



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Adiante Franszoon

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Good afternoon. Today is April, today is Monday, April 20th, and I am here with Adiante Franszoon, and he has been a long-time vendor at the Market and today he will give us an idea of some of his experiences at the Market. Welcome.

FRANSZOON: Thank you. Thank you for having me here.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: How did you get to come to the Market?

FRANSZOON: Well, I came there in '91 and passed through and somebody showed me the place, but I didn't start vendor until 1992. That's the time I first came there as a vendor.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: OK, so how have you seen the growth or decline over the years since you've been there? How have you seen it?

FRANSZOON: I've seen both of them. I saw the growth and the people come all shape and sizes, do different things, truckload all kind of thing they want to sell. And some of us came with something we made yourself, handmade stuff, and from then on people keep coming, telling people "my cousin made it in China for me to sell here." And from then on different people start coming with things they didn't make—or they lie about it and tell the organizer that they made it, that their cousin made it in someplace in Mexico, whatever it is. So from then on different people start coming and the people who actually do their work feel like they have been betrayed, they don't feel like they are represented anymore. So different things went on to the point where we are now today.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So this was more to encourage craftsmen.

FRANSZOON: Yeah. My understanding at the time is to encourage craftsmen to come in with the handmade, handmade work of their own, really was beautiful. But sometimes the other manager [that] came before the episode we have now is just ... they just trying to fill the space. Either you've make the thing yourself or not, they put you next to the guy who had made their own jewelry or craft their own work and then from then, they always can out-sell you, buying things from Mexico and China or India. Come and just sell it right underneath you, and so it been struggle for many of us who do our own work.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Can you tell us where are you from?

FRANSZOON: I am originally from Suriname, South America. I was born and raised there but I came here long time ago, went to school here, and I do wood carving. I make a traditional wood carving, handmade, and what I do most of the time, all the time I'm there, I bring my work to carve there in the

crafts show for people to see and demonstrate carving, wood carving, for children or whoever onlooker to see what I'm doing. So I do most of my work in the Market. I bring the work prepared to carve it and do it there and I am trying to introduce the traditional—I'm a Maroon, the people who escaped from the slavery during the slave trade in South America and from their own community in the Amazon rain forests which we try to maintain which has been rough going but still, the tradition is still there, and that's where I learned my craft from.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: And so you see yourself at a disadvantage as a crafts person competing with ready made goods.

FRANSZOON: Yeah, yeah. Because the most obvious thing you compete against is mass production, and if you do one piece at a time yourself, it is difficult to compete with mass production work come from different places. But I understand also those people have to live and eat and so on, so you cannot get it the way you want it all the time, but that's the way it is.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Is this the only market you sell in or do you sell at other markets?

FRANSZOON: No this is the only market I go to.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: OK, so you see yourself when the Market opens, where is your place you think?

FRANSZOON: What I think is maybe that's not the management thing. I am thinking to have a space where I can demonstrate carving for people with children to see because sometimes I teach classes in here in the District area and Baltimore for children, children's classes, and summer courses and so on. So I am hoping for the managers and the District government to recognize that and for those of us who actually doing work by hand to get a special recognition to be there, to be able to do your work where you vendor so people can come and watch you and see it.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Have you expressed this to the new management so in their planning they could include a space for you? Have you informed them that this would be your ideal situation?

FRANSZOON: Well, not exactly, because I was away for three and a half months. I just got back. So as soon as I get here, the manager introduced themselves to me, went on vacation, so we have a substitute manager right now which I didn't even bring it up to her yet.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Now what is your best season?

FRANSZOON: The best season is summer, close to Christmas. Summertime. People being more out, people renovate their houses. I make furniture, carving furniture, so people come there, order things and

unique, and I design them, the work according to what they want me to design for them and carve it the way they want it to be carved.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So where do most of your customers come from?

FRANSZOOM: Mostly around this area in DC. People who come there, they have seen my work for many, many years, and some people, tourists, come and buy some pieces and I have to ship it to them wherever they want me to ship it to.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So that must be exciting to have somebody from someplace else coming to DC to purchase these things and ship it to them.

FRANSZOOM: Oh, yeah. Right, right. It is a very exciting moment because one of the thing that happens is, when you make things by your own hand, the excitement you get from it is nothing under the sun can provide it for you. Because I have done all kind of other work before—office work, I was a chef for a long time—but when you do work with your hand and people take it home and 20 years later you see the piece hanging someplace ... And you get paid for it! That is exciting. You cannot get anything better than that as far as I'm concerned.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: What is your biggest seller, your most popular things that people often ask for?

FRANSZOOM: I make a full length mirror, carved full length mirrors, and those are popular for people. You can see yourself and you look at it. It is not a gender item, men can see themselves, the woman can do the same thing. So I customize it, tell them “measure the space you are going to put it, and we make it to fit the space the way you want it.” So therefore they can sketch whatever they want, show me what they want me to carve for them in the wood and so on.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: What particular wood do you work with? Coming from Africa, I know some things about wood. Also one of the things I really know about it is making sure that you don't have moisture in the wood, so what's your favorite piece of wood to work with?

FRANSZOOM: Well, my favorite one is the two—the tropical cedar which is from South America. I grow up with it and I know the quality of it. It is the kind of wood, you can leave it in the sun for four or five years and you come back and the color will be the same and no insects mess with it. It's bitter. So I like that and the other one is a Peruvian walnut, walnut from Peru. It's a really nice, dark, creamy color and it is very easy to work with and the quality of it is outstanding.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So is it easy to get this wood from around here?

FRANSZOON: Yes you can. One thing you have to realize is, in this place of the U.S. of A., anything you want, you can get it. Only two things you have to know: where to go get it and have the money to pay for it when you get there. So you can get any wood you want, but they are expensive, it is imported wood. So the prices are really high. So what I do, is if the customer has time or willing to follow me, I tell them “come with me to see where I buy the wood for yourself to see, the price you have to pay for the quality of wood you want on your furniture.”

OYE' YAA-ANNA: But then most of them go along with you and they understand because they want a certain ...

FRANSZOON: Yeah, sure. Some people will come; some people say no, I believe you, I know how much it costs me to buy pine and they know that pine is not the imported, so the imported will be three, five times that much.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Now where were you when you heard about the fire at the Market?

FRANSZOON: I was in Baltimore, and somebody called me like at two o'clock in the morning, three or something in one day. “Man, why you call me so early?” And they said “A fire in Eastern Market.” I said “What? You're kidding.” So then it become a reality and I click on the news and there it is, a fire, smoking, fire engine and all kind of things. So that's what I, I was really concerned what would happen.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Because don't you leave, I know you store some of your things here at the Market.

FRANSZOON: Yeah at that time I used to have a storage space there and my blood pressure went up so high that day. I didn't know if the whole place gone down on fire. So finally I heard later on, said the section where we keep our stuff in the northern part of the Market is not burned, and I just relieved and I go get another drink [laughs]. I say, “I want to be drunk when I hear the news that all my stuff is gone. But at that note I will get another drink even if I'm not going to get drunk!” [laughs]

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So you were very lucky that nothing happened to the products on the other side. I know you were much, much relieved to know that.

FRANSZOON: Yeah.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: But now since the fire, how do you see the Market, I mean what do you think will happen with the second life of the Market?

FRANSZOON: Well I think the Market has a life of its own so the government become part of the Market as I understand it, I'm not sure. I was away for a while so I just got back. So I'm hoping that they

recognize the value the Market bring to the capital, and the people, the kind of people come just to visit and see it and buy things. So I'm hoping the next life of the Market, all of us to be here to witness it. But you never know. So therefore I am looking forward for better management and better concern in the value and recognition of the people who make the place what it is.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So you're really, so you think the response of the government and the community, so what you thought of it that it was ...

FRANSZOON: I think they really did a good job in respond to it because it was a bad disaster happened, so people step up on the plate to do something need to be done to make the Market function again. So I am really glad that people recognize that and the government really vigorously trying to revitalize the place. Renovation and so on goes on now, which many people complain. But, so what? People always complain about something.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So since the fire, how has business been? I mean, have you really seen better or the same or less business? What do you think?

FRANSZOON: To me it's the same. In some cases it's much better for me because I used to vendor inside and many people don't go to the inside of the building. So now I am outside, people recognize my work more frequently than they used to, and some people told me they didn't know I has been here that long because they don't come inside. So it's worked both ways.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So what have you done differently to attract more customers since the fire?

FRANSZOON: What I did, what I have done is I polish my work much better [laughs], so over the scratch I used to hide it inside I couldn't do it anymore. And I recognize some of the work people really ... I mean, even if the person doesn't have money to buy the thing but you see the thing they look at it, and you emphasize on it more and come with different understanding what the people really want, which is hard to do. But I'm checking it out whatever people want and I ask them what they expect me to make or even for this very purpose.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: And now we talking about turfs. Have you noticed that people have come in to the Market with "turfdom," you know, where "this is my space"? "I've been here 100 years, this is mine, I don't want you" ... have you noticed any of that since the fire? Or was it there?

FRANSZOON: Well, those things always been there with some people trying to emphasize better than other and lack of consideration with the other people, and sometimes even if the person hasn't been there that long, they will emphasize they been there for years, years. And the manager should recognize that,

which I am hoping they do. And the people have been there for long time, and the people who just come in when the weather is nice. And even if the person tell you that he has been there for long time, you have to take into consideration the people who help you pay the bill, people who will come there regardless winter or summer. They will be there to help you pay for the cost of running the place. So that's the kind of thing many managers don't recognize what some people do for sure, but that's my concern with the new management coming in.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: How about the rent, what is the rent? Because when they have this new market, I'm sure there will be some increase in rent. Does that bother you?

FRANSZOON: Well, nobody want to see their rent goes up. That's one thing goes up all the time, the rent. Nothing goes up but the rent. But it's understandable because they put a lot of money in it. We don't want the rent goes up so high that you cannot even come back to vendor there and they have to take those things into consideration not to kill the vendors.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Have you all, have they, the new management, have they called on vendors, have you vendors gotten together to express some of your concerns to the new management?

FRANSZOON: Well, there has been but I was gone since December, so I just got back. So there are a lot of meetings they went through and I get a lot of e-mails and some of them expire, no need to go through them because the thing been discussed and passed and resolved or unresolved. But now the city took over as the manager. I don't know how long that going to last, but to me it seem like they concerned with the people been there but a lot of complain, of course, it doesn't matter what you do, there always somebody complaining and if no complaining, that mean you're not doing a good job. And they say all change are welcome as long as improvement, so that's the way it goes.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: If you traveled away from D.C. and you wanted to tell the story of the Market, Eastern Market, what would your story sound like?

FRANSZOON: Well it would sound like, bring your checkbook and go to a beautiful craft market in D.C. on Capitol Hill, and you see people from all sizes and shapes and colors come there and they make a really, really nice place, relaxing. Even if you don't have money, come; it's better than go see a shrink! You can come there, relaxing, restaurants, food, and see people come, especially in the summer, come all shapes and sizes and colors and all kinds of ... It's a beautiful place to come even if you don't have anything else to do, come watch people. And that's one thing I like about it, you find a lot of international people there, you meet people: "I'm from Lebanon," "I'm from Syria," "I'm from Colombia," "I'm from Venezuela," "I'm from Brazil." You know, the list goes on and those things make life, to me, make life

much richer to live in rather than being confined to one group of people only. So I've been looking for that kind of environment all my life and so I basically find it in Eastern Market.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Oh, that must make you happy.

FRANSZOON: Oh yes, oh yes.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So you look forward to coming, how far do you drive?

FRANSZOON: An hour.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Okay.

FRANSZOON: When I come it takes me an hour to get here.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So your day begins at five a.m.

FRANSZOON: Five a.m.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: And when does it end?

FRANSZOON: It depends if I make money or not. It end around eight o'clock in the evening. That's the time I usually get home.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Now do you make money every week?

FRANSZOON: No, that's a misconception. People think you come there, you clean up; sometimes you just come because you didn't want to stay home that day. But the money is not there. There are too many vendors, and everybody have to get their fair share, which I understand. So, some days you do well, some days you pay the bills, some days you don't even pay the bill, but you think tomorrow will be better day. And then you realize you are not the only one suffering, the general world are going through the same thing. Even if they have better opportunities than you do, but it's still the same principle, you have to sell. In the capitalist system, you have to sell something or somebody in order to make a living. If you don't do none of them, then society doesn't count you, you don't belong in.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Now how have people changed in the way that they shop? Have you noticed any drastic changes or what changes have you noticed?

FRANSZOON: Well the economy have a big, big impact in the Market. Some of thing people buying before or talk about, they say now, "Everything is on hold. I don't know what my financial situation going to be in three or four months from now." So you can see that, change is on the air, but there is

nothing you can do about it, that's the way it is. So you do your best, come there with your best products, and try to convince people that's the way to spend their money. But there definitely, there's a change you can feel it and you can see it.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Now about when the fire happened, do you think that because of the fire, the new structure, they're taking into consideration what happened and try to improve and make sure that they don't have a problem with the new structure?

FRANSZOON: Well, that's a design question which I am not part of it, so I don't know what went on the design or the structure part of it to make it better. So I'm not sure but I'm hoping the architecture, the engineer, and the electrical people understand that, that something had to be done to make the place a better structurally and electronically or electrically.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So have you noticed any major problems? Do they have any major problems with the Market now since the fire?

FRANSZOON: The major problem is the scoffers in the building. "You cannot put thing here, you cannot put thing there." And some of the managers didn't tune to the change much and they act like as if the place, there was no fire there. And it's nobody's fault or maybe somebody's fault, but I mean that's what you have to live with. You have to adjust your attitudes and way of looking at the place considering that there was a fire there, the place isn't going to be exactly the way it was before the fire.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So how did you feel about closing Seventh Street on Saturdays? Do you think it's a good thing?

FRANSZOON: Yeah, I think it's a good idea. Saturdays and Sundays. I'm looking forward for it to be closed so people can walk freely there.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So you are more interested in foot traffic?

FRANSZOON: Yeah, the foot traffic. I mean not the whole week, just for Saturday and giving people a chance to wander around with their dog or whatever you have, with your wives or your husbands, some people have a multiple of those, and your childrens and so on. It make it easier for people to move around.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: I know one of the things that people have told me that they really would be happy for to have restroom facilities in the building, so I'm sure that everybody will be happy for that because most of us, we have to leave the area to go far out to be able to go to the restroom, so that is something you are looking forward to also.

FRANSZOON: Oh yes.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: And how about heating?

FRANSZOON: Oh yes. The place was running, those of us came from third world country, the mentality of the people was running it was not different from the third world country. They have a third world mentality living in a first world country. So this thing wasn't addressed before, but there was a serious problem, no heat, no cooling, and no bathroom facility. There was a portable thing there which is something you find in the Amazon jungle or something. But I am looking forward for those improvement to be made, considering this is the United States of America and this is the nation's capital. And so I'm hoping when they designed the new design ... I haven't been inside to see what they put in there, but I am hoping those things been taken into consideration.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Who are your suppliers? Where do you get your supplies from? You have to go, nobody comes to you. You go to the suppliers.

FRANSZOON: What do you mean, suppliers?

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Your suppliers for your carvings, for the wood ...

FRANSZOON: Oh yeah, yeah. The customer tell me the kind of wood they want, then I go to the lumberyard where they sell those imported wood and I buy them from them. So I don't even bother, you can make arrangement for somebody to send you the wood. Well, you wait for it the rest of your life and probably never reach here.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Oh, so your order is based on requests of the customers.

FRANSZOON: Yeah, yeah. The wood is very expensive, you cannot stock up inventory for too long because ... Suppose you stock a certain wood and the customer want different wood, then you are in trouble, you are in trouble financially right there. So what I do is I wait, I buy some pieces wood, make certain thing, put in display. And if somebody want it bigger, then they put a deposit down and I check how much wood I will need to make that thing, then I go to the place where I buy the wood and I will buy them to make what I need.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So basically, the display items, this is how the customers would know so you don't have a catalog. Your display items, this is how they're able to make their selection.

FRANSZOON: Well, I have both. I have a catalog and I have a display physically piece is already there. So you can see it, even if you see it in the picture, you can see the physical aspect of it, how it's constructed and what quality it is and what quality it doesn't have.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Okay, but now that you don't have any storage space, what do you do, you transport these things?

FRANSZOON: Yeah, I put them in my truck every day which make it much harder. I have a van which I load my stuff in it and every day after the show, I take them back to where I live, back with me home, and next day I come back with them, unload the load, and so on, so on.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: That is challenging.

FRANSZOON: It is challenging.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So I know that in the planning if they could include storage space for vendors, that would be really ...

FRANSZOON: It would be blessing from the sky.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Have you mentioned this to any of the powers that be?

FRANSZOON: Yes, I did. But I don't know what went down in the meeting when I was gone. I was gone for almost four months. So I'm pretty sure those things been mentioned, but I don't know how much of them been incorporated to the design and so on.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So you haven't been in touch with anyone since you returned ... what, you only been back a couple of weeks.

FRANSZOON: Yeah.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: But I'm sure you're going to follow up to see ...

FRANSZOON: Oh sure, I have to.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: And now, for yourself, you plan to be at this Market for forever?

FRANSZOON: Well, as you know, nothing lasts forever, it's for sure, but I want to be here. I enjoy myself working there, I come and go.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So you enjoy the fact that you can come and go as you want so, as you said, nothing lasts forever, so you'll be at the Market for as long as ...

FRANSZOON: As long as I am capable of doing the work in quality, quality the way I want it to be, and I will enjoy doing it.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So do you see yourself expanding?

FRANSZOON: Yeah, expanding a little bit. That's not the only work I do. I have a moving service, I move people as well. I do both sides. I get my physical work done when I'm moving people, and I come there, relaxing, carving, do wood carving.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So you move people from the Market?

FRANSZOON: No, I move people from their home, if they want to move from their home to a storage, or from storage to their home, or out of state.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So this is in addition to the vending?

FRANSZOON: Yeah.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So you are not necessarily moving vendors?

FRANSZOON: No, no, no. I don't move vendors unless they want me to, but sometime I help people take them home if they ...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1
TAPE 1/SIDE 2

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Yes, hello. Yes, we're back. We had a little glitch but we're back, and we are wrapping up now. So you think that this time around, this go-round in the Market will be much, much better. I know you are optimistic.

FRANSZOON: Oh sure. I am optimistic about the whole thing. But I am hoping the management recognizes some of the mistake the older one made by letting so many vendors selling jewelries in the same spot. That's one of the thing dried up the Market. I don't mean I have something against the people who make jewelry, okay, don't get me wrong, but there are too many of them and they keep coming, keep coming, and keep coming and people only look on the bottom line, say how much money I can bring in on the weekend. I mean the management, how many people I can squeeze in here to make some money, and that's one of things that cause the saturation in the Market with the vendors.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: But I know that you'll be the only wood carver.

FRANSZOON: Yeah.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So that really would have to please you. So you're really not in direct competition with any other carvers.

FRANSZOON: No, no.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So this helps you to get you products out and also giving your workmanship, your product's quality, so all of that you kind of lucky, fortunate that ... But I know what you mean by you have too many people selling the same product and then it getting away from the main objective of the Market which was to cater to crafters. You know, people in the small, medium scale industries or business people trying to get things done. But you don't want to be competing with imports.

FRANSZOON: Or mass production, for that matter.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: Right. So hopefully, this time around maybe something will be done. So you're optimistic, huh?

FRANSZOON: Yeah, I am. I'm optimistic about the whole thing and I am looking forward for the new manager and new Market and new environment and new economics surrounding ... Of course, the downturn in the economy doesn't help much, but still we are here, people living here, that we need the quality thing to be hang around or even if you can't afford it, at least you come there, see it, then go home and get another job so you can buy good things for your home or your friend or for yourself.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So want to really thank you now. We're wrapping up. Do you have a final word or do you have something that you can leave with us? As you know, this project is really trying to have as many different voices as we already have in the Market. So is there something you want to say before we take off?

FRANSZOON: No, I would just say thanks for having me have the opportunity to raise my own objective or my idea or what I've been doing and so forth. And people should come in the Market to see different people, what they do, and a lot of time the thing look so simple, but when you get down to do it, it's not that simple, and people sort of appreciate thing people had made with their own design, their own hand, their own idea, bring it to the Market and value it. It's not something you get from the warehouse or from Ikea for that matter. As I always telling people, that when you come there, in case you don't like my carving, you don't like the wood I use, you have an opportunity to go to Ikea. It's there waiting for you, but still, I do quality work and I will maintain to do it, and people should appreciate those kind of work.

OYE' YAA-ANNA: So I want to thank you so much and I wish you much, much success.

FRANSZOON: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW