

Stephanie Zollinger: This is Stephanie Zollinger interviewing Helena Hernmarck on Monday, April 20, 2009, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Tell us when and where you were born.

Helena Hernmarck: I was born in Stockholm in 1941, and I grew up in the old town of Stockholm.

Stephanie Zollinger: Can you describe your childhood and your family background?

Helena Hernmarck: Yes, [my father was a scholar]. He was an art historian. He was head of Decorative Arts at the National Museum in Stockholm. In fact, he worked there from the '20s to 1964, or something. My mother's father was a doctor, but my mother's sister married an architect by the name of Sven Markelius, the famous Swedish architect, who built one of the rooms at the United Nations building in New York. So I was exposed, as a child, both to wonderful antiques and [to] wonderful modern design.

Stephanie Zollinger: How did your parents influence you in the arts? Did they persuade you to try architecture?

Helena Hernmarck: No, not really, because my parents were of an era where [they] did not try to influence us in any way to a particular [direction]. Because they themselves had been led so much, they wanted to give us the freedom. In a way, I got too little guidance. But I was always drawing and doing designs and my father joked and said I'd do something with my hands because I had a younger sister who was always getting A's in school and I was not. So, he said I'd [work with my hands], which of course I have ended up doing. But no, it was mostly the environment and, of course, the designers in the '50s were a very tight little group. With World War II for example, my uncle took care of Danish architects who fled from Denmark when they were occupied. My mother even got a medal for housing people, but it was mostly their friends, you see. And, around Sven Markelius, there was everybody from Arne Jacobsen to Alvar Aalto, not the Saarinens because they were over here, but the whole architectural community in Stockholm. Then [there was] the great designer, Astrid Sampe, whom I always refer to as Sweden's Jack Larsen. She, of course, was somewhat older than Jack, but she made a name for herself as an industrial textile designer. She was hired by the department store NK to create a special textile department within the department store. It sounds almost like Japan, but this was in the '30s and '40s. She worked with Sven Markelius a lot on many of the projects; [they worked on] many buildings together. So, this is the world I

grew up in. So when I arrived in New York in 1965, I went to see the Swedish Consulate General by the name of Tore Tallroth. He was there for quite a few years and befriended the New York art scene. He was one of the first supporters of Donald Judd. He gave Donald Judd the Swedish scholarship. And he, of course, knew Jack. So the first thing he says to me is, “You’ve got to meet Jack.”

Stephanie Zollinger: At what stage in your childhood did you become interested in fiber arts?

Helena Hernmarck: That’s a good question because my parents divorced when I was nine. When I was twelve, they both remarried. My mother married an Englishman. We had lived with our father. I thought briefly I wanted to be a journalist like my mother because I moved to England when I was fourteen. But I had already started on my designing, not that I had woven anything. I went to an English Girls’ School and, while there, I decided—this was 1958— I decided I was going to study textiles. [I thought] I better go back to Sweden because I felt that Sweden was way ahead of England at the time in textile design.

Stephanie Zollinger: How did you know that textile design existed?

Helena Hernmarck: Oh, because I knew all these people. My father actually had taken me to visit them on one of my vacations back to Sweden: I went to visit Alice Lund who had a weaving studio in Dalecarlia. I walked into her studio and I just knew that that was what I was going to do. So, I had seen it with my own eyes exactly what I wanted to do.

Stephanie Zollinger: So the passion was there.

Helena Hernmarck: Well, I think [it is important to have] mentors and to be exposed. Many kids don’t get exposed to that area. They may have it, but happenstance must be there for them to see the choices. That wasn’t me. I was not going to be an academic. I wasn’t even going to go to the university. I decided to go to art school. I moved back to Sweden to go to art school. A school very much like RISD (Rhode Island School of Design), but, in those days, in the ‘50s, it was not accredited. You did not get an accredited degree for studying design or art, only if you studied academics.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you receive a certificate?

Helena Hernmarck: Yes, of course I did. I met Alice Lund when I was 17. We had to apprentice during the summers. So the first summer between '59 and '60, I apprenticed. Let's see if I get this straight, I apprenticed with Alice Lund two summers running. I was allowed to be part of the production team. They put me to work making a huge warp for some curtains that were commissioned for a ferry. Lund was totally part of the modern movement. However, there were hand-woven fabrics, carpets, upholstery, and curtains in theaters.

Stephanie Zollinger: Similar to Jack Larsen.

Helena Hernmarck: Yes, very much. You understand what I'm saying. And it was only after the '60s that all that hand weaving just vanished from Sweden when the Polish people started producing much cheaper things. It always moves to—

Stephanie Zollinger: Mass production.

Helena Hernmarck: Hand weaving was cheaper in Poland. Now it's cheaper in China and India. It's always cheaper somewhere else. But, when I was an apprentice, this little weaving firm that supplied hand-woven stuff for public spaces, essentially, had five people in the office and 25 weavers. But I saw the handwriting on the wall. I was in art school and my teacher in art school was another equally fantastic person called Edna Martin. Sweden had a number of amazing women who were involved in textiles and most of them were not on speaking terms. <Laughs> But they were fantastic in every different way. I was surrounded by this sense that textile [design] could be a professional thing, not just an amateur thing. I think that's the main difference.

Stephanie Zollinger: And then you decided to go to New York?

Helena Hernmarck: No, no. It's much more colorful than that. I spent three years in England as a teenager. I moved back to Sweden and went to art school. In 1963, I had married a Danish engineer. It was part of the so-called brain drain that European young people who were educated moved to Canada or mostly to English-speaking countries like Australia, Canada, and the U.S. But the U.S. had then changed the law about the quota system and didn't let in that many from Scandinavia. So, we went to Canada. We moved to Montreal when I was 23 or 24. He moved ahead and we both crossed the Atlantic on freighters. I came on the freighter with all our stuff, just like an old time immigrant. I was the only passenger. It was a small freighter that went to Chicago through the St. Lawrence Seaway before container ships were used.

Stephanie Zollinger: Isn't that something.

Helena Hernmarck: Yes. So I have this wonderful memory of those two weeks at sea. <Laughs> That, very few people have: the way to change continents. And, of course, I was getting carried away. The "*Emmigrants*" movie had just come out and I was never going to see Sweden again. I was pretending that I was like the people in the 19th century, but of course I wasn't. I had the choice to come and go, so that was different. But I arrived in Montreal in perfect time for Expo '67. I was there just for a few years, and that was all getting organized. I got two good commissions. One [was] from the National Film Board of Canada and one was from an architect in Montreal who was building a new theater in conjunction with Expo. And one was for Habitat '67, but that came a little later.

Stephanie Zollinger: That was young to get commissions of that magnitude. How did you get those commissions? Did you compete in a competition?

Helena Hernmarck: No. That's a good question.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you submit some drawings?

Helena Hernmarck: Yes. I started out by having an exhibition at the Province of Quebec's Architect's Association. I got a little notoriety that way and people came to see what I had done. And I had already done some very interesting abstracts that had stayed in Sweden, but which I also had the designs for. People would pick a design that I would weave for them. While I lived in Canada, I did 50 pieces. I don't remember how I got the commissions. I think I just got to know some of the people who worked there. And they figured that I had worked with the filmmakers who were creating the building called Labyrinth, which was on the site of Expo. There was a five-story building with a multi screen presentation. It was all about Crete and the Minoan culture. I flew to Crete immediately to go and do some research in Knossos. And I came up with my design. It was hard to work with the filmmakers because they were, of course, totally creative and wanted to tell me what to do, but I sort of managed to stand my ground enough to produce my own piece. It was made actually to be like a stained glass window. The light comes through it. And now it's lost. I don't know where it is. It was 20-feet long and seven-feet tall. It showed a snake labyrinth form on it with the light coming through, which was quite effective.

Stephanie Zollinger: Was your work similar to what you were producing back in Sweden?

Helena Hernmarck: No. It was different. The Canadian people who saw my work thought: “Why isn’t it red?” They thought weaving should be red. I was weaving black and white. I was being sophisticated, but they just didn’t see it. Blonde Scandinavian, it meant nothing to them. But it was the time of Pop Art. So this snake labyrinth was kind of a diversion from the abstract work that I had been doing and, actually, the one for Place des Arts, hanging behind the bar, was an abstract with the same kind of script that I had used in my early designs. For Habitat, of course, I fell right into “Rock and Roll” and that whole world and the Pop world. Tiny Tim was very popular and so I found an article about him. I didn’t weave his figure upon it; I wove the pattern that was behind him and I made a combination. Because of Expo ’67, I met Peter Blake, who was the editor of Architecture Forum. He liked what I did. So he said, “I know everybody. Who do you want to meet?” It must have been the same time, ’67 or ’68, I made my first trip to see American architects. But I should also tell you that there was another thread here and that is, a woman who worked as an archaeologist assistant to my father’s best friend came to Sweden. My father’s best friend was called Erik Sjöqvist. He was the head of Archaeology at Princeton University. This woman had been a Cranbrook student. She loved archaeology. She’d been on his digs in Sicily. So she comes to Stockholm and my father says: “My friend is recommending I take care of this woman. Why don’t you show her around since you’re moving to America in two months.” So, I took her around. Her name was Barbara Carmen, and she lived in Princeton at the time. I had arrived in Montreal in October by boat. In February she said, “Get on the Greyhound bus. I’ll meet you in Boston.” I spent the first night at the Ritz-Carlton in Boston with her. Then she said, “We’re going to drive to Princeton, but we’re going to stop on the way in New Haven and visit Jill Mitchell.” Jill has worked with Eero Saarinen and was the wife of one of my husband’s teachers. It took years for me to meet my husband, but on my second day in the United States, I met somebody who my husband-to-be knew. Isn’t that funny?

Stephanie Zollinger: It’s a small world.

Helena Hernmarck: It’s a small world. So, we stopped there on the way and we went to visit her. Of course, Eero had died. I didn’t meet Eero. He died in 1961, very sadly of a brain tumor. You probably know that. But his office was still going on under Kevin Roche. So, we went to visit the office. This woman Barbara Carmen was just about to marry a guy who had been the manufacturer of some parts that went into the roof of the ice rink at Yale. The one with the big span, the famous ice rink. She was about to marry him. He was quite well-to-do and even had an Impressionist painting collection. I went

to visit them in Worcester, Massachusetts. I saw this house and these paintings. She knew an architect couple who she wanted to design a new home for them—not a colonial but a home that would fit the art collection. All this was going on. So, I meet these architects. They were Thomas and Mary McNulty and they lived in Lincoln, Massachusetts. They had an office together, and they had a very modern house, a concrete house, which was just curves. They fell in love with me and I fell in love with them. They said, “Oh great, we’ll just hang your tapestries on the outside of the building, and we’ll invite José Luis Sert and all the architects in Boston.” They said to me, “Here are the Yellow Pages. There’s ‘A’ for architects. Just start at the top. Go and see them,” because they could see this was something they would respond to. Because in those days, and that is where my timing was so perfect, the architects were still steeped in love with Scandinavian design from the ’50s and also from the Bauhaus. They could see that textiles looked good in architecture.

Stephanie Zollinger: They appreciated the art.

Helena Hernmarck: They appreciated this combination. Without that, my career would not have happened because it takes a reciprocal interest and connection even before you meet. There has to be something that stirs the interest. But I will go on to say that the architects in those days had so much more time on their hands. They were not threatened. It was not at all like today. They had time to look at the young person’s work. Even Jack, all through his career, always set aside time when some new, young person came to see him. [At] these architectural offices that I went to visit, everybody would stop working. They would assemble in the conference room and I’d run my slides. I was nobody, but with an introduction from someone they knew.

Stephanie Zollinger: That’s a lost art today of socializing.

Helena Hernmarck: Yes. It was such a glorious time. The McNultys immediately commission a carpet, which was still in my Scandinavian sort of style. They had this wall, a curved wall like that and I had started to weave—I must have showed them samples. Because, in Montreal, I had found a theatrical supply store that sold rolls of something that sequins came out of. [It was] a honeycomb roll of plastic; shiny sequins that are stamped out. Well, what’s left is like a honeycomb thing but this wide. I bought a bunch of those rolls and I started to put them in my weave so I could make my tapestries both two sided and translucent.

Stephanie Zollinger: And somewhat dimensional too.

Helena Hernmarck: Indeed. I could weave three layer things. One side, top layer faces out, one space is in the middle and another side is the back, and yet it is also transparent when you hold it up. They wanted me to play with it. In the end I wove it single layered piece for this curved wall with this reflective material. Recently, I tried to donate that piece to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, but it was so broken that they couldn't take it. It needed so much restoration. I still have it—that very piece. After they had said to me, okay go and see all the architects, and Peter Blake said, “Look, here is a list,” I then went to Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco. And in each city I saw the best architects, just like that. <Laughs>

Stephanie Zollinger: That is amazing.

Helena Hernmarck: It is amazing, but my meeting with Philip Johnson is very funny if I should tell it here. It is a whole story in itself. I met Louis Kahn. Of course, he knew my uncle. They were friends. It was a very rewarding trip. In San Francisco, in his office, I met Chuck Bassett. He said, “I am designing Weyerhaeuser's headquarters in Seattle, and I'm interested in what you do.” So that actually happened. I got to do two big tapestries for Weyerhaeuser's headquarters. First of all, I won the AIA Award. I got a one man exhibition at MoMA, and I got on the cover of magazines.

Stephanie Zollinger: This was all under age 30?

Helena Hernmarck: I was 32, but you see that nowadays too. Young people are brought forward by many. It's one of the things that are done, but I was certainly a lucky recipient of this.

Stephanie Zollinger: To meet with these architects who have become icons.

Helena Hernmarck: Yes, and on one of the charts that you have here at the University of Minnesota libraries. I made five pages this big and have written on both sides, everyone who I met, when I met them. Who introduced me to whom. What they said. Da, da, da, da. It's here in the archive.

Stephanie Zollinger: In terms of Jack Larsen?

Helena Hernmarck: Yes, well, Jack you see, he was just totally encouraging.

Stephanie Zollinger: You met him in the '60s?

Helena Hernmarck: I met him on my first visit to New York City. Yes, that was in February in 1965. Tore Tallroth, the Consulate General, said, go and see Jack. I called and went over. He's in a townhouse—

Stephanie Zollinger: Gramercy?

Helena Hernmarck: Yeah, and that's where the Lunnings lived in Gramercy Park. The family started the George Jensen stores and just Lunning was Jack's friend. So, mostly he helped by including me in his books, in terms of just being exposed and established. But funny enough, at that time, he and Connie were just beginning to fall in love with these three-dimensional textiles; the liberation from the loom was going on and anyone who was anyone stopped weaving and started doing sculptured work. Lenore Tawney, Claire Zeisler and those people were sort of in the forefront. So, when they did that first book, they put me in the historic session. I was part of the Old World. That was a first.

Stephanie Zollinger: Were you surprised?

Helena Hernmarck: I was surprised. But I knew that they were looking for abstract because they were also—Connie was involved with a show at MoMA. What year was that? That was also '60—Yes, we were supposed to turn in work at Christmastime in 1968 to the Museum of Modern Art, but the program was only abstracts. They had accepted some of my shiny plastic stuff in the spring. I had been included even though they didn't want the realism. I knew that, but meanwhile I got four big jobs—my first four major jobs. So I just did my four commissions and forgot about the show. I was never part of it because then I veered off into total realism. I went to exactly the opposite direction of what they were doing. When they did their second book, the one called *Mainstream*--the first was *Beyond Craft* and then *Mainstream* - this is Jack calling me and saying, "Helena, we want to include you even though you are doing realistic stuff because of three reasons." I always tell this story because it's true and very funny. "One, you've done so much work; two, because you've got such good photographs." [This was true] because I had always paid for good photographers to shoot every new installation. I always made sure I was paid enough money that I could afford to do that. It was smart. "And three, Connie loves Niels." Therefore, those were the reasons. Of course, he was joking, but I mean, it's pretty funny, his way of teasing me.

Stephanie Zollinger: And by this time you had met your husband?

Helena Hernmarck: Oh yes. Of course, because [then] I was living in the loft. So, how I met my husband was to go back to Astrid Sampe. After the McNultys had told me here's the phonebook, start with "A". I was visiting my parents in London. By then, both my sets of parents were living in London, both my father and stepmother and my mother and stepfather. So, I was there, and I was saying, "Well, I'm here for three days. Whom do I call?" I was already keen like this. So, I called Astrid in Stockholm because I knew she really knew everyone. She was actually Honorary Royal Designer for Industry already in '49. She had been made that. I don't know if you know what that is, the Royal Society in London?

Stephanie Zollinger: I am aware of it, but I may not know enough.

Helena Hernmarck: It's a fine building near the Strand. Very beautiful. When you step in, on the wall, all around the walls are all the people who have been part of this organization. It starts with Benjamin Franklin. It's very cool. Astrid was there on the wall. <Laughs> Anyhow, she gave me three names and the next day, I had three jobs. I had the QE2, which was just being launched. I was to do a suite of tapestries for the QE2 and then the Strand Palace Hotel wanted a big piece. Those were the two jobs I got instantly. We go forward to 1972, and I'm about to move to England. I'm about to leave Canada and move to England with my second husband. I say before I leave, I'm going to make a drive around to my circle of friends and visit architects before I leave so that I have fresh connections. Then, I remembered Astrid in Sweden, knowing England, so then I thought, "Whom do I know in another country who is well connected in the U.S.?" I knew a man in London who was head of the Council of Industrial Design called Paul Riley, Sir Riley. He wrote ten letters. I lived on that for twenty years, more or less, because he knew me, and he knew the people he wrote to. It's an amazing thing. But by then I had done the Weyerhaeuser tapestries so I was then more of a known quantity and people would say, "You're the one who did the Rainforest." That was always the first thing they said to me. On that tour, I got to meet Philip Johnson for a second time. He was very interested and very helpful. It was he that saw to it that I got to show at MoMA by calling Arthur Drexler and so on. Philip Johnson, first time he was horrible and the second time he was very nice. That's typical of Philip Johnson. Much later I got to do two tapestries for Philip's buildings, but that was later. Of course, one of the persons Paul Riley recommended was Henry Dreyfuss. Niels worked with Henry Dreyfuss. Donald M. Genaro, James M. Conner and Niels Diffrient were associates of Henry Dreyfuss Associates. Henry had sold the business to them and in fact, I met Henry Dreyfuss— Do you know who I'm talking about?

Stephanie Zollinger: Yes. He did *The Measure of Man*.

Helena Hernmarck: He's one of the first founders of industrial design as a profession. He and his wife committed suicide together in the fall of 1972. She had cancer. They had always worked together. Of course, he was only 68. Niels was just shocked and furious. Henry had had such a glorious career. He could already see changes coming in his way of doing things and that it was gliding into another world. He was apparently willing to give up life at that point. But before he died, he introduced me to Niels. Thank God.

Stephanie Zollinger: Again you were in the right place at the right time.

Helena Hernmarck: Yes. It is odd. It truly is odd. One must always remember that. The timing is everything. It's a matter of luck. Definitely it's a matter of being ready to use the opportunities right as they come along.

Stephanie Zollinger: You need to take advantage of them.

Helena Hernmarck: Yes. People could see I was really serious about making tapestries.

Stephanie Zollinger: And very motivated.

Helena Hernmarck: And I produced them on time and on budget.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you have a studio at this time?

Helena Hernmarck: Yes. I always had people in my studio. In Montreal, I had it just in my apartment. I had a big apartment. Then, when I moved to England, for a year I was in Wapping in London, the East End. The docks had moved downstream and all these buildings were empty and artists were sort of squatting in them. I squatted in a building, in my studio, for about a year. Then we moved out to Dorset, and we rented an old 1540 house. There was room for my weaving and all the time I had people working with me.

Stephanie Zollinger: Is this one or two looms?

Helena Hernmarck: It was basically one big and one small loom in those days. One of my best assistants became Mollie Fletcher, whose father is Norman Fletcher who was one of Gropius's partners. She moved to England to work with me. We had such a ball. We're still best friends. She lives in Detroit now. Her husband is Alan Dart at the museum there. Mollie and I were a very good team and when I moved to SoHo, this is when I met Niels. I moved to America and divorced my English husband. Mollie then also moved home. She moved to Boston first, which was her home. After I was installed in SoHo in New York, she moved down. She got a smaller loft that she lived in, and she worked with me there, too, and did the first of the big flower tapestries. Then her husband got the job in Detroit, and she applied to go to Cranbrook so they moved. Another one of my former helpers in Montreal went to Cranbrook the same year so I had two of them at Cranbrook.

Stephanie Zollinger: You're surrounded by Cranbrook folks.

Helena Hernmarck: Yes. Cranbrook is the big thing, even though I never went.

Stephanie Zollinger: Larsen was a graduate.

Helena Hernmarck: And Niels. They were there at the same time. They were the same age. Niels is 80 and Jack is 81.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did they hang out together?

Helena Hernmarck: Not a lot. More professionally because when Niels worked with Henry Dreyfuss, one of the clients was American Airlines, for example. He bought fabrics. Jack even did some leather.

Stephanie Zollinger: I saw it behind the bar area.

Helena Hernmarck: Yeah, on the airplane. They were stolen.

Stephanie Zollinger: Really?

Helena Hernmarck: They were too appealing.

Stephanie Zollinger: I've seen photographs.

Helena Hernmarck: He wanted me to produce that. That's how we first met, before we were romantically involved. He said 25 airplanes. At that point, I was moving. I had no help. No studio. Nothing. How could I do 25 things? At that point I hadn't started going back to the studio where I was an apprentice with Alice Lund. Later on, in 1975, I was able to bring them a big commission that I couldn't do myself. I gave it to Alice Lund Textiles, which had then run into other people's hands. She had retired and sold it, but the same weavers were there. One of those weavers, who worked on that first job in '75, is still working on my work right now in Sweden. I have fed work to them since the '70s, and I help keep them alive with my American jobs.

Stephanie Zollinger: They produce for you?

Helena Hernmarck: Yes.

Stephanie Zollinger: You send them the drawings?

Helena Hernmarck: I send the drawings, and I often dye the yarn. I supply the yarn colors that I think they should be using. We use hundreds of colors. It's just to cover the bases. They've done some fantastic work for me because they keep weaving five days a week. I get more and more distracted. I can't stay at the loom like that.

Stephanie Zollinger: Gradually, you've gotten away from the actual weaving, but it's the design piece that you--

Helena Hernmarck: But I weave all the samples. I weave and I also weave smaller things. I kept weaving myself, too. I've had people in my studio in Connecticut, but that's ended too. Now I'm alone in Connecticut. The last few things done in Connecticut I've done myself, but it has been a mix a bit because at one point—

Stephanie Zollinger: You've always kept with the hand loom. You've never transferred.

Helena Hernmarck: Yeah. No. Never have. Never. I only do one commission of each. I've never seen the need or the interest to do otherwise. I prefer it this way. The

work fortunately kept rolling in. In the '90s, it was pretty bad for a while. We had no work. Alice Lund just locked the door for a year or so.

Stephanie Zollinger: What was the cause of that?

Helena Hernmarck: It's the way the economy goes. Here's a funny example. In the '70s, my work went to Texas. In the '80s, it went to Chicago. In the '90s, it went to Atlanta because that's where the building boom was happening. Now we do the big jobs in New York. It was nice to have. It essentially has kept rolling and I give them the big, big work. The biggest one we ever did was 880 square feet. But most of them have been in the 200-square foot size. Some are 400 square feet.

Stephanie Zollinger: Do you make them in panels or sections?

Helena Hernmarck: Yes. The biggest we can do one piece is 11 feet by 26. Beyond that we have to sew.

Stephanie Zollinger: Your weaving philosophy is somewhat similar to Jack Larsen's because he liked to use the hand loom and went to foreign countries to find different yarns—

Helena Hernmarck: And skills. Yes. There are many--

Stephanie Zollinger: But he did his for more—

Helena Hernmarck: Production.

Stephanie Zollinger: And you ended up doing yours— They're both art, but his is more consumer.

Helena Hernmarck: Yardage. It's not mass production by any means. It's much more what one might call serial production or a smaller scale. But I know he was working in 31 countries at one point and that's incredible.

Stephanie Zollinger: He was global before we knew what global was.

Helena Hernmarck: Yes. Yes. He lived on airplanes. That's one reason why I never wanted to get involved in India or China. But I have this funny feeling, too, in my pieces, which are very personal and only one of a kind. I have a feeling that the weavers have to be on the same cultural wavelength as I am in order to do what I want. I'm sure one could have it done in China and India, but that deep similar understanding for why you're doing things can't possibly be there. It's another world. What I've done, I must have been the only one in the whole world to go back to Sweden and pay Swedish wages for hand weaving. It's why nobody does it. It's because it costs too much with all the social payments that they make to support the welfare state. Even though the weavers don't get that much in salary, the state gets an enormous amount. But I've been prepared not to get rich on this. There's no point. You can't get rich, but I just keep going.

Stephanie Zollinger: Obviously, there is a lot of pride in your work.

Helena Hernmarck: Oh sure. Yeah.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you and Jack ever collaborate on any jobs?

Helena Hernmarck: We have not actually. He has recently talked about something he was doing in Santa Fe, but I don't know what's happening there, with St. John's College. No, not like that. But our paths have crossed all the time in different ways of course, being friends and being in the same world and knowing all the same architects are certainly tremendous common points.

Stephanie Zollinger: When you think of Jack Larsen and what his contributions have been, can you elaborate on what he has meant to the textile world?

Helena Hernmarck: What he's meant to the craftsmen is his interest in collecting and supporting exhibitions and writing books and promoting it all the time. That's for the craftsmen. But what he's done for the textile industry or for the architects and the clients is to provide an artistic production more hand-adjusted. It's production, but it's site-specific. He could spread it around, I'm sure, in other jobs. I'm sure I don't know half of the jobs he did [because] he did so much. But he was totally unique. He supplied a middle level of product that the big country usually doesn't supply because the big country [cannot afford to]. I can parallel it in a silly sort of way, by talking about industrial design. Why can't you buy a well-made wheelchair that's made in America? Well, the wheelchair market just isn't big enough for an American company to find profit in it. Canada can afford to do wheelchairs but not America. I think Jack was like

a foreigner in this country in a way. He brought in the rest of the world; the thinking and the language and the methods. So, it's very appropriate that everything's been said because he was totally separate. Niels tells me that when he was at Cranbrook, he got more mail, Jack, as a student, than the whole school put together. Even though he was a student. So he was already ready to go.

Stephanie Zollinger: This is mail from—

Helena Hernmarck: Just letters. Yes. Connections.

Stephanie Zollinger: He was getting his name out there.

Helena Hernmarck: Whereas Niels says it never occurred to him because here he was working for Henry Dreyfuss and his own name never got out anywhere. For 25 years! And meanwhile, Jack is just building and building and building. Yeah.

Stephanie Zollinger: I read that he had to first knock on doors in New York City to peddle his wares.

Helena Hernmarck: Oh yeah, you have to start but he also had good connections and people who said, "You go see that person. You go see that one."

Stephanie Zollinger: Networking has really been the key to getting things started?

Helena Hernmarck: Well, even going back hundreds of years, the modern networking on the computer is not really personal. I don't know how that really works. You have a presence as a website. I don't do that, but you can get work that way. I know the gallery I'm associated with, the Browngrotta Gallery, they do a lot on the web. They have a very advanced website. They have a roster of artists and maybe for them it works well. But I wouldn't. At one point, I was written up in *Traditional Home* where my address was published. Everything in the whole magazine is such that you can find—you can buy something yourself. So, people called me. How much? Well, \$30,000.00. It was the wrong place to be. It didn't work.

Stephanie Zollinger: Alice Lund was a big influence on your work.

Helena Hernmarck: And Edna Martin my teacher, too. If I can say the difference: Alice Lund was more like Jack in that she provided textiles for the interiors and she was happy to be a little anonymous. It was not a work of art. Occasionally, later on, she used other artists' work for sort of a centerpiece. But my teacher Edna Martin, who ran the Handarbetets Vänner, the other weaving atelier in Stockholm. They were similar to Alice Lund in the '50s, but then they got much more into producing artworks by famous artists. That was Edna Martin's way of—she wanted her textile students to eventually be on the same level as a fine artist. [She thought] that the textile art should be on the same level as fine art. Of course, that was never achieved, and it still hasn't been achieved. But her attempt was to produce fabulous textile art in the studio or atelier where the skilled weavers and she herself could interpret the art and make something more of it as a textile. It can't just be a copy of the painting. It cannot be. So, she was amongst her students. She wanted us to gain the self- confidence to be out there as artists, but in the textile medium. She was wonderful in bringing out our creativity. She really worked at loosening it because when you start, you're all scared. At least we were in those days. Nowadays, young women are not scared of anything. We were still shy and scared.

Stephanie Zollinger: When you talk to people about obtaining a commission, do you go to them with a concept and drawings?

Helena Hernmarck: No, no, no. You have to, first of all, make sure that they know you exist. I have never had a commission from anyone who hadn't already decided they wanted a textile. I never had an art consultant, for example, force a buyer to switch to textiles if they were thinking about other fine art.

Stephanie Zollinger: When you get approached to have your work hanging up, do you go to them with ideas? Do they tell you what they want?

Helena Hernmarck: They might tell me, but immediately I have to explain to them what they're paying for is me, and my skill and my knowing what the right thing to do is.

Stephanie Zollinger: You look at the space where your tapestry will be and you decide what the concept will be?

Helena Hernmarck: Very much so, everything. And quite often they have preconceived ideas, and I have to talk them out of it.

Stephanie Zollinger: Do you come up with more than one option?

Helena Hernmarck: Sometimes I do, yes. That's right. One of my most amusing meetings was in 2000. I got to do that big one. There was a modern architecture model, and it was for a subsidiary of Fidelity Investments for speculative office buildings. I had studied Boston history for this and knew what would fit. While I was in the middle of showing the various things, Ned Johnson comes into the room and rolls up his sleeves and starts trying them. Then he picked the best one, thank God. It's not often that that happens.

Stephanie Zollinger: Have you ever had a disagreement?

Helena Hernmarck: Oh yes. I had that, too. A falling out. But I really only had two bad experiences. I've had many, many, good experiences.

Stephanie Zollinger: Do you have a piece that's forever in your heart as a favorite piece?

Helena Hernmarck: I have several actually in different ways. The second one with Philip Johnson is so perfect in its setting that it's an urn. When you see it from the street, you think it's the stone but it's woven with wool. So, that's kind of neat. And, of course, my early out-of-focus flower tapestries I did for Dallas in the late '70s. They were published in Jack's book. And the long one of the rocks (*Journey*) for Aid Association for Lutherans in Appleton. Then, of course, the job for Time-Warner Center, the four tapestries that rotate. They all turned out great. That was in this decade. In a different era—I have about ten that are perfectly great, I think.

Stephanie Zollinger: What words of wisdom would you like to leave for the next generation of textile artists?

Helena Hernmarck: Wow. The only reason that you do it is that you love textiles. There will be some wind against you because it still faces problems. But, on the other hand, the work gives so much that if you really believe in it, then you can get your way. It all has to do with how you present yourself and what talents you have and how you utilize them.

End of Helena Hernmarck