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Oral history interview with Ruth Braunstein, 2009 August 10

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Ruth Braunstein on 2009 August 10. The interview took place at Braunstein's home in San Francisco, CA, and was conducted by Jo Lauria for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by the Widgeon Point Charitable Foundation.

Ruth Braunstein has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JO LAURIA: Beginning the interview with Ruth Braunstein for the Archives of American Art on Monday, August 10 [2009]. The interview is taking place at Ruth's residence in San Francisco. This is tape one.

[END TRACK 1.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Ready.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. Ruth, could you just pronounce your name for us?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: My name is Ruth Braunstein, B-R-A-U-N-S-T-E-I-N.

MS. LAURIA: Let us start with the background biographical information. Can you tell us where and when you were born?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I was born July 20, 1923, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

MS. LAURIA: And why don't you tell us a little bit about your family background and how your childhood—how that went and if there was any connection you had to art from an early age.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I probably would say I got interested in a form of art, not visual arts, when I was 10 or 11 years old. I wanted to be a dancer. And there wasn't any money for that, because this was during the Depression and after the Depression. But in Minneapolis, during the senior—you had to take gymnasium 24—I mean, all the way through twelfth grade. And they offered a class called modern dance, and I took modern dance.

That was my first introduction into any kind of formal kind of dance training. And I evidently was considered pretty talented, and a woman who ran a modern dance center in Minneapolis invited me to become an apprentice in her space. I was about 15 years old at that time, 16 years old. And she—in exchange for free dancing lessons, I would help her on Saturdays working with the young kids in her dance classes, as well as help clean up and so on, et cetera.

So it started my whole career in dance, which I continued on 'til I came to California, when I didn't really respond very much to the kinds of dance that was going on here. Dance was limited to maybe—the only person I knew about, frankly, was Halprin and Welland Lathrop—Halprin Lathrop School of Dance. And Welland Lathrop was a professor at San Francisco State [University], I guess. And by the time I got here, he retired, and he wasn't dancing anymore. And there was just a—Ann Halprin around, who was out looking for her navel. And it [laughs] didn't appeal to me, and I just sort of let that sort of pass through.

MS. LAURIA: Well, you mentioned when you came to California. Can you give us sort of a chronological mapping of—you started out in Minneapolis.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And I stayed with dance all the way through, from the time of high school. And I never finished college. I just took a class called pre-wed. I was dating the man I married, you know, when I was a senior or junior in high school, and he was two years ahead in school—two years ahead of me in school.

And so when I started college, it was interesting, because, in retrospect, I realize now that it was the first year of the—my first class was the first class they gave SATs to, back—you know, [laughs] way, way back then. And they ended up putting me into political science, said that's what I should be taking for my test. That didn't interest me at all.

And nobody paid any attention to the fact that I was already dancing. You know, I should have gone to physical education to become a teacher or doing something, but no one really pushed me in that direction. So I just took

what I called a two-year course called pre-wed. And when Toddie got through with college, we got married and moved to Seattle, Washington.

MS. LAURIA: Toddie—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Is my husband, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And his full name?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Is Theodore Howard Braunstein. And today is his birthday. [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: And what year did you get married?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Nineteen forty-three. And I was all of 19 years old. I was 20 years—20 years the next week, after I got married. So we moved to Seattle, Washington. But then, with all my connections through Gertrude Lippincott, who was my mentor in Minneapolis—she was very, very big in dance education, you know, trying to get dance going on in all the colleges throughout the United States, and she was very, very influential. She got the program going back east at—what's that fancy girls' college?

MS. LAURIA: Vassar [College, Poughkeepsie, NY]? Skidmore [College, Saratoga Springs, NY]?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, the one like that, but in that area around there. And they—

MS. LAURIA: Sarah Lawrence [College, Bronxville, NY].

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, no. It was—

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It'll come to me eventually. This is—

MS. LAURIA: Smith [College, Northampton, MA]?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No. It's—

MS. LAURIA: Radcliffe [College, Cambridge, MA].

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, it wasn't Radcliffe. It's a women's college. And it's not Bennington [College, Bennington, VT]; wasn't Bennington.

MS. LAURIA: Bard [College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY]?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, it wasn't—

MS. LAURIA: I mean Barnard [College, New York, NY].

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, no. It was before—it'll come to me. She was very involved in there, and she knew everybody in the dance world. So I came to Seattle very well—it was a lot of information about the dance program there, and even who to dance with. And I went to the Cornish Institute of Music and Dance and started dancing with Eleanor King. And her accompanist at that time was John Cage. And Merce Cunningham had danced with her before he went to New York. And I got—I remember the first dance class or second dance class that I took with Eleanor was a party, a going-away party for John, who was going to meet Merce in New York.

MS. LAURIA: And you also said, in this interview that I'm referencing, that's published on the Internet by Richard —

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Whittington [Whittaker is the correct name. Ed.].

MS. LAURIA: —Whittington—that was conducted a couple of years ago, that you were able to dance with Jose Limon and Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham when you were in New York.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. When Todd went into the army after the war, we lived in Seattle for about—three years. And then he got drafted when the war was over. He got drafted and we got sent to the East Coast. And I didn't—through basic training and for about six or seven months after that, Toddie was around. He was sent someplace. You know, things were sort of scattered at that time. And he was mostly on the East Coast.

So I just took myself, because my one dream in life was to dance with all these people. And so he was there, so I went back there and lived with my sister, who was living in New York. She was a musician and she was living in

New York. And I went and lived with her all the time that Toddie was on the East Coast. And then when he finally—maybe about four or five months after he got drafted, he finally got located to Dayton, Ohio.

But then, meantime—all that time I still—you know, those five or six months I was in New York, I was able to dance with Jose. And I ended up with Jose. I liked him better than Martha Graham. I didn't like that kind of technique. So I danced—Jose had just left the Humphrey-Weidman Group at that time when I got into his life there. So, I mean, I took probably a couple of classes with Weidman, but the technique was pretty much the same. So I—and then I went home. We went back to Minneapolis—in the war—he got drafted a year after—a year and a day after he got drafted, he got released. I got pregnant and had my first child.

MS. LAURIA: And that was in Minneapolis.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The baby was born in Minneapolis, yeah. But I got pregnant in Dayton, Ohio, at Wright Air Force Base. [They laugh.]

MS. LAURIA: Now, in the beginning, your parents must have recognized that you had this affinity and special talent for dancing, because you said you were very athletic in this interview.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. Well, I wasn't that much. My folks were much—my dad was much more interested in music than he was in dance or any of the visual arts, you know, like I'm into now. There was—but there had to be a trace of it in the family. My father was a furrier, and he was able to make patterns and cut them to your size, and so on, et cetera, which he had taught himself to do, with some help, probably from people he worked for, you know. But he—so there must have been some trace of that in the family, and—

MS. LAURIA: Because your sister is a musician.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: My sister is a musician. But he was much more interested in music, because he was denied—he evidently had a very beautiful voice, but he wanted to play the piano. And because he was from a poor family—he was born and raised in Siberia and he was from a poor family. You couldn't sing—you couldn't play the piano. You could sing, maybe. So they put him into the choir, you know, in the synagogue that they were attending there. And he sang.

And the interesting thing is that before he died, before he—after we were all grown up—and he never wanted to belong to a synagogue, you know. But after we all got grown up and left the house, he went back to the synagogue to sing in the choir. And he sang in the choir, you know, from the time all of us left home. We never heard him sing because none of us was around. And the only time he sang was at the High Holidays, stuff like that. But he loved the rehearsals and so on, et cetera. So I can only really figure that's where the interest came anyway. But everything else that happened in my career, you know, art-wise, I sort of fell into.

MS. LAURIA: So what about your mother? Was she a supportive personality for—you know, encouraged you to be creative?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Not really, no. My mother was a very smart lady. She ran my father's business. And I was sort of the tyrant in the family, you know. But she was smart enough to know. But I was terribly influenced by Gertrude Lippincott, which happened to have been a very good influence, because she was professor at the University of Minnesota, very highly thought of. She was a mentor to Hubert Humphrey when he was in school there, and a very, very highly respected member of the faculty there. So I was brought into that little circle of people. It's really—there's a word for—[inaudible]. There's, you know, like—it was just one of those crazy serendipity kind of situations, and—

MS. LAURIA: And you mentioned that Minneapolis at the time, the public school system was extraordinary for—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —its educational emphasis on the arts, which—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —doesn't happen so much today.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Not anymore, not—it sure isn't in California. My kids took dance training all the time they were growing up in Washington. And when we came to California, Marla at high school—no, at grade school—no, junior high school—there was six weeks dedicated to modern dance. And she knew more about dance than the teacher. In fact, the teacher was smart enough to let Marla teach half the classes, or part of the class. She warmed the kids up every day, or something like that. You know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know, that—because they really learned—they were brought up in a dance environment. But as far as I was—I was—my folks, you know, didn't pay much attention to me. In fact, my mother never even—and dad—never saw me dance until we came back from Washington or wherever we were living. We lived in Minneapolis for about four years. Both kids were born in Minneapolis. And I convinced my mother to come to see some kind of choreography that I had done for something. I don't know where in the hell it was even. And [laughs] I went to—you know, I did my little performance. And then after, I said, "Ma, tell me how good I was." She says, "Oh," she says—she called it *meshuggener tanz* [Yiddish: crazy dance]. She says, "I don't understand, but you should wear makeup more often." [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: That was her sole comment?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That was her sole comment on my career—[laughs]—my dancing career. So it really was something that I just sort of picked up on my own, and very similar to, when I think about it in retrospect, my almost fifty years in the gallery business, which is something I fell into too.

MS. LAURIA: Right. Now, you mentioned also—I'm sorry I keep referencing this other interview, but it will help us—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, that's all right, because this is pretty much the same thing. You know, I have the same story to tell you. [They laugh.]

MS. LAURIA: Well, that's all right, because it'll be told to other people who will read it on the website of the Archives of American Art.

You did mention that you at some point, when you felt you had to make a decision pivotal in your life where you couldn't dance anymore, it was either become a dance teacher or not. And you didn't want to become a dance teacher, so you and your husband were living in Tiburon.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, no—

MS. LAURIA: No, Palo Alto.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Palo Alto, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. No, I didn't want to start teaching dance again. I had taught for 20 years. You know, I mean it was enough already. And you don't just go in and—it's easier to start an art gallery than it is to start a dance teaching career, especially when I had no—I had no prerequisites. I didn't have a degree in college. You know, I had a lot of experience teaching dance, you know, all over the—well, just in Washington and Minneapolis, you know, but it wasn't—I wasn't looking for a career. I was looking for something to do.

MS. LAURIA: And your husband's income—what was his business?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Toddie was a chemical engineer, and we came to California to make our fortune. [Laughs.] He went—he was working for the government in Washington, D.C. And then when we came to California, he—[inaudible]—into private industry. He was working for United Airlines, UTC [United Technologies Corporation]. They had a big technology program going on here in Sunnyvale and in Palo Alto, that area down, the southern part, San Jose. And they were the company that—they got the contract to make the fuel to take the people to the moon.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, wonderful.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And we were there and saw that in 1969; not there, but on TV. [They laugh.] But that was why the company was organized, you know, that branch of UTC, because they were from Connecticut originally.

MS. LAURIA: So you were established in this community of Palo Alto, and his income was great enough where you really did not have to seek a full-time job to bring—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, that's right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —to bring in money to support the family.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, he had enough money for that. We had enough money for that. And even, frankly, if I needed money, I would go to him. I didn't have any backers. I never had any backers in the gallery business besides him. And I was his—I was his—he was my—you know, he was my backer. And—

MS. LAURIA: And you mentioned this wonderful story about the man who had—who owned the whole community.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, this is—evidently the years that I spent with my mother and father rubbed off on me as far as business is concerned. [Laughs.] And, you know, and they too came from—they came over here from Europe, and they were self-made for whatever they did. They had four children, and we all knew—we all had very good work ethics. I can say that. If nothing else, we all were participating. We all had to work in the store.

My father was a furrier. And so from the time—in fact, I have a nephew here who lives in California here now on the other bay there, and he talks about how his *zayde* [Yiddish: grandfather]—he had to go—paid him five dollars—no, five cents an hour to come and clean up the store on Saturday mornings. Well, we did—that's what we did. But he got paid—we got paid five cents an hour. He got—oh, that was it, he was getting 50 cents an hour.

So that's [laughs]—you know, but it was that—he started to work for my dad after we all grew up and went away, and he was the only—my brother was the only kid who stayed at home in Minneapolis. There were three girls and a boy, and the three girls all moved away, and the boy's the one that stayed. And he had the kids in—he worked for my—you know, for his grandpa.

MS. LAURIA: Took over the family business.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: Is it still—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Not really.

MS. LAURIA: —a furrier?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Not really. No, no. He didn't take over the family—he ended up—he's an editor for—a TV editor now. [Laughs.] I mean, he went to college. He went to college. I mean, all—my generation, kids didn't go to college, none of us in our family. I went—my sister was more interested in music, and she didn't want to go—she went and studied with her—in New York, she studied with her teachers from Minneapolis who went to New York to live, and she just followed them there, which was lucky for me, because when I got to New York, I mean, I had somebody there, I mean.

MS. LAURIA: Right, that you could stay with her.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And you say you fell into the art business.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, yeah. It's an interesting story. I don't—I didn't tell the story about Rodney Strong here?

MS. LAURIA: Yes, you did.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. Well, I literally fell into—as you read before, into the gallery business through Rodney Strong, who was a dancer who I knew in New York and I met—one of the first people I ran into when I came to California. I knew he was someplace in California. I didn't know where. And I ran into him on a very foggy evening on July thirteenth, which was our anniversary. And we were in New York—in San Francisco waiting to meet a friend for coffee after a theater or something like that, and we saw Rodney walk down the street, with a woman on his hand. He was very handsome. And you know, and straight men are very hard to find in the dance world. And there he—but I'd heard he had gotten married, and it was his wife with him. And we exchanged addresses, and we lost—he lost our telephone number. And I knew he was living in Sausalito.

And he told me right then and there, he says, "I want to find—I want to get in the wine business." He says, "I want to open a wine-tasting room, you know, and I'm looking for a place here. And I can get a group to dance here," and so on, et cetera.

So, to make a long story short, he finally enters up, finds this place in Tiburon. And he rents this place. Toddie and I and the kids, you know, we were new here, so we would go to help him. And he had a little dance company and he had an agent and all this jazz. And he would get the gigs. And whenever he got—we would go over and help his wife down there. And, in fact, we were there when the first bottling he did [laughs] for a wine called strawberry wine.

MS. LAURIA: Oh.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Somebody down here below San Jose made it, and he tasted it at something and thought it was great. He said he's going to have only three kinds of wines. He'll do a strawberry wine and a Chardonnay and a red wine or something. And his strawberry wine was the one that was so successful, and that came in barrels. So he didn't know how to get the barrels out, the wine out of the barrel. He bought the—he bought the label made. He bought the bottles.

[Doorbell rings.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, that's going to be what's-his-name.

[END TRACK 2.]

MS. LAURIA: All right. We will continue on, after that interruption.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Where was I?

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] Well, you were talking about—you met Rodney Strong, and his strawberry wine was successful, but he did not know how to get the wine out of the barrels.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So—[laughs]—

MS. LAURIA: And I know this has something to do with art, and we'll get to it.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: [Laughs.] Not really. But Toddie Braunstein's father made a living out of buying large quantities of syrups and pouring it into small bottles. And Toddie Braunstein remembered that his father would go to the drug store and buy an enema bag with a long tube—[they laugh]—and so we did the same thing. You know, that's what he knew. And Rodney didn't know about that at all. So we went and got a—we got the enema bag, long tube—and that's how we poured all the—poured the wine into the bottles for the first selling of the—of that crop of strawberry wine.

MS. LAURIA: So he opened a tasting room in Tiburon, and this is how it brings us to the—the full circle to the art story. And he was renting this from a Mr. Zelinsky.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Mr. Zelinsky is his name. Mr. Zelinsky's role in the San Francisco art scene—the San Francisco scene was, he was a painter—the family painting business started in 1832. And he got the contract to paint the Golden Gate Bridge.

MS. LAURIA: Wow, that's amazing.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And that's where—the family still does that. The family is still going. Well, Mr. Zelinsky owned all—he, in—when the war broke out in 1941, Mr. Zelinsky bought up all of Main Street Tiburon, because everybody thought the Japanese were going to come over here and take over the city of San Francisco, okay? And so it was frankly—people tell me that you could buy a house down by the marina for half—for nothing, because the people too moved away from there because they thought for sure that's where they were going to get taken.

So the deal was a place became empty—a store became empty on Main Street, and Toddie and I and the kids had spent a lot of time in Tiburon. And we got to know everybody there. And one day he says to Rodney Strong, who got—called him in his office. And his office was his Cadillac car. [They laugh.] And called Rodney Strong and says, "You know, that friend of yours, Braunstein?" "Yeah." He says, "You know, when the store here hasn't paid rent in 18 months,"—and his accountant said, "You can't do business that way, you've got to get rid of that person—what about your friend Braunstein taking over that space?"

And so Rodney goes home and calls—talks to his wife, and his wife says—she was only about—was it, it was furniture she was—I guess the woman was an interior decorator. "She doesn't know anything about furniture." But I was—I said—I'd taken off a year just to do nothing when I came to California because I had never been to California before. So I just sort of, you know, just meandered around the community and so on, et cetera, and got involved with some people. I met some—I mean, I was new—new at everything.

And she says, "She doesn't know anything about decorating, and you know, and furniture." She says, "But she's taking a painting class. Maybe she'll open an art gallery. Tiburon could use an art gallery in this town"—because it was just beginning to grow, this is 1961 I'm talking about. And Tiburon was a quiet, little, sleepy place. The only time that it opened up was on the weekends when people would take their boats—they would call from Sausalito or from the marina in San Francisco, cross the bay and come to eat there. You know, that's all it was. And then you had these—so you were open—he said, but we—they could use—the wine tasting place would be good for them to have people who like art, you know. So this was self-serving in some respect. But it was her idea.

MS. LAURIA: What was her name?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Her name was Charlotte Strong. She was Rodney's wife.

MS. LAURIA: And so this all happened in 1961, and fortuitously you were able to negotiate with Mr. Zelinsky a rental fee that you could afford.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Thirty-five dollars a month. And the deal—and [laughs] and the percentage of, after a certain—I don't even remember exactly but—it was—and the deal was that I went in business with this woman who's running a gallery in Palo Alto. So she taught me all about the business. And I said to her, "You know, I'll put the money up, and you become my partner if you'll teach it to me."

So she told me—I knew nothing about percentages. I knew nothing about that—that they didn't own all the work. You know, everything was on consignment. I mean this was all new to me, because I had never hardly even gone into art galleries. I went to museums and stuff like that, while I was growing up, but I never really—I mean, after I got married, I mean, but I didn't do much with art galleries because we didn't have any money for art. And so this gal thing with Verna Aré, and she became my partner.

And Toddie gave me the money, he gave me $500, you know. And we got that place all done in less than 500 bucks—for $350. We still had—we paid first and last month's rent, which was only $70, but we bought wonderful rugs and we put lights up. And she had a husband who was handy as Toddie was handy. And so the two guys and us—the four of us did all the work.

MS. LAURIA: But had you at that point thought about or discussed the first show?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Who we were going to show? Absolutely not. [Laughs.] Not until—we were busy setting—we talked as—we talked as we were doing the work. And she was from Seattle, Washington, and I was from Washington, D.C. And there were a couple artists that I had met already, in Palo Alto, that we thought we could we could put into the show, you know, group. And so we're talking about it as we're painting, we decided we would do a show from Washington, D.C., to Washington, you know?

MS. LAURIA: Wonderful.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And she went and got her friends, and I got my friends, and we opened up. But frankly speaking, the—and she had great taste—she still has great taste. She's—

MS. LAURIA: That's Vera?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Verna, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Verna, sorry. And what was the gallery name?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The Quay Gallery.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Tiburon is a quay. And we went—you know, under the—that caused me a lot of trouble. Under the rules of the state board of [inaudible] I had to have a name for the gallery so we called the gallery 32 because that was the address, 32 Main Street. And I had the whole community there trying to find a name for me, and I just didn't want it to be Braunstein, because that wasn't the way it was being done, you know. And I just followed everybody else around the community, what they were doing.

And so one day there was this, what, crazy old architect named Soriano, was it Raphael Soriano, was his—

MS. LAURIA: Oh yes. He did a lot of commissions in Southern California.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's right, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: He did Julius Shulman's house.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's right, yeah. And he did—he lived in Tiburon. He lived across the street from me. So one day he comes rushing back from the city, says, "It's a quay!" I says, "What are you talking about?" He said, "It's the Quay!" And I says—and then he rushed off. So after I closed the store I went over, I says, "What are you talking about? What's a key?" Because I never even knew—heard of the word spelled Q-U-—and he says, "Spell it Q-U-A-Y." So then I figured it out, that, you know, when he—after he left that he was doing something about a name for the gallery—[they laugh]—you know? And then when I went over there, he told me that Tiburon is quay. Well, that was a perfect name.

MS. LAURIA: And that was—you opened the gallery in the early '60s. Do you remember exactly what year?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: July—yeah. 1961. July, 1961. And it was known as—by that time it was known as Gallery 32.

MS. LAURIA: But soon thereafter you changed it?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But yeah, a week or two later it changed to Quay Gallery, yeah. I still have my sign downstairs.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, how wonderful.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: And you mentioned that you had to keep the gallery open on Sundays because that was when so much of the traffic came through from the people who came with their sailboats and things.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. So we lived behind the store, you know, we had a little apartment behind the store. And then when Rodney and Charlotte's wine-tasting place caught on and his knowledge of wine caught on, and he was offered this great piece of property in Windsor, California, if he could house-sit the house. And it was a beautiful three-bedroom house. And he said, "Only if I check out the grapes and see what kind of grapes they are." So he went there and checked the grapes out, and they were chardonnays in Windsor.

And there—this is—have you—Windsor is grown up now. But—he went there and he searched the land a little bit more. And he found—he found a little mill there, a little place where the winery was made. It was literally—it was dug into a hill and was—and you couldn't see it from the road at all. You know, so he—so he and Charlotte moved out to Windsor when he was really getting serious about the wine. And then we stayed upstairs above the wine-tasting place, there was a little apartment up there.

So we would come from Palo Alto, I lived in Palo Alto.

MS. LAURIA: And your two children were how old?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They were—at that time they were 13 and 11—or 14 and 12, something like that, you know, in that neighborhood, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: So you could devote a significant amount of your time?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh yeah. And we would—we had a big enough place where they—we had a little fall boat that we'd had from Washington, which we had brought with us, and so they took the boat out on the water, and you know, and—it was our little—it was better than going to Tahoe, it was closer. [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: Sounds ideal. And did you have—did you make any important relationships at that time that you've now continued on?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Absolutely. I went to Los Angeles and I did a—I met—I got very involved in the art scene down there. And they loved the idea of having a place to show from here. And I got involved with David Stuartand, you know, and Primus, and Jackie Anhalt, and Felix Landau, and—

MS. LAURIA: In early '60s still?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And Rolf Nelson, did you ever hear of him?

MS. LAURIA: No. But I know you probably—did you meet Peter Voulkos through Felix Landau?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Not at all.

MS. LAURIA: No? Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I didn't know who Peter Voulkos was. [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: You do now.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's right. [They laugh.]. No, no, I had—when I first came to the gallery, the first group of artists I had was—some of them were ceramics, ceramic people. They were—I showed a guy named—oh golly, he was real big in making fires, what do you call, that kind of fire—

MS. LAURIA: Raku?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Raku, yeah. I forget his name. He lived in—he lived in—

MS. LAURIA: Win Ng?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, Win Ng is a—Win Ng is Chinese. And he was a—he was, you know, the hot star. And he was the first one that I met, and so was Jim Melchert. But none of them introduced me to Voulkos.

MS. LAURIA: Because it—in this previous interview that I've already referenced, you said that you showed Win Ng, and you hadn't heard of Voulkos then, but you flipped over his word when you did see him, and you showed Jim Melchert, Hal Riegger—right?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, Hal Riegger. He's the guy—he was the—what's that kind of cooking when you—

MS. LAURIA: The Raku—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The Raku guy, yeah. Hal Riegger, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And Dominick Domari.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. I got an early Dominick Domari here I'll show it to you, huh?

MS. LAURIA: So those were the first artists that you represented exclusively at your gallery?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I didn't even know about exclusivity. [Laughs.] I mean, the first couple years. I didn't—I think, I did—I didn't do Hal Riegger—I had Hal Riegger's work for sale. And there was also another woman named Doris Aller who made wonderful little birds out of clay. Very realistic, beautiful little birds.

MS. LAURIA: A-L-L-E-R? Aller?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: A-L-L-E-R, yeah. Doris Aller. And she was from Palo Alto. And I was really—and there were some artists in Palo Alto. A guy named Igor Medvedev who isn't doing any work anymore. And he really knew the art scene in San Francisco because he went to school at Berkeley. But he never told me about Voulkos either.

MS. LAURIA: But it was in retrospect unusual for you to have this cross-disciplinary—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, it was by far the most exciting work that I saw here in California. I never saw anybody work like this. I have the first piece—the first piece of art I ever bought, this is in Washington, D.C., was ceramics, you know. And I have it right here—it's close by. And it was a very odd form, you know, compared to —

MS. LAURIA: And you bought this at a gallery in Washington, D.C.?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I bought this at the—I bought this at the Corcoran—a show at the Corcoran Museum [Corcoran Gallery of Art].

MS. LAURIA: Oh, wonderful. Do you—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Twenty bucks.

MS. LAURIA: Do you know who it is?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No. I never knew who it was.

MS. LAURIA: It is signed, but I can't read it either.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I can't read it either.

MS. LAURIA: So it is—just so people who are reading this will know—it's a faceted, rather heavy, stout vase form that is glazed, it's stoneware, and it has a really expressionistic blue, sort of turquoise, splashed over the shoulders of it.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It's very Indian looking to me—you know, American Indian. And that's the first piece of art I ever bought.

MS. LAURIA: Much more organic than American Indian work though. But I see that you liked the tactility—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: So when you started your art gallery you did not think, as so many—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I didn't know that art was considered a craft. I had never heard this before. I had never heard the word craft before, you know, I mean, in relationship to visual arts. And so I just bought—I just—I mean, look at the glaze on this thing here. It's beautiful.

MS. LAURIA: It's all pebbled.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, huh?

MS. LAURIA: It's like a pebbled surface.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Is that—is that from the—by choice? Or—

MS. LAURIA: It looks like it is—it was fired in a wood-firing kiln—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You think so? Back in '50s?

MS. LAURIA: Well—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No.

MS. LAURIA: I don't know. But it is—it has somehow pebbled on the surface. But I know what you're saying. It is—it's unusual, it's not so pristine and precise, and you probably responded—it looks very Japanese to me. Asian influenced.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And the pieces that you see—the Win Ng's that you saw there, those are from the early shows, you know.

MS. LAURIA: But nobody sat you down, Ruth, and—not Verna, not anyone—and said to you, "Ruth, if you're going to be an important dealer, you're going to have to show painting and sculpture." There were no hard and fast visions?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No. My teacher absolutely never divided me in any way. In fact, she came from a background of design, you know—

MS. LAURIA: Interior?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —interior decorating kind of thing. So she was on a different kind of a wing than I was, you know. And so we never even talked about that. We just, you know, whatever came in there and that we could sell, we sold. I sold prints. A guy named Elton Bennett, who's one of the first people to take reproduction—one of a kind—I mean lithographs—

MS. LAURIA: Lithographs?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. They were lithographs. And the—they were signed, but they were not numbered, you know. And he would sell them for five [dollars] to $10 each. And I remember I went to visit Toddie's cousin just recently, and so this is 40 years later—45 years later, still had it up in her living room, you know. And there it was. And she said, oh no, these are—these were very important to her. She—it had nothing to do with me. That she just loved them. And sadly to say she died and I asked her could I get them back, and you know, she never marked down—and I just would have gotten back just for posterity's sake and the interest to see them again.

But we—no, we—and we—and I had a unique way of working with my crew. Everybody there took it out in trade.

MS. LAURIA: Rather than the—they were not paid a salary in dollars?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's right.

MS. LAURIA: You decided the amount that they were owed, and that was, they got to accept the artwork?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They could—yeah, yeah. And so we all kept the gallery going that way, when you think about it in retrospect that—

MS. LAURIA: And you also built a very beautiful collection—significant.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And so it was a—I didn't start paying any taxes on, you know, sales—I paid a sales tax I had

to pay, but I didn't do any equalization tax and all that jazz, for salaries and so forth, until 12 years after I got into business. [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: Did you consider them then volunteers in a way?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: In a way, yeah, yeah. They were all people who didn't have to make a living. And one of them was my—was a woman who goes back to the Gertrude Lippincott days because she was a sculptor by trade, she's living in the Altos she was a sculptor by trade who was a dancer too. And she made these little pieces out of clay.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, how wonderful.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They're molded. These were done in the '30s and '40s.

MS. LAURIA: Their like three-inch figure—figurative work—very abstracted, stylized figures.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: My—they're all reminiscent of Martha Graham—

MS. LAURIA: Graham. Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: With the movements.

MS. LAURIA: With the movement, right. And what was her name?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Her name was Jean Laury.

MS. LAURIA: And so did Jean Laury work with you on any—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh no. She asked me—yes, when she came to—she left Minneapolis. And she came to California. And she ends up living in Mill Valley, and my little connections in Minneapolis told me that she was in Mill Valley. Okay, so I found her. Mill Valley is right next door to Tiburon. And I found her in Mill Valley. And she had by that time—I got to her, she had raised four boys, and her husband worked for BBD&O, the advertising agency, and she just loved the idea. She didn't need the money, but she could collect art. And she had a good eye. I just sold the Voulkos that she bought from me in 1968 for $300, I just sold it for $13,000 for her.

MS. LAURIA: That's great.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So I've been able to give her—you know, and she—and her husband bought a John Altoon from me and paid $275 for it. She paid for it, she worked for it, you see. And her whole little art collection that—she's now 90-some years old and she's still alive. She's living in a home in Sonoma. And whenever she needs money, we sell a little piece for her.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, that's great.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But there was a whole little group of women there that, you know, as well as me, who took everything out in trade until– let's see—about '61 and 12 is—'75, '74. I had to—this gal came to work for me and she—and she was very rich and I didn't see why she needed the money, but she didn't like my idea. She said she couldn't get from it—get away with it. She needed to get paid. And she had to build up Social Security or something. So I finally had to bite the bullet and pay. [They laugh.]

MS. LAURIA: Now, you also said that your—at some point you decided to leave Tiburon because you couldn't get reviewers to come out and see the shows and also Zelinsky had found another renter who was willing to pay three times more—or twice—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Twice more, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —more that you—because by that time you were paying $100.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It was $100 a month yeah. So that was the best move that he ever did for me. And I used to see Zelinsky at—he loved the opera, and I would go to the opera all the time and I would run into him there. And he—you know, and he says, "Oh," he says, "I miss you so much, you know." And I kept saying, I said, "Ed, that's the best thing you ever did for me was kick me out of Tiburon." I mean, you know?

MS. LAURIA: Right. Because it was too regional.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And I probably would have, unless—I said, "You made me get out there and look for a place." And now, you know, he said, "Well, I heard you've become famous." I says, "Well, I'm infamous more

than famous." [They laugh.] But he says, "Well, you can help me build up the city, you know." Well, he went on and on and on. And I says, "No, no, no, no. You are—I'm forever grateful to you for making me move."

MS. LAURIA: So in May of 1965 you went into business in San Francisco. And you mentioned that Jim Newman and—he had started the Dilexi Gallery?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. In—he did that in '58.

MS. LAURIA: So there was another—where you were, there was already the beginning of what we now call a gallery district.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, well the deal is Jim and I try to find a place together, you know, when we—we kept in touch with each other when I was in Tiburon. And when I—because his gallery was located on Union Street, which was on the way back from Tiburon to Palo Alto—I lived in Palo Alto through this whole thing—so I would stop by and told him that I—that I'm going to really move.

So it was—I don't know whose idea it was, if it was his or mine, to let's see if we can find a place together. And we decided that we would go—that his gallery was on Union Street, way out there. And he had been in North Beach earlier. And he says, you know, we should move closer to the city. This is too far away from everything. So we started looking around, and we couldn't find any place that was big enough to hold both of us, and didn't need a huge, huge amount of remodeling that would have cost us a fortune to do it.

So we went—we looked at one place on Clay Street, and we decided that we wanted to go down where—in the, you know, in the district there—what do you call it—at the financial district and the interior decorator district because there were no galleries down there at all. And the whole idea was to make money, for a change. [They laugh.] And so we saw a place on Clay Street and—but it wasn't big enough for the two of us. And then my real estate agent told me about a place on Jerome Alley on Pacific. And I went down to see it, and I found this little place, $175 a month, you know? [Laughs.] And it had beautiful wooden floors, and upstairs was a building—was the—upstairs was a—there used to—it was next to the Little Fox Theater. And it's right in the street where all the whorehouses used to be, you know.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And the buildings that are still there, the windows are still set that they can't—they're historical monuments now. And so I was real mixed up, you know, I said with Jim. I said, oh God, what will I do with Jim? This place is not big enough for both of us. It's perfect for me. It's under $200, you know? And a beautiful wood floor because it was the rehearsal hall for a nightclub that was upstairs of us.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, I see.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So it had this beautiful wooden floor in it, you know, and about nine- or ten-foot ceilings. And the story goes was that Gump's was going—had put in the lights, because they were going to—and it was very mysterious when you walk down this little alley maybe 20 feet, and you came down some stairs. And they were going to make it like a cave, and they were going to put all their beautiful, beautiful jewelry in there, and their beautiful—it was going to become their real expensive store because it was in the neighborhood of, you know, of the decorators. So they were going to have the one on Post Street and have this—and then they decided not to have—do that. That's when it became available and I got it.

So Jim, who was very well off, could afford a $600 a month rent. And he took the place on Clay, and I was on Pacific. So we had the beginning of a little—a little nucleus of two of us there. And then some woman from San Diego moved in on Montgomery Street, and so there were three of us. And then a guy named Lee Carlson, who had a gallery on, oh, up in the area in Pacific Heights, and it was in his house, and they made him move out of it because it wasn't residential, and he was—so he moved across the street on Montgomery from the other person. Her name was Weller, I think, something like that. And all of sudden, there were four galleries there.

MS. LAURIA: And you said Michael Wallace came from New York?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Then Michael came from New York and opened a gallery there. And there was a guy named Blum there too, I just remembered that.

MS. LAURIA: And then the Wenger Gallery?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Wenger, that's the one I'm talking about was next door to me. And I was on the entranceway to Ernie's Kitchen, which was a very fancy restaurant which is not there anymore. And you know, in all the years that I was there, I never ate there. [They laugh.]

MS. LAURIA: And you said that this was the nucleus of the space, in 1965 to 1974, that's the length of the time

that you remained on—at that—is that on Clay?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, that was on Pacific.

MS. LAURIA: On Pacific. Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: [In the background.] Can I ask a question or no?

MS. LAURIA: Then the one thing that you said that turns you on more than anything else at this time was clay. So were you showing clay artists when you moved to this new gallery?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: When I was showing clay—oh yeah. I—Win Ng, and think I had some [Jim] Melchert stuff there. And I had some other people—and then I—yeah I started to show—I showed—I started showing Richard Shaw. See what happens is that—is that Jim Newman opens his gallery there in '66, '65, same time as I did, couple of months one way or the other. And he was showing Richard Shaw at that time.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And he kept this gallery going until 1968, and then he decided to close it.

So I went over and stole a lot of his artists. I took on Richard, I took on Bruce Conner. I took on Jeremy Anderson, who else, Sidney Gordon, who was showing with him at that time. Five or—I took on five or six or seven of his artists that were—when he closed his gallery. But I meanwhile, before that, I was showing other people. I was showing Win. And Win—there was a little group around Win too, you know what I mean, I don't know who they were. They weren't interesting enough for me to keep them going.

But I always limited the number, and I—number of—you see, I didn't take—didn't take Dominick with me because I just didn't want to—because by that—by 1965, '66, I was very much involved in the whole art scene universally, all the way over to New York and back, and knew about these hard feelings going about clay and about any kind of craft. You know, there was—I didn't want to become a craft gallery.

MS. LAURIA: On that note, let's end this first disc.

[END TRACK 3.]

MS. LAURIA: This is disc number two, interview of Ruth Braunstein for the Archives of American Art, interviewer Jo Lauria, August 10, 2009, at the home of Ruth Braunstein in San Francisco.

So, Ruth, I don't want you to lose your train of thought because you had just mentioned at the end of disc one that there was some ill feeling about clay in the art community at this time in the late '60s—1960s?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yes, like mid-'60s.

MS. LAURIA: Mid-'60s, okay. So would you expound upon that for us?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, in relationship for me, well—I'm just going to talk about myself, because that's all I knew, you know, and because I do—don't have any training in art. I never even—I took a painting class once, and they told me—I wanted to learn how to build a—put a house on a—on a piece of paper and make it three-dimensional.

MS. LAURIA: So you wanted to learn perspective.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, perspective. That's the word. And I took this class and got bored with it all, and I just left the art world, who never saw me—still don't know how to put a house—[laughs]—on a hill, so it looks like everyday art. But the point I'm—that's me being facetious—but the deal is, is that I was—got involved in the art world in a time when it was all experimental. There—the—you know, and my lack of knowledge was to my advantage, I think, in the long run, because I could really show—and I didn't have to make a living off of this, really. So I had two good things going in my favor, and I could show just what appealed to me.

MS. LAURIA: And you mentioned having met this—or listened to a lecture.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh yeah, by Herschel Chipp. Yeah, definitely so. So—but that was—that was years after, you know, five, six, seven, eight years after I had the gallery. But then I could really have the—really had the guts to admit that I—not trained as an artist, I didn't go to college—I mean, I—the two years that I went to college was not spent on studying the arts. I had never taken a painting course or a ceramic course. I've never gotten my head—hands dirty with clay. I had never seen—frankly, I didn't see Peter Voulkos even work in clay until about 15 years after I was showing him because, you know, he would do these demonstrations all over the world, and I

only went to a demonstration when it turned out to be in Palo Alto, and I was living there, and I wasn't—so I went there.

But the deal is that it was all the craft—what people call craft now, which I call art, having to do with clay and with material, and even, in metal. You know, I can't figure out why metal is not considered a craft.

MS. LAURIA: But these divisions you find artificial.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Divisions, yeah. And why the wood is not considered a craft, you know. I mean, Jeremy Anderson—and then the one they made the biggest fuss about was clay. They accepted Jeremy Anderson into the, quote, unquote, fine arts world, but they rejected Voulkos.

MS. LAURIA: And so, to you, this did not make any sense.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Didn't make any sense to me. Did I—and so I became known, when I first got into the art world, you know, back east in—was—it was as a crossover gallery.

MS. LAURIA: Because you were willing to show these artists that worked in craft-based materials—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's right, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —along with artists who worked in the fine arts discipline, right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Quote, unquote, yeah, yeah. And so they don't—I've had that reputation ever since, and I don't find it bad. I don't find it deteriorating at all—detrimental at all. I just think that's an interesting way of looking at it, so I am a crossover gallery. But many other galleries have gone—and I find, frankly, that the whole art world are a bunch of sheep. They follow—they get a hold of one or two people that they get interested in, and then everybody else gets on the bandwagon. And this is really what has happened, you know, as far as clay is concerned. It's still not much different now, and this is 40, 45 years later.

MS. LAURIA: Do you feel that you were one of the few proselytizers or advocates of clay that brought that aesthetic from the West Coast to the East Coast?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Definitely so. I mean, I—in 1975, I opened up with three other dealers outside of New York a New York gallery at 139 Spring Street. And there was Phyllis Kind, Carl Solway from—Phyllis Kind was from—was from Chicago. Solway was from Cincinnati. Ed Thorp, who's from Santa Barbara, and me from San Francisco. And I brought clay to New York, and these guys had never seen it before.

MS. LAURIA: And—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And I brought—I started—I opened up my first show with Peter Voulkos and Sam Tchakalian, who's a painter.

MS. LAURIA: What—who was the other?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Sam Tchakalian.

MS. LAURIA: And this was what year?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Nineteen seventy-five.

MS. LAURIA: Okay, so—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Voulkos had not had a show in New York since 1961.

MS. LAURIA: And you said that in—he finally did get a show at the Museum of Modern Art that was curated by Peter Selz.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, in '63, you know—and—or '62, somewhere in like that. But you know where it was? No one knows about it. It was up in the—it was in the cafeteria.

MS. LAURIA: Oh my goodness.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know, and they sold—the whole show sold out.

MS. LAURIA: Did they normally or regularly have shows in the cafeteria?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Peter Selz was a curator at that time, and he arranged it.

MS. LAURIA: Okay, so the community in New York, when you introduced not only Voulkos, but—did you have other clay artists at the time?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I didn't. I opened up with the Voulkos show. I sold one piece of Voulkos, and I sold it to another art dealer. Grace Borgenicht bought it—$750.

MS. LAURIA: Was she a dealer from New York? Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Very well-respected dealer. She's dead now, but a very, very well-respected dealer in the '60s and '70s and '80s. But the deal is that they—people were curious. Everybody came to see the Voulkos show because, you know, I couldn't keep this stuff in San Francisco there. People would come up from around to buy from me, but in New York, people themselves—they, first of all, they didn't know who I was. You know, who's this little snot coming from San Francisco to putting—opening up a show in SoHo.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: At that time, the only dealers in SoHo were—was OK Harris, and [Louis] Meisel was there, and Nancy Hoffman were the—and then right after that, after we got there—maybe about a year after we got there—what—[Holly] Solomon opened up there. You know, then it started to grow. And then somebody started developing 420, you know—Charlie—Charlie Cole started developing that, and that grew pretty—

MS. LAURIA: Oh, 420 Broadway?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, West Broadway, you know. But when we opened up there, there were not more than four or five galleries in SoHo.

MS. LAURIA: Now, why did you venture to New York? It seems like a huge risk.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Because we were an art dealers' coop.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So we had the rent on this place—this—a guy from Germany had bought this floor, and he was going to put a gallery in there, and he couldn't get it to work. So he decided he would rent it out, and he eventually sold the building, you know—[inaudible]—like that, and sold off his floor. And so there—I don't even remember what the rent was.

But the deal was we got—the four of us got together and worked this thing out. We had 10 shows a year, and each one of us would do 10 shows—there were 10 shows going on during the year, and four times 10 is 40, and we'd each have—we could each do four shows a year—five shows a year and keep a body of work there. There was a place for us to sleep. We had—we had a little apartment inside of the building. There were two galleries on one floor. And so the—we gave one gallery to the—in lieu of paying for a director, who was Ed Thorp, and he got—he got a place to stay. There was an apartment there, and there was an apartment where we could stay or our artists could stay, you know, in the space there.

So it had that together. The rent was not maybe two, three—it didn't cost us maybe two or three hundred dollars each, okay? And then we had to pay for—and so we—I would go out there for the show. It was a month long, and I would stay for two weeks. I had a place to stay. I had no rent. I'd bring the artists out there. I had—I had a place for the artists to stay. So, you know, I—and I had my own little digs there, and a chance to get to know the community.

MS. LAURIA: And do you think that this more or less propelled your reputation internationally, being that New York was so close to Europe and—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well—and yeah, and people had heard about this gallery. This gallery was already around for 14 years, and I did a lot of advertising, and I got to be—I got to go on that circuit from the art magazines where they set up at museums and at universities and—I did a gig at—that Judy Schwartz and Rose Slivka put together, you know, back in—it was after '75 because it was—it was about—in the '80s.

And I did a gig that Milton Esterow did, for *Art*—for the magazine business. And so I got—you know, people got to know me, and people were very curious because they had heard about these artists in—you know, they read the magazines. These guys had to sell their magazines in California as well as New York. So they had writers out there who came out there, you know, and interviewed the artists and looked at the shows. So they were very curious about me, but they didn't know me personally. And I've always attributed—the fact is that New York is a very insecure place. They're not near as adventurous as they are in California. They exist—that's why they never came west.

So he came west, and he's learning a lot about the—this is a new—it is like another frontier. I don't think it's changed that much in the 50 years I've been here.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, so you're referring to Luis—what's your—

LUIS CANCEL: Cancel.

MS. LAURIA: Cancel, okay—who is here observing or listening to the interview. So what was the coop gallery called?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: 139 Spring Street.

MS. LAURIA: Okay, so you all decided on that name, and you each took over a certain amount of shows.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: We did four shows or five shows a year, and we were responsible for our own mailings, our own announcements. And we had—and we hired a director, and that was—and he—and the director had a secretary there, and the secretary took care of all our stuff for the four of us, and the director was there to do the sales and stuff et cetera, and that was Ed Thorp.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And then after the fourth year, Carl Solway just couldn't afford to keep it going anymore, so we started looking for someone else who would fill in his place. And we couldn't find anyone that we all agreed on, you know, because it had to still pursue the—and meanwhile, Phyllis had bought that floor, okay. [Laughs.] Yeah, she had bought that floor, and so she wasn't going to kick us out, but she made it uncomfortable to stay there. And the rent was so cheap, frankly, is that—I mean, I was saying, I'll stay with you, do you know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But frankly—but what happened was that the girl who worked for us, because Phyllis was there so much, was being completely influenced by Phyllis and her staff and her stable, you know. And I heard that people would go to New York to visit the gallery and galleries and they would come into 139 Spring Street, and they wouldn't see a piece up of our work.

MS. LAURIA: It would all be from Phyllis's stable.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. [Laughs.] So, I met with her, and I says, "You know, Phyllis, I want to keep you as a friend, but I think I'm going to bow out of this too." And she was delighted because, you know—because Ed was still there, but Carl—we couldn't find the fourth person. And then—and Ed had found someone to back him up to his own gallery.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, so Ed Thorp, who was the director at the time, then became a dealer in his own right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. So I just left Phyllis, you know, and took the stuff out and came back. And that was about the—it was the early '80s.

MS. LAURIA: And was it—do you recall—was Nancy Hoffman Gallery at the time—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Was still there, oh yeah, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Was she showing Viola Frey?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No.

MS. LAURIA: No, okay. Did you introduce Viola Frey to the East Coast?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, we had a show of Viola Frey's. I brought—I brought Viola. I brought Ron Nagle, Richard Shaw, Vanderbrook—Vanderberg—Vanden—

MS. LAURIA: Peter Vanderberge?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. Well, you see, Rena and I were in business together on the Quay Ceramics Gallery.

MS. LAURIA: Right, now, see, we missed that part.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: We missed that part, yeah, yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: So we have to back and catch that, but Rena—you're talking about Rena Branstein.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. Bransten.

MS. LAURIA: Bransten. Okay, so when did that happen?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That happened in 1975.

MS. LAURIA: And Rena was a collector.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Rena was one of my collectors, and I wanted to do the first ceramic sculpture gallery in the world. [Laughs.] And—but I couldn't—you know, I—and then there was this—and I had moved over—I had left—I had left 2 Jerome Alley, and this was in 1970—let's see, '65 and '74—65 and eight—'74, '73 I left there and moved to 560 Sutter Street. I left Jerome Alley and—because there—the gallery scene was limited where we were, but everybody was convincing me to go on Sutter because that's where everybody was, on Sutter. So I found this place in Sutter—you know, Sutter Street, and next door to me was an empty—another room that was empty. And I said, "Hey, I could start a ceramic gallery here."

So I decided to find—I needed a partner. I couldn't rent both galleries by myself. So I—some woman who—I was—who was interested in being my partner, but then she backed out of it. And one day, Rena, who I—was a collector of mine, walks in the gallery, and I says, "I want to pick your brain." And then I told her my story. I wanted to do the ceramic gallery, and she loved ceramics. And—

MS. LAURIA: And you had sold her ceramics before?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Before, oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And so I told her what I wanted to do, and she says to me in this little voice, she says, "Well, what about me?" I said, "What are you talking about," you know. She said, "Well, I would like something to do. I don't"—she got tired of—she was working, very active in the San Francisco art museum women's board. And she says, "You know, I'd like to do something that's a little more challenging than being a member of the women's board."

MS. LAURIA: Which was all volunteer.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: All volunteer, you know, and I would—and she sure found out this is volunteer too, honey—[they laugh]—and cost her lots more money. So she became my partner, and the girl who worked for me who made me pay her a salary—she says, "I want part of that too." And so—okay, so come on, the more the merrier. So we opened up this space at—in the—right next door to us, on 560 Sutter Street, called the Quay Ceramics Gallery. And we decided to keep the name Quay because that's the one that people knew about with clay.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But the way it was—it really kind of ironic because it was Branstein, Braunstein—Bransten, Braunstein, and Brown.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs]. The three Bs.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The three Bs. We were going to do that before too. [Laughs.] We decided we would change that. But so Sylvia Brown only lasted about a year and a half with us, and then she got a job at the San Francisco Art Institute doing PR for them. So she went to work for there, and Rena and I kept it. And then we decided—somebody came and robbed us a couple of times because we—the two rooms were next to each other, but they didn't have a door that connected them. So you know, one of us would leave—so we decided we would look for a place where we could have the two galleries in one big space.

So we found it at 250 Sutter, or 246 or whatever it was, a block down the street. And so we took that place and did that over, and we each had our own gallery there, but we had—office space was together.

MS. LAURIA: And wasn't that the building where Dorothy Weiss also had—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: She was next door to me.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And she moved next door to me so she could be close to me, so that she would have a place—and she just did—you know, what everybody else wanted me to do was just do a ceramic gallery. And she did that.

MS. LAURIA: So you were no longer known at that point as the Quay Ceramic Sculpture Gallery?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I was a Quay Gallery—when—no, we were still—we still did the Quay—for about one year, we still did the Quay Sculpture Gallery—the Quay Gallery, and then—and the Braunstein Quay Gallery. But then I think—I think, if I remember correctly, that—is that we—a lot of the artists that were showing with Rena—but then we—then we—that's when we put in, in that side there, we put in Ron Nagle, all these people who we—I couldn't show that were going on there, you know, we took them on at the gallery there.

MS. LAURIA: But—so you had twice as many artists.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I—yeah, but the artists were divided in two categories. One group belonged to the San—the Braunstein Gallery, not—just the Braunstein Gallery, period.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And the other one belonged to the Quay Gallery.

MS. LAURIA: All right. And do you have, like, archival papers from your gallery years that would show—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It's at the Archives of American Art.

MS. LAURIA: So there is a listing of who the people were at these times, divided into these two categories.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I'm quite sure, yeah—yeah, because they have all of my writings. And so the deal was, is that a lot of the artists at the Quay—at the ceramic gallery didn't like being called a ceramic gallery.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It had—and so that's when Rena—when—so they dropped the name "ceramic" and just had the Quay—we had the Braunstein Gallery and the Quay Ceramics Gallery. And so they dropped the name "ceramics" and became known as the Quay Gallery. And then the Braunstein Gallery. [Laughs.] And so when Rena left me—her daughter decided to come into the business.

MS. LAURIA: Is that Trish?

MS. BRAUNSTEN: Trish, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Okay, and what year are we talking about?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I'm talking about 1984—'83, '84. And so we decided—she decided it was time for us to break up. And so Rena—but Trish says—but we want to call it the—she wanted to drop the name "Quay." And so—and so she only wanted to call it Bransten Gallery. Fine, so I took the Quay name back. It became the Braunstein Quay Gallery, since 1961, because she had put a—she put a date on hers, but I noticed she dropped the date, you know, when she—they started in '87, something like that. So then that's when they moved over to—but about '86, '87, they moved over to 77 Geary.

MS. LAURIA: And you stayed on Sutter?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Sutter Street until I moved—until 1999. I stayed another 10 years after they left, you know. And then when they tripled my rent—you know, that was the beginning of the downfall of the world—[they laugh]—of the art world, anyway. And—

MS. LAURIA: And what artists would you say, during this time period of—let's just talk about the first maybe 10 years of being in San Francisco. What artists' do you think—careers that you really developed during that period?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I could say—I would say—I can't take credit for Voulkos was around since 1952, '53, you know what I mean, way before I came around.

MS. LAURIA: But he wasn't showing in a crossover gallery here in San Francisco.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: He was showing—he did that—he did—he showed with Hansen-Fuller [Gallery], or just—it was called Arts Limited—Unlimited, in 1961, '62, but not in the '50s, no.

MS. LAURIA: And he was showing in—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: In the '50s he showed in Los Angeles. See, there was a big snobbery going between Los Angeles and San Francisco. San Francisco wasn't considered an important art community. You could work here,

and he got this good job at—we're talking about Voulkos—he got this good job at the University of California that allowed him to do anything he wanted to do. I mean, when he left, he left Millard—he left the Otis Art Institute [Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA] because Millard Sheets was putting—giving him rules of how he wanted to run that space. And no one gave Voulkos rules. He made the rules, as far as he was concerned.

And so—you know, so when he took this job here, even him coming to San Francisco—nobody in San Francisco at that time in the '50s that I know of wanted to show him, or show anybody—there was very—there were—the galleries—Jim Newman was around in the '50s. He had a gallery called the Dilexi Gallery. But he didn't like Voulkos's work. It was—it was too Abstract Expressionism for him. He was after more hard-edged people than—like he showed John McCracken from LA, you know, I mean—and he showed Joe Goode from LA. And that—he started his gallery down in Los Angeles and then moved it to San Francisco in the '50s.

MS. LAURIA: So you really were the first gallerist to give Voulkos a—no?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, no, Hansen-Fuller did at first, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: In the early '60s.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: In the early, early '60s. See, I didn't even—I didn't even know Hansen-Fuller was around when I started my gallery in '61. I mean, I learned about her later and met her then, you know. But I didn't know—I did—I wasn't playing the gallery scene at all when I came to California in 1961.

MS. LAURIA: So how did Voulkos become one of your leading artists?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, we were at a party—[laughs]—given for Harold Paris, who was having a show at Hansen-Fuller.

MS. LAURIA: And Peter Selz is a big supporter—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Of him, yeah, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Of Harold Paris.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Paris, yeah, yeah. And so the deal goes is that we're at this party that I was invited to, and this was, like, in the '60s. And it was—this was about '65, this was. So I mean, I'd already had—you know, I was in Tiburon—I was out of Tiburon, and I was on Jerome Alley, and I was showing Win, and I was showing Melchert, I think. And a guy named Tony—no, not Tony Costanzo, not—I didn't have—Vandenberge, maybe. But I had three or four galleries, but I was also cognizant of the fact that I couldn't take on a lot of ceramicists. I didn't want to over that line, you know what I mean? Because I still to this day think the most important work in California is the ceramics, above all the artists that are here and all the art forms, it beats them all.

But the deal is—so that—

MS. LAURIA: Because the collector base probably wasn't—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It was in Los Angeles and not up here.

MS. LAURIA: Right. Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: There was no—some people buying, but not here. And the deal is, is that—what was the question? I forgot it already. What am I talking about?

MS. LAURIA: How did you meet and take—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Voulkos, oh yeah. So I'm at this party, and it was 1965, '66. And I had heard he was not happy with Hansen-Fuller. And it was also the time when he had gotten out of working in clay. He taught clay, but he was beginning to do big commissions for GSA, you know, and he was doing them out of bronze and out of metal. And he got very involved with Arnaldo Pomodoro, who came to work at Stanford. And he was looking for bigger things than clay, so—

MS. LAURIA: And was Pomodoro a—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: A sculptor from—

MS. LAURIA: Right, bronze?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: He worked mostly in bronze. And there was also a guy named Tio Giambruni, and also Harold

Paris. Harold Paris came from New York and saw all the space here and convinced—and he was teaching at the Berkeley—you know, at Berkeley there. And Peter was head of the department there, and he could do anything he wanted to do. So Harold Paris convinces him to start a foundry.

MS. LAURIA: Convinces Peter Voulkos?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, to start—"Let's go looking at a foundry. We'll just get a whole new group of artists here," and no one was doing it. And Peter had this big—had a big studio on Shaddock Avenue somewhere, and there was a guy named Tio Giambruni who died very young. And he was—he was doing a foundry. He had a foundry someplace in Santa Cruz, so he wanted to bring it closer here. So he brought his whole stuff over to Peter's place there, and that's how his foundry got started, through Harold Paris.

And meanwhile, he's talking to me, and he's not happy with the girls, and he says, "I want somebody who can give me a stipend," because a—that word, stipend, had come into the artists' world vocabulary, you know, because these guys wanted to do their work, and they—nobody was buying anything. So he says, "Would you give me a stipend?" And so my little head says, "Sure, I'll give you a stipend. How much do you want?" And he says, "I want $500 a month."

MS. LAURIA: In exchange for work?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: "You'll have—I'll give you a show within a year," I says. "Fine." So I went to one of my collectors and also one of my artists who was very rich and a very big, big collector and didn't own a Peter Voulkos, you know, and said, "How about giving me $500 a month to give to Peter, and you'll have first choice when the work is—we're scheduling a show for 1967, I think, or '66, '67."

Okay, so he did that for a year. No Voulkos show came.

MS. LAURIA: [Gasps.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, he was doing these big commissions, you know. In fact, he was working on the—your piece, the Hall of Justice thing, because he knew—and he knew that Pomodoro was going to be—was one of the judges. So he—as far as he was concerned, he had that piece tied up, and sold already. [Laughs.] And '60s—my—so '67, my two wonderful—what do you call these guys who give you money?

MS. LAURIA: Backers?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: My backers said, "Well, when is Peter's show coming?" you know. [Laughs.] When the end of '67 came—or he did—hooked in a whole year, I says to Peter, thinking that wouldn't move him. And he says, "I can't get any more money out of them. This—you know, the arrangement I made was they would have first choice at the show. And a year is up."

Well—so he—we worked—that's how we worked together. So the word got around that I was going to be showing Peter Voulkos, and of course everybody, you know, owed a nod because he was leaving Hansen-Fuller, who was the only gallery left in—around at that time. And in 1968, he finally—he started working in clay again. Then he comes down and see the space, and he says, "I can't bring my sculptures in here." So I says, "I don't want your sculptures. I don't want your metal sculptures. I promised these guys clay," you know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I says, "I want clay." He says, "Oh, you do?" I says, "Yeah." So I says, "I want clay," because he was complaining that his big sculptures could not go down in my little door. I had a regular door like this. [They laugh.] Maybe a little bit bigger, I don't know, you know.

So he says, "All right, you know, and make"—and he's—"okay, I've got some new stuff that I've been doing." And he brought me all these black sculpt—but he says, "We'll have a closing. We'll not have an opening," because he didn't have enough work, as far as he thought, to open a gallery show, you know.

MS. LAURIA: All right. And was he living in that building?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: He was at 1306 3rd Street.

MS. LAURIA: In Oakland?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah, in Oakland. But meanwhile, he got all involved in this dumb—in the bronzes. [Laughs.] And he had to move the—he was making these bronzes in his small little space there that he was living in and working in. It was crazy. And the city of Berkeley says you can't put—and the fires were outside near the railroad track [laughs], I mean—because when they finally found out what was going, the city came and

says, "You can't do that," you know. "You've got to do it inside."

Well, he couldn't do it inside, so he founded someplace else. He—and he wasn't that interested in clay, but Peter was a very honorable man, and he owed me a show because a lot of artists would have just said, "Fuck you, Ruthie," go on to someplace else, you know what I mean? You know, big deal. So—but he had—was brought up right.

MS. LAURIA: So he was still teaching at UC Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley].

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: So he had access to the studio there as well—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. LAURIA: —that he could do clay in?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: He could do clay in—you know, and he—so he made all these black sculptures, and—

MS. LAURIA: What series were they, Ruth? Was it from the ice bucket series, or—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It was—it was—it was the last gas-fired work he did.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It was a gas-fired show, and it was the last one. And then—then he, you know—and it wasn't—it was the beginning—he did a—it was the beginning of a whole new series of the ice buckets—yes, it was the beginning of the ice buckets and the big stacks. It was the beginning of those, yeah. I've got a couple of them at the gallery—or one at the gallery that's still there, if you want to come over and see it tomorrow, yeah.

But it was the beginning—at that time, you know. And so we did this show, and my—what's the word?

MS. LAURIA: The backers?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: My backers didn't like any of them.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, no! [They laugh.] They came and they said, "Well, this isn't art."

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But he—well, you know, they were getting greedy too. They—"I heard he's working in metal now. What's he doing in bronze," you know. I says, "What he's doing in bronze are big huge commissions. You wouldn't ever be able to make one." He—they never asked for the money back, and they never asked for a piece. They were big supporters of mine.

MS. LAURIA: So that's how you started your relationship with Peter Voulkos.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Because I was able to give him 500 bucks a month.

MS. LAURIA: And that was in 1968.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Which I got from somebody else because I didn't have it, yeah. [They laugh.]

MS. LAURIA: And you continued to represent him throughout his life, and now you represent the estate?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: In San Francisco. He's got a dealer in Los Angeles too, and one in Chicago, and he—he had Charlie Coles in New York, but Charlie closed his gallery.

MS. LAURIA: And do you feel that because of Voulkos, you were able also to bring in other people that you may not have taken a risk on? I mean, when did you start to show fiber artists, for instance? I mean, I know you have—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I showed—I showed Dominick Domari in Tiburon.

MS. LAURIA: That's true, and then—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know, and then—and then I showed—I didn't do—I did the fiber work—I stayed out of fiber—no, in 1970—well, 1978, I think, '77, '78, Dominick—I hadn't seen Dominick since I left Tiburon, which was, like, in '66 or '65. He didn't—he was teaching school. But he didn't come much into the art—he never has

been a big participant in the local art scene. He's always been very, very private.

And so he walks in the gallery one day, about '77, '78, something like that. And—you know, I hadn't seen him for at least 10 years, when we had this big greeting—so I says, "Well, are you still working?" He says, "Yeah." I says, "Well, are you interested in looking at—you know, at the—would you be—can I come and see what you have?" He says, "Sure, you can come over, yeah."

So I came over there, and he had just begun to working on—I've got some of the work here—on that—he has one tree, a hawthorn tree that he would get all his limbs from, and things like that, and he would make with it. And so he just approached me and said, you know—we both agreed it's time to show again. And I—you know, my theory was, I was showing clay, why can't I show fiber, you know?

MS. LAURIA: Right, because you were a crossover gallery.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, I'm a crossover gallery. Call me names. [They laugh.]

MS. LAURIA: And you showed Gyöngy—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, Gyöngy Laky just the last couple years ago, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: But I mean, that's actually pretty courageous because a lot of galleries will not go out of—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They were, but there I got involved with a woman named Myra Block, have you ever heard about her?

MS. LAURIA: Myra—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Myra Block. She does a thing on TV called FiberScene. When you go on your TV, look for it. And she is pretty far—she's a woman interested in fiber. So in 1981, I think, or '82 or '83—it was at the other gallery—I did a show. I did a show of fiber art that she curated for me, and I gave her my space in the month of August, when I would go—we—so it had to be '82, because we had just built a house in Santa Fe, and I wanted to go away, and I didn't want to be—she was going to be there.

So I gave her the use of the gallery, which we've done—I did that every other year for about four—until—and then one year, I did a show with Marna, who did art to wear—not art to wear, Art for the Walls—and she found people who made jewelry and things that go on the wall, but then were usable.

MS. LAURIA: As artwear, or—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] So they would show them as sculptures when they weren't wearing them and then take them off and—sort of the beginning of, like, what Bruce Metcalf does now with his jewelry. He puts them on sculpture stands so you have a presentation.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, these were—these were just—just went on—and she found all these people. My—that's with my daughter. And she found all these people and did this really very interesting show. I forget who she had in it, but a lot of good—she really researched that, and she used—she had fiber, and she had glass, and she had metal—a guy named David Ruth, you know. He's a glass guy.

And what else have I done. I've done a show of—she was dating a guy who did—what did—how would you call him. He worked at—he worked with—a blacksmith artist.

MS. LAURIA: Okay, he's a blacksmith.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, he was—he did a show of blacksmith art, you know.

MS. LAURIA: Well, you have the legacy up here too of Roland Reiss, who was the—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: This guy's name was Bondi.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, Walter Reese. I'm sorry.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah—well, this guy's name was Bondi, who was very well respected here in town, who was a blacksmith and did very wonderful things with jewelry—of jewelry and other forms of metal, who came down with a very serious illness and died before he was about—not even 50, about 40 years old.

MS. LAURIA: Oh. So your daughter is involved in the art dealer business?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, not at all. She won't go near it. [They laugh.]

MS. LAURIA: But she did this—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: None of my kids will go near my gallery. Oh, they come to it, but they won't do anything for it. They're not into—

MS. LAURIA: But she curated this one.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, she curated this one show for me. And she does a show now called "Art to Wear." It's jewelry and—you know, and one-of-a-kind things.

MS. LAURIA: At your gallery?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No.

MS. LAURIA: No, okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: She does it at—she did it at 44—at 49 Geary, and at 77 Geary. She had the two places, and it was about 17 different makers of art. And she's done it for about four years now.

[END TRACK 4.]

MS. LAURIA: We are going to start on disc number three interview for the Archives of American Art with Ruth Braunstein, on Monday, August 10, at her home in San Francisco; interviewer Jo Lauria.

Ruth, I know we left off on talking about whose career do you think you developed during the time that you've been in business. And also, I know one of the questions that applies from the questionnaire they give us is: What are the most powerful influences, do you feel, in your career? And what artist or fellow dealers or teachers, would you say, have been the biggest influence on you during your years as a gallerist?

MS..BRAUNSTEIN: Well, where should I start?

MS. LAURIA: Well, you can talk about your first mentor, who was Gertrude Lippincott, you mentioned—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And Verna Aré, who taught me the business. You've got to give her credit for that.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. Can you spell Aré?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: A-R-E.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: With a little accent on the E.

MS. LAURIA: And who else do you think—well, who do you find inspired you? I mean, if you had to look towards a dealer before you even were in—well, not before you were in the business because you really didn't know much about art dealers as you said, but thinking about it now in retrospect. Who do you think was somebody that you would have liked to emulate?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Who's not in the business already, you mean?

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Or whatever.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Or who is in the business?

MS. LAURIA: Well, someone that you admire for what they've done as a dealer.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I admire all these artist dealers who had the guts to go into the business, because it's a strange business. And it's demanding. It's a cross between being a mother, being a sister, a cousin—you know, like becoming part of a family. And—I've discovered—frankly, it's hard to say who in particular could I mention. I think a lot of it has to do with the people who were part of the Art Dealers Association, and still are, where we were able to, at the beginning especially, put together a group of people who all had the same—had the same—not designation, that's the wrong name—the same—

MS. LAURIA: Objectives?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Objectives and goals. So—

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And it mentions that you were the founding member of—one of the founding members.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, I was an early member of the group, yeah, because I'd been around the gallery business the longest. A lot of the people who were in that original group of art dealers aren't even around in business anymore. Some of them have become private dealers, some are dead, some have moved away. From the original group of, it must have been six or eight, others have—I mean, Wanda Hansen was the first president of the Art Dealers Association, and she's—you know, she retired. She's a private dealer now. So they're not allowed in our group, quote ungroup—quote, unquote.

But I think that, you know, that the whole organization was probably more influential than I thought it was to me because there were so many different areas you could—if you needed some help from, you could go out to like—[inaudible]—one person was responsible for, you know, for any problems you might have or could answer all the questions that you have in the gallery world. Does that make sense?

MS. LAURIA: Well, an art dealers' association, what would be the bylaws? What are the guidelines? I mean, if—do you have to be invited to join?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Definitely so, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You have to be in business a certain length of time, a minimum of three years. You have to produce seven to eight—seven shows a year, one-person shows. What else is there? You have to be honest, and trustworthy, and so forth, et cetera.

MS. LAURIA: And you have to be open to the public?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And open to the public, you know, a minimum—I don't think it ever mentions how many hours, but it's open to the public. No private dealers. No art consultants. Strictly members of the art—of the—

MS. LAURIA: Commercial art.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —commercial art dealers.

MS. LAURIA: And this was a new concept when you all got together to start it.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, it was sort of—they had started one in New York. The ADA, I think, is older than that. I think our organization was started in '72, I think. It started really in '68, '69, and our first project was to do an art gallery guide. But then what happened was the Berkeley Art Museum venue—I mean, had just opened up about that time. And they were looking for something for their women's group to do. So they started their own little art gallery guide. And, you know, and we sort of backed away because they needed the—they had the manpower to organize it better than we did and fulfilled the same purpose. And it was fine.

Well, that didn't last. But then the Art Dealers Association sort of fell apart. And then it got back together again around 19—in the '70s, early '70s, you know. And it became even stronger in a way because there were more dealers at that time too. I mean, when we start talking to the Art Dealers Association in the '60s, late '60s—there was me, and Michael Walls [Wallace?], and Jim Newman—but he had very little to do with it, he wasn't that interested in that kind of stuff—and a guy name Jim Willis was in on it and a guy who showed photography.

It started about six or—Buzz Sawyer, Helen Heninger from Gump's, you know. So there was a limited number. Well, there weren't that many galleries around, frankly. And—

MS. LAURIA: Was it also an organization that gave financial support on any level, or no?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, we couldn't—we couldn't—first of all, we're a not-for-profit organization, we couldn't get ourselves a non-profit because we're—we had our own business. And we started the—we did a program called "Introductions," that you probably heard about, where we—where in the month of July we invited artists, it was a one-shot deal, artists who had never shown in San Francisco together, to join ranks and—every dealer picked up their own.

MS. LAURIA: Right. Well, they did that in Los Angeles, too.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, but we started—Los Angeles did it after we did it. I must say so myself.

MS. LAURIA: Well, that's—no, but I mean, I'm familiar with it from that point of view.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And we started that in the '70s. And then we closed it down in 2002, and frankly they're starting trying to do something now that would replace it because it was the one thing that held the gallery together. And I think it was, you know, it was—with those artists that dealers—I mean, that were part of the organization, from the young ones to the older ones, you know, I still have—we still remain as a tight little group.

MS. LAURIA: And do you have monthly meetings or—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, we—there's a new board now, which I'm not on the board anymore, which it was time to let go, and the latest—one of the latest projects is this thing that I'm trying to work with for the San Francisco Arts Commission, it's called ArtCare. And the idea is that San Francisco is sitting with like 600 pieces of art that have no—nowhere is it written that there's any money set aside for repair or wear and tear. And the first piece that we're looking at is this Peter Voulkos piece that was done in the '60s and has not been touched. And it's a 10- or 12-foot sculpture, and—

MS. LAURIA: And it belongs to the city of San Francisco?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Belongs to San Francisco, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And so now you're raising awareness and raising funds to have a restoration monies.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, set up there. Now, the new art commissions that are given out now, they have money set aside for that.

MS. LAURIA: I see.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know, that was part—instead of raising 10,000 [dollars] they raise 15,000 [dollars]. They put $5,000 away for repairs sometime and that can grow, you know. And so this ArtCare project is something that the art dealers are—have looked upon as very important. They are going into cahoots with the Arts Commission, and that way people can give money to the Arts Commission and they get tax deductions. Up to now you couldn't do—you can't do that with the Art Dealers Association.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Because we're not a non-profit organization.

MS. LAURIA: So it's a partnership.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, that's a good way of putting it. Yeah, and that interests me much more than some of the other things that they're trying to do about—they want to have a symposium on giving art away, and what do you do with your art collection after you die, so on, et cetera, you know, and—

MS. LAURIA: So there's an educational component.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They're trying to work on that to get that going. And to do something that can become much more a part of the local community because the one thing that when we did the art—the "Introductions," was that—

MS. LAURIA: [Side conversation.] Thank you.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —we, the community knew we were there, and we tied it in with, like, with the San Francisco Museum one year, and one year with the CCAC [California College of Arts and Crafts, San Francisco], where we had a big party. Like, instead of everybody having their own opening, we had a big party after at—charged everybody to come, you know, 20 bucks. And then we gave that money away to museums—San Francisco Museum benefited from it, Oakland did once, over a period of time the CCAC—

MS. LAURIA: So it was a way to raise funds—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Funds, and also get our name out in the public that there was this—such a group consisting in this town. Otherwise nobody would know about it. You know, art is one of the best-kept secrets in the world.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] You also belong to ArtTable.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And I know ArtTable started out in New York, and they have local chapters. But were you one of the founding members of ArtTable in San Francisco and your chapter?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I'm a local—yeah, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And how do you see your role as—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I'm still working with them now; in fact I'm on the membership committee. And you know, they've tied things up pretty much—everything happening in New York. And that's how they find it more efficient to work. And what we do here is just, you know, it's more like socializing and networking in the community.

And right now, as membership chairman, we're trying to divide the group up. You know, it's over 200 members now. And we've been sort of breaking it down into sections where—like we have 25 members in Los—in the south—peninsula area, which is down south—San Jose and there. And we're trying to get a little group there that will meet a couple times—two or three times a year.

MS. LAURIA: In their area.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: In their area, instead of having them to schlep up here all the time. So you know, we're doing that about the membership business. It's, it's going. You know, it's—for people—I don't think dealers get so much out of it as people who are consultants will get, or people even in your line of work would get. And we don't—

MS. LAURIA: I'm a member of ArtTable.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, that's right. So we have a lot of people. You know, and, I mean, how often do you go to meetings?

MS. LAURIA: Well, I go to events.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Events? Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Because I—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's what I mean, events. We don't do meetings, we do events.

MS. LAURIA: Right. I go to an event whenever it interests me.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah, well.

MS. LAURIA: And usually it's curator-led exhibition tour or—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, we just did one the curator led, the—we had one at the "Cad and the Cave" [ph] show, which was fun to do. And then we just had a new members party over recently at the Paule's Gallery and—with a walkthrough by the artist who was showing at that time.

MS. LAURIA: Well, I think it's just another arena to network, to get to know more people, to bring more people into your circle because obviously, if you look at it as a nucleus—it's a very small—the art world is a very small nucleus.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Very small nucleus. And yeah, and it's getting smaller.

MS. LAURIA: Well, that's one of the questions, is how do you see the—I know this is a huge question for you, since you've been in business for so many years and you're coming up on your, in two more years, your fiftieth year as a dealer—how do you—how would you describe the changes that you've observed in the last 48 years as being a dealer? In the art public, in the artists, you know, in the way in which art is perceived?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I think that there—I think the base for—the selling base, or the collectors base has widened. And I think that—I always say that, let them graduate 150 students from the Art Institute and from everyplace else. Maybe 10 percent will turn into—really follow through on their art, as you mentioned. But the rest of them at least have had some history of art. And you hope that they will at least maybe buy a piece of art for their house, instead of having to think "wait."

You know, when I think I first started the gallery, the collection base was very narrow. And it was all the same people that you dealt with. So one of the things is that you have to learn to do in the interim of this gallery world is to contact—it's a very social business. And unless you don't like people—if you like people, it's a wonderful way to get out there and get networked. And this is why things like ArtTable, an art dealer hasn't got much a chance to network with these people because they're not into buying art. [Laughs.] We're into selling it. And the majority of them are looking for, you know, for jobs, for things to do with it. So one job that you have

to face is being seen, quote, unquote, in the art world so that you don't think that—people think that your dead, especially when you're around so long.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And then also—

MS. LAURIA: Keep a high profile.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's a good way of putting it, yeah. And also going to—being seen, and keep your finger in every part of the art world that's going—scene that's going around.

MS. LAURIA: Well, you mentioned, when we were having our lunch, about this exhibition that you have curated, you organized, called "Collaborations," on Richard Shaw and Robert Hudson's work. And that you not only supported the catalog, but that you also secured all the venues. Now, do you view that as being part of a dealer's job?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It is and it isn't. You know, it's—if you have a big organization and you're going to have a department set off for moving art around like that, I think it is a dealer's—it is a dealer's responsibility. It's definitely a dealer's responsibility of letting these art curators going on—you know, at one time the only art—curating that an artist—that someone did for—was mostly for museum curating. And now it's become another kind of a business. I mean, I think I'm speaking right. I don't know—because I don't know that much about it. I'm just sort of getting into it.

And it's the responsibility of an art dealer to let curators know what's going on in their gallery. And to do what I did with the "Collaborations" show is taking a chance. You know, it's a 50/50 chance of you're going to make it or not break it—make it.

But it's very nice for the artist, but I think I'm waiting now to see, frankly, how many other artists will say, well, why don't you do a thing like this for me? You know what I mean? Now, I haven't had any repercussions from that yet. But I'm waiting for that moment to come and, like I—

MS. LAURIA: Was this the first show that you ever did the catalog for fully and also secured the venues?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: It was? Okay. But you have done other—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yes, I did the work with Signe Mayfield on the Bob Brady thing, piece. But she—the catalog was done already, and all it was—and she had a couple of leads on the venues, but she didn't want to take the time that it costs me to do to circulate the information around and set it up. Now, that went much easier, but the times were different too. So I think that was lucky.

I've done a show that traveled, but it was mostly of—it was mostly, I just sort of remembered this, I did a show back in the '80s. And you know, I went to Huntsville, Alabama. I went to about four different venues. And they—it was all California artists. And—

MS. LAURIA: All artists that you represented?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, no.

MS. LAURIA: No?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I spread out further.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I just—you know, it was a certain period of time, and I included some of my artists in there too. And I got—I forgot all about that—I had three or four or five venues. You know, which was—it was self-supporting. I mean, I don't expect—I've never expected to make a living off of this gallery.

MS. LAURIA: And have you?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, I haven't. I still haven't made a living out of it. But I've had a good time doing it. And

I've also got a really special art collection that's important to me, and just leaves me with very good, good—I just loved showing you around today. You know, just good vibes. And my kids will have a—it'll be their responsibility to sell this or do something with it. And they'll get to reap the rewards for putting up with their mom through all these years. When they had to lick stamps, and—[they laugh]—you know, lick envelopes, when we first started the business.

MS. LAURIA: Why do you—what would you cite as the business model that doesn't allow, a lot of art dealers may agree with you that it's—that you're operating at a loss. Is it because you can't sell the art for the amount of money that it takes to sustain the operation of the gallery? Or that you just can't sell enough of it? I mean, why—I mean, other business models work for—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, a lot of it has to do with your whole, you know, you whole—it has to do with your whole attitude toward the business. What are you trying to do in the gallery, to make money? If I made any money, I would never have done what I've done with this gallery. I mean I would have—first of all, I don't think I would have ever gotten the gallery because I was learning like the young artists I was showing were learning.

You know? And it's the same way—lots of—there's a lot of new galleries in town now. And usually the new galleries are showing younger people who aren't demanding. But they also are getting much more money for their art now than they used to.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know, I mean, when I had Peter Voulkos's show in 1968, the top price was $1,200 for a big stack. I mean, the plate went for 300 bucks. And I sold the whole show out, you know. But I think the whole show maybe grossed something like, maybe if it was $10,000 that was a lot of money.

MS. LAURIA: And what would a Peter Voulkos stack go for now?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I just sold one for 35,000 [dollars] from that show. The people paid $1,200 for it.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. That's right. That was for Verna.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Huh?

MS. LAURIA: That was for Verna.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, that wasn't with Verna, that was with Jean Laurey.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, that's right, Jean Laurey.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Because I know you mentioned earlier that you sold a piece. So it is true that art—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But her—she paid $300 for that plate that I sold for $13,000. You know, huh?

MS. LAURIA: Okay. So that's one difference is that, of course, it's more than adjusting for inflation. I mean—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, it has nothing to do with inflation; it has to do with the success of the artist.

MS. LAURIA: That's what I mean. It has absolutely nothing to do with the rise in the cost of living or anything; it has to do with the reputation and the validity of the artist. So people do buy art for investment. And do you have collectors amongst your group of people that really didn't have the same sort of passion you did for the artist, but were interested in art as a business?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I don't think I had many people like that.

MS. LAURIA: So mostly you saw people who were very passionate about—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Passionate about what they were buying, you know, and the thought of selling it was—it never entered their mind that it would be worth a lot more money. And I've always nurtured young people in the gallery. I've always had, you know, at least two or three new young people every year.

MS. LAURIA: That worked with you?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That I started to show them, yeah. Like every—you know, I didn't want—the "Introductions" went on from—at least 14 years. So—and of the—and there was no—there was no guarantee that these people were going to stay with you. But Bean Finneran was my "Introduction" to 1996.

MS. LAURIA: Bean Finneran was somebody that you gave a show to, and then—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: In 1996 and I kept her in my gallery. Of the work that you saw today—Kyle Reicher was one of those, in the other room, that little box, metal box.

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I showed him, I think, the year after Bean.

MS. LAURIA: So it was a way for you to identify new talent, but it was also a way for artists in the community to —

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Absolutely, they were very upset when the art dealers stopped doing "Introductions" because it made a lot of us go out and look at new work.

MS. LAURIA: Well, that's not such a bad thing.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, it's not. You know it wasn't. But the dealers themselves got tired of it, because we all had—we didn't have enough money to hire a director or something to run it, so we all had to do this in conjunction with running our galleries. We were all volunteers who did—put this thing together.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know, and so—and evidently a lot of the dealers didn't feel that it was worth it. You know, they maybe made a few sales, but everything was selling for so reasonably that there wasn't anything big to show for it.

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But you said that your objective when you started the gallery was not—the first objective, the primary objective, was not just to make money. It was—what was the objective?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Was to show good art. And you know—Hi. [Side conversation.]

Was to show good art, and keep myself going without having to borrow money from my husband all the time.

MS. LAURIA: So it was an income for you?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It wasn't an income, you know, to this day I don't take a salary home. But I—you know, I shouldn't say this over the—to be written in the—but there's many ways of—

MS. LAURIA: Supporting.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Supporting the gallery through your own—well—

MS. LAURIA: Your own means?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I mean, this is why the first 12 years when I started the gallery and everybody took it out in trade. I was that much ahead of myself, you know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I probably made the most money there than I ever did.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Because I didn't, you know, I didn't have to pay any expenses.

MS. LAURIA: Right. Well, do you—I know we keep skirting this issue, but how would you say that the market for American art has changed in your lifetime, within the U.S. either regionally and/or internationally?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh, I think there are more people going to museums than there have ever been before. And I think part of it is that the art dealers have accepted—I mean, have been friendly and nice to people. And they're not afraid to, you know, people—lots of people were afraid to go to galleries or were afraid to go to museums because they thought it was way above them.

And you know, and it's amazing how few people do that. But I think that the numbers of—even my kids, I don't know how much—how many museums they go to a year. And if I wasn't—didn't—they come to see the gallery shows because they come to see their mother, you know?

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But it's just—but I do think that there has—there has been a tremendous increase of gallery going. I mean, you go out on First Thursdays, when the art dealers start—which is a program the art dealers started back in '74, called First Thursdays, where we're open Thursday night. And I think they did this in—they did this is, and it's not a new idea, they did it in the '60s in Los Angeles.

MS. LAURIA: At La Cienega.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: La Cienega. I mean, I used to drive—fly up or drive up to Los—or down to Los Angeles for the first—and it was a Monday night. You know, and so you'd spend—you'd go down and Monday night they would have the opening every month. So what we did is just copied from Los Angeles.

MS. LAURIA: And would you also say that in general—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And look at the people that come out there. No matter if they're just out there looking for girls or boys. You know, they are still being exposed to art.

MS. LAURIA: And do you think that they're more educated about art today than they—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh, definitely so, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And do you—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I mean, they have to be, when you think of all the different elements that are made available to them. You know, the TV, the Internet, the—you sit at a bus stop and there's something about art going on there. I know there is here, anyway. That the Arts Commission has worked together with the city on that. That they have posters on there that are made just for the kiosks where you wait for a bus. So many of these things — there's all kinds of ways around, you know, that are available for people to look at art, without even knowing they're looking at it.

MS. LAURIA: And there's also—the Internet has been an enormous—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. The whole—the whole—that whole system of this machine called the email, you know, I don't even know what it's called—what to call it. But that's definitely been a help. And you know, it's—some people, a lot of people, have made a lot of money off of the Internet. I've sold very little art on the Internet.

MS. LAURIA: But you might have gotten your name out there. And people can click on your images and see your past—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Absolutely. Yeah. You never—you don't have any idea—I guess you do know how many times people have looked at them, and I'm overwhelmed when I see it's up in the thousands.

MS. LAURIA: Right, the numbers of people who have gone to your site.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, it—I haven't sold anything but at least they know who I am or what I'm showing.

MS. LAURIA: Or they're looking.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Or they're looking. Who knows?

MS. LAURIA: And I note that in this previous interview that was done by Richard that—I loved the comment that you made that the one intersection for—that you think between the dance world and the art world was that when you were dancing you were onstage; when you were a dealer, when you put on a show, you felt, you know, that you were onstage.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, you definitely are. We're always onstage, whatever we're doing. And it's a good—you know it's a good release on both ways.

MS. LAURIA: Well, but do you get great enjoyment out of installing exhibitions and choosing the work and—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And I like to talk to people, you know, who come in the gallery. And I've made myself accessible to schools—to public schools and high schools, and university—at all levels—to go out and talk to these people about that or having groups come in the gallery. There's a lot more of that going on now that's ever been done before.

MS. LAURIA: Really? That's positive.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I don't remember in the '60s, you know, groups of—lay groups too, not just people from school. But I mean, people—you know, a business has started where people are—

MS. LAURIA: Do art tours?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Do art tours, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And do you get great fulfillment or reward from doing, like let's say, the nuts and bolts of doing an exhibition. Anything from, you know, first finding the artist; discussing with the artist their objectives, their concept; deciding what kind of a show you want to do of their work; and then actually choosing the work and installing the work. I mean, is that process to you an exciting part, or do you give that over to somebody on your staff?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, we do it together as a team, frankly. It's—

MS. LAURIA: Well, tell me how your gallery works. Let's start there.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: All right, let's for instance, let's—we'll use this Bean—the show that I'm doing. Every artist is different. The work that we had before of Ursula Schneider, that just went down, she lives in New York and everything was done by—on the Internet. So we knew the pieces that were coming. So I didn't have to go out and choose it.

I had a right to reject them, but the show was—there was good work. And some was better than others. But there wasn't enough, like, to me to be able to choose out just—and I didn't have the guts to put in just three pieces or four pieces because her feelings would have been hurt too, and there was space. But she was, like, she sent a very beautiful show up.

The artist that I have now, that I'm dealing with, had been with me long enough to know what I want, and I've been with them long enough to know what they'll do for me. And they've learned that what they're doing is exposing themselves. I'm just there to sell it. Okay? You know, and so the deal is this—is that you send what you think is the best.

Now, at one time, I say going back 20, 25 years, I probably—my ego was much more involved than it is now. I probably felt I had to go look at every artist's work before I would show it in the gallery. I don't have to do that anymore. If they want me to come and see the show before it opens, before—you know, to help them choose it, fine. If they feel uncomfortable, I want to be there to help them.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know. And that's basically what, you know, what the whole thing is, it's building faith within each other and the stable of artists that I have.

MS. LAURIA: Well, do you work—do you work with the artist though if the artist is particularly interested in the way the pieces should be hung?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh there are—the majority of—practically everyone is there with me to hang the show. Some people can't be, you know, so we hang it and then send—the Internet is great, you can take that—in five minutes, they can see that show. And—oh, and why don't you put that over there. You know, we've done that with people from out of town who can't come to the opening.

MS. LAURIA: Right. So you're—it's more collaborative.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It's a collaborative situation. And even with the kids who work with me. I mean, I feel that part of my job is educating these people for future, you know, for future use to other people. And we work together as a team there too. We have a little space on the side where we do group shows. And you know, and that's my staff's responsibility.

MS. LAURIA: Right. So that's their project room, that they decide—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: What is going to go in there.

MS. LAURIA: Right. And how it's going to be displayed.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, and it's not a big space. You know, the big space we're in now is a pretty good size.

MS. LAURIA: And what size is that room?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I think it's about 1,500 square feet.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. And what—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The whole gallery is 3,500 square feet. But I don't know—I don't know how to measure that. You know, it's 30 feet long one way and it's all cut up.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But someone said it was close to 1,500 square feet.

MS. LAURIA: Is that the largest space you've been in?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. And with the rotating exhibitions, do you show an artist or a group show or whatever for six weeks, eight weeks, twelve weeks—how does it—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: We're doing five-week shows now. We used to do four-week shows. But it got to be—too much was going on. We were just getting through with one show and the next one came in. And it didn't give us enough time to really promote this—you know, and call people up, and so on, et cetera. And so we're doing five-week shows now.

MS. LAURIA: And do you close for part of the summer ever or—?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: We take a break—there will be about—almost a week between the show in August that's up now, and then the next show opens around the third of—it's opening—of September. It's about five or six days. But then—but then Shannon go, we all—we go—we keep the gallery open and—but we take vacations. Like, Shannon is going away the fifteenth of September for two weeks, you know. I usually would go away, which I haven't done the last couple years—well, last year I went away for 10 days to Minneapolis—but I would go to Santa Fe for three weeks in the month of August.

MS. LAURIA: Right, because August was always, in the art world, kind of the quiet—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Quiet time.

MS. LAURIA: —the quiet time.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And I noticed that, you know, in that little guide that we give about what's going on here now, a lot of the artists are taking off the whole month of August. They're not open to the public, a lot of them are just cleaning everything up and just—they need some downtime. And I know because I was—I had to get a hold of Cheryl Haines and there was somebody there. And she said, oh no, we're not open. We're just doing inventory and all these kind of jazz.

And so it's—it's a teamwork effort, as far as I'm concerned. That I'm there to sell the work, you're got to put your best foot forward and, you know, and keep it going. And it's the responsibility of the art dealer to try to get your artists shows in other parts of the world.

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what about art fairs?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I was very involved in art fairs when they first started, for the first 20 years, shall we say.

MS. LAURIA: And what kind of art fairs did you—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I did—at one time, the only art fair around was the Chicago Art Fair. And I did that from the very beginning until the Art—I did that for at least 12 years and then my husband came down with Alzheimer's. And I just didn't feel comfortable about going away, because I didn't want him to go into a home. I wanted him to be here with me.

And so I stopped doing art fairs around 1992. And then Tom Blackman, who was running that fair in Chicago, came by, and he said, "What's happened? Why are you out of the fair?" And I told him, I said, I told him about Toddie, my husband, you know, and I said I feel very apprehensive about booking something a year from here or six months from here because—I just can't afford to lose that money, you know.

MS. LAURIA: As the deposit you mean?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Deposit, yeah. And so he says, "Well, don't worry about that." He says, "You look—he says, there's always somebody in the wings. Like there is for Marnois [ph] here, you know, in the wings for this year." I said, "Okay." So in 1993, I sent in my application, and I got rejected.

MS. LAURIA: Oh no! So it is obviously vetted or some jury that—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They had a jury. They always had a jury. But nobody—but I was out of it for so long, I was out of it for five or six years, this new group of people didn't know who the hell I was, you know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] Sorry, I don't mean to laugh. I think it's kind of funny.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So then—no, no it is funny. You know, and so I said, "Screw it, I don't need this, to have my feelings hurt." You know?

MS. LAURIA: And art fairs are fairly expensive.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And they're very expensive. And they're very closed in within their own little grouping. And —

MS. LAURIA: But you would always participate in the contemporary art fairs.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. And you know, and we all started at the same time, and we—so I was on the art fair that they had in—I did an art fair in Los Angeles once. Then it kaput—it went kaput. Well, that wasn't bad. Oh, then it went kaput, I take it back. They—I did a fair in Los Angeles and that was—at the last minute that was a very good fair for me.

MS. LAURIA: Yes, the one in January.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, no. This was way back in—when the—when did the—LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] open up, what year was that?

MS. LAURIA: 1965.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, no, no, it wasn't LACMA then.

MS. LAURIA: You mean MoCA, Museum of Contemporary Art?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah—what year—when was that?

MS. LAURIA: That was in the '80s I think.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And I remember the—and they had a lot of people coming from all over the United States to see the new opening so they had a fair going. And I went to that, did really well. Everybody else did terrible. For some reason or other I did very well on that fair. And of course the next year it went kaput. [They laugh.] You know. So to make a long story short, for the last—I've done the fairs locally here, San Francisco, and I did a fair in Seattle once, and Chicago. But I never did a fair in New York.

MS. LAURIA: And I know that some dealers—I was speaking with Jane Sauer of Jane Sauer Gallery in Santa Fe and she—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I did that—I did that fair one year too, at the—I decided I was living in Santa Fe, I should let people know what I'm showing because I kept a very quiet profile in Santa Fe. I never—nobody knew I was in the gallery business except a few people, you know?

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So you did the art fair in Santa Fe?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The first one that they had in a hotel. Jackson ran it—Charlotte Jackson's group did it. And—[laughs]—I think I—I don't think I—no, I didn't—so I just did—well, it was in a hotel.

MS. LAURIA: And you would go from room to room then?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it was a—

MS. LAURIA: The participants?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And I did that for one year. And I just—I just—it didn't pay. I mean, I might have broke about even, I don't know.

MS. LAURIA: Well, I was going to say that Jane Sauer told me that she actually last year did the art fair in Beijing, like, China. Beijing. And I thought, that's really, you know, taking a huge risk—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Risk, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —because it's bringing artwork that you have to ship internationally, and you don't know, you know, what the clientele's going to be like. You know, who is participating. But she said an enormous amount of people were interested and came to the show.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: How much did she sell?

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] Well, she said they didn't sell anything, I don't think.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, that's my whole point.

MS. LAURIA: I mean, she might have sold one piece, this was on her website, but she said she thought the benefit of it for her—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The whole thing with the ArtTable, art fair is exposure you get. There's no getting away from it. You know, I got great exposure in Chicago, and I did a lot of business in Chicago after the fair, and to this day I still have a little nucleus of people—not anymore, so much, because that's, you know, 30 years ago and, you know, people are dead, and they're not buying art—but there was a little nucleus of people who I got to be very good friends with from Chicago.

MS. LAURIA: Right. And they got to know you from the art fairs, from coming through and speaking to you and asking you questions about your artists.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah, from the art fair, yeah. And then they came here and, and saw more work and we—there was just one couple, two guys, that I got very involved with. And they moved to New York. And every time I would go to New York I would see them, and I still see them. They live in Connecticut. One of them just died last week.

[END TRACK 5.]

MS. LAURIA: I think at this point, Ruth, I think it'd be important for us to sort of address some of the questions that we may not have touched upon or only touched upon in a cursory manner. So let's do this in rapid fire. Wouldn't that—we should have bullets going off somewhere.

When you started, how many people worked for you and how many people came into the gallery daily, and how would you associate that with now, 48 years later?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I started a gallery in Tiburon, which definitely was a place for—a weekend gathering place. This is why we were open on Sundays, Saturdays—well, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. And the weekends were very busy, mostly lookers. People who bought, came on the other days, because there were too many people around. People were very private about what they were buying, art, at that time. They still treated it as, you know, a sort of a sacred kind of a situation for them.

On Thursdays and Fridays, it was quiet, you know. And mostly locals came around, and that was about it. We were open from 12 to—first I think it was 12 to six. Then during that—Thursday and Friday—Thursday we closed—and then eventually we closed at around 4:30, five o'clock. Friday night we kept open later because people were coming around, you know, because it was a weekend. And Saturday and Sunday—Sunday was definitely the biggest day. People who were—really wanted to look at art would come in on Saturday, though. From the local—the local people came on Saturday, and then Sundays were the tourists, in Tiburon.

Now, when we came to the city—should I go to the city next?

MS. LAURIA: Right. Well, how many, on an average basis per week, would you say, people came to the gallery?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I think in those four days, it was 50 to 75 people for a good week.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. And were you doing sales mostly from people that actually came in to see the work at the gallery? Or I guess at that point—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It's very hard to say.

MS. LAURIA: It wasn't from art fairs so much.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, no. There was no such thing as art fairs. And I was the only gallery in town, you know. And—

MS. LAURIA: Okay. So you kind of cornered the market there. [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: A little bit. [Laughs.] And the people who came, knew—some of them knew the artists, because I was bringing in—people in from Los Angeles, and there wasn't anybody in San Francisco doing that. You know, and that's when I brought in John Altoon to the gallery, in 1962. I brought him and Ken Noland and a guy named Hefterton, Phillip Hefterton, and Lloyd Hamrol. I showed those four people. And that brought in—you know, people were curious about them, so that brought—and then I started—the important people to get in was—as far as I was concerned—was not the tourists, it was the people from the museums, and the people from—you know, collectors I heard about from other people. Because you've got to realize, I had no connections in San Francisco at all. And the—and the—and I think what—probably one of—maybe one of the best tributes to the gallery itself was the fact that the talk was about me having this gallery in Tiburon. And it evidently was positive enough to make—I'll never forget when Mary Keesling, who was on the board—women's board—brought in George—I forget his last name—who was the director of the San Francisco Museum to the gallery. And I just was overwhelmed.

MS. LAURIA: Flabbergasted that he came.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Flabbergasted. Yeah, that he came all the way—but he had heard about this show, about this gallery, and he finally showed up. I had done a show of an artist from New York who had influenced local artists, you know. And I literally borrowed a—I found out somebody in town had a—had a Hans Hofmann, so I borrowed that. You know, it wasn't firsthand, but I put all these different artists up. And not only that but I had a lot of artists coming in with work who had not necessarily been showing their work, but they had some really great ideas about what to do. And I had a show of young artists from New York in my gallery at Tiburon [laughs].

MS. LAURIA: Well, that's probably the only way—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They will ever come to the West Coast—

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —was to do that. So you know, the greatest thing about the gallery business, I think, is the creativity that you're allowed to do, especially when it's your own place. You can't do that at a museum, you know.

MS. LAURIA: Because you control—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I'm controlling everything. And it's a lousy word to say, but it's facts.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You win a few and lose a few.

MS. LAURIA: Well, that kind of leads into my next question, which is what do you consider to be amongst your most successful shows and which ones the least successful? I mean in terms of—I guess it would be in your terms, as a dealer, it would be one of two things—either for the development of the artist or for the sales of the artwork.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I think my sale—there's a couple artists' works who I sell well in the gallery, and one is Richard Shaw, and one is Bob Brady. And you could probably—and Peter brings in the most. It's mostly the clay people I sell. So I guess when you think about it in retrospect, over the 40 or 50 years, it's filled with ceramics that—it's attention that I—I gather still there from, you know, it's the clay people.

MS. LAURIA: And what are—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And I do pretty well with the—with the—with being—[inaudible]. But artists go in spurts. And one time I did very well with an artist named David Ruddell. I still do well with him, but not as good as I used to. Now, I don't know if the prices are higher? Maybe that's what slows it down? Or else there is a limit to—or the one thing that he—you know, what he's doing. But—

MS. LAURIA: But what are some of the more memorable moments for you. Like what—I know you mentioned having a show of New York artists in Tiburon. That obviously was important.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, it was—you know, when I—definitely I hadn't thought about it in 40 years, frankly, but I can see that the input it would have—not the input but what the—

MS. LAURIA: Impact?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —impact it would have on the arts community, you know. And I think whatever I did—and Tiburon was a great learning place for me, learning ground for me, because I could try anything I wanted to do. And not having done anything before, or even know what the market is, who it is—and so forth, and et cetera—it—it attracted people to who I was, you know, and—

MS. LAURIA: Established your name.

MS. BRAUNSTEN: My name. And I came in there a complete outsider.

MS. LAURIA: And unknown.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And unknown completely. I mean, you know that—people start galleries nowadays, they'll have a following of some sort. They know who—they know people. I had been in the city less than a year when I started this gallery.

MS. LAURIA: Right. Well, and it was a different time, too.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It was a different time. And also, I didn't live in San Francisco. I didn't live in Tiburon. I lived in Palo Alto. You know, so I did do some business in Palo Alto, and some of my friends did come to buy art, and so I can't knock that. But on the whole, I came here as a complete stranger. And, you know, in this day and age, you probably could never do that.

MS. LAURIA: Right, because you need to attract a crowd to your door.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Right away, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

And what are you—what are some of the accomplishments, achievements, over the course of your last 48 years of which you are most proud? This could include artists that you feel like you've really developed, or exhibitions that you feel have made an enormous impact on the art world.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I think—I'm trying to figure out—

MS. LAURIA: Or professionalization. You've obviously have had something to do with professionalizing your—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I think—I think the one thing that makes me feel the best about what I've been doing is the fact that I've shown a lot of artists who have never really been part of my stable, quote, unquote, like Ed and Nancy Kienholz. I mean, I knew—I knew Ed and Nancy Kienholz back in the '60s when they were still—and he was still in Los Angeles. But at that time I was scared to bejeezus to even think of showing him, you know, who was—and I didn't pay much attention to it. And he had told me after, he says, "If you had asked I would have done it. Didn't I—didn't I do it when you asked?" And I said, "You're right. [Laughs.] You did do it," you know. And so it took up until the '80s 'til I got the courage to ask him to be—you know, to show with me. And I did some really interesting things with him. I did a show, it was called "Still Live," where you sit in front of a gun. And—[inaudible]—it's going to shoot only one time in a hundred—

MS. LAURIA: Wow.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —in a hundred years, I think. Something like that. And people—you had to sign away your lease, and I wouldn't be responsible for it, and so on, et cetera. So that was an interesting—that caused, I got a lot of PR on that. That was 1983, I think.

MS. LAURIA: Did that have a live bullet in it?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. LAURIA: I don't know how someone can sign away their rights to live.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They did.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] All right. It sounds like a performance.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It was a performance, but see, it was a way early performance, you know. And—

MS. LAURIA: Well, absolutely. What year are you talking about?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I think it was '81 or '82.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But I mean, Rena was in—Rena and I were in business together. And I mean, I told her about what I wanted to do, and I said, "You know, if you feel uncomfortable it, we—I won't do it." You know, it's fine with her. But then at the end I sort of got cold—

MS. LAURIA: Cold feet?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Cold feet. And I called up Edward; I said, "What if it goes off?" Am I really responsible for it?" He said, "Yeah, you got everybody to sign this." And then I said, "Well, I don't know if I can go through with this." The show was already scheduled. I mean, the announcements were done. And he said, "Well, if the announcements are out," he said, "I can send it out and say no." You know, he says—then he finally says to me, "You know, Ruthie, I'm going to tell you the truth." And I said, "Yeah, tell me the truth." He says, "Do you know what the catch is on that gun, to release it to shoot the bullet?" I says, "No." "It's an old catch from a screen door." [Lauria laughs.] Okay? And he says, "That'll never go off." [Lauria laughs.] He says, "Do you think I want to kill anybody?" But this was his sense of humor, you know? I says, "Okay, Edward." So we did a show. And we had hundreds of people sitting in that, signing to sit in it. But only I think—anyway we had hundreds of people seeing it, but we only had about 150 who would sit in it. And then he tells me after, that this—so we were taking the show down. And I says, "Okay, Edward, it's your turn to sit in here." He says, "Do you think I'm crazy?" He says, "I don't want to die." And I says, "Well, you wouldn't sit in that show?" He says—he said, "I would never sit in a show" like—something like that.

MS. LAURIA: Sit in that chair?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. "For anybody," he says, "I'm not going to rely on anyone to put me to sleep or keep me alive." [Laughs.]

MS. LAURIA: Oh, my goodness.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So I went and sat on it. And I, you know, am still here.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] Wonderful.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But the experience of working with the Kienholzes was a very good one for me, and we became good friends. And we did some interesting things with him. I did a show called "The Art Show" that he had—he started this—he had a whole—about at least 20 figures that he had made up of his best friends. And he cast people's bodies, and then he, you know, put them together. And then he had this show, and then what he did was that, when he showed in Europe, he had artists—young artists—Ed was very interested in young artists. He had young artists who he thought were good wherever the show traveled to, he would get their paintings to go up in the show, you know, and then set the show up—

MS. LAURIA: To give them exposure.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, you know, along with him, and did the same thing with me here. We showed it in San Francisco. And I did travel that show. You know, and it paid—I mean, it broke even, maybe made me a little money; I don't remember. But it had a catalog and everything from the European show. And it was done in English, and in German. And I traveled that, and I did pretty well with that.

MS. LAURIA: And you keep mentioning the word *friendship* or *relationship* comes through. And I'd imagine that one of the most satisfying things about being an art dealer and working with artists—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I was just going to get on to that next.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It's the people I've met. You know, I'm still close to Nancy. I sold her work—I sold her first work after he died. I sold it to the gallery a couple years ago. And we had a good time putting it together and a very close friendship, you know, while she was here four or five days.

MS. LAURIA: And she lives in Wyoming or—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: She lives in Idaho and in Los Angeles—and Germany, I mean—Idaho and Germany. Her mom lives in Los Angeles.

So with—you know, the people I've met in the art world, at all levels, it's probably one of the most positive

things about the gallery business, for me anyway.

MS. LAURIA: And I—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And I was blessed with never having to make a living off of it. And, you know, and I think that since my husband has been dead, I've been able to keep myself afloat. And if I take—go into my savings, there's not that much that's going to hurt me, so I don't buy a new dress or—you know what I mean? There's a million ways to compromise this thing.

MS. LAURIA: And how do you think that mostly you found your artists, Ruth? I mean, obviously you had to see their work. You had to know about them from somebody or go to their studio. I mean, what was the mechanism when you first started that—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, first was that artists that I knew and artists that Verna knew. She brought artists from Seattle, Washington. I brought artists from Seattle—Washington, D.C., that I knew. And—but the minute you opened the doors, you had everybody in there to look at your—for you to look at their work. I turned down the work of Bill—William Wiley, in 1961. And he said to me after I got to know him, "You know, you were absolutely right. It was terrible." [Lauria laughs.] And I said, "Well, thank you for telling me that," I said, "because I never even took a painting class, but it was some of the worst painting that I'd ever seen." And he says, "You're right, and you're one of the few people who's ever seen them." [Laughs.] You know, he's never brought out his old work. You know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So it was a matter of that after—after your door was open—and Verna, you know, really knew how to install a show.

MS. LAURIA: But that's because of her interior design background.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's right, yeah. And so the show looked really handsome, didn't look crowded. It didn't look like I have it here, where you've got to choose—you know, zero in a piece. It was—everything had room about it. And it attracted the artists, because they saw there was a certain—

MS. LAURIA: Quality.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —professional quality there that came through from the very beginning, you know. And I really attribute that to Verna teaching me how to do it. I can—I can—I can handle a show real fast now, you know, especially when you're used to it in the space you've been in 10, 12 years. You've learned how to manipulate the area to its best advantage. But so that was—you know, and then you travel, you move around, and you see things from other parts of the country. I mean, I decided I don't have to bring New York artists here. You know what I mean? There was enough good things going on here where I would—I would just concentrate. Then of course, you realize, all of a sudden, that you're local, you know?

MS. LAURIA: Right that you're representing regional—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Regional people, and so what, is my big deal, you know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Well, we talked a little bit about this at lunch, how having the overlay of regionalism has become a pejorative; that, you know, oh, well, they only show artists from their region, when a lot of people want to see artists from—I mean, if you're in California, they want to see California artists. But a lot of the museums don't have so many works by regional artists. They want to have national artists or international artists. And, you know—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, it all had to do with ego, you know—I mean, on the part of the dealer as well as the part of the artist. I mean, I want my ego to be satisfied and—and a San—and a museum person, you know, especially at the beginning of my career, chooses one of my artists, well, my—that's good for my ego—hey, I—you know, especially when you're dealing with somebody like me who was really so—who is untrained, who decides specifically on my gut feeling of whether I want to show this work or not. You know what I mean? I'm not doing it because I see this and that, which I can't even talk the language of some of these curators and art dealers can, you know?

MS. LAURIA: The artspeak.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The artspeak. I just don't know—I don't even want to. And so it's—you know, it's—that's ego satisfaction that I get.

But on the whole, I've learned over the years, there's good things going on here, and not only that, but I have a

certain loyalty to the artists who I've—I've shown Ursula Schneider since 1974. You know, that's almost 40 years.

MS. LAURIA: Well, and she also, in reciprocation, has a loyalty—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And—to me, you see?

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And that's a very nice feeling. I've shown Bob Brady since '75. You know, he—and I don't tie my artists down to that they can only show with me. And I also don't demand 10 percent from them or 20 percent from the other dealer.

MS. LAURIA: Right, if they show with another dealer in another state or something, or even another city.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, if I owned them, you know what I mean? I mean, if I'm showing it locally here, I'll give them 20 percent like I give consultants and stuff like that. So I— I keep my fingers tied—that way involved. But I don't play that game where, you know, dealers—these artists get exposed throughout the country it's helping me as well as helping them.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know, and it's helping their reputation. And it's helping—it's satisfying the egos of all the people who bought the work.

MS. LAURIA: All right. Let's end this tape before we run out. End of tape number three.

[END TRACK 6.]

MS. LAURIA: This is disc number four, interview continuing and eventually ending with interview subject Ruth Braunstein at her home in San Francisco for the Archives of American Art, interviewed by Jo Lauria on August tenth, 2009.

So you were talking about relationships and how rewarding that has been in your life. Have you also—besides having great relationships with some of the artists and getting to know them, have you established relationships with collectors that have become meaningful to you? And do you feel like you've—like you've had sort of a sophisticated hand in directing their collections, almost curating their collections?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, I've never been able to do that. I would love to have done it, but I've never been able to find a collector who would give me such free rein, you know? [Laughs.] No. I'm going to pass it on to—that's the job of the interior decorator or the—or the consultant.

I think that a lot of dealers could be very good consultants, but I think many businesses who use consultants are afraid of that thinking that all they would do would be pushing their own work, their own artists that they represent, and that's—and probably the thing to do is to start at home and then branch out. But I've never had that opportunity. I've never set up a collection of one person, for one couple or anybody.

MS. LAURIA: And part of your history, Ruth, not only as a commercial dealer, has been to be involved in other non-profit organizations that are advocacy groups for the arts. And I know that I saw on the Internet that you were one of the founding members of the new Langston—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Street. Yes. We were the—San Francisco Art Dealers Association, started 80 Langton Street back in the 1970s. When we talked about, when we—when we reorganized ourselves after the first attempt, Josh Reynolds—Jock Reynolds, who owned the building at 80 Langton Street, had this space for rent. And what we did was that, we took it, and we made little—we all needed extra space for showing—for storing art.

And we made a beautiful area there around the whole downstairs floor, which was many, many feet—I don't remember how big it was—where we rented to dealers space to store artwork. And then there was a wonderful space down the middle that was available, to where we brought shows in from all over the United States and Japan. And we did a trade show with—trading with a group of artists from Japan. And a lot of this had to do with the connections that the art dealers had in these parts of the country.

And so we helped set up—the Art Dealers Association helped set up 80 Langton Street's non-profit status because we couldn't do it through the Art Dealers Association, because we're profit-making people. And so they were—they stayed in there until—I think that we set up a board and got—some members of the dealers were involved in it as well as collectors and so forth and et cetera.

And then Jock—Jock had his solvability, so, you know, they took—the 80 Langton Street took it and went to another space.

MS. LAURIA: So originally, this copy that I'm reading from is from the Internet on the website that's called New Langston Arts Information is from Answers.com. And it says that a "series of performance events were held in 1974 in a vacant industrial space on Bluxome Street."

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Bluxome Street? It wasn't Bluxome Street at all; it was on Langton Street. Go on.

MS. LAURIA: And then it said, "When artist Jock Reynolds purchased and renovated a former coffin factory—"

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, that's what it was. Yeah. He lived upstairs. Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: "–at 80 Langton Street, he made the ground floor available for a new organization to support new work."

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That was us. Yeah. Yeah. That was the Art—they never put in the Art Dealers in there at all. Did you notice that?

MS. LAURIA: Yes. Well, they do mention your name.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Where? Where?

MS. LAURIA: That's how I knew that you were involved with this. I'll tell you.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Okay.

MS. LAURIA: It says, "Inspired by models in New York and elsewhere, in parens, artist space, Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, they were committed to artist control, artist financial support, and support of artists by other artists. The not-for-profit 80 Langton Street Corporation was created in 1975 and opened its doors in July 1975 with a one-person video installation by artist Peter D'Agostino.

"Signers of the corporate documents included Judith Dunham, then editor of *ArtWeek,* David Robinson, architect, and gallerists Ruth Braunstein and Diana Fuller. A board of directors made up of artists and art professionals took control."

So is that accurate?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. So this was a way, would you say, of giving back something to your community in the sense of—as a commercial gallery, you're not going to be able to exhibit any more artists than you—you know, than what you can hold in the given amount of shows you have per year.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Peter D'Agostino was an artist who I showed.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But he was also involved with film and so on, et cetera. And there was nothing that you could sell.

MS. LAURIA: That's what I mean. This was a way to give them space to show—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: He had stuff for sale, but the stuff that he really wanted to do was what he did here. And so artists have an opportunity—you know, the 80 Langton Street is 40 years old this year. And they are in trouble. But they are having some kind of celebration, and there's going to be this new magazine called *Art Limited.* You know that one? It comes out in LA?

MS. LAURIA: Yes, I do.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, a guy, DeWitt Cheng, from this area here, is writing a story about San Francisco Art Dealers Association. And part of it is our involvement with 80 Langton Street. We're hoping that he'll get it right, so people really will know that we were part of this group. Look, people still are doubting this, but I gave him just on Saturday—

MS. LAURIA: The writer?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The writer, yeah—all this paraphernalia about a big poster that we had done years ago when

we did a show where a group of artists went from San Francisco's work—not the artists, the work itself went to Japan, and Japan work came to us at 80 Langton Street. And we had that show in that space there. Then we did other shows all until they had to move.

MS. LAURIA: And so it was all not for profit.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: So the—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And we supported it by charging rent for the—

MS. LAURIA: Storage.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: For the storage. And I think the rent wasn't—maybe six or seven hundred dollars a month. And we had seven or eight places and 50 bucks each. You know, it was very convenient. We even bought supplies together, for toilet paper and pencils and—and everybody would put in an order. And we were very much of a coop at that time. And it all had—

MS. LAURIA: And what was New Langston? Did it become an art destination, where people knew to—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh, yeah. People came in to see these pieces. Yeah. And there was a gal named Bonnie Anderson who was the director of it until it—until it—until he closed us down.

MS. LAURIA: Who closed you?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I think what happened was that Jock had sold—was moving to Washington, D.C., and sold the building.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Jock Reynolds.

MS. LAURIA: Well, I think it says in a letter dated July 22, 2009, and sent to members of San Francisco's art community, "Sandra Percival announced her resignation after four years as executive director of New Langton Arts."

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, that's what's happening now. Yeah. But, you see, that had nothing to do with the Art Dealers Association. It hasn't all these years. In fact, it was only until we started making so much noise, that we're not going to support 80 Langton Street because you have never given us credit for what we've done.

And so Percival, I've never even met. I've never met—well, yes, I think I have met her. But I know that there was something that they did. They did mention the Art Dealers Association. But we wanted to—them to keep mentioning it so that we would be given credit, at least that we were the ones that supported this thing and kept it started.

MS. LAURIA: All right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And the average art-goer today doesn't know this.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. So basically, though, the art dealers started it. But you had a board, because it was non-profit. But you supported it by renting the storage space. But somebody—the board must have hired a director.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They did. They hired Bonnie Anderson.

MS. LAURIA: Right. And then after her must have been Sandra Percival.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh, no. Percival is way later—2009. But Percival comes in four years before that and before that was Susan Miller. And Susan Miller was in the '80s, you know.

MS. LAURIA: All right. There have been several directors.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: There's a few directors and I think they worked for many years without a director because they had no money to keep themselves going. And they moved around a lot.

MS. LAURIA: Well, it's good for you to tell us what your—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: My conception of this. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: What you think. Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It was a sore—a sore source for a lot of us, especially people who spent a lot of time organizing this, and time and energy into the whole thing. And we had to—it would have been a nice way for us to be recognized and accepted in the community.

MS. LAURIA: As advocates.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And this is why we're—the newest one we're doing now—one other thing that the art dealers did, back in 2002, we were going to have a series of lectures. And the first one was interview—Jeremy Stone interviewing her father and Wayne Thiebaud because he was showing Thiebaud's work, back in the '60s, '61. And we did this thing over at the—over at the Four Seasons Hotel. It had just opened up.

And we were—we charged 75 bucks to come to it. We had about—over 300, 400 people show up. And we were trying to start a kitty to go non-profit, you know? And the next person who was supposed to be onstage was Edward Albee, but he canceled out. And then the organization started falling apart—the Art Dealers Association. It's never gone all the way, but we've always kept paying our dues. But now we're trying very hard to recoup it now. And that's why this thing with the San Francisco Arts Commission, if we can get that going—

MS. LAURIA: ArtCare.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: ArtCare would be a—really a positive, positive thing for the community, as well as for the history—for a way—for a way for us to tell about the history of the Art Dealers Association, that we're not just out there trying to screw everybody out of their money, that we're a serious group.

MS. LAURIA: And do you think that the perception of an art dealer is that they are greedy? I mean, when you say this, I wonder because I know a lot of art dealers and, as many people do who like art, we go to galleries. I mean, you have to make a living—you have to sell art.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, everybody is afraid of it. Everybody thinks that—there's a funny attitude about art dealers. As I said before, it's that one of the most important things I think that all good art dealers have learned is how to be friendly with the clientele who comes in. But at one time, people were afraid to go into a gallery, because it was so snobbish. Nobody would look at you unless they thought that—if you weren't wearing the right kind of clothes—that you had the money to buy art, so why waste my time with you. Know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Right. Okay. They were intimidated.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And the same about going into museums. They felt that way about going to museums, that there would be somebody—they didn't like something, then they didn't feel they had a right to express it.

MS. LAURIA: Right. Or if they didn't have a background in art, they didn't feel like they could talk about art.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's right. So the deal is—this is that there has been, for many years, a problem like that with the art world. But I think, in the 50 years that I've been around, it's gotten much more accepting, and everybody—people are not afraid of coming to galleries anymore. And I think that probably the attendance at museums has grown too.

MS. LAURIA: Well, and also, I think museums have made a concerted effort to be much more accessible.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And they also look at themselves as a source of entertainment.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. They're doing that. Many, many things that's—a lot of them are being criticized for this, but they're—you know, like the dating thing going on, meeting people—come to meet—

MS. LAURIA: Singles night.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Singles night, you know.

MS. LAURIA: Over a painting.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. Yeah. Something like that, you know. Everybody does it. My daughter, who is—lives by herself—her husband died about 10 years ago—said she's taking kayak lessons so she can meet a guy.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] Or at least somebody who likes to kayak.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. Yeah. So everybody is thinking about their own satisfaction and what they're doing. And the art world falls into that category. But I also think that because an art education, especially as I go back to—[inaudible]—about the 150 artists a year that get graduated from art schools, have really helped to develop a clientele of people who feel comfortable about coming into galleries. And it's up to the dealer themselves to be how aggressive they will be in trying to nurture them to become a client of theirs.

MS. LAURIA: Well, there has been some comments by colleagues of mine and other dealers that I know that they feel there's a graying of the collector base, that the collectors who—that they would sell to are now of the age where they're—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh, definitely so. Absolutely. I'm saying, that's why it's so important, these kids who are growing, that you take those people there who have graduated, at least have had a training in art, or some kind of knowledge of art history—I understand they are literally teaching art history now at the Art Institute. I don't know about the other places. But at one time, they didn't even have classes like that going.

MS. LAURIA: You mean, they all had on the studio arts but not art history.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: They never had an art—they do that now.

MS. LAURIA: I see.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So people are learning about art besides the studio art. And you just try to develop these guys. But there definitely is a graying of the art world. There's no getting away from it. And you just love when they come in. I mean, I've got—a guy came into a gallery on Saturday. He's moved up here from San Diego. He lived down there for years; was a doctor down there and he moved up here in his retirement. I sold him art 40 years ago.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, my goodness.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I sold Richard Shaw 40 years ago, which he still has. I'm not going to sell him any more art. He's now got involved in—one thing he's—he's [taking on?] clay. He's got himself involved on Japanese art because he spends a lot of time in Japan.

But it's still nice to have him come in and kibitz with me and talk about old times, and so on, et cetera. And you need—I said, "Why don't you bring your son in sometime to see if I can sell him—[inaudible]?"

MS. LAURIA: You need new blood. New generation.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: New blood, a new generation to help us out, frankly. And the older guys, like me, a bunch of my generation who have been around 30, 40 years. And there must be that because a lot of new galleries have shot up around here. I don't know about Los Angeles.

MS. LAURIA: Well, I mean, this year, we've seen some closures, actually, in Los Angeles. But I think that's just a reflection of the economic downturn.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But you see, this must have been a very, very good time to open a gallery. But right now, in just this last meeting of the Art Dealers Association, there were three new dealers who came on board, who have been in—you have to be in business a minimum of three years. So they've been around at least three years or longer. And they're selling—sending art—selling artists I've never even heard of.

But they're honest. They fit into the criteria. And they must have a base of dealers—I mean, of collectors to keep them going, because, as you say, these kids are asking tremendous prices for art now.

MS. LAURIA: Well, it is a different time.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Art students come out of the graduate programs and—we discussed this—they expect immediate success. They also expect much higher prices for their work than artists 10 years ago wouldn't have even gotten until they were established, having maybe three years in the business—professional business—and selling work. I mean, it is true. But then I think there might be collectors out there now who have more disposable income.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. That and I think that's exactly your answer. They need a painting, makes—it's hip for the normal one and if they've got the money, you know. I mean, this happened to a friend of mine who was an interior decorator. She got herself involved with some of these guys down there in Silicon Valley. And one guy wanted an Oriental rug—a big one. And so she went and she bought this rug that really just looked absolutely beautiful in it. And he says to her, "I don't care what you spend for it; just buy it. I love it."

And she brings him this rug, lays it down. He says, "How much does it cost?" She tells him. "It's not enough money—go and buy one—spend this $50,000." I mean, he wanted to be able to tell his buddies—

MS. LAURIA: how much the rug cost.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: How much that rug cost. That was important. You know? And this kind of attitude—so some people that have hit that group and I—sadly to say, I haven't found that group.

MS. LAURIA: Well, what do you actually—what are the qualities about an artist or his or her work that really attract you? I mean, if you could boil it down to like three or four points, what is it that in artwork that really fires your soul?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It has to have a gut reaction to it. It's something that's going to pull me back to it and not just to walk by it.

MS. LAURIA: And what might that be, Ruth? I mean, if you could say—you know, I know for myself that I am attracted to art that is imbalanced, somehow, that I feel—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Is in balance?

MS. LAURIA: Imbalance. Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: In balance. Right side is the same as the left side?

MS. LAURIA: Well, it's not. It's not in balanced. It's not in balance. It is imbalanced.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh, that's right. Yeah. So it's not in balance. Yeah. Yeah. It's offset.

MS. LAURIA: Offset. Yeah. So I mean—but that—that interests me. I have to then analyze what about it is making me—because work that is not totally in harmony is kind of edgy. It makes you—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, you look around here and you can tell that I probably am a storyteller, because there's a lot of things involved with it—and probably, the work that I'm sharing—showing now probably is not as storytelling as it was at the beginning, because you're attracting a different audience now than you did before.

And a lot of people don't want to hear a story. They want just color, or they want something that push—a shove-and-push kind of a situation. And so you have to bring in other kinds of work. So you think about that when you're looking at something. And, well, does this fit in with the rest of the art that we have, or is this what somebody is looking for, you know?

But on the whole, I think that the majority of the art that I'm still showing is storytelling art.

MS. LAURIA: So it's more narrative-based.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And also, you do still show many painters, sculptors, who work in a figurative idiom—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, definitely so. That comes out from—yeah, that would be—it's just any kind of story that—a story line and stuff, which probably is what I got. And it also has to give me a gut feeling, right? I've got to respond to it.

MS. LAURIA: I mean, when we talked a little bit before about how you saw Peter Voulkos's work and you wanted to show him. I mean, he doesn't really fit into that.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yes, he does.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It depends how you look at it.

MS. LAURIA: All right. So tell me how you looked at it.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, his work, to me, is very figurative. I'm looking at this piece right now that's right behind you. Right here, on that wall. The red one right—

MS. LAURIA: Oh, right. The painting.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: The painting, yeah. To me, that's very figurative. There's a face in it—you see that face?

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: On the mountain?

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know.

MS. LAURIA: Looks like an airplane on top.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Could be an airplane on—whatever it is, you can build on it. You can—

MS. LAURIA: It has a sense of mystery that you can sort of fabricate a story, imagination.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. Your own fantasy goes—makes my fantasy work.

MS. LAURIA: So that's what's important.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. I never saw the face until now. You see what I mean? Now, I've had that piece for about 20 years or something.

MS. LAURIA: It's called *Welcome Back Mommy.*

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Peter Voulkos—he called me Mommy.

MS. LAURIA: That's funny.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Huh?

MS. LAURIA: That's very funny.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I had been in Santa Fe and I came home, I guess.

MS. LAURIA: Yeah. So he gave it to you. So the other thing that I noticed is, you don't—you don't have one direction in your collecting.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Absolutely not.

MS. LAURIA: You have an amazing spectrum of work in your house and I'm—and it runs the gamut from outsider art all the way to what we'd call blue-chip artists. So what is it that, you know, you think in your background or whatever that makes you so free to decide that you've really got these very—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I'm free in the fact that—[Telephone rings.]

[END TRACK 7.]

MS. LAURIA: So you were just saying before the phone rang that—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Above—

MS. LAURIA: Why do you feel you can be—what has liberated you to understand or appreciate so many different kinds of art, where there are so many people who only collect art—[Telephone rings.]

[END TRACK 8.]

MS. LAURIA: Anyway, I was just trying to say that some people will only collect in a very narrow category—like, I only want to collect hard-edged painters from 1960, or whatever. And I don't see that here.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, not at all. But I think it has to do with the way people live.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That the person who collects only hard-edged work hasn't got—you know, maybe, not as

adventuresome or as curious. I guess, in some respects, you can say I'm very curious. I would never have gotten in the business of being an art dealer if I wasn't curious, because I absolutely had no training. I don't even—I've been in business through my father and mother, you know, all my life, but I've never—I never purchased—even literally purchased a real painting. I purchased prints and stuff like that when I first got married, et cetera.

But you know, a dancer has to do only things with dance. And that's maybe, in some respects is where I was more narrow into it. Yeah. And what—you could go back to the fact that I did go into the business because it was—it was a—something I had never done before. I was looking for something to do, because I had taken off this year just to do nothing. And I was looking for something to do. And the cost of it was so that I could afford it, so I wouldn't be a burden on the, quote, unquote, the family, and so on, et cetera.

So with all those ideas in, you know, in your head, you're still always shopping for the thing that makes you react to your gut. And when I look at the work around me here, and remember where I bought them, they all came back to me, that—from that feeling. And that's why I bought them.

I also had a limited cost of the work.

MS. LAURIA: You had a budget.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Because I had a budget, you know, and also—so I didn't spend that much money on the work. And if I didn't like it—there hasn't been a piece that I bought that I haven't put up. I don't have anything set away. I might have some down in the basement from when I came from Santa Fe, that I haven't placed them anywhere yet. Because I bought a different kind of art when I went there. See, then I bought—I did a lot of Spanish art. But mostly, you know, untrained people, because that's—I could—I could afford that, and I couldn't afford to go into, really, you know, specially—artists who I'm supposed to recognize—Spanish artists who I'm supposed to recognize. So—

MS. LAURIA: But you—you live your life with your art surrounding you.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: And that's important for you.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Very evidently it is, yeah, yeah. Because I can identify every piece here. And I—and there hasn't been anything I put up that hasn't—like even that little piece there that's falling apart?

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, it's—I've had that for about 10 years, now. And it's—it used to be like little boxes, just like you like?

MS. LAURIA: Oh, right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know?

MS. LAURIA: And now it's kind of—drooped.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, it's got a whole new look.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Right. It's grown with time.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And what I—what I do do a lot of times is move things around, you know. So when you move the art around—people don't believe you when you tell this, but it's true. When you move art around, it looks very different than it looked when you had it where you had it first. It looks like a whole new painting.

MS. LAURIA: Or—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Or a piece of sculpture.

MS. LAURIA: And people will come in here, and they'll say they've never saw that before.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's right, yeah. And there—yes—and I've had it for 20 years, you know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It's so—you know, so it's very functional and very satisfying. And if you—I don't move furniture so much; I move art around more than I move furniture around. But—[laughs]—I think we've been in this house about 12 years or 13 years, and I'm just looking around—oh, there's more here.

I was just going to say, this—most—majority of this stuff was what I bought when I lived in Palo Alto, and it's not true—[laughs]. I mean, this is from here. That's from here. That's from here. That's from here. That's from here. I mean, a lot of these pieces are from here—that I bought since we moved to San Francisco—

MS. LAURIA: Right, when you had your gallery.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —from Palo Alto, yeah. No, the majority of the work all came from the—when—in my experience with the gallery. I mean, I didn't have any—I didn't really have any art when I was first married, or—

MS. LAURIA: Do you buy art from other dealers?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Definitely so, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: We dealers have un—we each give each other 20 percent off, or more—[laughs].

MS. LAURIA: And if you find some—an artist that you don't represent, but you—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. Like, I bought—I bought this from Toomey Tourell. And I don't know why I bought it, but I did. And I still like it, you know. And I bought that at an art auction; I do that a lot of—you know, at art auctions, to support the deal—

[END TRACK 9.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It's all right.

MS. LAURIA: So Ruth, I wanted to end our discussion with a two-part question, which I know we had a little bit of time to talk about off the recorder. But the first part is, what keeps you going? And when will you stop going—as in, when will you stop going to the gallery? You mentioned that that might be coming soon.

And after that happens, what would you like the legacy of Ruth Braunstein to be?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I'm going to go backward—one thing I know, that I don't want to start building a new gallery. I've been forced by nature—called "people who own my building"—the building's been sold.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, I wasn't aware of that.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. The building has been sold as of six months ago, or a year ago. And our lease was up on—was up on March 2009—or February 2009. So my partner in the space there, Todd Hosfelt we've been on a month to month here, and negotiating about what we want to do.

We prefer to stay where we are for the time being. But the one thing that I did know, I figured out I do not want—I don't want to borrow—first of all, at my age, at 86, 87 years old, they're not going to give me a loan—[laughs]—

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —at the bank. So they're not going to, you know, to—you know, to support me. And I can't be in business without it, without doing a gallery over. I don't want to do that anymore. So that part of me—so I've had—I've been thinking, as you can imagine, you know, seriously about this throughout the—since I've had to think about it, being forced to think about it.

And the latest is, is that we definitely are in the process of signing a three-year lease with the people who bought the building because of the—of the money—what do you call it, the—

MS. LAURIA: Economy?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Economy. They're not—they can't afford to—they're going to build a 285-unit—apartment units in our space there, plus stores and the whole business. You know, it's going to be a whole new city.

MS. LAURIA: Multi-use.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And so they have—they can't afford to do that until they think, maybe, three years. I have made arrangements with my next-door neighbor; I don't want to sign a three-year lease. That makes me to be 90—89 years old. And I don't want to do that. So I made arrangements with next door to me that I will be in there for a year for sure, and after a year when I want to leave, I will stay at least six months to get out, and then I would find someone who would take my space that he would approve of.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. So—or like a sublet.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: A sublet, yeah—

MS. LAURIA: Or a sublease.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And we have the same thing if he does that to me, if he—you know. Nine chances out of 10—I mean, he's 45 years old. He's not going to be in any position—he doesn't want to leave.

So the idea of starting another gallery is limited. What do I do after I start—close that gallery?

MS. LAURIA: Well, you don't want somebody else to take over and call it the Ruth Braunstein Gallery under your name?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I don't know. I never thought about it until I saw this thing about—when Patricia Faure died, someone bought her gallery out, or they bought it—I think she sold it, I think, before—when I think about it now, she sold it before she died. Right?

MS. LAURIA: Right. But it's—it was—it only stayed the Patricia Faure Gallery for a limited amount of time, and then the person who—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Who bought it?

MS. LAURIA:—who bought it is—started his own gallery under his name, Samuel Freeman.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So he's changed it. So I haven't been to Los—haven't been there for a while.

MS. LAURIA: Yes. It's the Samuel Freeman Gallery now.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Okay, yeah. But I think it was a couple years that he waited—yeah.

MS. LAURIA: It might have been contractual.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. Well, you know— I don't know. But I've never seen this happen before, but the artists themselves have to make the decision of where they want to go on—you know, and what they want to do. I'm sure when the word gets out that I'm closing up, there will be a lot of inquiries about, what are you doing with your artists.

And I'm just going to tell them that they'll have to—they'll have to talk to the artists themselves. I can't tell anybody where they're going to go.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: And some artists may feel like it's—they may want to come to you for counsel or guidance of who you think might be a good—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah—yeah, yeah. I'm sure they're going to ask me that. And they'll be probably flattered, you know, to—I mean, you can—you can go down the list about who's going to—who's going to be jumped upon, who will be—you know, they're going to be the people who brought in the most money, frankly.

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm—[affirmative]—right, because they're a known entity.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. So then—you know, so that part of it is—I figure that's going to take another six months to get out of that anyway, you know. So that's how we got it two years—[laughs].

MS. LAURIA: And you mentioned that your children are not interested—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And my kids are not interested in taking over the gallery at all. And I don't think anybody can take over it. Now, you know, Mr. Freeman might have been buying art from this girl before, you know what I mean? And so he was familiar with the artists that she had. I never—I never heard of him before—Samuel

Freeman.

MS. LAURIA: I don't know the history there, either, but—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. But then—but then, how many—you know—

MS. LAURIA: Well, the gallery—Patricia Faure Gallery was based on her eye of who she represented.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, so was mine.

MS. LAURIA: Right, so I'm saying—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —that this is—when you have something like that, the only way that it can continue in the same, you know—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Manner, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —the same manner, or, you know, the whole—ball of wax has to be that the same artists agree to stay, that you don't lose your customer base or your collectors, and that the same aesthetic continues. But how do you define that?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And you can't control it when you're dead, that's for sure.

MS. LAURIA: Right, well—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know, and she couldn't even control it when she was alive, when he took over. Didn't he—so you have to—you have to bite the bullet and let it go, this—you got to let go—and frankly, is what happens. And I'm going to—you know, I've been thinking about where I would—what I would do, you know, when I don't have to go to work anymore.

And there's many, many ways I can go. And one would be to—you know, to pick up on something like this ArtCare program, and spend my energy working on that, and something similar to that.

I understand that my daughter and some other people are trying to [inaudible] like this Ruth Braunstein legacy business. They definitely want me to be part of that, not just to use my name. But I've—

[Side conversation.]

MS. LAURIA: But to continue on, Ruth, you talked about legacy, a foundation that would be in your name, that would raise money presumably to continue your philanthropic or advocacy of the art world—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Of the world, whoever more—I started at the beginning, I started with people who needed a place to show.

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And also, have you been involved throughout your career at all—I know you gave Voulkos a stipend. He may have been the only one. But have you supported artists in any other way by perhaps giving them residencies, or finding them residencies, or—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, I've done all those things that good dealers are supposed to do, you know—finding a residency—so I haven't been in a position to support them, except like I said, with Voulkos I literally found someone to—I wasn't—I didn't give him my money because I—

MS. LAURIA: No, I know. But you—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. But I found someone to take him—you know, to be responsible. But I've also—It's interesting because when I think about it in retrospect, a lot of the artists helped me out more than I helped them out. Like, I would sell their work, and business was awful, and I got paid. A lot of them let me use that money to pay the rent to keep the gallery open. So I've always had—with a certain group of people, I haven't had to do that in the last, you know, say, the last 15 years. But in the first 15 years, I really had to—had to borrow from Peter to pay Paul. You know what I mean?

And the artists were very sympatico about this. And no one ever, you know, says, you owe me this or that. But I always told them this: "Listen, I sold this piece, but I'm short this month's rent. Can I pay you next month?" "Fine."

You know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So I've always done that kind of a deal with my artists. And they have come to me for money, too, you know.

MS. LAURIA: Against a—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It's family, frankly, is what it boils down to—is that you built yourself a little family, an extra family, and I'd hope that they'll take care of me.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: [Laughs.] I'm going to have to start an advocacy that all my artists send me a hundred dollars a month. That's not too much.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I have three thousand—I got 30 artists, $3,000. But I have to take off the dead ones.

MS. LAURIA: Oh, oh no—[laughs]. Maybe they have to send more. [Laughs.]

So what, in summary—or as a—as a sort of an ending statement, Ruth, what you would like people—if they were to use adjectives to describe you, how would you like to be described?

You mentioned "honesty." That's an—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's taken—granted—taken for granted.

MS. LAURIA: Okay.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I—"creative," "sense of humor," "a feel for people." What else? "A lust for life."

MS. LAURIA: That's a good one.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. "Curiosity"—killed the cat, but it hasn't killed me yet. And just, you know, "good health." That's very important; I've been really blessed with that. You know, I've never had anything really wrong with me. I did have an attack of sciatica this year, but there's no trace of it now. I'm in—and three months before this, two months before this, I had to use a cane to move around.

MS. LAURIA: And now you're fine.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Now—yeah. And so I've been blessed with good health. And my memory has always been very good. I've had—I have a hard time teaching myself to write myself notes because I never wrote notes to myself. I just remembered everything from day to day and—[laughs]—week to week.

But lately, my memory is going. So I hope that it doesn't go any further. But you know, it's—I'm not afraid of dying; I don't know what that means. I've never done it, so—

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: [Laughs.] So I—

MS. LAURIA: It's a new experience.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah, so I—[laughs]—I can't worry about that until it happens. So I think on the whole, this—the gallery has been good to me as I've been to—I don't think I have any artists that I've shown—and I've shown a lot of artists over a period of time—who will speak badly about me, I don't think. Even Bruce Conner, who ended up with a big lawsuit with each other, spoke to me after we got settled. You know?

So I think that on the whole, you know, I made an impression, and the art world has made an impression on me, and has been—I've been lucky to have it, frankly. I never even wanted to come to California, but that was a good thing about it—[laughs]—was that the—that I did get involved in this racket, as they say.

I learned to play tennis.

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] But you certainly have given many California artists a very strong voice—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well—

MS. LAURIA: —that they may not have had, had you not been so interested.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, probably—probably, that's true. But it's also—I was only verbal about it because I really believed in it.

MS. LAURIA: Well, but you had the opportunity—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And that's when—yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —and the means, and the perseverance. You see, it takes those three things to make a go at it. And I think that overall, you've certainly enriched it and been enriched by it, as you say.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, as they say, it takes two to tango, and it's—you know, it's cliché-y, but it's true. And you know, I had all the right genes. And frankly speaking, it has kept my head active. I know many people my age who move around in a very different way than I do. And I go to bed knowing I have something to do in the morning, you know, which is—which is a big thing, especially when you live by yourself, you know. You have to figure out ways to keep yourself going. And you know, as you—you have to rely on yourself. And luckily—[laughs]—you know, you wake up in the morning—oh, I guess I have to do it again; off you go—[laughs].

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] Right. Well, tomorrow you may have somebody walk through your door with a portfolio of work or send it to you on the Internet—you know, digital art that you just can't refuse—that you just have to go look at that work, whatever.

I mean, there always is that next—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: There is always that next, but it's also very disappointing when you think it's the next, and it isn't. So you want to protect your own self, you know—

MS. LAURIA: But you have to have hope that there—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You really have to hope. But right now, at this stage here, at the very—you know, I had some kids come in this week who had so many interesting things. But I've had to learn to say "no." It's like when I—when I close the gallery in Tiburon, I had—are you ready for this?—75 artists.

MS. LAURIA: Wow.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I did not know how to say "no." You know what I mean?

MS. LAURIA: Right. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I mean—I mean, it was crazy. And it was between 70 and 75 artists, and—and so—and five—and I ended up only keeping about five or six of them.

MS. LAURIA: And then you added to your stable until now, it's about 30.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: After that—yeah, yeah. And what I've learned is how to say "no." I could not say "no" when I first—when I first started a business. It was just terrible. I mean, it was a nightmare returning everything—God.

MS. LAURIA: My goodness. Well, anybody too who wants to learn about the history of your gallery, where they can go to the Archives of American Art because you have deposited your papers there and your exhibition catalogs. Is that correct?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. But how do you—how do you find that? People have been asking me that.

MS. LAURIA: They can pull it up on the website. It'll have—if it's cataloged already, it'll be under your name. And they can make an appointment. If it's not—you know, they don't have time, I don't think at this point, to digitize everything from everybody's papers that they might give. But they do a listing, an inventory listing.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: So I can go—because somebody asked me this recently, you know, because I've given them my work. When I moved from Tiburon in '65, '64—in fact, I was the first person to give Paul Karlstrom—you know Paul Karlstrom?

MS. LAURIA: Yes. And he represented the Archives here on the West Coast.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: That's right, yeah. And I was—I was the first art dealer to give him any work.

MS. LAURIA: And have you been able to access it, or you haven't tried?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: I was doing my 20-year retrospective. I did go to Huntington Beach at that time.

MS. LAURIA: Huntington Art Gallery and Library.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah. And I went and got some stuff out that I was looking for, you know. But at that time, it was still in the—still in the—in the warehouses. It hadn't been—what's the word—

MS. LAURIA: It hadn't been cataloged, or digitized?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Digitized, yes.

MS. LAURIA: Okay, well—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: But I'm told that it has—that work has been—done that already. I gave him, again, from '65 to '87, when I moved over to where I am now.

MS. LAURIA: Okay. So those will be on an inventory list. So when you come up to your fiftieth anniversary in two years, and if you want to do a grand tour of the Ruth Braunstein Gallery, you will be able to go through an inventory listing on the computer and decide what it is you want perhaps to borrow.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh, really?

MS. LAURIA: Or—and borrow in some way, or research. I'm not sure what those parameters are, if you are the person who has given the art. But we can definitely find out for you. And in the future, researchers will certainly be able to know about the history of your gallery through the availability of that material. Because it's—they do catalog it; they store it in boxes, and you're able to make an appointment. Because I did this last year; I was researching—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, I went—I went—they—and they brought me this box of stuff, and I got what I wanted out of it, yeah.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: You know, and then—and then—

MS. LAURIA: Did they loan it to you for the exhibition?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: No, no, no. I just wanted some information, and I wanted to get the—I wanted—I did a little catalog of my first 20 years.

MS. LAURIA: And then did you give that catalog to the archives as well?

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Oh, yeah. They got—they got—I think they got it. Oy—[laughs].

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs]—well, you'll find out. But that is the whole purpose of this project, is because there will be times when other scholars in the future want to assess what was going on in San Francisco during this time period, and they will be able to use the archives as a source of information.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Well, you see a lot of that knowledge. There's a—there's a big play on Woodstock, now, on TV. And you could see where these people have gone someplace and gotten these old pictures, you know, of the space and—see what happened at that time.

MS. LAURIA: Right.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: And they had to find it in something like this, you know.

MS. LAURIA: Right. There are several archives around, you know, the United States where people know—I mean, like, for instance I only mentioned the Getty Center because of course that's where I live, is in Los Angeles. But they have archives of certain—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Yeah.

MS. LAURIA: —dealers and especially of architectural photography.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: It's six o'clock.

MS. LAURIA: Yes. Let us end. Thank you, Ruth—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Okay.

MS. LAURIA: —very much. End of disc four.

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: Thank you for being such a good sport—

MS. LAURIA: [Laughs.] Well, thank you for—

MS. BRAUNSTEIN: —in hearing my story.

MS. LAURIA: Well, and you've had great endurance.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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