DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH:	**THOMAS S. CARROLL (TC)**
INTERVIEWERS:	**CARL COLBY (CC); RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)**
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TC: I think the history of art has been first, the military. Whether it was the Greeks or the Romans, first there were the legions, then there were the commercials, and then the art. And art has, so often in history—the commercial support has come from the business community, or then in terms of rich individual businessmen. Now more in terms of the collective businessmen that make up the management of many of our big companies.

CC: Why would business be particularly interested in art?

TC: Well, no less so than other communities—they enjoy the visual arts, too. But beyond that, which I think is of key importance, there's a connection; the art and design connection. And that is [that] almost all businessmen are aware that the modern art, modern design, has influenced the shape of our products, our packaging, our offices, the buildings we work in, the homes we live in, the chairs we sit in. In fact, most businessmen well know that there is no such a thing as no design. The doorknob—somebody had to sit down and do it, and draw it. So there is that well understood [idea] that the products we make, the packages we put them in, have a basis in modern design. Moreover, companies want sometimes to support an exhibition that the museum has, which I think is really great because the [Pablo] Picasso [*Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective*]—the fantastic Picasso [show] last year, it was supported by IBM [and] the National Endowment for the Arts, too, but IBM made that possible, which is a great gift to the people of New York and the people who visit New York. And IBM wanted to do it, in their own self-interest, but certainly to the benefit of the community. Businessmen have called upon the Museum and have been received by using the facilities of the Museum for some of their functions which aren't strictly

business—I mean, which aren't simply a meeting to settle where they'll put the new plant, or something of that sort. We've had sort of the business social function, and the Museum has used its facilities to grace those occasions.

CC: Do you see it ongoing? Are people looking too heavily let's say towards corporations now as helping to solve all the problems of museums and of non-profit institutions? I mean, there's a limit to what they can do.

TC: Sure. There has been [a lot of looking to corporations] in the last couple of years, particularly, since federal support is not increasing, it's decreasing. A great deal more competition exists for the contributions made available by businesses. I mean, it's a real tough, competitive world. But as far as the Museum—and I mean, we certainly know about that, because we, the Business Committee, get the requests for support, so we're conscious of it; and then we're conscious of it in terms of the support and what it takes to get it to the Museum. But, over a long period, given in terms of 50 years, say, rather than just this past year or two, I believe the trend will continue of increasing business support for the arts and, [it is] not so much decreasing support from the trustees as the share of giving is coming more and more from the business community. And we have records over the last several years at The Museum of Modern Art that corporate contributions have increased as more corporations have contributed and as the average contribution has increased, so that in terms of annual giving to the Museum, the corporations now carry the biggest share and have replaced trustees, whose giving hasn't decreased, mind you.

RC: It's just the other costs have gone up.

TC: But other costs—the inflationary spiral has taken the business community past the trustees, past other sources of the contributors, individual contributor funds. And I think that, over a long period, [it] will continue.

CC: You also must think it's profitable or helpful that the Museum might have tried to find some of its own solutions to some of its problems, like the air rights.

TC: Well, that was a very business-like solution. I can tell you, we looked at financial projections. The Museum does not get—unlike the Metropolitan and other worthy museums, this museum does not get any help from the city. And I can tell

you, no matter how we worked out the projections, the Museum was in jeopardy unless something was changed. And this was a magnificent achievement, not only a business-like achievement, but political. The community at large, the state and the city, had to say yes to this, and it caused somebody—like the builder of that tower, had to say, 'I'll bet my chips on it, too.' And so the basically three parties involved: the Museum, the construction people—the man [Charles H.] Shaw, who's constructing that tower—and the state and city community, were involved in that. I think [it was] complex, very difficult, [and] very well done.

CC: Yes, it seemed to be that way.

TC: That's bootstrapping in the most magnificent combination play since Tinker to Evers to Chance.

CC: As we're tracking the evolution of the Museum, I don't think it would have been possible nor would it have been warranted in another time [or] in another phase of the Museum's life.

TC: Right.

CC: Now with the involvement of the business community: yourself, Donald Marron, Frank Cary, people who have that expertise and also, fortunately, the interest and love of the art, it's a very fruitful combination. Back in the days of Alfred Barr and the ladies [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie P. Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan] who started it, it was beyond their wildest dreams that they would have had to confront—and they wouldn't have had the expertise to deal with these problems.

TC: Absolutely. And one other important thing has changed. Back in those days, the city was not seen as to be in financial hazard itself. I mean it was—if I think; it's foolish to speculate, I suppose, but I don't think the city and the state would have been as cooperative at the time toward this kind of a plan.

CC: So the city recognized what the Museum means to the city.

TC: What it means to the city.

CC: What it brings in terms of revenue.

RC: It's one of the major resources; it really is; it's a landmark.

TC: The resources are enormous, aren't they? But it costs—it in itself is a fantastic achievement. And it's part of a fantastic city. I mean, the wealth—have you, did you see yesterday's *Times* [article] about; or today's?[1]

CC: Today's article; we haven't yet.

TC: I mean, right. And if you could do this [INAUDIBLE: 0:09:17] or not. But since the end of the war, this city has replaced Paris as the place. And the paper today explained all that. But it's a hell of a city; but in that thing—here is an event that the city really couldn't lose on. But I think it was psychically of great value to have a large-scale renewal in the city at the time, so that here is a museum—you know, this started a few years back when—[and] you've read the census reports. People, the middle classes were leaving, businesses were leaving, it was a desperate time. And big MAC[2] was wondering whether—we were biting our nails wondering if it would work, and here was a museum that said, "We're going to double our space." I mean, that was a—

RC: Nobody has brought up the timing. That's a very interesting point for people to realize.

TC: Right. Hey; we were starting the renewal process.

CC: At the darkest moment.

TC: At the darkest hour. And why not? Who shouldn't lead the way but The Museum of Modern Art?

CC: And also, I bet there's an awful lot of respect among contributors and the corporate community to a museum that instead of coming once again hat in hand saying, "Bail us out,"—

TC: Right.

CC: Comes to them and says: "Well, we solved our own problem;"

TC: Right.

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[1] Michael Brenson, "New York vs. Paris: Views of an Art Reporter," January 16, 1983.
[2] Municipal Assistance Corporation, which raised money by selling bonds backed by sales tax receipts and stock transfer taxes when NYC was on the verge of bankruptcy in the late 1970s.

CC: "We've doubled our space really in and of ourselves; sure, we want your support for exhibitions, but we don't need you to eat tomorrow. I mean, we've solved our own problem." And I think that must mean—that carries a little extra weight in the community.

TC: Right. Well I think, if in your own individual charities—I think you're happier when you give money away, [when] you think it'll be used effectively and efficiently, rather than squandered or misused. So yes, as you say, that had its mark.

RC: Even with as well as the Museum hopefully will do with all of this going on—we have spoken, of course, to curators in the Museum. And one of the comments we would come across was that, with corporate sponsorship, of course, the corporation wants to get some mileage—obviously, that's another reason for doing it—out of their contributions. And they'll finance—for instance, the Picasso [show] which is for sure to be a big, big success—blockbuster shows. Whereas—then there are curators carrying on their scholarly mission for the Museum, which everybody would still want to maintain, [for example] doing a small show like [Henri de] Toulouse-Lautrec drawings that was mentioned—it's not as easy still to get money for the shows that the Museum must do to continue its mission. How do you feel, being part of that community, the corporate community?

TC: Well, again, that support comes from the annual giving, which, there are no strings attached.

RC: I think that's important for the public to understand that it's a dilemma, and that's why they should still give.

CC: See, particularly Jack [Limpert] mentioned to us that the corporations may be giving, and it may say, sponsored by IBM or United Technologies or Olivetti but, he said, under no circumstances are they coming in and saying, "We want this." He said, as a matter of fact, it's completely the opposite. They're coming to the Museum and saying, "We want to do something, but you tell us what to do." They can't come in and say, "We want this artist." They may fall on their faces. It's not their function. And I think for the public to know that is crucial because at

this particular time, I think there's great sympathy that the corporations are contributing—

TC: Absolutely.

CC: But you want to dispel the rumor that the corporation is establishing taste.

RC: Is setting it all up.

TC: Oh, golly, no; the progenitors are the curators. That's interesting; I didn't even *think* of it as an alternative.

CC: We're trying to target it, to keep those arrows at bay.

TC: Okay.

CC: Because we could see that as a possible—it's just like answering the Rockefeller question. We spoke to Blanchette Rockefeller and we said to her, very matter of factly—and Limpert said that he had an incident like this happen a number of times; you go in to the Museum, and if you don't know, you put down your $3.00 and in a sense you think to yourself, "Hm, $3.00, I probably don't even need to put it down; it's the Rockefellers' museum; they can pay for it." And that probably was a feeling for 40 or 50 years, or it's been for a long time.

RC: A general notion. Some people obviously still think that.

CC: And he said that he even confronted a boy one time going in who didn't want to pay, who said, "The Rockefellers, it's their place, they can pay for it." And he [Jack Limpert] said, "Well, if you want that, then they determine what's in here, the whole show." He said, "Oh, well I don't want that; it should be independent; it should be the curators." And he [Limpert] said, "Well, you can't have it both ways. The Rockefellers do help support, but it's very much up to your $3.00 to then match another three more dollars." And that's one of the areas we're targeting, because the last thing we want is for people to enter the Museum once again, after—a film can reach two or three million people. If it reaches people enough to say, "Listen; it's as much your place and your neighbor's place."

RC: It's your responsibility.

TC: Right, absolutely.

CC: And a couple of corporations, and everyone else who helps, than it is [the Rockefellers]. That's really what we told Mrs. Rockefeller, and she says that's important because she said that really, one of her tasks is to oversee, in a sense, I wouldn't say the dissipation but the gradual weaning out of the Rockefeller imprimatur on any other [INAUDIBLE: 0:15:10].

TC: Because as I said a little while ago, I think they're [ticket prices] *remarkable* how that's held up, but it cannot increase fast enough to handle the rising costs of the last 10 or 20 years, or the next 50.

RC: That's an important point to remember.

CC: And as you would say, and maybe you would be in a better position than anyone else, but wealth in this country is no longer being accumulated in—

TC: It's gone more like so.

CC: It's gone more horizontal.

TC: Sure.

CC: It's a lateral development rather than—and you don't see it obviously going into the hands of seven or eight individuals or—and the heads of companies now are really managers, aren't they?

TC: They're hired hands. I was the head of a big company; I was a hired manager. I don't mean that in a bad way. [Laughing] It was pretty good.

CC: It's like a general, really.

TC: The piece I owned was miniscule in terms of the public ownership, and that's the way it is for hired hands these days, by and large.

CC: And I think that helps understand what the Museum—who's contributing.

TC: Furthermore, there's another very important thing. The Museum has the curators, who have great knowledge and taste. But these very same curators have great respect for the market, for the people who come. I mean, they know, believe me, what the attendance was at what shows. Now they don't let that control them to the extent that a Broadway play might.

CC: Or the movie business.

TC: Or the movie business or television. But they are responsive to the wishes of the people who come and put their $3.00 down or the membership which comes and buys an annual membership. And as well they should.

RC: So there are always going to be popular shows, which isn't a derogatory term.

CC: There's nothing intrinsically wrong with that, though.

RC: There isn't anything wrong with that, as long as—

TC: As long as it's scholarly.

RC: Because the Museum does exist to perpetrate the scholarly.

CC: Would you say that the Museum is pretty unique, then, in its ability to have doubled its space like this, in a sense solving its own problem, in the United States? Does it have a different reputation in the business community than other places? Let's put it that way.

TC: I think it has a different reputation, not all of which is universally good in the business community. Because, modern art itself is still controversial. Modern art has existed for a 110 or 120 years or something, but modern art is still seen as that crazy—there's a large group of our citizens in all—whether they're in the business community or the government or the universities, they still see a lot of craziness in modern art. So, the business people maybe know more or less than others, but there is a large element in the business community that thinks that's kind of nutsy stuff. So there's that part. There is, on the other side, the things I mentioned; the smartest guys in the world know that the connection between the people out on the cutting edge, the artists of today's designing and art, have a hell of a connection with their own products. Look at the way computers look, toasters, and as I say, doorknobs. You know? And we live in it. One of the biggest businesses in the United States is building a Philip Johnson thing on Madison Avenue.[3] The man who designed Lever House has just designed one in Saudi Arabia. Those are *business* events, from modern artists and modern designers.

[3] AT&T building, completed 1984.

CC: So that sets the trend, and then AT&T or Bell, look at their products—as far as the Touchstone phone, these are all modern sculpture.

TC: Certainly.

CC: I have one of those and it looks to me like a beautiful piece of design.

RC: They're exhibited in the Design Department.

TC: That's right. I think it's fun to go into the Design Department and see toilet seats. [Laughter]

RC: And computer chips now. They were saying that everything is [INAUDIBLE: 0:20:32].

CC: That's very important, I guess. So you think the fact that it is on the cutting edge—though at the same time it might be a little questionable to a lot of the business community—that's okay because it separates the far-sighted ones out from the others.

TC: Absolutely.

CC: So you're more of a club, the ones who do like it.

TC: And—but I don't wish to distinguish the business community as being less respectful, I'm just saying that wherever the hell you go, in the hospitals or the universities or the gymnasiums, the government, the business community, there are individuals who think modern art is really wacky, and others who have a taste for it. One other thing about The Museum of Modern Art that the business community has some respect and admiration for, and that is, it is not just art and sculpture. They have fantastic work in drawings and design, in film. They were the *only* ones—talk about the cutting edge—they were the only ones who recognized film as an art form of some incredible importance, and it *is*. It seems silly to labor that point, but the Museum started the collection; the photography collection. Now, everybody's into photography. If you don't have a photography department, you're simply—this museum was doing it years ago.

RC: When we were speaking to Mrs. Rockefeller, she was almost kind of protective in saying on the one hand, it gives her pleasure to know that the Museum is a success and people are imitating it, but in the other hand, it's like, "Hey, wait a

second. Everyone is a cheap imitation." Well not a cheap imitation, she didn't say that.

TC: [Laughing] Yes! But the business community knows that. You work your heart out in business to make a new development and you might get a six-months lead, if you're lucky. [Laughing]

CC: Particularly with your business, internationally—Nelson Rockefeller, one of his great contributions, I think, to the Museum, or one of his great feelings was to disseminate it and how it creates a great worldwide atmosphere.

TC: It's a *fantastic* thing how, here, in the middle of Manhattan, we've got a *national* resource. Oh, I wish I had the data, but Martin Segal has an operation, and they listed the exhibitions that come out of New York and feed the rest of the country. Wow; what The Museum of Modern Art does in terms of sending out its treasures, its resources, all over the United States and, of course, Europe. And, by the same token, collects them from all over the United States and, I said Europe, but I mean all over the world.

CC: So that has an impression in Japan or Singapore.

TC: You're damn right.

CC: They're paying a little bit of attention to this.

TC: That's right. Which has, I think, lots of values. I mean in peace and stabilization—I think there's an awful lot of forces that would work for hostility and a number of successful ones that counteract it.

CC: Yes, one of the most interesting things—one of the curators of film, Eileen Bowser, said that no matter what the atmosphere politically—she, last year, for instance, attended a symposium of film curators [International Federation of Film Archives], and there they were, all around a table, from East Germany, Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia; a lot of hot spots were there and a lot of places where we don't get along all that well with people, but there they all were, exchanging films. And that doesn't hurt. It creates a good atmosphere.

TC: I think it creates a good atmosphere. It's much easier to slight somebody you don't know. So I think that's a force for peace, as I think other international

events are. World trade. Exchange students. I think there's just an awful lot of hopeful things going on.

CC: Can you recommend—? We were planning to see Frank Cary as an example of—Jack [Limpert] said it might be particularly beneficial for us in the film. You can see how, in the end of the film, if someone such as yourself was to present the point of view from the business community and as an interested citizen, really, an outsider—you're not a curator, you're not an artist—saying this about the Museum. If we get that point of view, someone like Frank Cary, I imagine, would be quite interesting.

TC: Oh yes.

CC: Is there anyone else who has that great commitment who might—? He [Cary] probably would be good; maybe he's the best. He'd be terrific?

TC: He'd be first rate.

CC: See, we think it's important to say this because if you don't mention business, if you don't mention the companies, then everyone's going to think, well...

TC: I'll tell you someone else. Let me try—a very hard-headed, great business leader is Rawleigh Warner, the Chairman of Mobil. Now Mobil has paid to keep the Summergarden open.

CC: For a long, long time; sure.

TC: A long, long time. Now let me tell you what that means. You and I, if we want, we can't get to the Museum during working hours very often. Sometimes we can, if you happen to have lunch on 52nd Street, you can go to 53rd and take a look. But basically, keeping it open at night is of great value, and it's a great expense to the Museum because you now have all the meters running: overtime, maybe, or extra people, so running it one night a week is an expense. Mobil did that for the—the Museum doesn't make any money on it, but he did—Mobil did that for the people of New York so you could go see the damn thing when you've got off. I think that's terrific. He has a collection and he has a fantastically modern house, Bud does, Bud Warner, Rawleigh Warner. And he would be—?

CC: That sort of testament is important for people to hear.

TC: I think—I mean, that's a very large and important United States company.

CC: Sure. And also, people identify; they realize—

TC: Let me just run down and see if I can think of somebody else. I'll give you another, but—Al Casey is chairman of the American Airlines. Now, you may notice—I assume you fly only American Airlines [laughter].

CC: Well, we hear it's the best.

RC: You're convincing us.

TC: When you walk through, if you look on the terminals at LaGuardia or Kennedy or wherever, there's art on the walls. And that is very modern art. Now there used to be, but we don't have so much anymore, sort of a tapestry, it was a fabric design like a rug design on the bulkhead of many of the airplanes. They changed the confirmation, but they used to be all very abstract designs. Andrew Heiskell is a pretty well-known—

CC: There's someone who was mentioned to us, a fellow who works for Agnelli.

RC: Oh, Mr. [Gianluigi] Gabetti?

CC: Gabetti? Do you know him?

TC: Yes.

RC: We might be seeing him.

TC: Good.

RC: We'd kind of like to have an international perspective.

CC: We saw a number of the Trustees, also. We saw Donald Marron, we saw also—

TC: You saw me.

CC: Saw you. [Laughs]

RC: That's right. We saw Mr. Thayer, Walter Thayer.

CC: Walter Thayer was terrific because you walk in—you wouldn't know it. He's [a] very elegant and powerful looking character, and you think maybe this is pure business—

RC: With a conservative bent.

CC: And he looks a little bit like an Eisenhower or whatever—you wouldn't know if he'd like modern art at all, and all of a sudden out of his very imperious frame, he's saying, wow, the place ought to be much more contemporary; it ought to do this. He was a real champion of contemporary art. And it's a nice mix, you know. And I know he publishes *Art in America* and all, but still, there's a real commitment there that's personal.

TC: Yes.

CC: And it's great to see that.

TC: Okay, another name is Harold McGraw of McGraw-Hill. I was thinking of pretty well-known people, to what you were talking about.

RC: Sure.

CC: We're pretty happy, I think, but this has been very good, especially for somebody who speaks so frankly about the way a good part of America can perceive it. Sure, there are people who like modern art, but there's still a lot of people who think it's a little wacky, and this is a step forward, and it's also an intelligent step forward. Because, as you say, look at the telephone, look at ashtrays; this is very much a part of our lives; don't ignore it. And if this is the place that champions it, maybe it's a good idea to support it.

TC: One of the things we did, the Museum, is if a corporation gives $6,000 a year as their contribution—there are lots of privileges, but we let all their employees come in free, just with their ID card.

CC: That's terrific.

CC: Yes, it really is.

TC: They don't have to have a special card.

CC: They don't have to be individual members?

TC: They say, I'm a member of IBM, or Lever Brothers. Come right in. Now I *love* that because it has—you know, oh, IBM? Come right in. [Laughter]

CC: Also, look at the kind of people you're getting in; someone who might never go, there they are. They're walking down Fifth Avenue at lunch time or in the afternoon on a Saturday, and they say, "Hey; I remember in the bulletin that I can go in." Then they walk in, show their ID, and all of a sudden, they might be introduced to a whole world that they would have never really had the courage to go into or thought that it's outside their experience.

TC: Right, and it has the endorsement of their company. I mean, they can't be all crazy if AT&T says—[laughing] let's face it, if they say it's okay, it's got to be okay.

RC: Right, that's true. The confidence of an American company.

CC: Well, thanks a lot.

TC: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:31:58