DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH:	**WALDO RASMUSSEN (WR)**
INTERVIEWERS:	**HARVEY ARDMAN (HA); RUTH CUMMIMGS (RC); CARL COLBY (CC)**
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HA: What is your job, essentially?

WR: International Program is broadly concerned with international exchanges with foreign museums. And mostly that means circulating exhibitions, and that's the primary thing now. It means sending exhibitions to foreign countries, but it also means sponsoring incoming exhibitions from foreign countries, under certain circumstances. Not every exhibition of a foreign artist or a foreign country is considered sponsored by what we call the International Council of the Museum, but many are.

HA: You mean there are some that have a different channel?

WR: Yes. And that gets a little complicated, but the International Program was founded to encourage exchange in the visual arts between the United States and other countries. [Knock on door]

HA: That's probably Ruth.

RC: Hello.

WR: Hi.

RC: Sorry.

HA: Just started, Ruth.

RC: Okay, great.

WR: I'm trying to explain what the International Program is.

RC: Okay. I hope you didn't get too far.

WR: Should I start over?

RC: You can continue; I can catch up.

WR: See, the purpose of the International Program has changed over the years, I'm sure. And I have known and seen a lot of it, since I came here in '54, and the program itself was founded in '52. For the earlier [years] of the program, you really ought at some point to meet with Porter McCray, who was the first director of the International Program.

HA: Yes, he's on your list.

WR: Yes, well he's very important to see. He's wonderful, a fascinating man. You'll enjoy talking to him. But he can tell you things I can't about the genesis of the International Program, how it actually came to be. I mean I know some of it, but I don't know a lot of the specifics. But I know it came to be mostly because there was no way for the United States to have any kind of official exchanges with foreign countries in the visual arts, things like the Venice Biennale, for example, or the São Paulo Biennial, which, in other countries are the charge of government. This fell in between, and there was no way for the United States to be represented in those festivals. Also, I suppose this began in the late forties, the thinking about it, and then it actually began in 1952. So that's very close to the end of the second World War, and there was this kind of hunger for seeing things from foreign countries as well, and the hunger for cultural exchange, of which there hadn't been any for a long time. So the International Program was founded to fulfill some of those needs. And so for the first decade or so, The Museum of Modern Art assumed sole responsibility to represent the United States at a lot of international art festivals.

HA: On what authority did the Museum make that assumption?

WR: Well, the authority of a vacuum, I suppose.

HA: [Laughs] The government said, you go ahead and do it because we're not going to.

WR: No, but certainly the government had indicated very clearly it wasn't. For example, in the Venice Biennale, the biennale had always been done privately, and the building in the biennale was owned, actually, by a private art gallery; the Grand Central art galleries. And they decided they couldn't do it any longer. They had done it very well, apparently, because they had the selection and organization done by museums. But there was no money for them to continue doing it, so they put the building up for sale, and the government would not buy the building, and so The Museum of Modern Art did. And to this day, we still own that building in Venice that looks sort of like a colonial post office.

HA: What do you do with this building?

WR: Well, we don't do anything with it any more. It's now used by whatever organization is putting on an exhibition representing the United States. But at that point we actually bought the building. And at any rate, the Museum issued a statement saying that for a limited time, it would undertake this responsibility. And that meant not simply doing exhibitions all by itself, [but] that they would encourage other museums to participate. So, the Museum would do a show, and then another museum.

HA: But you would be in charge [and] would take the responsibility?

WR: Well, yes, we would guarantee that there would be a show for some of these exhibitions, at any rate, at least for Venice and São Paulo, and that was the case then from '52 to '62. So representing the United States was a very important part of those early years. Then that changed. In '62 we announced that we would no longer assume that responsibility, that we felt we had demonstrated the importance of doing so, and that it was a province of government. And we gave about a year's notice of the decision, at least a year's notice—no, two years for Venice. The last year we did in Venice was '62, so the next one would be '64. But, and at the same time, we announced that with the hope that the U.S. government would assume its responsibility, we began changing our own priorities, namely toward sending exhibitions to Europe or towards representing American art, to more helping other parts of the world to see modern art. So we were doing more exhibitions in Latin America, for example, not restricted to the

work of American artists, and more exhibitions in Asia, and more exhibitions in Australia and so forth.

RC: Who curates those and how do you come up with the concepts and determine whatever countries—? Do they participate in this? Or how does the Museum [INAUDIBLE: 0:06:15]?

WR: Well, my job is first of all to help organize the shows and administer the tours, and work with the curatorial staff in deciding on the content of the programs. And one factor in that is my contacts with foreign museums to find out what they want or what they need. So we try not to figure out in New York what the rest of the world should see in terms of modern art. We try to find out from Latin American museums which aspects are particularly relevant to them.

CC: Do you mostly export or do you import also?

WR: Mostly export now.

HA: What sort of aspects of American art are they interested in?

WR: Not American art anymore; we're talking about the whole range of modern art.

HA: You're talking about the collection of the Museum, I assume.

WR: No, not necessarily. We're talking about any subject in modern art that we can cope with, that's a practical exhibition proposal to organize for them. I mean, for example, we have done exhibitions, some very basic but major shows, like an exhibition called *Cezanne to Miró*, which is like a primer of modern art; that was not based on our own collection. It was not a huge show; it was under 60 paintings. As I remember, about 20 of them were from our own collection, and the rest were from private collectors and other museums. But we assumed the responsibility for those paintings. And then we did another show for Australia called *Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse*, which was the same concept, essentially. Well, what that meant was, you see, that in Latin America and Australia, they were seeing works by major painters for the first time. In Latin America, there had never been, say, a [Kazimir] Malevich or a [Vasily] Kandinsky or a [Piet] Mondrian. There were then maybe *a* [Pablo] Picasso or [Henri] Matisse, but they just hadn't seen.

CC: And these aren't shows that originated here, just shows that you put together?

WR: Sometimes yes and sometimes no.

CC: Who curates the shows?

WR: Museum staff.

CC: Here?

WR: Yes.

CC: So it's as if you're producing—in a way you're putting something together on the outside, one of your own staff people doing it, and then delivering it to a particular market, whether it be Hong Kong or Bogotá or wherever it is.

WR: Yes.

CC: And it doesn't necessarily have to originate here.

WR: Not necessarily, but sometimes it does.

CC: So they come to you—in essence, they're coming to you for expertise on modernism.

WR: Well, they're coming— it's not the expertise, it's the objects they want.

CC: Your paintings, your pictures.

HA: Or your ability to put them together.

WR: See, the thing is that, though it's no longer—it's a smaller program than it began as, because it's more expensive to do and because the availability of major works is more difficult. But we're still the only agency in the world that does exhibitions on this international basis. Because again, the comparison would be with a government agency like the British Council, which exports British art, but they don't export Picasso and Matisse.

HA: So you were in the kind of odd position of exporting art which is not American to foreign countries.

WR: Yes, although we export American art, too, if someone asked for it.

RC: It's almost like the International Council then, has taken on the—and I don't use this in a derogatory way—missionary zeal for what the original founders took on.

WR: Yes, oh yes.

RC: The curators for shows here almost seem that they're, not locked in, but they do a core of shows, whereas you could do something on primitivism; correct?

WR: Yes.

HA: Well you're still working with virgin territory, so to speak.

WR: Well…

HA: I mean, if you're saying to me that some of the great painters that you mentioned had never been seen in some of these countries, then it's almost the same situation that Alfred Barr had when the Museum was founded.

WR: Yes, that's right. It's more like the early days of the circulating program in this country.

HA: Mm-hm.

WR: Well, it's—however, this program began in '52, and it's [now] '82, so.

HA: You have 30 years of doing this.

WR: Yes, so things have changed, obviously. I mean the two shows I mentioned, they're not all that recent. The *Cezanne to Miró* show was done in 1958, so, at any rate, that's the basic thing. Then, we continue to send abroad exhibitions that are shown here, in which foreign museums are interested.

RC: It's almost like you primed the territory then, so now you can almost look to just extending the exhibitions you have here. Is that possible, or is there still a great need for original context in shows?

WR: Oh yes; yes. Because what we do really has to be considered a drop in the bucket, and so, I mean, we can do—these days, we can do a major painting or a sculpture show for Latin America, at best, one every couple of years or three years.

HA: What does it cost to do something like that?

WR: Well, that's so variable that one can hardly say, the biggest variation being insurance.

HA: Are we talking about tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars?

WR: Tens of thousands. I mean, a $100,000 budget would be a major show, a hundred, a hundred fifty. Occasionally, something like the—well, that depends what you consider a budget. If you consider a budget to be out-of-pocket expenses only, that's what I'm talking about.

HA: And that's what I mean, essentially, assuming the Department is always in existence.

WR: But I mean if one were actually figuring out what the cost of an exhibition would be, then you would indeed have to prorate the time of the people working on it.

HA: Of course.

RC: And does more of your budget percentage-wise come from the actual Council, or from the public contributions? I mean, I'm wondering how, where the—?

WR: There are no public contributions.

RC: Oh, I see, because this seems like a very specialized—and again, the founders would appreciate how important this is for the general membership of the—I don't know if they think that you should [be] out using their money—

WR: No membership money goes towards it.

RC: Oh, I see; so this is very specialized.

WR: Yes. The financial support comes from the International Council, primarily. They give the kind of base money. They pay the costs of this department and they make a contribution towards the Museum for its staff time, so the Museum is reimbursed for some of the time it spends on it.

HA: I see.

WR: And, we don't give the shows away.

HA: I would assume that the people you're sending them to are also paying something for it.

WR: Yes, yes. Now those fees graduate. European museums would pay a larger percentage of the cost than a Latin American museum would.

HA: Why is that?

WR: Because they can afford to.

HA: [Laughing] I see.

WR: It's very [INAUDIBLE: 0:13:35].

CC: Does this also figure, when you do something like that for them, even though they're paying for it, does that foster a relationship with a certain European museum that other museums in the United States might not have? Or not necessarily?

WR: Well, probably, though we've had good relations with European museums for a long time, through borrowing from them and their borrowing from us. And what I'm talking about doesn't have anything to do with straight loans from our collection, individual loans or individual groups of loans. That's done elsewhere.

HA: They don't even come to you if they want to borrow a specific painting?

WR: No, no; no, no.

HA: Or if they're putting together a show, their own Picasso show, for example.

WR: Yes.

HA: And they want a few things from the Museum, they'll go to another source altogether?

WR: They go to William Rubin.

HA: So you're interested in the shows only, really, that you're putting together.

WR: Yes.

HA: What kind of reception do these shows get when the exhibition takes place abroad?

WR: Well, again, that depends on history, the timing, where it's been shown. Historically, one of the most important things we did was obviously to make

American art known abroad, and the first show to do that was a show called *The New American Painting* [*The New American Panting as Shown in Eight European Countries*] in 1958, which was [Willem] de Kooning, [Jackson] Pollock, abstract expressionist painting; [Barnett] Newman, [Mark] Rothko, and so forth. And it circulated simultaneously with the *Jackson Pollock* one-man show, so it was a big kind of double whammy. And the reaction was very divided. A lot of people were scandalized and thought it was junk. And if you look at the press criticism, a lot of the critics who wrote those reviews would probably be quite embarrassed to have to reread them. On the other hand, it was a revelation, and historically it's been one of the most important shows in the post-war period. For certain parts of the world, it had the same effect with the Europeans that the Armory show had on us.

HA: Isn't that interesting.

WR: Then there were a whole series of one-man shows which also, in the early years, were very controversial. Later on—if you did a Rothko show today, I'm sure everyone would say he's a great master, but they didn't in 1964.

HA: It seems to me that there's almost a built-in conflict between your department and other departments in the Museum, where you each might want to do one thing or another thing with a specific painting or a set of paintings. It sounds difficult.

WR: Mm-hm. [Laughter] That's right.

HA: I see.

RC: You all get to win some of the time? Or how are those decisions made if there is conflict?

WR: Well, there isn't that much really.

RC: Are things scheduled so far in advance that you can—?

WR: Yes. Well, there really isn't that much.

RC: Because I guess there's really major paintings appearing here that certainly you're not going to travel, [like] really, really important major pieces. Or do you send masterpieces?

WR: Masterpieces? Yes. Now the problem—we'll be faced with an interesting situation when we have more space, because though the collections have always been kind of base for us, obviously, and the base varies a lot, but say, for example, the year before last we had a very beautiful and a very important show traveling in Latin America called *Four Modern Masters*. And that was Max Ernst, [René] Magritte, [Joan] Miró and [Giorgio] de Chirico. Well, it was a modest sized show; it was about 60-odd works, and of those, 50 were from the collection. That means, say, 10 de Chiricos. I'm sure, when the new galleries open, there aren't going to be 10 de Chiricos available for any show that we send abroad.

HA: I see what you're saying. Right now they're in storage, but they'll be on permanent display.

WR: That's right. So that's obviously going to change things for us. But I don't know to what degree, because I don't know how much of that collection is going to be on the walls.

RC: Do you think you would have the clout, let's say, if all the de Chiricos were taken, to call—I don't know who might have one in a gallery—and say, you don't have any to give but would you give yours?

WR: Oh, well certainly, we've done shows that were entirely loan shows, with nothing from our collection. I mean—

RC: So that type of reputation, of course, has been established, to use carte blanche.

WR: Yes, but then your loan power depends a lot on where the show is going. Because when you're doing a show for, say, Latin America; Latin America is the particular case, I guess. It really has more to do with doing good than it does with big prestige or whatever. It's obviously much easier to borrow works of art for a showing in Paris or London or Cologne than it is for Buenos Aires or Rio de Janiero or Caracas. And obviously, people also think that there's a greater risk involved in sending works to Latin America.

HA: Probably true.

WR: Well, it is, to a degree. But what we do is to supervise those shows virtually every second. We travel with the shows. We supervise the transportation ourselves. We don't leave it to the subscribing museums to arrange the

transport; we do it here in New York, and someone from our staff travels with the show and then goes back at the close of the show to take it all to the next city. So our record is terrific. But yes…

HA: Have you ever had any real problems?

WR: Oh, we have lots of problems but we never—

HA: I mean *real* problems.

WR: We lost one show [*Young American Printmakers*] years and years ago, and luckily it was a printmaking show, so it wasn't unique material. It was lost in a warehouse fire.[1] But there have been no disasters.

HA: Whooh, that must take constant vigilance on your part to make sure that doesn't happen.

WR: Yes. Well, it's also a kind of irony because everyone thinks of the museum world as being a quiet, secure world, and we're working in the most insecure—

HA: You're working in countries that are possibly politically unstable?

WR: Well it's not—no. If we sense that there are severe political problems, we would not send a show there.

HA: But there's also always the problem of physical danger to the paintings of some sort or another, or even theft, I suppose also.

WR: Sure; but that's true on 53rd Street, too.

HA: I suppose, yes, although I don't know. If I were you and I were in charge and I had sent *Sleeping Gypsy* to Argentina, let's say, I'm not certain I could sleep nights until it was back in New York.

WR: Well I didn't say I wasn't an insomniac. [Laughter]

HA: You must have nerves of steel sometimes, I would think.

WR: Well…

HA: Do you travel often with the shows yourself?

[1] *Young American Printmakers*, a show of (35 prints purchased by the International Program) by 35 artists, was destroyed by fire in a Guatemalan warehouse on July 16, 1959.

WR: Yes, I do. But all of us do. Curatorial staff travel with the show, the registrars, the conservators; a lot of us will go.

RC: What if people come up to you as a representative of the Museum and give you some fanfare, how is it to travel to these places where modern art is a foreign animal? What has the response been?

WR: It's been wonderful. I can't say that I've ever experienced any hostility.

RC: How about praise for the Museum? Do you recall any individual comments of people who were grateful?

WR: It's a very satisfying thing to do, because people are so grateful. If you send works of art to a country where they've only seen reproductions, then the response you get is very thrilling. For example, in Buenos Aires, when we had that *Four Modern Masters* show there, and it was just the year before last, there were lines outside the museum for a show which here would be regarded as a very beautiful but modest sized show. It's not a blockbuster.

HA: Mm-hm. [Unrelated private conversation from 0:22:20 to 0:22:30, then tape break] This seems to me, what you're doing seems to me a continuation of a tradition that began in the thirties really, when the Modern Architecture [*Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*] show went to 12 places and Bullock's department store in Los Angeles. You're doing essentially the same thing, only on a broader scale, but then we live in a world that's on a broader scale.

WR: Yes, that's right.

HA: I would imagine if life is ever found on other planets, you'll have shows going there too. [Laughter] Of course, you might want to import more from them.

WR: Well we did—in the earlier years, we did a lot more foreign shows. We did surveys of Japanese art, Polish art, Spanish art, Indian textiles, [INAUDIBLE: 0:23:15]; there are many, many such shows. And that was when there was a kind of crying need to do that. But now that happens more easily, so there are fewer such shows because there have been so many national surveys. And we tend to emphasize, rather than national origins in any case, internationalism. So a national show or a show from abroad would be when there's some aesthetic

reason rather than a national or—which is essentially [INAUDIBLE: 0:23:51] political.

HA: What are some examples of these shows that have come here that you have handled, the ones that you've imported?

WR: Well, I just mentioned that whole series. We've done a Japanese—

HA: Oh that; yes. But I mean, is there something more recent [that is] not a national survey? You said aesthetic reasons would be the—

WR: Oh, well, often, one of the things we do now is to sponsor incoming foreign shows when they represent exchanges between our museum and other museums. So for example, we had drawings from the Kröller-Müller Museum [*Drawings from the Kröller-Müller Museum National Museum, Otterlo*] shown here, and we, in exchange, sent drawings from our collection there. And we have a whole series of exchanges with the French National museums where sometimes we co-organize the shows, like the [Paul] Cezanne show is a case in point. And that gets International Council identification as a cultural exchange project. So it's been more that kind of thing. We did an African textile show [*African Textiles and Decorative Arts*], and that had funding from the International Council.

HA: What about Iron Curtain countries or third-world countries that might not—? Well, there might be political differences. Do you have exchange programs with them too, or do you send them things and get things from them?

WR: Well, we have had—it's difficult without government assistance, because usually, eastern European countries, for example, can't reimburse you for any cost in U.S. currency. So that's been a big impediment. And the other big impediment, obviously, has been modernism itself in terms of the Soviet Union.

HA: Mm-hm.

WR: Because they're not interested, so they're not our customers, for that reason. But we've had shows in Iron Curtain countries.

HA: It's funny to hear that because I've been reading about some of the early reactions to the paintings that the Museum exhibited, and one of them said that—one of the critics said that it's just Bolshevism on canvas.

WR: Yes.

HA: And Russia has no interest—the Soviet Union has no interest in modernism. That's striking.

WR: Well, that is to say, beyond a certain classic modernism thought. We have sent exchange loans of individual pictures to Russia.

RC: Russian Constructivist?

WR: No, of Picasso and Matisse. But exactly *not* the Russian Constructivists. Those artists were for a long time frowned upon by the Soviet regime [INAUDIBLE: 0:26:34].

HA: No Jackson Pollock, I assume?

WR: No.

HA: No Mark Rothko?

WR: No.

HA: I see.

WR: Though we have, years ago, too—another thing we used to do was to send American art to the residences of U.S. ambassadors abroad. We did that for about 10 years. And that did include quite a few Eastern European countries. So that was a way of having more contemporary American things seen in that country.

HA: I see; that's interesting.

WR: And the ambassadors would always make a special effort to invite artists to receptions and so forth, so they would have a chance to see it.

HA: It's too bad that that program stopped. That sounds like a very sensible idea.

WR: Yes, but it was never a thing that we did as a pilot project to get the government involved, and the government now does have such a program.

HA: Oh, I see. Are there museums around the world that are problems to you? The people that won't cooperate or always make your life tough, or who are really opposed to the ideas that you have?

WR: You mean in terms of not lending?

HA: Not lending or not wanting any part of anything you might have to offer. I'm not talking about the Soviet Union now, but I mean, are there other museums where you've had really serious problems?

WR: No, I can't say that there are.

HA: No. Everybody was happy to do this.

RC: Captain of the team, no one's going to pick a bone with you.

WR: Well, there's no reason for the hostility. People aren't hostile to somebody who's being generous.

HA: Not at the moment, anyhow.

WR: No, but you see what I mean. It's not like—you see, the big saving, in terms of the political situation—because after all, you know, that's part of the reality, is that we're not sponsoring the art of our own country. If we were sending U.S. art to Latin America, that would be a very different story—

HA: Yes, I'm sure.

WR: Because that would be perceived as cultural propaganda. Now, there certainly have been accusations that The Museum of Modern Art is guilty of cultural imperialism, and there have been press articles stating that. I don't know what it means, because imperialism means if you're trying to establish an empire, and I don't see how that applies. But that has been a theory, I mean, there have been critics of the Museum who have said that.

HA: How about a museum like the Metropolitan, which would, if you didn't know that The Museum of Modern Art was doing this, and someone said, "Is there a museum in the country doing such a thing?" you might say, "Well yes, maybe the Metropolitan Museum in New York would do such a thing." Is there—? How do

you—? Do they feel that you are—? Are they cooperating with you and helping you?

WR: They lend. Well, the Metropolitan Museum doesn't send modern exhibitions abroad. So we're not infringing on their territory. And they, in fact, lend to our program, so.

RC: Have you ever had guest curators from other museums besides the Modern that have coordinated exhibitions for you?

WR: Yes.

RC: In areas where maybe you don't have the resident expert on a lot of things?

WR: Yes, we do. Just because, though the Museum is big, the staff isn't as big as people think it is.

RC: Right.

WR: And no, I have a case of that at present. We're working on plans to send an exhibition [*Pop Art, 1955-1970*] of Pop art to Australia and for the latter part of '84 to '85, so we need someone to work on it now. And there is nobody on the staff whose field this is or who really can spare the time, in Painting and Sculpture, because that's the Department involved. So I've invited Henry Geldzahler to work on the show. But mostly, they're done by our own staff.

RC: Have you ever projected in your own mind what the effect of your good offices would have on the enlargement of the art community worldwide and the art market? What are your thoughts about that?

WR: None about the art market whatsoever. It doesn't interest me. That is really totally out of our control. The other; yes, because I myself come from a provincial situation, so I have some feeling for what it means. I came from Portland, Oregon, and the first shows that I saw were exhibitions circulated by The Museum of Modern Art. So I know what it feels like to be someone interested in modern art in a community which doesn't have a collection, where for the first time I could see Paul Klee or Picasso and whatever. So I know what that feels like. And my feeling about it is, I suppose, really similar to what Alfred Barr and the people who began the Museum felt, mainly that if you make modern

art available to people, then you are making a contribution to art itself, because it enlarges the possibilities. Artists need to see art in order to develop as artists.

CC: There's nothing like you're selling it, I mean, you're just—

WR: No.

HA: But it stimulates.

WR: It stimulates the artists. It becomes another kind of source for them. And it's enriching. So I think, in some small way, because it is a small way, it's too small a program to have a gigantic effect. But in some small way, I think it has enlarged the possibilities. I mean for example, in Australia, we did this show [*Two Decades of American Painting*] of American art from 1945 to 1965, which was shown there in '67. And Australia had been very isolated from contemporary art. They had never seen a Jackson Pollock or a Rothko or a Frank Stella or Andy Warhol or whatever. And the effect of that show on them, they said, was like the Armory show. They had had in the late thirties a school of Paris show which changed Australian art, and this other show almost 30 years later, had the same kind of effect. And I see that. In the 18 years or whatever it is since that show was there, you can see that.

RC: Australian art has—

WR: Has been affected by that show and by other shows. Also, the other change is that because we did that show and then other major shows, certain concrete things happened to the Australian art world, preeminently with the *Modern Masters* show, because that was a tremendous public success. I mean, it was unprecedented in Australian museum history in terms of the numbers of people coming to a museum in a given period. And what they told me is that it was instrumental. That show was instrumental in their setting up an Australian arts council and getting federal government money for the visual arts. I think the other thing it did was to demonstrate that masterpieces could be sent to Australia and taken care of, so that other museums in the world were encouraged to do so. And that's what I've always told would be one of the side effects of our sending these exhibitions; is that if we're willing to send 10 de Chiricos to São Paulo, Brazil, then so should other museums. I can't say it's taken all that benefit

because all this takes money, and it takes staff, and most museums have to be concerned with what's going on within their own building. But still. And the other thing is that it enriches us, as a museum, because it means that our staff sees more of the world. We're not unknowledgeable about what's happening in Latin America now, or Australia, or parts of the world that in fact other modern museums don't know that much about.

CC: And it's good public relations, too, in terms of having an impact on the rest of the world with the exhibitions that you have—

WR: Yes.

CC: While also probably fostering—do they end up, in a sense, then, paying for the curatorial staff to go over there and to—?

WR: No.

RC: Probably the International Council does it.

WR: Well, they will pay an exhibition fee which covers a portion of the costs, and then the other portion will be subsidized by—

CC: But it keeps you in the forefront, obviously, with the American museums.

HA: Well, I think it was interesting what he was saying, that the Museum staff becomes knowledgeable about these areas, which is an advantage over all the other modern museums in the world, I would guess.

CC: Which don't have as much contact.

WR: Yes, that's right.

HA: Are there any other museums in the world that have a program like this?

WR: No, not in terms of the continuing—a department charged with this kind of program.

CC: So [it's] both your objects and somewhat your expertise, then, that you're exporting?

WR: Yes.

CC: Not just the objects here though. It's [INAUDIBLE: 0:36:15].

WR: No, not entirely and also we have other programs besides exhibition programs. And we've had some museum training programs; again, a very small program because our facilities aren't big enough to have a real—we don't have a real education program like the Metropolitan Museum. But we have people come in occasionally from foreign countries to work here for two or three months, and that's been a big help. And we've arranged some international conferences about museum problems.

RC: When do those interns or people from other countries come to work here?

WR: They're here right now.

RC: Oh, they're here now; they're here through—for how long do they stay?

WR: Well, I mean, it'll be one person at a time.

RC: I see.

WR: It's a really small number, but over years—

RC: And that person will be here for a year, or—?

WR: No, oh no, probably no longer than two months.

RC: And where is your person from now?

WR: Argentina. And usually the department that works most closely with us on that is the Registrar, because training with the Registrar is a kind of backbone of museum training. Occasionally someone will, if they're further advanced—we usually take very young people at the beginning of the museum career who really need to know the basics: how to take care of works of art, how to examine them, their condition, how to pack them, that kind of thing. Then occasionally, someone at a more advanced stage of the profession will come in and intern with a curatorial department and actually see the workings of the show and the organization of an exhibition.

HA: You said one thing about the enlargement of the Museum, that is that there may be more of the permanent collection on display all the time—

WR: Sure.

HA: Which could affect you, but I was wondering, what other—? What do you see as the future of the Department? Do you see a program very much like the one you have now, given that liability of having more on the wall, or do you see an increase in these traveling exhibits, or a decrease, or what? What's ahead?

WR: Well, I don't know. It's very hard to predict because it's hard to predict where a new audience may exist or where new problems may exist. I mean, for example, the situation in Latin America is very changeable.

HA: Yes.

WR: And the countries that we're able to send shows to in any given period will change. During one phase, Chile may be a terrific place to send an exhibition to, and in another phase, it isn't. Or there may be a phase when they have absolutely no money, or when there is no director of the museum. You can't send an exhibition to a museum without a director. All sorts of things can change, so it's really hard to predict. I don't see any tremendous change happening.

HA: Have you ever had any—? I'm thinking of kind of dramatic situations where you've sent a show to someplace and civil war has broken out, or the museum has burned down, or something really incredible has happened. Has anything ever occurred like that, a really dramatic story?

WR: No, luckily, no. [Laughter]

RC: It would be great for our film, but we're happy that—

CC: I bet you're happy that, too. [Laughter]

WR: Yes, I am. I don't need that kind of drama. [Laughter]

HA: Well, I understand.

CC: It sounds very good, though. It sounds—it's interesting—

HA: It sounds like a very worthwhile thing that's being done here, for all parties.

CC: —because I would imagine people would want to be in contact with the Met, obviously, or the National Gallery, but most people I think on the outside simply think that museums are in contact with each other so that they can exchange

each other's treasures and line up a tote list and have promises kept, but in a sense, you're educating people on modernism, which is a very—which is ongoing and you're part of a 55-year history of proselytizing. If anything, do you think you draw on more of that than—? Or you at least encounter more reaction from the initial shock of modernism that people here; that western Europeans have pretty much run through that?

WR: Yes.

CC: So you still get that when you go to Buenos Aires or not Buenos Aires particularly, but—?

WR: Yes, you may well; sure, because it's newer.

RC: In your office is there somebody that collects the criticism of the shows, the articles?

WR: Yes. We have a whole archive on it because I think some of that will be important to art historians.

RC: Kind of like to show that history [INAUDIBLE: 0:41:05].

CC: What's the most outrageous or the most contemporary show that you've put on, as opposed to the—? Would you say the abstract expressionist one?

WR: Well, contemporary when it was done. But, well, we did a similarly contemporary show [*Some Recent American Art*] in Australia in the seventies around minimal and conceptual art, for example. And you can imagine the reaction that would have, say, to a smaller city in the United States, the reaction to it in Australia was like that. It was very important to the art community, and it was cordially hated by a good many Australians.

CC: What would be the places that we'd be surprised to hear how little they get in terms of painting and sculpture? I mean they might get an awful lot of reproductions, obviously.

WR: You mean outside the United States?

CC: Yes. Australia? Or Hong Kong?

WR: Australia now gets a lot.

HA: What about Africa? I would imagine that's limited.

WR: Yes, yes. And we have—

HA: There are no facilities to show the art in most African countries.

WR: So far as I know, and I don't really know Africa.

RC: What about the Orient? You were going to say; or have they taken to it and seen a lot?

WR: Well, Japan, yes. But Southeast Asia and India, not very much. And we have not had very much there. And we have sent some important exhibitions to India, but just to New Delhi, not for tour. And we've sent smaller shows of prints, and we're now doing a book illustration show [*Modern Artists as Illustrators*] specifically for Southeast Asia and India.

RC: Was one of the shows in New Delhi painting and sculpture?

WR: Yes, that same exhibition of American abstract expressionists, were in India.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:42:45].

WR: And then I did an exhibition [*U.S. Representation: Second Indian Triennale New Dehli*] once in India which was funded—it was for a triennale. I sent an exhibition of American artists, where some of the artists actually traveled to India and made works on the spot.

RC: Was this with—? There was a gentleman whose mother—they have a [Le] Corbusier house, he was helping [Robert] Rauschenberg.

WR: Sarabhai?

RC: I believe that might be. He was helping them make works on paper, [and] they'd go on residence; Rauschenberg, [Robert] Ryman.

WR: That's something he's done on his own, or his family has done on its own. And they've done terrific things. This was another show where Carl Andre and Alan Saret and Keith Sonnier and Sam Gilliam all traveled to India and actually made the works or set up works in India, and they used non-traditional materials. The idea was to kind of show to Indian contemporary artists that you needn't work with paint and canvas, particularly since paint and canvas in India are very

expensive. And Alan Saret made a piece using Indian material, bamboo and hemp and so forth.

RC: Do you have documentation of all of that? A catalog?

WR: Yes.

RC: That would be good to see. [INAUDIBLE: 0:44:10].

WR: It was a very beautiful show. And again, it was very controversial. A lot of the Indian public is very conservative, and so they thought it was quite crazy. And I think some of the Indian artists were very interested in it. This was done in 1971. I don't know whether there were any after-effects of the show or not.

RC: I'm wondering if any of those artists have made it here. I mean, that often happens.

WR: Indian artists?

RC: Yes, who've come here and who now work here. Would you know? Or has that happened [to] any of the artists that you may have shown works to in other countries, arriving here? That would be great to talk to someone like that.

WR: Oh, yes; I don't know. I don't know. I've really never thought of that.

CC: It might be interesting to talk to some of the consulate people. We were thinking of various international people who might have something to say about the Museum from, an overview.

WR: I wouldn't do it from a governmental view, because they're not that close to it. The art community would be who you would speak to.

RC: How about? Does your office handle—? Let's say there is a group of dignitaries or businessmen or whatever from other countries—

CC: Or artists who come here.

RC: Are you involved in showing them the Museum, or is that Membership, or who handles special groups?

WR: It depends who they are. Sometimes we do.

RC: Because if you had anything coming up, we'd certainly be interested to know about it.

CC: If there was, let's say, a particularly interesting Indian artist or someone from Hong Kong or Australia or whatever who—

RC: That would be great.

CC: Who had been influenced or visibly influenced, in terms of his career, by the Museum, it might be interesting to have him or her in the film because—or a curator of a small museum in India, or whatever—because then that would give us that—

WR: Yes.

RC: That outreach.

WR: Sure.

CC: Exactly, just to have them say something about the Museum and then the show that came to them speaks for your department as well as it speaks for, in everyone's mind; suddenly, they'd understand.

WR: Yes.

CC: It would be like having Sir Roland Penrose, but I mean, he's much more connected, but to have someone—

WR: Oh, I could suggest people to you, I'm sure. For example, there was a young man who was in Australia at the time my American show came there.

RC: Was Bob Hughes there, by the way, at that time? Because we had spoken to him and he said he had never seen anything and he finally came here, but [INAUDIBLE: 0:46:35].

WR: Oh, I don't know.

RC: I'm sorry to interrupt.

WR: At any rate, this young man came to work with me at the Museum afterwards, but he was in Australia when that show was there, and so he might give the Australian point of view about it.

RC: What was his name?

WR: John Stringer. He's now working at the Center for Inter-American Relations. And there may be some Latin American artists in town.

RC: That would be helpful. If some names come to you, we're working out of Luisa Kreisberg's new office, and [INAUDIBLE: 0:47:07].

CC: It would be helpful because it would be interesting to hear one or two of that perspective, just—

HA: One of the things we want to say in this film, one of the things we want to make clear, is the impact of the Museum, not only nationally but internationally. And so that story is maybe best told by somebody who was affected.

WR: Sure.

HA: Especially an artist.

WR: Yes.

CC: And we've been thinking as outrageously as Lillian Gish or Clint Eastwood, or—and it doesn't have to be simply Sol LeWitt or Robert Motherwell or someone like that, who's very close and obviously connected, but somebody who might just have been affected by—seen a show and it changed their life.

WR: Yes. Well, that's exactly what happened with me.

HA: That's exactly what happened with you?

WR: Sure. Walking in the Portland Art Museum and seeing an exhibition of three Spanish artists names: Picasso, Miro, and Juan Gris; [it] had a rather major effect, in my teens.

HA: Is that why you came to New York? Is that what brought you to New York and the Museum?

WR: Mm-hm; it was. My ambition was—I came here to go to graduate school in art history, but my ambition was to work here, assuming that I would do that after graduating from graduate school and working for a smaller museum. And I had the luck to get a job here within two weeks of arriving in New York. [Laughter] So I didn't get to graduate school.

HA: Uh-huh. Have you ever had works or any kind of program with China I wonder?

WR: No, alas; I would love to.

HA: That would be very interesting.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:48:45].

WR: It would be very nice, yes.

RC: What's it like when you go back, now, to Oregon, if you do? You must be swarmed with people who want to know, [and] talk art with you? What's that experience like?

WR: No, I don't; I really don't. It's just a family experience. I don't get back to that art world. I have the art world here; I don't need another one.

HA: [Laughing] No; in spades.

RC: But there is an art community there.

WR: Oh, absolutely, sure, well, there always was. It was a very good museum when I was there.

RC: Rothko is out there and [INAUDIBLE: 0:49:23]

WR: No; [Mark] Tobey. Tobey is from there as well. And there are some very good Northwest [INAUIDBLE: 0:49:30]. And it's nice; it's a small museum.

HA: This has been a very interesting conversation. It seems to me that you're doing some of the things that the Museum set out to do at the very first moment that it was a museum.

RC: With freshness.

WR: Well, you know, I've been here so long, I had the good luck to work with Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller and René d'Harnoncourt, and Porter McCray, who was also [INAUDIBLE: 0:49:57].

HA: Porter McCray, was he involved simply in the International—?

WR: No. He was Director of Circulating Exhibitions and the International Program, as I was too, after he left the Museum.

RC: And what about Elodie Courter?

WR: Elodie Courter was Director of Circulating Exhibitions before there was an International Program.

RC: Oh.

HA: So, do you know her?

WR: Yes.

HA: She's also someone on our list.

WR: Oh she's a lovely woman, very—and she knows all the old history of the Museum.

HA: Yes. So you worked with Barr and with d'Harnoncourt.

WR: Absolutely, and with Dorothy Miller very closely.

HA: We're seeing her tomorrow morning.

WR: Are you? The first time I was ever in New York was with Dorothy, with the *New American Painting* show.

HA: Uh-huh.

WR: So I came early on, a wonderful time.

HA: Of course, d'Harnoncourt had his own international overview. I know he brought, what, Mexican art here?

WR: Yes. Well, I'm sure the International Program exists because of René, more than anything. It was a combination of René d'Harnoncourt and Nelson Rockefeller, I think, more than anything else.

HA: Yes; Nelson, the Latin America connection.

WR: Well, not just Latin America, but I think that feeling of wanting to do something international, because he was an internationalist and so was René d'Harnoncourt, and so was Porter McCray. So that those three people, I think, are the key ones to starting this program.

RC: Was there any resistance at all, or again, was it just these people could do whatever they wanted and nobody was going to challenge them? I'm wondering was there an American backlash saying: Wait a second; why are you going off and trying to spread yourself?

WR: You'd really have to ask Porter because I wasn't here then. I think there was a resistance within the Museum to some degree, because I think there was a concern that the Museum would be spreading itself too thin, or diverting resources that the Museum itself needed. I know Alfred was concerned about it. He was worried about the perils of sending a collection to a foreign country. And then there is a built in—as you bring up, there is a kind of built-in problem that if you have a program on 53rd Street and an external program, there's bound to be a given amount of competition.

HA: [Tape break at 0:52:30] widespread it is and what impact it really had.

WR: Well, the one thing I think I should tell you, just so you know about it, is to know what the International Council itself gives, because it's different than the International Program. And it's the group of art patrons and collectors who are members of the Council whose dues go to support this program. Because that's unusual and there is no organization quite like that in the world to compare. And that began a little after the International Program itself began, roughly a year later, and it began with about a dozen people who were intended to give it nationwide support originally, and then it grew to an international [scale]. So now there are about 180 such members representing 21 foreign countries. And they're very important to us, not only for financial reasons, though that's obviously a very important reason because they pay annual dues and those dues are what makes this possible, but also because they help in other ways. They are a contact between me and the foreign museum. They will help with, if there is additional fundraising or problems in their countries, or whatever. So it's a very important organization.

HA: These people then are kind of on the level of the trustee level for the Museum.

WR: Yes. It's like having a very large board of trustees.

CC: 180 individuals. And is that the one Niarchos is on now, the Stavros Niarchos, he's on your—?

WR: Yes; I've never seen his face ever. There are a few people who belong because they believe in it but don't actually participate.

HA: Except financially.

WR: Yes. But most of them are very active.

HA: Is there a president of that organization?

WR: Yes.

HA: Who is that?

WR: Mrs. Alfred Stern.

RC: Is that Joanne Stern?

WR: Yes. And the chairman, who's Prince Franz of Bavaria.

RC: Now do these people also pass approval on the shows?

WR: Yes.

RC: The whole, the whole shebang?

WR: Well, they have a program committee, which is—

RC: I see. It's a similar setup to a Museum show.

HA: Yes, it's almost like a shadow organization, in a certain sense.

WR: Well, so I really—

RC: Parallel.

HA: Parallel, that's a better word.

WR: I really have a dual approvals system, every show that I do has to be approved both by the International Council and by the Museum trustees. So the International Council and the Trustees have to work together very closely. And of course, there are all sorts of other financial and legal arrangements.

CC: Like almost all painting and sculpture, then occasionally, some prints or photography?

WR: And a few architecture and design.

RC: Any film shows?

WR: Rarely, but some. I mean, we had a D. W. Griffith film [*D.W. Griffith Films*] cycle traveling. We will also support something like—there's a D. W. Griffith colloquium in Paris now at the Centre Pompidou, and the Council has sponsored sending two American scholars besides Eileen Bowser from the staff to that conference. We did a film cycle on modern art and artists [*Films: Modern Art and Artists*] for Latin America because they don't see very many art films. But to send Hollywood films, no, because the whole problems of rights from the industry is too complicated, and because it's not that necessary.

RC: You're really [a] diplomat, you have to be, or something. What does it take to do your job well? How do you describe yourself?

WR: I haven't any idea; I just do it.

RC: You deal with just a lot of different folks.

WR: Yes, it is complicated, I mean, there are lots of balls that are being juggled.

HA: A dual approval sounds like a potentially difficult business.

WR: Well, it sounds like it, but it really isn't.

HA: Usually, if the International Council approves of something, the Museum trustees also approve?

WR: Yes. And what you have to realize is that there are many trustees who are members of the Council, and the by-laws require certain of the officers to be trustees; the president has to be a trustee. So there's obviously a close link. There have been four presidents of the Council. The first president was Mrs. [Blanchette] Rockefeller. The second president was Mrs. [Elizabeth Bliss] Parkinson; the third was Mrs. [Elizabeth Allen] Straus. So they've all been key trustees.

HA: All three of these are key trustees also.

WR: Yes. So obviously that makes a difference.

HA: So it isn't quite dual approval.

WR: Not quite, but there is built into it a possibility for conflict. And I can't say it's ever really happened. But there was a period, for example, in the early years of the International Council, there was this other built-in problem, namely, that we were soliciting members from other U.S. cities, so the question in many people's minds was, are we stealing other museums' trustees? Then the other question was, what kind of program was this? Was this a program representing the whole of the United States, or was it The Museum of Modern Art's program?

RC: And what's the answer to that?

WR: The answer is that it's The Museum of Modern Art's program, that we do not seek to be representative of the many points of view; that it really is from this Museum, and if you didn't like this Museum, then you shouldn't be a member of [the] International Council. But it was a very ticklish situation for a long time, so we had to be very careful not to infringe on other museums; not to poach other museums, [INAUDIBLE: 0:58:24] support.

RC: But you don't run into that problem anymore?

WR: No; that's old history.

RC: To get away from it all, do you ever follow the art around here? Or how do you? I'm wondering.

HA: [Laughs] It sounds like a busman's holiday to me.

WR: Well, I do, but it tends not to be modern art so much as older art or the other arts. I love performance, I love dance, and opera, and theater.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:58:49] find out the answer to that [INAUDIBLE: 0:58:51].

WR: And I also go through phases of—I've gone through a phase now of sort of taking a sabbatical from looking at contemporary art. And now I've come back, so I'm seeing better. It's a good idea, I think, to *stop* looking for a while, because you get sated.

RC: Especially when you work with modern art.

WR: Yes, and you can know too much. Trying to view with innocent eyes is very important; it's not easy to do.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:59:23].

CC: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:59:26