THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **S. LANE FAISON, JR. (LF)**

INTERVIEWER: **ANNA SWINBOURNE (AS)**

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

AS: First, may I start by saying thank you, Mr. Faison. We're delighted that you decided to participate in the Museum's Oral History Project.

LF: Well, now that you're here and I can see you, I'm delighted, too.

AS: Very sweet. I thought we could start with just a few introductory remarks.

LF: Certainly.

AS: At the beginning, to start, could you tell me where you were born, when, and your first interest in art history. Could we start there?

LF: All right. I was born in Washington, D.C., on November 16, 1907. So, I've just had my ninety-fourth birthday, believe it or not.

AS: It's hard to believe it.

LF: My mother came from Washington, D.C., and at the age of twenty-nine she married an army officer who, at that time, I think, was a major. His name was exactly my name, and I'm named for him -- Samson -- which I tend to hide because Samson was a biblical strong man, and I don't feel that way. My father was known as Sam, and I'm known as Lane, to keep us straight. He came from a farming family in North Carolina where they raised cucumbers, watermelons and that sort of thing. I think he was the seventh child in the family. They lived in a place called Faison, and I think

they were, maybe, the fourth generation of people named Faison, already. French Huguenots who had escaped Catherine II's murders got into the Netherlands, as so many did, and then finally made it over here rather early, to Virginia, and then gradually spread from there. The family I come from moved south, to North Carolina. There doesn't sound like anything in art from my father's side, and there wasn't. From my mother's side, she was gentry, she went to a good school. The class, which must have been very small, in a good school in Washington, D.C., went to Europe. As a result of her trip, -- she was, I suppose, nineteen or something like that -- a gaggle of girls -- something happened to her in Dresden, and she bought a lot of photographs. This is before 1900, not much before, '97 or so, and these are sepia photographs that curl up, you know, and they were in an album, a fairly good album. I vaguely recall turning the pages of this album. It didn't mean anything, but I was sort of interested. This may have something to do with it. All I know is I never went to Dresden until about 1980, and I was guiding a tour of people from Williamstown and elsewhere. I'd never been to Dresden but I thought I knew the pictures pretty well. I did know the pictures pretty well, and suddenly thought, "Oh, my God, yes! It's my mother's photographs." At any rate, I instituted a thing which I approve of now. If you go to a concert -- I'll be back on track in a little bit -- if you go to a concert and it's magnificent, you applaud when it's over. Why not, if a great thing hits you and you all believe it's marvelous, why don't we applaud? So, people thought we were crazy. We went around, "Yes" [clapping], and so forth.

Now to get back on track. So, there is a vague little thing in my childhood that may have something to do [with it], but army life had nothing to do with art. I went to nine different schools, usually one a year. I never went to the same school two full years in a row until the last three years of high school. I was always changing, changing, changing. Well, there was an educational overtone there, but nothing about art. Nothing about art. Absolutely nothing. Well, the rest is changes. I'm in Panama, yes. Honolulu, yes. World War I entered by USA; father taken, suddenly, back to the United States. He got together a whole division and took it to France and fought, toward the end of World War I. Nothing about art in any of this. And in my school, which was a very good school in Brooklyn, Poly Prep, way out on the far end, near the Narrows, absolutely no mention of art. I'm really trying hard. No, no. Some music yes, but no art whatever. I was asked back seventy years later. I graduated in 1924.

So, in 1994 I was invited out there because they now have a new arrangement with alumni. Each year the member of the class which is the oldest class, in the scope of whatever year it was, '94. . . So, they wanted somebody from '74, and they wanted somebody from '24, and they wanted somebody from around '44 and the younger ones, and I was one of those three. I hadn't been back to the school for seventy years. It was hard to get out there, and there was no particular reason. But I was very excited, all on my own, about ships. That's partly because, and this is edging toward art now, there was something wonderful about living on Governor's Island, which was my father's last post. He was retired from there, and then we moved to Brooklyn Heights and had a view all the way from the Narrows to the Statue of Liberty and lower Manhattan. That does something to you. I got very excited about ships, and for two years, in my school, the first two years, five days a week I'd get on the little government ferry, from Governor's Island to South Ferry. In the morning it was then a long subway ride out to school. At all stages of seasons of the year. New York harbor and what floats in it is in my blood. Well, so, I enjoyed classes in those early days, if by any chance they had an outside window toward the Narrows, and I could see the ships coming in during class. I kept a record of what was due in today and at what time, "It's going to dock at such and such a time." So, you'd subtract the amount of time it takes to get from here to there. If the weather was decently clear you'd see "it." Very, very, very exciting. In 1994, when I got back to the school, I rushed to the back to my old view, to see the view again, and all I could see was steel structure, and I said, "What's this?" They said, "Well, that's part of what's called the Verrazano Bridge. I said, "Oh, my God. That's terrible." But now the school was full of art. It's unbelievable what's happened. In that direction. Well, does that answer part of the question?

AS: It sure does.

LF: Well, then, something happened to me soon after I graduated from school, which really is the answer to your question: what started me?

AS: O.K. Tell me about that.

LF: I'll tell you all about that. All right. Because of my father's. . . Well, he was hit badly with arthritis when they didn't know anything about it -- I suppose the exposure in the war -- and the doctors knew nothing, they really don't yet, and all they could give him was aspirin. He finally died a real cripple. It was perfectly awful to watch him disintegrate. But the doctor said if we could get him to Europe, the waters in the spas might be helpful. Well, my mother was dying to get to Europe anyway, never having had a chance since she was a schoolgirl. So, with my younger sister, the four of us went to Europe, and I had a whole year after school and before college. In the course of it I changed my mind from Princeton, where I was all set to go, said no to Princeton and yes to Williams. Now that happened partly through correspondence with two different classmates, and the argument appealed to me. . . Yes, I would be going to graduate school somewhere afterward. Why go to Princeton and then stay there as a graduate student? Why not have the college experience by itself?

I arrived at Williams as a complete stranger, when I got to Williams unlike the time I had been to Princeton with my mother. Her brother had been an honorable member of the class of 1896. His favorite teacher in philosophy was still at Princeton but by this time was the President. So, I was introduced at the very top. I had no problem about Princeton. I had had good marks at school and so forth.

However, we're in Europe now and I'm getting rather bored in Switzerland but getting my father set up. He met some English gents, French gents and other gents, and played bridge. There was never a table at which anybody could speak the same language, so you played bridge in silence, and you used symbols -- one heart, one spade, one club, one diamond -- all day long, a wonderful time, not a single word! They kept score, but I don't know about that. However, for me somebody my age was found who spoke Swiss French. I had very good real French training at school. So, my fairly good French was jeopardized, but I got a letter at Christmas time from a teacher at my school, who had become almost a member of our family, very much beloved, maybe ten years older than I. He taught Spanish. I never took a course with him, so it was purely on the basis of friendship. He wrote from Paris, "I'm on leave here for a while and I'm thinking of you in Switzerland, wondering why you're not in France instead. Why don't you come up for a week or so and join me, and I'll show you Paris?" Yes! So, I was there. We went to the Louvre more than three or four

times. Each day he had a whole thing planned. I'd say, "What's for today?" and he'd say, "Well, today we're going to Chartres." This is a favorite story of mine. "We're going to Chartres," and I said, "What's that?" That's how much art I knew! "What's that?" He took me to Chartres. He didn't tell me what it was going to be, but the train finally stopped. . . I said, "Oh, look at that," and he said, "That's it." We walked up and stood in front of it, and he said, "Now, I'll tell you what. I could tell you a lot about this, but it's much better if you go in by yourself. Then, when you feel like it, come on back out, and maybe you'll have some questions." Well, that's what hit me. Talk about St. Paul being knocked off his horse! I mean, that is what happened to me. I cannot explain it. I've been back so many times, and even the last time, which was maybe six years ago, I had this impact all over again, in a sense of proportions and scale and space that I hadn't quite drunk in, even many times before. I was asked in France, many, many years later, to take a friend's recalcitrant son. "Won't you take him and show him Chartres Cathedral?" A dear friendship was behind it all so I said O.K. Then I remembered what had happened to me, so I did it the same way. He was not built the way I was. But, still, it obviously impressed him. Then we got going pretty fast on how the vaults are held up and things like that. Still. So, yes. A "thing" happened to me, in a vague way. When I got to Williams I found a professor of art history. I went to him and discovered you can't get in his classes until Junior year; he was the only one teaching art history, and there was no such thing as an art major at Williams, in 1925, when I arrived. I said, "You mean wait for two years?" I told him what had happened to me at Chartres, and so forth, and he said, "Well, I think. . ." He had to protect himself, because he was a wonderful teacher, and the class had grown up to seventy-five students. He'd surrounded himself with pre-requisites, good ones, mostly history, history, history. But he said, "You can join with the Class of '28 when you're a sophomore." So, I got his two big courses. All courses were year courses, and I had those two. Then senior year I was his honor student, all by myself, with him. I wrote him fifteen pages a week about the history of sculpture and the poor man had to listen to me read my own stuff. Then he'd say, "No, that's wrong," or, "Yes, that's a good word for that. Yes, I like that." This sort of thing, for a whole year, from the person I admired among all others at Williams. Such was professor Karl E. Weston.

Now we're getting to my trek to Harvard graduate school, one year. You automatically got an MA if you can get B's in advanced undergraduate courses. That isn't very hard. They don't give that MA degree anymore. Mine from Harvard is something of an antiquity. I moved from Harvard for various reasons, mostly because of two professors at Princeton I wanted to study with, Rufus Morey and Frank J. Mather, Jr. Mather happened to be a Williams man who had trained my teacher Karl Weston, Class of 1883, I think. In those days there were fraternities at Williams. Graduation and alumni reunion, in those days, were at the same time. Later both got bigger and bigger, and now they're held on separate weekends. But the old system did bring alumni back. As you graduated. . . and they seemed funny looking people, you know, we didn't know them. One of them happened to be in my fraternity. Somehow I got thrown with him, and a lot of things happened very fast. He said, "Well, Harvard's all right, but you might change your mind. Come on down to Princeton, we'd love to have you as a student." I kind of liked that. He didn't have the sharpest "eye," as I discovered in later life, but he was a very wise, very bright, very civilized man. That was good for me.

AS: Well, when you finished at Princeton, how did you end up back at Williams? Because soon thereafter, you started teaching at Williams.

LF: Well, I finished up at Princeton. In those days Princeton thought particularly well of itself, and one of the things they decided was, and this is not very generally known, that the Ph.D. was not going to be given in the same way as other places like Harvard. "We're going to do it differently. We're going to give a Master of Arts and a Master of. . ." Let's see, what was it they called it? MFA. Master of Fine Arts. Art was always called Fine Arts in those days. Still is, at Harvard. This Princeton degree, MFA in Art History, would be everything except a Ph.D. itself. In later years you'd come back with a thick book, more or less the authority on a given subject. Then there would be a Ph.D. For the MFA smaller publications were necessary; you already had to have something impressive published in the art world. That gave you an MFA, which I have. Princeton said, "That's the equivalent, really, of what they do in other places. We do it our way." That system had gone into effect at Princeton two or three years before I got there, and it lasted for two or three years after I'd left. So, here I was, in the cold world, with an MFA, which doesn't exist anymore, in Art

History. Princeton gave up and went back to the usual. An MFA, of course, is now a graduate degree in painting. Our final examinations in 1932 were very severe. One day, you'd get little blue books to write in, at 9:00 A.M., and you handed them in at midnight. Then there was a day to recover, and then another day like the first. You'd wait around to see whether you passed or not. When that finally happened and I passed, the phone rang from New Haven, Yale was looking for a young man, a woman had little chance in those days in Art History, teaching. Yale wanted a young man trained in the Middle Ages, which I was, and who spoke French, which I could, and I got the job. It was to assist two very distinguished Frenchmen who were being brought over to start up Art History at Yale, not from the undergraduate bottom to build it up, not at all, but at the very top. A whole group of students were lined up, Yale graduate students, who spoke French and knew their way around the rudiments of Art History. One Frenchman arrived at the beginning of the academic year in the fall, and left at Thanksgiving; the other arrived at Easter time, and left in June. I was to run this course in between, and while the distinguished visitors were lecturing, always in French, if translation was necessary, I could assist.

Well, you see, the phone call came just as I was saying, "All right. What happens now? I've got a degree." I went up to Yale and got the job. Marcel Aubert was the first guest. He was, of course, the great architectural historian or whatever of French gothic cathedrals, especially Notre Dame de Paris and a major curator at the Louvre. The other guest was "College de France," which is the highest category. That was Henri Focillon. He was for me the most wonderful experience of art understanding I have ever had, on top of anybody else. I think I know him by heart, and I adored him, from so many points of view.

I should tell you about my first meeting with Marcel Aubert, because of the first thing I said to him. I taught at Yale for four years before I went back to Williams, to answer your question of long ago. I got back here to Williams in 1936, and for a couple years I commuted to New Haven, to fill in the course between Thanksgiving and Easter, because Yale didn't have anybody yet to succeed me. At any rate, for one or two years I did that. However, my first meeting with Marcel Aubert was in Paris. I promised the Yale Dean I would go to Paris immediately and brush up on my French. Dean [Everett] Meeks was going to Paris anyway and he invited me to lunch at a fine

restaurant near the Louvre. After I walked over to the old part of the Louvre. Mr. Aubert had an office on the troisième étage. Well, I got to the bottom of the stairtower, very much on time, and realized, "Oh, my God. Look at this staircase." Well, I just. . . You know what troisième étage means. I got up to the top, panting and rapped on the door. There was a little bell on the door. I had never met Marcel Aubert before. I said, "Bonjour, Monsieur Aubert. Je suis hors de baleine". He replied, "Ah, Monsieur Jonah!" So, that was a lovely beginning with Marcel Aubert. I was Jonah. [Note: hors de haleine means out of breath; baleine means whale]. So, I've given you a lot of unnecessary information.

AS: I don't think it's unnecessary. You mentioned that there wasn't an art degree at Williams at the time you were there.

LF: Indeed there was not.

AS: So, it must have been established just before, or when you started. Can you tell me about that?

LF: When I arrived in 1925 and when I graduated in 1929, there was no art major, no. There was a younger person helping Mr. Weston who would maybe give a course. There was no music major either, but a bit later came the beginning of music, and that was put under Karl Weston because the music man, wonderful as he was, was in no way equipped to direct a program or anything of that sort. So, things were sort of gathering. At last we no longer had the same President, Harry Garfield, the son of a President of the United States who also went to Williams. He was a very distinguished man, Harry was, but not much of a president, I thought as an undergraduate. He didn't seem to know students or think much about them. He was interested in the summer program he'd built up, and it was a very good thing for Williams. It was called the Williamstown Institute of Politics, and this was quite something for several summers in the '20s and '30s, then it gradually disintegrated. The joke was, anybody will tell you this, that when the tourist buses came through Williamstown, the barker would say, "On your left and right, ladies and gentlemen, are the buildings of the Williamstown Institute of Politics, occupied during the fall, winter and spring by Williams College." Harry Garfield would leave before Easter,

and we wouldn't see him again until graduation. An old fuddy-duddy, I think, was made acting president. Well, a change of Williams presidents finally came. Garfield lingered to about twenty-six years as president. The new president caught on to Karl Weston very quickly. Tyler Dennett had just received a Pulitzer prize for his biography of John Hay. He was teaching Poly Sci at Princeton. He was taken with Karl Weston, so things began to move rather fast. By the time I got called to Williams in 1936 a major had started in Art History.

There was a happy juxtaposition that rather saved my life, because I was very happy in my relation with these two magnificent professors at Yale, but there was not much else. Yes, I had a little course on my own, but the whole idea for me was to stay "up there" and not try to do anything "down here". I was interested in undergraduate teaching. I wanted to do that. The man from the Yale Art School taught in a very nice way, but he was very old and he died. The Dean suddenly appointed a brand new, young painter to continue this course, without very much credit or anything like that, from Yale college. So I said, "I think I should be it. I'm the only art historian, sir, on your whole staff," and that was true. That didn't mean anything at all to him, and he said, "Well. . . " Personally he was very nice to me and so forth. But believe me, this actually happened, the Dean said, "No, I couldn't possibly appoint you to teach that course, because I wouldn't have any Yale graduates -- undergraduates -- being taught art except by an artist." And I said, "Well, sir, I don't think you understand art history," and I gave him a little lecture. He said, "I'm not interested." I then said, "Sir, for the last three or four months I've been in agony whether to accept or not accept an opportunity to go back to my own college and be, presumably, the heir to Professor Weston. He's invented a little art museum I would take over, I'd actually have objects, and it sounds awfully good to me. From what you tell me, I'm sorry, I'm resigning right now. That's it." And that was it. So, now you have my history. I've arrived at Williams, in the fall of 1936, after four very, very interesting and important years at Yale.

AS: And you taught at Williams for forty years.

LF: Yes. I retired officially in '76, yes.

AS: And you were also, simultaneously, the director of the Williams College Art Museum.

LF: Mr. Weston retired from teaching in 1940, but he stayed on. He invented the College's art museum. That's a whole other story, a beautiful old building that was the college's first Library. He persuaded the trustees to let him save it. It was going to be destroyed, possibly by students living there. Books were in the process of leaving it for a much bigger new library, you see, and then what was going to happen with this lovely partially 1846 Greek revival building? Karl Weston managed to persuade the trustees to add an addition out back, then Art and Classics would have the whole building, and the upstairs would be museum space. That's what he accomplished. So, in whatever way he had he had acquired $2,500 a year from the Carnegie Foundation. Each year they said, "This is the last year. We'll never do this again." But he was so good in the way he spent his $2,500 that they renewed it for seven years, and the last time they said, "This is truly the last, but we insist you won't even get it this year unless you put it in the official budget of the college." I think they demanded at least $2,000 a year. Well, that's $2,000. So, that's what I heard, and he stayed with this, his, museum until 1948. Then he disappeared into a little office in the tower of the building. But he made a little card index. There was no file or anything like that. He kept a scrapbook of everything as it came in, letters or whatever, and there were maybe three books of scrapbooks. So, those were our records, and then he set himself up and he had a system. This object would be FA-1. "F" means furniture, "A" means American, and "1" is the first one I got to. He would put that number on the object, then we'd have FA-2, and PF-1 was "painting, French, 1" -- the first one I got to, you see. Each object he marked with its number. Well, the whole thing was in a drawer, like this, but absolutely wonderful. And there I was. He handed it to me and said, "You're it." In 1948.

AS: He said, "You're it."

LF: "You're it." Yes.

AS: Can we talk a little bit about your teaching? There are so many museum professionals who were trained by you at Williams. Could you tell me a little bit about

your teaching philosophy? About, maybe, your ideas about why so many of the leading museum professionals today were trained by you?

LF: Well, that question is often asked: Why have so many of these Williams guys gone into museums? It is true that, for the most part, each one of them was going somewhere else. He was going to be a doctor, he was going to be a corporation executive, or he was going to be whatever you want. Occasionally, an art historian, but that was rare. For my first four years, Karl Weston was still running the show. In the meantime, in 1938, a Williams graduate named Whitney Stoddard was brought back directly from Harvard; had just gotten his Ph.D. at Harvard. Karl Weston brought him back. Karl Weston was a friend of Whitney's father at Williams. At any rate, Whitney was a very bright fellow, he attracted one branch of Williams students and I attracted a different branch. You add them up, and it was quite impressive. Then we jump to 1940, and one of the things I did in the meantime, with the enthusiastic help of Whitney, was to run a war, in faculty meetings, to try to get credit for some making of art -- you can't call it anything more elaborate than that -- which was going to be made part of a required senior course. We had a curriculum in those days. Each department starts off with a course that leads to a required Junior course for the majors, which, in turn, leads to a Senior course for the majors. That implies this, and this implies that. I always thought it was a very good system, and still think so. While I'm at it. . . How did I get the job? Because there was a resignation of the number two in the department, I think there were three members by this time, someone named Andy Keck, who was very bright and able. He has his ideas, they're strong and he believes in them. He said, "That's fine, but the introduction to art has to take two years. Furthermore, it's got to be in strict historical sequence," which meant you were never going to see anything contemporary until the end of the second year of your study! Well, there it was, and he stuck by his guns, and resigned. He was a good teacher, very good. He had connections in Washington, D.C., spent the rest of his life at American University, and had a very fine and wonderful career. But this happened at just the time I was wondering about breaking with my Yale Dean or not breaking. Talk about coincidence! It helps. So, I walked into a job that was empty. That's it. Now what did we teach? Well, there's an emphasis, no matter what the course is, there's an emphasis on objects. Ideas about objects are fine, but the object. . . I keep thinking of Courbet, who kept saying

[banging on something], "If I can do that, I can paint it. If I can do that, I can paint you." Something like that. Well, I think that has much to say for itself. Furthermore, well, Whitney and I were intensely interested in teaching art but there was a wave of horror around the country that art history was for girls. This was a real problem. So, at Williams, it was Karl Weston that drew people, and not the fact that it was art. At any rate, we were somewhat in the mold of Karl Weston, in other words, and, well, eventually Kirk Varnedoe was on the Williams football team, and you know all the rest of that. I don't remember talking to anybody about, "should I be this, or go be a doctor?" I didn't do that kind of advising. Oh, the head of the Rhode Island School of Design. He's now the president of the Rhode Island School of Design, and he was number two in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. . . [Note: Roger Mandle] I do forget names! I'll think of it in a minute. But Roger was sort of a painter, and he said, "I'd like you to see some of my things. I wonder if I should be an artist." I saw them, carefully, and I said, "Do you want my advice?" He said yes, so I said, "No kidding? No. Don't be an artist. You're not good enough. Don't do it. Go into art history, museums, that kind of thing." He thanks me any day of the week for the advice, and it was very good advice as it happened. There have been occasions like that. Rusty Powell, Director at the National Gallery in Washington got the job.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

LF: Roger Mandle was director at Toledo and moved via Washington to Rhode Island to become President of the Rhode Island School of Design, the whole complex, of which the museum is a main part. I was honored to speak at his inauguration. I had an introductory speech, and I called him "Roger <u>of</u> Williams," referring, of course, to Roger Williams, the great founding figure of Rhode Island.

AS: Turning him into an aristocrat.

LF: Yes. Roger.

AS: So, you ended up luring very many people who were not art history majors, into the art history field of study.

LF: I don't know. A lot of them were art majors. If they were in medical school we had a problem, but, still, we had a few people, one or two, who became doctors. But the medical career, as it goes back to undergraduates, absorbs a lot of things. The Art I, II course, it's been altered quite a lot. We don't cover as much history as we used to, and it's less of a quantitative curriculum, the content. We tended to focus on a few big things of each category, and we focused on, and still do, the nature of the art we're studying before we get into any history at all. I remember at a certain point the first thing was we were going to study architecture mostly, in this course. Not altogether, but the history was going to be from Egypt to the Italian Renaissance. You've got to talk about architecture first, so your first assignment is to go out and look at West College, and just draw a picture of the front of it, of the building. Don't say you can't draw. Anybody can decide it's that high, that high, has windows, and put them in the right place. Well, then, those papers are brought to class and there's the wildest confusion, as you can imagine. We get long, narrow things, we get tall things. It often has the exact number of windows, and sometimes, even the cuts in the curved windows, all that type of thing, but totally missing the relationship. Then the spacing of the windows; it's thicker toward the end, and thicker than before the next windows. Why? Well, there are various exercises, and a little later you go inside West College and make a plan. Oh, dear me. Oh, my goodness sake. You see, it's not even a theory, it's simply a statement of fact, I think, that American youth -- at least we got them that way, and do still, to a lesser extent -- grow up without any sense of shape. Shape. The only answer I know of, and I've often said this, is, if you're on the beach, picking up shells -- not as a collector of what shell this is, it's very rare and I like it -- but you pick up this stone. Something appeals to you, and you pick this thing up and not that one. Why? That is about all you've got to work with, because just look at these pictures of West College. It's unbelievable, from one extreme to the other. I guess they all had it as a three-story building. I think you could assume that, but that's about all. That's about all.

So, shape. Then there are other matters. It serves a purpose, and maybe the purpose shows you a little about how it's going to be arranged inside. Maybe the

arrangement inside affects the outside, so here we go, long before we. . . We don't start with an Egyptian pyramid, in other words. You don't see pyramids. Yes, you do, if you're I.M. Pei. All of this was enormously helped in 1940 by the appointment of William H. Pierson, Jr., making a trio with Stoddard and me that worked together for some twenty-five years.

AS: I've heard about one of your courses that was very influential, the honors seminar on criticism that you taught. Can you tell me a little about that class?

LF: Yes, I can tell you that that is the most exciting teaching I did in my whole career. This was toward. . . Well, I was getting toward retirement, and I had a very dear friendship with a member of the English Department named Hallett Smith. He's a very brilliant fellow and made a big reputation on Shakespeare scholarship. We lost him about the time of World War II to Cal Tech, where he was put in charge of all humanities studies. They woke up out there about the same time MIT did, that training scientists only in science was not a good idea. It was very important to go beyond that. Einstein was a passionate musician, after all. It's not all that unusual. Advanced scientists, really inventive scientists, are, as I could tell you later on, in a committee I served on at Harvard where we were interviewing all sorts of people for a whole year, the great friends of art -- I didn't say art history, but art -- including the making of it. Extremely brilliant, way-out scientists were our friends. Not literature people. "Fine arts mean us. Don't bother with pictures." That's what you hit: condescension beyond belief from literature! Well, now, what was the question I was answering?

AS: We were talking about your honor seminar in criticism.

LF: Yes, thank you. You've got me back on track. You'll have to do that from time to time. Well, Hallett and I sort of got interested in each other, and he wanted to learn more about looking at pictures. He wasn't very good at it and didn't have much skill at it. I said, "Well, I don't have much skill. . ." I didn't do very well in literary studies at Williams. I got B's or something. I don't remember. At any rate, he had already started a new maneuver, based on I.A. Richards' book called Practical Criticism. If you don't own it now, for heaven's sake get it and read it. It's an old book, Cambridge

University, to begin with, and I.A. Richards, in his studies of literature for Cambridge, British students, he invented the following: "Poetry is. . . Never mind prose, it's more terse, and you can talk about it more, and the word means more in poetry. And rhythm is important, and it may not be so important in prose," and so forth. Well, Hallett would hand out -- we didn't have mimeograph in those days -- carbon copies of a few lines, four or five lines of poetry, another four or five lines of poetry, maybe three sets, maybe two, no author, no date, nothing. Just those lines, and you were on your own. He said, "And I mean, you're on you're own, and it won't always be that we have one that's terribly wonderful and the other is junk. It won't always be that way, no, no, no." That's why sometimes we had three. This was a comparison. You tried to make this out, you tried to make that out, and write. Something in this said, "By God, that's got to be by Shakespeare, only Shakespeare," so you operate on that base. But if it turned out not to be Shakespeare at all? The question is, what did you say about it? Those papers were read or discussed in class, you see, mistakes made, and you could demonstrate people not paying attention to the words of the poet, and misreading or not even reading. When I joined him and did a parallel thing for painting that I would put up, it was a little bit harder. If you put up a great masterpiece, that kind of gave things away ahead of time, but you could get around that somehow. From my point of view, if there are two people they've never heard of, one I think is magnificent and the other I think is junk, you could do this sort of thing, and cover up any information. Then he and I did each other's questions, you see. He'd write, join the students, so he was a student of me, and I would join them and was his student. In the discussion, of course, we had a wonderful time saying, "Now this is probably the worst paper," and it would always be my friend, you see. We were really terrible on each other. The students caught on, and loved it. Every minute. Well, what you found out was. . . I said, "We're not trying to identify beauty," and we both agreed. I said, "If you end up the semester with the definition of beauty, it won't help you in any way to respond to the quality, the artistic quality, of the work. The theory will help you only very, very slightly," and that's why I'm a little suspicious of studies in aesthetics. Unless the person is very much into one of the arts. . . He doesn't have to be good at all of them. Music will do very nicely, or literature, or painting. So, the whole thing went like this. We met once a week. I lost him when he went to Cal Tech, and by that time the English Department decided that that sort of thing was not really part of an English major, and everybody was too busy. I said,

"Well, by God, I've learned a lot about poetry. I'm going to do this course, by myself," and I started out, always, on poetry, a good way to start. Because every student has learned to read, since however young they were, but they've never learned to see. Only recently I got this thing -- I would have used it as a logo for the whole course -- "Learning to see what you're looking at." That's what it's all about. Most people, particularly Americans, Americans from the center of the nation, shall I say, Americans from any part of the USA but, I think, rather more numerously in the center of the country, want to know what is represented. What is it? Describe what's represented. No. No, no, no, no. Then, as sort of a helper -- it doesn't work for all kinds of painting, but -- you turn it upside down, and just like that you see, you look at these connections. My God, Degas. . .watering can here and ballet dancer there, with foot up on the barre and her shoe, and behind her is another gal with her arm out like this. You put it all together and it's the shape of the watering can. Well, this is way out. The picture is in The Metropolitan Museum now, and I take people to see it, two ballerinas rehearsing. It's hard work, they're practicing, and the water from the watering can has been used. Finally, somebody says, "Oh, the floor's wet." Aha. Yes. And does the watering can belong in the picture? We're talking in terms of journalism. Yes, it does. Yes. They use the watering can. Well, shall we turn the watering can around? Oh. That's doesn't look right. Why not? Etc., etc., etc. Well, that's what I call learning to see what you're looking at. Now that's assuming verbal definitions. The two words are certainly interchangeable, but I think seeing implies going deeper, into perceiving, than looking does. Then we come to class. They're limited to 300 words or whatever it is. "You're all going to be writers, you're going to turn in a column, and you're limited to 300 words. That's all you've got. If you have a gorgeous conclusion that leaves you to an extra 200 words, the editor uses his scissors and you never see it. So, you're under discipline. It's a very good idea to figure it out ahead of time. So, this is partly a course in writing, which is one reason I loved it so much. Then all these mistakes they make, and you have a field day: "its," "it's," and all that horror. It never happened to me but it's happening now: "its, it's" Did you know that? Go to work on that. That is happening! And now we have "its." Indeed, figure that out!

AS: Wow.

LF: Well, we come back to. . . The papers are due, we're meeting once a week and by this time. It was right in this room at home. I limited it to fifteen people, and usually had about that many. The papers were due to me two or three days before the next class, and I had a chance to read them and put things in the margins like "R" meant, "review." "Hold your hand up. Why did I put an 'R' here?" So, the first thing we do is: "Everybody read the first sentence." Why? "Read the first sentence, to the period." Well, if the guy is going on for two minutes and there still isn't a complete sentence, I say, "Forget it. Stop. Too long. Much too long." That never really happened. Everybody read a sentence, and I said, "Now which paper do you want to hear?" And the unanimity of the responses, not always the same person, by any means, was simply extraordinary. There was never any problem of a high percentage heading toward that paper. Or, if it was close, we took a vote between those two, and that fellow read his paper. Then the discussion would go from there. The course, I would say, was useful and important and helpful in discovering thousands of ways in which your criticism can be simply irrelevant.

AS: Irrelevant?

LF: Irrelevant. Another way of putting it is, don't go outside the frame of a picture, literally.

AS: Keep it to just what they see.

LF: Well, that is why I loved this course so much. Because I think all teachers, teachers, in general, maybe not all of them, should have a sense of duty to train people to write. I mean, after all, you don't have to be an English major. . .

AS: To express yourself on paper.

LF: Of course you don’t. At any rate, the response to that course was really wonderful. A lot of people I still play ball with came out of that course. Another aside to this. . . It was during my last four years of teaching. The President was a good friend, Jack Sawyer, and he came out to see me. He said, "Let's take a walk. You're going to retire next year. What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm pretending it won't ever

happen. I want to teach." He said, "Good. You can stay for three more years, year by year, if the department wants you, at no increase in salary. You're no longer on tenure, in other words. But if they want you, year by year, for three more years. . ." Well, I enjoyed teaching without being on tenure more than anything I've ever done, and I wasn't very popular, telling the young ones about that. But it was a wonderful feeling. Boy, you've got to deliver. You asked me a question. I think I answered it, whatever it was.

AS: I think you did, too.

LF: Next question, please.

AS: Shall we take a little break now?

LF: Sure, why not.

AS: That sounds like a good idea.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

AS: So, we're continuing. Why don't we pick up where we left off for the last session, talking a little bit about your teaching philosophy and the courses you taught, especially the course on criticism, the honor seminar. I think now might be an ideal time to talk about your teaching and experience with the chief curator of painting and sculpture at MoMA, Kirk Varnedoe. You had mentioned, when I first came, how you first met him. [Note: Varnedoe collaborated with William S. Rubin on *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, MoMA Exh.#1382, September 19, 1984-January 15, 1985; became Adjunct Curator, Dept. of Painting and Sculpture, 1985; was appointed Director of the Dept., 1988. He resigned in 2002.]

LF: Well, I gave you the background.

AS: Would you mind, briefly, talking about the background again?

LF: Well, he was being toured by his mother. He was then, maybe seventeen, going to colleges, and they came here. Then there was a little extra; they came here, maybe, primarily because his mother and my wife were childhood friends in Savannah, Georgia. . . born there, grew up there, kept together, and did not go the usual debutante direction but went to college, against tradition. They went to Smith College. So, that's maybe why they came here. At any rate, that's how I met Kirk, and he seemed like a very bright young fellow, and interested in art. They weren't here forever, but I thought if. . . wouldn't that be nice. Somehow it kept going, and the next thing I knew Kirk arrived a couple years later as a freshman. I met him and said, "Well, for heaven's sake. Come on out to the house. You're part of the family." So, it was a very nice relationship. He did very well. I didn't think of him as super brilliant at the time. I only knew him person to person, talking. I never, until much later, heard him speak in public. But as he evolved. . . He took my criticism course that we were talking about, and was always very good, spoke up when others were dozing, maybe -- and he was all right, and he wrote quite well, although I'm not sure how often he read his papers, because his sentences were always too long. I have this constant thing, right up to right now: For God's sake, use the period! Don't make me put a parenthesis in the middle of what you're saying, and another parenthesis in the middle of that, because, by that time. . . I can do it if I'm reading, but you're continuing to talk, and I'm trying to parse the sentence, and I'm losing it. I'm losing it. So, I keep at it for him, and I think even today that is a criticism, as I keep telling him, one more time. Use the period! Well, he did very well as a student. I won't say spectacularly. He was very bright and he got better and better as time went on. Let me see. What should we say next? In his Senior year he got very excited about [August] Rodin. He was thinking about all that, and, as I've already indicated, we teachers liked him so much we invited him to stay another year as sort of an assistant in the department, helping out in the big course. We got comments right away from students, because they thought he was fine in conference groups of fifteen, from a course of 180 people. He took several of those once a week, and they liked him very, very much. He was also busy in the late afternoons with the football team, as an assistant coach. Toward the end of the year he worked for us around the corner and about two weeks off, there was to be a big lecture given in the big course

on Rodin. He said, "I've gotten awfully excited about it. I wonder if I could give that lecture." We said, "All right. Yes. You can, after you've been here as an assistant for most of the year. Yes. We trust you." It was a howling success. It just was superb. And that's when I discovered he's a great speaker. I didn't know that until late in the year after class. This is a born speaker, and he speaks just marvelously. Maybe in his writing that period should come more often, but with his intonations and accents you had all that help, and you could follow along. He kind of touched back somehow where the sentence began, and continued. We didn't have a problem, as we found out in a bigger way, years later, when he got an honorary degree at Williams and gave *the* commencement speech, which is remembered with the greatest pleasure. It was a superb job, just a marvelous speech. Still later came the night when he invited me to the opening of the Jackson Pollock show [*Jackson Pollock*, MoMA Exh.#1819, Oct. 28, 1998–Feb. 2, 1999.] I sat at his table. I was next to a very elegant lady and I was the only one at the table who did not know who that fellow over there was, who was a famous comedian. What's his name? A big collector of modern art and so forth?

AS: Steve Martin?

LF: That's right. Steve Martin. I had never heard of Steve Martin. Everybody else had. People were trooping down the stairs, after the dinner was over. MoMA was then open to a crowd of guests. "Oh, there's Steve Martin!" He was way over on the other side of our group, so I never had a chance to talk to him. Well, where are we?

AS: We're talking about Kirk's gift for speaking.

LF: Yes. At any rate, he went off to Stanford. He decided, because of Al Elsen, the great authority on Rodin in this country. One thing led to another, and a book appeared. Here he was, a young graduate student, helping Elsen on his book on Rodin drawings, and there was the problem of forgeries. Elsen was obviously a very generous scholar, and his treatment of Kirk was most unusual. The young helper usually gets a notice, "Thanks a lot for what you did." This time it was joint authorship, which is a credit to both parties, in different ways, and I think it's perfectly wonderful. Kirk was still a graduate student at Stanford when this happened, toward

the end of it. Well, they had a show, I guess in Washington. I don't think I went to that, but I went to the one a little later in the Guggenheim Museum, and it was a wonderful show. My Lord! You went into a series of "rooms" and the Guggenheim space wasn't that good but they could block things off, sort of, and you saw Rodin drawings. In another room, you saw forgeries. Then they had another one with some of this and some of that, and then some of that and some of this. And then a final room in which you got a pencil, went through and made a decision, yourself, and then could check it at the door with how you made out. This was a superb and fabulous show, yes, yes.

AS: It gave the audience the test.

LF: My last year with Williams was Glenn's [Lowry] too and off he went. But he'd become excited with Milo Beach in Asian art and ended up, as you know with Milo, in Washington, D.C. From there he went straight to direct MoMA. . . Well, no. He went first to Toronto.

AS: The Art Gallery of Ontario, yes. And then to the Museum. Could you just briefly tell the story about Glenn Lowry, and the show he wanted to put on at the Williams College Museum, as an undergraduate?

LF: Well, it was just charming. Maybe it wasn't awfully exciting, but together, he and his wife did this together, and much depended on where and how things were placed. There were writings you could read, instructions, and a whole lot of information, all of it new to me. But it just looked awfully attractive. You poked your head in there, and said, "Hey, I think I'll go look at these things."

AS: And this is the show he did with his wife, who was also a student at the time.

LF: Oh, yes, very much so.

AS: And it was a show that concentrated on Canadian art.

LF: Well, arts and art in Canada. I thought it was going to be. . . It didn't occur to me it was going to be Eskimos. Not at all. Inuit art.

AS: You mentioned that you heard, either directly from him, or almost directly, about the impact this show had on his career.

LF: He told me, I think personally. . . I believe he said one day, "You know, it all started with that." I treasure that statement. "It all started with that."

AS: That one show. O.K.

LF: I couldn't do much with him on the art of Asia, because that was all Milo Beach, when he was actually teaching here, and a major force. Then, of course, we lost Milo Beach. He was called to Washington.

AS: And off he went. I noticed you graduated from Williams in 1929, correct? This was the same year The Museum of Modern Art was founded, in 1929.

LF: Yes. And the next year I'm at Harvard. If anything was happening, I wasn't hearing about it. Classes in modern art didn't exist, really. In 1930? No. No.

AS: Can you remember the first time you went to the Museum?

LF: Well, it was the Fogg Museum. That's where the classes all were. Sure. Wonderful museum, but you didn't see anything contemporary. Alfred Barr was giving a course out at Wellesley. That was the first course in modern art in the United States, and it was just about men. A little later for me, at Princeton, it was Middle Ages, Middle Ages, Middle Ages. I heard about The Museum of Modern Art, I think mostly when I had started teaching at Yale in 1932. You heard about it in New Haven. Then I suddenly discovered that the prime movers of this had been undergraduates at Harvard when I was a graduate student in the same building and never heard of it, because they got no support from the art faculty at Harvard, and they opened up what they were doing in Harvard Square, in the Coop. Yes. The names began to be familiar, you know, and we, in the Fogg, were in another world.

The first MoMA show I saw was Van Gogh and, I guess, Cézanne, four people. [*Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh*, MoMA Exh.#1, Nov. 7-Dec. 7 1929]. That was almost their first show. It was very exciting, my heavens. No building yet on 53rd Street. We were on Fifth Avenue, near 59th, in a semi-skyscraper with a gilt rooster on top. There MoMA had a floor. [Note: The Museum's first location was on the 12th floor of the Heckscher Building, now the Crown Building, 730 Fifth Avenue, between 56th and 57th Streets].

AS: The first temporary quarters of the Museum were, I think, at 730 Fifth Avenue.

LF: That's right. On the west side of the street, between 57th and 58th. Yes, yes. In New Haven it's awfully easy to get to New York. I was in New York all the time. I'd always go there. Then, gradually, they discovered a building slot around on 53rd Street, and they were going to have a building. Then they had to have a bigger building, and so forth. I went through all that.

At a certain point, it's hard to put a date on it, maybe in the '50s or something like that, I was considered but I won't say I was offered the job. I can't document it, but I felt I was offered the job. At any rate, I even declined the offer, or made clear I didn't want it, after considerable thought. It's Kirk's job, but at the time Andrew Ritchie got it. [Note: Ritchie became Director of the department of Painting and Sculpture in June 1956].

I did a little prospecting about moving to New York, to see what's what. The salaries weren't much better than I was getting, maybe a little but not much, and I asked a friend, "Look, if I go. . . We've got children, presumably private schools. I'd like to go to the theater. I'd like to go to concerts. What do you think, for an income? Leave out the little that I own." My mother was still alive, so, I mean, very little. The answer I got was $25,000 a year. Well, that was nowhere near what I was offered, and that had a lot to do with it. Then, also, I thought, "No, this is not primarily teaching, and that is primarily what I want to do." Of course, you would have the objects, yes. It's there. Oh, boy. But can't we combine that somehow? I'm not sure about my dates here, but when I'm at Yale, teaching, I developed a real friendship with a person exactly my

age, maybe two years older, who had been to Harvard and then went directly into an underling position at the Metropolitan Museum. His name was James Rorimer. You've heard of him. But we were just personal friends, he was nuts about the Middle Ages and I was getting to be. So, when I got up to Yale, teaching, he kind of kept track of me, wanted to know what was going on at Yale and so forth. I said, "Well, the thing I lack is objects to show." We had four or five magnificent sculptures from Angers, yes, I think late Romanesque, wonderful statues, but not much else, until we get to painting in Florence and Siena in the 14th Century, Very, very good, again. That was when I particularly barreled in as a graduate student at Princeton, and had a piece in the *Art Bulletin*.

With Jim Rorimer I sort of grew up with the Cloisters. Jim had attached himself Joseph Breck. Wasn't it. The Met's curator? He trained under Breck way beyond whatever he received at Harvard. The Cloisters were being put together. George Grey Barnard, the sculptor, owned them. They were in a warehouse somewhere. So, this development had already gotten underway when [John D.] Rockefeller [Jr.] got into the picture. And James Rorimer had a wonderful influence on him. Rockefeller supported him in everything he wanted to do. Rather quickly James became the director of the Cloisters. The first thing he did was stop all construction. "We must think about it. We want to try to house these wonderful objects in architecture that is also authentic. We're going to buy whole apses or broken-down churches," and they did. It was too late to do anything about the charming modern gothic chapel on the southwest corner, overlooking the Hudson. It had marvelous tombs and things in there, but shown in all Gothic of 1920, you know, and that's what they were trying to get away from. The main tower was also pretty well up: and his Premier Art Roman style should be much thinner and more delicate, and nobody ever saw a massive thing like that PAR style, but it was already built. So, Jim put his own office on top. His father was a great furniture designer and maker. Jodie and I had dinner up there more than once, Hudson moonlight and everything else, bright yellow and black leather furniture. Boy, it was just a plain knockout. Had nothing to do with the Middle Ages, of course.

AS: Nice juxtaposition.

LF: That friendship lasted all through wartime, and I was very sad when he died and furious at how long it took them to make him Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, because it seemed to be a real case of anti-Semitism. But he made it. He was a real scholar, difficult, but never mind.

Now, back to The Museum of Modern Art. Being at Yale I was in and out of MoMA a lot, and I knew people. James Thrall Soby, a very big figure in my life, went to Williams in the class of 1928, but he did not come back for senior year. [Note: Soby served as Director of the Dept. of Painting and Sculpture, 1943-1945 and chairman of the Dept. on an interim basis, 1947-57. Soby was involved with the Museum in various capacities, including on the Acquisitions and Photography Committees, and as a Trustee, 1942-1979]. He did not graduate. I think he never graduated. He was a socialite from way back. He had lots and lots of money, and he had a beautiful car. Not many people did in those days. He told me later. . . I hardly knew him, we weren't in the same fraternity and we weren't the same class, and that makes a hell of a lot of difference. There was kind of a social club, not connected with a particular fraternity, but these were people who were supposed to be wonderful greeters for arriving teams and he was one of those. He was very good at that kind of thing.

Jim Soby he told me later he'd never studied under Karl Weston, and was sad he never had. I said, "Boy, what you missed, a fine friend." But at any rate, Jim started in, immediately leaving Williams, said, "I'm not coming back," and went back to the Hartford area, where he came from. He had lots of friends who knew artists, he got more and more excited, went abroad and met them. He had plenty of money so he could do whatever he wanted. He turned out to be an absolutely brilliant writer, and MoMA made a curator out of him pretty fast. Most of the distinguished catalogues of The Museum of Modern Art, in the early years, are written by James Thrall Soby. Then came a book of essays on American artists of the day, going back a little -- I mean, Charles Demuth is in there, and so forth -- prefaced beautifully in several pages by Paul Sachs of Harvard. That's a real distinction. Paul Sachs never had the chance to make a museum director out of him. Jim never went to Harvard. He went to. . . What did he do? He didn't go anywhere, except to artists in the area, and from there to Europe. Well, I think it's incredibly distinguished. When we had our first show of works of art lent by the Williams alumni, that put us on the map. There were no

restrictions; it was helter-skelter. But he said, "I'll lend you things," and the great Picasso was in the show, *The Woman, Two Faces* that's in your collection, 1927, black face, white face, red dress, major, major Picasso [*Seated Woman*, 1927]. It was in our show. He lent us fine things. He gave us a few things. But after all, his career was in Hartford, New Caanan and New York. He gave us a very nice [Gordon] Matta and a [Pavel] Tchelitchew and several other things, and he caused other people to give to us. He made a great friendship. . . What's her name? A modern artist, who married Yves Tanguy? Kay Sage. He made a great friendship there, and after Tanguy was dead, and before Kay Sage died, she said, "Look. I want my collection distributed." And Jim was her executor. "I want it distributed among colleges in New England, and I want you to be particularly generous to Williams, because any idiotic place that would give you an honorary degree. . . ", which we had done, and which I had helped arrange successfully, ". . .anybody like that, I want them especially well treated." So, we got a very fine [Giorgio] de Chirico with red smokestacks and things, early on, it's all early de Chirico. We got a [Juan] Miró watercolor drawing, made out to Kay Sage. We have two or three Kay Sages, we have two or three Tanguys. A very nice gift. All through James Thrall Soby. He lent something to our second show. The first show was 1962, the next show in the '70s. Well, there's James Thrall Soby, a big figure in my life. I was asked, and this is a sadness, I was asked to write a series of books for the general public about modern art, and I wrote the first one. We had a meeting after the publisher had done everything, Abrams. . .

AS: Harry Abrams.

LF: Mr. Abrams was very enthusiastic about what I had written. So, there was a contract that I was to deliver in a certain number of years, and edited at MoMA by. . . What is her name? Never mind. She's a friend, but too much of a friend in the sense that she held things up forever, for small points, important but small points, and she's famous for this. Retired from there now, I could give you her name, but let's not bother with that. She's awfully nice in every way, except slow, slow, slow, and I sort of lost my steam, and I got to be slow, slow, slow and it all collapsed. I mean, when I say I knew everybody at The Museum of Modern Art, I really did. I circulated in there, all the way down from New Haven, or from Williamstown, as much as I could. So, that's

a sadness. Then the whole thing was taken over by John Canaday, for the Metropolitan. That took its place. This was not about modern. The thing I was to do for them was modern art, to start off with, and whatever else we started with. I suppose with *Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh*. . . But Canaday did a splendid job. He went through it awfully fast, and was very good. That is why somebody like Steven Paine who was in uniform at the Korean War time and hadn't gotten abroad yet, fell very strangely ill and went "off to the side of the road." He lived in Boston and he was not far away from there, in training. He was misdiagnosed as with the flu but it was polio. He was paralyzed from here down, for life. While he was otherwise recovering he read those books by Canaday in bed, and that got him excited. Like Soby he'd never taken art at Williams. We have two or three very distinguished Williams people who never studied art at Williams.

AS: But you didn't get to them.

LF: But we didn't get to them.

AS: Now you must have known Alfred [H.] Barr [Jr.]. [Note: Barr was Director of the Museum from 1929 until 1943; Director of Research in Painting and Sculpture, 1944-1947; Director of Museum Collections, 1947-1967.]

LF: Yes. I remember Jodie and I were invited to the Barr house, and various other people were there, like. . . The history of American architecture, a great friend of Barr. The big man in the history of American architecture, overall.

AS: Philip Johnson? Was it Johnson? No.

LF: He taught at Smith for years. He moved to New York University. Also taught. Well, you'll know. One of the originals in the American. . . into the international style of architecture. [Note: Faison is talking about Henry-Russell Hitchcock.]

AS: The international style of architecture.

LF: Well, Barr is a leader in it, and. . .

AS: And then Johnson was the person who established architecture and design at the Museum.

LF: Architecture, and the role of historian, really. Well, he was their voice. He was their voice, he was.

AS: The Museum's voice.

LF: He was a practicing architect, he wasn't their voice. Well, where should we go from here? That, together with a never ceasing interest in The Museum of Modern Art, maybe getting to be a bit less and less, then along came Kirk Varnedoe, you see. And when he went to The Museum of Modern Art, I mean, I'm more than welcome, and I go there more often.

AS: But you've watched, sometimes from up close, sometimes from afar, the evolution of the Museum.

LF: Yes, yes.

AS: You've seen it go from temporary quarters to 53rd Street.

LF: The whole thing.

AS: Six renovations. From one curatorial department to seven. In your opinion, was there an exhibition or two that you thought was extraordinary, or a turning point in the evolution of the Museum?

LF: Well, when Kirk rearranged the permanent collection, and did it very historically, in groups like this, you went through some wonderful rooms, turned a corner, and there were the four [Wasily] Kandinskys, that hit you in the face, like this. Two of them had been owned by the Guggenheim, and the arrangement was made so the four were from the same dining room, I think, in New York.

AS: They had been commissioned by Edwin R. Campbell.

LF: Do you remember that wall? I'd say it was, literally, a turning point. It was simply terrific. Well, he had ways of emphasis and grouping that was a first-class mind at work. I don't mean to say that previous to that it was just things hanging on the wall but there was a new sense of meaning that Kirk gave the whole thing. Other exhibitions: I suppose the basic one of *Cubism and Abstract Art* [MoMA Exh.#36, March 2-April 19, 1936] by Barr, was certainly a major achievement. Do you want any more? There were many others. We tended to get closer to individual artists by this time.

AS: Maybe now we can talk a little about the middle of your career, after the Second World War. You were involved with the Office of Strategic Services and stationed in Europe, in Munich. I don't so much want to talk about the history now, but can you tell me a little about, in recent years. . .Because provenance has become such an issue. . . are you consulted by scholars? By curators? By writers? By journalists?

LF: Yes. Not frequently, but often enough. You should know this: that I was offered this job to get out of Navy duties. I was still a member of the Navy. At first I had to become a member of OSS, and that took a long time. They put me in western Austria, in a wonderful house somewhere near the Great Salt Mine, where the Hitler collection and other prizes were stored. This was from July, 1945, until the end of the year, over into January, although I was back in London when cold weather took over. So, the second half of summer and fall, in that work, then writing it all up in London, and then. . . Because I had the problem of doing the history, as far as possible, of the collection of Adolph Hitler, how it was made, and who contributed to it. That was my job.

Then we skip five years is it? From November, 1950, and all the year '51 until September 1st. The USA got out of military government and everything else and gave it back, then, to the Germans. I was the final director of the collecting point in Munich. They are two entirely different. . . But I got the second job on a year's leave of absence from Williams, of course. I got the second job primarily because of the first one. I was back in Munich in 1960-'61 and I was entirely on my own, and I had a

Guggenheim fellowship. My wife and I did 17,000 miles on back roads, in southeast Germany, western Austria, some of Vienna, and German Switzerland. So, that was '60-'61. I think that was in the legitimate sabbatical year.

AS: And that was as a Guggenheim fellow.

LF: Yes. I got a Guggenheim to do that. Those nice people don't require anything. That's why I never wrote the book, I'm afraid. I wrote pieces of the book, in various ways.

AS: Because you had the distinct, very different part of your career, for the Office of Strategic Services, one, writing the history of the Adolph Hitler collection, and the other as director of the Munich collecting point, you have a lot of experience in terms of provenance research of the paintings, then also, the history, the literary part. I can imagine that that experience, especially with the paintings, must make your expertise very valuable right now, when many people want to know about that period.

LF: Well, it has to be something that happened when I was there, not otherwise. Otherwise, somebody else knows and I don't. I came back to Williams in 1951 full-time, teaching. That's it. That's over. But I'll give you one thing that happened, that will give you an interest, to make it specific. A young army officer, an American, in 1951 it has to be, arrived, and said he had found this in his town, a little town in southeast Germany, bordering Austria. He said there was this soldier, and I think the soldier brought it in, and he was getting scared, because he owned this thing. It was a big painting. It was rolled up. His story was that he somehow saved this thing in Montecassino if you can believe it. The painting did belong to Montecassino and there was no joke about it. But his story was that he found this thing in the wreckage, ripped it out of its frame, or what was left of the frame. The painting wasn't very much damaged, so he rolled it up, took it around with him, and took it home when he went back, at the end.

Well, that was the story. The thing was brought in. I called in everybody who's interested, unrolled the thing on the floor, and we saw that this was one hell of a fine, 17th-Century, Italian baroque, religious painting. He said it came from Montecassino. Well, it had a subject, and out of the crowd there was enough knowledge and

experience, and sure enough, it was one of the paintings that was missing. So, that's the easiest provenance, I guess. We returned it through the Italian representative in Munich. It was very, very fast. It went back to Italy, no questions asked. That happened. There's one that went back.

AS: A success story.

LF: And now I guess it's hanging in Montecassino in whatever they've rebuilt.

AS: Thanks to your efforts, partially.

LF: Well, that was easy.

AS: But also, I do know several colleagues, curators, who have mentioned to me stories of consulting with you -- not curators at The Museum of Modern Art but, for example, a curator at the Fogg, who's been in touch with you -- about the label on the back of a painting that confounded her. She didn't know what it was, and thought you might be able to help her.

LF: Yes. While I was there, maybe it was even in '45 -- it could have been, more likely -- two people came in. They were maybe Yugoslavs, and they described themselves as "Czechniks." Well, that's a thing we don't hear about anymore. You must see my map of Yugoslavia -- a funny map -- but we don't have anything about Czechniks. Czechniks were violent opponents of Tito, so they were in bad shape. They somehow survived, and there was a day, between the sudden departure of all German troops, all the German troops in Munich, which was supposed to have been declared an open city, and the arrival of Americans, and there was a kind of Bastille performance. The public got in the cellars, and what they found was that there were two or three big shipments that hadn't quite gotten sent to Austria before it was too late. So, our visitors brought with them one little picture by a little Dutch painter. It had a monogram on the back, in the *New York Times* kind of script. I don't think you call it "roman." Maybe you do call it "roman," but it's "gothic," to me and *The New York Times*. . . [Tape interruption].

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2

AS: O.K. I'm sorry about that. You were saying that it had a large "S".

LF: Yes. A gothic "S" on the back, blue on white, and that was a mark somebody knew. The Schloss collection was a huge thing, a Jewish collection out of Paris, and he was interested in signed, small pictures. The emphasis was on who did it, and there was an enormous number of artists, you see, a very big collection. Everything was signed, whether it was any good or not, but it was all 17th-Century Dutch, no doubt about that. The identification of the collection was this sort of sticker on the back. They had two pictures, and there they were. Well, obviously, in that day between, that Bastille day. . . They rushed in and ransacked, so everything was found in terrible shape when the Americans came right in. These "Czechniks" helped themselves. They said, "We have others, and our friends have others," and we said, "What do you want?" They wanted food, and they wanted gasoline. That was easily arranged, and we kept the two pictures. The reason I think it was 1945 or '46 -- more likely '45, yes '45 -- and not 1950, '51 -- well, then, there was a case of what happened. They got, for them, something very valuable, gasoline and some food. As I remember, their friends were going to bring more things in. I'm pretty sure I wasn't in Munich then. I was visiting at the moment, when one of these came in. I went on back to Austria, but that's the way things were happening, and the Schloss collection got pretty much split up. I think things may still be missing. Not much, but maybe.

AS: Well, it's keeping many researchers busy these days, trying to make sure that provenances are not problematic.

LF: Of course.

AS: So, would you say that in the past five years or so you've been consulted more by colleagues, journalists, authors?

LF: Much more than at first. Everything closed down rather rapidly, and then, I don't know. Nobody was much interested. Silence. Then all of a sudden, wow, it happened so fast, the whole thing started up again.

AS: And do you find you're able to answer the questions they pose to you?

LF: Some of them. Some of them, sometimes. I mean, so much went through Munich, in my year in Munich. Well, so much went through Munich. It was wartime, after all. Where did it go?

AS: And you saw the end of it? The closing of the collecting point.

LF: Yes. Yes. And more and more. Well, a special place was opened up, you see, and it was done by Craig Smyth, whom I hope you've heard of. He persuaded, via other people, he persuaded General Patton, the horseman, who was the first general who came through. And after it was over he was going to have his headquarters in Munich. Then there was no point, because the destruction in Munich was simply terrific. This one place was enough to start things going, and that's what Craig Smyth was put in charge of. He, with his black tie and army uniform, was very important -- black tie, blue hat, U.S. Navy, black tie, blue hat -- and the idea was not one of the jerks from the navy doing, "We're going to show them the stuff". . . They couldn't have been nicer. General Patton, as such, by name. Patton established his headquarters in this building, there wasn't much else left, and Craig got word to him, not directly, what was up. And he said, "It's much more important now, get another building," and word came back that, "Yes, you have the building." A very important happening. So, that place, which was the party building in Munich and I guess more or less the same thing was happening with the building just like it -- which became Haus America, America House, much the same. That was Hitler's personal official office, there. No matter where he was, that was the center he'd come back to from Berlin. All this gets exciting about 1980 or something, and then wow.

AS: Everyone was interested.

LF: Everyone. That's when things started again. In the meantime, I'd been teaching art history, and forgot all about it.

AS: So, the last topic I'd like to talk about today is your time at *The Nation*.

LF: *The Nation*. Let's see. Where do we start?

AS: Start at the beginning.

LF: Well, there was a fine woman. I've got to get her name. *The Nation* was a very, very distinguished magazine, the whole thing was distinguished, and it made sense, way back. In more recent years, as the war approached, they began to be very strident about the war and that kind of thing. Such things as art were on the back pages, and they tended not to have much to do with this. In came Margaret Marshall. I think I got it.

AS: I think you did.

LF: A wonderful, wonderful woman, much older than I, and she made that back part of *The Nation* a very distinguished literary magazine, is what it amounted to. It had nothing to do with her until Frieda Kirchner came in as the new editor of the whole magazine. She wanted everything to be propaganda for what she was doing in the front part. This produced the resignation of Margaret Marshall, who had appointed me as art critic when her friend and sort of protégé, Clement Greenberg, had moved on. He got more pay and a better job at. . .

AS: *Partisan Review*? Was it *Commentary?*

LF: It may have been. He did several big steps up. But it all started under Margaret Marshall. So, what is our question, now?

AS: Just if you could talk about your involvement at *The Nation*.

LF: Yes, well, I met her socially, I think. No, that wasn't true. She heard about me. Oh, of course, I met her through Clem Greenberg. It all start with Greenberg, when he came up to Williams as an invited guest, placed on the program by a committee of Williams faculty and a few very bright Williams students. One of the students who had been in the war, was very, very bright. I think he has just now retired, after a very distinguished career in. . . what do you call it? Well, I'll think of it in a minute. It's not art history, but art comes into it. He told me, "My God, they say they've got an art person on the committee that's going to be at this meeting, a fellow who's. . . well, he had worked for. . ." At any rate, he could call in people and ask them questions about whatever, and that was the sort of thing he did. He didn't know anything about art at all, and Greenberg got wind of this. There they were together, at Williamstown. The question came up, how are we going to know how people feel? Or whether it's right or wrong? And this guy's idea was to take a vote." That set off Clement Greenberg in a way nobody had heard for a long time.

AS: It got him going.

LF: That was that, and Clement Greenberg became the art person on this group during two or three days' work, here in Williamstown. Anything to do with art was Clement Greenberg, and that's when I got to know him. And although I didn't know anything about modern art, I could talk, I was friendly, he was very, very bright and knew a lot of things, and a friendship started up, right there, at that event. Then I think from that time. . . Yes, he was already working for *The Nation*, and that's how I met Margaret Marshall, who got hold of me. First of all I became a book reviewer of all those art books. Then when he left *The Nation* she wanted me, and that was done very rapidly. I became "it" after Clement Greenberg, and loved every minute of it until the end. I was their art critic from 1952 to 1954 when I simply had to give it up. It was awfully exciting and I got to know a lot of modern art. I had a full schedule at Williams the whole time.

AS: You were just doing too much.

LF: At the start, when I said, "I can't do this. I don't know anything about modern art," Clement said, "Well, you know as well as I do that it doesn't make any difference

whether it's modern or not. Most people don't understand this." I said, "Well, I do understand that." He said, "All you need is exposure." Then I said, "O.K. Expose me," and I went down to New York City. I gave "pre-cuts" on Thursday and an essay problem. I had a long weekend from Thursday to Tuesday. Clement Greenberg took me around everywhere, tried testing me out, you see. A Robert Motherwell. I didn't quite get it, so he took over and said, "Don't you see. . ." "Oh, yes. Yes, yes." Well, I wasn't stupid, I responded to art and he responded to that, and we just kind of met in the new situation. He introduced me to all kinds of people, and then I came back to reality and. . .

AS: A whirlwind.

LF: So, one thing led to another, and rather than art reviewing which I was now doing -- and then his resignation came -- I went to a much more paying job. Margaret Marshall took a shine to me and I had taken a shine to her and I became "it," you see, for two or three years. My first article, which was on Loren MacIver. What shall I say? Never mind. First glance, but the subject matter was of some importance. I moved from there. I mean, I knew something about modern art but not in the detail to be a critic, but I became a critic overnight real fast.

AS: Well, it sounds like you had to.

LF: Yes, I had to.

AS: And was there anything in that whirlwind trip you took with Clement Greenberg that really stands out in your memory? Anything you saw? Any exhibition you saw? An artist's work that you saw? That stands out above the others? Or was it just an intense, blanket view of modern art?

LF: I wonder at what point I began to look at pictures upside down? That was very important in my life, to suddenly look at a picture upside down, particularly the more abstract it became, the more essential it was to do that, and discover that this experience and that experience are really much the same experience. Whereas if you do it to a Degas, it's upside down, but still it's damned interesting, the balancing

and everything else. You apply what's perfectly clear and understood about an upside-down Degas to an upside-down Pollock. That kind of thing. Well, maybe ask me that question later.

I met Pollock. Oh, yes. Another thing that happened. Back to Greenberg. He became an adjunct member of the faculty, I think, of Bennington College. He came up for two or three days every so often, Williams didn't have appointments like that. Bennington is another sprocket altogether. I saw something of Clem that way. I learned a great deal, very fast, from him, and it was all good. Then he went, I thought, too far, into absolute color-field painting. My chief trouble. . . I've gone and forgotten the name again. I'm getting addle-brained, so let's take a break.

AS: Shall we take a break?

LF: Yes. I'm getting addle-brained.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **S. LANE FAISON, JR. (LF)**

INTERVIEWER: **ANNA SWINBOURNE (AS)**

LOCATION: **WILLIAMSTOWN, MA**

DATE: **DECEMBER 6, 2001**

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

AS: Mr. Faison, if we could just maybe pick up where we left off yesterday, talking, again, about your role at *The Nation*. If we could start, perhaps, with your meeting Clement Greenberg here at Williamstown. If you could tell us about that.

LF: The end of the story is that when I succeeded -- this is about 1951, I think -- I succeeded Clem Greenberg as art critic for *The Nation*, a very big, important thing that happened to me. The buildup is rather extraordinary. A student, right after the war was over -- he was a genuine veteran, had been shot at and so forth -- came back from. . . He was a very, very serious fellow, and he was determined to get everything the college could give him, and give everything he could to the college. This was serious business. He wanted to write a paper about the Italian Renaissance in the 15th century, everything about it, art was one of the things about it, and did I know that bookkeeping was invented in Florence, at the same time Brunelleschi was developing the theory of perspective? I said no, I did not know that. Well, that is rather fascinating, when you come to it. I had to pull him down from a 500-page magnum opus to fifty pages. He balked at it, but it finally ended up that we became friends and he wrote me a brilliant paper fifty page paper. He got involved in everything in the college very fast, and there was created what turned out to be a three-day symposium in Williams College with a lot of invited guests, about very important things going on now that the war was over. I think this was about 1948-49, or so. Students got involved in this, too, and discovered there was nobody to represent art. He raised hell about it and they replied, "Do you know anybody? We've got this fellow who is part of the Poly Sci Department, but he also has a big thing on the side -- one of the major pollsters, public opinion survey people. It's a major one.

We don't have any problem. Just ask his opinion about a work of art or something," and that set him off. He said, "No, no, no, no, no-- *NO*!" Well, one thing led to another, and he produced a person to do that, a genuine, living, important art critic, named Clement Greenberg. People knew about Clement Greenberg, but I'd never met him. However, he had a connection with Bennington College, which was only fifteen miles up the road, and he appeared off and on. It was a kind of loose arrangement. He brought new pictures, and he kind of stirred them up on the contemporary scene. He was on this Williams commission, this group, and it actually happened that something of the sort came up from the audience, and the fellow said, "Well, let's ask So-and-So, that pollster fellow." Greenberg is sitting there, not so quietly at this point. The pollster mumbled something or other, and Greenberg simply took off, in a great big way, stunned the audience and really let go and said his piece. Well, that was the beginning. My student brought Clement Greenberg over, and I soon discovered he was beautifully educated. His heart, his world, was in the contemporary scene but he had acquired a marvelous background, and he obviously spoke well. So, it finally developed that. . . First of all, I had been reviewing books for *The Nation*, in the back part, and noticing his critical articles there. The back part and the front part of *The Nation* were totally separate. Margaret Marshall, a wonderful person, ran the back part, and paid no attention whatever to the very political front part. Suddenly Clement Greenberg got a much better paying job as art critic for *Commentary Magazine*, which was bigger in art terms. One thing led to another and I became his successor. Margaret Marshall and I saw things together very nicely, it all went very well, and I continued in the vein. The catch was I didn't know anything about contemporary art. My whole training was medieval art, Renaissance art, and Baroque art. In fairly recent years I'd turned pretty much to 19th-century, early 20th-century art. But in terms of the actual, shall we say, SoHo or pre-Soho scene, I was indeed ignorant. The question came up of my succeeding Clem, and I said, "Well, how can I do that? I don't know these things at all? I know some names, but I'm out of it." He said, "Give me a long weekend and I can fix you up." I said, "How can you say that?" He said, "Well, you know perfectly well that it's simply a change of scenery. The decisions and what you're trying to find out about and make judgments, it's all the same. It's just new scenery for you, and I need to show you the scenery. Give me a long weekend." So, the long weekend was from Thursday to Tuesday. I forget what kind of writing essay I gave the students to do while I left town. It was

some whirlwind, and I'll never get over it. It went on all day and all night long. I met all kinds of artists, mostly around McDougal Alley, particularly one evening. Fairly well along in the evening, we descended into the cellar and here was a lovely living room, quite a lot of people, plenty to drink and all that. This was Mercedes Matter, and you still hear of her. She's still alive. She's my age, and she's a kind of sainted trustee of an art school off Fifth Avenue on West 8th Street. Earlier the building had served as the Whitney Museum was, before it moved uptown.

So, chez Matter there's this wonderful jazz music going on, Benny Goodman kind of stuff, perfectly wonderful rhythm. Then I was aware that high up on the wall was a great, long painting with kind of things this way, on a dark background and all these. . . It was really white on dark, actually. It turned out that that was my first Pollock, the first I'd ever seen. I'd read a little about him. *Life* magazine had something about him. But seeing him under these conditions, and with the help of a restrained amount of alcohol. . . I insist, if you really want to get rid of everything else and focus on the medium you're looking at, a drink helps. I mean it. I'm serious. *A* drink helps. You don't want to over drink, but it tunes your receptors up. I began to connect it with the music and the rhythms. It became clearer and clearer as you went along. So, that was a very important start, and I was operating. . .

Well, he took me to the Kootz Gallery up on 57th Street, which was the one uptown place where a large public could see what was going on. Everything was new. My first so-and-so, and my first so-and-so. And I met one artist after another. I met most of the artists. I came back absolutely exhausted, but agreed to do this column once a month and I chose what I was going to review. Nobody was going to tell me what I should see. I could consult with Clem if I wanted to, but that was it. It was a busy time for me. I was chairman of the Art Department, running the college museum, in full-time teaching and now this on top. I couldn't do it forever, but I adored it and learned an enormous lot. My respect for Clement Greenberg has always been very, very high, for the way he treated me and the knowledge, and know-how he had. He could be crude if he wanted to, but he was a fascinating, fully developed human being whose world was art. One day he brought in a gal, who might have been nineteen, twenty years old, no more than that, a perfectly beautiful girl, from Bennington College, to our house. Jodie thought she was very attractive. It was the

first time she'd seen Clement Greenberg. He said, "I wanted to bring this girl down to show you. She's a very good artist, up there at the college."

AS: Aren't you going to tell me her name?

LF: I can in a minute, when I think of it. It'll come back to me. I can show you pictures of her. She's now about seventy-five years old, and almost certainly the major living American painter, in terms of a long career. Helen Frankenthaler. It was Helen Frankenthaler, who was considerably younger than I at this time. So, there's a little background on how my world changed to envelop not only what I was responsible for, but this whole new world, and getting to New York once a month, and all this new business. As I've always said, Williamstown is the finest place in the world that I know of, to live in, but you must get out of it all the time. You must get away from it, then come back and appreciate what you've got here. So, that's my speech on that subject.

AS: You mentioned early on Clement Greenberg bringing exhibitions and paintings up to Bennington College. Can you talk a little bit about that?

LF: Oh, yes. Of course. Well, part of his connection, it was a loose sort of connection, was that he gave talks or speeches up there. I heard about this vaguely but there wasn't any to-do about it. Clem also developed a few exhibitions of what he thought was first class. One day, after I'd gotten to know him, he said, "Look, I'm bringing up a show of Jackson Pollock, and this is different. Everything he does is put up for sale year by year in the Betty Parsons Gallery," and that was *the* center, in terms of a gallery. I met her, of course, later on. A lovely person. But Clem said, "This is the first Pollock retrospective. All other shows so far in New York have been what he painted since the last season. A lot of them were sold and a lot of them weren't, and then a year later we had another show, for sale, you know. But Bennington's show will be a retrospective. It goes back to the '40s. He doesn't want to show anything from when he was a direct student of, whoever that fellow was but you know him perfectly well. He's gotten way over all that. So, we start in the early '40s and we go up to right now. 'Right now' was '51, I think, so that included what most of us think is the career's centerpiece, meaning 1948, '49, '50, and that was what most of the show

represented. I found out a lot I didn't know when the show arrived. Clem said, "Why don't you have the show after Bennington, and pay half the expense of getting it up and down? Jackson Pollock will appear at both openings." I said, "You bet. You bet." The trucking wasn't going to be that expensive, in those days. I said, "Yes, indeed." He said, "Well, I should warn you about Jackson Pollock. You're going to get one of two things. He'll be totally silent and not say anything to anybody at all, or he'll be drunk, there'll be an awful scene, and you'll have to take care of that." Well, Pollock decided to be totally silent when he came to Williamstown. That's all I know. He'd nod if you said, "Good morning," but he did not converse. Last of all would he say anything about his pictures. No, no, no, no. But he was present, and that was kind of nice. I have photographs of various pictures. . . because we had no gallery quite right for it. So, one of them is at the head of the stairs, coming up, and it took up that whole wall. I have a photograph of it, indicating what kind of setting this was in. That's become an historical document, because this work is *#30 of 1950*, now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art but with a title it did not have when it was in Williamstown: *Autumn Rhythm*. You can look for brown fall leaves in the picture at the Met, but we didn't do that in those times. This show was a big to-do. All these things were for sale. I got more and more excited about this *#30 of 1950* picture. Almost nobody in Williamstown knew anything about Pollock. This was at the very beginning, and everybody thought he was a madman. *#30* was $5,000, and I couldn't see $5,000. That means more like $25,000 now, or more, and I also figured, well, I couldn't cough it up myself. That was way out of possibility. It was twice my yearly stipend to spend on the museum, for everything else. With anything left over from that, you could buy something. $5,000 was a monument, like Everest, you know. If I had somehow gotten the picture, I think I would have been seriously considered. . . Well, I had tenure. Life would have been very difficult, even so. But it was, obviously, an impossibility. I think it was three years later, or four, that the Metropolitan bought it for $40,000, I think. And now? How many millions of dollars? I look at that picture, which I adore, and think, $5,000, if I had it now and could get it, then, boy would I get it.

AS: The one that got away.

LF: That's the one that got away. So, that's that story.

AS: You mentioned that the people in Williamstown and the people in the region sort of felt Pollock was a little bit "out there." Can you talk a little bit more about the reception of the exhibition? What the public thought about it? What the college community thought about it?

LF: It's a nice, comfortable town and it isn't given to savagery and so forth. After all, this was just an exhibition. It caused a lot of comment and excitement, etc., and a few people began to be interested. Most people thought it was crazy, and we had lots of people who made what they thought of as their own kind of Pollocks. We had all the variations you can think of. While the show was there I think we were able to use some of the fakes that were created, put them up beside an original, and go to work on it, with students.

Well, the rest of *The Nation* story is rather sad. After I'd had this job, doing these columns, for a good two or three years, maybe a little more, Margaret Marshall, that wonderful, older woman, said, "I'm sorry to tell you, I'm resigning. We have a new editor, and she will not let the back part be what it is. She wants to dominate that, give it a political direction, and I won't have anything to do with it." I said, "Oh, my God. Well, I'm getting a little tired of this routine I'm doing, and I will resign with you immediately." She said, "I don't want you to do that. I want you, please, not to resign until she tries to do this to you, as she probably will. In the meantime, we have very few good critics in the country. Keep it up as long as you can, but she will probably get after you." About six months later, I was invited to lunch at the Harvard Club by her by the new editor. There was a special entrance for women in those days, at the Harvard Club. You did not go through the front door. We had a table for two. In our discussion she moved things around rather cleverly but then she wanted me to. . . Why didn't I review so-and-so? I said, "Well, these two brothers, these painters, are perfectly good but they're old people now, and they've been doing the same thing for years and years. There's not much new there. Why should I do them?" She said, "Well, it's about working people, and many gallery-goers want to see this." I said, "Oh, really?" Then she said, "Well, how about the United Nations?" I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "It's full of things from governments, and very important artists." Finally, it came out in the open that the Communist artists were the ones she

wanted me to write up, in very positive terms, you see. I said, "Well, I'm afraid you're barking up the wrong tree. I can't do this. No, no, no. If you insist. . ." She said, "Yes, I insist." I said, "Well, then, I resign," and that was the end of the luncheon, and the end of the whole thing. That's it.

AS: Wow. O.K. So, is there anything else we've talked about, yesterday or today, that you would like to comment on further? Anything to clarify, or that you'd like to discuss?

LF: One little thing. I did not do what I had hoped to do, or agreed to do for MoMA, which was a whole series of books on modern art. Abrams, the publisher, was going to be there, I had written Chapter One, so to speak, and I read it aloud. The agency people thought it was very good. Then Helen Frank entered the picture. [Note: Franc was Editorial Associate, 1954-1958; Editorial Assistant and Editorial Associate, 1961-1966; Senior Editor 1967-1969 and Editor-in-Chief; 1969-1971.] She's an extremely able editor on the staff of The Museum of Modern Art and has other jobs, but is a very, very bright woman. She and I worked together very nicely, but she's very critical. More and more you write something, then all these other things have to be taken. There's a limit to what you can do, and I began to get behind schedule. I got more and more exhausted, she was more and more demanding, so it just fell apart. I can understand her, but if my comment in any way puts the blame on her, that wasn't my idea. I think, in the end, I simply let them down, under circumstances that had sort of gotten out of my control. So, that's all I wanted to say on that.

AS: O.K.

LF: I'm very fond of Helen Frank. Give her my best. She'll remember the old days.

AS: Well, then, on behalf of the Museum, I'd like to thank you for sharing with us.

LF: Well, I've had a wonderful time talking with you, getting to know you. You're another reason why I love The Museum of Modern Art. I have a number of connections that are beginning to go away. People get older, some of them pass on and here I am, still. I go way back to 1956, no 1962, when James Thrall Soby, Williams College

Class of '28, lent us for our first show of works owned by the college alumni. We had an exhibition of them, almost anything from ‘here to there,’ no particular center. Williams College alumni owned important art, and we had a wonderful show. He produced that magnificent Picasso of 1927, the woman with two faces, which is a major figure in The Museum of Modern Art. His collection went to MoMA because that was his whole career. But that's a long time ago. Did I tell you, maybe not, how he got interested in art.

AS: I don't think you mentioned how he got interested in art.

LF: Fascinating. Well, he did not take Mr. Weston's courses. He was a rich boy, very rich, from, I think, Manchester, Connecticut. I think it was. . .

AS: . . .around Hartford.

LF: . . .something to do with clothing, or goods or something. But he had lots of money and was very bright, and Williams College was a vacation for him. He was having the best time of his life, and he didn't come back for senior year at all. All that he's so famous for happened after Williams. On the other hand, when it came to remembering Williams, he was very generous. I said, "What happened to you? You didn't come back to Williams. What happened?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you. In my junior year I went down to Spring Street, that little business street. . .” And at that time, off and on, some fellow with a lot of pictures, satchels and things, would rent a front window for the day, on Spring Street, and sell things, reproductions usually, and this and that. Maybe, occasionally, an original something or other, but never mind. Essentially, reproductions. He stepped in there and bought two things by Maxfield Parrish. They were two of the same sort of thing. I don't want to say naked, we've got to say "nude", girls on swings, in front of a beautiful sky-colored background, and maybe a Grecian vase at each end. He bought these icons and put them up in his room, and thought they were pretty wonderful. Then, in about a week, he got terribly bored. He said, "They just bored me, and he began to wonder, "Why did they attract me?" and, "Why are they boring me?" When he thought more and more about that, he decided, "I've got to find out why they bore me, so I'd better look at other things, to see if they bore me, too." It turned out they didn't. Soby had access. Hartford was

way ahead of New York at this particular moment, as you may know, and Chick [Arthur Everett] Austin was the director of the art museum in Hartford. This included opening a show by Gertrude Stein, you know, *Pigeons in the Grass, Alas*, or was it *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Things like that were happening, and artists were excited about Hartford. Jim got into this whole world, was very bright and very acute. So, he's listed among three or four very distinguished people who went to Williams College, and did not take art while they were at Williams. We have our own much longer list of "honoraries" who studies with us.

AS: It's quite a long list.

LF: Yes. But coming back to Williams. I love to consider this sequence. Karl Weston, myself and Kirk Varnedoe, and now there is you. Then there is Kirk Varnedoe, and there is you. Now the sequence, in terms that the link is the same, works all the way from and to. I believe Mr. Weston would be happy about the whole thing, and I know he would simply adore you.

AS: That sounds like a perfect place to end.

LF: Yes.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

END INTERVIEW