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Oral history interview with Arlene Schnitzer, 1985 June 7-8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Arlene Schnitzer on June 7 and 8, 1985. The interview took place in Portland, Oregon, and was conducted by Bruce Guenther for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

DATE: JUNE 7, 1985
[Tape 1; side A]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Arlene, as owner of the Fountain Gallery and a major figure in Northwest art, we're going to do an interview today to talk about what, who, where, and when. Where were you born?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Bruce, I was born in Salem, Oregon, on January 10, 1929. And I lived in Salem until I was two and my parents moved to Portland. First house was over on 33rd Street, around the Grant High [school--Ed.] neighborhood, and we moved to a house next door to Grant Park on 35th and Knott, and that's where I watched my sisters go to Grant High and I started Fernwood Grammar School. And lived there until we moved to 39th and Davis when I was in about the fourth grade. Went to Laurelhurst Grammar School until the seventh grade. And then my parents had built a home up on Terwilliger across from what was then Simmons Hill Villa, and went to Multnomah Grammar School, from which I graduated.

BRUCE GUENTHER: What were your parents' names?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: My mother's name was Helen Director, D-i-r-e-c-t-o-r, just like movie director. (chuckles) And my dad's name was Simon [Director--Ed.], and they were in the furniture business, had a very large furniture store called Jennings Furniture Company. It was a prestige furniture house up on Tenth and Washington, which is where the Medical-Dental Building is now. And so as a little girl I used to run around all those floors of furniture and learned how to work an elevator and work a switchboard. And I used to watch my parents -- really I grew up in a retail business. And my mother managaged, always worked in the business with my father. All my life I remember her as a working person, working alongside my father. She was a buyer. She managed one of the largest -- you know, we're talking, remember, 1931, Depression days, and still at that time, she was a buyer of a major gift department, and it was highly though of. I guess today you'd call her an interior decorator, but she used to win prizes. I can remember every year, the retail merchants would have prizes for the best store windows, you know for spring and fall openings. . .

[Tape 2; side A (cont.)]

BRUCE GUENTHER: We're going to start with how Louie Bunce came into the gallery.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: About a year after I first opened the gallery, so that would make it about '62, Louie Bunce came back from sabbatical, and of course I'd heard a lot about Louie and he was very flamboyant. You know, if he'd been a politician, he would have been on the front page of every newspaper kissing the babies. The babies that he was on the front page of the paper kissing were, you know, like 18, 17, 20. And Louie was involved in the jazz scene and the music scene and with a lot of fringe characters in town. He was really quite flamboyant, and very charming. But his reputation also was a little clouded at the time, in that a lot of people in the art community felt that he had really gone too far in the kinds of shows he was having, the kinds of places he was exhibiting, the kinds of things he was willing to do to get publicity to expose his artwork. I went to see, what year was the airport?

BRUCE GUENTHER: It would have been. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: It was before that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah, '60, '61.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right. It was before I had the gallery or was in the art world, and there has been a tremendous amount of controversy over his airport mural, and there were hearings about it -- it seems ridiculous looking back now that that safe and pretty mural that's at the airport would have caused such controversy at the time, but it certainly did. And there were a lot of people that felt that they really went on a limb and staked their own integrity testifying on Louie's behalf, and that consequently by some of the things that he was doing he was disappointing them in his level of behavior, because after all, you know, Art was spelled with a capital A, and it had to have special attitudes and treatment, and certainly if you were an artist

you had to behave Properly, also with a capital P. I wasn't really aware of all of these things. There were some nuances that I missed because I hadn't been involved in the art world that long. But Louie came back to the city with a splash and a dash, and I invited him to participate in this gallery that had opened in his absence. And I explained to him the only thing was that I was representing artists on an exclusive basis, that they were not to show elsewhere -- because I felt in a city like Portland that was really one of the only factors that could help the gallery in being a success. So that I told him the ground rules from my point of view were the exclusivity; he was not to show elsewhere. And did he have any other outstanding commitments, and he said no. And we made a very happy arrangement, he was delighted and I was delighted, and that was that. So he was due to come into the gallery a few weeks later, and I picked up the Sunday paper and there was a big ad on the front of the equivalent of the "Living" section, with a corny drawing of an easel with a fancy little corny drawing of a frame and inside the frame was the face of Louie Bunce. The advertisement was by a place called the Downtown Linoleum and Carpet Store, out on Milwaukee Avenue. And Louie Bunce had done a mural for the outside of this Downtown Lineoleum store, and this advertisement was for an exhibition of paintings by Louie Bunce to be held inside the store. It was just so shocking to me, and so kind of sleasy, and I'd asked Louie if he'd had any other commitments and he said no, and I was really shocked, plus you know I was younger and I'd just been in my gallery for a year, and I was filled with idealism and stars in my eyes, and this really kind of disappointed me and horrified me. And I took it on myself to go to Louie Bunce, and we sat outside the museum -- I went to see him during his class time -- and we sat on the brick wall in front of the museum, and it was very difficult for me, but I just decided it was something in order to maintain my own integrity I had to do. And I told Louie how shocked I was when I saw this ad for Downtown Linoleum and how disappointed I was, and that this was exactly the kind of thing that he had been accused of, and that I just really felt it would be better for him not to come into the gallery at that time. And as I looked back a few years later, where I. . . I mean, I was such a young punk, and this was Louie Bunce, and where I had the guts and the temerity to do something like that, I will never know. And he responded and I've had nothing but great admiration for him because he responded with dignity and with charm and politeness, and he said, "Arlene, I understand, and that is the way you must function, and I'm sorry." He just couldn't have been more subdued and sweet about it. He didn't make me feel foolish. He was very understanding, and we parted. And I was really kind of sad, because Louie was a pretty good name to have had in those days. But I felt this was something I really had to uphold.

So about a year goes by -- so this would have been about '63 or the end of '62 somewhere; I'm terrible with dates -- and I figured that enough time had gone by, and from the day that I talked to him on, there was not one more funny thing. No more kissing 17-year-olds on the front page, no more judging beauty contests, no more flashy kind of thing. He was really sedate and traditional in his behavior. And so I felt the time had come to approach Louie Bunce again to see (chuckles) if he would be in the gallery, and so I did, and he came most graciously. He never referred to that other incident at all. He was happy to participate and to be a part of the gallery. And from that time on Louie Bunce and I started a really wonderful relationship. It wasn't until a few years later -- and this was one of the most important lessons I've ever learned in terms of the gallery -- I learned that Louie Bunce was terribly, terribly in debt because of the alimony that he owed his ex-wives -- two wives. And I mean, what Louie did. . . He was living in a really fleabag of a hotel called the Beaver Hotel, which is down near the railroad station, and it really was kind of a sleazy joint also. I went to visit him there several times. He had a room -- and it had an old linoleum hotel floor -- and he had another room where he painted, and what I found out was that the Beaver Hotel needed new linoleum on all their bathrooms. Louie was so much in debt and trying to pay off alimony, Louie didn't have a dime to his name and was having trouble making his rent, so Louie traded the Downtown Linoleum store for that mural and the painting exhibit with all the attendant publicity for their doing the new linoleum for all the bathrooms of the Beaver Hotel, for which in turn Louie got rent paid. And I was so ashamed of myself when I found, and so really proud to know Louie from that point on more than ever, because of the way he handled me. He never felt compelled to explain to me. He didn't degrade himself by having to complain about his financial state. He was a proud little man. He could have so easily have told me. And he didn't.

And I really learned several very valuable things always. I learned something about pride. I learned something about one's feeling of dignity about themselves. I learned that you never judge a situation by what appears on the surface. And that lesson really held me many, many times in dealing with artists who similarly were in bad financial straits but who had too much pride -- or enough pride, or the right kind of pride -- and didn't want to humliate themselves, and maybe that's why my relationship with so many artists has held for so many years. That was a very valuable lesson I learned about Louie.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Louie was with the gallery until his death.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Until his death, and he right now still is. We're handling his estate for his son Jon.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So you saw him through. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Thick and thin.

BRUCE GUENTHER: . . .two or three more marriages.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Saw him through Gloria, the 17-year-old, who he couldn't even take into a bar and order a drink for legally. I think Gloria was from Spokane. She's now married to Roy DeForrest. And that's how she met Roy was because Louie Bunce and Roy were good friends. And she was a cute gal. That was a very happy period for him, in spite of the fact she was 17. Louie always had women friends. Women liked Louie. Really, everybody liked Louie. He was dapper, he had a sophistication that not many artists had around here, he was one of the gentle artists when it came to young people. If I'd have group shows, he would always come down and kind of try to spur the installation along so that the young people's work was always put in the best place. He'd always put his own work in a different spot, and promote a young person's work in a better spot. He was always encouraging me to look at particular young people's work. He's the one who first brought Jack Portland and Lenny [Orleonok--Ed.] Pitkin into the gallery, because he thought they were both just super young artists and had a great future ahead of them. And I can remember seeing Lenny and Jack -- always together, always together. So when I finally told Louie one day, "Yes, tell Lenny and Jack I'd like to see them and I'd like to their work," they came in together. And I can remember walking up to the two of them -- it was in the gallery down in the Hughes Building -- and they were waiting for me, and one was sitting in a chair and one was kind of kneeling on the floor by one of the big posts in the middle of the room -- close together -- and I walked out and I said, "Let's get something straight right now, you two. You gotta quit this Bobsey-Twin routine. It just won't go." I said, "I'm going to tell you this before I even see you work. Because what happens when people come in together is maybe you'll like one person's work and maybe you won't like the other person's work, and because you don't want to hurt two people who are that close, you end up rejecting both of them, because you don't want to hurt somebody's feelings. So you're doing yourselves a disservice and you're doing any gallery you go visit a disservice by being like the Bobsey Twins. You've just got to cut that out." We've laughed over that a lot of times since. Anyway, they did eventually come in independently to show me their work. I absolutely agree with Louie; how could one not. And they both came into the gallery -- this was a couple years after they got out of school -- and they've been there ever since.

You know, one thing I didn't mention was I quit art school in my third year. I had intended to go ahead and finish but. . . That was one of the reasons why I opened the gallery at eleven o'clock in the morning, because I figured that my mother and Edna could man the gallery from eleven to twelve, and I'd be out of school at twelve and be able to get down. But (chuckles) after I had the gallery I found out you just can't run a business and do the things and have the appointments. When somebody else wants it at nine o'clock in the morning or ten o'clock in the morning, you can't say, "Well gee, I'm sorry I can't meet you; I'm still in school." So little by little I dropped out of art school in my third year. One other reason I dropped out of art school is I was taking first-year painting, and I was put into Manuel Izquierdo's class. I always had the distinct feeling that Manuel did not like me. And of course I was too nervous about being in his class to realize that he really yelled at a lot of people in his classes, not just me. But one day, we had a painting on the easel and there was a -- it was a figure drawing; we had a model -- and he was about three easels away from me. And he got to the easel next to me and he started yelling at them. Yelling. And I have never responded to teachers who yell. I need encouragement. I can't take that kind of treatment. And I started to panic because he was going to come to my easel next and I was so sure that he'd yell at me, just like he'd been yelling at the other students, and I walked out of the class, to avoid it. I went out. And if I remember correctly, that was my last day of school. And that was just the final push that I needed to work with the gallery full time.

The other thing I remember so much about school. . . I was there as an adult, and there were about five or six adults at the time in the day classes. The kids, the regular students, of which I mentioned before who some of them were, really would have very little to do with me. They resented the adults coming down off the hill, so to speak, and taking up their teacher's valuable time, when to them they saw adults taking these classes as a lark, and they thought they were going into it as a full-time professional career.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Right.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: One of the people who in particular was just snotty as hell was Jay Backstrand. I'd walk in in the morning and Jay would be sitting at one end of the corridor, sitting on the floor, and he'd be looking at a painting upside down at the other end of the corridor. And he would just sit there and stare at it. And I'd walk by in the morning to school, and I'd say, "Good morning." And I'd get a, "Uh huh," just a grunt. He was really very rude. (chuckles) Later, of course, when he came into the gallery, as really a brilliant, brilliant young artist, we used to laugh about how he felt about the adult students and me in particular, because I wouldn't conform to looking like. . . All the adults started out in their normal clothes, and by the time the year was over they all ended up looking like artists in tacky blue jeans, and I wouldn't do it. You know, I never. . . I still stayed me and I painted in a smock and changed my clothes at the end of the day into my regular street clothes, and I never ended up looking without makeup and unkempt, which was such a trendy fashionable thing for everybody -- young students and adults alike -- to enter art school and end up looking like bohemians. And I just thought that was tacky. So I never did it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: (chuckles)

ARLENE SCHNITZER: But maybe if I had, the younger students would have been more accepting of what they would perceive as a seriousness.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: As many of them have since told me, who ever dreamed I'd end up owning a gallery, you know.

BRUCE GUENTHER: (laughs) And they'd be working for you, in a way.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Well, I'm working for them.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah, that's very true.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Jack Portland said to me a couple weeks ago, "I've hired you; this is what the gallery relationship really is. You work for the artists. Any time I don't like the relationship, I can get up and walk out." And that's really true. So, what else do you want to know?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Okay. I think I'm going to switch sides and then start.

[Tape 2; side B]

BRUCE GUENTHER: We've been talking about the early history of the gallery and the way key figures at the gallery came in. Did you ever consciously set out to build your gallery around the Museum Art School and its faculty and students?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: No, because. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Because in the early days you had that mix; and then looking at the long course of the gallery's history there have been times when it's been more Oregon, and then groups of Washington artists, or California, national, they come and go.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Well, I always started out with the commitment to the Pacific Northwest. I didn't differentiate in my own mind between Seattle and Portland -- or Salem or Eugene or Vancouver. It was just Pacific Northwest in my mind. That wasn't my focus of course, with my very first show I. . . I didn't know enough that when I opened with Pederdi and Arneson and Lee Chesney and Hayter and John Ihle and Dennis Beahl. . . It was only after I was in operation a few months that I realized it was too difficult to deal with an artist from a long-distance relationship. And it was reflecting back on the fact that I opened the gallery because the artists locally really did not have a place to show. My plans kind of got screwed up because of the opening of the other gallery which took the majority of the artists that I thought I was going to open with. That's what really forced me to branch out -- to a Kenneth Callahan in Seattle. But don't forget, I also had [Paul--Ed.] Horiuchi, I had [George--Ed.] Tsutakawa, I had Rosalyn Gale Powell -- for a very short period of time -- I had one other Seattle artist -- I had Bill Ivey at a certain period. Who else?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, in recent years you've added Alden Mason, and. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Yeah, Alden Mason and. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: . . .Bloedel.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Joan Ross Bloedel and Karen Guzak and I've always really been on the lookout for people whose work I admire and people who fit into the particular character that has become the Fountain Gallery. I started early in the game to realize that I had to find a different market other than just the lady who was decorating her house and would come in with her decorator, pick out a painting for over the sofa. So I went into the corporate world because it was something I was familiar with, because of my family, and started developing a strategy to sell corporations work. At the time very little of that was being done. Chase Manhattan Bank had a collection, but really throughout the west coast there wasn't very much of that, of art being developed with a corporation. And I deliberately and conscientiously created a strategy to approach corporations and sell them work. I can remember some of our early customers were Bank of California when they built their new building here. And then of course as the buildings progressed: PP&L -- Pacific Power & Light -- when they redid their corporate headquarters; they have a beautiful group of work. First Interstate Bank when they built their new building. As each new building came along. . . And I tried to work as much as I could through decorators, through architects and through direct approach. The corporate world was still a little skittish. As I look back, some of the corporations actually were a little more adventuresome in what they selected, considering when it was, than they even are today. Because at that, you know, 20 years ago, 22 years ago -- 24 years ago -- when I was still

developing the corporate sales. . . Believe it or not, here in the northwest and on the west coast, the attitude towards Abstract Expressionism, the argument was still going on! It seems ridiculous. Even then it should have been passe. But it wasn't; it was still going on here. And so for a lot of these corporations to pick work up -- Carl Morris, and some of the other, Louie Bunce -- was fairly adventuresome for them at the time. I find a lot more corporations today that want that pretty, safe painting with the horizon line in it, meaning a landscape, than even at that time. Really, it was through the Bank of California job that I did a job for United States Steel for their world headquarters building in Pittsburgh, and that was about 19. . .whenever it was.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Late sixties, after you moved to Fourth Avenue?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Oh yeah! It was in the early seventies, I believe. Or middle seventies. I think it was about nine years ago. And that was quite an exciting job. It was a tiring job. I was gone for almost eleven months. The longest period of time I was back home was about two weeks. But I worked with some interesting people. I bought from a lot of New York galleries, Chicago galleries. You mentioned Phyllis Kind a few minutes ago; I bought some work for her. We used to send in several million dollars of art at one time for viewings at US Steel. I picked out a Morris Louis from Andre Emmerich, from the Unfurled series, that I just thought was a wonderful painting, and it was $250,000, with a ten-percent discount to US Steel. I was being paid by US Steel on a per diem and expense basis. All the discounts were passed right on to US Steel. But the only reason we finally got US Steel to buy that Morris Louis was because coincidentally that was when the Metropolitan had just bought the Rembrandt, highest price for any painting ever paid in the world. The Metropolitan invited a select group of people to a preview and a dinner and an opening for viewing this Rembrandt painting. So one of the vice presidents of US Steel, by the name of Larry Heath -- was on the art committee -- was invited by the Metropolitan to go and participate in these festivities surrounding the Met's acquisition of this Rembrandt. Well, he was the one who had been the most vocal in saying, "They weren't going to pay that kind of money for that. . ." I mean, oh! He just thought that Morris Louis was a terrible painting, just a bunch of white space with those few little colored stripes on each corner. I mean, he was gross about it. But, he goes to the Metropolitan, flies up on the US Steel plane, and lo and behold, he came back the next day to the art committee meeting saying that he really has had a change of heart about US Steel purchasing the Morris Louis, that at this opening of the Met's Rembrandt painting, "Why right next to the Rembrandt, around the corner on the wall, was a huge Morris Louis painting that he could swear was just almost exactly like the one that we had at US Steel," and so he thought that US Steel should buy it. "If it was good enough for the Metropolitan, then US Steel could buy it." That was why US Steel ended up with their Morris Louis.

But I did work with a fabulous man who at that time was a vice president of US Steel, Ed Speer, went on to be chairman of the board and president of US Steel. He since has died, just died a couple years ago. But he'd listen to the whole committee and what everybody had to say, and then he'd say to me and to Maria Bergson, who was the interior designer, "We'll come back tonight and we're going to pick out exactly what needs to go in the spaces. Forget what the committee said." So this is what happened. It went on that way day after day. James Mellon Walton, who was president of the Carnegie, was on the committee. Leon Arcus, who was executive director of the Carnegie. . . And believe me I got my eyes opened as to how paintings made the Carnegie. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: International?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: I don't know if you talk about things like that.

[Interruption in taping]

BRUCE GUENTHER: A brief discussion of ethics and kickbacks has ensued which we did not wish to record, concerning the activities of the US Steel committee and certain parties connected with the Carnegie Institution who are no longer there. So the US Steel committee met, you would bring in things, and this was all sort of '71, '70?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Traveled the country, picked out things to be sent in from all over. US Steel paid for all the crating and shipping. And then the committee would meet. There was a local artist on the committee. They really tried to do things correctly. As I said, the director of the Carnegie; a local artist; an art teacher, who was a nun; James Mellon Walton; Larry Heath, vice president of US Steel; Maria Bergson, the interior designer; Ed Speer, a vice president who later became president; and myself. And it was just very interesting. Forget the art for a minute. From the point of view of being involved with at that time the largest corporation in the world -- second largest corporation in the world -- was a most unusual experience. And when you deal with art, you get very close to people. And for eleven months, it was a most unusual experience. It included things like being brought back for one day to talk to the chairman of the board about the art program because at that time he was threatening to blow the whole thing out of the water. Just the entree to US Steel. The fact that in 1971, they had an executive dining room where all of the junior executives ate lunch every day which admitted no women -- no women. After I was there, it was changed. (laughs) I ate there. And from that time on they had women. That was because of the man I worked directly under, who was the controller for US Steel. Just so many things to do

with the corporation, with the. . . Mr. [Roderick], who is now the chairman of the board, I worked very closely with. It was really quite exciting. One mistake: it was a mistake not to have gone back to the special opening of the grand opening for the building. I was invited as a special guest, and I should have gone. I think I was just so tired at that point of the whole scene that I just didn't want to. I figured it was over and, God, I just didn't want to. . . I realized later I should have. Some very nice things were said about me at the opening ceremony, and it would have been in retrospect a wonderful occasion, and I should have done it. But I didn't. And the building stands and they've got a wonderful art collection and I'm really proud of the role I played in it, and it was exciting. I'm not sure I'd want to do that all the time, very taxing, and emotionally draining, and you're dealing with people who really. . . It has so little to do with art. It has to do with so many other things.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, that experience I would think would have been a good one in '71, given the expansion of the corporate and business community in the Northwest in the ensuing decade.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Um hmm.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The US Steel could provide an example for you to use with the local community.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Yeah, except by that time we had already done a lot of corporations. We'd already done ESCO and PP&L and lots and lots of corporations. So that really it was more the experience from the corporations that I had already that gave me the experience to do US Steel. The one thing that it did give me, which I really didn't take too much advantage of following that, was the experience with the New York scene. I didn't follow through for this gallery with some the things, the contacts and the arrangements that I could have. I had unbelievable access and entree and contacts that I could have taken advantage of in terms of this gallery. I didn't because I had to make a very conscious decision that once I started bringing in on a permanent basis work from New York, I was no longer following through with the commitment to the Nortwest artists that I really deeply and sincerely felt. The character of the gallery would change. I was bringing in a show about once or twice a year from various parts of the country, and with bigger names, that I would have here in the gallery, that I felt was an educational show and of great benefit to not only the community but to the artist community living here, because we had really no opportunity to see firsthand a lot of work that was being done outside the area. The museum was flat on their ass.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And PCVA [Portland Center for the Visual Arts--Ed.] didn't start until '74.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: PCVA didn't start until '74, so nobody was doing anything and you could see it reflected in the work that students were doing. They were little pictures, little two- and three-inch pictures from Art in America. So I was really trying to bring in a couple of shows. I brought in a show early, early in the gallery history from Felix Landau in Los Angeles, which was -- oh, I mean, it was a wonderful, wonderful show -- very costly to bring in. Sold nothing. Not one thing. I also brought in a great show from, at that time, Multiples; it's now Marion Goodman Gallery in New York. And we had the first exhibit of Andy Warhol's Mao prints. I mean, really some. . . Your [James--Ed.] Rosenquist that's in the Seattle airport now was the exact piece that was in this gallery. I sold it to a customer here but I wouldn't let him take it because it had a little tiny crack in the plexiglass where the screw. . .?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: If you go into the airport and look at that Rosenquist, you'll see a little tiny crack in the corner where the screw. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Hit it?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .hit and cracked the plexi. So I got my customer a pristine one. And (chuckles) Seattle ended up buying the one that they've got at the airport -- not from me; it went on up to Seattle. But that was a very, very exciting show. And at that time the -- oh, you've got it in some of the articles, fellow who since has died -- but at the time was the curator of contemporary painting for the Metropolitan. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Of prints and photographs.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Prints and photographs, right. . . .was here for the opening, and it was just a really, really exciting show. A few years ago, just a short time ago, '81 or '2, I believe, I brought a fabulous show in from Pace, Castelli and Emmerich, that they put together. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: '79.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: '79. . . .for me. I mean it was really outstanding work. Couldn't sell a thing. People see one painting of a Lichtenstein, or one painting of a Hoffman, or one Gottlieb and they think they're seeing the dregs, the leftovers; that was not the case in that show. In fact, I was amused because the Lichtenstein that I had here,

one of the Entablature series, ended up touring, having been purchased by a major collection, and was in a show that toured, I think it came to the. . . It was at the San Francisco museum. I looked at that painting and here it was sitting in my office for months and with getting comments from various people like, "Oh, it must be the last or the worst." That's very frustrating when you're functioning like that. You know what I'm saying?

BRUCE GUENTHER: No, I understand. It's a problem on a whole with the region when the museum is less than active in bringing in work and. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And nobody at the museum was here to. . . I mean it would have been to their benefit to encourage people to purchase here. I mean, first of all the gallery. . . I could have sold ten paintings out of that show and probably not even broken even, because it so costly to bring that, and you make such a tiny percentage from those galleries. They just won't work very well with you. Why should they? They have a waiting list for half of this stuff. And they work on such a small margin with you that it doesn't matter how much you sell. You can't make money on shows like that -- or I can't, at least, or maybe I'm just not sophisticated enough to know how to deal with, or I don't deal with them often enough to get a better deal from them. But I had one Gottlieb that wasn't very big. It was $22,000. It was a beautiful, beautiful painting, and after the show was down, I had it sitting in my office against the wall, because I just kind of wanted to look at it for a while, because sometimes when there's something that particularly interests me or appeals to me, I'll bring it into my office and sit and work with it. And coincidentally, Gene Baro, who at that time was curator of prints and drawings for the. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Brooklyn [Art Museum--Ed.].

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .and then also for the Carnegie [International Exhibition--Ed.]. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Right.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .was here in Portland. And he wanted to go to a couple of artists' studios, and so I met him here at the gallery at five, and he came in and he took a look at this Gottlieb leaning against my wall, and he said, "My God, that's a beautiful painting." He said, "Have you sold it?" And I said no. And he said, "Can't you get anybody in this city to understand what you've got in this painting?" And he said, "That price is fabulous," you know, great price. I said, "I know it." So Gene and I went out and looked at some studios. And I got a call from Andre Emmerich the next day, from Nathan Kolodner at Emmerich, saying put $40,000 on the Gottlieb, and it was overnight! It was overnight. Why, I don't know; I didn't question, and obviously if I couldn't sell it at $22 [thousand--Ed.], I sure as hell wasn't going to be able to sell it for $40 [thousand--Ed.]. But anyway, Gene Baro, incidentally, bought some Jack Portlands for the Brooklyn collection and for his own personal collection. I felt really sad when I found out he died. He was a neat guy.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah, he was. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And very supportive of us out here.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah, very supportive of west coast artists, and artists in the region. Portland is. . . You've been the only act in town, for. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Ohhh, I hear that; I don't believe that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, the only successful act in town.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: What do you call. . . All right, success in terms of maybe what I've been able to sell and do in terms of making money, it's cost us a fortune to operate this gallery. Now let's face it; I run a big operation. I don't have to have as many employees as I do, and I do things maybe more extravagantly than I would have to, and I provide a lot of services for artists that most galleries either charge for or don't do, and that we do and consider a part of earning our commission. But at the rate I operate, with the kind of overhead I've got, there's no way the gallery can make money, because you can just pull so much in sales out a community like this. But I think we're a tremendous success in terms of what we've done in exhibiting regional artists' work, what we've done in terms of selling the work. Our staying power alone in a city like Portland is miraculous. I'd like to think that a lot of other people would consider success not just in monetary terms. But the gallery has cost a great deal of money to operate. We've put. . . And I've often wondered if I hadn't opened the gallery, or if I'd closed it after ten years, and if I'd put the same amount of money that it cost to operate and the same kind of energy and time into let's say the Portland Art Association, or some other art organization, or just into the art community in another way, what else maybe could have happened that would have been even more valuable for the city. I mean, these are things one never knows. And I'm sure other people would have come along and opened a gallery, just like they would do if I closed the doors tomorrow. You know, these are the what-ifs in life that you ponder, and you never really do know. I think I've had some personal wonderful benefits from getting to know people like Louie and Mike Russo and Sally and Cindy [Parker--Ed.] and Jack [Portland--Ed.] and Lenny [Pitkin--

Ed.] and people that I'm very fond of. Oh, I think it's so easy to look back and try to second-guess yourself and second-guess what you should have done or. . . But you know, the one thing I can't help but think of is not only that the actual dollar amount that the gallery cost to function -- which has been I think a gift to the community, you might say, in its way, although that sounds self-serving and I don't mean it to sound that way. . .

Harold, without Harold, the gallery wouldn't be here. He's the one who has been the most supportive and the most, well, what can I say? Without him it wouldn't be here. He not only has supported the gallery and encouraged me and given me the freedom to function in whatever manner I should, he's never butted in. He is the largest single purchaser every year of artwork.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm, through Harsh Investment Company.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right. And not only personally, but through the company. And I mean, he has bought tremendous amounts of work, every single year. At the hotel, the Claremont, in Oakland, he's the one who's commissioned all the art and all the sculpture. I've put in the paintings, but the sculpture's been his baby. He's done that. And I'm really proud of him, and I think the artists really know the role that he's played. When they gave us a surprise party, they didn't just give me the surprise party; they included Harold. And they gave him a plaque that they all signed and lovingly inscribed. I think they're well aware of his quiet but very important and very effective role in providing Portland with this gallery. The space we take up is. . . I mean, everything -- he's just been wonderful -- the resources of the company, the personnel. . . I cannot say enough about how supportive he's been. And I think the artists know it and feel very strongly about him.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, certainly, what's happened at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley-Oakland. .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Isn't that exciting?

BRUCE GUENTHER: How many sculptures have been commissioned now for the. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: A Brian Wall, a William Wareham, Peter Forakis, and then artists that I carry here in the gallery. There's a Mel Schuler, the Don Wilson, big Manuel Izquierdo in the lobby that this one was the maquette for [gestures--Ed.]. A big, fabulous, wonderful -- I think it's the most important piece he's ever done -- Lee Kelly. Was that installed when you were there?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Wasn't that a great piece?

BRUCE GUENTHER: It's beautiful.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: You should see it now with the landscaping. See, the landscaping wasn't in.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Wasn't around.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Oh, the landscaping! It's just beautiful. And he just finished commissioning, and the artist just installed, a Tom Morandi that I think is. . . You could see sculptures by people who are much more famous; no piece could be any better. It's as resolved and finished and complete, a wonderful sculpture. It's called Lynch Pin, and it's done in Tom's style where there's -- I forget -- 30, 40 different sections; it's about six feet wide and about -- it's a fabulous piece of sculpture. It's on a pad. . . One of the things that thrills me about that sculpture, it's on a concrete pad that was already there. So he had certain defined requirements that he had to work within. What had been there was a Fletcher Benton, one of his balanced-unbalanced series -- which I loved and I wanted to keep, but it was out of Cor-ten, and Harold hates Cor-ten. He loathes it. He's a metallurgical engineer from MIT. He thinks it's a terrible material and ugly to boot, and he doesn't like the quality of the material. And Fletcher's piece was in Cor-ten, and Harold said no, and he commissioned Tom to do this really wonderful piece. I hope you get a chance to see it. It's outstanding.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well then, inside the hotel, every wall surface, practically, in the public areas is filled with paintings.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Covered with paintings. We have everybody from Michael Dailey, Jay Backstrand, Louie Bunce, Orleonok Pitkin. We have [Shirley--Ed.] Gittelsohns. I mean, practically everyone in the Fountain Gallery stable is represented -- I think everybody is represented -- plus others too. There's a few pieces that really I wish were not part of the Claremont collection. They're pretty and safe and flowers and not the greatest painting in the world. I'm talking about somebody maybe like a Michele Taylor. But it is a hotel, and it is commercial space, and I didn't really have a point of view or a direction when I was first starting the collection, so it kind of grew like Topsey. As it went along it got better and better and more defined in terms of the kind of art. We have several really beautiful Jack Chevaliers from Seattle, and Tom Fawkes has some wonderful paintings and

constructions. Just it's become a better and better collection. It's been fun to do. Lots of good prints. We commissioned special edition prints from Jack Portland, from Pitkin, about 300 prints, special edition for the hotel.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh, which are in the rooms?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Which are in the rooms. So it's been fun to do.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah. The gallery grew from its early beginnings to what? How many artists do you show now?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: I don't even know; I couldn't even tell you. And I've never gone by numbers. Everybody always says how many people have you got. I don't know whether it's 30, 40, or 50. The reason I don't think numbers are important is because artists don't like it, for one thing. They hate the fact that you've got 30 or 40 artists: "How can you be represented well when the gallery has so many artists?" But you know you can have 10 artists and you got maybe two things in here from them, and maybe those are five years old. You can have a printmaker that is still a person represented that maybe only'll have three or four prints in at a time. A couple of artists right now I have are on sabbatical; I don't have anything. An artist who just finishes a show and they're burned out; they won't produce for a while. Or an artist who has just completed for a show coming up, who won't complete any more work for a while. So numbers are deceiving. You can have 30 artists but have enough in art in here to be the equivalent of maybe 12 artists. So. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Or enough work to be the equivalent of 100.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Hundred artists, that's right; just depends.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You've been very involved over the years with the electronic media.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Starting as early as '68.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: That's right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Or '72, actually, with the "Open Door" and "In View" programs, with KOAP-TV.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Um hmm.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I remember some of those programs were really important first introductions to a broad audience of many art issues and art personalities -- as well as other public-interest things.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: That's right. I was responsible, on the commercial stations, for bringing to the tube some of the first programs done on child abuse, homosexuality, the death penalty, abortion. Being picketed was nothing new to me for doing some of these programs, which were really the very first time that programs were put on the air covering these subjects, and done in such a way that they were. You know, I worked in television for 14 years, and it took a tremendous amount of time. I still ran the gallery, I had my own program on channel 10, "Open Door," on which I interviewed some of the major people that came from all over the country, and at the same time was producing the programs for the commercial television programs. Two of the programs I was involved with and was responsible for developing the format for the program and did the producing won Irises, which is television's equivalent of the Oscar, and for a Portland, Oregon, station was really quite unusual. And I'm very proud of some of the work that I did on the tube.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Besides social issues, there were also the programs on the arts and. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Um hmm. Not actually as much as some of the social commentary. There were other programs that I was involved in encouraging other people to do and get some art programs on the air, like KOAP's "Tapestry" with Bob Jackson, and getting some of the news programs at the stations I was working for -- and I worked for all the stations -- to cover art events as part of their regular news program. This is what I think is important. This is what Europe does. They bring art up to a level where it isn't a separate and elite little part of a person's life and environment. It is a very important part of the culture. And I felt that covering art events on the news programs and on the prime-time programs was very important to do, and I worked very hard to try to get that done. Was quite successful. Isn't being done as much now, because somebody isn't there lobbying all the time.

BRUCE GUENTHER: In a sense it was a kind of a going back to your earliest direction of being an actress.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: (laughs) Yeah, you might say that. In a way running a gallery is not too unlike the theater.

(laughs) Those openings -- I will tell you very candidly, I have always loathed and despised openings. If there was just some other way to do it. For me they are just very, very difficult. That's why I understand artists who just have such a tough time at their own openings and they don't want to come. I don't blame them. I can understand how they're feeling. And the phoniness that goes along with it and the having to sit there and watch most of the people with their back. . . I've always said I'm going to have a show sometime where I'm going to hang all the paintings in the center of the room and leave the walls black, for all the people who turn their backs to the wall at openings and face the front of the room to see who they're going to go talk to next. Those openings when you don't make any sales for an artist. I can tell you many times I've come into my office alone after everybody's left and just cried, it's been so painful. And those phony statements to the artists on those nights when nothing is sold, when. . . You don't even really know why sometimes. Sometimes they've been terrific shows and great paintings, and the times were bad, or interest rates just went up, or the stock market just went down, or you never knew why something maybe didn't sell. But it was still, the pain was there. And for the artist it's excruciating and it's humiliating. And you stand at the door when the artist leaves and make the platitudes that you have to say. You know, "Wait till the show comes down and we can get the paintings alone and we'll really be able to sell them then." And you know, sometimes it's true. Sometimes you can sell things better when you have them to work with and can take them to an environment where people can see them. Sometimes people are afraid to buy out of a show: "What if it doesn't work, or the size isn't right, or the color doesn't look good in the room." And you know, we don't have a terribly sophisticated audience here where people are buying because they've gotta have that painting. People here buy because they've got to have something taking up that space on their wall. So it's a different concept. A real collector, you know, buys, because they can't live without it, and it doesn't matter whether they have room for it or not. I always try to tell people: I've got them under the beds and in the closets. But there's a difference too between collecting and acquiring, and it takes -- well, you were just telling me about your experience in Chicago taking people to different places -- it takes people to see other people's collections to spur that on. What have we got here? We've got one collector; we've got Ed Cauduro. And that's it, really.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, except over the years you've built up a number of collectors of Northwest art. But in that group, you and Harold are probably the most important. You have the largest extant collection probably in the Northwest.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: I have a terrific collection, of good things and good people, and I haven't prostituted myself about it. There are some things I don't own because I don't think they're significant enough to own. I would have had a much bigger collection except for what burned up in the fire. I lost a lot of very important work, which I still can't believe is gone. I still go look for it, even after all this time. I just can't believe it's gone. But, you know, I rebuilt. I rebuilt the collection. I have a great collection of Prices, C. S. Price. They aren't huge, but they're I think significant paintings and important. I have some wonderful Russo paintings. I have I think a very beautiful collection of very good art. And it's been kind of exciting to. . . But you know something with everything I own? I can't seem to rehang my house. Every time I go to do it, it's like I can't take something down because I've got to stay and look at it. It is the most peculiar thing. And of course now my walls have faded (chuckles) so that unless I have something to rehang in the exact same spot. . . That sounds so superficial. I'm in a way teasing. But very difficult. I've added. I've added, so I've got things over my doorways and in little spaces, but it's very hard for me to take everything down and put all new things and rehang everything. It shouldn't be that way. But it is, because I love everything I own. I love them. You know, they'd be like shoving my children in the garage if I take them down. And so I amuse myself. I'm very fortunate in that I have several establishments so I can hang lot of art in several different places. We have an apartment in San Francisco, and I have some really terrific things there. I have a couple of beautiful Prices, and my best Callahans are actually in San Francisco, and I have a few things that aren't Northwest there. I have that Homage to Michaelangelo portfolio that I told you I have there. And I have a wonderful Parker and Pitkin in Portland, and Russo and. . .great Russos in San Francisco that nobody's ever seen.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Early ones, too, that are gorgeous. And I have a beach house where I have really maybe some less significant work because of the salt air. I really don't think the beach is the greatest place for very, very important art, but I have some very nice things there -- and a lot of works under glass. And I'd love to personally own a lot of things in the Claremont. If we ever came to where we ever sold that hotel, I think I'd die, because I'd have to part with some of the work in that hotel collection. But it looks awful good where it is, and it gives people. . . You'd be surprised how many people write us, having come from different parts of the country. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: And having seen that Claremont.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .after seeing that Claremont art and want to know about it and who the artists are. And it's really been wonderful exposure too.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, it's certainly been very good for the Northwest artists, to be seen down in that area.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: We have very good artists working here. We really do. I'm proud of them.

[Tape 3; side A]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Over the course of the years you must have had many relationships -- cooperative and otherwise -- with other dealers in the Northwest and around the country. We've talked of some with US Steel. What about the interrelationship between Portland and Seattle?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: When I first opened the gallery, there were several dealers in Seattle at the time. Zoe Dusanne was one, and Otto Seligman. And Zoe Dusanne I met several times and I found her most interesting, most captivating. But the relationship that I developed which was the strongest was with Otto Seligman. Everybody warned me about Otto. You know, he's hard to get along with, and he's. . . And they were not very complimentary about Otto. So on a trip that my mother and I made to Seattle, I called him and asked for an appointment and we went to see him when he lived in and had his gallery in that apartment building on University Avenue. And we went to see Otto. I don't know exactly why, except that I think that Otto and my mother just hit it off beautifully -- Otto being German and European-born, and my mother being European-born, and they both had that same kind of self-madeness that made them understand each other. And lo and behold, Otto started telling my mother about his son, who at that time was very, very young. Otto had him quite late in life. And we just developed a very good relationship, and everybody was always flabbergasted that Otto and I got along so great. He was very good to me. He gave me wonderful Tobeys to sell. (chuckles) Oh, and we had a great show. The only Tobey I was able to sell was to Joan and John Shipley here. It was a beautiful little yellow with white writings, small. I think it was $3,200 or $3,500 at the time, which, you know, in 1961, '62, was expensive. Anyway. . . No, it was $2,500. I remember now; it was $2,500. Anyway, Otto was really nice to me, made sure I had lots of work, made sure I had introductions to some of the artists, and I think this bears repeating, that everybody was flabbergasted that he was so good to me. He also brought down to meet me and visit with me, several times, Mark Tobey. And they were accompanied by Mark Tobey's friend and lover, Pehr [Hallsten--Ed.]. And it was always so fascinating for me in this funny little section of Portland to see Otto Seligman, Mark and Pehr all walk with their blue berets on. And Pehr was getting fairly senile at that time, and I had a woman who worked for me by the name of Jo Jones, who was an older lady, wonderful with older people, and one of the visits I remember so clearly, when Otto brought Mark and Pehr into the gallery and Pehr was tired and he sat in the back and Jo talked to him. And I was up in front -- it was the little tiny gallery on Ash at the time -- and I was talking to Otto and to Mark and every once in a while from the back room I'd hear this voice calling out, "Mark. Mark? Is your coat buttoned, Mark?" [said in high-pitched voice--Ed.] And just every once in a while. He was getting senile.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And maybe today they'd call it Alzheimer's disease, who knows. Because I don't know how old he was, but I don't think he was. . . He was older, but. . . God, and then, although I didn't think they were that great, because of Otto I did take some paintings by Pehr into the gallery. They were these small kind of naive, charming little things. I don't think I ever sold any; I don't remember. But it was nice, that was a nice thing back to remember about starting the gallery. And I've always felt very fondly towards Otto.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Did you handle any of the other artists that he had, like Siebner or. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Yes, Herbert Siebner I had, and I kept a relationship going with Herbert Siebner for many years, and Siebner used to write me and send me little drawings and things I still have and I cherish them. That relationship through attrition just kind of dissipated as the years went by, again pointing out some of the difficulties in dealing with an artist long distance.

BRUCE GUENTHER: How about someone like Guy Anderson or. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Guy Anderson. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: . . .Morris Graves?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Guy Anderson, Otto used to encourage me to sell. I just couldn't hook in to Guy Anderson's work. It just was not compatible with me for some reason, and I never -- I had a few at the gallery; I tried a couple through Otto -- I never really could quite get that much into Guy Anderson.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm. Did you ever work with. . . Because Gordon Woodside would have been moving, his gallery would have been opening up in Seattle 20 years ago, I suppose.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Did I ever work with Gordon?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Gordon Woodside was a brash, snotty, difficult, rude -- extremely rude -- self-conscious young man.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You'll be happy to know he's become all of those things as an old man.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: (laughter) That's what I understand. I think this young fellow that has taken over the gallery, this John Braseth, is quite a charmer. I wish he wouldn't chew the gum as much as he does. I think it's kind of tacky looking. He's constantly chewing gum, every time I've ever seen him. But I think he has a sweetness about him. I think he tries hard. I think he wants the best for the gallery. And I don't know how much he knows but, you know, good for him for trying. I've liked him every contact I've had with him. I don't think I like Gordon any more today than I ever did. And I don't think he has really helped the gallery business or the artists that much. He developed a certain cadre of clientele and. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, a number of your artists, like the Morrises, and Louie Bunce and Russo even I think, have shown with the Woodside over the years.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right, Sally Haley, yeah.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Frank Okada.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Frank, right. I don't think they ever loved Gordon and I just don't think there was anyplace else to go.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That's right, because Zoe Dusanne's gallery was gone, and. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: That's right. And Francine [Seders--Ed.], who would have been the logical person, had her gallery too far out and really was not a very aggressive dealer. And listen, if I were an artist I would have picked Gordon too.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah. What about Dick White when he was going? Richard White's Gallery.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Uhh, very slight contact. Somebody else ran it though.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That's right.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Can't think of his name. Don, not Foster, there was somebody else.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah, there was somebody else.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: I had contact with him, and I can't think of who it is. And of course Don Foster and I have always had kind of a charry, wary (chuckles) relationship. Again, I think Don. . . But listen, Gordon had to make a living out of his gallery, to support himself. Don Foster had to make a living. It's easy for me to sit back and say they should have done this or they should have done that or they should have done the next thing, and they should have maintained a certain attitude or ambience in their gallery. I was sitting in a gallery where I didn't have to make a living out of it, and it's easy for somebody to. . . You know, my mother used to tell me, "Arlene, until you've walked a thousand miles in somebody else's mocassins, don't criticize." And so really, in fairness to them, they've done the best they can with their frame of reference, under the circumstances in also a difficult city in difficult times.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I'd like to talk a bit about February 7, 1977, which was the fire.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: On Fourth Avenue.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right. One of the great sources of pride in the gallery was my insurance policy. Hardly any gallery I knew at the time had the kind of insurance that I did. It was, as I said, a great source of pride and every time I talked to a new artist, it was always a pleasant thing for me to be able to describe our insurance policy. Well, as the gallery grew, and as I mentioned a while ago, when you have the kind of physical space we had, artists love to bring you new things, but when it came time to say to the artist, "You know you gotta take this back," it was always, "Well, I'll do it next week," or "It's raining out," or "I don't have my truck," or. . . There was always some excuse for the artist to not pick up the old work and take it back. And the insurance policy that we had, which was a very common type of policy, was what we call a reporting form. We had to take a tape every single month of every single item in the gallery. So that at the end of the year, you were able to average out how much you had, because it really wouldn't have been fair. . . One month I could have a Carl Morris show in there

and I could have one show just leaving and one show coming in, and they'd both be there at the same time, and I'd have exorbitant premiums, when a month later one of the shows would go out or I had a less expensive show in.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Right.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: So this way it was averaged out. My premiums started. . . You know, this was 1975. My premiums had started at around $4,000 and went up to $6,000 and then they were $8,000, and then they were $10,000, and they were being raised to $12,000. And several of my artists -- Jay Backstrand in particular, Louie Bunce, several other artists -- kept saying to me, "God you're an antique! None of the other galleries I'm in have insurance." Why don't you cut out the insurance and do a couple of other things. We'd like some color on the announcements. How much you paying for insurance?" And this was the way the relationship always was. The artists used to sit and talk about the business end of the gallery. So I just didn't really want to cancel the insurance, but by that time we had gotten so much work in the gallery that we couldn't get artists to pick up, that my insurance agent kept saying the policy was going to be invalid because we were just so far over the amount of art that we were supposed to have in the gallery.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Right, and then with that other floor, which was warehousing. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: That was where we had it. It was a warehouse for art.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then part of your own collection was up there.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: All of my own collection except what was hanging in my house. I had 14 years of a collection of work of every period of every artist. I had a lot of Colescotts that I owned, I had Jay Backstrand from every period, Louie, Mike, Sally. . . You name the artist, I had the work. Plus I had things like, oh, I had Robert Indiana's Decade Portfolio, which you can't get for love or money today, complete, it was wonderful. I had other works of that kind that I'd bought from my Multiples show. Anyway, so we sent a letter out to the artists saying they had to come and pick up their extra work, that we were just so beyond what was tolerated by the insurance company they had to come and pick up the work. So we went through the work and stacked it up upstairs in the loft space according to name, and people little by little, just by constant phone calls and constant letters, started coming in -- because we threatened them -- to pick up the work that had sat there for five years and we couldn't get them to pick it up. So Frank Okada had six paintings in the gallery. Frank at the time painted in very large, those brightly colored, primary color-type, geometric-form paintings, and they were expensive. They were selling for 3500 bucks. And Frank didn't drive, so he was one of the worst offenders; you just couldn't get Frank to come and pick up the paintings. So one day finally Frank said, "I'm bringing up a friend, and he's got a truck, and I'm going to pick up the paintings." I said, "Great." So Frank got there and we went upstairs to the warehouse floor and there were his. . . We were keeping two of the paintings. He was supposed to bring us several new ones and take back four of these. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Big paintings.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .big paintings. So I said, "Here they are Frank," and they were stacked up against the wall. And Frank's a small fellow and he moves when he talks; he kind of dances and bounces up and down in little tiny short jerky movements, and moves his arms from side to side. And I watch him walk over to his paintings and he takes a knife out of his pocket, and I saw him go over to the painting leaning on the top of the pile, and he starts up in the right-hand corner with this knife and slashes diagonally all the way down to the left-hand corner. And you know, these are five-foot paintings, six-foot paintings! And I said, "What in the hell are you doing, Frank?" And he says, with his little bouncy jerky movements, he says, "I want the stretcher bars." I said, "What do you mean you want the stretcher bars?" He says, "I want the stretcher bars." I said, "What about the paintings?" He says, "I never liked the paintings anyway." I said, "You son of a bitch. I've been insuring those paintings, four of them, at 35 hundred bucks retail for four years that they have been in here, and now you're telling me that all they've meant to you are the stretcher bars?!" "Well, I never liked them." I said, "Frank, you just did me a favor." And I turned around, I walked downstairs, picked up the phone, called my insurance man, said, "Come on over here; I want to talk to you." So he came over. We talked about insurance.

So, as I said, my premiums had gone up to $12,000 at that point -- this was 1975 dollars. So I found out what kind of insurance I could have and still maintain and. . . It took me a year, because I wouldn't cancel any insurance until I had a discussion, either in writing from artists who weren't living in Portland or a personal discussion, with every single artist and a signed agreement. And it took me a year to accomplish that. Every artist I had a discussion with either by phone or in person, with an agreement, that I was canceling the insurance and listing what kind of insurance I would continue to have and what I wouldn't have. What I would have would be anything that the artist didn't have a decision about would be covered by insurance. If a painting went out on approval, if I put in my truck, if I was delivering it somewhere, if was sold but still in the gallery, any kind of situation where the artist had no choice in the matter, then I would still have insurance. But as far as leaving it in

the physical confines of the gallery, he had a choice whether he wanted to leave it there or not, based on whether. . . And he knew I didn't have insurance in the gallery.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Whether it was on exhibit or in the storeroom.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: In the storeroom or on exhibit, if he didn't want to leave it there knowing I didn't have insurance, he didn't have to. But once he left it there, and then I had the decision of where I put it, whether I sent it out on approval or out of the gallery, into somebody's home that he didn't know, then I was covered.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And every artist seemed very happy with that, and I took the 12 thousand bucks and I bought a truck, and we started having color, I added another employee, and funny little things over the years, like an addressograph and pretty soon another employee, and just really took the same premium money and called it self-insured, and did other things with the money that. . . At that time we tried advertising in Art in America. Really nothing ever came of that. I always felt it was an ego trip, particularly out here. If we lived in the east, that's different. But anyway. . . And then whenever anything happened, I mean, we had a little breakage, I still paid off, even though it was in the gallery and I didn't have to. We were hanging a show of Mike Russo's once, and Bert Garner and Mike Russo and I were standing around talking, and Bert was putting screw eyes and wire into the back of one of Russo's paintings to hang, and Mike asked a question, and Bert turned around to answer Mike's question, and we just stood and watched while he put the whole screwdriver right through a painting. I mean, fist and all! It was just, you couldn't believe it! But I paid off on that, and I have to this day carried through my responsibility.

Who knew there was ever going to be a fire? It's the once in a lifetime thing that you just don't ever dream you're going to have a major catastrophe. And that's of course what you have insurance for, is that major catastrophe. Well, the night of February the 7th, at about 2:30 in the morning, I get a call, Harold and I, woke us up, that there was a fire at the Hughes Building, and of course we just threw on our clothes, and it was very cold; it was just a bitterly cold February. And as you're on the way to something like that, you really don't think of the worst. I mean, you think of a portion of the building. It was the Hughes Building, which the building belonged to my father, as you recall, and you just, you know, you think of maybe a little corner of a building or, you know, the Bush. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: A floor or something.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: The Bush Garden Restaurant was in the first floor of the building, so you think of maybe a. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: A kitchen fire.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .kitchen fire or something like that. So it took us about 15 minutes to get dressed and get down there, maybe 20. And pulled into the Standard station, across the street from the Hughes Building, where I always parked on the corner of Fourth and Burnside. And my God! The whole building is in flames. And the fire department is. . . I mean, it's so shocking a thing to have happen, that you can't believe it. And ran over and the fire department. . . There were still some people in the building, and of course the thought of loss of life is overwhelming at the moment. They were brought out in a basket. You know, the big things that come off the ladder trucks, and there were a couple of firemen that had to be sent to the hospital. They were overcome with smoke. And you're just sitting in an absolute stupor watching this building and nobody knows at the moment how it happened and it's bitterly cold, and gawkers even at that hour of the morning are coming from all over. I found there are people that love to watch fires, and they come from all over the minute they know there's a fire. And every piece of fire equipment. . . It turned out it's the biggest fire in the history of downtown Portland since, 65. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: It was a four-alarm fire?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Five alarm!

BRUCE GUENTHER: Five alarm?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: As many alarms as they've got! That was the biggest fire in downtown Portland in the past 65 years and even up to this date. Of course it turned out afterwards, it was an arson-set fire. Two transients had gotten into the Bush Garden Restaurant on the first floor of the building, had had a party till late, and so their door to the street leading to their garbage alley was still open because they didn't leave the Bush Garden till about two o'clock in the morning. And two winos -- you know, we're still in the wino district; we're right on Burnside -- had gone into the alley, taken garbage and stuff from the Bush Garden, and in two different places started fires to keep warm. Unfortunately, there was the freight elevator right next to this alley, which also came

onto the street from this Hughes Building, and it was the freight elevator that we used. And the freight elevator shaft just acted like a chimney flue. And the building, which was an old building, and a wooden -- it was a brick outside, but wooden. . . You know, as thick as the floors were and as big as the beams were, it was still wood.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Very dry.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And very old, very dry. And it just burned. And there was nothing to do. We got in the car in the Standard station and just sat in the car and just with abject horror, sat and watched this building burn. Finally, Harold said, "You know there's no point in our just sitting here. Let's go home. Can't get in the building, can't do anything." So I took him home and turned around, came right back -- this was like about five o'clock in the morning -- came right back down, and by that time artists started to get the word, because. . . [starts crying but continues talking]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .you know, they were getting ready for school and stuff, so they started hearing it on the news, and one by one they started appearing and there's nothing you can do. You're just sitting watching this building go up, and you know what you've got in there. And a few customers, you know, people who were involved started appearing. And the firemen were fabulous. Until you have an experience like that, you don't really know how wonderful those firemen are. They are so trained and so considerate. And my office was in the corner of the building which was getting a lot of water damage but the least amount of the heat. It was the farthest away from the hot point of the fire. And Don Wilson, just that day, Saturday, had brought in a wonderful sculpture. And he'd done it with a helper, brought it in, and it was a big thing. It was a big torso figure, seated. And he'd put it in the back of the gallery in the storage room by the stairway, and I said, "No, Don. Bring it up into my office, because I'd like to work with it a little bit." And, oh, Don was so teed off. "I moved it once. I don't want to move it again." I said, "Come on, be a good fellow. You've got somebody here to help you, and please move it up into my office for me so I can look at it." So he grumbled and moaned and he moved it up there. That sculpture had been right over the hotspot of the fire. And the one thing I said to the firemen when they were going into my office, "Please cover. . . There's a limestone, seated marble sculpture; please cover it if you can." They took it off the sculpture stand and laid it down on the side and covered it with a tarp. And I was going to give a wedding present of a couple of Jack Portland's small paintings to a couple of sisters who were neighbors of mine, and they were wrapped up as a gift in the kitchen, which also. . . That was about it! Jim Hansen had a show that was installed and his sculptures popped open. Some of them were saved, but not without a lot of labor of putting them back together. Jay Backstrand had just had a show come down, and we'd had a hell of a sale. We really sold a lot of paintings, and they were in the racks waiting to be delivered. A couple of people had come and picked their paintings up that day of Jay's. Every once in a while I run into somebody and they'll say to me, "Do you realized I picked up my painting of Jay's that I had bought from that show that day?"

And anyway it was hours, it was like two o'clock the next day before we could even get into the building to see what the damage was. So we didn't know. All of us just stood out there and just did not know what to do. Because you didn't even know what was burning.

And one image that I have that will always stay with me is I had a collector by the name of Robert Chapman. Bob Chapman was an old batchelor. He was kind of a deformed person and used to come in for hours and hours on a Saturday. He was an accountant who worked for a printing firm. He used to come in for hours and look at one painting before he made up his mind to buy it. And he had some really, really wonderful things. And he'd had a couple of nervous breakdowns, was up in Dammish [a mental hospital--Ed.]. And his doctor called me a couple of times from Dammish because his art was so important to him that part of the recovery of Bob Chapman had to do with the art and my respect for him. And I will never forget standing on the west side of the street looking up at this burning building at about ten o'clock in the morning, and I just happened to look over on the other side of the street, and here was this Bob Chapman standing across the street looking up at this building with the most stricken look on his face. I mean he was with us in spirit. [crying] He couldn't apparently come over and even say hello or anything. And all of us just, were just stricken. It was just a horrible thing.

But what also happens is it's kind of like a family when you have a tragedy. You pull together and you cling together and you find out who your friends are, and it sure happened with us. And the building was just totaled. And, oh, you know, it was just a disaster.

I can remember when we finally went into that building, I will never till the day I die forget that smell. And anybody who's ever been involved with a fire will never forget that smell. And I mean, it was ashes, and wet, and soggy, and just destruction everywhere. We went up to the warehouse floor, and one of Mel Schuler's sculptures, which is copper over redwood, the inside, the redwood, had totally burned out, was nothing, charcoal, and the copper still maintained its form and was this bright pink, and it was standing almost alone, like a solitary figure in the middle of all this black rubble of the fire that had disintegrated and fallen to the floor, and standing in this solitary fashion almost, except for the beams that were crisscrossed on the floor, was this bright

pink, which fire turns copper, like totem. And then, in another part of that warehouse floor, there was one pot that apparently had been such high-fired that it withstood the fire. I'll never understand it. And it was standing up! Hadn't even fallen over. All alone. And the files and everything were saved, because they were in the part of the gallery that had the least fire, and the couple of pieces of art in my office and in the kitchen and in the other office, but other than that, everything was gone. [cries] We had discovered in someone's garage a couple of months before the fire about 70 old paintings of Bob Colescott's that he had been storing, a friend had been storing for him, and they were in a garage, and when I found that out, I said to Bob, "God, let's bring them into the gallery and see what they are, because they're probably just disintegrating out there." And we did, and I had Jack Lucas come over and look at them, and half of them were just destroyed. I mean they had just disintegrated in the dampness over the years in this garage -- Bob by this time was living in California and Europe -- but there were a few of the paintings that were survivors. They needed restoration and we were going to have them taken care of and restored, and they were all in the fire. Here we -- the irony, you know -- we had brought them in from a garage. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: To save them.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .to save them and to keep them from disintegrating, and here we brought them in in time to. . . All of the things that I owned -- I say this with sorrow -- but I had as much personal work that I owned and more dollar value than any artist in the fire. And one thing I just found out recently that really hurt me was Leonard Duboff wrote a book on art law, and I just looked at a section in the book -- just last week -- and he has in there, "In 1977 one of Portland's most famous galleries had a fire in which most of the work was destroyed. The gallery had no insurance. It was apparently the policy of the gallery to not cover any of the art work for insurance. However, the gallery owner had her own works insured." And, boy, I called him on the phone and said, "I want that corrected." I had no insurance either. Neither did the artists and neither did I. There were about seven or eight artists who had independent insurance that were covered. Because again, the irony is that artists are able even today to get, through associations or even independent insurance policies, very reasonable coverage for a lot of dollar value of art -- anywhere, whether it's in their studio or at the gallery or their home or in transit or anything -- much cheaper than a gallery can. It's a business, you know. Particularly a gallery that locates in any kind of an old building or a wooden building or a bad, high-crime district, like Old Town. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Right.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .or in a building where there's a restaurant, or a building that isn't sprinklered, it's just something incredible.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So how long were you closed then? Almost a year?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: No. Harold and I owned a building up on 21st and Burnside, little small shopping center, in which was the first Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant, next door to the very first Farrells restaurant. And Kentucky Fried Chicken had moved out, and the building was being remodeled for a -- what's that restaurant? Seven Coins, or Thirteen Coins? -- and they couldn't get a liquor permit. So the whole restaurant was shot, and the space was empty, and everything was a mess. It was stacked up from floor to ceiling with heavy kitchen equipment left over from Kentucky Fried Chicken, and there were deep trenches in the concrete floor, and, oh God, it was a mess. And about five o'clock, February 7, couple of hours after we were in that burnt-out building, Harold came down and got several of us -- Mike Russo and myself and my staff and several of us -- and brought us up to look at the space that I just described. And we went home to my house, got on the phone, got ahold of Neil Goldschmidt, who was mayor at the time, and in 30 days from the date of the fire, we were celebrating the opening of the Fountain Gallery. We got the city to waive the building permits, the building inspection [department--Ed.] worked with us, the electrical inspectors hurried up, we got everything just speeded up, and the artists got in and helped, and we laid it out, and sheetrocked it, and helped the carpenters, and you've never seen anything happen so fast in your whole life. And in 30 days we were opening and celebrating the new gallery. In that 30 days, we also had hundreds of volunteers come forward who sifted through ashes, blotted-out books -- blotting paper to try to preserve them. I had years and years of Southeby catalogues. . . That really was a fabulous collection of catalogues, and today you know how valuable those are today.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And it was really. . . Oh, I mean they, we got cranes in there that had to lift out those Hansen sculptures through the windows, to take them to Jim's studio for repair. And just the hours and hours of lifting out whatever could be saved or preserved, and half the stuff you didn't even know until you got it out and looked at it. And the carefulness with which everybody had to tramp through that building. And every night the smell just clung to the clothes and your hair and just permeated your pores, that smell of smoke and ashes and fire, and I can smell it as I'm talking to you. And at the same time, the fire department's questioning because it obviously was determined it was arson at that time. And they take photographs of people who watch buildings burn, and, you know, they bring around photographs to you to see if you recognize any faces that have been

around in the building. And, oh, that fire department is my. . . I salute them. They are remarkable. And very underappreciated.

But we were up and running. It was a remarkable experience. We had telegrams and letters from people all over the world! I mean, sacks full of expressions. In a lot of ways it was weird and eerie and bizarre, because in some ways it was almost like reading your own obituary. It's like the kind of things that happens after a funeral when people are writing notices. Some of it was just like reading, as if you had died, and you were reading your own condolence messages to your family.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: It was a remarkable experience. I know that it's a sad thing. There are a lot of people who have made a lot of the fact that we weren't insured. There were some artists who lost a little, and there were many artists who lost a great, great deal. But something interesting happened -- and this is not said in justification, because God forbid nothing like that could ever be justified, and I would never want to go through that again -- but the artists who lost a great deal of work. . . Just like when you face a death, things are put in perspective, and priorities are established, and values become more dear, and a lot of artists who had been selling well, life had become quite good, and some of the work had gotten quite smug, and something happened after that fire. A lot of artists changed, and it was for the better, and their work became tighter. Some artists started doing some work that referred back to earlier in their life. Artists I'm talking about in particular are Mel Katz. . . Yeah? [apparently talking to someone new--Ed.]

[Interruption in taping]

BRUCE GUENTHER: We were talking about the catharsis that had happened with fire for the artists and how their. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right. One other thing I wanted to say is that it also. . . By attrition and because of the shock of what happened, several artists who really hadn't been that secure in the profession anyway, fell out. Bob Coghill is an example of that. It shook up Jay Backstrand, took Jay time to recover, but when he did, he recovered out of that Baconesque period, which was coming under such criticism and such attack, into a really stronger mode. I was really fascinated to watch how this, as you put it, catharsis really effected the changes that were to start taking place in some of the artists' work, the tightening up, the. . . As I said, it relates to establishing priorities and establishing preciousness and establising what's really dear and more meaningful.

BRUCE GUENTHER: How did it change your attitude about the gallery?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: It did the same thing for me. It put a perspective on things. It's still, and I think always will, hang like a cloak on me, and makes you realize that there are things in life and in art that is beyond your control, that you do not have control over, you have to accept. It taught me how people respond in time of tragedy. They were magnificent. The artists were magnificent; their families were wonderful. And it was an experience that has contributed greatly to my life. I wouldn't want to repeat it. A part of me died. I still am looking for that work; I cannot believe that work is gone. It sounds ridiculous I know, but there are times I will go to the racks and start pulling out paintings, because I am convinced that they can't be gone. But they are. And I don't another group of artists has ever gone through that kind of trauma. But a lot of good things came out of it, and as I said that isn't just. . . You have to look at things that way.

[Tape 3; side B]

BRUCE GUENTHER: You've been, by nature of your position as a highly visible gallery owner and patron of the arts, involved with a number of public institutions here in Portland, and in the national scene with your activities with the Archives of American Art for one. You've been on the board of the Portland Art Museum, Portland Center for the Visual Arts, the symphony, Artquake -- local arts festival here in Portland. I'd like to talk a little bit about the starting of Portland Center for the Visual Arts, PCVA.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Well, of course one of the people who have had the most influence of my art life and who've been one of my greatest parts of my support system and my network has been Mike Russo, as he has been for many people in the arts. He has been a strong activist, a man of high principles, a man of great conscience, someone who is not only I think a great artist -- and time will prove him to be one of the great artists -- but a prod and a person who because of his activism is always there. He becomes a person's conscience, he picks at the scabs until one must react to an action. Mike was one of the founders of PCVA, an organization formed much in response to the lack of response by the Portland Art Museum to the contemporary art world and what was happening in the world of art today -- at that time. And Mike and Mel Katz and Jay Backstrand -- and Cindy? [Lucinda Parker--Ed.] -- formed Portland Center for Visual Arts, PCVA. It became a prototype for alternative spaces throughout the country. It was formed not only as an education for working, living, creating artists in the Northwest, but a place where every exhibition that was carefully and thoughtfully planned and put together also

brought the artist, the famous artist, to the area to talk with, work with artists of this region. The early artists who participated were Karl Andre and Frank Stella and Jack Youngerman -- it reads like a who's who of contemporary art. David Hockney sent Henry Geldzhalder here. It was that caliber of contact that was enjoyed by all of us. PCVA meant a great deal to me. I think I was responding to a great need that I felt, and I was responding to the fact that the artists did something which was really so wonderful for the community and for themselves, how could one not respond. At that time, it was my major area for contributions. Didn't have as much money then to contribute to organizations; that was where most of it went. Most of my time was given to PCVA. Whatever talent or ability to fund-raise I have went for PCVA. I tried to be a catalyst and a liaison with the business and corporate community for PCVA, and I think there was a fair amount of sucess. Sometimes the artists would get scared because they didn't feel the access or the entree to that segment of the community that they were depending upon for funds, and I provided that link. And it was very, very exciting. Mary Beebe at that time was director, and there was a lot of creative push. I never -- again, that groupy thing -- I never participated or butted in to the program part of PCVA. I didn't feel that was my proper role. I had my own establishment, the gallery, to do my own programming. I felt that it was artist-formed, artist-run, and it was the artist who should have planned the programs, and they did. My participation and commitment to PCVA was to help raise funds and to provide that liaison to the rest of the community. It was a very exciting period for art. Unfortunately the museum still continued to sit on its ass, didn't do a damn thing, didn't do what it should have done on the international scene, the national scene, and certainly not the local scene. So they felt a little competitive with PCVA. It was really kind of amusing to sit back and watch. Anyway, you know, hurrah for PCVA and everything that it contributed to the visual arts in Portland during that period of time. My feeling about PCVA today. . . I think it is on the wane. My sense, of course, is that all things change, things never remain static -- it either goes up or down -- and I think PCVA peaked out, and of course its focus now is much more on the performing arts, the. . . That's not my particular area, so I'm not as involved now. And I wish it well. I still participate. I still try to be active. But, candidly, I think PCVA is on the way out.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So, and in recent years, you've become much more involved with the museum again.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: No.

BRUCE GUENTHER: No?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: No.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You haven't been on the board?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And it's not my fault. I was on the museum board many years ago. I was an associate chairman of the capital fund drive that raised a million and a half dollars for the new school and for the auditorium. I found that. . . I worked very hard on that campaign and did a good job and felt very successful at it, but there was a little episode after that where I just had a philosophical difference with the board in an event that they put on called Spectrum 70, in which they asked artists to donate work to the museum so that the museum -- or a group called the Activities Council of the museum -- could turn around and sell that work and raise the Activity Council's portion of what was due to the capital fund drive for the museum. The artist membership, which was a group that was at that time made up of all the professional who joined, had their own goal that they had pledged to contribute to that capital fund drive. And every artist in the museum's membership gave their own funds to the capital fund drive. Some of them gave the rental of a painting that was in rental sales for a couple of years. A couple of artists came in and said, "Gee, if you sell three of my next paintings, will you give up your commission so I can give the proceeds to the museum for its capital fund drive. Many artists sat down and wrote out a check. They gave very generously to complete the artists' membership pledge towards that capital fund drive. And I didn't think it was fair for them to be hit up twice. And I didn't think it was ethical for a group connected with the art association to ask them to donate to them paintings in addition to what they'd already given, and I put up a big fuss and all my artists supported me. They were the ones that were really upset and came to me, and I. . . It was a question of our supporting each other. And we did not participate, and the museum went ahead anyway. I was on the board at the time. It became a big cause celebre. Papers took part, the newspapers. It was a very, very uncomfortable period for me. But my artists remained staunch and firm -- them to me and I to them -- and I resigned from the museum board.

The museum board, mostly because of the attitude that emanated from the top -- which at that time was Francis Newton, dear man that he is -- really did not support the gallery system in this city like other cities were supported by the museum directors. Dick Fuller in Seattle certainly supported the local galleries up there. He used to purchase from them for the Seattle Art Museum. Dick Fuller has purchased more works of art from my gallery in Portland in the 25 years I've been in business, by number, than the Portland Art Museum ever has. And the Portland Art Museum in a way fostered an attitude that galleries were competitive with them. It was really very sad. The new executive director or president of the Portland Art Association understands that. He's been here only about eight months. He already has gotten the picture of how damaging and really debilitating that has been to the growth and development of art in this area and is determined to change that, for which I

and the other galleries are grateful. He is well aware of the fact that galleries find it very difficult to really function in certain areas without that support of the "mother" institution, the art museum. And he is determined to try to change that, and I just think that's wonderful.

I think the museum has thwarted the development of contemporary art in this area. They have not utilized people. Ed Cauduro is an example, who has a fabulous, wonderful eye, a great contemporary collection, and the contacts necessary to be able to develop and utilize a collection. He would be a great asset to the museum in its acquisition program. I think that the new director that I just mentioned, Dan Monroe, will take advantage and utilize him, but the past administrations sure as hell have ignored anybody in this community who seems to know something about the fields of art. I know I'm sounding very strong and hostile in what I'm saying, but I've lived with it for 25 years, and that's exactly how I feel.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well. . . Moving on. . . (laughter) With the Symphony Hall, the. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Let me go back. I'm not through with that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Okay, okay.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: I think the attitude towards purchasing art of the local artists has been very, very poor. There have been certain circumstances that have really hurt, have been damaging, and I just can't stress enough how I think that we would have been so much further ahead with a different attitude, and I've changed my mind. I was going to say a couple things, but I think I've said enough about it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You've been involved with the symphony and the creation of the new performing arts center and the hall that's named after you.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right, yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Parts of that were controversial. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: . . .but it's added to the community in an important way.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Your interest in music came from your childhood, your family. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right, um hmm.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Would you like to say anything about that?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Yeah, I think that no one who has ever been born and reared here doesn't have wonderful fond memories of the old Paramount Theater: the naked lady in the front foyer surrounded by goldfish when we were little, has provided many, many young children with their first look at God's creature. And it's really interesting with the revitalization of that theater into the new Symphony Hall, how many people will tell you now of stories about first walking by and the giggles and the tee-hees over the Saturday matinees that they went to as children. I was no different. I have great fond memories. I still have my diary that I wrote when I was ten years old, when I went to see W. C. Fields in "You Can't Cheat an Honest Man," and the little boy that I was with held my hand. And of course I used initials; I'd never spell out names in your diary because you didn't want anybody to see it, and I still have my diary where I say I went to the Paramount Theater and, "S. likes me. He held my hand."

BRUCE GUENTHER: (chuckles)

ARLENE SCHNITZER: So we all have those kinds of memories of the theater. When the Paramount Theater came into being as a possibility for being part of the performing art center complex, a bond issue was passed by the City of Portland that provided I think it was $19 million worth of funds for the creation of this center, which at the time was going to cost about $32 million -- give or take now. I'm fairly certain about the numbers. And they had raised all but $1,700,000 and were in danger of losing the entire project because they had to have X number of dollars of private money so that they could sell the bonds or the whole project would be down the tube.

We were approached by Bob Scanlan, who was chairman of the finance committee and the major-domo behind this fundraising effort. And Bob came to Harold and me -- and this is a little-known fact (chuckles), because we certainly didn't want this advertised around -- but Bob had been authorized to say to anyone who please would come through with this money to keep the project from failing and being lost, they wanted to name the entire performing arts center after anyone who would give this money. This is an ancient and honored way of raising

money as anyone who's ever been involved in fundraising knows, or who's ever been in a medical complex or a university campus, or. . . There is nothing unusual about names of any kind going onto museum rooms and theaters. And when we were approached with the entire center being named, my husband said to Bob, "No, these people of the City of Portland have voted the bonds, and the center should be named for the city, Portland." That's why the sign was changed from Paramount to Portland. Harold and I went to lunch at the Benson Hotel with Bob, and the last thing I said to Harold before we went into lunch was "Harold, don't give him an answer without telling him you and I want to talk about it first, and then we'll get back to him." And Bob is explaining about the need for this last money, or the whole project's going down the tube, and I sat there and I watched Harold put his hand out to shake Bob's hand, and says, "Bob, you've got it." And I was totally dumbfounded. Harold, at that moment said that he wanted to name it after me, and I said, "No, I want it named after both of us," and we went back and forth and round and round. The city is the one who came and said, "Please. . ." And Harold said I want it anonymous until after the bonds are sold. And it was Bob who pleaded with us on the basis that the only way we can get other people to take their hands out of their pockets and contribute money was by attaching a name to the gift.

The chairman of the effort, Ron Ragen, also wanted to be able to announce this gift at a community foundations luncheon, because at the same time that they were raising money for the performing arts center, there was another major fundraising effort under the name of the Heritage Endowment Fund, which was a major fundraising effort involving gifts which would go into a single pot to benefit the three major institutions: the opera, the symphony, and the art museum. And that was siphoning off a great deal of money and had become quite competitive with the effort to raise money for the performing arts center. So this little controversy kind of set in that really had nothing to do with us. The reason the controversy started I'm really not too sure. Somehow or other the newspaper got ahold of what was just a normal contract sent in by the performing arts center to us, and the newspaper started to try to make it look as if we had come and said, "We will give you a million. . ." That the whole thing, the gift, the money, the everything, the naming, was our idea. "We will give you a million dollars only if you will put our name on this." That was not true; that was not the way it happened. Unfortunately the commissioner in charge didn't squelch it the way she should have. Everybody, you know, in the times when they face a bad press, get a little paralyzed, and a controversy ensued. Nobody ever called us. Nobody ever contacted us. No newspaper person ever came to us. And we just kind of sat back and watched the whole thing. The Hult family from Eugene, who gave a magnificent gift so that Eugene could have a performing arts center, went through the same kind of shit. In fact today, there is. . . Nils Hult died recently. Many people feel the stress over this situation hastened his death. But in fact there is a lawsuit in the city of Eugene trying to say that why should people have their name on something just because they gave some money.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Hmm.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: It's kind of sad that that attitude, which is really quite provincial, should exist out here, because all you have to do is look anywhere in the country from [Alice Tully] to Carnegie to Louise Davies to Meyerhoff to anywhere else, and in Portland certainly. . . It's just sad. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Right.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .and it's not even worth discussing beyond that. I'm very proud that my name is attached to this very beautiful theater, that is the home of the Oregon Symphony. I've been very active and involved with the Oregon Symphony for quite a few years now. It is dear to my heart. I think it is extremely important for the vitality of a city to have a major orchestra, just as I think the arts should be vital. I think both the visual arts and the performing arts are truly what keep a community vital. I think the major vitality that a community can have comes from keeping its young people in that city so they don't have to rush off to the big cities where they think all the quote, "action" is. And the only way you can do that is by having good professionalism abound in your city. And if you have good music, a good museum, good opera, good galleries, and keep that artistic environment vital in a community, that's the way you keep young people in an area. And my husband and I have always been vitally interested in that aspect of our community and have made strong contributions, both in terms of time and money, to not only the performing and visual arts, but the educational organizations in the community. My husband serves on the board of Lewis and Clark College. He is very interested. I am on the board of Reed College. I've been a member of the Reed College Art Associates for many, many years, which was also an organization started by a wonderful women, Edith Feldenheimer, who I feel never really received the recognition that she should have in the community.

BRUCE GUENTHER: There's almost a sense that she didn't want it.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Oh, baloney! You know.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah, well, I don't know. My contact with her was limited, but it was. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Oh, she was a wonderful woman.

BRUCE GUENTHER: She was such a quiet kind of warm person.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: She and I served on the museum board at the same time. She felt just as embarrassed, just as shafted, just as ignored by the Portland Art Association as I did. We had many, many discussions about the way they treated people who really knew something about art, were involved in art in the community, and wanted to serve. She was very hurt by that, and we had many conversations about that. That's one of the reasons she formed this Art Associates at Reed, which did a magnificent job, in limited facilities, of bringing in national and internationally known work to the community.

BRUCE GUENTHER: May well have also spurred the development of PCVA. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Absolutely.

BRUCE GUENTHER: . . .because of what they were doing in their small exhibition program.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Yes, yes. She was a wonderful woman. I have great admiration for her and was saddened by her death. I'm glad that we got her on. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: The archives [Northwest Oral History Project--Ed.].

ARLENE SCHNITZER: . . .the archives. But, you know, as negative as I'm sounding about the Portland Art Museum and the Association, I must say for the record that I have great hopes for what is happening there now. I think this new man, Dan Monroe, is going to prove to be a great success, not only with the institution but with the community. He cares, he is working very hard at it, he's smart, he's a listener. And as negative as I have been in the past, I have just as strongly positive feelings about the future because of him.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You've been witness to 25 years of the art scene in the Northwest.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And sooner or later, every artist in the Northwest sends their portfolio to you. It's changed -- my perception of the world. We first met in 1967, and I know in that time since then it's really changed -- the whole scene has changed. There's been an increase. I'd like you to think about it and make some observations about the way it's shifted. You've been a major player on so many fields, and the gallery has been an important part of the life blood of the community. That community has grown and changed and shifted.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Answer me something? How? What are the great changes that you have seen? I have. . .

BRUCE GUENTHER: Number of people involved, for one. The amount of _____. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: You mean working artists or purchasers?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Working artists.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Okay.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And I guess having worked here in Portland and now being in Seattle, it's that shift that I see that Seattle is supporting a dozen serious galleries at this point. I think they're all like this, on the windowsill with their fingernails, but. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Let me tell you something. The reason that there are so many more working artists now is because the educational institutions get funded per head. They are turning out far too many artists. There are thousands of artists who are going out into the "real" world to become professional artists who should be learning a wonderful, dignified trade, like how to repair a car well, and how to sole a shoe well, and how to take pride in some of the skills and crafts that have gone by the boards. They have no business being artists. They are lousy artists. And they end up being unhappy, frustrated human beings. They are in fields that they should not be in, and that is because the schools are turning out far too many artists. Art schools and Maryhurst and learning centers are cropping up all over the country turning out thousands and thousands of artists who have no business being artists. So when you say the scene has changed, I haven't seen a hell of a big change. I think a lot of time is being taken up. . . Here I said a while ago that when I went to art school, the serious artist student resented my presence at a professional art school, because I was taking up the time of teachers, away from them. In my case, it was a little different. My education was terribly important, because I ended up (chuckles) running a serious art gallery. But I understand, now, what they were feeling. I think a lot of artists are taking up people's time -- both my time, galleries' time, museum time, collectors' time -- that shouldn't be artists. [crying] But because they're valiant people, and they work hard at it, and they're diligent, and they ply their craft and their trade well, they get taken seriously, when they're really mediocre.

BRUCE GUENTHER: _____ _____?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: There's too much mediocrity out there. How do you judge, how does the average person who doesn't have the daily exposure to art that you and I have. . . You don't even need art school because of the exposure that we get to our profession. How does a person who doesn't have that exposure, who just walks into gallery after gallery after gallery, and museum rental gallery and museum rental gallery after museum rental gallery, which exhibits nothing but mediocrity. . . Most of it is pure crap. It is worse than mediocrity. How do you make intelligent evaluations? How do you become an intelligent collector, able to evaluate really brilliant art from mediocrity when you're assaulted by mediocrity day in and day out. It's very tough to develop a pristine, brilliant collection with clarity. So when you say there has been great changes on the scene, I don't think there've been a hell of a lot of changes. Relative to numbers, you may have a few more collectors, but I don't know that their motivation is any different. You know, you've still got the person who needs to fill up that space over the couch, and once that space over the couch is filled up, they don't buy any more. And they need the painting over the credenza in the dining room, and they need the little vertical painting in the foyer or hall of their house. They're not collectors! And yet they're called collectors. People actually call them collectors. "Oh, how long have you been collecting?" They're not collectors; they're buyers. They buy a painting or two.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Like they buy a chair or two.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Exactly. And I don't think the scene has changed enough. As a matter of fact, I mentioned a while ago, I think some of those corporations that bought work from me 20, 25 years ago, really were more adventuresome and had more guts than a lot of the corporations buying today, that are so worried about not pleasing the secretary or the copy girl or the typist down the hall, who puts up a big fuss about what's going to hang over her desk, and six months later, she's pregnant and gone. And I've seen that happen so many times. I don't care why people buy art, I've always said. I don't care if it's to keep up with the Joneses or to put that painting over the couch or to make their business environment better, as long as they buy art. If it's good art, something happens to them when it gets in their environment. They get hooked. Their life is never the same. They are truly touched by something unique. And maybe they don't even realize it, but they never again see things the same. They never again can go on a trip and look at a painting and not compare it theirs, or see something different. They get hooked. So I don't care why somebody buys art, because I think it's a wonderful (chuckles) thing that they do and their lives are changed because of it. But I don't think they know how to go far enough with it. And I haven't seen a lot of changes through these 25 years, very frankly. I think the Seattle area has changed. I think the Seattle area has changed ever since the World's Fair [1961-62--Ed.]. I think Seattle has many more serious collectors, many more people with a serious attitude towards art, but tell my why that has come about. It has come about because of the attitude fostered by the Seattle Art Museum. They have been the leader. They have been the tastemaker. And you have a Ginny [Virginia--Ed.] Wright, and a Mrs. [Anne--Ed.] Gerber, and a couple of other people who led the way. We didn't have that here in Portland. Most of our galleries I don't think you could really even call serious galleries. I wouldn't want them to hear me say this, and I hope they never read this, but they aren't.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I would agree. The Fountain Gallery has always been the serious gallery. There have been attempts: Sally Judd. . .

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Absolutely. Ed Hughes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Ed Hughes. You know, they came along. Blackfish initially sounded good, but none of them have been able to survive.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: That's right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: There's the one-year test, the five-year test, the ten-year test.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: That's right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And most of them haven't made it past five.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And, you know, a gallery puts up a lot of pretty little watercolors and landscapes and production pottery -- I don't call that a serious gallery, and if you'll really look, that's what almost every gallery in the city is. And I don't think the scene here in Portland -- and it breaks my heart; I've got 25 years of literally the best years of my life in this business. And I love the artists, I love the art. I'm sitting here while I'm talking and looking at a Cindy Parker, who's been a great joy in my life, to watch her grow and develop and her strength. I watched people like Greg Grenon, who walked into my life, who's fresh and creative and gutsy, and people from Seattle like Jack Chevalier, and Fay Jones, and this whole new crop of very serious young artists. Jack Portland has been a joy, all the years I've had him to watch him develop and grow. That's what art's all about. So I don't know if it really matters if the scene has changed that much.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: I've done the best I can in my way. You can't do it alone.

BRUCE GUENTHER: No. Thinking about that, how would you categorize the gallery philosophy? Has the founding. . . You founded the gallery because the artists needed a place to show.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That need never changes; we recognize that.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: Right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Has it evolved?

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And the regional artists.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

ARLENE SCHNITZER: And what I said a while ago, has been the philosophy behind the gallery. I want the young, serious, good artists coming up to know that there is a place here he can show. He doesn't have to run away. I want him to stay in this community. I want it to be a vital community, and a community can't be vital without the arts. So my commitment has never really wavered. I've been tempted, been very tempted, to turn the gallery into a big-time, big scene. . . Listen, what it costs, I could have done it. I never really wavered from that commitment of wanting a place for the regional artists to show and to be encouraged to stay here.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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