

A CONVERSATION WITH GERALD HINES

IN CONJUNCTION WITH
THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Interviewee: MR. GERALD HINES

Date: December 1, 2004

Place: Telephone Call from Houston to London

Interviewer: Leigh Cutler

INTRODUCTION

Center for Public History
University of Houston

GERALD HINES

Gerald D. Hines came to Houston in 1948, after receiving a degree in mechanical engineering from Purdue University. In search of good investment opportunities in the early 1950s, he began constructing small buildings and warehouses.¹ In 1957 he founded Gerald D. Hines Interest, a firm that is now one of the largest privately held real estate development, investment, and management companies in the world. As co-owner and chief executive officer, Hines is responsible for directing all firm policy and procedure, as well as participating in major new business ventures and cultivating new and existing investor relations.

Among other career accomplishments, Mr. Hines is credited for setting new industry standards for quality in real estate development and management, and for his support of urban planning initiatives. He oversees a portfolio of more than 600 properties valued in excess of \$14 billion.² Many of those major properties are in Houston, including the Galleria development, the Williams (Transco) Tower, and several downtown buildings. Mr. Hines splits his time during the year between Houston and London.

INTERVIEW

The interview focuses on Mr. Hines' involvement in commissioning French sculptor Jean Dubuffet to create *Monument to the Phantom (Monument Au Fantôme)* for the outdoor plaza at the 1100 Louisiana Building in downtown Houston. It touches upon such details as the coordination between the building's architecture and the sculpture design, the challenges involved in getting the piece installed, the cost of the art, and the inspiration behind Dubuffet's creation.

The interview was conducted over the telephone between London and Houston; Mr. Hines was in his London office. He was cooperative throughout the interview, which consisted of specific, targeted questions intended to keep the conversation length to a minimum, in consideration of international calling expenses. The interview required approximately twenty minutes. For further insight on the topic, Mr. Hines suggested contacting the project manager at the architectural firm that worked with him on the selection, placement design, and installation of the Dubuffet sculpture.

¹ Walter L. Buenger and Joseph A. Pratt, *But Also Good Business: Texas Commerce Banks and the Financing of Houston and Texas, 1886-1986* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986) 224.

² This information was acquired from the Hines company website, <http://www.hines.com>.

Side A

Cutler: This is Tape One, Side A. This is Leigh Cutler doing a phone interview with Gerald Hines and the date is Monday, November 29, 2004.¹ This is an interview regarding the Dubuffet sculpture in downtown Houston at the 1100 Louisiana Building. The interview is taking place in Houston, Texas, over the phone with Gerald Hines, who is in London.

I'm not sure how much you already know about what I'm doing, but I am a graduate student at U. of H. in the History department and this interview is part of a larger study that I'm planning to do about the history of public art in Houston. I'm basing it largely on oral history interviews and at this initial stage, I'm focusing on a few of the sculptures that are in downtown, including the Dubuffet² at 1100 Louisiana. So, that's why I wanted to talk to you.

Hines: And you're also concentrating on the Miró?³

Cutler: That's right, and I already spoke to Mr. Love earlier this month and got a lot of good information about that sculpture from my interview with him.

¹ The recorded introduction was prepared on this date, for which the interview was originally scheduled. Due to a scheduling conflict, the interview was postponed and actually took place on Wednesday, December 1, 2004.

² The title of this sculpture is *Monument to the Phantom*; it was named originally in French, *Monument Au Fantôme*.

³ This reference is to *Personage and Birds*, the Joan Miró sculpture in the outdoor plaza of Texas Commerce Tower in downtown Houston.

Hines: Good.

Cutler: I wanted to complement that with the Dubuffet. So, if you don't mind I have a few questions lined up and we can just go from there.

Hines: Sure.

Cutler: First of all, what was the original thought behind the configuration of the ground level plan of 1100 Louisiana, in terms of not building it out to the street, but leaving an open plaza?

Hines: Well, I think that in the preliminary thoughts was to have a sculptural piece there and so, the design of the building encompassed a plaza. We tried to leave a plaza, whether it was internal or external, on each of our projects, such as One Shell and Pennzoil, which is an internal, enclosed glass plaza. Then of course, Texas Commerce Tower.

Cutler: I know that the sculpture was not actually installed until about three years after the building was built. Is that correct?

Hines: I don't think it was that long. No, it wasn't that long.

Cutler: Okay. Well, I'm just wondering, since there was a little bit of a difference of time – they didn't happen simultaneously – how much of the rest of the building's architecture was considered when a sculpture was chosen for that outdoor plaza?

Hines: Certainly the design had been made and Chuck Bassett was the architect, who has now passed away. It was in consideration of the architecture of the building. I worked with Chuck Bassett on that, as I worked with I.M. Pei on the Miró sculpture.

Cutler: What considerations went into choosing Dubuffet specifically as the artist, and choosing that particular piece, *Monument to the Phantom*? Could you just tell me a little bit of background on that choice?

Hines: We looked at a group of artists, and we thought with the design of the First National Bank of Dallas – that was the major tenant at the time – that it would be a good companion to that design. So, that became our focus: what would be compatible with the architectural design. I think that Chuck Bassett and we felt that [compatibility] when we looked at all the potential [sculptures].

I went to Paris to meet Dubuffet and he was quite elderly; he had his

infirmities. This was [the same procedure] as when we went to meet Miró when we did the Texas Commerce Tower.

Cutler: Right. So, you say the sculpture was a companion to the design of the building. What do you mean by that exactly?

Hines: Well, that it would fit in the courtyard, that it would fit with the type of granite that we had chosen for the building, and the general architecture – the exterior materials.

Cutler: Was the *Monument to the Phantom* designed specifically for that space, or had Dubuffet already made that piece?

Hines: No, no, it was designed for that space.

Cutler: What other artists did you consider, if any?

Hines: Right now I just can't remember... I know we did consider others, but I can't remember who they were.

Cutler: That's all right. Otherwise, who was involved in the selection process of the artist and the sculpture? Anyone else besides you and the architect?

Hines: No, just Chuck Basset with S.O.M.⁴

Cutler: I know with Texas Commerce and the Miró you all had sort of a selection process, where several architects entered a competition? Did you have something like that with this selection as well?

Hines: That was on the architecture, not on the piece of sculpture.

Cutler: Oh, yes, that's right.

Hines: We had maquettes drawn up on the Texas Commerce and there were some maquettes made for the building at 1100 Louisiana.

Cutler: Do you remember how much the sculpture cost?

Hines: No... It was too long ago (Laughs)... I think it was in the area of \$200,000.

Cutler: And did that cost affect the decision of the sculpture at all? Do you remember that being an issue?

⁴ S.O.M. is the acronym for the architectural firm, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

Hines: No. We had engaged [Dubuffet] and I think the process was that we paid him for some drawings and then after we got the drawings, we looked at those, and that's how we did it.

Cutler: I guess I'm just curious on the basic idea of why Dubuffet, and how he came up. Was there some sort of inspiration, something he had done before, or someone involved who was fond of his work?

Hines: Well, we looked at a number of sculptors and we just thought that Dubuffet's work would be interesting in that particular plaza.

Cutler: What kinds of challenges arose in getting the sculpture actually installed there in the plaza?

Hines: Oh, just getting it done. (Laughs)

Cutler: Timing-wise, you mean?

Hines: Timing – just to get him to finish the work. He was quite elderly and his studio was not a big studio. It was very a personalized studio.

Cutler: And the size of the piece made that a bit more difficult?

Hines: Right, right.

Cutler: So, he did it in a studio in France and then it was brought over here?

Hines: Yes.

Cutler: Okay. The sculpture was in place by 1983, and I've read that Hurricane Alicia destroyed a lot of the windows in that building. Is that correct information?

Hines: The hurricane? Oh, yes – some [windows].

Cutler: I was wondering if that affected the sculpture when the windows fell out or were destroyed.

Hines: No, not to my knowledge.

Cutler: I know that also Chicago and New York have major Dubuffets as public art. I know Chicago's for sure came after the Houston sculpture. Did this create any sort of noted connection between those cities and Houston?

Hines: I don't think so.

Cutler: What would you say was the artist's commentary on Houston through this sculpture that he designed?

Hines: His comments on Houston?

Cutler: Yes.

Hines: I don't think he had any. It was a foreign city; it was outside of France!

Cutler: I had just read that the design was supposed to look like a cityscape and I would think that by just looking at it, at a glance, it wouldn't look like what you would typically imagine a city to look like. So, I just wondered if that went into his decision – making it look like a city, or like the Houston skyline.

Hines: I've always said that Dubuffet's work looks like the rocks along the coast of Provence, from Cannes to Nice. You walk along the seashore there, and you'll see these limestone rocks with very dark black outlines. I think that's where he got his inspiration.

Cutler: What was the sculpture's meaning then for Houston at that point in the city's downtown development? And how has that meaning changed over time?

Hines: Well, it set some precedence about art in public places. I think it put pressure on others to think about that.

Cutler: Do you mean other places within Houston, or in other cities?

Hines: Yes, other places in Houston.

Cutler: Overall, why would you say this sculpture is significant in Houston's history, over these past twenty years?

Hines: Well, I think it's an outstanding sculpture and to have that kind of piece in downtown Houston is significant.

Cutler: And it's significant for the art scene in Houston or for the business world?

Hines: For the downtown urban development, for the art scene... I mean, it's a significant piece!

Cutler: Those are all the questions I had lined up. Is there anything else you can think of that I didn't mention, that might be important to this topic?

Hines: I can't think of anything right now, but you might call... I can't think of his name, but he was a junior partner with Chuck Basset in the San

Francisco office of S.O.M. John Harris, in our office there in Houston, would probably know his name. He was the project manager on that and might be able to give you some additional insight.

Cutler: Okay, that'd be great. I'll look into that. Thank you so much!

Hines: You're welcome. Goodbye.

Cutler: Bye.

