

THE PORTLAND ART MUSEUM PODCAST EPISODE 23 TRANSCRIPT



BRIAN FERRISO

Hello and welcome to the Portland Art Museum Podcast. I'm Brian Ferriso, the Director and Chief Curator of the Museum. This episode is the audio from a conversation I had with Life Trustee, arts advocate, and philanthropist Arlene Schnitzer on November 5th, 2014, in association with the exhibition, *In Passionate Pursuit: The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Collection and Legacy*. We are releasing this episode now because we recently lost Arlene, who passed away last week at the age of 91. Arlene Schnitzer, with her late husband, Harold, provided unprecedented leadership and contributions at pivotal moments in the Museum's history. Most recently, Arlene made a historic gift to the Museum to help support the Connections Campaign. In my conversation with Arlene, we talked to her about her close friend, the late Robert Colescott, whose work is currently hanging at the Portland Art Museum in an exhibition called *Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott*. At the time of this episode's release, the Museum is in the midst of a temporary closure in response to the global Coronavirus pandemic, and our team is working hard to provide an online experience for this exhibition and others at the Museum. Arlene attended a panel discussion with the exhibition's curators, Lowery Stokes Sims and Matthew Weseley, as well as our very own Grace Kook-Anderson, the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Northwest Art. A link to the video of that discussion can be found in this episode's description. And now, here is my conversation with Arlene Schnitzer.

BRIAN FERRISO

I'm Brian Ferriso, the Director, so nice to see everyone here this evening, and it's a great honor for me to interview Arlene Schnitzer. We're going to do this a little bit differently. And first what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you a little bit of a blurb about Arlene and Harold and a little bit of a talk about their history with the museum and with our city. So let me begin and I'm not sure if everyone knows this, but Arlene began her relationship with this institution as a student at the museum art school in 1958. And her frequent visits to our galleries with her late husband Harold nurtured their relationship to what I believe is art eventually leading to the founding of the fountain gallery in 1961. And I think many of you recall that gallery and it's such a significant part of our history. Through the gallery, Arlene and Harold solidify their commitment to the artists of the north northwest and really initiate what I call an unprecedented art appreciation and collecting in our city and our state and its really served as the foundation for this community. Their passion for art also led to leadership roles at the museum and both were appointed the first life trustees in 2007. After Arlene's appointment to the board in 1967, and Harold's in 1990, their joint service continued for more than 20 years for this museum. Today, Arlene continues to be a very active member of our executive committee, thank you Arlene, with donations of more than \$10 million to the museum, Arlene and Harold are the largest single financial contributors to our museum in our history. Endowment gifts to the northwest art and Asian art departments total over \$5.5 million and capital investments exceed \$3.6 million. Additionally, they have donated nearly a million dollars in support of special exhibitions, membership and general operations. At the heart, as many of you know of our institution, are our collections and Harold and Arlene have built and sustained those collections as well as allowed them to evolve. Among the foremost collect collectors of Chinese Han dynasty in the world, they have gifted more than 70 unique objects to our museum and they are appreciated worldwide. And for those of you who have not been

to the Han Dynasty collection or galleries, it's something to be seen. It's one of the great, unique aspects and one of the most important collections in this institution thanks to Harold and Arlene. Their role as founders of the fountain gallery also facilitated recognition of much deserved Northwest modernists and allowed them to build their Northwest collection. Many of the works you see in the exhibition, as well as in our wing are the result of that commitment. Additionally, Harold and Arlene have contributed major pieces of American and English silver, as well as provided funds for the acquisition of major pieces. Now, what I thought was interesting when I've gotten to know Harold and Arlene is their influence upon others, and they have helped and I think inspired many in this community become major collectors of Northwest art. And I'd like to just name a few of them Dick and Deanne Rubinstein, in particular, Lila and Doug Goodman, Katie Durant and Gordon Sondland, Jim and Susan Winkler, and Jerry Pratt, to name a few. And I'm sure all of us have been touched by Arlene and Harold's collecting or been inspired by the fountain gallery. But I think most significantly in the biggest impact that they've had is on their son, Jordan. And today, he's considered to be one of the world's foremost postmodernist war print collectors. And although his in through his collection sharing, it's a very unique program where he shares his collection to museums throughout the country. He's really had a significant impact not only on this institution, but many museums and a lot of university museums in particular, connecting with young students and educators about the great works of art in his collection. So a real nod to Jordan tonight. And all I can say without a doubt that this institution has achieved an unparalleled success, due in large part to Harold and Arlene Schnitzer. So it gives me great pleasure to welcome Arlene, tonight, to be with us to have a conversation so Arlene, welcome.

BRIAN FERRISO

Now, as many of you know, Arlene has always a unique way of doing things. So we talked about this the other day, how would you like to do this? And she said, Well, of course, Brian, we're going to ask the audience questions. First. There's no questions and answers after it's going to be first. So we're going to start the conversations with questions from you. Now, if you don't have questions, we have a lot of ideas in my mind that I could share with you and elicit some thoughts from Arlene. But let's start with some questions from the audience. And perhaps we can get going that way. So

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Let me just interject--

BRIAN FERRISO

Go ahead

ARLENE SCHNITZER

--for one minute. The reason I asked Brian to do that is because otherwise, you just spend a lot all the time talking about things that really your audience isn't interested in. So I thought this way, if we got questions first why at least it's at least one person's interested in.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

So let's, let's hear it.

BRIAN FERRISO

And here's a question up front, Jim.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It's an astonishing collection. But what I'm curious about is what was the first piece? What did you start the collection with?

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Wow. First, honest to God, I don't know. Jordan knows the very first piece he bought. He wrote on the back, this

was the beginning of the Jordan Schnitzer collection. I honestly, you know, we opened my mother and a friend of ours at the Brigham open this little space. Down on 2nd and Anthony. You know, every morning, I had the push the homeless, out of the doorways, so we could open the door. And it was small, I had a little section set aside for prints. And you know, that I don't know, the first thing I bought, I know that I became an addict. And, you know, one thing I want to say at the outset, because it's really important to me to say it at the beginning, is the truly unsung hero in this whole thing is Harold, you know, I get a lot of credit. But it was really Harold, and my dad, Simon director, who really supported us from the beginning, when my mother and I went to the bank. And this was 1961, my mother and I, to open the gallery went to the bank, to borrow \$50,000. We couldn't do it, unless we had Harold and my dad on the dotted line with their signatures. And for you women in the audience. I just wanted to mention that because I think that's kind of an interesting, interesting point. And they were both very supportive. They were more than willing to do it. But that's always all these years kind of rankled me. But but so we did we opened this little space on the corner of 2nd and ankle knee. And it was a really glorious experience. Mike Russo helped us hang the first show. And most of you know what the journey's been ever since.

BRIAN FERRISO

Thank you. Other questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Hello, I have... Do you hear me?

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Yes, we can.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Jack Portland is my and my wife's favorite contemporary Oregon artist and I was wondering why he was not part of the show this time. And then I assume he's part of your collection.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Thank you for asking about Jack. I was thinking about him this afternoon, when I sat at my desk and was kind of thinking about what I wanted to say tonight. Jack was still in art school, when I opened the gallery. And he and an artist by the name of Lenny Pittman, who I'm sure a lot of you are also familiar with. They were always together. And I made a rule that I wasn't ever going to take an artist into the gallery until they'd been out of art school at least a year plus, because I wanted to see what they were doing independently. I didn't want that influence. so strongly felt like I had seen them so many students during that first year, so out of art school. So after about a year and a half went by after Jack and Lenny Pipkin graduated, who I think, Lenny, I think is now teaching at Pacific Northwest College of Art. So they came to see me in the gallery because they wanted to have the work included. And I can remember walking over to them in the middle of the gallery and saying, first of all, you got to quit this Bobbsey twins routine. And they looked at me and they said, What are you talking about? And I said, Well, what if I like one of you? and not the other then I'm going to be more inclined to say no, to both of you. So you've got to walk into galleries, whether it's mine or anybody else's and be independent and show your work independently of each other. Stop the Bobbsey twins stuff. So they did I did end up taking both them into the gallery. I think Jack is one of the most talented, of that younger generation of artist. And he's--Is he still living part time in Italy?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

And he's just done some beautiful, beautiful work. And he personally is a wonderful, man. And I've watched him develop and grow ever since art school, and talented, careful. Really superb artist.

BRIAN FERRISO

So Arlene, you have a great story in the book about how Jack got his name. I don't know if you want to share that.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Well, we were all sitting around one night there was Jack and Lenny and I think Mike was there and several of the other artists and they were talking about Robert Indiana and Judy Chicago and somebody said, well gee, Loftus, which was what Jack's name, was Jack Loftus, why don't you take the name Portland, and he says, okay, from that minute on he became Jack Portland.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

When you were purchasing each piece, there was a reason for it. And now looking at this whole collection, when you walk by your home and you see a particular piece or a group, is there something, one of those that just strikes an emotional chord or a memory that you look at? It's almost like your baby, is there something that just really strikes an emotional note with you?

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Well, maybe I was in a little different position than the average customer who walked into the gallery to purchase a painting, because it was my gallery. So I was committed number one to the artists that I opted to show in the gallery. And I used to say, you know, you don't have to have a space. I honestly I was thinking about this the other day, I don't think I have bought any of our art thinking of a space. I bought some objects thinking, gee, that would look great on on this table. But I don't think I've ever bought a painting and thought, gee, this is perfect for this space, or this is perfect for that space. Now, listen, you know, I've had the luxury of having first crack, you might say, at a lot of the artist's work and, and also the luxury for which I'm grateful of being able to buy a lot of art. But I don't buy for a spot. Do I alternate? Yes, I think it's very difficult. It's so easy to put something up and leave it there. But when you get to the point where you really walk by it and you don't see it, then it's time to retire it and rehang. And it's not easy to do. But think about it. Everybody, when you go home tonight, how many times you've walked by something, and you realize I didn't really see it. So you just have to sometimes pick out a day and get somebody in to help you rehang and just do it. And I think you should also, I used to say to people, you know, put something under the bed, but don't pass it up. When you feel something about a painting when you're you see it and it's like nothing else. And for all of you who I'm sure have something on your walls that's created by artists, take it down. And all of a sudden you think oh my gosh, that space what was there. I can't stand it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

When one has a portrait painted of themselves? Who's in charge? Is it the subject themselves? Or is it her spouse? Or is it the artist? Who decides that there's a piano in the picture? and etc, etc?

ARLENE SCHNITZER

That is really a great question. It depends on whether you're talking about boardroom portraiture, or whether you're talking about a certain, this is the way I feel, or you're talking about a certain artist whose work you love and who does portraiture that you respect. If you want something that is such, this is the way I feel, if you want something that is such a likeness of you, then go have a wonderful photograph made. But when you're having a portrait done, you're asking that artist and his interpretation of what you look like to him. So that's just the way I happen to feel personally. But other people when they have portraits done, they want it to be a likeness. And let me just tell you a quick little story. Jordan commissioned when he was young, I think he was about 12. He was about eight when I opened the gallery, and I think he was about 12 at the time. And Sally Haley was very well known for portraits in the city, and I'm sure many of you even maybe have portraits done by her. And he commissioned her to do a portrait of his grandparents, my mother and dad. And she did a portrait of my mother. And she, my mother, was a small woman and she had white hair. And she he was a formal person. I mean, people who'd worked for her for 30 years still called her Mrs. D. They didn't call her by her first name, but she was quite just steady, a steady person. And Sally painted her very regal, these folds and folds of purple material around her and almost like she was Queen Elizabeth. And Jordan came in who was a

little kid. And he said, Sally, that's not my grandmother. And she destroyed the painting. So that kind of I'm telling you, it was a very personal story, but I'm kind of telling it to you as an example of how an artist feels about the commission, or their painting or if you've asked them to do something. Are you asking for a likeness? As I said, then they will tell you go get a photograph. If you're asking for their interpretation, then you accept what they see.

BRIAN FERRISO

Yeah, it's a great, great question. And it's, you know, there's the Henk Pander portrait, which is featured in the exhibition we actually have an image will show in a bit, but I think that that issue really emerges because I think you and Harold weren't sure how you felt about it.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Harold was very sure he and Jordan did not like that Hank Pandor portrait of me. I who philosophically felt exactly like what I just said to you was very accepting of it. That is what he saw at that moment. So I'm thrilled to have it, it was a moment in time and in my history.

BRIAN FERRISO

Very well done. Yes. Other questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Ryan? Higher Higher lien? Let me preface my question quite quickly. Several years ago in Miami Beach. A small sculpture was found in our retirement home abandoned basically in the corner and they interview the residents of the retirement home and they said, Oh, that ugly, awful thing. It was the geo committee.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

It was the what?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It was the geo committee. Last night in New York at Sotheby's a record was set for sculpture \$100 million for the sister of this piece in Miami Beach. What gives a piece value.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

I wonder every time I look in the paper and see that the Bacon just went for 42 million or the Warhol just went for... Honest to God I wish I were an economist. I don't know the answer to that. What do you think? Why Why do you think... I've got some thoughts but let me hear what you thought.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I was always raised that if no one wanted it, it had no value. But I don't totally believe that. I believe in inherent beauty. I just--

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Are we spoiled out here in the Northwest? Our prices are so low compared to, I think, frankly I'd put our artists out here up against anybody anywhere. I always felt that not all of, not 100% of them, but a lot of them and here I mean the same painting that was \$450 would be \$28,000 somewhere else. I can remember I brought a show every couple years out here from Arne Glimcher at the Pace Gallery, Leo Castelli kiss Delhi and Nate Culloden are from Andre hammer gallery. They were nice enough to combine their shipping to help me out because it was coming to the other side of the country. And I have a Hans Hoffman from Arnie Glimcher from Pace Gallery sitting in my office, and I'm just kind of working with it and looking at it. And it was \$25,000, which at that time, here in Portland, in the gallery was a big price. And I had its kind of sitting on the floor leaning against the wall, because I was kind of working with it and thinking, you know, I'm trying to understand this. And right then, coincidentally, I get a phone call. And he said

to me, You got that Hans Hoffman on consignment from me. And I said, Yeah. He said, Well, you have to put it up to \$45,000. And I said, What are you talking about? I said, I've already shown it to a couple of potential people, for 25. He says doesn't matter. They didn't answer right, then it's 45. I don't understand. I didn't understand intrinsically, what made the difference right at that moment, except the market that somebody came into, to the gallery and was willing to pay x for Warhol and x for... I mean, I don't get it myself.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

How would you feel about a show that's totally unlabeled? Where all we saw was the piece? We had no idea of who made it, or the value or the provenance?

ARLENE SCHNITZER

How would I feel about this show with no price tags on it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Or nowhere, that the emphasis was just put directly on the piece without any... you know.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Well, I think there are a lot of those. I mean, I think you go into a gallery and most galleries don't put prices on the wall, because that's the way that they have of forcing you to ask them how much is this so they can start a conversation with you. I didn't believe in that. I always put prices up because I happen to like prices when I go somewhere. But it's a very tough business. Let me tell you all, it is a hard business. Harold used to say to me, you've got a high strung temperamental group of people supplying you your product. And you've got a high strung temperamental group of people over here buying your product. You know, it's a very tough business, the artists are constantly needing money. They're constantly after their dealers, because they need the money. They're not frivolous in their requests. And they've chosen a lifestyle that is not always sufficiently rewarding monetarily. And it's just, it's fair, it's tough to be an artist, it's tough to be a gallery, a dealer. And unless you make it big in the big time, unless you have paintings that are in the, you know, \$50,000 bracket up, then they're making, you know, if you're if you're talking about even if they make 10, or 15% they've paid for their electricity for the day. But in parts of the country like this, and I'm sure lots of other cities throughout the country, that they're trying to really support their artists and keep their artists working in their, their cities, because that, to me is the soul of a city. Just imagine, this community without art departments and without artists working without galleries to go to and what and walking into all the offices and the buildings that we do, and just absolutely blank walls, just visualize that for a sec. There's no soul. But it's a tough business to be a dealer, I'm telling you, I did it for 25 years, it's tough to be an artist and to put those things on the wall that you've labored over for a couple of years, and you're exposing your heart and your soul. And your people come in and just there's nothing worse than indifference. I used to say to somebody tell me you hate it. But don't be indifferent. There's nothing worse than indifference. Don't just walk by it, give it a chance. And we've hung an awful lot of art in our offices. And I've said the same thing I've had employees say, Oh, my God, I'm not going to live with that, take it down. And I've said give me three months. If you still want me to take it down after three months, I will try to get it away after three months. So I answered your question, but rambled? I'm sorry.

BRIAN FERRISO

Well, I think the the simplest explanation has always been what someone's willing to pay for it. So I think there was a question over here. Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I'm just wondering, criteria, you had said earlier that you did not select anything based on a particular spot that you wanted to fill. But was it emotional? Or was it you know, certain criteria that you had when selecting the works that you did?

ARLENE SCHNITZER

I'm glad you re-asked that question. Thank you. Having the gallery, I had the luxury of feeling that way. But all of a sudden, I'm remembering going to people's homes because they came to pick out a painting for over a credenza or over a couch. And yes, you have to do that you're filling up your wall. And so really what I said wasn't may be accurate or fair. You do walk in and look for a certain painting for a certain place. And, and that's fine. That's good. And I'll tell you what else I never objected to, I never object to people bringing in the swatches of their fabrics. Oh my god, you should hear other gallery dealers. Talk about people who did that. I mean, it was just terri-- I thought it was great. I wanted my paintings that I sold to look fabulous. And so I understood people who brought in swatches of their couches or their rugs or whatever. You know, what a lot of people don't realize is that from the minute, you wake up in the morning, your assault, people say I don't know anything about art, or I don't know anything about design. From the minute they wake up in the morning. They're assaulted with art and design when they get in the car. And they see the front of the car with circles and lines and dots and, and patterns. That's art, that's design. And so people who say oh, I don't know anything about art, everybody knows something about art when a man picks out the tie he's going to on in the morning, or it's just so many things that people are picking out colors and designs and art. I, that's the way I see it.

BRIAN FERRISO

Well Arlene expand a little bit on this because I think it's an interesting aspect of how you and Harold collected. And as I understand it, you never needed Harold's approval, and he never needed your approval in collecting as a couple. Talk a little bit about that.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Oh, gosh. Well, you know, there's his towels and her towels and, and our towels. And I think that's the way... Harold likes some things that I just did not like, but I lived with a couple of them and and certainly vice versa. And this is the way I think you grow. And it's true, I think of a lot of things that couples have to share in life. And, gee, why should art be any different than the the man who's free to pick out the color of his car? So I, I just think that it's great if they don't have to agree on everything. Interestingly enough, the artists that I had that people really seriously quarreled about to the point where sometimes it got embarrassing was Mike Russo. It was often the woman who wanted the nude and didn't mind the the pubic hair being so blatant. And it was the man who was nervous. And I had more arguments over Mike Russo's paintings than any other artist in the gallery. So

BRIAN FERRISO

Mike has had a huge influence on you and you talk about him in the way he talks about art and articulated art. Tell us a little more

ARLENE SCHNITZER

did many of you know Mike Russo? And in the audience, okay. You know how eloquent he was he? I just, I walked into art school as an adult and thought, What am I doing here? All these kids, you know, they were 18 years old. And here I was. And I really almost started walk out. But somebody said, you know, Are you new here? I said, Yes. And they said, I'll show you where to go. And my first class was Mike Russo's art history class. And he was so eloquent. And it was so enlightening for me. And I just walked in. And it didn't matter that the rest of the class were 17 and 18 year olds, my whole life started walking into that class. Something happened, and I would only hope that everybody in this room would have some of that experience when they saw a painting or a sculpture or a watercolor or print. And, and fell in love with art.

BRIAN FERRISO

and this one is always I think, something for us to admire. You know, Arlene, when you talk to her, and I want her to expand a little bit on this, she always quotes her mother, you always had great quotes. And that's Helen Director, and, and sort of words of wisdom, Arlene that she gave you that you've passed on to, I think us, me and this institution. Share a little bit of some of your reflections.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

I had... I was really, really fortunate. I had a mother who was born in Europe, in Poland, and came to this country as a little girl was very, very poor. And as a young girl, she and her brother, her brother worked in a factory in New York factory. I--she never used the expression, but I'm sure it's what we call sweatshops. And he made ties and she worked in a factory that made paper flowers. And she said if that they made their quota, they got to keep an extra one that they made. And that after work, long hours, she would go out in the street. And she said she thinks that people felt sorry for her cuz she was so little. She loves a small woman, and they always buy her flowers from her. And the one thing relevant, nothing to do with art, but having to do with my mother, which has a lot to do with me Was she always told me there's no shame in being poor, but there's shame in being dirty.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

And, she just was one heck of a woman. And she just was a wonderful woman, she worked side by side with my dad, building up a big business, she always worked. She was the one that through the depression, saved the penny and the dimes the nickels, so that they could come to Port-- This was in Salem, where I was born, so that they could come to Portland, and have enough money to buy a furniture store, which is what they did. And this was due to my mother. And she was a fabulous role model, a wonderful example. She was unusual in that everything she learned she wasn't taught, she learned by herself. She was always ashamed of her handwriting because she was basically left handed. But when she went to school as a little girl in New York, they used to hit your hand with a ruler to make you right with your right hand. And she was just a wonderful woman, she did build up this business with my dad and, and she retired. And that really bothered me because I saw this role model for me this active, dynamic woman who ran a big business and all of a sudden, in retirement, I saw her make a project out of small things. So when I decided to open a gallery, I said, how would you like to be my partner. And she was so smart. She taught me things. And one thing in particular, once in a while a customer would come in, and my mother would say don't don't take credit from that person. Because that was the way you sold art than you sold on credit. And I'd say Mother, what do you mean, you're so suspicious. And she looked at me and I never forgot. She said, when you've been in business as many years as I have, you'll be suspicious too. And guess what, she was right. But she was terrific. And I was very, very lucky. And Harold said he had the greatest mother in law in the whole world.

BRIAN FERRISO

... not only a better relationship to the artworks, but to the artists. And that's always been, I think, a unique aspect of what you've created here.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

How many of you are familiar with Robert Colescott, the artist? Oh, great. Good. Okay. So Hilton, Carl told me go meet Bob Colescott. So I ran down to Portland State and I got in the wrong building and was late and I was sure he'd left and okay. And I met him. And first of all, they want to know who, who is this person? What does she know about art and what is she doing opening a gallery? I mean, I had to really prove myself because they just really thought I was a an upstart. And I was. And so I went down to Salem, the next day to the Bush Barn to see this glorious show. And I mean, what a great painter. So I had Bob in my gallery. For many years, we were good friends. And then Bob left, and went to Egypt to teach the American University in Egypt. And Harold and I were in Paris. When Bob and his wife at that time, Sally had to flee Egypt. And they mean, I mean, flee. And she was a potter, and she had to leave her kilns and everything behind. And we met Bob and Sally in Paris. And we met him for lunch. And I looked at Bob and I said, Oh, my and he'd grown a mustache. And I said, My God, Bob, you look, Murray, we had just come from Egypt, but not in the same place where Bob, we couldn't connect there. And I said, Bob, my God, you look more Egyptian than the Egyptians. And fast forward several years. How many of you knew Bob early in his career? Okay. He was not a black artist. Am I right? Okay. He was not a black artist. What happened was that when he went to Egypt, he told me later, it was like he came home. He felt at one. And he called it Africa. He didn't call it Egypt. And of course, Egypt is in Africa. And I said, Bob, what happened? And I have pictures. I swear to you, I have pictures and people will back me up that the years that he was at Portland State, and then I had him in my gallery, he was not black. And once he came out, I have pictures, his features to everything. Brilliant, brilliant artist, he represented America, Venice Biennales, as

Brian said, and a wonderful, wonderful person. He since has died. And a brilliant painter. But it was one of the most remarkable things in my whole gallery life. And I felt privileged to know him as a person and as a friend and I am a friend of his last wife. He was married several times. And her name is Jandava. And she is black. And she represents black artists. But it was a fascinating, he told me that his mother, he has a brother whose name is Warrington Colescott, who's a printmaker back east. But Bob said to me, my mother, he was from Oakland always said, if you can pass, you pass, you'll never get a job teaching. You'll never... And he was light enough. And she said the same thing to his brother. And this is what happened in our society and those years. And if this is making anybody uncomfortable. I'm sorry. But it's such a part of my history with the gallery and with Bob Colescott. And the interesting thing was that we owned a hotel in Berkeley at that time, and the publisher of the Oakland paper was black. And he had a absolutely gorgeous wife, who was black. And they had a, and she was president of the symphony. And the symphony had been closed down because of the union and everything. And so they had a big event at the hotel. And she stood up there. And she told this story. That was absolutely almost identical to Bob's how she grew up in Oakland. Her father was a porter in Union Pacific, he was an accomplished violinist. But that was the only work he could get. And this whole story, and it was just like Bob, who also came from Oakland. But he finally came out as a black artist and was a brilliant, brilliant painter.

BRIAN FERRISO

That's a great story. Good story. Gregory Grenon and, and, and, you know, really very symbolic of where we are today in this part of the country, but also a real national figure collected by many institutions across the country. And you were, you were right there at the beginning Arlene.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

At the very beginning. And do you remember Jon when they first came in from Detroit, and as things were laid out? Here's this big burly guy. And I'll tell you just one really quick little story about Gregory. I used to work down at my gallery late at night often doing my books, and particularly if Harold was out of town, it was a safe place for me to to finish up stuff at the gallery. And so I had a discrepancy on Gregory's account, on my books, so it was late at night, but I knew he was stayed up kinda late working. And so I called and it rang and rang and rang. And finally, there was an answer. And all I heard was help! help! help! And I said, Gregory, is that you? And he said, Yes. I get in the car. And that was when the gallery was on Morrison. I, the one time I prayed for a cop to stop me, because I was going really, really fast. And it was right when car phones had just come out and I was furious with Jordan because I thought he'd been so extravagant by putting a phone in my car and I thought the only reason he put a phone in my car is because he wanted one. So thank god. And I called to find out the closest hospital to where Gregory was because I knew something was wrong. And I go, thank God The door was open, he is bleeding, everything was drenched in blood. You know, when your adrenaline's going, I had the strength, this big guy, I got him into the car, how I don't know, and raced to some Hospital of Southeast and they said had I been 20 minutes later, he would have been dead. A skill saw a round skill had flown off and hit him right here in his thigh. And I'm telling you the blood was everywhere, including my car and I didn't care. And so I really have a special special bond with Gregory and he I think with me.

BRIAN FERRISO

And then Bob Arneson, again another national figure who who you immediately saw the talent there.

ARLENE SCHNITZER

My mother and I went to Mills College, he was an assistant to Anthony Prieto who was considered one of, probably the greatest, American classic ceramicist. And Bob was his TA, his teaching assistant. And my mother was talking to Tony Prieto and, and who I really went down to see if I could have things and I was wandering around his studio and I saw this young guy fashioning really crazy stuff. This is 19, you know, 61 and just crazy. And he was parlaying, and bubbling and wonderful personality. And I didn't I was so new to this whole game. I didn't know you didn't ask the master and his teaching assistant to be in the same gallery, let alone the same show. When you open them. I just thought he was fabulous. And I just said, Gee, how would you like to be in this show? I'm opening a gallery in Portland, Oregon. He actually he says I'd love it. And this is the piece he sent me. It was called "She-Horse and Daughter" in

black clay. And it was the very first thing. I sold that day. My first day of the gallery. I sold it to Virginia Hazelteen who was a noted collector of Northwest art, her collection has gone to the University of Oregon Art Museum. And it just you know what you couldn't Harold, you say to me, are you a buyer? Are you a dealer? Are you a collector or are you a dealer? The gallery was costing Harold and my dad really seriously. So, you know, I sold it to Virginia. And about two years ago, and I always wondered, two years ago, I'm at Nancy's restaurant, and I see Jim Hazleton and I said, Gee, Jim, whatever happened to that piece that your mother bought from me the very first day I opened the gallery, it was a horse and uh... He said, as a matter of fact, I have it at a gallery in San Francisco for sale. And I said, You gotta be kidding. I said, What he asking for it. And he said \$25,000 I said, Jim, when vibrations get out in the air, it's gonna somebody else is going to want it right away, please Can't we call right this minute to hold it. I want that piece. And I explained it was the very first piece that I'd sold him to his mother. And we got on the phone. They had it on hold for somebody. And he said it sold ship it back and I bought it back. 25 years later.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I looked at the collection. I was very impressed by that Indian beadwork how beautiful it was. But it seemed almost to be not consistent with the rest of the work as far as a craft. Yet it was so beautiful. It really fit in. So I was wondering if you could tell us if there's any special story about how you came about collecting that work?

ARLENE SCHNITZER

There really is. I have bought Native American art for many years, but I was never really that much into beaded work. I always thought it was very beautiful. But one day Rose Quintana. She had collect--Her daughter was born on Valentine's Day, Cecily, who now runs Quintana Galleries and I hope some people in here have been to Quintana's because it's a really wonderful gallery. And because her daughter was born on Valentine's Day, she used to buy a heart shaped bag for her daughter every year and she had this wonderful big collection. Fast forward as many of us buy things for need later on. She had a need quite a few years later. And but it was very important to her that the collection be kept together. She didn't want it piecemealed out or separated. So she called me and asked if I would please keep it together would I be interested in buying it? And I understood what she meant about keeping a collection together and not letting it just get tossed out piecemeal by piece. So I bought the collection from her and it's gorgeous and I'm very proud of it and I hope it's always kept together. It's significant collection of heart shaped beaded work, really covering quite a long period of plateau Native Americans.

BRIAN FERRISO

Thank you. Well, thank you everyone for being here and Arlene and on behalf of this entire institution and this entire community. Thank you for enriching our lives. Thank you.

BRIAN FERRISO

Thank you for listening to my conversation. We, as well as countless others, are saddened by the news of Arlene's passing. As we are releasing this episode during the Coronavirus pandemic, I want to thank everyone who has continued to show support to the Museum and Northwest Film Center with your membership and your additional donations, and also by engaging with us on social media and experiencing our online content. On that note, this podcast is about to undergo some big changes, so be sure to hit subscribe. In the meantime, be safe, stay healthy, and we'll see you when the Museum re-opens.