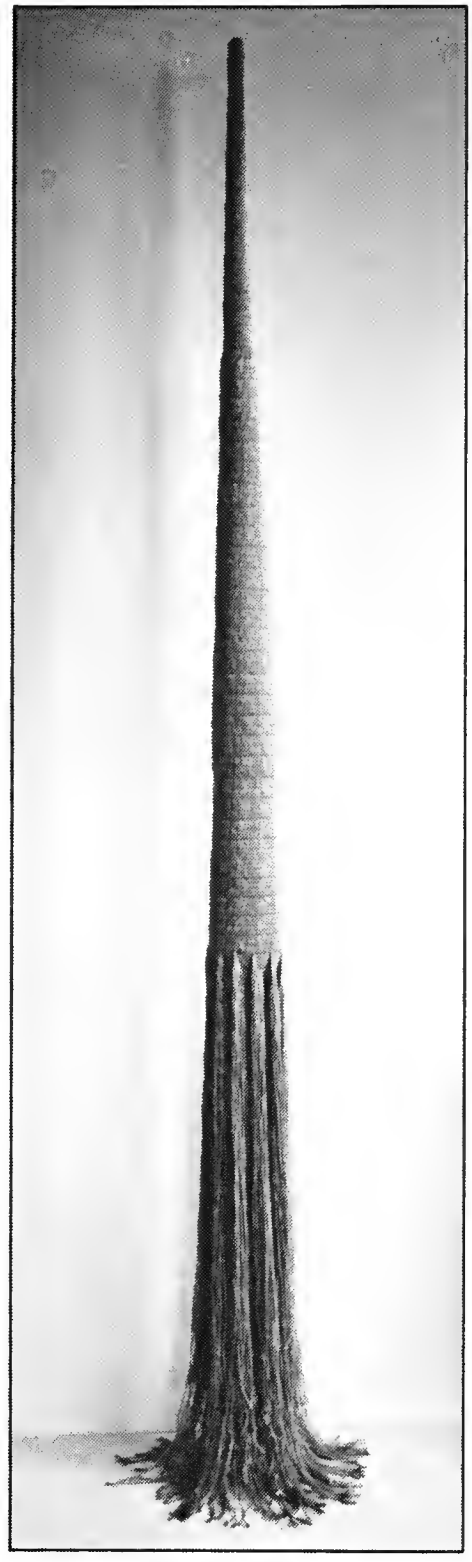
Nesting boxes, circa 1974 and 1975
Linen, five-layered weave, double weave pick-up, 4½x4½x4½" to 8x8x8". Collections of Jack Lenor Larsen, John Lewis, Olga Matson, Alex and Camille Cook, and private collection.

(Photograph by Christopher Dube)



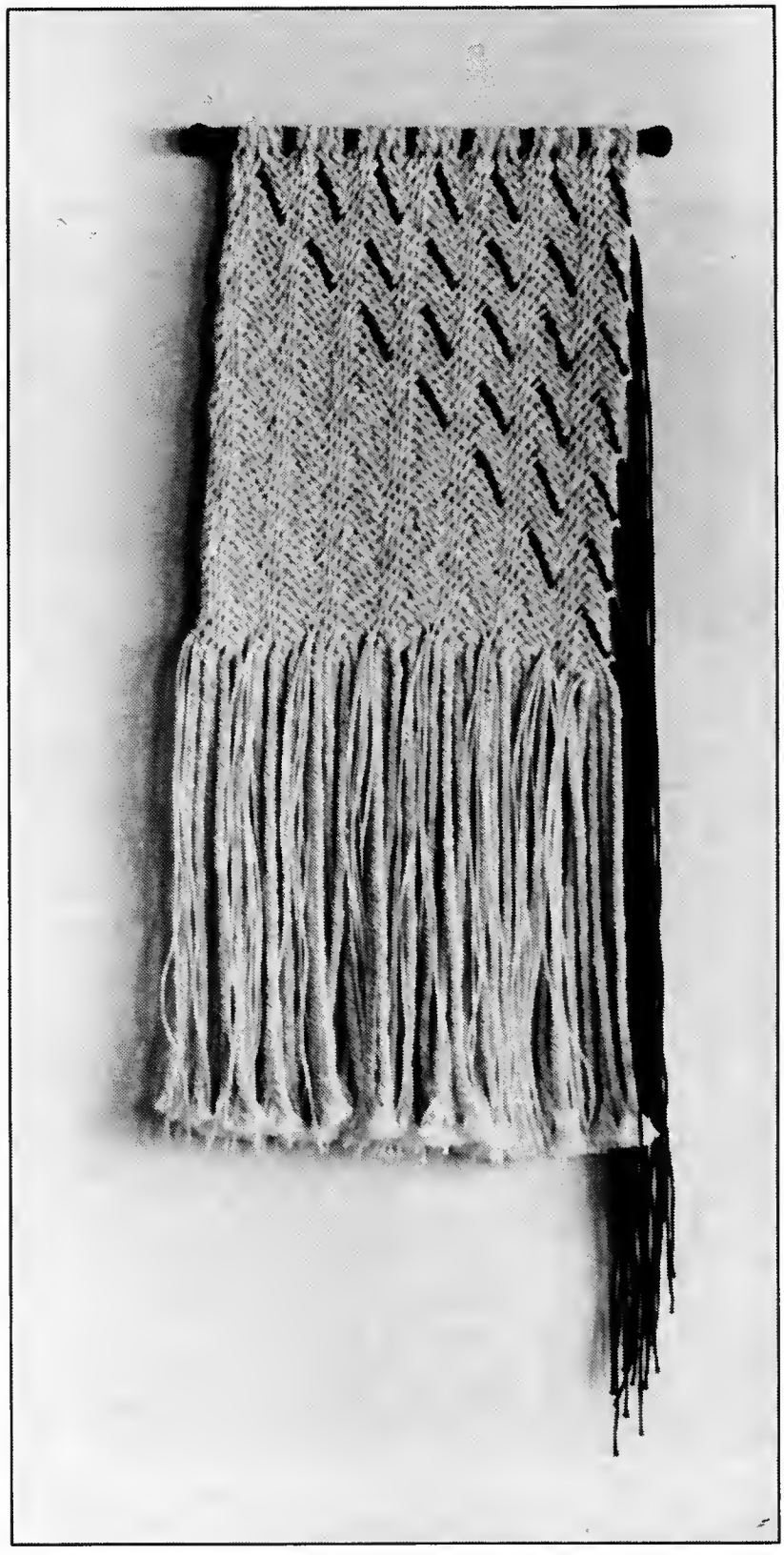
Basket with Brown Lines, 1980
Natural linen, quadruple weave, continuous weft. 7½x5x5".
Collection, the Oakland Museum.

(Photograph by Bob Stocksdale)



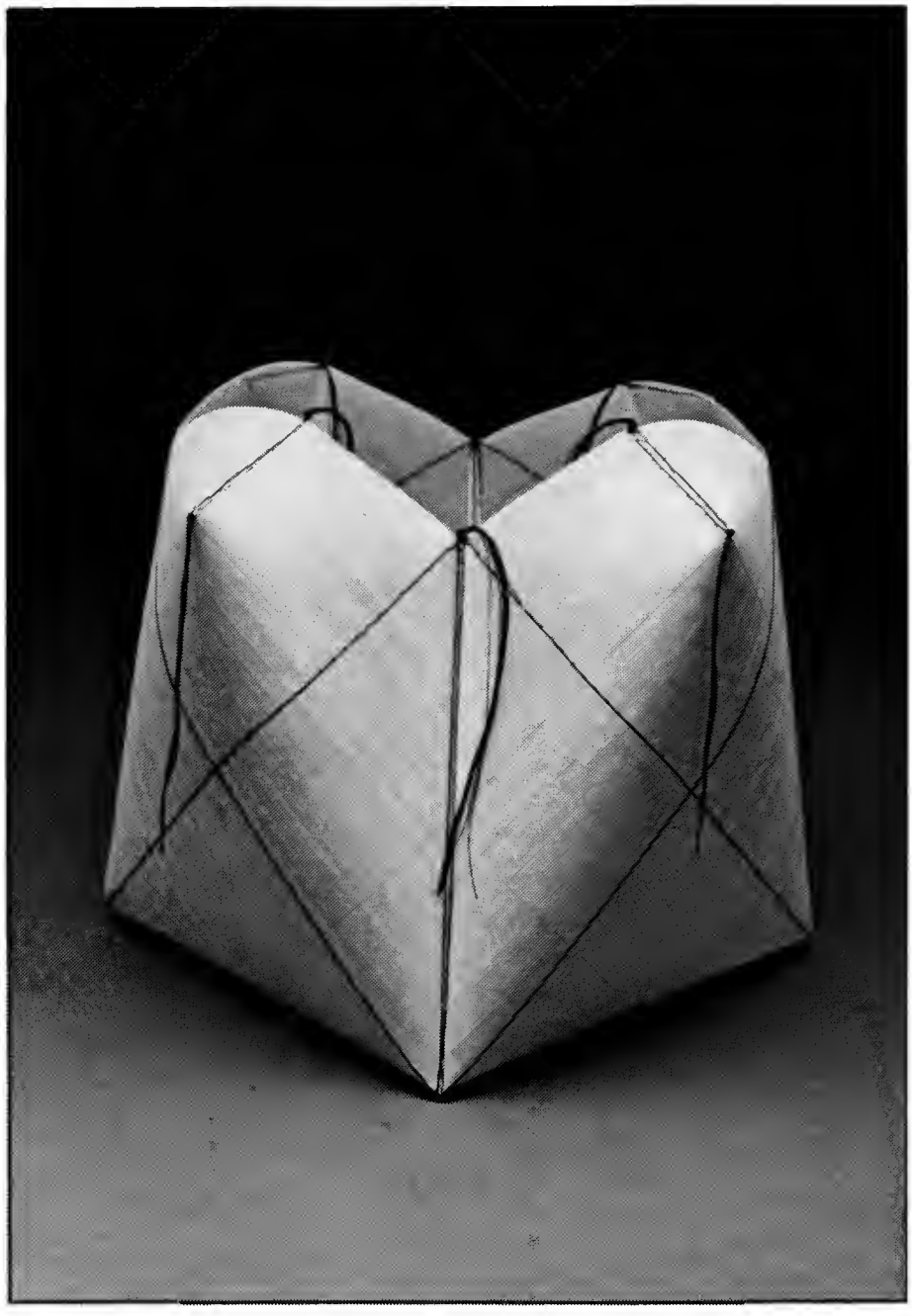
Marugawa (round river) X, 1976
Linen, card woven seamless tube. 92x5". Collection, Phyllis and Al Niklas.

(*Photograph by Stone and Steccati*)



Variation on a Camel's Girth, #3, 1976
Natural cotton and cotton braid, natural, black and white. 16x6½. Split ply twining. Collection, Rosanne M. Clarke.

(*Photograph by Stone and Steccati*)



Kiri VII #1, 1993
Kiriwood paper lined with silk tissue, machíne stitched and folded. 6½x8x8".

(*Photograph by Carley Fonville*)

Paper columns, 1992
Antique Japanese paper, indigo dyed and treated with persimmon tannin. 65x9" and 74x9". Collection of Kay Sekimachi.

(*Photograph by Christopher Dube*)

VII MARRIAGE TO BOB STOCKSDALE (1972)

Nathan: Well, we've talked a lot about the events in your life. Perhaps you would want to mention your marriage in 1972.

Bob Stocksdale and His Family

Sekimachi: Sure. I think I even made some notes because I'm so bad at remembering things. Anyway, Bob and I had known each other for years through Designer Craftsmen and through the same exhibitions that we were in. I know his marriage broke up in about 1971 for sure. Right at that time, or maybe it was before that in about 1971, right after "Deliberate Entanglements" I think, there was a couple in Palo Alto by the name of Cynthia and I think, Peter Williams. They decided that they wanted to start a gallery called Sterling Associates, and so they were gathering work from the so-called best craftsmen of the Bay Area. Bob and I were both included and they were having a grand opening. Bob asked me to drive down to Palo Alto for this event. So, that's when, I guess, we really sort of got together. Anyway, I guess we decided we would try it, get married and try it.

But, anyway, I know that I really was ready for a change. I was forty-six years old. My mother wrote to my uncle in Japan and he wrote back saying, "Unheard of, getting married at forty-six. [laughter] But congratulations anyway." [laughter] So, we laughed about that. Anyway, it certainly was a big change. I had lived in and grew up in a household with women. You know, my father died when I was ten years old and so my mother raised three daughters. We lived sort of a very narrow life.

When I married Bob, not only did I have Bob but I had Kim living with us, Bob's son who was maybe nineteen years old, still a student at the junior college. Later when he became a student at San Francisco State University he did go over and moved into a dormitory. That certainly was a big change. [Bob's daughter, Joy, was a textile major at CCAC, and had an apartment of her own. Soon after we were married, she went to Rhode Island School of Design to do her third year there.]

Certainly before I was married, I didn't think that things were permanent. I guess, after I got married I sort of felt more complete. So, as I mentioned, all I know is I felt like I could buy things because this was permanent. Maybe that's not the way to express this but anyway, I felt, you know, this was it.

Nathan: Earlier had you thought that you would perhaps not marry?

Sekimachi: Yes. I don't think I had thoughts of getting married at all. In fact, I felt terribly awkward socially and maybe even afraid of boys since we just didn't have men around.

Nathan: I suppose even at CCAC there were probably more women than men in the classes? Well, that was brave of you.

Travel, and a Broader Life

Sekimachi: Yes, I think maybe friends were kind of afraid for me but somehow it worked. I think one of the things that made it work was we had so many friends in common, we knew all the same crafts people, and so it was really kind of nice. Then we began to travel. Up until that time, I hadn't done any traveling at all other than going to Haystack and coming back.

Nathan: We had mentioned your traveling to Japan. Did you travel other places?

Sekimachi: Yes. Let's see. I guess Bob was in a number of programs, symposiums on wood in England. These conferences took us to England three times, and I certainly enjoyed going there. I think I was sort of an Anglophile from way, way back because one of my scrapbooks that I had was on the English royal family, and believe it or not, Harriet, I am a saver and I do have scrapbooks from when I was in grade school. They're in boxes in the basement and I know I'm going to have to do something with them one day because they're of no interest to

anybody else so, I don't know. I'll just have to give them someplace. But I do remember, very definitely, this whole scrapbook on the royal family and all the weddings and events.

Nathan: Exactly. Many young girls of your age liked that fairy tale quality. While you're talking about your collections, please don't throw anything out until you have thought through what you wanted to deposit with The Bancroft Library.

Sekimachi: All right. I'm so pleased to know that there is a place that would possibly want this stuff.

Visiting English Weavers

Nathan: Right. So, you got to England--

Sekimachi: We got to England and, of course, I wanted to meet some of the weavers. Bob had already known some. Well, John Makepeace was, and still is, quite prominent in the field, the furniture design field in England. He has now a beautiful home and school called Parnham House in Dorset. At one time he was married to Ann Sutton, who is a weaver and quite well known in England and probably Europe and in the States, too, because of her books. I guess at one point they had visited us and so we were acquainted with both of them. By the time we got to England the first time, they were already separated. But anyway, we got to see John and certainly got to see Ann and also Peter Collingwood.

I was trying to think whether I had met Peter Collingwood in England or here. But actually, I met Peter here and it was in 1974. I remember it so well because of Convergence. The first Convergence was held in San Francisco and Peter was on the program. Unfortunately, I couldn't attend anything because I had to have a hysterectomy. Jackie Wollenberg brought Peter Collingwood over to meet me. I guess I knew some of his work. I don't know whether he had written his wonderful book on rug weaving already or not. But anyway, we got acquainted.

So, on all our trips to England, we always go up to see Peter, and I've got two of his hangings, which are my treasures. Anyway, I really think of him as one of the best weavers working today. Well, number one, he uses black and natural which I also love using. And he's so inventive. He comes up with his own techniques and then adapts or changes a

loom to carry out his ideas. It amazes me that he had started out as a doctor.

Nathan: A medical doctor?

Sekimachi: Yes, a medical doctor. I guess when he had to do a class or do a little work as an occupational therapist working in rehabilitation, he got interested in weaving, and he did go to work with Ethel Mairet. She was one of England's foremost weavers I guess in the forties or before. I had heard about her from another weaver friend of mine, a woman by the name of Helen Work who had studied in England and in the Scandinavian countries. I know that Ethel Mairet wrote a number of books on weaving, and on weaving and education, and they just sort of became my bibles, too.

Nathan: You had sort of a natural introduction to all of these interesting people through your own interest in weaving?

Sekimachi: Yes. There seem to be a lot of people who were really interested and doing interesting things. So, I should say, I just met or got acquainted by getting to know or making friends with people who were weaving.

Nathan: Were there other places besides England where this happened?

Sekimachi: Not really, because I really haven't been on the Continent. I went to Paris one time and that was it.

Nathan: There may be another whole world there.

Sekimachi: I'm sure there is. I'm sure there is.

Nathan: It would be fun for you to go to Scandinavia.

Sekimachi: Yes it would, because I really appreciated the Finnish weaving. And of course, the Finnish designs I thought were just absolutely beautiful in wood as well. Today some beautiful baskets are being made in Finland, and of course, the furniture, the architecture. So maybe Finland is where I would really like to go.

Nathan: Did you find that seeing the work of other people influences you or gives you ideas?

Sekimachi: I suppose everything you see gives you ideas. Going to people's studios and homes always gives me ideas, maybe not for my work but certainly for what to do in my own house. For instance, Ann Sutton in England had an eye for decorating. I

remember her studio in Arundel, which she was sort of doing over. It was absolutely marvelous the way she was going to paint the banisters and the spindles of the banisters. They were all going to be multi-colored. She uses a lot of color anyway. The idea of painting each one a different color was just [laughter] I thought wonderful.

Then, of course Parnham House was absolutely marvelous. It was a manor house. Gosh, one of the kings slept there. So we were put up in the king's bedroom and it was done up beautifully. Of course the gardens there I found quite beautiful, and the museums in England were absolutely fascinating.

VIII TRUDE GUERMONPREZ

Some Significant Innovations

Sekimachi: I know that Trude certainly was influenced by Paul Klee's work.

Just to say a little more about Trude, her work was really innovative and I think she was the first to do a lot of things.

Nathan: Can you give some examples?

Sekimachi: Well, certainly to my knowledge, tapestry was always thought of as covering up the warp threads. That was traditional tapestry. In her so-called tapestries, she let the warp threads be as important as the weft. She just let them come through, and they were equal with the weft. I do remember, well, she did sheer tapestries where the light did come through. And then her use of portraits as subject matter and stencil-printing the images onto the warp threads. Sometimes she would use poems or phrases in her work.

There was an exhibition very recently called "Talkative Textiles." Some of these were very old pieces and one was just marvelous. [A wall hanging or coverlet with text out of the Bible was embroidered all over a woolen cloth. It was done by someone who was in an insane asylum. So nothing is new under the sun, but certainly Trude was one of the first contemporary weavers to use text in her work.]

Some of the people working today, like John McQueen, who's doing basketry, he's certainly been using words as part of the design of his baskets. I think a lot of people have been doing that recently. So, for sure by just her work she has been a great influence on people who are working today.

"The Tapestries of Trude Guermonprez," Oakland Museum (1982)

Nathan: That retrospective show, "The Tapestries of Trude Guermonprez" at the Oakland Museum was very impressive. In the catalog, you wrote about her in a way that was revealing and not only respectful but warm.

Sekimachi: Well, I hope it was good. I did it; I really can't write at all but I did it just to get this retrospective going and to get the catalog going. Hazel Bray said, "Well, why don't you do it?". And so I said, "Okay, I'll give it a try."

Nathan: So, your hand was very much in the show?

Sekimachi: Yes. Well, I felt Trude did so much for me and so I felt that the least I could do was to try to organize a show of her work.

Nathan: What year was that, do you remember? I have the catalog.

Sekimachi: Nineteen eighty-two. She died in '76, so it took six years. But anyway, I'm no good at organizing people or things but I had to do it. We got some people that were fairly close to her and some former students together and Hazel said, "The first thing you do is form a committee," and so that's what we did. We got Hazel to apply for a grant from the NEA and I know I made a call to Eudorah Moore telling her this was what we wanted to do and that we wanted Hazel Bray to apply for a grant. Eudorah Moore assured me that if she did that, she would get the grant. That really spurred us on.

So anyway, we were looking for someone who would write an essay and so Hazel said, "You do it," and so I tried. And I must say, I wrote it and then Hazel gave it to her good friend Johanna Robison. Johanna edited it and then they really worked on it and when it came back to me, I couldn't believe it because it sounded so good. I didn't believe that I wrote it. In fact, I'm sure they did a lot of work on it. I know they did.

Nathan: It's the first draft that's the hardest. Did you feel that the show did represent most of the things that you wanted to see?

Sekimachi: Yes and no. Well, to me she was so important that I wouldn't feel that any show really would do her justice. I know that I was kind of disappointed at the opening because not that many people came. I was expecting, you know, huge crowds but maybe that was just beyond all expectations.

Nathan: Were people willing to lend pieces of her work?

Sekimachi: People were certainly willing to lend. Yes.

Nathan: I wandered in quite a bit after the opening, but I was interested to see how many people were there, paying close attention, observing very closely. Perhaps more people came than we might think.

Sekimachi: Yes, probably. Yes, I hope so. And I know that I asked Hazel, "Do you think the show could travel?" And Hazel said, "No, because most people do not like to lend things for a long period of time," and so that ended that. Well, anyway, I was glad that there was a catalog. But as I say, I just feel, even today maybe that her work isn't still fully appreciated like it should be. At the time of the show "Deliberate Entanglements," here she was doing these wonderful three-dimensional silk banners. One I remember as being absolutely marvelous. I couldn't quite understand why Jack Larsen didn't include her in that show. Well, I guess that was Bernie Kester's show, but I couldn't understand why she wasn't included. Of course, I didn't ask. I think, you know, soon after that she went on to her textile graphics period. But I guess she was very modest and you know she wasn't a bit pushy about getting her work out.

Nathan: It's conceivable that a lot of her ideas and accomplishments are passed along. And you might never have been the artist you are without having met her.

Sekimachi: Well, that is absolutely true.

Black Mountain College Connection

Sekimachi: I have thought about Trude, and I guess maybe it's because this book came out by Sigrid Weltge. She teaches at the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science. It's about the textile workshops at the Bauhaus, and how they influenced what happened in textile arts in this country. Of course, Anni Albers was a Bauhausler; she came to teach at Black Mountain College and then Trude came there because her parents were teaching there and stayed on to teach there too.

[Interruption: doorbell rings]

Nathan: Were you at any time interested in going to Black Mountain yourself?

Sekimachi: Yes. But it was only really a dream; I guess I had lofty ideas but couldn't really go. My personality was such that, you know, I wouldn't make it. I was too shy and timid. Oh, the women's colleges seemed glamorous, and so I thought, "Oh, boy, one of those, like Vassar, seemed like just a great place to be able to go." As I said, I thought about Black Mountain College but it really wasn't for me.

Nathan: Perhaps we could go back a bit. You have mentioned and indeed written about meeting Trude Guermonprez, and did that fine essay in the catalog of her retrospective. What were you looking for when you went to hear her the first time in 1951?

Sekimachi: All I know is the weaving guilds were flourishing and everybody was really into weaving. But we were following weaving out of a book like following recipes. Suddenly, it was like a rumor; there was a weaver from Europe on the scene now in California and she's going to talk at Pond Farm. As I mentioned, two of my weaving friends, Claire Weaver, Helen Pope, and I went. (Helen Pope did come to our opening of "Marriage in Form" and I was so pleased because she's got to be eighty-five and she had heart surgery and it just delighted me that she came.) But anyway, Helen drove and we went up.

Of course, to me, I think Trude was again, a glamorous figure, you know, her background, being from Europe. Her parents were, let's see: he was a musicologist and conductor of an opera orchestra, and her mother taught voice control and book binding. Her sister was Lisa Aronson whose husband was Boris Aronson, the very famous stage set designer.

A Gift for Clarity

Sekimachi: I was about twenty-five and Trude was sixteen years older so she was forty-one. I was sort of in awe of her. She was just terrific. For one thing, I think no one here explained, or made it clear what the whole process of weaving was all about. Suddenly as Trude talked and explained weave constructions and the relationship between the draft and the harnesses, it all became clear. In fact, I think in this book [*Women's Work...*] there is another student of Trude's who studied with her at Black Mountain College. She writes that Trude was an extraordinary teacher, that she had a special gift of making

the process of weaving logical, and that she learned from Trude to think independently. I thought that was so well put.

I was twenty-five and the only Oriental, and all the other ladies were in their forties or fifties, so for sure I stood out. I understand that Trude asked about me. She was curious. You know, "Who was that young person?" But it wasn't until 1953 or '54 that I was able to take a summer session at CCAC.

Nathan: When you heard her for the first time, can you describe her personality, her vitality level, something from your memories of her?

Sekimachi: I think she seemed a bit shy. In my memory, she didn't seem terribly lively then. She seemed serious. I think maybe we were looking for someone who was serious about weaving and not just weaving glittery things. And so, she was more impressive. [Later as I got to know her, I found her very lively and animated with a great sense of humor, also discovered she had a playful, mischievous streak.]

Nathan: Then you had a summer session with her?

Sekimachi: I had the summer session with her and you know, I had been weaving since the fall of 1949 but really not understanding what I was doing. So, suddenly that one summer session, things just sort of became clear, and yet not totally clear. [laughter] I had a lot to learn.

Open-Weave Tapestry

Nathan: But that opened your eyes in an important way. Did you feel that you were willing to accept her taste and standards?

Sekimachi: All I know is she certainly influenced me. As I said, she had done a beautiful kind of tapestry, it was an open-weave tapestry in that the warp showed and of course the weft. It was just like a fifty-fifty weave, meaning that it was very open.

Nathan: Almost like a net?

Sekimachi: Almost like a net. It was very different from our concept of tapestry which was dense and heavy. You could see through it. I hope someone still has it. It was a beautiful piece. I know that one of my first weavings was a sort of a, I'll just have

to say it, a takeoff on this, but using very dark, or earth colors, beige, brown, and black, which I just love. I think I might still have a slide of my piece although it was nothing great. I know I did another piece that I called Kites. (She had done a very beautiful piece with charming colors, sort of like Paul Klee colors.) This was done in the late fifties and again, definitely an influence from Trude's work. And then my double weaves: Trude introduced us to double weaves, and then we started looking at Anni Albers' triple weaves.

Nathan: When you say double weave, it reverses from one side to the other? Is that a double weave?

Sekimachi: Or it could be just one cloth right on top of another one.

Controlling the Harnesses

Nathan: I see. And you're weaving them simultaneously?

Sekimachi: You're weaving them simultaneously because in weaving the weft builds up. If you put a weft in the top cloth, then you have to put a weft in the bottom cloth unless you want definitely to just weave on the top cloth and leave the bottom warp unwoven. Depending on the number of harnesses, if you have a ten harness loom, you could have five layers of cloth going at the same time. So, if you have a twelve-harness loom, you could have six layers.

Nathan: I appreciate your willingness and your ability to make this clear. You were saying that Trude got you interested in double weaves?

Sekimachi: In double weaves. Anni Albers had done wall hangings in Germany. She had done triple-weave hangings. The project after the double-weave sampler was a very geometric double-woven hanging using eight harnesses so that you can make many more changes. You could bring up a different combination of harnesses to weave top cloth. If you have a shiny and a dull thread on harnesses one and two, you could bring them up together to weave a cloth on top. And if you have another shiny thread on harness three, sometimes you could weave one and three together and make top cloth and so it could be a real shiny cloth. These are the things that I guess Trude taught us about the freedom of the harnesses, that you control the

harnesses. You could bring up whichever harness you wanted to bring up.

Nathan: And not be intimidated by your equipment?

Sekimachi: Right. And then when it came to weaves, she helped us to see how you could carry weaves farther than, for instance, what you saw in a book. You could develop it.

Nathan: That was a liberating experience with her?

Sekimachi: It really was, because before we were looking in Mary Black's book and you would see a weave draft, and then a photograph of a fabric below, and we thought that was it. Trude made it like it was infinite, and I guess it still is.

Weaving for the Home and Designing for Industry

Nathan: I don't know if I have this right: I read that one of the Bauhaus theories was that what you create must have utility. Did she have that viewpoint?

Sekimachi: I don't remember Trude thinking that way, although she did utilitarian things. You know, she wove upholstery for her furniture. Her husband was a very fine builder, did a wonderful job of remodeling their home on Clipper Street in San Francisco. I do believe he built furniture for them. She did upholstery fabric for their dining room chairs, and I know she did placemats.

She did clothing fabric. In fact, she did a wonderful, let's see, is it a quilted weave? Maybe it's a quilted weave but it's a double-woven fabric. Hers was natural on one side and the lining, or the underside--you don't even call it a lining because they were stitched together--the underside was pink. The pink threads from the underside came up on top to make a design and I think this was a diamond pattern. But it made very nice, warm, very functional apparel, a jacket.

Nathan: Did she design for industry?

Sekimachi: Yes, she did. In fact, I think she did designs for a company and then she did designs for, was it a steamship line? I know that she worked for a company in New York. They sent out spools of wonderful colors of cotton. John had made a wonderful thing for her to hang these spools on so it covered

an area four feet by three feet. These spools of colors were sort of pegged in and it made a wonderful thing to look at.

Nathan: That's John Elsesser?

Sekimachi: Yes. And she did a series of designs for this company in New York. I don't remember the name of the company but she did small samples.

Comment: Personal Disinterest in Business

Nathan: Has designing for industry ever interested you?

Sekimachi: Not really, except I was approached and I did a few samples for a company who manufactured casement fabrics. They sent me a box of linens to work with. I would weave something up and I would send it back. I'm very bad about following up on things and so I don't even know whether they used them.

This is even true with Jack Larsen. This would be in the late fifties when we were doing casement fabrics, three-yard lengths. I loved linen and so I did two designs that I really liked, and Jack liked them, too. He asked me if he could use them in his line, and he did. I know that I got a few checks, not very big but a few checks. They wrote me and said I could come to New York and look at their books and that I would be getting royalties, but I don't think that they ever came. [laughter]

Nathan: That's an important detail that slipped?

Sekimachi: Yes. It's my fault, too, because I don't follow up.

Nathan: Somehow one would think that the purchaser ought to be responsible.

Sekimachi: You would think so. But maybe Jack didn't pay much attention to what his bookkeeper was doing. I don't know. [laughter]

Nathan: Isn't that the story of artists somehow?

Sekimachi: I know, and the thing is we're just not interested in the business end. I really would love to be left alone to do my work. Even today, I think the hardest part is in pricing my things and filling out invoices. It's a nuisance. It really is a nuisance. People tell me, "Well, that's why we have

agents. If you're not willing to let an agent take over then you have to deal with all these other things."

Trude's Wall-Hangings and Tapestries

Nathan: Right. So back, perhaps, to Trude. She did do some items that had, let's say, actual utility, in the usual sense. But she also had this other interest in artistic expression?

Sekimachi: Yes. [For me, she was the only weaver I was aware of who did tapestries and not in the traditional manner. Many other weavers in the area followed, but I think hers were the best.] I definitely remember tapestries that she had in her home. They weren't big.

Nathan: What would they be three by four feet or something like that?

Sekimachi: Not even that big, maybe eighteen inches high. I remember one called Leaf Study, which was very beautiful, beiges and browns and a little black with painted warp.

I know that she was concerned about what was going on in the world. For instance, when the astronauts were going to the moon, she wanted to commemorate that and so she did a series of small hangings. One was called Moon Shot; this was supplementary warp threads, but in red. This went right up the middle and ended in a triangular shape, like the tip of the rocket. So, she was very aware. She kept abreast of what was going on in the world. That's something that I certainly don't do.

Nathan: Were she and her family originally refugees?

Sekimachi: They were refugees, yes, from Germany.

Nathan: Did she talk about that part of her life?

Sekimachi: Not very much. All I know is her husband was killed, I think by the Nazis. She lived in Holland and worked in Holland and even taught at the school that's sort of equivalent to our adult schools in Holland until she came to Black Mountain College. Then, Marguerite Wildenhain, a very good old friend of hers, invited her to teach at Pond Farm.

Pond Farm, and Later

Sekimachi: Marguerite Wildenhain was invited to come to Pond Farm first by Gordon Herr. Jane and Gordon Herr wanted to found an art colony and school, and so that's how Pond Farm got started. Well, Trude came to Black Mountain College. I guess it was her intention to go back to Holland, but Marguerite invited her to be the weaving teacher at Pond Farm and that's what brought her to California. Then, of course, she met John Elsesser, who became her husband, so, she just stayed. But also, Marguerite Wildenhain studied with Gerhard Marks. And Trude became Gerhard Marks's favorite model.

Nathan: Was he a painter?

Sekimachi: A sculptor. And well, she was beautiful to look at. She was very beautiful with an interesting face. I know that just recently, the letters of Marguerite Wildenhain and Gerhard Marks were published. When the show about Pond Farm opened at the San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum, we were talking about Trude, and again a friend reminded me that not only was she Gerhard Marks's favorite model, but she was also his mistress. I remember hearing that years ago, right after she died. I let that sort of go out of my mind, but it is very logical because when she was modeling for him, she was very young, just gorgeous.

Nathan: There was one photograph, I think, in that catalog of her retrospective. Even in the photograph, it was a very arresting face, wonderful eyes.

Sekimachi: Wonderful eyes.

Pacific Basin and Fiberworks

Nathan: Did she have the same effect on other people that she had on you? Could you tell?

Sekimachi: This is something I'm really interested in and I must ask Sheila O'Hara, who was student of hers. There are other people around here who worked with her and I know she had many other students. To what extent, I'm not sure but I know that Inger Jensen and Pat McGaw studied with her and so they were certainly influenced by Trude. When they started the Pacific Basin School of Textile Arts they tried to establish as a

school where you could get a very good foundation in the textile arts. I'm sure that came from Trude and Trude's background. Also at Pacific Basin, they had the atelier, which meant they were trying to produce fabrics commercially. So, that would sort of follow what happened at the Bauhaus.

Nathan: Had you done some teaching or lecturing at Pacific Basin as well as Fiberworks?

Sekimachi: I did some teaching at both places but very, very minor.

Nathan: Is there anything like that around now?

Sekimachi: Not that I know of, and it's a shame. In the early seventies, well, there was just an overflow of students. I think this is one of the reasons why Pat and Inger started Pacific Basin, because they took the overflow from California College of Arts and Crafts. People did come from all over. I think the Bay Area did become the center for fiber arts. And the two schools, Fiberworks, which was founded by Ginge Laky, was sort of the far out one, they had more of the so-called avant-garde work in fiber arts. So, they sort of complemented each other.

Nathan: Which approach was more acceptable to you?

Sekimachi: Well, I believed in a good solid beginning. In fact, one of my favorite classes was to teach beginners, because you taught people who didn't come with any preconceived ideas or didn't have a favorite way of threading a loom. I guess I felt that the way Trude did it was so great that maybe everyone should be doing it that way. So, I felt Pacific Basin was doing a wonderful job. But also, Fiberworks was very interesting and they brought the other side in which was just wonderful. Anyway, things at Fiberworks were very, very interesting.

Nathan: Right. At one point, maybe it was Jack Larsen who said that before you wove, you should really know exactly how the loom works to the extent of being able almost to build it and then to set it up. Did you have this feeling about how much you needed to know about the loom itself?

Sekimachi: Well, it certainly helps. Yes, it certainly helps to know about the loom, the function of each part. To know a good method of warping makes it so much easier. Yes. I think the way we learned to warp a loom, was by cutting threads first, you know making a warp and cutting the threads before it ever got on the loom. It could get so sloppy, so messy, so tangled up that it made the task a chore.

Jim Ahrens was wonderful. He was a mechanic, but he was a loom genius. He really understood about warping and putting a warp on the loom. He used a method of warping which, if I were still weaving, I still would be doing, called the raddle method. A raddle is like a reed. You do not cut the ends of the warp threads until you are ready to thread. So, threads cannot get out of order.

Knowing things like this made it so much easier because I know that probably a lot of people gave up weaving because their warps got so tangled up and it became such a tedious process, just threading the loom. I told people that I don't mind threading a loom because you sit there and you do it and it's like a period of time where you could think and be quiet. Actually sometimes you could even listen to music. I didn't mind any step after learning this raddle method.

Coming back to the functional things, Trude even did rugs. She did a beautiful rug in one of the weaves that a lot of people have used, summer and winter. She did pile rugs. I know that when she was commissioned to do this pile rug, she felt that she didn't do the selvages as well as she would have liked to, so she went over to Janice Bornt who did mainly rug weaving and learned how to do a good selvage. Trude was also willing to learn.

Nathan: As you speak about this, I was wondering whether during the time she was in Holland, she had anything to do with Finnish weavers.

Sekimachi: Their rugs are so beautiful. I know that she had a scholarship to Scandinavia, whether she got to Finland, I'm not sure.

Trude's Techniques and Personal Adaptations

Sekimachi: To paint on the warp, as far as I know, she was one of the first to do that. And I think, painting on a warp went way, way back for her, and then stencilling on the warp.

Nathan: Did you stencil on the warp in some of your books, like *One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji*?

Sekimachi: Yes. I did. It wasn't stencilling, but it was a technique called transfer printing, and that is using dyes. It's a heat transfer. You paint your image with the dyes on paper, on tracing paper or transfer paper. And then you make your warp

and your warp is set and threaded and all ready to weave. And then you pull it out so it's still under tension. I spread it across my ironing board and put paper underneath it. Then you take the image that you had painted on the transfer paper and you put it on top of the warp threads. And you heat, use your iron, and you just press with the iron and the image goes onto the warp threads.

Nathan: That must have opened up enormous possibilities.

Observing Scale and Materials

Sekimachi: Yes. In fact, actually, when I did that series, someone said, "Kay, you could be doing a great big screen." [laughter] And so, I thought, "Yes. You know, it could be blown up to a great big screen." But, I don't know, I just like the sort of intimate little book. It never got carried out in big threads and on a large scale, but, certainly it was possible.

Nathan: Do you think that maybe there is an optimum size that you feel comfortable with or the material suggests?

Sekimachi: Yes, I think so because I know with my paper bowls, I think, "Gee whiz, people like big things." But I always go back to the smaller size.

Nathan: That patched pot, is that about as big as you like to do?

Sekimachi: That's about as big as I've gone.

Nathan: You're a little more at ease with twelve or sixteen inches across?

Sekimachi: I think maybe even smaller. The lace paper bowl is about maybe eight inches across. It is delicate. It's only two layers of this lace paper and so in areas, there are little tiny spots that you could see the light through because the paper has holes. It's really lace.

Nathan: Of course, you like that.

Sekimachi: I do like that. [laughter] I really like that. I don't think it would work on the larger scale.

Nathan: Your own sense of scale is something that is appealing. Also, your columns, those paper columns, they're big.

Sekimachi: Yes they are, they're certainly big for me. Yes.

Nathan: And then this long tubular work. There's a name for this?

Sekimachi: Yes. Those are my card-woven tubes and I call them Marugawas and it means "round river."

Nathan: Certainly those small woven boxes, the ones that surprise me with the different pattern on the cover and inside, they seem to be technically dazzling.

Sekimachi: Yes. I thought they looked very good. They were fun to figure out. I don't know, I guess it's like working out a puzzle. For all of these, I make, well, the boxes and the folded paper things, I really do make small models. I do make it in paper first. So, for all the woven boxes, like in the Hako series and the nesting boxes, I have little paper models.

Nathan: Do you keep those?

Sekimachi: I keep those. So, anyway, when I got this stash of Japanese papers, I already had a bunch of little paper models. There were little paper boxes that I had folded that would never work woven, and so, that's when I thought, "Well, gee whiz, this is better in paper."

Trude as Teacher: Her Students at CCAC

Nathan: Would you want to talk about some of Trude's students?

Sekimachi: Yes. Of course, the first person who comes to mind is Carole Beadle. I think Carole Beadle was in my class when I subbed for Trude in the spring of 1962.

Nathan: This is CCAC?

Sekimachi: Yes. Carole had gone to CCAC to study pottery but [she was so impressed by Trude and what Trude was doing in the weaving classes that she changed to textiles and stayed with it, and of course, studied with Trude. Carole then got a Fulbright and went to Norway for a year. Then she came back to CCAC to become the first student to get an MFA in textiles. She taught for Ed Rossbach for a year at Cal and then Trude asked her to become her teaching assistant and she's been there at CCAC ever since.]

In these past few years she's been exhibiting; I think it's taken her a long time to find her own direction, but she is doing some interesting three-dimensional things now. It seems to me she received an award in Japan in one of the recent textile shows or competitions. I know she took off for Japan and she was all excited because it was her first trip.

[Another master's degree student was Ann Wilson. She got her B.A. somewhere in the Midwest and came to work with Carole and Trude. She is now [1994] teaching at the Art Institute of Chicago. More than being influenced by Trude she remembers Trude as being exotic and being impressed by Trude's background and circle of friends.

By the way, Trude and John lived with original Paul Klees and ate off of dishes made by Marguerite Wildenhain. Ann also remembers Trude telling her, "You're an artist, you're an artist."]

And then there's another student, Lisa Lee Peterson. Lisa is now a tenured professor at Purdue University. [She did her undergraduate work with Trude at CCAC (she actually knew Trude from when she was seven years old). And in 1969 when she wanted to get an MFA, Trude suggested she study with Ed Rossbach, saying, "I always wanted to know what Ed was up to (in regards to his teaching methods)."]

Nathan: Exactly. Carole Beadle and Lisa Lee Peterson, did they continue to work in the Bauhaus mode as Trude had started them?

Sekimachi: I'm not sure. [Lisa did tell me that she was of a like mind with Trude in terms of structure and discipline and so in teaching I am sure Trude's influence was there. But in her own work she says Ed's influence was greater.] But Lisa did have a show at Pacific Basin and she had done some wonderful double-weave pieces. One was I thought wonderful. They were heads of people, of all races, black, Oriental, white; and a very beautiful composition--a social commentary. Of course, she's also very interested in Chinese gauzes; she's a textile scholar and had been going over to Lyon to study at the Centre International D'étude des Textiles Anciens. And I know that this past summer, she was over there giving a paper. She's a serious scholar as well as doing her own work and raising two small children and I think doing a wonderful job at Purdue teaching. It's very impressive. In fact, I don't know how these young people do it.

Nathan: Exactly. Well, there is a feeling of energy when you describe these people. Perhaps Trude had something to do with that.

Sekimachi: Yes, probably. I know because, well, it was amazing all the work that Trude got done because she developed the program at CCAC and then got this graduate program going, too. So, she devoted a lot of time to CCAC and also a lot of time to the American Crafts Council. She instigated the Fellows Awards for ACC. She gave workshops all over the country, and participated in conferences. And then she had, as her friends say, a very difficult husband to take care of. [laughter]

Nathan: Time consuming?

Sekimachi: Yes. [laughter] They had this lovely home right on the hillside near Twin Peaks. John was a fine carpenter and builder and actually, her little studio was what was the laundry room. And then she also had her Macomber. It probably was a twelve-harness Macomber right in her kitchen. I think it probably was a twelve-harness loom. But she really did not have a big studio as such, like a lot of the young people have today.

Building Trude's Studio at Twill House

Sekimachi: I know that she always wanted a studio and she also loved the country, and they had bought property up in Glen Ellen. The first thing that John was doing was building her a studio. She already had a name for it. It was Twill House, with a wonderful deck and sliding doors. For the doors, the wood was placed diagonally to make a twill pattern. The doors just slid open so that the whole room would be flooded with sunshine and they could move the looms outside. I do believe she was thinking in terms of maybe having summer workshops up there.

Well, unfortunately she didn't live to see the completion of the building. But anyway, her stepson Eric Elsesser and his wife Sylvia are now using Twill House. I think they go up there weekends and Sylvia told me that because of the grandchildren, they're building a swimming pool before they even build a real house. So, I thought, great. She said the studio is plenty big and I know it was a good sized space. It was a beautiful piece of property with a creek running down at the bottom of it. And if I remember, it has a lot of oak trees.

Eric Elsesser told me a funny story that his father told him. I think John died at age ninety-four, something like that, just maybe a couple of years ago. John told Eric that

late in life he had invested in gold bars of some kind that he buried up at Glen Ellen. Eric said, "I've looked where my father said they were supposed to be." [laughter] They weren't there and so they've looked everywhere. And so they're sitting on a pot of gold.

Nathan: Isn't that amazing? It's like a myth.

Sekimachi: I believe that John buried Trude's ashes there. I think her father's ashes are at Black Mountain College, and I'm not sure where her mother's are. I don't know what happened to her mother's remains.

Her mother came to California to live, actually just a few blocks from Trude. John redid her house; it was a small house but he did it beautifully. All I remember is it was just one big room, I guess sort of like this. Her mother had one big grand piano. I think it was a concert grand, a huge grand piano. John had fixed a very nice window seat. I think that's all she had in the space and it looked absolutely marvelous. In one area, there was a counter where she could work, I'm sure, work at her book binding.

Nathan: Did she have any of her daughter's work on display?

Sekimachi: I don't remember. I'm sure she had some things on the wall. Maybe they were some of Gerhard Marks's drawings of Trude. I kind of remember her mother having some of those. Maybe her mother had some of the Paul Klees. Certainly Trude had Paul Klees on the wall, too, so I'm not sure that they came from her mother.

Nathan: Did Trude ever have a chance to work there at Twill House? Was there enough done?

Sekimachi: I don't think so. As far as I know, it really wasn't completed at all because when she died, all her things were still on Clipper Street, where they lived in San Francisco. All I know, is after she died, John asked me and a few others to help dispose of some of Trude's things and so we thought, "The first thing we ought to do is start a scholarship fund for her at CCAC." I am no good at this sort of thing and so we made a feeble attempt. But we did sell some of her yarns and made a little money.

Trude's Will, Works, and Papers

Nathan: Was it difficult to do that job of handling her things and disposing of them?

Sekimachi: Yes. Well, she did leave a will. In fact, I inherited part of her textile collection which I still treasure. But I think all of her weaving books and most of the equipment went to the California College of Arts and Crafts. I wish I were just better at handling things like this, because I think we could have raised a lot more money if it were done correctly and if we had given it the amount of time it takes to do something like this. I'm just thankful that we got the retrospective together for her.

Nathan: At the Oakland Museum? It was quite fine.

Sekimachi: I think I was just pleased to see it together and presented. I was glad that there is a catalog. Now, finally after all these years, I think Sylvia and Eric are giving the body of her work to the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. She had this one room on Clipper Street which was sort of her study and also served as the guest room. It was filled with her papers and notes and letters. She did write, she wrote wonderful letters and I know that she had a huge correspondence and so I hope they've got all that together. I hear she left some wonderful notebooks with sketches and I hope all this stays together so that anyone who's interested in doing research could go right to the Cooper-Hewitt and have access to all these papers.

Nathan: That's great that the material was together. Do you know whether there were plans to publish any of her letters or show excerpts from the notebooks?

Sekimachi: All I know is there is a gentlemen in Halle/Salle, I'm not pronouncing it right, in Germany. He's the textile conservator at the museum there. He writes that's he's just fascinated with Trude, and the fact that she immigrated and made this name for herself in the States. He writes that no one knows her in Germany, and, of course, that shocked me.

Nathan: One can understand in the context of the times that she might not be known--

[Interruption-phone rings]

Nathan: --and she was really quite young?

Sekimachi: She was very young.

Nathan: So, her development really, as you suggested, came when she was in this country. Perhaps in Holland, too.

Sekimachi: Maybe in Holland. In Holland she did teach and she did work for a steamship company, weaving or designing rugs. But maybe most of her creative work was done here.

Nathan: Can you speculate about why she left Holland and came to the United States? Did she ever say?

Sekimachi: She didn't say but I think it probably was after the death of her father. I think he died of a heart attack at Black Mountain and so that left her mother and younger sister. So, she came over maybe because of that and then just stayed because Anni Albers was on a sabbatical and so Trude took over for Anni Albers at Black Mountain.

Then, as I said, she got invited by Marguerite Wildenhain to come to Pond Farm. So, that brought her to California and then she met John and married him in about 1950, '51, and stayed on. But this Albrecht Pohlmann wants to write a book on Trude and also hopes to get a show together for her in 1996 which would be the twentieth anniversary of her death, 1996.

Nathan: That's not very far away.

Sekimachi: That's not very far away. And it's so unfortunate that today everybody is so darn busy.

Nathan: It should be here?

Sekimachi: Yes, that's true. Or if he organizes it there, it certainly should come over here. But maybe if everything goes to Cooper-Hewitt, it should be right there at Cooper-Hewitt and then go to Germany. I think he is trying to get funding. And I hope he does because it would be so much better for him to come and interview people because letters are so, well, people just don't write. I certainly don't write anymore. So, I hope he could come and interview, just travel around the country and interview everybody she knew.

Nathan: And some of the collectors, perhaps, will appreciate this work. It may be expecting an awful lot let's say from artists, whose time is overloaded anyway to take on a completely new enterprise. You can't be mad at yourself for that. But it would be good if somebody here could write--would Larsen do anything like that? He writes.

Sekimachi: It seems to me he would certainly be supportive of a project. One should give him credit for helping to develop fiber art in this country and certainly more than helping, he's been keeping it alive. He's done a lot for textile arts. So, I'm sure he would give as much help as he could.

Nathan: Has the Cooper-Hewitt done any show based on Trude's collection?

Sekimachi: Not that I know of. So, it would be a wonderful thing for them to do. Well, I should just get this in right away to Albrecht Pohlmann and tell him to get in touch with, I think it's Milton Sonday, who is at the Cooper-Hewitt.

Nathan: Is he the curator?

Sekimachi: I think he's the curator there.

Nathan: I see. I know you need one more thing to do, clearly. [laughter] But, it would be nice to see something come of it.

Sekimachi: It certainly would. And you know, 1996, it would be so appropriate. And also thinking about back upon her work, I have a feeling that her things are sort of timely. You know, they don't look, to me, dated. And she did so many interesting things in so many different techniques.

Fiber Artists as Innovators

Nathan: Was it mostly on loom?

Sekimachi: Mostly on loom. I remember her painting (I can't remember whether it was on paper or whether it was on fabric) and then cutting the fabric into strips and then weaving it into a monofilament warp so that the image, a tree, came through. I know a lot of people have been doing that since. In fact, Gerhardt Knodel, I think, has done many huge things by printing on tape and then weaving it into the warp.

Nathan: So, you see Trude in part as an innovator?

Sekimachi: Yes. Maybe her things were quieter.

I was thinking of Ed Rossbach who has gotten so famous, he's collected by all the top collectors. It seems to me that

he was an innovator in the materials that he used, in the so called throw-away materials.

Nathan: With the newspapers?

Sekimachi: With the newspapers and plastic. I do believe that he was more interested in the process rather than even in the end results because some of the results looked like they could have been done by a child. They have sort of this spontaneous quality which is, well, sometimes not so easy to do.

Nathan: That's interesting. Yes, the child-like things can be very difficult.

Sekimachi: Yes. And yet, in some of his textile pieces the techniques that he use are just amazing, time consuming. Although again some of the colors he used certainly weren't colors that I would choose myself. You have to admire the work that has gone into these pieces. He certainly has done a great deal of research. He just knows so much. It's really amazing, and the amount that he and Katherine [Westphal] both produced. I really respect and admire both of them so very much.

Oakland Show Catalog, and "Trude Remembered"

Sekimachi: For the banners in the museum show, I think Trude was using silk. They were beautiful.

Nathan: One was Arachne?

Sekimachi: Yes. And I know, I'm positive that this other banner was silk, the orange and magenta banner, called Small Banner. And again, Arachne--this was very difficult to do because she was doing two layers of fabric, crossed right in the middle and weaving triangular shapes, leaving warp threads unwoven on the sides. This opened into a four-sided, three-dimensional hanging--very beautiful and elegant. The silk was perfect for this piece.

Sekimachi: Then, I must say that the last bit in the catalog essay ends with the poem that came from another mutual friend of ours and Trude's, Merry Renk. Merry had loaned Trude the Castaneda book which Trude loved and maybe Merry had mentioned this poem to Hazel because Hazel said, "I'm going to add this poem." And I said, "Fine."

Nathan: The name of this essay is "Trude Remembered." Good for you. That is so hard to do.

Sekimachi: Yes. I don't write well. Believe it or not, I don't think I've ever told another person but, when I was a teenager doing all this reading, I thought, "Oh, wow. I'd love to be a writer."

Nathan: I see. Everybody needs an editor, so don't be too modest. The statement rings so true that, yes, I think you should be happy with that.

Sekimachi: And I reread Hazel's essay not too long ago and I thought it was fine, too. Yes.

Nathan: I remember that show vividly. When I think of all the busy people who did this, I'm impressed all over again.

Sekimachi: Yes. I could still see it in my mind, too. And it really was quite beautiful.

Nathan: The tapestries and other things that she did, were each, I thought, eloquent.

Sekimachi: Those notes to John. Oh, I love those pieces.

Nathan: Yes, and there's one, We Are But Ghosts--

Sekimachi: We Are But Two Shadows.

Nathan: Two Shadows, right. That was a great one. I wondered whether she ever wrote poetry.

Sekimachi: She actually did. In fact, I think in some of her notes, there are lines of poetry and she did, I think, several tapestries after We Are But Two Shadows and they have, well like this one, "Leaves rustle, one bird warbles, I shiver at sundown." There was another, what I would call a companion piece to this one and again it was like a poem and very beautiful, very beautiful. Her work is very personal.

Nathan: Well, it does make one want somebody to go to Cooper-Hewitt and do something.

Sekimachi: Yes, absolutely. Since we've got the fax machine, the thing to do is just fax things off. [laughter] Someone said it was cheaper to fax to Singapore than it is to make a telephone call. So, maybe faxing is the way to go.

IX CURRENT STATUS OF FIBER ARTS

Nathan: Exactly. Well, you were saying a little earlier that you felt there was a time when the interests and activity in fiber arts had reached a crest. Did I understand that correctly?

Sekimachi: Yes.

Division into Specialties

Nathan: And that you feel fiber art is not at that high point now?

Sekimachi: I guess, well, yes. [Maybe I'm thinking mainly of loom weaving. (I still think of myself as a weaver and don't even like the term fiber artist.) Stores like Straw Into Gold are concentrating on knitting yarns rather than weaving yarns and I think this is true all over the country. On the other hand, fiber art is being shown in museums and galleries all over the country, and this is a healthy sign. Fiber art is being collected.

Two fiber collections have recently been given to museums in the Midwest: the Ruth Kaufman Collection of Small Fiber Structures to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and the Mildred Constantine Collection of Small Works in Fiber to the Cleveland Museum of Art. Also, part of a collection of contemporary crafts, the Dorothy and George Saxe Collection, has been given to the Toledo Museum of Art.]

Maybe it isn't so visible but it's just sort of been divided into a lot of little compartments, if you want to call it that. There are all kinds of textile groups, like study groups all over the country. There are groups just interested in ethnic textiles and textile history. Others, I think grew

out of the hand weavers guilds. They just study weaves that use more than eight harnesses. And then there's a group called Ars Textrina and they have a conference every year. It's a group of people who come together and read papers on any phase of textiles.

Nathan: I see. So, these are more or less research papers?

Sekimachi: These are research papers.

Nathan: What happens to those papers?

Sekimachi: They do get published. I think this is a group in Canada, but they meet here in the States. The last one met at Purdue University when the Midwest Weavers Conference was meeting there too.

But then, of course, there are the people who are doing lacework, embroidery. [There's a big Embroiderers Guild now. There's a young woman in Oregon weaving, I think, silk velvet.] And then of course, there are the people who are just doing tapestry weaving, there's a group called the American Tapestry Alliance. Every little aspect of textiles is represented.

Focus on Baskets, Wood, Furniture

Nathan: And are there basket-making groups?

Sekimachi: Oh, the basket makers. Well, the basket, I think, is the big thing right now, besides wood. Wood and furniture. [Galleries and museums are having big basket shows. Museums and collectors are making collections. There are conferences and workshops. I think it all started with Ed Rossbach's books on basketry.] I get thrown in with and get included in some of the basketry shows. Not that I think of my things as baskets but more as bowls but since it's a vessel, you know, if it's a vessel, it could be a basket. [laughter]

Nathan: This is so interesting to hear you describe how it's bursting out. What do you think the consequence of this fragmenting may be?

Sekimachi: I haven't thought about what the consequences will be. But certainly it's still all really fascinating that there are so many people out there interested in these little areas of the so-called textile arts. [Perhaps there's so much work being

done today in all these areas that you have to work harder to find outstanding work.]

Nathan: Is there anything that holds them together, all these special interest groups? Also, is there such a thing as a national style?

Sekimachi: Gosh, I'm not much of a scholar. But all I know is the techniques certainly are universal. Weaving is universal. There's a technique called double-weave pickup. Well, the Finns call it Finn weave. The Mexicans call it Mexican double-weave pickup. And I'm sure the technique was used in other countries, but speaking of another textile technique, which is dyeing, you know the Japanese shibori and the boumaki.

It's where you wrap your silk onto a stick and then you crush it together and you wrap it. Then you place this pole with the silk wrapping into the dye bath.

Nathan: Does the dye take evenly or is some of it sort of a resist?

Sekimachi: It's a resist. Yes because where it's compressed, the dye doesn't penetrate where it's wrapped. There are so many of the ikat techniques, well you find, certainly tie-dyeing in India, probably Indonesia. And of course, ikat is in India, Indonesia, Japan.

Nathan: Would you say that if you looked at two pieces of something done on a loom, would it be possible to say this was done in Japan and this was done in the United States or Finland or somewhere else if the technique was the same?

Sekimachi: Maybe there was at one time. I haven't been looking at textiles from, for instance, the Scandinavian countries recently, but certainly at one time, you knew that this runner was from Sweden. There was something, maybe fresh and clean and crisp about the things of so-called Scandinavian design and certainly if it were a Japanese kimono you knew it was Japanese.

I'm thinking about the contemporary basket makers. The Japanese have a way of just picking up ideas. [laughter] The young people over there, my gosh, they're so prolific and they're doing all kinds of vessel forms. There's this one girl, Hisako Sekijima, who has studied with John McQueen. She's doing some beautiful baskets using all kinds of materials but I wouldn't say that her things necessarily were Japanese.

Works by Fellow Artists

Nathan: Do you feel that what you have seen of other artists' work, let's say other than Trude's, had some influence on the way you either select materials or decide on the technique?

Sekimachi: I really love the work of Lenore Tawney. I guess it's because she uses linen, which is my favorite material. And of course she did those marvelous kings and queens. She uses a gauze technique.

Nathan: You're gesturing. These are large?

Sekimachi: These are large and they took on forms almost like a mummy, the outline of a mummy. Also a lot of her things were either all natural or maybe natural and black. Maybe not more recently, but all the while she has been doing collages. These are boxes and I just love them. She lived on the beach, I can't remember where, maybe it was on Fire Island, but she would collect bones and shells and bird eggs. Then she would put them all together into a collage or assemblage.

Nathan: It was shaped like a box?

Sekimachi: It would actually be in a box. Anyway, I really love these things. I also like the work of, is it Joseph Cornell? He does collages and puts fascinating combinations, using, I guess, things he finds in nature together.

Then Lenore Tawney's done some drawings where she would make lines on graph paper using geometric shapes. I know that one was lines that look almost like threads crossing each other. I think I read somewhere that she did these after she had seen a Jacquard loom. You know, on a Jacquard loom you have all these threads coming down from a superstructure mounted on the top of the loom. So, apparently that inspired her to draw all these lines, and again, it's a very simple thing but very beautiful.

Then I do love Peter Collingwood. And again, maybe it's because Peter works mainly in linen, especially in these, he calls macro-gauzes. I have two of these and all I remember is Lenore Tawney did visit me one time. She sat right over there on the sofa. She looked up at Peter's piece on that wall, then looked at this one and she said, "He copied me." [laughter] This is Peter's own gauze technique, but on a much bigger scale than Lenore ever worked. I mean, hers are delicate and fine.

Nathan: What a nice moment. [laughter]

Sekimachi: Yes.

"Kay's Folly," and Computer-Aided Looms

Nathan: Have you ever worked on a Jacquard loom?

Sekimachi: No, I have not. I do have a forty-harness dobby, which I call "Kay's folly." Jim Ahrens built it and it was his first dobby loom; he built it during the war. Actually, it should go into a loom museum because it really is, well, unique, but it's obsolete because we now have the AVL Compu-dobby. That's a loom Jim Ahrens helped design and it's being built up in Chico. It's a computer-aided loom. All you have to do is type in your pattern and you don't have to do this laborious pegging by hand.

So, my poor little loom is obsolete. When I got it, my friend Miriam Leefe had it and her husband finally told her after twenty years, "Either the loom goes, or I go." So, she called me up and said, "Kay, if you still are interested in my loom, it's yours." And so, it came to me. Jim Ahrens came over and helped me put it together and we got it to work. I must say, it is fun to operate. But, again, it is so time consuming. I did a series of samplers and I found them all interesting but I couldn't zero in on any one thing. That's when paper bowls started. I was resting one day and I thought, "Isn't there something I could do that goes fast?" [laughter] I remembered my linen thrums and the Stitch Witchery I had and just found myself fusing a bowl together, and so that's how it came about.

Nathan: I see. How do you respond to the computer-aided loom? How does that feel to use?

Sekimachi: I'm so bad mechanically that I don't even want an answering machine. I don't think I want any part of one. Although today, if you're teaching, I think it's absolutely necessary to know about the computer-aided loom. I'm sure wonderful things can be done on it, fascinating things. But, I don't know. Maybe I feel too old to even try.

X FURTHER COMMENTS ON EXHIBITS

Nathan: You have been invited to some very prestigious shows. I was thinking of, for example, the "Eloquent Object" in Kyoto and Tokyo '89 to '90.

Sekimachi: Yes.

Nathan: Did you want to say anything about what that did for you or how you approached it?

Sekimachi: Actually, there've been so many shows.

"Objects USA" (1970)

Nathan: If you'd rather, you could select those that seem of greatest importance to you.

Sekimachi: All right. Maybe I'll just start earlier than "Eloquent Object."

In 1970, for the Johnson Wax Collection, Sam Johnson had Lee Nordness put together an exhibition--

[telephone interruption]

Sekimachi: --and it was called "Objects USA." It opened in New York at the American Craft Museum, and then it toured the country and it did come to the Oakland Museum. I have a feeling that maybe this exhibition and the book that accompanied it was, I don't know whether to say it was a breakthrough, but it certainly gave crafts more validity. I think maybe people began to take crafts more seriously. Because certainly, after "Objects USA," there were a whole bunch of shows, and I could only talk about

the textile exhibitions because those are the ones I participated in.

"Wall Hangings" (1968)

Sekimachi: Okay, for textiles I've got to take that back. In 1968, as I mentioned earlier, Jack Larsen and Mildred Constantine put together a show that took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It was called "Wall Hangings." It brought Magdalena Abakanowicz and maybe it was Jagoda Buic to this country. Now I'm looking through the catalog but I see, well, it has Gunta Stölzl who was at the Bauhaus, and a Dutch weaver, among other European weavers. It did bring their work over and so I would say this probably was a very important exhibition. Chances are, if I were outgoing, I probably should have gone to the opening.

Nathan: Were you involved in that?

Sekimachi: Yes, yes, I was. And I showed one of my monofilament hangings. It's a 1967 piece.

Nathan: This is black monofilament?

Sekimachi: Black monofilament. So, I think this would be the major exhibition to bring together (I guess, if you want to call it that) the so-called important weavers working in Europe and in the States. This started off a whole group of exhibitions and I must say, it seemed to me that the same group of people were in all of these shows. That's when I was showing my monofilament hangings and just the monofilament hangings. Well, I guess that's what I was mainly working on. They went to Lausanne, they went to New Zealand, to Japan.

Then all around this country people were having what they call three-dimensional weavings or three-dimensional fiber art. I think most people were interested, or the curators were interested, in these things because the flat tapestries had sort of gone out of vogue. I would say, for about a ten-year period, it was just these three-dimensional pieces that were shown in the so-called important textile exhibitions.

Nathan: Did you have different pieces for each exhibition?

Sekimachi: Sometimes I know I sent the same things because I don't think I did that many monofilament pieces. Maybe if I did twenty-five...

Nathan: Seems like a lot.

Sekimachi: Ten years is a long time and if my production were rated, I felt I should have been producing more. But at that time it was very slow going because there wasn't a computer that you could attach to a loom. I was telling my friend Sheila O'Hara that I spent more time under the loom changing the tie-ups. You're in an awkward position doing this very awkward maneuver. And so I was under the loom half the time. But now, apparently the tie-up changes are just nothing. So, in that sense, I feel like maybe for my things, I should be doing them today where the work wouldn't be so laborious.

Nathan: Do people submit your name to a committee that is making up the collection of what will be shown? How does your name get found?

Sekimachi: I have a feeling that, is snow-balling the word? For instance, a curator would see the wall-hangings exhibition and go home and say, "I want to put on a show similar to this." So, you would get a letter inviting you and that's how it happened.

Nathan: I wonder whether fiber artists had agents or people who would seek to make sure that the work gets seen.

Sekimachi: I know a lot of people do have agents today. Or maybe they did in those days, too, but somehow I just couldn't. I like to work alone and I guess I like to do everything myself, and so this is the reason why I couldn't think of having an agent. I know today, it takes a lot of the work away, and certainly an agent would see that your work was seen, you had exposure. I got invited to these shows because I was doing what I was doing, and that's what people were looking for.

Monofilaments, Lee Nordness Galleries (1970)

Sekimachi: All I know is before the three-dimensional fiber art exhibitions began, I did have a show at Lee Nordness Galleries in New York, and this was in 1970. It was just of my monofilament hangings. For sure I didn't know anything about how to go about getting publicity. I didn't know whom to invite. In fact, if I were smart, I would have invited Jack Larsen to the opening, but it didn't dawn on me that I should be doing these things. I think I was so excited about the fact that I was actually going to go to the opening, make this trip to New York, that that was the only thing that concerned me. I

didn't think that if you were smart about wanting to make sales that you would pursue these other things.

So I know I made one sale out of the show. I think that it was made to a person in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His name came up recently because, I'm assuming that it's the same person. He is an architect and he, I think, designed some buildings for a famous collector in Pennsylvania. But I'm just assuming. I'm not positive. I made one sale and I think maybe Lee Nordness bought another piece, so maybe I sold two pieces out of that show. I think maybe in the 1970s, it was still too new.

Collections and Requests

Sekimachi: So, maybe after "Objects USA" when actually all these things were bought by the Johnson's Wax people and put into the Johnson Wax Collection, I think I began to make more sales with the monofilament pieces. It was around that time the Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C. got started, and for their opening exhibition they wanted a monofilament piece. And so it was the piece that is hanging in our retrospective in Palo Alto that is the one they bought, and it was in their inaugural exhibition. I'm not sure exactly what date that was. But slowly these pieces began to be acquired by museums. As I said, actually, I've got more requests, people asking me, "Kay, do you have any monofilament pieces?"

Nathan: Do you?

Sekimachi: I do have. I'm digging them out of the attic. I've got one that was in the attic that's a 1964 piece. There are actually several collectors who are interested in it but I don't know whether I want to part with it because I have parted with a lot of things that I wish I hadn't. I don't know whether I even want to talk about it but there are a number of people, collectors, asking me and so, as I said before, I'm thinking, "Well, maybe I should pick up on the monofilament hangings and just get Sheila O'Hara to weave them for me." So, it's still just in my head.

Nathan: At this point are there other things that call to you more, out of your own preference?

Sekimachi: Yes. I think the last things I did were those miniature baskets and I'm still interested in doing a few more of those.

Nathan: Are you talking about the ones that had a pattern on the lid and a pattern inside, those tiny ones?

Sekimachi: I'm talking about the tiny ones that were done in the technique called split-ply twining. They are really miniatures.

The Hand and the Spirit Gallery (1993)

Nathan: Did you want to say more about the little baskets?

Sekimachi: Yes. I know I'm really ready for a rest and yet I can't really rest because, as I mentioned, I am in a show at The Hand and the Spirit, the Joanne Rapp gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona. This opens on November 4. So, it's coming up right away. It's a three-person show with my friend June Schwarcz and a potter, Anne Hirondelle.

It turns out we are going to the opening and so if we're going to show up for the opening I do want to have a few good things. I've been, just in the last few days, madly working, trying to make at least a few good paper bowls.

Nathan: Are you asked for certain things? Do people say "I want monofilament" or "I would like some of your bowls," or "I would like your baskets"?

Sekimachi: At a gallery that is involved with a shop, they just sort of let you send whatever you want. I chose to send six paper bowls and six of the kiriwood baskets, so, anyway, I would like to have some good ones.

Volcano Art Center (Future)

Sekimachi: After Christmas we will go over to the Big Island again. Before we left the Big Island in January Bob and I were asked to have a show at the Volcano Art Center. So, for that one, it's just going to be bowls because they're much faster for me to do and at this point I feel like I need a rest.

Nathan: I can understand that. When you were standing in that show at the Palo Alto center for four hours while people came thronging

up, I felt for you, although you looked happy. But it's tiring.

Sekimachi: It's very tiring. It's very exhausting. But anyway, I'm looking forward to Hawaii because I can take my basket full of materials and my crochet hook and make a few of the miniature baskets. I could also walk on the beach and collect sea shells.

Katy Gingrass Gallery, and Berkeley Art Center (Future)

Nathan: You do seem to have a lot of shows coming up. Does it seem like a lot to you?

Sekimachi: Actually, this year there were a lot of shows. Next year, actually, our calendar is pretty open right at this time. But as soon as you say that, it begins to get filled up; but since this year was the Year of American Crafts, it has been a busy time. In fact, Bob and I are both in a show at the Katy Gingrass Gallery in Milwaukee. And then there will be a show of the work of artists who are influenced by Japan and that will be at the Berkeley Art Center, and that will open on December 5 right here in Berkeley.

All I know is our retrospective is going to travel for two years and now I think it's going not just to four venues but to five. I think Tampa, Florida has agreed to take it and so the thought of going to all these venues makes me tired. [laughter]

Nathan: Well, at least you'll get a chance to look at your things even if you can't take them home with you.

More on "Marriage in Form" (1993)

Sekimachi: Anyway, it's really wonderful for the Palo Alto Cultural Center because they did a fine job of putting this ("Marriage in Form") show together. I know that Signe Mayfield is on a real high because this past weekend Lloyd Herman was here to give the keynote address at a symposium in San Francisco. He mentioned our exhibition and said that it was not to be missed. Anyway, she's feeling very good about the whole thing.

Nathan: Well, indeed she should. It had an elegance about it that I felt really displayed the work. What was the symposium?

Sekimachi: The symposium title was "Cultural Pluralism." In some ways I think I should have gone just to support the three museums that were sponsoring this. It was their big show and their big event for the year. But anyway, I wanted to get some work done, so I didn't go and instead we went to the California College of Arts and Crafts where they had a special reception for Lloyd Herman, and he gave a lecture there. I have a feeling that he gave the same lecture at Fort Mason and so maybe it was a good thing we weren't at Fort Mason. But we did get a chance to see him, and on Friday night he told us that from the airport he went right down to Palo Alto because he had heard about the show. We were pleased that he really made an effort to see it.

Nathan: You explained very beautifully what some of the early shows meant. Were there any others that were of significant importance that you care to talk about?

"Eloquent Object" (1987)

Sekimachi: You mentioned the "Eloquent Object," which happened in 1987. Then it did travel to Japan and it was a beautiful exhibition, multi-media, and installed beautifully at the Philbrook in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Bob and I did go for the opening. I would say there were just a handful of craftsmen and a group of collectors. Anyway, they treated us royally, gave us a tour of Tulsa and had a wonderful huge after-the-opening dinner party. I think all of Tulsa must have come out for it. Then Marcia Manhart and her husband, Tom, had an elegant brunch for all of us. It was done absolutely beautifully.

Anyway, along with the show, they produced a beautiful book. I know that Mary Lee Hu in Seattle said that when she got the book, she decided that she just had to go to the opening because she was so impressed by the essays in it. Actually, it is an elegant book.

Nathan: What did you have in the show?

Sekimachi: They borrowed an old monofilament hanging, one of the first that I did. For this exhibition, Tom and Marcia traveled the country, you know, seeking out work. They specifically wanted this monofilament hanging. It was in Brooklyn, New York, and

they contacted Kenneth Oberman who was the owner of this piece and went to see him, and decided they wanted it. They had a huge crate built for it.

I remember I wanted to see the piece because it was an early piece and I wanted to do a little work on it. So, they had it shipped to me and they even paid me for doing a little restoration. Anyway, it was done, I guess what you call "right." I'm sure they spent a lot of money on it, for sure. In fact, this crate was big enough for several monofilament hangings. Bob said, "Gosh, it's so big," that he was going to put in his bowl, which was going into the exhibition. He built a little section into this crate. He said, "I'm not going to ship mine separately, because why have them spend extra money?" And so that's exactly what he did. [laughter]

I can't remember the name of the company, but they got it and before they screwed up the box, they called me up to say, "You know there's a wooden bowl in the box?" And I said, "Yes, that's going to the show, too." [laughter]

Nathan: What a good story. Did that mean that the hanging travels at full length?

Sekimachi: At full length.

Nathan: Would it have been a bad idea to try to fold it or to roll it? Would that have harmed it?

Sekimachi: Yes. Actually, they certainly did it right, like I would have packed it, where it was sort of suspended in a crate, as though it were hanging in an exhibition.

Nathan: And it was marked "This side up"?

Sekimachi: Hopefully it went right side up all the way, but they had it secured so that even if it was turned upside down, it wouldn't move.

Life Span of Materials

Nathan: Interesting. Is monofilament brittle?

Sekimachi: It is brittle, it's wiry, but it is strong. It is very strong. Actually, when I was first doing them, I didn't have money and so I used any materials that came to me. I know that in this

box of samples that were sent to me there was one material called Tynex. It came from the box from du Pont and it's the material that they use to make paintbrushes. It was black. I made a monofilament hanging, maybe I made two out of this material and by golly after, was it ten years, the material just disintegrated.

Nathan: That's a shock.

Sekimachi: Really. I'm sure it was a shock to my friend who owned the piece because when she took it down it just fell apart. And so that particular material, I'm sure wasn't nylon. I don't know what materials actually went into the product, but certainly it wasn't made to last. It just had a life of, well, ten years. There are a lot of plastic materials, you know like the webbing that's used for the outdoor furniture that falls apart after one season.

Nathan: It's a horrid thought that maybe it's designed to do that. Of course that's not what you want for an art piece. Weren't you lucky that the nylon monofilament was different, or maybe you knew what the other monofilament was and knew it would destruct.

Sekimachi: No, I really did not. I do remember after doing a number of these, writing to du Pont and asking about what the life of nylon monofilament fishing line would be. I was dyeing the black and so I wanted to know whether boiling it would harm it in any way. I got positive answers to all my questions and decided what I was doing was okay. Anyway, I'm just happily surprised that the material is lasting so long, and for the most part holding its shape as well as it's doing. Actually, last week we were at a gathering and there were three fiber artists from Japan. This young woman couldn't believe that my monofilament pieces dated back to the early 1960s, because she said her pieces only lasted a year.

Nathan: Oh, how sad. What did she use as a material?

Sekimachi: I don't know. From seeing the photograph (I should have asked her what material), but I presumed it was just cotton. I'm not sure. Her work was three-dimensional and it was sort of gathered and I presumed that maybe those gathers just came out. She said they stayed in that shape for about a year. And so she really wanted to talk to me. She said she had a lot of questions, and of course my Japanese had gotten so bad and I think a lot of the Japanese are shy about using English. So, we really didn't communicate that well.

Nathan: Poor thing. So much work and so little longevity.

Sekimachi: Yes. But I think it's true. A lot of work may be done today that, well the work gets tired after so many years. Certainly my paper sculptures--

Nathan: The tall ones I see standing?

Sekimachi: Yes. They're very delicate and so I tell people I really do those for myself. I like them and that's enough.

Nathan: I was thinking of the kiriwood boxes. How do you think their longevity will be?

Sekimachi: I hope the kiriwood will last longer. Well, actually I must say paper lasts pretty long. In fact, washi in Japan, they say that if it's made out of good material that it gets whiter as the years pass, that it doesn't yellow, the way our newsprint yellows immediately. And of course, works on paper have lasted years and years. So, hopefully the paper bowls will last. I started in 1982 and I still have examples of my work from that period. So far they are holding up.

Nathan: Does the, whatever the glue substance is, does that help to preserve them?

Sekimachi: I am using wallpaper paste and of course some people say, "Why don't you use archival paste?" But I figured that wallpaper sticks and has lasted on walls for years and so I'm just hoping that that will hold true with my paper bowls and that they will last.

I would say mainly it's dust from the air that causes the most problems. And not just with paper bowls but with all wall hangings and tapestries. Dust collects on them. And so for my precious pieces, I use plexi-boxes to keep them in because it saves me from dusting them. But I know that a lot of people are opposed to putting things under plexi. But certainly if you want to preserve a print, you've got to put it under glass.

Nathan: Why do they object to the plexi-glass?

Sekimachi: I really don't know. I should just ask someone who says they don't like plexi.

Nathan: You're not going to breathe on it or touch it anyway. Maybe there's some aesthetic problem there.

Sekimachi: Maybe if they use plexi for one thing, they feel they have to cover everything. But I'm not sure why. For me it's preservation. I feel that the things would keep better.

Nathan: Some of the split-ply twining looks so sturdy. Are you concerned about whether those are going to get tired?

Sekimachi: Okay, some of them are sturdy, especially the ones where I used a very dense weave or made a very dense basket. They are sturdy. But the ones where I left a lot of threads or had open areas, they tend to be more fragile because the threads can move. I pondered over, "Should I glue them so that they stay in place or shall I just let them be and if the threads do fall a little bit, should I just take my crochet hook and push them back up?" So, I'm still pondering that.

Nathan: It's interesting that you mention the crochet hook. That seems like such a nice old-time thing to use when you're getting away from all of the computers and you're there with your crochet hook. [laughter] So, when you go to Hawaii and you have your materials and your crochet hook, what sort of work will you be doing?

Sekimachi: I'll be doing just a few more miniature baskets and by few, if I come home with one, I'll be happy.

Nathan: Do you have any feeling about keeping your fingers limbered? When Jane Sauer visited here, she said she had brought basketry-weaving materials to keep her fingers limber. Do you do anything like that?

Sekimachi: No, I don't. Except that I do know that I wake up in the mornings with my fingers a little stiff, and so maybe it's beginning arthritis. It could very well be because my older sister does have crooked fingers and it's arthritis. But it's just beginning.

Nathan: Actually, I wasn't even thinking of arthritis because I think Jane didn't have that problem, but it was like an athlete who is used to exercise. So, there may be another benefit in taking the work with you.

"Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical"

Nathan: Were there any other of the big shows that seemed important? I know I've asked you this probably more often than I should but I wanted you to have a chance to comment.

Sekimachi: Well, actually there is. The American Craft Museum did get a brand new building. This was, I think, completed in 1986. So, they had a big exhibition which was called "Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical." I had two of my paper bowls in it. They're my favorite forms and I'm still using the form because I feel that it works.

Anyway, there was a book that went with the exhibition. And then, the exhibition traveled all throughout Europe. So, that was wonderful exposure for a lot of American craftsmen. Now, I can't remember whether it traveled in this country or not but it certainly went on a grand tour of Europe. So, that would be a very big show.

Nathan: Are there people in Europe who are interested in American crafts and collecting?

Sekimachi: I'm sure there are. Well, I'm not sure, but there are European collectors and I do know that Camille Cook, who founded Friends of Fiber Art, is sort of the champion of fiber art right at the moment, and taking small groups to tour exhibitions in Europe and visiting collectors and artists in Europe. She did make the comment that in Europe, the only American fiber artist that they really know is Lia Cook. So, maybe they've got to be educated. [laughter]

Nathan: There is a lot they're missing.

Aspects of Lausanne Biennal (1973)

Sekimachi: Yes, there's a lot. Of course, the Lausanne Biennal certainly introduced the Americans. And of course, they introduced a lot of the Japanese because the Japanese may be more prominent than the Americans in the Biennales now. All I know is the one and only Biennal that I was in (was it the sixth in 1973?). I had my best and last monofilament hanging in it and it was bought. It was the first piece, I understand the first piece to sell. I think chances are it was the first piece because it probably was the most inexpensive piece.

Nathan: There may have been other reasons, too.

Sekimachi: Well, anyway this Gilbert Baechtold, who is a lawyer in Lausanne, purchased it. All I remember is being so annoyed afterwards because he wanted it signed and so being a sculptural piece and being a see-through piece, I suggested maybe just a little tiny plaque with my name on it. But anyway, we had a lot of correspondence back and forth, back and forth until we finally settled on my embroidering my name on a little tiny silk ribbon. I told him attach it to it in an inconspicuous spot. I think I might still have a standing invitation from Mr. Baechtold because he said if I should ever come to Lausanne that it was almost a demand that I visit him. [laughter]

[telephone interruption]

Sekimachi: But, gosh that's twenty years ago. I'm glad it probably is in a fine collection. And later on there was photograph of the piece in *Connoisseur* magazine, I guess the *French Connoisseur* and it looked very good, so I was very pleased to see that happen.

Nathan: That is rewarding. Your work is finding its way into fine collections for good reason. Thank you for the clarity of your story and for demonstrating how an artist, a weaver, raises questions and solves them to produce her unique art.

Transcribed by Melanie Schow
Final Typed by Shannon Page

APPENDICES--Kay Sekimachi

KAY SEKIMACHI
2145 Oregon Street
Berkeley, California 94705

Studio & Home
(415) 843-7954

Birthplace: San Francisco, California, 1926

Education: Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Liberty ME, Summer, 1956

California College of Arts & Crafts, Oakland CA, 1946-1949; Summer, 1954 & 1955

Teaching: Arrowmont School of Arts & Crafts, Gatlinburg TN, 1987

Mendocino Art Center, Apprenticeship Program, Mendocino CA, 1987

University of Washington, Seattle WA, Summer, 1985

Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle ME, 1983

Seattle Pacific College, Seattle WA, Summer, 1976

Anderson Valley Ranch, Snowmass CO, Summer, 1976

San Jose State University, San Jose CA, Summer, 1975

University of California, Los Angeles CA, Summer, 1975

California College of Arts & Crafts, Oakland CA, Summer, 1956, 1959, 1960, & 1961; Spring, 1962; Fall, 1975

Berkeley Adult School, Berkeley CA, 1964 to 1972

Adult Division, San Francisco Community College, San Francisco CA, 1965 to 1988

Sonoma State College, Mendocino Art Center, Mendocino CA, Summer, 1964

Workshops & slide lectures: Paper Symposium, Mendocino Art Center, Mendocino CA, 1986

Fresno Art Center, Fresno CA, 1986

Sitka Center for Art & Ecology, Otis OR, 1985

University of Washington, Seattle WA, 1984

The Evergreen State College, Olympia WA, 1984

Sacramento Center for the Textile Arts, Sacramento CA, 1983

Intermountain Weavers Conference, Ft. Lewis College, Durango CO, 1983

Workshops & slide lectures (cont.):

Bunka Gakuin, Tokyo Japan, 1977

Northern California Handweavers Conference, Sacramento CA, 1982

Santa Fe Textile Workshops, Santa Fe NM, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1981 & 1982

Rhode Island School of Design, Providence RI, 1980

Boston University Program in Artisanry, Boston MA, 1980

Masters Seminars, Richmond Art Center, Richmond CA, 1978

Honolulu Weavers Guild, Honolulu HI, 1973

San Diego Weavers Guild, San Diego CA, 1973

Selected one & two person exhibitions:

"FORMS OF GRACE" KAY SEKIMACHI ~ BOB STOCKSDALE BEELKE GALLERY, PURDUE UNIV. LAFAYETTE IN 1991

"INTERSECTIONS" EMILY DUBOIS ~ KAY SEKIMACHI. UNION GALLERY, PURDUE UNIV. 1991

"Three Masters: Mary Walker Phillips, Kay Sekimachi, Bob Stocksdale," California Crafts Museum, San Francisco CA, 1988

Kay Sekimachi & Bob Stocksdale, Nikko Gallery, Waimea, HI, 1987

Kay Sekimachi & Bob Stocksdale, Contemporary Fine Art Gallery, Tokyo Japan, 1985

"Vessels," Kay Sekimachi & Bob Stocksdale, Contemporary Crafts Gallery, Portland OR, 1985

"Side by Side," Kay Sekimachi & Bob Stocksdale, Contemporary Artisans Gallery, San Francisco CA, 1983

Kiyomi Iwata & Kay Sekimachi, Gayle Willson Gallery, Southhampton, Long Island NY, 1983

"New Work," Textiles by Design, Berkeley CA, 1983

"Misc. Matter," Fiberworks, Berkeley CA, 1982

"Parallel Views: Kay Sekimachi & Nancy Selvin," California Craft Museum, Palo Alto CA, 1982

Jenny Lind & Kay Sekimachi, Clay/Fiber Gallery, Taos NM, 1975

Pacific Basin Textile Arts, Berkeley CA, 1974

Kay Sekimachi & Bob Stocksdale, Contemporary Crafts Gallery, Portland OR, 1973

Anneberg Gallery, San Francisco CA, 1971

Lee Nordness Galleries, New York NY, 1970

Selected one & two person exhibitions: (cont.)

Galeria del Sol, Santa Barbara CA, 1968

College of the Holy Names, Oakland CA, 1965

"INTIMATE + INTENSE" SMALL FIBER STRUCTURES, THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS, MN

Selected group exhibitions:

"IN OUR HANDS" AN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION, NAGOYA, JAPAN, 1991

The Stocksdales, Helen Winnemore Gallery, Columbus OH, 1990

Meeting Ground: Contemporary Textile Forms, The Forum, St. Louis MO, 1990

Strength and Diversity: Japanese-American Women 1885-1990, The Oakland Museum, 1990

Craft Today, USA, Traveling Exhibition, Europe, 1989-1992

The Eloquent Object, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto and Tokyo Japan, 1989-1990

Vessels, Miller/Brown Gallery, San Francisco CA, 1988 & 1989

Paper Dimension, Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley CA, 1989

Artful Object, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne IN, 1989

Fiber Concepts, Art Museum, Arizona State University, Tempe AZ, 1989

Splendid Forms, Bellas Artes, Santa Fe NM, 1988

The Eloquent Object, The Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa OK, 1987

Six Decades of American Fiber, Oregon Historical Society, Portland OR, 1987

Paper '88, Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan WI, 1987

Japanese American Craft Invitational, Morikami Museum, Delray Beach FL, 1987

The Modern Basket, A Redefinition, Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Pittsburgh PA, 1987

Fiber R/Evolution, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee WI, 1986

Poetry of the Physical, American Craft Museum, New York NY, 1986

Fiber Images, LeHigh University, Bethlehem PA, 1985

Japanese-American Women Artists: Fiber & Metal, The Evergreen State College, Olympia WA, 1984

Splendid Bowls, Arizona State University, Tempe AZ, 1984

Selected group exhibitions (cont.):

Fiber Directions, Brunnier Gallery, Iowa State University, Ames IA, 1982

Basketry: Tradition in New Form, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston MA, 1982

The Art Fabric: Mainstream, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco CA, 1981-1983

Old Traditions/New Directions, The Textile Museum, Washington DC, 1981

4th Triennale, Lodz '81, The Central Museum of Textiles, Lodz Poland, 1981

International Exhibition of Miniature Textiles, British Crafts Centre, London England, 1974, 1976, 1978 & 1980

Fiber as Art, Design Center Phillipines, Manila, 1980

Fiber as Art: Americas & Japan, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto & Tokyo Japan, 1977-1978

Three Dimensional Fibre, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth New Zealand, 1974

6th Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie, Lausanne Switzerland, 1973

Woven Structures, Camden Art Centre, London England, 1972

Deliberate Entanglements, University of California, Los Angeles CA, 1971

Wall Hangings, Museum of Modern Art, New York NY, 1968

Modern American Wall Hangings, Victoria & Albert Museum, London England, 1962-1963

Awards:

Craftsmen's Fellowship Grant, National Endowment for the Arts, 1974

Gold Key Award, National Home Fashions League, Inc., 1962

California Craftsmen's Biennial, Oakland Art Museum, 1961

San Francisco Art Festival, 1956, 1960, 1961 & 1972

P. Orman Ray Memorial Award, Richmond Art Center, 1960

Fiber, Clay & Metal, St. Paul MN, 1953

Designer-Craftsmen USA, Brooklyn NY, 1953

California State Fair, Sacramento CA, 1952, 1954 & 1955

Collections: Japan Air Lines, San Francisco

The Oakland Museum, Oakland

St. Paul Art Center, St. Paul

Magnani Memorial Collection, San Francisco State University

San Francisco Art Commission

Illinois State University, Normal IL

American Crafts Museum, New York

Dreyfus Fund Collection, New York

Metromedia Collection, Los Angeles

Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

The Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh

Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles

Mathews Center, Arizona State University, Tempe

The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

Erie Art Museum, Erie, PA

Musée Des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, France

THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS, MINNEAPOLIS, MI

THE CHARLES WUSTUM MUSEUM OF ART, RACINE, WI

Selected publications:

The Tactile Vessel, New Basket Forms, Erie Art Museum, 1989

Thomas, Michel. L'ART TEXTILE, Albert Skira, October, 1985

Levine, Melinda. PARALLEL VIEWS: KAY SEKIMACHI AND NANCY SELVIN, American Craft, April/May, 1982

Talley, Charles. KAY SEKIMACHI: SUCCESSFUL ON HER OWN TERMS, Fiberarts, September/October, 1982

Constantine, Mildred/Larsen, Jack Lenor, THE ART FABRIC: MAINSTREAM, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1980

Waller, Irene, TEXTILE SCULPTURES, London, Studio Vista, 1977

Hall, Julie, TRADITION AND CHANGE: THE NEW AMERICAN CRAFTSMAN, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1977

Constantine, Mildred/Larsen, Jack Lenor, BEYOND CRAFT: THE ART FABRIC, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1973

Selected publications: (cont.)

Kuenzi, Andre, LA NOUVELLE TAPISSERIE, Geneve, Les Editions de Bonvent, 1973

Nordness, Lee, OBJECTS: USA, New York, Viking Press, 1970

Kaufman, Ruth, THE NEW AMERICAN TAPESTRY, New York, Reinhold Book Corporation, 1968

Uchida, Yoshiko, KAY SEKIMACHI, Crafts Horizons, May/June, 1959

Published essay:

TRUDE REMEMBERED, The Tapestries of Trude Guermonprez, The Oakland Museum, 1982

Honors:

Elected to the Academy of Fellows of the American Crafts Council, 1985

Honorary Member, Baulines Craftsmen's Guild

1992 EXHIBITIONS: INTIMATE + INTENSE: SMALL FIBER STRUCTURES
THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

2 PERSON SHOW: K.S. + B.S. BROWN/GROTTA GALLERY, WILTON CT.

OUTE SKIN/INNER SPACE, PRO ARTS, ST LOUIS, MO. 1992

EMISON GALLERY/DE PAUW UNIV.
GREEN CASTLE, IN. 1993

CHARLES NUSTUM MUSEUM, RACINE, WI. 1993

1993 SMALL WORKS IN FIBER, THE MILDRED CONSTANTINE COLLECTION
THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

PACIFIC RIM, CALIF. CRAFT MUSEUM, SAN FRANCISCO

HEIRLOOMS OF THE FUTURE, MASTERWORKS OF WEST COAST AMERICAN DESIGNER/CRAFTSMEN
MINGEI INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM, LA JOLLA, CA 8/21

"MARRIAGE IN FORM" KAY SEKIMACHI + BOB STOCKSDALE RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION, PALO ALTO CULTURAL CENTER, PALO ALTO, OPENING 9/26

THE HAND + THE SPIRIT, SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA 11/93

KAY SEKIMACHI

by YOSHIKO UCHIDA

WHEN Kay Sekimachi bought her first loom some ten years ago, she had no idea at all how to go about using it. She had studied painting, design and silk screening at Oakland's California College of Arts and Crafts, but it wasn't until she settled down to grapple with the problem of earning a living that she decided to learn to weave.

"I had no training at all when I bought the loom," Kay says. "I simply plunged right in."

Of course the lessons came, and they were followed by a six months' apprenticeship at Ahrens Studio in Oakland where she perfected her techniques and skills in traditional weaving. It was not until she spent a summer studying with Trude Guermonprez in 1954, however, that Kay discovered the full potential both of herself and her craft.

"Until then I was simply using accepted techniques and relying on books and traditional patterns," Kay says. After that summer she was liberated. She realized what she could do on her own and began to create wall hangings. In them she has achieved a personal statement of rare integrity.

Kay Sekimachi's work reflects a forthright approach to her craft and its techniques. A recent tapestry, for example, is composed of numerous angular planes of color, delineated quite candidly with the slit technique. In several other hangings, she has combined warp brocade with geometric motifs, the design more or less deriving from the technique itself. She has used warp brocade in many creative and imaginative ways, as in the casement cloth she designed for Jack Lenor Larsen in which she cut the ends of the warp float to form an overall fringe pattern that added a touch of whimsy to the subdued quality of natural linen.

It is typical of Kay Sekimachi to attempt an honest expression even of something as hazardous as metallics. "So often metallic threads are thrown in only for glamour or sparkle," she says. "I wanted to try something in which the material could speak for itself." She therefore executed a hanging in a double weave pick-up, using a gold and silver metallic background for a pattern of alternating black slub linen squares.

For lengths, Kay uses a great deal of natural linen and sometimes deliberately limits herself to one or two materials in a given piece of work to emphasize a particular physical characteristic of the fiber. In her tapestries, however, she uses a variety of materials, including a good deal of jute, wool and linen. She makes preliminary color sketches mainly to work out her values and then works rather loosely from a cartoon. "I use traditional tapestry techniques modified for my own personal needs," she states. "Rather than working in rigid color areas and interlocking wefts, I try for a more fluid effect by extra weft inserts and overlapping threads. This enables me to work more rapidly and improvise as the work progresses. In each tapestry I try to achieve a harmonious integration of design, material and technique."

Kay's hangings are not marketed at retail outlets at present, but are either sent to exhibits or sold to individuals. For the past ten years, Kay has derived an income as a designer-producer of silk-screened Christmas cards and this is an aspect of her work which she will have to continue in order to support her creative efforts in weaving.

Kay Sekimachi works in the converted living room of her Berkeley home, a studio dominated by her looms—two counter balance floor looms (20" and 42"), an eight-harness table loom and, her latest addition, an eight-harness jack-type floor loom.

She has made extremely attractive place mat sets for various commercial outlets, and last summer ventured into large-scale commercial production, an experience that taught her many things, but principally, that it is impossible for a handweaver to compete with the machine. The order was for 400 place mats to be executed in three designs and varying colors for one of New York's major department stores. Kay had three months to complete the order, but those were also the months during which she was committed to teach a summer session at California College of Arts and Crafts. When she was able to begin work, she wove 12 mats a day for 40 days. In the end, even her mother had to help her set up the warp. She met her deadline, but computed that she had earned just about 50 cents an hour for all her effort and would have had to charge three times as much as she actually did to make any profit at all. Kay looks back on the experience philosophically, but says quite firmly that she will not attempt it again.

Teaching has proved much more satisfying, and in addition to her work at the California College of Arts and Crafts, Kay has taught a summer group at Lake Almanor and the Town and Country Weavers.

Petite Kay Sekimachi does not like to verbalize, for she seems to work almost intuitively. Her tapestries express all that needs to be said.

Yoshiko Uchida is our Bay Area correspondent.

"AIA Award to Weaver"
ARTWEEK, February 7, 1970

© [illegible]
ARTWEEK
WEST COAST ART NEWS
P.O. BOX 2444
CASTRO VALLEY,
CALIFORNIA 94546
(415) 537-9738
CECILE N. McCANN, EDITOR
Artweek is published by McCann Publishing Co., weekly except July and August. Subscription $5.00/yr. Second class permit applied for at Hayward, California.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Creative weaver, textile artist, and educator, Trude Guermonprez (Mrs. John Elsesser) has been named recipient of the 1970 Craftsmanship Medal by The American Institute of Architects. The Medal is bestowed in recognition of "an individual craftsman for distinguished creative design and execution, where design and hand craftsmanship are inseparable."

Chairman of the Craft Department of the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland since 1960, Miss Guermonprez was born in Austria and received a degree from the College of Arts and Crafts at Halle, Germany, and the Textile School in Berlin. From 1933-47, she served as designer for the weaving studio "Het Paapje," in the Netherlands, before coming to the United States.

Miss Guermonprez served on the faculty of Black Mountain College, North Carolina, and, in 1949, formed a workship with other craftsmen at Pond Farm, Guerneville, Calif. Two years later, she taught at the San Francisco Art Institute, and joined the faculty of the California College of Arts and Crafts in 1954.

Commissions

Her commissions have included the carpets for the "Statendam" lounge of the Holland America Link, Ark curtains for synagogues in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and San Rafael and Los Altos, Calif., and fabrics, rugs, and hangings for private residences. Miss Guermonprez' work has been exhibited at the American Pavilion at the Worlds Fair in Brussels, Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York, and National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington D.C. She had a one-man show at the H.M. de Young Memorial Muesum in San Francisco in 1964, and will have another in 1970.

The author of numerous articles in professional publications and the subject of several others, Miss Guermonprez numbers among her awards the Menlo Textile Award, 1950, San Francisco Women Artist Award, 1951, Purchase Award of the San Francisco Art Festival, 1953 and 1969, California Craftsmen Biennial, 1961 and 1963, and Gold Key Award of the National Homefurnishings League, 1962. Her work is included in permanent museum collections in New York, Oakland, St. Paul, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

A charter member of the Designer Craftsmen of California, Miss Guermonprez was Craftsmen trustee for the Southwest Region to the Board of the American Craftsmen's Council.

Craftsmanship

In naming her recipient of the AIA Craftsmanship Medal, the Jury on Institute Honors commented that she "must be considered in the front rank of weavers in this country. Her work has always concerned itself with excellent craftsmanship, but has gone far beyond craftsmanship in the inventive use of materials and sensitive handling of color and design."

Two other Californians similarly honored were Ernest J. Kump, architect of Palo Alto, whose firm received the Architectural Firm Award, and Barbara Stauffacher Solomaon, San Francisco, who received the Industrial Arts Medal.

Other medalists were R. Buckminster Fuller, Gold Medal; Richard Lippold, New York, Fine Arts Medal; Robert L. Van Nice, Bethesda Maryland, Allied Professions Medal; George Cserna, New York, Architectural Photography; National Park Service/Mission 66, Citation of an Organization; Henry-Russell Hitchcock, New York, Architectural Critics' Medal; and American Broadcasting Companies, Inc., Architectural Critics' Citation.

The Medals will be presented at the Institute's national Convention in Boston, June 21-25, 1970.

Appendix D
Review of Orikomu, 1967
Christian Science Monitor, July 30, 1970

The Japanese have an apparently effortless way of accommodating ancient traditions to new techniques and materials. In some of their commercial products—for instance, an English-style bicycle for the American market—the tradition is confined to matters of exact craftsmanship, and originality of form is set aside.

But in such art as the woven, hanging sculptures of Kay Sekimachi, a Japanese-American from Berkeley, Calif., whose work has recently been shown at the Lee Nordness Galleries in New York, craftsmanship both conditions the form and is illuminated by it.

Miss Sekimachi's medium is nylon monofilament, a tough, translucent synthetic thread often used by fishermen for nets and lines. Though it is relatively intractable as compared with natural fibers, she threads it onto a complex multiple loom and weaves it into panels of various widths, lengths, and patterns. For these panels to become sculpture means in most cases that they curve and billow out and describe space, suspended from one or more nylon threads. As they do so they are susceptible to light and air.

Many of the forms are vaguely human. The smoke-colored "Kumo" (Cloud) shown today takes on its width from cells which are created, not by stitching panels together after they are woven, but by planning their actual intersections as part of the weaving process. A plastic rod near the top and threads running down from each end of it help to keep the shape filled out.

In "Orikomu" (Interlace), black thread is used, the intersections are more on the plane of the panels, and the support at the "waist" is a plastic ring.

LOUIS CHAPIN

Appendix E
Gallery 1, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1975

Craftsmen Exhibit Intriguing Work

By TOM HYSOM

An intriguing, beautifully-turned show featuring hand-worked bowls by Bob Stocksdale and three-dimensional weavings by Kay Sekimachi is on exhibit at Gallery One in Nob Hill Center, 3500 E. Central.

The show will hang until Aug. 24 and gallery hours are Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Art Review

The most outstanding feature of Stocksdale's bowls and platters, created with a number of rare woods from around the world, is their perfect harmony. They are artistically conceived and flawlessly constructed, developing the fullest potential of various wood types.

Stocksdale has approached a traditional craft and elevated it to the realm of fine art. Sensitive interpretations of harmony and form lead to a number of esthetically stimulating creations.

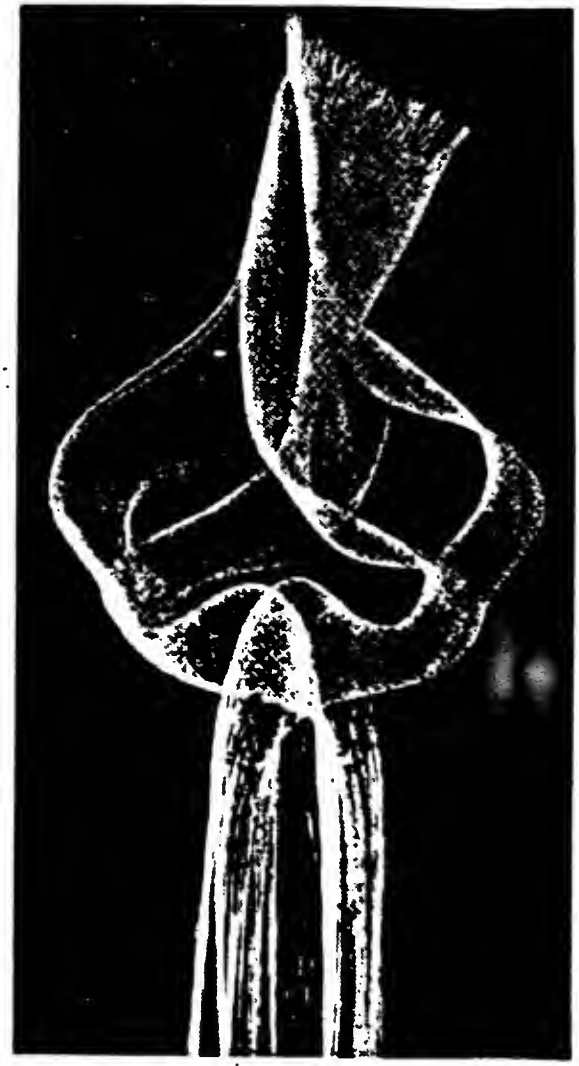
MISS SEKIMACHI seems most successful when utilizing monofilament (a fish-line type of substance. While her linen creations are as technically intricate as those of monofilament, they somehow lack the impact of the latter.

Cardwoven pieces, titled "Kuromono I, II, and III," display extreme drama in their design; while she uses only black in these works, the richness of her ideas prevents any suggestion of starkness.

A number of woven boxes, created on a complex multi-layered loom, may be viewed more as exercises in control than strictly as art works. While the basic idea she employes is interesting and the woven designs clever, they seem to lack purpose or direction — they somehow lack warmth and fail to make a definite statement.

"KUMO I," "Kumo II" and "Ogawa II" definitely highlight the show. Created of black monofilament, "Kumo I" is smoothly fluid and quite pleasing. While the other two works are more abrupt, incorporating cutaway views instead of the satisfying roundness of the first piece, they are all outstanding.

Mary Elizabeth McDonald has built a stimulating, artistically vivid show, demanding attention from all people interested in the work of modern American craftsmen.



Monofilament Relief Hanging
Woven by Kay Sekimachi

Gallery 1, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1975
Please return to Kay Sekimachi

Kay Sekimachi: Successful On Her Own Terms

One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji #4, 1981: linen, double weave and transfer print, 4½ by 4½ by 20 inches. Inset. Number 3, 1964: nylon monofilament, 36 by 12 by 6 inches.

By Charles Talley

Kay Sekimachi is something of an enigmatic figure in the world of internationally recognized textile artists. She holds no university appointments, operates no production studio, employs no apprentices, accepts no large corporate commissions and has no affiliation with either an agent or gallery. Yet she has exhibited widely throughout the United States, Europe and Japan. Her work is eagerly sought by museums as well as individual and corporate collectors. And she has received critical acclaim for producing a body of work characterized by its intuitive use of materials, sensitive design and flawless execution.

Sekimachi has not become spoiled by these accolades. Modest and unassuming, she has concentrated on developing her own work. She has achieved success on her own terms, and by staying close to her work has remained sensitive to new possibilities despite pressures to repeat past triumphs.

A lifeiong resident of the San Francisco Bay area, Sekimachi began weaving in 1949 after having studied drawing and design at the California College of Arts and Crafts. For six years she struggled to master loom techniques under what she terms "a succession of bad teachers who stressed only the rote learning of traditional pattern weaves." But two summer courses with the late Trude Guermonprez during the mid-1950s proved to be the necessary catalyst in the development of her artistic expression. "Trude taught us not to be afraid of the loom, but to understand it as a tool that *you* control."

Sekimachi went on to work for several years on a series of tapestries inspired by the power of line and color she so admires in the work of Paul Klee. In the early '60s, her interest shifted from flat weaving to sculptural, three-dimensional forms. Seeking to concentrate and refine her expression, she limited herself to the use of a single element (monofilament), a single color (black or transparent) and a

"I start with an idea and a technique. I work very slowly. I never go as far as I really want; before I'm done I'm on to something else."

single technique (loom-controlled, multi-harness weaving). For more than a dozen years, she stayed within these self-imposed constraints to produce a series of woven mesh hangings that articulate space in a succession of airy, interconnecting layers. Titles such as Shiratake (Spring Rain) and Amagumo (Rain Cloud) reflect the character of these beautiful works, which are at once delicate and powerfully present.

One perceives in these pieces the emergence of a clearly defined and deeply personal aesthetic. Unlike many other "free" and "experimental" works from that time, Sekimachi's pieces maintain an abiding interest, a classic beauty. While freed from the traditional constraints of function usually associated with textiles, they are nevertheless rooted in a deep and conscious respect for materials and techniques. Her method has been "to let the aesthetic emerge by allowing the materials and techniques speak for themselves."

The actual execution of the monofilament works was a painstaking, time-consuming process: "It took more than an hour, using twelve bobbins, to weave a single inch of cloth. Each piece was woven in three sections placed side-by-side on the loom, each section containing four layers." It is this series, widely exhibited and justly praised, that one frequently associates with Kay Sekimachi. Although she stopped producing this type of work more than six years ago, she still receives requests for it from collectors. Another artist in the face of such demand might be tempted to replicate the work for the sake of a sale, but Sekimachi has been indifferent to such pressures. Popular success has not influenced her development as an artist.

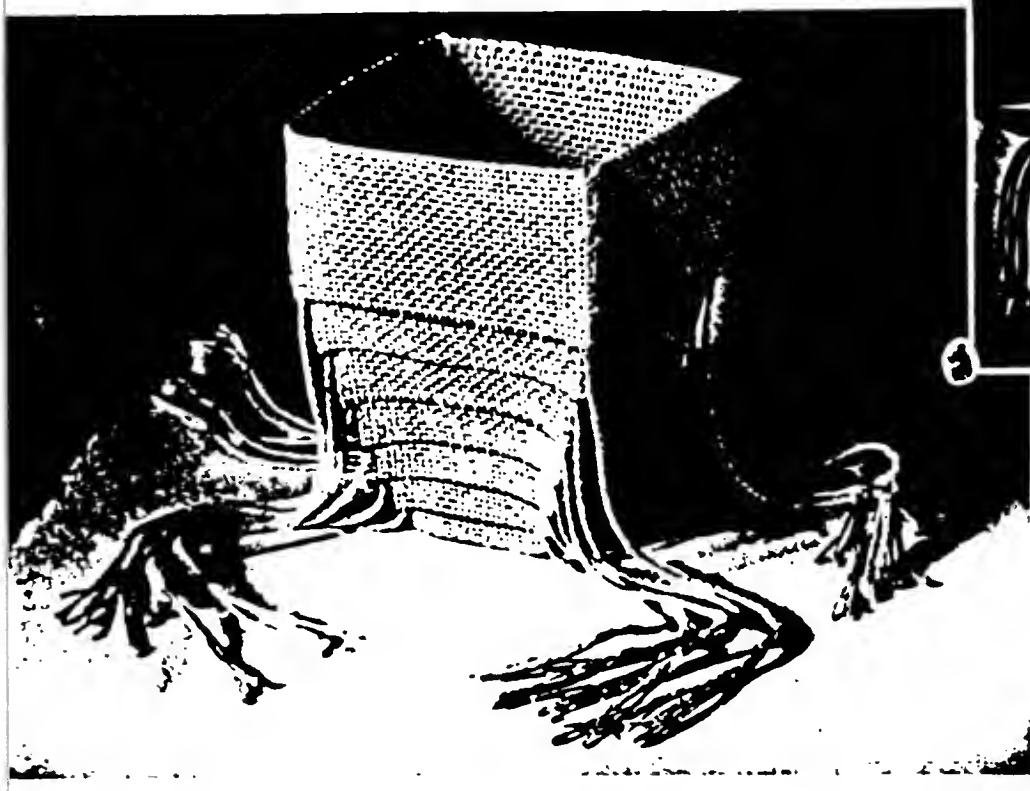
Sekimachi turned her attention to cardweaving: "My drawings for the monofilament pieces were becoming more complicated. I found myself writing notes—'Why not finish the pieces with some cardweaving?'—so instead of incorporating the technique into the monofilament forms, I found myself working the entire piece with cards." Retaining her preference for a single material and technique, she worked the new forms in varying shades of linen. Starting in 1971, these new sculptural shapes—*kawas* (rivers) she called them—began to develop. "I didn't design them ahead of time. They would start out very calm. Then all of a sudden there would be waves and rapids. Long and narrow, these pieces flowed like a stream." The first "rivers" were flatwoven with flared ends. Then they took on a tubular shape, becoming *marugawas* or "round rivers," expressed in alternations of blue, orange and white to delineate the progression of the spreading form.

Her marriage to woodworker Bob Stocksdale in 1972 brought still another significant change as she moved from cardweaving to split-ply twining: "I still felt newly-married then. With this technique I could sit down with Bob in the evening and do my work." Even in this new working

Kurokage, *1980; waxed linen, 37 by 5½ by 3 inches. Collection of the artist. Photo: Stone and Steccati.*

format, she persisted in exploring the manner in which technique shapes design—in this case through the arrangement of colors in patterned repetitions along a dowel. Using cotton mop string for material, Sekimachi worked a series of flat hangings in black, brown and white with a herringbone structure quite distinct from that of a loom-woven twill.

An invitation to submit work for the first *International Miniature Tapestry Exhibition* in London in 1974 prompted the artist to return to the loom: "I liked the idea of doing something smaller—the show's limitations were eight by eight by eight inches—something that would allow me to work through an idea more quickly. My love for multi-harness weaving suggested to me the possibilities of producing a box form." Mastering the techniques of construction and assembly, she began to use geometric forms as design elements in the containers. She also produced a series of nesting boxes that fit one into the other. Linen was again the material of choice in these eight- and twelve-harness constructions, which she reinforced with inter-



Above left, Kay Sekimachi. Above, Haniwa II, *1980; linen, 24 by 8 by 6 inches. Collection of the artist. Photo: Stone and Steccati. Left,* Basket With Brown Lines, *1979; linen, 7½ by 5 by 5 inches. Photo Stone and Steccati.*

lining and joined with fusible polyamide (Stitch Witchery™).

In 1976 Sekimachi began to use cardweaving techniques to construct basket forms. Using a specially constructed board frame to maintain tension, she works with two sets of cards placed at opposite ends of the warp. She weaves the handle of the basket first, adding cards to build up the sides and passing the weft clockwise through both sets of cards. She weaves the bottom of the basket last.

Every project brings with it new possibilities for further exploration: "I start with an idea and a technique. I work very, very slowly. I never go as far as I really want; before I'm done I'm on to something else." There is a consistency to the flow of her work; she builds upon and expands past knowledge to develop new forms.

Sekimachi's current work reinforces this interplay of continuity and innovation. Her interest in container forms persists, but now the shapes are realized on the loom once again. In addition to the boxes, she has begun to explore the book format, devising a number of small volumes that involve interlocking "pages" of linen onto which she has painted a series of light-hearted motifs like One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji. As in all her work, the choice of materials and techniques is apparently traditional and conservative. Yet the resulting piece is something altogether new. Elegant, restrained and refined, her expression is at once contemporary and classic.

The issue of personal identity is central to Sekimachi's work. She mentions that many people sense a Japanese feeling or influence in her work: "They tell me my hangings remind them of the strips of paper that the Japanese hang from trees for the celebration of Tanabata. Or that my 'rivers' remind them of bell pulls in the ancient temples." Although she is of Japanese ancestry, Sekimachi has neither self-consciously imitated nor avoided these traditional forms. In fact it was only in 1975 that she visited Japan for the first time and began to develop in a direct and conscious way an appreciation of the Japanese aesthetic.

In the work of Kay Sekimachi, one cannot help but note a sustaining sense of commitment and integrity of expression. Her work spans several decades but is not tied to any chronological generation. It has always been wonderfully present, reflecting her growth, interests and development over time. For many years before the current explosion of interest in the fiber arts, Kay Sekimachi worked patiently at her art. She continues to follow her own path. •

Charles Talley is Executive Editor of Craft International, *a new quarterly magazine. His book,* Contemporary Textile Art: Scandinavia, *will be published in the fall.*

Textile artist's designs on new direction

By MELINDA LEVINE
Art Critic

Kay Sekimachi began weaving in 1949, and has not stopped since. Although her own work has changed directions many times, she has remained a key figure in the promotion and acceptance of textile art.

A life-long resident of the Bay Area, and presently living in Berkeley, she has achieved an international reputation. She has shown in Europe, Japan and throughout the United States and is represented in many collections, both public and private.

An exhibit of her new work — currently at Textiles by Design — reveals still another direction for Ms. Sekimachi. The versatile weaver is now showing "pots" constructed from various textiles.

She says that this new work represents "a respite from the loom," that she has "worked at for 30 years." Her desire to produce an art object quickly, as a potter does, and her interest in the overlapping of translucent materials lead to the development of these forms.

If using the loom, few pieces could be finished in a day. For example, in her large-scale nylon monofilament work of the 1960s — vertical, hanging diaphanous sculptures — it took Ms. Sekimachi more than an hour, using 12 bobbins, to weave just one inch of cloth. The current pots have a spontaneous quality, not possible in the labor-intensive woven pieces.

After recovering from the initial shock that a show of Ms. Sekimachi's art was not composed of weavings, I carefully began to study the tiny, free-standing vessels and wall-mounted, laminated lace fragments. The vessels are made from paper and various fibers, and are translucent, white or earth-toned.

—Photo by Tinkess

A rice paper/linen pot by textile artist Kay Sekimachi

The several groups of work on view vary in technique and form. In one group, linen threads are sandwiched between two thin layers of rice paper, and molded into a bowl form. The ends of the threads curl past the lip and spill into the interior of the narrow-footed vessel. The curls of the thread and the graceful shape create a fragile, elegant statement.

Another group, which Ms. Sekimachi calls "baskets," are made from fused threads of white, black or tan, with wire accents. A jumble of threads form round, open shapes, resembling life-scale bird nests.

In some bowls, Ms. Sekimachi laminated square patches of woven line onto the outside of a molded rice-paper form — a subtle earth-toned and luminous patchwork quilt in-the-round resulted.

The group of coiled brown fiber-flex and paper pieces is less successful. Narrow strips of translucent rice paper cover coiled baskets. Through the translucent paper, the heavy brown fiber is clearly visible. The overlapping paper only detracts from the form beneath; these baskets seemed to break from the artist's usual ability to integrate disparate elements smoothly and richly.

A group of soft, brown mulberry-paper bowls proved that light is a critical ingredient in the success of these works. Opaque paper made the lightless little bowls, clumsy and lackluster.

This show provides valuable insight into the creative processes of a mature artist whose work is in transition. We are able to see here works that, though not completely resolved, offer glimpses into the artist's methods, as well as hints about her next direction.

These small objects, for all their unevenness and welcome spontaneity, are well worth comtemplating.

Ms. Sekimachi's work is on view through March 19, at Textiles by Design, 1812 Fourth Street, a rapidly growing renaissance block on Berkeley's westside.

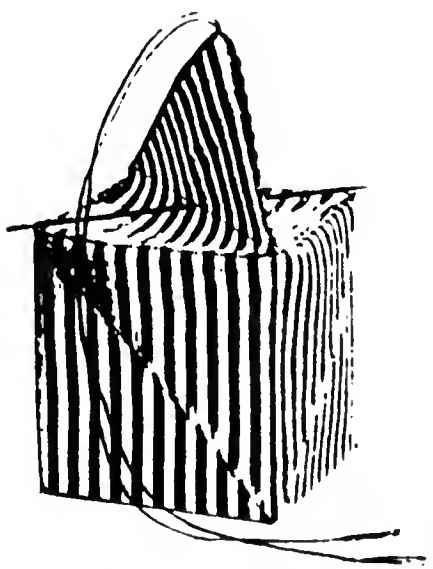
VESSELS OF POWER AND PROMISE

San Francisco / **Charles S. Talley**

For better and for worse, fans, kimonos, shrines and containers have served as the objects/metaphors of choice for a great many textile artists and others in recent years. *Vessels: Variations on a Form* at Miller/Brown Gallery, however, is a happy exception to the increasing banality of such forms. Essentially the juxtaposition of three one-person shows rather than a unified merging of talents, this exhibition features recent work by two seasoned professional textile artists—Kay Sekimachi and Lillian Elliott—alongside that of a promising newcomer working in raku, Agelio Batle.

A true pioneer in the contemporary textile arts movement, Sekimachi has been active and consistently productive since the mid-1950s. From the initial creation of her breathtaking *kawa* (river) sculptures —painstakingly woven in clear nylon monofilament—her work has evolved into more concrete forms such as woven books and baskets. At the same time, her interest in structure and materials has remained constant. Sekimachi is represented in this show by ten pieces involving her most recent explorations in both woven and handmade-paper boxes and bowls. A series of linen ikat containers of tubular woven construction, such as *Striped Ikat Box* (1988), consists of simple, static forms that can be closed origami-style at the top and base or pierced with a slender rod. Works such as *Patched Pot* (1986)—a piece that incorporates ikat-style linen as well as handwoven fabric and paper—reflect Sekimachi's essentially contemplative view of art. These are simple, pleasing objects that, while lacking the dramatic urgency of her early work, nevertheless reflect an abiding concern for integrity and technical perfection.

Like Sekimachi, Elliott has been a seminal influence in the development of the textile arts in the Bay Area through her teaching and her own work. She is represented here by a series of rough forms whose apparently random composition belies a deep understanding of structure and a great sensitivity toward texture. In contrast to the static, almost courtly formality of Sekimachi's work, Elliott's basket forms burst with primitive energy and vitality. Involving such diverse elements as bamboo, coconut, poplar bark and waxed linen, they represent a fearless exploration of the expressive possibilities of "found" materials from nature. Many of the works in this show are quite similar in appearance, however. Consequently, a piece such as *Bark Shrine* (1986) stands out. Boldly constructed from lashed bits of cane and rattan, it is a strong and sensual work, its apparent crudeness belying a deeper sense of control and design.



Kay Sekimachi, *Striped Ikat Box*, 1988, natural and black linen, paper and bamboo, 10-1/4 x 7-1/2 x 7-1/2", at Miller/Brown Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: Peter Marcus

Batle's work draws its inspiration from classical sources, the rough surface of his raku-fired sculptures suggesting a visual connection with archaeological findings. Flattened slab-thrown "urns" are presented as if they were museum artifacts, mounted on and in supports of the same material. *No. 13* (1988) is typical of such works, which incorporate intentionally anachronistic elements. The diamond lozenge imprint of a manhole cover, for example, represents the injection of an element of contemporary irony that never seems far from Batle's expression. The overall impact is that of hieratic stillness, yet the quietude is neither precious nor contrived.

Agelio Batle, untitled, 1988, raku, 14 x 11"x 14", at Miller/Brown Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: Peter Marcus

The works in this show possess a deeper connection that is not apparent in the exhibition's title. More significant than their use of similar forms is a common anchoring in traditional construction and use of materials which feeds, rather than inhibits, their highly individualized esthetic explorations. It is an anchoring that both explains the sustained power of Sekimachi's and Elliott's work over time and points to Batle's promise. ❙❙

INDEX--Kay Sekimachi

Harriet Siegel Nathan

University of California at Berkeley alumna with two Journalism degrees: A.B. in 1941 and M. J. in 1965. Wrote for the on-campus paper, *The Daily Californian* ("Monarch of the College Dailies") as reporter, columnist, assistant women's editor, and managing editor. Prepared President Sproul's biennial report to the Legislature, 1942-44; wrote advertising copy; edited house journals; served on local and state boards of the League of Women Voters primarily in local and regional government and publications. As a graduate student, wrote for the University's *Centennial Record*. Worked as an interviewer/editor at the Regional Oral History Office part-time from the mid-sixties; concurrently served the Institute of Governmental Studies as Principal Editor doing editing, writing, research, production, and promotion of Institute publications. Wrote journal articles; and a book, *Critical Choices in Interviews: Conduct, Use, and Research Role* (1986) that included oral history interviews in the analysis. Also with Nancy Kreinberg co-authored the book, *Teachers' Voices, Teachers' Wisdom: Seven Adventurous Teachers Think Aloud* (1991), based on extended interviews with the teachers.