



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Betty Cooke

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Archives of American Art  
750 9th Street, NW  
Victor Building, Suite 2200  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
General.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	1
Scope and Contents.....	1
Biographical / Historical.....	1
Names and Subjects .....	2
Container Listing .....	

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Oral history interview with Betty Cooke
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.cooke04
<b>Date:</b>	2004 July 1-2
<b>Creator:</b>	Cooke, Betty, 1924- (Interviewee) Yager, Jan, 1951- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
<b>Extent:</b>	132 Pages (Transcript)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Betty Cooke, 2004 July 1-2, Transcript</a> <a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Betty Cooke, 2004 July 1-2, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)</a>

---

## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

This interview is part of the Archives of American Art Oral History Program, started in 1958 to document the history of the visual arts in the United States, primarily through interviews with artists, historians, dealers, critics and administrators.

---

## Biographical / Historical

Betty Cooke (1924- ) is a jeweler and metalsmith of Baltimore, Maryland. Jan Yager is a jeweler from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

---

## Scope and Contents

An interview of Betty Cooke conducted 2004 July 1-2, by Jan Yager, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, in Baltimore, Maryland.

---

## Scope and Contents

Cooke speaks of her family and growing up in Baltimore, Maryland; taking art classes in high school; attending the Maryland Institute, College of Art; apprenticing in a jeweler's studio; teaching design at the Maryland Institute; buying a house and setting up a studio and shop in it; showing her work in the MoMA "Good Design" Exhibition; marrying fellow artist Bill Steinmetz; working as a design consultant; designing

interiors for bowling alleys and restaurants; early jewelry designs; studying one summer at Cranbrook Academy of Art; selling works in various galleries; her interest in folk art; using wood and stones in her pieces; creating a wall mural for a school; working with the Rouse Company; opening The Store Ltd. at Cross Keys and designing the modern interior; her trademark designs; making jewelry on commission; and showing her work in exhibitions. Cooke also speaks of her current studio space and routine; sketching designs; documenting her work; traveling to Mexico, China, Morocco, and London; her current involvement with the Maryland Institute, College of Art; renovating a barn for a new studio; the function and wearability of her jewelry; having a retrospective show in 1995; designing for Geoffrey Beene; her interest in painting and sculpture; defining design versus craft; the market for jewelry; how her work has changed over time; sources of inspiration; collecting objects; deciding to go into retail; choosing metals and tools; masculine and feminine jewelry; and being a female artist. Cooke also recalls Margaret De Patta, Harry Bertolia, Philip Morton, George Nakashima, and others.

---

## General

Originally recorded on 5 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 8 digital wav files. Duration is 6 hr., 2 min.

---

## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

### Subjects:

- Decorative arts
- Women artists
- Women designers

### Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

### Names:

- Beene, Geoffrey
- Bertolia, Harry
- Cranbrook Academy of Art -- Students
- De Patta, Margaret, 1903-1964
- Maryland Institute, College of Art -- Faculty
- Maryland Institute, College of Art -- Students
- Morton, Philip
- Nakashima, George, 1905-1990
- Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
- Steinmetz, Bill

### Occupations:

- Jewelers -- Maryland -- Baltimore
- Metal-workers -- Maryland -- Baltimore

### Functions:

- Artists' studios