THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **WALDO RASMUSSEN (WR)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Where and when were you born? Tell me just a little bit about how you grew up.

WR: I was born in 1928 in a small town near Spokane, Washington. My father was part American Indian, and I'm a member of that same tribe, the Cœur d'Alene tribe in Idaho.

SZ: He was part Indian. Not the Rasmussen part.

WR: No, Rasmussen wasn't in fact his name. He took his stepfather's name. His father and mother were both part Indian. My grandmother was about a quarter Indian, because her mother had been French-Canadian and Scottish and married someone who was then called a "half-breed," as a French-Canadian woman could do and probably a U.S. woman would be less likely to do. I never knew my grandfather. My grandfather was a rodeo rider named Tex McCleod, and my father also rode in rodeos when he was a boy. Very Northwest. So I lived in Spokane until I was ten or twelve, something like that, and then in a small town outside Spokane.

SZ: What was Spokane like then? Was it very built up?

WR: No, it was a small city. I didn't know anything about visual art in those days. We're talking about the middle of the Depression, so I never visited a museum until we

moved to Portland during the Second World War, when I was fourteen, in 1942. I remember going to the Portland Art Museum very early, and something clicked. What was interesting about it to me in retrospect is that one of the shows I remember very early on was an exhibition of Mark Tobey, who of course is a major figure from the Northwest. I had never seen anything contemporary like that. But I was interested in it, not hostile, and that was interesting to me.

SZ: The Portland Museum was not specifically modern art at all.

WR: No, it was a small, generalized museum, but of course it did exhibitions of local artists, and this was a major show. Forty-two was relatively early in Tobey's career in terms of awareness outside the Northwest, but it was still the mature Tobey. . . .

SZ: So you had no special talent in the visual arts?

WR: No, none at all.

SZ: And in your family?

WR: No. The only person . . . I thought my paternal grandmother did, because I remembered that she had in her bedroom a collection of kitsch art, really wild stuff. It was sort of like an Oldenburgian environment. It was great. She also had collected some original watercolors during a time when she had some money before the Depression.

SZ: So she had an eye and the taste for it.

WR: She had an appetite for it. But my maternal family did not. They were Southern Baptist and I didn't have any sense of that. Surely my mother did not. Also, my family was working class. Both my parents came from rural backgrounds, and my father was mostly unemployed during the Depression and my mother was a waitress. My

father became a welder. They were very working class, and no one in my family had ever gone to college at that time. Later, there were some people on my mother's side, but there was certainly no one on my father's side, and there was no kind of expectation that that would be the case, because they really were poor. They weren't just working class, they were poor, particularly during the Depression. When they moved to Portland during the war years, it was for the ship-building industry, and both my parents worked in that during the war years. But Portland was sort of an awakening toward culture for me. Music and dance had always interested me. I loved dance. Fred Astaire was my god.

SZ: So you knew it from the movies.

WR: I knew it from the movies, and opera I knew from a couple of live performances from one of those small touring companies which had a public-school program, and that clicked right away too for me. So music and dance, but the visual arts I only knew slightly through books.

SZ: You never studied music? An instrument?

WR: No, never did. Took some tap-dancing classes when I was a little boy, and then later studied dance from the age of eighteen to fifty as a perpetual untalented beginner. That is something I feel strongly about, that people in the arts should have some experience in trying to make that art, or learn something about it. So I took studio courses when I was in college. I went to Reed College in Portland.

SZ: I assume you went to public schools until then.

WR: Yes.

SZ: So how did you get the impetus to go to college if it wasn't expected and it wasn't part of the tradition at all?

WR: It was my mother's expectation. My mother had expectations for me, as other people in the family did not. Her family had begun to educate themselves —her brothers went to college—so she expected me to. But the Indian side of my family did not. I certainly wasn't very Indian-looking or whatever, but still, there was that part of the culture for which expectations were not great for the best of reasons. But it meant I had to support myself through college. I had to sort of work my way through, and it took me a very long time.

SZ: You were a good student?

WR: Yes, but it took me seven years to put myself through college. Reed has an undergraduate thesis—Reed is a wonderful school—but not any art history to speak of. In the humanities, there were lectures on the visual arts, but there was no art history whatsoever. I took a lot of studio courses at the Portland Museum School, which had a joint program with Reed, not because I wanted to be a painter--I found painting a situation of discomfort just like de Kooning says. But it helped me see, I think. Then, in my last year of college, when I was working on my undergraduate thesis—it was on Henry James—I got a job at the Portland Art Museum. I had gone down to San Francisco for the first time in my life. San Francisco was a kind of mecca, and I had gone down there to investigate a museum career. I had taken some vocational counseling tests and they indicated something having to do with writing and visual appreciation.

SZ: You didn't have a real plan for yourself at that point?

WR: No, I didn't quite know what to do with myself, so the idea of a museum career crossed my mind. I went to San Francisco and I met with two great women museum directors, Grace McCann Morley, who was then at the San Francisco Museum, I

guess, and Jermayne MacAgy, and they were both wonderful to me and discussed the profession, talked to me very openly about it, and that encouraged me. So I decided to try it out at the Portland Art Museum and worked for two years as a general museum assistant.

SZ: One always thinks of museum jobs anywhere as being so desirable but hard to come by. Was it that way?

WR: No, there wasn't any trouble in getting the job. Museum work then, as now, pays so badly that it wasn't that hard to get. This was 1950, I guess.

SZ: And was this where Betsy Jones was?

WR: Yes, Betsy was my predecessor there, and Betsy helped get me a job at the Museum [of Modern Art], I think. At least she sent me the application.

SZ: But you met her at the Portland museum?

WR: No, I sort of met her when she came back summers.

SZ: That's right, because I think she came in '49, I think she said.

WR: Yes. I don't know that my position was exactly the same as hers, because I worked directly under the registrar. But of course a small museum is a wonderful place to begin your career in a museum, because you work in every single department. I worked with the curator, the director —the director then was Thomas Colt, who later moved on to the Dayton Art Institute; he was a very grumpy and cantankerous man who took a great interest in me and really helped me and saw a career for me very early. He was quite wonderful. In fact, he sort of kicked me out of the museum in 1954 because he said I should go on to New York and go on to graduate school and not stay in Portland. And I must say, that was not an easy decision for me, because I

was already married by that time—I married very young—and we already had one child, and no money.

SZ: I was going to say, on one of those lousy museum salaries.

WR: Fifty dollars. But I loved working at the Portland Museum, and at the Portland Museum there were several traveling shows from The Museum of Modern Art. There were in fact several important modern shows that also pushed me towards modernism, which seemed anyway to be a natural inclination. But there was a very great show called *Three Spanish Painters* — Miró, Juan Gris, and Picasso —and there was a Klee retrospective, and then from The Museum of Modern Art, probably in '51 or '52 or something like, there was a show that included Abstract Expressionists [*Modern American Painting: Movements and Countermovements*, C/E, 1949-1952]. Now that's very early. It had Pollock in it and de Kooning and Gorky, I think. But that was very important to me. Also in those years I was an avid reader of *The Partisan Review* and Clement Greenberg's early articles, but I read the articles without seeing the art. You didn't see it in person; you didn't see it in *The Partisan Review*, either, for that matter.

SZ: When these shows came from the Modern, did they come with anyone from the Museum?

WR: No.

SZ: So your museum would just take it and unpack it and hang it.

WR: Yes. But I was there to do that, so it also gave me that experience that you have from working with the registrar, of a physical relation to the work of art, which I loved, which I've always loved.

SZ: So the decision to go to New York. . . .

WR: I applied for a scholarship to NYU, to the Institute of Fine Arts, and received one to my surprise. So we left. I think I should mention one other New York connection while I was at the Portland Museum, because that was also very important to my life. David Smith came out to Portland to be the sole juror for the Oregon Annual. I met David Smith at that time, because I was on the staff when he was choosing the show. I was enormously impressed by him. I bought a drawing of his at that time for $125. I paid for it in monthly installments, probably every other month, of about $10. He brought out a group of his drawings, and the first installation I ever did was to install his drawings. I know that that was the first museum exhibition of David Smith's drawings, and it was very beautiful. So that was a New York connection I had, and he and I became casual friends, and of course I worked on several exhibitions of his later on. So we came to New York. I had sent in my application, and on the application form in those years there was a sentence which read, "State lowest entrance salary you can accept," [laughter] and of course I wanted that job very badly, because my goal in life was to work at The Museum of Modern Art. What I thought would happen would be that I would go to the Institute, get an M.A., then go to some other provincial museum, but some day I wanted to work for The Museum of Modern Art. And that all got very speeded-up. So when I saw that application form, I thought, well, New York has to be more expensive than Portland, Oregon, and we were living on $50 a week, so I said $60 a week. You can guess that that was the salary I was hired at. We arrived in New York in August of 1954 with one child, the second en route, no place to live, borrowed money.

SZ: Brave man!

WR: It never occurred to me . . . I didn't feel brave, I just thought . . . I was a very highly skilled secretary. I worked my way through college as a secretary. I typed like a demon, I took dictation, and male secretaries made more money than women

secretaries.

SZ: Should that surprise me?

WR: No. So I thought I could always live on that, since I had before. But I came into the Museum sometime in August and met Porter McCray. Personnel had processed my application.

SZ: So it was a general employment application that you filled out.

WR: Yes. Of course, the person I wanted to work for was Alfred Barr, and I'm glad I didn't get the job working for Alfred Barr, because I don't think that would have gone anyplace and working for Porter did. I couldn't believe that I got that job. I arrived in August and I joined the Museum staff a few days before my birthday, September 1954, in the International Program, which was just two years old. So it was a very exciting time to be there, as you can imagine.

SZ: What happened to the Institute?

WR: I went for a couple of years full-time, and I just couldn't do it. I was very ill-prepared, because I had no undergraduate art history, so it was very rough for me. Of course, in those years the Institute had very few modern courses. The first course I took was a course on Mannerism, under Craig [Hugh] Smyth, and since I was reasonably shaky on the Renaissance, Mannerism was a nightmare, as you can imagine. But I was lucky to have courses under Robert Goldwater and Dr. [Horst Woldemar] Janson on modern sculpture. I did a paper on direct metal sculpture. I audited courses for a few years; I was doing that from '54 to '59, but I didn't take a degree. I just couldn't. So in coming to The Museum of Modern Art in the International Program, I made a switch of ambitions, gradually; I didn't know that at the time, because what I wanted to do was curatorial work. My first job at the Museum, in the International Program, was under a title called Assistant Circulation Manager, which meant working under the Circulation Manager for the department, who was in effect

the registrar for the Department of Circulating Exhibitions. One thing that's not generally known is that the International Program and the Circulating Exhibitions department were one department; it was the Department of Circulating Exhibitions. [Note: Executive Director of MoMA Department of Circulating Exhibitions from 1962 until 1969 when he became the Director of the International Program; retired 1993; currently Director Emeritus of IP.]

SZ: Which meant national and international together.

WR: Right, and the national program was a very big program.

SZ: Had you traveled before?

WR: No.

SZ: Not at all?

WR: San Francisco was my only metropolis.

SZ: And then you came across country.

WR: Yes.

SZ: How did you get across country?

WR: That was a great story. We got across by several stops. The first stop was in Denver, and as we were about to get off, one of the stewardesses came down asking people if they could take a later flight, because they had overbooked the next segment of the flight. We were near the end of the plane, and they'd been unsuccessful, and when they got to us and asked whether we'd do it, I said, "Well, someone's going to meet us," and they said, "Well, we can give you a hundred dollars." A hundred dollars! We'd borrowed $800 to move, so I said, "Yes, okay." So we did that, then flew to

Chicago and were to collect the money there, and they said, "Now, was that $100 for each of you or $100 for both of you?", and I said, "Well, naturally, it was for each of us," so we got $200, which I think made the difference between survival or not at that point.

SZ: So let me ask you the first obvious question. You came and were interviewed by Porter. What do you remember about Porter from that time?

WR: I was very daunted by him, because I don't think I'd met anyone quite like Porter in the far West. He was a Virginian aristocrat. Reserved. His accent was different. I felt quite intimidated by him. It was intimidating, but I had these skills and I didn't worry about it. But I remember how scary it was coming there. I wasn't unsophisticated in terms of the arts in certain ways, but I was certainly unsophisticated in terms of the art world, particularly the world of the patrons. I knew nothing about that. I remember later Porter being quite appalled that I knew none of the names of the trustees. I didn't know who William A.M. Burden was. I knew the name Rockefeller, but I had none of those social connections.

SZ: And you had to learn all that.

WR: Yes, and that did not come easily to me. In a kind of political way it didn't come easily for me because I came with working-class bias. So that was hard.

SZ: Did you lose it?

WR: Not entirely. By no means entirely.

SZ: It's an interesting contradiction.

WR: It didn't make my life at the Museum ever that totally easy, working as I did with the International Council, which is certainly a group of the privileged. At any rate, the first work was really like a registrar, supervising the packing, making packing lists, and I worked for both Circulating Exhibitions and the International Program. Then I became in charge of working on the itineraries for the International Program shows.

SZ: I brought a list of . . . this is the whole staff of the Museum, but here. There was Porter, then Grace Davis, Elizabeth Hurlihy, Rose Kolmetz, Annalisa Stenson, Lenore Polombo, Virginia Pearson, Marie Frost, William Alex, Charlotte Dyer, and Helen Franc.

WR: Yes. Helen Franc and I shared an office.

SZ: So the Program had just started two years before, and I know that Porter really built it up quite a bit before he left and you took over.

WR: Yes. It had gotten off to a big start already, because before I came there the Museum had already circulated a show called *Twelve Modern American Painters and Sculptors* [ICE-F-3-53, April 1953-March 1954] in Europe, and that was a show done by Andrew Ritchie. It was sort of like the pattern of Dorothy Miller's shows, with each artist represented by several works and with no stylistic continuity, like a series of little one-person shows. But it had in it some Abstract Expressionist painters. Pollock was in it. I think David Smith was in it. So that was a major show. The Museum was also preparing *Modern Art in the United States* [ICE-F-24-54, July 1955-August 1956], an exhibition from the collection, and then a big design show had already been done—*American Design for Home and Decorative Use* [SP-ICE-2-53, October 1953-June 1955], I think it was called. I remember that very vividly because one of my tasks was to check the condition of shows when they came back from tour in a warehouse outside the Museum, and one of the objects was a radio, which I plugged in to listen to music while I was doing this task, and it blew up [laughter], and I thought I'd lost my job for sure. A Raymond Loewy radio. It was an AC/DC thing,

because a different current was in warehouses. So I had that experience working with Virginia Pearson, who was a wonderful trainer and a very fine registrar. At that time the registrar at the Museum was Dorothy Dudley, who was one of the great professionals ever and certainly one of the great registrars. They [Pearson and Dudley] were very close friends and worked together closely. So I had good additional training, but I have to say, my training in Portland was also very good, because the registrar there was a German named Johann von Schmidt auf Altenstadt, who had worked on the repatriation of Nazi-looted art and was very Prussian in his discipline. But he trained me very well, too. And I enjoyed that work because of the physical relation to the works of art. But then Porter assigned me to work on correspondence for smaller exhibitions that were traveling around. At that time, Bill Lieberman had selected, I think it was, seven printmaking exhibitions, which the International Program purchased outright so they could go on long tours, and they went all over the globe. So that meant I had to learn geography, because I didn't know, you know, how you got from Athens to Beirut. These shows went to the Near and Middle East and Latin America and Asia, in the '50s. So I was in charge of drafting the correspondence for those shows while doing this other work. And that was the first more individual responsibility I had. I found that I could draft letters for Porter well, and I enjoyed doing that. So that was the job in the early years.

SZ: Porter was traveling in the early years?

WR: Yes.

SZ: But you did not.

WR: No. Well, very soon I did. Then in '55 Frank O'Hara joined the department, and he and I became very, very close friends. He was first assigned to work on an exhibition called *French Drawings from American Collections: Clouet to Matisse* [SP-ICE-21-58, July 1958-March 1959], which Helen Franc was also working on, and Grace Davis was working on it. That was an enormously complex show. I didn't really have

anything to do with that show in particular, except for clerical work, and I never saw the show until it came. . . . It went to the L'Orangerie [in Paris] and the Boymans in Rotterdam, and then it was shown at the Metropolitan Museum when it came back. But it was an enormously complicated show, as you can imagine. At any rate, Frank, who had been working in the bookstore, I think it was, or at the membership desk. . . .

SZ: I think he was at the desk. I'll check. [Note: Frank O'Hara sold tickets at MoMA front desk in 1951; rejoined Museum in 1955 organizing circulating exhibitions; appointed Assistant Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions in 1960; died 1966]

WR: I think that's probably right. Then he came into the department on temporary assignment to that show and worked with Porter and the curatorial committee along with Helen, who also worked on the catalogue, of course. And then Porter hired him as a full-time staff member, and I don't know quite what he was called--probably Exhibition Assistant, something of that sort--but he was rather quickly assigned to work on the U.S. exhibition for the São Paulo Bienal in 1957. The relationship with curatorial departments was interesting, because any proposal that came from the International Program was discussed curatorially. I was never in on those discussions during those years, so I didn't really quite know what went on, but apparently Porter had nominated Frank to select this exhibition, and he probably did it because nobody else could do it at that point. At that time Andrew Ritchie was the director of Painting and Sculpture, and Sam Hunter was a curator or perhaps an associate curator, and Margaret Miller was another curator. Those were the years when Painting and Sculpture was not responsible for the collection. Alfred was director of the collection [Director of Museum Collections] and Dorothy Miller was curator of the collection [Curator of Museum Collections]. But of course there was overlap. So there was a committee to discuss the artists to participate in that show,

but then Frank was given the final responsibility for the selection.

SZ: Had Frank had any training? He was a poet, right?

WR: He was a poet, but he had been writing reviews already for *ArtNews*, and also, he was already in the art world. He was sort of a known factor, and I'm sure a questionable one to some people on the staff. I've heard from Porter that Alfred had great reservations about Frank, both because he was not trained, but more personal because of his relationship with Larry Rivers and nude portraits of him and sort of being in the thick of the art world, which he was already at that early age. He was a friend of a lot of the second-generation Abstract Expressionist artists and a great admirer of the senior figures and knew them, too. But Porter fought for Frank and Frank then did two exhibitions for São Paulo. He did a Jackson Pollock show [ICE-F-32-57, September 22, 1957-December 31 1957]. The Jackson Pollock retrospective had been shown at the Museum in '56 [*Jackson Pollock*; MoMA Exh.#61, December 19 1956-February 3 1957] and Frank had to re-select that show and had a different point of view toward the material from Sam Hunter, chiefly around having more early work, and more late work. But it was really a different show; there's been confusion on that score. And then he chose a combination of Abstract Expressionist painters and sculptors, and Larry Rivers was in that show in São Paulo, too. So my first trip abroad any place was with that show, accompanying Porter. Porter pushed me into working on the installation by myself. It was an enormously complicated show to do. Essentially, it was Porter's installation, but he had me lay it out. In other words, he gave me a little training in installation, which was just wonderful. It was an enormously daunting trip, because Alfred and Marga Barr came and Philip Johnson came, and I found myself with these people who were brilliant and terrifying, and I worshiped them. So it was absolutely wonderful. And to go to Brazil as your first foreign country was quite something. I remember arriving in Rio after a twenty-four hour flight, with two stops, one at 4 o'clock in the morning in Belem, like something out of a Warner Brothers tropical movie, with flies swimming around the Brazilian coffee and steam coming from the jungle, and then arriving in Rio, which was like

nothing I had ever imagined. But it was very exciting. That trip also came back to me many years later, when working on the Latin American show [*Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, ICE-F-238-90, August 1992-April 1993; MoMA Exh.#1654, June 2-September 7 1993]. It was my first introduction to Latin America and also to the international art world, because there were so many important figures on the international jury at that time, so I met people like the then-well-known Gonzalez Robles from Spain and Lillian Somerville from The British Council. I can't remember who all, but it was a very interesting experience. So that was my first trip. And then when I came back, there was a discussion about *The New American Painting* [ICE-F-36-57, April 1958-March 1959; MoMA Exh.#645, May 26 1959-September 8 1959]. I have to say that was a great lesson to me, because the history of that show was that several European museum directors had tried to organize an Abstract Expressionist show--they were Arnold Rüdlinger from the Kunsthalle in Basel, Robert Giron from the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, and Will Sandberg from the Stedlijk in Amsterdam. Rudlinger had come to New York to work on the selection, and at some point, I don't know quite how or why this happened, the Europeans decided they could not organize it on their own—-for financial reasons, I think, but also maybe for logistical reasons. At any rate, they asked if The Museum of Modern Art would undertake the show. So Porter proposed it and in principle it was accepted, but there were scheduling problems that made it seem unlikely that we could organize it in 1958. The catalogue was one of the chief reasons for that. It was one thing to do a show and, as you know, another to get all the information for the catalogue within a very short time. Frank and I drafted a memo to Porter, drafting a kind of schedule that he and I would work on with Dorothy Miller to see that this show happened.

SZ: How was he in terms of keeping a schedule?

WR: Frank?

SZ: No, Porter.

WR: We were told that it was impossible to do this show, and we said that we could do it, that we'd work whatever hours necessary to make it happen. Porter sort of pushed it through. Frank assisted Dorothy Miller with all the selection details and I worked on whatever else had to be done. But it was a lesson, because it made us realize that access to power —-not power about advancing your career but power about making things happen —-was reachable, that that was something that could happen. And it did happen, and it was a history-making show. I then traveled with Dorothy Miller to Basel for the first showing of the exhibition, which was a joint showing with the Jackson Pollock show. That was my first visit to Europe, and Basel was a wonderful place to begin because it was small and manageable, and Arnold Rüdlinger was a great character. He was a wonderful, open-hearted, interesting man, a serious drinker with great appetite, and complicated. But it was wonderful working with Dorothy. I hadn't known Dorothy before then at all, so I helped her with the installation and all the other physical details, like making condition reports and all that. And while we were there, the Museum had a fire, and we got the news in a telegram from Porter that said something like "Yours is the only Museum operation. Carry on." Something military-like. And of course we did, but Dorothy was terrified, and I was quite scared, too, because my children went to the Children's Art School at the Museum and I was afraid that they had been there during the fire, which they of course had not. But during the fire, the Monet *Waterlilies* was burned, and Dorothy had been responsible for that acquisition. I remember Sam Francis coming to Basel at that time for the opening and saying to Dorothy, "Dorothy, don't worry about it. I'll paint you a better picture," [laughing] which he never did, though he had painted some very good ones. So that was a very big event for me.

SZ: That show had trouble with the critics in Europe, as I recall, is that right?

WR: Yes, very up and down. It was scorned, and it had some passionate supporters, but it was very mixed. But there was already professional support for it because of the earlier shows, because of *Twelve Modern American Painters and Sculptors* [ICE-F-

3-53, April 1953-March 1954] and *Modern Art in the U.S.: Selections from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* [ICE-F-24-54, July 1953-August 1956], which had the works then in our collection by Abstract Expressionist artists. Those sections of the shows reached the serious critical audience.

SZ: And it was well-attended.

WR: I think so. I traveled again with it; Porter and Frank traveled to Berlin to install the two shows, and I went to Berlin to take down the show. It was a wonderful thing to work on, and that first trip is, of course, something I'll never forget.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SZ: Something you mentioned and then sort of lost it in the course of something else, you were talking about relationships with the curatorial departments. I think there was something else there.

WR: The "something else" was the division of opinion about the International Program, which I wasn't aware of much at the time but became so later. First of all, I think, or I know ,that Alfred had very mixed feelings about the International Program, because he was concerned that it would deflect money and support from the Museum as a whole, especially from the collection, I suppose. And he was also not a good lender. He was very concerned about the security of the works of art, that things would be damaged in traveling, wear and tear, and so forth. Which were very good reasons. But, nevertheless, he was very severe about lending. And then there were questions about Frank being given curatorial responsibilities with no academic background. Not that Dorothy had any, either. She was not an art historian, or an art writer. Then, more seriously, because of Porter's architectural interest, the woman Ada Louise Huxtable, whom you mentioned as being on the International Program staff in

those years, was assigned to work on architecture shows, and I know that Arthur Drexler resented that a very great deal. So I think there was a general feeling--not by Bill Lieberman, because he worked for the International Program as a curator, himself, no one else did print shows--but Porter commissioned several shows by William Alex, and others, like Ada Louise Huxtable, and Arthur was by no means pleased. In those years, we would have circulating abroad something like a dozen to twenty shows. It was quite amazing. And there would be something like forty to fifty shows traveling nationally. And the department itself had come to have a staff of around eighteen people. It was a very big department, and a tremendously large program. So the "separate empire" theory arose among the curators. There were great problems, and not just among curators. There were problems between Elizabeth Shaw and Helen Franc; Helen wrote press releases for the International Program. And she was very good at it. And, I think, Porter was so aristocratic, and Arthur, like me, came from a more working class family, and I always felt that had something to do with Arthur's resentment of Porter. I think he felt Porter condescended to him. It wasn't the best of relationships. And Arthur was a "Young Turk," and he and Liz Shaw were confederates. But I didn't sense that at all from Andrew Ritchie, whom I found to be a lovely man to work with, nor with Sam Hunter. I worked with Sam as a kind of curatorial assistant on the American section of the sculpture in the Battersea Park exhibition and it was a very nice relationship.

SZ: I guess film really didn't factor in at that time, right?

WR: No. And Steichen did separate exhibitions. There was no separate empire theory there. And the International Program worked on *The Family of Man* [MoMA Exh.#569, January 24 1955-May 8 1955; C/E, 1956-57 and C/E, 1957-58; 12 versions traveled around the world, see SP-ICE-10-55] exhibition. We organized copies of it which we sold to the USIA [United States Information Agency] for circulation [original MoMA version and C/E, 1956-57]. I remember I traveled to Washington with my wife in the summer to unpack that exhibition in unair-conditioned galleries. So I don't know that there was any problem. [Tape

Interruption]

SZ: Porter had been put in by Nelson [Rockefeller] originally. When the dissension arose...

WR: I don't know how active Nelson Rockefeller was in the Museum in those years. I wasn't in touch with what was happening at those upper levels. But certainly the concept of the International Program was a joint concept of Nelson Rockefeller, René d'Harnoncourt and Porter, primarily. And René was a great supporter of the International Program, always.

SZ: Can you tell me a little about him, since you just brought him up?

WR: Well, he became a great father figure for me after Porter left. Porter resigned in 1961, and there was a search for his replacement, which didn't last very long. They didn't find anyone. I've forgotten the name of the man who was invited to take the position and turned it down. [Note: 12/9/96 Waldo Rasmussen told Rona Roob it was Gordon Washburn.] René proposed me to succeed Porter. To my astonishment. It never occurred to me that that would happen. I remember being at a meeting with a group of trustees and René when he proposed this to them--I don't remember why I was at this meeting, or what the meeting was about--but I do remember that John de Menil questioned René's decision very severely, and said, "Well, we'll go along with this decision if you really think it is right, René, but if this kid can't do the job and you find yourself doing the work, you'll just have to get rid of him and get somebody else." Which absolutely flattened me, as you can imagine. René was putting himself on the line for me, and I was young then. This was 1961, and I was 33 years old, and I was very scared. But he gave me lots of time and support and advice and counsel, and was always available to me. He believed in it. And the character of the International Program changed in those years, from what had been up until then a great emphasis on doing U.S. exhibitions for international festivals. The Museum of Modern Art had assumed responsibility for all U.S. representations to international

festivals. The Museum hadn't organized all the shows, but they ensured that the U.S. would be represented in Venice and São Paulo. And then did exhibitions for the international exhibition in Japan and India, and elsewhere.

SZ: They had bought the pavilion in Venice...

WR: Yes. And the Museum, before the International Program, had an agreement with the Museum of Modern Art in Rio and in São Paulo for cooperation in international shows. That then became transferred to the Bienal, because the Museum of Modern Art organized the first representation to the first Bienal, before there was an International Program. The first Bienal was in 1951, I think. To the second Bienal, the Museum sent *Guernica*. It wasn't in the Museum's collection, but the Museum helped coordinate all American loans to the Picasso retrospective and made shipping arrangements, and it was a cooperative venture already. Doing that was a tremendous responsibility,, and it meant that there were other things that couldn't be done, as a result. Then, after Porter left, in 1962, René felt the Museum should no longer assume that responsibility, and ...

SZ: Let's leave that until later. Porter's resignation: did that surprise you? Did you feel it coming?

WR: Yes. I felt it coming, because he was so pained by the dissension within the staff, and he felt attacked and vulnerable. I didn't know a lot about it at that time, but Porter and I were quite close. There had been a staff meeting called in Maine by William A.M. Burden, who was then president, and it was to discuss the future of the Museum. And apparently, at it, the International Program came under severe attack.

SZ: You were not there?

WR: No. But Porter was, and he felt personally attacked, particularly by Arthur Drexler and Liz Shaw. He was deeply hurt, and wanted to resign immediately, but René

persuaded him not to. But he did resign in 1961. I tried to persuade him then not to, because I felt he was abdicating unnecessarily, that he should fight this through. But he couldn't be dissuaded, so he resigned.

SZ: From your point of view, what would you say his real accomplishment there was?

WR: Oh, well, enormous. To initiate this complex program, to carry it out by the highest standards--the standards of the International Program were identical to those of the

Museum--and the administrative skill to negotiate with foreign museums. This was a whole new thing. The Museum had sent one exhibition to Paris in 1938, pre-Porter, but Porter had traveled in Europe, had met many of the people in the art world, and he had a kind of diplomatic training working under Nelson Rockefeller and in other government offices. He was a kind of diplomat, and he had stature. And in terms of the art of the times, Porter was a more passionate supporter of Abstract Expressionism than anyone else in the Museum. I think that the trio of Frank, Porter and me was important in that regard, because there had been no Abstract Expressionist show at the Museum until *The New American Painting*, and that wasn't proposed by Alfred or Dorothy; it was proposed by Porter. Then the International Program did a whole series of one artist shows--Motherwell, Rothko, Kline -- shows that hadn't happened at the Museum. Porter was also closer to the younger generation. For example, for the U.S. representation in the second Documenta in 1959, the selection was done by Porter and Frank. In my view, it was a better representation of Abstract Expressionism than *The New American Painting*, because for one thing, it had Hans Hoffman in it, which Dorothy's show did not; it had a better representation of Barnett Newman, because it had the giant painting *Cathedra*. It also included Robert Rauschenberg, with *The Bed*, which was a real shocker. It also included other artists close to Abstract Expressionism, but not usually considered part of it, like Pousette-Dart. It was a very interesting show. And included sculptors

as well. And then, Frank did a smaller Pollock show. So I think Porter's relation to the artists was different, in a way, because I think he was more like an advocate than the impartiality that Dorothy and Alfred tried to maintain. And I've always felt that way myself. I've never felt impartial. That whole idea of "cause" has always been important to me.

SZ: Of course, you're in a different position, you're not doing the collecting, so you don't have that issue to deal with.

WR: That's right. But, still, that was always the case for painting and sculpture...

SZ: In fact, that's one of the criticisms of Barr that comes up a lot, that he didn't have an appropriate appreciation of that movement.

WR: I don't think that's true.

SZ: You have read that, though?

WR: I certainly have. But I think people forget how early the Museum collected some of these works. I don't think Alfred supported Abstract Expressionism to the degree that he might have, but I think his awareness and understanding of it has been under-appreciated, and the fact of the Museum's early acquisitions... The fact that I was seeing a show from the Museum in 1951. That was very early; no other museum was doing that, as far as I know. Alfred was also, naturally, very concerned about money, and I remember his being scandalized by the prices of Pollock after his death, when *Autumn Rhythm* went up to the Met for $30,000 or so. The Museum [of Modern Art] had an option to buy that picture, but what I heard was that he thought that was an immoral price.

SZ: There was a lot more to come.

WR: That's right. We got *One* (1950) from Ben Heller, a similar size and type of painting, for rather considerably more.

SZ: Did you in those years go down to the galleries and look?

WR: Oh, yes. The drinks with openings was always a big thing to do. But I have to say I always felt a little uneasy. I was a little intimidated by the art world. I went with Frank a lot, and so that gave me access to it. But I was shy, and it wasn't that easy. Also, I wasn't single, and I wasn't at the Cedar Bar, and so forth, so it was different. But I did have some friendships with second generation Abstract Expressionist painters, largely through Frank, like Joan Mitchell was a friend, and Norman Bluhm, Helen Frankenthaler, Mike Goldberg. Then Frank and I worked on several exhibitions of David Smith, both for National Circulating and the International Program. But it was more fun in those years, too. More like the combat zone.

SZ: That's an interesting way to describe it.

WR: The "combat zone" describes the feeling I had about the International Program vis à vis American art in Europe, and elsewhere, too. I remember when I was in São Paulo for that second (sic) Bienal in 1957 [it was the IV Bienal], that was a very controversial show [*U.S. Representation: IV Bienal do Museo de Arte Moderna, São Paulo*, ICE-F-32-57, September-December 1957]. The Pollock got an hors de concours award but no other American artist did. There was a pride in American art, a national feeling about it, I guess. But for me it was always about the art, it wasn't about the U.S.A. It was about this art that was under-recognized. I thought it was the greatest art being done anywhere in the world, and I still think I'm right. The particular fight was against Paris, I think, because of the feeling of condescension the French had towards U.S. art, and that was a kind of battle. I didn't feel it was a battle elsewhere so much. I certainly didn't feel it in Switzerland with Rüdlinger as a

champion. The three of us felt like champions for that movement.

SZ: What about within the institution itself up until the time you took over? Was it easy to integrate? You said you found it a little intimidating at first.

WR: No. It was pretty easy. It wasn't that many years until I was working with Dorothy Miller. I loved working with her. And I remember working as a kind of curatorial assistant to a project of Margaret Miller's and Sam Hunter's. I enjoyed working for all of them. No, I didn't really feel that, for myself. And my wife worked at the Museum in those years, briefly. She worked weekends in the Art Lending Service, while I took care of the kids. And took them endlessly to galleries until they finally said no. I remember in 1958 going to Barney Newman's exhibition at French & Company with my children. And I remember sitting them down in front of *Cathedra*, that glorious blue and white painting and asking them to sit there and look at the painting for a while, and afterwards I came back and listened to what they thought they saw in it. They fell in love with the picture. At first they thought it looked like just plain blue, but then they saw shapes floating, and so forth, and they said, "Daddy, please buy that picture." [Laughter]

SZ: And you said, "Not on my salary."

WR: Yes. [Laugher] And then I had to fight for that picture. It was damaged in Documenta 2 when it traveled there. It was installed very high, apparently, and when taking it down, one corner of the picture fell to the ground. It was insured by Documenta through German insurers, a policy which, after this incident, no longer existed for the Museum. Subsequently, we never allowed outside insurers. The German insurers did not honor the claim. The claim was for ten percent depreciation on a value of $30,000, because of damage to its delicate surface, which wasn't really visible at that time. The German insurers refused to honor the claim, and it took two years and I actually went to Germany to meet with a room full of German insurance brokers who said why should it be worth that much money, it was just a picture with

blue paint and white stripes. I said I hadn't come to discuss their feelings about art criticism, that it was an insurance matter. And so it got resolved.

I've lost track of where we were...It [the Museum] was so much smaller, you know. In those years, the Penthouse Restaurant was a gathering place for the staff to have coffee. You would meet people at coffee, and that's how I got to know Frank. We were so young, and I didn't really have a feeling about careerism. I was doing this job, and I didn't expect anything to happen about that. And Frank wasn't anxious to advance within the system. It was just that we were working on things that interested us. It was very different, and the Circulating Exhibition department was big, but very congenial. There were occasional problems within it, naturally, but Charlotte Dyer was an exhibition designer in it, and her husband Carlos was also a designer. She had come from Martha Graham's company, and she was great fun and interesting. Brenda Porson, who later married Evan Turner, later director of the Philadelphia and Cleveland museums... It was just a wonderfully congenial group. The hours were extraordinary, because we would get on deadline and I would be there until 4 a.m. It was very exciting.

SZ: And Alfred Barr? His presence in those days?

WR: I was terrified of Alfred. I really was. For the best of reasons. Because he could be quite daunting. I remember an experience with Alfred: one summer I was summoned to Alfred's office. Because the Museum offices were not air conditioned in those years I rushed off in shirt sleeves, and a woman was seated in his office, and Alfred looked up from his desk and said, "Who are you?" I told him who I was, and that he had asked me to come, and he said, "Go away, and come back properly dressed." Of course, I was absolutely flattened by this rebuke, and having to retire and come back jacketed. Later I learned he felt absolutely terrible about saying this thing to me, but at the time it was totally devastating. When we were in São Paulo for the second (sic) Bienal in 1957 [it was the IV Bienal], Alfred was on the jury. When I was with that distinguished group, I got along wonderfully with Marga [Barr].

I appreciated Marga. I thought she was wonderful, very glamorous, witty and sophisticated. She and Philip Johnson were a great team. And I laughed a lot. I remember her appreciating my giggle. It was wonderful being around such intelligent and intense people. But Alfred was really something else again: he was really unapproachable. And people who worked for him stayed there; they did not, in general, advance much. So I was lucky to work for Porter, and be pushed.

SZ: So when you got the job, were you concerned you couldn't do it?

WR: I don't know. I just did it. The hardest part for me was working with the International Council, speaking at meetings, because I was shy, and I had stage fright. First of all, Eliza Parkinson was President of the International Council at that time; she and René were very close. The two of them supported me. She became a wonderful friend. Their support gave me a kind of acceptance by the group, and I think they were kind of amused that this kid was standing in front of them, with shaking hands, all that. It was okay. But I certainly could not have done it without René. It would have been too overwhelming. There were then differences between me and Porter. I worked to have the International Program seen more as part of the Museum. Then we developed other procedures, so it became better integrated within the Museum. International Program proposals were discussed by the curatorial program committee, like any other Museum proposal. The steps had to be the same as for any other show. I think it was better integrated. It was also aided by the fact that the Circulating Exhibitions program eventually dissolved, not so long after that, because of financing, because the Department of Circulating Exhibitions always operated at a loss. The whole point of it was to make exhibitions available at the lowest cost possible to institutions that couldn't afford them [otherwise]. The primary targets were smaller museums like Portland, and college and university galleries. It was always subsidized by the Museum through one source or another. CBS under Paley supported it with a grant for a certain number of years. And then when that grant expired, the Museum decided it couldn't continue doing that, so the Department of Circulating Exhibitions, as a department, was then disbanded. That meant this great

surge of activity was lessened. [Note: The Department of Circulating Exhibitions was officially established in 1933; it was reorganized into the Exhibition Program in 1969.]

SZ: And that was not long after you took over?

WR: I can't remember. Well, it was probably about 1966 when that happened, so I had at least four, maybe more years, as Director of Circulating Exhibitions and the International Program. My first title was Executive Director of Circulating Exhibitions. [Note: Waldo Rasmussen was appointed Executive Director of The Museum of Modern Art's Department of Circulating Exhibitions in 1962, a position he held until 1969 when he became the Director of the International Program. He is currently Director Emeritus of that Program.]

SZ: Well, in fact, the function stayed, did it not?

WR: Oh, yes. But it was interesting that I wasn't originally called Director of the International Program. I think that was in direct response to this feeling...

SZ: That it had been too separate an empire.

WR: Yes. And that they didn't want to put me with the same title as other department heads. Although a lot of people thought Executive Director meant you were higher than a director. So that was kind of silly.

SZ: You mentioned before, and I kind of cut you off, that you really changed the focus of the program, to some degree.

WR: Yes. It was because, in 1962, when we stopped doing the U.S. representations to international art festivals--it was too expensive and overshadowed the rest of the

program--we wanted to do other kinds of things, like shows for other parts of the world besides Europe. Specifically, to undertake a program of sending exhibitions to Latin America, and that meant that the goal became something else. It became more like the original goal for the original Department of Circulating Exhibitions: to help other communities see works of art they wouldn't otherwise see. In 1962, the first task was to try to organize a continuing program of exhibitions for Latin America. René organized a sponsoring committee from the International Council, and Eliza began to recruit Latin American members to the Council, and we developed a five year program for sending exhibitions to Latin America. That meant sending exhibitions of international content, rather than U.S. content. That was a very different story. A milestone from that history was an exhibition called *Cézanne to Miró* [ICE-F-111-67, May-August 1968]. Monroe Wheeler did that show, and it was an exhibition of masterpieces from American collections, public and private, that went to Buenos Aires, Santiago and Caracas. Exhibitions like that had never been seen in those countries, and attendance was absolutely phenomenal. Two hundred thousand people would see that exhibition in Buenos Aires, with lines around the block. That museum had never had attendance like that before. And it changed peoples' lives in much the way my life had been changed by seeing exhibitions in Portland, Oregon. Sending U.S. art to Latin America was not a proposal. It was a politically unwise thing to do at that time; there was so much anti-Americanism.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: So you were just saying that you had to be careful what you were sending.

WR: In terms of American art to Latin America, yes. It would not have been the time to be sending big exhibitions of American art. But I do remember, for example, even before this Latin American program, we did two smaller shows, one very beautiful show *Josef Albers, Homage to the Square* [ICE-F-87-63, March 1964-August 1965; C/E 63-6, 1965-67], which Kynaston McShine selected. That was a wonderfully manageable show --small-scale, high quality —and it was just right for Latin America

because there was so much interest in geometric art, and Albers was a revered figure. Dore Ashton guest-curated an exhibition called *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: U.S.A.* [ICE-F-45-60, January 1962-May 1963], and that traveled widely, too. So that introduced some more advanced U.S. art, but that was a modest show, so it didn't encounter, as far as I know, any political problems. Those two shows together, which were circulated widely, to eight or nine countries each, gave us experience in working with those institutions, so that before we did the *Cézanne to Miró* show we had a working relationship with them. Then that whole concept of the International Program being more a service to other institutions as the primary function rather than trying to promote the cause of American art, that was the primary difference.

SZ: And that was its original mission.

WR: The original mission really had at least as much if not more to do with furthering the cause of American art internationally, of establishing the cultural prestige of American art, and that idea never interested me, I have to say, and that where Porter and I differed, because he came from a more governmental background and I did not, although I was happy to work with the government on cooperative details. For example, in Latin America, there was no reason to have USIA and USIS [United States Information Service] sponsorship, and there was every reason not to, because that politicized the shows and I was very anxious to depoliticize them. And then we extended these same ideas to Australia, where we did a lot of shows. We did something like sixty exhibitions for Latin America, forty for Australia. So that was the basic change in philosophy.

SZ: And the issue of the pavilion in Venice?

WR: We continued to own it, because we couldn't get rid of it, but it was lent to the government for the exhibitions. Eventually, I can't remember when, sometime in the 1970s, it was finally sold to the Guggenheim Museum, or lent to the Guggenheim

and eventually purchased by them, for probably about the same amount we paid for it, which was $30,000. [Note: The Guggenheim Museum acquired the Pavilion in 1986.] But it was a drain on Museum resources, because it was in such bad repair that a lot of money had to go into reconditioning and building and so forth. I was there with Dorothy for the last exhibition we did in Venice, in 1962. That was a great experience, because Louise Nevelson, Dorothy and I traveled to Venice together, and I worked with those two wonderful women on installing Louise's show. That was an early high point of her career. I also remember a wonderful experience with the three of them. I was an opera nut, a madman, and I had learned that Maria Callas was going to be singing Medea at La Scala in the summer and by-hook-and-by-crook I got tickets to it and invited Louise and Dorothy to come with me. Dorothy said, "We couldn't possibly go; we've got so much to do," and Louise Nevelson said, "Dorothy, we're going. Maria Callas is the greatest woman artist since Martha Graham, and I wouldn't miss it." So the three of us went, Louise in her Oriental robes, and had a wonderful time. But that working relationship was a wonderful, wonderful experience. It was also interesting to me because the intensity of working with Louise was like participating in the work of art itself. It was such a great experience, and then, when the actual event happened, i.e. the opening of the Biennale, I hated being a part of the international art world, I have to say, because it was about what was hot and who was going to win the prize, and it just got into some other non-art realm, which I found distasteful. I was very disillusioned. I had gotten to know Giacometti through Joan Mitchell--I would often have drinks with Joan and Jean-Paul Riopelle and Giacometti, who was installing his sculpture and painting show, and Giacometti won grand prizes for everything, and I was very amazed by that, by this wonderful, ascetic man having that kind of ambition. It seemed very strange to me... unworthy of him is what I felt, and still feel. I think that kind of situation is very hard on artists. I think it's wonderful to do shows, but being in that kind of competitive situation I think is hard and I'm not in favor of it.

SZ: Maybe the last question, which may or may not be a non sequitur, in '64, the expansion—-anything you recall about that? Did it give you better quarters?

WR: No. We were moved over . . . I forget quite when that happened. It happened before Porter left. We moved to what was then the "21" building, the building next to the Museum, the old brownstone, so we became more separated than before. A major thing that happened around that time is that the International Council made an agreement with the Museum to suspend fund raising activities during the period of the drive, in exchange for which the Museum agreed to establish an endowment fund for the International Program, for which International Council members could make contributions to the Museum. So the Council raised about two million dollars at that time for the Museum, and that established a closer relationship between the Council and the Museum, which René was already working on as part of this whole scheme of integrating the International Program and Council within the Museum. That was symbolized by a change in title of the International Council, because the Council was at one point the International Council *of* The Museum of Modern Art and then it was switched to the International Council *at* The Museum of Modern Art, so that it didn't seem so much a purely Museum of Modern Art institution. Then it changed back, meaning that it really was The Museum of Modern Art's program, it wasn't an agency representing different points of view; it represented one point of view, that of the Museum.

SZ: Which was part of the Porter fallout.

WR: Yes.

SZ: Maybe this should be the last thing, because it's been not necessarily an uneasy relationship but a relationship that was hard to understand, at least for a while, so maybe you could talk at least a little bit about the history of the Program together with the Council.

WR: The whole concept of the International Council was a brilliant concept, and I think it was largely René's concept and some of the other trustees. The idea was to give the International Program national support. It became the first organization of its kind

of art collectors on a national basis rather than solely within New York City and then later, particularly under Eliza, and then later under Beth Straus, it became a more international organization. It was the envy of every museum in America, because we had this distinguished group of international collectors, and they weren't asked to contribute to the Museum but in point of fact they did, and it became a kind of training ground, in a way, for some trustees. For example, our current chairperson, Aggie Gund, became a member of the International Council when she was a very young collector in Cleveland. So it had enormous prestige and it became a great resource for the Museum. But the relationship of the International Program and Council was that the Council really was, in a way, a separate corporation with its own bylaws and structure and financing independent of the Museum, and it was like having a separate board of trustees. Every exhibition that was proposed by the International Program had to have the joint consent of, first, the Museum's staff and then, theoretically, the trustees and the Council. So nothing could be done independent of the Museum's approval and the Museum couldn't circulate something internationally without the Council's approval. That solidified the partnership. It became a real partnership. There was always the inherent problem, that other museums would feel we were stealing their patrons by having them be part of this, or the patrons feeling they were invited to become members only because the Museum wanted their money. And that really wasn't the case. Eventually members felt that, and the Council became a real arm of the Museum. It was very useful to the International Program, particularly when the international membership was expanded, because it meant that the administration of the Program could first have the counsel of international members as to what shows might work in their countries, but also, they could help with the fund raising for shows when they came to their countries, with advice from collectors—they were a kind of liaison. Very important for me was always establishing museum to museum contacts, so that we weren't trying to put together a program that didn't have the participation of the receiving institutions. Like Porter, I've known more about the international art world than I have the U.S. museum world, and that closeness has been very important in determining what we should do. It wasn't just an accidental program, it was a program that we

worked out to some degree in consultation with other colleagues.

SZ: Thank you.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **WALDO RASMUSSEN (RM)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: **NOVEMBER 9, 1994**

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SZ: Since you said you knew Frank O'Hara so well, I thought maybe you could just go back and think a little bit. . . .

WR: Sure. First of all, you should know that I wrote a piece on Frank's history in the Museum; in fact, I have it right here, because I recently gave an interview . . . for the BBC, which is doing a program on artist collaboration. That should be in the Frank O'Hara archive, my essay—the whole book probably is I forget what it's called—*Tribute to Frank O'Hara* or something like that. It's a personal memoir of Frank, it's not a history. [Waldo Rasmussen, "Frank O'Hara in The Museum." In: Bill Berkson, Joe LeSueur, eds. *Homage to Frank O'Hara*. Berkeley: Creative Arts Book Company; 1980:84-90.]

SZ: If you've got that and if I can get a copy of it and put it in the Archives, that would be great.

WR: I hope there are copies around. I just have one. But probably Frank's sister could get you other copies.

SZ: I guess we could pick up where we left off [last time]. I think I had asked you to tell me, when you took over, the kinds of changes you were thinking of making. That's really sort of where we left off chronologically.

WR: As I was saying, we really shifted emphasis from sending art abroad to a program that tended to be dominated by American art, and I think we already discussed some of the early exhibitions in Latin America.

SZ: We actually talked about one, I think.

WR: The *Cézanne to Miró* show. I think probably the easier way is sort of by parts of the world. We did a special fundraising effort to do this Latin American program, which meant that the exhibitions were heavily subsidized by the Museum, because Latin American museums could afford very little indeed. After the *Cézanne to Miró* show, which was only in three cities—Buenos Aires, Santiago, and Caracas—that was such a milestone that I think it stimulated a lot more interest in other shows. Then the emphasis tended to be pretty much on classic modern shows. For example, among the exhibitions in that series was one on the art of Surrealism, drawn from the Museum collections, which Bernice Rose selected, and that traveled very widely, both in Latin America and in a somewhat different version, with a few outside loans, to Australia [*Surrealism*, ICE-F-151-70, August 1971-February 1973]. And those probably were the first exhibitions on Surrealism —I know it was in Australia —and the first thorough coverage of that movement. And then other kinds of shows that we did included one show called *Four Contemporary Masters*, which was Bacon, Dubuffet, Giacometti, de Kooning [ICE-F-159-72, April-November 1973]. That was more contemporary, but not a very contemporary, show. Kynaston McShine did a very beautiful show called *Color as Language* [ICE-F-166-74, February-November 1975], which was, as you can imagine, a theme show using that theme through contemporary art, not old masters. Then we did another show, called Four Modern Masters [*Four Modern Masters: de Chirico, Ernst, Magritte, Miro,* ICE-F-195-80, May 1981-January 1982], which included de Chirico, Ernst, Magritte, and Miró. So, as you can see, there were quite a few so-called "classic" modern shows. And then we did some smaller shows [that could go to] secondary centers, exhibitions of architecture and photography, some very beautiful paper shows. We circulated Latin American prints from the collection of The Museum of Modern Art to Latin America. So it was a very, very rich program. Then, in this same period we began sending exhibitions to

Australia in a more concentrated way, much like Latin America, and also to parts of Asia. Around that time, I had the chance to do my first exhibition on my own, as director of the show, and that was a show called *Two Decades of American Painting 1945–1965* [SP-ICE-30-62], which I organized for showings in Japan and which subsequently traveled to India and Australia. That was, at that time, the largest exhibition of American painting that had ever been seen in either of those two countries. It was supported by the JDR [John D, Rockefeller] 3rd Fund, which had programs in Asia. (At that time, Porter McCray was director of that Fund). It included works from Gorky and key Abstract Expressionist painters, with a few second-generation Abstract Expressionist painters like Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler and Norman Bluhm, my contemporaries, to Rauschenberg, Johns, Lichtenstein, Kelly, Warhol, Frank Stella, Morris Louis, and Kenneth Noland. It was a big survey. It opened in Tokyo and then went to Kyoto. Interestingly, in Japan it was not a tremendous success, because it sort of fell in-between the identifiable modern masters, which is what the Japanese public tended to attend in large numbers, or something right up-to-the-minute, which it was not because it was a retrospective exhibition. So it was more a kind of critical success than a popular success. Then it went on to India. These were tremendous problems technically, because we're talking about 1966 and not the jet airplane, and the exhibition had pictures that were twenty feet long—Al Held and Frank Stella. They went by sea. But still, that required a lot of supervision. Staff traveled with the exhibitions, to see them packed and to supervise their transport and to meet them at the dock and transfer them to railway trains, etcetera.

SZ: You would have your staff go. . .

WR: Yes, that's been a procedure for many years. The exhibitions are never handled, nor installed without someone from our staff being on hand, both for openings and for closings, so we've had a very good record of security and very few damages over the years.

SZ: What would you do in a case like that, when, as you said, there was no jet

transportation to speak of. Well, actually, there was. Certainly not all over the world. . . .

WR: Not cargo flights.

SZ: I guess staff would tend to stay places longer, right? They didn't do as much coming and going as they do now?

WR: No, there is a fair amount. Usually, you didn't stay for the duration of the show. For Japan and India we did have staff living on site with the show for the whole duration of the showing, and that was particularly important in India. India was certainly the more problematic of those two countries. But it was a great contribution, but more towards the sort of artist audience, the elite intellectual audience, than it was a popular success. But when it went to Australia, it was really a very different story, and that was really very exciting, and one of the most exciting things in my career at the Museum. It was sort of like the Armory Show for Australia in more contemporary terms, which meant that the artists were all ready for this but not so many of them had actually traveled to America, so they were like me in Portland, Oregon. They had seen these works through magazines and so forth. So it hit a chord. Because the show had so many different kinds of art in it, it reached many different kinds of artists as well. But much of the public was appalled, so it was wonderfully controversial, great letters to the editor and things like that, and very high attendance. So it was a great success in Australia. It was interesting how that came about, because Australia wasn't on the original plan for the tour, and it came about as follows. I had a telephone call from Barnett Newman, who was a good friend of mine. He said, "There's a young Australian I want you to meet, and he wants to tell you about Australia." I had never been to Australia at this time, and this was in the planning stages of this *Two Decades* show, in 1965. So this young Australian came to see me, his name was John Stringer, and he was with the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. He was very involved with contemporary art and with the artists' community in Melbourne, and he had heard about the show and was desperate to get it to Australia. He was sort of like in my beginning position in the International

Program, he was a museum assistant in that museum, and he made the show happen. The director of the museum supported him, in Melbourne, but he had to work to help raise the money to get support for the transportation costs, et cetera. Subsequently, about five years later, he came to New York and became my assistant at the Museum, and it has been a lifelong friendship. But it's interesting that things can happen through this kind of situation, just a personal contact and a chance connection of this sort. So anyway, that was very, very satisfying. We had had other exhibitions in Australia, but that really began a new phase with them as well. Very soon thereafter, the International Council invited some Australians to become members, and they've been among the most active of our foreign members. They travel to New York for meetings very often. The first member was John Fairfax. The International Council then organized a special members' committee, a subcommittee of the Program Committee, for Austral-asian programs. Emily Tremaine was the first chair of that program, with John Fairfax, and she was then succeeded later on by Agnes Gund, who had lived in Australia for a while. So over the years, then, we developed some very important programs for Australia as well. There is another kind of *Cézanne to Miró* type old master/modern master show that Bill Lieberman did, called *Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse* [ICE-F-163-74, April-June 1975; MoMA Exh.#1105, August 5-September 28 1975], and that was another blockbuster. It was a loan show, with loans from European museums as well as U.S. and private collections and our own Museum. But it was just like the *Cézanne to Miró* show: hundreds of thousands of people saw it in Sydney and Melbourne. Then that was followed by other shows like a second American show, which Jennifer Licht did, called *Some Recent American Art* [ICE-F-160-73, February-November 1974], and that, I think, almost certainly was the first exhibition anywhere of American painting and sculpture that focused on Minimal and Conceptual art. I had done a U.S. representation the year before that for the Second Triennale of India, and that also was a show that was based primarily on Minimal and Conceptual art [*U.S. Representation: Second Indian Triennale, New Delhi,* ICE-F-154-70, January-March 1971]. That was done on a $20,000 budget from a small foundation, the Grey Foundation, and in order to work within that budget, I organized the show so that the works sent there would be lightweight and compact, with things like the Eva Hesse

bucket sculptures of lightweight plastic, a Robert Ryman seven-panel work, now in the Stedlijk Museum collection, with each panel on cardboard, Robert Rohm rope sculptures, and then sending several artists to execute or install their own works in India, and that meant Carl Andre, Keith Sonnier, Alan Saret, and the Washington painter, Sam Gilliam, who installed his stained canvases, and a Richard Serra poured cement sculpture which we executed according to his instructions. I think that, too, was the first exhibition of its kind to focus on that kind of American art, and it looked very beautiful, I have to say. The idea, the concept behind the show was to include work in different kinds of materials, to encourage the Indian artists to think that painting and sculpture didn't have to be oil paintings on canvas, which they couldn't afford, or sculptures made of bronze. Alan Saret did a beautiful sculpture, a ramp sculpture, made of bamboo and other local materials. Carl Andre did a little sculpture of colored plasticene which he donated to the local museum. So that was the idea. And also to have artists meet artists. The show was most successful in that regard. Of course, it was a very startling exhibition for the Indian public, and there was a great savage article by John Canaday in *The New York Times* saying how ridiculous this was. But anyway, it was something that was very exciting to me.

SZ: And an article like that did not bother you?

WR: No. Why? I knew what happened, and what happened was that there were connections made between artists and between a young public in India. It wasn't a mass show; it wasn't intended to be. But it was also a kind of challenge to other countries, because it was not talking down to the Indian public. It was the kind of show that one could have put up in New York and should have been put up in New York and hadn't been at that point, and that wasn't the case in other countries, because they reserved their big guns for Venice and São Paulo and tended to send second-quality things there.

SZ: What percentage in those days of your shows going abroad were shows that originated at the Museum versus the shows that you yourself originated?

WR: In those days, relatively few originated at the Museum. Most exhibitions like this were done specifically for circulation, and that's particularly true of those kind of old master shows that went to Latin America, because that material was familiar in New York and to do a major exhibition of that kind in a foreign country as well as in New York would have been too difficult. But later on, that changed. One of the things that I had to work on was to try to offset that feeling that had arisen with other curatorial departments about the separate empire of the International Program. I can't remember whether we discussed this at all.

SZ: Yes.

WR: Well, that was really a concerted effort on my part and on René d'Harnoncourt's to overcome that and have a more active collaboration between the International Program and the curatorial departments. I think that worked. The most important consequence of that was sending Museum exhibitions abroad, primarily to Europe, but a lot of exhibitions like the Barnett Newman show, the Frank Stella show, particular those American shows, were first shown at the Museum and then sent to Europe.

SZ: So you're saying that that acted to counteract this feeling of a separate empire and also made the curators happy.

WR: It was to everybody's advantage, because it was the right thing for the show. In each case, we would balance out whether it was more to the advantage of an exhibition to be shown elsewhere in the United States or in Europe or elsewhere, and oftentimes the tours were a combination, of New York, another U.S. city or two, or a European city or two. Sometimes they were more collaborations between our Museum and other museums. We did several such shows, like the drawings from the Kröller-Müller Museum [*Drawings from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo*, MoMA Exh.#1034, May 24-August 13 1973], and our drawing collection traveling to the Kröller-Müller Museum [*100 European Drawings from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, ICE-F-161-73, April 1973-March 1974] and other European museums,

or exhibitions of European material, like, for example, Bill Rubin's de Chirico show [*Giorgio de Chirico*, ICE-F-198-81, August 1981-April 1983; MoMA Exh.#1331, March 30-June 29 1982], was afterward shown in London, Munich, and Paris. So I think that helped a good deal.

SZ: What, again, in the early days, what was the percentage of either loan shows or shows you drew exclusively from the collection, or combinations? Because I would imagine that might have had something to do with the problem, too.

WR: This also changed with staff. Relatively few shows were drawn from the collection while Alfred Barr was the Director of Museum Collections, but there were more shows later on, when Bill Lieberman and Bill Rubin became directors of Painting and Sculpture. Bill Lieberman was in particular a great supporter of the Latin American program and the circulating program in general, and that's how, I'm sure, the *Art of Surrealism* [Surrealism, ICE-F-151-70, August 1971-February 1973] show went to Latin America and Australia. But of course it was limited to those fields in which the Museum collections were particularly rich, and Surrealism is *the* part of the painting and sculpture collection in which there are many more works than can ever be shown and you can do an absolutely first-rate show from the Museum collection and still have great pieces on the walls in New York. Then photography exhibitions became more important as the years went on. Several such exhibitions came from first showings at the Museum, like John Szarkowski's *Mirrors and Windows* [*Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960*, [C/E R-55, 1978-1980; MoMA Exh.#1221, July 26-October 2 1978; ICE-F-185-79, November 1980-January 1982] show, and several of his one-artist exhibitions circulated after the New York showing. Same was true of drawing exhibitions. Bernice Rose did the *Drawing Now* [MoMA Exh.#1117, January 21-March 9 1976; ICE-F-171-74, October 1976-July 1977] show, which was an interesting kind of show to circulate abroad, because it was a contemporary show that was international. Both versions of that show, the first *Drawing Now* show and the sequel to it, the title of which I now don't remember, from the latter part of the '80s, traveled to Europe. The Jackson Pollock drawings show traveled in Europe. So that, I think, was a healthy development. What also happened

during this period, however, was that we did fewer and fewer shows each year, because the expenses rose so incredibly with the rise of insurance values and the rise of insurance costs, and loans became more and more difficult to obtain for major shows like *Cézanne to Miró* or *Modern Masters*. So in the early years, as I think I said before, there used to be something like a dozen to twenty exhibitions traveling each year. Eventually that came down to maybe half a dozen traveling each year, more full-scale shows than a lot of smaller shows. When the Department of Circulating Exhibitions was dismantled as a department, the staff of the International Program diminished, too, so that there were only five or six people on the staff. So that meant that we automatically had to work more with other departments.

SZ: How would you describe, if you can, the reactions, but more than that, the taste of these various areas, if you can compare and contrast. For instance, Latin America, what you found, if you can make those kinds of generalizations, about what the Latin Americans really liked to see, what they had a taste for, versus, in Australia and on into the Far East.

WR: Our role was different, because really the basic role in Latin America and Australia was educational—in Australia not quite so much as in Latin America, because it was easier to send more contemporary shows to Australia than it was to Latin America, partly because Latin American museums had really very few international collections. The Museum of Art of São Paulo is the only museum with a really important international collection, that is to say, of the twentieth century, and that's not the case in Australia; they have more international collections—not heavily into modern art, but still. So it was basically a more educational kind of mission. Also, I must say, the museums in Latin America are all governmental, so it also meant dealing with governmental bureaucracy, and that's where the International Council members came to be a big help, because they're inevitably all on the boards of the principal museums, and they would be a big help in all sorts of negotiations. So those exhibitions really tended to reach pretty much a mass audience—in the case of *Cézanne to Miró*, a real mass audience—but in the case of the other exhibitions, like the Surrealist show or the Alexander Calder exhibition [*Alexander Calder*, ICE-F-149-

70, October 1970-November 1971; C/E R-18, 1972] which we sent to Latin America, they were very popular shows. It was less an art-world audience and more a mass-public show. It also developed very close connections between us and Latin American museums, and that was very personal. I have become lifelong friends with people in all the major museums in Latin America. How can I describe the difference in Australia? Australia was, for me, a little bit like the Northwest, because it was sort of lagging behind New York, certainly. It was certainly more provincial, in certain ways more provincial than Latin America, because it was not as multicultural; it was more an Anglo-Saxon culture at that time. But it had a different kind of energy. It's very hard to describe these things, but there just is that kind of Australian energy, which is wonderful, and they supported those shows very well. They really wanted them and they worked hard to get them. The museums were all actively involved; they weren't passive recipients in any way. To a degree, the Latin American museums tended to be more passive recipients. The museums professionals in general didn't have access to power. They had to go through a ministry of culture. Of course there were exceptions to that, but in general they had a harder role, I think, than Australian museums. Japan has been a special problem in my view, because the Japanese museum community has hardly been a museum community. They've had very little access to power, because the national museums have very little money, and the whole issue of commercial sponsorship is a kind of basic problem, because it means essentially that the newspapers and the commercial sponsors determine the nature of those programs. So what they're after is box office, and the curatorial staff of the museums has very little to do with the planning of those exhibitions. This may be changing now, but it certainly wasn't in those years. We were fortunate in having an honorary member of the International Council, Dr. Chisaburao F. Yamada, who was director of the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo and a classical scholar. He was a great help, because he was a senior scholar who had close connections with the government. He could help make these things happen. For example, we did a very beautiful exhibition of classical drawings from the Museum collection, *From Cézanne through Picasso* [*From Cezanne through Picasso: 100 Drawings from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*, ICE-F-148-70, May 1971-June 1972] which was shown at the National Museum of Western

Art, which was his museum. In his case, the impulse would come from the director of the museum, but for more contemporary shows it really meant negotiating each show with a separate sponsor, and the result of that was less continuity. There wasn't a group of colleagues with whom we could regularly be in touch. It hasn't had the same kind of cumulative effect. Each experience was a new experience, you sort of started from scratch with a whole different cast of characters. They were successful and they were needed and it was an interesting and exciting thing to do, but it didn't have, for me personally, the same kind of satisfaction as being able to plan exhibitions with colleagues in advance and follow them in a more intimate way and develop long-lasting friendships. So I've never felt that we left a mark in the same way. The other programs in other parts of Asia really have been different. India is a very difficult country to send works of art to, particularly for circulation, though we've done some major shows outside of painting and sculpture. One of the important projects, which Porter McCray undertook, was *Design Today in Europe and America* [SP-ICE-17-57, March 1958-1961], which was assembled by Greta Daniel, the associate curator of design, and consisted of purchased objects of design that could circulate throughout India to demonstrate design concepts. It was a very ambitious project that traveled for a couple of years to many cities in India, traveling in a geodesic dome that the United States Information Service made available, and then it ended up to form the nucleus of a design collection in Ahmedabad. So that was a very interesting kind of show, and that was a show for which Porter McCray was perfect, as a trained architect working with the design collection. It was a very important and interesting project. But sending painting and sculpture exhibitions to India for circulation is not possible. The amount of supervision required . . . it just meant that someone would have to be staying with the exhibition for months and months.

SZ: I would imagine that in some places the conditions are not so great, either.

WR: Exactly. So that part of the program really has not developed, sending shows there, outside of the representation to the international recurring shows. The project that I most regret not having had happen was a project for Asia, which was a project to

send, again, a kind of *Cézanne to Miró* type show to China. This was very frustrating.

SZ: When was this?

WR: It was the year of Tianamen Square.

SZ: Nineteen eighty-nine. That's why it didn't happen.

WR: That's why it didn't happen. We had a very generous grant to do this exhibition, and this time it was to be a real collaborative show, sort of like the earlier shows in the International Program, like the *De David à Toulouse-Lautrec* [SP-ICE-7-54, April-July 1955], that were French paintings from American collections. So we organized a group of eight museums and representatives from those eight museums sat down and worked out a basic selection for this show, which was beginning with van Gogh and Cézanne and coming up to Frank Stella and Anselm Kiefer. It was about 150 works. So we worked on that for about a year and a half and had the show selected, seventy-five percent of it was selected, and Elizabeth Streibert and I traveled to Beijing to negotiate the venue and sort of check out sites. She had had a preliminary visit to China when I did a collection for the American Embassy residence, and that gave us a chance to have a first contact with China. We sent the collection and Liz traveled with it, so she began to meet people. This was when Winston Lord was ambassador, and his wife is Betty Bao, so we had an American-Chinese woman there who had persuaded The Museum of Modern Art to do a collection for an embassy residence again, as it hadn't for many, many years. But she was very passionate about the need for this collection, and it was very useful to her, because it meant that she could bring in Chinese members of the intellectual community and they could see another kind of art and have another kind of dialogue. So we went there, and the Chinese were very eager to have the show. The problem was finding a venue that was safe, and we found one, in the University of Beijing air-conditioned, et cetera. They were beginning demonstrations at that time, but we came back and we couldn't find a suitable location in Shanghai, because there was no air-conditioned, safe space. But it was all set, and three weeks later, Tianamen Square

happened, and of course we had to cancel the project.

SZ: You couldn't revive it later?

WR: No, we really couldn't, because the whole issue of human rights was something that everybody felt too strongly about to start all over. The grant wasn't going to be held forever either, and the grant was for something like $700,000. It was a tremendously expensive project. So that was lost, and I'm really sorry, because I hope that one of the future things the International Program is able to do is to evolve more programs in Asia, because that's a whole new audience that is developing very rapidly —in China and in Korea and probably other parts of Southeast Asia, like Singapore and Hong Kong —and that would have been a wonderful beginning for it, so that was a real loss, both for us and for China.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2

SZ: Backtracking a bit, we didn't talk at all about the agreement with the French museums in the '70s.

WR: That agreement was really an agreement established by Dick [Richard] Oldenburg. That wasn't something the planning or execution of which I participated in.

SZ: It affected you, though, right?

WR: Certainly. The co-sponsorship of exhibitions like the Cézanne and other exhibitions like the André Masson --what this closeness meant was that it encouraged the International Council to support some of these exhibitions for showings at the Museum, so there was an additional source of sponsorship—not vast sums of money, but nevertheless, it's been a consistent source of financial support for exhibitions of this sort. The ground rules for that kind of support are pretty vague. In

general it does not mean that the International Council would support all exhibitions of foreign material. It was really concentrating on exhibitions that stressed international exchange or collaboration, such as these exhibitions in the agreement with the French government and French institutions, exchanges of collections like *European Paintings from Swiss Museums* [MoMA Exh.#1160, December 1976-March 1977; and serving as the exchange exhibition: *American Art from The Museum of Modern Art,* ICE-F-183-78, February 1979-April 1980], for example. That kind of thing was stressed. So again, I have to say that certainly helped relations between the International Program and the Museum, because the International Council was helping the Museum more and more over the years. Similarly, for an exhibition that was planned to go abroad but first shown at the Museum, International Council members would often come in with financial assistance. The Andy Warhol show [*Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, ICE-F-228-88, September 1989-September 1990], for example, was supported by the Henry and Drue Heinz Foundation, and that kind of sponsorship has often been the case. So this collaboration was very important for all concerned. Our European members have been very active members as well, and again, very helpful in helping to secure funding for the shows or helping us secure loans for the exhibition from European museums or private collectors. So I think that sense of working together has been very important. But I should say, in all candor, that there certainly have been periods, following Porter McCray's problems, when I've also had problems with the Museum, and the most serious of those was during the brief period that Bates Lowry was director of the Museum. Bates Lowry really felt that the International Program should be subsumed into the Museum totally.

SZ: He was going to establish that international center, [International Study Center] wasn't he?

WR: Yes, that had much higher priority for him than the International Council.

SZ: Maybe we could just back up a little and lead into that, because there was a question I wanted to ask you. I guess in '67 Alfred Barr retired, in '68 René retired and then

died, which was not planned at all, and then, in '69 Monroe Wheeler retired. So you had this big vacuum all of a sudden. In the middle of all that there were the problems of finding a director who . . . so just tell me a little bit about what that was like, to have all that happen. I think in '69 you also were named director of the Program, so I don't know how all that fit into. . . .

WR: For me, personally, the period of the '60s was a very difficult time, because first of all, in 1966 Frank O'Hara was killed, and he was the dearest friend I've ever had in my life. Two years later, René d'Harnoncourt was killed in that terrible accident, and he was my father figure at the Museum and someone whom I loved very deeply. So that was very difficult. His death happened just as Bates Lowry came to the Museum, and Bates was very anxious to assert himself at the Museum. There was a famous meeting that Porter McCray went to in Maine in the late '50s, when the International Program was severely criticized by members of the staff. I went through a similar experience in absentia in 1968, because I was going to Caracas for the opening of the *Cézanne to Miró* show with Monroe Wheeler, and I was for the first time going to go with my wife and two children, who were then teenagers. A week or so before I was to leave, Bates Lowry told me there was going to be a staff meeting in upper New York State or someplace and would I please come. I said, "No, I can't. I'm going to Caracas, and I won't give up that trip for my family. I've given up a lot of things about my family, and this is one I won't." It was the first time the children had ever been to a foreign country, and it was very important trip. I wasn't about to do that to my family. So when I returned after René's death, because his death happened while I was in Caracas, Bates Lowry asked me for a drink. During the course of it, he informed me that the International Program had been a principal subject of discussion at that meeting and that, among other things, my exhibition of *Two Decades of American Painting* was severely criticized by the staff as being below Museum standards and that he felt that I should thus no longer do any further exhibitions. It was a very unpleasant meeting. I said, "You're wrong, and what was it they criticized?" He was vague, but it became clear that some of the things that were criticized were artists who weren't then in the collection, and that meant artists like Alex Katz, for example, who wasn't then in the collection; Cy Twombly, who wasn't

yet in the collection who was represented in my show by the painting *The Italians*, which is now in the collection; and particularly second-generation Abstract Expressionists like Joan Mitchell and Norman Bluhm. I think Al Held was also “below Museum standards” —something of this sort. I don't know, because I wasn't at the meeting, but it was not very pleasant to come back and find out you had been attacked in a meeting without your being present. That made me very angry, but it didn't make me doubt myself, nor did I even believe him in terms of the criticism, because I talked to Dorothy Miller about it and she said she had no such criticism of my exhibition. It was hard to take, nevertheless, and it meant a real conflict. He stirred up a lot of problems for the International Council as well, because it was all about the concern, again, the old concern that the International Program would divert monies from the Museum, and that the International Council should give money to the Museum rather than to circulating exhibitions. That went forward for serious discussion among the trustees. I wasn't there, but Beth Straus was then president of the International Council and William Paley was the chairman of the Museum, and Paley questioned whether the International Program was costing the Museum money. So it was a very serious issue, but briefly, because Bates Lowry wasn't the director for a very long time.

SZ: But that was his issue, that he really sort of, as you say, stirred it up.

WR: Yes, and he wanted more control over the content of the International Program, and that was contrary to the agreement between the Museum and the International Council. It was to be a program jointly approved and conceived. Essentially, I think what he probably wanted was that the International Council should support the International Study Center with finances rather than sending exhibitions to other countries.

SZ: Which was just his agenda.

WR: Yes, that was his agenda. And it's always been hard for some people to understand, including some trustees; the question about the exhibitions circulated by the

International Program is, what does the Museum get out of them if it isn't money? Because those showings don't provide great income for the Museum. The answer to that question is that it's hard to quantify that. It's helped establish The Museum of Modern Art as one of the greatest museums in the world. It's helped to develop international awareness of the Museum and other kinds of support. But you can't answer that question unless you really believe in a kind of idealistic vision of the Museum and of the art world, that it's a natural and honorable thing to do to support other countries and other communities in having the opportunity to see original works of art, and that's more important than the financial consequences. If you don't have staff and trustees who believe in that idealistic goal, then the program will disappear. I'm happy to say it hasn't disappeared, but this was a period when it was severely weakened. After Bates left and John Hightower [Director, MoMA 1970-1972] came to the Museum, that problem lessened, because John Hightower was very idealistic, and I think he understood the goals of the International Program. He and I got on very well. He was obviously overwhelmed by a position that he hadn't been trained to take on, but I think he was very courageous. Of course that was a very difficult period for the Museum, when there were so many political problems and problems of racism and sexism and the Vietnam War, all of those things coinciding. [tape interruption]

SZ: We were talking about what this period of great upheaval, at least in the outside world and I guess inside, too.

WR: It was, very much so, inside, because it was a time when artists' groups were making great demands and there were a lot of issues that came up for the first time, like the whole issue of a museum giving fees to artists for inclusion of their works in exhibitions, participation of artists on the board of trustees, the whole issue of the Vietnam War, and then the development of a staff union.

SZ: What about PASTA and the strikes —how did that affect your department?

WR: My department was very small. I have to say I was more sympathetic to PASTA than I was to management. I thought the reason a union had to develop was that there

hadn't been a sufficient voice for the staff, that department heads in particular were just not open enough to communicating with staff and there was too much hierarchy. I agreed with the whole movement about the union in terms of finding more access to power for younger members of the staff, and for a kind of democratization of the whole structure. But I thought that should have come from the staff itself. I was very sorry to see the division of the staff between management and union, and I was very uncomfortable with that, forever. When the big strike took place, which I guess was 1971, I was left alone to manage the International Program —I was it. I was management, and I sat in my office and tried to keep things going, and it was a very dangerous position. It was a time when the *Four Contemporary Masters* show had just finished its showing down in Rio, and it was over the holidays, and I was having to try to arrange to get it through Brazilian customs and deal with all sorts of problems while the strike was going on. But I was sorry it had to come to that, and I'm still sorry. I'm sorry to see those negotiations become so ritualized. I've always been pro-union. I come from the working class, and that's where my political heart is. But when it comes right down to it, I've hated to see the rhetoric and posturing that took place with all the negotiations, rather than the staff working together. I'm sorry about that, but that happened, and I think the development of PASTA was important to the staff, but I still feel critical of the Museum administration for not having done enough for the staff. I understand all the talk about the Museum having a higher level than most museums, etcetera, but my experience is that it's just as difficult for young people to join the Museum staff and make the same kind of sacrifices that I had to make in 1954, and I think that's too bad. I also think it's meant that a lot of people haven't come to the profession. When I entered the museum profession, very few men of my age were entering it; they went into academia. They couldn't afford to do it. I couldn't afford to do it, either. And then, with the rapid growth of museums in the '60s and '70s, the profession got a big shot in the arm. But I think it suffered again in the last ten or fifteen years, because we still haven't kept pace, and I'm sorry about that.

SZ: Do you think the strike and then the formation of the union, that that altered forever the relationship of. . . ?

WR: No, I wouldn't quite say that, but for me the cause of that formation was the fact that the management staff didn't encourage this kind of communication, and that in fact several of the department heads acted more as if they were the trustees than colleagues with their assistants. There was a kind of conservative tendency in some of the Museum administrative staff that encouraged that development, I think, and I thought it was unnecessary. I thought a staff association in which all of us could participate would have been a healthier solution.

SZ: Were you surprised when Hightower departed? I presume you were not surprised when Lowry left.

WR: I was, because Lowry's departure was so abrupt. It happened in 1969, in the spring, when the International Council was having its spring meeting in London. He was scheduled to come to attend the meeting, and we learned by telegram from the trustees in New York that he had been discharged. So that was a great surprise. In all candor, I have to say it was also a very great relief.

SZ: To you and to other staff?

WR: Yes, and to some of the trustees who were there as well, because the situation felt destructive, certainly it was destructive for my department. None of that was the case with John Hightower, but I think in his case he was overwhelmed by the combination of a kind of naïveté and inexperience in this loaded situation. I think, too . . . I was very fond of John Hightower. I haven't retained a friendship with him, but he was a kind of old-fashioned liberal like myself.

SZ: After last night [Election night, 1994] you must be feeling really good.

WR: Yes, great [laughter]. Hightower was leading the Museum in some directions that are interesting now in retrospect because they're like politically correct attitudes in the '70s that the Museum undertakes with enthusiasm now in the '90s. For example, one

issue that came up that affected the International Program was the representation of American artists in American embassy collections. We had had an Art and Embassies committee of the International Council, through which we assembled collections of American art as loans to American ambassadors and their wives for embassy residences. That took place from roughly 1960 to 1970. [Note: The Art in Embassies Program was established in 1960; the U.S. State Department took over in 1970 when it developed its own program]. Each collection was tailor-made by the curator in charge, meeting personally with the ambassador or his wife. The idea was that the collection would be selected according to Museum standards but would be discussed with them. The ambassador could not have a veto over the selection, but they would be consulted and it would try to be worked out in terms of what would work in the house, etcetera. It was always intended as a pilot program, to encourage the government to have a similar such program, because other countries do; the French, Germans, British, all send important works to be represented in their embassies. It was a very successful program. It was very difficult to do, because you had to be working in terms of installing things in specific rooms that you generally had never seen except in photographs. We did something like forty collections. I worked on several of them myself. But it was running down towards the end of the '60s, when it coincided with the Vietnam War, and a lot of artists protested their works being shown in any representation or in any exhibitions sponsored by the U.S. government, and most certainly in U.S. embassy collections. So we were sympathetic to that request. As I say, it coincided with the time when the embassy program itself was coming to a close, so we didn't have to withdraw things from collections peremptorily, but we articulated that. We said we were sympathetic, we said that we understood their feelings. We didn't take a political stand. That was the kind of issue that came up. The whole issue of representation of black and Latino artists, of women artists, those were all issues coming up then that John Hightower tried to face. I must say, I think some things that happened in that period were sort of premonitions of things going on now. For instance, Betsy Jones, who was then curator of the Museum collection, did a show from the collection called *The Artist as Adversary* [MoMA Exh.#968, July 1-Sept 27 1971]. It was a head-on exhibition about political engagement of artists during the modern period, and it was a very

interesting, stimulating show. It brought out a lot of things that hadn't been shown. For me, it was particularly important because a lot of Latin American things came out for showing. It was the first time, for example, that the Orozco mural, *Divebomber and Tank*, had been shown in the Museum for twenty years. It was a modest show with a modest publication, but I thought it was a very good sign. I think that was the beginning of the Museum becoming more responsive to the artist community and to other political issues. I'm glad to see that that's being continued now. But that was a hard issue for John Hightower to be facing then. It would have been different if the director of the Museum had had some seniority and some standing and more confidence from the trustees.

SZ: That's what did him in?

WR: No, but I think it was one of the things. I think a lot of the trustees were uncomfortable with these issues. They have become more comfortable with them, I'm happy to say, since then. But certainly that would have been a difficult time for anyone to be director of The Museum of Modern Art, and for anyone fresh to the field to come into it at that time was really trouble.

SZ: I guess also at this time, starting a few years before and ending at about the same time, was the problem of the two Bills.

WR: Yes. I have to say, that wasn't my problem, because I liked both of them and Bill Lieberman was always supportive of the International Program. He had done shows for the International Program since the early '50s. I always got along extremely well with Bill Rubin. After Bill Lieberman left, I have to say that Bill Rubin was more generous in lending from the collection than before. I don't know why that is, but that is the case. I collaborated with Bill on several shows.

SZ: You mean after Bill Lieberman left to be director of Drawings?

WR: Yes, and more particularly, even, after he left the Museum. One of the advantages of

my position in the Museum has been a certain distance from internecine strife, and that's been nice. So I've never been really involved in internal politics in the Museum.

SZ: You've certainly been an observer.

WR: I've been an observer.

SZ: You've attended all those meetings, departmental meetings. . . .

WR: Yes, program committees, exhibition committees. That period was very hard on all the curatorial staff involved. But I wasn't. I didn't take sides and I really wasn't involved with it. It was just a period of great strain and discomfort for a lot of people. That has a big sense of drama within the Museum, but that's just a part of any institutional life. Take any university and this story gets repeated.

SZ: Some people say that Bill Rubin's having won that struggle certainly affected the shape of the collection and affected the shape of the exhibition program to a great degree also. I guess everything is interconnected.

WR: I suppose, but I think it turned out right. I think Bill Rubin has done a wonderful thing for The Museum of Modern Art, and I think he's done things that Bill Lieberman would not have been capable of doing. There's a higher level of scholarship and a more passionate conviction for specific moments of art, particularly Abstract Expressionism.

SZ: Maybe one other piece of this, would be specifics about department heads, since sometimes you had some of those problems that Porter had, even though you worked hard not to have them. But I'm sure that there were always differences in who was eager to lend, who was not so eager, so I'm just going to throw out some names. There was Arthur, there was Lieberman and Rubin after a while. Who else?

WR: John Szarkowski. Riva.

SZ: Steichen, I guess you had really just sort of taken over when Steichen left, right?

WR: Yes, pretty much. It differed a lot from one department head to another. Arthur Drexler was never very interested in the International Program, and there were relatively few exhibitions that circulated from Architecture and Design during the time I was head of the department. I don't think it was hostility, it's just that his focus was on the Museum, and he wasn't particularly interested in The International Program. There were a few shows that traveled, but never a lot of enthusiasm on his part [laughing], and he was not easy to work with, I have to say. For example, one project which we did do was a kind of latter-day version of that design collection which we had done for India. We raised money through International Council Latin American members, particularly from Brazil, to do a collection of industrial design along the same lines, *Design Today in Europe and America* [SP-ICE-17-57 March 1958-1961] for São Paulo, and Stewart Johnson worked on the selection of it, but. . . .

END TAPE 3, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1

SZ: Stuart Johnson was involved?

WR: Yes, it was a project that had first been proposed by the Architecture and Design department itself, when Emilio Ambasz was the curator. Emilio was from Argentina, and he very much wanted to do that kind of exhibition for Argentina and Brazil, to stimulate, again, the industry to establish design standards in those two countries, as the most industrialized of Latin American countries, with the aim of helping them develop products which would help their economy. It wasn't just an aesthetic goal. So he hired someone to work on research for the project with support from the International Program, but then when Emilio left, the project was left unfinished, sort

of in flux, and we had a commitment to complete it. So that was hard, because it had very low priority for Arthur Drexler, though he had approved Emilio's project in the first place. So we eventually did it, but it wasn't done with a great deal of zest, I have to say, and with a rather disproportionate amount of effort on my part. Similarly, Bill Rubin had an agreement with Swiss museums, like the French cultural agreement, and one of the things that had been agreed upon was that we'd do an exhibition of American art from The Museum of Modern Art, a sort of new version of the exhibition *Modern Art in the United States* [ICE-F-24-54], of intra-departmental collections holding American material. That meant my working with each curatorial department in the Museum to get a representation, and the stumbling block was Architecture and Design. Again, William Rubin and Arthur Drexler could hardly be described as pals. They had some violent temper tantrums in several of our curatorial meetings, and since this was a project instigated by Bill Rubin, Arthur fought it. Eventually, we got an exhibition from the department, but it was hard going. Arthur's Richard Neutra exhibition [*Richard Neutra: From International Style to California Modern*, ICE-F-203-82 July 1982-February 1984] did circulate in Europe. The Vienna showing of it was the first showing, since Neutra was Viennese, and that occurred while the International Council was having its Spring Meeting in Vienna, so Arthur came. But it turned into a typical Viennese, Act Three of Der Rosenkavalier cabal, which was very unpleasant, because this was shown at the Museum of the Twentieth Century in Vienna, and their curatorial role, they had determined for themselves, was to locate some correspondence involving Neutra in a kind of sexual scandal [laughing], so they showed the results of this research in correspondence and news clippings of the period and put it up on the wall without our knowledge. Arthur discovered this on the opening day of the show. That wasn't a good introduction to how an international exhibition is supervised and handled. Arthur did get involved in the Mies van der Rohe show traveling to Germany and Barcelona [*Mies van der Rohe: Barcelona Pavilion*, ICE-F-192-79, December 1979-December 1980], but in general sending shows abroad never interested him very much. John Szarkowski, I have to say, became more and more interested. The whole role of photography was more difficult in those years, because in the '50s and even the '60s the medium was still regarded with suspicion, by overseas museums in particular. We circulated some important

[exhibitions] —-*Family of Man* [MoMA Exh.#569, January 24-May 8, 1955; C/E, 1956-57, 1957-58; 12 versions traveled around the globe, see SP-ICE-10-55, 1955-1965] circulated, but through the United States Government, not the International Program —-but we circulated quite a few one-artist shows. I remember our doing a Brassaï show [*Brassaï*, ICE-F-131-68, February 1971-June 1974], and a Cartier-Bresson show [*Cartier-Bresson: Recent Photographs*, C/E 63-17, 1963-66; MoMA Exh.#861, June-September 1968; ICE-F-130-68, February 1970-August 1971] in Latin America, for example, but I can't say they were very successful, because none of those museums in Latin America collected photography. For example, in Argentina for years and years *La Nación*, the leading newspaper, *The New York Times* of Buenos Aires, would not review photography exhibitions because it did not consider them works of art. So that's the kind of level. That was a reason to be doing photography exhibitions, to stimulate interest in it as a serious art form. But still, if you're the curator of an exhibition of Brassaï and it had low attendance, you can understand that that would be discouraging. But shows that were more encouraging to John were shows like *Lee Friedlander* [MoMA Exh.#1083, December 1974-February 1975; ICE-F-170-74, June 1975-October 1977], which did receive more attention, and the Steichen retrospective exhibition [*Steichen the Photographer*, MoMA Exh.#682, March-May 1961; C/E 61-45, 1961-63; ICE-F-72-62, March 1963-March 1970] which traveled in Europe, the Steichen retrospective, was very respectfully received. That began to establish a circuit, and once that happened, John became more enthusiastic. But that was a process. He was always a very demanding curator in terms of being assured that the material was going to be treated with the proper respect, and I understood that. I had to develop more of an interest in photography myself, because that was never my field. I have to say that John was my teacher in that, because I think he was *the* Museum curator, along with Arthur Drexler, with the most beautiful prose style of any of our curators. I think his writings are just permanent. The great sadness for Arthur Drexler, I think, is that he didn't write enough. It was too hard. Arthur was a tremendously difficult person to get along with, and his political ambitions to be director of The Museum of Modern Art were very hard on him and on the people who cared about him. I certainly never supported those ambitions of his, and that didn't make me a friend of his, obviously,

but I think the great tragedy for him is that he was an authentic genius. When I came to the Museum in '54, he and I were both very young, and he was absolutely brilliant; he was a brilliant talker, and I think it's a pity that his great gift was never fully realized. I think part of the reason was this whole deflection along career lines, that he really had this other [ambition].

SZ: It seems, in retrospect, so odd.

WR: Yes, it was. It was a totally unrealistic ambition. It wasn't something that would have made him happy, because a director has to be a great administrator.

SZ: Or would have used his talents.

WR: No, it would have submerged the talent that he had.

SZ: Isn't it puzzling?

WR: Yes, it was very puzzling at the time. Arthur was exactly the opposite type of John Hightower, for example, which was odd, because Arthur, like me, came from working class, I think, but he was very anti-liberal, I would say. He seemed very conservative and elitist. I'm not anti-elitist, but [he was] very negative towards all the socio-political concerns, very negative towards the participation of staff in decision making, that kind of thing. So we were totally different. But he would have been a disastrous director and it would have been a disastrous personal experience for him. I'm just sorry [because] I never felt that talent was fully realized. Riva has always been a great support of the International Program. She's among our most widely traveled curators and she's done a lot of exhibitions for the International Program. And Bernice Rose, who was on the staff of Circulating Exhibitions for a while, also did a lot of shows for the International Program. Kynaston McShine was also hired by Porter McCray in 1958 and first worked for Circulating Exhibitions, did some embassy collections, before he left the Museum to go to The Jewish Museum, and he always enjoyed doing shows for the International Program.

SZ: I guess that's it. And Lieberman I had, but I guess we did sort of talk about him.

WR: Yes. . . .

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **WALDO RASMUSSEN (WR)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: **NOVEMBER 14, 1994**

BEGIN TAPE 5, SIDE 1

SZ: I wanted to ask you about some of the presidents of the International Council with whom you worked over the years, beginning with Blanchette [Rockefeller].

WR: Yes, she was the very first president, so I didn't know her very much at that time. She was really one of the people instrumental in the whole formation of the International Council. It was essentially she, I think, and Eliza Parkinson who spearheaded the whole drive to find members of the International Council who were among the founding members. I can't remember how long now that Blanchette Rockefeller was president. . . .

SZ: Until '57, so it was, I guess, four years.

WR: In those years, I didn't go to the International Council annual meetings, so I had less contact with the Council. It was really Eliza Parkinson with whom I was very close when I succeeded Porter McCray, and I have to say that her partnership with René d'Harnoncourt is what sustained me in taking over Porter's position. As I'm sure you know from other interviews you've had, she and René were very, very close, and it was a wonderful collaboration and friendship. She absolutely supported me in daily ways and made it easier for me with International Council members, and was very enthusiastic about the changes in the Program and the new directions. The big change was the change towards Latin American and forming a fund raising committee and expanding the Program to include more Latin American members,

and she took that on wonderfully. She had great zest, and she attracted a lot of people to the International Council. Then I remember very well in 1965 I went with René d'Harnoncourt to Paris to help him with the installation of the first exhibition I think he had done with the International Program, which was *Modern Sculpture U.S.A. [*ICE-F-96-63, June 1965-April 1966], which was shown in the Musée Rodin in Paris. Eliza Parkinson came along for the opening of that show; so did Emily Woodruff (Emily Stone). That was great fun to work on the installation of that show with René, but it was while we were there that René asked Eliza to step down as president of the International Council and become president of the Museum. So we sort of celebrated that event. Then Eliza was succeeded by Beth Straus, who served for the next five years. Beth, too, was particularly interested in Latin America. She was very much behind our doing the *Cézanne to Miró* show and was a very close friend of Monroe Wheeler, who selected that show. She pursued that goal of finding new Latin American members and made that a real priority for her. She was also very interested in Japan and was a great help to me, kind of moral support, through the *Two Decades of American Painting* exhibition, which I did in '66. As an outcome of that show, she organized the first trip of the International Council to a foreign country, which was in 1968, when the group went to Peru, Chile, and Argentina. The Buenos Aires trip coincided with the opening of *Cézanne to Miró*. That became a kind of pattern. This was the first overseas trip, but from then on, pretty regularly, U.S. meetings in the fall would alternate with foreign meetings in the spring. I can't remember the exact sequence of those, but I remember being in London, for example, in '69; we covered that in the previous tape, because that was the time of Bates Lowry's dismissal. Then she organized a very beautiful trip to Japan in either '70 or '71. Those trips, of course, attracted members, but the going rule--and I think it might have been a rule that was overlooked once or twice--was we tried to arrange those foreign trips in connection with one of the shows opening or being shown in a foreign country. That made a big difference, because it meant that International Council members saw what the International Program did, and it also made their presence there more serious, so they didn't degenerate into fancy tourist trips. They were very serious trips, and of course they saw wonderful things. The International Council worked a long time on each of these trips with a good travel agent, and we

almost always had foreign members in those cities, so those foreign members helped make other collections open to them, made special events with the local museums, etcetera. But it was Beth who started that whole policy. Then she was succeeded by Joanne Stern, who had the longest term of any president. She and I were particularly close friends. She is one of my dearest friends in the world, and she supported me through a lot of bad times, including some very bad personal times of mine, when I wasn't certain whether I could stay at the Museum. She brought a wonderful kind of zest to the International Council and Program because she's such an open, warm person, and she has a great sense of fun. The trips she organized were really sensational. Perhaps the two most astounding were trips the Council took to Munich and Vienna sometime in the late '70s or early '80s, and then a glorious trip to Spain, which went from Barcelona to Madrid, Seville, Granada, with a little side trip to Santiago de Compostela. Just incredible. It was great because it wasn't just fun; it really helped establish relations between the Museum and other countries, because higher levels of government would be involved in those trips. In Spain we were received by the king and queen, but also the minister of culture. So it signified what The Museum of Modern Art was doing in those countries. At that time we opened a very, very beautiful drawings show at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, for example [*Contrasts of Form: Geometric Abstract Art 1910-1980*, ICE-F-218-85, April 1986-January 1987]. So they were constructive in so many ways. In terms of chairpersons, we've also had a very distinguished group of chairmen, particularly August Heckscher, who was the chair twice and was one of the most eloquent of all of our chairmen. That position in the Council is less actively involved in program; it's more a kind of honorary position, but it's also been very important. Alfredo Boulton was the first Latin American to be elected chairman of the International Council, and that also was a great aid in getting more Latin American members of the Council. Then we've had a couple of diplomats. Walter Dowling, who'd been ambassador to Germany, was a chairman. And then, during Joanne Stern's tenure as president, Prinz Franz von Bayern was the chairman, and he was very active as chairman. In recent years, Joann Phillips succeeded Joanne Stern; then Jeanne Thayer succeeded her, and now Jo Carole Lauder is the president.

SZ: How is the decision made about who will be invited to do that?

WR: I'm not party to it, really. It's the trustees; we on the staff aren't aware of, really, how new officers are selected. They're very demanding positions, they take a lot of time. The president really has to be a New Yorker. You can't do that from another city, because there are just so many events and so much planning. So that's one precondition. The chairman can live anywhere, because really the presence of the chairman is essential only for the spring and the annual meeting. The president has to be a very good organizer; they really have to work closely with the administrator of the International Council. I have to say that the International Council has been very fortunate in having an absolutely wonderful administrator in Carol Coffin. I don't know how long Carol has been there now, but it must be fifteen to twenty years, and that's an enormously detailed position, as you can imagine. She helps make that group very congenial; it has worked very well.

SZ: You've said that, over the years, there has been an issue of what the International Program's place is in the whole Museum program. Did that tension or whatever it is change at all through the years? We've talked about it up until Dick [Oldenburg] took over [in 1972], but then you've had twenty years of Dick Oldenburg as director of the Museum. From your side of it, did you feel that you were sort of outside the mainstream at the Museum?

WR: Outside to some degree, but outside in what to me was the most beneficial sense, namely, that freedom of not having to be on a political trail. And also, I have to say, having pretty much financial freedom, because the rule was that the International Program exhibitions could not cost the Museum money, so we operated with a budget that was to a degree separate from the Museum's, and if there were a deficit, it was the International Council that had to be notified in advance of the deficit and get their acceptance of it. So that was a form of autonomy, which I cherished, as you can imagine. What I found was that, as curatorial members changed, I had to keep educating them about the International Program, because they didn't understand it. To this day, a lot of staff members don't know the difference between the

International Program and the International Council. It can have a low priority for curators, because it isn't happening on Fifty-third Street. That's why, when Porter was director, it really was very useful to have curatorial staff right on hand within the department. I don't think there's been a great swing in these last twenty years. I think the difference was in the support the International Council gave to exhibitions held at the Museum. Once curators saw that happening, they knew that this wasn't a foreign, alien body. I tried very hard to make it clear that I saw one of my roles as helping the curatorial departments, not competing with them, and I really did feel that way. One of my great pleasures at the Museum has been to help make things happen, and a particular pleasure for me was to work with curators, being in on their thinking about shows, and then selling the shows in terms of tours and promoting them to the International Council. So I really saw my role as a kind of facilitator for those shows. I also made demands upon the curatorial departments, and I'm sure sometimes they weren't terribly welcomed, because once shows were scheduled, those schedules had to be kept. It's a complication for a schedule. It's one thing to get a show open in New York, it's another thing to have it travel to three other venues afterwards. The real problem came in providing supervision for the shows while they traveled. So what we strove for was a combination of International Program staff and curatorial staff traveling with shows, so that they had both things—-people who would take care of the technical problems and security problems and all that, and the curator who could work on the installation and also make it a more collegial relation with the sponsoring museum in the foreign country. But, as I think I've said before, it is difficult for some of the younger curators to understand the raison d'etre for this program, but eventually they do. What they really need to do is experience it first-hand. They really need to do a show and travel with the show, and then they get it. Those curators who travel all the time—-like Bernice Rose and Kynaston [McShine] and now Magdalena Dabrowski has had several such shows—-really understand that.

SZ: Where would that put you in a department heads' meeting when some controversial policy, some decision that had to be made, where would that put you in that?

WR: I had an equal voice in that. I never felt shy about expressing my opinion. I think those meetings are less open than they used to be. The program committee meetings have changed forms many times. They've gone from meetings which included curatorial and some administrative or support departments, like the registrar, public relations, development, back to a committee on exhibitions solely, which I think is better. But they're still pretty big. So that's a real change I've seen in the Museum, because the first point of those program committee meetings was more like proposing exhibitions to a group of your peers, like a kind of thesis defense—-proposing the idea, having it discussed, and having it recommended or not recommended as a result. In my view, it's changed to more reporting on proposals than actually discussing them, and I think there has been less communication about them as a result. It's kind of a divine rule of curators. I think proposals being challenged more would be healthier for everybody concerned. I think that's probably a result of the Museum growing so, but the big loss I have seen to the Museum in that regard is the sort of second rank of curators—-assistant curators and particularly curatorial assistants-—have less voice in that program. It's not as easy to be assigned direction of an exhibition as it was for Kynaston McShine in 1960, say, or Frank O'Hara.

SZ: Do you think that's good or bad?

WR: I think that's bad. I think the Museum should have as many points of view as possible, and I think too peaceful a regime is just as bad as too fractious a one. I missed the real kind of communication that we used to have when those meetings were smaller and when there would be stronger divisions of opinion.

SZ: How much do you think that has to do with who the director is?

WR: A lot. The difference is like this: René d'Harnoncourt did not think of himself purely as an administrator; he was not an art historian but he was a generalist, and he had done exhibitions himself and had done them with great expertise and éclat. Dick Oldenburg came from publishing and from a non–art history background and from a

non-curatorial background; he's been diplomatic in not pushing his point of view and he has had congenial relations with the curators, but that's different from leading the meetings and making his own imprint on the program. Because René d'Harnoncourt really did that. The program differed; I can't say how, but it did. I think that meant that he really led those meetings in a different way, and he felt free to question a curator—-even Alfred-—about a specific proposal. But he was so skilled at doing it, because his skill in personal relations was so extraordinary, that no one ever felt on the carpet or exposed or whatever. Humor was an important part of that. But that's a big difference. If I were on a search committee for a new director today, I would be looking for someone who could play an important role in developing the program of the Museum, not just the administration of the Museum. I think in order to do that, you really have to have had a good program in art history and real aesthetic commitment. Dick Oldenburg has been very careful not to express himself about aesthetic commitments.

SZ: But he came in at a time that . . . I guess institutions have different needs at different times.

WR: Yes, that's right. His directorship has been successful in the main.

SZ: What about this idea of having two directors?

SZ: I think it's a terrible idea, I really do. No, I think the Museum should be directed by the director and the administrative staff should be facilitators, not determinants of that policy. A good director will be responsive to those other elements, but really, the administration is a tool; it should not be guiding the Museum. The administration should develop out of the purpose and function of the Museum, not the other way around.

SZ: Just to backtrack a little bit, anything about the '84 expansion that affected your program?

WR: We were in exile for years.

SZ: Which had the result of?

WR: It was rough. I'd sort of forgotten about that, a sort of healthy amnesia, because our offices were moved about three times. We moved in the first drive, then we moved to Fifty-fifth Street into a brownstone that the Museum leased for a while, and then the last and most difficult period was when we and other administrative offices moved to Seventh Avenue and Fifty-fourth or something like that. It just meant that human contact . . .

SZ: I'd forgotten that. That's right, in a building they subsequently tore down.

WR: That's right, so nobody cared about the upkeep of that building. But it wasn't that so much, it was just the whole psychological thing. It wasn't so hard for me, but it was very hard for other people, because they didn't feel as much a part of the Museum. So I think it was very demoralizing for our staff. I felt like it was a triumphant return when we came back to the Museum in 1984 and I found out my office was one room down from where it had been ten years previous, whatever it was, because we were gone a very long time. So that's really what I remember about that drive, but again, International Council members contributed a lot to that drive, and I don't think that they felt imposed upon to do so. I think relations between the Council and the Museum were so healthy by then that they gave generously because they believed in the Museum. But that didn't hurt in cementing this friendship between the International Council and the Museum and the Program.

SZ: And the actual space that you got?

WR: Was just about what it was before we left. It was very nice space. The Council offices are a little small for them; they have to have their meetings in the committee room. Our staff by then for the International Program was five people, and the International Council has three people on the staff, so they're not huge offices.

SZ: Have they found a replacement for you?

WR: Not yet, no. I don't know where the search stands.

SZ: Are you a part of that at all?

WR: No, I'm not, and I have mixed feelings about it. I really want to let go of all that, but that's beyond human possibility. I really would like to see somebody young take this position with ideas that are different from mine and with a different kind of energy and interest. I think it needs shaking up, I really do. So I hope that works out well.

SZ: I was going to ask you what you saw for the future of the program, but obviously what you just said to me makes me think that that's something for somebody else to think through.

WR: Yes, it really is, but the problem is, I think it's very difficult for trustees and groups like the International Council who have gotten familiar with one person for so long, for as many years as I've been there, for heaven's sake, to know what the position is. I've tried to tell them, and I've even given them some traits or sine qua non, and one of them . . . Again, I see the position Porter [McCray] and I held as being equivalent to being a museum director, and I think as a result the person holding that position should have curatorial interest and training. He also has to be, as a museum director should be, a good administrator and someone who can handle exhibition budgets and staff relations, et cetera. But again, I think it's not a role just for a coordinator; it really is somebody who has to have his or her own ideas about what that program should consist of and what its direction should be and how to achieve it. Among the traits are having a certain amount of nerve; you have to know that the nature of the position is that you're dealing with traveling exhibitions, which involve risks, and you have to minimize those risks to the highest degree possible, but you have to know

that you have to live with that kind of risk; you also have to be willing to take risks with the results of the show. You're not in a position of just trying to please people, you're trying to achieve something, and that's very important; you have to have confidence in what you are doing and you have to be able to fail. For example, my Latin American show had very, very mixed reviews [*Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, ICE-F-238-90, August 1992-April 1993; MoMA Exh.#1654, June 2-September 7 1993]. Nobody likes to get a bad review, but you have to be prepared for that. You have to believe enough in the idea to accept those reviews and go on. So I think that's very important. You have to be able to be assertive enough about your ideas and proposals without being so aggressive that you become hostile, because the director of the International Program has to defend the ideas for those shows just as a curator has to defend them. It's that role. So you have to be able to defend those ideas. Then you have to be able to work with a great variety of people, from trustees and Council members to foreign museum colleagues. I think for me one of the greatest pleasures of having that job was seeing other talents develop, helping other people develop. It sounds a little goody-goody, but I think it's fairly important. You have to get a kick out of that, because there are lots of things you don't get a kick out of [laughter]. That's been a great pleasure to me, to see people like Kynaston and Bernice Rose and Barbara London all develop over the years as curators. That's been very satisfying. What I'd advise against are the pure administrator or someone who is so totally with the minute that the viewpoint is narrow. I think it's important to be pretty much a generalist, but we'll see. The qualities I mentioned are the ones I think are the most important.

SZ: And for the Museum in general? There will always be a place for the International Program, you think, at least for the foreseeable future?

WR: Yes, for the foreseeable future. It has to change, as it has changed, and the future directions don't depend just on the Museum, they depend on the rest of the world receiving these shows. What I see are changes in direction in terms of global interest. As I think I mentioned earlier, Asia is a new kind of audience; there are new kinds of audiences in Asia. Central Europe is another area where things are

beginning to happen in a very different way now. I think Latin America is going to change again, now that there's a new kind of energy in Latin America that's now happening, which may make it more possible to do different kinds of shows -—I would hope more contemporary shows rather than the kind of old masterish shows that we did in the past. And I hope that the Museum can do more collaborations with foreign colleagues. That's the one real serious concern I have about the Museum in terms of the International Program, that our curators get more aware of the outside world in terms of having foreign colleagues as friends and communicating with them and learning from them.

SZ: That's kind of the direction the whole world is taking anyway.

WR: Yes. There was another issue I wanted to discuss briefly. The other day when you brought up Frank O'Hara, since then I've thought about some of the issues that brings up for me, and one that's important to me and I think somehow it's something that should be thought about. It seems like an interesting issue to me, and maybe it's just interesting to me personally, but it's the whole situation of the gay man in the Museum, or the gay woman, for that matter, but I haven't known so many gay women in the Museum. Because there has been a lot of homophobia in the Museum, some subtle and some not.

SZ: Among staff?

WR: And trustees. Yes, I think so. My position has been different, because I was a married man, but I always considered myself gay. I was married for twenty years, so I was never out publicly, though certainly privately to most of my friends in the Museum I was fairly open about my sexuality. In a sense, because of the fact that I had been married and had children and have grandchildren now, I've been able to perceive more of this homophobia than some gay men would otherwise see, and it's not been pleasant, I have to say. I have never been out with the administration of the

Museum or of the International Council, because I didn't need to be for myself, and I thought it would create more problems than it would solve. But I do think that it's important for people like me to be as out as possible, because it encourages other gay men to be more open, so I'm doing this to you for the first time in any kind of official way. For example, with Frank [O'Hara], Porter McCray has told me that Alfred Barr was very conscious of his homosexuality, coming from that kind of puritan, son-of-a-Protestant minister [background]. No matter how sophisticated he was, this was something which troubled him about Frank, all the more so with Larry Rivers's nude portraits of Frank. That apparently made him very uncomfortable and really made him not like Frank.

SZ: And made Frank's experience there not as. . . .

WR: I think so. I think his homosexuality was used against him, I really do, and that's what this brought back to mind to me. The number of distinguished homosexuals at the Museum, without having to out people who prefer not to be outted, is a very distinguished group, beginning, after all, with Philip Johnson, who in his eighties has been out in a more public way. So the contribution gay men have made to the Museum has been very important, and there was a time in, I forget when it was, probably in the late '40s, there was an attack on the Museum for the number of gay men and lesbian women on the staff, and that this was coloring the program. It was in an article somewhere. It was somebody like Thomas Hart Benton, somebody on the far right. So it was an issue at one time, a kind of public issue. From time to time, I've wondered whether the incidence of homophobia on the part of the trustees and maybe on the part of some members of the administration—-not maybe, *knowably* on the part of some members of the administration, and knowably because I've witnessed it—-has not limited the careers of some of the gay staff members. For example, I was very surprised and said so to Mary Lea Bandy, that Steve Harvey was never made a curator, though he published and did some very distinguished shows. I know he was greatly loved and respected, but nevertheless, that didn't

happen. I must say, there have been a lot of discomforts for me through this, because I would have preferred to feel free and open about who I am, because that's such an important part of me, but I didn't. And yet I had this other kind of security in a way that so many other people don't have. But I think that's a kind of issue that is interesting.

SZ: Do you think it's still an issue or do you think that may have improved as sort of going along with what's happened in society, or at least in New York?

WR: I don't know. I still perceive a great deal of homophobia in the staff, in some department heads and certainly in some trustees. I've heard it, because they thought they could say this to me. It's an issue that I think would be interesting to gay studies: the position of gay people in various forms of the arts.

SZ: I was going to ask you if you think this was not unique but more pronounced at MoMA as opposed to another museum, like the Metropolitan?

WR: No, my guess would be that the Metropolitan would present more problems still, because it is by its nature a more conservative institution. But it's odd that I've seen this exist. Anyway, I wanted to take this opportunity to make my position clear about it and just go on record. I know Porter McCray suffered from this a great deal, and I did not really suffer from it, I have to say. I just didn't. But still, I would hope for the day when that didn't exist, and particularly in the trustees. People are welcome to have their prejudices and their feelings, but they should not be allowed to have those prejudices determine other people's futures or the character of the institution, because if they had, they would have missed some very great talents at The Museum of Modern Art, and I'm glad that they didn't.

SZ: Wouldn't you think that they know that, somehow?

WR: I think so, but I think some of the male trustees have much more problem with this than the women, I really do. I know they do, because I've heard their homophobic

remarks. Likewise, some of the male department heads have problems with this, and I have heard them. So it's something that should be known about the Museum. It's part of the history of the Museum, both the contribution and life in the institution. It's not unique in this regard, but I think probably it has had a higher percentage of gay leadership in the Museum than most cultural institutions. That would be my guess. After all, when I came to the Museum, the Museum was small, and the number of gay men in it was significant.

SZ: But what you're saying is, in most instances, closeted.

WR: Yes. I think most gay men were like me. They didn't make extraordinary efforts, they didn't marry because they were gay, or whatever, but I think they tread very carefully, and it's too bad that people feel they have to do that.

SZ: I guess I'll ask this question in spite of that, on balance, are you glad that you spent so much time there?

WR: Certainly, yes, certainly. I really am. It was the chance of a lifetime for me. I certainly had low points during my career at the Museum and there are things that I could still want to do, but I'm proud of what I did at the Museum. I don't have false modesty about it.

SZ: Why should you?

WR: It was deeply satisfying to me, and I must say that today the remaining satisfactions have been contacts still with foreign museum colleagues and special friendships I feel for members of the staff. When I go back to the galleries, I have six guards saying hello to me as friends, and it's very nice. I think for anyone who's worked as long as I at the Museum, it's a cliché, but it really does become your family, it just does, and all families have their histories, but mine was on the main deeply

satisfying.

END TAPE 5, SIDE 1

SIDE 2, BLANK

END INTERVIEW