DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH:	**ELIZA BLISS PARKINSON COBB (EC)**
INTERVIEWERS:	**CARL COLBY (CC); RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)**
LOCATION:	**ELIZA BLISS PARKINSON COBB'S APARTMENT**
DATE:	**1983**
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EC: A group of people, and that it could never have happened at any other time or in any other way. I think there's a lot in that.

CC: And it was an extraordinary gathering of people?

EC: An extraordinary collection of people that appeared on the scene.

CC: How would you describe your aunt [Lillie P. Bliss] or Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller or [Alfred] Barr? How would they have gathered together? How would that really have happened that they would have found each other?

EC: Well, I think that Mrs. [Mary Quinn] Sullivan, my aunt, and Mrs. Rockefeller were all friends. And I think they may have come together as much as anything through Arthur B. Davies. They were all friends of Arthur B. Davies. I've always felt that he was sort of in the background or one of the founders, although he wasn't even alive when it was founded. And they all made collections which he influenced very strongly. I think he influenced my aunt's collection entirely. I don't think she ever consulted anybody else, and they were awfully good friends. And then these three women—I don't know how many pictures Mrs. Sullivan really had, but she had a husband who was a lawyer who—he gave his services for nothing. That was her main contribution. She did have some Arthur B. Davies paintings; she was a friend of Arthur B. Davies. And they made these collections, and they didn't know what to do with them because if they had left them to the Metropolitan Museum at that time, they would have been put in the cellar; they wouldn't have been known. They were not considered art in this country at all, except by a very small handful of people. And they really founded

the Museum because they didn't want to see their pictures just put away in the cellar. They didn't want to see their collections broken up and have no meaning.

CC: Was it a small group of enthusiasts, really, that this comprised?

EC: Well, there were these three women [who] really started the whole thing. And then they looked around. They went to Paul Sachs, and that's how they got Alfred Barr. And they went to—I don't know how they got [Anson] Conger Goodyear, but he was fired out of Buffalo because he was too modern for the Buffalo museum [Albright-Knox Art Gallery] at that time. So they thought he'd be pretty suitable for what they were trying to do.

CC: So these were outrageous things to be hanging on your walls, even in the late twenties?

EC: Well, the interesting thing is, it really began with—after all, the first exhibition was, what was it; [Paul] Gauguin, [Vincent] van Gogh, and [Paul] Cezanne [*Cezanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh*]. These pictures were pretty well known in Europe for the past 30 years, but they weren't known over here. There were very few people who saw them, so they not only meant a lot in the sense of being rather shocking to the public and interesting to some of the public, but it meant a great deal to the artists. In those days there were only a few artists who could afford to go abroad. It was a long trip on a boat; it was expensive; and they didn't go.

CC: Did you see the interest start to mushroom though as the Museum—? Could you feel that through the late thirties that modern art became more and more pervasive?

EC: I think it changed everything, I mean, even the window dressings in shop windows immediately began to change. And across all installation in museums has changed as it was [INAUDIBLE: 0:03:45]. I think today it's beginning to be affected more by people being afraid of somebody stealing something or smashing something up. Everything's in a glass case wherever you go. But it did certainly change the way pictures were shown. But Alfred Barr was certainly entirely interested in that period from Europe 30 years before, so that although we used to be criticized because we didn't have any contemporary art, we [also]

didn't have any American art. You know, no matter what you have, of course, you're always criticized for not having something else.

CC: Right.

RC: That's true.

EC: But I was on what was called the Junior Advisory Committee, which my aunt and Mrs. Rockefeller founded, I think partly because they really did want some young people, and partly because she wanted me and Mrs. Rockefeller wanted Nelson to be in on it. [Laughing] But it was certainly a very brilliant group. I mean, it was Lincoln Kirstein and George Gershwin, of all people.

CC: Oh my god.

EC: And Eddie Warburg, and well, I'll think of more as we go along, but it was a very, very brilliant group.

CC: Well, you were sort of the vanguard then, or at least—

EC: Well, we were called the Junior Advisory Committee and we were told that we were just there to criticize, because we were young and they wanted our opinions. And so we criticized. [Laughter] We had a very good time doing it. We got very excited about it. We used to sit sometimes and have meetings all day long, break up for lunch, and we'd sit on the floor and we'd be raising our hands to be allowed to speak. We were all so excited.

RC: Meeting with the Trustees?

EC: No, by ourselves.

CC: And there'd be Eddie, and Lincoln, and Nelson.

EC: Yes, and Alfred always came to those meetings.

RC: I see. Oh, that must have been great.

EC: Walter Chrysler was on it. The names will come back to me. They're all in a book somewhere, anyway. A great many of them became trustees. Of course, Lincoln went off with the ballet, but Eddie stayed with both, Eddie Warburg.

RC: What were some of the things that you got most excited in a positive way about? What were some of the things that you criticized the most?

EC: The chief criticism at that time on the part of the Advisory Committee was that we weren't showing any American painters and any living painters. And of course we were founded, you see, in 1929, just at the beginning of the Depression. And we never had enough money—we've never had a real endowment fund; we couldn't raise it. And so we criticized them because they didn't show American artists, and the idea was that if they did, that maybe American artists would make some money. And so finally they told us to go ahead and give a show. And so what we—Lincoln was the most professional person on the Committee, and so we were all—we didn't really know how to give a show. [Laughing] So we suggested that Lincoln do it. [Laughing] And Lincoln got people like Ben Shahn, and then—the exhibition could be looked up; I don't remember who all the artists were.

RC: Were these people who were already recognized?

EC: They were young American artists; I mean, I had never heard of any of them, but Lincoln knew about them. Anyway, he got this collection together and we took it to the Trustees with a great deal of pride. And we had a wonderful trustee; his name was Sam Lewisohn. And he used to sleep through all the meetings, but he always woke up when something interesting happened. And he'd just open one eye, and then he'd say something, and then he'd shut it again and go to sleep. So he opened one eye, and he said, "Do you realize that that's John D. Rockefeller being stoned by the mob? Do you realize that that's J. P. Morgan being hung? Do you realize that—?" There was a third one being crucified. And he said, "I thought this museum needed some money." [Laughter] [INAUDIBLE: 0:07:48]. So that was quite appalling, and we were told we couldn't have the show.

CC: The mural show [*Murals by American Painters and Photographers*]?

EC: So then it seemed that—yes, they were murals; the idea was that everybody was going to then decorate their houses with murals by American artists who were starving.

CC: Was [Diego] Rivera one?

EC: No, that was something else again. [OVERLAPPING DIALOGUE; INAUDIBLE]. That was in Rockefeller Center. But Lincoln was very professional accepting that he had no clause in his agreements with the artists, that we didn't have to show the pictures, and so they said they had been commissioned to paint them, and we had to show them, and if we didn't, they would have an independent show and say that the Museum had refused to show them and had broken its contract. So we decided that it was better to show them than not to show them. And we were then in four rooms in the Heckscher Building. And the show attracted so much attention that the Heckscher Building asked us to get out. They said the elevators couldn't stand it. [Laughter]

RC: That's great, really.

CC: Lincoln must have been quite a—was he kind of a rabble rouser in his day?

EC: Well, he was always a controversial person.

CC: He's quite extraordinary. We went to see him and he—of course now he's very bitter, or he's very much against it [the Museum], very vitriolic, but he at the same time, it's as if he felt it went wrong. He still had an initial passion for it all though. He's an interesting character though.

EC: He's a very, very interesting person, a very brilliant person. He is seriously ill. I mean, he is a manic depressive, and it depends on what day you get him. Philip Johnson's been his best friend all his life, but months will go by when he won't speak to Philip. And Philip never knows why. And people just don't pay any attention to it because they know that's what it is.

CC: It's very strange though because—

EC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:09:48] brilliance.

CC: He would say charming things about someone, but then a horrible thing, about Alfred Barr or whatever.

EC: Yes.

CC: Wishing him the worst, and gratified that he spent his last years in such a terrible state, I mean, all sorts of terrible—

EC: Well, he must be in pretty bad shape.

CC: Yes, to be saying things like that.

RC: What about Alfred Barr, though? We enjoy hearing so much about him. He seems like a bigger than life character.

CC: What would your characterization be? We've heard all sorts of—

EC: Well, he's a terribly hard person to describe. He's a terribly hard person, in a way to know, I think. He was so objective and intellectually interested in everything, you know. He was only 27 when he came. He was teaching in, what was it? Smith College?

CC: Wellesley.

EC: Wellesley; teaching at a girls college. He certainly had always a very strong idea. I mean, the minute he heard about this thing, he wanted to do it. And he immediately knew what he wanted to do. The whole Museum really was Alfred's—from then on, after these women decided they wanted to make a museum and their reason was their collections, it was Alfred who thought we must include everything; we must include photography; we must include architecture and design; we must include film. The whole Museum was planned by Alfred as it worked out.

CC: How was it that they—? They were concerned about their collections; they wanted their collections championed or at least given the imprimatur of being genuine?

EC: Well, they wanted people to appreciate modern art, I think. They wanted people to look at what was going on in their own day. They loved these pictures.

RC: I think that's really special.

EC: And as I said, they didn't want them put in the cellar of the Metropolitan. And they just thought it would be nice to start a modern museum. But you can see how unpopular the idea was. It was in the Depression, and my father—my aunt

died in ’31, so it hadn’t really started; it wasn’t out of the Heckscher Building. And she left her pictures to the Museum, her whole collection to the Museum on condition that her executor, who was my father, decided that they had a sufficient endowment fund within three years of her death. So he put a million dollars as the required amount, and they couldn’t raise it. We raised $600,000, at the end of three years; that would have been ’34. And so my father said, “Well, this is what she wanted, so I’m going to give it [the collection] to them anyway.” So he gave it to them anyway, which made it a museum. And then Mr. [John D.] Rockefeller gave us that house which now—it was a house, and we’re now built there, but we tore down the house eventually—but we were in just a private house for quite a while. And they cared terribly, these people, about its becoming something important to people in the world, people appreciating it, understanding it, seeing it, having a chance to see it. See, I think there were only five galleries in New York that showed modern art.

CC: So you could really make the rounds very easily in those days.

EC: Yes, and you couldn’t see very much.

RC: I find it so special that the generation of the women who started it—and then they entrusted their idea or their desire with this very young man, who obviously was brilliant, but *that*, even, is a very special thing, that they gave him basically carte blanche to go off and do and he certainly did.

EC: Yes, they believed in him absolutely.

RC: And his relationship with them, how would you—? Or, how did he deal with that?

CC: You were mentioned in the [Russell] Lynes book [*Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of The Museum of Modern Art*], and you actually mentioned it quite well—the business about he and [René] d’Harnoncourt and the firing of Barr later—that in a way, it was understood that it would have happened that way, that he couldn’t run a gigantic institution like that.

EC: He was a very creative man. He was what I would call an *artiste manqué*. He was not an administrator and an organizer. He was thinking always in big concepts and areas and about pictures. The bigger the Museum got, all with his own ideas, the less able he was to run it. [CC laughs] And the longer it would

take to get anything done. And the Trustees got pretty impatient. A lot of those men were busy with other things; it wasn't the only thing *they* did. And weeks would go by, and things wouldn't happen that were supposed to happen. And he was difficult, I guess, to get along with, in that way.

RC: This is all very interesting. But in the beginning, when he started out—what about tests of wills in the beginning? Because he was very firm with his judgment and opinions. And what about in dealing for instance with your aunt and Mrs. Rockefeller and so forth; do you know what the dynamics were?

EC: There was always, in the Museum, a very strong feeling that you hired a professional of his caliber to do the job because he knew more than you did. And if you didn't like what he did, you fired him. But that if you had him there, you backed him. It was very, very rarely that a picture was turned down if he wanted it. Of course, also, he was very clever and he had a great many devoted disciples, you'd have to call them. And one of them was Jim [James Thrall] Soby, who was at that time the director of the Wadsworth Athenaeum, but had plenty of money of his own and a very fine collection of his own. And he simply gave up his job and came down and became a trustee of this museum and was chairman of the Acquisitions Committee. Well, there was only one Acquisitions Committee for everything. Now, of course, we have one for each discipline, ever since Alfred left. But Alfred was the head of that and everything. And then there was Philip Johnson, and Philip Johnson always had plenty of money, and in those days, most pictures didn't cost much, either. [Laughing] So if the Committee did occasionally turn a picture down, Philip would buy it and keep it until the Trustees came around. [Laughing]

RC: We've heard some great stories about that. The other person we really enjoyed talking to was Bill Lieberman. And he made a good turn of phrase; he said, Alfred created [us], he made us.

CC: He said, "He invented me."

RC: He invented Lieberman. And that's a pretty big thing to say. And he did—a whole group of people. But then, after that generation—I guess talking about the very present, there are people on the staff there who certainly don't have any immediate connection to Alfred Barr.

EC: Some of them perhaps never even knew him.

RC: Right.

EC: But the very difficult thing was that it was a one-generation place, and the turnover to the next generation was terribly, terribly hard. And it caused a lot of tragedies and a lot of difficulties, and I mean, it was a one-generation place, and these people were so dedicated, they all cared in the same way. They wanted to make this thing known to the rest of the world. They saw it—it was like a mission, and I've always thought it was interesting and nobody has ever brought it out, Alfred was the son of a minister. And René was of a family of very, very devout Catholics. He had an uncle who was a cardinal; he has a nephew who is a priest; and his entire family has remained very, very Catholic. He's the only one that left the church and wasn't a practicing Catholic. But I think, for both of those men, art was god and the Museum was the church. And they had such a sense of mission, and they transmitted it to everybody. And people just worked day and night, and they never thought—nobody ever asked if they were going to have a pension when they left. Nobody ever asked for more money than they could possibly live on, because they wanted the Museum to have every cent. It really was true; it just ran right down from the top. And when René came to this country from Austria; well, he came via Mexico. But of course, the thing that interested him the most was this museum. And he recognized Alfred Barr right away as being the man, and he said, "He is Mr. Modern Art; he is the Modern Art Museum." So when they made him director—by this time having decided that Alfred simply couldn't run it—and Alfred really couldn't, and he shouldn't have been doing it—René said that he would only take the job on condition that he could bring back Alfred. And so Nelson Rockefeller, who was president of the Museum then, said, well, you'll be the head of the Museum; you can hire anybody you want, but you'll have to stand between him and us because we just can't cope with it. So René did. He stood between them. He never let on that there were any difficulties at all, but—

RC: But we've heard there were difficulties between René and Alfred.

EC: They were very devoted to each other, really, and very admiring of each other, but Alfred always felt he'd been fired. And then he felt—you know how you hate to be grateful to somebody? He felt that René had brought him back.

CC: How would you describe—? Was Nelson very much his mother's son in terms of his interest?

EC: Yes, I think he got his love of art from his mother. And that's another thing that describes how these people felt about the Museum. After we had finally gotten the pictures and had only raised $600,000, about a year later we went to a meeting and somebody announced that we'd been given a million dollars anonymously. And that night I went home in a taxicab with Nelson. And so I said, "Who gave the million? Come on, you must know." [Laughing] And he just froze; it was like sitting next to a statue; just froze into a piece of stone. And we went into the park, it was a spring night in an open taxi—we went into the park on 59th Street and we came out on 72nd Street, and he never spoke to me and he never looked at me the whole way through the park. And as we were coming out at 72nd Street, he leaned over and he said, "Alright, I'll tell you if you'll never tell anybody as long as my mother is alive." He said, "You see, I just came into my money, and I gave it. But I think it would mean so much more to her if she thought people outside cared." He said, "That's what she wants; that's what she founded it for."

RC: Oh, that's a marvelous story.

CC: That's terrific. That's a very wonderful story.

EC: It really is a wonderful story.

RC: Oh, that's marvelous. So she never found out?

EC: She never did.

RC: Nobody ever divulged?

EC: No, I never told the story until he died, and then I told it to the Board of Trustees when they announced his death.

RC: Oh. And how about yourself? How would you characterize the passing of the torch from your aunt to you? Did you pick up on it right away? How did she groom you for all of this? Or were you immediately interested yourself?

EC: I was interested. I was on that committee, and I was interested, and I stayed interested. And eventually I became a trustee. My father became a trustee when she died, but he didn't like modern art. He was one of the many people who didn't like modern art. He was only interested in doing this for her. So when he had finally accomplished all this, he said, 'Well, I don't like modern art, and I don't want to have anything to do with this place, but my daughter likes it.' And they thought they ought to have a member of the Bliss family on the Board because at that time, really, most of the pictures had come from this family, and so they put me on the Board.

RC: I think that's fair enough. That's calling a spade a spade.

EC: Now, of course, my son is on the Board.

RC: I'm sorry, and your son is?

EC: John Parkinson. And I'm very pleased about that. He's terribly interested in it and seems to be doing them a very good job. He's the treasurer, and the vice president and a member of the Photography Committee. He collects photography. And so he really spends a lot of time over it.

RC: And people really do devote a lot of time to it.

EC: Yes, they do. You get caught up in it.

CC: How about the turning of the Museum into an institution of sorts. That must have been a torch passed from the first to the second generation in a sense. Was that extremely difficult to achieve when Nelson came up?

EC: It seems to me that this has just happened through the fact of its becoming large; larger and larger. And because it now has, I suppose it has, up until [Pablo] Picasso died—I don't know if it's true any more or not, now that his estate is going to the [INAUDIBLE: 0:23:29] museum in Paris and everything, but up until Picasso died, we had *the* definitive collection of Picasso. And we've pretty nearly got it, if we haven't already, of [Henri] Matisse. I know that Bill Rubin has thought

that was the next thing to do. And I don't suppose there is another modern museum that—the closest to it in this country, I used to be told, and I don't know, maybe it's changed, was the Buffalo museum [known] for really representing a cross section of the best of that period. Just where the period ends is always an open question, and nobody's ever said it ended anywhere. But I suppose that we haven't collected modern art, contemporary art, to the same degree, since the Abstract Expressionists, since the New York School.

CC: You seem to have kept up fairly much in contemporary mode. Was this always part of your character?

EC: Well, remember, I grew up with it, of course. My aunt was not married and she had no children, and she was very much a part of our family. We lived in her house and she lived in our house. And I was very close to her, so I grew up with her pictures. And then from there, I went into the Modern museum; I mean, it's been my life. [Laughter]

RC: What do you think though of how the Museum is doing now, its role? Should it attempt to catch up in contemporary works? What's your feeling of where it is and where it might go; or is it good where it is now?

EC: I don't know. I think one of the greatest things about Alfred Barr was that he never defined. Somebody used to say that the power of the Catholic Church is never to explain and never to define. And I think Alfred was an absolute example of that. You never could get Alfred to say that we stopped at one place. We did begin in one place, about 1898. But you never could get him to say that we stopped anywhere; although we certainly have a greater collection of Picasso and Matisse and that area, that vintage, than anything else. But I don't think for a moment that we think we're going to stop collecting, but I don't know what are all the museums in New York going to do or anywhere. I mean, you can't go on forever adding wings and getting bigger. It's a decision I think [that] will have to be taken by several museums together. I mean, I don't know why the Whitney and the Guggenheim—you know, twice we've had arrangements with them all, and they've broken down.

CC: Bill Lieberman was saying that last week. He said he was very surprised that there isn't more of a cross-fertilization.

EC: When we were founded, we were founded with the idea that we were going to be the Luxembourg to the Louvre.

RC: Right.

EC: We were to sell pictures to the Met after somebody was 50 years dead, I think, and hadn't been placed on the pedestal of greatness or whatever you would call it.[1] Somehow it didn't seem to work out. I think for one thing, we didn't really want to part with the pictures. I mean, if we had done that, of course, our whole collection now would be in the Metropolitan, practically.

RC: Bill Lieberman even went so far as to say that he could see having the paintings, the Gauguin and van Gogh paintings.

EC: Well, of course he could. [Laughter] He's in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [Laughing; phone rings at 0:27:05]

RC: Exactly. But that he could see opening up room on this end of the spectrum for—

CC: But it's very difficult though. Once you have—in a way, when your aunt's collection came, it established it as a museum and as in a permanent place, but at the same time it gave it a charter. It wasn't so easy then to let go of those pictures. I mean, those pictures were the core.

EC: Exactly.

CC: The seed from which everything else grew, really. It gave it permanence; it gave the Museum respectability.

EC: Yes. We'd destroy the Museum now if we did that. What I think we should do is, I think that we should have the Guggenheim and the Whitney and the Modern, and let's say the Whitney takes care mostly of American, and the Guggenheim, and then we should make three-year or five-year programs all together, and each museum exhibit so that we don't overlap, and so that everything gets changed, and if you come to New York you know what you can see. But that means we

[1] Cobb is referencing the Inter-Museum Agreement among MoMA, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1947, intended to allow the Met to acquire a number of older works of painting and sculpture from the collections of the two modern museums, freeing them to concentrate on more contemporary acquisitions. This agreement, by which such works as Picasso's *Woman in White*, entered the collection of the Met, was terminated in 1953.

might lend some of our pictures to the exhibition that was going on in the Guggenheim. But they would be labeled Museum of Modern Art.

CC: Sure. I think it's a good idea, because you'd be able to have watershed exhibitions.

EC: In other words, instead of competing, we would all work together for the city. But we would still, each of us, own—

RC: What you have.

EC: Yes. The Guggenheim has the greatest collection of [Vasily] Kandinsky. We've always been very poor in Kandinsky, and this is sort of a landmark in that direction that Bill Rubin was able to affect an exchange. We gave them a Matisse, and they had never had a Matisse.

RC: Oh, I wasn't aware of that.

EC: And they gave us a Kandinsky, and Bill said that he'd been terribly worried about opening because he felt that with what we have, we didn't have a sufficient representation of Kandinsky. And so now—

RC: Oh, so for the opening you had—?

EC: We had an actual exchange. Now we each own each other's pictures; we made an exchange. There are all sorts of ways it could be done. There are lots of ways of skinning a cat. But I think that's what we have to do eventually.

CC: It is like separate apartments. If they would have pooled together at least for exhibitions, they'd be able to achieve fantastic effects.

EC: Of course, while we've been building, we've been lending our pictures all over the country, and all over the world, even.

CC: Sure.

RC: That's good credit for [the] future, too.

EC: After the fire, in that time when we were closed, we sent the body of our collection, the best part of our collection, to the National Gallery in Washington. And it was the collection of The Museum of Modern Art being shown in the

National Gallery in Washington. It looked perfectly beautiful. Of course they had the kind of building for it and everything else. [Laughter]

RC: You had mentioned Arthur Drexler; obviously, you've had some connection with him. What about any other people that come to mind?

CC: Were there great favorites of yours? Iris Barry or...

EC: I never knew Iris Barry very well, and I never got very involved with the Film Department. Somehow or other that never interested me as much as anything else did.

CC: And your son is involved in Photography.

EC: He's involved in Photography.

CC: He's keen on that, and were you more Painting and Sculpture?

EC: I was more Painting and Sculpture, Drawings, and Prints. I think we have a wonderful print curator now, Riva Castleman.

CC: We spoke to her; she was wonderful.

EC: I think she's simply marvelous. She was trained by Bill Lieberman. And I think she's one of the best people we have.

RC: She's very articulate and very art—

EC: She is getting around the world and showing contemporary things from everywhere and buying contemporary things from everywhere, much more than the Painting and Sculpture Department is at the moment, because Bill is chiefly interested in the collection. Which is perfectly valid. It is terribly important, the collection, and he wants to fill the lacunae. And I remember when we were looking for someone for Alfred's place, Alfred came to René and said [tape break at 0:31:21] Bill Rubin came in and he studied the collection for three months and then he made his comments on it. And Alfred came in to René's office and he said, 'I think that this is the man. He's picked all the lacunae.' [Laughter]

CC: You were very instrumental in creating the International Council and involved in that. Was that a very necessary—? You felt at that time it was very necessary to extend yourself beyond your borders in New York?

EC: Well what happened—I think that due credit should be given, and perhaps never is given, to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, who said, after the war, that they felt that American art was not being shown abroad at all, that Europeans didn't know we had any art. They thought we had Cadillac and bubble gum. And that they felt that something should be done, and that we should be properly represented, for instance, in the Venice Biennale. And they offered us a certain amount of money for three years if we would make up a program of sending American art to Europe. And you see, we could do it because we didn't take any government money or any city money. If we had, there would have been painters we couldn't send. For instance, the State Department once tried to send a Ben Shahn and he'd been a communist for a while, and they took it out of the thing right on the dock. And they left. But anyway, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund asked us to do this. So it was put into what was then our—we did have a national circulating program which was run by Porter McCray, who is a very important man. He came in later but he added an enormous amount to the Museum, and I'm sure you will interview him.

RC: Yes, we heard though that he's not too well.

CC: That was Allen Porter.

RC: Oh, I'm sorry.

EC: Oh yes, he's perfectly well. He had his leg cut off because he had cancer in one leg. Now he's going around on two sticks and he's everywhere.

RC: I was getting him confused with Allen Porter.

EC: Allen Porter; no; he must be pretty old now. I didn't even know he was still alive. No, Porter [McCray] would be very important—but he was running the national collection, so we simply put it into his department and he developed his department into the international department [International Program]. And at that time there were only three paintings by Americans in museums in Europe. One was a [John Singer] Sargent, and one was—I think one may have been a Winslow Homer; I'm not sure. There were only three though. And they were certainly not modern. Well, I mean, after this program started, if you went to Paris, you saw all the same pictures that you were seeing over here. And

everybody in France started painting like Jackson Pollock. [Laughing] The whole thing changed. And so as we went along, we realized it was something we couldn't stop, that we'd have to go on doing it. The government didn't do it. See, every other government in the world not only sends out exhibitions but puts paintings in their embassies and so forth. We didn't do anything like that. So we thought, what are we going to do? The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, as a fund, initiates things but doesn't go on supporting them forever. And at that time, Mrs. August Belmont had just started the National Council for the [Metropolitan] Opera, which was purely fundraising. Ours is fundraising but it's a little bit more than that. And she had been a great friend of my family's, and my father was always very involved in the opera, so she made me go on that. So I knew all about this. So I thought, why can't we have this for the Modern museum? And so René sat down and thought for a while and he said, "If the National Council of the Metropolitan Opera can charge $250 a year to be a member, The Museum of Modern Art can charge $1,000 a year." [Laughter] That's the way they felt about the Modern Art museum then. And so we started [the International Council], and we did—

RC: And you did well.

EC: We had a very hard time at first because people thought we were trying to get money away from the local museums. And we had to convince people that they were doing something for their country and for the art of their country, and that they were not robbing their own museums to do it. And so we only wanted collectors and serious people, not just people who had the money to give it to us. We had an awfully hard time; for a long time we had very few members. Now we have a waiting list of over a hundred people. We tried to keep it down to a hundred people and it's gone up to 180.

RC: My goodness.

EC: But it's a terribly interesting institution. And these people now come from all over the world and they've made friends because they all have the same thing in common; they're all interested in the same thing. And they can't wait for the meetings, to see each other again. They come flocking from all over the world; we get them for a few days.

RC: Well, that's the way you should be able to fundraise, make it that special.

EC: And they not only pay very large dues, but they pay a lot of money toward special exhibitions, particularly if they're coming to their own countries. And they're making a contribution; they have a goal of a million and a half dollars toward our capital drive. So they have been a very valuable addition.

CC: You also were very involved earlier with Victor D'Amico in setting up the Education Department.

EC: Yes.

CC: That's been a very commendable program, I would think, in terms of its influence.

EC: Have you seen him?

CC: No, we haven't seen him.

EC: I don't know just what state he is in mentally.

CC: Yes, we had heard [that].

EC: Because I have had communications with him both over the telephone and by letter, and I have the feeling that he doesn't quite know what's going on any more, but I think he would perhaps remember the past very well. And you might find it worthwhile to talk to him, even if you couldn't use everything he said. Because he did do it, and it was really perfectly wonderful what he did. He came in and he made this—what was it called? Not a circus but—

CC: The Young People's Gallery?

EC: It was the young people's something or other [The Children's Art Carnival], and you had little tiny turnstiles, and no adult could go in except with a child.

RC: Escorted by a child. Oh, that's great.

EC: Yes. And then when you got in, the signs all said "Please touch me." [CC laughs] And then there was an organ which you played and it made colors and patterns on the wall.

CC: That's terrific.

EC: And he really did extraordinary things. Then he started a parents and children's painting class, and they all came and painted together. And like everything else in the Museum, it grew too big to handle. And we finally had to—just because we didn't have the space and there were so many people coming in and out, so many children, that we couldn't handle it. And it was time for him to retire, and we gave it up. But the Metropolitan immediately took it and started one up there.

RC: Right, which is still there now.

CC: Were you quite close with Monroe Wheeler? Or what was his exact connection? Was he always even around?

EC: He came in in the forties, he came in later, but he was always in the publishing business in a very special kind of publishing, I mean really rare books and good books. And he was abroad a lot. And he's a *tremendously* sophisticated, knowledgeable man. And he came in as, I think he was our first Director of Publications, when publications were the catalogues that came out with the exhibitions. But under Monroe they became marvelous books.

RC: They are wonderful.

EC: And I think they kind of spawned the coffee table book. I don't think there was anything like that before. But these were very scholarly, of course, and they were about the exhibitions. And Monroe is certainly somebody you would talk to.

CC: We spoke with him and we were very—

EC: Oh, you have. He has got the most brilliant mind still for a man who must be 85.

RC: He does.

EC: And he doesn't miss a [INAUDIBLE: 0:40:11].

RC: He'll make an aside then he'll come right back to the point. That's right.

EC: Yes, and he doesn't—and he never uses a word too many; he never wanders off the subject. It's perfectly extraordinary.

CC: And he can speak just equally as well about the Rockefellers or about a woman from the Bronx coming down and appreciating [*The*] *Sleeping Gypsy*.

EC: Exactly.

CC: I mean, it's really something.

EC: Exactly. And he knows a lot about art and a lot about literature.

CC: What strikes us—and particularly for our audience of one or two million people who will see the film—is that many posters or little reproductions of Gauguin paintings that appear now in countless dormitory rooms in colleges, an awful lot of that is really a direct result of the Museum's sending things out through circulating exhibits—

EC: That's right.

CC: Or through catalogues. Robert Hughes at *Time* magazine, we interviewed him, and he said if it wasn't for the Museum's early catalogues, he wouldn't have known anything about modern art.

EC: Yes.

CC: He was in Sydney, Australia.

EC: Well, speaking of Victor D'Amico, his education was The Museum of Modern Art, himself, he said. And Bill Rubin has said—and Arthur Drexler went to the—there was one, there is, I believe still, the same school—there's just one school in the public school system which is the school for artists. I forget just what it's called.

RC: The School of Performing Arts?

EC: Not Performing Artists because it's for other kinds of artists.[2] And Arthur was a sculptor when he was a little boy, and he was removed from the public school he went to and sent to that school. It was founded by Margaret Lewisohn, Mrs. Sam Lewisohn. And he said his whole education was that school and the Modern Art museum. He said he saw every exhibition and bought every catalogue.

RC: That's a good education, a very good education, the best.

EC: Yes.

CC: So we've gotten great testimonials from various people, from Robert Hughes and from other critics.

[2] High School of Music and Art, 1936-1984. In 1984 it merged with the High School of Performing Arts (established 1947) to become the LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts.

EC: That's wonderful.

CC: And we also plan to talk to a couple of—well, the dealers also. We spoke to Pierre Matisse, Sidney Janis.

EC: Well of course, Sidney Janis was one of the people on the Junior Advisory Committee.

CC: He was on the Advisory Committee early on.

EC: Then he became a dealer, and so we couldn't have him, because we don't have dealers. Pierre Matisse of course has been always enormously generous, given us things by his father.

CC: Well yes, we didn't know that. We interviewed him last week and he was terrific.

EC: Oh he's marvelous, yes.

CC: Impish character.

EC: Yes.

RC: So many people. The Museum brings out the best blood.

EC: If we could have dealers as trustees, we certainly would have both of them. But you can't get into that. I'll tell you somebody that I think you'd find very good to talk to because he's so articulate, if you haven't done it, and that's Robert Motherwell.

RC: He is on our list. Also Sol LeWitt, we were planning on speaking to.

EC: Who?

RC: Sol LeWitt.

EC: Oh, I don't [INAUDIBLE: 0:43:05] him.

CC: He's funny because he's normally been—

RC: He'd worked as a guard in the Museum and then ended up having a one-man show [*Sol LeWitt*].

CC: He also had a one-man show.

RC: And he was involved politically at some point, not wanting to show. So he had kind of an interesting relationship.

EC: That's very interesting.

CC: And he would go when he was young. So it's almost a lifelong connection.

EC: But Motherwell is so articulate, he should almost have been a writer, I think.

RC: It's true, and his writing is so wonderful.

CC: Yes, his writing is very good. The little books he's published, too, are extraordinary.

RC: Yes, we will get around to him.

EC: Of course he is the second generation in a way, but he became awfully close to the first generation of Abstract Expressionists.

RC: He's a good spokesperson for the whole of the American movement.

EC: Yes, and he knew them all. And most of them are dead.

RC: That's right.

CC: We wanted to be able to—what's nice also is, well, Monroe Wheeler and yourself—particularly telling the story about Nelson in the taxi, and it's very similar to the sort of feeling we've gotten from people like Eddie Warburg and all, who give, who evoke, really, a sense of not only the times in the thirties, but also what the people were like who started the Museum. Because it's one thing to evoke Alfred Barr, but to be able to create the feeling of your aunt and what the era was like, and really what drove them to do that, is very interesting. Because people presume too much now. They buy their ticket at the Museum and they think oh, well, my admission will pay for something, but the Rockefellers will pay for the rest.

EC: I know.

CC: They just presume that there was this great largesse.

EC: Well you know, it's funny because it's supposed to be, of course, a great honor now to be on the Board of Trustees at the Modern museum, and people are very,

very pleased to be asked. But when I was first on the Board of Trustees, I used to try to hide it [laughing] because it caused such controversy and such argument, and I had so many rocks thrown at me. [Laughter]

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:44:58