THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**PORTER MCCRAY (PM)**
INTERVIEWER:	**SHARON ZANE (SZ)**
LOCATION:	**300 EAST 59 STREET NEW YORK CITY**
DATE:	**APRIL 18, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: I will start the way I always do and ask you where and when you were born, and tell me a little bit about your family background.

PM: I was born in Clarksburg, West Virginia in 1908, where I have never lived since. Clarksburg was the home of my grandmother, my mother's mother. I'd gone there, really, to be born. My parents were from a little town called Waynesboro, Virginia, near the town that my family still lives in, which is Staunton, Virginia. We stayed only a week in Clarksburg and then I came home and was more or less identified with Staunton until I left after college graduation. My grandfather Wyndham (the spelling was changed to Windom shortly after their arrival) on my mother's side, was from Wales and a schoolteacher who was brought here to teach in a prep school in Virginia. My grandfather McCray, on my father's side, was born in the States but the family was from Aberdeen, Scotland. It was in that era just before the Civil War, shortly before, when a great many of the railroads were being engineered in our part of Virginia; the C&O (Chesapeake and Ohio) was moving to its ultimate headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio. My grandfather had training in railroad design, and did the design work on the spurs off the main line of the C&O to what at that time was opening up into rather important watering places--Hot Springs, Virginia, and White Sulphur Springs. Then he was also involved with the building of the Luray tunnel which the French designer had done for the C&O through the Blue Ridge Mountains. For its time, it was an extraordinary engineering feat. So much for that. I went to

school in Waynesboro first and then in Staunton. My father had a small business in Staunton. It broadened into an affiliation with a friend in St. Louis, and he was involved in varying canned goods businesses, jellies particularly and table things, relishes and all that sort of thing. I don't even know what the label was; I think it was the other man's name and my father's name together. At any rate, he followed the usual life of a person from a small town. Waynesboro was maybe 8,000 people and Staunton was maybe 18,000 people; so that was the range of those towns by then. Staunton, for example, had been in the line of march of the Federal troops out of Washington during the Civil War, and there had been quite a bit of damage done. Many of the houses in the country had been burned and things of that sort, but it was a rich agricultural and orchard area. So we grew up in this atmosphere, and we were quite near the University of Virginia, only about thirty-three miles.

SZ: That's in Charlottesville.

PM: Yes. We were also the birthplace of Woodrow Wilson--I'm old enough to remember when he campaigned for the Presidency in Staunton--I'm now on the board of the Woodrow Wilson manse, his family's house, and that's been made a national shrine, The Woodrow Wilson Birthplace.

SZ: You say you remember him campaigning.

PM: I remember him campaigning with his first wife. We were in my uncle's law office, looking down on the carriage as he went by. In my sophomore year in college, my roommate's family was from Richmond. They were rather well-to-do, and each year spent three months in Europe. They occupied Lickleyhead Castle, a rather beautiful early Elizabethan castle built in 1608 in Scotland. Fortunately they invited me to stay and travel with them--they frequently traveled a good deal in Europe before taking the castle, which was for the famous month of August, in Scotland for grouse shooting and for salmon fishing. When we got to England and to Scotland, I, being

unfamiliar with the manners and so forth of the Scottish and English hunters and fishermen, was sent to a few classes in London to be taught fly casting. I caught on fairly quickly--and in addition, to shoot rabbit and occasionally a deer. All of these things I had never before cultivated. I had fished when I was young, but I had never done any regular sport fishing, certainly no shooting. Mr. Scott, my host, was remaining in London for a few days on business while I spent my days exploring the city. Occasionally, he would take me around to show me points of interest in the city. Mr. Scott was interested in art and a collector of considerable note in Richmond. As a result, I was automatically and very comfortably injected into an art background of some consequence. He was very knowledgeable; his wife was a Sunday painter and had studied painting in college. So I derived a great deal from them as we traveled around. She had, with her mother, gone early in her life to Europe to a convent in Belgium and then another convent in Spain and later to one in Germany, primarily to--her mother was traveling with her--to learn various languages. She already, by her marriage, was fluent in Spanish and French and Italian and German, which was a great boon for traveling in those areas, particularly looking and listening to the history of the area and the times and the places. This was an absolutely extraordinary opportunity for me.

SZ: Was that your first trip abroad?

PM: Yes, that was my first trip abroad, and it occurred in 1928.

SZ: So art was not something that you grew up with.

PM: No, no more than...my mother had rather good taste and she had a modest but attractive house. I stayed on in the--I don't know whether you would want this, necessarily, in this document--the Scotts had found this perfectly beautiful spot up above Aberdeen. It had two houses; one was a great sort of Walter Scott nineteenth-century "mountain" that had been built, and another one was this

Elizabethan, beautiful, 1606 or 1608 house called Lickleyhead Castle. The husband who was a large landowner and, I believe, a member of the House of Lords, lived separately from his wife. She lived in the Lickleyhead, which she had kept in the most beautiful condition, almost original condition. She would not have electric lights put in to it; she had electric things in the kitchen and all of that, but you had to be taken upstairs by candlelight every night to your room and all that sort of thing, which was more romantic, of course. Her husband behaved as nearly as a normal husband would behave and accompanied her on all public occasions, but they lived separately. The children, two sons in their late teens, lived with the father and came to visit the mother. We saw this a little bit because we arrived a week early, before the lease began, and stayed at an inn just outside of Banchory, waiting to take residence. Anyhow, so much for that, but it was quite an extraordinary experience because the Scotts had been going long enough and were renters of a handsome house and whatnot, so that they had made friends with a great many of the gentry, so to speak, in that county. It was bordering on the official summer residence at Balmoral Castle which the royal family occupied in those summer months. They went for shooting and fishing too. We were invited, for example, to many of the local sort of things like sheep trials and all the best of the local castles. It gave a wonderful impression of the local community. And because of the many shooting parties, it was important that I be taught to shoot in London before going North, because shooting in a box with a number of other huntsmen is quite dangerous. It's also dangerous to the animals and so forth, and to the dogs. So you had to learn the manners of the game and also the skills of it to some extent. They were always afraid that someone in the box, when the drivers--Have you ever seen the game drive of grouse, of lots of people called the beaters, coming up over a hill and shouting and waving flags, and arousing the birds out of the moor into the air? So the people in the box--the box is a large "blind" structure where the hunters stand around, with a loader standing by them with a second gun which he loads while you're shooting the other one.... So it can be rather tricky. We did this and then we had a wonderful old hand of the castle who took care of the guests and saw that their

equipment was in perfect order and that the guns were loaded and cleaned and everything was immaculate. Since we were young and he was instructed to teach us all sorts of things, which we learned with considerable interest. It was a remarkable insight and experience for me because it was extended, three months of exposure to European culture.

SZ: This was in the middle of your college years.

PM: Yes, I was a sophomore. And one of two high spots, of course, was this thing. We were having lunch at friends of the Scotts, the Hamiltons, his wife was related, not that indirectly, I guess, to King George's family. One afternoon after a Sunday afternoon lunch, it was announced that Queen Mary was coming to call on her sister-in-law, Princess Maude, who was visiting the Hamiltons, and we were having lunch with them--not with the Queen. The queen was coming for tea however, afterward, with her sister-in-law. So we were told to get scarce and sent down to the tennis courts and played our game of tennis, and when we came up the hill from the tennis courts, the Queen was still there. They were sitting on this huge terrace that stretched along the down side of the castle. So we were told just to come quietly up the hill and get our tea on the far end of the terrace. However, while we were having our tea, the queen very graciously asked to meet us, so we came over to meet her and then came back and sat down. Well, the thing that most fascinated me was, I was from a very little town, a considerably very conservative town, and ladies did not smoke. My mother was very liberal in all of these things; she didn't smoke, but she had friends who did. Women were not smoking very extensively in those days. At any rate, in the course of their conversation on the far end of the terrace, the Queen was carrying what the ladies called in those days a minaudiere, long sort of tasseled bags of metal mesh. She reached over in to this--it was hanging on the arm of her chair--down into this bag and pulled out a quite beautiful, oh, it must have been a--you know, she was a famous collector of snuff boxes, and it must have been about that size and in exquisite taste and done in various kinds of gold; I couldn't get close enough to really look at it, but I could size it up. She opened this and took out

a cigarette. The Queen of England! Well, I nearly fell over backwards. She lighted it just as if she had done it all her life and got on her way with the cigarette and put it away and that was that. But it was really quite amazing, and it was an education, all these things were, you see.

SZ: Until that time, in school...your college was the Virginia Military Institute?

PM: I went to college there.

SZ: That's the school, and your roommate (was) from there?

PM: Yes. It was always called the West Point of the South because it was set up about the same time, and it was set up with Stonewall Jackson as the superintendent, and that's, I suppose, indirectly, why my family wanted me to go there. I did not want to go to military school myself, but I bargained with my father--I wanted to study architecture at that point--so I told him that I would go to VMI if he would send me on to graduate school, which he agreed to do, in all good faith. I did my duty as a cadet, I guess. The academic level of the Virginia Military Institute--I think there were five or six that qualified in the national credit thing, including VMI. People, I think, who normally hear of VMI think of it being of sub-college level, but it met the standards at least, and I was admitted to Yale on the basis of it, to the graduate school.

SZ: In architecture.

PM: Yes, but that was six years later. My father, in 1929 when the crash occurred, lost his business and was not able to send me on, so I immediately started looking for a job. Of my class of 178, my graduating class, only seven of us got jobs that year. That was the situation. People don't realize how grave that was. That was only by luck, because the prep school down the way in the country from us, who were friends of my family, called my mother one day and said, "Richard Jacob has just died and we need someone to replace him the next September for picking up his classes. Do

you think Porter could do it?" They were high school courses in the prep school, but they were not areas that I had specialized in necessarily. One was in ancient history, one was in English...they were all very good for me, because I had to do a lot of studying myself.

SZ: Just to be able to do it?

PM: Yes. You never wanted your students to get ahead of you.... So, I taught there for the next three years. I was given a room in the faculty club, a bedroom, and three meals a day at seven dollars a week in the mess hall at school, and also, $1,000 a year was my salary. Then, during the summers, I became, at first, an expert peach packer. We were in peach country, and I became very good at it. I don't remember what I made, about $7.00 a week, I guess, but you put all these things together. I was determined to go on to graduate school, and my father said by then he perhaps could help. So I did, and then I taught another three years--VMI asked me to come and to be an instructor at the Institute. I didn't just teach English history, of course; I taught ancient history in the prep school, and I taught geometry and I taught English classes for grammar and so forth. That was the first three years, and then the other three I went to summer school at Columbia, two summers at the University of Virginia--two summers and took special courses that would equip me to....

SZ: ...study architecture?

PM: Yes. I did two things in those six years I had, I went to summer school four times, I guess, six weeks each.

SZ: In the summers when you were teaching during the year.

PM: Yes.

SZ: I was just wondering what the Depression was like in the South, whether it was even worse than here.

PM: Well, it was, of course, in much lower towns, but I think the areas which I was in were much less disturbed because there were not so many people involved and the communities were more stable. The blacks and whites, the indigent ones, were much more the same level than they were, I think, in the North. I don't know that that's true, because I was not observing in the North that close or that long. But Staunton was about three-quarters white, and the relationship between the blacks and whites was quite good. That was proved, I thought, as soon as the civil rights thing went through. Even though it took the white vote to do it, the deputy mayor was a black, elected by the white majority, which I was very proud of, in Staunton. There's been a certain amount of that. Virginia still has the first governor as a black. It has done things like that, and thoughtful people, many thoughtful people, had the whole Jefferson doctrine drilled into them, and they were very wonderfully aware. I don't remember when I was old enough to have been aware, really, of the fact that this was being bred into you of some of the principles of government that Jefferson had stood for. People who read any amount were aware of a lot of Jefferson's writings; it's incredible how it turned out that way, where no compulsion was involved. We had some very good people in the two or three state papers Douglas Southall Freeman and Virginius Dabney, who later became the biographers of Washington and Jefferson, and even Lee and Jackson--a small group of people. Virginia was, I think, 1,500,000 people, the whole state, so it behaved very differently from especially a big, dense population like, well, certainly New York.

SZ: Was that your first real trip to New York, when you came to summer school at Columbia?

PM: That was the first time I lived there, yes. I went through New York in '28 on that trip.

SZ: When you went over to England.

PM: And that was only overnight, because we were all going off the next morning on the boat. That night was spent going to Showboat, with Helen Morgan. It pays to go back a little ways.

SZ: It's fun. Columbia summer school was the summer of 1931, according to what I have in front of me.

PM: Yes.

SZ: I was just wondering, that must have been, obviously, a very big change.

PM: Well, it was a total change of everything. I don't think there was a Southerner in the summer school that I could find. Some teachers qualifying in the Teachers College at Columbia were from the South, but there were no architects, there were no art historians, anything like that, that were from the South. [unintelligible]

SZ: How did New York seem to you then?

PM: It was a great, fascinating place to be. You could travel for a nickel on the buses; the Fifth Avenue buses, the double-deckers, were ten cents, maybe. You could go all the way up to Columbia on the circuits and see the river and all that. I really liked to look and see what was all around me, and I would walk a lot in New York. It was, of course, a complete revelation to me. As a matter of fact, the first time I came was very near the Depression, and I thought there would be more tension in the city between the blacks and the whites, but it was not noticeable. As a matter of fact, Maggie, who was our cook, had a sister who worked in New York and she would come up every now and then to see her during the summer, and Maggie would come back and tell me these tales. "New York, Mr. Porter, you gotta be careful when

you're up there." She said, "You know, they have these things in the street that open up and you're just gobbled up, and you're never seen or heard of again." Well, you would have thought every loading door in the sidewalk was an absolute pit or something to chew you up. I used to tease Maggie about this, because she was believing half of it herself, but those eyes of hers would just roll around and you'd think, "Oh my god, this is just a hell hole on earth." But she always came home alive and well.

SZ: And you liked it?

PM: You see, by then, New York was in many ways more fascinating than it is now, because we were in a Depression and Roosevelt was President, and the various state social programs had been initiated. And the city was really fascinating. The people that I met--the architects that I met, the painters that I met, the theater people that I met--I sort of gravitated to these people just by having interest, I guess. I knew a lot of the up-and-coming ones who became really quite famous in those three years later. The Met was holding forth, you know, with the greatest of the singers from, mostly, Germany and Scandinavia at that point.... What we called the WPA Theater was producing a lot. Hallie Flanagan I knew, and she was doing a perfectly extraordinary job. You could go to the theater for twenty-five cents, some of them, if you were a student. Very interesting productions were being done, and extremely talented people who couldn't get employment were performing in some of these things. So it was really perfectly fascinating. I found it very challenging, and just oozing with creative things to see and watch and try to decide on your own what your opinion of them was. I had never been exposed in any lengthy period of time before to this; almost every evening, almost, you could do something for very little. As a matter of fact, as a comment on the economics of that time, I, being on salary of $1,000 a year, you would have thought that I--and I did--have to shuffle pretty carefully to have enough money to get through the year. On the other hand, I decided to come, on the second year that I was working with $1,000 a year, and I

took $300 out of it when I started teaching that year to use the next summer for summer school here in New York. I bought a perfectly comfortable round-trip ticket from Staunton, Virginia, to New York and back, over a six-week period. I had a private cubicle in one of the dormitories, it was one of the new ones, one of the big ones, up at Columbia, just down below the level of the library. All of those things were great experiences. I went occasionally to the theater on that budget I had. I went to a film now and then. Of course, you could go to a film for fifty cents, and that sort of thing. Everything was comparable in price, but not everything.... You could ride from A to Z on buses; I'd frequently take them just to see what it was all like uptown, as far as the bus would go, and then get on another route if I could. But that kind of thing was a great education to me. I was just taking it in my own way, I was just observing mostly. But out of all this I had a three-meal ticket with the cafeteria at Columbia, all of the six weeks, and the trains there and whenever you had to take a taxi occasionally for luggage and stuff like that. By the time I got back to Staunton, I had $15 of my $300 left. Can you believe it? Those are important things to recall every now and then, that everything is relative.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SZ: I was going to ask you what it was about architecture that interested you, how that interest developed and why you wanted to study it.

PM: I suppose primarily because I was in the midst of it a little bit, that whole valley down there [near Staunton] which has some rather nice old what they call antebellum buildings. Charlottesville had the University of Virginia that people were conscious of even then architecturally. The capitol building of Virginia was another. I spent a good deal of time visiting cousins and things down in Richmond. That was the period during which a lot of the restoration was beginning in Virginia. Many of the

historic houses were...you know, after the Civil War, many of the owners of those houses lost them, and they just sat, were abandoned, or the families had been killed off or something. In a few instances, the family had survived and had maintained its wealth as well as they could, but they had also lost their land, so there was no way of producing very much. They were all in a pretty bad way. Then, the Metropolitan Museum, for one, started the American wing, and they started buying rooms from out of houses in the South, all over the East as a matter of fact, and several of them were taken out of houses that had in some instances almost been abandoned. You'd just go by these houses and you'd go in, or you'd go to school with people whose families had them and they'd ask you down for a weekend, to look at the house primarily. It was just an interest that I had. Then that summer at Virginia (1933), when I was taking architectural design courses, I had an accompanying lecturer who was actually in Charlottesville as the director of the project of restoring Monticello. He was Fiske Kimball, who was a brilliant art historian, primarily on European rococo. He was brilliant in so many ways, and he had just been elected the director of the Philadelphia Museum and was giving brilliant guidance to the women who had raised the money to save Monticello originally and also to the later group of women that he had gotten interested in saving the Lee Mansion, Stratford Hall. In the process of his classes and my talking to him about certain buildings, he saw that I was becoming intensely interested, so he asked me if I would like to go with him occasionally to Monticello for the day and watch the workmen work under him when he was here in the city, in Charlottesville. And then one day he said, "You know, I've just persuaded [the group of women mentioned above], and the purchase is being made now, of Stratford Hall, and if you would like to go with me, on Saturday morning we can drive down for the day and look at it in its present condition." Monticello was in dire structural condition at that point, because Jefferson had died bankrupt and the house had been sold and had not been in very good hands. It was occupied by Federal troops during the war when Federal troops moved up this far. The restoration was coming along, going to be quite interesting; it went through many phases after that, but it's now sort of settled down, I think, the whole

restoration and the research and everything. We went down to Stratford it was once an immense plantation..., and it had tobacco and cotton grown on it, and a great view down to the river from the house. But when we came up to this tangled mess of vines and trees that hadn't been pruned or cared for in any way and we came into this grove, as you came up to the house almost every window in this elegant house--it was almost a Jacobean building--had a stovepipe coming out of each window, right through the window glass. The squatters, mostly black families, had squatted in each room, and the stovepipes were the stoves to their particular apartment. Sitting along the window sills of the grand windows on the main floor of the house were chickens flopping up and down and messing up the sills. I don't know, you could see some potential to this thing. Well, Fiske Kimball did miracles with people. It didn't take that much money in those days, to give the money to revive that house, and it's now really one of the magnificent houses down there, and the state historical society and one thing and another--the whole disease, across the United States, of preservation--got going. Not a disease, I shouldn't say, but.... Wonders have been accomplished, certainly in my lifetime, to save a lot of these things. I also went, whenever I could get a lift or something, to look at Maryland houses and to look at New England houses, so that I got myself pretty well imbued with the different styles and with the regional characteristics and so forth, and it just sort of grew and became a fascination. I was not in the least conscious of contemporary architecture at that point. There wasn't any around.

SZ: You got that when you finally got to Columbia to actually study for your degree.

PM: Before I went to Columbia I began to read it in magazines and buy books and things of that sort, but not much of it had happened. It was coming to us from Europe, you see, the contemporary part of it, and the Nazis had not totally excluded their great talents, particularly the Germans. So many of those people came to the United States. As soon as I started in to architectural school, I became imbued with European influences, contemporary influences, because both at Columbia and even

in the summer at the University of Virginia there were critics that came, sometimes from Europe, as refugees, or were just beginning to come, and were settling in these areas and carrying with them news of the Bauhaus and all those things. As a matter of fact, I made a fairly good library of contemporary books that were in architectural school shops, books that were not expensive either. Well, books weren't expensive then, but that library, as a matter of fact, I was able to sell when I went overseas into the war, for $7,000 because all of that book publishing had stopped in Europe, you see, and the supply had never come in any great quantity. So the rare book dealers were trying to get these books, and I sold this little shelf of books that I had, which were quite good ones, for all that money. I was a volunteer during the war, at the end of the two and a half years of it, in an ambulance corps of the American Field Service, serving in India and in Europe. The only way I could do it honorably with my family--you see, volunteer organizations pay you nothing and have no insurance on you and not anything to take care of you if anything happens. Before I would go into it, I went to Lloyd's of London to find out how much it would cost me to insure myself against war risks, and it was $7,000. So I took it out, of course, to protect my family; I was not going to leave them penniless in case anything happened to me.

SZ: They were depending on you at that point, your family?

PM: No. I just didn't want them to end up with, you know, a lump of flesh for them to keep the rest of their lives, of my life, I guess. I never discussed it with them, not even until I had not died and I could give them the document that protected me. I had lost a number of people in the field service before, so it was a real concern to me. The trucks were always destroyed by mines, always blowing them up, and the drivers in them.

SZ: You studied architecture at Yale; I have the dates 1937 to '41. I guess during your time at Yale you also did some work in museum administration.

PM: Yes, the director of the museum at Yale and the professor of some of the courses in museum care and things of that sort that I wanted to take -- from Theodore Sizer, affectionately called Tubby1 -- I knew him and his family quite well, so Tubby took me into that. You see, I already had college credits to enter Yale, so that I was able to substitute a course, not for credit, for quite a number of things that I wanted to get under my belt, including...and then I was allowed to sit in, not for credit...as an auditor in some marvelous courses that George Kubler...and that funny old guy who was in Latin American-Spanish architecture, what was his name? Anyhow, they were all up at Yale and there were these brilliant people coming in to Yale, mostly all from Paris. Josef Albers came from Paris. Then, when I got into architectural school proper, the technical part of it, we had people like Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant, even Corbu (Le Corbusier)--he was not a regular, but he was an occasional lecturer on various subjects. Oscar Nitzchke, the French architect who just died the other day; even that fascinating fashion designer Madame Schiaparelli. Rockefeller Center was also being built at that point, and Wally Harrison had been the head of the architectural school at Yale, and he and Raymond Hood and Jacques André Fouilhoux were among those designing Rockefeller Center. Once I got out of architectural school, I went to Harrison's office to work for various projects he had. But the extraordinary people--who was the shocking pink woman [Schiaparelli], a dress designer, a famous one...everything was shocking pink.

SZ: This is not my department [laughing].

PM: She was a delightful woman, though, and brilliant as she could be. Anyhow, it was interesting, when they were designing for Rockefeller Center the building which later became an Eastern Airlines building--it has three-story windows on its north elevation--it was designed to become a fashion center, and Harrison had brought this

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1 Theodore Sizer was a professor of Architectural History at Yale.

brilliant designer [Schiaparelli] over and she was brought up to Yale every now and then as a color consultant. We were just bashed with everything that was coming, you know. Ozenfant came and stayed. José Luis Sert came and stayed. Bauhaus people--Walter Gropius to Harvard, Serge Chermayeff went to [the Institute of Design,] Chicago, at that point and then to Yale; László Moholy-Nagy came. It was the richest possible time to be close to all those things. We were in the midst here in town, and in Chicago. I never lived in Chicago, but I had friends and met those people there and when they came here one would see them.

SZ: And this was how you met Harrison.

PM: No. How did I meet Wallace Harrison? That's a good question. I worked for Nelson Rockefeller when I got out of Yale, immediately afterward. He took two of us out of class and took us to Washington, because by then all building materials had been more or less commandeered by the government and there was no architecture to be built, so it was all going all over the whole world, being temporarily used for other governments and so forth.

SZ: Had you known Nelson Rockefeller before that?

PM: I had known Nelson through the Harrisons, because I used to go to the Harrisons--they would invite me from Yale--down to the country in Long Island. Mrs. Harrison, Wally's wife, was the sister-in-law of Nelson's; her brother had married Nelson's sister, Abby Rockefeller, so we would occasionally see them at one place or another. Then when the war began and Nelson became the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, Wally Harrison became his deputy. George Dudley and I were assigned to that job in Washington where we assisted with various aspects of that program. I was concerned with the cultural activities associated with the program.

SZ: During the time when you were at Columbia and then the years you were at Yale, were you aware of the Museum, did you visit it, what kind of a part did it play in your life?

PM: MoMA?

SZ: Yes.

PM: When I came to...those years are very tricky if you don't look at the record because they were years of the formation of the Museum. René d'Harnoncourt and I had known each other quite early, and I'd known [Miguel Covarrubias] and people like that. Let's see, the dates. I could look at that list and apply myself a little bit, and I'll do that before you come again. I was consistently going into the Museum, even while I was working in Washington, because we had commissioned the Museum to do most of the exhibitions that were being prepared to send to Latin America in Nelson's program, and that's where Nelson knew me and why I think he made me the head of the International Program of the Museum after the war. During the war, in those early years, when I was briefly in and out of the... That was quite near the beginning of the war, when it all happened. Elodie Courter and Philip Johnson and Edgar Kaufmann and all those people were there then [i.e. at MoMA]. Eliot Noyes and John McAndrew....

SZ: It's that obvious that before the war you already had the vital relationships, the connections to the Museum. René you say you knew early on.

PM: Yes. I took their apartment in Washington when he became the director of MoMA. Then the war came.

SZ: Maybe I'll just ask you one last question. What was Wally Harrison like?

PM: He was really one of the great people, I think, that I've ever had in my life. Wally, I think, has suffered more than anybody--that has much to do with this city and its better aspects, when you think of it. That was partly because he had the association and power of the Rockefeller family behind him, although he was an extremely impressive man in his own right. He worked with Robert Moses on some of his better things. He was very close to Moses and on not rare occasions at dinner at the Harrisons, Moses would be there. Harrison was quite a straight shooter, he didn't pull any punches...and he could smell Moses when he was getting ahead of himself and call him on it instantly.... Wally wasn't afraid of the devil, you know. Wally was originally from Worcester where I believe he had gone into architecture. We had something in common in the discovery of architecture. He was fond of me and so was Ellen; they were always very sweet to me. Ellen Harrison and Mary Callery were very close friends, and it turned out that Mary Callery was descended from the Lewis family--this is good old Southern talk--that Mary Callery had been a Lewis, who were one of the founders of Staunton, Virginia. So this made Mary and me sort of under-the-skin brothers, not that close, but still.... Ellen was her most intimate friend, and they had close connections through New Orleans. It was all too complex for words. I think that was one tie that Ellen always felt, that we were all Southerners, you know, in this crazy Yankee land. But it was really a very wonderful relationship.

SZ: We'll stop for today.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **PORTER MCCRAY (PM)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **300 EAST 59 STREET**
NEW YORK CITY

DATE: **APRIL 25, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: I wanted to just ask you a little bit about some of your war experiences. You were a volunteer with [the American Field Service organization.]

PM: I was. As a matter of fact, on Pearl Harbor day I was in Mexico coming back to Washington to resume work there, where I was already involved in cultural programs in Guatemala and Mexico for the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. After lunch with friends, we went out on the terrace to have coffee, and the coffee never came. I got a little ruffled and went to find the waiter. We couldn't find anybody so I went to the concierge and asked him what had happened to our coffee. He looked at me and said, "I guess this is the best answer I can give you." He turned the knob on the radio and here was the first-hand account of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I still had an active commission awarded on graduation from VMI. This, of course, called for immediate action. I called Washington immediately and when I got back to Washington from Mexico, I applied for active duty. I was sent almost immediately to Fort Mead to be tested for what was to be an intelligence mission to Australia. I was in preparation for that at Fort Mead for six weeks. I was recalled suddenly to Walter Reed Hospital; they said they'd discovered a spot on my left lung. So shortly after, they canceled my lieutenancy and returned me to civilian life. I went back to the job with Latin America and stayed for almost a year. Then I became impatient about participating somehow in the war, and if possible, constructively. Just at this moment, Newell Jenkins, a former classmate at Yale, arrived in New York on home

leave from his assignment in North Africa with the British Eighth Army. He brought news of the death of two of my friends from Yale, Virginians, too. They had all joined the American Field Service early in the war. This prompted me to join the American Field Service, an ambulance service that was originally set up with France in WWI, but due to France's early fall in WWII, we worked with the British and at that time, with the Eighth Army in Italy which had just come from North Africa. In two weeks I was in Naples , where we were assigned to duty and remained in Italy until we were sent to France and Holland As the retreat of the German army started, we chased in pursuit. The losses were considerable, needless to say. We were kept very busy right up until the day of surrender, VE day. As I said, we were attached to the Eighth Army there, and as soon as the war was over in Europe, the instant it was over, Mountbatten, who was in command of the Asian Allied forces, made an appeal to the Field Service for as many of their drivers as possible to volunteer to go on to India, where the war was continuing with Japan. A separate entity was set up in India and we were assigned there.

SZ: Had you ever been there before?

PM: No, no.

SZ: You'd never been east. In driving an ambulance in that way, I guess you saw combat, you were right in the middle of it?

PM: Oh sure, we were under combat all the time in Europe, I mean when we were on duty, which was most of the time, because they didn't have an off-hours. We simply did the runs between the battlefield and the various hospitals that the seriousness of the injury required. There were stages of hospitals. There was a field dressing station where your patient would get a shot of morphine or something, and field attention; and then, depending on how serious--if you'd lost a limb or something like that--you went perhaps into the third stage of hospitals that were available in the line from the front. This was continued instantly, almost, from the time that we'd arrived in Italy. We had spent a little time in Naples, where we had been trained in

assembling our ambulances, taking them apart and putting them together again and doing other servicing that had to be done, and whatever few chores we were allowed to execute with the wounded. I was a driver and I was accompanied always by an orderly who was a trained British medic. This continued until, as I said, the end of the European war. In the Indian one, we arrived and were trained in Bombay with the war still going on with the Japanese. But not long afterward, in August of that year, of '45--I think it was August--the British and the Allies were on the way to the immediate end from the bomb at Hiroshima. As soon as that happened, we were immediately redirected to Calcutta and were asked by Mountbatten again to surrender our advanced departure--as a volunteer, you had first priority, under the Geneva Conference--the transportation situation was so really desperate, with the immense number of prisoners of war being found along the Pacific rim, which were all pouring into Calcutta. The Medong [?], the park in the middle of the city, was made into a sort of tent and quonset hut city, where former or released prisoners that were injured, wounded in various stages, were being returned and moved on home as quickly as possible. There were quite a number who could not travel and were set up in temporary tents and quonset huts in the park there until enough medics could come in to take care of them. We were simply assisting them. Also, though, these were prisoners from the British Empire, not just British--the Australians and New Zealanders.... Do you want this much detail?

SZ: Yes, I do.

PM: The Indians and Nepalese, the Canadians--all of the prisoners were bunched in these Japanese camps. And also, the Dutch that had been taken by the Indonesians--the Dutch, you see, had been the colonizers of Indonesia and were living in Indonesia at the time the Japanese arrived from the north. The British had accepted these prisoners as well. At any rate, it was necessary to stay there until almost the end of the year to catch up with this accumulation of people that they were trying to lift out as fast as possible, but many could not be moved immediately. Also, complications resulted from the fact that the Japanese had not made it possible for six years for the prisoners to make contact with anyone, family or otherwise. The

families from all over the British Empire, when they heard that the prisoners had been released, started focusing on India and this repatriation center. This facility had once served as a grand installation for the old Viceroy just outside of Calcutta. These families came, without any reservations, to be accommodated in a city that had not a great many accommodations for Westerners. These people nevertheless were coming to find their relatives. They were civilians as well as military, because the Japanese had come down so suddenly that they had taken families and all sorts of personnel. Most of them had been gradually returned, children and wives and mothers and things like that, but some had not. At any rate, we administered in any way possible or useful until about the fifteenth of December, and then we started our trek back home. By then they had transportation and could get us to England where we then waited for the next crossing of the Queen Elizabeth II. We were aimed for New York, but there was a stevedores' strike initiated during our crossing, so that we were not allowed to come in to the New York harbor. The Atlantic coast had only one other...port to accept a ship the size of the Queen Elizabeth II, Halifax was the nearest one.

SZ: Which is not so near.

PM: So we were redirected and it was already in iceberg season, so it was a little precarious. But we did get in there and the Canadians were absolutely fantastic. They brought in the best of the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National first-class sleeping cars and put us in them and directed us to take off almost the instant we stepped off the Queen Elizabeth II. They were trying to get us to the States in time for Christmas, just three days away by then.

SZ: Did you make it?

PM: I made it to the midnight service Christmas Eve at Trinity Episcopal Church in Staunton, just before the choir procession started, surprising my mother in the church pew with my appearance, which was a happy but rather disrupting moment.

SZ: I'm sure [laughing].

PM: At any rate, then I had this bug from India, so I was directed to the hospital--there was an Army base near my hometown of Staunton--where I was kept for three months recuperating from this thing. As I came through New York, however, from Canada, I ran into Wally Harrison, the architect, who had been head of the architectural school at Yale. We collided with one another in the swinging doors of The Museum of Modern Art.

SZ: Is that really true?

PM: In the few hours I had before I had to get on the train to Virginia. It was really quite a coincidence. We exchanged greetings and so forth, and he said, "Now Porter, I want you to let me know as soon as you're free, and come and join us in the office," which was pleasing, because we had not been able to join an office right out of Yale because the architectural offices were closing down or shrinking badly because of the fact that building materials, most of them, had been frozen for use abroad.

SZ: His office at that time was Harrison and Abramowitz, right?

PM: Max Abramowitz was one of the associates, I guess, at that time, but he had been with Raymond Hood and Fouilhoux prior to joining Harrison. Fouilhoux was the noted French engineer involved with the building of Rockefeller Center. So I then returned and started doing design work and work in the office. In a relatively short time, Harrison accepted the commission for doing the new Television City, which was to be built on the site of the old slaughterhouses on the East River. At this time, Mr. Zeckendorf, who was largely responsible for assembling the property, was approached with the suggestion that this choice site might be offered to accommodate the United Nations. It was the site that was later converted to the UN, but not until Mr. Rockefeller made this possible.

SZ: Because he bought it from Zeckendorf. No....

PM: John Rockefeller, Jr. paid off the deposit for the development rights for this whole seven blocks. It's just like the problem that Mr. Trump is in now with his property. By then, the General Assembly of the United Nations had accepted New York City as the site for its headquarters. The idea to use this location for the UN World Headquarters appealed to Mr. John D. Rockefeller Jr., who came forward with an offer to purchase the property so that work could begin. Within three days, the drawings and all of that--the presentation drawings that had been made for Television City--were quickly converted to be shown to the General Assembly, which was just going into its annual meeting and which had to vote on the acceptance of the site.

SZ: So you worked on those drawings?

PM: No, the great delineator Hugh Ferriss had done the most extraordinary drawings and shifted them around a little--it was all imaginary architecture at that point, anyhow. They were used at the UN just to convince them of what could be done on the property. They accepted them, and an international committee of architects was then set up to begin immediately on the design. Harrison was made the chairman of it because he was the one who Mr. Rockefeller wanted to be made chairman, because of his expertise and technical experience with Rockefeller Center. He had built skyscrapers using the newest innovations and the other foreigners had not, not of the scale they were expecting to be developed on the UN site. So that got under way very quickly, and some very distinguished architects joined the team, including Corbu [Le Corbusier] and their representatives from the member countries...Poland had a very good architect on that team, and the British and the French, and...a number of the architects, European people, who had come to this country during the war. So they were able to generate action very quickly. There was also a Russian architect among them.

SZ: It must have been an exciting time to be in his office.

PM: It was quite fun. I was, alas, not involved directly through the end of the project. I

went back to work on the other projects. It was quite unfortunate that Corbusier took such a highly critical and really unpleasant--inexcusable, I think--position that he had been deprived of being called the winner of the design because Oskar Niemeyer, his student, had been chosen, his design had been accepted by the committee as the best design. Corbusier was greatly offended by this and blamed Harrison for eliminating him so that there would be no rivalry between them. Very sad, that part of it. But that was when I left the U.N. project and went over and worked with Harrison in his regular practice, until I was approached by Nelson Rockefeller to work at MoMA. The war was over at that point, and Nelson had left Washington as the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs and had returned to be the chairman of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. I think I told you this the other day. Nelson's activity in the Coordinator's office in Washington was being pursued particularly in political and economic and cultural channels. The cultural section had, surprisingly, survived during the war and had generated a certain amount of exchange, of exhibitions, of the orchestra, of what is now the New York City Ballet and things of that sort that had traveled around to most of the capital cities, the larger ones, in Latin America, and had served their purposes very well, bringing the whole hemisphere much closer together. This activity was eventually transferred to office spaces at the National Gallery, which had just been open a couple of years; it was in the process of completion. That and the Arts and Monuments office and two or three others were placed in the National Gallery during that period. Eventually, of course, it was rotated out right after the war. So Nelson came back to New York and, I think, was really inspired by how effectively the cultural program had worked even in wartime and even in government. He sought to have it continue, which the government was not in a mood to do, and so he managed to get a handsome grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and set up in The Museum of Modern Art an operation that could plan for tours to Europe and to Latin America, to continue that. And that was when I was brought into the Museum [in 1947].

SZ: He asked you to come and do it?

PM: He and René both asked me; the board, of course, had to appoint me. But that was

my beginning of experience at MoMA.

SZ: Was that a hard decision for you, to leave architecture to do that?

PM: It was and it wasn't, because by then I had tasted the effectiveness of art as a working medium and seeing the good that it was doing. Also, it had a certain glamour to it, you were dashing in and out of this country and that. I had not spread my wings sufficiently to get engulfed in architecture, because it wasn't going yet, it was still recovering from the wartime period. I took this [move to MoMA] as a temporary thing, however; I didn't abandon my career completely at this point. It just gradually melted from under me, though I did a little bit on the side, privately. Harrison and Nelson were working together, so Harrison was Nelson's deputy, you see, not only in the thing in Washington. He was also Chairman of the Architectural Committee at the Museum. Nelson was, I believe, Chairman of the Board of the Museum at that point, so it all melted together. And that became the International Program. The International Program had operated for some time before.... Nelson very shrewdly was trying to build up an apparatus that would, eventually, certainly make a generous contribution to the course of continuing the International Program, and therefore suggested with Blanchette Rockefeller that they form this committee of people interested in international art exchange, which grew into the International Council. Very small at first, just a few, and they were chosen very well. They were really people who were committed to the idea and committed to supporting it, although not nearly enough to make it thrive or make it possible to do much for quite a number of years. Then the Council began to boom with increasing numbers and they became more generous in their contributions.

SZ: I want to get back to your coming to the Museum, because it was, well, my records say 1947, so you had a few years before the International Program started up in the early '50s.

PM: Yes. I was hired, you see, to go.... The department already existed of Circulating Exhibitions, and then it was divided into two pieces, the national exhibitions and the

international exhibitions.

SZ: Once the International Program began.

PM: Right.

SZ: But in those first early years when you first came, I assume it was the national circulating division.

PM: Yes, they were replacing Elodie Courter, who was the one who'd started it and who'd done a brilliant job of getting it organized and going, all around the country.

SZ: Just tell me a little bit about what the Museum was like when you first got there, what the atmosphere was like; and also, I guess I'm really thinking, too, of what was happening in the art scene in New York, how much you were involved in that.

PM: Well, by the time I came there, the Circulating Exhibitions department's activities were not that clearly defined. They did prepare special small exhibitions of original works of art to circulate to small museums and university galleries and things of that sort. They also were beginning to take responsibility for the organization of big shows leaving the Museum and going to other major museums. San Francisco was one of the ones that subscribed, and here and there, all over the country, other large museums joined in. A new Museum of Modern Art at that point was being generated in Washington as a sort of first arm of MoMA itself. Mrs. Bliss lived in Washington and was very active in the arts. With her husband, Robert Woods Bliss, she was very much behind the Washington Museum of Modern Art. Boston was also forming its branch. These outposts; they wouldn't like me to say that...perhaps very close associates, were taking almost everything we did. It was a very exciting time for lots of reasons. Europe, which is always an important factor in contemporary art, had been almost totally inactivated by the war. The artists were in the war, they were doing things associated with the war and helping in ways they could. Of course, many of them were still working in the arts, but the concept of everything being

organized and coordinated and going in Europe was far from the fact.

The buildings in many instances had been damaged badly or at least considerably, so that they had to close or partly close or they had to rebuild all sorts of things. As late as 1954, I believe it was, which was, after all, nine years after the war, the skylights of the Musée National d'Art Moderne had not been cleaned--you know, the blackout paint had not been removed. Not all of it--I shouldn't imply that all of it had been kept that way; it was gradually being cleaned. But we did participate and share some of the cost of cleaning the skylights when we took over the entire Musée National d'Art Moderne for that big show that went from New York, of the collections of the Museum [50 Ans d'Art aux Etats-Unis]. We sent painting, sculpture, furniture, design, drawings, prints; we sent films--everything. The collections of the Museum were fully represented in this huge show that traveled and was shown by sections, rather than integrated, in one museum after another, including the Tate, including the Musée National d'Art Moderne, including.... I must really check that list, because we've got the list of where these shows did go and when, and which institutions they went to [see the Records of the International Program in the Museum Archives]. At any rate, we got going fairly quickly, I think, considering. The idea of what we were doing took hold quite quickly, with many of the lenders and museums who were willing to go along with us and lend stuff and help in ways they could, some of the governments...well, as a matter of fact, very few of the European museums that were associated in any way with modern art had had exhibitions from MoMA.

SZ: There had been that one before the war.

PM: The one that was arranged particularly with Paris and with the Museum itself, Alfred [Barr]'s department--painting and sculpture, it was Three Centuries of American Art, at the Jeu de Paume, 1938.

SZ: I was thinking in particular of right after the war and the developments in New York and how much of that you admired and how that really affected what you did, because of course there was that show, and the whole reputation of the Museum

somehow having become a missionary for the new.

PM: You see, we already had that association in the U.S., and it had gotten spread around remarkably quickly. However, we were confronted with the problem of too great a demand for loans being placed upon the collections of the Museum. The trustees were extremely generous in lending their things, but the loan to the Tate was quite large, and it was beginning to affect New York operations in the use of those loans as well. We realized we were going to have to seek more sources of contribution of works of art than we had in our immediate press. But it grew remarkably, and some of the big shows that were undertaken were considerable diversions from exhibitions of American art. The French, for example, approached us and asked us if we would consider putting together an exhibition of major French works in American collections. We did that, borrowing--since the French wanted to go back to that era prior to the Modern period, which was quite rich--in areas that were not most characteristic of the MoMA, as a matter of fact, so that the first big French show that was lent of American collections was called De David à Toulouse-Lautrec. For this show we got the major museums in the U.S. interested and, as a matter of fact, asked most of the directors or the curators of painting and sculpture in these institutions to join a committee in The Museum of Modern Art and to make the selections for the show. The purpose, really, was to strengthen the possibility of borrowing major things from those museums, and it worked like a charm as it progressed, because the members of the various top museums of the country would sit around a table in the morning and vie with one another on which was going to lend the better picture. One after another, much choicer things came available right at the table, so that there was a very handsome--there's a catalogue in the other room--very handsome show put together. Then the Italians followed suit by asking for a similar show. The Italians wanted the same thing, so we brought together--and this was a new show for me, because in the first place, the Museum was not that aware of where major modern Italian things were in American collections. There were a few well-known works. But we got a very handsome show of prewar works, [Twentieth Century Italian Art from American Collections, 1960], particularly [Umberto] Boccioni and the early Futurists, and brought it right up to the

war. It was put in the Palazzo Reale in Milan with a certain amount of splash. Then we put together drawings from four hundred years of French drawing [French Drawings from American Collections:Clouet to Matisse, 1959]; we asked the Metropolitan if they would collaborate with us--and if they would do not only the contemporary things--but the French wanted to make Agnes Mongan the chairman of that committee. They wanted to borrow and obtain for the exhibition from American collections. Both of those shows were shown in the Orangerie as full summer shows and were real eye-openers, I think, to Europeans. It was odd, of course, to be working in these particular areas, but on the other hand I think it gained greater respect for the Museum too; it showed its continuity in the acquisition and scholarship of the whole, the continuous period. And it afforded the museum curators and staff of the collaborating museums an opportunity to work with one another. [Note: it was shown first at the Museum Boymans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, and was in Paris in the fall rather than in the summer.]

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2

PM: You must realize also that at that early stage the show, for example, the final big show that was done before I left was the New American Painting, for example--it would never have been possible to assemble that show when we first started, though we thought of it. I'm sorry that our own committee thought it was too early, too shocking. I was very much for it; I was the one who proposed it. I said I thought that almost the best introduction there could be of modern American painting was to take the most sensational aspect of it and then follow, fill in with the historical work...rather, to have the bang and then have the movements prior to that, which is more or less the aim that we had, but we never materialized it until the full New American Painting [1958-59], which came at the end of the eight-year operation. Also, the staff of the Museum was relatively small. We had very few people trained to supplement the regular staff that would come in. Then I began to seek younger people and people who were not as identified and were really not, I have to point out,

did not hold graduate degrees in the history of modern art, which was an awkward spot to be in; but nevertheless, they played their role well. The Europeans, I think, developed great respect for someone like Frank O'Hara and younger people who were coming into the Program. We were bringing them directly into the staff of the Program itself. We had some understandable...Alfred did not want to credit the younger ones who were having any finger in it, and he was right in one sense; but on the other hand, he was not able to write a great deal for us, the catalogues and all that, because he was doing things and having trouble with the trustees of the Museum--that's what led to his dismissal from the Museum. So we never did advertise the fact that it was as much a balancing act as it really was. And then, I think eventually, the recognition that those exhibitions enjoyed abroad began to arouse some feeling in the Museum that we were getting too strongly identified as a separate operation, which I can understand, because our activity was so considerable--lots of shows were being organized. There were four, sometimes five showings being organized simultaneously, and each one had to be custom-built, more or less. When we arrived at a show, we sent out several releases. There were releases made on Alfred, there were releases made on René and there was a history of the Museum always done, and these, one had to remember, were constantly being changed. There were catalogues being written. One major catalogue was prepared, but then it was adapted. All of them had to be adapted, translated and published in each language for the show, from one stop to the next. It was an immense task, is all I can say. My working day was almost around four o'clock in the morning and back at ten or nine-thirty for years, and I was getting quite exhausted from it; and then flying to install a show or negotiate the details with the government. We could not use the embassy, we were not permitted to do this by our government; we had to deal directly with the foreign governments, and most of them...France had the Action Artistique, which could handle this unofficially out of the home embassy. The State Department took a stance at that point that they did not want embassies to be identified with the activity, which is a great help. On the other hand, in only one instance did we fail to get the foreign minister at the opening, and the minister of culture.

SZ: What was that one instance?

PM: André Malraux. After I resigned from the Museum and went on that year and four months on my own in Asia and Africa, I was back in Israel, as a matter of fact, when René caught me--they had my itinerary in New York here, at MoMA--and René got me in my hotel in Israel and said, "Porter, you simply have to come back to the Museum immediately to do one job for us." I said, "René, my itinerary's not quite complete." I was going to spend some time in Europe afterwards, just for my own pleasure. But anyhow, he persuaded me so I flew from Israel to London.

I had sprained my ankle rather badly and I called Francis Mason, who was the cultural officer in London at that point, and I said, "Could you possibly get me the name of the doctor and an appointment with him who's just mended the Queen Mother's ankle?" She called back and said, "We've got a date for you." So I arrived in London and had my leg worked on, the ankle worked on, and had then made meanwhile appointments in Paris, which Mr. Malraux did not honor. René had already sent Monroe Wheeler, and Monroe had been very badly rejected by Malraux, which he really couldn't take. I tried fresh again just for the hell of it, because we could have profited by his assistance, but the problem was that Malraux, just about three weeks before the opening of the [Mark] Rothko show that I had scheduled before I retired, had canceled this with no plans to show it anywhere else in Paris or in France, in order to bring in what he'd found was a charming exhibition of Haitian folk art. By then, Rothko was ill, mentally and physically too, and it was a very touchy situation. So I used the Action Artistique, which we had had to use, always, in order to get at the government, and eventually went in to get them, but never officially. The State Department would not have permitted it that way, until David Bruce and Douglas Dillon became ambassadors, and they were very enlightened. L'Action Artistique said, "We will make an appointment for you with the Mayor of Paris and see if we can get you the Paris Musée National d'Art Moderne." The mayor was extremely cordial about it and said, "Of course, we would be delighted to put the show on." I said, "Where?" and he said, "We can put it up--we have no empty galleries on such short notice--but we can offer you some of the unfinished

galleries in the basement, down the main stair"--which was to be one of the main floors of galleries. As you come into that museum, there's a winding, monumental stair that goes down into this area. That was a suitable entrance, in a sense. So I then called architects that I had met in Paris and we went over the space--very raw space, all cinder block, concrete floors, one bulb in the ceiling. I didn't have very much money to spend, but anyhow, they got into this thing, were really quite challenged by it. We covered the entire floor with quite handsome sisal, very fine sisal, and the concrete floors disappeared. Then we had the electricians in and I said, "Can you possibly disperse this into fluorescent light?"--the center light, the one light that was installed in the ceiling--"because Rothko always paints in fluorescent light; and then we will stretch under the fluorescent light muslin, heavy enough not to show through the lighting fixtures and diffuse the light." Well, it really turned out to be quite a magic space, quite different from the upstairs because there were no spotlights, just this haze of rather beautiful light. It was just right for Rothko. And then, the director of the Jardin de Paris telephoned me and said, "Mr. McCray, I've heard of your dilemma, and I want you to feel free to borrow any plants we have. We will deliver them, we will take them and bring them back." So we had some very handsome trees bringing you into the stair and down the stairs.... So it all ended up really quite handsome there. The young turned out en masse, and then George Schmidt, who was the director of the Basel Kunstmuseum in Switzerland and who had already had the Rothko show in Basel, arrived in town and he said, "Oh, we've got to get some of the young inhere by having lectures. I will give some lectures if you would like me to." And the young started crowding in; it had a nice, fresh air because the young were the ones who were setting the tone for it. Then people came from all over; it got reviewed in different places and it ended up being quite a popular show. Rothko, in the end, didn't come for it, but he was greatly encouraged.

SZ: I think I'm going to stop for today. I feel like I've kept you too long.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **PORTER MCCRAY (PM)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: **MAY 23, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SZ: You had just started to tell me that the acquisition of the building for the Venice Biennale was a fairly simple matter.

PM: Yes. The acquisition was very simple because the people who owned it, Grand Central Galleries, and who had operated it before, had already offered it on a one-time basis. It must have been two times before we took over responsibility, and in those two times very selective exhibitions had been sent, and they were made largely by Alfred Barr and Jim Sweeney. They had been sort of organized by [Alfred] Frankfurter, who at that time was owner and editor of Art in America, the magazine. Frankfurter, I think, largely obtained the funding and so forth that was necessary. Then it finally came up, the sale of the building and the transfer of who would hold full responsibility for the preparation of each entry every two years. The government had been approached in Washington about taking this on, since it was called the U.S. Pavilion, but the government declined, as it was declining all sorts of things relating to contemporary art exchanges abroad.

SZ: Why was that?

PM: Just policy, I suppose, which remained for quite a while afterward. The reason we finally took the responsibility ourselves and continued either paying directly for the first three exhibitions, completely for the first one, and then shared the cost with invitations to museums that we ourselves approached and asked if they would share

the responsibility of assembling the exhibition as well as picking up half the cost and we would pay the remainder. Preparation began immediately after we bought it, because the Biennale was approaching within just a few months and the building had to be put at least in safe repair, because the roof was glass and a lot of it was broken and damaged, weather-damaged, in the building; it had become quite serious. Since it was intricate for us to take the total responsibility of supervising the repair due to the distance between New York and Venice, I asked a friend of mine, an architect, in Milano, who had done several exhibition installations to help out. He had done the cathedral museum in Milano and he was an interesting architect and one of the leading ones in Italy at that point. I simply asked him if he would take this responsibility and also hire the Italian workmen. I said we couldn't possibly do it because of the possibility of strikes and so forth, the time was too short to take any risks, and would he take the full responsibility of putting it together, the conditioning of the building--which he did very well, and promptly. Meanwhile, we began here in New York to put together an exhibition, which was partly suggested by the Italians themselves. They had said that there had been a great deal of demand through the Biennale's office in Venice for a representative show of Ben Shahn; the Italians were very impressed by Shahn, primarily, I think, because of the whole series [about Sacco and Vanzetti] and his political commitments and so forth to the Sacco-Vanzetti trials and so on. At that time Jim Soby, who was actually the trustee chairman of The Museum of Modern Art Committee on Painting and Sculpture and a very close friend of Alfred's, had done a book on Shahn and was asked to assemble an appropriate catalogue essay on him. The other painter that was selected by the Coordinating Committee was Bill de Kooning, in considerable contrast to Shahn. It was later pointed out by Mrs. [Claire Booth] Luce, when she became ambassador in Italy, which was the first year we did the exhibition, that she was absolutely convinced that Shahn was a communist. She said, "I don't understand why you've chosen a communist and a foreigner to represent the United States in this first exhibition." I said, "Mrs. Luce, Shahn is not a communist. This effort to convict him of being a communist, by all the forces in government that have been conducting a massacre of liberals in all creative fields and have tried their best to implicate him, has not succeeded.... Your own State Department will accept this, as it has had to

accept it. It is true, de Kooning is a Dutchman and has been painting in this country quite a number of years; although he is still not an American citizen, he has been on the WPA payroll for about eight years." So that silenced the lady, and we went ahead with the show.

SZ: Were there other instances of this kind of attitude? What I really wanted to ask you was, what if it had been that he were a communist?

PM: Mrs. Luce was on the board of The Museum of Modern Art, as was I at that point. I said, "Mrs. Luce, you know we do not consider political affiliations in judging the selection of artists in the exhibitions we send out. There are several occasions already in which we've had to deny requests from the embassies that we withdraw a painter. We do not do that."

SZ: You did have those kinds of requests.

PM: Yes, and it continued up until the time I left the Museum. I had ambassadors and people calling from embassies. When it was decided to use that really quite handsome university in Caracas for the overall meeting of the Organization of American States, the representative at that time, the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States who had been at the U.N. here in New York and was well known at that point, because he was very interested in the arts, and was heading a committee of the states to put together a large representative exhibition in the university in Caracas at the opening of the Organization of American States. This was also to be the cultural future of the congress itself. I said that Alexander Calder has been commissioned and had done this ceiling of the congress chamber in which they will deliberate. The Government of Venezuela has commissioned quite a number of important European artists to do very important, major contemporary works in the dedication of some of their buildings and in the biggest stained-glass window that I've ever seen--by Fernand Léger, so that it was oriented towards contemporary art. Even then, the ambassador, whom I had worked with in Washington earlier--he had been in the diplomatic corps and I was outsider working

with one of the war agencies at that time, the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, in which we were dealing with cultural aspects of the states in Latin America--even as late as 1976, he called me and said, "Porter, I'm going to have to ask you to remove from that exhibition that you're sending down here the work of two artists, Ben Shahn and Franz Kline." I said, "But John, this is not done with our exhibitions. We do not consider their political affiliations, so that they will have to go. In the first place, the selection of artists in this representation was made jointly with the Secretary General for the meeting conducted for the congress. They have not only participated in the choice, they have also reimbursed the Museum for every penny in assembling these things, in flying them there and everything else, and there's no way that we would withdraw any number of these." He said, "Well, it's going to be terribly difficult for us at the embassy." I said, It need not be. You were asked to help, but you didn't." I mean, you can't exclude other possibilities when they're looking for a job to be done. I said to this man, "You knew, being in the U.N., what an admirable representative he [Shahn] was there and how respected he was, so I don't think there's any problem in that." At any rate, the next day, he telephoned in the morning and he said, "Porter, I've done you a great injustice." "In the first place," I said, "if you'll check with the State Department, it has definitively been established that Shahn is <u>not</u> a communist, number one. Number two, I can't imagine Franz Kline, who was the second artist, I know Franz well and he is a liberal artist, but he is not in any way even concerned with politics." He said, "What was his first name? The Kline that we have is"--what was it now? It was an ordinary first name.... I said, "This is mistaken identity. This is not a point to discuss here." He said, "Well, I'm very sorry." Sadly, it was another example of mistaken identity, in which they make these broad accusations, eliminating a person from a big international exhibition. There will never be an end to it, I'm afraid. Going back to Venice...that was many years later, the Caracas thing. But Venice, the second participation, we meanwhile continued.... The very intelligent Edward R. Morrow was at the USIA--you know, the broadcasting arm of the USIA--and I went down to see him, because he was sympathetic actually, to see if the government, through the USIA--it happened to be its channel for representation in things like this--if the government would not consider, if possible, buying the pavilion from us. We had no desire to own a pavilion

and the whole responsibility of having to fill it with an exhibition every two years. The Museum could not afford that, and it did not want to be the sole representative, anyhow, of American art in international exhibitions.

SZ: When you agreed to do it in the beginning, you had no plans for this to be a long-term arrangement.

PM: No, we had to resolve that, and we thought we could resolve it, because I, among a number of other people, served on committees at Hubert Humphries's request, at Dwight D. Eisenhower's request, and I don't even recall the first committee that was held here in New York, where artists Bob Motherwell and people who were at that time interested in the Archives of American Art, museum people of one kind or another, all met and discussed this whole problem, of the government taking the responsibility, particularly of recurring biennials or trienalles, whatever. We had a very intelligent discussion, but Murrow said that they would not be able to take the responsibility presently. It would be a long road; it would take time, if ever it was done. They finally did take a lot of responsibility, but not from us. By the time of the third Biennale in Venice under our ownership of the building--we asked the Baltimore Museum if they would take the responsibility. I thought it would be interesting. Adelyn Breeskin was the director of the museum; she had an excellent curator Gertrude Rosenthal, who knew the contemporary scene extremely well. The Baltimore Museum did take them up. We picked up half of the check for the whole thing, but we didn't want to repeat this battle. We hoped that somebody would move in, because we would be unable to be the one who was organizing every year, every time. We thought it should reflect, if necessary, a central body that would represent a broad view rather than a single institution's necessary choice. But the Baltimore Museum did itself very proudly, did a very handsome show, and Adelyn was extremely effective as the commissioner that year. The first time we found an institution willing to accept the responsibility for half the cost and the selection of art was The Art Institute of Chicago, and the third was Adelyn [Breeskin]. Dan Rich, the Art Institute of Chicago director, was going to do it, and then Katharine Kuh [the Institute's curator] made the choice. Katherine and I, unfortunately, had rather an

unhappy understanding about what would be appropriate for Biennale representation. She insisted on doing an exhibition on the city in American painting. I said this was not in the character of the Biennale. The Biennale is a competitive exhibition of contemporary artists; it is not a theme exhibition. But she insisted. She had many artists in the show, so there was no strength given to any one of them as far as competitive position.... So we could not force them [the Chicago Art Institute] to change their attitude. It was most unfortunate to me, that it totally switched character as an assembled exhibition. Shortly after that, we became much more intense in our discussion with the government, trying to bring about at least the pick-up of the check for the cost of putting on these shows and choosing different museums to make selections and so forth, rather than the choice being ours, to choose both the institution and to pay for it. At that time, Lois Bingham came into the picture through the Smithsonian and took on considerable responsibility in selecting the representative shows...and the Museum gradually withdrew from responsibility. The Museum still owns the building, and it has participated in the group of museums that have been concerned with the content of the shows. [Note: MoMA has not owned this building since the early 1960s.] But it was through the Smithsonian by then that it was done. As far as I know, that is more-or-less the pattern that the government adopted, not only for Venice, but we had done the same thing for the Bienal in Sao Paulo for the first three years as we did for the Venice one. By the end of those three first efforts, the Smithsonian got involved with that and assigned responsibilities to single institutions--which they chose very well in some instances--meaning the choice of institutions they entrusted the shows to. In the United States it has never been made a strictly government responsibility, unlike most of the other governments' exhibitions in those big international shows.

SZ: They are that.

PM: They are the responsibility of the government. Also, at the same time, Documenta started, and the first three of the Documentas were done by MoMA, because there was no response from the others and they made a direct appeal to us to assemble it. [Note: Documenta I not done by MoMA.] In most instances, they liked to choose the

individual artists that they wanted represented in the shows, because in the overall program in the earliest Documenta things were on a discernible theme, in which they needed participation of certain artists to be most representative of the theme. It was very simple sometimes. The third time they asked for black-and-white paintings of Jackson Pollock's, so we put together a whole show of black-and-white works. I would have to go back and review the catalogues of those three Documentas, the first of their series, to even remember correctly now whom exactly we did include. It was quite interesting that about that time I resigned from the Museum, and this responsibility was not accepted in full force after I had left.

SZ: It was not.

PM: No. It has since been...I haven't followed the detail of it myself, so I don't know exactly how it has been managed, but the representation has continued to be there. But the committee for Documenta was an extremely intelligent group of museum people like Werner Haftmann, who just retired as the director of the Hamburg Museum. He was young and very bright. He later became the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Vienna, and then moved to Hamburg. And then, of course, there was the brilliant, really brilliant, one of the most impressive figures, I think, in Europe at that time in the field, George Schmidt from the museum in Basel. He was almost like...the Piped Piper of Hamlin. He was adored by the young artists around Europe, in France, in Holland, in Sweden. It was wonderful to see him hold forth, for example, in the galleries of the various pavilions in Venice or in Documenta, because he would just visit them and there would be a whole covey of young painters behind him, just listening, hanging on every word he said as he looked at things. I never will forget, he absolutely was brought to the level of practically swooning over the Mark Rothko show that we had in Venice. He was so ecstatic about it, and the painters just absolutely loved it, the young ones. He was really an extraordinary figure, and a remarkable museum man.

SZ: Of the exhibitions that were organized at the Museum by curators and department heads, how was it decided which you would take traveling? Was that a decision you

made?

PM: In most instances, we did not travel Museum shows. There were shows especially prepared for that program.

SZ: I was thinking of, for instance, The Family of Man....

PM: Well, Family of Man was, in a sense, an exception, because the Museum had a copy of The Family of Man and started sending it out to various regions of the world, and in a few instances would ask us to follow up on some aspect of the installation. I, for example, went to the great American show that was put up in Moscow, The American National Exhibition, 1959; it was not a MoMA exhibit--the exhibit was put into a show of all sorts of things, outside the geodesic dome. Charlie Eames and [Eero] Saarinen and various others were involved with a real commission from the government to do this very elaborate show. Family of Man was just one of the ones the government had already bought and was put into that show in Moscow.

SZ: So you went there for that?

PM: Yes, and Charlotte Trowbridge was sent to install the show.

SZ: How was that?

PM: It was, I think, a great success in Moscow. Many aspects of the U.S. were represented: film, etc., and a copy of [Edward] Steichen's photography show [Family of Man]. There was a varied collection of paintings and sculpture selected by Edith Halpert, who operated the Downtown Gallery in New York. I must say, I'd never seen a more amusing situation. The exhibition was set in a large park; large sculptures were arranged in one area. It was quite warm and some of the Russian visitors to the exhibition were lying around on the ground to cool off. They were looking at the very bosomy Lachaise's Woman from the Museum of Modern Art, and they were having the time of their lives, joking and talking about this thing--I'd love to

have known what they were saying--and guffawing and hitting their thighs and everything else. They were so delighted by it. It was quite interesting, because some of the Russians, who went to The Family of Man came up to me and said, "It is perfectly remarkable, some of the inclusions in this exhibition." You may remember that there was one severe lynching photograph in that show, and they said, "I can't think of any other government that would permit this to be included in an official exhibition." I said a question was raised about it, but Mr. Edward Steichen said the exhibition could not come if it were not included. Finally, enough respect was accorded him to let the complete exhibition come, and the Russians never forgot it, that the Americans felt strong enough to put that in the face of everybody. It turned out to be a real asset, in a sense, from that point of view. They got the full impact of its being a cross-section of the Family of Man, Americans, whatever.

SZ: That was part of the reason for the exhibition, but also, isn't that in a large measure what, on some level, your program was doing as well?

PM: It was one of the rare ones; it had a real political impact. Every now and then an exhibition did carry content, not that often, it wasn't always that obvious.

SZ: Well, I was thinking about that, and The New American Painting show.

PM: The New American Painting show, if I'm not mistaken, traveled in Europe before it was shown in New York; it came back and was shown here. It fortunately had the great advantage of having Dorothy Miller make the selection. As a matter of fact, it was quite interesting that when we started the program, my idea was to have done The New American Painting almost from the beginning, as a real hit in the gut. It would have caused much criticism, particularly from our own side, to begin with; but we delayed doing that show for several years and meanwhile did things like 50 Ans d'Art aux Etats-Unis. Alfred was able to lend so much of the Museum's Collection to that exhibition because of the fire at MoMA and the repairs that were going on in the Museum that he let painting and sculpture and architecture and photography and prints and drawings and film programs come over in great mass to many of the great

capitals of Europe. They had their impact, and they certainly did serve a useful purpose as a background for all of the other shows that had come and that were coming later. The New American Painting came as one of the last things in that program while I was still attached to the Museum. The Pollock show followed it, for example, and that was done in the Museum before it went to Europe; it also went to the Sao Paulo Bienal and traveled, and then the black-and-white ones, in another, entirely different exhibition, went to Documenta.

SZ: And you would go and do the installations.

PM: Not always. We had other people in the2...and in some instances, the local institutions wanted to do their own installations. We always had someone from the office there who may have modified their original concept for the benefit of the show. I think people have difficulty comprehending that we started our program in the mid '50s, almost ten years after the war. Europe was still recovering from an appalling agony of all things--physical destruction of incredible proportions, and certain reparation problems and costs that no government could possibly provide in the quantity needed. Nevertheless, a great deal of rebuilding, cleaning out and so forth was accomplished. The museums were not a top priority for getting funds. But the fact that that much time had transpired, and, for example, the paint on the skylights--the blackout lights--at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris was not removed for at least seven or eight years. When the building was washed and painted, we shared the costs of washing the whole interior. And then, the size of the big 50 Ans... show was so immense and varied in the nature of its contents--everything from painting and sculpture, large sculpture and small sculpture, but big, huge panel shows of architecture and things of this sort--in some cities took as many as three museums to accommodate.... In Belgrade, for example...the city had in the middle of its park a large sort of exhibition area that was used for all sorts of things, and it was given to us along with two other museums; as

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2 Someone from MoMA would always go with the show to assist with the installation, even in cases where the local institution was handling it.

a matter of fact, there were four, including a small little gallery--in which we installed that show, because it was so huge. Because it was so huge, one whole museum was gutted; it had been built and was devoted to facsimiles of full-scale copies of the mosaics and frescoes in the early churches in Yugoslavia, for example, and that was cleaned out for the architectural show. The Yugoslavs themselves, in that case, voiced some objection--not to us, but to their government, for removing its contents to make place for one of these shows. But this big central building in the center of the city in a park was built, both inside and out, more elaborately in the inside, of the local marble, which is yellow with black streaks....

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2

PM: There was a great deal of the new American painting represented--not the exhibition itself, but things in the collection; the show that was traveling was not only the collection of the Museum but included some loans from the trustees of the Museum, so the recent material was quite extensive. These huge paintings had to be accommodated against a simple as possible background. We simply could not, in the first place, envision their being hung against these marble walls. And then I needed a lot more wall space to hang the large paintings, and the huge court in the middle of this thing I made into an arrangement of sort of Miesian angles that would accommodate some of the large paintings and arranged them in as pleasing a shape as possible. But we also covered, and it was quite a problem, the interior walls with unbleached muslin, which I had native seamstresses and tailors come in and make by the thousands of yards, to hang this entire huge room. Then the panels were set up within the center of it for the big paintings and the lesser ones were hung on the curtained walls rather than the marbled walls themselves. That was really quite an amusing and exciting project. In the first place, the minister of culture turned out to be a great authority on Surrealism, of all things, and had studied in Paris and written a book on Surrealism, too. On my arrival, a meeting had been set up with this man, which was very frustrating, because when I arrived with this whole trainload--it was

the Orient Express, and we had seven or eight cars of art; we had, because of the insurance company, to ship that show into an Iron Curtain country "grand vitesse", which means on a passenger train, and of the first-class trains going through Yugoslavia, the main one was the Orient Express. So we had to use the Orient Express, and you may remember that in those days the cars were rather short and the loading doors were in the center of these short cars. The long paintings that we had we could not get in diagonally into the cars. So I let up a scream to the brilliant Swiss shipping company that we used, and they, of course, solved it, by the foresight they had shown. When the war was over, they brought, out of the German-confiscated equipment, trains of cars that had been used for loading troops and tanks and things of that sort onto their first-class passenger line--as camouflage, you see. Those cars were made to load at the rear, and they had ramps all built in, so that we were able to bring these long boxes we had. We had to lease these cars and bring them in and take them out again. We arrived an hour ahead of time that morning in Belgrade. Francis Mason was the cultural officer in those days. Francis was an hour late coming--he wasn't late coming, he just was coming on schedule with the train. A very nice American woman who was Czech in origin fortunately came a half-hour before Francis did, so that I was finally, assisted by someone that could speak the language. And here we were with this crack train, which kept its schedule regardless, with all of our exhibition on the back of it, and we couldn't find a person who could authorize the uncoupling of the cars from the train. I was about ready to have apoplexy at this point. Well, it just happened in time to get them off and sidetracked before the train pulled out for its next stop, Istanbul! Then I was greeted by Francis, and the young woman said, "I have bad news for you. Your appointment with the minister at ten o'clock this morning has been canceled indefinitely." This is great, with the exhibition coming up in the week, and we hadn't even confronted any of these problems physically that had to be confronted in addition to hanging the show. I said, "Well, what has happened?" They said that The New York Times yesterday had published a very critical editorial about Tito's speech in Moscow, and for the time being, all exhibitions and contact with the government are canceled. I said that this was a private arrangement, really; we were not doing it through the government. Francis Mason was helping us, but unofficially. So I went

to the hotel and I had some names, the name of the former U.N. representative of the Italian government at the U.N. here was a friend; I'd known him and his family, who were immensely attractive, and had been in New York for several years. He was a brilliant diplomat. It was at that moment when the settlement of the town on the border between Yugoslavia and Italy, Trieste, was up at its hottest state of discussion, and the Italian government had just days before moved the U.N. representative, their most sensitive diplomat, to be the new ambassador in Yugoslavia. I had their telephone number and I called them from my hotel that morning and told them what had happened. She said, "Oh great. I'm entertaining the minister this evening. You must come, but come early, because I want to plan this a little bit." Sure enough, I arrived early and she took me right into the living room and she put me on a sofa right opposite the front door, and when the minister arrived a little bit later she said, "Mr. McCray is here from The Museum of Modern Art." He said, "Ah, I would love to see him." He didn't say a thing about his appointment to anybody until he walked across the room and couldn't have been more cordial and said, "I'm so looking forward to seeing you at ten o'clock in the morning," which was the next morning, you see. Never a word was said about breaking his date or anything. From then on, he couldn't have been more cooperative. The tensions of that show were incredible.... At this time all kinds of materials were being rationed, and we were buying thousands of yards of this stuff. So we got the minister and our ambassador and I said, "I will call New York and see if I can acquire this immediately and have it sent, if the government will send it by one of the army planes that come every day to this area." That's what happened. Meanwhile, the Yugoslavian minister handed over their own stock, and then we, fortunately within two days, were able to replace the loan they had made. It was a happy moment, I can tell you. And we got all these people in who made dresses or made suits for diplomats around town; diplomats from other governments even got working for us. The next problem was the workmen had to go on leave in the afternoon at three o'clock. Well, we were just revving up, at that point, for this huge exhibition that had to be hung and curtains and everything else made. I said, "Isn't there any way we can persuade you?" and they said, "No, our food is rationed, and it's rationed by the day, so we have to be there in order to get it as soon as it's

released, and we have to leave then." I then again turned to the diplomats, ours primarily, and asked them if we would buy the food from the post exchange, so that we would not be affecting any rationing problem for the workmen, even saving their rationing allowances, and get the food done by some of the cooks that were able to cook it between their normal meals at each of their diplomats' residences. That worked out, and of course the workmen we could hardly get rid of at night. They were perfectly delighted.... I can go on like this, but you don't want this kind of thing.

SZ: Yes, I do! As a matter of fact, that's exactly what I want.

PM: We encountered somewhat the same situation at the Tate Gallery in London with the same show, as a matter of fact. The Tate gave us the whole of the right side of the main floor to install the show. The Tate had been damaged during the war, and the damage had not been repaired any more than temporarily. They were getting ready to rebuild the damage; a hole had been blown in the wall. The first galleries that you came into, in those days, in the Tate, on which were hung the really few but very fine twentieth-century European paintings--you see, the Tate is British painting, primarily--had very curious walls; they were studded, and then the burlap was heavily painted in a very thick chartreuse paint. Over that, there were great big stencil designs done in bright, lightish blue--sort of brocade figures. That in itself had been badly shaken by the hit the building had had, so the stretch had become limp, sort of, and the cloth was rippled and still had the plaster dust on it that had been created by the explosion. Fortunately, I had been working in Paris before and we were using muslin in Paris to do some quite big exhibitions--I took a leave of absence from the Museum for a year to do something for the Marshall Plan. We were doing a presentation to the Western European countries of the advantages of joining the Marshall Plan. This guy was from London and he was the best installation man that I ever found in Europe, of just the fundamental things, covering walls and so on. In that case, we did the same trick again, except we had the muslin stretched and stapled to the wall. So we transformed all of those galleries in the Tate into white galleries and were able to go ahead and hang our show. As a matter of fact, the English liked the plain so well that they asked us to leave it up when we left, and it

was up for about three years before they finally got around to redoing the whole thing. There was many an adventure. But the installation man moved in with the most elaborate modern equipment, so it didn't take any time to staple this whole sequence of galleries. They even let us cover up some of the memorial installations here and there, very elaborate paintings and mantelpieces and everything else; we boxed them in and painted them white and had more hanging space. But there was one thing after another.

SZ: You mean with that show?

PM: Well, it was a particularly difficult one and the accommodation of it was rather a problem. We also put up a show in which we put the most contemporary part of the show, in Vienna, in the famous building in Vienna where the first avant-garde splash was made. They loved the idea of putting our avant-garde in the building that had served them when they first showed the early Cubist stuff and that sort of thing, in Vienna, the various manifestations in the countries of Europe that they had shown prior to our arrival. The Yugoslavs, as a matter of fact, showed remarkable acceptance to the nature of the exhibition.

SZ: You mean the people who came to see it.

PM: The people who came to see it, including Tito. He smiled, and he was always very polite. I walked through the show with him, or most of it, and with one of the Metropolitan Opera's great singers.

SZ: Did he speak English, or did you have a translator?

PM: The accompanying lady served as a translator, but he spoke some English. But he was extremely cordial about the whole idea, and I was surprised, particularly when.... You see, all of our trouble sprang out of an event that had occurred in Washington and then in--I'm not sure whether it was Czechoslovakia--an exhibition was organized by our government, avant-garde art of sorts, though moderate, and sent to

Europe under government auspices. [Note: it was Prague.] A committee of Congressmen traveling in Europe visited the exhibition and immediately insisted that the exhibition be recalled to the States, and Congress voted on it. So that exhibition was lifted out, canceling all its extra presentations, and just absolutely killed what the government was really trying to do. It also, in a sense, reflected on what we were doing; the government was withdrawing just this kind of thing, this exposure, in Europe, in these countries. I don't know what they thought it would do..., but with that having been done, the government absolutely clamped down on every kind of contemporary art support for several years. Bit by bit, it loosened up a little bit, but not much. It was the persistence of the McCarthy thing, you see, which was a nasty period. Some of the public embassy officials in recent years have told me that during that period when we were operating these various exhibitions here and there Washington issued a warning against cooperating in any way with the Museum of Modern Art's activities. We had some demonstration of that in Venice, but I was not aware of it; they were much quieter about it.

SZ: You said you had had a demonstration of that in Venice?

PM: We had a demonstration of it by the government refusing to assist us in Venice with the Biennale. It was due, I think, largely to Mrs. Luce. I talked to her a good deal before this in the first place because she was opposed to this exhibition that we were bringing and said that she would never attend the official opening of the exhibition because of the fact that it contained two artists she identified as a communist and a foreigner. At that time, a new consulate building opened in Venice, and I was hoping that we would be able to get...we had a lot of translation and that sort of thing to do and the embassy officials knew the kinds of things that we would be asking to have done. The Italians themselves, the employees, I was hiring them and paying them special for after hours work, but the embassy then put its foot down and would not allow us to use them, which was a very great handicap. When we ran out of many of mimeograph stencils, it took several days to persuade the consulate to provide a few of these for immediate use. We were issuing slightly different press releases in three different languages for the immense press that was coming to the opening. To get

all that out, particularly without the know-how of the Italians working in an American organization in Venice, it was very difficult. Meanwhile, we paid the consulate for the stencils. In order to meet our deadline, we were compelled to purchase the stencils from the U.S. Consulate.

SZ: That was another thing I wanted to ask you. The relationship between the Council and the Program, how you saw the Council, how you worked with them, used them, and from the other side as well, how you could characterize that.

PM: In the beginning, that relationship was perfectly clear, because Nelson Rockefeller and René very explicitly set it down; but the Council itself, I don't think, has ever quite understood the difference. I was paid from the payroll of that special fund that was given to and accredited to my department only in the Museum. The Council, when it began, had three people, then it had five, then seven; it grew very slowly, so that whatever money they gave was given to maintain their own office, of Elizabeth Smith and one or two secretaries. There was no contribution whatsoever made to the Program. Then gradually, these contributions expanded into some portion of the Program; the Art in Embassies loans, for example, the Council did finance, though we carried out the work for it--the Program staff handled it. But keeping them separate was always a bit of a problem, and now, with the Council having contributed considerably more than it was contributing in the beginning.... Nelson Rockefeller, when he came back after the war to New York and left to be the chairman of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, made the grant to the Program. After we had gone on for ten years, Nelson and his family and others put up a separate fund, made a contribution to the endowment, in the name of the International Council for Program activities. That was a stimulus for the Council to organize in some of the cities where they had very strong membership to raise special funds to contribute to the endowment, to match what Nelson had given from the Brothers Fund in the name of the Council. Once, the Council voted to give the furnishings for one of the rooms of the various Council chambers in the UNESCO building in Paris. Philip Johnson was commissioned to do the decor, more or less, in one of those large Council chambers, and the Council raised the entire amount of money to pay for

it--not a great deal of money. Helen Russell, who was a member of the Crocker family from San Francisco and who was also the American representative of the UNESCO council, gave a good deal of it herself and got a good deal out of her colleagues in San Francisco.

SZ: So when they began to take their trips, did you go with them?

PM: In the beginning, yes, I used to go always. After I retired, in several instances they invited me to be their guest; the last one of those was three years ago in London, England, which I was grateful for. I found out, however, later--none of these things were discussed with you--that in most instances, the instances in which I was invited were contributed by individual Council members. The Council members were lending individual support to various exhibits and activities. Monroe Wheeler was by then beginning to participate in the formulation of several exhibits and did some very nice shows for them.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **PORTER MCCRAY (PM)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: **JUNE 21, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1

PM: I'd like you to look through this folder sometime when you have time.

SZ: Maybe I could take it with me today.

PM: It's the only copy that I know I can put my hands on; I have had some of it, but not all of it, copied.

SZ: The International Program included numerous categories?

PM: We [the International Program] initiated the placement of art loans, contemporary art mostly, to some ambassadors' residences. The ambassadors first came to us and asked that we lend them selections of works of art which they could use as a sort of background. These works of art, served as points of discussion, for instance, at dinners and receptions in the embassy. These were originally borrowed from the Museum. As the director of Collections, Alfred was extremely cooperative in that he advised the ambassadors in choosing appropriate pieces. Our ambassador in Norway was the first one, and then George Kennan, when he was in Yugoslavia; and then it grew and grew and grew to the extent that we couldn't possibly supply.... Alfred couldn't let that much of the collection go out, because it was a year or longer, the loan. The extent of things, the Art in Embassies thing particularly, covered every continent; I even remember delivering, myself, a collection of contemporary prints, rather good ones, in Ethiopia, in the embassy there. But it was quite interesting how

fascinated young people were who were artists or artistically inclined. In a few instances, in some of the Iron Curtain countries in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, the selection was, from our point of view, a perfectly fair one, but it was a cross-section of, say, Ben Shahn, which was figurative, to the more contemporary. The tendency, always, in the larger exhibitions...was to make them quite contemporary, the contents of the exhibitions; on the other hand, as you will see from the list of exhibitions, over the period it [the International Program] developed, they became exhibitions of American Indian art, they became folk art, to some extent.... We were not a folk art institution, but we began getting requests for all sorts of things.

SZ: What would happen if you got a request for something like a folk art exhibition?

PM: Well, we would refer them, to begin with, to exhibitions of folk art. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure but I think the Whitney, when it finally did its Shaker exhibition, when Tom Armstrong was there, we had discussed the possibility of sending a show of Shaker art, which was very much admired abroad. For example, I took a couple of the Japanese cabinet people up to Hancock Village in Massachusetts, and they were just absolutely overwhelmed by this art, which they felt quite close to--the severity of it and the discipline and all that. Every now and then, even to this day, some Japanese will appear and say, "Mr. So-and-So told me that you had taken him to Hancock; would you go with us sometime? I'm trying to acquaint some of the people, first, my family, and some of the people in my office, with this particular thing." So it led to all sorts of informal diversions here and there. But these were the things that I suppose became characteristic of a lot of the work that I myself was responding to personally, because we couldn't carry on the scale of exhibitions that the requests would have required. But you'll see from the titles of many of the things that did go under our auspices, or if we could not directly handle them, we frequently referred them to the director of a museum that was characterized by being rich in a particular field, and it worked out too, enriching contacts between the museums of the two countries that were involved, and familiarizing foreign governments with many aspects of American culture that they had never thought of that existed here, like folk

art, things like that. In the beginning, they thought that very little of any importance would come from this highly mechanized society that we lived in. It was quite informative, in the long run, how the interest spread in all sorts of aspects of American culture.

SZ: And it did do that.

PM: Yes, it did do that, and they've been curious more and more. Also, we did respond to exhibitions occasionally. Barbara London went out with a very early exhibition of video to Japan when it was still a young art in the States, although video was not, especially at the Museum at that point.... Barbara was hoping, a number of us were hoping, that video could become a departmental activity in the Museum, as it has become now, but with an affiliation with film. But I think that once you read the range of what was done that you will realize that we were not only sending American art always, but in a few instances, and they did pay off really wonderfully, I think--we did quite important shows of the work of France, for example, in nineteenth-century painting. We borrowed what we could from the collection and we borrowed from many of the trustees, who had magnificent things, and then lenders from all over the country got interested in that big show that we organized for the Orangerie in Paris. That was done through the Louvre and the marvelous director of the Louvre and the Musée de France, Georges Salles, who was one of the great museum people in Europe during that period. We also did an exhibition of four centuries of French drawings from American collections, De Clouet à Matisse, and we conducted that selection process with a committee of the leading drawing curators from the major institutions, and individuals with significant drawing collections. The Metropolitan Museum happily agreed to show the exhibition afterward, and to be the receiving institution for this rare material. Some of the lenders felt that we were not experienced sufficiently to handle fragile eighteenth-century materials, and other periods of time, so the Metropolitan cooperated wonderfully; they even packed it. Then the Italians, when they saw the French thing, wanted contemporary things, particularly Futurist things. There was a great deal of Italian work in private collections, and Nelson Rockefeller had just bought considerably, particularly in the

Futurist area, as gifts to the Museum and for his own collection. Alfred assisted with that selection and it was sent to the Palazzo Reale, Milano. From time to time there were less intensive exchanges of exhibition materials done through the painting departmental section at the Museum itself, in the painting and sculpture program.

SZ: You would just ask them to put something together and they would do that?

PM: No, they did those as activities of the Museum.

SZ: And they would have been shown at the Museum and you would just take them....

PM: We did not handle that material, but it stimulated the spreading of the word that the collections were rich in many foreign representations but not comprehensive enough for the Museum to do a whole exhibition of, but, on the other hand, to which trustees and friends and others were willing to supplement foreign exhibitions of the Museum itself. Andrew Ritchie--he was an expert to begin with before he came to the Museum, in British art--did the late-nineteenth-century and the twentieth-century activity, right up to the current movements in England. That was actually an entirely separate operation; that was done through the New York Public Audiences by the curator of the Department of Sculpture. Sometimes Alfred would participate, sometimes the director of the department would do it, but we had no control over that, no participation in it. Then we did things, for example, totally unrelated to painting activities. We were asked, as the International Council in that case, to finance the furnishing and completion of the interior of one of the council chambers in UNESCO in Paris. We commissioned Philip Johnson to do that.... Mrs. Russell of San Francisco, who was Helen Crocker of the famous Crocker family, had been the representative on the UNESCO representation from the United States government here; she was the American private citizen who was particularly interested in that and took responsibility largely for raising the funds that were necessary to accomplish it. That was quite an irregular operation in a way, and it was solved that way because they couldn't get the American Government--we were the last major country of the West to reply to this request. The French and several other European

governments had replied with very handsome contributions and their most famous artists, as a matter of fact.

SZ: Why was that?

PM: Well, it was because most of the European countries, especially, and Japan and several of those countries as a matter of course would allocate funds out of their government--large quantities, too, sometimes, to compensate for contributing "major" works of art.

SZ: And we just didn't have...

PM: The big Picasso mural in the UNESCO village in Paris today was supplied by the French government. The same is true of the Italian representatives...; some of the chambers were furnished primarily with works of art. Ours, alas, was not; it was just making it ready for large meetings of that particular council. I am not sure, but I think the UNESCO project itself actually accommodated the cost of doing the garden which Isamu Noguchi, as an American artist was commissioned to do, but I think that was a part of UNESCO's own responsibility. Well, there were things of this sort that were responded to when we had the cash to accommodate it.

SZ: ...I would assume that a lot of this activity was based on your relationships abroad, is that right?

PM: Yes, I was the only person who in many instances had to go the whole path to go through the government, to go through the ministry of culture or fine arts, whatever it was called. Our government, you see, absolutely forbade the embassies to participate during a period of time in any negotiations with foreign governments for cultural exchange. It was extraordinary. From time to time messages were sent out from the State Department in Washington that I was not to be assisted. For example, when we acquired the U.S. Pavilion in Venice--the Biennale was revived after the war, and the Biennale building until that time had been owned by the Grand

Central Art Galleries in New York--we bought it, very inexpensively, because the building was up for grabs. A number of the Eastern European countries were on a very choice axis position on the grounds there. When it was near being auctioned, we picked it up for twenty thousand dollars and then spent quite a bit of our own money, the Program's money, to restore the building--the glass, roofs and all that were in very bad condition.... When we opened the first exhibition in the space--have I talked to you about this earlier?

SZ: You talked about the Biennale, but....

PM: Well, the Biennale, the first one that we had responsibility for, when we got to almost the opening date, something as simple as mimeograph stencils that would work in the equipment that was there, ran short in all the shops in Venice , and I went to our consul general's office in Venice and they said they would have to charge us for these because they had been forbidden to supply The Museum of Modern Art either with personnel or material assistance.

SZ: Right, I remember you told me that.

PM: I must say the cultural officer in Rome was very much in favor of backing us one hundred percent, but he was forbidden to do it.

SZ: But, in general, this reluctance on the part of the government to support this kind of cultural exchange, that came from what--the economic situation, the Cold War?

PM: It came largely from the McCarthy thing. It was a purely anti-Communist, political, vicious.... You're too young, probably, to have been exposed to all that. I must say, the more they tried to protest, I think the more cooperative the foreign governments were, just on my request, on a letter with the chairman's--Bill Burden's--signature. And we had, really, an extraordinary relationship, I feel, with all the governments that we were dealing with. We dealt with the directors of the major museums. The fact that I had, by then, become associated with some of the international organizations

like ICOM, the International Council of Museums, and all of that, helped, because I was participating with them at International Council meetings and whatnot in Europe all the time, though we still had no official representation. It was quite an extraordinary situation we were trying to operate in, and we were lucky in many ways that it worked out as effectively as it did.

SZ: How often in the course of a year were you abroad, would you say?

PM: It would vary; sometimes very frequently. We always had a considerable amount of negotiating, which may have necessitated two or three trips, and then depending, for example, on the exhibitions, some required a member of the museum to accompany it due to their immense value, for insurance purposes. The exhibition of French art, for example, was accompanied by me on the boat it was traveling on....

SZ: Did most exhibitions travel by sea at that point?

PM: Well, the very large ones did. Most of them did. As a matter of fact, the planes weren't big enough to take some of the gradually enlarging contemporary work. The big show in Yugoslavia, for example, occupied three whole museums. It was the whole collection of The Museum of Modern Art, practically, of every department, painting and sculpture, architecture, there were collections of photography and films, of drawings, prints--everything. That took an awful lot of space. Two museums had to be stripped of their contents. And we had to do a great deal of maneuvering to get the whole interior of yellow and black streaked marble--of this immense building hung in plain muslin in order to get a plain background for the abstract works. Oh, the tales that could be told about the circumstances in each of those places. Frank O'Hara, for example, went occasionally with me. In the beginning, I took with me, generally, one person from the office--it may have been Waldo [Rasmussen], it may have been Frank O'Hara, Kynaston [McShine] at one point, I believe, went with me--to help me hang the shows. Once or twice, Frank hung his own show. It was true, not only in exhibitions in museums in Europe, but it was also true in big shows like the Bienal de Sao Paulo. In the case of Documenta, they maintained control of

installations in areas allotted to you, and that worked out. The Tate in London was another problem, because some of the buildings had been damaged during the war, and even though it was as much as nine years after the war, the buildings had not been any more than made waterproof, and we were trying to do the best we could with the background we were using. It led, in a number of instances--the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, for example--to our washing the walls and ceiling of the two floors we were installing on, for presentation's sake. But there were many challenges in normal circumstances. When we went into new spaces in Brazil, the buildings built by Niemeyer just for this purpose, there were huge exhibition areas, and lighting problems had to be solved. There were endless things; I'm sorry they were not all put down at the time, but you were working from dawn to midnight, most every night.

SZ: The International Program was started with the five-year grant thing with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, was it?

PM: No.... The Department of Circulating Exhibitions was given $500,000 with a promise in the second half of a ten-year period for replenishment of that grant. So in the ten years we had $1 million to spend. That was expendable with the approval, in the beginning, of the Museum. At that time, a committee was formed with some of the department heads. But it turned out, actually, that members of the committee that approved things like this--I submitted proposed exhibitions to what was called the Coordinating Committee and got their approval, and then it was submitted as the meetings of the International Council became significant--in the beginning, there were not that many people; we could all get into a room this size, to discuss things. They would also maintain entirely separate administrative functions. They had one person, Elizabeth Smith, Carleton Sprague Smith's wife, who became the director of that office, and she had one assistant, who was primarily a secretary. Their money was in a separate account and they spent it and authorized it without consulting us, but it was largely dispensed for office maintenance.

It was some time, actually, before the Council contributed to the cost of the

exhibitions. Then it was largely through the generosity of individual members, whose foundations or corporations could make grants directly to the Program, which was entirely supported by the Museum. It was a separate operation from the Council. As the Council grew, the intention of the Museum was to eventually resort to the Council to supplement fiscal support of the Program. The Council was given more and more opportunity at the annual meeting to express its approval, which, I have to say, we were seeking approval in order to ask them for some support. But that support was never of any consequence--I shouldn't say consequence, but we could not rely upon the quantity of it to accommodate the cost of those exhibitions.... Nearing the end of the ten-year period, the Council, as the time of the expiration of the grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund approached, they had indicated more or less that they could not renew the grant beyond that point and that they hoped that the Council could take over. Well, when the time arrived, which was about the time I was leaving, Nelson, chairman of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund at that point, through private negotiations with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, arranged for them to make contributions. It also coincided with the Museum's drive for an endowment, and an allocation was designated for the International Program in that endowment, and the International Council was asked to make a considerable contribution to the endowment. But the Rockefeller Brothers Fund also made another grant to continue the operation we already had going. As time went on, the Council, through the energies and intelligence of a few of the members who composed a committee to raise Council contributions, did very well in supporting the endowment. This encouraged the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to make an additional contribution to the endowment for this purpose, to supplement the Council's contributions. I must say, Nelson conducted these negotiations immensely skillfully and generously.

SZ: This came out of a real commitment of his, didn't it?

PM: Yes. He had always believed very strongly in the value of cultural interchange as one of the most important channels for winning friends and respect for another nation. I worked for that first part of it, where he was working for the government in a war agency where he was able to make a major push in this agency to conduct

cultural exchange with music, or dance, or exhibitions with our neighbors to the south.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 2

SZ: Do you think that that was something that Alfred Barr felt as strongly about?

PM: No. In singular cases.... The first major exhibition that went to Europe was organized by Alfred--have you seen the catalogue of that?--some years before the International Program was dreamt of. It was the first large exhibition of contemporary American art that was being shown in France, and the French did not particularly warm up to it. Even as late as we came along and started sending contemporary American art, Alfred felt very strongly that more time and effort and so forth should be devoted to building up the background of American art. I don't know where I got these instincts, but I had a certain amount of instinct that...we were seeking visible response; we had to count on publicity that we had no control over at all, or any familiarity with, and I was more inclined to focus the earlier things that we took fairly largely and not just in chronological sequence, and I wanted to create, on one or two occasions, almost a scandale of sending pretty avant-garde stuff, to arouse the French to at least thinking about it and having to think intelligently to have it published. They restrained themselves to some extent. For example, one of the leading papers in France, in reviewing the first show titled of Fourteen Americans, or something like that, that the Coordinating Committee almost insisted upon having--Andrew Ritchie was very adamant about that.... [Note: the show was actually called Twelve Americans.] It ranged from Shahn...to Pollock, I guess, was the last person, and David Smith and a few people like that, but it also had the marvelous realist that we had...who gave most of his collection at the end to the Whitney.

SZ: Edward Hopper.

PM: Yes, Hopper. At any rate, they called Hopper a "calendar" artist, and Shahn was a...what did they call him exactly? I'll check it out for you, because I have given it in another reference. But they were the two that they singled out to really put down. Very few of them said much in the review, but in the later reviews of the more avant-garde things that we sent, they were sort of prepared by then to begin to look a little bit more closely and to interpret in terms of American culture rather than European culture or to seek out the impact of European art on American art. Fascinating time, though, because the time that had lapsed between wars--I'm sure it was difficult to breach that gap too in a different way--but with the Europeans not having been exposed to American art at any of its levels, except in Paris in that one exhibition that Alfred had done, it was very difficult for them, less so in many other countries than France always, to adjust to the newness of what had been going on during the war, when European painters were not very active in painting and they had not been exposed to what was happening in other countries outside of the war area. It was understandable that there was a certain gap of unfamiliarity and a certain amount of uneasiness at not being able to comprehend what was going on. I think that a few particularly outstanding people worked very hard at this and, I'm glad to say, have continued to in many instances, in France and in other countries. For example, the director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, [Jean] Cassou, who was quite a brilliant scholar in contemporary art in Europe, was a member of the Communist Party, so he was very much in question with some of our people in the states, with the whole political orientation and had nothing to do with the Program. What we were considered by Washington is really rather on the verge of, in some cases, as being almost tainted with Communism in presenting some of the things that were included in those shows. For example, the Ben Shahn thing, repeatedly, because of the Sacco-Vanzetti kind of thing, was condemned.

SZ: Porter, how much autonomy did you have at the Museum in terms of exhibition content and the whole organization and what you were putting together to take out somewhere. Did you have to go through committees?

PM: No, we were rather fortunate. I say "no" quite flatly; of course there were discussions

held, informal ones.

SZ: Informal, though.

PM: Yes. In the Coordinating Committee we had most of the people who were calling the shots for the Museum anyhow--René and Alfred and Monroe. Monroe, as a matter of fact, participated less in exhibition formulation at that time. He was the director of publications and handled incoming exhibitions. He was the manager of exhibitions that were prepared by other curators on the staff of the Museum. Alfred and Dorothy Miller, of course, were the pacemakers, and the person that supplemented Alfred when he was brought in, such as [William] Rubin..., fed ideas into programs considerably in advance, usually. They were all reviewed, though. Then the trustees were the ones that really passed on every exhibition that was done.

SZ: Yours also?

PM: Ours, fortunately--fortunately, maybe unfortunately, too--was passed after.... We came into this direct contact with the Council, you see, so quickly after we started, that they would recommend as we would pass on their recommendation to approve in bulk, more or less, the program that had been drawn up, sometimes for years. I have to admit that I had a great deal of leeway in lesser things, decisions that affected the operation--almost had to, because they had to go through not only the intricacies of the Museum's procedures, but then we had to go through, in most instances, official governmental things with the governments we were dealing with abroad. It was a very difficult process, and I had to do that in most all instances. I don't want to diminish the fact that René, being the director... there were appropriate times that we would get René to make a formal entre that was required just for protocol. On the other hand, I knew, at working level, many of the museums that we were dealing with, because René, for example, was the first American representative on the...I forget exactly now what the name of that committee is in ICOM; it was one of the divisions of ICOM that brings together contemporary museums and reviews and discusses interchanges at this level. In many instances, at the annual meeting

of that committee René asked me, because I was in and out of Europe so much, to represent him, so that a little of that authority brushed off at that point, so that I never had any real problem in dealing with representatives of foreign institutions, up to the actual negotiations.

SZ: What about within the Museum, in terms of putting your hands on works from various departments that you wanted to include? Would you work together with the department heads?

PM: Certainly. Every exhibition that we sent abroad...was reviewed with that department in the Museum. It was drawn up and presented, however, and reviewed at preliminary stages, and then as it developed the person curating the show was dealing with the department. We were sometimes, I think, misrepresented by some of those departments, saying that we had gone ahead without their participation.

SZ: Do you have any questions? Do you want to stop for today?

PM: We might in a minute. Would you like something cool or something warm to drink?

SZ: No. I'll turn it off for now.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **PORTER MCCRAY (PM)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: **SEPTEMBER 22, 1993**

BEGIN TAPE 5, SIDE 1

SZ: Porter, we were just talking about the origins of the International Program.

PM: I don't know if I went through this with you before, but I was hired by the Museum by René and by Nelson, to some extent because I had worked with Nelson before. I never went to the Museum. He had been during the war the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, and he had a program with three main divisions, one of which was cultural, the second one was political and the other was economic. Since Nelson had already identified himself and was quite committed to realizing his intention to do something about it, to get Government money eventually, he was perfectly willing to contribute a good deal of his own money and his family foundations and so forth to assist in this effort. But the first gesture that he made, which was typical of Nelson and a very generous one, he and René put down on paper sort of an outline of what they wanted to accomplish--not in detail but just in principle--and talked with me a few times. Then Nelson and René came into the office one day without my expecting them and said, "See?" and they had a check for an ancillary amount of money made out to the budget of my particular program, which was the Department of Circulating Exhibitions. Elodie Courter had been the head of it and she had married and they were moving to the country. So I revived Circulating Exhibitions immediately; it had not been carried on for a while, but I had gotten my feet pretty well on the ground in that whole operation in this country. I had also, before I came to the Museum, been involved in a good many things in Europe, in international organizations, in ICOM...and several of the committees...I could not

be a member of ICOM itself because it was only directors of museums. I did meet with them. They were always, fortunately, a contact that we could use very comfortably because we could get a direct answer sometimes about exhibitions we were proposing and the director could give the word more or less. As soon as Nelson put this generous amount of money into the account--it was given specifically to the C/E [Circulating Exhibitions], through the Museum, obviously, but it was exclusively for the International Program. That's why we always put ICE before our charge numbers when we submitted expenses to the Treasurer's office, in order to identify the International Program. In the beginning, before we took on the international aspect of the program, we used "C/E" for Circulating Exhibitions for all charges, which were out of the Museum's regular annual budget. This, then allowed us to make this simple modification....[telephone interruption]

SZ: You were telling me about how you would charge out on the budget so it was clear what was....

PM: Yes. And after that, to keep very particularly separate even from the Circulating Exhibition charges we added an "I" for international circulating exhibitions. I bring this up because it has now cropped up in a very incorrect way. Someone has just completed a vast list--have you seen that list of circulating exhibitions?--all indicated as ICE, those that were done in-program with Rockefeller money and those that were done not by us at all. Arthur Drexler was a great one for getting--I don't suppose you want to publish that--but Arthur was a very independent-minded person and generated all kinds of exhibitions on design and architecture and so forth which were not part of our program; they were just an intimate exchange between him and a friend that he had met in Europe at meetings and things--perfectly logical, I think, most of them. But they've taken our numbering system and used it to identify all of his things and occasional ones that were done by curators in other subjects in the Museum's whole operation. But it would eventually become very confusing, this document, unless something is done about it. I've never been consulted about it.

SZ: You just received a copy of it?

PM: I just received a copy of it, and I am afraid that they have used it, interpreting it...so I called Waldo and asked him if they had consulted him. I said, "Do they realize what ICE is?" Because the first two letters, remember, [represent] International Council, and I hope that they don't think everything labeled "ICE" is necessarily International Program. That I'm going to take up with whomever has made that list and see if it can't be somehow adjusted so that it will be an accurate indicator of what is and isn't a charge and what isn't an exhibition.

SZ: I think that you had said to me that one of the things you felt was left unclear, not explored enough, was the whole issue of, for you, how exciting it was to be able to see, as you said, intellectual life reconstituted in Europe after the war. So I'll leave it to you to expound on that.

PM: Do you want me to just give you a sample or so?

SZ: Sure.

PM: I'm not even sure what year that was, but we can confirm that.

SZ: That's okay, we can find the dates.

PM: But it was quite a while after the war, but those countries, almost all of the ones--not all of them but most of them--that the governments had so intelligently, I'm sure with artists' help, not only museum artist people but poets and dramatists and everything else, the whole intellectual community of these countries, there had been some brilliant people who had survived, in some of the countries, the actual killing by the Nazis of some of the best people. There was no less opportunity to take advantage. Some of them were the leaders, not necessarily always; they were the troublemakers from the Nazi point of view, however, either because they didn't like what they were painting or what they were drawing or what they were writing, plays or anything else. But there was still a surprising survival group that could advise the government, and the government must have very intelligently used their advice and

discussed it with them from many angles, and it came out as a very sophisticated program, in general, not in every case. It was particularly interesting in view of the fact that several of them that went back to their country had escaped and been in the West somewhere or other during the hardest period of the war. In some instances, however, they had survived even within the country during the whole Nazi occupation and were still very bitter when you talked to them about what had happened, because so many of their closest friends were killed. It really wiped out a whole block of some of the most brilliant minds and artistic people in that part of Europe. As I said, through the international connection that I had just instinctively developed beforehand in Europe--I worked in Europe for awhile for the State Department, for a year, then I went on a one-year grant in which the State Department was largely the funder for the exploration of these various situations. As a matter of fact, that tour that I made--not only Eastern Europe, but Asia as well by then--was totally provided and done as a special project with State. I was able to move as an independent rather than as a government representative. I asked them if that would be possible, because it would be much easier to explore and to discuss quite freely what they were planning to do. Thee governments in Europe had immense curiosity when you mentioned the possibility of their receiving an exhibition of American art. They all were for it, and they would pitch in in the most incredible way. They didn't have a large amount of money, but they took chunks of that and joined the contribution that we were making, so that it was extraordinary, from my point of view, to see how much they were really with us and the objectives--their own objectives as well as our own. It was certainly a pleasure, if there were many complications in it, to be working within this atmosphere and what they had already done on their own. I know that this is not for this paper, necessarily, all this stuff, but just as background for how we got into it. Before we did very much, I made these trips to these places. I had to rethink a certain amount of things. I didn't realize the degree of cooperation that we would be likely to receive, and that was certainly a very encouraging aspect of getting going, both receiving and.... Alfred, you know, was very cautious. I suppose he was no longer official staff of the Museum; he was at one time, you know, dismissed, and Nelson was the one who returned him to the board. Nelson was really a terrific guy, if people really knew how fair-minded he was

about things, as least as far as art exchange; some of his political aspects sometimes were a little questionable, but that's beside the point right now. At any rate, these were just the factors I was confronted by when I sort of jumped in to this whole unknown. I had fortunately, when I was quite young, from that trip with my roommate's family--remember, back in the beginning?

SZ: When you went to Scotland?

PM: Yes, and after that trip we did travel some in Europe, and a few of these Eastern countries were ones that we had touched on briefly, just to look at the countries, primarily, and the cities. But it was useful to have some recollection of this wild new world that I was being reintroduced into, but in control of, more or less, myself. [Telephone interruption]

SZ: You just had mentioned Alfred.

PM: Yes, I was just mentioning that because Alfred was, you know, occasionally he would do an exhibition for us, and he had done the whole brilliant first exhibition that was done considerably before we or the International Council were ever thought of, quite early in his career as director of the Museum. That was that great show that went to Paris, which was practically a review of American painting [Three Centuries of American Art, 1938] . Alfred was a great educator, you know, along with everything else, and was concerned that we were sending exhibitions of...well, even The New American Painting show was one that we sent, and Alfred said, "You can't send things like this because you haven't sent a number of previous shows tracing the history of American painting." I said, "Alfred, we're going to treat these shows just as we would treat them directly with museums who are asking for exhibitions for contemporary American art. They know a lot of it, they have a lot of it. That's not the object of our program; the whole thing is a contemporary program." Every now and then we would go back and do a show with a certain period of time purposefully for some of the museums abroad. We collaborated, you remember, on two very big shows of French paintings, for French consumption and for European consumption.

Anyhow, getting back, again, to the money that came from Nelson to our department, once we had cash on that scale, it meant that we did not have to go to the Museum's budget each time. They were deposited to our credit, and I could simply authorize payments out of that. Nelson somehow put it into our credit that we could go directly without even...I don't know why. He said, "I want you to be independent, and I don't want anyone to block this program."

SZ: Do you think he had a fear that somebody would?

PM: I think there had been some indications. Alfred was objecting. But, on the other hand, meanwhile he was dismissed.

SZ: But he was there.

PM: He was in Washington, you remember, at the time--Nelson. Anyhow, with this much cash in hand I was able to go visit and see the foreign exhibitions, discuss really what they were after and also outline to them what our objectives were. We were ready to shoot, more or less, after I got back from that and several subsequent visits. I think they continue to operate in the same way to some extent to today; the contacts were made usually with the heads of the national galleries or whatever they were, if they had modern institutions, with the personnel of those institutions. I made a point of seeing, as a matter of fact it was one of the main points that I made when I approached the governments, their governments, to give me an opportunity to meet some of their best contemporary painters and architects and so on. They had heard of most of these people who were fairly young and had gone through the war and all of that. Ten years had gone since the war and it was quite remote in time by then, but our beginnings were in the contemporary and in the circulating exhibitions field, and they were fascinated by our tale and so was I by theirs, particularly the government action, you see. Fortunately, as I believe we've mentioned in earlier talks about the whole thing, the European countries had the great tradition of participating in cultural exchange, contributing and paying for and in many instances assembling exhibitions to send abroad to represent their best in art in the foreign

countries that were agreeing to exhibit it. They had the strong tradition, all the Europeans, even the British, who were behaving somewhat along our lines, eventually set up within my memory the British Council and the Arts Council of Great Britain to take both domestic incoming and outgoing, and they were quite well organized and it was a separate operation, even, in the department of fine arts in the overall arts programs of the country, abroad and at home. These individual organizations within government would concern themselves, both in financing and assembling the exhibition, even, in some instances. This was something we had never had in our government and they couldn't understand why we didn't have the equivalent of an organization that could respond to their requests and also to seek requests from them, confirming that they would take responsibility. Some of that meant considerable monetary responsibility, but all the government assistance that the whole structure of Britain could afford, which was considerable when the museums got into the act, was a really rather well set up structure through which we could work quite directly and personally almost sometimes. It infinitely made negotiations that much more official. From the very beginning you didn't have to get a lot of approvals here. I always submitted our things to the Coordinating Committee, which was an irregularity. We did not submit our exhibitions to the Museum's committee, you see, for clearance of exhibitions to be put in MoMA itself. That was where I was on that committee, where we did not get into Museum channels any more than they insisted that we do, which was perfectly simple and accommodating. Just occasionally, as I said, Alfred, he was very friendly, but he did say, "You have to look at this from the standpoint of just introducing American art to Europe," and I said, "Alfred, really, you must remember that the Europeans, particularly young ones, have been to this country in hordes since the war and they're quite familiar with what we're talking about or what they're asking for. They've seen enough to qualify what they are requesting." And he eventually just sort of quieted down and we were more or less free to proceed. I, Sharon, realized that we were going to be accused of a kind of separate operation, and I did everything within my power to keep people involved in the Museum well informed on what we were planning and to discuss the matter and to make suggestions or raise objections if they had any. So it was in the long run a very cooperative arrangement.

We had a problem of the Museum not having sufficient staff always to supply the full operation of organizing an exhibition for abroad, and in those cases, in many instances, we would hire somebody--I shouldn't say we would hire, because we consulted the department concerned beforehand about whom they would like to assemble the exhibition, since it was of their particular area in the Museum, and that really worked very comfortably, but it was really in a sense what Alfred...he wanted the Museum to have its say, which they did, and as a matter of fact I welcomed it, because I did not have the expertise. I knew a great deal about the situation in Europe and as far as that was concerned, because we were on our own.... We'd circulate, for example, sometimes, the big exhibitions that came here from abroad; we picked them up when they'd been in New York and took them on to other places--sometimes; sometimes they did it directly or their own people in Europe or wherever it might be who was sending the things did the negotiating directly with the other museums It was very free-wheeling. It all had to be done by the individuals involved and the countries involved. Unfortunately, we did not have a central...we were the nearest thing to the central agency, in a sense, that these people would come to, and they did, but then we couldn't transfer these responsibilities to the government. We had to pick up the tab and we had to pick up where additional personnel was necessary; we had to provide that. It got to be a very complex operation, but all in all I think it was respected and got on with the objective of, not only Nelson, but many people in the Museum did want the Museum participating more in the European scene and a great many of our people on the staff started going to Europe. I sent some of my people on the staff deliberately, because I wanted them to have first-hand information about what we were dealing with, and that's how the whole thing grew. As a matter of fact, the amounts of money, going back to the International Council, the Council was in the beginning, that's the area where I find a little disrupting. The Council immediately assumed, because they could correspond with people, anybody who just wrote them, for some kind of cooperation, and they frequently just answered to anybody who could probably consider it, brought it to me and see if we had money to do it, and in some cases they were very good ideas and we did pick them up, but we did give our own program items first priority. We had to have the money to spare. As a matter of fact,

then as the Council moved in, they called themselves the International Program, and I objected to this at a meeting of the Council and I said, "We must keep a separate...my office letterhead calls us the International Program and we cannot change it to the International Council at this point." The Council was not even literally any more than just another one of these more or less social things of which the Museum has many of, or was beginning to have many of, and they would just ask friends if they would give money for this, and some of them at first did give money directly to the person with whom they had generated the idea, but that technically got complex. So we finally, I thought, had got that designation straight, that the Program was the actual fact of the exhibitions, of reality itself. You see, the Museum was paying, had included in their budget, the cost of operating our office, and all this other stuff was extra money just for the exhibition and program itself...and it was important to keep that in everybody's consciousness, the definition of the two different things. But, the thing that I do want to say is that the International Council had a few, in most instances, people who were in New York or close to the Museum from other, earlier experiences, and without batting an eye they would--Drue Heinz was the first one, maybe--would tender through their family foundation an immense amount of money to us from time to time, grants to realize parts of an exhibition or support an exhibition that we were anxious to finance. More and more...and Helen Russell, who was Helen Crocker, originally, from San Francisco. She was a Crocker, which, I suppose, is the richest family in San Francisco. She was very international-minded. She was the American representative on ICOM and she would give, herself, half a million dollars or more without batting an eye. She behaved in a sense in sort of the same manner as Nelson did; not nearly as much, but San Francisco is not as big a city as ours, or the institution it represents. At any rate....

SZ: That certainly clarifies a lot of it, I think.

PM: I can't just offhand recall all the ones who did give money. Some of them, even New Yorkers who had never been associated with the Museum were Council members and they gave through their own foundations very generously to supplement it, and it went always into our budget so that we had access to all of it.

SZ: Into your program and exhibition budget.

PM: Yes. It was quirky, really, I know that, but we just played it by ear as we went along, and we never got in any squabbles. It consolidated a good deal of the individual negotiating itself. The departments were getting a little competitive about who would get the money for this or that from members, Council members, or Trustees for that matter, and I think it was probably good for the Museum in a sense that we did not take the identification away from the departments; for that matter, full credit was given for the authorship of the show and all of that, to where it came from. But a lot of our performance was just dirty work--getting things, tracking all kinds of things, sometimes official and necessary contacts established through government and all of that, and almost all of that was handled through my office.

END TAPE 5, SIDE 1

END INTERVIEW