THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: James Coddington (CJ)

INTERVIEWER: Kate Lewis (KL), the Agnes Gund Chief Conservator, MoMA

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KL: Hello. My name's Kate Lewis. I'm the head conservator at the Museum of Modern Art, and today is November 3, 2022. I have the pleasure of interviewing Jim Coddington, the former Chief Conservator at MoMA for MoMA's Oral History Archive. Hi Jim.

JC: Hey Kate.

KL: So, Jim, where do we start? I'm wondering if we should start with a little bit about when you were born and a little bit about your background.

JC: Fine. Born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1952, moved from Cleveland to the suburbs of Philadelphia. I was either three or four, a town called Swarthmore where, parenthetically, another conservator grew up, Anne Hoenigswald. Didn't know her that well at that time, but we became friends partially through that connection.

Lived in Swarthmore until I was 11, two years in the Princeton area, and then spent my high school years in Nashville, Tennessee. My educational experiences during that time were actually somewhat varied. I started in a very progressive school when I was in kindergarten and first grade in the Philadelphia area, but my mother was a teacher there teaching second grade, so I moved to the local public schools after that and continued in public school through eighth grade, a rather indifferent student for much of that time. But when we moved to Nashville, somehow or other, in a private school that also was progressive, certainly by American South standards, I suddenly caught fire and got very interested in learning and just really how to study, things like that. I was very lucky to have had that particular experience. So, that takes me through high school.

KL: So, Jim, I know you went to Reed College. That would be after high school.

JC: Yes.

KL: Was that straight after high school?

JC: Yeah. For me, it was indeed straight after high school and it was a somewhat unusual choice. Nobody from my high school had ever gone there before, but for me it was an

absolutely perfect choice in the end. I was not always totally connected to the school and my education while there, but that was because Reed gives each student there an enormous amount of latitude to be who they are. A very conservative academic curriculum, lots of requirements, and that's one of the reasons why I went there because they did require study in humanities. Everybody had to take humanities. This turned out to be a good decision for me because, even though I went there planning to be a biology major and actually finishing as a biology major, writing my thesis in biology, Reed's emphasis on the humanities generally, and specifically some interactions I had with art historians and taking art history classes, led me to first art history and then conservation.

KL: So, Jim, you were studying biology.

JC: Yeah.

KL: So, at what point did you get interested in art and/or art history?

JC: It would've been my freshman year. During my freshman year there, the art historian Charles Rhyne, there was only one art historian on the faculty at the time, he showed [Kenneth] Clark's *Civilization*. I suspect his approach to art history is in bad odor in the academy these days.

KL: Is that the TV series?

JC: Yes, the TV series and I was quite spellbound by it. I think now that it was just sort of the formal analysis that he would do, that works of art were susceptible to this kind of thinking. But it just seemed to be very, very ... It seemed to be a kind of easy way of thinking for me. And then also, now that I think about it, one of my assignments in the required humanities course that freshman year was on an [Albrecht] Dürer print, *Melancholia I*. We were to write about a Dürer print and the eagerness with which I did additional research, just trying to learn more about Dürer and looking at more Dürer prints, reproductions of course, and the thrill of the writing that I did after that research, made it clear that this was something I wanted to pursue at some level.

So, I took art history the following year, introductory art history, which was a great course. It was taught by Charles Rhyne, who was a Constable connoisseur. That was his area of research. And so, he made objects, even though we were in Portland, Oregon, where there was a smallish museum and the college didn't have its own art gallery or anything, he made objects as much as he could, the center of teaching introductory art history. For instance, the first assignment in class was: go find a building on campus, draw it and write about it... and I really do remember that and have thought about it over the years.

And two things became obvious to me, or I learned to some extent. Art is everywhere. Somebody took the trouble to design this table that we're sitting at and there is effort and you can look and see that if you're willing to see it, just as somebody designed those buildings on campus. And that drawing a building and, by extension, making art, is

really, really hard. So, it gave me an appreciation for not just the thought behind art, but the actual creation of it too. And also, as part of that course, we spent I think it was three or four weeks literally studying materials, everything from oil to pastel to silver point, and learning how choices and materials made differences in the way things looked. You can see all of this in plowing the earth that would lead me to conservation.

And that actually occurred when I was taking another art history course a couple of years later and that was in Peter Parshall's Northern Baroque course. Peter had just started at Reed. Ultimately, Peter went on to become the curator of Old Master prints at the National Gallery. So again, I've got two professors here who are really, really wedded to the object. They are connoisseurs yet they're teaching undergraduates and obviously that was very formative to me. And it was in one of Peter's ... It was in that Northern Baroque course where before class one day Peter was talking to another student about the National Gallery London cleaning controversy. And I was just overhearing this and what they were saying, and I know this sounds cuckoo, but I just literally made a connection at that moment between my study of science and my burgeoning interest and sense that I could actually do art history. I didn't have a sense by that point that I could do biology.

KL: So, this is your undergraduate degree?

JC: Right.

KL: At what point did you think ... So, clearly this was an important conversation hearing about that sort of famous part of the history of conservation.

JC: Right, exactly.

KL: Which for those people listening was in 19-

JC: Oh, when was the National Gallery cleaning controversy? Dates are not my strongest point, but it was played out in the pages of *The Burlington Magazine* beginning in the 1940s but most notably in 1962 with major art historians and, of course, the conservators from the National Gallery arguing their points. And parenthetically, Ernst Gombrich in London was one of the most highly critical art historians of the cleaning procedures of the National Gallery and as it happens Peter Parshall had studied with Ernst Gombrich so there's just this natural progression there.

So, when did I think I would want to become a conservator and how did I pursue that? I talked to Peter and Charles, and even though we're in the mid '70s here and conservation was not a thing at all in academic circles and certainly not undergraduate academic circles, they both were acutely aware, intensely aware, of conservation and encouraged me. So, I spent a few years in Portland working in a restaurant and adding things to my CV and taking courses. I needed to take some studio art courses in particular so that I could apply to conservation graduate school.

Although I knew that I wanted to go into conservation, I decided that I would go to University of Delaware in graduate art history with the idea that I would be really close to a conservation graduate program and this would be helpful to me. So, I did a year of graduate art history study at Delaware as well and I think that has always influenced my thinking about conservation generally, just that higher level of art historical inquiry.

KL: So, Jim, I have a question at that time, what were the training options in the US?

JC: There would've been three and I, like I think almost everybody else, I applied to all three. Cooperstown, as it was called, State University of Buffalo [New York] at Cooperstown- it was really [SUNY] Oneonta, but anyway, New York University [the Conservation Center at the Institute of Fine Arts] and [the University of Delaware, Art Conservation Department at] Winterthur. Winterthur had been around for just two or three years at that time. We're now in the late '70s. And that was that.

I eventually did get into Winterthur. I was the third student off the waiting list that got in that year. Lord knows what would've happened if I hadn't. It's just one of those funny things. It's not a chance event, but things hang by a thread sometimes as I am not sure I would have been able to hang in for another year.

KL: And you talk about, between finishing your undergraduate and then starting your graduate studies in conservation, taking these different courses. Today we think about things that you need to get into conservation school. There's a lot of discussion about that in the field. So, it sounds like that was also-

JC: Well, at Winterthur, and I think Cooperstown as well, you needed to bring a portfolio. Now, I had done a fair amount of photography as an undergraduate, but I felt like that was just weak and too easy. And I think that there was this real sense that I had gotten from my art history study at Reed that learning how to make art is going to teach me something about the art itself and undoubtedly it did. So, I took drawing, I took painting, and again, those just underlined that making art is hard.

KL: So, you figured that out yourself.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

KL: And then applying to graduate school, did you go and visit? I mean, in those days, do you go and visit all the colleges? Do you get a piece of paper that tells you about the course and then you apply?

JC: I did go visit. So, I would be on the East Coast at Christmas time visiting Jan's family and my family. My family was in the Boston area at that point. So, I went and visited NYU before applying, one or two years before applying. I did not visit Cooperstown until I applied and then went there and had an interview. Obviously, I had visited Winterthur because when I was an art history graduate student there I asked to volunteer in the

Winterthur Paintings Studio and Joyce Hill Stoner said, "Fine, here, consolidate this [Edward] Burne-Jones painting."

KL: So, you applied and then you got in that year?

JC: That was the second year that I had applied.

KL: That's the second year. So, the year that you started your studies in graduate school-

JC: I had applied that year also to the conservation schools and not gotten in. I was sort of going to pursue one or the other that year.

KL: So, what year did you start at Winterthur, your graduate studies in conservation?

JC: 1979.

KL: And how long was that program?

JC: Three years. First year was the so-called block system where we spent six weeks in different materials and we were also taking science courses of various sorts. Then the second year was you focused on your major, which in my case was paintings. Third year was an internship off campus. I spent that year working with Marion Mecklenburg in Washington [DC]. Marion ran a private conservation studio, but most of his work was contract work with museums in the Washington area and also government agencies in the Washington area.

KL: So, Jim, just going back a little bit, what blocks did you do? Photography-

JC: Yeah. José Orraca was there, and we did photography, we did paper, we did objects. Don Heller was a metals conservator so there was a lot of emphasis on that. We did paintings, of course, and photography.

KL: Then at what point did you know that you wanted to specialize in painting conservation?

JC: Interesting question because, intellectually, I was really drawn to the idea of paper and drawings and the idea that this is where the thinking by an artist often goes on. Obviously, there are complete works that are done that way, but this idea that studying the development, trying to see how the artist comes up with that creation, I was very drawn to the possibilities that being close to works on paper would give me.

But in the end, just the unbelievable aesthetic joy of paintings was really important. I think I was also influenced by certain things that were going on in the field at the time and that Joyce Hill Stoner at Winterthur was connected to. And that was the presence of John Brealey at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art] and John's deeply persuasive

view of how to look at paintings and think about paintings from a conservation standpoint, but I mean it was also a great deal more than that. It was just this amazing world view that John had. So that too, the possibility of thinking about paintings in a way that John was opening up in the field, also drew me to paintings.

KL: So then going to your third-year internship in Washington, DC, were you working in the studio? Were you going on site? What did you learn that year?

JC: Well, I also stayed on with Marion for about a year, almost two years after that too. It was a really formative experience for me in a number of ways. One, it was a private conservation studio. Therefore, you did the work. I probably averaged restoring one painting a week during that time. Some of them were really simple things, but many of them were full structural treatments, cleanings, et cetera, and you just did the work. And this really was important for me in that, after having done that, no matter where I was, what I would do, I knew I could get the work done if it had to happen.

Two was that Marion was doing some of the most important research in the field at the time. He was doing research into the mechanics of paintings, how they deteriorate due to the mechanical properties of paintings. This is still very influential, the bedrock work of understanding the structural restoration of paintings. And Marion said, "Part of what your internship here is going to be is you're going to help me do these experiments." And so, I was both restoring the works and working with Marion on these experiments on the mechanical response of painting materials to changes in temperature and relative humidity. So, I was getting a real double dose mostly because it was a private conservation studio, but also because Marion had come up with this central insight and was following it through. It was pretty exciting I have to say. There were drawbacks to it, but we can get to those later.

KL: So, you graduate. You spend another two years in Marion's studio. And then what happens next?

JC: I go to the Met to study with John Brealey. I got a Mellon Fellowship at the Met. And certainly, on the surface and in many very real ways, this was like 180 degrees opposite to what I was doing with Marion. With Marion, we were putting out product, and a lot of that was wax lining paintings. And it was around this time that the validity of wax lining as a treatment for paintings was beginning to be questioned. It had started to be questioned in the early '70s. The Greenwich Lining Conference,[1] that propelled the question to a central place in our field. So here we are in the early '80s.

So, I was doing a lot of those kinds of structural treatments, the aesthetic consequences of such be damned, and go to the Met knowing full well that it was the opposite there, that the aesthetic consequences were everything. And not just in structural restoration, but most particularly in cleaning, Old Masters in this case. And that was even more exciting. Even more exciting.

[1] The Greenwich Conference on Comparative Lining Techniques, April 23-25, 1974, held at the National Maritime Museum, London, UK.

KL: That must have been quite something to go to the Met and work on Old Masters that have had quite a long lifetime already at that point.

JC: Yeah.

KL: So how long were you at the Met, Jim?

JC: How long?

KL: Yeah.

JC: A little over three years. The fellowship kept extending.

KL: And was there one object that you worked on at that time, is there a specific project you worked on that stands out to you now?

JC: No. No. It was being completely immersed in this milieu of looking, looking, looking, understanding in the most subtle ways how I or whoever was working on a picture, how it was being transformed and that it was a colossal responsibility. It was not rhetorical to John that this was a huge responsibility. He just made it clear that you hold the life of this work of art in your hands and that you take it seriously.

I mean this sounds like sort of overblown rhetoric, but it's not. And also, again, this milieu, we were all talking to one another. John would come over and be talking to you about the cleaning that you were doing. Gisela [Helmkampf] his right hand in this studio, she could be really, really unpleasant and be really harsh, unduly harsh I thought at some times, but only because it mattered so much. So, there were a number of us who went through John's fellowship program during that time, and we all filtered out to different institutions over the years.

But this kind of Brealey mafia, you might call it, we remain a somewhat close-knit group because we just have this thing deep in us where we believe that what John was saying there is so vitally important. I'm not- John was so, the way he would speak was like a preacher. I guess you could say we all kind of got religion at the Met. Yeah.

KL: And who else was in that group, Jim, that you mentioned, that you talk about?

JC: So, before me, before I came, Frank Zuccari had been there, but having had the Met experience, Frank and I felt like we'd been there at the same time. Alain Goldrach had also been there, and Alain and Frank went to the BMFA in Boston. Other people who were there that either overlapped with me: Claire Barry, Joe Fronek, Lucie Kinsolving. Now I am missing a few people here, but it was a real extended group all the time. Lucy Belloli, she wasn't one of the fellows there, she was the conservator of modern paintings that John had on staff.

KL: And did you work on any modern paintings while you were at the Met?

JC: I did. I was there to work on the Old Masters and I always had Old Masters on my easel, but Lucy Belloli, who was the conservator for modern paintings there, kind of had the far end of the studio and she had the structural problems working on modern paintings. And for all of this emphasis on the subjectivity of conservation that John would talk about constantly and that we would talk amongst ourselves constantly, he also understood that there were scientific questions that were central to helping make the cleaning of paintings... Let me back up to explain a bit more about John's thinking and how he also had a practical vision for changing things.

If we could remove paintings from the cleaning cycle, if we could make a varnish last a hundred years instead of 40 years, that would be better. Because every time you clean a painting, the painting is at serious risk because of the chemicals involved and also how skilled the restorer is at cleaning. All those things that are a real danger during a cleaning. So, he hired up René de la Rie and equipped an entire science lab around creating a better varnish. Better, both in terms of longer lasting, but equally pleasing aesthetically, and had the same working properties as a natural resin varnish like dammar. By the way, Chris McGlinchey joined René in that research project so that's where I first met Chris McGlinchey.

And so, John could talk about all of this stuff about, you know, clean a picture subjectively and so on, bring it back into balance by cleaning a touch more here, a touch less there, balance, balance, balance. But he also understood that there would be a scientific side, so he really pushed that. At the same time, he understood the ills of current structural treatments. John was one of the people who helped organize the Greenwich Lining Conference back in '74. So, when alternatives to wax lining came up, and when suction tables began to sort of percolate as a possibility for structural treatment of paintings, he expressed great interest and bought some equipment.

Specifically, a tabletop-suction device/screen that fit on top of existing hot tables that Al Albano and Bill Maxwell designed. And because of my experience with Marion, I was very interested in these things. So, I would just, if something was going on around these structural treatments, I'd sort of be there paying attention. And Lucy, the modern paintings conservator, would often be the one who was confronting these problems, whether it was a flaky Mondrian or whatever. And she would say, "Can you give me a hand?" And so, I did work on a number of modern pictures, but mostly from the structural side working with Lucy.

KL: So, Jim, let's get to the Museum of Modern Art because I think that's your next step.

JC: It is, yeah.

KL: In 1987.

JC: Yeah.

KL: So, tell us how that came about.

JC: I'd been at the Met for about three years there. It was time to move on, you can't be a fellow all the time, and they don't want you to be a fellow all the time. And John had set up a couple of job possibilities for me. I mean, he was that influential. I had a job offer out in Minneapolis. John had said I could stay at the Met and be what he called a boffin because I had taken a real interest in technical studies of paintings... Also, Maryan Ainsworth, she was part of the conservation department too. John embedded an art historian and a scientist in the department. So, John really, really walked the walk. He didn't just talk about integrating art history and conservation. He literally did it.

I had taken an interest in Maryan's infrared work. And so, John saw this interest in technical stuff and said, "Well, we could use somebody who just really pursued that kind of stuff in the department." So, there was Minneapolis, there was the Met, and one day, truly out of the blue, Al Albano called and said, "There's a position open here. Would you be interested?" And I said, "Yes," because I had met Al first in my interview at Cooperstown. You got a tour of the program, then you had lunch with a couple of students, and Al was one of those people.

And we just had a great time talking about Cubism and Surrealism because I was taking a course in Surrealism. I was in graduate school in art history at the time. And Al's depth of knowledge was phenomenal and we'd really just hit it off, just digging deeper and deeper into these questions, Surrealism and Cubism. And he called me saying, "Would you be interested?" And I was interested because one, I didn't want to move to Minneapolis. Two, as interested as I was in the technical parts of conservation, and I always retained that interest, that's not what fundamentally kept me interested or what I wanted to do. That was just a means to a far greater end. I know I would've felt very constrained by that.

And so, I went to the Modern and I interviewed and I distinctly remember when I went in for the interview, came up to the painting, Al took me up to the paintings conservation studio and just sitting on one of the tables was Jasper Johns' flag. And I said, "Wow, this really is a great, great collection." So, I interviewed with Al and Antoinette [King].[2] I should back up and add a certain amount of conservation history at this point. So, at this point, there was a tendency in conservation during the seventies and even into the eighties to choose sides, whatever the question was, you had to choose a side.

There was the John Brealey side about subjective, aesthetic cleaning. There was this so-called Keck side of you clean things and you varnish them and that's what you do, it's not necessarily a huge aesthetic question on that side.[3] Somehow, you had to choose one side or the other, even if they weren't always that far apart. For instance, in regards to structural treatments, you were either for Gustav Berger or against Gustav Berger.

[2] https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_king.pdf
[3] Referring to Sheldon and Caroline Keck who played a large part in establishing science-oriented professional standards for the field.

And it was very much around this time, I think it might have been in '83 or ’84 that John Richardson had published “Crimes Against the Cubists,” a really incendiary publication that decried in the most strong terms, wax lining and varnishing of cubist pictures, that they were basically destroyed by them.[4] The fact of the matter is, some number of Cubist pictures that the Museum of Modern Art had been wax lined and varnished and he was pointing directly at those.

KL: And originally, they were never varnished?

JC: Right. And so, there was this huge upset in the field and a lot of defensiveness around the question of wax lining generally, but specifically these [works]. And John who had been so openly vocal about the importance of the aesthetics of the surface, whether it's an Old Master or a Cubist painting, was thought to be the sort of éminence grise behind Richardson's article.

And so, once again, we find ourselves choosing sides. If you're from the Met, you're against the Modern, which wasn't true. It was, I think, kind of bold of Al to give me a call given that particular climate at the time, but he knew me well enough. So, I interviewed and Antoinette King, who was head of conservation at the time, brilliant paper conservator, she indicated really strong interest in me and then gave me a call a few days, maybe it was a week or so later, and said, "There's a member of the staff who is unhappy about this. Would you be willing to meet with us?"

So, the three of us had lunch just to sort of, I don't know what, maybe to show that this nominal war between the Met and MoMA wasn't such… that when you get to the individuals involved, it's quite different. So, I guess that ironed things out and I was offered the job and came thinking, “this is a great modern collection, and I've learned from Lucy that restoring modern and contemporary paintings is hugely complex, and I could really use two or three years of experience here to learn about that.” But that was pretty much my frame of mind going in, that I'd be there for two or three years and then go on and work at a museum that was principally an Old Masters' museum.

KL: Jim, tell us who was in the Conservation Department in 1987.

JC: There was Antoinette King, who was director of the department. There was Al [Albert Albano] in paintings conservation. Anny Aviram was in paintings conservation part-time at that point. Carol Stringari, now Lena Stringari, was an intern from Winterthur at the time as well. Pat [Patricia] Houlihan was in sculpture conservation. Lynda Zycherman was there, but Lynda was also part-time. Karl Buchberg was in paper conservation with Antoinette. I forget who was the Mellon Fellow in paper when I started. And Bonnie Lee was the administrator for the department. And Eugena Ordonez, she was either there then or started very soon after I did, to do basically microscopy and the kind of limited

[4] John Richardson, “Crimes Against the Cubists,” *The New York Review*, June 16, 1983, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1983/06/16/crimes-against-the-cubists/.

amount of technical analysis that would've been available within the department at the time.

KL: And Jim, tell me about what was the lab set up? So, you had sculpture, paintings, and paper, an administrator. What was the lab set up?

JC: The studios were in the old education wing. The museum had recently expanded. It opened I think in '84. And so, I'm arriving there around, it would've been '87. And the paintings conservation was in what I think was the old library or a part of the education wing and sort of tucked in next to it was a really mean, tiny little sculpture conservation studio. It kind of got things backwards in terms of space allocation, but that's the way things were back in those days. Paintings always took primacy in any museum, and certainly in the development of a conservation department. Everybody started theirs with a paintings conservator. And then in a separate section of the Museum, also on the fourth floor, but over near the Prints and Illustrated Books Department, was paper conservation and that was it.

KL: So, you were separate? Conservation labs were separate?

JC: Separate, yeah. Yeah. Painting and sculpture were next to one another.

KL: Next to each other.

JC: Right, but yeah, that was it. Yeah.

KL: So, Jim, tell me about your first few years at the Modern, working with new colleagues, working with the curators, shows, what you began to learn doing modern and contemporary all of the time. Does anything stand out from that time?

JC: One thing that I also remember from the day I interviewed was after they released me and said, "Well, do you want to see the museum?" I said, "Sure, of course," and there was the most amazing Paul Klee show [MoMA Exh. #1440]. It was riveting. I hadn't spent much time looking at Paul Klee, certainly not in volume like this. And it was a show curated by Carolyn Lanchner who was a mentor to some of the best curators we got to work with over the years, like Anne Umland.

But on a day to day basis, it was tremendously relaxed. Not long after I started, Al also went on part-time. His girlfriend at the time, Ann Craddock, who he later married, had moved to Washington so Al started to split his time between Washington and New York. So at least a couple days a week, I had the studio to myself and all I did was work on pictures. The level of demand for a conservator's time was not anywhere close to what it is now. And so, I was working on minor artists and major artists, all different kinds of problems.

It wasn't a surprise to me having worked both with Marion, one of whose clients was the Phillips Collection, but also mostly with Lucy at the Met. Every single one of these was a very different kind of problem materially. But there was also, at this time, I think in the

field, a lot of willingness to experiment. I remember a Willi Baumeister painting on panel. Basically, it was gesso that had oil paints on top of it, very textured surface that had a very, very discolored coating on it. No solvent really worked on it. It was probably some sort of an early urethane, but it was pretty discolored. And I just wondered whether light bleaching might work on that. This is what Rubens told the King of Spain to do if his oil colors, his whites had gone yellow, just leave it out in the sun for a while.

Didn't get any traction with that, but that was the kind of foment and open-ended thinking that was in the field at the time. And that one could apply to the works that just kept coming through the studio. In those first few years, I'm not remembering any... Oh yeah, there was a Léger with the most peculiar varnish on it that we were able to literally peel off. Its adhesion was so poor and that's why it was so gray and disfiguring. We just were able to peel it off. Just really interesting stuff like that.

Exhibitions. Bill Rubin's *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism* [MoMA Exh. #1529], I think was the first or second year I was there. Just an absolutely brilliant exhibition. Beautifully installed. I mean, as close to perfection for an exhibition as I can recall. Right up there with the Caravaggio show that Keith Christiansen did at the Met when I was there. And just, again, parenthetically, that's where I met Pepe Karmel, the art historian who has published extensively on Picasso and many other things. And we undertook a lot of close looking at those pictures. And it was at this point, Bill Rubin, the curator of that show, wanted to know everything one could possibly know about Picasso.

I forget how I mentioned it to him, because he never spent time in the conservation studio, just wasn't interested in it at all, but that we could maybe look underneath the surface with infrared and see the development of the composition. And he said, "Fine, how do we do that?" And I said, "Well, we have to buy a camera, we have to do this." Next day the money was there and we went out and bought ourselves an infrared camera. And Pepe and I would go down after hours in the gallery and do infrared studies. We didn't find anything really earth shattering or new, but we now had an infrared camera in the conservation department. And there were other things that we really did find some interesting stuff on in the years after that.

So, there were these great exhibitions that were always present. Kynaston McShine's Warhol show, that was really something [MoMA Exh. #1510]. That was about two or three years after I started. And by that point Al had left and we had hired Carol as an assistant associate conservator. And I just remember Carol and I making seemingly thousands and thousands of feet of strip lining material because so many pictures were in need of strip lining that were coming in, that we needed to stretch or that were in MoMA's collection that needed restretching. So, there was that kind of thing going on too.

KL: And were you stretch lining works from 19th century? Were you stretch lining Abstract Expressionist [works]? Was it many things? Because at this point, no one was wax lining.

JC: Yeah, no. Let me back up. One of the reasons why I think Al did call me was that he knew prior to that, he knew of my work with Dr. Marion Mecklenburg. And while I was at Marion's, I hope you can get this chronology straight, while I was at Marion's, this would've been in 1983. I got an Institute of Museum Services Grant to go study in Europe with Gerry Hedley at the Courtauld, Bent Hacke in Denmark, and Vishwa Mehra in the Netherlands. They had all been doing work on alternatives to wax lining. Mehra and Hacke had developed rather full and coherent systems that included suction tables. And so, I was going over to see about, well, how would one design and build a suction table? Marion had a side business making vacuum hot tables, and he thought, well, maybe we can get a suction table business going.

And in the end, they did. And it was a really well-designed table. But Al, while I was at the Met, was doing the same thing, designing a heated suction table with grant money. And he pulled together a group of people that included Stefan Michalski and me. Don't think it included Gerry, but also Carol, Lena was part of this group. So, Al and I had actually been working together, at least on that project, before he called me. So, when I called it out of the blue, I guess it wasn't entirely out of the blue. I never thought that there would be connection between working on that project and a job at MoMA. So, I forget how I started on...

KL: Strip lining with Lena.

JC: Yeah. Yeah. So, there were these efforts at trying to figure out alternative ways to do the structural restoration on paintings and yet for all of that, for designing and building a really state of the art heated suction table, during all my years at the Met, I lined one painting. And we took that lining off in the end. I took more linings off at MoMA than I put on. And that is, I think, kind of a measure of what happened in the field. We were looking for alternatives to lining, didn't really come up with wholly satisfactory solutions. And so just sort of held back and said, "Well, how much lining do we really need to do?" Especially in the context of a museum like MoMA, where you'll be able to monitor works pretty constantly. But yes, strip linings were something that we routinely did, and it was just standard practice. Not for every painting, but any with weak tacking margins or one that had never been stretched.

I remember when Kynaston was doing the Warhol show, he sent me down to the factory and there was one of these canvases with multiple screen prints on them, and Kynaston said, "Choose one of them and then cut it off and roll it up and bring it back." That's the way things were done then. So, I was kind of thinking, "well, if I do here or here, people are going to think this is a choice that Andy Warhol made." And it was just stupid me making this decision as to what the sight-size of this painting should be. It wasn't all that complicated to sort out, but I was just deeply struck that this junior conservator got charged with making what seemed to me to be a fairly important decision, but maybe not. And I think Kynaston understood Warhol's working practices and said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." He would've said, "That's fine."

KL: And Jim, what painting is that you brought into MoMA's collection?

JC: Well, no, this was just one that it still belonged to Warhol, but Kynaston wanted to put it on view.

KL: That was in the show, right?

JC: Yeah, it was an Elvis. All the better.

KL: So, it sounds like an exciting time in terms of conservation and also the Museum of Modern Art, and Jim, when I think about the many things that you've done in your career at MoMA, I think your work with de Kooning and Pollock stand out. So, I'm interested, when did that work start?

JC: In those first few years, I began to learn something about the difference in the way conservation was perceived in the Museum versus the way it had been perceived at the Met.

So, again, a little more context here. In my time at the Met, curators were in the conservation studio all the time. There was a constant dialogue back and forth, and that was just, at least on the painting side, pretty much unheard of at the Modern. And I remember very distinctly, one day… Kirk Varnedoe had become the chief curator of painting and sculpture by that point, and saying to Kirk, "we've got this painting," I think it was a Cezanne but the details don't matter, "I'd like to bring Lucy Belloli from the Met down to look at it and talk about it with us." And he said, "that's fine, and I would love to come down and be part of that conversation."

And he wasn't able to make it. And I got a call from the registrar saying, "No, we're not going to bring the painting up. You can't show this painting to somebody from outside the museum. We don't do that kind of thing here." And I realized we've got a long way to go, to break that kind of a mindset, that one circles the wagons rather than opens up the dialogue. But working with Kirk, that was certainly much easier. As I said, Bill Rubin just wasn't very interested in conservation. And in fact, in that John Richardson article, [Rubin] just threw Jean Volkmer under the bus, claimed no responsibility for the wax resin lining and varnishing of the pictures, saying it didn't happen on his watch when it did.

But Kirk was much more attuned to looking at pictures, and every so often he would come down. Backing up, Carolyn Lanchner, who I mentioned, had done that Paul Klee show. She was doing a Miró show, and I guess I mentioned to her that Miró looked to me to be a perfect candidate for looking at under drawings, seeing how things would develop, and Carolyn said, "fine, let's pursue it." And we did a lot of looking at MoMA's Miró's, with IR. The curatorial assistant for Carolyn on that show was Anne Umland.

So that created a kind of, "Okay, what they're doing down in conservation can be useful to art historical scholarship." And it's not just putting out a bunch of numbers, but it's looking at these paintings and what's going on underneath them and trying to explain how they connect to Miró. That, I think, very much helped to develop the beginning of a

dialogue with curatorial staff. Over on the paper side, there was more of it, I think, as a matter of course. I don't know whether that was necessarily fostered by Antoinette or just the nature of things. I'm sure that it helped that they were right next door to the curators. And that became another question when we did expand, whether that was something one wanted to do. But it would've been, I guess, in '96 when, I remember it clearly, when Kirk came down to the studio one day –early– and said, "We're going to be doing a Pollock show." [MoMA Exh. #1819].

"And pretty much everything's been written about Pollock, his state of mind, his history, et cetera, et cetera. Nobody's tried to explain how he made these pictures, how's that for an idea?" And I knew virtually nothing about it at the time, but I saw the opportunity for what it was, a chance to show how conservation could contribute to art historical studies and said, "That's just great, let's get started." And I don't know if it was I who said it, or Kirk who said it, but we were in immediate agreement, that maybe we should have Carol Mancusi-Ungaro along as a collaborator on this. And so, Carol and I embarked on the research for the Pollock exhibition, and it was pretty exciting because there's this huge exhibition budget, and I've never seen that kind of money for travel and research in my life and realized that you could really do a lot if you could show that this was viable, that this was an important kind of research in modern art.

And I had always, always thought that. When I arrived at the Modern, I looked around and it dawned on me, this is pathetic. We know more about the way Vermeer painted than Picasso, and that's just dumb. But I also knew over time the question is going to be asked. For the same reason it is important to understand how Vermeer painted his paintings, it's going to be important to ask how Picasso painted his paintings. So, the time would come when the question would get asked, and Pollock was the moment when that happened.

KL: So, Jim, what year was that roughly?

JC: The Pollock show was in '98, if I remember correctly. And so, Kirk would've gotten this underway around '96. Yeah.

KL: And Carol Mancusi-Ungaro is currently the director of conservation and research at the Whitney Museum. What was Carol doing then, and how did you know her?

JC: She was at the Menil Collection. And, okay, this is a good story. I had first met Carol when she gave a paper at the Baltimore AIC Conference on the Rothko Chapel paintings.[5] They had developed an efflorescence that needed to be cleaned off, but Carol had not just then said, "Fine, I'll clean it off." She approached scientists. She didn't have scientists in her department at the Menil, of course, at that time, but got in touch with scientists at Shell Oil, Houston being a huge oil town. And she really developed what I thought was such a huge, responsible approach to this, trying to understand it materially and scientifically in order to get to an aesthetically satisfactory cleaning protocol.

[5] American Institute for Conservation 11th annual Conference, Baltimore, MD, 1983.

And she was also able to unpack why this was happening, the way he was layering his different media and so on, how it was causing this efflorescence. So, I thought that this was just so much the right way to do things. I said, "this is really, really interesting." And we stayed in touch over the years. And when Bill Rubin was doing an [Ad] Reinhardt retrospective [MoMA Exh. #1585] in 1991 and the question of the restoration of the Reinhardt's came up. This, too, was a deeply, deeply vexed question in the field. Reinhardt's had been known to be completely overpainted, I think some maybe with Reinhardt's approval. I know this was happening with Ellsworth Kellys. These very fragile, monochromatic surfaces are just really, really deeply scarred by the most minimal mar or deformation on the surface. And so, the question of the restoration of the Reinhardt's, and in particular, the black Reinhardt's, was being discussed around this exhibition. And so, I gave Carol a call, just to renew this conversation and ask what she knew about Reinhardt's and so on. And also, to discuss, "Okay, what am I going to do about this?" And the problem that we were discussing was that Bill was offering for private lenders to the show to have their works restored if they wanted. And I knew that that meant overpainting them, that he would send them to Goldreyer to be overpainted.[6] And I knew that this was just so wrong.

So, I brought the matter up to Antoinette and she said, "Okay, go talk to Jim Snyder." He was the deputy director who was in charge of things like exhibitions. And I made the case to him that I think that, one, this is morally wrong, but two, we could find ourselves in serious legal jeopardy here. And it was this question that I was talking to Carol about, how do I frame this question? What are the specific things we need to be talking about? And we had some really frank conversations around it, and that is how we realized we both think about the long-term restoration of modern and contemporary pictures much the same way. And in the end, no private pictures were sent to Goldreyer, even though Bill split a gut at me over the question. So, Carol was very pleased that that was the outcome. So that's how I knew Carol and knew that this would be a very productive collaboration. We had covered some pretty serious territory prior to the Pollock exhibition.

KL: So, Jim, going back to the Pollock show, you said that you had a budget for travel and research you hadn't seen before. So how did you begin that work?

JC: So, Carol and I talked about how we would approach the question, and we decided, let's not make Pollocks, but let's make Pollock-marks on pictures and see how it is done, how you can reproduce those marks and then do it again, this kind of mark, that kind of mark. So, I went down to Houston for a few days, and Carol sort of cleared out the conservation studio there. And she had very carefully set up different paints that we thought were about the same viscosity, types, et cetera, and the house paints, all that. And we just started to make these marks on canvas and follow very closely what was happening– what happened when it was on a raw canvas, what happened when we had sized the canvas, what happened when it was on something more like a sail cloth, a colored canvas, and the way that the paint took under all of these different conditions and how the paints interacted.

[6] Daniel Goldreyer, a New York City based private conservator whose restoration of a Barnett Newman work for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam was the subject of controversy in the early 1990s.

And from that, we were really able to create what I would call a vocabulary of mark-making, and mark-making intersections, that helped us read these pictures in really pretty significant detail and make a genuine contribution in the two papers we wrote about it to Pollock studies.[7]

And then we also traveled, I don't think Carol and I traveled together, but I went with Pepe Karmel and Kirk to look at a number of Pollocks and talk about what I thought about the condition, how they were painted and so on. And I do remember getting really caught up in this, and that there was a painting at the MFA in Boston that had a coating on it. And I thought this was really, really interesting. And it was discolored and so on, so it had some age, and I thought, "Well, maybe that's a coating that Pollock put on, and if we're pursuing the material questions in this show, this is really important to have." And so, I laid it all out in a memo to Kirk, and I thought very persuasively. And he said, "Those are all really, really good points, but it's just not a very good picture." [Laughs.] So, I mean, there are these other moments in working on an exhibition where you get to really hear the curator speaking for their vision of the artist and they are really very informative.

KL: So, Jim, I think there's sort of mythology around Pollock making his paintings, and there's that famous film, I can't remember who made it, but is that something that informed your work with Carol seeing an artist on film putting paint to canvas?

JC: Yeah, that is interesting. One of the things we did down in Houston was squeeze [paint] out of a tube, not getting the right things. So, we did different things and eventually punched a little hole in the tube of paint and started to get the right kind of line. Or lifting the can of paint up really high to get a super thin kind of endless stream of paint. And we got very excited about this. And then we went back and watched the film again and said, "That's exactly what he's doing. He's already showed us that." But it was kind of a validation that we had gotten it right somewhat independently.

KL: So, you did all this research to understand how Pollock made his pictures, how he used those materials. How did that then influence the conservation work? Did you even need to do any conservation work at that point? That's a question that you always get with contemporary art. Why are you conserving that?

JC: We did not need to do any conservation work at that point, but it did lead to conservation work in the somewhat distant future. When the exhibition was up, we were looking at *One: Number 31*, 1950 [#7.1968], and there were all these really fussy little passages of paint on it. We actually had it in this studio before the exhibition. And I called Kirk down and said, "I can't figure this out, but you come take a look." And we looked at it and I said, "either Pollock is coming back and fussing at these surfaces in a really, really particular and specific way, or there is restoration on these."

[7] See: James Coddington, “No Chaos Damn It,” and Carol C. Mancusi-Ungaro, “Jackson Pollock: Response as Dialogue” in *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*, ed. Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel (Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 101-120. https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_226_300198616.pdf.

And Kirk agreed that these were really, really odd and would not fit into the overall narrative of Pollock painting these pictures on the floor. And that's that. That question we never answered at that time. But I do remember when Susan Lake came up to see the exhibition, I asked her to take a look at these and she said, "Oh, I've seen these kinds of marks before on de Koonings," she was deep into her de Kooning dissertation research at that time, “and I know those pictures to have been restored. So, I think that this is restoration.” So that question was there to be pursued at a later date, and ultimately, we did. But at the time of the exhibition, no restoration work and the pictures were pretty sound.

KL: Yeah.

JC: So.

KL: Do you want to keep going?

JC: I can, your call, yeah.

KL: Okay. Let's keep going. So, this was in 1998, this exhibition. And Jim, you became the chief conservator at the museum in 1996. So, would you talk about how that came about?

JC: Yeah. So, when Antoinette retired, I wasn't sure I would want to head the department, but in fairly short order, I thought that I would. And motivated principally to try to push the ball forward towards more curatorial-conservation interaction, more curatorial-conservation research into how things were made and how that would be important to art historical scholarship. And they formed a committee to do the search. The committee was actually headed by one of the trustees, Patty Cisneros, who was kind of the acting head of the conservation committee at the time. That's another story, the development of the conservation committee. And it was Patty, Kirk Varnedoe, John Elderfield, John was a chief curator of drawings at the time, Dick Palmer, who was head of exhibitions, and Susan Kismaric, who was sitting in for Peter Galassi, who was the chief curator of photography, but didn't have time for this apparently. But also, at my interview was Jennifer Russell, who unbeknownst to me at the time, had actually already been hired by MoMA to be the deputy director for exhibitions and collection support, whatever her full title was.

So that was the interview team, and I went in for the interview and didn't hear for quite some time. I guess John Elderfield had been appointed sort of interim head of conservation, if we needed administrative things done or so on, go to John Elderfield. And he had asked me to just be the point person in the department at that time. And that continued on for, I don't know, a couple of months at least. I guess while they did more interviews, there were a handful of other people interviewed I know. And then finally offering me the job, which was really exciting. I was really excited by the possibilities and where we might go.

KL: So, Jim, when you said first went to MoMA in '87, you said what, I'm going to be here for a couple of years?

JC: Yeah. [Laughs].

KL: And then I'm going to move on. So clearly in '96, that's like nine years later, you were still there.

JC: Yeah. And you know, I just put that down to the collection. I mean, the collection is just so diverting, so engaging that I never for a moment thought, "Oh, let's go..." Well, that's not entirely true, that it could be much better anywhere. That the kind of interaction and inquiry that I was able to do with the restoration of the paintings, with the exhibitions that were going on, it wasn't likely. It could be matched elsewhere, but it probably couldn't be better. And the museum was also evolving at that time. So, there was that kind of draw to it that things were beginning to change.

And right around '96, they had announced a new expansion. That was one of the reasons why Antoinette retired. She said, "I've done one expansion, I'm not going to do another." And understandably so, so there was that. I knew that there was an expansion in the works, and that surely would offer real ways to make conservation a different kind of... give it a different place within the museum.

KL: So, coming into that role, as you were talking about, you have that expansion with opportunity. What else were you thinking about with the department at that time? What was, not necessarily your vision, but-

JC: Oh, there were a number of really, really specific things that I wanted to do. One was to create photography conservation. I remember in my interview when they asked me that question or question along those lines, I turned to Susan, and I said, "This is going to sound like playing to the audience here, but I think we should have a photography conservator on staff."

That could happen. I thought it was a real possibility because The Mellon Foundation had quite recently started to express interest in photography conservation and supporting photography conservation. So, I thought, "Look, we're the Museum of Modern Art. If Mellon is serious about this, they should be serious about us." So, I thought that there was a real possibility there.

The other thing that I knew we needed to have was a science section. Eugena was still there but she was still part-time, and there was basically no equipment at all. But it was going to be a lot harder to create a science section because I'd have to make the case and have the museum find the money to do it. But those were two really specific things that I wanted to do pretty much as soon as possible.

KL: So maybe we should talk about the expansion first. Glenn Lowry began as director in 1995.

JC: Five, right. So, it was technically Glenn who hired me as head of conservation.

KL: And so how was that? Who was driving that expansion, and how did you experience that as a conservator? And [as one who] clearly took advantage of opportunities presented.

JC: The museum approached that expansion in a really methodical way. They convened a group of thinkers, architects, curators, you know, different thinkers to a meeting that would just envision the museum of the 21st century. And from there, then begin to think about, "All right, well what needs to change at MoMA within that vision if we adopt any of that vision? How does that then get built into a building?"

So, all kinds of questions were on the table from the beginning there, such as, "Well, do we do the Guggenheim? Do we have outposts here, there and everywhere? Do we become like the Frick? Do we stop collecting? Do we become a museum of 20th century art?" And some of these were dispensed with right off the bat, but it was that level of "there are no first principles that should not be examined." So that was kind of the approach. Who was driving it? The trustees were driving it. And Glenn, of course. There would be a real need for more space to do what we envisioned, as all this sort of percolated down into a plan for what MoMA would be. It would require more space. And it was hugely ambitious, that expansion. So that began in earnest, I think around 1999 when we started to... One of the first things that happened in the conservation department, I think this was pretty early on in the development of the expansion, painting and sculpture conservation had to move because that education wing, which is on the west side of the garden where many of the galleries are now, that was going to get torn down. So, we moved to a tiny little space that used to be called the Projects Gallery. Where would that be now? That would be the bar room of the Modern restaurant. It was pretty much right in that area.

KL: In the Johnson Building.

JC: Yeah. And so, we just all crammed together down there. By this point, I had been able to convince James Gara, the chief financial officer, that we should hire a scientist. It didn't take a whole lot of back and forth. And I knew exactly who I wanted because I had worked with Chris [McGlinchey] at the Met. I knew how he thought about science vis-a-vis art and that he was a perfect fit for the modern, and happily we were able to hire him. And he wasn't totally put off by an initial lack of equipment or research capability, or big research capability. He was able to do his research.

So, there we were, sculpture and paintings and now our one scientist sort of jammed into an impossibly small space. And we then moved out to Queens. And this is one of the interesting things about, again, the way the Museum went about this. Pretty much the first thing they did before they did any construction or anything, they went out and bought a storage facility for the Museum. We had been renting space in an art

warehouse for many years and the Museum said, "Nope, we should own our own space. That's the responsible thing to do." So, they went out and paid pretty good money for a factory out in Queens knowing that they would need to retrofit it and put in state of the art, climate control and so on.

And then, as it turned out, the museum was thinking, "Well, where will we have temporary exhibition space? We can't go dark for all those years the two or three years that 53rd St. would need to close. We need a temporary exhibition space somewhere." And they were looking around different places in the city, had decided, "No, if we're going to do this, we've got to stay close to Manhattan. We can't go to the Bronx or some other space where we could retrofit something very large." So, they said, "Well, hang on a second. We just bought this building that we're going to be installing climate control in Let's turn some of it over to our temporary exhibition space while we are building in Manhattan." And that's what they did.

So, I have to say that for a kind of big institution, there was a lot of rational decision making all along the way. And another example of that is that pretty early on in the process, I was asked to come to a meeting with the chief curators. And the meeting started off with Terry Riley, who was the chief curator of architecture and design. And Terry was really central to a lot of this, given that he was an architect, choosing the architect and so on. But said, "All right, we've got our new building built and we're opening the doors first day. Who needs to be on staff?"

And people said, "Well, we need security, and we need operations people, and we need front desk people." And somebody said, "Do we need curators?" And people said, "Actually, we don't have to have curators on site. They don't have to be there, but we should have at least some conservation capacity there." So, there was this kind of really rigorous rational approach to it. Now, of course, one knew that the curators would be on site. That wasn't really a question. But again, it was asked.

But this also raised a real worry in my mind because other museums had recently expanded and moved conservation offsite with the rationale, "You get all the space you need, it's going to be the most perfect space you ever had." And for me, this would have just cut what I thought conservation should be in the museum off at the knees. It would be untenable, impossible to do what I thought conservation should do, and that the museum would be missing... It would no longer have a capacity to be a leader in this field.

So, it raised the question for me, "Okay, they're talking about just a triage facility potentially." That means that the question of being offsite could be in play. So, throughout the expansion process, when that question came up, I was always alert to just try to argue immediately against it. And it didn't come up that many times. Soon enough it just was, "Well, okay, conservation will be on site." But it wasn't like, "All right, we will have conservation on site." It was more that every time it came up it got enough pushback, I think, that they said, "Fine, let’s keep it here."

And so, we were also out in Queens for those several years that the museum was tearing things down and building things up in Manhattan. It was a great time. It really was because we were out there, the collection was right there in the building with us, we were getting it ready for a reinstallation. So, we were working on art all of the time. I worked on more paintings during that time than I had since I first started at the museum. It was just great. And this was also the time when we could do the *Demoiselles* [*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* # 333.1939]

The *Demoiselles* as a conservation project was kind of a classic for me. When John Elderfield did the Matisse retrospective, probably I think that would've been around '92, he kept a couple of big Matisse's, and in particular *Bathers by a River* from the Art Institute of Chicago, and set up a separate gallery and hung the *Demoiselles*. These two great masterpieces by the great masters of the 20th century. And the *Demoiselles* just didn't look like the greatest picture of the 20th century, just sort looked... [blows raspberry].

And it was because it was dirty. It had a certain amount of discolored varnish and, of course, dirt and grime on it. So, I just made a mental note that this is something we need to do. And brought it up to the curators. And they said, "Yeah, but we can never have that off view, can we?" And I said, "No, we probably can't." Certainly not for a month's long restoration. But this was the time when we could, when the museum was clearly in transition. And so, I asked Michael if he wanted to restore the *Demoiselles*. He said, yes. And off we went.

But this was also a case where one of the other things that I really felt strongly about as head of conservation of any department, but as it turned out at MoMA-- we need to explain ourselves to the world. When I could go to one of the people in this room here and say, "Well, let's you and me go rub some chemicals on a painting," and when you do it? It's vandalism. When I do it it's conservation. How do we explain this to people that we're not... That's sort strong language, vandalizing pictures, but how is it that we have been assigned and accepted this responsibility. And this, too, comes from John Brealey. How powerful and just almost overwhelming a responsibility it is.

So, I was always looking for ways to try to explain us as a field to an interested public. Not to just the passerby, you can't get easily into the nuance and enough of the important stuff. So, we did a website. So, this would've been 2002, maybe '03. And I think I was aware of one other museum that had done a website around a conservation restoration at that time. And I wanted to do two things, one, to explain what we do and how we do it, but also to explain why the *Demoiselles* is not available for you to see, but maybe you'll be interested in this.

And that was back in the day when you had to pretty much completely rewrite a website if you were going to make changes to it. So, every, maybe, three weeks or so, we would do an update. And we did ask people to write in questions and we would, Michael mostly, write answers back to the people. And you can't measure how successful something like that is, but it seemed the museum saw that there were not just some value in showing off conservation, but that websites can be a really useful way of communicating complex information. So, again, that was an opportunity to go after

something that had been in the back of my mind, even before I became head of the department that, "How do we explain ourselves to the world?" But do it more on our terms than on the terms of the popular press or just getting bodies through the door.

KL: And then, Jim, this is the kind of key moment where the studio set up changes. So, as you said, the case was continuously made to have conservation on the site in the museum, which I think still has a profound effect today.

JC: Yeah. I'm sure.

KL: No question. But you also designed these beautiful studios. They're still beautiful. So, can you talk about that? Because I know that was quite a process.

JC: Yeah. So, at one point during the design, the possibility of the curators being in the same tower as where painting and sculpture and science are in the museum was floated. And I got super behind that idea and I thought, "Great, they can just walk down the stairs and come see us." But alas, that didn't come to fruition. The museum put it together and said, "It's better that we make some money off of that office space than have curators there, because we've got other space where they could be." Paper conservation remained much in the same area it had always been. It's an expanded space from what they once had, but still cheek by jowl to the curatorial departments that they spend most of their time working with.

When it came time to design space, I had been in Boston not too long before that, and there had been a lot of talk and articles about the newly designed Straus Center at the Fogg. And I went to visit it and a it was beautiful. But the thing that just struck me so forcefully was that one discipline space bled into another and into another. Even though it was sort of a square, the separation of disciplines was really not there. It was a very seamless total department in design. And I realized architecture can design and express values, the values you bring to what you want to happen in a space. And Sam Anderson Architects was the one who designed that.

And so, Sam was giving a lecture somewhere and I went and I said, "Can we meet and can we talk?" And we talked and I got the museum to hire on Sam as a consultant and ultimately as the designer of the space. And it was a long process, Sam and his team... Let me back up a little bit more. Part of the initial development of the expansion was a needs-analysis that an architectural firm did where they just interviewed people in departments and came up with essentially a wishlist. And that wishlist turned out to be a billion-dollar museum when you put it all together.

But that process, I was able to hear from the conservation staff what their true wishlist was, and try to think about that from the standpoint of what's achievable, but also what's desirable. And so, then Sam came in and did a more granular type of process with the staff. "What are your needs? What can you absolutely not live without? What's the ideal work table?" I mean, Sam and Eddie [Edward Gormley] were just phenomenal and really developed a pretty good rapport with the conservation staff. But one thing that happened

repeatedly in the meetings was that because sculpture and paintings conservation had been separate in the old building, they thought they needed to be separate in whatever new ideal space would be designed. And having been to the Fogg, I knew that that really was not the case. And also, having watched the way the collection demands collaborative work, that just didn't make sense.

So, it took a fair amount of persuasion through a series of meetings with Sam to get that ninth floor developed as more of a single shared space, even though they've each got their own sides. But I also thought, again, this question of architecture reflecting values, sculpture conservation absolutely had to have equal amount of space to paintings conservation. It's insane not to. And that happened, and we could have done it other ways, but that just had to happen that way.

And so eventually, just by putting a sliding door, or the possibility of the sliding door, between the two, I was able to say, "Look, you guys can separate yourselves when you need to." And as far as I can tell, that's never closed. [Laughs]. And Sam, he did such a beautiful job designing taborets. That is just all Sam Anderson choosing the palette of materials, which was done with the conservation staff. And the practicalities versus the aesthetics was always this constant dialogue that he resolved so well.

KL: And it remains a very practical studio. So, you have on the ninth-floor painting and sculptures, as you talked about, together.

JC: Mm-hmm.

KL: And then directly above, Jim, that's where your office was and conservation science.

JC: Right.

KL: And a meeting room. And then conservation had a library, which was also a meeting room.

JC: Yeah.

KL: And then can you talk a little bit about that?

JC: Yeah.

KL: And then can you talk a little bit about paper and photo?

JC: Yeah. Might we take a break?

AUDIO FILE 1 of 3 ENDS [01:47:35]

BEGIN AUDIO FILE 2 of 3

JC: So, the 10th floor, there was indeed a meeting room that we had. And the idea behind that was an extension of the idea of how conservation could seriously contribute to scholarship in the museum. And that if we were going to be doing research, whether it was exhibition research or research within our field, whatever, having a space dedicated to that would be very, very useful. And again, through design and space, state the priority, that this is a priority for the department and for the museum because resources have been allocated to it. And I also thought that having a library– up to that point all the conservation books were scattered everywhere– would just facilitate people doing the research that they would need. The meeting room, it would be good idea, not just for staff meetings, but for bringing people from outside the museum to have meetings there. We had a whiteboard for writing on, if that was necessary. We also had a light box for putting x-rays up, so that if that kind of discussion was being had, we could do that. It's interesting that this was... So, we got on site in 2004. It was not too many years later that x-radiography was digital and so on, books were digital. Some of the uses of that space simply became obsolescent in a way. But again, as I say, it was meant to underline what this department would be doing and similarly, science. When the museum said, "Well, what kinds of things do you need within the conservation department?" Obviously, Chris made a list and it was there when we moved in.

So, I mean, it was a really generous expansion, at least in that initial phase of it. There was a second phase that finished a little bit later. But in that first phase, I can only remember one moment when they started to say, "No, this is too much." They wanted to cut the ninth-floor conservation space in half. And again, I was able to, without too much difficulty, point out how foolish that would be from a fiscal standpoint, that you're putting in all of this stuff, climate control, many other things that you only have really one shot at. You can't do it again. So really make the most of it when you can. And whatever they were planning to do there, they didn't. [Laughs]. And yeah, I'm very, very fortunate.

There was within the department, especially once the construction started and that the ninth-floor space became so clearly spectacular, “Can we move paper conservation over here too?” And that just would've made things too tight. And we would've lost that really important physical connection to the curators for them. And as tight as their space is, I still don't think that that was wrong to do, even if we could have found an equal or larger space over on the west side of the museum.

KL: So, Jim, the paper and photography conservation lab that's on the fourth floor, that stayed where it was before the expansion?

JC: Yeah. It's the same space. It's somewhat larger than it was before the expansion. It was meant to be somewhat larger than that, about 10 feet larger. But the curator of prints just wanted that 10 feet so badly that the museum said, "All right, you have to have it. You get to have it." That 10 feet would make all the difference in the world though. Yeah, yeah.

KL: And that space was also designed by-

JC: Also designed by Sam and Eddie, yeah.

KL: And that was the same overview and redesigning of the lab and all new equipment.

JC: And I think even more so, I mean, the paper conservators, Karl and Erika and Lee Ann in photography, they really, really worked with Sam on designing things down to the last detail, their work tables, the sink, the bridge between the sink and the storage area. Just a really, really smartly designed space. And it has to be because it is tight. It really is.

KL: So, at that time, so there were the three conservators that you just mentioned, Karl Buchberg, Erika Mosier, and Lee Ann Daffner who were working-

JC: We had hired... Scott Gerson had been a fellow and during the expansion process, Jennifer said, "All right, you're going to get money to hire another conservator. You decide where you want that conservator to be." And I said, "Paper conservation." So, we hired Scott Gerson. So that, too, expanded the department, getting that additional position. Somewhat hard call because sculpture conservation could easily have used that too but Lynda and Roger were there. There was just so, so much on the paper side that was happening.

KL: And so just going back to everybody who was in the department at that time, you mentioned Lynda Zycherman, and Roger Griffith, who were the sculpture/object conservators. And then painting conservation at that time was?

JC: Nominally me, Michael Duffy, and Anny Aviram. So, the department at that time then would've been me, Michael, Anny, Bonnie Lee as the administrator. Paper conservation would've been Erika, Karl, and Scott. Lee Ann in photo. We would've had a photo fellow, don't remember who, but we always had a Mellon Fellow in paper conservation. That was from money from the previous expansion. When I allocated the new position to paper, I said to Lee Ann, "Okay, we'll use this to hire a photo fellow so that you get some help." So, there would've been Lee Ann and a photo fellow. And Lynda and Roger in sculpture and Chris in science.

Various interns rotated through and fellows rotated through during the expansion. People like Suzanne Siano and Per Knutås and Matthew Skopek and others. But that was the staff and they were all full-time. That, too, was something that I really wanted. When I took over, I did not want to have part-time people on staff. And so, when the opportunity to make people full-time arose, I tried hard to do that. Because I did not want to send a signal that, "Oh, you can do conservation part-time, that's how demanding it is." It's not, it's really a full-time, demanding job. Yeah.

KL: So that takes us to...

JC: 2004.

KL: When you moved into those new labs?

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KL: Great. Thank you, Jim. Maybe we'll end part one there.

JC: All right. Very good. Thank you, Kate.

AUDIO FILE 2 of 3 ENDS [00:09:37]

BEGIN AUDIO FILE 3 of 3

KL: Today is January the third, 2023.

JC: Yeah.

KL: And here we are for part three of our oral history with Jim Coddington.

JC: Great. Thanks, Kate. So why don't we sort of circle back to something that I think I mentioned earlier on about the conservation committee, which actually was formed while Antoinette was still department head. And it came about really one day, or the idea came about one day when I was sitting in Antoinette's office, and we were talking with one of the development officers, Dan Vecchitto. He was, Sue Dorn's, who was head of development at the time, pretty much her right-hand person. And Dan said, "It would be a good idea if we could find a way to get a group focused on conservation the way we do on each of the curatorial departments and education." Antoinette and I said, "Yes, that would be a good idea, Dan." And I had had some exposure to that before. Again, this is how formative my time at the Met was. John Brealey had what was called a visiting committee at that time.

And it was, in that case, formed... The members were art historians, some museum directors, but also museum trustees. And although I never sat in on one of those meetings, I could see the impact that a committee like that had in bringing real serious attention to the conservation department, at least paintings conservation at the Met, amongst the true decision makers in the museum, and that is the trustees. So, the idea that we could potentially have something along those lines at MoMA was absolutely... I could see a lot of potential in that. So, the idea was broached, and Sue Dorn kicked it up to Dick Oldenburg, who was director of the museum at that time, and nothing much happened. We would bring the topic up again. It had to be at least a year later, maybe more, when after several efforts to say, "What's happening? What's happening?"

I was not offered a couple of jobs but was asked to interview for a couple of jobs. And I brought this to Antoinette's attention, that I was, at least, looking elsewhere. And she

said, "What would it take for you to stay?" And I said, "Well, one thing would be if we could actually get this conservation committee formed." And pretty quickly, there was a conservation committee with Jeanne Thayer, who was a trustee at the time, as the chair of the committee. The early members of that committee were Aggie Gund, Patty Cisneros, Patti Birch, and Brooke Berlind. It was probably about 10 different members. Sid Bass was on the committee to. He didn't always show up for those first early meetings, but he was there for the most part. It was just a great thing to have. And right off the bat there was strong enthusiasm from the trustees and other committee members for this.

There were dues, and so this brought a little extra money into the department every year for different projects that we might have in mind. But it was also... I think the second or third meeting, they asked Antoinette for a sort of vision of the department. And she asked me to write something up, and then she edited it a bit, and we presented that to the committee, which is all just to say that the kind of exposure and thinking and seriousness about conservation within trustees and other real decision makers was now happening.

Yeah, I think that that, as much as anything, was a really key event in elevating conservation's profile and importance to the museum. Not just in the conservation parts of it, in care of the collection, but in the scholarship and how we could explain what the museum does-- i.e., not just education, not just exhibitions, but collection preservation-- to the public that is interested in the museum. And that committee remains vibrant and, I think, still very much serving that function. And some of those names that I mentioned, Aggie Gund, Patty Cisneros... Aggie was, at that time, or very shortly thereafter became president of the museum. And she was a strong, active advocate for conservation from day one. Yeah.

KL: And, Jim, the chief conservator position at MoMA is the Agnes Gund Chief Conservator.

JC: Yeah. That's an interesting story, Kate, in that when I was offered the job, there were a few things I asked for. One was to be able to appoint somebody as a Senior Conservator, basically to make a line of authority below me clear. And that was Karl, who I just already had the utmost respect for. And he just proved my wisdom a thousand times over, over the years, but another ask was a change of title from Director of Conservation to Chief Conservator. And the reason I wanted that was that all the head curators were Chief Curators. And I wanted that same equality of recognition, even in title. It's a subtle thing maybe, but it's not so subtle that one of the Chief Curators, when this was announced to the management group said, "Isn't that a change of title?" And Glenn said, "Yes, it is." And it was Glenn, I think I mentioned this before, who actually offered me the position. He had taken over as director of the museum about a year before. That's about right in terms of chronology. So yeah, that's the story behind the Chief Conservator title.

KL: And then, Agnes Gund.

JC: So, the funding of that. Aggie did not fund that. That goes to the 2004 expansion. I call it 2004 because that's when we reopened. Aggie was a trustee at the Getty Trust, one of a

handful of trustees. And the Getty wanted to make a contribution--they had been asked to-- and their choice was to honor Aggie. And they asked her. I think they asked her. I can't say for sure. But in any case, the money that the Getty gave to the museum was going to be in honor of Aggie. I guess she said, "Well, endow the head of conservation position." So that's how it was named for her by the Getty Trust. Yeah.

KL: I mean, since then, Jim, also, Marie-Josée Kravis sits on the Conservation Committee, who was the president, is now the chairperson of the board.

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So yes, there have been a number of influential trustees who have been on the Conservation Committee for extended periods of time. And another wonderful story was when Joan Tisch... she was from the Tisch family, the Loews Corporation that had owned hotels, but they also owned a tobacco company of some sort. And when she was first brought through conservation. There was a Picasso on my easel, it was a portrait of a woman, *Head of a Sleeping Woman* that had just come into the collection. And she said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I am taking tar off of this from smoke over the years." And she said, "Well, I suppose I should be on this committee so that I can undo what we've done." [Laughs]. It was a wonderful, just very amusing little story and very sweet. So yeah, Marie-Josée has been on the committee. I think Patty Cisneros may even remain on the committee.

She is so dedicated to it. And Patty was one of those people who wasn't just dedicated to MoMA. I remember very clearly, not long after I became chief conservator, a couple years later, she brought a number of collection management people, registrars, conservators, from the Museum down to Venezuela for a workshop for museum professionals from around Venezuela. And it was a two or three-day workshop where we gave general presentations, and then we each fanned out and sort of helped problem solve within the museums. It was so impressive, how much they were doing already with far more limited resources. But that was the kind of thing that was something that a trustee like Patti would have us get involved with too. And it was a really wonderful thing for us to be able to do.

KL: And then thinking about patronage, I know we have the Sally and Michael Gordon Conservation Science position and the Andrew W. Mellon Photography Conservator and Fellow .

JC: So, the Mellon photography position was one of the things that was on my mind when I first became head of the department. Indeed, I said in my interview that that was something that I wanted to do. Mellon, I knew, had already begun to develop a sort of pipeline of photography training in this country. So, I thought that MoMA's great collection of photographs arguably would warrant having a photography conservator position to help employ conservators from that pipeline. We already had Lee Ann on as a Mellon fellow, and she helped us put together our proposal to Mellon. It got redlined and edited two or three times over by Angelica Rudenstein, who was propelling this major initiative, transformative initiative in the field of conservation. And we did get that position. But we needed to also round up some matching money. That's the way Mellon was doing those kinds of things in museums at the time.

It's just not a freebie. You have to show your genuine, legitimate interest as an institution by putting some money up. And that was a little bit of a struggle at that time. But Peter Galassi, who was chief curator of photography at the time, was helpful in finding some funding to get a sufficient match to make a full-time position, which we eventually filled with Lee Ann.

The Sally and Michael Gordon position is another wonderful story. Emmett Watson, who came on to the development team around the time of that 2004 expansion, he just took a great interest in conservation and kept trying to find people who he thought would be good matches for the conservation committee. And I had always thought, "Well, one of the rationales for the museum to have a conservation committee, any committee, is to sort of regard it as a farm team, see who has a genuine interest in the museum and maybe, you might say, graduates to the board of trustees by performance on a committee like the conservation committee."

And Emmett was always looking out for people to add to that. And Sally Gordon, I don't know how he first came to know her, but we had a few meetings with Sally, showed her around, and she said, "I would love to be on the committee." Her husband, Michael, became quite wealthy in investments of some sort. I don't know. I don't think it was in investment banking. I think it was a boutique investing firm that he ran. And she became an active member, was really wonderful. And then one day Emmett asked her, "What do you think you might do?" And she said, "Well, I've heard a lot about science in the various meetings that we have had." We would have meetings twice a year, "And I think we would like to be able to fund a position." Now, this was around the same time that Mellon, again, had shifted its focus. It had developed this very large and now ongoing photography initiative around the country, and had turned their attention to conservation science.

But at that time, they were saying, "You need to really show some interest." They needed to get directors on board with any grant that they might give and so on. And so, we were looking for some kind of match, a legitimate match for Mellon. And Sally and Michael said, "Fine. We will fully endow a head of science position." And Mellon said, "Well, that's good because that shows a real interest. We will provide funding for the second science position." So that was kind of a twofer and, again, a really fortunate one.

But again, I think that story shows how Sally saw what we were talking about and what kept bubbling up to the surface, both consciously and unconsciously in these conservation committee meetings, and that a science position would be important. And this was just after we had reopened the museum. So, we had a new science facility, much, much more impressive than we had had before, new equipment. And so, we had some real... And Chris was doing just some amazing projects in basic research that were increasingly evident. in a way a philanthropist would understand, that they have serious impact by funding that position.

KL: And while staying on the theme of the committee, Jim, I also think about Marlene Hess and everything that she's done for the conservation committee.

JC: So, the history of the various chairs of the committee. Jeanne Thayer was the first. Patti Birch then stepped in, and it was kind of a quiet period then for the committee. And that principally was because we were out in Queens at the time. Where would we have the meetings? Well, I was really insistent that we have the meetings at Queens, that we have meetings around works of art, that we'd be explaining the works of art. Shall we say attendance was sparse during those few years? And then we came back, and Patti stayed on as chair for a couple of years. Aggie Gund then stepped in for a couple of years too. I'm not quite sure of the chronology, but then she decided to step down. And the question was, "Who would be interested?" And Marlene was not on the committee at the time, but I think Glenn and other people in development, and maybe amongst the trustees themselves, thought that Marlene could well be somebody interested in this.

And boy, was she ever. I remember having lunch with her to discuss the possibility. And it was like, "Okay, we'll hit the ground running here." And Marlene's focus was, "Okay, we have these meetings and so on." And these are some of the most interesting meetings she said she goes to. "I think we should share more of that information." And so that is how the occasional evenings [began], where an invitation list would go out, and various donors or people within the museum and outside could come, and we would do a pretty scripted tour, usually of an exhibition. The first one we did might have been de Kooning. I'm not sure. By this point, pretty often there would be a conservator assigned to an exhibition, but increasingly, they were also contributing research and certainly dialogue with the curators of the exhibition.

So, very often, the format that these would take would be a joint presentation between curator and conservator through the exhibition. As I say, they were fairly scripted, mostly just to be efficient because you had, what, about 45 minutes in an evening to do this kind of a tour. And I think Marlene was great in further building that kind of added exposure for conservation. And for me, it was wonderful to see how staff members sort of brought themselves together and made their presentations better and better, both prior to each one, but then when they did a second or a third over the years, they were just increasingly concise yet complete, staying out of the weeds-- those conservation weeds that we like to talk about but that a lot of the general public just glazes over on. So yeah, there's been an evolution about what the committee does for conservation, how it pulls conservation along with it sometimes too.

KL: And then before we leave the committee, after Marlene, we have David Booth, who gave a very significant endowment to the department.

JC: That gift was given almost simultaneous with when I decided to leave, at the time of the next expansion. And apparently, David had a meeting with Glenn. David was on the board of trustees at the time, and they were going to be discussing, "What is it? Where do you think you would be interested in putting your money?" At least this is how I understand it. I wasn't there. And David said, "I think conservation," is where he would like to do that. Now David had prior experience with conservation. He had been married to Suzanne Deal, Suzanne Deal Booth. And they, I think pretty much prompted by her, but with clearly David's support, had been significant givers and philanthropists in the area of conservation. I had first become aware of David some number of years before

because there was a Friends of Conservation group out in Los Angeles that I guess he and Suzanne had started.

Peter Norton, another member of the conservation committee and board of trustees, who I also know because he went to the same college I did although a number of years before I did. But I tried to strike up a relationship with that group to see if we could raise money through them, but nothing much, nothing at all came of it other than some nice letters back and forth. But David now said that he would like to give to conservation, and it was a really substantial gift. I met with David, I think, twice around that time. He had pretty much already made up his mind, I think, to make that gift. But Glenn and I met with him, and I explained what we were doing in the department. He visited the department, and the rest, as they say, is history. It was a wonderful, generous gift by David. Yeah.

What I had principally been using committee funds for, prior to that, was trying to cobble together fellowships for students. And that was hard business because we would have these wonderful fellows, and they would say, "What's my status for next year?" And I would say, "I don't know. I don't know. How am I finding some..." And I would just be looking to see if we could squeeze enough money out of committee dues and maybe monies from elsewhere. And I think part of what David did was take that pressure off by giving enough money that we could plan fellowships in whatever we wanted.

KL: Yep. And I mean, I think maybe the word transformative is overused, but I think it really... I think we can honestly say it's transformative for the department. And it is the David Booth Conservation Department.

JC: It is. I think that that is a wonderful example of if you go about your business and you're doing it right, the right people will recognize it. And amongst the right people who recognized what we were doing in conservation was definitely Glenn. Glenn was a supporter. When the expansion was finished in 2004, and I was giving Glenn a tour around, he had of course had seen the conservation facilities being built and so on. But I was giving him a tour around and he said, "Very impressive. This looks great." And I said, "Yeah, this worked out very well."

He said, "I assume you have some big ideas after this," he said, looking around. And I said, "Yeah, I think I do Glenn." And he said, " I'd go slow with that." But we didn't really go slow with that, I mean, he was just pointing out that it was really an area of the museum that had gotten built, and offered really a new vision of how the museum would be. And that was the goal of that entire expansion, a new vision for MoMA. But Glenn, always very, very supportive. Never missed a conservation committee meeting. We would plan them around him, but he just never missed one at all. He, too, saw the importance of this sort of educational quality of the committee and was an active participant in whatever presentation was going on.

KL: So, talking about the 2004 expansion and going slow with plans - you expanded conservation, both in terms of staff, but also in terms of discipline and space.

JC: So, when we came back to 53rd Street, we had our same disciplines. We had added photography just before going out to Queens and science a little before that, but we came back with two scientists, and then we added another sculpture conservator somewhere along the line, I forget exactly when. But a really major thing that happened, and this was quite a while after the expansion, but when we were able to get a department manager on board, Gene [Eugene] Albertelli, things really started to... Just the management of the department, the amount of paperwork, the organization, all the things that I kind of felt obliged to do because it was just hard to get it done any other way. Gene just took off with and made the world so much easier for all of us in the department.

That was maybe about three or four years before I left. So that was long after the expansion. I don't remember when the first Matters in Media Arts meeting was. It was in London at Tate and-

KL: 2005, I believe.

JC: I think five would be exactly right because I really think that some of the museum departments still weren't back at MoMA. They were still fitting out some of their spaces, because I remember having some meetings post Matters in Media Art with some of the registrars off site. And I think 2005 would be exactly right. It was at Tate and it was the New Art Trust, the consortium of Tate, SFMOMA, and MoMA. And that consortium was initially, well, was arguably a collaborative, what, collection to be shared that had been put together by Pam and Dick Kramlich, and fill in where I get this wrong Kate, but Pam and Dick Kramlich from San Francisco had this collection that they wanted to give to all three institutions the curators would get together and decide how to distribute it and so on.

But one of the key questions was, well, where is it going to live? How do you, who is going to care for it? And what does that care actually mean? So, I guess Pip and Jill, Jill Sterrett from SFMOMA, Pip Laurenson from Tate, deemed it important enough to call this meeting of the three museums and the various staff at those museums who either were or might be expected to be part of caring for the collections. And I went with the most, I would say rudimentary understanding of what time-based media was, what it required in the way of care for a collection.

And three days later, I was very much on red alert. What Tate and SFMOMA were doing in terms of planning, staffing, and just meeting, understanding what this very, very complicated art form would require in terms of care, never mind trying to share it amongst three collections, required. And then when I looked at the numbers of what MoMA had collected versus those institutions, I said, we have an awful lot of catching up to do. Our collections were many times larger than either of those institutions. And that was a sense that others who came from MoMA had too. The other people who came from MoMA were Ramona Bannayan, John Alexander, they were both from the registrar's department, and Anne Morra, who was from film. That is the level of sophistication that MoMA was bringing to this. But Anne was wonderful. She said, "This is not a film thing. This is, yes, nominally Barbara London, the curator at MoMA who was responsible for video art and had built this collection is in the film department, but it's

really, this is Barbara and a whole different beast. I'll help where I can." And I remember coming back after that and sitting down with Ramona and John and sort of asking some really, really basic questions. Like, all right, we need to come up with a plan. We need to have... We've seen what they're doing at these different institutions like Steve Dye at SFMOMA, people developing specializations at Tate and SFMOMA that we had no concept of at MoMA. But first question was, where are we going to house this initiative? And for me, what I had seen there was a lot of this stuff is just-- not *just*-- it is information gathering, characterizing, and so on.

A fundamental thing about this, you could make an argument that the registrar's department would be a logical place to house this initiative. And that said, we sat down and we decided, no, it really is conservation, but it is... The relationship between us is probably going to be different around this. So, we started up, I'm trying to figure out, all right, how do we get this started at MoMA.

Around the same time, a conservation committee member, Monique Warshaw, wonderful, wonderful lady, and she'd been on the committee for a few years. She just stopped by my office one day and she said, "What's going on?" And I said, "We just had this meeting, this is a big project that is going to have to go on." And she said, "How can I help?" And I said, "The first thing I think I need to do is do a collection survey." That's what one does when confronted with a collection. And she said, "Would $30,000 help?" And I said, "It certainly would."

And it took me a while to get that started. I don't know how I landed on Glenn Wharton. I knew Glenn had come to New York and was looking for work. And I thought, well, maybe Glenn could do something like this. But again, very naively, I thought Glenn can do a little bit of this, but he can also spend maybe half his time working with Roger and Lynda. And I think that that would bring a new, really great critical eye into sculpture conservation. Well, again, that was naive. I eventually was able to get together with Glenn and bring him on part-time to do a collection survey, and Glenn brought so much activity and interest to this, he made a connection with a woman named Barbara Mack, who wrote a white paper, really a deep dive into the technology and technology responses to long-term preservation of these works. I forget the name of the company where Kara Van Malssen works...

KL: AVP.

JC: Yeah, AVP yeah. Yeah. And he made connections there. And I was able to get ongoing funding from the Museum for this. And about the same time the Museum started a video department. And I guess, I don't think Barbara London was ever head of it. The first head was, I think Sabine Breitwieser and part... No?

KL: Wasn't it Klaus Biesenbach?

JC: Oh yeah, sure. Klaus. Sure.

KL: Chief Curator of Media and Performance, right? As it was known then.

JC: Yeah, you're right. But the preservation question didn't interest Klaus, but it did give us a certain gravitas. We have a curatorial department here with no corresponding conservation personnel to respond to it, to help build something there.

So, with that in mind, the Museum said, fine, we can bring Glenn on as a staff member. And again, Glenn then just continued to build this. He established a working group across the museum, curators, registrars, AV, all of the obvious people, and got everybody talking around the table, enfranchising them around this project. Nothing particularly dramatic. It's sort of an organic evolution. But I really very much handed it over to Glenn to spearhead. Staying in touch with him, but I was doing other things, although recognizing this was a very major priority.

And I will say that when I was able to get the money to hire Glenn, Sculpture Conservation said, "We need more help. We don't need a new media conservator." I said, "You don't turn down money ever. You just don't." And it proved to be a really exciting time as Glenn built this out, addressing storage needs, and I mean, very simply getting some drives to start to store things on, and seeing that that's inadequate. Getting AV, IT on board with, okay, we can store it on servers, and then further on board with, no, we need our own separate servers. It just built and built and built. We hired up some contract people, Ben Fino-Radin, now Cass Fino-Radin... Glenn had put together an outside working group of various people from around the country, but mostly from the New York area, from New York Public Library, NYU. There was a guy from University of Illinois, to brainstorm and try to lay out what the next five years would look like in preserving works of art like this. And that was very, very helpful in helping me understand some of the technical aspects, and I'm sure Glenn as well. But also, to match what these people were talking about with what our collection really was, and how we could prioritize around our collection. So, I guess we hired up AVP for a while, and this was when Sabine Breitwieser took over, and that gave a big kick to us because part of what Sabine was going to do, if she came here, was set up media kiosks around the museum.

So, we had to have a capacity to serve these things up instantaneously. And that meant getting Peter Oleksik and his skills and knowledge on board. And yes, it was on board to just get these kiosks up. And it just became obvious that first of all, the popularity of this was so great that the Museum said, “we want to do more, we want do more.” And okay, if we're going to do more, we have to have somebody on staff doing this. And so, Peter came on staff. Ben came on staff to address the long-term storage needs, which came about, again, another study group of people to essentially ask, what does it mean to have a media repository?

KL: Which was MoMA's research related to Matters in Media Art, right?

JC: Yeah. So, Matters in Media Art had continued on after that initial meeting, [laughs] where the scales fell from my eyes. We had a second meeting in New York at MoMA where we

started to look at this, not just as a New Art Trust question-- how do we share our works-- but that what we are learning here for ourselves is applicable to the field. So, let's start to push that out to the field. And so, Matters in Media Art was formed as a sort of public facing entity. And we divvied up, we said we'll make a website with basic worksheets, checklists, and rationales, really basic stuff about collecting, acquiring, lending, storing, and so on. And we divvied each of those things up between the three museums and developed a website that I think is still active and still actively used. But as we were doing this, and in our regular conversations, it became clear that each of the museums was having to take...

Its collection needs were different. SFMOMA had begun collecting internet art. We had not. And they said, “we really need to dig in...if we're going to continue doing research, we've sort of done this basic stuff around it as a group, I think we need to each go about it to address our individual collections.” And so that's what we did as the third leg of this. And interestingly, at that third meeting, this had become such a large effort within MoMA that our head of IT, Juan Montes came, a lot of people came because we were all three institutions. And the New Art Trust had seen they weren't getting anywhere on the curatorial side. People just couldn't get traction on how are we going to share these things.

We had pretty good solutions, technically how you're going to share these things, and we had decided SFMOMA will house them.. But the Kramlichs, I think saw “we're getting great traction on the conservation side. Let's fund this next meeting at SFMOMA,” where, as I said, we then divvied these things up. And like I say, real important, influential people within the Museum like Juan and of course, registration and curatorial were all there. And we decided that a media repository, a digital repository, was the logical next step given the scale of what MoMA's collection was. And that's where Ben came in and started moving that along. Very complex efforts. But the museum funded that. We didn't go for outside funding, and it was not just paying Ben, but paying consultants, buying equipment and so on, and getting that set up. The museum really saw how this was something that could potentially deliver on the demand side outside the museum, for instance viewers coming to the website and wanting to view a video was going to be the future and we needed to facilitate that. The digital repository offered that possibility.

And so, we were taking a pretty big risk because nothing like this, within a museum, to my knowledge, had been built. So, it was a bespoke system for good or ill. And that's where we were. And so, by then, Peter, Ben and Glenn were here. Glenn decided to leave, and we did a search and came up with a new head of media conservation, Kate. And after that, we had various fellows. We got money from Mellon. See, this is all, some of these details I'm forgetting, but we had some money from Mellon for... No, maybe I just raised that money separate from Mellon for some fellows.

But Mellon, yet again, enters the picture here at a really opportune moment. We seem to be arriving at these things at the same time that Mellon is taking a close look at time-based media. And they decided that a major initiative in time-based media was warranted. And just like with photography conservation, Mellon looked at it and said, training is a fundamental question. Where will we find places to train? Where will we find

people who have the skills and knowledge, which are very, very different from the kinds of skills and knowledge that traditional conservation disciplines have. But also, part of that training is getting people into museums at advanced training stages, and where are we going to find those opportunities for these students as they eventually come out of whatever training programs get developed? But Mellon really also saw it as, “there is a huge need for education within museums,” as well. And something along the lines, I think, of what we were trying to do with Matters in Media Art. So, they came up with a really generous... Well, we made a proposal to them, back and forth, that came up with a really generous program that funded a series of meetings at MoMA, internationally attended, basic workshops on how to handle things, works of arts. I mean, you can fill these gaps in better than I can Kate, but, and how to... provide some of the fundamental, basic ways to approach such a collection and even providing some knowledge and skills around whatever media collection you might have. That was what, a four-year program? Or was it five?

KL: I think it was five.

JC: Yeah.

KL: Yes. Yeah. The media conservation initiative, which you worked with Alison Gilchrest to-

JC: Yes, Alison-

KL: ...put together.

JC: ...very much spearheaded that from the Mellon side. And that included some funding for fellows who we were able to increase the manpower -- Woman power, mostly really-- within time-based media, and eventually hired an additional person, Amy Brost, not with Mellon funds, but with, I guess, I don't know, museum funds. What am I missing?

KL: No, no. So, I think that contribution, Jim, when you said in 2005 you were like, fundamental to then really influencing the field of training, where the training was needed in that area back in 2015 or 16, when the Mellon funded Media Conservation Initiative at MoMA started. And there's been a ripple effect, obviously, within training in the US on time-based media conservation training as a result of that project and Mellon's support in different areas like NYU.

JC: Yeah. Yeah.

KL: But I think also the other thing I think that's worth touching on about the Museum is also going back to space. And so, it went from Glenn being part-time to having three full-time positions in time-based media conservation but then also creating a space, seeing that opportune moment. And I think that was all your work.

JC: That is another, sort of... Well, all right, how does one think strategically, given certain facts. And the clear fact was, the Museum was going to take our library meeting room space and turn that into a space for servers for the Museum. They were going to do it. And they said, "Sorry, but this is going to happen." I said, "Well, just give me some space for media conservation. We've invested a ton of money. Let's invest just this little bit more so that that money can be even better spent."

And they carved out a space on the 10th floor. And there was kind of a dead space near that, and I said, "Let's expand science conservation. Let's take advantage of that, what was a hallway, and just incorporate that into Science." So, we added maybe a couple hundred, few hundred square feet to Science, and the museum was willing to do that. So yeah, you sort of wind up in a situation where instead of resisting the obvious, you know, you're given a lemon, you make lemonade.

JC: Because I really valued that room, as I said before. That was an architectural statement, that conservation is an intellectual enterprise as well as a craft practice. But we were going to lose it, so let's just make the best of it.

KL: But thinking about opportune time, the fact that media conservation was expanded into a fair amount of square footage, I always think that's in Midtown Manhattan, where space is especially restricted, but then also the timing of David Booth's endowment which is-

JC: Yes, yes, that made it-

KL: It was like an argument for space, but then it was, how do you fund that work to make-

JC: Yeah, I mean, again, I think it's an example, yet again, of that was a really great media conservation team. We could point to success, after success, after success, about what media conservation had done. This is what you need to do to ensure that success, going forward, makes the space, make it state of the art. We're supposed to be leaders, let's continue to lead. So, I was just thinking of something else about what I learned during all of this... anyway. So, media conservation was something that I never saw coming, but, thankfully, Jill and Pip did, and gave me the opportunity to, at least start with my head a little above water and not drowning. There is something else that occurred to me about how media conservation came about, but can't remember it now. Maybe I will later.

KL: Workshops? Fellowships? Labs?

JC: No, no. But anyway... so yeah, that was a huge project. And I think, by the end, we had more people in media conservation than any other section.

KL: Paper.

JC: Yes, did they did... paper yeah, with Fellows, too. So, I guess it's about the same. I count you though, as Media Conservation, just as I nominally counted myself as Paintings Conservation. But one of the other things that was really true, and this question of when Mellon came up with the idea, they needed to make a major initiative in time-based media conservation, how do you train a media conservator? And I never really... it was a hard, hard question. There were times when I would look at, say, things that Ben was doing and saying, “an Information Science background, that should be the person's fundamental training.” I don't know. Somebody in Film and Moving Image Studies, “that should be it.”

But wait a minute, hang on. This is a conservation department. The traditional conservation kinds of training and the inculcation of the ethics and history and standards, that's where you really have to start. It was just so very different. And what really happened was, and this became clear with Glenn's media working group, hierarchies get flattened with this. At least, new relationships are built on a level plane with the registrars, with the curators, with IT, with AV. They each have different needs and even different agendas within that group.

But none of them can get by without the other. I think that was also why it was, I wouldn't say easy, but that really did help in making the case for resources. It is going to have an impact across the museum. Other people will benefit from this, and it will make their lives, well, I hope, easier. So yeah, and I think maybe in a very big picture kind of way, that cross-discipline collaboration was something... that's what I was looking for with the long-standing interest in collaboration between curatorial and conservation, that the breaking down of the silos is a creative function. It creates real ideas and information and momentum within an institution.

KL: So, talking about, hang on. So yeah, I mean, where do you want to go next? Well, talking about collaboration and creative ideas through a museum, which was definitely needed in media conservation, but throughout, as you built already, you've already talked about that with Pollock, being a sort of like foundational moment for research, maybe this is a good moment to go into research projects that you were-

JC: So, my personal research touched on a number of different things over the years. I think I talked early on about the use of infrared. And when I did some work with Suzanne Siano, which I think we published at the 2000 IIC meeting, whenever that one was in Melbourne.[8] we had purchased an IR camera that allowed us to insert different filters so that we could see narrow bands of the IR spectrum. And we would see somewhat different, sometimes radically different, things in these different bands, which was telling us that, okay, these are different materials. And so, the idea of multi-spectral imaging occurred to me just naturally in the IR band. And part of this paper that we wrote using some geoscience imaging software, the geoscientists had been using multi-spectral imaging to identify different things on earth by breaking down the various spectra, and

[8] The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) Biennial Congress, “Tradition and Innovation: Advances in Conservation,” Melbourne, 2000. Coddington and Siano presented the paper “Infrared Imaging of Twentieth-Century Works of Art.”

then merging them or doing different mathematical manipulations of them to see more deeply into each of these images.

So, it struck me that if we were able to take a small area of a Pollock, and using training classification software, we could identify the different materials. We could identify where he was using oil, we could identify where he was using house paint, and we could identify where there was gesso. Very, very rudimentary. I mean, really crude, but the proof of concept was there. So, the idea of multi-spectral imaging sunk its claws into me there. And at some point, Roy Berns from Rochester Institute of Technology, we crossed paths, and started to talk about multi-spectral imaging. And even before that, quite a bit before that, I had gotten to know John Delaney. He had been doing work with the National Gallery, and now he's got a huge empire down there doing hyperspectral imaging, all kinds of really interesting stuff. But I had been meeting and talking with John Delaney, who was interested in the same things in a highly, highly, far more sophisticated way than I was, but further underlined the validity of the idea.

So, I meet with Roy, and Roy was interested in using cameras to get true color renderings. A film camera, or your basic SLR camera in a museum setting, is really only estimating the color. And Roy thought that there were ways to come mathematically much closer to what the actual color was, to measure the color on a painting. So, I did some research with Roy and his group, up at our IT, on developing a new camera. And they did all the heavy lifting on this, obviously. But we became sort of their test bed-- they'd come down, take some images of various works, and take it back and see how their camera is doing in measuring the actual color, because you can take a spectrophotometer, point by point, on any given painting and tell you what the color is, so we would see how close their results matched the spectrophotometer results.

So that became a project that sort of went by fits and starts over a number of years. But it did lead to the development of a high-resolution camera built by Sinar. But you can actually do this with any camera, just with the right filter set-- have your infrared filter removed from in front of the chip, and have a set of three filters in front that will basically give you six different spectra instead of the three spectra that you normally have with a camera. And from that, with some calibrating software where you've calibrated to known targets, you can come very close to a true color rendering of a painting. We never really got to how one might do that on a more three-dimensional object. And we published, gave a number of papers on this, published it a number of different times, and Sinar, as I say, actually developed a camera. I don't know how many they sold in the end. But it never really got traction in the field. And I don't know why people don't want to know what color their painting is because this rather simple technology can tell you that.

I mean, can you imagine how important it would be when you start to talk about, well, how much has the color changed in a painting? "Well, we have an accurate measurement of it from 2005. It's 2040. Let's measure it and see how much it has changed." It just seems so very, very practical to me to have that kind of information. And we can get it. The device that Paul Whitmore developed, the-

KL: Microfader?

JC: Microfader, that gives you information on, obviously, how a color will change, but it also gives you what the color is at that particular moment. And that's another thing that Chris McGlinchey did. Chris modified that instrument to make it more practical and easier to use for conservators. So, there was the work with Roy. We struck up a relationship with the Courtauld Institute at Art, University of London, and they sent over a student, Jane McCree--she's at National Gallery of Ireland now-- and she did a month's worth of really deep research at this time with Roy, really setting up our targets, formalizing how to do this in a conservation setting. Christina Young at Courtauld, who is a rigorous scientific researcher, was part of that as well. And we had another student, I think the year before, from Courtauld, who came over for a month and did research with us on a different topic, or did she? Was this the next topic?

Yeah, she worked with us on flash thermography. So, the idea behind flash thermography was how to image voids beneath the surface of a painting. And the people we connected with they used this technology to find flaws in airplane parts, because you don't want a whole bunch of air pockets and weak points in an airplane wing. But talking to Christina we thought, what about maybe seeing if there was a way to apply this to paintings, find voids beneath paintings. And we did some research, brought this technology to MoMA, imaged a couple of paintings, a Motherwell and another one, that we knew had blind cleavage, points in a painting where the paint is kind of bubbling on top of the surface, indicating a void beneath it., you could tap them and hear these hollow spots. And the way it works is, you just instantaneously heat the surface of the painting, it doesn't take much heat, and you have a sensor on a camera that will watch the decay of the heat, because that air pocket is going to push the heat away from it. So you're going to get less signal anywhere where there's a void, where there is air underneath. And it showed these voids pretty effectively.

It was very, very expensive equipment. It's not something that you would just routinely set up. But again, this was more a proof of concept idea: is flash thermography something that one could do? And then could you adapt an infrared camera to do this? Because if you could capture the signal, most of what was going on with this equipment that these guys brought was some very high, fast processing in the computer to find the rate of change the rate of change of the heat decay on the surface of the painting. And that's what they would print out as an image and show us where a void was, it was in the area that decayed faster because of the presence of the air. It was also very interesting in that we said, "Okay, now let's get a little bit of adhesive into that void and we'll just decide when it's the right amount, because when we've got a good amount of adhesive, when we filled that and it's solid..." and then we took the image after doing that, and there was hardly any adhesive in there at all. It was just really interesting to quantify what we thought we had qualitatively measured that really hadn't, there wasn't that much adhesive, but there was enough adhesive in there to hold it together. So that was an article that we published in *Studies in Conservation.* Other research projects... Well, on the curatorial side, I think I already talked about publishing around the Pollock exhibition. One of my favorites was the Miró *Painting and Anti-Painting* exhibition [MoMA Exh. #2056] with Anne Umland, which was looking at Miró from 1927 to '37, when he made the rather bold claim that he wanted to assassinate painting. And the brief that Anne gave me was, all right, well, can that story, can that effort be told in his use of materials? And it could. At least, I believe it could. And it was wonderful to write an essay for her catalogue on how he would invert the relationship between standard painting materials,

if you were looking for it, if you sort of had that as your premise for looking at a Miró from this period. “How is he screwing with traditional painting technique?” And not just by throwing things on or so on, but by putting nails on the surface, but not just any nails, the nails that you hold a canvas to a stretcher with, how you kind of incorporate the stretcher into an image, so on and so forth. That was a really, really fun one to do.

De Kooning [MoMA Exh. #2169]. That research, I think, was similar to the work I did on Pollock, again collaboratively, in this case, with Susan Lake, who was finishing her dissertation on De Kooning at the time, so seemed a pretty logical person to have along for the ride. And Susan and I would travel and look at some pictures together. The format of the catalogue was such that we just divvied up essays around choosing a particular work from the chronology that John Elderfield was establishing for that catalogue. And we would take one work and write about it, and then Susan would take the next one and we just sort traded back and forth throughout the catalog.

And backing up a little, John Elderfield succeeded Kirk Varnedoe as the chief curator of painting and sculpture. And John was equally wonderful to work with. It was just... every time John would come up to conservation, he'd be coming up to look at a specific painting for one reason or another, and we would start talking and Sharon Deck, his assistant, would be just bothering him and bothering him and bothering him, "John, you're late, you're late, you're late." And you couldn't tear John away from looking at the paintings. It was so great. Another curator I worked with from outside MoMA was Maryan Ainsworth, she and I edited an issue of Art Journal dedicated to Art History and Conservation. It was published in the Summer of 1996 I think and was a publication that really showed there was an appetite for conservation and art history research outside museums as well. Some of those articles hold up really well many decades later.

I don't think that it is just luck that two consecutive Chief Curators… and then Ann Temkin afterwards, wonderful person to look at pictures with, with her own very strong ideas about collections, and so on. But I think, almost in a way, the conservation studio became, not quite a refuge, but a kind of release, back to what drew curators in to wanting to be an Art Historian in the first place. They didn't read some theoretical tome and wind up being a curator. They were interested in objects, and they still are interested in objects, and you just give them half an opportunity and they're happy to take it. So it was, again, Kirk, John, and Ann, kudos to the museum for choosing such good people as Chief Curators.

Let me also go to a research project that is not mine, but Karl Buchberg’s, who struck up a really fruitful and productive collaboration over the years with Jodi Hauptman, first a Seurat drawing exhibition [MoMA Exh. #2020], and Karl did some really land breaking research on Conté crayon and also how these works were made. And Degas monotypes [MoMA Exh. #1279].

But I think the real crowning achievement for the two of them was... Ever since I came to the museum, the question of Matisse's Swimming Pool and how to restore it had been on the table and had been discussed and approached, discussed and approached. Well, Karl decided it was time to do that restoration. It was a really very, very precise restoration where the paper had to be lifted off the canvas and threads scraped away,

pulled away, and then remounted. It became an opportunity to really do the deepest possible dive into Matisse's Swimming Pool, what its physical history had been, how it had been installed, how should we install it at MoMA.

It was truly a joint Curatorial-Conservation exhibition. Karl and Jodi Hauptman were co-curators on it. It was an exhibition that just began with what one learns by being as close to an object as a conservator gets, as we do as a matter of course. And that the depth of information that can be brought forth from that encounter, in this case, became an exhibition.

KL: Did you want to say anything about Cézanne or Pissarro?

JC: That was an exhibition that Joachim Pissarro did. He was on the curatorial staff at the museum for a few years around the time of the reopening in 2004. He did a Cézanne/Pissarro show [MoMA Exh. #1944]. They painted side by side for many years. It was a straightforward exercise for me in looking at paintings, mostly using infrared, to see how each of them built a scene somewhat differently. A Publication never came out of that. There was a website where I presented what I found, which I think is now a dead link, and it does frustrate me a great deal because I expressed my concern that in the future, this information will not be accessible. And the museum said, "Oh, no. Oh, no. Every iteration will bring these things back forward." Maybe Time Machine has access to it, but I don't think you can get to it from the museum website.

KL: So those were research projects that came about through interests through exhibitions. But then we know when you work at a museum, it can also be very unpredictable. I know there are a couple of events such as a Duchamp slashing and a Mondrian incident.

JC: I think it was a disgruntled worker at the museum who one evening slashed Duchamp's *Network of Stoppages* [#390.1970]. It was not a long slash. I think it probably was about four or five inches. But I got to work on it right away the next day. This is a perfect example of earlier, I mentioned how working with Marion Mecklenburg and restoring every day, all day, seven, eight hours a day, had given me real confidence that when it came time to get work done, I could get work done.

As it happens, this painting had been wax lined. We talked about the evils of wax lining before. But in this case, because this painting was wax lined, this slash stayed perfectly aligned. It was very straightforward to put some mend across that with some threads, a technique that I had learned at the Met, and keep it very well aligned. And then to fill the gaps, some paint had been lost, so I put some fills in, and then did the retouching across that tear to match. A dramatic event and a rather undramatic restoration, because luck was in my corner on that because it had been wax lined. That wax lining maybe was unfortunate aesthetically. There was some bare canvas that had gotten darkened and stained by the wax lining. But it made the restoration easier. Not just easier, but really pretty much a non-event in the long run.

The Mondrian, again, luck was a little bit in my corner. Turns out an MFA student from a program in Canada had decided to do a, I don't know, master's thesis or something, called *Primary Vomit*, I think was it. His plan was to vomit red, blue, and yellow on different Mondrian's in different museums. He chose MoMA for his first one [*Composition in Red Blue and Yellow*, #635.1967]. Ingested only blueberries and grape soda and blue and purple flavored things for the day prior to that. He taught himself to projectile vomit and did so on a Mondrian at the museum. I forget which one, maybe understandably so.

This was on a Saturday. I had actually been in the museum that day doing some work on a particular painting on my easel, and had gotten home and got a rather frantic call from museum explaining this. So, I headed right back in and went to work on it. The guards had done the exact right thing. They had taken it off the wall, had not touched it with water or chemicals, not knowing what they were dealing with, but got it into conservation. So, I arrived there. The matter of luck on my side was that this Mondrian had been varnished. I simply took swabs and some water and removed it, made sure that it had not bitten through the varnish or anything, and it hadn't, and we were set to go. Could hang the painting the next day. Those are some of the war stories one has when one works in a museum for that many years.

But then there are the other restorations, like the cleaning of Matisse's *Dance (I)* [MoMA #201.1963]. Again, the kind of encounter that you get with an art object when you stick your nose on it. That there are subtle differences in the hair color of each of those dancers was not really easy to see-- it's a big picture and some of those heads are up towards the top of the picture. But getting years and years of discolored wax and varnish off made those more evident, the choice that Matisse made more evident.

But maybe the one that was maybe most stimulating in many ways was... I think I mentioned during the Pollock exhibition, we had seen these odd marks on the-- I don't think I talked about the restoration of that Pollock before. Did I?

KL: You mentioned that you later discovered that there were restorations with Susan and that you'd removed them.

JC: Right, right. When we were looking at the pictures, there was these very odd fussy marks on it. It was time to finally address this question some, what, 20 years later almost, or maybe more. There were two other Pollocks that needed restoration for different reasons.

So, we have *One: Number 31, 1950* [#7.1968], the one with the odd fussy marks. Certainly, the most iconic Pollock in the museum's collection. Just a classic drip painting. Also, *Number 1, 1949*, which is a transitional picture for Pollock where he is in contact with the canvas most famously with hand prints in the upper left and right corners, but also with a brush. But he's also squeezing from a tube, as he did in his classic pours, and dripping, as he did in his more classic pours. So, he's moving back and forth on the canvas and away from the canvas, which is reflective of the direction he was going with his aesthetic and technique at the time. And then one from 1951, *Echo: Number 25*

[#241.1969]. The problem with *Echo* was that it's mostly raw canvas, and that canvas had discolored, but it discolored unevenly. It was yellower at the top than at the bottom. So, these were three pictures that needed a restoration. We knew in '98 that they might need restoration.

Eventually, I just decided we'll do a project around all three. Got some money to do that. So, we hired Jen Hickey, and Jen Hickey and I worked for, I think, a year and a half or more on these three projects. Now, the details of which are interesting from a conservation standpoint. But again, what this afforded us was an opportunity to explain conservation to a wider audience.

One: Number 31, 1950 is a painting that people come to MoMA to see, and we knew it would be off view for a long time. So here again, Jen and I set up a blog on the museum website. We were much more sophisticated about these things internally in the museum than when we did the *Demoiselles* website many years before. Jen and I blogged regularly on this, setting up an almost primer on, what is evidence when a conservator looks at a painting? What are they looking at? How do they verify what they're seeing? How do they then rationalize whatever action they take? This is the evidence that pushes in a certain direction. Why do we take that action in order to restore the work?

So, in the case of the *One: Number 31, 1950*, these fussy passages, they looked wrong. We analyzed them, we took technical images of them, all pointing to that they were wrong. But this is just the most wonderful part of the story for me. One of my undergraduate art history professors, Charles Rhyne, had taken photos of that painting when he was first at Reed College. in the early 1960s it came to the Portland Art Museum as part of an exhibition of the Ben Heller collection before MoMA had acquired the painting. Charles had taken photos of this. He had taken detailed photos. He had a detailed photo from 1962 showing that this passage was not there. All the other evidence showed that it really was suspicious and probably not right. But since Jackson Pollock died in 1956 and those marks were not there in 1962, we knew they were added by somebody else and we could take them off with absolute confidence.

I knew that Charles had those photographs because when I got the job at MoMA, he said, "I've got these photographs from the Ben Heller collection. Should you ever need them, let me know." Turned out I did need them. He also had photographs of *Blue Poles* that I sent along to National Gallery of Australia, which they were vocally grateful for. That's just such a nice, perfect symmetry that the person who got me so deeply interested in this field gave me the information to really and truly restore one of the great works of art in the Museum's collection.

Echo, that was pretty straightforward. Just evening out the yellowing differences. And *1, 1949*, that was rather more complicated because it had been in the fire at MoMA in '58, '59, whenever, which prompted the formation of the conservation department. It had not gotten burned, but it had become very soiled with soot. The restoration at that time was necessarily aggressive to get all of the grit and grime out. But it included bleaching, and in the subsequent decades, the tonality of the canvas had changed in the areas where it had been necessary to bleach and those that it hadn't.

Much like *Echo*, Jen and I worked to try to bring the color of the background of the painting to a more even level so that the paint stood on its own, rather than fighting with this weaving in and out of a lighter area here in a darker area there, when they should be the same tonality overall. There were a lot of losses of very thin filigreed squeezed paint that we filled and bridged the gaps along the breaks of those.

The most important thing that we did, I think, was restore that work to the original stretcher depth, which was a good quarter, maybe almost half an inch narrower than what it had been displayed on. This was one that we talked about at great length with Ann Temkin. By doing that, and getting the picture plane closer to the wall, it became much more like a mural. It almost became part of the wall. It made me, anyway, think that when Pollock said, "My painting is between the easel and the wall," that he was achieving that there. It was just a matter of small measurements, but we're getting it back to the original depth that he had originally painted it on.

KL: Jim, something that strikes me is when you talk about these very significant conservation projects that you did on these really important paintings, not just in MoMA, but really important paintings, something you talk about is humanism. I remember your lecture that you gave at NYU when you held the Judith Praska lectureship. You gave this really key lecture to which many, many... The room was beyond full.

JC: I'm glad you bring that up, Kate, because I think that we do ourselves a disservice, we do our profession a disservice, when we make it about science. When we make it about something that is part of, but not the essence of, the work of art. To me, we are humanists. In that lecture, I tried to make the case for that rather than just assert it, as I'm doing here. I think that when we talk about preserving cultural heritage, we're preserving human activity. Things that have been made. Things that are important to people, not just to modern and contemporary artists, but to a glass blower from before Christ was born. These are human enterprises. They have been preserved by people. This is a humanistic activity.

Additionally, we don't write about it, we do it. We express that through our hands when we are restoring the work. It is not just an intellectual knowledge, it is a craft knowledge that we also bring to bear. I might get laughed at for saying such things in an academic setting, but I don't think that there is a truer measure of our success than whether we have contributed to that ongoing human dialogue through our restorations writ small and writ large. I really strongly believe that. I've written a paper for what I hope will be a forthcoming Getty book on cleaning that further makes that argument. Humanism, the source of the word is the same as humility. I think that that is a defining characteristic of the good conservator, genuine humility.

KL: Is that a good place to leave it?

JC: Why not? Why not?

KL: Is there something that we missed?

JC: I don't think so. Perhaps there will be when I look at the next transcript. It's a nice place to end because that was an effort by me to try to think back across all the things I've done and the people who had taught me.

KL: With decades of knowledge and experience.

JC: And some hard-earned humility.

PART 3 OF 3 ENDS [01:37:32]