

**DIEDRA HARRIS-KELLEY ORAL HISTORY**

Interviewer: Camara Holloway	Interviewee: Diedra Harris-Kelley	Date of interview: October 13, 2021
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CAMARA HOLLOWAY: So, this interview is being conducted for the Romare Bearden Digital Catalogue Raisonné Project. The interviewer is Camara Holloway. The person being interviewed is Diedra Harris-Kelley. And the interview is taking place at the offices of the Wildenstein Plattner Institute in New York City on October 13th, 2021. So, welcome, Diedra.

DIEDRA HARRIS-KELLEY: Thank you.

CH: Yeah. So, first of all, can you tell us who Romare Bearden was?

DHK: To me?

CH: Well, in general, to everyone, like, why should we be interested in him?

DHK: Well, he's one of the innovators of visual arts of the twentieth century and of African-American art. Very experimental with [elevator rings] a series of media that, you know, primarily was collage but also oil on canvas, printmaking, watercolor. And he often depicted African-American culture, and so you get a lot of themes of music through his work, particularly jazz music. You get themes of family, home, rural South -- which is where he was born -- and New York and Pittsburgh. And I think, you know, he appeals to a lot of people because of his depictions of life and African-American life. A

lot of street scenes. And he's just a beloved artist, you know, for color and his experimentation, I believe, yeah.

And he lived a long time. You know, born in 1911 in segregated North Carolina, Charlotte, at the time. And moved then as a young boy to New York. Spent some time in Pittsburgh. And he didn't pass away until 1988. So, he did a lot of work. Produced a lot. And also worked as a social worker. So, he lived a lot of life. He was very active as an activist/artist in the '60s. So, he got involved with a lot of the movements to increase representation in museums. He was very interested in education. We've formed curriculum around his ideas. He co-authored several books. And so, I think his legacy is of an artist who was very generous and involved in moving art.

CH: Okay. And so, how are you connected to Bearden?

DHK: I'm connected to Bearden right now as the co-director of the Romare Bearden Foundation. But the way that I got connected to that is through the founder of the Bearden Foundation, Nanette Bearden, Romare's wife and widow. And I did -- I was fortunate enough to grow up in the family and to know Bearden as a child. And he and Nanette didn't have kids, so we actually got to spend time in the city with them, because we all grew up on Staten Island.

CH: Okay.

DHK: So, Nanette was one of eight girls born to two immigrants from St. Martin, in the Caribbean, the French Caribbean. And she was second to elder, eldest. And so, she was doing various things outside. She was a model; she started a dance company. And so, by the time Bearden passed away in 1988, she was very active in a lot of scenes and doing a lot with her dance company. And she took on starting the foundation, because it was something that Bearden had willed and wanted to happen. And so, I came along about 1994. So, she started it in 1990, and I came along in about 1994, just a couple of years before she passed away.

And I was returning to New York with my family. I had a young daughter at the time, and we had moved back to New York -- I say back, because both my ex-husband and I are both from New York originally, but we'd been in California and Michigan and Atlanta, North Carolina. We had been to a lot of different cities and we were finally returning to New York. And I had finished graduate school; I got my MFA at the University of Michigan. And had done a little bit in my studio in Michigan before moving here. And so, I opened a studio here in New York, down on White Street, by Canal. And then, I started teaching at NYU. I got just, you know, an adjunct gig, teaching in painting and drawing. And, you know, was about to be an artist, I guess. [laughs] Was about to try to be a professional artist. But I had a young daughter, so it was -- you know, it was challenging.

And then, Nanette was, you know, asking me to be on the board, and I felt like I definitely needed to help and be involved. And

so, I became a board member for a little while, and then I stepped off the board and I was doing various jobs with the Foundation before becoming actually employed by the Foundation in 2005.

CH: Okay.

DHK: Just wanted to give you a little break, in case you had some questions.

CH: So, well, let's take a step back and start about you growing up. You said that you were born in Staten Island, and --

DHK: Yep, yep.

CH: -- and that's where your family is from. What was it like growing up there?

DHK: Well, I was born in the early '60s, 1962. And my family -- you know, they were -- you can imagine, okay, so eight girls born to this family. They were poor. And my mother was born in 1932, so that's during the Depression. And so, they didn't have a lot. So, it was a very good -- in a way, a good childhood, because even though we didn't have a lot, we had a lot of people. We had a lot of aunts, a lot of cousins. And so, you always had people around you; you always had people to go to school with. [laughs] And I was the youngest of four. So, my mother had four children. And since I was born, very soon after I was born, she separated from my father. So, she was a single

parent. She remained a single parent -- to this day, she's still alive, she'll be 90 in January. But you know, so it was a little bit of a struggle, but the thing that I always say about my family is that they are responsible, really, for me going into the arts and feeling comfortable in the arts. Because, you know, a lot of people ask me, Well, how did you get to study art? Didn't you worry about how much money you were gonna make? [laughs] And, you know, was there pressure from your -- from your family? There wasn't.

You know, so this was a family where you had a dancer. One of my aunts, my youngest aunt, Sheila, was a dancer with the first dance company of Dance Theater of Harlem. And she had three children while she was a dancer, but she had three children -- so that's a testimony to the support that she had through the family and her husband. And then, you had Nanette, who was interested in dance. She had shepherded Sheila through dance, her younger sister. And she was a model, and she was living in the city. She was living in, you know, those circles, many circles, artistic circles. And many of my other aunts are creative folks. You know, one is a quilter now. I mean, at the time, she was in nursing. And so, this was a family that sort of accepted artists. And so, when I was younger and just drawing in the corner, they left me alone. And I have to credit them. Having brought up my own child and really supported whatever she was doing, it's not easy to do that and to allow kids to have their own direction. But I will say that I credit that with the family that I grew up in and that there were artists there.

And so, it was -- it was [pauses] hard because we grew up in the projects of Staten Island. Now, they're not the projects that they are today; they're not the like, public housing developments that they are today. It was kinda nice. I hate to use that term, [laughs] but -- because there were communities created depending on what building you lived in, and then you were a community in the whole. So, yeah, we were exposed to a lot of art. My aunt, who was the dancer, she also was a part of the community on Staten Island that was involved in dance and arts and starting institutions. They had Universal Temple of the Arts, which still exists today, and they do jazz festivals and they do children's classes. And we had to do, like, African dance classes. They made us do all of that, right? Like, we didn't have any say-so. We were dragged around, and they were like the pied pipers of Staten Island, and that was the community that I grew up in.

And so, you know, the other thing that I've said many times over is that I saw these women as leaders in their community. So, I learned a lot about doing what you're called to do, and then, just always being open to the challenges. Because, like I said, I came to New York thinking I was gonna just have my own studio and, you know, paint. You know? [laughs] And it didn't quite go like that. I was called -- I was pressed into service and called to do, you know, to work with the legacy. Which is, you know, great. And so, I learned a lot. I won't turn away from any of that. I think that I -- you know, I tried to maintain a practice, but it was very hard. And it's a little daunting when you are faced with the legacy of knowing what Bearden did and

what he was and what he meant to other artists and to the field. To sort of not want to be in service to perpetuate that. So, what else about growing up? Is that -- are we still on my growing up?

CH: Yeah. Is your -- was your mother artistically inclined?

DHK: Yes. Yes. And my father was an artist, which I tend to leave out often, because I didn't have much of a relationship with him. But he was an artist. He was a painter. And you know, the thing is that he was interested in the life of an artist, and he was a graphic designer, for the most part, I think. And he made paintings, and Romare did try to talk to him, tried to help him. But you know, I found out later that he actually was involved with the person who ran Wells' Restaurant -- you know, Wells' waffle, chicken and waffle place? He was friends with them, and at one point, my mother and I -- I took her over there as an adult when she came to visit Harlem. And she went looking for the murals that he had done inside the restaurant. Which I didn't know. This is great. [laughs]

But he was also sort of one of those man-about-town kinda guys. You know, flashy -- good-looking, very good-looking. He was in the service for a little while. But he was flashy; like, I remember he wore flashy outfits. Like, a one-piece green jumpsuit, which I'll never forget, 'cause I was so embarrassed when he showed up at a family function with this, like -- looking like a pimp, like a straight hustler. [laughs] But he was. I mean, he was artistically inclined, but I do tend to



overlook him as an influence, because he was hands-off. You know, I didn't live with him much as a young child, but when I did go to visit him, unlike Romare, his studio was off -- like, you know, hands-off, kids can't go in that room. We couldn't play with his stuff. I didn't really know anything about what he was doing. But I know that he was working for a lot of magazines and doing a lot of -- I don't know if you remember the magazine called *Sepia*.

CH: Yeah.

DHK: He worked for that. And he did, you know, graphic design. But he was not as generous as Romare. I say that because as an artist, I know it's not easy to have people in the studio. Not -- to have little kids in your studio, messing up stuff. And I know that he really was genuinely, I think, interested in what we thought. So he'd say, you know, "Draw me -- or pick out pieces -- of magazine scraps that remind you of spring, or remind you of summer." I mean, I remember that distinctly as a project. And he was interested in reading with us. So, we would come and he loved comics, so he would sit, and one of us would read, and he would laugh and we would laugh, and he'd ask us, "Well, what do you think about that?" And we came in, and I mean, often he was busy and we were off somewhere with my aunt. She would take us to theater, ballet, ice skating at Rockefeller Center. 'Cause you have to imagine, we grew up on Staten Island. She grew up on Staten Island. And she knows there's none of that, really, there. And I think she took it on -- she took that

project on of exposing her nieces and nephews to the larger world.

And so, we would come, and sometimes he was very busy and he would greet us like the jolly uncle. And people think I'm playing, but that is like, my image of a jolly uncle. You know, big smile, working there in the loft. And then, we were off somewhere and he'd give us some money, like dig in his pockets, give us money. Or there were times when we'd come back and he'd have dinner with us. And he and Nanette liked to make these biscuits that I thought were like, these incredible biscuits. And spaghetti. We always had spaghetti and biscuits or pasta and whatever. But these biscuits were so good. And then, I learned later, they're like Pillsbury biscuits or -- [laughs] or Bisquick or something really easy. But that's a memory that I have of them.

And they just were happy, and they obviously were bohemian, but I don't know if I identified it as such then. I just knew that it was very different than our homes in Staten Island, you know. And eclectic. They had a lot of stuff, and a lot of books. And we loved going there. It was -- you know, they had cats. They always had at least three cats at every moment. And there was a family that lived downstairs from them. They lived on Canal Street; 357 Canal, I'll never forget that address. And it was a fourth-floor walkup. And narrow, narrow, dark, walkup. But I remember that. And they lived -- the family was a Japanese artist and his family. He had a daughter and a son. Toshito

[sic],<sup>1</sup> I think her name was -- Tokito, I don't remember exactly. But she was about our age. And so, oh yes, I should mention that whenever I went over to my aunt and uncle's house, I went with two other cousins. We were all the same age, and from different sisters, [laughs] aunts.<sup>2</sup>

And [pauses] -- one little funny story is that -- I don't know, maybe you won't find this funny, but I think it's cute. [laughs] Initially, when Nanette was bringing us -- when she got involved with her nieces and this idea -- they built a loft bed in the back room of their loft. And the loft bed was -- I mean, it's so small when I think about it now. But what they did was they just had a closet and on top, they built a bed with stairs. And so, they started having mostly nieces, because that's what Nanette could handle. And at first, it was my cousin Charlene, who is Sheila's daughter, and my sister Irie, who's older than me by two years. And she was taking them to dance class; she enrolled them in dance classes, and then they would come and hang out for the weekend. And I was not able to come. Like, I wasn't asked to come.

One time when we were bringing my sister into the city, well, both of them into the city, and I was driving back with my mom and my uncle. I didn't want to leave, so I hid my shoe, thinking that if I couldn't like, find my shoe, that maybe they would just let me stay and hang out. And it just didn't happen, and my mother got hip to it. But I remember for a little while they

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<sup>1</sup> Chiho Tokita, the daughter of Ryo Tokita.

<sup>2</sup> The other two cousins referenced are Charlene Muhammad and Annmarie Spicer Henderson.

were all looking for the shoe, and I was like, Hm [laughs]. It was a sandal, and I think my mom -- I don't want to say she hit me with it, but she was very upset with me for delaying. But anyway, so I say that because aunt Nanette did what she could with who she could manage. Right, like, it wasn't like she was bringing all the boys, and all of the -- you know, all of us, and we had to be a certain age, and we had to be able to know how to behave. So, this is between the age of, I'd say 10 to 17, we were hanging out.

And really, not so much -- like, when we were 18, we went with them down to St. Martin. And it was my first visit to St. Martin and the Caribbean. And they took all three of us, three cousins. And we were all turning 18. And we were a hot mess. [laughs] We would just -- we just did too much. And they were ready to send us home, [laughter] because we were going -- we were trying to go to the clubs; at that time, there were only two dance clubs, you know. And we felt like superstars, 'cause we were from New York, right? And so, we did that. And then, at one point, my uncle Romie said that we had to have whoever was picking us up at the bottom of the hill, 'cause the house was on a big hill. Whoever was gonna pick us up had to come all the way up the hill and meet him, and we were like, Oh my god. So, it was that kind of stuff where -- after a week they were ready to send us back. We put posters on the wall; why were we bringing posters? I don't know, we were going on vacation, but we brought posters. We were using too much water. It was that kind of [laughs] -- just 18 and just a hot mess. And I had already moved to California by then with my family, but I came out to go with

them. So, that's why I'm saying that I'm -- I'm trying to think of the last time we went to Nanette and Romie's house. I think we might have been 14 or 15, I don't think we were older than that when we stopped going. And we would go for the weekends, and then we would go back. Sometimes she would bring us in on the ferry, but sometimes my uncle would drive us. And so, yeah.

And -- my mother also had some artistic [ability] -- she still does. But she actually made paintings, a few paintings that I remember being in the house. No one knows what happened to them, but you know, so. But I did have that as an influence. I did know that. And my brother actually -- I credit him with teaching me how to draw. Because he was into comics, and he knew how to draw comics really well. And he would just show me some shorthands, drawing the *Archie* comics. And so, that is really sort of the beginnings of it. And I remember, too -- I think I've been asked this before -- what I thought of Romare's work initially, as a kid. This is why I think I can relate to kids in workshops, because some of it was scary. I remember feeling like some of it was -- was scary. The faces, the masks, the big hands. You know. And so, [fire siren] I guess I can say that I had come to appreciate it, but as a kid, you know, you have all those questions about the work. But also, I just didn't even know what an artist did.

I did have one other really strong influence in art, and this was a neighbor -- I'm sorry, she wasn't a neighbor. This is the best friend of one of my aunts, my aunt Sheila. And so, yeah, they had a whole group of bohemian artists, dancers, writers,

poets. If it was happening on Staten Island, they knew about it, right? They were part of it. And so, her name is Andrea Phillips, and she also does collage-type work. But it spilled out into every aspect of her home. So, for instance, she had a refrigerator that was the most fascinating thing to me, because it was collaged with labels from bottles, like wine and liquor bottles, and all kinds of, you know, labels, that she would -- mostly when I think about it, it wasn't like, food labels. It was definitely like, wine and liquor labels. Beautiful, the most beautiful thing. Now, I'm sure she threw it away; she's still living, too. But also, she would do these patchwork creations. Right, so purses, pillows, clothing, jackets. Everybody had them. You know, I still have some. And she did quilts and she also -- she did decoupage on all her furniture. Her yard in the back had a ceramic path that she had pieced together. And I just remember that her whole life, all of her energy, all of her art, was her house. Like, it was like you were living inside of a painting. And the most fascinating thing as a kid. I mean, if you like visual stuff, and I think I did even then. Just so much to look at. And she was just funny -- she is funny and warm. She came to one of my openings, and I was just so honored, because she loved my work. And that was a real -- that was a real perk for me.

But anyway, so she was a strong influence also, because we would go over to her house. You know, they were girlfriends, all the girlfriends like we do -- you get together and you talk at each other's house, and the kids just play. And I was under the table most of the time, drawing or doing something, and I had access

to the whole rest of her house. And so, that really was a big influence, I think, to me, and what art could be. Because she also, at the time -- I don't remember him as well, but her husband was an artist. And he was a painter, and he made funny paintings -- like, to me, as a child. Very explicitly sexual, weird, paintings. Where women figures had like, six and eight breasts. And I just thought, That is weird.

So, compared to -- so, I did have a variety of art in my life, [laughs] I can say, before I started going to museums and galleries. This was what I thought of as art, was just what these people were producing and making with their hands. And I thought of that as art. Andrea sewed. My sister sewed, made clothes. Nanette sewed. And so, those are the kind of things that -- and I say that because I think so much of the influence in talking to children about art is getting them to understand what art can be. It's not just what you see in the museum, but it's things that people create; it's crafts.

And I know that kids often get a kick out of knowing Romie -- and this is why I show a film of him actually walking, breathing, making art -- because I think they have this idea that artists are these other beings. You know, they hear about Picasso, whatever, whatever education they do get in art. And I like for them to understand that he was the kind of artist that was out in the community. He was real, he would make things, he would take scraps and put them together. I think that's important for young artists to understand, that art is everywhere and that you can make it, too. And it doesn't take

some special being to, you know, have these visions and make art. And I think that that's, to me, a lesson that I learned early on, that artists were people. I'd never thought of them in any other way until I started studying them, and then I was like, Wow, okay. Cut your ear off? Alright, okay, so something was going -- operating with you. [laughs] No, but -- but yeah, and so I didn't have lofty views of art, I think, in that way, until I got older and kind of understood what it took for other people to make things, too.

JOSIE NARON: I'm really fascinated by how -- you know, I think we think of like, quilting and sewing as very feminized arts. And I love that is what you were drawn to, you know, when you were growing up. You recognized that as art. I don't know, can you talk a little bit about how that played into your practice as you grew into it?

DHK: Um -- [pauses] yeah, I guess I am drawn to the way things are made. Like, when I go to museums -- I mean, I paint because I love illusion. I love what you can do with the knowledge that people have of representational space, of how you can flip that or blur it or abstract it, whatever. But I'm always drawn to the way that things are made, so, the transformation that art makes from paint to -- to different structures and surfaces. And I try to look at art in many different angles before I make a -- oftentimes, before I even make a decision or analysis about what's going on in a painting. I'm more interested in it as an object. And I wonder if that comes out of just my experience with craft, family, in that way.



But [pauses] I do think that, you know, with the debates between craft and fine art, I've always like, rolled my eyes, like, What is that about? You know, and it's still -- they're still doing that. Even certain forms of accepted art practices are -- you know, there's a hierarchy in the museums between photography and things that are watercolor versus oil paint. And I just -- that never stuck for me, for what it's worth. And then, also, now, I mean, a lot of those lines are being drawn -- I mean, blurred, which is good. Artists are making -- with all sorts of things. But I think for me, I never explored -- I mean, I do remember while I was working on graduate work that I started taking some classes that could have easily completely derailed me. You know, one was an early computer class, and I thought, Hm, what could I do? And then, I took printmaking, and I was like, Why am I painting? I could be making ten prints [laughs] in the time that I do one quarter of a painting! And I can try out different colors and -- I could get easily distracted in the way things were made. And there was another class I took on electronic circuits, and I thought, Ooh, I could really like, get into this. You know? So I was always interested in -- I took woodworking when I was in middle school. And my mother still has some of those little things I made.

The thing I liked about that was that -- and this is maybe a challenge, and maybe this is a therapy session, I don't know -- but [laughs] it's one of the challenges I have in making paintings now, is that I don't see them as utilitarian in the way that I'm always seeing craft and other art and what I always

wanted to sort of put into the world, as opposed to putting in a hundred more paintings. You can stack them all up and burn 'em, you know, for all I care? But it's -- well, scratch that. That's not nice. But I do think that that's a challenge for me, is this idea that I -- there's a part of me that always wanted my paintings to be useful and used and part of other kinds of objects. And so, when you're just painting, which is what I have done, I find that that is just about conversation. And I had a lot of debates in graduate school about things looking pretty, or pleasant, or pleasurable. You know, because I was going through graduate school in the early '90s, and there were debates about like, what's pretty and not valuable, or what's less valuable [laughs] because of the prettier it is. And so, yeah. I don't know if that answers that question, but it could all go back to my engagement with craft early on. And my respect for that and fascination with the -- how your art, you know, moves out into your world and becomes your home.

CH: Did your mother specifically have any art in the house that you remember?

DHK: She liked to collect little tchotchkes. I mean, she has -- she still has that thing where she collects a lot of little things. But no, I mean, she had -- I remember there was a painting, her painting. And I don't remember any of my father's paintings, because by the time I became aware, he was -- you know, they weren't living together. I've seen pictures of his paintings. Some of them are abstract; one of them came up for auction recently, it was an odd little thing that came up for

auction. And it was a painting of a singer, and I think it was hanging in a club. And the singer was Josephine, not Baker, a different Josephine -- 'cause I looked her up, I did a little research. And basically, it was a rendition of a famous photo of this singer. But I don't remember any of his paintings or photography. We had Andrea's work in the house, and they were wearing her work. But I don't remember Romie's work hanging as a child. But as a young adult, once we had moved to California, once my mother moved us all to California -- this was in 1977 -- I do remember then she had framed prints and posters of Romie's work. But I don't remember that as a young child. It would've been like, high school age, I remember seeing some of it, yeah.

CH: So, you said your family supported your decision to become an artist in general?

DHK: Yeah, um -- you know, my mother didn't -- she had some college, but not a lot of college. But she believed in education; they all did, all the sisters, expected all of their kids to go to college. And I was the baby. My oldest sister, she was probably the most scholarly in the family, and she got a scholarship to Simmons College, the girls' college in Boston. And she was very bookish; she was, you know, very tall for her age and awkward. And I always felt sorry for her, because she had to take care of us, pretty much, because my mother was single, working, and she was taking care of us after school. And when she went away to college, it was such a relief for her, [laughs] and then she'd come back in the summers and have to deal with us. But it wasn't -- there was an expectation, right.

There were a lot of expectations on her. She was the first child; she was smart; she was going to college; she got a scholarship.

Then, my brother -- you know, he had other interests, and wasn't really that bookish. You know, and so, there wasn't any pressure on him. But I do recall sort of all of his troubles that he would have. My mother would often say, "Well, you should've went to college. You should've --" -- you know. So, I got that messaging, 'cause I was the youngest. And then, my middle sister, she was always sort of a hustler, doing a lot of things: working, she was in sales, and she was busy, and she could make clothes, and she started off at FIT, but then dropped out.

Now, for me, I mean, I -- I knew that I liked art. And I had two wonderful, wonderful teachers in high school. I'm in California at this time. And I sort of didn't -- I really didn't think about being an artist as a profession, but I did well enough at school where it was expected that I go to college. So, I didn't really know what I was gonna study. And then, these two art teachers that I had, who were married, a married couple -- they were very encouraging and they had suggested that I apply to the University of California. Because I couldn't afford college, necessarily, but they said, "You should apply to Long Beach State. It's one of the best of the state colleges for art." Betty Edwards was teaching there, I don't know if you -- you don't know who Betty Edwards is, but she's the woman who wrote that series of books *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*.

Okay, so she [laughs] was at Long Beach State. And they recommended that.

And you know, it was clear from college counselors, they were not encouraging -- you know, I was part of that generation where they were not encouraging Black kids, necessarily, going to college. They would just say, "Well, you know, you can get a good job going here, doing that," and you know. And so even though I got pretty good grades, they were not pushing us to go to Ivy League schools or any of that. I don't remember any of that kind of push. Not like here on the East Coast. My daughter's school -- I mean, it's like you're going to college when you're going to middle school. Right? So, you -- and that's about exposure. You know, I'm sure if my mother had gone to college, she might have been a little bit more savvy about getting me into other colleges or encouraging me to apply to other kinds of colleges. Maybe I could have gotten scholarships. But I just didn't apply, because it just wasn't something that was presented to me.

CH: Did Romare have any impact on your decision to go to art school?

DHK: No. No. I remember when I called him up to tell him I was going to college and that I had decided I was gonna be a professional artist, I was gonna be an artist like my art teachers, and he goes, "Okay, that's good, but you need to either marry --" -- no, first he said, "You need to come back to New York. Because in order to be an artist, you need to be in

New York." And I was like, Okay. And when I was -- or maybe he said that to me later. I remember calling him on the phone, and there were two things that he told me, and I might have the order mixed up. One, he was saying I needed to marry someone rich. Because it takes a lot to be an artist. Okay, well, he had a wife. He didn't have a rich spouse, he had a wife. And I guess that's what I really needed, was a wife [laughs], you know, somebody to take care of me while I was doing my art. And then, he said that I needed to come back to New York. But I remember at that time, this is why I'm thinking I had it mixed up, because at that time, my first thinking was there's no way I'm coming back to New York right now because I'm with -- I have this boyfriend, and he lives here. And so, I'm not moving to New York. And he wasn't gonna be rich; he was going to be a scholar, and I knew that even then.

So, no, he didn't have any -- you know, and I'm trying to think back now whether there was any -- whether Nanette and Romie even knew what kinds of things we were doing once we left New York. I'm not sure how much my mother was in conversation with them. I mean, I think that the impression that I had, too, is that most of the way that I got into college had in part to do with my professors, but also -- or my teachers, my high school teachers -- and my sister, who was already in college. And we are nine years apart. So, she would have been my only experience getting into college, and I remember she helped with applications, and she helped with the statements and things that I had to do. But even like, for financial aid, I did all of that. And I went to a school that was considered a commuter school, so, you know, we

did all of our own financial aid papers. And by the time that I got there, that's what you did. You got the Pell Grants and you got your way through college on your own, without a lot of input from your parents -- or maybe I just didn't have that input from my parent. Even though, you know, now that I think about it, I had cousins and other people who had gone through college, but I either was not in contact with them or we were on the West Coast and we just weren't, you know -- we weren't hip to it.

But I do remember thinking back to that time when my daughter was applying for colleges, or applying for middle school. And I was like, Wow, this is intense. You know, because these parents were already designating their kids to go into the Ivy League, and so, they're just trying to jockey for spaces and figure out what they have to do. And the kids all know about this; they know that they're expected to go to Harvard and Yale, and I'm just like, Wow, I wish, in a way, that I had someone exposing me to that. Because like I said, I got pretty good grades; I probably could have applied and gotten in and maybe gotten a scholarship. But it wasn't the way that I got there.

CH: But you did manage to become an artist, and you --

DHK: I did manage; I did.

CH: -- said that painting was your medium.

DHK: Yes, well, painting became my medium. I went -- when I first entered into college, I went as an illustrator. I mean, I

wanted to do illustration. Because that's what I was encouraged, and that's where my skills were, in painting and drawing. And -- you know, so those are the classes that I took. I remember the hardest class, for me, was perspective. I say that was like learning another language. You know, the technical aspect of 2-D design. I didn't know anything about that. And I always felt a little behind the ball, compared to the other students. 'Cause you know, you'd be in art history classes, and these students had -- some of them had been to Rome and [laughs] and had been to France and had seen these churches and this great art, and it was all new to me. Like, the study of art was completely new. And I always felt like I was trying to catch up and trying to figure out how it informed what I was doing. And so, I didn't really get the idea -- I didn't really free myself up to do painting for painting's sake until I was in my senior year, and I was about to graduate. And I went out, and I got a couple of jobs doing, you know, illustration and paste-up and layout, because they didn't have -- they weren't doing it on computers then. So, the basic paste-up and layout, kind of chop-shop work. And then, I was like, This sucks. You know? This sucks. And so, I wanted to go back -- it took me a while, but I wanted to go back to graduate school to become a painter.

CH: So, when you were doing the pasting and cutting and pasting, did that remind you of Romare's practice?

DHK: No.

CH: It didn't have any connection to --



DHK: No, no connection to that. Interesting, but no.

CH: So, to get back to Romare and sort of how you first became aware of him as a person. He was already, when you were born, married to your aunt?

DHK: Mm-hm.

CH: So, do you have a first recollection of him? A first, like, time sort of becoming aware of him as a distinct person?

DHK: Okay, that's something to think about. What I can say is that [pauses] he was sort of a star in the family. You know? You can imagine, a family of eight girls, on Staten Island, okay? And their father had died when all of them -- when some of them were teenagers. My mother was eight, I think, eight or ten. And so, she struggled with them, to support them. And she had a good community in Staten Island; there were a lot of, you know, St. Martiners, and a lot of West Indians there. And the older girls -- so, Evelyn and Nanette were the older girls, really. And Dorothe. They all -- you know, this is the family lore, but they were able to get out of the house, because they were working, and their money was needed for the house. And so, then my mother is fourth, and my aunt Marie is fifth. And they claim that they were the workhorses of the family, okay, 'cause they literally had to do all of the housework and all of that. Bring coal up from the basement, you know, that kind of stuff that they just

have never let go of. Because then you had three younger ones, right, who were the little kids.

And Sheila, the youngest, who was the ballet dancer, she had polio when she was younger. And I don't think it was a severe case, because they put her in a brace -- I remember being told about that. I don't remember seeing her that way; of course I didn't, she was a baby. But she did wear a brace, and then, that was how she -- that was how they suggested dance for her, ballet dance. And Nanette, her older sister, would sort of take her to dance classes, and then she'd take her into the city. Dance classes on Staten Island, and then she'd take her into the city and then encourage her. And you know, when Dance Theater of Harlem was doing auditions, you've gotta go, I'll take you.

And so, I think that by the time that Romare came around -- or any husbands came around -- they were feted over by my grandmother. It was like, Oh, you know -- like my aunt Dorothe's husband, or boyfriend at the time or soon-to-be husband, was a lawyer. He was gonna be a lawyer or he was a lawyer, and so it was always like, Oh, make sure Ernest has a plate, make sure -- you know? And this is how those women grew up. You know, it's like, make the man's plate. And they all loved my grandmother, the men who came into the family -- they all loved her. It was a big family; she'd cook, and they were welcome at the table. And they would come, and they were loud, you know, and they'd have parties and family gatherings. And I remember Romare there.

Now, he was an artist, and he and Nanette were doing their thing in the city. And when they came to Staten Island, you know, like every other guest, he was feted on and served. And I remember, though, his laugh, too. Which is funny, because you hear other scholars and friends talk about his laugh. But his laugh was really, like, deep; what they call a southern laugh. I don't remember him having a southern accent, per se, but I might just not have detected it then. But he was welcome and my father was welcome. Everybody loved this family of women, because they would dote on them when they would come. And Romie was a bit of a star, 'cause I think he was -- he was making his way. But so was Nanette. She was modeling, and she had done things on TV, and she had done things in magazines. And you know, that had a certain cachet. My aunt Evelyn, the oldest girl, she was always working sort of clerical -- um, secretarial, but at a high level. And I think she also at some point did factory work, as my grandparents did. And so, I remember my mother talking about my grandparents working in a copper factory in New Jersey, when they first came to the country. So, I don't think it was the kind of thing where, you know, she was marrying into a wealthy family, because Romare wasn't wealthy then. He was an artist. And by the time they got married in '55, he was not -- he had had some exhibitions and he was of note, but it wasn't anything like what happens in the '60s to his career. And he was a social worker.

But he was respectable, and Nanette was, you know -- the way that people talk about her, or the way the people in the family talk about her, was that she was very willful. So, she kinda got

what she wanted. You know, because I asked the question, why would a young Black girl from Staten Island, you know, from parents who were immigrants -- why would she be starting a company? Like, why would she be starting a dance company, and where did she get off, like, modeling and, [laughs] you know? And they said because she sort of had a way about her where she just got what she wanted, and she was in the right circles. And starting a dance company was what they were doing then in the '60s, is that, you know, there weren't -- they didn't exist. So you had to make them, and it was possible. Whereas I'm thinking, even now, I'm thinking to myself, that's not an easy thing to do, but okay. You know, and so, I'm sure that when I first met Romie -- [pauses] I was trying to think about the way he looked when I met him. He had hair, so [laughs] -- he had hair, and he was friendly. I always remember he had a wonderful smile, and he took an interest in the kids. It's not like he didn't notice us, didn't know who we were. I mean, he knew who we were, and he would read and talk to us. And so, yeah, I mean, he was definitely favored in the family. As I think any guy would, coming into a family like that. And as long as you're a good guy, you'll get good treatment, I don't know. [laughs] I don't know.

But yeah, that's what I remember of him. And what I remember of him initially was not as an artist, because I didn't really know what that -- I wasn't really conscious of what that meant, or what his work was like. It wasn't until I was visiting their home that I could see that he would make things and paint and create things. And he was the type of artist who used scraps and

collage. And, you know, I was familiar with what collage is, just from school. But that -- I could tell that he was doing something that people liked and that was respected. Yeah.

CH: Can you tell us a little bit more about the loft?

DHK: Mm-hm. Oh, okay, that's a good question. The loft, to me, was like, just a big, long box. And [laughs] I remember it mostly later, when I'm thinking of my own home, or looking for an apartment in New York. And the beauty of a loft that was just one shape. And I remember Nanette and Romie yelling to each other. You know, right, it's like they were in one room. But they'd say, "Rome!" And then they'd talk. Or -- "Nan!" You know, 'cause he called her Nan, she called him Rome. And it was just like one big space, and we could hear everything. And you could hear them walking. That was the thing, 'cause Romie was a big guy. And you could hear -- he had a certain movement on the floor, and you know, in a loft, you hear everything. You hear the pressure, you hear upstairs, you hear downstairs. And so, I remember that.

I remember that there were [pauses] -- I remember the wall of books, because that, to me, was just a wonder. And that he had a ladder that would go from one side, that was on a pulley, yeah, a track. And it would be pulled from one side to the other, and just looking at all of those books. And then, everything stuck in between books. It wasn't completely disorderly, the loft, but it was a lot of stuff. And I remember you came in, and there was a marked-off living area. And I say that because literally, in a

loft, it's just a wall or a cabinet or something that makes the next room. And so, you'd come in and there was a living room. And I remember for a long time, they had what I later realized was furniture like they had in St. Martin. Which is -- some of it's wicker and fabric. And I never thought it was weird when I saw it in the house until I saw it in St. Martin and I saw that a lot of people in St. Martin, in the islands, have furniture like that. I'm like, Why would they have that in the city? You know, but it wasn't anything that was -- it was all kind of exotic as a kid. Like, they had Turkish carpets. But it wasn't [pauses] -- like, it wasn't immediately -- or even thinking back now, it wasn't apparent, like, how wealthy they were, or if they were wealthy at all. Like, you didn't get that sense. It was comfortable; it was lived in; it had a lot of things from their travels. You know, a bookcase with a lot of little roosters and other papier-mache kind of things that they'd pick up. African masks, they had. Vases and tapestry kind of things that they'd collected. And it was eclectic.

And then, Romare had a -- like a drafting table set up in one corner that faced the door, which I always thought was interesting. So, if you come into the loft -- like, say you're coming in, you're in the middle of the loft. Right, and it's horizontal. And the windows were these big, huge windows, just beautiful; they always got a lot of light in there. And then, to the right, Romie had his desk sort of perpendicular to the wall. And I wondered if that was to greet people when they came in, 'cause he often would be there, and we would come in, and he would be -- "Hey, the girls are here!" They called us the girls,

right? "The girls are here!" And he'd get up, sometimes, or sometimes he'd be in the middle of something or he would be on the phone. And sometimes he would be sitting watching TV; they used to like to watch a lot of TV. You know, sports -- he was into baseball. And they taped a bunch of stuff, which -- you might have seen that in the archives. Taped over other programs. And then, behind Romie would be -- so, from that desk that was perpendicular, the drafting table, back, was sort of his work area. They had a bed back there, and they had the wall of books, and they had paintings stacked. And so, that was sort of like his studio area. And then, to the left would be sort of the dining area, dining table and chairs and bookshelves with things on them. You know, which I'm used to in my family, just all kinds of little knick-knacks. And then, a kitchen and a bathroom, and then that back room where we would -- which was basically a walk-in closet, probably. Now I'd think of it that way.

And so, but again, it wasn't -- it wasn't something that was stylized. It was just lived-in, basic furnishings. I think they lived modestly, when I think back now to what they must have -- they traveled a lot. But I think they were living quite modestly, and they were in one of those lofts -- they didn't own it. They were renting. And towards the end of his life, they also started renting the one that was on the ground level, because he couldn't go up the stairs anymore. But they had both of them. And that one was full of stuff, and then they filled up that bottom one. And after Nanette passed away, shortly after Nanette passed away, there was a fire in the store. 'Cause you

know, this is Canal Street, and they have shops on the bottom floor, mostly. And there was a fire on the corner of that building, and it affected their bottom loft. So, some things got lost in that. So where am I? [laughs]

CH: Yeah, no, that's interesting. Were you able to go to the studio in Long Island City, or was that --

DHK: You know, I never went there. I never went there. I wish I had. I never went there.

CH: Okay. So, you saw him work at home.

DHK: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. And I also saw him entertaining. He would entertain people. Invariably, there would be people there. And some, I guess, were there by appointment, but others, I think, were just hanging out and talking, telling stories. Family, you know. We have a big family, so there were always -- you know, somebody hanging out. And then, he was working. And he would take moments out to talk to us. Like I said, I never thought of him as one of those artists where, like, See ya. Get out of my way. He was generous in that way, and he was generous with his guests. You know, talking, being interviewed, and occasionally, asking Nanette for clarification. "What's the name of this, Nan?" [laughs] You know, what's the name of this again? What's the name of that, or what's this? You know, they would talk like that, just like, yell into the other room. And they were close. They were cute. They were close.



And they had those damn cats, which to us, you know, as kids, we would -- they were just a nuisance. We would be responsible for feeding them in the morning, and my cousins -- one in particular -- could sometimes be cruel to the cats. I mean, we were always scheming of how we could just do these cats in. Because they would cry, and it was creepy to us. 'Cause it felt like they were babies, right, like [meows] -- ooh, these cats are scaring us. And it seemed like the cats could do no wrong, right? Like, I remember one time, funny story, there was company. And I was just sitting in the corner; I don't know why. I watched it, but I was freaked out. But the cat came with a mouse in its mouth, and there was company there. And they were just like, Shoo, shoo, shoo. They were just like, shooing them away, and I was just like, [screams]. This cat. But yeah, and one time we caught the cats tearing up a tapestry. Or to us, what seemed like tearing it up, sorry. They were like, pulling their nails against it, their claws. And we were like, Ooh, you're gonna get in trouble. And Nanette was like, "Stop that, Tuttle, stop that!" Just like, talking to them like they're just kids and they're not destroying some expensive tapestry. You know, one of Romare's tapestries.

But so, they were funny. And of course, as kids, the adults were funny. Right? They're funny; they don't dress well. You don't come to respect any of that until later. And so, that's -- my aunt was funny. She dressed, she didn't care about what she looked like -- and she used to be a model! But yet, when she got with Romie, it's like she let herself go. I don't know, you know, that's what we always said. Like, she just had other

things to think about. She wasn't worried about being pretty all the time, and she had a lot more to do, because she was running the dance company, but she was also helping to manage his stuff. And so, she had more to do, so she was rushing around. And yeah, you know, we would laugh at her, the clothes she wore. 'Cause she was a bit of a bohemian; she was like an artist. But they all were. My mother used to wear capes. Like, big capes. Like, she had a big, red cape, and I'll never forget, one time, she came to some school function. Everybody talks about this to this day. But she came to this school function, and it was -- it's bad enough that they all had like, little short afros, 'cause that was the style, and she thought she was so fly. She came walking into this thing with this huge red, bright red cape on, and she thought she was just -- I think she must have had some boots on or something. And she looked really good, when I think about it, but as a kid, it was a horror. It was a horror. That our parents and aunts were always embarrassing us. But okay, but why am I saying that? Okay, did I answer that question?

CH: Yeah, no, what else do you remember about how Nanette supported Bearden's career?

DHK: Yeah, yeah. You know, some of it, I learned later, where she actually was helping to sew some things. You know, there are a couple of tapestries that were manufactured commercially; that's not what I'm talking about. But there's a couple of things that Romie was putting together, and I haven't quite figured out for what reason or to what end. We still have them in the Estate. But I would think of them as maybe maquettes for

things. And we know that Nanette sewed and made her own clothes. I can't say she directly did that, but it makes sense that she would have helped him with that. I know that from her diaries, which I'm still sort of getting through, her diaries and journals. It is full of appointments and phone calls that she has to make. A lot of them are for the dance company, but in between, if you read between the lines, she's calling this one or that one, or helping Romie do this. And he was helping her, too, with her dance company. He created the logo, and he would create prints that could be sold to help finance -- I'm sure he was financing a lot of the activities. And she was going back and forth.

And then, you know, they traveled a lot, and she was the one who would organize the travel, organize the bags, and then she would talk about how much entertaining they were doing when they went to a place like St. Martin. Because he would invite people down, or they both would, I don't know, but it was a lot of art world people who would come down and hang out. And so, oh, we're having dinner with this one, or we have to go pick up that one from the airport, and you know, that kind of thing. And Romie didn't drive. I do not think Nanette -- I don't know. But I know that Romie didn't drive and that he had a driver when he went to St. Martin. And I know that Frank Stewart drove a lot for him around the city, and up, back and forth to Yale when he was doing those lectures.

So, he had a lot of support, but she was -- and I'm trying to figure out exactly how that worked, because he -- you know, she

was so busy with the dance company, I don't think it was the kind of thing where -- they seemed very unconventional, now that I think about it. To me, as a child. And I loved going there, because it wasn't like -- you know, it wasn't like home, and it was more interesting, and Nanette would take us places. But I don't think it was the kind of thing where she was getting home and cooking dinner and doing all of that. I mean, they didn't have any kids. They were kind of free spirits. And so, I'm trying to think, when they made some of those films, like *Bearden Plays Bearden*, which is the documentary -- she's sitting there with a cup of coffee or something, and it looks really odd, because it didn't look like her personality. But I think that they just posed it for the film, where, you know, Romie's there looking at a piece or a painting or pretending to paint for the camera or whatever, and she's there with a cup of coffee. I'm just like, what is she doing there? Why did they put her there, right? [laughter] Because she wasn't that kind of wife, like, wasn't like that.

But so, besides sort of the business of being in art, I don't think that she was involved in the, you know, business with his gallery until after he died. Then she had to do all of that. But she was there when company came, she was part of the conversation. And she was helping him get stuff ready, you know, and get things ready, and definitely, towards the end of his life, there was a lot of support. You know, even in that piece about Teabo<sup>3</sup> and him, you know, at one point, Schwartzman, the biographer, says that Nanette started coming to the studio every

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<sup>3</sup> Andre Thibault (Teabo), Bearden's last studio assistant.

day. Because, I guess, to pick him up, or just to check on him and make sure that everything was okay. So, I'm trying to think -- but in terms of making the art, in terms of titling -- of course, he had Albert Murray to help him there. [laughter]

CH: Were you aware of these figures like Murray or the social scene that they were a part of, or you just knew that they saw a lot of --

DHK: I knew there were a lot of people around. Is that what you mean, like --

CH: Yeah, did you have a sense that it was -- they were important?

DHK: Of course, now I'm kicking myself, because I was not aware. Like, I say that he had company -- I don't know who they were, I wish I had known. I wish I were more aware, or that there were recordings, or something to sort of document it. But I just sort of missed all of it, because, you know, you're just -- you're not in the right frame of mind. And when I did start to become aware of art and the importance of him, I was already in California in, you know, college. So, you know, I had sort of missed out on really being a part of what they were doing.

And one other thing I was gonna say about Nanette was [pauses] -- oh, this is what I was gonna say. What I remember when I was looking at the documentary for the first time -- no, it couldn't have been the first time. It was when I first saw the outtakes.

And they did end up adding some of this to the DVD set that they made. 'Cause this was made in the '80s, so it wasn't a DVD at the time, and they reissued it. And part of what they put in there was this outtake with Nanette and Romie, talking. And I love it because she's talking over him. [laughs] You know, so it's a little bit about her personality, but also you get the sense that she had some influence over the way he was thinking, or that they had exchanged a lot, at least. Because he's saying why he made something blue or whatever, and she's like, "Well, it's because of this." And you're just like, Wow, shouldn't you just be letting the artist talk? But she's got that personality and she obviously knew why he had put that blue there and why he had used that. And it's because of your feel for the Caribbean; it's the colors you see in the Caribbean. And so, that's kinda, like -- I just saw that as a little sign of her personality and boldness and input. Not that she was telling him what to do, of course, but that she was in touch with some of the inspiration for the works.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

CH: So, can you tell us what you may remember or your impressions of what they were like as sort of engaged people during the '60s?

DHK: I can't talk about Romie, or Nanette, actually, because in the '60s, my awareness is [pauses] what was happening on Staten Island, even just a little bit. And it's mainly just what my mother and aunts were involved in. I know there was an incident

where -- 'cause Staten Island always had -- they had a lot of racial problems in the '60s. And I remember being with my aunt and her group. You know, like, her group of -- her band of dancers and singers and meditators and [laughs] all the stuff that they would do. I remember that we were -- they were practicing for some kind of performance, and we were in the community center of one of the public housing projects. Not the one I grew up in, but I believe it was -- Park Hill or some other area of Staten Island. And we were singing, and had tambourines and all kinds of -- making, you know, very loud -- "Young, Gifted, and Black," I remember that song. And so, this was part of some performance that my aunt and her friends were putting together. And somebody threw a rock at the window. But I -- I guess I'm telling this story because I know that the kinds of things that they were involved in, you know, that we had to contend with some of the racial strife, I guess, is the best way to talk about it, on Staten Island.

So, someone threw a rock, and then they were threatening outside. Like, a group had gathered outside. And so, they called the police. And I remember having -- you know, I was very young, [pauses] probably seven or eight. I don't even remember now. But I remember that we had to wait for the police to come, and then they told us to come out. And when we came out, you know, they were there, like with bats and sticks. You know, we were really scared. And I didn't even realize how scary it was when we were inside. I didn't know what was happening. All I knew was, you know, the adults were telling us to get down and away from the windows. And then, when we went out, we saw that there were all

of these white people with bats and sticks. And I was thinking to myself, All we were doing was singing. So, that was just a scary moment, but it's like, my aunts just like, took it all in stride. Like, let's go. And -- but yeah, I remember that.

And my mother was involved with the Urban League. She worked for the Urban League. So, she worked for the Urban League on Staten Island, and then she always worked for sort of like job corps, getting people jobs, you know, having all kinds of people staying in our house [laughs] on our couch. She took in people and that kind of thing. And Romie was a social worker, but I didn't really have a sense of what he did or where he was at that time. And Nanette -- you know, they did fundraisers, but I know that now. Like, they met at a fundraiser for hurricane victims of the Caribbean. You know, so they were doing that. Romie did several posters, and again, I know this now, for -- you know, one was a campaign poster -- I don't remember who it was for. Somebody, Toby Moffett, I just remember that. And of course, he helped with the dance company. But I'm trying to think of anything else political that I was aware of with the Beardens. No, I don't -- not that I'm aware of. It's only what I've read about now, you know, in retrospect.

And I don't get a sense that Nanette, Sheila, my mother, that they were really -- overtly political. You know, Sheila who was involved in the Dance Theater of Harlem, you know, that was somewhat a political stance that Arthur Mitchell was taking at that time. And they wore short naturals, like you see that famous photo of Dance Theater of Harlem, the first company, many



of the women had short naturals and they wore tights that were the color -- brown tights that were the color of their skin. So, that's, you know, sort of a thing they were involved in. And they were always getting together and you know, going to protests and things. But I wasn't as aware of what it was for.

I know that they had to -- they had a little struggle to get us into the local -- the new middle school. So, we didn't go to the middle school that was right in our neighborhood, we went to the one that was new. Sort of like what we would call a magnet school; I don't think they were calling it that. And I remember that there was a whole struggle, because we weren't in the neighborhood, so we had to, you know -- I don't know how we got into that school. But I remember it was a whole struggle, that they were banding together with my aunts and going to meetings and pushing their weight around, whatever they could do to get us into those schools. And then, I went to an all-girls Catholic school, [laughs] which was a complete switch, for high school, my first year of high school before we moved. I went to Notre Dame Academy. But when I went, there were only eight Black girls in the whole school. And we all knew each other. [laughs] One of them was my cousin. And so, that was an eye-opener. But it wasn't any -- overtly political reason for us to be there, besides that we were on scholarship [laughs]. Yeah. But I say that because our parents were sort of interested in those kinds of ideas of, you know, of pushing, of protesting, of getting the best schools for us that they could. And these were -- it was a family of women, primarily. The men were there, on the periphery, but most of them were not as present.

CH: So, moving to later, Romare dies in 1988. And it's announced in his will that he wanted to have a foundation. And so, Nanette gets involved with making that a reality?

DHK: Yeah. Not immediately. Because she didn't have control of the estate immediately, believe it or not. He left it in the control of his lawyer at the time, which was Morris Cohen. And so, there's one place where I believe -- I'm trying to think of where I found this [pauses] -- oh, it was a letter that I found in the archives. But it might have been Nanette's archives, I can't remember now. I'm sorry. But what it says in the letter is she's addressing it to a friend of Romare's who's -- this is very soon after Romare passed. And she said to him, "Okay, now we really have to start that foundation that he wanted." You know, it was sort of coming to the realization that we gotta start this. So maybe -- so that led me to think maybe he had started -- he tried to start one, or whatever, but then she was left with the --

CH: He meaning the lawyer?

DHK: No, maybe -- right, yes. Because he had written for -- but maybe Romie had expressed this and maybe even tried to do it first, and that didn't happen. And then, the lawyer, you know, didn't do it right away. They were interested in other things. Settling the art work and moving it out of Cordier [&] Ekstrom, for no good reason. And then, you know, finding a different dealer, ACA. So, they were doing all of that, and she was

saying, "This is what we should be doing." And so, it isn't until after Morris Cohen dies, and then I think his son took over the case, somehow. And then, he died. And then, Nanette got control and she started the Foundation.

CH: So, do you know if there was a clear idea of how the Foundation should run or how it should go about making -- preserving the legacy?

DHK: You know, [pauses] it had been a while since I've read -- I should have known you'd ask me that question. And I don't know, but I often ask myself, "Are we there yet?" Like, what was the initial idea? Because there's a mission that she set up, and the mission has changed over the years. But this idea of perpetuating the legacy has always been something that we're sort of reckoning with now. You know, what does that mean to perpetuate the legacy? Does it mean to just protect the artwork? Preserve whatever was left? You know, Romie would not have been anticipating what would be left and what would need to be preserved. But Nanette clearly had work that she needed to make sure something, you know, happened to it. But I don't really know what that initial mission was that Romie might have had. I don't know. You know, and so I'm always asking myself, "Was this just something that was supposed to happen indefinitely?" In perpetuity? Like, what does that mean? Like, when do we -- how do know if we've accomplished what we're supposed to accomplish?

And I don't know, because I haven't looked -- I've forgotten -- I'm sure that I've read both the will and Nanette's initial

mission, but it's been so many years that we've just been controlling the mission and doing what we think fulfills that idea of perpetuating the legacy. Through educational programs, through the things that we know were important to his -- were important ideals for him. So, education, helping up-and-coming artists through Cinque -- we tried to preserve that. And preserving his books and his archive. But, you know, those two things, and then I'm always thinking -- well, was he intending them to be preserved or out in the world? Or are we supposed to be making books -- I really don't know. I mean, I struggle with that. The Foundation struggles with that, because initially, Nanette was doing things on a very small scale. She was giving out money to, you know, the Guggenheim's children's program or Cinque artists, she was helping Cinque, the gallery, and doing this and that. And it was no real coordinated thing. Some scholarships had started under her that then ran out of money, and they were coming to us, but at a time when we didn't have a lot of money. So, we were trying to negotiate preserving it and hoping that the school -- like, Davidson was one where a scholarship was started under Nanette. And she gave some initial monies, and then they started running out. [coughs] And we weren't able to help at that time.

And so, you know, yeah, these are all questions about what he thought. I mean, 'cause he might have just been thinking of it as a tax shelter. Which were popular in the '70s, you know. And all of these prints that he made that were part of tax shelters. So, I don't know what the clear thinking was. I do know that we're one of the longest-running foundations of this kind as a

nonprofit that perpetuates the legacy. But we don't have the money that [laughs] those other foundations have. Which would have been great, if Romare -- when he died, there wasn't a lot of cash. There was a lot of artwork. Same as Nanette; when she died, there wasn't a lot of cash. She never endowed the Foundation with a lot of money. You know, there was some monies that the sisters who were involved in her estate, that they wanted to -- that they invested in a condo. You know, like part of a floor of a building of nonprofits. And that was the 305 7th Avenue address. And then, soon -- that was hard. 2008, we moved out of that because of the economy. We were doing so poorly; our investments were doing poorly. And so, we moved out of that and we moved up to Harlem.

CH: So, Nanette dies in '96, and then your aunts take over running -- so, which aunts were involved and what did they do, more specifically?

DHK: Yeah. So, when Nanette started the Foundation, she worked with a friend who was a lawyer. And I don't know right now where she knows him from or whether he was around when Romie was still alive, but his name is Gregory Perrin. P-E-R-R-I-N. And he basically helped her with all the administrative -- setting it up, getting the 501c3, all of that. And you see a lot of letters from Perrin that I'm just going through, because I just got these as a file from Sheila. But he was the one who was basically the director, because he was interfacing with folks on who had Beardens, who wanted to loan, who wanted to do all of that. He really was doing that, even though he was a lawyer.

Everything was done in a much smaller scale. There weren't that many shows; there wasn't that much to manage. And Nanette was doing a lot of it, too, but she was also running her dance company. So, I could see where they were really working together. And they had an office -- I wonder -- I think they were using the studio. I think they were using Romie's studio in Long Island City. I think that's where the office was.

And so, the sisters that were helping her -- for instance, Dorothe came on and Dorothe is the third sister. So, it would have been her younger sister, one step under her. And Dorothe had worked for -- like, she worked for 100 Black Women, and she, you know, lived in DC. So, she had done some political work, and she was good at public speaking and all of that. So, she came on and she was officially the first director. I don't think Perrin actually ever took the title. I don't know how long he was involved. And so, Dorothe was working with her. There was a moment when Nanette passed away, and Marie, who's younger than my mother, then came on. And because she was one of the co-executors, she became the president of the Foundation. Not the director, because she wasn't doing that kind of work. But she was the executor of the estate, Nanette's estate. So, they were working together to keep things going. And the dance company, Sheila was in charge of that, and she dissolved that at one point. She brought it back for a little while, but basically, she dissolved that. And so, those three stepped in.

So, Dorothe was already working with her. Oh, no. And also, Evelyn, who's her older sister, came to work, but I'm not sure

-- I'm assuming that Nanette was -- passed away by the time Evelyn became involved. And Evelyn was a bookkeeper. So, imagine this. Evelyn's the bookkeeper, Marie is the president, Dorothe is the director, and Sheila was just like, doing little secretarial stuff, right. But this is where the Foundation got the bad rap that it's just like, a family foundation run by the family. "They don't know what they're doing." Well, they didn't [laughs] really know what they were doing; they were learning what to do. I mean, for them, it was all about keeping this Foundation that Nanette had started going, because this was Nanette's dream, Romie's dream, whatever. They felt that they had to do what they could, and they did try to get people to work with them and help them, but they encountered a lot of people who wanted to take advantage of them, just as Nanette had. And she talks a lot about this in her diaries, her journals. About people taking advantage of them. But her sisters tried to help. They brought -- and all along the way, they kept trying to get advice.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

So, we were always trying to make those divisions, but also, to make up -- to become more transparent all along the way about who's working for the Foundation, how many family members are on the board. 'Cause Nanette had set it up where always -- it should always be a third of the board, or five members of the board. And so, we were always, you know -- so then, there came a time when Evelyn was retired from working with us, because we needed to have a different kind of accounting service. Someone

who's not a family member. And then, you know, little by little, people stepped back and stepped away so that we could have this better transparency. Even though nobody was doing anything; they just didn't -- most of them didn't know what they were doing. So, not that the professionals they hired were a whole lot better, but at least it looked better. [laughs]

So, yes, and so over the years that I've been with the Foundation, we have revisited the mission quite a bit to figure out how we can continue to do what we do, or what we're best at, with the resources that we have.

CH: So, what are those resources? There's the archive --

DHK: There's the archive, which --

CH: -- there was the studio --

DHK: We never had the studio.

CH: Okay.

DHK: Yeah, we never had -- the Long Island studio?

CH: Yeah.

DHK: We didn't own that. They were renting that. And I believe that they used it as an office. And then, there was a moment before Nanette died -- or maybe it was right after Nanette died



-- they moved that office. They stopped renting that office. Yes, it must have been when she died, because I'd never been there. So, they moved the office to my aunt's house in Staten Island. They were working in the basement. And in fact, when Grace Stanislaus was introduced to the Foundation, Dorothe was the -- Nanette had passed, Dorothe was the director. But Grace Stanislaus was going out -- hiking out to Staten Island to consult on the board, developing the board, making sure that the organization was set up with all of the right documents and standards and everything. And so, she was trekking out to Staten Island for that. So, they didn't own that. And they never owned any of the loft spaces. So, the only thing that they ended up owning was the investment that they made on that condo, which was the 305 building, offices, yeah. And that was in 2000 -- I think like, 2000.

Yeah. So, the assets consisted of artwork. [BREAK IN AUDIO] There was a pool of artwork that Nanette had created when she set up the Foundation. There was a group of artworks that were intended for sale to help with operating costs of the Foundation. And so, that was a pool of work that the estate and the Foundation shared together, the proceeds from, if they should sell. [BREAK IN AUDIO] The Foundation had in its by-laws that they could sell up to two or three works a year for operating costs. And Nanette put that in there, but you know, the whole time I've been here, we've been trying to [laughs] fight that. You know, to find other ways to make money so we don't have to sell artwork.

And so, the other asset, the big asset, are the archives. [BREAK IN AUDIO] It wasn't until later that the estate turned over the archives, and they turned over -- they divided up the artwork that was in that pool so that the Foundation could own works and be free and clear to sell them or do whatever, or not sell them, you know, do whatever with them. And then, during that time, they also turned over the archives and copyright to the Foundation. That way, that was a way of then being able to help finance the operations.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

CH: So, how did you get involved? I mean, you were in California and you'd come back to New York to --

DHK: Yeah. I came back to New York just a couple of years before Nanette passed. Maybe not even, because we came in 1995, although I was already on the board, 'cause she asked me to be on the board, you know, on the phone. And then, when I moved here, you know, I was going to some meetings, and then she died. Like, a year or two -- under two years from the time that I got to New York. And so, I was on the board. There were just a few people; it was a very small board. I remember having the first meeting after she passed away at my aunt's house, and people were, you know -- they were kind of scratching their heads about how to go forward without her, because she was the thing driving it. And even then, I think, now that I think about it, everybody was like, Okay, what -- what is the purpose gonna be? Like, what should the purpose be?

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

But yeah, so it was sort of the thing. And it's always been, you know, doing this for Romie and Nanette. Like, feeling a sort of awesome responsibility for the work, the legacy, his legacy, her legacy. But never really -- well, not until more recently, not really knowing how to do that, or how to work within the art world. And that's why -- I was so insistent on getting a dealer, because I was like, we don't know anything about that, and we don't want to undersell his work. We don't want to overdo -- we don't want to do that. Nanette was willing to jump into that, but I didn't have the skills. I was the only one who kind of knew a little bit about art, [laughs] but I didn't want to get into that. And I wanted to shield them from that. And to work with a professional. So, we interviewed with Grace Stanislaus, who was a consultant at the time. We interviewed and we found a gallery, we found DC Moore.<sup>4</sup>

So, I came on initially as a board member. Did very little until I actually moved to New York. And then, I was just sort of learning the ropes. I didn't know anything about being in organizations except artists' collectives, which never worked. [laughs] You know. Were always a hot mess. And so, I learned. You know, I learned at the meetings, how to look at budgets, how to make decisions, voting and all of that. And then, it was in 2005, [pauses] I officially -- okay, so in 2004. Wait, let me get this right. In 2005, I -- so I was not getting paid by the

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<sup>4</sup> DC Moore Gallery consists of Bridget Moore (President), Heidi Lange (Director), and Ed DeLuca (Director).

Foundation, but I was sort of their collections manager. Kind of, you know, informally their collections manager. So, I was the person they called when someone wanted to borrow a work, I would get it ready. Somebody was coming in to do conservation, to look at stuff, I would get that ready. Working with the galleries, I would get that ready. And you know, 'cause we were calling in appraisers, that kind of thing. And then, they had -- they built a little -- not a little, but a gallery space in that 305 office, right. So that was the whole grand plan, was that they were gonna have the gallery space, they were gonna have the artwork stored in the back -- god, I can't believe we were doing that [laughs] -- and the offices. And so, they had a gallery space, and I was creating exhibitions from the artwork that was stored on the premises. And --

CH: And this all belonged to the Foundation?

DHK: This belonged to the Foundation. Okay, just to finish that up. So, I was the one setting up the exhibitions, and I was, you know, basically doing the loans and interacting with appraisers, conservationists, and also, there was a moment where the Archive of American Art came in and wanted to look through things, so we did that. And Sheila was taking care of the licensing with the licensing agent, VAGA.<sup>5</sup> And then, when I came on in 2005, part of the thing was they were kind of phasing Sheila out; they were phasing Evelyn out. And they needed staff. And I could no longer give that amount of time, 'cause I was teaching at NYU. I couldn't give that amount of time without getting paid. I was

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<sup>5</sup> Visual Arts and Galleries Association.

going through a divorce; I was like, I have to -- I can't help any more in that way. And then, Grace asked me to stay and to officially come on as a program person. So, I did that. And --

CH: And what was the programming -- this was the Cinque?

DHK: Right. No, not yet. Because Cinque was something that we took over from the Cinque Gallery when Ruth Jett was quitting and they were dissolving. And so, we took that on as a program. But at that time, the person who developed that program was the education officer, which was Pam Ford. And so, she did all of the -- she designed that Cinque program that we do, and -- my programs were mostly workshops for children. We were working on the curriculum a little bit. And the programs of the gallery. So, those were minimal programs that we were doing, and we also were working on a traveling exhibition. And this was Pam, me, the education person; everybody was working on that. And it finally got off and running. It was a major traveling exhibition of the prints. And we did the first stop in 2008. Or nine, 2009.

So, that's that. And then, in 2010, Grace announced that she was leaving, and we had a very skeletal staff. And so, they wanted me to take on the directorship, and I did not want to take on the directorship. [laughs] And so, they convinced me to do a co-directorship with Johanne Bryant-Reid, who was on the board at the time. She stepped up, and that's history. That's where we've been, in a sense. It was supposed to

be a temporary situation, but it actually worked out pretty well.

CH: So, do you have a division of roles? She takes care of what, and you take care of what?

DHK: Yeah, yeah, it's interesting. [laughs] I think it's developed over the years. I mean, it was clear that I had a desire to primarily work with the art and programming, because I was already programming. So, Johanne was using her skills of administration. She was coming in -- we didn't have any -- we had one staff member, who was the receptionist, Sheila. [laughs] But -- well, we had other staff too, at different times. But her skills were in budgeting, finance, you know, she worked on Wall Street for a while. So, she was management. But I was doing pretty much, you know, anything to do with the art. I was -- we no longer had the condo. When Grace left, by the time Grace left, we had just moved up to Harlem.

CH: Okay. So, you sold the condo?

DHK: They sold the condo, yeah. And so, and that was during 2008, so you know, we didn't do that well. But it was -- it definitely had a profit. And E.T. Williams was the chair of the board at that time. So, Johanne primarily now does finance. A little bit has spilled

over, because Johanne has learned, and she's become more involved, and because we've had very -- short staff. I don't want to say short staff, we just don't have a lot of staff. [laughs] And so, I can't do everything. But I do everything concerning the art. And then, we work together on projects. So, even our programming, we work together on the planning and developing and some of the actual implementation. And yeah. And so, I'm still the one who will train educators. We used to train educators to go into the schools and teach our curriculum. I'm usually the person who will lecture and go out and give talks on Bearden. Sort of the spokesperson. So, she'll handle, you know, some of the contracts and things like that. And right now, she's very involved in the archives, which we are shopping around. And involved in a lot of the talks of direction. Because she's still a board member, too. I mean, she's still -- does board work.

So, it works out very well. I mean, we could always use more hands. You know, especially now, with me working on the catalogue raisonné, we really could use a lot of hands, because I'm realizing that I don't get to do that much right now. So, we are -- we're looking to increase staff. But now, with the COVID thing, it's the -- you know, do we get an office, do we not get an office? Is it gonna be worth it, and how do you work with people who are not working together in the office? All those kinds

of questions. But it's worked out well as a co-directorship. And I guess that we should, at some point, try to write down how it developed. I mean, occasionally people do ask us, like, "How does that work?" But it works very well. She works with all the accountants to make sure that kind of stuff happens well. And I do a lot of the research, which is what this job has become, a big research job. Because really, it's like, people calling, or people doing exhibitions. I mean, calling about things. Sometimes they're only calling about posters, but sometimes they're calling about a collage they've discovered. And then, I go on this whole research -- you know, thing with it. You know, Camara, [laughter] you're getting a piece of it, 'cause I'm pulling you in.

But yeah, so, little by little, we tend to make a lot of work for ourselves. Like, we've gotten involved in creating centennial celebrations and other celebrations. We did a citywide celebration. We got involved in the park down in Charlotte. They created a Bearden park, and they needed us to develop some information that would go on these, you know, permanent markers. So, we're able to take those meetings together and make decisions, and run interference with the board. There's a lot of, you know, management of the board. Johanne gets to do a lot of



that. So, yeah. It's -- it works. I think we should write down how it works, but somehow, it works.<sup>6</sup>

CH: So, what is your hope for the archive now?

DHK: [laughs] Can I tell the truth? The truth is, and I'm not afraid to say it, I wish that we did not have to give up the archives. It has been a prized possession for us, and it has allowed us to, you know, call ourselves a type of clearinghouse of Bearden's art and information. We like people to come to us. We like to say that we can give information that they wouldn't get elsewhere. And we try to get it right. There's a lot of misinformation out there, or bad information, and we try to correct it. But being able to open the archives to scholars to work on projects, books -- Mary Schmidt Campbell, Bob O'Meally, Glenda Gilmore -- all of these books are very important. All of the catalogues: the National Gallery spent a long time working in the archives, and I think it gives us a lot of pride to be able to have this asset that we -- you know, we were able to get a pretty nice-sized grant to get it organized and get an archivist in to write a finding aid. And it has just been around with us for a long time, and it's beautiful; I'm always discovering stuff in it, even though I've been through it. I'm always

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<sup>6</sup> Past directors of the RBF include Dorothe Dow, Joan Sandler, and Grace Stanislaus.

discovering new things in it, and sometimes, it's not until somebody asks for something specific that we find it. And it's just a lot of fun.

So personally, for me, I wish we could just keep it. But at the same time, it's another one of those awesome responsibilities, because I look at it sometimes and I think, this could burn in a second, right? How long would it take, maybe an hour for -- for it all to burn down. And so, it wasn't until WPI came and they were like, Oh, well, we'll digitize it for you. Because that was something that we had tried to write into the grant when we were organizing it, but they didn't do digitization [laughs] at that time. The grant did not want to get involved with that. So, we were looking for money to get it digitized. Because we did feel like, you know, we're not really an archive. We need to have it where other archives are. And I'm really an advocate for, I guess, the use of libraries the way libraries used to be used, where you happen upon the thing that's adjacent to something else, because you're looking in one place and you see something else. And I wanted this archive to be in an archive. But I think many people, members of the organization, did not want to let it go as an asset, but also because they feel like we haven't really explored everything that we can do with it. Exhibitions, books,

blah blah. And I'm like, yeah, but in the meantime, let's try to get it where it can be best used.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

But I would like to see it in a library or archive where it would be with other artists -- not just African-American artists, but artists of his -- like, his contemporaries. You know, maybe artists of New York. I mean, various sort of angles and usage. That would be my dream.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

CH: So, what do you think the Foundation's like, key accomplishment has been?

DHK: Well, getting that archive organized and getting a finding aid was a major accomplishment for us. Also, some of the celebrations that we have been able to organize ourselves or be a part of, I think are important, lasting sort of things. Because in that way, we brought in the community. And, you know, I'm talking about two specific ones. One was a citywide celebration that happened in 2004 when the National Gallery show was coming to the Whitney. We just -- we saw ourselves just blowing it up, you know? And we were able to plan for a whole year with

other organizations. Almost every cultural institution in the city came together and we started talking about different ways that they could have programs. And we'd do advertising together. And it was very, very successful, because a year of planning meant that these organizations could use their own funds for their own programs. But they would all be designed to talk about Bearden or music or dance and art and, you know, children's museums, the libraries. It was fabulous, and it lasted maybe two years.

Columbia did a symposium on Bearden. These symposiums are another sort of big thing that I think is really rewarding and long-lasting. That's what -- I'm always trying to think of what's gonna last beyond us. So, the symposium we did in Chicago, we actually were able to get a publication out. The one we did in Pittsburgh, we weren't able to. Because of funding. But publications are something that, again, adds to the scholarship and lasts a long time. And so, we're very proud of that book that we were able to get out, and any books that we're involved in, that we can help facilitate. Retrospectives that we can help facilitate. So, I think that those are some of the things. I think we're particularly proud of our traveling exhibitions that we've organized. We get involved in the larger shows, but ones that we put together ourselves. And we follow up with programming,

I'll go and talk, or we do educator workshops around them. Those are some of the things I'm really proud of, and things that I think we do well.

You know, some of the educational things that we do in the schools, there's so many organizations in New York that do it better than us and have a greater impact. We can do one or two schools in Harlem at a time, but we're limited by funding, because we make them free. By funding, and you know, being able to train the artists. Where they can go to the Studio Museum, make more money, and they have a larger scope and coverage. So, that -- and we keep our public programs and some of our scholarships and things to a minimum, because unfortunately, we just don't have -- we can't do the impact. We can't have the impact that we can with these other things, like a symposium.

CH: I wanted to ask you, is it a challenge to advocate or try to perpetuate this legacy of a Black artist? Do you come up against any difficulties there?

DHK: Well, not so much with Romare's legacy, because it's undeniable. But one thing that Mary Schmidt Campbell said that I find is true, as we go on. She said this in like, 2004, and it resonates with me, is that here we are, again, celebrating him as if we just discovered him.

'Cause that's what she said around the time of the National Gallery show, but she was saying that -- when he died, you know, they had that show at the Studio Museum, and it traveled to Brooklyn, and it went to several cities. And so, when it was at the National Gallery and there was a write-up about it being the first show of -- the first solo show of an African-American artist. And how, they're saying this about Bearden, and wow, wow, wow. It was like they had just discovered him. And she's like, "Why do we have to keep coming back to it like we don't have history with this?" And I think that that is, in part, because he's an African-American artist. Because, you know, how many of those shows got to large institutions before the National Gallery? Not many.

And it's the same thing about his prices. People wonder why his prices are not sky-high like, you know, other African-American artists. And I said, because, you know, at the time of his passing, or even while he was alive, he was not making the same kind of money from his artwork that other white contemporaries were making. And so, he didn't have that -- he wasn't -- he didn't have that amount of wealth to leave in his will. So, you know, that's one of the reasons why we struggle as an institution, whereas any of the other ones, I don't need to name, but you know they're wealthy institutions. They don't have to have to do programming. You know, they're

giving money away. We've never really been able to give money away as much as we would like to make that impact. So, what we do is we do free programming to try to help artists and young people in that way.

I think that that's a struggle with African-American artists, but also, you know, sometimes we struggle to get funding because there's a perception that his work does make a lot of money on the market. Or people are hearing about auction prices and they think it has anything to do with us. And it doesn't. And so, that's kind of a struggle, is that we're always fighting against this idea that we're a family foundation and the idea that we don't need money, because we must have money. Which we don't. [laughs] If they could look at my salary, [laughs] they would know we're just a struggling nonprofit. And all of that's public knowledge, but I think it's the perception. And so, no, I would say, usually when you say Romare Bearden, people have a lot of respect. And his work is sought-after. But it just doesn't -- it doesn't [pauses] -- it doesn't equal, you know, funding, and it doesn't equal higher prices on the market for his work.

I mean, now, they've just jumped over that whole -- all of his contemporaries and everything, and now, they're rediscovering some of them, but some of the younger ones. When I talk about younger, I mean, like, Howardena

Pindell, who was younger than Bearden. So, it's like, that generation, Bearden, Norman Lewis, Charles Alston -- they're not making millions of dollars on auction right now. They're not. It's sort of like, yes, there's an interest in some of those artists, and maybe it's because some of them are still living, which is good. I'm glad. But it doesn't translate, necessarily -- people aren't looking for, you know, to pay millions of dollars for a Bearden. Not yet. Still. I mean, they pay -- I think, you know, Jacob Lawrence is finally getting sort of his work is -- and I'm saying all of that, 'cause this makes me really angry to talk about auctions, so I won't get into it. But I'm saying all of that because I don't equate auction prices with value. It's just interest. But I get that question a lot. How come Bearden is not getting three million at auction? And I have to think that it's because -- his work is just not -- it's also not as available, maybe, the ones that would be high priced. Like collage. It just doesn't come up that often. But they haven't fetched those kind of prices on the market. So.

CH: So. For a final question, I would like to know, what would you want people, therefore, to take away about Bearden? When people hear his name, or when people encounter the resources of the Foundation, what should their takeaway be?



DHK: Um, [pauses] well, the one thing that I push a lot is Bearden as institution-builder. And his interest in education and also, you know, jumping into some of those debates early on in the '40s. I mean, he was writing -- in actually the '40s and '60s, he's actually trying to tackle some of those debates about what art is, what African-American artists should be doing, that kind of thing. So, there's Bearden as the scholar-intellectual. There's Bearden as institution-builder, which I think is really important, that he wanted to be involved in what other artists were doing to push everybody along. He did the Cinque Gallery; he was a founder of the Cinque Gallery, along with Norman Lewis and Ernest Crichlow. It was something that they wanted artists to be able -- artists of color -- to be able to show their work.

And maybe it's not as needed now, but, you know, this idea that artists would gather together and use their resources together as artists who were getting shows and could lend support, or artists who were curating who had opportunities to curate and could curate artists in, and for people who were going to take a little bit of their power and use it to build something for the future. And I think that that is what we try to do and be at the

Foundation, is to continue that aspect of his legacy.<sup>7</sup> Whether we're doing it to any great extent, you know, sometimes it just feels like we're just staying afloat. But I do think that I would like that to be the legacy of the Foundation, is that we attempted to do -- to finish the work, and to leave something that would last. And possibly others will take it up. I don't know; it may end with me, I don't know. [laughs] But that is my hope.

And I would hope that people feel the value in that. And allow us to continue -- and support us in continuing the work that we do. For them to understand that we're a nonprofit, which a lot of people don't realize. We're a nonprofit, so we fundraise for everything. And if we don't have the funds, we don't do it. And so, it's important that you support the work that we do; even the work that we do with the gallery. To manage that. Because if you're a collector and you're worried about the prices of the art and how the art's being displayed and exhibited, that -- you should be involved with us, because we're taking that on and we're working that with the gallery. It's just not out in the world by itself; we're the support. And also with the copyright and royalties.

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<sup>7</sup> Members of the RBF's Board of Directors, circa 2021, include Tallal ELBoushi, Akosua Barthwell Evans, Sheila Rohan, Emilie deBrigard, Irie Harris, Ron Jackson, Dianne Whitfield Locke, Alva Greenberg and Eric Shiner.

So, there's somebody behind the machine making decisions, and it's not easy, and we need support for that to continue. A catalogue raisonné, you know, somebody who has been collecting the information and can turn it over and be a part of making sure that that's something that's going to last. That's a major coup, too. I'm sorry, I should've mentioned that, because that is our -- that's our present major coup. I mean, we feel like it's something we would not have been able to do without the form and function of the WPI. You know, the idea of doing it online; the idea of digitizing our materials. I mean, that's been great for us.

CH: Well, great. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us.

DHK: You're welcome. Thank you for asking the questions. I enjoyed it. It gave me a lot to think about, now.

[laughter]

[END OF AUDIO FILE]