



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Michael Bernard,
1976 December 20

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Michael Bernard on December 20, 1976. The interview took place in Newton, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: December 20, 1976, an interview with Michael Bernard in Newton, Massachusetts. You were saying how you got gradually into planning, and then out of this comes design. You went back to Chicago after work at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard and worked in Puerto Rico. About when was it when you actually went back to Chicago?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Let's see, I'd gone out of the School of Design at Harvard in 1959 and then yeah, we moved to Chicago just about that time, sort of getting close to the turn to '60, and this job I got was—other than the Puerto Rican job that I had taken a league of absence in school for. That was the first big job that I had out of the planning school, working for the Chicago Planning Commission Department there. While I was there, I guess I was there about four years, say from about 1960 to '64, I would guess it was right around—

ROBERT BROWN: Well exactly doesn't matter really too much.

MICHAEL BERNARD: I got a call from this friend of my wife's I guess it was, about working with this idea she had, of setting up a museum of contemporary art or a gallery of contemporary art, and the reason I sort of got placed in her mind as someone that would add some value to that effort, was being at the Planning Department, she knew that I'd been working with the development of the area and I would know some of the areas and properties and so forth, that were in the city, that had some possible value to finding a location. [00:02:45]

ROBERT BROWN: Who was this person?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Her name was Doris Butler, and I believe she had been an art critic for the *Chicago Tribune*. Anyway, she was well known and very well liked, she was a very wonderful person and I thought she seemed to know just about everyone around town in the art world. She had a get-together, that's what I was—I was trying to get a fix on that date, where she sent me this card and said she was going to have a meeting in her home, of people who were interested. Yeah, it was in 1964, that would have been right. It was in January of 1964, which was let's say about the last year of say about the third year I'd worked there in the department, seeing one particular place that they had in mind, and I think this was quite significant to the work that was going on there in the planning field, was the Court of Appeals Building, which is on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago. [00:04:17] That building was being vacated because they were building two new civic centers in downtown Chicago. One would have contained the Federal Building, which would be sort of a little more on the south side of the loop, and the other was right in the center where the City Hall would be, and that would be a place where many of the municipal offices would be relocated. Incidentally, that's the site, that whole opening of the plaza and so forth, is the site where the Picasso statue was put in. So that meant that the second, that is the Court of Appeals Building, would be vacated because of the relocation into the Federal Center on the near South Side, and this would then become surplus property, so we started to get into that. The city itself would have probably had first say for reuse and at this meeting, Dory, she had called a number of the people that she thought would be effective in getting something like this started and she had a real skill for this type of thing. She approached gallery owners, major collectors, various people, and got them interested and involved, and at this meeting in January, she explained her ideas and we then went about trying to find out what possible use would be made of this Court of Appeals Building. [00:06:16] It was one of these big sort of old, well it looked like a library building, maybe something like a New York Public Library type of architecture.

ROBERT BROWN: Well did you, at this point, you didn't know most of the people who were there?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, I knew some of them. There was one or two people, one person say was an architect that I had known, there was someone I knew, I guess he had taught art history at the University of Chicago. A few assorted people that I just had run into in other contexts.

ROBERT BROWN: Had these people met previously or was it spelled out to them there, just why there should be such a museum?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Pretty much. I think the situation is pretty clear that it was Dory's concept.

ROBERT BROWN: What was her concept?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Her concept was that there deserved to be, in the city, a single institution devoted to contemporary art, as opposed to the situation where, in the Chicago Art Institute, the big building where they had introduced a sort of wing, or a special sort of—I'm not sure, it probably was a curatorship that was established there at some point, but it was a separate department that just put that on and had to compete with the rest of the needs and space and so forth, of the museum. [00:08:06] And so she felt that the city certainly deserved one that specialized just in that, and she felt also, that there was a support to do this in terms of interest and collectors, that sort of thing. So this is the way she realized her idea and the way she pursued it. So, after getting these people together, first there was the effort to convert that building. As it turned out, the building was too high in value and was sort of lost to regular development, being a Gold Coast piece of property overlooking the lakeshore and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: This is very desirable residential.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yes. This was sort of a very low level use of a place where they had had tremendous high-rise development, and so it was sold, the parcel was sold, you know in figures, in the millions, and it was bought. As a consequence, what had happened was they set up a committee to look for a site and that committee of course was considering the courthouse, and it was also considering alternatives. She conceived that that was probably a realistic way to go about it, so that was the way I had been drawn into it, serving on that committee, which incidentally included Richard Feigen had his gallery, right around the block from the courthouse, and I think there, Dory saw the opportunity of getting him very interested and involved, because if there were an institute there his gallery would certainly benefit by it. [00:10:02] He did take enthusiastic part for quite a while, hoping that that would come to pass. Then some of the other sites we looked at, I think included the building which they ultimately did end up getting, on Ontario Street, which was I think a Playboy executive office, and that was renovated, gutted, rebuilt into its present form.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there opposition at all, to this effort, did the artists of Chicago respond to this?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well that came up and it was interesting there, because now they had a very good person involved there, and I think his name was Spier, and they talked to him and to other people that were involved in the Art Institute, and surprisingly, although some people would have thought that there would be opposition, in fact they felt that it was not a competitive thing. They felt that there was certainly room for both and in a sense gave them their blessing, and so with that out of the way, she really pursued it. I believe the upshot of all her efforts came to something like this, because they didn't have any real professional fundraising help, I mean this is all done with her effort and the enlistment of all the volunteer work. They had gotten, at that meeting, I believe it was about two dozen people that came and the trustees that were ultimately appointed, each contributed very sizeable amounts, I think you know, it was something like \$50,000 a piece, but when it was all counted up at the time they were opening, I think they had exceeded \$1 million in contributions from just this essentially volunteer effort to fund the building. [00:12:34] Now, what happened in my case, which was sort of ironic, is by that time I had left the city and I was now living here and I walked into the Institute of Contemporary Art when it was in the insurance building, the New England Life Building—

ROBERT BROWN: The New England Life Building here in Boston.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yes. I picked up actually, this copy of *Art Gallery Magazine*, it was the October '67 edition, right at the front stand, and I started thumbing through the pages and then I saw this thing, "What's this man up to in Chicago?" This is the first director, Jan van der Marck, who had been appointed to that position, and then it pretty much told the basic outlines of what had happened to get the place started, although I noticed when I was reading it at the meeting it said 34 persons had come, and I think it was more like 24 persons, because her apartment was so small, I don't think it would have held 34. That was the first time I realized that what we had been working on had actually come into being, you know it became a reality and there was a building there and it was funded and there was a director, and I was so overcome by this sense of the idea that you could make this kind of a dream become a reality. [00:14:17]

ROBERT BROWN: What work had you done before you left Chicago? Were you there for a couple of years after this first meeting?

MICHAEL BERNARD: I left in '66.

ROBERT BROWN: Two years.

MICHAEL BERNARD: So that would have been, yeah, about two years. I think what I had done was mainly work with the site committee and you know, we had several meetings, discussing it. Dory's approach is she used, very

skillfully, a lot of the institutions here, like there was the Arts Club, which is a very strong institution for her to meet people and get people to support her.

ROBERT BROWN: This is a broadly based group of artists and collectors.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah, collectors, architects, people who were just interested in arts. Of course, Chicago does have this situation where there are a lot of people who do want to make a mark, they've accumulated a good deal of money or art, or both, and they do want to make a name for themselves, and these collectors, I think were brought in and the people who were interested were brought in, in this very skillful way, and made to work very effectively to produce that result.

ROBERT BROWN: Was she, with Doris Butler, the main moving force?

MICHAEL BERNARD: I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: What was her approach at that meeting and subsequently?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, I think her approach, I've thought about that because you know, I kept thinking all the things people try and nothing ever really happens, and that's what impressed me about it is what did she do that was different. [00:16:06] Of course she was a very likeable person, I mean right there, that gave her an advantage that I think was very unusual. She had a very good knack of dealing with people but basically, she understood people's interest in this kind of thing and she understood how to make it both an enjoyable and worthwhile kind of enterprise for them to join in with her, so the choice of people, she very carefully chose the people in terms of their interests; the gallery owners who would want to have the stimulation of this type of thing, the collectors, the various people working in aspects that would be sort of resource people, and knowing where the money is and knowing where the interest was, and just in a very low key, pleasant way, making these people come together into this organization that I think was quite well conceived.

ROBERT BROWN: At the Art Institute of Chicago, kept out a lot of people, or were there just too many collectors, that even with its contemporary department, it couldn't absorb?

MICHAEL BERNARD: There are a tremendous number of collectors, because at the time we lived there, we got to know some of the people. I've seen collections that are just beyond imagination. Well, for example, there was a family, the Cummings family, that live on the north shore, we got to know that particular branch of the family and it turned out actually, that my wife's mother knew the family from Montreal, it was a very peculiar thing. [00:18:19] We came over to their place one time and they showed us their collection and I would say there was enough there to start perhaps several museums. They collected everything that was of current interest.

ROBERT BROWN: And these were people who didn't have things, or hadn't done much at the institute, the Art Institute?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: And thus they were, or at least they were ones that Doris Butler could get to work on this new museum.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, like in this case, I don't think they in particular had any involvement in it, they were just representative of the kinds of collections that were just there. Ultimately, I don't know what will happen or did happen to collections of that type, except that they're there and there are many of them. There are a number of people you can see, that were in these papers, that were drawn in. Many of them had very valuable collections, some lived on the South Side, from the University of Chicago, at least two or three or maybe even a half dozen sizeable collections that could conceivably stock a museum.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that in fact what then happened when it opened in '67? Of course you weren't there. [00:20:00]

MICHAEL BERNARD: I wasn't there, although there was a very humorous thing that happened to me. When I happened to be going back there, I think I was going someplace to teach a course or something like that, and I stopped over in Chicago and I said this is my chance to see that museum that I'd never really seen in concrete form, and when I got to Ontario Street, I saw the building was all covered, as if there was construction work going on. I looked at it and I said oh my gosh, it looks like they haven't finished it or the thing is being worked on by workmen, and as I got closer, I realized there was something peculiar about it and then when I looked at the front it says, "Exhibition by Christo." I realized what he had done was wrapped the building, and that was really an exhibit, and it was just very funny, and so I got a chance to go in and see—

ROBERT BROWN: Now in your opinion, would something like that have been a very stunning event for Chicago,

had they had such outlandish kinds of things, is that in their midst?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah. Well of course, things like when happenings were going on, they were very heavily involved in that kind of thing, it's an open city for that sort of thing. It's the kind of place where you've got things like second city, that type of thing, it's quite open to these innovations. I think it's partly because of its—you know it has like a frontier aspect to its history and it also has had a lot of movements that were important, like the modern architecture movement there, you know the poetry magazine? [00:22:06] So it's a place I think where things like that can happen in a very energetic place, a very tough place, but also a very energetic place where that type of thing is acceptable. People who are willing to take a chance and make a mark for themselves because in a sense you don't have that tradition as strongly, to fall back on, to give them a sort of sense of having culture.

ROBERT BROWN: Are they going to try to gradually amass a collection there or simply become something like the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, simply an exhibiting center, or are they both?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, I really can't say where it's gone right now, I haven't been out there in quite a few years. Anna Mark isn't there anymore, so it's quite possible, but I'm drawing a complete—

ROBERT BROWN: Is he someone you knew?

MICHAEL BERNARD: I've heard of him but you know, the whole thing came as a surprise as I just read about it in 1967. I'd left, actually not suspecting that anything in fact would take hold quite that successfully, so this in a sense was a revelation to me and to me, the importance, I think, was that—personally, the importance was that it got me started in working with things like this, where in the past, I suppose I would have said to myself, well, you never really see things like this come to any fruition. [00:24:00] It was a sort of fortification of any sense that things like this could produce tangible results, and that is the fact, when I was here that first year or so, I'd come back here and I'd gone on a tour of artist studios that was organized by the Fine Arts Museum here, the institute, and as I went from studio to studio, I saw these mimeograph sheets about how a few people had gotten together and they wanted to do something about contemporary art in Boston, and they were having this meeting, or as some people described it, this confrontation with Perry Rathbone, who at that time was there, about why more wasn't being done. There was a meeting that was mentioned and right then and there, I had this very strange feeling that this same thing was happening again.

ROBERT BROWN: That you'd seen in Chicago.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yes. And I said well, maybe I should go to this because there, something had started and actually produced a tangible result that was successful in its own way, and maybe this is going to happen again, and I thought why don't I go and see what is going on. So I did go to a meeting, there were some people that had been involved at the very early stages I knew, and they said oh, you know, why don't you come, and we ended up at that time, at the Parker 470 Gallery and these meetings sort of started to become a regular thing. [00:26:21] I think they began to meet every Wednesday evening at the Parker 470 because they had the space there. Phyllis Rosen, who was one of the principles of the Obelisk Gallery, agreed to make that space available to the artists that were meeting, and then one night when I came there, the meetings had proceeded to a point where they felt that they did want to form an organization, a more permanent sort of organization. They'd already had oh, perhaps two or three people who had served, I forget what they called them, they were sort of like meeting coordinators or so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the aim, was there a realized aim or was it all sorts of things still being tossed around.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, essentially, it was sort of a gripe that not enough attention was given to the living artist, that is the person who is producing now. He wasn't being seen in the exhibitions and the emphasis was mainly on very old, established and probably dead artists who were being collected in well, sort of a sense, a historical sense. [00:28:11]

ROBERT BROWN: The same applied to the MFA and to the Institute of Contemporary Art?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Actually, I don't think you could have scored the institute. Well, there was a problem with the Institute of Contemporary Art. When I had seen it at that time, that is the first visit where I picked up this copy of *Art Gallery Magazine* I referred to, I thought that they were doing a wonderful job and as a matter of fact, I think they'd have to go a long way, even now, to achieve the quality of the exhibitions that were being put on at that time, but it evidently had a great deal of trouble internally or whatever it was they were foundering in the administrative or whatever, and as you probably know, they had a lot of ups and downs, and then they seemed to close down there for a while, they left the New England Life Building.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. So this group of artists then, weren't too concerned, they didn't know whether there

would even be an Institute of Contemporary Art I suppose, but mainly, were they older and younger, a tremendous mix of artists?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well they certainly seem to be younger, the main number of members, predominantly younger but there were older people there. There were certainly, to my knowledge, there were some artists that were maybe in their 50s and 60s it would turn up, people who had been in the "contemporary movement," but also had never felt that proper recognition had been given to that kind of thing. [00:30:12] It was mixed. I can certainly think of say, three people who were at least well, in their 40s or older, maybe quite a bit older than that, who attended regularly and took part in that. So I'd say as far as the Institute of Contemporary Art, they felt, or they were observing that the Institute of Contemporary Art was not in a viable situation, they'd kind of lost the impetus. They had a pretty good start but they saw it disappearing rather than being on the ascendency, and so they felt that there was really nothing there.

ROBERT BROWN: So what was their plan at this point, as you surmised?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well I guess the confrontation was essentially to get the fine arts to show more or to develop some sort of programs, and of course this created quite a problem as I understand it, in the board because there were people, many of them I think, strong members that felt that it's well and good to say we should have this but you know, we feel that this is our function. Our function is to be perhaps a historical, a teaching, a collectors type of thing, and if there needs to be something else, well and good, why don't you go establish it, but not us. [00:32:08] I think some of the ones I talked to that were on that side of the fence—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean were on the Museum of Fine Arts board?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Right, would say we can't do both. We don't argue that both things are valuable, but we can't do both well.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were some of these that though that they really couldn't straddle too much?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, I'm trying to think of who it was that expressed it to me most clearly. Whitehill, I had a conversation with him.

ROBERT BROWN: Walter Whitehill.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah, at one time, and of course I thought he was very eloquent in stating that position. He described the position and some of the others felt that way, and there were others who, for their own reasons, felt that something should be done. Now, I guess Lewis Cabot had had an interest in funding it, that is he was willing to put up the money to see something like this happen, which is what he ultimately did. At that time that wasn't known, but from his own point of view, he had a personal interest. Of course, some of the things he collected and wanted to see exhibited would have been in a sense promoted by this development, and so internally, he was working for it. I'm not that sure, you know from my own position, what the conversations were, and I only can put it together by the way they acted and things that were told to me by some of the board that I might have talked to, but I gather someone like Coolidge may have been—[00:34:23]

ROBERT BROWN: John Coolidge.

MICHAEL BERNARD: He may have been receptive to it but I don't know for sure, so there was a faction that was pro-sort of contemporary art, but the question was what could they do about it. Was it something using at least Whitehill's characterization of the issues, was it really something that they ought to do, and that's pretty much the way it went and I understood there was quite a bit of internal discussion, perhaps argument, discord, about what they might do. The upshot of it all was, and I think this is sort of the way things do happen, when the union got underway, that is the Boston Visual Artists Union, some of the people I knew there or got to know better, I guess maybe they'd—I had told them about what had happened in Chicago, they proposed to put me up as one of the candidates for whatever they would have called the officer of the organization. They had a vote and I was elected and the question was what title would be given. [00:36:00] I know we've discussed that question of where that—

ROBERT BROWN: This was important to those people wasn't it?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Very important because at that time there was a tremendous sensitivity to the question of authority, that is of having what you'd called a pyramidal type structure.

ROBERT BROWN: This is what, 1969 or '70 or something like that wasn't it?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah, right, it was all in the air and they were particularly sensitive there. I should say that inside there were factions in that group that ranged from people who were anarchistic, to those who would have

been conservative in the spectrum of ways of going about things. There was a very strong sort of anarchistic sort of thread that would have done anything to keep a more structured organization from taking hold, that it would have been a loosely associated group or pretty much nobody would be in a position to represent the union, so it was a very difficult position as it evolved for me, under the circumstances. It was sort of interesting, the way things did happen. What happened thereafter was the group that was say, more interested in keeping any kind of organization structure from forming, if you looked at it in terms of union terminology, that's been an issue too, whether the union is really a union or whether it's a good thing for it to be a union in the sense of unions like steel and coal, that sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. [00:38:12]

MICHAEL BERNARD: The way things then evolve is a sort of wildcat group, to use that term, formed, they did not have certainly, the—there was nothing in the way of a vote, they didn't have any sanction for what they were doing, but they started to engage in various tactics and of course that one that was thought up to embarrass the institute was to hang this exhibit in the bathroom there, and I think that got everyone quite nervous. As I say, whether it's known or not, that was not at all sanctioned in the organization, loose at it was, they never brought it up for discussion or vote but it was done outside the organization. It got the institute very concerned, as I can imagine, and it was really after that, that an effort was made to, I think negotiate some kind of solution to the problem. Of course the people who supported contemporary work in the institute, I think—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean the Museum of Fine Arts.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah. The museum, I think found that the proponents of contemporary art picked this up as an opportunity to press their case and what did happen was sort of interesting, that's where in fact, the decision was ultimately made to set up a separate curatorship.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure, in contemporary art. [00:40:22]

MICHAEL BERNARD: Of contemporary art, and to give it a room in the Art Institute. I've heard people argue about you know, who caused it. Was it the people who gave the money or the people who embarrassed the establishment to take the step, or I suppose a combination of both, but as I say it was interesting that really, it happened outside of certainly, the union itself.

ROBERT BROWN: You were head of the union at that time.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the effect then, upon you and upon the union?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, of course it made things quite difficult for me. Of course, while I talked to these people and there was certainly a lot of more official type of activity going on, we also were working on the idea that there should be representation on the Institute of Contemporary Art that is newly sort of reorganized, and that in fact did take place, that there would be artists, members of that board. I had mainly tried to keep to what I felt were basic essentials and one was to set up an organization that was basically a service organization on the one hand and then the other thing that I felt was very important to do, although I think it may have gotten lost in the shuffle for a while, was to get it incorporated, and that's what I tried to spend a good deal of time getting underway. [00:42:13] It has in fact become incorporated since, but I was concerned, especially with the activities, that if they did not get incorporated, here you know I was looking back on the legal implications.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, sure, your original training as a lawyer.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Being essentially an organization that was associated in that way, they would each be responsible for the actions of the other, and I think that in fact would have been the situation if it came to a crunch on it. That was something I felt was worth pushing and I sort of in a way resented the use of the organization by this group, to give the impression that the union was behind all these things. Now it's true that many of the members were inclined in that direction, but I don't think that you could say that there was anything sort of official.

ROBERT BROWN: If incorporated, what was the chief reason for doing so?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, I think it would have protected the members from you know, after all, some of the things that could have been done if you look back at those times, the sorts of things you know, like the sit-ins, that was the backdrop, sort of people going in and throwing files around and doing things like that. [00:44:03] If you didn't have the members, the bulk of the members, agreeing to whatever actions were going to be taken, were taken, that there was no right to put them in a position of being involved in it, and I don't think that was in fact the case. They did not get the agreement of the membership all together but as it worked out, nothing

serious did occur. I think it's good that it did work that way and perhaps you had both points of view, in their own way, ultimately prevailing, and if that was the goal, that is to get something like a curatorship established there, then I suppose it was achieved. There was a lot of heat and maybe discomfort generated, ended up with this institution, and I suppose they could all take credit for it in their own way but that's the way it happened.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. But now the union itself, it did finally become incorporated, and what difference has that meant to the union?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, it's interesting because although it headed originally in this anarchistic direction at first, I know when I left, I had written this letter to them saying that I had been dissatisfied with the lack of direction in the organization. [00:46:06] The fact was that as it developed, it became quite highly structured and I felt it went a little too far in the other direction, and then you got this phenomenon where it seemed like you were creating a lot of parliamentarians. They were very involved in organizational matters and so forth, but just to summarize what happened from an organizational point of view, I think it really solved itself somewhat by setting up a very strong committee structure and they had people that were assigned as chairman to various areas, who took the responsibility and people would volunteer to join that or be asked to join that, and then the committees would report to the whole and that's the way it functions now and it functions pretty much that way. It's of course had a number of people in there, personalities have, one way or another, touched the way the organization functioned. I think now, it's in a completely new stage again, and although there's been a lot of discomfort generated along the way, dissatisfactions being voiced and so forth, in general what's happened, I think has been to establish a very valuable kind of institution that provides these services. That's the feeling I had, is it's real mission, although there are many things it could do. It now has, for example, a credit union, I mean a federal-type credit union where members deposit their own funds and then people can borrow for that type of thing. [00:48:05] Of course the gallery is another story, I feel that was essentially a mistake.

ROBERT BROWN: You allude to the Government Center in Boston.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you think that was a mistake?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, if you look back now, on how the thing has worked out, I think there was a point where they had to leave the Parker 470 Gallery for various reasons, certainly Parker 470 closed because of problems in the area. In fact, it would have happened in any case. Then they went to the Boston Center for the Arts for a while, they met at MIT for a while and then finally, there was this proposal that was put together to take this gallery in Center Plaza, and that was worked out, of course with the Leventhal brothers, who had the space. Recently, I sat down with some of the people who had worked in the financial areas with the union and was able to put together what the cost to the union has been for that space. Now, arrangements were made to have it sort of rent free, but it wasn't really so free when you consider that renovation was part of the contractual agreement, you know they had to put things in like the carpets, they had to paint the place and they had to make certain cash contributions to the landlord to put the gallery into an occupiable condition, plus paying a portion of the taxes and so forth. [00:50:22] Well, the upshot of it is, you know just to talk figures, these may be rough but I think they're accurate enough, is that we probably spent about \$72,000 in cash equivalent anyway, on the gallery, and I think this would have probably have been enough to have bought a house free and clear, with enough space certainly, to take care of their needs. The sales don't produce quite that much to even justify it, I guess you could pay the light bill with what's sold there.

ROBERT BROWN: That was one of the main arguments for having it in high density downtown wasn't it? You could attract thousands of office workers and shoppers.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, a crisis occurred in two ways. First of all, as the sort of so called "free provisions" ran out on the lease, Leventhal is the surviving brother, one had died, had suggested that the economic rent should be \$20,000 or \$30,000 a year. Well they can't even begin to talk about that volume, it just isn't there. Now, they both were Leventhals and are very supportive of the arts in their own way and I'm sure they didn't want to get in a position of throwing the artists out when they had no place else to go and that type of thing. [00:52:00] So when they talked about renegotiating this year, the union voted to make an offer of \$5,000; it was lower and then they voted to make it \$5,000 even, and he accepted that amount, but I think it's simply and interim thing. Now the problem is this, the way I see it. They have gotten a letter from the Internal Revenue Service this last year, saying—it's like a show cause thing; if you don't show us why you shouldn't lose your tax exempt status, you are going to lose your tax exempt status, and of course they did get tax exempt status when we got the incorporation through, which was just about the time I had left.

ROBERT BROWN: What has caused the IRS to look into it?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, it's a general view that they've had and I think this is a problem with a lot of the organizations, you know that not just the union will have, and that is that the character of the organization in the

air view, is very close to—

ROBERT BROWN: A commercial gallery?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, it's like a professional organization. It's a group of professional people who have gotten together to promote their own interests, and that has a status of its own but it does not have the status of what you call the 501(c) (3) tax exemption, which gives you exemption in every way, that if someone gives you money, you can take it off your income tax and you don't pay taxes otherwise. That's the preferred status but the real value of something like that is that if you ever go anywhere for grants, to a foundation, you've got to have that letter from the IRS just to walk in the door, they won't consider you as council, the arts and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Right, sure. [00:54:04]

MICHAEL BERNARD: Now, if they lose that, then they don't have the kind of income necessary to pay for the gallery, that's a circular problem and they're going to be defeated in the course by doing just such a thing. What I'm saying is that if you don't produce the income to pay for it, well you could tap membership fees but how much can you get in membership fees? If you have a thousand members, which they have now—see it's interesting, like when I left there might have been 350 members and now they have a thousand. Probably the gallery has been responsible for that kind of increase because people, for \$20 a year, have an assured showing place, but I think it's a trap in a way. Say that produces \$20,000, but that has to pay for everything else that they do. If they lose the tax exempt status and if you're getting a commission of 25 percent and maybe selling one or two thousand dollars' worth of stuff, something like that, you know whatever it's adding up to, it's certainly not in a much higher order than that, there's just nothing there to pay the kind of rent you're talking about. So, with a gallery, you know this 100 percent location gallery, a very posh type of thing, facing the Internal Revenue Service, you know this is the tangible activity, I think they're pretty much fighting a losing battle because the IRS is going to say well what is it you're doing, you're just running a gallery. If you're running a gallery you're not going to be tax exempt, if you're not tax exempt, you're not going to be able to get the grants that you need to pay rents on this type of operation. [00:56:08] So I think eventually, it's a no win situation in the long run and I think that the course that certainly suggests itself to me, is that they ought to go out into the communities and develop the possibilities in the schools and libraries, all these places that don't have and can't afford, really good, professional resources. So it would give, I think, a better—talking from the political point of view, it would give a better political base certainly, I mean people throughout the communities would be able to see the interest, I mean there would be sort of a natural constituency.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean have small exhibits and talks?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Go out and yeah, put shows on, help in the high schools.

ROBERT BROWN: And eventually to raise money to maintain their quarters.

MICHAEL BERNARD: And give artists a source of income.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

MICHAEL BERNARD: They could teach courses in these places. To concentrate on the gallery and to—I also think they should be selling in their own studios too, and I think this is a very good thing. I feel that's what I learned, let's say on that first tour that I describe when I move back here, this is a wonderful educational, public educational device, the people coming out to the studios and seeing the way the artist works and lives, and has the feeling that they can buy right there on the spot, I think is a very valuable kind of thing to do.

ROBERT BROWN: The Visual Artists Union, they put so much into this gallery, they should stick with it too, that they're going to have to generate further income? [00:58:04]

MICHAEL BERNARD: I don't think it's going to work. I think my suggestion that I've made is that if they have to have a central location, they ought to have a small office that would do the administrative work, you know make the phone calls, receive the phone calls, do referrals or whatever it is that needs to be done, in a small space, you know just like people, all kinds of professions, will take a small, centrally located space to be the clearinghouse, but it seems like the gallery, under those circumstances that I'm describing, I don't think can ever make a go of it. Maybe there's a hope that there's always going to be the angel there that will give them a below market rate, and I personally don't see how this can go on forever. I think it's just a better strategy in the long run, to go out and find in the communities. Now this has a relationship to the tax exempt problem, and that is to get the type of tax exemption we're talking about, we've got to qualify under two and only two categories. One is you're either charitable in the sense, you know Red Feather, Salvation Army, whatever, you're a charitable operation, or you're an education operation. Now they're obviously not charitable, so it's got to be educational. If they cannot show educational activity as a predominant type of involvement, they're going to lose, that's my estimate. I could be wrong but you know, they're going to lose. This could be done by

concentrating on going into the communities and in fact performing an educational kind of activity. Now I think it's not only a defensible, it's not only a smart move in terms of the tactic, I think that is probably the best purpose that a union of that kind could have. [01:00:16]

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. You're advocating really, a decentralized operation.

MICHAEL BERNARD: At least to that extent.

ROBERT BROWN: To that extent.

MICHAEL BERNARD: To that extent. There's a centralized function.

ROBERT BROWN: Worth initially, the anarchism that you saw initially disturbed you and you didn't think was fruitful. At this point, at least you think they've been too weighted down with a facility, a physical facility.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah, I'm sure the gallery has done this.

ROBERT BROWN: The major reason is that you think that one of their great missions would be to educate.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Right. I think that's the mission that will return real wages in a sense. It will fulfill a function that will give them the tax exemption, and I think is a very laudable function in its own right, it has a political value too. After all, that union is in fact based on a sort of political approach, a new type of political approach in the sense that it's not that the politicians are using art, it's that the artists is beginning to see a certain political aspect to his life in terms of organizing and seeing that he's given, first his first share or you know his proper role as a professional citizen and so forth in this world, and I think this is probably in a sense, the profound aspect of this kind of development and I don't think this has happened very much in the past, creating an "artist-political" breed. [01:02:09] It's not the only place it's happened but I think you know, it's begun here, so it's something that is more new in its character.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bernar76_7949_m.]

ROBERT BROWN: The Visual Artists Union, your position was called that of secretary general, is that right?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You had mentioned earlier titles, how important they were at that point.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Right, that was an issue that came up. That was the first time it was used, although perhaps some people had said that there were other ways it came about. I remember very clearly, what had happened in the discussions, when this initial move to set up a more permanent organization, as I indicated, there were perhaps three people that had served in some sort of officer capacity when the organization was still more informal, and then when I had been elected, this issue of what to call the position arose and was discussed a great deal at the meeting. Some wanted to use this title, coordinator, and some wanted to use secretary, and then the suggestion was made to use general secretary, and I sort of half-jokingly said why not call it secretary general, it gives it a very international flavor and somehow, I don't like to think of it as being a secretary's position or a coordinative position because somehow, a coordinator always kind of gets caught in the middle of the coordinating function. Maybe that was more prophetic, but it ultimately, you know was the accepted one and they voted to call it secretary general and that was the first time it was set at a year term. [00:02:14]

ROBERT BROWN: What year was this?

MICHAEL BERNARD: This would have been about '71, it started about that time.

ROBERT BROWN: It was set to be a year term.

MICHAEL BERNARD: It would be a year term.

ROBERT BROWN: Now you mentioned that one of your principal goals was to get the union incorporated. Was there anything else that characterized? What did you find when you took the position, that you spend most of your time doing?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, there were a number of very important immediate issues that were brought up. If I had to just think back what the main ones would be, there was a question of housing, that is housing, gallery space and so forth, getting that type of thing, that was an effort that was initiated, to go out and find the available places where people could work and the figure was also developed pretty much bantering back and forth, what people could afford, that about a dollar a square foot, this would be a yearly basis, was a reasonable, affordable kind of benchmark to use. This was important because so many people were working in large scale,

you know the big picture type of thing, and so if you needed to have the space, then that was the kind of figure you should work with.

ROBERT BROWN: And you were thinking in terms of the gallery, the union gallery.

MICHAEL BERNARD: No, I'm talking about people working, that is working, studio.

ROBERT BROWN: I see. The union would work towards doing. [00:04:00]

MICHAEL BERNARD: To acquire or find spaces for people to work in, and these would be whatever, loft buildings or places that had good light or good structural space in the sense that there weren't too many supporting members getting in the way. So that was certainly one of the principal things that came to be an activity or a purpose related to that was a safety problem, because a lot of artists were living in the space and you had this problem with violating fire laws and so forth, and you know, the zoning requirements. So that was one of the big, big issues. The other big issue was representation on, and I mentioned this, the institutions like the Contemporary Art Institute or fine arts, to have somebody, either as a board member, a trustee or whatever, to voice the professional working artist's opinion and not just simply have those who might be more inclined to see it from a point of view of the social or fundraising or whatever point of view, you know simply giving it a broader spectrum of opinion to generate policy from. That was certainly a very important aspect.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work directly on that?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, everyone worked on that, I mean that was you know, when you had a meeting, that was the stuff that would have been on the agenda customarily. [00:06:10] Then of course there was the actual setting up of something like a special curatorship or department in the museums, to have contemporary art or living people shown. The original purpose after all was that here you had people who were working in art but were essentially ignored by those who showed are, so that you could say was probably the single most important issue that generated this whole effort, was to get recognition of the fact that there were people who were alive and working and that the public should be made aware of their work and see it. The next thing would be related probably to the economics itself or the sale, and this ultimately resulted in adopting this contract that was developed in New York, so-called Projansky contract where in terms of who gets the benefit of any value or appreciation in value, of a work of art, that contract was designed to give the same sort of rights that you would get, say in well, an actor, the residuals or whatever, you know the terms in the particular field, provide an income so that if there was an appreciation of value, a certain percentage would inure to the benefit of the artist and that you didn't get into the situation where someone sold something just to get a few square meals or to pay his rent and so forth, and then that was resold say five years later or whenever it was sold, at huge increases in value. [00:08:37] Now of course not everyone is that fortunate, to have that kind of appreciation, but I think you don't have to go far for examples, to find very dramatic cases of appreciation in value where it's just the middleman who is making the killing on it. That was perhaps, I believe the fourth major thrust, was to get the union members to agree not to sell work unless it was covered by some kind of provision which would recapture some of the appreciation for their benefit, in terms of sales of their work.

ROBERT BROWN: I see, and this can be carried over from several sales from the initial sale, into the future.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Right, past a certain point. It's that you would have a certain sort of base that you would use, it could be five percent or whatever above that, in the re-sales, and it also set up, which I think was another important aspect, it set up a way of authenticating it. Now they haven't really found a device for doing this but evidently, this may become a possibility and the revisions to the copyright law is that you would have a repository where you would keep a record that is to authenticate work so you could trace it like a title, you know of land or something like that you would be able to say this is an authentic so and so painting. [00:10:25] This would also keep a record of the sales and it would also give the artist control over the work in the sense that if it were damaged, that person would have to be contacted so that it wouldn't be altered in any way.

ROBERT BROWN: By clumsy restoration.

MICHAEL BERNARD: By clumsy restoration or to get into the situation, you know with David Smith.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Where the work is altered.

ROBERT BROWN: Well now you had the problem then, of going—how about the dealers locally, did they agree in some cases, to this new kind of contract?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Of course some of them are sympathetic to that point of view, you know it's not as if they don't see that there is certainly a precedent for it. Certainly, an experienced gallery owner is well aware that

other aspects of the arts have a customer institutional, you know built-in institutional arrangement where these things are returned. It's not that you know, they can't see that it's a perfectly reasonable thing. Of course there's a question of the realities of it, you know whether you can impose it and police it and so forth, or whether you're going to get undercutting or black marketing or whatever, that will ultimately make it—

ROBERT BROWN: What did you find to be the case when you started it?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Of course it had been adopted. [00:12:00] I just think it's too early. Some people have been living with it, it's too early to say. There have been certainly, the European precedents for it, that is you know in France, there's that kind of institution, it's well recognized and it operates in a similar manner, but I think it's going to take a long time here to become a custom, an accepted thing, if people stick together on it. The problems, the administrative and so forth, problems, are worked out with a great deal of tenacity that I think eventually will take hold. There's nothing wrong with it in concept, it's just that you know, when people get used to dealing a certain way it's hard to turn around and certainly in the interests of certain factions, not to have that.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean the middleman.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Well what else was there in that year you were secretary general?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well let's see.

ROBERT BROWN: The personalities, were there any problems with that, or was there a good deal of cooperation? You were the first really to—

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well there was, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: There's been other people before you.

MICHAEL BERNARD: There was a lot of difficulty in getting over the so-called anarchistic aspect to it but like I say, I think in a sense, I may be just interpreting it in my own way, but I think when I left, and I had made an issue of it when I left, was that I felt we weren't getting enough direction, that is in a sense that the programs were not being developed in an effective way. [00:14:18] I think it did swing the other way in terms of getting a more highly structured situation. That certainly happened when it became incorporated, because in a sense it required the thing to take on a more corporate structure. It didn't have to go quite that far I think and I think it's going to even itself out now. Of course some of the personalities that came there, I think certainly that structure and that kind of swing, and the situations where you have a post like that, that's unpaved, you get a tendency for it to develop a situation where a position is exploited for publicity value, for personal value and so forth, and that's a very difficult thing. They have at least gone so far as to vote to pay certain positions so that people don't feel that they've got to get their pound of flesh out of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Since you're put in a position where there's no end to the work and to the contribution that you can put into it, so you feel you've got to do something, or you attract the kind of person that will use the position. Well, to give you one instance of one of the most difficult problems I had, in answer to that question, is that there was a period where, while I was trying to get the place incorporated, there was a group that wanted to use the union as a means for promoting a project for renovating a building for artist space. [00:16:23] It got to the point where that was on the agenda practically every week for months running, and it used up so much of the time that we never got to our core work. We'd have slide shows about, you know how the space was being marketed and so on and so forth, and an attempt was made to use the union as sort of a protagonist, to get financing for it with the Massachusetts housing finance agency and so forth, and a great deal of ill will certainly was generated, as far as I was concerned, about the use of the union. I think that was another example of how vulnerable an organization like that is, to being exploited for the purpose and of course finally, we got back to our own business, but I would say that for maybe as long as a half a year, it used up a great deal of energy and time.

ROBERT BROWN: No one had that much control over the agenda, that they wouldn't exclude it?

MICHAEL BERNARD: That was the problem, is that there were enough people in a sort of anarchistic situation, using just the organization in this very loose way of constantly, there was no way to exclude things from the agenda, so you were constantly open to motions to consider this, you know time and again, and they would just use up the whole meeting period. [00:18:09] You'd meet once a week and then spend a couple of hours on that.

ROBERT BROWN: And this was all a scheme that seemed too narrow and it didn't really serve the broader interests of most artists?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well it was just one group with just two people in a sense, that were promoting those.

ROBERT BROWN: Who have benefited particularly from this.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah, that was the Piano Craft.

ROBERT BROWN: And you weren't really, you weren't interested in a building; you were interested in what would do the most good for the most people?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, this was a one group enterprise, it was just a single thing. Now some of the people, I'm sure felt that certainly personally, they might benefit, but as far as most of the artists that had occupied that particular building, that's the one on Tremont Street, that's the old Chickering Piano building, and these two fellows were able to acquire it and renovate it. The artists that were in there wanted large space, but it was to the benefit of the promoters/developers, to rehabilitate the building and introduce much smaller units, to get a maximum rental, so the kind of person that you got, that would rent that space would, in most cases be, let's say the artist who was working with the usual medium. Now it would be more people who were sort of living the "artist life," so to speak, they have a nice apartment studio.

ROBERT BROWN: Sort of puttering at it really. [00:20:00]

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well—you know, I don't want to judge it, it's just that all I know is that the people who were working there and living there were very incensed about the fact that the kinds of space that would be developed would be much smaller than their needs or their desires, and so they would move out. Some of them came back, perhaps they didn't need that much space, but that was the nature of the institution.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you learn, do you think the union learned something from these months of being rather sidetracked by this apparently selfish preoccupation?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, I think it became an issue of now, you know from some people's point of view, that that sort of thing was probably touted to be a great achievement and I suppose in a way you could look at it that way. It was looked at as a way to provide lower cost housing because with that loan, they were required to provide a certain number of low cost units, below market type units, and some of the people that helped them get through probably saw this as socially beneficial. It depends on what point of view you have and you know, it's not all bad and all good.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were aware you had so darn many other issues.

MICHAEL BERNARD: It was the use of the time and the use in the sense of the union pretty much involuntarily, I mean it was a way of taking advantage of the situation so that an inordinate amount of time and energy was used, you know just the agenda, to promote this. I don't think anybody in a sense gained by it, I don't think they ever really got the union support as union, and so much time was used up that had they just gone their own way, they would have pretty much achieved what they did. [00:22:10] They felt that having a group like this organized was such a temptation, to come in and get the authorities that would be of help convinced that they had a marketable valuable idea, you know so carried them away that they simply couldn't stop pursuing this until it finally reached a head and essentially, when I left, that was—if anything was learned, it was that we just couldn't go on like this.

ROBERT BROWN: When you left as secretary general, did you leave the organization or were you still somewhat involved?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, I left the organization on that issue but I came back fairly soon thereafter. The issue was that until they got incorporated, I just didn't see that we should go on with this sort of loose type of way of working, that this was an immediate issue, that is the question of having people come in and sort of take over the entire meeting with this kind of thing. After the incorporation, I felt that maybe we could start out fresh and I came back, I rejoined and took a more active part again.

ROBERT BROWN: By that time were they looking toward moving into their gallery in the Government Center? [00:24:00]

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah, but of course that wasn't so far after. I think right after I left, there was someone that came on for about a month and then decided they didn't want to stay longer. I don't know what exactly had happened there and then let's see, someone followed. Again, it may have been two, three, two or three. No, after the month had passed, that is the term of a person staying for a month, then the next secretary general

was there not very long when the incorporation came through. Actually, there was a committee on incorporation that I worked on with about three other people, and we used this fellow from Palmer and Dodge, George Hughes.

ROBERT BROWN: An attorney.

MICHAEL BERNARD: He pretty much volunteered his services to do this, and we finally drew up the bylaws and so forth and got them into sufficient shape so that the corporation was carried through. He also got the tax exemption for us, which I thought was actually one of the most valuable asset right there, because once you had that you could do so many things with programs for education and so forth. Well that's when I came back, it was just a matter of months after, and I felt, you know leaving, my feeling was that I had to do something that had some shock value to bring the issue to—

ROBERT BROWN: Well you resigned.

MICHAEL BERNARD: I left the union for those next months and I said you know, I just didn't feel that we could continue this way because the most important thing to do was to get incorporated so that we could embark on some of these programs. [00:26:06] Of course in the back of my mind—not so much in the back of my mind, it was maybe more in the front of my mind, was not to continue with an organization that was vulnerable in this way, that is where people could go out and do things in the name of the union and not have, in a sense the legal protection in one way and also, having the sort of anarchistic situation where they could speak for the union and not really, in fact have the backing of the members.

ROBERT BROWN: Your intention was that in the future, the union vote can approve something that was done or wasn't to be done, is that right?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Right. Well, in this loose organization that it had, someone could just come into the organization and let's say they were to do something that was illegal, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, that is with the sit-in at the Museum of Fine Arts.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Right. Now nothing happened there but let's say some property was destroyed or something like that, now they were very concerned this would happen, that is the museum, and it didn't. I think in a way it wasn't really justified to suspect something like that but you know, under the circumstances, you have to look at it in the backdrop of what was happening in those times, there were a lot of sittings-in and so forth, that they were so concerned that something like this would happen. I was concerned too because here we are, a loosely associated group of this type and if people went out and did this type of thing, all the other members could conceivably be held accountable for it.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas if you're incorporated, what's the legal liability?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well that would be the liability is—I mean if you were a member of a corporation, I mean that is this nonprofit type of corporation, and someone who was also a member went out and did something, but you didn't have a vote that authorized that person to do it, you're after all, in a much better position in terms of your responsibility for that person's unauthorized act. [00:28:27] I mean, you could even carry it to terms of your financial liability to it.

ROBERT BROWN: When you were secretary general, there were about three hundred members, there are now over a thousand. What does that indicate to you, are there an awful lot of very committed artists here, or is there all manner of people join?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well there's no question that the gallery itself was a great impetus to increasing the membership, because people would put—you know had before them, say now it's \$20 a year, for \$20 a year, you had a guarantee that you had a place to show your work, a gallery to show your work, there's no question that that was a great boost.

ROBERT BROWN: There was quite a waiting list wasn't there, I mean it's not that big a place.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Oh, you mean a waiting list to show?

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah, well that's true enough. I don't think that's the only reason, I mean I think it's grown from its own impetus from the fact that people see this as really, the one place where they can go for both moral support, support of various kinds that comes from associating this way and they're getting benefits in many other ways. There's a way to buy materials much more inexpensively because they're bought in bulk, in a sort of wholesale way. [00:30:03] You want to buy canvas, you can get canvas much cheaper that way, paints,

anything like that. There's thing I mentioned about not having a credit union, that's new and I'm sure that's going to be a very successful and helpful thing for people, to know that they can go someplace and they've got unquestioned credit that is available to them up to a certain extent.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think many people, because of the Artists Union, will be able to hang on to being full-time artists in the Boston area, which has remarkably, very few commercial outlets and very few institutional places in which to exhibit.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well I think the only thing you can say about that, it ends up being about the only real hope in the sense that you've got some institution that's fully devoted to that.

ROBERT BROWN: It's probably made the difference hasn't it, in a lot of cases?

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah. One thing I hadn't mentioned, in enumerating some of the programs, major programs that took hold, another one was—I don't know if this would be, say the fifth one I had mentioned, is that the idea of having a slide registry where anyone who was interested in art for whatever purpose, let's say they might want to have a hotel and they want to hang art but they don't want to buy just the awful reproductions that you get in some of these wholesalers, where they just sort of cut off a few feet of something, that registry would be open to the public and it has been established in the gallery where they can just come in and take cassettes in slides, if they're interested in painting, sculpture, whatever it is, and look through them, and then contact the artist for commissions, or they might want to buy the work or so forth, now that provides a ready market. [00:32:22] It's very difficult for someone to make all those contacts, it's in lieu of an agent in a way. It doesn't have to be exclusive of it but it provides a real source of making a contact with the commercial purchasing world. This is another thing I think that's been certainly successful in being set up, that if you're looking for art, this is a place you can go to look at a whole panorama of people that are producing, and you can see the kind of work they're doing, you can see the medium they're working in, you can see the quality of their work, and that I think is something that is just not available in the institutions that are around, that exist. Certainly a newsletter, something like that, the communication device of people being able to write into a place, to advertise for things they need, to look for places where there is showing, look if there are grants available, if there are opportunities to do something, there are competitions, you know having a newsletter was certainly one of the sort of basic essential things that I'm sure any professional group wants to have. They can read about their colleagues and read about what's being done, achievements and so forth. [00:34:06]

ROBERT BROWN: In your opinion, is the prognosis pretty good for the union?

MICHAEL BERNARD: I think what you could say is that now that it's started, you can't predict ultimately, what form it's going to take, and maybe not even from year to year, but I think it set up a structure or an institution that I think is going to last, it's there, and now that enough people use it and relate to it and expect it to be there, it's just about permanent. It's the kind of thing that you know once the concept has been achieved, it's going to last in one form or the other, I really feel that that's something you could say about it right there, even just to say that there's a place that people can go to meet or a place that you can go to get some kind of financial support in the sense of a credit union or whatever else they'll do, you know they've been talking about having things like health insurance. After all, you get a thousand people together, you can get together a certain amount of economic viability and if you can get things like health insurance, which you ordinarily wouldn't be able to do too well with because you're not part of the usual organization, you're not working in the ordinary corporation that can go out and get Blue Cross or something like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Except for those who teach formally, full-time in schools. [00:36:02]

MICHAEL BERNARD: Right. Well that's a small number.

ROBERT BROWN: It is.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Most people are not that fortunate and even some of the people who could do it find that it interferes with their way of working, I mean they just don't want to put that much of themselves into a full-time commitment. I think a full-time commitment would be the kind of commitment that would produce something, let's say like health insurance, you couldn't just teach a course and then expect to get health insurance.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

MICHAEL BERNARD: So making a full-time commitment, in many cases with people who could teach, that is they could command a faculty position somewhere of consequence, they may very well turn that course down because it would take too much out of their schedule or their energies and so forth. I think I know at least a few people like that, that would do that kind of—

ROBERT BROWN: So these are by and large, you're saying that a great many of these members are determined

to make it or if they have made it, they're determined to stay committed to their art above all. It doesn't, in other words, include at least that active full-time faculty member say, at Boston University and the larger art schools.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Yeah. Well there's a surprising number of people who are evidently willing to do whatever it takes, suffer it out, they do stick with it, but I think it's always well to remember that there's every conceivable range in the spectrum. I mean there are people who do it just once in a while, when they just have a little time off from their regular job, to those that that's all they want to do all day long, and they'll just put up with any conceivable kind of hardship to make that their principal activity, but everywhere in between, you're going to find some different level. [00:38:17] It runs from someone that's working 1 percent of the time, to someone that's working 100 percent of the time, and every figure in between, and if you come to ask people in a questionnaire, you're going to get this extremely mixed result that I think is quite difficult to deal with statistically, because everyone has got some particular way that they're satisfying this need, I mean the need differs in the way of satisfying differences. You've got everything, just everything that's conceivable in between, in ways of working, in time and involvement, and ways of supporting themselves, so it's very hard to pick a prototype situation, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: So it's very healthy probably, this kind of thing.

MICHAEL BERNARD: Well, I think that's the nature of it. You know, probably in places where the status is better, that is at least the economic status, and I'm sure you could find places like perhaps, just to pick one out of the year, like in Holland, you would probably find it much more likely that people could commit themselves to a career, they would have more social and economic recognition on a regular basis than you would here. That has not become the institutional situation we have here. Here it's pretty much make it on your own and that's it.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bernar76_7950_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]