INTERVIEW WITH: **WILLIAM LIEBERMAN (WL)**

INTERVIEWER: **LYNN ZELEVANSKY (LZ)**

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BEGIN Sound Recording 2000-28SA at 0:08:05

LZ: Do you want to say something, just in general, about the Museum's reception of abstract expressionism? Were they slow on it?

WL: I think fairly slow. I was in Alfred Barr's office when Lee Krasner offered -- this was after Jackson's death -- offered the Museum their choice of anything. And it was refused.

LZ: You mean it was as a gift?

WL: Yes.

LZ: Really?

WL: Yes.

LZ: And he refused it?

WL: Well, I don't know that he did but let's say the Museum did. You check in the files and you'll see that in the questionnaire that was prepared for Jackson Pollock during his lifetime, it was never sent. It may still be in the file.

LZ: And what, why was that?

WL: I have no idea. At this point, it was after me.

LZ: Mm-hm. The American shows in general, how important were they?

WL: People remember they were very important, how people tend to remember what was good and forget what was bad. Which is also good.

LZ: And they were important in the art world in general, the artists were very concerned about them?

WL: The Museum of Modern Art being is, was, so to speak, at the helm, or whatever you want to call it, anything the Museum did was noticed, and certainly the American shows were noticed. They got a little quirky sometime, I think *Realism and Magic Realism* counts as an American show.

LZ: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Right.

WL: That, of course, was done in close conjunction with Lincoln Kirstein, and that's before Lincoln and Alfred had fought.

LZ: Yes. As far as Dorothy Miller is concerned, was she a powerful person inside the Museum?

WL: I don't think Dorothy or I ever thought that way. But we were both devoted to Alfred Barr in our different ways. I mean I was his skin, and Dorothy, in every proper sense, his confidant co-worker.

LZ: Can you separate their opinions? Because for someone looking at it from this side, it's like almost seamless.

WL: What do you mean by saying that?

LZ: I can't tell what was her idea, what was his idea, whether they ever had any differences of opinion about art?

WL: They probably did, about the American show. Close as that was to him, I don't remember any specific differences. I remember one of the shows – Alfred had a knack of upsetting things without really intending to. One show, I think it was *Fourteen Americans*, suddenly George Tooker was added.

LZ: Oh. And that was Alfred adding?

WL: Well I say suddenly, and George Tooker was added. Which was sort of funny to open a show with the catalog printed called *Fourteen Americans* – I think it was *Fourteen Americans* – with a Loren MacIver cover.

LZ: That's '46.

WL: And you'd better check that.

LZ: Mm-hm.

WL: I was always distressed by that catalogue cover, because there weren't fourteen paintings in the artist's transom, in Loren's __[0:12:00] I think Tooker was probably added with a strong thrust from Alfred. Remember, Alfred was always interested in realistic art. One of his first writings was on the German painter Otto Dix. Was Alton Pickens in one of them?

LZ: Yes, he was one of them, I don't know whether it was '42 or '46.[1]

WL: They were particularly proud that at that time he was not represented by a dealer, although to me that doesn't make any difference between the aesthetic value of a work.

LZ: Right.

WL: Pickens, though, was quickly taken on by Curt Valentin.

LZ: Mm-hm. Well do you think that they were eager to have artists who weren't with dealers because they wanted to be showing people something that they hadn't seen before?

WL: Or something that hadn't been tarnished by previous exposure. It got a little quirky sometimes. Morris Graves was shown before Toby.

LZ: Oh sure.

WL: I mean, when you think of it, that doesn't make sense.

LZ: No. Well, Stella was shown before Reinhardt.

WL: Stella was in the last one, wasn't he?

LZ: No, he was in '59; there was one in '63.

WL: They've all sort of merged into one. Larry Rivers barely made it, really barely made it.

LZ: But that was an early one. He was in '52, I think. Or maybe it was '56.

WL: And Grace Hartigan was in it, too. And previous to that there had been discussion – I think if you look, or if they haven't destroyed the files – suggesting that she call George Hartigan.

[1] He was in *Fourteen Americans,* 1946

LZ: [laughing] Yes.

WL: And Alfred did something that was very, very rare for him, suggesting changing something, one picture, I forget which one,

LZ: Oh, really?

WL: Which I never saw him do before.

LZ: Yeah. Do you remember that in the '50s there were – it went into the '60s – there was a series of shows in the upstairs penthouse galleries, *New Talent*?

WL: Yes, that was Andrew Ritchie's idea. And I helped with those, showing for the first time Carol Summers. What was I then? I was a curator in Painting and Sculpture, and at the same time I was, I guess, Director of Prints. And when Carol Summers came in to show some prints, __ surprise __[0:15:16] And he was in one of Andrew's shows. What were they called?

LZ: New Talent.

WL: New Talent; yes. Those shows were in the penthouse, of course, and really weren't seen by too many people.

LZ: What I'm trying to understand a little bit is, what Miller's position was in all of this. And they wouldn't have stepped on her toes in any way, those shows.

WL: Yes.

LZ: She had been the Americanist; right?

WL: Subconsciously, I think Andrew was flailing out, trying to do his own thing.

LZ: Yeah.

WL: Alfred demanded absolute loyalty, and I guess Dorothy and I were the only two people I know of that were friends, really, of Alfred's, __[0:16:15] friends for a long, long period. He seems really to have – an intense relation with Peter Blume vanished. Edgar Kaufman was his invention, then vanished. A good friend of his was Varian Fry; that sort of. It's funny, you look back over all this man's life, not too many friendships were maintained over a decade.

LZ: Do you think it's because he required so much from them?

WL: I don't know.

LZ: But so you think, whatever it was, she may have felt something about the New Talent shows. At some point in the early '40s, around '43, he talks about her as, she is our specialist in American art.

WL: Well it tended to be although it was never said, that Dorothy was Americana __.[0:17:22] And I remember, for a long time, we had lunch every Saturday together, at very sleazy restaurants at that time I didn't drink coffee and always needed a glass of milk which was sometimes difficult to get. And then we'd tool around to the galleries of that time, walking really up and down 57th Street. But I remember at one of those lunches, I jokingly said of myself, I'm not supposed to look at anything American. And Alfred contradicted me. Dorothy's husband, of course, Holger Cahill, one will never know the role he played.

LZ: Yes.

WL: Typically, Holger had been one of Alfred's closest friends, and that really changed after Dorothy and Holger married.

LZ: Oh.

WL: I remember Holger was even I think Acting Director of the Museum, at one point.

LZ: He was, when Barr left for a year.

WL: Yes. And Dorothy didn't get along with Edith Halpert. I did. And of course, Edith Halpert used to think that Holger Cahill was her invention, and indeed, he did work for her at one point.

LZ: Oh, I see. What about Marilyn Miller?

WL: No, not Marilyn, Margaret Miller.

LZ: Margaret Miller.

WL: Margaret Miller was a person of infinite taste. Mrs. Murray Crane had a daughter, a lesbian, Louise Crane, and there was some accident, I think, in the south of France, a car accident, and that resulted in an arm being severed. And so she had a wooden arm. She was incredibly beautiful. Hired by the Museum for her talents certainly which were considerable, but also I think Mrs. Crane

probably subsidized her salary in the beginning. I don't know how that would ever be checked. She and Dorothy were not friendly.

LZ: Margaret Miller?

WL: Margaret Miller.

LZ: So she was Mrs. Crane's daughter?

WL: No. Mrs. Crane's daughter was a lesbian, Louise Crane. She and Margaret were friends I don't think Margaret was a lesbian. Somehow though Margaret was in this car, in this accident, and an arm was severed.

LZ: I see.

WL: Therefore, it probably was the Murray Cranes' thought,[2]

LZ: I see. And she did the large painting show, I think?

WL: She did, I think, a few independent shows. The one I remember most vividly is the large painting show, and of course, in retrospect, those paintings don't look so large. At the time though, it was quite important. Indeed, it was there that I first saw the Balthus painting, *The Mountain*, which I consider his masterpiece, and actually, was one of my first three acquisitions when I came here. I mean, things go around.

LZ: Yes. And do you think that Margaret Miller was

WL: She was very good at installation. Very good.

LZ: Which, Dorothy Miller was too, right?

WL: Yes, but the best person in installation, the best person, I think, was always Alfred. Always Alfred. I mean, even today, I look at something and -- what would Alfred have thought? I think Margaret's installations tended to have more flair. I don't mean that in a negative way with Dorothy, which were always quite coherent. But Dorothy's chief installations were the American shows, and remember, that was sort of one box and then another box.

LZ: Was Margaret Miller competition for Dorothy, do you think?

[2] Mrs. Winthrop Murray Crane (Josephine Porter Boardman), was one of the original founders and trustees of the MoMA in 1929. She moved to New York City after Mr. Crane died in 1920 and was a friend of Abby Rockefeller.

WL: They were not friendly.

LZ: They were on an equal?

WL: No. Dorothy was always above.

LZ: Above. I see. Why didn't Dorothy get to do, when it came time to do the major monographic shows that started in the mid '50s, why didn't she get to do any of those? I mean, they were her people to begin with.

WL: Well, that's very funny. Why did Alfred never take Dorothy Miller to a trustee's meeting? Why was it always me? I mean, it's peculiar. This, I have only considered in retrospect; it seems strange.

LZ: Do you think it had to do with her being a woman?

WL: Oh no, not at all. Alfred didn't think that way. Margaret Miller served, really, as girl friday to various guest directors, for instance Sweeney with the first Calder show. I think she helped Henry Hope with the mechanics of the Braque. Rona can fill you in, probably, on that.

LZ: Yes.

WL: I'll never forget, I introduced Henry Hope in Paris to Braque, whom I knew through my parents. And Henry said to me, "When do you think Braque will begin to tutoyer me?" [laughing] I said, "Probably never." Braque called him "Henry Hopie" __[0:23:38] [laughter] Margaret, I believe, I'm not sure. I was going to say helped with the incipient Art Lending Service, but that should be checked. I think that was taken over by Alicia Legg. This was when I was Staff Advisor to the Junior Council.

LZ: Yes. One thing that struck me when I was going through and reading correspondence and stuff, was in 1946 when I think

WL: Dorothy was marvelous about filing.

LZ: Yes, her files were fabulous.

WL: She would, and then, she'd just write here what it should be filed under.

LZ: Yes.

WL: And I've always envied that. Of course, she was sensationally beautiful.

LZ: Yes, everybody mentions that.

WL: And that marvelous hair, I remember, occasionally, you know, having worked all day or something, she'd just loosen it, and it was glorious when it cascaded down.

LZ: In 1946, I guess, there was a letter in the file from Jim Soby – no, it was actually in his file, and it was a letter from her to him. And he had clearly written to her to ask her, would she work on his upcoming Shahn show. And she wrote back, sort of just thrilled that he would ask her to do this. And I was struck by that, because it was 1946. She had been at the Museum for twelve years. She was at that point, I guess, an associate curator, and she just said something like, 'They're never going to let me do another show again anyway.' So, I think it was right after her American show, and this would be the best thing that could possibly happen. So that it seemed to me that

WL: Did she help on the Shahn show?

LZ: She helped out on the Shahn show. She was called Assistant Director, I believe, yes, Assistant Director.

WL: I had forgotten that. Of course, Shahn was represented by Edith Halpert, __[0:26:05]

LZ: Some problems. But I'm just struck by trying to understand, I mean, there's this woman who people obviously had a great deal of respect for. She did a series of very important exhibitions, and yet she seemed to have always been sort of tamped down. Is that right or no?

WL: No.

LZ: That's not right. So is it the position she chose?

WL: I don't know. I'm the same way. I really like to remain fairly anonymous.

LZ: Uh-huh. And you think that that's what it was, that she preferred that?

WL: Well, I certainly, I really think she did.

LZ: That she didn't want too much power? That she didn't want too much authority; maybe the word authority is better than the word power.

WL: And she was, I mean, the physical mechanics of the collection, photography, registration, photo album books, all that, it was under Dorothy.

LZ: That was her charge. And I imagine that kept her pretty busy.

WL: She had good assistants, Elisa Van Hook for quite some time, and Sara Kuniyoshi, or Sara Mazo, who was very, very good. Her closest human being friend at the Museum, apart from Alfred, was Dorothy Dudley. And I believe they had been at Newark together.

LZ: Oh, really.

WL: I think you'd better check that. Dorothy, of course, had some personal income, which helped her. The salaries – well, they're still bad there, but salaries were really horrible. When Alfred asked me – when Alfred was kicked out, and then asked me to become his assistant,

LZ: What year did you come to the Museum?

WL: Oh, I'm a monster, I really was. Really was. It was actually Dorothy who relayed to me Alfred's – Alfred had phoned me, but it was after Dorothy relayed at the request

LZ: The request that you

WL: That I would be Alfred's assistant.

LZ: That you'd be his assistant. So is that when you came to the Museum?

WL: I came to the Museum in '43. I was going to Harvard then __[0:20:10] Fellowship, and there was the summer. And I had first gone to The Museum of Modern Art in 1939 as a miserable child, and then decided that's where I wanted to work. I was graduated from Swarthmore; I was going to Harvard in the fall. I really wanted to work somehow at the Museum, but I was going ahead, and my tutor, Wystan Auden, said, 'Well why don't you volunteer? I know someone called Monroe Wheeler.' And I volunteered, and through Wystan, was hired as a volunteer by Monroe. Then left to begin at Harvard. Almost immediately Alfred

was demoted, and there actually was a retirement party, he was given a gift by the staff.

LZ: Oh really?

WL: __.[0:30:20] And then came back. Why am I rattling on about me and not about Dorothy?

LZ: Oh, I guess, what was I asking you about? I've lost it myself, at this point. But I guess I just have been really curious all along

WL: Dorothy had a block about writing.

LZ: Yes, that I gathered.

WL: And subconsciously, Alfred encouraged that block.

LZ: He wanted to have her available to him; he didn't want her off doing her own thing?

WL: He did not think that way; he really didn't. But it <u>was</u> that way. Had he said, say, at one point, or in the beginning, 'Now you just lock yourself in a room and write that out,' Dorothy, I'm sure, would have.

LZ: Yes, because if you read her correspondence, she writes very literate letters; there's no reason why she couldn't write an essay. Do you remember anything about a controversy around *The New American Painting*? Not the big controversy that developed later, but something at the Museum about whether it should be shown in New York. Anything about that?

WL: I don't, really. It was not originally scheduled to be shown in New York. It was such a hit in Europe, then it was shown, just the way the New Masters of Modern Art show, which was done for Australia, was never supposed to be shown at the Museum. __[0:32:15] one quarter of the population of Australia __, that was shown at the Modern, where it was equally successful.

LZ: Barnett Newman was put in very late to that show.

WL: Probably.

LZ: And I gather that – she, actually, when I was a graduate student, I interviewed her, and she said at that point that she had never felt __.[0:32:40] She said, 'We

never felt strongly about Newman. We didn't think he was as good as the others.'

WL: Well, I think both Alfred and Dorothy thought there was something of the emperor's clothes in Barney's work. They may be correct. One could not ignore Barney's, you know, the influence or the presence of other artists. Barney also was a latecomer. If you just look at the dates.

LZ: Yes.

WL: Which, the kids today don't realize. And Barney could pontificate. I mean, that was part of his charm.

LZ: [laughing] Yes. Do you have any sense of the Museum being more adventurous in its international program in circulating exhibitions in terms of taking more chances with more radical artwork than they would have in New York?

WL: I don't know. __[0:33:45]

LZ: Do you have any sense that the Museum was more adventurous, say, in its circulating exhibitions and international program exhibitions than?

WL: No. There was – Elodie Courter, also a close friend of Dorothy's, did a marvelous job with the Circulating Exhibition program, always sort of being contained within, or should we say under, Alfred's umbrella. When that expanded, really had an almost rival program, but it was not more – the only thing I think that the Circulating did that was more adventurous than what the Museum was actually doing – I mean, they'd do shows like, say, *A Museum Menagerie*, and things like that.

LZ: Yeah.

WL: The only thing was a show of Italian design, and that, I believe, was done by Louise Huxtable, that was shown at the Museum. But again, that was conceived to be a circulating program. As for Painting and Sculpture, you certainly couldn't think better than Alfred. He did not, though, react immediately to abstract expressionism.

LZ: Why do you think?

WL: I don't know. If you think back, Alfred never liked Soutine. This is years ago when there weren't definitive catalogues, when we all did our shows. It's so easy now because __[0:36:03] of, as I said, Alfred, one of his first things was an Otto Dix, and Alfred wrote that, as you know, about Otto Dix's Dada period. And I, snoopy me, unearthed some fabulous Dada woodcuts, and I think Alfred was rather horrified. And now they're prized possessions of the Museum.

LZ: Sure.

WL: When, what was it? Shewolf? Werewolf?

LZ: *Shewolf*.

WL: Was acquired, that was actually hung, not in the galleries, but the penthouse.

LZ: Why was that?

WL: I'm just pointing this out to you.

LZ: [laughing] Okay.

WL: And it was outside the men's room by the telephone booth. [He sketches] The old penthouse, this would be 53rd Street, there was the terrace out here. There were restaurant facilities here. And there were occasional paintings here, and occasional paintings here. This was the men's room, ladies' room, telephone booth; or maybe it was telephone booth, and *Shewolf* was hung right there. The telephone operators were over there.

LZ: And this is the penthouse gallery?

WL: It wasn't a gallery, it was a members' room.

LZ: Members, yeah, right. I see.

WL: And then what you called the New Talent bit, Andrew was allowed only this much.

LZ: I see.

WL: __[0:38:02]

LZ: I see. Interesting. Do you think that Barr had a block about the idea that really important art could come from this side of the Atlantic? Do you think he was stuck on the idea of Europe?

WL: Alfred had a much more comprehensive view of European art, much more, say, than the Europeans. Although __[0:38:42] oriented to Picasso, and later Matisse. I mean, Alfred's resumption of his interest in Matisse was late. But Alfred also saw British painting, painting in Germany, things like that. He was not exclusively School of Paris at all. And of course, he was one of the first people to do the fanfare for Russian suprematism and things like that. And of course, Alfred was doing Latin American art long before __[0:38:24] I think Alfred became convinced sort of mid-on that America, the United States, New York, was central.

LZ: Sort of mid-fifties, would you think?

WL: I guess so. I'm so bad at dates. If you check back, I'm not sure of this, I think the Met had a drip painting by Pollock __[0:40:03] check __ , that may be before the Modern had a drip painting.

LZ: It may be, it may be. I think that I remember that from previous research.

WL: Alfred didn't like Jackson.

LZ: Personally. But Dorothy did.

WL: Well, Dorothy, unfortunately, __ near Jackson, and we all had problems with Jackson. Only when he was drunk. [0:40:45]

LZ: Yeah.

WL: I mean, later he became, I guess, one of our closest friends. But not Jack the Dripper. There were a few things, you asked about his influence in the American show, and there was an artist called [Ben L.] Culwell, or something like that.

LZ: Yes; yes.

WL: And Alfred sort of pushed that through. I'm not sure that __[0:41:20] those things correctly. If I remember, they were heavily crayoned things, and though they

were abstract, but if you looked, you could see a woman's breast or a crotch. I'm not sure Alfred saw that. [LZ laughs] No, I mean that.

LZ: Really? That he saw the

WL: Yeah.

LZ: It seems like, when you look at the Museum's record on American art early on, that there was much more support for Burchfield and Hopper and Ben Shahn than, for say, Marsden Hartley or John Marin or the people that you really think of as the modernists in this country.

WL: Yes, that's Stieglitz, Alfred Stieglitz.

LZ: Oh, so is that why, you think?

WL: I'm not saying that.

LZ: That's just something to think about. Okay.

WL: Who was the first American artist to get a retrospective at the Modern?

LZ: Probably Hopper. Was it Hopper? Burchfield? Who?

WL: __[0:42:18]

LZ: Yep.

WL: __

LZ: Oh yeah.

WL: Maurice Sterne.[3]

LZ: Oh god, yes. That was the first one? Yeah, so it's very strange. Except that you can see a sort of __[0:42:35] type quality to a lot of the work that they liked.

WL: Try to go into the correspondence about a show called Living Americans.

LZ: 19 Living Americans? *Paintings by 19 Living Americans*, right, the second exhibition, '29 to '30.

WL: Try and go into that a bit.

[3] 1933

LZ: Okay.

WL: __[0:43:10] someone do __ research on that. __ the input of the trustees __ and also someplace there are lists in Alfred's hand. Rona might, if they still exist, Rona should have them or know about them. I mean, everything wasn't so set always. The first show had, the catalogue for which was written very hastily by Alfred __, and that text was then definitive for years, and that was the text used __. [0:44:15]

LZ: Mm-hm.

WL: But Renoir was originally in that.

LZ: Oh really?

WL: And as Alfred's __[0:44:30] grew, __ went bye-bye.

LZ: Right. Interesting.

WL: When I did the 50th Anniversary show, *Art of the Twenties* or whatever it was called, Alfred had wanted the Museum, this was at one point, to open __ '29 surveying the past decade, and that's really __ the show that Alfred and I __[0:45:05]

LZ: Mm-hm.

WL: The involvement with Monet comes much later, strangely enough through Walter Chrysler, who got the __ out [0:45:18] fairly early and got a big whoopshy-whoopshy __. Alfred is always cited as being interested in Monet; that's not true. And if you go back, when we did acquire a Monet it was a much different sort of Monet, a bequest of Mr. and Mrs. William Jaffe, and that was shown in the New Acquisitions show or Given and Promised show, something like that, but then returned __[0:45:58] The Water Lily bit, though, is later.

LZ: I see.

WL: You can get it __. [0:46:04]

LZ: It's almost as if, when you look back at the choices of the U.S. artists, that as if there was the idea that that kind of work sort of encompassed something that was American, like American realist painting.

WL: Shahn seemed the ideal choice. In retrospect, how many people even know the name Ben Shahn? It's funny.

LZ: Although he was, people talked about Shahn a lot, I remember, even as I was growing up, so it lasted a long time, too.

WL: Right; but I'm speaking of today.

LZ: Yeah.

WL: Alfred was particularly – not particularly, but quite interested in a Philadelphian painter, although we only have one painting, and that was Franklin Watkins. And Alfred got that marvelous portrait of Boris Blai, and also a fantastic set of watercolors for some ballet, a ballet commissioned by Lincoln.

LZ: What about the famous story about Barr and Miller buying three Johnses out of his first show, and Philip Johnson buying the Flag for the Museum?

WL: Well, there were four, referencing the flag.

LZ: I mean, he had never done that for an abstract expressionist, he had never gone out and bought that way.

WL: No, but if you look

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LZ: I'm sorry, you started to say, the kind of, we were talking about

WL: It was never conscious.

LZ: It was never conscious. Yeah. But

WL: Alfred was a marvelous manipulator. Always for them, never personally. Never, never, never.

LZ: And so maybe Dorothy's position there had something to do with that also, that he just felt if she were there for him in the way

WL: __ Dorothy there was always Mrs. Barr.

LZ: Yeah. They were close, weren't they?

WL: Yes, Alfred and Dorothy never had anything sexual.

LZ: Despite all the rumors.

WL: Absolutely not. And I was in a position to know.

LZ: Yes. Well, maybe it's just what everybody would think, logically, since she was always there, and she was beautiful.

WL: Alfred's taste tended to the more exotic.

LZ: Oh yeah? Is there anything else you think I should know, just in terms of the American shows, or abstract expressionism and the Museum, or Dorothy Miller?

WL: Why don't you __[0:01:35] yourself __ Alfred __ a list of all the artists, and see how that measures out.

LZ: Okay.

WL: Just as an exercise.

LZ: As far as you know, those were basically her only shows, the Americans shows? Well, she did *The New American Painting* and she did some exhibitions from the collection. Did she do anything else?

WL: Yes, but I think Dorothy was quite active in the *Three Centuries of American Art* that went to Paris. You can check; it was before me.

LZ: Right. Yes, and she also did

WL: And of course, her particular knowledge was Shaker art.

LZ: Uj-huh. And she also did the fifty years of American art that went to Paris in '55, which had had a big abstract expressionist component, actually.[4] Almost purely abstract expressionism.

WL: That was done under Porter McCray.

LZ: Right, right. A lot of the sort of contemporary abstraction people were actually first-generation abstract expressionists.

[4] 50 ANS D'ART AUX ETATS-UNIS, Paris, Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Mar 30-May 15, 1955. Later shown as Modern Art in the U.S.A.

WL: But to take Levine – actually I think you could check, the Met bought *The Feast of Pure Reason* maybe before __[0:03:05] in that American show.

LZ: The Met got which?

WL: Jack Levine's.

LZ: Jack Levine. [pause]

WL: It's strange that neither Alfred nor Dorothy responded to someone like Ellsworth Kelly.

LZ: Although he was in the American show.

WL: I know, but that great Paris painting __ actually Ellsworth's __.[0:03:44]

LZ: The '51 painting? Yeah, that is an amazing painting.

WL: Did you see the show __

LZ: I did. I saw it both -- I saw it in Paris, too. It was wonderful.

WL: Oh, gorgeous.

LZ: Yeah, it was fabulous. But they probably wouldn't have known that work very early on, would they?

WL: No, Dorothy,

LZ: I mean, he comes back to New York in '54, Kelly.

WL: __[0:04:10]

LZ: Uh-huh. I was struck when reading the correspondence and the reviews, that Kelly was sort of the most popular painter in the '59 show. It's the one that people seemed to like the best. No, it is true that a lot of the stuff that they responded to most easily was figurative, and maybe that's why they picked up on Pop in the '60s, also, in a way that they hadn't done.

WL: I don't know how much they picked up on Pop.

LZ: You don't feel that?

WL: I mean, actually, that was the first one to show __ a miserable drawings show I did __ drawing __[0:05:00]

LZ: And when would that have been?

WL: __ check, it's one of the big shows. The only open shows the Museum ever did were four shows done by the Junior Council. And that began with the prints, then drawings, then painting, then sculpture. Intellectually, of all the AbEx people, it was Motherwell that Alfred most respected.

LZ: And Motherwell was already in '46 he was in the show. It always seems like a class thing with Motherwell. He could talk to people at the Museum and at other places, and he could

WL: A marvelous speaker, and if you think, early Motherwell is really very School of Paris.

LZ: Yeah.

WL: Indeed, the only AbEx artist that Pablo knew by name was Motherwell.

LZ: Is that true? Because he was mixing in those circles?

WL: No.

LZ: Or because the work was the most appealing to him?

WL: It's funny, there was an issue of __[0:06:25] brown and black castle on the cover, and I even kidded him saying [pause]

LZ: And *The New American Painting* I think almost wasn't done. And it was, I think, O'Hara, that really wanted it, sort of pushed it.

WL: Well Frank's book, they're bound to be dreadful.

LZ: Yes. [laughing]

WL: No, there are so many errors. I mean that Olivetti typewriter, and that was my Olivetti.

LZ: [laughing] Really?

WL: Funny, it becomes this mythic object.

LZ: [laughing] Well, he also quotes Porter McCray as saying that Dorothy Miller was Alfred Barr's slave, which I think, no matter how

WL: Porter was very resentful, in his way, and still is. For years, he wasn't made a member of the Executive Committee. I was able to push that, finally, and anonymously. But the O'Hara thing has Alfred doing an Ensor show, has him doing a Munch show. I said to Shirley __[0:07:55], "Why wasn't all this checked?"

LZ: And? [pause]

WL: Dorothy was terribly close to __.[0:08:15] And I don't mean close __, too.

LZ: And she was, I also have the sense, looking at the correspondence, that she was very concerned about the artists that she dealt with, that she really tried to help them in various personal ways, and she was anxious to get the work sold for them, and she really was looking out for their best interests, that that was important to her.

WL: It was Dorothy who really got Pierre Matisse to take on MacIver or some sculptor.

LZ: Raoul Hague, maybe. She was really into Raoul Hague for a while.

WL: Yes. __[0:08:58]

LZ: [laughing] Yes. This is enormously helpful for me.

WL: Sure.

LZ: [tape break] Let me get this. You were saying they both pushed Stamos in the beginning.

WL: Perhaps too early. Stamos was actually born in 1922.

LZ: So he's late, for that generation.

WL: He's a little late.

LZ: They liked Baziotes a lot.

WL: Yes, they did. Brooks they never did anything on.

LZ: He was in one of the Americans shows.

WL: __[0:09:40] Bill de Kooning __. Alfred, there had been some installation of the collection on the second and third floor of the Museum. And I was with Alfred when he asked Motherwell to come through and review it. And as Motherwell pointed out, the Museum lacked a de Kooning.

LZ: This was when?

WL: I don't know. It was a 2-floor installation in the Museum collection, which was unusual. It was Alfred's desperate way of trying to get more space for the collection.

LZ: Oh right, I read about that.

WL: Not the big show where everything was planned.

LZ: Oh no?

WL: No. This was only the American stuff, if I remember correctly.

LZ: And so Motherwell pointed out that there was no de Kooning.

WL: Yes. Gorky and a really significant de Kooning enter the collection after Alfred. Check. I mean, that little *Garden in Sochi* picture for years was the token Gorky.

LZ: Right.

WL: And that tells very little about his career. They completely ignored __[0:11:20] in the show with __.

LZ: Mm-hm.

WL: They weren't so hot on Poussette-Dart.

LZ: Right.

WL: Alfred tried to make __[0:11:40], Lipton, and Roszak abstract expressionists.

LZ: [laughing] Yeah.

WL: And __ told you about David Smith.

LZ: Yes, David Smith

WL: Don't go by the acquisition numbers because some of those are just medallions or little things that have nothing to do with __.[0:12:05]

LZ: Right, not major works. No, I was struck by the fact that he was on none of the lists for anything, you know, when she was thinking about people. And that although the Museum does do the show in '56, I think Sam Hunter came in to do that show.

WL: Sam Hunter came in under Andrew Ritchie. And Sam Hunter had been a critic at the *Times*, and then he went away to live with [Tony Bauer?] in Europe. And that friendship declined. Then he came back to New York and was hired by Andrew Ritchie. I can't think of any show Sam Hunter did, and that's true that he must have done some shows.

LZ: I think he did the Pollock show in '56, and I think he did the David Smith show.[5] And there's a letter in the file from him to Dorothy Miller pleading with her to make the 1956 Americans show an abstract expressionist show, saying it's really time for that, and let's not have a smattering of this and a smattering of that any more, let's really make a commitment to this work.

WL: A statement.

LZ: Yeah. And don't take the – and write an essay. Don't use these artists' statements, but write a real essay. It was very respectful and very friendly and nice, but that was really what he was saying. But I guess this was a formula that they had arrived, for the American shows, from, like, *19 Living Americans*, and they weren't going to change it.

WL: Well, in Elisa Van Hook's office, on the fifth floor, if you came in on the – (Do I have that luncheon today? Yes, you do. You're supposed to meet Mrs. Wilson at noon in the lobby of __. Which Mrs. Wilson? Josie Wilson. Oh okie doke. Thanks.) What were you saying?

LZ: I was saying that there was this formula for the shows, and you started to say in Lisa Van Hook's office.

[5] https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2016/spelunker/constituents/6672/

WL: Oh. There used to be, for Museum Publications, those dealing with American art were kept together, so when people came and complained that the Museum wasn't doing

LZ: [laughs]

WL: I'm not kidding.

LZ: Yes.

WL: Just reach for this clump of books.

LZ: And Lisa Van Hook, what was her position?

WL: She was – I don't know; she was assistant to Dorothy Miller or something.

LZ: I see. Yeah, no, there's no question that they were continually concerned about this, that this was the thing that was nagging at them most, and that they were, um. But, you know, it's interesting, there's that 1949 roundtable discussion, and Clement Greenberg is there, for the Museum, for the magazine __[0:15:18]

WL: I was abroad then.

LZ: Yeah? But Barr actually says, in 1949, that he thinks that the stuff that's being done by American artists – that's what it was about – that there was a trend toward abstraction, but he thought it was stronger than any but the best of the last generation of European work, and yet he never really got behind it.

WL: Come down and look at the abstract expressionist show.

LZ: Oh, I'd love to. [0:15:57]

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END OF INTERVIEW