

Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.

Interview with Neil Di Teresa

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Interview conducted by Greg Willihnganz

DI TERESA: You know I want to look engaging. (Laughter) Do I look engaging?

WILLIHNGANZ: You know smiling is the most important thing you can do to look engaging.

DI TERESA: Oh, okay.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's been my experience that if you do

DI TERESA: Just smile and you'll be alright.

WILLIHNGANZ: Just smile and whatever.

DI TERESA: Just waiting patiently for the next question. I hope I can do all this.

WILLIHNGANZ: What I'm going to throw at you, it's not real wild. (Laughter)

DI TERESA: Okay.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh, basically, I'd sort of like to start just if you could just tell me a little bit about . . .

DI TERESA: Have you started already?

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh, yes, it is recording so . . .

DI TERESA: So it got me doing this?

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, well (laughter). Tell me a little about yourself as a crafts person; how you got into doing what you do.

DI TERESA: Okay. My early experience that kind of lead into my life of doing puppetry and painting was with puppetry as a child and before I knew it was an art form, I was working with that and it then led into painting and I've had a lifetime of doing all of these things. And actually the kind of unusual thing about the Kentucky Guild is that artists and craftsmen are put together and there is a famous guild called the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild out of North Carolina in which they just have handicrafts or crafts, no painters, no printmakers, or anything like that. So our Guild was unusual from the very beginning and so very exciting to be part of that and we actually did performances with the puppetry program. I directed a program with Berea College then subsequently called, which I originated as a cultural outreach, which is called the Summer Puppetry Caravan for Appalachia. And we did, with student personnel, touring and workshops in the summers and so I was able to work with that particular interest as

well and we did perform at the crafts fair. So for a lot of years we were always there doing performances and we actually sold some puppets, you know, things of that kind.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, you've done obviously a lot of canvas work.

DI TERESA: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh, and then you do puppets as well. Are you still active with puppets?

DI TERESA: The puppets actually, this summer I spent time working with students and we're sort of putting the program to sleep so we're not touring. I've written a book about the caravan called Puppet Man and when I find a publisher maybe this will appear. It's done as a story so its individual puppets tell the chapters. I think it's very interesting myself. (Laughter) In fact, I've been working on it for several years and when I've been away from it for a couple of years, I went back to it and read it again to see where I should start to make changes and I was, I found it really interesting (laughter) as much of a bystander as I could possibly be. So anyhow, doing that, the puppetry caravan, we are offering puppets and set pieces to various museums and other collections who have sponsored us during the time we were touring. There were twenty-five years of touring and so that's where all of those things will be in the future.

WILLIHNGANZ: How old were you when you started into puppet making?

DI TERESA: I thought it was when I was in the fifth grade because we had a class project and we were all doing various things in this and it turned out that Neil was the one who was doing more and more and more and finally it became something that I was doing. Uh, rubbing my nose I think will look cute in this. (Laughter). I'll try not to do that. Uh, but my mom told me that when I was three years old, that was the time of clotheslines for hanging out your clothes, you know. No dryers. And she said I would put strings on my teddy bear and then throw the teddy bear over the line and pull on the strings to make the teddy bear move so I think that was my first, some of my first puppetry experiences.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. (Laughter) What drew you to puppets? What is there about them?

DI TERESA: Well, puppetry is an art form but not with a capital A so it's very engaging and many people enjoy puppets who would never go to a museum to see a painting or to see sculpture or some more formal art form or see whatever collections. So, of course that's not my personal, you know. The question is personal so I really have no idea. It's just been a lifelong quest for me, along with painting too and teaching, those things that I just stepped into and never stepped out of.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, have you been able to pretty much devote the majority of your time to your craftwork?

DI TERESA: Well, it's really wonderful to be teaching because I, you know, get a paycheck and so it gives me the permission to do some interesting work and unusual things and not worry about something being immediately sellable. Though I think I have a big collection of paintings at home but I don't. Many of my paintings are out in the world which is where I want them to be anyhow. That's where they belong.

WILLIHNGANZ: Could you tell me about this piece behind you?

DI TERESA: This is a painting, it's on canvas. I do both watercolors and acrylics and I began to paint first with oil and as one of my student T.A.'s at the college told me . . . I teach at Berea College, I think I've already said that . . . one of my student T.A.'s said to me or like to tease me about, she said that Neil was painting before acrylics were invented. (Laughter) And that's not quite true. Acrylics were around when I was in graduate school but they were really watery and nasty so today the way we can buy them and they're in nice tubes and they are thick color. It's great. And uh, so I first painted exclusively with oils. When I, the summer after I graduated from Pratt Institute where I went to school, really wonderful art school. I'm so glad I made the choice to go there. I began to paint watercolors just informally and I would, on a day off, I would go to the beach, Martha's Vineyard being on the coast for people who don't know, and I would just have a big number 10 can, one of those big cans and fill it with water from the beach which my organic period. You know the natural water and all that. And so I would just paint and sit on the beach for the day. I'd have some lunch and so that was the beginning of doing a lot of watercolors which I continued and I more or less taught myself watercolor. But my painting style is very intuitive so I learn a lot. And as my wife was just saying comments about Pavarotti who has just passed away, wonderful singer, he said that learning is a lifelong thing and so I'm always learning. I'm always learning. So this is an acrylic painting. At a certain point when acrylics got better, I began to paint with acrylics and I found that they match more closely the way I thought and the way I would work so they do dry quickly. They're very forgiving. Lots of change is possible. And so that's, it's a great media for me and because I am teaching fulltime at Berea, I don't have the extended periods of time that I would have had to do oil painting which does take a lot of forethought and preplanning and so on.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me about the composition of this.

DI TERESA: Okay, this particular one is obviously a landscape and, a Kentucky landscape. Something that is I think now kind of interesting is, and will be interesting to others, is that I've been experimenting with the idea of using the computer, particularly Photoshop, as a design tool and this is my response in the 21st century to what's happening in design and graphics. And what I'm saying is a lot of people today don't go as far as the canvas. They just do the thing on their computer, print it out and it's finished and I've seen pieces in museums that are done that way. There's no actual material, brush, and paint and all of that. So I wanted to endorse the idea of painting still and so I began to work with this idea which I've worked on several years. I've had students working special projects with me in summers and doing studies and I've

worked with them and I had a sabbatical in which I worked on using the techniques. And the whole idea is that the painting is still the supreme thing. The painting is the main thing. So when I did this, I did the research and found all kinds of clippings and photographs that I had and I distorted them, put them in various places, tried them out and I really designed the whole painting to scale before I began painting it. Now the color that I use here is different from what I had and I also made changes. I always make changes as I work because painting is full of surprises for people who are willing to take that walk which I think is what art is about, is having those wonderful surprises. But in this case, like this guy was in another painting that I did about ten years ago and so I was experimenting also working with the students also with the idea of taking drawings and other things that they'd previously done or maybe paintings and incorporating that into the new paintings. And so I took this figure from this other painting. You know, I digitally photographed and I then because you can do all this with Photoshop, I tried it in different locations in the painting. The painting was not finished but it was well on its way and it seemed like a big vacant space so I needed to make the, include some kind of figure or something human, live. So I tried it. At first the figure was very large over here; just the upper part of the figure and it looked like the Incredible Hulk, like the attack. So and see this was the advantage of doing that. I could see if it was no good. In the past, I would have had to draw it in, paint it and then decide it was no good, paint it out and then get back again. I had another one where there was a very small figure way in the background and it was so kind of innocuous, almost invisible. That didn't work and then this guy. Try that size and also people who are familiar with Photoshop know you can move things a quarter of an inch, you know, and move it around and change it. Make it lighter, make it darker, etc. And so, before I began the painting of the figure, I had a kind of preview. Lots of changes were made. I want to stress that because it's about to me the painting experience is what this is about. But designing it ahead of time in the way that I now do, facilitates doing this. And so, if I can give myself more freedom as a painter, then I can do a better painting because freedom is what it's about and intuitive and creative work. Also, if I do something complex, I have also worked with and with watercolor in this case I did a 90 inch by 40 inch triptych three panel painting which is the nativity as if it's happening today. And there are different aspects of that which would take some time to talk about but there are fifty-five different figures in it as well as background, foreground and all sorts of things. And there is no way I could have every designed this without using Photoshop. I now have on, and it's a full scale markup of a crucifixion which I'm doing in the same way and typically, one thing I will tell you is, typically, these such paintings are done in the artist's location so Rembrandt painted Dutch peasants in his nativities. I paint Kentucky people, Berea people or people I know. And the artist is often pictured and so I'm on the edge of the canvas. And the artist is not pictured in an important way but in a sort of worshipful way so I'm in both paintings. The location is Berea. The nativity scene is Twin Mountains so if you came to Berea, you could find that. The crucifixion takes place in my storytelling of it, uh, Indian Fort Mountain, east pinnacle, which is very craggy and very rough and stony and such as that so anyhow. So, the same technique I used for this I did that but it's, they're both much more complicated. They are watercolor so watercolor for me has always been a very, it's just an easy

media for me to paint in. I know many people really struggle with it and have difficulty but I never did and so it's like puppetry or whatever. I just . . .

WILLIHNGANZ: Forgive my ignorance but is watercolor different than acrylic? I thought . . .

DI TERESA: Yeah, acrylic is . . . right. Watercolor is traditionally done on paper. Acrylic is usually done on canvas but could also be done on paper but acrylic paints have as a media, they have water so that's why it might get mixed up. Watercolors are never as insoluble so when you paint with watercolor, if I took a sponge and wiped over that, it would still pick up much of the paint. With acrylic, I could use a scrub brush and then a hose on this. Nothing would happen. So acrylic is a very permanent kind of painting and versus oil painting. Oil painting is said to have what is called inherent vise. In other words, the minute it is finished, it starts to deteriorate. So it gives a lot of people working for museums lots of work because they have to keep restoring these paintings. Acrylic paintings, that isn't the case at all. And I remember you know in the landscape, of course, that's one of our issues, problem with plastic not breaking down the way it should. I was in Italy on sabbatical in Sicily and here's this beautiful countryside and there was a spot of blue in the distance and I thought that is gorgeous. This beautiful rich blue and I thought, I parked my car and told the family to wait and I ran over to see what it was and what it was was a plastic laundry bag out in the middle of this gorgeous landscape. So, you know. It was beautiful in color but I didn't like the idea of it being there after all.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. Perhaps we could talk a little bit more about the Guild itself and your involvement. When did you first become aware of the Guild?

DI TERESA: Well, I came to Berea in 1962 and the chairman of the art department was already active in the Guild. He was on the Guild board and the Guild was just getting under way. And he invited me to become a member and it just seemed like very interesting possibility and I did become a member, went to early meetings. The Guild at that time had a lot of educational programs which have since not been continued. They did have quite a lot of funding from the state to support the educational programs and it would be good if again we could get back into that mode because it was a great way for people to engage the arts and crafts directly as an experience and then also incidentally it became a sales room for them as well. So they had a touring train called the Kentucky Guild Train. It was two cars given to the Guild or loaned to the Guild by the L&N Railroad. One of the cars was an exhibition car and the other was a car which housed the director of that and so the director, he would not ride in the car to the different locations. He would drive but the train would move the, so any location in the mountains of Kentucky where there were train tracks, was a valid place and there was lots of interest in that, a tremendous thing. I don't know today whether that would need to be revived but I know that it was very successful at that time, very good.

WILLIHNGANZ: So you joined the Guild back in '62?

DI TERESA: '62, 1962.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. Were you there at the first . . . I was talking with Fred Shepherd . . .

DI TERESA: Yes. I remember Fred.

WILLIHNGANZ: he was telling me war stories about the first, the first show they had and going out trooping out into the middle of these fields somewhere and they had no tents and

DI TERESA: Right. (Laughter)

WILLIHNGANZ: and they, you know, they said, "You want to set up? Here's some blocks and you can set those up with some boards." (Laughter)

DI TERESA: Right. Yeah, the first fair and I was there and I remember Fred very well and we would trade things. We would trade paintings or I also did a lot of fabric pieces, banners in batik and these I found that I could sell at a more reasonable price. I did realize that marketing was part of this too and of course he would, like a potter would have smaller items as well. Other people would do the same. So when we had the first fair, we had no tents. We just sort of went out and I strung up clothesline and hung these batiks and then one of the days, maybe the first day, we had a tremendous storm come up. And the banners that I had were whipping around, you know. They were just going crazy and very sweetly people from Berea who were out at the fair ran up and began to take them down for me. It was very nice and then I had them all piled up in my car. I took them to the art department and put them in our auditorium, which at that time had wooden walls so I could just pin them all up. And then the next day when they were dry and there was no more rain, brought them back out to the fair. And it was very exciting and people, at that time, people came to the fair as a really novel thing. This was before there were a lot of craft shops and stores and before the Kentucky Artisan Center which is just a few years old here in Berea, places like that were available and so the way people got crafts was to go to these fairs and it was really great because we'd have, let's see, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Like four days, or at least three days, Friday, Saturday, Sunday perhaps. People would line up to get in before the ten o'clock opening time. They would wait to buy their tickets and it was great to have that kind of interest and support, really wonderful. And, you know, after that year, I guess we had our first tents. The tents were owned by the Guild and if you reserved a booth, you had the use of a tent. When you went out to the fair, your tent was set up and you worked around that or whatever so. I really loved the, I had some easels and I would paint, I would put paintings in the woods right around. It was great looking and I loved that. And you know, sell some of them and sometimes I painted out there as well. I demonstrated painting and talked to people. It was a great experience.

WILLIHNGANZ: Fred said that there were a number of people working in watercolors who got rained on and lost a fair amount of work during that.

DI TERESA: Yeah, I'm trying to think about that. I didn't lose anything. I don't know why. (Laughter) I had everything covered in plastic for one thing. I did know enough to do that, still things were whipping around like crazy but not the paintings.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, did you take or conduct any of the classes that the Guild was involved with?

DI TERESA: Hmm. . . . I didn't take any classes. I did, actually probably not. I did a number of workshops and maybe the Guild was involved with that sort of thing. I can't remember who sponsored them but I did a number of workshops in batik at that time so surely was some Guild influence in that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Did you make a lot of friends and acquaintances within the Guild?

DI TERESA: I guess so really because it's been a long time since I've been out at one of our fairs and it has changed a lot so some of the people that I knew probably are retired like the potter you mentioned and other people. So, it was always nice to be there to see people and to sort of renew acquaintances. That was part of the fair and often we would have some kind of a picnic after one of the days of the fair or a Guild meeting or something of that kind with food to follow and that was always very nice. I always like that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Did the Guild contribute to your development as a professional?

DI TERESA: That's quite a question. (Laughter) No, I was perfect from the beginning (Laughter) of course, every experience. Remember I just said Pavarotti said we're always learning. Life is about lifelong learning and I very humbly agree with that and I feel as if everything I do teaches me something and I'm very open to that. And I'm also a good listener so when I was at the fair and people were talking about my work you know, I was listening. They, even a negative comment, a comment that was a question, you know, I think we need to hear everything and I made an effort to do that and to learn.

WILLIHNGANZ: As egalitarian as it is to be open to all experiences what we're really trying to do here is establish the Guild had some value for developing people in the field.

DI TERESA: Oh, of course. Well, I mean the very fact that we had the format, the format of the Guild. And I was frequently asked to be on the Standards Committee which would review the work of people applying to be members of the guild and I would hear again, things from other people. I mean it wasn't like I was taking a class in that but I would hear questions that ceramists had about their craft and other painters or

other people in the fine arts would whatever, and so it was, I think the format was what it was about, maybe not the formal activities. I was always grateful though that I wasn't, as I said earlier in the interview, I wasn't concerned about earning a living by my art. And so that gave me more freedom than some of the people who did come and Fred Shepherd, he also taught at Murray, so we had some freedom. We had a chance to try out new things without as much threat as somebody who needed to, you know, use it to pay the rent. So, but the Guild gave that opportunity to do, for us to learn, to grow, specifically talk to other people about what they were doing with their art. And we also, the big thing at the fair was trading with other people for their work and they'd trade you for pieces of your work so it was great. I built up a nice collection. For a very long time I had a Fred Shepherd pot until one of my children put an end to that so (laughter).

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, the whole process seems to have been, there's a lot of energy, mostly from the state forces and government and educational forces that got the whole thing rolling and they started pretty quickly into the Guild train and then the fairs come within a year or two.

DI TERESA: Exactly. Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: And that went on for quite a few years. I think the train went on for seven or ten years? Something like that?

DI TERESA: I'm not sure but it was quite a while. Sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: Quite a while. And then that support really sort of got withdrawn from the state per se. Do you have any idea why that happened?

DI TERESA: Well, the state, they were, I mean I'm assigning their interest to educational purposes but maybe it wasn't that so much as marketing. So they thought that they, and through the Commerce Department, the state could help us but they were interested in their little shops in the various state parks and so I don't think it ever worked that we really had a majority of good quality products, craft products in those shops. There was an attempt to do that but it was very hard to do because the marketing people wanted something that would show up as, "Oh, yeah. We sold twenty of those backscratchers." You know, well, then we should get lots more backscratchers. So it's a very different attitude. The, I already mentioned the Artisan Center which is now in Berea. I'm pointing here as now as it is that way. It's that way. Anyway, I'm telling you about it. It's just about three years old now. Not older than that and it's a very handsome location. It is still through the Commerce Department. And it's about tourism. It is not a nod to creative work and crafts and art though the very best examples of those things are in that building. So it's very nice. It's an excellent thing that the state has and many of the members of the Kentucky Guild of Artist Craftsmen are also exhibiting there and selling there. So it's also a great opportunity. On the other hand, it is almost closed or maybe it has closed some shops in Berea where people don't have to come into town to find these things because now there right handy. They're all in this great building. You can eat there and walk around. The

restrooms are beau...they've won prizes for their restrooms by the way. (Laughter). If you can imagine what that would encounter. But you know it's another story. I do have some paintings there, I'm very glad to say and I have, every year I do my own Christmas cards and after a while I began to accumulate my extra printing that I had done so I began to sell those and they always keep a group of those there and also posters so. And prints of this nativity that I was talking about, they do have those. They are on a small scale so they can be put in a suitcase and carried with someone and used as a devotional wherever they travel or live. That's the way it would have been done in the middle ages.

WILLIHNGANZ: Interesting. Where you ever involved in any of the leadership responsibilities within the Guild?

DI TERESA: I was never president. I was on the board and the board, you know. It's just like any board, many challenges, many would come up unexpectedly and blah, blah, blah, things about the fair or memberships or just sort of hacking through and trying to find some sensible solutions to the problems that, whatever came up, which I honestly can't remember at the moment. I just remember sitting there for hours talking about it. I do remember, we would drive from Berea to Elizabethtown, which was considered a central location and people would be there, Emily Wolfson, Richard Bellando, myself and I can't remember others, Jerry Workman, other names. And we would, you know, Richard was one of our early directors and we would talk and try to iron things out and the Guild on those days, we were really operating close to the soil so the Guild didn't even buy our lunch. We drove there, we spent the whole day and then we couldn't have our lunch bought by the Guild. Everybody paid for their own lunch and then even when we did the judging of people who were wanting to join the Guild, the Standards Committees, same thing. We'd drive to Murray, Kentucky for review of this stuff, look through it, give reasons to people, letters would have to be written, etc. and actually in that case too, people were, if it was in an area that I had some expertise, and this would be true of anyone on the Standards Committee, they would provide our name to the person who did not make it and that person could contact us and talk to us about improving their work or other things or whatever. And so we, they did that and I was, you know, I did that a number of times for people.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you think the guild has played an important role in fostering the growth of arts and crafts work in Kentucky?

DI TERESA: Well, I think before the Guild nobody had any idea that arts and crafts were worth anything at all. I mean, it was just something that some people did. You know, women did quilting at home or crocheted or something and in the mountains there was some tradition but really the tradition of the mountains I think ended with World War II so it was a long time ago that it was really a serious tradition. There was some very old people who still made chairs or such things as that for their communities and sold them but some people made brooms and such. Most of the people, by the time that the fairs started and the Guild started up, were my generation so I was . . . How old was I? I was twenty-four years old. And the, everybody, the other people who

did the traditional things were elderly. Most of the people who were at the fair were people educated in universities and colleges. So there were some older people who would come and as they say would rive shingles. They would demonstrate shingle riving or they would weave chair seats or something like that but those were really in the minority so that was changing. But I think the guild really demonstrated to people that crafts were a viable lifestyle and that, I'm trying to think of, George Jensen in New York, this is a store that was on Fifth Avenue. It's now on Madison Avenue, still in New York; major center for very fine crafted items from Europe and here came to our fairs and selected things which they would sell in their store. So they got some of my banners and when I was in New York, I got to go and see, and here they were, George Jensen in New York. It was really quite amazing and I wasn't the only one of course. But it brings to mind that they had, and prices were, you know, they didn't ask for a wholesale price. They paid the price you had on it and then they doubled that and sold them in New York. Well, I'm from New York, and I know how these things work and at one point they sent me a check and I deposited the check and that was it and that was in full payment and a month later they sent me another check for the same amount. And I tell you I heard devils telling me go deposit that but I didn't. I sent it back and thanked them so they got their money back.

WILLIHNGANZ: As time has gone on, obviously after the Guild started and there were other things, there were other organizations that developed that supported the arts and has there been any competition among those organizations for resources or has it been pretty much been an easy negotiation to work together?

DI TERESA: Well, there are more funds available. As time went on, and I'm not sure when we began with, I think it was with Kennedy, the National Endowment for the Arts was created, and so that was before 1963 but that has grown somewhat and then with Reagan it sort of shrunk up. And you know various kinds of funding have been available. Excuse me. Nothing like the National Science Foundation which I always thought was too bad because we need this creative experience as well for people but they didn't ask me about that. So I guess what I'm saying is more money became available. The state became wiser in ways to distribute it and to deal with applications of groups and so they continue that. They do some, depending on who's governor at that time, they do some support of the arts in general but it's a much broader than it was when we, when the Guild first started. So there would be the competition for funds but there would be more funds. Now if we're talking about competition for markets, that's a different story because now you can go to fair that's located in the mall and a lot of the things are very manufactured looking to me. They are not made in China but they might as well be. They're so very standardized and so that's kind of sad because people who buy them think they're buying something that is truly handcrafted. The mark of, I love handcrafted things and wonderful Kentucky baskets and such things which are still being done by a select people and weaving of various kinds and ceramics, the whole bit, woodworking, wonderful things, instrument making. Homer Ledford, a person that just died a couple of years ago, maybe last year, had a lifetime of making and playing these marvelous instruments that he did. He had a small band and was very creative in his approach and he earned a good living doing that, maybe better than a good living, I

would say. In Berea, Warren May does dulcimers and his dulcimers are very famous and people are always buying them and they are very nice and crafted and he also does great furniture so there's still some of that. But there are more kind of commercial things, like last year, I don't want to get off the subject but the Kentucky Guild, not the Kentucky Guild but Churchill Weavers was a tradition in Berea and was is the operative word. A few years ago, it was all handcrafted weaving of different kinds of use, not tapestries but throws and pillows and ties and all sorts of things, napkins and tablecloths, baby blankets. And when it was sold a few years ago to a major national company, it looked like they were going to keep it going. But just about a year ago, they decided that the competition from foreign made textiles was too great. They couldn't compete so they sold, they closed the business, they sold the looms so that's gone. And they were very active in the fairs and very active in kind of demonstrating that crafts were alive and well. But the mistake was to sell to this conglomerate that didn't care about Berea and the Churchill Weavers and its history so it was gone.

WILLIHNGANZ: Don't you always have a certain amount of conflict between, you know, regional local output and the demands of a greater market? I'm looking at, for instance, Louisville Pottery and their choice to basically continue making things sort of in a handmade way but at the same time upping their output so they're really almost into manufacturing.

DI TERESA: Sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: Even though it's crafted pottery. And I wonder of the decision you make. When I was talking with Lester, he commented about a particular village, I've forgotten where it was, somewhere in Africa, they were well-known for shoes and you had to travel through the mountains to get to this place and finally found this place and they made these very ornate, very fancy, very well crafted, beautiful shoes and some guy came across and said, "We'd like to order some of these." And they said, "How many?" And he said, "Half a million." (Laughter) and then of course they just you know it's just, in the realm of possibilities, but that's part of the problem you get into . . .

DI TERESA: Oh, yes, of course. No way to do it. I don't think there's any way to balance it. It's very hard to; paintings are more one of a kind things, of course. And occasionally I have a request to do something like something that somebody saw that I had and, you know, even that is almost, that's impossible to do but I can do something with the same kind of theme and coloration and directions but I know what you're saying about that. Actually I have had to make some decisions myself with things that I've had where, you know, I have a poster that I did for the gallery with a watercolor on it. The watercolor is called Headed Home and actually there's an acrylic I did of the same theme which is in the Artisan Center and its part of their collection. But and it's, my acrylics specifically are this size and so my nephew, I sent my three, my sister's three children each a poster. My nephew said I needed to get it on the web and sell this and he said it would sell and it probably would sell but how could I ever do this? I mean, I couldn't even, I don't even have the time to ship the things, you know, much less do any correspondence and all the rest. So, it is always that issue and it's overwhelming. I

know people who have done like production pottery. They're the only craftspeople I know who really have made substantial amounts of money doing that. And it's just very difficult because your, the demands of supply and demand are so difficult to do and they're, you know, I don't know how they do it.

WILLIHNGANZ: It seems like as an artist, you almost have to make a decision about whether you are going to go, I mean you look at what Chihuly has done with his glass (inaudible).

DI TERESA: Sure, right.

WILLIHNGANZ: And I mean he has a production house basically and he grinds them out and they're all over the place and they're stunning but it's very much a production type facility.

DI TERESA: And he doesn't even blow any of the glass anymore. He doesn't work with it directly at all.

WILLIHNGANZ: Right.

DI TERESA: I mean, he just kind of directs and talks to people about what he wants and they do it.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's a franchise almost.

DI TERESA: Yeah, so yeah, it is and I know I've thought about that a lot. I know some people particularly in the area of ceramics where it's wound up being a kind of self made factory and I thought you know one has to decide if you really want to do factory work or not. And it's sad because even though you're the designer, you have to produce the product. Years ago I was working in New York and a job . . . I was working for the New York Public Library and a job came up in their illustration department and I knew someone . . . I was doing some kind of prints, I mean just prints, you know just Xerox type prints people would order and so we were doing that and this, first they advertised within the company. The New York Public Library is a huge business and it was on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. And they, so I knew some guy who was also a painter and I said to him, "Well, you know this job has opened up." So I said, "You'll probably apply." And I said, "I'm going to apply." And he said, "No, I'm not going to apply. I keep my art completely separate from my work." And I have never done that but I thought, well, that's one way of doing it. So he kept his art pure and he worked, earned money and paid rent, bought his food and all that and probably did very well that way but he kept his art completely his own.

WILLIHNGANZ: Interesting. At the University of Louisville, we had the opening this week actually of the Frederick Heart display. I don't know if you're familiar with Frederick Heart's work with the sculptures.

DI TERESA: Southwest.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, he did the southwest stuff. He's also done a lot of spiritual stuff from the National Cathedral. He did (unintelligible) for that.

DI TERESA: Hmm. Oh, he did? I didn't know that.

WILLIHNGANZ: He did the three Vietnam soldiers who are in bronze looking over the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC.

DI TERESA: Right. And okay is he from Louisville.

WILLIHNGANZ: Uh, he, I believe (unintelligible)

DI TERESA: I'm trying to find, my mind, I'm sorting around to find out who he is. Okay, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: He's an enormously talented guy, amazing things and he worked in bronze for a lot of years and then he for the last twenty years or whatever he's worked a lot in acrylic, solid acrylic which he sculpts out so that it's clear. You can see through it. And then there are sculptures in it.

DI TERESA: How interesting.

WILLIHNGANZ: And the result is when you move around the piece, you see reflections of . . .

DI TERESA: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: So you have two or three heads appear where one was before. And he has, for instance, a crucifix that he did and they presented it to the Pope and whatnot. And it's a beautiful amazing crucifix with Christ inside the cross, so he's got the cross and then the Christ figure is actually inside it and as you move around it changes a great deal. And as I was going around the campus, when we did the opening, it was a pretty big important thing with hundreds of people in heavy clothing and the heat. People were walking outside and dying. But we're going

DI TERESA: Were you videotaping that?

WILLIHNGANZ: No, I was not. My wife is the provost at U of L

DI TERESA: Oh, okay.

WILLIHNGANZ: So I go to a lot of these things. So we're walking around and I saw two different versions of the Christ cross in different sizes. So obviously he'd taken this big piece of creation and then done variations on it and I'm wondering how many of

those he put into the universe. How many of them are actually there? You know, in the years to come will we see them at the local 5 and dime. I mean, what really happens to your art when you do allow copies to be made in multiple?

DI TERESA: It is amazing because I did a, I had a commission this spring from a group that was doing a new musical in North Carolina and they wanted a poster. I decided I, they told me about the whole story and so I designed the poster first as a painting and then, using Photoshop, placed the lettering and I sent the painting to them as well as a digital cd and the whole bit but they had the painting printed again. They had the original painting but they had it printed again on canvas in different sizes and they said, and they asked me if it would be okay in the future if they would, you know, sell that at performances like in the lobby. They would sell that and it would be a great money maker for them and I have to think about this. We haven't negotiated anything yet but I mean it does happen and I know that with the computer today, they can actually do 3-D things as well so maybe that figure within the cast piece is just another function that they can do, that you were describing.

WILLIHNGANZ: I wonder how many there will be in five years?

DI TERESA: Exactly. Well, they do, they can use somebody who teaches sculpture was talking about it in the department the other day, they can take a photograph and the material. I don't know what the material is; it's some kind of plastic. The computer can construct the image 3-D and then you can cast it and cast it in bronze or whatever you want I guess, I don't know. Anyhow, it's another world, and that's why my thing with the painting with, I really feel like I'm defending the art of painting from all of this other stuff happening because it looks like its happening.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I think it's going to be very hard to fight it.

DI TERESA: Yeah. I have a course that I've taught which I call computer to paint. My whole process I call computer to paint and students are very interested in it. They are very capable with the computer and they like the idea of moving into and they're not just art majors who take that course. So I'm glad of that. And I thought at the time, when I was experimenting with it, I thought we're doing something really unusual here. Well, I know Photoshop's been around for a while and my wife was telling me that on The Morning Show from Katie Couric or who is that on that? She was interviewing some people at the Chicago Art Institute who are doing the same thing. So I thought at least it was a nice, a good school. You know, we had a good connection. But anyway, I don't know how, what they did. I would never require a student to do this. I mean, I would be very happy for them to just work in the direct traditional way because I think it's important not to make . . . that kind of demand could be too restrictive to someone. So in that sense, it's always open. Of course, if they sign up for the course, and that's the name of the course and that's what we do.

WILLIHNGANZ: There's been such a change in the way art is used and whatnot and I was reflecting the other day that it's sort of interesting that in some ways it's been

paralleled by what's happened in food. If you look at the way traditionally we made food 200 years ago or a hundred years ago, you made it at home to have food. And now we're in the age of manufacturing where you go to the store and they buy the food and then make it at home and then you have boutique food stores. You have whole foods making specialized green products and no preservatives and Rebecca Grace milk and all of that.

DI TERESA: Right. Sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: Sort of the crafts have gone the same way. We used to build chairs because we needed a chair.

DI TERESA: Sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: But now it's an art form.

DI TERESA: Exactly.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's handmade; it's a different product from what you buy from China.

DI TERESA: Exactly.

WILLIHNGANZ: And it's interesting how we sort of rarified our output.

DI TERESA: There are two things that makes me think about. There was, I don't remember the man's name but there was an elderly man at the early fairs who made rockers of walnut and they were very coarsely made but they were very handsome, very handsome. And he would use hickory bark to make the seat and back and so on and that sort of thing. And they really were an art form and his prices then were like \$350. Today they would be something like \$700 but still it would be very modest so that people could afford them to use and he, you know, he was a real mountain guy with a big beard and the whole bit, work shirt. And I get a catalog because my son is interested in, and he's made some furniture, but I get a catalog from Thomas Moser and they do furniture, very finely crafted furniture and they have these wonderful chairs that have . . . the wood is, you know, the grain of the wood is gorgeous and you see the whole side of a side, uh, not a side chair but like an easy chair but the whole side is this wood, beautiful grain. And those chairs are \$3900. So it's not exactly the kind of thing that no matter how much a person loves the natural look at wood would be able, I mean we're moving into that kind of thing, where they do have wood craftsmen but practically speaking, the price is prohibitive if they're going to be reasonably paid. And as I've often said, somebody says something to be about the work of a, price of a painting, and I said, "Well, you know, the last time I went to the dentist, I didn't try to negotiate him down for my tooth filling." You know what I mean. We just simply pay for a professional person to do something for us that we can't do for ourselves. And I think that's the answer to both fine crafts and arts today or anything. I mean again, the Pavarotti, when

I heard some of the recordings again, it just lifted me up and I thought I can't do this myself. You know, I can't do that. This person can do it and he should be well paid.

WILLIHNGANZ: But I wonder too as you do this if you're not to some extent taking the crafts away from the people just in terms of, we get into juried art fairs and to get into an art fair, you have to have a lot of talent.

DI TERESA: Oh, sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: You're not getting in there unless you can meet the standards and standards are quite high.

DI TERESA: Sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: And I, as a, I don't know that I consider myself a crafts person per se. I've built furniture and we sleep on the bed I built and I've got various things around the house . . .

DI TERESA: Sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: But I'm no master woodworker. I go to, of course, I go to the St. James Art Fair and some prestigious places but I go there and I look at this dazzling woodwork

DI TERESA: Oh, sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: and I'm thinking if I had forty, fifty years left I couldn't get to this level.

DI TERESA: Oh, I know. That's remarkable.

WILLIHNGANZ: And you become almost more of an audience rather than a participant. And I wonder if that really the message we want to send because, like you said, the earlier emphasis of the Guild was in education, in bringing artwork into consciousness so that, I assume, people would participate in it and take part in it and celebrate it and enjoy it.

DI TERESA: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: But be able to do it.

DI TERESA: Right. The way you're talking about it, I feel a very sympathetic cord and I think there's still room for the educational purpose. I wish the Guild could get in a position. Maybe we could get grants from some major foundations or something that will pay for this educational dimension because I think people still need that, you know. I wouldn't be doing paintings if I didn't think they had a purpose for people. And

as I earlier said, you know, I don't own many paintings of mine but I know I've done a lot of them, probably a couple of thousand or more and they are out in the world and that's where they belong. So I think that, yeah, it's about getting people to participate or to join in, joining in and that doesn't mean doing something crass or very ordinary. It isn't that. That's really an insult to people who see the work but just something of the best quality and your most sincere attitude and you bring everything you are to every piece, whatever it happens to be. You know, the potter, their hands are more than just hands in clay; there's a whole cone of experience that moves into every piece that they do and that's true for painting or any of the crafts. You know, so it's not anonymous. It's not, yeah, this came from China. A few years ago, we were at the Chicago Art Institute and bought two bowls, two very handsome bowls with kind of a little handle. They looked, they were from the Far East but we didn't know where they were from, or from Asia, but they looked it up and couldn't find where they were from in their records. I mean they knew what distributor they bought them from but that didn't help with the true origin but they are very handsome. They are made from the roots of trees and gorgeous grain and handcrafted and every one individual and we paid about, you know, \$60 which I thought was very cheap and recently I was someplace in Lexington where they had similar things from China which were selling for \$20. And that doesn't make the ones we bought, I gave one to one of my sons and the other one is waiting to be given to the other son. But it doesn't make them less beautiful. But they become anonymous. It's not about a person. I love to know the person that made piece or know about them or why and it's great to know that. Warren May, as I said, is a dulcimer maker and I know him personally and I can walk into his gallery shop down here around the corner and just talk to him and I think people still value that. People who come to the gallery and they always want to talk to me before they buy a painting. And they understand intuitively that it's something that we're giving personally and they're exchanging money for it but the money doesn't really buy it. It doesn't buy that quantity. That quantity is present because we're artists and craftsmen.

WILLIHNGANZ: Where do you want to see the Guild go in the future?

DI TERESA: Well, one of the things already is a greater educational purpose, I think very important. Um, otherwise, our purpose is not different from any commercial fair. There's a commercial fair that takes place in Berea in the summers that is strictly people apply to do it and they gather together and have the fair and make whatever money that can and pay the commission and they get out. I mean that's the beginning and end of it and I would like the Guild to have a greater purpose. I think it would serve the Guild more as well because frankly today, there are so many such fairs, that just being an ordinary crafts fair is nothing. It's a negligible quantity today. And if we do the education and let's say have workshops, and other things, I can imagine all sorts of functions that we could conduct if we had some moderate funding to do it, to deal with, you know, what an arts and crafts item is, for instance, or maybe the history or maybe. I don't know, whatever. Nothing too cold and too boring but something with, I think people would come. They'd be interested in that. And it would accrue to everything we do so it would accrue to sales, definitely accrue to sales. But that wouldn't be our primary purpose.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, I think we have one minute left if you have any concluding thoughts.

DI TERESA: I could sing something. I know I think I've been saying things that sound like the end. (Laughter) I just feel very, well, fortunate to have had the kinds of influences I have had in my life, teaching at a distinguished college like Berea College with a true sense of purpose in what we are doing and this carries through all of the departments including the art department which we are serious about what we are doing. We want people to learn about it and to know about it. I can see this blurring off into my experience with the Guild, the same thing. We're not just a salesroom. It's about people learning and experiencing and having something for their life. When they buy something it becomes part of their life from then on for whatever purpose. And so, in time they would know the difference between what they bought at a Guild fair and what they bought at Wal-Mart as a useful item; there's a big difference.

WILLIHNGANZ: Thank you very much.

DI TERESA: Thank you.

WILLIHNGANZ: Terrific. Okay, I think we are a wrap.

DI TERESA: Okay, well I'm glad.