

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

**INTERVIEW WITH:            DAVID ROCKEFELLER (DR)**  
**INTERVIEWER:              SHARON ZANE (SZ)**  
**LOCATION:                      30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA, NEW YORK CITY**  
**DATE:                          17 JANUARY 1991**

**BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

SZ:    This is an interview with David Rockefeller for The Museum of Modern Art Oral History. It is January 17, 1991 and we are at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. I'll start the way I always do: tell me where you were born and a little bit about your growing up.

DR:    I was born at 10 West 54th Street in New York City on June 12th, 1915. I was born in a house that my parents built, shortly before I was born, near my grandfather's house at 4 West 54th Street. There was an infirmary in the house; in those days, many people were born at home rather than in hospitals. I'm not sure that that isn't happening again. But, in any event, I was born there and lived there until 1937, when the house was torn down and my parents moved to an apartment at 410 Park Avenue. I give those details because it just happens that when my parents moved from 10 West 54th Street to an apartment, the land that they owned between Grandfather's house and ours was given to The Museum of Modern Art. That is now the [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller] Sculpture Garden of the Museum. So I feel rather sentimentally about the Sculpture Garden, which was named for my mother, and I gave the initial funds that made possible the creation of it.

SZ:    Which was the site of your...

DR:    Which was the site of our home and where I grew up.

SZ:    Now, in your childhood, that neighborhood where your house was, that was essentially residential?

DR: Essentially residential. Many of the buildings that are still there, like St. Thomas Church and the University Club, were already there. Several of the buildings across the street on 54th Street are still there. Two houses across the street--11 and 13 West 54th--had belonged to my parents, and one or two of my siblings were born there. Then, after my parents moved to an apartment, I guess perhaps it was right after the war, my brother Nelson acquired those buildings between 54th and 55th, and he used them for some of his offices when he was governor of New York State. After his death, the buildings were sold to the Danske Bank, which is a Danish bank; the houses themselves have been preserved as a historic monument, and therefore the facade cannot be changed, but the buildings are now used for other purposes.

SZ: The big house that you grew up in, did your father build it?

DR: My father built it, probably in 1914 or '15. In any case, I was born in it.

SZ: Did it seem very big to you when you were small?

DR: Yes, well, it was very big. It was nine stories high, which is pretty big for a private house in New York.

SZ: Did it have a yard? Was there greenery?

DR: There was a yard between Grandfather's house and our house, and there were, along the street, both trees and iron urns that held flowers. But the yard itself was concreted over, so it was not planted; in fact, sometimes, in the winter, if the weather was cold, the yard would be flooded and you could skate on it. I don't remember that being done a great deal, but it gives you an idea that it was definitely not green or planted with flowers. And then, in back of our house, there were two houses that were owned by my aunt, Mrs. Alta Prentice--Mrs. E. Parmelee Prentice--and those houses were next to St. Thomas Church on 53rd Street. She left those houses to The Museum of Modern Art, which also owned the buildings my parents had given

much earlier. I went to see her back in the late 1950s or early 1960, and asked her if she would leave her two houses to the Museum in her will, which she did. She was very nice about it, because I don't think she was any more interested in modern art than Father was. She died in 1962, and those houses were then torn down and the Museum completed its first major addition, designed by Philip Johnson, which is located between the Museum and St. Thomas's Church.

SZ: Let me just say for the purposes of this that dates such as those are matters of record, so we'll fill them in.

SZ: Since you've brought that up, tell me a little bit about the fact that your mother had a great interest and love for art, modern art in particular, and your father did not. Was this something you were aware of early on?

DR: Oh yes. Father did not like what he called modern art and didn't like having it around, and, as a result of that, when Mother became interested in it, she took over the seventh floor of our house--I told you that it had nine stories--and made it into a small art gallery. She got Donald Deskey, the great Art Deco architect and designer, to do the gallery. It was really quite a charming gallery. It wasn't very big, but she was able to show a number of things there, and she did show the things that she liked. She also had a room where she kept prints and also her records, and she had a curator who worked with her. She collected a great many contemporary prints, which, of course, she subsequently gave to The Museum of Modern Art. It's still, I guess, the basis of the Museum's print and drawing collection. She gave part of those in her lifetime, and the rest she left in her will. Father was very tolerant of her collecting what she wanted to. He didn't try to prevent her from doing it. On the other hand, she didn't have a huge income of her own and therefore was limited in what she was able to buy. That may be one of the reasons she bought so many prints and drawings: they were less expensive than paintings. Also, even then, works by French Impressionists were relatively more expensive than works by early 20th-century American painters, which she liked and collected to a considerable extent. She had only a very small number of French Impressionists. She did have one

beautiful little Monet flower painting that we now own, I'm happy to say, which she had in her office at 740 Park Avenue. And she had a lovely Redon flower picture that we also own, and a few others. She enjoyed flower pictures and had those in her room. But they were small and I'm sure she paid quite little for them at the time.

So she collected many more contemporary things. She also, of course, collected folk art. I think she was one of the first people in this country to start a folk art collection, which was inspired in part because she worked a lot with Edith Halpert of the Downtown Gallery, who in her gallery exhibited not only contemporary American art, but also folk art. Edith Halpert encouraged Mother, but I think Mother's purchases undoubtedly helped her as well. They were quite close, and I think Mrs. Halpert had a lot to do with helping Mother form both her painting and folk art collection.

SZ: Your mother's father had been a collector; he had an eye, and she got that from him, is that not right?

DR: He certainly was interested in works of art. I'm not really aware that he had many paintings. He had a house that he built in Warwick Neck in Rhode Island, where they lived during the latter part of his life, and they had a certain amount of sculpture there, mostly 17th and 18th-century European sculpture. Four of the pieces belonged to Nelson, because they went from my grandfather to my mother's sister, Lucy Aldridge, and when she died, Nelson acquired them from her, so they're still in the family. He did have also a certain number of Greek amphorae, which we now have--maybe eight or ten of them--which I think are quite good. But I'm not aware that he collected paintings. Certainly, he enjoyed traveling, and would go to museums, and I'm sure in that sense he encouraged both Aunt Lucy and Mother to be interested in art; but a lot of it they must have developed themselves.

SZ: And modern art, which was a big leap at that time.

DR: Yes. I think it is quite remarkable that Mother did develop such an interest in that. I'm not certain of exactly when she began to like it, but I should point out that she

developed a very real interest in it, so much so that she played a major role in starting The Museum of Modern Art. She also loved beautiful things of all periods and types. She had very eclectic tastes, and I think it's fair to say that, while modern art was an important interest, it was by no means her only interest. She was very interested in Asian art. She collected Japanese prints; she began collecting them--I just learned this fairly recently--Hiroshige and Hokusai, prints of that vintage, during the first decade of this century.

SZ: Do you remember seeing them?

DR: Oh, I remember seeing them very well. I now own quite a number of them. She had them around the house, particularly in Maine, where she kept a lot of them. She actually gave a collection of 700 Japanese prints to the Rhode Island School of Design. Interestingly enough, last year, 400 of them were loaned to an exhibition in Tokyo, the first time they'd ever been out. The curator at the Tokyo museum said that it was perhaps the largest single collection of Japanese prints of that period that he was aware of. And that was back, as I say, in the very early part of the century. She also collected Persian and Mughal miniatures, as well as Chinese, Japanese and Southeast Asian sculpture. I was at the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] this week, for a meeting with some Chinese officials and others, and went past the hall where there is a lot of sculpture. I looked into the hall and I saw a figure that I thought I remembered from my early childhood, and I said, "I believe that was one Mother had and gave to the Metropolitan." It turned out I was correct. It was a Quon Yin [sp?] Chinese Buddhist figure, a seated figure with one knee up and the other down, that Mother had at 12 West 54th Street, a building they added next to the tall building that they lived in, in which to put beautiful things that they liked. In 12 West 54th Street, there was a room that was for Oriental sculpture, including a number of Buddhas and other Oriental figures. It was rather darkly lit, and Mother used to have incense burned in front of some of the figures, so I remember the smell of the room. And later on, because some of these things were really rather good and they didn't have room for them at the apartment, she gave several to the Metropolitan and to other places. Also, in that same building at 12 West 54 Street were the Unicorn

tapestries that are now at the Cloisters and are really the basis of the Cloisters. In that case, it was more Father who was interested in acquiring them, but Mother was also tremendously interested in them. I grew up with these incredible Gothic tapestries, which are certainly some of the most beautiful in the world. But also in that same house was a room with Beauvais tapestries, which are also now in the Metropolitan. I'm mentioning this because it illustrates that Mother's interests were really a great deal broader than just contemporary art. She was not, however, a scholar of any of it. She read a certain amount, but I think she had an instinctive taste for quality wherever she saw it, and enjoyed beautiful things wherever they were to be found.

SZ: Did she talk to you about the things she particularly liked?

DR: Not in an organized way, as though she were teaching me, but as we would see things, she would talk about them, so from early childhood, I was interested in them and exposed to them. At 10 West 54th Street, they also had a number of Renaissance paintings--a very good Piero della Francesca, a Goya, and two Duccios. It was a very good, small collection of fine quality Renaissance, some a little later than that, but basically classical works, as opposed to modern. Father certainly enjoyed these more than he did the contemporary, but Mother was equally enthusiastic about both.

SZ: But she liked modern and he didn't.

DR: She liked modern and he didn't. But, as I said, I'm not sure that he really encouraged her in her interest in modern art, and I think probably at times fretted a bit when she spent a lot of time working on Museum things, because it took time away from him and he liked to be with her very much. But, on the other hand, the fact remains that it was he who gave the land to the Museum, because he owned it, not Mother. I think this was an indication of the fact that he was fully supportive of her and basically was proud of the fact that she did what she did and it was such a success.

SZ: Did you spend a lot of time in that seventh-floor gallery?

DR: I went there frequently, yes.

SZ: You described it as charming. Could you describe it in a little bit further detail?

DR: It was very contemporary in design and quite different from the rest of the house--contemporary in that there were very simple Art Deco chairs. We still have a few pieces that came from there. The walls were very simple. It was a gallery that today would seem quite natural to people, but in those days was quite new; it had a simplicity and lack of ornament which was very suited to showing pictures, but was nevertheless furnished sufficiently that it was a pleasant place to sit in, even though it was used primarily as a gallery. Mother would change the pictures from time to time, using it as a place where she could see things if she wanted to. I think there was one larger room and I think there were two smaller ones. It was the southern end of the building. Incidentally, my own bedroom was on the fifth floor looking south, and in those days from my bedroom you could look out over some very, very low buildings where Rockefeller Center now is, and see the spires of St. Patrick's Cathedral--I guess it was built when I was young—and the Empire State and the Chrysler Building. In fact, I have upstairs a painting--a contemporary American painter did it, and I'll give [the name] to you--which was commissioned by Mother, of the view from my window, before the Center was built. It is quite interesting to see today. I have loaned it to the Rainbow Room, and it is now in a private dining room that is used on the 65th floor here.

SZ: Was Fifth Avenue basically not a commercial street at that point?

DR: There is one building in that painting that was DePinna's--I don't know if you remember that name—which was a haberdashery store, where my family bought our clothes as a child [laughing]. That was up on Fifth Avenue. But there were still a number of mansions along Fifth Avenue when I was there as a child.

SZ: I wanted to ask about the Lincoln School, where you went.

DR: The Lincoln School of Teacher's College, which was a school that my father helped to establish. It was developed along the educational lines advanced by John Dewey, but it was particularly the idea of Abraham Flexner, who was an educational scholar at Princeton in those days and the brother of Simon Flexner, the first director of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. Flexner's ideas were closely related to those of Dewey, and Teacher's College was interested in new, progressive education, with people having more freedom to study what they wanted, and less regimentation. Father was persuaded this was a good idea and helped Teacher's College establish the school. I think he gave something like three million dollars to build the building, which is now Public School 125.

SZ: Located where?

DR: At 123rd Street, between Morningside Drive and Amsterdam.

SZ: Wasn't that unusual at that time for someone like yourself to be attending a so-called progressive school

DR: I think probably a lot of my contemporaries whose parents were wealthy would have been more apt to send their boys to places like Buckley or St. Bernard's, and the girls to Chapin or Brearley. I think my parents felt it would be good for us to go to a coeducational school and good to go to a school where there was a broader mix of people with a variety of economic and social backgrounds. I think this was a very good idea.

SZ: Did you like it?

DR: I went there for twelve years [laughter], so I have no comparison, but yes, I did like it, and I think it gave me a good education and was useful in many ways.

SZ: Is that the same school that then became the New Lincoln School?

DR: No, the New Lincoln School was started by a number of teachers who had taught at the old Lincoln School. Just before the [Second World] war, the Teacher's College and a group in the parent-teacher association at Lincoln got into a very heated debate--there were card-carrying members of the Communist Party who were teachers--and as a result, there were such problems that they closed the school, and the teachers started another school, New Lincoln, but it was not really related to the old Lincoln School. New Lincoln still exists, I believe.

SZ: I think it finally folded.

DR: Did it fold as well? I hadn't heard that. I never had anything really to do with it. It happened, of course, long after I graduated from Lincoln, in 1932.

SZ: I guess Lincoln was an experiment that was really very successful.

DR: I think so. It probably had an influence on other schools. They had some very good teachers.

SZ: Do you remember your mother talking about the Armory Show?

DR: Yes. I can't specifically remember that Mother said about it, but I remember its being discussed. It was something I was aware of at a relatively early age.

SZ: The two other women who founded the Museum with her, did you know them well?

DR: Surely. They were frequently at the house. Mrs. Sullivan perhaps I saw more of than Mrs. Bliss, because in addition to being a friend of Mother's, she was a dealer. I don't think she had a store, I think she just bought things for people, including Mother. So Mother saw her in other connections than in starting the Museum.

SZ: And Miss Bliss?

DR: Miss Bliss. I would see her, and she certainly was a friend of Mother's. I think I didn't see as much of her as I did of Miss Sullivan. I would see her when Mother was meeting about, and planning for, the Museum. I certainly knew her, but I didn't see a great deal of her. I was quite young.

SZ: What is your first memory of talk of the Museum, the idea of it?

DR: I certainly remember talks between the three ladies and Alfred Barr, who was brought in at a relatively early stage.

SZ: You must have been thirteen or fourteen.

DR: Yes, I would think so. My recollection is he was recommended to Mother by Mr. Paul Sachs and Mr. Edward Forbes, who were the two co-curators of the Fogg Museum at Harvard. Mother had an interest in the Fogg, partly because of her interest in Oriental art, and served on the Fogg's visiting committee. Alfred Barr, of course, studied there; he took Paul Sachs's museum course. I think it was certainly Paul Sachs who must have brought Barr to Mother's attention.

SZ: What was Paul Sachs like?

DR: He was part of the Sachs family of Goldman Sachs. He was a businessman, a wealthy man, who had a great interest in art. I remember him as being somewhat abrupt and rather businesslike, but Mother liked him and respected him very much. I think he was very helpful to Mother in giving her guidance on some of her collecting. And, certainly, I think nothing could have been more important for the Museum than bringing in Alfred Barr, who turned out to be the most creative force in the founding of the Museum. I knew him very well, and continued to, until, regrettably, he really lost his memory and had to be institutionalized, which was very sad. He was acutely unhappy about that loss of memory, because he had had an encyclopedic kind of

mind, not just about contemporary art, but all the arts, and many other subjects as well. He was quite a good amateur ornithologist, among other things. So I knew him very well. Toward the end of his life, he and I both served as members of the Board of Overseers at Harvard. I can remember even at that time, which must have been back in the early '60s because John F. Kennedy was also a member at the same time, he would be asked to make a report to the Overseers on the Fogg--I think perhaps he was chairman of the Fogg visiting committee--and his memory would go and he couldn't find words. It was really a very sad thing.

SZ: It was distressing to him?

DR: Terribly distressing to him, because words didn't come. But we continued to see him until he had to be institutionalized. My wife, Peggy, and I were both very fond of him. I feel with him that I had really a very long period of close association. He was extremely helpful to us in our early days of buying pictures and often recommended paintings to us, which in many cases we bought. Many of the ones he recommended are going to the Museum, which obviously is what he had hoped would happen [laughing]. But he was an extraordinary and fascinating, brilliant person.

SZ: He and your mother had a good relationship?

DR: A very good relationship, indeed they did. I started to say, and then got a little diverted, that I remember his being at meetings at the house with Miss Bliss and Mrs. Sullivan. Frequently, when I would come back from school, or when I would come home for lunch, they would be there, and I would listen to conversations going on about the Museum. So I was very conscious about Mother's interest in it and the people who were identified with her.

SZ: Can you remember the kinds of things that they would talk about, the kinds of things that they were concerned with at that point?

DR: Most importantly, I think that they felt that contemporary art was not generally

appreciated, not understood. I'm sure that the Armory Show did have an impact in that it created a great stir and controversy, but in reality there was no way that it could be followed up on, because there was no museum where people could see on an ongoing basis the things that had been shown in that show. So, in that sense, undoubtedly it was an important force in persuading the three ladies and others who were also involved to move forward with the Museum. They felt that artists with different points of view, who were trying to be creative in ways different than what had been the case in the past, should be given a chance, and, unless there were a recognized museum where that could happen, there wouldn't be an appropriate way for them to become known. The fact that Mother had this little gallery on the seventh floor made it seem natural to me to see things that were different. I guess my own tastes at the time were a good deal more conservative, and quite a number of the things that Mother showed then I didn't particularly like....

## **SIDE 2, TAPE 1**

SZ: ...that she had in her....

DR: In her gallery, yes.

SZ: What didn't you like that you can particularly remember?

DR: I think I was puzzled by them, because they didn't seem realistic or they showed things that seemed odd to show. I can remember Mother had a painting, *Danger on the Stairs*, by Pierre Roy, of a snake going downstairs. It's in the Museum's collection now. She had a Bonnard, which now belongs to my brother Laurence. It's a portrait of a lady in a room and the lady is almost part of the total scenery, so that it really isn't a portrait of a lady, it's a painting of an interior in which there's also a lady. It seemed to me odd that she wouldn't be clearly defined, and so I found that troubling at the time. Well, Bonnard is now one of my favorite artists, and I wish I had that particular painting. I do have another a little bit like it. But that is what was so good for my perspective: having an opportunity to be exposed to these things

even those I was critical of them or didn't understand them. Over time, I came to understand them much better. Of course, that that was helped by the fact that when Mother died in 1948, when she seemed to me to be still quite young, I was asked to take her place on the board of the Museum, and I've been on the board ever since. That's forty-three years now. Obviously, the ongoing experience of being on the Museum [board] and involved with [the Museum] has....

SZ: You've probably grown to like things that you never in a million years thought that you would.

DR: That's true. I have to say there are still quite a few things that the Museum has that I don't like [laughter]. So I haven't completely adapted myself to all of the most contemporary of work that's being done today. That doesn't mean, though, that I don't think it isn't important to exhibit it. I think the important thing is that we have curators dealing with that part of it, who hopefully have some of the instincts that Alfred Barr had in his day, selecting the things from the mass that is being produced today which will be the ones that will last and that will have ongoing value. I'm sure some of them will. There's an awful lot more being done today than was being done then, a lot more galleries, and people are more interested in art and more interested in seeing it. I find it very puzzling today to know how to make selections, because so much of it to me is unattractive and unappealing and even sometimes almost revolting, which it is probably meant to be. Then the question is, How do you evaluate its quality, what's good and what isn't?

SZ: I think even Barr ran into that problem from time to time.

DR: I think that's true. Towards the end of his life, there were a lot of things that were being done that he didn't necessarily like. Yet, certainly, in terms of New York Abstract Expressionism I think he picked extremely well--he and Dorothy Miller, who worked with him very closely. I think the two of them together had very good insights as far as that was concerned.

SZ: I think there was an instance of a Balthus painting that he really liked and wanted, but there was sentiment against it. So it went both ways sometimes.

DR: Sentiment against it by others in the Museum?

SZ: Yes.

DR: The Museum has a wonderful Balthus, and I think that was the one he bought. He won out. But he certainly had differences with other members of the Museum, including Mr. Stephen Clark, who had been a very active member of the Museum. I don't really know all of the details of what happened in the 1940s--it was before I was actively involved as a trustee--but clearly there was a falling-out between Alfred and Mr. Clark, and, unfortunately, from the Museum's point of view, Mr. Clark left all of his paintings to the Metropolitan instead of MoMA, which he had expected originally to do.

SZ: Just going back for a moment, is there anything else you can tell me about [Alfred Barr's] relationship with your mother, how they worked together?

DR: I think Alfred Barr really was devoted to Mother, and she to him. They were very different in age, but I think she really looked upon him almost as a son, and had great confidence in his taste and I think gave him great support. As time went on, as the Museum got bigger, I think it was clear that his skills lay in his artistic talents and taste and his enormous scholarship and academic knowledge. He obviously was not a businessman and I don't think was particularly good as a manager. As so happens in an organization as it grows, some of the people who were originally there and able to cope in the early stages cease to be able to deal with it as it grows. I think Alfred went through a difficult period when it was decided that he shouldn't continue to handle things that he was less good at.

SZ: How about in the early days?

- DR: He did just about everything. When the Museum was small, the economic and managerial problems were less important, and therefore his relative deficiencies in those areas were less important for the Museum.
- SZ: Did your mother in the early days really stay very much involved?
- DR: She did. She never was president of the Museum; she was a vice president. That was, in part, because Father really did not want her to get more involved than she was, and I think he probably discouraged her from taking a more active role in running it. But her interest was enormous, and she continued to play an active role behind the scenes, and with the other trustees she was very active. There was A. Conger Goodyear, who, of course, was another important early trustee.
- SZ: Do you remember him at all?
- DR: Yes, I do, slightly. But here again there was a sort of falling-out, and I don't remember exactly what the cause of that was. But Mother respected him as a collector and thought he had very good taste and he was very helpful in the early days. Then, of course, a younger group began to come in: Jock Whitney, Bill Paley and my brother, Nelson.
- SZ: The story about the founding of the Museum: one of the stories states the idea germinated on a trip to Egypt, a discussion between your mother and Miss Bliss, whom she encountered in Egypt? Is that what you remember?
- DR: She wasn't on that trip.
- SZ: Well, tell me the story as best you can.
- DR: My parents took me out of school for three months in 1929 in the middle of the year to go to Egypt and what was then called the Holy Land. Of course, there were no planes, so we went by boat. To get all the way to Alexandria, it may have taken us

close to two weeks.

SZ: I'm curious, how did the boat go?

DR: Well, the boat went through the Straits of Gibraltar, landed in Algiers, and then went to Naples. I think the trans-Atlantic boat that we took stopped at Naples and then we got off and took another boat that landed in Syracuse in Sicily and then went on to Alexandria. We spent a week or more in Cairo and then went up the Nile in a private boat. Professor James Breasted, the great Egyptologist, was with us; Father already had been interested in helping him and I think it's because of him that they took the trip. He was the founder of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, which Father supported to a very large extent in the very early days. But I must say I don't remember the connection between the Museum and that trip. Certainly Mrs. Sullivan....

SZ: Miss Sullivan was supposed to have been on the same ship on to the trip back to the United States.

DR: Maybe she was, but it doesn't ring a bell for me.

SZ: Okay. Well, that's it for today. Thank you.

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM****INTERVIEW WITH:            DAVID ROCKEFELLER (DR)****INTERVIEWER:             SHARON ZANE (SZ)****LOCATION:                    ROOM 5600,  
                                     30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA****DATE:                        17 APRIL 2001****TAPE 2, SIDE 1**

SZ:    Can you tell me what you remember about the first Museum building?

DR:    Well, the first building was built before I really became active in the Museum. So while I remember it going up, because it was actually in my view from my bedroom window at 10 West 54th Street -- and I obviously heard about it from Mother and others -- I don't really have any particularly significant comments about it.

SZ:    Or whether she was pleased with it?

DR:    Oh, I think she was.

SZ:    Well, it was a real architectural landmark.

DR:    It was. And very important. Obviously, it was the first permanent building the Museum had, so it was tremendously important. But I was not in any way directly involved.

SZ:    So your first real involvement came in 1948.

DR:    That's right. I took Mother's place on the board after she died, which I was very happy to do. And, obviously, even though I didn't know in detail about it, prior to that,

because of Mother's interest and my brother Nelson's interest, I had obviously been exposed to, and was certainly very enthusiastic about, it. So I was happy to succeed Mother as a member of the board.

SZ: Is there anything specific you remember about some of the issues facing the Museum at the time? Your brother [Nelson] was president of the board.

DR: My brother was president. I can't remember. Well, Alfred Barr was certainly there.

SZ: Alfred Barr was there, although he had been -- demoted is probably the wrong word -- but his position, his title, had been changed.

DR: That's right. I had known Alfred from when he first came to the Museum, had always liked him very much and saw him with Mother. When I went on the board, even though his position was not as responsible in terms of management as it had been, he was certainly still recognized, in terms of taste and knowledge, as the most important person [at the Museum]. Furthermore, my wife, Peggy, and I became, really, quite good friends with him and his wife, Marga, and used to see them personally. We'd go out for dinner, and things of that sort. And even after his health began to decline and he developed Alzheimer's, in the early stages of that he was on the Board of Overseers at Harvard, which I was, also. I remember being saddened by the fact that he really was not able to articulate his thoughts very clearly at board meetings at Harvard. For one who was so brilliant in his earlier days and so articulate, it was a very sad thing to see. I remember the last time I think Peggy and I took both of them out to dinner, which must have been, maybe, a year or two before he died; it was clear that he had lost a lot of his memory. It was a sad experience.

SZ: It's my understanding that he really did remain the guiding intellect [at the Museum], although he was given a different title.

DR: Well, everybody was certainly devoted to him, and he was greatly respected. But,

obviously, his ability to make sharp judgments was very much impaired, and it was something everybody who knew and loved him deeply regretted.

SZ: Your first years on the board: you've described the chairmanship as being largely an honorary position, and the presidency as being much more active in terms of day-to-day affairs.

DR: That was generally true, and certainly was in my case. During the period I was chairman, I was still very active at the Chase [Manhattan Bank], and I really didn't have the time to give the Museum, the way Blanchette [Rockefeller] or others who had been president had done. I was greatly interested, presided at meetings, and would meet at other times when it appeared appropriate, but I was certainly not involved in anything like the degree to which Nelson had been at one time, or Blanchette.

SZ: Is there anything you can tell me about Nelson's presence at the Museum, from your personal point of view?

DR: Well, he was tremendously enthusiastic about the Museum and, of course, very close to René d'Harnoncourt. I think -- I'm sure -- he was primarily responsible for bringing René to the museum. So while René was still there, and before he was tragically killed, I think Nelson did play a very active role. Then, when he became Governor of New York, his ability to spend time at the Museum was very much reduced. In fact, I think he had to resign -- or did resign-- from the board.

SZ: Yes. He did.

DR: Yes. Exactly. For that period.

SZ: The year you went on the board, Nelson was president and René had just been named, I think, officially, director of the Museum.

DR: What year was that?

SZ: Nineteen-forty-eight. Jim Soby was running the Painting & Sculpture Department, although Alfred's presence was still strong. One of the things that had happened the year before (and I know this is something you've been very interested in, and the ideas behind it) was that an agreement was made among the Museum, the Whitney and the Met (and the Whitney then dropped out of it) that this was to pass along works, as they became more established or less contemporary. There had been kind of a -- "divide" might be too strong a word -- but there had always been discussion about how modern the Modern should be.

DR: Yes. Well, there was no question that there was a strong element on the board -- I can't really tell you who were the leaders in it -- who felt that it was not appropriate to keep paintings after they had ceased to become part of the modern movement. Of course, we did give to the Met quite a number at that time. I couldn't tell you how long it was between the time we first gave them and the time people began to see that that was really a mistake.

SZ: A mistake why?

DR: Well, because while they might no longer be contemporary, they were extremely important in understanding how we had gotten where we were. I have to say, I think it was a great mistake. Fortunately, I think we were able to get back most of them. That's my recollection.

SZ: Except for that one that stands out in my mind, Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein?

DR: Yes, that's right. That one they wouldn't give up, which is too bad. I do remember that. But most of the others they did [return to us]. I think the whole idea was just a mistake. Maybe not every picture we bought throughout our history was important, but I think the modern movement began not that long after MOMA was founded. And the Museum was founded by people who felt that this was a significant break with

the past in terms of artistic expression. That's why they started the Museum, and to me it was quite clear that we should have examples the break.

Of course, I think many people feel that the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* of Picasso, which Alfred bought, is sort of the critical painting that is the turning point from the past. Therefore, to have it in our collection is enormously important. I think it's viewed today as one of the most important pictures, if not the most important picture, we have. But there were others that went with it, and I think the story of that evolution was one that, clearly, should have been kept as part of MOMA's collection, illustrating the role that MOMA played in recognizing what was new and important.

SZ: They don't always go together.

DR: No. That's right. And, therefore, I don't think it would have been appropriate for us to just buy everything that was coming along. But it was important to buy pictures that were innovative, and that became part of the historical record. I think Alfred was particularly well qualified to make that selection. Of course, he did so, and the basic collection of the Museum is largely thanks to him.

SZ: Does this sound familiar? I think I read somewhere that Alfred had once said that if one thing in ten that he bought had real, lasting value, he felt that was doing very well.

DR: I think that was probably true, and probably still is true. It's very hard to be sure, when new things come along, that they're not just change [for the sake of change] but will have lasting significance. Certainly, we were extraordinarily lucky in having Alfred, because I think he was a great art historian and knew classical art intimately well. He had studied it, and got his Ph.D. in it. So that was the great thing: he knew where we were coming from, and, I think, more than most people, recognized what was good as well as what was innovative. He really did build the Museum's basic historic collection, as I think few other people could have.

SZ: Do you have memories of him presenting works for acquisition?

DR: Well, I certainly do, but I think I would perhaps be hard pressed to remember specific ones. But he was very eloquent about it, in his own way, as much as Kirk Varnedoe, who, of course, is a brilliant person in analyzing and explaining paintings that he thinks are good and that we should acquire.

SZ: I presume this is the case, that the Acquisitions Committee would have been hard pressed to turn him down?

DR: I was never on it; therefore, I can't speak from personal experience. My guess is that they would have gone along with anything he really felt strongly about.

SZ: Now I've made a list of some other things that occurred in the period when you went on the board, before you really became active in '59. One is the formation of the International Program.

DR: Well, I think I really did have something to do with that, and that, strangely, was quite early on. The exhibition that was sent to South America that Monroe Wheeler organized [From Cézanne to Miro] -- what was the date of that? Can you remember?

SZ: It was 1968.

DR: Yes. Well, in 1955, my wife Peggy and I bought Cézanne's Boy with a Red Vest from Chester Beatty. Alfred was responsible for my buying that. I had been at some sort of cocktail party, and ran into Alfred. He had brought with him photographs of this painting, one of the four versions that Cezanne had done, and said he felt it was a very great picture. The whole collection of Mr. Beatty's was about to be sold by Wildenstein, and Alfred said he felt this would be a painting that would be very important for the Museum to have. He said that if my wife and I would buy it and promise to leave it to the Museum, he would see if he could get us the first opportunity to look at the whole collection, and that we might get other things as

well.

We agreed to do it, and as a result we did have that opportunity, and I think we must have bought several in addition to the Boy with a Red Vest, one of them being Seurat's The Roadstead at Grandcamp, which is a wonderful painting, and Manet's La Brioché, which is probably his finest still life. So those are three absolutely unique and outstanding pictures we were able to buy in one afternoon. The [Chester Beatty] collection was outstanding; there were many other wonderful ones. In retrospect, I wish we had bought more, because they have all become very much more valuable, and they were beautiful. But, as it was, we spent more money than we'd ever spent before, by far, on paintings. At the time, I didn't have large amounts of money and had to ask the trust committee that managed the trust that Father had set up for me to give me money from the trust so I could buy them.

SZ: These that you bought were the ones that pleased you the most?

DR: Yes. Absolutely. Thanks to Alfred, we had an opportunity to look at the whole collection, and there were certainly a lot of others we liked as well. But these were the ones we were especially pleased with, and I must say, I think we did very well. They were just marvelous paintings. As I say, even though they were a lot less than they would be worth today, we still spent, for us, a lot at the time, to get them. But they're all paintings that still give me the most tremendous pleasure.

SZ: And the connection between these and the show that went down to South America?

DR: Well, I'm glad you came back to that, because the person who suggested the show was Monroe Wheeler. He said -- and I'm sure it was true -- that no museum in South America had any really first-rate, contemporary paintings. He felt this would be a very important thing to do, and he said if we would lend the Boy with a Red Vest, the Cézanne, it would be the star picture in the show, and that that would enable him to get other people to lend paintings.

It was a great success. It was very much played up in the press in Latin America, and I think had quite an impact on a lot of people there. There are a lot of wealthy people there who have since become collectors, and I think it probably was a very influential show.

SZ: And the initial formation of the International Program at the Museum in 1952? You said you had something to do with that?

DR: Oh. Right. I was, at the time, at Chase, in the International Department, and it seemed to me it was very important for the Museum, which had become such a dominant factor in contemporary art in this country, to expand its influence on a worldwide basis. So I think it's probably true that even at the very first meeting I attended, I said that I felt the Museum ought to become an internationally oriented museum, a museum that would be of worldwide influence. There were certainly others who were also supportive, but I think I was one of the strong pushers of the program.

SZ: It's my understanding that this was a first for a museum.

DR: I think that's true. So, certainly, for someone who had just come on the board, maybe it was a little bit daring to recommend it right away, but I felt so strongly that it was the right thing to do that I did recommend it.

SZ: And, I think, actually, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund contributed to its founding, right?

DR: It did. I was on the board of the Brothers Fund at the time, and strongly promoted the gift.

SZ: And the selection of Porter McCray to run the International Program?

DR: Porter had been working with my brother, John [D. Rockefeller 3rd], but was also

actively involved with the Museum. I'm not sure I actually suggested him. He seemed like a logical person, but I don't believe I was the prime mover in his selection. I don't remember that I was.

SZ: And the following year the International Council was formed.

DR: Yes. And that seemed to me to be the logical step to get us involved internationally, because through it, we would get people in other countries who were interested in the arts to belong to the council. That would both promote better understanding on the part of our trustees, and also be very helpful in sending shows abroad, and in broadening the knowledge of MOMA in the rest of the world. And it certainly has done that. I became a member of it, I think, right in the beginning. But I was so heavily committed to work at the bank at the time that I don't think I went on any trips until much later. In fact, it's really only in the last decade that I have gone on a number of them, and have played a more active role on the Council. But I certainly was always supportive of it.

SZ: And there was the purchase of the U.S. pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

DR: Yes. And that was certainly something that I also supported, but I never was able to see it. I knew about it and followed it, and thought it was a great idea.

SZ: I know in many areas of banking that was a real time of opening up for various institutions and industries in this country.

DR: Yes. And, of course, I did play a major role in the formation of Chase's collection. That was back in 1961, I think, when we completed our new building downtown, which, in itself, was quite a departure, for a bank to have an international style building done by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore Owings & Merrill. The building was a departure for the bank in the field of architecture, and then Gordon Bunshaft and I both felt that since it was a severe, modern building, it very much needed paintings to decorate it. So we persuaded the bank's board to create a fund of \$500,000,

which doesn't seem like very much now but was enough to buy a lot of things at the time. We created an art committee that included Alfred Barr and a number of other people.

SZ: You had Dorothy Miller on that, too, I think.

DR: Dorothy Miller was very active. In fact, she was really the person who bought most of the things for us. But that committee included Jack McCloy, who was chairman of the bank at the time; myself; Robert Hale from the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Perry Rathbone from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; Alfred Barr; and James Johnson Sweeney. It was a very good committee. We met on a regular basis, and Dorothy would search for things for us, bring them to us, and we would have committee meetings and make a selection. We had a rather interesting way of doing it. I think some people in the bank who were not that enthusiastic about it felt concerned that if a group of, as they saw it, far-out artistic people were to select pictures, it wouldn't necessarily be well received. So Jack McCloy and I served on the committee. And I think it worked very well, because we had a voting system, and everyone voted secretly in the sense of putting it on a paper. Then the votes were added up; you didn't have to speak out. And unless it got a majority of the votes, it wasn't bought. But a great many of those picked by Dorothy Miller were selected.

SZ: Maybe this would be a good place to ask you just a little bit more about Dorothy Miller.

DR: Well, she was a wonderful person. She unfortunately has Alzheimer's, to a point where she's really not able to communicate. It's very sad. But, at the time, she had been Alfred Barr's assistant for many years. So although he was on the committee, she was also. She was the person who went out and looked for paintings. She would bring a selection of paintings, from which we picked. That was a great help. I think one could truthfully say that she was responsible for the bulk of the paintings bought by the bank during the first five or ten years.

SZ: She had a great eye?

DR: She had a wonderful eye. Well, for instance, she found -- and I bought, personally -- the Rothko that's out there. I don't know if you noticed it.

SZ: I noticed it the last time I was here.

DR: It was a wonderful one. She found it, and I had it in my office at the bank for many years. I think it's one of his really good paintings. She played a vital role, but the committee made the final choices. She brought more things than we bought. But the Chase's collection certainly would not be what it is had she not played the role she did. I'm sure you've seen the book about the Chase's collection, haven't you?

SZ: Yes, I have.

DR: Oh, good. So you know it.

SZ: But she also, at this time, at the Museum, was doing those wonderful but controversial shows.

DR: That's right. She identified a whole group of new painters, who came to be known as the New York School of Abstract Expressionism. Of course, today they're really the most outstanding painters, including Pollock, de Kooning and Rothko, I think. But they were very daring at the time. She had such a wonderful eye that I would guess - - I haven't seen the list recently, but I would feel pretty certain that all of them are names that everybody has on the tip of their tongue today, and that was her doing. Of course, the Museum bought many of them at that point.

SZ: The fire?

DR: Yes. That was a tragic thing. It burned Monet's Water Lilies, which Alfred had bought, and which created quite a sensation when he bought it because Monet

lovers, at the time, considered late Monets to be not really that good, that he had lost his touch. But Alfred saw one when he went over to Paris, and he bought it for the Museum. Then, tragically, it was burned in the fire. So the Museum, of course, bought another. In fact, it's the Triptych that's on exhibition now, and it's wonderful. I must say, I became very intrigued by it, so when my wife, Peggy, and I went to Paris in I think 1953, maybe 1954, Doug Dillon was the ambassador to France at the time, and he and Peggy and I went to see Monet's paintings of that period that had been bought by a French dealer named Mme. Katia Granoff. She had many of them in her studio, and we bought three.

I still have two of them; I gave the third to be sold to raise money for Rockefeller University. They are quite large paintings. Those are two of the paintings I enjoy the most, but I wouldn't have seen them had Alfred not told us when we went to Paris to have a look at them. Of course, at that time they were going for practically nothing, and today they're selling for huge prices.

## **TAPE 2, SIDE 2**

SZ: Tell me how your active involvement in the Museum really began, in '59?

DR: You mean in collecting?

SZ: Well, no. Actually, I was thinking more of museum affairs.

DR: Well, I did early on play something of a role in terms of the international side of the Museum, so that I was not without involvement. But that was more in specific things that I pushed, then didn't necessarily follow up on in terms of active involvement. I wasn't involved on a regular basis. I first became chairman in 1958, for one year. I took over because Nelson became Governor and I sort of filled in.

SZ: Yes. But during that period, I think the decision was made that the Museum needed to be expanded, and there was a decision to have a \$25 million capital campaign, which was a first.

DR: Yes.

SZ: That was in 1959.

DR: Well, I was certainly involved in that, both in helping to raise money and the decision that it was the right thing to do.

SZ: Well, it was the first time the museum had chosen to raise money in that way?

DR: I think that's true. And I can't remember how much we raised.

SZ: Twenty-five million.

DR: Yes. Considering we are now trying to raise \$1 billion, it seems quite modest.

SZ: Right. And it was done so easily, my understanding is.

DR: Well, I think that's true, and probably mostly from within the board, which is still true to a large extent. The board and immediate friends have raised about \$400 million in the present campaign, out of the \$500 [million] to be raised.

SZ: Do you remember meeting in Maine in '59? There were two meetings actually and I think you were at both of them, but this one had to do with planning the capital campaign and planning the expansion. I think that's where the decision was taken to raise money in this particular way, which has obviously, then, become the way in which it's done.

DR: But I think Nelson was still playing a pretty important role in that. The very fact that it was held in Maine suggests to me that Nelson asked to have it there. So I don't remember too much about the decision; I think it was probably pretty obvious we had to. When did we complete the first expansion?

SZ: It was completed in '64. There was that opening. There was that famous picture of you with Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson.

DR: Right. Well, I was active in it, and I certainly was on the building committee.

SZ: Well, maybe you could talk about that a little. I know you asked your aunt for the buildings.

DR: That's right. The buildings that had been given by Father were buildings that he owned to protect our view to the south, when we had the house at 10 West 54th Street. They were directly south, and meant that we had a view across them, because our building was quite high. The two next to the church [St. Thomas] belonged to my aunt, my father's sister. Then there were three, or maybe four, I can't remember, that belonged to Father. When my parents, in 1937, moved to an apartment at 740 Park Avenue, Mother persuaded Father to give all the land he owned on 54th Street -- which was both our house, which was number ten; another house next to it, which we used as an annex (number twelve); and Grandfather's old house, which was 4 West 54th Street. In between those was open space. Then he owned the houses on 53rd Street, for protection, and he gave that whole piece of land to the museum. And that, of course, is the principal area on which they built. The only two pieces he didn't give, because he didn't own them, were the two my aunt gave, subsequently. And the 1964 expansion, the Philip Johnson building, couldn't have been done without those houses. My aunt was already quite old. I went to see her and asked her if she would leave them to us in her will, which she agreed to do. Then she conveniently died within two years.

SZ: She was living on the premises?

DR: Oh, yes. I went to see her in the houses. She died two years later, so we were able to do the expansion on that property.

SZ: That's right. Because she died in '62.

DR: I must have asked her, probably, in '60. I think that's undoubtedly right.

SZ: Anything else about that? The ground breaking? The choice of Philip Johnson to design it? There are pluses and minuses, right, to having a board member be that involved?

DR: I'm sure that's true. I, of course, had known Philip because he was one of the bright young men who helped start the Museum. He was a very good friend of Nelson, my brother, as well as of Mother. I'd seen him before the war. Then, surprisingly, at one stage in the war I went to a place called Camp Ritchie, in Maryland, which was a military intelligence training center, and one of the people who was there was Philip, whom I had known slightly. But I got to see him quite a bit during the three months that we were there. Interestingly enough, another person who was also there was John Kluge. You know who he is?

SZ: Yes. Sure.

DR: He's considered to be one of the wealthiest people in the country. I met him because he and Philip were training. It was long before he made his fortune, and I didn't see him for thirty years after that. Now he's become quite a good friend. Interesting. But that was where I saw Philip and got to know him a bit. Then, after the war, he built his famous Glass House, and Peggy and I went over to see it. We were very impressed with the lighting he'd done in the house, as well as other things. So we asked him if he would do the lighting in our house at Hudson Pines, which is really a little bold. It's not a very important thing to ask a great architect to do, but we did and he was nice enough to do it. And we still have it.

So I got to know Philip. I'd seen him under these earlier circumstances, at Camp Ritchie. Right after the war, we asked him to do the lighting. Then, when the decision to build the Garden [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden] came

along -- I put up the money to do it, originally, and named it for Mother -- I asked Philip Johnson to design it.

SZ: That preceded the expansion.

DR: It preceded the expansion, yes.

SZ: Because the Garden, before that, had been sort of --

DR: It was really nothing. The one thing they had done was install an experimental, prefabricated house in the garden, which was designed by Mies van der Rohe. Nelson then bought it and moved it out to Tarrytown, and it's still there. It was quite a job getting it out. But that was in the garden, before the Sculpture Garden was built. I asked Philip to do it, and I put up the money to do it. Obviously, it's been expanded and changed since then.

SZ: So, then, the choice of Philip to do the expansion itself?

DR: I don't believe I was the person who suggested it, but I certainly was enthusiastic about the idea. I think it was certainly a good choice. He's an extraordinarily creative architect, and, I think, also has very good taste.

SZ: I think Ada Louise Huxtable was the New York Times architecture critic at the time, and she just raved about it.

DR: No, I think it was awfully good. Philip has continued to be a good friend over the years. I don't think his health is very good now. I haven't seen him for a year or two.

SZ: He must be ninety-four?

DR: He could be. He's certainly quite a bit older than I am.

SZ: And the opening, with Mrs. Johnson?

DR: Well, that was a very happy event, and it was a nice thing she agreed to come up for it. Of course, it gave it a prominence it wouldn't have had, as much, without her. She's really a wonderful lady, and, of course, did so much to get Washington to plant flowers and trees. My brother, Laurance, knew her quite well, and still sees her quite a lot. So it was a great thing, to persuade her to come. And, it was logical in that she had already been very active in beautifying Washington. She had a real interest in the Garden.

SZ: You were chairman from 1962 to '72.

DR: Yes. Let's see. When did René die?

SZ: René died in 1968. He retired, then died just a few months later.

DR: That's right. Yes. Well, he died while I was chairman. It was a very sad event, to say the least.

SZ: And Alfred had retired the year before, I think.

DR: Alfred had retired. Well, when René was killed, Alfred had retired already.

SZ: Alfred retired in '67. René retired, then was killed, in '68. Monroe Wheeler retired in '69. It was sort of a power vacuum, in that sense.

DR: My busiest period was '62 to '72, because it was during that period that we had both Bates Lowry and John Hightower [as directors of the Museum].

SZ: I thought that story we could save for next time.

DR: Okay.

SZ: Here is something I read: that the opening the expanded Museum in 1964 somehow changed the feeling of the place; that the Museum went from a much smaller and more club-like institution, and really started to evolve into something different, because the plant was bigger and required more staff, and required a lot more money to operate.

DR: I think there's no question it did. It ceased to be just a cozy little place where the founders and the early directors were the major factors. It was becoming increasingly important and known about in the world. But it was a totally different institution at the time, not the really huge thing it is today.

SZ: Well, that's more of the story. Well, let's just see. Curators at the time. Anybody in particular?

DR: René d'Hononcourt was closer to my brother Nelson, certainly, than he was to me. But I knew him well and liked him enormously, and had a very good relationship with him. Of course, he died in '68, right in the middle of my first term. I felt very close to him.

SZ: What would you say his major contributions to the Museum were? We've talked about Alfred's eye.

DR: Yes. Well, Rene, of course, didn't have the same knowledge of the history of art that Alfred did. Nelson found him. He was basically an anthropologist and had been involved in the founding of the archaeological museum in Mexico City, which is one of the great museums of its kind. He was not a scholar in contemporary painting and sculpture, but he was a man of enormous enthusiasm. He loved beautiful things and had very good taste. He quickly learned a great deal about contemporary art and I think his taste was extremely good. But he was a very different person in all respects, a much better manager, and much better, really, with people in general than Alfred. Alfred was a very retiring person in many respects, and certainly was

not a good manager.

I think René provided many of the things that Alfred lacked, and was an essential factor in the expansion of the Museum, even though he didn't have Alfred's knowledge of art history. He was probably not quite as outstanding in his ability to select paintings, but in terms of all other aspects of the Museum, he was far more qualified. He was very much liked by everyone, and I think he was an ideal person to have brought in. He was also good at fund raising. He was just very good with people.

SZ: So when he decided he was going to retire, it was a very big --

DR: It was a very big thing for the Museum. I can't remember. How much before he was killed did he retire?

SZ: It was a matter of two months, I think.

DR: Just two months.

SZ: I think he retired in June and was killed in August. Somebody suggested to me that it was hoped that he would be around to help Bates Lowry learn the job.

DR: Exactly. No, it was a tragedy in every respect. I think it set the Museum back.

SZ: One last question for today. For the time period we've talked about -- basically '48 to '64 -- what is your memory of the board? I guess what I'm asking is, was the board a very hands-on board? Or was it rather the opposite?

DR: Well, I think the board has always been made up of a relatively small number of insiders, who have played a very active role in between meetings, in what they've done. There is another group, which is made up to some extent of wealthy people who are also collectors and/or interested in the arts, who really don't play a big role

in its management and policy making. And that's true today. I think it really has probably always been true.

SZ: So maybe next time we can -- I guess I'd like to talk a little bit about the Stein Collection, then the rough few years you had.

DR: Yes, they were.

SZ: And then go on from there. Is that okay?

DR: Fine.

SZ: Thank you so much.

DR: You're welcome.

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM****INTERVIEW WITH:            DAVID ROCKEFELLER (DR)****INTERVIEWER:             SHARON ZANE (SZ)****LOCATION:                    ROCKEFELLER CENTER****DATE:                        20 APRIL 2001****TAPE 3, SIDE 1**

SZ: In the chapter on the Museum that Peter has given me from your memoirs, you talked about several challenges facing the Museum in the late 1960s, not the least of which was replacing management. René d'Harnoncourt had retired and then was killed. You had a new director, Bates Lowry. And you needed a new president. The Museum was starting to run some heavy deficits, and I think you weren't happy with the way it was organized, in terms of its managerial style. We were going to start to talk about the hiring and subsequent letting go of Bates Lowry, who was the first of a couple of directors.

DR: You're right. René d'Harnoncourt died in '68, and the first person we picked to replace him was Bates Lowry, who was only with us for one year.

SZ: I was wondering what you remembered about his selection, why he seemed like a good choice at the time?

DR: Well, he had had quite a lot of experience, as I remember, in art history and some, I think, in running a museum, although I have to say I'm a little vague on the details. [He had come from Brown, where he taught art history, and had worked on the Florence flood in 1966, organizing CRIA [Committee to Rescue Italian Art]. He had also run the art gallery at Pomona College.] In any case, he seemed like a qualified and good person.

But when he got there [to the Museum] he seemed to be more interested in feathering his own nest and being well taken care of than he was in running the Museum. He insisted upon a rather expensive apartment, and he also wanted to be head of the Painting & Sculpture Department, as well as being the director. Those were two very different and big jobs; it was certainly not appropriate that he should have both of them. He also ran up a lot of expenses. The result was that Bill Paley became very fed up with him, and let him go, I think, rather abruptly. He was replaced by John Hightower, who, as I remember, had known my brother, Nelson, at one point.

SZ: I believe from the New York State Council on the Arts.

DR: That's right. He had been with the New York State Council on the Arts, and Nelson had been very enthusiastic about him. But it soon turned out that he had rather leftist political ideas, which he started to introduce into Museum programs in a way we felt was quite inappropriate. In particular, he curated a show called Information, which was really both political and inappropriate in a number of other ways. For example, I remember he had a box where people could put their opinions about whether or not my brother Nelson, who was then Governor, should be replaced. Since Nelson had been very active in, and had been president of, the Museum, it seemed most inappropriate. In any event, it had nothing to do with the Museum.

Then, I remember, in that exhibition, also, they had a place where there were curtains and a bed, and people could go in and romp around on the bed. Just how that related to Museum exhibition is hard to imagine. In any event, it very quickly appeared that he was using the Museum in a way that was inappropriate, and the show, in particular, caused quite a sensation. I think many people were very unhappy with it. So he was asked to leave in 1972. He had been there, I guess, less than two years.

Then, looking around, we felt very discouraged at having picked two directors who had worked out so poorly. We looked to see whether there might be someone closer

to the Museum, and there was Dick Oldenburg, who had done a very good job in running the Publications department of the Museum. Everyone liked him, and he knew my sister-in-law, Blanchette, quite well. She had gotten to know him. So he was asked to take it, first on an acting basis in January 1972, and then in June of 1972 as director. And he stayed for twenty-two years.

He kept the Museum on an even keel in a number of ways. Everybody liked him; he was a very nice person. He was not really a scholar in the arts, and he really hadn't had a lot of experience in running a museum, but he was very much liked by most people. He became very close friends with my sister-in-law, Blanchette, during the period she was chairman of the Museum, and she felt very comfortable with him.

Then, of course, [after his retirement], we had to find a replacement, which was not easy. Having made mistakes in the past, we wanted to be sure this time that we would get the right person. So a group of us, Aggie and myself and Don Marron, started a search process. I think we actually employed a headhunter, Nancy Nichols from Heidrick & Struggles. We identified a number of names, some of which were people who had connections with the Museum. For example, René d'Harnoncourt's daughter, Anne, was then head of the Philadelphia Museum, and we talked with her at one point. We talked with the head of the museum in Houston.

SZ: Weren't you also considering for a while a dual setup?

DR: We did consider that. We were thinking of a co-equal president and director.

SZ: Like the Met has. Or had.

DR: Yes. We were looking for that, and that we did for, I guess, for almost a year before we came to the conclusion that we just were not going to get the right person to accept the directorship if he had someone as a co-equal. And, I must say, my own experience at the Chase, where I had been co-equal with the chairman while I was president for a number of years, did not work well. So I wasn't surprised to find that

we weren't getting a response. But we talked to quite a few people, Aggie and I particularly, but Don was in on some of it, too, and then concluded that we really had to change our objective and find a director who would be on his own and not have a president who would seek to have comparable responsibilities to the president.

SZ: The impetus for a dual setup is what? That there's just too much to do?

DR: Well, I think -- That's a good question.

SZ: I guess I would assume it somehow came out of a judgment that you'd made? Perhaps it was too much, or required different kinds of skills?

DR: You're certainly right, and I think you should certainly talk with Aggie about this. I remember we did actually try to find somebody who would be co-equal with the president, and had no success. We also tried a man from Atlanta, Maxwell Anderson, who is now the head of the Whitney. But we were just not comfortable, really, with [any of] them, and they all turned it down. So then we decided we would have to look for a sole director, and we turned to Nancy Nichols. In fact, we may have gone to Russell Reynolds [Associates] first, but they didn't get us anywhere, and so we hired her, and she came up with very fresh and different kinds of ideas. It was she who identified Glenn Lowry, who was at the museum [Art Gallery of Ontario] in Toronto but had previously been in Washington at the Sackler Museum, which he headed, and also at RISD, in Providence. [Note: It was actually the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, VA, where he served for two years as founding director of the Joseph and Margaret Muscarelle Museum of Art.] So he had had quite a varied experience, although he was still very young. Aggie and I, and I think Don -- certainly one other person -- flew up and had lunch with Glenn in Toronto, and liked him right away. It just became clear to us that we had found the right person, and we were able to persuade him to come. It certainly has to be one of the most important and positive developments in the history of the Museum, because he not only has a solid knowledge of art history and a great interest in contemporary art, but he's also a very good manager and he's wonderful with people. He's liked by

the board and by the staff of the Museum, and has really proved to be precisely what we needed.

SZ: One of the functions museum directors have really had to take on in the last twenty-five years, which at least wasn't as obvious before, is the job of fund raising.

DR: And he was good at that, too, although we did finally hire Mike Margitich to be head of marketing. Mike is a professional and has done a wonderful job at Harvard and Columbia and various other places, so Mike has taken a lot of the load for fund raising off Glenn's shoulders. But that doesn't mean that Glenn doesn't play, in many cases, a key role. But the drudgery and legwork are done by Mike, and has been very well done. And we have raised a lot of money.

SZ: Why is it important for a museum director to be solidly a scholar in the arts? Obviously, it doesn't necessarily have to be modern art, for the Museum of Modern Art, but --

DR: I think in many ways it was very good that his field of specialization was not contemporary art, because we have [on staff] some outstanding people, some of whom were rather temperamental, and I think if they had felt he was being competitive with them, they probably wouldn't have stayed. He turned out to be skilled in all the ways that we needed -- with the public and with the board and with the staff. So the history of the Museum, since he came, has been a happy one.

SZ: I'm just thinking -- The only other thing we didn't touch on, in terms of talking about that time in the late '60s and early '70s, when politically everything was kind of upside down, is the formation of the union.

DR: Yes.

SZ: And there were two strikes, one of which was rather long.

DR: That was one of the things I should have mentioned -- that John Hightower had encouraged the union, really almost invited them to form a union. The union had been formed, actually, before he arrived, but he was pro-union. I have to say that this has created problems that I don't think needed to exist. The majority of the staff didn't want to belong to a union. Yet the union was able to strike and dislocate them, [creating] a disruptive phase on numerous occasions. I think it was one of the most unfortunate legacies he left behind.

SZ: The expansion that culminated in the opening of Cesar Pelli's building in 1984: What can you tell me about the history of it, how this idea for using the air rights came about, etc.? Because I know you were a driving force in that.

DR: Bill Paley was chairman of the board in '84, when the building opened. He was chairman from '72 to '85, while my sister-in-law, Blanchette, was president. The Museum had grown very rapidly, in both staff and collection, and in the number of visitors coming to the Museum. We just weren't physically able to accommodate the growth. So the question was, how do we expand? We did own, I think, two or three buildings to the west of the Museum, on 53rd Street. Of course, we had the Garden. Let's see. The Whitney Museum had built a building on 54th Street, which was just in back of MoMA and next to the Dorset Hotel, to the west of the Garden. They had built that [in the early 1950s] and were occupying it. Then, in the early 1960s, they decided to build a larger building uptown and we were therefore able in 1963 to acquire the Whitney's building, which was right next to ours, and incorporate it into the Museum. That was a help, but it still wasn't enough. So we concluded that we had to do more. We also had the problem of how to finance it, and I remember there was a young man with whom I had worked at the Chase, Richard Weinstein, and I asked him to think about this problem. We'll have to find his name.

SZ: I didn't realize you had worked with him at the Chase.

DR: He had been an assistant to John Lindsay when [Lindsay] was mayor, and I had gotten to know him through the Chase and related activities in Lower Manhattan. I

thought he was very bright and able, so I think I invited him to take a look at the Museum, and see if he had any ideas. It was he who came up with the thought that perhaps we could help in the financing of a new building if we were to use the air rights over MoMA and sell those to a developer, which would produce a substantial amount of money. The developer would build a commercial tower, for a residential tower, up through a new building, and we would then be able to get ongoing income from the tower. But this, then, involved getting special legislation in Albany, to permit the creation of a new Trust for Cultural Resources. This rather intricate financial deal was worked out and has been an absolute godsend to the Museum. The tower doesn't in any way interfere, and yet, through the Trust for Cultural Resources, we get rental from the tower, which will go on for a long period of time. I don't really remember the details specifically, but it was a very ingenious concept.

SZ: It's provided significant income.

DR: Absolutely. It was ingenious in that it provided funding over a period of time, without which I really don't think we could have done it. Then, of course, we had to raise, in addition, some \$55 million dollars. In that order of magnitude. Nothing comparable to what we're doing now.

SZ: No. But I'm just thinking. There were some difficulties. There was some community opposition. I guess there wasn't going to be a setback. They were saying that the Garden was going to lose square footage, and the sun. There were a few issues, and I know there were some community board meetings --

DR: Yes. My recollection is that there were, obviously, problems, but I think we were able to overcome them. I think this ingenious method of financing really was a salvation for the Museum, and still has ongoing benefits. But the details of it you need to get from somebody else.

SZ: Yes. I know that in reading the Museum chapter in your memoirs, you expressed great pleasure with Cesar Pelli's design.

DR: I think the design was very good. The wonderful thing was that it meant we had five floors of Museum under the tower. And it was so ingeniously done that when you go into what is under the tower, the museum space, you're at no time aware of the fact that there are columns that go up through the space, supporting the tower. It's really a remarkable feat of architecture that Pelli did.

### **TAPE 3, SIDE 2**

SZ: You know, the other thing, to me, was the desire -- and then his subsequently being able to carry out -- the desire to keep the facade, or the impression of the façade, the original intent of the 39 building.

DR: That's true. And, of course, what is even more remarkable is the new Taniguchi design, which takes the Pelli facade on 53rd Street, and also incorporates the original building, the Philip Johnson building, the tower, and the new buildings which will be built on 53rd Street (having torn down these other houses), and makes a unified composition which looks as though it had all been done together. It's an absolutely brilliant feat that he's done, I think. Then, of course, on 54th Street he has designed this very simple, new facade for the two new buildings, which I think are very beautiful, with a great fineness of detail. So I think the new development is going to be spectacular. Of course, we're getting ahead of ourselves.

SZ: Right. But I was just thinking about what Pelli did.

DR: That's right. And what Pelli did was magnificent, but Taniguchi has been able to preserve what Pelli did, and then carry it on for the new expansion.

SZ: Is there anything you can tell me about the selection of Pelli? Did you know him or his work?

DR: I didn't know him, and I don't really know who suggested him. Who was head of the

department for architecture at that time?

SZ: Well, when it began, Arthur Drexler. But he died, I think.

DR: Well, he died or was replaced. And who took his place?

SZ: Well, first, someone named Stuart Wrede. Then Terence Riley.

DR: Terry Riley, of course, is there now. And it may be that Terry was the one who recommended Pelli. And it could have been Philip Johnson. But I think he turned out to be a very good choice. As I say, I think the nice thing is that Taniguchi has been able to harmonize all these facades in a very ingenious way.

SZ: This is, now, an enormous undertaking. It makes the last one look like child's play.

DR: Absolutely. Both financially and physically. Although building the tower was no small thing to do.

|

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM****INTERVIEW WITH:            DAVID ROCKEFELLER (DR)****INTERVIEWER:             SHARON ZANE (SZ)****LOCATION:                    ROCKEFELLER CENTER****DATE:                        25 APRIL 2001****TAPE 4, SIDE 1**

SZ: I wanted to ask a little about the new expansion. Last time, you did talk about the decision and the need for it, but I wanted to know how you felt about the prospect of having several sites, and then ending up deciding that you would stay in that one place?

DR: Well, I think everyone on the board agreed that our present location is an unusually good one, and that we would be better off staying where we were if we could find a means of doing so, and accommodating the new, additional requirements. But, because for a long time we didn't see how we would ever be able to expand on the existing site, we did consider a number of alternatives, specifically, two or three places on the very far West Side in the 50s, near 12th Avenue. There are some big, barn-like buildings there that could have been acquired. We actually took members of the board to see them, and considered the prospects. But the more we looked at alternatives, the more we concluded that trying to divide the Museum would not work. We didn't feel that what had happened with the Guggenheim had been very successful; I guess the Whitney had also tried that. So we came back, then, to saying, "What can we do?" and it was at that point that Jerry Speyer started talking with the descendents of the Goldens, who owned the Dorset Hotel. The children were not very united, and they were not really interested in selling. Those who were had very high ideas for a price. So Jerry Speyer probably spent two or three years talking with them. Of course, he's a very skillful real estate negotiator, and in the end persuaded them to sell the Dorset. We had to pay a high price, but everyone felt that

was so much the most attractive opportunity for expansion that we should buy it. So we did, together with another building between it and the Museum building.

Then we started the study of how to do the expansion. It finally came to hiring an architect. We concluded that this would be a major expansion for the Museum; therefore, we wanted to get a very good architect to do it. So we decided to first of all talk with Terry Riley, as others knowledgeable in the field of architecture, including Philip Johnson. What we did was to put together a list of some thirteen or more names. We wrote a letter to each of them and said, "If you were to be selected to do this, what would you propose?" and got each of them to do a kind of maquette of their thoughts. Then we had a selection committee that reviewed those and reduced the number to three. It was not an easy decision among the three, but we finally picked [Yoshio] Taniguchi.

SZ: And in re-reading (which I did before coming this morning) some of the analysis of, really, what his plan was going to do, it's interesting -- Did the committee really have a sense, let's say by the time you got to the three finalists, of what you wanted?

DR: I think so. I think we pretty well agreed on that. Interestingly, after many long discussions, we had a meeting, I think on a Saturday morning, with the members of the committee. Then there was to be a presentation by Terry and others; in fact, I think all the principal curators were invited to come up with their choice.

SZ: Among the three?

DR: Among the three. So we scheduled ourselves to meet with them successively, separately, and they all came. Interestingly, it was unanimous; Taniguchi was everybody's choice. So that made it easy for the committee, because all the principal curators felt he was the right choice.

SZ: And fairly unknown here, in this country.

DR: Fairly unknown here. Of course, he speaks somewhat halting English; it's fairly fluent, but it's not perfect. Therefore, he had some difficulty in making the presentation. But we all concluded that he had a very good concept, and we all liked the quality of his design. We felt that he had a very fine sense of detail and really cared about it. We concluded if he did it, it would be a very beautiful building. And, I must say, I certainly think -- and I think the others also feel, now that we have a sizable model -- that we made a good choice. I think the way he's integrated the different stages of the building on 53rd Street -- each one was done by a distinguished architect, and they're very different. And he has come up with a facade that uses the original ones, but ties them together, I think to a remarkable degree. So it makes an interesting composition, and I think it will be very beautiful, despite the fact that it's not a single front. So we're very pleased with what he's done so far. Then, on the other side of the Museum, on 54th Street, there is a very simple wall, which he's managed to make interesting through the quality and texture of the wall, and by putting a window in and doing a number of other things to make 54th Street look very handsome.

SZ: That's where the major entrance is going to be?

DR: There will actually be entrances on both 53rd and 54th Streets. It [54th Street] will become a major entrance; I'm not sure it will supercede 53rd.

SZ: A few other points some writers have made: The Garden will be brought back to --

DR: Oh, of course. If there was one thing everyone agreed on, it was that the Garden was sacrosanct and should not be touched. Now that doesn't mean that in the process of building, it won't be torn apart. But it will be put back, almost 100%, to what it has been. We even went so far as to move some of the trees and store them elsewhere, bagging them so they can be replanted.

SZ: Another point made was that Taniguchi makes very good use of natural light. He will make very good use of natural light in the new Museum.

DR: Yes. Both in the ceiling, and with windows.

SZ: Another thing was the fact that the collection will be stacked in some ways. This was just an allusion to the fact that because Pelli's tower is there, and because the city is so vertical, there will be an echo of its belonging in midtown in that way, too.

DR: I think that's true. But also, of course, it was decided to add several more stories to the new building that will be put up to the west, something that had not been planned initially. But again, the way he's managed to do it, I think, fits in very happily with the overall design. So I personally think the current proposal is a very elegant one, which will make a great addition to the city.

SZ: And along with this, I guess, is the new round of fund raising.

DR: Well, there's no question about that; it's apparent that the total objective is now what? Some \$690 million? I think that's correct. We have already raised close to \$500 million, so I think we've done very well. Most people are pleasantly surprised we've done as much as we have. And we have, of course, really, until the beginning of 2005 to raise the balance.

SZ: Two-thousand-five being the targeted date for completion?

DR: Completion, yes. Obviously, we'd like to have all of the money in hand by then. But it's a big job.

SZ: Do you like fund raising? Do you like doing it, personally?

DR: I have to say I've done a good part of it. Well, it's a challenge, and it's been sort of fun, trying to persuade members of the board who have the financial capacity to share my enthusiasm and participate very generously. I guess I've used a technique that I've used before -- which I think tends to be helpful -- which is making an initial

gift myself. So then, when I go to people I can say, "This is what I'm doing. Will you join me and match me?" First we got Aggie [Agnes] Gund and Ronald Lauder to agree to what they could do: Ronald to match what I did, and Aggie to do what, for her, was a very generous amount; he didn't have quite the same resources as he. Then we went, with that in hand, and talked to Sid Bass and persuaded him to help. One of the things I've learned from fund raising is, as I say, to set a target to shoot at, by making a gift oneself if one can, and then thinking through who are the other most logical people -- it was quite clear that the three of us were the right ones -- and then move out from there to others who have both the ability and the interest. So I think we have been very successful.

SZ: Of course, what you refer to as enthusiasm, that deep connection to the institution that you're fund raising for --

DR: Well, if you don't have it, you're not apt to be very good at it.

SZ: I think people do sometimes attempt to raise funds without a real understanding and appreciation of the institution they're fund raising for. I don't know how well it comes out.

DR: That's true. And I have to say, I've had quite a lot of experience over a good many years. Therefore, I think I have a sense at least of some of the techniques that can be effective.

SZ: Well, there is a question I want to ask, and maybe this is the appropriate place. When people refer to the Museum as a Rockefeller institution, do you feel that way about it now?

DR: Well, I can understand why people say that, in that Mother was, certainly, unquestionably, one of the founders. My brother, Nelson, was president for a number of years and was very enthusiastic until he went into politics and couldn't continue it. Then my sister-in-law, Blanchette Rockefeller, my brother John's wife,

became first chairman and then president, and really, for a long period of time played a very important role. And I came in and out along the way. I became chairman (pro tem.) of the board, just on a temporary basis, from 1958 to '59, right after Nelson became Governor and before we were able to persuade Blanchette to do it. Then, in '59, she was able to convince my brother John, who was quite opposed to her spending so much time on the Museum, to let her become chairman which, actually, she only did for a year. Then we had Bill Burden as chairman from 1961 to '62. I then served as chairman from 1962 to '72, and was followed by Bill Paley who was chairman until 1985. Then my sister-in-law was able to come back for two years, until 1987, when I again stepped in and served as chairman until 1993. When I served as chairman from 1962 to '72, I was still with the Chase and, therefore, really wasn't able to give a lot of time to the Museum. I think I probably did quite a little more during my second stint -- '87 to '93. Don Marron was president then. In fact, he was president most of the time I was chairman. He had played a very active role in the '84 expansion process, along with me. I'm now a trustee emeritus, but with the need for this big fund raising project, I sort of slipped into it without it quite being intended. So, in effect, I guess you'd say I am chairman of the fund raising committee. I'm not sure I was ever officially appointed to that, but it's happened. So I've been working, basically, with Ronald and Aggie. I have made a lot of the calls and requests for funds.

SZ: The Museum is so big now, and it's such an international presence. It's obviously evolved enormously since the very early days.

DR: Yes, that's true. You were asking (and I'm sorry I got diverted) about its being called a Rockefeller museum. It's certainly true that one member of the family or another has been involved pretty much from the beginning, I guess more so than any other one individual or family. But there have been wonderfully loyal people, like Aggie Gund and Ron Lauder, of course, in recent years, and Bill Paley, very importantly, earlier on, along with Jock Whitney, Nelson and Stephen Clark in the early days.

SZ: And Mrs. [Henry Ives] Cobb, too?

DR: Yes. Of course. She did [for a long time], but her health really has not been good in recent years.

SZ: But she also had that connection from way back.

DR: From way back. You're quite right. But sadly, she really had to drop out. Let's see. She was president from '65 to '68, and she was vice-president in '68-'78. But her health really has not been good.

SZ: But then her son, John Parkinson III, was involved with the Museum.

DR: Her son has been involved as treasurer, and still is. He now has cancer, and has not been able to do as much. But he has played an active role in the management of the funds, and as treasurer, in keeping track of expenses and so on. He has not played that active a part in the building or the planning, which she did in the early days. But neither of them has really been involved more recently.

SZ: And your son [David Rockefeller, Jr.] is on the board?

DR: My son is on the board, and is now chairman of the nominating committee, which is a very important role at this juncture -- determining who's going to be in charge of the future. He lives in Cambridge, [Massachusetts] and is here only sporadically, not on a regular basis any longer. So while the family, certainly, up to this point has played, at most periods, an important role -- and I think a lot of people do identify the Museum with the family -- it would be wrong to carry that notion too far. It certainly is not, today, a "Rockefeller museum." There are lots of other people who have very independent thoughts and play, as they should, a major role in determining policies.

SZ: Do you feel pleased with the direction the Museum is taking now?

DR: I think so, yes. I think it's very good. I'm glad to be able to help, particularly in the

fund raising, and I think David [Rockefeller, Jr.] being able to play this role on the nominating committee is excellent. I would be very pleased if he becomes more active. Even though he's in Cambridge, I think he really is interested, and I'm hopeful that he will play a more important role. I'd like to see others in the family become more active. My granddaughter, Miranda, who is my daughter Neva's daughter, has become somewhat involved. She's on the Drawing Committee, and I hope we can get her, when she finishes law school this year; she is going to be working in New York, and I hope she may play a bigger role. So I would hope the family will continue to have a role, but I suspect it will be a diminishing role rather than a growing one.

SZ: Now for this interview, for this oral history, we didn't talk about, for instance, the Stein syndicate, but you did that in your memoirs. I would like to ask you about some of the Museum's exhibitions, those which for you are memorable.

DR: Yes, well. There have been some wonderful ones.

SZ: Well, you did mention the installation of the Breuer House in the Garden, which was in 1949. Then there were several of Dorothy Miller's shows: There was "Fifteen Americans," in '52, "Twelve Americans" in '56, and then "Sixteen Americans" in '59. And you did talk about Dorothy Miller, somewhat.

DR: I said I thought she had really played a very seminal role during that period, in the identification of the artists who, in effect, have become the leaders and most respected artists in the world. Of course, the Museum has also acquired very important works of each of them.

SZ: Then there was the Family of Man, the photography exhibition of 1955 that was a huge success and traveled all over the world.

DR: Yes, and very, very well done. Interesting. I liked it very much.

SZ: And there was the Rothko show.

DR: Yes. That was a very good one. I loaned my Rothko to it.

SZ: And *Cézanne: The Late Work*, which was in 1977. That was maybe what one could consider the first "blockbuster."

DR: Yes, it was a wonderful show, which Bill Rubin put on. I guess I loaned three works to that: the watercolor of Mont Sainte-Victoire, my *Boy With the Red Vest*, and the *Still Life* that was acquired from the Pellerin Collection in Paris. Pellerin sort of had a corner on the Cézanne market, back in the early part of the century. They had 50 or 100 of his paintings, and Bill Rubin, in particular, felt some of them were very important for us to get. In particular, he felt the *Still Life*, which had once belonged to Gauguin, and was in a frame that he had had it in. I think he [Rubin] may even have said he thought it was the greatest of Cézanne's still lifes. My associate, Rick Salomon, who's now on the Museum's board, made I think five trips to Paris to negotiate acquiring that painting and finally succeeded, with the understanding that although I own it and have it in my home, it will go to MoMA when I'm not around. It's a wonderful painting.

SZ: Had you seen it and loved it?

DR: Well, actually, I had not seen it. It was Bill Rubin who was aware of its quality. I'm not sure I would have recognized as strongly as he how important it was, because it was quite dirty. It hadn't been cleaned, and it was very badly framed. It was obviously a very good one, but after it was cleaned and reframed -- which I had done when I bought it -- I really do now think it's the still life I like the best of any Cézanne did. It's not nearly as big as some; it's relatively small, but the quality of it and the composition of the subject matter is wonderful.

SZ: Then there was the Picasso show in 1980, the big retrospective.

DR: Yes. Which was a magnificent show. I guess I loaned, certainly the *Boy With the Red Vest*, and then the *Reservoir*, which I had also acquired from the Stein

- Collection. I can't think whether I had others in it or not.
- SZ: Well, that's a matter of record, anyway. Then there was Miro, and the Primitivism show, which was --
- DR: I thought that was very interesting.
- SZ: Primitivism?
- DR: Yes. Because it showed an influence that perhaps had not been fully recognized previously on modern art.
- SZ: And the big Matisse show in '92.
- DR: That was, I guess, the high point, in terms of success. It was an unbelievably big and beautiful show. I think it sort of confirmed, it and the Picasso show together, that these artists were the two giants of the 20th century. If there had been any doubt before, I think it was pretty well recognized then.
- SZ: I thought you were going to say that it confirmed the fact that the Museum had to expand. Because I remember it was just totally full; everything had to come down to accommodate the works of art.
- DR: Well, that's true, too. But the quality of those shows was so extraordinary. It just hit one clearly what giants these two artists were.
- SZ: Do you have any feelings about blockbusters vs. collection shows?
- DR: I think they each play a role. Blockbusters are what attract the crowds, and strengthen the leading position of MoMA in the minds of the public. On the other hand, I think we have an obligation to pioneer, ferret out and identify the promising people of the future. The Museum was set up to do that, and I think it would be a

tragedy if we didn't continue. So even shows that may not have been that popular have played their role in bringing to the public's attention people they hadn't known before.

SZ: What I think I hear you saying (and I think you said this last time) is that, for you, the Museum should -- I mean, it's the old Gertrude Stein, "How can a museum be modern?"

DR: I think it's important -- and I believe this has now been accepted by the staff and board -- that in many respects it was Picasso who took the lead in bringing about an almost sea-change in what was considered important painting. Therefore, I think it's part of the role of the Modern to be able to give the public the history of that extraordinary revolution, really, in painting. I think it's fair to say that we have some of the seminal paintings in that process. I think the public has come to recognize that, and that's one of the appeals that, in addition to seeing new and interesting things, that people like or like less well, that they can also look at the great master works from the beginning of the movement. And even now, during the period when most of the Museum is closed down [for the new expansion], we have a few rooms showing the great master works of the collection.

SZ: And some very new and interesting things, as well.

DR: Well, that's true, but I think the public has become so fond of and used to seeing *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and the wonderful Henri Rousseaus and Cézannes and so on that it would be unhappy if at least a few samples couldn't be seen.

SZ: And the great growth in the MoMA-going public in the last twenty-five years?

DR: Well, there's no question that it has grown, and I think that's just an indication that it has succeeded in its objective.

SZ: And the future?

DR: I hope it will retain its strength in the past, and build out into the future. But that's the reason we need more space, why we're doing what we are.

SZ: Thank you.

**END INTERVIEW**