**Description:** 4014 Rana O’Connor, interviewed by Katrina Wynn, February 8, 2016, at her house in Portland, ME. O’Connor talks about quilting; growing up in Iran; her family and friends; getting inspiration for her quilts from photographs; minakari; going to college in the United States; traditional Persian fabrics called Qalamkar; restoring quilts; her designing process; charity quilts; local quilting groups; round robins; quilting retreats; Art quilts; sewing; learning how to sew and making her own clothes with her aunt’s guidance; learning how to quilt with a coworker; organizing quilts exhibits; quilt shows; her blog: Rana Quilts ranaquilts.blogspot.com; making a quilt with her daughter for a school project; labeling her quilts; quilting techniques; her quilting studio.

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**Notes** Transcript is finished and approved by Rana.

**Accessioned by** KWynn

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[Begin Session]

Katrina Wynn: Hi, my name is Katrina Wynn. I'm here with Elisa Sance. We are in Portland, Maine today. It's February 8, 2016, and I'm here interview Rana about fiber arts. Would you mind introducing yourself, and spelling your name for its record?

Rana O'Connor: Yes, I'm Rana-

Wynn: Oops.

O'Connor: O'Connor, and my name is R-A-N-A, and then O'Connor is O-'-C-O-N-N-O-R. It's fine, everybody in Maine calls me Rena, or Rona, or [laughs]

Wynn: Oh no, I'm sorry. Thank you.

O'Connor: Yes. But, I go by Rana.

Wynn: Okay, so can you give me a little background? Where you grew up? What your parents did? That kind of thing, including uhh I just had something, but let's just start with that.

O'Connor: Okay. So I was born in California. My parents are, my mom's American, my dad's Iranian. When I was four we moved to Iran, and lived there from, I went kindergarten to twelfth grade in Iran, so thirteen years, and then came to the U.S. to go to college, returned to Iran two summers, and then came back to the States, and then it was the revolution, and I didn't go back after that. So I haven't been back since then. So, the other questions were for my parents. My dad did a bunch of different jobs in Iran. He, he worked with the oil company, he worked with electronics, he worked with a bank. He did, he started a glass factory, he started a canning factory, so he did a bunch of different kinds of, he is an electrical engineer by education, but he did a bunch of different things. My mom didn't work for a little while, and then she went to work
for ARMISH MAG for the American military as a, a executive secretary, so she worked for the military most of the time that I was growing up. And I have a brother, and a sister, and we all grew up there. I'm part of a pretty large international community. I went to a community school, and we had twenty-six countries represented, or maybe more, and all the major religions. So it was a very international school, taught primarily in English. We took Farsi as a, a second language, so I can read and write. And so, and like I said I went all the way through my schooling at that school. So small school, my graduating class was fifty-three students, and I'm still in touch with about half of them. We get together every once in a while. There is a big get together in Boston this next year for all the graduates at that school. Not just my class, but my class gets together about every five years, so we still are in touch, and of course email has made our lives much better in terms of being able to stay connected, because they are very far flung now. My friends are all over the world, because they were international, so they're in Russia, and the Philippines, and in London, as well as all across the United States, so.

Wynn: It makes for great traveling.

O'Connor: It makes for great travel I suppose. I haven't been to some of those places, but you know whe-, I think when we graduated, a lot of us anticipated that we might go back to Iran, but then things were what they were, and so people did end up kind of wherever they had gone to school, and you know where ever your life took you, so yes. [cat meows]

Wynn: It sounds like a great school.

O'Connor: It was. It was a great place to grow up. It was a wonderful experience, growing up in Iran. And we lived in a pretty cosmopolitan city. Teheran was three and a half million when I left. It's much, much larger now, but you know there was a lot of, you know just every kind of thing you can imagine. You know, very westernized, it was the time of the Shah, so we had a lot of freedom, we were out running around, being high schoolers [laughs] we could do pretty much what we liked. I think we were pretty privileged, and pretty sheltered, and it was a good life.
Wynn: Excellent. Earlier with the question, I was, I [O'Connor acquiesces] if you're comfortable, would you mind giving your date of birth?


Wynn: Thank you.

O'Connor: You're welcome.

Wynn: Okay, so can you tell me what you do?

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: Artistically.

O'Connor: So I'm a quilter. I took up quilting here actually. I'm self-taught primarily. I started quilting with my daughter, my youngest daughter was in kindergarten, and they had to represent a hundred days of school, and she came up with the idea that, at the time my husband was having ties made by a local crafter, and she would send little 1-inch sample squares of fabric every month, [4:59] and my daughter thought of those 1-inch sample squares, and said we could collect a hundred of those, and you know "dad's got all those little squares, that'll be a hundred." So we collected all of those, met with a friend who knew something about quilting, got the basics, and made a small hundred-days quilt which I actually have upstairs still. And I just enjoyed the process so much that she then taught me a little bit more, and my next quilt was a king sized bed quilt for our room, and then I, I followed a pattern for that one, but at that point I realized I really enjoyed the whole process, including the design, and so I started designing quilts. Designed some bed quilts for my daughters, and then began moving towards smaller quilts. Did some lap sized, but then really discovered art quilting, and have moved into that, where the pieces that I do, for myself primarily, are now art quilts of one kind or another, often based on photography.

So I don't know if you saw the big horse and person on the way in [points in the direction of the entry door] that photograph was taken by a friend of mine, Henry, who is a, a, he travels the world doing photography based on, his theme is horses, and that one was taken in India, and he
had sent out a picture, you know, "I'm traveling." So I saw that picture, fell in love with it, and said "could I interpret it as a quilt?" So that was one of my first picture quilts. I took that image, and recreated it as a quilt, which I sent to Henry, and he sent me the print, so we have each other's artwork in each other's home. [laughs] But yes, he is quite a guy. So, so I did that one, and of course one led to another. I've never been without a quilt on my wall pretty much that I'm working on [cat meows] since, since Leila was in kindergarten, and she is now twenty-six, so yes, so the last twenty years or so I've been quilting pretty much continuously. And I think that certainly, growing up in Iran exposed me to different images, different color choices. I think there's a lot of attention to detail. One of the Iranian artworks that I love is, they call it minakari which is like miniatures. They paint beautiful tiny miniature paintings, and you know the great attention to detail. And I think that I bring that into the work that I do, I really, oftentimes actually I’ll work in such detail that when I step back I'm like well did all that work and nobody can see it. You know it's like not even visible at this point because you went too finely into the detail, and you know, and I, I like working that small, but I do like the small details that you can add to something. I always try to bring a lot of that detail work to it, as well as the different mix of colors and, and then of course, you know photographs that, not only that one of Henry was a nice one, but then others friends have sent pictures from their travels. I'll often see one that just inspires me. It's nice to have that resource, yes.

Wynn: That's great.

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: It sounds, what I'm hearing is that you've got this great mix from your backgrounds. Your community here taught you about the quilting, and then you're pulling some of the aesthetics from your up growing-upbringing in Iran. That's really great.
O'Connor: Yes, I'd say so, yes it truly is. I guess although I've lived in Maine now without traveling internationally for over twenty years, thirty years? However long I've been here, I think there is still that international flavor. Just because I have that connection with those, with people all over, so it's nice, yes.

Wynn: Yes. How did you come to Maine?

O'Connor: Well, when I left Iran to go to college, I kind of threw a dart at the map to try to figure out where to apply, and I was a skier, so the first year I went to Colorado, and skied the whole year, but it was a very small town up in the mountains in Colorado, and I realized soon that I didn't want to stay there. People had no idea where Iran was. I had come from a city of three and a half million to a town of three hundred people, three hundred cows. [laughs] It was, you know it was not a very good fit, so I immediately started looking for another school, and friends there said "oh you should apply to Maine." I knew I wanted to come to the East Coast. I had other friends from Iran who were at school in Boston, and New York, and you know more on the East Coast. So I applied to schools on the East Coast but University of Maine was the first school to respond and give me a full scholarship, so I came to Maine. And I met my husband actually the first day I was here. He is from New Jersey but we met in the dorms. [10:01] Didn't really date initially, but were friends though college, and then at the end of our college years, started dating, and he never wanted to leave Maine, so here we are. I might have moved to a desert state or something more like Iran had I, you know if I had been on my own, but he liked Maine, wanted to stay, and so we did.

Wynn: I forgot the, my roommate was from, is from near the capital, and she is talking about the desert but I forgot that it was there. I'm learning that there are mountainous and cold skiing regions of Iran too.

O'Connor: Yes, yes.

Wynn: Did you, did you go skiing in Iran.
O'Connor: Oh yes, that's where I learned to ski, it was in Iran. And a friend of ours, actually I have a friend who just went back to Iran for a, his mom had passed away, and she had property and stuff he had to go take care of in Iran, and he was there doing that, but he sent back pictures of skiing. He was like "oh, I took a day, and went skiing," and he sent back pictures of the ski area, the mountains, and yes, that is, so my best memories of Iran are that, and the Caspian, going to the ocean, well not the ocean, the sea, but yes, on the beach.

Wynn: So before this interview I actually looked you up, and looked at your blog.

O'Connor: Oh, thank you.

Wynn: And I really, I used the search function, and I found that you had done for a friend, for her wedding, a Persian quilt.

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: Could you tell me about it?

O'Connor: Yes, so Arlene who is my best friend, I've known her since kindergarten, and we've been best friends kind of ever since, she, her son is getting married, and she wanted to commission a king size quilt for him. I told her I don't do a lot of king size quilts, but for you, you know. So she said well, and I want to use Persian fabrics in it. And I said, alright well, bring what you want. She had actually been in Iran, and her mother in law had a store room with a lot of fabrics in it, so she had cleaned out a lot of fabric from the store room, and brought them. So we met in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, one day about a year or so ago, and she showed up with a great big duffel bag full of fabric including, and I'll show you some of them, they're called Qalamkar, they're block print, or wood block print fabrics, kind of a coarse cotton. So she had one of those that was her son's bedspread growing up, and she said I really want to use some of the panels from this, it was a pictorial on, and it had pictures. His name is Cyrus, and it has pictures of Cyrus the Great from Persepolis on it, so he, she wanted to use pieces from that, and then she wanted to use fabrics from his grandmother's store room. So and then we went shopping
for fabrics together down in Portsmouth, and collected a whole bunch, and came up with the design, and so I worked on that for quite a while actually. I just gave it to them, I was down in Boston about a month ago. I had finished the quilt so I brought for, for them, and we gave it to her son and his fiancée there, so it's gone, I can't show you, but I think you saw maybe a picture on there? Yes, so...

Wynn: Yes. What was their reactions, the son and the...

O'Connor: Oh they were just bowled over by it, yes, yes, very touched.

Wynn: Yes, that's great. That's really wonderful.

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: Have you worked with the Iranian fabrics otherwise?

O'Connor: I have not much, it actually hadn't occurred to me until Arlene gave me this project to do, to use the Iranian, that really coarse woven stuff, because it isn't like the kind of cotton, the 100% cotton that we use in American quilting. It's much less easy to use. I actually ended up backing it with an interfacing so that it wouldn't be stretchy, and so I don't know. I have several of those, I've thought since well maybe [cat scratching at the window screen] - this one wants to go out - there might be a way. [Wynn laughs as the cat rushing to the front door] He might be not so happy to go out when he sees the weather. [it's snowing heavily – sounds of bells from opening the front door] Go, go, go, go, go on. Yes, going upstairs instead, [to the cat] are you kidding. [all present laugh] So yes, I hadn't really considered it, but I have some older Persian fabrics. I might think about cutting them up. It's always been sort of a like do you want to cut those up? or do you preserve them the way they are? I have another piece though. My cousin in New York sent me a piece, a very antique piece of fabric from Iran that had been a quilt but it had all kind of fallen apart. [15:01] He took it apart, and has sent it to me and asked me to remake it for him into a quilt, so that's another project that's kind of sitting to one side. So I do have that piece, but it would be, I wouldn't be cutting it up like I did Arlene's and her, her
bedspread looked like Swiss cheese when I was done with, so I was like are you sure? But she said absolutely, cut it up. You know, he used it as a kid, it's stained, I don't want to keep it. I want it cut up and re-, you know, I want them to be able to use it so, so we did.

Wynn: Yes.

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: Okay. So one of the things that I know about Iran fiber-wise is that they do a type of, oh I hope I'm not blocking. [about the cat?]

O'Connor: It's okay.

Wynn: Okay. That they do a type of rug making.

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: Have you ever tried that?

O'Connor: No. Well, no other, no, Arlene and I did some, she had a loom for a little while. We played with that, but no. [laughs]

Wynn: That looks intense.

O'Connor: That's intense, yes. It's little knots, right? You have to make little knots, and I don't, I've seen it, you know in pictures, the same as you have probably, and of course we had Persian rugs growing up, the hallway rug is from Iran. The others are not, but the hallway rug is one that my dad got for me, but yes, no I would never try to do that. It's pretty intense.

Wynn: Agreed. Well I mean, what you do is just spectacular.

O'Connor: Thank you.

Wynn: And I'm not saying it so [laughs]

O'Connor: But it's a very different thing.

Wynn: Very different.

O'Connor: Yes.
Wynn: Yes. So you were saying you were influenced by some of the colors. [O'Connor acquiesce] What are some of the colors that are, strike you as-

O'Connor: So I think about turquoise. Growing up the landscape [Squeaky back door - daughter comes home] was very much a desert landscape with really bright colors, where there was color. So there's the, the mosques often had turquoise domes that were really bright. Maybe I'll show you when we look upstairs our pictures of, the tribal women wore brightly colored mixed fabrics, like different mixes of prints in really bright colors. So I'm, when I use color I like it to be intense. I like bright red, bright oranges, bright blues. Really deep intense colors I'm drawn to. It's hard for me to make a pastel quilt. I tend to always use deep dark colors, and paired with so that sandy neutral. So that's what mostly attracts me. If I'm doing a, an interpretation of a photograph, then I try to stay more true to the photograph perhaps, but when I do, when I design some more abstract quilts, or bed quilts, that's where my color choice is going. If you saw that, like the Iranian quilt that, it was all kind of the same deep colors, dark jewels colors.

Wynn: Yes, it was beautiful.

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: How do you go about designing a new thing?

O'Connor: It depends on the use obviously. So if I, and the size. So like for Arlene's quilt, we knew that, that she wanted pa-, the panels from that bedspread, and it was one big panel, so I suggested that we put that in the center, and then I would add the other pieces around. So it's just a matter of taking. I use graph paper, and pencil, and start drawing it out on graph paper and pencil, what I want to do. I usually make a small sketch of what I'm interested in, and then figure out whether it's doable, and then work on creating that to size. So I don't have to draw it out to size necessarily, but you know, I'll like take that, and when you draw it on graph paper, the nice thing is you're drawing to scale, and so I can say okay, this is, every square represents two inches, or five inches, or whatever it is, and go from there, and then translate that to pieces that I
can cut out. When I'm working with a picture quilt, then I'm often on the computer. I might take two or three pictures, and morph them together, and then, to get the image that I want, and then print that out, use that to make a drawing of what I want. I usually make that on a fairly small scale, and then take it to a copy place where they can enlarge it, and then use that as my master pattern, so enlarged to the size that I want, and then go from there. And then you just figure it out as you go along. I mean, one of the things that I like about quilting is that the process is a series of decisions as you go along, and so you can, you don't have to know what the end product is. You can have some idea, where you're going to be at the end, but a lot of times, where you end up is not exactly where thought you would when you started. [20:00] A lot of things change as you move through the process, so it's kind of just a series of, of problems you have to solve, and I like to solve the problems, so that's one of the things that really attracts me about it is, you know like, I like puzzles, I like crossword puzzles and jigsaw puzzles, and figuring out problems, and it is the same sort of thing, but more satisfying at the end result.

Wynn: That does sound wonderful. When you reach the end of a quilt, how do you decide what to do next? Like how do you decide? Do you, is it, does someone, is it always that someone had sent you a photo that has inspired you, or?

O'Connor: You mean how do I decide what the next quilt will be?

Wynn: Yes, sorry.

O'Connor: [laughs at her cat on the table] Let me get him out of here. Great question. I wait for inspiration to strike, but I always seem to have something going on. I also am a member of a, Calico Quilters which is a chapter of the Maine State guild, and I'm a member of Art Quilts Maine. So the, those groups have projects and challenges. So, and charity quilts, so there is always something to do. So, for instance this last Saturday I got together with three of my quilting friends. We do a, a retreat every summer in Friendship, Maine. And they came up for a winter retreat, so we got together, and I cut out pieces for a couple of charity quilts which is
probably what I'll work on next, is getting some of these charity quilts done. So, so I cut out, you
know looked at fabrics. We talked about ideas, came up with sort of the basics of a pattern idea,
and did some cutting. So I'm ready to go with two quilts there. I have another one I just finished.
I'm working on a challenge piece for Art Quilts Maine that's due in June, so I've been working on
that as go, on a little bit at a time. So you know I have several pieces in process, and something
else always comes up. And then if I'm, if I were to be, I guess at a point where I didn't have
anything going, I'd start looking around for inspiration.

Wynn: Yes.

O’Connor: Write to my friends "hey has anybody been anywhere?" or I'd look through my list, I
have tons of photographs, look through my photographs to see if anything inspires.

Wynn: Yes, great. So you've been talking a little bit about the nuts and bolts of it. Could you
give me a better understanding of how a quilt-, what your process is for making a quilt? From A
to Z?

O’Connor: Uh sure. So okay, so once I have the idea, the design figured out, so whether it's a
more traditional quilt, or a picture, then fabrics, I start pulling out fabrics from my stash, and
start looking for you know fabrics and colors that might work. I don't make my own fabrics
generally. I feel like there's a lot of fabric out there in the world, so I, I, and I kind of like the
hunt for the right fabric to complete something so, and I like the idea of making do with what
you have, and I think when you have one red fabric, ten red fabrics probably is better. It's, gives
more variety and interest to the piece you're doing to have a combination of fabrics. So I will like
I said pull out pieces from my stash, she what I have that will work, decide if there is anything I
absolutely have to buy to make it work, and then, and then start cutting. If it's an appliqué piece,
which most of the picture ones are appliqué, then I take my master pattern, and draw templates
from that, and apply the templates to my fabrics, put pieces of web on the back, and fuse those to
a base, which either is the background, or it might be muslin, and then cut it out, and apply it to a
background but, but usually I fuse those directly to whatever my background is. So I may have created a background first, and then applied those. If it's a more traditional style quilt, then I'm using usually a rotary cutter, and cutting strips, or blocks, and then start piecing those together, and I usually make a couple to see if I like it before I go cutting the whole thing. I generally do not cut a whole quilt out at once. Actually this Saturday was an exception where I cut quite a bit of pieces ready to go, just because I was, you know, over my friend's house, I didn't bring my sewing machine, so that was what we were doing. [25:00] So yes, but normally I don't try to cut out a whole piece. I try to cut a little bit, do what my husband calls proof of concept, do it and see if you like it, you know, before you move forward, see if this is going to work. And then try to figure out the things as I go along. There is a piece I'm working on right now which has, has three fates, the three fates you know, Clothos, and their name, Clothos, Lachesis, and Arthos [Atropos?], the three fates who you know measure time and cut it, right? And I, I got, each piece along the way, I've had to kind of figure out how to do, what, how do I get what I have in my mind onto fabric, and then go from there. So I, I've been, in that case, I took images of the three fates, redrew them onto watercolor paper, did watercolors of them, scanned the watercolors in, and printed them on fabric, and then cut those out, and now I've got those three, but now I want to embellish those with thread, and, and I have some sheer fabric that I want to put on there as well, to represent the stars, and so I've got stuff going on with that, that I'm trying to figure out. Like so how do I get the sheer fabric on? I'm thinking I will stitch along the edges, and I don't know, find out if it works, you know, so I'm just kind of playing with it to see if it'll work, but part of a point that's a piece for Arts Quilt Maine, and for me part of the point of the challenge is to really challenge yourself, and to try something new, and to try something different. So I haven't done a lot of this idea of making a watercolor, and then printing that onto fabric, and then using that image in a new way, is something that I haven't done [message ringtone on a phone]
much before, once or twice, but not to this extent, so that will be fun to see what I could do with it, so.

**Wynn:** Yes, that does sound cool.

**O'Connor:** Yes, so yes that's a different, I don't know, I don't know if I answered your question.

**Wynn:** No, you did.

**O'Connor:** I kind of rambled along. [laughs] But, yes.

**Wynn:** No, no, no that's great. I did want to know, it sounds like you use a combination of hand sewing, and machine, or mostly machine?

**O'Connor:** Mostly machine. I tell my friends I'm very impatient, so I do not have the patience to do hand sewing, and actually a piece that I just finished, a, a lot of the quilts that I'll do for charity quilts, or ones that are not, like not the wedding quilts, but for other ones, I'll even finish the binding completely by machine, even though I know it's more traditional, and more accepted to do it by hand. But once I figured out that you could do it by machine, I'll do that on ones where I think I can get away with it. [laughs] So, I do very little handwork except the embellishing, if I'm adding beads, beads and rhinestones, and thread, or yarn, or you know any other kind of fabric embellishment, those I'll do by hand at the end of the piece, so like my horse that I did for Henry. He had a braided bridle that I did all braided it, and attached that by hand, and he had, it had beads coming off of it, so it was quite a lot of bead work involved in that. In a lot of them I do put beads. Beads and rhinestones, I do like sparkles. That's another Persian thing I think I love. You know there is mirror work in Iran a lot, and I think I just love that glitz and sparkle, so I put that in pretty much any quilt I can get away with it. [laughs]

**Wynn:** That's great. When did you learn how to sew? Or and how did you learn the sewing machine?

**O'Connor:** Yes, so I learned to sew in Iran. I actually learned in, must have been either middle or high school. [message bell rings again] We had a, you know like a home ec' class, we had to
learn to sew. Well once, so my mom taught me, and then? I made a skirt, and mom taught me how to sew. She knew how to sew. And, but once I learned to make a skirt, I went on to make pretty much all of my clothing when I was in high school, because in Iran, we didn't have a lot of access to clothes. You could hire a dress maker, you could go to a boutique, you could, because we had ARMISH MAG privileges, you could order from the Sears catalogue, you know, but there wasn't really, or you could travel somewhere outside of Iran I guess, and shop. Sometimes people went away, they'd bring me something, but there were things that I wanted, so I learned to sew, and made a lot of my clothing in high school. I made my prom dress, and then when I came to the U.S., I'd still make quite a bit of clothing until I was in my twenties. And then it kind of got expensive to make clothes compared to buying them, and so I kind of quit making clothes, and it wasn't probably for about eight to ten years, I didn't do any sewing, and then Leila had that project, and I got involved with her, the quilting. Got back to it. And I really always enjoyed sewing, I just didn't see the use of making my own clothes anymore. It didn't seem to make sense. Growing up though, my aunt, my dad's sister was an amazing seamstress, and she made like couture clothing. She would make like Chanel inspired suits and these wonderful summer frocks, and you know, just all, she made all of her own clothing, it was all beautiful, beautiful. And so when I learned to sew, she was very, she was my sort of exacting task mistress. Like she would check my hems, and said well you got to do, you know, you need smaller stitches, you need to hide them more. So she taught me a lot about detail, and about paying attention to that, to the details, and the, and the technique of what you're doing, so yeah, so between her and my mom, I learned to sew.

Wynn: What did your mom do? I mean she taught you to sew.

O'Connor: Sewing?

Wynn: Yes.
O'Connor: Sewing-wise, she didn't do, she didn't sew clothes for us. She did, you know, support my interest in sewing my own clothes. She, the things I remember mom making was stuff for the house. She made curtains, she made toss cushions for the couch, and she was kind of like, if she wanted to make it, she would. And then I had a girlfriend there as well who was also a good sewer, and she made, she made a, I remember she made a quilt out of all of our denim jeans. She cut them up and made a quilt. And she made a bunch of sundresses one year for everybody. And so when I would go to her house, she was always into, "oh let's make those," "let's do that." So we used to sew together growing up as well. But through high school I did a lot of sewing.

Wynn: That's great. Do you have siblings.

O'Connor: I do, I have a brother and a sister.

Wynn: Do they do any crafty?

O'Connor: Mm my sister, no, she is, I don't think she does anything crafty. She cooks, she did some, I want to say like counted[?] cross stitch when we were kids, she did some needlework. My brother did, when he was a bachelor, he sewed a whole bunch of things for his house. He made like pillows, and bedspreads, and he decorated his whole house, and did a whole bunch of sewing. I was like "wow, where did you learn to do all this?." "We all learned how to sew, I learned how to sew too. So, it's just a machine, and you know I'm mechanically inclined." So he, he learned to sew, and made a bunch of stuff for his house. I don't believe he does any now.

[laughs] Yes, yes.

Wynn: So I've been, I was curious about the Calico, and the Arts, Art Quilts Maine.

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: Could you tell me a little bit more about those groups?

O'Connor: Yes, so Pine Tree Guild is Maine's state guild, and then they have a number of chapters all around the state, smaller groups. So Calico Quilters meets in Yarmouth. There is
actually one a lot closer. There's one that meets in Portland, Cobblerstone, but I had a couple of friends who I had been quilting with when we decided to join a guild, and they were closer to Yarmouth, so we joined Yarmouth's Calico Quilters, and I've with them now for a number of years. I'm not even sure how many, maybe six or seven years with them, and so they meet every, well they meet the first and third Monday of the month, and they'll do you know different projects, different educational pieces, members will share their work, they'll, we do a quilt show every other year, and it's an opportunity to, to celebrate your work as well as to learn new techniques. Like last meeting they had techniques night, where each, several people demonstrate a technique. So you could learn different things that you might then incorporate into your quilting. So they're I would say more of a traditional guild, and there are a number of those guilds around the state. And then Art Quilts Maine is a state-wide guild that I learned about after I had been going to Calico for a while. And they meet every other month on a Saturday in Augusta, and their members come from all over the state, and the only criteria is that you're interested in doing art quilts, quilts that are non-traditional. [35:00] And that group again has a heavy emphasis on education and technique. So almost every meeting, because it's only every other month, they bring somebody to do a technique, or so like the last time they had a woman who was printing on silk and cotton with natural ingredients. Not dyes, she was, she gathered berries, and leaves, and things from her surroundings, and then print those onto the fabric. She had a technique where she laid all those out, and then I don't remember exactly but it ended up being wound around a stick that she then did something to, I don't know, some kind of chemical combination, and the image of the leaves, and the flowers, and the berries would be left on the fabric so, I think I actually have a piece that I got from her that day. So, so it was an interesting, you know they bring these people who do these cool interesting things, or the members will teach a technique that they know. So we always have something that's, that's really oriented towards challenging yourself, moving forward. There are some splinter groups out of that, there's
a couple of groups that I've met outside of that. I just feel like I don't have time to do more than two groups. I was never a group person to begin with [laughs] and quilting has forced me into a couple of groups, but you know maybe when I retire, I'll join other groups, but right now, this is enough, you know for me, so.

**Wynn:** You said before you joined Calico, you were with some friends already quilting. How did you find each other?

**O'Connor:** Yes, so actually through work. When I, so the whole time that I've been quilting, when Leila was a little girl, and I started, I was working at Casey Family Services. And [pause] how did that all start? So we, I wanted to, oh how did we start? There was one woman there who was a quilter for many years, and so she was kind of our mentor. And there was another friend who wanted to start quilting, and I think we started with baby quilts. There was, you know, you work in an agency, so somebody was pregnant, and somebody said wouldn't it be nice to make a quilt, and so we decided to start. I had done a couple of quilts, and Linda was a very, very good quilter, and so a group got together, and made group quilts for, we, and we in the end I think like three baby quilts, and two or three wedding quilts, and one divorce quilt, [Wynn laughs] and you know whenever people we having events we'd make quilts together, so we, throughout the time that I worked at Casey, there was kind of this core group of people that quilted. And it was a nice sort of side thing, you could bring in your work, and talk about it with each other, and you know get together on lunches, or on weekends, and work on the projects together. We made some projects with like adoptive and foster parents, we did a couple of big quilts celebrating adoptions or foster care, so it was interesting you know to bring, it kind of brings the two worlds together. So, so I met and got to be really good friends with a few people who were quilters there. And then once Casey closed, several of us remained really good friends. Linda who'd been the longest time quilter introduced me to her sister, and her sister's good friend, that are the ones who come to Maine, and we the, the four of us have gotten together along with another girl- women who
now has moved to New Mexico, but was in Maine, and also we'd get together. So that group is the one that would do retreats together, and we get together on the side, and quilt. So now actually Linda and I went out there once, to Albuquerque, and went to meet her, and spent some time with her. There was a sort of a, serendipitously the weekend we went, there was a quilt show, so we went out, and saw the quilt show, and hung out, and also saw where she was. She comes back to Maine occasionally, and we get together, but, but Linda and I have, Linda is in the guild with me at the Calico Quilters, so I see her every other week. We maintain that connection, and we've done a lot of projects together. So, we did one project with Heather. She found another friend out there, and the two of us, and the two of them did a small round robin where we each started one, and then sent it to the next person, and they added a piece and sent it back, and so we did one where we circulated, and added to each other's work. And so we each have one piece that we all four worked on. But it's kind of hard to maintain that long distance you know, but yes, so that's how we got together anyway, through work.

Wynn: That's wonderful. So for things like the round robin. I know there are different quilting patterns that you can do. Do you agree on a different one ahead of time or do you generally have the same one you generally do? Like what quilting pattern do you generally, if you're not doing the art quilts?

O'Connor: Anything and everything. There is not like one in particular.

Wynn: Okay, you don't have a favorite?

O'Connor: No, and I, I usually try to, so round robin, the one that we did, that the four of us did, we called it an art quilt round robin, and the only restriction we put on it was that it should stay twelve inches on a side, and otherwise you could do whatever you liked within that, so if it meant cutting the person's quilt apart, and re-piecing it, and doing whatever you wanted, but it was going to stay small so we could mail it back and forth. So I could actually show you the
finished one. And they you know, they, somebody added flowers that she handmade [phone rings] somebody added, we will let that go. [speaking about the phone]

**Wynn:** Okay.

**O'Connor:** You know, somebody added some painting, all kinds of different embellishments and pieces to it. So that was the rule on that one. The Calico Quilters have a round robin that I do every year with them where each person contributes a center, and then that center goes to four other people during the course of the year, and each person who gets it add a border to the center. So you just add whatever you feel will work with the center that you've got. And you never know. You know, you get a center, you look at it, and you go, okay, what am I going to do next? And then you add something, and pass it on. So whatever strikes your fancy I guess.

**Wynn:** So I love learning the, the lingo. What are some of the names of the patterns?

**O'Connor:** So, uh you mean for like blocks and things?

**Wynn:** Sure.

**O'Connor:** So, pfff, there's-

**Wynn:** Or do you not usually use?

**O'Connor:** I don't use-

**Wynn:** Okay.

**O'Connor:** Traditional ones very often. Like you could make friendship star, you could make square and square, you could do snowball. Half, there's a lot of things you could do with half square triangles, there's strip quilts, yes, there's a lot of different things, and there are thousands of quilt blocks, but I'm not so much on using traditional blocks. When I do design, I very often use just some, a few simple blocks. I'm not into all of the intricate piecing that you might do for some of the blocks. There's birds in the air, somebody was doing that the other day. So there's, there's a lot of really colorful name for, and that's an American tradition, those quilt blocks. I tend to go more with squares, half square triangles, and, and try to use colors. I think I'm more
drawn to color value to create the image than making lots of little small pieces and putting them together. **Wynn:** So I've been thinking about these, the groups that you learned quilting from. So you've got some of the aesthetics from Iran, but you really learned the how, and I'm sure you've been shaped by these, these groups that you've been part of. The one at your job, and the, what are the demographics?

**O'Connor:** Yes, so, so the first person that helped me learn, that sort of gave me that initial information about quilting was a woman my age, so at the time we were in our early thirties. And then, Linda who is my really good quilting buddy is probably a few years older than me, like maybe five years older than I am. Heather who was the other person that was really close, and moved away is also my age. When we go to the guild, I'd say that ages range from 30 or 40 into their 70's and 80's, so it's yes.

**Wynn:** Yes, that's wonderful.

**O'Connor:** Yes, a pretty wide ranging group.

**Wynn:** Yes.

**O'Connor:** I'd say probably it's still dominated by older women. We don't see as many younger women in the guild, and that may also be just either there's not as many younger women doing it or there's, or they join an online group more than join a live group, and have to go out and do that. Because I know there's a ton of online kind of things that you can do, and certainly we all go online to find inspiration.

**Wynn:** Yes.

**O'Connor:** And so you were talking about terminology, so there's the piecing part of the quilt, the base, and then there's the whole piece you have to do with thread. [45:00] You have to quilt it. It's not finished until it's quilted. Somehow you have to hold, the basic of a quilt is the back, the middle, and the front. You have to hold those three layers together. So thread plays into it quite a bit as well. I do a lot of both thread work on the surface of the fabric before I layer it, and
then quilting the whole thing to hold it together. And in the last few years, I've moved into doing some teaching as well, so I teach what's called free motion quilting, which is the, quilting the layers together, some beginner quilts. I've taught the thread painting, which is on the surface, the more embellishing, more art related, and then a piece on taking photographs and turning it into a quilt, that, put that process into a two-day class, and I've taught that as well.

Wynn: That's great. It's great to pass it on.

O'Connor: Yes. And it's fun, yes.

Wynn: So, so the age range we have. What about, would you say that the ancestry of most of the quilters is in the British Isles? Like Yankee, American Yankee style? Or-

O'Connor: Well this is Maine, so a lot of the women that I know who quilt in Maine are from, are, are Mainers of one kind or another. We don't have a huge international group in Yarmouth, Maine. I wouldn't think. So there was, there was one woman who came to Art Quilts Maine for a while, she had an Indian heritage, but yes most of the people that I've met through the guild have been Mainers. So with whatever American/Maine background that they have, yes.

Wynn: I'm just thinking, you know, the quilts up here, if I went to Santa Fe and compared the two they would both be quilt, but be very radically different. I mean both recognizable as quilts.

O'Connor: Right.

Wynn: But the preferred patterns

O'Connor: The influences.

Wynn: And the influences, the, the colors that they choose to use, you know things like that would be different.

O'Connor: Might be.

Wynn: Might be, especially the-

O'Connor: Actually, might be but you know what? I think that because we are all so exposed to each other's work now.
Wynn: Through, through the Internet?

O'Connor: Yes, there's more, it's more homogenous than you would think. There's a great quilting tradition in Japan, and so when I was beginning as a quilter, one of the things I did was try to look at quilts from all over you know, look at the traditions outside of the U.S., and what are other people doing? And so I used to get a magazine that had a lot of Australian quilting in it, and I had another one that got Japanese quilting in it to kind of get a sense of what's going in other parts of the world. And when I first started, those traditions did look really different to what American quilting looked like. Today when I see those quilts in quilt shows, they’re a lot more homogenous. People have kind of learned each other's techniques and incorporated them, and so they're not quite so unique to the eye as they were initially I think.

Wynn: Okay.

O'Connor: It's interesting that yes, you don't see has much difference in color and pattern as you might think.

Wynn: Okay, that’s good to know.

O'Connor: Yes. Although I think you can, I think there's still like Japanese quilting you, you might be able to tell some of the things. There is some difference but, difference in the fabrics. They, for instance Japanese quilters brought like these Taupe fabrics to quilting, but then there was so much discussion of it in the U.S. that I think American quilters incorporated that and picked it up. Sashiko is a certain kind of quilting that then Americans also incorporate to some degree. So a lot of people make Japanese style quilts, but you know, so I think that there is a real mixing of those cultures in quilting, even if you are a Maine quilter you might still have a mix of cultures.

Wynn: Yes, for sure. So this, there is this international influence, but how does, how do the different groups that you're in, how they influence you in your quilting?
O'Connor: Well certainly from Art Quilts Maine, I think I get, I get a lot from that group in terms of inspiration, and, and challenge to improve my work, to push myself to the next level, to do things that I wouldn't necessarily attempt except that I have a vision because of something I was exposed to there. So to try new things, and do different things. With the Calico Quilters, I think it's just that opportunity to continue to bring new work to them, and to be celebrated for whatever work you are doing even though I don't think that they are, my quilts don't always fit into the style of the quilts that most of the women there are doing, because they're much more, for the most part they're more traditional. So when I talk about traditional quilts, those are things that you know they'll make table runner, I really don't have an interest in making a table runner. Or a tote bag, I don't really have an interest in making a quilted tote bag. Those things don't really turn me on, but to each their own. Or they'll make, you know a quilt for somebody's dorm, or something like that, and unless somebody asks me to make a baby quilt even, I'd probably don't very often make baby quilts, or wedding quilts or things like that.

Wynn: What are the charity projects that you work on?

O'Connor: So those are, you know, there's a what's called Linus Quilts is a larger organization that collects quilts to give to kids who are sick so, and I think they also donate to elderly. I'm not 100% sure on that, but we do, we donate quilts to Linus. So our, the Calico Quilters collect fabric that they get from various sources. I just got a bunch of fabrics from a store that was closing. And then we, actually Linda, and myself, and another woman there get together, and decide on a Linus project for the year, and then we'll make kits from the fabrics that we've collected, hand them out. People will make those tops, and then we have one woman in the group who is a long arm quilter. I bet you know what that is, but a long arm is a machine that's, they're huge, where the sewing machine rather than being stationary, the sewing machine moves, and they can quilt a great big quilts much faster, and much more intricately than we might do on our home machines. And so we have somebody in the group who does that as a, as her job.
She has a long arm quilting business, as do other quilters, and, and so she donates her time as a long arm to finish our Linus quilts, which helps as a, because that's the piece that people are you know, probably the top gets done, and then it doesn't get quilted. So our group has done really well at getting a lot of Linus quilts done, because we can give Linda the tops, she'll finish them, and then we're able to donate much more than we might have otherwise. That's really been a boon to the group. And, and we come up with something fun to do for the project. So we've done a couple years, we've done a mystery quilt were they get a little piece of instruction every month, and then at the end of six months, they'll have a piece, so you know they, they can start with you know, "collect these fabrics," or you know "then cut these pieces," and then you know, so you've got all the little pieces of instruction, but you don't know what you're making until you see it at the end, so that's kind of fun, and we, we have good participation by doing that. Yes, and this last one, I think we did improv', I think I actually have a piece here that I've just finished that's improvisational quilting. So we send out like basic directions but you had to come up with what you were going to do with that, improv' it, yes.

Wynn: So besides for charities, who do you make your quilts for?

O'Connor: Mm, a lot of them I just make because I'm inspired, I want to do it for myself. Then I will give them away, or exhibit them, either locally or nationally, so submit them to quilt shows. There's a couple of galleries that have done exhibits for Art Quilts Maine, I’ll participate in that. I usually help organize. There's one at Kimball Street Gallery in Lewiston that we do every year now. Because once you do it, people what you back. We do, the challenge quilts travel every year to a bunch of libraries around the state, and bookstores. So we travel those, and do an exhibit annually with those. Last year we got into First Friday [Art Walk] in Portland, on First Friday in May, and they want us back again at St Luke's Cathedral, so, so you know, so we look for opportunities to exhibit. It's my feeling that if we're going to make these quilts, we shouldn't leave them in our house, but we should get them out in the public, and do things with them, so I
start looking for venues that we might be able to put them out, particularly the art quilts, because I think people don't think of quilting necessarily as something you put on the wall, but more as something you'd put on the bed, and they think of them more as like kind of they have one image, that's what a quilt is. With the art quilts, there is just so much variety, and just so much, so many different techniques, and, and styles that you wouldn't imagine, you know that they might be a quilt, so it's been fun to get those out into the world, and do different things with them. [55:00] So I'll do that, and then if somebody admires it, they can have it pretty much [laughs] you know. Sometimes I'll be working on a quilt, and you know somebody will come in, and say "Oh, I just love that," and then I know that's going to be theirs when it's done.

**Wynn:** Okay.

**O'Connor:** I've sold some, not a lot. Or I'll make commissions if people want something, yes.

**Wynn:** How do determine the price for those?

**O'Connor:** That's impossible. That's so hard to figure out a price. So I have seen all kinds of formulas, and I'll try them, they're all like so much per square inch, you know so much add up all the materials, and then plus something for your time. I've tried all the different methods, they all come out, if you actually try to do it, yes, you know, and then, then you look at the price that comes out, and say well what would this person really pay me, so then I always give a friends and family discount [laughs] so I'll say well it would have been..., but this is what I'm going to charge. So, you know so, it just depends on who I'm selling it to, I think for some times, which isn't a good way to price your quilts but, and then when I go to galleries, and you have the opportunity to sell, then it's a different story, and I do try to do those pretty consistently, where I will use a price per square inch to figure that out, and I try to make them consistently priced, yes.

**Wynn:** It's great. And you sold some of those?

**O'Connor:** A few, not a lot. [laughs]

**Wynn:** That's great, that's great.
O'Connor: But I have, yes.

Wynn: Yes.

O'Connor: Yes. And then I've also made, oh yes, another place we've been is the Center for Maine Crafts. We've done a couple of exhibits up there as well, and, and I actually sell more pieces there than anywhere else that we've been, but what made me think of that is the last time we were at the Center for Maine Crafts, I made a bunch of quilted pins. They were just little, like two- to three-inches pieces of fabric, and embellishment that I made into pins, and those sold pretty well at places like a gallery, or Center for Maine Crafts, so yes, yes, because it's something small, and you don't have to charge a couple hundred dollars. You could do, you know ten dollars for a pin, and it goes, so.

Wynn: Almost everyone we've talked to has said something similar.

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: It's very hard to figure out pricing to get the value of your time, and then the little, cute little things sell of the [laughs]

O'Connor: Right, that's what you do. Yes, sell those, and those can go, and then hopefully people will go: "oh yes, I got that pin, now I need a quilt. I'll call and see if they'll commission something, so.

Wynn: That's great.

O'Connor: Yes. [57:37]

Wynn: Yes, so your fabrics, where do you get you fabrics?

O'Connor: Mostly quilt stores and, in Maine, and when I go to quilt shows. So I, I like to go to the quilt shows, there's a big one in Maine every year. There's a big one in New Hampshire probably three or four times a year. There's some in Massachusetts. So within an easy travel there's quite a few. Usually I'll go with one of my buddies, and we'll go to the quilt show, and I usually bring money to spend for fabrics at a quilt show. That's, that's probably primarily where I
buy them, is at quilt shows, and then local fabric stores to fill in what I need. So if I'm pulling out
of my stash, and I need a certain color purple and I don't have it, then I'll go around to the local
fabric stores, and see if I can come up with something. One quilt I made for Linus, I used shirting
fabric that we got from one of the mills. It was shirting ends, so they sell the fabric I guess but
these were the ends of the bolts, so they donated that to our guild, and so I made a small quilt out
of shirting fabric. That was fun. There's another woman in our Calico group that buys shirts at
Salvation Army and cuts them up, but that seems to me like a lot of work. But she cuts them up
and makes her fabrics out of that. So, I haven't done a lot of recycled fabric kind of things like,
other than that woodblock print for Arlene, I haven’t done a lot of other ones. [59:16]

Wynn: What's the Maine show? Or-

O'Connor: Pine Tree Quilters.

Wynn: That's-

O'Connor: That's Maine Quilts, yes, Maine Quilts.

Wynn: And then is it because there's so many options that are brought together? Is that why you
mostly get them at the?

O'Connor: Oh, the fabrics?

Wynn: Yes.

O'Connor: Yes, because then they bring vendors, so there are vendors you know, all around the
outside of the show, and in a separate room of vendors, you know so they have a lot of different
fabrics, so it's a great place to go and shop. You've got a lot of people in one place.

Wynn: Are there very many Maine vendors at those shows?

O'Connor: Mm, yes, there's a few, and there's, well the quilt show, the quilt store right here in
Portland just closed, but there's a quilt store in Windham, [1:00:00] and then there is one in
Freeport, and there is one in, one up in Brunswick closed too. There's one in Kennebunk I think,
down that way, and then there's one up where we go fo-, to Friendship, there's one on the way to
Friendship that we usually stop at, and sometimes, I have a lot of friends who to like Marden's and JoAnn to buy their fabric. I don't do a lot of that unless it's something that I'm not really particularly worried about it being of great quality. I just think that if I'm going to sew, I'd like to use really nice fabric, so I prefer to wait.

**Wynn:** Do you have a fabric preference, like cotton?

**O'Connor:** It's almost all cotton, yes. Yes, I use other fabrics as embellishment, but usually I use 100% quilting cottons. They're the easiest to work with. And the pie-, the, I, there's a, there's woven fabrics, and then there's batiks, and batiks, originally from Indonesia, but I think [they are now produced??] in a lot of different places. They are really, really nice to work with, and so I, and they have those kind of intense colors that I really enjoy. So I do have a lot of batik, and incorporate that a lot into my quilts, but I don't necessarily make a quilt that's all batik or all woven. I will mix in all the different fabrics. I don't tend to use, like velvets, or corduroys, or others fabrics.

**Wynn:** Would someone who isn't in the fabric world be able to tell the difference between the batik and the woven?

**O'Connor:** The batik?

**Wynn:** Yes.

**O'Connor:** Yes. You would, and, and you would, you would, after you see them, you would, yes.

**Wynn:** Okay.

**O'Connor:** That's pretty easy to pick it out. I will show you. I have a drawer of batik, and a drawer of woven.

**Wynn:** Yes.

**O'Connor:** And you'll be able to tell.

**Wynn:** I was going to ask that next.
**O'Connor:** Yes.

**Wynn:** Tell me about your stash.

**O'Connor:** Yes, would you like to see my stash? [laughs]

**Wynn:** I would love to see your stash. [Laughs]

**O'Connor:** Okay, then we're gonna look. I don't have a stash that's nearly as big as most people. I, I, A, I don't buy a lot of big fabrics, because a lot of my work is art quilts, and because I like to use like I said, if one red is good, ten reds are better. I like to mix my fabrics a lot, so I buy primarily what's called a fat quarter, which is a quarter yard, but it's cut, instead of cutting a long skinny yard, they take a yard, and cut it [cat meows] in half across the width, and then half across the length, so you get a piece, that's about eighteen by twenty, twenty-two, and so those pieces are nice to work with, [cat scratches at the screen at the window] mostly I buy fat quarters, and then a few yards, but I tend to, and I have a huge collection of scraps that I dig into for, for my art quilts. I can almost always find what I want in my stash.

**Wynn:** That's great.

**O'Connor:** So, and then I go out, and buy a, little bits t- to add into it, so, yes, so we see the stash when we walk around, look at stuff.

**Wynn:** I'm not quite.

**O'Connor:** Yes.

**Wynn:** Almost. How often do you? Do you, you said you always have one on the wall.

**O'Connor:** I always have something in process, pretty much, have since I started.

**Wynn:** Okay. And you said you had like three going on now. How much time do you devote to each, say day? Do you do it every day?

**O'Connor:** I don't do it every day.

**Wynn:** Okay.
O'Connor: I probably quilt every week. [Wynn acquiesces] And maybe one, or two evenings a week. Tuesday nights, my husband goes out with his friends. They kind of have a standing Tuesday evening thing, so Tuesdays I'm generally here on my own, especially now that my kids are grown, so I'll often spend Tuesday nights quilting, and then I only work Monday through Thursday, so I have Friday, Saturday, Sunday, so usually one of my weekend days I will spend quilting, or in quilt related activities. It might be working on my blog, it might be coming up with curriculum for a new class, but something quilt related. I usually spend a day doing that, or often I'm teaching on a Friday, or a Saturday. I teach about once a month. And so that's where I find the time. And then when I do retreats, like when we go to Friendship, I'm usually there for four days, and just quilt the whole four days while I'm there, working on projects. Get some projects done, get some new ones started, but yes, I almost, I can't think that there's ever been a time since I started that I haven't had at least one in progress that I've been working on, you know on some way. Sometimes pieces stay on the wall for a very long time while I contemplate what's going to happen next, and so sometimes I may be like, like in this case with the fates, I'm thinking about the next step, and what am I going to do, and how am I going to go the next step. I always think of it as another opportunity to ruin my quilt, [1:05:01] or maybe [laughs] come up with something that will work, and go forward, so you know, what's the next step, and am I going to do something drastically wrong, and have to try to fix it, or am I going to do something that I like? So, I'll be working on that in my mind as well, and, and so sometimes, because I'm working on that, kind of thinking about it, I'm also doing other pieces like the charity quilt that I know I can just jam out while I'm, while I'm thinking about something else.

Wynn: Do you watch T.V. while you quilt, or do you focus on the quilting? Or listen to the radio?

O'Connor: So, the only time I'm, I'm not very good at two things. I used to try, somebody said "oh, you should listen to books on tape." I can't follow the story when I'm quilting, so I'd lose the
thread of it. I might listen to music. When I'm beading, and embellishing, or hand sewing, I usually will do that, while I watch a movie, or watch T.V. I got into that when I was doing Henry's quilt. My father-in-law was here when I was beading his quilt, and my father-in-law liked to watch the Red Sox, and Dancing with the Stars, so we would sit and watch, go back and forth between the two, and it was a way for me to hang out with him, and I'd bring my beading, and sit and do it. So I thought "oh well, this is easy, I can do this while I'm watching," so I tend to always bring my [cat one the table sliding on papers] wohoho, my int-, my embellishment to the couch, and work on it there. Unless it's like the, the, the pins, I need a surface to work on, for those are small, so I tend to do those on the table. I'll show you, I work in my dining room. That's my studio, so we'll go see that, yes. I don't know when, we only eat at that table on holidays. Pretty much otherwise we have to eat somewhere else [laughs] because it's taken over by my quilting.

Wynn: That's great. [laughs]

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: And then the last question I have that I really wanted to get done is how did you decide to blog about your work?

O'Connor: Oh to blog?

Wynn: Yes.

O'Connor: Oh god, when did I start blogging? Mm, I can't remember when I started my blog, but it was because I wanted to get my work more open, more out in the world. I felt like okay, people at work see my quilts, because I would always have a quilt on the wall in my office. I'd bring in work and hanging it there as art work, and then when I got a new piece done, I'd bring it in. And you know we had that group that was active in doing things, but I felt like you know there's, people at work know what I do, but other people don't, and you know this whole impetus to get it out into the world, that's the reason why I started doing the exhibits as well, and asking
people to, let's do some, you know, some traveling shows or something. Let's figure out a way to get venues that will show quilts, because they're, they're art work but they're not acknowledged as such. At least, they weren't. I think they're more so now, but still I think in the general public's eye, a quilt is something you wrap up in, and not something you hang on the wall. So, I wanted to get that information out more. I don't know, I just sat down one day, and started figuring out what I could put on there, and I decided I made parameters for myself that the blog would only be about quilting, it would not be about my personal life. I would only put out there things that I was doing quilt related. And I had, I don't know if I had started teaching or not, but once I started teaching then I also thought that blog was a way to inform students, and try to bring new students on board. So now I, when I send email to the students I always put my blog address on the bottom as well so they can kind of see what's happening in the, in my quilt world, so.

Wynn: Great.

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: And then of course, as I said that was my last question, I turn my page over.

O'Connor: Yes, yes.

Wynn: And oh there are three questions that I-

O'Connor: Let's see if we can convince this guy [speaks about the cat] to go out, so he stops [Wynn laughs] knocking things off the table. [To the cat] Come on.

Wynn: The cat has been joining us on the table, and he is very [pause] solid as a cat, and so whenever he steps, he makes everything on the table slide around. That's what you've been hearing.

O'Connor: Nope, [closes the front door] he still doesn't want to go in the snow.

Wynn: [laughs] He is not stupid.

O'Connor: Alright, so.
Wynn: Okay, so they're the last, the thirty to thirty-two, if you want to. [Referring to the number of the questions on the list prepared for the interview]

O'Connor: Okay.

Wynn: Okay, so why do you do quilting?

O'Connor: Why do I quilt? Ah, it's a, I think it's an addicting hobby. A friend of mine gave me a sampler at one point, and it said "patience is finding something else to do while you're waiting for what you want to happen," or something like that, and, and I thought that's really true that, you know, if you have something else to occupy your mind, [1:10:01] and your time, then you can kind of wait through some of these other things going on in your life. So you've got worries, or problems, you can quilt, and take your mind off of it, and it's a wonderful way to you know, to do that. God, as a hobby it, it fulfills so many different aspects you know, it, it's, I never thought of myself as artistic, like I can't really draw in my mind, I don't think I'm a very good drawer, or a very good painter, or, but I love color and so that's why sewing was attractive to me, you know, because I could take a pattern and make it my own with any color, and then when I realized that I could take quilting, and design my own work, it was a really great way to satisfy that artistic part, and really find a way to bring out what I feel is, is the, the creative side in a way that I didn't have another outlet for it. And yes, my, my, my degree is in theater. I have always had creative outlets. I wrote some poetry as a young person. I you know, I enjoy cooking, and creating my own recipes, but quilting really, I don't know, just satisfies that whole piece, and it was something that was mine, I could do on my own. I didn't have to find a partner, team, or whatever to do it, and, and I could indulge my love of color. Indulge my love of solving problems, and creating pattern, and it's always challenging. There is always something new to learn. You can always get better. You don't ever achieve sort of that, "okay, I've got that perfected." I may know how to make a good point on a star, but I'm never going to be perfect. Quilting there is always another level to go, there's always something new to learn. So you know,
and there's always somebody who has thought of something new to do that you, that's completely out of the realm of what you've thought of, and so, when you go to quilt shows, you're always exposed to new things. It's just, it's constantly evolving, and exciting, and interesting, so yes.

And it's, you know, it's given me a, a lot of people to be connected with that I wouldn't have otherwise. You know, I would have gone on these weekend retreats to Friendship. I never would have joined a group. I'm not a big group person, but joining that group has been a really boon, a boon for me to have that group of, of women who I get to meet every other week, and once a month, and they're, you know it's nice to have those connections in the community that I don't think I would have had otherwise. And I found things to do like, I'm a member of Maine Fiber Arts as well, and through them, we did a, we got invited by York, was it the museum in York? To come down, and do an exhibit of quilting, to do a, a demonstration of quilting. So my girlfriends that we go to Friendship with, one of them had a quilting frame. We went down, they gave us period clothing, and we put on old clothes, and set it up, and did old style quilting on the lawn, and had you know everybody who came by put some stitches in, and it was a great day. Wouldn't have had an opportunity like that, you know. Yes, so just different things that come along. This opportunity to talk to you guys wouldn't have come along otherwise. So yes, I just, I think that it's, it's given me a lot of different opportunities to try new things, yes.

Wynn: That's great

O'Connor: Yes.

Wynn: What's the hardest part about quilting?

O'Connor: Finishing. [laughs] There is, so as I mentioned, when I can get away with it, I try to do my bindings a 100% by machine, because I am impatient, and I don't really love the handwork, but so, yes I think finishing that quilt, and putting a label on it, as satisfying as it is to put the last stitch in, it is also the piece that I procrastinate on the most. I will take my, if I am going to do it by hand, I take my quilts to bed, and add the binding by hand while I sit up in bed.
It's, turns out to be the best place to add a binding [laughs] when you're, instead of, you might be reading in bed, I do my hand sewing. That's about the best place to get that done, I have found, yes.

Wynn: And do you have a label, or a special stitch you use for signifying that it's your quilt?

O'Connor: Uh no, I do put a label on my quilts, but it's a, I just write the, I, I name all my quilts, so I write the name, whatever I decided to call it, and I always put my name, the year, and either Portland, Maine, or Maine. I like to always put where, where it was done as well. And one thing, one thing that convinced me that I should do that is, there's like a, there's a project called the Quilt Documentation Project, and one of the things that they talk about is dating quilts, and knowing who made them, and where they were made. It's really difficult if there is nothing there, and so I made a commitment early on that I would put a label on all my quilts, so I do that. When I teach I emphasize that for my students as well. You know that future generations will want to know who made it, and so put a label on it. And they're not anything fancy. I just write them with, you know a permanent marker.

Wynn: Well, archivists everywhere thank you. [O'Connor laughs] And then, last question for me is what's the most fun part about quilting?

O'Connor: I love every aspect of it, except maybe the last bit of hand sewing. Mm most fun part? I think two things probably. The inspiration, so when you realize "ooh, that's what I'm going to do next." That is, you know, wonderfully exciting. Starting a new project is always really exciting and fun. That piece, and the oh, would it be the quilting, or the piecing? I think it's the putting the picture together, so when, whether it's piecing, and the picture starts to come together on my wall, and I began to see the pattern from piecing blocks, or when I'm doing a, a picture quilt, and I'm working on appliqué, I'm most often working on my ironing board, making segments of it, and then putting that on the wall. When I start to see the actual image of the quilt...
that I had in my mind coming to life on the wall. That's I think the most satisfying part. For me, yes.

**Wynn:** Okay. Wonderful. Do you mind if we take the recorder with us while we go look at, and so?

**O'Connor:** Let's go wander around.

**Wynn:** You know.

[End of official interview at 01:17:03 - move to O'Connor's studio - noise from people moving around – see recording for the discussion of the pieces in the studio]

[End session]