

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: JOHN REWALD (JR)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Mr. Rewald, I'll start the way I always start. Tell me a little bit about you and about your family background.

JR: I came here in 1941, getting out of France, and Alfred Barr was one of the people who gave me a kind of moral affidavit.

SZ: Could we go back for just a few minutes and tell me, before you came to the United States, just briefly a little bit about your life?

JR: I was born in 1912 in Berlin of a German father and a Russian mother. I went to France to study in 1932, that is, before Hitler came to power; but while I was away, Hitler came into power and my parents wrote to me and said, "Stay where you are." So I never saw the Third Reich. Being in France, I stayed home. They left, they left immediately; they went in 1933 to England.

SZ: What had your father done there?

JR: My father was a chemist, so he could work anywhere. He had no problem; he got a laboratory and worked in London after he left Hamburg. We lived in Hamburg.

SZ: You left Hamburg to go to, what, the Sorbonne?

JR: The Sorbonne, yes.

SZ: Did you leave other brothers and sisters, did you have a whole family?

JR: Yes, I had two brothers; they went to England. They were younger, and they went to England with my parents, so I was all by myself in France. When I was finished with my studies, I stayed on. I wanted to become a Frenchman. I lived in France, and eventually, I married a French girl [in 1939]. Then the war broke out.

SZ: Let me just go back a little bit. You went to university in Germany first?

JR: I went for three semesters in Germany, and then my father gave me a year's study abroad. I picked Paris and went there.

SZ: Were you already interested in art?

JR: I was attracted by art then.

SZ: How did that interest develop for you?

JR: Through books, and I was encouraged by my parents; they made no difficulty. But I went to France to study Romanesque and Gothic architecture, for which France was an ideal place.... I still have notes I made of the various churches I visited, but then I switched; through a chance encounter with a German painter, I switched to [Paul] Cézanne.

SZ: Who was that German painter?

JR: A man called Léo Marchutz. Then I wrote a thesis on Cézanne, which was difficult, because the Sorbonne told me they stopped at [Eugène] Delacroix and didn't want to let me go further, but finally, they did. I presented my thesis in 1936. I was twenty-four.

SZ: What was Paris like in the early 30s? The economy was no good, over there as well as elsewhere?

JR: I had no problems. My parents sent me a monthly remittance, and I took a room in a small hotel without much comfort and lived there and went to the library. I didn't follow courses so much; there was nothing of interest to me, so I went to the library and worked mostly in the library and did my research and then wrote my thesis.

SZ: Was that one of the attractions of the Sorbonne, that one didn't have to attend classes and could pursue...?

JR: I didn't because they had a major and a minor doctorate and I took the minor doctorate because the major doctorate takes much longer and then entitles you to a position as a teacher. But that was out for me; since I was not French, the advantages of the major would not have been available to me, so it was pointless. So I did the minor one, which required a minimum of two years, and I spent four years there, so everything was fine.

SZ: Had you studied French in Germany?

JR: No, I didn't know a word of French. My type of school, I did English and Latin, and no French, so I didn't know a word when I went there. But I wrote my thesis in French.

SZ: So you learned it quickly.

JR: I lived with a French family. My parents insisted on that, because in the Latin Quarter I only saw the influx of German-Jewish students who had gotten out, so I only saw them and spoke German. My parents didn't want that, so they put me in a family, where I spent three years, and had to speak French. The old lady, who was a very distant relative of my mother's, then corrected my thesis.

SZ: Where did they live?

JR: In Paris. But it got me out of the Latin Quarter, and I was near one of the major libraries, which since has moved, but in those days it was very near where I lived, so everything was fine.

SZ: I think I know the answer to this question, but for the time you were a student until...1936 was when you got your doctorate?

JR: Yes.

SZ: You say you wanted to be French, so I assume you felt safe and no menace?

JR: No, because there wasn't. Hitler was in Germany, but nobody thought there would be war, at least I didn't. I applied for naturalization and I got a reply that I should reapply two years later. Well, it never came to that, because, by then, the war was on.

SZ: Anything else about Paris in the early '30s, what student life was like?

JR: No, because I didn't participate in it. I did my work and I worked very hard, but I was not involved in any student activity and I didn't live there, either, near the Sorbonne, so I was like a private scholar, if you will.

SZ: What area of Paris were you living in?

JR: It's called St.-Philippe-du-Roule; it's near the Champs-Élysées. Since I was not French, I had to pass a language examination, and I did extremely well in that because they had by then discovered they had Japanese students, rich fellows who got somebody else to write a thesis for them; they hardly spoke French, and the French didn't want these people to go out and back to Japan and have a French doctorate without even speaking French, so they instituted these language exams for foreigners, and that applied to me too, but by then I was very fluent in French.

SZ: But it was a rigorous exam?

JR: It was just a language exam.

SZ: How was your accent by then?

JR: I speak French fluently. I speak practically like a Frenchman. Sometimes when they detect an accent, they wonder what particular province I may be from, because I have a very extended vocabulary. I'm gifted for languages, you see; they are my tools. There's hardly a French word that I'm not familiar with. I can still write in French if I want to. I was married to a French girl--twice, to two French girls--so that I spoke French at home here, too, even in New York. I spoke English on the outside, and at home I spoke French.

SZ: While you studied, you traveled a lot?

JR: In France, yes. I began a pilgrimage to all the French Romanesque churches and things like that, but all that stopped in '33, when I met this German painter and became interested in Cézanne. He lived in Aix and he had concerned himself with Cézanne all his life, and he had found many places where Cézanne had worked, just from roaming over the countryside. He wanted to have these things photographed, so I asked my father to offer me a camera. He gave me a Leica and I started taking pictures, which was a good thing to do, because these places no longer exist. Everything has been built up or torn down, either way, and is gone.

SZ: You still have those photographs?

JR: Of course. I have an extensive archive of these places.

SZ: What was it that you saw in Cézanne, either through this artist that you met or through your own familiarization, that made you want to study him in such depth?

JR: Because I found that there was nothing. Nobody had looked into these things systematically. I read all the available books, of course, both in French and in German. There wasn't much, but there was the German literature. I felt there were things that could be done, first of all a documented biography, which then did not exist. Eventually, my book came out in a commercial edition. The original edition was funded by my father. You had to publish it in a given format to get your degree. Three years later, in '39, a regular publisher took it on and brought it out, and that won a prize from the French Academy, because there hadn't been anything on Cézanne that reliable and careful. I have continued to work on Cézanne ever since.

SZ: When you were working on Cézanne then, did you get to know about The Museum of Modern Art in New York?

JR: Yes. I met Alfred Barr once in a restaurant. I was with somebody who knew him and Alfred was there and I was introduced, but it was something like "How do you do?" But then, when Hitler invaded France, I tried to get out. I had a brother here then, from England; he had settled here. I wrote to the few people I knew. One was an American writer who had written a book on Cézanne, Gerstle Mack, years ago, and I wrote to Alfred, and he gave me what you would call a moral affidavit, saying that I was a serious scholar and that it would be good if I could come to the States. So when I arrived here, the first person I went to see was Alfred.

SZ: Before we get into that, let me just pick up on a couple of other things, still in Paris. After you got your degree in 1936, you had the intention of doing what?

JR: I wrote. I wrote articles. That was very nice in those days because then there was free exchange of money and my articles were picked up, usually by a Swiss paper, and I got paid for that. Somebody translated them into German, and then I began to also have them translated into Dutch, so for one article I collected very good royalties. Then I began working for an art publisher, so I started to earn my living there.

SZ: In Paris.

JR: In Paris. There were no problems. You didn't need a special permit or anything.

SZ: A special permit because you were...?

JR: Working there. Now you can't go to France and work.

SZ: Because you weren't a citizen.

JR: Yes.

SZ: Was it hard for you to leave Germany? You had spent your childhood there.

JR: No. My mother wasn't German and hated the Germans.

SZ: From the beginning.

JR: I grew up without much patriotic feeling. I left for a year. I was delighted, and I didn't mind staying, so I didn't go back. I never saw the Third Reich.

SZ: Did you think of yourself as German?

JR: No.

SZ: Never?

JR: I think of myself as European.

SZ: I mean then, when you first went to France.

JR: Well, I was German and German was my mother tongue--still is--but there were years when I didn't say a word of German, particularly in the Hitler years, when I avoided German. Now I do. Now I have a girlfriend who is German [we married on August 5, 1992]. She speaks fluent English and fluent French, but we speak German together. I find it silly with her to speak French.

SZ: Did you speak German with your mother and father?

JR: Yes, but they were in England. I didn't see much of them.

SZ: I mean when you were growing up in Germany?

JR: Of course we spoke German at home. There was no reason for speaking anything else.

SZ: You said your mother was Russian.

JR: When I'm in France and I go out with my girlfriend, we speak German. I make it a point to wear my Legion of Honor so that people can see that I'm not just some German tourist or something, because that I wouldn't want to be taken for under any circumstances. On the other hand, I used not to speak German, but when you're out with a German girl, it's stupid not to. I could speak English with her, or French, it would make no difference. She's as trilingual as I am, though not quite as fluent; but she's very young. She is from Hamburg, which was my hometown. I wasn't born there, but we lived there. Actually, my youngest brother was even born there and I grew up there, so for me, Germany is Hamburg. It so happens that this girl is from Hamburg, so I have visited with her in Hamburg. I never go back to Germany. I would never dream of spending vacations there or doing anything. I went there in the '70s when I worked with Bill Rubin on the late Cézanne exhibition [Cézanne: The Late Years, 1978], because I took on the German museums and went there to ask for loans.

SZ: Because you could speak German.

JR: Of course.

SZ: And that was the first time you had gone back?

JR: I had gone back two or three years after the liberation on behalf of my mother, who by then was a widow--I was the head of the family, being the oldest--to see whether there was any hope of getting anything back. After seeing the lawyers, I told her that it would take so many years and we would get so little, I said, "I don't think it's worth bothering. You won't live to see it and there won't be much, anyhow." So we gave it up; I made no claims. My brothers made a claim to get money from them; my brother got it every month or so for students whose studies had been interrupted because they were Jewish. I didn't apply for it. I didn't want any German money; I didn't need it that badly, so I didn't want it. I avoided all German contacts. I've never been in the Goethe House here.

SZ: When your parents left, did they have to leave things?

JR: They left everything. They had a house and they left it behind--you can't take it with you. My father had a position waiting for him and he was very lucky. He kept sending me the monthly remittance. I didn't suffer for one week from the change of the situation in Germany, but I just couldn't go back, and they left everything behind.

SZ: As the '30s came to an end, could you see what was happening?

JR: No, but once I was in Paris and I started meeting people who had gotten out of Germany and who told me.... I remember telling a distant relative--I called her my aunt, but she wasn't.

SZ: The woman you lived with, you mean.

JR: Yes. She said, "These are all exaggerations. All refugees exaggerate; this can't be true." And of course it was true. When the Germans occupied Paris, she had to wear a yellow star that said "Jew" on it.

SZ: Where were you when the Germans came into Paris?

JR: I had gotten out of Paris a few days before.

SZ: Because you knew they were coming?

JR: They were coming closer every day. I was lucky. I had a permit that allowed me to circulate, otherwise, I would have been caught immediately.

SZ: How did you get that permit?

JR: Through some Frenchman [Henri Hoppenot] who knew about me. I was interned as an enemy alien. He was working at the Quai d'Orsay and through mutual friends he got me out. He got out a number of people, six people; Arthur Koestler [the author of Darkness at Noon] was one of them, and a man [Siegfried Krakauer] who worked on German movies [Caligula]. He used to work at MoMA in the library. He then got a Guggenheim [fellowship] that allowed him to do his research work. He was one of the six [which also included Walter Benjamin].

SZ: The six that this man got out?

JR: On his personal list. He was very high up at the Quai d'Orsay. He put our names down and got me out of the camp.

SZ: Where was the camp?

JR: In Vierzon. That means nothing.

SZ: How long were you interned?

JR: Several months.

SZ: What was that like?

JR: Just very depressing. They didn't beat us, they didn't torture us; they were the French who interned us.

SZ: I read somewhere that you were interned with other Germans, some of whom were Nazis.

JR: Yes, of course. They interned everybody. They didn't prepare anything. You see, the English prepared things after Munich. They looked into all the Germans living in England and made three categories. Those that were clean, those that they wanted to examine and those that were bad. The bad ones were interned immediately, the others had to appear before some group of people--my parents did--and then were released when it was found that they were not Nazis. But the French didn't do any of this. They just interned everybody. I was married to a French girl and I had volunteered for the French army, but it didn't make any difference.

SZ: So once this fellow got you out of the camp, what happened to you then?

JR: Then I got a permit to be in Paris, and that was a mixed blessing when the Germans arrived. He realized that and gave us a paper that allowed us to circulate and asked people to help us. That saved my life. If I hadn't had that.... I wound up in Aix, where I'd been every year while doing my Cézanne work and where Marchutz lived, whom I didn't see then. He had married, and we otherwise didn't get along, so we didn't see each other. From there, I came to the States. I had applied for a visa and people like Alfred helped me.

SZ: You left from Marseilles, I recall.

JR: Yes. I was in Aix and the consulate was in Marseilles, so I went to Marseilles to get my visa. I left from Marseilles on the last boat that went through to Martinique, which was French, where I was interned again as an enemy alien, but only for a few days, because we found a boat to Puerto Rico, so we emigrated to Puerto Rico.

SZ: They let you go.

JR: Yes. They didn't want us.

SZ: When you were on the island of Martinique, or maybe it was on the boat from Marseilles to Martinique, you were with [André] Masson and his family?

JR: Yes.

SZ: Had you known him before?

JR: No. I met him there, but we became very good friends. He used to call me his younger brother. I saw a lot of him later. On the boat, there was nothing much going on. It was very dreary. But we could sail with lights on because France was out of the war, but the next boat, the one that came after us, the British seized it and took the people then to a British colony in Central America. After that, the French didn't send any more boats to Martinique because it was just like delivering them to the English.

SZ: And life in the camp in Martinique?

JR: There was nothing. We were just sitting around, not doing anything, but at least we were in a beautiful setting and got fresh fruit. But that didn't last long, because after a week or ten days, my wife, who was also interned but was allowed to circulate during the day--

she asked for permission--found a small banana boat to Puerto Rico. They had a few cabins and we got one. On that trip, [Claude] Levi-Strauss was with us.

SZ: Whom you had not known before?

JR: No.... I didn't see that much of him. You see, everybody was wrapped up in their own concerns. There was no social life on the boat or anything.

SZ: Was there a sense of relief?

JR: Yes. Once we were on the banana boat, we were on the way to America. We then were taken to a hotel because they had to get us cleared in Washington. We were the first, my wife and I, to get clearance. Washington said okay and then we were told we were free. Then we just looked for the next steamer to New York and made it to New York.

SZ: Because it was Puerto Rico.

JR: Yes.

SZ: And part of the reason that you were cleared first is because you had this letter from Alfred Barr and your brother?

JR: I had a clean file there. I didn't ask them. I could have been third, but it happened I was first.

SZ: But Alfred Barr had already written this letter.

JR: Yes. He had written for me to get a visa, so that went through the State Department and to the American consul in Marseilles. Then my brother had guaranteed my living. My father, too. My father was willing to send me for two years a monthly remittance, but by the time I reached America, the English had stopped permissions to send money out. So

I had money, was entitled to it, but couldn't get it. That was a great handicap. So I looked for a job.

SZ: Your brother was living in New York?

JR: Yes. At first I lived in the country, in the summer, on my brother's farm, because I couldn't do anything here. Then in the fall I came to New York. But I visited Alfred to see him before I went to the country to stay with my brother. He lived in upstate New York. He was a dairy farmer.

SZ: Your brother lived where in upstate New York?

JR: Near Ithaca. He is dead. My younger brothers are both dead. I'm the only one in the family who reached this dreadful age I'm.

SZ: You're going to be...?

JR: Eighty.

SZ: Did you have a plan? You went to live with him for the summer, you said, and then you came back to New York.

JR: I had no choice. I had no money. He had some money that my parents had given him when he left, and some of it they had told him to give me. My father that year was to give me [a stipend] for two years so that I could quietly look for a decent job, but that didn't materialize. My brother wasn't very easy to get money out of, so I took the first job [I found]. I tried to get into a university or a museum, but there was nothing. I went to the College Art Association and they asked me what kind of job I wanted, and I said I would take anything I could get. They told me I was the first refugee who was willing to settle on a job below director. I said, "I don't expect America to have waited for me. I don't want a directorship. That's crazy." But they didn't find anything, so I worked for the Weyhe

bookshop for over a year.

SZ: As a clerk?

JR: They had a gallery, so I ran the gallery. They just closed. They still existed until a year ago or so, on Lexington Avenue. It was an art bookshop.

SZ: So you did that for about a year. You came to the United States in 1941?

JR: Yes, a few months before Pearl Harbor. Then I got Pearl Harbor into the bargain. I came in May and Pearl Harbor was in December. I gave my first lecture at MoMA, on [Aristide] Maillol, the day of Pearl Harbor, and there were six people or so who came.... That morning I knew about it [Pearl Harbor], but Alfred decided to go on with the lecture.

SZ: So by then you were already talking to Alfred.

JR: Oh, yes. I had talked to him since I came in May; I spent a few days in New York, and I went to thank him. I also thanked Gerstle Mack, the man who had given me an affidavit. I knew him better than I knew Alfred.

SZ: How did the relationship with Alfred develop so that you were...?

JR: Alfred didn't get me to the Museum, Monroe Wheeler did. I was working then for the War Department. I left the bookshop and then it was very difficult to get a job because I was of draft age and I could be drafted any minute and nobody wanted me, because they didn't know for how long I would be there. The War Department, the French section, had a French radio program, but they didn't want me because I was German, which was grotesque because I was not, but they wouldn't take me. They also gave me a language exam, which I passed, but.... The War Department had a French section and was looking for proofreaders and needed them very badly because they published what were called technical manuals that went with Lend Lease. The Americans furnished all kinds

of technical things, but you needed a manual with it to tell you how to put it together, how often to oil it, whatever. These were translated by American-French engineers, from English into French, and were printed, but they needed to be proofread. I went for an exam and they wanted to keep me right then and there, but I told them I had to go home and tell my wife first. I came the next day. I could correct proofs because I knew all the signs, which nobody that they had knew. They had to train them. Then Monroe Wheeler did an exhibition on modern drawings [Modern Drawings, 1944], and for that he needed help. He came and asked me and I thought, Well, I would love to come, but I have to get out of here. I mean, that was a government position. He spoke to the Canadian officer who was running the thing and I promised that I would train somebody. After I had done that, I was released and came to the Museum.

SZ: So you still had the possibility of being drafted?

JR: Maybe by then I was 4-F. I was drafted, but I got through the exam and I have only one ear and I cannot hear directions. I never know where a noise comes from, because it's one-dimensional hearing, and for that they didn't take me. By that time, I was already 4-F, and then there was no problem.

SZ: Had you known Monroe before? Had Alfred introduced you?

JR: I don't know how Monroe knew me, I really don't, but he is the one who got me my first position at MoMA, and then I saw more of Alfred.

SZ: And that was working on this exhibition with him.

JR: Yes.

SZ: Which was a very important exhibition.

JR: It was a big exhibition, with a catalogue, but these things were all much smaller than

they are now. But we had to do it only with American lenders; there was nothing you could get from Europe in those days.

SZ: What were your impressions of Monroe Wheeler at that time?

JR: He was a very polite, very elegant person, but he was not really a scholar. There was a girl who ran the publishing department, Frances Pernas. She was an incredibly able girl. She did all of Monroe's work. I worked with her. I worked more with her than with Monroe.

SZ: What were your responsibilities in this whole thing?

JR: I don't really know. I think I wrote part of the catalogue, but I'm not sure. I think Monroe wrote the introduction. Monroe was not a hard worker. Monroe and Alfred didn't get along terribly well.

SZ: This was 1943?

JR: Yes.

SZ: At the time that you came to the Museum to work on this exhibition, had Alfred lost his position?

JR: No, that came later.

SZ: Do you think that was part of what was going on between them?

JR: No, I didn't know any of this.

SZ: Well, in retrospect? You say that they didn't get along.

JR: They just didn't, because Alfred was a very serious scholar and Monroe was the representative of MoMA on the cocktail circuit. He was at every reception. This was not Alfred's type of person. I turned out to be Alfred's type of person, so I saw much of him then. We went out for lunch together. But Alfred was a very strange man. He could one day not see you, not say hello, not do anything, and then the next day I could be standing there and suddenly there was an arm about my shoulder and somebody saying "How are you?," and it was Alfred. You never knew with him. He was very absorbed in what he was doing. But then I worked with him after the war, in '47, and I went to France. He was working on his Matisse book [Matisse: His Art and His Public, 1951] and he had lots of questions for Matisse, and he didn't speak French; so he sent me letters with questions and I went to Matisse and asked him and sent Alfred his replies. Many of them, I found, are quoted in the Morocco book [Matisse in Morocco: The Paintings and Drawings, 1912-1913, 1990] in the footnotes, because MoMA had all my letters that answered Alfred's questions. Afterwards, they asked me whether I had Alfred's letters, and I said sure, I had all the letters, because he didn't type, he wrote longhand, and I had them. My papers go to the Archives of American Art, but I gave them [the Museum] the letters from Alfred and told them if they made xeroxes so that I could put them in their place in my correspondence they could have the originals, so that they [would] have both Alfred's letters to me and my answers to Alfred.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SZ: Just for a minute, to go back to the Museum during the war: you were there after you worked on the Modern Drawings show--Alfred lost his position.

JR: They just gave me assignments. I used to say in France when they asked me that I was an attaché détaché. I never had an office, I never had a permanent position, so that I could do my own work, which I was anxious to do. But at least whenever they hired me, I had a regular income.

SZ: You spent time in the library, I know that. Somebody mentioned that to me.

JR: Yes, because I did research.

SZ: And you had no office, so that would be a place where you would....

JR: Somewhere I had a desk or something, according to what my assignment was. But I left when I was finished with something, I left and worked on my own things, so I was not a staff member.

SZ: Did Alfred ever talk to you about his being fired?

JR: No. All of a sudden, he was gone. He was in his little cubicle in the library where he worked, but he didn't discuss personal things with me.

SZ: That wasn't the kind of relationship you had with him.

JR: No.

SZ: Ever.

JR: No.

SZ: And Marga Barr, did you know her?

JR: Yes.

SZ: Were you friendly with her?

JR: Yes, but that was when they came to Ménerbes. I had a house in a village [in France],

and they came and spent a few weeks or more there. In the same village, they were invited by the Gimpels, the British dealers, who had a house there with a little guest house. There I saw them every day because they came to swim in my pool and they came for dinner every night. I had them over. I had help, it was no problem. This is where I met Margaret, "Daisy." I had not known her before, except when I was invited for eggnog at Christmas in their house. But there was no real social contact. I went out for lunch with Alfred often when I was at the Museum. There was a small Italian restaurant where he used to go and we went together and talked.

SZ: About art.

JR: Yes, about whatever. I also met [René] d'Harnoncourt, with whom I also sometimes had meals. That was more in the cafeteria of the Museum, when they had it on the top floor.

SZ: What was the genesis of your first major book, The History of Impressionism, and of how the Museum undertook that?

JR: I submitted it to six publishers.

SZ: You started writing it when you came here?

JR: Yes. It was turned down, and I didn't know what to do. Then Alfred said he wanted it, would take it. It was the first book MoMA published that was not linked to any exhibition or any of its activities. They brought out a rather small edition, but since then, it has been reprinted; it was always kept in print.

SZ: But there were some problems with that first edition, weren't there?

JR: Not really.

SZ: I thought I read that the chromes, the colors were off.

JR: The color plates were bad, the paper was bad. We couldn't get the whole quantity of paper we needed for the book.

SZ: Why was that? Because of the war?

JR: Yes. So they had two different types of paper. It was agreed that they would use one paper for as many copies as they could and then the other paper for the remainder, but the printer didn't do it. He ran the papers together, so that the books had a section with one paper and the rest with another paper. That wasn't planned, but there was nothing we could do once they delivered it like that. But that was really all Monroe, because he was director of publications. He was director of publications and of exhibitions, so that I really worked with him. But I really worked with Frances Pernas; the work was done with her. I did my own layout and all that, but with her. Her office did the proof correcting and all this. Monroe really had nothing to do with it.

SZ: During the time that you wrote it, the Museum had nothing to do with the book.

JR: No.

SZ: So they just agreed to publish it because you had written it.

JR: Alfred agreed to publish it. I remember I submitted it to Simon & Schuster, to Knopf, and they all turned it down. Nobody wanted it. I also submitted the idea for a Guggenheim [fellowship]. I never got a Guggenheim, but that was because [James Johnson] Sweeney had an important position with the Guggenheim family, and he and Alfred didn't get along at all. Since I was Alfred's protégé, I was turned down for the Guggenheim three times. Then I gave up applying. I wanted a Guggenheim fellowship for the publication of the [Camille] Pissarro letters to [his son] Lucien. Then Dr. [Henry Allen] Moe, who was the director, said to Wheeler, who spoke to him about it, "Well, he does his books anyhow, why should we give him [a fellowship]?" I said, "Except it takes

me three years for something I could do in one." I didn't apply every year; I let time pass. After six years, I applied again, to edit the [Paul] Signac diaries, which have never been done. They turned me down again, and then I didn't ask anymore. I had to do other things to make a living. For the Pissarro letters I borrowed money against royalties, and all my royalties went to pay for the translation, because I had a publisher but he wanted it in English, and I couldn't translate them; that I couldn't do. For The History of Impressionism, I got the equivalent of a Guggenheim, which was two hundred dollars a month for a year. Alfred paid that.

SZ: That was Alfred.

JR: Yes.... That was the first book. Post-Impressionism I did on my own; I just wrote it and they paid me. Post-Impressionism was meant to be much bigger. It was meant to go up to 1906, but by the time I was halfway through, Monroe just took it. He said, "I want it, we are going to publish it," because they needed books for their members. Members got books, and MoMA had nothing, so I let him have it on the condition I could write one more chapter on [Paul] Gauguin and Tahiti, because I felt I needed to round it out. So I wrote one last chapter and then they published it, and it was big enough. Then I wanted to write a second volume. It never came to that. That's why it was subtitled "From van Gogh to Gauguin." The next one was going to be "From Gauguin to Matisse."

SZ: And why did that not happen, the second one?

JR: Because I got other things, other assignments and things that I had to do for money. Then eventually, I got to do the Cézanne oeuvre catalogue, and that was closer to my heart. I started [the second volume of] Post-Impressionism, but I never went through with it. I have all the notes, I have ring books of notes for Post-Impressionism.

SZ: During your years here, you said that Alfred gave you lots of different kinds of assignments?

JR: Yes.

SZ: What other kinds of things did you do?

JR: I think the first thing I got to do was a [Pierre] Bonnard exhibition [Pierre Bonnard, 1948]. For that I went to France, and by that time, the war was over. I went to France and I borrowed lots of pictures in France because there were hardly any Bonnards here. The most Bonnards were at the Phillips Collection. They were very generous, they lent, but the other pictures I picked up one by one. I had written to Bonnard to say that I was coming to do this exhibition and wanted to do it with him. He got my letter, but he died, so it never happened. I then got loans from the estate. I knew some of the people from the estate because one was a museum curator, a nephew. The niece worked for my French publisher. I was just lucky. That was the first exhibition where more than half of the pictures came from Europe, but we ran into such expenses that we had to give up certain things. We couldn't take everything that I had secured, because with insurance, which is nothing compared to today, we were running over the budget. For these things I used Museum stationery and everything; I was representing the Museum.

SZ: But for that show you picked what you wanted in it, you installed it?

JR: This I did on my own, completely. These things Alfred just asked me, "Would you do it?" Then I did a Fauve show for them [Les Fauves, 1952], but there, Alfred was very tough. I had a room with precursors of the Fauves, and when I had hung them, he threw out half of them. He said, "No, no, no, we have to get other pictures." He was very hard to deal with. Then I secured pictures than those that he wanted, that he felt were leading better up to the Fauve pictures that I had had originally.

SZ: Did you not agree with him on that?

JR: It was not a question of whether I agreed or not. When he said, "This is not what we need," that was it. There was no compromise. He just said, "Out, out, out!" That was a

tough experience. But he was right.

SZ: He was. That's what I was getting at.

JR: Absolutely.

SZ: Was he always right?

JR: I think so. He knew exactly what he wanted and he went after it.

SZ: And his taste?

JR: Impeccable.

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: JOHN REWALD (JR)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

LOCATION: NEW YORK CITY

DATE: 11 DECEMBER 1991

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: I think there were four major exhibitions that you played some important part in at the Museum. If you could just think back on them and tell me what you remember about putting them together, what it was like to work with the various people at the Museum, anything that comes to mind on that. We could start with the Bonnard show [1948].

JR: That was the first I did. They left me pretty much alone and let me do what I wanted. When there was any problem, I dealt with Monroe Wheeler. There I had solicited too many loans in France. I went over for the Museum and when I came back and we figured out the insurance and so on, we had to straighten out a number of loans, simply because it was too much. Otherwise, there was no problem or difficulty. They let me do whatever I wanted to do. I wrote a catalogue and that was it. There, I worked very closely with Frances Pernas, which I did throughout for any publication problems, including The History of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. But I did my own layout; I had learned from working with her how to do it, so they let me do what I wanted to do. Then we worked on it together, Frances and I. That was a very smooth collaboration.

SZ: At that time, was Bonnard well-appreciated in this country?

JR: No, he was not even known. That was the first exhibition he ever had, and that really started the appreciation; unfortunately, it came after his death. But there were

comparatively few Bonnard's in American collections on which I could draw. That's why for this exhibition it was essential that I go abroad and solicit loans there, which I did. We could not have done it with what was available in American collections. That has changed tremendously since.

SZ: Was the idea for a Bonnard show yours?

JR: I really don't remember. I don't think. After all, I had never done a show for the Museum, so it would be logical that they would come to me and suggest that I do it. They wanted to do it with another museum. I went to Cleveland for a lecture and I told Monroe and he said, "Why don't you ask them whether they would be interested in the Bonnard show." [William Mathewson] Milliken, the director, came to pick me up at the airport and asked me what I was doing, and I said, "I'm working on a Bonnard show. Actually, MoMA wonders whether you might be interested in it." He said, "That's something to be considered." The next morning when he called me to tell me when he would come pick me up, he said, "You've got your Bonnard show." They had Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. as a trustee. He was very wealthy and very close to Milliken, who just told him [about the show] and Hanna had said, "Fine, I'll underwrite it." So the exhibition, as it turned out, went first to Cleveland and then came to New York. This is how the schedules worked out; there was no condition of that. It went very well. I came back from Cleveland from my lecture and told Monroe, "I got another museum that will take the show," period. So that was very smooth.

SZ: Was Bonnard an artist whom Alfred admired?

JR: I do not know. I never discussed it with him. He sat in on some of the things, but he never, as I remember, made any judgment. Knowing what he liked, I would doubt that he was very much an admirer of Bonnard. That wasn't really up his alley. But the exhibition was very successful because it was the first show to show off in a chronological way how Bonnard had developed, to his late works, which are his finest, so it was a kind of revelation.

SZ: And your feeling about Bonnard?

JR: I greatly admire him. If I hadn't, I wouldn't have wanted to do the show, but I was very happy that they had asked me to do it.

SZ: Did you know him?

JR: No. I had written to him, but he died before I arrived, so I had no opportunity to meet him. I had not met him before I left France in '41, so I didn't catch up. He had died, and [Edouard] Vuillard [in 1940], so the main people of that period were gone. I did work closely with Bonnard's heirs, his nephews and niece, some of whom I had known from my stay in France. There was also a lawsuit going on about the estate because they had found some heirs of Madame Bonnard and it was a very nasty and ugly thing. It made it doubtful at one point whether I could borrow anything, but since it was made plain that anything that was lent to the Modern Museum would also be returned, that the estate wouldn't suffer from anything, they finally got permission to lend. I had more-or-less my pick of what there was available, and there was a lot....

SZ: It probably, in the end, improved the value of the estate?

JR: Yes. The exhibition certainly didn't hurt any of the pictures that were in it. The family was all in favor, but they couldn't dispose of anything as long as the lawsuit was unsettled.

SZ: And the Fauves show, how did that come about?

JR: Again, I think I was asked to do it. I couldn't suggest things. I may have suggested Odilon Redon [Redon, Moreau, Bresdin, 1961], but I don't even think I did. They came to me. My position wasn't that I had any way of getting things done. If they came to me and I agreed, that was fine. It always meant I had to drop whatever I was doing, because whenever an exhibition like that came up, you had deadlines and things and you really

had to get going on it, which I did. The subjects I had were all things in which I was very interested. I was very friendly with Redon's son, and he helped tremendously. He helped also in dating. I made xeroxes of every picture I could obtain here and sent it to him for dates because the Redon chronology is not settled. Redon didn't date things, but he kept a book where he wrote down what he sold, and that gave us, at least, certain limits; I mean, something had to be done before he sold it. The son looked up and checked everything in what he had available of his father's notebooks, so that was an essential thing. Simultaneously, more or less, a man called Klaus Berger did a book on Redon and didn't even go and see the son. It was amazing. I always worked with the people themselves. For Les Fauves, that was different. I dealt with the artists and I would go and see them with a large group of photographs of things that were available in this country and would show each one to them and say, "Look, this is all I can have. It's more than I can use. I've decided to pick this, this and this. Do you agree?" And in every case they agreed, and they were very touched that I consulted them, that I came especially from the States to do this with them. There had been exhibitions in Paris where nobody had asked them and consulted them. I remember I had a very fine [Kees] van Dongen, a woman in a Spanish shawl, which was very colorful and it had been shown in a Fauve exhibition in Paris and there was dated 1906, which is a classical date for Fauve pictures. I always asked the artists, "When did you do this?" and so on, and he said 1910. He said, "I remember it because in 1910 I was in Spain and bought the shawl, and when I came back, I had the model use it." I said, "How could they show it here at the Paris Musée d'Art Moderne with the date 1906?" He laughed and said, "They never asked me." So all the information I have on the Fauve exhibition, dates and everything, comes directly from the artists. With the exception of [Albert] Marquet and [Othon] Friesz, they were all still alive. I went to see [Georges] Braque and [Henri] Matisse and van Dongen and [Charles] Camoin, everybody I needed. Now, the French had done something else which was very typical. So as not to get into trouble with anybody, each Fauve had a room, and they had hung them in alphabetical order, so they started with Camoin, who is one of the most minor. He was a good friend of mine, I had known him for years, but as a Fauve, he was really not of great consequence. I reduced his section to three pictures, whereas Matisse had twelve or fifteen, because we kept a proportion in

there. Also, the French started with Camoin and Friesz who were not really great or important artists, not even important Fauves, and the more important people like Matisse and van Dongen were on the lower floor, because alphabetically they came much later. We wanted to do it in a more historical way and give each the proportion that was due him and not overplay a man like Friesz, who did not play a great role in the Fauve movement. But Marquet, I had the collaboration of his widow, and with Friesz, too, but he was not a problem; there I took only three, and they were easy to come by. The important people with whom I worked directly were [André] Derain and [Maurice de] Vlaminck and Matisse. Matisse went through his old collection of drawings and I got drawings from him, Fauve drawings, that had never been shown. There were large drawings that he signed when he lent them, so these drawings of 1906 have signatures that were put on fifty years later. They all made a special effort to get me things also from their own collections and to tell me where others were. I remember I had found a very fine Braque, a large painting that I had gotten for John Hay Whitney, whom I was advising, and that photograph was, of course, among those that I submitted to Braque and he was delighted. He said, "I have lost sight of this picture completely. I had no idea where it was and am delighted to know that it will be in the exhibition and that we now know where it is to be found." So it was a real collaboration, and the artists were pleased that they were being consulted, so they did everything they could to contribute, even out of their own collections. Derain lent me a portrait of him by Vlaminck. They contributed. But we had a very small catalogue because there was no money, so the catalogue was really a little brochure, a very modest thing. Then, when I came back, Monroe said, "What are we going to do on the cover?" We decided to ask Derain to design one, which he did. He sent us three. I kept one of them, but my wife got it when I divorced her, so I no longer have it. They were really interested and were helpful in every conceivable way. The Redon [exhibition], that was played up. We didn't think it would be enough of a draw, so we put [Gustave] Moreau and [Rodolphe] Bresdin with it, except that Redon was the only one that was known in this country. The Moreau section was interesting because we got lots of things that had not been shown in this country at all. He was very little known in this country. Bresdin mostly did etchings. The Art Institute of Chicago had a very extensive collection, so we got that. The exhibition then traveled to Chicago. We

did it with them and we worked it out so that whatever we had in the graphic work we took MoMA's collection but did not send it to Chicago because they had a very important group of Redon graphic work, which I think came from Redon's widow. There was no point in our sending it. But in our show here, we wanted to have our own, which we did. It meant keeping track of all these things and doing it right, which we did, more or less. Bill Lieberman was curator of drawings at that time, and I had trouble with him.

SZ: Because?

JR: Very difficult to work with and very unreliable. From Chicago they sent us what we needed from them, what we didn't have. They sent us every lithograph and on the back were the passages, quotes from the works that were illustrated, so that we had the whole thing. MoMA just gave us in the very last minute a batch of lithographs with no indication [of which literary works they accompanied]. Then we had to sit and work through the night to get all this straightened out, and it was very disappointing. I remember Bill Lieberman had insisted because of one work: MoMA had a blue print of a lithograph which was unique and he said that you must have it because that is something that nobody else can give you. Of course, I put it in. When the time came to deliver it, we discovered that it was in a traveling exhibition and he couldn't even give it to us. This kind of thing made it very difficult to work with him. It was not enjoyable, whereas Chicago was...Carl Schnieewind was already gone, I think. It was Harold Joachim with whom we worked, and that was really a marvelous, professional way of doing things, very impressive.

SZ: Did you find Bill Lieberman knowledgeable?

JR: No.

SZ: I'm just looking at the dates of the Fauve show and the Redon show. For the Fauve show, did you work at all with Andrew Ritchie?

JR: No.

SZ: You did not. With whom did you work at the Museum on that? Just Monroe?

JR: My boss was Monroe, but Alfred Barr was also interested. I think I told you that he threw out practically the whole introductory section because he didn't find that the works I had accumulated there--which were mostly from MoMA and other places, not private--were representative enough of pre-Fauve works, so in the last minute I had to substitute. But he was right. It was just unpleasant, but he was absolutely right. For this kind of thing, no friendship entered into it; it was professional. The way he did it upset me very much and it meant also redoing the whole thing, but the result was good, so I cannot complain.

SZ: I guess by the time you did the Cézanne show [Cézanne: The Late Work], things had changed a lot at the Museum.

JR: But that was completely different. I did this with Bill Rubin and we worked very closely, because I was working on the Cézanne catalogue--I still am--so I had the information about owners and dates and things. Also, I knew so many people who were involved. We really did it, the two of us. There were other people on the committee, like Ted Reff. I'm on very good terms with him, but he doesn't know where pictures are, he doesn't know owners; it's a completely different thing. So we split it up: I went to Germany and Russia and Bill Rubin went to Switzerland, and France, if I remember correctly. Of course, even there, when we discussed it, I would say, "I know so-and-so even in Switzerland," which was his, "which I think I can obtain," and then I did. I knew the most important collector of Cézanne, the descendants of Pellerin. Bill had been at wherever he studied, Harvard or so, with the grandson, so he had a personal link there and got crucial pictures from them which I couldn't have obtained. I could have tried, but I wasn't in as good a position. I went to Germany because I had ever been to Germany in any official or other quality and they were very impressed that I came to solicit their pictures. Also, for instance, the museum in Bremen had a picture which I had always been convinced was a late picture, even though in the literature it was dated quite early. I was

sure it was wrong, so I went to Bremen and looked at the picture and then I asked for it and got it. I got everything I wanted from the various German museums. There were not that many late Cézannes in Germany, but what there was I managed to obtain. In Russia, as I said, Moscow refused the one single picture we wanted, and Leningrad lent everything we asked for, so we had a very pleasant collaboration with them.

SZ: Did you and Bill decide together which pictures you were going to include?

JR: Oh, yes. We had a list. We worked on it. Before I left, I knew what I wanted, but for instance, I said, "Bremen I have to see before we can include it." There was somebody else in there. Was it Ted Reff? It was mostly Ted Reff here in New York. Bill said, "I want it known that I am doing the hanging by myself. In spite of the committee, I don't want anybody else to interfere with the hanging. This is my job." After the meeting, he turned to me and said, "John, I just said this to keep Reff and whoever else out of this, but you are, of course, welcome to come and be there when we do the hanging." So we worked very closely and did everything together.

SZ: Easily?

JR: Yes. Bill can be very unpleasant, but I found him very pleasant to get along with. We had a very smooth collaboration. Very.

SZ: And your view of him as a scholar?

JR: He's a very good scholar. He knows what he is doing and he is extremely intelligent. I was not going to write an essay for the catalogue, but when I worked on the comments for the pictures, and many were from Aix and the vicinity, instead of in every case explaining where they were painted, I decided to do an essay on Cézanne's last motifs. When I told Bill, he said, "Fine, go right ahead and do it," and I did it. So this is part of the catalogue, in addition to the rather lengthy comments on individual pictures. Bill wrote his essay and Ted Reff wrote his. I remember when I came back from Russia,

they had discussed in what order we were going to be listed in the catalogue as organizers. Bill told me because I hadn't been there. I had told them, "I don't care where you put me. You can put me at the end. It makes no difference to me." So he reported to me what had happened. They had had a meeting that he laughed so hard he had tears in his eyes. Reff had said, "Why don't we list the contributors in alphabetical order?" Which meant that Reff would have been on top and Rubin would have been at the bottom. It was very ingenious of Reff, but the exhibition was done by Rubin. It was his exhibition, with me collaborating. I didn't care where he put me, but he had to be on top. There was no way of doing it otherwise. So the alphabetical suggestion was almost funny. I have never insisted on this kind of thing. This has nothing to do with MoMA, but when I did the catalogue of [Georges] Seurat paintings, I did it with Henri [Dorra], and I said to Dorra, "You will have to be named first because it should be in alphabetical order"--there were just the two of us. He was overwhelmed, because he was young and unknown, that I would not insist on being first. I always felt this was not what mattered in the thing. Also for giving credit. I've always given credit to anybody who has worked with me or who has credited something, because I don't feel it takes anything away from me, and not giving credit, I can't do that. So I have always been very careful in acknowledging any type of help that I received. I don't remember for Cézanne: The Late Work who is second on the list.

SZ: I'm going to go look [LAUGHING].

JR: I can look here, too. But to me, it's unimportant. The special thing was that Reff could write an essay, and did, a good one, but he could not help us because he was not in touch with collectors and with dealers. I could borrow things from dealers whom I knew, and Bill Rubin knew lots of dealers, too. There were people like [Ernst] Beyeler in Basel. I don't know which one of us asked him. It may have been Bill, but I could have done it, too. Reff didn't know him. This was not something he had to deal with. Since I was an adviser to collectors, I knew the dealers, of course, who had pictures.

SZ: Before we talk about that, you mentioned before installing the Cézanne show. Was that

basically Bill's plan?

JR: Yes, yes, yes, that was Bill's plan.

SZ: What would you say about the way he installed?

JR: Very intelligently. Whatever he does is done intelligently. He would have problems. Should we have this picture together with this, or should we separate them? Do they belong in the same room? There I would say, "Look, these two represent sites that are next to each other, so the pictures should be next to each other." This kind of thing I would say, and he would go with that. Sometimes he asked me. "How do you feel about having this here rather than there?," so I would say [what I thought]. He is very professional in these things, and very good, but he doesn't like interference.

SZ: You mean he has his idea of what it should be.

JR: Yes. He visualized it all. He knew where he wanted to do what, but then there were minor problems. We had a whole wall of watercolors, and they were glorious, but they were all in different frames. The frames were distracting. Some had very slim frames and some had very heavy ones. I spent all day and night on account of the European lenders to convince everybody to let us reframe them. We put the same kind of neutral frame on everything so that we had a unity on this wall, and it looked very good. That was, for instance, my task of persuading all the European lenders to allow us to reframe. And they did. We had no problems there. Since I speak French and German fluently, it was easy for me to call these various lenders and plead our case, and I was successful. It looked great. The whole exhibition looked great. It also went somewhere else.

SZ: It went to the Grand Palais, and you took it there? You were guest director for it there?

JR: I was one of the guest directors. All the people that are named on the front page--I can get it out--were guest directors. The essays are not in alphabetical order either. Essays

by Reff, [Lawrence] Gowing, F. Novotny and so on, then Bill Rubin at the end, but it says edited by Bill Rubin.

SZ: They probably listed them in the way in which they appear.

JR: It could be, but here in New York it was only Bill, Reff and I. George [Heard] Hamilton wrote an essay but did not contribute to the exhibition. Geneviève Monnier did because she was at the Louvre then. But most of these people had nothing to do with the exhibition. For instance, the foreword is by Bill. I would think the first essay is by Bill, too.

SZ: Did you go over to Paris for the show when it was at the Grand Palais?

JR: I did.

SZ: Did you install it there?

JR: No, the French did that. The Grand Palais doesn't lend itself to exhibitions. It's really not pleasant to work with it. Only for the late twentieth century did it have a very nice way of displaying them, otherwise, I was not taken with the way it was installed. They have to deal with a very difficult building there, so there was nothing to be done. Then there were a couple of pictures that couldn't travel, that they only had in Paris. These things always happen. It happened with the Seurat show [at the Metropolitan Museum of Art]. Even though it was done with the d'Orsay museum, the d'Orsay museum did not lend any of its small panels, and that's a great pity. Françoise [Cachin], who was the director of the d'Orsay and is a very old friend, was here for three days for the symposium and she came to see me. She said she didn't lend any of the wooden panels because she was afraid of the change in temperature, that they may crack. She owned panels, and d'Orsay has very important, crucial panels, but the Met didn't get them. This kind of thing can interfere. It's always easiest when you do an exhibition just for one place, without traveling, because it's a great imposition on lenders when they have to part with things for a long time. That makes a big difference. For instance, here at the Met, [Walter]

Annenberg would not lend his pictures to Paris, his Seurat, but the Met had it, of course, he had promised it to the Met. As I said, for the Redon I couldn't get any pastels, but there were lots here in this country, so I could replace them. The easiest things are, of course, the prints, but for Cézanne we had no prints; there isn't anything important in the line of prints.

SZ: How do you sometimes go about talking a collector into lending when he or she is somewhat reticent?

JR: You tell them how important their picture is and that you really need it for a complete record of the artist's work in this particular field. For Bonnard, there were no problems: I needed everything, early, middle, late, whatever I could get, because I had very little from here. For Cézanne we needed the Moscow picture very badly, but there was nothing I could do. The lady curator said it couldn't travel, but they would lend it to Paris. I said, "If you lend it to us, we could have it treated while it was in New York." She said, "You don't think we don't have the right people to treat it?" I said, "If you have no time to do it before the show, we will." But there was nothing I could do. She did lend it to Paris. She was a very hard, party-line....

SZ: Because it traveled to Paris.

JR: But America was not then on the list of friendly nations, so she just wouldn't lend, no matter what I said. So that was it. They were not doing exhibitions, so they didn't need ours, unfortunately, so there was nothing we could do. But I remember, on the other hand, that Detroit had just inherited the Tannahill collection and there were two very fine late Cézannes in there. I asked about lending and I was told the Tannahill bequest cannot be lent. It has been lent since. I never even asked for it because I was told that. I should have asked. I've always regretted it. I could have written a letter and we could have seen what would happen. There seem to be no restrictions, so their pictures have been out on loan. We could have used their pictures, but we didn't get them.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2

SZ: This is just a little aside, but what do you think of what the Met did in the Seurat show with the things that it didn't get?

JR: The Paris people did the same thing. The big pictures, Un Dimanche à la Grande Jatte, the Poseuses from Barnes [the Barnes Collection] and Une Baignade, Asnieres from London, you just couldn't get. The Paris people had large black-and-white enlargements in the rooms and then grouped the studies around them. Here, they didn't do that. They had the photograph in the re-creation area or something. The French handled it perfectly alright. The Modern Museum, in its exhibition on the Steins [Four Americans in Paris: The Collections of Gertrude Stein and Her Family, 1970], the Met wouldn't lend Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein. That, I thought, was very mean. I can't see any excuse for that, but they just didn't. That belonged in the exhibition. They hadn't bought it; Gertrude Stein had left it to them [the Metropolitan]. I'm sure if there had been an exhibition on any of the Steins, she would have wanted her portrait in there, but when they say no, they say no. I think it was [Thomas] Hoving who did that, and what the reasons were, I do not know.

SZ: You haven't even guessed?

JR: I had nothing to do with the Stein exhibition, so I have no excuse for trying to find out what was going on.

SZ: But you did, as you mentioned last time, have something to do with the way the Stein collection was split up.

JR: Yes, but the portrait of Gertrude Stein was not in that group. That Bill Lieberman engineered, and very successfully. He convinced the trustees or whoever to put up the

money to buy the whole group [from the estate], and then it had to be split up. William Burden, who was one of the participants, in the last minute got out of it, so David Rockefeller took his share. David Rockefeller had two shares, in contrast to the others. They drew lots. The works were all hanging in one room, and whoever's turn it was went around and picked the picture he wanted. We had rehearsed it with Jock Whitney and he was down on the line. He got a very fine group of things, so it worked out very well. Except [André] Meyer, who I think was ahead of Whitney. I'm not sure. He made a poor choice; he was the one who got the poorest group. Whether this was because he didn't know any better, I don't know.

SZ: Did it come as a group, or did each man make one choice and when it came around again, another choice.

JR: Yes.

SZ: That's what you mean by a group: what each ended up with.

JR: Each, in turn, always one picture. Bill Paley was number one, and he wanted [Picasso's] girl with the flowers, I think [Standing Female Nude, 1906]. The pictures were estimated, so that took up his share. He got it, and that was all he wanted, so he went home. Rockefeller could go through twice every time, you see, because he had two shares. When I was there with Jock Whitney, he was there, too, with his daughter and his wife; they all looked and decided what they wanted, but they were never sure they would get it because there was always the danger somebody else could pick it before their turn came. This was very dangerous with Whitney, because he was late; I think he was sixth or something. We had for everything at least two or three choices: If you can't get this, take this. We never knew what would be there by the time his turn came. It worked out beautifully for him, because he got some very fine things. I prompted him on these things.

SZ: Did you look at what pictures you liked intrinsically, or did it have to do with what he

already had?

JR: He had a blue Picasso and a Picasso self-portrait, but there was nothing like that in the Stein Collection, and the early things he wouldn't have gotten, anyhow, like the girl with the flowers. No, I just picked what I thought were the finest pictures and that I hoped he would be able to get, and he did. On the whole, it worked out very well and he has a very fine group. There were certain pictures that MoMA wanted, and those pictures had a red sticker or something, and whoever picked that picture had to leave it to MoMA. That was part of the deal.

SZ: Didn't everybody have to leave one?

JR: No, no. I think Whitney picked a very small picture that had a red sticker and that is now at MoMA, but Burden didn't want that. Later he left his Seurat and other things to MoMA. It was absolutely stupid to refuse your share on account of that. It made no sense. The others just get richer then. They had to leave their pictures, anyhow; the estates couldn't keep them for the expenses, so there was no hardship.

SZ: Were you there for the actual...?

JR: No, not when they picked them. It was only the collectors who were there, and nobody else. I was there before, when they were exhibited, and went over them with Jock, but not when it came to the selecting.

SZ: You mentioned before that you've done a number of things, one of which has been an adviser to collectors, including Mr. Whitney. How did that evolve?

JR: It came through the Bonnard exhibition. Bonnard was really very little known. They had a meeting of the wives of the trustees who were giving dinner parties so they would know something about Bonnard. I spoke--it was the obvious thing--and told them about Bonnard. My performance impressed Mrs. Whitney, and she told her husband about it.

This was comparatively shortly after the war and he had decided to go into collecting. He had just inherited the greatest part of his fortune, which was going to go to him when he was forty. Mrs. Whitney said, "This young man sounds like somebody who knows what he's talking about." So he called me, and I started working for him on a percentage basis. When he bought something, I got five percent or something. Then I recommended [from Paris] a very important and, for then, expensive picture. It was \$125,000, and at that time, \$100,000, nobody had done more than that. He turned it down; the Korean War was starting and it was not the time. I did something which I have never done when a collector turns something down. I wrote again and said, "I'm so anxious for you to buy it that I am willing to give up my percentage." He bought it and didn't give me a penny, but when I went to see him upon my return, he said, "This doesn't work out very well. I should give you a retainer." That was much better. This is how it happened. Through him, I got [Paul] Mellon. Mellon was impressed at an exhibition by the quality of Whitney's pictures and said, "Who is doing this with you?" Whitney said that I was, and Mellon said, "Do you mind if I approach him?" Whitney said, "No, go right ahead," so I got Mellon. This is how these things happened, you see. I'm still handling things for Mrs. Whitney. When she sold the [Pierre-Auguste] Renoir Moulin de la Galette, I was involved with this from beginning to end. I'm still getting my retainer, and from Mellon also, even though he has stopped buying, but every now and then he comes with a question. They just keep on paying their retainer, which is good for me because that's what I'm living on. Now there are no collectors anymore that buy that much.

SZ: It's very different.

JR: Completely. Bill Rubin advised David Rockefeller, which was normal. Originally, Alfred Barr had advised him, so he went through the Museum, which was perfectly alright. I have never gone after collectors; they have come to me.

SZ: I guess what I'm wondering is, the shape of a collection like Mr. Whitney's, because you've had so much to do with it, how much of it is your eye and your loves and how much of it is his?

JR: Whenever I saw something, I submitted it to him. I never made any decisions. There were things that he turned down--very few, but some he turned down and some I was very sorry he turned down, but I never went back and said, "Won't you reconsider?" except for that one time.

SZ: And what was that?

JR: That was a [Henri] de Toulouse-Lautrec, [Chilpéric]. It's one of his most important pictures, and that is promised to the National Gallery [of Art]. When they had this exhibition of things that were promised or given, Mrs. Whitney asked me what to do. I said, "If you do something, you have to do something smashing." It would have come to the National Gallery, anyhow, because I drew up the list of where which pictures should go for the three museums in which Jock was interested, which was Yale [University Art Gallery], MoMA and the National Gallery. For some things where the National Gallery was rich, like Cézanne, I marked his Cézanne still-life for Yale; they're getting some very good pictures from Whitney, not just left-overs, because it didn't seem necessary to give another Cézanne to the National Gallery, which is rich in Cézannes, and MoMA had said that they wanted the late landscape, which Bill Rubin connects with Cubism. That's something else. I said, "Let's give it to MoMA." So I made this list and Whitney adopted it. He had never thought of his collection [in terms of] the estate. I went to him and said, "Have you done something about it?" He said no. I said, "You better." So he said, "Make up a list," and I did, for the important pictures, but they went first to her, so she could sell the Moulin de la Galette, which would have gone, confidentially, to the National Gallery, because it was not for MoMA. Actually, he had promised it to MoMA, and Françoise Cachin was very upset and said to me, "How could you do that? He had promised it to MoMA, it has been shown as a promised gift." I could do it because Bill Rubin came to me and said, "We are not interested in the Moulin de la Galette, because that is not how we want our collection to expand. There is no room for it in our collection. Couldn't we switch it?" I said, "I'll talk to him," and he said, "Fine." So they wanted a late Cézanne landscape, and they got it; it is earmarked for them. So I know where the most important

pictures will go, and others--we haven't done everything--she can still do what she wants with them. But she has consulted me in every step she has taken concerning the pictures.

SZ: I read somewhere that you said you owed Alfred Barr everything.

JR: Yes.

SZ: What did you mean by that?

JR: First of all, his sponsorship to get here, and then his sponsorship for The History of Impressionism, which wouldn't have appeared without him, and then the exhibitions. He has done a lot. He was also my sponsor three times for the Guggenheim, which I didn't get, but at least he did sponsor me--which may have cost me the Guggenheim in view of Sweeney's feelings for Barr, but then, not to ask him would have been silly. I could count on him when I needed this kind of help, and I always got it. So I find I owe him a lot. If MoMA hadn't taken The History of Impressionism, I may not have been able to publish it, and that did a lot for my career in this country.

SZ: Shall we stop for today?

JR: If you wish, if you are running out of questions.

SZ: For now.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 2

END INTERVIEW