

**Holt/Smithson Foundation Oral History Archive**  
**Harmony Hammond interviewed by Brenda Folstad**  
**December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019 edited by Harmony Hammond, July–November, 2021**

Brenda Folstad is the Head of Operations and Finance of Holt/Smithson Foundation. Harmony Hammond is an artist and activist.

This interview was recorded on December 15, 2019 at Harmony Hammond’s home in Galisteo, New Mexico. Harmony Hammond describes how she heard of Nancy Holt in New York and met her in New Mexico, and their subsequent friendship.

This transcript is a lightly edited version of the conversation, correcting names and dates where needed as well as removing redundant words.

Keywords

Art  
Galisteo  
*Sun Tunnels*  
Lucy Lippard  
Michelle Goodman  
Robert Smithson  
May Stevens

Copyright: Holt/Smithson Foundation



**Brenda Folstad**

Here. And so this is Brenda Folstad conducting an interview with Harmony Hammond, on Sunday, December 15th, 2019, at some time of day.

**Harmony Hammond**

It is around 12:30.

**BF**

It is 12:30 PM on a beautiful Sunday in Galisteo, New Mexico, and the recording is for Holt/Smithson Foundation's oral history project. And if I may ask you to introduce yourself and tell us where you're currently based.

**HH**

Hi, I'm Harmony Hammond, and I live here in the old lanera in Galisteo, at 5618 New Mexico Highway 41.

**BF**

What is lanera?

**HH**

Lanera is Spanish for wool barn. This building that we're sitting in right now, that I live in, is an old wool barn, and I'm the first person to live in it. I moved here in 1989. Bought the property, moved here, but didn't have this part where we're sitting now, fixed up. It was a shell of a building, a rough space with stone walls, floor of wide pine boards set on RR ties placed directly on the dirt, and a lot of snakes, pack rats and other critters. And I used it as a studio, until I got a Guggenheim, and then I built the studio out in back.

**BF**

It's a beautiful studio and a beautiful barn that we're sitting in.

**HH**

So that is why I use la lanera in my email and we often talk about having a dinner at or coming out to la lanera.

**BF**

So how did you first meet Nancy or become aware of her work?

**HH**



Well, those are two separate and different questions. I'll tell you first how I met Nancy, then go back and talk about her work.

I didn't meet Nancy until she rented la lanera. I had lived in New York for 15 years, moved to New Mexico in 1984, and eventually bought the lanera in '89. I believe it was in the fall of 1993, that Nancy rented my place while I taught at the University of Arizona. I would go to Tucson to teach for one semester, then come home, where I had the rest of the year to do my own work and live my life here in Galisteo. When Nancy rented this place, it wasn't fixed up nice, like what you are seeing. The living space only went up to where the papel picados are hanging, that first row of them. There was a wall there. This table was jammed into that little space, and I was cooking on a hot plate. There was an old, funky refrigerator- that was the kitchen area. If you walked through the doors in the wall, you were in what I called "the pit" which I no longer used as a studio, but it still wasn't fixed up like it is now. Mostly I used it for storage. I stored Lucy Lippard's files until she moved into her own place in Galisteo. Later, May Stevens used the space as a studio when she and Rudolf stayed at Lucy's house while she summered in Maine.

Every year, I would do a Christmas Eve dinner. I would come back from the University of Arizona and—I don't know how in the world I did it—buy a Christmas tree, decorate it, and do a big Christmas Eve dinner for my daughter, friends or anybody in town who was visiting, or just somebody who didn't have someplace else to go. Each year was different. My memory is that one of those Christmas's, Carey Lovelace and Michelle Stuart, two friends of Nancy's, were in Santa Fe, so they came for Christmas dinner. They were friends, but much closer to Nancy than me. At that point there was no room to eat in the tiny makeshift kitchen I just described, so we ate in my bedroom where there is a fireplace and room for a table and chairs. For over a decade we always ate dinner in my bedroom until I finally put in a real kitchen, dining and living area – the space we are now sitting in.

At some point later on, when Nancy was talking to Carey and Michelle about wanting to have a break from New York and come out to New Mexico, they told her about my place, which I rented when I went away. After checking it out with Lucy, Nancy rented la lanera for six weeks in fall of '93, and then for another six-week period, or something close to that, in winter/spring of '94. So it was only when Nancy rented my place, that I met her.

Now, to backtrack, I lived in Manhattan from 1969 until 1984, when I came out to New Mexico with my partner, Judith Daner, with the idea of just staying for a year. Judy had a tropical plant store in Manhattan that she was selling and wanted to leave New York for a while. I didn't want her to go without me. I also had a teenage daughter who was about ready to enter high school and dripping hormones. So I had



to get my daughter and her hormones off the streets of New York and I didn't want my girlfriend to leave town without me. Judy didn't care where she went—she just wanted out of New York. I said, "I want to go to Santa Fe or Paris," because they were both cities that I had been to, liked, and wanted to spend living time in, versus tourist time. I think it was good we came to Santa Fe and not Paris. We planned to be here a year, but I stayed, so that's how I got here.

I knew of Nancy's work when I lived in New York, however, I don't remember when I first heard of Nancy Holt and/or her work, and I don't remember the first pieces of hers that I saw. What I do know is that the early 70s, in Manhattan, was such an exciting time, and there were so many of us who made up the downtown art scene. It was exciting, creative, experimental—everybody was doing everything and calling it something different every day. Nobody had a market; nobody had curatorial interest in their work. You just had your art buddies, the other people that you were sharing ideas with. Everybody was feeding off of each other in a really wonderful way, creating a vibrant scene that we all contributed to, including Nancy and myself. Although we were in slightly different circles, our circles overlapped through sculptors who identified as feminist and through the dance and performance scene.

When I arrived in Manhattan, I was introduced to many of the post-Judson dancers, who were living down in Lower Manhattan. And I'm thinking of Deborah Hay, Trisha Brown, Joan Jonas, Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk who overlapped with Nancy's circle of friends. These dancers, had evenings where you would just turn up at their loft at a certain time and they would lead a class, which wasn't a class on how to dance but rather more of a movement evening—it was experimental. We were just bodies. The Judson and post-Judson dancers were very interested in non-Western postures in movement and dance and working with non-dancer bodies. Our physical bodies were their materials. We would do what they told us to do, which could be anything like, walk straight ahead until you bump into somebody, and turn right, and then continue walking until you bump into someone else, and turn right again. Or take a whole Rolling Stones song or album to bend over and touch the floor. That was the choreography!

Like I said, there was a lot of interest in non-dancer bodies, and movement in everyday activities. Ironing and vacuuming as a dance movement. These were the things that were in the air, as well as an interest in martial arts and other forms of non-Western movement. When I went to my first Tai Chi Chu'an class, in Chinatown, Meredith Monk and Ping Chong were in the class. You can see the influence of Tai Chi and other martial arts forms in Yvonne Rainer's work and that of some of the other dancers. So there was this wonderful mix of stuff going on. And that's where I would say Nancy and my circles overlapped. While I don't remember the first time I heard of



Nancy or her work, I do know that it was in this creative atmosphere and context. In the creative stew of lower Manhattan in the early 70's.

There were all these alternative not-for-profit art organizations, spaces, and projects: The Kitchen, Artist's Space, Creative Time, The Clocktower, PS 1, 112 Greene St, artist co-ops such as 55 Mercer Street and A.I.R. Gallery, or projects at Art Park, under the Brooklyn Bridge or at the lower west-side landfill. We went to everything. That's the point I'm trying to make. We all saw each other's work. And it wasn't even so much about some one person's work standing out. It was all part of—I don't even want to say a language. It was just the stuff that was in the air, and everybody was just experimenting and feeding off of each other, because that's really what happens when there is nothing to be gained, monetarily or critically. It was very fluid and very open. So while I'm sure I saw some of Nancy's work in those spaces and places, I don't remember a specific piece, except, I want to say, the Clock Tower, for some reason. But I don't even know if that's true [laughter].

So what I'm saying is, I knew of Nancy and her work. What pieces I saw, would've definitely been shown in the alternative spaces that I just described. I did not go to Art Park. I did not go to any of the site-specific places outside the city where artists, such as Nancy and some of her friends, were beginning to exhibit. The invited artists and their closest friends were the only ones who went to those sites (unless you happened to live close by). I don't know. I was familiar with the site-specific works done at Art Park through photographs. So I was familiar with Hydra—or a similar reflecting pool piece of Nancy's that was at Art Park, through photographic reproduction.

Since I didn't go to any sites out of New York to see any early site-specific land-based works that Nancy was beginning to do, the pieces I would've seen would've been early works in Manhattan. But that gets hazy, because you begin to know an artist's work through reproductions. This is especially true of site-specific or time-based performance work. We begin to know the works through tight beautifully framed photographic compositions (some of which, as in Nancy's case, become art works in and of themselves). And so what of Nancy's work did I know through photo-documentation and reproduction, and what did I really see? I'm not so sure anymore. *Sun Tunnels* is an exception in that I know for certain, I did not visit it until after Nancy's death or that beautiful piece with the hole in the dune, that you look through, out to the water. I am sure I only know this piece through reproduction.

**BF**

View Through A Dune? Yeah. Yeah, [crosstalk]--

**HH**



Yeah. I know I didn't see that physically, ever. So I know I've come to know those pieces through, not only the reproduction, but I'm assuming, through Nancy's photography of them, because she was so anal and careful about her photography. I mean, the photography of her work, the photo documentation of her work is as much Nancy's work as the sculptures. So, knowing work through reproduction—which is an interesting kind of phenomena, affects a lot of artists. Not me as much, because I'm more object-based, but still, it does. What art works have we experienced physically and what art works do we only experience through photographic translation or quotation? Certain photographs get shown and reproduced over and over, and begin to represent an artist's work. Everybody knows *Sun Tunnels* through photographs, and quite a few visited the site, but there's a whole lot of other work that Nancy did that is not so well known and maybe equally as good. That's true with every artist.

When I was getting ready for this interview, I realized that Nancy and I were in a couple exhibitions together. One, called the "Downtown Whitney"—it was in the 70s—and then one, later in the 80s, called "Standing Ground", which was an exhibition of contemporary sculpture by women at the Cincinnati Art Museum. To be honest, I don't remember Nancy's work or the work of the other artists. She probably wouldn't have remembered mine either. The work was very much of the moment and too many years have passed. So, to recap, I was very aware of Nancy's work in New York before I ever met her in New Mexico. We don't go way back. I didn't know Nancy, early on, at all.

**BF**

It's interesting how you can be brushing up against each other and then suddenly in Galisteo, New Mexico, of all places.

**HH**

Yes, I know. That's really the way it was. It's kind of funny—it was other New Yorkers that were the link, the thread between us. So, that's that story.

**BF**

Have you since been out to see *Sun Tunnels*?

**HH**

Only once. I went on the bus trip that Nancy arranged for us to go out to the *Sun Tunnels* after she died. That was interesting for me in a number of ways, because in all the years that Nancy did lived here in Galisteo—well, I'll answer that question first, but there's another thing I would like to talk about, which is how we did or didn't relate around art when she lived here. But for now, let me say that I never saw *Sun Tunnels* while Nancy was alive. And I used to say to her, "Nancy, some time when you're going out to *Sun Tunnels*, I'd love to come with". She always thought I was



really strong, and I used to be really strong. I'm not anymore, but Nancy would call me over to her house to help move trees, or whatever. So, I would tease her and say, "Nancy, if you want me to carry a camera or you want me to do something—I'm happy to assist you when you go to the *Sun Tunnels*". But it never happened. Why didn't it happen?" It's so strange that I never went with her? I think part of it had to do with the fact that I was always commuting and teaching. Nancy was here. She didn't have to have a job like I did. So whenever she went, it just didn't happen when I was here or maybe she just wanted to take someone out there alone. Who knows?

So it never happened, but I was invited, by Nancy, to be on the bus that went out to *Spiral Jetty*, or that was added on? I don't know, but I went on the trip to *Spiral Jetty* and *Sun Tunnels* after her death. That trip is very vivid in my memory.

**BF**

What do you remember about it?

**HH**

Well, I remember a lot I remember being on the bus with people, some of whom I knew, and some of whom I did not know. I knew others to varying degrees. The people on the bus were from different parts of Nancy's life. Most of us art-related, but some were from the Buddhist community which Nancy was a part of. I don't remember a lot of talking specifically, about Nancy. There also wasn't a lot of light chatter. While most of us moved in the art world, we weren't relating to each other through those connections. Everybody was very respectful. We all knew Nancy and were there on this bus taking a trip to the *Sun Tunnels* because of her. We felt honored to be invited. It was so Nancy to gather her friends and put this trip together. It was perfect Nancy.

We were all thrilled to be there. People would move around and sit in different seats. They wouldn't always stay in the same seat, but I sat up front the whole time as I wanted to hear Matthew who pointed things out and gave us a little tour on the way to *Spiral Jetty* and the *Sun Tunnels*. He was very generous and sharing that way. Some of the people on the bus, like Diane Karp and Virginia Dwan, had already been to the Tunnels with Nancy, but for others like me, it was all new, and I loved it. We were all flown into—was it Salt Lake City? Is that where you fly into?

**BF**

Mm-hmm.

**HH**

We were put up in the hotel, had meals together and then we went on the bus together. It was two separate day trips in the bus, the first going to *Spiral Jetty* and



then another day to the *Sun Tunnels* and the gravel pit [laughter]. To get to the Tunnels we had to transfer from the bus to jeeps. One of the things I remember out at the Tunnels, is that when we got there, it was very windy. When we stood in a silent circle, privately remembering Nancy, the wind stopped. It just stopped. We all noticed it. Then everyone walked around at their own pace and examined the Tunnels, looked through them to the landscape and stood inside of them looking out at the landscape. What's inside and what's outside the frame of the Tunnels. There were only one or two other people (not in our party) out there at that time, which was nice. I wouldn't have wanted more people. I have heard from many an artist who visit me, that they're on their way to see the *Sun Tunnels* and the *Spiral Jetty*. People go there to pay homage, like it's an art pilgrimage. What impressed me was the physical scale of the Tunnels in relation to the human body which is different than seeing them in the landscape....

**BF**

Or in a photograph.

**HH**

That's what I'm saying, it's different than in the photos. Over the years, I had seen so many of those images. Nancy's vocabulary of locators to frame time and space, and emphasize point of view were very familiar to me, but it was really nice to experience the Tunnels as gigantic locators. And then I loved thinking about, and I still do love thinking about Nancy, the much younger Nancy than the Nancy that I knew, camping out there by herself as the Tunnels were positioned in place. I love that idea of this woman artist out there with these dudes coming in on cranes and stuff. And this woman needs to get a road in, so she buys a gravel pit. And it's so ambitious and so intentional. Nancy's work is very intentional; has a lot of intentionality about it. On that scale it has to be. And focused. I mean, it's not only about focus, it is focus. My work is much more process-oriented than her work is. Nancy's work has to be more mathematical, more thought out, much more considered in advance of the making.

So I love that image of Nancy living out there for a while—being so vulnerable in that vast empty landscape. It makes perfect sense, that if she loved being out at the *Sun Tunnels*, she would love New Mexico.


**BF**

The expanse.

**HH**

The expanse of the west. Space. There's always been room for people to be who they think they are or who they want to be here. It is especially true for strong women. There's that history of strong women who come west where there is space to be





themselves. And Nancy's one of them. So anyway, I remember all that, and then I remember the time we spent riding around, to get to *Sun Tunnels* and *Spiral Jetty*. So a lot of it was about the journey. That's interesting. I've never really thought about it. But because of the time it took to get to these sites, it was about the journey. It was about the getting there, as much as being there. Don't know if that's true or no. I have to think about that. It may be true; but I'm not sure if it is. If you're going to be doing sculptures in remote places, then it would have to be partially about the journey of getting there, wouldn't it?

**BF**

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**HH**

I'm thinking out loud. So there was a lot of time getting there. Once at *Spiral Jetty*, we took our time, walking, sitting, looking. Everybody just did what they wanted to do. It was the same at *Sun Tunnels*. We journeyed by bus only so far and then we were put in jeeps to go the rest of the way.

**BF**

I was wondering about the bus on that road. It was--

**HH**


Yeah. We were switched over at a certain point, into jeeps [laughter], and driven out to the Tunnels in the jeeps. Again, we took our time, walking in and around the Tunnels. Then we went to the Cowboy Cafe.

**BF**

I was going to say, did the bus pull up to the Cowboy Cafe?

**HH**

Yes. The Cowboy Cafe was closed in honor of Nancy. There was a sign on the door which read: "Attention Cowboy Bar & Cafe Patrons. The Bar & Cafe will be closed this Sat Sept 13<sup>th</sup> from 5-8pm for a private memorial service for "Nancy Holt" the artist that designed the *Sun Tunnels* at Lucin. The bar will reopen at 8pm for 1 hour of free drinks in her memory and karaoke until 12pm. Please come join us." The Cowboy Bar & Cafe had fixed a special meal for us. We were the only ones there, so we spread out eating and drinking in the booths and at tables. When we were leaving, around 8:00, some of the cowboys and local folk were beginning to arrive. They said, "Oh, yeah, I remember Nancy. She liked to dance," [laughter]. I don't know whose idea this was or who arranged it, but the catered dinner for us and free drinks for the locals, was perfect Nancy.



There were all these aspects to the trip that Nancy planned. I was only out at the Sun Tunnel this one time. I'm really grateful to have been included, as it was a great way to go. It was wonderful.

**BF**

It sounds wonderful.

**HH**

It was.

**BF**

Before we digress, you had mentioned that you had something specific you wanted to talk about? The work?

**HH**

Oh, yeah. I started thinking about the times of the early 70s and then once Nancy moved here. So she rented my place and you could check these dates, but I think she moved here in '95, which was—

[crosstalk]

—so she came out here in '93, moved out here in '95. There was Nancy and myself, Lucy and May Stevens, all from New York. Other New Yorker artists live here as well, but we four were kind of a New York core that we referred to as the Galisteo gals even though May lived in El Dorado. There was a definite bonding and closeness. Everybody thought we hung out together, all the time. And we did. I mean, we were close, but it's not like we spoke to each other every day or anything.

In thinking about Nancy and her work in New Mexico, I have a number of thoughts. One is, until she started working with Tom and reworking the photographs and so forth, she seemed like she wasn't doing any art, and that she was here because she didn't want to do any art. I know that she was probably finishing up some big international projects we didn't see. She might have mentioned them in passing, but she did not talk a lot about those projects. Maybe she did, a little bit, with Lucy, but she really did not say things like, "Oh, I'm finishing up..." or, "I'm having trouble. Got to go to Finland," and, "Dammit, the stones are the wrong sizes,"— none of that. Certainly not in the sense of trying to complete a project. I know Nancy made a few proposals for local projects, but you never felt like she was that engaged with those proposals.

I know she was finishing up projects from before her move to New Mexico, and I don't know if they were the— I know there was that one in Finland or someplace in



Scandinavia. And I know she had some pieces that were at university or college campuses that had to be moved. I mean, that was about the gist of it. Nancy really didn't talk about her art. And the feeling at the time was you didn't ask—I mean, you just didn't say to Nancy, "So, are you doing any new work?" as you might say to somebody that's just moved or had a change in their life, "Oh, are you starting any work? Is your work changed since you moved here? Are you working?" We just knew she wasn't. Or she let us think that she wasn't, other than these few projects I mentioned. You didn't want to ask because the feeling was that Nancy was doing a different kind of work that wasn't about making physical objects or things, that she was doing work on herself, in this sense of coming to the wide space of the southwest that you and I were just talking about. That, and her Buddhist practice.

Nancy's notion of doing work seemed to be a different kind of work, and I wasn't involved with that aspect of her life. I knew about it and knew some people that saw Nancy as a spiritual teacher or went to the same meditation places. What really went on, I don't totally know, of course.

Lucy, as you know, is an historian and an art writer and May, Nancy and I were the three visual artists in this small group. But we rarely talked about art. I had to think about this, because it never dawned on me at the time. We really didn't talk much about art. If we talked about art, it was about a show we'd seen or another artist. But we really didn't talk about each other's art, and we didn't share ideas. Nor did we share studio visits much; it was rare. But then Nancy didn't really have a studio to go and see work in because she wasn't making work, even though she had a designated work space. Nancy did come to my studio a couple times, but that was rare, very rare. She seemed to be in a space in her life which was about rethinking, re-evaluating—I don't know. I don't know what all that was about. But she was not actively making art—or to be more accurate, I should say that I don't think she was actively creating art.

During this time Lucy is saying that she's not writing about art anymore. But, of course, we know she does. But she writes about it in an expansive way. So before Nancy starts reprinting photographs, she's not making any new art and you've got Lucy saying that she's not writing about art any more as she's more interested in cultural anthropology and notions of place in relation to culture. Then there's May and myself. Our work is very different from each other. You think of May Stevens, my work, and Nancy's work. It's all very different. Our esthetic, conceptual and formal concerns, even our materials, are very, very different. And because we are older and have been making art for a long time, what we do is pretty solidified. I mean, we change, we add, we grow or don't grow, whatever. But it's not that early experimental casting around. We've honed our interests, our concerns, our processes. We have developed bodies of work.



That's a very different milieu, than the early 70s with a group of artist friends when you're all emerging artists. You don't know what the fuck you're doing, but it's fun, and like I said, and you're just sharing the moment and bouncing off of each other. So that really great creative early time in Nancy's life starting when she and Bob got together up through the 70's—and I don't know for how much longer after that—was a huge hotbed of creativity and experimentation. That never existed here for her, that kind of atmosphere, even though there was a group of us. It didn't exist for me, either. I had a different creative group in the early 70s, which was more of a feminist group. But, again, it was the same thing. We were all emerging, there was no market, there was no critical discussion. Nobody cared what we did. And so we did everything. But by the time I moved here, to New Mexico in 1984, I already had a developed practice. And I think the same is true for Nancy and May.

We were all kind of—I don't want to say solidified, because that sounds so static and deadly, but ... maybe we were here to kind of shake things up and open things up, because you can feel that way in New York. But there are these nodes of creativity and art activity that happen at a certain time and place.... We know the 70s in Lower Manhattan was one of those times and places. The four of us did share that. We shared a history and a practice in the sense that we took our work very seriously, and we all really respected each other and each other's work. There was a lot of intentionality, seriousness, focus, and a kind of respect around "the work", very definitely. And we knew that we had worked hard to be where we were.

So there was this shared history, but it wasn't like this great artistic energy group. We would get together, we would share birthdays and Christmas and do some things together. One of the things that we did do together was hike—you've probably seen the photograph of the Halumina Club?

**BF**

No, I haven't.

**HH**

Well, okay. Let me tell you about that, because Lucy, Nancy, myself and Michelle Goodman, whose name you've probably come across, would go hiking together. I guess it was before May moved here. Nancy, had probably hiked with Bob and others, to ruins in the Southwest and maybe Mexico – possibly the Yucatán and Chaco Canyon. I didn't go to Chaco Canyon till I moved here (I tried in 1978 but the road was too muddy for my VW Beetle), but Nancy went when she was still living in New Jersey or New York.

But I want to tell you about the Halumina Club photograph. It's a very early digital art work by Michelle Goodman, who found this old photograph of a hiking club. But if you look closely at the photo, you can see that Michelle inserted the four of us. So here's



Harmony, my head second from the left on a male body, Lucy's head is next to me on a male body—our heads replaced those of the hikers who were all men. Here's Nancy on the far right, and here's Michelle. and here is Jack, Michelle's dog, who went on the hikes with us. So Michelle took this old photo that she found—and digitally pasted our heads into the photo, very crudely by today's standards. But we were also interested in the original photo—everybody is sitting on the ground, except the center figure. And the center figure doesn't have a tie on, and it looks like the jacket doesn't quite close. We wondered if this might be a woman. Are there breasts under that jacket? You don't know. We were playing with this way of looking at the photo and trying to read into it, but then Michelle photoshopped us into the photo with the “might-be woman” and wrote the name of The Halumina Club—the first letters of our names Harmony, Lucy, Michelle and Nancy—in white ink on her altered photo. I love this photo art work of Michelle's and hope to use to someday in a monograph or whatever.

So we would go on hikes, the four of us, the Arroyo de Los Angeles and all along the Galisteo Creek, behind Nancy's house—well, actually, we started off of Highway 14 over there by the Pueblo San Marcos, and walked the creek dealing with the quicksand until we came to Nancy's. I remember we also hiked to the old Blue Corn Pueblo, as well. there are some snapshots from these hikes. Then, what started happening — I mean, we'd go, maybe, once a month or something like that, maybe less—is that friends started joining us, and the group got larger. As we tried to find dates that accommodated everybody, it got too complicated, so we just stopped doing it at some point. But hiking in the Galisteo Basin was another way Nancy, Lucy, and I spent time together.

How Nancy came out here makes me think how about how I came out here. How did we all get here? Why are we here? Why did we leave New York? I mean, none of us had left New York for bad reasons, but we came here for something we were looking for or wanting, I think, in terms of time, space. Whatever it is that feeds you as an individual or individual artist. I don't know. It can get really corny sounding, really fast. But it happens. The point is, it does happen. So there was a sharing and closeness and a bonding, for sure. But it's interesting, we really did not talk about art a whole lot.

## **BF**

It's interesting you say that, because Jane Crawford, yesterday, mentioned the same thing, that she had known Nancy for a very long time, but they never really had the conversation about art as just sort of a casual component of friendly conversation.

## **HH**



Again, I'm just talking out loud, but for those of us who came from the New York art world, part of coming here was about leaving the New York art world. I mean, it's like we're still part of it, but we wanted out of that kind of grind or whatever it was where—you're always on, in New York. "How you doing?" "Oh, Oh, making work. I'm working. I'm working. I'm always working," and you're always on. And I think that, for various reasons, many of us who come here from a place and an environment like that, want a break from it or to get to something else. To get to something else. And so I think that's the four of us, anyway. When we left New York we all were known to various degrees. In other words, we had already emerged and now had careers. We were known within the New York art world. But there's a point where we chose to leave, to get at some essence, or something like that, some reason we left a lot of what other people were trying to obtain.

**BF**

One thing you didn't mention about the difference between New York and New Mexico, that I notice when I go to New York, it is so loud.

**HH**

It is.

**BF**

It never stops making noise.

**HH**

You're so right.

**BF**

And one thing I love about being out here is that you can get at silence. And out in the desert, like where *Sun Tunnels* are located, it's so quiet.

**HH**

It is. I don't know if Nancy's studio practice required silence, because, like I said, what constitutes her studio practice is kind of amorphous. But let's say Nancy's working on diagrams or drawings or just planning a piece—I don't know, if she listens to music or requires quiet. Her work is so different than mine. I don't play music in my studio. And one of the reasons I don't play music in the studio is I love the silence. I love hearing my own thoughts. It's very selfish, but I love hearing my own thoughts. I think that comes from being a single mother, and also being a teacher for so many years. There are so many voices. There's always people talking —I covet silence and love where my mind goes - . unintentionally, I figure out a lot about my relationship to the world while I'm moving paint around.



I think maybe it's a little different for everyone, but there's some core thing that you've just touched on. It was very exciting to see when—I don't know exactly how fast it all happened, but Nancy started working with Tom around the same time digital printers became available to everyone. That was great timing. Nancy bought Tom a very good printer and he started printing her photographs. She began printing and reworking her early photos—a visual strategy that artists frequently do, which is to recycle or rework earlier work. I know this gets messy as it's not clear if Nancy thought of her early photographs as art or simply as photo-documentation of her art. Certainly, in later years when she started recombining the images, they become artworks. I felt like that process of digitally combining and printing her early photographs opened things up for Nancy—and/or she was just ready to do it after all these years. I mean, why do artists who make things, stop making things and then restart? Who knows the answer to that? Nancy never talked about a work block or anything like that. I just think she wasn't interested in making work for a while. And then, by way of new technologies, she got interested and found someone whom she could work with.

Working with Tom really opened things up a lot. She could print old photographs and make new work. And then having the show that Alena curated. All that kind of came together—again, we talk about fortuitous timing.

Oh, I know there's a story that I want to tell you, because it fits into this conversation about the time when it didn't feel to me like Nancy was making new work. I thought I knew Nancy's past work, but I didn't realize how much she'd made. There wasn't a monograph to look at. I had some catalogs and I'd seen reproductions of different installations, but didn't really know the amount or range of her work.

At the time, I was teaching at the University of Arizona in Tucson, and one semester—I don't remember the year, but I know it was when SITE Santa Fe was getting ready to open, probably the fall. I made an arrangement with the Art Department to teach a graduate seminar for visual artists, working in any media, from my home in Galisteo. I love graduate seminars. We did it for two semesters. The focus of the seminar was "place". I was using the notion of "place" as cultural as well as geographic specificity, so "place" as content. Students came to my "place" in Galisteo twice during the semester. I went to Tucson at the beginning and the end of the semester, and maybe once in the middle of the semester, I don't remember. In between my visits to Tucson they came to New Mexico. There were about 12 students. They drove together and stayed here at my house and studio. We slept here, ate here, had presentations and discussions here. Additionally, we visited artist studios, talked with curators, visited northern NM cultural sites and ate at cheap restaurants. Everything fed into the theme of "place", specifically the place we



were now in (Galisteo and Santa Fe), but also therefore, larger and more complicated notions of historical and contemporary “place”.

I took them to Susan Rothenberg's studio. Nancy came here. I didn't have money to pay Susan, Nancy and others. They were very generous and did it for free. I told the students, I said, "You have to trust me. These presentations and visits aren't in any order, because everybody's meeting with us for free, so when they can do it, we're doing it. You'll just have to trust me, that somehow, it is all tied together. I overloaded them with input – visits, conversations, conflicting discussions and readings about art, culture and “place” using Galisteo and Santa Fe as an example. At the end of the weekend, the drive back to Tucson, an eight-and-a-half-hour drive, functioned as a breakout discussion group, where they talked about everything that had happened. Everything they had seen and had been presented. "Why did Harmony do this and do that? Why did she have this person meet with us?"

So, yes, we had artists come here, we went to artist's studios, and we even talked to the curators and people putting together the first SITE Santa Fe Biennial, which was hugely controversial at the time, because it was bringing artists from outside of New Mexico, and dropping them in Santa Fe to do special locally based projects versus focusing on local artists. Outside artists, heaven forbid! It brought up historical issues of regionalism and cultural colonization for starters. How did local artists feel? How did the local arts community feel?

So I invited Nancy to talk to my students. She gave a slide talk here in my kitchen which was much smaller then than it is now –and I want to say it was in the morning. There where that hat is hanging, she projected slides on that wall, on the pink stucco. This table was jammed in there, and there was a door and a wall there. We had just finished coffee and breakfast. Nancy's presentation blew my mind. We tend to only know certain works by certain artists, because they get reproduced over and over and over and over again, but most artists have done a lot of other work that we don't know about. Nancy, of course, in her most methodical, thorough manner, was showing us everything.

She showed us installations that were site-specific at different colleges and universities, sites you wouldn't know about unless you went to school there or lived nearby. And since there weren't books on Nancy's work, yet, you hadn't seen the work reproduced.

I had many an artist friend in New York who did one or two outdoor site-specific pieces as an opportunity came their way, such as an invitation to do something at Art Park or the landfill down in Lower Manhattan –if they were interested they did it. But when Nancy presented her work, I realized that she was not an artist who did one or two earthworks or site-specific pieces. Site specificity, be it indoors or out, comprised her whole body of work. This is what Nancy did. And we're talking about a





huge focused body of work. It was so different from the other artists I knew, many of whom were Nancy's friends and good artists. I'm not putting them down in any way whatsoever, but site-specificity wasn't the focus that ran throughout all of their work. And in Nancy's it was, and it was really impressive.

This was the first time I saw the full range of Nancy's work. Certainly, the first time I ever saw images of any of these interior pieces with plumbing and conduit and all of this kind of stuff, running from the inside buildings to the outside. I mean, how would you ever see it? You wouldn't. Because when you're doing outdoor, site-specific work, your audience is somebody who lives or works in that neighborhood or area. Unless you're doing an art pilgrimage to that site, most of us wouldn't see it. At that time, Nancy's work wasn't that known, is my point. Even I didn't know the full range of her work, but I knew enough to have her come talk to my students. I only knew certain pieces, maybe half a dozen. They are fabulous pieces, but they get reproduced over and over and over. All of a sudden, in my kitchen, I really got the full scope of my artist friend, Nancy.

And later, she gave a talk at SITE and I think one at the Santa Fe Art Institute. So she did give some lectures in town, which brought her work to the attention of more people. But that talk in my kitchen was a real eye-opener for me. It was really nice to see the exhibition that Alena curated later, and then all the attention that it got as it traveled, and, of course, the wonderful catalog. The exhibition and catalog opened up a lot of things for Nancy. People became aware of her work. Nancy took joy in this. I mean, she was enjoying herself, really. She loved it. She loved the renewed attention to her work; it gave her great pleasure. And I'm just so glad that she got to experience renewed interest in her work before she died and that it didn't all happen afterwards.

**BF**

As it often does happen, that way, yeah.

**HH**

As it often does happen. Fortunately, there was a renewed interest in that period, the late 60s. Nancy went through whatever her cycles were, too. And it all came together. But there was a period, while she was in New Mexico, when even I didn't know a lot of the work; I just knew certain pieces. And since we didn't talk about our art work much, how would I know? How would you know unless you happen to have seen the installations firsthand?

**BF**

Right. Been there at that location.

**HH**



Writing about site-specific, land-based work and so forth, did exist, but as far as I knew, it focused on all the big boys. It was about the boys. It just was. And so here was this woman artist, Nancy Holt, who'd done, like, 30, 50 pieces or something, but nobody was writing about it. There were other women artists, too— I think about Mary Miss, I think about Alice Aycock, I think about my friend Pasty Norvell, who came out here from New York and knew Nancy and stayed at Lucy's. Who else? Suzanne Harris was a very interesting artist from back at that time. These artists did stuff at PS1 and the Clock Tower in the early days. They were all part of a group of artists doing site specific work. But the women got lost in the shuffle. They all were hugely respected. Everybody knew their names, everybody knew their work, but they never got that kind of larger historical contextualization that gave them a kind of importance. And so it's nice to see some of that coming back around. For instance, Agnes Denes now exhibiting at The Shed—a lot of long overdue attention is being given to her work. There is that early photograph of Agnes out in a wheat field she planted in Lower Manhattan. It's an incredible piece. Nobody talked about it for decades, until now that is.

**BF**

About time.

**HH**

I'll say. So there were a lot of factors.

**BF**

I have one question that I heard through the grapevine. Because you know I had that intimate relationship with Nancy's house. One thing I noticed about the house was the way that the window so beautifully framed your view of the view from the windows. And then Tom Martinelli had mentioned that Nancy would really thoughtfully sort of place what chair the visitor was to sit in, to have the primary view. Tom Moran mentioned that you had said that Nancy had rearranged some of the shrubbery around the house to properly--

**HH**

Well, that was because she thought I was strong. I wasn't aware that she was controlling where I sat, but she may have. But I do have a true story about Nancy—her house had those great windows and the view was important. And she had the financial means to pay people to do things for her. So Nancy would not only pay landscapers to plant or take out a tree but also, to move a tree or bush six inches to the left or to the right. One time, when I was in the middle of something Nancy called me. (Lucy, Nancy and I—we all knew each other's work schedule, like I know Lucy writes every morning. So you kind of don't interrupt her then...)—but anyway, Nancy called me when I was working. And when Nancy wanted something done, she wanted



it done then. So she called, and I'm in the middle of something, and she's got these—I can't remember. It was one or two guys, and—I want to say two, (surely, they could've done this without me). But anyway, she had them dig up a sizeable bush or tree that was there when she bought the house, and she was having them move it, like, a foot so it would be better positioned as someone looked out the window. The guys couldn't lift it. They needed help. They needed another pair of hands and Nancy thought of me because I was doing Aikido at the time and was strong. So I went over to her place and helped. Whatever I added, we did move and replant that bush or tree. It did, indeed, happen. I was called to help the guys. It's totally, totally true.

**BF**

Well, we've been talking now for an hour and 10 minutes. Is there anything that you would like to add? You have your notes?

**HH**

Well, I think we talked about most of the stuff. It was interesting for me to watch Nancy as she was working on Bob's show at the Whitney. I enjoyed the exhibit, and remember sitting at the museum and watching a film or video where she and Bob are walking at Palenque or one of the Mayan ruins in the Yucatan. Nancy came up behind me while I was watching. She was there and had everything to do with the curation and installation of his work. I think that a lot of the time when she wasn't doing her own work, Nancy was working on Bob's art, she was....

**BF**

Tending that legacy.

**HH**

Yes, tending that legacy. I never felt that was the reason she wasn't doing other work, as I felt those were her personal reasons, but the fact is, she was putting time into Bob's legacy and, as you know, she was constantly getting a request from people wanting to exhibit or reproduce his work. Some of this was proactive on Nancy's part, but some of it was just responding to people's requests. Most folks don't realize how much time it takes.

**BF**

It's a lot of administrative work.

**HH**

Yes, it's a lot of work. Those of us who deal with or have dealt with this stuff, understand it's difficult because you're only one person. You're not a library with a staff. Anyway, I was going to say part of that exciting time back in the 70's was how everybody carried a Portapak around, videotaping each other and themselves—it



was a new tool. And artists love new materials and new tools. Plus, video, unlike film, was inexpensive to do. Everybody did it. It was part of the excitement of the time.

I think we've talked about most things. Oh, there's one thing more personal. Nancy was so focused and in control of many things in her life and work, but there was this other side to her, what I call, her wacky side, that would come out when you least expected it. [laughter]—You'd never know when it was coming or where it came from, but it's like, "Whoa."

For instance, because Nancy's birthday was in April, we would frequently have joint Aries birthday parties, often here at my house, for Lucy, Nancy and my girlfriend, Marghreta. Back then, we didn't have this nice kitchen, dining, living room space. So the party was all crammed into that little space by the kitchen entry and my bedroom. Marghreta's a musician, so she would sing. Then we'd bring out a birthday cake. Lucy was always embarrassed by the cake and the whole thing. But not Nancy! She came alive with the party celebration and would start dancing by herself around the cake. It was like this dancing imp came out of what was usually Nancy's controlled and conservatively dressed body. Nancy loved parties and she loved dancing. I remember, being over at her house years later.... her bedroom I think. I can't remember how we got talking about the TV and exercise—I know she had exercise equipment, but I don't think she had it in her bedroom. I think it was in that other room that she didn't use.

**BF**

It was in that other room.

**HH**

Yeah. Anyway, we weren't in that room. We were someplace where she had the TV, I want to say her bedroom. She had a zillion cable channels. We were talking about how she had so many—now I don't get cable. I have never had cable. I mean, look at the TV I have here.

**BF**

It's so cute and small.

**HH**

It actually is color, but I always think it's black and white. That's what I tell people, but it really has color. I have another one in the bedroom, which is a little bigger but that's a different story. In any case, I was saying to Nancy that "I wouldn't want all these cable channels." But Nancy said she loved them and that she knew which ones had really good music, because she loved to dance to the music. I'm sure it was exercise, but it was more than that. She revealed that she would dance by herself to music she could access on cable channels. That struck me as similar to those odd



gleeful moments at parties or social events. A couple of times Nancy and I went to parties together, say at New Year's Eve, and you would see a different Nancy.

**BF**

Like at the Cowboy Bar, [crosstalk].

**HH**

And the Cowboy Bar. And if you've seen any of those photos or videos of her dancing, she's loving it. She's loving it.

**BF**

What music would she dance to?

**HH**

That, I can't tell you. She may have said but I don't remember. There was this quirky side to Nancy. Tom knows because he was around her a lot. Dancing, and Nancy's endless shopping on the internet and from catalogs. Catalog shopping and just buying things. She specially loved to buy these strange gadgets. Astronomical gadgets or for measuring things. She would give them to us for Christmas presents. You'd say to yourself, "What's this for?" Or, "Why?" But Nancy was interested in them. Sometimes they were similar to things that she explored early on in her work, —when she was casting light or figuring out some of her pieces that involved light and shadow and reflection...all of that kind of stuff. Yeah, she liked gadgets. And again, in her spirit of generosity—she was always very generous—we would get them. We'd go, like "Okay, thanks, Nancy, but what do I do with it? [laughter]". It's these funny little quirks that fill out a personality.

I think Nancy owned three works of mine, two of which I gave as gifts at different times. But that one with the grommeted holes, incorporating light and shadow, she selected.

I was working with grommeted canvas when I had an opportunity to do some monotypes with master printer, Marina Ancona, who has a print shop in Brooklyn, and one here, in Santa Fe, out on 599 where her parents have a house. We thought we'd like to work together, so Marina came out to my studio. I wanted to make monotypes with grommets but was afraid to put the metal grommets through the press for fear they would wreck the press. I said to Marina, "I would like to use-grommeted paper, what do you think? Is that possible?" She said, "We can do that." I said, "It won't wreck the press?" She said, "Oh, no". Marina knew how to do it plus she thought it was a sexy idea, so we started printing on grommeted paper. Lucy called the resulting monotypes "grommetypes", and that term has just stuck. Lucy has such a wonderful way with words. Any monotype by Harmony Hammond that has grommets in it, is now referred to as a grommetype.



Later, Nancy told me that she too had worked with grommets. This was a very rare art conversation between us —acknowledging not only that we both had worked with grommets but also that that we weren't so interested in the grommets themselves, but rather the holes, and light and shadow. These shared concerns are articulated very differently, in our work. I don't think we think about each other's work while we are working, we just do what we do. In Nancy's early work, there was a lot of shadow, light, reflection, pools, all of this stuff happening. The surfaces of my paintings, because they're so physical and in relief and dimensional in a sense of materiality, the straps, the grommets, the pushpins, or the strings, whatever's on the surface.... light hits them creating highlights and cast shadows on the surface. Light and shadow are so important that I almost could list them as part of the materials, though. I don't. Grommets holes literally open up pictorial space. And, in my case, of course, relate to the body, as well.

So it was in the 2000s, that we discovered that we shared a formal vocabulary. But that isn't the way we usually talked. Nancy and I had a very close connection, and I can't exactly say what it was. There was something very strong just there. I miss her, yeah.

**BF**

It seems like it.

**HH**

I don't think there's anything else. We talked... Oh, I was going to say, when I saw the show of her work in New York—what was it?—two years ago, last year, or something like that.

**BF**

At Dia:Chelsea?

**HH**

Yeah.

**BF**

With the *Holes of Light*, *Mirrors of Light* and the *Locators*?

**HH**

I loved the exhibition. I saw it twice. My response, when I first walked in, was, "Nancy would approve."

**BF**

Oh, good.



**HH**

That was my thought. "Yes, Nancy would approve." I was so glad I thought that....

**BF**

Me too.

**HH**

It was the right mix, Brenda, because there were still rough walls in the Dia space. The rough walls, the brick wall where cement had been filled in or whatever, is the kind of space Nancy originally showed in. It's the kind of space we all showed in. Early SoHo ground floors of loft buildings. Tribeca. Clamp-on lights. I mean, that's what we all did in those days. The Dia space still had that element. At the same time, there were nicely constructed, thought-out, clean, white walls. The mix of the two, the funky and the clean, called up, the way Nancy was working in those early spaces—they were dark. There wasn't good lighting. You had to bring a light source in. You had to make light an issue if you wanted it to be important. I could imagine Nancy playing around with circles of spot lights in these alternative spaces and intentionally developing pieces around those spotlights. Anyway, I thought the Dia exhibition was a great installation of her work. I was really pleased, and I'm sure she is—I'm sure she's pleased.

**BF**

Excellent. That space was a perfect space for that show.

**HH**

It was. Did you all have a lot to do with the installation itself, or what?

**BF**

Dia did most of it, but we definitely were working with Tom to figure out what the intention would've been. And, of course, one of the other challenging things is that the light source originally would've been this old theater lamp that had an asbestos-covered cord and got super hot. And those kinds of things, they say, "No, no, no, no, no, don't use that."

**HH**

We can't do that anymore.

**BF**

So you have to modify to meet current safety standards.

**HH**



Right. Right, right. I mean, back then you used what you had, or what anybody had. But it's true it probably didn't meet any safety standards back then, much less now. I'm sure you had to do a lot of that type of translation.

**BF**

Yeah. We were very excited when we realized we had that lamp, and then it was a bummer to find out we could not use it.

**HH**

Right, right. But then, the real question, of course, is, "How would Nancy have dealt with that situation, today?"

**BF**

Exactly.

**HH**

So, given that you can't use that old lamp anymore, what would Nancy do, were she alive today?

**BF**

And trying to figure out the electrical system that is going to be installed in Ireland.

**HH**

Well, that's these same issues. Same issues.

**BF**

Which are the same issues we're running up against.

**HH**

I understand. I'm friends with Karen Dunbar, who's the executor, or, no, the director of the Michael Asher Foundation in Los Angeles. His work is even more conceptual than Nancy's and site-specific in a different way. But some of the really interesting conversations I have with Karen, or that she shares that she has with her board of trustees for the Asher Foundation, are exactly along these lines. Can Michael's pieces be re-exhibited, reinstalled, reconstructed, or we could even call them re-performed? If they are re-performing a piece and there are limitations based on the electricity or today's technical issues, things that are not allowed at a particular site, the question they always come back to is, "What would Michael want?" Would he do this? What would he be okay with? How would he handle this situation? The Asher Foundation you realized every time they try to answer they are also setting precedents for the future presentation of Michael's work. These are really interesting questions to me as an artist. Reinstalling or re-performing some of my





work raises similar issues but not to the same degree that they are raised when reperforming Nancy or Michael's work. Or how to respond to a request to position work, let's say, in a group exhibition, which is different than how the work is usually positioned. Is this something the artist would be open to? They might. They might not.

How open is the work? How exact does it have to be? I think what you, as boards and working for a foundation do, is hugely, hugely important, because the notion of legacy is not that simple. It's not just keeping the artist's name and work alive and important and all that. There's a lot of translation involved, and a lot of—you have to really know the artist as well as the objects... Always going back to the artist, what would they want... yeah.

**BF**

Right. It's really—

**HH**

It's rigorous. It's rigorous.

**BF**

It's really interesting, it's really challenging, it's a lot of planning.

**HH**

It is challenging. It is challenging. So, anyway, good luck with it all.

**BF**

Thank you. And I thank you, Harmony, for a fantastic interview.

**HH**

Yeah. [crosstalk]. Well, thank you. You get me going and I just blab away.

**BF**

I'm going to hit the stop button now.

**HH**

Good.