

DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH: DOROTHY C. MILLER (DM)
INTERVIEWERS: RUTH CUMMINGS (RC); HARVEY ARDMAN (HA);
CARL COLBY (CC)
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RC: You didn't even try to get a mat on that.

DM: No.

RC: Because you knew that was pretty good.

DM: But actually, that was what he was getting at that time.

RC: Mm-hm.

DM: And this insane rising in prices was a real phenomenon.

RC: You saw it happen.

DM: Unbelievable.

RC: And didn't the Museum play some role in that?

HA: That's a really good question. What role do you think the Museum played?

DM: Well I think it did play a role because it sort of put those people on the map and instead of just being local artists that few people in New York knew, suddenly they were nationally known, because those shows all traveled and catalogues went everywhere all over the world. It was more than national. It was... Well with people like [Franz] Kline and [Mark] Rothko and [Jackson] Pollock it was internationally known.

HA: Well, were you aware, when you were selecting? You must have been aware when you were selecting people's works to be shown in the Museum, that this would have an extraordinary effect on their careers.

- DM: Oh, we knew it would be good for them, but we had no idea how good. Nobody could foresee what was going to happen to American art, and nobody could have been more surprised than the artists. But I mean, who would have thought, in 1940, that American art was going to lead the world in a few years, and that's what it did.
- HA: Well, we were struck by—you know, we've read backwards and forwards Russell Lynes's book [*Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of The Museum of Modern Art*] and we've done as much research as we can, and we were struck by the fact that when the Museum was founded, that there were only a handful of art dealers in New York City.
- DM: That's right.
- HA: And today there are more. There are as many art dealers as there are movie houses.
- DM: I saw it happen. It was just unbelievable. And I don't know exactly why it was, but, well, it was partly the War because European dealers in general had to close down. And there was a tremendous influx of dealers and artists. That's when the big influx of artists came, just when the War was starting, in '43, '42. The International Rescue Committee [sought] to bring artists out through southern France, many of whom stayed, of course. Some went back and many of them stayed.
- HA: Were you involved in any of that?
- DM: Yes, the Museum was deeply involved with it.
- HA: How about you personally?
- DM: Well, I wasn't involved personally very much with that, but Alfred Barr was. And his wife was particularly involved. She was not on the staff of the Museum, but she knew, being European born and bred, she knew a great many of those artists personally and knew all of the situations in their countries. And she was very, very valuable on the Committee.
- HA: Which artists came over through the means of that committee?

- DM: Oh, there were—I don't know how many. I can't make a guess. But if you need to know that; we could find it out.
- HA: I think that would be interesting to be able to mention a few of the really important people.
- DM: There would be several.
- CC: I think [André] Masson came over.
- RC: Masson, [Max] Ernst.
- DM: Masson and [Yves] Tanguy and Ernst. Many of them stayed, and almost all the top Surrealists came then, because they were being attacked most heavily by the Nazis.
- CC: Right.
- RC: [Hans] Hofmann came over, and [Josef] Albers.
- DM: Yes.
- RC: Hofmann and Albers.
- DM: Yes. Oh, it was a tremendous list.
- HA: I guess that that was responsible, at least in some measure, for transferring the center of modern art from Europe—
- DM: Absolutely. That was it.
- HA: —to New York.
- DM: That's exactly what happened. And also, of course those artists were very influential in the development of young American artists. Our young artists had before them people like Hofmann, ones that came at the top, [and] had these amazing people to get to know.
- HA: Yes. We saw a film yesterday of George Grosz teaching some young American artists.
- DM: Yes, he came earlier.
- HA: Uh-huh.

CC: We saw some film on you, too, moving paintings.

DM: What film was that?

CC: In 1937.

HA: Oh yes, moving day in 1937. That must have been, uh, into the Concourse? Or out of the Concourse?

CC: It was from the older building. It looked like it was going into the Concourse, into—

HA: 11 West 53rd.

DM: [INAUDIBLE: 0:04:58] the Whitney Museum.

CC: Either into the Whitney or into—it didn't show where it was going, just everybody walking out of the Museum.

DM: Well, that—gee, you know, some of those pictures were—

CC: There was a newsreel.

DM: Had to do with that disastrous fire that was—

HA: Yes, we know about that.

DM: I wasn't there then. I was putting on a show at the museum in Paris.

HA: Oh, in '50, '58, I think that is.

DM: In '58 when the fire took place. And it was so terrible. Then there were, I think, only two telephone lines from Paris to New York. Can you believe it?

HA: No. 1958 seems like yesterday.

DM: They tried to call me from the Museum. The fire was in the middle of the day. And of course, for me in Paris it was 5:00 p.m. or something. And they were trying to get me. My husband was trying to get me from here, and Alfred Barr and other people in the Museum. And they couldn't get me on the phone because there were only two lines and they were insanely busy.

HA: I'm sure.

- DM: So I got three terrible cables, inexplicable to me, about the fire, all of them assuming that I would have seen it in the *New York Herald Tribune* published in Paris. Well, I hadn't. That didn't arrive in Basel, Switzerland until the next day. And you know cables—my husband said, "Museum collection saved, staff safe."
- HA: [Laughing] You didn't know they were in danger.
- DM: And, oh, it was horrible. And Alfred Barr's cable told me exactly what paintings—there were three or four paintings that were lost.
- HA: That were damaged; yes; lost.
- DM: And others damaged, and he specified that for me. His was the only sensible cable, [laughter] and said, "Rest of collection saved; stay where you are; we don't need you here." Porter McCray who I was working then for, he was running the International Program, basically, he said, [laughing] "Stay where you are. The operation you are engaged in is now the only antiphony of The Museum of Modern Art." [Laughing] I thought I had died. I got these three cables all at once without knowing what had happened.
- RC: Oh my.
- DM: It wasn't until the next day that I was able to call through from Paris.
- HA: It must have been some night.
- DM: Oh gosh, it was simply terrible.
- HA: Well, you know, we have, in looking at old films—we've dredged up all of the old films of the Museum and we saw one yesterday that had—it was a film with René d'Harnoncourt as the host, but Alfred Barr played a fairly large role in this film. It was—
- CC: Early fifties.
- HA: Early fifties. I think it was called—
- CC: It was part of a—
- HA: It was kind of a, like—
- CC: Television lecture, or an introduction to the Museum to the public.

- DM: Quite a long thing.
- CC: Yes, quite long.
- HA: Quite long, yes, like an hour, maybe. The reason that I bring this up—
- DM: Oh yes, there was a TV thing.
- HA: Yes, it was our first chance to really get a feeling for Alfred Barr, who is somewhat of a figure of mystery to me, because we've talked to a lot of people about him—
- DM: Well, that is such a shame, because he was absolutely an unbelievable man. And the first person to say so would be René d'Harnoncourt.
- HA: Oh, I'm sure.
- DM: They were *very* compatible. And Alfred was an absolute genius, not only in what knowledge he was able to acquire and keep and use, but also in museum work which I mean, the workings of a modern museum were—he had to invent at that time. There weren't any other big ones except a few in Europe. And they had an entirely different situation. But he just created that museum, and that's sort of forgotten now. And René tried to keep that alive, that knowledge. But as you probably know, Alfred's career was cut short in the most brutal way by one of the Trustees, Stephen C. Clark, who just decided to fire him.
- HA: I still don't understand that. What happened? Why did that happen? I don't understand that.
- DM: Well, it happened, in the early forties, Alfred had gotten the collection together, a great deal of it, the important background material, and he himself wanted to retire and to write, because he really was dying to write about modern art. And he couldn't do it while running the Museum, obviously. And Stephen Clark, who was head of the Board of Trustees then, was a curious man and he was a brilliant collector. My god, the things he got hold of, because he had unlimited money. And he was generous to the Museum and was head of the Board for quite a long time. And I think he was very jealous of Alfred Barr. He always felt—Alfred didn't know that he made Stephen Clark feel he didn't know as much as he, Alfred, did. [HA laughs] But this was the way some of us analyzed it after

the event of Stephen Clark personally firing Alfred Barr, without, actually, the Board. He just wrote him a letter and fired him, as Chairman of the Board. Well, Margaret Barr and I, we really thought Alfred was going to die. It was such a horrible shock to him. I mean, here was just the bottom [INAUDIBLE: 0:11:49]. And then—

HA: You worried about his physical health?

DM: Physical health. We thought he was going to go to pieces. He didn't leave the house. He didn't leave his apartment for a month, just sat during the days, in his room, trying to compose a letter in answer to Stephen Clark's letter firing him. And it was horrible. He couldn't eat; he lost pounds. He was so depressed, you know it was quite the [INAUDIBLE: 0:12:24]. And he finally pulled out of it and went back. He was—from having his old office, he was put in a sort of closet-like space that was part of the Library. But it was a closet. And the staff, which was small then, we had all been trained by Alfred and all of that. And we didn't know how to exist without him; everything we did we had to ask his advice about how to do it under the new circumstances.

HA: So as far as you were concerned, he was still the director.

DM: Yes, well, we knew he wasn't and he was just killed by the thing, but the staff just made a path through the Library to that little cubbyhole of his, because we had to ask his advice about everything.

HA: Uh-huh.

DM: We didn't know how to operate in our jobs without his telling us how, what to do in the new situation.

CC: This was before René came on board.

DM: Yes, this was right after Alfred was fired. I've forgotten what the gap was between—

HA: It was—I think René was two or three years later.

DM: René was already there—

HA: Yes, but it was—

DM: —as a member of the staff—

HA: Right.

DM: —for several years.

CC: In a way it had been something that, Alfred did want to let go of being.

DM: Alfred did want to let go because he wanted to write.

CC: But he didn't want to be ousted in such a brutal—

DM: Of course not. And you see, he was going to resign anyway because he himself wanted to write a number of books about his subjects. And the Museum wanted him to, and Stephen Clark's ostensible reason for firing him was that he hadn't. He had been given six months' trial to use half his time writing and half his time at the Museum. Well, that didn't work. I mean, when you're at the Museum, you're working full time.

HA: Right, so he didn't really write.

DM: So he couldn't write during his six months. Although he had the stuff—he knew just what he wanted to write. And so that seemed like he had the six months to do this and he hadn't done it, so, goodbye. We'll keep you on a salary but you've got to write and you're out of the Museum; off the staff, I mean.

HA: But he eventually regained a large amount of his power, didn't he?

DM: Yes, he did. And it was largely because of the fine relationship between him and René. I mean, René refused—not formally, but just in effect, he refused to be the means for ousting Alfred. He insisted on Alfred staying on as—

HA: Director of Collections.

DM: Director of Collections. And in fact, that was not René's idea but that's the way Stephen Clark did it. But René insisted upon Alfred's keeping his old office and being part of the important governing committee.

HA: So those years with René after World War II were comparatively good years for Alfred Barr.

DM: Yes. René was a wonderful friend, a marvelous man, and he could understand what this meant to Alfred.

HA: Yes.

DM: And was able to make an atmosphere in which it was possible for Alfred to go on working. But then it got more difficult as they appointed people to be in the position of Director of the Painting and Sculpture Department.

HA: That chipped away a little bit of—

DM: Yes. But in spite of the fact that people like Andrew Ritchie were friends of Alfred.

HA: Mm-hm.

DM: But it was just horribly difficult to be asked to sort of push Alfred out.

HA: What was your working relationship with Alfred? I mean, I don't quite understand what your duties were in regard to—

DM: Well, I was called—when I went in, I was just assistant to the director. That was a long time ago, before 1935. I was hired by Alfred in '34, late in the year, and I was just his general assistant. And I think it was about a year after that that he got me a title. I was called Assistant Curator of Painting and Sculpture or something like that. [Laughter] And I've forgotten exactly when it was that they were giving me the title of Curator of Painting and Sculpture. And then I was Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture [laughing] for a year, but it—

CC: How did you go about looking at the—at pictures with Alfred, in other words, for new exhibitions? How did that begin to happen when you would go to galleries?

DM: We just naturally went anyway.

CC: About when? When you first came in?

DM: In the thirties, yes, in the thirties.

CC: Studios and—?

DM: There were very few art galleries then. We saw the whole immense development, which was mostly during the War, really when I don't know how

many dozen European dealers moved to this country and many of them stayed here. And the vast influx of artists came to this country who—many of whom stayed here—were so influential on the history of American art.

HA: Mm-hm.

DM: And then we always used Saturday afternoon and many Sundays to visit studios. And then the galleries—it was Alfred who persuaded the galleries to stay open on Saturday afternoons. They used to be open only until 12:00 on Saturdays. And he said, “You’re missing all of the business; we’re going to buy art from you. [Laughter] If you don’t stay open on Saturday afternoon.” Instead, the galleries their day to be open was Monday, and the businessmen couldn’t get there then.

CC: Of course.

DM: So Alfred persuaded them to that change, which was a great improvement. And indeed, hundreds of businessmen did become frequenters of the galleries and purchasers. That’s when all of the dozens and dozens of collections started being formed. I mean, when we first started off, there were just about 12 or 15 or not more than 20 important collections you could name in New York City. And then suddenly it became hundreds. I mean, people would buy six paintings and spend quite a lot of money on them, and that was already a collection starting. It was very, very interesting.

HA: When you and Alfred went into one of these studios and looked at the works that were there, or a gallery, how did you decide? First of all, how closely did you agree on what you saw, on the value of what you saw?

DM: Well, of course I was tremendously influenced by him, but he just had a magic eye. Hundreds of times I saw that demonstrated. He could walk into a big show, let’s say, at the Whitney Museum, and we’d walk through independently and write down which ones we liked. Then we’d compare notes and I felt very lucky if mine agreed with his a few times. But he really trained me to look at modern art, very much, and, you know, I didn’t have a bad eye, and his was just magnificent.

HA: So eventually it got to the point where those lists were very similar, I would imagine.

- DM: Yes, it did. And then we—the visits to the studios were the same thing, essentially. He would just go like a bee to the best work, wherever we were. And it was very dramatic, it really was.
- HA: You were around then in the thirties when some of the great shows were, like, for example, [Cubism and Abstract Art](#).
- DM: Well I, yes, that was '36, late in '36; right?
- HA: Yes.
- DM: I worked at the Museum first as a volunteer worker. [Laughing] And that was when I'd just left the Newark Museum, and Holger Cahill was pinch hitting while Alfred had a year off because he was so exhausted.
- HA: Right, when he had stepped down.
- DM: And that was '32, '33.
- HA: Mm-hm.
- DM: So, Holger Cahill was asked to finish an American show [[American Painting and Sculpture, 1862–1932](#)] that Alfred had started that had [James Abbott McNeill's] "Whistler's Mother" [*Portrait of the Artist's Mother*] in it. And that was late in '32. Then they kept Cahill on because he'd had more experience—there weren't very many people around that had had a lot of exhibition experience and that sort of thing; there really were very few people. And Cahill had done a lot of exhibitions, and some pioneering ones, like the *Folk Art* at Newark. And he could manage it, and he could work with the Trustees, and he knew what he was doing. And so I, at first, I volunteered, because I had finished my job at Newark, and then worked at the Montclair Museum, and then I got through that job. So I was on the loose, and I just volunteered. I had probably saved \$200 and I could live on that for about two years. [Laughing] And so, then Alfred Barr came back from this leave of absence, and I'm trying to think when I first met him. [James Johnson] Sweeney put on a marvelous African Negro show [[African Negro Art](#)] in '34 or '35, or something like that, and I helped with that as a volunteer worker. And that was at the time that Alfred came back. And he and Sweeney were installing the show together, and I was sort of running around helping him. And I think that, or slightly before that, that Alfred came back and I first met him. I had never met

him. And when that volunteer work and all was over, and I said, "Well, I've got to get a job now," and I told him that I could get a job at the Montclair Museum but I didn't want to, and I wondered if I could possibly be hired by The Museum of Modern Art. He said, "Well, I have to get the permission of the Trustees." There were only about four people on the staff.

CC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:25:41] the Trustees.

DM: There was Alfred Barr's secretary, who also acted as registrar.

CC: Mary Sands.

DM: No, it was after her. What was that woman's name?

CC: [Dorothy] Dudley.

DM: No, no; Dudley came later.

CC: Well, it doesn't matter.

DM: Well, she was only his—

CC: There were only four of you, then?

DM: Just about.

CC: There were four people on the staff then?

DM: Philip Johnson

CC: That was in what year?

DM: That was, um, '34, end of '34.

CC: And the Museum was still on the—

DM: Philip Johnson was there as a volunteer. He wasn't being paid. But Alfred and he had set up the Architecture Department in '32, when Philip had just graduated from Harvard.

CC: What other volunteers were there at that time? Was Allen Porter there yet?

DM: No. Allen came in as a member of the Film Library staff.

CC: He sounds like a remarkable character.

- DM: Oh, he was. And—
- RC: Was Eddie Warburg there then?
- DM: Yes, Eddie was there. And Eddie—
- DH We're seeing him tomorrow.
- DM: Oh great. He was perhaps our youngest trustee. He was in his very early thirties or something. And he had been a great influence on his class at Harvard. I think it was largely through Alfred Barr because Alfred was teaching at Wellesley.
- CC: Mm-hm, and Paul Sachs had that class.
- DM: And Paul Sachs had the class. And between Paul Sachs and Alfred's immediately taking on with Paul Sachs to work in the field of modern art, get it going, it all happened. And Eddie Warburg I think was in the same class with Philip Johnson, and Lincoln Kirstein.
- CC: Who we're seeing tomorrow morning.
- DM: Yes. He may be still very unfriendly toward the Museum because he left in anger.
- CC: I know that. Yes.
- DM: Because he just couldn't stand abstract art. His whole interest was in the magic realism of the time.
- RC: That [Peter] Blume and—
- DM: Yes, and he just thought the whole business of abstract art was being over emphasized and really didn't have any importance as a—
- HA: You know, that's an interesting subject by itself. I know we're kind of wandering a little, but I know that the American—the abstract artists protested in about 1940 that they were being left out.
- DM: Yes. This was in '37 or '38, they picketed.
- HA: They picketed. Right.
- DM: I think it was in the thirties, the late thirties.

- HA: But the Museum responded; you responded to the—
- DM: We all did because, you see, Alfred Barr had done his pioneering exhibition called, what was it and Abstract Art?
- HA: Well, there was the [*Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism*](#).
- DM: Well that was the second one. The first one was *Cubism and Abstract Art*.
- HA: *Cubism and Abstract Art*, right.
- DM: And the date of that show was what; '34?
- HA: Uh, I don't know, '34, '35, something like that.
- DM: '34, and then came *Fantastic Art*. They were in the same—
- CC: 1936.
- DM: They were in the same year, I remember now. *Cubism* was done in the early part of the year and imagine doing those two. Imagine!
- HA: I think those two shows—
- DM: He was the most amazing worker, Alfred. I mean, he knew so much. He had educated himself before he got the Museum to direct them.
- HA: Those particular two shows strike me as being two of the most important shows the Museum has ever had.
- DM: Absolutely they were the most influential thing on the whole development of American art, and it brought European art—it prepared the way for all of those dozens and dozens of important artists that came here during the War, when the War started a year or two later, you see. And they were tremendously influential, tremendously attacked.
- HA: They were not well received?
- DM: Well, they were marvelously received by scholars, and a large part of the public could understand what was going on. There was also a large part of the public that didn't. And you'd walk through the galleries and listen, and people were saying, "Shocking!" "What does it mean?" That sort of thing. [Laughter] It was very funny.

- CC: The "Fur-lined Teacup" [[Object](#)] and those things?
- DM: Yes.
- CC: A lot of reactions?
- DM: Oh yes. And Emily Genauer was one of our worst enemies. She was an influential art critic, and she just systematically and predictably attacked everything the Museum did.
- CC: So would you say that by the time the artists came from Europe, it was as if you were welcoming back the family.
- DM: Yes.
- CC: I mean, when they came, it created a whole different atmosphere because suddenly, Masson and Pierre Matisse and all those people were all here. And they helped give it support.
- DM: And very important in that development were certain dealers, particularly Curt Valentin.
- HA: Curt Valentin?
- DM: Yes. He took on the major European artists in his gallery here which had only been started in '37. But he had the bulk of them.
- HA: Without that, without those shows at the Museum, without Curt Valentin, the European artists would have no place to go.
- DM: Yes, it was a very strange thing to see this little German guy, Curt Valentin, who didn't have inherited money. He only had money he was able to make, supporting those great French artists. And he did support Masson and Tanguy. He actually paid for their livings up there in cheap rental houses in Connecticut. And it was very touching to see that happen on the part of a German.
- CC: There probably also was a lot of interest then among people who were beginning to collect—
- DM: Yes.

- CC: —that suddenly the artists that had been championed a few years back in these exhibitions are now here.
- DM: Yes.
- CC: And then that created a whole atmosphere.
- DM: Yes, well, it was very short. There was no real gap between their coming—
- CC: And also, I think all the people were very influenced—Rothko, for instance, all his early work is Surrealist.
- DM: Oh yes.
- CC: It looks very much like [Arshile] Gorky or—
- DM: It was a *tremendous* influence. And I think, and many people would agree—I think, that the predominance worldwide of American art which came shortly after that, a few years afterwards, was owing to the influence of those great Europeans on their work. And I think it was just a great eye-opener for the Americans.
- HA: Were you involved in that Museum show [[Three Centuries of American Art](#)] that went to Paris in the late thirties?
- DM: Oh yes; oh my god yes. [Laughing] 1938, and that show was actually selected by the President of our board of trustees then, [A.] Conger Goodyear. And he was a very curious man. He did know a great deal about modern art, and he had been fired from being President of the Buffalo Albright Art Gallery because he bought them that great 1903 [Pablo] Picasso—you know the one I mean? It's called *La Coiffure* [*La Toilette*], a very big vertical picture of a seated woman with her back to the viewer and her long hair is being combed by a—
- RC: Is it blue or pink?
- DM: It's pinkish.
- HA: So this was more than Buffalo could take, I assume?
- DM: It was too much for Buffalo, and Conger bought the picture in Paris for \$3,000 from a dealer. I've forgotten what dealer.

- CC: Maybe Count [INAUDIBLE: 0:34:55].
- RC: Or [Ambroise] Vollard.
- DM: Yes, it could have been Vollard. Anyway, he bought it for \$3,000 and made a gift of it to the—no, first he expected that the Museum would repay him. And then they all thought it was a terrible, terrible picture. Of course, it's been one of their great treasures ever since. [Laughter] So he said, "Alright, I'll give it." And they didn't even want to accept it. So he left. He not only left the Board of Trustees but he left Buffalo.
- CC: He left town.
- DM: He left his business; he said, "I'm not going to live in a place like this." [CC laughs] He came to New York, which was all to our benefit at The Museum of Modern Art, because he right away was brought on the Board and was President of the Board for a long time.
- HA: So he selected the pictures for that Paris show?
- DM: And I helped him, yes. I was assigned to work with him, and Alfred was involved in other things, other shows. So I worked with—he was known to the staff as "Toughie Goodyear." [Laughing]
- HA: Toughie?
- DM: Toughie. He was a real tough man.
- CC: But when in your opinion did the Museum start to become an institution? In that—in a very neutral meaning of the word, when it became very established and—
- RC: Big staff and bigger staff.
- DM: Oh, that was much later.
- CC: Much, much later on?
- DM: Yes.
- CC: Were you there when that began to occur?
- DM: Oh yes.

CC: And you could sort of feel that that was happening?

DM: It really had to happen—it had to start when we moved into our first big building, you see, the old part that's left on 53rd Street. And that was in 1939, May, we moved into that building. And that building, the money had been raised by the Trustees; \$2 million was all that building cost. Six floors, three basement floors, everything—storerooms, everything we needed. The portable walls that could be stored and changed so that galleries could be changed in shape and whatnot. And that opened in May '39, and that began the need for a big staff, you see.

CC: And that began to change in a sense the feeling?

DM: And before that we had very tiny quarters for two years in Rockefeller Center. I mean, we had something like four or five small galleries, and that's all. So we suddenly moved into this colossal building and nobody knew how to run it. [Laughing] Except Alfred.

CC: And a couple of years later, Alfred was being booted by Clark, so that must have been a very, a transition period then.

DM: And you see, Clark [resigned](#) on the night of the opening of the Museum, and Nelson Rockefeller on that same night became President of the Museum.¹ And that was all very bad feeling, because Nelson had been a young trustee full of ideas and just out of college, and Goodyear resented him very much, and, you know...

HA: Yes, we read in the Russell Lynes book that in his speech, that Nelson forgot to mention that. Forgot might not be the right word.

DM: Well I think he did really forget. Nelson was anything but tactful at that time. He had to learn tact when he worked for the government. But anyway, Clark left in a huff and withdrew his support and withdrew his—what do you call it?

HA: The stuff he was going to donate.

DM: The stuff he was going to—

CC: His endowment and all that [INAUDIBLE: 0:39:14].

¹ A. Conger Goodyear resigned as President of the Museum and Stephen C. Clark was elected as Chairman of the Board on May 8, 1939.

- DM: He took away his endowment. He took away all the masterworks from his collection which he had promised, many of which Alfred Barr had found for him, you know. And Alfred was always doing that. I mean, he'd find all these things that came on the market during the War—the early years—people had to sell. Masterpieces came on the market.
- HA: So a lot of the Trustee's collections were being—?
- DM: Being made by Alfred. Always he tried and got the promise, from Jock Whitney, from Nelson, that it had to come to the Museum in that man's will, otherwise he couldn't have it. Some other collector would get it.
- HA: So Alfred's eye, in the end, was really for the Museum, when he would buy these things; he was just finding a temporary home for them, so to speak.
- DM: Yes, that's right, with a promise. And actually, the only person who kept that promise down to the letter was Nelson Rockefeller.
- CC: As we do our research, we are all very impressed by the Rockefeller influence on the Museum.
- DM: Oh my god, the Museum wouldn't exist without it. Starting with old Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller, of course.
- HA: Of the three ladies who founded the Museum—
- DM: She was it.
- HA: She appears to me to me to be the one who really led the way.
- DM: She did. Lillie Bliss had the collection. Mrs. Rockefeller's collection was given to the Museum much later, five or six years later. But she didn't have her collection then, and then it wasn't as valuable as Lillie Bliss's. But Lillie Bliss's collection started the Museum, and Mrs. [Mary Quinn] Sullivan—see, Miss Bliss and Mrs. Rockefeller met on shipboard, returning to America from the annual trip that those ladies always took to Egypt or somewhere in the middle of the winter. And they were coming back from their little sojourn somewhere, and they met on shipboard for the first time and they liked each other and they got together and said, well, "You know, we really ought to have a place to show modern art officially in New York. There's no one that will do it. The Met won't touch it and

there's no other museum." And so they said, "Let's found it." And so that's how it started.

HA: What about Nelson, I mean, what kind of influence did—? He was president of the Museum for several different times, I think.

DM: Yes, that's right.

HA: Well, what influence did he have on the—?

DM: Well, he had a big influence. Fortunately, he was influenced by his mother. He got his basic ideas about the function of a museum, what its collection should be, and that, from his mother. And she and Lillie Bliss were responsible really for starting that thing, and they said, on this shipboard trip, "We need someone to advise us. Who can we get?" And they knew Mrs. Sullivan, who was one of the few dealers in this country in modern art. And they said, "Let's ask Mrs. Sullivan to help us." So those three ladies are called the original founders of the Museum. And then they said, "We've got to have a man." This is so typical of those times. "We've got to have a man to be president of the Board." And who will we get? And that was just the time when Goodyear was angrily leaving Buffalo, and they had somehow heard about Goodyear and heard that—I think this is all told in the Lynes book, but the Lynes book is very accurate. We worked closely with him.

HA: As a matter of fact, this afternoon I'm going to be seeing Russell Lynes himself.

DM: Oh great. Give him my best.

HA: We'll be happy to.

DM: But he was the first person that wanted to write about the Museum seriously and accurately. We'd had Emily Genauer attacking us, always falsely. We had some critics that were very good to the Museum in the newspaper; I'm speaking of newspaper critics. But Russell's was the first important book that wanted to do it right. And he already knew several members of the staff, and then he got to know everybody. He worked for two years just interviewing people.

HA: I know it's a massive job.

DM: It's a massive job, and he did it with such absolute—

HA: Dedication? Determination?

DM: Dedication and determination to get it right. And he did get it, essentially. There are just so few little errors and very minor errors in that thing, very minor.

HA: The film we hope to make is one that will have a lot of people speaking about the Museum; yourself, we hope, speaking about what happened and who did what and what was exciting. And I suspect that there may be some exciting stories on how some of the great masterpieces were acquired.

DM: Oh, that is very exciting, but I don't know who's going to tell that now. Of course, Mrs. Barr can tell an awful lot, because every single summer the Barrs had to make the trip to Europe. And when the War started, all those great masterpieces came on the market, that were in European collections. And the only problem was to find the money for them, and Alfred would have to scrounge that out of the Trustees. But certain trustees realized how important those things were and gave a lot of money for them.

HA: I was thinking of paintings like [*I and the Village*](#), [The] [*Sleeping Gypsy*](#), [The] [*Starry Night*](#), [The] [*Persistence of Memory*](#).

DM: Yes, oh my gosh. *I and the Village*, that was interesting.² That was in a German collection, a Berlin collection of modern art, and the man who made it—I've forgotten his name [Marc Chagall] but we can find it—he was Jewish and he had to leave Germany. And he came to Brooklyn with his collection. And the Weyhe Gallery, W-E-Y-H-E, variously pronounced [laughing]. So anyway, they were asked to handle this collection because he had to sell it. He didn't have enough money to live on. And it was just full of masterpieces; it was just staggering that collection. And of course [Erhard] Weyhe immediately got in touch with Alfred Barr, and Alfred [tape break at 0:47:03]

DM: ...six marvelous things from that collection.

HA: What about some of the other ones that I mentioned, like *Sleeping Gypsy*. Does that have a story to it?

² *I and the Village* was acquired by Nell Walden (1887-1975), Berlin, 1916 [1]; returned to Marc Chagall, Paris, 1926 [2]; purchased from the artist by René Gaffé, Brussels, February 22, 1926 [3]; acquired by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, June 13, 1945.

DM: Oh god, yes. What a story! Now, Mrs. Guggenheim was frightfully important to us, Mrs. Simon Guggenheim. And she was not a trustee. She had no connection with the Museum. Her own collection was Italian Renaissance paintings. Some dealer, I've forgotten now who—it's in the record, some dealer in Europe, in Italy helped her buy the things that were in her living room and parlor and so on. And they were all Italian Renaissance things. And she somehow got interested in modern art. She used to come to the Museum almost every day, alone. We didn't know her; nobody recognized her. She was an unknown character in the art world. And she got interested in modern art. And on a summer day in 1938, the gods were with the Museum because instead of being abroad, Alfred Barr was in his office. She came in and asked to see Mr. Barr. She had never met him and they didn't know each other at all. And she went into his office and said, "I'd like to see whether the Museum would be interested in having me buy important paintings and sculptures that are coming on the market, for the Museum. My only request would be that you, Mr. Barr, and Mr. Clark, should believe them to be masterpieces." Isn't that wonderful?

RC: That is.

HA: I'm sure that this made Alfred's day. [Laughter]

DM: Alfred nearly fainted. He had never heard of this little lady. And she was extremely modest. She always said, "Don't ask me. I don't know anything about art."

RC: Yet she picked these paintings?

DM: Well, she didn't pick them out, except, she's picked some of them.

HA: How about *Sleeping Gypsy*?

DM: No, Alfred picked that. But she always—she was educating herself in a very effective way, all the time. And she always was very modest, and she'd say, "Don't ask me; I don't know anything about it. I only want Mr. Barr and Mr. Clark to think it's an important work of art. That's all I ask." And it was very interesting. And so, we'd never had a big fund like that; we'd had only a few small funds like Goodyear's and—

HA: Mm-hm. So she established a permanent fund?

DM: —and the Lillie Bliss collection; the great collection came to us, but there wasn't any money with it to buy things. So hers was the first important big fund to buy with, and he ran out and nearly went crazy, because the things that were coming on the market because of the War were so astounding. And *Sleeping Gypsy* was one of them, and it was—I'm trying to think about this. [Pause] It was owned by a Swiss collector [Mme E. Rockstuhl-Sieglwart] that was a woman, and Alfred borrowed it for the show that opened our first building in May 1939. Alfred was able to borrow the painting. He put on a great show, a three-floor show called [Art In Our Time](#). And it was just studded with masterpieces. And then it had a large American section, some of which were later considered masterpieces. And then it had, the Film Library, all the other departments of the Museum were represented in that big exhibition.

RC: Was the Evans collection part of that, or was that—?

DM: [The] Evans collection came, Walker Evans—

HA: Yes, that came before.

DM: That was in '38.

HA: I looked up and my eyes went to Walker Evans' book right here. [Laughter]

DM: Yes! [Laughter]

HA: At that exact instant I see his name. [Laughing]

DM: Yes, well, Walker's show [[Walker Evans: American Photographs](#)] was '35, 1935.³

RC: That must have been some show. What was the public's response to that?

DM: I had the most wonderful experience because the show had to be prepared in the summer. And I usually didn't get my summer vacation, we just, all of us were—it was very hard to get a vacation. But I was assigned to help get together the Evans show, and Frances Strunsky was head of our Publications department then. She was the daughter of Simeon Strunsky who was very important on *The New York Times* for a great many years. And she ran our Publications department in the late thirties, and so, I worked with Walker. Frances Strunsky had put on a great big show of Walker's work. She knew him as a friend and just

³ Sept. 28–Nov. 18, 1938.

deeply admired his work. And she put that on without the proper trustee approval. She put it on in the middle of summer. And then Alfred Barr got a grant from the Guggenheim, I think; no, I think it was a Rockefeller grant, to photograph, to make negatives that the Museum would own, besides what—Walker Evans, he would continue to own his own negatives, but we would—he got a grant from the Rockefellers to give 1500 Walker Evans photographs to 15 institutions. I think I'm mixing this up with something else. Yes, I'm mixing it up with the *African Negro Art* show, but the Evans show came later. But in '35 Sweeney put on that show at Alfred's request, of African Negro art. And most of those pieces came from Europe and were not accessible here, and that's why we got the grant to have them photographed; 1500 photographs of African Negro art, to be distributed by the Rockefeller Foundation to the then 15 Negro colleges in this country. And it was a gesture to make them proud of their inheritance, and to build up the attitude toward themselves of these Negro colleges. And the Rockefellers paid for that, and Walker Evans was hired to take all those photographs, and the exhibition was on at the Museum. So I was assigned to help him, and he was an unknown photographer at that time. And we would start to work at 5:30 when the Museum closed. And with our screwdrivers and things, we would take things off their pedestals and set them up under Walker's lights, on a neutral background, he'd take a picture of every one. And it took—oh, it took about six weeks to get this job done, because Walker was one of the most marvelous talkers I've ever listened to. He'd talk on any subject, very knowledgeable.

HA: So instead of taking pictures he was talking to you.

DM: And he would be talking all the time. And then meanwhile I'd be getting the thing off its pedestal and setting it up for him, and finally I had to say, "Well now let's snap this one and get it over with." [Laughter] In other words, he needed a watchdog to make him get the job done, which we did. And that's a beautiful archive of photographs that he made.

HA: I'm sure.

DM: There were 15 portfolios made for those Negro colleges, and there's one for The Museum of Modern Art, and one for the Rockefeller Foundation, who had paid for it.

HA: Have you been to the Museum recently?

DM: Oh yes, I try to cover every show they have.

HA: How do you feel about how the Museum has changed since you began with it?

DM: Well, I'm not insanely happy about the building, the way it looks. I think it's kind of [INAUDIBLE: 0:57:38] but I haven't seen it since, oh, for about four months, and then I was just looking at it from 53rd Street, across the street. I think the skyscraper is pretty sad, but it was necessary to finance it. And I think there'll be other skyscrapers in the block later, and then it won't look so bad.

RC: How about the inside? How about the spirit of the people?

HA: Yes, that's right; I wonder how that's changed over the years.

DM: Oh my; you could talk for a week about that.

HA: Let me ask the question—

CC: Well that's not the controversy I guess, that there was—I mean, people don't walk around saying, "I'm shocked."

DM: There were so many controversies.

HA: That was the lifeblood of it, really; wasn't it?

DM: Well no, it also was very damaging, because certain people were hired for the staff who turned into terrible enemies of Alfred Barr, and he was fired because of the activities of a man named John Abbott.

HA: Yes, I've heard about John Abbott.

RC: Not Jere Abbott?

All: No, not Jere.

DM: Jere was his friend.

HA: Wasn't that Iris Barry's second husband?

DM: Yes.

RC: What power did he have to—?

DM: Well, he was hired by Stephen C. Clark during Clark's regime as president of the Board. And he was a stockbroker, Abbott was, didn't know anything whatever about art. I've forgotten what his in was to Stephen Clark, but he somehow—it must have been through Iris Barry. He married Iris Barry, and she pushed him, like mad. And that's how he got to Stephen Clark, because she was working at the Museum. And he convinced Clark that he, Abbott, was a great man, and Clark insisted on his becoming what amounted to business manager, but instead of that term, they said Executive Director. Alfred was still Director. Well, between them, Clark and Abbott got Alfred fired from the directorship and the Museum was without a director for about five years, until René d'Harnoncourt finally accepted it. He didn't want to when he was a staunch champion of Alfred and didn't want to replace him, but it was necessary for the Museum's continued existence to have a strong person in that job.

RC: In a more administrative type of capacity.

DM: Administrative. And René was deeply interested in art. He didn't know painting and sculpture well, but he kept learning all the time. He was a wonderful man.

RC: People say he was a master of exhibiting, of optics, with displaying.

DM: Well, his gift was in primitive art, so-called, you know. Those were his great exhibitions, South Seas [[Arts of the South Seas](#)] and the African, and so on. No, Sweeney did the African.

HA: I remember his Picasso sculptures exhibition [[The Sculpture of Picasso](#)].

DM: Yes, Picasso's sculpture. But René was a marvelous man; he was always learning, never stopped learning, and you could feel that in his whole attitude toward everything. And he got along with Alfred because he wasn't going to allow his becoming Director to spoil their already existing friendship. And it didn't. He always supported Alfred in everything and pushed his ideas and took his ideas about everything.

HA: It sounds like a good partnership.

- DM: It was, and René was a very wonderful man.
- HA: Now, I wonder, is there anything of the spirit of Alfred Barr still at the Museum, in your opinion?
- DM: Well, there's practically no person left besides me that remembers him. That's the obvious—
- HA: Well, yes. But I mean, is the—? Do you think that his—?
- CC: No, but that's interesting what you're saying.
- HA: Yes.
- CC: And there's no one who—?
- DM: All the old staff is dead or—
- HA: Retired or—
- DM: Mostly dead; mostly dead.
- CC: Who are his children, in a sense, though? Wasn't [William] Lieberman his protégé?
- DM: Yes, and Lieberman.
- CC: Who are the saints? Who are the people who carry the flame for him in New York, would you say?
- DM: Not Lieberman.
- CC: Not Lieberman?
- DM: Lieberman, Alfred took him, and indeed, Lieberman was terrifically talented and was getting his M.A. or something at the Fogg Museum when Alfred hired him. And he was just a terribly brilliant young man, and learned very quickly and was devoted to Alfred, and suddenly it all changed. And Lieberman, I don't know what happened. He suddenly became ambitious in a way that wasn't working for the Museum any more, and that's why he moved on to the Met.
- CC: Mm-hm. When did this happen?
- DM: Oh [pause]

- CC: Well I guess when Alfred Barr was fired by Clark but then still was there, obviously, through into the sixties, it may have been that he occupied such a champion's position, such a hero's position—
- DM: Yes.
- CC: —that suddenly, when he decided to pull in a bit himself in order to study and to write, and then when the Museum, in a sense, caved in on him to get itself going as an institution, when that happened, I guess [was that] the old structure just fell in. And so, it created a huge rat race, and personalities changed.
- DM: I think that's very well observed on your part; I think that's really very close to what happened. And in the end, you see, there were very few of us left who remembered the old days and were totally loyal to Alfred Barr. And Lieberman did not remain loyal to Alfred Barr; he became very ambitious for his own career, which he has indeed done well by. [Phone rings] Excuse me. (Oh dear, I've got arthritis, I can't move if I sit still too long.) [tape break from 1:04:45 to 1:04:55]
- RC: There's one person, John Szarkowski, of the staff that's currently at the Museum, [that] embodies Alfred's vision and so forth.
- CC: He still has a [INAUDIBLE: 1:05:01].
- DM: Yes, yes, very much.
- HA: We liked him a lot. He's tremendous.
- RC: He's a rugged individualist; he stands out.
- DM: He is just wonderful. I am going to try and sit in this chair because as I said—
- RC: Would the couch be any more comfortable? Or do you need more support?
- DM: I've got this—what do you call it? Lumbago. No, it's just this is too soft. But I hope this is going to go away. It's better anyway.
- CC: What we're planning to do would be perhaps returning in, oh, a month and a half, or whatever. What we're doing now is essentially seeing a lot of people.
- DM: Yes.

- CC: As we said, Lincoln Kirstein, Eddie Warburg, all the way up and down the list of people.
- DM: Yes.
- RC: John Canaday told us a wonderful story about you sitting in his lap coming back from a party and he said you all never got along but [laughter] that you were very pretty, and that here you were, slung together.
- DM: Absolutely killer; it's funny he remembers that. But he always hated me and hated everything I did at the Museum because he—when he got the job, he didn't know anything about modern art. And he had to learn it all, and he thought my American shows were just too awful for words, and he wrote some bad reviews about that, so I didn't feel very friendly toward him. And oh, I know, that party was given by [Jacques] Lipchitz, who lived, oh, in Yonkers or somewhere, out there, sort of a country place. And there was a sort of fleet of cars that were bringing us all home. And I was one of the last people to get into a car, and there was no other place for me to sit except—
- CC: On John Canaday's lap. [Laughter]
- DM: Yes. You know, there were three people already in this back seat. And they tried to make room for me to stick my little behind in on the seat. [Laughter] But I was really sort of reclining on John Canaday; it was terrible. [Laughter]
- RC: What about some of the artists like [Raphael and Moses] Soyer and [Isabel] Bishop, who, they weren't seen there but they were working.
- DM: They were seen in the early days. Let's see, what was that show? It was perhaps the second show we put on, it was an American—
- CC: Nineteen American Artists [[Paintings by 19 Living Americans](#)], or something like that?
- DM: Yes, I think that was it.
- RC: They were represented in that?
- DM: Well, I can't remember all these facts. I used to have this all at my fingertips. I'm so sorry.

- RC: I was actually just using them as examples of American artists who would storm your doors and say, “Hey, what about us?” and “how come?”
- DM: That whole school of Isabel Bishop and the Soyers and so on, it’s quite true, the Museum did neglect them, because it didn’t seem to the Museum people that that was what we were supposed to be showing, because they were already being shown heavily at the Whitney and at the Metropolitan. And we were the only people who were bringing stuff from Europe and trying to show the public something that wasn’t right at their doorstep that they already knew about. You see?
- RC: So you’d almost say that that was kind of a policy that defined how you selected artists.
- DM: Yes.
- HA: How long did you stay at the Museum?
- DM: A lifetime. I was there 35 years.
- RC: And what was your introduction to modern art? Did you just take to it, or—?
- DM: It was gradual, and I was helped tremendously by Holger Cahill, whom I later married. I met him at the Newark Museum; that was where I first went for this training course.
- RC: So you decided a career in art was [INAUDIBLE: 1:09:18].
- DM: I had majored in art at college and fortunately realized that I couldn’t make with the brush myself. And so I decided to work in the art field. And just then, John Cotton Dana, this great man—I may have told you this before—who started the Newark Museum, and he was one of our very great men and I hope he won’t be forgotten.
- HA: What’s his name again?
- DM: Dana, D-A-N-A, John Cotton Dana. He was the greatest librarian we ever had.
- RC: Was he any relation to Charles Dana?
- DM: No. His was a Vermont family, I guess coming originally from England. And he became a librarian in Denver—I think it was, very early in this century, like 1903

or four. And he was the great innovator in library work, not only in this country but for the world, although libraries are pretty stuffy, still, in most parts of the world. But he was the first one, for instance, that allowed the public to go into the book stacks. That never was done before, never was done in Europe. But he said, no, they can't be expected to know just one book's name on their subject; they have to see all the books that are on the shelves that are on their subject, and choose from them. And he did that sort of thing, and he was essentially an innovator. And he started the Newark Museum within the library; it didn't have its own space, on the third floor in the library, it was just a few little rooms, in 1913, I think.⁴

HA: Same year as the Armory show.

DM: Yes. And, I wish I could remember everything, but I can't remember how it related in date to the Armory show; it probably came right after the Armory show or something.

HA: So was he showing modern paintings?

DM: Yes. And he was showing a miscellany of living artists, and some was modern and some was Eugene Speicher and [Edward] Hopper and things like that. However, they came later, but that type of thing. Anyway, he believed that you should show the living work of whatever character it was if you thought it was good. And so he started the Newark Museum and it put on a lot of really pioneering shows in those early days, for instance, immediately after the World War, he brought a great exhibition from Germany of German arts and crafts; they were excelling in that field at that time.

HA: After World War I.

DM: After World War I. He brought this big, big German show and said—you know, he was trying to heal the breach and let everybody know that Germany was a great country. And he was like that, and he thought up the idea of an apprentice class. Now first he was going to—well, it was going to be a class for which you paid tuition. And I was at Smith College, graduating in the Art department, and I got this letter saying that tuition would be \$200 a year, for a year's course in

⁴ The Newark Museum was founded in 1909 and was originally located on the fourth floor of the Newark Public Library.

museum work. And since I found out I couldn't be an artist, I said, "That's what I want." But I didn't have \$200. [Laughing] And [there were] several other people, about 10 or 12, that wanted to take this course, and they didn't have \$200, so he said, "Well, all right, we'll pay our apprentices; they can be apprentices who actually work for us."

HA: So he changed the whole idea.

DM: So he decided to pay us \$50 a month. And so that was my first salary. And it worked well. We were nine people and the Newark Museum had gotten Louis Bamberger, who was a great department store owner, to give them their first building. It's the building they're still in, on Washington Street there. And so that building was completed late in '25 or early '26, and meanwhile he had these nine apprentices learning every phase of library work. We went through every department of this great city library and actually did everything that was being done, even bookbinding and everything. So we thoroughly understood—I've never failed to be grateful for that education in libraries.

HA: Did any of the other eight rise as high as you did?

DM: Well, we all were given jobs at the end of the year because they had moved into this new building and they didn't have any staff. They had four people on the staff. So they just hired us all for \$25 a week. And I worked there for about four years—yes, nearly four years. A couple of the others stayed longer, and a couple of the others dropped out early on. But it was a very mixed class.

HA: Did anybody come to work at the Modern after that?

DM: Well I began stealing people after that. After Newark, I got a job at the Montclair Art Museum cataloguing an American Indian collection. It was a temporary job. Because I had been brought up in Montclair and if there was one place I wanted to get away from it was Montclair, New Jersey. [Laughter] But anyway, here's this great American Indian collection that Mrs. [Florence Rand] Lang had started with her mother in the 1880s when you could get everything. And it's really a wonderful collection. They don't exhibit it; it's mostly in the basement now. But she wanted me to catalogue it and install it in a new wing she had built for the purpose on the Montclair Art Museum. So I did that, and it took me two years.

She didn't hurry me at all. I spent six months reading about Indians. [Laughing] She's in there, I say, why don't you get to work? [Laughter] But anyway, I had finished that job and was scratching my head and wondering where I was going to work. And you know, it was hard times, and I finally—when Holger Cahill was pinch hitting for Alfred Barr during that year that Alfred had a sick leave, I knew Cahill and he said, "Gee, there's no staff here and I'm supposed to put on four big exhibitions this year. And I'm going to ask if you can come and work for a dollar an hour." So I said, "Wonderful." And that's what happened. So I got to work on the great American show from 1862 to 1932 [*American Painting and Sculpture, 1862–1932*]. That included Whistler, Winslow Homer, and everybody; [Albert Pinkham] Ryder. It was very educational and very interesting.

RC: I'd love to see that show now, it must be wonderful.

DM: What?

RC: I'd love to see a show like that now.

DM: Oh boy, it was a marvelous show. And then Cahill sold the Trustees on an idea of his that he was dying to do, an exhibition [[*American Sources of Modern Art \(Aztec, Mayan, Incan\)*](#)] of the early art that preceded the coming of the white people to America, in other words, pre-Columbian art, Aztec and Maya and Inca. And I worked on that show with him as a volunteer worker. It was such wonderful material to study, you know. We went to all of the eastern museums, a great many of which have big collections of that that they made right around 1900. And so he put on that show which was a stunner. He also put on the *American Folk Art* [[*American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America, 1750–1900*](#)] show when Mrs. Rockefeller was buying folk art.

HA: Did you have anything to do with the [*Machine Art*](#) or the design shows?

DM: Well, Philip Johnson did the *Machine Art* show with Alfred Barr at Alfred's request, and that was '32, no, '34. It was '34.

HA: Well it was very early. Did you have anything to do with the Good Design shows that happened a little later or the Useful Objects shows?

DM: Useful Objects, we would all contribute our ideas to. But in general, by then, the departments had started in the Museum.

CC: Right.

DM: And there was the Department of Architecture and Design, which was the first of them, and the Film Library was the next.⁵ But Philip Johnson, as I said, he was just out of Harvard and—

HA: He was also high on our list of interview subjects, of course.

DM: Yes.

HA: Now he's one of the people who's still around from that period.

DM: Yes.

HA: In fact, he's before you, really.

DM: Yes, he was hired by Alfred. No, he paid his own way.

HA: Paid his own way.

DM: Paid for his own department, too; paid his secretary. But Alfred wanted him to start the Department of Architecture and Design. Philip was dying to do it, he was just out of Harvard, was rich, so that's how that started. But Eddie Warburg was in there as a very early trustee who had been in college slightly before Philip Johnson; he's a little older.

CC: We wanted to get those people to talk about the earliest possible days of the Museum and even the antecedents to the Museum; Katherine Drier, Alfred's Harvard Coop idea, and Paul Sachs's class, and really what the flavor was at the time that the Museum came into existence.

DM: Those people are a little too young.

CC: Well, it's hard to get anybody around now who's a little bit older.

DM: No, I mean, I'm older than they are, but I wasn't up at Harvard at the time. But they will know about it. Especially as that—

CC: Lincoln Kirstein would know.

⁵ The MoMA Dept. of Architecture was established first in 1932. Renamed the Dept. of Architecture and Industrial Art in 1935, it returned simply to the Dept. of Architecture in 1940 when Industrial Design was made independent. Both departments merged in 1949 to become the Dept. of Architecture and Design.

- DM: Lincoln and Eddie Warburg. Eddie—I forget whether Lincoln was in on it—Eddie and—
- HA: Lincoln was in on the Harvard Society.
- CC: Lincoln was very much in on the Harvard—
- DM: Yes, that's it, and Eddie Warburg.
- HA: Yes, both of those two were.
- CC: And then what we wanted to do was to go up a little bit and then [we] would begin the Barr period, really, in the picture.
- DM: Yes.
- CC: And I think that's where you would come in, to give us a flavor of, not only a characterization of Barr, which you could do quite well, but also, we were intrigued—when you were on the phone we were saying, you seem to give a good flavor of what the Museum was like in that first decade in terms of—
- RC: It was more like a family.
- DM: Yes, it was.
- CC: Four people working, kind of a club atmosphere, and you were holding the picture—
- DM: Yes.
- CC: And I think that gives a nice flavor because it gives also a feeling of how impassioned I think it all must have been. I mean you were being criticized and ridiculed for doing what you were doing, yet at the same time you felt you were doing something extraordinary.
- HA: You were pioneering.
- CC: And you were pioneering. I think there's an interesting—that's the kind of tension we want to create.
- DM: Yes.

- CC: And create, not halos, but create a nice feeling about what that meant. Because now I think people take it all, obviously, for granted.
- DM: Of course they do. But when I was allowed to put on those first American shows, they always got panned. No, the first one didn't get panned, but after that.
- CC: [INAUDIBLE: 1:23:26] Winslow Homer.
- DM: No, that wasn't the show I mean. I mean the New Americans, the Young American shows. The first one was called *18 Artists from 9 States* [[Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States](#)], or something like that. And then from then on, they were called [12 Americans](#) or [14 Americans](#). I was allowed to choose them, and the Trustees always supported me. They said, whatever you think should go in, you put it in. But the critics were very apt to pan those shows, people like Emily Genauer.
- CC: They'd find omissions or people who showed that didn't belong.
- DM: Or they thought, "Why show *that*?" you know. I remember—this is much later—Arthur Drexler was running the Architecture Department then, he came into my office the day after the show, the morning after the show had opened and the newspapers had come out—and Arthur came in and sat down and said, "Congratulations, Dorothy, you've done it again! They hate it!" [Laughter]
- CC: That's exactly the kind of thing.
- RC: That's the kind of thing that your remembering will really give color to that whole period.
- HA: How did you feel about having your shows panned?
- CC: You know now the critics are more like reporters. They seem to be—
- RC: They don't take a stand or really argue with the—
- DM: Well, Emily Genauer took a stand, and that was hating us.
- RC: Was there anything she came around to like? Did she ever soften in her position while you were there?
- DM: Not on the Americans. I can't remember—of course I was very healthy to be able to forget those reviews of hers. But they're all on file.

CC: Oh yes, yes, we know about that. We have got a lot more work to do.

HA: Well, you've given us enough of your time and a lot of great ideas, and we thank you very much, and we're going to come back to you with our camera sometime and ask you some of the same questions all over again.

END OF INTERVIEW at 1:25:41