CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF RUTH BOWMAN

by Joan M. Benedetti

Ruth Bowman
February 12, 2008

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Ruth Bowman was born on June 14, 1923, in Denver, Colorado. She was a founding member of the CAFAM Board starting in 1975. She taught at NYU and was Curator/Director of the NYU Art Collection 1963 – 1974. She became well-known for her interviews of famous 20th Century American Artists on CBS' "Sunrise Semester"; she taught 49 sessions, the tapes of which are in the Archives of American Art. Before Bowman left NYU, she located and rescued two of ten murals done by Arshile Gorky between 1935 – 37 for the Newark Airport. She guest-curated an exhibition, "Murals without Walls: Arshille Gorky's Aviation Murals Rediscovered" at the Newark Museum that opened in November 1978 and toured for two years to six U.S. cities. She also authored the accompanying catalog. Bowman is an art historian and an art collector and has been active with the American Association of Museums (she was Vice-President in 1974) and various museum education groups. She was Director of Education at the L.A. County Museum of Art from February 1974 – August 1975. She was influential in the hiring of Patrick Ela as CAFAM Administrative Director (who had worked for her at LACMA), and she introduced Mort Winston, who served as board chair for eleven years, to CAFAM. She acted as a mentor to several CAFAM staff members, including Joan Benedetti, Marcia Page, and Sharon Emanuelli. Bowman served on the CAFAM board for eight years (1975 – 1983). She moved back to New York City in the mid-eighties.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer: Joan M. Benedetti. B.A., Theater; M.A., Library Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. **Related Experience:** Milwaukee Public Library Decorative Arts Librarian, 1967 – 1968; CAFAM Museum Librarian 1976 – 1997. From 1998 – 2012, Benedetti worked to process the CAFAM Records, 1965 – 1997, which are now part of Special Collections at the UCLA Young Research Library. From 2008 – 2010 she conducted oral history interviews with seventeen former CAFAM staff and trustees; almost 60 hours were recorded and transcribed. She is the author of several articles on folk art terminology and small art museum libraries and the editor of *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship*, Lanham, MD: ARLIS/NA and Scarecrow Press, 2007.

Time and Setting of Interviews

Place: Joan Benedetti's home in Santa Monica.

Dates, time, length of session, and total number of hours recorded: Only one session was possible: It took place Tuesday afternoon, February 12, 2008;1 hour, 45 minutes, 55 seconds.

Persons present during the interview: Ruth Bowman and Joan Benedetti.

Conduct and Content of Interview: To prepare for the Bowman interview, Benedetti reviewed the relevant documents in the CAFAM Records collection at UCLA Special Collections. When she was finishing the editing of the transcript in early 2015, Benedetti consulted with Bowman's son, Mark Finkel. Although Benedetti guided the interview in a chronological direction, Bowman frequently interjected comments on earlier or later events.

Editing: The transcript was edited by Benedetti and by Bowman with the assistance of her son, Mark Finkel, for spelling of names and some family history. Benedetti added full names and opening dates of CAFAM exhibitions where appropriate. She also added in brackets further information for clarification and deleted with ellipses some back-and-forth comments that did not add to the reader's understanding of the narrative. Time stamps have been added to both the table of contents and the transcript at five-minute intervals; the time stamps make it easier to locate the topics in the transcript that are mentioned in the table of contents.

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INTERVIEW OF RUTH BOWMAN

Tuesday, February 12, 2008. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti (1 hour, 45 minutes, 55 seconds).

JB: This is Tuesday, February 12, 2008, and I'm here [at my home] in Santa Monica with Ruth Bowman, who's visiting from New York City. And we're going to be talking about her involvement with the Craft and Folk Art Museum, as well as some of her personal background. I have her here just for this afternoon because she's going back to New York tomorrow. But for anyone who is interested in more of her background—other than [her experiences with] the Craft and Folk Art Museum . . . [her papers and some other materials are] in the Archives of American Art. So, Ruth, let's start at the beginning. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

RB: I was born in Denver, Colorado, on June 14, 1923, in St. Joseph Hospital, as the first child in my mother's and father's six-child family.

JB: Ah-h. Six children. Can you tell us a little bit about your parents and your early childhood?

RB: My parents met when they were thirteen and my father sent a valentine when they were thirteen and it was a postcard and it said, "Our eyes have met, our lips not yet, but oh you kid, I'll get you yet." And so he did. And at 21 they married and at 23 they had me.

JB: My. It's amazing that you can remember that.

RB: Well, I couldn't forget it. I mean, "Our eyes have met, our lips not yet." What kind of thing is that for a scrapbook?

JB: That's wonderful. So when you were growing up, were there art collections or other kinds of collections in your home?

RB: Well, my first museum experience--actually, I was the first granddaughter on one side of the family and the first grandchild on the other side of the family. In other words, I had grandparents and they had cousins and I got a lot of attention and I was taken places. One of my earliest memories is riding on my father's father's shoulder in the Natural History Museum and seeing all those stuffed animals that were real.

JB: Now was this in Denver?

RB: It was in Denver. We left Denver when I was five and I had a brother who was three and a new-born sister when we left. And then the other three were born in Washington, D.C. My father was a lawyer. He had been in public service and at the age of—in his mid-twenties—he came to Washington to work with another lawyer from Denver to set up

the—he was involved in [federal] communications. [In Denver] we actually had a tower in our backyard in a row of houses—I think I was three weeks old--and [I was told] my father took me from my little basket in their bedroom out to the shed and I hear I made baby noises on his radio station and so I've been broadcasting since—for almost 84 years. [Bowman's father was the first General Consul of the Federal Radio Commission (the predecessor of the FCC); he then went into private practice.]

JB: I can't think of any more appropriate upbringing considering what you've been doing for the last--

RB: Well, I like the microphone as you can tell.

JB: So when did you first—I mean there's so much that I could go into if we had more time, but I'm just wondering when you began to have your first professional interest in museums and art. Was that in college?

RB: Oh no. It was absolutely . . . [all] around you [when I was growing up]. There were two things: there was nature—and I was very involved in going in the woods and going across little creeks and stepping on stones and picking wildflowers—or if not picking them at least drawing them [and the other thing was:] my mother was very interested in drawing. And we went to the Corcoran Museum and the—I had an art teacher by the time I was in public school, and she would go places with me and we would make pictures of bridges, . . . from below the bridge. And by the time I got to be a Girl Scout--this was very tough for me—I had made a drawing to submit to the Girl Scouts and my teacher was helping me and she touched my work! And that gave me a--*very—subdued—rage*. [laughing] [**5:00]** I was so angry that she put *fleur de lis* on the skirt of this woman I'd made in a costume.

JB: Oh no!

RB: But I certainly got the badge and I always felt guilty, but I was still angry with her so I didn't want to work with her anymore. And I was a doodler too. I had school books and in the outer pages of the school books there were a lot of drawings that someone had seen. I certainly can't remember whether . . . [the doodles were in the] . . . math or language [school books], but I always liked drawing. I liked to draw what I saw and I liked to draw what I thought of—or dreamed. I even tried to draw pictures of things I was looking at.

JB: So, did you end up taking a degree in studio art?

RB: Oh, no, no, no, no. I wouldn't do that. I couldn't do that.

JB: So, what were your degrees?

RB: I couldn't compete in that way! [laughing] And I never went to life class. But I did go to—I did draw from still lifes in school. And one of the things that I learned when I started in the Quaker school system was I learned how to make panels with gilding . . . and—you know—the various layers of color. That was very exciting. That was seventh grade I think. So we did tend to—in Washington, D.C.—go out to the museums all the time.

JB: How could you not!? [laughing]

RB: Well, and then the National Gallery was built and I was allowed to go downtown by myself to the National Gallery and look at the—I think--15th century—I was really into the 15th century at that time—looking at these small paintings in great detail. But then modern art did come into my life because I wanted to be an architect by the time I was 12 and I built a little model house with a curve in it. And it was certainly similar to a house in Switzerland with a curve. [Le Corbusier?] And I used cellophane and I used sandpaper, which I painted green, for the grass and sponges, which I put in . . . the green paint. I made trees.

It was--I had ambition from early childhood and I had a teacher in seventh grade--I was new and the other students weren't nice to me--so she gave me a kind of clay that was different colors. And while she was teaching us history or math, I was sitting at my desk making little dolls—or making little whatever. And her husband was very good--**[interruption in the recording]** In any case, it was—there was a lot of sympathy from my teachers in certain ways—not all my teachers, but some of my teachers. And the Quaker school system paid attention to what the specialties of the students were so--

JB: Now, was that in D.C.?

RB: That was in Washington, D.C. I started out in a townhouse on I Street—near 18th Street, where there was a Quaker meeting house and a gym and a concrete backyard where we played . . . The school—the Quaker school--was started out on Wisconsin Avenue by a Mr. Sidwell, but he had this school way downtown and then the Quakers sold that property and Mr. Sidwell died and he gave—he had left [to] us—that is the ninth graders, the high school—this is where the art really came in—we moved into Sidwell's house as the high school. And my class—the ninth grade—had the living room and there was a Mrs. White, who taught us how to write and how to read. And we also attached ourselves as students to *The New Yorker*, particularly the beginning of *The New Yorker*, the little short stories. And we had a magazine and in my four years of high school I got to be joint editor of that and I had a classmate who was a great artist, small artist, making details. I was very jealous. She did me a favor and she made cartoons of me—if you can imagine [laughing]--

JB: So how did the—you said that that was really the start of the art there--

RB: Well, we all learned—we had slide shows. We saw magazines. We had books. And Mrs. White and some of the other teachers attached history and art together. And by the time I got to Bryn Mawr--where my father said I would never get in—

JB: Which you did!

RB: By the time I got to Bryn Mawr, I really was attaching myself to classical archaeology and to art history. And--

JB: What had happened to the architecture? **[10:00]**

RB: Well, I pulled that out of the hat because when I got married [in 1942 to Stanley Finkel] and had a two-year-old, I went to Columbia at night and studied architecture in night school for a year, and then at the end of that year I was at a picnic with my little two-and-a-half-year-old and my husband, and I heard someone asking my husband if I was going back to Columbia in the fall and I heard him say, "Not as my wife," because he wanted a larger family—and that's what happened. So I didn't stick with it that way, but as an art historian I was already caught up in the history of architecture and I began to want to share what I knew, and that's probably somewhere where you and CAFAM came in.

JB: Well, I was about to ask you when you first—what brought you to California? . . . I know we're skipping a whole bunch but--

RB: Well, if you want to take the story of my life--I was married three times. And it was my third husband, who left his-- . He was a Yorkshire man and a hero in World War II. He was a hero of the RAF—the Royal Air Force. He trained in America because . . . the weather was too bad in England. He wanted to be an American, which he became.

JB: Now was this Wallace [Bowman]?

RB: Yes.

JB: Wallace.

RB: Anyway, he was working in New York and we married in 1967 and somewhere in the early seventies—1973-4—that period--he had a great offer to come to a company that was going to get oil out of shale [laughing] . . . .

JB: [laughing] I think I know the one you mean!

RB: It was called Tosco [an acronym for The Oil Shale Company].

JB: Yes.

RB: Anyway, he came to work here and I—for all kinds of reasons—got a job at the L.A. County Museum [of Art], which was an education job. And it came from something that happened to me—the most amazing—I guess curatorially--I was the most fortunate person on the planet because I got--the timing of communicating knowledge of art began with the growth of television and reproduction and all kinds of things and all through my childhood--from the time we moved to Brandywine Street in a nice big house in Washington, D.C. in the . . . third alphabet, as they say in Washington--from that time on, there was nothing that was too hard for me to get to see.

And if I didn't see it in a museum, I saw it in a book. And if I didn't see it in a book, I saw it in a reproduction. And I was—I don't know—it was better than eating. And it was a delicious time. Classical archaeology, I was a bit of a coward. I didn't learn enough languages. I didn't learn enough German to pass the Ph.D. German exam, although I didn't need it for [the M.A., NYU, 1971. . at] the graduate school I went to. But at Bryn Mawr College I majored in art history, minored in classical archaeology, and went all the way through World War II without ever going anywhere except cities in America to look at art. [For example, in] San Francisco, where my then-husband's [Stanley Finkel's] ship came in: there were museums there and collections there . . . I go back there with great joy and see things that I remembered from those years. I mean it's been a while.

But then all kinds of things happened. I got a job at the Jewish Museum as a curatorial something or other. [She was Assistant Curator at the Jewish Museum in the early 60s.]

JB: Now was that in Washington?

RB: No, that was in New York City.

JB: Oh, in New York, OK.

RB: Because when I was married to Wally we were in New York City. It was only in '74 that we moved out here to the Los Angeles area and I went to work at the County Museum—which was a very difficult job, a complex job.

JB: Talk about that a bit.

RB: Well, it was--

JB: That was where you met Patrick [Ela], I believe.

RB: Well, yes, I met Patrick Ela there. . . . Patrick Ela had just been graduated from a program in the Middle West as an intern. But that was steps along the way.

What happened to me was in 1963 I left the Jewish Museum and I was a graduate student for 11 years at the Institute for Fine Arts [at NYU]. **[15:00]** I finally got a

master's degree, but in the course of that I suddenly began teaching. And I got a job at NYU as the curator of their downtown university collection, which was about 400 wonderful paintings and drawings and prints. And it was very exciting! . . .

And the university, which still is the same way, sent out a press release [for] this person, who knew nothing about how the politics of art in a city like New York would go. So they sent a press release out and it was in *The New York Times* that Ruth—by that time my name was Ruth Gurin . . . I had a lot of names I'm sorry to say. [She was married to Maurice Gurin from 1960 – 61.] But anyway [the press release said] that I was the curator of the collection and the next day I had a phone call. (This was a very important part of my life.) I had a phone call and the voice on the other side said, "This is Joseph Cornell. How would you like to come out to my house and select some works for the students?"

JB: Now what was his connection to that-- ?

RB: He saw it in the paper.

JB: Oh, because of your press release!

RB: Yes.

JB: Oh my goodness!

RB: So there I was. I was absolutely shaking. And I said, "Mr. Cornell, could I have your phone number? I'll call you right back." Because I couldn't talk. My throat was closed. And I finally got myself together and I called him and I made a date and I was so terrified. I mean, this famous artist who was—who made films as well as made boxes and collages and was known as a very strange personality living way out there in Queens. And I decided to take the head of the department—the art department [with me]. I worked for the president as the hierarchy went, but I had an office about the size of my front hall closet and I had three desks in it. That was my place to work, but it was quite nerve-wracking, and I asked [the department head], Howard Conant (who now lives in Arizona and is in his nineties), to come with me to [see] Cornell. Well, he was very excited.

JB: Well, sure.

RB: We took the subway and we took the bus and we got to the house and I rang the doorbell and Cornell was right there. He knew when I was coming and [looking at Conant] he said, "Who's that?" And I said, "Oh that's—I'd like you to meet Howard Conant, the head of the art department." He said [to Conant], "Sit over there," and he pointed to a chair on the deck in front of the house. Two and a half hours later, after I had been in every room in the house, looked at every box, not only in the—and his workshop--in the garage,

boxes and boxes that he had made, and we'd made selections, and then I came and left with Howard. And Howard was--

JB: And Howard had to sit out on the front porch the whole time?

RB: Cornell had no interest in Howard Conant or his title.

JB: Oh, my goodness!

RB: And he knew that he was the teacher of a faculty of about twenty art teachers in the department. And he wasn't interested. He didn't want to hear what or who he was or anything. And we did a job and then on the 22nd of November, when, I guess, at the time of the funeral of JFK--

JB: Oh, JFK! This was '63. [President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963; the funeral was on November 25.]

RB: Yeah. I came to pick up—I had already picked them [the art pieces] out**. [interruption in the recording]** Without Howard there to instruct me, Cornell and I got together all the boxes. I came with a friend who had a station wagon. We loaded it up and, unfortunately, it was the day of the funeral of JFK and the world was gloomy and we went—I had to go into the house to get some of the material and, on the sofa, was his poor brother, who was unable to stand. He was being fed his supper by his mother. And they were watching the TV of the funeral—the rerun of the funeral. And you can imagine what it felt like taking these mysterious boxes and the wonderful collages into the car and making them safe and then getting to NYU and finding security. The university was totally shut down. I had to find—get someone with a key to our storeroom to put these things away. And then we put everything into the—what was in the student center. I mean, when you think of these valuable things going into [primitive] kinds of cases of his work. **[20:00] And** they were there for three months. And I thought he'd given them to NYU--to show you how naïve I was.

JB: Oh-h-h!

RB: And, well, I got a call from Cornell, and he said, "When are you sending things back?"

JB: Oh, my word!

RB: He'd also given me a book and he wanted that back!

JB: Oh, my word!

RB: And from that time—and so we shipped them out there. I didn't want to--

JB: Did he think you were going to have an exhibition?

RB: Oh, we did have an exhibition . . . . But it [was] no big deal—we made a little [checklist], a one-page thing that the students could pick up. And it was quite—probably now it would be worth millions of dollars—these three cases in a row filled with his work and certainly, historically, if we'd been brilliant, which we weren't--we were just delighted and excited. And I had graduate students working with me. I actually had people with very big jobs who didn't have their master's degrees and I—without my own master's degree—had things for them to do.

[So] I got to be a teacher before I was a teacher, making things available, and taking people's papers and giving them assignments, and there I was with my Bryn Mawr noise—my funny accent—and I was there for 11 years! And I taught all kinds of courses. I taught to the general public in one department. There were eight departments at NYU, including at the Heights, in the Bronx, and I had a representative of each of the faculties of those eight. And we had our regular meetings. And the head of that committee was Howard Conant, but the powerhouse was H.W. Janson, whose book—this is part of the story—his book, *The History of Art*, hit [had sold] its millionth [copy] . . . and another press release went out from NYU—no, went out [from] Abrams, the publisher. And I got hold of it and I called him and I said, "How would you like—

Oh—I had to tell you that I got on two more press releases—this has to fit in—I got offered a job at the Museum of Modern Art to work with the Junior Council of rich people who were helping the—and I didn't want the job—and that's how I got the job at NYU. But then they [MOMA] invited me to come back and give talks to the public in 1964, when Philip Johnson's building opened there. They had a new building, which is still there as a very special part of the Museum of Modern Art. And Philip Johnson designed it, and it's perfect and every time I go by it I think, "That was a wonderful year—1964."

And Mrs. Johnson, the wife of the President [Lyndon Johnson], came to cut the ribbon. And somebody in the back garden--which I cannot hold back--said, "Wasn't that nice of the wife of the architect to come and cut the ribbon?" And the people were going—covering their faces laughing because they [the person who had spoken up] didn't know which Mrs. Johnson it was—and of course Philip Johnson did not have a wife! So that was fun.

But in any case I did then, on my lunch hour, when I was [at NYU]--in that 11 years--I would run up to the Museum of Modern Art, give a talk in the galleries--and I had to submit a list [of the attendees] to Liz Shaw, who was a very important PR person, because there was no education department at the Modern, believe it or not, in 1964, So there was one woman who had the school classes, and was a wonderful teacher—and

actually, later, took my position, and spoke to the adults when I left to move to California. But they sent a press release out that we were going to have lunch hour lectures. And I used to get 45-50 people in the galleries. And some of the galleries were quite small.

JB: What a wonderful time you must have had!

RB: And they sent out this press release. And I got a phone call from [the radio station] WNYC asking me if I would like to come and give—do interviews. So I began doing interviews in 1964. And when Janson—years later—when Janson's millionth copy [was printed], I invited him to come down [to be interviewed]. And this is where my career began, really, because—my so-called career—I still call it "my so-called career" because you can't turn up your nose at anything and you're innocent no matter *what you do*—and it comes out of your head and your imagination—there are people around who might have some problems with what you think you're doing-- . **[25:00]**

But in any case, WNYC invited me to come down and from that point until I moved to California, I had my own radio program and for the 11 years that they had television, I also did that. And all I did was do what you're doing [with] me. And that is ask them about their lives, have them tell it—tell us, the public—and to make that useful. And throughout that period, they kept track of the tapes on little cassettes [and] various kinds of 7" [reels]—I was hauling around a 7" player, which was very hard on my back.

But in any case, I was doing all of this stuff and having a wonderful time and I had special students. I taught in the graduate school of education. I have to tell . . . [whoever is] going to be listening to whatever it is I'm saying . . . some of the things that happened in the course of teaching. I submitted, "How to Use Museums," for a teacher's course, and what I got [back] was "The Educational Utilization of Museum Resources," as a title. [laughing] And that's education for you! I never took an education course. I just liked teaching—and I liked giving people something to think about. And to support whatever it is that they do that I admire.

JB: Now, you had young children at this time, didn't you? Or had they grown up--

RB: My children at that time—in the time that I was doing that—were going to the Rudolf Steiner School on 78th for the high school and 79th for the younger kids, and I was going to graduate school in the late afternoon and they would come and pick me up and take me home to cook their dinner, which was four blocks away.

JB: So that worked out fine. [laughing]

RB: So that was that. My children put up with it and they certainly went to a good school for people who wanted to be involved in the arts. So they've been wonderful about it.

JB: So when Wallace got this job offer with Tosco—that must have been a little—you must have felt somewhat ambivalent about leaving New York City.

RB: Well, luckily, at that time in the early seventies--before Wally got the job to come out here--he was working for Larry Tisch [at Lowe's Corporation] in New York. Before we came out here, what happened was that Janson, having been interviewed by me on the television, decided that I could talk on camera. OK. Now this is something that I've never said to the public—or any public. When Janson called me in the spring of '72, he said, "I would like you to teach a Sunrise Semester on CBS network. This is where my career began—my serious career began. "Would you like to teach "Sunrise Semester" on 20th century American art?" And I sort of giggled and I said, "Dr. Janson, you have eight Ph.Ds that could teach this course." I said, "What about Robert Rosenbloom, who's the most famous modernist that ever lived—and brilliant?" And he said, "Well, Bobby," he said, "Bobby didn't want to do it. He said he liked eye contact." Well, I'd been looking at cameras for years and that was my eye contact. And I took the job and for forty-nine [sessions]—it was Monday, Wednesday, and Friday on "Sunrise Semester."

NYU had had an agreement with CBS because they had to do something nice for the world. So NYU taught [on] television from the late forties to the early eighties. And all kinds of subjects. And I was teaching Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 20th century American art, and another professor was teaching Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, art of the Middle East—or, no, history of the Middle East—modern history. And this is a very important thing (cause it happened to me, I guess—a lot of things happened) and I taught the course, forty-nine programs with no script—just a list of slides. And that was pretty bold and not very brilliant, but they had nothing to go with [them] except the tapes and the tapes are at the Archives of American Art. **[30:00]**

But Barbara Rose had written a book called *Twentieth Century American Art*, so I had a course book all ready to go. In that course book there was a small rectangular reproduction of a gouache that was in the collection (black and white) of the Museum of Modern Art. And it was called "Studies for a Lost Mural at the Newark Airport," [by] Arshile Gorky. And I nearly jumped out of the room in which I was sitting reading this book . . . right in the middle was something that looked like a Leger, and I'd already written an article for a magazine about this thing that looked like a Leger--and what it was, was a segment of the northwest mural of Gorky's in the [Newark] airport where there had been ten murals and they were lost. And so I said, "I'm going to go look for that!" I rushed down to the president's office at NYU and there was this painting and I took it out of the frame and there was a selvage at the top and there was a signature in

the upper right hand corner and I said, “Oh, that’s just a WPA painting, but I want to go and find those murals.”

So, one of the things that I did--and this is where it got exciting for me professionally-- is that a group of us—with the help of the Port Authority—went by helicopter from 16th Street and 8th Avenue—this conservator and I—we went to look for the murals. And eventually we found two of them under 14 layers of paint and it became a major, major project [to find] these two murals—which were not the best murals. They weren’t the mural I wanted to find. It [the mural I wanted to find] was gone. I went all over the state of New Jersey to find out what happened to the other eight murals. And people said, “Well, those went to the dump. And those were burned in a—“

JB: Oh, my goodness.

RB: Because [at that time] the WPA was of no interest and the army, the U.S. Army, had taken—[or] Air Force—had taken over the airport during World War II and there is a saying that says, “If it moves, salute it. If it doesn’t move, paint it.” And that’s what happened to the murals.

JB: They were painted over.

RB: Fourteen layers--and we made a traveling exhibition [and] we rescued it. The Port Authority got the money. The Newark Museum got . . . [involved] and those two paintings became part of a traveling exhibition. And it [the catalog] has—it’s still in the Met—I guess in all of the libraries. There’s a note that, indeed, two of [the catalogs] got bound, and they are available. They’re going to now, as I speak, they’re going to a second conservation of these murals [as] they were so fragile; they had no varnish on them. There was a lot of grease from the airport on them when they were cleaning them. And so it’s become a very major thing. [The murals themselves are at the Newark Museum.]

JB: And it was because of your persistence that that happened.

RB: One of the tragedies that came after this was all of the records that we had of all of the things we did were in the Port Authority when the Port Authority [building] was bombed [that is, burned] on 9-11.

JB: Oh-h-h!

RB: So the only record they have is what was in my files from the traveling exhibition, which were in the Newark Museum. So—and I had the slides. I still have them. I’m going to give them to the Newark Museum. . . . I’m not giving them to the Port Authority because they don’t even want them.

JB: Wow. And that all happened just--not that long--before you went to California.

RB: Well, actually, the opening exhibition . . . I put together by going to Europe to find all the studies. The Gorky family, which was two daughters (one married to Stephen Spender's son, Matthew, and the other living somewhere in Germany—I think) . . . came to the exhibition, of course. But I [had gone] to visit them and [to] find in various places (including Zurich, where the Rothschilds were--one of the Rothschilds was hiding or holding [them] in some kind of way) the Gorky paintings that are in the family. [The development of interest in Gorky] is still happening. There's going to be a major, major exhibition in Philadelphia of Arshile Gorky in a couple of years. It's going to be very exciting. And these murals will be in it, I'm sure. ["Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective" was mounted at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, October 21, 2009 – January 10, 2010, and afterward traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.]

JB: Well, you had quite an amazing career going at that point.

RB: Well, up to that, and arriving in L.A. And candor is cutting in now. I'm going to talk very, very openly about my experience. Because one of the people, the director of the-- . I always had to have people to interview on my radio station because 52 times a year I had to interview somebody and one of them was— **[35:00]**

JB: And those were all live shows?

RB: Yes, it was live tape. We never edited anything. So the director of the L.A. County Museum was in town and I interviewed him and he went back and he did—and when I was looking for a job--

JB: Who was the director at that time? [Kenneth Donahue was the LACMA Director from 1966 - 1979.]

RB: So, anyway, years later . . . I left the County Museum . . . after a miserable experience as an academic and a teaching person in a museum where the structure of the museum was not to be bragged about. That is, there was the usual—the director, the curators, the board of trustees, and various support things, one of which was the library, which is a very important library, very well managed, a slide library, [and] a bunch of volunteer [docents]. I had no contact with or invitation, really, to work with the three hundred volunteers that were working in the museum—which I think was a bad decision, that maybe I shouldn't have been the kind of person that was hired to [be] the head of education, when I was used to having contact with everybody in Manhattan. [Bowman's title was Curator of Education—she was the head of that department.]

JB: Yes, they always kept that volunteer [docent] group separate [from the Education Department].

RB: Well, they had some wonderful ideas. But when I made the mistake of allowing lower [grade classes] to visit. They [the docents] were set up and they had programs and they were very strong programs and I was very innocent and I had my own programs and they did not mesh. One [example] was really sort of silly. One of them had to do with the fact that I got kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teachers to come with their children and I found out you're not supposed to wear slacks or blue jeans or anything like that and you certainly--

JB: That has changed! . . . . But not that long ago! [laughing]

RB: Well . . . I think the purpose of museums has always been interesting to look at. And one of the things that happened to me [during] this transition was that I got very involved in museum education, which I'd really never been involved in except for my lectures at the Modern—which were from my heart and soul kind of lectures—and my imagination. This was very different, and the curators were wondering what I was supposed to be doing, and I never got to write a label for any curator because somehow the education didn't mesh [with the curatorial divisions]. There was not any fine tuning.

And it was very hard for me because there must have been at least 50 women [who were docents] who dressed better than I did, went to the same kind of fancy sister colleges, could give a talk whiz-bang better than I could probably, and I admired them, but [the two programs] just didn't mesh, and I was not allowed to work with them]. I just wasn't allowed [to do what I wanted], and they couldn't believe [in what I wanted to do] because they had structured themselves [to believe that]: *the fifth grade is the best age group to bring to a museum*—that was it--cold. And they had a perfect right to do that, but, somehow, I was too excited [about museum education], and I probably offended a half-dozen women badly by doing things without involving them, or, when I involved them, I may have made critical remarks. Who knows? But I left after a few years and went on to become involved, as I had been, with the American Association of Museums.

JB: Yes, I wanted to ask you about that.

RB: Well, this was really crazy. In 1974 there was a meeting of the American Association of Museums in Texas in Dallas and Fort Worth and there was a meeting of all the museum educators and there had been a upheaval in the American Association of Museums, which proved that all the museums were run by white men and no women except for curators—and they were underpaid. I mean it was—and then the departments of education were very indifferent. But we began—I wasn't at the real uprising in '73—I think in Minneapolis, maybe—I don't know where--but I heard about it and then I had just joined an education committee. We had a meeting and two of us were appointed to be on the ballot--

JB: Excuse me—now was this while you were at LACMA? **[40:00]**

RB: I was still at LACMA. Yeah.

JB: OK.

RB: And they had—that was a very important question. Thank you. So we all went to San Francisco [at JFK University?] and took courses--and LACMA sent me there--and took courses in how to improve the education. I was finally pulling myself out of the mirage and it was very, very exciting. So two of us—a man from the American Museum on Central Park West [the American Museum of Natural History] and me. We were—and I was considered from NYU—and we became members of the Council of the AAM. And the following year some woman from Texas decided that I should be the Vice President of the AAM. And I began traveling around the country and, sort of with my thumb in my mouth, very ashamed of my not learning more before I went there.

There was no structure for museum education in the way that would have swept me up. I just did the best I could and I did much too much study and evaluation. I had psychologists doing evaluations and then I got involved at that time with distance learning. And then I went to Britain and I found out about distance learning and look what we have now. Just turn your computer on and you can study anything! And it all began in the seventies.

JB: And you were really involved, I think, with some of the first organized—well, not the first because I suppose John Cotton Dana was one of the first—but I think [at the time that you began to be involved, museum] education began to be a little more formalized.

RB: Well, and the fraternities and sororities of these people. They really paid attention. I looked at all of this now and it's much more sophisticated. It's much deeper and it's much—it goes out to other disciplines. You know, there's not one discipline called education.

JB: Well, what I meant was, museum education became, I guess, a real profession in the sixties and seventies.

RB: Well, the saint of all of this is Steve Weil, who died recently.

JB: Yes.

RB: And his volumes and his way of attaching ideas of not just the object but also the people and the responsibility of museums. The responsibility of museums is still a very important thing and every summer Steve Weil used to go to Victoria—the University of Victoria—and teach a course and the last course after he died . . . has a volume that they have in their library and in their archives—[describing] his final thoughts on what museums should be and do. And I think of him as a saint cause whenever I was called to be an

advisor (for instance, to the Philadelphia Academy), he went with me and he went to a retreat that the Brooklyn Museum had that I ran and another one in Seattle that I ran. He had one trustee who found out that he . . . [couldn't function as] a trustee except in a trustee meeting. He couldn't go to a dinner party and discuss what's going on with the trustees. Because: what is a trustee? Is it an honor or is it a responsibility? And that brings me to the Craft and Folk Art Museum here in Los Angeles.

I have to tell you how I met the Wyles . . . . Because what happened to me was when I was at NYU, Mayor [John] Lindsay had opened something called the Cultural something—I can't remember the total title [laughing]. He opened all the arts and invited certain people. And at that time the wife of the president—the retired president—of MIT was in New York City. Her husband (the retired president of MIT) was . . . for five years . . . the president of the Ford Foundation. And she was working on this council of Mayor Lindsay's. **[45:00]** And I was sent by NYU because nobody [else] wanted to be bothered—I swear. And I met Kay Stratton there. And Kay Stratton was starting in 1970--with a wonderful woman named Ida Rubin (who just passed away) and she [Stratton] decided that I should come to MIT and work with her at the end of her [tenure]. First, she gave me her job at the end of five years . . . her job working with Lindsay's committee. And then she went off to Cambridge and insisted that I come up and join the new Council for the Arts at MIT. . . . The whole engineering . . . and scientific part--of MIT is connected to the arts—all of the arts. They have 32 music groups and every department of science is involved in the arts and that's wonderful—including theater and film and dance. I mean you go on and on.

So Kay Stratton invited me up to Cambridge and I went to an education meeting to see what they were doing, OK? And there was Edith Wyle and Frank Wyle, sitting there in this education meeting, and I was sounding off because I didn't know who they were and Ricky Lee, who had worked with [Flaherty?] was there talking about film. And I was asking questions. And I knew I was going to stay on the council at MIT for the rest of my life, because I couldn't afford to be a financial donor, but I really wanted to play that game of bringing science and art together. So Edith was very excited and she said, "You know, we have a museum in the making in California." And I said, "Well, I'm moving there." She said, "You're not." I said, "Oh yes I am." And that was the beginning.

And then I went into the sadness of my life at—I shouldn't say the sadness—the difficulty of my life at the L.A. County [Museum of Art]. But I started going over to—across the street--to the Craft and Folk Art Museum a lot, having lunch there and so forth. And before I knew it, Edith and Frank had asked me to become a member of the board. And I thought that was hilarious because what do I know about being a member of the

board? So I had to learn how to be a member of the board with other board members, and go to meetings and pay attention to the programs. And the [CAFAM] transition was happening, from a restaurant with nice exhibits and nice crafts being sold, into a major museum that had to be approved [accredited] as a museum nationwide [through the American Association of Museum accreditation process].

JB: This was—well, the first meeting [of the CAFAM board] was in June of 1975, but, obviously, you met the Wyles quite a bit before then.

RB: Well, yes, Edith and I became friends and Wally [Bowman] and Edith and I had a lot of time together, and then I got two assistants coming in, one of whom was—later [October 1975]-- became a director of the museum.

JB: Patrick.

RB: Patrick Ela.

JB: So—but let me—before we talk about Patrick—which I do want you to do—you obviously got to know The Egg and The Eye Gallery before it was the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

RB: Obviously.

JB: So just tell us a little bit about your impressions. I mean, most obviously, how does it contrast with LACMA? I mean, they're both museums. They both have restaurants. They both have boards of trustees.

RB: Oh, I always thought there was a naivety and a passion and a lot of challenges and I've never forgotten that the most important part of my experience there was the beginning of my friendship with Edith—and with Frank. And I tried to help build the board. I didn't do very much, but I did bring Mort Winston there. **[50:00]**

JB: Well, see, now that's the part—that was the key—I thought you--because Wally was working for Tosco--that you would get to know Mort Winston [who was the CEO of Tosco] first, but in fact you got to know the Wyles first, apparently.

RB: The Wyles opened their doors to us permanently. And we even went up to their mountain--

JB: The ranch.

RB: Ranch. And—no, I was just fascinated by Edith and her background and then her skills herself. I just—I couldn't get enough of what she had to say. I was absolutely mesmerized by her because everything she said, she said differently from the way I was thinking. And believe me, that was a challenge. And I was so jealous of her ability to transfer from one idea to another idea and make it make sense. Because you weren't

hopping around, you were really being challenged to learn and to respect her. You know, when she died, I really lost a piece of my life.

And as far as Frank was concerned, he was bemused [by me] and we had MIT in common. And then after a while he stopped being a member of the Institute, but he was a member of the board of MIT when I met him—which I didn't even know for years. He didn't mention it. And then when I had—when I was at the County Museum with a staff and Patrick came--oh dear--well, I have to admit that this was a choice for me: when they were looking for somebody, and I introduced Patrick and, therefore, I put something into the wheels of--

JB: Of history. [laughing]

RB: Of history. And they were pretty annoyed with me at the County Museum because I had just hired him. He hadn't been there very long before I decided he was perfect for [CAFAM]—and he became a part of their family because that's the way they functioned—the way the Wyles ran the museum.

JB: The Wyles, yes.

RB: When it became a museum. But getting it accepted by the American Association of Museums was a lot of work [and CAFAM never completed the accreditation process]; getting the right kind of people and making the right kind of choices, and Patrick . . . had—when he was an intern in the Middle West [at the Kohler Museum in Wisconsin] . . . a lot of knowledge about how to get everything done. And I was so excited. I just threw him across the street. [CAFAM is at 5814 Wilshire Blvd. and LACMA is at 5800 Wilshire.] It was such an amazingly accurate throw! And for many, many months and maybe years, it ran very well. And then it got complicated. But my life--I didn't mind leaving the County Museum, because CAFAM was there and I really knew what was happening [there] and what I could do, which wasn't that much--

JB: Well, talk about that . . . , because it seems to me that you had a perspective that no one else on the board at that time really had. Josine Ianco-Starrels, of course, was a gallery director [at the Barnsdall Municipal Gallery in L.A.],. . . and Gere Kavanaugh was a designer, and Bernard Kester had worked [as a designer] with museums--but I think your experience with the AAM and . . . in museum education brought a perspective to the formation of the Craft and Folk Art Museum that really wasn't there otherwise—and that's really the [museum] professional point of view.

RB: Well [laughing], I probably—if I sat down with the minutes of all the meetings and read through them, I might have found my name ("and Ruth said," "and Ruth said), but I—I had something else going on, which had to do with a knowledge and a learning that I

never had before--and I was [also] involved with the museum in New York that is now become the—MAD—the Museum of Art and Design--before it was the American [Craft Museum].

JB: Oh, yes, [and before that] the Museum of Contemporary Craft . . . .

RB: Yes, Museum of Contemporary Craft, and . . . they had a man named Smith--

JB: Paul Smith [was the curator], yes.

RB: And I did some teaching with him. And my idea about a museum was give—just open the doors. What happened to me when I was first starting out in 1960 or '61 [was] I went to Seattle to the opening of [the] Exposition. [Seattle's Century 21 Exposition, which became known familiarly as the Seattle World's Fair, opened on April 21, 1962.] And I happened to be there for that week, and the director, Mr. [Richard] Fuller, the director of the [Seattle Art] Museum, the only museum director who never got any salary because he came from the Dole family.

JB: Oh!

RB: He was a pineapple man. He and his mother--

JB: In Seattle? Oh, how funny! **[55:00]**

RB: In Seattle—built and ran that museum—and he took me backstage. I had to do a paper for my graduate training at the Institute of Fine Art at NYU and I was interviewing him, but he kept opening cabinet drawers and taking things out and he would say, "Now this piece of jade is 4,000 years old, and see how—see the carving." And he'd say, "I paid $35 for that." And I'd say, "Oh my goodness." He said, "Well, when you think about it, you collect things that nobody else is doing." And he had cases and cases full of things and I thought, "Well, this is going to be more interesting."

And then I met the curators and it was sort of the first edge of how to look at craft because this is art, but this is craft, but this is art, but this is craft. And the war was still going on between the craft people, who had a publication in New York [*Craft Horizons*—now *American Craft*--published by the American Craft Council]. And it's still separate. They have a different kind of gathering of craft people and the word "craft" is still getting kicked around, back and forth, and I just can't wait to find out when MAD opens on the Circle—on Columbus Circle—what people are going to do—the critics. How they're going to pick it up--

JB: Well, the critics have never really known what to do with this material. And that's--

RB: We may never learn. I've decided I'm a critic right now—for the next ten minutes I'll be a critic. [laughing] But I was bewildered because people were so angry or so nervous or so

feeling—particularly the people who were making craft or what they—they wanted to keep it that way and the fact that museums all—I mean every museum has a department—look at the Brooklyn Museum. You go to the Brooklyn Museum and you can find three CAFAMs, hidden around.

JB: Yes, but CAFAM focused at first on these two things, which were of course many different things. But they called it "contemporary craft" --which is of course what the American Craft Council also called it, "contemporary craft"—and "folk art." And that, I think, was really what made the Craft and Folk Art Museum such a special place because they focused on those [two] things, and then later Patrick added industrial design and product design. But it was focusing on that material and asking the questions about how they related to each other, which was endlessly fascinating to a lot of people.

RB: It was fascinating to a lot of people and there were thousands of people in L.A. who were ready for the [Festival of Masks] parade and were in and out of there regularly and even came upstairs [to the restaurant] and had an omelette. I don't know how long the restaurant stayed as it was when I first got there. [The restaurant closed June 30, 1989] . . . I think I hit there at a time [that] . . . was a transition, and I was supposed to be thinking about that. And I don't know whether I was an appropriate person to be thinking about it.

JB: What did you think about the restaurant?

RB: Well, as long as you didn't smell too much cooking, then you could look at the art. But then of course, we now know that that was the "many senses" kind of place, and the idea of smell and taste--

JB: That was one of Edith's things [--one of her basic concepts].

RB: But Edith was the genius of it all. I mean she never, never went out of bounds. And she taught me so much and whenever I spent time with her and she was making something [which] was 90% of the [time]. I mean she was always making something, always shifting, always experimenting. And changing her house--and Frank went along with everything she wanted to do because he knew that it was better than anything anywhere else. And that went for the country [at the ranch] and it went for the city [house in Brentwood]. But in board meetings, for instance, where there were challenges-- .

The Craft and Folk Art Museum was involved with many, many different organizations, and when we had [the exhibition, "The Greek Ethos," February 18 – April 15, 1979], . . . Malina Mercouri stopped me. There was an [opening] event—I have to tell this story because she grabbed me by the lapel and started lecturing me about returning the Elgin marbles. She was holding my—a piece of my jacket [laughing].

JB: Oh yes [laughing].

RB: Lecturing me on the fact that people had stolen from Greece and I thought, "What am I supposed to say here? What is the party line for this one?" And she was a woman whose film life I admired immensely and her face was about maybe 15 inches from mine while she was holding onto my lapel. **[1:00:00]** It was fascinating, but [then] we had Japan [Today]. We had--I don't know how many countries that we did. [Japan Today, Scandinavia Today, and Egypt Today were celebrations sponsored by a consortium of private and public organizations that were national in scope and CAFAM was the regional coordinator.] And then [exhibitions focused on] materials like glass and clay and we just went on and on. There was so much to learn.

The thing that bothered me a little bit was: how do I get those school groups from across the street [at LACMA] into this museum and fit them in and not feed them? [laughing] I don't know what things were done programmatically. You know I didn't stay there forever.

JB: Well, but you were one of the few board members who did get involved with the staff, who did get to know a few of us and really support us. And what made me think of that is your talking about education--and Karen Copeland, of course, was the first museum educator at the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

RB: That was good.

JB: I know that you—oh yes, she was terrific—and I know . . . that you supported her in some of the things that she did--as you also [supported] Marcie Page, who [inherited the job of registrar]. Well, Karen started out as the registrar—I guess because that was a more essential job.

RB: Well, professionally, you have to know what you have and where it is and to take care of it and to keep it clean and "polished."

But my view, now that you've mentioned the staff . . . one of my personal things about myself is that whatever has happened to me as a fact also goes with something I remember seeing in my environment. And working in the—being in the same space when the library was being developed and the records were being developed and the awareness of the value of what we had there as trustees or whatever we were called—board members—that we had a responsibility. And the fact that you were the librarian was a very, very important thing for me. It changed my attitude for how to handle my own library. And I was sort of scooping people—graduate students from around the place to help me organize [my library] and it did me a lot of good. And you never said, "no" to me.

JB: [laughing] Well, I don't know what you asked that I would have said "no" to!

RB: No, you were on a track and you were committed and you had training and it was just wonderful for me to see what you were up to.

JB: Well, you were very supportive--I guess, really emotionally--to me at that time because I had started out as a volunteer. I was, you know, between jobs, and I had a special interest in this subject matter, so I took it on as a volunteer job and, lo and behold, it—I finally figured out that this was something that, if we began to create a research facility for this material that it would be a real contribution, at least on the west coast, if not nationally. And you helped me to articulate that in a feasibility study that we both worked on in the summer of '78 and I remember I had to go away to Boulder, Colorado, because Beny, my husband, was directing at the Shakespeare Festival there. But [I worked on the feasibility study there and] we carried on a correspondence (which is in the CAFAM archives) and [when I got back] you invited me to your condominium on Wilshire Blvd.

RB: Oh yeah.

JB: And I would see Wally running in and out, jogging, and you gave me lunch. And it was just the first time, other than the Wyles, of course--Edith Wyle was always supportive. But other than that, you were the only board member who had, I think, any idea what a museum library might be.

RB: I think I should interrupt you briefly to say that my mother was a librarian.

JB: Ah-ha! [laughing] I did not know that and you did not say that before!

RB: Not only was she a librarian, but when we moved from one rental house to another, when we first got to Washington, we had to wash our hands before we looked at a book! And not only that, we couldn't bend it open because we might break its spine. And can I tell you all that? **[1:05:00]**

JB: Where did she work?

RB: She worked in Denver--

JB: In the Denver Public Library-- ?

RB: Public Library, yes.

JB: Well, good for her. I had two parents who were librarians and it does sink in somehow--

RB: Well, you know, I still like to read a [printed] book instead of reading a book on the computer. And because of something called the "Book House"—did you ever hear of the Book House?

JB: Yes!

RB: Well, Book House was [sold] door-to-door. [It was a series] of illustrated books in the style of the—1910 illumination of books. And it had, I think, six volumes and then it had three tall volumes and it [looked like] . . . a house with one side missing and my mother used to read to us. She—we found them in a rental house and then my mother went and bought them and then I started going around to try to buy some of these Book Houses because they did go into families that were actively interested in reading and reading aloud in the twenties and thirties. And then they started disappearing from the market and the reason was that the people bought them and cut them apart and made collages of these beautiful illustrations. But back to—and that was art as well as craft, this silly house.

JB: Sure, sure!

RB: But back to my wishes for the Craft and Folk Art Museum. I had my problems with folk art because of New York. . . . The folk art [there] was a handmade, wooden American flag and, you know--

JB: You're speaking of the Museum of American Folk Art in New York-- ?

RB: Yes—and it was a neighbor down the street from the Museum of Modern Art where I worked.

JB: Right.

RB: One hour a day.

JB: Right.

RB: I wanted a lot because I didn't know very much [about craft or folk art].. Not that I borrowed all the books or anything like that but . . . when somebody came into the museum--the museum part of this changing body—if anyone came in [to the museum] and had a question, it would be nice to know that there was something backing it up in the way of a magazine or access to information—how early did you have a computer?

JB: Oh, [laughing] not nearly early enough, but it was about 1985 [actually 1987]. That was something about Frank Wyle that I never quite understood. I had a hard time convincing him that computers might be helpful to the library. And I thought, considering [laughing] his company, Wyle Laboratories [sold PC computers], that was a little odd, but he did introduce me to some people at Wyle Laboratories that I spoke to and I learned from them and we got money from other sources, primarily from the Irvine Foundation, to computerize. But the first nine or ten years of the library was, you know, an old-fashioned card catalog library. It worked perfectly all right. But we were able to accomplish a lot more once we computerized--

RB: Well, and then you were out in the ARLIS [the Art Libraries Society] world too.

JB: Oh yes!

RB: And that was very important to the museum and I'd like to just stop for a minute and tell you that the steps you made—from your own training into the [Craft and Folk Art] Museum stepped out into your impact on the profession. Because when I walked into the Archives of American Art two months ago with . . . [the] book [*Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship,* Scarecrow, 2007] that you had developed, which—I don't know why you developed it, but--

JB: Well, because of ARLIS! [laughing]

RB: They pounced on it and the first thing they did when they opened the book is--they had just been confronted with the idea of an intern and here's a segment of your book that is making it easier—10 minutes after they got their [copy of the] book. But the fact that you are a total professional in the field and know what their needs are has spilled out everywhere. You've done a fantastic thing and I'd like to say that for this tape.

JB: Well, thank you. I just—to transition back to the Craft and Folk Art Museum—I just want to say that I really think that it was your support . . . [that made] sure that the Craft and Folk Art Museum administrators hired professionals in their fields—or at least people who were able to get professional training and had a sense of what museums' responsibilities were. **[1:10:00]** I mean there was always a sense, Ruth, . . . (and I think this not only was because of you personally but because of your association with the American Association of Museum) that museum ethics were very important—and you communicated that to the board—or at least you tried to.

RB: Well, [if] they wanted to become a [accredited] member themselves, then they had to prove it by filling a lot of requests of who does what for whom and whether indeed this is a museum or a restaurant or a store . . . . And Lord knows, there were a lot of people on the board who were very loving. I think that--when I say the word "loving" I mean Edith and Edith's goals, and she gave such an enormous gift to anybody who would pay attention to what she was doing because it had never been done before—not in that way.

JB: Yes, in that way. You mean more than just the subject material?

RB: Well, there was this question about money and I'd be happy to talk about money because money was very difficult.

JB: You were on the Executive Finance Committee for a while anyway.

RB: Really? Ooh.

JB: Yes [laughing].

RB: Oh, [laughing] sorry about that. I forgot about that. It's not in my c.v.

JB: Well, [board] committees were—they were a little slow to develop as far as I can tell. They really didn't become active for a couple of years anyway.

RB: Well, there were a lot of people on the board who were so full of good will that they gave money.

JB: Not enough! [laughing]

RB: Not enough--and I was thinking—and I should mention it—that Mort Winston came [and served as CAFAM board chairman from 1976-1987] because we asked him to come and he, in the beginning, was quite warm about it, and very active and I think very generous corporately speaking. Then I thought there was a little tension between Frank and Mort and who was making the decisions, and financially was part of the problem, and financially is part of the problem with any institution that makes transitions into places that they never wanted to go. And that's what happened. Because leadership and priorities put their foot in the door.

JB: When you say, "make a transition to someplace that they never wanted to go," what do you mean?

RB: When the board was no longer responsible for the management of the museum something had to happen. [Not certain if Bowman is referring to the time in 1998 when CAFAM went into a partnership with the L.A. Cultural Affairs Department?] I mean they didn't step out and say, "We'll pay for it and keep going and keep doing it the way you're doing it. They couldn't do that. Although I don't know that it was money.

JB: Yeah, the popular—I think--sense—and I have no idea if—what the truth is of this—but I've heard many people say that they were sure that because Frank Wyle was such a major contributor—and I know, in fact, that he did, at the end of most every year, come up with whatever was needed, you know, at the end of the year—or, whatever amount he gave—it was widely known or assumed that it was a large amount.

RB: He picked up the problem every time.

JB: And because of that, some people felt that it discouraged others from contributing.

RB: We hope [it wasn't something else that discouraged them].

JB: What was your take on that?

RB: My take was that a lot of people here on this list [Ruth is looking at a list of the board as it was constituted in June 1975] had other places to give money. I don't know what happened with Anna Bing Arnold because I never—I don't remember any contact with that wonderful woman in any major way. She just loved everybody. **[1:15:00]**

JB: She did stay on the board, I think, until at least ’83 or ’84 and she was fairly active with the Associates group. I was going to ask you if you ever went on any of those Associates trips or--

RB: Oh, of course I went on the Associates trips. I even went after my husband had his stroke. He came along on one of the trips, to South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia. We had a lovely time. And that’s where I got seduced by folk art—in the field. We went to a farmer, a hand-made farm and a wonderful African American guy who was making sculptures and narratives and so forth. No, we had wonderful trips. I think, you know, by the time I go through my own memoirs—the material for my own memoirs—I’ll come up with a lot more material that I’d like to share. I’ll keep sending you stuff. You’ll be sorry.

JB: I did want to just ask you if you remember anything about that very first meeting [of the board on June 4, 1975] and if you knew any of the people besides the Wyles who were on that very first board.

RB: [Ruth continues to look at the June 1975 board list.] Well, I don’t know if I’m the person who brought Daniel Selznick to the board, but I certainly knew him and I certainly knew Bernard Kester because of the great things he was doing at the L.A. County Museum [of Art], and I don’t know Mrs. Dart at all. And I knew Mrs. [Richard] Sherwood [whose husband was chairman and president of the LACMA board, 1974 - 1982], because she was—I don’t know [but] I ended up on airplanes sitting next to her--going from here to there and there to here. And then Proctor Stafford, who was absolutely deliriously happy about the museum. I don’t know about the money, but I did visit him somewhere up the coast. He had a place and of course Josine Starrels was a *mind*—I don’t think that she and I did too much together, but I certainly admired her. And as far as Virginia Weaver—we crossed paths, and I don’t right this minute remember Katherine White, but I just know that I was led everywhere by the ideas and dreams of Edith Wyle.

And one of the main problems of the museum was that Edith Wyle was a dreamer and what she insisted had to be done--and she was right--caused a little shake in the air because everyone assumed that if no one else came along, that Frank would take care of it. And so she turned into some kind of brilliant child. And everyone loved her and loved what she did, but it was a kind of view that was quite visible by others, who said, well, if Edith wants it and we can’t—at this point we can’t—pay for it, I’m sure that Frank will take care of it. I think that was very unhealthy and it was Frank’s fault--because he was too nice and . . . too generous and there are so many museums—even in today’s *New York Times*—you know, personal museums, which have problems because . . . [the founders are] strong financially.

And Frank Wyle and the history—economic history of Frank Wyle: It wasn't too easy all the time either because his field was growing, it was changing. He had a lot of pressures and a lot of contributions to make. And he stopped going to the Council at MIT and that upset me a lot because I expected him to stay there. And the fact that--he did show up once--after Edith died—at a meeting with his friend [Bette Chase] and she was sick, and it was sort of sad that he really was not interested in the fact that the arts were very active at MIT. And he had been responsible, in the early days there of—and then you saw that—was it the County or the City that took over the museum?

JB: It was the City. Well, at first, I guess you could say that they "took it over." [They actually went into a partnership with the CAFAM board.] . . . [It was contracted to last ten years.] And they have contributed less and less and now; I believe, it may be down to zero. I'm not sure, but it is very little. **[1:20:00]**

RB: Is it still running?

JB: Oh yes, [the Museum is] doing very well programmatically. The director, Maryna Hrushetska, is very well supported by Frank Wyle.

RB: Still?

JB: The exhibitions and programs that they put on are very interesting, but I know that she's worried about the money, you know. I mean that never seems to end.

RB: Well, I think that if you take the American Association of Museums list of museums—the list keeps growing and there are more and more small museums that have work to do financially—and particularly university museums, who go into this wonderful meeting of craft and folk art. It shows up everywhere, it shows up in corporate lobbies, for instance, you see--all of sudden you see--wonderful carved wood things and people come rushing in and say, "Oh, I bought one of those about twenty-five years ago," and they get very excited with-- particularly with--folk art.

JB: Let me ask you something that was, I think, an issue forever. It may still be, I don't know—at the Craft and Folk Art Museum. And that was the sort of tension between the fac—(they were really factions) of those who primarily supported contemporary craft, were primarily interested in that, in collecting it and learning about it—and those that were folk art people. And that manifested itself not only in terms of, you know, relative support, for example, for the Folk Art Council as opposed to the Contemporary Craft Council. It manifested itself in some people in the Folk Art Council being upset because there weren't more folk art shows, and—at any rate, there was this, almost, competition between [them]—did you have that sense on the board?

RB: Well, they called it Craft and Folk Art—well, I don't even know about [that] myself. I'm sitting here wondering what I would have done had I been a collector in either department. I ended up, of course, with craft, because I did--because I met the craftsmen. In folk art--I have a--

JB: Well, you're speaking of folk craft then? You're talking about folk craft. Or are you talking about contemporary craft?

RB: Contemporary craft is very [easy to acquire] and great folk art out in the world is hard to get. I mean I know people who have fabulous folk art collections, but they also have junk in between. You know, the color fits with something else or the animal is a different part—it comes from Arkansas instead of from Louisiana or something like that. And also found objects, which have turned out to be folk art.

JB: Now one area that I didn't mention in which this was somewhat of a problem was in terms of the permanent collection. And there were people who really didn't think that the Craft and Folk Art Museum should be collecting at all. There was a controversy about what, if anything, it should be collecting. And so I was wondering if--

RB: Well, from my point—from a museum point of view, collecting is a very expensive thing. Not just conservation and exhibition, but just keeping records--and keeping records is not like putting a book on the shelf either.

JB: Right.

RB: Because [with a book], there's another one somewhere else you might be able to get. Occasionally you get a book that is really valuable, but what you're doing is two-sided. As far as I'm concerned, this was not a conflict and I didn't see that it could be a conflict. I don't know what those people were talking about.

JB: Well, Edith, obviously, did not see it as a conflict—although she would say that she favored folk art, but she obviously collected both in her personal collection.

RB: She made it—she made her own. She was always making something. And she certainly could sew. **[1:25:00]**

JB: And I know that I thought it was extremely valuable that both things were collected. If we had become as some people--some people would say-- in referring to the Craft and Folk Art Museum--they would say, "Oh the 'folk art museum' is going to do such and such." And that used to drive me crazy, because of course we were so much more than a "folk art museum." And I think the fact that we collected and exhibited . . . both contemporary craft and folk art—[is what made it important and stimulating] , . . although it seems there always were those who were unhappy.

RB: Joan, do you remember seeing any kind of minutes referring to the meeting when they decided what to call it?

JB: Well, no—

RB: Because I was there. It was a roaring difficulty.

JB: I'd love to hear about that because—no, I mean, it was—this very first meeting, which was, I think June 5 [actually June 4], 1975-- . There were three or four meetings, actually, that took place, separate meetings on that day and that had to do with making the legal transformation from what had been The Egg and The Eye Gallery to the museum. They started out with something they were calling the Folk Art and Contemporary Craft Society and then it [merged with] the Craft and Folk Art Museum. But I've never seen minutes that actually discussed that and I'd love to hear--

RB: Well, I remember it was sort of wild, but I don't remember specifics of it, but it's like a cadence of: Craft and *Folk Art*--Craft and *Folk Art.* You know it was not—the word "craft" really drifted off into I don't know what so—unless you went . . . [into the museum] you didn't know what you were talking about. It bothered me a lot and it still bothers me except it's nice to say "CAFAM."

JB: Now did it bother you cause you thought the full name was awkward or because . . . it was ambiguous or-- ?

RB: No, I think a long name is . . . [difficult] unless you want to take [the] initials and turn it into something amusing. But again, you're in a commercial area here. You're selling as well as exhibiting. And of course every museum on earth has a gallery out of this country and out of this world really--you go anywhere where there is art or craft being shown and somewhere either there or downtown a block [there's a shop]. I remember when the Whitney had it's shop in a brownstone next door. Now they have half the basement. So, I just—during that period I thought, "Oh Lord, I don't think I can make a contribution on this because I can't solve the problem," and, of course, The Egg and The Eye [restaurant] was still there.

JB: Well, the Egg and The Eye—the restaurant—took over the name [from] The Egg and The Eye [gallery]. Yeah, I still meet people who will, if I say I used to work at the Craft and Folk Art Museum, they'll get a blank look on their face. [both laughing] But if I say, you know, it used to be The Egg and The Eye gallery, they'll say, "Oh-h. That wonderful restaurant that--," that you know--

RB: Yes, with the hundred different omelettes.

JB: Yeah, yeah.

RB: I just—I am so grateful that I met the Wyles at MIT. Because they had a certain special way of talking about this transition or this—they didn't exactly say it's going to turn into a museum, but they knew that I was a museum person, so they both made a big fuss over me while I was [on the Council] at MIT, which was like two days, and they had annual meetings and I really wasn't [as] active then as I am now. You're dealing at MIT with probably one of the most famous universities in the world, not just [in the U.S.]—and as you've probably read in the papers--what's happening is that MIT and almost every university in the United States is now in Abu Dhabi [in the United Arab Emirates] or somewhere around there--

JB: Oh right, yes. **[1:30:00]**

RB: But that gives me a thought about where we go and the meaning of the object. I think about this all the time and particularly when there's a theft like today--

JB: Yes, in--

RB: I have to look at a reproduction of something that's been stolen--

JB: --in Switzerland.

RB: There are organizations all through the museum network, there are organizations that are there really waiting to support by their own histories that were longer—one of the things that maybe was not done was enough research to look for a comparable institution from which they [CAFAM] might have learned. It never crossed my mind. . . .

JB: Well . . . I just [want to] ask you if, you know, you recognize this at all: my impression was that Edith Wyle was not very interested in some organizations that might have been helpful. She was very protective of *her* museum and it was a little touchy if other museums like the ones in New York, or especially the American Craft Council—there was something--

RB: Well, that was political, it really was--

JB: Yes, and I never really—I mean the only way to understand it, it seemed like, was in terms of a competitiveness that she felt. I really wasn't clear about [what it was].

RB: I have not done enough research on museums of that size—having rolled around the Met—you know that I was a Rockefeller Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum for a year and—I certainly learned a lot of things that I don't know—and now again I'm involved in a project at the Met—a brief project honoring an artist—and I see that with those walls and with that history and with that sense of permanence, you're very safe. You can try anything—and if you can get through the string of people to approve of them, there are ways of convincing people. And I thought that Edith had the world's greatest style of getting

people interested. When I—I mean that scene up at MIT—that first scene—she didn't contribute particularly because it was Frank's party, you know. He was there, she was there. But somehow the two of them with their energy and their knowledge and their existence in the place I was about to move to--I hadn't moved there yet and . . . they were waiting for me and it was really funny because I have no idea what impression I gave them except that I was [eventually] there and they needed someone like me to be there.

JB: Yes.

RB: And I could only produce people and it was Mort [Winston] and it was Mr. Ela.

JB: Well, those were pretty important figures in the history of the Craft and Folk Art Museum. [Mort Winston was chairman of the CAFAM board from September 1976 to December 1987. Patrick Ela was CAFAM's Administrative Director, October 1975 to July 1984; then Executive Director until June 1996, when he resigned; then was acting board chair 1999 – 2002 and interim director April 2001 – April 2002; and remained on the CAFAM board until July 2005.]

RB: I certainly didn't do any fundraising other than ask Mort to throw some Tosco money in their direction. And then there was this—something between Frank and Mort, which I don't even understand and Mort has not retired very comfortably—and I'm not talking about money, but he was very sad about not being a corporate president anymore. It happens to people all over the world.

JB: Well, I think Frank had to go through that too.

RB: Yeah, Mort still teaches in high school, in that private high school. He's interested in a lot of topics that were intellectually stimulating. I don't think he was interested in objects at all.

JB: Well, he seemed to be on the board or had led the board at a very good time for the Museum.

RB: He made a difference. There's no question.

JB: And he stepped aside just before the museum, you know, began this transformation [to expand via the Ratkovich Museum Tower project]. By that time, I guess, you had moved back to New York, or at least you were not active on the board.

RB: Well, I was down in Irvine too.

JB: Yes, yes.

RB: Yes, I left L.A. in '86 and went down to Irvine, [where Wallace Bowman, after suffering a stroke], was in an assisted living facility] as well. And I was always in New York. I always had an apartment in New York. **[1:35]** Otherwise I couldn't exist. But I certainly

do know the difference between Wilshire Blvd. And Fifth Avenue. I think that the "Museum Mile"' was a great idea. I'm sorry nobody kept it up.

JB: Oh, but they did.

RB: Oh, they did?

JB: Wally Marks—do you know Wally Marks? He's been on the board for quite a long time. His family—they're in real estate. He's been a tremendous help to the board and, anyway, he was instrumental in getting the old Miracle Mile sign put back on [the median] down near Fairfax and Wilshire. And, yes, he's a great booster of L.A. as well as of the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

Well, I know that we didn't actually talk about every single thing that I had on my list of things to talk about, but we have talked about a great deal. And I think that maybe we should wind things up now--

RB: You don't have any unanswered questions? It's OK 'cause I have plenty of time. But what I keep thinking about is—because of the way my brain functions—is being there [at CAFAM]---and *being there* was always a very interesting experience and I can remember time after time different aspects of that place: which floor it was on, which—who came, what people said about it, who wrote about it, all of the aspects, but I still—my memory is physical of *being there*.

And when the memorial service parade [the memorial service for Edith Wyle in November 1999] came from the park across Wilshire and I came into the building—and I think I had been in the alteration before, but seeing that stairway and that opening onto the courtyard on the left [side] of the [renovated] building—it's so profound, it's almost like a dream for me, that it has a future and it has a strength that might resolve itself in a different way and even change the name or change the focus, because you have people from all over who want to make museums *mean*—something.

And one of my goals for this coming year is to read all of Steve Weil's books and be able to utilize (that terrible word) the message. But the message is that in our society-- in America--education has huge responsibilities, but communities also have huge responsibilities and leadership from those communities is of enormous value to our survival as a country—and this goes for politics—that you have to reach out and stop fighting, arguing.

JB: Yes, and the Craft and Folk Art Museum really was about that [about bringing people and their cultures together] from the beginning.

RB: Every parade. Every time we appeared *outside* of there. Everybody was wondering, you know, how did this happen? I think probably the museum didn't tell the story enough.

JB: Yes.

RB: And I think telling the story is not impossible. I think there's enough around, there are enough people around who can make a nice movie about it.

JB: Well, you know they did make a movie about the Festival of Masks ["Magic in the Afternoon," produced by Dorn Hetzel] and I think the Festival of Masks is a perfect example of both the greatness of the Craft and Folk Art Museum and the problems, the challenges, because everybody loved the Festival of Masks, and--almost as much as they remember the restaurant--The Egg and the Eye restaurant--they remember the Festival of Masks, but they don't necessarily connect that with the Craft and Folk Art Museum, because the Festival was across the street [in Hancock Park by the Tar Pits] or it was in Pan Pacific Park, which is several blocks away. So I think you're right, Ruth, that there was a disconnect sometimes in getting the message across, but once you did come in the door—like you did—you were embraced. **[1:40:00]**

RB: Well, my concern also is that L.A. is so big and there are so many communities and it's very difficult to—I don't know—are they still doing Festivals?

JB: Well, I believe so, on an every-other-year and much-reduced basis. Just really within that courtyard area and--

RB: And how many small museums [are] in other ethnic areas?

JB: Oh, there are many more now, many more. So--

RB: Well, are the educators in those institutions in touch with each other, would you know?

JB: Well there is that Southern California Educators group [MESC—Museums Educators of Southern California] and so I don't know what the present [CAFAM] educator is doing in terms of [reaching out to] other [educators]—I don't know if she's a member of that group, but there certainly, you know, there are vehicles for doing that--

RB: Well, the museum has a maternal role, I think, if it wants.

JB: I think that it does and I do think that it played a very important role in the past and it seems to be moving into, you know, a pretty vital [future]--

RB: Well, I think I'm going to go through all my slides and all my photographs and see if I can make a package by the end of 2010 to give the museum. . . . But I really—and my hopes for it were to revive. And at that memorial I looked around [at Edith's friends] and I thought, "Well, could this really ever be a dream of Edith's place?" when it had changed

so much, and I was very upset by it, and the only thing that really kept me going on that particular day was sitting there on those—in the marble semi-circle [behind LACMA, where the memorial was held] and looking around at who was there and I thought, "All those people! They really loved her and they loved it!" And so maybe they can be called upon as the people who came to the memorial and given the opportunity to write their memory of--

JB: Well, that's what I'm hoping will happen with this oral history.

RB: The oral history is important and I've thrown oral histories around in my life and I have no idea of—I had no idea until this year of--why bother? But I've now had people show up and one is a woman in Baltimore who found a box of correspondence of a woman who had been very famous and very important in the art world at the turn of the other century in 1900 and who was a painter and brilliant. Her name was Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones. And this woman found that I had interviewed her [Jones] in 1963 for two and a half hours and it was transcribed and she wrote a really sappy—this young woman—wrote a really sappy novel and she was ashamed of it and so she never published it, and then she decided she was going to write a biography of this woman when she found the box [of correspondence] in a building that was about to be torn down. I don't know how it happened. Someone said there's some stuff in there--maybe you're interested-- because she was a journalist. And now she's writing a biography of Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones, who for ten years was the most famous artist, American woman artist, and her mother caught her in a nervous breakdown and put her in a mental hospital for nine years and she came out and she had to put her life back together. I mean, can you imagine such a thing?

So . . . you have to look back--as an archivist and a librarian--you have to look back and find these people that have a story to tell that is really useful . . . because the world has changed so much since this museum started. . . . I knew them [the Wyles] when they were moving because things were tight. You know, they had some financial set-backs, and they moved out of one neighborhood into another neighborhood because of one thing and another and their children were at a certain age. . . . [At any rate], I think something like CAFAM can have a political impact. **[1:45:00]**

JB: Oh, yes. Well, I believe that in a small way it did in a number of areas.

RB: You realize that you have to write your own book, lady—about what it did and what it can do—because you have so many people to talk to.

JB: I do. But I . . . want to thank you, Ruth, for taking time from your vacation to come and tell these stories and it'll be a very, very important part of the history of the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

RB: Well, I certainly loved being connected with it, and I miss Edith like crazy!

JB: Me too! **[1:45:55].**