

Holt/Smithson Foundation Oral History Archive
Bruria Finkel interviewed by Lisa Le Feuvre
August 15, 2019

Lisa Le Feuvre is Executive Director of Holt/Smithson Foundation. Bruria Finkel is an artist and community activist based in Santa Monica, California.

This interview was recorded on August 15, 2019 at Bruria Finkel's home in Santa Monica. She describes a commissioning process of Nancy Holt's unrealized project *Solar Web* on Santa Monica Beach, and makes recommendations as to how to realize it today.

This transcript is a lightly edited version of the conversation, correcting names and dates where needed, as well as removing redundant words.

Keywords

Dark Star Park
DeeDee Halleck
Ecology
Feminism

Matthew Coolidge
Museums
Public art
Robert Smithson

Sky Mound
Solar Web
Unrealized projects
Urban planning

Copyright: Holt/Smithson Foundation


Lisa Le Feuvre

When did you first meet Nancy Holt?

Bruria Finkel

I met Nancy in 1984. The reason I met Nancy was I was a member of the Santa Monica Arts Commission. We were the founders of the arts commission. And I proposed to the city that we should have a park. Change the beach into a new concept of a park. And this was to be Natural Elements Sculpture Park, which we called NES Park. In Hebrew, by the way, *nes* is a miracle. So the story goes on.

In any case, we invited ten artists, and Nancy was one of them. Among them was James Turrell, I think, Nancy, and Doug Harris people who were just beginning, considering that in 1993, we were all very young. And they were interested in the ecology issues, and I think that addressing the idea of all the issues that are involved with ecology. Some worked with sound. Some worked with light. Nancy was unique in her way because she brought the world and she brought the universe down.

And her connection was immediately both exciting and very interesting because she proposed a piece called *Solar Web*. And the idea was really to kind of connect with the sunset at the beach, and also bring in the shadows of what happens every day and also create a circle where there would be an eclipse, an inverted eclipse once in June. And it was very exciting. We worked on the project for about fifteen years. Nancy was very busy. At the time, she was working near DC, I think, doing the park.

LLF


Dark Star Park.

BF

Right. And then there was some work that she was doing in Finland.

LLF

That would've been *Up and Under*.





BF

And she was very busy, but it was really wonderful to have her here. So she came down to kind of look for the production to be done here, not to be brought from another place. So she had to survey the people that she needed, and so on and so forth. And she stayed with us at the time, and I love what she said. I think somebody called her from New York, and she said, "I now know I'm in California because there are crystals, all kinds of prisms on the window." And the sun was right coming down, and we had lights all over the place, and she said, "I know I'm in California now." And it was really kind of wonderful.

We had sort of a small guest room in the back and she stayed with us for a few days, doing her work. And we cemented our friendship at the time. It was really very wonderful. When we came to New York, we met DeeDee Halleck and her husband, and that became a very good friendship. And Nancy said to me one thing very interesting. She said, "There is only one person here in Los Angeles that you should really get to know, and that's Matt Coolidge. And so they were part of her universe, and very much involved. As you know today, they're all very involved still.


And it was a pleasure to meet her in that moment. She worked very hard. She found the people that she needed, astronomers who would work with the piece and create all the trajectory of the light and everything else. She worked very carefully and very intensely on this issue. And it was something I thought would be amazing for everybody in Los Angeles because that would be a place people came to gaze at the sun and come for the solstice and do all the things. Unfortunately, as we were getting all our permissions from the city council and also the permissions from the federal government-- not the federal, the California state government, there were people here who really were not interested.

LLF

So these are people who were living along the edge of Santa Monica beach, is that correct?

BF

Yes. Not only them. Those were the rich ones. But there were other rich ones living somewhere else, and they had this notion that the beach has to be empty of anything. They didn't mind having ball games on the beach or flying little things across a screen.



**LLF**

So just to go back a little bit, Bruria, you invited this group of artists that included Nancy in 1984. What made you decide on Nancy as being someone that you wanted to reach out to?

BF

Her work. Her work was essential to the choices that we made, and the work of every other artist too. I won't go into what they designed or what they did. It's really beautiful, but Nancy was really a star in the group. Her work was not only simple in the approach, but very deep. Her ideas of connecting the sun, the moon, the nighttime, and the daytime to creating this whole sphere that we are in was an extraordinary expanding of a thought. And I just loved it instantly, and I think that other people would too immediately. And now we see that she's getting quite a bit of attention on her work, which she, through the time that I knew her, obviously struggled. I think Smithsonian himself was a very brilliant young man, and unfortunately, was cut off much too soon. But Nancy was the keeper. She was really the keeper of all that and committed and never really veered away from any idea that would-- she really kept both her work going and his commitment. And I admired that. Those are the things that really attract me to her.

And you'll have to take into . . . none of those artists really were too well known at the time. In the art world, they began to get some attention, but none of them were really known. And the thing that was very interesting to me was this was at the beginning of our consciousness in the city into the idea of the ecological and the issues of the day that were beginning to happen. And not only that, but we really got the whole art world, who's sort of in another direction, to look at it. And the ecology became an issue before . . . I myself am an artist and my very first show had to do with ecology and it had to do with the issue of war, the issue of mental sickness, the issue of the use of materials out of the Earth, like getting oil out in Santa Barbara and covering the seashore with gunk, and the animals all kind of struggling and dying. That was part of the images that I used in my show, and so I was very alert to it. That show was in 1968, so I was looking for artists who had this language in their work and found great, not only sympathy, I wanted that to become a very important part of the language. At the time, minimalism and pop art was the hot stuff, and it's okay, but that was not what we were being or living. And I think we have to address that, just like we have to do this today.

LLF

So to return to the process of the work by Nancy, she made all the plans and then you started talking to people.





BF


What we asked them to do is give us a name of the piece that they wanted to do and also give us a drawing. Also, make a suggestion of how much. And we had a certain amount of money, but we knew that we would have to go out and get more money. And a timeline. Those were the things. And the people who came in, the ten artists, only two of them were from Santa Monica. The others were from all over. This was a virgin event because we were still young. The idea of having an arts commission, we started it in the Southland, even though arts commissions were happening in Baltimore and other places, in New York. But nothing was happening here in that sense, and so we kind of lit the fire. And doing that with this group of artists who are now very, very ensconced and very committed and still here and doing work was an important moment. And so all of a sudden, the city became more conscious of it and building became more important. How things get disposed of and how things are being built. So we affected everything around us. It wasn't just art. It was really changing the language and also creating an opportunity for really moving on into the 21st century. And that was exciting. It was a good moment here in Santa Monica, but it always complicates the situation when you have politics that depends on power. I don't mind politics that is supported, but politics that depends on power becomes really rancid very quickly.


LLF

So Nancy's work that you commissioned, she really came up exactly what she wanted to look-- what she wanted it to look like. And where was the location on the beach? I know last time I visited, we went out to the beach. But it was quite close to where there's currently a playground. Is that correct?

BF

Yes. Yes. Right. Actually, I went with Nancy, and when Nancy couldn't come and she already made arrangements with someone, I would take her place and talk to her to see what she wanted out of this meeting. I was there the day she was there, when we put the pin into the ground. And so she was very serious about the work. And what happened was that we needed to raise more money, and she knew that. But she had everything going, and she called me up and she said, "Henry Korn says that I should do it right away." And I said, "Well, we got all the permissions. I don't know what the rush--" well, Henry was right because those naysayers began very involved and started attacking. And so I wrote a very long article in the paper to try to take them in a different direction.





And then a change in the city had to do with the council, and the council-- this was already set in stone, so to speak, and this council decided that they were going to listen to the naysayers. And unfortunately, this person who caused the disaster of refusal was a green guy. And of course, he didn't last very long, but he was there at the time, and he didn't even understand what the work was about.

LLF

And just one question, Bruria. Henry Korn, who was he?

BF

Henry Korn was the director of the arts commission at the time.


LLF


Right. Okay. And then the naysayer, was this a politician or a local resident?

BF

Well, the naysayers, the person who was really objecting to it is - if I only remember their name - this husband and wife, and he was on the city council when the banks were in charge, you see. In 1980, the radical movement here changed, and we became more interested in unions in the city, interested in ecology issues, in art. None of that was really [inaudible] before. And so our first mayor was a woman. And most of the people were flower children. And rent control got in. So issues of the day were very important, and the politics of the place really became different. It seems like people turned their minds, and they all became very supportive of rent control. But it took to near ten years to make that happen.

But once we set up the arts commission, it was a very important part of the city. We created really policy that is, up to today, still an important part, like percent for the arts, like public percent for the art, the developers percent for the art, planning events where the community can come together on the pier, and the beach is an important aspect of Santa Monica because it's a treasure place. And to say the beach doesn't need anything was really something of an insult. We managed to put in two works, and when it came to Nancy's piece, they were very emboldened and this green guy decided that he went with them. And that one vote-- it shouldn't have gotten to a vote at all, but that's what





happened. It's interesting what happened in time because when I met you and I saw that you were all very serious about this work to go back on the beach, I was really happy. That was something of a dream for me. And so I started talking to some of the council members, and they're interested because what happened in the decision was to cut her piece down, meaning it's seventy-two feet. They wanted it to be thirty feet. And I said, "You can't do that. This is an artwork that is thought out and every portion, every inch of it is well done."


And so we kind of left it alone. I think it can go back, and I think that we can put it back there, but it's going to take time. It's going to take money and time. The money issue was also very interesting. We started out with 75,000. She thought that she might be able to do it. But clearly, it was not enough because there was metal pieces that needed to happen, cement, and for the circle that she wanted. All those different aspects raised it double. And then we finally got back to it, and she managed to get some money from the Lennon Foundation. And we had \$270,000 to do the piece. And I'm sure that it's double this time, that it's going to be more than that. Maybe not. I don't know. We have to check it out.


LLF

And could you, Bruria, describe how you remember the piece, how it would've looked if it would have been realized back in 1984?

BF

I saw the whole thing because envisioning the whole park was going to be something very interesting because Nancy's was a gateway to this beach park, which only had 500 yards between each piece to the other. And so her piece was going to be the gateway. James Turrell was going to be something that connects with the canal that comes under the Earth to deliver winter water, which is both dirty sometimes because it goes through the whole city. So the question is: how do you bring it in? And Jim had a very beautiful plan also, which was a circular space, which he would cover with dark sand and create a tunnel of the water, every movement of the water, every sunrise and sunset or whatever. So they were involved all with the nature, the actual what's going on in time, and it would create just a thin layer where you can reflect the sky. That piece just died very quickly because the council decided that an inch of water can kill a child. Forget it, you know? Which is nonsense.





Other pieces had opportunity for a gaze to sit on the beach and look into the wilderness of the beach. I think Zimmerman decided-- Elyn Zimmerman decided on another piece. But the last piece that I thought would be interesting is the Lloyd [inaudible], who created some kind of walking arch, and you could play under or you can play over. And that didn't [get] realized at all. So it was complicated because we had to have enough money to do the whole project, but we didn't. And it was very hard to raise moneys at the time. Probably 2 million would've done it and would've made it really possible, but I don't know. Now, it's probably 20 million to do something like that. And the wheel of the leadership, because it was sort of a young leadership, was not to make too many waves, which annoyed me thoroughly. And so what happened at the time is that they decided that they're not taking the idea out. The idea of NES Park is still in the books, but it has to be smaller.

Carl Cheng did a big roller. Now, his idea when he presented was that it should be an aluminum or bronze roller that would be about two feet tall and could be run behind a truck, and he would run it right at the edge of the water, right? When kids came in, or people, and they could go on the different-- knock down the house and the circle and the square or the triangle. And the truth of the matter is I don't know what happened to him. It became an eight-foot cylinder that you need a tractor to move, and it changed the whole idea. You cannot move this kind of a thing very far. But he created it, and we really needed a Caterpillar tractor to bring it on. And that day that they were making a decision, the arts commission office decided that they were going to try moving it, and they did get a Caterpillar tractor. But the problem was that it barely moved. And so they moved it in the beginning once, and then that was the second time. And that was a disaster. And so I think staff decided that they like it as an object, and they created a place for it on the beach.

Now, about a year ago, it got broken up and unfortunately, fell apart. And Henry was asking me, "What do you think happened? Why did he go off the beat?" I said, "He probably looked at maps, and he looked at different things and got caught in the sight of how much can he put in onto this roller?" And Carl himself said, "Unfortunately, I didn't do it in aluminum because aluminum gets destroyed in 200 years." And I thought to myself, "Well, that's looking to a real future." But the point is that he really did not do what he should have done.

LLF

And Nancy, in distinction, am I right in thinking that she had a very clear idea of what she wanted to do the moment you started talking to her in 1984, and that idea was consistent through the fifteen years of working until 2001.





BF

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. Nancy didn't veer one inch. The only issue that came up-- the few issues that came up is if children climb on it, what happens? So the diameter of the pipe had to change, and so she did. She changed it to five inch or four inch, and they were two inches before, so you can climb on it and roll on it. But in order to stop kids from doing that, she increased the size of the perimeter of the pipe. She was very sensitive to the questions that people asked. She was very inclusive on the ideas that people suggested. But she was very clear of what she wanted. And I think that in general, this is about Nancy. She's very clear when the vision is there, and she doesn't veer away. If she has to drill that pile of sand, that's what happens because it is what you want to see on the other side. And I think that that's the mark of a genius. It's the mark of an exceptional vision. Her idea of drilling holes in the pipes to see Venus at night, you have to be there a long time to find it, right? Wait through weather and all the rest of it. So I think Nancy's unique, totally unique in both her approach, her understanding, and her vision.

LLF


And then after starting your conversation in 1984 with her, you became good friends and you kept in contact until she passed away in 2014. Can you tell me about the first time you went to see *Sun Tunnels*? What was that like?

BF

Well, I went to Utah when there was a conference that was made, and I think Nancy and the art center there did a very fantastic conference because what happened was the *Spiral Jetty* all of a sudden appeared white. And that caused by the fact that there's not enough water getting into the area at the time that covered it. And that was really quite a vision. Amazing. I have some really beautiful shots of that time. And Nancy said, "You have to come, and this is going to be the thing." And so I did. I was there four days with Nancy. There was a couple that got married on it. I think I have a picture of that if you need it, the bride. And Nancy was delighted with that because it all of a sudden became alive in many ways. Not only did the *Jetty* arrive in this kind of a virgin look and people used it and loved it and were there. It was a really fabulous moment, I think, for her and for the people who experienced it with her.

I think Matt was taking a group down to the tunnels, but I couldn't go then. But in 2014, I went to the tunnels the first time, and I was just amazed. I've seen pictures of them, and she's talked about them. She described how the moon looks at night. She was [inaudible] a chart. And I don't know





where it is. She gave me one. And it was always wonderful to be with Nancy. I saw her through the time-- I started looking at participating actually in the sculptors' conferences in 1978, and the first one that I did was in Canada and met some very interesting artists. And I did a series of interviews for KPFK there. And I interviewed Bob Irwin and what's his name? The guy who said that the message is the message or the message is the message?

LLF

Marshall McLuhan.

BF

Yes. So in their archives, they have-- and so I interviewed some interesting artists, and I think the next one was Nancy in Washington was doing a presentation of her work. And so we were in contact all the time and were able to say, "Well, I'll see you there." And David [BF's husband] and I came to New York one day before she actually moved to Santa Fe and we stayed in her place because she was somewhere in the world, either France or Denmark. It was a relationship that was worth keeping. And I always found Nancy very generous. I found her generous with time, with thoughts, with friendship, and this personal kind of connection was really always truthful and never demanding anything, but always there. And I loved her very much. She was very special.

So when you came back and said, "We would like to look at it again," I would like that. I would like to work on that. I think this would be a very important thing. In general, I'm thinking that I have to give up my political agendas here. Forty years is a long time. There are a few things that I want to still do, and that's one of them.


LLF

And do you think that in 2019, 2020, the best way forward would be to start with Nancy's project, and then to see if it's right to do other artistic commissions on the beach? Or do you think Nancy's project would be enough on Santa Monica beach today?

BF

I'm not too sure that we can do the whole vision of the NES park, the Natural Element Sculpture Park. Would be ideal because then you have really something on the beach that really deals with different aspects of the environment. It would be wonderful. And it goes all the way to the end of the pier.





Many of the artists are gone. They were young, but they grew old, and I don't think we can do all that there is there. So my thinking is that Nancy's piece, because there are people in this community and in the world who are really pushing the idea of Nancy's work and making it happen in the communities that she worked in, that would be not enough, but it would be one thing to start with.

LLF


And you talked, Bruria, about Nancy's commitment to working with local companies to make the work. Can you tell us a little bit about how she went about finding the right companies to work with, who she spoke to, really her working processes?

BF

Oh, it's interesting. I think that first of all, she knew what she wanted. And so she would find every pipe company in the country-- I mean, in the area to go and visit. She never really just ordered it on the phone. She physically went to places. She physically saw the material. She physically would decide what color it should be and where she would get the color. And then she would like to hire people right from the community, and I think it was an approach that she took in every place. And I learned a lot from her on that, so. Because what it does, it shows respect to both the community and brings work to the community. Bringing material from other places to-- I relate to it like she probably did as far as bringing art pieces to a museum. We had lots of talks about how come this whole movement of Earthworks began and what was in the mind of these artists who went into this wilderness and away from the urban life? Completely away. I mean, she and Bob certainly were pioneers in that. Michael Heizer was doing it too and Walter De Maria, and all these people had this notion that they can connect with something very special in the wilderness. Now, it's almost Biblical because that's exactly where maybe you find some kind of solution and revelations that are not available when you have too much light going on and noise going on, so.

And I think Nancy really had this searching all through her life. I mean, she was involved with a particular kind of meditation form, which I think I always said, "It's going to kill your knees." Nancy used to kneel or sit on a pillow. She can do that. And I think it did eventually kind of caused her physical harm, but she searched. Nancy both searched and practiced all that. And I think those were important places for her, and as far as I'm concerned, were the places where she was able to clear her mind and to be very clear about what it is that she is involved with. And her clarity is one of the things that I admired very much. She would not get to say anything without that, and she would not start work without that clarity. When she started working on the project in New Jersey-- now, I was sitting in a meeting just last week, and I mentioned her name and I mentioned the project to this





person who is a friend of mine, who is now heavily involved with the whole methane movement, methane gas movement, where they want to change and use the methane as power, as electric power and all the rest of it. Now, those ideas, they're searching it out and when I said to him, "Nancy did a fantastic park plan for that," he says, "I want to see that, and I would like you to send me whatever you have on that." Because I remember we went to that park to see it, and it was amazing.

LLF

So this was the project *Sky Mound* that Nancy was so committed to. She began in 1986 working on it, and it was a major reclamation project in New Jersey .

BF

Exactly. And it didn't happen, again, because of politics, you see. But now they're awake. All of a sudden, they're awake. And how do you reclaim this methane gas coming out of the garbage that humans are creating? This recycling notion, this idea of preservation and the idea of using it in a different form, this is really amazing. In that piece, I think she has achieved real strength, real power, everything, because we talk about going to the moon and going to Mars, but these are nonsense kind of comments because it's exciting. It takes your imagination and flares it up. But the daily interaction is where Nancy was. Nancy lived every moment of the day. I wouldn't say it was easy, but I think that that's what she strived for. And that's where the clarity comes from, I think.

LLF

And did you visit the various manufacturers that Nancy was talking to with her?

BF


A few.


LLF

And what was that like? How did she describe her project to the workers, to the people?

BF

Well, by now, we had an image, right? And so she would take her image with her and suggest. But her knowledge of materials was very deep, very easy to understand her. I personally was always in awe of how she created the easy understanding between her and the person who was supplying whatever was necessary, and particularly in the issue of the astronomy. The astronomy was unique,





really wonderful. And I would say within three or four minutes of time that the people behind the desk had a very great respect.

LLF

What was it about Nancy that made her inspire such respect in others?

BF

I think she spoke the language, you see. She knew what she was talking about. It's very hard to go into a place of professional builders and not know what a screw is, not know what a welding point is, or not know what you want to do. She knew everything about it. It wasn't like something that she had to learn about. I think she did, but she learned it from her experiences in life, and also her own research. So my impression also that she was always prepared. She was always prepared and knew what to say and knew what to ask. I remember standing next to her at the guy with the pipes, and you could see the changes, right, happening right there as she was beginning to say, "I'm here to--" and she would be kind of a little shy at the side, and within five minutes there was so much interest and so much involvement and so much awe, really. And it was great. It was really great. And I'm sure she found that situation with almost any project or any part that she goes, any group of people that she had. I think she was basically a shy person. She did not like to put herself forward in any way. And so I was kind of admiring that idea that she found a way on how to survive with it.


And I think her commitment to Bob [Smithson] was also very important, and her idea of being the person to take care of it and no other people was another commitment because she really understood his work. And I also, when I saw her, their early interchanges on film or other situations, I think she was the most important contributor to the process, both in measuring the Earth and knowing what it is that is happening right there and where to put something, where to begin to do with it-- to deal with it. Yeah. And that was a time when women were not respected. It was a time we were still struggling to be recognized, and Nancy was a feminist, definitely. And I would say she was not only conscious of it. She was active with it.


LLF

Did she describe herself as a feminist?

BF

Well, she always stood on the right side of things, and that was part of it. And I once asked her something. I said, "It's interesting to me that as a space artist, you are involved with museums." And





she said, "Our start wasn't there. We didn't do it for museums. In fact, we were opposed to museums. We thought they were mausoleums. We were not interested in that. We were really interested in the interaction between nature and the human being, and it's not just an idea. It's a physical connection." But she had a big show at MOCA, and I said, "So how do you explain that?" She said, "Well, that's a form of communication." This is not something that I would object. At this point, she was very, very secure in herself and secure in the work, and I think they did this combined thing for Bob and for her at MoCA here, and it was a beautiful show. It was a beautiful show. And I think that transferring those ideas into the urban environment is extremely important because the urban environment is, in a way, oppressive because it doesn't allow you to create that daily contact with nature. That's why I have big windows.


LLF

And, Bruria, what would your advice be to realize some of the Web? What would be the first step in moving Nancy's project through to completion?

BF

I think we talked about that, and I don't quite remember what I said. I think the very first one is to have enough money. When you would come to the city and say, "We have the money. It's going to cost this much. We need your support. We need your energy. We need your," whatever it is that the city can help us with, which is certain kinds of insurances that you're going to have. The city's self-insured. But what we used to do, we would hire the artist for the period of time, which would take either 2 days or 4 days or maybe 3 days, whatever it took to install a piece. And then it would be a temporary kind of an arrangement, and they would be covered by the insurance. I don't know what the policy is now, so this is something to explore. What we need is at least a few months to explore, first of all, the desire to do it, secondly, to plan who would come before them and how to present it in the open moment in front of them, and that will take longer, I think, than just putting together the money. And then have good PR. Have good PR. Those people who objected very much are dead, so we don't have their noises here. But there are some people who are still around. The question is the will. If the political will is here-- and I think that we can explore it, and coming to them, we should have a full plan. We should have a plan of the money-- I mean, to be able to say "and how about this?" I think that the fabricators that Nancy used should be looked at again because I think the people are probably there. Companies stay for a long time. If they don't, we find another. And they would probably be delighted to do it.

So those are the things. The people who are still objecting are going to object, but this time, we have to have really a very strong position where they're going to lose, period. It's not something that is



their beach. It's our beach. It's our country. It's not his country. So those positions are sometimes hard to get, but I think we can. I think we can. And of course, everybody's impressed with Nancy's coming out now. All of a sudden, oh my God. Nancy is something. Well, Nancy was something all the time, forever that I knew her, and I suspected probably forever. But it is those things we have to kind of fan up as far as the PR and how it comes and what happens. And we can do that. We can do that.


LLF


And is there anyone specific who you think we should talk to in Santa Monica about gathering information about working with Nancy back in the 1980s?

BF

In Santa Monica. After the first time, Nancy stayed with us a couple of times, maybe two or three times. And then when she stayed at the hotel, the Shangri-La. She liked the Shangri-La, right, at the beach. Who knew Nancy in Santa Monica beside David and myself? Well, you see, David unfortunately died a year later, and so his position in the city was very important and very supportive. I think there is a person like Danny Zane. Danny Zane is the person who I was at the meeting with and was talking about using the power of the garbage. He's the one who said, "I want to see that." So we could make a meeting with him, arrange a meeting with Danny and maybe one of the council members and see where we are with it. But I think when we do that, we need to have really a plan already. I mean, we're talking, but with certain people, we have to [inaudible]. That's it. And that's what we'd like to do, and that's been a dream of Nancy and a lot of people in the community.

It was interesting because I was looking at what it was that was so fearful for people, right? Well, you want to know what is it, the motivator. And I found that they were addressing it as something that they didn't want. And why didn't they want it? They didn't want it because they thought all kinds of crazies are going to come down and do all kinds of voodoo things and be into their-- what did they call it? Create all kinds of behaviors that were not expected or that should be in temples or should be in some other place, which I thought was ridiculous because I saw weddings on the little circle. But they created kind of a peculiar fear that you don't need anything but sand on the beach. But we don't mind sport and stuff. So I think that their mechanism of fear was really kind of peculiar, and I think that at the time, that council was young because they got the power in '80 and we're talking '84. And I don't think they wanted to muscle themselves too much. Now, it's 40 years later. It's a long time. They're in a different position. But politics is always murky, really. It doesn't ever kind of settle in because every time there is a change, and every time their whole relationship changes. I think at the time when we get to talking privately with Danny and maybe another council member is that they







would send us to the arts commission. They would send us to talk to them. For that, we need to have a plan also. So that's the important part.

And then things are changing here a little bit because the city had made a decision about the airport. You would think that it has no connection, but it does. They had decided that one group in the city-- 18th Street, I don't know if you know who they are. They're a group that has some very good piece of property on 18th Street in Santa Monica. They have been an art place for many years. They started, I would say, at the same time in the early '80s or maybe even kind of late '80s. It was bought by a woman, Sue Durkin, who decided-- I think at the time, there were studios there. And I'm not an artist like Deborah Sussman, who was a very exceptional designer. And Judy Chicago had a studio there. Other people had studios. But Sue bought the place and bought a piece and created some studios for artists. And that organization had changed in time, and now they have opened up to the-- I can send you some information for them. And they consider themselves the most important group in the Southland. And they were given the opportunity to the tune of a quarter of a million dollars a year to run the airport community. It took years to really make that happen, the airport community of the art, just as it took years for Bergamot to happen. And in both situations, I played a role. The artists finally got 41% of the space, of the land at the airport to become a cultural space.

And so they hired the administration of 18th Street to run the place. And by that, they kind of pushed out another group that was there, which was not a nonprofit and it was really presenting enough opportunity for others to have studios. The problem with Santa Monica really has to do with the fact that it's tiny. It's 8 by 3 miles. What can you do? And it's pretty much covered. So we don't have land, great parcels of land. So when Bergamot came up, it was 4 and a half acres. And that was bought by the city for transportation purposes, and now we have a train going through there. And my husband was on the council at the time. I suggested, "Let's make it an art place." And so it was rented to a guy who made it into gallery place. And that was missing in the city too. It's not that we had galleries. We had galleries here and there. But the clump became very important. And they were there for 20 years, and the ICA was there, then known as the Santa Monica Museum of Art, which was a very big, important calling card. And then the politics got in, and it got very messy and very disturbing. And the manipulator par excellence was the one that got the contract with the city. He bought, with a friend, with the same guy who helped him make it, a piece of land. It was one acre point four, and he sold it for \$35 million. So the opportunity here, the opportunistic behavior was really kind of something that kind of hit people on the head.

And when we'll meet with this council member who supported our project, but he's really precisely responsible for a lot of debt. But we'll see. We'll see what happens because we're not coming to do





much of real estate change, even though we're asking for a piece of real estate. But that's a state real estate. Now, that state real estate is already approved.

LLF

Already approved from when the original plans were...

BF

Yeah. The coastal commission approved it a long time ago, almost forty years ago. And so all the approvals were in place.

LLF

And those papers will be filed with the Santa Monica Coastal Commission?

BF

Exactly, and they are there. You could connect with them, and you could ask them if you could see those papers. So their permissions were made with the coastal commission. So the question is has anything changed, either politics or mood or anything like that? So what I see is happening now is the fact that 18th Street has gotten the charge of it, and the director of 18th Street, Jan Williamson, has a vision of her own. Her vision is that she wants to be the main say here in Santa Monica. We have a philosophical change in mind. I believe in the horizontal. She believes in the pyramidal. I don't believe that we need a czar in the arts. I believe that we need to have as much inclusiveness as we can, and I think those two ideas are now in clash. I don't think it's going to make any difference as far as Nancy's piece is concerned because that's going to be probably supported by every artist and every person. But it creates the problem of the politics a little bit, and it makes me a little wondering. So I think talking to Danny and making Danny understand what we are talking about is very important, and showing Danny more of Nancy's work is very important. Being mentioned in the book of Nancy edited by Alena Williams that Santa Monica was a terrible place, that's also important.

So we'll see. I think we have to plan how to bring it up. And we can sit around this table and talk to them and see what happens, but I'm revealing to you a whole lot of information that maybe is relevant and maybe not relevant. Maybe it's not that important. Maybe enough time has passed and people can indeed wake up. Elsa, for example, who you met, has just retired.

LLF

This is Elsa Longhauser who was the former director of the ICA in Los Angeles?





BF

Yeah. Yeah. That's right. She was the director of the Santa Monica Museum of Art while in Bergamot. And she left because of the politics of the city and moved downtown. She's done fantastic well there, and she told me that at the age of 72, she feels it's time to change. And she wants to work with the homeless. That's right. But there was there, there was a compassion and a space that was very special. I don't know the people in-- I know the other person that you met, but she was sitting on the arts commission for a while. She's a different sort of person. I think she's very good with her ideas and probably running the place, but they found somebody else, so they're going through changes also. But we can engage them. We can engage them. We can engage [inaudible] and [inaudible] certainly knows Nancy's work and certainly knows Bob's work, and I think Matt has some connections. So we have to put it down on paper, look at it and see, oh, this is good. This is powerful. This is not so [inaudible]. We don't need this. We do need this. So it'll take some work to do. And I have one more year on this board, and I think I have enough. I will have more time to do what I want to do. It'll be very important.

LLF

Thank you, Bruria. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we stop this first recording session?

BF

I hope we do it. I really do. I think it's such a unique and special piece, designed for Santa Monica, designed for the people in Los Angeles. It's going to be a piece that will be an absolute calling card for the city, and an important piece for the city. And I know that the way Nancy had designed it, it would last more than 200 years, as long as we have the sun and the wind.

