DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH:	**MARY SCHMIDT CAMPBELL (MC)**
INTERVIEWER:	**RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)**
DATE:	**1983**
TRANSCRIBER:	**JANET CROWLEY, TRANSCRIPTION COMPLETED AUGUST 2018**

RC: By the way, Carl Colby was going to join me, and then he got—we found out that we had two appointments this afternoon, so we split up. First of all, I guess it would be interesting to know, since Marcia [Tucker] had mentioned that this [The Studio Museum in Harlem] was started as a project of the Junior Council and I wasn't aware of that—maybe how you—?

MC: It is. Apparently—certainly it was kicked around as early as '65, '66, from the documents that the attorney had sent to me, and the idea wasn't to have a Black fine arts museum. The idea was that *because* there was a camp at The Museum of Modern Art that felt that the Museum, particularly back in the sixties, should be more responsive to what's happening right then and there, that there needed to be a new kind of museum; a working space where artists who were doing experimental, kind of avant-garde things, would come and work, and the notion would be that the public would come and watch them at work. And that [since] this is a very non-traditional idea, so maybe it should be located in a space that's sort of non-traditional for museums, Harlem. Because Harlem still had a strong cultural sense, cultural affinity; people identified. So, the name—hence the name, The Studio Museum.

RC: Oh, okay.

MC: Actually, the very first name was The Harlem Museum. It was originally incorporated as The Harlem Museum, but then it was felt that the concept of the idea should be reflected in the name, so it was The Studio Museum in Harlem. And if you read the charter of The Studio Museum in Harlem, it says nothing whatsoever about Black art, Black people.

RC: Any kind of connection or community; period.

MC: Harlem connection; right. It really is about the business of talking about art and the development and creating an audience, et cetera. Well, it didn't take too long for people to figure out that to put a museum in Harlem—

RC: Sure, you're going to have a community.

MC: You're going to have to be responsive. So that right from the outset, when they were forming the Museum, they brought in a couple of key people like Eleanor Holmes Norton, who I think was the Human Rights Commissioner in New York City at that time, and Betty Blayton Taylor, who with the assistance of The Museum of Modern Art was starting the Children's Art Carnival too. So Betty was a very well respected [person] in that area, person in the arts, and absolutely, she and Eleanor Holmes Norton couldn't have been better as people to bring in. But the original Board—I believe Carter Burden was the president or chairman of the Board; Jeffrey Byers, who I believe died a few years ago—

RC: His name isn't on here.

MC: [He] was the treasurer, sort of roughly real estate developer, I believe; and some of the early board members were Charles Cowles. I think—though, Thomas Hoving was not a member of the Board; he was part of the group of people who helped get it started. Some of the earlier contributors included the Astor Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation. In the first two or three years I think David Rockefeller helped Chase Manhattan with—Chase Manhattan Bank did a big fund-raising event for the Museum; it got us $69,000. So there's real evidence of a real commitment to do something different, something very novel [INAUDIBLE: 0:03:27]. 1968 was the year of Martin Luther King's assassination. That was the year that they opened the first exhibition [*Tom Lloyd: Electronic Refractions*], and it was a light show by an artist named Tom Lloyd. It was interesting how they kind of resolved the community versus the avant-garde notion; they had a very, sort of avant-garde Black artist do the first show. But, and this is hearsay, this is strictly hearsay [laughs], I understand that somebody came upstairs and said that there were limousines streaming down in front, and someone came upstairs and pounded his fist on the pedestal and said, "What is this shit?" And in fact, one piece of the art got broken that night, and so there was an immediate conflict and tension set up between that idea and where it was located. And in '68 they hired

a young Black filmmaker, Ed Spriggs, to be the Director, and from that point on the Museum really developed a set of programs that took it farther and farther away. But this was going to be the place that was responding to some of those very trends that you're talking about at The Museum of Modern Art.

RC: Well, that was very interesting, not knowing of that history. So then it took off in a direction focusing on Black artists.

MC: Black artists, regular schedule of exhibitions, the artist-in-residence program. You know about that?

RC: That you bring artists? Well I don't; I know what an artist-in-residence program is, theoretically.

MC: This is—and it's real interesting how some of the early ideas kind of lingered on.

RC: That's—yes, okay.

MC: Because that notion of a working artist stayed, and the artist-in-residence program became a cornerstone. And to this day, we're still The Studio Museum in Harlem and it's still one of the major programs, where we bring the artists in; the stay is for a year.

RC: Oh for a year, wow.

MC: But he also gives back service to the public. He holds workshops. Back in those days I think Valley Mayn [Valerie Maynard] used to actually go out and get the kids in from off the streets; they'd come, and it was very, very, very much a reason for, you know, being in close contact with the community. And they get a stipend of $10,000; and then they get an exhibition at the end of it. So that part of the idea has stayed with the Museum. Another part that was part of the original concept is that there was the notion that this experimental museum was not going to collect. It was not going to be a collecting museum, and that stayed with The Studio Museum for at least a decade. We are now collecting very aggressively [INAUDIBLE: 0:06:21]. But that was a real major change—but they kept—that was something that stayed from the original concept. [The Museum] always had strong emphasis on being—of trying something, of taking a risk, of doing something a little different, not necessarily traditional. And having that as part of our origins I think has stayed with us.

RC: Mm-hm.

MC: And it's really—I think it's fascinating to see how the concept was sort of creatively evolved.

RC: Well what's interesting too is that people like Marcia and yourself are closely aligned with what Alfred's concept of the museum was—

MC: Mm-hm.

RC: And a common frustration is when people in the art community and outside say, "Hey, The Museum of Modern Art, come on, 20 years ago, it stopped being modern." And maybe it's okay to do that, but then, in its place, there are other museums that can take the leading edge and not be so stuck in their success that they have to watch their steps very closely, and then they can't have a big failure. But I don't think that's so bad. I mean, I think that the Museum could still do that, but what's interesting is that—I was going to ask you about this—as another museum director in New York and of a smaller museum, you're able to do a lot of things, some of which you've already answered that they can't. What do you think, as a museum director, of The Museum of Modern Art? What's the relationship of it to other museums?

MC: Well, let me talk about that first personally and then kind of in the sort of larger institutional way. When I was—because I studied art history formally, too, and I thought that Alfred Barr was just *the* superb art historian. I mean, when I thought of myself writing something that was the model. And then to come into the museum world and to understand that he was also a preeminent museum person, I just, you know, I felt that well yes, this is, in fact, my idol. And I thought that wonderful little book he did, *What is Art?*[1]

RC: It's still the best—some of the best writing!

MC: It's a classic. Yes, it is.

RC: I mean, who else has been able to say it that way? Nobody else. You get such a dense written material now, that you know, you put it away after; I do, after the first 10 words.

[1] *What is Modern Painting?*, 1943.

MC: Exactly. I still read that book and I still read his [Henri] Matisse book [*Matisse: His Art and his Public*] and I still read his [Pablo] Picasso book [*Picasso: Fifty Years of his Art*], with all the stuff that's been written about those two artists. And so that—sort of from that point of view, there's no question but that here was somebody who set standards, you know, and he set real standards of scholarship in looking at art and talking about it. For The Museum of Modern Art institutionally, it's curious that even though the [Studio] Museum kind of was spawned by MoMA, we've institutionally just not turned to it in the way that I would expect that we would for that kind of institutional guidance and direction. We do with The Met, very much. [We] very much work with The Met, and we get a lot of technical assistance from them, a lot of advice, a lot of guidance. There's a lot of involvement. And I understand they do this for a lot of—not a lot, but for several smaller museums, they kind of take an internalistic, in the best sense of the word, point of view. But there's not been that much of that with The Museum of Modern Art. And I don't know if it's because we just haven't gone to them or what, but I think that it would be helpful probably to them as well to reach out to some of the smaller museums, because something happens in the dialogue.

RC: Absolutely. And I was wondering, have you taken that thought any further? Like what types of things would be—? For instance, we spoke with Bill Lieberman at The Met, and he said New York is like, obviously, no other city in the world with its art, the number of museums. They could—if they just put away the, whatever keeps them, kind of so with their hands around themselves—have wonderful exhibitions. I mean they have such resources amongst them and do like city-wide kind of exhibitions.

MC: I would love to joint venture with other museums, and in fact, I find that outside of New York—I find that museum directors are very eager to sit down and swap: What is the Studio Museum doing? What do you have that we might use? What can we develop together? And I find that there's an eagerness outside of New York that I wish could take place inside of New York. It would be wonderful to do some kinds of joint things and I can't even think off the top of my head of what that would be. Well, let's take the American Museum of Natural History; they're going to have a Cameroonian show [*The Art of Cameroon*]. Well, I would love to do something where we would have perhaps something related to that show.

And I'm sure there's something at MoMA that's coming up down the road that we could—

RC: Bill Rubin's Primitivism show ["*Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*] is coming up.

MC: Sure, oh absolutely, absolutely.

RC: Well, maybe that could happen—it'd be interesting to see.

MC: When is that? Well I guess they don't know when anything is now.

RC: That's right, our film is due February '84, and I think they're looking at spring for their—

MC: Opening?

RC: Opening.

MC: Is that show opening the Museum?

RC: I think that's one of the opening shows, though—let's see, Kynaston [McShine] is doing the Contemporary scene [*An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture*]. And I believe that is one of the opening shows; I think so, which would be wonderful. I was going to ask you also about René d'Harnoncourt. Maybe you didn't know him but you know of him. In his reign as—well, Alfred was Director of the Collections, but René was the Director of the Museum. And he was very open to, as was Alfred, to, 'Let's really run our scope and always reach out and give a synoptic view of art all the time.' And he did that Peruvian show [*Ancient Arts of the Andes*], and I think—I'm not sure if he did a primitive show, but he was interested in those areas, as was Alfred. And now it seems the curators are kind of plumbing the collection. Rubin is really kind of emphasizing the collection. There's nothing wrong with that, but the reaching out, and kind of the exploring in other areas is something that they seem to have tapered off on. Now that would seem that the existence of your museum is again a connection to that bigger way—that world view of thinking that Alfred always emphasized.

MC: Yes.

RC: And I don't know where that's gone or if they're—I mean, maybe if you approach the Museum—somebody maybe needs to knock on their door [giggles], because it seems like they're collecting dust. Or is the issue really, fine, let there be lots of museums that handle specialties. I mean, I'm wondering if—

MC: I think that something very wonderful happens when you begin to work with another institution. We've had such good success with it. I know there was a show being put together in Rhode Island, A Century of Black Photography [*A Century of Black Photographers: 1840–1960*]. And they would call here—and we were taking the show, and they'd call here and ask us to advise them on how to get in touch with somebody, or ask for advice, and it was a nice—it's a nice; why not? I mean, there are certain areas—if there's going to be a contemporary show, it would be nice to do something that shows different perspectives.

RC: Absolutely.

MC: We did a WPA show [*New York/Chicago: WPA and the Black Artist*] in '77 and I think there were three other WPA shows in New York at the time. And when Hilton Kramer—he was at *The [New York] Times* and reviewed all those shows, and reviewed ours with them, and it was really the first time that you had a real good cross-section of what Black artists were doing during that period, and it was surprising the strength of their output and the substantiveness of their output, when it could be laid out and compared with what else was being produced at that same time under the same program, the same structure. And I think that we need—for the integrity of the history of art, we need to see more of that kind of thing.

RC: Right, that's a good point of view from another museum director; that would be interesting to hear about. What about the influence of the Museum here on maybe expanding people in the community's horizons? Do you know if people who visit here go down and check out The Museum of Modern Art? I mean what about relationships?

MC: We encourage it. We try. We have—in fact, we have a program every year called "The Fine Art of Collecting," and one of the things we try to do with that is to take people to other museums. We've gone to the Whitney and looked at their permanent collection, their American collection, and I think Patterson Sims gave

a talk there. We went to The Met and Lowery [Stokes Sims] has talked to us there. We went to MoMA, in fact, when Howardena Pindell was the curator in the Print Department, I guess—she gave us a wonderful talk, and took out of the collection a vast array of works on paper by Black artists that was just extraordinary. They have an *incredible* collection of works by Black artists, just wonderful. And [Romare] Bearden—I did my dissertation with Bearden so I know it very well, they have from his very earliest works to his most recent collage. They have a *marvelous* selection. So the resources—to be able to introduce our public to the resources of The Museum of Modern Art is a real plus for us. When our curators are researching—we're doing a Jack Whitten show [*Jack Whitten: Ten Years 1970–1980*] in the fall and Henry Geldzahler is the curator, and one of our assistant curators is doing some of the research. I said, "Go the Archives at the MoMA."

RC: Oh yes.

MC: That'll be one of the best places, in addition to The Archives of American Art. MoMA's Archives are incredible for Sam Gilliam, for Bearden, for Whitten.

RC: Sure, sure, sure.

MC: So it is very important for us to be able to say that here is a resource for you; here's something that's possibly going to mean something to you. And the Primitivism show would be something that we would want to highlight for everyone to visit.

RC: Absolutely. And—well, just the fact that it is a resource center. This is coming through on some people's hopes and aspirations for the new Museum, the expanded Museum, that the job it can do maybe best—some people are saying—is not to be that leading edge, but to be a resource, a study center, and have the space so that each department will have its own study center and be able to offer it to people, in-depth facilities, or in-depth resources to study. Because, like, with photography, it was a little annex off the painting galleries, which kind of got lost—now each place will now have its own department. One of the Trustees said, "You know, I'm really worried about it becoming 'The Museum of Fashionable Art' if they keep trying to bring in the corporations," which they obviously need for survivability, but they're doing these blockbuster

shows, and then they're going to have this two-story restaurant, and two-story book store, and then, you know, wow, it's a shopping mall. But then, the same person said what it would be able to do well will be to offer study for all people. And I really think that of all the museums, it seems to have done the best job, in terms of the established, older museums, in making itself accessible to the public, and hopefully, there will be much more trafficking in from people on the street.

MC: I think probably The Met would have to take the—

RC: The award? [Laughing]

MC: The award for being most accessible to the general public and maybe

RC: And why would you think that is?

MC: Because of the scope of its offerings. It's hard to beat being able to go from Egypt [laughing] right on up to 20th Century American.

RC: Yes, yes.

MC: That and that feeling of, 'Well, today I can go to the Egyptian wing and tomorrow I can go the American wing, and the next day I can go to the Decorative Arts.' It's hard to beat for anybody, so that puts it in a different realm.

RC: That's true. Now one of the things people said in regard to that is—it may not be true of the new Museum, but [with] at least one day in the Modern, you wouldn't have to get totally tired out, but you could really go through it, kind of find where you were, and see modern art, see all there is to see of modern art. Now that may be lost in the new Museum. But I agree because I happen to like art. I'm trying to figure, for the public.

MC: You're saying of the popular public.

RC: Yes.

MC: As opposed to, say, someone who is an art historian or who isn't specifically a modernist or whatever. But in terms of where I would prefer to go as a working researcher, I would certainly much prefer to go to MoMA.

RC: Mm-hm. Then in terms of its direction, being another museum director, do you feel it's okay, where it is? Do you think it should be pushing out to that outer edge? Do you think, in terms of its future direction, where does it need to go, if any place?

MC: Well, this may sound like a cop-out but I think that a museum has to make its own choices, you know? It has to decide what it is [that] it's going to be. More than saying it should be the leading edge, or it should be a resource center, it just has to be very clear about what it is, and the public should know that that's what I'm going to get when I go here. On the other hand, I think that there are in New York, places that maybe can do some of the exciting, alternative things better. And there's nothing wrong with that. I just think that it's important that whatever mission the Museum chooses, it's very clear about it to itself, and clear about what it's offering to the public.

RC: Good point. I think they have a real identity crisis going on and people are really discussing this.

MC: Mm-hm.

RC: I don't think they know yet where they'll go [and] how far out they'll push. Bill Lieberman obviously isn't directly involved anymore, but he said 'Hey, we'll give them space out front that they need. We'll take the first 20 years of their collection gladly, and then they'll have that air to fill in.' Then somebody like Bill Rubin says, 'Well it's my responsibility, having taken on this great collection, to fill in the lacunae,' he calls them. 'If we have 10 great Picassos,'—they obviously have more now—'but one period's spotty, I have to fill it in and make it right, because we have a responsibility, having that many great ones, we can't present a partial view of these objects.' And then there are trustees such as Barbara Jakobson who's very much interested in keeping that original mission of Kunsthalle as well as Kunstmuseum. And then there's somebody like Arthur Drexler who says that goes in flux all the time, we've never been equally both. So there's all these views, but I think your summing up of it is that that's what a museum—to do a good job, anybody to do a good job, you have to have a sense of who [or] what you are.

MC: And that was what was so wonderful about Alfred Barr, the identity that he gave to the Museum was his. It was his own making, it was his own creation, but it was wonderful! And it was clear. And you knew he had a sense of what he was trying to accomplish. And I just think that that's more important than almost anything else.

RC: So you would say then that it's the museum director or—?

MC: Well, I think that that is a major role of a museum director, is to be able to formulate what that mission is. And he may do that in many ways. He or she may do that by trying to understand what all of the curators' feelings are and sense of the mission is; he may do that by getting that from the trustees. But somehow at some point, that sort of flash, you know, of pulling it all together, has to come up together in a kind of creative synthesis within that individual, and it's got to be verbalized, it's got to be articulated, and he's got to be clear saying it to the public and then clear saying it back to the staff and the trustees. And god knows, I find for myself—I find us having to do that over and over again.

RC: You're always re-assessing.

MC: Yes. Because although we're much, much smaller than The Museum of Modern Art, we just moved from a loft space on Fifth Avenue into this building, and we went through an identity crisis, and it left some bruises, and it left some open wounds. I have a feeling that we did that maybe about two years ago. But since we've been open, and it will be a year in June, I think we've been able to, with every exhibition, in putting the exhibition out, in putting the publications out with it, we keep making that identity statement more clear. And in all the programs that we do, it becomes clearer and clearer, so I have become comfortable with having made the change in our identity from this loft space into here. But I think that is a role of the director or leader of a museum.

RC: Right. Now, what about the area of funding exhibitions and stuff like that? They've been criticized for—maybe not as much as The Met. We've heard stories of blockbuster shows and curators have complained [that] there's lots of money knocking on the door for Picasso or [Paul] Cezanne, but Riva Castleman, if she wants to do a print show, or John Elderfield, something that's scholarly and small and really needs to be done—people would want that scholarly role to still

exist for a museum—people aren't banging then at the doors. So there's always that problem. Do you have any feelings about corporate involvement?

MC: Sure. There's no question with that. If we went to a corporation and tried to get our Sam Gilliam show [*Red & Black to "D": Paintings by Sam Gilliam*] funded, and I'll show you that show, I think it's breathtaking; corporations would yawn. But, on the other hand, Roy DeCarava [*The Sound I Saw: The Jazz Photographs of Roy DeCarava*], whose jazz photographs—well that's, you know, that's a subject that's easy for them to understand vis-à-vis Black people, Black artists, it's photographs; it's fundable. There's a balance that you have to strike, and you know full well what exhibitions are going to be jazzy and glamorous, and you serve them up. But I think that one of the beauties about having a National Endowment for the Arts or a National Endowment for the Humanities is that presumably you are able to articulate those real scholarly needs to those kinds of agencies.

RC: That's part of your charter. However, as you probably know, The Museum of Modern Art does not get city; or I'm not sure if they get—

MC: They get federal.

RC: They get federal, that's right; they do get federal, that's right. And they don't get city funds and that's something that I don't know—how do you feel about that knowing what they do? Because in fact, one of the points that we're trying to bring out—and we haven't even spoken to members of the family, the Rockefellers, who are still involved; it's not their museum anymore. There was a time when people said, 'I'm paying my $3.00, why do I have to? It's the Rockefeller museum.' But it's not the case and the time has passed, unfortunately, when a small group of individuals could finance the place. And in another sense, it's not so bad because then we would be seeing what they wanted to show. But now, there are some people who are trying to make a case for the Museum to get city funding. How do you feel?

MC: Well, I don't know, it's a hard question to answer. I guess the city has a rationale whereby they give city funding to, for the most part, to institutions whose buildings they own, though they don't own this one and we are city funded. And in fact, I guess, The Museum of Modern Art, in lieu of getting city funds, got a

handsome tax abatement, or a reduction in tax; there was some legislation [involved].

RC: Yes, and air rights for the tower.

MC: It's difficult. And the city, I guess, is in a position of trying to do things equitably for all different kinds of institutions, and I think this tax abatement was their effort to provide something for The Museum of Modern Art, but that's for 10 years in the legislation; I think the abatement is for 10 years or something. And then I would think that the question would come up again of what contribution would the city make? It's certainly—if I were a trustee, I think it would certainly be of concern.

RC: I think it's really—it is a resource in the city, it's like a landmark.

MC: Sure.

RC: Just thinking in terms of pure tourism. I mean, people do come here to visit The Museum of Modern Art, and the other museums of course, but that's a draw. So, they did quite well. In fact, we were thinking today that where they've really been creative [has] been in dealing with financial responsibilities—

MC: Mm-hm.

RC: Which is an issue that's very real for all museums to survive.

MC: Mm-hm.

RC: You can't only have your scholars and curators and interested artists and participants.

MC: Yes, that's very true.

RC: There's a whole new league out there that needs to be incorporated, and they did quite well in their trustees, and collector trustees. Donald Marron, who is really out there and has no problems with the history of the Museum and the responsibilities—he's just like: Look, here's what we've got to do—alright, we'll do this and I'll buy this, and it's fine. And then the old guards of the Museum, as much as they appreciate that, have different sentiments about this new breed of trustee. But there has to be a change.

MC: Sure.

RC: And they've made it already now. We spoke to John Rockefeller, Jr. yesterday, who is only recently a trustee of a couple of years, and then there is his aunt who is the President; Blanchette.

MC: Blanchette, right.

RC: And two very different points of view. Realizing the history of the Museum, the passing of the baton and so forth, he was really ready to say, 'Look; not to burn bridges, but we've got to get on with it, and this museum represents some opportunities that I hope we'll take.' And then there's Blanchette who's saying, 'Even though imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, I sometimes look around and say, well, it was us that started it and now every museum has a photography department. People don't even think that, in fact, this was a revolutionary museum concept.'

MC: Sure.

RC: And of course, it did come from Alfred, and who is Alfred, some people say. So hopefully, we'll be able to help people appreciate museums in general. That would be one great thing.

MC: Mm-hm.

RC: So when they go, they don't think, "Oh, I'm paying and the city can help, or the private trustees can help," because in fact there are areas—and we hope to have several people say this—that aren't just immediately fundable; that everybody would want a museum to continue doing, these areas of scholarship and these small shows and the research that can be done.

MC: Yes. I've always had my quarrel also with The Museum of Modern Art because I have always been disappointed in their sort of—well, it's not The Museum of Modern Art only. That would be most unfair. But many of the other museums, The Whitney Museum of American Art—and there's almost a sort of a resistance to the very presence of what this whole museum [the Studio Museum] is about.

RC: Right.

MC: And it's absolutely ironic that we were spawned from them and in the way that we were—sort of in resistance to their—

RC: I think it's a real important point to bring up, because certainly, they speak about being a great museum in New York. Well, [what about] the Hispanic community? I don't what shows—well, René d'Harnoncourt did something. I mean he started this off and, you know, a sensibility for the art that existed with them.

MC: Well, [William] Edmondson had his first show [*Sculpture by William Edmondson*] in 1937 at The Museum of Modern Art and he was a Black folk artist. There was another person, I can't think of the name. But in recent history, I mean Romare Bearden had a retrospective [*Romare Bearden: The Prevalence of Ritual*] that was pathetic that was there. I mean, it was really—it wasn't good. I didn't see the Richard Hunt [*The Sculpture of Richard Hunt*] that was there. But not only in the artists that they show, but it just stuns me, in the museum world too, to see almost the absolute absence of Blacks in the curatorial professions. Well okay, there's Lowery at The Met, there's Kynaston McShine.

RC: Well sure, the fact that you can name them on one hand.

MC: At each museum! You know? And I don't know who's at The Whitney. And sometimes, you just keep going and keep going on and keep putting the artists out there here, but once in a while, I go to a panel, and there are whole panelists from The Whitney and from the MoMA, et cetera, and they speak as if Black artists and Black art don't exist, as if communities like Harlem don't exist. And, it's that kind of closeting that I think is really self-defeating and self-destructive in a city like this that is as pluralistic as it is.

RC: Right, and also representing—I mean people do look for the museums' imprimatur, the world looks to them, their capital is here and, well, that's a good point to be brought up, certainly. I mean, the existence of this [Studio] Museum having started—

MC: It's ironic.

RC: Knowing that. And I'm wondering where those souls are; you mentioned some of those people. I didn't mean them specifically, but, why have some of the original fire and enthusiasm and all that been lost and we're trying to find reasons. Some

of it's that—there's just been an explosion in the art world; the gallery system took over. What are your musings on it?

MC: Some of the people who were originally associated are still associated with the [Studio] Museum and quite helpful; Charles Cowles is one of them. He's given to our collection, he's on our Visitors Committee. Others have said quite frankly: Go away, don't bother me, those were my other days; and they have in fact changed their point of view. I think one of the things that happened though from a historical point of view, just taking personalities out of it for a time, is that the climate that developed in Harlem in 1968, from '68 to about '73, was a climate which was not hospitable to the points of view that were brought here in the first place.

RC: Right, it was very insular.

MC: Yes. It was insular from the Studio Museum's point of view, but it was also insular from the originators' point of view. [Tape break at 0:36:30]

RC: Able to move with the currents?

MC: Well that's a neat idea, but I think that the parts can be vital. I mean, I think that, for example, Joan Sandler at the Met in Community Education has just kind of revolutionized that concept so that she's creating something that pulsates.

RC: Mm-hm.

MC: The Met just did a program with the Abyssinian Baptist Church. It was marvelous! Of four—presenting four jazz singers. But that's the kind of—I mean, if it can happen at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, it can certainly [laughs] happen at our Museum of Modern Art.

RC: Right.

MC: And as I've said, I, for one, have felt a much more active dialogue, in fact—I mean, I guess you know Philippe de Montebello came and participated in our dedication and made a connection between the opening of the Rockefeller Wing and the opening of The Studio Museum in Harlem. And, if it can happen there, it can certainly happen at MoMA. They're not too big for that.

RC: It's great that we have this point of view expressed because it's not supposed to be applesauce. Even Mrs. Rockefeller [MC laughs] said that, "Well you are going to get some conflict." And I said yes, we are seeking out people who will say, "Yes, good, but," and there are some "buts." There are a few "buts" and that's really helpful, because it's certainly objective commentary.

MC: Yes.

RC: And if in fact they're leaving—I don't know, you'd be more aware of what this seems like across the country. I mean, are Black artists dealt with better in other areas or is this kind of—? And I'm wondering if—

MC: Yes.

RC: If the Museum, if they take, you know, [a position] that they can correct things—they're still in that position. Are you saying that they are kind of in the position that people still—museums still look to The Modern for their modeling?

MC: Did you see Michael Brenson's article recently in the *Times*?

RC: No.

MC: He wrote—

RC: Oh, about the art capital?[2] That one?

MC: Yes.

RC: Oh, yes I did, yes.

MC: I sort of agreed with his point of view that although New York is undoubtably *the* art center, that some of the museums are beginning to say that the museum world in New York is losing its hegemony; that there really is something that's happening outside.

RC: Oh, yes.

MC: I mean Sam Gilliam is having a major show [*Modern Painters at the Corcoran: Sam Gilliam*] at the Corcoran. The Corcoran did the Black folk art show [*Black Folk Art in America: 1930–1980*]. Even the Brooklyn Museum has had to

[2] "New York vs. Paris: Views of an Art Reporter," January 16, 1983.

consider thinking outside of Manhattan. There's an excitement and a risk-taking there that you really don't get in the core. And it may be—I am continually surprised and delighted by what you find outside of New York City.

RC: Mm-hm.

MC: I think one of the things that other museums are doing that in my experience—museums in Chicago, Baltimore, Los Angeles, located in large urban centers, are saying, "I have a constituency whom I have to represent in this museum." And maybe if MoMA were a city-funded museum or one of the line items, maybe that sense of responsibility would be greater. Maybe it's being private is one of the things that insulates it from that.

RC: That's interesting, yes, mm-hm. Though again, if you go back to the people who started it, that core group, I bet, [they] would have gotten around to making sure it stayed open.

MC: That's true.

RC: I think. And maybe that's just a factor of, well, the people not being there anymore. For instance, Bill Lieberman—a lot of people said, "Alfred Barr made us!"

MC: Mm-hm, yes.

RC: I mean, he said, "I'm a creation of Alfred Barr," and he said that without any hesitation. But then you wonder, well—but did Alfred Barr groom anybody to be his successor? I mean it's an interesting thing, because then d'Harnoncourt came in, which was a natural evolution of its growth. I mean they needed someone; Alfred was not an administrator. He was great at what he did, but when it got too big he faltered. And he and René, they were the perfect combination. But even then, you know René had, as people described it, had this special talent of being able to really deal with all the personalities—

MC: Mm-hm.

RC: And also totally appreciate and respect what the curators needed, being himself a great master of exhibitions; and appreciated Alfred Barr; and because he was at ease socially, [he] could handle the Board and all that social stuff. So

that's…those are special people you're talking about. Now, you've got people who can handle one area and they maybe need three or four that can do a job that in the past could have been accomplished by one.

MC: I don't know, you have—maybe this is crass [laughs] but I think that if you look at a corporation and you look at good corporations, they have the same thing, they have—

RC: That's true.

MC: If it's Johnson & Johnson, they have pharmaceuticals, they have diagnostics, and somehow I know that you've got to manage all of those different parts of it. I think that there's a special talent; I really do believe that there is something very creative in being able to synthesize all of that.

RC: Right, right.

MC: But I still think it has to come together in one focused vision.

RC: Mm-hm, okay.

MC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:42:13].

RC: I think that's a real good comment and one that's been brought up before. Liz Shaw, who was around in the early days—I think she was Director of Public Relations and now she's at Christie's—was saying that, in another way, the time of the Museum expanding, it should maybe just close down altogether; it's going through this identity crisis and should figure out where it launches off and what it is going to be doing. It's not half bad. Then there's the other camp that might say, well, we've always kind of felt our way along; we've been organic and open.

MC: It's tough. I mean, to be real candid, I had a very, very definite vision of what I saw was the growth and development of The Studio Museum in Harlem and it clashed! [Laughs] And it's very hard to have something just clash. But sometimes it's better to go ahead and say, this is what I think it should be, and stand by that and weather it, than to let things kind of meander and—[laughs] I don't know if that's what's happening at MoMA, but I do think that—

RC: Hard pressed to say, I mean.

MC: I think whatever a museum is, it's just got to be crystal clear.

RC: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Okay, let me see if there's anything else. This has covered good ground, I think, and this will be really helpful because towards the end of the film...

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:43:43