

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: PETER SELZ (PS)
INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)
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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: I'll start the way I always do and ask you to tell me where and when you were born and just something about your family background.

PS: I was born in Munich in 1919 and my father was a doctor. As far as my professional life is concerned, the most important person when I grew up was my grandfather, Julius Drey, who was an important art dealer of old art in Munich. My grandfather took me to the museum, the Pinokothek there. He realized, and I realized, how much I enjoyed seeing the pictures; we went about every Sunday, looking at different parts of the museum. So I really got interested at pictures early on; I was seven or eight years old. I read all the books I could read about art by the time I was very young.

SZ: How did he get interested in that?

PS: The family had been in the art business for several generations. If things hadn't changed in Germany as they did, I think I would have gone into the art business and carried it on. Actually, one branch of the business is continuing still right now in New York, and that's Rosenberg and Stiebel. That's the same business.

SZ: Same family?

PS: Not the same family, but it's a branch of the same art business.

SZ: For some reason this passed your father by, or was this your mother's father?

PS: It was my mother's side.

SZ: Did she have an interest in art?

PS: Not particularly. That was in a way the most important thing as far as this is concerned that I can tell you of my childhood in Munich. I left Munich in 1936 when I was seventeen.

SZ: So all of your elementary-school education....

PS: Was in Germany. Then I came here and I had relatives here--you had to have relatives to bring you over here, at least very, very distant relatives--and it was the Liebmanns and they owned a brewery, the Rheingold Brewery in Brooklyn, and they sent me to high school. When I came here I had one year of high school, at Fieldston, then I went to college for one year, to Columbia, and after that, to bring my parents over here, I had to go to work. One interesting anecdote about a year after I got here, there was a family group meeting around a table, and they asked me what I wanted to do. I said, well, they owned this brewery, and I didn't know what else to do, I said, "I want to work in this brewery." They said, "We don't believe that. You don't look like the kind of person who wants to be a brewer." I weighed about a hundred and ten pounds at the time. They said, "What are you really interested in?" So I said I was interested in art. They said, "This is a terrible idea, you don't want to become an artist." I said, no, I didn't really have any talent as an artist, but that I would like to be, you know, with my family history, I said I'd like to be in the art business. So one of them said, "This is really a terrible idea; we already have one

relative in the art business"--and I remember exactly what they said--"and nothing's ever become of Cousin Alfred." So I said, "Who's Cousin Alfred?" They said, "Alfred Stieglitz, and he has a gallery on Madison Avenue." I said it sounded interesting, and they said it was called American Place, and within a few days I introduced myself to Stieglitz and he became a big mentor to me. I spent all the time I could hanging out at the gallery and meeting all the artists, because he loved to talk. I didn't know anything about modern art at that point, and he started telling me about modern art and what it was all about and what art is all about, and this was extremely important to me. I met Dorothy Norman and Georgia O'Keeffe. This was a very important moment.

SZ: In Germany it was all Old Masters?

PS: Yes, Old Masters and objets d'art.

SZ: It was during the '20s when you were doing this, but you didn't have any contact with of the movements [of the time]?

PS: No. Then also, I started hanging around the galleries on 57th Street and met all these dealers who had come from Germany. The other important person of the early days was J. B. Neumann, and he also took a great deal of interest in me.... So I got to know J. B. Neumann, Dorothy Norman, and Curt Valentin..., and all these German emigrés who had come about the same time--except for Neumann, who had been here since the '20s--who had come over from Germany too, who had a love of the art. So basically, that was my context, with Stieglitz on the one hand and the 57th Street dealers on the other, until I think in 1941 I went in the army.

SZ: You were a young man. Was picking up and leaving one culture and coming to another, was that hard for you?

PS: It was wonderful. I loved New York. I thought it was the most marvelous place, and it really felt good. I adjusted rather quickly.

SZ: Had you studied English?

PS: A little bit, just in high school.... There I was, I missed my parents, I didn't know if I'd ever see them again and they were in constant danger, I was looking in the paper every day and all that. That felt terrible....

SZ: Did they tell you to leave?

PS: They told me to leave. We were kicked out of school, there was nothing to do. My parents, like many people of their generation, felt they didn't have to leave, things were going to change again.

SZ: But they did leave.

PS: They finally did leave in '39, at the very end, and came over here and were safe. Other, more distant uncles, aunts, cousins were killed.

SZ: So you came and you learned English, first at Fieldston?

PS: Yes.

SZ: You just did it as part of the school program?

PS: Yes, we were still young enough to learn the language.

SZ: Fieldston...at that time had a reputation as, what?

PS: Progressive. I think it probably still is. It's a very good school.

SZ: And then you went on to Columbia.

PS: I went to Columbia for one year, and then I started working.

SZ: So that didn't do anything for you, was that it?

PS: I didn't know what I was going to major in my freshman year there. I didn't know what was going to happen to me. Then I had to take a job. I actually had to take a job in that brewery in order to make some money. I had to support my parents at that point. I worked there for three horrible years; there were a lot of Nazis working around me--German people--and then I spent three years in the army. I was in the OSS [Office of Strategic Services].

SZ: How did that happen? Were you recruited?

PS: Yes. I was in the regular army, in the Signal Corps.

SZ: For that you were drafted?

PS: I was drafted as an enemy alien [laughing]. Then after about a year, I volunteered when they offered me to go into the OSS, I never went overseas.... It was because of my Germany background, I guess, my I.Q.--whatever they were looking for.

SZ: Can you tell me a little bit about what you did?

PS: I didn't do very much. I was in training, communications training, near Washington, in a secret place, which is actually where the CIA is now. You weren't supposed to know where you were. It was a very strange thing. Here we were in training, in a

camp up on top of a hillside in Virginia, and we weren't supposed to know where we were. Then they took us away on weekend passes, they took us in a truck with tarpaulins over it so that we couldn't tell where we were, and took us to Union Station and picked us up there. The other people, most of the other guys in the camp, you could talk to them about everything--except your past and future [laughing]. There wasn't very much to say. Anyhow, I was in this communications training, and by the time my training was complete, they didn't need people in Europe; in Europe, the war was over. Then they sent me to another camp before I could be discharged, for almost a year--in Oklahoma. When I got out of the army, I went to the University of Chicago, where I got an education.

SZ: When you went there, you had an idea of what you wanted to do by that time?

PS: After about a semester I knew that's what I wanted. I found out that they had a department of art history, and I found out that one could possibly, eventually make a living teaching the stuff or going into museum work. A very good friend, Kenneth Donahue, was going there, had already gotten a teaching job at Queens College; he had gone to NYU. So then I decided it would be a good thing for me to do.

SZ: Why Chicago? Did you know people there?

PS: I figured since I was on the G.I. Bill and could go wherever I wanted to go, I might as well go to the best university in the country. They also had a very marvelous program...you see, I had had one year of college, and they had a different program, one more like a European university, so I never got a B.A.; you could go straight to the end, sort of catching up on undergraduate work in a graduate program. It was a wonderful school, really a very intellectual center; it was the best university, there's no question about it.

SZ: There was a lot of intellectual activity going on in Chicago at the time. There were a

lot of refugees there, right?

PS: Yes. So there I was in Chicago. Then, in '49, I got my M.A. and got my first job, a part-time teaching job at the Institute of Design, at the "New Bauhaus." Moholy [László Moholy-Nagy] had already died, but it was still a very, very--I'm writing about it now for a show that's coming up at the [Museum of Contemporary Art] in Chicago-- it was an extremely exciting place, all the new ideas about design and design education and architecture. There was a great department of photography, and some wonderful people, not only on the faculty, but everybody from Europe, and then people would come in and out, Bucky Fuller. I was the art historian there, and I had a marvelous time. I taught there from '49 to '55, except for the one year I went to Paris on a Fulbright; '49-'50 I was on a Fulbright in Paris.... That was the first year of the Fulbright. I had to finish my masters in German Expressionism, but I didn't want to do that in France, so I studied postwar French painting, the stuff that was going on right then and there. That was very exciting. I enjoyed what I was doing and talking to all the artists and finding out what was going on in Paris. Paris was wonderful in '49-'50, all the different things happening.

SZ: So by the time you really started studying, you had made the transition from Old Masters to contemporary.

PS: Yes, because...I don't know. I thought this was the time, it was part of my world, and believe me, there were a couple of other Fulbrights in Paris, and I was happy with what I was doing. The other people were spending their time in the archives in the libraries and I was spending my time in the galleries and the cafés and the studios. I had much more fun. I enjoyed what was going on, and having come from the Institute of Design, which was really the most advanced place in art education and the whole concept of new design and architecture, I felt very much at home in working with contemporary material.

SZ: And the interest in German Expressionism?

PS: Eventually, I went back to that. After I came back to Chicago, after the Fulbright, I decided to go on and do my doctorate, and I wrote a book on German Expressionism.

SZ: That was something you had an affinity for?

PS: Yes, very, very much so, and still do.

SZ: Had you been to Paris before?

PS: No, that was the first time I had been in Paris; I had never been there before, so that was very, very exciting. Then I came back here and did the German material. I had some very, very good teachers. My main teacher, actually, was a great Renaissance scholar who had also come from Germany, Ulrich Middeldorf, and then Joshua Taylor came and I worked with him to finish my dissertation. I finished the dissertation in '54. My job was only a part-time job and things were beginning to fall apart there. The brilliant old place, really the whole Bauhaus idea, was falling apart. There was no longer any private funding, and the school became part of a very minor university, the Illinois Institute of Technology--of course Mies [van der Rohe] was there, but that didn't help.

SZ: Why did that happen?

PS: Because they had to associate themselves with someone.

SZ: No, why did it disintegrate like that?... Tell me why you think it fell apart.

PS: It was having personality problems. You had all these prima donnas, and it was a

very ingrown kind of a place. It was a place not nearly as important as everybody thought it was. All my colleagues thought this was the only important place in the world.... So they were fighting each other for position all the time, and there was no...they couldn't find a director. After Moholy died, [Serge] Chermayeff took over, and then Chermayeff left, and then there were enormous fights as to who was going to be the director.... They even talked about getting Corbusier as director.... [laughing]. There was a lot of fighting going on, and in a way the purpose was no longer quite there. It had been achieved, in a way. The kind of experimentation that was done became accepted everywhere, and they didn't go into any new kind of experimentation. And the whole sociopolitical idea, that better design would make for a better world, people didn't believe that anymore. I think that was one of the major, major reasons.... Modern design had been accepted, so this kind of experimentation wasn't necessary anymore. The only thing that really survived well was the photography, with [Aaron] Siskind and [Harry] Callahan...and all the people who were teaching photography; that remained as a major thing. In addition to being the art historian, I also took over a graduate program that I actually created in art education. There we had an effect on the school system, on the teaching of art and design in schools. But then, they brought in a commercial designer.... [There were only] five or six of us left to protest.... Then I got a very, very nice job at Pomona College as chairman of the art department, and enjoyed it enormously.

SZ: Had you been out to California?

PS: No. So that was a wonderful job, and it still is a first-rate liberal-arts college; it's like Wellesley or Oberlin, the only one of its kind on the West Coast, and I would have stayed there forever if this thing hadn't come up here [at The Museum of Modern Art]....

SZ: That was sort of a big jump and a big change.

PS: That was nice, yes. And my children were born there. We had a lovely time there, until we were dragged over here.

SZ: Before we get to that I can ask you one other thing. When you were living in New York, did you ever come to The Museum of Modern Art?

PS: Yes, yes.

SZ: Tell me a little bit about what you can remember from those days.

PS: I remember the pre-Columbia show [Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art, 1940]. I remember the Surrealist show [Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism, 1935]. I remember the Cubist abstract show [Cubism and Abstract Art, 1936]. I had this horrible job working in the brewery, and I said, My gosh, I would like to sell postcards here.

SZ: That would have been better than....

PS: Much, much better. I liked the place, and I came as much as I could.

SZ: There must have been not even the original building here, but the old brownstone.

PS: No, it was the original building. This I remember. This building was built in '39, and that's about the time I started coming. I do remember going to the original brownstone. Again, my friend Kenny Donahue, who then became later on the director of the Los Angeles County [Museum], he was a docent here, and we were good friends. We went to the penthouse a lot and saw all the modern furniture.... I thought it was a wonderful place. I went to the opening show...Art of Our Time.... It was a very, very exciting place. I didn't know anybody except Donahue.

SZ: But it was exciting from an intellectual point of view?

PS: Yes.

SZ: What about within the whole modern movement, what place do you then feel that it had--I was thinking of design in particular.

PS: Before the war?

SZ: Yes.

PS: I didn't know very much, but I liked what I saw. I also went to the Guggenheim, which was right across the street; it was already open then, the Museum of Nonobjective Art. That was a real weird place, as you know, with all of these...enormous paintings in these big silver frames hanging near the floor and the Baroness [Hilda Rebay] coming in and lecturing, music by Bach and Handel piped in. It was a weird place, but I liked the Kandinskys.

SZ: A few of which we now have. What about after the war, while you were in graduate school?

PS: I came to New York as often as I could, and of course I spent a great deal of time at the Art Institute in Chicago. We had a much better library in modern art at the Art Institute than at the university, so I did most of my research in that library, and got to know the Art Institute extremely well. In addition to my involvement with all of the people at the Institute of Design,...I got to know the artists of my own generation at the Art Institute of Chicago and [through my interest in] New Figuration, [principally] Leon Golub, but in those days there was a whole group of people [involved in that movement], which was an important thing; I'll talk to you about that. I was very much involved in that kind of New Figuration.

SZ: You did a show.

PS: Yes,...about eight shows, one every other year, in protest against...well, in those days, Chicago, like most cities, had the annuals, and the Art Institute annual had more money and prizes than any other museum, I believe. Soon after the war, some of those prizes that were given by an independent jury went to young artists, most of them still art students. So then they established a rule that no art student could participate. Then the art students started their own group...from the Art Institute and from the Institute of Design,...and they brought in the best jury, people like Jackson Pollock and Alfred Barr and Jim Sweeney and [Robert] Motherwell, anyone you can think of, as jurors, and they became a much better exhibition than the Art Institute annual. So that was very, very exciting, actually. Then, I think the first thing I published, actually, was an article in ArtNews called "Is There a New Chicago School?" about this group of people. The Museum of Contemporary Art is going into its new building in Chicago and they brought about eight scholars together to decide the different aspects we were going to write about for this fifty-year [anniversary], '45 to '95, and I'm writing the first essay, which will be about the Institute of Design.... I'm working on that now, so I'm going back to where I started.

SZ: That's okay [laughter].

PS: I'm doing all these things and having a wonderful time.

SZ: And is it different?

PS: It is, sure.

SZ: It seems to me that what you've just described was interesting and there was a lot of activity, and I would guess that going to a place like Pomona was different for you.

PS: I did shows and I ran the art department. I had a small budget and I did exhibitions, and I started out very, very successfully with an exhibition of Toulouse-Lautrec posters. I did all kinds of very, very interesting exhibitions. At the same time I rewrote my dissertation into the book, which then the University of California Press put out. There was a lot happening out in Los Angeles, and I became very much a part of it.

SZ: Such as?

PS: All these Los Angeles painters...and there were people like Wally Berman, whom I was interested in at the time, and a whole group of very, very exciting Los Angeles artists, and they became very interesting to me. Then the last show I did was [about] this particular group--the Ferris Gallery [group].... Robert Irwin was very much part of that. Then, I also found out that there was one thing very unique going on in L.A., which was very different from Abstract Expressionism, which was pretty much what everybody else...was doing, including the students. But there were all these geometric abstract painters, so the last show that I was going to do in Pomona was the show called Four Abstract Classicists, which Jules Langsner directed. That was John McLaughlin and Lorser Feitelson, Karl Benjamin and Frederick Hammersley.... But by that time I couldn't do the [organization of the show]; I turned it over to a friend, an art critic named Langsner, because I was coming here. The Ferris Gallery group was very experimental, beyond what was going on anywhere else. The one thing that came out of my interest in both Chicago and then Los Angeles, and of course I knew what [Robert] Rauschenberg and people like that were doing here, was a show which eventually became the Assemblage show [The Art of Assemblage, 1961], because there was a lot of that going on in L.A. and in San Francisco; many people were doing it in Chicago as well as in New York. That was one of my first proposals when I came here. [Note: The Art of Assemblage was curated by William C. Seitz, who also wrote the catalogue.]

SZ: I'm trying to think if there was anything else, until we get here. Can you think of anything else?

PS: Maybe as we go on I'll think of other things. I did lots of good shows and had a lot of fun, going to Los Angeles and coming here once in a while, and I started publishing. In addition to my book, I published a number of articles, and I had a very free hand in what I wanted to do in that small department, so it was very, very nice. Now how did I come here? You probably want to know about that.

SZ: Yes, exactly. That was my next question.

PS: We had a tiny gallery in which I was doing the shows at Pomona, so then money was raised--I helped to raise the money--for a new exhibition space. Then I thought, What show should I open this new exhibition space with? Perhaps because of my early connection to Stieglitz, but primarily because nobody paid any attention to the work anymore, I decided to open the [space] with a show called The Stieglitz Circle. I'm talking about 1958 now. Names like [Arthur] Dove or [Marsden] Hartley or O'Keeffe had been forgotten, really been forgotten. You could find them in the books, but nobody, nobody talked about them, although when I came here, [Theodore] Stamos was talking about Dove; but basically, the individual people, even [John] Marin, were part of the distant past.

SZ: You mean in....

PS: In America. So I decided to do this revival.

SZ: Why?

PS: Because I loved the work! What else could I have done? Shows of some third-rate Abstract Expressionist? I had already done the geometric abstract artists. So I

thought it would be a great idea. So I came to New York in order to get loans for the show. I went to the Downtown Gallery for many of the loans, and I went to see Alfred [Barr], whom I had met before because we were on a panel together about a year or two earlier in Sarasota, Florida, and spent an evening together talking and got to know each other and had a marvelous discussion. Then I visited him at another time; just before going to Paris, as a matter of fact, I stopped by and he said, "Look, we are thinking of buying this painting, what do you think of it?" and it was the first time I saw a Jackson Pollock. So we knew each other. Anyway, I came to see Alfred and we were in his office and I had the list of pictures by the Stieglitz group that I wanted to borrow. He said it was a wonderful idea, this revival; he thought it was a very, very good idea. My German Expressionist book had been out for about a year, and he had read it and he said all kinds of good things about it. There had been a twentieth-century German show here the year before, and he said, "We should have had you do the catalogue for this show." I said, "Yes, but nobody asked me." He said, "It would have been much better," and I said, "Yes, I think so." So anyhow, we talked for a little while, and he said, "You know"--and he knew my background, he knew I had a Ph.D. from Chicago and I had been with the Institute of Design and now I was teaching, and I had had a Fulbright and I was teaching at a liberal-arts college; it all sounded pretty good to him, I think--"how would you like to work for us?" I said, "Doing what?" He said, "Andrew Ritchie left a year ago, and we don't like the man who's been handling the department"--that was Sam Hunter--"and we need somebody good to take over."...So he said, "Would you like to discuss this?" I said, "Yes, I'd like to discuss it." He said, "In about ten minutes I'm going to have tea with René d'Harnoncourt; why don't you have tea with us?" So we had tea, the three of us, and we talked seriously about my taking over this department. They said, "If you're interested, you have to stay for a few days so we can talk to the trustees and meet everybody. Can you spend a few extra days in New York?" I said, "Yes, indeed I can." Then Jim Soby took me around to meet everybody, because he was really handling the department.... Soby and I got along beautifully. After about three days, Jim...this is a funny story. We were having drinks somewhere before I was catching

the plane back to California, and Jim says, "Well, this still has to go through a trustee meeting and it has to become official, there are many things that would have to be done, but I think that if you want the job, it could probably be yours." I said, "Well, I might be interested in the job, Jim. It sounds exactly like what I would like to do. But we've been talking for three days, and one thing was never discussed," and Jim said, "What's that?" and I said, "That's the salary that goes with this job. What's the salary?" I remember Jim saying, "You shouldn't ask me. I've been working in this place for twenty-five years and I've never drawn a cent" [laughing]. That was a different time. So then I went back--this was in the spring of '58--and then I got called, there were all kinds of telephone calls back and forth with René; then he said, "I'd like you, since you're going to be in charge of painting and sculpture exhibitions, I'd like you to send me a list of three exhibitions that you'd like to do."... I sent him a list of three exhibitions which I ultimately did do, one of which became the New Images of Man [1959], which was an exhibition of New Figuration; the second one was Art Nouveau [1960]; and the third one, which we at that time, because we hadn't coined the term yet, we called "Collage and the Object," which then became the Assemblage show. Then we did those three shows in succession.

SZ: Is that sort of a typical thing to be asked, what shows will you do or want to do? Were they looking to see what....

PS: Yes, what I would do. I don't know if it's a typical thing....

SZ: So I'm going to ask you a couple of things. Were you surprised by this offer?

PS: Yes, very, very much. I did not expect it.... I was very much surprised. I thought the offer would go to somebody much more established, somebody older and more established. The only museum experience I had was running a little college gallery on a shoestring, so I had no museum experience. So I was amazed.

SZ: Did you know that it was open?

PS: Yes, I knew the job was open.

SZ: You knew what had been going on here?

PS: Yes, that was known, because Andrew had left a year earlier, so that was known. And I was on the board of the College Art Association, and we knew what was going on. But I did not expect to get that offer. I think--I'm not sure--I think the job was offered to one other person, who turned it down. I'm not sure of that, but I believe it was offered to Leo Steinberg. I'm not sure, but I think they offered it to him. Who also had no museum experience at all.

SZ: So that obviously wasn't high on their list of priorities.

PS: No.

SZ: Before we sort of move into all of that, just from those three days or whatever, you've talked a little bit about Barr; tell me a little bit more about what your reaction to him was....

PS: ...to get this job offer, but Alfred felt I deserved it, very much so. We're writing some kind of memoir now, my first wife and I, about our time here. She said to me the other day, "You always wanted to show you could do this kind of thing"--to have the chance to do it in a place which at that time was much more important than it is now, because it really was the only place, it was the place that called the tune. We admired Barr enormously. He was our mentor. I've had students who are doing all kinds of things now to break down the canon, but he established the canon. He did all these marvelous things in bringing all the different aspects of modernism together in one museum, and we admired that enormously. There was a great deal of

admiration for Barr. Of course, he was a wonderful person, too, and I always felt that.

SZ: And d'Harnoncourt when you first met him?

PS: He was charming, he was wonderful. He was just a wonderful, marvelous man, and always was. He was really very, very exceptional, and the way he ran the Museum was admirable, absolutely admirable, because it's a difficult place to run.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1

SZ: When you were here, to get the loans and when this whole job offer came up, was that before the fire or after the fire?

PS: It was right after the fire. I think it was right after the fire; I'm pretty sure.

SZ: The fire was April 15th, 1958.

PS: It was April 1958, and I came here maybe a month before the fire. [Note: Selz joined the Museum staff November 1, 1958.] Yes, it must have been before the fire, because they opened the new gallery at Pomona in the late spring of '58. It must have been a month before the fire.

SZ: So you weren't here for the fire. But by the time you came you had to deal with what was going on.

PS: That's right.

SZ: So how long after you were here did they tell you it was yours?

PS: Maybe two months, something like that. There were negotiations going on about the shows I was going to do, the salary I was going to get. Something like two months, maybe less. Then I started working here in September of '58...summer of '58.

SZ: So there was no question you were going to take it if the terms were reasonable?

PS: Yes.

SZ: And how did you feel about coming back to New York?

PS: I always liked New York very, very much.... And then the nicest thing happened in that René managed to get me an apartment at 333 Central Park West. It was a very nice, large, rent-controlled apartment; it rented for \$190 a month [laughing].

SZ: When you first came in, or even before, when you knew the position was open, did you have a sense of how things were running here? Because you had Alfred, who had responsibility for the collection and acquisitions, and then you had the exhibition part of it. You had Alfred and you had René....

PS: I caught on. I knew it pretty well.

SZ: What was your impression of all that as you settled in?

PS: It seemed like a very good arrangement. It seemed to me at that point like a very good arrangement, and that's the way it was. I didn't question it. I was on the acquisitions committee; I had a little voice--not a vote, but a voice on all that. I thought the kind of separation between collection and exhibitions made sense, and I didn't question that at all. Then I had a good staff. Alicia Legg was my number-one

assistant. Everybody, especially in the beginning...I had this great welcome and it was very cordial. The marvelous thing really was that I could do whatever I wanted to do. I would come to the curatorial meetings and propose some shows and they were generally accepted. It worked very, very well. Then after two years an associate curatorship was open, and I got Bill Seitz to work with me. I'm sure you have more questions about that.

SZ: You could restate it, but more slowly, and give me some details.

PS: I was looking for somebody, because I couldn't do it all myself. When I met Bill...you know, modern art was a very, very new thing. I think he was the third person to write a dissertation on twentieth-century; I was the second. That was one reason I respected Barr so much because he and Meyer Schapiro really made modern art into a scholarly discipline; there were others, but those were the two people who really did it. Then, I forget exactly how I met Bill.... He was an assistant professor at Princeton at the time, and I met him. He had written his dissertation on Abstract Expressionism and he had just finished his book on Monet. He suggested that we do a show on Monet, the Claude Monet: Seasons and Moments show [1960]. I liked the idea very, very much, and he came in as a curator, an independent curator, for the show. We got along beautifully, I loved the way he did the show, I liked the way he wrote the catalogue. Then I asked him if he'd be interested in being the associate curator, and he said yes, he would be. Then I went in to René to make that suggestion, and René said--this was interesting--"Well, we thought you'd hire somebody who is on a lower level for this lower-level job. Do you really want to have somebody who is on the same level as you are?" Coming from academe, where you have two, three, four, five professors, I thought this would work very well. I said, "Yes, I think we'd get along fine and we respect what we do. We don't have exactly the same opinion about everything, which is only a good thing. And I would like that very much." And then we hired him.

SZ: In that way.

PS: Yes.

SZ: He was telling you something, though, wasn't he?

PS: René? He was wrong, though, because Bill and I worked out beautifully.

SZ: What I meant is that he was telling you something about the institution in general.

PS: Yes. In a way I was very, very innocent. The first thing I did was a little show for the first Paris biennial [U.S. Representation: I Biennale de Paris], I think it was in '58, as soon as I came in. I don't know if it's listed here.... They had this young people's biennial. But it was important: I introduced Rauschenberg to Paris. That was the first show I did. I did that for the International Program, the International Council, with Porter McCray. So then I began to see that there were some strange things going on in the Museum. I was supposed to be in charge of exhibitions but they were supposed to be in charge of international exhibitions, and eventually, Arthur [Drexler] and I changed that. We said, "This can't go on like that," because we felt, you know, that Arthur was in charge of Architecture and Design and I was in charge of Painting and Sculpture, and we didn't want to have somebody else in charge of Painting and Sculpture or Architecture and Design. We felt that that was what we had been hired for. And, eventually, Porter McCray had to give in on that. He ran his own institution, which we didn't know too much about; it was sort of like a CIA kind of institution that he was running.

SZ: In what sense?

PS: Because he never told anybody what was going on. He had all kinds of connections....

SZ: You mean to various countries?

PS: To various countries and inside the Museum. Then I heard that Frank O'Hara was an assistant curator.

SZ: I just want to go back to this other thing, since we were talking about that.

PS: I can't tell you too much about it, but it did not feel comfortable somehow.

SZ: For you.

PS: Yes, and the same was true for Arthur.

SZ: It's been said to me that it had to do with loans, that you couldn't know where things were.

PS: Where things were and how they did loans. That was part of it, yes.

SZ: Somebody also said...he was really separate, had his own press office....

PS: That's right. He had his own press office, they were working in the building next door, and we never knew exactly what they were doing.

SZ: So you felt, as, essentially, the head of painting and sculpture exhibitions, that you should be putting together exhibitions for travel here and abroad, and Arthur, I guess, felt the same.

PS: Yes, he felt the same.

SZ: And how about Porter's presence in the Museum?

PS: I never liked him, I'll tell you that. There was something I didn't like about him, and I didn't quite know what to make of him. He was on a different wavelength from people like Alfred and René and Arthur and myself--we all got along very well.

SZ: How do you think Alfred felt about this dichotomy?

PS: I'm not sure. We never discussed it. You'd talk to René about it and [he'd say], "We're going to work it out, everybody's going to be happy." Any time you went to René about something he smoothed it over. Everything was going to be all right--and usually it was. He was an extraordinary diplomat, and he tried to make everybody feel good. Every time you walked into his office with some kind of complaint, you walked out feeling good [laughing].

SZ: But did things really change?

PS: No. Then Porter left. Then Waldo Rasmussen did his own thing. I don't remember too much about all that. I was too much involved in the shows we did.

SZ: Once Porter was gone and Waldo [took over], did you feel a difference?

PS: Not very much.

SZ: So it was as it was.

PS: Yes. What's Waldo's position now?

SZ: He just retired. He was head of the International Program. When you first came, you said that Alicia was in the department and she was your assistant. And Sam Hunter

was still here?

PS: No.

SZ: He was gone also. So for those couple of years....

PS: Just Alicia and me. We did a lot of work, and she was extremely able and she knew all the ins and outs of the place, and she was extremely helpful and very loyal. We did a lot of work. Then I put on the New Images of Man show [in 1959], and that became very controversial--all those controversies in the press--but it was a very, very controversial show.

SZ: Because?

PS: Because it was a break with Abstract Expressionism, and how could The Museum of Modern Art, which had been at the center of Abstract Expressionism, suddenly go back? I felt it was going forward with the new kind of figuration. So that was one of the things that was questioned. The other thing that was questioned is that here I was showing Jackson Pollock and Bill de Kooning and...well, [Alberto] Giacometti was quite acceptable.... But there were all these people from abroad and from the American hinterland; I showed some from California and two Chicagoans and people from England, Austria, Germany...no, not Germany. That time was extremely xenophobic. I mean, you have no idea. New York had just made it and was sure that nothing else of any importance was going on anywhere else. To show all these foreigners and these hinterlanders, I created a tremendous amount of controversy. Here I was showing Leon Golub level with Bill de Kooning, and that created a tremendous amount of controversy. The show was beautifully installed--René installed the show. That's how I learned to install shows, watching René installing that first show. The book was...Ernst Tillich wrote the preface, which was nice. It made a tremendous impact that is still being felt. So I was very pleased with the

show and the fact that I was very, very controversial didn't bother anybody, because they had always been controversial. I got a great deal of support from René, from Alfred, from everyone--from Monroe [Wheeler], from the people I was working with--a great deal of support for the show.

SZ: No problem from the trustees because of the controversy?

PS: No. Then around the same time I did a little thing...now, let me see.... Images was in September of '59, which was very controversial. Then, in [Spring 1960] I did a little thing which was also extremely controversial, which was Jean Tinguely's Homage to New York [March 17, 1960]. Tinguely had approached Dorothy Miller about doing this thing, and Dorothy said to him, "Look, we are in the business of conserving, not destroying art. Go away." So then he talked to me. I said, "Gee, I'm in the business of exhibiting art, and this sounds like a very, very exciting exhibit, and we'll do it." Then we had the Bucky Fuller dome, which was up for the Bucky Fuller show in the garden, and I said let's keep it up for an extra couple of weeks, and then Jean Tinguely was erecting his big assemblage. He had never seen anything like the junkyards and the junk heaps in New Jersey. And he collected it all, and Rauschenberg and everybody else helped him, and he assembled it all. He would go there every day and you'd see him working day and night, putting it altogether. Then he got some filmmakers to make the films, one by Pennybaker and one by Robert Breer, who made Homage to Jean Tinguely. And the last day, just before he took it out into the open garden from the dome, he painted it all white so it looked very, very beautiful. Then, on a very wet, mush day, the thing took place. The balloons coming out and the writing coming out and things being thrown off and things falling all around. But one thing he didn't tell me was that he had a piano in there that was going to be put on fire. So then there was a fire. Do you know about this story?

SZ: No.

PS: All of a sudden there was a fire. I didn't worry about the fire, it was just a small flame, and it was an extremely wet day, and it was in the garden. But I hadn't experienced the Museum fire a year earlier, you see, and everybody freaked out. So they called the fire department. The fire department came, and as we said later on, they wouldn't even allow a suicide to happen.

SZ: Who said that?

PS: I said that. So then they doused it. Then there was a party afterwards at the Staempflis' on Fifth Avenue, George Staempfli. After the thing was over, Tinguely was glowing. He was happy, it was a wonderful scene. Only about thirty or forty people were invited to witness this. They all thought it was wonderful, but my colleagues didn't think so. They were at that party, and neither René nor Alfred spoke to me [laughter]. They wouldn't even speak to me. When I went home with my wife I said, "I don't know what's going to happen next." The next day there was a favorable review about it in the Times--I forget who wrote it--that there was a fire and nobody got hurt and that everybody was okay. But I was doing all these controversial things, you see.

SZ: Who was invited to witness the event?

PS: The critics, artists. I remember photographs with Dore Ashton and Philip Guston standing there--people like that.

SZ: The staff?

PS: Yes.

SZ: But you said there were forty people?

PS: Forty or fifty people, yes.

SZ: That's all?

PS: Yes. There was not such a big staff yet, and people didn't know this was an important event. It became a history-making work of art, but nobody knew then. It was just a "happening," and this was the first of the Happenings, you see. It was just a different kind of "happening." I thought it was absolutely wonderful. It was a great neodada gesture. Tinguely stayed in [Richard] Huelsenbeck's apartment on Central Park West. So he had this wonderful connection between the old dada and the new dada. So that was nice.

SZ: What other kinds of controversial things were you up to?

PS: Not all that many.... In March '60, under my general supervision of the department, Bill did the Monet; that was in March '60. The Homage of New York was also in March '60. And then in June we opened the Art Nouveau show. Coming from the academic side, not realizing how every department in this place was its own little empire, I was able to do the first and maybe the only show in the whole history of the Museum in which all the departments worked together. People said, "My gosh, you brought it off." I did the painting and the sculpture part and wrote about it myself, Arthur did the architecture and had Henry-Russell Hitchcock write about that, Mildred Constantine and Greta Daniel did the design part, then we [brought in] Alan Fern from the outside to write about book design. I forget now whether the show was installed by Wilder [Green] or Arthur--one or the other. Then there was photography.... It was really an interdepartmental event.

SZ: How did you pull that off?

PS: I didn't know you couldn't do it [laughing]. I asked all these people, "Are we going to

do this Art Nouveau show?" Anyway, that was controversial, too, because Art Nouveau was basically taboo. I remember one phone call, for instance, this lady calling me up, saying, "It's because of you people at The Museum of Modern Art and all your new design that I sold all the family Tiffany, and now that it's all gone, you bring it back" [laughing]. So in a way it really was a controversial thing. To suddenly reconstruct Art Nouveau was...the fad really started with the show; before then, people really, really looked at it as something that was in the distant past. It wasn't like bringing in Monet, not at all; it was bringing in something that had been discarded. So that was controversial. In general, I would say that almost all the shows that I did, and...I've been doing since then, were never mainstream. The third show that I did was the Futurist show [Futurism, 1961]. Then, Futurism was considered an aberration away from Cubism because they didn't know what they were doing: a misunderstanding of Cubism. That's what people thought about Futurism, or that they were Fascists, which they were [laughing]. Then, let's see.... So there was the Art Nouveau show, which was, by the way, very, very successful.

SZ: Critically.

PS: Yes. It was beautifully done, beautifully installed. It just looked glorious, absolutely glorious.

SZ: You didn't do the installation.

PS: No, it was either Wilder or Arthur.

SZ: He did it for all the contributions.

PS: For everything, yes. I just saw a bunch of the things at this show--there's a big Nabis show in Paris right now, and I saw all these old friends which I had brought over here, because we had shown all these painters. We had [Edouard] Vuillard and we

had [Pierre] Bonnard....

SZ: Was [Art Nouveau] a loan show?

PS: Yes, that was a big loan show, and it traveled around. I remember it traveled to L.A. and they broke something; a whole vitrine of glass was broken. Then the next show under the department...sort of under the department but within the International [Program], was Frank O'Hara's New Spanish Painting and Sculpture [1960].

SZ: Yes, you were about to say something else about Frank O'Hara.

PS: I thought Frank was a very interesting person, and I would read his poetry and I thought it was...wonderful. The great strength of Frank was...all the artists he was close to. But he was not trained as an art historian and that field was all that he knew. New Spanish Painting and Sculpture was another one that happened to be at the same time at the Whitney [Museum of American Art] or at the Guggenheim which was very much better.

SZ: How did O'Hara make it into the department in that way then?

PS: He had been working for Porter, doing things, and I think Porter probably hired him because of his close contact with the artists. But he didn't do very many things, because the other problem with Frank was, he rarely came to work [laughing]. He was home writing poems. René would never complain, he would never put anybody down. There were a lot of people, though the staff was small, there were a number of people who didn't do their work in this Museum. But René could never fire anybody. If he found out somebody couldn't do their work, he hired somebody else to work for them and kept the other person. I guess money wasn't that scarce. But the idea of his firing anybody was just something he could never do. I said to him, I remember, "This person isn't doing anything," and he said, "We'll get somebody else

to do it for him."

SZ: Certainly it's been suggested that in the old days, and you just gave another example of it, that a lot of people were not here to work to pay for their living expenses.

PS: No, they had a lot of people who never took any salary. I mean, these were people who were independently wealthy, but you also knew what they were doing. It was a very, very different world. Many had lived in Paris in the important days between the wars and they knew what was going on, they had connections, they had taste, and they didn't need money. I think that was part of it.

SZ: I assume you were not independently wealthy.

PS: Hardly! [laughing]

SZ: So how was it to be here?

PS: It had changed by the time I came. Edgar Kaufmann was gone, Philip [Johnson] was doing his buildings, such as they are, and Soby was just head of the acquisitions committee.... Monroe, although I'm sure he was on salary, he was part of that world; he was very much part of that old-time world of gentlemen scholars. They were wonderful, wonderful people. I can't say enough good things about them. They didn't have Ph.D's, hadn't had classes in business administration. These were good people, and these were the people who really created this place to a great extent. People are poorly paid here. They were very poorly paid then.

SZ: All up and down?

PS: All up and down, yes.

SZ: I assume you're talking also about yourself?

PS: When we finally had this talk with Jim Soby, he said, "What salary do you think you should get?" I said, "I have one child and another one on the way. My salary"--I forget what it was--"in California is such-and-such. Living in New York will cost me one third more than it will cost me living in a small college town in California, and that's what I should get paid." That was my salary. It was not much; it turned out higher than many others. People were very badly paid, including Alfred, I believe.

SZ: That's been said.

PS: I think he probably never asked for a raise. I think that's true. I don't know how René did, but I'm sure everybody was poorly paid.... There was a deficit every year. Every year there was a deficit, but René went to the right trustee and rubbed out the deficit. He knew how to do it. They respected him, they had the money. So a deficit wasn't that serious a problem.

SZ: I guess what I started out to ask you was, given the people who were still here of a different type, the ones who sort of formed and shaped the institution, you said it had changed somewhat. You felt comfortable?

PS: Yes. Except I didn't feel comfortable with Philip Johnson. I knew the guy was a Nazi sympathizer, and I think his recent work still has fascist characteristics. No, I didn't feel comfortable with him, but I felt comfortable with everybody else. Now, let's see, after the Spanish painting show, which I didn't have too much to do with except my wife and I had to spend a whole full night rewriting Frank's catalogue--his poetry was better than his prose [laughter]. Then we did the New Talent shows up in the penthouse. One of the early shows I did was a wonderful show of a sculptor I had known in California, Peter Voukos.... Nobody knew what to do with it, because

nobody had seen huge ceramic sculptures that looked like Abstract Expressionist paintings before. So that was a show that nobody knew how to...it had no response, except that it was a wonderful show. Then I did other New Talent shows of David Hayes and Walter Gaudnek [New Talent (XI): David V. Hayes, 1959; New Talent (XIV): (Mowry Thacher Baden, Gaudnek, Leo Rabkin), 1960]. These were little shows that we did up in the penthouse.

SZ: Was that in conjunction with the Junior Council or anything?

PS: They had something to do with it.

SZ: Because I think that was their space.

PS: Yes, that was their space and we did the shows.

SZ: Were these things for sale?

PS: No. [Note: Works from the New Talent shows were for sale.] The idea was that these had to be people who had never had a one-man show in New York. Then we did Jean Dubuffet, [1962] which was a wonderful show. What's the next show that we did? Well, I guess the next show is Assemblage No. that came later. The next show I did was in January '61, and that was a very, very important show, and that was the Mark Rothko show. [Note: Mark Rothko opened at the Museum in January 1961, The Art of Assemblage in October 1961, and Jean Dubuffet in February 1962.] It was a wonderful, wonderful show. I should say a couple of things about that. First of all, the only Abstract Expressionist who had had a show before was Jackson Pollock, so I decided that Rothko should be the next one. It could have been any number of people.

SZ: Is that because you particularly liked Rothko's work?

PS: Yes. Then we had a wonderful show, and this is just the time that Rothko was involved in the [Four] Seasons murals and had just [had them] returned..., and I spent an enormous amount of time and got a great deal out of spending time with Mark, organizing that show. It was one of the most beautiful shows you've ever seen. Each room was a chapel of its own. These are like the most beautiful paintings. The only controversy in that, except, of course, the Times hated it, because John Canaday hated all the Abstract Expressionist artists, so we got bad reviews in the Times because of that--but that was beside the point, because everybody knew that Canaday was not to be paid much attention to--the condition of the show was that Mark had certain demands as to how his pictures should be shown. They should be in galleries, very small galleries, by themselves, not big displays; they should be hung low; they should relate to each other in a certain way that he understood; and they should be under fairly dim light. Those were his conditions, and those are the conditions that made a great deal of sense to me and which I accepted. Some of my colleagues said "We install the shows the way we think they should be installed. You shouldn't listen to an artist." Dorothy was saying that primarily: "You should never listen to an artist about how they want to install shows." But I don't agree; maybe because I'm of another generation and I think artists should have a great voice in how their work is to be shown. About a year later, Bill [Seitz] was going to do a de Kooning retrospective, and about three months after he started talking to [de Kooning] about the show, he [de Kooning] decided to cancel it. He didn't feel he wanted to have a retrospective--he was scared of having a retrospective.

SZ: Because?

PS: Because he had seen too many artists who were finished after they had had a retrospective. He felt that he would be perfectly willing to show current work or maybe even old work, but the idea of a retrospective was something that [de

Kooning] didn't want. There was actually one anecdote that had a lot to do with that. It's an interesting anecdote. There was Museum of Contemporary Art or Gallery of Contemporary Art--it doesn't exist anymore--in Washington at the time that had scheduled a Franz Kline retrospective. They put up this show, and just about a month before the opening of the show, Kline died. I went down on the train with Mark [Rothko] and you come in and there is a big sign: "Franz Kline, Memorial Exhibition." On the train down, I had mentioned to Mark that we were going to do a retrospective of de Kooning, and whether this was semimalicious or just a slip of the tongue, seeing the memorial show, Mark said to de Kooning, "I understand the next memorial show will be yours." I think that's what really did it. Fifty years ago--he's still alive--he cancelled and said he didn't want to do the show. Then we went to the next curatorial meeting and I said, "We have to substitute"--I forget what I wanted to substitute--"something for the de Kooning show." "Why? It's already up on the schedule." I said, "De Kooning doesn't want it." So then I was asked, "How many of the paintings"--Bill Seitz was going to do the show--"how many of the paintings in the show belong to [de Kooning]?" Well, [de Kooning], unlike most of the others, had been selling like crazy. I said, "Maybe ten out of forty, fifty." They said, "Then we can do the show. We don't need him." I said, "No, we can't." This really became a controversy one did run into. There's an older generation, I think, not the new generation, who felt that the Museum called the tune and the artist followed. So there was the Rothko show, which was a very beautiful show. Then I did the [Norbert] Kricke show in the penthouse, then Bill Lieberman did the [Max] Ernst [show] for the department [in 1961].... He was in charge as the curator or director of Prints and Drawings. I got along with him all right, except for the fact that he had expected to get the job eventually, and I think he was unhappy that somebody from the outside took that job. But he was enough of a gentleman not to...well, he was disagreeable once in a while, but that's his manner anyhow. But he did a beautiful Ernst show, I remember.

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BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: I guess that's right. That was '60 or '61 that that became separated like that. There was some interconnection.

PS: Yes.

SZ: So he was a presence....

PS: Very much so.

SZ: As a scholar, you felt he was....

PS: He was good. More the connoisseur than a scholar. Of course, Alfred called him the curator of collectors, and I think this is why he got the Metropolitan job. But he did very, very good work, I think. Then I did the Futurist show, and I got Joshua Taylor to work with me on that. I was really the curator of the show, but he wrote an extremely good monograph; we spent a whole summer traveling together in Italy, putting the show together. It was a great show, really a marvelous show. Futurism was really a very, very...sure, the Museum had its great big [Umberto] Boccioni up and a [Gino] Severini, but Futurism was really not known. I felt that was something we had to catch up on. It was a great show.

SZ: How did John Canaday like it?

PS: I don't remember. And at the same time, we did a show, I think in the basement or whatever it was at the time, of the Boccioni drawings from the Winstons in Detroit [Boccioni Drawings and Etchings from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Harry L. Winston, 1961]. A lot of the loans came from the Winston collection in Detroit and

the Museum, of course, expected to get the Winston collection, which it never did. She promised it to everybody and gave it to nobody; but she was a nice lady. Then there was a lot of debate about Futurism and people became interested.... We did these shows and then it [encouraged] scholarship and people began to work on all aspects of Futurism and the second generation of Futurism. The selection, I think, was very, very good. At that point you could get anything; the work was not very valuable financially. Nobody paid any attention to Boccioni, to Severini, to [Giacomo] Balla, to [Carlo] Carrà.... It was a beautiful show, and it really opened people's eyes. It was, again, out of the mainstream.

SZ: It must have given you some satisfaction to do that.

PS: That's right.

SZ: And a sense of power, too.

PS: Sure.... We had the Futurist show and we changed the market, the scholarship as well as the market, both at the same time, and they are closely related. Alfred was very much interested in having the Futurist show. He was especially supportive of that show.

SZ: Peter, let me just ask you, as part of your responsibilities and the expectations of what you did, were you supposed to be doing, let's say, what Lieberman was doing-- courting collectors, getting gifts, looking for collections?

PS: That was Alfred. Bill was in charge of prints and drawings for exhibitions and collections, just like Arthur was in charge of architecture and design exhibitions and collections. In Painting and Sculpture there was a separation. If I could find somebody giving something, that was very, very nice, but that was not part of my responsibilities. I did that later on when I became the director of the University Art

Museum at Berkeley, but not at that point.

SZ: The other thing I neglected to ask you in all this, were you a collector yourself at all?

PS: Not really. I have a bunch of things people have given me over the years and I bought a few things here and there. By this time, I've accumulated a number of things, even though I'm not a collector. Not at all. Then we did an interesting show in 1961, and I have to tell you about that now, called Fifteen Polish Painters. There was this whole attitude that nothing good was happening behind the Iron Curtain. That was the American attitude. It's been written up now how Abstract Expressionism has been used politically to show the freedom in America, that here you could paint freely and paint abstract pictures and that behind the Iron Curtain everybody had to submit to Socialist Realism. Well, this wasn't true, of course; it was true in the Soviet Union, but it wasn't true in other places. I found out especially it wasn't true in Poland, and I found out there were some very, very interesting abstract or semiabstract and avant-garde painting being done by people like [Tadeusz] Kantor, a whole bunch of people. So I suggested I'd like to do a show of the new painting from Poland. Nobody objected to that, which in a way was surprising. But René made sure that you could do what you wanted to do. There was only one instance in that whole time...at that institution that I personally saw any political interference by anybody on the board. So they approved it and then there were all kinds of complications. I went to Poland, and the Poles said, "Well, if you think you're going to do a show of Polish paintings, these are the painters we want you to show," and they gave me an official list of the painters they wanted me to show. So I said, "No, that's not what we had in mind at all." I made the rounds with a former student of mine who was Polish, as an interpreter and photographer, and we went around to all the artists and made our own selection and brought it back to the Minister of Culture. They said, "Well, you can show all these things, but you also have to show this, this and this." I said, "We're not going to show this, this and this." So it was left up in the air. About six or nine months later, I went back to Warsaw

and tried again, and I ran into exactly the same problem. They would not let me have the show that I wanted to have, and the show which we finally did do. By this time, I found out that if you came from what they considered an official American museum, they wanted to have an official Polish show. On the other hand, any art gallery could get anything out of Poland and the Poles were delighted to send anything that the galleries wanted to American galleries because they were hoping to get hard currency for it. So I got two galleries in New York and one in Washington to import all these paintings. They had a wonderful deal, because they got these paintings, then immediately lent to a museum show and then they were valuable. At first they paid almost nothing, but they had been shown in The Museum of Modern Art, so the galleries were happy, the painters were happy, the Polish government was off the hook so they were happy, because they got an extremely good press for this Polish show in New York by American critics. So that worked out very, very nicely, and I had a lot of fun studying Polish art. Because I was working like crazy. I was running the department, I was putting on all these shows and I was writing all these catalogues. The next show that I was involved in...the Polish show was in the early fall of '61, then in December '61--my gosh, I don't know how I did so many things.... There were a number of trustees who constantly said, "Why don't you show some of the roots of modern art, show some of the old art?" Then you have a show that [Maurice de] Vlaminck, [André] Derain, [Raoul] Dufy, which were artists who were very much present in the collections of the people I'm thinking about. I said, "I don't want to do a show of Vlaminck, Dufy and Derain. They're not interesting to me. But I'll do a show of late nineteenth-century [art] and I'll do a Symbolist show," and that's when we did the show, which I suggested, of Redon, Moreau, Bresdin [1961]. That was a wonderful, wonderful show. I couldn't do everything myself; actually, the show was curated by three different people. The idea of the show was mine, but we got Harold Joachim, who was the greatest print connoisseur in the country, from the Art Institute of Chicago, to do the Bresdin, which I think they all owned anyhow. We had Dore Ashton do the Moreau and the late John Rewald do the Redon. It was a wonderful show and people loved it; they had never seen these totally abstract

watercolors that Moreau did in the 1880s. That was very, very exciting, and a nice book came out by these three people. That was a good, good show. The only thing I did, really, on that show was bring it up; it was my idea, and we had the other people do it. I all this time was working on the big Dubuffet retrospective, which opened in February '62. I actually wrote a book on that; that Dubuffet became a book. It was called The Work of Jean Dubuffet (1962). Dubuffet was an artist I had first encountered on my Fulbright in Paris in 1960, when he was considered out of the running. What was going on in 1960 in Paris, really what was being pushed was the so-called painters of the French tradition--[Alfred] Manessier, [Jean] Bazine, [Maurice] Estève, [Jean] Le Moal--artists whom we have pretty much forgotten now. But those were the new generation of artists that were pushed by the people I worked with on my Fulbright. Then I discovered people like [Jean] Fautrier and Dubuffet. Dubuffet also became very, very important in Chicago. He was collected in Chicago; the students at the Chicago Art Institute were more interested in Dubuffet than any other living artist of the older generation. That was a marvelous, wonderful show. Still, when I look at that catalogue, I think we did extremely well. That really introduced Dubuffet to America. I had him, of course, in the New Images of Man [exhibition] three years earlier, but this was a major retrospective, and what a great show. So by this time, Bill Seitz was working with me. Now when was the Assemblage show? The Dubuffet show was in February '62 and the Assemblage show was October '61. That was my idea. That was one of the things I originally proposed under the name "The Collage and the Object." Then Bill Seitz came on board and I turned it over to him, and he did that marvelous show. We worked on it together a lot; we were in Paris together and sort of collected the stuff together in Paris. That was the one of Bill's shows that I was most interested in myself because it had been my idea, and he wrote this excellent catalogue and did the show. It was really a marvelous show, another one of these pinnacle, important events. Bill and I got along extremely well.

SZ: I was going to ask you to tell me a little bit more about what your working

relationship was like.

PS: We were colleagues, we were friends. Sometimes--in fact, later on, when Pop art came in--he thought [Andy] Warhol was a good artist and I didn't, so we didn't always see eye to eye on things like that, but we respected what each person was doing. He did some very major shows, and people would get us confused. Our names were similar--Selz and Seitz, Seitz and Selz--and people would get us confused all the time. But Bill was very, very happy doing shows and writing monographs and being very close to art. He was an artist himself; he was a painter originally before he became an art historian, and he had a wonderful eye. But in the New York art world, everybody is after everybody's hide, and they said, "Watch out, he wants your job"--all the time, all kinds of people kept saying that. I said, "I don't think Bill wants my job. I think my job is secure and Bill is very happy."... I had to worry about budgets and running the department, he said, "I wouldn't want to have that, I really, really would never want to have to do anything like that." But then people would say he was after my job. A month after I resigned, he resigned. They gave him the job, he looked at it, and he hated the idea of the administration. But then he did run a museum himself, but that was a little one, when he took the job at Brandeis. No, our relationship was basically very, very, very good. He really was a friend as well as a colleague. But it was nice. It was lucky. The other people at the Museum were people I...they weren't friends. I would never say that...Alfred was a personal friend, or certainly not Bill [Lieberman] or Arthur. No, I think the only person was...but Bill and I became good friends.

SZ: What kind of contact did you have with Dorothy Miller?

PS: Just collegial; never very close.

SZ: What was your impression of her and Alfred, their interaction? Did he call all the shots?

PS: If she didn't do what he told her to do, which I think was rare, she always did what he thought he wanted her to do. I think that was it. They had been working together for so many years that she probably knew what he liked better than he did, and that's what she did. That was my impression. Very little independence, very much a lifelong student. I think other people probably had the same impression.

SZ: And her eye?

PS: Her eye was good. I mean, she did the "Americans" shows, and she did awfully well. If you look through all these years of the "Americans" shows, not many people did she pick that fell by the wayside. Now that's for two reasons: one, because she did have a good eye, and the other is a more commercial reason, that once you were in that show, you weren't being dropped. You were in Dorothy Miller's "Americans" show and you got in the best galleries and people bought your work. People bought the work that was being shown here. Between Dorothy and Bill [Seitz] and myself, they must have made multimillion dollars for all these collectors and dealers [laughing].

SZ: It's an interesting issue.

PS: I mean, we call the shots, we determine the market. People are much more aware of it now, younger scholars, than we were even in those days. But we determined the art market. If a dealer could say to a potential client that Alfred had come and seen his paintings--not even that Alfred had liked this painting but that Alfred had come and seen this painting--the price went up by twenty percent, just by saying that. So we had a lot of power.

SZ: What about the subtle pressure, occasionally at least, to exhibit works that might enhance the value of a collection of a trustee?

PS: I've encountered very little of that. I think you'll find in other museums...I mean, René didn't like that. If I look down the list, I don't think we did much of that. Okay, so I did a show called Chagall--The Jerusalem Windows [1961], and I'm sure they were a great many collectors who wanted a Chagall show. They all had Chagalls coming out of their ears. So I'm in Paris, and I'm called up by somebody--René, I forget who--and they said there are people who are interested in showing these windows that had just be made in Reims and they were determined to go to the Hagassah hospital in Jerusalem, and some people wanted to show them at The Museum of Modern Art before they go to Jerusalem. So I felt when I got this phone call that this was exactly the kind of thing you're talking about. I said I thought Chagall was a good painter forty years ago but I'm really not interested in what he's been doing the last thirty or forty years. So they said, would I go to Reims and look? So I went to Reims and looked, and I thought they were very beautiful, that suddenly the old man, working very, very closely with a great craftsman named Charles Marc in Reims, really brought stained glass back--a medium which nobody had thought could ever be brought back--into some very, very powerful things. I thought they were really beautiful, very, very beautiful. So, while there had been initial pressure, I exhibited them because I really liked them. Then we had this crazy installation. René installed that in the staircase.

SZ: I remember it.

PS: You remember that? It was beautiful. Who expected Chagall to be beautiful again? It was the most successful show The Museum of Modern Art ever had until that show. There were Jews coming from every borough and the whole country in the winter, lining up.

SZ: I was on that line. I was a young kid and I was freezing. I'll never forget it as long as I live [laughter]. And here I am, talking to the man who brought it here.

PS: Was that the first show you saw here?

SZ: It's the first one I remember. I know it wasn't the first time I was here, but I remember it very, very well....

PS: It was such a marvelous show. I think that's the kind of thing that would happen, you see. But I would never have shown his paintings. Need I say there was this pressure on Derain, Dufy and Vlaminck. Showing the early Vlaminck and Derain in a full context would be one thing.... They mentioned it but we just didn't do it because we did not do any of this kind of work, we just did not do it.

SZ: Actually, I think the first show I ever saw was The Family of Man, the first show I saw here, in '55, I think it was.

PS: Yes. I remember other museums...I remember one time a museum director came from California and he, I forget now what it was but these people always had to do shows the trustees wanted them to do, and we just didn't do this. There was something very clean about this place in that sense. Now maybe some people might say that our taste was formed by Alfred, let's say, that the trustees and we had similar tastes so there was no conflict. Then, I think, if you look at this it's probably true. Whom did we learn from?

SZ: You all came from the same school.

PS: Yes, I think that's true to some extent.

SZ: What about this idea that there was a sense of mission here?

PS: Yes.

SZ: So that would account for part of it?

PS: Absolutely, absolutely. Alfred felt, we all felt that way...definitely. I know Arthur Drexler had that feeling. This was a great place. It isn't now, as far as I can tell; I don't know what's going on. We didn't do any blockbusters, we didn't do any of these huge shows. For instance, Monroe, who was in charge of Publications, every time we put out a catalogue, he made absolutely sure, not because of budget problems, but because he felt a monograph should be small enough that students could afford them. Now they're putting out these enormous books. Students can't buy these books. Nobody cares if they can buy such a book or not. If the price was above five dollars, whatever it was--books were around four-fifty, something like that--students can't afford to buy them. Nobody thinks about this anymore. But it was also very, very different. I would go to curatorial meetings and we would propose a show. The show was discussed on the quality of the idea and of the show, not as which corporation would sponsor it.

SZ: Or how many people would come.

PS: Or how many people would come. But the whole idea of outside sponsorship didn't exist, and how many people would come and whether...I mean, the Matisse show made a lot of money for the Museum. We never made money for the Museum on a show. Nobody thought of that, even though for many years this was the only museum in the city that charged admission; nobody else did. But nobody thought how much money [a show] would make.

SZ: But it wasn't expected to either.

PS: Not at all. It was as absurd to think of making money on a show as for a university to think of making money giving a course. This was not part of the thinking that was

going on. I don't want to get nostalgic, but this is really true.

SZ: You were going to tell me that there was only one time there was political interference.

PS: This was Captain [Edward] Steichen's last show, the big show,...which was his last show, was marvelous--Roy Stryker's Farm Security Administration photographs [The Bitter Years: 1935-41 (Farm Security Administration Photographs), 1962]. So in the afternoon Steichen asked me to see the show. I went through with him and I looked at the show and it was wonderful. He was a marvelous old man, he really was. Today they are celebrating Grace's [Grace Mayer's] birthday. How old is she?

SZ: Ninety-three.

PS: As you came in, there was a large photograph of FDR, and then you saw the show--on the opening wall there was this FDR photograph. So then in the evening I come and the photograph is gone. So I asked, "What happened to the photograph that was here this afternoon?" "Oh," he said, "the governor came in and he said that since it was not a Farm Security photograph it didn't belong in the show." That is the only time, really, that I....

SZ: And the governor at that time was?

PS: [Nelson] Rockefeller [laughing]. That was the only time that I was aware of political pressure. Now other people say that we did all these Abstract Expressionist shows, [and]...the reconstruction that's going on because we were interested in showing American freedom against..., that these were purposeful shows with a political purpose. Well, in a way everything you do is a political act, so in that sense it was. But at the same time, we were convinced that we were showing the best stuff. Then, after the Dubuffet thing, Bill Seitz was doing the Assemblage show, then he did the

[Mark] Tobey show [in 1962], and then he did the [Arshile] Gorky show [Arshile Gorky, 1904-1948, 1962]. So he did two shows in a row, in '62 and '63, which were done in my department that Bill did. Again, they were just splendid shows, and they were small--they were not big, we had small catalogues, and they were very, very important shows.

SZ: Did he hang his own shows?

PS: Yes.

SZ: You were hanging yours?

PS: Yes, yes. After New Images and Art Nouveau I was hanging all my own shows. I had learned how to do it, and we did it well.

SZ: What does that mean? What did René do that was so wonderful?

PS: You'd start out, what is the first thing the viewer sees when he enters the show? You want to put the most important work there, then the second. Then, what would relate to that here and here and here and here? If you want to do a retrospective, you may start out thinking in terms of chronology, but then you break the chronology for the visual impact. Should this painting be three inches higher or two inches more to the left? A great, great deal of finesse. We all have little models that we play around with for months, moving things around. That was a lot of fun and I enjoyed that enormously. How much space do you need? Do you crowd things together so you can have space for an empty wall.

SZ: But he was good at it, René.

PS: Yes.

SZ: And what about Arthur?

PS: Arthur was good, Arthur was very good, and Wilder was good, but they were installing different kinds of things.

SZ: That's true.

PS: I think that René was a master, an absolute master at installation. Even Alfred, I think, learned from René when he came. René had this incredible sense of finesse about how you install something, and we all learned from that. Then we had these one-man shows--Tobey, which Bill did, and Gorky, and then my Emil Nolde show in '63 [Emil Nolde, 1867-1956].

SZ: That was a big show.

PS: That was a big show. You remember that show. That was a very, very beautiful show, and people just loved the watercolors especially. He was known very, very little. Then I did the [Max] Beckmann show [in 1964]. At one point we were thinking of a two-man show, of Nolde and Beckmann together, but once I started working, I realized that wouldn't make any sense and they each deserved a one-man show.... They were both very beautiful shows. I did them in succession, the Nolde in '63 and then the Beckmann a year later, I think.

SZ: They were both loan shows, too?

PS: Yes, all these things were.

SZ: How did you do that many shows that way?

PS: You mean how did we get the loans?

SZ: No, I mean how could you just keep turning them out like that?

PS: I don 't know.

SZ: Was it different then?

PS: I worked very hard, I worked very, very hard. No, it wasn't. We had a couple of secretaries, that's all, and we knew how to write the loan letters. Getting loans wasn't all that difficult because you were The Museum of Modern Art. There were certain shows that we couldn't do because we couldn't get the loans. There was all this talk that we should do a Manet show, so I said, "I'll do a Manet show if I can get either Dejeuner sur l'herbe or the Olympia. If I can't get either one, I'm not going to do a Manet show." We never did a Manet show. So we couldn't get everything. I did the Nolde and I did the Beckmann in two different years, and in between Bill did the [Hans] Hoffmann show [which opened in 1963]. Alfred didn't like it--he hated Hoffmann--but [Bill] did it anyhow. That was the one show that we did against Alfred's [wishes]. He did not like Hoffmann.

SZ: Because?

PS: I think because...there were certain shortcomings with Alfred. I don't think that Hoffmann was the greatest painter, ever, but Hoffmann never established a style. Alfred said, "What's his style? He paints this, he paints that." His eye was too methodical to see somebody who could paint two very, very different paintings, a expressionist free-form color paintings and squares in the same year and put them in the same show. Alfred thought it was ridiculous--why doesn't he establish a style? Therefore, he didn't like Hoffmann. But Bill did a beautiful show. Before that I did the Rodin show [1963]. I have to tell you about the Rodin show. Here they had this show

that I had nothing to do with, André Derain in the Museum Collection [1963], so we did do a few things like that. I thought, just like Manet, we should do a show of the beginning of modern sculpture, we should do a Rodin show. Believe it or not, in 1963, the Rodin show was the first Rodin exhibition ever held in America. There were many Rodins in American museums, but nobody had ever done a Rodin show. So I decided to do this Rodin show, with most of the loans coming from the Musée Rodin in Paris, and we had all kinds of problems. First, I couldn't do everything myself, so I asked Albert Elsen, who had been writing on Rodin, to do the catalogue. It was the most difficult, because you would write loan letters to Madame Cécile Goldschneider there, who was the curator, forever, of the Musée Rodin, and there'd be no reply, there'd be no reply. Finally, we called up--we didn't have too many transatlantic phone calls in those days--and said, "Did you get those letters?" "Yes, I think so." "What's your response for these loans?" She said, "Oh, I don't have secretaries, I don't respond to letters." So you had that kind of thing. So we had to send René to talk to her, we had to send him to Paris or he went to Paris anyhow, and we finally got the loans. All kinds of controversies still persist. I did this show in '63--you've seen the book--and Al Elsen was my friend at the time and he wrote the book, the monograph. So later on, he told people that it was really his show. He had moved to California; he was at Stanford. So I confronted him and said, "How can you say this was your show, Albert? This was my show and you did the book." "I say it was my show, and if you don't like it, you can sue me." This is the kind of thing one runs into. We haven't talked since. And then, again, as I was going to do the Beckmann and Nolde together at one point, I was going to do the Rodin and Medardo Rosso [shows] together, but that didn't make any sense at all. So we did the Rodin show in '63, with Elsen writing the book, and the Rosso show right after that, in the fall of '63. Marga Barr...I was responsible for the show, but it was basically her show, something she had always wanted to do, and she did the catalogue for that. Then the last show that I did...then I did a small [Eduardo] Paolozzi show [1964], which was very, very nice. We had a small space on the first floor where you could do shows on the spur of the moment, Bill and I did the

Paolozzi and he did a show of a German artist named Gunter Haese--lovely little things. Then I did the Beckmann show, which was a great show.... We had all the triptychs in one room...there were nine triptychs, and we had six or seven of them. In one room, he would make this huge space, a sort of octagonal space, a triptych; they called it the "Branacci Chapel of the twentieth century." It was an absolutely beautiful show, one of the finest shows; it made people realize this was one of the great painters of the century. It was a great, great show and a nice book, which I have just re-edited; it's coming out next year by Abbeville. So that was a wonderful show. That sort of comes to the end of our time, with Bill doing The Responsive Eye [1965]--in terms of our tenure here. We broke it up into two sections: he was doing The Responsive Eye and I was going to follow it up with kinetic sculpture, which I did, but I did it as my first show at Berkeley. Then my last show and the most important show I did opened in June of '65, the Giacometti show. And then I left soon after that.

SZ: And the Giacometti show? Tell me a little bit about it.

PS: It was a great retrospective, from the Surrealist time to the work that he was doing at the time, and very, very beautiful. All the painting shows I installed, but this was a sculpture show and Wilder Green did a beautiful installation, and it traveled around the country. All of these shows traveled, you know, like the Beckmann show, which went from here to Chicago, London, Frankfurt and Hamburg. They all traveled--Giacometti, of course, too; that came to San Francisco when I was already there. It was just one of the great, great retrospectives, paintings as well as all the major sculpture. It wasn't as big as somebody would make it now. We were much more selective. People do shows now and want to show everything. The [René] Magritte show [1965] was a show that we organized; I was still here. But the [Robert] Motherwell [1965] and the Magritte, they were scheduled...I was responsible for those, but I was gone by the time they were installed. But we did a show of about fifty Magrittes, and we selected the best Magrittes. At the Met they had this Magritte

show with a room of this junk. The general feeling now would be it was "elitist" to make selections. Well, we felt we really had to make selections. There was a big, big difference. "Who are you," they would say now, "not to show these 1940 Magrittes?" Who am I? I'm the one making the selection!... Before we left, Bill and I, we scheduled the Motherwell, we scheduled the Magritte--the Magritte I got out to Berkeley after it was shown here--a Sam Francis show, a [Isamu] Noguchi show, but they were not put on after we had left. [Tape interruption]

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2

SZ: I want to know lots of things. We've just covered all the exhibitions, I think, pretty much. But I want to go back to the institution as a whole. Let's just talk about how the place itself ran and talk about some people a little bit, give a little bit of color. Steichen you knew, and you were here when he left and [John] Szarkowski came in. Let me go back even more. The way you saw the relationship between Alfred and René--what was your impression of how that worked and how that facilitated or did not the way things happened?

PS: I was just working with it. There was no question that they didn't always see eye to eye, but I think there was a sense of great respect on both sides. Alfred felt, I'm sure he said this to me, that he was reinstated by René; if it hadn't been for René, he would not have been reinstated in the position that he always wanted to be in.... As far as I was concerned, if there was any conflict, as there must have been, one wasn't really aware of it--they made sure of it. Especially since René was such a strong diplomat. If there was anything wrong, he made sure that people didn't know about it. There was a great deal of competition for space. We had very, very, very little space for exhibitions. Arthur wanted to do a show and Steichen wanted to do a show and Bill [Seitz] and I wanted to do a show and Bill Lieberman wanted to do a show, and this all had to be adjudicated. I did all these shows, but I would have liked to do more of them.... All the writing I did was at night or on weekends. In the

beginning we didn't get any royalties, and one day Arthur and I got together and we decided that we were writing these books not on Museum time, we were writing these books on our own time; we were writing this stuff at night and on weekends, and if we were writing for someplace else, we would get royalties. So we insisted on getting royalties. They were very chintzy; they didn't like to do that at all. They said, "You work at the Museum, and this is part of your job." We finally insisted, and I think we got five percent, or ten, something like that."

SZ: Which is the norm?

PS: Ten's normal. I think we got five. So there was always this kind of competition for space, for attention and all that.... There'd be openings, there were parties. People...were collegial, but they weren't very, very, very friendly. I remember [thinking]--this was shortly before I left--Do any of these people spend their evenings together, not at an official, grand dinner party? Do any of them ever invite each other for dinner? No.

SZ: So you didn't have that kind of relationship with anybody?

PS: Except for Bill Seitz, and to some extent with Mildred Constantine.

SZ: Other department heads--what about Arthur?

PS: He was living in his own world, and we'd get along; his office was next to mine, and we'd have lunch. We'd get along fine, and I'd learn a lot from him and he'd learn from me, which was great, and that's as far as it went. I think we really liked each other, but we would never spend evenings together, that's for sure, never anything like that; that never happened, with anybody. He was very, very distant; the professional thing was a separate thing.

SZ: Professionally, who did you feel particularly comfortable with?

PS: Certainly with Arthur. With Alfred there was always a sense of distance. But then we had these acquisitions meetings, we had a lot of different meetings. I should say a few more things.... When Pop art came in...well, I didn't like Pop art at all, [but] Alfred said the Museum should acquire Pop art and I think he would have liked me to do a Pop art exhibition, but I said no. So Alfred had some idea that something that's happening is important because it's happening. So we had disagreements on that because, I remember, when I first came to America I saw what was happening, and what was happening in America, when I first looked, I didn't like.... But I would never have shown that, because I didn't think then and even now I don't think that people like [Thomas Hart] Benton and Grant Wood were, to me, good artists, anymore than I think Warhol and [Roy] Lichtenstein are. So we had disagreements on that. There was all this money, this Rockefeller money, for Latin American art, and he would say something like, "Well, you should get this work, because [it is] the best from Venezuela." So there was this kind of disagreement.... This was also, as I found out later on, a very major, major disagreement between Barr and [James Johnson] Sweeney. Sweeney had the opinion that he was much more selective in his taste.

SZ: Sweeney believed that he himself was more selective?

PS: Yes, and I believe he was more selective--I know he was more selective.... I felt Sweeney to have more selective taste. So there were disagreements along that line.

SZ: That's so hard, because then whose taste is it that's been applied to that?

PS: It's very, very hard to know.... By the time I left, there was Pop art and there was color-field painting.... If I had stayed, it would have been difficult because of that; I would have shown other things. I don't know why it took thirty years for America to

look at Lucien Freud. I was interested at that point in land art and things like that enormously, but I could not look at the [Clement] Greenberg pack of color-field painters. To me that was just an exercise, and empty, especially when you compare it with people like Rothko; it had a sense of meaning. Maybe I left at the right time.

SZ: I was going to go back to having you describe an acquisitions committee meeting for me. How did that work? Because there was just one committee for all the disciplines, right?

PS: That's right. Soby was the chair, and everybody could bring things up. Arthur Drexler would bring things up; nobody paid much attention to that.

SZ: Why is that?

PS: Because most people on the committee were painting and sculpture collectors. And the same thing was true, basically, people didn't pay that much attention to prints and drawings either. It was the painting and sculpture that was prestigious. And we had big fights. Alfred would say one thing and Bill Seitz would say another and I would say another and Dorothy would say something else, and we had some very, very interesting arguments at these meetings. We really took things seriously. Another thing which I think is true, or was then at that point, of this Museum which I don't think is true of any other institution, and that is there was no distinction made between gifts and purchases. A gift was appraised just as carefully as something that had to be bought. And that, I think, was a very good. There was one person on the acquisitions committee who just had tons of pictures, [Paul] Klees and Giacomettis, and he would say things like, "I spent all this time, which is worth a great deal of money for me, coming in from Pittsburgh, and here you're spending twenty minutes of my time talking about a piece worth \$1200. If you want it, I'll give you \$1200; if you don't want it, forget about it. I don't have time for this."... But they were kept on because these people expected that he would give his Giacomettis and

Klees, which he sold, most of them. Then there were some nice people, and sometimes Philip [Johnson] would buy things, like I once brought up a wonderful, marvelous, very controversial piece, Bruce Connor's Dead Child, and Alfred wanted it, but he said he felt he couldn't spend Museum money for it and he couldn't show it because it was too gruesome. Later it was shown.

SZ: Without your asking.

PS: That's right.

SZ: Give me a specific example of one those arguments you were describing you had. It would usually be over the value of the art?

PS: Yes, if something should be acquired or not. It might have been an [Jules] Olitski painting which I thought was a piece of junk. I said that what he's doing is phony and he's doing what Hans Hartung did in Paris twenty years ago, except that nobody in America had seen it except Olitski. Other people would say, "Well, he's important and shouldn't the Museum have it since Greenberg thinks he's the most important living painter?" Maybe you have some questions relating to other people in the Museum...?

SZ: It's all in here, but first I want to do some of these things. You've already told me, I think, that you felt the split between the collection and exhibitions was one that made sense and worked well, but in fact, I guess, shortly after you left they were reunited.

PS: I think Bill Rubin insisted on that.... Who's going to be director [of the Museum]?

SZ: Don't ask me. You talked a little bit about the press, but I don't know if you have any specific relationships with people in the press.

PS: I was always a close personal friend, and still am, of Dore Ashton, and when Dore was at the Times, that was very, very nice, because we were personal friends, until Canaday pushed her out. So that was the only person that I really was close to in the press. Otherwise, Elizabeth Shaw.... Alfred always had much more connection with the press, and people talked to me; I was on television all the time and would discuss things, but basically, I...was pleased with the press. But we had for a long time Canaday and what's-her-name, that horrible person on the Tribune....

SZ: Yes, [Emily] Genauer.

PS: They didn't like what we were doing at all, so the press was not very much on our side, except when it came to good critics, critics who would respect me. I was on very, very good terms with Harold Rosenberg, and I respected him enormously. So that was nice.

SZ: Canaday was an art historian, as I recall, of some sort.

PS: He called himself that. He really felt on a mission against us. So the press, I don't know, we looked at it carefully and we had press previews and talked to them and told them what we felt why we felt it was important. That was about it. So we basically had very, very good press.

SZ: Because it was so....

PS: So out of character, and here they had this new person come in, what's he doing, what does he know, why is bringing all of these strange people that we've never heard of and bringing them....

SZ: I also had Monroe Wheeler on here. You mentioned him a little bit, but I just wanted to get any other impressions that you might have had of him and of his importance in the power structure.

PS: He was in charge of scheduling exhibitions. He really had two jobs: he was in charge of publications and in charge of exhibitions. They all had to be scheduled through him. He was very good at that. I had, for instance, on every exhibition I spent much time with him, and he...was the one who did the budget; he knew how to do that. But he made the budget. So he was pretty important. He made the budgets for exhibitions, he was in charge of all the scheduling and of the publications. He was very, very good. He had a wonderful sense of what makes a good book. I liked him a lot. Is he still around. I saw him one day; he was so old.

SZ: He died a few years ago.

PS: He was a good person, a person of culture, you know?

SZ: Did you ever get the sense that he might like to be director of the Museum?

PS: No, but since you asked me, he did. Then, when I first started out, there was Allan Porter still working here, at the very, very beginning. He was a nice guy, but I didn't have that much [to do with him]; I didn't know what job he had. He was hanging around. I think he was from the very beginning of the Museum. What was his job?

SZ: He was a sort of administrator.

PS: He was one of these people that René couldn't get rid of, you see, because he was there.... [laughing]

SZ: And in the film department there was [Richard] Griffith?

PS: Yes. The idea of the film department [at the Berkeley museum arose from] what I saw here, and it became very, very important. But what I did when I went to Berkeley

in 1965 and even brought my secretary out with me--she learned from Dorothy Dudley how to do registration and went out to Berkeley with me for four months or three months, something like that, to establish registration procedures, because I didn't know how to do any of that.

SZ: Dorothy Dudley--you must have worked quite closely with her?

PS: Yes, on every show. There were good people here. She established the best registration procedures. It was a good, good staff, and a very small staff.

SZ: It must have been growing during the time you were here.

PS: Yes.

SZ: Those are some of the things that I want to do; maybe we'll do them after lunch. While you were here there was the expansion of '64 and all of that, and how that appeared to you and how it affected what you did. In fact, I guess when you came, for some of the first months you must have been hamstrung to some degree because things were sort of closed down, and fixing the building after the fire and putting in air conditioning.

PS: Yes. But you'd get around all right. Then they acquired the Whitney, in '61?

SZ: Sixty-two, I think. Should we break?

PS: Yes. [Tape interruption] A couple of things you mentioned about Henry Geldzahler. We had an arrangement for about a year, every Wednesday morning four of us--Bill Seitz, Henry Geldzahler, Dick Bellamy and I--would go, and this is about '64, '65, and we would look at new art. He would go to their studio, and once in a while it was Bill or me or Henry, but most of the time it was Dick Bellamy, and this is how he saw

all the artists and eventually started the Green Gallery, from [Claes] Oldenburg to [Donald] Judd and all these people who would eventually be shown in the Green Gallery...he first saw in their studios. And then I first got to know Henry, and later on he became a great advocate of Pop art--this is now about '65, I think--he was doing a Pop show, which I didn't want to do, and we had his famous Pop art symposium. I tried to be neutral--I was the moderator--but it was a good group...Henry Geldzahler and Leo Steinberg and Dore Ashton and Hilton Kramer and Stanley Koontz.... It was a very interesting debate, which, of course, has all been published. So I remember that. Then, of course, Henry went to the Met and made his mark there. So, what else? You mentioned about Bill Rubin taking over.

SZ: Was Bill sort of in the shadows towards the end of your time here?

PS: No.

SZ: But you knew him.

PS: I knew who he was. He was a colleague; he was teaching up in Bronxville, at Sarah Lawrence. I saw him socially. He had done a Matta show, I think. That was before I was here, I think.... [Note: Matta opened at the Museum in 1957.] I think even at that time he was hoping to be considered for the job that was given to me. Before I had the job Andrew Ritchie was director of painting and sculpture exhibitions, then a trustee decided to change that before I got here and my title became chief curator.

SZ: Why do you think they did that?

PS: I don't know. Maybe they felt they had too many directors. No museum had as many directors as [the Modern]. They didn't want to have two directors. There was Barr.... Later on, I thought I should be made director of the department again and Bill Seitz should be made full curator. I remember suggesting that to René and he said, "I'll

see what I can do about it."

SZ: Which meant nothing got done at all?

PS: Exactly. After we left I understand there was a big competition, whether the job should go to Bill Lieberman or to Bill Rubin, and the decision was made to bring in Bill Rubin. As I mentioned at lunch, I felt this was...what I objected to primarily was the unethical thing, that he was exhibiting these things and writing about them, who were the very artists which his brother dealt with first at the Lawrence Rubin gallery in Paris and then at Knoedler's. I always felt there was a conflict of interest there, but somehow or other, and I don't quite understand why, nobody ever seemed to raise an eyebrow about this, which was totally different from my time at the Modern. For instance, there were no suggestions to show such-and-such or such-and-such a private collection. Alfred and René said they would not show a whole collection because in a way a whole collection is for sale. They would borrow things from every collection in the world, but they wouldn't borrow whole collections. They had all kinds of ethical scruples. All of a sudden, they had this strange combine of one brother showing the work and the other one selling it. I felt this was a very, very questionable thing to do, but we don't have a Securities and Exchange Commission on art as they do on Wall Street.

SZ: You also said something about doubting the intelligence, if you would, of having the heir to Clement Greenberg....

PS: Yes, and I think that Greenberg himself did a great deal of harm in his impact on the art world, this whole idea of there being a kind of evolution of moving from an age of Cubism in a straight line on to a certain aspect of Abstract Expressionism, ending up in what he called Post-Painterly Abstraction. I felt Clement had a tremendous impact on an extremely academic...idea of history evolving toward some kind of an end which was finally the color on canvas itself. But in Greenberg's case it was totally

extreme, where he valued nothing else but this straight-line development where every artist is only seen as a step to the next one. For a disciple of that to run the painting and sculpture department here and fill it with this material to the detriment of all the other things I thought was terrible. So what you expected to see at the Modern is what you expected to see. It was Frank Stella and the color-field painters in painting and Anthony Caro in sculpture, to a great extent to the exclusion of other things. I remember the first big show that Rubin did was the Surrealist show [Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage, 1968], and he had this extremely dry, academic approach where the whole vitality was taken out of Surrealism, and it was all done in this very, very dry academic way without any of the guts that belonged to it. I was not happy when I saw this happening here. On the other hand, I'm sure he got many important gifts for the Museum, starting with the [Sidney and Harriet] Janis gift, which I think was maybe responsible for his getting the job.

SZ: I'm just going to throw out a couple of things that happened while you were here and let's see if they bring any up any other stories for you. You had talked before about the fight for space, and then Alfred did that show called A Bid for Space, right before they began the capital campaign to expand the Museum. You don't remember that?

PS: No.

SZ: Or the auction in 1960? Did you have any part in that?

PS: I knew about it, but I had no part in it.

SZ: And then I wanted to talk about the opening in '64.

PS: What I remember about the opening in '64 was that when I first saw the list of guests, I was truly shocked but not all that surprised because this is what was going on all the time, of there being no artists among the invited guests. And then I think

we mentioned to get a couple of artists as sort of a token gesture. Artists in general, as I mentioned earlier when I talked about the de Kooning show, it was in general considered...people really had the feeling that the Museum served the artists. On the other hand, they felt that art was being shown but the whole idea, that one of the purposes of the Museum is to serve the artists, was not part of the thinking. [Note: The May 1964 opening of the Museum was a tribute to the artists in the collections of the Museum.]

SZ: Was not.

PS: I think the Museum had many functions, but this was one function which did not somehow fit into the picture. Artists were invited to openings, yes, but they were second-class citizens.

SZ: What else about the opening? I assume that it was Alfred's reinstallation?

PS: It was a new building. I didn't have anything...I think I may have spoken a little bit at the opening, but it was the opening of the new building. We were very happy. I finally got a beautiful office overlooking 53rd Street in the new wing, and this was all very nice.

SZ: But it didn't make that much difference--or did it?

PS: It was nice to have the extra space, absolutely. And then there were more spaces for exhibitions.

SZ: What about that space? You then got the whole d'Harnoncourt wing, right?

PS: Yes, that's right.

SZ: That's what it was called later, I guess.

PS: Yes. That was a good thing, because before that we only had two small spaces, on the third floor and then a little first-floor space--really only two exhibition spaces. And everybody, of course, wanted to have the major third-floor space.

SZ: How was that resolved?

PS: It was really basically that everybody wanted it, and Monroe was in charge of allocating the space and which exhibitions were decided on. I don't know.... I had wanted the third floor for Rothko and I only got the first floor, which was only two-thirds at most that size. It had a lot of prestige; if you had a third-floor show you had a little more prestige than a first-floor show.

SZ: So that had become important.

PS: That became an important aspect, yes [laughing]. That's what we were fighting about! And when I left, when I finally decided to take the Berkeley job in '65....

SZ: You didn't say anything and I was going to ask you, what were the circumstances?

PS: They offered me this job in Berkeley, to be director of a new museum which was going to be the largest university museum in the country and in a place which was politically very, very exciting, which is also one of the great universities in America, and going back to teaching as well as running a museum and living in California--all these things were so appealing that I decided, after a long...it wasn't like when I got the offer here and I immediately knew I was going to take it. It took me almost a year of thinking about it and negotiating with the University of California until I finally decided to take it. I also felt responsible for what was happening here. In spite of the fact that Bill Seitz always told me he'd never want to be the administrator about the

department, I felt very good to turn it over to Bill, not knowing that at the very same time Bill was negotiating to leave, which he did about two months later.

SZ: I have two questions in relation to that. I think it was in the [Russell] Lynes book [Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art (1973)], he says that you were encouraged by René to leave, to take that job.

PS: That wasn't true at all. On the other hand, he did not, for instance, make me director again of the department.

SZ: Was that part of it?

PS: No, I had decided to leave, and René never encouraged it.

SZ: Is that a part of why you decided? Did you feel that you were just sort of in one place and that's where you would stay?

PS: Yes, that's right. Exactly. I felt in one place, that I would stay [there]. Also, I felt--and this was very, very important--that the kinds of exhibitions I wanted to do I had already done, and that it could become repetitive, doing similar exhibitions and then another one and then another one. I felt the mark I wanted to make, starting with New Images and ending with Giacometti, I felt I had made that mark and had done that work, and I was ready to do something else and join a great university.

SZ: Did you put out feelers to them?

PS: No, no. They came to me. Having this job I had, two years earlier I was offered the directorship at the Walker [Art Gallery], in Minneapolis. People came to me a lot. I was still young and employable and had this knowledge. The Berkeley job, they really wanted me, and other places came to me, too.

SZ: And then he said that Bill Seitz left because of a misunderstanding. Russell Lynes said this, and he didn't elaborate on that, so I was going to ask you what your understanding is of why Bill Seitz left.

PS: My understanding is that Bill Seitz did not want to administer, he did not like the administration job.

SZ: So it was his choice.

PS: He wasn't eased out, not at all. I don't know what Lynes is talking about. They wanted to keep me and they wanted to keep him. What would have happened later on, with Bill Rubin coming in, I have no idea. I don't know what Lynes is talking about. With Bill [Seitz], I knew they were very happy. I think René and Alfred were sort of sorry to see me leave, but they also felt assured the department was in good hands with Bill Seitz.

SZ: When you left, who was here? The department was bigger than when you came, right? There was more than Alicia.

PS: Frank was still there, Frank O'Hara.... And Alicia, and Bill had this young woman who was right under Alicia...but it was small. [Note: Jennifer Licht was Assistant Curator and Sarah Elliston was Curatorial Assistant in this department at the time.]

SZ: Was she a curator?

PS: She was a curatorial assistant. And then there were a couple of secretaries. That was it--there was no one else.

SZ: Did you go on that weekend to Maine in 1959?

PS: Yes, this was a great old retreat.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

PS: ...I think it was Northeast Harbor, and we were all staying at the [William A.M.] Burdens' establishment. It was unbelievably luxurious. I remember one time going on a picnic, we were going out on this boat and everybody was assigned a place, there was a table all set. One day we went to the Ford establishment, and there Mrs. Edsel Ford handed over a million-dollar check to René [laughing]. There was the Rockefeller "cottage," which was an enormously large Victorian place with...a saltwater swimming pool.... For three or four days we were out there, discussing the future of the Museum and being wined and dined. There was one dinner--I think this was at the Ford establishment--and there were about a dozen of us, and there was a servant, a footman, standing in back of each of us, like in the movies,...for each chair. I mean, the conspicuous consumption was quite, quite extraordinary. We'd have to mention Arthur Drexler, Bernard Karpel and me as the first Jews ever to be in that mansion....

SZ: That brings up two side things. being Jewish at this Museum--how was that?

PS: I personally never felt anything. If there was any anti-Semitism, and I'm quite sure that there was, it was very covert, very, very covert.

SZ: Because certain museums had a reputation for a long time of just being closed in terms of....

PS: Right. Yes, I think this is true. The idea of having a Jewish museum director is very,

very recent in America. But I think it was covert. I never encountered anything directly, even indirectly.

SZ: This is another thing that you might be able to clear up. Perhaps it was a different weekend, but also I think this came out of, I think Lynes reported it, there was apparently, and maybe it was at this retreat [at the Burdens in 1959], that I guess Arthur Drexler and, I don't know, I guess there was some issue made of what was going on in the International [Program]. Was this all the same weekend?

PS: Yes, but I don't remember too much of that. Arthur and I both wanted to be in charge of our areas.

SZ: That in some ways what came out of that was sort of a whole unraveling of a lot of things down the line.

PS: Yes, I think that's true, but I don't remember any details.

SZ: Was this retreat just for upper-level staff?

PS: Yes.

SZ: So it would have been you, and Arthur....

PS: And Monroe--the heads of departments. That's what it was, the heads of departments. Bernard Karpel from the library, but really just department heads and nobody else.

SZ: What was the issue, the future of the Museum?

PS: The future of the Museum.

SZ: But why there?

PS: I don't know. I think everybody wanted to get away on a vacation--I don't know. There wasn't that much of a substantial discussion. Okay?

SZ: Just then bring me up to date on what you've done since you left here. You went to Berkeley....

PS: Omigod, that would take another three hours.... I went to Berkeley and I started a new museum. I went there in '65 and for five years we supervised the construction of the building and did some marvelous shows, including the kinetic show, which I had prepared already to do here, in a temporary space. Then we got the Magritte show from here. Then, let's see. We built the new museum, a very large and beautiful building, and started a permanent collection, an exhibition program and a film program, and I did all that. At the same time I taught either a graduate seminar or one course a year as part of being part of the faculty. That was '73, at which time I resigned from the museum there and taught until a few years ago.

SZ: And your experience here? If you could summarize it.

PS: It was very, very good. I left when I thought I had done what I came to do, and basically they were seven really very rewarding years, and I was really very happy that I was able to do the shows I wanted to do and make the mark and do the things I wanted to do.

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END INTERVIEW