THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**ILEANA SONNABEND (IS)**
INTERVIEWER:	**AVIS BERMAN (AB)**
LOCATION:	**SONNABEND GALLERY** **420 WEST BROADWAY** **NEW YORK CITY**
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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

AB: We're going to start with brief background questions on your beginnings, on your youth in Europe. As a young girl growing up, what were your first contacts or experiences with art?

IS: It's difficult to say. My father had a few paintings that I think were good, but certainly not mainstream. [Laughs] Otherwise, it was part of the education of young people, at that time and in that place, to go to museums, to read, on a very low level perhaps, but still, about the artists, about the work. So I guess I went to see a lot of important museums. I also knew that these thing were very precious, and not only to me, and I got sort of a liking for them. I remember the first time we were small children and my parents took us to Venice for the first time, and we became crazy with enthusiasm and love. We ran out of the station and started wanting to cross the canal to see the churches there. Then later, we were taken to Rome, to the Vatican museums and all of that. So we got some kind of an education—not very profound or anything. Another very important event for me was that, when I was eight years old, we went to Vienna, my mother and my sister and I. My sister was four or five years older, so she would go and shop with my mother, and then it was a big problem: what would they do with me? [Laughing] So they decided that maybe it would be a good thing to take me to the museum and let me look around. Now, I was thrilled with the occasion, to look at things by myself, so for a few days, I think, I spent time alone with these works of art, and that

was very important to me. It was one of the great memories in my life, and when I go back to Venice and go to the museum and see some of the works that I saw then, I am so thrilled, because of course now I see them differently, but I think that they were wonderful things, and I was right to be so enthusiastic about them.

AB: Did you say Venice or Vienna?

IS: I said both.

AB: The first time you got to look by yourself was in . . . was that Vienna, did you say, or Venice?

IS: Vienna, at the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

AB: All those Archimboldos and Breughels.

IS: Yes.

AB: And there's the Albertina, too, of course.

IS: I never went to the Albertina as a child, or as a young woman.

AB: When you were looking around, and I'm sure you went to Florence and Paris and other places, can you remember what art you tended to gravitate toward or like best?

IS: In Vienna, I liked the Velázquezes, and of course Titian. In Paris, there were the huge Rubenses, but I had some difficulty with those [laughter]—not because the women were fat, because I thought that was very attractive, really, but they were just too big and too much.

AB: Your father, what kind of pictures did he buy?

IS: Minor, minor Impressionists, but I don't remember the name; and a little – sorry, I can't remember, but Antonio [Homem] will probably know.

AB: That's quite all right. And your mother, was she interested in art very much?

IS: Yes, she was interested, but by that time she was quite sick, and so we went with the governesses.

AB: Was there any idea of looking at the art in your own time when you were a young woman?

IS: And what?

AB: Did you ever look at the art of your time when you were a young woman, what artists were doing [then]?

IS: Of course the Renaissance things in Florence, and then going to Venice, we used to visit the churches.

AB: But how about contemporary art? Did you look at any contemporary then?

IS: I didn't know anything about that. I really was not very attuned to it.

AB: Were you ever interested in being an artist yourself?

IS: No, but I thought that I should be. They sent me to drawing lessons, and it was all right, you know. It wasn't the fashion.

AB: So you didn't feel it.

IS: No. Then, after that, when people asked me, when I was young, if I, wanted to be a painter, I would say, Oh, God, no, I never could, because I was thinking of all those wonderful things that I had seen.

AB: You had seen the best.

IS: Yes, I saw a lot of good things.

AB: After you married Leo Castelli but you were still in Europe, how did your involvement with art grow?

IS: I want to tell you that traditionally a man buys a woman a ring, but I didn't want that, so we went to a gallery, the first gallery I visited in Vienna also, and they had a show of watercolors, and so I chose a Matisse watercolor instead of a ring. So that was really my entrance to modern, so to speak. What did you ask me?

AB: After you two got married, your involvement with art, how did that begin to grow?

IS: I became more curious, of course, particularly about Surrealists, about [Salvador] Dalí and [André] Breton and all of that. It was there. But I didn't participate very much, you know. Leo opened his gallery and he had his friends and I had my baby.

AB: When was Nina [Castelli Sundell] born?

IS: In '36. So she was quite small, and then we were setting up house in Paris. I was busy with those things, and I was very busy with hats and dresses [laughter]. I liked Schiaparelli particularly. I used to go to the fashion shows, which were not the way they are now.

AB: They were legendary. They always looked so elegant.

IS: Yes, they were very beautiful. So I chose dresses and went to try them on and things—totally devoid of interest, really, but they were fun.

AB: Yes, and also, when you're young and you could wear all that stuff, why not? Now I'm going to skip to coming to New York in 1941. As you said, you met in Europe many of the Surrealists and other artists who ended up in Manhattan during the war years, so when you got there in the early '40s, who were the artistic and cultural figures that you knew?

IS: Dalí, of course. [Marcel] Duchamp. [Fernand] Léger. Let me see . . . all the people who were here, really.

AB: Why don't you tell me about your relationship with Duchamp?

IS: It was hardly a relationship. He was so important and so cool. I was very interested, but from far away.

AB: How about Léger, then?

IS: I want to say that, by that time, Leo had found a lot of people that he knew, and he was very friendly with [Roberto Echuarren] Matta and [Arshile] Gorky and [Willem] de Kooning, and the whole group from the Cedar Bar [Cedar Street Tavern]. I was particularly drawn to the American artists.

AB: I guess the thing to ask you is, that during this time I assume you began to go to The Museum of Modern Art.

IS: Yes, I did, but . . . I don't know, it was difficult for me.

AB: In terms of going to exhibitions?

IS: I was still learning, and the Museum, of course, was a great eye-opener. Also, I liked something very much. There were people, there were times when the Museum had people explaining the exhibitions, and I liked listening to them. I think I learned quite a bit that way.

AB: The docents who would go around. . . .

IS: Yes. Somehow, stupidly, my feeling was that, oh, well, these were European artists, and if I didn't know everything about them now, I was going to be sure to know about them later. However, the American artists were really something new to me, and something I had to take positions on immediately [laughter]. Now all these people, all the Cedar Bar people and [Robert] Motherwell and [Alberto] Giacometti . . . Giacometti didn't have much to do with, was not American. . . .

AB: I don't think he ever came here.

IS: Probably not. I don't know. But later, we had that house in Easthampton, and it was just opposite the house of Motherwell. I thought Motherwell was very kind and sensitive, which was not the case with other people. But he had people coming to the studio all the time and he gave wonderful parties, so I got to know Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg.

AB: When did you meet Alfred Barr?

IS: I used to go regularly to The Club, and sometimes we saw Alfred Barr, who was very aloof. He created an enormous sensation when he was there, and all these artists were whispering, “Oh, Alfred Barr is here.” But, more intimately, I was a great admirer of Dorothy Miller, who came every day, and she was always there when there was something going on in art. She was very understanding and very sweet.

AB: When you say she came every day . . . .

IS: I mean she came every time when something was happening, and she came every Friday when there were the meetings.

AB: So she went to The Club.

IS: Yes.

AB: Did she ever speak?

IS: Not publicly, I don't think, but I could see that she was genuinely interested, and she was warm and she liked to talk with the artists.

AB: What was the artists' attitude toward her?

IS: They were very friendly, and very hopeful, but it was a time when people were terribly macho [laughter], and so somehow, yes, she was a nice woman, a nice little woman who could perhaps do something for them [Laughs]. Well, that, of course, was not my idea. I thought she was terrific, and I still think she's terrific.

AB: But their attitude wasn't the same as when Alfred Barr was there.

IS: No, no. Of course not. Barr was the emperor. Sometimes de Kooning was very angry with him, and I remember one time that he attacked Alfred Barr because he didn't do anything for the artists who were producing. He was still buying French or European artists. But, of course, these things didn't go far because he was so distant.

AB: When de Kooning attacked Alfred Barr, did Barr react to this?

IS: Mostly defensively, which I think was right.

AB: What did you feel about that, when you heard that? Did you think de Kooning was right, or did you think Barr was right?

IS: I could understand de Kooning, because times were so hard, and to sell a painting would have meant so much. But I also thought that Barr had great integrity, which I appreciate.

AB: Did other people pay attention to you there, or did they think you just a "nice little woman" too?

IS: Me?

AB: Yes.

IS: I was just a wallflower [laughing]. I was young, I was terribly shy, I was very unsure of English, so I preferred not to talk or even to answer. The first time that I went with Leo to a party at Motherwell's, he offered something during dinner and I said, "No, thank you, I don't drink." He was so astounded that I spoke in English, because he thought that I didn't speak English at all. So it was funny.

AB: I guess with The Club it would be much more interesting to listen, maybe, to what the artists had to say.

IS: It was fascinating.

AB: Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller went to The Club. Was there anyone else from the Modern that you remember? Did you ever see Bill Lieberman at The Club?

IS: I saw him, but I don't remember seeing him there.

AB: Or anyone else from the Museum who was interested? Monroe Wheeler, anyone like

that?

IS: Who?

AB: Monroe Wheeler.

IS: I don't know.

AB: I guess not.

IS: Well, I didn't know everybody.

AB: But you were close. What were some of the shows or things in the permanent collection, what you used to like to go to at the Modern in those days, favorite works or memorable shows?

IS: There were all the classic things—Matisses and Giacometti—but I never felt that it reflected what was going on, which was another domain, somehow.

AB: What do you think it did reflect?

IS: It reflected probably the European art from before or during the war, and that was good enough.

AB: What do you feel it should have been reflecting? Do you think it should have been reflecting what was going on?

IS: I didn't think it should have been, but I wished that somebody would show these very interesting artists that were around. They were intense artists, and unless you knew them and you could go to the galleries where they were showing or to their studios, you had no way to see what they were doing, and I thought this was a pity.

AB: So the Whitney wasn't doing the job either.

IS: No. Nobody was. Of course, the Guggenheim was very eccentric at that time [laughing].

AB: So the Guggenheim was still showing what the Baroness Rebay wanted to show, is that correct?

IS: Yes. I don't know that there was any specific show. I remember the music and the way the door was opened, which was very formal, like somebody opening their doors to their home. It was amusing, but I didn't think that the art was so great.

AB: So in other words, one would have had to have gone to Betty Parsons or Janis [Sidney Janis Gallery] or someone like that to see these things.

IS: Yes, of course—all the openings. Also Kootz [Samuel Kootz Gallery]. But at that time there were a few German galleries that were very interesting.

AB: Curt Valentin? [Karl] Nierendorf?

IS: Curt Valentin was wonderful. He was wonderful because he was showing good things, he was wonderful because his prices were reasonable, but I never could buy because they were not reasonable enough. However, you could talk to him and he would be available. I have a great respect for him.

AB: Were you buying the Americans then?

IS: I wasn't buying anything—it was the war. Maybe I bought some beer at The Club once in a while [Laughs].

AB: Let me ask you about John Graham and The Museum of Modern Art. Did you ever go to the Modern with John Graham, for example?

IS: No, actually, I didn't, but I heard some talk about it.

AB: Good. I'd love to hear it.

IS: He was very upset. He was upset because his shows had no effect, and he felt that he was very close to de Kooning and to Gorky, which he certainly was, but people didn't think that that was very interesting. So he was very bitter one of his paintings that de Kooning wanted to study and then finally appropriated. He was so eccentric, you know.

AB: When you say appropriated, this was a painting of Graham's that de Kooning took, is that what you mean, or emulated?

IS: No, Bill thought that this painting was his, and John thought that this painting was *his*, so they were friends and therefore they were joking about it, and it left some trace in John and he was sometimes bitter. Actually, it is a painting that is very like Gorky and like Bill, so I could imagine that that would be a source for Bill.

AB: What painting is this? Where is this painting now by Graham?

IS: I have no idea. It must be in the Modern, I imagine. It's a woman, leaning back, distorted.

AB: Did Graham have any relationship with Dorothy Miller? Did she know him?

IS: Yes, of course.

AB: I'm interested in which people at the Modern took an interest in John Graham.

IS: John Graham was one of those people who everybody said was a good artist and nobody was really very interested, so it was hard for John.

AB: But I had wondered if he . . . you had said that de Kooning had attacked Alfred Barr at The Club, and I wondered if John Graham had ever said anything, because he was so involved also with African art and all kinds of other art.

IS: Quite so. No, I don't think I heard anything about that.

AB: If he ever went and evaluated the Museum or discussed it in general terms with you.

IS: Of course he was talking it down because there was no painting of his in the Museum. He was no exception.

AB: How about Gorky and the Museum—did he ever discuss anything having to do with the Museum that you knew?

IS: No, I don't remember. I know that when I met him he was terribly upset and terribly unhappy. It was just a few months before he killed himself, and so . . . I thought he was so beautiful and so fiery, but also, that he was like skinned. Very sad.

AB: About this time, you were starting to give parties, I guess, and the artists were attending. Did anyone from the Modern ever come to your gatherings?

IS: Yes, I think they did. Alfred Barr, of course, came, and Clement Greenberg and [Jackson] Pollock and the whole crowd.

AB: Were you ever approached by the Modern at this time, before the Leo Castelli Gallery opened, in, say, the early-to the mid-'50s to participate in the Modern, as collectors or to donate work?

IS: No, no [laughing].

AB: Why do you laugh?

IS: Because the idea seems preposterous in view of the distance that they had established. The first time that I saw Barr really excited was at the opening of Jasper's [Jasper Johns] show, when he came and he bought a work, and that was very pleasurable to me. I thought, Oh, well, then he does have blood like all of us [laughter].

AB: I thought that perhaps Dorothy Miller did, who sounded much more approachable.

IS: Dorothy probably came to parties, yes. [Tape interruption]

AB: What about the Ninth Street show? Were you involved in that?

IS: No. The Ninth Street show, since things were so difficult for the artists, of course, there was a lot of competition and a lot of talking down, a lot of intrigue around it. But I wasn't involved in it, really.

AB: I wondered if it interested The Museum of Modern Art. I guess we're saying that they just weren't . . . what about [Mark] Rothko?

IS: Yes, Rothko was often at The Club, and also came to see us.

AB: What was his attitude toward the Museum? Do you have any sense of that?

IS: Of Rothko, no, I really don't.

AB: How about Motherwell?

IS: Motherwell, poor thing, he was sort of disparaged by everybody because he was an intellectual, he knew French, he knew about the history of art, and so people were very ambiguous. One of the things that, for myself, they were very ambiguous about me because I didn't talk, I didn't drink, and I studied at Columbia, so I was very suspect [laughter], and so was Motherwell.

AB: Did you study with Meyer Schapiro?

IS: Meyer Schapiro was another thing. I had listened to some of his lectures at Columbia, and he was revered there. I was totally bedazzled. I didn't even suspect that one could think and talk like that about art.

AB: Were you studying art at Columbia?

IS: No, I was studying psychology, which was really bad for the artists [laughter]. Bill [de Kooning], particularly, was so upset with me.

AB: Why? What did he say?

IS: Because I think that he thought that I think that I knew the secrets of his mind, and that I was a judge of his behavior, and I really . . . it was interesting, but I didn't care if he had one girl or ten [laughter].

AB: He was so handsome and so charming, and if he only had ten it wasn't enough, because they were all after him.

IS: But somehow, he was very angry with me. He thought that I must feel superior if I was studying psychology [laughing], which was funny.

AB: You couldn't dissuade him of that?

IS: I think I didn't want to get into arguments.

AB: There were a couple of years when you had the house in Easthampton and de Kooning painted there, right?

IS: Yes.

AB: Did you ever watch him paint, or what was his schedule like?

IS: Yes, I watched him paint, and he would always ask if what he was doing was good, and if I said that I liked it very much, he would tear it or overpaint it. So that was the relationship there.

AB: What if you said you didn't like it?

IS: I think he accepted that, because he could work on it more and make it more like he wanted to.

AB: Did he allow people in his studio while he was working?

IS: No, he didn't, really, but people came in. It was an open situation there, so old friends of his, like [Milton] Resnick, like [Herman] Cherry and people like that would come in, and they would go into the studio and then they would come out again and have drinks or whatever. But he didn't encourage people to go to his studio.

AB: I guess that was when he was painting some of the Women?

IS: Yes. He had begun painting them.

AB: Maybe he was afraid of the psychology of that [laughter].

IS: I never would have mentioned it. No, I think the trouble was that, at the same time or a little before, Pollock had begun to paint figures, and that upset de Kooning.

AB: Were you friendly with Jackson Pollock and Lee [Krasner]?

IS: Yes. I liked Jackson a lot, and I pitied him, because he was such an alcoholic. But he always very sweet to me.

AB: And he talked to you?

IS: Of course!

AB: Well, you know how people said that he never talked.

IS: He talked. They weren't great conversations, but. . . .

AB: Would he talk about his painting to you, or just other sorts of things?

IS: I was very admiring, very in awe of his paintings, and of him, I think.

AB: Do you think maybe because you were a little shy that you were easier to talk to than some of the other people, because you would have been less threatening?

IS: No, actually, I think that he understood that I was sympathetic, and I think he very much needed that. He was quite uncertain and unhappy about his work, and he could never understand that people told him that they were so great.

AB: He found it difficult to accept the praise.

IS: Yes. It was ambiguous, because he liked you to tell him it was beautiful, that it was extraordinary, but at the same time, he didn't really believe it too much.

AB: What other artists were you friendly with in the '50s that we should talk about?

IS: I was very impressed and very happy when Dorothy Miller made her shows.

AB: The "Americans" shows.

IS: Yes.

AB: You would go to those?

IS: Yes. I was thrilled about them. I thought, “Now the Museum was going to show [inaudible] things”, and they were great shows. I don't remember the dates.

AB: They were every two years or so—*Fourteen Americans, Twelve Americans*—but you felt it wasn't enough, though, or that it was almost like a ghetto for the Americans?

IS: No, because I only saw two of those, somehow.

AB: Only two.

IS: One in which there was a [Frank] Stella painting, I think, and another one with—was it Franz Kline? I don't remember, really.

AB: There was a big one in 1953 that had Rothko and [Clyfford] Still in it.

IS: Yes. And that was *Sixteen Americans?*

AB: Yes.

IS: Yes, I saw that.

AB: Do you have any sense of the impact of that when you saw that?

IS: I thought it was fresh air [laughing]. I thought that the shows were very strong and very vital. I think that's why I was so positive.

AB: When Dorothy Miller was selecting artists for any of these shows, did she ever consult you or Leo about it?

IS: No. You know, I was a young woman, I was a flower.

AB: And the Stella show was 1959. That was a very famous one. But let's talk now about the Leo Castelli Gallery being opened. What was your role in the opening of the gallery?

IS: We had planned it, or plotted, together, and I was very thrilled at the opening.

AB: I don't mean the opening as an event, I meant, in other words, the ideas, the policies, kind of what led up to it.

IS: Actually, it was such an organic development. And then we started looking for young people. So that was very thrilling to me.

AB: Which artists did you help select?

IS: Which artists?

AB: Yes. Did you really help select . . . ?

IS: [Robert] Rauschenberg was from the beginning, from the Ninth Street show, really. He was amazing to me. And Jasper, and Stella a little later. But then, of course, we had to

have other artists.

AB: What other artists did you gravitate to in the gallery?

IS: I think those three, mainly, but I was on good terms with everybody in the gallery.

AB: By then, after, say, the purchase of the Jasper Johns by Alfred Barr, how did your relationship with the Modern, with Barr, begin to change? Did they start coming to the gallery all the time?

IS: They did a major show that I was interested in, and that was a show curated by Jenny Licht, with Kynaston [McShine] working, and I thought it was a very interesting show and I was also hopeful. But that didn't work out so well for them.

AB: Is that the *Information* show?

IS: Yes.

AB: Why was that show memorable to you?

IS: Again, because it showed very interesting new things which had to be seen and wouldn't have been without the Museum. But evidently it was too much.

AB: So you felt that that was an exception to what the Museum was doing.

IS: Yes. I wish that I didn't, but there it was.

AB: How about René d'Harnoncourt? Was he interested in . . . ?

IS: I really don't know, because by then I think I was gone already.

AB: How about Dorothy Miller or Frank O'Hara?

IS: Frank O'Hara we knew in Easthampton, and, of course, we were there when he got killed. That was very sad. There was an interesting group there, with O'Hara and [John] Ashbery. . . .

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

AB: We were just talking about Frank O'Hara, and you had said that you had known him in Easthampton, and that it was an interesting group around Frank O'Hara.

IS: Yes, they were very young, they were very, what shall I say, crazy? It was interesting to me that they were interested in poetry and in painting at the same time. Otherwise, I think they were quite separate fields.

AB: Were you involved with them?

IS: By then, they were involved with my daughter, with Nina, so they were friendly and she used to go to see them and they used to come to see her, and they had poetry competitions, to write sestinas, things like that, which were very nice. And of course they were very friendly with Elaine. Actually, I didn't say anything about Elaine de Kooning.

AB: Was she a friend of yours?

IS: "Friend" is perhaps too much, but I was sympathetic to her. I thought she was a very unhappy girl, and very, very intelligent.

AB: She was a good writer.

IS: Yes. . . In the '70s, the Museum had those Project rooms, and I once came to see one, and it was a Mel Bochner project. I was really intrigued by that, so Mel was there and I thought I would like to show him, and so this is where we really met.

AB: So that's how you got the idea that you wanted him in the gallery.

IS: Many years ago. Yes. By then, it was my gallery, it wasn't Leo's anymore.

AB: That would have been the Sonnabend Gallery. I'm going a little bit in chronological order.

IS: Yes.

AB: Also, it's very different, because here was the Museum showing you something instead of it being, I guess, behind the times, or you knowing the artists more than the Museum, but it had begun to catch up by then. Let's move away from the Leo Castelli Gallery and ask you about, first of all, the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris. Did that have any interaction, was the Paris gallery connected at all to The Museum of Modern Art? Were there any artists shown there that the Museum hadn't known about and began paying attention to?

IS: I really couldn't say. Once in a while we saw Kynaston, both in New York and in Paris, where we did what I thought was a beautiful [Roy] Lichtenstein show, and people were very interested in the work in Paris. At that time, there were very many artists, it was really quite an international set-up. One day, Bill Rubin came in, and so I was very honored and very flattered, and I went around showing him things. Then he wanted to look at it alone, and what he was doing, was looking at the paintings, with his cane, and saying, "Shit!" [laughter]. And so he went around to all the paintings in the gallery, always saying, "Ah, shit."

AB: Was this Lichtenstein?

IS: Yes—in the beginning, of course. But that was funny.

AB: I guess you can laugh at it now. You must have been devastated then.

IS: No, I did laugh about it then, especially since we had a young coworker who was Turkish, and she came to me and said, "What is 'shit'? Does it mean ‘beautiful’?" [Laughter]

AB: I know that you and your husband collected Art Deco furniture and objects, and those were shown at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Was anyone in the design or decorative arts department at The Museum of Modern Art. . . ?

IS: Yes, of course. I think it was [Henry] Geldzahler at the Modern.

AB: Geldzahler was at the Met, not the Modern. But I wondered if anyone [at the Modern] was interested in that.

IS: No, I really don't think anybody saw those.

AB: Because they had had furniture and design and objects. . . .

IS: Yes, I know, but. . . .

AB: They also had a huge Art Deco [exhibition], no it was Art Nouveau, excuse me, that The Museum of Modern Art had had. But no one was interested in that sort of thing that you were doing. Were you known to them for it?

IS: Not really. I was more in touch with the Metropolitan, because they were buying the same things I was.

AB: So Henry Geldzahler was a much more active figure for you.

IS: And then later, Arnold Lehmann from Baltimore [the Baltimore Museum of Art], and so he knew what I had collected. When we came back here, he made a show of the Art Deco collection, and that was very nice. He took so much trouble, and Brenda [Richardson] also. They both wanted to show the things in the best possible way.

AB: Did you feel, in terms of the Sonnabend Gallery, that it was neglected by the Modern?

IS: That it was neglected?

AB: The artists, not the. . . .

IS: Probably. But I know that Kynaston was coming often.

AB: So Kynaston McShine was the person you felt was always most in touch with developments.

IS: Yes.

AB: Was he ever able to act on his interest and buy anything?

IS: Yes. Actually, he was instrumental in the Modern buying the [Piero] Manzone piece from our show. That was really good.

AB: Was there anything else that he was able to acquire from you?

IS: I think so, but I don't quite remember. I know that he was involved in something else maybe.

AB: Actually, I have a list of the acquisitions, and we'll go through that later on. I'm going to ask you all of those things. Let us now go back to New York in 1970. You are setting up the Sonnabend Gallery here. Now we're going to do the New York gallery, because I didn't know if there would be too much connection between the Museum and the Paris gallery, but if you think there's more, we should discuss it.

IS: You know, I don't remember.

AB: What did you think of the job that the Modern was doing with contemporary art in the early 1970s, when you set up this gallery?

IS: It was a great institution for me, and I was very honored when somebody came down to look at whatever we were doing. And then it became less humble, and I expected them to come more often, but I understand that New York is very demanding. Actually, Aggie [Gund] comes every three or four shows to see it, so I'm pleased.

AB: That's an interesting thing. Were there trustees or collectors associated with the Modern in the '70s who were interested and who would come in?

IS: That's where we need Antonio.

AB: Okay, I'll save that question for him.

IS: You know, there were some people who were coming. Bernice Rose was coming very often, and there was Cora Rosevear, and I think that they were good friends.

AB: There was also maybe Alicia Legg—I don't know if she came or not, but she was a curator there at the time. So the younger people were coming in, or the people who were involved with drawings.

IS: Yes. And, of course, Bill Lieberman came once or twice while he was at the Museum.

AB: There were certain shows that were very important in introducing artists to the New York scene, like Gilbert & George. Was the Modern interested in Gilbert & George?

IS: I think that everybody, everybody who was somebody and even those who were not, came to see the show. I'm sure that the Modern came to that.

AB: Mario Merz is another important person that you showed quite early and helped to introduce to New York, and also Vito Acconci, the *Seedbed*—that was the most notorious. I just wondered if anyone from the Museum ever commented or was interested in any of that.

IS: I don't know. Sometimes I was annoyed with the Museum, really.

AB: That's good to know, just because you feel they didn't pay enough attention.

IS: Perhaps it's not to be said, but it was so. When I felt they were very, perhaps not important, but innovating shows, and there was certain interest from the Modern Art Museum, and then nothing happened, and a few years later I was told, "We also have one," so I would feel badly, because I would think that they would have come to me, but they were buying directly from Europe.

AB: From the artists.

IS: From the artists, or worse, from other dealers.

AB: After you had done the spadework.

IS: Yes. So that annoyed me. It still does [laughing].

AB: Do you feel that they do this just because it's cheaper?

IS: I don't think so. I think that the grass is greener, and everybody nowadays, or even then, I think, wanted to make discoveries, and sometimes they were discoverers of already discovered things, and that was not so pleasing.

AB: What about artists like [A. R.] Penck and [Georg] Baselitz and [Jorge] Immendorf? Do you feel that you introduced these artists to people like Kynaston?

IS: I don't know about that. I think I introduced these people to the public, the New York public at large, because they were in Germany and there were certain difficulties. I think it was information that was lacking, really, and I showed these people because I wanted to keep people informed about what was going on elsewhere.

AB: He certainly showed those artists in some of his international shows, but I seem to remember that they were seen here first, before they were exhibited in the Modern, and that's what I wondered.

IS: Yes. I also showed [Anselm] Kiefer quite early.

AB: Also [Jannis] Kounellis, that show that. . . .

IS: Yes, that was in the '60s.

AB: That show I saw at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago was one of the best shows I've ever seen.

IS: That was really late, because we had shown two or three exhibitions.

AB: We mentioned Cora Rosevear and Bernice Rose and Kynaston McShine. Were there any other curators that you felt you were working with regularly at all? Was there ever that kind of relationship?

IS: Yes: Bernice.

AB: As far as I can tell, you have given gifts to the Modern yourself, three different ones. The first one is the Manzone, the *Thumbprint,* and that was done in 1960 and it was accepted in 1984, and so I want to ask you how these gifts came about and why this was what you gave them.

IS: Just by talking with Bernice and asking her if the Museum had something or would they like to have something, and then she would say yes or she would. . . .

AB: Something in general or something by this artist?

IS: A drawing.

AB: You said I'd like to give you something by Manzone or I'd like to give you a drawing?

IS: At that time, yes.

AB: And then was Hanne Darboven. This was the *Pen and Ink and Typewriter,* the twenty-eight panels. Was this the result of a conversation with you and Bernice again?

IS: Yes.

AB: And then, you also gave a Barry LeVa, and again, was that a discussion with Bernice?

IS: Probably. I don't remember the details.

AB: Do you think that if another curator from another department had come and asked you about a gift that you would have given other ones?

IS: I might have, but nobody asked me [laughing]. But, you know, I have a funny attitude towards that. I love the work I have, the work I collect, and before I give it I want to have a good relationship with the person I give it to. The Museum is what it is, but everything that I saw by Bernice I liked. I thought it was beautiful and it was intelligent.

AB: So you approved of what she was doing in general.

IS: Yes.

AB: It wasn't just that she was coming in here; you liked what she was doing.

IS: I liked what she was doing, and I thought it would be nice to show it to her.

AB: Were there ever curators . . . did you like what was going on in paintings and sculpture then? Did you like what was Rubin was doing?

IS: My relationship with Bill was very distant and cool. He just . . . I don't know, at that time he thought that everything I was showing was "crap" [laughing]. What can one do?

AB: He was also largely doing historical shows anyway, except for the shows of Frank Stella.

IS: Yes.

AB: Did you feel, though, that the Modern in the 1970s and early '80s, that they were, again, doing the job of contemporary art?

IS: To a certain extent. I think that they're doing much better now, because they've got the Philip Johnson [collection] and other people. The way they're showing is beautiful.

AB: Could you elaborate on that?

IS: Yes, I think that they had one room that was . . . the Pollock room was incredible, *is* incredible, and I like the fact that they changed the hangings, so that you could see works anew—not really new, but different.

AB: What effect do you think Rob Storr has had on the Museum and its outlook?

IS: I really don't know. I like him very much, but. . . . I think he's a good person, and I think he's a sentimental person. I really don't know too much of what he's been doing. I thought that Varnedoe's show, the Primitivism show, I liked very much, and there's a more recent one that I liked a lot that he has done. I also liked the [Andy] Warhol show, and I think that was Kynaston.

AB: Yes, that was.

IS: I think he felt a little badly about that show.

AB: Why was that?

IS: You know, Andy [inaudible] or altogether. He is only one of few. So I was upset, personally, about this show because I thought that it was really wonderful, and then at the dinner a collector who was supposed to be very daring asked me if I really thought that Andy was an artist. So that upset me. And I think that the reaction was not as good as it should have been.

AB: By and large, I thought people reacted positively to that show. I thought it was sensational.

IS: Yes, they did—some did. But there was a lot of resistance.

AB: By the way, from what you knew, your knowledge of and friendship with Andy Warhol,

did he ever say anything to you much about The Museum of Modern Art?

IS: No. He was only heartbroken about Geldzahler not wanting to include him in his big show.

AB: Right, the New York show at the Met. . . .

IS: Yes.

AB: I would think he would have wanted a show at the Modern very badly if he had ever admitted it.

IS: I suppose so, yes. I'm sure. But he had already had some important shows in Europe. This is something that really upsets me. There are so many museums here, with so many trustees who are, let's say, well-to-do, but when it comes to buying work that is, perhaps, in their idea, more risky, they won't find the money for it, and often I sold things in Europe because they recognized it almost immediately and they made the money available. But here, there's a lot, still a lot of hesitancy. Is Andy an artist or not? Is Rauschenberg worth what he's worth?

AB: Germany has so much important Pop art.

IS: Of course, and, I must say, I sold it to them [laughter]. I sold it to them because I couldn't sell it here.

AB: You said you had liked a couple of shows that Kirk Varnedoe had done. What is his impact on the Museum? What do you feel. . . ?

IS: That was a great show.

AB: But, in general, where do you see Varnedoe's influence?

IS: There again, he makes a terrific show, and it's difficult to obtain those works, and then people panic, no matter what. So I feel badly for him, and badly for myself.

AB: Right now, besides Agnes Gund, are there any other trustees who come in at the moment who are interested in contemporary art?

IS: Yes. Ronald Lauder would come in, quite often, I must say. We'll have to ask Antonio.

AB: Okay. I have a very long list of works of art acquired through the Sonnabend Gallery. These aren't gifts, but things that people bought, and we can start doing this now or, depending on your schedule . . . it's now about 5:35 now. We can keep going or we can stop. What would you like to do?

IS: I think we should go on, because I don't know when we can meet again.

AB: Okay, fine. What I want to ask is if you can remember how the acquisition process came about or the thinking behind that acquisition for the Modern, how it fit in, and maybe the effect of the acquisition, what was the effect on the artist that some of these things happened. This was Mel Bochner; it's called *Mental Exercise,* and that was a drawing and it was one of four drawings back in 1972, accepted in 1973, that the Museum acquired. I wondered if you had any sense of that. That was quite early. I think that was probably the first thing that the Modern had bought from your gallery, two years after it had opened.

IS: Yes. I don't know if that was the first or if the Manzone was the first. The Manzone was quite early, too.

AB: You're right, actually.

IS: Of course, to have the Museum buy a work is very, very flattering to the artist.

AB: I see that Mrs. Armand Bartos, for example, purchased a Jan Groover from you. Was she someone who came into the gallery?

IS: Yes, she did come.

AB: Was this normally her area of interest?

IS: I have no idea, because I don't know if she collected photographs.

AB: Here's Terry Winters. That was another artist that they bought. Was that a hard sell, or how did that come about?

IS: I think it was a sale, purely and simply.

AB: You know what I'm going to do? I'm just going to hand you this list, and if you see anything you want to comment on or remember—it goes through several pages. Why don't you look at that?

IS: [Reviews list] We'll have to ask Antonio. Mr. Tobin bought a few things.

AB: You're talking about the Jim Dine.

IS: Yes, and other things. He would come in with Bernice.

AB: So she was advising him?

IS: Yes.

AB: Was there anyone else at the Museum advising anyone that you were aware of?

IS: I don't know. . .

AB: Let's go off the acquisitions, because that might be a little too nitpicking in terms of detail. Have you ever suggested an idea for a show to anybody at the Modern?

IS: I'm sure I have [laughing], but I don't remember what. Again, Antonio may know better.

AB: Did anything ever materialize from these suggestions?

IS: No, actually I thought maybe it was not a good idea to propose anything. Barbara Jakobson is a close friend, and so she saw all the shows, and she would, I think, inform the Modern Art Museum as to what we were doing.

AB: There was another well-known show you had, in 1986, with Peter Halley and Ashley Bickerton and Jeff Koons and Meyer Vaisman. Did that have an impact on the Modern? Was the Museum interested?

IS: No. I know that Kirk wanted very much to have the [Koons] *Rabbit,* but by then I had bought it and I had no intention of relinquishing it. That is what I know. Of course, he was very enthusiastic about the work, and he showed a section of the work in his sculpture show [*High & Low*]. That was nice.

AB: So that was a direct connection that came out of the show, a quicker reaction often than in the past.

IS: Yes.

AB: Let's talk about some of the Sonnabend Gallery artists who had individual shows in the Museum. I'm going to ask you what the gallery's involvement was or how things came about. Jan Groover had a show in 1987 that Susan Kismaric did. Can you tell me how

that came about and how the involvement was?

IS: I don't remember anymore. Antonio again.

AB: Vito Acconci had the *Public Places* show, which Linda Shearer did. Did Linda Shearer have much involvement with this gallery?

IS: Yes, she did in fact. She used to come often. It's ungrateful of me not to remember.

AB: That's okay. There were so many people. Was she ever able to buy anything or suggest that anything be bought?

IS: I don't remember.

AB: And then, of course, in 1989 there was the Kounellis show, and Robert Morris, and Rauschenberg. Were you involved in any of those exhibitions?

IS: I'm sure I was, but again, I don't remember the details.

AB: Let's talk about something that was more recent, which was the John Baldessari show, the Artist's Choice show in 1994. He was the first artist to make a whole new work as part of the presentation, and I was wondering if you had any involvement in bringing about the show or assisting John, anything about that, and how that came about.

IS: I'm sure the gallery had, but again, I don't remember.

AB: Because what was also interesting is that that work that he made, he also called it *For John Graham,* which was a nice circle. Why did he dedicate it to Graham?

IS: I think he had heard a lot about John from us, and he saw paintings of John's in the Museum. So he used that painting in his work.

AB: I'm kind of curious when you say, "He heard a lot about John Graham from us." What were the sorts of things that he was interested in, that John Baldessari was interested in, about John Graham?

IS: John Graham was a very original man, and he had a lot of ways of behaving and talking that nobody else had. We told him [Baldessari] stories about when we went to visit a friend of my father's in Paris who was very old, French school, and he was a baron and all that, and when we came in, John immediately stood on his head [laughter]. So when the baron came to welcome us, he saw this man, and he did not show surprise or any kind of emotion, just went to him, bent down, and shook his hand. We thought that was very funny.

AB: Excellent. Each of them refused to be nonplussed by the other—good breeding and great aplomb.

IS: Yes [laughing]. That was good. He used to embarrass my mother, because they had a house in Southampton, and people were coming to deliver and things like that, and John would go to open the door in an apron, a woman's apron, naked except for the apron. People were very surprised.

AB: I'll bet [laughing].

IS: Especially the grocers and the commercial people.

AB: People making deliveries—truck drivers.

IS: Right.

AB: Let's say, in the last ten years, how do you think that the Modern has changed the most?

IS: I was very happy to see the newer things in the collection shown so nicely and in such a dignified way, and that is a change, because I think that many of the shows were not as well hung as they could have been. . . . And of course, the collection is much more, as the Italians say, *agiornato,* which means “more today”.

AB: More current.

IS: Yes.

AB: What you were talking about, that the Modern in the '60s and '70s was less contemporary and more historical, do you think that the Whitney stepped in and took the lead for a while in showing. . . ?

IS: I think the Whitney did a very good job during [Tom] Armstrong, and personally, I think it was a pity he left.

AB: Me too. I think he bought very well.

IS: He bought very well, and he had interesting shows, and he knew who to delegate to, and I liked even the way his extravagance, no, not his extragavance . . . I don't know what the word is.

AB: His high spirits, maybe?

IS: High spirits. I liked him being a barman in the elevator for the openings, and I like the story of his growing tomatoes on the roof. I thought that those things were really sweet.

AB: I think Tom's a real human being.

IS: Yes.

AB: I wondered if you felt that what the Whitney did had any impact on spurring the Modern into finding a way again into contemporary art.

IS: I don't know. At the Whitney also there were changes.

AB: Right. I think we could talk about the Armstrong era, from 1974 to 1990, in which the Whitney became really more aggressively contemporary and tried to step into the void.

IS: Yes, they had some very interesting shows, group shows, also.

AB: Do you think that the Modern should do anything like a biennial?

IS: I think that biennials are so difficult now. I think the only way a biennial could succeed would be for a very strong curator to make his choices and not be influenced by what is going on. But I don't that we will see that very soon, because the structure of the museum is different now.

AB: At the Modern, what do you think needs to be improved?

IS: A lot more contemporary shows—not political shows but historical shows. There's room for a lot.

AB: When you say "historical," what do you mean?

IS: They did make some good shows, like the Surrealism show, taking it from the beginning. A big survey, I would like to see that, which is, after all, in the frame of the Museum.

AB: Yes, it would be germane to the Museum. And in terms of contemporary, you feel that there should be surveys, or theme shows, or one-artist shows—what do you think

would be. . . ?

IS: All of that [laughter]. All of that is needed.

AB: What kinds of things do they do now that you would criticize or that you think are. . . ?

IS: What the Museum is doing?

AB: Yes, that you do not agree. . . .

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

AB: [You] had just said that the Museum was very safe, just the way it used to be, and you were going to say, "I would the like the Museum to. . . ."

IS: I would like the Museum to be more active. I understand all the difficulties, all the compromises that one has to do.

AB: What were the periods when the Museum was most active?

IS: I thought the beginning of the Varnedoe era.

AB: Is there something else you would like to add?

IS: [Laughing] I wouldn't know.

AB: Would you like to get Antonio over here for a little while?

IS: Yes. [Tape Interruption]

AB: Antonio Homem is now joining us. Were there any trustees or offices associated with the Modern who would come in regularly?

AH: That's difficult for me, too, because when they come in, we don't think of them as being part of The Museum of Modern Art. Barbara Jakobson comes in, but is also a personal friend. Bernice Rose comes in. And there is Kynaston … Agnes Gund comes in, but we don't think, "[The] Museum of Modern Art" immediately because she has come in for such a long time. Pierre Apraxine came in.

AB: How about Joanne Stern? Is that a name that comes to mind?

AH: No.

AB: Mrs. Bartos?

AH: Yes. I don't know much.

AB: Lily Auchincloss?

IS: Yes. She was very sweet.

AB: There was Mr. Tobin.

AH: We met Mr. Tobin through Bernice, and he was not someone we saw very regularly. We met him more in the eighties.

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**ANTONIO HOMEM (AH)**
INTERVIEWER:	**AVIS BERMAN (AB)**
LOCATION:	**SONNABEND GALLERY** **420 WEST BROADWAY** **NEW YORK CITY**
DATE:	**MAY 20, 1997**

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

AB: This is Avis Berman, completing the interview on the Sonnabend Gallery and The Museum of Modern Art, on May 20th, 1997, at the gallery at 420 West Broadway, with Antonio Homem. Antonio, would you like to start with things that you've had on your mind about The Museum of Modern Art?

AH: Yes, I think I'd like to say that when we came to New York, when I came the first time, in 1970, and we were still in Paris until 1980, with a gallery there, so we were coming

intermittently, what impressed us very much about the [Museum of] Modern Art were basically two things. It was the Projects series of shows, and we always told . . . actually, I remember it was at a time when Beaubourg [Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris]—no, Beaubourg was later on, much later on—but I remember when Beaubourg started and probably thought of other museums, we always said that we thought that one of the best ideas we knew of any museum was the Projects shows at the [Museum of] Modern Art, and that the problem, why people generally don't visit museums, it's because if they saw *a* show they had no reason to go there for three or four months, and what's very exciting in New York is that there are always several shows going up at the same time, and the fact that there are these shows. At the time, it seemed very, very important, and I say "at the time" because now, of course, there are so many galleries it's difficult for artists not to be seen anymore, but at that time there were very few galleries, and the fact that the Modern was making small shows with a small budget of more difficult works seemed very, very remarkable.

The other thing that was very impressive to us was the photography department. It was totally unknown to us in Europe, and I must say it was beautifully done, the [John] Szarkowski room. I don't know whether it had to do with the fact that we knew less about it, or what, but I do think that there was an incredible freshness to it, and there was very little, but what there was, was all extremely good, and you went just from one exciting thing to another, and it was incredibly exciting. I must say, another thing that we thought was very impressive at the Modern was that, by the time we arrived here, quite early showing certain European artists, the Modern had already bought two of the most—actually, it is four, but there are two identities—of the most interesting artists we felt we were showing here, and it was the Bechers [Bernd and Hilla Becher] and Gilbert & George. I believe that had to do with Kynaston McShine and with the show of new art he had organized at some point in the late '60s. That, I must say, was very, very impressive, and was probably even more impressive since for many years then we didn't see anything like that happen and probably the only thing quite interesting like that that happened was Jenny Licht's show, and that was very exciting because it was a show that really had to do with things that were new and were going on in New York, and at the time again there was a big split between what was happening in New

York and what was being shown either in galleries or in museums. As a matter of fact, what was happening in New York was being shown mainly in Europe. It was a curious state of things.

I think that I was mentioning to you that one interaction we had was this show in Projects of Mel Bochner. We went to see it, and even though we knew his work before, it was at the time of that show, and I believe even at the [Museum of] Modern Art, that we told Mel, "We really took a decision, we would like very much for you to join the gallery, we are very interested in what you do." So those were very interesting points. I was thinking, when I spoke of John Szarkowski, it always interested me . . . he's probably the person I owe the most in terms of education and interesting me in photography, but I was always interested, too, in the fact that he seemed on the other hand to be so completely uninterested, unable even, to connect with what artists were doing—in other words, with the kind of photography that was less about photography itself, and I know that he made a show that for me illustrated that. It was, I believe, called *Mirrors and Windows*, and the part that had to do with photography, the way he always dealt with it was beautifully done, and the other part was absolutely horrible. I think that it happened because he felt it was horrible anyway, so I guess the best example that he found to show something that he felt was horrible were things that were indeed horrible [laughing]. I thought it was an interesting aspect. Another thing, maybe I tell these stories about John Szarkowski because I know so little about him, so this was [one of] the very few points of contact that we had, but I thought it was very interesting that at that point we were saying that we were very interested in showing Rauschenberg's photographs and [David] Hockney's photographs and Ellsworth Kelly's photographs, which we didn't, and people like that, and he said, "Why do you want to do that? They are such uninteresting photographs." At one point he started telling us that we should show [Henri] Cartier-Bresson's drawings or watercolors or whatever, and I said something about, I had seen photos of them and they didn't look very interesting, and he said, "Yes, but if you keep in mind what he is as a photographer, they become very interesting." I said, "Now you see what we mean about the photographs by Rauschenberg and Hockney and all. If you keep in mind

what they do as artists, then these photographs become very interesting, because they really are a very different vision of the world by the same person." I also know that he absolutely hated what the Bechers did, which actually makes me come to the point that I suppose I understand that there was always a big kind of friction between the photography department and the arts department in terms of purchases of artists working with photography, and I imagine that the Bechers would never have been bought with the approval of Szarkowski, and I imagine that people like Baldessari and others certainly would not have been either. But again, I think he was tremendously important for us in giving us an instruction and a feeling about photography, and it's just that in our case that feeling and instruction was only a way of broadening into other things, and I think in his case he was more closed in to it. These were things that I was thinking of.

I think you were talking the other day about people we knew and who did we feel in touch with. I think of course, as I said, Kynaston would probably be the person who would have been closest; on the other hand, we were never close to him. I don't know, I think that there was something personal and that Kynaston maybe felt uneasy with us or whatever. I have no idea, really; one would have to ask him. But I know that there was always a bit of a problem with that, and I actually think that probably most of the purchases that he made of artists we were interested in came from elsewhere. But I was very pleased, actually, recently when Kynaston proposed the purchase of a second Becher, and that was probably thirty years after his other purchase. It was very nice that he would still be fighting for that. We felt very good about that. But there were other people that we were in touch with, like Pierre Apraxine. He was someone that we thought we had a lot of interests in common. Of course Jenny Licht, certainly, and I don't know at what point we were in touch with Bernice Rose, but I think Bernice for many years was probably the person at the Modern that we felt the closest to, and when Ileana gave gifts they were generally drawings, and it really had to do, too, with Bernice and with really feeling a link that was very nice with someone who had a lot of attitudes and interests in common with us. Where do we go from here?

AB: So Bernice would come into the gallery?

AH: Yes, very often. Actually, she was probably the person from the Modern who would be most often here, but I don't know from what year on that was.

AB: I'm very interested about your mentioning John Szarkowski, because I think that this is something that hadn't occurred to me that was a link. First of all, in general, when you say that he was the one who educated you the most about photography, could you elaborate?

AH: For instance, photography, to start with, was always seen as an image that could printed anywhere, and it was, I think, I don't know whether this is unique to me, but I think one saw photography at that time the way one talks about this information on computers or something. In other words, you don't need an object, it's just the thing, it's just the image of the thing. So photography that you saw in books or in magazines or whatever, but the fact that photography would be shown as objects, as photographs, somewhere, with a historical perspective and in a very exciting, interesting way, sort of defining different people, different creators, by just one work or two, and defining them surprisingly well, that was fantastic. It was really very useful.

AB: So do you think that that influenced this gallery to show photography?

AH: Not directly, but certainly through knowledge, through making us become more open and knowledgeable to it, it led to other things, certainly. I think that some of the people we showed, I think we were interested in even before that, but again, let's put it this way, yes, that maybe the idea of showing photography in the gallery was certainly helped by the fact that there was photography being shown at the Modern, and that by seeing it shown there, it made it so clear that it was so interesting to see it that way. Otherwise, it is true, one would have thought, yes, well, you just have it in a book and it's the same thing, which, by the way, is what most people had a difficulty with at the time with photography. They always felt, like, what was so special about having the

original of this photograph? You had it in a book, it was just as book. Of course I remember spending a lot of time explaining, you know, it's not. After all, a printed photograph in a book is very much like a drawing or an etching printed in a book. The real thing has a different quality.

AB: I guess I would have to look, but, in the gallery in Paris did you show photography?

AH: Yes, but it probably also . . . it started in that period, as a matter of fact, probably. I can look that up. Actually, probably at the time we were coming to New York we showed . . . we did come here before showing the Bechers, I would imagine, and Gilbert & George, of course. But still, it was happening at the same time. Actually, when we started showing photographers, which was uptown and then we showed them also in Paris, people like [August] Sander and [Cecil] Beaton and [George] Hoynigen-Huene and [Horst P.] Horst. Of course it had to do with the fact that the Modern had photographs, and we were excited about it. I think it's interesting, though, that we chose those people, by the way, like Sander and Beaton and etc., because while Sander, of course, is a very serious photographer, but Beaton and Hoynigen-Huene and Horst were not, and possibly are still not, but what interested us in them was that they had this kind of artificial vision of the world. In that way it comes more to the idea of artists. We were not so interested in artists who were again mirroring the world, like Cartier-Bresson and others. It was not that that interested us. What interested us was somebody building a world for himself or herself, using photography instead of painting or drawing, the fact that this was a whole world built by the person. In that sense, for instance, the Bechers, too, since the way they were seeing these buildings was very much a world of themselves, and nobody could look at them as just photographs representing *the* world outside. In a way, you see, it has even to do with the Gilbert & George and what we were saying. The structures that the Bechers photograph become like the Gilbert & Georges here, photographs of an interior world more than photographs of an exterior world. And that always interested us. Of course, fashion, in a funny way, was also a part of that, fashion photography, because again, they were people creating an imaginary world.

AB: You mentioned before that John Szarkowski had talked to you about collecting drawings of Cartier-Bresson and. . . .

AH: About showing, yes.

AB: Yes. What was the context of this?

AH: I think we saw him because . . . I don't know exactly what we expected, but we saw him because we liked what he was doing and we were thinking of making these portfolios, in this show of photographs by artists. Now, why did we feel that we should talk with him about this, I don't really remember. I just know that we did. Maybe we felt that, well, we admired him and maybe he was going to have some interest in this notion, and that's actually when we realized that, no, as a matter of fact it was totally elsewhere.

AB: He had the outlook more of his generation.

AH: No, no. Well, yet also maybe it was just a matter . . . he had this area and he totally focused on that, and in a way it was very useful to get his area, but then we were using it to focus elsewhere, basically, even though that also interested us.

AB: Were there any other departments that you had interactions with?

AH: Remarkably little otherwise, as I said, very little.

AB: Let me ask you a couple of things. When did you join the Sonnabend Gallery?

AH: I joined the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris in October of '68, and I came here the first time in January of 1970, when we opened the gallery uptown. [Tape interruption] Then, of course, I was here also in '70, and at the end of '71, when we started this gallery here. I guess it's with the gallery down here that I had more to do with, in the sense that I

really started working very much Ileana and the artists. It was actually an interesting idea. When we opened the gallery in SoHo, we really felt that we were basically going to make the shows that we were interested in seeing— not even the shows we were interested in *making* but the ones we were interested in *seeing*. We were discovering things as we were doing them. It was wonderful. I wish we could do that again. The question is, why can't we do that as easily now? I guess that the answer is that nowadays in order to do that you would have to be working with people who are very, very much at the beginning of their work, who would have to be students or something. It's not quite that. What was fantastic at the time was that there were people with a very finished personality and kind of work who were available because nobody wanted to touch them, so when we started with Vito Acconci or people like that, they were very ready. Mel Bochner, Vito Acconci, Barry LeVa, Dennis Oppenheim, John Baldessari, Bill Wegman—all of those were people who were very much together, and very formed. We knew when we started working with them that these were people that we could go on working with. We're still very reticent about taking people just on a sort of, like, it seems nice, so let's show it, and then if it's not nice, we get rid of it, which is basically the way most people do it, and in a way it's very tempting always to do it that way, but it's somehow not the right way.

AB: The other thing, of course, is that you have had a lot of these people for a long time. In other words, there's not room to show others.

AH: But still, there's more than that. Of course, now you basically have to start every season or every two seasons. It doesn't happen necessarily that way. At the time, I imagine that . . . these people had been waiting for some time already, and there was more of a lag between things happening. Now there are things happening all the time, and so there's nothing, really.

AB: And so many more galleries.

AH: Yes, exactly.

AB: You made a comment before that there was a gap between what was exciting, what was going on in New York, and that people were not showing it.

AH: Yes. Actually, I think, and that has nothing to do with the Modern, it has to do with the Whitney, but I was talking about that the other day. It was so funny for me as a European to see the Whitney Biennial in 1970, I guess, between '70 and '71, the first Whitney Biennial I saw. It was full of the kind of art that the Europeans had stopped doing because Pop Art had appeared, and because of American art, Europeans felt unable to do a kind of art that in America was still being done and shown at the Whitney, and I thought, gosh, all those poor guys who stopped painting ole-de-Paris paintings, if they came here and saw this at the Whitney annual they would just die of frustration.

AB: It changed a few years later.

AH: It certainly did, yes, but it was so interesting that, you know, what was very interesting to us and what was possibly even the reason why we felt that we should concentrate in New York and that we should leave Paris was that we felt that New York was a place that just kept changing, that was progressing at an amazing pace. And it did, really. But this took us very far. Or maybe not.

AB: Now what I want to do is give you, which you've seen, is this list of the Modern's acquisitions from the Sonnabend Gallery. We have two pages of them, and I'd like you to look at them, and if you remember anything or how things transpired, anything specific, please elaborate.

AH: I see. Again, the Barry LeVa, I'm sure it had to do in '85, I'm sure it had to do with Bernice and the fact that she liked the work and that we felt very positive towards her. Again, Bochner, *Mental Exercise,* it was Bernice again, for sure. Acconci, *Behavior*—those were the books, and there were some books from the Hausman

editions that we were distributing and that the Modern bought. Bruce Boice, that was Bobby [Robert] Rosenblum, and I remember when we started showing Bruce, Bobby was quite enthusiastic about the work. There was actually somebody who was doing interesting work. . . .

AB: When you say Bobby Rosenblum, was he involved in getting anything for the Modern?

AH: Yes, definitely. I think there's even a Robert Rosenblum fund. I think that he was involved in that. It had to do also with [inaudible] Wingate, who then was directing the gallery here, I think. The [Jim] Dine, I remember when the Modern bought that series of tool drawings. Actually, I don't know whether it is really related to the Modern, but there was a funny story about that that I remember, about the purchase by the Modern and that show. There was a Dine drawing of a saw that had a very illusionistic kind of screw, and everybody during the show, there were like fifty people who all wanted to buy that drawing, but the Modern had a reserve on it. At the end of the show, the Modern decided that they already had a drawing of a saw and they preferred buying the drawings of the tools. Suddenly, one just couldn't sell the other drawing, after fifty people wanted to buy it. But the people we called, all were not interested, and it stayed here for months and months. I guess that was an example of how often absurd these things are, these situations in which everybody wants the same piece at the moment, and then nobody wants it for a long time.

The Hockney, [*Henry Avoiding the Sun*, 1975], I suppose that was a photograph. Was it? It must have been a photograph, but, I must say, I don't know too well. Jan Groover was one of the few people that Szarkowski seemed to accept. Terry Winters, it was actually Kynaston who bought, in '82, a canvas, and it was a painting. I can tell you also a funny story about that one. I think it was this Terry Winters that we sold to the Modern, and—I believe it was this one—anyway, I know that this happened, and I think with a Terry Winters, so it must have been this one. We were going to show it in an exhibition, but the Modern was interested in buying a painting of Terry Winters, and they bought it from the studio. We sent it to the Modern for approval, and they bought

it. I don't think it was this one. There must be another one. Yes, it must have been *Double Gravity*, this one here. And then we wanted to show it in the show for which it had been painted, and we were told by the Modern that, no, we couldn't get it, or otherwise we would have to pay a rental fee for it. We thought, well, this is really a bizarre situation. We just sent it there for them to see it and have all the information, and now we have to rent it back. It was not much money, but I thought it was an amusing, bizarre kind of situation.

Dark Lance was a drawing, and I think again it was bought very early by Bernice. I think, probably, it was Ronald Lauder, also, who had to do with it, because I think I remember Bernice coming with Ron Lauder. Morris, *Untitled*, from the *Firestorm*. Yes, it was again Bernice. She was very enthusiastic with these drawings. Actually, I remember Mr. Tobin [R. L. B. Tobin] bought, not this drawing, but another one of the works that came from here. He had come originally to visit the show with Bernice also. *Via Vanvitelli* [by Mel Bochner] that Ileana sold, again, it was a marvelous piece, and a big mistake to sell it, but I think that in a funny way . . . you see, there were all these drawings, and in a funny way the idea of selling, the fact that she had this good dialogue with Bernice. . . . Terry Winters, as I said, that was that story. *The Birth of the Black Rainbow,* gift of Mr. Tobin—precisely, and again, Bernice, of course. It was a beautiful piece, and I think in 1984 we made a show of early works, drawings of the early '60s, and we think they are very important and very beautiful works. In Europe, people knew a bit about them; here, nobody knew them and nobody knew even who they were by or what period they were from. I even remember Roberta Smith wrote a funny review of it in which she compared these works to the residues from performances or something like that, which I don't think she meant negatively, but it just meant also that she was having trouble seeing them for what they were, as paintings. Mel Bochner, *Counting Rocks,* gift of Pierre Apraxine. The two Bochners had to do, as I said, with the fact that Pierre was really around and that we had many things in common, and of course photography became very important in his life, though I don't know that at that time it really was a focus. Neither was it of . . . it's too absurd not to remember his name, the main person in photography in the

world—[Robert] Mapplethorpe's friend.

AB: Sam Wagstaff.

AH: Sam Wagstaff, exactly. I think Sam started buying . . . I remember that the first time I heard of Sam buying a photograph, it was a Hoynigen-Huene or a Sander—a Sander, sorry, from our first Sander show—I don't know how many photographs he had bought before that. It was a very early show; it must have been, like, '72 maybe, something like that, or '73. Bickerton, the *Tormented Self-Portrait,* I don't remember anything very particular about it, except that, again, it was a very wonderful piece. I think it was Kynaston, again, who was in touch. The Winters *Schema*, Lily Auchincloss—that had to do again with Bernice. The Bickerton, *Bad*—that I think had to do with Michael Schwartz a lot; he admired him very much, and I think he had to do with that acquisition, from the print department. *The Way Things Go* of [Peter] Fischli and [David] Weiss was just a movie, so that was much later on. Actually, I believe that Kynaston was interested in buying something of Fischli and Weiss, but I don't know whether something was bought or not. Carroll Dunham, *Index*, gift of Tom Driscoll. . . . John Baldessari, that was. . . .

AB: Let's save that, because we'll do the Projects shows. Have you ever suggested an idea for a show to anyone at the Museum?

AH: Not really.

AB: Was anyone at the Museum interested in the '86 show of Vaisman, Halley, Bickerton, and Koons?

AH: I remember Kynaston being not altogether positive, even though I think he did arrange the Bickerton they bought, but no, not too much. I suppose at some of it at least, possibly. Possibly Barbara Jakobson felt interested in it. I know she had bought Steinbach, and she certainly bought Koons later on, but at the time, well, everybody

was very confused with it anyway.

AB: That was a big, splashy show.

AH: It was.

AB: Now I want to ask you about some of the gallery artists that have had shows in the Museum. Essentially, how did the shows come about and what was the gallery's involvement? The first one was Jan Groover, which was curated by Susan Kismaric.

AH: By that time, she was not with us anymore. I really wanted to see whether there was one earlier. Vito Acconci was also not with us anymore [laughing], so I'm afraid in most situations they were not with the gallery anymore by the time it happened. Kounellis, Rauschenberg—what show was that? Maybe it was just a show of acquisitions, and again, the Kounellis was not bought from us, and we were actually not working with him anymore. I must say, it's remarkable how little we ever had to do with the Modern, and on very rare occasions, like with the Bechers and Gilbert & George, the Modern bought before we showed, but in most cases the Modern bought much later on, and, very often, even after we were not working with the artist, or from a gallery in Europe or something. So, I must say, if we wanted to be neurotic, we could very easily be.

AB: Let's go to John Baldessari and the “Artist's Choice” show that he did in 1994.

AH: By the way, I should say again, probably the only thing that was very new and very interesting that happened at the Museum in terms of series of shows since those shows of Projects, were those shows in which the artist, Artist's Choice, and I must say, I hope there will be a lot more, because all of them were very interesting in different ways, and even when I was not interested in the artist I liked the show a lot, and I guess it probably only happened once. But anyway, it was really very fascinating. I thought the Baldessari show was marvelous, and it really came out, I think, of a very close collaboration between Kirk Varnedoe and John Baldessari, and it was all very

nice, really, and the results were very nice. We were joking the other day, and I don't know whether this meets with them, but I was rather, in a way, offended at the time when the Modern offered to buy the work, which we are so glad that it's at the Modern and all, but the way the price and the purchase were decided, I thought, was really not absolutely wonderful. At that point, actually, the Museum, how can I say, that we said if the Museum didn't want to spend the money to buy it, they didn't need to buy it, and we would sell it elsewhere. The Museum said that maybe they would not give the permission for that work to exist with images that came from the collection of the Museum, and I thought that that was a very odd thing to do, because after all, the work had been made with the collaboration of the Museum and it was never a question that the work had to be of the Museum, and so I thought it was a funny attitude and it was said that John should give the work to the Museum against a fee. I said it seemed to me very odd that one would consider that an artist would be paid a fee to make a work for the Museum to keep. Let's put it this way, that it's one negative aspect that I find odd, since after all, I suppose that if there were lots of negative points I wouldn't really count them anymore, but it was a negative point on the whole thing. I thought it was really not good, and I don't know whose responsibility it is. I thought it was funny, actually, because basically, I suppose that probably a lot had to do also sometimes with collectors and the board and all, and I remember thinking how curious that most of these people are people who in the '80s always glorified themselves on paying ten times the price of works, and now in the '90s they feel that they have to pay one-tenth. I'm not for paying ten times and I'm not for paying one-tenth. I think paying the right price is more advisable. But anyway, that was a point that, really, at the time I was very upset with the whole thing, I must say. I must say also that Kirk must have been in a difficult situation, and he was very dignified. I do respect him very much as a person. There's someone I also have a great [respect for], and that is Pepe Karmel, who's now at the Museum, and actually very nicely he's proposing some pieces that are quite difficult and very beautiful by Mel Bochner. I don't know whether they'll be purchased or not, but independently from that, I must say that I admire him very much to fight for work that is difficult, that presents problems, even, in museographic situations, that is, work that is quite elitist and probably the Museum will even be reproached for it at one

point or another, I presume. Maybe not. I always find it very impressive when someone chooses a difficult task and somehow, if I may so, in a museum I find it even more impressive because it's more unusual. If there is one thing that I find about museums generally, about people who work in museums generally, that is regrettable is that very often you just have the feeling that people don't want to have anything to do with anything that involves an effort or a problem. I remember that we used to say, especially in Paris, that sometimes there have been people who were very interesting and interested, and once in a while they started working within a museum and they totally disappeared [laughing]. I guess it's just the profession, and they were just buried in bureaucracy or something. I say this again just because we do appreciate very much when there are exceptions. I do understand that, after all, bureaucracy does have an important part in one's life and sometimes it engulfs you, but nevertheless, it's very nice when people look for trouble and make efforts for something.

AB: So with the Baldessari show, did you have anything to do with organizing it?

AH: No, not at all. I must say, one thing we've realized with all museums, generally, is that basically I think museums resent galleries being involved. As a matter of fact, whenever I have anything to do with it, I always discuss with the artist, never with the museum. I always told the artist, John or whomever, that in most cases they really would have much better chances of results if they discussed it than if the gallery discussed it. In John's case, in terms of the purchase, of the business aspect of it, let's say, of course it was for us to discuss; but otherwise, I always think it's better for the artist to deal with it.

AB: What did John Baldessari think about what the Modern was trying to do in terms of extracting this work from him?

AH: I think he was quite hurt and felt it was vexing. But after all, the Museum did buy it and they are pleased with it there, and we do think it is a wonderful work. Again, it's all very

positive anyway.

AB: I would assume, of course, that he would have wanted it to go into the Museum.

AH: Yes, of course. We all did. Finally, sometimes what's annoying in this kind of situation is that basically we all want the same thing. I guess it's human of the Museum to try to drive a hard bargain, and of course I think the Modern always has a feeling that they are entitled to it, since it is a very good museum and a very well-known museum, but I wonder sometimes whether it's also not a weakness to want to force things too much.

AB: You have had some luck with Kynaston and Bernice Rose over the years. We've talked about the Modern a little bit in the '70s, but you found that it's changed? There have been big changes in the staff now.

AH: Not basically. I think it's opened itself more, of course. It's more open, but then of course that has to do also, I suppose, with the whole world around, I imagine. Again, I think that Kirk opened things up a lot, and I think he has had a very positive. . . .

AB: What about Rob Storr?

AH: We've had nothing to do with him basically. I don't know, maybe he's interested also in other artists or something. Let's say that we had very little to do with Kynaston, but we knew that he was basically interested in the same kind of artists we were. I'm not sure about Robert Storr. How can I say, that doesn't mean that I have a bad opinion of him. I think he did some very good things and some very beautiful installations. I thought it was wonderful what he did, for instance, in the installation of the [Bruce] Nauman show. He also made a beautiful, very impressive, very unusual installation, I remember, years ago, with [inaudible] in the center, actually works mainly by women artists around it. But I don't even remember because I just remember looking at that room and thinking, gosh, this looks so different from the way the Modern generally looks, and it looks quite interesting, really, and very unorthodox. I found out it was he

who had made that installation, and I really was impressed that he could have that. . . .

AB: How about Margit Rowell?

AH: That's been more recent, and actually, I suppose, more now with this show of the still lifes. Actually, I'm quite curious to see it. It's funny, I told her that . . . I never did that before, I did try to have an interaction there, if you want, in the sense that she came to us for the loan of the Warhols, etc., and I think she must have asked me for a point of view, whatever, because I remember I told her, "Look, Margit, I never did this with anybody from the Museum before, but I am going to tell you I really think that there's somebody that should be in your show—Haim Steinbach—that I really think should be there." She said no, she was not so sure of him. She seemed to feel that it was a big deal to have Koons in the show, because obviously she was not very interested in him, and I gave her a book on Steinbach and I remember that she looked a little worried, and she said, "I hope you are not making the loan of the Warhol dependent upon Steinbach being there," and I said, "Of course not, Margit. I just think that if you don't put Steinbach in the show at least I'd like to know that you, how can I say, that I gave you all the information for you to include him or not include him." And of course, she didn't include him. I do think that this is really a big mistake. It's a big show, and I'm sure there will be lots of really beautiful things, and I certainly would not think that she should put him in if she doesn't. . . .

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BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2

AH: Yes, I respect Margit for not putting him in the show, since she doesn't believe in him, but I do think that the show, and as I said, I haven't even seen it yet, but I can't conceive of a show of this subject not being better through having Haim Steinbach, and not just because I think that Haim is an interesting artist, but because I think that

what he's doing with that notion of still life is so different from everybody else and so consequential. So, even if the whole show is marvelous, which I hope it is, and, after all, I enjoy seeing marvelous shows and I'd like for it to be marvelous and to enjoy it, I know that what Haim does with it can never possibly be represented in the show, and it seems to me that it's an important lack. I've been more candid with you than with publications. It's very interesting, actually, because normally I would never speak about all these things to someone else, but with you I guess it becomes part of an obligation, in a certain way. In other words, I mean that I owe it to you, I owe it to what you do.

AB: Thank you, and I can certainly assure you that one, this is not for publication, and two, both of you can put a strict restriction on anything at all. It's for the Modern in the future. . . .

IS: Very good.

AB: Thank you so much. I appreciate this; it's been extremely helpful.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 2

END INTERVIEW