CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF MARYNA HRUSHETSKA

by Joan M. Benedetti

March 5, 2010

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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Maryna Hrushetska served as CAFAM's Executive Director from March 2005 through December 2010. Born and raised in the Chicago area of parents from the Ukraine, Hrushetska was immersed as she grew up in the Ukrainian language and culture. The focus of the family was always the arts. She received a full scholarship to attend Illinois State University, where she obtained a B.S. in Finance and International Business. She then earned an M.A. in Global Affairs at the Thunderbird School of Global Management, affiliated with Arizona State University. While at Thunderbird she was one of 12 graduate students chosen to intern with the Project on Economic Reform in Ukraine run by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. (This was during the break-up of the Soviet Union.) After getting her graduate degree she attended a two-year international managers' training run by a Dutch banking firm in New York City. She then was recruited to move to Russia and the Ukraine to work for a hedge fund. During this time, she became fluent in Ukrainian, German, and Russian. She worked for several financial firms in Europe and started collecting art and getting to know Eastern European artists.

Gradually she began to act as an art dealer and in 2002 she returned to the U.S. with a container of art and did private viewings in Chicago. In 2004, she formed a partnership with Off Main Gallery at Bergamot Station in Los Angeles to expand her collector base. It was while there that she was recruited to CAFAM where she utilized her management training and skills to revitalize the museum and its programs. While at CAFAM, working with the Center for Nonprofit Management and the AAM, she replaced and trained all new staff, curated and/or organized all exhibitions, developed a website, and worked closely with the Board of Trustees. She had a special interest in enhancing the educational programs. She left CAFAM after five years to again pursue her career as an art advisor to global private clients. She has also been hired as a creative consultant to work on diverse projects: a film about furniture designs created out of recycled material; a boutique art/design school in Dubai; and an interior design firm focused on creating emotional and mental well-being through thoughtful spaces.

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 Interview

Place: Craft and Folk Art Museum, 5814 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036. We met in a separate back room on the first floor in a space used for workshops.

Dates, time, length of session, and total number of hours recorded: One session was recorded at 3 pm on Friday, March 5, 2010, for a total of two hours, ten minutes, and fifty-seven seconds.

Persons present during the interview: Maryna Hrushetska and Joan Benedetti.

Conduct and Content of Interview: To prepare for the interview with Hrushetska, Benedetti studied Maryna's resumé. She was the only one interviewed who did not have any experience or memory of CAFAM during the principal period covered (1965 – 1997) by the CAFAM oral history project. (Maryna started at CAFAM March 1, 2005; Joan interviewed her March 5, 2010.) Other than talking about Maryna's childhood and background before taking the job of CAFAM Executive Director, the content of the interview was entirely about Maryna's time at CAFAM up to the time of the interview in March 2010. Wally Marks III, CAFAM's board chair at the time, who had been interviewed by Benedetti a couple of weeks earlier, suggested that Maryna be interviewed. Joan has continued her membership in the Museum and so has stayed aware of CAFAM's public activities. Her work with the CAFAM Records, her experience with the other CAFAM oral history interviews, and her personal knowledge of CAFAM during her 21-year tenure as CAFAM Museum Librarian (1976 – 1997), also prepared her for the Hrushetska interview.

Editing: Benedetti and Hrushetska reviewed the interview transcript, making minor changes and correcting spelling of names. Benedetti added full names and opening dates of CAFAM exhibitions where appropriate. She also added (in brackets) some further information for clarification and deleted (with ellipses) some back-and-forth comments that did not further 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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Friday, March 5, 2010. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti (2 hours, 10 minutes, 57 seconds)

JB: Today is Friday, March 5, 2010 and I'm here at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles with the director, Maryna Hrushetska, who is celebrating the completion of her fifth year at CAFAM's helm. And we're going to talk about her experiences with CAFAM thus far and some of her personal history, as well. And my name is Joan Benedetti.

Well, this is exciting because this is the first interview I've done in CAFAM--in the CAFAM building. It's very nice to be back here. And you're the only person that I've interviewed who has no history with the old CAFAM--that is, the CAFAM that, I guess, ended at the end of 1997 when it closed temporarily. So, you represent the brave new present and future. And since CAFAM is still very much alive and thriving, at least programmatically, I think it's very appropriate to find out what your challenges have been over the last five years and how you see CAFAM going forward over the next five. But I'd like to start by asking you something about your personal history. And I want to interject that some of the questions that I have come from reading your very interesting resumé that you sent me. So, to start at the beginning, can you tell us where and when you were born?

MH: I was born in Chicago on a spring day . . . the second of three daughters, to Ukrainian immigrant parents. And so my childhood was informed by both my parents' culture and also their longing to go back, because they left due to war and violence and political reasons--and, their need to preserve their culture and pass it on to their children, but also integrate within the larger American society. And also, I'm a Midwesterner.

JB: Yes. So many of us are (laughter) that end up on the West Coast. But certainly, having a Ukrainian heritage is very interesting. There are a lot of Ukraines, I know, in the Chicago area--Ukrainians, I guess I should say. Do you have other relatives here on the West Coast?

MH: I don't. And actually--my parents actually were married on the West Coast and briefly lived in San Francisco and Los Angeles. And after the birth of my older sister, Oryna, they decided to move back to Chicago because the Ukrainian community in Chicago is very large, very organized, and their whole social sphere was influenced by that. So I went to Ukrainian school on Saturday. I did Ukrainian dancing. I was in Ukrainian drama at a school that my mother ran. Every summer I was shipped away to Ukrainian camp for three [weeks]. So when I had my birthdays, I had to have Ukrainian birthday parties and I had American birthday parties in the same year. So my life was very split that way.

JB: Was your Ukrainian birthday party on your saint's day or something? Was it actually--

MH: No, it depended [on] who got invited because one of the biggest things about preserving your culture is the language. So, for example, we weren't allowed to speak English at home. We were supposed to speak Ukrainian. . . . I think that my parents' generation in particular came from an educated, middle class in Ukraine and they were very cultured. And that was very important to them. And so they brought that. So all of my parents' friends--many of them from Chicago--they knew [them] from Germany, they knew [them] from Czechoslovakia. My mother grew up in France, actually, and my father grew up in Czechoslovakia and then migrated to the U.S.

JB: I think you were very lucky to have a family that encouraged you to speak Ukrainian because so many other immigrant families, including my husband's--his mom and **[00:05:00]** dad did not want him to speak Italian. His dad had had a very bad experience [related to not speaking English] in going to school. He was born in Italy so he mostly spoke Italian when he first came to the U.S. And his experiences in school were very sad, really.

MH: Well, it wasn't easy, I have to say. When we moved to a nice suburb outside of Chicago--I tell the story and people don't believe it, but it's true, you know--we had three blonde girls: Oryna, Maryna, Kalyna, little towheads. And the neighbors would say awful things to us about being foreigners: "Go home . . . DPs go home." ["DP" was a slur that stood for "displaced person"] And they were so rattled by the fact that we spoke another language. And it really came down to language, which I find so interesting. And to my parents' credit, they were like--I remember some women from the Daughters of the American Revolutions came--

JB: Oh, the D.A.R.!

MH: --and talked to my parents about how they were ruining our future if they didn't speak English. And my parents were very clear that that wasn't an option. And we were raised to believe that we were special because we had two languages and two cultures and two traditions. And all three of [us], you know, still believe that to this day.

JB: Well, how good that you had your sisters to sort of band together.

MH: Yes.

JB: Did you have any other friends that went to school with you that were Ukrainian?

MH: No, we didn't. Because we moved to a suburb [River Forest] that didn't have any Ukrainians. But, you know, my older sister, she decided that she always wanted to be different, so she called herself a Martian. And she would wear green and so she created this whole persona based on being different--and would do headstands in the hallways and get demerits, you know--from the students. And she would say, "I'm different. I'm speaking with my people on Mars." And, you know, so she took it, she got very creative with that. But what I find, which--you know, also informs how I think about the world--is that people are scared and nervous when they encounter something that is different. But it's exposure, it's the experience of working together, going to

school together with someone who's different. And then eventually, you just come up with, "Oh! Well, he or she is just like I am. There's such a little difference between us. What was all that about?" But it does take that one-on-one personal experience to kind of shift people's perceptions.

JB: You certainly brought a lot of those experiences to CAFAM. And they made you a very strong person, I think.

MH: Yes. I think I was born, you know, a pretty stubborn, strong person. (laughter)

JB: So you went to public schools [for] elementary school and high school, did you?

MH: High school I went to a private school [Mother Theodore Guerin High School, Elmwood Park, Illinois].

JB: And this was in Chicago?

MH: Yes, yes.

JB: So when you were in high school, had you begun to have some ideas about what you might do with the rest of your life at that point?

MH: Gosh, that's such a good question. I--

JB: Or in grade school for that matter.

MH: In my grammar school yearbook when they asked us what we were going to be, I wrote--and it's immortalized in the book--I was going to be the first female president of the country. So I definitely didn't know how exactly I was going to get there, but I definitely set my sights high. And, you know--I mean, my mother is a strong woman. She kept on going back to school and getting more degrees and more degrees and was very curious. Both my parents are curious and intellectual. My mother was and is, you know, a revolutionary in many ways and a community organizer and an art collector and a preserver of culture. So my role model was--you know, I could do anything I want, pretty much.

JB: That's terrific. So you did have art in your home as you were growing up?

MH: Oh, absolutely. And, you know, it's interesting. My whole life was related to the arts. My family would sing together. We would dance together. My parents had salons at their home. They would have poetry readings.

JB: Oh, my goodness.

MH: They also would **[00:10:00]--**you know--my father's first love is Ukrainian literature, which he taught at Ukrainian school. And if we didn't have enough homework, then he would give us dictation tests where we would have to memorize poems. Art and culture was everything. And nature. We also spent a lot of time in nature. So that was a very big part of my growing up. And

I couldn't imagine it another way. I remember in college, somebody coming over. I had just bought this little piece of art at a street fair for--I don't know, maybe $5, $10--and I had it prominently in my room. Someone said, "Oh, my gosh! You have original art! You must be rich." And I looked at that person and thought, "How did that [person] put those two together?" Because from my perspective, you just have art in your house.

JB: That was part of your life.

MH: Yes. And I wasn't wealthy. I mean, I was comfortable. But, you know, my perception now [is] how [can] people think . . . only the wealthy collect art. And that is not at all how I was raised.

JB: What were your mom and dad doing in Chicago? Were both of them working?

MH: Yes. My father was a civil engineer and worked for the county. And my mother had several degrees but landed in--she was a librarian.

JB: Oh, I didn't know that, Maryna.

MH: Yes. Yes. Yes.

JB: My goodness. [Joan is the former CAFAM librarian.]

MH: Yes, she was a librarian.

JB: Where did she work?

MH: She worked at a seminary. She also studied world religion and she was very interested in all of that. So she worked in a seminary in Oak Brook, Illinois. And she has her master's in library science from Dominican College in River Forest.

JB: Oh, that's really interesting. I wish I had known that sooner.

MH: Yeah, I just put that together. Which is interesting, because I think she enjoyed the process but my mother is very creative. And I think being a librarian was a little too organized and structured for her. And so--

JB: She should have worked in an art library. (laughter)

MH: Yeah, she probably should have. Not only that, she graduated and started working just before the whole digitalization revolution took off. And she just didn't have the, you know, capacity to kind of--

JB: Make that transition.

MH: --make that transition, yeah.

JB: Well, that's very interesting. I've never lived in Chicago, but I've lived near there. And I know what wonderful parks as well as museums are available to you there. So, having your parents

encourage you to go to places like that, as well as all that wonderful flat farmland outside of Chicago--

MH: Yes. Well, like I say, we didn't think ourselves to be elites by any stretch of the imagination because we listened to opera or classical music or went to see the Nutcracker or anything. I thought that all kids did that, quite frankly.

JB: Yeah, yeah. It's kind of a disappointment to find out that there are very few that do or that was my experience. So, let's see. How did you end up at Illinois State University in Bloomington, Illinois?

MH: Well, that's an interesting--that's actually kind of an interesting personal story. I was starting to go through my rebellious stage. And my mother in particular wanted to make sure that I stayed in Chicago. And I had been accepted to, I think, both Loyola and DePaul, which were in the city. And I really wanted to go out and get away from--

JB: Of course.

MH: And my mother wasn't very supportive of that. So I kind of--

JB: This was a compromise.

MH: No, it wasn't a compromise. It was--you know, it was also a matter of she wasn't going to financially support me going away. So I came up with a strategy where I actually got a full scholarship from one of our representatives, but I had to go to a state school. So I picked ISU because my older sister was going to the University of Illinois, which was **[00:15:00]**--

JB: Just a little further south.

MH: Just a little, yes. And my younger sister ended up going to Bradley, which was the other way in Peoria. So I ended up at ISU. And my mother, you know, got used to it. I did, after I got there, realize that it probably wasn't the best school for me and what my desires were and interests. I think it was too big. So I ended up going for a year and then studying in Salzburg and doing an exchange program. And that kind of also cemented--well, my desire for travel and culture was evident early on. You know, there was like an old family story that I fell under the spell of a globe one night because I was so mesmerized by it, always twirling it and twirling it and asking, "Who lives here? Who lives there? What do children dress like in China or in Peru," or something. So that was evident for a long time. And interestingly enough, because my parents were so ethnic-centric, as a lot of immigrants are, the more I talked about other cultures, my parents thought that I was rejecting my own. And they thought that my interest in other cultures was a rejection of their Ukrainian heritage. So it did cause a little bit of tension. It's interesting to relive all this because it seems like ancient history, but--

JB: Of course, it is in a way. But all those things have influences on us.

MH: Yeah.

JB: You say that ISU wasn't really the best place for you to go. But you ended up getting a degree with three majors, right? Science, finance, and international business? Did I read your resumé right?

MH: Yeah--no. It was definitely not science . . . . It was finance and international business. Yeah, science--my brain does not work that way.

JB: Sorry about that. So you had an interest in business from the get-go as far as--

MH: Yes. Well, you know, it's interesting to see how young people's brains develop. And my brain is naturally logical. I like problem solving. I'm not afraid of numbers even though I don't, you know, want to be crunching them all day. But they tell a story to me. And it just felt like it was easy. You know, business is easy for me. I didn't really have to struggle to understand it. But it wasn't necessarily satisfying--which took me a while to figure that out. And also, as I said, my mother is extremely creative. She was a ceramicist and a painter and a singer. And my older sister wrote her first play at six and would write Christmas plays every year and cast it. And I was always cast as the villain. (laughter) And then we would spend Christmas break sewing the costumes and choreographing every scene. And Christmas Eve was the big production. So I grew up thinking that's creativity. You know, I have to know how to write or sing or paint. And I didn't really have a strong inclination towards any of that. So I must have got the impression that I wasn't creative.

JB: Well, what turned you around? Something happened before you started in college, I guess. Or did you go into college not being sure?

MH: Oh, I definitely went into college just thinking that it was an opportunity to learn. And I wasn't so deliberate with what was going to happen on the way out. I knew that there was an international flavor of it. And actually, while I was in college, my mother at the time was working for the international--because my mother, you know, speaks several languages. And she was working for the international division of something called the Wilson Sporting Goods, which makes golf [equipment], yeah. And it was owned by Pepsi at the time. And so my mother's boss gave me an internship one summer and I worked there and he really **[00:20:00]** encouraged me to apply to Thunderbird, which is where I ended up going for graduate school.

JB: Oh! OK. I was going to ask you about Thunderbird.

MH: Yeah. And that I would probably say was one of the best decisions of my life. It was the perfect school for me.

JB: So the internship with Wilson was one summer--

MH: I was in college.

JB: --in college. And [your mother's boss] could see that you had a head for business, I guess, at that point.

MH: Yes. And also, just my desire to travel and learn about culture.

JB: And your knowledge of Eastern European languages, I guess.

MH: Yes, yes. And interestingly, those were kind of the last days of the Soviet Union. So, you know, I put all this time and energy into learning Ukrainian grammar and history and literature, never expecting that it would help me have an edge in business. But--

JB: But it did.

MH --in fact, it did.

JB: Yes, that was interesting. In reading through your resumé, that seemed to be the thread through all the jobs that you took. Well, talk about the Thunderbird School of Global Management.

MH: It's the number one rated international business school in the country. It only does international business. I mean, now you have all the other essentially Ivy Schools in the past ten years coming on the bandwagon. But it was founded by military personnel, actually, that came back from World War II and just saw the opportunity of interacting and trading with other countries. And so Thunderbird is kind of a nickname for the school because it was founded on the Thunderbird--it was a--what is it called? Airport. Not airport, but a military base. And so the--

JB: Oh, Thunderbird was the name of the base.

MH: Yes, yes. So the formal name is the American Graduate School of International [Management].

JB: And it's in Arizona.

MH: It's in Arizona. It's outside of Phoenix. [It is affiliated with Arizona State University at Glendale, Arizona.] And so quickly it develops--I mean, it's amazing that [at the beginning] they didn't have competition. Because if they did, they probably would have had a hard time. But to me the specialness of that school is the curriculum, which is based on a *tri-parte* system, [a] *tri-parte* system where you have to pick a language sequence and you have to pick an econ/cultural/political science track that matches the language. And then, of course, your business classes. So they say now, "We are in the business of educating global leaders--global citizens." So you don't just focus on the business. You understand what is the history, what is the cultural history of the region that you're doing business with. And that takes it from--

JB: That was ahead of its time, wasn't it?

MH: It was definitely ahead of its time. And you're also sitting--less than one third of the student body is American. So you're sitting in a classroom talking about IMF [International Monetary Fund] policies in Peru with a Peruvian that had to live through those austerity measures. So it really

attracts--you know--the average student there maybe worked on a safari before they came. Or they were a foreign service officer before they came to Thunderbird.

JB: So you learned a lot from your fellow students.

MH: Yes, yes. And because we were in the middle of nowhere, we took care of our own socializing. So every weekend, another cultural group was in charge. And so they would do--you know, the Spanish Torero Club would do paella in the desert. And the Egyptians would have some "let's honor the pharaohs" this weekend. And, I mean, it wasn't like high brow, you know, museum-quality programming. But we got to know each other very well and have a respect for each other's cultures. And also understand all the subtleties of doing business internationally, which are complex--from the colors that you wear to a business meeting, to how you greet somebody, to how you present [your] business card, what color flowers do you send somebody at a funeral. So it was just an extraordinary experience. So globally, the network--we call ourselves Thunderbirds.

JB: And you've stayed in touch with--

MH: Oh, absolutely.

JB: --those people.

MH Mm-hmm. Absolutely.

JB: So, when did you get your M.A. degree?

MH: That was in 1993.

JB: Ninety-three. There was a lot going on in the early '90s, internationally.

MH: There was a lot. Yes. I was very fortunate. After I graduated, **[00:25:00]** there actually was a recession going on.

JB: Yes. I remember that very well.

MH: And so everybody's kind of--you know, we all graduated, we're going to go and travel the world, and we're all going to get these great international assignments. And then reality snuck in. But I did land a--I got admitted to a very good training program for investment banking.

JB: Was that the Harvard...?

MH: No. The Project on Economic Reform in Ukraine--P.E.R.U. [is the acronym]. It's a project out of Harvard. It's basically the Kennedy School of Government that ran it in Ukraine. It was basically a think tank they were running. And every summer they would supply graduate students. They were mostly Kennedy School of Government students, a couple from MIT. One from Tufts School of Diplomacy. And then myself from Thunderbird.

JB: So, was that right after you got your M.A.?

MH: That was my internship in between the years. That was a summer internship [in Ukraine].

JB: And then--you started to say you--

MH: And then I ended up in New York--well, first [I thought] I'll just [be] working for the World Bank. I thought that that would be a possibility for me because I was very much drawn to doing good. But I realized that the World Bank wasn't a place for me because it does attract very smart people but they're not producers. Because it's--you just think about problems and you write report after report after report. But I really needed to be closer to the action. And I need to see the fruits of my labor. You're not going to really do that at the World Bank, you know.

JB: And you needed to have some practical hands-on experience after--

MH: Sure.

JB: --all that schooling in business.

MH: Well, yes. But many people that work at the World Bank never have any hands-on experience. And that to me [is] part of the problem. But that's a longer story. But I was also in Ukraine that summer [and it] was very scary. I had never been in a country that was so unstable, where you had coup attempts almost daily. That the black market was the primary way of conducting business, where, you know, my job was to prepare large factories for privatization. And you would go and meet with the factory directors. And they would say, "This is a joke. The Soviet Union is going to be back in power next year. We're not even going to--we're not going to talk about privatization. We've never been free. Someone always has ruled us. Why should I plan for the future?" I thought, "Well," you know, "Who knows? Maybe the Soviet Union will come back together." It was just a very touch and go situation. And--

JB: Well, who could have imagined it ahead of time? It was certainly surprising for everyone.

MH: It was definitely surprising. But the populace felt very defeated and insecure. And you could also see that the people that had more--I would say . . . [that] a criminal element was coming to power. And, you know, it was an interesting summer, that's for sure.

JB: Yeah, I suppose they would also feel, you know, that question about trading the devil you know for the devil you don't know.

MH: Yeah. I mean, it also speaks to the--part of Communism [that] was, of course, the psychological aspect of, "There's no better country in the world than the Soviet Union." That's what many of them believed. And it really is the technology that brought it down. When they saw how people were living in the West, that the young people--and when I was there that summer, where they were getting shipments of Western products--you know, gym shoes and T-shirts and sunglasses and they would sell them in these, like, street fairs and bazaars and so forth. And people would

wait, you know, hours in line to buy a cheap pair of socks or sunglasses. And then they would leave . . . [the price tag] on the sunglasses to say--they thought that was the way you wore it.

JB: Well, and they probably wanted to be sure that everybody knew--

MH: Yeah, yeah. So that was an interesting summer.

JB: So that was, let's see--I'm a little confused, I guess. The Harvard course, that was not the summer--

MH: That was the summer internship. And then I went back and finished [at Thunderbird]. And then joined the ABN AMRO **[00:30:00]** international managers training program.

JB: Yes. And that is a Dutch banking firm, but you were located in New York for that?

MH: Yes. Well, most banking training programs start with a couple of months of classroom and then you do rotations.

JB: OK. So you were in New York and that was a training program?

MH: Yes. So I did three months of classroom and then you rotate for another year and a half through all the different departments of the bank to find your eventual home. So that's what I did. And I ended up in the Debt and Syndication [Department] in New York, which is interesting because you're responsible for raising the funds for many different types of transactions, which range from a very simple plain vanilla, as they say, line of credit to very complex project finance, which is used to raise funds for a nuclear power plant, for example. We worked on the financing for the Dabhol power plant in India that ended up, you know, being very controversial and so forth. So, I was able to see in terms of structure, different types of structure, used to finance projects. So that was a good base. And when you're an associate working in New York in an investment bank, you are worked very hard. So I was also taught a very strong work ethic. And, you know, learned to perform at a very high level. And it was stressful, but I don't regret it at all.

JB: Did you have any time to enjoy New York?

MH: Not as much as I would have liked.

JB: It doesn't sound like it.

MH: But, I have to say, I didn't necessarily love New York. All my friends were living there [at] the same time so we had a great time. But it's a harsh place to live, I think. For me, at least.

JB: You had several other positions in the finance world. And I think in the interest of time, I'd like to just skip over a lot of that. It seemed in reading your resumé almost as if you were on kind of an odyssey, looking for the right fit.

MH: Yeah, I think odyssey would--you know, it's a journey. We're all on a journey. And everything adds to--after I left New York, I was recruited away to go to the former Soviet Union and Russia

and Ukraine and work for a hedge fund, which was really exciting. Probably the most exciting time of my life, because I was seeing history unfold. I was in the Parliament in Ukraine listening to them debate what kind of constitution they wanted. I saw them launch their own currency and get off the ruble zone. It was a time of--being an ex-pat in these countries gave you a very high status, where [if] it was the Fourth of July, you were at the ambassador's home having a hot dog with him. That wouldn't happen right now. But I also traveled extensively because I was writing and [doing] a lot of research and looking at investment opportunities. And I saw first-hand, because I had to make decisions that involved a lot of money, that it was so important to understand the culture and the society and to understand what's happening here. Because the math and economic data, especially in the former Soviet Union, you couldn't really rely that it was even accurate because their accounting system was based on a completely different principle [inaudible]. So I spent a lot of time with historians and artists, quite frankly. And I also was making quite a bit of money and I loved art and started collecting--

JB: Ah, that's where it started.

MH: --pretty extensively. I started--

JB: Where your contacts with Eastern European artists started.

MH: Yes. So I collected quite a bit of art. And then when I left Ukraine, I had diplomatic status to go back to London, which was very good, and it's important because at that point, the Ministry of Culture had to approve every art object that left the country. So **[00:35:00]** the firm that was hired to move me had to go through that. Had I had to do it myself, I don't know if I would have done it because of a lot of red tape. But I did get to London with my collection and started having all sorts of people that walked through my door just ooh and aah. "Where did you get this?" "Where did you find this?" And, you know, [I] developed a reputation as having a really great art collection even though to me it's just a tiny little collection of things that I love. But other people saw it . . . [differently].

JB: And perhaps, not that much art from that part of the world had been seen--

MH: Perhaps.

JB: --in Western Europe.

MH: Yes, yes. And so people started asking, "Next time you go to Bulgaria or Romania, can you pick this up for me," and so forth. And then it was in London that a dear friend of mine, who is very senior at Sotheby's--and her father ran for a long time Christie's in London--came over and they just said, "You know what? You have great taste. You have business savvy. You should be a gallerist." And I thought, "No, no, no. Not me." And then a couple years later, I became a gallerist.

JB: But that was after you had moved to Los Angeles.

MH: Yes. Well, I moved to California, yes, mm-hmm.

JB: And was that when you founded Fresh Air Salon?

MH: Yes. Well, I had it for several years as a kind of a part-time business representing artists from Eastern Europe. I bought an inventory, I shipped it over. And I had clients in Miami, Chicago, and California.

JB: So you had a good basis for starting this, but you did actually have a [physical] gallery at that point?

MH: Yes.

JB: And where was that located?

MH: That was Bergamot Station.

JB: You had obviously made those connections, and did you work directly with the artists or with representatives of the artists--

MH: The artists. Everything that I own, I know the artist personally, and not--I don't own a piece of art where I don't know the artist.

JB: And I guess in your resumé it said that there was--it was in Los Angeles and Chicago. Was there actually another office in Chicago?

MH: Yeah, yes. It was out of a loft space and I would just do private viewings there, which--

JB: Yeah, I would think the market in Chicago would be pretty good for--

MH: Oh, yeah, yes. I sold much more in Chicago.

JB: Yeah. I'm not surprised. But here, where you had the gallery [at Bergamot Station], you were organizing exhibitions and doing publicity and community outreach. Now did you have some staff to help you with all this?

MH: No. It was a partnership. It was a tiny gallery in Bergamot Station. And it was a very unique set-up where I did not have to really worry about the cost of running that for about a year. So that was very helpful. That was very helpful. But I also didn't exclusively focus on Eastern European artists. I also looked for local artists. Because that's one of the things that I realized is it's very hard to transfer an artist's reputation. The artists that I represented were sold and enthusiastically collected in Germany, in Austria, and in Switzerland. But in the U.S., they were unknown. And so I had to rebuild their entire reputations. And it was a lot of work and I didn't necessarily enjoy it, quite frankly.

JB: I notice that you included folk art in the list of kinds of art that you dealt with. What kinds of folk art did you have or did you deal with?

MH: I worked--one of the artists, for example, that I worked with—Thor Melnelchuk--in Ukraine is a professor of folk art at the Kiev Academy of Art--Fine Art in Ukraine. And he is actually trained as a woodcarver. But actually, now does large canvases, oil on canvas, that are so thick that they take over a year to dry. And you can see his wood carving influence because there's so much texture in his canvases. I also collected textiles, icons, **[00:40:00]** and the glass that I collected is actually mostly contemporary. But the thing about the term "folk art" is that I don't necessarily think--I think there's something called "folk art" and there's also something that's a "folk art aesthetic." For example, this artist that--everybody that walks into my house uniformly goes crazy for his work. He has a very high education and he's definitely a fine artist. But he absolutely works within a folk art aesthetic because he documents the life, village life, in the Ukraine. He takes his students there and he documents rituals and costumes and beliefs. Then he puts them on these beautiful large canvases. So, to me, he's a contemporary artist that's working within a folk art aesthetic.

JB: Mm-hmm. I think that's a good way of putting it. I remember reading about the collector [of self-taught art] Herbert [Waide] Hemphill, [Jr.], whose collection eventually went to the Smithsonian. But he himself did some painting and he called it "faux folk art." (laughter) He didn't mean to put it down, exactly. You know, he just recognized that he was not [what] he himself would call a folk artist. But he certainly worked in what I think you mean [by] the "folk art aesthetic." So you ran that Fresh Air Salon--I think that's a very interesting name for a gallery. That presumes there was something besides just the showing of the art. Did you have programs at all?

MH: Yes. I mean, book readings and I also love music. I'm a big music lover. And I would say that I'm also very interested in discovering new talent. So if I stumbled on a street musician--I mean, I did this several times when I lived in Kiev because all of the musical students were out of work, out of money, and they would be playing something on the street. I'd say, "That's great. I'm throwing a party next Saturday. Can you be here. Here's $100." And I would have like a seven-piece band there. So, I am just drawn to artistic talent and I particularly take pleasure in finding new talent--so yes. That's why it was the whole salon idea, of talking about what is the meaning behind the art.

JB: And when you were in L.A., how long were you in L.A. before you found out about the job opening here at CAFAM?

MH: Well, I lived in L.A. for--I only came actually for six months. And this gallery opportunity [came along] that I couldn't say no to, of basically having a gallery for free. I said, "Oh, I'll come for six months." And so I rented a little apartment and did my thing. And then I met--I probably was

here about nine months when I met someone that was on the board of the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

JB: Well, I was wondering if you had had a chance, before you got in touch with CAFAM, to get to know any of the other museums in L.A.

MH: I did. I knew--I mean, I had gone to MOCA and LACMA and my favorite was the Norton Simon.

JB: I was going to ask you what your favorite was.

MH: Yes. My favorite. I didn't, you know, fall in love with the Getty. The Fowler, I have to say, I did not know about until I started working here. But the Norton Simon, I would go sometimes by myself. Every time I had a guest in town I would take [them] there. It was a very special place to me.

JB: Had they done the renovation of their gardens and all of--

MH: I believe so, because I love their gardens and the Henry Moore sculptures, yes.

JB: It is much more beautiful than it was a few years before that. But it's a wonderful collection. So I guess my next question is how did you come to apply for the job at CAFAM? How did you hear about it?

MH: Well, I was invited to apply. I had--as I said--I was doing my own thing and then met a board member. And we became friends and he **[00:45:00]**--you know--was telling me about the problems they were having.

JB: Yes, they had gone through a few directors at that point.

MH: Yes. . . and they were going through a really hard time. And so, you know, I [had] listened to it and given [him] some advice. And then a couple of months later, he contacted me and said, you know, "I think the board has made a decision to ask the gentleman who is running the museum right now to leave. And I was wondering if you would be interested in applying." And I said, "Oh," you know, "I don't know, but maybe I can advise you on finding the right person," and so forth. Because I was still very tentative even about staying in Los Angeles. And so [Frank Strausser and I] met. And we spoke. And then I thought, "Well, I think I'm going to go down and see the museum." So I came down. And I saw the museum and I'll never forget it. . . . It was a December afternoon and it was gray and cold and no sun--

JB: That must have been 2004.

MH: Yes. Mm-hmm. 2004. And I walked into the museum and my first thought was, "There is no life here." And this is a dirty, dirty place. I saw dust everywhere. I didn't see anybody smiling. And I really--for a second--thought, I was just going to turn around [and] tell him that I came. I did not

feel welcomed. And I thought, “OK, I’m here. I’ll just go up to the galleries.” And there was an exhibition called Collecting Folk Art A to Z.

JB: Oh, yes. That’s the one that the Folk Art Council put together.

MH: Yes, yes. Exactly.

JB: By the way, was the elevator installed at that--

MH: Yes.

JB: --point? OK.

MH: And, you know, the exhibition was actually quite charming. And I thought it was sweet. So that started to shift my mind a little bit. And then I met with [Frank Strausser] and I, you know, wanted to be diplomatic, also. And he came and he had a folder for me of information about the museum. And he just went, you know, “Read it through. And see what you think.”

JB: Wait. Who is he that you--

MH: It was Frank Strausser. He was the board member.

JB: And he was the one that contacted you to begin with.

MH: Yes, yes. And so the thing that really got me excited was reading the obituary of Edith Wyle in the *Los Angeles Times*. ["Edith Wyle, Founder of Craft and Folk Art Museum, Dies," *L.A. Times*, Metro Section, Part B, page 1, October 13, 1999.] And really getting a sense of her spirit. And that’s when I said, “Oh, my gosh. This is what it used to be. This is the originating thought, the originating vision.” And it was so dynamic and compelling and needed. I felt like this is what the world needs. So that’s when I--so then, of course, I went online and started even Googling her more and wanted to read everything I could about her. And I started, you know, even having conversations with her and saying, “OK, Edith. If you think that I’m the right person for this job, if you really think that the museum needs another shot in the arm, then you’ll make this happen.” You know, I was very clear in saying, “*You’ll* make this happen.” I never wanted a museum. I’m willing to give it a shot. But, you know, we’ll see. So I never was attached to the idea. And so I went through the interview process. I know there were several candidates that came from within the museum world. And, you know, it’s an interesting lesson. When you’re not attached to something, you usually get it.

JB: Yes! You were in a very good position psychologically.

MH: Yeah. So they did offer me the position. Now I thought, “Oh, my gosh. Am I even prepared--

JB: Now you have to do it.

MH: --for this. (laughter) Am I even prepared for this. So I came to my first board meeting. I was approved. And then, you know, I started working March 1, 2005.

JB: Well, they were probably attracted to your business background, since a lot of the woes were financial at that point. Not entirely, I guess, but--

MH: I know during the interview process--what I did to prepare for the interview is that I did what is, you know, the basic kind of strategic exercise of--it's actually old fashioned, it's outdated, but it's called the SWOT analysis. You know: **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, **T**hreats. And that's how you analyze--

JB: S-W-O-T?

MH: S-W-O-T, correct. And now they have all different models, but, you know, this is a good, solid model. And I just said, "OK. What's happening with CAFAM? What's happening with the industry?" And **[00:50:00]** so that's what I presented at my interview of what I thought the strengths and weaknesses were, the opportunities and the threats and what were the first things that I would do in my first six months. And they said that all the other candidates when asked the question of what they would do told them, "Well, I would do what the board wanted me to do." (laughter)

JB: Do you remember what some of those things were that you told them? It's been a while, I know.

MH: I may still have the notes. I may still have the notes.

JB: Well, it would be interesting to, you know, compare that with--

MH: Oh, no, no. Those notes guided me because I'm a thinker and I like to--I'm a good--

JB: You said you're a problem solver.

MH: Yeah. And I'm a good researcher. So, to solve a problem, you have to research it and understand it. So, I asked a lot of questions.

JB: You said what attracted you to the museum. I guess you began thinking about the subject matter partly, and the objects, the potential objects. And maybe you were also attracted to the fact that there were these problems that you thought maybe you could resolve?

MH: Yes.

JB: So what did you see as some of the very first challenges when you started?

MH: I'm trying to think of how to put it.

JB: Maybe cleaning up or dusting. (laughter)

MH: I just felt like no one was taking pride in what they were doing. And I just find that offensive in general, whether it's my cable repairman or my doctor. Whatever you choose to do in life, just do it with gusto.

JB: I think they were probably pretty demoralized at that point after going through--

MH: Well, yes. They definitely would be. But I think that we're all responsible for our own inspiration. And if you are demoralized at your work, then you don't stay there. But to allow, you know, the simple thing of your physical surroundings to look so shabby, I think is a reflection of something of a larger problem. So, I remember the first day, I did actually hire somebody to come on with me.

JB: Oh! And who was that?

MH: Ann Kowaleska, who was a gallery assistant that worked at the gallery next to mine at Bergamot Station. So that was one of the conditions. And that was very helpful. So at least I had--

JB: And what was her position? How did you--

MH: She was what is now the exhibition publicity coordinator.

JB: OK. I think I may have met her.

MH: Redhead. Very lively. So we basically got out Windex and towels and the first thing I did is I cleaned the office, moved things around, changed my desk. It was like all the way in the back. I need light. And then we got to work.

JB: Well, I know I often make a judgment about a place when I see what the restroom looks like. And I have to say that the restroom here looks very good. (laughter) And I can certainly see how the--you know, if you see something that has obviously not been taken care of, it's pretty depressing. So let's see. Who was on the staff when you started and what were their jobs? I guess one of my questions is how did you not just change the people in those jobs, but the jobs themselves. Did you add positions or subtract positions?

MH: Well, the first thing I asked the board and then the staff members was, "Can I see your job description? Can I see an organizational chart?" None of that existed.

JB: Oh. Not at all? There are some old ones, but, yeah...

MH: Yeah. No one had been reviewed. No one had been assigned goals. And so it was very difficult for me to understand what exactly people's roles--I mean, I knew generally. But in terms of accountability, I didn't. And the people weren't really forthcoming with telling me what exactly **[00:55:00]** they were doing. So that was a bit frustrating. And so then I said, "OK, well, I'm going to write everybody a job description. And I'm going to let them know that they will be reviewed in six months." And at that point, I think two people just quit automatically. So--

JB: Well, that was easy.

MH: That was easy. (laughter) That was the easy part. So that's just a managerial tip. If you want somebody to leave, make sure that they know they're going to be reviewed. So that was the first thing that I did. And two people left. And two people kind of decided to stick in their heels and be a thorn in my side. I think they saw the writing on the wall--that I was going to be making major

changes. And so the next two people--it wasn't such a pleasant process. And they, in my view, were not only unproductive, but they were destructive in terms of their behavior to the organization and in both cases I think there was a very dysfunctional and unprofessional emotional involvement with an acute sense of entitlement of what the museum owed them. That me being new knew a little bit about, but I didn't think it was--I just didn't take it into account because it was in my view inappropriate.

JB: Well, I think the fact that you came into the organization with virtually no history of it was an advantage from your point of view. After you read the job des--did everybody give you a job description?

MH: No, they didn't have it. I had to write them for them.

JB: Oh, that's right. You said you wrote up the job descriptions. So at that point, you were basing those job descriptions--I suppose at least in part--on what they were doing at that--

MH: No, I actually based them on industry. I did research with the Nonprofit Center downtown [the Center for Nonprofit Management]. I did research with the American Association of Museums. I mean, there are certain basic departments: membership and admission--

JB: Yes, well, I was going to ask you what you considered to be the essential positions.

MH: Well, the essential positions. You know, I'm the director. I need a development associate. I need an exhibition coordinator because we don't have a curatorial staff or a collection. And we have a shop, so I need somebody that runs the shop. And I need somebody that greets people as they come in, the admissions and membership person. [The] position [that] was not at the institution--and I found out [had not been] for many years--was an education manager.

JB: Oh, that was always a very important part of CAFAM up to the time I left. Boy!

MH: When I started, they had not had a full-time education manager for over seven years. So that was the first thing that I lobbied for. I lobbied the city to give me a little more money and I added an education director, which, you know, pretty much within four or five months transformed the place because we were able to add so much programming. They did have, like, these contract teachers that would come and do little workshops on Saturday. But they weren't strategic, they weren't depthful, they were just like, "Let's get together and do some paper maché or something. So that's what I found.

JB: I just spent some time on your website before I came over here today. And I mean, those are the jobs you have today. So they must . . . [be] working.

MH: Yes. One of the things that--I kind of traded--I got some funding from the city for the educational director. One position that we did have was a full time facilities manager.

JB: He was the city--or she was the city per--

MH: No, he was a CAFAM employee. So I eliminated that position and I took part of that money and applied it toward an education director.

JB: [You mean you eliminated] the maintenance--

MH: Yes, the maintenance person. So that's a position that I eliminated and [I] added the [head of the] educational **[01:00:00]** department.

JB: So I guess by doing that, you then had to distribute the jobs that he did among the staff that you had.

MH: Yes.

JB: How does that work?

MH: The actual cleaning of the museum is [done by] an outside firm that comes in twice a week. But they only come in twice a week, whereas he was here--

JB: Yeah. All the time.

MH: --fifty hours a week because he actually wanted to get paid overtime and liked getting paid overtime. Apparently, that was a tacit agreement between himself [and the administration—or the board]--and he had been here for nearly 20 years and expected to get overtime. And I couldn't even understand what he was doing for 40 hours a week. So 50 hours a week was not going to happen. And so he became very angry and he couldn't explain basic things to me like when was the last time the elevator was serviced? Where are the reports of, you know, elevator maintenance, air conditioning maintenance? Things that I would expect if I have a full-time building person. So that kind of gave me an idea that that position--there was something very wrong.

JB: It needed to be modified.

MH: Yeah. But to answer your question: we change light bulbs. I have an all-female staff and they get on ladders and change light bulbs. And we all take [turns]--you know--if we're in the bathroom and there's a mess, we clean it up. If we need to change the toilet paper [we change it]--and none of us have a problem in doing that because every--I'd much rather use the moneys that I have towards putting together exhibitions and programming than facilities management.

JB: In my experience working with your staff--I know you have some new people since I first met your staff [four or five years ago], and they visited the library over at LACMA--what used to be the CAFAM Library at LACMA--I've been very impressed with the people that you've hired. And I was just wondering how you went about advertising [positions]--once, I guess--at some point, everyone who had been there when you first arrived, had left.

MH: Yeah, within the first year, there was a 100% rotation. And I really exhausted Craigslist. It was all through Craigslist. You know, I know how to screen people. I think that I--especially in the first year--made the best decisions that I could. And to be quite honest with you, everybody came with a desire to make a change. And there were so many changes to be made. So it was like weekly improvements. Weekly improvements. Because, you know, you start working from ground zero. You don't have a website. You don't have a professional accounting system. You don't have an inventory system.

JB: So there were a lot of exciting things to do.

MH: Well, I don't know if they were exciting. But I have to say that they're gratifying because you see improvement constantly.

JB: And for a young person--and most of the people that you hired were relatively young. So they really were eager for those challenges, I think.

MH: Sure, sure. And they thought, "Wow. I'm making an impact. I'm making an impact. Even though this is tough work. I have responsibilities I wouldn't have at a larger organization."

JB: I know that that's one of the things that attracted all of us that were working here at the museum, especially when Edith was still alive. But with Patrick, also. Was the fact that for most of the time, even though we did have more people on board than you've been able to have--but still, we were basically one-person departments. And that was hard, but it was also--it brought out the entrepreneurial spirit in each of us.

MH: Sure, exactly.

JB: So, I think you've carried that on.

MH: And I think I've realized that even though I think that one of the problems that we do have is that we're such a skeleton staff and there's a high degree of burnout because of that, but there also--from the point of view of being a director--I know what every staff person is doing or should be doing.

JB: Because the staff is so small.

MH: So small. Yeah.

JB: Do you have regular staff meetings?

MH: Mm-hmm. Every week. Every Wednesday.

JB: And how do you develop the exhibitions? Do you do that--well, you have--I'm sorry--what is her name--who is in charge of exhibitions now?

MH: Well, now it's Eileen **[01:05:00]** Stewart. She's not in charge. She's the coordinator.

JB: How does that relationship work?

MH: The development of exhibitions is--when I first started, I inherited a schedule.

JB: I was wondering if there were some in the pipeline so that you didn't have to come up with something from scratch immediately.

MH: There were [exhibitions] in the pipeline, so I just worked to retool [them]. And worked with the curators to--part of my plan when I did the SWOT analysis during the interview was that I felt that the programming and the exhibitions were very stale and didn't really reach out or link to contemporary society. And if you're talking about engaging people and art in culture, you have to make it relevant to them. So the exhibitions that I did inherit, I renamed them. In one case, I had an exhibition that was supposedly--it was straw art.

JB: Oh, yes. I remember that.

MH: And I actually thought, "Oh, boy. Maybe I should cancel this one." But I met the curator and he was so passionate and so knowledgeable and so dedicated and I thought, "No, no, no, no, no. I'm not going to cancel this." But I said--he was so focused on the object of who made it and how difficult it was to make. I said, "Well, tell me the story behind the object." And then it comes out that all of these objects are created in the context of harvest rituals around the world. Twelve countries were represented from Japan to Ukraine. And I said, "Well, that's the story. That's what's going to get people through the door. It's not--" He wanted to call it "The Art of Straw." So I changed the name to "Feast of Straw, Harvest of Hope." And then we found--

JB: A little *double entendre* there.

MH: Yes. And then I hired a friend of mine who's a screenwriter to rewrite the text, the wall text, so it tells a more dramatic story. And it's one of our most popular shows.

JB: And who usually designs the installation? Is that--

MH: I do.

JB: You do.

MH: I'm very hands-on. And I love that. I think that's one of the discoveries that I have made is that, you know, I have a knack for color and design and creating an experience, which is what you're doing when you're designing an exhibition.

JB: It really is a show. There are all kinds of parallels to theater.

MH: Yes. Absolutely. And I love it. We have "tone" meetings with my staff and the curator and the artist--

JB: You have what kind of meetings?

MH: Tone meetings.

JB: Explain.

MH: So, we talk about what is the story we're telling. What is the tone that we're taking? What are the three words that describe the experience? And then everything flows through that. The title, the font, how it's written. Is it written in a conversational tone or a scholarly tone? And, you know, the colors. How people experience the art, how close they get up to it. So, it opens up a really--we had a four-hour tone meeting, which was a little draining at the end of it because the artist--it's his first museum exhibit--and he was never asked these questions. And he was actually, it turned out, confused about his own art and what he was trying to communicate in it. So, I think it was really helpful for him, also.

JB: Well, some artists, at least in the past, have been told that they didn't need to communicate, that the art would communicate for them, so--

MH: Yeah, that's not a philosophy that I adhere to. When I first started, the gentleman before me--I think it was him, but I can't remember--he was very opposed to wall text, which I--

JB: That's a very 20th century attitude.

MH: Yes. And at that time, we did have a relationship with a consulting curator that also held that view. And I will never forget. It was my first show that I inherited, but we installed--the Otto and Vivika Heino exhibit. And in my five years of being here--first of all, I love reading our guest book. It is a great source of inspiration, commentary, thinking, for me. And [in] five years, the only comment like this that I ever got was in the Otto Heino [show]. This man wrote, "I want my $5 back. There's no art here." And I love Otto and Vivika Heino, but there was no wall text. People didn't understand what **[01:10:00]** they were seeing, how it was created, and what kind of values were being transmitted. And they [the audience] didn't have enough knowledge themselves to come to some conclusions. And so it was such a missed opportunity to educate somebody. And the curator was so involved with developing this beautiful catalog which sold for $35. And I said to him--

JB: [He] sort of forgot about the exhibition.

MH: Exactly. You know, [if] you want people to get inspired and come downstairs and buy a $35 catalog, then you're going to have to give them some more meat up there. So he ended up agreeing and we did put some wall text [up].

JB: You know, Edith Wyle loved to design the installations, also. She didn't do all of them. And she had a great deal of respect for the people that she hired to design and to curate. But she had very strong opinions about how things looked and how they enhanced the--complemented the objects.

MH: From what I know about Edith, I think she and I had several similarities. And actually, we have the same astrological sign. We are both Tauruses.

JB: Oh, yes, yeah. She had a number of bulls in her [office collection]. (laughter)

MH: I have one on my desk. I don't know if you noticed it. It's a bull from Mexico.

JB: I didn't notice it, but I'm not surprised. So you've been the CAFAM director now for five years. You've curated or developed 32 exhibitions. I was really surprised when I saw that. And then I started counting the ones for each year. Six shows a year. I think in one year there was seven. What is the importance of changing shows so frequently? I mean, I'm just playing the devil's advocate here. If you have fewer shows, you would spend less money and less staff time and so on.

MH: Well, we have shortened it. We now do six a year, so three--we have two galleries, so three in each gallery. And we also have condensed--so the opening parties are on the same night for both shows. So that has made a big difference. And I am sorry I didn't do that earlier. Some of the exhibits, especially . . . [when we had] seven or eight a year were maybe three or four week-long exhibits that we teamed with, for example, Neutrogena, to do the Faces [exhibition] that only ran for three weeks I think. So those--the standard museum show is three and a half months.

JB: Yeah, that's a good amount of time.

MH: And because we're not a collecting institution, we're always working with either an outside artist or a curator. And there are no two curators or artists that are alike. So we have to adjust to people's personalities and our own expectations of their performance and delivery.

JB: At this point in your career with CAFAM--you've hinted at this already--but can you tell us a little bit more about how you feel that the vision of the museum has shifted from what it was before?

MH: What it was before when I stepped into the role--

JB: Well, there are two "befores," I guess. There's the before when it was [at] the height of its success. And then there was the before, which, I guess, in your opinion, you found when you first arrived.

MH: I think if I look at it with a long lens of the 35-40 year history, from, you know, the perspective of management theory, I go and I do something called "appreciative inquiry," which looks at an organization and you look at it at its peak. And you study the peak and you don't try to replicate it. But you try to understand what made it special. And what were the factors of success at its peak? And I've come to the conclusion [from] my research and [from] speaking to people that the peak of this organization was when it was the Egg and the Eye [gallery]. And it was a gathering place. It was a place to exchange ideas, stories, and also to celebrate beautifully made things **[01:15:00]** and diverse cultures. Period. You know, with the personalities involved, what the

budget was, those are all details. So that hit--it was a success because it was in many ways way ahead of its time. Way ahead of its time. And it--

JB: So there was a certain excitement generated simply by the fact that people who came or were involved in any way were part of something a little bit radical, not too radical--

MH: Sure, yeah.

JB: --but on the cutting edge.

MH: Yeah, it was on the cutting edge. And, you know, like energy attracts like energy. So people that were interested in that came. And there was really no comparable institution. And so that was the peak. So if I take the essence of the Egg and the Eye [gallery]--it's a gathering place, it's a place to exchange different ideas and celebrate cultures and so forth--and then I bring it into the 21st century, I can see that there's still a need for a place like that. But I'm facing a completely different landscape in terms of competition, in terms of value systems, in terms of what has happened to the terms "craft" and "folk art" in the eyes of the majority of the people. So that's what I try to do is recapture the spirit of the Egg and the Eye [gallery]--

JB: Let me interrupt you just a moment because I think there might be some confusion in referring to the Egg and the Eye. You're not really going all the way back to before it became the museum, are you? Or are you including the Egg and the Eye restaurant, when the museum had the Egg and the Eye restaurant here?

MH: I'm including--I think--I'm definitely including before it became a museum and the early years of the museum. I think that the whole aspect of the gathering place, of the gathering place that was about discussion and learning and then [later on] this idea of making it into a museum and focusing more on scholarship. That doesn't seem to me to have made a lasting impact, quite frankly.

JB: I don't think that Edith was all that interested in scholarship. She was certainly interested in learning. And took every opportunity to learn herself, as well as providing classes and workshops and so on here. But scholarship in the sort of dry, academic sense--she was never interested in, really. So I certainly think that that sense of-- . . . of it being a social gathering place, though--and I believe retrospectively--I didn't understand this at the time and I think a lot of us did not understand it at the time--that the restaurant really did make a dramatic difference. That when we did not have the restaurant, it made a big difference in all kinds of ways.

MH: Yeah, no. I mean, that's absolutely clear. And it's interesting to see now all these museums that are opening restaurants. And it's such a trend. And you just think, "Ah." You know, sometimes you can be so ahead of a trend that you actually lose sight of it. And so it's a shame. It's a shame. And we've had so many discussions in the past five years about bringing back a restaurant. It's just very complicated. It's very complicated. So I don't know who made the

decision to shut down the restaurant, but it definitely changed the spirit of the organization and--I mean, I think we probably all agree that it wasn't the best decision.

JB: As far as I've been able to determine--and I have to say that one of the reasons that I've been so fascinated to work on the processing of the archives of the museum--is to try to determine, you know, how some of these decisions were made. And I know that it was a very complex decision. And part of it was financial. And part of it was the fact that we had been **[01:20:00]**--we had been this two-building entity, which had to shrink, basically, cut [itself] in half. So I don't know that it was one decision. But it was a number of factors. And I know that even Edith Wyle would often say--she would get mad at the thought--that was obvious sometimes--that people would come here to our restaurant and have lunch or a cocktail or whatever and completely--they might go into the shop-- but they would completely overlook the galleries. And many people who came to the restaurant really were unaware that they were in the middle of a museum.

MH: Well, yeah, I can understand because people still do that with the shop. I mean, we have a certain percentage of customers that don't even know that there are galleries up there.

JB: Upstairs.

MH: And I'm just shocked by that. And I do get frustrated. But I'm a pragmatist also. The shop is a source of revenue. And ironically, when I started, the shop was losing a lot of money. And that was absolutely unacceptable and, quite frankly, ridiculous to me. Why does it exist other than to support the institution? So the shop now contributes between $25-40,000 a year to the bottom line of the museum. And it pays its vendors on time. And it wins plenty of awards and we're actually looking into right now launching an online shop and applying for grants to do that because the writing on the wall is clear from the philanthropic community that you either have a large endowment or you need to find a way to have sustainable earned revenue, where you are not constantly going out and trying to . . . [fund] the budget year after year after year after year. And probably the most shocking and disappointing aspect to me of the history of this institution is that it never cared enough about its future to set up an endowment.

JB: Well, there were a couple of sort of aborted attempts to do it. I mean, I could probably point to short periods of time when we, in fact, had an endowment. But--

MH: I know about one account.

JB: --it always had to be borrowed from, it seemed like. So essentially, we didn't. You're right.

MH: Yeah. And that, I think, looms very heavily on the future of this institution.

JB: Yes. Well, I do want you to talk about the future of the institution. I wanted to mention a couple of things before we get to that point, if you're up for it. I've been very impressed with your

website, which you had redesigned fairly soon after you started, I think. What was it, about a year after or so?

MH: Yeah, I think the first redesign--I mean, what I'm learning is websites--it's a living organism. And we've had a couple of redesigns. But, yes, that was one of the first things we did, yes.

JB: Yes, I think that's a good metaphor for the whole museum experience, that it has to be viewed as a living organism. But the website--I certainly had noticed this before but it really struck me when I was looking at it again this morning--the very first things that you see on the . . . home page is--two things that I noticed. The picture, the image, is not of an object or of objects. It's of people. They're in a gallery, presumably looking at art, but they're also looking and talking with each other. And I thought, you know, that's really different. And then I scrolled down a little bit and, of course, I did see some beautiful objects pictured. But the first thing was the people. And I think that's a significant change. And then, of course, your--I would call it a motto--"Because a shrinking world requires an expanded mind." Where did that come from?

MH: Well, (laughter) both those things that you mention were implemented 2008 when we received a grant to do a **[01:25:00]** marketing campaign, an outreach campaign. And--

JB: Who was the grant from?

MH: The James Irvine Foundation.

JB: Oh, yes.

MH: And we hired an outside firm that works with progressive nonprofits. And the first thing that they did is something called a "communications audit." And one of the findings from that was that there was a disconnect from the written language that we were talking about folk and reaching out to people and being around people and our website that was all about objects. And that no matter how beautiful an object is, seeing people enjoying themselves is much more of an emotional, you know—powerful--image. And so that's how that change came about, to really emphasize showing people enjoying art and not just art in a static kind of "precious pedestal" atmosphere. So, I thought that was actually very good feedback. And then we wanted to come up with a tag line that--we first wanted to start focusing on CAFAM versus craft and folk art museum. But then we didn't want to lose the flavor and the spirit of it. So we did all sorts of brainstorming sessions about what we do here and why we're important. And that's how--

JB: That must have been a fun process.

MH: It was--it was. And, you know, everything is thought through when you run any organization. You know, the color of our original logo redesign. I inherited a logo that looked like a Victorian ghost house. And it was a picture of the brick building that we're in. Nothing to do with the programming. Nothing to do with the mission. I was like, "Can I toss this stationery and business

cards?" And they said, "Use it first." So I quickly used it and then we redesigned it and our key color was orange, which in many cultures is the color of worthy ambition because it has the passion of red and the intelligence of yellow. So that's our power color--orange. So you'll see orange a lot. And then "Craft and Folk Art Museum" was redesigned with a hand-done font [and] every line had something different. And that kind of broke a grammar rule. And so that was our--the square orange logo that I can show you. And then we moved to CAFAM and then came up with this line, "Because a shrinking world requires an expanded mind," that ties into CAFAM being a place of discovery and education and learning and discussion. [Maryna says she composed this motto while working with Melinda McInnis.]

JB: You know, Edith's--I don't know if it was her favorite--well, she told me one time that her favorite color was yellow. But the color that came up as part of the branding of CAFAM--well, of the Egg and the Eye, really, and early CAFAM--was more of an orange. It wasn't a bright orange. It was a kind of yellow ochre color. But it was close to orange.

MH: How interesting.

JB: Let's see. I'd like to just talk a little bit about--I noticed on the website that you have a really interesting discussion about what is folk art, and, you know, what the museum considers folk art and so on in two different places. And I am wondering--well, first of all, I guess, did you have discussions with staff or board about those before you put those up? Or--

MH: With staff. Yeah. I think--actually, the board did participate in one day of discussion on just our communications and how we want to message and how we want to talk about the museum. And then we refined that. And then the staff and I, you know, work really, really closely on what goes on the website.

JB: Well, the thing--I was very impressed with those narratives, those texts, but I did wonder because I know one thing that used to drive me crazy, and I don't know if you still have this problem, but I would hear people refer to us as "the folk art museum." And obviously, we did then and you still do show quite a lot of contemporary craft. **[01:30:00]** But there isn't anything specifically on the website about that, and I was wondering--

MH: No, there isn't. And, you know--first of all, getting back to the name. I can--everybody mispronounced the name. From the mayor to the head of--

JB: You mean CA-*FAM* or *CA*-FAM or--

MH: They'll say the Craft Art Museum or the Crafts--I can't even go--I've heard--

JB: Somebody was even collecting some of those, you know, that would show up as addresses.

MH: Yeah, yeah. I think what you're hinting at is there's a large discussion that we're having right now as we're in the middle of this strategic planning process. And in 1973 when they came up with

the Craft and Folk Art Museum name incorporating the Egg and the Eye as the legal name, that was based on what was happening at that time and what craft meant and what folk art meant then. Those two art genres have gone into different universes in many ways. And attract a different audience. And have--you know--there are certain factors that influence the development of that work. And it's not necessarily a natural fit anymore, even though they are both handmade. But contemporary craft artists and the organizations that support them have this very strict view that, you know, "we're just as good as the fine artists. Look at us, we're just as good as—"

JB: Very defensive.

MH: Very defensive. Very defensive. And "we don't want to be seen next to those primitive folk art artists." And the folk artists, whether they're schooled--you know, when we showed Josh Dorman--I gave him his first museum show. I mean, he is a fine artist and he teaches at Spence Academy in New York. You know, a very elite school. And he loved being part of the Craft and Folk Art Museum. A lot of contemporary craft artists turn their nose up at it. So I have found that the folk artists don't take themselves that seriously, are much more interesting, and are easier to work with. The [folk art] community has embraced us much, much more generously. And I think that in my perspective, that's where the interest is of the public.

JB: So you think the interest--I guess it sounds like you're saying a couple of different things. You're saying that there's more popular interest in folk art, but you're also saying that the definitions of folk art or maybe [of] folk art itself are changing, are becoming a little broader--

MH: Sure. I mean, they absolutely are. You know, there's so many things happening because we don't live in a static world, first of all. And the *New York Times* did a great article right when I started called, "The Word that Dare Not Speak its Name." Did you read that article?

JB: I'm trying to remember. I think I did. I think you may even--

MH: I may have a copy of it.

JB: --have given it to me. Yes. ["Why Craft Never Was a Four-Letter Word," by Roberta Smith, *The New York Times,* April 17, 2009, National Edition, C5.]

MH: And the word was "craft." And it was when the New York Craft Museum [the Museum of Art and Design] spent a lot of money assessing people's opinions of that word and realized even if they had $10 million, it wouldn't change people's minds of what that is.

JB: Yes. They changed their name so that ["craft" is] not a part of it . . . .

MH: I mean, listen: I'm in love and committed to profiling works that are done with integrity and with respect for material and that are based in the cultural story. I don't like labels. My first couple of years, I did all this research and I read all the books. I did debate after debate. And then year three, I just plugged out of that and said, "let the academics debate. Let the commercial galleries

debate. I just want interesting programming that people can relate to, that is exciting to people." And so, yes, I would have to say that the contemporary craft aspect of the museum is not as developed or robust as the folk art. And that just reflects what our audience wants and what our interests are, also, that just kind of naturally flow together. Partly it's--I have to say, I think the crafts community has been very uppity towards us--

JB: That's interesting.

MH: --even when *American Craft Magazine* did a whole--

JB: Oh, I saw that. On Los Angeles. **[01:35:00]**

MH: I think that you read some--yeah, I think--and they didn't even include us.

JB: That was nuts.

MH: And we went back and forth in a *tête à tête* and they made all these very bogus and lame excuses. And I was just like--I mean, Corinna Cotsen is a board member here--

JB: And there, yeah.

MH: --and there. And they wanted to show, you know, LACMA. So, I don't know. They're [the American Craft Council, which publishes *American Craft Magazine*] going through a major identity crisis. But even when we do show a craft artist, we--strictly craft artist, because, you know--Josh Dorman, also, who makes these beautiful landscapes based--that have a little bit to do with Japanese landscape in terms of perspective, but are created as a collage based on old textbooks. And he is also a fine artist and a craftsman. But there's elements of craft and folk art within his work. But that whole issue of taking yourself so seriously, I just--it's not for me.

JB: Got it. (laughter) And that's also, you know, one of those topics that could go on and on for hours and hours and it can get very boring.

MH: Exactly.

JB: Even for people like me who enjoy part of it. Well, let's change the subject a little bit. I'm guessing that one thing that's very different for you is working with a board, or at least a board of a nonprofit, a private, nonprofit museum. So I'm wondering what that's been like for you.

MH: Well, it definitely was a transition because I didn't realize that I was an entrepreneur until I got placed in a nonprofit. And I also have always worked, you know--my background in investment banking has put me in an environment where I work with a lot of high performers and people that didn't tolerate non-performers. You know, there's no place in that world for someone that doesn't perform. And [I worked with] people that were, quite frankly--in my previous career--felt very comfortable making decisions and taking risks. You know, when you're investing money, you're always taking risks. So that was really not the case with this board. I've come since to

understand that is the case with most not-for-profit boards. As I've had much more experience and working with colleagues and so forth, [it is common to hear that] there is something about the not-for-profit board structure that encourages inaction, maybe? . . . . I don't know if that's even the correct way to say it, but . . . . But that maybe people that are high performers in other areas of their lives think, "I'm doing this"--

JB: "This is just going to be fun."

MH: "This is going to be fun. This is charity. And I'm not really going to [have to] be tough." And it creates a dysfunctional environment in general. And then I think there's also the fact that when you sit on the board of a for-profit company, everybody's focused on one goal and that's to maximize shareholders' profits. And every decision that you make is judged by that.

JB: Is on the bottom line.

MH: So, in a nonprofit, you are a mission-driven organization. And if you're not even clear on what that mission is, you don't have a clear understanding [of what] it is--the role that you're playing and the impact that you're supposed to be making. And also, you're not trained to be in that role. So that creates a very diffused power structure. On top of that--what if I speak specifically about this organization? The board was really not professionalized, as I was saying. Much of the museum wasn't either, because the classic founder's syndrome happened here, which would make itself a good case study. So the board was kind of stacked with friends and loyal family--

JB: And when you say they were not professionalized, do you mean they didn't have the training that, perhaps, they should have? I mean, boards do sometimes get training in the museum--

MH: Sure, yeah. They weren't selected based on a competitive criterion. They weren't screened properly. They weren't trained about what their roles are. And there were no consequences for nonperformance. That's just **[01:40:00]** not a functioning environment [in which] to operate.

JB: Well, Frank Wyle has given a tremendous amount of money to CAFAM over the years. Many years, I know, when I was here, he would give at the end of the year. Of course, most donors do give at the end of the year. But I mean, in the sense that he would make up whatever, you know, was lacking at the end of the year. But I also know that he's always hoped that a few other board members or others would come forward and give at least as much--or more--than he does. At least he says that. So I also know from talking to Wally--I interviewed Wally Marks [CAFAM's board chair] a couple of weeks ago, and he says that you are working to locate some few people [donors] who may or may not be on the board. He also said that the annual contribution of board members has finally been raised. I know that it stayed very low for a very long time. So I know that you're taking some steps to focus people more [on the bottom line].

MH: Oh, absolutely. We have, I mean--well, Wally and I have always had a very good relationship. And we can speak very candidly and we are colleagues and friends. And we both care about this

institution. So that's been a huge help. We have brought on some pretty powerful, smart people--Harvard MBAs, Harvard lawyers. A lot of them have left after a year because they're young and ambitious and efficient and they come to a board meeting and they think, "What was that?" (laughter)

JB: What happened? What happened? Yes. (laughter)

MH: What was that? What exactly was that? So the issue of the board at CAFAM has to do with the culture. A culture that was established many years ago and a culture that was tolerated for many reasons, some of which I don't understand. But the bottom line is that it's very difficult to change a culture. And we've tried. We've had some success. For sure, we've had success. But, you know, raising the board contribution from $2,500 to $5,000 isn't going to be the transformative act--

JB: No, but it's one step.

MH: Yeah. And I found a fundraising study--I wonder if I can find it if you're interested in it--that some top firm did for the museum like in the '80s, I think.

JB: For this museum?

MH: Yes, to see--before they embarked on the capital campaign. And one of--

JB: Yes, yes. I know that study.

MH: OK. And one of the take-aways was everybody has a good feeling about the museum. They like the mission. But the museum does not have a history of--they only had at that point, I think, one or two gifts at the million-dollar level.

JB: Yes. And I think that was primarily because of the capital campaign. That wasn't something that had happened in the past.

MH: Well, I know that Lloyd Cotsen had given $1 million.

JB: And I think Caroline [actually Kathleen] Ahmanson--. [Kathleen Ahmanson served on the CAFAM board; her husband, Robert, was the head of the Ahmanson Foundation, which gave generously to the museum.]

MH: OK. Both of whom no longer give to the museum and don't want a relationship and do not look fondly on their departure, divorce, or whatever you want to call [it]. So that has not been a relationship that I have been able to have access to, you know, even to start to turn around. So it's a problem because today there are something like 56,000 nonprofits in Los Angeles County.

JB: In L.A. County alone? Oh, my goodness. It'd be interesting to know how many of those are art-related. It would be a much smaller number, I would think, but still--

MH: But still big.

JB: --you have a sizable amount of competition.

MH: Yes. We had a board consultant come into a meeting this year, and she started with that just to let people know, "You're competing for money. You're competing for staff. You're competing for executive management with these 56,000 nonprofits in the county." So it's a very different landscape. It's a very different landscape.

JB: Well, **[01:45:00]** something that we haven't talked about is the role of the City of L.A. [Department of Cultural Affairs]. When you started, the museum had been supported for, I think, about five years--five or maybe six years by the City of L.A. after it had closed--we thought--forever, when I left. That's the reason the library and the archives were given away. Besides the fact that we didn't have the space for them because we had lost the building next door. But really, we thought it was closing forever. But it turned out to be closed for only 14 months because--well, I guess it was--you know the story of Patrick Ela working with Al Nodal, who was head of [the L.A.] Cultural Affairs [department] at that time, to get the museum under the umbrella of the city. And their contribution was quite substantial at the beginning. It's not as substantial now, I know. Do you want to tell a little bit of the story of how that has gone since you started?

MH: Obviously, I wasn't here when it was negotiated. And it was negotiated, I'm presuming, based on a certain level of assumption to the city and the museum. Almost immediately after it was ratified by the city council, it was clear that the city didn't have the funds to fulfill its end of the bargain. And so the city support has steadily gone down. And, you know, we've gone to city hall and fought with city hall and went back and forth and have dealt with this general manager and that general manager. And my summary--because actually, June 30, 2010--so just in a couple of months--will [be] our ten year--the original contract negotiated was for a ten year period, which expires in just a few months.

JB: Yeah, so it was 2000, then, I guess, that--

MH: I think it was ratified in 1999 and then put into action. But so, hopefully, we'll be receiving our last [semi-annual] payment in April of $45,000.

JB: That's scary.

MH: But in terms of the larger picture of the cultural landscape, most people at the city and in Los Angeles that are within the arts community believe that CAFAM got a sweetheart deal and didn't deserve it and didn't appreciate it and are looking forward to it going away. And I can tell you that even at our much reduced rate from the city--I get $90,000 a year from the city. The next highest grant of the city is $23,000.

JB: I can see why there would be that bad feeling, then.

MH: Yeah, so--

JB: But that is a lot less than was originally--

MH: I think it was about $250,000.

JB: Yeah. Plus at the beginning, there was staff included. [At the beginning of the City partnership, CAFAM was structured as if it was a separate unit of the Department of Cultural Affairs; in effect, CAFAM became what had historically been the city's Folk and Traditional Arts Program, with Joan de Bruin, former head of that program, appointed CAFAM Director.]

MH: Mm-hmm. And they paid for electricity and our utilities and also our postage, which just two years ago--so we've been slowly over the years absorbing--you know, first it was the postage. Then it was the utilities and so forth. And now, we are in three months losing our largest donor. And the city's in crisis, $200 million in the red and all this kind of stuff. So it's a big issue. I don't really blame anybody there. I think the city is the city. Everybody had good intentions. I think people--and Al Nodal, who obviously loved the museum and really wanted to see it reopen--and this was the way to do it. And had it not been reopened, that would have been the end of the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

JB: I think he loved Edith Wyle, too, you know.

MH: I'm sure, yes.

JB: And that was a gift to her--because she was very ill at the time that the museum closed. And she was able to see the museum reopen before she died, so--.

MH: I'm sure she appreciated that. And he clearly went out on a limb and made it happen for her, for the institution, and certainly, her. And so I know Frank sometimes gets very mad at the city and he gets accusatory. But it is what it is. They don't **[01:50:00]** have money.

JB: Under the present economic situation, it's amazing that you do get the $90,000. [At the time of this interview, a major nationwide—and worldwide—recession (sometimes referred to as the Great Recession) was still going on.]

MH: Yeah. From my perspective, they've been very generous to us. They've been very generous. And I have a good relationship with them. And I used to be invited to their senior staff meetings and sit through hours and hours of just loads of problems that they face running that department. It's an underfunded department and--

JB: You mean the Cultural Affairs department?

MH: Yes. Just to put it in perspective, the city of New York spends $33 per capita on art. Chicago and Houston, between $13-15. Los Angeles spends $1.33.

JB: Oh, my God.

MH: So that's--

JB: That's scandalous.

MH: It is what it is.

JB: When you first arrived in 2005, we had a few conversations. I guess I was [considered to be] sort of the historian or something with the museum. But in the course of our conversations, you mentioned that you were very worried about the reputation of the museum vis à vis funding agencies. And in particular, the Getty Trust. And we talked about, you know, what could you do about it because obviously, reputation is everything. And it seems to me that you have turned that around. And I was wondering if you could just comment a little bit about that.

MH: Well, not with the Getty, unfortunately. I did--the Getty is still, you know, on my "to do" list, so to speak. But one of the things that I did not know when I took the position was the financial--the extent of the financial misfortunes of the museum. I knew that it had suffered a loss of funding. I did not know that the reason for that loss was because of mismanagement. I did not know that there were several lawsuits threatened or initiated towards the museum. And when I stumbled on those files, that was a shock to my system. Especially the Getty one. Because there was, you know, loads of correspondence and the dialoging was very harsh and personal. And it was really about people not wanting to admit they did something wrong. And that seemed to me to be really tragic, that we would lose a reputation--because in the Getty's case, every single penny that the Getty Foundation--that is one of the wealthiest arts institutions in the world--gave us whatever it was--$90,000, I can't remember now--

JB: [Was it] $500,000?

MH: No, no, no, no. It wasn't that much. That was the NEA. The NEA gave us $350,000 to start the endowment. And they also took legal action. But it was the Getty in particular. Because now I just got my first NEA grant, by the way. Small grant.

JB: Congratulations.

MH: Yes, thank you. But the Getty--it was about how we spent the funds versus how we were supposed to spend the funds. So to me, that's just very clear. You wrote the grant to spend it for this--X. You spent it for Y. You admit that you spent it for Y. You tell them why you spent it for Y. You apologize and you move on. But the people involved refused to apologize and refused to say they did something wrong. And it just kept escalating. I mean, the letters were just--it was ridiculous. And then finally they took legal action. And Edith and Frank paid them--paid the Getty. The Getty back the money! And, you know, [after] 15 years, they are still holding a grudge.

JB: So it could have been handled better.

MH: It could have been handled better.

JB: It wasn't the facts of the matter so much as the communication.

MH: The way it was handled. But getting to your question is that I thought that I would come in, clean up, have some success and then people would start, you know, opening doors to me.

JB: Well, hasn't that happened?

MH: It has, but it's taken a lot longer. I mean, it has been a very slow process and part of it has to do with--they thought, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Maryna talks a good game, but," you know, "is she going to be here a year from now?" They've had so many different directors, no one stayed for longer than, you know, ten months. And so, you know, year one, year two, year three, things started kicking in. And I felt like everybody was testing me. The funders, the former patrons **[01:55:00],** the public. But you know what? I decided kind of about a year and a half into this job that I was going to really limit my exposure to what we affectionately call here, "the oldies." (laughter)

JB: Yes, I understand.

MH: And it has nothing to do with age, it's just the people who know it from "back when--back when."

JB: Yes, they have so much history.

MH: Yes, yes. We call them the oldies around the staff. We say, "Oh, she's one of those oldies." That are just very attached to--

JB: And many of them are she's, not he's, for some reason.

MH: And so I plugged in more to people that didn't know the institution, or heard about it but never had been here. And just everything flowed much better in terms of cooperation and brainstorming and so that's where I put my focus. And then, yeah, money started flowing more freely.

JB: Well, you certainly have garnered some very impressive grants.

MH: Oh, thank you.

JB: Do you do most--well, no, you have a development officer, but I'm sure you work with her, too.

MH: Yes, yes. Because grantors want to fund new projects.

JB: Yes, that's the catch, isn't it? The Catch-22.

MH: So always coming up with new projects.

JB: Which stretches you and stretches you.

MH: Yes.

JB: Well, let's change the subject one more time. I'm just wondering--with all of these challenges--if you have any time left over for professional networking, for being active with any of the museum organizations or any museum colleagues.

MH: Well, that goes in phases. My first two years, I did not have time to do anything in my personal life.

JB: No. Certainly understandable.

MH: It was a really difficult--I ended up having Epstein-Barr syndrome and being very ill and not knowing--and being misdiagnosed for a long time. And then just realizing, you know, I had to take care of myself. And so [I am] doing that. And also, I think, year three was my year of disillusionment with--you know, I'm an idealist. I thought--working for a nonprofit, this very important mission, doing great work, getting the response that I want from the public--that more resources would go my way. And then to be reading about organizations that I think are sort of narrow interest and more have an elite focus raising millions and millions of dollars. And that was kind of the year of disillusionment. And then realizing, "You know what? I don't need $10 million to run this institution." I don't want it to be a huge, impersonal institution. That's what I love about this museum is that I know a lot of my members. And when I see them in the gallery and I see them in the shop, I can say hello and ask about their family. And that's what I care about. But yes, I do, and then--so in around the fourth and fifth year I got more involved in . . . [some professional museum organizations] and I received an award from the County to do the Arts Leadership Initiative.

JB: You began to get some positive feedback and some motivation to go on.

MH: Yes, yes. And just--you know, it was very helpful just to hear from colleagues that run small nonprofits about their boards and their challenges. And I ran one of the largest institutions [in my group], so, you know, meeting women--because they were all women in my case--that run nonprofits that have a $50,000 budget, for example. So that was helpful. And then that's where I received the grant to go to the Harvard Strategic Leadership Program, which was amazing. Two hundred nonprofit leaders from around the world looking at strategic issues, really, really high level instruction and networking.

JB: Was that a week or a--

MH: That was a week. That was a week. And that was really helpful and very enjoyable because I like big-picture thinking.

JB: And when you can network like that with people who are having the same kinds of problems, you don't feel so isolated yourself.

MH: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. **[02:00:00]**

JB: You talked about this a little bit. I was going to ask you--of the many tasks you confront every day, and I'm sure there are many--that's partly what makes the job interesting and part of what

makes it overwhelming, right? But I'm just wondering what gives you the biggest pleasure? Just on a personal level.

MH: I would have to say [it's] when we're in installation. That's--

JB: Yeah, that's what you had mentioned before.

MH: Because there's so much, you know--I'm always thinking that we're the underdog, that we're the "little museum," that everybody has more resources and they do things better. And then--it's been interesting. A couple of times we've taken exhibitions from larger institutions and we've received the text, for example, in a state that is unacceptable to me, and we had to completely rewrite it. And we found factual errors and typos and so forth.

I hold myself to such a high level of performance in terms of the development of the text, the story line, the educational programming, the interactive component of an exhibition, the design of it, the postcard--everything has to be top notch for me. So when I see it all come together—but [initially] it's all in these little pieces. And then when I get to install and get my hands literally dirty. I literally show--every exhibition, I go and I take the paint roller up and down three times, and say, "OK, I helped hang this show." And so that's very gratifying to me. I'm usually exhausted by the time the opening reception comes.

But even the exhibit that we have now . . . it's like, if I'm having a bad moment, I just go up there and breathe that in. And it's a stunning installation. And sometimes I get an email or a note from a patron and they noticed everything. They noticed why I chose this color here and why I chose it here and I'm like, "OK, great. People notice that." So that's probably what I enjoy the most. And secondly, I enjoy going out and talking about the museum and the mission. That would be my second favorite thing.

JB: Well, your [enjoyment of the] installation work, I think, shows that you have the craftsperson's heart. Well, it's obvious that your biggest challenge for the immediate future is just keeping the museum afloat financially. But if you can steer a course through these economic storms, what kind of--to extend the metaphor probably more than it should be--what silver linings do you see ahead for the museum?

MH: Silver linings?

JB: I went a little overboard.

MH: Gosh. Silver lin-- I think that--

JB: What would you wish for the museum if the financial problems could be resolved?

MH: I think the museum as an institution has to find clarity on what it wants to be because the past five years it's been driven by the vision of primarily me. And that's on the one side been good for me because I've been able to implement what I care about in my vision. But it's also made the

institution more vulnerable because it hasn't forced the board to step up and take responsibility for developing a strategic plan--which we're in the middle of. But yet anytime a question [comes up], it's "Well, what does Maryna think?" You know, "What does Maryna think?" And I've struggled in the past couple of years as I think about my own career and my own career goals and other opportunities have floated my way. I just feel such an enormous sense of responsibility for this institution. Like it's my institution. And I have to remind myself--and I have the past year--it's *not* my institution.

JB: I guess that can make you understand how the Wyles must have felt, in a sense.

MH: Sure. Sure. Yes. But I don't--it's a tough thing because when you work at a nonprofit, you're obviously working at a reduced compensation **[02:05:00]** because you're getting something else out of it that's not monetary. And I've accepted that because I did get a lot out of it. But I also realize that I can't erase a lot of things that happened in the past. And a lot of it's actually dealing with the reputation, you know. In many people's eyes, the Craft and Folk Art Museum is an example of a missed opportunity. And the question that I always go back to--is it too late? You know, can we reverse course or are we always going to be treading water? Because all of the success that I could sit here and list for you, that I've had in five years, it hasn't gotten me to ground yet. I'm still treading water. So that's discouraging. I mean, I've had all these little successes. I mean, they're not little successes, they're big successes. But they still haven't gotten me to solid ground. And treading water is a sign that something is off, I think. And so that's my question.

JB: How long do you think it would take to turn it around?

MH: It isn't a matter of time. It's a matter of money. And it's a matter of vision. The organization doesn't have the vision right now that's outside of my head. And we've talked about a strategic plan for years. I mean, thankfully, I have to say, I've been very lucky. The board has let me put my personality on every single part of this organization. And that is a huge gift. Huge gift and I completely appreciate it.

JB: And you have to credit yourself for part of that--

MH: Sure. No, I credit myself, but I also think that I'm very fortunate to have [had] the opportunity. We just opened a Flickr account and I sent pictures of some of our gallery installations to some of my friends.

JB: Yes, I noticed that, yeah.

MH: And they were like, "We can't believe you've done this." You know, my friends in Europe and so forth. And they said, "God, I see your personality in this. I see your personality in this." And they said, "Oh, you're so lucky." And I thought, yeah, I am lucky. But with that comes this huge responsibility of--if I stepped away, what will happen to this organization? So I have struggled

with this. And I've decided and I've announced to the board, as I mentioned--I actually announced to the executive committee, it will be announced to the full board later this month, that they need to start planning for my succession. And I've given them six to nine months' notice. My goal in doing that--I know that I can't just give them a four-week notice and say, "Good luck." We have to build the infrastructure.

JB: It's very good of you to do that.

MH: Well, yeah, I care--I didn't do all this for nothing. And, you know, Wally was very concerned and [he said], "I don't think we have the stomach to go forward without you." And I said, "There could be a person out there that would be a much better museum director for CAFAM in 2010. I got you through this part, but now maybe you need a different type of personality. Maybe you need a different type of person, a person that has different skill sets." And I'm sure that there is somebody that is just salivating for this job. I'm not salivating for it anymore. You know, I've had five years and I have other aspirations.

JB: You're still young.

MH: Well, I--yes. I hope to accomplish much. So it's going to be interesting. I'm encouraging the board to think strategically, to put everything on the table--including a name change, including a location change.

JB: I was wondering if a location change had been discussed.

MH: Everything. Let's put it all out there. Because we're about to lose our largest funder. We're facing a recession. Philanthropic giving is not due to recover until 2013. So people don't fund need, they fund an idea, they fund a vision. So we'll see. I mean, we're in the process of that. And my hope is that when the full board realizes that succession is on the table, that maybe that is a kind of a call to action.

JB: Yes. I think that [that fact] combined with the loss of the city funds might just goose the [board].

MH: Maybe.

JB: Maryna, I guess we need to bring this to a close. And I just thank you so much for making time on relatively short notice to talk for **[02:10:00]** over two hours.

MH: Oh, my gosh. Oh, gosh.

JB: Two hours and ten minutes.

MH: Oh, wow.

JB: It's really been a pleasure. And I have been very, very gratified to see the changes that you have made and the progress that you have made with this institution. So--

MH: Well, thank you, Joan. I know that you and many like you have such a fondness for the institution. And you knew it in a different place. And it's had a wonderful life. It's had ups and downs. A lot of us just call it the "little engine that could." And I'm going to be interested to see where it goes from here.

JB: Well, we all will. But I think it's in a very good place now.

MH: Thank you.

JB: And thank *you* very, very much.

MH: Thank you.

[End of Session: 02:10:57]