

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: MALU EDWARDS (ME)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

LOCATION: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

DATE: NOVEMBER 4, 1998

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Just tell me, Mrs. Edwards, just a little bit about your background, where you were born...

ME: I am Chilean, and I was born in Santiago in the year 1930. I went to school in the Chile, in Santiago. I got married there and my six children were also born there. So I'm really a Chilean citizen. But I travel a lot, and have been connected to the United States for different reasons. My husband is a newspaper publisher in Chile. Two of my children also live there and four live in this country.

SZ: Four living here now?

ME: Yes, four are living here now. So to keep contact with them, I travel quiet often to the United States.

SZ: Edwards is not a Spanish name.

ME: It's a Welsh name.

SZ: It's a Welsh name.

ME: The Edwards family has been in Chile for 200 hundred years.

SZ: That's a long . . .

ME: What we do is journalism. We publish a chain of 23 newspapers including one that is the oldest Spanish language newspaper in continuous publication in the world today.

SZ: Which is?

ME: "El Mercurio". It is a family tradition.

SZ: Your family is also many generations?

ME: My own family is of Basque origin, from Bilbao. The name is "Del Rio". My father was an engineer and my mother volunteered for the Red Cross. They both worked in Santiago all their lives. We are three sisters and one brother and all of us live in Chile.

SZ: When you were growing up in Chile, going to school in Chile, what kind of role did art play in your life?

ME: Let me tell you, the very first time that I can think of as important for me anyway . . . I was coming back from school. I think I was around nine years old, ten maybe and I was walking and I saw somebody selling some reproductions on the street. Among them I saw Picasso's "Girl before a Mirror", and I said "I don't know what this is, but this is fascinating". So I bought it, and since then I've been interested in art.

SZ: Interesting.

ME: Yes, I remember it very clearly.

SZ: Did you have any particular skill yourself? Can you draw?

ME: I respect art so much, but I know I'm not very good, so I don't do it really. I can do it. At school I always took art lessons and was quite good, but it is so difficult to

be a really good artist, so I gave it up. My daughter is a painter, her name is Carolina Edwards, and my other daughter Isabel is a graphic designer.

SZ: Interesting.

ME: Yes, we are very happy about that.

SZ: So, now, just tell me a little bit about your involvements in Chile, civic, or with cultural institutions. I'm trying to lead up to your being invited to join the International Council.

ME: I was invited to join the International Council when the big exhibition "*Cézanne to Miró*" at The Museum of Modern Art came to Santiago in 1968.

I had been a friend and known David Rockefeller for a long time, because he traveled so often to Latin America, and my husband was also involved in the banking business. So David asked me to be a member, and I really couldn't be happier about the idea of belonging to such an organization which is to me number one in the world.

SZ: Did you know much about it before...

ME: About the MoMA? Yes.

SZ: Yes, well... Do you remember your first trip to MoMA, when that was?

ME: I came with my husband to see an exhibition, I can't remember exactly which one... but at the time we talked to René d'Harnoncourt, the MoMA director at that time, because we had the idea of building a museum of modern art in Santiago someday, and we wanted to hear from him his thoughts on that. He was a wonderful person and the meeting was really nice. Unfortunately nothing happened after that, well every time I come to New York I think the most exciting thing is to visit MoMA.

SZ: That is an interesting thing, though, picking up the Picasso first. So, I presume your taste has always been for modern art?

ME: Well, I think each period in art has something valuable and interesting to say, so I can't say that it's the only thing I enjoy seeing or appreciate. But modern art is what belongs to us, today.

SZ: So, when you joined the International Council, I think, René was still director of the museum.

ME: He was director, yes. He first came to Chile because the *Cezanne to Miro* exhibition that first opened in Buenos Aires and after that in Santiago and then Caracas. It was really something extraordinary for Chile. That was in 1968, June 17 and it lasted for four weeks, exactly four weeks, because the 17TH of July it was over. And in those four weeks 22,000 people visited the museum. Which is a record for US, mostly schools, they came by bus from all over the country, even people from Peru came to see it. So it was an extraordinary event.

SZ: And that was Monroe Wheeler's exhibition?

ME: Yes, it was Monroe Wheeler's exhibition, his personal painting selections, and he was there, among us.

SZ: Well now, tell me a little bit more about that. You sort of played host to the council when...

ME: Well, I did the best I could, but it was easy because everybody was so wonderful. In Chile there is not too much you can offer, except of course being friendly and kind to people, I guess. Eliza Parkinson came, she was the director of the International Council in those days, and Beth Straus also was there. Who else was there? I can't remember exactly. Bill Lieberman, Margaret McDermott, Madeleine Russell, Gertrud Mellon, Joann Phillips, Alva Gimble, Jacqueline Hume, Barbara Duncan and many others but Monroe was the person that organized it.

SZ: Was that the first spring trip that you participated in?

ME: Yes, that was the very first one. What can I tell you...

SZ: Just tell me a little more about...

ME: I remember taking them to the farm in Chile. We all had lunch there and I think they enjoyed it very much, because they are still talking about it. René was very happy there. He was wearing a Chilean poncho and he danced the "cueca". What is import I think was his being in Chile in those days and it turned out to be one of his last trips, and it was wonderful to be able to be with him and share the last part of his life. After that he had the accident, you know.

SZ: Yes, in August.

ME: In August, yes, and this was in July, so it was just before he died. We all miss him so much.

SZ: He knew a lot about Latin and South American art.

ME: Yes, René was a very interesting man. I remember him telling me he was Austrian and such a nice person. But the one person I really had the most contact with was Monroe Wheeler, because he participated in all of the museum trips. I must say I learned about art through Monroe.

SZ: Really?

ME: Yes, just listening to him in front of each painting in the different museums around the world, he was incredibly knowledgeable and such a dear person.

SZ: So you said something before about how it was such a wonderful thing to join the International Council. Can you just describe a little bit about, maybe, what the ambiance of the group was in the beginning?

ME: It was a small group then, compared to today. We were like a family. It was very nice in those days, we were very active, today I get the same feeling... how the museum is looking towards South America and being interested in creating strong exhibitions and making us participate, what is all very important for us.

SZ: It has been, yes.

ME: Yes it has been. All throughout the different directors, and now with Glenn Lowry and Jay Levenson, we have a lot of exciting new plans and look forward to participating.

SZ: Well, tell me a little bit about that. I know that trip... "*Cézanne to Miró*" show and the trip in '68 was the first time the Council traveled outside of North America for a trip.

ME: I don't know about that, even to Europe or Asia?

SZ: I don't think so.

ME: But it was the quality of the show that was so striking. To have a show in Chile with paintings by Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin and Van Gogh it was a dream really. People just couldn't believe they were actually seeing an original work of Picasso. They had never seen one before, and who knew if they would ever see one again? And for the students... The influence on young people was enormous.

SZ: So, because at that time, in Chile, and in Santiago in particular, there was what in the way of museums?

ME: Well, we had a biennale, a print biennale, in those days. But we were not too professional, we were just starting out to receive works from all over the world, and so this was exceptional, and it influenced, as I told you, a lot of our young artists.

SZ: How has it changed now in Chile?

ME: What kind of change?

SZ: Well, in terms of museums...

ME: There are more galleries and museums now. We still don't have a museum of modern art. We have a fine art museum, and we have good shows there. A telephone company also has a good gallery. Marlborough opened two years ago. So we have really come a long way.

SZ: The Cezanne to Miró show, it was shown where when it came?

ME: First in New York, then in Buenos Aires, then Santiago and later Caracas. That was all.

SZ: Caracas too, right.

ME: I understand that the collection exhibited here in Chile also included private collections from the United States. This included twenty from private collections, seven from the other museums, and fourteen from MoMA so it was a unique thing to have in Latin America.

SZ: So. Your membership in the council has obviously had a lot of different effects. Tell me about some.

ME: I'll tell you about the most important one. I have learned a lot. And Chile has also received the benefit, I learned a lot throughout the thirty years of being a member of the museum. Today it's part of my life. I feel like I arrive at home when I come here... seeing all my friends, and especially knowing that; I'm one of the oldest members.

SZ: Because you've been a member since when?

- ME: I've been a member for thirty years. This year is exactly thirty years. It's fascinating.
- SZ: Yes. For one thing, as you've just described a little bit, you have seen a great change in this institution.
- ME: Also, the way The Museum of Modern Art organizes the trips overseas visiting a country. I will never forget those trips to England, Spain or Germany. The opportunity to visit the private collections... you cannot do that as a tourist. Especially the museums as they would open just for us, so it was never crowded. It was great to be there.
- CZ: Pick one of those trips and just tell me a little bit more about it.
- ME: Which one? Well, I will never forget when we went to Venice and Vicenza and visit all the Palladian Villas, the theater and gardens. That was wonderful. This year in January we went to India. I can't really say which one was more interesting, because I feel that they are equally good and so different.
- SZ: Give me a little idea what a trip constitutes. I mean, I know there are dinners.
- ME: When we get there, it's always an exhibit from The Museum of Modern Art. Then we visit different exhibitions planned especially for the people of the museum, we visit the great galleries of the place and then we travel around the country. Everybody among them is very professional. So it's an interesting experience to visit under those conditions.
- SZ: And the bus rides, do you enjoy those? [Laughter]
- ME: Oh, I don't mind. [laughter] The travel agency takes care of everything... luggage and hotels, so it's really very easy and convenient.
- SZ: Does your husband go with you?

ME: No. He doesn't have the time to participate.

SZ: So, it's really yours...

ME: I'm sure he's very envious [laughing] about the trips that I take. Because he likes art as much as I do.

SZ: And friends? You've made friends through the museum?

ME: Through the museum? Yes, of course. Imagine belonging to this institution for thirty years, and don't forget about the new members...

SZ: That's one thing you mentioned before, I was going to ask about. When you joined, it was a small group, and now there are well over 200 members.

ME: Yes. There are now more from each country. From Chile, there's always been just me. I've been here for such a long time. This year a second member will probably participate also. He has already applied to be a member. He's a very nice person, an architect and a collector. So I think he will be a very good acquisition.

SZ: What are the benefits of having broadened the membership in that way?

ME: That's one question I should ask you [laughter]. Maybe more new ideas... I don't know.

SZ: Does it change the way the trips go?

ME: Well, I'll tell you... I've been so lucky to participate for so long, visiting wonderful museums, galleries and collections around the world. So few people in Chile have had the opportunity to do what I've been doing for all these years. In those days I always asked Waldo Rasmussen, who was the director of the International Council at the time, "When are you sending another show like *Cézanne to Miró* to

Santiago”? and it was always a very difficult thing for him to answer because there were a lot of problems with insurance and with the loan of the actual paintings. So he always said “it’s not really possible, I hope you understand”. It was never again possible to do another show like the one we did in those days. Then I thought that the best idea would be to create a museum of reproductions, if we can’t afford to bring the originals to Chile. We will show the people what the different art schools from all over the world are. So that gave me the idea, of creating in Chile, that kind of museum. Then together with a group of people, of different companies and with the help of the “Town Hall” we were able to found a museum called “Artequin”. It is a space for the art, where we have around one hundred and twenty painting so far. These are reproductions made by Polaroid Co. and a French company called Sartony.

SZ: By Polaroid?

ME: Yes, Polaroid’s been helping us. We have a building in the old part of the city, close to a park. It’s a national monument. The building was originally built in Paris and it’s structure is iron. It was built for the one hundred anniversary of “La Bastille” in 1889 and then it was brought to Chile, and placed in Santiago. The architect was French, was called... Henri Picq. It’s a beautiful building, but it doesn’t hold too many...

SZ: Paintings... reproduction.

ME: Paintings, reproduction.

SZ: How did you decide what you would hang?

ME: Well. We tried to organize the different schools. It’s very hard because of the lack of space... and imagine you have the work of all the artists in the whole world to reproduce. We did most of the Impressionists reproductions with the help of Polaroid, and I must say we still have a lot of work to do, because we always are in need of more reproductions. I think we are the first country in Latin America to

have a museum of this kind. We've been asked by other places like Mendoza and Guatemala, to help them do the same.

SZ: Are there a lot... I think I know the answer to this... are there many collectors in Chile?

ME: You mean of modern art?

SZ: Yes.

ME: Well, yes and no, I don't think there are too many, because really the good works of art are so expensive. Chile is not the United States or Europe, we have to face that.

SZ: So, this museum of reproductions opened in 1993, did you say?

ME: 1993, yes. During the month of May.

SZ: How's the attendance. I mean how's it being used?

ME: The attendance is very good, we have about 60,000 people visiting each year. The different schools make appointments for a certain day. We can take 7 groups of 40 students in one day. We focus mostly on children between four and fourteen years old. They come and visit. We provide transportation for them by bus. The museum has three floors, we have an auditorium where they see a video telling them about the collection. Then on the other floor is the collection itself. On the third floor is the interactive part of the museum, where we also have software and all the didactic models for color, light, composition and perspective. I must tell you, it's busy all year round, but it closes during midsummer. In February. Since it was founded, until now 335,000 people have visited, during the five and half years it's been in operation. That is about 60,000 a year. Now we are planning to publish a manual for the teachers in which we explain each painting, the school the painting is from and how to look at a painting. I think it's very important that teachers from school around the country learn and

understand how to look at art. So they can in turn teach that to their students. We divided the content of the museum into five main topics: the human figure, landscape, religious work; historical and twentieth century.

SZ: And it has a staff of about how many?

ME: I wish I knew exactly. We have twelve guides, very well trained and the administration forty people in all.

SZ: So, it's substantial.

ME: Yes. I wish you can come some day.

SZ: Yes, one day I will [laughter]. So, I think what you're saying is that your association here has helped you with that.

ME: Oh, a lot. It has made me do something for someone else, in this case for education. Although the technology is excellent today. It's not the same as seeing an original but the children can learn the background of art history.

SZ: How big is Santiago?

ME: Chile has fourteen million people and Santiago is one third of the population.

SZ: Well, Chile has that-

ME: Yes, and it's a very long and narrow country.

SZ: -has that natural barrier. So, I'm just thinking... Waldo [Rasmussen] was the head of the program, I think pretty much the whole time...

ME: Yes. He was a close friend of Nemesio Antunez, the director of the museum in Santiago so they kept in close contact.

SZ: But you haven't had another opportunity to have a show like that come down?

ME: Well, we've had very good shows, but none as important as that, we had a Botero show, also a Tamayo show, and many other things from Europe, we had received exhibits sent by the embassies. Today, we have one from the Vatican museum at the "Museo de Bellas Artes". At Marlborough we have prints and drawings of Matisse. It's very exciting what's going on in the art world today in Chile.

SZ: So, in your thirty years you've seen a lot of things come and go, and a lot of change. I guess.

ME: The economy of the country has improved lately and that has helped very much, I don't really want to go into politics or economy, that is not my field.

SZ: I guess I was really thinking specifically at this institution with, I guess, three directors, there was Rene, and Dick (Richard E. Oldenburg).

ME: Dick Oldenburg, of course.

SZ: Which was for twenty years.

ME: ...and Glenn Lowry now.

SZ: Have you seen, beside the change in the size of membership, a change in its direction?

ME: Well, I think having the new building is going to make a big difference with a larger space. Of course, modern paintings and installations are so enormous that there's never room enough for them.

SZ: I was thinking more the goals of the International Council, the council itself.

ME: The Council. You know more about the Council than I do. In so far as what the real work of the Council is. We can see the importance and effect it has all over the world.

SZ: To go to India, that must have been a big change, right.

ME: That was a lovely trip. It was my second trip to India. Going with the MoMA was a different approach. I remember in Bombay, we went to see the Indian miniatures. There was Glenn Lowry explaining and giving us a lecture about it...so wonderful.

SZ: So, various curators come on these trips to teach...

ME: Yes, Kynaston McShine for example. Curators are so knowledgeable.

SZ: So, what did you say you did today? There was an architecture meeting?

ME: Yes, there was a meeting on Latin American architecture. There was an award from the Mies van der Rohe foundation for Latin America. Patricia Cisneros organized it and Mexico got the award. Well, also of course I visited the *Jackson Pollock* [MoMA Exh. #1819, October 28(11/1), 1998-February 2, 1999] exhibition.

SZ: So, it's fun to come.

ME: Always.

SZ: Anything else you can think of?

ME: Well, only that I wish I could in some way repay the museum for all the wonderful things it has done for me.

SZ: Well, thank you.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

END INTERVIEW