THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **RICHARD PALMER (RP)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **WEST SIDE, MANHATTAN, NYC**

DATE: **4 AUGUST 2003**

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: I'll start the way I always do and ask you to tell me where and when you were born, and just a little something about your family background.

RP: Okay. Well, I was born January 4, 1934, in a little town in Ohio. I don't remember a lot about my early years. It was sort of the aftermath of the Depression, and my parents lived with my grandfather for several years. He owned several farms, in Napoleon, Ohio.

SZ: And that's near what?

RP: Well, the nearest, bigger city is Toledo. So it's in the northwestern part of the state. We lived on the farm, I think, probably just for a few years. Then we moved into town. My grandfather moved with us; my mother was sort of his caretaker. I started school there. I think I probably went through the third grade in Napoleon, Ohio, and then we moved to Archbold, Ohio, another small town about twenty miles away. That's where my mother was from. She was born there. We lived there through my grade school and high school years. I went to college, initially at Eastern Illinois University, because my mother's older sister and her husband lived there; he was on the faculty of the university. So I lived with them, and was there, for two and a half years. Then I transferred to Bowling Green University, in Ohio. At that time (I graduated in '55) everyone who was in the school got deferrals.

SZ: Because the Korean War was over?

RP: Yes.

SZ: Just to back up for one second. Was your father a farmer?

RP: No, he never was a farmer. He had a number of jobs during the war. He was 4F, for whatever reason (I think because he had a big family, and he was older), so he had to work in a defense plant in Toledo. That was for several years, actually, so my mother really held down the home front, even though that was only forty miles away. I think gas was probably rationed, and he could only come home on the weekends. I'm not sure I remember the exact order, but at one point he worked for an uncle of mine who had a big automobile dealership in Toledo. At the end, though, my father was in the meatpacking business, as a salesman, and my mother was a schoolteacher. My father was high-school educated, and my mother was a college graduate.

SZ: Did you have siblings?

RP: Yes. I have two sisters and a brother. They're all still alive. I'm closest to my brother. One of my sisters has had severe emotional problems since she graduated from high school. She's been in and out of institutions. It's very sad. She's currently living in sort of a group home in Ohio. I actually haven't seen her for years. My mother only passed away just before the holiday last year. She was ninety-seven. I did get out to Ohio with some regularity to see her, and I usually stayed with my brother, who's now retired (he was a dentist), and his wife.

SZ: How did you experience the Depression?

RP: I think I was too young for it to really phase me. I think things were still rough, and I don't really remember what my father did during those years. I was really too young.

SZ: In high school, was there an expectation that you were going to go on to university, or was that self-generated?

RP: Well, yes, it was expected that I was going to go on. I mean, my sister and brother and I (I'm the oldest) all graduated from college. My younger sister, Karen, who had the problems, was the only one who didn't go beyond high school.

SZ: So you went to college and you majored in what?

RP: I majored in art.

SZ: Studio art?

RP: Yes. Studio art.

SZ: Something I didn't know.

RP: I did have quite a bit of art history, but I definitely majored in studio art and minored in history.

SZ: When did you realize you could draw, or paint, or liked to do it?

RP: I think when I was really quite young. I was very interested in drawing. I probably didn't paint until I was in high school. It was a very small town, and there were no art courses. Nothing. The curriculum was really very limited. The first college I went to in Illinois was actually ideal. It was very small -- there were about 1,200 students -- and it had a pretty good art department, actually. It was small, but very good. The reason

I didn't stay there was I really got tired of living with my aunt and uncle. My uncle was sort of overbearing. I liked the school, but I wasn't sorry I transferred to Bowling Green.

SZ: And there you finished up in studio art?

RP: Right. I graduated in '55, and, as I said, at that time everyone who had been in college had been getting deferred. It was just going to be a matter of months until I got drafted, so I volunteered because I wanted to get it over with.

SZ: Oh, that's how it worked. In other words, you got a student deferment --

RP: -- as long as you were in college; as long as you didn't flunk out or something.

SZ: But then you had to go.

RP: You had to serve, yes.

SZ: It's so long ago. I'd forgotten that that was true.

RP: Well, you aren't as old as I am.

SZ: Not quite. But I remember things like the draft.

RP: I was sent to Kansas, Fort Riley, Kansas. I went in mid- to late summer, fairly soon after I graduated. Back then (I don't know if this exists anymore) basic training was in two segments, each six weeks. During the first six weeks I don't think you were really allowed to leave the post. And basic training, for me, was a real drag, because I was never really very athletic. It involved five-mile hikes, with full packs and a rifle and --

SZ: Did they scream at you, and hit you on the back?

RP: No, no. But after the first six weeks we were allowed to have overnight passes, so a bunch of us would go into this little town called Manhattan, Kansas. I think there's a college there. A bunch of us would rent a hotel room at the Mayflower Hotel -- something like that -- four or five of us in one room, and we lived it up. I remember they had a Sunday buffet in the Sunflower Room, which was $2.00. We'd all go down there and pig out. Eventually I met people from Kansas City, and I went to Kansas City every weekend. That was actually the first big city I ever spent any real amount of time in. After a year, I was reassigned, and was sent to Tokyo. I was actually sent to the West Coast, not knowing where I was going to wind up, being shipped overseas. Well, the Korean War -- I think there were still some skirmishes going on, but it had pretty much tapered off. It was long before the Vietnam War, of course. So I was sent to Japan, and, actually, that was really quite an experience, because that was my first foreign country. It was a real change.

SZ: Did you go by boat?

RP: We flew over. I don't even remember if there were jets back then, in the '50s.

SZ: No. No.

RP: Anyhow, we flew on a prop plane, so it was not a direct flight, obviously. It was a very long flight.

SZ: You had a stop in Alaska and -- I guess that's how they went, right? You don't remember?

RP: I don't think we stopped in Alaska. Well, see, we were on the West Coast. We probably stopped in Hawaii, and then we stopped on Guam. Then we went to Tokyo. Anyhow, I was assigned to an artillery battalion headquarters. I knew nothing about

the artillery, but it didn't really make any difference because the army of occupation in Japan at that point was really a joke. The war had been over for eleven years, and there was a post of probably 150 people. We had Japanese orderlies who polished our boots and made our beds, and if we had inspection they laid everything out for inspection. We had Japanese KPs; we had Japanese guards at the entrance to the post. It was really just a joke. There was a post office there, and I was in charge of the post office. I was the post office. There wasn't very much to do there since it was such a small post, so I went to either Tokyo or Yokohama almost every night. Tokyo, of course, was fabulous. Again, a number of us would rent a room in the Imperial Hotel. That was when the Frank Lloyd Wright building was still there, and it was great. There was a service club just down the street from the Imperial Hotel that had been some fancy, private Japanese club, where we'd go and have drinks for 10 or 25 cents. I bought a lot of Japanese prints when I was there, most of which I've given away. Back then they used to cost $1.00 or $2.00, these 19th-century woodcuts.

SZ: So you had an eye for that. Did you know about them, had you studied that?

RP: I probably had studied them and seen them a bit, because when I was in college -- Well, before that, my family used to go to the Toledo Museum of Art, which is actually quite a good museum. Then in college, in Illinois, we went to the St. Louis Art Museum, on field trips, with some regularity. That's also, actually, quite an excellent museum. So I was always interested in art. I don't think I knew a lot about Japanese prints, but I found them very fascinating so I bought quite a few of them. I don't remember that I really went to -- I don't know what the museum situation was in Tokyo, when I was there. I don't recall really going to museums actively. I had a very active social life, though, partying, mostly.

SZ: Did you happen to go down to Hiroshima? Did you do any of that?

RP: I did go to Kyoto with a Japanese friend of mine. I took a number of trips outside of Tokyo, to various places, because the army had taken over what had been, at one point, fairly fancy watering spots for the Japanese. We could stay there at very modest rates. Anyhow, I went to Kyoto and the southern part of Japan. I did go to a lot of the shrines in Kyoto, including the Katsumura detached palace, "Sanja San Gen Do," and I found those places very fascinating. It was a very good year for me. I met a lot of Japanese students. One of the big universities in Tokyo had a branch that was near the post I was stationed at, and the students would come to the service club to practice their English. So I met quite a few Japanese students, and we used to go out, eat out in restaurants, and I went to the Kabuki a few times.

SZ: So you got a taste for a different part of the world.

RP: Right, right. I knew when I graduated from college that I was going to come to New York. I had always planned to come to New York, and I actually came with an army friend of mine, someone I'd known in Kansas. But he had not been sent to Japan; he had been sent to Colorado or someplace. He was from Indiana. We met up, and we came to New York together. I think we stopped off to see an aunt of mine in Cleveland. That was in 1957.

SZ: Did you expect that you were coming to try to be an artist?

RP: No. I don't think I ever had that much confidence in my artistic ability. I really had thought about interior design, and when I came to New York -- it was probably within the first year I was here -- I started going to Pratt, in the evening. Over two or three years I probably took ten or twelve courses there. It took me a while to find a job, and it was sort of a boring job but I needed to work. New York was quite an amazing place, for someone from a little hick town in Ohio. Anyhow, my friend and I found an apartment in what is now Chelsea. Back then it was not Chelsea.

SZ: It was part of Hell's Kitchen?

RP: Well, it was West 19th Street, and it was a mostly Hispanic neighborhood. It wasn't a particularly desirable place to live. But it was affordable, and I had a job. My first job was at a place called Eastern Card Library, which supplied medical information to life insurance companies. It was a job; it actually paid fairly well. I think I was there for a year and a half or so. Then -- I don't remember how I heard about it -- I found out that the Museum of Modern Art hired people during the holidays to work at the front desk and do various things, because the traffic was heavier then. I was still going back to Ohio every year for the holidays, so I wanted to save up some money for Christmas. I got a part-time job at MoMA on weekends, working at the front desk.

SZ: Was that around Christmastime of 1959?

RP: It might have been November. I think it was probably '59. I'm not absolutely sure.

SZ: Do you remember the first time you ever visited the Museum of Modern Art?

RP: It was definitely after I came to live in New York. It was 1958 or ‘59. I was very impressed. The Museum was much smaller then. Anyhow, I liked the people. Back then the front desk was really just a desk in the original building. It was the original configuration. Along one wall there was a long desk. There was no real bookstore then. The books, etc., were behind a counter. There was an admission booth, and across from the sales desk there was a window, which was membership. I mean, it was very small then.

SZ: All of that in that lobby?

RP: Right. And people who worked down there at the front desk also had to work in the ticket booth, which I really did not like doing. I think after the first season I was there they offered me a full-time position at the front desk. I think the starting salary was --

it was definitely quite a bit less than I had been earning. I think it was something like $70 a week. I know. Now it's sort of a joke.

SZ: But was it something you could live on at that point?

RP: Well, I did. I did make the decision to do it. Althea Borden was then the director of personnel, or whatever she was called (I don't know what her title was), and I told her that I was definitely interested in staying at the Museum -- I was also still going to Pratt then -- but I didn't want to stay at the front desk. There was an opening in the International Program. Maybe it was called the Department of Circulating Exhibits -- it was always a department that had two divisions. Anyhow, Porter McCray was the head of the whole thing. It was like a little museum within the Museum. Aside from security, it was the biggest department in the Museum. It had probably twenty-five or thirty staff members, because it was sort of like an exhibition factory.

SZ: I want to get back to that. But during your time at the front desk, was Frank O'Hara there at that point?

RP: He was already in the [Circulating Exhibitions] department. No, I think the man who was in charge of the front desk was Bill Sutherland. I don't think he's alive any longer. He left the Museum, in any event, a long, long time ago. Alvin Nowak, who was also a pianist, was at the front desk. And there was George Riabov. He left a long time ago. He was from Russia. I don't think I knew that at the time, but he was quite a big collector of Russian art. I don't know how he ever afforded to be such a major collector, but I think he gave quite a bit of his collection to one of the Rutgers museums. There was someone whose name was Bob (I've forgotten his last name); someone named Sheldon Barr, who was not related to the Barrs. They were friends I worked with, and I got to know some of them. Anyhow, I was probably at the front desk only -- well, certainly less than a year, when I was interviewed for this job in Porter's department, and was hired.

SZ: You said this -- and this is certainly something I've heard -- that his department was like a museum within the museum, which, I presume, at some point presented some difficulty?

RP: It did.

SZ: What was it like when you entered, in -- which was 1960, I guess. Right?

RP: Probably. It could have been '59. Or it could have been '60. Well, there was quite a bit of resentment, I think. I wasn't necessarily fully aware of it at the time, because I was a member of the junior staff. But Porter, I think, was practically the only department head who was also a trustee. I think that caused quite a bit of resentment. Then, of course, Porter had the International Council behind him, which was made up of very high-powered collectors from all over the country and the world. I don't remember who he had unfortunate relations with, but he was only there for about a year after I went to work there, possibly even less, and he traveled a lot. Waldo Rasmussen was the second in command.

There were a number of people who were curatorial. I don't remember what Frank's title was [Assistant Curator, Circulating Exhibitions], but he definitely did many of the major exhibitions, which traveled abroad and in the country. There were also people who were sort of equivalent to curatorial assistants but I think they were probably called exhibition assistants -- people like Renée Neu, who actually worked with Frank; and somebody whose name was Berit Potoker, who was definitely Scandinavian. There may have been someone else. They were curatorial people who either did smaller shows, or worked with other curators on shows.

Then the department had its own editorial component, which was Anne Hecht and Nadia Hermos. Campbell Wylie, I think, started working there a short time before I

did, and he and I also worked with other curators on exhibitions. I mean, there were curators in the main part of the museum who did exhibitions and traveled abroad. I think one of the first exhibitions I worked on had already been traveling for years. I think it was a design exhibition that was curated by Greta Daniel, in the Architecture and Design Department. She had either done the show or had worked on it, and it traveled in Asia, in India. It was shown in a Buckminster Fuller geodesic dome, and there were some things in the show that had to be replaced, so I worked on that with her. Then I remember working with someone on a Ben Shahn exhibition, which went to Europe.

We also had a fairly active Art in Embassies program. I think that started when Porter was there, and it continued for many years. I worked on some of those collections, not in terms of selecting. The International Council borrowed works and bought works for the embassy collections, mostly drawings, watercolors and prints purchases. There were quite a few important works that were borrowed. I remember meeting the Reichauers, when he was the ambassador to Japan, and the Galbraiths, when he was the ambassador to India. But, as I said, over the years we must have done twenty-five or thirty of those collections, and I worked on a number of them, assembling the works, arranging for their re-framing and photography. We sent out albums with photographs and descriptions of the works and the artists. That sort of thing.

SZ: That's interesting.

RP: The International Council sponsored the program. I don't remember whether curators in the main part of the Museum were involved in forming the collections or not, or whether it was done within our department. Well, anyhow, Waldo moved up to Porter's job. I don't remember now if there was a search to see who might be available from outside, or whether it was just accepted that Waldo [Rasmussen] was going to move up. In any event, he did, and I must have been there at least a couple

of years by the time this happened. I then moved into Waldo's old job -- at least I moved into his old office, where I had the same responsibility. At that point, I think I worked primarily on the International Program. I don't remember when she came in, but a woman whose name you've probably heard and who might have been there when you were -- Inez Garson -- was brought in. She headed up the National Program.

SZ: Maybe before we get to that, let me just ask you something. Once you were really in a working department, you had a much better sense of the institution and you'd been there a while. Just characterize it a little. Did you have a lot of interaction with some of the names we all know? I guess René d'Harnoncourt was the director at that time?

RP: René was the director. Yes, because I think once I moved up to Waldo's old job he and I both attended meetings -- I don't remember what the meetings were called -- where the chief curators and the heads of all the curatorial departments were present. I don't think Alfred was involved in those meetings. But, at that point, Peter Selz and Bill Seitz came into the Painting and Sculpture Department -- I don't remember what their titles were but they were known as the "S.S. men " [Selz was Curator, and Seitz Associate Curator, P&S] and they were the ones who did most of the major contemporary Painting & Sculpture exhibitions. Dorothy Miller, of course, still did exhibitions. When I was there, she did at least one or two of her American exhibitions, I think the "Sixteen Americans" show. There might have been one after that, but "Sixteen Americans" was the exhibition that Frank Stella was in, that introduced Frank Stella to the New York art world. I don't remember the other artists in it; some of them fell by the wayside.

Anyhow, I did go to these meetings, and I was sort of amazed, because a lot of times it seemed that people were just not very serious. They seemed to joke around a lot. I mean, there were a lot of serious discussions, but --

SZ: Was that true of René d'Harnoncourt?

RP: No, not so much. I think more of Peter Selz and Bill Seitz, actually, in that respect. Of course, Arthur Drexler was there. John Szarkowski came to work after I had started working at the Museum. Well, we were in the townhouse next door, as you probably remember, which was torn down during the 1984 expansion. Our department was on two whole floors -- I think the third and fourth floors -- and the Photography Department was in that building, too, on the second floor. [Edward] Steichen was still the head of the department. Of course, he was already a very old man, but he did come in periodically. Grace Mayer sort of held down the fort, and I remember when John Szarkowski was hired, Steichen brought him around and introduced him. It was a fairly big townhouse, a Beaux Arts building. Photography had the back of the second floor, and in the front of the second floor was the Finance Department. I don't remember now what was on the first floor. I don't think the main entrance to it was ever open. The way you entered was, you took the 21 Building elevator up, to like the fourth floor or something, and then you either walked down to the third, or you walked up to the fourth. At one point -- they uncovered it -- there was a beautiful, oval, stained-glass dome in the stairwell, which had been painted over, but at some point they restored it. Then, of course, the building was torn down.

SZ: Talk about the ambience -- the culture?

RP: Well, as I said, the department really was like an exhibitions factory, because we produced as many as twenty or more exhibitions every year.

SZ: And this was after Porter left.

RP: It was sort of going on while he was there, but it continued after he left, for many years. For the National Program we did a catalogue every year. We offered shows we were planning to do, and then, depending on the response, we either did or didn't

do them. If there wasn't enough interest, they didn't get done. We still did, as I said, at least twenty new shows a year, which was a huge amount of work, because while there was material in the exhibitions from the Museum's collection, quite often the majority of the works in the exhibitions were loaned. So we had a floor at the Santini warehouse on West 49th Street, which was just used by the Department of Circulating Exhibitions. That's where the exhibitions were, where the loans were assembled and framed and packed. The Santini facility was both an assembly and packing facility, so people from the Registrar's Department, including my ex-wife, who was then in the Registrar's Department, working for Dorothy Dudley. . . She was great. She was one of my favorite people --

SZ: Dorothy Dudley?

RP: Yes.

SZ: Because?

RP: Well, she was just such a down-to-earth character. She was very highly respected. I think my ex-wife really enjoyed working for her.

SZ: So you met your ex-wife at the Museum?

RP: Right.

SZ: What was her name?

RP: Her name was Lynn Hersey.

SZ: Was she an art historian?

RP: She didn't major in art, no, but she was very interested in art. She went to Mt. Holyoke, and the Museum was always an acceptable place for women who went to Ivy League schools to work. She had grown up in Hartford, Connecticut, where her father worked for Pratt Whitney. She came to New York, I think probably immediately after she graduated from Holyoke. I think the Museum was probably her first job -- to the best of my recollection.

SZ: What I'm thinking is, in a way you were really becoming a curator, doing this stuff.

RP: Well, I think a lot of what I did was sort of like what curatorial assistants did, it's true. But I was never really involved in selecting works of art, or in writing about them. I did a lot of correspondence, but I didn't do any kind of creative writing.

SZ: So once you got to the International Program part of it, did you start to travel?

RP: I did. Not really a huge amount, but the International Council had a meeting every year in New York, and one out of town. I think the first International Council meeting I went to was in Houston, Texas, because there were always quite a few important collectors from Texas who were members of the Council. Foremost was probably Mrs. de Menil. Her husband, of course, I think, was also a trustee of MoMA at the time. But she was really the collector. There were probably four or five International Council members from Houston. It was also very interesting because I got to meet one of my favorite actresses, who was Gene Tierney, who was married to a Texas oil man. Mrs. de Menil had a party. I think her brother, Pierre Schlumberger, had a dinner party for like 250 people. It was outdoors. That's where I met Gene Tierney. I don't think I'd ever been around so many wealthy people in that kind of environment before. I was quite impressed. Because the people from Texas -- well, not the de Menils -- liked to boast about how much money they had, and still have. Anyhow, I think my first trip abroad for the Museum was when Waldo and I went to Japan in

connection with a major exhibition we were sending there. I don't remember exactly when that was. But we sent a number of exhibitions to Japan.

SZ: That must have been interesting, going back.

RP: I didn't really get to Europe on business. My first trip to Europe was after I was married. I had planned to go to Europe the year I got married, then didn't because I couldn't afford to. I think we probably already had at least two kids when I decided I really needed to go to Europe. I felt out of it because I'd never been there. I'd never been to the museums. So I took a trip of about three weeks to London and Paris and Amsterdam. That would probably have been in the mid-'60s. It might have been in the late '60s, actually. Even back then, curators and heads of departments were the ones who did most of the traveling. I did have opportunities to take other trips, but quite often we were about to have a baby, or had just had one, or something.

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: This is sort of a non-sequiter, but do you remember the expansion, if you want to call it that, in '64?

RP: Yes.

SZ: The thirty-fifth anniversary?

RP: I guess I don't remember that expansion as well as I do the subsequent one in 1984. I think, really, the reason is that, being as we were in that Beaux Arts building, we were not drastically affected by that 1964 expansion. Everyone was affected, of course, but, physically, I don't think we were that drastically affected. I remember the one in '84 much better, because that did drastically affect everyone. As you know, we were planning the huge Picasso exhibition, which was going to be the last big

exhibition before the Museum had to be shut down. I think they'd already torn down the 21 Building and the Beaux Arts building, and they were excavating for the undergrade construction and the tower. There was blasting going on, it was behind schedule, and at one point we thought we couldn't possibly do the Picasso exhibition, with all those billions of dollars worth of paintings in the building, while blasting was going on next door, because you never knew what could happen. I think finally they provided incentives so they sped it up, and we were able to do the show in the building. There was talk at one point about possibly having to rent the Armory or something, to do the show there, because it had already gone so far forward we weren't in a position to cancel or postpone.

SZ: I thought you were going to tell that story about finding René d'Harnoncourt's enormous shoes -- do you remember that? I think it was in the Beaux Arts building, or maybe it was the 21 building. Somebody unearthed this massive pair of shoes. You don't remember that?

RP: No, I don't remember. I really am skipping around -- and I don't remember the exact date -- when René was due to retire [June 1968]. There probably was a trustee search committee established for his replacement, but I don't think there was any staff representation on it, that I know of. There might have been senior staff representation, but, you know, Bates Lowry was brought in as René's successor, and he only wound up lasting for somewhere between a year and two years. Not much longer than that. The Museum made a lot of special arrangements for him, including buying a fairly fancy apartment on Fifth or Park Avenue, and setting it up for him. He wasn't given the apartment, but it was presented to him and he was expected to entertain. Anyhow, it was while he was there that Wilder [Green] became head of Exhibitions. I had known Wilder for many years. He had originally been in the Department of Architecture & Design. Then, I suppose it was when Monroe Wheeler retired, Wilder became the head of Exhibitions. Monroe was really the head of

Exhibitions & Publications, going way back. At some point those two functions were separated.

SZ: We should be clear here that the Exhibitions department was different than Circulating Exhibitions.

RP: Yes, that's right. Exhibitions, then, meant the New York program, which did include some exhibitions that traveled. But those that didn't travel as part of the Circulating Exhibitions Program --

SZ: -- traveled as part of Exhibitions Program.

RP: That's right, and that meant they were handled by what had become Wilder's department, and the Registrar's office. Anyhow, while Bates was there -- I don't remember whether Wilder ever had an assistant or not -- Bates and Wilder asked me if I would be interested in moving up to work with Wilder on the New York program. It definitely was a promotion, so I was interested. It was a small department, and Wilder was the director. I don't remember what I was called -- the Assistant Director or something. We each had assistants, and we were fairly busy. Actually, I think I was busier than Wilder, because Wilder spent a lot of his time doing his private architectural practice, especially for some of the trustees, Louise Smith being one of the primary ones. So, I was working with Wilder. Bates wound up not being around very long.

SZ: Was that a surprise to you?

RP: Yes, because I didn't really know what was going on, on that level. After Bates left, there was quite a long period of time when there was no Museum director. Wilder Green, Richard Koch, and Walter Bareiss were the ruling triumvirate, and that's when the union, PASTA, was organized, because people didn't really feel they knew

what was going on, they didn't know who was in charge. It was sort of awkward having a trustee, Mr. Bareiss, that actively involved in the Museum's day-to-day matters. He always seemed okay to me. I didn't really know him that well.

SZ: Did you participate? Were you pro-union?

RP: I was, actually, but in my position, I wasn't ever eligible to be in the union, because I was part of the administration. After that, when the union was formed, for years, whenever there were union negotiations, I was on the management bargaining team.

SZ: So, being pro-union, did that put you in a funny position?

RP: Not really. I mean, the union did accomplish a lot of things for the entire staff, like improving our salaries drastically. There were some very unfortunate aspects, too. The first major strike was certainly very disruptive. It took quite a while for things to settle down and get back to normal, because it was very acrimonious. Not as bad as the more recent strike, which was after I retired, and which went on forever.

SZ: During that first strike, I presume you crossed the picket line? Did you have a problem doing that?

RP: Well, I didn't like doing it, but I didn't really feel I had a choice. I don't think, actually, in fact, anyone ever was fired for doing so, but technically, if I hadn't, I could have been fired. It was very hard for me, because many of the people who were on the picket line were friends of mine, whom I'd known for years.

SZ: Sure.

RP: So it was certainly difficult, but I didn't feel I had a choice. I think the [Ellsworth] Kelly show was on view at the time, and that show was scheduled to go out on tour, so the

work had to go on. There were some things that people in the union did that I think were very questionable during that first strike. Pierre Abraxaine threw a stanchion through the windshield of a delivery truck. No one got injured, fortunately, and I think he got fired. I haven't seen him for ages. For a long time he worked for the Gilman Collection. He may still be there, for all I know. Anyhow, I really have been skipping around a lot.

SZ: That's one of the nice things about this process -- you can do that.

RP: I remember feeling it was such an unfortunate thing that René, who had all these plans to write books and do things that he never had time to do when he was the director, only survived a couple months after he retired. About six months before that, Frank O'Hara was struck by one of the beach taxis on Fire Island and died a day or two later. It was really very upsetting.

SZ: Well, also, you know, from a historical point of view, you had Monroe retire in '67; you had René retire in June 1968, only to be killed in August; and the following year, Alfred, theoretically, retired. So there was this was this big power vacuum.

RP: Well, Bill Lieberman was briefly the head of the Painting & Sculpture Department, I think.

SZ: Briefly. Right.

RP: And then Bill Rubin was brought in. Then the combined Drawings and Prints Department was separated, and Bill Lieberman was made head of Drawings. I don't remember when Bill Lieberman left [1979].

SZ: About this power vacuum: after the triumvirate, you had John Hightower come in. So why don't we finish with that.

RP: I don't remember how long John lasted.

SZ: Two years, a little less.

RP: Shortly before he was ousted -- and, fortunately, it was never announced -- he asked me if I would join his staff. Irene Gordon worked for him. I don't remember what my title was going to be -- Special Assistant to the Director, or something like that. But it had never been announced, fortunately, and then he got fired.

SZ: Not that it would have threatened your position.

RP: Probably not. It just would have been awkward. I don't remember when Wilder left the Museum; it must have been around that time. I actually liked John Hightower. I think he was just a little bit too advanced for the Museum.

SZ: Those were also very difficult times, politically, and people felt very strongly about a lot of things. Do you remember any of that? Do you remember the different protests? There were African-Americans complaining about the fact that there were few, if any, African-Americans represented in the collection. Then there was women's stuff.

RP: I guess I don't remember much about that.

SZ: It wasn't that meaningful to you. Well, this might be a good place to stop.

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **JACKSON HEIGHTS, QUEENS, NY**

DATE: **25 JUNE 2004**

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: I looked over the transcript from the last time, and we really had just gotten to the point where, I guess, Dick Oldenburg was coming on board. It's the early '70s. I want to know how you took your department and really turned it into something.

RP: Hmmn. I don't know exactly where to start. As I think I said before, when I came up to Exhibitions, Wilder Green was there as the director of that department. I think he probably was there three or four years after I came up, and then he left to go to AFA. I think I was pretty much automatically promoted to his job, although I had a different title. I didn't feel the director title really made sense – and probably, looking back, that may have been a mistake on my part -- because I felt it was more of a coordinating function, a managerial function. So, I think my title was Coordinator of Exhibitions, rather than Director of Exhibitions.

SZ: Yes, that's right, actually.

RP: It was always a pretty small department. When Waldo was there we each had a secretary and that was it. The department did expand gradually. I had an associate coordinator, and then eventually there were about five of us in the department. We did have a fairly active circulating program. When the International Program and the program of Circulating Exhibitions were sort of changed, the domestic exhibitions were transferred to my department. At that point, we no longer did as many circulating exhibitions for U.S. circulation as we had at one time. I think I said during our earlier interview that, at one point, when I was in the Department of Circulating

Exhibitions, we did as many as twenty-five or thirty new exhibitions per year, either for international or domestic circulation, sometimes for both. Anyhow, after that department was split apart, it became the International Program, which was under Waldo's direction, and it then just did, of course, international exhibitions, and probably fewer of them. The department was really changed rather drastically, because at one point the department probably had twenty or twenty-five people in it. It was a very big operation. A lot of things are not too clear now. I've been gone for eight years, so I'm sort of out of it.

SZ: Even if your title was Coordinator, you did sit on what they would consider like the management committee?

RP: Yes, I did go to all those meetings. I've forgotten exactly what they were called. At one point, as you know, we only had one deputy director, and that was Dick Koch. All the curatorial department heads, the head of Publications, and myself -- I don't know whether Membership was represented at the meetings. For a while there was a trustee committee on exhibitions, which Marty Segal was the chairman of. Frankly, it was never really very effective. I don't think the curators really wanted the trustees to be too involved in the program, so meetings were very infrequent and they were sort of straight-forward; they didn't involve any decision making. I did not routinely go to trustee meetings. I only went to their annual meeting, when I had to give a report. That was part of the original format. Anyhow, my department did work with every single department, especially on the major exhibitions. On the smaller departmental exhibitions we were still responsible for budget planning and control, but we had relatively little involvement in some of those smaller departmental exhibitions.

SZ: How would it be decided what exhibitions would be circulated? Of course, I guess there were two kinds: exhibitions that were mounted at the Museum and then circulated, and exhibitions that were created solely for circulation, I believe.

RP: Yes. That sort of stopped pretty much after the Department of Circulating Exhibitions was disbanded. There were very few exhibitions after that that were created just for circulation. From the very beginning, it was planned that an exhibition would be in New York and it might go to Los Angeles; it would be part of the original loan arrangement for major exhibitions to travel. Sometimes departmental exhibitions traveled because we needed to earn some income to help pay for them. Sometimes that worked and sometimes it didn't, but a lot of the major exhibitions that traveled to one or two other sites [Interruption] --The touring exhibitions never really paid for themselves, but I suppose sometimes we turned out fairly close to a break-even point, because we usually had corporate or other sponsorship for our major shows. I don't suppose we ever really broke even on a major exhibition. It would have been pretty unusual, because there were additional expenses involved in getting an exhibition on the road. There was often a lot of re-packing, and insurance was expensive. My job really did involve a lot of financial details -- budget planning, and attempting to keep things under wraps. We did a fairly good job most of the time, but there were some exhibitions that just went way over their budgets, like the Primitivism show that Bill Rubin did.

SZ: And that went over-budget because of what?

RP: Well, the major part of the exhibition came from abroad, and Bill also insisted that he bring back Chuck Froom, who had been at the Museum for a number of years. For a while, he was Fred Coxen's boss. He was really an exhibition designer, but I don't think he was ever called that. But he was really quite good. Anyhow, Bill brought him back, and he designed a very complicated installation that went way over budget. The installation part of the budget was just totally out of whack. The show -- I can't remember now. It definitely went to Dallas. Whether it went anywhere else or not, I don't know. But we had to send all that exhibition equipment out on the road with the show, and it was very bulky. It was very expensive. I don't remember who the corporate sponsor was, but we had one. I'm sure we had indemnity coverage. But in

any event, it did go way over its budget. It was, as I said, principally because the installation costs got way out of hand. Bill managed to convince Dick Oldenburg, somehow, that it was really my fault, which always ticked me off. I mean, Bill could be great. On the other hand, he could be totally selfish. Bill usually got what he wanted. Anyhow, in general, I had what I would say was a fairly good working relationship with him. There were times when he was extremely difficult, but he wasn't the only one in that category. [Laughs] Arthur Drexler was another one. He was quite difficult to work with. He didn't really work with anyone. He didn't want anyone's help or interference. With Arthur, he worked out his own budget, and he wouldn't always communicate the details. Bill Lieberman was a little bit like that, too. I'm trying to think who was easy to work with.

SZ: John Szarkowski?

RP: Yes, he was fairly easy.

SZ: I'm just thinking of the others. There was Riva [Castleman] and Bernice [Rose].

RP: They were all relatively easy to work with. In the case of Photography, Photography exhibitions, in general, were not big price-tag exhibitions. Because photography values used to be relatively low. The works themselves were easy to transport. So Photography exhibitions as a rule were not tremendously expensive, and we did circulate quite a few of them. So, financially we did pretty well with those kinds of shows. I think Carolyn Lanchner, who is still a very close friend of mine, was also really quite easy to work with. She was very well organized. But, like most curators, she wanted what she wanted to include in an exhibition. I thought then and I still think, that museum exhibitions, and not just MoMA exhibitions but museum exhibitions in general, especially one-person exhibitions, are too big.

SZ: Was it difficult to be in that kind of an institution, in a service role?

RP: Yes, I think it was sometimes. I didn't really have any control over what was actually going to be included in the program. There were some years when we came up with preliminary budget estimates, and it was decided that we couldn't afford to do three big shows in one year. And, you know, frankly, there wasn't really even that much discussion at the meetings. Because when the head of a curatorial department wanted to do an exhibition, there wasn't usually much opposition to it. In other words, people didn't interfere that much with each other's turf. I don't know whether that has changed now or not. I think when Kirk [Varnedoe] was there, he made an effort to have much more inter-departmental cooperation and collaboration. But that wasn't true for most of the years I was there.

SZ: You started at the institution at a very particular time, and we've talked about what it was like up to the beginning of the '70s. But from, maybe, a cultural point of view, how did it change over the years, once Dick Oldenburg took over?

RP: I don't have too many thoughts on how it changed. After each expansion the program grew, because we had more space to do it in. We never seemed to have enough space, and I wonder even now, with the greatly expanded museum, how long it will be before it has outgrown its space again. I don't know. I don't know how to comment on that, really. There was a time when the individual departments didn't all have their own departmental galleries, and you may remember, there was a little gallery on the way to the downstairs garden restaurant. It was very small. There were two small galleries and a corridor, and the departments took turns using that gallery. I think after the '84 expansion every department did have its own departmental gallery. That did increase the work load a fair amount, because most of those galleries were changed three or four times a year. Sometimes the exhibitions were actually fairly ambitious. The museum staff just kept growing and growing. I think before this latest expansion it was over 500 people. It might have even been more than that, and I imagine they're going to be hiring again when they move back. And

the union -- I think we probably talked about that before. The union did cause some very positive benefits for everyone on staff, but at certain points I thought it became pretty obstructionist. Anytime there was a major strike it took quite a while for things to get back to normal. Pretty early on I started getting involved in union negotiations, just with PASTA, not with the other unions. And I was on the management bargaining team for something like twenty years. Towards the end I think I managed to escape.

SZ: That was something you chose to do initially?

RP: No, I was asked to. I never particularly wanted to do it.

SZ: No, I would think that would be difficult.

RP: It was. But I think Beverly [Wolff] asked me to continue. It always followed a routine -- exorbitant demands which would be moderated and counter-offers. Usually, of course, there was a settlement that was somewhat satisfactory to the union. Charles Silver was also always on the PASTA bargaining team, and there were certain things they asked for every year which they never got, like a union shop. They also were legislating for a holiday in honor of Martin Luther King. So I don't know if it was Beverly or someone else who said, "Well, we could consider trading an existing holiday for Martin Luther King." They said, "What would you suggest?" and Charles Silver said, "Christmas." [Laughter] I think Martin Luther King Day is a MoMA holiday now.

SZ: Well, I want to talk about the expansions you lived through, and how they impacted your department.

RP: Well, there were two. I probably remember the '84. I don't remember the 1964 expansion in detail all that well. At that point I was probably still in Waldo's

department. In '64, you see, the Department of Circulating Exhibitions was really a separate entity, which some people found problematic. Because when Porter McCray was there, he was practically the only person on staff who was on the board. But since we were in the townhouse, in what was then the Philip Johnson office entrance, we were really not very much affected by that expansion. We just stayed put. I don't even remember now how it affected us. It definitely affected the rest of the staff, but I've forgotten to what extent it did.

SZ: Well, it changed the configuration of the Museum.

RP: Yes, so it did. But it really didn't affect us very much. I'm sure some people must have had to leave the building at certain times, but we really didn't. In 1984, of course, it was different, because it affected virtually everyone, although it was accomplished in stages. At that point, I was in the Exhibitions Department. I think it was at that point -- I don't remember now when the Museum curtailed its program.

SZ: It was after the Picasso show.

RP: Which was in what?

SZ: September of '80.

RP: We were very concerned about that show, because at the time we were about to assemble works of art for the show and, of course, it was an incredibly valuable exhibition. We were already excavating for the tower. In other words, the 21 building and the townhouse -- and I can't remember if there was another structure there that was torn down to make way for the tower or not. There may have been. But in any case, they were blasting for the tower and the west wall of the Museum was exposed. We were concerned that we could have a major disaster when the Picasso work started coming in. There was even talk about (Bill Rubin was intent on doing it) having to rent the Armory. If it was determined that it was too dangerous to do it in

the original building, he would continue to do it but in the Armory or some other space off-premises. That expansion was definitely staged. My department never actually left the building, but it had to move around. I don't remember the timing exactly but at one point, when the west wing was somewhat complete, we were moved into the west wing, into part of the space that Painting & Sculpture would eventually occupy. And, of course, there were certain departments that were outside the Museum for probably almost four years. I think there were two different spaces, one, I think, actually, on the site of the Equitable building.

SZ: Right. On Seventh Avenue.

RP: I know there was a fairly long period when the Museum was completely shut down. But that wasn't until toward the end. I don't know how we continued to run the program in the interim period. Maybe I should look, and see if it jogs my memory.

SZ: Do you know how, once the expanded Museum opened, that impacted your program?

RP: It was expanded, because all the departments had their own temporary galleries, in addition to their own permanent galleries, so it did increase the number of exhibitions we did every year. A lot of them, in Photography, Prints and Drawings were really not that expensive, but sometimes they required a lot of framing. So the shops were kept fairly busy. Architecture & Design, even though it had a rather small gallery, tended to do quite elaborate installations that were time consuming.

SZ: Circulating Exhibitions became the Department of Exhibitions.

RP: It was amalgamated, yes.

SZ: Then you had responsibility for everything that went up inside.

RP: Yes.

SZ: And that happened before the expansion?

RP: Well, the Department of Exhibitions was always responsible for all the exhibitions that were shown at MoMA. The Department of Circulating Exhibitions devised exhibitions exclusively to be circulated in the U.S. and abroad. When that department was changed -- and I think that was more or less at the time of Bates Lowry. Maybe there was a year or two when the department continued to manage the exhibitions that were circulating, but after a certain point they were transferred to my department and Lynn Schaffner, when the remaining circulating exhibition was transferred over, came over and was part of the department for a few years. Then she left. Inez Garson had been in charge of that program. I don't recall now whether she retired or left or what happened to her, but, as I said, at about that point we did still have a number of exhibitions in circulation in the U.S., but they were usually exhibitions that were done at MoMA first. Sometimes the curatorial staff would want to circulate an exhibition they were doing in their departmental gallery, in one of the main temporary exhibition galleries. Sometimes we would put out feelers to see if it was going to be worthwhile to go to the additional expense of preparing a show for touring. Quite often it was. Well, that started changing at a certain point. For a long time, a lot of major institutions took MoMA exhibitions, and MoMA never showed anyone else's exhibitions. But at a certain point -- it probably would have been sometime after we opened in '84 -- that started changing, because other institutions wanted MoMA to participate in their exhibition tours as well. It didn't happen right then, but at a certain point MoMA did start participating in other museum tours. That was a pretty big change for MoMA, actually.

SZ: Were they dragged into it? Or was it just a natural evolution? It sounds in a way like they were forced to do it.

RP: I think probably it happened, really, in Painting & Sculpture, after Kirk and Bob Storr were there. I don't think Bill Rubin would necessarily have been opposed to the idea, but basically he only cared about exhibitions he was interested in doing himself.

SZ: So Kirk and Bob added something.

RP: Yes. I would say they did. Well, I think with Kirk, he tried to encourage more inter-departmental collaboration and cooperation. I think that was beginning to work. I do think it's a shame that Rob left, because he was a real live wire. He had so many ideas. I didn't, personally, think some of them were great. I didn't think some of the smaller exhibitions he did turned out all that well, but he certainly had plenty of ideas. Kynaston [McShine], I gather, is still there.

SZ: Yes, as far as I know. That's another thing, you know -- what it's like to be in a place for a really large part of your working life, and to gradually see one person after another retire and you're still sitting there.

RP: Well, Kynaston may be like Bill Lieberman at the Met: until someone tells him to go, he'll stay. He's always had a fairly easy life, as far as I'm concerned. He didn't do many exhibitions, he didn't really do any writing, and he always managed to travel a lot.

SZ: Did you get to travel a lot, in this job?

RP: No, I didn't really. I traveled very little after I moved up to the MoMA Exhibitions Department. I traveled a certain amount when I was in the International Program. And I could have traveled more. I probably said this -- I think I did -- in our first interview. Quite often, when I've had the opportunity to go on a trip we were having another baby or something, and it just wasn't the right time for me to be away.

SZ: Rosette Bakish. She worked for you for how long?

RP: Seemingly forever. She must have worked for me – Well, I was at MoMA for thirty-seven years when I retired. She worked for me before I transferred to the MoMA Exhibitions Department, so I would say she worked for me thirty-plus years. I don't know. At one point Jenny Licht was my secretary, and at another point Bernice Rose was my secretary. I'm sure they both have preferred to forget that. I must say, neither of them was a very good secretary. But Jenny was sweet. There wasn't anything she wouldn't do. She was not a fabulous secretary. It was just one of those things that I just never made the effort to change.

SZ: Rosette is a good artist.

RP: Yes, she is. I have one of her works in my bedroom. Actually, I have quite a few of her things. She used to give me one every year, for Christmas.

SZ: That's so nice.

RP: I went to a show of hers a couple of years ago. I don't know what's happened to the gallery, actually. Because at one point the gallery was in a building that was full of galleries and they were definitely told that their lease wasn't going to be extended, because the owner of that building was turning the spaces back into offices. I haven't been in touch with her. I usually hear from her once or twice a year. I haven't called her since I got back. I have talked to Waldo because he had quite a serious physical problem this year. He developed some sort of a blood clot in his leg, and they were afraid it might move up. He wound up being in the hospital for almost two weeks. He had rented a place in Fort Lauderdale. He was going to spend six weeks in Fort Lauderdale, and he had to cancel it. Then he was going to spend three months in Easthampton. He sold his place in Easthampton, but he was leasing one and then he

had to cancel that. Because at this point I think he feels he has to be near his doctors and the hospital.

SZ: Now, what about this issue of the Museum under Dick and the Museum under Glenn [Lowry]? Well, you weren't there very long for Glenn, right?

RP: No. I don't think it was even a full year. I was sort of offered the job that Jennifer Russell now has.

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

RP: I was going to retire when I was sixty. Then Dick Oldenburg made a special arrangement with me that served to increase my pension benefit substantially, so I had to stay until I was sixty-two. Then I agreed to stay another half a year, and then Glenn asked me to stay. Maybe that was before it was really clear that he was really offering me Jennifer's job. Then I made such an outrageous salary demand. I didn't really want to stay. I wanted out, after thirty-seven years. That was enough. And I figured at that point my kids were pretty much grown up, and I could afford to live on my pension. As it turns out, it did work out that way.

SZ: So you left because you were just ready to retire, or stop working.

RP: I was. I had really been working since I was in high school. I was tired. I now feel sorry for anyone who's still working. Most people don't stay that long with one employer. I'm certainly not sorry I did, because there were a lot of very interesting years. I think, actually -- and I can't remember exactly when it happened -- but I was really not happy with Jim Snyder becoming my boss. It must have been in the mid-'80s, because he had been very involved with Dick and with the expansion. Jim is very smart, he's very ambitious, and he's very good. When Jim came to the Museum, I was one of the people who helped train him. He came to MoMA just after he

graduated from Harvard, and he worked first for Jack Limpert, in Development. Or gee, it might even be before Jack. Charlie Hessen might have even still been there. Well, in any case, a lot of my friends at the Museum knew I was unhappy about the situation. I found him difficult. I don't want to be unreasonable. I think he got along well enough with some people, but I think in general he wasn't really very well liked, and I was sort of in that category. He was not one of my favorite people. After the expansion, he became Dick's right-hand man, and I think Dick felt that he owed him something. So that position [of Deputy Director] was created for him. So I worked under him for a number of years. I retired in '96, and I don't remember when Jim left. He left, obviously, before I did, because Jennifer came in to take his place. And I liked Jennifer. I thought she was very good. I was on the search committee when she was hired, and I think it was a pretty unanimous decision that she would fit in.

SZ: Well, you have one of the longest institutional memories, actually.

RP: Really?

SZ: Yes. You were on that search committee. Any others?

RP: Oh, yes. As I told you last time, I was on the search committee that selected Bates Lowry, although René d'Harnoncourt sort of handpicked him as his successor. There was a search committee for Dick, and Betsy Jones and I were on that committee. I think John Szarkowski was on the committee, too. But we were the only staff people, and it was clearly going to be a trustee decision. I suppose it could have gone one way or the other, but the people we interviewed -- Well, actually, I don't know whether Bill Paley was chairman of the board then or not, but some of our meetings actually took place in his office. And because of the whole CBS staff, whenever anyone was going to be a candidate for an interview, we would get this huge background folder, like fifty pages long, to read. It was understood in the beginning that Dick was going to be a candidate, along with James Brown, who I think was then

at the Virginia Museum of Art about whom the committee was not tremendously impressed. There were a couple of other people. It's possible Anne d'Harnoncourt was asked, and didn't want to be considered. I really cannot remember who else, because I was also involved in the search after Dick left.

SZ: Yes, you told me about that.

RP: Anyhow, Betsy and I both felt Dick Oldenburg was not right for the job. We felt it really should be someone with curatorial experience. But the trustees felt Dick was right for the job, so he got the job. Jumping way ahead -- I don't think the trustees had really been happy with Dick for a while. I never personally saw the evidence of that, but I think he was more or less forced out. Anyhow, for a while there was another search committee formed and the Museum was planning to hire a paid president. I was involved in that, too. There may have been a couple of other people on staff involved in that. Mary Lea [Bandy] might have been involved. I'm not absolutely sure. Anyhow, I remember one woman who was interviewed, and we all thought she was terrific. She had been the head of a women's college somewhere in the South. She had originally been at Yale, had had an important job at Yale. Then she moved to this college. It was a well-known college. But I guess she'd been there long enough, and she was interviewed. But at the same time (I think we found this out after) Yale had tried to hire her back in an even more important position. I thought, personally (of course, I couldn't have said this to her), that it would have been a mistake for her to come to MoMA --

SZ: -- because of her qualifications?

RP: No, she seemed really brilliant, [laughs] but I just thought it would be a nightmare. Who else did we interview? Well, I think at some point, then, the trustees --

SZ: I heard that you had a hard time getting people to consider it, because of the dual aspect.

RP: Right.

SZ: Is that correct?

RP: I think it was. Because I don't remember -- I'm sure we must have interviewed at least one other person, but then I think the trustees gave up on the idea. Then there was a search committee for the next director. Anne d'Harnoncourt, I think, actually did come for an interview. The man who was the director of the Houston Museum came for an interview. He seemed quite good. Of course, we all thought Anne was fabulous. Then I think toward the end Glenn's name was thrown into the hat. I think maybe that had to do with Aggie [Gund]. I think the International Council may have had a meeting up there in Toronto, and a lot of people, when he was at the Art Gallery of Ontario, may have met him. Anyhow, we were very impressed with Glenn, and he did end up getting the job. I guess it worked more or less like the paid-president and director situation at the Met. I don't think Anne d'Harnoncourt was ever particularly happy with it in Philadelphia, but I had the impression that the paid-president there pretty much stayed out of her way, and didn't give her a lot of trouble. And maybe it did free her up from some of the fundraising concerns. I suppose that was true at the Met, too. I think, in general, it doesn't really make that much sense.

SZ: Did you ever sit in on the Acquisitions Committee meetings?

RP: No.

SZ: In terms of the museum-side Exhibitions Committee, when they were trying to decide what would go on the schedule, is there anything about that? Was there fighting for space?

RP: Not really. Not really at meetings. It was always understood that Painting & Sculpture was going to get the major share of the temporary exhibition space, and that the other departments would be able to use them less frequently. There could have been private discussions about some of those things. But my recollection is that when the head of a curatorial department wanted to do an exhibition that either he or she or someone on the staff wanted to do, it was usually not contested. There were times when we approved a small budget amount for making a preliminary study to see whether it would be feasible to do a given exhibition. Usually it was. [Interruption]

SZ: I want to ask you about this decision to retire.

RP: Well, to be honest, I had the feeling that I was a step or two below all the heads of the curatorial departments. I didn't really feel that I had much to say about what we did or didn't do. That's just the way it was. Actually, it seems odd, but I think Arthur Drexler at one point encouraged me to take a more assertive role. He must have had some reason for wanting me to do that.

SZ: Of course. You just didn't see it. [Laughter]

RP: I wasn't sure what it was, but I'm sure there was some reason. But at that point I think it was too late.

SZ: You were a service person.

RP: Right. And it was more than a full-time job. I quite often, for many years, worked late, worked on Saturdays, and for a long time the Museum really -- and I think that had to do with Jim Gara – was very far behind in becoming computer literate. It was ridiculous. We didn't even have computers in my department until, I don't know, it might have been the early '90s, and the equipment we had was a joke.

SZ: Yes, in your function of all things.

RP: Right. I mean, Gara felt -- Of course, the Finance Department had been computerized for some time, as had the library. Even when I left, I think the only department that actually had Internet access was the library. I'm not saying that we needed it in my department, although it would have been useful to be able contact other museums, etc. in that way.

SZ: Do you think financial constraints kept him from being overly enthusiastic about providing this?

RP: Yes. I think for years he just didn't think my department needed to be computerized.

SZ: Did that make you mad?

RP: Yes, it did. Well, you know what a difference it makes. Before that, eight carbon copies; if you made a mistake you had to erase them and white-out the original. You know. It was just ridiculous. Well, every technological advance made a difference, and even before we had computers we did have a fax machine, which already made communication a lot easier. I imagine now -- I don't know -- I would think that most of the departments would have Internet access, at this point.

SZ: I think they all have it.

RP: I would think so. In terms of my retirement, I do some volunteer work -- I didn't this past year, because I just decided I was going to pamper myself. But Guillermo Alonso, who was at MoMA briefly, now has a pretty important position at the Miami Art Museum, and I did some volunteer work with him. His department only within the

last year or two has had Internet access. I think probably that just had to do with expense --

SZ: I was going to say, I'm sure it has as much to do with what the financial situation of a particular institution is.

RP: Right. But years ago -- really, probably, ten if not fifteen years ago -- I'm trying to remember where it was -- whether it was the Walker Art Center or it might have been a Texas institution -- which had done a big, new addition, and everything was computerized. They were in right at the beginning. For an institution of its size, MoMA really was very late. Then when we got computers, you know, most of us hadn't really grow up with them, whereas young kids now do, and there was really no one to show us how to utilize them properly. I didn't have too much trouble, because I've been typing since I was in high school.

SZ: So what you're saying is you were ready to leave, on a lot of levels.

RP: Yes. Really. It wasn't an easy job. The people were, of course, interesting, but some of them difficult to work with. But it really wasn't a dull job, it just involved a lot of very hard work. Frankly, even though I was fairly good at it, I had never really expected to be so heavily involved in the financial stuff. But I was, and I was also responsible for insurance for the collection, Museum-wide. That probably is back where it belongs, I hope, in the Registrar's Office. That's really where it should have been.

SZ: So you retired in 1996?

RP: Yes. It will be eight years in August.

SZ: And you've done nothing but have a good time since then?

RP: Well, I've been through a few medical setbacks. But yes, I really like spending the winter in Florida. I hate cold weather, and I have a great apartment in Miami. I know quite a few people. Guillermo, my friend that I mentioned, is in the building, and I know several other people in the building. I'm on the board now, and it's a nice situation. A number of us have each other to dinner. I usually have people in at least once or twice a week, and we have a big pool. I'm so lazy I never even go to the beach anymore; I just go to the pool. So all I have to do is take the elevator or walk down six flights. We also have tennis courts. I don't play tennis, but we just redid the tennis courts and we're in the process of redoing the lobby.

END INTERVIEW