

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH: WILLIAM (BILL) BURBACK (BB)**

**INTERVIEWER: PATTERSON SIMS (PS)**

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**BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

PS: You're a New Yorker [Pause].

BB: Yes, I am a New Yorker.

PS: You came here as a junior member of the Photography Department. [Pause]

BB: A curatorial intern. It was the New York State Council program.

PS: We didn't have an internship program then, so you were among the vanguard of interns at the Museum. Now we have a very ambitious intern program.

BB: I think it was probably different curatorial departments who took the initiative. There were a number of people who had proceeded...

PS: Peter [Galassi] came an intern.

BB: I think so, yes,

PS: Yes.

BB: And [Maria] Morris [Hambourg], at the Met, quite a few people, Anne Tucker, a lot of interesting people.

PS: And it was a part of the national program, NEA, which sent people?

BB: No, it was here, the New York Council, but John [Szarkowski] had quite a network, and I met him actually at the Oakland Museum. I was working there as a curatorial assistant in their photography division and I was lucky enough to know him. He was going to Hawaii or someplace like that, probably, though I learned from him in an *hour* than I had to that point, because the way he saw things and the way he saw that they should be presented were so exciting. And I asked him, "Are there internships at MoMA?" [Laughing] and he said yes, so I instantly applied, and was able to get it...

PS: And [Maria] Morris [Hambourg] and all those people came at the same time?

BB: Yes, Ingrid [Sischy?]...

BB: There was quite a whole cast of characters.

PS: Fascinating. And photography, though, has been a focus of yours?

BB: Not necessarily. I taught. I was teaching at Berkeley and teaching at the De Young Museum. And frankly, I thought the shows that the De Young installed for photography were boring. I thought if I saw another [inaudible] Bard, that would be it. And the woman there, Elsa Cameron, who was head of the art school, said the George Eastman house had a summer internship [inaudible] and I got it. And Nathan was there...

Really into non-linear thinking, and it was fabulous to be exposed to all of this and Rauschenberg and Warhol and all those other interesting people were using photographic processes, but in California, art museums were not recognizing that. They weren't thinking of it as part of photography. They had this very narrow, I thought, view, and out at George Eastman, it was very, very broad. So it allowed me, to think differently about the medium and also about the museum's responsibilities to their public.

PS: And how did you make the switch from teacher to curator? In other words, was that...?

BB: It was what was available. [Laughing] It was that easy.

PS: Could you have conceived of yourself as staying as a teacher, per say?

BB: I'll tell you, when I started teaching in a museum environment, it was really fabulous, because all those artists' ideas were throughout all the galleries. It was so inspiring; it was inspiring to me, it was inspiring to my students. I was really shocked when I realized that when I was at Berkeley, I never really had looking assignments in their museum. How, in San Francisco, none of my professors ever used museums. I used them for pleasure, but teaching in them made me think about what an incredible resource of ideas they were.

I think I was incredibly lucky, just lucky, and as we were talking about, there was more money around. I think things were more fluid in terms of getting jobs in museums and there were lots of internships at lots of different institutions. We were trying to bring people in. And so, there were wonderful ways to take advantage of it. I got an MFA from Berkeley, which prepares you for nothing [Laughing]. You know, it's like an English department that would, prepare you to be a poet. So, one had to find ways. They, they ask a couple of students to stay on each year and teach, so after I got my MA, I did that.

PS: And you were from that area?

BB: Southern California. It was the perfect time at Berkeley, it was the sixties, so, speaking of change in format, it was fabulous.

I did my undergraduate and graduate work there, so I was there in the early '60s, came here in '69, which turned out to be a fabulous time to be at Berkeley.

PS: So you moved east, you were an intern with John, who you met in the West, and at that point, how would you describe the atmosphere in the Museum? Very open, as you've said?

BB: Well, open to ideas, as I am sure it must be now. It was an interesting and strange and very competitive place. I mean great egos. Well, I am sure that hasn't changed, but to me it what was part of the thrill. Again, coming from California, I hadn't been part of that dynamic, and I found it exciting. I found it exciting on the street. So much was happening and artists were dealing with things on the streets, which again, hasn't changed, particularly, but it was at a level that I hadn't known before. It was just breathtaking. And I think anyone in New York has this vicarious sense of power, no matter what level of decision-making they are, because there is so much going on now.

PS: Now, describe the kinds of projects you've had within the Department and how you relate it to other areas of the Museum?

BB: Well, Chuck Rosenbaum was here and we were pretty good friends [Pause]. So that was pretty exciting. And Photography and Film, and Works on Paper, the Drawing department were all on the same floor, so those were pretty interesting departments, I think, places that were doing unusual kinds of things.

PS: And you had a lot of interconnections?

BB: Well, more, kind of social, I think, than anything else, but, again, I think John kept prodding. He knew I wanted to work on exhibitions, it was very clear. It was funny, during the interview, Peter Bunnell was here. Peter Bunnell would say, "Can you type?" [Laughing] and I'd say "No!" [Laughing] I didn't want to. "No, absolutely can't". He wanted me to catch up on back cataloguing [Laughing] and John was more interested in our mutual... But there were great shows, I mean, Peter's shows were so different from John's and again, what I thought was interesting about John was he encouraged things even though you knew it wasn't what he was particularly interested in.

PS: He was quite open?

BB: I thought so. He was very clear in what he saw. He had a niche, a fairly wide niche, I must say, but he had a way of looking at clarity, I think, and that sort of expectation in picture making. He didn't limit his colleagues' sense of what photography was or could be.

PS: Now, you worked there, had the opportunity to organize exhibitions. Could you describe a little bit how it came to pass, there was a show to install, and you installed it, and then you actually got to work on them.

BB: John asked a really interesting question, which I am not sure he meant in a literal sense, but I was glad I took it that way. He said, "I want 50 ideas for exhibitions" and what that set off was a process of thinking that got you beyond one-man shows, theme shows, group shows. [Laughing] I was in no-man's land. Very much interested, as I said, in Warhol and other people who used photographs, but Warhol I thought was so provocative. He kept—even when I was a graduate student—pulling the rug out from me all the time, which I thought was an interesting way of working. And again, the social connection with Berkeley was on my mind too. I kept thinking about museums as institutions that had to deal with the visual world, that we had a responsibility to the larger community, so that I began to try to figure out, "How could one do a show that had to do with looking, but also had to do with the fact that, we were reading in the papers that there were surveillance cameras being placed everywhere?" Whole communities were thinking of, instead of hiring more policemen, putting these cameras in everywhere, so you could be watched. That's where the idea of doing an exhibition that had to do with pictures taken by automatic cameras, "I'd rather be a machine", the Warhol, and then this notion about this kind of intrusive, and looking at those pictures which were junk.

They had absolutely nothing to do in and of themselves with aesthetic decisions. No one was making an aesthetic decision, but you did see this enormous variety of compositions within an incredibly dumb visual context. The camera never moved. So you kept seeing all these different, black and white, graphic situations. None of them made them as interesting pictures in themselves, maybe a few, maybe the one

we used as a poster, but it was about something else. It was about how did you make that, sort of beautiful, not in the even Warhol sense of beautiful, but how do you make a convincing picture. How do you make something that you want to look at again and again and again? And at that time and I guess you still do, you have exhibitions, small galleries within the permanent collection. We actually just used a very small room. We had them optically printed, which was very important to me. I did not want them printed, did not want them framed, did not want them on the wall. Because I did not want to confuse people with that sort of picture making. So we found somebody, or I found someone who would optically print them and so we showed them on a rear screen projection in a room where there were no chairs and people were allowed to sit on the floor. And there was a kind of handout wall label, which did tell you about a kind of thesis here, much of what we've been talking about. But you couldn't read it in the room, because the room had to be dark. So you did kind of have to come to terms with "What is going on here?" which begins to be this educational issue. You have something in your hand, that's going to tell you, give you some clues, so that you know that at some point, that you can come to terms with it. It is not that the answer is withheld; it's not given right away. And that kind of tension I thought was kind of interesting. And the fact that these pictures that were about the absence of thoughtfulness were in galleries, or adjacent to galleries, was [inaudible]. Again, it was working on tensions, much like a painter would. And that's where, I think, my fine arts background, rather than art history, I took art history, but more or less hated it, because, oddly enough, it wasn't about ideas. It didn't seem to be about ideas. There were one or two teacher who really made you think, really made you look, but most of them wanted you to memorize stuff.

PS: Images and who did them and dates and...

BB: [Laughing] [Pause] When this or that image was done and not why or what inspired them or who they were connected with. Later, when you get to really good art historians, you get to see that, but for undergraduate and a lot of graduate classes at Berkeley, oddly enough, especially in Western art, I didn't find it. So it never really intrigued me, until frankly, I got here.

PS: Now, you did *One-Eyed Dicks*, and it had a pretty positive response, can we talk about that?

BB: Sure, it had that salacious title, that was all part of it. There was this marketing notion without ever knowing or without ever being part of the marketing world, but that was the risk. *One-Eyed Dicks* had to do with, oh what was it called, Bag Dicks, wasn't there an old movie or something?

BB: Oh, I have to tell you, you might want to turn this off. I don't know if John ever told you this fabulous story that Dick Koch, who was the legal counsel, do you know this story?

PS: No, no, I know who he is, but I don't know the story.

BB: Dick asked me to his office, because we didn't have releases for any of these pictures. The one thing we could use were pictures when the criminals had been convicted. If the person hadn't been tried and convicted, we could not use the picture. And we used the whole, you know it started when someone felt it was safe enough to start the camera and it ended when it ran out of film. No editing whatsoever. So there were no releases and people looked foolish. They were trying to burrow in the marble to get out of the way [Laughing] and all this stuff. And so I had to meet Koch to talk about insurance and all these issues. So, Koch thought this was fine, don't worry, he liked the idea, thought it was intriguing. But by the time I went from his office back to John's, he had called John and he, according to Szarkowski, said "I think it's a great idea, but this title. I mean, don't you think people will think dicks and penises?" And Szarkowski said, "Richard, how could you say a thing like that?" [Laughing]. End of problem. [Laughing]. But the New York magazine picked up, but that I thought was the best review, it said, it started "It takes a kind of classic call". And that's what it was about and that was what the Museum supported. And to me, that was very much, it was at the same time, not as interesting, certainly, not on the scale that Kynaston did that beautiful *Information* show. So there was an odd kind of connection and a worry in some of the press was this curator as artist. Was this curator...?

PS: Canonizing these objects?

BB: Making something really looking or was this a thing itself? Well, I think that's an interesting question.

PS: And do you remember the moment you had the idea to do the show?

BB: It was with that struggle. It was absolutely with John...

PS: But, I mean, were you in a bank, depositing money?

BB: Oh, no, no.

PS: I mean, how did it come to you?

BB: It seems to me, frankly, that I either read about a literal accident at a tollbooth. I associate it somehow with tollbooths, because I know they have cameras and if you don't pay your toll...

PS: Right, they get your license plate.

BB: Right. And I think actually another idea that I discarded was seeing these drawings that artists made from descriptions of victims of crimes. The drawing part didn't seem interesting, but the sort of connection with images. How do you capture people? It isn't art, but it has something to do with recall, skill, certainly with the drawing it has to do with some skill. I don't know, that whole sort of business about the Ten Most Wanted, again a Warhol idea.

PS: Exactly. That had come in '64 hadn't it? Because it was the World's Fair in '64.

BB: I don't think ... [Pause] There was some originality, but I...

PS: You did it alone?

BB: Yes, yes [Pause]. In fact, that was what was so great about John. He gave you all the room [Laughing] you needed. But when I first told him about the show, he said no, which, I don't know, I always credited John as an incredible deep thinker and, I think he is. I don't know if he said no to test me or not, to see if I would come back with the idea or not, to see if I was really committed or not.

PS: And this was on your list of fifty shows?

BB: Oh, sure, absolutely. I didn't tell him any other idea though. That was the only one. He said, "What have you come up with?", and I said "This." I didn't want to do anything else, no. He said, "I think that's a crazy idea," and then he waited a few more days and he said, "What have you come up with?". And I said, "John, this is it", which is not necessarily my personality, [Laughing] I must say. I didn't know, at that point, what I was getting into.

PS: Now, would you have done other projects? Because, not so long after that, you made kind of a flip in your professional life.

BB: Well, again, I stayed a little longer than the year. The Museum was incredibly generous, and John, John organized some interviews. I met with [inaudible] at the Met, when he was thinking about doing the satellite museum in Queens, and a lot of different things. He introduced me to Alan Scherner. And I had done a few things for the New York State Council while I was working here. And it turned out that...

PS: You knew David Mendoza, right?

BB: But that's after, that's much later. But the Council wanted an upstate representative and couldn't get it as a line item and they had an intern position at Albright-Knox. And I think it was in Education. But they kind of created this schizophrenic, pretty open situation, where I traveled around for them and got to see or talk to people who were, either had a grant, or how were they doing, or proposing a grant, and talked to them about it, and often represented them at meetings.

PS: And the director at that point was Gordon Smith?

BB: Yes, yes. But while I was still there, became the director.

PS: And Jim Wood was there? And Ann Rormer?

BB: It was a real interesting group of people and they asked me to do a show, too, I guess an educational kind of show, which was called *Kid's Stuff*. And again, this irreverent kind of notion, that took, head-on, this idea that my kid could have done it, and tried to address some of those issues. Again, the Museum was fabulous. We had huge garbage cans from which you could pick up, that was like the container for the catalogue. And it was something you used as you walked through. And it was done on shirt cardboard, so some cardboard was gray on both sides, some was white on both sides, some was white and gray, so the images all kept working graphically.

PS: Differently?

BB: Yes. Lots of volunteers. We hand-tipped in postcards, skied images. Just did a lot of things that, it also had a lot of quotes from artists, and it was trying to get to artists and ideas. That's what I've always been excited about. It also had a picture of Oldenburg. No! It's not Oldenburg. Who was the director of the Wadsworth, and Oldenburg made the wedding cake and everyone got a slice?

PS: Of his own wedding cake, though?

BB: No, they were little...

PS: Little plastic wedding cakes, right.

BB: There was that great photograph.

PS: Right.

BB: That was in it. Oldenburg said something about he had his best ideas as a kid. That sort of stuff.

PS: But, it was an Education position?

BB: Oh, it was very schizophrenic. It was kind of all over the place. Again, it allowed me to learn about and try different exhibitions. But that was a great cast of characters. For one thing, Buck asked me if I wanted to do a show and I wanted to do a Hockney photography show. He wasn't using color yet and they were really, again, dumb, and loved Ed Ruscha. And, again, because working for the Council, I thought we could, and Hockney did print himself, so I thought we could do a traveling show, and I talked to Hockney about it, select images that would be printed on very cheap paper, which would be literally glued like a subway poster to the wall. So no one could keep the image. In a certain way, I thought it would connect to Hockney's view of photography at that point, which he certainly didn't care about the...

PS: The aesthetics of it?

BB: Well, aesthetics, but not the technology. And getting art to places it might not ordinarily go to. Smaller museums. And it would protect Hockney, because those images would be destroyed when you took them off the wall. [Bob Buck?] said, "Don't you know, Hockney's a homosexual?"

PS: Said this to you?

BB: Yes, he said, "We could never do a show". And I was so stunned. [Laughing]. "Are you talking to me? Let's look at this collection" [Laughing]. You know, there's this fabulous collection at Albright.

PS: It's time to break the news. [Laughter]

BB: Where are you, or where have you been? So antithetic to MoMA. I was just, "What are you talking about?" So, at that point, I thought, there's not a great future here. [Long Pause] Help me, who's the Walker, the fabulous couple?

PS: Micky and [Martin]...

BB: Friedman. And Joan Rosenbaum told me they were looking for an educator there. This museum [MoMA], evidently, had just gotten the Noble Foundation Grant. I didn't know anything about that. Being very naive, I mean I just called Friedman up and said, "I've heard about this position, I'd like to apply for it. Can you tell me what to do?" And he said, "Tell me three people who might recommend you." References. So I told him and Szarkowski was one of them. Well, I thought there would be this long period, where I would write this letter, and da da da. Well, I got this phone call from John at the Albright, this might have happened on a Friday. Monday morning I get a call from John, and John's saying, "Before you make any decision about this" [Laughing], to ask him. He said, "I've just written Oldenberg a memo, because we've got this Education position". It was this sort of approach and then I got a call from Oldenberg, saying "We've got this opening, we'd like to know more about you."

PS: And you had known Dick when you worked here?

BB: Well, not really.

PS: You knew The Publications Department, but not...

BB: But not really. Truly not. I was an intern, so no, truly I hadn't. But I did like talking to him and I liked, and again, on my part, very naive, because I didn't know about Education departments, particularly. There was one at Albright...

PS: But there wasn't one at MoMA.

BB: There hadn't been. When I was an intern, Victor [D'Amico] was still here.

BB: A very sad Victor.

PS: Well, it turned out to be the end of his career here.

BB: I think it may have ended by the time I was here, but as you may know, there were a lot of people who either retired, or [Pause]-didn't Victor retire five times? [Laughing] He didn't want to retire, but he was retired and he'd come back the next day.

PS: I guess, Alfred Barr was at the very core of that group of people.

BB: [Laughing] Alfred was certainly not around. I remember Mrs. Barr.

PS: Yes, but well he left in '68. That was the year before.

BB: Well, he was ill, as I remember. But at any rate, he, Victor very much influenced my idea of museum education, structurally. I would just talk to him in the elevator. I wasn't anyone, but he really wanted to talk to someone, anyone. And this huge disconnect between curators here and people who needed to remember or know what he was doing here. They didn't know what he was doing here anymore. That's what I mean by this disconnect. He was completely independent. And he would talk about that, but in the sense of "You know, I really should let these people know that what I'm doing has something to do with what they're doing." Well, you know the story of [inaudible] and Drexler; they lost track. I thought that if I were ever to do Education, but I wasn't, I would certainly bring people together. I would let the administrative side of the Museum know, I would want to know what they wanted. It wasn't an independent kind of thing. Now I was an artist of sorts, not making art, but I believed in conceptual art, so all this stuff to me was making art. Still is, in a museum, I think. You're an artist, you're always creating. But, it was kind of a sad lesson, in terms of someone's incredible contribution, almost being a victim of your own success.

PS: Victor?

BB: Victor. And people forgetting. So, again, this notion of you really got to work together. You need to understand the curatorial perspective. It seemed to me an educator is always building fans [Laughing] for those different collections. But that is our job. It's to help people understand. Those who don't, those who already get it,

that's terrific. We won't worry about them. Or, in fact, you make new ways to make either the institution or the shows or whatever more accessible and let those teachers or those professors or those other curators use your institution as they want. They're prepared, they're ready. Open it up for them. So it was very interesting, it was very inspiring. It was sad, it was kind of a negative way of learning something, but I've never forgotten that. It was kind of the core of my belief in terms of how you work in an institution, educator or not.

PS: How many encounters would you say you had with Victor D'Amico?

BB: Very few.

PS: But you actually remember them?

BB: Oh yes, because he's- [Pause] did you ever meet him?

PS: Never.

BB: Modest, kind of, in statute, but really compelling. You had to be. When I came back here in the Director's Special Assistant Role, Victor had moved away from New York. Maybe he had passed away.

PS: No, he was alive. He had moved out to Amagansett.

BB: That's it, he had moved out the Island. But there were a lot of people who were furious. A lot of his teachers were at the Met with Muriel Silverstein. And again, that's where I was incredibly naive. I had no idea there was this backlash and it was very deeply felt. Very deeply felt. A lot of disappointment, and especially because of what we were doing. Well, I was asked, actually to try and figure out what we should do, which was kind of interesting. Dick didn't really have a strong sense of direction that in Education you need this or that. But he did like the idea of working with curators and trying to bring people a little more together.

PS: In a peculiar way, you were brought back because a curator wanted an Educator here, or maybe wanted an Educator/Curator here, for all I know.

BB: I think you're right.

PS: You wouldn't have come back, probably, if John hadn't written that memo.

BB: Absolutely. Absolutely not, you're completely right. But there was an odd incongruity, because I think what John loved was that show. And I think *Projects* had some connection with that show, actually.

PS: It was one of the first?

BB: People began to think about artists' ideas differently. My understanding was that there was a meeting with [Pause] editors of the *New York Times* and some curatorial staff. My guess, and no one ever told me formally about it, but it was the notion that you could do provocative things on a very small budget. That show cost, I don't know, maybe a couple of thousand dollars. It was very, very cheap to do.

PS: And it attracted attention.

BB: It attracted attention. And it was about ideas, which again, was what Kynaston's [*Information*] show was about.

PS: Now, did you get to know Kynaston at that point?

BB: As well as one could. [Laughing]

PS: But, I mean, he spoke to you?

BB: Oh, sure, Yes. Oh, absolutely. And I think he's one of the great, well, just quickly walking through the show, the way he puts things together, is breathtaking. But it is also interesting, as you must know, being a curator and an educator and the way they rethought education here for you is that education had a very low, or people had

a very low opinion of it. Curators thought of it, well if you want to talk about kids' stuff, that was this odd thing. Education had to be for children. That education wasn't directed at an academic community. It wasn't adult-oriented. Curators took care of adults and educators took care of children. I think that, I certainly know that when I went to Boston [to The Museum of Fine Arts], I basically told people, that that was marketed to, that I didn't care about kids. Because it was so ingrained that education was kiddy land, so I tended to other business. And then built the programs, hired wonderful people developing school and community programs. Very, very smart people with a lot of vision. But I thought politically that it was extremely important to move to where the curators were and then move them. It's what educators do; you start with your audience. I felt it was a strong need, to think about your internal staff as a major audience and to build them. When I was first here, Arthur Drexler had an African textile show. And all stretched, they were all stretched like paintings. To me, one of the things about textiles...

PS: Katherine White. Material.

BB: Yes, yes. But it's movement. And again, before I was here, and it must have been Arthur, a huge, maybe a NEA grant, and part of it was to have materials that kids could touch, because they were bringing high school, New York City kids here. So consultants who were teachers were very upset that Arthur wouldn't borrow any textiles for people to touch. And it was part of the thesis for this grant money. And so I went to talk to Arthur. But I wanted to understand why Arthur, what was the problem here? They wanted, and they kept saying to Arthur, "You've got to borrow work". That was it; that was the only they could say to him. And I wanted to understand where Arthur was on this touching and all that. He loved the idea. The reason he didn't want to borrow textiles was that people would only lend you schmatas. They won't give you anything of value, because they know it would be ruined. And as we talked, he said, "We shouldn't borrow it. Let's buy it. I'll buy it". Every [inaudible] in the place you were telling me about, he knew and he went to some of these shops that carried all these beautiful things and he said, "I'll just buy it from my budget". A kind of grim guy in a lot of ways and I think you must have known him. He was very serious. But, when he was with kids, you wouldn't believe it. He was like Danny Kaye. It was the most incredible transformation I have ever

seen. The most dramatic. He came alive. He was really interested in kids, and what they did.

PS: And did you use him with the programs?

BB: Absolutely, more and more and more. Once you saw this thing happening. He was so much better than [laughing] the people we hired. Because he knew it, he was passionate. And we did other programs with Arthur. Arthur was very interested in the public high school program because he wanted bright kids to stay in school. But he was not interested in the kid with the conventional portfolio, who would do well, because he said, "That kid's taken care of. That kid's going to get the scholarship; everybody's going to take of him. What I want is the really bright kid who's so poor, who hasn't been reached. I can make, this institution can make the difference with." So, we had to meet with high school teachers and he taught to them, about the kind of portfolio he was interested in. The best kite, the best model airplane. You know, something that was strongly meaningful to the kid, not the teacher. And that's the kid he wanted to reach. And so, again, there were those ideas to mine. It was, I thought, very exciting.

PS: Along with John Szarkowski and then Arthur Drexler, what were the other kinds of relationships that you forged?

BB: Oh, mixed! [Laughing] I don't think I ever had a relationship with Rubin. But other people on his staff, and you'd work around, and you'd find the person you could talk with. But [Long Pause], it was just having a kind of vision about how this place could serve, and then working with a range of people to make it work. And often just listening to what people wanted. If you read the thing it the, what is it, *The Art... The Art Museums Educator*, do you remember that?

PS: Yes.

BB: And they were very hostile to what was happening here because, [inaudible] is a smart woman, but they had a kind of lens of what museum education needed to be. And it was a certain kind of program, and we didn't fit that, at all. And I would meet

over and over again with their graduate students who would do the research, and these students would be so interested in [inaudible], anything about this approach, and working with curators, and that curators had ideas, and that academics had ideas, and what do you know, maybe educators were supposed to have ideas. And they would leave this out, of that little study, and you know they did it separately. We're not part of the body. And I went to Oldenburg and I said, "There's something really wrong here, because I think this is very useful to the field". And he went to Blanchette [Rockefeller], and Blanchette went to [inaudible] and they had nothing to do with me, at all, except [inaudible] and trying to change it. And that's exactly what we did, internally too. But now, you know, that educators are to be totally integrated; they are to work with curators and other administrators. Isn't that the way you work?

PS: I would say, I mean, I think that there are tears and frustrations on both sides of the transactions, to be sure, but I think it's much more integrated now. And I think it probably helps that you had a curatorial background, that I had a curatorial background, but the point is, curators and educators are different entities, because they're approaching that same audience in different ways, and in fact, that audience is multi-part. Each one has different parts of that audience that they're going to work best with, and reach most effectively.

BB: But your key word is difference. And what I loved about this place, was differences. You didn't all have to be alike, you didn't all have to think alike, and that's what our audiences are like.

PS: They are very diverse.

BB: And if you just sort of recognize, "Where are people coming from?" and hit them where they are, then you take them where you want to go. And that's internal, and external.

PS: Did it help that you were in the Office of the Director? What did it mean to be there?

BB: It did at first. It meant a lot because it was very low key. I note that one of your good questions you sent us had something to do with "What did the curators think of

education?” or something like that. Well, it was a capital “S” for skeptical. Very skeptical. And both Dick and I, and Dick is a very good strategist, it meant that you had to come in in a kind of low key way...

## **BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2**

BB: ...but with his backing and that's why it was the Director's Special Assistant for Education, and it was maybe four years, five years, we reconstituted the Department of Education. We were ready. But it wasn't threatening, at first. It was building relationships. Again, what everybody talks about in the field now, is building relationships internally. And it was that kind of seriousness that I was very interested in. But...

PS: Did you meet with Dick constantly?

BB: ...Fairly often. [Pause] But I don't truly think Education was a high priority, particularly. The person who really is the hero, or the heroine, is June Larkin.

PS: I would say, she still is.

BB: She is incredible, and persistent, and modest. Think, of that time, putting a million dollars into Education. The lowest, the lowest of, I wouldn't necessarily say priorities, but in terms of where you would get feedback. I mean, if you gave a million dollars to an acquisition, or to a department, or to a wing or a gallery, you knew you could be guaranteed a certain kind of, not just respect, but, help me, what's the word I want?

PS: Recognition?

BB: Recognition. Risk. She took an enormous risk, because, not a high priority could have failed miserably. Where [inaudible].

PS: Well, it was also a very sage investment.

BB: Oh, absolutely.

PS: Amazing things are still working off of that capital. I mean, a million dollars to acquisitions, at least fifty percent of the material would be in storage.

BB: Well and, Dick, again, I don't know how he really worked with her, but they worked very carefully together because my understanding was they went through this proposal a couple of times. It wasn't the first time around that everybody was happy. They really worked carefully and with a sense of cohesion. It was fabulous because you always had enough seed money to start something. If it didn't work, fine. You'd put that money somewhere else. I must say, the Museum did not put tons of money into Education. They sort of didn't need to, to start something; you could do a lot with not a lot of money.

PS: In a way you rebuilt on an amazing beginning, because Victor D'Amico had such a role in this institution.

BB: Absolutely.

PS: He was a key, key figure, transcended many of the other extraordinary key figures because he lasted so long. He did so much, he was so dogged in the way he approached things, and he also was fabulously inventive.

BB: He was.

PS: I mean, he invented a field as far as I can tell.

BB: I think that's absolutely right, and the things that were sent to schools. Somehow, when things changed...

PS: At the end of the '60s, he was out of step.

BB: Couldn't again...[Pause] I think what he was so fabulous too was presenting the new, in terms of form and format and all of that, but you have to keep adjusting that to other peoples' needs. And that's where I think the Museum, and Barr never had lost,

and kind of miss it. And maybe we'd talk about partnerships now but there's always critical, it's a human connection that has to be established for things to grow. You have to have a leader.

PS: You need a person who's respected who can simply move it forward but. . . In many ways as you began what you were doing, do you think you had a specific philosophy? Do you think you had a guiding educational or pedagogical system or set of objectives and procedures and policies?

BB: No, I don't think in the conventional way, no. And that was probably a kind of weakness. I mean, I took education classes at Berkeley. I thought they were truly dreadful. I mean, I taught in a junior high-school, again more studio, but I thought the course work wasn't exciting, wasn't really thrilling and it didn't seem to have a lot of structure. So, I was exposed to some of that but I wouldn't say, in truth, I was a real educator. I think the Museum probably didn't want that. But I think that foundation. . . People like Philip [Yenawine] who did and you who have more experience. . . Again, I think. . . I think I knew very much that what was begun was the start of a foundation and then it would build. And you also realize that I did know that this wasn't a role for me for a very long time. I mean, I stayed quite a while. It was close to eight [years].

PS: '78, I think.

BB: But there was always the sense that somebody else was going to move on. . . move it on. . . along.

PS: Help me out with the chronology. Because you came as part of the Office of the Director. . . But was the Director. . . The first director you worked with was Dick [Oldenburg] but in fact, was John's letter written to Dick or was it written to a previous director? Dick became the Director in '72, right?

BB: Well, I came in '71, '72. I think I remember him saying Oldenburg.

PS: Yes. But, at that point, when you were part of the Office of the Director? Where was your actual office?

BB: Well it was, I think, the third floor. Two offices away from his. Very close. All of that was well thought out. I agreed with it, but Dick had. . . That was Dick and [June's(?)] thinking from the beginning that there would be this accessibility.

PS: And it worked.

BB: It did work. And we tried to bring people – again, where I thought I didn't have that pedagogical background -- we'd bring someone like Rudolph Arnheim, trying to bring people into the Visiting Committee who. . .

PS: Now who was on your Visiting Committee?

BB: At first it was. . . They were people who were interested in education but not really educators. So, I brought John Walsh. That, sort of, was the connection to Boston.

PS: And you'd known John just. . .

BB: I'd known him by reputation. But [I was] trying to bring some other voices to the table.

PS: How often would you meet, this Visiting Committee?

BB: I think it only met two or three times a year.

BB: There were curators. . . Honestly I can't remember if we invited different curators. . . I don't have that. . .

PS: I can maybe try to find out.

BB: I know curators would be at those meetings. But I can't remember. I mean, now, at Boston, we invite curators to the meetings. They are not on the committee. I'm not sure.

PS: You invite MFA curators to sit in on your trustee meetings?

BB: Exactly, depending on the issues and questions. I can't remember at MoMA if we did it the same way. I certainly remember a lot of discussions with curators at those Visiting Committee meetings. I can't remember the actual make-up, if they were part of those committees. Are they now?

PS: Well, what we've done. . . Since I got here Howard Gardener. . .

BB: Oh.

PS: . . . was a member of the Committee. Recently, since June [Larkin] [took over the role of Chairman of the Trustee Education Committee again] --it's been a lot more flexible to work with June for me than it was for David Rockefeller, Jr. -- with June we added Tom Cahill, which was a natural for me because I'm on the Studio-in-a-School board and obviously Tom has this close working relationship with Aggie [Gund], but not such a close working relationship with the Museum because Philip was not so interested in hands-on art-making issues. And then recently Richard Benson, [a photographer and head of the Yale Art School]. And we're working on a couple more people, basically. I'd like to find someone who has a lot of technology issues and interests to see if they would join. And they're members of the Committee but, I think, as we get four or five of them, they'll have separate meetings as, sort of, a visiting committee. Howard. . . We've struck on a kind of close relationship basically. We E-mail each other. He invited two of us to come up and present some of our technology projects that we've done as part of the Web site of the Museum. And I like him. He's been very nice. He's been very helpful.

Did you see yourself developing a philosophy for what you wanted to accomplish within education? Did you build, for instance, on Victor d'Amico or did you have to be a very different entity for a very different time?

BB: You had to be a very different entity. You really did. First of all there weren't studio spaces. There weren't those sorts of facilities. So, you did work a lot with teachers who had classrooms, studios, or whatever to build their skills. We did a lot of teacher training. And again that's that same sort of relationship of having people do what they do regularly but with more information, with more resources, intellectual or otherwise. It was always, sort of, bringing artists to those teachers. That's what was I thought was fabulous about MoMA, the resources of ideas. So, we would have. . . When Sol LeWitt was here. . .

BB: He gave us, the Education Department, eight drawings to make [for his show] and the Lauders gave us money. Again we had a meeting with. . . We invited everything single high-school principle in the city. . .

PS: Every single one?

BB: Yes. To a meeting with Bob Rosenblum. You know trying to lay out. . .

PS: How many showed up?

BB: There were twenty-four people. And Bob was terrific, you know, short sleeved rolled up, no tie. We also had the graduate student program then. The graduate student lectures. They were in place. So, they also attended. And the notion was to get them some perspective on LeWitt but context. And then to really convey what LeWitt was really interested in which was how these kids would interpret those directions. So, what we did was offer all the materials — there was a certain definition, pretty open-ended, of what a wall was, anything between a door and a window, according to LeWitt, and it could be public, private, it didn't have to last, all of LeWitt's interesting ideas — and then we would send graduate students out to meet with whomever those high-school principals wanted, a group of teachers, a group of parents, a group of students, or any combination, and again introduce LeWitt much as Bob did to them, and then to get them all those materials and to let them know that we would send a photographer around to document the results because that's

what LeWitt wanted. That's all he wanted out of it, was to see what they actually did. It was fabulous.

Then LeWitt, as, again, a kind of program we had with artists, would come on -- not the best speaker, I must say -- but for high-school and college students, we would open the Museum at, I guess 10:00 in the morning on a Saturday, free to all those people. They would go into the auditorium. We'd usually have someone like a Roberta Smith or a curator set a context for the artists using works from our collection so that, again, people would go out into the galleries afterwards. So, they come in free to the museum, get a context, understand where the artist came from, the artist would speak, answer questions. Meanwhile the Museum would have opened and the kids are all there in the Museum free for the day, trying to connect collections to artists' ideas. And in some cases like Gloria Anderson and Alice Aycock, people of that sort, who didn't have that kind of name recognition at that point through the New York public schools we would. . . they would identify high-school students who would go to those artists' studios. They would usually be on vacation over [inaudible]. . .

PS: That's a wonderful. . .

BB: So, they would meet the artists here in the gallery and then they would go, on another occasion, to the artists' studio. And it was wonderful how hospitable they are. I remember Laurie Anderson making coconut milk and warm punch [laughing]. She had come back from some exotic place [laughing]. These were small groups, they are larger, but, again, the sort of relationship idea: working, bringing institutions together. Long before there were ADA laws.

PS: Yes.

BB: You know the business of trying to develop programs for the deaf part of [inaudible].

PS: Yes, exactly.

BB: There was pressure to develop. . .

PS: Legally, yes.

BB: . . .lots of programs. You couldn't. But if we did something once a month and six or eight other institutions did, there was a pretty interesting program. And so, we began to work that way. It ended up, I think, that we became the [inaudible] but again bringing institutions together to do what they could do on their own terms and getting a larger critical mass than anyone could do.

PS: Do on their own.

BB: So, I would say that's that ongoing principle. It's about an idea and how you can expand it with others. Others doing what they could do well but maybe better through a relationship with MoMA. So, it's a very simple [inaudible]. So, if you want to know what my pedagogical [laughing] central thesis is, it's very, very simple: treat other people the way you want to be treated. And I believe that teachers, first-time visitors should get materials. We hired a woman at [inaudible] who's a copywriter to write stuff for teachers. But those materials have to look like they had been sent to a trustee. It's very important to give everyone that level of respect, no matter what level they're at, novice or. . .

PS: A scholar.

BB: . . . a professor.

BB: It's simple, like opening the Museum in the evening or before we open so that a college professor could teach here.

PS: We're still doing that. It's harder because we open [to the public] earlier.

BB: But again the whole program for the graduate student lectures was realizing that these students weren't using primary material for their research. So, we gave them tough interviews. We wanted to be sure [that] they wouldn't make up answers and [that they] felt comfortable saying, " No, but I'll find out that answer for you."

Connecting those students to the museum world, or whether they stayed in the academic community or whether they became critics, [so that] they had an understanding of the job and a straightforward vocabulary, at one point in their lives, anyway. So, that, again, broadened the institution's mission [and] allowed us to reach many more people than we could have otherwise. You know, Adam Gopnik. . . A lot of interesting people started here.

PS: As lecturers.

BB: Yes. He wrote a piece in *The New Yorker* ages ago on the death of the art audience and he talked about his time here. So, again, but very simple kinds of, not necessarily programs, but of point of view, I guess.

PS: A certain moment arrived and you got other job offers or realized it was time for you to go.

BB: Yes. One of the things. . . It's very true. It's so interesting to hear about Philip and you. Coming [to] a different stage of maturation in your career was very hard to be honest. It's going to be hard for me to be able to put this in writing. But I came as an intern. Those curators still were mentors to me, and it was pretty hard to ever jump out of that completely. And I had to go somewhere else to do that, frankly. As you and I know, the institution needed someone else. A different point of view. And after Philip, it needed you with. . . No, it did.

It is that kind of development and if you understand developmental theory and we talk about it, we have to live it. We can't just think about it abstractly. I don't.

PS: Yes. And you went right to Boston to do the job you're basically doing now.

BB: Yes. I did. It was at a time when, in fact, the Museum here was about to go into hibernation, just before the building. . .

PS: Pre-'84.

BB: And Boston had a headhunter, which was very unusual. I didn't know this was a headhunter. I thought it was someone doing research. He said he was going around to various museums in the country. And I believe he did. But he came here quite often. Then he said, "I'd like you to meet our director. I'd like him to hear some of these ideas." [inaudible] because I was really happy. I mean, there's always a struggle. But I just loved this place. And I arrived and there was a search committee. They had been looking for a very long time. John Walsh was there, again because he was on the committee, [and he] asked me two years before and I absolutely [inaudible]. Yes, it was time for me to make a change. And I thought for the institution clearly we had done what we had set out to do, which was to create this foundation and I think it needed a jolt.

PS: You were here for things like the PASTA strike?

BB: Yes, that's right, I was.

PS: '73.

BB: I was, absolutely. Mary Lea [Bandy] was fabulous, wonderful. I mean, I knew her in all her roles. . .

PS: Yes, her stages.

BB: She was such a solid figure, thinker. And, of course, I was management. I think a lot of the [inaudible] for PASTA MoMA was when I was at [inaudible].

PS: Other issues?

BB: [Laughing]

PS: Well, other issues for you I terms of. . . In a way this forms some kind of a record of the time you were here and thoughts you have about the institution and the thoughts you have about education here, what makes it work and where the challenges lie.

BB: Well, I think we've talked about it. What I think is so, again, wise institutionally -- and I don't exactly know because we haven't been made as much connection as we should have and I hope this will begin it -- is the way education was rethought. And maybe that isn't even the correct term anymore. But I thought from what I understood, the organization, the structure of what you're heading up makes so much sense. It is, you know, those progressive new steps from a low visibility to a higher visibility to a different organizational scheme, which I think is just right.

BB: One thing that was exciting to me as a new challenge at the MFA. . . John Fontaine was the Director and he really did understand -- and I was really ready for this -- that an educator had to bring something else to the table. And in large urban museums, being like curators was really getting very codified. And I liked the idea and, I think, had felt confident about it, that educators should work with curators still but should be very clearly, as we were talking about off tape, bring[ing] something else to the table. And that was the next step because it was very clearly making a close connection. And, again, I think, the next step for MoMA was to move beyond that and for me to move beyond that. [Interruption].

**END TAPE 1, SIDE 2**

**END INTERVIEW**