THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**LEO CASTELLI (LC)**
INTERVIEWER:	**SHARON ZANE (SZ)**
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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: I thought, since you've been interviewed so much and so much has been written about you, what I normally do is an extensive life history, but if you want to do away with that, I really want to talk to you about your relationship with The Museum of Modern Art.

LC: Yes, that seems to be the most important thing.

SZ: Some of the facts of your life are well-documented, I think.

LC: I could go a little bit backward and see how I came to find The Museum of Modern Art in New York on my arrival from Europe, particularly under the circumstances of the time, escaping war and destruction. I have to go back a little bit to explain why, arriving here in New York, one of my first visits was to The Museum of Modern Art. I did get involved with contemporary art -- what was contemporary back in '38, '39 -- in Paris because I did open with René Drouin, an architect and friend, that famous gallery on the Place Vendôme, 17 Place Vendôme. I don't know if anybody ever mentions number 17? In a quite splendid location -- let's speak about that a little bit -- between the Ritz hotel and, well, just to give it a definition, on the right-hand side, [Elsa] Schiaparelli had a boutique there. The people who succeeded her are still there, you

see the name Schiaparelli still there. Walking with a friend of mine through the Place Vendôme one day, it must have been sometime in the beginning of '38, we had already discussed the idea of doing a gallery. I was very dissatisfied, as you know, and has been repeatedly said, with what I was doing, so I was looking for something that I really would like to pursue. So having discussed that idea of opening a gallery beforehand, walking through the Place Vendôme we saw that place that I've described between the Ritz and Schiaparelli was available for rent. So we said, "Should we walk in?" It seemed a daunting thing to do. Then we said, "Well, why not? After all, we can go and ask." So we did, and asked for whoever was in charge of the rental of the space. It was at the Ritz, actually, that you had to inquire, at the Ritz hotel. They gave us a name of the person in charge, who, I think, was one of the directors of the Ritz at the time. I even remember the name; it was Auzello. We came in and he was very friendly. He did not consider us as two unlikely people, and said, yes, the place was available, and the thing that we thought would make it impossible right from the beginning for us to consider was that it would be too expensive. So he said, "Well, I'll make it very reasonable to begin with, for one year, two years -- you have expenses, too, to install the place and start your business. So it will be very modest, and we will escalate it as we go along." Now, unfortunately, I cannot remember what the rental was, but it was really very reasonable, or it seemed to us very reasonable, so we said, "Alright, we'll consider it." Then we had to find support, which, actually, had been already promised to us (by Ileana [Sonnabend], who was then my wife), by Ileana's father, Mr. [Mihail] Schapira, who at that time was extremely wealthy, was one of the two or three great industrialists in Rumania, fabricating railway cars, bridges, airplanes and such -- a really big man. So he had seen that I was very dissatisfied with what I was doing and was always hoping that I would find something, in the interest of his daughter, find something that really would click that we could do together. So he said fine, after we showed him the place and gave him the details of our plan. He said, "Fine, I'll advance you 500,000 francs." Now, 500,000 francs, at that time...I haven't

ever calculated what the corresponding value is, but I would say at least $2 million, if not more.

SZ: Which was a lot of money.

LC: It was a lot of money. So, what was our plan? That's now what I have to tell you about. When we got to Paris -- and I did, at least, get there in the beginning of '37 or the end of '36; I don't remember the exact date -- everything was very lavish at that time, so we had taken an apartment in Neuilly, which is not a suburb, really, quite close to Paris, a very nice area with gardens. It had been decorated by Drouin, who was a good decorator. It was very fine, simple taste. You must think that we were living then in the Art Deco period, so it was, for a younger architect, the example of the great designers of the time like Jean-Michel Frank, Pierre Chareau and many others which we can find or may come to mind. So he was in that tradition. He had decorated the apartment in Neuilly in a very sober way, with simple furniture and simple, clear walls. It was very nice. There were no paintings in it at all [LAUGHING]. Actually, the strange thing is, he liked his architecture, his interior design, very much and didn't want paintings to interfere with it. The idea of doing what we were planning to do seemed to be slightly contradictory. But anyway, the idea was this: that he would design the interiors, the furniture, in part, then my task, and his, too, but mine more specifically because I was sort of mildly interested in art....

SZ: Mildly is what you just said.

LC: Mildly, well, it was not really my main focus. I had been interested, with Ileana...we had been buying antiques and also, modestly, watercolors. There was a watercolor of Matisse and something, a landscape, of [Maurice de] Vlaminck...one of the little ones. We were interested in art, but first, to begin with, while we were still in Rumania we

tried to find antiques of interest there, which we found especially in the area of Transylvania, where there had been a tradition of furniture that came from, say, Austria and those parts.

SZ: But in terms of knowledge of modern art....

LC: No, we had very mild knowledge of modern art. My main interest at that time was really literature. I had since my adolescence been reading ferociously in actually four languages. I had learned French early on, when I was about twelve or thirteen, then English when I was about sixteen, seventeen, actually. I spoke German well since I had learned it when I was a child in Trieste, then had spent something like two and a half years in Vienna during the war [World War I] and had gone to school there. So I was really in my adolescence very interested in literature and was reading at the age of fourteen, fifteen, from the French side, say, in the beginning, because I had a teacher from Switzerland who had ambitious plans from me, so I was reading Anatole France, for instance, that's what she suggested that I should read. I read practically everything that Anatole France wrote. I can't remember what other French books I did read at the time. At the same time, I was reading German literature. I was most interested in Thomas Mann especially, *Magic Mountain* and *Buddenbrooks* and all that; then, also, [works by] other German writers -- *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Döblin is one that comes to mind; then the Austrian writers of the time, like Stefan Zweig and Arthur Schnitzler. So that was the German part, and much more, actually, I also read Freud, who was interesting to me because, as every adolescent, I was exploring myself, so Freud was interesting from that point of view, but also because his work was interesting from a literary standpoint; he was just a fantastically good writer. So that was the German part. Then, when I started to learn English,...there was a publishing house at that time, a German publishing house, called Tauchnitz. They published English books, paperbacks, that you found everywhere. I don't remember

what happened to that publishing house. Then I bought my English books in the Tauchnitz edition and reading all kinds of junk to begin with, like Tarzan and whatnot, then getting down to more serious reading. My special idol then, because he also reflected the viewpoint that was interesting to an adolescent, was Aldous Huxley, especially *Point Counterpoint,* which I considered a great masterpiece. Whatever he wrote seemed very, very good to me at the time; I've tried to reread it later on and changed my mind about his importance. But then I read other things. Of course, I was very vanguard in my intentions, and so I felt that I had to read [T. S.] Eliot, and that was probably fairly easy. I read the early things, *The Wasteland*. I read, of course, *Dubliners* by James Joyce and read *Ulysses* here and there, but that seemed very hard and I never really got quite through it. In French at the same time I was reading Proust, of course, and so many other French writers, including, also, the classics, a lot of Stendhal, Balzac, of Zola, all those, the whole spectrum. In English literature, well, there must have been others aside from...oh, Evelyn Waugh, for instance, who I considered very good and who turned out in the end to be a much better writer than Huxley. But that came later on, the classics, like the Brontës and *Vanity Fair* and Dickens and so on, that came a little later. Actually, that came when I was serving in the army, those classics, because in the army while I was waiting, as one does in the army when nothing was happening, during basic training and the other trainings that I had, they had marvelous little books that you put in your pocket. I'm quite sure that I read *Vanity Fair* at that time, and maybe also *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* -- maybe, I'm not quite sure whether I didn't read those earlier, but that was the kind that I was reading in my army days. So that was my constant involvement with literature, and I actually mention it because you wanted to know how I came to know about art, whatever I knew at that time, which wasn't really much. I had this real sense of it because it was connected with vanguard writing.

SZ: Gave you a sense of modern thinking.

LC: Yes, and I had read a book by...not Roger Fry, the other one, the husband of Vanessa Bell...the book was called *Since Cézanne*. That was really the first book about art that I read. What was his name? Well, it was him, and he was the husband of Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf's sister...Clive Bell. There you have it: Clive Bell, *Since Cézanne*. This gave me an idea about art, not about Cézanne but what happened after Cézanne. It was really quite interesting. I would like really to reread that book and see what an Englishman of that time, what he wrote about. Well, probably Picasso and [Georges] Braque and all that. So, really, that was at that time whatever I knew about art. I also went around a little bit to galleries in Paris, not much, but I remember seeing a [Amedeo] Modigliani show at Bernind Jeune. And of course I liked Modigliani very much -- that was easy to like [LAUGHING]....

SZ: What about it appealed to you, this project with Drouin that you wanted to do?

LC: Why, then, being a more literary person, having read some on art and sort of considering vanguard art terribly important, why, then, did this particular project appeal to me? The reason is, I liked interior design very much -- not architecture, really, I didn't know much about that, but I had a real sense of how it should be and we shared this taste with Ileana, my wife. So I always thought, well, having this beautiful house, that I would like to be involved in projects that would involve design, you know? Strangely enough...I'll tell you why and how I got involved with the Surrealists at that time. After I got involved with them and that very snobbish crowd that gravitated around the Surrealists, how, then, at that time, having read about the importance of Picasso, Braque and the others, Georges Rouault, I then rejected them. To me, they were old hat and what was really alive and interesting was Surrealism, which, by the way, I found out later, was just on its way out, it was dying, Surrealism. Anyway, how did I get to know them? We had this place, and I can't remember how.... A friend of mine, so to

speak, not really a friend of mine but a girl that I knew in Trieste who was about my age and probably knew my sister -- I had a sister who was a year or so older than I am, and she knew lots of girls that I got to know at the time, and one of them was Leonor Fini. Now, she was very much part of the Surrealist group and quite influential, socially, in the group,...although her art, as you know, was a bit on the superficial side, she was highly appreciated as a character, which she was, an extraordinary character -- elegant and much involved in the fashionable world, the fashionable Surrealist world of that time, which included people like Marie Laure de Noailles and the de Bestagne from South America and Etienne de Beaumont -- all these elegant people. So she found out, God knows how, that I had this project, and she sort of took over. She said, "Now I am going to show you what to do." Actually, we had only vague ideas. Drouin intended to design some furniture, but we didn't have any idea of what kinds of objects, paintings, we would put into it. So, as far as I'm concerned, her appearance was a blessing because she had very clear ideas of what had to be done there. She barely accepted Drouin's furniture, which she found too classical; she was more for fantasy things. What they liked very much at that time was, to give you an example, those crazy Victorian inlaid tables and things like that -- serendipitous things, that was what they liked in that milieu. Then she said, "We are going to design things for you." She designed an armoire, which I can show you one day, which was in the form of two swan-women; the doors were the wings of the swans and the heads were women. [INTERRUPTION].

SZ: You were describing the armoire.

LC: There was an armoire, which I'll show you. There were two beautiful photographs that Horst took. In front of the armoire, actually, there was Leonor Fini in a dress by, I think, a couturiere of the time called Alix, but I'm not quite sure it was really that or the other one. The other one was a real beautiful one done by Eugene Berman, who belonged

to the Surrealist group and was especially a theater designer, a set designer, a very successful one. After the war he came to New York and designed successful sets here for the Metropolitan [Opera] and other performances. So Eugene Berman did a sort of ruin -- again, I have a photograph of that -- which looked like a Guardi painting, you know. It was really beautiful. I'm sorry it got lost in the shuffle; both got lost, the two of them. So she [Fini] designed that.... Then there were other, smaller things. Meret Oppenheim was around at that time, of fur cup fame; she was part of the group, too. She designed a hand mirror with a golden frame with sort of locks around, golden locks. The idea was that if you looked into it you were framed by these golden locks. Then she designed also a little table; I can't remember exactly what that looked like. Leonor Fini also designed panels in grisaille, with...I can't remember what kind of images there were; there were figures, but I can't remember what they looked like. I was in charge of finding the serendipity things, and I found in Paris--you still find them now -- little tables with mother-of-pearl inlay and other things like that. So I was in charge of that. Drouin designed a dining room table with chairs which was quite, quite nice, but a bit too classical for Leonor Fini's taste. She and Drouin didn't get along at all. He wasn't very happy about those developments at all, but he went along. [Salvador] Dalí wanted to design a chair that would move, a chair that would breathe. It wasn't done because we didn't find...well, the mechanism could have been explored, but it wasn't, there wasn't time for it. But before the opening, when all these things appeared, there were some shows before the place was ready, even. You came in, into a sort of foyer, and then there were a few steps going up flanked with two large columns and then the actual gallery space began. I think there were about four wonderful rooms with windows on the garden of the Ritz, but in that front space we did show two things. One of the things I remember very well. It was a [Pavel] Tchelitchew painting, a new Tchelitchew painting on an easel, and then a Max Ernst painting on another occasion, while work was in progress in the back. The Max Ernst painting was presented by candlelight; I don't know how the Tchelitchew was lit. Or perhaps it was

Tchelitchew that was lit by candlelight...I'm not quite sure about that. The painting of Max Ernst could be traced; it was called *Phenomena*. Or was Tchelitchew's that was called *Phenomena?* We have to investigate that. I could, I think, if I saw it -- I would have to go through Max Ernst's catalogues and books -- I could, perhaps, recognize it, and perhaps even Tchelitchew's painting, too. So that was that. There was a brilliant opening, with all the beau monde of Paris present. The opening took place, I think, late in May, it must have been in May, with a beautiful invitation, a bit precious, designed by Leonor Fini. I think it was in May; that could be determined, perhaps, one day, but I don't have any of those left. It was on for a while and then summer came along and we all went away on vacation, then the war broke out in September, so the gallery didn't reopen until the defeat of France. Then Drouin, who had been in the army, came back and reopened the gallery. It became something entirely different. Now we are already at the end of the war. I was in Europe in army service and on a furlough, it must have been in November or December of '45, I came back to Paris and then saw that the Drouin gallery was functioning and had become something entirely different. Very interesting, by the way: he had [Jean] Dubuffet, he had De Stael, Wols, [Alfred] Manessier, then he also had [Antoine] Pevsner, and he had a good relationship with Nina Kandinsky and so there were Kandinskys there, too. So these are the artists that I remember being there. I saw a few shows, well, some of them right then and there in '45, and then on my way back to the United States at the end of service at the beginning of '46 I saw another show. I must have seen on one of these occasions the [Jean] Fautrier Hostages series, unless it was later, but I think it was then, and certainly not Dubuffet yet, that may have been later, although I knew that he was handling him. There was a show of Art Brut that Dubuffet had organized. But this is already in '45, '46, and my first perception of MoMA came in '41 when I got to America after the long odyssey through the South of France, Algiers, Morocco, Spain.

SZ: A long odyssey -- a two-year odyssey?

LC: No. Actually, my father-in-law, my famous father-in-law, had a villa in Cannes where we went while the war was on. After the defeat of France we stayed on for a while and left only in, I would say, November of '40. Then we went to Algeria. It was complicated, Algiers, Morocco; it took, finally, about two months to get here. But it's a story that's been told, I think, but, if you wish, I can give you more details on another occasion. Anyway, I got here, and since I had been involved with art, with the Surrealists in Europe, well, my first idea was to get in touch with the people who were handling art in New York. I probably had heard about what was going on here. Peggy Guggenheim, certainly, I got to know through Max Ernst. I don't know whether she was my first contact, or perhaps Julien Levy, I don't really know exactly what happened there. But anyway, I got to know Julien Levy, who actually -- they thought I knew much more than I actually did, and Julien Levy proposed to me, "Why don't we work together, do something together?" I said, "No, no," because I didn't feel competent at all to do something like that.

SZ: What was his position in New York at that point?

LC: He had that famous gallery, the Surrealist gallery. He was showing, apart from [Arshile] Gorky, he was showing [Joseph] Cornell -- the Surrealists in general. Of the Americans, it was Gorky and Cornell that he showed. Actually, the painting that you have at MoMA, which is called *Summation* -- a big drawing, actually -- which, well, much later, after Gorky's death there was a big exhibition at Julien Levy's, in '48, of wonderful paintings, you know. In the back room there was a floppy big drawing that was not even put on stretchers or framed, just leaning, somehow, against the wall. I liked it of course; I like Gorky very, very much. That's so much later, because then I had know [Willem] de Kooning and [Jackson] Pollock and so on, so I was very familiar with American art, so my interest in Gorky was quite logical, natural. I asked Julien if I

could have it, how much was it, so he said $900. That was in '48. I said, "Well, Julien, I can't pay $900. Could I pay you in installments of $100?" And he said fine. So then I got this painting and it stayed with me for quite a while until I sold it to Ben Heller and then Ben Heller sold it to MoMA.

SZ: Back to 1941, and coming to the Museum.

LC: In 1941 I got in touch with the art world and I came to the Museum right away, of course. It was the logical thing to do to see contemporary art. Modern art, not contemporary. At that time, it wasn't called contemporary art.

SZ: We can talk about that some other time. [LAUGHTER]

LC: It was called modern art. I still call it modern art. For me, the concept of modern is what's being done at any given moment, not a historical thing. I think it's a misnomer to put modern art in the past. Anyway, I went to see The Museum of Modern Art with great trepidation. I had some drawings with me of Dalí, very nice early drawings, and after being sort of full of admiration and love for that museum, going through it, and being amazed at the fact that I didn't know anything about art at all until I got there. It was beautifully structured. The structure I understood, finally, what came from where. So I was full of admiration for Alfred Barr, who seemed a demigod to me at that time, I wouldn't dare to speak to him. I went to see [Monroe Wheeler].... I think he's died in the meantime, he'd been there for a long, long time. His name will come back to me.

SZ: He did what?

LC: He was not really a curator. He was around until quite recently.

SZ: Working there?

LC: Working there.

SZ: In painting?

LC: He was not working particularly in painting and not even in drawing. Perhaps he was in drawing at the time. Bill Lieberman wasn't there yet, I think. He may have been in drawing. We will come back to it.

SZ: You went to see him?

LC: I wanted to express my love and admiration for the Museum, to do something for them, so I went to see him. He was the one who seemed to be accessible. I said that I wanted to offer these drawings to the Museum in recognition of the wonderful things that the Museum was doing for me. If you go and look at what's there, you will find my Dalí drawings in your collection.

SZ: That was not Jim Soby?

LC: No, no, not in the same class, but a fixture there that has been there til the very end.

SZ: I should know, but I just can't....

LC: He was there and he probably died only one or two years ago.

SZ: Monroe Wheeler.

LC: Monroe Wheeler, yes.... So I went on looking at things in the Modern. I got very involved with Peggy and what she was doing there at Art of This Century. I, strangely enough, never met at that time -- [Fernand] Léger, who was there; [André] Breton was there, too -- I for some reason never met them. This was all before I got into the army, so it was in a period of adjustment. I got into the army quite late, really, because of my age, so they got me in '43. So I was there in '41 and '42 and almost all of '43. I decided that I wanted to do something. I felt that I couldn't do anything in the field of art because I had no capital, no money, and I realized I didn't know enough, so one of my ambitions was to study history. I went to Columbia [University] and they gave me credit. Since I had a law degree I was considered as having had one or two years of graduate studies and could work for the Ph.D. So that's what I did until I got into the army. I had half-finished; there were a few things missing. I would have gotten a masters degree at least, but I didn't get that because there were some courses that I hadn't completed. I went into the army, so that was interrupted. All along at that time I was interested in art and I went to the Museum....

SZ: Do you remember any of the exhibitions at that time?

LC: No. I went to the Museum. Also, Peggy was nice and invited me, and I saw in her apartment, which was near the Museum at the time, in the Fifties off Fifth Avenue, the Pollock that you have there in your collection. I think it's the *She-Wolf*. So I began to get some kind of education in American art, but very little, because there was very little at that time. This I found out. There was Pollock, there was Gorky, but Gorky...I don't think I became aware of Gorky at that time. After that time there was the war, and then I came back, and as soon as I came back, I got in touch with the art world again, with Peggy or whoever it was, and Clem Greenberg knew about my interest and he said, "I'll take you around and show you what's going on here, what the young American artists are doing." He showed me a few, but the one that was really important, that

interested me very much, was de Kooning. I knew about Pollock already. So I got involved in all that, seeing de Kooning, getting to all these parties. I remember a party at Gorky's -- it must have been in '46, '47 -- where Pollock was there and very, very drunk. So I sort of functioned in the middle of that world, without still having any idea of doing something about it except being a terribly involved and enthusiastic onlooker.

SZ: What was the Museum's place in that world at that time?

LC: The Museum, actually, didn't seem to play a great role in that world. What happened is that not so long after that I did that 9th Street show, and that was sort of like a salon de refusés, you see. It included, apart from the masters -- de Kooning, [Franz] Kline, Pollock, David Smith and so on -- all the younger generation down to [Robert] Rauschenberg, who was the youngest member of the group. Most of these artists, being the heirs of Abstract Expressionism, were all followers of either de Kooning or Pollock, de Kooning, especially. Pollock didn't have many followers; strangely enough, nobody could do something after Pollock, but they could exploit de Kooning to the hilt, which they did -- [Conrad] Marca-Relli and...who else was there? Well, any number of them. We can go into that later.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

LC: ...who, actually, were all following in the path of de Kooning, especially. Anyway, at that time, to come back to your question, I found out that the Modern had not been involved with many of the younger people. They maybe had a Pollock at that time. They had a de Kooning; I don't know when they bought the de Kooning, that wonderful black-and-white de Kooning that you have, which was in an Egan show in '49. In '49

[Charles] Egan had a show of de Kooning, and maybe at that time the Modern acquired that painting, or maybe they acquired the painting later, I don't know. I know that...well, I presume, rather than I know, that they had at that time already a Pollock, and that was about all they had of the younger American artists. I must also tell you that, since I had been involved with the Surrealists, when I came here I got to know Matta, who had a great influence on me. I admired his wit, his spirit, and his painting very much, although even then, I think I realized that Gorky was the better painter of the two, in spite of the fact that Gorky had been influenced in a certain way by Matta. That relationship ended tragically, as you know. Matta was a really great friend of mine and I saw him constantly, and he was a great influence on my development because of the freedom of his spirit and his understanding of what art really was about, essentially. Then somebody else that I met at that time who became a great friend was [Frederick J.] Kiesler, who I had a great affinity with because he came from Vienna and had a certain background that we had in common, having not only been in Vienna when I was quite young, but I had gone on being interested in Austrian arts, especially writing. Strangely enough, the Museum also hadn't caught onto that, until later, not in Austrian art. The Museum, at that time -- this I say in retrospect; I was then very pleased after I got to know Viennese art better -- didn't have any [Gustav] Klimt. They had [Oskar] Kokoschka; he was the only one. Klimt and [Egon] Schiele were not there.

SZ: In this milieu that you're describing in New York after the war, Alfred Barr really wasn't there and Dorothy Miller....

LC: Alfred Barr knew everything: he was omnipotent. The fact that perhaps the Museum had neglected the younger generation, which I sort of realized when I did that 9th Street show, didn't at all change my mind about the work of the Museum. Well, they were a bit slow, that's all, as a museum should be, in order to decide after something really had become totally acceptable and integrated in the scheme of things. No, I

never lost my admiration for Barr, never. I never sort of thought him of being backward and not seeing what was going on. He saw quite well. For instance, I have the great example of his incredible enthusiasm for my first Jasper Johns show. So there I found that he was still young and when something very important came along he would understand it right away, he and Dorothy Miller. But he, without Dorothy Miller, he came actually without her and then she came later, he never understood, never liked Rauschenberg's work particularly and didn't quite understand why I considered him so important, but he accepted that. He said, "Well, you probably understand things better than I do." I remember being at dinner with him at the Modern just before he went to have his surgery that then knocked him out. He still mentioned the fact of Rauschenberg to me that evening. We were sitting at the same table, and he said, "I really still don't quite understand Rauschenberg, but since you really think that he's so important, I accept it."

SZ: I wonder what you think it was that he couldn't react to.

LC: I understand it very, very well indeed, because I, myself, when I first saw Jasper Johns -- that was in '57, right after I had opened the gallery...I had had a going relationship with Rauschenberg since '51 because I had put one of his paintings that I liked very much in the 9th Street show. I had picked it. I went around with [Jack] Tworkov and he had at that time a show at Betty Parsons -- that was in '51 -- so we picked something there. It was, curiously enough, the famous Number painting, which obviously influenced Jasper to do numbers, in a different way. I had admired Rauschenberg's work very much when he did the black paintings, the red paintings, and then he started doing his combines and putting stuffed animals, birds -- at that time, the goat wasn't there yet -- but some stuffed animals, maybe the guinea hen that was in the collection of Claire Zeisler, who just died, that Claire Zeisler bought at my first Rauschenberg show. That probably was the first stuffed animal that he used. He had the *Bed* already

that I then showed in my '58 show. I liked the *Bed,* in spite of the fact that at that time it looked pretty horrifying, but I didn't like the other things as much; they seemed disheveled, disorganized. I was always for more classical structure in paintings, which you may say, why, then, Pollock? Well, Pollock is very structured and I never had any doubt about the fact that he was not disheveled at all. There was in the case of Rauschenberg, it seemed to me, a lack of structure, although it was there because he has that Cubist structure, squares....

SZ: And Barr perceived that?

LC: Barr found him, as I did to a certain degree, although I found him important in spite of the fact that I didn't quite go along with what he was doing, he just stopped at that disheveled kind of character that the painting had and perhaps he was against the ties that he attached to the painting and the birds and so on. The fact that it was Expressionist, also, really, by nature.... He never was very much in favor of the Expressionist movement, Barr. He functioned as I did, more or less. We were very close in our feeling about art. Maybe that exaggerated Expressionist element in Rauschenberg was something that he did not quite like. Let's see how we got to that now.... Yes, my admiration for Barr. He then came and got completely bowled over by Jasper. That sort of clinched things for me. He was a great man, he understood something right away, as I did.

SZ: Was that the first time you met Barr?

LC: No, no, I had met him before, but I always felt at a little distance. For me, he was a person that I didn't venture to talk to, really, at that time. Then, of course, I think that after he came and spent hours there to look at Jasper's painting and discussing it and thinking about it and having Jasper around to speak to Jasper about them, too, we

were from then on speaking terms. I lost my timidity.

SZ: Do you want to stop now? We can pick up there next time.

LC: Yes, perhaps we will stop at this time.

SZ: I think this is a good place. Thank you.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **LEO CASTELLI (LC)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: **NOVEMBER 16, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

LC: I think I told you about the tremendous respect that I had for [Alfred Barr]. I was in awe of him. I seemed to be somebody who didn't know enough, wasn't important enough, to have a proper intellectual relationship with him. Of course, when he came to see the first Jasper Johns show, in January of '58, then we got to talk about things. There was a real reason for conversing with him, that changed my attitude towards him, and he became a human being instead of being a demigod. So that changed my relationship to him. I didn't see him very often. He came, of course, to see my shows. Rauschenberg, whom he didn't particularly care for or understand, his [Rauschenberg's] show came just a month or two after the Jasper Johns show. Then Barr got very involved, I remember, with [Frank] Stella, the black Stellas especially, although in that particular case it was Dorothy Miller who saw the black paintings first with me in Stella's studio. In the fall of '59 I took her there after seeing them a few days before. She was looking at that time for some new young artist to include in her *Sixteen Americans* show; she hadn't completed her selection yet, although the show was pretty close to being opened at the end of the year, in December. Anyway, she was very enthused about Stella. I'm not quite sure that Barr ever came to the studio to see those paintings, but he obviously did when they were installed at the Museum. When it came to purchasing one after the end of the show, he expressed his great

enthusiasm for them. He understood them perfectly well, went along with Dorothy in her enthusiasm. When it came, then, to purchasing one at the end of the show, as Barr usually did with a show of this type, he chose one. The title of the painting...what was it? [*The Marriage of Reason and Squalor,* 1959] It was sort of a double-door type painting, and the board refused to purchase the painting, which was $1200 at the time. So Barr came to see me, or I went to see him, I don't know exactly how it happened, and asked me if he could have it for a lower price, which would permit him to purchase it without the board's consent. At that time, of course, prices were totally arbitrary, although I had sold a black Stella painting for $1200 in a group show that I had had previously in the fall. I wanted to know what the price was that he could afford to pay without consulting the board or having the permission of the board. He said, I think, $700 or $750, I'm not quite sure now. It should be investigated.

SZ: I have seven hundred.

LC: Seven hundred, yes. So I said, fine, it was fine with me. He represented it to the board, just to tell them that he was acquiring it on his own reconnaissance and was then told, from what I heard later, by whoever it was on the board expressing the opinion of all of them, that this painting would end up in the basement and would never be seen again. Anyway, that's what happened with the black Stella and with Barr in that connection. In 1960 I had my second Jasper Johns show -- or was it '60 -- anyway, my second Jasper Johns show, Barr was disappointed in it, because what he had seen in Jasper probably was more the symbols, the Flags, the Targets, and less the way they were painted. It became quite obvious that, after all, Johns was an heir to the way in which the Abstract Expressionists used paint, so he saw him as retro, going backward, and becoming again more involved with the previous way of handling paint and less with the symbols. The symbols were also less clear in that second show. He was a bit disappointed there, I remember that. The Pop art that came about a bit later on, like

[Roy] Lichtenstein and [Andy] Warhol and [James] Rosenquist, I can't remember clearly what his reaction to those was. You would have to ask Dorothy Miller, who is still alive and kicking, and see what she remembers of Barr's reaction to Pop art. I mentioned that there was a dinner at MoMA, I don't remember what the occasion was, and I was sitting at the table at which there was Alfred Barr, who sat next to me so that I could talk to him, Dorothy Miller, and also Mrs. Barr [Margaret Scolari Barr] were sitting somewhere at the same table. So we got to talking, Alfred and I, and he expressed admiration for what I had accomplished at the gallery, my choices of artists. One choice, however, although he took it for granted that he was important, that he still didn't quite understand was Rauschenberg. Actually, what resulted from this incomprehension was that the Museum at that time never got a good Rauschenberg. When he was included in the *Sixteen Americans* show with Johns, there was a good painting there, furnished by Ileana Sonnabend, called *The Magician,* in the group of paintings that was shown. I think *The Magician* would have been a logical choice, but Dorothy wasn't that sure about Rauschenberg either, so that no acquisition of a Rauschenberg was made at that time. Stella was acquired; of Jasper Johns, they had acquired several already. They had bought them in 1958. I don't know whether they bought another one; that can be determined. Anyway, they had already bought two or three or four, so there was no resistance to Jasper Johns. But they didn't buy Rauschenberg at the time of my show in '58 and then again didn't buy one from the group that was shown in the *Sixteen Americans* show, which was rather exceptional because they usually picked one of each painter. Then they got one from Philip Johnson called *First Landing Jump,* which is hanging at the Modern now in the room that is now reserved for Rauschenberg, Johns and [Cy] Twombly, which is right, but [it is] not one of the early important paintings of Rauschenberg's and therefore not a great choice. I think until they got the *Bed* from me recently, they didn't really have a good Rauschenberg painting in their collection. Let's see what else, since we are on the theme of the Museum. I can't remember, perhaps you can tell me...well, I can find

out, because, after all, I have that book that appeared on Alfred, which is not very good by the way, very sloppy, but still there would be some dates there concerning his illness and so on. I think the dinner I talked to you about in which he said that he admired my activity. It extended to Rauschenberg, too, but he still did not quite understand what was so great about Rauschenberg. So I would like to know when that event occurred, because it was the last time that I saw Alfred. He shortly thereafter went to the hospital, was operated upon and never recovered consciousness, although he dragged on for quite a while.

SZ: He left in 1967.

LC: So the event must have taken place in 1967.

SZ: The same year, you think?

LC: Yes.... After that, MoMA went through a rather confused period, without anybody really being there solidly at the helm.

SZ: You mean at the helm in terms of the collections?

LC: In terms of the collection, not where the internal policy was concerned. Well, everything functioned with everything else, but, anyway, there seemed to be a period of transition until...I can't even remember the names of the people who succeeded Alfred. You probably could help me there.

SZ: Alfred for a long time was not director of the Museum. It was René d'Harnoncourt.

LC: Yes, but we don't speak of directorship; that's a different matter. What's important is

the director of the collections.

SZ: But after Alfred retired, Bates Lowry came in, not only as director of the Museum, but took back the function of director of the collections.

LC: Bates Lowry, yes. He took some kind of beating. He really was a poor choice that they made at that time and did regret, and his departure was a bit, let's say not scandalous exactly, but not elegant. After Bates Lowry, who did they have?

SZ: Then they had a period of time when they had no one. Then they got John Hightower.

LC: John Hightower didn't leave any mark there, and then after that, Bill Rubin, who then put the ship back onto its proper course, although I felt at that time and still feel that he focused too much on the collection of Picassos and Braques and the earlier period and didn't pay enough attention to later developments, although he knew what was going on. There was one exception to that, and that was his love for Frank Stella from the beginning, and his belief that he was the greatest. He did appreciate other artists, too. He appreciated what Johns was doing. He had a great understanding for what was going on, except that he just decided to focus on something else and did a really quite marvelous job there, perhaps a necessary job.

SZ: Do you think it was necessary?

LC: In the long run, perhaps, what he did there was of great importance. In the long run. In the short run, evidently, the Museum became a museum of modern art and no longer a museum of contemporary art, so certain things were, of course, neglected. One great neglect there that has its consequences today is the fact that they didn't provide proper space for the development of contemporary art, which is a problem that they still have

there. It's gotten to the point there only recently the late '50s are on permanent display -- Jasper Johns of the late '50s, Rauschenberg of the late '50s, with Twombly there is a little overlap into the '60s. But there is still, which is very odd, no space provided for Pop art, for the waves of great developments that followed upon Jasper Johns, Rauschenberg and Twombly, namely, Pop art -- Stella was taken care of, we'll forget him -- but Pop art, Minimal art, post-Minimal and Conceptual art. They had examples of everything that appeared and disappeared, but in a certain way, what you could see at the Whitney [Museum of American Art], in its permanent collection, gave a visitor from Mars a better idea of what was going on in American art than the Modern. Now, this is something that I speak to Kirk Varnedoe often. [TAPE INTERRUPTION] We discuss that pretty often, and, of course, the great problem there is space. I think that what the Modern should have now is enough space, and even if they didn't show anything new, as they do now, and even if, for instance, they devoted all the space on that floor, after Johns, Rauschenberg and so on, to further developments, I think that the space would not be sufficient to show what happened, especially Minimal art being rather large. All the Pop art period is missing; there is an occasional Lichtenstein or an occasional Rosenquist or whatever they have there, but you don't get a sense of what happened up to, let's say, the early '70s. After that, I forgive them hesitations. From then on you can be tempted to show this or that, focus on something or other, withdrawing it and then showing something else, to judge a little bit tentatively what seems important or not. But I think that the Museum should have a complete overview of what happened in American art until the early '70s. That's something that seems to me absolutely indispensable and should be worked at. The reason why this didn't happen goes back to the time when new space was often discussed and the problem was never properly solved, was solved only in a provisional way by adding to the existing building. So, that's something that will happen, but it will take a few more years before this can be done. You see, the [The Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum], whatever you may think of the Guggenheim -- it's a very different type of museum of

course -- but they, especially [Thomas] Krens now, has been very conscious of the importance of space, to the point where now he is opening a branch in SoHo with something like a 40,000-square-foot capacity, which is more than the Whitney has. That's a very important event, and I think it's a good thing for them to do. I don't know how they are going to use the space, but I hope they use it well and do certain things that the Modern just cannot do because of the lack of space.

SZ: Are you talking about quantity of space? There's also the issue of the fact that the rooms aren't....

LC: No, no, just quantity. Also, the space that they have now where they have the temporary shows is not a very agreeable space. You have a sense that you are somewhere in a basement. There is a lot to be done there, and it's a bit unfortunate that there was this contretemps with Kirk's *High and Low* show, which sort of stopped him a little bit in imagining and doing things.

SZ: You mean it frightened him?

LC: It didn't frighten him, but it's a setback for him. Instead of going ahead and being daring, he just now seems to be holding horses and not really coming up with something new. Perhaps he does at the meetings of the board, but nothing appears. You have a very nice new curator in Rob Storr, but again, we are not sure about what he's going to accomplish, although he went a step forward there and showed different things that perhaps previous curators wouldn't have shown. No, it's unfair to the others, because the younger ones under Rubin, for instance, did try to do things in smaller spaces and without much fanfare, so they didn't make a dent, but attempts were made to show new things at the Modern by the various curators under the stewardship of Bill Rubin. So, what the Modern really should think about, in my

opinion, is space. They had thought about that already quite a few years ago and had contemplated getting a building in SoHo or somewhere in this particular neighborhood, but it never came about, so they still have the problem and it may take many, many years before it gets solved.

SZ: This brings up an issue of what a museum's place should be in contemporary....

LC: What the function of the Modern is?

SZ: I'm really thinking in particular of the kinds of things your gallery did, and then you have the Museum and how those things mesh.

LC: They're meshing quite beautifully. A certain number of galleries have been in existence through the past twenty or so years or more have meshed their activity quite beautifully with the museum activity. I think that perhaps the purchase activity hasn't been brilliant either. There have been so many wonderful shows here and at Ileana Sonnabend's, at Mary Boone's, and other important galleries, and they have not been able to buy the best material there. It went into the hands of certain collectors, one of them, for instance, just put his head around the corner here, Si Newhouse. The Museum profited from some of his purchases, for instance, the Lichtenstein *Matisse Dancers* come to mind; they would never have been able to buy that, and they got it as a gift. But even in the gift area, I think they could have done better by pursuing it more closely, seeing, well, here there was a show of so-and-so, which had some magnificent things. They should have, I think, followed that and seen where those pieces went and then try at a later date to get them -- as they did in the case of Si Newhouse and the *Matisse Dancers*. They certainly missed the developments that occurred in the past fifteen years. After the Abstract Expressionists, quite a number of really important paintings that appeared on the scene in the market that they couldn't

purchase because of lack of funds to begin with, but also lack of energy, in a sense. Funds or ways are always found to buy something incredibly important by van Gogh or whoever when necessary, but that effort was not made in order to get something very important of one or the other contemporary artists that appeared in the last thirty years or so. So that's something that they could have done better. The other museums...well, we won't even speak about the Metropolitan [Museum of Art], whose acquisition policy is just below par. They got themselves a good collection, I don't know how and why. They shouldn't have gotten the Muriel Newman collection; they didn't deserve that. Anyway, they buy things right and left, they get gifts of inferior material, so what they're doing is not to be considered seriously. I can't understand how an intelligent man like [Philippe de] Montebello lets things slide there and doesn't seem to pay any attention to what's going on in the contemporary department, or at least to all appearances he doesn't pay any attention to it. We have a quite wonderful policy, a very curious one, at the National Gallery [of Art] in Washington, where Jack Cowart had the very ingenious idea, since they don't have funds for the acquisition of contemporary art, to reserve important spaces for the artists that he considers important -- Rauschenberg, Johns, Lichtenstein, [Ellsworth] Kelly, Stella and so on -- and other artists to lend the paintings that they own, so that they would give them wonderful space where they could show five, six, seven paintings. Also, they ask not only the artists, but also the collectors or the galleries. I, for instance, have in my collection various paintings that are at home or in the storage space. Instead of putting them in storage or keeping them at home, I've been very happy occasionally or sometimes even permanently loan them to the National Gallery, such as *Fool's House* by Jasper Johns or the *Washington* of Lichtenstein. They're there on loan. When you walk into the National Gallery you find out at least that there have been in the past twenty or thirty years some important artists that the whole world has taken notice of, and you can see them there when you cannot see them to that same degree here; you have to go to the Whitney. Up to the Abstract Expressionism you see a splendid group at the Modern, a group that you

don't see anywhere else, but you don't see there the very important development that occurred in America, that the whole world really admires and [that] influenced European art that occurred in the '60s and '70s...no, the late '50s and '60s, after Abstract Expressionism. That's something that should somehow be corrected. As a general idea, one shouldn't say that the Modern has to stop somewhere. Yes, they have to have stops, but not stop definitely somewhere and say, "We go up to 1960 and that's the end of it." I think that would be a wrong policy. They should, after a while, when everything's said and done, let's say, ten years, twenty years...twenty years is a sufficiently long time to then find out, well, what do we do now? What has acquired permanent value and should be there in the Museum just as the Abstract Expressionists or that brief, transitional period that Johns and Rauschenberg are. That, I think, is something that should be attended to.

SZ: But you think it's not.

LC: It will. They are attempting to do it, but there is no space to do it. They will do it, I'm quite sure that Kirk would do it if he had the space, but the main concern now should be to solve this problem. I don't know how they could solve it, frankly. They've made some various half-hearted attempts. There's a question of some buildings next door there that could be used, but nothing is done and I think many, many years will elapse before we see at the Modern a proper appreciation of perhaps one of the greatest periods in art history since the beginning of the century. So that's something that they should think about and haven't. There is really so much wealth there at the Modern. Not actual wealth -- there are no funds for acquisitions and things like that -- but wealth of very interested people who have that wealth and could in some way, perhaps, place it more at the disposal of the Museum, you know, the Rockefellers and people like that. There is still a lot of money there that could be used not so much later but right now. It's difficult for me to judge how much money those various people can afford to give. They

do give, but not quite enough to solve a major problem. But again, when you are not inside something, you jump to conclusions and solve problems that seem simple to you and that probably are infinitely complicated, the funding of the Museum, the funding by all those very wealthy people.

SZ: And of course the whole situation is very different than it was twenty years ago.

LC: There was a wonderful moment -- it wasn't so wonderful -- when the market went haywire and some people felt very generous because we thought, well, what does it mean, giving the [Rauschenberg] *Bed* and the next time the prices will go up for this, that and the other and it's a relatively minor sacrifice. Now, with the market in total recession, a gift of the *Bed* seems to be an extravagant gesture which I probably would not give now. Anyway, it's a good thing that the possibility occurred at that time for me to give that gift without any special compunction.

SZ: What was it about that time that made you want to do that?

LC: There were many considerations. Bill Rubin had actually been after it a long time and I appreciated it very much, since he was, generally speaking, not involved very actively in the contemporary field. The fact that he, Bill Rubin, who was so involved with Cubism, wanted it so badly and considered it very important was the first push to do something about it. My wife, [Toiny], who died four years ago, was very much against it; she wanted the *Bed* to stay at home.

SZ: It was in your private collection at home.

LC: It was always at home, yes. So, as long as she lived, I couldn't do anything about it, because she wanted to keep it. After she died, the situation changed, and there was

more discussion about it with Bill and with Kirk, and then the market situation was such that one felt that a gift could be made without too much sacrifice. So I did it. So it was very good. Actually, the Museum profited from that fever that got hold of the art world during a couple of years, where the sky seemed to be the limit.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SIDE 2, BLANK

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **LEO CASTELLI (LC)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: **9 JANUARY 1992**

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

LC: I am not specifically looking for young artists, always having in mind that I would like to go out and discover new artists and show them. I can't even remember who it was, somebody suggested to go and see the show of [Rob] Pruitt and [Jack] Early at the 303 Gallery on Greene Street, Lisa Spellman, and my just dropping in and being delighted and enchanted with what I saw there. They had this show with the beer cans and things like that, I just left it at that and told everybody how delighted I was by the show. They found out and came in at one point or another. Actually, Pruitt had been working at Ileana Sonnabend for a while, installing shows, that kind of thing, as young artists do, so I knew him. I also knew Early. He sort of did come around. I really didn't know at all before I went to see that show at Lisa Spellman's what they were doing. I knew the one from upstairs, the other one because he's a very typical redhead, so once you see him, you can't forget him. Anyway, I went to see the show, was delighted, they came around, he from upstairs, or maybe he wasn't working upstairs anymore but certainly Early, who always used to come around. I told him and I told Jack how delightful I found the show. There's also somebody like Asher Edelman, who liked the work very much and had actually bought an important piece, a pyramid of beer cans, that he then included in the first show of his museum in Lausanne last summer. So it was sitting there with all the other important artists he had collected and

many of which you could see in his apartment on East End Avenue. So he liked them very much, was delighted with them. I left it at that, and one day they came in, both of them, sort of embarrassedly and shyly, and said, "We know you liked our shows so very much, could we have a show at your gallery?" I said, "Yes, of course, I'd be delighted to show you at my gallery, but what about Lisa Spellman?" "Oh," they said, "she has limited space and she would be just delighted if we worked together." I said fine in that case, no problem. As you know, we then sent out the announcement saying that Leo Castelli and Lisa Spellman have this show. It's not that I took them away from her. We share them now completely. That's the idea. I said yes, of course. Then I was thinking, I had quite a schedule of shows already for the fall and then the next year, and I really didn't even know when a space would be available. Actually, I hadn't even considered showing them at 420 West Broadway. I thought it might be fine to show them over at Broadway or at the 65 Thompson space. I said, "Well, let me think about it. Let me see what the schedule is and then tell you when and how I can do it." Then I spoke to Ileana about it. I told her that they wanted to show here and that I was thinking of showing them either at Thompson or perhaps Broadway. She said, "You are crazy." "Why do you say I'm crazy?" "You're crazy. You have to show them at your headquarters here. They are very important, and you cannot just show them as a side show." So I agreed with her and I looked at my schedule and I found that January of this year, now, was available. So, that's what occurred. So you see how history is written. The show had great success, really, I had an enormous crowd at the opening and there was a very nice party. They sort of figured things out. I asked them, "What are you going to do, party-wise?" They said, "Well, something that we would like to do is have a party at Nell's on 14th Street." I said, "I know Nell quite well. Of course, that's entirely feasible." I phoned Nell and Nell said, "Fine. You can have it from seven to ten, exclusively for your crowd, and then if anybody wants to stay on, other people will come in and they can just mingle." So we had that wonderful party, which started at seven after we closed here. The idea was that we would take about one hundred

people, but then I told them they could invite anybody who's around, so we had two hundred people, we doubled the figure. There was general enchantment with the show and ever since, more people than usual have been coming. During the day, during the week, there are usually not many people, but there's a constant crowd here now, so it is in a very different way that kind of attraction that Jeff Koons has, though, of course, it is something very different. I frankly prefer this to the Koons show. Although I love Koons and think he's a very important artist, I feel that in his last show, maybe, he got himself into some kind of corner. He shouldn't have gone...I don't even say "as far," because it's not a question of distance but of doing something is not transcendent enough. There is an idea there, of course, but it is not transcendent; it becomes something rather cheap.

SZ: There certainly were a lot of very different opinions about that show.

LC: Nobody can have found that his show was right. It wasn't. Who says that it was right either is brainwashed for saying so or else they do like pornography and therefore liked that aspect of it. I think the show was not right, so that modest things like a bouquet of flowers or a couple of little dogs were much better works than the important paintings. Anyway, so much for him. But this show [of Pruitt and Early] has that kind of attraction that Koons has. I'm selling lots of things. For instance, Asher Edelman, who got that important piece at the last show, it was not so long ago, it was actually the spring of last year, told me, sight unseen, to reserve the largest piece. The one that I reserved for him is the one that's facing you as you come in the door. Other people, all kinds of people, bought pieces, even an artist, Ford Beckmann, whom you may know about, bought one of those units. They are very inexpensive, as prices go, $3,000 for a small unit and they go up to $12,000 for a very large one, or even a bit more, $15,000, for the Chevy pick-up van. So $15,000 is the highest price we have on those things.

SZ: That's not really a very high price.

LC: No, that's really low, especially since, after all, all of this material is costly. While they were doing it, I had advanced the money for materials and whatever went into it, and they spent $21,000 for this show to make up these pieces, to get the material, etc. So you see that the prices are exceedingly modest, if we take just $1,000 or $2,000 off the top for fabrication, the prices are really modest.

SZ: And you really like these things.

LC: I like them very much. I like the spirit, I like the way they do things. I don't know whether you read the statement that they wrote. You must read that. It really is something very thoughtful that they're doing, not just funny. They're really incredibly bright and pleasant young men -- twenty-seven and twenty-eight, respectively.

SZ: That's young. So you're still looking, you're always looking.

LC: I'm not really looking. That's a question. I'm interested in what's going on. Of course, since the early '70s, few things have happened that I consider really sensational and noteworthy in the art world. Lots of things have been done, lots of good things have been done, but nothing that really...not nothing, and I'll tell you about the exceptions, but anything that really had the same kind of importance as...I don't even mention the Abstraction Expressionists, but starting with Johns, Rauschenberg, Twombly; then Stella and the Pop artists Lichtenstein, Warhol, [Claes] Oldenburg, Rosenquist; then after that, the Minimalists, [Donald] Judd, [Robert] Morris, [Dan] Flavin, Carl Andre; after them, the post-Minimalists, importantly, [Bruce] Nauman, [Richard] Serra, [Keith] Sonnier; and then the Conceptualists, like Larry Weiner and [Joseph] Kosuth, just to mention a few. So all this happened within a period of, I would say, fifteen years -- I'd

say from '57, when I started the gallery, to, say, '70, '72. Something that I didn't do and should have done and I don't know what the circumstances were that were responsible for the fact that I didn't publish that show -- I had a show in two sections at Greene Street and I called it *The First Fifteen Years*. The first part went up to Stella and then the next part was devoted to the Pop artists up to Oldenburg and the Minimalists and the Conceptualists and the post-Minimalists, too, like Nauman were included, too. So there were those fifteen years, which one day I really have to.... There was a little film that was done about it. Actually, what happened there is that Jasper's show of the Seasons coincided with that and I had to show the Seasons here. Jasper had just had an accident in St. Martin's; he was pruning a tree and he fell off the ladder and did some damage to his arm. That show of the Seasons here celebrated my thirtieth anniversary, therefore it was in '87. That was the show of the Seasons and all the related material, drawings, etcetera. So there was that and there were my two shows at Greene Street. I think that I have to really gather this material and publish it somehow. After the early '70s, there was that movement of pattern painters that appeared on the scene that Holly Solomon tried to promote. It was an interesting movement, not sensational, but interesting. However, it was obliterated by the onrush of Neo-Expressionists from Italy and from Germany. At that time the "three C's" appeared upon the scene -- [Enzo] Cucchi, [Francesco] Clemente, [Sandro] Chia -- and the Germans: [Georg] Baselitz, [A. R.] Penck, [Jorg] Immendorf. Who else was there? [Anselm] Kiefer appeared at Marian Goodman's. So there was a rush of these paintings, which I, frankly, never quite went along with. I don't think that it was something new and original; it was just sort of something that they picked up from a previous period. Some very talented painters there, but nothing that you could say had the same importance as those five or six movements that began here with the Abstract Expressionists up to the Post-Minimalists and the Conceptualists. There it was, it caught everybody's attention. There were some Americans who also participated in that; they were [Julian] Schnabel, [David] Salle and [Robert] Longo. We have our own

homegrown Neo-Expressionists. I showed some of them, especially some of the Italians. I had a joint show with Mary Boone, of Clemente, which was a good show; it was on Greene Street. I had exhibitions of Chia but never showed Cucchi. I did it a bit half-heartedly. It was not my movement, it was not something that I was deeply involved with. What happened next that I think was important and was in reaction to this new Neo-Expressionism was Ileana's group, she showed actually four artists at the gallery. They re called Neo-Geos, which for some odd reason is a name that actually doesn't mean a thing since the only geometric one is [Peter] Halley. Anyway, there was Halley, there was Koons, there was [Ashley] Bickerton and there was [Meyer] Vaisman. These were the four that Ileana showed in the middle '80s. That was very refreshing. It was a strong reaction to the Neo-Expressionist movement. They went back to certain previous movements like Pop art and things like that, but they had their own original approach. There was also Haim Steinbach, who, however, was not included in that show, but Ileana also had him. So she had a group that was really interesting and fresh, after having had to abandon the German [Neo-]Expressionists, which she showed, because they had been taken over by Mary Boone, who got involved with Michael Werner and therefore, obviously, she was the one who was going to show them. As far as Koons and the others were concerned, I didn't know about them until I saw them up there at Ileana's. I was delighted about them, especially since there was finally something that was really close to my feelings, whereas I had always been pretty lukewarm about the Neo-Expressionists. The other artists that I really found very original and that I liked very much, whom I just simply discovered at the Whitney Biennial, are the Starn Twins, with whom I was incredibly impressed. That happened at the end of the decade; must have been '87 or '88. I liked them very much. There were some interesting artists that appeared here and there, but nothing, really, that I felt was as fresh and original as Ileana's group and the Starn Twins. Now I think that again something fresh and original are Pruitt and Early. In the meantime, I've been sort of looking around, not very intensely, but interested in what's coming up that's of

some interest. Not much that I saw at the last Whitney Biennial impressed me very much. Cadie Noland I had sort of liked and she was there, but her piece at the Whitney biennial wasn't particularly good. She was of some interest to me. Somebody that I found interesting is an artist from France, Sophie Calle. She came to my attention somehow, probably before but more importantly because she had a double show at Pat Hearn's and at the Luhring Augustine [Gallery] on Prince Street. I found that she was really good and thoughtful and that what she had to say was important. I liked Cadie Noland, and, well, that's about it. So, so much for thinking back to the past in connection with Pruitt and Early.

SZ: Last time when we stopped, you were really saying that the gallery really often has done a job that the Museum maybe should have done.

LC: Yes. I have sort of changed my feeling about that, really. I think the galleries do play a certain role, which is their role, and if they fulfill it, then some of us really do what's essential and necessary, that the museums cannot do because their scheduling is more long-range and they can't rush on things that we can experiment with. It's not really their function. I have changed my mind about that, and it is my feeling that, after all, we have to do what we are doing and it's our role and the museum's role is a different one. Although, they can just keep track of us. If they do, as the Whitney did, then they're accused of being trendy, and there is the whole tragedy of Tom Armstrong and general criticism of the Whitney, with its biennials being trendy. So then, what is a museum supposed to do? To just stay put and wait for ten years before something gets confirmed? Or participate in what's going on in the wonderful, lively environment we have here? For instance, what I thought is that the trendiness of the Whitney, although sometimes very ill-conceived, was preferable to the inaction of MoMA, which tried to do sort of separate little shows to indicate interest in what was going on, but they were not for some reason well done, well conceived, they had no real impact. It's

not that I do entirely agree with Rob Storr's choices for his show, but what he did has a meaning, that really fulfills an important role of the Museum. Also, being part of what's going on, analyzing, gathering and putting things together, which I think MoMA hadn't done, really, in the splendid way that I was accustomed to in my younger years when Dorothy Miller had her *Fourteen Americans* and *Sixteen Americans* shows. That for me was an example of what the Museum should do. It was so well-done. Those shows were infinitely better conceived than the Whitney Biennials. They were really good, and the choices were splendid. I think that something got lost in the shuffle after Dorothy withdrew and there was a moment of crisis there in the leadership of the Museum, and then there was so much concentration on the part of Bill Rubin on completing certain of the collections as far as Matisse and Picasso and other great artists are concerned. That was a moment of, I wouldn't say reaction; it was just something...Bill had a good understanding, generally speaking, of what was going on. It's not that he was rejecting all of these new trends, but he just felt that his job was somewhere else. But unfortunately, perhaps because he was such a dominant figure, there was no young curator there who would feel like doing something because he was not really encouraged by Bill. Kynaston McShine, who had been so good, especially when he left the Museum for a while and organized some shows, really ground-breaking shows, at the Jewish Museum, got somehow cowed and didn't function anymore. He was really good. He did a show at one point sort of, perhaps, to indicate...I can't remember what the name of the show was.

SZ: Where? At the Modern?

LC: At the Modern, yes, sort of fairly recently, maybe five or six years ago, just to show what the trends were.

SZ: It was *International Painting and Sculpture*.

LC: That was a show that was really poorly done, not well chosen, not well articulated. There was a good plan there and good intention, but it didn't come out right. So much for that. You see, there is an interaction between museums and galleries and collectors and whoever is part of this great scene of ours, and sometimes it takes different aspects. There is one moment where galleries and museums seem to work wonderfully well together, like at the moment -- although there were very few galleries at the time -- at the moment when Dorothy Miller was doing those Americans shows. There was a really wonderful interaction among galleries and MoMA and collectors.

SZ: That's something I was hoping you'd get more specific about. That just occurred at a time when Dorothy Miller was there with whatever taste and eye she had.

LC: Yes. I suppose Alfred paid a political role there, too. She was not doing it all by herself; she had to have Alfred's approval, I guess. She made the choices, I suppose.

SZ: The point was also that you were all interested in the same thing at that time, more or less?

LC: You see, my feeling is, and it's very curious, that there was a period, let's take the end of the war as a starting point, '46, where we all agreed about everything. It was quite evident that the great artists of the moment were Gorky, Pollock, Kline, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, [Mark] Rothko. It was evident to me; I don't know if it was evident to other people -- they were the great artists of the moment. There were also [Adolph] Gottlieb and [Robert] Motherwell, [but] it's just ridiculous to compare them to those great five or six. So that was clear. What was very clear to me too, and to a number of people, good collectors like the Sculls [Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull], the Tremaines [Burton and Emily Tremaine], Panza [Count Panza di Biumo] and Ludwig [Dr. Peter

Ludwig], that up to the beginning of the '70s, what was quite clear then was that there were these various trends, starting with Rauschenberg, Johns, Twombly and on through Stella and the Pop artists and the Minimalists and the Post-Minimalists and the Conceptualists, and that was it: there was nothing else that could compete with that. So there was general agreement at one point among certain people, museums, collectors and galleries, that this was it. The curious thing is, actually, with few exceptions during those fifteen years, starting with Rauschenberg, Johns and Twombly, I had them all. They were all concentrated in this particular gallery. That was a strange and curious phenomenon. There was nothing else around that was of equal importance. Well, one artist that I didn't take on..., who was responsible for a very important invention, was Carl Andre, the flat sculpture. But I don't think an artist like [Robert] Mangold was of equal stature, although he was good. So everything, I would say, was here for fifteen years, and everybody agreed about it. There's no question. There was a fantastic consensus.

SZ: During that time, how did you and your gallery interact with the Museum? Would they come down regularly or would you call them and say you've got something?

LC: I never called. My principle was wrong, I would say. Probably in these times, as it turned out, you have to be more public relations oriented, I just expected people to come, after having given them a few examples of what I am doing, that they would come. I wouldn't have to ask anybody to come down; they would just have to come down and see what I was doing. I had an impossible location on 77th Street, where nobody was, to begin with; for a couple of years it had been just my apartment. It became the gallery, and you had to go up four floors in a rickety elevator that just would hold two persons at a time, but I was just confident that people would come. I had declared my intentions of what I was going to do. They then, of course, got modified, but the initial intention was to compare great American painting that was just

emerging with great European painting that was well-established, to just quote the most recent ones, say, Dubuffet or [Alberto] Giacometti, but also early ones, Léger and [Robert] Delaunay and so forth. So that was my first show.... There was Kandinsky and also [Piet] Mondrian there, and there was Dubuffet and Delaunay and there was Giacometti and Léger in that first show. Actually, that was an idea that we had, [Sidney] Janis and I, quite early on, in 1949, when we did that comparative show that started at the Galerie de France, in Paris, and then was shown here and excited a great deal of hostility on the part of the group of artists, especially Abstract Expressionists, who gravitated around Charlie Egan, who felt it just was absurd to compare Kline to [Pierre] Soulages and things like that. The only things that they found acceptable, say, was the comparison between de Kooning and Dubuffet or Matta and Gorky, but all the rest was just bosh. It was, in a sense; it was sort of gimmicky, if you wish, but it was an attempt to do something, to see what was going on in Europe and what was going on here. Now we found out not much later that the American group was much stronger, that a fair comparison was not possible. But that was the seed of what I intended to do with my gallery when I started it. That idea failed, because the Americans were so much stronger than the comparable Europeans, so a little bit after showing Rauschenberg and Johns, I just forgot about showing the Europeans altogether and looked for and got all these other artists, like Stella and the Pop artists and so on, so this comparison idea fell by the wayside. What really was the point that you wanted to make there?

SZ: I was really wanting you to explore a little bit of the way your gallery and the Museum interacted.

LC: Did they come to see what I was doing?

SZ: Yes.

LC: Actually, everything goes by word of mouth in this. People will not come systematically to see what I'm doing because, well, there's so much to do and to see and there's not enough time to have a look at everything, unless by word of mouth it goes around that this is something that you have to see, like this show or like, in its time, Koons and those others. But in the early days, there were few galleries, as you know. There was still Betty Parsons around, there was Janis, there was [Samuel M.] Kootz, also, for a little while. There was Egan, who seemed totally inactive; he spent most of his time at the bar downstairs, but he did wonderful shows. I remember a Cornell show that he had, the Dovecotes, then that splendid de Kooning show, the black-and-white paintings, of which MoMA has a fantastic example. There were few galleries, so there was not much that people, museums and collectors, had to do to see what was going on. It was done in a very short time. There was no SoHo at that time. There was 57th Street and art galleries like mine up on 77th Street. Actually, what I complained about a little bit is that people did not come from museums systematically to see what I was doing, not being quite aware that there is this word-of-mouth thing that is the most important element. When I had the Jasper Johns show, believe me, everybody was there, right away. So it's very complex. It's not something that you can direct, that you can do something about. Suppose you have a very good P.R. assistant, which I hadn't at all, there was no P.R. assistant at all; I just did my shows and that was it. Fortunately, magazines and museums and collectors did the work for me. Now, I think, there is much more that you have to do to promote somebody or other, but still, the old system of word of mouth is prevalent. No matter what you do to promote something that won't work, it's useless. Now there are certain shows that get the attention, and I think sometimes undeservedly; that is my feeling and opinion. For instance, one that recently got a lot of attention, and I'll tell you why it happens, also, and who plays a very important role is Roberta Smith. Whether she likes something or dislikes something, what she says is important. For instance, just to give you an example,

there was a show of Matthew Barney at Barbara Gladstone's which got a great deal of attention because Roberta, though not only because of that, I suppose, but again, word of mouth and other elements, word got around that this was a very interesting show. I went to see it and disliked it intensely. I didn't feel it had anything to say to me, but lots of people liked it. Actually, Roberta's article was ambiguous. She didn't really say that it was good. I don't know whether you read it.

SZ: I don't remember.

LC: Anyway, she made a fuss about it, that's the important thing. What other people say in the *New York Times* is just irrelevant -- [Michael] Kimmelman, [Michael] Brenson; it doesn't carry any weight. What Roberta Smith says is relevant. In the time of the Abstract Expressionists and a bit later, there were very influential writers, like Harold Rosenberg, like Clement Greenberg and then a little later, Leo Steinberg (when he was still interested in contemporary art), they were very influential. From then on, I would say there are really good writers, like Peter Schejldahl, but he doesn't appeal; what he writes is a bit difficult and complex and people just don't understand what he's saying. You have to pay much more attention to him to understand what he's saying. Some of the writers in the magazines, and again, this is a curious phenomenon, the attention that magazines like *Vanity Fair* and now *Connoisseur* are paying, not so much to art, but to personalities in the art world. So you have a great number of articles written about this. [PAUSE] We were speaking about the critics and their influence. I was speaking about the personalities, the cult of personalities, and certain writers that are particularly good at it. Paul Taylor, as a matter of fact, was very good at writing about Ileana Sonnabend's show.... It was not only the show, but the article he wrote was equally important. Also, at that time, [Calvin] Tomkins wrote an article which was a bit more exhaustive; it was not only about those four, but surveyed the whole scene. He's very good, too, but he didn't, I think, have the impact, say, that Paul Taylor's

article had. Taylor also wrote an enormous article about Jeff Koons that was in the *New York Times*. Another one who writes good articles of that type is Anthony Haden-Guest. So there is that kind of thing that plays a very important role, the cult of personalities. To speak about more magazines, there is *New York* Magazine. You've got Kay Larsen there, who is also very good and also has her own opinions. She's not just wishy-washy like so many others, but she doesn't cover enough, sometimes for months, and then she doesn't say something that should be said about something-or-other. It's not quite sufficient coverage. Somebody that's very good who writes for a newspaper that hardly anybody reads, *Newsday,* is Ami Wallach. Then there is Kim Levin, who is good, too; she writes for the *Village Voice*. She was influential at one point; now she doesn't write as often. I don't know what she's doing these days. I saw her the other day here. I must ask her what she's doing, why she's not coming out with [articles]. She was quite influential and she wrote good, interesting articles. You may not be thoroughly in agreement, but she had opinions, you know? She wrote not just for the sake of saying something. So that's about it. All these magazines, the other ones, the art magazines, actually, I'm sorry to say, don't contribute very much. There is none of these, although they are well-conducted -- *Artforum, Art in America, ArtNews*. I speak of these three especially...well, *Arts* and some others are really less relevant. They don't seem to do something. They don't seem to be influential in saying something. Do you have that impression, too?

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LC: There are some magazines, especially a magazine that's published in France that's called *Galleries,* which has itself a rather interesting program in that they always had in each issue an article about a gallery, an article about the collector, about a collection,

with good photos. That was of some interest. The other magazines here in America didn't do it as well as galleries in France. Again, it's a more chatty thing, it's not serious writing, but anyway, it attracted attention to collectors, to artists and galleries and so on. I think that the contribution of the specialized magazines, for me, is not as great as it could be. But you've got good editors, you know. I forgot to mention *Interview,* for instance. Again, that doesn't do much for the art world. *Connoisseur* is, again, the type of thing that is interested in personalities and not in art per se. There are also articles at one point or another that were not bad at all in *Vogue,* say; Barbara Rose occasionally wrote a good article that was of interest. But that's more in the area of *Connoissuer* and *Vanity Fair.* That's the milieu in which we function, and sometimes one section is more prevalent than the other, but generally speaking, it's more or less the galleries with various personalities that have emerged into the spotlight. The appearance of Mary Boone was such an interesting event. You can criticize, you can say whatever you want about her activity, still, there she was and she was important. What Larry Gagosian did was a fresh approach to things and was interesting and shook up the art world. These were, I would say, the two interesting things that happened as far as the gallery world was concerned, and some of Ileana's are very good and interesting shows, and that's about it. Barbara Gladstone has been of some interest, if you want to mention a gallery, and perhaps Metro Pictures has been of some interest, with fresh things like, recently, Mike Kelly and before that, Cindy Sherman and Louise Lawler and so on. So there are just five or six galleries that at one moment or another play a more important role, come up with new ideas.

SZ: You were saying before that there is the gallery, there is the collector, there is the museum. What about the way those relationships have changed, the shift in the balance of power among those?

LC: I would say that the collectors during a certain period of time, let's say, the '60s, '70s,

'80s, actually for a long period of time, played an incredibly important role. We speak now about, in the early days, the Tremaines and the Sculls, and then a little later, Panza, and then a little later, Ludwig, and then, very importantly, the very powerful appearance of [Charles] Saatchi. There are other collectors who have played a role, and very well, but in a more well-balanced way, just being collectors and not, in the case of Saatchi...God knows what you can call him. The Meyerhoffs, of course, and in California, Eli Broad and Doug Cramer. These are model collectors that have gone on, quietly doing their thing, and they have put together really very splendid collections without buying and selling -- just buying [LAUGHING].

SZ: But now Saatchi's selling.

LC: Saatchi's selling, he's still buying, changing his mind about things, concentrating on something different from what he did before, so he is a very disturbing element. He has created a great deal of disturbance. Ludwig was a very stable collector and he bought what he could during a certain period of time, especially the Americans of the early Jasper Johns-Rauschenberg-Pop art period and others. He bought regularly and accumulated a vast collection of Americans, probably the most important one that there is in the world, the most complete one. Then he went on to other things. He started getting interested in what the Russians were doing and so on, so he is no longer with us in the way he was for, say, a good decade or more. This is the collectors. Then there are some local collectors that are pretty good, like the Spiegels and the Plehns and [Elaine] Dannheiser -- reasonably good collectors. These are the collectors. The museums have suffered from lack of funds and have not been able to buy things that they should have bought. They receive gifts, thank god for that. There are some patrons who [underwrite purchases], say, if Bernice Rose, gets Sheldon Solow to pay for a drawing by Jasper Johns or whatever she wants very badly, but this is a painful, uphill activity, because, generally speaking, the museums don't know how

to go about buying new paintings and therefore have to rely on gifts. So they do probably miss very important pieces. But then, eventually, they get them; in the end they do get everything, so it's just a matter of patience. The Meyerhoff collection goes to the National Gallery. MoMA has been pretty good at getting certain things from various collectors, or promises of things, things that they really felt were essential, but they are not in the market, really, at all.

SZ: Then that really changes their relationship to you, doesn't it?

LC: In what way?

SZ: In the sense that you don't have that same interaction, for one thing....

LC: I really don't count at all now on the museums ever coming and buying something from a show, ever. It just doesn't happen. The great exception was the Jasper Johns show, which remains a landmark in my career, when there was a tremendous flurry and enthusiasm, of Barr coming and spending hours there, or Dorothy [Miller] coming, and all the rest of the Museum getting involved in it. But that was a unique phenomenon: it happened only once. At that time, also, the prices were extremely low and it was easy to get [Richard S.] Zeisler to give six $600 to buy the target with the faces. So then, museums just don't come, and I'm surprised if, by some kind of curious accident, a museum like Detroit, which is in deep distress -- they don't even open every day -- buys one of the new Lichtenstein interiors. That was a great surprise for me. Here, this particular show, which is fresh and new, well, the museums will miss it completely, except Asher Edelman, who is a fan and has reserved a big piece. (MoMA actually bought one of Lichtenstein's large interiors, and so did the Guggenheim.)

SZ: But, will they come? Will Kirk [Varnedoe] come?

LC: I don't know whether he will come. I think Rob [Storr], generally speaking, is diligent; he comes to see the shows. Kirk, not so much. We have a good relationship, I am going to have lunch with him on Wednesday, but I don't see him coming very much, unless he just appears and disappears without my noticing him. There is, of course, this friendship that I have with an incredible number of museum directors all over the place -- [Richard] Koshalek or [chief curator Paul] Schimmel now at the MoCA [The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles]. At LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art], of course, I have a good relationship with [curator] Maurice Tuchman. I had a wonderful relationship for years and years with Martin Friedman; I have a relationship now with his successor, Kathy Halbreich. There are all these relationships that I have with the museum directors all over America and in Europe, for years and years, with people like [Edy] de Wilde of Amsterdam -- they would come, they would buy. I'll give you an example. De Wilde, in the beginnings of Lichtenstein, came to the gallery (that was a period when he did those war pictures) -- let's say, '64, '65 -- and he came and specifically came to buy Lichtenstein, there were some really good things at the gallery. I told him about a great triptych that I had in my dining room at home, across the street; at that time, the gallery was still at 77th Street. He liked what he saw at the gallery, but I said, "I would like to show you something in my apartment which is not for sale, but to give you an idea of important pieces that he has been doing recently." So he came and looked at the piece and said, "That's the piece that I want." I said, "I'm not selling. I told you." He said, "That's very selfish of you. It's a very important piece. It should be seen by lots of people and not sit here in your dining room. What would be the current price of it?" I said, "Three thousand dollars per panel: $9,000." He did something unprecedented. Usually, as you know, they haggle -- he said, "I'll offer you $12,000 for the piece, $4,000 per panel." Well, of course, it was not the $4,000 or $12,000 that mattered, although that was a lot of money at the time. It was not that, really, but the fact that he convinced me that the piece should really be in

a museum. He used to come and buy important paintings through the years, you know, and you can see the results of his activity at the Stedelijk, the splendid rooms that he has. Somebody else from Europe who was very active in buying was Franz Meyer and his successor, Christian Geelhaar. They bought a number of Jasper Johns paintings and Nauman and all kinds of good things. They were from the Kunstmuseum in Basel. Zurich was not very active, but let's see.... French museums, in their own slow, impossible way, like Beaubourg [Centre de Georges Pompidou, Paris], have bought important things. In a way, the museums abroad have been more active than the museums in America, which rely more on getting gifts.

SZ: Leo, shall we stop?

LC: We should stop, yes.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

END INTERVIEW