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Interview with Emily Duffy

Emily Duffy

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Interviewee: Emily Duffy

Interviewer: Zehunna Szeszowicki

Date: 11/27/2020

Location: Zoom

Collection: Auntie Sewing Squad Oral History Archive, SBS 112: Women and Social Change, From 1890s to the Present, Fall 2020

Length: 00:50:27

Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Interviewee Biography: Emily Duffy is a practicing Pagan woman of Jewish descent, currently living in northern California. Her work in the fashion industry has taken her to LA and San Francisco, but is content living out her later years outside the big cities. FIDM taught her how to sew with industrial techniques, which has heavily influenced her mask-making processes. Aside from her work as a professional fine artist--creating sociopolitically significant work--Duffy finds fulfillment in activist work too. From starting an abortion rights club at Cal, contributing to the Howard Dean campaign, and now sewing masks and organizing "asks" with the Auntie Sewing Squad, Duffy is a poster-Auntie; treating all life with respect and equity.

Abstract: Duffy addresses her necessary history that led her to the Auntie Sewing Squad as well as her experiences as a part of the group. That history includes her introduction to activism at Cal, her introduction to industrial sewing at FIDM, and her faith-based values inspiring her work. Her experiences include having to find the perfect mask pattern, finding the right fabric for the recipients, organizing "asks", and maneuvering the fabric market in the midst of a global pandemic. Duffy discusses which fabrics are up to standard for the masks and how she modifies them with filters, sizes, ear loop varieties, and slight fit differences. Duffy also shows-and-tells some of the masks from her personal collection to give examples.

Themes and Time Stamps:

Identity influencing art and activism: 0:00-7:08

Activist start at Cal: 7:09-9:55

Race and personal values in dean campaign work/current election/Covid pandemic: 9:56-17:38

Stories of Auntie Sewing Squad: 17:39-23:23

Industrial sewing background influencing mask-making: 17:39-33:47

Mask-making with specific fabrics and fabric stores: 33:48-50:27

Interview Transcript

ZS: This is Zehunna Szeszowicki's Oral History with Emily Duffy, member of the Auntie Sewing Squad, for Dr. Chrissy Lau's SBS 112-02 "Women in Social Change Class" on November 27, 2020. So, Emily, the form where I signed up to interview you specifically mentioned that you consider yourself Pagan before anything else, and I just kind of wanted to know if that has influenced your perspective on your activism specifically in any way?

ED: I think so because I really don't have any prejudices against any particular religion because Paganism is really more about honoring nature, and you know, life and death. And a lot of religions don't [laughs], they have it as a much narrower focus. I guess I could also call myself a Humanist, a secularist. I don't--I'm not into dogma at all mostly because I look around me and I don't see that any of it works. And I see a lot of hatred based on, you know, religious doctrine, and throughout history.

ZS: Mhmm, yeah.

ED: And right now is no different and it's appalling, so... That, and also, I think Paganism is more interested in equality among genders and fluidity--which is a part of biology. So, you know, it allows--there's room for science with Paganism and there maybe isn't with some of these other religions. But, like you, I'm 100% of Jewish extraction, and Nazis would kill me in a second, ya know? So..

ZS: Certainly. So, building off of that, you mentioned on that same spreadsheet I mentioned a second ago that your activist work took you toward the Howard Dean presidential campaign. What was your focus working on that campaign? And like if you want to tie it back to what your Pagan inspiration for it was at that time in your life, feel free to.

ED: At that point it was, I mean, we thought Bush, George W. Bush was the worst president of all time. [both laugh] So, we tried to stop that way back then, um, because it's a lot of the same people that are behind Trump. And, it was the beginnings--not even the beginnings, it was already happening, I really feel like ya know, when Raegan was president was a real turning point against liberalism. And, also what Newt Gingrich, who was Speaker of the House around that time, he called it the "Contract with America" but I felt it was a contract *on* America. Like, they had taken out a contract *against* all these democratic principles and it really offended me and I felt like for the first time in my life I really had to do something. And, ironically, I grew up in Berkeley, surrounded by all these protests and anti-war things but I was too young. So I witnessed all this and, you know, wasn't a part of it, and it was like: oh okay, here's my moment.

ZS: Mhm, interesting.

ED: Just like for you, here's your moment. Ya know?

ZS: [laughs] Thank you, yeah.

ED: And until then, I--actually I think your generation is *much* more socially conscious than mine. I was born in 1957 and I came of age in the 70's, and that was a very weird time. Very...we were very lost, you know? The 60's were very focused and powerful and a lot of changes happened, and the 70's was kind of a confused afterbirth or something, you know? And, it was hard to, you know, there were like no good movies and the clothes were ugly and the music was eh. But there was punk rock, so...

ZS: Fair enough, yeah.

ED: And I actually have become a punk rocker in my later years, ironically. [laughs] So I've come late to everything. And I came late to activism, and I even came late to college. I went, I worked for many years in the fashion industry and then went back to college for a four-year college at UC Berkeley as a Fine Arts major. So that's where my sewing background came from was that I learned how to sew and make patterns and work in that industry for about, almost 20 years.

ZS: Wow.

ED: And then, pushed it further, you know, away from commercialism and more towards art. Which, you know, pays even less [both laugh] So, wasn't so smart. Because there was work in the fashion industry but I did have to move to LA which I hated. So, you know, living back in the San Francisco Bay Area I tried multiple times to get my own company going with clothing but I just didn't have any money. And, eventually went back to school and fell in love with, you know, the art world and making art. And then I started making art, after I got out of Cal. I started doing art about body image and being woman. And I think it, that kind of came on because my first ever activism happened while I was at Cal. And this was in the 90's, so it was like '92. And I noticed in some, I guess in the Student newsletter or something there was--or when I was walking on campus...So here is, you know, Berkeley, California, and there were all these tables out for student groups and they were all Christian, like there were almost 50 of them. That was it! And I was like wait a minute, where am I?

ZS: Do you mind me asking if at this point you were identified with Paganism? Seeing all these Christian tables?

ED: No, it was more like, unreligious.

ZS: Okay yeah, fair.

ED: Unreligious. I mean, I wasn't conscious that I was you know... Pagan.

ZS: Yeah, yeah. Feel free to keep going with that tangent, I was really enjoying it.

ED: Yeah, okay. So I tried to think, you know, what is the issue? I only have energy and time, because I'm a full time student, I only have energy and time for one issue, what is that issue for me? And I decided it was abortion rights, and that, uh, I wanted to join, you know, whatever pro-choice group there was. And it turned out there wasn't one and I could not believe that. So,

there had been one, and I guess everyone who had been in it eventually graduated so there was no, so there was actually a holding place for it but there were no people. So I went in and resurrected it and this really was my first ever experience as an activist. I was much older, I was in my 30's, and, everybody that joined was for some reason Freshman, [laughs] And they were like "Yes!!" So they all joined and we got it going, and we did some protests and we actually got kicked out of the... We tried to get the pro-life groups kicked out of the student government-self government building. Like, we had office space in there, all the student groups got an office, and they [pro-life groups] were being funded by outside groups and the University didn't allow that, so we got them kicked out. But then we also got kicked out, because we had connected with some NARAL [National Abortion Rights Action League] and Planned Parenthood and stuff, and they [pro-life groups] basically threw that back at us. So we basically got kicked off campus, but we still did out protesting. And then at one point, which I've learned now this happens in cycles, the art department every five years or so, try to shut it [pro-choice organization] down at Cal. So we did a bunch of protests doing that. So I was finding myself, you know, saying, you know, saying "no" a lot, making signs and marching around places and basically being like: "I dissent!" You know? That's what I was doing. [laughs]

And so I got out of school, um, I don't even remember what I did. This was like... What did I do? At that point I was working as a waitress most of the time and not, you know, making any money on my art. And I did try to do that later, um, and I had various jobs I don't even remember. This year it's been hard to remember anything that came before it [both laugh], but I was being a Fine Artist and I was doing political art. And then the political art you know, uh... The political situation got worse and worse and when the Iraq War started I just had to hit the streets with everyone else. And around that time [freezes] You there?

ZS: Yes, now I'm here.

ED: Okay [laughs] I felt like the war was totally wrong and it was so obvious that Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11, and that was of course proved later. It was ridiculous and it was just a vendetta and it was, you know, an excuse to go to war. And so I joined the protests and they started to sweep the country. And then Howard Dean started to get more of a public persona and then he decided to run for president. Which he lost of course, but, I met a bunch of people, locally, we started meeting. And that was before Meet Up, that was before...they were really the first campaign to use the internet. They really were. And a lot of the people that worked for them [the Dean campaign] and set that up, who I actually met, um, then went on to work for the Obama campaign.

ZS: Interesting, yeah.

ED: You know, so it was really, the beginning of the new way to campaign using computers and social media. There wasn't even, there was no Facebook yet I don't think, or at least it wasn't being used much. So we had, you know, we met in person and we used Meet Up as a way to recruit new people who wanted to work on this campaign. And um, bit by bit it just kept me active and the people that I met there we all stayed active--I'm still connected to some of them. We all just moved over to Facebook, and you know, we're stirring shit wherever we are because we realize that we have to do that. I mean what happened, Obama got in and we were like "we won!" and then a huge horrible backlash of white supremacists and, you know, corporate Rudy

mongers and whatever. And so that's what we've been living with the past four years and it's been, as you know, horrible. Um, and I was supporting Bernie at first but you know, he's way too old and Biden is too old so then I kinda hitched my wagon to Elizabeth Warren. But the problem with Warren and Bernie was that they really didn't have a good connection with the African American community. And, it was African American women, I feel, just decided: "We want Biden." And I was like, "Okay, I'll work with you. Whatever you want. You--you've done the work all these centuries, really. I'm with you, I'm a supporter."

And so, um, that's really how the Aunties--it's not African American, but it's Asian American women who started it--and it's women of color who have really... You know, because they have the most to lose, they've really fought at every point in history when they had to, you know, for survival. And I'm like you, I call myself "beige" because we're not White-Christian and the Nazis would kill us, but we do pass for White. For a moment we can get away with being White and we get benefits from that and privileges from that, that people that are obviously of color don't get, and I'm done with that. We have to learn to share, that's a fact. The problem with these primarily white, racist men who have power and money, basically started the country by taking it away from people of color. And, I don't want to destroy the whole country, but I want to make things more equal. And one horrible example of, you know, this entire Manifest Destiny philosophy-gone-awry, the government and this racist president could [sic] care less and didn't want to help anybody. He has his own reasons, I mean, he's got his narcissistic whatever, he wouldn't help anyone in Blue states and it's ridiculous. So I'm very hopeful of, already, the Biden incoming administration is doing more than the Trump administration ever did.

And, um, I actually am still working. I work part time for a small film company and my husband is still working full time, he works online. So I wasn't really able to join the mask movement at the beginning, but the moment the virus hit, we masked up and we stayed home. And we've been doing it ever since pretty much. So for us it's kind of like "oh my gosh, we have to do it harder now?" Because people won't even wear masks, and people in our neighborhood are still not wearing masks, like what is wrong with you? What is it going to take?

ZS: Just today I dealt with two customers not wearing masks, it's everyday.

ED: [scoffs] What? And you're in California!

ZS: Yeah, right!?

ED: C'mon! Like there's a curfew in California, what is going on? Anyway... I think there are people who are doing it on purpose, to be contrarian, and they really believe all this... They're a part of this Trump cult. And the cult believes that they're not going to get it, that only Democrats and Black people are going to get it, so who cares? And in fact, let's give it to them, you know. So um, I was already making masks for friends. And I haven't sewn in years--or sewed, sewn. I haven't done it for a really long time, but I have these skills. And what I didn't expect is that while I'm sewing, it *feels* good. It's like the only thing that calms me down, you know?

ZS: Mhm, yeah.

ED: I've gained all this weight from eating and stressing and not being able to sleep, and sewing calms me down. And it's, you know, something about just working with the fabric and just

thinking about--I have to know who I'm making them for. Like there are some Aunties who can just power through making huge amounts of masks, thousands! I mean, some of them have made up to 6,000 masks already. I didn't start until July, doing this for the Auntie group, and um, I have to know who it's going to because that helps me pick out the fabric. Like I need to know, you know, is there a gender issue? Are they, you know, a part of Navajo Nation? They have a restriction on color and patterns. Are they homeless, you know? I don't want to put anything on there--I want them to put it on their face. So I don't want to use fabric that's going to turn them off. Um, and it's tricky, you know? You have to be careful what you do, because some stuff is just *so* wrong and nobodys going to wear it. And then they'll be offended and maybe won't ever wear a mask at all. And so, the goal is to save these people. Save people who are vulnerable, who are at risk, who are impoverished or somehow cut off from support, being ignored. And there's *millions* of them, it's just heartbreaking. It really is.

We've done a lot of masks for farm workers in California. And then there were all the fires so we had to try to figure out how to get them some N95 masks because our masks wouldn't help with the smoke. We've done... When the outbreak happened at San Quintin we did I think 2,000 masks over there. We did some for a women's prison, and that was really fun because we were told we could use all the most femme fabrics we had. And so everything we had not been able to use until then, we just went to town on.

ZS: [laughs] Excellent.

ED: And um, done some senior centers. And I've actually organized some, um, what we call "asks". It's like "there's an 'Ask' out there", there's a need, and then we Aunties pledge "I'll do 20", "I'll do 100", "I'll do five", whatever. And I actually have organized some in the town next to mine, which has a really high death rate. Well, compared to ours. The town I'm in is about 20,000 people and we've had three deaths.

ZS: Wow.

ED: So that's really good. But, it's an upper-middle class, bedroom community. The town next to us is where all the essential workers, the grocery stores, the cleaning services, and a big Latino and Hispanic community is there--and they are dying, frankly. They are dying. They have, I think, I just read that, um, the next town over, 200 people have new infections in the last two weeks.

ZS: Oh my goodness.

ED: And they have 100,000 people. Their infection rate... Ours is like 44 or 77 out of 100,000 people. Theirs is almost 4,000 people out of 100,000. So, and that's still nothing like North and South Dakota but that's right here in Northern California, in the San Francisco Bay Area, and I'm like *appalled*, again. So, I've run some, I've organized some smaller asks for that where we did like 200, 300 masks. And um, it feels so good, you know. And they're like, "You mean for free? You're giving these to us?"

ZS: [laughs]

ED: Because they're just so used to being treated like garbage, like they don't matter.

ZS: Have you ever, like, encountered somebody wearing one of the masks that you've worn? Or, sorry, that you've made?

ED: No, and um, that's problematic because--this just happened the other day. The post office I go to regularly for work, and also for mailing the masks, there's a couple of homeless guys that camp out there. Not with tents, but they sit there and beg, spare change people. And I never give money but I give them socks, and at Christmas time I give them a bag of personal items and you know, wet wipes and toothpaste and a toothpaste and stuff like that. But I give them socks all year long because they walk a lot. And I made two masks for two guys that I know regularly, that I see regularly who I even know their names, and I've never seen either of them wearing those masks. And so one of them I saw the other day--he was having a real hard time finding masks to fit him because he has a big, wide face. So I made him--and he's African American, so I had this stash of African fabric that I only make for African American people. Even though I love the fabric too, I just don't think it's right for anyone else to wear it. I made extra large masks just for this guy, two of them, and gave them to him, and then he apparently lost them. So, it made me really *sad* because here he was wearing a shitty, blue paper mask, upside down, with his nose hanging out. You know, it's like, I'm trying to help. But he's still alive, so he's obviously managing. But no, other than my friends I have never seen a stranger wearing one of my masks. But that would be a kick. Although, I think it's better to remain anonymous because, you know, it might make the person who was gifted it feel weird.

ZS: Yeah.

ED: Like, oh, hmm. You know, a white lady with purple hair, yuugh. You know?

ZS: Yeah. [both laugh] Any, like, special tricks when you make the masks that speed up the process or, like, make them a bit sturdier?

ED: I do.

ZS: Yeah, can you talk about those?

ED: Absolutely. Yeah, well the mask pattern I use is one--I didn't make it but I found it--and I searched high and low for really good mask patterns. Um, the one that sort of has pleats and opens up like an accordion, it kind of smushes your nose, right? And I sometimes wear glasses, and there's a lot of them that fog up the glasses. That's a big problem. So I wanted something that was going to fit here [bridge of nose] and also, you know, be snug [across the face] but also have room and not squeeze the face. So I found this wonderful pattern that was designed by a woman who is in construction. And she, I just found it online, and it has a dart here [down bridge of nose] and a dart here [down the chin] and then there's no like... The seam doesn't go all the way down, it's just a bit of a seam and a bit of a seam. And then it has, it goes across the nose [fabric has rounded peninsula jutting out from the top for the nose] and it has, um an elastic, I mean um, a wire. You know, you're supposed to put something in there. And I found that the best material to put in there is one of those double tip tie things from a coffee bag. So it's like it's got wire, it's

plastic, it's this long [about seven inches], plastic, and it has wire on the top and on the bottom and so it's real flexible and it doesn't break. Um, you can't put it in the drier, but I always add a tag on my masks that says "hand wash, air dry." Um so, hopefully those will stay alive. And you know, I test ran it myself, on me and on my husband, we've been wearing them for months. And, they just fit great.

And you can make it with a filter pocket or not. And then I researched "filter material" during the fires. We had a *small* stash on N95s from the previous years' fires, but a lot of people know and particularly my Stepmother, who has asthma, didn't have enough and I wanted to make something--I wanted to make a cloth mask with a filter that was as close to an N95 as possible. And I did find a material called "Filti", F-I-L-T-I, um, and again, just found it online. And two pieces of the Filti put together make a 90% mask. So, N95 is like 95%, so it's *really* close. So I tested them--both of us tested them during the fires, and we couldn't smell the smoke at all.

ZS: Wow.

ED: So, I think they're pretty good.

ZS: Yeah.

ED: But I have not made any for other people because I was still not sure, you know, I don't want to be advertising: this is as good!

ZS: Mhmm.

ED: But I have made some for my Stepmother and for friends and stuff. And then, uh, the ela--it [the mask] has a channel on the side that you can thread elastic through for earloops, or you can make elastic that goes around your head, above, and around your neck, below. I wear the earloops. You can also, it's wide enough that you can tread through what we call "t-shirt ties." Which is, um, a tie that you've made from a strip of a t-shirt. So you like cut t-shirt material or a t-shirt about an inch wide, and then you pull it, and it like coils and becomes a tie, and it's real soft. And in fact, the farm workers like to have those because they can, you know they're wearing big, heavy gloves, and they can take them on and off easier. They don't want to ear loops. So, for different groups we do different things.

For the prisoners at San Quentin, we were not allowed to have any wire. So no nose wires. Luckily, this mask still does fit, and the design of it kind of forces you to wear it over your nose. Like it won't fit [down on your chin], you can't, you know--you have to swing it to the side on your ear. But it just doesn't crunch down under here [the chin] which is a good thing. The accordion one does, and people keep doing that and then, it's like sunglasses on your head you don't realize it's there or you, whatever. But I think they really have to have a nose wire to stay up, no matter what design it is. Unless...There is one that some of the Aunties do, uh, I can't remember what it's called. But it has like, a triangle here [nose bridge], and a triangle here [chin], and then there's a box piece [across the mouth]. And so, that really works too and they don't use a nose wire.

So there's about, I would say there's at least a dozen patterns being made by different Aunties. And, you know, we're a collection of people that were already making, in most cases, were already making masks for people we knew. And then we stumbled into this group where we are

still allowed to do our own thing, but we pledge to these Asks that come up. And, um, you know, it allows us freedom but also to be a part of the community. And it's just really successful. I know it's really hard on the, what we call "Super Aunties", that are running everything, they're exhausted. And the woman who started it, Kristina, um, Kristina Wong, who's a comedian and uh...uh, wait. What does she? Uh.

ZS: Performance artist?

ED: She's an actor. Yeah, she does, like, performance, individual performance and stuff. And she's down in Southern California, which is really where it [Auntie Sewing Squad] originated. But now it's spread all over the country. So most of the Aunties--and Uncles, because there's some Uncles too sewing, and some of them want to be "Aunties" even though they're male--uh, most of us are in California because that's where it started, but it has spread to almost every state. So, it's *pretty amazing*.

ZS: So on the topic of California, specifically, um, how you mentioned the fashion industry stuff took you to LA. How different do you feel like it was witnessing the political strife in LA *then*, and seeing how close [similar] it is now, but like from Northern California so many years later? You know?

ED: It really wasn't, um... That was before I got politicized. So, I was just, you know, in my 20's and I was just trying to get along. I wasn't paying any attention, I had no idea. Uh, I had just-- I *had* to move down there, I went to the Fashion Institute of Design and Technology, FIDM not FIT--which is the better school. Um, I started the first year in San Francisco and then they require you to transfer--oh sorry this is my husband [in frame].

ZS: Eh, it's okay. [laughs]

ED: Okay, um, you had to go there for the second year, in LA, because that's where the business, the fashion industry is. It's in LA and New York and it really *isn't* in San Francisco. And it's, it's not there at all now. But, you know, there was a fledgling one like, uh, Jessica McClintock had a big company up here and Osprey had a big company, and there were big companies up here but there wasn't much. You know, it was all in LA. So the idea was that you would finish your--uh, I went as a design student, to learn how to design clothing. And I didn't know how to sew before that, they taught me how to sew, so I learned industrial sewing techniques to begin with.

ZS: Mhm, *very cool*.

ED: Yeah, and I, actually, any commercial pattern that I've bought I cannot understand it. Because they make things so hard, it's *unnecessarily* difficult, unnecessarily so. And, you know, they have you buy all this extra fabric and it's just a mess. Anyway, that's not how I learned. I learned on power machines with pattern-making tools, and how to, you know, streamline construction, and the order of things that they, you know. So most of that I don't remember, but uh, I still kind of can figure out how to do something faster. So I have adjusted the pattern that I use to be faster. And I've tried to share it with Aunties, but most of them like the pattern that they came in with. So very few of us are doing the one I have, the one I use, but it fits great. It really

has a great fit. And, there's a size range from kids' size all the way up to extra large for like, a man with a beard. And a lot of the other ones are just medium, and there's no size. And faces are different sizes!

ZS: I have to tie my ear loops on every single mask I get, because I usually go with the accordion one.

ED: Oooh okay, okay. Well, maybe I'll make you a mask.

ZS: Aww! [both laugh]

ED: Well, I'll send you to my swatch page. So, almost every seamstress has what we call a stash, which is her piles and piles of--his or hers--piles of fabric that they've collected over the years.

ZS: My stash is hiding in my closet [laughs]

ED: So you know.

ZS: Oh yeah.

ED: This is a great opportunity to use your stash, and then buy more fabric. [both laugh] That's what I've been doing, in fact I was just ordering more fabric! Uh, which makes me *happy* because dealing with the color and the texture and all that is the joy I get out of doing this project. So it's really a win-win. I enjoy the process and the product and it's saving lives. You couldn't have a better outcome for anything creative, really. You know, it's not--

ZS: Where do you buy your fabric? Sorry.

ED: Well I'm doing everything online because we're in lockdown, basically, like I said "all along." There is a small clothing company nearby which I guess is retail, and I just ordered some stuff from them online and went to go pick it up--to save shipping. But, I order a lot from Etsy because I myself sell on Etsy and I want to support, you know, small businesses. Especially today, Black Friday, which I normally don't shop on, but I made a point of shopping only on Etsy with small companies. So I make sure that they're in the US, and there's an actual human, and you know, um, that's basically where I'm getting my supplies.

ZS: I definitely wanted to ask, because of the quarantine, like, if--because I've also bought some fabrics from Etsy and they're wonderful and I love supporting independents like that, but I also used to go to a little art store around here. Do you have any person like that in your area? Like, that you're ordering online from or anything?

ED: Well just the one yes, I think it's called Bay Quilts. And uh, yeah, I have ordered some stuff from them. They have a more limited stock because they're an actual brick and mortar store, um, but I've gotten some--actually I got a couple of really nice prints from her that no one else had. So, I start there first. There was another store in Berkeley that I have gone to over the years and I started with them, but they really didn't have much. Um, and they do have a huge amount in their

physical store, which I guess is open now, but I just don't want to go in. I only go to grocery stores and that's it, and the grocery store I go to is, um, everything is being wiped down. It's a real small, local grocery store, mostly organic, um, and I pay extra to go there, you know? And then, the rest of the stuff we have delivered by Costco. So I'm--we're living in a lockdown life and we have been since March 11, basically. So, most things I do get online but I do try to get them locally, um, and I do try to support small business.

ZS: Do you notice ever when you're shopping for fabrics, like whether it's in person or online, when you're seeing it and you're holding it, you're a lot more critical than a lot of people around you because of your fashion and industrial sewing background?

ED: Of the fabric or of the masks?

ZS: Like the fabric, uh, like, when you're shopping for masks, just what you run into.

ED: Yeah. Oh yes, like for instance, "Spoonflower", their fabric is like cardboard, unfortunately. They have great designs, and Spoonflower is--are you familiar with them?

ZS: No, but you mentioned them the first time we tried this [the interview], yeah.

ED: Yeah, so there are several, and they're on Etsy and I imagine they're on other places, but Spoonflower is kinda like "Snapfish", which was for photographs. Spoonflower is for people to design their own fabric. So they have a bunch of white fabric, of different kinds, and then you design your repeat of a print that you want and then they print it for you. It's very expensive, like it ends up being, you know... One of them that I bought was almost \$20 a yard, but it was RBG, you know.

ZS: oh yeah [chuckles].

ED: Ruth Bader Ginsburg, so I *had to have it*. Um, it was right when she died. And um, it's [Spoonflower] at least \$10 a yard, which is high, when you're doing quantity. Um, so, and it has a big white border, because they're literally printing it on demand. So it's like "CafePress" is for t-shirts. And it's great because it allows you to have all kinds of designs from these people. So there are some that say, somebody--uh, another Auntie and I traded masks. I had one that said "VOTE as if your life depends on it" by a company called "Think Turner" which has a lot of BLM--Black Lives Matter--prints on Etsy. And, uh, my friend traded me one that says--it's a floral print, it's very cute--and then it says: "Back the fuck off!"

ZS: [chuckles]

ED: "Six feet motherfucker!"

ZS: Yeah [laughs]

ED: You know? [both laugh]

ZS: Ah, I wish I could wear that to work.

ED: So you're wearing this cute little print, and anyone that gets close enough is like "*woooah*" [both laugh]. Um, so that fabric [Spoonflower] is very stiff. It's not supple and soft and--you're frozen.

ZS: I'm--You're back.

ED: Okay, you froze for a minute. Okay, so I was saying that that fabric is very stiff and kind of crunchy. Um, but I put a soft fabric lining inside. I don't--I try to only use 100% fabric, cotton fabric, because that just feels best on the face. And they're saying that two layers of fabric, of cotton fabric, with a high-weave is the *best* resistance to the aerosols of the virus. So, quilting cottons tend to be pretty tightly woven, and that keeps the virus out. This... this Spoonflower stuff, or on-demand printing material, generally is a really open of a weave and you're not going to have as much protection. Oh, hello? Oh you froze up again. Um, so yes, I definitely notice the quality. Um, and when you're dealing with these--the lowest quality fabric os generally from these on-demand print places. Quilters fabric is really high quality, generally. Um, tightly woven. I *do not* use knits. I don't think knit is a good choice for this. And I know a lot of people wear t-shirt material. It's very comfortable, but I don't think it's going to protect you as well from the aerosols. Um, and it stretches out and sags and makes, you know, gets all... loose and funky. So, your woven cotton is your best bet, and with quilting also you get great patterns and I'm all about patterns. So, when you see--actually I can even show you some of my masks if you want?

ZS: Sure, yeah, because I was just going to ask, like, what sort of masks are your favorite ones.

ED: Yeah, yeah, I'll show you because I have like 16 masks because every time I have a fabric I like I make one for myself.

ZS: Nice.

ED: So, uh, can you hang on a sec?

ZS: Oh yeah, absolutely.

ED: Okay, here's my mask wardrobe. [both laugh] There's a lot of them. So, they're all the same pattern, they're all the same size. This is it [holds up mask with Minnie Mouse-style red and big white polka-dots on the outside, red and white traditional bandana paisley on the inside].

ZS: I love that

ED: You can see there's a seam on the top and a seam on the bottom, and then a channel. And then I started putting a bead on the elastic and making the elastic longer so you can adjust it.

ZS: Oh wow

ED: I learned that from another Auntie. You can see inside--I just realized the other day that they can actually be reversible, if you don't mind the pattern. But you can see, that it [puts mask on]

ZS: That's *perfect*.

ED: It really fits well.

ZS: Oh my goodness. Yeah, that looks comfortable too.

ED:[sucks in air quickly]: that's tight. But there's space to breathe. So that means that it's--even though it looks loose on the side, it kind of sits against the face. It's a great design. Sometimes--

ZS: So when you're making--

ED: --it does ride up, like I think I'm probably between--

ZS: Keep going, yeah, in between sizes?

ED: Um, I'm between sizes, so I've had to adjust it a little. And the next ones I make for myself are going to be--they're going to angle down a little [from the nose towards the ear]. This [the nose] will stay the same because it's perfect. But it will come down a little here.

ZS: Because I was just going to ask--

ED: Because it rides up into my eye.

ZS:--what do you do, yeah, what do you do different when you're making different sizes. Like are the darts different lengths? Like, I assume the fabrics are different sizes, but..

ED: The woman I got the pattern from, she graded the sizes, just like t-shirts are graded or blouses are graded. She did the grading, grading is, um, sizing down and sizing up. So you can lay the patterns--she has printouts, you just cut it out. And I actually cut it out on cardboard, or manilla board, like manilla envelope material, which is pattern-making stuff. And, so I just reuse the same patterns but I have a pattern for each size, and this is the size medium. So you can see some of my different [holds up mask with deep blue, monochromatic flower ornamental line art on the outside, and a fabric designed to look like the surface of water on the inside]

ZS: Hmm, I like that color.

ED: For me it's all about the pretty, it's all the pretty. Then I started getting into--this one's a little psychedelic, and I got more psychedelic on the inside [hold up a mask with radially symmetrical purple-orange dominant pattern on the outside, and an equally as busy blue-dominant, square-triangle translation pattern on the inside]. And, now this--this one, is an earlier one [holds up a mask with watermelon colored foliage on the outside, and dark green speckled fabric on the inside], and it has a pocket for the filter.

ZS: Nice. These look incredibly well made. Like, I've seen quite a few hand made masks and I just really want to compliment how much you have *nailed* your process.

ED: *Thank you, thank you.* This is the filter [holds up a masked-shape Filti paper with some zig zag stitches around the edges], so it's two pieces of the Filti and then I just zig-zagged around. Um, and I did have to mark the top, because the top and the bottom are different. You can see [holds up the last mask, folded in half, to show the difference of the angle for the nose and the angle for the chin], this is--this goes deeper in, into the chin. And so, these cannot be washed, they disintegrate. So, you have to slide them in and slide them out. But they last quite a while, I have not had to get rid of any of them.

ZS: Nice

ED: And they, like I said, really help with the smoke. So here's some more [chuckles] I *love* this fabric so much, with the birds [holds up a delicately colored mask with lush foliage and exotic birds in front of a pale blue background on the front, and similarly colored rose-bush fabric on the inside]

ZS: That's beautiful.

ED: More birds [holds up a brighter mask with more stylistic birds on its front], it's like [scoff-laughes] I can't help it. This one, I *really*, [holds up a mask with a blue-green circuit board pattern on the outside and a royal blue inside] I love this computer, circuit board.

ZS: Oh yeah, so detailed.

ED: And then the inside is just plain. And this one is like Mexican dishes [holds up a mask with neutrally colored, overlapping talavera plates on the outside and an orange-red inside], red. Okay now these are the, this is the material from Spoonflower [holds up a mask with the Auntie Sewing Squad logo in front of a white background on the inside, and pale pink-orange daisies evenly spaced out on the inside in a polka-dot grid].

ZS: Oh yeah

ED: This is--one of the Aunties designed out logo, I don't even know who it is, I don't even think she's around anymore. Um, and another Auntie set it up with Spoonflower so we could all buy this material. And then *this* [inside] is a fabric that hundreds of Aunties have gotten, that orange stuff. And this is the RGB [holds up a mask with pop-art colored portraits of identical RGB portraits on the outside and magenta-to-purple, diagonal ombre fabric on the inside].

ZS: Oh, that's gorgeous.

ED: Which is still, it's kinda stiff you know? And I had some scrap that is kinda ombre. And then--

ZS: It matches your hair!

ED: [laughs] It does. [holds up a mask with cartoon hands holding peace signs alongside speech bubbles with "vote!" on the outside, and thin, alternating white and red pinstripes vertically sewn on the inside] Before the election, I was scouring the internet for vote fabric. This is a good one. And then *this* [holds up a navy blue mask with muted cyan ovals encasing: "VOTE", outlined with "LIKE YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT / FOR CHANGE"] is the one I was telling you about, that says "VOTE like your life depends on it!" Now these, this is the really expensive stuff. And, and stiff. It's like a bad combination. But, I identified--I said to all the Aunties: "Who lives in a swing state?" And I gave them a list of the states that, you know are on the list, there's like a dozen states. And, I sent one of these to every Auntie in a swing state that said they would wear it around out in their world. And, then they sent me photographs of them, in these. And I found some other people after I--you know, I only had about.. 20 of these that I was able to make. But I sent them to almost every single swing state. So there was at least one--there was one in Iowa.

ZS: [chuckles]

ED: There were about eight... in Arizona. And I just, you know--who knows if it helped. But it just made me feel good and it made them feel good and they were being activists there. And I'm way out here and it's like "I gotta do something!"

ZS: Yeah [laughs]

ED: And actually I just finished, um, 20 masks for the Georgia senate race. Um, and that's an Auntie project--this [swing state masks] was my own project. But um, there's an Auntie project right now to send masks that have vote-stuff on them--which you can't find *anywhere* anymore. And, to outfit the people that are walking precincts and stuff in Georgia for the senate race. So, did that.

ZS: That's very touching, yeah.

ED: Yeah, like I said, it has to have a *meaning* for me. I can't just be making a huge volume of random masks. I wish I could. Because the need is so great, and there are some Aunties that are like "Yeah, here I happen to have 100 I just made" and I'm like "whaaat."

ZS: [laughs]

ED: One of the Aunties has made more than 6,000 masks, herself. It's just like, holy... What?

ZS: [scoffs] Yeah.

ED: So, that's not going to be me, but, these last. [shakes swing state mask] These are going to last. That's the thing, I want them to last, if they don't lose them like the homeless guy.

ZS: Yeah, yeah.

ED: So, you know, I want to know who it's going to, and that they're going to have something that they like enough that they'll wear it. That's my goal

ZS: Absolutely, it's a very noble pursuit. Thank you for doing the hard work that other people like myself can't afford to do right now. If you are in need of fabric I can send you some, but...

ED: Yeah! *Yes*, I mean, if you've got cotton fabric, I will, I can use it. And I can give it to other Aunties, also.

ZS: For sure, I'll dig around.

ED: Yeah, and tell anyone else you know that has a stash, that this is a real good cause. Quite a bit of the linings I have are from other people's stashes. One woman gave me her mother's stash because she was only using the [zipper] teeth. So, you know, yeah. So, yes please!

ZS: Of course

ED: And I will make you a mask! How about that?

ZS: Thank you! I would love that.

ED: Is that a deal?

ZS: Yeah.

ED: Okay, I'll send you my swatch page and you can choose which fabric you'd like.

ZS: Oh absolutely, I'm so excited now. Okay, I'm going to go ahead and end the recording.

ED: Okay.