

Interviewee: **Barbara Gillman: Gallery Owner, Lincoln Road, brought Andy Warhol to Miami Beach**

Interviewer: **Kathy Hersh**

Location: **1001 Ocean Drive, Miami Beach, FL**

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Q: Barbara, you are an art dealer and you have a long association with galleries on Miami Beach. Tell us about your gallery on Lincoln Mall?

A: Lincoln Road.

Q: Lincoln Road. Was that the first one?

A: No that was my second one.

Q: Okay tell us about your first one, then.

A: My first one was in the Design District. I was in in a really fabulous place, I was it was very young then. I've been in business for 32 years. So when I first started, that was my first gallery, it was great but the area wasn't so great. So we waited and when they broke in our windows for the fourth time, we decided to go to Lincoln Road, which was offered to us because they hadn't done anything yet. It was really... I loved it and there were other galleries there.

Q: What year was that?

A: 1990 I believe.

Q: Was that before the boom on Lincoln Road?

A: Yes they were doing the street and everything while we were there, unfortunately. And then it was beautiful. It was great.

Q: Did you represent any artists from Miami Beach?

A: A lot, from Miami mostly, but a few from the Beach. I represent a lot of famous artists. I brought Andy Warhol here in 1980 and we took him on a trip all over Miami Beach. It was wonderful. He wanted to see Miami Beach and find out what was happening. He had a great time. I have lots of pictures of that.

Q: I heard he came to the Deco district.

A: Yes he did. We took him there.

Q: Can you give us some of his impressions?

A: We didn't know why he loved Art Deco, because nobody really... '80 was -- like he was famous, but not as famous he was after he died. He collected that. He collected Art Deco things and when he died and they opened his apartment they found that out. He was wonderful, we took them all around. He went to... what was the place where what's his name was killed?

Q: Oh, Versace.

A: The Versace Mansion was originally another place, you must have it -- the information about it. And he loved it. It was a real Deco building and we have pictures of him in front of that, if you want any of those I'd be happy to let you have them. We went on Española way where they had great chicken -- nothing there now that used to be there. And the guy came out and gave Andy Kreplachs, things like that. And then we ate at the Famous. Can I talk other things besides what I'm saying now? If you haven't lived here for a long, long time you wouldn't know the Famous.

Q: The Famous is famous.

A: The Famous is famous.

Q: Tell us about going there.

A: The famous was a wonderful place we ate at. It was incredible. And it was almost at the end of its life when we took Andy there. Because my friend came and opened, and they changed it, and they opened into a new

restaurant and it was great. The food was wonderful. There is not a place like it. No place.

Q: Your grandparents, you said, built an apartment building. Could you tell us when that was, and how they came to be here on the Beach?

A: They came to Miami in 1911. They lived downtown and I think -- I have this on paper -- but I think that what happened was my grandmother loved the ocean and she was also active in a lot of organizations and her friends were here and I think they bought the building called 327 Jefferson. But they also built an apartment after which they lived in and my parents and I lived in the one in front. And it was usually people came for the winter. It was a winter place. It was wonderful here. You could walk down to the ocean; we used to go there every day. It was a great place to live.

5:00

Q: So you lived on the Beach until you were six?

A: Until about first grade. I went to first grade in Miami.

Q: You must have some memories of what it was like, then?

A: Oh sure. I don't know if you have been to the ocean recently but there were no -- what do they call them -- you could get in and didn't have to go through anything. And you were so close to the water because it was a long time ago.

Q: They have widened the beach since then.

A: They've widened the beach, they put all kinds of things there that you have to go through. It was totally different. But I do have pictures of everything. It's just that they didn't take so many photos in those days, you know, they really didn't. It was great memories. We used to walk where they had the fighting there -- who was it who used to be there...

Q: Muhammad Ali?

A: Muhammad Ali, he fought there. We used to pass it. There was a place I could read comic books underneath it. There was a drugstore and

they used to leave all the comic books outside. And my mother would take me to buy something, for her, and I'd sit and read the comics.

Q: I understand Fifth Street was quite a commercial area?

A: Fifth Street was great. Everything was on Fifth Street.

Q: So when you went there with your mother, you would do your shopping on Fifth Street?

A: We would do our shopping because all the places to buy meat were there -- the kosher meat places. There was no Publix or anything like that, all the different places to buy your meat in one place, you buy your groceries in another. Some of those places, I thought, were still around, I don't know. I'd have to look up the history and see. I can't remember back that far. Walking on Miami Beach was easy. You could walk everywhere. It was really great.

Q: Did you have to lock your doors at night?

A: No, but the other thing I was going to tell you was we didn't have air-conditioning. But you didn't need air-conditioning here because everything was facing the way you would get the wind and all the things you need for it to be cool. Even in Miami, when you bought a house you made sure it had a certain way that it was that you could get the cool, and then the air-conditioning. Oh, I remember some wonderful things, they had... There really was an iceman and there were milkmen. Now we're really getting too old period and the milkman would deliver the milk and leave it on your porch and the iceman would come because sometimes you had refrigerators... Were they called refrigerators -- icebox. An icebox, of course, and we had an icebox and you put the in. But my mother did have a stove that was not electric. What was it?

Q: Gas?

A: A gas stove. Yeah.

Q: We've heard that the movie houses had ice under the seats?

A: That I don't remember. But we had a movie house where Joe's Stone Crab is, right in back. Called the, not the Mayfair, I should've boned up on this. No, the Mayfair was downtown. And we used to run after the iceman and my mother used to say, "don't get the ice" because -- I can't think of the word now -- people got paralyzed from what was happening.

Q: Oh, they were afraid that Polio was transmitted through water?

A: That's exactly right, so my mother said, "Never eat the ice." Well who listened to her? I didn't listen to her. It was a neat place.

Q: Were there other children in your neighborhood.?

A: A few, not a lot. Oh, and we had the gangsters who lived on the corner and they used to talk on the phone and take the...

10:00

Q: The bookies?

A: The bookies.

Q: Were they that open?

A: Yeah, in fact my ex-husband, his family -- part of his family -- used to be involved in that and my ex-husband used to live on the next block to. So we knew that. And what else did we have? I'm trying to think what else we had. In back everything... Have you driven all over Miami Beach? They all have the alleys. Well, in our alley on Jefferson, on the back, they were doing the kosher pickles. The famous kosher pickles were being made there. It was really neat. And then the -- and this is where I couldn't find the picture that I wanted to show you -- where I am standing on the street and you can look down, you can see the Rolls Royce car place that would repair the car. It was almost on Fifth Street because we were 327 -- the next block was Fourth and Fifth Street you could see the famous Rolls Royce place in this picture. It was really neat.

Q: So a lot of people had Rolls-Royces?

A: I don't know. I think they came from up north, a lot of people who had Rolls-Royce. I don't think a lot of people we knew had Rolls-Royces, because Fifth Street was like the dividing line. Well, people stayed at the hotels too, and all the hotels that are here now a lot of them were here then. We didn't have the fancy hotels that they have now.

Q: When you said Fifth Street was the dividing line, what did it divide?

A: It seems to me -- because I'm remembering it as a child -- I mean I can go now. It seems to me that what happened on the other side were big homes, were homes, as opposed to all the apartment buildings that were on this side.

Q: Fifth Street was also the dividing line from Jewish and non-Jewish.

A: No I don't think so. I think it was farther up. I think it was 41st Street because the schools were on the other side. Although, I went to elementary school when it was closer here -- somewhere here. I can't remember where though. The high school was built while I moved back to the beach. I moved back to the Beach 50 years after I left the Beach, but the school was not there the school was down further on... Washington? I have to look that up.

Q: So when you opened your gallery, did you move your residence back to the Beach?

A: No, no, I lived in Pinecrest. My kids were there and I lived in Pinecrest. Mickey Wolfson owned the building my gallery was in and he had a wonderful restaurant upstairs.

Q: What was that?

A: Called The Women's... It was only for women. No, you were allowed to bring people. I forget what was called but I'll think of it.

Q: Did you know him?

A: Oh, very well, of course.

Q: We're hoping to get to interview him.

A: Did you ask?

Q: We haven't asked yet we haven't had a connection.

A: So have you had Cathy Leff at all? Well, she didn't live here then. If you want I could call and see if he would. But I don't know if he's in town now, but you have to give me a little card and something and I'll be happy to call him.

Q: Let's talk about the art world here. Now we know that Miami Beach and the Art Basel has really put the Beach on the map, worldwide. But tell us about the days when you started your gallery.

A: Didn't put us on the map because the Rubells -- you know the Rubell collection? The rebel son opened a gallery about the same time, maybe a little later, and after two years he said... I don't want to repeat that. Never mind. But we had five galleries and we had a gallery walk and it was fabulous but what happened was nobody could make any money here. It was not a profitable... People weren't walking the street like they do now and it was different.

15:00

We didn't have the restaurants here and everything sort of became much more, not established, but more people knew about it. I'm not going to say that they sell so much now, but we didn't have the famous names then. We had people that had very interesting stores, so interesting that some people loved it came down to see it but then, since no money made too much money, they closed the stores and they opened the famous names. So it was sad, I guess. I was the one left besides -- I don't remember if Romero had opened, but he's a friend of mine, but that's different. That's a different kind of store.

Q: There were some artists that had some workshops for a while.

A: Well, the art center. Oh, you should interview the woman that started the art center and all the different...

Q: Who was that?

A: Where are you getting information, because the people that are running it -- in fact my neighbor who is the head of...

Q: Miami Design Preservation League. Charles...

A: Charlie... He's living in my building, now. He just came to my building and he and everybody, in a sense, is new. I'm so glad you're doing this because so many wonderful old things happen and there are some really great people that you could talk to that were living here all those years.

Q: Do you have grandchildren?

A: Five.

Q: Did you ever tried telling him about all this?

A: They don't want to know. Grandchildren today. My kids know, of course, I have kids who are older and have the grandchildren. They might at some point and I'm writing something and I'm going to write something for the Herald and I've got something to talk into and going to do that because my son's sons think that's what I should do.

Q: What you writing about?

A: I'm going to write about what life was like growing up, not just here, but in Miami. And what a great place it was. All the things that happened. And the original -- I didn't sell them art but loaned them art [the famous TV show here].

Q: Miami Vice.

A: Miami Vice came and they loved the people sitting in the chairs, rocking chairs, and everything, and it was like that while they were here. And they really loved doing what they did here, because it allowed us to get all the information out to people and what was going on and it was great. And I worked with them a lot with artwork for their different things that they were shooting.

Q: In what way did you work with them, supply them?

A: With the art supply. They would do a scene like in somebody's office and if it was a doctor or something we put in something that should be for that. If it was someone who was a crook we'd find interesting stuff for that. But we worked with them for many years.

Q: So you provided them art props?

A: In a way, but always art and they got props from other people and they had a big warehouse out in... It had to be Miami. It wasn't here on the beach. But it was a great show and it did a lot for Miami even though the people that were on the board at that time they thought it would be horrible to have 'shoot them ups' and it was just the opposite. It drew everybody here. All the models and everybody. It was really good. But it was a different time.

Q: Were you ever involved in any of the preservation efforts?

A: It was early on when they didn't have this building. Yes, I did a lot of things with them.

Q: Did you know Barbara Capitman?

A: Of course, I knew Barbara well.

Q: Tell us about her.

A: And...who also died -- I was selling his work.

Q: Leonard Horowitz?

A: Leonard was a good friend of mine. I've a lot of stuff on them, too.

Q: On Leonard?

A: On both of them. In fact we did the first... we get a great thing. We re-created the 20s and 30s and I had a little gallery outside [the Cardozo].

Q: You had a gallery there?

A: We made it one night and for a long time into a place that was like the 20s and 30s. I showed artwork from that era. We had a little tiny space. It was great because Barbara Capitman's son owned the building, at the time. Did you meet him?

Q: Yes we interviewed him.

A: Oh, great. I'm so glad. That's great. She was marvelous. There was nobody like her. And Leonard was great, too.

Q: Tell us more about Leonard.

A: What you want to know?

Q: He had a thing for color, apparently?

A: Fantastic, yes. Yes. One of my artists did little photographs, like this, of the Art Deco section and of the buildings that Leonard did and I kept some of them -- we sold some of them and I kept a lot of them, and I had one looking out the window of one of the buildings. This big. It was great, really great. Leonard was great. Well he and Barbara were terrific together, they really were.

Q: We know a bit about Barbara, what was Leonard's personality like?

A: Not like Barbara. Don't quote me. He wasn't well but he was good. He was just sharper. I don't mean sharp in the mind, but quick and Barbara was very - talked very slow. Do you have any tapes of her?

Q: No.

A: They should have plenty of them.

Q: They do have some tapes here and we haven't managed to be able to find the right kind of technology to play them, because they're old.

A: I know there's ways to put into a regular CD.

Q: We're working on that. We'll figure it out. Barbara apparently was able to inspire a lot of people to join her.

A: She was she is the reason we have all this, she really is.

Q: So you think she does deserve the credit?

A: Absolutely if not more. Yes.

Q: So when you opened your gallery things weren't all that economically great on Lincoln Road?

A: No. It was that there weren't a lot of galleries in town and we had a really nice gallery. People would come... When people came here from Europe, we did so work. But not so much to people here because everybody in Miami thought the art world was nothing and they should go to New York and buy. And I'll never forget someone coming to my gallery and seeing an artist's work and saying, "Where in New York does she live?" I said, "She lives right around the corner."

Q: What a presumption!

A: Now it's different -- except now it's a different art world.

25:00

You have a lot of hip-hop and a lot of stuff. And people buy -- a tremendous amount of money they spend. And they don't even know what they're getting. But it's okay.

Q: Is it more of an investment for people now?

A: I don't think you should buy art as an investment but maybe they think so. Well, no because the market fell. But I never sold art as an investment. You buy because you like it. And now I am on Art Net and I sell art all over the world from the computer. Which is great. But we didn't have computers, what, 20 years ago.

Q: So it's a very different art scene, now?

A: It's a very different art scene but they're having a very big art show right now in Wynwood, I believe. It's supposed to be very good. My new

daughter-in-law told me it was great. She's an artist. It's nice. But I can't do too much walking. I have some problems with my legs. It's a terrible thing to say but 'I've been there and done that.' But I have. But the art world's picking up. It'll always be good if you like art and if you want to buy art.

Q: What about the scene for artists here on the beach?

A: I don't know about the beach. The art center has a lot of artists. And they have people coming to them and buying but you'd have to ask someone that knows it better than I do. I used to be active in all the things here.

Q: So back to your family history, what did your parents do for a living?

A: My father was in the insurance business. My mother was a volunteer at the hospital but she [raised a family] and I had a sister who died. When we moved to Miami my grandparents were still alive and my father had three brothers and they were all here. We had a big family. Big -- a hundred in our family and we don't have a hundred anymore. We had a very big family.

Q: When you got together did you get together on the Beach?.

A: No. No, unless we are living on the Beach. [We did have] a big party at one of the hotels. [We went to] the different hotels and have dinner and I don't know if you know when you pass -- do you go to the Venetian at all?

A: No.

Q: Have you seen the Venetian Causeway? There's a big buildings that is a storage place, that was the Copacabana. I don't know why there's no sign on it.

Q: Did you come up here as an adult? And go to the nightclubs?

A: Yeah, we went to nightclubs and things like that. It was quite an entertainment scene over here. It was, in fact I saw Harry Belafonte at the Fontainebleau. In fact when I went to college [the] Fontainebleau was somebody's home and they were just building it. And my mother said, "Oh, there building this gorgeous place." And I remember that Harry Belafonte --

it was closed to blacks, to African-Americans, the whole Miami Beach for a long time -- and, in fact my family owned a jazz club in Overtown, in the black section of town. Harry Belafonte came down to do a benefit for the doctor at Bascom Palmer. Bascom Palmer is our big eye hospital center that's at the University of Miami, Jackson. And, I remember him saying that he would never come to Miami Beach because they wouldn't let blacks, African-Americans there, but he was doing it for the for the doctor that saved his eyesight. And I remember my ex-husband and I went for five dollars. We're talking about a long time ago.

Q: You said your parents owned a jazz club?

A: No, my family. Part of our family.

Q: What was the name of it, do you remember? Was it in the hotel?

A: It may have been the St. John, but I'm not sure. I'd have to check with them. My cousin sent me a lot of stuff because we were doing something else, checking that. I used to do a lot of movies where I gave them art and that's what they were doing -- a [TV show] called "Miami..." something. It hasn't come out yet and my cousins owned a big hotel on Miami Beach, too. I don't know if it's still there, maybe.

Q: To sum it up, how would you describe your feelings for Miami Beach?

A: I lived here. I'm living here now 20 years and I lived here before that --50 years. Of course, it's a great place. But I live on Venetian -- on the island. The island's wonderful.

Q: So you came back to Miami Beach?

A: I came back to the Beach. In fact I was bringing you the article they wrote in the Herald about "back to the Beach" because I opened my gallery on Miami Beach and they had a big article about me coming back to Miami Beach and it was great.

Q: Do you feel like your roots are here?

A: Oh, of course. This is where I was born. Your roots are always where you are born. Isn't it? I guess it's true.

Q: Do you have memories of music at family occasions?

A: Yeah, we used to have big Hanukkah parties. All kinds of things. And I remember the family that came down from Tannersville, New York every year and they were looking for an apartment. And I remember at three years old we had a step and I said I'd like to clean up with a broom. So I was cleaning up and they were pulling up into the front of the building and get and say, "Can we speak to the manager." I said, "I'm the manager." And from that time on they came here every winter for probably 30 years and I visited them in Tannersville and I felt very close to them, and I grew up. Yeah, I have great stories. This was the place to be. Miami Beach was where everyone came. It was great. We had great things here.

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