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CONVERSATIONS WITH CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS: SIGRID OLSEN LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

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Video Description

An intimate discussion with Sigrid Olsen. An artist at heart, Sigrid discovered her passion for textiles in 1974 after graduating from Montserrat College of Art. Fueled by the craft markets of the 1970's and her small shared retail shop in Rockport, Massachusetts, Sigrid's funky, artistic designs grew in popularity. But the big break came in 1985 when she partnered with an apparel salesman and a venture capitalist to form a new company, based on her distinctive hand-print

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style--"Segrets Sun Prints" (which later became simply, Sigrid Olsen). She still paints, designs greeting cards and also has a line of print-to order fabrics and pillows available.

Subject list

Montserrat College of Art

My Life, Redesigned

Inspiration retreats

Sigrid: Style, Living, and Inspired Life

Transcript

Linda Marshall 00:10

Welcome to the Cape Ann Museum. My name is Linda Marshal. I'm the Director of Programs. Thank you so much for coming out on such a beautiful summer's afternoon. You're probably wondering about these colorful pieces of paper that are on everybody's seat. SeARTS, a local organization that many of you are familiar with, recently received a grant and they're taking a look at cultural tourism on Cape Anne. So part of that project is to have visitors to various events and cultural organizations fill out some evaluations. So I do hope at the end of today's program, that you'll take a moment to fill those out. I did put a table out in the atrium with some pencils and extra forms, if that's a little bit easier for you. There's also information on membership. If you're not a member, I really do encourage you to take a look at the materials that we have available and please ask staff members who should be wearing a name tag like mine, any questions that you might have about becoming a member. Today's program series is called Conversations with Contemporary Artists and this is actually our second year of offering this newer program. We're thrilled to have Sigrid Olsen with us today. Sigrid is a nationally recognized fashion designer. She's traversed the roles of corporate creative director, artist and entrepreneur. As many of you already know, she maintains a studio on Rocky Neck. And she's brought in a number of things from her studio that you can take a look at the end of the talk. Her more recent projects, which she'll be telling you a lot more about, have included the areas of food and cooking as well as wellness retreats, and she's also working on a new book project with just a fabulous title, which is Sigrid Style: Living an Inspired Life. So I just want to say thank you to Sigrid very much for being here today. And won't you please join me in welcoming Sigrid Olsen.

Sigrid Olsen 02:22

Hi, everybody. I see a lot of familiar faces here. Hi, I have lived on Cape Ann now longer than I've lived anywhere else in my life. I grew up in Connecticut and moved here to go to Montserrat, but we'll get into that later. I just wanted to say I'm really honored to have been invited to speak here and especially in this room, the Folly Cove Designer room. It's funny, because when I moved to Cape Ann, the second place I ever lived after I lived behind the Last Step Variety, not far from where I live now, in East Gloucester, I lived in Folly Cove and I got

married the first time in the backyard there. And I just feel like what they've done, what they did at Folly Cove Designers was breaking new ground. And the kind of work that I do is never really done before. Nobody started a business with potato prints as far as I know. So I feel honored to be here. Thank you. And what I'm going to do is speak for a while and leave time at the end for question and answers and if people think they want to do that. Okay, good. So you'll have to bear with me, hopefully everything will work out perfectly.

Sigrid Olsen 03:31

The page turn. So this page is about the things that I'm going to cover. And the very first thing as being an artist and growing up as an artist, is having support from your family. And I grew up in Woodbury, Connecticut; was born in 1953. My parents had friends like Alexander Calder and William Styron. And I felt like it never was a question that you could be an artist and make a living at it and aspire to that. So I'm grateful to my parents for that. And then I went back through some of my paperwork when in my mom's house, and I found something that I had filled out in the eighth grade when I graduated from eighth grade. And it asked, you know, your pet peeve and all that stuff, but what do you want to be when you grow up and I remember distinctly thinking, textile designer, and in eighth grade, I have no idea how I even knew what a textile designer did, but I knew that I liked decorative art. And for some reason, I knew I liked fabric. So I did end up putting that together. I ended up going to Montserrat. I was one of the first graduating classes in 1974. Remember Natalie from there, and I think there were seven of us in the graduating class. And at that time, it didn't even offer a degree, so I don't have a degree. I have a diploma and an honorary doctorate that they gave me when I was the commencement speaker at Montserrat a few years ago. And I'm on the board of trustees, so very close to the organization, to the institution. And I think they're doing a great job over there. And I'm really honored to have been part of that. When I graduated from Montserrat, I decided that I would become a textile designer, but I started first with weaving. So I bought myself a loom. And I dyed my yarn with like onion skins and beets and whatever, you know, stuff like that. I actually spun my own yarn, but at that time, I was grinding my own flour and hauling my own water. So that wasn't that far off base. And that was in Rockport in the early 80s, I guess it was 70s, really, because my son was born in that house with no running water in 1979. So I really started to ramp up the business. I remember, I had a studio over in Lanesville, actually in Folly Cove, but I lived in Rockport and Pigeon Cove. And I used to walk every day through the woods to get to my studio and walk back. Things are a little bit different now. But, you know, those were really, really special times that in your 20s, you ought to be able to do stuff like that. Anyway, where was I? Oh, weaving, yes, that I quickly realized I was way too impatient to be a weaver. Because it's quite tedious. But, I you know, I love the color and the yarn. And, and I think that in later years, when I was designing sweaters, that background really helped me and mixing yarns together and playing with the textures. And shortly after that I developed, I was probably making Christmas cards or something with potato prints and then I thought, hmm, if I use textile inks, with the potatoes on fabric, I think I can print on fabric. So that was my big aha moment. When I did that, I could feel it like kind of outside it. So then I started my own cottage industry where I was printing the fabric all on my own. You have the tote bag right here and that's an example of one of the early pieces. Can I borrow that? I'm not

going to steal it. But you know, this is printed with potato prints, I'm pretty sure. I set up in my barn and you know, had a long table and literally cutting the potatoes and then after a half hour, they would get kind of squishy and have to cut out another one. Now you saw my new generation, which is these rubber blocks that are made just for carving stamps out of and that's what I use. I've got hundreds of them in my studio. So I soon found out that I could make stuff that people wanted to buy and that was a plus. I mean, I liked making it anyway. But it was really nice that it had such a great response from customers. And I see Kate, are you, Oh, there you are. So much encouragement from Kate Seidman, who she and I were in a gallery together. And I just remember being really resistant to like commercialization. And look at me now. But I quickly kind of got on board and I joined the center and main gallery. And then after that I had the 10 Hands. It was a cooperative crafts shop in Dock Square in Rockport with four other women. So there are five of us, 10 hands and that was great. So I started selling things there. And I really enjoyed it. And I had women who had little kids at home like I did that were sewing for me. So I'd bundle everything up. They'd take it home, sew it, bring it back. We got a little system going. And then one day, I had a visit from a man who lived in Rockport, who had just come back from Hawaii, who was in the apparel business. And he said, you know, I think that this could make some great clothes. And I was like, yeah, I'm not gonna quit my day job because it was just so far-fetched. And with his encouragement, we found somebody to print the fabric and somebody to make the garments. And we've put together our first sample line. And that was in 1984, where we establish Segret Sun Prints, and the bird, the egret was our logo. And then we'll go through the fashion years 1984 to 2009. And that's like 25 years, right? Actually 2009 is wrong. It was 2008 actually through the year of 2007. So it was almost 24 years that I was in the fashion business and a lot happened during those years. I'm not going to talk on this one slide. I'll kind of be talking as we go through. And then you see back to the studio in 2005. So I started painting again in 2005 and have the studio in Rocky Neck and we'll get to that, to what I'm doing there. So this is the handprints these are the rubber stamps that I've collected. Just shows little icons that you can carve out of rubber. And I've used in a number of things, including a pair of textile design. And here's some of the early textile designs, you might recognize them from 1984, 1985. It's what I started with. And then we had an anniversary collection 25 years, 20 years later, I guess, just some more textile designs. And then the idea that art becomes fashion. So this silk blouse that the model is wearing was a painting. And it was then scanned. And by that time, we had very sophisticated computer equipment at work. And they scanned it, and they made it into screens. And then they sent it over to Asia where the fabric was printed and the garment was made, and made it into what we called our signature print blouse. And that became huge. So what I really got was, yeah, you know, in the beginning, I started with my hand prints, and then over the next like 10 to 15 years, it just got to be a little bit more generic, I'm not gonna be negative about it, because it was great. And I have so much positive feedback from customers that love the clothes because of the color and the texture, style and the quality. But there were many more things in the line than I could possibly paint or design myself. So we had a huge team of designers. And we made all kinds of clothes, everything I say from jeans to sequins. And it was huge and kind of a little bit out of control. But what we found was these things that were the closest to my artwork really seemed to still resonate with people and sell very well. And here's a sweater that has my painting on it.

And then a huge wallpaper of my painting, which I thought was fabulous in the showroom in New York. And then here's me, shorty, with all these models. When they took the real picture, they put me up on a milk crate, so I'd be the same height as them. But it's just to show you the different signature print designs that we did for the silk blouses and bandanas. And then these are the some of the more recent pieces that we did in the last like three or four years. This was a photoshoot that we did in Capri. And I just want to say hi to my mom who was born in Naples; she passed away a few years ago and just before we went to this photo shoot. Capri was one of her favorite places. I did the photo shoot because I knew I was going to go there to bring her ashes and dump in the Mediterranean. So that's what we did. And it will, you know, always have a very special place in my heart. So thank you Lucia. This is in Capri too. And then this is in Harbor Island. This woman India Hicks has this gorgeous home in in Harbor Island. And I felt very strongly for this photo shoot that I wanted to photograph from a real woman. I mean, she is a model, but she was at least in her own home. And I realized that that was just the seed of what I'm feeling now, and wanting to find more and more authenticity in what I was doing. So instead of just getting models that I've just met that day and have no relationship to anything, I tried to tell a story about this woman who lived in this gorgeous place in Harbor Island with her kids. And we used this for our spring campaign. And then we opened retail stores. So let me track a little bit here because it didn't go from potato prints to retail stores that easily over the first 10 years. I told you we started developing all kinds of other things. We did open a store in Rockport. We had one on Newbury Street. We had a couple down south and then closed them and then because it was too hard to run the wholesale and the retail business at the same time. So then as the business grew and kept growing and growing, and of course its demands grow. So you sell to more department stores and more stores. Because most of the stores we sold to in the beginning were tiny little stores like Willoughby's in Rockport. And then all of a sudden, we were in Nordstrom and then we were in Macy's and then we were Dayton Hudson and Saks and it grew and grew and grew. And then in 1999, we were recognized by Liz Claiborne, the Corporation Liz Claiborne. And they purchased the company. And I was really still a minor shareholder. The other two partners, I forgot to mention the man that gave us all our money. Yeah, thank you, David. But that was a fluky conversation that my partner just met him in a restaurant and said he had this line of clothing. Would you like to invest in? And he said, Sure, and the rest is history. So David and Peter were the major stockholders and I was, I literally rode my bicycle to the to my first business meeting, and I thought, well, I can just get paid to do what I love to do. That's how I am. That's good enough for me. Not too wise, but that's what you do when you're in your 20s. Actually, I was 31 when I started this company. So anyway, 1999 comes along. Liz Claiborne wants to buy the company. I don't have a lot of say in the matter. I just go along with it and I really actually learned a lot. I was thrust into this fast-paced world of big business and public company, where you know, everything is growth and profit, growth and profit. I'm like, wait a minute, wait a minute. What about creativity? What about imagination, innovation? So in the beginning, they really tried to keep the culture of our company very creative, but it's almost impossible to do. We were the first of I don't know, 20 acquisitions. And they when, when 2007 rolled around, they had 49 different brands and they couldn't manage that. So they decided they had to cut back to something that was more manageable. And they just took that moment in time. Where in 2005, we were one of the top

performing divisions of the whole Corporation; 2007, they've made a number of management changes that resulted in poor sales for us, but we're on our way to getting it back up. But they just said, Okay, today, if you're not profitable, you're out. So that's what happened, they ended up closing the line. But before that, they opened all these retail stores. And this just shows you how many people it takes to run one store when you do it that way. And if anybody's been to Isla, there's usually one person working there, or at my gallery, there's one person working there. And if it was a little bit bigger, maybe you'd need two people, but it's just the massive amounts of people and expense involved in opening. We had 54 stores across America, plus, all the department stores that we sold to. It just was major expansion. And here I am, I was just fresh from vacation. So I look really happy and rested there. And we'd be one of the wonderful experiences that I had as an artist was to be able to work with a really great architect to design the stores. And the first stores were very cookie cutter. Like if you've ever been to the Chestnut Hill store or the Newbury Street store, they didn't really have a lot of personality. So eventually, they said, what can we do about this Sigrid? So I said, well, let's try to make it a little bit more like a home. So we created this little nook in the corner and we copied all of the vacation photographs that I had on my turquoise wall at home and we put it on turquoise wall and we just tried to make it a little bit homier, and definitely tried to convey the idea that there's an artist behind the brand. I mean, people didn't even know there was a person behind the brand, much less an artist. So we had about five or six stores that were designed this way. And it was a great experience for me to be able to do that with somebody who knew what he was doing. He was the same architectural firm that did the anthropology stores. So after 24 years of mega growth, expansion to major department stores plus 54 companies stores and multiple licenses. We had eyewear we had bed, bed and bath. We had jewelry, handbags. All of that was discontinued except for one that I wear. You can still buy Sigrid Olsen glasses, I guess has to do with vision, right? And here I am Here I am doing a fashion show at Macy's I think was one of my last fashion shows at Macy's in in Florida. Then it's happening. You want to stay there. Come on, come on.

Sigrid Olsen 19:03

There we go. Explosion This is the new me I guess. It was almost like a blessing in disguise actually to have all that. And I had two years of non-compete agreement, which meant that I couldn't really do any I couldn't sign I couldn't go to work for somebody else or start a new company. I could do my art. That was what I was left and they still own the trademark for Sigrid Olsen for clothing and apparel, I mean apparel and accessories, home furnishings, all of that stuff. The only thing I can really do on my own is art, books, movies, TV, radio media like that. So I decided well, I'm just going to throw myself into my artwork and into my gallery and that was great. It was great. And these are the things that you can find there. I gave you a little sample outside on the table and I started painting in 2005, but we didn't really do it full time until a couple of years ago. And we just sold our other house. So we live here, people walk into the gallery, if anybody's been there, they go into the gallery, they can see the things like you see out on the table there, then they peek around the corner. And there's still a wall in the other room that is for sale with paintings for sale. But there's also our big huge wooden dining room table where we eat dinner after I clear my art supplies off of it. And then the kitchen, I

might be making soup or something on the stove, and then the office with a big computer, and then the living room, you know, so it's like, that's it. So when people come in, and I just tell them, it's like, pretend you're in a reality show or something. Because it's all there. And it was funny downsizing, because Rocky Neck was our summer home. And we would go back to Hamilton in the winter, but then we would travel a lot in the winter. And then suddenly, it felt like just too much stuff. And it felt great to get rid of the big house and just live in this little house. And then winter, we still we were in Mexico a lot last winter. So it just felt like downsizing felt right. And then all of a sudden, the economy just kind of fell apart. And everybody is thinking about do they need all this stuff and is downsizing what I need to do. So it's very timely. Okay, what is the story? There we go. So these are some of the things I have in the gallery she claimed prints are our archival prints of my paintings. And then here's another she claim print. And you can see how they've taken the print, put it on fabric and made it into lampshades. Here's another one. And then the alphabet prints. The first one was my cook's alphabet. And I did that when we did a fashion show in our Newbury Street store in conjunction with Gourmet Magazine. And this was, I don't know if it was a door prize. I can't remember if we made little prints and gave them away. But it was the first one I ever did. I really liked it. So then I did the yoga alphabet. And our most popular one right now is Cape Ann alphabet. And these are just some of my paintings. And you can see the technique here. Where I take I have these special watercolor dyes that are waterproof and fade proof. And I do these transparent washes of watercolor. And then I overprint them with the same stamps that I used for my textile design. And this one doesn't have any stamps. This is just watercolor. Too fast.

Sigrid Olsen 23:15

This one was for a woman who lives in Florida and we got to talking about the Everglades and how beautiful Alligator Alley I guess it is going from one side of Florida to the other I was had taken pictures. So she wanted something of this is actually a funny story. She wanted something that showed that but she also said, I have a red wall that I want to put it on and anybody that knows me, I don't really do red very well. So I said, Alright, I get I think I can do that. I'll try. So I put these red flowers in the painting. I ended up loving this painting. It's one of my favorites. This is more recent, where I'm doing things that are just a little bit when we opened Isla which we'll get to our other little store on Rocky Neck, I decided I'd put a different kind of art in there that's more Cape Ann inspired. So that's what this is. This is the creek, at Good Harbor Beach. And then I decided to do postcards. I thought, Well, okay, I'm gonna have a little shop out on the neck, I might as well do something for tourists. But I would be something different. They'd be able to get art and you know, a souvenir at the same time. So these are the lighthouses of Cape Ann. And then I do note cards. You saw those out on the table. And it's funny because you can literally buy a little painting because they're all original five by sevens for \$8. And I do it because I wrote this somewhere, I think, on Facebook or my blog or something that it's like, it's like a musician you have to practice and if I don't just get out there and practice I feel like I lose touch with my hand eye coordination, my color so I enjoy doing this and then I sell them in the gallery. But in the meantime, I photographed every single one of them or scanned at sorry, every single one of them. So a huge archive on my computer. So if I ever get into designing, or having a line of note cards, I have a huge inventory of them on my

computer. And I just keep doing new ones all the time. And on same with the hand painted journals, oh, I don't have the picture of me and Martha Stewart. But I was invited to be on the Martha Stewart show. And we painted journals together. And this is an example of what they look like. That was interesting. And then ceramics, which is a new thing for me, I started last year, it all started with the empty bowl. And Marty Morgan asked me to paint some bowls for the empty bowl. And I just really got into it. And then she told me where she got the bisque wear. And I went online and I ordered some more bowls. And then I ordered some platters that I ordered some mugs, and then I ordered some more stuff. And then I just started finding that I love doing it. And it was a whole new technique for me where it's quite similar in that it's a, it's almost a multimedia process where I paint, I paint the bowls, a solid color, I paint the motif shape on top of it. And then I carve into it with this graffito tool. And that is a signature look now and that's what I do on all my pottery. And then this year, I got a little bored. So I decided I needed a new project. And my husband and I had opened a store in Beverly Farms several years ago called Isla. And then another one in Wellesley. And it just was in that when my career was at its height, it was just crazy trying to manage everything. So we decided that we would close that. And we sold the business to Glee. And then I just kept working doing what I was doing. And suddenly we felt like we really missed that. And but we wanted to do it differently. And also, yeah, FYI, I can't use Sigrid Olsen. So I'm starting to develop a new brand and Isla will be my new, my new label if I do clothing again. So this whole concept of Island inspired beach wear that whole casual side of, of the clothing that I designed, feels like the right direction for me to go. And so Isla Beach House was the first step in that direction, there was a little house out on the wharf near the Mad Fish Grill that last summer was completely empty. Nobody rented it. So we felt bad for it. And we thought, well, that would be a great spot. And it is a great spot because it's quite different being where I am and 34 Rocky Neck and where Isla is at 77 Rocky Neck, it's a very different feeling. And it was so we went out and we went to some of the gifts show and that in the apparel shows, and bought some things to sell because I can't design my own clothes. So it was a combination of my artwork and clothes that I picked out. So it was really kind of fun to not have to design them. But to be able to choose a collection of clothing that suited my lifestyle and it looked like it went together. And that's what he's led to. So if you haven't been there, it's really cute. It's basically a little fish shack that's about to fall down into the water. And if you know I was in there trying to set it up and I kept almost falling over because the floor is tilted like this, and nothing is square. So all the paintings I had to do by eye because if I used a level, they were totally crooked. And this is a little taste of the apparel in the center is my daughter Brita if anybody remembers her from years ago, and on the beach in Mexico with Frieda and Brita. And the others are just friends that were kind enough to model for me. And I did all the photography, it's sort of funny going from a staff of like hundreds to me and a couple of other people. And then I in the midst of not knowing what to do with my life, I decided that I would do yoga, which is a very good choice when you don't know what to do. In fact, I read I think it was in the New York Times that ashrams are getting just full right now because people are losing their jobs. It's a really cheap place to live. You help like do the dishes or do the cooking and you can meditate and, and kind of regroup when I think it's a it's really kind of a great phenomenon. And that is kind of what I did. I did a lot of yoga. I went to Mexico to this part of Mexico in Telum where they have just one little hotel after another on the beach

and they all offer yoga. And my husband said you know you could do a retreat and I was like Why don't teach yoga but my sister Martha down at the bottom there is a Kripalu trained yoga instructor. So We had to do something together for the first time, which was really fun. And in Mexico we had, I brought my art supplies, and she brought her yoga supplies which are in her head. And you can see her on the top right leading a guided meditation. So we did yoga on the beach in the morning. And then we went for a walk. And then Martha would lead us on this guided meditation. And then I'd have all the art supplies at the table for people to sit down. So they do the guided meditation, then sit at the table and play with the art supplies, I gave them direction. But it was amazing. It was five days of just pure bliss, and fun and laughing and nonstop talking. I was like, ready to fall asleep. In the middle of the day. Sometimes it was exhausting. But it was fun. That's what happens when women get together. So we're having another one in in Italy in October in Tuscany. That was fun.

Sigrid Olsen 30:59

So this color inspiration, these next slides. I think I tell most of my story. So if I haven't, you'll be sure to ask me questions. These last slides are the slideshow that I put together for the inspiration retreat, where it was my introduction to color and my inspiration. And so it's a combination of my work, and my photographs in a little color. Color montage. And that's it. So we're just gonna walk through that now. I think it just gives you an idea of how what I'm trying to do is integrate everything that wellness, the Oh, she mentioned the book and I don't have a picture of it. But this is sort of an essence what the book is, is going to be it's a combination of interior design, fashion, travel photography, cookbook recipes yes, I have a cookbook out there to inspire people. It's my little grandson. He's not so little anymore. He's a little bit bigger than that. Thank you.

Sigrid Olsen 33:04

Did I leave anything out? Anybody have any questions? Don't be shy. Yes.

Audience Member 33:10

Do you bisque over your scratching's?

Sigrid Olsen 33:14

Actually, I get the bisque, which is just that the white stuff that white shaped pottery. I paint it with the underglaze. And then I bring it to a fellow in Rockport. No, that's the last thing that I do. And then he doesn't overglaze he does it for me though. And when he just before he fires it, there's a clear glaze that goes over everything. And so I haven't had to learn how to do that. Because I don't really have time. Yes.

Audience Member 33:49

What is your favorite color?

Sigrid Olsen 33:52

They used to call me the queen of green. Or because it's not every shade of green. It's that beautiful. Like, spring sprout color. This is my favorite color. And I love turquoise too. Yeah. Everybody loves turquoise. I think just about. Pardon me, where am I in Tuscany? In a town I can't remember the name of it near Sienna. And I haven't ever been there. I'm doing it through an Italian Toit, a woman who does tours in Italy. So she's handling all the logistics, which is nice. It's in October so that'll be nice. Anything else? Yeah.

Audience Member 34:35

Is Isla the first four letters of island?

Sigrid Olsen 34:40

Oh, no, that's a good question. Actually. Isla is the Spanish word for Island. And my husband and I second time around, got married in Isla Muy Heras which is island of women translates to island of women in Mexico. And while we were on the beach in Isla Muy Heras, we came up with the idea to open the first Isla. So we decided why don't we just name it Isla? And then there's sort of the context of it is the idea to create a retail concept, a space where people walk in and they forget about the world outside. So it's an island unto itself. It's away from the malls, away from the city away from civilization and you just go into like, so that was the idea for that.

Audience Member 35:24

Is there a time period when you can do clothes?

Sigrid Olsen 35:27

I can design clothes starting January 1 2010, under another name unless I come to some other agreement, but right now I don't have that.

Audience Member 35:38

Are they still selling your clothes?

Sigrid Olsen 35:39

No, no. Well, I mean, there are still clothes being sold like it. Filene's basement, TJ Maxx. If you go online, you could probably find things on eBay. But no, they're not making the clothes anymore. Not right now. Anyway.

Audience Member 35:54

Yes. Do you personally carve all of your stamps?

Sigrid Olsen 35:58

Yes, I do. Yeah. It's very relaxing, actually. And the beauty of it is unlike potatoes, they last forever. So I have a big collection. So I don't have to every time I sit down to paint, I don't have to carve. I just use the ones that are already there.

Audience Member 36:18

I'm curious about your home furnishings like pillows and draperies and other things. Will you be doing any more of that kind of thing?

Sigrid Olsen 36:25

Right, because we did have a licensee that did some really beautiful bedding and towels for the bathroom and don't have that anymore. And I would love I really would love to do that. Because after fashion, I really didn't want to do clothes for a while and I just wanted to do interiors. But now I want to do both. But again, that will have to be under another label too. Can you see what else for that? Yes.

Audience Member 36:49

When your line was closed down? Have you seen this coming? Were you surprised? Did you feel ill-treated?

Sigrid Olsen 36:56

Yes, yes. But no, it wasn't it wasn't really a surprise because it you know, when things start tanking, it happens fast. And I just never really, I don't think I ever dreamed that there would be an end to Sigrid Olsen, the clothing line, I thought we'd have some hard times we'd get through it. But then we got to a certain point where things shifted. And I no longer had any control over anything. And basically had to just kind of watch people do dumb things and standby. And one time I was called belligerent. And you know if anybody knows me, they know the last thing I have is I'm not really very belligerent. I usually get along with people. So you can imagine how bad it got. Because I just couldn't, you know, it's like, staring in the face of it's not really injustice, it was just didn't make sense. It was counterintuitive. Everything that they were doing was counterintuitive. And now I think they would probably admit that it was wrong, but at the time, and then there was a shift that when you're in a large corporation, you've got leadership changing all the time. So just get used to somebody and then somebody else will come on. So anyway, no, it wasn't really a surprise at that point, because I knew how bad things had gotten corporate wide. And I knew that something had to change. And by the time they called me and told me they were closing it down, it was a relief. But I felt sad because we had such a family and the people that I worked with, and I knew that they would have a hard time finding another situation that would be as great as that one. And from what I hear, they have had a hard time. Yes.

Audience Member 38:53

Can you talk about your show with Martha Stewart?

Sigrid Olsen 38:56

Sure. It was it was very exciting to be invited to be on her show. And it was amazing. Because anybody that knows me, I'm quite spontaneous, and I just kind of set things up, but I do them and it never takes me very long and I do everything really fast. Well, we had like 17 rehearsals and you know to do to print I'm exaggerating a little bit but beforehand, I was on conference

calls with her not with her but with her production people who are wonderful, sweet, creative, really nice people kind of like apologetic I'm sorry, I have to do this to you, but to get it right. Okay, so then when we open the book and when and what how, where will we place the inks and where you know, then so every little detail was spelled out which I just never do. So that was amazing to me. So they're extremely organized. And when I got to the set that it's an amazing set or TV set with a big kitchen and everything is painted beautifully and everybody's running around, you know, making sure everything's Perfect. But what I what I was really struck with was the people that she had working for all they all went to RISD, or they went, you know, they're really incredibly creative people that found a way to make a living being creative. And they had to, you know, just kind of please mark them, they were okay. And so what I did was I went through the process, I was supposed to be teaching her how to do it, but I was teaching her producer how to do it. And then at the last minute, she came in and said, Hi, oh, and this is the best part. It was aired the day after Thanksgiving. So the Friday after Thanksgiving fabulous time slot. That was great. But we filmed it on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. So I'm sitting in the greenroom, looking at her on TV, and she's welcoming everybody going, how was your Thanksgiving? Mine, I'm still full from last night. And then after dinner, we went for a horseback ride. And I'm like, Oh, just skip over that part or something. I just, it just seems so weird to me. I was like, Okay, this is too weird. And she said about two words to me. And then that was it. But it was a good experience.

Audience Member 41:14

But I just want to congratulate you. And also, thank you for giving this presentation. And just you, you are an inspiration.

Sigrid Olsen 41:25

Thank you.

Audience Member 41:33

You've been so generous with what you've done, and what you've done in the community. And so, I think it's very fitting that you're here today. And I look forward to all your new creations.

Sigrid Olsen 41:46

Thank you. Yeah, it's funny, you mentioned about the community because I was thinking, I feel like I've definitely come full circle, like this community spawned me and I, you know, 25 years ago, and I feel like it's finally me again, I don't know what I'm gonna do. Exactly. I've got a lot of different things that I'm working on. But being here on Cape Ann and especially on Rocky Neck, that is an amazing, amazing place to live. We're just like, it's again, like family practically there. It gives you the security to be is like being in the nest, but having the having the support to go out and, you know, conquer the world again. Yes.

Audience Member 42:24

Now that you have had the big corporate experience how big do you aspire to be?

Sigrid Olsen 42:31

That is a really good question. Yes.

I don't know. I mean, there's only so much that I can it's a really good question I asked myself pretty much every day, I don't want to get in one of those. Watch out what you wish for situations where I have all these dreams and aspirations. And if they all came together at the same time, I'd be stressed out again, I don't really want that. And what I really want is to be constantly challenged, but in a good way creatively. And I'd like to have maybe six people to work with on a regular basis. And I'd like to be able to provide them with a full-time job like Aaron who works in my gallery. And Stephanie, who works at Isla are kind of the main people that I've got some part time people, they used to work for me before, but they can't really live on this. I mean, they're only there in the summertime part time, but I'd love to be able to provide a little bit of a career path for about six to 10 people again, but not 100. And, you know, whatever. So I don't know how to do that. I mean, I have to pursue all these different avenues. And I don't, I don't know. I'll guess I'll know when the time comes when the opportunities arise. But you know, if it all comes together, it might be too much and I don't I don't want to be as big as I was before. Christine.

Audience Member 44:09

Sigrid we are here in the Folly Cove Designers room and I know they were inspired by Cape Ann. What about Cape Ann inspires you?

Sigrid Olsen 44:18

Well, besides just the people? I feel like I just remember when I went to Montserrat. I guess I must have flown up here. I don't know why because lived in Connecticut. But my first introduction to Massachusetts was Route 1. And I thought, Oh, this is really scary. And then I got to Beverly then and at that point, it was on the grounds of the music theater grounds. And that was okay. But they I said where are we going to live because they didn't have dorms or anything at that point. And they said, well go to Gloucester and Rockport and I set foot on Cape Ann and I thought, this is magical. This is amazing. It was I don't remember what time of year it was, it wasn't February, I can tell you that. I might have turned around with the gun like to California College of Arts and crafts and in Oakland, which is the other place I was thinking of going.

Sigrid Olsen 45:12

But the light, the fact that there are a lot of other a lot of working artists, I think is it makes it validated in a way. There's no I've never experienced a community like this. And just the beauty everywhere. I mean, I go to the grocery store from Rocky Neck, I never go on East Main Street, I always go over the hill to Bass Rocks and around that way, and I think this is my route to the grocery store, you know, so I feel really grateful for them. Yes.

Audience Member 45:43

Do you have a structure to your day where you have blocked out very severe limits so you have time to do your art work?

Sigrid Olsen 45:54

No, not really. I mean, I am a morning person. So I get up really early. And usually you know, I'm at my computer or, you know, doing that kind of thing that doesn't require me setting up my studio or anything by like, 6:30, 7 o'clock in the morning, those of you that get 4am emails from me know that I keep very strange hours. So I just have a bunch of things that I do every day and every day is different. I don't know that I would like to be that regimented, or that I am even capable of it. It's not in my nature. But I never rest so I get a lot done in a day.

Audience Member 46:37

Were the Folly Cove designers, themselves an influence?

Sigrid Olsen 46:42

You know, it's a I felt like I just sort of it was in the back of my mind. I knew what they had done but really wasn't until I saw the documentary that I knew the extent of it and I knew Isabelle because she was a neighbor when I was when I lived in Folly Cove and I kind of knew what they did. But I don't know that I really studied Folly Cove designers, except that I thought well cool. Somebody else's done something with handprints because it's quite unusual. I just love printmaking. Okay.

Audience Member 47:14

So I would just like to say that having known you as just Sigrid Olsen from 30 years ago, right. It's just what is most amazing to me is how little you have changed in your kindness and just your ability to be a person.

Sigrid Olsen 47:40

Thank you. That's like the biggest accomplishment I think a person can have. It's much more important to me that I haven't lost that. And that you say that it's really, and thank you. That's what's important. Really? Yeah.

Audience Member 47:56

What do you think the impact has been of your presence on rocky neck?

Sigrid Olsen 48:02

I think it's been good. I mean, certainly, we've gotten a little bit more press out there because of people that have come out to interview me and I'm always talking up Rocky Neck. And I think that, you know, I've gotten involved in the Rocky Neck Art Colony, and everybody says it's nice to have me there. And at first, I didn't want to come in like, you know, a torpedo into this really sweet little community that hadn't changed much in years. But so I just took it easy in the beginning and wanted to make sure that I didn't step on any toes, but everybody's cool. You know, it's great. Patty.

48:39

Audience Member Can you talk a little bit about your cookbook and then about your new book? What is the new book about?

Sigrid Olsen 48:43

Okay, yeah, the cookbook was kind of a funny thing. I was asked to do a recipe for Design Sponge, which is a blog. And in order to do it, I had to write the recipe and provide a photograph. So I made this soup. And I put it in one of my bowls from the studio, from the gallery and, and then did the recipe together. I thought this is really kind of fun. And then I'm always photographing my ceramics for the website. And I thought, if I did recipes on my ceramics, wouldn't that be cool? So that's what I did. But it was an amazing process because I'd be cooking something, have it on the stove and I'd run out to the gallery get a bowl, get it, put it in there, photograph it, like in several stages, because in the cookbook, it's not just the finished piece that's photographed it's like I cut up ginger nuts or whatever and photographed it. So I'm getting my camera getting my ceramics, plugging it into my computer and pulling it up on the computer. Does that look okay? And it looks okay and then I go Do you know that Meanwhile, something's burning and it was really amazing. It took me it was one of the longest things that most things I can do in one sitting but that took me a few months to finish because I had to get the recipes and then test them and everything like that. And they were just things that I cooked, they're not fancy recipes. In the beginning of the cookbook, it says something about that they have to be like 20 minutes or less, and they have to be healthy, and they have to be delicious. So it has to be easy. So that led me to the next step, which was to think about writing a book. And I know nothing about that, I really know nothing about publishing. So I did find an agent, a literary agent that gave me an idea of, of how to put a book proposal together and talked a little bit about what kind of book would I want to write? Would I want to write a scathing expose of the corporate America, I don't think I'm gonna do that. So I decided not to do that. And I decided to just kind of take the feeling of the cookbook and expand beyond it. So there will be recipes and photographs and in there, but it will, hopefully, actually kind of be like what I'm doing right here to tell the story of my life and my career, but in a way that's inspiring. So I would cover everything from the fashion to the art, to interiors, not necessarily that I designed, but places that I've lived and ideas. I mean, they definitely want to how to element in the in the book, that's what the public, the agent is saying that publishers are looking for. So there's got to be a little bit of a teaching element to it. It's but it from more from an inspirational standpoint, so it's got different categories, fashion, interiors, or home design, travel, wellness. So I talked a little bit about the retreats and things like that. I'm not sure how it's all gonna come together. I haven't even really finished the proposal yet. But it would hopefully be beautiful enough to put on your coffee table, but it can't have too many photographs, because that gets too expensive. So it's going to be a balance between telling a story, how to and then the photography and art.

Audience Member 52:08

Yes. related questions. The cookbook is something you self-published?

Sigrid Olsen 52:12

Yeah, I just did it on my Mac. So it's about \$2 of profit for the book.

Audience Member 52:17

Do you have a publisher for the lifestyle book?

Sigrid Olsen 52:20

And yeah, that will be published.

Audience Member 52:21

You have a publisher?

Sigrid Olsen 52:22

Yeah. No, I don't have a proposal yet. But I have a publisher that's interested. But I don't know what that even means. We'll see. Yeah,

Audience Member 52:36

I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how your feelings about your relationship to your own art has changed since the beginnings and now you're doing of it, your feelings about it?

Sigrid Olsen 52:48

No, I can't. I don't know if I'm going to answer it. But I'm going to try. When I first was invited to speak, and it was conversations with contemporary artists, I always get a little nervous because I don't think of myself. I don't really know what's going on with contemporary art in the real world of art I've been immersed in, in commercial and the commercial venture for 25 years. So I think I definitely, when I'm creating things, think of will people like it, where there are a lot of artists that don't do that they're expressing their own concepts and messages. And you know, it runs the gamut. So that I know, that's not the whole idea of your question, but so I don't have a lot of confidence in that way. But I will say that as time has gone on, I feel like okay, I am who I am, this is what I do. So I do have a sense of confidence about it. And I love looking at my art myself, and I'm glad that other people like looking at it. I in 2005 when I first opened the gallery on Rocky Neck there, the artwork had a lot of text with it. And it was all you know, very uplifting and good messages and it was something that I did when I was recovering from breast cancer surgery, and I had a month of not working. So I was like who looks forward to surgery. I was looking forward to it because it had been at that point 15 years since I'd had a vacation longer than a week. So I was off for a month and the first two weeks I didn't do a whole lot It was a little uncomfortable. But the second two weeks I got back into the studio and started painting and then creating this body of work that had this positive messages and healing kind of messages. So that's about as close as I've gotten to. Using my intellect in my work it's more usually very intuitive and just about color and being you know being pretty and That's not always that doesn't always cut it in the world of contemporary art. So I don't know if that answers your question, but that's my sort of ambivalent feeling about my work.

Sigrid Olsen 55:20

Did you say? How did I What? I'm sorry? You heard the last part. But balance? Yeah, yeah. So I thought, well, the support of the community was helpful, we did a lot of taking care of each other's kids, when the kids were little. And then as you get, you know, some money coming in, you can pay for daycare, and, but it was really hard. I feel like I missed a lot of things. And I don't know that they suffered as much as I did. You know, I feel those of you that are parents, you know, the kids can survive a lot, much worse than my kids ever had to deal with. And, and then the end, they turn out, okay. But if you miss, you know, their field hockey game, or, you know, their senior prom or whatever, you miss it, and never happens again. So I tried the best that I could and on top of that I was a single mom. So it was it was doubly hard. And I don't know, you'd have to ask them, did I give them a good exam set a good example of somebody that wasn't going to let anything get in their way of their dream? Or was the dream more important than they were, I can't even tell you this day, how to balance it, but you just sort of know, you know, and, and it was at a time when women were just sort of starting to think about those things. I know, it seems like they did it in the 60s. But it really didn't take root until the late 70s and early 80s. And, and we were all kind of going through it together. And, and then of course, it was funny because I like in my career to the kids because when it was starting they were infants. And then as it matured, they matured and then by the time I was done with when we sell to Liz Claiborne they were they were living on their own and now they're adults and our grandchildren and you know it just the beat goes on. So I did the best I could.