

Title: An Oral history interview with Benjamin J. Rabe, September 2, 1988

By Anne Bessemer

Ben Rabe talking about the beginnings of Redlands Art Association in 1964

Starts: 1.17 min

Ben: Well, not much happened in Redlands especially until the 60s. We did start up the Lyon Art Gallery in the library. Do you want any of this?

Anne... Oh yeah...

Ben: We started that up in around 1962 and there were a dozen of us that physically gathered the material. We had oriental shows, we went around the houses and gathered oriental things. We had African things and er European er things before 1850 we brought the things ourselves and the shows, developed pretty well.

Anne: Oh you used to have about 4 or 5 a year?

Ben: We had, to begin with we had 7 the first year.

Anne: oh...

Ben: That was ok for 2 or 3 years, by the few who helped.

And people began to want to give money and they called me up I had to be the 1st president, the first couple of years. And they wanted to join. There really wasn't anything to join because our expenses were nothing, we did all the work ourselves and if we had to buy a few things, er hooks, and nails and wire we did it ourselves. So we thought well let's start up an art association. So er...

Anne: So The Lyon Gallery was the first thing in 1962...

Ben: And about 2 years later the Art Association was formed, and I ended up the 1st President on that, I think Rex Crammer drew up the By-Laws, and Jack Smith at the University was very important in organizing it and within in er 3 or 4 months and once we had an art association we had about 200 members right away...

Anne: I remember that...

Ben: And it was \$5 and \$10

Then the art association, er, we had to have a place, and the idea was for all the local artists to exhibit their things and all the other nice people in Redlands were contributing because an art movement was er, really quite new. And we rented the front of a store, in the Fox Theatre Building. We had the first ten feet and we had about 8 or 9 paintings hung in there and we had an attendant and we sold quite a few. And we beginning to have trouble because we had about 50 painters and we could only put up 10 paintings at a time and people were a little irritated that they didn't get hung.

Anne: yeah

Ben: So, about then, the families... the Assistance League was moving out of the theater building; they were on Vine Street, and it turned out... They were moving out when they built their building, and I went over and signed a lease and rented the store at 12 East Vine Street for the Art Association.

Anne: And the first one was around the corner?

Ben: It was facing west. It was.. uh

Anne: I vaguely remember that.

Ben: Yeah.

It was one side of the other was Hyman's cleaners... Matilda's Cleaners. One side of the other, we had the front part.

Then we got the store at 12 East Vine

And many of the members were agast because the lease was 175 dollars a month!

However the store prospered and did just fine, and stayed there a good many years. And then 10 years (1978?) or so ago they moved over to Citrus, Citrus avenue, next door to Mozart's. Much nicer.

Anne: But actually that store was there for a great many years--

Ben: We were there for a long time. It was probably 65 or so, and we were there--

Anne: Towards the beginning of the 80's

Ben: Yeah.

Anne:Mmmhm

Ben: We started out with 200-250 and we still got about the same number, and of those well less than half do any artwork and the others are just nice people in Redlands who contribute. And take turns manning the store, we take turns being sitters, we're all volunteers.

Anne: And the membership as um...let's see.. You had lectures?

Ben: Yeah, uh. Oh, in the 70's we had a ser--were very active then. We had a series of four or five evening lectures with painting demonstrations and sculpture demonstrations and all of those kinds of things and that were very well attended, but then some of us kind of did it for oh, 6 or 7 years, and the bloom wears off and nobody uh, moved in....

Anne: Picked up?

Ben: Picked it up, so it kind of it died out.

Anne: But they still have an active association?

Ben: Now, yeah, then, then the thing kinda came to life again just two or three years ago, and we have a very active all new group, and people such as I who began it a long time ago, are laid back now, but the new bunch is fine.

Anne: I think that's good to cultivate; younger newer people, keeps an organization going. I know Margaret Clark has worked for years on her classes--

Ben: Margaret Clark was terribly important all the way through this. She was a, a real pusher. Very good. There were a number of others too...

Anne: Well that's uh, I hope that they keep a lot of the literature and have a good file on those early years because I think that's important--

Ben: I really don't know.

Anne: They have some files down there; I'm sure they kept, you know, one of each of the early brochures from the art association. You know, I, I had a great many of the early ones, because that's when I first moved to town. I gave them to them when I when I was cleaning my files out, they kept a good file--

Ben: I really don't know. The Lyon Gallery... it was the beginning of the Art Association, and the Art Association when it got going, then it began to give money to the Lyon Gallery so they could rent some things and pay some money, but by then they were supposed to have insurance. But it all got more complicated. Then the Art Association financed the Lyon Gallery, but not quite sufficiently, but by then in the 70's, there were a new group of people in the Lyon Gallery and they chipped in some money to do the things they wanted to do also.

Anne: Now, the first Juried show was the Mini Show, wasn't it? And that was a Mini Show simply because of our gallery being so small--

Ben: Yeah. Everything had to be done by the member himself, or herself, that was hung in the gallery. And we had a rule that no more than three of anybody could be exhibited. And everybody could bring in whatever they wanted, and any member would get one thing exhibited, and then if the walls weren't full then they'd start using second ones and er, third ones. But everybody with... It was to encourage the artists and keep it interesting, and it's still like that way.

Anne: Mhm. Good rules, because they've held up well then. You remember when they had the first mini-show? I'm trying to remember--in the 60's?

Ben: Probably... in the 70's. And we wanted to have a show that other people other than members could bring their work in, and our gallery on Vine Street had limited area wall, so we had everything framed had to be less than 12 inches in any dimension, so that er, we could hang a hundred or more things down there, and we'd judge that. And people brought in two or three... It had no connection with you being a member if your work was good, and you came from Los Angeles or Riverside you were eligible to be uh... And the Mini Show has been going on every year ever since then.

Anne: And now they hold it out at the museum?

Ben: Now it's out at the museum. And the Mini Show now, it's grown, instead of 12 inches maximum it's fifteen inches.

Anne: Instead of about 200 entries, it's they probably have...

Ben: Well...

Anne: A great any more?

Ben: I don't know how many entries they have, but it's still a good show.

Anne: The one year I was chairman with somebody on...

Ben: It's a big job.

Anne: I think it was the second year or third year, and we had to get everything in before we were smart enough to realize you know, we had to cart and crate and what's the other one? Rewrap them and ship them back! Oh, was that a job!

Ben: It's terrible.

Anne: It's interesting, you've been such a workhorse through the years, both Mary (his wife) and yourself and the art association.

Ben: We've enjoyed it.

Anne: Well, that's delightful I think, and that's a great part of everyone's life that has any interest at all... It's delightful.

Ben goes on to talk about beginnings of the Edward Dean Museum...