DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH:	**RIVA CASTLEMAN (RC)**
INTERVIEWERS:	**RUTH CUMMINGS (X); CARL COLBY (CC)**
LOCATION:	**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**
DATE:	**1983**
TRANSCRIBER:	**JANET CROWLEY, TRANSCRIPTION COMPLETED SEPTEMBER 30, 2018**

X: In this department, the people have said when the Museum started it was very forward in what it was showing in painting and sculpture, and some of the criticism has been, what's it doing now? And we've been asking people if they feel that the Museum should be coming from its collection and making that a very substantial part of what it does. Or, how do you handle being a museum that harbors a great collection as well as trying to push forward and be that tastemaker that you always have been and probably still are? Do you have an impression—? What camp are you in? Do you feel you're doing a good job here now?

RC: The print field has been a very burgeoning one in the last two decades, so therefore there's been a different attention paid, I think, to what artists were doing, [to what] contemporary artists were doing. And so yes, I mean, I don't think that one can sit back as a collection and just take different slices out of it all the time and rehash the history, or leave the collection [to] sit in just a sequential or chronological way. I think that the only way that it looks interesting is in light of what an artist is doing now. And since many of the historical things that we've been doing—[the] historical shows that we've been doing, have affected what the contemporary artist was doing—it's sort of a weaving back and forth between what we set out this week to be and what a contemporary artist sees what we've done to be. We had a [Edvard] Munch exhibition [*The Masterworks of Edvard Munch*] a few years ago, and a few paintings that Jasper Johns did last year were extremely affected by that exhibition. And many artists have said the [Paul] Cezanne exhibition [*Cezanne: The Late Work*] was terribly important in terms of the development of certain ideas. Now these are the middle-aged artists, and it

may be that the real effect of these things we're not going to see for a while because it's the young artists who are still accumulating ideas and haven't quite fixed their own aesthetic and their own style, who will have the most profound effect, impression of these things, in the development of a new kind of art. And I would feel terribly bad if we didn't keep our eyes and minds on the contemporary, mainly because I think of the Museum still as a laboratory with a great library. I mean, that's the way I conceived of it when I was a student, and then coming here and the kinds of people that we develop here as curatorial tend to look at things in that way. We simply don't have that many people around who are going to sit in a library and do bibliographical work so it's not a very ivory tower thing. Hello.

CC: Hi. Sorry, I'm late.

X: Riva, this is Carl Colby.

CC: Hi, how are you?

X: That's a wonderful phrase used to describe the place, a laboratory. Now, in Prints, I think you're in a more, in a sense fortunate position to still have that dynamic going, because it seems like, with Painting and Sculpture, there's been more of a distancing from the current scene or having that dialectic going.

RC: Well, see, what happened—I mean, we can already appraise part of it historically at the moment, because since there was a very anti-institutional situation in art amongst artists who were making earthworks and conceptual artists making works and so forth, things that were anti-museum, anti-standing looking at a wall situations—there was this terrible rupture, tremendous disillusionment, with making objects for people. And the Museum was seen as the focus of this sort of anti-acquisition of material. Then, what simultaneously occurred among other artists not as radicalized was the making of art in tremendous variety, so that it was very difficult for institutions that were used to making assessments of style or congealing a whole batch of people together, to actually make a critique of a certain style of art. So then that meant that what we could do was only deal with this piecemeal. And it's very interesting that during this whole period, that is, the last 10 years, we had exhibitions of contemporary art every time, all the time, but they were these Projects. And they were piecemeal. They were a way that we

felt that we could deal with the plurality of style—the fact that people didn't very often want to make art that was collectable, and so on. And the perception was that we didn't do anything for contemporary art during that period, and yet we always had an exhibition up. And it was the fact that the intention very often of the artist, whether they could know it consciously or not, was to disperse the strong, one-way way of making art. That they were sick and tired of being categorized. And you know that when we had the Op Art show [*The Responsive Eye*], it was the first true backlash that people said, "You *made* Op art." In other words, you didn't find a movement and then just tell us about it. In doing that show, artists went and made the kind of thing that you wanted to do a show about. And there was supposed to be a following show to that of kinetic art. And it seemed that that was even going to be more so. And so that sort of was the juncture, even though *Information* and all the things about conceptual art were done, that show was done later, and Minimal Art was done later, they never had the impact of that Op Art show. Because in a way, that was—you know, we'd just gone over the top of the hill in appraising movements. And from that time on, there wasn't any movement that you could really catch hold of, like you could have Pop art, and do a show. Even during Pop art, most of the Pop artists insisted they weren't doing Pop art. So it was too conscious, the idea of labeling this had become much too conscious a way of handling art. So naturally, we went to the same—we went through the period that the artists made us go through. And I mean, we are supposed to be one, a mirror first, and then an assessor of some sort, as things get further and further away. And so we felt that the only way we could mirror what was going was through these Projects, and interestingly enough, the mirror didn't reflect very far. So that's what happened with, I think, the mainstream of art, and it just happened that in order to have some kind of survival situation going, I think art is getting—I think we are going through a period in which art is getting out of this sort of starved, in the garret thing and coming into a regular commercial situation. I mean, we still don't—I think a lot of people still don't like to accept the fact that—I mean, they call Julian Schnabel a phenomenon, you see. But in reality, it's just part of this business that in prints, we've seen for a long time, that artists devote more and more and more time to things in which they don't have to efface their artistic-ness, and make money. And now you will find articles—what I was reading in the book of

[INAUDIBLE: 0:09:30] how he has no reason to worry about what kind of unique works he does any more because he's fixed for life from all of the prints that he does. You know. But I mean, this is real business. And because we are dealing in this department with works of art that are multiples, it's just like making a shoe. And the people who make the good style of shoes are making the money. That's all. And so we don't feel that an artist has to be holier than thou. And it's hard to get out of that period for other departments and to see that kind of thing, because I mean, we still want artists to be mystical and give us truths that we can't recognize, from afar, because since the industrial revolution, we've used artists to be sort of our seers, and, you know, our religious art purveyors of [INAUDIBLE: 0:10:35] ideals. And I think that's more the period that we're going through. You know, if you really come down to the whole sociological aspect. So, anyhow.

X: Great. I didn't have to ask a question; you covered about five things. [Laughter]

RC: You've got to be careful with me.

X: That's wonderful. Then all we have to do is snip, and there it is. I was just thinking about the idea of the Museum and the art market, and who feeds who. Do you still make artists here? Or are you going to galleries?

RC: They say we don't.

X: Who says? The artists say.

RC: The world says we don't.

X: What do you say?

RC: I think that we probably don't. And I don't think we ever did.

X: When the Museum started, it was the collection of a few people, and then the galleries took notice and fed off of their [INAUDIBLE: 0:11:33].

RC: The thing is that there were two or three people involved in this museum who saw that there was not a public realization of what was going on, and that they had broader knowledge of these things than most other people did. And they brought those things to public attention at a time when there was no New York market to speak of. There was no communication as we know it. There was no

television to bring images to people's homes or to their eyes. There were very few magazines that had photographic material in them, and they couldn't be and they were not distributed widely, so that a focal point could be made for material such as design objects, such as works of art by artists, many of whom had had modest exhibitions here in the States or in the World's Fairs and so on. But once you have an arena, once you have a place where people can go to, then people who are aware of the stuff can make it go through the pipeline out to all of the masses. So, yes, alright, then, through that situation, I think we were able to give people a better idea of what was going on in the world. The fact that we looked particularly at Europe rather than in America—and by the way, the perception of our work with American artists at that time was the same as the general perception of our work with living artists now. In other words, they thought we didn't pay any attention to them because the bulk of the program was based on European things, but, I mean, we had [Marsden] Hartley show first. There were many things. But there was, let's say, a generalized already interest in American art. You know, the twenties and thirties were a tremendously nationalistic period for every country, particularly in the western hemisphere. And so, that gave the American artists something to fight against. There was this pulling around and it gave people who were more commercially minded, such as the industrial designers, something to aspire to, because nobody had set a standard before, especially in America. So in those two areas, there was a lot going on, and the fact that we were going to accept something that was a real American industry as an art form, film, in those early days, it was because there wasn't any video, because there wasn't any—there was *Life* magazine, in the beginning, [it was] starting to begin. But because there wasn't much photographic material, that is, film and photography, it had to find a place somewhere. I mean, it was a matter of looking, and [Alfred] Barr was interested in every kind of looking. So those seemed innovative because there hadn't been any format committed to deal with them.

CC: I think you can see it pretty easily when you go to a—I'm shocked for instance when we go to Italy or parts of smaller towns or smaller cities in a place like Italy or Germany, and then come to the United States and see the different publications that exist. Over there, there's not as much that's—except for *Stern* and some of the big popular ones. Most of the intellectual magazines and

newspapers and weeklies, they're all printed and there are long articles by—well, it's actually quite interesting, because they're almost all op-ed. And here, it's almost exactly the opposite: *The New York Times* with Home, and Living, and...

RC: Also, as you know, the American culture has always been considered highly visual, as opposed to England, France, very literate. Right? The ideas expressed in words rather than in pictures and that was something that Barr was sensitive to, other people were sensitive to. So anyhow, those were the early days; that's why it was exciting, and then because there was the possibility of confrontation, which now there isn't. I mean, everybody knows everything about everything. Right?

CC: It's very hard to be controversial, other than, the only thing I can think of that would shock someone now would be something pornographic or something visually graphic. And that's maybe not even that—

RC: Although I want you to know that they still don't—there are places that take some pictures out of exhibitions. It's hard to believe.

CC: But that's about the only—certainly not stylistically.

RC: No; nothing. And in fact, what vestiges there are of it, they are stylistic because of course having gone through a minimal phase, then it's obvious that the next one you're going to have is expressionist, of course. The same thing happened during the twenties and thirties. You went from very cool geometric abstraction to social realism, to social protest kind of things, and so on.

CC: When you mentioned the Op Art show, was that—? Did I hear you correctly to say that in a sense, you had stepped over, you had almost jumped the gun on it and you were about to go—?

X: You had the concept and it was illustrated by these artists that came and made art—

CC: In the response avant[?] show. But then next you were about to go kinetic. Did you say that there was a huge bandwagon you jumped on the movement and then you suddenly put a halt to it knowing that?

RC: No, no; I don't think that. I think it was—I think everybody thought that it wasn't a good enough move.

CC: That you were creating Op?

RC: That we were inaugurating the movement and it wasn't good enough.

CC: Now you were beginning to champion something that really was...

RC: It was—yes, well it was—it's hard to [explain], I'm sure somebody in Painting and Sculpture could better—

CC: I think I know what you mean. No, it's a strange area.

RC: And Peter Selz might be able to better express what was happening at that time, because he was around, and of course, Bill Seitz was the one who did the show and was going to do the kinetic show.

CC: Was that a particular favorite of his? Or?

RC: Well, he was very involved in the very moment of movements; he was very involved with what was going on at the moment, and wished to survey it. And of course, we ended up having the Machine [*The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*] as the sort of not kinetic totally exhibition.

X: Tinguely's machine?

RC: No no, there was a show called The Machine, you know, the one Pontus Hultén did?

X: Oh, the Machine show.

CC: When did you first come here to work?

RC: I came here to work as a cataloguer in '63, so, it's 20 years.

CC: One of the things that we're going to be looking for in telling the story is certain points of conflicts that haven't been solved or that—are there any great controversies or conflicts in the history of the—?

RC: Do you think people are interested in that?

X: We'd like to know because Mrs. [Blanchette] Rockefeller said [INAUDIBLE: 0:19:44] politics at The Museum of Modern Art. [Laughing] I mean, it's interesting that they're—

CC: I don't mean personality clashes, but more—for instance, we see at the very beginning a couple of obvious things, the story of how the few people that started the Museum were able to corral a lot of interest, and there was some objection [to] what they were doing. Some. But that's an interesting dramatic story in its own right. And then in the forties, the changing of power, in a sense, from one to the next and how the Museum was becoming more institutionalized at that point. And for better or for worse, some things went, other things came on. Is there anything that could illuminate the period [of the] late sixties and early seventies, and I'm not particularly talking about just the strike and that sort of thing, but is there anything you can amplify about that period? You said people were very much anti-object.

RC: Well, you see, the thing I see more than ever—the longer I'm here and maybe the tendency to be a historian gets the better of me, but I see the Museum very often being a microcosm of all sorts of social [INAUDIBLE: 0:21:03] that are happening at the moment. And really if you deal with the kinds of things, such as expansion, which 1939 was, and of course inevitably after that expansion, you have a desire to say, "Oh, what the heck are we doing? How did we get ourselves into this?" Where we all used to have lunch together and we all used to be able to tell everybody everything about everything. And now I have to phone you if I want to see you because you're so far away, et cetera? And I think the first expansion in '39 led to the first dissolution of the family.

CC: The club.

RC: I would say family more.

CC: Family? It's like, family, club, then the institution.

RC: Yes, actually, and when I came here in '63 before—I mean, it was just at the moment five months or six months before we closed to get into the next building. And at that time, still people used to take a break in the afternoon and have tea together. We had no staff lounge, we had no coffee cart or anything like that.

And people would get together and talk socially, which of course inevitably meant that they were talking about their problems, and how to get this guy, and so forth. There was still enough conflict, just typical things where you know people better. When we got into the next phase we were already a big institution, and we had never been that before, really never got to that point.

CC: Was that then scary at the beginning?

RC: And then that got—it was not scary because things had been planned, and it was exhilarating. And I think you had the same similar hiatus after '39. There was a period of sort of finding your way around, and it lasted for about four years. And it just happened that I think that we would have probably had certain personality falling apart anyhow, had not Barr and [René] d'Harnoncourt had to retire. That's all. I think it probably would have occurred anyhow as it did before. I mean there would have been tremendous desires to change, but it turned out that this coincided again with all the business of the late sixties.

CC: You saw it as an inevitable change.

RC: It was a very interesting concurrence of things.

CC: But were there concerns that the Museum was losing its direction? Or if there were definitions about what direction next?

RC: Well, of course. Don't you think it would be scary if the man who was the founder director of your museum would leave?

CC: Sure.

RC: Although he had not directly directed everything.

CC: Sure.

RC: There was nobody who didn't feel his influence here. Dorothy Miller's contemporary things, I mean, they were all filtered through Barr.

CC: They beat that path up to the library?

RC: Yes, but the recognition of Barr's intelligence and appraisal of everything did not diminish. It was just that nobody wanted—nobody felt that he could manage everything. And it just happened that when René d'Harnoncourt was brought

into the Museum, a little more formal manner of handling things came along with a tremendously cultured person.

X: With a different kind of style.

RC: Yes, which was good because it was a little more mature style.

X: That's interesting.

RC: Right? Maybe less emotional, although it was very—

X: A showman.

CC: It was less adolescent.

RC: It was—yes, it was more mature. And then, Barr had a great brain, a great talent. But I think once the Museum got a little bigger it had to have this more—

X: Post-graduate [way]?

RC: Post-graduate way. And then, it was a burden. They didn't know really what direction to go into.

CC: At the end of the sixties?

RC: At the end of the sixties. And [they] tried first an art historian [Bates Lowry] because that seemed like the logical thing to do. But at the same time, it had made an institution so large that nobody knew how much money we had been spending. So together—I'm saying, it mirrored life so perfectly that the poor guy who you get as an art historian who obviously doesn't know anything about organization, finance management, and all that junk, steps in to this trough at the same moment as somebody says there isn't any money there. You know? And so that couldn't last, and it just created chaos [INAUDIBLE: 0:26:23].

X: A very good illustration of the problem.

CC: We were talking to Kynaston McShine yesterday and he mentioned the business of the strike and that in the old days it was more clubby, and if you needed another employee, you'd call a friend and then suddenly somebody would come to work here, and there were people working here for no salary, volunteer—sort of a clubby atmosphere. And he said that nowadays, with the budgets cut so much, there's almost a—well, Nelson Rockefeller said in the forties to Barr, I

think it was—he said the days of the great endowment are coming to an end in the sense that Park Avenue ladies getting together and with millions of dollars starting something. Do you feel the same sort of strictures now? And how would you describe how you were able to mount something in the earlier days as opposed to what you're able to do now?

RC: Nobody knew what it cost and nobody cared because everybody was willing to work for nothing. The majority of the people who wanted to work at museums obviously had access to culture and therefore didn't always need money. And if you were like I was, who came from a family who didn't have any money and didn't know that you worked in a museum for nothing nearly, you took whatever you could get and you tried to exist on it. And so you, in a way, were closer to many of the artists, too, because you were in the same category as they were. And then to put on an exhibition, everybody was always going over budget. Nobody understood what a budget was. After all, what's the difference? If you don't have unionized personnel, I could hammer just as well as—I who don't make any money could hammer just as well. Once we started having unions, only the people who were in the union—and you were getting a union scale or less here even—are allowed to hammer. They are only allowed to hammer certain hours, and so on. Bill Paley still says, why does it take so long to put on an exhibition around here? And the reason is, he remembers another time when everybody on the whole floor would go in and put the exhibition together. And you can't—do you realize that when I came here, the biggest department was the guards. And then came the curatorial departments. There were two people doing all the finances. Now the Finance Department is as big as all the curatorial departments put together.

X: That's a great multiplication.

CC: You're talking about raising money?

RC: All different—no; I'm talking about bookkeepers.

CC: Just bookkeepers.

RC: Finance people, computer people, all that. The whole management structure has gotten so—it's like this, and this underneath.

CC: Really?

RC: It's the tail wagging the dog. [Laughter]

CC: Because we saw for instance the other day a terrific piece of film.

RC: Have you ever looked at the annual report?

X: No actually, we haven't.

RC: Look at the list of the people who work here in the annual report, and you'll see how much space the curatorial people take up. It's nothing. We laugh at it but...

CC: We saw a piece of film the other day of the move in 1939 to the new building, and Jere Abbott and—

RC: Peter [INAUDIBLE: 0:30:04].

CC: Yes, they're all carrying paintings out. [Laughing]

RC: Yes. And then also we learned—other kinds of awareness come on you as you get bigger. It's caretaking. And then insurance. And then liability. And of course, I think the first vestige of knowing all about that was the fire. And it was, you know—certain circumstances make you grow up very fast. So there were a whole batch of things that I think changed the aspect of the Museum.

CC: Do you have the same problems as someone like Kynaston might have in terms of going out and—he says for instance, in his department, if they want to put on a big show of primitivism in modern art or obviously the [Pablo] Picasso [*Pablo Picasso: A Retrospecitve*] or something of that scale, Mobil Oil or IBM or corporations are only too glad to lend assistance and to sponsor the show. But when it comes to more experimental things or contemporary things—

X: There's a big gap.

CC: And even your things, you may have several well-known names attached to it, but they're still very contemporary and they're a little unusual. [Robert] Rauschenberg in China wouldn't be everybody's cup of tea.

RC: No, but when you're doing a big exhibition in general, up until recently, it was very much a fact that you could go out and get it for the big ones and you couldn't for little ones, or new ones.

CC: Do you have as much difficulty because—

RC: But we are now having tremendous difficulty with somebody named Lautrec [*Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec*], probably the most popular artist there ever was.

X: Nobody wants to come forward to sponsor?

RC: And we're having trouble getting a sponsor. Isn't that funny?

CC: Probably one of the greatest print—

RC: And it's not just print; [INAUDIBLE: 0:31:58] but it's a big show, with other things. Yes, things are changing tremendously. If you talk to people like Jack Winthrop, who are the pros in the business—the development man—you'll find out that the problem is that most of the kinds of money that we were getting for these big shows, even the blockbusters or whatever, was coming from organizations that didn't particularly have problems with keeping their head above water. Their social issues with their interest in supporting a hospital didn't particularly—I mean, that was certainly the grassroots trouble was, employees could say I want to give a dollar if you give a dollar to such and such hospital. These matching grants, mostly large corporations have. Now, are they going to say no to a hospital? If a hospital comes to them and says, we want $100,000, and a museum wants $100,000, and you are a corporation who wants to keep your good ethical moral stance, you don't want anybody to write in the paper that you supported Lautrec over Mt. Sinai Hospital, over the finding of a cure for cancer, or things like that. And I mean it's a situation that the present administration has pushed into consciousness, everybody's consciousness. He says that that's the problem.

CC: Does this affect how you put together shows?

RC: At the moment, we're not letting it because one, we have this damn building to just get it done, and so, since everything is iffy, we let—we figure, why cry yet?

CC: What about collecting things? Are you—? Could you describe a little bit about how you acquire?

RC: Money for collecting things is about the same.

CC: It's about the same. And you have a committee that approves [acquisitions]?

RC: We have a committee that approves. We have the same thing as Painting and Sculpture, if you know what that is. And we have our own committee.

X: A trustees committee?

RC: It's a subcommittee of the Board of Trustees with a certain amount of trustees and other people who are collectors and experts in the field. And a certain amount of the richer people on it give money to buy what they accept, and give gifts of prints. And then I also have—this is the only department that has an organization attached to it which is called the Associates of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, who are 32 couples who collect things, and they give me money also to buy things.

CC: Do you think there's more, or less, or different, the amount of trustee involvement in the Museum in terms of what they collect and their buying, what they want the Museum to collect, and how much approval or disapproval there was and maybe now?

RC: I think there were more collectors in the earlier days because then it was—even the Trustees were like family, to a certain degree. Some of them were just awful, and—

X: That is just like a family.

RC: Yes. And I mean, to the point where, I can't remember—Mr. Barr would not let anybody have a dog but the Chairman of the Board of Trustees had a dog, so he brought his dog, and they never got along. I mean, it was very difficult. But, you know, they were friendly, so therefore they were always passing ideas between each other: Do you like this artist? Do you like that artist? And now, there are a couple of younger trustees that we have who really do collect a lot and sort of do want to have those things. But you have more difficulty, and in funny ways, they don't have the warm family relationship with anybody here. And so there's a great deal of resentment. They start going out and buying things that we would like to buy but we don't have the money, and you don't have those strong feelings of anything they buy they'd give to us someday. In the old days, there was such a unity in feeling there.

CC: It was always the feeling if they bought it for themselves—

X: That this would ultimately come.

RC: Some day, yes. So you would be happy to help people out. Right? Because you knew it was going to come. Of course now the Museum Association says oh, conflict of interest, et cetera, et cetera.

CC: Conflicts of interest; really? Between the trustees and the—?

RC: Because the curators are supposed to be holier than thou and *not* influence anybody because we're supposed to be only interested in what we can get for the Museum.

CC: It's amazing.

RC: Right? And then if you place something in somebody's collection, and god forbid that person sells it, you have gone down the drain, you know, as far as moral, ethical.

CC: I saw the letters at the Archives of American Art between Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller and Alfred Barr, back and forth, and there would be whole letters where Barr would write back saying, 'I can get you this for about $300; I can get this, and I can get that.'

X: He had shopping lists of—

RC: Oh sure, oh piles of that material.

CC: And he was an expert at that. He was terrific.

RC: And who else was? I mean, that was it. It was her museum.

CC: And he felt that if she wasn't going to give it now, she'd give it later probably.

RC: Exactly. But you see then you have a situation like this. You go one generation later with Nelson; alright? And Nelson's entire collection of modern stuff was made up in a way like that, in that friendly way. But he dies after the people that he knew had left the Museum, and it doesn't come to the Museum.

CC: It doesn't come to the Museum?

RC: There was—during his lifetime, he—because, after all, he was the chattel of lawyers and god knows what else, and you know that he overspent. And so

during his lifetime, he made certain promises, and he had the exhibition and so on, here, of his collection [*Twentieth-Century Art from the Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller Collection*]. And at that time, everybody said, 'Alright, this, this, [and] that, we're not so sure of. This, this.' And so certain things that were in that exhibition became promised gifts, then he made even more promises, and MoMA bought the Stein collection, and so on. And then when he died, nothing more of what he had promised came.

X: Where is the rest of it? Just sold off?

RC: We assume a certain portion of it was sold off during the years. A lot of illustrations, you know, a lot of the things that I was interested in that were definitely bought at a time when he would very often make sure that we could get the same thing, because they were multiples. But there were a lot of things—that he had extra illustrated copies of nearly everything [INAUDIBLE: 0:39:39]. They're all gone.

X: Let me ask you something about [INAUDIBLE: 0:39:52] in the period that Nelson Rockefeller—

CC: That's extraordinary. So he was a very generous—? I didn't know that he was, overspent in that way. He was very, very generous then? Up to most challenges when somebody was asking?

RC: No, no, no; I don't think so. I mean I would say that from time to time, because he—I'll tell you how it really worked. If somebody was going abroad, he would really sort of almost commission them to find things for him, and that would allow the Museum to find things. Because otherwise it could have gone wrong. That's how budgets were.

CC: That's interesting. So he was financing their trip.

RC: When somebody went abroad, if they could take $3,000 that was Nelson's money; they could get something for him as well as for us; that's how it worked.

CC: That's very interesting. All of this of course would be considered unethical now, but in those days that's how they were building the collection.

RC: Of course; it was the only way. There was no money to do things.

X: We had said, or, you even termed it yourself—at the time it was looked at as the Rockefeller museum. I don't think it is now anymore so much as it's expanded and there's a lot of other funding sources.

RC: It's alright. Tom Armstrong said, "We don't have Rockefellers at the Whitney, you know." He said that about six months ago to me. So, don't count on that, people don't think of it.

X: Right. Well, what I was going to say is, though people have looked at it as, or the public, as an elitist museum—but what's your impression of it now? As the staff has gotten more institutionalized, and the institution has become more of an institution, hasn't the public felt more at home here? So there's kind of been a reversal.

CC: Become more democratic at all, or not so?

X: Do you think? Because it's still looked at—The Museum of Modern Art as not—

RC: Well, it depends on who's looking.

X: Kynaston even said that people are awed by it still.

RC: People are always awed by museums, institutions of any kind. I mean, I don't think that it's that. I don't know. You have to define who it is you're talking about, because obviously, young people were never awed by the fact that they couldn't come here. They came here, they enjoyed it, they lolled around. People still sit on the floor. The thing is that it's never been—oh sure, let's hope that the stuff that the artists make knocks them over, really gives them that kind of thing. But I don't think it's ever been the institution for *that* group, for the people who were actually interested in the art to come here, the students, the people who got to a college. I think that whole young college group, post-war young college group really didn't come here with a sense of awe. I never did. We didn't have that grand staircase of the Met or the Art Institute of Chicago or anything like that. It didn't have big columns to keep you out. In actuality, it was a much more accessible institution.

CC: It's really the only one in town that's like that.

RC: But, in terms of support and who would involve themselves in this place in order to support it—yes, certainly, they thought of it as a Rockefeller institution and therefore it became quite difficult to bring moneyed people into this place for that kind of support. And so you have a whole echelon of people who are well settled in the community, let's say, who would see the Metropolitan as being maybe tremendously elitist but not focused on one family, and who would have aspirations, let's say, to become a somebody on that board, with grave doubts about whether they could become somebody on this board. And so what happened was that we built up our board in the post-war years through the Junior Council, through the various little organizations of volunteers, where they could see what it was really like and could see where they had a place and see what they could do. And then, you know, a certain portion of the people were people who felt that they would never have the possibility of being on the Metropolitan board with the whole Jewish business thing.

CC: How do you see—? How will the Museum survive now in the next 10, 15 [years]? Where is it going to draw its strength from?

RC: I don't know, I really don't know. I think that New York probably is going to get more and more like Venice. Probably not, I hope, in my lifetime, but, you know, where the whole thing will be a big monument of some sort. And I think at that point institutions will become just part of the government and continue on that way. But that's probably far off in the future. I think as long as there is a viable financial community in New York City, things like museums will continue to survive. I don't think an institution of this size is likely to go out of business.

CC: So it's pretty much a New York institution then.

RC: No, I don't think that you can say that. I mean, we have always tried hard as hell to be international.

CC: No, no, I mean, it is international.

RC: But as far as the perception of it is—but in the long run, you can't organize internationally. I mean, look at the UN. The UN is an American institution as far as its continuance goes, and when the United States takes its money away from the UN, there isn't a UN. So therefore, there has to be one interested party that's

going to really make something continue to function. And so therefore this institution is not going to find that person somewhere else than here. I don't think.

CC: So the world enjoys it, but New York supports it.

RC: I think that's true. I think that's how it's going to be. I think eventually all culture is going to have to be taken out of a certain competition with commercial things, and I think that the Metropolitan Opera and all of these places where we have to pay so much money to see what is a museum after all, a museum of theater, will have to be totally supported. Or, if you know...

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