

Susan Feller

Where: At her home in Hampshire County, WV

Date: March 27, 2018

Location: Hampshire County, WV

Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

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[Susan Feller](#), 63 at the time of this interview, lives in Hampshire County, West Virginia with her partner Jim in the log home they built. With a degree in Art and History from UMass/Boston and a life-long interest in handwork craft, she learned to rug hook in 1994, a medium allowing her to “paint with wool.” This skill was the entry into the niche market of rug hooking—designing patterns, selling hand-dyed wool, and teaching as far away as Australia, throughout the US and Canada. These days, Feller works in her studio creating fiber art for the walls. Juried as a Tamarack gallery artist, and a recipient of a purchase award from the WV Division of Culture and History, she serves on the Board of Directors for Tamarack Foundation for the Arts and The River House board in Capon Bridge, networking with and advocating for artists in the state and beyond.

In this interview, Feller talks about her work, her research into the textile art of the McDonald sisters of Gilmer County, the state of the arts in West Virginia, and more. Read her piece on the West Virginia Folklife blog about the McDonald sisters: <https://wvfolklife.org/2018/05/15/textile-artist-susan-feller-on-the-mcdonald-sisters-of-gilmer-county/>

Susan Feller’s website: <https://artwools.com/>

SF: Susan Feller

EH: Emily Hilliard

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00:00

EH: Okay. Let's see. Okay, could you tell me your name and when you were born, who you are, where we are right now?

SF: I'm Susan Feller and I was born November 4, 1954 in the northwestern corner of New Jersey. We are now in Hampshire County, again in the Appalachian Mountains, so I feel like I've come home from that time period of my youth.

EH: I'm gonna get closer.

SF: The building that we're in my husband and I built and it's a log home so it really looks like it's a 100-year-old building, although we built it in 2006.

EH: Yeah, it does. So why don't you tell me a little bit about your background? Where you grew up and your initial entry into art.

SF: I was lucky enough to grow up in a rural community on 120-acres of land that my grandparents had accumulated. My grandfather was an electrician, my grandmother worked with him so I saw independent men and women working together. My mom was always into hand crafts and so a Christmas gift was a new type of craft--shell art, string art, and such. She sewed all of our clothes and taught me how to sew. I do remember that my HomeEc teacher in 9th grade gave me a B+, not an A, because I did not take the little facing out and fix the little tuck and she said to me, Susan, you can do it better.

EH: Whoa.

SF: So I was a Girl's Scout from Brownies all the way to Senior Girl Scout, one reason being my mother was a Girl Scout leader and I enjoyed that type of skill level. I do feel that I'm very happy to say that I'm a Girl Scout in heritage and such. We learned a lot of handcrafts and make-do, self-sufficiency. That 120 acres of forest and such was my brother and my backyard and lots of fun stories to explore.

EH: Nice. And maybe talk about then later how you got, you know, maybe talk about the gallery and some of your first adulthood art experiences and how you came here.

02:51

SF: So being in rural New Jersey and the first to go to college, I decided to go to Boston instead of New York because New York was too close and too intimidating. Boston was a wonderful, interesting city. My initial interest was interior design, so I went up for a 2-year program. My parents sent me 5 dollar check for spending the first week and I got a job after that. Work-study. They were paying for my college and my board. So that was really good because I learned a lot about retailing. I got a job at Shreve, Crump, and Low and you know, it's great to have a work-study program that's applied to your college. After that I stayed in Boston. I worked actually in the registrar's office of Newbury Junior College where I went to school and continued my own studies at University of Massachusetts in Boston with a double major in art and history. So my background is in business and I continued. I have lots of classes that I took at Newbury in accounting and economics and management and such but art and history were my majors and

probably how I transitioned. Living in Boston, the history--I was there in 1976. It was a great time to be a history major in the city. And then I decided, I finished my degree and for a lot of reasons I called my parents up and convinced my parents I would cook and clean if I could move home. At the age of 29 I was retiring.

EH: (laughs)

SF: She said I couldn't retire but my grandfather had taught me how to save money so I had, I was okay there. And they did accept the transition (laughs). So I took a couple jobs that worked with that type of skills and met my husband to be, and we moved in and opened a gallery in Califon, New Jersey, The Church Door Gallery. And the service that we did was picture framing. He learned gold-leaf gilding and loved working with handwork and it was really exciting to work with a regional artist and to show their work, at which point someone brought in a hooked rug and I learned how to hook in 1994. And since we had bought our property here in West Virginia, and we knew, romantically, we were building a log house, it needed hooked rugs on the floor (laughs). So my art major, the technique that I used was photography. I didn't gravitate to oil or watercolor or any other fine technique. Photography, definitely. The skills that I learned in color selections during the picture framing business helped me. And picture framing, those experiences helped me transition into rug hooking and rug hooking for me is my art. I paint with the fibers. I combined all the other fiber skills that I had been learning along the way. And as a studio artist, my work is not only for the floor. My work pretty much these days is 3-dimensional. It's artwork for the walls.

EH: Mmhm. Was there a history component to it too that you were...

SF: Definitely. My heritage is Pennsylvania-German, so the rug hooking business that I developed included probably over 150 designs based on Pennsylvania-German motifs and that historical design and also more contemporary geometrics, so that business was Ruckman Mill Farm and I have recently sold that to a company in Vermont, Green Mountain Hooked Rugs. Transitioned from bending and dyeing wools and being on the circuit of rug hooking events to solely being an artist and advocating for the arts here in West Virginia.

07:19

EH: Did you find a rug hooking community and/or a lineage when you came here?

SF: Here in West Virginia, not immediately. I have found and done extensive research about two ladies in Gilmer County, the McDonald Sisters, because there was a rug hanging in the State Museum, and according to the label it said it was hooked and it looks like it's hooked and I finally have learned that they didn't do the same technique but ended up with a similar look. So it's fascinating in that. There are rug hooking events in the state. There's 2 events that happen at Cedar Lakes annually, and they've been happening for decades, actually. So the state is a good area for it and there are several people who do hook within the state, contemporaries of mine.

EH: Okay.

SF: The fun part for me is that rug hooking immediately, I think a person thinks of traditional art and crafts, so it says West Virginia so easily and for me being here in the land and the property that we have, it's extremely inspiring. So I've traveled around the world with rug hooking. I've gone to Australia because I'm a rug hooker--past president of the International Guild of Rug Hooking. And it's really been a really wonderful network of people, male and female.

EH: Are there--you said there's Pennsylvania-German motifs--are there different regional styles of rug hooking?

SF: Yes, definitely. For the quick history of rug hooking, I would like to say that it's an American craft. It moved down from the Canadian Maritimes into New England and such and it makes sense because it's wool fabric that was used because they were put on the floor and wool wears well, so that fabric was used to walk on! But if in traveling and teaching in different areas, that's one of the reasons I like to travel with the rug hooking, you see the colors of the Southwest in the type of designs and how they're working on them. In New England, the traditions and also in Canada of very finer cut widths of work and working in a variety of values and shades creating the realistic looking flowers and fruit and such. And then there's abstract work by contemporaries. Or Marguerite Zorach who was from New York City and Maine, used rug hooking as her medium and exhibited in fine art in the early 1920s.

EH: Wow, so along with--would you consider her an influence?

SF: Not necessarily for me, I think it validates. I think it's a nice bridge. One of the interesting problems I had when I was rug hooking originally or initially, was to talk to interior decorators and say that I could be commissioned, whatever their design. And I had several people say to me, oh well I don't do country. So, I hooked an abstract piece and I said it's a technique. It's not necessarily a style. I have a particular style, but if your client has a look that they're interested in, this technique can be interpreted that way.

EH: Right.

SF: Alexander Calder's wife interpreted some of his work.

EH: Oh wow!

SF: And Blanche Lazzell also had several of her places made into patterns and she hooked but in her case, most of hers were done commercially by another cottage industry.

EH: Why do I know her name?

SF: Blanche Lazzell's from West Virginia, from Morgantown area and at the West Virginia Museum they have a huge collection of her work.

EH: Okay, and she was a...

SF: Woodblock? And this is her sister, her niece's work, so it's Grace Martin Taylor's woodblock. So she was actually a contemporary of in the early 20s. She worked up in Provincetown a lot and innovator in the white line of block prints. An abstract artist with not wide recognition except within the state, and a really nice thick book by WVU about her.

EH: Cool! I'll have to check that out.

12:36

SF: But she also hooked.

EH: Yeah. Nice. Yeah, I think one of the things that I encounter all the time and also what drew me to traditional art is the fact that those labels aren't as strong as people think and people are working across mediums and genres and it's kind of fluid.

SF: Mmhm. Well and one of both Blanche and Marguerite specifically used the textile mediums to be able to process in their minds a different medium that they were working on. And it's one of the things that they say. If you work in other techniques, the next medium that you are going to address has been influenced by them. And it's a benefit. You're not, your work won't be stagnated. You're gonna find something new by even I was talking with someone who's learning--she's training her left hand to hook and she's getting sloppy. She said, "Yeah, but I laugh at myself. It's like being a beginner again!" And I said to her, I said, well it'll be interesting what type of design you might work up only using your left hand.

EH: Is she using that to give herself that...

SF: She actually had some physical problems and she wanted to not go, everything's fine but she doesn't want to burden her right hand as much.

EH: Cool. And it seems like you do that too in your squares and trying these different techniques and styles and mediums.

SF: Yeah, definitely. Even like these 3 pieces with the embroidery work and straight hooking and then incorporating trapunto embroidery and hooking. I just find them so satisfying because I've explored the same pattern using different techniques.

EH: Yeah, yeah.

SF: And you're able to look at it completely differently.

EH: Right. So what would you call this that's kind of like a quilted or applique?

SF: Yeah, it's trapunto, so it's an Italian word for stuffing. And would be used in quilting. I've seen some beautiful quilts in the middle of the state--people use trapunto work on all white work.

EH: Oh wow, yeah.

SF: And this is definitely something that the McDonald sisters used in their tapestries.

EH: I bet it's really warm too.

SF: It is! Yeah. And then you can, as you saw, I embellished it with different embroidery work, and that was my question to myself, they looked great all by themselves, they were just beautiful, so I didn't...there's that's the fine line as an artist, you know, are you gonna do one more technique? And what is it? When is enough? One of the artists who we represented in the gallery, he would have that quandary. You know, when do you stop?

EH: Yeah [unintelligible]. One of the things I see around is sailor ribbon art in West Virginia and it looks pretty similar to--I'll have to show--I think I have a photo on my phone. It looks, it reminds me of the McDonald sisters, and you haven't encountered that?

SF: No. So do you think that's how they saw the...is it like the looping?

EH: Well, I wondered. Here, let me see if I can find it.

SF: I can hear it in it's description to me, it sounds like...

16:06

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00:00

EH: Okay, so we were talking about techniques. Let's see. Why don't you tell us more about the McDonald Sisters and how you discovered them and what your research has taken you to?

SF: I'm passionate about rug hooking so I went to the State Museum one day and in the crafts and legacy room there's this huge tapestry, I think it's about 4x6 and I think it's labeled "hooked and applique work" and all it says on it the Gilmer Sisters, No, it says the McDonald Sisters, Gilmer County, 1970. That's it! I didn't leave until I learned a little more about it.

EH: Hi! [to Susan's husband]

SF: Hello!

Husband: How'd you know it was me? You yelled out, I could have been anyone!

SF: I went back up to check 'cause I looked at my watch and I said it's 11:30. Maybe I should be...

01:01

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00:00

EH: Okay, the McDonald Sisters.

SF: So. Otha and Blanche McDonald come to find out, there wasn't much information, but I was determined to learn and out of Glenville's State College, the research people found lots of information for me. Luckily they had shown at the West Virginia Arts and Crafts Festival in Glenville for many years in the '60s. And I ended up learning the piece that was in the museum, that was on display was purchased after they had received a purchase award. So there are actually 2 pieces in the museum's collection--they have one in the archive and one on exhibit. The one that originally received the award got that at the Appalachian Corridor's exhibition in 1968, which Ellie Schaul, who is an artist in Charleston today, was one of the co-coordinators of that exhibit. The Appalachian Corridor Exhibit was an idea to invite artists from all of the states that the Appalachians are in to submit work and they were juried by a, the first one was someone from the Met and the, 2 judges from New York City came down.

EH: Okay.

01:28

01:28

SF: And one of the rugs was selected as a purchase award. So that's in the collection. It was interesting to learn about that piece. I have read several articles. Their work was brought out of Glenville because of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 that President Johnson signed, which encouraged within the different states economic opportunity commissions to be built and people then were sent into the hills to find viable art work and craft that could be marketed. So that's how they were found originally and what's interesting is that I'm really trying to remember the person's name...Florette Angel was one of those representatives and she was also involved in the Mountain...the Mountain Artists Quilters--the book's over there that's why I got the R--the title of it. She was involved in that, and in that quilt book, in the very corner is one of, is the rug that she purchased and it was in her house. I met her husband, Florette has passed away, I met her husband and Phil had sold that rug before I was able to see it.

EH: Wow.

SF: But over the years I received, I wrote an application for the fellowship through the Tamarack Foundation and was honored to receive that fellowship to continue my research on the McDonald Sisters. So that funding has helped me travel throughout the state. When someone says they have a rug, I was able to see Mrs. Page's rug and that according to reputation was their largest that they had ever made. But it is a fascinating piece. It has two peacocks on it.

EH: Okay.

SF: So most of their pieces are totally amazingly intricate, layer on layer on layer florals and then the piece that the Pages own has two birds on it. And what's really interesting is that we have a photograph of the two ladies beginning that rug.

EH: Oh, cool!

SF: So in the archives in Glenville State College, we have that and then I was able to see some of the material that they used in the background to keep building that rug up.

EH: That's rare to have a process photo.

SF: And then to be able to see it and turn it over and look at the back of it, and say "Oh my gosh, there's the flannel design fabric that has planes on it from the late 1960s. Boy's pajama fabric is basically what it is that backs that rug."

EH: Amazing.

SF: That's really cool.

EH: And you think they worked collaboratively?

SF: Yes, yes. But, so I have to talk to some people who actually met them. You know, they passed away in '75 and '76 in their 80s and the older one is Otha and she was the older sister, we'll put it that way (laughs), it seemed. But supposedly, each of them had a particular skill involved in the making of these.

EH: Okay.

SF: For whatever reason, I gravitate to Blanche, so she's the younger one by 2 years and I think she did more of it, more consistently. I'm not sure which skill each of them acquired but supposedly they learned

these skills from their mother with Scottish heritage. And they worked in Letter Gap. I know where their house is. It was passed down into the family on the mother's side and their nephew lived about 3 miles from them. They would take a little red wagon and pull it--they never drove--and walked the 3 miles out the lane and up the road to Letter Gap to their nephew's monthly. He would take care of their bills and help them with that and they'd pick up their mail and then off they went back home!

EH: Wow. How old were they when they died?

SF: They were in their early 80s.

EH: Okay. And Letter Gap--where is that?

06:11

SF: It's just outside of Glenville, maybe 10-ish miles.

EH: Okay. Wow.

SF: In the same county. I first misunderstood where the house was, so I thought it was 3 miles up the road itself off the main road. And I was in a Toyota Sienna alone about 4 o'clock at night, and I traveled this road and it kept getting narrower and more narrow and going up the hill and I got to a point where the gas line was up there and it was really beautiful view, but there definitely was not a road that this vehicle was going to go on and I had to turn around somehow, 'cause no one knew I was up there.

EH: I've been in those moments!

SF: Yeah! Then I found out later when someone took me to it that it was a total of 3 miles from the nephew's house in Letter Gap, not 3 miles up the lane.

EH: Got it. I see. Why don't you talk about your work in a broader West Virginia art community and role with Tamarack and that sort of thing?

SF: I'm on the Tamarack Foundation board. Very happy to be involved in that. One of the skills that I wrote in the fellowship originally, and the purpose for writing the fellowship was so that the Foundation board knew who I was and some of my background. My skills are in networking and I really enjoy finding out what people are doing, who they are and thinking, well you ought to know so-and-so, and making those connections. That's part of the skills that was mentioned when I was asked to be part of the board. So I represent what's going on here in the Eastern part of the state. It's 5 hours to get to Charleston and we're in the same state. And then there's still 2 at least more hours below Charleston, so it's an amazing state. I find that it's very gratifying to be in West Virginia which the state does...

EH: [cat interrupts] Hey!

SF: No!

EH: (laughs)

SF: The state recognized and acknowledges the arts and crafts. It's a value that I literally was on a plane traveling to San Francisco to teach and my plane person sitting next to me asked where I was from and I said West Virginia and he said, "Oh my gosh there are so many craftspeople there!" It's a reputation that

we need to just keep talking about. And I think that's what's really important and something that I can be doing by representing the traditions and the crafts and the people of West Virginia.

EH: So now you travel, you said you've traveled all over, do you still go to shows, go to conferences?

SF: I do go to conferences and I don't vend now, meaning I don't have to do dyeing of 300 yards of wool and create my patterns and such. I miss not being behind a booth with thousands of people going by and being able to talk to them and finding out what they're doing and their projects, but I do go to them to the shows. I think one of the best shows about contemporary and traditional rug hooking is at Sauder Village in Archibald, Ohio and it's in August and that event I always attend. I'm often teaching there or lecturing and/or exhibiting something on it. It's a really important venue. This year I'm going to represent an exhibit called Reimagined and it's sponsored by 2 people in Australia. They've coordinated the southern hemisphere of fiber artists and it's a completely online exhibit so the people did not have to send it to them in exhibit, and we're going to premiere it in Sauder Village with an online exhibition. Supposedly they're working on some software that you'll be able to feel like you're walking through a gallery to look at all these different pieces.

EH: Wow.

SF: So there's North American people, they're judges, and I'm coordinating that jury, and I'm going to do the lecture and talk about it and one of the coordinators is coming from Australia to the show this year.

EH: Nice!

SF: So it's really fun. That's the premiere, I would say, show for people if you're just learning about it, there are 20 different vendors, so you're able to work with the people who manufacture the wool or meet up with, as I said, an Australian whose only just come one time in her life that she'll be able to come through and talk to the Canadians that come down and people from all over the United States.

EH: Nice. And when you teach, what have you taught in the past and what do you generally teach?

SF: I have taught designing using the Fraktur motifs and I developed actually a travel, a box after doing my workshops for so many years so I put my 100 different motifs in a box and then some guidance and let people work that way. But that's also either a day and they can create a pattern, or up to a 4-day workshop. I'm going to teach at Augusta Heritage this summer, I'm very excited about that--finally teaching in the...

EH: Is this new?

SF: It is for me, yeah, be teaching rug hooking and embroidery and quilting. We expanded it as broad as possible, but that's certainly my background on it.

EH: Nice, cool.

12:22

SF: Yeah, so it'll be interesting to see what people come up with. I encourage that they might want to create a footstool like the McDonald sisters or start one of their rugs. Had somebody from, she's living in Abu Dhabi now but she is Canadian. She said, she regretted that the timing wasn't right this year, but if I taught there next year she would be coming to Augusta.

EH: Wow! Very cool.

SF: So that will be a really good one. And she's a good friend of mine. I'm also teaching just outside of Yosemite this year at a retreat and I don't know what the people will have. So there will be 16 people in that workshop with a variety of different projects. The skills that I bring are helping people in design and principles of art. Even if it's a primitive rug, it might only have a house and a tree, it's understanding where to put that house, how big the tree's going to be, how are we, what's your attention that you want us to be looking at, how can we color it, how can we make it more prominent? Is it about the house, is it about the tree, is it about the entire environment? Those different opportunities using the principles of design.

EH: Nice. Could you talk about your community here in this local area?

SF: Mmhm. Hampshire County is a agricultural county. If people are not working in farming they quite often commute to Winchester or Moorefield to either the factories that are there working in some of the industries that are available that way. They also are working here in the education systems and in the hospitals. So what I really appreciate about it is it's quite a bit of a rural area. You were able to travel 10 miles off of Route 50 to get down here and it's a really comfortable community because you can be in your own space and then get out to meet the people. There's an arts council in Hampshire County based out of Romney. The River House in Capon Bridge is an interesting new space allowing arts, music, and community to come together. And I think, it's interesting to be able to see the different generations merging together and sharing what skills that they have.

EH: And who are your friends--are they other artists? (laughs)

SF: Jim and I chose this area and this type of a lifestyle so that we could come back to the land and the space and rejuvenate ourselves. The internet which is not super fast, but...

EH: (laughs) Right.

SF: (laughs) It does connect us to the world, so those Australian friends of mine, my Canadian friends, my New England friends for sure, I'm able to connect and share different ideas with them and then come back here and really settle in and get re-energized. I think one of the experiences that we had when we were traveling back and forth from New Jersey to here, after that 5-hour drive on the interstate and coming out into the back roads, just putting my foot on this land reenergized me. And it does. I mean I love to travel, totally enjoy it, but I need to come back here and when I do, I'm fine!

EH: Yeah, right. And so you have this experience as an artist, a board member of Tamarack and you can kind of see the whole artist landscape here. What do you think are the elements that need to happen to help crafters and artists in West Virginia? I mean, I'm specifically interested in traditional art but having been talking with Tamarack about ways we can leverage and support. So what's your thoughts on it?

17:01

SF: I think that the story that the art is made by individuals is a message that needs to get. That story meaning the individuals are surviving and happy to do that. We don't need a Madison Avenue income, so it's not a dollar figure, what the poverty level or such. As I said, I come back here. It's wonderful. It's a sense of mental health. But I also mentioned that the internet is extremely important to me. It's my business line. It's my community line and it's also an inspiration and education line and that's what this

state needs to do, and that's what the country needs to do. We need to look at our infrastructure and our education system is lacking because we don't have equal opportunities because of internet.

EH: Yeah, rural internet is a huge issue.

SF: Yeah! It's a very unique landscape, so Walt Disney said to his engineers, figure it out, this is my idea. So here's the idea. Connect us somehow, somehow and don't cut down some more trees just to do it. There's got to be another way to put the education equal. And I think that's really important. More exhibition space within the state and opportunities working with public space and companies is one thing that I do remember in New Jersey, a lot of the corporations had incorporated their open lobby spaces and created them as gallery spaces, so either they exhibited their own private collections, which they did, and the companies don't do that anymore, but they also had that space for public displays. And I think if we can look at opportunities for more shows and telling our stories.

EH: Yeah, and also what you said about you know, we are individual artists. I think that sometimes gets lost with traditional art because people thing, oh it's a community tradition, and it's true that's one of the elements of traditional art--that it comes out of a community, but these are actually individual artists with individual needs and creativity and that gets lost on a lot of different levels, I think, and you know, people quarreling about prices and that sort of thing, but not fully understanding the time and work that goes into it.

SF: Mmhm. Yeah, there's a value, a monetary value because of need, and then there's the value of appreciation of the work. And as you said, there is the community. We call them hook-ins, so a lot of people coming together and working. And it is a social need that we have. It's gratifying. It's also really, for me when I sit down and listen to different artists and we talk, we can come up with amazing ideas and implement them really, really quickly. I think that's the best part about working within West Virginia, you are able to achieve much more than too many layers of bureaucracy in other states.

EH: Right, right. That's true.

SF: And there's also not a politicking hierarchy within the arts here. I don't feel it in West Virginia. I did feel the academics of it in New Jersey more so. It's an observation, not a negative necessarily. But you can talk person-to-person.

21:06

EH: And it's easy to know the people you need to know.

SF: Mmhm.

EH: Would you like to talk about a piece you feel particularly proud of? Or a work?

SF: How about this piece that I'm working on? Developing?

EH: Sure! Yeah.

SF: Because it's kind of talks about...So at Sauder Village there's going to be an exhibit about work that people acquired--an image from Google Earth.

EH: Okay.

SF: In my work, I try very hard to discuss environmental issues and social issues but I find it difficult to scream out a particular point of view that I have. So I like my work to be addressed by people superficially as oh, that's nice and that's pretty. And if they look deeper, than they can learn more about the issue. And I decided that Mountaintop Removal is an issue that is important to me and selected one of the mountains that's being destroyed and created what will be a necklace. So I have hooked the brooch, it's gonna hang like this.

EH: Oh wow.

SF: And I'm working these three areas are going to be done in metal, which Christine Keller is going to help me. I'm going to learn more about metal work.

EH: (laughs)

SF: (laughs) And I'm also going to connect a full necklace. So the brooch will be able to, the necklace will actually be able to be taken off and worn, it should hang about here, and yet I've installed it on the mountains with the quilting and the Trapunto work and some bead work and some interesting yarns that give an idea of that water flowing out of that coal area.

EH: Oh yeah. And where is this?

SF: This is in Pax, so actually this is, I'm not sure that this is it, but Route 64 goes pretty close to this, so it's Beckley area.

EH: Yeah, okay. Very cool.

SF: So I'm happy with that one. And it will have a second piece. I went to school in Boston and Frederick Law Olmstead created the multitude of parks, so the Boston Commons, and then Commonwealth Avenue stretches and connects to the arboretum. And it was referred to as the Emerald Necklace.

EH: Ah, I didn't know that!

SF: So it's a reverse palate in that case all the buildings are going to be grey around it and only the park systems will be green. And it'll be in the same proportion.

EH: Very cool!

SF: But I'm just having a problem creating it as a necklace actually. It looks more like a bracelet, so I'm not sure that it's going to be a piece of jewelry after all. But I will have the two pieces similar in size and going from, changing the palate up from the grey on the mountaintop and the greens around it to my city life and the greens of the parks. That was my saving grace being from rural New Jersey to live in Boston for as long as I did, it was the parks.

EH: The green space, yeah.

SF: Mmhm.

EH: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

24:58

SF: I'm really excited about being on the journey at this point in my life. I'm 63. and it's scary to be a studio artist only. I used to have a business and represent other artists and also myself that way. I certainly was very successful working out on the road with the vending of the Ruckman Mill Farm products. And now I have to find venues to at least exhibit my artwork and sell it. And as I said, it's the internet. But as I said, it's the creativity that's so important to me and it's gratifying to have a partner that also is an artist and we're both quirky enough to whatever's. We often say, well you got 29 acres! Wherever you're gonna put it, go ahead and find a place. And I appreciate having that freedom, that space.

EH: And are you both working, or did you both work full-time as artists?

SF: We owned our gallery for 20 years together.

EH: Okay, but then when you came here.

SF: We were able to transition that. I went on the road for 10 years selling Ruckman Mill Farm products and Jim has been able to maintain the property here.

EH: That's great. Well, I'm sure we could talk for much longer but I think that's pretty good for now!

SF: (laughs) Come back anytime!

EH: Great. Yeah, I would love to! Thank you so much.

SF: Yeah. I think a lot of people always say, they wander around and it's interesting to see what you will remember about the house or about the place.

EH: Right, yeah, for sure.

SF: Everyone remembers something totally different.

EH: Cool. Thank you!

SF: You're welcome.

EH: Stop this and...

26:57

END OF TAPE
END OF INTERVIEW