DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH:	**AL HELD (AH)**
INTERVIEWERS:	**RUTH CUMMIMGS (RC); CARL COLBY (CC)**
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AH: Just about covered the turf: good, medium, bad. [Laughter]

RC: Where would you join in on that? Because I know, when I spoke to you, you said, "I have mixed feelings."

CC: I went to a thing the other night and I asked a friend of mine. He's Cuban and he's an artist. He lived in Paris and he's over here. He does relatively well; sort of sexual imagery. But he's quite a good painter. And I asked him, I said I'm doing this thing on The Museum of Modern Art, and he goes, "Ah, The Museum of Modern Art. It used to be really a great place." And I suddenly had this feeling of great excitement and interest in artists, and European connection, and all that that used to be there, and now it's as if I had mentioned a corporation, I think, to him.

AH: No. It's as if you had mentioned a staid institution. And that's not necessarily a corporation, but it's certainly a staid institution. My position is somewhere to the right of Marcia's [Tucker], in the sense that I think also that it stopped functioning as an institute of contemporary art, in that sense. But the other question is, is there enough stuff around to sustain the excitement, even if they did prefer to go in. Let's say, if they chose—if Bill Rubin or company chose to—I don't know if I'm going to bow to say this on film—if Bill Rubin and company chose to go into the live world, so to speak, is there enough life out there to recreate the stuff of the twenties and thirties and forties? Obviously not.

CC: Isn't that really hard for you, though? You're having to judge yourself, in a way.

AH: Well, that's what I'm saying is—you're asking my opinion. My opinion is that there's an awful lot of stuff going on, but historically it's the late stages of

modernism. The early stages of modernism produced an enormous amount of—it's the first blush of romance, with all its headiness. The problems in late modernism are radically different from the problems—it's the problems of middle age. It's not just the problems of middle age of The Museum of Modern Art, it's the problems of middle age of modernism, or old age, I mean, depending upon where your position is. That's why I said that I'm a little to the right of Marcia in the sense that I'm not as gung-ho as Marcia is about the terrific ongoing deluge of creativity. On the other hand, she's perfectly right that The Museum of Modern Art stopped dead in its tracks. And as far as I'm concerned, the absolute visual symbol of the mental state of The Museum of Modern Art is the miserable building they built [César Pelli 1984 expansion]. That is a visual symbol of the banality of—I mean, that building is so banal. The crime of that building is that it's not even a mistake. They didn't even have enough courage or adventure to make a mistake. You can't even complain about it as a mistake, because they didn't even take a shot. It's that banal. And that is really the state of affairs. And that building and the expansion, is a perfect graphic symbol of where the mental center of The Museum of Modern Art really is. On the other hand, Bill Rubin is no friend of mine. I think he's a terrific thinker. The problem with The Museum of Modern Art is, there aren't two or three Bill Rubins who he can knock heads with.

RC: Yes, that's right.

AH: That's the problem. The problem isn't Bill Rubin. The problem is there aren't strong enough personalities who can take him on. But he represents his position very well, and he's a terrific person for his position. And he's not to be faulted for that. His passions are real and authentic. No problem there. The problem is that the void of occupying other positions to balance out Bill Rubin. There's nothing there. That's the problem. But I wouldn't fault Bill Rubin. Or maybe I would fault Bill Rubin if he says that he doesn't permit any peers. But what Bill Rubin and the institution needs is a number of peers to represent other positions. His position is well represented by a major figure, and I think Bill is a major figure in that sense. But it's a major figure of history; he's an art history professor, and his instincts are as an art history professor.

CC: Do you think someone like Marcia is—? She's a show person; she wants to put on exhibitions; she's looking at everything. But is it a little bit scatter-shot? A morass, a big mess?

AH: Marcia?

CC: Yes. Well not just her, but...

AH: I think Marcia's fantastic. I think she's extraordinary. I mean, if you stop and think, that she's actually done the impossible. She's created a museum out of nothing, in this day and age, in the middle of a recession, in the middle of a depression, I mean, the middle of you name it. With every other institution it's been sort of like screaming their heads off about not being able to pay for toilet paper, [and] she's created it out of nothing, and with nothing; a museum! It's crazy! Nobody, even her best friends, didn't believe it was possible. So she has done something remarkable. Her enthusiasm for contemporary work is incredible. I don't go along with it. We have our differences. But she has in fact created something that, I don't know of anybody who had gave her that much chance to do it.

CC: So there's really no place for her, obviously, in anything like The Museum of Modern Art, if there's a Bill Rubin there too. It's almost impossible. It all has to be dictated from above, and, you couldn't have those kinds of shows. When we were there the other day, she had somebody who does psychic readings in this incredible environment, and there were all these, I don't know...

RC: It was so jam packed, you wouldn't have believed.

CC: 150 very interesting drawings. Actually what they are are working spaces. They're like a little studio thing. They're interesting.

AH: Marcia and I talked about it. She's created a kunsthalle, a little kunsthalle—[she's] created a kunsthalle in New York City, which was badly needed. And I think she performs an incredible service, and she's created her own institution, which is remarkable. I mean she's remarkable.

CC: You don't think like a division at MoMA could be doing that? It's too much of a cutting edge?

AH: I don't know if you know this, but I don't know this. I don't know the inside work of The Museum of Modern Art. I don't know if you know this [INAUDIBLE: 0:08:06]; I used to work there.[1]

RC: Oh, no, wait; maybe Marcia said that you had worked there.

AH: I was a paint handler. In other words, I was a blue-shirt man. I wasn't part of the curatorial...

CC: You were part of the physical plant.

AH: Yes. I was a blue-shirt worker there. I was, you know, [a] storage man, shipping, receiving end of the...

CC: Right.

AH: I saw the workings of The Museum of Modern Art from another perspective.

RC: Oh, that's good. What was that like? What impressions has it left?

AH: Working there was very exciting; you see a lot of paintings that—that was the time that the International division was quite active, and they were doing a lot of shows. And I used to handle a lot of those crates. And it was very exciting to see all of those paintings that were never shown in The Museum of Modern Art. That was very exciting. It was the most class-conscious institution I ever worked in in my whole life. In my whole life, I've never been working for an institution that was as class-conscious of the divisions of class as at The Museum of Modern Art.

RC: And what years?

CC: In the hierarchy of the trustees and the other people?

RC: And even the curatorial staff as opposed to—?

AH: Oh, the curators. Try to date a girl on the secretarial floor from the blue-shirts; impossible. [Laughing] I was that—it was really heavy.

CC: And you're a painter.

[1] Al Held was hired in 1954 and worked in the Distribution section of the Department of Circulating Exhibitions and International Program.

AH: It's heavy.

RC: What years was this?

AH: '53, '54; I've forgotten now; someplace in there. I only worked there for about a year.

RC: So you were around the heyday exhibition of the Abstract Expressionists?

AH: Yes. Off the norm.

CC: Did you feel then that it was a pretty going place, or was it already kind of—? Were there other things going on outside?

AH: Oh yes.

CC: What was the climate like then?

AH: Well, The Museum of Modern Art was late with Abstract Expressionism. And that's [Alfred] Barr's scope, I mean, that's Barr's responsibility, Barr's scope. And I think Barr was very good. What I'd say about The Museum of Modern Art, and I said this to Dorothy Miller, I said, "Mr. Barr," basically to Dorothy Miller. By the time I said it to Barr he was already ill. I don't think he understood. When I was a young man, a young artist, I went to Paris. I had only been studying art about a year and a half. But, you're interested in modern art in the early fifties, in 1949, 1948, the fifties, the only place in town was really The Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim too, but The Museum of Modern Art. By the time I got to Paris two years later—I had only been looking at art for two years—I spent three months in Paris. I spent three years in Paris, but I spent the first three months in Paris looking around for the real stuff. Because I couldn't find the real stuff. What I'm really saying is that my eye had been so developed, not just the mind, but I'm talking about *the eye*, and the typical representative of my group of Europe in America. Not American, New Yorker. The European French equivalency of me didn't see as many first class—didn't see any at that 1950—*any* first class paintings of [Paul] Cezanne's, [Pablo] Picasso's, [Fernand] Leger's, [Henri] Matisse's. If somebody spoke to me in those days about Matisse or Picasso, the only Matisse's and Picasso's I was conscious of were the ones in The Museum of Modern Art. I didn't know they were the best or the worst. They were Picasso and Matisse. So when I saw the schlock, I was shocked, because

I had cut my teeth on The Museum of Modern Art. And The Museum of Modern Art was the greatest education for art in the city of New York. It brought standards, the unconscious standards, the eye-conscious standards up, way, way up, very high; very, very, very high. And it is a teaching mechanism. I think that that collection had a great deal to do with Abstract Expressionism. It merges with Abstract Expressionism by the quality that it presented to you. Not just [INAUDIBLE: 0:12:43], and that was actually [INAUDIBLE: 0:12:45]. I went to Paris naively with [the idea that] Picasso is Picasso, Matisse is Matisse and those Matisses and those Picassos. It wasn't until I got to Paris I realized there were other Picassos, other Matisses, other Cezannes, that weren't those.

CC: Yes. And also a lot of other painters that weren't up to snuff.

AH: Yes, a lot of them.

CC: So your trip to Paris led you back to New York, then?

AH: Well, I stayed in Paris; it was a great education, too, for other reasons. But what I'm really saying is that the development of the art quality came out of The Museum of Modern Art. And that directly connected to Barr. And I think he raised the quality of the development of the eye and the vision of artists in New York, really, just—you can't measure it. You can't measure it.

CC: So no matter, institution, non-institution, the fact just of its own collection and the fact that it's assembled—

AH: It was there and it raised the visual cultural level just up, not 10 percent or 20 percent, but I mean radicalized it. Just brought the culture level up, the visual level up, radically. People just simply weren't—[you] couldn't look at schlock after The Museum of Modern Art.

CC: Right.

AH: They knew the difference. It was just there, all the time.

RC: Now even because of that I'm wondering—I doubt that people, being in a similar position to you—

AH: And I was a very innocent kid. I mean it wasn't that I was sophisticated or came from a sophisticated family.

RC: Right.

AH: These were—you went to The Museum of Modern Art, you paid your money, you walked through the halls, you looked at these paintings, and your eye got developed.

RC: But people now wouldn't make the trip to Paris. In fact Parisians, Italians, everybody's coming here.

AH: Well no, Paris now—20 years later, The Museum of Modern Art in Paris has an incredible collection. It's not nearly—I don't think it still is as good. But [there was] nothing 25 or 30 years ago, there was none. There was not a Cezanne to be seen in Paris.

CC: The only thing that was there that I remember was the [Constantin] Brancusi studio, which was nice, and they had that and that was about it.

AH: Well at that time I was there, Brancusi was living in a studio that I had went [to and] visited and that was another trip. But The Museum of Modern Art in Paris didn't have any Matisse's or Picasso's or Cezanne's. The only thing they had, which was a tremendous impact on a lot of people, not me as much as a lot of other people, were the *Water Lilies* that had just opened.

RC: At the Jeu de Paume?

AH: Yes. That was very important, [for] Americans in Paris seeing the *Water Lilies* and the installation. It's very, very important.

RC: But then they came—what year did they come to The Museum of Modern Art?

AH: It never did. I mean, they had one "Water Lily"—

RC: Set.

AH: But I'm talking about the installations. I mean it's environmental and the walls curve and the whole thing and it goes beyond—I mean it's everything that Barnett Newman talked about for 20 years afterward.

CC: I know, it's really.

AH: Peripheral vision. So those things could not be seen in New York and those were very important connections. I think that was about the only thing [INAUDIBLE: 0:16:23] Barr [INAUDIBLE: 0:16:26] in terms of [INAUDIBLE: 0:16:28] the School of Paris.

CC: What was it that made him miss the Abstract Expressionists, do you think?

AH: I don't know, I was a young artist, I mean...

CC: Yes.

AH: I wasn't privy. I mean, I was a young, innocent kid in 1950. He was late on, that's for sure, and a lot of carping from the older men, I'll tell you that.

CC: So it was a pretty popular spot though? The Museum was a pretty popular spot by then. Wasn't it?

RC: A meeting place. Did artists meet? And was that the place to meet?

CC: Wasn't it pretty?

AH: When you said a pretty popular spot, it was a great pick-up place. [Laughter] It used to be a great place in the Garden to—it used to famous—a number of famous—when I working there, there was always these—they weren't necessarily artists, they were just simply people that hang out. And they were very, very—they were famous among the staff. They would show up every day and pick-up women. And it was a great pick-up place, The Museum of Modern Art garden. A great pick-up place.

RC: Well now it's officially listed in those swingles guides to New York, you know, museums.

AH: Oh, is it?

RC: Sure museums are.

AH: I'm older now, I'm way too fat. [Laughter] But in those days it was—

CC: [Laughing] You used to see the same guys come in?

AH: Oh, the same guys. There was Harry the Hat, and there was a few other people, and when I was working there I used to sort of watch them operate.

CC: [Laughing] They were like quasi artists, or they'd be—?

AH: Yes, quasi artists, yes. There were a number of artists who dropped by, who had studios uptown. Dropped by, and you could meet them there occasionally.

RC: Like [Mark] Rothko?

AH: Like Rothko, right.

RC: We know that. Did you know Sol LeWitt when he was working there? We heard he—

AH: Well Sol worked there, yes, I knew Sol then. And Sol worked there a year or two after I did.

RC: Who else, whether they're associated—?

AH: Well, Bobby worked there, Bobby Ryman.

RC: Right.

AH: And Nick Krushenick. And [Dan] Flavin worked there. And, you're talking about my [time there]?

CC: Yes.

AH: I can't remember. A lot of people worked there. But I only worked there a year.

RC: And the paintings that you were seeing were ones that the Museum was—from their collection—sending out to international exhibitions?

AH: Oh, there was this one show I remember which fascinated me which was the show—the title of it was called Early Works of Modern Masters [*Early Works by Modern Masters*]. And the guessing games—we'd pull out the crates and the guessing game would be—we'd pull out a painting and say, "Who's that?" And it was fascinating to see a lot of the early work of people who you know were showing, but you couldn't recognize [because] their styles had changed so radically. So, it was stuff like that, and a lot of other shows, a lot of thematic

shows. The Museum would only show their heavyweight themes, specific. Then they would make up a lot of other things which were minor. And they would make up these international shows to send away.

CC: What was their building like then? In the fifties it was the monolith.

AH: It was the building before [Philip] Johnson got his hands on it.

CC: Right. [Laughter]

AH: It was pretty much the original building.

CC: Yes, we talked to Johnson—it's kind of funny, I mean his eyes lowered a little bit when he talked about this new building, too. Because, you can imagine, I mean there's a guy that helped put the whole goddamn place together.

AH: Well, I didn't think he did such a good job himself in the addition.

CC: Oh you mean the addition of the '64 [building]?

RC: Oh, the new—you mean the older—?

AH: The older new wing, or the new whatever.

CC: You mean the ones with the circles or something?

AH: Yes, I didn't think that was such a terrific addition to it.

CC: He's a funny character.

RC: Compared to some of the museums—

AH: He could do better. What?

RC: Yes, compared to some of the museums, of this grand, awesome...

CC: At least it stuck its neck out a little bit.

AH: At least it did a little something. Yes, but...

CC: Like his new building with that—

AH: The new building is something—I mean I just, I haven't seen the whole thing completely done, but from just the temporary gallery that I have seen and the model, it doesn't strike me as—as I said, it's banal.

CC: No, I mean—I mean his new, Philip Johnson's new—

RC: No, he's not doing the tower, he didn't get the tower.

CC: Philip Johnson's one...

RC: AT&T with the Chippendale kind of—

AH: Oh, the Chippendale.

CC: [Laughs] He must be having fun, I guess.

AH: Well, he's—it's the post-modernist trip he's on and he's a little late on it. He's always been a little late in those things, but he's obviously a good practitioner. He's always, like, 30 seconds late but he's always there.

CC: Uh huh.

RC: Do you think there's a consensus—? I mean, if you could describe if there was a consensus among artists now about the relation [and] the position of the Museum? Do people consider it just a good place to go and look at great paintings? Is it still that kind of resource, or are people kind of [like] we don't need to see this? Maybe I'm talking about younger artists; I don't know if you're in touch with them.

AH: Well, younger artists; two things. I don't think you can get a consensus in the New York art world about any position. I don't think there's [INAUDIBLE: 0:21:52]. It's too large, it's too fragmented, and I don't think it's possible, getting consensus about [INAUDIBLE: 0:22:05] let alone [INAUDIBLE: 0:22:07].

RC: Yes.

CC: I mean—you used to feel like, in the fifties, at least, that there was much more of a fixed—

RC: There was a community, one kind of—

AH: Well, there was—this community was much smaller and there were ebbs and flows and feelings about things, and even in the sixties and the seventies, it got larger and larger and got more and more distinctive. By this time, I don't think it's possible today, a consensus. I miss it. The trouble with the New York art world is that about 75 percent of it is under 30. So, in two years, the population changes so radically that I would say that about 50 percent of the so-called art world, meaning people under 30, don't miss it because they've never been in it. [Laughter] I'm not kidding. The population turns over. If you had a large show in New York, let's say five years ago, and haven't had a show since—50 percent of the so-called art world wasn't around to see it. [phone rings] Now it's a ridiculous thing to say but it's the truth, the attrition is so radical.

CC: It's funny because it makes me think—I don't know, even in late sixties, you had a feeling of—I was pretty young myself but I'd come up—I knew people. I worked in a gallery in Washington. I worked with this guy, Max Protetch, who has a gallery now. And we used to come up here and, in a way, I felt, even then, you'd meet a bunch of people. You'd go to a bar, and it'd be [Robert] Smithson and all these people would be there, and you'd talk to them all and go out to dinner and it'd be—it just seemed like a smaller group. I didn't feel that there were 650 kids from the University of Oklahoma who were here suddenly as artists. It just didn't feel that way.

AH: It already was growing very rapidly.

CC: By then?

AH: But now, it's completely out of hand.

CC: Completely, it seems completely out of hand.

AH: Well, I don't know.

CC: Maybe not.

AH: Again, that's the way the world is in New York.

CC: Yes. So New York is Paris now, with millions of artists—

AH: Oh, by the sixties it was already that. By the sixties it was already that. I'm saying, it's just grown so large—I mean it's so international now, the people are floating in and out from all over the world.

CC: Do you still see good work? Or you think it's a lot of stuff in the middle? I mean, anything excite you very much?

AH: You're talking to a 50-year-old man, [laughter] a middle-aged man. I don't get as angry as I used to. So maybe the work isn't as exciting. [Laughter] I don't know. I mean, maybe I measure it that way sometimes. My blood doesn't get up as fast and as high as it used to. This so-called new style of punk art, expression, whatever you would call it. I can't get terribly agitated about it. It just seems like another late stage of avant-garde-ism. You know, I don't—I can't see it as—

RC: Something that will last?

AH: Maybe that might be my problem. What?

RC: Doesn't seem like something that will be here in 10 years?

AH: Not that it won't be here. I think it's part of the same manifestation of things that have been here for the last 25 or 30 years. It's just simply—it's got a new set of clothes, it's in drag. It's the same thing. It's avant-garde gestures. And so, I don't get agitated or excited because I don't really see it as really new ideas to even take a [position to] be for it or against it. I just see at as the same cycle, just with a slightly different style to it. So frankly, I'm a little bored by the—

RC: Turnover.

AH: The number, again. And, so, but then as I said, maybe I've been around too long. The art world gets, you know—maybe we're divided now into a lot of different segmented places. I would say 50 percent of it is kids under 30 who, this is their time, so to speak. They're acting as though it's Paris 1908. Maybe they should, because it is their time and their—I can't feel them.

CC: Yes.

AH: Maybe it's true, maybe it's not. From my perspective, it's done.

RC: What about a place to show the art of your generation. Will The Museum of Modern Art today have a show of, let's say your works? You would be honored by that? Would you feel—? How would you feel if they came to you?

AH: Oh sure, I mean the Museum—well The Museum of Modern Art is still a very important place to have a show. It's still probably the—it used to be a lot more important, but [it] still [has] probably got the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval more than any other institution. It's not as dominant or as all dominant as it used to be. It used to be like the, *the* preeminent place. It no longer is that.

RC: What is now? Are galleries more important now?

AH: No, it's the other museums, I mean I think its spread out a little bit.

CC: It dissipates a little bit.

AH: Yes it's just spread out more in the sense that, if, let's say, if you want to play the game, you would say if all the museums in New York came and offered me a retrospective, I wouldn't automatically chose The Museum of Modern Art. Like 10 years ago, I would say that it would probably be the preeminent place. Now I would, if I had my druthers, I would then analyze their commitment, the level of their commitment, the space, the light, and factor a lot of stuff in, in terms of how I feel about their space versus using somebody else's space, how I feel about the curator who'd be working on it as compared to another curator. So, in the past, they could name their own shows.

CC: Right.

AH: I don't think it's possible now. I think now if there was a heavy competition for a superstar, they'd have to compete. Where before, say, 10 or 20 years ago, they were the predominant institution, they wouldn't have to compete, they would simply say, we'd like to show you and they would assume you'd accept it.

RC: So, for instance, I mean, you're thinking the Whitney? Or you're thinking San Francisco?

AH: Well there's the Met, there's the Whitney, there's the museums I think in Washington now, in Chicago, the West Coast. There are a lot places.

RC: Oh, really?

AH: Yes. Because I'm a New Yorker, I mean, my preference is still, that the predominant place would still be New York, but even in New York it wouldn't be an automatic choice to taking The Museum of Modern Art over the Whitney or the Met or the Guggenheim. One of the drawbacks would be, [of] the Guggenheim—I just don't like the space. You know, it's just not good for my work. Where[as] with somebody else's work, it might have been much better, just the other way around. But they've lost ground in that sense. They have to compete for shows.

CC: It's a very strange place for that, it's—

AH: No, I'm talking about the Modern.

CC: Oh, the Modern.

AH: But, as I said earlier, the Modern has lost ground, lost its preeminent place in New York. But whether it could be faulted for not being as exciting a place as it was in the thirties and forties, or whether you don't have to come to figure in the level of the art world that [INAUDIBLE: 0:31:27].

CC: No, and their preeminent spot of; you're right. I mean it's like it's a successful—I mean it's kind of crass but, it's like it was the only restaurant in town, and it was the best place and everybody went there.

AH: Sure.

CC: And the club, and—

AH: I'm factoring in one other thing, that there were a dozen great chefs functioning at the time.

RC: Right.

AH: You know, and how many great chefs are working today? That's the point.

CC: Sure. It seems to be too—I mean it's funny because when you're talking about your work and all, it just sort of hit me that Bill Rubin, obviously, is terrific for the

past, and I'm sure he's out finding some Cezanne now or filling his gap with whatever, whatever, and that's terrific, that's his job.

AH: He's a passionate man.

CC: Yes, no, he's great at that. And then there's this huge, wide gulf, I feel, all the way over to Kynaston McShine, who is running around like with his head cut off trying to find new work to put into the new show and the new this and the new that. And then I think to myself, well hey, wait a second. You know, if he's over here trying to chase after Italians or whatever, and he's handling Cezanne, and big figures, and movements.

RC: Yes, who's dealing with the last 20 years?

CC: You know, what's going [on] about all the good work in here?

AH: Did you know?

CC: Who's collecting? Who's dealing?

AH: Did you know that a year ago, they had a search—The Museum of Modern Art had a search. For two years, an ongoing search for two years, for a curatorial position, to fill that very position. And after a search—

CC: Two years search?

AH: A two years search for this position. And they were almost about to focus on one or two candidates that had lasted out the two years.

CC: [Laughs] Yes.

AH: In some internal workings of The Museum of Modern Art, they dropped the project.

RC: Oh no.

AH: Just this happened last year. It would be, if you're interested, probably a question. I'm telling you some information about The Museum of Modern Art very much in line with the question you're asking, which is one; why did they

conduct a two year search for another curatorial position, to fill this very space that you're asking?

CC: Right.

AH: And then after two years of intensive search, through some internal political mechanism, dropped it. And, if you get the answer to that, you get the answer to what the whole psychological state of The Museum of Modern Art is. And, [what] I'm suggesting is that, there were forces in The Museum of Modern Art who understood that there was this great goal, in fact, and wanted to fill it with not one of their own, because they knew that they were short.

CC: Sure.

AH: And looking for a young curator, not being able—you know, and then finally focusing on two or three candidates, when they were about to hire somebody. So other forces in the Museum were able to squelch the whole project.

RC: Hm.

CC: Yes, because it's funny—because I can imagine very easily Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller running around in the fifties or early fifties let's say, or whenever, going down to see so and so's work. And, you know, here he's busy—he's been there 20 years, so he's busy with his Cezanne's and all, but that's not that far gone, you know. And Matisse is still alive, or just about.

AH: Picasso is still alive.

CC: People are still around, you know, [Georges] Braque and Picasso, and I mean, you know, they're still working. So all these people, these great old masters are still working in the present day. And then there's this new group that he's just barely getting familiar with, and Dorothy is his scout. And Dorothy's playing Kynaston McShine. She's running around all the galleries and finding all the studios—terrific. It seems to be that can be manageable. But then by the late sixties, you know, Pop art and all this other stuff coming up, you know, the gulf gets even wider. And, Jesus, by 1983—

RC: They're still trying to catch up.

CC: By 1983, you've got this one guy lording over this entire area, but yet his love is over here. And then you've got this little chicken over here.

AH: One of the great tragedies of The Museum of Modern Art was that they were grooming somebody for that job, but he died. His name was Frank O'Hara.

RC: I wasn't aware that he was in the Museum. I know he was a poet among painters.

AH: Well he was also a full-time curator of The Museum of Modern Art.

RC: Gee.

AH: You didn't know that?

RC: I didn't know that. If you look up the positions, you'll see that—and Kynaston was one of his junior aides, among other people. And he was the one. And he would have been a much stronger personality to have counterbalanced Rubin.

CC: Oh sure.

RC: Oh yes.

AH: And, if you ask—it's just at that time that there was a changing of the guards, when Frank O'Hara died.

CC: Well I guess it's tough, I mean you know, somebody like Rubin, if he had somebody for that middle ground, and for the late—for the new stuff, obviously it would threaten his reign.

AH: Well you see Kynaston. I don't even think—I don't think Kynaston—Kynaston's not quite my age. But Kynaston's been around through my—I think Kynaston, like myself, may be a little too old to sort of get out there and beat—

RC: Beat the bushes.

AH: He's of my time.

CC: Really? I didn't know that.

AH: I mean he's a little bit younger, but he's a sixties man.

CC: It's funny, I just am a little shocked because, you know, you look at the department and it doesn't have to [be] the biggest department, you know John Szarkowski and his little group take care of Photography. But, you know you think about it—Rubin. We talked to a few people: Rubin, Kynaston, who is so nervous he doesn't want to talk really, because it's a hot seat. I mean, he's really uptight. And then, you know, who did we talk to? Alicia Legg or someone? Jesus she's there, and she's got her big picture of Alfred Barr on her wall, the poor lady. I sympathize with her, but I left after 10 minutes. What can I say to her, you know?

AH: Well, I think you go back and ask them why that project of hiring a younger man—

RC: That's a real good thing to ask.

AH: —was abandoned after two years of work.

RC: We're supposed to see Bill Rubin again.

CC: Yes, we'll ask him that.

AH: I think that's a significant question.

RC: Yes. Well, we're aware of the kind of directions among the Trustees. There's some very, very conservative, you know [feeling that] we're successful and going [to] watch our step, and everybody looks at us, and let's not get out there. And then there's other people who were—

CC: But there's a good part of them, and even surprising ones—

RC: An older man named Walter Thayer of Whitney Communications is really supportive, and Barbara Jakobson, let's go get 'em, and Donald Marron.

CC: Ivan Chermayeff.

RC: So there's—but who knows what the direction will be? I mean it probably—

AH: Did you talk to Bill Paley?

CC: Not yet.

RC: We're going to. Yes.

AH: It's really—again, if you keep asking that question, why did they have a need to go on an exercise of two years to look for a younger curator, and then why did they abandon that? I think, getting some answers to those questions will give you the answer to the question about.

CC: Yes.

AH: But then, I'll ask a serious question of [INAUDIBLE: 0:39:05], and you can ask other people this question: Do you think there's enough material out there to recreate the excitement?

RC: Well, that's what even Bill Rubin was saying.

AH: I mean, have other people discussed this?

CC: Bill Rubin.

RC: Bill Rubin said that very thing. And he also said, kind of off the record, he said, I don't know how I'd say this, but I don't get the feeling here. He said, not that we used to do [INAUDIBLE: 0:39:26] he doesn't.

CC: He said after the sixties he doesn't feel as much.

RC: What is all this? He said people that came to the fore who were mature artists by '65 were really—he said that's the cut off point for him.

AH: And it may be our age limitation.

RC: It may be your generation. Okay. At least you went as far as to say that.

AH: It may also be the truth. But that's something that's debatable.

RC: Right.

CC: Well, he also brought up—and it's true—he said, look at the 19th century in Italy; [what] will you remember from the 19th century? The Futurists and what else?

RC: Sometimes there are stale periods in art.

CC: What were the Dutch doing in the 19th century?

AH: But it's a hell of a place for the head of The Museum of Modern Art to be saying.

RC: To be saying... [laughter]

AH: And it should be.

CC: And he's glad about the fact—and it's so funny because you'd think the guy who's head of The Museum of Modern Art would be upset every day that passes that makes his tenure that much longer, that makes 18—you know, [Édouard] Manet to whoever you're going to name today. I mean, every day gets longer and longer because this doesn't come up.

AH: Did you know about the—?

CC: But he's glad about that, because I think the more it goes up, the more this period becomes richer and more memorable.

AH: Do you know about the other situation, which is really the turning point for The Museum of Modern Art, which was the arrangement that they had with the Met?[2]

CC: Yes.

RC: The pictures, yes.

AH: And after they gave the Met their first delivery of paintings, Alfred Barr, and this is Alfred Barr. It got [INAUDIBLE: 0:40:57]. It was a knife in his stomach; he couldn't do it.

CC: He couldn't give them the pictures; he didn't want to give?

AH: He couldn't break up the collection. See, the original arrangement was the most idealistic thing in the world. It was perfect. When a painting—when the paintings got to be—

CC: Classic.

RC: Mature.

[2] 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.

AH: Historical, classical, they would then go to the Met. The Met would give The Museum of Modern Art their market value. By giving The Museum of Modern Art the market value that means it would be a continual—

CC: Fund for buying.

AH: —fund, a capital fund that The Museum of Modern Art would then have this money to then buy contemporary art. And let's say one out of 10 paintings would be good. But, if they had a batting average of one out of 10, they would still have—it would be a continuum. It would go on forever and because they would have a source of capital they would be continual. And with their expertise in picking out the real stuff, so to speak, they would be able to assure themselves this continued. And The Museum of Modern Art would continually always to be modern. And the—

CC: Like what Marcia [Tucker] wants—is doing.

AH: Well she's not doing that, because that's something else; she's not collecting.

RC: She said she is going to. Her plan now is to have—

AH: She's changed her... [laughs]

RC: —a collection, and every 10 years have one show of it and then sell it off.

AH: Uh huh.

RC: That's her and she was—

CC: But at the same time, she doesn't have 62 Cezannes.

AH: Alfred Barr did it.

RC: One time.

AH: He went into the agreement; they signed the papers with the Met, and they had this tight agreement. They actually did do it. And some Cezannes and Picassosé quite a number of Cezannes went, and some [Vincent] van Goghs went over to the Met.

RC: So that wasn't from [Lillie P.] Bliss's collection then, or it may have been.

AH: I forget who.

CC: But it must have like all of [a] sudden—he felt, wait a minute.

AH: When he just saw that hole in it, he just died, he just died.

CC: Yes because his whole thing wiped—

AH: Then they just walked away from the agreement.

RC: Bill Lieberman, we were speaking to, and he said you know, I'd like to lop off the first 15, 20 years, and take their Cezannes.

CC: He'd like to get that deal back.

AH: It was a, from my perspective, a very rational and very true—I mean it was a good idea.

CC: But that's a radical departure.

RC: That's a rational—

CC: From then on, when they decided to have that collection.

AH: But I think that's—from that day on—

RC: They had a new set of responsibilities.

AH: Right.

RC: Yes, it was a different mission.

CC: It became a real museum.

AH: More difficult.

CC: Yes.

RC: Sure.

CC: True.

AH: It gets full of old relatives and old loves, and you're—and yes indeed, they're better paintings. I mean like...

CC: Hah-hah!

AH: What I mean to say by that is that maybe better paintings are being painted today, but old paintings you don't—you know, there's so much history, it's no question.

RC: Yes.

CC: Oh, sure.

AH: So, so long as they're there, of course they're valued.

CC: When I look at the permanent collection in The Museum of Modern Art, you know, you go through it and you've seen some of them so many times. They have such historical value. You look at it as a painting, as a whole thing. Then you go to Marcia Tucker's, and you're really looking at art then. I don't know if it's good art, bad art, but you're looking at what purports to be art. You're not looking so much at your old friend again, you know, and see whether your old friend has changed.

RC: Or the historical document, yes.

CC: It's very rarely that you look at a painting and then finally decide, you know, I liked it when I was—you know, years ago, but it really is shit now. I mean that happens sometimes, but not with the great ones.

AH: I disagree with you. Marcia, she beats the bushes to find the same kind of frenetic kind of art. I don't believe that that's—I have many arguments with Marcia, I think, because I have a deep respect for her. She's admirable in the most extreme sense but she and I basically, fundamentally disagree about art through America in the sense that I think her drive for better commercialism and [to] bring commercialism into high art is for me not.

CC: I think in a way what you're saying is, leave the artists alone. Let the art percolate up; let the good stuff come in. Go visit the art, see what's going on, and if there is something going on, recognize it. But the other school might be,

horsewhips and 600 shows every year in New York. And, where's the stuff? You know, let's get these galleries, and people trooping by the galleries all the time; let's get that.

AH: Actually, I agree with Bill Rubin in this sense. I think there are a lot of galleries now, and the youth portion of them, in America, not just in the art world, but in America. There's an awful lot of galleries. There's never going to be enough galleries to show enough art, because there's always going to be people who need shows. If you quadruple the number of galleries and museums, there'll still be people out there saying, I need a show.

CC: It's never going to be where they're just waiting.

AH: It's not going to be one on one. But compared to what used to be, I think it's fairly—but the trouble with the galleries and the museums is that it's all based—they all run in fashion.

CC: Yes.

RC: Mm-hm.

AH: So you can have a bunch of kids doing something else. They are not going to get attention because the galleries really do—like, two years ago, you couldn't see punk art except in alternate spaces. Now you can't see any other kind of art in the galleries.

RC: Right.

AH: So any kids who do anything else but punk art cannot get a show; no way.

CC: Yes, like somebody like Ivan Chermayeff, for instance, he's very concerned. He thinks the Museum—I mean, he's probably the most contentious of all the Trustees and he's very upset. He says, you know, the Museum of Fashionable Art, he said, you know it's really disturbing.

AH: About The Museum of Modern Art?

CC: Yes, I mean he—well no, I mean, not the Museum, but—

AH: It's not the Museum of Fashionable Art, it's the Museum of—it's not fashionable at all, it's historical.

CC: Well, he doesn't want it to become that. He doesn't feel that that's what it is, but he doesn't want it to become [that]. He was actually strange. He likes the permanent collection. He fears competing with Bloomingdales, though, and being the big, new museum. He's very scared of it being so big.

RC: Sort of like the two-story gift store and with big huge restaurants.

CC: And lots of T-shirts.

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:47:21