THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**FRANCES PERNAS (FP)**
INTERVIEWER:	**SHARON ZANE (SZ)**
LOCATION:	**MATTAPOISETT, MASSACHUSETTS**
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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Tell me where and when you were born, and then just a little bit about your family background.

FP: I was born in Cranford, New Jersey, on April 9, 1916, and I lived in Cranford until I went to college. I went to Wells College, in Aurora, New York.

SZ: That was an all-women's school?

FP: It was an all-women's school.

SZ: And Cranford is where? Was it a rural community?

FP: It's not far from New York--it's a commuting town, actually, from New York--and very much a suburban town. It's changed now, entirely different. It's gone down the tubes, the way a lot of those places near New York have.

SZ: It was fairly leafy?

FP: Yes, it was. As a matter of fact, the nice thing about that town--and I'd never noticed it when I lived there, but when I went back one time I did--the light in that town was beautiful. There's a river that runs through it, winds in and out, and then there are these big trees--much bigger than around here, because there's sandier soil here--

and the light coming through those trees is so pretty. And that is, fortunately, what I remember about it, because it's really awful now. It's manufacturing.

SZ: You shouldn't have gone back.

FP: True, I shouldn't have [laughing]. I didn't go back for long; I beat it out as fast as I could.

SZ: And you went to public school in Cranford?

FP: I went to public school in Cranford.

SZ: And you had a sister?

FP: I had two sisters, one fifteen years older and the other nine years older. Eloise's [Eloise Ricciardelli] mother was nine years older, so in a way I was an only child, because they were adults when I came along...very much the baby.

SZ: Going off to Wells College, at that time it was the Depression.

FP: It was the Depression. Before that, I went for a year to a boarding school in Connecticut, and then went on to college. It was the Depression, yes, and it was also the Spanish Civil War--remember, it came about that time. That was a big thing at college.

SZ: Did the Spanish Civil War have any importance to you?

FP: We were all very excited about it. My father was a Spaniard, so that made it closer to me somehow. My mother was half-Spanish. So we were interested in that.

SZ: That was a politically very...it pulled a lot of people apart.

FP: It was terrible. It was a civil war, and that always is the worst possible thing, a civil war. Witness them all around now. It was as bloody then, I guess, as the small wars have been recently....

SZ: So when you went off to Wells College, what were you interested in? Had you studied music and art at home?

FP: No, I hadn't. As a matter of fact, though the public school I went to was excellent in literature and other things, but literature was the one I was interested in, I thought I would major in literature when I went there. But I had a course in Greek literature and translation by a Mr. Rusk, William Sener Rusk, and he had been Alfred Barr's Latin teacher, or Greek teacher, I don't know which, in Baltimore. He had also taught him some art; he branched out into art when he was teaching him. He was one of the influences on Alfred. Alfred said it was really because of him that he decided to go into art. And the same thing happened to me. He came into this Greek literature and translation course, and he taught us about Greek art. I had been taught in school, and we were taught that Greek art was the greatest there had ever been and ever would be. This is the way the teachers in the school taught it, fully believing it. So when Mr. Rusk started tracing the influence through the ages and up through Picasso, without denigrating the other art, I was so excited I couldn't wait! As soon as that class was over I signed up to major in art. There was only this one teacher in that school. I didn't have a choice of any but one, and he was dry as dust, really, in some ways, but he had a real feeling for it. He was a good teacher if you were interested in the subject. If you weren't interested in the subject, you went to sleep. But I'm so glad I took that. Then they had these traveling exhibitions from the Museum, and they were only reproductions, but it was so new to me, the whole thing was so new, and they had these reproductions that would come up and we would see them, and I decided then and there that I was going to work at The Museum of Modern Art.

SZ: Just like that.

FP: Just like that. I never had to make a decision. It just all happened. It could have

happened some other way, but I knew that's what I wanted to do. And I was right. It was just right for me.

SZ: So, then how did that happen? You finished college.

FP: I finished college.... I majored in art, and loved every minute of it. I also liked my literature courses there. And the others I just got through...I mean, they were not particularly interesting to me. They taught languages so badly then. I would have been interested in languages, but that was taught in such a dry way.

SZ: Did you know Spanish?

FP: No, we always spoke English at home, which is too bad, because my father spoke a particularly pleasant Spanish, and it would have been nice if I had learned it.... My mother didn't know Spanish, and you never learn from your father; you learn your mother's language. But that was all right. I could have learned it in college, but it was just taught wrong for me. After college I took a course in shorthand. I was the next-to-the-dumbest in the class. They used to list our marks or speeds or something on the wall, and there was one person that was below me, and I was always so pleased with him, but he was mentally deficient [laughter]. His family had sent him to a school in Elizabeth [New Jersey] for as long as they would keep him there, and they didn't keep him any longer, so then he traveled into this school. It was a joy to me, because there he was, dumber than I was.... I needed this to get a job. Absolutely. At the time, I was reading Proust, and I couldn't have been less interested in typing and shorthand. I just couldn't have been.... So that was a dismal experience, but it did get me a job in the Museum, and the only reason I was allowed to stay in the Museum is because they had such a very relaxed attitude about how much work you were supposed to be able to do and how well you were able to do it, because I was hopeless, absolutely hopeless. I got in because there was...the Italian show [Italian Masters lent by the Roual Italian Government, 1940] was on, which was a big thing.... I think it was '40 or '41. I graduated in '38, and then I think I was a year or two, learning shorthand [laughter] and looking for a job, because it was the Depression and it was very hard

to find a job. And that was the only place I wanted to go. I went into the personnel office and said, "Here I am." I also looked at a couple of other places. There was a Museum of Industrial Art or something like that, and I was offered a job there, and I didn't take it. I just knew it wasn't right. I just kept going. This poor woman I kept going to see [at the Modern]--a Miss West, her name was--and she said, "I must say, Miss Pernas, you are persistent." Finally, one day I went to see her and she was in tears, absolutely in tears, and she said, "Come in tomorrow." And they put me at the front desk. I didn't know what the trouble was then, but I was able to piece it together afterwards. Evidently, there hadn't been enough people at the front desk to take care of the mobs that were coming in [for the Italian Masters show]. When somebody burst into tears that way, you could be pretty sure at that time that it was Alfred Barr who had said something absolutely withering to her, and she went to pieces [laughing]. That must have been it. At any rate, I got in. Then they put me upstairs to take typing and shorthand, and I just was hopeless. The only thing is, I took it from Alfred, and he was very rapid. The only thing that got me through at all was that he assumed I could not spell Cézanne, I could not spell Matisse, and so he spelled those all out and of course I was able to just put a little down. Then I broke my typewriter, and it fell on the floor and little pieces flew all over the place. Mr. [Philip L.] Goodwin was there, and he was the most dignified and kind and lovely man, and he got down on his little fat knees, and he was picking up these things too when I was picking them up. I didn't know what to do about this, so I called afterwards...I found the name of the man who fixed them, and I was not supposed to have done this, but I called him and told him to come over and fix this typewriter so I could work on it. And he said, "But you know, the back is cracked," and I said, "I know it is, but take it apart and put it back together again." And he did, and I had it all the time I was there. I had that [typewriter] with the crack in the back. But any other place, I'd have been fired out [laughing].

SZ: So in 1940...the building was brand-new.

FP: Yes, because that Italian show was sort of the first big thing, I think, that they had. It was either '40 or '41. That was a tremendous success. I'm not sure about this, but I think Italy wanted to send it over, and the Metropolitan, which was much sleepier then

than it is now, felt it didn't have enough room to put it in, or it may have been that they didn't like Mussolini or whatever, I don't know. So anyway, the Museum pulled up its socks and showed it, and it was a spectacular show. It was beautifully installed. At least I thought so. It was all new to me. That was a nice show.

SZ: Had you been to the Museum before they moved to the new building?

FP: No, I never had.

SZ: So the building as a piece of architecture...how did you think about it?

FP: It was just beautiful to me. After all, I was just out of school, and all these things were new to everybody, really. To me it was all exciting and had no quarrel to find with anything.

SZ: So you went to work for Alfred, is that it, in the beginning?

FP: I was in the secretarial pool, the stenographic pool, and the only reason I survived at all is because all the others were worse--really, they were. There was a woman there who always had to do her exercises [laughing]. She had red hair and she was Irish, and she was always picking fights and all. She was a cute woman, but.... They hadn't had the background or the education, and that, I think, made a difference.

SZ: In terms of you, you mean.

FP: Yes, it did. So I was fortunate there.

SZ: And then the war.

FP: And then wartime. That was another break I had, because I wanted to work for Elodie Courter in Circulating Exhibitions it was called. But, Ione Ulrich, it was, decided that I was not to work there, that I was to work in the Publications department. Why she

took it upon herself to do this, I don't know. Ione ended up being a good friend of mine and I really was very fond of her. She was a difficult woman, as I'm sure has turned up in this. She was bossy where she didn't need to be bossy and so forth. But she was a good person, a nice person. Anyway, she took it upon herself to decide I should go into the Publications department, and at that time there was a man, Holger Hagen. He was Uta Hagen's brother.... He really was not prepared for the job he was in, either by knowledge or by temperament. He was a very nervous person and terribly amusing about certain things. He had some of his family's talent--he came from a very talented family--and he was very amusing, but he wasn't very efficient in his job. He was drafted, and so I was put in his place, and that was a tremendous break. I didn't realize it at the time.

SZ: You were still wanting to be in Circulating Exhibitions?

FP: Yes, although I was happy to have a job there. I didn't want to be advanced. I just didn't have that kind of temperament. I didn't want to run the thing. But actually, I got to be very interested in printing. On the first vacation that I had while I was there I went down to Wm. E. Rudge, Printers, as a volunteer. It was the one place that wasn't union that we worked with, so I was able to go in, and I learned to set type and run the machines and all that. That was great fun, lots of fun, and very helpful, because then I knew what I was doing and knew what the printer should do, and what he could do, more or less, and what he couldn't do--at least enough for me to start. So that worked fine. We worked mainly with printers in the city. So that's how I got into the publishing end of it.

SZ: How much of a publishing program was there at the time, when you started?

FP: I think when I started we put out at the most four slim volumes a year. In that office we had two other people besides myself: Margaret Miller, who was the most brilliant person, really brilliant. A friend of mine said, "You never expect it, but somehow she comes out with things that only a Churchill would have thought of." She had one of those really clear minds on certain things, but she, too, was very fragile, and I think

the Museum never was really able to use her capacity as well as it could be used, but maybe the Museum used it better than any other place could have, because the Museum really was marvelous with all the funny temperaments that we had there. They were very good with her, really. If she'd been in a commercial place she wouldn't have been able to cope at all. And then there was Carlos Dyer, who did typography and design. Then he was drafted into the army, and I don't know who did the designing. There was nobody for a while, during the war. Then I can't figure out what happened next.

SZ: So those slim little volumes were things that were put out to send to members?

FP: Yes. They were catalogues. I can't remember what it was the first year during the war, and actually there was very little paper then, but we had paper on hand, I think, at first. Then later, to get paper...then we did the History of Impressionism [by John Rewald], and that took a tremendous--not the second, the first one--and that took a tremendous amount of paper, and the book was put out with two colors of paper in it. We were able to get paper because there was this nice little man named Mr. Scilipoti who worked for a paper company, Whitehead and Alliger, and what he did, on just a piece of typewritten paper he would type across the top "Michael Scilipoti's Wartime Paper Company," or something like that. What he did was, he would buy up somebody's odds and ends--and he didn't even have a place to store them; he would earmark them in a certain place, make a list, he had it all out--and if we, who used less paper, wanted something, he would look up Macmillan, for instance, who had a great lot of paper, and we would buy that and he would send it over. I had bits and pieces that were left over, and he would keep a record of that, and then they would go to somebody else who didn't use as much, a gallery or something like that. So it was very helpful. We got through, were able to do the publishing we wanted to do during the war. For some time afterward there was a shortage too.

SZ: During the war, do you remember, and I'm sure you do, Alfred's demotion?

FP: Yes. That was so sad. That was very sad. Yes, I can tell you right now, I was very

fond of Alfred Barr. I worked with him, he was my favorite author, he was the easiest person to work with, I found, because he was completely interested in what he was doing. When he was writing a book, that book came first, and if I was working on that book, I came first. He didn't go running off to this or that or the other thing. I could always get his attention if I needed it. And that was not always the case. To work with an author sometimes was quite difficult, because they had their hands in all sorts of things and weren't as interested as I wanted them to be on certain things. But he was always very cooperative. I know what I worked with him on: What Is Modern Painting? I had Bill Lieberman in my office then, as a volunteer. Yes, more for you on Bill Lieberman. He was the brightest thing. He was just so incredibly bright. He was eighteen. He was on a holiday from school or something. Anyway, he was there as a volunteer. When Alfred handed him his What Is Modern Painting?, he had an index in it, and he said, "Now, this index is not the way an index should be, but it's the way I want it. It's to be just this way, and I don't want it changed." So Bill Lieberman looked at it, and after a while he said it would be better if it were this way. I can't remember what the exact problem was. I said, "Bill, it does sound as though you're right. Do you want to tell him?" He said yes, and he went into his office and he discussed it with him. When he came back, I said, "Bill, what did you say and what did he say?" He said, "Well, I was so nervous, all I could say was 'Okey-doke.' I couldn't think of anything else to say but 'Okey-doke.'" But he must have said something more than "Okey-doke," because Alfred said, "Yes, you're right," and changed it. It was a minor little thing, but I think it had a lot to do with Alfred's relationship with Bill from then on. It's what started it, because Alfred was able to see what an intelligent person he was, really extremely bright. Bill was wonderful to work with when you proofread, for instance. He was another one who loved to work, so he would help me proofread--this was with later books of Alfred's (and his own), not that little one--but if he were working on one side and I was working on another and he went faster than I did, he would simply sit and wait till I caught up. He was so easy to work with in that respect. He never pressured you and said, "That's supposed to be this, that's supposed to be that." He never interrupted; he let you go on your train and he went on his. He was marvelous to work with that way. Later he got really complicated, and that was pretty sad. He had a lot of troubles. But he was a sweet, nice person in my office, and I

liked him very much. I've always liked Bill. Even after he got to be a pain in the neck, I still liked him.

SZ: But when he was eighteen....

FP: Yes. Later, he got to be really difficult, but I'd known him long enough so I understood more or less why he was that way, and I still liked him.

SZ: Back to anything you can tell me about [Barr]. I asked you about when Alfred was pushed out in '43, and you started telling me how much you enjoyed working with him.

FP: Yes, I was very upset at the time, and it put me in a bad position, because I worked for Monroe Wheeler, who was instrumental in deposing him. Alfred sometimes was kind of snide about that, in a way. He would say...I still worked with him, and Alfred was put down in a little room in the library, and he would call up and ask me something and say, "Of course, I can't find anything here because I have no space, and I don't know where anything is." And I would say, "Alfred, let me find it." That sort of gave him comfort, I think. But he would say things, as only Alfred could say, snide things about Monroe, which put me in a bad position. Finally, I said, "You know, Alfred, when you say bad things about Monroe, you put me in a very difficult position." And that was the end of that. I don't know how I had the courage to talk to him, because I was much, much younger, but I somehow felt comfortable with him, I really did. That sort of put an end to that. But it was terribly hard on Alfred, and it seemed most unfair. He certainly knew more than anybody else in the Museum about art, but I think he must have been a bad manager. I don't know any more about it than that.

SZ: Monroe's interest in having him demoted would have to do with...?

FP: I always assumed that he had simply because of the remarks that Alfred made about him, and also, I guess, just general gossip that I heard. But you know, Alfred was the type of person that, if you put him on the elevator, the elevator would have been the

most important thing in the Museum. Everything would have taken place in the elevator and everybody would have had to know about the elevator, because what they did, of course, was put him in charge of the permanent collection, and there was no permanent collection to speak of at the time. And before you knew it, there was a permanent collection [laughter]. He was very motivated.

SZ: The other thing I wanted to ask you about before we move on is if there is anything you can tell me about working with Rewald on that first book [History of Impressionism].

FP: I worked with Rewald on all his books--all the books he did with the Museum. He was a wonderful author to work with because he was the most organized person. He was born organized. Everything slipped into his head click, click, click--like that. He was dull, but he knew that. He said any number of times, "The kind of book I write is the kind Alfred Barr can use." He adored Alfred, just worshipped him, had dreams of Alfred coming over to visit him in Europe and things like that. He always wanted to do something. He was an extremely generous, open-handed man, and open-hearted. I never heard him say any nasty thing about anybody, or any selfish thing. He was a worker, but terribly dull to work with, in a way. I would be making a dummy, and he would want to change something, so we would have to move a sentence along. And he would say, "Yes, so you see, I move this sentence from here and I put it up at the top, and then that made this one too long here, so I took that sentence and I moved it up to the top here, and then that made this sentence too long and I put it up at the top" [laughing]. He would go on for forty pages. That's an exaggeration. It would go on an awfully long time, as he moved one sentence. Anybody else would have said, "I had to make room here." But he made his own dummys. He did everything. He made his own dummys, he did his own proofreading. He did everything except work with the printer. That was my only job with him. I went over everything with him, we worked carefully together getting the pictures together and so forth. As far as anything else...then we always had a typographer who always did the typography. But he really handed in everything complete, just complete--the index, the bibliography, everything.

SZ: Did you find his style dull? Is that what you mean?

FP: His books, in a way...well, yes, they were dull in some ways. They were a compilation of facts that he had. That's what he wanted to do, is have that, so that it was handy for somebody who wanted to write more opinionated things.

SZ: You said that that suited Alfred's needs also.

FP: That's right. He mentioned that, and it would be for anybody. But at that point Alfred was writing very interesting books and so forth, and that's what John liked. But he worked with Wildenstein a lot, and he had a lot of friends, a lot of collectors that he worked with. He'd bought and sold--he was an agent, in a way, and that was his life, in the commercial end of it. But he was a kind, kind man, a good man. A lot of people said terrible things about him, I suppose because he was so terribly commercial. One day I said to his wife, Tiny Alice, "John is very good." And she said, "He is, and nobody seems to know that." But he really was very good and kind. But dull.

SZ: That may be that line where art and commerce....

FP: That's where he was.

SZ: And I guess that's hard for people.

FP: Hard for whom?

SZ: For some people to think that you can do both.

FP: That you can do both, right. I think a lot of people thought.... Of course, he also was very fond of the Museum, because the Museum was instrumental in getting him over here. He was one of three people, as I understand it, or a few people, anyway, who were released from a French detention camp. Do you know that story? Evidently, the

mayor, as John told it to me and as I remember it, the mayor of that village said...he had done something that was cooperative with the Nazis who were running it, and they said, all right, since he'd been a good guy he could release some of the people from his town. He liked to read, so he said that he would release the authors, and John was one of them. A Dr. [Siegfried] Krakauer that also worked down in the library in the Museum--he was interested in films--and I think I knew another one, but I've forgotten him. They were brought over, and I think that one of our trustees--what was his name? he was the head of the board for a long time...anyway, he ought to turn up someplace.

SZ: He was head of the board at that time?

FP: I think so. Anyway, he was the head of the board for a long time and he was a very

philanthropic man, and he turned over his house for these people who were coming over from Europe. He was also instrumental in paying their passage and all that, and he was the one who got John, as I understand it, and Krakauer and the others. [Note: see also John Rewald's Oral History, MoMA OH, #91.68, December 5, 1991.]

SZ: Then I guess the whole project of the History of Impressionism, was something to get him started, too? Was that not the case?

FP: I don't know. I never heard it, but it could be. It might easily have been, yes. I never thought of that. I wish I could remember that man's name.... I just can't remember anything at all.

SZ: Was it Stephen Clark?

FP: Stephen Clark. Thank you. Now that you can put a query by, because I'm really not sure.

SZ: I think that's right. Who later, of course, left the good graces of the Museum, or

whatever.

FP: Yes, that's right. He put some other people in the Museum too. There was a woman who was put in charge of membership, I believe. I can't remember her name. She and her husband came over. He was head of protocol in Belgium, and they got over through Lisbon. She said when they arrived in this country--and they had been able to go to a Salvation Army in Lisbon or someplace at any rate where they could get some clothes, and she was able to get a very large black dress, because that was all that was left by the time they got there, and some men's shoes, and she had to wear men's shoes because she'd walked so long in France, getting supplies and all that, that her feet were ruined, so she had to wear men's shoes, and this big black dress, and her husband, the only thing he could get was this cutaway with striped pants [laughing], so they arrived in this country that way. She was an Englishwoman, and fortunately, she had a good sense of humor. He took care of them, and she was put in, eventually, with a change of clothes, into the Museum.

SZ: Anything else about the war years that you can remember?

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1

SZ: Someone's told me stories about the garden being used to entertain servicemen.

FP: Yes, they did. We also had an exhibition on camouflage. The Museum did little things like that. Yes, a lot of soldiers used to come from other places--Australia, New Zealand--and they gave them tea upstairs afterwards. I can remember them coming in, with their big hats from New Zealand, and they were given free tea upstairs. Yes, they did a lot of little things like that, but nothing, I don't think, at night, because there was a blackout.

SZ: You've talked a little bit about the shortage of paper.

FP: Of course there was a shortage of people, too, which is how I got the job I got. If they'd been able to hire somebody else, I'm sure they would have.

SZ: You really learned the skills on the job is what you said.

FP: I learned the skills on the job, right.

SZ: Tell me a little bit about Monroe at that time, how you saw him and what your relationship was.

FP: He was the head of the department, and he was always kind, always nice. I really liked Monroe very much. He was irritating to me, because I guess I demanded more of a boss than he was willing to give. He was interested in a lot of other things, too, and of course he was head of Exhibitions and Publications, so he was happy to just not pay much attention to publications--until the last minute, and then he would jump in, and of course that's always annoying to everybody. He was interested in a different type of art than I thought--and I was no one to judge--the Museum should be in, and mostly his friends. Now I can't remember their names. One of them was [Florine] Stettheimer--the Stettheimer book. That seemed to me so much froth, and I didn't see why we were doing it. That was more what he liked, that type of thing, but I don't think he was blind about art at all. He'd been like that, but I think he was a people person. He really was. He was a lionizer, and that used to sort of annoy me at the time. At that time I just wasn't wise enough to know that that was a perfectly acceptable type of person to be. He was an admirer--an admirer of people who had accomplished things. I just didn't appreciate that that could be done and still be a nice person, which he was. He was a very generous man, very generous, but not a steady worker in the Museum. But what he could do--what he could do was amazing. I was in his office one day and someone came in and said, "We really need a whole lot of money for something, and Monroe, do you think you could see about it, call so-and-so?" So he picks up the phone, and he says, "This is Monroe Wheeler. Do you think

for this project you could give us $10,000?" And at that time, $10,000 was a whopping big amount of money, and it didn't cost him a thought. He was able to do that, he did it so well. He didn't kowtow, he didn't butter them up first, he didn't think of any good reason for doing it. He just asked them, and he got it. Of course there was a lot of work on the side that he did. He was very social, and he met all these people at cocktail parties--I think he went to about three every night--but this was all part and parcel of what he could do.

SZ: You said that you wanted more from a boss.

FP: I wanted him to pay attention to what the office was doing. I was just a kid most of the time when I started, and even afterwards, when I was no longer a kid and I was running the department, I still felt the lack of...I needed support every once in a while, and I know when Monroe went away for a while and he put Andrew Ritchie in charge of his office, in a way it was just a relief to have Andrew Ritchie there, because I could go in and say, "Look, I have this problem, and this and this and this is happening and I don't know what to do," and he would sit there--he thought extremely slowly, but he thought--and he would focus on this.... But he was terribly good at answering questions and focusing on something. And that, Monroe could not do, or would not do. He could always do it on a personal level, but he couldn't do it on the job. But he was a nice boss, you couldn't ask for better, except he could have paid a little more attention to the work.

SZ: Do you think he harbored any desire to be director of the Museum?

FP: I never thought about it at the time, but I bet if somebody offered it to him he would have taken it. I don't know why he never was offered. It was James [Thrall] Soby who took over. That was a normal step, because he was very close to Alfred. So that's why Alfred must have been gaining in ascendancy there, that that happened.

SZ: Do you remember René d'Harnoncourt's arrival?

FP: Yes, I do. He came just after Soby, didn't he? No, no. Soby was just very temporary. Then there was that lovely Irishman...James Johnson Sweeney. He was the director for a while.

SZ: That was of Painting and Sculpture.

FP: Was he just Painting and Sculpture? But he was sitting in Alfred's office, I remember, for a while. Maybe not, maybe he wasn't.

SZ: My impression is, d'Harnoncourt was brought in--originally he did one show, and then he was hanging around.

FP: He did some non-European art shows, and then he came in as director. He was a good choice, because he could work with the trustees, and he also had some idea of art--in fact, a lot of idea of art. So he was very good, and he got along with most people very well.

SZ: Did you have a lot of contact with him?

FP: On the books that he did. He was such a nice person. I never really got to like him too much, I don't know why. Maybe because I didn't much like the books that he was doing. I mean, I was not interested in Indian art. So that might have been it. I didn't enjoy working on his books as much as I did some of the other books where the subject matter was more interesting to me. It's funny that that should make so much difference, but it does. But he was an awfully fair, nice man.

SZ: Any impression of him as an administrator?

FP: He seemed to administrate in this odd sort of equivocal way of just getting along with people. I never had the feeling of a particularly firm hand there, although you never felt the lack of a director either. About that time, the Museum got awfully large--not compared to what it is now, but it grew fast, I guess, after the war. The cohesiveness

of the Museum sort of gave way about that time. There were more...the staff was larger, and it just wasn't as focused, it seems to me, as it had been before. I wasn't particularly interested in some of the shows. That's not true, though; I did like all the shows they did, really. I just didn't want to spend that much time on the books, I think. Another thing, I was probably doing many, many more books. I was spread much thinner--much thinner--because we ended up having a huge budget for the books, and it just meant much more work. We also were doing more invitations and more of the ephemera, so that took a lot of time.

SZ: What about the graphics for the Museum? Did Alfred have a strong feeling about the way things should look?

FP: Very definitely. Very much out of style, in a way. He didn't like a book that was designed as a book. The art came first. He had definite reasons. A big painting should have as large a cut as possible, a little painting should have a small cut. That all came first, and if the book looked like the devil, he didn't care. That was sort of an uphill fight with Alfred--I mean, just to get it so the plates weren't overlapping. He really didn't care about that. But, on the other hand, I thought his point of view was terribly good, and much better than...a lot of the art books that came out were just demonstrations of the typographer's art, and it didn't matter what they were showing. They could have nothing in those cuts as all; it didn't bring out the art--the designer wasn't interested in that, and so he did it his way. Alfred brought up a big fuss about that, and we went along with that, pretty much. His layouts were always pretty awful. On the other hand, he wrote very well, and what he had to say was good. When I finished his books, I was pleased--not with the looks of them, but I was pleased that this at least was down and people were going to be able to read it: that it was a solid, good book. But we did have an awful set-to when it came to the fiftieth-anniversary book. He wanted that double-column, and I had a fight with him about it--I guess the first fight I had with him. No, no, it wasn't the first; I'd had others. But I just couldn't see that book in double-column. The text was so good, what he was writing was so good, I just enjoyed it so much, and to have that in two little strips, nobody going to read it, and a big book--you can't read that that way. I kept saying no, I thought we

really should have it three-quarter column with pictures, and so it would take a few more pages, let it go. But he wanted to get more words in all the time. So I kept bringing this up, and we made up a dummy--I just kept bringing it up--and he finally said, "Frances, it's going to be double-column." He had small hands, and wicked hands, in a way--I don't know what was wicked about them, but they were small, wicked hands--he held them up and he said, "It's going to be double-column." I said, "Alfred, I know if you say that, it's going to be, and I won't bother you about this anymore." But the next day he came back, and out of my mouth came, "Alfred, this is wrong. We can't have two columns." It really meant a lot to me, I don't know why. And he got up and walked out of the room. He was mad. So I thought, There now, you've done something bad, Frances Pernas. But I lobbied. He decided he was going to ask René d'Harnoncourt, Monroe, and some others whether it should be double or single. So we made up a dummy two ways--a mock-up--and we handed it in, and all these people gathered around, and they looked at it. Alfred--he was so crafty--the way he presented it, it obviously was that he had changed his mind, and that he wanted three-quarters. When he saw the dummys, I guess, it finally...and before that I had lobbied everybody in a sneaky little way. I went around and told Monroe what the problem was, and I told René d'Harnoncourt what the problem was. So then they all went in, and afterwards, Monroe said to me, "Well, what was the problem, Frances?" [laughter] What was the problem?

SZ: So after the war, which is what you've said, things really kind of changed. It wasn't the same...

FP: ...camaraderie that there had been before. Gradually that disappeared--not immediately, but gradually.

SZ: In terms of camaraderie, you've mentioned some people. You mentioned Ione Sutton, and I assume that since you wanted to work for Elodie you had some relationship with her.

FP: Yes. She was a lovely person. Everybody liked Elodie. She was the most charming person.

SZ: Did everybody spend their time together? Did the feel that they were part of....

FP: I think so, yes. People spent a lot of time together. I didn't so much because I was commuting to New Jersey, and I had a sick mother, and then later, a very old father, so I commuted, and I didn't join in too much to that. We all had lunch together and everything. At that time you could have lunch for fifty cents. Not anymore. Au Steak Pommes Frites was one place. That was early on. That disappeared in the war. You got a decent little lunch for fifty cents, and a glass of red ink for ten.

SZ: So people did do that.

FP: Yes. Very seldom did you eat lunch alone. You could have a quick lunch. A lot of people, I must say, drank their lunch--not a lot, a few drank their lunch--but nobody that I knew did. It was a sober group, mainly.... Actually, on the fifth floor, which is where I was, I don't think anybody drank. Monroe, as I said, went to about three cocktail parties a night, but he didn't drink. He didn't drink at all. People used to think he did, because he had a tremor, and he sometimes had to slap that hand down so he could write. I don't think, and I have a tremor, too, but I knew that he didn't drink; he just obviously didn't. But nobody did; they were all sober there.

SZ: Did you work with [Edward] Steichen?

FP: Yes, I worked with Steichen when we did the twenty-fifth anniversary book, and he was very nice to work with. He was inclined to pinch and whatnot, but harmless. I had an awfully nice designer at that time--Charles Oscar--and I would send him, when I was working with Steichen, if there were pages to go over or something, he would go up and take care of that. But it was not bad. It was sort of annoying to work that way, and in the Museum there really wasn't any of that, just because.... So I worked with him. He was very good about checking plates. He could tell you--this was done in Holland, on letterpress, and they sent us the copies of the black-and-white plates. I remember him going over, and he was excellent with that--excellent. He had a very

good eye. When the book came out, Alfred was terribly embarrassed at the looks of them. He said, "I can't show this to Steichen. These plates are terrible." They weren't; they were just the way he wanted them, and he explained that. But Alfred like things sharp, and Steichen wanted this all muted. They were his photographs, so I guess he knew. But Alfred liked it black-and-white. He had a marvelous eye, Alfred did, a marvelous eye, but in an intellectual way. He did not have an artist's eye at all. I know one time we were correcting color plates, and he said, "This needs more blue." He said, "Blue and green make purple." But that's not true. Charles Oscar was there at the time; we didn't say anything, we just let it pass and put the right color in. He said, "Well, if Alfred Barr says it, it's probably true, and we'll do that. I'll bring you this and you'll get purple" [laughing]. So he didn't have that kind of an eye, but he certainly had every other kind of an eye for art, as you can tell by the present collection.

SZ: Did you work with Philip Johnson?

FP: Yes. He was very nice to work with too--rather wild, unpredictable, would jump up and down--but very nice. Philip was a nice person. He did a lot of the work himself. We didn't do as much for him. He had someone write for him, to begin with, so you worked with him on the writing. He also had such a definite idea of where things went, and he was so very good at it. I mean, that was fine. Also, Arthur, who followed him, died...Arthur Drexler. The architecture department pretty much handled their own things.

SZ: So you didn't get involved too much, because I understand Arthur had a reputation for being very late.

FP: Who did?

SZ: Arthur--late with his....

FP: I think he was late, but I don't remember that as being a terrible problem with him. He probably, because when he was doing a book--we'd put it through the press--when

he was doing a book, that came first, and so he would get that done. He was nice to work with. I liked working with Arthur. He was very bright, very, very bright. I wonder what happened to him? It was terrible that he died young. Actually, I'm a survivor. I've outlived just about everybody that I worked with--just about everybody.

SZ: What year did you retire?

FP: Sixty--'60, I guess. Yes, I retired, I think it was in 1960, and then....

SZ: That was early.

FP: Yes, I was young. I finally realized that life held more. I got so involved, I had so much to do and I had to work so hard--late hours, and Saturdays and Sundays--I was walking down the street, and I always was thinking of the next four months or something like that, because that's when a deadline would be, that's when the book was ready, that's when everything had to come out. I was walking down the street, and I saw a pumpkin in the window, and I thought, What is a pumpkin doing in the window in April? And then I realized it wasn't April: it was October. And I resigned that day. Of course, it had occurred to me before that life held more than this rat race. Of course, another thing is I had been doing this, I had done that many books, had produced that many books, and the excitement begins to wear thin. But mainly, that triggered it. I thought, Life holds more than this. So I just took a chance. I was there maybe four months afterward, because I had to find somebody to train in, and I was fortunate to find this very nice woman...Françoise Boas. A lovely person, a lovely girl.

SZ: Did you take another job?

FP: I just stopped.

SZ: So you were forty-four.

FP: I guess I was. I was born in 1916. I guess it is young to retire, isn't it? I managed to

retire, I managed to get along. I had a [Willem] de Kooning, which I sold, and bought a house up here.

SZ: So you collected for yourself a bit?

FP: Yes, I bought. I bought the de Kooning. This was a case of throwing bread upon the waters. He had a baby. He was terribly broke. They thought his work was terrible; it was not popular at the time. But Sidney Janis had a show of all those big women, and they were all so handsome--God, they were beautiful. I thought, Well, I have a job, and I think he's marvelous. If I can't buy this, who's going to? So in a way it was an altruistic thing. I guess it always does pay off, I don't know. But that was one of my thoughts. I bought that by borrowing money from the bank. To me, it looked like a Velasquez. It was so richly painted. It was a lovely thing. It was the least of the ladies, in a way; the others, museums had picked up. So I had that, and I finally I had to sell it. I sold it through the good auspices of Dorothy Miller. She told me that this gallery,...I can't remember the name of it, it was such a black day in my life when I sold it.

SZ: You mean you sold it out of necessity.

FP: I sold it because it had outgrown me. I couldn't even afford to keep up the insurance. I lived in a high-risk apartment, and the only people who would insure it were Lloyd's of London, and the insurance was just too much. And also, it was being borrowed all the time, and traveling, and when it traveled, of course, I didn't have to pay the insurance, but I finally had to sell it--I realized that it had finally outgrown me. I sold it to a man who said he was going to give it to the Los Angeles [County Museum of Art]. So I went down, and there was a lawyer, and there was a picture of it, and I had to sign it and say that was it. I was so terribly upset that I just got out of there in time before I burst into tears, and I wept all the way home--boohoohoo, walking down Lexington Avenue, all the way. I finally thought, If somebody should stop and ask what is the matter, I would have to say, "I just sold a painting for more money than anyone ever heard of" [laughing]. At the time I sold it, it was for seventy-five

thousand; it was the most anyone had paid for a de Kooning.

SZ: It must make you sick now.

FP: No, it doesn't. I never bought it for that. I told my CPA, when he was doing this, I said, "You know, I never bought it to make money on." He said, "Of course you didn't. If you had, you would have sold it when it doubled." And it's true. I never have been able to think of things with a pricetag on them. But I did love that painting. She had a beautiful diaphragm, sort of like a field of wheat here. She was cross-looking, but she was wonderful.

SZ: Where is she now, do you know?

FP: She's in Los Angeles, but I was so upset, because it was such a cut-and-dried affair, selling this. I just managed to get out the door before I disgraced myself.

SZ: In the '50s, we talked about some of the change and much more pressure and more volume for you and anything. [Tape interruption] I was going through lists of some of the curators who were there when you were there and asking you if you had worked with them, but we didn't get to Bill Lieberman.

FP: We got to him...in another way.

SZ: Is there anything else that you wanted to say about him?

FP: No, except just to say that, in spite of his difficulties--and there were difficulties with Bill Lieberman, I'm sure that's been turned up--he really had such a fine mind that he was a pleasure to work with.

SZ: And Peter Selz and Bill Seitz?

FP: Yes, I worked with them. Yes, they were both very nice to work with, particularly Peter

Selz, because he was very well-organized. Bill Seitz was a better writer, but he was disorganized and was always late in getting things in, which, of course, left all the mess in my office instead of in his office. So that was difficult. And he used to be sort of coy about it, which used to irritate me. He would sort of peek his head in the door and say that he didn't have it ready and things, but in a fey kind of way, which used to irritate us all. But he was very nice. He died young. He went to Brandeis, I believe. I don't know, is Peter Selz still alive?

SZ: Yes.

FP: That's good. He was a nice man. He had a warmth about him that was very nice. I guess you heard about Charles Oscar, who was murdered. He was the designer in my office, just a charmer. He was murdered on the streets of New York.

SZ: Just walking on the street?

FP: I think he was picking up boys--it was a homosexual murder. He was such a nice person; everybody liked him. When something like that happens, you get sensitive about it. If they look at you this way, you don't like it; if they look at you another way, you don't like it. I remember Peter Selz...he came in and he sat down--he'd been away at the time--and he said, "How did it happen?" But he said it in such a way that I saw right through him. He really was...he'd worked with Charles, not a great deal, but he'd worked with him, and you could just tell where his head was and where his heart was, and that he was absolutely thinking about what had happened, not gossipy and not anything. He did things like that just right. So I always liked Peter.

SZ: Were you there for the fire?

FP: No, I was in Europe at the time. I was in Europe and I got a mysterious cable from my office saying--and I hadn't even seen it in the paper; I was in Austria, I think--and I got this mysterious cable saying "All Museum books are safe," or something like that. They sent that to me in that way in case I hadn't heard about the fire, and also just, if I

had heard it, to know that the Museum was there, anyway, because it was all over the papers in Europe, and I hadn't seen it. Eventually, I saw it, but not then. It was delayed coming in, or I was late seeing it. So I missed that. I'm just as glad I did.

SZ: This brings up another topic that I wanted to talk a little bit about.... You traveled through your work.

FP: For the Museum?

SZ: Yes.

FP: Mostly I traveled on my own. I did the German book in Germany, in Berlin. At one point I did some postcards in Italy, but that's because I was there; I didn't go for that purpose.

SZ: So the bulk of the printing that was done at that time was done in this country.

FP: It was done in this country. Then, when the dollar was so high and the European currency so low, we switched over to Europe, but it was done through the mails, which was very satisfactory. They sent agents over and one thing and another. It was very easy to do. They had excellent printers--excellent.

SZ: I have a whole exhibition list. Should I get that? You had just said something about going through the '50s.

FP: You had said something about the '50s, and I can't distinguish in my head what the '50s were.... You didn't ask me about Dorothy Miller, and she was a big favorite of mine.

SZ: Then I want to know about Dorothy Miller.

FP: She was a charmer, she really was the most charming person, and pure gold. Very

disorganized, hairpins flying all the time, so beautiful, with the hair flying down. She was just such a beautiful person, and sweet and kind. I thought when I first met her, This can't be true. She can't be that nice. Anybody that looks like that. I was, what, twenty-two at the time or something. Anybody who looks that nice can't be as sweet as she seems. But she was, she was every bit as sweet as that. She was kind and nice. She wasn't always easy to work with, because she was indecisive about things. She would have things all fixed, and then Alfred would come in and say, "Now, Dorothy, I want you to make these pictures as large as you can." They were already as large as they could be without having flip-outs or something. Then she'd tear her hair again and try to get them larger. I think he just did that to stir her up a bit [laughing]. But she was nice to work with, because she was so kind and nice, and she had a nice office, with Sara Mazo and all those people in there. They were so cooperative. I can't remember her name; she came from Oregon.... Betsy Jones. I guess she was in Alfred's office, Betsy Jones. All that little nucleus down there, they were very nice to work with.

SZ: Did you ever get any sense of how much input Dorothy had into some of Alfred's choices, collection choices?

FP: I don't know. She had...I doubt if there would be any direct influence, but certainly there could be a lot of indirect influence, that she would probably see...she was the one who saw the younger painters that came in, and she must have influenced him on that level. But he pretty much made his own decisions. He used to have them lined up at the end of the corridor, across from his office, there were generally some pictures there, so that when he would walk by he would look at them. That is absolutely the way to know whether a painting is good or not. I don't know whether you've ever noticed that. Not to go look at it--you go to a museum and you look like this; you're not getting anywhere if you don't think about it, because I know when we laid out a book we were working with the photographs and working with the cuts, and we were thinking about, this one had to be made such-and-such a size, and this one isn't very clear and has to be redone--we were thinking about it from that point of view. When we finished a book, everyone in that office knew what he thought about

that painter and was never going to change his mind. It all became so clear, and I think probably my opinions then would be my opinions now--I mean, I've probably kept them. As a matter of fact, I haven't progressed very much, I really haven't [laughing]. Yes, I probably do have the same opinions.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2

FP: Stephen C. Clark could not get any further than [Paul] Cézanne, and I thought, "Well, I hope this doesn't happen to me when I get older." And of course it did, and now I don't object to it, because I can see now that if everyone jumped on every bandwagon that came long, we'd go faster than we are. There has to be a drag, and Stephen C. Clark was at that point the drag--a benign one, but a drag--and now I'm trotting along behind, too.

SZ: Where did you stop?

FP: I stopped before Pop art, I guess. I don't mind Pop art, but I can't get excited about it.

SZ: You wouldn't want to look at it every day?

FP: I wouldn't look at it every day. I don't think it would involve me every day. I think I would eventually find it boring.

SZ: Did you go to the galleries when you were there?

FP: Yes, we all did that.

SZ: For your own pleasure?

FP: Yes, it was just for fun. That was sort of the Saturday-afternoon occupation, and sometimes during noon hour if there was a show we wanted to see we'd go up and see it. I knew Andy Warhol to some extent, but just very little, because he came in trying to get us to do some Christmas cards. This was before he'd really become big-time. Charming little thing, he was. He'd come in with this great, long knitted coat on--this was bizarre clothing--and this funny little face, and he'd be so shy. I remember he sat down, and I had a swivel chair in there for extra seating, and he sat on this swivel chair and he didn't say anything. We were looking at his postcards, which were obscene. They were the cutest, fattest cherubs, which he felt would be appropriate for Christmas, but they really were...I don't know why they were obscene, there was really nothing wrong with them, but they were obscene [laughing]. So we couldn't publish them. But I remember him sitting on this thing and saying, "Oh, it moves." We didn't know what he was talking about. He was really kind of zany, but a nice guy. But then he got big-time after that. He used to bring in...he did a book, and his mother had written in it--he and his mother had done this book together--and he brought that in and we all looked at it, but we couldn't have published that either. It was really beyond the pale.

SZ: Tell me a little bit about the Christmas cards, how that started.

FP: I don't know when it started.

SZ: But while you were there.

FP: Yes. We didn't do it with great energy. There was a feeling that these things were not appropriate for the Museum. This was Alfred's influence, his sort of puritanical influence about not having it look commercial--[he was] anti-commercial. So it had to be something that was appropriate for the Museum. Well, there wasn't that much. We didn't have pictures of Santa Claus and things like that in the Museum, so we were sort of hard-put to find it, and nobody ever really got awfully interested in it. The only one we ever put out that was nice and I liked was Joseph Cornell's picture of a bird--I think it was a bird. I have that still, a copy of it. That was appropriate, and it was good,

but most of the things we put out were not terribly good. I think they do better now.

SZ: But it's a whole different thing. It's a very commercial thing.

FP: It's a commercial thing, but, after all, when you're going to do Christmas cards, why not have it commercial. We could have had just that aspect of it. They didn't have that at the time. The Museum was a much purer place than it is now. It just didn't have that commercial aspect at all, or very little of it--very little of it.

SZ: Did you do a calendar?

FP: No. Do they do a calendar now?

SZ: Yes. You did some sort of newsletter for members, or the Bulletin I think it was called then?

FP: Yes. I never did the Bulletin. Alan Porter did that.

SZ: Tell me a little bit about Alan Porter.

FP: A secretary at the Museum for a while, Frances Hawkins, described Alan--Alan told this on himself--he said...froth isn't the word, but it was similar to that. She said, "Alan is all froth, but what froth." And that was right. He was very clever, lots of fun, and shallow, I think, in many ways. But he served his purpose there. He could go to the openings. He never got paid enough, they never paid him enough, and he was always just on the verge of being fired. I don't know if he knew that or not, but he might have guessed it, because he really didn't get that much work done. But I know Monroe said one time, "I'm afraid we are going to have to let Alan go," and I said, "You know, he really serves a purpose. There's no one like him at the openings. He's wonderful at the openings." And he said, "I wish you could persuade the trustees of that." Well, somebody did, I guess, persuade the trustees, because he stayed there until he retired. But he was wonderful at those things. He was nice to everybody--your

old Aunt Hattie, or the trustees. He had a way of greeting these people and being nice. I know one time there was a woman who came in, she was really nutty, and she wanted to take down all of the paintings in the Museum and put hers up, and she was strident and so difficult. Instead of calling the police, they called Alan Porter. He went down and he put his arm around her and he talked to her. The two of them were seen going down the street together, and he had his arm around, and I guess he was saying, "Your paintings are absolutely wonderful." And she was enthralled, perfectly happy, didn't want her paintings up anymore. He was wonderful that way.

SZ: He put together the Bulletin.

FP: He did the Bulletin, but for how long he did it, I don't know. But I know I never had that. I think the Bulletin finally stopped, didn't it?

SZ: It gets reincarnated.

FP: When it was the Bulletin, he did it. I think sometimes a department would put out one or something. But he did it as the Bulletin. Mostly the printer did it. Alan got the material together, but I think the printer did most of it.

SZ: How did you feel about the idea that things should not be commercial? I guess towards the end of your time there, there must have been a certain pressure to start thinking that way.

FP: I think so. I think I resisted, because I think I still feel that way. I think I was of a generation that was very influenced by Alfred Barr, and that's the way he felt. And, of course, that is the way I would feel. I was just a young girl going in, and that would be my inclination anyway, to think that way, just by nature. But, of course, any person going in at that time would certainly have been influenced by Alfred. That was one of the schisms, I think, in the Museum in a way. Dorothy Miller certainly felt that way, and I'm sure Elodie Courter did--all of the people that had come in early and were under Alfred's influence. There was probably room for both those opinions.

SZ: Did you ever feel bottom-line pressure, or was that not anything that was really talked about?

FP: What is bottom-line--you mean the money?

SZ: Yes.

FP: We had a budget to work within.

SZ: My impression is that it was always running at a deficit, there were always overruns, and it was always sort of taken up, and that it wasn't thought of seriously in the way that it is now, and I don't know if that is true or not.

FP: I wasn't involved in it. I had a budget for my own books, each book that came out, and I don't think I even had a budget for the department. I think Monroe had a sketchy kind of a thing, where he'd pull a few figures out of the air, but I don't think it was based on anything. I just had it for each book, and I think we generally went over it, as I remember. Nothing terrible happened. I didn't have much to do with the figures. I used to go into Sarah Rubinstein. She'd get out her left hand and help me with it.

SZ: Ione had something to do with it, too, didn't she?

FP: Yes, she did, then, after Ione, Sarah did. Yes, Ione did, but I never worked with Ione on the money angle at all....

SZ: You said something before, when there was a pumpkin in the window and you realized how much pressure you were under. One hears that a lot.

FP: You mean the pressure in the Museum.

SZ: Yes. That it burned a lot of people out.

FP: Yes. In my case I really wasn't that tired. I was in good physical condition; that wasn't it. But I just began to realize that there was more to life than just putting out one book after another. I would go to concerts and I would go to the museums and I would go to see friends and all that--by that time I was living in New York--but my social life was this big, with museums and concerts, and the rest of it was like this. It just took over. It also was the thing that I thought about most of the time, so just going down the street I was babble, babble, babble to myself, that I had to get this done. And I didn't get home very often until quite late, and when I'd come in, the first thing I'd do was the crossword puzzle.

SZ: I see you're still doing them.

FP: Yes [laughing]. I don't do them with the frenzy I did then. If I did the crossword puzzle, my mind became a blank after that. Then I could eat and I could go to bed and all the rest. But a lot of people work that way, that same pressure all the time. The people in my department did, too, and they didn't like it. They were younger, and they weren't so influenced as I was. They weren't as interested in the Museum per se, I guess, as I was, although God knows they were good workers, and all of them terribly nice. All of them gone, all of them died; they were all younger, and every one of them has died. One of AIDS, the one that was murdered, and then Susan Draper, who was the dearest person, and she just died of lung cancer--all of them a lot younger. Also, I'll tell you another reason I left, I think. After Charles was murdered, I felt something was gone in that office, and Susan said to me--I had been to Greece, and that's what reminded me that things could be different, and when I came back, I was really so happy to have been in Greece...and then, after that, Charles died, I think, after I came back, and Susan said to me when I left, "You're leaving because Charles was killed, aren't you?" I said, "No,"--and I thought I was telling her the truth--"I'm leaving because after coming back from Greece I realized there was another way to live, and that's why I'm leaving." But I think she was right. That whole office, when it happened we all behaved so well. We kept on doing our work, and people brought us their

work. Monroe was away, and he wrote the sweetest letter, such a nice letter, when he heard about it. But we were all sort of hanging on our teeth for a while, because it was really very disturbing, a really disturbing murder, and we had to go down and identify him. It was very sad. He was sort of a favorite.

SZ: It changed something.

FP: It changed something. It did. Also, I missed his expertise. He was the one who could get along with Alfred perfectly. He was absolutely silent. He never said anything. He was Irish and he had a very good sense of humor, so he said plenty in the office; but he never said anything to Alfred at all. He knew what Alfred wanted. He'd felt the same way. He was a painter. Charles was a painter, and I always tried to get for whoever did the designing in the office, I tried to get a painter, not a typographer, because a typographer saw the book as something to exhibit himself, and I couldn't have bucked Alfred on that. I couldn't have bucked several other people on that either. So I hired a painter, and they understood that attitude and they followed it, and they all learned typography in no time. Typography is not that difficult. You have to learn a few technical things, but if you're a painter and you have a good eye and you apply yourself, you can do that very well. So that worked out. Charles was, I guess, the most comfortable person with that attitude that we had. So that left a big hole. I think that had something to do with my leaving, although I didn't admit it at the time. But it did.

SZ: Do you go back ever?

FP: After I left I helped Dorothy Miller with a show. She was putting up a show and, what was the woman's name that did the boxes--wonderful boxes, just box, after box, after box? Big constructions of boxes, and she had false eyelashes this long. I can't think of her name.

SZ: The only person I can think of, because the boxes don't mean anything to me, but the eyelashes do, is Louise Nevelson.

FP: That's it: Louise Nevelson [laughter]. She had the boxes of Louise Nevelson to erect there, and of course the men didn't have that much time to do it, so she asked me. So I had a photograph and the boxes were all around, so I put them all up. When it got way up to the top Peter Selz came along, and I was standing way up on a ladder, and I couldn't get that top piece, and he said, "I'll do it," and he went up, stood way up on this ladder, and leaning this way he put that top box on. I thought, If he falls, I'm a murderess [laughter]. So I helped her on that, and then I helped her on her loan forms, because she was always terribly far behind with her loan requests, people requesting loans. I did that just for a couple of months just to get her out of the hole. I remember one horrible day Monroe saw me in the hall, and he gave me such a terrible look, because I had left his office and he saw me working for Dorothy, and he was upset. And I said, "Monroe, I'm just helping with some loan forms." But I worked for four months in my office...training my successor, and I worked part-time. I would disappear so she could work. She was terribly good and awfully nice, and she really was much better prepared than I was. She knew much more about typography than I did. She had a miserable time in the beginning because Alfred was awful to her, just terrible. I couldn't understand it. Alfred was difficult, but I couldn't understand it. But then, we realized later that he was beginning to get Alzheimer's. That was the saddest thing. That was like a Greek tragedy. Words meant so much to him, and to be struck there didn't seem right. So that's what happened to poor Françoise. He was just getting off. I think something like working with a new person was enough to set it off--not the Alzheimer's, but just set off the disagreeable things. Françoise just couldn't understand it, and I said, "I don't understand it either, Françoise." But she said, "Don't worry, I have a way of getting around these things. When anything bothers me, I go home and go to sleep" [laughing]. That's where she got rid of things. She would go to sleep and maybe sleep ten hours, twelve hours, or something, and then it was gone. But it was a shame she had that. But it didn't last long, because everybody liked her. I was fortunate to get her.

SZ: It can be a hard place.

FP: Yes, it was not easy to fill, and I think it was changing at that time, the whole Museum was changing at that time, and I think she was much better equipped to take care of that change, because I would have bucked it, and she didn't. There were many new people.

SZ: Did you have a lot of contact with trustees?

FP: No, I didn't. I didn't really have any contact with trustees. The only time was when the staff went up to [William A.M.] Burden's for a weekend.

SZ: That was right before you left. Did you go to that?

FP: Yes [laughing].

SZ: Before I turn my tape recorder off, why don't you tell me about that.

FP: I can tell you the food was fantastic.

SZ: That's not what I want to know about [laughing].

FP: But you want to know about a dessert they had. We were all around this big table.

SZ: This was management staff, right?

FP: It was the heads of all departments. Monroe would have gone, except he wasn't there, so I went in his place, because I was below him, I was in production only. Let me tell you about this dessert. This tall glass came in with champagne, I guess, on the bottom and a peach on the top, and as they brought it in, the peach started turning. All these glasses came in. Of course they had a troop people in that kitchen, and also Mrs. Burden was there early in the morning and all day long. Boy, those people know how to entertain. But there were these peaches. They all came in, and they were all turning. It really was a beautiful sight. [Tape interruption].

FP: The food was excellent, but the deportment of the staff was very poor. Arthur [Drexler] misbehaved and lit into Porter McCray in the most dreadful way. I can't remember what it was about, but I'm sure it was not important. Susan [Cable], who worked in the International Program at that time, stood up for Porter beautifully. I guess she worked for Porter; I guess she was in Porter's department. She was an awfully nice person. I remember that little contretemps. Everybody was supposed to tell what they wanted to do in their department, how they wanted it, what new things they would like to do. I can't remember anything really brilliant being said, or anything happening about it. It was sort of a nice weekend in the fresh air as far as most of us were concerned.

SZ: So the purpose was somewhat unclear to you?

FP: I don't know that the purpose was unclear, but certainly the results were unclear, and I don't think we could have pleased the Burdens one bit, or the other trustees. I remember Monroe being pretty upset when he heard about the fighting up there, because that would have upset him very much. He liked decorum, and he wouldn't have wanted people arguing in front of the trustees. Personally, I didn't think that was so bad, arguing in front of the trustees, but....

SZ: Porter was gone a short time later....

FP: Gone a short time later? Do you think that had anything to do with it? I don't think so. I don't think so. I hope not. I never thought that that...I can't even remember what Arthur said, but it was something about how he didn't like the way Porter's department was being run, I guess. What business it had to be of Arthur's, I don't know. He was a spoiled person, Arthur was. An only child, I guess, and bright, but never disciplined. But I don't think anybody could have taken that too seriously. Maybe Porter left because he was upset, hurt. He probably wasn't let go. He probably was just upset. Poor Porter, that was too bad. I didn't realize that that would have made that much difference to him. I don't know.

SZ: I just don't know. I just know what the sequence of events was.

FP: No, I don't know either.

SZ: So, for someone who wanted to work at a place so badly, are you glad you did it?

FP: Yes, very much so, because...I never think back on my college days. I didn't learn half as much in college that interested me--I learned a lot, and I enjoyed college; I'm not saying anything against it. But certainly the Museum has occupied a much bigger slice of my life, and bigger than I wanted it to, actually, but it was a rewarding experience. Anybody who lives in New York is lucky, at least for a time. When you see people up here who have lived much quieter lives, and they have never been subjected all the things in the city, they're entirely different, and they'll never be anything else but different from people who have lived in New York City. This may also be true of Chicago, I don't know, and certainly San Francisco. People that live in San Francisco are quite different. But it is an experience, a broadening experience, to live in New York City, with all its problems, and also to have a nice place like the Museum to work in, a central place like that. If I had worked in Macy's, I don't think that would have meant anything to me. Macy's is bankrupt. Don't you find it rewarding?

SZ: Yes. Thank you, Frances. I think that's all I can think of.

FP: I guess you can't drag another thing out of my head.

SZ: I don't know, I probably could [laughter].

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2

SIDE 2, BLANK

END INTERVIEW