A photograph of an elderly man with white hair and glasses, wearing a patterned jacket, standing in an art gallery. He is looking at a large abstract painting on an easel. In the foreground, there is a white table with a stack of papers and a white cup. The background shows other art pieces and a gallery setting.

Harold Zisla, photographed at a recent exhibition
of his work at Indiana University South Bend

Our Arts History

Harold Zisla Heads
Project to Document
the Fine Arts in
Our Community

by Andrew S. Hughes

Twenty-one years after retiring from Indiana University South Bend, Harold Zisla is teaching again.

But not in a classroom.

The Abstract Expressionist and former chair of the art department at IUSB is heading a collaborative project tentatively titled *The Art History of South Bend*.

When finished, it will include a book, a DVD, and an online database that chronicle the history of art in the South Bend area, primarily through biographies of individuals and organizations involved in the visual arts here. Eventually, the database will be placed with a museum, university, or library to maintain and continue to update it.

"For me, it's a legacy," Zisla says about the project. "I'm 85 years old and don't know how much time I have left. I'll have the paintings—some of them are in some people's homes—but I want somebody to stumble on this book."

Before then, however, he and his collaborators have a great deal more work to complete and money to raise for the project to be successful.

They've set deadlines of January for the Web site to be live and late summer for the book and DVD to be published. Research has yet to be completed.

So far, however, they have identified and compiled information about more than 500 area artists; 48 past and current organizations, educational institutions and businesses that have been involved in the arts; and several past and current area festivals and events.

R. Michael Beatty, a former student of Zisla's who has been coordinating the logistics of the project through his RMB Creative Associates company and as the executive director of the nonprofit organization Lifetime Education and Research Network Inc., says those numbers aren't yet as inclusive as they want the project to be.

"I know there are many artists in the area that we've missed because they haven't been in what we've been researching," he says. "I know we have information that may not be correct or if it is correct, it isn't everything we need. My goal is to get that [information] on the Web so that people can say, 'My name should be up there' or 'Here is more information for you' or 'My father should be on there.'"

The database entries will consist of an artist's or organization's complete name, dates and places of birth and death, years in the South Bend area, education, local organization memberships, local exhibitions and awards, permanent work in local public collections, medium(s), a short biography, sources for the data, additional information, and published works.

Although the database will include such disciplines as filmmaking and performance art, both Beatty and Zisla think the book will focus on the traditional visual arts—painting, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking and photography—that the community has a longer and deeper relationship with.

"I want it to be as inclusive as possible for the database," Beatty says. "For the book, whatever will drive forth the story, I think, will be discussed. For example, I don't think architecture will be a major part of the book, but there have been organizations devoted to photography."

As for the many industrial designers who worked at Studebaker, Uniroyal and other companies, Zisla says, they need to have "established a certain seriousness of purpose" in fine art, too, to make it into the project.

"Ed Herrmann was a successful painter, and Bob Kuntz worked in clay, and they were brought into the survey because of that and not what they did for [Raymond] Loewy [at Studebaker]," he says.



Helpful collections

Individual collectors such as Fred Elbel and Charlie Hayes, who serves on the project's steering committee, have helped advance this project by sharing examples of works by artists with community connections.

Shown above is Clarence Bell's *Notre Dame* (circa 1905), one of the works in Hayes' collection. Hayes, a South Bend resident, focuses on work made before 1950. He believes that 1950 was a pivotal year when tastes changed from modern to contemporary.

The book will be written by Walt Collins and Roger Birdsell, both of whom covered the arts for the *South Bend Tribune*, and Judy Oberhausen, a former curator at the South Bend Art Center.

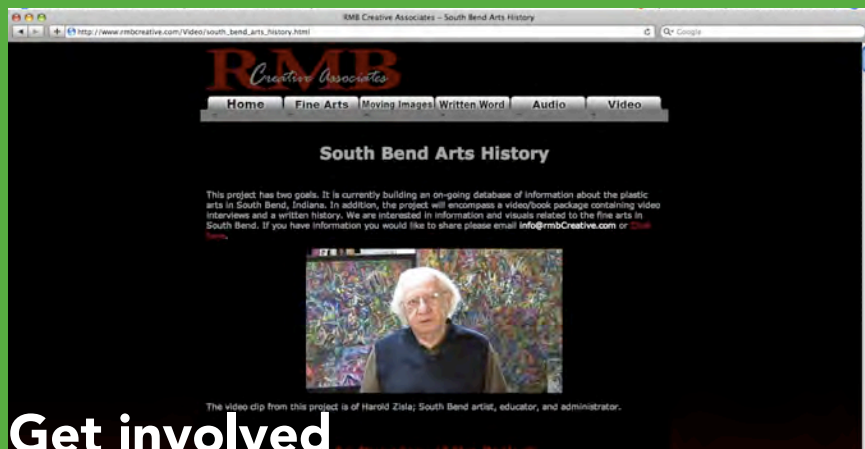
Northern Indiana Pastel Society founder Catherine A. McCormick will edit the book, while longtime Northern Indiana Artists board member Jim Ferm has designed the database and Web site.

For the DVD, interviews have been completed with Zisla; Collins; Dea Andrews, the director of the Colfax Galleries at Colfax Cultural Center; Fred Elbel, a longtime local fine arts collector; Dean Porter, an artist and former director of the Snite Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame; Susan Visser, the current director of the South Bend Museum of Art; and Jake Webster, an artist and co-owner of Artpost Gallery in South Bend. Eight more video interviews are planned.

In January, three students at Saint Mary's College will join the project as researchers to augment the work Janet Beckman has already done as the initial researcher. And a nine-member committee—Zisla, Beatty, Collins, Birdsell, Porter, Center for History senior curator David Bainbridge, collector Charlie Hayes, SBMA curator Kim Hoffmann, and St. Joseph County Library reference librarian Ann Kuntz—has overseen the project's development.

But Zisla clearly has been the instigator for the project, after being prodded into it by an old friend.

Few people are as qualified as he to oversee telling the history of art in South Bend: For almost 60 years, Zisla has played an intimate and provocative



Get involved

Wondering if *your* favorite local artist is included in this project? You can see which artists are in the project's database so far at the RMB Creative Web site: **RMBCreative.com**. Under the "Written Word" tab, you'll find a link for "Art of the Michiana Area" which includes a list of the artists whose information has been collected to date. If you don't see your favorite artist, email his or her name and pertinent information to **info@RMBCreative.com**. In January, Zisla and Beatty plan to launch a Web site dedicated to the project where you can enter that information directly.

role in the city's art scene as an administrator, teacher, and artist.

Born June 28, 1925, in Cleveland, he graduated from what are now the Cleveland Institute of Art and Case Western Reserve University and moved to South Bend with his wife, Doreen, in the early 1950s.

He worked at Uniroyal as a designer and then directed the South Bend Art Center—now known as the South Bend Museum of Art—from 1957 to 1966. He left the Art Center to become a professor of art and the first art department chair at IUSB, where he taught until he retired in 1989.

Six or seven years ago, he says, he and Doreen were at a reception at the South Bend Museum of Art when sculptor Konstantin Milonadis approached them.

"He came over to us and said to Doreen, pointing at me, 'You've got to get him to write down what he knows about art in South Bend before he dies,' which wasn't a nice thing to say, I guess, but I was involved at a time when a lot of people were here and I knew them," he says.

Zisla thought about what Milonadis had said, began to solicit donations for the project and, four years ago, mentioned it to Beatty, who joined immediately.

A native of South Bend, Beatty met Zisla when he took classes at the South Bend Art Center. He attended Indiana University Bloomington and the Pratt Institute and graduated from I.U. Bloomington with a bachelor's degree in fine arts and education.

From 1975 to '83, approximately, he was the host of the art show "Images" on WNIT Public Television, and he later was the director of a national fine arts organization in New York City.

After returning to South Bend, Beatty served as director of AIDS Ministries for 15 years and now runs RMB Creative Associates while continuing to work in photography as an artist.

"There's a bunch of different quotes I could send you about history and the importance of the fine arts, but what I think it comes down to is that in this community, there have been histories of the people and politics and business, but the arts play as important a role and there has not been a history done yet," Beatty says about the project's purpose. "I feel it's important for us to hear the voices of these people who will not be around for a long time more. Even with

the little bit that's on my Web site, I get email a few times a month from people wanting more information."

For the book, Birdsell will cover 1900 to 1947, Oberhausen will cover 1947 to 1977, and Collins will cover 1977 to the present.

"Actually, Roger and I and Judy are trying to decide what the book will be," Collins says. "I envision it as a timeline and some profiles."

The project, however, won't be a work of art criticism.

"I feel this should be done with the height of objectivity and professionalism," Zisla says. "I don't feel it should be a vehicle for criticism of the institutions or the people."

Collins does, however, want the text to provide context and not be a mere list of names.

"Why are we choosing these people to be in the book?" he says, referring to such suggested examples as sculptors Ivan Mestrovic, who taught at Notre Dame from 1955 to 1962, and Mark DiSuvero, whose "Keeper of the Fire" ignited a controversy when it was installed outside Century Center in 1977. "I imagine we'll have to cover some of the controversies that swirled around the DiSuvero in the river. Although these are not people from South Bend, they are part of the art in South Bend."

As for the period he'll write about, Collins says, the community has become more aware of the visual arts during the last 33 years.

"There seems to be more attention being paid, not just in the media, but the art walk and those types of events," he says. "Certainly the South Bend Museum of Art has come into its own, and Notre Dame continues to hold some major shows. I guess my whole concept of visual arts in this community has evolved and that we're at a much more mature period than in any other era. I'm not talking about the stature of the people doing it, but awareness of it."

South Bend, Beatty says, belongs in the middle in comparison to other mid-size cities and their production of and engagement with art.

"I think this project will show that a tremendous number of people have been involved in making art in a serious way," says Harold Zisla, of the history project.

"I think that South Bend, with the industrial base it had and with the educational institutions, it brought people into this area that other cities would not have had," Beatty says. "I think that geographically, our proximity to Chicago and the Art Institute is very important for South Bend."

But tourist destinations, Beatty says, tend to do better commercially than South Bend with art.

"From the 1970s on, I've seen the difficulty that everybody who has opened an art gallery, the difficulty they've had in keeping that gallery open," he says. "Because this isn't a tourist destination and isn't, like, along the lake, it hasn't had that support."

Art in South Bend, Zisla says, has had a "quiet presence, but a presence," and he doesn't think it's hyperbolic or boosterish to lay claim to art's role in the community.

"Not to say a Renaissance has happened here," he says, "but a lot of good work has been done here, most of it conventional. ... It has not been a desert by any means, and I think this project will show that a tremendous number of people have been involved in making art in a serious way." 🌈

Andrew S. Hughes is the Arts and Entertainment editor for the South Bend Tribune.