

Knobkerry

NEW YORK



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SARA PENN'S KNOBKERRY
AN ORAL HISTORY SOURCEBOOK

SVETLANA KITTO

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FOREWORD

A figure like Sara Penn and a store like Knobkerry offer a distinct entry point to histories of art and histories of how we live. The accounts in *Sara Penn's Knobkerry: An Oral History Sourcebook* cast Penn as an artist, unparalleled and influential designer, pioneering Black businessowner, exacting connoisseur, and generous mentor. To read these oral history interviews alongside the appendix of images is to understand Knobkerry's aesthetic as a pivotal harbinger of the future. Penn's vision leapt beyond the constricting and exclusionary conditions of postwar American identity to describe a much larger world of social practice, art, texture, pattern, and music, especially for herself and her peers at a time when a new global culture was beginning to pass through New York.

We are grateful to Svetlana Kitto, who conceived and developed this project with great care and attention to Sara Penn's life and legacy, and to all of Penn's colleagues and friends who participated in Kitto's oral history interviews. Thank you to Lucy Flint, managing editor of this publication, whose tireless work has been crucial in balancing the sharp recollections and murkier impressions that constitute any history. SculptureCenter and New York Consolidated are honored and humbled to play a small role in supporting this project in the hopes that Penn's legacy becomes more legible and present in our minds today.

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INTRODUCTION

SVETLANA KITTO

The story of Knobkerry is the story of the late Sara Penn (1927–2020), a Black artist-designer-curator-entrepreneur whose monumental yet under-known impact on the cultural landscape of downtown New York is the subject of this book. Penn opened the first location of Knobkerry in 1965, establishing it as one of the first stores in the United States to sell ethnographic art, objects, and clothing from all over the world. Across its multiple locations over the years—its last iteration closed at the end of the millennium—Knobkerry was a brick-and-mortar fixture of the downtown scene, a favorite among an ever-changing group of Village artists, musicians, dancers, actors, and designers up to its last breath.

This volume calls on oral history's unique power to resurrect places from the past in order to bring us a little closer to the Knobkerry universe. In my interviews with Sara Penn and some of her closest friends and colleagues (the transcriptions condensed and edited here for clarity and readability), I sought to build up a portrait of Penn voice by voice, story by story, memory by memory. My interview with Penn herself is the first and lengthiest. We are extremely fortunate that she was able to participate in this oral history before her death, allowing her to be the first and foremost authority on her own life in this volume. The account next turns to the recollections of people who were close to Penn or her project, or both, their memories and analysis giving us some idea of Knobkerry's bearing on histories of art, fashion, music, and New York. Her influence and reach is also visible in a clientele more likely known to a general audience: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Louise Bourgeois, Don Cherry, Ornette Coleman, Mia Farrow, David Hammons, Jimi Hendrix, Lena Horne, Mick Jagger, Janis Joplin, Woodie King, Eartha Kitt, Marcia Marcus, Louise Nevelson, Larry Rivers, Sonny and Cher, Sonny Rollins, Ntozake Shange, Ming Smith, Yves Saint Laurent, André Leon Talley, and Leon Thomas were all fans, friends, and/or customers at one time in the long life of Knobkerry.

Just as Sara Penn was more than a shopkeeper, Knobkerry was more than a shop; I've heard it described as a gallery, museum, atelier, café, cultural center, salon, and sanctuary. In many ways, the depth of the cultural work that Penn enacted and the breadth of Knobkerry's influence defy description—you just had to be there. It is hard to overstate the pioneering significance of a Black woman owning and operating her own shop in the context of New York's Lower East Side in the mid-1960s. With Knobkerry, Penn created an international context for a thriving scene of radical artists and thinkers—a place where people could meet, talk, and reinvent themselves. Throughout Knobkerry's tenure, Penn's iconic garments and eclectically designed windows introduced a groundbreaking aesthetic on the Lower East Side.

Rigorously developed, her bold aesthetic kept pace with the moment's political and social transformation, sensitizing and radicalizing a generation of American artists to a global, hyper-spiritual perspective. A refrain in the interviews is that Penn's globalism reflected a desire to go beyond the limitations of the engrained Eurocentric purview. In the words of Penn's longtime friend Danny Dawson: "We weren't interested in being American. Still aren't. An enduring conflict."

Knobkerry opened in the mid-1960s on Seventh Street between Second and Third Avenues. Over the course of thirty years, it moved from St. Mark's Place (and possibly other spots in the area) to Spring Street in SoHo to a location in Pasadena, California, and, finally, to West Broadway in TriBeCa, this last operation closing in the late 1990s. The store began as a collaboration with designers Fumi Schmidt and Olive Wong—who would go on to work independently—and initially focused on jewelry, accessories, and outer garments: gharara and salwar pants from India, leather pendants crocheted in the back of the store, custom-made cholis, "gypsy" blouses made of Chinese silk and skirts made of Pakistani fabric. (Penn's contributions to popular fashion were often described as "gypsy" at the time, a sign of the white mainstream press's efforts to brand her garments as part of an exotic strain in youth culture, seen today as a marker of the racial and ethnic insensitivity that persisted when Penn's work was first received.) "Prices run from about \$6 for a plain dashiki to \$250 for a coat of elaborately embroidered dowry cloth," reported the *Christian Science Monitor* in a 1968 story about Knobkerry and pan-African fashion trends titled "African Dress, Natural Hair." Because the items she carried were world-unique, celebrity musicians flocked to Penn's store—they never had to worry about seeing their favorite garment on someone else. At the later iterations of the store, on Spring Street and West Broadway, furniture and objects became increasingly prominent, including Moroccan kilim rugs, West African tribal masks, "Indonesian monk baskets and wooden harps . . . woven Ikat robes, ceremonial chairs from Africa, wooden Buddhas," as reported by André Leon Talley in a 1977 *Women's Wear Daily* story on "the precious items found in [Penn's] boutique called Knobkerry Third World Art and Design." The TriBeCa store, where the artist David Hammons self-curated a show in 1995, was the largest, displaying bigger items—Penn's visionary multicultural emporium on a magnified scale. The poet David Henderson describes that location's enduring power in "The African Burial Ground Called TriBeCa," which he performed at the Def Poetry Jam in 2001: "Sara Penn's 'Knobkerry' on Franklin and West Broadway / Black woman humble in a museum disguised as a shop / among the rare treasures of Africa, Asia, South America / offering healings for free from the powers of antiquity."

I first learned of Sara Penn during an interview I conducted with the artist Ken Tisa for a catalogue accompanying the opening exhibition at Gordon Robichaux, *Ken Tisa: Objects/Time/Offerings*. Tisa shared with me his personal discovery of this novel store on St. Mark's Place in the 1970s and how Penn went on to become one of his best friends and most important teachers. We—Sam Gordon, Jacob Robichaux, and I—were very excited by these stories, as we'd never heard of Knobkerry before

and wanted to know more. In the spring of 2017, Tisa took me to meet Penn at her last residence on Thirteenth Street, where she showed me her scrapbook and told me stories about her early life that I collected using an audio recorder.

Penn was born and raised in Pittsburgh, and spent summers on her grandmother's farm in Alabama. "I realize," she once said, "that I reflect my great-grandaunt, Sadie Lee in Pleasant Valley, Alabama, who followed Booker T. Washington's idea of skilled training for newly freed slaves. She taught quilting and sewing. She opened a training school that grew to have over two hundred students."¹ Like her mother before her, Sara Penn trained as a social worker, earning a graduate degree from Atlanta University. In the 1950s, Penn traveled throughout Europe, living in Paris and Amsterdam for a spell. Back in New York, she worked as a social worker at a place called Manhattan Hill, hanging out with her boyfriend, the painter Wolf Kahn, at the Cedar Bar with artists like Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Joan Mitchell. In the mornings she would apprentice at Phyllis Jewelry, a silver store on Seventh Street. Penn found a home among a diverse group of artisans there, including Art Smith, a Black silversmith, and Barbara Shaum, who had a popular sandal store next door to McSorley's Bar. Penn opened the first location of Knobkerry between Shaum's business and McSorley's.

Penn first encountered the word "knobkerry" in a short story by George Bernard Shaw, "The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God," when she was still a social worker working with youth.² The allegorical satire, published in 1932, follows a South African child who escapes a mission, with nothing but her knobkerrie, a Zulu fighting stick. "Anytime she encounters anyone who tries to tell her who God is, she just hits them with the stick and keeps going in her personal search."³ Penn conceived of the store with a fight in mind: "I thought, if anyone tells us what fashion is we're just going to hit them with our stick, our store. We'll discover our own fashion," she said. People who knew Sara Penn well describe Knobkerry as a political site, a liberatory portal into worlds and ways of seeing beyond the United States. "I think black designers, like black musicians, should dig into their origins for [their] inspirations. It would help to signpost our current quest for identity and bring something healthily different to Western fashion," she told the *Washington Post* in 1969.⁴

When I interviewed Ken Tisa for this project in his SoHo loft, he showed me a real-life knobkerrie that Penn had given him, not the fighting kind but "a ritual knobkerrie, which the chief would carry." For Tisa, it symbolized a passing-down of knowledge. Penn, he felt, had taught him so much, perhaps even how to be an artist. And now he was telling me the story of Penn to illustrate the idea of the artist as the keeper of time: objects, stories, art, histories. I have read that Penn, Fumi Schmidt, and Olive Wong also thought of the knobkerrie as a symbolic link to various cultures and identities. In my oral history interview with Penn before she died, she refreshed her memory by referring to a scrapbook, an incredible visual archive of magazine and newspaper clippings, fabric swatches, photographs, drawings, postcards, event

flyers, Polaroids—some of which are being documented for the first time in this book. After the interview, she gave me the scrapbook to use as I wrote about her and Knobkerry. From the outset, I wanted this to be an oral history project, to look to the people who occupied her scrapbook and memories, who were there and could attest to her legacy, who loved Penn and were changed by her.

It was always my thinking that in place of a large physical archive, Sara Penn and Knobkerry left behind a set of disciples, friends, and intimates who adored her to the end of her life. When I embarked on these interviews, starting four years ago with my initial conversation with Penn, all I had was her scrapbook and some possible contacts. With each person I met, the list of connections and communities that emanated from Penn grew exponentially. Everyone wanted to help, everyone was invested in preserving her legacy. I rushed to keep up by searching out every name that emerged and connecting with as many people as I could. Taken together, the idiosyncratic assortment of archival materials I gathered—Sara's scrapbook and a stuffed envelope from her good friend Renoir Darrett—have a dreamlike quality well suited to the memories presented here. There are many more people to interview, materials to collect, clippings to collate, and scholarship to pursue. This is only one configuration of Penn's enduring legacy, as Knobkerry's reach was so wide and variegated. It is my hope that this project will be a jumping-off point for many more imaginings.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

- 1 Rosemary Reed E. Miller, *Threads of Time, The Fabric of History: Profiles of African American Dressmakers and Designers, 1850 to the Present* (Washington: T & S Press, 2011).
- 2 While Penn, like George Bernard Shaw, used the spelling "knobkerry," Merriam-Webster Dictionary prefers "knobkerrie."
- 3 Joel Lobenthal, *Radical Rags: Fashions of the Sixties* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), 234.
- 4 Sara Penn, quoted in Joy Elliott, "From Poverty to High Fashion," *Washington Post*, December 21, 1969.

SARA PENN

This interview was conducted in March 2017 in the lobby of The Markle, the women-only residence in the Village where Sara Penn spent the last decade of her life.¹ During the conversation, Penn used photographs and clippings in a scrapbook as an aide-memoire. Her longtime friend Ken Tisa participated in the first part of the interview.

Svetlana Kitto: Sara, are you ready to start?

Sara Penn: *Je suis prête.*

SK: How about telling me where and when you were born and a little about your early life?

SP: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Ken Tisa: What year?

SP: 1927—I'm eighty-nine years old. I started playing the violin when I was in first grade.

KT: You've always been interested in music.

SP: We had a string quartet! Four little kids playing violin.

KT: Was that in Pittsburgh?

SP: Yeah.

SK: Were your parents musical?

SP: No, but they made sure that we had music. I also had piano lessons as a young kid, and in our church we had an orchestra. The Baptist church. My brother played the trumpet. In high school, we had orchestra, too.

SK: Can you tell me a bit about your mom?

SP: My mom was a social worker. She was born in Alabama, where my grandmother was born and raised. My grandmother was a missionary. She built the Log Cabin Community Center for women in the neighborhood to teach them sewing and cooking and so on. My mother was one of seven or eight daughters that my grandmother had. And Grandmother sent my mother and all her sisters out of Alabama to school.

SK: How did she do that? What did she do?

SP: I don't know. She was a farmer. She had all these farmhands. She sent all the kids north to different places. She made sure that they had an experience that was beyond being a poor farmer's farmhand. They all got some kind of education. One of them became a nurse, another a community worker.

SK: So, your mom was a social worker.

SP: Before she was a social worker, during the 1930s Depression my mother had to do people's laundry. There were two people, including one old woman that used to bring my mother her laundry in a chauffeured car. Anyway, she started doing social work in a place called the Kay Boys' Club and she became the women's worker there. The girls' worker.

SK: Did you know your grandmother?

SP: Sure. Every summer we would go to her farm. She had a big farm and my brother would go out with the farmhands who worked for her and gather goods.

SK: What was it like going down to Alabama from Pittsburgh?

SP: That was like vacation. We all got in our car and drove. I remember how different it was. My grandmother had this big farm with corn and tomatoes and all that. And she had chickens. She would go out to the back where the chickens were, and she'd say, "Chickie, chickie," and then she'd grab one by the neck and twist it around. My grandfather was there but he wasn't very active. He must have just watched everything. It was fun. I loved it. You knew you were getting away from Pittsburgh and going to the country. It was nice.

SK: What else about your mother?

SP: My mother learned from my grandfather how to perform. Her favorite thing was reciting James Weldon Johnson's "Creation." Very famous Black poet. My mother would perform that at teas. We had Sunday afternoon teas at different homes with programs—we would play the piano and somebody else would do something else. They were community gatherings. The poem "Creation" was very popular and my mother and grandmother knew it backwards and forwards.

SK: Did you learn it?

SP: No, I didn't. God stepped down. I can't remember because I didn't do the creating.

We went to church every week. During the Depression, as I said, we were very poor, but you knew you had the fundamentals. We went to a Baptist church because we didn't need transportation to get there. We could walk the five or six blocks. So we went to it until everybody was well employed. And then we went to the Methodist church—my mother and my father were both Methodists. But at the Baptist church, we used to go to Sunday school, and between Sunday school and the regular service we'd go across to the street to the YMCA and buy candy before we went back.

They had an orchestra in that church. There was always a lot of music and cultural activities going on. My girlfriend and I had to go to interpretive dancing. That was modern dance we went to at the YWCA during the week, and then we had tap dancing classes. You had all of these things that make a girl become a fabulous woman.

SK: What about your dad?

SP: My dad was busy. He had a home improvement

business, and my mother said, “Get a card and call it interior decoration.” They did wallpaper cleaning with sponges, something people don’t do anymore. They’d refinish floors, paint woodwork, and all that. That was his business.

KT: It’s called contracting now.

SP: Contracting. Yeah, that’s what it was. He was a contractor.

SK: What was the house you lived in like?

SP: It was nice. There were about twelve houses on our street. Everyone eventually owned their own home. And they were all Black. At the top of the hill, Cement Hill, was Cement Street. It wasn’t really a hill. There was a family there, called the Kelly family, who were different because they were white. But on our street there were all Black families.

SK: Your parents ended up owning a home, then?

SP: As soon as you got your foot in the bank, that was the thing—you had to own your own home. I should have kept that in mind.

SK: What part of town was it in?

SP: It was in Homewood. It was on the edge of Homewood and Wilksburg. Wilksburg was mostly white and Homewood was predominantly Black, and we were on the street that divided them. Our street was only two blocks long. We used to go to Wilksburg on Saturday morning after we did our cleaning in the house, and we’d go to the movies for ten cents. We would get a five-cent box of pretzel sticks.

It was good for kids. You’d walk to school. And then we got to junior high school. When I say we, I’m talking about my girlfriend who lived next door to me. We rode the streetcar and we never got into fights or anything like that. Good kids.

SK: Tell me more about your friend.

SP: She was smarter than me. As a matter of fact, she was the valedictorian of the high school. And then she went to Fisk University and I went to Spelman. In September we would take the train, the Pennsylvania Railroad, from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati. And in Cincinnati we’d change to the Jim Crow train, which went south.

It was fun because between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati we just played and talked. Our parents made us lunches with fried chicken and biscuits. And when we got on the train in Cincinnati we opened them up and had a picnic.

SK: You say that in Cincinnati you would transfer to the Jim Crow train. At what age did you start being aware of Jim Crow?

SP: Seventeen. But we weren’t civil rights workers. That’s just the way things were, and we made the best of it.

SK: How was race talked about in your house?

SP: Can’t tell you.

SK: You can’t remember?

SP: Yeah, I remember. I can’t tell you. My mother used to curse white people out [laughs].

SK: Please tell me.

SP: She’d get mad at the insurance man because he was white. She’d get mad at the man who owned the grocery store, he was white. She said they were all cheating us.

SK: She was probably right, wasn’t she?

SP: Yeah, they’re still doing it. We didn’t have any white friends, but every once in a while you’d hear the word “nigger.” If somebody was our enemy, we would call them “white trash” or “crackers.”

SK: Or “honkies”?

SP: Yeah, “honkies,” the people who were from Eastern Europe, from Hungary [laughs].

KT: I don’t think that’s why they were called honkies.

SP: Yes, it was.

SK: You’re talking about people in your school?

SP: The school was mainly white, and the teachers were all white. The teachers appreciated you. We were in the school orchestra and stuff like that. There was a small percentage of Black students scattered around, I guess maybe five percent. It was primarily white. And in a sense, sort of positive. All that other shit, you didn’t really spend that much time on. Like being hostile or even fighting for your inalienable rights.

I went to Spelman because a friend of my mother was a member of a Black women’s sorority, and the wife of a Black councilman in Pittsburgh who was a Spelman graduate belonged to that same sorority. So my mother felt that was a place I should go to get some culture. So I went to Spelman.

SK: Who instilled this goal in your mom?

SP: Grandma. My grandmother.

SK: She was interested in it too?

SP: Yeah. My grandmother was part American Indian. She was a friend of Booker T. Washington. All of them had something going on in their bones. I was the only, you know, slouch.

SK: Did she tell you about being friends with Booker T. Washington?

SP: No, we didn’t talk about it. It was just heard. All we talked about was contemporary pride in yourself. Don’t marry a musician [laughs].

SK: Can you tell me about going to Spelman?

SP: My mother took me to Spelman. We went on a train. We both entered the portals of Spelman with no stockings on—we were bare-legged. The woman looked at me. “You can’t go in. You’ve got to wear stockings.” My mother had to go out buy me stockings.

SK: Was that a difference between the North and the South?

SP: No, that was just Spelman. Spelman was very tight—they had very strict rules. If you had a male visitor, he was only allowed to come into this one room if he signed up and sat there with you while the chaperone sat in the same room with you.

Spelman was in what was called the “university complex.” You had Spelman for girls, Morehouse for men—boys. Morris Brown, Clark College, and Atlanta University were coed. Spelman and Morehouse were restricted.

SK: Heading into Spelman, what did you love?

SP: Freedom. Freedom from my family, from my mother. My mother was so strict.

SK: What was she strict about?

SP: She wanted me to be an ideal thing, and I wasn’t ideal. My mother’s skin is lighter, much lighter than mine. She was a nice-looking woman, I wasn’t. So she was never satisfied with me. She bought me clothes and she used to go to thrift shops and buy me designer clothing for Spelman. But she wanted me to be perfect or at least be as best as I could with my ugly-ass face.

SK: She said that to you?

SP: No, she didn’t say that. She just looked at me that way.

SK: What were your interests at Spelman?

SP: I just went to get a bachelor’s degree. I didn’t specialize. I participated in the cultural program, and music, but I just wanted to get my degree. When I got my bachelor’s I decided I didn’t want to go back to Pittsburgh, and I persuaded my mother to let me go to Atlanta University, where I studied social work. I was enthralled with Atlanta because I wouldn’t have to be a prisoner at Spelman. I had kind of a nice time in Atlanta. Martin Luther King, Jr., and I were in the same religion class.

SK: Really? Do you remember him well?

SP: Yeah, I remember him. We weren’t like this [linking her forefingers], but I remember him.

In Atlanta I had a good friend named Nancy Coleman. We got together later on. She was from Baltimore but she went to New York, and when I got out of Atlanta University I got a job in New York. I became her roommate. I stayed in New York for about three or four years after I graduated. I met this girl Phyllis, who was

a silversmith in the Village, on West Fourth Street, and started working for her and learning how to make silver. That’s when I met my first real boyfriend, Wolf Khan. He was the arts director at the community center where I was working.

SK: Was that the Manhattan Hill place?

SP: Yeah, I think so.

SK: How did you get into silversmithing—what drew you to it?

SP: I don’t know how I met Phyllis, but I did. Sometimes I just storm into a territory and become a part of it. I certainly had to be down there where her store was. I liked it there because she had her store and then there was a Black silversmith called Art Smith. He was fabulous.

SK: Were there a lot of Black-owned businesses?

SP: No.

SK: Just artisans?

SP: Yeah. Art was Black. His boyfriend was white. Phyllis was Jewish. And next to her was Allen Block. There were a lot of artisans on West Fourth Street.

When I worked at Phyllis’s store I met Wolf. We used to come downtown from uptown every night to a place called the Cedar Bar. That’s where Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning and other big-time artists—Joan Mitchell and all those people—were. We’d be there every evening. In the morning, I’d work at the silver store. It was called Phyllis Jewelry. Then I’d go to my social work job and then come back.

SK: Before we finish that, what was it like when you and Wolf would hang out at the Cedar Bar with Kline and de Kooning?

SP: I was impressed.

SK: Because you were so young—twenty-two or something.

SP: I remember a party we had once. I had an apartment on Eleventh Street or someplace, and we invited all these people. We covered one wall with brown wrapping paper, and they all autographed it. I wish I had that now. It was a nice life. I’m glad that I did all those things when I was young, because I’d be regretting it right now if I hadn’t. Then Wolf got tired of me and went to Mexico.

He got married.

SK: Was Wolf an American guy?

SP: Yeah. He was a student of Hans Hofmann.

SK: A student of Hans Hofmann?

SP: Most of those people were Hofmann’s students. During the summer when I was going with Wolf, he rented a shack on the dunes in Provincetown. He lived there and

sometimes I'd go on weekends. And then when I had a vacation I'd go up there. That was very nice. It was just struggling artists. When we decided that I was going to go and see him up there, he requested an interview with a woman in the city who owned the place to ask if she was against interracial couples. She said no. That was nice. Her husband was a fisherman or something.

SK: How were you treated going around with your white boyfriend?

SP: It was fine.

SK: People didn't care.

SP: If they did, I didn't. The only time I had a problem was once when I wanted an apartment and had to get him to sign the lease so I could come in as his wife. Where we hung around were places that were pretty Democratic, liberal. I can't remember the bad parts. I guess I wouldn't want to.

Later on, Nancy decided to go to Paris, where her brother was. She moved to Paris, and I followed her. I don't remember the time frame, but I remember staying with her. She told me about the Alliance Française, and they hooked me up with a family who owned a factory in Lille. They had their apartment in Paris just off the Tuileries Garden.

The way I could live there at very little expense was that in the morning I gave the daughter English lessons and after she went to school, I had English conversation time with the mother. After that, about noon, I was free. So I had the whole day to hang out and see a lot of Paris and go to the galleries and stuff like that.

SK: Did you meet people there?

SP: Yeah. I was so involved with Adolf [Adolfo Kaminsky] that the people I met were American artists we had known in Greenwich Village.

SK: Adolf was your boyfriend. How did you meet?

SP: I met him at a party and we clicked right away. We lived together for the time that I was there and traveled all around with his job as a photographer.

SK: Was he French?

SP: *Oui*. Yeah. He was born in Germany. His family moved to Paris. He was a member of the French Resistance and forged identity documents.

SK: Oh, right. He was Jewish.

SP: Yeah. He got a job with this company and made pictures of all of the major cities for them for postcards and calendars. We traveled and lived in a tent, but we always came back. I left Paris because I got sick. I went to a party and when we got home and I went to bed, I said, "Adolf, I'm looking down at myself like I was on the ceiling." He said, "Biscan"—that was his nickname for me—"what are you talking about?" I said, "I'm looking at myself." He immediately drove me to the American hospital.

SK: What did you have?

SP: Too much rum. I had never had rum before. They put me in a room where the doctors questioned me. One doctor would question me and then he would leave and another doctor would come in and question me. And then they all came in and said, "You can go home now." They took me out in the hall where Adolf was waiting for me. He said, "What are they laughing about?" They all came out hysterical, laughing at me.

I decided at that point I wasn't going to die in Paris, I was going back home. I came back to Pittsburgh and got a job at a social agency on the North Side. My mother helped me buy a car. One night I was driving home from work—I lived on the West Side. There's a jazz club called the Crawford Grill right in the center of the African American area of Pittsburgh. I thought I'd stop in and hear some music. I was so brave, doing all that stuff by myself. The night before, I had received an Ornette Coleman record from a book club I belonged to that sent records out for advertising or as gifts or something. When I walked into the nightclub, who was playing but Ornette Coleman. I went up to him and said, "I got your record in the mail yesterday." He said, "Really?" I said, "Yeah," and invited him to go to the Highland Park Museum the next day if he wanted to. I knew he did. We became very good friends. When I returned to New York, he was playing at the Five Spot Café, which was around Fourteenth Street and Third Avenue. I went in to see him and then I went to his loft afterwards while he was there.

SK: What's this picture [looking through Sara's binder of archival materials]?

SP: A photograph somebody took in my store when I first opened on Seventh Street. And this is the *New York Times*, with the kind of Indian clothing I was selling. Do you know Bill Cunningham?

SK: Yeah.

SP: Well, he took the first photographs of my store when he was still working in Chicago for the *Chicago Tribune*. Actually, I got a photograph from him the other day, before he died this last month or so, and he wrote a note on the back of it saying how much he enjoyed meeting me back in the '80s.

This is one of the kids who was working for Calvin Klein in the '80s. I can't remember who he is now. I got Calvin Klein to write a letter for me when I wanted to work at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

SK: Did you?

SP: Yeah, I worked there. I can't remember if I worked there as a volunteer or got paid [laughs].

SK: Who are these people?

SP: This is Woodie King and this is Seret [Scott]. She worked for me, and she was in movies. What is that?

SK: A letter from you to Linda O'Keefe at *Metropolitan Home*: "I am outraged that my business did not receive a single credit in 'making a grand and graceful gesture'

published in the March/April issue of *Metropolitan Home*. The red and yellow ikat textile which you borrowed appears in two photos with no mention of Sara Penn/ Knobkerry; yet every other contributor receives credit. My outrage is based on the fact that a similar oversight occurred last year with *New York Magazine* in which Corky Pollen photographed my goods and gave credit to two other retailers in the city. I am sorry to have to suspect racism, but I see no other reason for the oversight, particularly since my fabric was a positive asset to both photos. If I sound paranoid it is only because I have been a pioneer in my field and watched others walk away with my ideas and gain acceptance and recognition. I had to let you know how I feel because I have passed the stage of silent acquiescence." Did she write you back?

SP: Hell, no.

SK: Did that happen a lot?

SP: No. People gave me credit. There were times, though. This is the *Esquire* cover, *Harper's Bazaar* cover, *Saturday Evening Post* cover, *Home Furnishings Daily* with an article, *Christian Science Monitor* with an article, *Vogue*.

SK: This is where they would use stuff from the store in editorials. How did that get started?

SP: It was while I was a social worker, working for Mobilization for Youth, and I wasn't happy with what was going on in social work. Barbara Shaum was a leather crafter with a shop on Seventh Street and she told me about a shop near hers.

SK: Where did you live at the time?

SP: I can't remember, but I moved into the back of the shop.

SK: It was on Seventh Street?

SP: Yeah, two doors from McSorley's.

SK: Was is it cheap to rent down there at the time?

SP: Yeah. I started my store with three thousand dollars, and that included inventory, rent, utilities—everything. I started with my two friends, Olive [Wong] and Fumi [Schmidt]. I lived in the back until I was making more money. I forget the name of that store on Eighth Street. I don't know if it's still there.

They had two stores on Eighth Street and told me I could have one of them. It was next door to Abbie Hoffman. I kept Seventh Street as my workroom and living quarters.

SK: Did you just start collecting?

SP: John Gregg had an import store on Sixth Street and was walking by and saw a couple of things we had in the window. One was a dress that Olive made. We became friends. He said he was interested. He was traveling, I think. He started bringing things in from China when it was first opening up as a communist country that everybody loved then. He was a very good source of

textiles and goods. He moved up to Andes, a small city in upstate New York, and he named his store after his daughter Paisley. He still has a beautiful store up there now—I looked on Google and found out a little more about it. He was my primary source of merchandise, the one who got me started. He was always interested in textiles and art, but I hadn't been, so he helped me. That's when Angela Taylor from the *New York Times* wrote an article. Things just boomeranged from there.

When John Gregg came back from India, I started looking around in New York for a store that was selling Indian textiles and Indian merchandise.

SK: Because of John?

SP: I think of John as the main influence. Indian Nepal was one of the stores that sold Indian clothing, and then it just grew. At that time they still had craft shows, textile shows. I would go to the shows and if I saw something I liked I'd make contact with those dealers.

Through different dealers and shows I began to build my inventory, and I had these two genius women—Olive had good design techniques and Fumi was an excellent seamstress. They both made things for the store.

SK: So you'd get the textiles and they would make clothing out of them?

SP: Yeah.

SK: Was your input on design?

SP: Vaguely, but they did most of the designing. I liked patchwork, and that's where most of my influence was. Olive's design was much more sophisticated and Fumi's was very detailed. The combination of all this plus clothing that was already made in other countries, like India or wherever else, built up. Our eyes were good at choosing interesting things.

SK: You would scout different sources and materials?

SP: Yeah, I would go to the shows and get stuff. Then a lot of people, a lot of dealers, came to the store bringing jewelry and costumes. That *New York Times Magazine* article helped.

SK: And the dress the woman was wearing was made by Olive?

SP: Yes. It was inspired by a French designer named Grès—Alix Grès.

SK: Was everything one of a kind?

SP: Yeah, mostly with cholis and things like that. They were always one of a kind because they were made by Indian women. Each one was different. I didn't know there was such a variety of stuff. As a matter of fact, John Gregg, who I haven't heard from for over fifty-seven years, sent me a package just the other day. It's a choli from way back when. I gave it to one of my friends, Katie, who has a store on Sixth Street where Fumi's store used to be. It's called [Nomad Vintage]. Right near Cooper Union.

SK: Do you see Fumi?

SP: Yeah, but she's in Hawaii right now. She went to see her brother who is in the hospital. They have a house there, so she's taking care of it. I don't know if she's going to come back. Her son-in-law is a guitarist and he travels a lot around the world—classical guitar—and her daughter plays in a female quartet. And they have grandchildren. Her granddaughter is living in her place on Fourteenth Street.

SK: So you opened the store on Seventh Street and then you opened another one on St. Mark's, but you kept the Seventh Street store as your workplace and for a while your living quarters.

SP: I'm like a nomad—I moved everywhere. I've been in five or six different places in the Village.

SK: What was it like in that neighborhood at the time?

SP: Ukrainian. The store was across from a Ukrainian school and there's a Ukrainian church there. Our landlord and most of the tenants in my building were Ukrainian, except my friends the Plenda sisters. One of the sisters [Carol Plenda] was married to the painter Bob Thompson, who is dead now. They had a store on Sixth Street. It was like a little community. Nice times.

SK: When did you start doing your own collecting and traveling?

SP: I think it was when I took the store on Spring Street in SoHo. I believe that's when I took my first trip. Now, where the hell did I go?

SK: Did the store start off doing very well? Was it a success monetarily?

SP: Oh, yeah, the store always did well.

SK: Were you the main owner of it?

SP: Yeah.

SK: Did Olive and Fumi drift away a bit after the St. Mark's store?

SP: No. Sometimes if they made something we'd sell it in the store and they'd get paid for it. And then Fumi opened her own store.

SK: Most of what was being sold in Knobkerry on St. Mark's was textiles, right?

SP: Textiles and costumes. We did one thing for . . . who's that singer? That loud singer. She's dead now. White girl. Janis [Joplin], yeah. And Jimi Hendrix. And then some of the other people in that whole group of performers.

SK: They used to come to the store and buy things?

SP: Yeah, because St. Mark's was the street with the Electric Circus and Kristina Gorby's store. She was married to Jules Olitski. And then there was Jackie Lewis,

who had opened Grand Hotel around the corner. Jackie gave up that business and opened a spa in the Bahamas or some place [Jackie's on the Reef, Jamaica]. Trash and Vaudeville had an extra store on St. Mark's Place that I took. There was an African American partner in that store—what's his name? He's dead now. He was the one who got the idea that I should have their shop when they moved to the other one on St. Mark's. Everybody was friends. It was a close neighborhood.

SK: What were some other stores?

SP: One sold Japanese stuff. Leekan Designs were Asian and North African dealers. Oh, that's when I was in SoHo. Jacques Carcanagues and Leekan Designs. They opened down around Spring and Broadway. They were good friends, too. And then I had a couple of Japanese dealers I was very close to. One was called Noriko. I know Noriko finally moved out to Long Island. Was she in Oaks Bluff? I'm not quite sure. Anyway, she opened a Japanese store out there. I have some of her stuff. And Mrs. Tara, Jessica Tara, used to bring me Japanese textiles—indigos. She moved to California. I'm not sure if she is living now or not.

Jimi Hendrix would come in and just sit on a stool and watch his women try on stuff. Miles [Davis] never came in. He used to go to Andrea's store. Andrea, she moved up to Thirtieth Street. It's called Andrea Aranow Textile [Design Collection]. She sells mostly textiles and textile designs to big designers now, uptown designers, *Vogue* designers. I can't remember what the name of her store was back then [Dakota Transit].

I still see her. Ken and Andrea had a birthday party for me in November at the Spanish restaurant down the street here.

SK: When you had the store on Eighth Street, what was going on in your personal life? Who were you seeing, what you were doing?

SP: I was really involved in the store. Running it, making stuff, and traveling—it was a good time. And doing shows. I made a trip to Africa. I went to Senegal and then Ghana and Nigeria, a couple of other African countries. I collected textiles and art.

SK: Do you have any memories of those first trips?

SP: They treated me like a queen. When I left Senegal to go to Nigeria, I didn't have a hotel reservation. They saw it was an American and a Black single woman and they got me booked in a hotel that cost a fortune. Then I went to Northern Lagos, and at that time the African Games were going on. Who's the famous African athlete? Anyway, his brother was a textile designer and we became friendly, and went around collecting African objects—that was in 1978. I was always making patchwork clothing. I made a coat back in 1980 that I wear now. That's my sole winter coat. I can't believe it.

And I had a show of David [Hammons]. I met him when I was living on Spring Street and had storage, I think. He came into the store and just started putting stuff together. Making little art objects and installations. It was a beautiful, beautiful show. A couple of people wrote about it. We didn't even send invitations or anything.

SK: How did you meet Ken [Tisa]?

SP: He just came into the store and we hit it off. He came in to ask me if I needed somebody to work there, something like that.

SK: He says that you taught him a lot.

SP: Well, he likes to pay compliments to people. He taught me a lot.

SK: What did he teach you?

SP: Art and looking—general art education. We hung out a lot together. You know *Details* magazine? At that time it was owned by—I forget her name [perhaps Annie Flanders]. She lived on the corner of Spring and West Broadway and we were all friends and used to party together.

SK: She founded *Details* magazine?

SP: Yeah. She sold that magazine, probably for a lot of money.

SK: So, as soon as you opened the store, it started making money?

SP: When I opened the store, I was still working. When it got to be too much, I gave up my job to start working there.

SK: Your social work job?

SP: Yeah. Off and on during my career I would be in social work.

SK: After you had this store on Eighth Street, you opened up the store in SoHo?

SP: On Seventh Street.

SK: Why did you move to SoHo?

SP: That's where it was happening. I remember sitting on the doorstep of a restaurant across the street, called Station something. I knew the couple who owned it. I said, "That's the next store I'd like to move into." I think it was emptying out or had been empty. The girl who was the real estate agent got the store for me, which was really very nice, because by that time people were beginning to look you at you this way and that way.

SK: What people?

SP: Society. Becoming more color-conscious.

SK: You think it was more color-conscious than when you were growing up?

SP: When I was growing up, it wasn't so much in the open. If you said "Ku Klux Klan" when I was young, that was something way back over there.

SK: You're saying that it started when you were in the East Village?

SP: It wasn't too bad in the East Village, but renting a place became difficult. When I was living with Nancy, she and I and one of the girls from Mobilization for Youth went to rent a place on, maybe, Barrow Street. We rented a basement apartment. All three of us with our master's degrees, but it was so unfriendly that finally I moved across the street. I think I was going with Wolf then and he signed the lease. Johanna Schmidt, that was the other girl, she married the director of Mobilization for Youth. That was an interracial marriage, too.

SK: So, you decided that SoHo was happening.

SP: Yeah. Craft Caravan was on the corner of one of the streets down there, and I used to stop in and see them. They told me that the store on Spring Street was occupied by a couple of East Indian guys who felt they weren't doing the kind of business they should. So I met them, negotiated with them, and I took that store. That was at 154 Spring Street. Next door to the Spring Street Bar, which was very popular.

SK: Was the store on St. Mark's still doing well?

SP: Yeah, I guess so.

SK: You just wanted to move neighborhoods?

SP: I can't remember why I left it, but it wasn't a bad thing.

SK: Have you been to St. Mark's lately? It's so different.

SP: No, I don't go anyplace anymore. I don't even go down to Spring Street or TriBeCa. I go to the corner here—Sixth Avenue. I just stopped traveling. I didn't realize how old I was until Ken and I sat down to figure it out. I thought, *Oh, I've had it!*

SK: When was the last time you worked?

SP: At my store in TriBeCa. I met that guy I was married to for seven days—years. I wish I had only been married for seven days.

SK: How long were you married?

SP: It was a couple of years. Afterwards, I had a breakdown and went to California. I came back and moved out of there. I left wonderful things in there, wonderful furniture and everything else.

I stored some stuff in different friends' basements—which is still in some people's basements—and storage. That's when I moved to the Salvation Army. I thought I'd go there for no more than a month until I found a place. I didn't have any luck finding one. I've been at the fucking Salvation Army, this place, for over ten years. And I'm in a room about the size of these three tables. So that's the end of the story.

1 The John and Mary R. Markle Memorial residence, dedicated in 1930 under the auspices of the Salvation Army, is located at 123 West Thirteenth Street in Manhattan.

CHARLES DANIEL DAWSON

Charles Daniel “Danny” Dawson is a photographer, curator, arts administrator, consultant, filmmaker, and scholar based in New York. He is an early member of the Kamoinge Workshop.

Svetlana Kitto: How did you first hear about Knobkerry?

Charles Daniel Dawson: A friend took me there—Jimmie Mannas. He was at NYU’s Graduate Institute of Film and Television the year before I attended. It was 1967. The school was around the corner from Sara’s shop. She was on St. Mark’s Place and the school was around the block on East Seventh Street. In fact, Jimmie introduced me to both the film school and to Sara. The shop turned out to be a de facto cultural center because artists came by and felt so comfortable. So many musicians and visual artists came by. And also, the shop was really attractive. It was a beautiful shop. I met a lot of musicians there, like Ornette Coleman and the singer Leon Thomas. This whole school of creative people.

SK: What were your first impressions of the store? Was there anything else like it at that time?

CDD: Knobkerry was for me an international wonderland. The store was unique—she was kind of philosophically eclectic. She would just collect whatever she thought was a beautiful piece. She didn’t care what culture it came from. So it would be African, Indonesian, Chinese, whatever. She didn’t have a lot of Northern European stuff, because a lot of shops around the area did.

SK: Like Ukrainian, right?

CDD: Exactly. There were Ukrainian shops that did that, so she didn’t have to, but she might have something European there because it was beautiful and represented a folk or roots tradition. When she moved to East Seventh Street, she was there next door to Ukrainian shops.

Jackie [Lewis] was located right down the street and had her boutique Grand Hotel there.

SK: You went there as well?

CDD: No, mostly Sara’s. At Jackie’s, I’d just go in and say hello. But Sara was a close friend. Also, it was much more welcoming. Not that Jackie wasn’t welcoming, but it was more like a community environment to go by Sara’s.

SK: I don’t know where you were at with your scholarship at that point, but in terms of what you’ve taught, and what you’ve studied, do you remember anything specifically about the materials that you saw there?

CDD: I was only vaguely familiar with African art and textiles. I remember she had Indonesian and African fabrics. She used them for her sewing, also. Sara pulled them all together, so you’d always be asking her, Where did this come from? How’d you get that? How do you make them?

I bought a coat from her, a velvet jacket with a beautiful design embossed in the velvet that I used as my dress-up clothes. It was black velvet, so I bought a pair of black velvet pants and then it looked like I had a suit. It was incredibly beautiful. Sara sold it to me for some ridiculous price, like I think it was only thirty-five dollars. She eventually wanted it back, so I gave it back to her.

SK: Why did she want it back?

CDD: Because she was actually just doing me a favor. This thing was probably worth a few thousand dollars. I’m sure some emperor or some other important person had it made. Her shop was full of that, but also had African sculpture and David Hammons’s stuff, too.

SK: But you went to the store before David Hammons started going there, because he didn’t show at Knobkerry until the ’90s.

CDD: I’m involved in David being in New York, too. I used to be a curator at the Studio Museum, and I chose David, Charles Abramson, and Jorge Rodriguez one year when they still allowed me to help choose the artists. To help with the process. But they stopped after they found out that David and Charles were contrarians—anything you said they couldn’t do, they would do twice. So they never asked me again. I guess they thought my judgment was faulty or too radical.

SK: They were artists in residence?

CDD: Yup. They were all brilliant, too.

SK: You had mentioned that the shop was like a center of cultural life, but it was specifically a center of African American cultural life.

CDD: It wasn’t only African Americans, because all the major artists came by, too. Larry Rivers would come by. I never saw him, but all the major painters would come by. Everybody knew about Sara. I went in a few times when Louise Nevelson was there. She and Sara were friends, and they were just sitting around talking. It wasn’t like business. Nevelson might buy something, but they were just friends talking about art and talking about objects.

SK: To what extent did Sara want it to be that way, do you think?

CDD: I think that’s exactly what she wanted. She constructed it like that. Also, she was just welcoming. She seemed to have a particular thing for musicians. They would just come by and sit and talk—people actually talked, it was a forum where they could hold court.

I remember going in one day and talking to Sara, and she had just gotten a new Indonesian instrument—a bamboo xylophone. And then Don Cherry, who was a famous musician with Ornette, he walked in and looked

at it, picked up the two mallets, looked at the mallets, tapped the thing, and then started playing it. You have to realize there’s no hope of ever becoming a real musician unless you have that kind of gift. He could just look at an instrument and find the notes to make music. God can do that, too. Don just sat in Sara’s shop, making music.

SK: That’s a beautiful story.

CDD: It was really nice, but it was also my realization of a confounding thing about music for me, that he just walked in and could do that. He was born with that kind of brilliance. You could give Don Cherry a tin can, put a hole in it, and he could make music on it. He wouldn’t just toot on it, he would make music.

SK: Did you want to be a musician?

CDD: No, but I enjoyed music and was fascinated by it. Sara was on the same block as the Five Spot Café. Across the street was a place called The Dom, a legendary Lower East Side dance hall or music hall. Sara knew all these musicians, they were all friends. There was this bass player, Jimmy Garrison, who used to play with John Coltrane, and his second wife, Roberta Escamilla Garrison, used to come by. She was a dancer, and she would come out and hang out at Sara’s all the time. So, everybody who was an artist in New York City on the Lower East Side knew Sara’s shop, and would come by and hang out. It was such a comfortable place to be. It was so visually exciting, the place was just beautiful. And her ability to combine international fabrics and objects inspired everybody. People sent jewelry.

SK: Sara would design it as well, I think.

CDD: She would design some jewelry, but she also had Indian silver. I bought a beautiful Indian bracelet from her. Her prices were ridiculous. There were some sacred objects, too. Her taste was so good. At times, she had jewelry designers like Vincent Wilson working there. I bought one of his pieces. She used to sell jewelry by Art Smith, a pioneering Black designer.

SK: That’s what everyone says—that her taste was so good. It wasn’t just an inventory of foreign or exotic materials. It was a curated store.

CDD: Whatever she had, it was the ideal of that thing. If it was an Indian silver bracelet, it would be the best of Indian silver bracelets. If it was an amber necklace, it would be the best of that. The first time I ever saw those big amber beads that come out of Africa was in her shop.

SK: What about patchwork?

CDD: She was one of the first to do patchwork. She’d take fabrics from Africa and from India that were really Indonesian Dutch wax prints made for the African market but that were considered African prints. Some of it was actually made with an African sensibility, using African designs, but a lot came out of Indonesian ideas about what African design should be. She would cut them up into squares, about five-inch squares, and she would make patchwork clothing with them. There is a picture by Dawoud Bey of me wearing a scarf that was one of those things.

She would make coats and shirts and things like that, too. It was like a sensibility in Senegal, with the Mourides, a group of Muslim followers of mystic saints in Senegal—the major one is Sheikh Amadou Bamba Mbàkke. Sheikh Bamba had a disciple, Sheikh Ibrahim Fall, who also had groups of people from Senegal who were musicians and artists, and their practice was: “Work and make music.” One of their standard outfits was patchwork clothes, so you’d see that. The photographer Laylah Amatullah Barryn is actually a Kamoinge member, but she did a series on the Baye Fall, a Senegalese group that were followers of Sheikh Ibrahim Fall. One of their traditional dress is patchwork clothing.

But Sara was doing that in the ’60s before I even heard of Sheikh Ibrahim Fall or the Baye Fall Movement. I don’t think she got it from them, though I don’t think they got it from her either. I think they might’ve been doing it forever since the time of Sheikh Fall. Part of their tradition was that you never threw anything away. If the fabric was worn out in certain areas, you just chopped it up into pieces and put mismatched pieces together. Then that becomes a kind of ritual dress for them. It’s not showing an aesthetic of poverty but instead the idea that they weren’t bound by standard conventions of dress.

SK: Also, at least from our perspective, it’s sustainable.

CDD: There were a few designers around. There was one woman who used to be married to the painter Bob Thompson. She had a shop around the corner.

SK: Carol Plenda. And Andrea Aranow?

CDD: Yeah. And Fumi [Schmidt].

SK: There is the origin story of Sara going from being a social worker to doing the store and being an artist herself. Who shaped Sara, would you say?

CDD: She came from a family that appreciated museums and hanging out in art circles. Also, that area was alive with art, particularly African American artists. First of all, you had all the jazz musicians in the world living there. Then you had theater groups: Negro Ensemble was around the corner. All the Black players were around, and every Black painter was living on the Lower East Side at the time. They all knew Sara, and they all came by the shop.

SK: She influenced so many of the people around her.

CDD: I agree. Just to think of seeing Ornette in Chinese silks—Ornette is really original, but that combination of ideas, of visual ideas in terms of clothes and fabric, that’s Sara. When Ornette first came to town, he was in a standard collegiate 1960s suit with a skinny tie. When I first saw him, he was wearing a big overcoat and a hat without a brim. Well, a little bit of a brim, but it wasn’t shaped or creased in any way. He looked like a hermit or something. A kind of a stylized hermit. But later he wore phoenixes embroidered into Chinese silk. That sensibility comes out of Sara.

SK: Right.

CDD: Of course, Ornette loved art, he had a gallery, so how else would he be thinking. But he's a good friend of Sara's and they see each other all the time too, he's living around the corner. He's got to be influenced by Sara.

Sara basically had two shops: she had the shop out front, where Seret [Scott] and Lois Johnson and Elena [Solow] worked, and another in the back, where people would sit a bit. It was Sara's little boudoir, where you could come and have a more intimate time with her.

When things got interesting, she'd come out and have a good time. She loved socializing there, going out and greeting people.

SK: Do you remember any details of times hanging out there?

CDD: I went there one time because they were doing a photographic session with James Van Der Zee. It had been put together by Camille Billups. Camille was working on a book with Van Der Zee called *The Harlem Book of the Dead*. Poor Mr. Van Der Zee didn't have a clue what they were doing with his work. He had done a series of funerary portraits that were superimposed images of little angels flying over all these dead babies in coffins. It was a standard kind of a funeral photograph from that time. Camille put it together as *The Harlem Book of the Dead*.

Van Der Zee didn't know anything about the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, or any other book of the dead, but he was supposed to be taking pictures there. I think Camille did it as a way to help raise money for Van Der Zee. So they set up where you would come in and have your portrait taken by Van Der Zee. But sometimes Tony Barboza would take the damn picture. Tony basically set it up, because Mr. Van Der Zee couldn't see it—maybe he couldn't push the shutter either. I think they took Basquiat's picture like that and quite a few others. Owen Dodson, the famous playwright and a good friend of mine, had a photograph taken by Van Der Zee in the same way.

It was that kind of event that Sara would come up with—having a Van Der Zee photo session.

SK: Did she know Van Der Zee?

CDD: She knew him, I think, through Camille. Originally, I was the Van Der Zee Curator for Photography, Film and Video at the Studio Museum in Harlem. They created the position for me. For that, I had to do all this research on him. I had to look at fifty-nine thousand pieces. But half of his photographs had been thrown out in the street, so his real collection would have been a hundred-something thousand photos. Most of them were like passport photographs, headshots of taxi drivers or whoever needed an identification photo. He didn't even think his photography was art. He started out with violin playing. Music. Photography was like a schlock trade that he did. Deborah Willis and I did a Van Der Zee show for the Studio Museum where I talked about that. I mentioned that what he was really photographing was the attitude of the time. Black people came to the studio and a lot of times you'd see them dressed up in these beautiful suits. The suits were from racks in his studio. They didn't have suits. They were farmers coming up from the South. They worked in factories. They didn't have any fancy clothes like that, but they had fancy spirits, and the

clothes represented the spirit. It's funny to look at how they constructed themselves that way. Given the choice of objects, how you present yourself.

SK: Did you yourself take pictures in the store?

CDD: I did. Of the store and Sara and some of the guests in the store, of Lois and Seret when they worked there. I don't know where the photos are now, but I remember taking them.

SK: Joanne [Robinson Hill] has mentioned to me your coming into the store on Seventh Street and taking her portrait.

CDD: On St. Mark's, too, in '72. I was photographing in the shop all the time. It was really visually interesting. It was just beautiful. Do you know about Lois Johnson?

SK: You're the first one who's mentioned that name to me.

CDD: She worked at St. Mark's.

SK: Is she alive?

CDD: I think she lives in Brooklyn, but I can't find her contact information.

There was another guy I used to see at Sara's shop all the time, too. He was a close friend who died a few years ago. His name was Jerry Barr. He was an architect and would design futuristic space stations. They're totally nonfunctional but they are incredibly beautiful work—Afro-Futurism before the term was invented.

SK: One thing I've been asking people is to describe Sara's worldview. Was she politically minded?

CDD: She was politically minded the way African Americans are sarcastically reminded of this country and this culture. But she was also an internationalist. The same way she looked at culture at large, she looked at material culture, and she got ideas from it all. That Indonesian fabric could be next to an African fabric; that African sculpture could be next to an instrument from another part of the world, like an Aboriginal instrument. She would have diggeridoos in there. Anything that was uniquely—I don't want to say native—but a strong thing from a culture. Most of the time it was Third World cultures, though there'd be things from Europe that you would see there sometimes. It had to be beautiful.

SK: Something that I've wondered about in terms of our current context is how much of the conversation around taking things from other cultures has changed. Ideas around cultural appropriation. Sara had all these women, including a lot of white women who were very enthusiastic, like Elena, around her. Elena would wear Mexican garb that she got from the villages.

CDD: Elena made a living importing and selling Mexican jewelry and Mexican clothing.

SK: I think it's interesting that in the '60s and '70s, the idea of wearing stuff from another culture would

be transgressive.

CDD: In the '60s, it wasn't seen as transgressive, it was seen as innovative, even informative.

SK: I mean transgressive in relation to the square, mainstream culture.

CDD: Well, yeah. Still, that was not transgressive but insightful. Sara's seeing beauty in another culture, but not appropriating it. It was seeing a parallel beauty that she could incorporate into something she did. She was matching beauty with beauty when she put fabrics from different cultures next to each other.

The shop was like that, too. There was everything from all over the world, but it didn't clash because the unifying factor was her sensibility and the quality of the things of beauty.

SK: What about the people who ended up wearing it? Did she care?

CDD: Well, so many of the things were made for her friends. There was also a kind of hierarchy, where some of the people who worked in the store made fun of the rich white women who bought the objects.

SK: I've wondered about that.

CDD: Well, first of all, Joanne, Lois, and Seret [Scott] were beautiful. They would tie their hair with a beautiful fabric and everybody would come in and want to tie their hair like that. They were conscious of that, it was almost like a tease. I think Sara was really conscious of it, too. She enjoyed playing the game.

Joanne and Seret told me that Faye Dunaway came in there a few times. Everybody who was somebody in the art world who knew something about, not exotica, but the fact that there are other methods or venues for finding things, knew about Sara's shop. She was the pioneer. There was a place called Jacques Carcanagues that's down in SoHo now. They come directly out of Sara. They don't exist without Sara setting that groundwork, seeing these things together.

SK: You've said that you think her impact was singular on the cultural life of New York.

CDD: She normalized that kind of vision.

SK: Can you talk about that?

CDD: The vision we see now, which has become so common because of more fluency in terms of travel, where we see a lot of different items from all over the world put together. Sara did it when you couldn't do that. You didn't even know what it was. Sara found the objects and put them together.

It also gave you the sensitivity to look at other world cultures and see the validity in their material culture. A blanket from Guatemala or an Indonesian fabric or an African mud print, you understand that they're all beautiful. They might not be ritually made for the same purpose, but they're all equally beautiful.

That was part of Sara's internationality, raising our level of international visual sophistication. She was

so good at that, without following any textbook. She followed her own sensibility. That's why the store was such an *objet d'art* itself. You're looking at pillows on a Chinese bed, a Tibetan bed, or an Indian bed from the 1800s. That's what the pillows are sitting on. And that's what you're sitting on when you sit down and talk to Sara. And then you're sitting in one of those folding African chairs. They're all right next to each other, a unique way of showing each individual material culture as beautiful. You can feel them and see them and understand the sensibility.

Nothing clashed, because it all fit into her particular sensibility. There was such a high level of artistry and understanding of what art is. Only she would know that you could put a simple African chair next to a David Hammons. They're not in conflict—they're in conversation. You get to look at the conversation they're having.

SK: And then the theater people were a whole other thing.

CDD: Right. Woodie King was the don of African American theater. He was a major producer of African American plays since the '60s. He was a film producer and a playwright and an actor, and he was a good friend of Sara's.

Everybody in theater was a friend of Sara's. All those places, all the theaters around her were in there too. It was a sensibility you couldn't avoid. If you're hanging out with someone like David or Tyrone Mitchell or Charles Abramson and they have a shirt or a scarf and you say, Oh, where did you get that? They'd say, Oh, I got it at Sara's. Everybody knew where that was.

SK: It's interesting that stores, unlike museums or even galleries to some extent, are much more transient because they're strictly based on commerce. It could have been a gallery, but it wasn't.

CDD: Well, galleries are just as transient as stores.

SK: I guess so. With a gallery, though, she could have made more money, right?

CDD: She probably could have. Priced things properly.

SK: A lot of it, too, seems to be that she was just very generous.

CDD: I know she was generous to me, but I don't know if she was generous because we were friends.

SK: She was friends with everyone who came into the store.

CDD: You're damn right. But a lot of the people that she was closer to were treated differently. I know I was the beneficiary of that. I got a more reasonable price than her general prices.

SK: She did make a living. At one point, she made a lot of money.

CDD: Once you got something from there, you didn't get rid of it. It was like something your grandmother gave you

as an heirloom, but you got it from Sara.

SK: Why do you think she stopped doing social work?

CDD: She was working at the Lower East Side Settlement House, and it was frustrating. Social work is bullshit in the United States. It's like a patchwork of systemic problems. You realize that you can't help your client because it's a system structured to keep them where they are. It's frustrating unless all you want is a paycheck.

Because Sara was an artist, she was more than happy to find a new way of fulfilling herself. I don't know how she started with Knobkerry, though.

SK: I have so much amazing stuff that Renoir [Darrett] sent me. Let me show you some: This is Lauren Hutton in a choli. These are all Knobkerry items and jewelry. This is a *Saturday Evening Post* from 1968. And this is from the *Christian Science Monitor* on June 7, 1968: "Today's Afro-American is literally bringing his culture out of the closet. Men and women alike are wearing native African dress on the streets where they live. . . . They're letting their hair 'go natural,' instead of straightening it. Women are abandoning red lipstick. Little ready-to-wear and custom shops are springing up across Manhattan and Brooklyn, from Bedford-Stuyvesant and Harlem to the East Fifties and into the East Village. One of the more firmly established, Sara Penn's Knobkerry shop on St. Marks Place, is a focal point." Then they interview people.

CDD: Did they say who they interviewed?

SK: Yeah. Raymond Saunders was one.

CDD: Raymond Saunders is a famous painter. He teaches at Berkeley.

SK: And here's the actor/model Bert Middleton quoted explaining why he started wearing African clothes: "I thought it better to identify with something closer to my own heritage' than to wear a Nehru coat or Mao collar, he told me." And, a little later: "Small-framed Sara Penn had on Ethiopian pants and shirt in white monk's cloth with an overshirt in batik print from Nigeria. She was about to change into Western clothes, and report to work at the Human Resources Administration, where she is a full-time social worker. She's been handling two careers since she opened Knobkerry on Seventh Street in 1965. So far, she hasn't felt like giving up her job. But since she moved the shop to St. Mark's Place three months ago, she said, it really has 'caught on. I'm hoping it will get to this place where I can do just this.' . . . Knobkerry already keeps designers Olive Thurman Wong, an Afro-American, and Fumi Schmidt, a young Japanese, busy full-time. Prices run from about six dollars for a plain dashiki to two hundred and fifty dollars for a coat of elaborately embroidered dowry cloth."

It goes on: "Although most of the Afro-Americans in New York aren't wearing African garb to work, except perhaps in Harlem, it's being seen more and more on the streets of Manhattan. Natural hairstyles are getting to be commonplace. The new image, which took hold in black nationalist groups and spread across the ghettos, is picking up. . . . A visitor from Liberia and Nigeria

observed that most fashionable Africans wouldn't be caught in their own backyards in most of the African-inspired dress being worn here. Their native robes are much finer, she said. Then she added with amusement that while many Africans are going Afro, many Africans are taking to Western dress during the day. They're also doing their share of updating, such as slitting the sides of their long, narrow lapa skirts so they can hop on and off public transit cars. Several years ago, the African look had virtually saturated American and European high fashion in at-home and evening clothes, but had almost disappeared when today's new image started spreading among Afro-Americans. Some say it's just a fad. Others say that it's one of many manifestations of the black American's positive reception of his African heritage."

CDD: They create a goddamn dialectic when there wasn't one.

SK: How so?

CDD: The negativity about the interpretation of African Americans or Africans themselves. That certainly wasn't an issue. If there were differences with some of these, it was an understood difference. It also had a lot to do with political aspirations, and who was an immigrant who wanted to fit into the American scene. At least, my generation was trying to get away from the American scene.

SK: The American scene?

CDD: We weren't interested in being American. Still aren't. An enduring conflict.

SERET SCOTT

Seret Scott is a theater director, playwright, and actor best known for her roles in the films *Losing Ground* and *Pretty Baby*, as well as many theatrical productions, including Ntozake Shange's first staging of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf*.

Svetlana Kitto: When did you first go to Knobkerry?

Seret Scott: In 1966. Sara's first shop was on East Sixth Street, down the block from the entrance to Tisch School of Arts/NYU, where I was studying.¹ I probably met Sara within the first month of being at the university. Every day I'd walk up to the shop window and just stare at the beautifully presented, elaborate compilation of fabric, textiles, clothing, pottery, wall hangings, jewelry . . . I couldn't stop staring. Imported items I'd never seen outside of a museum display were shimmering in the window of that small Lower East Side shop. On one occasion I saw Sara bustling around inside and I knocked on the door, thinking the shop was closed. Sara came to the door and I, with no real thought, said I was a model and would really like to model her clothing if she ever needed one.

She looked at me like *Who is this kid and what is she even talking about?* and then she said, "Hmm, come on in." I went in and was overwhelmed. Overwhelmed. In that small room was just every kind of beautiful fabric and textile from everywhere.

It wasn't just clothing, there were wraps and blankets, odd musical instruments, and I don't know what else. We talked. She asked what I was studying at university, where I was from, where I was living now, and then she told me to come back next week, and I did. She started me that day as a salesperson, so I probably started working for Sara within the first couple of months of moving to New York. There wasn't a real schedule. I'd go there if I didn't have late classes or rehearsals, and she'd tell me what she needed done in the shop that day. "Salesgirl" was a loose term—we sewed, swept up, arranged displays, pretty much everything. Most people came in with the same sense of awe I felt, because no one had seen that kind of shop before. It attracted a certain type of person. Our customers were seasoned travelers, hippies, collectors, musicians, scholars, and housewives, and the items in the store had some kind of personal resonance for them.

SK: Yes.

SS: I was a "Knobkerry Girl." Sara had a rotating group of young women who worked at Knobkerry part-time, and wore clothing from the shop while working. It wouldn't be a full outfit, maybe a wrap or scarf, and almost everything we put on would sell that day. Customers weren't really sure how to wear the clothing. Much of the inventory was one of a kind. It might be a thick shawl from Peru that had four different woven patterns. You never got something that someone else was walking down the street with.

SK: Was this the period of time when Jimi Hendrix would come into the store?

SS: Twice, I waited on him twice!

SK: Tell me about that.

SS: Well, I didn't really wait on *him*. He came in with the two women he was living with (just saying). Sara had an ordinary wooden stool by the counter that for some reason attracted everybody. Jimi just sat there, with his iconic black hat pulled low, while the women shopped.

The women were like butterflies, picking things up. "Ooh, I love this. I love that, I love this," and would put it on the counter. There was a bit of rivalry—if one picked up a necklace, the other one would pick up earrings or something, and he just sat there. So I didn't literally wait on him, but he was the one who paid for everything.

Another story . . . A guy, kind of lean and short with an unusual vibe, came into the shop one afternoon. I can't remember which location of Knobkerry it was. He looked around awhile and then pulled some matchbooks out of his pocket. The matchbooks were those little folded cardboard things where you tear the match off. The inside of the matchbook was usually just plain brown cardboard. On the inside of his matchbooks were little watercolor paintings. He wanted to trade them for an article of clothing. Well, as a simple salesgirl, I couldn't do that. I don't remember if another salesgirl was there—rarely would there only be one person—but I just couldn't make that trade of a clothing item for tiny matchbook watercolors. Later I was to find out that it was [Jean-Michel] Basquiat.

SK: Oh, my gosh!

SS: He didn't have money and wanted to trade these little paintings of his. He wasn't famous at that time, not known by his face anyway. I wasn't able to do anything, but that's who it was.

SK: That's a great story!

SS: Ornette Coleman was a really important and well-known jazz musician at that time. He'd come in and sit on the stool, just sit and watch people come in. He would talk with us if nobody was in the shop.

Another time, Sonny Rollins came in the shop—a big-time horn player. He came in and said that he wanted to get in touch with the jazz musician Don Cherry. Don had moved to Europe, Amsterdam I think, so Sonny Rollins wanted to leave his phone number for Sara to give to Don. He knew that Don Cherry would come in when he was back to the States. We're obviously talking before cell phones and computers. Sara was in the back of the shop, so Sonny gave me the number. This must've been Sixth Street, not St. Mark's, because Sara worked in the back on Sixth. I walked back and called her, "Sara, there's a guy here who wants to leave his phone number for Don Cherry." I didn't know either Sonny Rollins or Don Cherry at that time—I was such a ding-dong about all of it. Sara comes out and says, "Oh, hi, Sonny," and they chat a bit.

SK: Yeah.

SS: Then he leaves, and Sara turns to me and says, "What do you mean, 'a guy here'?! Don't you ever say 'a guy here wants you.' That was Sonny Rollins!"

Lena Horne came in and Eartha Kitt. Miles Davis didn't come in while I was there, but he was parked outside once for some reason. This was on St. Mark's. There were people who would book a layover if they were flying from California to Europe, they'd have a stopover in New York at JFK airport, get off that plane, get a cab, come straight to Knobkerry, and buy stuff. We'd see the item on an album cover. So many musicians, but remember when she moved to St. Mark's, the shop was literally across the street from the Electric Circus. Those were mostly the Janis Joplin—type of folks.

SK: Did you work at the St. Mark's store, as well?

SS: Yeah. I worked for Sara for years and years whenever I wasn't working as an actress. She said, "Come on down," and I worked in the SoHo shop also. Just everybody, I'm not kidding you, everybody came into Knobkerry.

SK: I heard Mick Jagger came in. Sonny and Cher came in. Mia Farrow shopped there. Fashion designers like Yves Saint Laurent and all these people. I heard that Yves Saint Laurent maybe stole ideas from Knobkerry.

SS: Everybody did. A lot of her ideas got stolen.

SK: Do you know any examples of that?

SS: It was a major magazine. I don't think it was *Vogue*, it may have been *Women's Wear*. Once when she opened the paper, it was basically her shop window that had been recreated in a studio and photographed. It wasn't subtle—let's just put it that way.

SK: She was so innovative in her displays and creations. I know she also made jewelry.

SS: If something was broken in the shop, like a necklace, she would take some of the parts and make earrings out of them. People would say, "Oh, these earrings are unusual!" Yeah, well, that's because about twenty minutes ago they were a necklace.

The shop on Sixth Street had another shop next door, owned by a woman. Actually, there were two other women-owned shops. There was a handcrafted jewelry shop, and another shop owned by [Barbara Shaum], who handcrafted leather sandals. I still have a pair she made me. She measured my feet and literally cut the leather pieces to my exact measurements. She and Sara spent time together both socially and for business discussions. At that time it was a big deal for women to own their own shop.

SK: There were lots of different stores that were selling handmade clothes for hippies, right?

SS: Oh, absolutely. For twenty years, everything I owned was mirrored, embroidered, or tie-dyed. That was it. I mean hey, I was living on the Lower East Side. Like I said, on St. Mark's, the Electric Circus was across the street from the shop, and on Sixth Street, the shop was around the corner from the Fillmore East.

Sometimes if she was sewing in the back on Sixth Street and someone called ahead and said Lena Horne was going to stop by at three o'clock, Sara would be there. She'd look at us with an expression that said, "Lena Horne is coming. Put some flowers on the counter!"

One of the people who used to come in and just sit was the actor Garrett Morris—he was on *Saturday Night Live* and now on *2 Broke Girls*. The photographer Danny [Dawson] was always in there. People would come in and just sit.

SK: Sara wasn't there, mostly?

SS: A lot of that time she was there but not present in the front of the shop. She'd work in a small space in the back, or off-site if necessary. The shops weren't big enough for her to work in the back, except perhaps Sixth Street, which may have been a converted apartment. Sara sewed whenever she could. I also worked in the shop all the way downtown.

SK: On Spring Street?

SS: Yeah. I worked on Spring Street. That's where a lot of artist types came in as opposed to musicians.

A lot of times when I worked with Sara, or for Sara, in the '80s or even early '90s, it was simply because I wanted to. I just wanted to be in the shop.

SK: When was the time that Ntozake Shange would come in?

SS: When it was on St. Mark's, we were all around that area because there were theaters there. The Public Theater was only three blocks away. Ntozake would probably have come in at that time.

SK: Did you get cast in *Colored Girls* after you had already met Sara and were working there?

SS: Oh, yeah. I did *Colored Girls* on Broadway in 1976–77, and a bunch of us would go down to Knobkerry between a matinee and an evening performance as a group. She would've been at St. Mark's at that time.

SK: Right.

SS: Whenever something happened that was major, I always made sure that I went down and told Sara. She did not like to go above Fourteenth Street. I'm not kidding you—she was a Lower East Side person.

SK: So, she might not go to a play of yours if it was above Fourteenth Street?

SS: Well, she probably wouldn't anyway, if she felt she had to be in the shop. But I would tease her about it.

SK: How would you say the later shops, the Spring Street and West Broadway stores, were different in terms of inventory or objects?

SS: The Spring Street store, in my memory, attracted mostly visual artists—the windows would appeal to them. Sara would have some object from Asia or South America, large pottery or something with fabric draped

on it. That would bring people in. As I recall, when she was on Spring Street, she had more stuff that people who worked and traded with her would make into some sort of interesting thing.

I remember when I'd be at the shop, especially the shop on St. Mark's, guys would come in specifically to Knobkerry to show handmade items from some other country. They'd have bags of stuff to show, and we'd call Sara, tell her to come to the shop. They'd take the trade out and display it. They didn't show her second-rate stuff—it was always good quality or one-of-a-kind items. They and Sara would make a deal. Sometimes it would be that Sara would take something on commission, sometimes she just paid them straight out. Myself and whoever I was working with that day would sit there and think, *I want that*, but we wouldn't say it aloud because we'd get in trouble with Sara, "The price went up because you said you like it!"

SK: I know that Knobkerry was speaking to a bohemian and hippie clientele, but it also seemed like a center of specifically African American cultural life, attracting all kinds of makers like artists, dancers, and musicians. I'm interested in what were some of Sara's ideas behind the store in terms of say, Blackness and the way that she grew up. What was she was trying to do that was different than white mainstream society at the time?

SS: Well, she had clothing from Africa. This was at a time, especially on the Lower East Side, when you rarely saw Blacks, even American Blacks. When I was at NYU, perhaps I'd see a day laborer, maybe a construction person, but mostly I didn't see Blacks around. Sara didn't import anything, she got African clothing and items because people came to her. It was mainly collectors, and other artists, who were interested in items from Africa. At that time, it was hippie clothing and artifacts that got attention. The whole point of the hippie thing was to look like somebody else.

When she lost the last shop in New York, we were very concerned about what was going to happen to some of the clothing and works she had, since they were valuable pieces. Four or five of us stored things for Sara so that they wouldn't just get taken. Right now, in my basement, I have African tops that you might call dashikis. I have large clay pots from Africa and, I think, Iran. Things like that that I don't know what to do with because I don't know who trades in that kind of thing anymore.

Fabric and textiles, that was the world Sara lived in and found most comforting. I think that she wanted everybody to recognize the brilliance of a piece of fabric and the story that it could tell. It would lift you into another way of looking at things, looking at the world.

When I started working at Knobkerry, I changed my entire way of dressing. Everything I had on was Knobkerry, and if it wasn't, it was from a secondhand shop and dressed up with things over it from Knobkerry. It was just everything. Knobkerry was an expression of the universe, it brought in everything and everybody to the shop . . . and into the objects of other places—the pottery, the artwork, the paintings, and definitely the clothing.

She had shoes the shepherds wore in Morocco. That was the kind of thing that interested me, and the

fact that she didn't let me, or any of us, get away with anything. Meaning that if you didn't do it right, something would happen. She would say, "What do you mean, you didn't such-and-such?!" You'd feel it, and really want to be forgiven—"Oh, please forgive me, my queen." We were her daughters. Even my own mother would say to me, "Talk to Sara about that." There were things she expected from us and I tried to deliver them.

FUMI SCHMIDT

Fumi Schmidt is a clothes designer. She came to New York from Honolulu to be a dancer, enrolling in the first dance class offered at the Juilliard School. For thirty years, she ran her own clothing store, featuring her unique and custom designs, first on Spring Street and then on Sixth Street. Schmidt's daughter, Rie Schmidt, was present during the interview.

Svetlana Kitto: How did you meet Sara?

Fumi Schmidt: Sara and I met by accident in Phyllis Jewelry. Curiously enough, Phyllis found that we had the right attitude and the right skills to be good apprentices, because we knew nothing. I just needed a job. I walked into Phyllis Jewelry, and she had this thing about dancers. She said that they make the best apprentices because hand-eye coordination is crucial. She said that as soon as she found out that a person had dancer's training, she knew they would make the best students.

I became a very good jeweler because Phyllis was a very good teacher. She taught me how to set stones and do soldering. Sara too. I don't know how Sara got the job, but we worked together a lot and became good friends. Sara lived in the neighborhood and I lived in the neighborhood, and we hung out together a bit. It was such a casual relationship in the shop. I don't know if you know Phyllis, but Phyllis was—we all would be—considered very eccentric.

SK: How were you eccentric?

FS: Well, I used to be a dancer. Whenever I had to go to class or audition, I just did it. I did a couple of Broadway shows and I was in a dance company. Phyllis knew I had to have a job that was very flexible. If we had a big order, we would just stay late.

SK: What was Sara like then?

FS: Well, she didn't have all her concentration on the job. It was just a job for her. She was still doing social work. She loved making jewelry, though.

Phyllis was the perfect employer because she never cared when we got there, and when it was time for us to be paid, she would just say, "Okay, tell me how much I owe you." And that was it. It was really very loose, which was great.

That's why Sara and I flourished. I remember that one of the first times we met, something was burning up in the workshop. We were using very strong torches for soldering and Sara said, "I think that we better do something about that." I said, "That's okay. It'll die out." We were very casual, but it could have been very serious. I remember Sara being just as cool as I was.

SK: I know that Sara's boyfriend at that time was Wolf Kahn. Did you know him?

FS: I never met him, but I know he probably would have made her the best husband. He lived in France, and she was thinking of marrying him, but didn't.

SK: Well, let's get back to Knobkerry. I'd like to hear about the opening of the store.

FS: She knew she wanted to do something other than social work. She suddenly decided she wanted to open a store. Of course she knew nothing about it, but she's a quick learner and she found the right location on Spring Street. It was a beautiful store. I think she had thought about it a lot, because Sara was not stupid.

SK: What was it like?

FS: Because she was perfect as a personality and in her taste in people, it was pretty successful from the beginning. St. Mark's was the first store, and it was a big success because of her personality. It was a hangout place. I used to help her put stuff together because I always had good skills with my hands and with machines.

SK: She wanted you to make things for her, right?

FS: I used to make and mend clothes, since she couldn't do it. The third person was Olive Wong. She was not much of a sewer either, but she had an incredible eye and impeccable taste. She was very refined. We'd always go for the finest, most expensive stuff—she would say, "Sara, that's the one to buy." Sara was learning all the time and she had so much to do that I became the craftsperson and Olive the shopper. She used to go buying with Sara a lot. Sara was perfectly willing to go along with all of this. It was a happy collection of skills because I was available to hang out in the shop when she needed something pulled together.

SK: Did you make clothes that were your designs, or was it always Sara's designs?

FS: It was never my designs. Olive made her own designs. Sara would find materials and say, "You think you can reproduce this?" I would say, "Yeah, I think we can." It was like that. Sara used to love Indian cholis. We made a lot of those because they always sold and she could never find enough of them. That was easy.

SK: Can you tell me what Sara's concept was behind the store to begin with?

FS: She didn't want to do social work and she wanted a freewheeling store. There was always a salon in the back, never mind the customers. Sara was always the complete hostess all the time and would get coffee or tea for people. And people did hang out. A lot of people did, women as well as guys.

SK: So there was this inventory that you guys were designing and producing, but there was also inventory that she was buying from other people and selling, right?

FS: She ran the business part of it, that was her baby. It was her investment, and she dealt with the finances. I don't know that her skills were in that direction, but it was her store.

SK: Didn't she also buy ethnographic materials from abroad?

FS: The store was unusual in that all of these peddlers came to the shop to sell. She didn't travel too much, though she did go to Guatemala and Belize. She would go out of town to look for things, but basically some of the best came right into the store from people who were traveling all over the world and buying. They would bring it to her and she would love it, and she would buy it. That was something that went on in the back room all the time.

SK: Selling?

FS: Yeah. People would say, "Oh, go to Knobkerry and show Sara this, she might be interested." She had good instincts about what would go, because she knew what she wanted the personality of the store to be. She couldn't have traveled enough to have found all those beautiful items, and it was a time when there were a lot of young people traveling around in India and Afghanistan and Pakistan. And she knew John Gregg. He loved to travel and he would always bring back wonderful items. She would buy it like crazy because he had beautiful taste and a feeling for the culture of the place. He loved doing it. He would say, "Oh, when we were in Kashmir, we saw this and we saw that." He would bring it back and Sara would love it because John was such a great shopper.

SK: Were there other stores like Knobkerry? Was she part of a trend, or did she start a trend of stores that sold all different kinds of materials?

FS: There wasn't anything like that I know of—but of course my world was so small then.

I think the world was ready for all the exotic items that were suddenly available, and Sara was in the front of it. She made wonderful windows, and lots of guys from uptown came to check out her stores because they figured she knew something that nobody else knew. Fred Leighton tried to be like her, but he didn't have that thing.

You have to be open. Sara read a lot of books and looked at a lot of pictures, and she'd say, "Oh, this looks fantastic." And then John would appear with some choice material and she would say, "Oh my God, I can't pass this up." People were always making things available to her, so she never had to travel to all these places. The people that traveled were seeing stuff that hadn't been seen before. And when they came back, they always knew that if they took it to Sara first, she had first dibs, she would buy it. She had such an eye.

SK: What kind of people came into the shop?

FS: Every kind of person you can think of—socialites, celebrities, and collectors. People like Lena Horne, for instance. Lena was always into clothing, and I made her some pieces. She was so charming that when she called me on the phone, I couldn't believe I was talking to her—it was such a thrill. And she was so beautiful that whatever you made for her she loved. She'd say, "Oh, I went to this dinner party with my daughter and her husband (he's like some famous director or something) and they love this dress that you made for me." I said, "How fantastic."

SK: Do you have other stories about clothes you made for people?

FS: In those days there was a big rock star name—Janis Joplin. She was a big star. She bought some of my stuff. Knobkerry was such a unique store that people went to it out of curiosity. It was very unusual, and Sara was eccentric enough that she endorsed things that were not ordinary. People were very excited by the store. They loved the merchandise and that it was always something they had never seen before.

SK: Are we talking about the '60s or the '70s?

FS: '60s.

Rie Schmidt: I think it's more the '70s, because I remember going there when I was in college. I think she hired me very briefly at the St. Mark's store during that period.

SK: It was sort of like a hub of cultural and social activity, right?

FS: Yes. She didn't care if people didn't buy. She didn't care if they hung out either. I used to do what I had to do. I would have to go home and cook and take care of my family, so I observed some hours but not a strict schedule. It was a beautiful time for her because she was her own person. In retrospect, I see that she was doing it because her mother would not have approved of this loose, nomadic, no-schedule, open-ended life. I think Sara probably spent the rest of her life trying to undo her mother. Her mother was very, very proper and very strict.

SK: Did you meet her mom?

FS: I met her mother more than once. She came to New York often to check on Sara. And Sara was fine with it because her mother never stayed. She lived in California. She wanted Sara to lead a certain kind of life and bought her that house in Pasadena. Sara blew that. She didn't want that house.

SK: When you were at Knobkerry on Spring Street, was the store making money?

FS: Of course paying the bills was important, but Sara never seemed to have any problems with that. She could pay the rent and she had a car and she had a certain lifestyle, and it never seemed financially difficult for her. She was doing something right, and I think it was because she had the right merchandise in the right location at the right time. That Spring Street shop was really the most successful. It was very beautiful and very big, and Sara filled it with her personality.

I had a shop on Spring Street myself. That's a funny story. Sara called to say that there was a guy named Fred who had a shop on Spring Street. She said, "Fred wants to get out of the business and his shop is for sale. Do you want to take it over?"

RS: It was for rent.

FS: I said, "Are you crazy?" I couldn't even make the rent. But in two or three days, I had a shop on Spring

Street. She was so persuasive. That was a nice period when she had her shop and I had my shop. And we were different because I designed and made clothing from all this wonderful material that she introduced me to. It was very inspiring for me to have some of the merchandise that she had because I was able to incorporate it into my development.

SK: Did you keep making clothes for her while you had your store, or did someone else?

FS: Not while I had my store, no. We were just a block apart, but her store was totally different than mine. Mine was a custom shop.

SK: A tailor shop.

FS: I did a lot of one-of-a-kind and I did a lot of custom work. Then I went to FIT for a while. My skills were very strong because I'd been making clothes since I was nine years old. I could whip around the machine like crazy, and for me it was a natural thing. I wanted to make beautiful, original clothing. We were in different areas, but Sara's shop was certainly an inspiration for me. That's when I got introduced to a lot of beautiful fabrics.

Nobody had seen these kinds of fabrics and nobody had seen this kind of designing. When I went to FIT, the job counselor said, "You should never work for anybody on Seventh Avenue. You've got to always work for yourself." And I always have, not because of what she said but because I knew that otherwise I would just be a little workhorse in the garment business. Freedom allows you to . . .

SK: To be creative.

FS: I could make colossal mistakes and nobody could say anything.

SK: Did you get a lot of African fabrics from Sara?

FS: Oh, yeah. But everything, not just African. It was from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, the lower part of Russia, the UK. I loved it because I'd never seen this kind of fabric before. I had all this beautiful Japanese, Korean, and Chinese material.

I loved putting together things that were totally unrelated culturally, because it would be startling. I think that's what people loved about it, that they couldn't be jaded when they saw it.

You have to be aesthetically balanced. If I had something so striking that it would overwhelm the garment, I made sure it was a wearable garment. It couldn't look like a costume. It had to be a beautiful garment that enhanced the person who was wearing it. I think the reason people loved it was because it was all very wearable. You didn't want to be considered some garish costume person. I sewed a lot of costumes in costume shops, and it bored me. I hated unaesthetic clothing—it bothered me. Sara was definitely the influence on this kind of designing, which I wouldn't call far out but unique.

SK: Can you describe it more? Can you give me an example?

FS: Take what I call the obi jacket—I had some antique Japanese obis in the front, I had Indian silks at the side, and I had old sixteenth-century European embroidery on the top, and it was all toned down with black velvet. It was beautiful together, never garish. The one thing no one could accuse me of is making anything that was difficult to wear or too costumey. That's when the garment wears the wearer instead of the person wearing the garment. It had to be unusual, but not far out, ugly unusual. It had to be aesthetically right. That was built into me.

SK: Something I wanted to ask you about. As a female African American entrepreneur at this time in New York, Sara must have experienced some bullshit and racism—or was the store so multicultural that she was insulated from that?

FS: I don't know too much about her growing-up years, but I have an idea because I knew her mother. I knew that the mother wanted her to be a proper Black debutante.

Sara didn't want it to be that way. It repelled her if you even thought of that. Basically, I guess that's why we gravitated towards each other. I knew that she was a very private person and I knew that we could never be girly, girly lady friends who went to lunch a lot. We didn't have the time and she wasn't made that way and neither was I. So it was perfect the way we met and the way we developed a friendship. We were such individuals.

When she came to New York, she did exactly as she damn pleased. She didn't follow friends' advice. She said, "I'm finished with taking advice from people. I'm going to do my own thing, no matter how ill-advised it is." And she did.

RS: Do you think it was hard for her being a Black woman running a business?

FS: No. I don't think that bothered her too much. She wasn't thin-skinned about being Black. I think she didn't like certain things about herself because her mother probably told her that she wished Sara were more this way or more that way.

SK: Sara's mother was very much into the church.

FS: Very much into the church, very much wanting Sara to be this perfect little Spelman girl. That's why Olive was the incredible third person in this trio—because she escaped that. Olive was raised as a Black debutante, and she went to Vassar. Her father, Howard Thurman, was a Black celebrity theologian. Olive was mentally tougher, in a way, than Sara. Sara could be swayed one way or the other. Olive would not be diminished by anybody because she was a strong woman. Olive married a guy named Victor Wong, so her last name was Wong.

SK: What was Olive's actual job?

FS: She was a librarian.

RS: Later in life, she worked at Lincoln Center, the Public Library, and the National Archives.

FS: She was very smart. It was unusual that the three of us got together, because we were anything but alike.

Olive was the one that had to be obeyed, and she and Sara had clashes because of their personalities. I never did with Olive, only because I knew where she was coming from. I knew that there was no way I could match my tenacity with hers because she was tough. She never let Sara ride roughshod over her either.

SK: Did Sara pay Olive?

FS: No. Sometimes when she brought in a garment—and they were so cheap—she got some money for it, I think, but I never knew any of their arrangements. Whenever I worked the machine, I got paid like a seamstress. If I ever sewed my clothing, which I did very rarely in her store, she always gave me the money for it. Sara was not a money person. She was anything but a businesswoman.

SK: But you say she did all the business of the store.

FS: She did. The store paid its bills, but she was never hungry, greedy, for profit. She wasn't that kind of a person. She handled the running and managing of the shop. I hated all that, I really did, and so did Olive, but Sara didn't seem to mind it.

There was never any problem with having to make a sales pitch because when people came in and loved something, they wanted it, and that was it. We never had to worry about selling.

SK: How long did the three of you work together?

FS: It had to be at least a couple of years.

RS: Probably longer than that.

FS: With Sara, there was no plan. She improvised. She had instincts and she knew that she never had to sell, which was great for her. They wanted to buy it. In fact, they couldn't wait to buy it because of the quality, which was so mind-blowing. As I said, one thing is that Sara was not stupid. We had great respect for each other. We knew that there were certain areas you didn't go into because it was not necessary. You never had to have long speeches about what was wrong with the relationship because we never had any problems.

I had skills that she didn't have, and I think she recognized that. That was good. I remember when I sold my clothing to Bloomingdale's for the first time, Sara was very excited. But I said, "Sara, they want me to make thirty of those. I can't make thirty. I can make maybe eight." She said that I should try, and I said, "You want me to go insane. I can't make thirty of those dresses, because each one is different. I'm not going to do that." I made as many as I could.

SK: What happened when Sara went to California and tried to open stores there?

FS: She went to Pasadena and tried to live a very proper life. She opened a store that I think it was just okay. Pasadena is a middle-class town, and that's what her mother wanted for her. Sara probably felt like she was suffocating, and that's why she couldn't stay there. She had the house and she could have been very

comfortable in that house. But I think she basically hated it there.

SK: Did you see her much in the past ten years?

FS: We saw each other like old friends. When I was in Honolulu for a couple of stretches and I didn't get in touch with her, she was really pissed. I explained that I was taking care of the family and the house and my brother.

RS: She used to come over, when she was in better physical shape, and bring my mother something from the place where she was living—maybe a bag of oranges that she didn't want to eat.

FS: But then later, a couple of times she said, "Maybe we can go and have some tea." Then I said, "Why go to tea? Come over here so we can have tea in my living room." When she was in bad shape the last year, I told her, "Sara, I have an apartment and I want you to come and stay with me." She said, "No way."

SK: Why?

RS: She couldn't. This is a two-flight walk-up. She said, "I could never do the stairs."

FS: She just didn't like the idea of being roommates. Because I would be like her mother.

RS: The last time I saw her, about four or five years ago, I had bought tickets for *Hamilton* for my daughter and her friend, and my mother and me. My daughter and her friend couldn't come, so my husband came and we invited Sara.

FS: She loved it.

RS: The show was still in its first or second year. The last time I talked to her on the phone, which was maybe two years after that, she kept saying, "Oh, I loved *Hamilton*, it was so much fun. That's first time I've been anywhere above Fourteenth Street in two years."

FS: I'm so glad we gave her that last ticket. One of the last times I spoke to Sara, I said, "I better go and check you out in your room." She said, "Oh, no, you can't come up here." She never wanted anyone there. When I told her she could come here to live, God, that was like the kiss of death. She would never. I understood completely. I said, "Okay, but you know, if you get so desperately sick of that place you're in, you can come here." She had a lot of friends, but whether they would come to her in her hour of need, who could know? I was not going to let her go on the streets, that much I knew.

SK: But she didn't want to go up your stairs.

FS: Yeah. I always met her halfway or downstairs. I didn't want her to take the stairs because they were tough for her. She didn't want any demands made on her condition because that's the way she was. Didn't want any pity or solace of any kind. She was independent. And I respect that because I understand it so well. That's exactly the way I am.

KATE PRENDERGAST AND JANE BARRELL YADAV

Kate Prendergast and Jane Barrell Yadav are the daughters of the painter Marcia Marcus, who became friends with Sara Penn when Penn first moved to New York. Both daughters conduct legacy work for their mother and other artists.

Kate Prendergast: I know my mom referred to Sara as her best friend at the time, but that was always changing.

Jane Barrell Yadav: We went to school on Eleventh Street, across from where the music school is now. My mother was born in that building, and we went to school there. It was Downtown Community School. After school, she would pick us up and we would typically wander over to Eighth Street, where Knobkerry was for a while. And then across the street, where [Mary Rafferty-Kanowitz] had the Queen of Diamonds. As you can imagine, that's full-on teenagers, hippies sleeping on the streets, that whole thing.

For Sara and for Mary, it was contentious. They couldn't stand the crowds. There's that piece of being really tough businesswomen. Just putting up with a lot, having very unique product for the time. My dad got a blue corduroy Nehru jacket out of there, and my mother got lots of dresses. There is an early portrait that my mother did of Sara, that she may have traded for dresses and jewelry, or whatever. Could have been a possibility at that time.

The painting, I think, is 1966, and right in there is where Sara's experimenting with clothes. She always loved clothes. I have, and Kate too, vivid memories of being in the shop and seeing all the toys. Sara did more sewing when she went to the location on Seventh Street. She was always giving us little bits of material, the scraps, that we would take home and use to make clothes for Barbie dolls. I had a sewing machine, I was given one in 1969, so I was sewing a lot. She would encourage that, she was really into fashion.

I just remember that her laugh was just fantastic. She and my mother could joke with each other, I think they really met on the same level. It was always a treat. To go into her shop was just a real treat.

Svetlana Kitto: When you say the shop, are you talking about the St. Mark's shop or the Seventh Street shop, or both?

JBY: I remember the Eighth Street shop as being very bright and having more dresses, and maybe she was doing some sewing in the back but I don't remember it from that time. I definitely remember that Seventh Street seemed to be more focused. In my memory, the back was pretty large, and her sewing machine would always be out with some project that she was working on or collaborating on. She was getting a lot of material from

India—or, I don't know where she was sourcing it. There were pins on the floor. I remember picking them up for her, that was a big deal.

SK: I think she lived in the back of that store for a while.

JBY: That's probably why it had more of a homey feel, for hanging out. I know that she made me feel special, because once I drew a drawing of what looked like bell-bottoms before there were bell-bottoms, and she made a big deal about it: "You predicted bell-bottoms!" Just going over there, she made us feel important, that we had something to contribute to the fashion world. It just always felt really fun.

SK: Do you have other memories of her?

KP: It was the first place I saw a poison ring, which struck my childhood imagination.

JBY: Oh, right, yeah.

KP: The idea that there were people that would carry some kind of poison in their ring was like something out of a fairytale. As a child of six or seven, I was surprised to learn that people *really* poison each other, in fact that a way to facilitate this activity had been developed and was still being manufactured.

All to say that Sara and her shop were full of magic—indications that the world was a large and mysterious place full of things beyond what school, television, and the museums of New York (my primary sources of information) could show me. The shop itself deepened my concepts about the world.

JBY: It was the magic of the shop. We're bringing home all this Indian material and my mother makes me a princess dress. But I can attest to the poison rings, because they are a thing in India. My sister-in-law (I married a man from India) has a poison ring that actually opens up. Quite the thing.

SK: Do you guys know Elena Solow? She used to work for Sara and was friends with her for a really long time. Forever.

JBY: She babysat for us. That's how we knew her.

SK: That makes sense. She was telling me that anyone who worked at the store had to know where everything came from. It wasn't just moving stuff off the shelves, you had to know the story of where it came from, then also the meaning behind it.

JBY: Absolutely, there was definitely a seriousness when you were in. It was a thing. I remember going to the store over in SoHo, and how it was bigger and better. I think she had a beautiful crown when I walked in there, and you got the sense that it wasn't taken lightly, what she was doing. She had a real purpose to increase people's understanding of ethnic culture.

KP: Are you aware of the mentions of her in *New York Magazine* from the late '60s and '70s? You probably found more than I did, but I found a few mentions for who she

was dressing and how she was dressing them. She was influential. I tried to imagine when they were all young, in their twenties. Sara wasn't from New York, right?

JBY: She was from Pittsburgh.

KP: The idea that they all met, these young women—ambitious, focused on putting a career together. I always think about that time period. Not just them, but some of the other younger artists that all knew each other. They were so young, and they were women. And they achieved.

JBY: Yeah, and many of them were Black. It was very remarkable for the time.

KP: What is the definition of what she did? Our mother is a painter, that's a clear profession. Sara's a shopkeeper, fabric aficionado, object lover, and cultural interpreter.

JBY: I remember, especially on Seventh Street, that there was an intensity even though she was joking around. I remember this much, she said something to the effect of "I'm not quite sure what I'm doing, but I'm going to make it work. It's going to be okay. I'm on the edge here, and I'm trying to make ends meet." There was some kind of intensity going on. I'm ten, so I'm not sure, but it was along those lines. Or she'd be telling my mother, "Stop making such a big deal about that. Life is tough, it's not easy." Or something like that. She was just really tough, she went through a lot. And for the most part, she was pretty cheerful.

SK: I want to hear about the McSorley's thing.

KP: It was a big deal. My dad took me. Did you go, Jane, to McSorley's, when it became allowable for women?

JBY: Yeah, I must have gone with Uncle Bill or something like that.

KP: Our dad and his brother, as it happens, came from the same place, which was England. And it was normal to go to a pub with your kids. I don't know when they began allowing women in, I think it was the early '70s, when my mother and father had just split up. But my uncle and his girlfriend and my father (and I don't remember if he had a girlfriend) took us. We all sat at a table, five or six of us, and had beers and Limburger cheese. And very, very aware that this weird place had been the last holdout to ban women. And that the first ones they let in were Sara and another shopkeeper on the same street [Barbara Shaum]. So when you're eleven or twelve, it made an impression, the idea that women weren't allowed in. Now, I get it even more, that there are people who have memories of the beginning of the '60s when there were places a woman couldn't walk into in pants, she could only wear a dress. And then by the end of the '60s, there were coed dormitories. Women older than me have these compressed culture-shock moments.

JOANNE ROBINSON HILL

Joanne Robinson Hill is a dancer. She is the former Director of Education at the Joyce Theater and an honoree and founding member of the Lincoln Center Institute for Arts Education.

Svetlana Kitto: You were in school when you came across Knobkerry, right?

Joanne Robinson Hill: Right. I went to Bennington College in Vermont. I was looking for a progressive liberal arts school that had strong arts programming, and dance was a very strong area at Bennington. In the end, I wound up doing joint work in anthropology. It's probably on one of those trips when you'd come down from the woods of Vermont and wonder where everything was that I first ran into Knobkerry on St. Mark's. Everything in the shop was just absolutely amazing to me, as was Sara—very mysterious to me at the time. I'm not quite sure when I ran into her again, but while I was still in college I came to live in my boyfriend's loft on Broome Street. I might have run into her again then, but I definitely did when I got out of school.

The first object I can remember buying from the shop on Spring Street when I got out of college was a Sara Penn pillow. I took dance classes at Bleecker and Broadway, so if I didn't have to run off from class to a job of some kind I would wind up wandering down Spring Street to her store. There were many long hours spent over many years in that store.

SK: In the Spring Street store?

JRH: Yes. Spring Street, that was where Kenny worked.

SK: Oh, Ken Tisa.

JRH: Elena Solow was there too for many years. She was there in the summertime because she spent the rest of her time in Mexico, in Zihuatanejo.

Sara's place was magical. It was relatively small, but you could see from whatever she put in the window what she was thinking about. From the moment you walked in, there was something to look at, and conversation was high. If I was there talking with her, my eyes were darting all around the space. It was not just the kinds of things that she had, but their juxtaposition and placement. You might be looking at a very small object that was worth maybe fifty cents and right next to it was a timeless and valuable sculptural piece.

She had such an eye for textiles, such as fabric that probably came from Rajasthan in India. She was fearless in terms of combining different kinds of textiles and fearless in terms of cutting into something. I have a bag of fabric that she gave me; if I pull a piece out of it, it might be something that she cut. It would be a piece of fabric that it would probably have taken me a year to cut into, but she was fearless.

She made her bags out of cuttings and clippings and piecings that she might have taken from velvet with Seminole patterns or patchwork. She'd combine that with a cutting from a suzani. It's an amazing embroidery. I'd never be able to cut into a suzani.

SK: Out of reverence?

JRH: Reverence, and also the cost of the textile. If I had a suzani at an earlier stage in my life, it would be the one suzani that I had, so the thought of cutting into it would be next to impossible. Sara was absolutely fearless and as a result she created incredible combination pieces. She made jackets using Seminole patchwork and she'd often combine velvet with an interesting textile like a Rajasthani piece or a pillow from Mexico with all kinds of beads. The beads had a kind of random quality. It wasn't as if she was saying, "I'm going to neatly stitch a row of blue beads." It would be "I'm randomly picking magical—energy." It was energy. It had to do with energy.

With the items that she placed on objects, like her bags, she was creating little talismans. It wasn't just the objects that she made but the environment that she created. The *face* of the store.

SK: What was it like at the store?

JRH: Somebody might pop in, and it could be Danny Dawson, a great photographer who is a friend of mine who I met at Sara's. He's a scholar on Africans in the diaspora, with a particular focus on Brazilian culture back in Brazil. Danny might come by and hang out, sitting and talking, and in the course of time, I had a photograph Danny took of me.

The musician Leon Thomas, who was a good friend of Sara's, might drop by. David Hammons was also a good friend of hers. I first knew of David through his presence in the shop, before I knew his work. And there were times later in the other shop, the other big shop that she had—

SK: In TriBeCa?

JRH: The TriBeCa shop.

SK: Were there other people doing anything like that at that time?

JRH: There was another store that I think may still be around. There was also a store called Jacques Carcanagues that was much larger than hers. He was interested in similar kinds of art pieces, but he didn't have clothing. She had pieces that she made and she also bought things like kurtas. A twenty-dollar Indian kurta could be alongside a piece of sculpture that was two thousand or three thousand dollars. It was that kind of juxtaposition. No one was putting things together like that.

SK: This is something Ken, I think, learned from her for his own work—the way she took these various influences and translated them into her own voice, making them into something modern that appealed to young people and artists.

JRH: It happened that that was the result, but just like any artist, she wasn't making what she made to appeal to specific people. She'd just think, *Oh, I'll make pillows or I'm doing beadwork right now*. She wasn't thinking, *Oh, I'll make things at this price point*. Again, I have a bag full of beads and fabric and stuff like that that she gave me. It was one of the last things she gave me. She'd reach down into her treasure trove and say, "Oh, you should take these." All my life, I juxtaposed things in similar ways.

For a period of time I made gowns. Kind of unusual gowns. Sara put them in her shop. They were similar in thinking to the way that Ken or Sara put different pieces together, but mine tended to use textiles that I could afford. I might not have an exquisite piece of embroidery all over the garment, but maybe would add a very small piece of embroidery. They were odd little items that artists might be drawn to. I've always made things like that and she was always great about taking them on.

SK: Would you say that she mentored you as well?

JRH: Absolutely. Even though she wasn't a dancer, she encouraged me to take risks. It was her spirit. That spirit filled me with the sense that *Well, yeah, I can do this*. Like taking an opportunity to go to Iran. This was in the '70s, when the Shah was still there. Well, of course I was going to do it. Sara was a risk-taker—she modeled that. And I think we all wanted to be that kind of person. There was a bunch of us who called ourselves Sara's Girls. Seret [Scott], I think, would be one, Renoir [Darrett], and certainly Marion [Lake].

I wound up in Portland, Oregon. I had left New York to go to the South, where I had a piece of property. I stayed in the field, dancing and teaching, but it wasn't ideal, so I wound up going to Portland on a whim, with a girlfriend, and met my husband there. It turns out that Sara knew him. He was older than I, but she'd known him since the late or mid-60s, I would say.

SK: Was he a musician?

JRH: Yeah. Andrew Hill. When I called Sara, I said, "Sara, I'm getting married. I'm marrying Andrew Hill." And she said, "Oh, he's a lovely person." Sara made me a headpiece for my wedding day. So Sara-esque. It was a beautiful piece of lace with Kente cloth and beading of various kinds. It included blue beads, which were my favorite, and cowrie shells. It is a magical piece that I have on display.

One of the reasons she had people working in the shop was because she didn't necessarily like to be out.

SK: Out in front.

JRH: Right. Also, she had a feeling that because she was Black, people would not respond to her as well, even though Renoir, Seret, other people at work were also Black. I never worked at the shop on a regular basis, but from time to time if I was having a hard time. I was never really an employee.

SK: You got to be her friend.

JRH: Yeah, in a different way. I'm sure that there were times, with all of us, that she felt protective of us.

SK: Sara's Girls. Did you all dress in Knobkerry?

JRH: I bought cholis. I mean, we all dressed very beautifully. I mean, I have a dress from Indonesia, a tunic that I bought from the shop, that originally had been Seret's. Seret returned it to the shop, and I wanted it. Clothing moved around, but we all loved dressing in beautiful clothes.

Elena came in from Mexico with a huge collection of Mexican traditional blouses, not made for tourists. She went into the villages and bought skirts and other wonderful things. There were summers when we all looked like Frida Kahlo. Sara always had a beautiful necklace on. Or she'd make something and give it to me. I'm thinking of a necklace that only Sara could have made. The middle of it has a cameo with the face of a white woman, but the beads are all African and other random beads. Again, the juxtaposition in objects was her way of seeing the world.

SK: Can you describe what her way of seeing the world was?

JRH: There's a certain kind of irony in it, and wit, and satire. And a sense of nothing being precious. Nothing being so sacred that it could not be—

SK: Changed.

JRH: Changed, recognized for its value in its own right. She was decidedly a Black woman. But you know, I don't think Sara fully trusted her own genius. She never really recognized or accepted the fact that she was making and doing significant things. I don't think she fully owned that for herself. For all the rest of us, she was magnificent and so important.

Sara was genuinely supportive without saying anything in particular. Certainly, she was not judgmental of the folks that worked with her. On the other hand, she could say something that would be . . . I don't recall ever being put down, but I know she did not take with people that she felt were foolish. She had no patience for that.

SK: When you were saying before that her worldview was witty and ironizing and satirizing, and that she was decidedly a Black woman, what do you mean? What was she satirizing, do you think?

JRH: I think the world as it thinks itself to be. I mean, what we're talking about now, and the voicings of people out on the street [a reference to public protests responding to the murder of George Floyd by police in 2020]. The world thinks it's white. It's not white. If anyone understood that, it was Sara. Look at the world that she was bringing together. It was a world of cultures that were undervalued.

SK: Right. Yeah, she was bringing forth those under-recognized cultures and a statement that the world is not white and that idea very much needs to be challenged.

JRH: I don't think that she was consciously saying, "This is what I'm doing, I'm sticking it to the man." But she was sticking it to the man. She could hang out in the back room and pretend that she wasn't the owner of this incredible shop, both because that's what she felt like doing that day and because she thought that if somebody came in, they would not necessarily buy the most expensive object in this space from a Black person or a Black woman. But they might buy it from Ken. Sometimes I think she thought that way. A lot of soul-searching seems to be going on currently within the larger white community. Well, where were you? Where have you been? The rest of the world is quite aware that you're not the only thing going on. And certainly Sara understood that, she could embrace the entire world.

I didn't know anything about when she was young in the '50s, but she traveled all over Europe and had French boyfriends and Spanish boyfriends, and she got to see the world on her own terms. Without having talked to her about it, I know that what a lot of African Americans feel when they leave this country is that even though you're living in worlds that colonize people, there's a lot less weight on your shoulders when you leave this country. You don't have to hold your breath all the time.

SK: I'm really interested in getting at what the store, like the name, Knobkerry, means. It's a South African walking stick, but I also read that during Apartheid it was used as a fighting stick.

JRH: Right.

SK: It's obvious that there are political and social undertones to what she was doing with the store. It went far beyond being a place where you buy cool stuff.

JRH: For me, that's the important thing, that it was a meeting place where folks that she liked or cared for went to sit. It wasn't about you buying something from Sara. Sara absolutely would not let me buy certain things. She just wouldn't. She never let me buy one of her famous bags, and when I'd say, "Why? Why can't I?," she'd say, "Because you can make your own." That's very powerful. Because that is a recognition of me, of what I have to give.

SK: Did she ever give you a bag?

JRH: Oh yes. I have one little bag that she gave me. In the bag is a Knobkerry label for me to sew on. More recently, I'd always say to her, "Why don't we put your things online?" I did get a Knobkerry bag once on eBay, and told her so. I was trying to say to her that her objects should be online, but we weren't able to get her there. I'm sorry I don't have one of her incredible jackets. When you saw her, she was undoubtedly wearing a scarf or a shirt or something that she had made. Up until the end, she was wearing things. There were some pants that I bought at a sample sale. I got her a pair and I got a pair. I'd see that she wore things that had been given to her or were from the shop right up until the very end.

ANDREA ARANOW

Andrea Aranow opened her custom boutique, Dakota Transit, on St. Mark's Place in 1968. She went on to become a collector, designer, and dealer of vintage textiles from around the world.

Svetlana Kitto: To begin, can I ask how you got into the textile business?

Andrea Aranow: I lived in Peru for five years, and my first job there was working for the Ministry of Culture—going around the country documenting traditional textile traditions in each department [region] of Peru. And I built a big collection that I eventually sold to the British Museum. I stayed on in London looking at other textiles, and ventured out from there in the direction of Asian textiles.

SK: When did you open your store, Dakota Transit?

AA: The store was before that—my first job after college. It wasn't supposed to be a business, but my boyfriend got tired of having two sewing machines living there along with me. There was an empty storefront, and things were so cheap then in the East Village. He said, "Use that as a workplace and get your stuff out of here." The storefront had a window, and one thing led to another. I hung something in the window and that started it. That was around '68, '69.

SK: What were you making?

AA: In college, I had been making suede clothes, which I then made at the shop, too. When I went to buy the skins from the jobbers (there were jobbers who mostly got stuff from the handbag and shoe trade), I saw that they had snakeskins. So I bought some and started cutting them up to use for appliqué on the suede. It evolved from there. I started making full snakeskin clothes, without suede.

SK: Did you study design, or maybe ethnography, in college?

AA: I studied cultural history. I don't think my college taught ethnography. They didn't even have much in the way of history. They had one Asian history class: "We'll teach you everything about India, Japan, and China in one year." It was a different age, much less specialized.

My career was almost accidental, except that I really felt for travel and for textiles—those were the two guiding lights. I already had one kid when I started traveling, so that was a further enrichment.

It was a special time in the East Village because the Fillmore East and other clubs were there. There was a lot of music. We thought we were really hot shit. Sara was around the corner, and other people, too. The rents were really cheap. There were a lot of little businesses, people trying out their own ideas. It was really fun.

SK: What was it like on St. Mark's Place at that time? Was it hippies mostly?

AA: Yeah. Sara was on St. Mark's and my shop was around the corner on East Ninth Street. St. Mark's hasn't changed so much since then. We made a few changes—we had a block association, we got money and planted trees that are now fifty years old. They look really great. We had a sense of community. We were young. We were experimental and we were downtown. Emphasis on downtown.

SK: Right.

AA: When I started getting publicity, it was kind of easy because I was making very showy clothes. Magazines like *Harper's Bazaar*—they needed stuff. I didn't figure this out till much later, but they needed editorial content. I wasn't very good about following fashion trends, but they would tell me the shape of the garment. They gave me tips on what they might want to see in editorials.

There was a shop down the block from me. Those girls were connected with the music business and knew Jimi Hendrix. They brought him by one day, and he saw this mass of snakeskins on the chair and said, "Well, suede clothes with applied snakeskin are okay, but I want an outfit that's all snakeskin." And it grew from there. Once these showy people came, the stuff was out in *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Then the ladies in the limousines started coming from uptown. So it was a mix. The musicians had money, and some of them were great to work with.

The garments took a long time to make, because what we did was to have an initial meeting and then create the pattern for a garment piece. We would make it up in muslin and do all the fittings with the muslin. The technique was for me to create a patchwork collage and glue it to muslin and then sew them together with nylon thread. And then that whole thing would be constructed into the garment. We had to do it this way because most of the kinds of snakeskin I used had very little give. Anaconda was one of the more expensive ones. The size of the animal and the kind of tanning could determine how flexible it was. I used a lot of cobra. I liked the way they glazed the cobra with something so it was shiny, and I particularly liked the dark colors—it was like stained glass. I played quite a bit with cobra. It definitely had to be sewn onto a backing.

These people had a lot of money. It was very different in the '60s. They were rich, my clients, but everybody had more spendable money in those days.

SK: You were spending less money on rent and debt, I imagine.

AA: I never heard anybody talk about school debt, and it was super-easy to get jobs in the '60s. There were a lot of people like me, college graduates with flimsy career ideas, and we could easily pick up jobs—social work jobs, working in the library.

SK: Before we get to Knobkerry, can you tell me about some of the people in the neighborhood and a little bit about other stores that you say were interesting?

AA: I wasn't hanging around outside much—I heard about other stores in London and LA where my clients shopped. On my block, there was a ceramic shop, and I think another leather shop. It was practically the same way as it is now. I was in the East Village last week and thought that things hadn't changed much. Independent little businesses and personal projects.

SK: Personal, yeah.

AA: I loved that aspect of it. We had an open door, and people came in and talked. I'm sure not everybody who came in was a potential customer, but they all talked. They brought in ideas or they brought in stuff. One time, a guy came in with this pack of tanned frog skins. They were very beautiful. They were thin, but they were tanned so I could use some for appliqué. Another guy brought in baby kangaroo skins from Australia, also tanned. Anybody could walk through the door with their ideas.

SK: How did you meet Sara?

AA: She must have come around when I opened—I don't think I talked to her before then. There was an immediate affinity because we both loved textiles. I didn't know yet that I was going to make a career traveling and gathering textiles. Sara didn't do that, especially, but she had a network of people who brought her textiles when they traveled. She had such an eye and such a mind. Right up till the end, a few months before, she was still checking up on me to see what I was wearing, asking me if I'd seen this or that in *Vogue*. I guess she got somebody to bring her fashion magazines. She had a pretty good network. But all the people in that building, at least a lot of them, liked her, even though she complained.

Every time we talked with Sara, we discovered some little treasure about her past. The time that she was in Europe sounded really amazing. She was skylarking around with this guy, a photographer. They must have been pretty tight—I think she said she stayed about five years in Europe. She was very good-looking then and fearless, and like so many Black Americans, she got a better general reception in Europe than here. I would have loved to see Sara in her prime, though to me Sara was always in her prime. Even when she was doddering, hardly able to stand up, she always put on her jewelry when she came down to meet me in the lobby.

SK: That's what everyone says.

AA: When Sara had a shop on Spring Street, she had the most beautiful loft down the block. She had an eye for arranging stuff. It's not like my approach, where stuff is mostly in cases and cabinets. She was very good at visual merchandising, as we call it now. That's when we were seeing each other often. She'd come by, she'd bring people by. I'd go to see what she had, all these African items. I didn't know anything about it, but it was great to see and touch.

SK: Was her store singular in that way, in the arrangement of multicultural, multiethnic things?

AA: It was singular because it was built around Sara and Sara's tastes, but there were other people involved because part of this hippie thing was that we wanted to bring in exotic elements. Another friend of mine had a craft store and he also had good ties to African stuff. Jacques Cacarnagues was another of those craft guys.

SK: I've heard about him.

AA: During the SoHo years, we were pretty few down there. Sara's wasn't the only store, but she kept it pretty personal. Having somebody like her at the helm, and people like Kenny and a woman who worked with Sara for a long time—Fumi—made the store what it was. Fumi was a good friend, they were the same age, and I think they both felt like outsiders.

SK: In what way?

AA: Starting with not being white. Nobody said this to me, but I have a feeling that that was part of it. Fumi's store was down there too for a long time. Sara's whole framework, it's always been open door. You can tell by all these people who feel close to her, influenced by her.

SK: Do you feel influenced by her?

AA: Oh yeah, she opened up so many things to me. "Go and see this show." I would have never known about David Hammons except that there was a party she took me to where I met him.

SK: What do you think she was trying to do with Knobkerry? What are some of the ideas behind the concept of the store, which seemed to be a place of not only but especially African American cultural life?

AA: She had this African hook. I think she was showing all of us New Yorkers that it existed since we hadn't seen it before, but also putting it out in a way that made us want to integrate it with the other things we were wearing or living within our homes, not like a separate kingdom. Sara was eclectic, she made a bit of this and a bit of that, put on a necklace from here and there, not to recreate the way it should have been worn in Peru or in Zaire or any place, but to make a mix.

KEN TISA

Ken Tisa is an artist who currently lives in New York. He is Professor Emeritus in the Painting Department at Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore.

Ken Tisa: In the 1960s and '70s, New York was one of the most extraordinary places the world has ever seen. The only thing I could compare it to, and only from my reading history, is maybe Berlin during the Weimar Republic. It was wild. New York was wild. Everything was new. New ideas were coming from all over. Because it was so cheap, artists from all over the world were coming to New York and living really comfortable lives on fifty dollars a week. Even then, we knew it was cheap. In any case, I was on St. Mark's, which at that point was like the Fifth Avenue of the cool and the hip. It was where you went. I remember Sara had a shop and I remember looking in the window and seeing all these kurtas in the window. There was one that was so beautiful—it was red with little tie-dyed things all over it, and it just called my name.

Svetlana Kitto: A kurta is a men's shirt, right?

KT: Yeah, at that time from India or Pakistan. Sara's was the only store in New York that carried ethnic clothing, and it was the first time I ever saw Indian clothing for sale off the rack. I just fell in love with this shirt, and it was fifteen dollars, which was a huge amount of money for me, since I was paying fifty dollars a month in rent. I had to have it. We didn't have credit cards, so I put a five-dollar deposit down and came back the next week.

When I put the deposit down, the woman who was working there wasn't Sara, and when I came back, it was Sara. So I asked, "Do you know who owns this store?" And she said, "I do." I said, "Well, it's so beautiful." She had all kinds of African art, African cloth, Indian embroidery. It was like being in heaven for me, because it was all the stuff I loved and had only seen in books. Everything was very affordable. When I was in there, all these really cool people would come in. We became friendly. I would go back every week, and Sara and I would talk. She loved art and artists. I was in there once when Jimi Hendrix came in. I almost pissed my pants.

After I started working in that store, many years later, I saw everybody over the years. Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman, every jazz musician that ever lived in New York was in that store. Sara was a focal point for the Black avant-garde. That was their store. That was their place. Then she got discovered by the fashion world, and all these big designers—Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Cardin—would always come into her store and get ideas. You'd buy Chinese robes, all these different robes, and you'd see them on the runway the next year. It was fine. They were inspired. But I'm jumping the gun, let me get back to my first entrance.

So after I bought this kurta, I kept going back to the store. The vibe was really great and the people in there were gorgeous. I've never seen so many beautiful

people in my life as I did in and out of that store. Then she moved her store to Sixth Street, a smaller space, but it was also a beautiful space and always packed. I would go in there constantly to see things. She would have Native American beadwork, she'd have not just wearable clothes but she'd have objects and incredible jewelry. She also helped support all these people that were making things.

You have to understand that if you were cool and hip, you had to have something from Sara's store. "Where'd you get that?" "Oh, I got it at Knobkerry." "Oh, Knobkerry." It became a fashionable place to be seen and to shop at among very, very cool people. The people that went to Sara's store were, for me, the crême de la crême. They were the brains behind the art world. Not only musicians, but artists discovered Sara. Louise Nevelson, Louise Bourgeois, these incredible women artists would buy all this fabulous clothing from her. She became a place for up-and-coming young female artists to buy clothes at, ethnic clothes, which became very hip during the period.

SK: Did you know of anyone else doing that before her in New York?

KT: No, nobody did. She was the first. There were other dealers in ethnographic art, like Trudy Seligman, who had an ethnic antique store that was the rival of any fantasy shop in the world. She had things that no one could possibly have. She had weird, like really weird—shrunken heads—really great stuff. They knew each other, of course. They would back-and-forth buy.

SK: What was different about what Sara was doing?

KT: Sara was doing mainly clothing. She was doing textiles and clothing.

SK: Did she design the clothing or was it mostly imported?

KT: She started by importing everything, but then she began making clothes. She started making these incredible assemblages of bits and pieces of ethnic textiles, like patchwork. She became famous for her bags. Everybody wanted a Sara bag. Everything was handmade. She was a good sewer, but she wasn't a perfect sewer, so there were always things a little off, which made her bags art as far as I was concerned. They weren't perfect.

SK: She also had people working for her who sewed, right?

KT: Yeah, but she did most of the sewing herself. She had the clothing of other people that also worked with ethnic textiles who were probably more exact in their sewing than she was. She worked with a woman named Fumi Schmidt. Fumi (who must be ninety by now) was very much involved with Sara. And Sara always had men. She liked men, but she had really bad taste there.

SK: What about Wolf Kahn?

KT: Wolf was one of her good-taste lovers.

During her early years, she had some really cool guys. She was with Wolf for years. They went to Europe together. Then she met this French writer, who was actually pretty famous. She had some Italian lover who she adored. She did Europe. When she lived in Amsterdam, she had a Dutch lover. She had a lover in every country in Europe. But when she came back from Europe, that's when she opened Knobkerry. After she had been trained as a social worker. She came from a middle-class Black family from Pittsburgh. They weren't rich, but they were okay; they were well-to-do by the standards of the day. She was highly educated. Sara was always a rebel, her mother was a very proper Christian woman and she had Sara. That was not a good combination.

I had moved to Cooper Square, which was not far from Sixth Street, right behind Cooper Union, so I would go into Sara's quite often. She loved my work, so I would always show her what I was doing. Over a series of years, we became very close friends. At one point, I got a job working at the Broome Street Bar, and was working until 4:00 a.m. every night. I'd sometimes go over to St. Mark's to get a drink on the way home. I would notice that Sara's lights were always on, so one night I knocked on the door. They were having a pot party in the back—Sara and Ornette Coleman and a whole bunch of musicians. At the time, I kind of knew who Ornette Coleman was, but I wasn't into jazz that much—I was into rock and roll—so I never quite understood that I was in the presence of a genius.

I'd go over there occasionally and hang out, and it was great. I never realized how privileged I was to have access to these incredible creative people. I was already involved in the art world, so it was an amazing time for me. I was a kid, like twenty-two or twenty-three years old. I was all of a sudden in New York City in the middle of this world of genius. Not only was the whole Sara thing happening, but there was this other art world thing that was happening in my life. All this stuff happened. I started working for this guy named Jacques Carcanagues, who was a dealer in ethnographic jewelry. That was a good job, but I had a falling-out with the manager and ended up working at Craft Caravan, an African store.

SK: Did Craft Caravan come after Knobkerry?

KT: Oh, yeah, Sara was one of the first stores in SoHo. She followed the galleries when the galleries started moving in. Then another store owned by an African American woman [Jackie Lewis], Tales of Hoffman, moved in. That was a very gorgeous clothing store, but more ethnic—very hip clothes. Between Sara and Tales of Hoffman and the galleries, the clientele was extremely cool. Sara had found the Craft Caravan store for Joe and Margaret [Knopfelmacher]. When they were looking for a store, Sara found them one up the street from Knobkerry. Sara would buy from them, African stuff. So I started working for them. Then somebody that was working for Sara stopped working for her, and she said, "Would you like to work for me?" I said, "Absolutely." So I left Joe and Margaret, moved over to Knobkerry, and I stayed with Sara for about maybe five, six years, until art stuff started happening and I didn't need to work. But I worked for her in her SoHo store, and that was amazing.

SK: Was the store different when it moved?

KT: Each incarnation of it was a little bit different. Sara knew how to do display, so she would gear the display to the shape of the space. The SoHo store was a square, no indentations, very boring, so she set the store up like a gallery. It was in a gallery neighborhood and her store was like a gallery. Again, the clientele was amazing. The high African American culture was a lot of the clientele, but also a lot of artists.

This is my favorite story of working at Sara's: I was behind the counter putting around, and this very cute guy walks in with an Afghan hat and a big Afghan coat and a bag. We start talking. I said, "I like your hat." He said, "I like all this stuff. You want to see what I'm working on?" He opens his bag and he pulls this cloth out, it's like a long cloth sewn with all different kinds of African American hair—every kind of Black hair was sewn into this cloth. I said, "Oh, my God, this is incredible. Can you wait one second, I want to get the owner of the store, she's going to love this." I told Sara, "You should meet this guy." It was David Hammons, and we all started talking. He would come into Knobkerry all the time. He'd always buy stuff and make art out of it. Sara and him became very close friends. Ntozake Shange became a very good friend of Sara's and the store, and all of the women from *Colored Girls* used to come there weekly. They were making money and spending it on earrings and jewelry and clothing and bags. Joanne Robinson also worked at the store. She became one of the directors of the Joyce Theater.

The people that worked at Knobkerry were all artists or dancers or writers. Nobody that worked there was not doing something. Sara only liked being around creative people. She didn't like being around ordinary people, so to speak. She was a snob. She loved artists. I've never met anybody that loved artists like Sara did. She really understood the creative process and what it entails. I loved working there, because if I had to go away, I just told her, "Sara, I have to go. I'm doing a show, I won't be back for two weeks." No problem. There was always somebody in the wings that could cover for me. So it was a great job. I didn't make much money, but it was fun, and you didn't need a lot of money in those days.

Thinking of stories, I have one to tell you. Sara was in the store cleaning, she was sweeping up and displaying, and some woman came in. Sara did not like to deal with people unless she knew them. This woman came in and said to Sara, "Where's the owner?" I'm looking at Sara thinking, *Uh-oh*. Sara goes, "He's right there," and points to me. The woman was trying to sell something, and she said something to me. I said, "I can't offer you anything, I'm really not the owner." She says, "Well, who is the owner?" I point to Sara. This woman was like, "What?" and she walked out. First time I ever saw anything like that. Sara said, "Oh, I'm not shocked. I deal with racism every day." That happened a lot, where people couldn't imagine that such a beautiful shop was owned by a Black person. Because the shop was gorgeous. It was seriously a beautiful store. Sara changed it every week: a Chinese theme, Indian theme, every week she would do a different look.

SK: Did you see more of that kind of thing happen to Sara? She read me something about things like that happening to her on an institutional level—her not getting credit or getting written out of her own story.

KT: There was a lot. Sara was the only Black person in SoHo practically, her and Jackie Lewis from Grand Hotel/Tales of Hoffman. There were very few Black people involved in commerce in terms of owning stores in really hip areas like SoHo and the East Village or West Village. You could count the number of people on one hand, and they all knew each other. Luckily, we were in SoHo and we were surrounded by artists, so you saw racism but you didn't see it as extreme as if you were in another business, like if she had a clothing store in a mall or something. It was shocking when you did see it because it was so unexpected. Sara was very conscious, she was very political, extremely political.

SK: In what way?

KT: She was involved with the Black political movements of the time. Members of the Black intelligentsia would meet in her store as if it were a café or a coffee shop. Anytime you walked into that store, there was always somebody in there that was somebody.

SK: Right.

KT: The store was never ever empty. People would come in and hang out and chat and have conversations. There would be African stools, and people would just plunk themselves down on pillows. It was like a salon. I loved going to work because every day it was somebody new that I would meet. All kinds of people. It was on the map for hip Europeans when they came to New York. It was one of the places you went to. So between all the Europeans, the African American artists and musicians, and American artists and musicians—white ones—it was a real potpourri of brilliant minds buying these cool things. Then of course the fashion aspect was big, because Sara had a lot of clientele in the fashion world. She even had a fashion show in the store, I remember. André Leon Talley, he was a good friend of Sara's. Again, I didn't know who any of these people were at the time, so I wasn't in the least bit impressed. Talley used to bring a lot of people in. For one fashion show, before I knew who he was, he came late and I said, "I'm sorry, there's no room." He got all huffy, and Sara came in and said, "Find room." I realized he was somebody I better find room for. I think he brought Yves Saint Laurent and a couple of other really big fashion people, and they would buy clothes from Sara for ideas for their collections. For a while, ethnographic clothing was extremely hip. It was in *Vogue*, it was cool to wear Indian cholis.

SK: The top worn beneath a sari?

KT: Yes. Cholis became a must-have item for all the models, so we were selling those like hotcakes. Each one was handmade: hand-sewn, hand-embroidered. The handwork on all this stuff was incredible.

SK: Are you saying stuff that Sara made or stuff that she got, or both?

KT: Stuff that she got and also stuff that she made. Sara would make her things out of scraps. If she got a choli and it was ripped, like an antique, she'd cut it up. I can't believe it now when I look back, all that cloth she

cut up. But there was so much of it, we didn't think about it. Now, of course, you wouldn't even consider cutting it up, because it's antique, rare, beautiful embroidery.

SK: Why would you not consider it now, but you would then?

KT: Because I was twenty-three years old then and didn't know value.

SK: But she did.

KT: She did, and she was making art, her art. She was able to do that, I wasn't. I could never ever. I tried using some antique cloth in one of my pieces and couldn't do it, just couldn't do it. It was too beautiful and it took over my visual space. It became about that. But Sara was able to combine designs and patterns from across cultures. In one bag, she'd have Japanese, Chinese, African, Indian, and Latin American fabric. That's why her bags and her jackets were so beautiful and so incredible. She couldn't keep them in the store. They weren't cheap, her jackets sold for about two hundred dollars, which in those days was a lot of money. But everybody had to have one. She became the "it" place for a while. She was always this other place for musicians and artists, but of course they didn't have the kind of money that the fashion world had.

Willi Smith was one of the first Black fashion designers that became corporate and big. His sister Toukie became one of the first Black models to be on the cover of *Vogue*. I think she had an affair with the actor Robert De Niro. Sara was good friends with De Niro's father. His father was an artist, and gay. Sara was a terrible businesswoman.

SK: I was going to say, what about all this money that she was making?

KT: She made so much money, and she gave it all away, essentially. If you needed money, you just went to Sara. Sara was the most generous person I've ever met in my life. That's one of the reasons I committed to taking care of her in her last years, because she had given to so many people and she helped everybody.

She got fed up with New York at one point and decided to move to California. She opened a store in Pasadena, but they weren't ready for Knobkerry in Pasadena, had no idea what they were looking at. It was the wrong place, it was the wrong group of people. So she came back to New York and found a store in TriBeCa and she made an apartment in the back of the store. It was sort of illegal, but she did it. That was a really neat store, but the problem was that there was no foot traffic. At that time, TriBeCa was the netherworld. There was nothing there. A couple restaurants, but there were no stores, no galleries. A lot of artists lived in lofts there, but not enough to make the store a success. She did okay, though.

SK: Was the rent cheap?

KT: Yeah, the rent was cheap. She survived. It wasn't like the old Knobkerry, but Artists Space was next door, so there were artists.

SK: Was she friends with the people at Artists Space?

KT: I don't think so. At that point, she was older and winding down a bit. The store was small, it was packed, it was beautiful, but it wasn't the same. New York wasn't the same.

SK: What year are we talking about right now?

KT: 1999. So then there was an interim where she had a tiny store right near Cooper Union, which she shared with Fumi. It was mostly clothing. Fumi had a rack, she had a rack and then a couple of showcases. She still had her followers, but it never achieved the fame that she had in the '60s and '70s, when she was the center of the group of Black intellectuals that revolved around her shop. Sara's was not only a place to shop in but a place to hang out in and share ideas. She would put people's posters up and promote different art events. It's hard to describe, because there's nothing like it—a commercial space that was also a cultural space. It was a very special place for people. Sara and I had a really, really special relationship. Sara loved me, I loved Sara. She could do no wrong, I could do no wrong. For me, it was perfection.

SK: It's not complicated for you to talk about her.

KT: No.

SK: Was she cranky when you first met her?

KT: Never. She was the nicest person in the world.

SK: To other people besides you, I mean.

KT: No, she was always incredibly nice to people. She didn't take shit, that's the one thing she did not take. If you made a racist remark, that was it, you were out.

SK: Do you have any examples of that, her not taking shit?

KT: I've seen her throw people out of the store, just tell them, "Get out."

SK: People that made racist remarks?

KT: Not even racist remarks, but maybe they didn't like something or said something snarky about something and she didn't like it. "Get out. I don't need your money." She once grabbed something out of a woman's hand—she was going to buy this very expensive coat, it was like five hundred dollars, that was a lot of money then. She just took the coat and said, "I'm sorry, I'm not selling this to you." The woman said, "What do you mean?" She said, "I'm not selling it to you. It's not for sale." The woman was one of these uptown privileged white ladies, and having a Black woman do that to her, I could see this look of utter blankness. Like this could not be possible.

SK: Do you remember why she did that?

KT: It was something the woman said, she thought she was being cool and she made some kind of remark.

It must have had a racial overtone, because Sara didn't usually get that bent out of shape unless it was racial. I do remember her following some woman around the store with a piece of incense because she didn't like the way the woman smelled. I had to go into the back room because I couldn't stop laughing. This woman was trying on clothes and I had to take Sara aside and say, "Sara, I'll handle this. Just give me the incense." "Nope, I have to make sure that woman doesn't stink up my store."

SK: The last thing I want to know is if you could talk about how she influenced you.

KT: That's a good question, because she did influence me. I'll be forever indebted to Sara for many things, one of them being what I learned from her. I consider Sara one of my teachers, from the very, very beginning, the first moment I walked into her shop. At the time I was young, in my twenties, and had decided that painting was too bourgeois, that it was elitist, some early-twenties political bullshit. I decided that I would only sew my paintings. I would only use things that I found on the street and I wouldn't buy art supplies. Of course, that was bullshit, because I was buying thread and scissors. But I had this political agenda.

When I started working for Sara, I began to learn about all these different cultures and different textiles and what they meant, and how textile weaving could form as much of a narrative as a painting. You could tell stories through making a quilt. Art was not just a piece of canvas stretched on a wooden stretcher, art could be worn, it could be strong, it could be sewn. Working for Sara and learning from her about the possibilities of what art could be was a major change in my life.

First of all, I had only male teachers, and if I had a gay teacher, I never knew it, so I never had a teacher in art school that was where my head was. I was very interested in women's work and the ideas that women, women who were artists but couldn't go to art school and couldn't be artists, expressed in their art. Artists who didn't know they were artists. That's why going into Sara's shop for the first time blew my mind. I saw things in there that you could wear that were as beautiful as any painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Sara would show me all these cloths from Indonesia, from India, from China—the embroideries, the beadwork. Stuff from all over the world that was art. I was able to translate and interpret. I think that nowadays I probably would be a little more conscious of cultural appropriation. I wasn't so much in those days. I was borrowing left and right from every culture I came across. But it's what informed my work and to this day it informs my work. Sara was one of my greatest teachers.

DAVID HAMMONS

David Hammons is an artist.

Svetlana Kitto: How did you initially come into Knobkerry—what’s the story there?

David Hammons: Well, it was about the kind of clothes she made. Her clothes were universal. It was amazing to see the juxtaposition of things from different places, the quality of her stitching, and the poetic-ness in the clothes. And then watching people come buy from others, Africans and people from Turkey, who were selling their things, their fabric. So I was just drawn to the spirit of the store.

SK: I talked to Danny Dawson, who told me that you and Charles Abramson and Tyrone Mitchell would go around SoHo and visit Sara’s store and others that you liked.

DH: Her store was very tiny. It was like going to a candy store.

SK: Are you thinking of Spring Street when you say that?

DH: Yes. And then people told me she was on Ninth Street.

SK: She was on St. Mark’s at one point.

DH: Okay. That was before I came to New York in the early ’70s.

SK: In terms of going to the store and doing a show there, how did that come about?

DH: We were friends and I wanted to get her some notoriety. I figured if I had a show there it would give her some publicity and people coming into the store. That was my purpose. I was trying to use my clout, as they say.

SK: Well, I guess it worked. Because here we are talking about it. That’s good. How was it working with her on the show? Did she give you free rein?

DH: Of course. You can see from the show that she gave me free rein. I pushed it as far as I could.

SK: What do you mean?

DH: Using as much space as I could to do the show.

SK: When you put the show together, were people there? Was the store open?

DH: What I did was to make sure nobody knew about the exhibition, so it was word of mouth. I let it grow on its own instead of having an opening and all that.

SK: Had you done a show, at that point, in that way? Where it was sort of hidden in plain sight?

DH: No. I needed the environment to do it in. That was the perfect place to hide things and move things around. Improvisation.

SK: Also in terms of the materials that you chose to use for the show, like the masks that you made into a fountain . . .

DH: Yeah, that was mine. But most of the stuff was already there. I just shifted it around and went in the back to see what I could bring out to the front.

SK: You put a basketball in a vase, right?

DH: Yeah.

SK: And you turned a basketball into a rice bowl, I seem to remember.

DH: Right. Did you see the show?

SK: No, I moved to New York in 2005.

DH: Well, you talk like you saw the show.

SK: I’ve seen lots of pictures of it and I’ve read a lot about it. I’ve been thinking about Sara and lots of things to do with Sara for a long time. I’ve seen documentation of the show and I’m interested in how, like you’re saying, the environment of her store would have changed how you make work.

DH: Things just needed to shift around. Anything to get the crowd there.

Sometimes I would ask her to speak French and tell me stories about when she lived in Paris. One story she told me: “I used to see Jack Clemente [an Italian artist] walking home drunk every night in the rain.” That’s the one that I liked the most.

SK: That’s great.

DH: But there’s another one. I don’t think you can write this one. I asked, “When did you leave Paris?” She said, “When Maya Angelou came to Paris, that’s when I left.”

SK: That sounds like Sara. I only interviewed her once, but . . .

DH: I introduced her to my daughter and they became close friends. Carmen worked for a while bookkeeping, helped her organize her apartment, things like that. There were a lot of people who knew her at the flea market on Twenty-Fourth Street, Twenty-Fifth Street.

SK: I’ve heard that that was the only time she went uptown.

DH: When I went to flea market, I’d say, “Anybody seen Sara?” “Oh, she just left.”

I used to buy tickets for her whenever Ornette Coleman was in town. I made sure that she went to see Ornette Coleman.

SK: Why wouldn’t she have done that on her own?

DH: That’s Sara.

SK: She was friends with Ornette, right?

DH: Mm-hmm. I used to take clothes over to Knobkerry a lot to have them altered. If I bought a jacket or something and I wanted another pocket in it, I would take it over there and she would make a pocket or do my pants.

SK: Right. I know it was very much a hangout place as well. There was business being done, but it was also a place to socialize.

DH: Excuse me, there was no business being done. When somebody wanted to buy something, she would run to the backroom. That’s why she had to have these other people selling the products.

SK: Why did she do that?

DH: Ask Sara.

SK: I wish I could.

DH: She wasn’t about the business. She was not a businesswoman. Most people came in there because it was a museum.

SK: Right.

DH: She was an artist and hippie, and these kinds of things terrified most artists. They don’t know how to sell their products, so they have to have someone else to do it. That’s who she was.

SK: Right. But she did sell stuff and there was some—

DH: It wasn’t enough though to pay the rent. She was an artist, she was a seamstress. Creativity.

SK: Her philosophy behind Knobkerry is a really interesting thing that I’ve heard about, her worldview.

DH: I came in late compared to Danny and Ken [Tisa] and all those people. I came in around the edges, because she was over there on Broadway. She moved around a lot. Then she went over to, was it Eighth Street?

SK: Seventh Street.

DH: Yes. She had a little shop there, and the shops start getting smaller and smaller, but I don’t remember Sara selling anything herself. Somebody else had to do it.

SK: My understanding is that she did love to host. She wanted people to come to the store and hang out, she loved that.

DH: Right, but you don’t make money if people are just hanging out. People are afraid to come in when they see all these Black folks hanging out. I’m glad somebody’s giving her some attention. My purpose was to get the attention to the store.

SK: I haven’t heard it put that way. That she needed help at that point.

DH: You can’t do anything without advertisement. I was coming up on the scene and I said, “Let me just go over here and do this to bring the attention.”

SK: Did it have that effect, do you think?

DH: It got articles. It was in all the newspapers. And then people moved on. But that’s what I was doing.

SK: Did you sell the pieces you had?

DH: Some of them. I hope she got money from it, because that was the purpose, too.

SK: So the money for the pieces went back to the store?

DH: I hope so. After that, people would come in and they’d buy things, for a short period of time. But people used it like it was a museum. She should have charged them to come in.

SK: In another time and place, do you think it would’ve been a gallery?

DH: No, it would be what it was. That’s Sara. To me, it’s all about the quality of the material. She was able to make these amazing clothes. Looking at the stitches in the fabric—those kinds of things are just masterfully done.

SK: Do you remember any particular pieces that you had or saw for the first time there?

DH: So many Africans would come in with things to sell her that she might like. It was so unusual. There weren’t that many stores down there where Black people could go in and feel comfortable. That was a big part of it.

But those kinds of places aren’t good for business. If you’re a business, you can’t have people hanging out. It wasn’t a barbershop.

SK: It did get a lot of press, though. Before you would have gone in, they were written up in the *New York Times* and *New York Magazine* and *Esquire*. They would make these cholis, Indian garments, that they would manufacture and send out. They would be used in fashion shoots. But the marketing didn’t connect. She’s doing all this work, it’s being used, but it’s not well known enough that it comes from her.

DH: Well, that’s part of the racism thing. And there’s nothing she could do about it, because she’s not a businesswoman. Romantic. I used to tell her, “What’s love got to do with this, Sara?” Sell these damn clothes.

SK: Wait. You used to tell her that?

DH: I did. People fall in love with their things and they don’t want to sell them.

SK: They don’t want people to buy them.

DH: I can see Sara saying that.

SK: Who else was working at the store when you went? Seret Scott? She was in *Colored Girls* and she was an actress. Or was it Joanne Hill, who was a dancer? Or Elena Solow, who was white?

DH: Which one was living in Mexico?

SK: Elena.

DH: Elena. Oh my goodness, they were like twins.

SK: What do you mean?

DH: She was always together with Ken, they were like disciples. Completely at awe in her presence, which was very interesting to watch. And Danny. They gravitated to Sara for her energy. They saw her as a deity, which was very beautiful to watch. I got caught up in it, too.

SK: Did you feel that way about her?

DH: Of course.

SK: Almost everyone I've talked to speaks about her with such total reverence. It's unique. I do a lot of this kind of work and I haven't really experienced that before quite like this.

DH: I may have to go now, because I'm starting to cry.

CAROL THOMPSON

Carol Thompson, a curator and art historian, works toward social justice by advancing greater recognition of the art of Africa and of the African Diaspora. She is currently Curator of the Thomas G. B. Wheelock Collection of Art of Burkina Faso and Art Advisor to the collection's Executor.

Svetlana Kitto: Could you talk about David Hammons's involvement with Sara Penn's shop?

Carol Thompson: Let me start with my first time meeting him, because it relates to his installation at the shop. I was working with the Center for African Art from '87 to '96—from the time it was in adjacent townhouses at Sixty-Eighth and Park to when it moved to SoHo, first to temporary offices above Dean and DeLuca; the New Museum was downtown at that time, and the Guggenheim was at the end of the block in that “quick minute.”

I was at a show with a very dear friend of mine, who introduced me to David, who had just come from doing a residency in Rome. He said he had just come from his studio, where he was working on a series of works that incorporated water because he loved the gigantic fountains in Rome. He commented how hard it was to control water. I remember thinking how poetic that was.

The shop was filled with beautiful things from all different places. Lots of textiles and functional objects. I have a vague recollection of a little architectural structure, like a Japanese shrine, a little house that David put black-eyed peas inside on the floor.

At that time, David was going to a place in Chelsea—Chelsea Mini Storage. A lot of the African art traders would use the units there to store their things. Downstairs, it was almost like a market. A market with lots and lots of stalls of African art. It primarily had replicas made for the Western market, not museum-type things, although there were exceptions because some top-tier collectors and dealers would go there. But it was primarily art for export. It was at that time that David and I had a drink together at the Bowery Bar. He was carrying a briefcase filled with little Dan masks, those small-scale masks that are referred to as passport masks.

He put a white-faced Punu mask replica in the window of Sara's shop. Often people think they're Japanese, since they have kind of an Asian aspect—they look a bit like noh masks—but they're from Gabon. They represent the face of a particularly beautiful woman with a hairstyle that looks like a mussel or other bivalve shell. They are sublime, sublime works of art.

SK: What else did he install at the shop?

CT: He put ostrich feathers all around the top of the replica of the Punu mask and adapted it to spout water from its mouth. The mask was hooked up in the front window and looked like a fountain made with a Mardi Gras

mask wearing a crown of huge billowing white feathers. David has done a whole series of works that I think he refers to as spitting-image sculptures. I like the play on words.

But then there was a work there that I loved maybe even more. Going into the shop, it was like a hide-and-seek game or treasure hunt. You just wandered around and then you spotted something and thought, Okay, that's David's work. He took a whole group of those little Dan passport masks and attached them to the wall with little wires so they looked like a waterfall cascading from the wall into space. I thought it was just so beautiful.

SK: How often did you visit Knobkerry?

CT: It was a place to stop in and chat and look around. I would go there from time to time during the period that David's work was there, because it was always changing. He was constantly adding things here and there.

SK: What do you think drew David and Sara together?

CT: They both loved beautiful things from faraway places. David has always loved textiles and she too loved textiles. She accommodated his playfulness.

SK: What was the work you said you loved the most?

CT: It's one he installed later, after he had already installed quite a few works. It was called *Freudian Slip* [1995]. David described how growing up he was one of a lot of children in his family. I don't know if he was the only male, but I know he had a bunch of sisters, maybe five or six, six or seven, somewhere in there. That piece is a beautiful old-fashioned woman's slip. It's a translucent pink color with a pleated skirt. And underneath he put a replica of a Gelede mask to make it look like a pregnant woman's stomach. One of my colleagues, Clyde Taylor, an African and African diaspora cinema specialist who at the time was in Africana Studies, said it was the most erotic work he'd ever seen anywhere in the world. I thought it was the most extraordinary, beautiful thing, and such a moving tribute to the concept as turned into a contemporary work by an artist of David's stature. I thought it was brilliant.

SK: That work was first shown at Knobkerry?

CT: Yeah, with the Punu mask and the little Dan passport masks. I was there with Sara when he was installing the waterfall work. I think the name is from the Rwandan genocide in some way, but I don't remember exactly. It reminded me, and I discussed this with him, of a work that it might even have been a reaction to, by Armand Arman, a famous twentieth-century French artist who used accumulation as a way of working. The Arman work is illustrated in the 1984 MoMA *Primitivism* exhibition catalogue: a group of Dan passport masks are frozen inside plexiglass like a vertical ice cube. It seemed kind of awful to me to do something like that to those little Dan passport masks. In some ways, David's work frees them.

PAULETTE YOUNG

Paulette Young, Ph.D., is a cultural anthropologist, curator, and independent scholar in the visual arts and artistic cultural practices of communities in Africa and the African Diaspora. Her research centers on the historical and contemporary roles of global dress, design, and style as an expressive artistic and cultural form. Young is Director of the Young Robertson Gallery in New York, which specializes in fine arts from Africa and the African Diaspora, focusing on traditional African fine art, textiles, and photography.

Svetlana Kitto: I'd love to hear how you met Sara and anything you want to share about your relationship.

Paulette Young: I knew her towards the end of Knobkerry. One thing I remember speaking with Sara about was the idea of leaving the country of your birth, leaving the United States to come into your own and see yourself not just as a Black woman but as a creative woman. A woman who wants to contribute to art and culture, a woman who feels like she has something to bring to the table, without quite knowing what that is, and having that be more appreciated outside of your own country, particularly being from Pennsylvania. She was Pittsburgh, I was Philadelphia, and what do they say—Alabama's in between. The two urban centers had a very strong African American and communal life. And although we were several generations apart, it was incredible to understand our shared histories, both daring to leave the States. I was just finishing up my degree at the time. I went to Ghana in '98 for the first time and then came back in 2000 to 2001.

When I was then writing my dissertation, I spent more time getting to know Sara. She was really excited about my experience. I thought she was being kind of motherly or auntly, but what it was, actually, is that she was saying, “I would've done something like that.” Coming into a foreign country as a Black woman in business is a little different than coming in as a Black student under the protection of Columbia University, which gives you access. That's why I studied anthropology and traveled as part of my project. I felt a little sheepish sometimes talking about my experiences, but she was very intrigued by them—how I dealt with the market women, how I wanted to follow design from its inception at the designer's studio in Holland to what happens once that cloth got to Africa.

She talked to me a lot about the Silk Route, which I had not really paid much attention to, and the movement of textiles. And that's what she and Eric [Robertson] have in common. The reason the three of us connected was that Eric was dealing in African textiles, and since I was interested in textiles I knew him. He told me about what Sara was doing with textiles from early on—Moroccan textiles. I had lived in Japan and done some textiles there, so we'd talk about the different ways that the Japanese approach textiles and how other cultures, India and other places like that, dealt with textiles. We talked

a lot of shop, about styles and marketing your taste to other people. And having Black women in the crew on St. Mark's with Jackie Lewis. Having these grandes dames, as I call them, dictate stock, it was really phenomenal.

I think about that a lot more now with Black Lives Matter and the push to give Black designers and Black culture their recognition. I wish Sara was here, because it's such a special time.

SK: She seemed to be unique as an African American female entrepreneur at this time and also, like you said, supported by a really interesting multiracial community of women, of makers. In her own store, she had Olive Wong, a Black woman who helped her with the aesthetics of the store and buying. And then she had Fumi Schmidt, who was Hawaiian Japanese and did a lot of sewing work and designing. Seret Scott, a woman who was in the first *For Colored Girls* production, worked at the first store. She said that at that time she didn't see that many Black Americans in that milieu. It was very extraordinary to her.

PY: Definitely. I know that she and I talked about certain designers, I'm not going to say who, who started off on St. Mark's and were able to get financing. They didn't have to go through middlemen or take private loans. They were able to jump a couple of leapfrogs ahead and have a different set of opportunities. Just how does that impact your decision-making, what you can produce as an entrepreneur, what you have access to? Growing up in Pittsburgh, as an African American woman she was very comfortable around different people and different cultures. I remember her saying to me once that it's really amazing how the textiles become the anchor, the textile becomes the connector, and you find like-minded people through art.

You can go in any direction culturally, and she would work with so many different types of people. And we talked also about some of the challenges of dealing with artists, who come in a wide range, especially performing artists. You have things starting off in business and ending up in a party or dinner. Talking to her about her role of being supportive, I asked her, "So, how is it for you? Do you feel like *you* were being supported?" She always had a giving spirit. In her older years, she said that she definitely would have done things differently

SK: That's interesting. In terms of your knowledge of the specifics of the textiles and the shop's inventory, when you say you talked shop, what did you talk about?

PY: My research was in Ghana, so I was working with the Dutch wax prints. They're the cloth that you see all the time that different designers use and most people think is African. Bold, colorful prints. Those cloths actually were marketed to Ghana in West Africa, on the Gold Coast. In the 1700s, early designs were done by a Dutch company that had been operating in Indonesia, and copied what they saw there. When I was in Indonesia, I saw those cloths in a market and said, "What's this African cloth doing here?" not knowing that what I was seeing was the Indonesian influence on African textiles. Sara and I talked about that story and the cultural connections. The Dutch wanted to automate their batik, to print it rather than do it by hand, and injected it there. It was rejected locally. Then, they came up with their own way to tap into

the market. They had a trading relationship with Ghana, and marketed those textiles there. After Kente, it became a representation of womanhood in Ghana. I wanted to know why it is that something foreign would have such a major impact. We talked about that. And she talked about the idea of outsourcing. Many cultures outsource designs, so why is it unusual for Africans to do that, to be comfortable with taking something and then tweaking it and making it their own? That's what my thesis was, that the way they tweak it and make it their own is to name the cloth with proverbial expressions that make it local.

So we talked about Ghana and going to the Cape coast, where I saw fishermen who had flags called Fante flags, which Sara sold in her shop. I talked with her about seeing the boats; the flags become three-dimensional versus seeing them in a two-dimensional form on a wall in a museum. At the time I didn't know that she sold them. She talked about being drawn to them based on their graphics and visual appeal. One thing she taught me, just from talking with her, is that it isn't enough to get something just because it's interesting or what the culture thinks is interesting. We don't want to get into the colonial mentality. She said, "Listen, it's also about what the client likes and not you convincing the client but showing the client that this is something useful, and also that it's beautiful."

SK: Right.

PY: Something else is craftsmanship, the idea of the artisan. She was the perfect woman to come to Africa because of her beauty and her attitude. And she was open to acquire.

The flags were one art form that we talked about. Eric had supplied her with some of them. We also talked about the idea of who dictates taste, the idea of being a tastemaker as a Black woman. She was interesting because she saw herself as a Black woman, but she also saw herself as a trailblazer as far as multiculturalism, globalization, go. People were like, "Globalization?" She'd just laugh. Sometimes you can be just a little early on something. If you stay the course, you can benefit from it.

What year did the last store close?

SK: I think it was 1998.

PY: Yeah, because I came here in '96.

SK: Do you remember the experience of going inside the store?

PY: When I came into the store, I was like, "Whoa. Wow." A beautiful space, beautifully curated. SoHo was really white even then, and I'd just come back to the States, reentered. I came to New York City and went to graduate school. It was kind of a shock. I was used to being closely involved with arts and crafts, where people are actually making things. I've known a lot of makers. So I'm going into really chichi boutiques, and saying, "Oh, wow." I'd look to see what they were doing with some of the crafts I had seen on a local level that they elevated here. I was either ignored or, as soon as I said, "I'm a student," having them turn on their heels and disappear. Coming into Knobkerry and being able to browse and

have someone say, "Do you need anything?"—it was almost like going to a gallery. It really had that effect. I was struck by the displays, the way they juxtaposed different cultures and music.

SK: No one's talked about the music.

PY: When I was in there, there was music in the background.

SK: Was Sara there?

PY: No, but there was somebody there and I remember they offered me wine. I remember thinking, "Well, it's a Friday, so why not?" I asked, "Well, whose place is this?" They would tell me about her. I was struck by the beauty of the place. It was like entering a different zone because it was very hip but also common. It stimulated the senses because you turned one place and there was something interesting, and then another where there was something else. There was furniture there, and the textiles, and art. I remember a guy in the back sketching. He looked like I was interrupting him. And I'm like, "What? It's a shop, right?" Then when I met Sara, the next time, she had on this beautiful robe that she came out with. Her hair was thick and billowing. She'd smile and tell me I was welcome. She knew I wasn't going to buy anything, but she was really nice about it.

I asked her once if she was afraid about the risk that's involved with going to places where you've never been, dealing in numbers with so many zeros on them, and talking about coming out with a space and an inventory. She said, "It's kind of stressful, but you also get a rush from it, because you're doing what you really want. It's your passion and you feel so comfortable with it." She was a real trailblazer.

SK: She was so brave.

PY: A real trailblazer, and not only in fashion—most people would expect you to be in a dress shop. For her to do what she did as a woman was pretty special. People tried to copy her. Some people are real talkers. Some men take a lot of license with women. And white folks with Black folks, particularly in the arts, saying, "Well, no, you are supposed to be our support. Support us." It came very naturally. I remember thinking to myself that they really should put her in a manual for nurturing and supporting us. Even clients would come in and get ideas from her. She would talk about that, but she was always discreet and wouldn't name people. There were people that were clients who would come in to buy from her. Then she'd see that same sort of idea replicated in their own work. And they wouldn't say, "Well, I was really influenced by Sara Penn." I think that would've meant a lot. I know it would've meant a lot.

SK: Related to what you said about her thinking about the client, something she did that I didn't know about, but learned from people who worked at the store, is that if you bought anything from the store, you were required to know the origins of the object, where it came from, how it was made, what it was originally for. To impart that knowledge.

PY: I didn't realize that she trained the staff. She was making these vests, maybe Moroccan, and I was telling her my experience of working in a museum with fine art, American art, that was being viewed as modern art. They didn't want me to mention anything about the artist's background or artistic influences. It was like, "No. This is our history, and you just look at the thing." That's why I didn't go into art history. I was so torn. For me, it wasn't just the thing. That thing has many layers. It's who created it, and what its history is. That's why anthropologists and art historians make a good team. It just amazes me that meaning didn't have a lot of input. For her, it was the opposite.

SK: She really knew her stuff.

ERIC ROBERTSON

Eric Robertson is internationally known for his knowledge of traditional African art and Africa's grand textile arts. He is an advisor to the Young Robertson Gallery, New York, which he founded.

Svetlana Kitto: Paulette [Young] told me that you knew Sara for a long time. How did you meet?

Eric Robertson: One of the simplest ways of meeting her was to go to her store. At that time, in the '60s, it was on St. Mark's Place. I was one of her constant customers there, and very interested in what she was interested in. I didn't have a background in art, decoration, or anything like that, but I really liked her taste.

SK: What was the work that you were doing at the time?

ER: At the time, I was a lawyer for medical groups who were interested in changing the way medicine, specifically preventative medicine, was distributed in the New York City area. Back in the '60s, I was part of the northern civil rights movement.

SK: A different path altogether.

ER: I would go down to St. Mark's Place to buy gifts. I forget which holiday it was, but I saw an interesting-looking store there with many things from parts of the Third World, the way we called it at that time, especially Asia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and India. I had never seen a store like that before. I did a little research on the name, Knobkerry, which is a weapon in southern Africa. It's a ball at the end of a stick. It was a very simple weapon, one that you could use to fend off carnivorous animals, lions especially, in protecting your goats or your sheep. So it was very useful, and of course it was useful man to man, man against man.

I was intrigued by the store, which covered such wide areas of material culture. And I was also intrigued by the woman who never came to the front of the store where her people were working and waiting on people. Without going on too much, she was quite beautiful. I was struck by her, the way she was dressed, her manner. She was quiet, and I thought this must be the owner, but she didn't come to the front of the store. Every time I would think of buying a gift for someone who had a taste for something exotic, I'd go to her store. More often than not, she was in the background, so at first I just observed her.

SK: What was the vibe in the store at that time?

ER: It was very busy. There were women who shopped there because they had unusual things from Asia. Besides clothes and adornments, she had art from different areas of the world, rugs from Afghanistan. This was in the mid-60s, when SoHo was just opening up, and no one else

had that type of material there. I discovered that the pillows she had were mostly from Africa. I was struck by that because I had never seen pillows from Ghana or Morocco.

It turned out that she traveled to these places to buy, but she also cultivated other women who traveled, by themselves, and she bought from them. They would know what she wanted, and they started making sure I knew when things were coming, because I started buying things for myself. Rugs, for example.

SK: Was the first thing you bought a rug?

ER: I had never seen flatweave before, rugs from Afghanistan, tribal rugs, rugs from parts of India and from Iran. I was struck by that. At that time, lofts were becoming popular, and in the early '70s I bought one, which I'm still residing in, on Twenty-Second Street. I wanted to furnish it, and of course you need to add more material. I went one step further. I started being friendly with her, talking with her. I said, "Maybe you have something to show me." She was surprised that I was interested in the furniture.

She took me to her apartment, which was on Seventh Street, right behind St. Mark's Place. It was very large—about an eight- or nine-room apartment—and she said, "Well, I'm thinking of doing something else as far as the decoration, so if you're interested in stuff, you can buy anything you want." I ended up the proud owner of deco furniture from the Philippines and stuff from Afghanistan, mostly rugs. There were small chairs, too. And most notably, a young prince's bed that was in the form of a couch with arms.

My loft became pretty famous, which is one of the reasons I decided it was just too much. Rather than being a gallery, it looked like a play place for me. I didn't want that. So I sold the furniture. Someone came in, an industrialist from northern Italy, a person of Jewish heritage whose family went back to the seventh century. They were so much in love with the furniture that I sold it all within a year, just so I could get back to looking like a gallery rather than a place of play. That was Sara's taste at the time. I got to know her better when she realized that I was actually spending money there. I was so struck that I actually went into the art business.

SK: Knowing that you were a civil rights lawyer, I was going to ask if Sara influenced you to be doing what you are doing now?

ER: She did. For one thing, I'm of West Indian heritage, and I didn't know much about jazz or African American music, the more serious kind. It turns out she was friends with all the avant-garde artists, whether painters, sculptors, or musicians, and I started meeting them, like Ornette Coleman. She cultivated named artists because she herself really loved jazz. Her first trip to Europe, which was years before, was via some of the jazz musicians who are there. Josephine Baker, who was there in 1925, was one of her friends. She knew everyone. So I started meeting people who were really into music, as she was. I started becoming more interested in her background.

In 1974 I opened the Grove Street Gallery, with lots of things purchased from Sara to make the store look interesting and elegant. Sara taught me about color and textiles, especially textiles of the Silk Route. I discovered

that most material can be traced to Chinese culture as it traveled through India all the way to the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. I got very involved in that as far as collecting.

SK: It's amazing how many people she influenced.

ER: Her store was absolutely spectacular. It expanded inside SoHo.

SK: First at Spring Street and then at West Broadway and Franklin.

ER: That's where she lived in the back. Things had changed a great deal by then. I gave her advice about putting contracts together, because she was fairly famous and Knobkerry was famous, too. One thing about her, she was very trusting, which does not always lead to good experiences. By that time, people wanted to be part of her. So I used to check—not as her lawyer but as a friend—many of the contracts she was involving herself in with people who wanted to be part of her, but who were . . .

SK: Predatory.

ER: These things happen, and she didn't believe in protecting herself the way she should have. She was, in many ways, a free spirit who was really enjoyable, but there are predators in this world. By that time I had quite a stock of unusual material in the gallery. I gave her things on consignment.

SK: You started selling stuff to her?

ER: Yeah, but with very liberal terms, very good prices. So people bought serious masterpiece stuff from her. It wasn't just me doing that to help Sara. You ended up doing that because she was an unusual person and very honest. If she said she'd take something at this price or that, that's what she paid you for it. In dealings with a small shop like that, there's always issues with money, but with her, you always got paid. Her honesty is probably one of the reasons people would always step forth to help her when she ran into some difficulty, like somebody screwing up the lease that she depended on. Part of it was that she was getting on in years, and she loved her creative artists who were loyal friends to her.

SK: Who are you thinking of—David Hammons?

ER: Yeah, and myself, because she got some spectacular flags from Ghana, fighting flags, from me, and I once gave her three large costumes of the ancestors from West Africa. And of course she'd sell them, because they were so spectacular. By this time I was moving on to more important pieces of sculpture and dealing with some very important collectors worldwide, so I could afford to back her. She still had taste and an eye. As she got into her seventies, it became a little rough for her.

SK: Can I ask about other creative artists she knew?

ER: Part of the undiscovered magic of Black American culture is you had people who were part of the Harlem

Renaissance. You would meet people who were main people, like Hale Woodruff, who she regularly conversed with, or Paul Robeson, who felt very comfortable with her.

SK: I didn't know she knew Paul Robeson. Did she tell you about her life before she opened Knobkerry?

ER: Unfortunately, she was shy. That was a quality she retained until the end of her life. She was shy, and you would have to find out many things from friends of hers. She knew everyone, because one thing that she did was to go to every opening. I had the luck to buy all the catalogues that she owned. They were small catalogues, but about major artists that weren't being given the recognition at the time, back in the '50s and '60s, like Norman Lewis, whose loft was nearby, actually. Practically every major artist, and she followed some of the less-known artists, too. She would buy the small catalogue at the opening. That's one of the difficulties of doing a history of Sara Penn: she was not an artist but a tastemaker.

SK: How did she discover all these materials and develop the fascination for textiles she had since the first store?

ER: She told me that on her first trip through Germany, with artists or other Germans, she learned a lot. Men loved her because she had a very womanly quality to her and was just lots of fun. She didn't mind, and a lot of doors opened to her.

She was also a critic. She would tell you, "This one has no . . .," and you realized she was sharp there, because she looked to what women did, women who dressed themselves in the material she would show them. She traveled and she enjoyed that. People were buying things from her all over the world, and she connected with that.

She affected me profoundly, because I ended up becoming, according to many of the critics, the person who played an integral role in bringing awareness of African textile culture to America. I think of myself that way. Then we discovered that the sensibility of ancient African textiles was related to African American culture through African American quilts. We discovered through our research that there were female African American designers who were at the top of their profession, designing clothes for Mary Todd Lincoln, and that African American designers clothed the wives of some of the leaders of the Confederacy.

SK: You're saying she was part of that lineage.

ER: At that time people saw themselves as connected to world culture and would actually go to these places or finance people to go to these places so they could buy whatever they found. One of Sara's main suppliers was a former social worker from Pittsburgh, and I bought a lot of textiles from her. Sara must have helped me meet her because I bought some spectacular material to go with the furniture. I can't remember her name—it's been a while now. As I got to know Sara better, I saw how she worked. She would pay for your roundtrip ticket and expenses, you just gave her first dibs on material that you would buy. The main woman who was going to Pakistan

and Afghanistan to buy tribal rugs became part of a secret society there among mostly men and people dealing with rugs by sharing her blood with people from the area. And it may sound very unusual, but there was also a white woman doing stuff.

SK: So you're saying Sara would buy roundtrip tickets for people . . .

ER: To buy the stuff. She worked out a deal. And these women loved traveling by themselves. Until about the '70s or '80s, women could travel quite easily in all those areas, including Muslim countries, without any problem.

SK: This is so interesting. I'm kind of overwhelmed because I haven't heard this stuff before. There's just so much out there, and the more I talk to people, the more I understand. It's just so remarkable that a store and a place and a person could be so important in a period of time, and then erased or disappeared.

ER: It didn't really disappear, because Sara became more personal in who she dealt with. She was still selling, but she would give her stuff to people she trusted to sell for her in flea markets. We're not talking small flea markets, but places where people would come down to from Fifty-Seventh Street. They had no idea that this stuff was coming from Sara.

I want to add that she was very intelligent. Practically anything you talked about, she had very deep knowledge about it. She was a progressive, a humanist. And she made sure that if you wanted her opinion, you would get her opinion. She had an opinion on everything because she was well educated. I hate to use a color word, but she's a brown-skinned woman who's an authority on these cultures. She came from a background where people were educated and were very interested in material culture.

As I said, she was shy. I didn't realize until dealing with her and supplying her with stuff that sometimes you would want to give her advice as to how to deal so she could make more money. People are always pushing themselves and being this and that. She didn't do that, she didn't operate that way, and her opinion was highly valued.

SK: It sounds like we could talk for a long time, but let me ask you, finally, to describe the worldview behind Knobkerry.

ER: I would say she influenced me by elevating world treasures or world culture, visual culture, looking at it as all connected and something that you can learn. I went on my own to try to understand African material, terracotta, and to research and develop a library of Chinese books and acquire a major African history and culture book collection, to join some of the smaller museums, personal museums that people had. I joined those so I could learn more, because it's all connected, as you can see physically on a map. You can trace Buddhism, you can trace the culture of even the smaller countries, Indonesia being key to understanding African and Indian design.

Of course now we are so much into the diaspora, which comes in very handy when looking at French Guiana, Nova Scotia, or Harlem. We have discovered that

the area that our gallery [Young Robertson] is in, on Twenty-Second and Flatiron, used to be a Black district. There were whites here too, but there are nineteenth-century photographs of African Americans who commissioned the portraits. They lived here, this was their area. People have said too that Central Park, parts of Central Park, were a Black area.

The African American area extended down to City Hall and the African burial ground right behind it. That's why there are so many monuments there to Black culture—because it was a Black area. Early European settlers were not agriculturalists, they didn't know how to grow anything. They were fed by Black people who came from farming cultures in West Africa or Guinea and had farms. Today we can establish the connection between West African countries and the cotton and rice cultures in the eastern United States. We can show the connections and get a better idea of how visual and artistic culture expanded in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It's there and we can prove it.

SK: Yeah, that's amazing. Is there anything else you want to share?

ER: One would have to really be dedicated to track down what Sara did and how she did it. I know that she could've been very affluent if she had held on to the large loft that she owned and lost. But that was not her. She was a romantic and she believed in sharing. Some people may consider that dumb, to lose all your money. She may have lost her money, but she remained Sara Penn. That was important to her.

SANA MUSASAMA

Sana Musasama is a ceramic and mixed-media artist based in New York. She is an educator and an activist dedicated to human rights causes, particularly the trafficking of women.

Svetlana Kitto: How did you meet Sara?

Sana Musasama: I wanted to be an artist and it wasn't anything my parents understood, coming from the segregated South, with Jim Crow and redlining. Their idea of what their girls were going to do was to be social workers, teachers, or nurses, or join the military. That's all they knew. But I was creative and they loved it. They gave me art lessons and sent me to art schools. But when I narrowed it down to a profession, it scared them desperately. They thought, *She's going to stop, she's not going to survive*. When I said that I was going to be an artist, they sat me down and said, "Sweetheart, if you were light-skinned Black, if you had a pointed nose, thin lips, and wavy hair, it would be a possibility. But having dark brown, kinky hair, African features, Mommy and Daddy don't see that as a role for you."

I was rebellious, and I screamed back, but they just didn't know and they had no vision. So what I would do was to say in my mind, Greenwich Village is where artists live, and all I have to do is steal carfare out of their bags and go to Greenwich Village. I could be an artist. And that's just what I did—one day I got my best friend at the corner and said, "I'm going to Greenwich Village to be an artist. You want to come?"

So we went to the Village and a world opened up. It was beatniks, hippies, the love thing. We were just walking around and saw Sara's store.

SK: On St. Mark's?

SM: It was definitely the East Village.

SK: It was probably St. Mark's.

SM: She had two places. I went to one place and then something happened economically and then she was in a very narrow place. She often sat on the stoop.

SK: There was a shop on Seventh Street and then at 26 St. Mark's, I think. Others were at 158 Spring Street and 211 West Broadway in TriBeCa. I don't know if you went to those ones.

SM: I took the train and got off at Spring, and then I would walk all the way down almost to Broadway. And there was her little sliver of a shop. You went in narrow and it opened up into the world.

SK: What occurs to you when you think about the first time you went to Knobkerry?

SM: First of all, I remember her kind of devilish smile, as if to say, What are you guys doing here? We had a mouthful of bubble gum. I think she just wondered what these kids were doing around there. She was sitting on the stoop and she had on unusual clothes and her hair was beautiful.

I remember her having a black line on top of her eyes that made her eyes really magical, like Egyptian. She was kind and she was sassy. She said, "Come on in." And we came on in, and it was a whole world of rugs and tapestries and the smell of incense. I was just at home with her, and she let us walk around. She explained where things came from in the world.

Then she sat down next to us and asked if my mother knew where I was. I said yes. She said, "I'm going to ask you again, does your mother know where you are?" I said no. She said, "You're going to get home before dark." So I looked around and looked around and then I picked up things, clothing that I loved. And I looked at prices and I knew I couldn't buy anything. I had no money. I had fifteen cents to get there.

She saw me admire something really, really beautiful that was in her secondhand basket. Not secondhand, but things that didn't sell so she had marked them down. She saw me look at something really lovely and watched me put it on and look in the mirror. She heard me tell my friend Francine, "I'm an artist now."

She wrapped it up and gave it to me. She said, "When you have some money, you pay for it." I still have that right now. After I had lost contact with her, I met a guy named Peter at one of my shows and he told me where she was.

SK: Was it Peter Stebbins?

SM: Yes. So I found that top in the house and wore it the day I went to the place she had in Manhattan. I asked to see her. I knew she wouldn't know me by name, and I wondered if she'd even come down. I heard her say, "Tell her just a few minutes, just a few minutes." As she came down, she was walking very slowly toward me. I stood up with the top on and she says, "I know you." Just like that.

SK: That's so sweet.

SM: We sat down and we talked for about forty-five minutes. She was obviously uncomfortable. She was in pain.

SK: Definitely.

SM: But when she wasn't in discomfort, she could talk about anything in the world. Musicians, people that she loved, people that she couldn't stand. She cursed, and she was sassy in her cursing. With people "paying the asses," she said, "I want to remain independent. I don't need anyone's help. I'm fine." And we talked and we talked and we talked. One of the things that I remember strongly is that she says, "Well, you know something? I'm going to go back upstairs and take rest."

I said, "Okay. I'm going to come back and see you." And she says, "You do just that." I said, "Can I bring you something?" She says, "No, I have everything that I need. I don't need another object in my room upstairs. I have plants." And I said, "Well, I have something for you." She says, "No, you keep that. I'm fine."

What hit me so much about it that day is when we stood up to say goodbye. I hugged her, and she said, “You go.” I’ll never forget that. She said, “You go.” She wouldn’t go until I’d walk out of that lobby. I remember standing up and looking at her. And as I walked away, I kept turning back to look at her, and she waved with a beautiful smile, but she wouldn’t let me watch her walk away from me. She made me walk away from her. When I got outside, I kept looking back at the building, but the glass prevented me from really seeing her. She had a cane and something said to me, You’ll never see her again, Sana. You’ll never see her again. And then I said to myself that I was leaving for Cambodia. I said if I never see Sara again, that image of her standing up like a soldier and saying “You go” is what I wanted her to leave me with.

SK: That’s a beautiful story.

SM: I never saw her again. I went to Cambodia. I came back and she was gone.

SK: Wow. Is that the first time you’d seen her in all that time?

SM: Maybe twenty-five years.

SK: Hold on. So you went back to Knobkerry?

SM: Sara kept moving, and I think by then she had an internal store in a private place like her loft or her home. She didn’t stay in places long because they were always gentrifying and changing. Landlords pulled back on leases and sold them to big fancy stores, like Apple.

The other thing is I was seventeen or eighteen when we met, and went on to college and then travel in Africa, and time went by. It could have been even thirty years.

SK: When you went to Knobkerry, did you go to the store more than once?

SM: I did, because I went back to pay her the money. She said she had a lot of musicians in there playing music. Jazz. I think she didn’t feel that it was an appropriate place for my age. The jazz musicians that were there looked at me like I was a piece of meat, and Sara picked up on that and she took that money and guided me toward the door. She didn’t want me to be in there.

I think her store went into an apartment. Sometimes people gave her events or sales in their lofts, but all that’s kind of blurry for me.

SK: It seems like you have a worldview that is similar in terms of looking beyond the United States for information about life and the world. Do you think that she had an influence on you at all?

SM: I think she must have, because every object that she talked about came from a faraway place that I’d never heard of. This made me go home and get a globe. I looked at these places and would think, *Wow, this is surrounded by water. How do you get there?* I remember my mother saying, “You take an airplane, honey.”

This was India and the Middle East. Sara had things—tapestries, beads, buttons, and shoes—from all

over the world. She gave me the sense that the world was open to me to travel as an artist even though I couldn’t afford it. At the conclusion of my undergraduate degree, I felt so uneducated, so I said to myself, Sana, you’re going to travel around the world. You’re going to find places that Sara possibly lived in or went to. You’re going to do that. I started traveling around the world by myself and I did it on and off for ten years. I went to India, I went to China, I went to Vietnam. I spent a lot of time in Africa, then went to Israel. I then doubled back and went to some of these places to see them in another season. Mendiland is one place in the dry season and an entirely different place in the rainy season. And then I went to graduate school. After graduate school, I had to get a job and start paying for all this education that I should have gotten.

SK: I’m with you. Also, from what I understand, it would have been rare to see an African American woman owning a business in the midst of those shops.

SM: It wasn’t common at all. And it went against the grain of what my mother and father told me against the arts.

SK: Exactly.

SM: Sara was not as brown as me, but she was brown, and she looked Black and she had kinky hair like me. And she moved and traveled effortlessly, without fear. So it was in the back of my mind that one day I would see Sara’s world on the road.

SK: She had a mother who was very rigid and strict, a church kind of person, so Sara trained as a social worker. She was working as a social worker in New York and just didn’t want to do it. She always wanted to be a kind of artist and to be around artists, and she wanted to do something else. Her mom was always trying to keep her on the straight and narrow, and she didn’t succeed. Sara rebelled, too.

SM: When I was with her that day, she talked a lot about jazz musicians in and out of her life. She hinted at a very unhappy marriage to me, but she also spoke about jumping over the hurdles. It sounded like some of them were dishonest and maybe womanizers, but she pretty much jumped over it.

SK: She told me about living in Europe and traveling through Africa herself, being treated like a queen there. About having the experience of leaving the US as an African American woman and being treated so much better in Europe, too. Basically everywhere except here.

She had ideas around bringing other-worldliness not just to white America. She worked with women from all kinds of backgrounds, women of color, to try to bring in things that would disrupt this culture of whiteness. She really wanted to disrupt that. That was my understanding.

SM: She certainly did it in the way she adorned herself and how she moved around the world, for sure. The world was on her body.

SK: That’s beautiful.

SM: As a young Black girl, my eyes went everywhere

looking at her. And she was so kind—she would pat the seat to tell you to sit down. But that day she got off the elevator, she walked very, very, very, very slowly toward me. When I stood up and she said, “I know you,” it touched me. Because I know it was over twenty-five years after we met. More than that, probably.

SK: More than that. If you’re saying you went there when you were seventeen, it was like forty years.

SM: I don’t know if in that time period I ever bumped into Sara at the loft parties where a lot of Black musicians were. I don’t remember now if Sara was in those clusters or not. But I do know a bunch of Black musician men, and her name always comes up. I went to a party a few years ago with a colleague who is probably Sara’s peer. These men that were there are certainly in the eighty and above category, because one of them I know as my teacher and he made eighty-three.

SK: Wow.

SM: She moved around in that world.

ELENA SOLOW

Elena Solow is a jewelry designer and collector living in New York.

Svetlana Kitto: Can you tell me about Sara’s first store?

Elena Solow: It was on Seventh Street. That’s where I met her. I bought a choli there. It was twenty-five dollars and I had to put it on layaway.

SK: Do you remember what the choli looked like?

ES: It was beautiful. It was silk and embroidery. Sara did so many things. She had an exhibition at the Smithsonian in Washington and she was in *Vogue* and everything else. She had a big scrapbook, but where her things are nobody knows.

SK: When I interviewed her once, she showed me all these newspaper clippings and asked me to keep them for her.

ES: And you took pictures of them?

SK: Yeah, I have a lot of that stuff.

ES: Because she was so knowledgeable.

SK: Tell me how you met Sara.

ES: When I would come to New York in the summertime from Mexico, I lived near there. I met Renoir Darrett at Knobkerry and we became friends. It was on Seventh Street, where I would sometimes sublet an apartment. I loved working there. She did some funny things.

SK: Tell me.

ES: All these famous people would come to the one on St. Mark’s. Janis Joplin was one. Sara had people sign the wall, but I don’t know if she ever took a picture of that. A lot of musicians. I think they just used Sara. And then there were people who would steal, come in and take the clothes, so we had to watch. I remember one time someone stole something and Sara saw the person on the street in the thing. She went out on St. Mark’s Place and ripped it off of her.

SK: Good for her. She was fierce. When you say that musicians were using her, what do you mean?

ES: She made these beautiful things for them to wear to play, but a lot of them didn’t pay for them. Janis Joplin did.

SK: Right.

ES: She was good friends with Ornette [Coleman]. I met Don [Cherry] and Ornette through Sara.

SK: What was she like to work for when she was your boss?

ES: She was very nice.

SK: She was nice?

ES: Well, she never screamed at us or anything as long as we folded things and helped people. We were good because we all worked there different times. There was another girl, Cheryl, a young white girl who was sort of innocent. She was a kind of manager of the store on St. Mark's Place.

SK: Did you design some of the jewelry?

ES: No, I began selling my jewelry designs years later. Sometimes Sara put things together, but mostly she bought really fabulous stuff from Turkmenistan, Africa, from every place.

SK: Can you tell me about the differences between the locations of Sara's stores? Fumi [Schmidt] said the most magical one was on St. Mark's.

ES: It was fabulous, but I liked the one on Seventh Street, too. That was her first one. Seventh Street between Second and Third.

SK: Can you tell me about it?

ES: It was a small store. There were other neat stores around. This other girl, Barbara Shaum, had one. She made sandals, hippie sandals. Sara lived on Sixth Street, upstairs, and people brought things by. She just had the most beautiful things and she knew how to display them.

She knew about them and she bought what she wanted. Then she moved to St. Mark's Place. That was bigger and there were a lot of things going on in St. Mark's Place. Across the street, there was music. And all these fabulous stores. Abbie Hoffman lived in a building nearby. He was weird. He gave me the book *Steal This Book* that someone actually stole from me. There were interesting people. There aren't any bohemians anymore because they can't afford to live in New York. You would hear music all the time on the streets because musicians could live there, and dancers and actors.

SK: Knobkerry attracted that type of bohemian?

ES: Yes, a lot of people. It was like an oasis. I didn't work there every day because I also worked part-time in the Peace and Freedom Movement. And then I would be in Mexico. Anyway, it was a different time. Now, you can't open a small business. It has to be the Gap or something because the rents are so disgusting.

SK: Were there other stores like Sara's, or was it really distinct?

ES: There weren't many ethnic stores then. There was one on Greenwich Avenue in the Village, where Sixth Avenue is and Greenwich Avenue slides up. Some lady had some ethnic things there but not like Sara, not like Sara's at all. No. Then, I guess, designers would come

in and they started copying because Sara made these jackets and bags and those kinds of things.

SK: What other stories do you have about Sara?

ES: She was just an interesting person. And she helped so many people.

SK: Who did she help?

ES: Like people that used to come in and say, "Where can I buy wholesale?" And she would just tell them where to go. I said, "Sara, don't give them that information."

SK: It's bad for business. So, she wasn't a businesswoman in some ways?

ES: She was not that great at business because she was very generous. She helped musicians and she went to a lot of cultural Black events at museums and stuff. She would get dressed pretty. She always wore something beautiful, some kind of Balochistan, Quetta, or Ethiopian thing and a big necklace with big amber. She had fabulous taste.

SK: Do you think of her as an artist?

ES: Yes. It's an art to be able to put a store together and decorate the way she did. She had such a good eye. She picked out such great things. People she became friends with would bring her stuff from places like Afghanistan and Indonesia. For Christmas once she gave me a beautiful chair from the Sindh Desert and this beautiful coat I have.

SK: Were you one of Sara's Girls?

ES: I worked there.

SK: I know, but Joanne [Robinson Hill] said that you all were called Sara's Girls.

ES: I guess so.

SK: Can you tell me about meeting Janis Joplin?

ES: She was so nice, but she smelled like alcohol, and I'm not an alcohol person. She was so nice. Some people aren't nice, or they're creepy. She was nice, and so were the guys that were in Jimi Hendrix's band.

Sara had a fabulous store in TriBeCa, but it was too innovative for the neighborhood at the time. Eventually, the landlord wanted something else there. In the early 1950s, she spent nights in the West Village because her boyfriend before I knew her, the man she loved the most, was there.

SK: Wolf Khan.

ES: She knew Robert De Niro's father. Louise Nevelson used to come in. Nevelson was her slave. She loved Sara. Let me read from a book that has a chapter about Sara [Joel Lobenthal, *Radical Rags: Fashions of the Sixties*, Abbeville Press, 1992]: "By 1965, when she opened her store, the hub of bohemia

was shifting east. Once called the Lower East Side, New York's downtown Eastern European ghetto was fast being renamed the East Village. An avant-garde colony took root when artists began fleeing the spiraling rents and raucous crowds that had descended upon the West Village during the folk music craze of the early '60s. 'I'd been a social worker at Mobilization for Youth on the Lower East Side, working with drug-abusing teenage gangs,' Penn explains. 'I decided that I didn't want to continue.' Penn's store supplied a personal demand echoed by women across the city. 'I wanted to wear pants. I wanted all kinds of pants to be accessible.' Knobkerry began as a source for softly draped Indian chari-door, guerrara, and chawal pantaloons."

SK: Pantaloons. Keep reading!

ES: "The integrity of the civil rights crusader could, in the '60s, dovetail very easily with the intransigence of a champion of avant-garde regalia. 'At Settlement for Youth, we wanted to dramatize a little fable by George Bernard Shaw called *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Her Search for God*.' Shaw's parable extolls a child in South Africa who 'leaves a mission, takes off all her clothes, and just goes out with a knobkerry.'" I have a knobkerrie here.

SK: It's a stick.

ES: A real old one, with the ball on it. So, "Anytime she encounters anyone who tries to tell her who God is, she just hits them with this stick and keeps going in her personal search. Shifting from social work to retail, Penn retained the 'Knobkerry' as a personal symbol. 'I thought, if anyone tells us what fashion is we're just going to hit them with our "stick"—our store. We'll discover our own fashion.'"

Whenever we sold something, we explained where it was from, about the people and their philosophies, all the history that we were never taught growing up in the US. Sara kept all these books and maps and we had to teach ourselves about places we'd never heard of. I remember trying to tell Jimi Hendrix's drummer once about where this tenting he wanted came from. I don't think he was real interested, but some people were.

SK: This is the first time I'm hearing that when you would sell something at the store you would have to explain its origins. That was her rule?

ES: We had to know. You couldn't just say, "Here, do you want this?" You had to say, "This is from Turkmenistan. It's in the middle of wherever it is over there."

IMAGES

COMMENCEMENT
EXERCISES

SPELMAN COLLEGE

SISTERS CHAPEL

JUNE SIXTH
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FORTY-NINE
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

*Kate L. Savery
Class of 1899
577 Madison St. Talladega Coll.
Brooklyn N.Y. Talladega Ala*

Charity (Love) suffereth long and is kind
 " " envieth not.
 " " vaunteth not itself,
 " " is not puffed up,
 " " does not behave itself unseemly

ORDER OF EXERCISES

10:30 a. m. *thinketh no evil*
 seeketh not her own *Rejoiceth not in iniquity*
 Is not easily provoked *Rejoiceth in the truth*

1 PROCESSIONAL—MARCH CELEBRE Lachner

2 PANIS ANGELICUS Cesar Franck
 Spelman College Glee Club

3 SCRIPTURE READING . . Reverend William Holmes Borders, *13. chap*
 B.D., M.A., D.D. *of I Cor.*
 Minister of the Wheat Street Baptist Church

4 INTEGER VITAE Horace, 65-8 B.C.
 He who is upright, kind, and free from error,
 Needs not the aid of arms or men to guard him;
 Safely he moves, a child to guilty terrors,
 Strong in his virtues.
 What though he journey o'er the burning desert,
 Or climb alone the dreadful, dangerous mountains,
 Or taste the waters of the famed Hydaspes,
 God will attend him.

5 PRAYER . . Reverend Arthur Vann Gibson, A.B., B.D., D.D.
 Minister of the Morningside Presbyterian Church

6 SPIRITUAL Lord, Make Me More Holy *until we meet again*
loving like Jesus

7 ADDRESS John Marshall, A.M. *now*
 Associate Director for the Humanities, The Rockefeller Foundation *let us say Amen*

Beware all things
 Beware all things
 Beware all things
 Beware all things
 Never fails

2,320,000
 1,500,000 can't hear or see right

8 HYMN

The Lord, in his righteousness, judges the people;
 The mountains and hills by his rule are secure;
 The men of all nations throughout all generations
 Shall honor him as long as the sun shall endure

His blessing he scatters like showers from the heavens,
 Like rain on the fields when the grass is new mown;
 His peace is descending, abundant, never ending;
 The needy and oppressed doth he count as his own.

From sea unto sea shall he spread his dominion,
 From the end of the earth to the rivers that run;
 The isles of the ocean shall offer him devotion,
 All kings shall bow before him, all nations be one.

9 PRESENTATION OF DECREES

10 SPIRITUAL O Seek and Ye Shall Find

11 NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD arr. by Mueller
 Spelman College Glee Club

12 PRAYER AND BENEDICTION Rufus Early Clement, Ph.D.
 President of Atlanta University

13 RECESSIONAL—MARCH ROMAINE Gounod

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 *Georgia Maxine Atkins
 Gloria Lanell Bibb
 Reatha Maye Blackmon
 Clara Arena Brawner
 Rhoda Yvonne Brown
 Bessie Mae Calhoun
 Julia Gertrude Chappelle
 Helen Marie Cochran
 Vashti Smith Cook
 Virginia Belle Davis
 Jean Rosamund DeGazon
 Elise Jeannine Dunn
 Eloise Jocelyn Dunn
 Frankye Lamont Durkee
 Henrene Theresa Ellington
 Willie Lee Ellis
 Cleopatra Ennis
 Beatrice Fennell
 Gwendolyn Olivia Fields
 *Lula Lavaughn Force
 Ella Mae Gaines
 Muriel Yvonne Gassett
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 **Pinkie Rose Gordon
 Geraldine Goss
 Eunice Marjorie Guy
 Dixie Elaine Hardy
 Harriett Elizabeth Hicks
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 Emmalynn Jenkins
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 †Irene Moore Jones
 Muriel Ruth Ketchum

Josephine Evelyn Larkins
 Lyda Ruth Larkins
 Lucile Logan
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 Mildred Frances Rogers
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 Senella Evangeline Thomas
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 Annie Marie Lundy
 Irma Tillman Marshall

Dolores Irene Posey
 Marjorie Armenta Ricks
 †Vivian Almeda Settles
 Rubye Ethel Singleton

**With high honors. *With honors.
 †Completed work in August, 1948.





Mr. Hon, Nancy

Mr. Hon, Nancy

Yates & Milton





Folklore fete
in
Medieval city
Concarneau
France



Feb 57

B. Penn

sees

San Juan

B

Sara E. Penn Set to Attend Chicago Parley

Miss Sara E. Penn, director of Personal Services at the Neighborhood Centers Assn. on Pittsburgh's North Side, has been selected by the agency to attend the Training Center of the National Federation of Settlements at the Hull House Assn. in Chicago, Nov. 13-19.

Professional people from all over the country will be attend-



MISS SARA E. PENN
... delegate from city

ing the institute on services to multi-problem families.

MISS PENN received her bachelor of arts degree at Spelman College and her masters degree in social work from Atlanta University in Georgia. She spent three years in Europe, where she did additional study and traveled extensively.

The daughter of Mrs. Anne Penn of 8011 Nimick Pl. and the late W. K. Penn, her main hobby is designing and making unusual costume jewelry which she does beautifully.

WEDDING
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Mrs. Goldie
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Mrs. Eula W
chairman.

—More for Your

Sahara Ten Annual Bal

The Sahara
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annual Deputie
day, Nov. 22, fro
2 A. M. at The C
107 E. 25

THURSDAY, AUGUST 1, 1963



Police sergeant pleads with demonstrators to "move on" from Rutgers Houses.

30 More Picket
Picked Up He



Living—and Shopping—Easy In 'East Village' Boutiques

By ANGELO TAYLOR

DOWN below 14th Street on First Avenue, women in head scarves poke the eggplants and haggle over the price of peppers. Over on Third Avenue, bearded poets and their long-haired girls price the guitars in pawn shops. In between, on East Seventh Street, Mrs. Julian Stein, wife of the Broadway composer, recently bought a dress for \$200 to wear to dinner at the White House.

Fashion is burgeoning in the East Village, the tony name for an amorphous section of the Lower East Side that has St. Marks Place as its core. Shoppers from uptown go there in search of something different, or amusing, or cheap.

No matter what the shopper is hunting, she'll find it well-laced with the sort of atmosphere Greenwich Village lost when the rents went up and the shoe-string shopkeepers packed up their sandals and moved eastward.

Living Is Easy

The living in the East Village stores, if not highly profitable, is easy. Shops usually do not open until afternoon, neighbors drop in to chat, and the owners' dogs and children decorate the premises.

Until recently, prices have been as easy as the atmosphere—the area's shops have rarely attempted to sell a dress for more than \$30.

Mrs. Stein's \$200 dress—a black and white Indian cotton lined in gold lamé—came from a new shop called Knobkerry at 19 East Seventh Street that is the joint enterprise of Sara Penn, a former social worker, Fumi Schmidt, a dancer and Olive Wong, a theatrical designer.

Knobkerry is both a ready-to-wear and a custom-made establishment that turns unusual fabrics into evening dresses.

The loose chiffon "Grès" dress that is currently uptown's favorite is \$135 at Knobkerry. Other dresses run from \$45 to \$250.

Hand-Loomed Knits

Next door—and sharing the same street number—is Studio Del, where Del Feldman designs and sells hand-loomed knits, working on her sculpture in between. Mrs. Feldman, who describes the shop's décor as Early Gypsy Tea Room, will vary trimmings and colors of her knits to suit the customer.

Her prices range from \$35 to \$125. One of her most popular designs is a loose drawstring sweater paired with either a skirt or bell-bottom pants for \$80.

St. Marks Place, one block north, has shops tucked into virtually every building. At No. 7, Kristina Gorby runs an emporium called Made in U.S.A. full of simple shift dresses priced from \$12 to \$25. Mrs. Gorby designs and makes them in a workroom across the street from one-of-a-kind fabrics.

She is also selling a collection of authentic high-laced shoes of World War I vintage that she found in a Massachu-



The loose chiffon dress, inspired by Grès, is big fashion at Knobkerry on East 7th Street. Leilani Schumann, a puppeteer who was the shop's first customer, models a green one.

setts store run by an elderly Yankee. Women of that era had small feet—the shoes run narrow and are in sizes from 4 to 6½—but a number of present-day Cinderellas have managed to squeeze into them. They are \$15.

Across the street, at No. 24, is Limbo, ostensibly a men's haberdasher but just as crowded with girls as men. Sweaters, T shirts and corduroy pants are as much Hers as His, as are Navy pea jackets (used, \$8.50) and regulation pants (also used, \$6).

Alters Navy Pants

Altering Navy pants to fit feminine figures is a special service at Pourquoi, a shop in the basement of 51 St. Marks Place. The alteration charge is \$10.

This, however, is just a sideline for Jackie Lewis, the long-legged proprietor. She stocks Rudi Gernreich dresses as well as those of several young designers who are exclusive with the shop. Dresses are in the \$45 to \$60 bracket.

Miss Lewis, who wears a Jackie Coogan cap as her trademark, is especially pleased with her newest find—thick wool bell-bottom pants, hand-knitted on four needles so they are seamless. These are custom-made for \$50.

Hammond Rutherford, at

No. 39, is the St. Marks Place milliner. Cecil Rutherford sells hats to uptown stores as well as on the premises.

If the customer wants whimsey, Mr. Rutherford is up to it, but his collection is mainly made up of wearable, tailored hats from \$18 to \$25.

The oldest established boutique in the area is Queen of Diamonds, at 33 St. Marks Place. It began five years ago as a jewelry shop, has since branched out into dresses. The store has a stable of its own designers and sells young, but not extreme clothes, priced from \$18 to \$35, as well as the jewelry (most of it made from old materials) it started with.

Little Bit Different

The newest shop—it opens today—is called Something a Little Bit Different, at 8 St. Marks Place. It specializes in pants of the at-home variety. Helaine Clark, the proprietor, thinks "at-home" is too limited an idea, since pants are now going to nightclubs and theaters.

Here are custom made of fabrics like brocade, satin and fake fur and come with their own tops. Prices range from \$80 to \$200.

Store hours in the neighborhood are likely to be irregular—it is a good idea to telephone first.

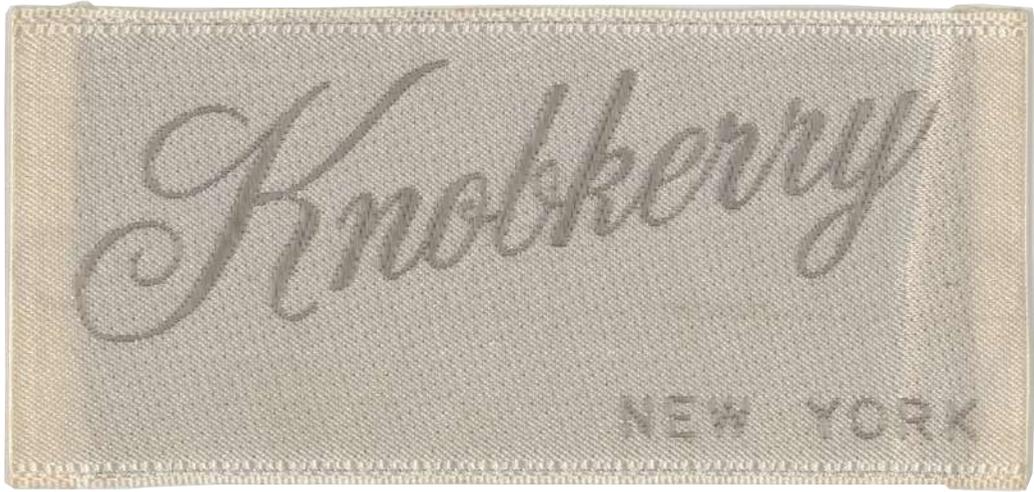


Above: St. Marks Place is the main street of the East Village. Limbo, at No. 24, is a men's shop where girls look for pea jackets, bell-bottoms and corduroys.

Below: Cecil Rutherford of Hammond Rutherford adjusts a wind sock hat on Tanya Korschun of Hunter College. George Nesterzyk, Cornell '67, watches.



The New York Times (by Edward Hauer)





SARA & FUMI WE LOVE YOU

DICK PRESTON

The first piece of banana cream pie is like a journey into the unknown — you wonder from which planet the ingredients for this recipe were gathered.

Later, you try it again — filled with the hope that once more you will be able to repeat that delicious and forbidden experience. Unfortunately, while it tastes okay, its delectable edge seems a little dulled. You blame your palate . . . you think maybe it's a little tired.

Retail reaction to LBJ's Riot Panel report runs the gamut — Some of the financing proposals are "rather staggering" says Broadway-Hale's Edward Carter who doubts current Washington climate favors such heavy spending . . .

The third time you taste it, it's absolutely revolting. But the weird thing is that it tastes exactly the same as it did the first time. EXACTLY.

Suddenly you realize that so does everything that is pre-cooked and packaged. The taste never varies. The recipe is repeatable for eternity and the exactitude in measuring the ingredients is perfect down to the last pinch of flour. Everything is constant — like cars out of Detroit — like politician's cliches.

It's cheaper that way. More economical. Save while you waste — motto for the day — today. Of course, you can't make everything exactly the same, so someone trips a switch and changes

So what's nude? This time it's Romeo and Juliet in the posters billing the London premiere of the Zeffirelli film — but for the command performance where they'll meet the Queen, Olivia Hussey will wear an apricot zibeline dress with train the color of the pie. But it still tastes the same.

And so over and over again the same phoney pie — the same phoney streamlining — the same phoney promises.

Trapped as in the grey-green walls of a public service labyrinth. SCREAM YELL — STUMBLE.

Some people, they tell me, actually freak out. And there was a time when the fashions in Klein's were only weeks older than the original Dior design. That's Democracy — everybody gets to wear the same style of clothes — and to hell with you if you don't.

But there were some of us (let's call them the creative rebels), sickened with sameness, who began making their own pies and designing and making their own clothes.

Among the pioneers of exotic clothing are designers Sara Penn, Fumi Schmidt and Olive Wong of the Knoberry on Seventh Street and now the New Knoberry at 26 St. Mark's Place.

Control of Frank R. Jell-off, Inc. sold by Mrs. Jelleff "Because I'm just tired of it."

Their designs are adaptations of styles from Asia, Africa and South America.

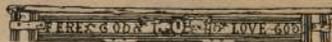
Their success is due to their understanding that in the soul of every sensitive woman, there's a romantic desire that cannot be filled by either Bendel's or Klein's, and the knowledge that we are now living in a braver new world.

A few years ago we secretly coveted exotic, ethnic and antique clothing. Now we are making our fantasies real. but hippies are ok," says Tom Hoving's daughter, as she discusses her favorite clothes ("Pants, but mother made me stop wearing them"), the problems of shopping, and her career plans.

You feel like an Indian Princess? Be one, baby . . . all it takes is clothes.

I can't pass as an authority on either women or the things they wear, but anything that makes a beautiful thing more beautiful, and emphasizes its individuality triggers my jaded eye. Seeing the models at the Knoberry I thought as much about the clothes as I did the girls inside them and that's not generally the way I see women.

Now that I've seen God I can kick the banana cream pie habit and go back to girls again.



DISCOVERY WORKSHOP
To develop being. To break thru barriers and release energy. Psychomotor structures, encounters, group meditations, dance and theatre games adapted to individual needs and group response. 6 week course begins March 26. Call Tony Rullo, Pt 7-6300.

"AWARENESS - EXPANSION"
T-Group Marathon
(8 p.m. to 3 a.m.) Friday, March 15, 22 and 29, 63 E. 11 St., N.Y.C.
Admission \$3 — Students \$2
(Refreshments)
THE CENTER FOR INTERPERSONAL EDUCATION

Clitoric Celebrations
SILVER APPLES
coming in
Anonymous A

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THE east Village OTHER

Friday Evening Post · July 27, 1968

POST

35c

WOMEN AT WORK

WHY THE
BOSS
IS UNFAIR

PRIVACY

WHO
NEEDS
IT?

*All Knobby
Stems
& jewelry*

WHAT
THEY'RE
WEARING
INSTEAD OF
CLOTHES

THE BIG
COSTUME
PUT-ON

*699
9/28*





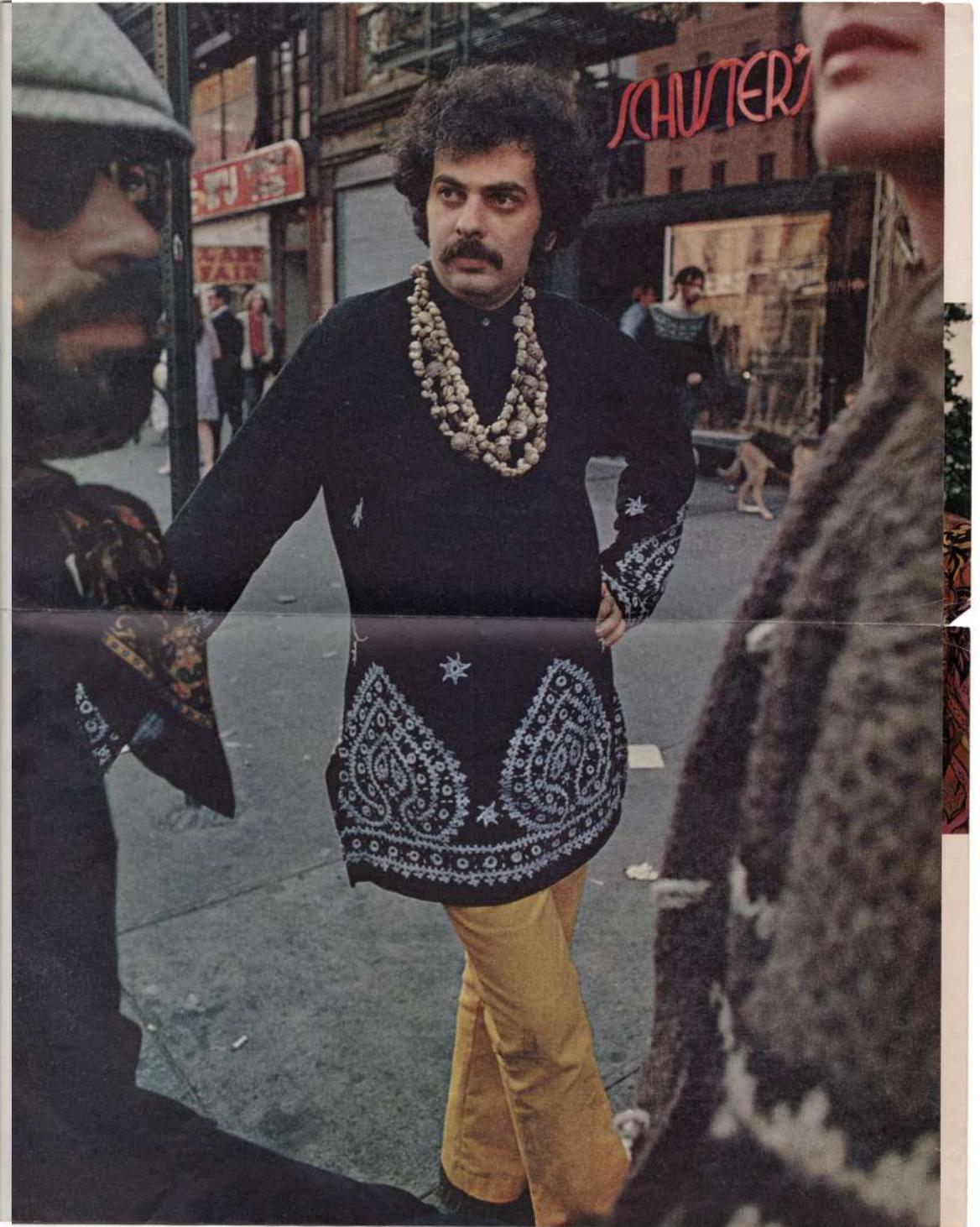
ON THE GREAT COSTUME PUT-ON

For those who don't want to look like everybody else, who are hung up on the movies or dream about other times and places, there are lots of things to wear that are more fun than real clothes.



This page, clockwise from left: Off the fashion pages, this year's supermodel, Penelope Tree, is usually seen in costume. "Lampman," known for modeling for painter Larry Rivers, wears a feathery cape with his evening clothes. "Kasoundra," a graphic artist, combined clothes from London, Lebanon, and New York thrift shops, and sewed the feathers on her hat for a Sunday in Central Park. When she's in the right mood, playwright Rosalyn Drexler likes to work in her pearl headdress and antique dress. Singer-hairdresser Monti Rock III, always in the fashion vanguard, said his shirt was made from a curtain.

Opposite page: Beads and beard add something to exotic shirt of undetermined origin.





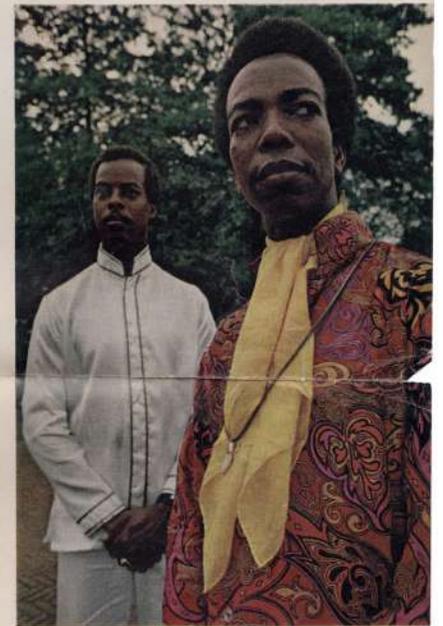
It may have started with the hippies in San Francisco or on Portobello Road in London, or when chic young women in New York discovered Army & Navy stores. One thing is sure—the costume revolution is spreading. The point is that it's relatively cheap, and very satisfying, to put yourself together, to create an image of yourself to fit your mood. It's a form of self-expression for both sexes, and it can be seen in New York at "in" discothèques and parties, on Sundays in Central Park and all over the East Village.

The possibilities are endless. Stores like Limbo, in the East Village, are sources of unusual shirts, jeans, and used military uniforms of all vintages. Transformations, on Second Avenue, has a great stock of antique clothes and theatrical costumes. Knobkerry, on St. Marks Place, sells exotic things like the Pakistani mirror-cloth vest and pants on our cover. Shops that used to provide ethnic minority groups with more or

Knobkerry



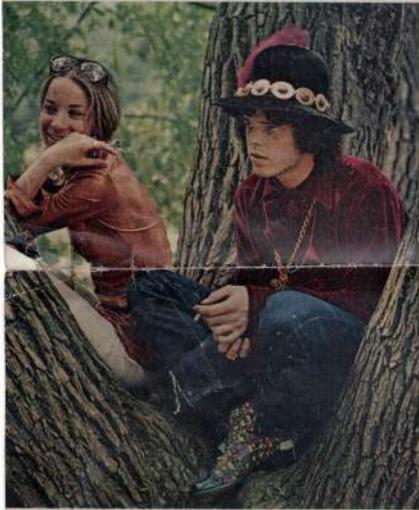
Opposite page, far left: Aussie hat, Army jacket, scarf and huge ring have a cumulative effect. Left: This young man wears his hat, and the jeans he painted and patched, every day, but sometimes varies the rest of his costume. This page, clockwise: The Shed House in the Village has uniforms, all kinds of shirts and pants, and men's wigs and moustaches. Eastern costumes in Central Park. There are antiques for all ages at Transformations. St. Marks Place, a constant costume parade.



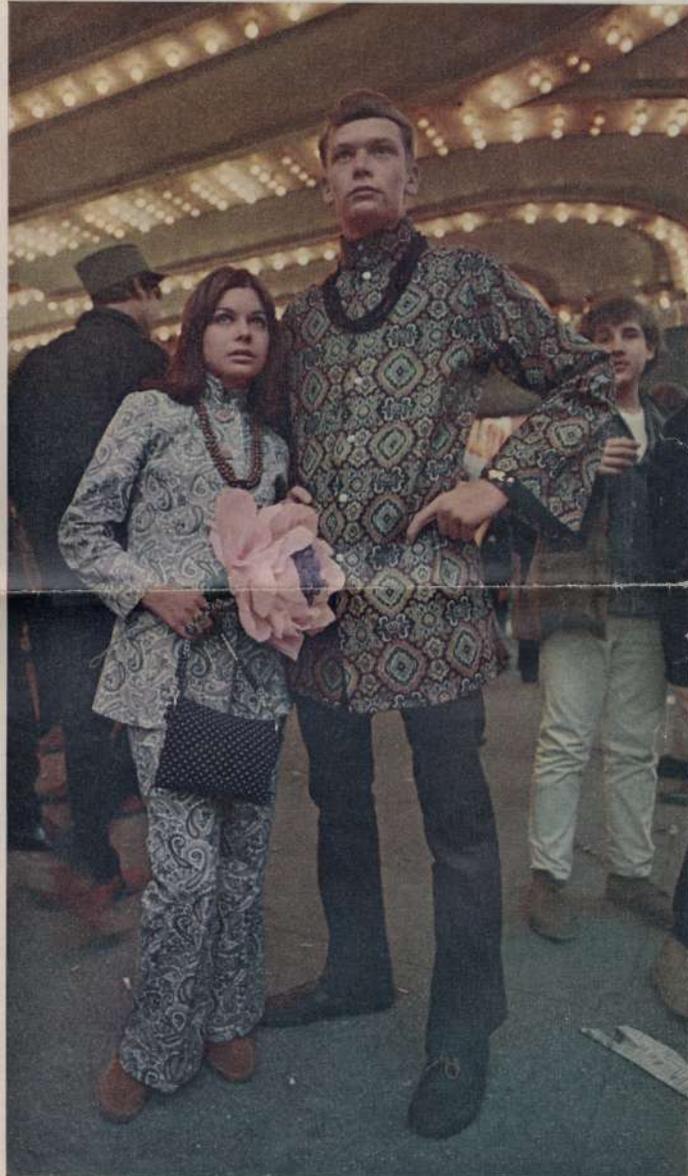
less authentic costumes are now branching out. As for accessories, rings, beads and scarves can be found almost anywhere, for either sex. Even wigs are now being made for men—also instant moustaches, sideburns, muttonchops and beards.

For the less adventurous, there are ready-made costume "looks" at every price level, both nostalgic (Victorian-Edwardian-Romantic, '20's, '30's, '40's) and ethnic (Indian, Gypsy, Russian, Greek, among others). Does it matter if the designers are inspired by the costume underground? "Lots of top fashions nowadays," says Eugenia Sheppard, "start young and cheap and move on up the price and age ladder." In the fashion press lately they've been talking about clothes designed for the "rich hippie," whatever that means. Fashion, after all, has always been a game. There just seems no reason, any more, to play by any particular set of rules.

—Maggie Foley



This page, above: Found in a tree in Central Park, a couple in an Elizabethan mood. Right: Many members of the audience for Fillmore East rock concerts, like the performers, come in costume. Opposite page, from top: Invitations to the Paris Review Spring Revel, a benefit for George Plimpton's literary quarterly, said "Finery Urged." Elsbjeta Halberstam wore a dress made in the '20's. Fashion writer Catherine Milinaire bought her costume in the East. Poet Gerard Malanga, dancing with her, wore a military uniform and lots of jewelry. Bottom: Costumes are common at Salvation, the "in" discotheque of the moment. This waitress wears '30's-inspired makeup and hairstyle.



feminique

YOURS EACH MONDAY—FASHIONS FOR: YOUR WEEK • YOUR HOME • YOUR JOB • YOUR SELF



Steeped in gypsy intrigue, the trio above wear Greenwich Village put-togethers in three of the going looks of today ... pattern on pattern, bareness, and the pants costume. From left, a head scarf of tie-dyed sari cloth tops an embroidered and jeweled vest over a multi-colored shirt and long skirt banded in mirrored embroidery. An embroidered silk bolero, worn backward, bares the midriff and back over a skirt of Indian printed cotton. Indian cotton pants pair with a hand-embroidered and mirrored silk tunic. Inside *feminique*, discover the gypsy soul also in high fashion and jewelry. And to test your own powers of intrigue: passion meters!

A Calendar of Events for This Week

Today	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<p>SEPTEMBER 2</p> <p>While Alaska celebrates the gold rush during "Sourdough Days," why not try making sourdough bread?</p> <p>Tuesday</p> <p>SEPTEMBER 3</p> <p>A nice gift for young parents: theater tickets and free babysitting.</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER 4</p> <p>Do you have dramatic talent? Why not try out for a role in "The King and I" at Lincoln Park theater, 2021 N. Stockton dr. Auditions will be held from 7 to 10 p. m. tonight and Friday for principal and supporting roles, and at the same time on Thursday for singers and dancers.</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER 5</p> <p>With summer almost over, you're probably already planning the glorious week-ends ahead. Don't forget to set aside a day for a special program to be held in the fall: <i>Jeopardy!</i> Tuesday. It won't be long, some of M.J. Higgins' trees have already.</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER 6</p> <p>Tonight relive some of your younger days. There's no age limit on the fun of amusement parks. But since <i>Bussness</i>'s closed, try another of the kiddielands in the area. If you hesitate to go without a child, borrow one from a friend.</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER 7</p> <p>Fond of horses? Don't miss the world's richest \$100,000 hand race, the Arlington-Hanover. You can see all the day's races starting at 2:15 p. m. at Arlington Park. The big one is scheduled for 3:30. Admission: grandstand, \$1.50; clubhouse, \$5.</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER 8</p> <p>Like to learn a little about gem cutting? See a closed circuit TV demonstration today at 5 p. m. at Lincoln Museum of Lapidary Arts, 210 Cottage Hill, Evanston. There's also a display of jade carvings and precious gems. Museum is open 1 to 5 p. m.; adults, 25 cents.</p>



... or a ribbon-like Drusean wedding coat, \$125, with red Indian cap, \$6, and bag, \$10.

... or a Moroccan caftan, \$60, with brocaded belt, \$12, and silk scarf, \$35.

Chicago's gypsy look: brightly-trimmed pants (\$20) with shawl at the hip (\$12).

Latent gypsies who care for a flash of mirrored fabrics and a glint of gold may find fashion fulfillment within specialty shops along North

Wells street, Chicago's counterpart to Greenwich Village.

Here, for the woman determined to make the proverbial entrance, or to be a gypsy butterfly while her friends are more ... are few-of-a-kind fashions. Following in the embroidered look associated with gypsies, reputed to love the look of shiny gold and silver, the outfit pictured makes for dramatic evenings out, or for dazzling street for the home entertainer.

They allow the daring woman to rove far from what may be neatly pigeonholed into any one category. Gypsies are lovers of heart, so clothing typified as "gypsy" is far flung in origin—and finished, perhaps, too.

FROM INDIA COME hand-woven cottons, embellished with bright-colored, hand-applied embroideries and tiny mirrors. The pants and the wide swath of a scarf wrapped around the hip, pictured here, are two examples.

Morocco exports caftans in heavy, gold-laden brocades which gleam with

brilliant gypsies or floral prints and metallic, beaded edges. Coupled with an ornately brocaded skirt and, they create a look that's enough to satisfy anyone who feels in the romantic-if mythical-origins of caftans and veiled women.

FROM THE DRUSE sect in Lebanon is religious group dating from the 12th century) come a conventional wedding coat that gleams with so many colors that even Jesus would be hard put to imagine it. Beige, purple, red and orange, and green and yellow, are accented with bands and chevrons of assorted ribbons. Blue and green stars, beaded by gold and silver beads, have centers of mirror-the silver patterns. All edges of the garments, including side slits, are rimmed with heavy silver braid.

An inscription across the top of the back border, recently translated, reads "Mashallah": "God be with you" is its translation.

Suzan Nelson

"The Gypsy Look," as it's loosely described, has been one of summer's fashion leaders among the sophisticates. It began with the

hippies, and is now adopted by fun-loving fashion fans in high places. Today's gypsy is intentional, all done up in handcrafted clothes and ornaments from such lands as India, Pakistan, Turkey, and other near east countries.

The Beatles and their guru focused the spotlight on mixing East and West fabrics, all in clashing colors and patterns, into one outfit—the end result being that the wearer looks a little like an animal rug.

ONE OF THE best pieces of gypsy dressing is that there are no ground rules; you make up your own. You find yourself in a patchwork skirt made of many different-colored scraps. Top this with a blouse from India, a mirrored vest from Pakistan, necklaces from Egypt, silver belts from India. For good measure add a couple of yards of tie-dyed scarves, also from India, to make a sort of a shawl. The whole gaudy concoction is the exact opposite of formal fashion's no-light feeling.

In New York one of the stores most influential for gypsy fashions is Knobkerry, located smack in the "middle" of the hippie sector of Greenwich Village at 26 St. Marks pl. Sarah Penn, the shop's owner, started out three years ago armed with an appreciation of handcrafted Indian fabrics and the technical help of two designers.

THE SHOP HAD no inhibitions at all about cutting up beautifully-dyed cotton scarves into mini dresses. In sophisticated circles, notably among the models, the mini dress of mini-cloth is second when worn over and outside Indian silk pants or a gypsy skirt, giving the look of a tunic.

The tie-dyed fabrics, that look from a distance as if they were beaded, come next length. Each is tied into about 1,000 tiny string knots before the material is dyed. After the string knots are removed, leaving the little white pebbly spots.

Miss Penn, who calls her fashion formula "mixed dressing," insists down material that no one else has and buys up whole lots when she can afford it. But it's what she does with



In Greenwich Village: an embroidered vest—over a tunic dress—over a long skirt!



A gypsy's jewelry: Coin belts are \$6 to \$8.



Or she wears stone-studded chains, coins, and pendants (\$5 to \$12).

A quick way to get into the gypsy fashion camp is via the jewelry

route. Link belts, rings on every finger. Just head yourself down with chains—for necklaces, belts, bracelets. The key is to pile them on.

To be restrained or delicate is to lose the whole look.

Another road sign that leads you toward the gypsy look for full, the jewelry wear that—all the waist and head.

While the same formula of mixed jewelry and over-decoration goes for either day or evening, one of the best mixes of the fall seasons is the day-



Or Florentine hoops (\$6).



Hoop earrings (\$4 to \$6), job bracelet (\$3).

Royalyn Livingston

Pakistani Fabrics Have a Certain Caste

BY ANGELA TAYLOR

IN Pakistan, the different castes are recognizable by the pattern of their garments. When John Gregg wanted to buy the red, white and black pattern reserved for bone-pickers (scavengers), a Pakistani merchant was convinced that Americans must be mad. If the peddler in the Karachi bazaar could see his embroidered vest draped on a half-nude model on the cover of a recent Saturday Evening Post, he might blow his Moslem cap.

Mr. Gregg started buying native crafts when he was in Pakistan last year because "I loved the fabrics." Bright young things are snapping up the garments at Knobkerry, 26 St. Marks Place in the East Village, because they are part of the fashion revolt against stereotyped "uptown" fashions, and because they adapt easily to the current passion for nudity when they are worn singly rather than in the many-layered Eastern way.

The painstakingly tied-and-dyed fabrics, with their mysterious caste patterns, happen to be cotton gauze and alluringly see-through. The kurta, or back-tied blouse the Pakistani woman wraps up in a shawl, stops just under Western bosoms. The kurta, minus its ankle-length pants, translates here to a minddress.

"Nobody really looked at Pakistani crafts, except the tourist junk," said Mr. Gregg, a 35-year-old Californian who, with his wife, Joan, recently started an import business called Serai. Headquarters of Serai (the name means caravan stop) is in the Gregg's apartment, a high-rise, modern building on Chinatown's Bayard Street. While her Oriental neighbors ride the elevators in Western dress, Mrs. Gregg is likely to do her marketing in white pajamas from Bombay.

The Greggs went to Karachi a year ago because he had a job with an American marketing institute that was setting up an export library to aid local businessmen.

The Greggs traveled to the villages and were entranced with the native costumes.

"Pakistan is really a sub-continent," Mr. Gregg said. "When it was partitioned from India, many Hindus fled and Indian Moslems poured into Pakistan. Since each area and caste has a different pattern, you get an infinite variety of costume."

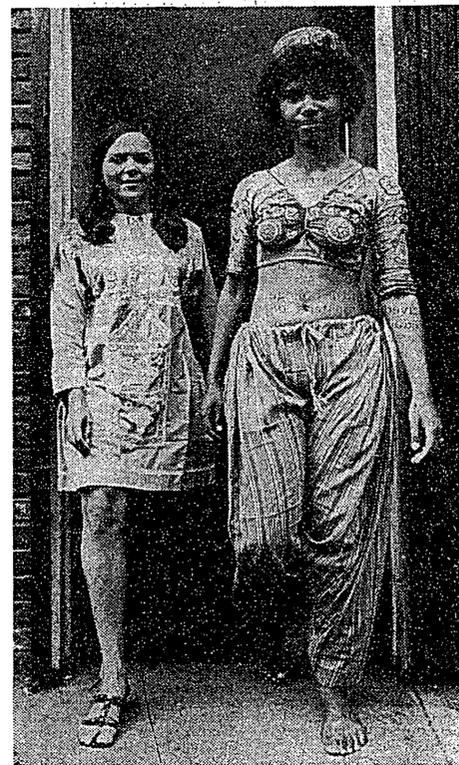
"Look at this," he said, showing a block-printed fabric in a cloud pattern. "It comes from the Sind desert where people rarely see clouds."

Watching the women construction workers in their cholis and full skirts wound around with shawls, or the bone-pickers in their abstract prints, Mr. Gregg approached merchants in the bazaars. They were shocked that he would want low-caste garments.

"Are your people free to wear anything they want?" he was asked. When Mr. Gregg decided to give up his job and take up exporting seriously, he had to educate both himself and the local merchants.

"I had to learn the names of each cloth, pattern and garment in Urdu and they had to be instructed about orders and shipping," he explained.

The Pakistani designs have been sold to various stores (Bloomingdale's has the mirror-embroidered vest), but the main outlet has been Knobkerry, whose owner, Sara Penn, has been turning the embroideries into fascinating modern designs, as well as selling the original garments. Prices range from



Pakistani fashions emerge from Knobkerry, in the East Village. Joan Gregg (left) wears a mirror-embroidered kurta, \$50. Renoir Daggett's choli, \$20, tops puffy, shalwar pants of striped cotton (\$15).

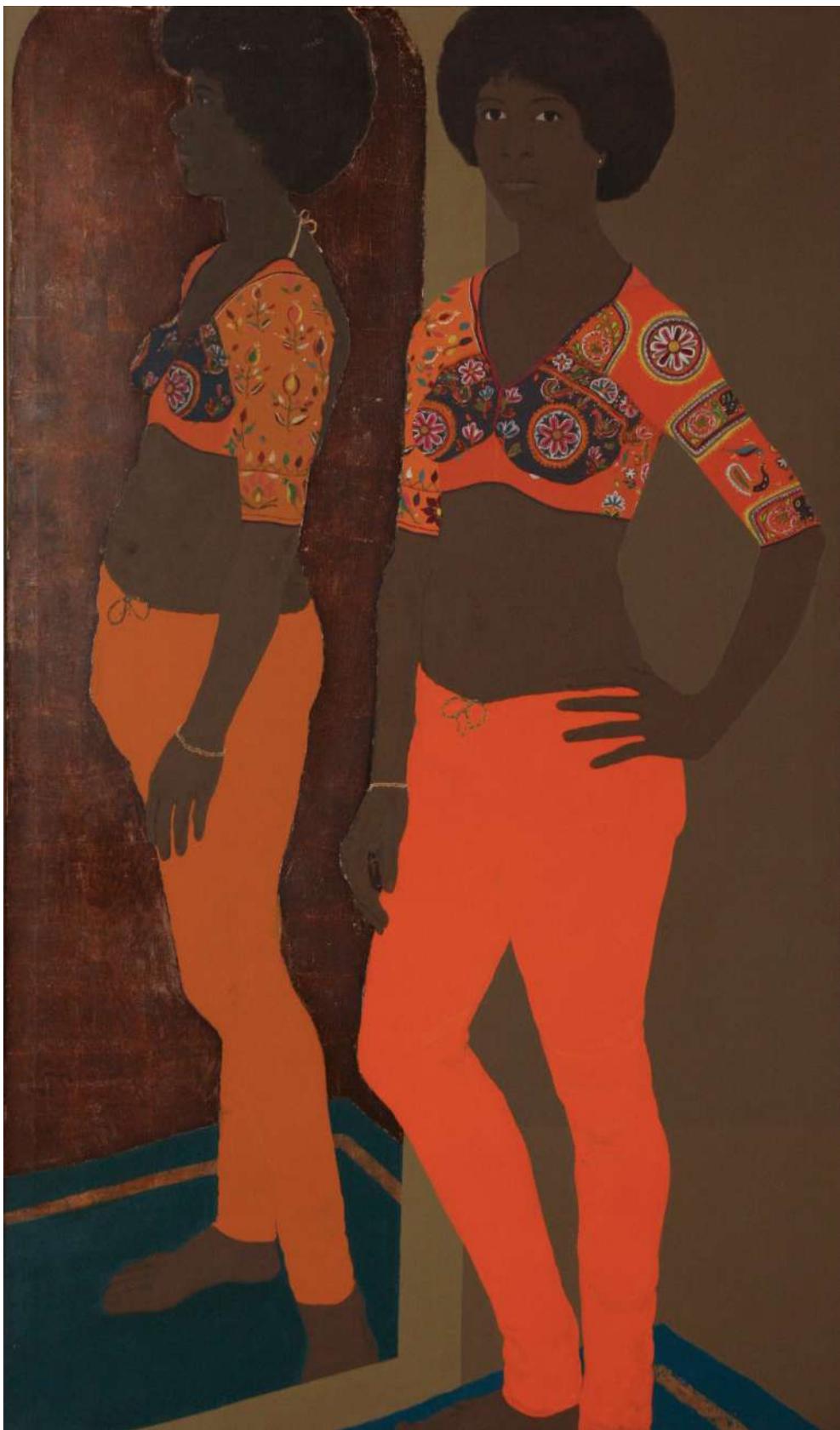
\$15 for the cotton pants to \$250 for an embroidered evening coat.

The most gorgeous garment of all — an all-over embroidered kurta from a rich Hindu caste, which took three years to make — Mr. Gregg is saving for a show he expects to have at the Brooklyn Museum in the fall.

Sait Muneysirci, a young Turk (and various Turkish cousins), recently opened She,

a boutique at 305 East Ninth Street. She's basic dress looks like nothing at all on the hanger, but acquires a good deal when it's slipped over a pretty figure.

Mr. Muneysirci, a voluble, dark-haired young man, does it in various types of printed nylon (including a see-through one with holes like window screening), in two-toned crepe, and with or without sleeves. Prices range from \$24 to \$35.



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THE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

“Chicks up front!”

How troublemakers use girls to put down the cops. See page 86

FEBRUARY 1969



PHOTOGRAPHS BY EDWARD HARDIN

Third World Reflections

By Dorothy Le Sueur

Third World is designer Sarah Penn's name for her "ethnic clothes" which feature patterns and fabrics from the Far East, Africa and South America. The costumes shown here were specifically inspired by Pakistan to complement the richly ornamented collection of Pakistani craftwork being presented by the Museum Shops of the Smithsonian Institution in the Arts and Industries Building through December 31.

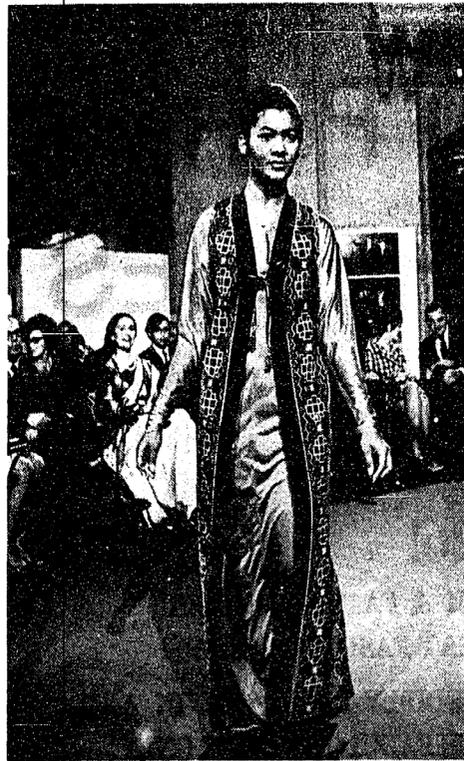
Mostly one of a kind, the clothes were made in the workrooms of Knobkerry, Sarah Penn's boutique in Greenwich Village. For modern women weary of sensible shirtdresses or Plain Jane sweaters and skirts, here is the reasonably priced antidote to fashion boredom. Whether courtly or outright coquettish, the costumes have mysterious, feminine charm that machine made garments understandably lack.

Sythians, Arabs, Moghuls, Tartars, Anglo-Saxons and natives from southern India contributed to the magic potion that brewed Pakistani fashion pageantry. The costume adaptations, presented along with authentic crafts which seem as far away from modern industry as the Khyber Pass, will add imagination to Christmas shopping lists. From desert villages and mountain towns, John Gregg collected the colorful crafts for the Museum Shops.

On the opposite page, CLAUDIA DE MONTE, standing, an art student at Catholic University, wears sheer cotton separates made of a delicate border print. Midriff, partly covered with a bib, is flattering and unrestricting. Skirt, prototype of nonconstructed clothing, is six yards of fabric wrapped to suit the individual, an ancient example of do-it-yourself. Necklace set with colored glass, \$35. Gaily-painted musical instrument, the Yaktar, \$11.

SUSANA MOSCOSO, opposite page, seated, a frequent Potomac fashion assistant, wears modern velveteen pajamas embellished with traditional embroidery. Bright yarn belt tied in her hair, \$2.75. Rings are \$3.35 each. Background is made up of "Rillees," hand applied quilts from the Sind desert which are striking in contemporary interiors, \$55, plus a tent with appliqued animals \$300. Hanging wind socks, derived from India, are \$50 each.

Cotton caftan, above worn by CLAUDIA DE MONTE, has interesting side smocking dotted with tiny beads. Rare coiled necklaces from Kafiristan start at \$35. Sandi fish-tail shoes, \$11. Hand wrought brass pot, \$70. Rich purple velveteen separates, below, on SUSANA MOSCOSO, are adorned with mirror embroidery. Handsome three-tiered pendant necklace from Baluchistan is secured with velvet ribbon, \$40. □



Full-length mirrored Pakistani vest, about \$300.



Sara Penn (left) with partners Olive Wong and Fumi Schmidt.

Tie-dye choli with gypsy undershirt, about \$75.

From Poverty to High Fashion

By Joy Elliott

"I think it was the poverty program that propelled me into fashion," says fashion designer Sara Penn, whose clothes are currently on sale at Smithsonian Museum shops.

Knobkerry, Miss Penn's East Village shop, is in the same area of New York as the anti-poverty coffee shop where she used to teach designing and crafts to teenagers.

"I was disappointed with the scope of the poverty program," said Miss Penn, "so after 15 years as a social worker, I decided to resign and make clothes for my own boutique."

She searched at first for a location in Harlem. Instead she found a low-rent shop in her neighborhood, on East Seventh Street. The shop had an apartment attached and she moved in.

At that time she sewed her designs by hand, since she had not yet learned to use a sewing-machine. Her master's degree in social work for Atlanta University had little relevance, except that most of her jobs in social work gave her the leisure to develop her talent for designing and photography.

Of more importance to her new venture was her work as a jeweler ("I once worked as a silver craftsman in the West Village.") and her experience designing her own clothes ("I almost got thrown out of College for not following their rigid rules of dress.")

Two old friends joined her. One was Olive Thurman Wong, a Vassar-trained designer, now living in California, who still acts as fashion consultant. Miss Wong has compiled a "Bibliography of Third World Fashion." The other was Fumi Schmidt, a Juilliard School graduate, who is still chief dressmaker.

In September, 1965, the trio opened Knobkerry with a fashion show at the Village Vanguard. In the competitive world of New York fashion they made fashion headlines. Fashion editors described Knobkerry designs as "timeless."

Sara, from Pittsburgh, and Olive, from San Francisco, are black. Fumi is Hawaiian Japanese. Together they worked out their own approach to fashion design.

Their boutique features modern clothes incorporating traditional fabric and fashion concepts from the

continents of Africa, Asia and South America.

"We prefer handcrafted fabrics and we don't use synthetics," said Miss Penn. "Traditional societies believe the body vibrates in response to everything it touches."

"That's why we are particularly choosy about the color and type of lining we put in our clothes."

Authentic fabrics range from cottons embroidered with tiny mirrors to multi-colored, tie-dyed materials. A wedding shirt may be worn with or without a long, gathered skirt and the cover for the Koran, or Moslem holy book, is turned into a purse.

Knobkerry does not mass produce. "I hope," says Miss Penn, "that we never have to ask our dressmakers to make six dresses of the same style in one week. I've tried it and it spoils your attitude to fashion and to life."

Knobkerry does not pander to fashion fads. "The fabrics dictate the design," explained Miss Penn. "We have an occasional mini-dress, but it's not our thing."

Miss Penn and her colleagues buy any fabrics they want, regardless of price. Most come from Serai Im-

ports, a New York import shop whose fabrics are at Toast and Strawberries in Washington.

The shop, now located on St. Marks Place, also attracts movie and stage celebrities. Young people volunteer to work there hoping that they might meet Mia Farrow, Jimi Hendrix, Ornette Coleman or Pharaoh Saunders. The volunteers add to a pool of part-time sales clerks that includes some of the teenagers Sara taught in the anti-poverty program.

"I do all the buying for the shop," Miss Penn said. "And I will pass up a bargain or a best-seller in a minute to retain the originality of our display."

This emphasis on naturalness and originality expresses her view of fashion. "I think black designers, like black musicians, should dig into their origins for inspirations."

"It would help to signpost our current quest for identity and bring something healthily different to Western fashion."

The quest of Western Negroes for an identity is the reason Miss Penn chose the name "Knobkerry" for her shop.

The knobkerry is a club-like South African weapon.

George Bernard Shaw internationalized the weapon in "The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God," one of Miss Penn's favorite stories.

Seeking God, the Black Girl travels through the forest with nothing but her knobkerry, which figuratively protects her from the dangers of pat, conventional answers. But since she is seeking an alien God, she never finds him. She ends up somewhat wiser, but estranged from her people and culture.

For these fashion designers, the knobkerry is the link to their cultures.



Suret Scott in an Indian sari, Sara Penn in a Japanese adaptation, Elaine Solow in a translation from the Mongolian and Ann Maurice in a mixture of Indian and Ibo.

PHOTO BY TERESA MCCARTEN

Three Around the Third World

By BEVERLY SOLOCHER

What's run-of-the-mill for one, may be fantasy for another. And for those not familiar with the native dress of the third world (non-whites countries, a visit to Knobkerry (26 St. Mark's Pl.) may well be a visit to fantasy-land.

Of course, for old East Village watchers, Knobkerry may be old hat. It's been around since 1968. But it's the kind of store that inevitably draws one back. Its big windows are always splashed with objects never seen before.

But first things first. In

EUGENIA SHEPPARD IS ON VACATION

1965, three girls, almost entirely uneducated in fashion or costume design, opened up Knobkerry at a small shop on E. 7th St. (It is, at present, their workshop.)

Fumi Schmidt got her degree in English at the U. of Hawaii and studied dancing at Julliard. Sara Penn got a Masters at the Atlanta School of Social Work. The one official designer in the bunch was Olive Wong, who got a degree in costume design at Vassar.

The name "Knobkerry" is from G. B. Shaw's "Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God," Miss Penn said. A knobkerry is a solo hunting stick, "one that she used on her search."

Miss Penn spoke for the group: "Knobkerry — the store — has to do with hand-crafted products."

The store was from the start a quiet success. When it moved, in 1968, to its

more accessible shop on St. Mark's Pl., the fashion press—and even other magazines—picked it up and featured its mirrored and beaded garments on their covers.

The store carries imports from many lands, but more often the three owners interpret the native costumes in a native fabric in such a way that an American woman can comfortably wear them.

Fumi Schmidt brought out her recent adaptation of a Japanese kimono. The fabric was a fine Indian cotton, tie-dyed in purple and yellow. The obi, or sash, was pink trimmed in gold.

"So many things about a kimono are just not practical," she said. "The sleeves always fall into things and the obi makes it difficult to sit." Her kimono is cut in such a way that these

things will not occur. "I tried to get the feeling by adapting." There is still an obi, but here allows the wearer to bend and move fluidly, and the sleeves won't dip into the soup.

Another adaptation, this by Miss Wong, is of a Sioux Indian costume. The skirt—a mini wrap—is of dark green velvet. The gold and purple ribbon that trims it is itself trimmed by multicolored beads. The actual Indian skirt is somewhat less flared than Miss Wong's. That's not all. Little leggings of matching fabric snap and wrap around the leg, starting at the upper calf and ending at the ankle. "The Sioux let the leggings hang open so that when they dance, the leggings move, too," Miss Penn said.

Some garments are not adaptations, but simply de-

signs the women found attractive for the particular fabric they had in stock. One wrap skirt, for instance, is made from aquete cloth, a particularly rare item because it was hand woven (cotton and silk) by the Ibo in Nigeria. It's not being made any more. The skirt itself is slim and full length with a fringe running down its side. An inside tie was provided to make the wrapping somewhat easier. "Most American women don't want to wrap," Miss Penn said. "They're afraid their skirts will come off."

Ann Maurice, a visitor, put the skirt on with a striped choli, one of Knobkerry's most popular summer items. Cholis are the Indian blouses which, aside from their ties, are bare-backed.

The shop is filled, too, with jewelry and toys and hangings. Some things are local; others are even done by hippies in upstate communes (like a rawhide dress with jagged edges).

The Knobkerry women keep going. Miss Penn recently returned with goods from Guatemala, and she wants to go to New Guinea next.

Through John Greg, an anthropologist-turned-importer, they did a show at the Smithsonian last year on Pakistani hand goods. More recently, they turned up in Kansas City where a large department store had them set up a similar—but broader—show. It was all of the third world: Africa, India, Pakistan, China, Japan, Vietnam (both), Korea, Guatemala, North American Indian and more.

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BAZAAR'S BAZAR

PANTALOONS—for day and night—
a whole new way to dress for the resort life. At SONA, The Golden One, 11 East Fifty-fifth Street, we found these airy rainbow-colored pantaloons with a tiny matching top (above left). About \$45. Also, the softest-to-the-body, shaped, black silk gold-rimmed pullover with pantaloons (above right). About \$85. Complete the look with this Berber necklace of amber and silver. About \$80. At Inside Outlet. A super look for a man is this sheer patterned voile shirt with Italian-style dungarees (above background). Shirt, about \$30. At Madonna.

Madonna, at 304 East Fifty-third Street, understands the pantaloon message. They have great ones in lots of patterns and colors. Add their studded leather or brightly colored long wool streamer belts. Everything from Morocco. The silk shirt (opposite center) is to order from Madonna. The other shirts, in fantastic textures of Indian cotton, are from SONA, The Golden One. This shirt (opposite left) is about \$20. The other shirt (opposite right) is about \$27. Feet and arm bangles and all those rings are found at SONA, too. A great way to look on the might be long dresses while everyone else is skinning around in those little bikinis. For instance, the embroidered (below left) from Inside Outlet, 956½ Lexington Avenue. About \$50. Or the most delicately-textured sheer cotton (below center), wrapped and tied under the bosom with its own bright yellow petticoat. About \$75. At Knobkerry, 26 St. Mark's Place.



The Beautiful People turned out en masse for a champagne preview given by **Lena Horne** to help kick off **Oscar Brown Jr.'s** new musical revue, *Joy*, now playing at the Intimate New Theatre on Manhattan's East Side. Of course, the most beautiful of all was Lena herself, who openly calls Oscar "great" and "wonderful." No less enthusiastic about the gifted composer-singer-actor's latest effort was the lovely **Abbey Lincoln** in her much together natural and fur pants. The show, which also features Brown's black and beautiful partner **Jean Pace**, along with **Sivuca**, an albino Brazilian who does fantastic things on the accordion, went over big to an audience that included the **Sidney Lumets** (Lena's daughter **Gail**), **Egon von Furstenburg**, **Pilar Crespi**, **Baron Alexis Waldeck**, **Arthur Schlesinger Jr.**, **Betsy Palmer** and *Hair* producer **Michael Butler** . . . Elsewhere on the theatrical scene, **Al Freeman Jr.** is deep in rehearsals for the big new musical *Look To The Lilies*, which will feature the nation's fastest-rising black actor opposite **Shirley Booth**. It's based on *Lilies Of The Field*, the movie that **Sidney Poitier** copped an Oscar for . . . Eagerly anticipated is the opening of *Billy Noname*, a black musical drama by brother **Bill Mackey**, with music and lyrics by **Johnny Brandon** . . . Another impressive contender for off-Broadway honors is *Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Mo*, an interracial conceived Afro-rock musical by **Robert Schroeder** with music by **Bobby Banks** and direction by **Michael Whitaker** . . . Some of the most imaginative of avant-garde blacks are operating thriving enterprises in the East Village, quiet as it's kept. Foremost among them is **Sara Penn**, whose **Knobkerry** or "Third World Boutique" is a pace-setter with its jewelry, sculpture etc.

—PHYL GARLAND

The Passionate Shopper / Jane Stanton

GLITTER AND BE GAY

A highly personal guide to the more sparkling costume-jewelry boutiques in town.

If the term "costume jewelry" brings to your mind images of a chorus line, you're making a fashion mistake. Amy Greene, high priestess of fashion and beauty at *McCall's*, tells us that in the seventies costume jewelry will be "as typically accessory as hair." Mrs. Greene is representative of a growing number of women who are beginning to view dimly even the most sparkling real jewelry. "Real jewelry has no sense of humor," she says. "Costume jewelry does." She is unimpressed by such extravagances as Mrs. Richard Burton's recently purchased bubble-sized bauble. "In this day and age, spending a million dollars on one finger or around one's neck is simply old-fashioned. Anyway, [the Burton diamond] really looks like the bathroom doorknob!"

Kenneth Jay Lane is a man who built a very real empire on very fake jewelry. K.J.L., his trademark, appears on a collection of jewelry designs which look like creations from a medieval tapestry garden of earthly delights. Diamond unicorns, enamel antelopes, golden Gordian knots, cascades of pearl waterfalls, shimmering gold leaf earrings, and various unidentifiable creatures and natural wonders are made to adorn ears, necks, fingers, wrists and heads. The jewelry is all hand-made. The most expensive K.J.L. design runs about \$300 for an elaborate belt or necklace, but you can own a pair of emerald earrings or a pin for as little as \$10. Mr. Lane signs all his pieces in good humor. It's not a matter of ego, but of identification. "It's really so the stores know who to send it back to if it breaks."

K.J.L. assemblages, which enhance the collections of Donald Brooks, Valentino, Oscar de la Renta and Bill Blass, are available to all at major department stores in New York—Bonwit Teller, Bergdorf Goodman, Henri Bendel, Saks Fifth Avenue, Lord & Taylor and Bloomingdale's—and at almost any good boutique featuring costume jewelry.

Almost all of the big couturiers have taken to designing costume jewelry. Givenchy's boutique at Bergdorf Goodman has some great way-out accessories, featuring one large silver daisy hung close

to the neck for around \$30. Yves St. Laurent stocks his boutique, Rive Gauche (855 Madison Avenue), with studded chain belts, button earrings in gold and silver, and the like. Also at major department stores: Geoffrey Beene, Lanvin, Sant'Angelo, Dior . . . the list goes on.

The list below is a personal rather than comprehensive directory of some unusual stores.

A sybarite is anyone fond of luxury and pleasure, and **Sybarites East** (221 East 60th) is a shop where such creatures should feel right at home. Richard Peters and Sheldon Barr, the owners of this boutique-restaurant combined, offer a select collection of costume jewelry, specializing in designs from the Art Deco period. For \$125 you can buy an Art Deco necklace of pink glass triangle stones set in silver which reflects the starkly bold style of that era. An elegant comb of white sapphires (the term used for a form of corundum) set in a row, which was once the property of a silent film star of the twenties whom Mr. Peters mysteriously refused to name, can be yours for a mere \$35. Also from the twenties: butterfly-wing jewelry, represented here by a thin oval pendant in which the rainbow-blue wing is mounted on silver and covered in crystal. Another unusual delicacy is a black scarab pin from the Napoleonic period. Set in gold and enamel, with ruby eyes, the scarab itself is made of coal. Other pieces range from about \$15 on up, and all are special.

At **Brentano's** (586 Fifth Avenue and 20 University Place), Coptic duck ornaments, Ashanti flatfish, African crossed crocodiles, Sun of Knowledge pins, Sumerian leaf necklaces, sacred eye amulets, Aztec calendar necklaces and Lincoln campaign badges come to life in electroplated gold- and silver-plate. If you feel overwhelmed by the assortment (which ranges in price from about \$4 to \$6 for a pair of earrings to about \$30 for an intricate necklace), try giving yourself an Egyptian Stability Charm to counteract the chaos. Other interesting pieces include Sumerian "Ur" earrings, Parthian loop ornaments, Pre-Columbian frog and llama charms,

Assyrian snake ornaments, God of Lotus bracelets, a necklace of ancient coins, and Byzantine wedding rings. Brentano's also has what they call "hand-crafted" jewelry from all over the world (\$4-\$100).

Getting right down to it in the heart of the Village at 26 St. Marks Place is **Sara Penn's** little big star store, **Knobkerry**, where you may run into Janis Joplin, Mia Farrow, Jimi Hendrix, Sandy Dennis or Al Kooper. Although the boutique offers mainly African and Indian clothes and leather goods (plus some Penn specialties like sandalwood-oil perfume with a delicious carpentry scent), it also features fantastic bargains in hand-crafted body ornaments ranging from Masai warrior necklaces (stiff rings of beads in a collar effect) to crocheted leather pendants made in Knobkerry's own workshop. There are intriguing items like Pakistani glass beads strung on elasticized bracelets in various colors, Bedouin amulets to store stuff in, an artistic white and brown leather something which Ghanians wear around their necks for protection, glass bracelets with writing from the Koran on them. If you insist on being unique, try the one-of-a-kind Ethiopian antique collar necklace in vivid greens, yellows, reds and blues, with real silver beads. Prices range anywhere from \$1 for glass bracelets to \$100 for the more specialized pieces.



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Blue Chinese kingfeather and enamel hair ornaments made in the 19th Century

NEW YORK — Authentic kilim rugs that some BP hostesses use for tablecloths for winter brunches. Turkoman jewelry which is the favorite jewelry of Paris-based Lou Lou de la Falaise, embroidered and glazed yellow doekin boots from Ghana, Indonesian monk baskets and wooden harps, 19th-Century Chinese feather jewelry, woven ikat robes, Palace Guard robes from Nepal, ceremonial chairs from Africa, wooden Buddhas, Chinese cornelian and home-brewed sandalwood incense at \$1 made by the owner Sara Penn are just a few of the precious items found in her boutique called Knobkerry Third World Art & Design.

"The story of how the shop came to be called Knobkerry is just too long. All I can say is Knobkerry means Zulu hunting stick. Olive Wong and Fumi Schmidt, two good friends, and I collaborated 11 years ago when I had a shop in the East Village.

"It goes back that far. Now Olive is in theater and Fumi works independently. I have lots of Fumi's designs in the shop."

Penn, an attractive woman who wears tailored jeans and her own designs made from antique Persian, Indonesian, African and South American fabrics that she also sells in the shop has been at 158 Spring St. in SoHo for the last three years.

"The shop carries nothing but things made

from natural fabrics. And, of course, it will always be nothing but the best handcrafted things in jewelry."

Penn has traveled to nearly every corner of the globe for her jewelry, objects, clothing.

"What is especially rare now is the Turkoman jewelry. The cuffs are handcrafted and they used to be had for almost nothing. Now, it's hard to find the really good old pieces."

One Turkoman cuff can cost as much as \$500 to \$600 in New York. They are cheaper in Paris and Marrakech.

Penn doesn't talk prices and business much. She claims not to seek out retailers and wholesale deals with stores. However, she explained that her prices range from \$1 for the incense to \$2,500 for one of the rare kilim rugs. A woman can get a carved Cornelian petal on a silk ribbon for \$25.

A customer also can pick up a Peruvian warrior headdress made of feathers on a wood band that can be worn the way Yves St. Laurent showed feather and stone jewelry in his last couture collection.

"If I don't have something like a Turkoman piece here, I am sure I can find it. In fact, I can drum up almost anything I need that's first quality."

—ANDRE LEON TALLEY

Tracking Treasures

Rare handcrafted Turkoman cuffs



A Peruvian warrior headdress of wood and feathers

A 19th Century Turkoman necklace



An Indian betel nut case with hinge top which can serve as a miniature

WWD photos by Rick Machalaba

The interior of Knobkerry





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→17A



→18A



→19A



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→11A



→12A



→13A



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Dan Dawson
Svet Scott
Marion Fake
etc



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164 North Third Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19106

Opening Thursday, December 2, at the Gross-McCleaf Gallery, the joyous holiday showing of the



From New York, London, Philadelphia and California, the Philadelphia Gallery's inspired, uninhibited, unabashedly original artist-designers will be shown together exclusively in the holiday collection of the

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For women who see themselves differently. Quite differently.

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The New York Botanical Garden

Bronx, New York 10458

(212) 220 8700

December 26, 1978

Sarah Penn
Knobkerry
158 Spring Street
New York, NY 10012

Dear Ms. Penn:

The show is done, up and open; I hope you'll be able to see it.

'African Objects Woven From Plants' will run through April 1st, as agreed to by you in a phone conversation with me. Know that your cloth is protected from harm, in cases, and is fully covered by The New York Botanical Garden insurance.

I will return your cloth to you after the show closes.

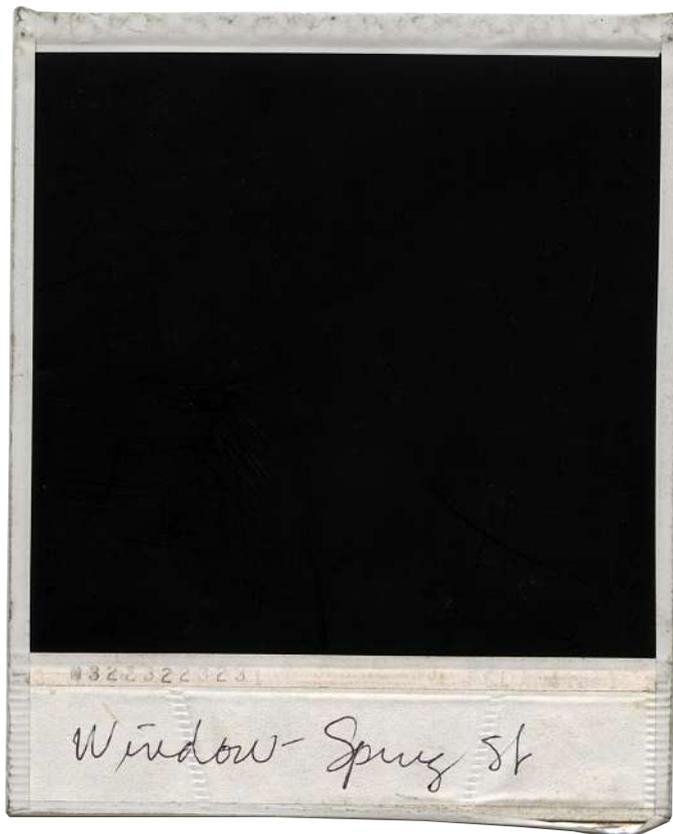
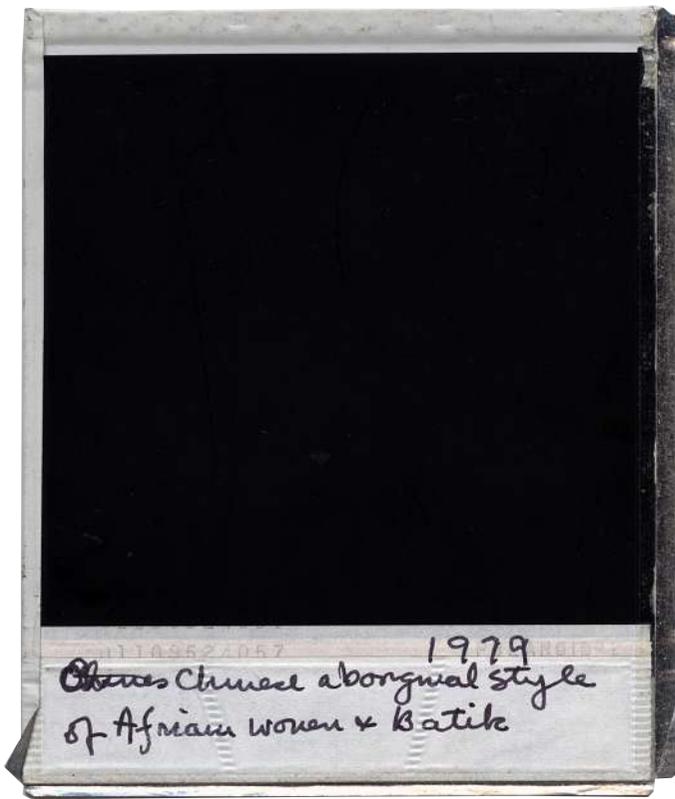
Thank you again, very much, for your generous loan.

Sincerely,

Susan Hartnett
Exhibit Coordinator

ju





KNOBKERRY is proud to announce
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PENN-ULMER
TEXTILE GALLERY

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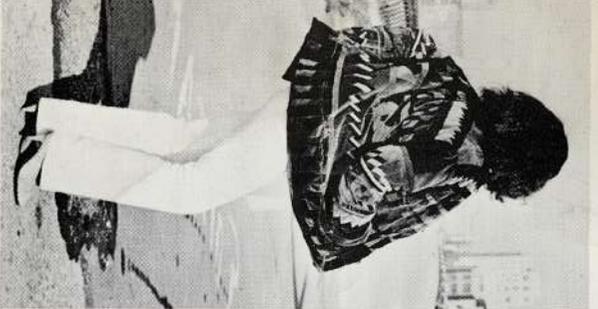
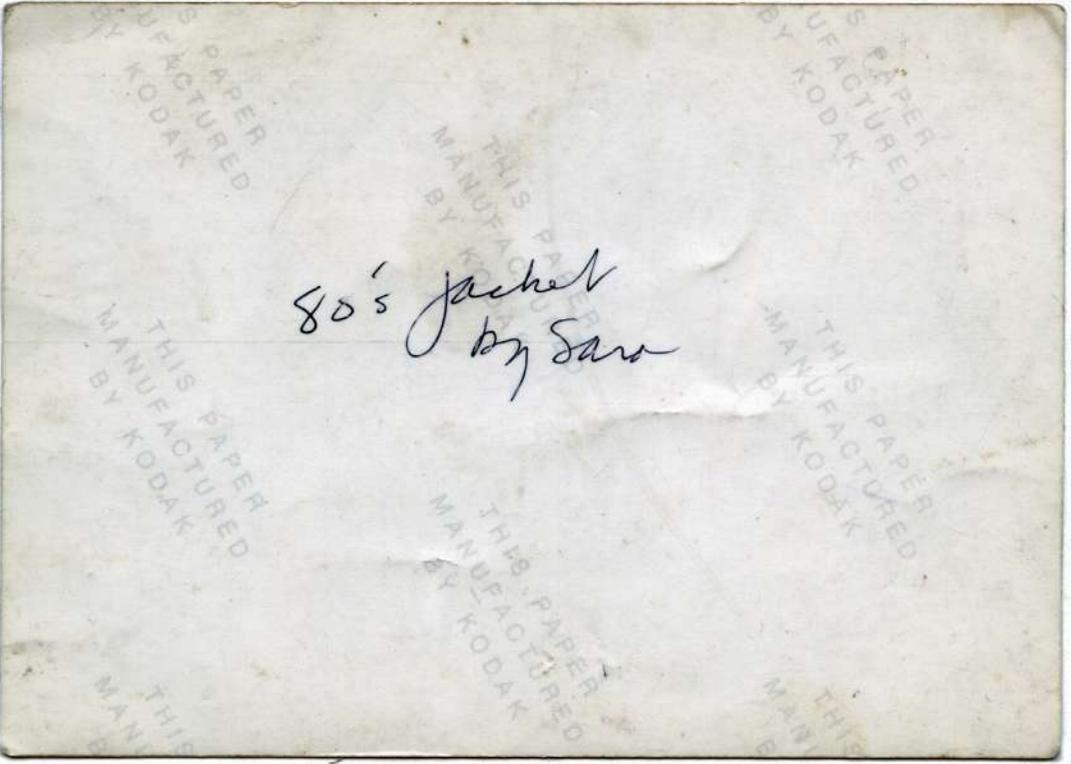
with an exhibition of

19th & 20th C. CHINESE
COSTUMES & TEXTILES

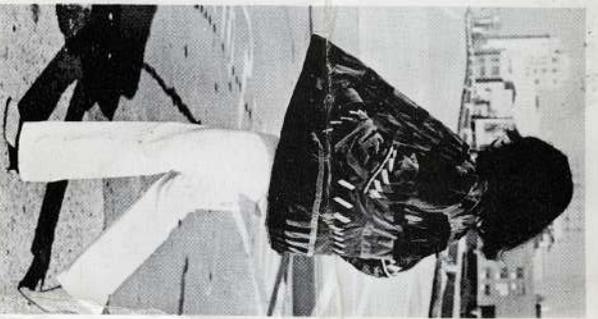
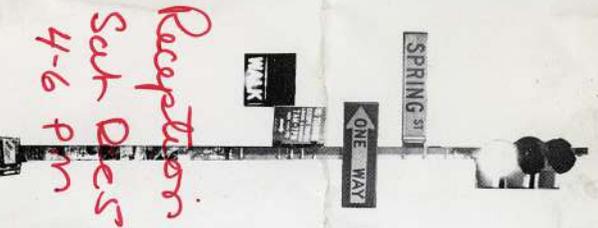
November 10 through December 31, 1979
Reception: November 10, 2-6 pm.

1980





Velveteen Patchwork



Seminole inspired — S. Penn

WALKING WORKS

by

SARA PENN

an exhibition of patchwork, appliques and assemblages inspired by ethnic design.

UNICORN GALLERY
120 SPRING ST. NYC

DEC. 1 thru DEC. 17, 1981
Tuesday thru Sunday — Noon to 6

© KNOWBERRY INC. '81





Calvin Klein

7 May 1982

Ms. Kinshasha Conwill
The Studio Museum in Harlem
144 West 125th Street
New York, NY 10027

Dear Ms. Conwill:

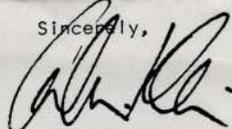
RE: SARA E. PENN

I have know Ms. Penn for several years, and found her to be very knowledgeable with respect to the history and tradition behind fabrics.

She has always been most helpful, and has supplied us with resources which have given me inspiration for my fabric collections.

Ms. Penn is highly competent and I feel her unique skills will make her ideal for the position of Director of the Museum Shop at the Studio Musuem in Harlem.

Sincerely,



Calvin Klein

CK:hmf

Calvin Klein Ltd., 205 West 39th Street, New York, New York 10018, 212-736-9601, telex 234820 CKLUR



Cyclists' leggings and hot high tops topped with parrot-bright patterns.

Far left: Something wild—and wily. Sweater, Melizan, \$86. At

Jordan Marsh. Leggings, Affair of State, \$40.

At Max, Denver, Aspen, CO. Nylon messenger bags, Frankie's Garage, \$40 each. Beer-logo briefcase, Craft

Caravan, Inc., \$50. Hat, Xenobia Bailey, \$200.

Left: Brighten up. Cotton sweater, Rue Britannia, NYC and London, \$69.

Leggings, Reminiscence by Stewart Richer, \$40. Bodysuit (sold with

matching tube not shown), Giorgio di Sant'Angelo, \$400. Batik skirt, Jacques Esterel

available at Jet Lag, \$55. At IF Soho, NYC.

Hat, Xenobia Bailey, \$200. Yellow and orange sneakers, \$37; blue

high tops, \$28; Converse. Beaded bag (around

neck), Sara Penn for Leekā Designs, Inc., \$150. Beaded dangle

belt (on bag), The Hemingway African Gallery, NYC, \$45.

Right: Find your true colors. Turtleneck, Andre Van Pier, \$144. At

Bloomingdale's. Jacket, The Common Ground, NYC, \$200. Beaded belt,

The Hemingway African Gallery, NYC, \$75.

For more details, see Shopping Guide.

THE
BRIGHT
STUFF!

Mickey Mouse the beloved icon of the world has been



Tirubeca

211
W. B. Shaw





The story of the basket is a complex one to weave, beginning, perhaps, about the time the infant Moses was found at the edge of the Nile inside a cradle made of reeds. Across continents and cultures, native fibers (bamboo, twigs, grass, straw) have long been used to create vessels in which to store grain, cart milk, boil water, gather berries, and more; thus, the richly muddied baskets of the Philippines or the tightly woven willows of the American Indians. When it comes to form and function, a roadside find can be as desirable as a fine antique basket. Of course, what goes inside is always up for grabs. —produced by Ellen Breslow

ASPECTS OF *Style* BASKETS

Center: Painted rattan, with wire bow, \$185—Renny, Inc. Clockwise from top left: Woven raffia "corn husks," by artist Lisa Martin (privately owned). Shaker fruit basket, circa 1900, promised gift to the Museum of American Folk Art, New York City. Nineteenth-century Japanese bamboo "vase," \$525—Sara Penn/Knobkerry. Wire form, \$25—Renny, Inc. Raffia "tray," \$18—Sara Penn/Knobkerry. Bentwood basket from eastern U.S., 1920s (privately owned). Handwoven reed basket with naturally shed deer antler and bead inlay, \$450—Galeria Primitivo - Art of the Americas. Dyed bamboo from Borneo, \$120, and Philippine mud-dyed rattan market basket, \$140—Tucker Robbins. "Granny bottom" basket of oak splint from southern U.S. (privately owned). For more information, turn to

120

The New York Times
nytimes.com

March 31, 1994

CURRENTS; Around the World in TriBeCa

By DULCIE LEIMBACH

TRIBECA may be the hippest triangle south of Canal Street, but it's sorely missing the kinds of arty shops that make SoHo, north of Canal, a jammed weekend spot.

Stepping into this void is Sara Penn/Knobkerry, an emporium that sells ethnic and brightly colored textiles, furniture, jewelry and clothing. Sara Penn, who opened her loftlike TriBeCa store in December, has been selling objects from Africa, Asia and the Americas since the 1960's, when she started in the East Village. "I moved to SoHo in the 70's, stayed until the 80's and am now here," she said.

Ms. Penn has been a Marco Polo, traversing hemispheres to dig up exotica. In one corner are saris, kimonos, sarongs; in another, 19th-century Japanese cabinets. Elsewhere around the shop are textiles from places like Sierra Leone, Mali, China, Indonesia, Colombia and Mexico. On the wall are fighting flags (above), \$2,500 to \$3,000, from the Fanti people of Ghana.

A 19th-century Japanese futon cover colored with natural dye, about \$1,500, can turn a futon couch into furniture worth showing off. The boutique, at 211 West Broadway (Franklin Street) is open Tuesday through Sunday, from noon to 7 P.M.; (212) 925-1865.

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NY Newsday 1994

David Hammons' Secret Magic Show

By Amei Wallace
STAFF WRITER

RUST DAVID HAMMONS. That sly practical joker, that tricky punster of the profound, that artist who makes magic out of street stuff and doggie-bag leavings, has concocted one of the best art shows in New York right now. And it's a secret.

Since Halloween, at least 15 works (there are more; you have to find them) by the artist, that every museum and international art extravaganza has to have — and far too many young artists have to imitate — have been a best-kept secret in Sara Penn's ethnic folk art shop, Knobkerry, in TriBeCa.

Hammons, who is male and black, has, in a sense, positioned his exhibition/installation as a stealthy, guerrilla response to the much-ballyhooed "Black Male" show at the Whitney Museum.

Selma Golden, 29, the Whitney's curator, "is a child," he says. "She made a child's exhibition. I thought something should be in town that was much more subtle, the opposite of it."

The Whitney show is stridently about stereotypes, with a publicity machine to hype it. Hammons' exhibition is nimble and wily, and he's relying on word of mouth.

The works are integrated with the shop's merchandise so cunningly that finding them becomes a treasure hunt for both objects and meaning — of the layered, shifting, confounding variety.

The only piece among the Japanese kimonos, the African masks, the Indian textiles in Penn's shop that announces that maybe an art show is going on here is a pyramid constructed out of rolls of toilet paper — mostly white, as in the white world.

Other works are secreted in the shop's merchandise: "Duck Tape," a decoy duck bandaged in surgical tape, like a ritual object, nests behind the door of a Japanese kitchen cabinet; a "Cigarette Chandelier," made of gracefully branching wire studded with cigarettes of an Italian brand, prophetically named STOP, blends into the gold brocaded Japanese fabric it takes as its background.

An actual pack of STOP cigarettes resides amid the jewelry and small ethnic sculptures in a vitrine — along with another Hammons piece, a doll house-sized Breuer chair with a plastic, flowered seat-cover and a piece of chewed bubble gum underneath.

You stumble across the "The Juice," an appropriated box with O.J. Simpson's picture and signature on it — a real box, housing a real juice extractor manufactured

some years back. You have to lift things, peer closely, pry and wander to get it — as Hammons does. "I spend all my time walking around this damn city to find where the energy is," Hammons declares.

Even the massive, baroque "Spitting Image" fountain in the store window doesn't immediately announce itself as an artwork.

On a high, spiky metal stand of Hammons' design rests a huge Chinese bronze bowl, out of which an African mask rises majestically, plumed with vast white feathers and weeping water out of its eyes and nose into the bowl — water as



Sara Penn in her shop, where Hammons' art is on display. Below, Hammons' "Basketball Rice Bowl"



a primal, healing force. On one wall, a basketball bulges the folds of a Nigerian robe, in honor of Hakeem Olajuwon, as a riff on Hammons' all-purpose basketball metaphor. Basketball is the childhood fantasy, the way out, the road to respect, the stuff of blighted dreams and manipulated realities in the world of the ghetto.

Hammons in the past has hung huge hoops high, constructed of debris off the streets, leftovers, ritual objects. Watching a basketball game, "that's the Black Male show," he says.

Hammons unexpectedly caught me in the act at Knobkerry as I

Please see ART on Page B28

David Hammons

ART from Page B3

bent over a case filled with small wooden African objects to study a deflated basketball shaped like a bowl, which contained rice and an African wooden spoon.

Over wine next door at 211 W. Broadway, he described his first meeting with Sara Penn more than 20 years ago, when she moved her shop from the East Village to Soho, and how ever since then "I've wanted to do a show in her shop, working off history."

"There are twenty cultures in that place; it's like a museum of natural history," he says. "It's like a slaughterhouse. The objects in there bring you more than you bring to a show. In a gallery, there's nothing to play off."

A recent prominent example was "Rolyholyover: A Circus," the continuously adjusted extravaganza of object and event at the Guggenheim Museum SoHo last summer, which the composer John Cage set in motion just before his death. (Still touring, it opens at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in May.) Eccentric in a different way was "The Spatial Drive" at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in 1992, a show devoted

to the art on view, one turned the museum's guards, who had all the answers. Shows like these have perhaps been influenced by the grassroots activities of young artists and dealers who, released from the pressures of a high-powered art market, shall we say, have approached show time with an irreverent, improvisational self-consciousness. Over the last few years, there have been additive exhibitions, which take shape while the show is on view (like "One Thing Leading to Another" at the 303 Gallery in Manhattan in 1992). Another variant might be called the insinuated exhibition, in which works of art are displayed in a space already occupied by other things. An example is the group show several artists mounted in and around a sole exhibition of Ron Gorchov's paintings at the Jack Tilton Gallery in Manhattan in 1991. (Last fall also saw artists living in their exhibitions at Exit Art/The First World and the New Museum, as well as exhibiting work in rented trucks parked on the street.)

At the moment two more departures from the exhibition norm can be seen downtown, one a conversation with curators, the other a conversation between cultures. "It's How You Play the Game.

... " at Exit Art/The First World in SoHo is an additive affair, an exhibition as work in progress as well as a kind of chess game between four curators, three from prominent uptown museums, who have been responding to one another's choices of artworks with further selections of their own since early December.

The other, an untitled effort of the insinuated variety, is a witty and subtle game of solitaire by the installation artist and sculptor David Hammons (whose work is also included in the Exit Art show). This occurs at Knobkerry, the TriBeCa store of Sara Penn, a dealer in African and Asian art and artifacts, where Mr. Hammons has orchestrated a kind of Easter egg hunt that includes both rearrangements and temporary assemblages of Ms. Penn's frequently impressive inventory as well as some artworks of his own.

While Mr. Hammons' piece becomes a stopping-off point of another sequence that includes Mr. Jones and Mr. Acconci, the glass-and-tears group is finished off by a work by Mary Del Monaco that consists of dozens of hand mirrors strung from the ceiling by their handles. Their shimmering plentifulness echoes Ms. Smith's floor piece, while their reflections enable viewers to compare their own eyes to Ms. Carlson's. Most important, the mirrors' suspension sends one's gaze eerily, yet unerringly, back to the image of a figure hanging upside down that appears on one of Ms. Applebroog's watercolors. (It is hard to believe that Ms. Del Monaco's work, which is a bit simplistic on its own, will ever look quite as good as it does here.)

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Knobkerry At Knobkerry, Mr. Hammons engages in a similar, also responsive form of thinking out loud, and seems very much at home. He is, after all,

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Sometimes his efforts are too casual: an old group portrait of a black family doesn't do much hanging within the folds of a Japanese kimono, and a pyramid of toilet paper looks plain silly. But often there is a double-edged quality to his decisions: covering the bottom of a small Shinto shrine with black-eyed peas is at once obvious and didactic in the political sense, and beautiful, even reverential, in the visual one.

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FRIDAY, DEC. 24, 1994 • 50 CENTS

NEW YORK NEWSDAY, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1994

SPORTS
NEW YORK
NEWSDAY
EDITION

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, JANUARY 6, 1995

Late Edition
New York: Today, becoming cloudy. High 39. Tonight, brief period of snow, then rain, windy. Low 36. Tomorrow, windy, rain. High 45. Yesterday, high 27, low 15. Details are on page A24.

60 CENTS

ART REVIEW

The New, Irreverent Approach to Mounting Exhibitions

By ROBERTA SMITH

The idea that the contemporary art exhibition is a malleable form to be approached creatively is hardly new. It has asserted itself at regular intervals for most of the 20th century, or at least since the Dadaists and then the Surrealists started making their presences felt. But lately, in certain museum and gallery shows, the convention of the exhibition has seemed more up for grabs than usual.

Such as how to layer not only meaning but objects — an unpainted African mask on another mask that is elaborately painted and wears an airplane on its crown, symbolizing the tension between stay-home ethnicity and the perils of entering the world, of playing the game.

Hammons has taught himself to be a master of the game of art and commerce. "I would like to be in it for the rest of my life, not just for a 20-year plan," he says. "My plan is to do what I want, not what they want me to do. This exhibition is a nice attempt to keep a little flame alive in the art world, very subtle and quiet and out of someone's way."

Shows like these have perhaps been influenced by the grassroots activities of young artists and dealers who, released from the pressures of a high-powered art market, shall we say, have approached show time with an irreverent, improvisational self-consciousness. Over the last few years, there have been additive exhibitions, which take shape while the show is on view (like "One Thing Leading to Another" at the 303 Gallery in Manhattan in 1992). Another variant might be called the insinuated exhibition, in which works of art are displayed in a space already occupied by other things. An example is the group show several artists mounted in and around a sole exhibition of Ron Gorchov's paintings at the Jack Tilton Gallery in Manhattan in 1991. (Last fall also saw artists living in their exhibitions at Exit Art/The First World and the New Museum, as well as exhibiting work in rented trucks parked on the street.)

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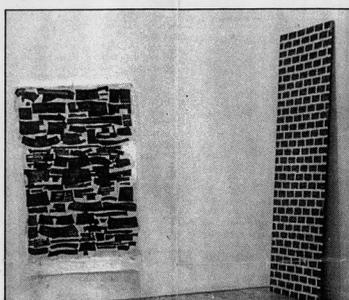
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One corner of the constantly evolving show at Exit Art: "L.D. Tarp," left, by Brad Kahlhamer; a Vito Acconci work from the project "Octopus," right, and Sergio Vega's "Paradise Island," foreground.



Each of the constantly evolving show at Exit Art: "L.D. Tarp," left, by Brad Kahlhamer; a Vito Acconci work from the project "Octopus," right, and Sergio Vega's "Paradise Island," foreground.

work-by-work basis, or cross-reference its contents by style or medium. It can also be deciphered, following the color-coded labels, as a series of simultaneous group shows that reflect the sensibilities of the individual curators. Ms. Spector, for example, has a clear preference for pieces of a Minimal-Conceptual nature; her choices so far include works by Roni Horn, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Janine Antoni, Jim Hodges and Georgia Starr, an English artist represented by a 20-minute video in which she leans against a wall crying softly. Many of Ms. Golden's choices, which

change shape and direction with each addition. In the back gallery, for example, realism as well as depictions of bricks or grids unify a wall that includes the tiny portraits of Mark Greenwald, a tondo by Martin Wong, an installation painting by Y. Z. Kami and an abstract painting by Jack Whitten that loses some of its abstractness in this company.

A cluster in the front gallery revolves around tears as a theme and glass as a material, beginning with the dramatically rendered crying faces of Ms. Applebroog's watercolors, chosen in the first round by Ms. Ingberman and Mr. Colo. From the other curators came: Ms. Starr's crying video; a sculpture made of dozens of big glass tears, by Kiki Smith; an untitled wheel made from empty liquor bottles and resting on a pile of coal, by Mr. Hammons; and "Bon," a tiny sculpture of a single eye that cries real tears, by Mary Carlson.

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NEW YORK NEWSDAY, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1994



Registration Department

Fax Cover Sheet

No. Pages 2

Fax Date 7/8/97

TO: Sara Penn

Tel.:

Fax.: 212 925 1865 212 274 8214

Walker Art Center

**Vineland Plaza
Minneapolis, MN 55403
Tel: 612-375-7600
Fax: 612-375-7618**

FROM: Joseph King
Assistant Registrar
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

Tel.: 612-375-7563

Fax.: 612-375-7618

Message:

Dear Sara,

Please find enclosed the standard request for non-exclusive license that Walker requests with each new purchase. As I stated on the telephone, we are launching a new web site on Friday and are hoping to include a reproduction of David Hammons Flight Fantasy, as a highlight of the current permanent collection installation, on view until April 1999. Although we sent the form to Mr. Hammons in 1995 we have never received a response. I would be most appreciative if you forward this form to Mr. Hammons and ask that he respond as soon as possible by either signing and returning the form via fax or by sending the unsigned form back via fax, so that we are informed of his wishes. Again thank you for your assistance with this detail.

Sincerely,

Joseph King
Joseph King



SARA PENN KNOBKERRY AND MILOS ATHERSTONE AFRICAN ARTS

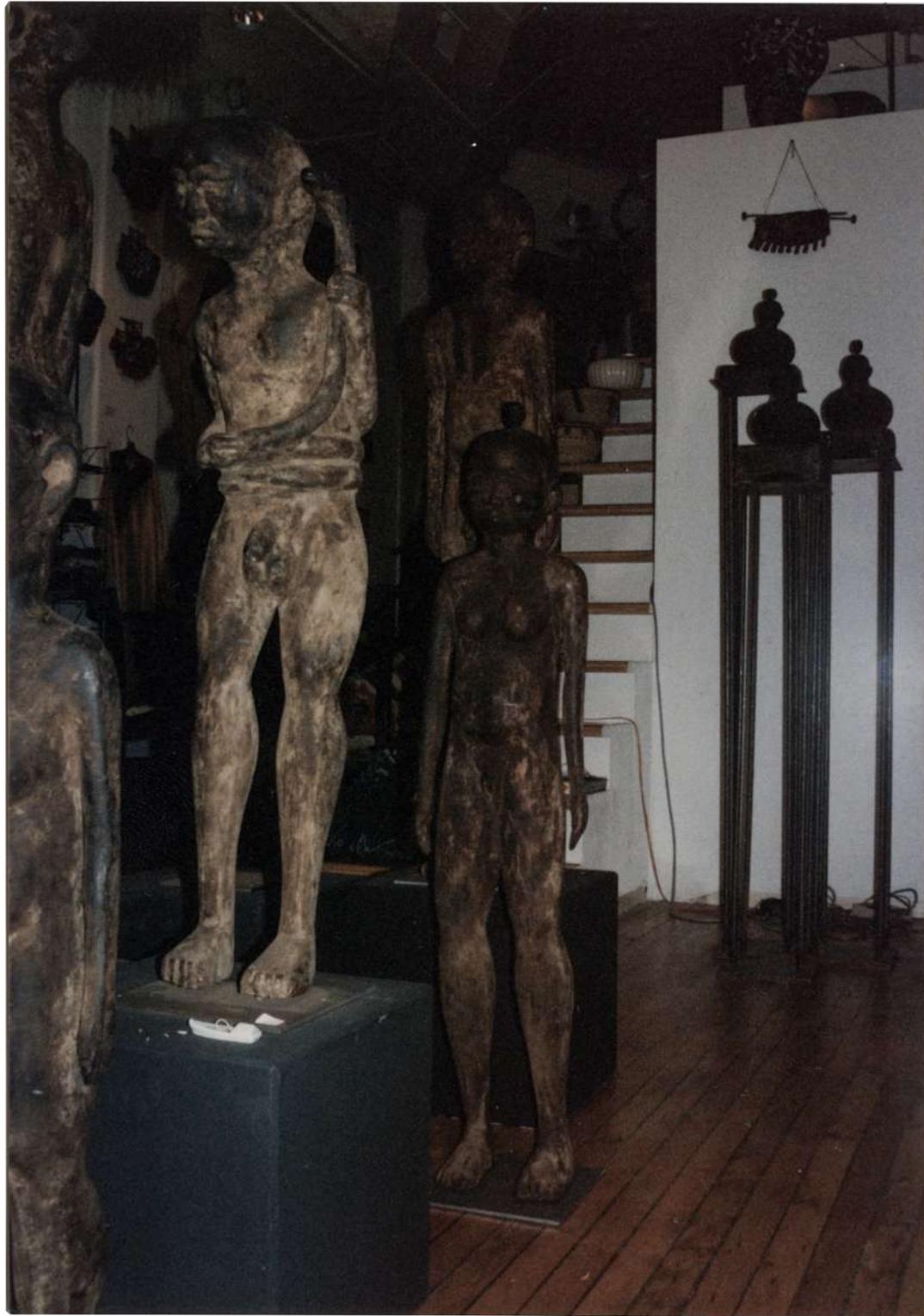
Fletcher please call me
800-4888

GONA
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 OF CHUKUNDA PEOPLE, MOZAMBIQUE

19 APRIL - 7 MAY, 1995
Opening Reception:
Wednesday, April 19, 6-9PM

KNOBKERRY 211 WEST BROADWAY NY NY 10013
 At Franklin St. in Tribeca Tel-Fax 212-925-1865

RETURNED FOR POSTAGE
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MILOS-ATHERSTONE AFRICAN ARTS
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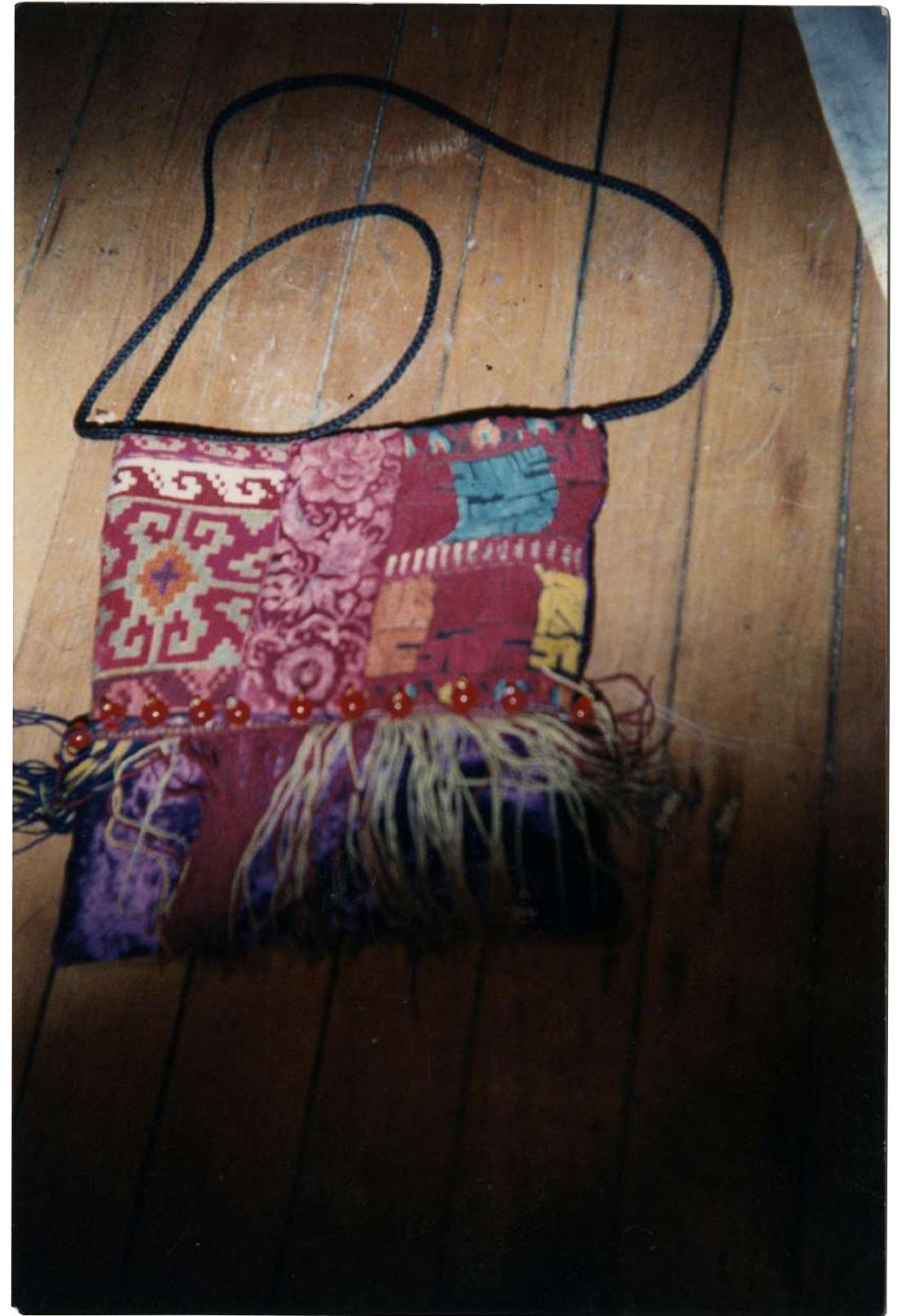
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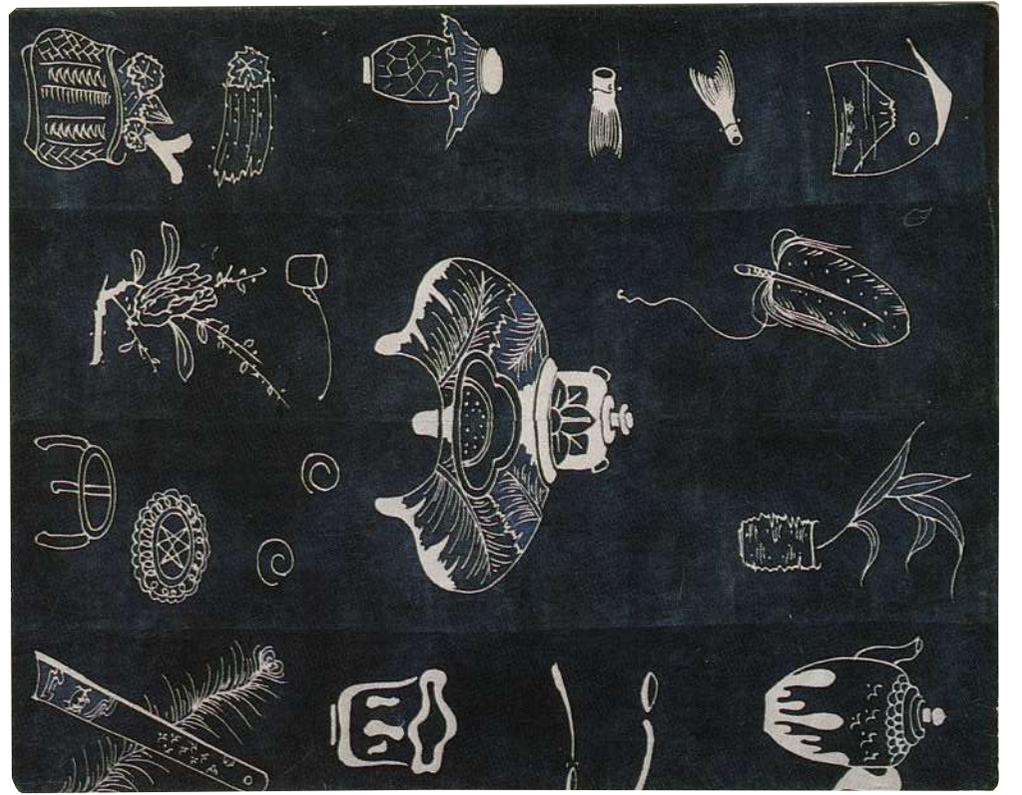
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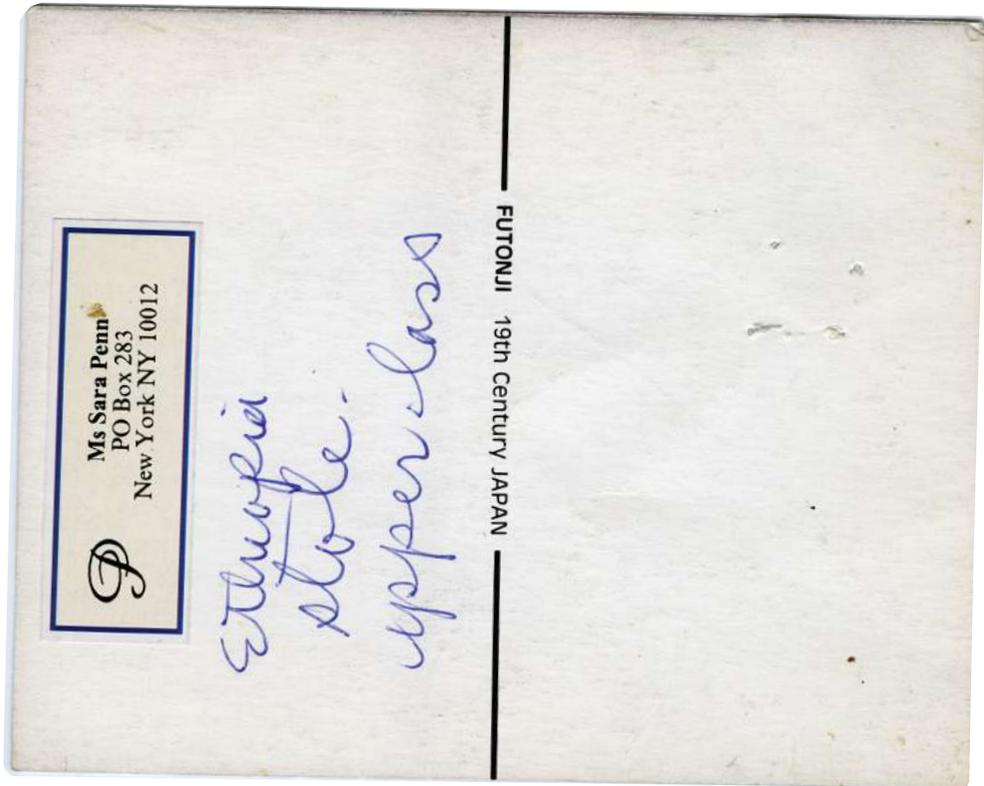
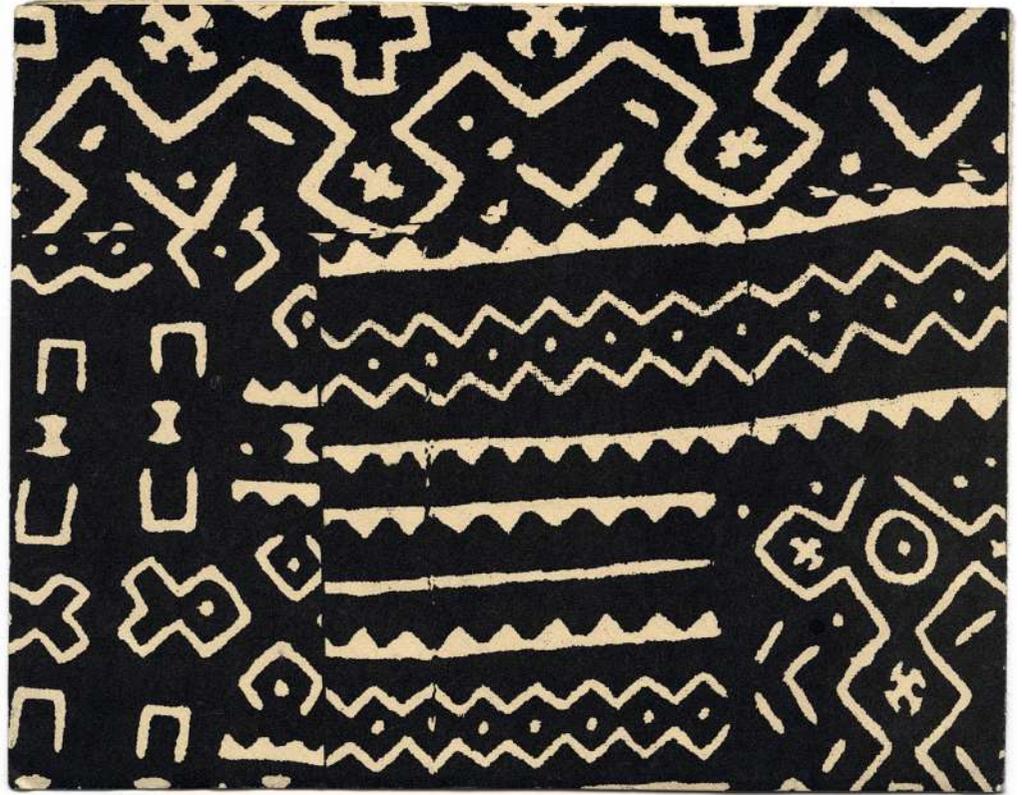
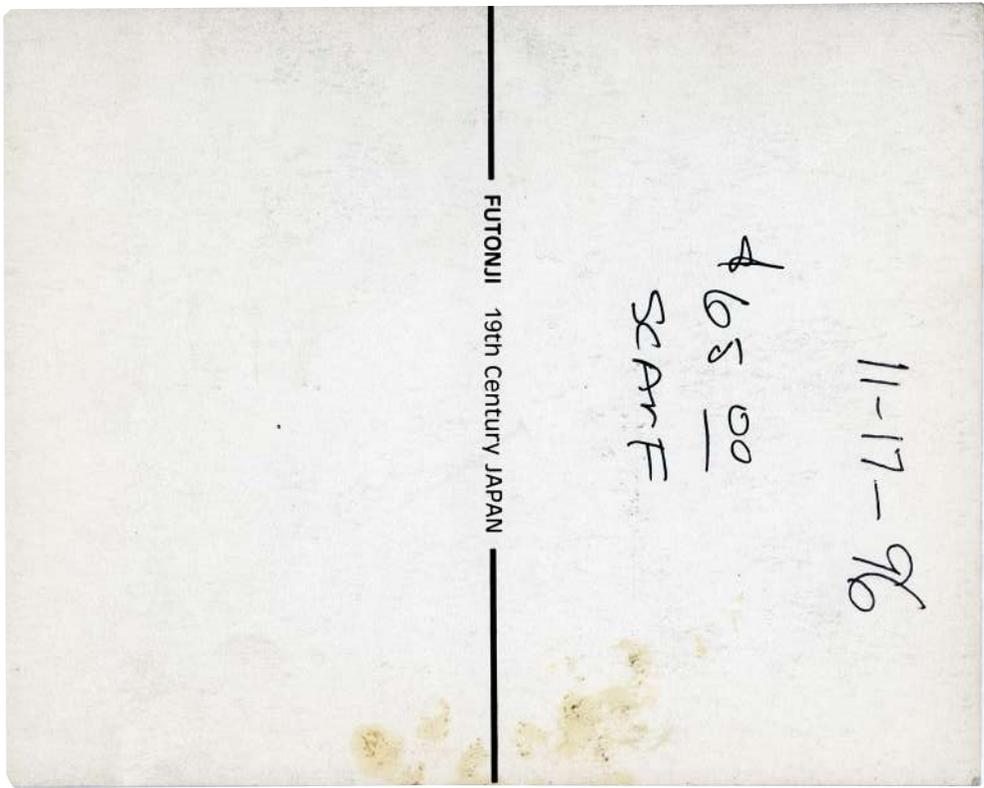
MEDICINE CONTAINER CULTURE OF
 CHIKUNDA PEOPLE-MOZAMBIQUE



sara penn/knobkerry
211 west broadway
nyc 10013
212.925.1865







Sew the old days for me, my fathers.
Sew them that I may wear them for
the feast that is coming...

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Indonesia, Pakistan, India and
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SARA PENN KNOBKERRY
ERIC ROBERTSON AFRICAN ARTS
MILOS SIMOVIC AFRICAN ARTS

ANCESTRAL SPIRITS

Gona Medicine Containers from Mozambique
Egungun Garments of Yoruba Societies

June 4 - 29, 1996

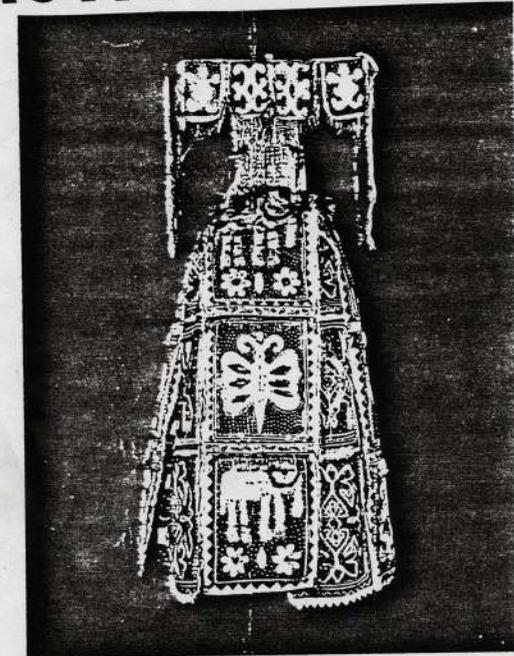
Reception, Saturday June 8, 6 - 9 pm

KNOBKERRY 211 WEST BROADWAY, NY, NY 10013

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Modern Postcard 800/559-8365

254
SARA PENN KNOBKERRY
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ANCESTRAL SPIRITS

Gona Medicine Containers from Mozambique
Egungun Garments of Yoruba Societies

June 4 - 29, 1996

Reception, Saturday June 8, 6 - 9 pm

KNOBKERRY 211 WEST BROADWAY, NY, NY 10013

At Franklin Street in Tribeca Tel-Fax 212-925-1865



Dear Ken
 Thanks for the card
 hope you had a ball.
 This letter I sent to Linda

KNOBKERRY/SARA PENN
 211 WEST BROADWAY
 NEW YORK, NY 10013
 (212)925-1865

LINDA O'KEEFFE
 METROPOLITAN HOME
 1633 BROADWAY
 NEW YORK, NY 10019

June 21
 Wasn't that a low blow.?!
 on card, than a bit

DEAR LINDA,

I AM OUTRAGED THAT MY BUSINESS DID NOT RECEIVE A SINGLE CREDIT IN "MAKING A GRAND AND GRACEFUL GESTURE" PUBLISHED IN THE MARCH/APRIL ISSUE OF METROPOLITAN HOME. THE RED AND YELLOW IKAT TEXTILE WHICH YOU BORROWED APPEARS IN TWO PHOTOS WITH NO MENTION OF SARA PENN/KNOBKERRY; YET EVERY OTHER CONTRIBUTOR RECEIVED CREDIT. MY OUTRAGE IS BASED ON THE FACT THAT A SIMILAR OVERSIGHT OCCURED LAST YEAR WITH N.Y MAG. IN WHICH CORKY POLLEN PHOTOGRAPHED MY GOODS AND GAVE CREDIT TO TWO OTHER RETAILERS IN THE CITY.

I AM SORRY TO HAVE TO SUSPECT RACISM, BUT I SEE NO OTHER REASON FOR THE OVERSIGHT, PARTICULARLY SINCE MY FABRIC WAS A POSITIVE ASSET TO BOTH PHOTOS. IF I SOUND PARANOID IT IS ONLY BECAUSE I HAVE BEEN A PIONEER IN MY FIELD AND WATCHED OTHERS WALK AWAY WITH MY IDEAS AND GAIN ACCEPTANCE AND RECOGNITION.

I HAD TO LET YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL BECAUSE I HAVE PASSED THE STAGE OF SILENT ACQUIESCENCE.

SINCERELY

Sara McCauley Brown
 (anthropologist)
 was in. She will lend several
 old banners for the
 Hallow show.

SARA E. PENN

I can't wait to talk to you - not about that above bullshit - but your experiences.

Ny Times
1998



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Manhattan Sources

ASIAN textiles, from Indian silk saris to Indonesian cotton ikat, are available in Manhattan, especially in and around SoHo. Fabrics range from sturdy cream-colored cotton to batiks to antique Kashmiri shawls.

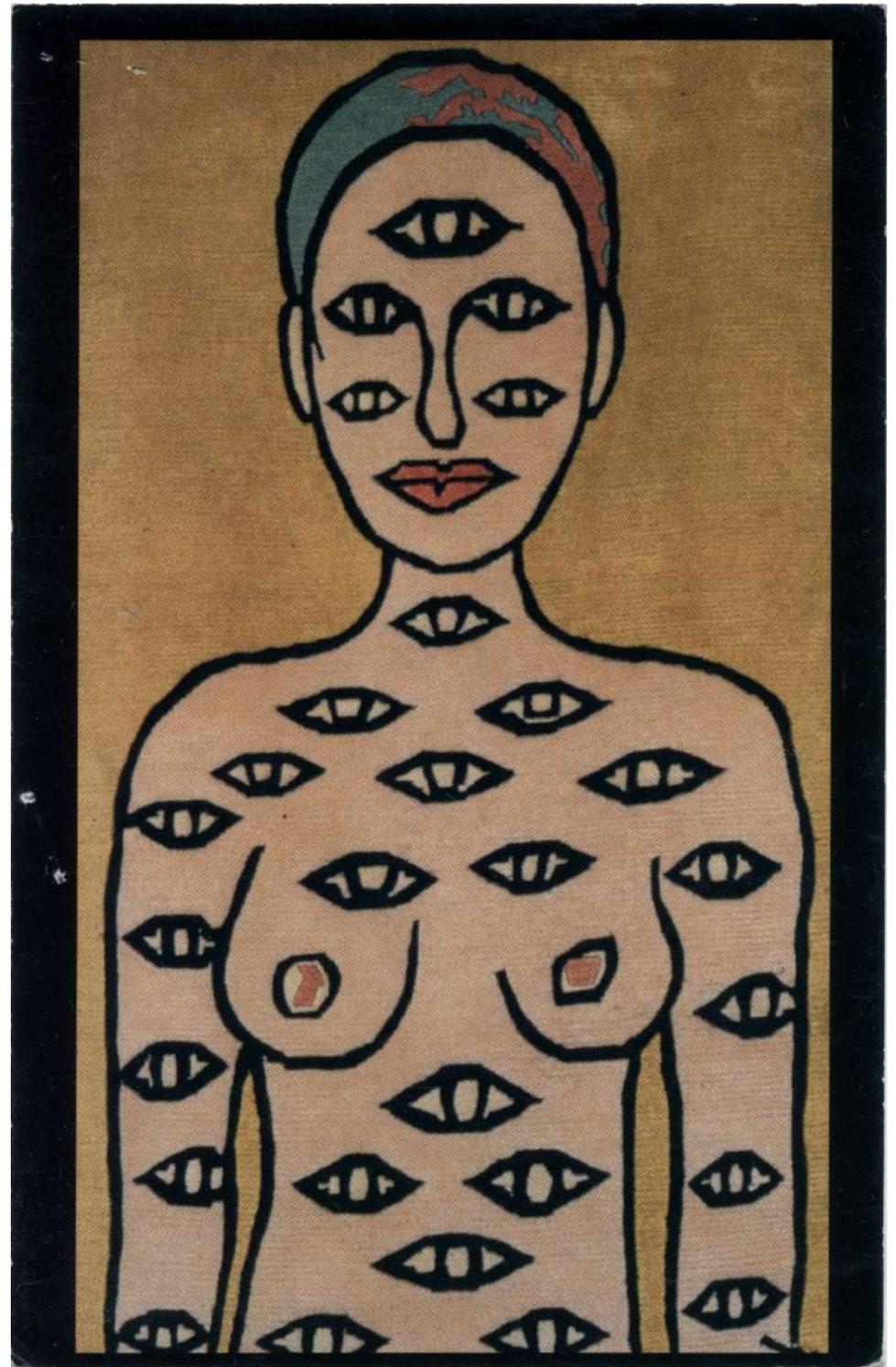
SARA PENN/KNOBKERRY 211 West Broadway (near Franklin Street), (212) 925-1865. Cream-colored cotton cut-out fabric (\$60) and silk saris (\$125 to \$600).

JAMSON WHYTE 47 Wooster Street (near Broome Street), (212) 965-9405. Indonesian and Indian batik scarves and bedspreads (\$20 to \$60).

MARK SHILEN GALLERY 109 Greene Street (near Prince Street), (212) 925-3394. Nineteenth-century Kashmiri shawls (\$600 to \$3,500), and early 20th-century Indian cotton dhurries (starting at \$1,000).

JACQUES CARCANAGUES 108 Spring Street (at Mercer Street), (212) 925-8110. Silk-embroidered quilts from India (\$100 to \$900).

KINNU 43 Spring Street (near Mulberry Street), (212) 334-4775. Indian cot-





RUG 6' x 3 1/2' wool
Ken Tisa 1998

KEN TISA RUGS

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April 18 6 - 9 p.m.

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Sara Penn Knobkerry
211 West Broadway
NYC, NY 10013

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~~At Heract about 11/11/11~~

Most coats match

some skirts -

\$ 225 - \$ 275

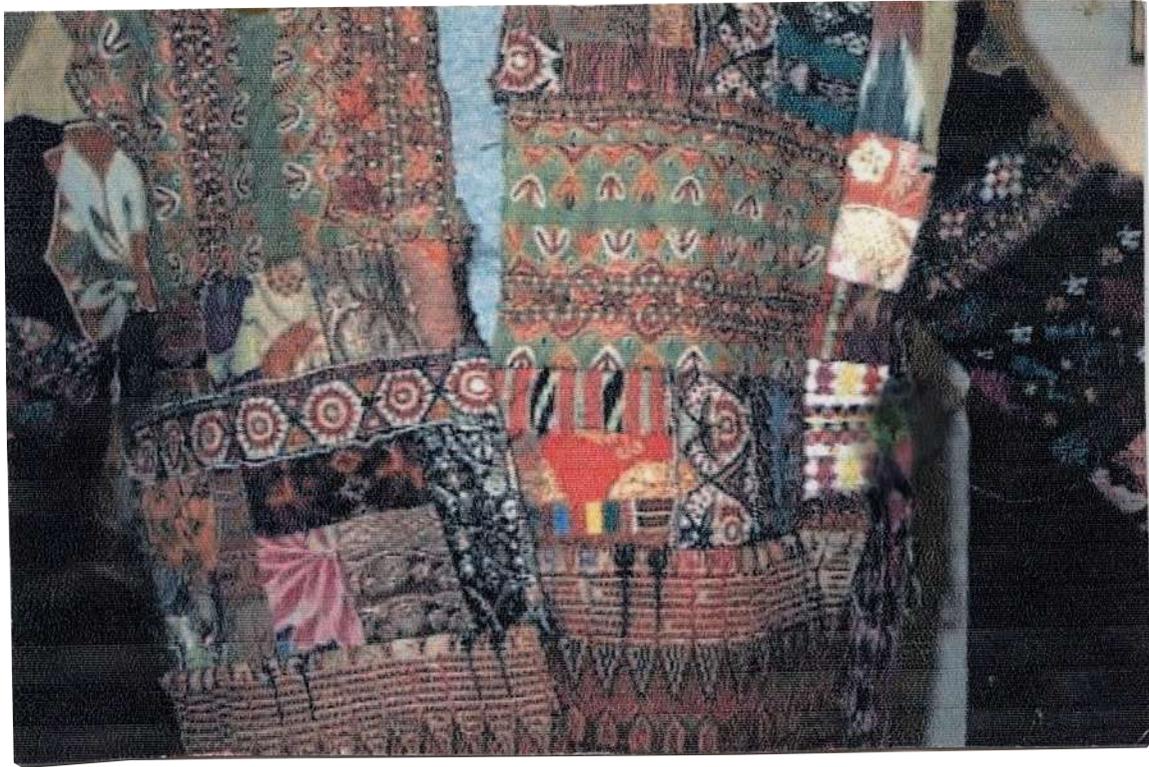
depeading on amount
of embroidery

This one \$ 250

Sold AT



















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The images collected in this volume primarily come from Sara Penn's collection of personal ephemera, another envelope of Penn's materials shared with the author by Renoir Darrett, and many generous contributions from those interviewed for this project. As such, it reflects a view of Penn's work and experience centered on the materials she herself chose to retain throughout her life. A few images (of older newspaper clippings, for example) were sourced in order to support references made in the interviews.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to Jacob Robichaux and Sam Gordon for bringing me into the Gordon Robichaux fold as a writer and oral historian. This remit has led to so many incredible opportunities, including the privilege of interviewing Sara Penn in the spring of 2017 and many people close to her in the following years. Thank you both for encouraging me to stay with the project and trust that it would find a home. Ken Tisa's generosity of spirit and gift of gab is how we learned about Knobkerry in the first place, and it's he who facilitated my introduction to Penn. Thank you, Ken. Thank you, Carmen Hammons, who has stayed in conversation with me about this project (and received way too many emails from me) over the past four years, giving me insight and guidance along the way. Thank you, Randy Kennedy, who first commissioned these interviews for Hauser & Wirth's digital arts periodical *Ursula* and made sure that I would be able to use them for future projects. Thank you, Rie Schmidt, for making my interview with Fumi happen. Thank you, Peter Stebbins, for volunteering your time as a researcher at the beginning of this project, and for connecting me to various people and resources. Thank you, Omar Kharem, for the use of your gorgeous photos, and Linda Mendelson for sending them. Renoir Darrett, your beautiful materials opened up a whole new world for this project; thank you for sharing them with me.

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To all the interviewees—Andrea Aranow, Charles Daniel Dawson, David Hammons, Joanne Robinson Hill, Sana Musasama, Kate Prendergast, Eric Robertson, Fumi Schmidt, Seret Scott, Elena Solow, Carol Thompson, Ken Tisa, Jane Barrell Yadav, and Paulette Young—thank you for trusting me with your stories and sharing with me so intimately and open-heartedly. Many of you provided contacts, connections, points of research, and photographs, and all of you let me into your special relationship with Sara Penn and Knobkerry. Your energy and love for Sara can be felt in this book, and I am so grateful to have experienced Knobkerry through your memories.

Lastly, I am ever grateful to Sara Penn for her vision and legacy, for making the world bigger and better. I thank her for letting me into her magical universe.

—Svetlana Kitto

Published in conjunction
with the exhibition

NILOUFAR EMAMIFAR, SOIL THORNTON,
AND AN ORAL HISTORY OF KNOBKERRY

SEPTEMBER 16–DECEMBER 13, 2021

SCULPTURECENTER, NEW YORK

SCULPTURECENTER

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SVETLANA KITTO

Svetlana Kitto is a writer, editor, and oral historian. Her writing has been featured in *New York*, *Ursula*, *Guernica*, the *New York Times*, *Interview*, and *BOMB*, among other periodicals. She is the editor of the art publications *1996* by Matt Keegan (New York Consolidated, 2020); *Talking to the Sun at Fire Island* (BOFFO, 2019); *Courage and Persistence: Art that Fueled the Fight for Women's Suffrage* (National Endowment of the Arts, 2020); and *Adult Contemporary Volume 1* (2017). As an oral historian, she has contributed primary material to archives and exhibitions at the Brooklyn Historical Society; Museum of Arts and Design, New York; New York Public Library for Performing Arts; and the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Washington, for which she conducted interviews with Robert Morris, Barbara Hammer, and Bill T. Jones. Since 2013, she has curated the reading and performance series *Adult Contemporary*, which has been presented at Storm King, CANADA, Hauser & Wirth, Performa, Printed Matter, and elsewhere. In addition to freelance writing and interviewing, she works as a writer and editor for the gallery Gordon Robichaux in New York.

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SARA PENN'S KNOBKERRY
AN ORAL HISTORY SOURCEBOOK

SVETLANA KITTO