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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Gladys Kleinman,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Gladys Kleinman on November 9, 1971. The interview took place in Boston, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Joyce Tyler 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

JOYCE TYLER: Gladys Kleinman who is the assistant to the director, Royal Cloyd, and is working in the department of public relations and publicity has just come in, and she's going to give us some of the current information on the Boston Center for the Arts.

GLADYS KLEINMAN: The Boston Center for the Arts was given tentative designation by the B-R-A in, uh—last year, October 8, 1970. I came on the staff in December of that year. We moved into this building, to the Cyclorama Building on January 1, and our—a staff of four people, full-time staff of four people working in this building—the Cyclorama being the center—the central building of the center. The—in 1965—may I go back a little bit to do—

JOYCE TYLER: Sure, go ahead.

GLADYS KLEINMAN: In 1965, the Cyclorama and the adjoining buildings were the home of the Boston wholesale Flower Exchange. And in—just through the nature of their expansion, the large refrigerator trucks that used to come into the South End just couldn't make it into the inner city any longer because the refrigerated trucks got larger and larger, and they found that they had to move—and that they would have to move right off the Southeast Expressway. And so, in 1965, they gave notice to the B-R-A that they—to the city that they would be moving from this area, from the South End, and the area became part of the urban renewal for the B-R-A. Mr. Cloyd, the present director of the center, at that point, lived in the South End and still does live across the street from the center, loved the building and heard that this was happening and just felt very strongly that the building couldn't be destroyed, and just he knew that it couldn't be turned into a parking lot. [00:02:09] For historical purposes, it had to be saved. And through a series of events of being—of his involvement politically in the South End—he's involved in the South End Area Project Action Council, SEPAC [South End Project Area Committee]—knew that we had to save the building and got a group of people behind him, and they formed an informal board of people to become what is now the Boston Center for the Arts Incorporated. Our board consists of 12 people, men and women, from a mixture of backgrounds. Many of them do live in the South End, but I would say for the most part, they are people who have new energies. They're not what you'd call typical board members in the Boston scene in that you've heard their names on every board before. They're new faces, new energies. They're people who can really give time to the center. They're not just a name on a list. These people can give 20 to 40 hours a week to the development of the center. Each of them has individual expertise. Like for example, one is a lawyer and thus is a lawyer for the center and helps legally. One is involved in real estate, and one in insurance, and so on, and so in each of their professional capacities, they can help the center. So we have, as I mentioned, a staff of four, a board of 12 people, and we have just started a new group called the Friends of the Boston Center for the Arts. This is a volunteer group of men and women who have come together for the purpose of promoting the center to keep it viable to workers in special events and to get more people involved in the center. [00:04:03] We look to this as kind of a mushroom effect where people become friends of the center—becoming a friend of the center can mean either in giving time or involvement through their interest professionally or money, different ways that they would bring in more people and this is—

JOYCE TYLER: Can I just ask you one thing? Do you pay rent to the BRA? What type of financial arrangement do you have?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: Okay, right. That's a very good question. A lot of people think that we have been given the buildings free, that the city has given us these buildings. Or some people think that we rent these for a dollar a year, and that's not true at all. We rent these from the BRA. The figures—I'm sorry, I don't have the exact figures, but they range from \$500 to \$1000 a month per building. The flow of money is as follows: We rent our space. It's between a dollar and three dollars a square foot just depending on which building you're in. We rent the space to artists, arts groups, dancers, painters, potters, sculptors, et cetera. And through the rent that they pay us, we, in turn, pay the rent to the BRA, and that's kind of the flow of money. As far as the groups that we have in residence, to date we have 45 residents that include individual artists and arts groups. They include

dance groups, art groups, music groups, theater groups including the major professional arts groups in the city. For example, the Boston Ballet is in residence here, the Theater Company of Boston, the new opera group, the Associate Artists Opera Company. Theater Workshop is in residence. We have a new modern dance group, which has just become Boston's new professional dance company—uh, modern dance company, excuse me, called Movement Laboratory. [00:06:04] We have a lot of children's functions through the Community Music Center, which has just become a resident. We plan, in total, to have between 1200 and 1500 children through this center a week.

JOYCE TYLER: You also will be having facilities for children's art classes, is that—

GLADYS KLEINMAN: Right.

JOYCE TYLER: —correct?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: We're having educational programs for children in the areas of theater, dance, art, and music—and film. Oh, I must add, film has just become a new part of our program just a week ago. So we will be having—so we consider ourselves a performing and visual arts center, and we think of ourselves as a cultural and educational institution. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOYCE TYLER: Now, the first exhibit that you had was the exhibit of New England sculptors and painters that was originally in Provincetown. Would you like to tell us a little bit about how that came?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: Okay. I'm really—I welcome the opportunity to do that. This is our first show. This is our first, uh, use of the Cyclorama as an exhibition space. This came about when—this summer when a group of artists who summer and work in Provincetown—came to Provincetown in the summer—got together and decided that they wanted to show together. They thought it would be really, really nice if they could show in the Boston, and they brought the idea to Boston and found that the existing arts—art institutions just either couldn't house them in terms of space or in terms of just, uh, priorities. And when they came to the Cyclorama, they—they knew that this was where they wanted to be. So, in August, we agreed to have the show here. The agreement was that it would show in Provincetown for the first two weeks of October, and in the last two weeks of October, it would show in Boston at the Cyclorama. [00:08:04] The show was an invitational show. The jury was comprised of painters and sculptors—well, Kahlil Gibran—the names being Kahlil Gibran, Robert Motherwell, Myron Stout, Edwin Dickinson, and Jack Tworkov. They invited the artists—the painters and sculptors who would exhibit. Painters and sculptors as individuals then chose what they are going to show. In all, we have 58 works exhibited in and around in the Cyclorama with dramatic lighting on white panels that were built especially for this exhibition. The show was, in our terms, very successful. We had 1500 people here the opening night and on the average of 200 people a day, each day of the two-week show. But beyond that, we consider it successful in that it brought a lot of new people to the center who have never been here before. And whether they liked the art or not, they really loved the building and they really—now, they found us, and they know where we are. A little anecdote on that, which I'm sure you'll find interesting is that we did get a lot of publicity on the show. I think in that sense, even if people didn't come to the show, they now know about us and they know the word cyclorama if nothing else. But a lot of people got lost because they were looking for a round building [laughs] because the publicity was all about, you know, this round dome and thus they were looking for either a round building or a big dome. But, um, we were very, very pleased. It was our first—as I said, our first endeavor, the first thing that we produced ourselves, and we plan to keep the Cyclorama as an exhibition space. In other words, we wouldn't be putting permanent chairs down and a permanent stage.

JOYCE TYLER: Do you have any plans for another exhibition? What will follow this? Is there anything sort of—

GLADYS KLEINMAN: They have a lot of ideas. A lot of things have been presented to us. [00:10:01] We haven't decided on which one, but some of the ideas that have come would be to have an open show for Boston just to give the local Boston artists a chance to exhibit. Another thought would be to have, um, Boston Center for the Arts residents' show, just the artists in residence here. And then we've been offered—the Boston Society of Architects, for example, are having their annual dinner here, and they've offered to put a display up of graphics and visuals of renderings of new use—new uses for old buildings, which is their theme for the dinner meeting that they'll be having here. But we haven't quite decided [laughs]. We're just, kind of, recoiling from our first show.

JOYCE TYLER: You mentioned at one point that you wanted to bring the neighborhood into the various things that were coming in with the building. How would the neighborhood fit in with the art program?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: Okay. Well, one of the buildings—I don't know, did you go through what the uses for the different buildings would be? Okay. Um, the—one of the buildings that we plan to have in—of the seven buildings in the plan, one of the buildings would be what we call a youth drop-in center for youth from six to 60. And that will be a place where people in the community, in the South End specifically, can come and try out or try on things in the arts. We will have arts, uh, art supplies and instruments, and things for people to try. And in this

way, we hope to bridge the gap with the surrounding community. We've started—that building isn't ready yet, so, um, what we've done so far is we have what we call South End Nights. And this is a promotional program that I've been involved in, and it works as follows: When a group like the Theater Company of Boston opens, the night before—if it's going to open on a Thursday night, the night before it opens, that Wednesday night, they need a dress rehearsal. [00:12:00] And in—for the dress rehearsal, they need an audience to test out their show. So we make that night, the night before opening night, South End Night, and what we do is we print out flyers in English and in Spanish, and in Chinese because of the ethnic mix in the South End, and we distribute these, hundreds, you know, through the laundromats and through the schools, and so on. We make it free and open to the South End community. We've had a tremendous response to South End Nights. We've done these with theater and concerts, and, uh, we look to this as a program that we hope to continue. It's just been very, very successful, and it's a really nice way to bring these people in to show them what we're doing, and what we're all about.

JOYCE TYLER: Now, it's been said that the Boston Center for the Arts is not going to be a Lincoln Center, that you are specifically avoiding that. Would you like to just make a comment on that?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: I would, yes. We don't look to our—we don't look to ourselves as a Lincoln Center at all in that we will never have white Carrara marble fountains [laughs]. I mean, that's just not our thing physically, purely in the physical sense. Also philosophically, we—what's happening with the Vivian Beaumont Theater could never happen here because, um, for example, the Vivian Beaumont Theater is dying in New York because there is no one theater that can perform 12 months a year. They just can't. They just can't physically do that. So our plan is to have a theater that nobody owns—that no theater group owns, that we own, and that a theater group can rent from us. And in this way, if we have four theater groups in residence, and they do three productions a year, and they have the theater for one month, that fills that theater for the 12 months, but that theater group only has to think about three performances or three months' worth of rent, lighting, costume, scenery, and salary. [00:14:04] In this way, they will not—you know, they will survive. Another way we see ourselves different, we've been called a center that is sort of halfway between Lincoln Center and the Henry Street Settlement. And this is how I see us in that we are a drop-in center, and a lot of the community functions that we will be doing will be very much along the line with the Henry Street Settlement. So, we're unique. We're the first art center in America that has been asked for by the community it's in. Lincoln Center was just put on West 59th Street, [New York City] by the city. People of West 59th Street didn't quite ask for it to be put there. The Atlanta Center, well, without going to too much detail about that, just, um, it was decided by a few people that that would happen, that they would build an art center, and Atlanta, as you know, has died—is dying. Oh, yes, there's one—they now have—um, their opera house is closed. All they have is their art museum, which is an art school, and the symphony, but the theater and the opera, the two big houses are closed. Which is really sad. So these are mausoleums that are left. And then, uh, I have not been to the Kennedy Center, I look forward to going to it, but I'm sure you've read the reviews that it too is maybe a mausoleum if they cannot get the groups to use it. We have the opposite reaction here. We have so many arts groups that need this center that we just can't keep up fast enough in renovating and rehabilitating, which is really the keynote of this center in that we aren't—in the seven buildings in the plan, we are not building any new buildings. We are just renovating and rehabilitating the buildings that are now existing. And we just—somehow, we're just trying to keep up with the needs of the arts groups that are hearing about us. And somehow, just—it's almost as if they're coming out of the woodwork. Groups that were performing in church basements and in garages before—we never heard of these groups, and they're doing viable things. [00:16:10] I mean, they're doing really incredible things—are coming to us and saying, "We've heard about you, and we want to be a resident."

JOYCE TYLER: How much money, to get down to dollars and cents, do you feel is going to be needed to make this center what you'd like it to be?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: Okay. A study was done about the center. I don't know if that was mentioned.

[Audio Break.]

GLADYS KLEINMAN: A study was done by the mayor's office of cultural affairs funded by the Associated Foundations. And, um, before the study—before the study came out, we had been saying that our projected plan for the acquisition, buying all of the buildings and renovating all of them would be \$3 million. Well, this study went into our figures and—I'm sorry, we said \$3.5 million, and the study came out with the figure of \$3.7 [million], so we were pretty close. This is including inflated costs over a five-year period. So our plan for acquisition of the buildings, for the total renovation of the space, and for the whole center, the plaza, and all pulled together will be \$3.7 million. We are presently conducting a campaign for \$5 million in that we would like some—we would like this money for an endowment so that we will do a one-time fundraising drive. And after we do this one—one-time fundraising drive, we can stop our fundraising and then help the groups in the center because we don't want to compete with the groups in the center at all. Because we're really bricks and mortar. The monies that we get go into the physical building of spaces, and we really want them to get—the groups to get monies for development of programs. [00:18:02] So we started our campaign. We're now doing the

foundations and large private grants. We're going to have to write proposals for that, and we project that, shortly, we will begin our public campaign.

JOYCE TYLER: You have a professional fundraiser, I understand?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: We have a professional fundraiser, Robert J. Corcoran Company. They are known for their fundraising for groups in—for arts groups in cultural and educational organizations. We're encouraged by the response. We have been—well, we just—we just [laughs] celebrated our first birthday with cake and candle, and we're quite pleased that we've come this far. The BRA, I must add, is really impressed with the work that we've done. Many of the members of the BRA were here for the opening of the art challenges, were so impressed with the amount of work that we've done in this short amount of time. As were—well, a member of the Lincoln Center was out a few weeks ago, and he just couldn't believe that this has happened. And sort of from my vantage point, from press and public relations, the media has picked up on this and not only have we gotten tremendous Boston coverage about our story because we have a beautiful story to tell, but we've just gotten word from New York that New York has picked up on this. And just last week, Group W out of New York, the director of urban affairs was here to zero in on doing a special on us. So we feel that we've put the arts back on the map. [Laughs.]

JOYCE TYLER: How about a timetable? What do you envision as being the time for the complete center? How long?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: That's a hard question in that we are so ahead of our timetable in everything we've done so far. But I—[00:20:00] we've been saying 1974 as a projection, but I think we'll be finished sooner than that—at the rate we're going, yeah, in this accelerated rate. And, of course, if we get that one large grant that we're looking for, that can really expedite things tremendously. Just a footnote, a lot of this will be included in that study that I've given [inaudible] you've mentioned that.

[Audio Break.]

JOYCE TYLER: Do you have any requirements concerning the things that come into the center? For example, the exhibitions or the various companies that perform here, do have any say in what's put out or what they do?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: Okay. Well, to date, um, we've really just—we've just not had to turn anybody away. To date, anybody who's come to us and has asked for space, we've let them come in, as I mentioned before, because these groups are doing credible works. We do not in any way censor what a group does. They are totally, artistically autonomous. We are an umbrella group, and they reside here, and in that sense, we are—we are landlords for the arts or a landlord for the arts groups. They pay rent to us, but they really do their own thing. Now, for example, a group like the New African [Theater] Company, who's in residence—we will help them if they come to us if they asked for advice. For example in my domain, if they're putting out a brochure or a press release, and if they come to me and ask me to edit it or look at it or approve it, I will work with them on it. One thing that I've tried to work on as the publicity director for the center is to ask each residents—resident group to put on any printed material on flyers, posters, press releases, et cetera, to put the phrase "at the Boston Center for the Arts." [00:22:15] And so we can build identity because we're all in this together. What we plan to do in the long run as far as, um, working with the groups on this would be to eventually have one central publicity director who can—just for expedience and efficiency—instead of all of the 14 groups in residence going to the newspaper on Tuesday morning to get into the Sunday paper, to have one person representing the 14 groups would be much more efficient. Also, a lot of these groups cannot afford to have a full-time publicity person, and therefore, they don't get the proper publicity that they should. Another area like that would be in the tickets. Right now, each group has to staff a ticket person, a box-office person, and they really can't afford to do that. And so we see ourselves as a central—having a central ticket office, a central ticket agency where we can handle all of the box-office matters for all of the groups. The same thing would be true for a switchboard and a central phone because, again, the groups cannot afford to have somebody sitting on the phone all day long, or even, in many cases, they can't afford an answering service. So we will be that function. One point in reference to all of this is that the residents now have what we call a residents' council. They meet one week—the first Tuesday of every month. They meet once a month, and they discuss problems, common problems and also issues related to the center, and many of these include things like security and publicity, and promotional problems, and questions. [00:24:00]

JOYCE TYLER: In terms of the artists' studios, the artists who rent the studios, have they complained about the rents? Because from what I understand, the rates that you're renting the studios are considered somewhat expensive as compared to some of the other lofts in the area, which seem to go for much less. Would you want to make some comment on that?

GLADYS KLEINMAN: Yes. Well, the rents, as I said, range from a dollar a square foot to three dollars a square foot. Now, that means roughly anywhere from \$30 month to \$100 a month for a studio. We think that's a pretty

good—and we've tested this, and we've asked people, we feel that's a pretty fair rental scale in that for \$30 a month, a leading theater company can have a little office, but in that office can have a phone, can have an address and thereby have stationery and be credible in that sense, keep files and typewriters. And what we provide are walls and floors, and a key, and so for \$30 a month, a group can really have a place that's their own. But part of the asset of paying rent, of being a member of the center is just the nature of being part of the family of the Boston Center for the Arts, and part of that includes meeting other artists. One of the anecdotes that I treasure is the director of the theater company came into my office many months ago and right behind her came the director of the theater workshop, and they had never met each other. It was just, you know, uncanny. They have been working in theater in Boston for five to seven years, and working in concentric circles, and they have never met each other—[00:26:00]

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