

NYFAI -

Interview: Sandra Branch interviewed by Dena Muller

Date: Thursday, March 22nd, 2007

D.M. Thursday, March 22nd. We're at the home of Sandra Branch, conducting an interview for the NYFAI Oral History Project. So the first question is: When did you first get involved in NYFAI and how?

S.B. I'm not too sure of the date. I want to say sometime in the late 70s. They were located in the UPS building on Spring Street.

D.M. I've seen pictures of that. It was a city building right?

S.B. Yes

D.M. A sort of federal style, monolithic thing?

S.B. Yes. It was way over by the river. I took my first class with Nancy's there.

D.M. Was it the Visual Diaries course?

S.B. Yes it was. I was trying to find another book but I couldn't. I don't know where it is.

D.M. You did keep them?

S.B. Of course.

D.M. A lot of people have said that, that's interesting. I think there's an idea afoot to do an exhibition or some sort of program around the materials that were kept from the class.

S.B. NYFAI moved to 91 Franklin St when Darla bought the building

D.M. To Tribeca.

S.B. Yes, Right.

D.M. Do you remember how you first found out about it? What made you take the first class?

S.B. I think I saw a flyer in the laundry on Leonard Street.

D.M. A flyer.

S.B. Mmhmm. They had put up a flyer in the laundry on Leonard Street and I saw it there when I was doing my laundry. It interested me.

D.M. It's so interesting how effective flyer-ing was at that time.

S.B. Well we were still very hippie.

D.M. Right, so many events and activities and organizations got started around flyers.

S.B. That was how you did everything. In fact, later when NYFAI was at 91 Franklin I was constantly posting flyers for them during that time.

D.M. And there were never any legal issues? You were never stopped?

S.B. No, the laundry had a bulletin board as did most places; coffee houses and such had bulletin boards or places for flyers.

D.M. Invited it.

S.B. Of course they got lost because people kept putting stuff over them.

D.M. O.k., so you saw a flyer and were you a working artist at the time already or what interested you in taking classes at the school?

S.B. Well, I was an artist. I had a loft on Canal Street and . . . was I teaching? I might have been teaching at The Little Red School House at that time.

D.M. Teaching art?

S.B. Yes. To sixth, seventh, and eighth graders . . . [in a whisper] never again.

D.M. [laughter]

S.B. I might have been teaching at that time or I was in a commercial art job. All my jobs were in art, were in some aspect of art. I was just interested in meeting other women in the artists' community. There was also a magazine at that time called "Women Artists" and there was "Artists Talk On Art", so all of these institutions were around . . . so I was just sort of interested in meeting people.

D.M. You were specifically drawn to the feminist . . .

S.B. Yes, because it was quite big then . . . coming out of the 60s.

D.M. Right. You identified as a feminist at the time?

S.B. Mmmhmm, yes but not militantly.

D.M. Were you in a consciousness raising group or anything like that before?

S.B. No. I did go to a few things at N.O.W. but they were a little too consciousness raising. They were a little too militant.

D.M. Right. They were organizing political actions.

S.B. And a lot of gay action which I really wasn't interested in. So I didn't ever really get into a consciousness raising group. The closest I ever got to one would be Nancy's Visual Diaries, an art conscious-raising group.

D.M. It's been interesting talking with students about how if they weren't in consciousness raising groups already, that that was part of the classroom environment for them. It had a lot of

the same components of consciousness raising: of listening to each persons experiences in the classes, and how it relates to their art.

S.B. Right, talking to the “I” and not to “you.”

D.M. Mmhmm.

S.B. You know what I’m saying? . . . using “you should have” but talking about the “I” and the question that we always had. We always brought up a question or a thought that we wanted to draw to.

D.M. Do you remember any of those in particular? Any that stick out in your mind?

S.B. [looking through her Visual Diaries book}

D.M. Sandra found one of her Visual Diaries dated February and March of . . . we don’t have a year but we’ll assume that it’s in the early 80s. There are some questions, assignments for each class written on the inside page.

S.B. And it was in February, March and April.

D.M. Would you mind reading one of the questions?

S.B. Not at all. “Which parent or family member was in your life the most important to you? Was it a negative or positive influence? Did she/he support your desires as an artist, your artwork?” And these were not questions that Nancy posed, they were decided by the class. We went around the group talking about what we’d like to work to.

D.M. So you decided the question in advance..

S.B. Yes it was done . . . You’d come to the class and as I remember the question would be talked about and then we’d sit silently and do a drawing and then we’d talk about it afterwards.

D.M. Class was once a week?

S.B. Yes.

D.M. And long? Were they like studio classes?

S.B. I think they were like two or three hours. Here’s another question. “How do you feel about your body? Do you take care of yourself? What are the parts of your body you don’t like? What are the parts of your body you do like? Are you afraid of being sick? What kind of illness have you had? How did you deal with them? How do illnesses of others affect you?” And then these were, I think, answers of how . . . what the drawing evoked

D.M. You mean from other classmates?

S.B. Yes because you could take notes. [Reading from her Visual Diary] Other peoples' illness makes me feel I want to help them/ I feel helpless. Accepting/ resigned to acceptance. A nuisance, narrow feet.

D.M. You mean that was someone's answer? I'm looking at your feet right now to see how narrow . . .

S.B. [Continues reading] Heavy calves, hard to find boots to fit. Self-conscious about body sometimes in bathing suit.

D.M. Those universal issues.

S.B. So you know, it was pretty open. People really did feel comfortable.

D.M. Right. All of the topics were personal topics like that . . . looking at family structure . . . mostly auto-biographical questions like that?

S.B. Yes. I think so.

D.M. Do you remember there ever being assignments being about broader social issues or were they always personal?

S.B. Here's the list of people. [Reading from book] Elaine Sessic, Sylvia Sales, Lynn Northrup, Joan Nickelson, Linda Right, and Kay Townes. Now I know she's still around.

D.M. I interviewed Lynn Northrup already for the project so that's nice to see her name there. And she kept her journals as well.

S.B. [Continues to read from book] Show books how class affected your life. What do you see in your future, three years and twenty years from now, what kind of life will you have? What kind of goals will you have at that time?

D.M. Well, we're twenty years.

S.B. Yes.

D.M. Did you write things down about what you expected in twenty years?

S.B. Well, Nancy had asked me to keep track of the questions. and I did, but I didn't enjoy doing a future plan...

D.M. Right.

S.B. And I think this is my way of haphazardly – you know how you think you'll do something and then you'll –

D.M. It's fantastic to have it. I'm sure Nancy would love to have photocopies if you wouldn't mind. She's archiving . . .

S.B. Because this is 6/20

D.M. So that's the end of the class?

S.B. [Continues reading] What does power mean to me, how would I define it?

D.M. There was a question that was a broader social question, right?

S.B. Mmmhmm. [Reading] When was the first time I felt I was powerful and how did I feel after? Another one was: What kind of child was I from my point of view?

D.M. The archival materials about NYFAI are going into the archive at Rutgers, the Women Artists wing.

S.B. I know, I packed up a lot of that when we left the building. I hope this doesn't get back to Nancy, I was furious she wanted to save everything.

D.M. You didn't want to save it?

S.B. No, I wanted to save 1 or 2 copies of everything not boxes and boxes of the same pamphlet.

D.M. Right.

S.B. Because it just gets dusty.

D.M. Sure. I wonder what happened. You think all of those boxes went to Rutgers?

S.B. I don't know, I assume so and they are weeding through it.

D.M. About what to keep and what not to keep?

S.B. Yes. Well, not so many duplicates, I thought everything should be kept, but not to make it so difficult for the archivist out there. They would get inundated with it. So you have 500 copies printed of something doesn't mean you have to save all 500 copies.

D.M. Well, it will get back to Nancy but I'm pretty sure that she wants everyone to tell the truth on the project so don't worry about it, you should say what your real experiences were. So that's interesting because we started with the very beginning and then talking about the archival materials brings us to the end. So you were involved at the time the school closed? You were also still part of it at that time?

S.B. Yes because Ceres Gallery was part of it.

D.M. Right.

S.B. Ceres was a program of it and I was the NYFAI liaison.

D.M. To Ceres Gallery . . .

S.B. Yess.

D.M. Can we talk about that? How did Ceres start as a project of NYAI?

S.B. Well it was to be a woman's gallery and it was . . . what's the other one?

D.M. Soho20 and A.I.R.?

S.B. No, Kore Gallery I think it was called – was the first one that was trying to get together.

D.M. You mean through NYFAI?

S.B. No. It was just assembling, a group of women were assembling – the temporary name was Kore. Then Rhonda Schaller and Polly Lai were very active members of NYFAI and they decided they would start their own gallery group because Kore was getting really picky/feminist about who they were going to accept.

D.M. What does that mean?

S.B. Well, I don't like your art or you so you can't be in our gallery. '84 was when the gallery was formed. Our first meeting was June 5th 1984.

D.M. So when you talk about Kore, was Rhonda Schaller involved in that group before and she brought the Ceres gallery idea to NYFAI?

S.B. Yes, it was the summer Darla bought the building and Rhonda, Polly and Darla wanted to have a gallery on the ground floor

D.M. So A.I.R. Gallery and Soho20 were founded in 1971 and 1972.

S.B. OK, but Ceres had nothing to do with those.

D.M. So this was a full 10 years later.

S.B. Mmhmm.

D.M. That people who were teaching and studying at NYFAI felt like a gallery project would be a good outreach program of NYFAI, right?

S.B. Mmhmm. Well, there were not that many people, just Darla, Polly Lai and Rhonda Schaller . . . it was because Darla had bought that building. So they had conceived of having a tea room and a gallery.

D.M. What happened to the tea room idea?

S.B. It never flew. It was hard enough getting funds to get the gallery going.

D.M. And were all of the people involved in the gallery also teachers or students at NYFAI?

S.B. No. About the only ones that were . . . Darla, myself . . . I'd say most of them had nothing to do with NYFAI.

D.M. They became members of the cooperative.

S.B. Yes. They were friends. We needed a paying membership; people to pay the dues, and do the construction. [Reading from minutes] The closing session by Darla, covered the construction. Update: She mentioned that the school NYFAI is behind schedule. She plans to begin next week. -- And this was June 5th '84. So you see both the school and the gallery were being constructed at the same time.

D.M. The renovations were happening to the Franklin Street building.

S.B. The floor above the first floor was where NYFAI was to be. [Reading from minutes] "She begins next week with a wall/s than lights can be put in, then paint to be done by the group."

S.B. But there were all these things that were going on, like we had . . . we probably had to build the whole NYFAI and renovate like painting the outside door, inside door area, spruce it up, cleaning window area, washing floors . . .

D.M. All the nuts and bolts of the collective.

S.B. So there was a lot. Construction sign up sheets were passed around and members and affiliates were encouraged to participate in order to have the gallery open for September 18th opening.

D.M. Does it say what year?

S.B. Well, that was 1984.

D.M. Do you remember what the first exhibition was at Ceres?

S.B. Yes. It was a group show.

D.M. Of the first membership?

S.B. Yeah. It was in September 1984

D.M. Did NYFAI ever use the gallery space for class projects and . . .

S.B. Yes, they had the option to use it. It was part of the by-laws. They also had an option to use it for 2 exhibits.

D.M. Each season.

S.B. Yes.

D.M. Were those usually group shows of students, or how were those . . .

S.B. It was open to anyone, NYFAI students as well as Ceres members and other artists. If you went to Ceres Gallery downtown, there's a brochure . . .

D.M. You mean their location in Chelsea now?

S.B. Yes.

D.M. That tells the history?

S.B. I have put brochures in a binder and there's one in the '85 binder.

D.M. Are you still involved in Ceres today?

S.B. I'm an inactive member.

D.M. Congratulations on The New York Times review on the Agents of Change show. That was a good thing.

S.B. I think the review was political if you consider who the artists were. It really doesn't have anything to do with the membership of the gallery.

D.M. You don't think so?

S.B. No. I don't think you'll see the gallery at all. It was just those people were very important. But it has nothing to do with it's being at Ceres.

D.M. You mean that the review happened. I think it's meaningful to Ceres, though, to have been open enough to host the show.

S.B. Yes it was a good move but I do not think it will bring more reviewers

D.M. It creates a good synergy moving forward.

D.M. O.k. so the school had been open for several years and had been in a previous location.

S.B. Right, and then Darla bought the building.

D.M. So did the school open in the new building at the same time that the gallery opened?

S.B. Yes. I think it probably did because Darla was paying for everything at the school.

D.M. Darla also funded programming at the school?

S.B. Yes. She funded the school. Darla was the mainstay of NYFAI. If it hadn't been for Darla there would have been no NYFAI.

D.M. Interesting. Do you know anything about the early Ford Foundation grant?

S.B. No.

D.M. There was . . .

S.B. How much was that?

D.M. You know, it's interesting because Judy Chiti who was involved in getting the grant, couldn't remember the exact dollar amount but thought that it was pretty large.

S.B. And what was large back then?

D.M. 25 – 30,000 dollars as an early support . . . that there was a whole process where the Ford Foundation had committed the money and then started to pull back a little bit. It was vague as to

whether they were going to follow through or not, and that the people involved at the time – Judith being one – were just really proactive and demanded a meeting with the Ford Foundation people and insisted that the grant be honored. I think that was in '79, '80 and around the time of the gala. Were you involved with the school when they had the big gala celebration?

S.B. Yes, yes I was.

D.M. You went to that party?

S.B. Oh, I went to all of them. I was a member of Ceres, and a member of NYFAI.

D.M. So it was at the World Trade Center and . . .

S.B. Yeah, and we had an exhibit. I vaguely remember that.

D.M. Louise Nevelson was there.

S.B. What year was that?

D.M. I want to say it was early. It was between 1979 and 1980, the very first years of the school.

S.B. And what was the date in the book there?

D.M. '83. This book says '83.

S.B. I remember there being an exhibit down at the World Trade Center but I don't remember it being that early.

D.M. I just saw for the first time, the invitation for that event and so, we can double check if the year is on that but I thought it was in the earliest years.

S.B. . . . and we rented to artist communities too like the WCA (Women artists)

D.M. For group shows you mean?

S.B. No, for group meetings. And Crystal Quilt, have you heard of Crystal Quilt?

D.M. Yes.

S.B. They rented from us. Have you interviewed Rhonda Schaller?

D.M. I will on Monday.

S.B. She'll have everything in writing.

D.M. Well that's definitely the intention of this project is putting all of these interviews together to get a good full picture of the time and different people's involvement. So you were a student in classes but also, obviously, you were really involved in organizational, administrative stuff as well, right?

S.B. I was working a little bit within the office but I was more involved with Ceres.

D.M. O.k. So how were you involved in questions of the archives, or what to archive?

S.B. Well, when push came to shove and they had to have people.

D.M. Was Ceres moving out or what was happening?

S.B. No, Ceres didn't move out til '91.

D.M. O.k.

S.B. We wanted more foot traffic,

D.M. When did this project to archive (and decide what to keep and what not to keep) happen?

S.B. I don't know. Perhaps it was when Rutgers offered to take it. You'd have to find out when Rutgers . . .

D.M. O.k. But Ceres was still physically in the building?

S.B. Yes. We were there until '90. We were there after NYFAI closed. I think '91 was our first show at 584 Broadway. We tried to do outreach. NYFAI had a raffle of a Judy Chicago print. The drawing was April 3rd, 1985.

D.M. She was involved as an instructor, right? Did you ever take any courses with her?

S.B. No I think she'd come in for one course, for one day.

D.M. She taught some workshops. She did something called "The Birth Project." at NYFAI.

S.B. O.k. I don't know.

D.M. She had everyone visualizing being born and giving birth and making art about it.

S.B. Interesting.

D.M. I'm pretty sure. So you took Nancy's "Visual Diaries" course, did you take any other courses?

S.B. Rhonda Schaller taught a wax course, I took that one. I did take some other courses, I just don't remember, they're sort of cloudy in my mind.

D.M. Did you teach any courses there?

S.B. No. Here it says [reading from brochure] in 1987, The NEA Workshop.

D.M. Was that about grant writing?

S.B. [Continue reading] NYFAI will also hold 3 lectures on Tuesday nights at 7 pm.

D.M. NEA Lectures because they were funded by the NEA?

S.B. Here, I'll let you read.

D.M. It sounds like they were funded by the NEA right? Yeah they're just being called the NYFAI NEA Lecture, I would imagine that's because there was some NEA support behind it.

S.B. Yeah, some connection.

D.M. And here's an Arlene Raven benefit. Do you remember anything about that?

S.B. No. I was the typist but . . .

D.M. What Arlene was raising money for.

S.B. You could borrow these books of minute if you'd like.

D.M. O.k. I'll talk to Nancy about it.

S.B. I know she wants the . . . Rhonda is also writing a book.

D.M. Oh, is she? Oh, that's good.

S.B. Well these are all my copies that I have kept and so of course, I'm the archivist for Ceres Gallery because everybody says, "Well you have a copy."

D.M. That's good. Thank goodness you did it. I'm not sure what is in the Rutgers Archives already and I'll definitely communicate that to Nancy.

S.B. Are you going out to Rutgers to look at them?

D.M. It would be an interesting thing to do. The physical archives are not as directly a part of this oral history project. The idea here is that we're interviewing people involved at all different levels, all different times at the school. I probably shouldn't even say all different levels, it's anti-feminist, there weren't levels.

S.B. Well no, there were levels. There were a few that were totally involved. Have you interviewed Kay Townes.

D.M. I didn't. Flavia Rando who started the project might have.

S.B. She was very involved. She was one of the names that I remember always being there. And Phyllis.

D.M. Phyllis has been interviewed. You're looking for more names of . . .

S.B. Well I'm just saying, not so many members of Ceres were deeply involved. Rhonda Schaller was, a lot of the people did not take courses at NYFAI.

D.M. So what would say was the relationship between Ceres and NYFAI then.

S.B. They were our 501.3 ticket to a non-profit organization. The 501 was given in the name of NYFAI and they're very hard to come by now.

D.M. Right.

S.B. So we were a chapter, or a department, or an offspring of that. For many years we kept NYFAI on our stationary but finally we were able to take it over as our own.

D.M. So it's now registered as Ceres Gallery, 501c3.

S.B. Yes.

D.M. Do you have a sense of what the current membership of Ceres . . . what the connection is to the history of NYFAI? Are people aware of that history or feel connected to it?

S.B. No. I don't think there's anybody there that . . . I mean, there may be 10 people who would know what NYFAI was but most of the people have joined long since NYFAI was defunct.

D.M. So you said that you got to know the school early and you took classes right away in the beginning. You took classes all the way through for a decade?

S.B. I took when I was interested and when I was unemployed I would work in the office sometimes to help.

D.M. What kinds of things were you doing in the office?

S.B. Typing, sorting, trying to make sense of what they were keeping and what they weren't keeping.

D.M. Do you remember what the enrollment of the school was? How many students were involved at any given time?

S.B. No, it was very loose back in those days. . . we had mailing parties. We had these gargantuan mailing parties where one would sit there and sort brochures by zip code. Students for classes were needed to keep the school open.

D.M. And that was to send out the course information to prospective students?

S.B. Yes. I can't remember the brochures at all. I just remember you have all those little 'c's, 'd's' and 'e's' that you have to stick on the piles to separate zip codes. You know it was bulk mailing and Darla was in charge of that. We'd have tables set up at the school. It was very companionable

D.M. She kept everybody in order?

S.B. Well, yes, she is a good supervisor. So we did do bulk mailings of the brochure but it's interesting, Darla was our first president of Ceres Gallery.

D.M. I've seen a few of them. One of the earlier ones has a picture from a renaissance painting of a woman painting herself. Does that sound familiar at all?

S.B. Vaguely . . .

D.M. I know Melissa Meyer worked on one of the first ones. I interviewed her and she talked about that.

S.B. Oh that's good.

D.M. She did the typesetting and graphic design for one of the first ones.

S.B. Great.

D.M. Were you part of the school when it closed? Do you remember any of the conditions around the school closing?

S.B. I'm trying to remember. I must have been because it became Darla's studio . . . and we were still there.

D.M. Ceres Gallery was on the ground floor?

S.B. Was on the street level floor. And Darla had her psychiatry office in the back.

D.M. In the back of the ground floor.

S.B. Yeah.

D.M. And the school was on the second floor.

S.B. Yes. And the third and fourth floors were sold as coops and the fifth floor was Darla and Nancy's. That was Darla's studio and they had bought a Jack Russell (dog).

D.M. Was that Gretta?

S.B. Yes.

D.M. Aww, Gretta.

S.B. I must have fed her all of the time.

D.M. They lost Gretta last year, a year and a half ago.

S.B. Did she remain?

D.M. Mmhmm. Those little short legs and bark, bark, bark, bark, bark.

S.B. She ate all the time! I can remember sitting in the gallery and Darla coming in and Gretta r-unn-i-ng in.

D.M. Those scrabbly little feet across the. . so you don't remember the situation around .

S.B. I remember the stuff going to Rutgers.

D.M. You remember the school closing. Did Ceres stay in the building longer than the school did?

S.B. Yes. Oh yeah. Ceres stayed in there until 1990.

D.M. O.k. Do you remember any of the conditions or discussions around the closing of the school? How that was handled? What were the reasons for it?

S.B. Darla didn't want to support it anymore and I don't think Nancy didn't either. It was too hard to maintain a class structure and for them both to do their own artwork.

D.M. That's interesting that you say that because we just interviewed Miriam Schapiro last week and she said that the reason that she left the school before it closed was that she felt like she needed to get back to the studio. It seems to be a really interesting issue in the women's movement that so many artists got roped into being administrators as well, doing all of this really time consuming, exhausting, demoralizing, work of fundraising and organizing and trying to lead the group . . .

S.B. Right, right, you get burnt out.

D.M. . . . that it taxes your energies and takes your time away from the studio. The whole point of, the art world should provide these resources for all artists, including women, so that they have the time and energy and focus to be in their studios, but the women's art movement was about creating those resources for women artists. It took a lot of people away from art making to be the organizers.

S.B. People got burnt out. It was always on a volunteer basis that you helped out in the office, or you came to these bulk mailings . . . and that was great coming out of the 60s.

D.M. All that grass roots hand . . .

S.B. And you know, you're young but it pales a little after awhile and you want that other energy coming in. I don't think that energy was what the next generation had in mind. They were more . . . "Hey I want to do my art, I don't want to sit here and do bulk mailings or . . ."

D.M. And it's a complicated issue in New York I imagine it changes with the art market over those times that people . . .

S.B. At first Soho was very inexpensive. Nobody wanted to live down there. Nobody had even been there. It got to the point that nobody could live down there. The 80s and then there was the depression, the recession, 1979,

D.M. Mmhmm the depressing recession.

S.B. Yes. I'm thinking back, Nancy held some classes on her own, in her own studio.

D.M. After the school closed?

S.B. No, prior to that. Nancy held no classes after that. She totally nailed and went into nailing her presence in the art world. I think both she and Darla did. Yeah, I think they were tired. And nobody wanted to . . . there wasn't that grassroots mentality of the . . .

D.M. And nobody wanted to do it single handedly.

S.B. Yes and nobody wanted to put in the time. You know, the same thing happens with artist-run galleries. You get a membership of 40 people and they say “Well you should” and you say “It’s not ‘you,’ it’s ‘we’.”

D.M. The gallery should, the gallery should, who’s the gallery?

S.B. “We” So, you know, it’s a problem as in every organization you have 5 or 6 people that end up doing the grunt work. I was secretary for eons at Ceres.

D.M. You were one of those 5 people.

S.B. And I finally said “enough.” And so I support Ceres by being an inactive member, so they get my money every year but . . . and it hasn’t changed. I read the minutes and they’re still begging for money and raising the dues. I don’t think it makes a difference even if men were involved.

D.M. Right and some of it is organizational structure, collective issues that are always going to be there.

S.B. It’s just the name of the game.

D.M. Well, is there anything about the structure of NYFAI or the tone of the school, the spirit in the classroom that you would say was unique to it being a feminist organization?

S.B. Well, it was a great idea. It came at a good time because there were a lot of people interested in it. Nancy’s “Visual Diaries” certainly will go down in history. I think a lot of people took that course.

D.M. It’s really true everyone refers to it. Almost every interview has talked about that class.

S.B. I think that was the highlight of the structure of the school. NYFAI is Visual Diaries is Nancy Azara.

D.M. Right.

S.B. I don’t think. Well, if you look at Women’s Studio and Melissa Wolf. She really puts in a lot of time to make that run properly.

D.M. Right.

S.B. I don’t think Nancy wanted to put in that kind of time.

D.M. Or had already done that for 10 years or something, right?

S.B. Well not really, not like Melissa Wolf. Melissa Wolf, I really admire that woman. She teaches plus she runs that place and she fundraises but Nancy wasn’t that organized. I think she wanted people to help her out, to do things for her.

D.M. Well, sure. She didn't want to be the one of one, or one of that life.

S.B. But I think there are two kinds of leaders, there's a leader who really know what they want and they know how they want to do it and they get people . . . they say "Hey, you would be great to do this, will you do this and this?." And you do it and they don't hound you forever to do it forever and ever, they find somebody else the next time around. And I think Melissa is very good at that. She is constantly seeking people to teach. And I don't think Nancy had that gift.

D.M. But in the classroom with the Visual Diaries . . .

S.B. She was wonderful. She's a real truly, true artist.

D.M. Yes.

S.B. It'd be like asking Louise Bourgeois to run a school.

D.M. That'd be an interesting school, right?

S.B. I mean she has a great mind and she gives those little salons the first Sunday of every month. But she would no more want to be . . .

D.M. Balance the books and deal with . . .

S.B. the money and . . .

D.M. Yeah.

S.B. I think it takes a very balanced person to run something like that. It was a great idea.

D.M. So would you say that you're experiences in the classroom and in the years that you were there with courses like the Visual Diaries, what impact did that have on you outside the school or after NYFAI closed?

S.B. The Visual Diaries class made you think about your art as part of you and not being separate from you.

D.M. Do you feel like it gave you more resources to continue with your career as an artist. Then you think about your career over the years, with your involvement at Ceres, how instrumental was NYFAI in developing your sense of yourself as an artist?

S.B. Well it certainly got me in with a group of women artists. It certainly was instrumental in helping me find a place in the art world. If it hadn't been for NYFAI than there wouldn't have been Ceres, and if it hadn't been for Ceres than I wouldn't have been a member, and I wouldn't have met these women and I wouldn't have exhibited there. So it was sort of a domino effect. In that sense it was an impetus to starting and it was a community. I think that was the most important thing, it was a community.

D.M. And that community, it sounds like, extended outside of the classroom and other projects came out of it. You were involved in Ceres throughout those years, but are there other friendships that you made in the classroom that you kept through you life or ways that . . .

S.B. In the beginning at Ceres we were a very close and supportive group. We went to each others opening and we took the showing artist to dinner after her opening, and times changed. No, soon, we all sort of came and went. You know, this one I just gave you the card of, I recognized her immediately but . . . and she sort of said “Oh you look vaguely familiar” . . . but it wasn’t a sisterhood, a society where you would go off and go to the movies together. I don’t think are that kind of . . . I think artists are solo anyway.

D.M. Hmm. That’s interesting.

S.B. I think your studio time is very important, you think time.

D.M. Not necessarily in it for friendship you’re . . .

S.B.. You’re in it for friendship and the community. You know you have the resource of somebody “Hey, I’m having this problem with finding this oil paint . . . “ It gives you a liaison but it’s not like you’re looking for this drinking buddy . . . Maybe guys are, but. . .

D.M. Is there anything else in closing about the school structure, the environment of the classroom, the impact it had on you as an artist, anything else that is sort of the central message that you would like to be recorded in this project?

S.B. No, I think it was a very good thing that NYFAI and Ceres grew together and than grew apart. I think it was a maturing process. It’s very difficult. Egos are very sensitive in the art world. I don’t think they will every change. I think there will always be little battles. That’s what make it so difficult. Just as an example, I was a textile designer and we tried to unionize the textile designers. Well, you can’t unionize artists, you can unionize graphic artists because it is closer to business - you know making brochures - but when you try to unionize painters, it’s just like . . .

D.M. Like you said, the spirit is too solitary to be corralled up like that.

S.B. It’s just like eww . . . I don’t want to be THAT close. Because we wanted to get a better pay for colorings and designs but the ego is just amazing. You’d think “Well I’m better than she is I should be able to get more money, I don’t have to join a union.”

D.M. Were you involved in that effort before NYFAI, when was that timeframe?

S.B. Ahh, Graphic Artist Association (GAA). I was in that . . .

D.M. The point of my question was did you enter NYFAI already having experience trying to organize artists or was that something that you tried to do after?

S.B. I think that was after.

D.M. In the 90s.

S.B. No, no. It would have been in the 80s. I entered the textile industry in '79 so it's sort of co –

D.M. Right. While you were involved at NYFAI and founding Ceres, you were also trying to organize.

S.B. Right. That was another leaflet, I had seen that poster someplace. It's interesting isn't it that all these organizations were vines.

D.M. All happening at the same time.

S.B. All this energy coming out of the 60s. The Graphic Art Association is still very present but they are graphic artists, they're not textile designers now it's done by computers so it doesn't make any difference. [laughter;

D.M. All right. Thank you so much for your time.

S.B. Your welcome. And if you ever want to use those minutes . . .

D.M. I will definitely let Nancy know that you have that.

S.B. Well she knows that I have that.

D.M. See if she wants them photocopied, or what would happen.

S.B. No, she knows I have all that.

D.M. O.k. Thanks.

S.B. And as I said Ceres' announcements would be in the archives.

D.M. I have seen some of those as well at Nancy's.

S.B. O.k.

D.M. All right. Thank you so much.

S.B. Your welcome.