

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **JOHN COMFORT (JC)** PS1 Board Member; Treasurer

INTERVIEWER: **JEFF WEINSTEIN (JW)** Arts & Culture Journalist / Editor

LOCATION: **THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

DATE: **JUNE 30, 2010**

BEGIN AUDIO FILE 1 of 2

JW: So, the first step, what we want to do is, just for the record, I'll introduce myself. I'm Jeff Weinstein and I'm sitting here with John Comfort in the conference room on the Architecture and Design floor, fifth floor, at The Museum of Modern Art. This is June 30th, about 4:00 p.m., 2010. And the first thing I wanted to ask you was to tell us something about yourself: where you're from, if you like, let's go back; where you were born, something about you so that we know who you are.

JC: Well, my family is actually from New York. I was born in Chicago and I grew up in North Carolina. Went to high school in North Carolina and then to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, was an English major. Did a bit of graduate work in business, and then was in the Peace Corps for a few years in Venezuela. But prior to that I joined Morgan Guaranty Trust Company and was actually on a leave of absence from that to be in the Peace Corps. Came back in January of '71 with my wife, to New York, and shortly thereafter encountered PS1, except it wasn't called PS1 then. [chuckling]

JW: Now, tell. This is very much what we're interested in. How did you encounter PS1?

JC: [chuckling] Well, it was a cold January or February Sunday in New York, and my wife said, "You know, there's a concert by a new composer in a funny place downtown on Leonard Street called the Idea Warehouse, and why don't we go? It's a fairly long thing but I think you can stand it, John." I said, "Who is the composer?" And she said, "His name is Philip Glass, and it's *Composition in Twelve Parts, Parts 3 and 7*,"

or something like that. And I thought, “Oh my god.” So we went down there, and it was a bitter cold, darkish, New York, typical February day, and there was this very energetic, attractive blonde, kind of getting people in this massive freight elevator that you were not sure was going to get up there. And of course, it was Alanna [Heiss]. And I ran into a friend named Steve [Stephen] Reichard, who, while not an old friend, was a person we’d met since we had been back from the Peace Corps, who seemed to be involved. And we went into this big space, and there were no chairs. We sat there on the floor; I actually took a nap there, as I recall, because it went on for about three hours. And it was the most wonderful music I had ever heard. Steve said, “Come over to my loft,” which was just around the corner on Franklin Street in Tribeca, “and you can meet Alanna and Phil and Brendan Gill will be there.” And so of course, we went. I had a wonderful chat with Phil Glass. It was one of these things where, New York was easy then. Here I was, a plutocrat in training, at Morgan Guaranty. And I met this artist, struggling artist really, and he just thought it was great that I had come and that I had a gig where I could get paid, and thanked me for coming.

And Brendan was wonderful. I think I was the first banker Alanna had met that month, so she seemed interested. And then it evolved, very quickly; Steve called me. I later knew that Steve became Alanna’s hit man in terms of raising money and all that, and many other things. A wonderful guy. We went on to become great friends.

So Steve called me shortly thereafter and he said, “I need to come to have lunch with you; I’m going to need to talk to you about something.” So he came down to the bank. We had lunch. And he said, “We’d like to ask you to be the co-chairman, with Angier Biddle Duke, of our first benefit.” And I said, “Jesus, Steve, I’m just a dipshit at Morgan. Nobody knows me. I know what these invitations look like: ‘Angier Biddle Duke and John Comfort invite you. . .’ That’s crazy.”

JW: But what is the “our” he was referring to, “our benefit”? [07:08]

JC: For PS1.

JW: For PS1?

JC: I'm sorry; it was not called PS1 then. It was called the Institute for Art and Urban Resources.

JW: That's right.

JC: And they had three venues. The Sculpture Factory in Coney Island, which I had never seen; I saw photographs, which was just an artists' workspace for sculpture, a big old factory loft, I guess. They had the Idea Warehouse on Leonard Street, which lasted about two years. And then they had the Clocktower, which was an old place on the top of the building where the traffic court was downtown, and where they stored civil defense kits, and Alanna had somehow procured it. So they were going to have a benefit in the Clocktower for the Institute, and it was going to be the Vogel collection, Herb [Herbert] and Dorothy Vogel, who were seminal figures in those days, at least that's what everybody told me, and they became so for me. He was a postmaster and she was a librarian, and they lived in a small apartment on the Upper East Side, and were the major collectors of Minimal and Conceptual art of the day. And they kept it all in this little apartment, which only you could do with Minimal and Conceptual art.

JW: Mostly they had works on paper, I recall.

JC: It probably was. And in concept, it might have been in an envelope. But they were going to have their first showing. And Steve was explaining all of this to me, and none of it made any sense at all. And he said he wanted me to be the co-chairman with Angier Biddle Duke, and I certainly knew who he was, but, I said, "Yeah, I'm not really in the same league. I'm a junior guy in a bank." And what it really came down to was, I was the only other guy they knew. And I said, "Do I have to pay?" And he said, "Yeah, you have to pay \$150." And I said, "Well, I guess I could swing that." But he said, "Well, that's okay. You don't have to do it. We'll find somebody else. But," he said, "the problem is, we've already printed the invitation with your name on it." [laughter] [09:00]. And so I said, "Well, okay, I'll do it." So we had this fabulous thing, at the Idea Warehouse, I believe it sold out, and we managed to feed everybody. In those days, \$150 was a good bit. And I met a couple of interesting artists. One was Richard Nonas, who had worked a lot with Alanna and maybe Bob

[Robert] Yasuda was there, and of course, Brendan was there. So that's how it kind of got started for me.

JW: And your wife, by the way, you've mentioned a number of times. She is Jane Comfort, and Jane Comfort is a choreographer.

JC: She's a choreographer, right, and much better known in the art world than I am, that's for sure. [laughing]

JW: I just want to make sure we get that on the record. She may come up later.

JC: And really, that was one of the things. I was talking to Alanna about what the whole point of the place was. She said, "We want to give both visual artists and performance artists places to work." And Jane had had a bad experience recently working for a choreographer where they kind of got evicted from a rehearsal studio or something, and so I told that story. And so she thought that I was a sympathetic type, in spite of being a banker.

JW: When you first met Alanna, and when you first got to know her, when you were talking about, ultimately, PS1, how did she present herself, where she wants to go with these art spaces? What do you recall? What got you actually engaged with her?

JC: It was the idea that it was going to be art, as in-the-raw. It was going to be art that was being made today, reflecting the culture we're living in. It wasn't going to help preserve anything. It was meant to be a place where people could work--She wanted to provide venues for people to work and for people to show their art.

JW: Show their art.

JC: And it was mean to be fairly democratic in terms of the working. You had to be a bona fide artist. But I don't think she made too many judgmental calls in terms of helping people get workspace as to whether she liked their work. But what she showed was very much judgmental.

JW: Yes.

JC: Which was right. She's a curator. And so she made an effort to show what she thought was the most important of whatever theme she was on.

JW: Now, you obviously were interested in art and interested in the art world, and in the world of music and performance. What accounts for that interest in your life? Do you have any feeling about how you came to enjoy the arts?

JC: Well, I married an artist. And I think I leaned more to the performing arts. I had not been trained in art, but I majored in liberal arts and audited a lot of art history courses. Nothing more profound than that.

JW: Did you look at art in a regular way? Did you enjoy going to shows, or?

JC: I would say, not in a regular way, but certainly did. I certainly knew MoMA and knew all the museums in New York, and knew the museum in Chapel Hill where they showed art. [laughing] [11:59]

JW: Well somehow, then, this attracted you in a different way, because you've stuck with it. You got to know the people involved. You became part of this new, growing institution. Isn't that the case?

JC: Well, of course. But I mean, I've always thought that art was one of the most important things there is, and felt that it ought to be made, shown, and preserved. And it struck me that this was a place that was really going to do that.

JW: Going to do it. And so it did. What was your next connection to what we now call PS1? What, after this benefit?

JC: Well, Steve was fairly unrelenting in terms of trying to get me involved. And we just talked about it a lot. And he had this concept. Steve was the greatest promoter that ever lived. We wish he had lived. But. . . [John Comfort turns away, upset.]

JW: I'm sorry. You were close.

JC: He just kept talking about stuff and his grand plan to really organize the board and make this place a functioning place. And the board then was Lawrence Alloway, the

art critic, and Bob [Robert] Rauschenberg and Brendan. And Alanna ran the place. She was the executive director.

JW: And this, again, was the three venues, not yet out on Long Island City.

JC: It was purely those three venues, and it was called the Institute for Art and Urban Resources. It had been sort of a spinoff from the Municipal Art Society. Alanna was a staff member working for Brendan, who was chairman of the Municipal Art Society, and she was always trying to get him into stuff. And he did let her curate a show called the . . . she found a vault under the Brooklyn Bridge. I never saw this show, but it was called "The Closed Art Show" or "The Open Art Show." ["Under the Brooklyn Bridge," 1971]

JW: Yes, I remember this.

JC: And I have one of the pieces that Richard Nonas did in it, on my wall. It was a big old piece of wood, it was wonderful. But I never saw the show, and Brendan, I mean, Alanna could be fairly unrelenting, too. Brendan told Alanna, "You know, you need to have your own institution with your own constituents, because the Municipal Art Society is really kind of older school and it's about preservation, and you're talking about new art. You need to attract young collectors to be your benefactors, and you need to have your own thing." And she said, "I'll do it if you'll be the chairman." And somehow they got Bob and Lawrence to join. But it was not a particularly active [board], I mean, I don't think they came to meetings or anything. I think they lent their name. And Brendan was just always available. And so Steve had this idea of forming an advisory committee.

JW: Right.

JC: And he got Tom Armstrong from the Whitney. He got his small-business professor from Columbia Business School. I can't remember his name; a great guy. And me, and, I can't remember who else. Well, Lawrence [Alloway], and maybe a few other people. And we had a couple of meetings. It was all about talking about how to organize the thing.

JW: Yes.

JC: And after, as a result of that, they decided to organize the board, they didn't change the name or anything. I can't remember now whether the opportunity for PS1- it might have been that the opportunity for PS1 came up, and they needed to kind of have a bigger corporate structure. I may be making this up, but this could be what happened. They needed to have a real corporate structure, or they needed a more active board, because they were going to make this big commitment, to do PS1.

JW: They were going to found themselves as a nonprofit organization?

JC: I think they already were, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc. It was a 501(c)3, but they wanted a bigger, stronger thing.

JW: So they had a board already.

JC: Yes, but that board was clearly just an honorary board. So the next thing I heard, I got a letter from Brendan asking me to be on the board, and the other people were staying on the board, and it was sort of a process of making a board. And that's when we started getting involved in trying to pull off PS1.

JW: Right. When did you first hear about the public school building?

JC: If this was '71, it might have been as soon as that spring. Because I remember the city said it was going to cost \$475,000 to renovate the building to some sort of a museum standard, and of course that was a number that was just way beyond anybody. And Alanna came up with a number of \$150,000. And she came up with that number because she hired a guy named Shael Shapiro, who was the architect to the art world. He was the guy that did all of the renovations of artist's lofts downtown. He was a delightful guy, and he said we could do it for that much, using artists as workers.

JW: And get it up to code.

JC: And get it up to code. Well, we never talked about that too much, but we thought we could get it up to use.

JW: [laughing] Okay.

JC: And what happened was that we were contacted by the office of the Borough President of Queens, Donald Manes, who was a promoter if there ever was one, who knew that the NY State Council for the Arts (NYSCA) was going to try a new way of allocating money to the arts.

JW: Right.

JC: Joan Davidson was the Chairman of NYSCA, Kent Barwick was the Executive Director, and she decided to allocate money to the boroughs on a per capita basis in her new administration. John Lindsey was mayor and Hugh Carey was governor.

JW: '71.

JC: They had this idea that if they gave money away on a per capita basis, it would be more democratic, and Manhattan wouldn't be getting all of the money. And so that meant that Queens could theoretically get as much money as Manhattan. Queens had no museums and Manhattan had a thousand museums. And so Donald decided this is a way to get some money for Queens. Alanna approached, with sort of the support of the borough president of Queens, NYSCA to fund this thing. And the executive director, well Joan was the chairman and Kent Barwick was the executive director.

JW: That's right.

JC: And we had several meetings with him, and it finally came out that we asked him for \$120,000. And it became pretty clear that they were going to give it to us. That was for operating. That wasn't getting the \$150,000. That was for our operating budget.

JW: I see.

JC: He looked at me, because he knew I was a banker, and said, "But don't expect me to be your banker, Comfort. This is this year. You can apply next year and you may or may not get something. So you'd better get this place so it can run." And then I think we had to raise the \$150,000 on our own. And Steve got the Rockefeller Foundation to give us a matching grant for \$75,000. And then he went through the list of Brendan's club memberships, and the one club that was really good hunting-

ground was the, oh, I'm embarrassed. What's the name of that club in the 40's where all the arts sort of people belong? It's a men's luncheon club except Alanna's a member there now, too.

JW: Oh, the one I know isn't.

JC: The Century; the Century Association. And he found a guy in that club who Brendan knew who was a senior vice president of U.S. Trust Company. His name was [James] Sinclair Armstrong-- who, the cross-reference, of course, with computers, you can do this now instantly, but Steve did it by hours of looking-- who was director, if not the chairman, of a not-for-profit arts organization called the Rubin Foundation.

JW: Yes.

JC: Sam Rubin. And so he said, "Brendan, call up Sinc [Sinclair], set up a meeting." So Steve and I, without Brendan, had drinks with Sinc one evening at the Century Association. And Steve just told him the story and said, "We'd like you, your foundation, to give us \$75,000 for this match." And he said, "Well, I won't give you the seventy-five, but I'll guarantee a loan for fifty." I think that's what it was. And so we needed \$75,000 more, so I met some guys at Chemical Bank, and they said they'd give us \$75,000 if we found the other \$25,000 of guarantees. And we had enough board members who were willing to do that. We had this wonderful director who was then the chief executive of Ernst & Company, David Moxley. He was a great guy. Unfortunately, he died as well. He pretty much guaranteed the \$25,000. So with the combination of the directors and the Rubin Foundation, we got the financing.

JW: And Chemical Bank.

JC: Chemical Bank. They made the loan.

JW: What was their interest, do you think?

JC: I think they wanted to be good citizens. And I may have mixed that story. Now that I'm thinking, I think that was a different match that Rockefeller had. I think we got Rubin to guarantee a lot more, and I think there was another \$75,000, the

Rockefeller Foundation matched later now that I think about it. But anyway, so, we got a loan, for \$150,000 from Chemical Bank, with \$75,000 guaranteed by the Rubin Foundation and David Moxley.

JW: Right.

JC: And this became quite a famous loan, because it had a lot of iterations and caused me much anguish over the next 30 years. [laughing] Because I sort of got it, or was involved in getting it. I can't blame Steve anymore because he isn't with us. So that's what happened.

JW: So you got your nest egg, basically.

JC: We got our nest egg and we did the building. We spent less than, we actually spent about \$130,000; \$120,000; and I said, "Oh, let's pay off the bank." And of course, I had no authority. And of course, they didn't. They just spent it on making the galleries nicer.

JW: Right. And Alanna is now, she's got a title?

JC: Well, she was then the executive director.

JW: And she remains so.

JC: Yes.

JW: In the process of the school being gotten into shape for shows, was anything happening with the other venues, at the time, that you recall?

JC: Well, there were a couple of shows still to go that I went to at the Idea Warehouse. I remember seeing a wonderful one with Charlemagne Palestine, with Simone Forti, and maybe one other. And that was about it. But we always had shows at the Clocktower. And that continued for a long time.

JW: It certainly did.

JC: Brendan said it was the greatest place for a cocktail party in New York. And there were a lot of shows, a lot of parties there, Christmas parties, and Alanna really was able to attract everybody in the art world to come to any one of her parties.

JW: Right. That I know.

JC: It was quite wonderful. [chuckling]

JW: Now the first show at PS1, do you recall?

JC: Well, I remember the Vogel show, but the first show at PS1 was the *Rooms* show.

JW: Yes, that's right.

JC: And that was pretty wonderful. Alanna had a cohort in terms of curation, who was Linda Blumberg. And she stayed with PS1 from the beginning, for a few years [as first program director]. I don't know; at some point she left and I was never really quite sure why.

JW: I know she moved on -

JC: And she ended up going to Europe and getting involved with the American Academy in Rome and other things. I think she's back in New York now. But she and Alanna were really tight in terms of the curation of that show.

JW: And that show had a pretty strong impact. Do you recall any of the critical response?

JC: I mean, it was fabulous. I remember also we had a huge benefit there, and it was just a great opening. Everybody in town was there. Everybody was very excited. I wish I could recite all of the names of the artists, but there were a lot of them.

JW: Oh, it's a big list.

JC: Vito Acconci and all of these wonderful Minimalists.

JW: Well, for the record, it was a show in which the artists used parts of the building to make their, used the rooms and used the stairways to put in installations and to

transform the whole building into different artworks. And it was widely reviewed, as I recall.

JC: Oh, it was the show of the year. Because no one had ever done something like that.

JW: Were you proud of that?

JC: Oh, yes. I was proud, but I just kind of thought this was the way it was. I didn't realize how unusual it was. I just figured this was what we were supposed to be doing.

JW: That's very interesting, because it was unusual, and in retrospect, it could be seen as one of the first uses of an alternative public space, of an alternative art space.

JC: Yes.

JW: To be used in this way. So you are now a member of a board, and you're, how do you feel about your involvement? Let's say it's 1976, the first show-

JC: *Rooms?*

JW: *Rooms.*

JC: I think, somehow, '76, because we've had a couple of anniversaries of that.

JW: And so, were there regular meetings, regular board meetings?

JC: There were regular meetings. The board was growing. We were always kind of strapped for money. And we always had great events but never really raised money at them. And invariably, Alanna would get somebody to pay for it so we didn't lose money on it, but we never asked people to pay for admission.

JW: Right.

JC: But, yes, there were plenty of meetings, and trying to decide directions. I never felt the board should get involved in the artistic side, and we didn't. There would be themes, but we would never approve a show or not approve a show, and we don't, to this day.

JW: That's right.

JC: Nor should we. It's none of our business. If we don't like them, we should get off the board.

JW: Was the board growing at that time? Did you have more people?

JC: It was growing but it was never huge. It was always a hard board because, one, you never were sure how financially solvent we were, and the information wasn't particularly good.

JW: Were you worried about record-keeping?

JC: Probably not as much as I should have been. We did have a couple of problems with some of the staff that just didn't do a good job and had to be let go.

JW: Could you tell a little bit more about that, what kind of problems?

JC: I remember one guy actually, I don't know whether he took money or he just didn't account for it properly, but we did have a real financial problem because of that. The main problem was simply doing great shows and spending money as well as we could, and just not taking enough in. You'd have a crisis if NYSCA, which-- Kent Barwick was right, couldn't keep supporting us. We'd get less money. It was always very complicated. We were always having these big dances about challenge grants from the National Endowment [for the Arts]. The Department of Cultural Affairs was beginning to get involved. We were a tenant of the city. In those days, we paid a dollar a year, though.

JW: But you did become a tenant of the city.

JC: Yes, we were a tenant of the city from the beginning.

JW: From the beginning?

JC: But we were paying one dollar and other valuable considerations.

JW: Was the city paying for your utilities then?

JC: Actually, I remember getting a donation of coal, at one point, so the answer is no.

JW: One of the other people I spoke to said that it was a big victory to become officially a tenant.

JC: Yes, to be officially, but then we had to negotiate a real lease and pay real money. It was not much, but yes, we did get to that point. We had a lease which we now assigned to Alanna's new organization at the Clocktower, and the Idea Warehouse was long gone. We kind of hovered around a budget of \$300,000 to \$700,000 a year for at least 10 years.

JW: And about what proportion of that do you think was grant money?

JC: Oh I'd say 90 percent.

JW: Did it ever change, that percentage?

JC: Oh yes, dramatically.

JW: Could you tell me how it changed?

JC: Well, at some point, we started having some earned income. We'd charge at the door. Alanna always didn't want to charge at the door. She felt that art should be accessible to everybody. But we would say, "Hey; we've got to charge something." But, we got to about five dollars about three or four years ago. Now we're up to, I think, \$10 or \$12. It's not much. And it's not mandatory. But we would have a show open, and we could have as many as three or five thousand people come, and then nobody would come during the week. We just weren't really set up during the week. And so we'd get some money in for those shows, but, how much are you going to get, \$10,000, maybe. Probably more like \$5,000 or \$3,000.

JW: Everybody knows that you would go to an opening at PS1, and then there'd be a trickle of people coming in after because the people would be coming from Manhattan, art world people, or people coming from elsewhere to see the show. Not from the neighborhood, for example. It wasn't a neighborhood thing.

JC: Never from the neighborhood.

JW: Did you have any discussions about that, whether that should be improved, or how you could increase the gate?

JC: All of the time. But not in terms of the gate. We just wanted our relations with the neighbors to be better.

JW: Were there any real problems with the neighbors?

JC: We had one big problem. This happened when Steve organized a black-tie benefit out there for an opening of an artist named Fred Sandback, I believe. And he's an artist, I'm sure you know, that makes these things with cords going up from the floor to the ceiling. And Steve had gotten one of these big klieg lights out front. It was a lot of fal-de-ral-de-roo and people driving up in tuxedos. The neighborhood was not really keen about that. They felt that that was kind of Manhattan, and you just had a feeling, you felt a little uncomfortable going into the building. And it turned out you should have felt uncomfortable, because there were a couple of local guys and it turned out one of them had just been released from jail that day, who came in and started cutting down the sculpture.

JW: This was at the opening?

JC: This was at the opening. We were upstairs on the third floor having drinks, and Steve went after them with a hammer.

JW: Oh my god!

JC: And so it turned into a big deal, and he chased them out of the building, and they came back with their friends. This is the old lore of PS1. I remember standing up there and I was standing next to uh, well, somebody, and Dickie Landry's [musician] wife Tina Girouard [artist] burst into the room and said, "They're killing Dickie in the street. There's a big riot in the street. Help!" And so this other guy and I started running down the stairs, and I noticed that he was getting out of breath. All of a sudden, I was the first one out. And luckily the police had gotten there. There was Steve still standing there. He may have even still had his hammer. He was all bruised up. And he said, "John, you've got to make sure Leo gets to his car." Leo Castelli [art dealer], because he was on the board of directors. And so I escorted Leo

to his car, and he said, "You're my bodyguard." I said, "Yes, sir, Mr. Castelli."
[laughter] And it ended, but by then, the party was pretty much over, I guess, and so we ended up, Jane my wife, and I, and Alanna and Joel Shapiro [artist] and his wife, all ended up in the police station. It was about one or two in the morning, in Queens. And these guys were in their cell, shaking the bars, and it was a big, dramatic night. And Alanna was very anxious that it not be in the press, and in fact, it wasn't. But it was very unfortunate, very unfortunate.

JW: I was going to say that I've only heard, I've never read anything about it.

JC: No, it never got in the press. It was just an unfortunate thing. This poor guy obviously just kind of went wild, and this was not his thing, and it was not handled well.

JW: But the way in which you could go in and out of an opening at PS1 at the time, it was pretty easy for anybody to get in.

JC: Oh yes, and we wanted people to come, and there were a lot of young people, and there was all sort of hipsters, but that really didn't fit in with the neighborhood. This was a working-class neighborhood. And it was a lot like Tribeca used to be, I mean, it was a place where people came to work but didn't live. So it was pretty deserted at night.

JW: Yes, I remember. I wouldn't send one of my critics if they didn't have people with them, to go alone, to visit PS1 in the evening.

JC: Well, we didn't do much in the evening. All of our openings were in the day, and usually it was on a Sunday. But, I think the relationship with the neighborhood is better, on an institutional basis, certainly with the borough and all that, but it's changed. I mean, more artists have moved in. [34:34]

JW: The neighborhood itself has changed.

JC: It's changed. It's totally changed. But I dare say there's a vast number of people that live there and have lived there all their life that have never been in the building.

JW: Now, you've said, rightly, that that board did not really want to interfere with the programming. But when you did talk about themes and talk about juggling different kinds of things, you know, PS1 is very well known in the art world for doing foreign shows that nobody else could have done or would have done.

JC: Right.

JW: That brings up questions of fundraising, of who paid for those shows, how did they come in.

JC: Yes.

JW: Was that discussed at board meetings?

JC: Yes, and I can think of two that were really kind of exciting. The one that was, well, they were both great shows, "Arte Povera" show ["The Knot: Arte Povera," 1981]. And that was a show that, well, it was originated in Turin, and so Alanna was not curating the show, but she really wanted to bring the show to New York. It turns out no one of any importance, MoMA, no one, was going to bring it. The only way it was going to get to New York was PS1, and she thought it was very important, and it turned out to be incredibly important. And so, that was going to cost, as I recall, the number there was \$300,000 or \$400,000. And boy, we didn't know where we were going to get that money. I can't remember the year of the show; you may have it on your list. But, Christmas week, between Christmas and New Year's, I got a call from a client of mine named Furio Colombo, the president of Fiat America. And so this would have been in the early '80s, probably. And he said, "You know, Mr. [Gianni] Agnelli [Chairman of Fiat] has a friend who has done some work at PS1, and Mr. Agnelli [would] like to see PS1, and I think you're on the board, aren't you, John?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Could you set up a visit to PS1?" And I said, "Absolutely; when would you like to do it?" And he said the only time he had was the morning of New Year's Eve, which was a work day. And I said, "Fine."

So I called Alanna and she got all excited. And of course, we had nothing up. And so she got Leo [Castelli] to send a truck over with a bunch of paintings in it. And we stuck them around leaning against the walls. They were probably Jasper Johns, whatever, the huge stuff. So there was art there. And we all turned up. Brendan, I,

Leo and Enzo Viscusi, another director, were there, and all of the PS1 staff. We had gathered beforehand for a little prep meeting. We had been allocated, like, 35 minutes for the great man to come in. And so Alanna said, "What we're going to do is, we're going to meet here and offer him coffee, then we're going to take him on a quick tour, and then I'm going to ask him for the money." And Brendan and I looked at each other and said, "We can't do that! That's a little direct, isn't it? Don't we want to say that we're doing a show about Italy, and boy it would be great. . ." And she said, "John, when is this man ever going to be in this building again? If I don't ask him now, we're not going to get this money. I'm going to do it." And so I took a deep breath and said, "Yeah, I guess you'd better." So, he loved the place, and we rambled all over for more than the 35 minutes, and we got back to the room, and she said, "You know, Mr. Agnelli, we were doing a show that originated in Turin." And he said, "Yes, I know." "And we're bringing it here," and she gave the good pitch about how it was so important to be in New York, and this was the only place it was going to be shown, and it was going to cost a lot of money. And he was agreeing. "And we'd like to ask you to pay for the show." And, "How much money would you need from me, Miss Heiss?" And she said, "Well, I need \$300,000." And I was about to, either I was going to faint or pass out of embarrassment or whatever. And he looked and he said, "I think we can handle that. Talk to Furio." And then Alanna just didn't want to give up. She said, "Now, there's a condition to our taking this money from you." And he's not used to being talked to like that. And he said, "Well, what's that?" And she said, "You have to give me a Fiat." [laughing] He didn't give her a Fiat but she made everybody laugh. And so then what happened was, basically,

JW: She was joking, I assume.

JC: Of course. She was joking, but it was just one of Alanna's jokes. You never knew what she was going to say. And he basically said he would underwrite it, is what he said. He said, "Yes, we can underwrite that." And so, Furio and I kept talking, and a check arrived to me, made out to PS1 for \$150,000, and he said, "John, we're going to get the rest from the other Italian banks." And at that point, our account and our \$150,000 loan were at the Bank of NY, because Chemical wanted to be repaid. As you may know, they have a thing called the right of offset. If you've defaulted on a loan with a bank, they can grab your money in your account at that bank.

JW: I see.

JC: And they were willing, if they had our operating account, to take the balance of the loan from Chemical. That's what happened. Boy, that was an amazing deal, that we got that. So anyway, I didn't want to put the money in the Bank of New York account because we owed them money; I was afraid that maybe we might not have enough money and not make a payment, and they'd seize the money, which would become a difficult issue for me, personally, because it was money that my client had given for a show. And if it got seized by a bank, it just couldn't help my banking relationship with the Fiat Corporation.

JW: Or your reputation.

JC: Or my reputation, or anything. And so, I opened another account for PS1 at Morgan. And basically, I told, certainly I told the bank what I was doing. It was not secret or anything, but I didn't want the Bank of New York to know that I had this money, so we deposited the Italian check in that account, the \$150,000 bucks. And we thought we'd just use that as the dispersal account to pay for the show. Well, Fiat couldn't raise the other hundred and fifty. They talked to all of the Italian banks and they just weren't interested in doing it. And I said, "But you said you'd underwrite it. Underwriting means to me that you're guaranteeing that you're going to do it." And he said, "Well, that's not what it means to me." So it was pretty delicate. And again, it was delicate for me, I couldn't push hard, and Alanna did push hard, writing letters to Mr. Agnelli, but he was not interested in hearing from Alanna again on that. And so it was pretty dicey. So Leo got involved, and a lot of the stuff was on the sea. If you may recall, there were a lot of pieces that were boulders. And why we couldn't just go find some boulders in New York State, I don't know, but these boulders had to come from Italy. So that was a very expensive shipping charge. And I think we got the shipping, somebody gave us the shipping; we got that paid for. But we still, we needed money. And Alanna found this Irish guy, who for some reason, was interested. And I think he wanted to one-up Agnelli. And he wanted Agnelli to see this Irish guy giving money because Agnelli was too cheap. And he wanted to make a big show, which kind of made me think, "Oh God." But what was interesting was,

the guy couldn't come to the United States. He either couldn't get a visa, or if he came, something would happen.

So he didn't get to do any grandstanding, so I was delighted with that, but he gave the money, and we paid for the show. And it turned out, as you know, to be one of the most important shows in New York that year, if not the most important show.

JW: That's correct; yes.

JC: And Leo and I became friends. And I remember, because he was so nervous about it. And he was in Italy for the summer and I was calling him every week, giving him a report on what our money was.

JW: What was Leo's relationship to PS1, you've mentioned him a number of times.

JC: Leo was a director. He was a director and he was just a facilitator of things. He would introduce us to people, he was a lot like Brendan. He was a wonderful front. But, you know, he was involved in the art.

JW: But personally, though, what do you think his motivation was, to be involved with Alanna?

JC: I think he wanted to see emerging artists, he liked her eye.

JW: I see.

JC: He wanted to see emerging artists. He just felt it was a noble cause. I don't think there was anything other than that. He didn't always come to the meetings; was not particularly interested in the organizational stuff. He was interested in what we were going to show. And never, I'm sure he and Alanna perhaps talked off line about it, but he never made a big deal about it. But he was always very interested. And I think really enjoyed the whole process. And I certainly enjoyed knowing him.

JW: His name doesn't come up very often when people talk about PS1.

JC: That's odd, because it should. He truly was devoted, and in those days was a great help. Because we didn't have that many strong directors in those days. It was a pretty much hand-to-mouth kind of a place.

JW: When do you think PS1 turned the corner, though? It's clearly a different situation now. But did you feel that there were any changes in the way PS1 was working, as you went into the '90s, for example?

JC: Well actually, I think we really became more legitimate when Tony [Anthony M.] Solomon joined the board. Tony had been the president of the New York Federal Reserve Bank. And we had a director named Enzo Viscusi, who was the president of ENI in New York, the Italian state oil company. There was a big connection with Italy and PS1, Count [Giuseppe] Panza and all of these people. And Enzo suggested that Tony was retired, and he was an amateur artist, and he suggested he might be good. And of course, Alanna had never heard of him. She called me and said, "Have you ever heard of a banker named Tony Solomon? Is he important? Do you think he should be our chairman?" I said, "Alanna, he's one of the most important guys in finance in the world. I mean, come on, of course, he'd be great if we could get him." And so she and I went to his penthouse up on Park Avenue and talked to him, and he agreed to be the chairman. And actually, that was a big help. That gave us some real respectability and legitimacy, and also we did finally have a bank call our loan, and he saved us on that.

JW: Do you remember about when that was?

JC: When they called the loan?

JW: No, when he became the chairman.

JC: Gosh, I wish I could. [1986, *New York Times*]

JW: We could probably find it.

JC: It was after Brendan's death. And that was, well, that's a matter of record. No, actually, it was not after Brendan's death. Brendan retired; he retired and Tony basically took over, that's when it was.

JW: I see.

JC: Brendan died much later [1997]. And Tony was great. He insisted on financials. He was very bankerly, and I think he attracted some other directors because they just felt more comfortable with his being there, and it made us look legitimate.

JW: Do you feel that record-keeping and certain things like that improved with him?

JC: They improved; up and down.

JW: Up and down. Okay. Do you want to take a break? Are you okay?

JC: I'm fine. Did you want to take a break?

JW: No, I'm fine, too. About the transition to merging with The Museum of Modern Art, do you have a story to tell about how and why that happened?

JC: Well, I think it happened because we grew. Our budget approached, well, it certainly cracked a \$1 million, and maybe it went, again, I'm the treasurer, I'm supposed to remember. But it was getting to be a pretty big budget. It was getting to be an annual agony, in terms of making it. And I think Alanna just said, "I don't think I can stand this anymore." Because she would be the one that would really have to exert herself and get money. She would solve it in many ways. One, attracting wealthy people to give us money. Two, not taking a salary. Three, laying people off. She always made herself suffer before she made the employees suffer. But everybody had to suffer. And so, it was always agony, and there was always fear of bankruptcy. And as I say, we did have our loan called one time. Which is a funny story, if you. . .

JW: Sure.

JC: I can't remember exactly, again, when it happened, but we were having a lot of negotiations with the workout people from the Bank of New York. And I befriended a nice senior banker there who knew my uncle, who had been there, and he seemed to let us go. But we had this terrible thing happen. Brendan and I and Alanna met with him, and basically said, "We intend to pay you back, but we can't pay you back. We are current on interest, but we can't pay principal. But we intend to pay." And he

says, "That's okay, as long as you stay current on interest." And so we all left and took a deep breath, and I called him the next day to thank him, and his assistant said, "He's not going to be coming in for the next couple of weeks." I said, "Oh, he's on vacation?" He said, "No, he's in the hospital." I said, "What happened?" He said, "Yesterday, he had a heart attack." That was the day of our meeting. So he literally had a heart attack after we told him we couldn't pay. So we didn't feel real good about that. He survived, and we went back and had another lunch with him, and he still said it was okay. So, you know, go figure. But finally, he retired, I guess, and we could no longer buy time, and they put another workout guy on it. And he was really a pushy guy, and he was not particularly interested in what we were doing, and just wanted the money back.

JW: I've heard that there was a loan connected to a show of California light artists that was a problem to pay back. Is this the same loan?

JC: There's only one loan, there's only one loan. It was \$150,000 and it just got transferred to the Bank of New York.

JW: Right; okay.

JC: Maybe people thought that that show caused us more of a deficit.

JW: One of the people I spoke to said that he thought that was the show that caused the deficit.

JC: I don't think there's any one show. I think it was just the general situation. What we did learn after "Arte Povera" was that we were never going to do a show that big unless it was funded, and unless we had strict go, no-go times. We didn't want boulders to be on the sea and not know we could finance it. We've kept to that rule since. But that was the real wake-up call. That was a big show with high risk, high gain; but, anyway. So we had a lot of meetings with these guys at the bank and made a lot of offers.

We had a busted up Dan Flavin piece. We had one of his pieces that we seemed to own, but it was all just the broken neon, but we owned the concept. It was in the basement of PS1. We offered them that. They didn't want that. And finally, after

many meetings, my charm as front-man for Alanna didn't work, and he called me and he said he wanted payment. He was demanding payment. And that's a real word. That's a defined term. If a bank demands payment, you've got to pay or you go broke. I called up Tony Solomon, and I said, "Tony, they've demanded payment on our loan. It's time for Plan B." And he said, "what's Plan B?" And I said, "You call [J.] Carter Bacot" who was the chairman of the Bank of New York, "and tell him we've got to come see him about this." And he said, "Right."

So he called him up, and I'll never forget, we were sitting down there in 23 Wall under the big chandelier at Morgan, planning our strategy, and Lew[is] Preston and Dennis Weatherstone, the chairman and the president of JP Morgan walked by, and they said, "Hey Tony, what are you doing here?" And he said, "Well, John and I have got this problem with this arts organization. We've got to go see Carter over at Bank of New York." And they said, "Well, good luck." And we went over there, and Bacot sort of vaguely knew what was going on, but what he knew was that his former regulator was there, and he was going to do what he wanted. And Tony said, "You know, I'm the chairman of this board, if you demand payment on this loan, I promise you, this will not look good for the Bank of New York. This is a very important arts organization. It will not look good." And Bacot really didn't understand what the situation was, and asked if we were current; I said, "Yes, Mr. Bacot, we are current on interest. We're not current on principal." And Tony said, "Well, I guarantee you, we will remain current." It was almost like a personal guarantee, but, it wasn't. And Carter thought about it, and he said, "Well, I'll get back to you." So the next day, I got a call from the banker. And he said, "You know, I mailed this letter to you to demand payment this morning." And I thought, "Damn; it didn't work. We're going to go broke." And he said, "So do me a favor. When you get the letter, tear it up." [laughter] My God, we'd survived again.

JW: I'm sorry to ask these sort of annoying questions, but can you date this at all?

JC: Of course not. It would have been, let's see, it would have been in the mid '80s. Because I remember where I was sitting at Morgan then, and where we had the meeting. It would have been the mid '80s.

JW: So at some point, Alanna realizes, as we know happened, that she couldn't keep raising more than a million dollars a year. What was the procedure, from where you saw it, of beginning to work with The Museum of Modern Art?

JC: Well, we didn't begin to work with them, it just happened.

JW: Well, how did it happen?

JC: Alanna and Glenn [D. Lowry] talked about it and decided it made sense. Alanna called me, as she did everybody, and said, "We're going to do this. We need to get this done and we're going to have a board meeting to vote on it." And it was in the summer. It would have been about 10 years ago, if not nine. And we had a meeting, and it was actually a little contentious. Tony felt that we weren't getting a good enough deal. And actually, he and Alanna split on that. Which was unfortunate, because he had put a lot of effort into the thing. And he, at that point, I believe he was the Director Emeritus by then. Another guy had come in. And so he [Tony] was against it, and that was unfortunate. And he was wrong. It was the best deal we could get. And the deal was that we would have a seven-year period of the PS1 board having ultimate authority over PS1, mainly from an artistic point of view. Not that we'd get involved, but we'd have that responsibility and authority. And that was to guarantee to the art community that this was going to be an independent organization. And we figured, after seven years, it would be part of MoMA or it wouldn't. And so it was important to have a mix of directors, with the majority being the old PS1 directors. And that's what happened for the first seven years. MoMA added directors, either from their board, or people that were sort of not on their board but important contributors who were much more interested in avant-garde art. And they became wonderful directors, and actually very generous. So it started, and it was fabulous participation from MoMA. I mean, Aggie Gund got involved, Ron Lauder got involved. Glenn was always at all of the meetings. And we had several financial crises during that time, and it was interesting -- and Peter Norton was very involved -- it was very interesting because it wasn't like, "Hey, we're just going to pay your bills." They didn't do that. They gave us some money every year, and they gave us a lot of administrative support, particularly accounting support from James Gara's group. We finally got our accounting so that you could believe the numbers.

And they would actually pay someone that I could talk to at PS1 who knew what he was doing. So there was a lot of help there. And Glenn, really, I just thought he became totally enthralled with the programs, and totally delighted to have Alanna's eye. And so a lot of exciting things happened. I always felt it was a great collaboration.

JW: Right. And you're still a board member now.

JC: I'm the last one of the founders.

JW: Are you the last of the founding board members?

JC: Yes, yes.

JW: Oh, so you are the repository of the history.

JC: [laughing] I'm afraid so. [57:45]

JW: Well, let's take a quick little break.

JC: Okay.

[Interview Resumes]

JW: When you look back on the shows that you saw at PS1, this may sound corny, but what are the ones that you're proudest of, or that you liked the most, or you feel most happy to have been part of?

JC: Well, obviously, I have to say "Rooms," the various versions of it. The show that I liked the most was the Mexico City painting show ["Mexico City: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values," 2002.] This happened right after 9/11, well, it was curated right after 9/11. Klaus [Biesenbach] and Alanna went down to Mexico City because Alanna just heard something was going on down there, in terms of people living in the old part of town, not necessarily Mexican artists, but plenty of them, just artists, were there, and she wanted to see what was going on. And I was there on business, and so they had a big party in a hotel, Gilberto Sandretto, husband of Rosa Sandretto, a PS1 director, let her have a suite. And

about 50 artists turned up. I remember asking Klaus, "What are we going to do?" and "How are we going to pay for this?" and "How much is it going to cost?" And it was classic PS1. Klaus said, "Well, it's going to cost whatever we get; that's what the show's going to cost." And so Alanna stayed there for three or four days, and Klaus stayed there a week or two and visited a lot of studios. That was in November [2001], after 9/11. So it was my first trip, I think, since the attack. And we did the show in July. And it was not your typical Mexican art show, it was dirty, nasty Mexico City, photographs and stuff. The piece that got me the most was a room, one of these wonderful big rooms downstairs, but you had to sign a release before you went in, full of fairly harsh photographs, as I recall, of car wrecks, and just the Mexico City that Mexicans live in. Which, you know, is one of the biggest cities in the world, and pretty polluted and dirty and nasty. There was nothing charming about it. And the room was full of fog. And the fog was made from water that the artist had used to wash off cadavers at the town morgue. And I got in there, I just thought, "This is it." I mean, I've gone to school in Mexico City. "This is it." Nothing touched me more than that piece.

JW: That's amazing.

JC: So I'm very proud of that show. And it only cost us about 60 grand, the whole damn show. It was wonderful. I loved that. I loved the Russian painting show ["Stalin's Choice: Soviet Socialist Realism 1932-1956," 1993] because I just thought it was fabulous that the world could see the art that a huge part of the world [Russia] had seen exclusively for the whole time that Russia was closed.

JW: Right.

JC: It was very idealistic and not what you expected to see. And I thought that it was very exciting that, well one, to be cheaper, we actually had *Pravda* print the catalogue, which of course, was in Russian. Nobody could read it, but it had pictures. And we opened the show in Moscow, and it happened to be the time, leave it to Alanna, when they were surrounding the congress, or whatever they have there, and there was fighting in the streets, and we were opening our show. Alanna was right in the center of it, of course. And that was a pretty fabulous show. And I

remember, we had a party at one of these Russian roller rinks out somewhere near Coney Island.

JW: Brighton Beach?

JC: Brighton Beach. And rock music, and I fell down and got a blood clot on my hip that, to this day, hurts me.

JW: Oh, I'm sorry. [laughter]

JC: But I won't sue PS1.

JW: No; don't.

JC: And let's see, what other great shows? There are so many. Those two jump out, well, the "Arte Povera" just because of all of the energy into it. But I actually liked a lot of that work. I really like the Minimal art. I must say, that was the art that was happening when I came to New York. I remember, Richard Nonas had a wonderful show there. I loved the, um, Bob [Robert] Ryman; is that his name?

JW: Yes.

JC: The white painting show. I thought, "That's the craziest thing I've ever heard," but each one was different. I mean, I'm not an art guy, and I just thought they, particularly the ones in the boiler room

END AUDIO FILE 1 of 2

BEGIN AUDIO FILE 2 of 2

JC: were pretty exciting. I loved that show.

JW: So you don't think of yourself as an art guy, even though you've been so close to art for so long?

JC: Well no, I mean, I'm a banker. I can barely remember the names of the artists, to be very honest, sometimes. But, as Brendan said, he didn't like anything they had there, and I liked a lot of the stuff, but he thought it was very important that they were

showing. And to me, that's the key. That's what makes me stay there, in a sense, because I really think it's important to have, not just a venue, but to have a world-class venue. A place that everybody will come to. That everybody says, "This is the place. If this is at PS1, it may not last, but this is important art right now."

JW: To take a look at.

JC: And as Klaus said so eloquently when he took over, "If it's at MoMA, it's art. If it's at PS1, it's an idea."

JW: Now, there was also an awful lot of performance at PS1, when you were there. Do you have any thoughts about that and how important it might have been, or...?

JC: Well, I'm not sure there were that many. I mean, we had the wonderful thing at the Idea Warehouse, and I loved the Charlemagne Palestine thing and Simone Forti.

JW: I've seen dance at PS1.

JC: My wife was the first curator of the dance program, and that was one time, but Alanna didn't really like it. Not that she didn't like the show, but she said, "We don't have enough heat. I'm not going to have dancers performing in that auditorium in the winter." Because we really weren't open in the summer. She said, "It's too damn cold; we just can't have a performance series going." So frankly, we haven't had that much. I know we're trying with the Saturday sessions in the winter, which is really a wonderful thing, to work our way more into that. So that would be great. But I must confess, I don't think of it as a performance venue. There are a lot more organizations in Queens now that are pushing performance, and so we can work with them. And Klaus is interested in that. So I think that could be, definitely, a direction to go in. But again, you know, as you say, it's not a night venue. Now it is; now it could be.¹

¹ Post interview note written by John Comfort, September 2010:

[My wife was one of the first four curators of the dance program. Jane was long interested in starting some sort of dance series in that beautiful third floor auditorium, and finally approached Alanna in the late 70's. She agreed, and Jane, Tim Miller, Marjorie Gamsso and Charles Dennis inaugurated the first performance series, called Para Narrative. The big idea beyond the neo-narrative concept of the series was that there would be a rotating curatorship. The curators were dancers, choreographers, critics and

JW: It could be better now. Is there anything that, looking back, you've had a long career with PS1. . .

JC: [laughing] Yes.

JW: Is there anything that you would do differently; that you know you would do differently, in any big way or any small way?

JC: Well, you know, it's funny. Here I'm a banker, and I probably, I was much more lax in trusting that we would get through, but had I done it another way, and said, "Hey, goddammit, the numbers aren't right; let's just get this right," and cancel the show or whatever, we wouldn't have pulled it off. So as much as I think professionally I might have not been as tough as perhaps I could have been, I guess luckily for me, in terms of not getting in trouble, anyway, and luckily for the institution, we did pull it off.

JW: You did.

JC: And it was Alanna. And now it's MoMA, so yeah, we don't have the immediate threat of bankruptcy or anything, but we don't want to be MoMA. We want to be the place on the other side of the river that has a totally different cost structure and can be more impromptu. We can still show ideas.

administrators, chosen by whomever the original four and the current curators decided on, and it was an amazing group of people.

Alanna warned Jane early on that this was a bad system, doomed to failure. She said that every department at PS1 had only one curator who watched the shop, made sure the grants got written, the critics got there, and their turf was in good shape. Jane and the other three originators, however, wanted a community based performance venue, and stayed with their plan.

As time went on, there were several curators who became attached to the potential of the PS1 gig and wanted to stay on past their two years, and they were excellent people. The group of four would meet and decide that despite the current curator's incredible skills, they still didn't want to change their mission, and then Jane would have to go and fire that person, often a great dance critic.

In the end, Alanna was right. Rotating curators did not have the continuity and strength of one, and the program didn't grow. One year it didn't get an NEA grant, and Alanna pulled the plug. She was also concerned about not having enough heat in the building for dancers in the winter.]

JW: And probably, winding down, you have a sense, then, of the future of PS1 that's: Let's not be MoMA, let's continue to be something different, continue to be PS1.

JC: Oh yes. But I think that's the conventional wisdom. Nobody wants it to be MoMA, because, then, what's the point? You could just be MoMA. I think we've energized MoMA a lot. And I think Glenn understands that, and I think he appreciates it. And they've MoMA-ized us a bit too, in terms of our cost structures and bringing things up to standard, and to a certain extent, we needed to do that. We don't want to go too far, though. I mean, yes, people doing sophisticated work at PS1 in the art world probably ought to get paid close to what people at MoMA get. That kind of stuff is going to happen. It just has to. But the quality control of what we show, i.e., a lot of committees looking at it and stuff, hopefully will never happen. We've got to be quick, and there it takes a long time to do a show, here it doesn't take that much time. The Mexican show is the perfect example. That's got to stay. Because that's the difference between the two places.

JW: Yes.

JC: And I think they want to do that. And you've certainly seen people like Connie Butler [curator of Drawings, MoMA] do quick shows like "Greater New York" this year? That happened pretty quickly. She fit into our way of doing things, with her superior ability, so it was a fabulous show.

JW: So you do still feel that the board has the kind of independence, too, that it needs to continue an identity that's a PS1 identity?

JC: Well that's a good question, because the board now is basically appointed by MoMA. And if anything, the board has become more active and gotten stronger, and financially stronger. There are more meetings. We talk about more substantive stuff. Klaus is clearly the artistic director, but he really wants to kind of pull everybody in. So, I think the institution is independent and the board, I'm not sure the board is what makes it independent. There's a spirit that we all want to have happen. But legally, yes, it's a board. We have a certain responsibility.

JW: But the difference that before you supported but did not interfere with the art that was being shown, and do you still have that same relationship?

JC: Absolutely; yes.

JW: But the spirit of doing things fast and bouncing off ideas, that has to do a lot with the mood that's set at an institution, and the institution sets a mood through its board members, through its staff, and through its head. And that's something you are hopeful about?

JC: We would never have a meeting saying, "Should we do this show?" The only time we ever did that was on the Russian show, because there was a lot of politics involved in that, and a lot of people were concerned, and that got to be a big deal. But that's the only one, and it was never what the content was going to be. It was, should we do a Russian show.

JW: Right.

JC: And now what happens is, we get a preview of what's going to happen, obviously, but there's no input at all. And Klaus will tell you, and Alanna would tell you things she's thinking of doing. And somebody might say, "That's a great idea." I never thought it was relevant if I or anybody said it was a great idea. I didn't think that should have anything to do with whether the show should happen. And I don't think anybody thinks that they have that kind of hook.

JW: Okay.

JC: They shouldn't.

JW: One other thing I didn't bring up: one of the reasons PS1 has been considered unusual and important is that it has not one but two kinds of artists-studio programs, international and U.S.. Now are they still going?

JC: Well, they weren't. They're going to get going again. Actually, you were talking about where we got our money, that was one of Steve Reichard's things. We had various cities in Europe that would give us, actually, in those days, a lot of money. Like, \$50,000 to have an artist come. And part of it was a stipend for the artist, which we'd pay. And I think we actually were pretty good about paying whatever we were supposed to. And part of it was just to pay us for putting up the artist, and

they'd get a bit of a show. And then we kind of ran out of space, and we were showing more art, but I think the feeling now is we should move back towards having more people work there, and with "Greater New York," Klaus really wanted the artists to come, and he's, "I don't care if you sleep there. You can't cook there, you can't light a fire, you can't cause a problem, but we want you there, to use this as your real studio." And I think that's what it should be. Again, you'd have juries and stuff to pick artists in the days when we had studio programs. We had domestic studios and international, and the international person paying would pick their international artist, and we would pick the others. And it was just meant that you had to be a bona fide artist. But I hope that comes back. And frankly, it would be a great way, on the international thing, to get some money. I think there, we just have to audit their process, in terms of picking the artist.

JW: Well, you did before, didn't you?

JC: To a certain extent. But to be honest, probably not; we just trusted them. But I think now, we'd want to know that it was a bona fide process that got some sort of a qualified artist.

JW: That selected the artist; yes.

JC: Someone that was going to do a serious project.

JW: So would you say you want people both international and-

JC: Absolutely. Well, you know we had this, I think, wonderfully successful residency of all of these architects last year, that did that project about a flooded New York ["Rising Currents: Projects for New York's Waterfront," 2009-10]. And then they actually did the show here. I thought that was a great thing to happen there. I think all of the artists enjoyed it, and you know, the curators here loved having the ability to work over there. So that was a nice interchange between the two institutions.

JW: I have a final question. The art world has changed in the time that we both started looking at art and where it is now. There are many, many more galleries, although there might be somewhat fewer the last couple of years. There is a very different media situation, with different kinds of people writing about art or broadcasting about

art. What would you consider success in the future for PS1? Is your definition the same as showing things that nobody else would ever show or get a chance to see?

JC: Well, that's got to be part of it. It's just got to be looking and encouraging someone who's going to move the art-form forward. That's all. What else is more important than that?

JW: On that note, I think we can [end the interview]. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

JC: I think that's it.

JW: Well, thank you very much.

JC: Thank you, Jeff.

END AUDIO FILE 2 of 2

END INTERVIEW