

DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH: MARGARETA AKERMARK (MA)
INTERVIEWERS: CARL COLBY (CC); HARVEY ARDMAN (HA); RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)
LOCATION: MARGERETA AKERMARK'S APARTMENT
DATE: 1983
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MA: Yes, I don't know why it would happen, but he gave the money and George Amberg was the first person who was connected—who was really the director of the Dance Art, Theater and Dance¹, I think it was called. And then something happened.

CC: Yes, [INAUDIBLE: 0:00:18] says she doesn't have an awful lot of time, so maybe we can describe to you.

MA: Yes, tell me, why do you need me?

CC: Okay, we'll tell you. We're doing a film on the Museum.

MA: I know that part.

CC: It's an hour. It's a history of the institution more than a history of modern art, because we can't do that in 60 minutes. And rather than simply a bureaucratic, chronological record of what happened year by year by year, we have taken the history and the chronology as we know it, and are beginning to see most of the major players who were involved, and then a few peripheral people, or people who can comment on it. We've isolated the initial 10-year, 15-year period of Barr, et cetera, and then we've gone from there to [the] beginning to ferret out information about the collections, et cetera. What we're trying to do, really, is almost a biography of the Museum, and a story of the Museum from the inside out.

¹ Department of Dance and Theater Design.

HA: And we hope to do it through the words of the people who were there. Rather than having a narrator tell the story, we would interview the people who participated in it so that they could bring it to life; their own personal experience.

CC: And since you know how films are made, we can get right to it. [Laughter] We—instead of there being a narrator just taking you through the ages, which could be very interesting but it most probably would be very boring, we felt we'd do more like witnesses: have the people who were actually there, if they speak well about it, have them tell the stories, and not just tell the factual story because that a narrator can do, even humorously, can tell various things that happened and very succinctly over a lot of montage of little scenes, can tell a quick story, and then have Eddie Warburg, or yourself, or Philip Johnson or John Szarkowski or Beaumont Newhall.

MA: Have you seen him yet, Philip?

CC: Oh yes.

HA: We haven't seen him yet but he's high on our list of people.

MA: Oh yes, absolutely.

HA: And he's very articulate and charming and funny.

MA: Yes.

CC: But for instance, when it comes to the Photography Department, we feel, if we can get Beaumont Newhall—and certainly we've spoken already to Szarkowski, and he's extraordinary. I mean, he jumps all over the room; he has an active imagination.

MA: [Laughing] I know.

CC: He's a good link. I mean, he can link it.

MA: Now how do you feel about Grace Mayer?

HA: Well, we talked to her but we felt that—we weren't certain whether she would make a good film subject or not.

MA: Yes.

CC: It's very...

HA: She's a nice woman and she has some very good memories.

MA: She was devoted, of course, to [Edward] Steichen.

HA: Yes, devoted is exactly the right word.

CC: But how much can you use more than 30 seconds of?

MA: But she's a little whispery.

HA: She's a little whispery, and—

MA: And she's bitter.

HA: Yes, although if you talk to her about Steichen, she is very admiring, of course.

MA: Oh yes.

CC: Also, this is not an official imprimatur that the Museum is fabulous and nothing ever went wrong. If anything, we would have not done our job and the film would be just a piece of cream cheese if...

MA: Yes.

CC: And it won't be interesting if it's just, oh well, the Museum is fabulous and it has affected society, and that's it. We need—

HA: We would like to have some controversy.

CC: A little bit. We can use—

MA: Are you even going into the fire?

HA: I don't know. The fire is kind of an odd episode, and we know about it, and we're not positive yet whether we're going to use it because it was an odd episode that really, in the end, didn't have very much effect.

CC: It's a factual thing. Put it this way: if there are ideological conflicts; if there's a controversy between Bill Rubin and Bill Lieberman, for instance, and not just in terms of personality but in terms of how they see things; if there's a controversy between someone's memory of Barr as being like a dictator dictating taste to people and very systematized, but then someone else who gives an incredibly

loving portrait of it, that sets up a kind of interesting relationship. The Film Department: why did it start out the way it did, or, is it failing itself now, or what are the priorities? These are maybe smaller items, but the very fact that it exists and who chose to champion what at what time is pretty extraordinary.

MA: Well, that is very well covered in a little booklet,

H/C: "Remembering Iris Barry?" [HA and CC simultaneously]

MA: "Remembering Iris Barry," how it all started,

CC: The facts are there, of course.

MA: With hardly any money at all and a very, very small but devoted staff.

HA: You saying just what you said, that it started with hardly any money at all and a very devoted staff, brings it to life.

MA: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

CC: I mean, Mary Lea Bandy can tell us the story and Harvey could tell me art history from a booklet, but you were there and not only were there, but you picked up the ball from Iris and ran with it for many, many years and developed a whole program.

MA: Together with Richard Griffith.

HA: Yes.

MA: Who was not—that's why I had to run things, really, because he was frequently absent.

CC: Was it one of the most difficult things convincing people to collect at all?

MA: He had a booze problem, unfortunately, because he was the most knowledgeable, wonderful, kind person that ever was. He wrote, together with Paul Rotha, he wrote several film[s].

CC: *Film Till Now.*

MA: *Film Till Now* and *Documentary Film.*

HA: You worked directly with Iris Barry for a while though, didn't you?

MA: Yes, I did.

HA: What kind of a woman was she?

MA: Apart from being extremely attractive, she was—it depended on her mood, how she was; you know. Sometimes she was extremely kind and cooperative and helpful, other times she would just shut her door and be very bossy. And for instance, we had a special showing she arranged for Jean-Benoit Levy. Somehow or other, Iris managed to get hold of a print of *Les Enfants du Paradis* long before it had opened, and it was something like four hours long. It was an uncut, uncut, uncut version. So she showed it to Jean-Benoit Levy and his wife and herself; I don't know what of any other people there. Locked the room, the projection room door, so that nobody else could come in. Wouldn't dream of asking any of the staff. We hardly ever dared to sit in on screenings. That was her bailiwick, and we were supposed to work.

HA: But she was kind of like the high priestess of film.

MA: Indeed she was.

HA: And saw herself that way.

MA: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

HA: And of course, working with the high priest of art, Mr. Barr.

MA: They were very close. As Mrs. Barr says in that little thing—I didn't know whether she even would write anything about Iris when I asked her—as she said, Iris was a man's woman, really, that few women liked her. But she had a very, very good mind. On the other hand, I, personally, think that she had a bit of an inferiority complex, because when she had to go to the trustees meeting or something like that, she was so nervous. And when she was nervous, she'd cut her fingernails. She didn't bite them, she cut them. [Laughter]

HA: Oh, that's very neat.

MA: And of course, she was, as I said, so extremely knowledgeable. And in those days salaries were lousy, absolutely. I started out at the front desk, and then they needed people up on the fourth floor because [of] the War. Richard Griffith went into the army. Allen Porter was drafted. And I think Arthur Knight had left

at that point anyhow. Arthur Knight started out in life—this is just for your information—as Arthur Rosenheimer. And when Iris was away, he was her assistant, and she was curator at that time, because Dick Abbott was the director. And Iris was in Europe for some film festival or FIAF congress or something or other. When she came back, she discovered that Arthur had signed his name, not assistant to the curator, but as assistant curator. So that was the end of Arthur Rosenheimer Knight at the Museum. [Laughing]

HA: Alistair Cooke also worked there, didn't he?

MA: Yes, that was long before my time. He wrote that book on [Douglas] Fairbanks. It's a little, itty-bitty book. Have you seen it?

HA: I haven't seen that.

MA: It's so rare.

CC: Did you ever go out to California in the early days to go through pictures?

MA: No.

CC: But Iris did that.

MA: She would do that.

CC: What was the reaction of the movie community at that time to your interest?

MA: To the Film Department?

CC: Yes, to wanting to preserve film and all. Were they suspicious or glad or couldn't care less?

MA: The Hollywood community thought the Film Department and Iris Barry and Dick Abbott were absolutely mad. Film, art? You're crazy. It's to make money, not to make art. So, they had a terrible time, and that's continued ever, ever since. We've had the least cooperation from the industry. I think perhaps now there's more cooperation because there are so many independents. And it's beginning to become respectable, 30...how many years later?

CC: It's hard to say though you know because—

HA: Beginning just now, I mean, here we are in 1982.

MA: I know.

HA: '83.

CC: It's hard to say though because with pictures—if a museum, which has boards of trustees who collect pictures and collect more pictures than anyone else collects—if a museum likes a picture and likes a particular artist and buys many paintings by that artist, and its trustees buy [them], then that of course forces up the cost of the original pictures of that artist. If the museum and trustees and some wealthy people or intellectuals like a movie, that's all well and good and it's good for the ages and it later maybe will be responsible for its selling on television.

HA: You can't increase the admission price.

CC: I guess they begin to feel that since it's a reproduction, [a] reproductive medium, it's hard for them to increase. But you could counter it by saying no films would ever be on television now late at night like 11:00 or midnight or 1:00, unless it was through the efforts of museums.

MA: Yes.

CC: And they would have thrown them away?

HA: Is that true?

CC: Could you say something about that?

MA: The preservation thing?

CC: Well, not just that, but what about that—?

HA: Someone said that to us and I'm not certain that's true, that all of the old films of the thirties, let's say,

CC: [*Stagecoach*](#) and things like that,

HA: Which are on television late at night, wouldn't be there if the Museum hadn't rescued them.

CC: [Laughing] *Stagecoach* is not too often, but that kind of—

MA: That's the one that we tried to get for years and we never could. I don't know that I want to stick my neck out.

HA: I'm not certain that that's true.

CC: But you could probably say that there'd be an awful lot of—

MA: Well it has inspired [INAUDIBLE: 0:13:00] preservation.

CC: But for instance, showing [Charlie] Chaplin shorts and things like that, that may— well, they still make money.

HA: Well, it seems to me that the interest in old films that almost everybody—

MA: You're not allowed to say "old films."

HA: Ah, excuse me.

MA: I'm quoting Iris Barry.

HA: Ah [laughing].

MA: Early films.

HA: Early films. [Laughter] Okay. The interest in what I would call early films, not terribly early; I'm talking about the thirties now, which is not really early at all, I guess.

CC: Hey, those are the best movies.

HA: They were wonderful movies, but I wonder whether our current interest, my interests, when I turn on the television set and am watching something that was made in 1935, I wonder whether that isn't indirectly inspired by the Museum's preservation, understanding, and even labeling it as art and worthy of watching. I wonder if there's a connection there.

MA: Or don't you think, in this day and age, it is that these films are a bit of nostalgia?

HA: I think that's part of it.

MA: And the current films?

CC: Yes, but the greatest thing that they've done, from a real enthusiast's point of view, is—I remember going to the Museum and seeing pictures like you wouldn't

probably have seen, Josef von Sternberg's *Underworld*, for instance, which is a movie that, if you haven't seen it and you've seen a few of the others, the others are good, but that movie is the *first* really of the gangster, mysterious setting.

HA: I haven't seen that one.

CC: Unbelievable, with a silent track, with an organ—it's an experience, really, that the sound picture doesn't duplicate, that a dialogue picture doesn't duplicate. The imagery is that much richer.

MA: This is a question that I think—and you obviously have to talk to Jay Leyda—because he was the very first assistant Iris had in the Film Department, Film Library, as it was called in those days. But you know, our showings in the very early days were extremely limited. We had one showing at 4:00 in the afternoon, which meant, of course, that students couldn't come, and it got the reputation of being rather elite. Members could call up and make reservations. And the back part of the auditorium—you know the auditorium, don't you?

HA: Yes.

MA: That's where they used to reserve seats. We even had a lady ushering people in those days. [Laughter] We only had two projectionists and one showing a day, but an usherette. And then of course, Mr. [Arthur Kleiner](#), full time; he was there full time, playing the piano.

CC: Playing piano, yes.

MA: And in those days, the stage—the apron was rather wide and the piano was put on one corner. And you opened it up, and there was Mr. Kleiner at the piano. [Laughing] You just saw the top of his head. [Laughter] And that had to be changed later for fire laws or something or other.

CC: Are there particular stories of the rescue of particular films that make very good stories? Are there particular collections or certain D. W. Griffith pictures or [INAUDIBLE: 0:16:40]?

HA: Do you recall searching for something or wanting to have it desperately?

MA: [Broken Blossoms](#); that's one.

HA: What happened with *Broken Blossoms*?

CC: The tinted version of it?

MA: Yes, which was salvaged, or not salvaged but was preserved by the Museum. And the very last showing of the original tinted 35 nitrate print was shown out in Hollywood a few years ago.

CC: They showed it at the AFI in Washington also, with the yellow and blue tints. This was a D. W. Griffith picture that was—

HA: Hand tinted?

CC: Yes, hand colored tints, but this is nitrate film from black and white—but hand colored, it's like water coloring, in a way.

MA: Yes, and it's beautiful.

CC: And it sets off effects like sunrises and things that are—

HA: Of course, how could you, when you preserved that on safety film—you can't have that color effect, can you?

MA: Some you do, but you lose something.

CC: It's not the same.

MA: Even in black and white. To see the old black and white nitrate print, there's a richness there and a quality that really cannot be duplicated.

CC: It's like MGM in the late twenties and thirties, had a trademark almost look to the way they filmed. It was creamy and real rich, velvety black.

MA: Yes.

HA: Was that film, *Broken Blossoms*, was that the subject of a search? Were you unable to find a copy at first?

MA: This I don't remember.

CC: Would there be anyone that you could—?

MA: Yes, I think, the MoMA's film curator now, Eileen Bowser. She's extremely knowledgeable and she is in charge of the whole preservation program.

CC: I'm thinking of something that you might have found in the basement of a movie house in Peoria that was the last surviving copy of something.

MA: We used to have a man whose name—what was his name? [Bill Jamison](#). And Mr. Jamison found films in the most extraordinary places: basements and garbage cans and what have you.

CC: There's a story about going through a garbage can in the Bronx somewhere and fishing out—

HA: Out of the garbage can?

CC: Yes, out of the garbage can.

MA: This, I think, Jay Leyda, again,

CC: Would be good on that?

MA: Would be good at, you see. Because I'm not actually a film scholar the way Jay and Martha [INAUDIBLE: 0:19:26].

CC: How would you define yourself then?

MA: Oh I don't know [laughing]. I've been very involved in administration. And then, of course, my particular passion [doorbell rings]

HA: That's the third member of our party. We're expecting her. She must have been delayed by something; I was delayed, too.

CC: You were saying, your particular passion?

MA: Documentary films and films on art. And I think I fell in love with documentary films when I saw Willard's film, [The City](#). I had never in my life, in Europe, where I was brought up and educated, seen a real documentary like *The City*. So that's when I realized—

HA: When did he make that picture?

MA: 1939.

CC: What about the *Berlin: Symphony of the City*. Did you—?

MA: Well there, of course, I was crazy about—oh, *Berlin* was an earlier film.

CC: That is a fabulous film, though.

MA: Oh, absolutely [INAUDIBLE: 0:20:42].

CC: We should see a film like that.

HA: I would love to.

CC: Well, it's so strange because it's just visuals of the city in motion, and the camera—it's seductive. After a while, all of the lines and the design; there's no narration.

MA: Well, in other films, Joris [Ivens]'s film [Rain](#).

CC: Yes, that's beautiful. That's just a rain storm in Holland.

MA: In Amsterdam.

CC: It's a street, a town, [and] the rain comes. I used to show that at—I used to show all these films. I used to rent them from her.

MA: From me!

HA: He ran a film festival—

CC: At Georgetown University, I started a film society there, and we used to rent—

MA: At which university?

CC: Georgetown, in Washington. We used to rent [Entre'acte](#), things like that, from you. And then the Corcoran, I got.

HA: She'll be here in a moment.

MA: We are having elevator problems. One of them has broken down.

CC: I rode up on the elevator with the oldest resident in the building, a very old man, he was like a hundred or something. He had gotten his mail or something.

MA: Oh dear. Well, they're currently trying to make this into a co-op. And I don't know anybody who wants to buy this leaky building...everything's run down and they need new wiring and so many things. I think the elevator must have broken down. Did you see that old copy of *Vogue*?

HA: Of *Vogue*.

RC: Hello. I'm sorry I'm late. Hi, nice to see you; Ruth Cummings.

HA: Hi Ruth.

MA: Hello.

CC: I arranged to come up Wednesday, under duress, so you have two hours.

HA: Okay.

CC: We'll meet at 11:00.

RC: Where were you sitting? Here? I'll get a chair.

MA: ...precious copy of *Vogue*.

CC: He really wanted us to come up.

HA: Tuesday night?

CC: Yes, let's get started early in the morning, and I said Wednesday. And he said, well, if you're really thinking, I'd much prefer a drink. I said, well, no, I have another interview. Did you set up Pierre Matisse? I'm using him as an excuse.

RC: That's okay. No, I haven't spoken to him. [tape break at 0:23:05]

MA: Archives, the photo archives?

CC: Yes, we did a quick couple of days. We went through; we've seen three sources. One in the library—wait, what's her name?

HA: Mikki Carpenter.

MA: Yes, Mikki there.

CC: We looked all through there. There were some good pictures, but...

HA: We're looking for informal things.

CC: Candids, and not—

MA: I have some somewhere. I mean, I have a wonderful picture, Monroe Wheeler, Allen Porter, René d'Harnoncourt, Richard Griffith—I think René's in it—Betty Chamberlain who used to be the publicity woman, myself, and Gene Autry.

[Laughter] I don't know whether they have that. He donated a print of *Mule Train* to us. I don't think we've ever shown it. [Laughing]

CC: That's funny.

HA: Why, the time may yet come. [Laughter]

CC: And then we went to look at the archive of—well, just at the Public Information office of the Museum. And then we also looked in—we're now going to be looking in the Barr archive which, there are some very good ones, especially from the earlier time.

MA: Yes.

CC: But for the Film Department, we're thinking of also—well, we've screened now all the films in the Museum's collection that are involved in the Museum. I'm sure there's other news footage and Museum of Broadcasting things. But, for instance, were you involved at all with the Tinguely-Pennebaker film, or was that separate from the Film Department?²

MA: That was separate from the Film Department.

RC: It was just a document of the—

MA: Yes, the event, or happening, or whatever it was. I was there; it was fascinating.

CC: We saw those Mike Wallace things.

MA: And Bob Breer also made a film on that.³

CC: Yes, we saw that one.

MA: You've seen that too; mm-hm.

CC: We liked—that Pennebaker one was quite good. That was short and to the point.

MA: Yes, yes. This is a precious document. It's falling apart.

HA: *Vogue Magazine* from when?

² *Breaking It Up at the Museum*, a film by D.A. Pennebaker of [Homage to New York: A Self-Constructing and Self-Destroying Work of Art Conceived and Built by Jean Tinguely](#), on March 17, 1960 in the Museum's Sculpture Garden.

³ Robert Breer. *Homage to Jean Tinguely's Homage to New York*, 1960.

MA: 1945. And it has a lot about the Museum in it.

HA: Hm; I don't think I have seen that. Or maybe I have; I just haven't—I think I have.

MA: They should have it in the Museum.

HA: I think I have seen it.

CC: Yes, they probably do.

HA: I've never seen it inside the magazine though.

MA: And this is fascinating.

HA: Oh, look at that; that is wonderful.

MA: By what's-his-name, whose name I can never pronounce it.

CC: Here it is, down here.

HA: It looks like Eastern European.

CC: That's a terrific picture. It would be great to get this and shoot it, you know, as little cartoons.

MA: Can you get it from *Vogue*?

CC: Yes, we probably could. You know what I mean?

RC: I bet they still have the original.

HA: I bet they may very well.

CC: It'd be great to shoot this sort of thing.

MA: That is fantastic.

RC: That is.

CC: It'd be great to have this in a documentary, these drawings of things. I did that with the White House film, strange little carriages.

HA: This issue is July 1945.

CC: Frank Crowninshield.

HA: Yes, Frank Crowninshield.

MA: Yes, oh, he was always around in the Museum.

CC: Yes. Look at this, fashions next to Fritz Lang. Who put together these montages?

HA: When did you leave the Museum? When did you retire?

MA: I forget. [Laughter] I told you I'm no good at this. 37 years later.

HA: 37 years—you were at the Museum for 37 years; that's amazing.

MA: I retired in '78.

HA: I see.

MA: And I'm now a consultant with the American Federation of Art.

HA: I see.

MA: Whose director is Wilder Green.

HA: Yes, and we've thought about talking to him, by the way.

MA: Yes, you should.

HA: Do you think that he might have some good memories of possibly Barr or—? I don't remember exactly—there was something that changed.

MA: He's a little later, I think, you know, when we had a sort of a—when there was that difficulty, a sensitive situation.

RC: With [Stephen C.] Clark and—?

HA: You mean 1943 when Barr was kind of fired but didn't go anywhere?

MA: Yes.

HA: Museum politics are very interesting, although we can't really dwell on them at any length, but they are interesting.

MA: Yes. But I must say, on the whole, the Film Department or the Film Library—I never know what to call it—has, is able—for instance, we don't have to submit works of art for approval to a committee or to the Trustees. The Film Library just gets what it thinks it should get.

HA: I see, which is good. Well, that's nice.

MA: Yes.

RC: It makes your job a little bit easier then.

MA: One purchase that was made by Alfred Barr for the Museum was Francis Thompson's film [N.Y., N.Y.](#) And the Film Department had no money to buy a print, so I think Alfred got money out of the Blanchette Rockefeller Fund in Painting and Sculpture, and bought a print of *N.Y., N.Y.* The Department had made a print, or gave Francis some money; I don't know that he paid such a lot. Unfortunately, I looked at it some time ago and it's completely faded, the 35 millimeter. The 16s have held up, but the 35 went just pink and pale blue and awful.

CC: That's too bad.

MA: But that was, as far as I know, the first time that the Department of Painting and Sculpture had purchased a film. [Laughing]

HA: Did Barr have a good appreciation for film? Was he very supportive of the Film Department?

MA: Absolutely. I mean—but [if it wasn't] for Alfred, I doubt that Iris could have started the Film Library. He was extremely supportive. He was also—he knew so much about film.

HA: He did?

MA: Yes.

HA: Huh.

MA: He reviewed films for—I have a copy somewhere—the magazine. And he was particularly interested in—he was very impressed with [Sergei] Eisenstein's films, and he reviewed several of them.

CC: And he met him in the Soviet Union?

MA: Met him in the Soviet Union. Well, that comes out in Jay's piece.

CC: That's in his Eisenstein book?

MA: No, in that little [booklet] "Remembering Iris Barry."

HA: Yes. Did you know Alfred Barr very well?

MA: Well, he was not a person that I think people got to know very well. I always thought of him as rather a shy person. But he got his will through, quite. [Laughter] He always spoke very softly, but he got his way. And I remember, we had a whole different setup in those days. For instance, there were budget hearings, those horrid things. And you always asked for double because you knew you were not going to get—they would cut in half any amount that was asked. But then you had to defend the whole situation. And we used to have a group of trustees, the first hearing was with the group of trustees. And I was always so nervous. And I will never forget when Alfred once looked at me very quietly, patted my hand, and said, "Don't take it personally if the circulation doesn't make the projected income." [Laughter] Because that's what we actually lived on at certain times you know was that income we were bringing in.

HA: So you were almost a self-supporting department.

MA: Ummmmm.

HA: Tried to be, though.

MA: We tried.

CC: Did you have great enthusiasts in the Board of Trustees, or was there a real division? Did some of the Trustees think the Film Library was a terrible idea and other people thought it was a terrific idea? Like Jock Whitney?

MA: Jock Whitney was extremely supportive.

CC: Because he loved films.

MA: Yes.

CC: He was in one of the original producers of *Gone with the Wind*; did you know that? Financially.

HA: Yes, I did know that.

MA: And Dick Abbott and he knew each other and were both—whatever this means, I don't know—runners on Wall Street in their younger days. And I think it was

Jock who brought Dick Abbott into the Museum when he became Director. Jock was always around.

CC: So he was a great enthusiast for your department?

MA: Oh yes, indeed. Why, he loved film. He had a wonderful theater out in his house in, what is it called? Greentree, on Long Island. And he used to get projectionists over a weekend—he got the projectionist from Radio City Music Hall to come out and run films. And you know, when Whitney's office called on a Friday afternoon, you'd hesitate to take the call because you knew they were going to ask for a 35 millimeter print and pick it up on Saturday, [laughter] when everything was closed and so forth. Of course, we bent backwards to get him films.

CC: And he helped with industry connections, too, and getting people to give films to you, or—?

MA: I think he did, but there again, I think Jay would probably be able to tell you more than I could.

CC: What about the direction of things now? Do you think it's good, or it's promising?

MA: I think it's great. Because I think the Film Department is getting so much more support these days than it ever got. And it's such a rich program. I think it's almost too much, sometimes, you know. [Laughter] There is the [What's Happening](#), there is the regular screenings, [Cineprobe](#), and my favorite program—what's this I told you?—starting out as [Wednesdays at Noon](#). Then we closed Wednesdays, so it became Mondays at Noon, or something like that. And it was a fascinating program to run, because you got the chance to look at films that weren't really around. The shorts that don't fit in anywhere, you know, like your favorite.

CC: A lot of films. It's funny, when I was in school, for instance, I went to a local repertory cinema. Now the people there own something like 12 movie theaters in Washington, Greek brothers, the Circle Theaters; they own everything. But in those days, you could go to see a [Federico] Fellini feature or—you could see features, but you couldn't see all the great shorts. And the Museum was one of the few places that you could get a little René Clair film or a six-minute film or a

10-minute film on horses or so-and-so, all these little ones. Because by the time of the sixties, shorts just weren't being shown. And they certainly aren't run on television, and they're never in theaters any more.

MA: Never in theaters; exactly. And that's the reason.

HA: It's too bad.

CC: We used to have festivals of shorts.

HA: Yes, I recall those.

MA: It used to be such fun.

HA: I grew up with a feature film, a short subject, a cartoon, and sometimes a serial, whenever I went to the theater, whenever I went to the movies.

MA: Yes.

HA: And I miss that, I really do.

MA: Well, they used to be newsreel, of course.

HA: And newsreel, that's right.

CC: Newsreels is terrific; I love the newsreels.

MA: You're too young.

RC: You're supposed to say, "Oh, thank you very much." [Laughter]

HA: Well, television has kind of replaced newsreels.

CC: You're very optimistic for what they've done, though. Do they still have—is it an uphill battle, though, with preservation?

MA: Money wise it's always going to be an uphill battle. And it's a very costly department to keep up. I mean, you have to have storage space and inspection facilities for all these 35 millimeter. I think they keep the 35s out in Fort Lee, New Jersey.

HA: That's right; yes.

MA: And we used to, in our days, have the 16 millimeters on the premises, and we had our own shipping department, people who inspected and shipped. But then it was decided—my goodness, 53rd Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, it's much too valuable. So we had to—

CC: Now you have to request them and you, like we did.

HA: Well, she's talking about the Film Society, shipping something through the Film Society.

MA: Yes, the circulation.

HA: There's no reason why that has to be on 53rd Street.

MA: There is a smaller collection in Chuck Silver's closet, you know, the study collection, or something like that. But, for instance, Roy Larsen gave us the entire *March of Time* library. By the way, did you see *Movies March On*?

CC: Yes.

HA: Yes, we did.

MA: I loved the opening there.

CC: We even saw that little clip of Billy Bitzer coming to the theater, in celebration of the—

MA: Oh, gracious.

RC: But it was all silent, unfortunately.

CC: And we had to recall Billy, who he is and what he is, but it was kind of fun to see him there.

MA: Then there is a little film called "Moving Day at the Museum."

CC: Yes, we liked that a lot.

MA: And that one, how that came about—Ione Ulrich Sutton used to work at the Museum. She was the treasurer and what have you. She actually hired me; we didn't have a personnel department in those days. [Laughing] And she told me one day she had a little film thing in one of her drawers, and she thinks it's

something to do with the Museum; she'd had it for years. And so she brought it in and we were fascinated [with] what we saw. It's just a few minutes.

CC: Yes, but it's very early.

MA: It's 1935.

CC: Remember we saw that—?

RC: Yes.

CC: And they're carrying paintings out the door. It's fun; it's very impromptu.

MA: And Beaumont Newhall is in the background somewhere. So, little accidents like that.

CC: What about champions of the Department now? If you were to look out, you say Jay, and of course, we'll see him, but people have mentioned Lillian Gish, perhaps, or—

MA: She loves us.

CC: Are there some that you could name who are like that? She, we would like to speak to because she does love the Museum, and she's terrific. Can you think of any other [person]?

MA: How about Jim Card?

CC: Who?

MA: James Card, erstwhile George Eastman House, also involved in preservation. And when we started the preservation program, we decided [that] between George Eastman House and MoMA that we shouldn't duplicate, so there was a great deal of cooperation there. And Jim Card, I think, he's up in Rochester someplace. I don't know where I have his address.

CC: Are there any other sort of movie personalities who were very instrumental, or directors, or—?

MA: My God, they're all dead, aren't they? King Vidor loved us, but that's too late.

HA: Martin Scorsese had some connection, doesn't he?

MA: His first film—did you ever see his first film?

HA: Which one is that?

CC: *Boxcar Bertha*? Oh, no, I know which one you mean, the Murray, Thank You Murray [*It's Not Just You, Murray!*], you mean that one?

MA: No, it's a film he made in somebody's apartment with a lot of ketchup. A man shaving himself. It's short. I showed it on the noon program. A white, white, white bathroom and a man shaving himself, and then there's blood all over the place. [Laughing] I forget what it's called, Close Shave [*The Big Shave*] or something like that. [Laughter] Scorsese, [Roberto] Rossellini, I don't know, what's her name there?

CC: Who?

MA: Rossellini's daughter.

CC: Isabella?

HA: Oh, no, no, the woman who's in the newscast...Pia Lindstrom?

MA: No.

RC: No, their mother—you mean, Ingrid Bergman.

CC: You mean the daughter of Ingrid Bergman.

MA: Yes.

RC: Isabella Rossellini; she lives in my building.

CC: I know her half-brother.

MA: But I don't know how much—it was her father who was a great admirer of Iris and what she did, and we've shown his films, and so forth.

CC: Do you think if Iris hadn't come along kind of accidentally to the Museum, that there would have been a film department? It would have been developed some other way? Or was her presence essential?

MA: Absolutely. [Laughter] I don't think—no, that's a strong thing to say but it was Iris who did it, absolutely.

HA: I know that Barr had the notion way early on, before that happened.

MA: Well, he had a notion also to have a department of photography, of architecture, and of films, but then he mightn't have found the right people, like Iris.

HA: That would be the hardest one to identify, too, because architects—there was a long tradition of architects and photographers, too. But films much less, I would think, as an art, anyhow. There were very few people who appreciated films as an art in those days.

MA: I spoke to—do you know Cecile Starr? I spoke to her husband, whose name I can never remember. He's a film editor, filmmaker. Aram Boy[ajian]...something or other. I forget his name. I met him at some film party last week, and he started to talk about [how] his early training in film was at The Museum of Modern Art, what were the showings that he went to at the Museum; it was his first grounding.

CC: Woody Allen, I think, used to go to the Museum.

MA: Yes, but I doubt that you can get Woody Allen; that would be a coup, wouldn't it?

HA: I'm not sure.

RC: Maybe if he's into modern art, though, he might step out.

MA: And [Stanley] Kubrick.

HA: I think it would be great to get Woody Allen, as a matter of fact. I don't think it would be impossible to get him.

MA: He also shot part of his film here.

HA: The opening shot of *Manhattan*—

CC: Opened in there, the film started there.

HA: With Bella Abzug speaking in the Garden.

MA: Right.

RC: Yes, he might do it.

HA: Sure; he might.

MA: I don't know how Gloria Swanson feels about MoMA but we've had her around frequently.

CC: And Vincent Minelli; they're having a [tribute](#) to him.

MA: That's right, Steve Harvey's doing the book.

CC: And they're also having the big annual event; whoever is around. And there's still people saying, "What? Minelli at the MoMA?" That sort of thing.

HA: The people who are shocked.

MA: Really?

HA: Yes, well, because they say, "Vincent Minelli and [Pablo] Picasso? Vincent Minelli and [Paul] Cezanne?"

RC: Great juxtaposition.

HA: Yes.

CC: I guess it's the big annual thing; it's the first time the Film Department has been—what is it? The annual dinner or something.

MA: I don't know what it's called.

CC: But they said it's one of the first times they had it be a film thing.

MA: Oh, I didn't realize that.

CC: Rather than Painting.

MA: The Spring Benefit, I think they call it, which used to be held in the Garden; it was lovely. It's so depressing to lose the Garden now.

HA: Well, it will be beautiful again.

MA: I hope so. [Laughing]

RC: It really seems like a magic time when all of you people came together. I don't know if it's like that now. It's great what you all were able to accomplish, and there's a legacy that the people who are at the Museum now are there.

CC: It's more bureaucratic now. Does it feel that way?

RC: Do you know anything about that?

MA: Yes.

RC: I mean, how would you describe that time that was your time? Obviously, you were there a long time, but was it different, or is it just that it seemed so great?

MA: It was so much pioneering, which I think made it exciting, and at times greatly depressing. But when we got \$600,000 from the Trustees for the preservation of film, I mean, there was elation. \$600,000 was a lot of money in those days. Those were the days when we made—I think Iris's salary was probably \$9,000 a year. I got \$25 a week or something like that [laughing] many years ago. And it was also very exciting in the Museum at that time; I started out at the Information Desk. And I don't know whether you've seen photographs, but it was a beautiful building, the original building, with that baldachin.

HA: The 1939 building.

MA: Mm-hm. The Information Desk was right inside the entrance.

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:47:19