THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **ROBERT STORR (RS)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

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TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: It's Robert Storr, and you go by Rob, right?

RS: Yes. I sign Robert, and am known as Robert by some people, but mostly Rob.

SZ: So, Rob, let me start the way I always do, and ask you to tell me where and when you were born, and just a little something about your family background.

RS: Okay. I was born in 1949 in Portland, Maine. At that time my father taught American History at Bowdoin College. Then we moved to Washington, D.C., where he taught at Howard University for a couple of years. Then we moved to Chicago, which is basically where I grew up, and he taught at the University of Chicago.

SZ: Just out of curiosity -- American history with any particular emphasis?

RS: His specialty, actually, was the history of education in America. He wrote about the history of universities and colleges, and how the idea of education, as Americans have known it, got cooked.

SZ: So you came from an academic household.

RS: Yes.

SZ: Brothers? Sisters?

RS: I have a sister who's a historian, another sister who's a historian, and a brother-in-law who's a historian, and a mother who's a historian. She ended up not practicing; she was doing a master's at Radcliffe and Harvard, under Samuel Morris, but then the [Second World] war happened and she got into other things. She became an occupational therapist during the war. She did that kind of thing afterwards, and worked for many years on a project for children's cerebral palsy. She has a very, very good, active and precise mind, but she's done other things with it.

SZ: That's interesting. Did she work while you were growing up?

RS: Yes, a bit, but it was an old-fashioned marriage, so she did a lot of settlement house work and things like that, on the side. But she didn't really work until after we left the house.

SZ: So you grew up in Chicago, basically. You went to public school there?

RS: I went to the Lab School, at the University of Chicago, Mr. Dewey's school -- an ardent experience, although we didn't know it then. Then, when I was about ten years old, we spent half a year in a little, tiny sea town in Massachusetts, and the other half in Berkeley. Then we went back to Chicago, and the rest of my growing up was done in Chicago.

SZ: The Lab School goes all the way through?

RS: Yes. I also had a sort of second education, which was I worked from the age of about ten or eleven years in little, tiny part-time jobs; then, afterwards, up until my twenties, at a bookstore in the neighborhood, which was one of the centers of the community. I worked for two women who ran this shop, and our customers were basically the faculty and the floating intellectual community around. So I sort of got educated by reading books in bookshops, and talking to the people who were buying them.

SZ: Were you a big reader as a kid?

RS: I was actually not a big reader. The reason I was sent to them, originally, was because I had big learning disabilities, which I guess is called dyslexia now. One of these women, her husband had been in a rooming house that my grandmother had run in a little town in Michigan, and by a series of referrals we got to know them. Then she and I got to like each other. And then, when I couldn't read in the second grade and so on, she was the person who somehow had access to me. So she taught me to read.

SZ: Interests growing up? Music? Art?

RS: I sang in the Chicago Children's Choir, so yes, music. I sang in the opera, at the Lyric, and all that. Art, absolutely. And since I couldn't read I did lots of drawing, and a lot of my communication with the world was through drawing.

SZ: So you're a competent artist in your own right?

RS: Yes. I went to the Art Institute of Chicago after college. I worked with Siqueiros in Mexico, very briefly, during college. I painted in Boston. I painted all over the place. I still paint.

SZ: But you chose something else. Let's go back.

RS: I didn't choose it. It chose me, in a way. I came to New York, my wife and I came here, in 1981, I guess it was. We were living in Cambridge. She's a musician. She plays Baroque and Renaissance music. We came here, and neither one of us had a job. She very quickly got a job with Waverly Consort, which was an early music group. I did a couple of years of sheet-rocking and a couple of years of art handling for [inaudible] Corporation.

I had first came to New York in '67, before I went to France. I had graduated from high school in '67, and didn't want to go to college right away. I did want to get out of where I was, so I went to school in France. I lived in France from '67 to '68, and I was

at an elysée in France. That year I came to New York, was leaving from New York to go to France, and a relative on my mother's side of the family -- fairly distant but prominent -- was a woman named Bobsy Chapman who was a patron of the arts in Chicago. She ran the Arts Club in Chicago in the 1930s, and was on the International Council at the [Museum of] Modern [Art]. She collected all kinds of things, and was a serious although not grand-scale collector. I came to New York that fall, to go to France, and met her. We hit it off, and that was the first time I went to the Modern, actually. Then when I came back from France, in '68, I saw a great deal of her for the next ten years of her life. So that was part of the story.

Anyway, in '81 my wife and I came to New York. After having done a lot of things, Roz got a job, and, as I say, I was doing a lot of make-work jobs. In the course of this, I read a review by Peter Schjeldahl in the *Village Voice* about Philip Guston, who was a painter I dearly loved, and had actually written a little bit about in a very modest way. I got really pissed off at what Peter said, so I wrote a long, long, long letter to the editor, protesting what he said. I said he wrote it beautifully, but he couldn't have been more wrong. That was the sort of thing you throw into the wind, and, lo and behold, Peter wrote me back a letter saying, "Your letter was way too long for us to publish it. By the way, you're completely wrong, but, by the way, you also write very well." He said, "Do you want to write, as my second-string person, for the *Voice?"* which was a complete shock to me, and not at all what I was thinking about. I said, "Well, I don't know." I hesitated, he got kind of annoyed, so we had a drink and he pressed the case. I backed away and said, "No, I don't want to do this. I want to paint my own paintings, and I don't think I'm qualified," etc.

Anyway, he ended up sending parts of the letter I had written to him to Betsy Baker at Art *in America,* and she then hired me to write for the back of the of book for reviews. I did feel like I could do that, since it was small-scale, and it was a very good education. She was a very good person to write for. That's 1981-'82, I guess, and

that's really how I got involved in doing anything other than just making paintings, and doing what people do.

SZ: So back up. You went to France after high school.

RS: For a year. France has a system of thirteen grades – basically *terminal*-- so I went and did *terminal "filot"* in France --

SZ: Where? In Paris?

RS: No, in a place called Chambon-sur- Lignon, which is a small Protestant college in the Massif Central, which has since become famous because it was a center for the pacifist resistance during the war. It was a little, tiny town that saved something like 1,400 Jewish children by just making them disappear into the families of French Protestant peasants. It's a very interesting place.

SZ: I presume you really got your French there.

RS: Yes. That was the year that everything shut down, so for the second half of the year I spent my entire time talking French politics with French students, and we shut down the school. I was an activist. So that was a great, great immersion training in language.

SZ: How interesting. How did you end up choosing that town?

RS: I wanted to go to France. I wanted to get out, as I said. I forget exactly how we had heard of such a place, and that they accepted foreign students. It was very inexpensive, and it was easy to do.

SZ: You lived with a family?

RS: No, we lived in the dormitory. It was a very "French schoolboy" -- Well, it was actually co-educational, but it was a very French kind of thing, with all the nonsense of regimented adolescence in France.

SZ: So you returned, and you went off to college?

RS: I came back and I went to Swarthmore. I was there for the usual four years.

SZ: As what? As a fine arts major?

RS: No. I did French and Russian history, and French literature. There is a very, very small fine arts program there, and a woman who has since become a very good friend, named Harriet Shorr, taught there at that time. She was a Yale person, and did an early show of Brice Marden's for example, at Swarthmore, at a time when Brice was not out in the world. But it was a scene, and it wasn't a scene I was comfortable with. I didn't get it.

There was one art history professor named Hedley Rhys who taught there, whom I did get and liked very much. So during most of that time, I was just drawing. I took two courses with Hedley and one with a man named Robert Walker, who was a prints person. He was friendly with Lessing Rosenwald, so I took, basically, two 19th- and 20th-century survey courses with Hedley, and then one with Bob Walker, which was actually working with prints at the Rosenwald collection. That's all I did for the arts. All the rest of it was literature and politics.

SZ: You mentioned your first trip to the Modern. I presume that --

RS: There were many more, at that time.

SZ: Were you doing abstract sorts of things?

RS: No. Actually, I wasn't even painting very much. It was mostly drawing. I drew a lot of different kinds of figurative styles, of one kind or another, and I did some printmaking. Bobsy was very, very good to me. Basically, I would see her once or twice a year for the next ten years. I would come to New York, and she would try to make me look respectable (which was hard to do in those days), then take me out. So in '68 she took me, what for her was (she was then at Sutton Place) very daring, was to go

downtown, which was below 14th Street. This, for her, was very exotic. We went to a party at Bill Rubin's house, although Bill was sick at that time. I guess his brother was hosting the party, and in one evening I met Jasper Johns, and Christo, Lee Krasner, and George Segal, and all these people. I barely knew who some of them were. I had, actually, kind of a wonderful wakeup call. I met these amazing people, and there was no complication to it because I didn't know anything. I knew a lot about French art, and I knew a lot about other things, but not about this.

Over the course of the next several years I would, as I say, come back and forth to New York. I met lots and lots of people at openings and galleries and so on, with her, but I was like the little green kid, so all I did was sponge it up and look hard.

SZ: And look hard?

RS: Yes. Sure. But, I mean, also, the social stuff. I met James Johnson Sweeney, Robert Penrose, and Bill Rubin, and tons and tons of people, lots of whom I've probably forgotten.

SZ: So it was, if I may use the term, a "scene" you felt comfortable with and in?

RS: Well, I was like a left-wing, 1960s student, but on the given occasion I would be put in my uncle's twenties' tuxedo. I would wear desert boots and a tuxedo, and go off and see the ballet and see Lincoln Kirstein and people like that in the lounge. That kind of thing was a sort of completely Balzacian experience of life, being in but not of.

SZ: So you graduated from Swarthmore in '72?

RS: Yes. And '70 or '71 was when I went to Mexico for the summer, and worked with Sequeiros. So that was in the middle of that somewhere. That was my attempt to mix radical politics with modern art.

SZ: Which they did so well?

RS: They sort of did it well. It was easy to go. My point of contact for that was Betty Catliff, who was at that time not very well known in this country. She'd been blacklisted and was living in Mexico, she and Pancho Rivera. I remember she had a show somewhat later, at the Studio Museum, and I think she had trouble getting back into the country because she'd changed citizenship, or married a Mexican, or whatever. Betty was my contact to Sequeiros. Sequeiros put me up, and I worked for him, as I say, for several months, and learned an enormous amount -- also about what I didn't want to do with art, which was to make rhetorical art like that. But it was a great experience, and I saw tons and tons of things. Then I came back and finished up at Swarthmore.

SZ: You had no problem with the army?

RS: Yes, I did. I was in the lottery, and I was lucky that my number was maybe ten or fifteen points above the actual cutoff for the first year that I was out. I was safe the first year I was out, and then every year thereafter they took fewer and fewer people out of the lottery system, so it was okay. But I would not have served. I would have gone to Canada.

Anyway, I worked for a couple years in Boston, at a bookstore called Schoenhof's, which is a foreign-language bookstore. All along, bookstores and that were my livelihood, my home base, my way of learning, etc. Schoenhof was a bookstore which sold foreign language books. I learned, actually, to sell Russian books. I didn't speak Russian very well but I spoke it a little bit, because I'd taken it in college. So I learned it on the job. I was an importer and exporter of Russian books, both from the émigré presses and from the Soviet Union, at that time.

That was a very interesting time, because it was the time of [Aleksandr] Solzhenitsyn. I remember selling *The Gulag Archipelago* to Rostapovich and people like that. When they came abroad they would buy these things. One of my customers was a painter named Albert [inaudible], who was a refugee who taught at Harvard.

He was not a very good painter, but he was a terrifically good teacher. So he made a deal with me that I would be a model for his classes and I would stretch his canvases; in exchange, I would be able to go and take classes with him at Carpenter Center at Harvard. So I made my living selling books, and took classes with him. I worked as a studio assistant, and also took night classes at the Museum of Fine Arts.

At the same time I got very friendly with Eleanor Sayre, who was the curator of prints and drawings at the Museum of Fine Arts, because I was very interested in [Francisco] Goya. She made these marvelous shows; one was on Rembrandt as an experimental printmaker, which basically looked at the different states of Rembrandt [van Rijn]'s prints, and made the argument that he used printmaking as a transformational process rather than as a reproductive one. You looked at his things, almost as if they were photographic prints, with each of them having different qualities, and papers, and rubbings, etc. It was a brilliant, brilliant show. She was at that time acquiring Phil Hoffer's collection of Goyas and some other things, and she made a beautiful, big exhibition of this acquisition.

It was during this time that I lived on Tetlow Street, which was behind the Gardner [Museum], so I would just go over to the museum print room, sit down, and she would bring out everything. I was very into [Edgar] Degas at that time, so she had lots of Degas, and I just spent hours and hours and hours in the print collection with her. She was, like me, not an academically trained person at all, so she was very, very welcoming. In a sense, she understood that not having degrees, the traditional thing, was an impediment. She told a wonderful story about how her father had been an ambassador to London -- she was a cousin of Woodrow Wilson's -- and she, as a little girl or young adolescent, anyway, had gone to the British Museum. She was interested in [Albrecht] Dürer, and she was told by somebody -- I don't know who -- that they had *The Triumph of Maximilian* there, and she wanted to see it. So she walked up to the doors of the print study room, and there was this very burly British

civil servant guard, and she was terrified. (This is an Oliver Twist story.) She piped up and said, "I would like to see Dürer's *Triumph of Maximilian,* and the man looked down at her from on high, smiled, and let her in. She said if that man had said no to her, she would have been terrified, and would never have crossed --

SZ: That would have been the end.

RS: So she sort of treated everybody who came to her the same way, and she was wonderful. So, anyway, that was another part of it. So when I was in Boston I did courses at the Museum School, I did courses at Harvard, and looked and looked and read and read, and looked and looked and read and read. During this whole period I was also in and out of New York at least twice a year with Bobsy, so I was seeing current shows. I was seeing historical stuff. I was just sort of getting a sense of what the world looked like.

SZ: What was happening to your own art, as a result of all that?

RS: Mostly what I did was drawing. I was painting some now. I didn't really paint much, or, certainly, not very well, until I got to Chicago, so most of it was drawing. Then, at a certain point, I decided, "This is treading water." Boston is a very dangerous town to be an artist in, because it's so historically minded and there's so little -- whatever. So I went back to the Chicago Art Institute and got a job in another of the bookstores that was part of my growing up. I lived off of that job and went to the Art Institute. I took a non-matriculating year just to catch up with what I hadn't done. I took courses with Ed Paschke, for example, who was a terrific teacher, and with whom I argued a lot. Then I was a master's student, and painted for two years, very happily.

I got a degree. I was a figurative painter at that time, and painted kind of eyeball-realist paintings -- objects, and people, too, but mostly objects. I didn't know anything about any of the New York style painterly realists, but was moving in a direction which they were already occupying. So, gradually, as I did that, people said, "Have

you looked at [Philip] Pearlstein? Have you looked at [Alex] Katz? Have you looked at this one? That one, etc." In Chicago, there was almost no support for that kind of work at all. It had the advantage and disadvantage, I guess, of not being the main menu.

SZ: Is that around the time you decided to come to New York?

RS: No, not quite. I met Roz. I was falling out of a relationship with somebody and she was falling out of a relationship with somebody else, and contrary to the thing about rebounds, we both rebounded very well, thank you. She was then in the Hague, at the World Conservatory in the Hague, and I met her at a weekend in Toronto with my family. She was invited to dinner, we hit it off, and we went to the Albright-Knox together, as our first date, then corresponded, etc., and I simply joined her in Holland when I was done. So she finished her two years there; I spent one year there, painting, and then doing odd jobs, again, around town, in the Hague.

Then we came back to Boston. We did a Play of Daniel together, for example. What was her name? The wonderful, crazy soprano? Anyway, they made a musical company and we toured parts of Holland and I did portable sets, which we put up in cathedrals in Holland and stuff. Then we didn't have anything to do. The parents of a childhood friend of mine had just been appointed Master at Winthrop House at Harvard, and Winthrop House was, at that time, a fairly square establishment. They wanted to have an arts program so they said, "Look, will you come and cook for half your living, and then be tutors for the other half? You can be a music tutor, Roz, and you can be an art tutor, Rob, you can teach house courses, and so on, and then you can play bridges and whatever the butler's name was -- sort of Upstairs/Downstairs -- and then you can live in the house, and you'll have essentially no expenses."

SZ: Could you cook, by the by?

RS: Yes, I could. Absolutely. I got better at it. We had to do it for the senior common room, so we actually had to do a respectable job. So we did that for a couple of years, and I was a tutor at Carpenter Center, which is where I had been previously, as a gopher. Then Roz did the same thing with courses in music. We spent a couple of years getting our bearings and just being married for the first time and all that. Then we decided that, again, Boston was a dangerous place to be an artist. For her it was particularly difficult, because it's a small town, and in her field the jobs that would ever be available were already occupied. For me it was just basic restlessness. I knew I wasn't getting anywhere, and comfortable as it was, it was a bad place.

SZ: So you came to New York.

RS: So we came to New York.

SZ: And you told me how you fell into this line of work. Are you still painting and drawing?

RS: Yes. I still paint and draw.

SZ: You still do.

RS: I still do. It's basically been a constant, and if I'd had more money or fewer dependents, or a whole host of different circumstances, that would have been the main thing. But after doing sheet-rocking, etc., I understood -- and I also had many friends who were living really meager lives, were very frustrated, and it was affecting their work. So I figured, "Well, look. You've got to keep your spirit alive. You've got to go in the direction of what can be done to make a living that is not soul-breaking and make trade-offs and just do the best you can." So we did that for a while. I did part-time teaching. I knew a lot of artists, I had been writing, so that also helped a little bit. There was one year I was teaching at RISD and at Maryland Institute [College of Art], and I would move up and down the eastern seaboard on a train and teach at

those two places, write part-time and stuff like that, and still do a few art-handling jobs.

SZ: That's a lot.

RS: That's what a lot of people do. That's just the way it is. At a certain point -- which is to say, in 1986, I got a job at the Studio School teaching, which was not much money but relatively stable. It was in New York, so I taught drawing and painting there for a couple of years. It was an interesting job. But one of my students was Nane Annan, Kofi Annan's wife. He was an under- secretary, I guess, at the time. She said, "My husband's a diplomat." Since then we've had numbers of contacts where she's been very sweet, and she says, "This is Robert Storr. He works for the Museum of Modern Art, and he was my painting professor."

Anyway. There were a lot of students that I met there, there were a lot of artists that I met there, and then the man who was running the school had a breakdown, so for a year a sculptor named Jackie Brookner and I ran the school, actually made it pretty lively and brought a lot of artists in. We brought in Joan Mitchell, Malcolm Morley, and a whole lot of artists who had not crossed that threshold in years, and we were duly punished by the Old Guard for having opened it up --

SZ: As in?

RS: As in thrown out. Hilton Kramer was on the board, for example. Hilton and I have thrown darts at each other and worse, but in those days we actually had Scotch together, chatted and so on, but, basically, they didn't want to have anything to do with what we were doing. So I taught there for three years and ran it with Jackie for one. Then I was shown the door. After that, I forget what we did for one year.

Then I got a first teaching job that had any kind of a future in it at all, and that was at at Tyler [School of Art]. That was 1989. That was a ten-year track job, a painting job, a good job with people I liked, whom I've stayed in touch with. So that was sort of the

final plateau, where I could just go make my work and so on. It was actually a very good job in many ways, but it was very little money. It meant being away a lot of the time, when we already had one daughter, and it stretched us pretty thin.

Before I actually went to Tyler -- I had already said yes to the job -- Kirk [Varnedoe], whom I did not know, but whom I had met briefly one evening in a sort of crowd scene, at the World Theatre, where Karole Armitage, David Salle, and Jeff Koons were doing a theatre piece together and had an opening -- got in touch with me. I forget how, and I never, ever really heard the whole story from his side. But he got in touch with me because it had been suggested to him by somebody that he talk to me. He'd read some stuff that I'd written, and he basically said, "Do you want to be the curator?" to take the job that Linda [Shearer] had left. By that time I had curated a little, tiny -- not bad, but little, tiny painting exhibition for the Studio School when I was there. But I hadn't curated at all, in other words. He said, "Do you want to do this?" and I said, "Number one, I don't know that I do. And number two, I made this commitment to these people. This is something I can't welch on," etc.

So that's where we left it. So he said, "Well, look. You've written a certain amount about Greenberg, critical stuff about Greenberg. I'm doing this show called 'Hi Low,' and I'd like you to write about Greenberg for me, for the book of readings that's going to go with this." I said, "Sure. I'll do that. I'll be glad to do that." So in the editorial stages of that, which would have been whatever it was, the spring, I guess, or even the summer of the following year he said, "Would you reconsider? We haven't been able to fill this job. I'm still interested in you. I was interested in you in the beginning," and so on. By that time I thought, "Well, geez. The new arrangement is very stressful, and it's not given me what I wanted, actually."

SZ: In terms of what?

RS: In terms of timing. I was at the point of saying, "This is not the right answer. So maybe what I can do is do this for a while, and find my way -- a clearing on the other

side of it." I asked artists and friends of mine, "What happens if I go work for these people? How's that going to affect the way you see me, or the way I'm perceived, or whatever it is?" The one I remember particularly was Feliz Gonzalez-Torres, who said, basically (I've told this story before, but it's true), "It'll be good to have one of us on the inside," is what he said. I was not a close friend of Felix's but we knew each other. I had written about him, etc. He was also very candid and very frank.

So I said, "Okay." So I thought about it a little bit, and I finally said to Kirk, "Okay. Look, I'll do this for a while. Let's try it and see how it goes." And that was basically the beginning.

SZ: But you did have some reservations.

RS: Oh, yes. Quite a bit. I said no categorically, the first time. I did not expect it to come back. So that was kind of a fluke that it did.

SZ: Mostly because of what?

RS: Well, many things. One thing is that I had ambivalence about doing anything of the sort. Two, I'd never done it, and frankly I was nervous that I couldn't do it. I didn't want to make a huge, public belly-flop. Three, I was deeply opposed to what Bill Rubin represented. As I said, I had met him in 1967-'68. I understood his genuine strengths. I understood his less admirable strengths, and I just didn't want to be a subordinate in a situation where I had fundamental disagreements with the overall thing. It was very clear by the second conversation with Kirk, the second one about that job, that he had been thinking about it a good deal in the meantime; that the Museum understood that something more than what Linda had been allowed to do would be necessary; and, that it was clear that it was now Kirk's job. Kirk was not Bill's protégé any longer, he was the head of his department.

Kirk and I -- It would be incorrect to say that we were oil and water, because we actually did mix, but we couldn't have been more different. One of the things that

impressed me about Kirk was that he understood that, and he was quite comfortable with it. I several times tried to talk him out of it; and, basically, once I had made up my mind that it was worth pursuing the conversation, I said, "You have to understand. I'm not an historian, I'm not a trained curator, I have social and political views that may not be all that popular here." I've since learned that, of course, there were lots of people who had them, but from the outside you never knew it. Also, they could see me coming, and as long as I wasn't going to get on a soapbox, people didn't mind that I had them. But I didn't know.

So I basically gave him all the reasons why he shouldn't hire me. He dealt with each one of them very correctly and very directly, and in other ways let me understand that the reason he wanted me was that I was not exactly what they had already, and that they needed somebody who was engaged with contemporary art; who was comfortable with artists; who didn't see things the same way. They, in a sense, knew what they were hiring (at least, he knew what he was hiring).

I guess I had a conversation with Aggie [Gund]. I went to her apartment. We had met on a couple of occasions before that, but I didn't really know her very well. I liked her but, again, I didn't hang out in those circles. After Bobsy died, there was no transition from being the protégé of the patron to being what I was. I started allover again, at the bottom. (Oh. I had another art-handling job too, which I can tell you about, which is funny, and pertinent, too.)

But that was the second vetting. I can't remember if there was anybody else. I don't think I talked to anybody else.

SZ: Was Bill involved in this at all?

RS: I have no idea.

SZ: You didn't meet with him.

RS: No.

SZ: It was already transitioning all of his influence out, I believe, already, at that point.

RS: Well, he had been made a curator emeritus for ten years. He had an office, he had a very strong presence. In those days he was still smoking in his office and there was lots of cigar smoke, etc. He made an effort to sort of befriend, suborn, enlist (I'm not sure what the right word is) me, early on, and I was cordial with him but leery of him. I'd actually written a very tough critique of Frank Stella in lectures; I'd written a very tough critique of the Museum itself, actually, for *Newsday.* So I'm sure he knew a little bit about who he was dealing with. My view was always not to pick fights with people and, as I say, not to get up on soap boxes, and to work with people to the extent that they wanted to work with you. So in as much as he didn't press certain points, I didn't press them, either, and it was all right.

SZ: I'll ask you about the art-handling job, but could you just back up? When you said that you did not approve, I guess, of Bill's influence, or what Bill had done with that department, could you elaborate?

RS: Specifically?

SZ: Yes.

RS: First of all, it was obvious that he didn't have much interest in contemporary art, or a very narrow range of it, anyway; that he had not given the people who were there much room to maneuver. Jenny Licht had done one really important show, Kynaston [McShine] had done a couple, some acquisitions that were very important had been made, but all in all he made it abundantly clear that it was about the Titans. There were very few American Titans to begin with, as far as he was concerned, and they were all of them either Abstract Expressionists or Frank Stella. He did a Tony Caro show, which was actually the first time I met him. I remember going to the Garden while he was installing that, and meeting him then. Greenberg was, in fact, his

ideological connection, but beyond that it was an extremely narrow, Formalist understanding, and even within Formalism it was a very narrow understanding of what mattered.

SZ: Did the trustees feel comfortable with that?

RS: Some did, some didn't. It's like all things. When a dominant figure is there, people want to get enthralled, to fall in line. But it was pretty clear, after he left, that a lot of people didn't see the world that way at all. Be that as it may, I thought the Modern was sort of "out of the game," basically, and if they wanted to get back in the game -- which Kirk indicated he did, and other people indicated that they did -- that it was an interesting proposition. In some ways I don't know how I thought I had the arrogance to think I could do it, because I didn't have any of the usual things. But I figured, "Well, you deal with it programmatically. These are the pieces that are missing, and there's this other piece over there. So let's see if we can put the pieces together." It was, in an odd way, very unpremeditated. It was like, "Okay. This is a great machine. Let's see where we can make it go."

SZ: Meaning that you didn't really have, I guess, the formal knowledge about what it meant to put a show together?

RS: As an art-handler, I had hung shows. I knew much more about hanging shows than most of the curators there, and I always got along very well (I think, anyway) with the art-handlers there, because we actually knew how to do the same things. I tried not to interfere with their doing it, but I understood space, visually, because I had made paintings. I understood the mechanics of hanging, and I understood architecture in terms of its relation to paintings, etc. So that part of it was, actually, first of all, the most fun. That didn't frighten me a bit. Actually, none of it frightened me, because I had also had a little bit of training in the social world, but I had learned it in a different way. I didn't have the official accreditation or whatever it is. I sort of put it together out of pieces of different experiences, knew what it was immediately and felt

comfortable there, but also felt like an outsider, in certain respects. The art-handling job was for a thing called the McCrory Corporation Collection which was put together by Celia Ascher and Meshulum Riklis. He had made and lost several fortunes, and was a real buccaneer.

SZ: That collection owned a lot of Constructivist works.

RS: There was a lot of Constructivist stuff, yes. Exactly. There were some hilarious parts about it. He was going to his apartment when he was married to Pia Zadora, whose pinup in the penthouse was being drooled over by the boys in the Xerox room, and hanging Constructivist pictures in his end of the apartment, along with Bacon, and hanging innocuous things on her end. I remember there were banquettes in the windows -- they lived on Fifth Avenue -- there were banquettes in the windows, and separating the two banquettes was a glass, sandblasted version of the pinup, from the middle of *Penthouse Magazine.* He had this carrot-red hair he had dyed, and it was high comedy.

He had a Constructivist collection. He had wonderful things, some dreck, too, but some very good things. Being an art-handler is like working in bookstores: you basically get to immerse yourself. I would go to the warehouse and do my card-filing and whatever it is, and then just pull pictures out - like Rothko's *Homage to Matisse.* So you're on the clock, you do the work that you need to do, and then you just sit and look at pictures, pull them out at will. It's great.

SZ: How was she to work with, Celia?

RS: Impossible. Impossible. I was the bug on the wall. When she wanted to sell things, she would call in the people she wanted to sell to. When she wanted to deal in some way or other Gene Thaw and all the big operators in the high-end of the market were in and out of there, and I was the guy holding the pictures. So I watched them do

their performances. It was perfect, because I could just study this little chess game going on, and I didn't have to have a role in it at all.

The first thing that happened after Kirk named me as having this job was he got a call from Leo Castelli. Leo wanted to have lunch with this person who had been appointed to this important job. That was Leo, very quick off the mark. So he wanted to have lunch with me, Kirk and Jasper Johns. I had met Jasper through Steve Greene, years before, and had gotten along well with him. So we went to Da Silvanos, sat down, and Leo said, "We've never met before." I said, "Oh, yes, we have." That happened quite a lot. I didn't do it sadistically, but I did enjoy the fact that I had seen all these people do their stuff. I was invisible, like a servant is invisible, right? So I just said, you know, "I've been around a long **time."**

SZ: What was he like?

RS: I liked him very much. He was very mean to me in a couple of situations, because I didn't deal with his artists enough, but he was also personally very elegant.

SZ: So what was it like for you to come into this, obviously having done a million things? To come into this institution, which had to, in some ways, have been kind of constraining? I guess what I really want to know is what did the place feel like to you when you came?

RS: It didn't feel constrained. That was what was very interesting. It was a place that was trying to figure out what to do next. There were lots and lots of opportunities for things to happen that. Because I had not come through the system, I didn't have the inhibitions that many people had. I had no sense that I had to wait in line. I had no sense that -- I was never Kirk's protégé. We didn't hang out. I think the whole time I was there we had two private dinners -- until he got really ill, and then we saw each other somewhat more. But Adam [Gropnik] was his protégé, and he was Bill's

protégé, and I wasn't part of that. I didn't need to be, and he didn't want me to be, particularly. So I just sort of said, "What about this? What about that?"

I didn't feel constrained, actually, at all. In many situations, it seemed to be perfectly clear where the opportunities lay, both in terms of how you dealt with people and how you could open it up that way; in terms of specific opportunities for exhibitions; particular ways of hanging shows; how to write; under what occasions to write. It was remarkably unconstrained. The one crucial piece of advice I got, actually, early on, was from Phil Yenawine, who was the education director then, and who was at loggerheads with just about everybody by that time. He had known my sister, who was a museum educator, liked her, and he and I knew each other tangentially through some people who were connected with. . .

Well, there's another piece of this puzzle, which is the video data bank, which is a video project based at the Art Institute of Chicago, which was run by two women -- Kate Horsfield and Lynn Blumenthal. They took over the Castelli/Sonnabend archives, and they made a lot of contracts with artists to distribute the art to universities, colleges, galleries and so forth. They had an interviewing program, they would interview artists, and this was at a time when it was almost not done at all. So through Lynn and Kate, I worked as a researcher for them, I did interviews for them, and through them I had gotten to know a lot of people. They were connected with the conceptual scene, the feminist scene, the gay scene, etc., and it's through them that I knew about Phil for the first time, I think. So I had friendship networks --

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

RS: When I showed up on his doorstep, basically, he had some idea of who I was and I knew a little bit about him. So he basically said to me, "Don't wait. You get a honeymoon, number one, and number two, just move as fast as you can."

SZ: So you don't get eaten up?

RS: So you don't get eaten up, and so they don't know where you're going. Get there before they know where you're going. He didn't say it in quite those words, but that's how I understood it. So my sense was that if you just keep moving, if you move in several directions, and if you deliver -- I wasn't trying to make a career there by being smart. I was trying to get something going, and have work to do that was interesting to do. I understood that you had to be available in lots of circumstances. You had to have a lot of energy, be straightforward with people, and do something, deliver something. So that actually worked.

SZ: What about the department itself that you were coming into? You had several curators who had been there a long, long time. Kynaston [McShine], for instance, at one time had a great interest in contemporary stuff.

RS: Okay. That's a whole story. When I was got there, Bill Rubin was still in his office, and still had a very strong presence. He would, in fact, go into Kirk's office more frequently than Kirk wanted, to deliver advice and coaching, but in other ways was very helpful to Kirk, because I think Bill was instrumental in certain big acquisitions, and in guiding Kirk in the world of dealers, which Kirk didn't know particularly well. So it wasn't all bad. He can be a horrendous bully, but he also has great accomplishments and skill. So he was very much present as a quasi- curator. He was getting ready to do a Picasso portraiture (not "getting ready," but it was on his horizon), and he was also involved in the Reinhardt show, which he basically did with [inaudible] -- So he was present as a curator. Carolyn Lanchner was there, and she was at that time working on Miró, first, and [Fernand] Léger, second. Then, there was Kynaston. Carolyn and I got along quite well from the beginning. I think she was both interested in and deeply mistrustful of me, but --

SZ: Distrustful just because of your coming in with the position you had?

RS: I came in with the position I had. I was another blue-eyed boy. She didn't understand where I was from. She had very mixed feelings about Kirk, and, I think, appreciated

him in certain ways but was loyal to Kynaston; was hurt, herself, over some issues; and, again, it was pretty much of a boys' club. Linda had left, and here comes another boy. Linda and I had actually gotten along well. Linda had made a studio for me. Linda and I had known each other when I was a petitioning young artist and she was still at P.S. 1. I remember I went up to talk for her once at Williams College. Lane Faison was there, and it was, again, one of those times where you finally get to meet some of these people that you've heard about. Linda was there, she introduced me, and she proceeded to describe the picture she had seen, lo those many years.

SZ: She could remember?

RS: She actually remembered, not because it was so good but because she says she has that kind of -- She's a real visual curator.

So, I had known her, and she and I had a very good relationship. Carolyn felt not the same way about it. I think she felt that it was the loss of a strong woman in the department, and the arrival of another "princeling," as she called it, etc. So it was complicated, but she was always very correct, we got along well and we talked a lot. Kynaston took a leave the year I came, the first year I was there. He, I think, wanted me to be his protégé. I wasn't interested in being anybody's protégé. I tried to be respectful of him, but he was nasty from the very beginning, basically. Once he couldn't make me "his boy," basically, the other stuff came out very quickly. And, Kynaston is driven by bitterness, and by failure, too, actually. He's a man who should have done things he did not, in fact, do. For years he had excuses, and his last phase as the acting senior curator was a demonstration of why it had not happened before. Up until then, there was always this assumption that he'd been badly done to by Bill, or terrible things had happened in his life or whatever. But the truth of the matter was that he was not up to it.

SZ: So that was the atmosphere, which you've just described a little bit.

RS: So, basically, Kynaston was in place. Kynaston took a year off. I'm trying to remember. He had been involved in the [Anselm] Kiefer show shortly before. Or, no. Actually, I guess the Kiefer show happened when I first was there.

SZ: You got there in '90?

RS: In' 90.

SZ: Late' 90.

RS: September of '90. So it was just as *High and Low* opened, or just before *High and Low* opened. Anyway, he had the Kiefer show, he had done [Andy] Warhol before that, and he'd put on the table two proposals. One was the "Museum as Muse" show, which eventually was done; the other one was the idea of a twentieth-century portraiture show, which was one of the situations where I got into a battle royale with Bill, because that was well down the line, but it was one of those curatorial meetings where Bill had had it in his mind to do a Picasso portraiture show. He had decided he would do it, it had been pre-negotiated at certain, high levels, he thought. And Kynaston proposed that, no, indeed, there should be a general-show of portraiture, and Bill was just obnoxious beyond belief. He talked over Kynaston, put him down, and declared that, after all, all things in portraiture had either been done by or anticipated by Picasso, why bother with anybody else, etc., etc., etc.?

At a certain point Kynaston just gave up, and when the topic came up again, I went to the defense of the Kynaston show. I said that perhaps we really should discuss this, etc., and then Bill tried to talk over me. I told Bill to his face to stop until I was finished, and he went crazy. He tried it again, I stopped him again, and certain people, whom I will not name, began to slide under the table to avoid the confrontation. It wasn't yelling and screaming, it was just like, "Don't do this to me, because I won't stand for it." He eventually jumped up from the table with his cane, and he said, "Well, it doesn't make any difference. I have my salary until I'm seventy-

five," or whatever it is, "and I don't care what you want," and he stomped out of the room. It was his grandstanding. But, of course, we did *Picasso and Portraiture*.

SZ: You've said that you got to the Museum, and your job was really to get things going.

RS: That was the charge, yes. I arrived in September, and by October, the end of October, they wanted to rehang the contemporary galleries. So the first thing I did was to do that. I had a lot of fun doing it. I love working with objects and I love hanging things. You couldn't have a better larder to raid, so it was really a lot of fun to do. I did the installation for them, which was done in about a month, and at the same time, roughly speaking, they said, "We want a show from you in about nine or ten months."

SZ: When you say "they" --

RS: Well, in those days the exhibitions committee consisted of Dick [Oldenburg], and people involved in the production side. Dick Palmer came to the table but Dick Oldenburg basically chaired it. It was the department heads, plus ranking curators. I was a full curator so I was at the table. It's now much more of a hierarchy.

Anyway, it was understood that they needed a contemporary show, and they wanted me to get on deck right away. One was to do a collection rehang, and the second was to do a show of my own devising. That became *DIS LOCATIONS*, basically. The first re-installation was very well received.

SZ: The rehanging?

RS: The rehanging, yes. There was an article about Walter Hopps by Calvin Tomkins in the *New Yorker,* and in the course of that, Tomkins and Walter walked through the galleries, as they had just, in fact, been rehung by me. Walter really loved it and said, "Wow, here's somebody who's hanging visually for a change," etc. So that was a big kudo from the right quarter at that time. There was a general, positive response to it,

etc. So pretty quickly I had that kind of wind in my sails, in terms of actually doing things.

SZ: The space itself?

RS: The space itself was a mess. The Eleven building galleries were pretty awful. The Philip Johnson basketball court was a very interesting and usable space. But that was also kind of the challenge; to not have to accept these galleries, but to have a lot of freedom to move walls and redesign. That's one of the things I worry about for the future -- whether, architecturally, it's possible to do it as much in the new building as it was in the old. And, number two, whether they will be willing to spend the money. But the entire time I was there, if you wanted to exercise your right as a curator, you could essentially rebuild the space every time you did something.

SZ: Doing that so early on, did it help you get a real familiarity with what was there?

RS: Oh, yes. Sure. It's an amazing collection. Ninety-percent of it, in painting and sculpture, is within easy access. The old MoMA was like a Chinese box; behind every wall was something else. You could go with the art handlers, and they'd know all the work, and you'd go there, you'd pull something out -"Let's see about this, let's see about that" -- and there was an enormous amount of freedom to deal directly with works of art, and to try things out. They did not stint on time. You had to do it within ten days or less, but that's a lot of time. You had people's full concentration, enthusiasm and no groaning, because almost all of them are artists or people who have gotten excited about art through working there. So you really had a sense that the whole activity was focused on getting it as good as it could be, and that they were interested in different styles. So you would hear the handlers talking about, "Work with Bill," or "Work with Kirk," or work with me, or "Work with Debby [Wye]," or whoever it is. You had a sense that they got a certain amount of pleasure out of having different conductors, so to speak. They were the orchestra, but they had different conductors. So that part of it was great, and I felt perfectly at home.

SZ: And your major thought behind that first rehang was what?

RS: Let's see. I wanted to get out things that had not been seen. I hung it so that it was, I think, 60/40 or 70/30 women, in favor of women. And I didn't do this in the sense of wanting it to be a polemic; I just wanted to hang a collection/show that was very contemporary -- I mean, it went to Johns's *Flag,* but it was -- because in those days, the contemporary collections stopped, really, at Ab Ex plus a little bit of Pop, not much. So if you started in 1960 or thereabouts, you were already into territory that was not represented in the permanent hang. So I figured I wanted to do that. I wanted to connect the galleries that were the tail end - Ab Ex and the beginning Pop galleries -- I wanted to connect them with contemporary art. I wanted to hang things that had not been seen, and that represented parts of the tradition that everybody said they knew about but had actually forgotten, or maybe never learned about, because it had been so long since they'd been up. Again, I wanted very quietly to do a hang that would simply flip the proportions. In fact, in some cases, 70/30, with 30% women, was far more women than you'd ever see. So I just wanted to flip that proportion, and show that, without making a big deal about it, you could do an absolutely quality exhibition from the collection. It wasn't about making a statement about what wasn't there, it was about what was there, and just do it so that nobody would notice it until they noticed it, by which time they'd already be completely at home in the galleries, and it would do that.

So I got out [Richard] Stankiewicz, I got out Alfred Jensen; I got out Jo Baer; numbers of people from the '60s; an Al Held piece, a beautiful wooden piece and an Al Held painting, and Al Held hadn't been shown that much; Agnes Martin; Jack Witten; Richard Tuttle; Bob Irwin. It was a mixed bag of things, but I wanted to make it the lesser-seen, and in some cases almost unseen things, and just move through. In the big room was Ralph Humphrey, Alice Aycock; a drawing of Dorothea Rockburne's, which I had once installed for the Bernice Rose drawing show when I was working for Dorothea as a draftsman. Susan Rothenberg, as I said. Who else

was there? Elizabeth Murray. I was also given the Projects program. Linda had run it, so, as of the time I arrived, basically, Jennifer Wells, who thereafter went to Paine Webber, and then to Citibank, was on the curatorial staff, and she did a show with Kiki Smith, which was already on the books. Then, thereafter --

SZ: -- you took it over?

RS: I took it over, and I basically saw it as a chance to, one, get a lot of stuff in; two, I thought it was really important to encourage the curatorial staff to do things. I thought this was the chance to let younger people show what they were capable of, and to use their information. That's what the Project shows had been about in principle, but I think over the years it had gotten more directed from on high, and I tried to make it somewhat more of a real committee, where consensus had to be reached but where people had room to do things that I wouldn't do, in the same way that Kirk let me do things that he wouldn't do. So, to sort of spread it out so that it was more representative of the available sensibilities, of new information, and that people had a chance to try things. So, as of the moment I arrived, I basically had Projects, the show to do the following year, and this installation.

SZ: Talk a little bit about *DIS LOCATIONS*, if you would.

RS: Let's see. What about it? Oddly enough, I'm not really sure how I got started doing that. I wanted to do something that I hadn't done for myself; I wanted to try something that I didn't know for sure. I wanted to do a show that had new material in it, but rather than trying to catch a wave or identify a new generation, per se, that took stock of a set of possibilities. So the artists in that show went from [inaudible] who was very old, to Sophie Calle, who was probably the youngest. But they were midcareer artists, most of them. Ilya Kabakov, also, was not terribly well known in this country at that time. He had shown at Ronald Feldman, and I had also put him in a show in Philadelphia that I was doing simultaneously with *DIS LOCATIONS*. I did two shows basically at the same time, and commuted to Philadelphia to hang the

one while I did the other one in New York. But Ilya was not a household name, by any means.

I decided to make a show that took stock of possibilities for doing installation work where you would see varieties of things -- artists not working in the same vein but people who had been, in many cases, at it for a good, long while. Also, a great deal was happening very fast. But they had had the split installation of Kiefer, which had been upstairs and downstairs, and I think I was given both those spaces, initially. I'm not sure about that. I may have actually only been given the top floor. Or maybe it was only the bottom floor. Maybe it was the other way around. Only the bottom floor. I think maybe, based on the precedent of the Kiefer, we argued that we should put the two of them together. Then I argued that, for Sophie, we should go into the collection to do her project. Very much to Kirk's credit, he approved it. I don't think he knew her work terribly well, but Bill would never have allowed that to happen.

SZ: No.

RS: It's interesting. Mary Staniszewski did this book on the installations at MoMA. It's one of the books up there [pointing to a book shelf]. What's it called? *The Power of Display.* It's a terrible book, but it's based on a wonderful idea. It's terrible only because it's so programmed by what she wanted to find. But she went into the archives and dug out installation photographs, and there's wonderful stuff in it, visual material, etc. At the end of the book, she's very, very critical of the Modern, saying that the Modern has ceased to do any innovative exhibition design, that the curators no longer had points of view, etc. She criticized *DIS LOCATIONS* in that vein, and she gave it some points for having brought in artists with political and social realities in their mind, principally David Hammonds and Adrian Piper, although, in fact, several others did it, as well. But, basically, she said it was a failure because -- Well, she never mentioned Sophie Calle. I don't think she even knew that Sophie Calle was in the show, because nobody would think that that was part of the show, because, of course, Bill would never have let it happen. So here you have the old,

locked-in conservatives with the Modern predicting responses on the part of the public, so that an art historian completely missed the point that one of the most innovative parts of that show –

SZ: It's amazing, actually.

RS: So she reports on it as if Sophie doesn't exist. The other thing is that at the beginning of the show, at the beginning of the show downstairs, at a certain point we built out the entrance. They taped and compounded the walls, and I told them to stop. Because I thought, "This is really great." One, graphically, it looked very good. But two, it declared at the entrance to the show that what you were walking into was a made space. It was a way of exposing, if you will -- it was like looking at the back of a canvas at the same time as you looked at the front. So there were a number of things done in that show that were explicitly set to comment on the museum. One of them was Sophie's, and the other one was this entrance hall.

Anyway, the idea of the show was to do that. Then I got those two spaces. At one point I was in conversation with Lothar Baumgarten about doing a project and he backed out of it, because he was going to do the Guggenheim, and he didn't want to do two simultaneously in New York. But I was also, at that point, going to have the balcony wall and he was going to do a word project, along the top third-floor gallery wall. That didn't happen. But, basically, it was a three-location show. It was Sophie, the collection, then the upstairs and the downstairs. The idea was to show varieties of things. There was an interesting dialogue between Adrian and David, because David mostly had not done museum shows at that point. He'd done the show with [inaudible] and Kelly Jones at P.S. 1, which wasn't a heavy museum show, and he was very nervous about doing it. But his strategy was to try to basically turn the indoors outdoors, and try to make the white cube disappear underneath green paint and decorative wall scrollings, and he brought in a whole lot of leaves from the sidewalk, which drove the conservation people nuts, because they were afraid they were full of worms; that they were going to get into the bigger collection.

So he basically tried to make the windows that looked out onto the Garden disappear, so that you felt like the whole space, the autumnal space on the outside and the gallery space on the inside were one thing. Adrian wanted to reinforce the white cube, actually, both because she wanted to contrast it with the image of the black man in the middle of the room, but also because she's a great admirer of Sol LeWitt's, was an assistant of Sol's, and she wanted to do this contrast in such a way that made the white room look really good. She wanted to assert the beauty of pure geometry at the same time as she wanted to create a contrast with it, so that in this exhibition you had, basically, two African-American artists dealing with, in both cases, a central image. In David's, it was the [inaudible] from the Natural History Museum, with Teddy Roosevelt riding, with the Native American man. So you had both of them dealing with racial issues, but they were also dealing with the container of the Museum, and in contrasting ways. It was like a dialogue, up and down the hall between the two. Very interesting.

SZ: Very interesting and, obviously, different from what had been before.

RS: Basically, since Jenny Licht had done her *Spaces* show, and Kynaston had done *Information*, there had not been such a show at the Modern -- which is to say, twenty years.

SZ: Right. So my question is, also, how was it received within the institution?

RS: Well, first of all, the exhibitions committee approved it. They said, "Yes, go do it." So if there were any problems with it, I didn't hear them. And I don't think there actually were very many, to be honest. I think they knew that they had to make such a move, and they knew they'd picked somebody to do it that was somebody they could talk to. They knew that, after that, they couldn't put the brakes on until it was done. If it had been a disaster, other things might have followed, but they weren't in a position to micromanage it, and nobody tried to, by the way.

SZ: That was part of the question. The other thing is, you just think about what it takes to, as you say, get an institution like that moving in a different direction.

RS: The answer is to do something that's decisive and imperfect, that opens doors rather than closes them, and so on. That was basically the only thing. All the way along with Kirk, he never wavered, he never second-guessed. We had a fight about a couple of things from time to time, but nothing major. Usually it had to do with his feeling that he hadn't been filled in in time, about something that was moving that he thought he should know about, and sometimes he was right and sometimes he simply hadn't heard it, and got confused and got mad. There was never a point where Kirk tried to censor me, there was never a point where Kirk tried to undermine me. We were, almost from the beginning, pitted against each other in gossip, because the response to *High and Low* had been so damaging to him and his position, and the relative enthusiasm about *DIS LOCATIONS* and other things that were going on had favored me.

Within a year of my being there people were saying, "Well, you'll get Kirk's job." And I thought, "Ich. I don't want to hear this. I don't want to be part of this. I don't want his job," etc. But I got it back from all different levels in the art world, and it must have been terrible for him. I would occasionally quite directly address it with him in some ways, and say, "Look, don't worry about this." I'm not looking for your position," etc. I think he really had to work hard to persuade himself that he wasn't being screwed by me, because a lot of people were whispering in his ear, saying, "That's what this guy is going to do to you. He's going after you," and it lasted up until, I would say, Pollock. After that, I think he really understood that -- To be honest with you, I think Bill was probably part of this, and I think Kynaston was part of this. There may have been other people, as well. I think, actually, maybe Adam [Gopnick], too. But he was certainly primed to be suspicious, and he did not give into it. However much he may have been nervous about it, he was utterly correct with me -- for which I liked him a

great deal, and I had a great deal of respect for him. But, under those circumstances, I'm not sure that I would have been as able to deal with it as he was.

SZ: I'm sure you know the old saying. Nelson Rockefeller once said, "I've learned everything I needed to know about politics from the Museum of Modern Art."

RS: I learned everything I needed to know about politics from the Studio School. After that, the Modern was a breeze.

SZ: Should we stop for today?

RS: Sure.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **ROBERT STORR (RS)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **BROOKLYN, NY**

DATE: **JUNE 2, 2004**

SZ: When we left you, you talked about what your charge was when you got there, and some of the first things you did.

RS: I did *DIS LOCATIONS*. It had a generally pretty good response. It certainly did some of the things I wanted it to do, in terms of staking out some open territory. It actually had a better response over the long haul than it had in the near term, I must say. It's interesting that people talk about it, particularly in Europe and Latin America. So that was that.

SZ: Why would that be?

RS: Well, because it was more avant garde than what they were expecting. It was a serious show. I remember, there was actually, at the Modern, when I first was there, only Elisa Behnk who was the communications assistant director, and she was not helpful. I went in to talk about the catalogue, and she said she would issue me a thirty- three-page catalogue. I said, "What?" So I had to fight for even a small catalogue for it, because the feeling was we would do this, we would get it out of the way, and we wouldn't make a big deal of it. In fact, that catalogue has circulated quite a lot, even though it wasn't a big edition. I keep finding it places, people read it and so on, and I get requests for translations.

Then there were a number of things I wanted to do. I wanted to do a late de Kooning show, which I ended up bringing to the Modern, a version which was done in San Francisco. But I worked very extensively on the catalogue for that, because I felt strongly that it had to be well researched and carefully researched, because there was a lot of confusion about whether those paintings were his or not. I didn't want to use the Museum to validate something where there was such a question. I had ruled it out, but, anyway, that became a major research project.

Then, eventually, it came to the Modern and I reconfigured it, because I actually didn't agree with the selections made by the San Francisco curator. So I added onto it, rounded it out and so on. I didn't take out a few paintings I would like to have taken out, then I added some. But that was one of the things I wanted to do. Another thing I dearly wanted to do was a Robert Ryman show and a Bruce Nauman show. In the case of the Nauman show, that also was something that was underway at another museum, so we simply joined forces and made sure that that came to the Modern. It had been offered, I gather, before I arrived at the Museum, when there were preliminary discussions about it, and it was bumped. In fact, one of the curious things is that Neal Benezra, who was one of the principal organizers (the other was Kelly Adams) was having trouble at the Art Institute, getting any enthusiasm for it. Actually, he left the Art Institute before it was finished, so the show never went there.

Ryman was a case where there was interest as well, but in that case we actually teamed up, and I did that show with Nick Serota and, truth be told, we did most of it. Working with Nick is a problematic issue; he's very territorial, so we had to fight a good deal to make sure that he claimed we were excessive, etc. At one point, for example just to give you an idea how high-handed Nick could be -- it was decided that I would write the introduction with him, for the catalogue, and he got incensed that a mere curator of the exhibition should sign, a pareil to him, who was a museum director. He got very, very up on his back legs, etc., until Dick Oldenburg, to his great credit, just said, "I'm the director of this Museum, and this is what I want."

SZ: And that was that.

RS: Yes, but that's petty stuff. So I wanted to do those two shows particularly, because neither Ryman nor Nauman were in general discussion in this country. Peter Schjeldahl, who had written an important piece in '84, I guess it was, when a Nauman show had been done at 120 Greene Street, which was the Castelli annex -- That really made a huge difference, in terms of American appreciation of Nauman, because he had been shown in '72 at the Whitney Museum and the L.A. County Museum, and that show had been very important for artists, but made very little impression on the art world. He wasn't heavily collected. He was widely appreciated in Europe, and there were a group of artists in that category - Nauman, Ryman, and Artschwager, to a certain extent, although he eventually had a Whitney show; Richard Tuttle, etc. So I wanted to do Ryman, Nauman, and eventually Tuttle. The Tuttle show I tried to bring to the Modern and was unsuccessful. That was all just about the time I left.

SZ: Unsuccessful for what reason?

RS: The present director [Glenn Lowry] was not interested. In any case, those were three artists who had begun in the '70s, who had developed large bodies of very complicated work, and were very important to younger generations of artists, who were not the figures that got attention in official mainstream or history. Ryman was talked about by the *October* crowd as being exemplary of the last possible things that painting would ever be able to do, rather than as an artist who represented the fact that painting was an open door. Tuttle was not even discussed by them at all, as far as I can tell, and Nauman was always thought to be second-fiddle (or third- or fourth-fiddle) to Bob Morris, who was the person who fit the schema better. He, of course, wrote some of the script himself, very well. He's a good writer about what he intends to do with his work, and Roz, a great deal of her thinking is directly indebted to Morris.

In any case, the hierarchies were such that Nauman was a difficult artist for most people, because of the variety of things he did. He was difficult because he made very aggressive work. So I wanted to do those and some other things, but not Tuttle, Ryman, de Kooning and Nauman.

The Ryman I was able to do basically the way I wanted to, with mixed institutional collaboration. I was close to Bob, and I had actually seen his Guggenheim show in 1972, when I was going around with Bobsy, and was really, really impressed by it. I had never thought about painting like that, at that time. I was still stuck in other things. But that show really, really made an impression on me, so when I was in a position to do that, I thought this was really an important show to do, because of the work, first, and its breadth; secondly, because of its absence from discussion in mainstream circles, so-called. Frank Stella got all the attention at the Modern, and he got an awful lot of the attention elsewhere. If not, it was the Colorfield painters, and so on. I thought Ryman was much the more interesting artist, overall, although there were great parts of Stella, and some good parts of Nauman and others. Also, because of his relationship to the art-history community, where he was seen as a punctuation mark rather than as a major sign of continuity of practice.

So that was the first one, and that was a show that involved the Tate and the Modern as co-organizers, then it was shown during the [inaudible]. And it was shown in the [inaudible] of the Walker, and it was shown in San Francisco, in SFMoMA's old building. Then Nauman, as I said, I brought to the Modern and did there. Of course, I had done a Nauman commission for the *DIS LOCATIONS* show, so Nauman had already been seen in that context. I also brought a couple things of his, major pieces that had been in the Eckhardt collection. I remember the guards used to laugh, because the piece that was in *DIS LOCATIONS* had this [inaudible] – "Help me, hurt me, sociology, feed me, eat me, anthropoi;gy." He sings it in a very piercing voice, very loud, and it's like a cannon. At first, when you hear it, it's very assaultive; gradually, it resolves into chords and so on. The guards, whom I got to know very

quickly and liked a lot, and had a lot of banter with -- they would say, "Are you going to have that 'Help me-hurt me' guy back?" When Bruce finally came in, they liked him a lot, and when Bruce came back to do the show, they liked him even more. So those were the ones I knew I wanted to do early, and did one way or another.

What else? The [Gerhard] Richter show took six years to get in the Museum, and that was an exhibition which I wanted very badly to do. I was put on stop-and-go and stop-and-go, stop-and-go. This was, of course, during the latter part of my time there, so this was with the current director. He would make commitments, and he kept doing things that indicated that he didn't want it. It was a very difficult situation because here we had a major artist who had had one retrospective and mid-career show in the Midwest, but had not come East, to New York. He was going to be seventy once the show finally arrived, once we finally got it on the books, and [there was] this weird kind of noncommittal, on-again/off-again attitude. The same director once said to me, "Well, give me a checklist. That should be a no-brainer." At which point I said, "Actually, it is a brainer." I got frozen for that.

Anyway, that was a show that was very hard to get in, but it did get in. Another one that was a major, major loss was a show that Debby Wye, Magdalena Dabrowski and I worked on called *Breaking Boundaries*, which we worked on for three years, and which was going to be a two-and-a-half-floor show, roughly the size of the *Matisse* show. It was about the transition out of painting, in Europe, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, into performance installation and conceptual art; then, the partial re-assertion of painting in the late '60s/early '70s, where painting no longer looked the way it did, because of all these things that had happened in between times; and, therefore, particularly for an American audience, it wasn't a matter of the continuity of formal histories but, rather, how non-painting practices altered, fundamentally, the way people thought about painting. It was also an attempt to kind of counter the notion that once painting had moved in that direction, that painting was obsolete and there was no use for it -- which was a prevalent opinion in certain quarters.

So we were going to start, basically, with the return of [Lucio] Fontana to Italy in 1948, and it was going to be Fontana, [Fiero] Manzoni, [Franz] Kline, all of them represented by large bodies of work; a quite large grouping of nouveaux realists from France; and some allied artists of that type, elsewhere -- the Actionists, in Austria, etc. -- into [Joseph] Beuys, and the point where Beuys feeds into [Sigmar] Folke, Richter, and [Francesco] Clemente - *arte povera,* which was going to have a large selection, as well. The thing was not to tie it off at the end, but to sort of open it up and do, in some cases, mini- retrospectives, in other cases to do bracketing of large bodies of work, like Beuys, in other cases to do a smorgasbord (that's not the right word for Italians, but), a smorgasbord of *arte povera* so that you would really have antipasto, so you could really see the arrangement. There had been a show, a good show that Germano Celant had done called *The Knot*, that was at P.S. 1. But the tendency had, number one, always been to show it through Germano. He had controlled, until his recent show at the Walker, every major exhibition of the *arte povera* people.

Secondly, to show it in context, because the purpose was to get away from the national organizations -- not a French show, or an Italian show, or whatever it is -- but to show the trans-continental aspects, where the boundaries between medium is dissolved; the boundaries between country is dissolved; where there were isolated, individual artists, like Herbert Izants, or Jan [inaudible] or somebody like that, to show just enough of them so you could see the connection. In any case, we had everything up and running. We had catalogue essays. Benjamin Buchloh was going to write something, as I recall. [inaudible] was going to write something. I was writing something, and all the principal curators were. It was going to be a really important change of direction for the Museum. We discussed it for a long time, in curatorial meetings, as being like a spine. Off of this spine would come individual, monographic shows, and eventually we did the Polke drawing show that Margit Rowell did -- but this antedated her coming, although she was there for some of the time we were

working on it -- all these kinds of things would grow off of this spine, once it had been established what the range was. It was going to de-Frenchify the Museum

SZ: -- which was exactly what you were there to do, right?

RS: Right. So we de-Frenchified the Museum, de-formalized the Museum, all of these things -- not to do it destructively, but just to get the material in the building, lay it out, and demonstrate that it was really interesting. Number two, that you could make coherent things out of it; that you could do it in ways that were directly connected to present practices and present issues, etc. We had the letters in the mail for all the loans, and had previously had a discussion, weeks in advance of this, saying, "We're ready to go. If there's any problem, tell us now." No problems. We suddenly got a memo saying that the budget was half of what it would have taken to do the show.

We regrouped, the three of us, and I argued strongly (Debby really agreed, I think Magdalena was less certain but she did agree in the end) that we were not going to truncate the show; that we would make reasonable adjustments on money. There were certainly things that would be more expensive than others, but we weren't going to truncate the show. There was no sufficient movement elsewhere so it died, just like that. But that had to do with the Richter thing, because in one case we had already made extensive arrangements to buy work through a dealer who represented Richter. So she knew about this, and when the Museum, at the eleventh hour, made a total aboutface and cancelled an exhibition of that order of magnitude, it made her and everybody else very furious. So that was the beginning of some very bad times. The acquisition (which we can get to) of the October, 1977 paintings, which I organized, fell into this same set of circumstances, in certain ways.

There were other things along the line, but those were the big ones. Then there was the end-of-century proposition [*MoMA2000*], and that was a very long, complicated, very interesting discussion across the curatorial staff. There were numbers of us who had serious misgivings about it as a package, but thought it would be very useful to

do some of that kind of exhibition work, and to do it in a way where we, as a Museum, thought out loud, so to speak. I can't remember who had different positions. I think Peter Galassi was more or less on this side but I can't remember. His position tended to change, let's put it that way, but I think he was generally sympathetic. But the feeling was that we don't want to do a millennial exhibition, because we don't want to put the Museum in the situation where it's announcing that you're drawing conclusions for the 20th century and the 21st.

We'd gotten away from doing that kind of thing in terms of the previous five or six years. The whole tenor of the department had changed; the department of the Museum had changed, and we didn't want to be put in that position, or have people think that that was what we were doing. Also, we wanted that each exhibition speak, in a sense, not through the curator; i.e., that it was about the curator's personality, but that people would understand that the Museum was polyphonic, and it was not a matter of what "the Museum" thought, but of what could be thought within the Museum, within its collections and context and so on. That was something that I think there was absolutely universal agreement on.

SZ: It was inter-departmental, too, which I think was part of --

RS: Actually, the inter-departmental combinations came up later. The idea would be that it would be Museum-wide. The idea was that it would be collaborative, but they actually had these teams that came up after another basic decision was made, and that was the decision to, in fact, do it around the millenium which I think was an expedient decision, to avoid having to do other exhibitions, partly, to save money. I think many of us felt that it should have been staggered; that we should have given over, basically, an entire floor (which would be collection floors normally), continue our regular exhibition programs, and then turn one floor to these rotating things, and have it begin a little before the millenium and run a little after the millenium, and be a kind of moving entity. That would have served the purposes that we all felt needed to be served, without making it this kind of big production number, and without

attaching to it expectations and pretensions that nobody really wanted to have. But it was decided, as a matter of strategic planning, I guess, that it should all be put into one basket. Then it was decided that the curatorial team should be headed by, essentially, one person. That was somewhat modified in my case, because Peter Galassi and I were equals in terms of our actual standing in organizing it. That was where it started. Putting me in the period which was 1920 to 1960, which was the middle third, was not a decision I made.

SZ: Was that Kirk?

RS: I don't know. I think it was arrived at by department heads, plus Glenn. But I think the thought was that Kirk and I should not do it together. That was too many people in the same department, in one area, for the contemporary thing. By this time, of course, he was already sick. He was very keen to do a contemporary show. He wanted to get back into the area that he had tried to deal with in *High and Low*. Being back, I think he wanted to go into that.

I actually was very pleased by that. I liked the chance to work with the earlier, historical material. I got a lot of questions about it, and a lot of people were sort of doing Kremlinology about why I wasn't in the contemporary part. After the fact, people complained about what Kirk did, and said, "Gee, I wish you'd done it," blah, blah, blah. But from my point of view, it was actually great because I grew up with a full sense of what modern art could be, but I hadn't been able to play much with that material.

So I had a great time. For that I did essentially seven exhibitions, I was one of the co-team persons. Then there was a disastrous book we published, which none of us wanted to publish and we were, again, told we must produce a saleable item. Essentially, what happened was that I dictated that. There was this wonderful guy named Charles Williams (who died, actually, of AIDS later on, very shortly thereafter). Nobody else wanted to write it, and since I wrote a lot, people tended to

think it was easy. So it was, "You go do it, Rob." Charles and I sat down, and I did it extemporaneously. Then we knitted it together, and Peter did some stuff on top of that, and that was it. But that was a complete mess, from the very beginning. Within a month or two of our getting involved in these shows, we said, "This is craziness. There's not a book here. We should not do this book." The one for the first part didn't do very well, either, although I guess it sold better. But all those things were simply cooked, for no good reason. And it was contrary to the principle, because the idea of the show was to use the time we had to do some serious thinking, which means you couldn't have a catalogue because if you got it right, you wouldn't get it right until opening day. So the whole forcing of that issue, the timing of it and the institutional stuff, was a mess.

That whole project -- I think some of it actually came out very well. The public was indulgent of the parts that didn't come out, and understood that some genuinely worthwhile stuff had happened in the meantime. But it was part of the whole, increasingly top-down, corporate -- Curators were told what to do, they weren't asked what to do. The chief curators were being told what to do, they weren't being listened to in terms of what their advice was. Without having been in the room, my sense is that John [Elderfield] was very keen to have the role that he had in the first thing, because he was very keen to stake his territory out. He was very keen to impress, he was very keen to prove that he had broad knowledge, etc. And he, who was actually (and genuinely and good at it) a classic/formalist/modernist, wanted to prove that he was actually a rock-and-rolling post-modernist, and he wasn't. I think his version of the show was the least good. As a result, he was sort of out of character.

Ours had good parts and bad parts, but it did well what it did overall. And it's a difficult period, too, because it's really the transitional period between the first, early, glorious days, and then the next big round. We stopped in 1960, so we dealt with Ab Ex, etc. I think Kirk's show, also, had some very good parts of it and some less good parts of it. But it did get it into the present, and he used his occasion very wisely to

advertise what had been collected in this area. I think people were really quite surprised at the range of things that had been collected. In truth, all along, Kynaston, Carolyn, Linda, all the people who were there before I got there, and, certainly, while I was there, all of us in our department were very actively collecting, but the opportunities to exhibit were small, because the contemporary galleries were so often cannibalized to do contemporary shows. That was a choice that everybody made, and that everybody made because they believed that that was the right choice, but it had a high price.

SZ: What about the changes in the collection that you did influence, in terms of acquisitions, while you were there, and what the character, the broadening, was?

RS: I bought a lot of things. I bought some big things, and I also bought quite a few small things. One of the interests I had was to collect some lesser-known figures from periods that we had already fleshed out with the major figures.

SZ: Give me an example of what that might be.

RS: I got people from Chicago, not because I'm a Chicago nationalist, but just because I knew they were good. So we didn't have a Knot painting, and I acquired two. I tried, in cases like this, to bracket it. If you had a really good career that had more than one act, to make sure that you had something of each. I didn't pay for it but got given a [inaudible] painting, and so on, like that. I acquired, I think, the first major [Piero] Manzoni; the first [Yayoi] Kusama painting; I acquired -- Well, I worked very hard with Elaine Dannheiser on all the things that were brought in there. Basically, I chose what was in Elaine's gift. She made a presentation, Kirk passed it to me, I checked back with Kirk and I checked back with Margit, in Drawings, when there were cases of things where I thought other eyes and other views would make a difference. But I decided, since we were given a dollar amount to work with that Elaine could afford, I decided which of the things we would go for and which we would leave out.

So within that there was a lot of material. It's Elaine who bought all of it, or virtually all of it. Some of it she bought with advice. So within that, within the shaping of that collection and bringing that in, it was mine. There's a piece -- I forget what it's called, it has a long title -- it's basically a series of toxic materials, all wrapped up together in a bedroll, that leaves a stain wherever you lay it down. I aggressively bought Ryman, and there are still Rymans that Ron Lauder has bought for us that he will give eventually, so that we will have a full deck of Rymans. We had some very good ones already, but Ryman is one of those people who is best understood if you make a "room" of the artist, and we had, oh, I don't know, four, maybe five, and I acquired maybe another six or seven, including gifts from Bob [Ryman] himself.

What else? I arranged the acquisition of the Richter October paintings. I found the opportunity, number one. Then I went to Germany and talked to Gerhard, whom I did not know at that time. It was around that time that I sort of formalized the idea of a show, but I had wanted to do it before so I sort of put the two things together. But, I said to him, basically, "I don't want this to be an acquisition where American dollars take away from Europe something that, for its meaning, depends on being in Europe. I really think these are great paintings, and I think they have meanings that go beyond the specifics of the German context." In fact, I said, "You know, we had this kind of stuff happen in this country, and no American artist has ever tackled this subject. But it's something that every person of that generation, and obviously more, sense. This work is important as art history and as painting, and it's also important in a 'news' ways." He said, basically, that he had originally intended them to stay in Germany, and that, number one, [inaudible] had somehow actually made a bid to acquire them; that they were in Frankfurt, and the director there thought that Gerhard had given them to him but didn't really pursue it. Later on he did pursue it, but found out that their backers, who were a couple of the principal German banks, would not go for it. It was impossible, politically. One other place, the Dionysis Museum in Cologne, had expressed some interest. But anyway, a more serious attempt had been made to acquire them in Germany, and secondarily, he said that he now

understood, ten years after, that as long as they remained in Germany they would be seen as partisan, topical pictures. That was not what he wanted, and he felt that if they were in a great collection of the history of modern art, they would be understood for what they were, and that the parts that were political and historical would remain, and actually enter into a larger discourse.

I came back to Kirk and I said, "I can do this." The price was a fraction of what it would cost to buy even one full-scale painting nowadays. We bought the whole thing for $3 million. There was a ten-year pay-out, and it was a very favorable deal. It was a lot of money. Not compared to some things that happened thereafter, but it was a lot of money. We were able to put together a variety of different funds and commitments, etc., to do it, and to get Gerhard to agree to this. The other part of this was that he put them on deposit at the museum in Frankfurt, and in addition to not wanting to tear them away from Europe if they belonged there permanently, I didn't want to tear them away from Frankfurt, and have him break his agreement. So we agreed to let that ten-year period run out, and that we would finish paying for them within a five-year payout. We would agree to pay off the thing and let the thing run out, so that when they came to New York, finally, they would come free and clear, with no commitments in any direction that would make it problematic.

So that went through, and there was some hesitation on the committee, but it went away very, very quickly. I think the strong endorsement of a few people made some people who did see them politically as volatile, give in, basically.

What else? I tried to acquire a major Leon Golub painting, out of Saatchi's collection. We began selling off the first round of Saatchis. I had a painting called *"Mercenaries Four,"* which is the best of Golub's 1980s kind of -- It's a group of soldiers, black and white, facing off, and you don't know whether they're getting into a fight, or whether they're joking, or whatever. It's the least polemical; it's most about potential violence and least about illustrated violence or victimization, etc. It's a really, really good painting. They were still coming to meetings at that point. In 1959, Bill had reviewed

Peter Selz's Golub show, and it was the beginning of the end of Selz's time there. He ridiculed Golub as kind of the worst of the worst.

So Rubin came regularly, he still had rights to come, and he came to that meeting. I presented the painting. Jerry Speyer was a collector of Golub's paintings and had mixed feelings. He wanted a tougher one. He wanted one that was obviously violent, and I wanted one that was precisely not. It is, in fact, the strongest of those paintings, I'm convinced. But, you know. Go figure. Ronald was open to it, and numbers of people you would not have expected to be open to it were. Then Bill got up and just destroyed it. He claimed that Golub's technique came from [inaudible] which is a stretch. He spun out all this --

SZ: Pardon me. What would be wrong with that, in any event?

RS: Yes. What he did was what he did with Kynaston and his portraiture show. He tried to prove that nothing was new under the sun, and so on. So he basically did an "Et tu, Brute?" and "Brutus is an honorable man talk: "Golub is an estimable painter, *but* " and then proceeded to claim that nothing was original, and that it all came from someplace else. It went on for ten or fifteen minutes, to the visible discomfort of the people in the room, who understood what was going on, but were not in the habit of encountering Bill, and he was in full sail. He destroyed it.

But [inaudible], who did not have the, best sense of tact, sent Bill two postcards -- which have since been reproduced in a book that Gerry Marzorati did about Leon -- in which he shows Bill pissing on his own hand, and then drinking out of a urinal. They were quite funny, but they were probably not a wise move. And Bill actually mentioned -- he made it very clear that this was a personal vendetta, but he cloaked it in art history like that. Sometime later -- the bottom of the bottomless -- he came up to Nancy Spero at an opening, and expressed his liking for Leon's work. And then later, by the way, he tried to force us, almost, to buy a [inaudible] painting which is of

the same ilk, only not as good. The very things he disliked about Leon he could suddenly like -- It was completely not about art, it was about other stuff.

So that was a mess. I tried to buy an Adrian Piper piece. Adrian was very worried about my presenting this particular one. She was afraid I was going to get fired. I didn't, but it didn't go anywhere. There were a number of things I tried to buy that were hot potatoes as far as people were concerned; some things they just didn't like, which is fair enough. What else did I get? There was a lot. Robert Gober. I bought an installation of Ilya Kabakov at a time when that was uncommon in the Museum, to buy installations. In fact, he had not sold but one, I think, in this country. I bought the Medusa's heads of Scott Burton's. One of the funny comments -- Barbara Jakobson could be very funny, sometimes destructively, sometimes supportively so, but she was lots of fun to watch. I remember on this particular occasion she knew the vote was going to go my way. She didn't like the piece for whatever reason (I can't be sure, because Burton is somebody she would normally have liked), but anyway, being Barbara, she said, "Well, I think it's sort of like the *Hide-and-Seek* of your generation, isn't it Rob?" I liked Barbara. She was a troublemaker, but she was always "the style" and had good judgment about lots of things.

What else? When I was first introduced to the acquisitions committee, I remember, I was brought in. I knew very few people at the table, and Aggie introduced me. She said, "This is Robert Storr, whom I first met at an AIDS awareness benefit." Now that was at a time before we had done the "Day Without Art" programs, which is something Philip and Aggie and I worked on together -- three projects (they're still going). But that was a very strong statement for her to have made, because it was before certain people sitting at that table were at all comfortable with the word. I don't know whether Philip Johnson was bringing David [Whitney] to public events even yet. I don't think he was. But it was in those years that the change from the unstated gayness of major figures, staff figures and others, to the open gayness of many people made a difference.

Of course, I was hired because, in some people's view, I was the one straight male. And the fact that I had this bookstore experience with the two women who ran it, and had grown up in a very, very gay world, actually, meant that I was quite comfortable on both sides of the line. People who were afraid of gay people were not afraid of me, and I could build some bridges back and forth -- and did. Many other people were actively doing that, as well, and Philip Yenawine was the last person who did it in a way that cost him dearly, I think. But then, also, he wasn't always as tactful as he might have been. I think he was great, and I think it was necessary, what he did. But he really ticked off certain people.

Other things happened afterwards, but, also, the AIDS thing got so bad. And, also, Aggie's daughter coming out made a big change in her; she put her weight behind it, and the whole dynamic changed. I don't know if you've heard this wonderful dinner-party story about Philip Johnson's birthday party?

SZ: I don't think so.

RS: This is a great one. This is Philip Johnson's ninetieth birthday party. They really put on a show for him. They had tables made out of glass and steel, with all his major buildings as centerpieces. It was a hugely expensive thing. This is one of [inaudible]'s better moments, I must say. It was the high end of the patron network, staff, etc., a very elegant dinner. The co-hosts were David Whitney and Daniel Shapiro. David Whitney got up -- and I had a direct sight-line to Jasper and to David Rockefeller and a few other people who were at the end of the -- [Interruption] So anyway, David got up –

SZ: Whitney.

RS: David Whitney got up and thanked everybody for coming, and said he was very glad to be a co-host of this dinner. He said it was very complicated living with a ninety-year-old man, because his teeth didn't work, his joints didn't work, and lots of things

didn't work. "But," he said, "he is still really great in the sack." You couldn't believe that, in that company. Jasper's jaw just dropped. I have actually once seen Bob Rauschenberg hug and kiss David Rockefeller, and Rauschenberg was wearing some very extravagant outfit, and here was this -- David likes him well enough, but the social – So that whole thing broke the ice. Later on --

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

RS: Later on, Glenn Lowry got up and introduced Daniel Shapiro as the next co-host, and said, in parting, "And I'll bet he's pretty good in the sack, too." I have to give him that one. The other story on cocktail parties, or dinner parties -- there are many of them - was the Chicago collector Hubert Newman, who was absolutely impossible, and who was the lender to the Chuck Close show, with whom I had to deal with a great deal. I'll tell you about the Chuck Close show, too. That was another story. But, anyway, Newman was an impossible man. His parents, whose house I visited in Chicago, were great, great, great collectors, and he and his brother -- his mother was still alive at that time -- he and his brother were sort of dining out on the collection, which they actually had not made, and they were lording it over people. They were just impossible people. Carolyn Lanchner dearly wanted to borrow his Légers, or some of his Légers, for her Léger show. He had put insurance values on them that made them prohibitive.

Nevertheless, he was invited to the Léger dinner, out of courtesy, etc., so he and his then girlfriend came to the dinner. We were sitting with Bill Lieberman, Jennifer Barnett was on one side of Hubert, and then Bill Rubin was next to Jennifer, a little bit further away. I can't remember who else was there -- a couple of other staff people. It was one of those tables where staff was in heavy proportion, because we had a difficult character, and we wanted to surround him. And, sure enough, he got there, his girlfriend got completely smashed, and she was wearing a $10,000 outfit and a few other things like that. But she proceeded, in the middle of the speeches -- which had gone on, I must say, too long -- to start , in a very loud voice, "I'm so sick

and tired of these dinners. All these people do is congratulate themselves. They never talk about the artists. You know, Léger was a Communist! He would've *hated* this kind of thing!" On and on and on. Jennifer was desperately trying to field this, and she had great style in these situations, but it was out of control. Finally, Bill Lieberman leaned over and said, "I think you should go home." She said, "Well, I can't go home." He said, "I think you can just go get a taxi." And she said, "Well, I haven't got any money here," or something like that. At which point he pulled out a twenty-dollar bill, creased it down the middle, and handed it to her across the table.

SZ: That's so Bill Lieberman.

RS: It was a great gesture. Then he said to Hubert, "I knew your parents. *They* were great collectors."

SZ: Oh, dear.

RS: That kind of stuff. There was a lot of it, but that was one of the better ones. I bought a lot of things. I bought lesser-known Americans. I bought conceptual work. I bought installations. I bought Europeans who weren't represented. I acquired Latin American art. There was still some money in Nelson Rockefeller's Inter-American Fund, and I spent, I guess, the last part of that. I acquired a piece, for example, of Jac Leirner. I went on a number of trips, and this was very good for me and one of the nice things about the Museum in general. Because we were the Modern, and because there was interest, now, in these things we were able to get from the Japan Foundation, from the [inaudible] in Latin America, and a host of others. I went out as an eye-ear researcher/ambassador, etc., so in the first four or five years I traveled constantly. Also, because I was writing a lot, people hired me to go places because I would give lectures. So the Modern paid for practically no travel for me. The travel allowances for curators were then $3,000 a year, or something like that, and I took lots and lots of trips on these foundations; or, actually, I paid for them by talking.

The good side of it is, I went to Brazil, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina, early on, and because of my experience with Sequeiros in Mexico, I was very interested in Latin American art but not familiar with the scenes around there. I knew some of the art but not the scenes, so I was able to establish contacts; I was able to acquire works; I was able to send out a message that the Modern was actively engaged in this. And now, of course, with other people in the departments, it's become very active. But this was before Paolo [inaudible] came. It was actually on that trip that I met Paolo. He was out of work, and sort of living as a free-lance critic and stuff like that. I actually said to Paolo, "You should come into the wider world. You should come back to the States," and so on.

And with Japan, the same thing. I went there for the Japan Foundation. I went back there and did a show for Toshyio, the Museum collection. So I was doing a lot of this kind of thing. The Jac Leirner story was, I was there, and she had this piece in her studio which was 3,200 packs of Marlboro cigarettes that she had smoked. She had strung it on this piece of surgical cord, and it was absolutely beautiful. It sort of looked like an Ellsworth Kelly curve. I bought a piece of Ellsworth, actually. The one that we gave in Dick's honor was a piece that I brought in, which I think was the first of Ellsworth that the Museum had bought in years and years and years. So that Kirk got very interested in Ellsworth, and there was sort of an Ellsworthorama in the last part of the time that I was there. But Ellsworth is somebody else who had been frozen out, with the concentration on Frank. I had always liked his work, and did a catalogue for him some years before, when I was independent. So I tried to cultivate that, and did. This piece of Jac's looked like an Ellsworth Kelly curve, so I said, "Oh, I want that." And she said, "Fine. Why don't you buy it?" I said, "Okay. Fine. How much is it?" It was -- I forget -- a relatively small amount of money -$10,000-15,000 -- something like that. So I just packed it in my bags, and I brought it back. She gave me, or tried to give me -- What she'd done basically was used every part of these packs. She made pieces out of the foil; she made pieces out of the tax stamp; she

made pieces out of the cellophane, etc. She gave me this piece that was called "Lungs," which was made out of two cellophane --

SZ: "Lungs," did you say?

RS: It was called "Lungs." The whole series was called "Lungs," they were like "lungs," because they were in a box. I said, "I can't accept gifts from you," so she gave it to the Museum. But she had made every piece of things -- these packs had become something. So we got Jac's piece there. I bought a [Norbert] Kricke. We had done a Kricke show for "Projects." So that kind of got busy, in that area, as well, and I had a lot to do with it, although it was a shared enterprise.

SZ: So one wonders what will happen to these things, in the new configuration?

RS: Well, to Kirk's credit, he changed the way Latin American art was hung, and I think it was something that came to him gradually. But he did it, and that's what counts. When I arrived, we still had, if not Milton Avery, then we had Wilfred Lams' "Jungle" in the lobby by the hatcheck. There were what I called the "off ramps," but the walls on the galleries, as you came out into the escalator section, you would see [Rufino] Tamayo, maybe "The Two Dogs," or you would see [Jose Clemente] Orozco's "Zapatistas," or something like that. But the Mexican material -- of which we had a lot, and there was virtually nothing else -- was usually hung in "dead" space. I talked about it a lot. So Kirk put Frida Kahlo into artists who were Surrealists, and figurative, romantic stuff. He put Siqueiros' "Collective Suicide" in a way that would be a preamble for Pollock. It followed, in historical logic, which was a fairly straightforward, formalist logic, but it did what had not been done before, which was to integrate Latin American and European art. It was also the time when he was reading, or re-reading, Barr's writing, so the torpedo model (which he talked about a great deal at a certain point), was something that I don't think he was thinking about at all when he arrived at the Museum and took over the job. But gradually, as he sort of delved into Barr's

history, he began to understand the logic of the collection in the light of that, and he began to rehang the collection to represent that.

SZ: What I'd like you to do is talk just a tiny bit about -- in terms of your own freedom and what happened -- Dick's management style.

RS: Dick's management style was a carry-over in many ways from having dealt with Bill; that is to say, a lot of stuff was pre-negotiated between him and Bill; and, correspondingly, it was pre-negotiated with senior curators. But Kirk's relation to Dick was never that of Bill, partly because Kirk wasn't [inaudible] -- that way, and partly because he didn't have the same standing, in fact, in terms of the institutional history of the Museum. So a lot of stuff of that nature was dealt with upstairs, in meetings. But, in fact, the curatorial meetings, where senior curators, full chiefs and full curators all sat, were very open and very democratic in conversation. One didn't have to wait one's turn; you could disagree with people. Of course, John Szarkowski was still there, and he was wonderful because he'd come back comfortably well-lit after lunches at the Century, and expatiate. But that's all right. Anyway, he would speak forcefully. This was before Peter Galassi had gotten his job, but Peter was there also. There were protests over the imperialism in Painting and Sculpture. John would make his joke about the difference between art and photography being $25,000, because that was what expensive photographs cost.

That's another thing. I got Peter Norton a grant very early on (I think he was the second person to get one), I forget what the exact amount was. It was $75,000, and the terms of Peter's grant -- Peter was just entering into the game at this point, he was not a major player. But the terms of the grant were that the curator should decide; that it should not be money spent by committee, or at the bidding of the senior curator; that this was the opportunity for a young curator to take some chances, and to buy something outright. So I bought a Cindy Sherman photograph. I bought Annette Messager and something else to round it out. But at a certain point, before I bought the last thing, I had the remaining twenty-five, or something like that -

- I forget whether it was -- I was down to the bottom of the barrel, and I had a shot to buy Charles Ray's photograph "Family Romance," which I thought was a great piece, which had just been made. It cost $75,000. It's now worth $1 million-some (the astronomical price changes took place at this time). I went to Peter and I said, "Can I put your money together with somebody else's? I need to buy this thing," because the money I had left over (whatever it was) was not enough. He said, "I don't like to do that. I'll give you seventy-five more."

When I bought the Cindy Sherman, that was about $25,000, and that was one of the situations where John would say things like, "The difference between art and photography is about $25,000." So they were very open, and one was not told what to do. I was never assigned a show. I was told that I had, in the first instance that I had to do a show. I also was actually given many opportunities to do shows that people would expect that I would get, or that I expected that I would get, partly because I came with ideas, I was forceful, and I got things moving. But I was never told to do a show. The one real exception was the Chuck Close show. I had written about Chuck, and I was interested in his work but did not think, actually, he was the move we should make. It was complicated, because he was negotiating with the Metropolitan and the Modern simultaneously. The Met made him an offer he couldn't refuse -- or, at least that's what it sounded like -- and, also, he didn't like the way we hung shows in the upstairs, third-floor galleries.

Anyway, he came roaring out of the Ryman show, at the opening, and he said, "I made the wrong decision," because he liked the way the Ryman show looked. Then not too long later, there was trouble in paradise, and the story would be hard to straighten out. But his contention was that the space that was promised him by Philippe [de Montebello] was reneged on, and that he then broke with the Metropolitan and came, basically, to Kirk, with whom he'd cultivated a friendship, as well. By that time Glenn was on the job, and he and Kirk decided that they were going to do a Chuck Close show, and pick this piece up. I had already prepared a

Chuck Close show at the time it was first under discussion, and I was willing to do it but I did not, in fact, think it was the right thing to do. I thought we'd have enough money, I thought we'd have enough Americans, I thought in general we should I think he's an important artist, but I don't think he's of the same magnitude as some of the other people. He turned out to be a hugely popular show, but that's a separate issue. It was a very awkward thing. It didn't happen. Chuck was the one who opted out. I was quietly relieved. It came back. I was quietly worried, but I went back to work on it, because Kirk asked me if I would "prep" it up. He basically wanted to do the show, and I was just as happy that that be the case. I think he wanted me to be his second, but we didn't really negotiate that very much, because things were already getting very strange -- not between me and him, but the whole dynamic was getting very strange. So I just soldiered on.

The decision was made to do this, and I said, "Okay. That's the way it is." It was not long thereafter that Kirk got sick. I can't remember exactly the dates and I may be wrong -- the things fall together -- but it was around that time that Kirk got sick, and he couldn't do it. He had made this commitment, and he simply said, "Would you do this for me?" and I said, "By all means." So I did it as much for Kirk as I did it for any other reason. But that's the only case where I did a show that I did not initiate of my own accord. I made sure that Kirk got in the catalogue, because I thought it was important that he have his voice. I thought that the print work was really important, so I brought Debby in on it. Basically, it was a show that I could have done all by myself. I had the mixed feelings. I felt that, for a whole host of reasons, it should be done with the print component of Debby taking a bow and Kirk getting due credit for having this kind of commitment to Chuck, and so forth. So that's how that one happened.

SZ: This is sort of an obvious question, but given your initial reluctance to enter the institution and then your decision to do it, from here, what does it look like to you?

RS: What does that time look like?

SZ: I mean are you glad you did it? It sounds like it was --

RS: I had a wonderful time for the first ten out of twelve years. It got bad starting about the sixth year, in various and sundry ways. But Kirk and I worked very well together, as I said. I looked out for him and he looked out for me when there were tensions. For example, he suddenly decided at the time of the *Century* show that he wanted to write the Gerhard Richter book. He'd forgotten that we had negotiated that, and that we had made a commitment together that I was going to write it. There was a flare-up, and he backed out of that. He was reminded, and sort of got himself straight. He got into sort of a professor/graduate-student head where the professor does what he wants. I tried to remind him that I was not his graduate student. Anyway, we had made a deal regarding Richter, and this was not what Richter was expecting. I gently led him back.

There's a little, incidental story about that, by the way. That book would not have happened but for Michael Magreth We had committed to do it and we would have done something, but the size of the book and so on was very much a result of Michael's willingness to take the risk, and that, in turn, had to do with the fact that he had spent a large part of his career in Germany, and that his daughter, who was involved in student-activist politics in recent years had, in fact, been harassed by the police, and he understood exactly what this whole thing was about. He made a commitment. Dick [Oldenburg] was always very correct with me, and I think it was a combination of ingredients. One, I got his humor and enjoyed it. Two, his Chicago years and the fact that he knew Bobsy, knew that part of my life which nobody else knew, and which I did not discuss at the Museum. In think Bill also knew about it. In fact, I know he knew about it.

SZ: Bill Rubin?

RS: Bill Rubin. It was just never an issue. I had not arrived at, or gone through any of that stuff. But in Dick's case it actually worked, because Dick has a sense of social stuff

but he also has a sense of the ironies of it, etc. So a combination of temperamental things, past histories, and his own predicament (he was there toward the end, etc.) -- We got along very well. We still do, actually. We're quite friendly now. I did the Art Spiegelman show, and that also was a slightly touchy issue with Kirk, because Kirk had been beat up for not really dealing with popular culture –

SZ: In *High & Low.*

RS: -- in *High Low*, and, in fact, Art had done a comic strip in *Artforum,* which made fun of that show. I didn't do the show for any reason other than that I thought that *Maus* was an amazing *book,* and I had gone to the studio and seen the extent of the drawing behind it, and thought this would make a really interesting exhibition. So it was a little tender with Kirk, but he didn't object at all. I remember Dick, in an acquisitions meeting, made some crack about "comic books," etc., but almost immediately, as it was out of his mouth, he realized that it was too late and it was going to happen anyway. So he was very gracious.

In situations like that, his taste -- which was not that catholic, after all -- didn't become a problem. On the contrary. He would sort of groan, in a theatricalized way, when things were going on that he thought were just atrocious, but he never got into a position of saying they should not happen; or, at last not where I was concerned. So, looking back on it? Looking back on it, it was very interesting. I learned an enormous amount. I was very lucky. I have individual things that I'm not happy about, and the latter parts of it were no fun at all. But I got a job I never expected to get and got, freedoms nobody ever expected me to have, and did works that I think was good work. I can't complain. I got paid for it.

SZ: Just for the record -- Now you're doing what?

RS: I'm the Rosalie Solow Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts. The Institute has not had a designated person for post-1951 art, and was in crisis, I think.

SZ: That's kind of shocking, isn't it?

RS: It is kind of shocking. [Robert] Rosenblum and other people had taught in that area, but there really wasn't somebody to deal with it. Jim, who was leaving, put it on his docket that this should be done. This is actually a little bit like the Kirk story. I was approached when things were getting very nasty at the Modern about would I be interested in teaching at the Institute?

SZ: Had you floated any of that?

RS: No, no. I once subbed for Rob when he was off on a leave, and Ellen was one of his students. She must have been the one to suggest me, or maybe Kirk did, because Kirk had had Rob as a student. Anyway, it came to me and I was asked to teach. I had done one thing there. I was teaching at the graduate center in the meantime, so I was teaching. I had sort of earned my stripes and that stuff. So I got a call saying would I like this job? It was more or less offered to me without competition. I said, "I can't." This was when Kirk was very ill, but still trying to fight for his vision of the Museum from inside the Museum. I was also offered the head of the, [inaudible] Foundation at the same time. I turned that down. I got offered the Tate twice, thereafter -- the Tate Modern -- and I turned those down. I was in a situation where I just didn't think I could leave, and I still thought there was some hope, both for Kirk and for keeping the Museum from going "off the walls."

So I turned that down. Later things just got unbearable, and then Kirk came in and talked to me, and he said, "You know, I just can't do this anymore. I'm going to have to leave. I want you to know this. I want you to know that you will not be appointed to my job," which, again, I was not bucking for. What he was trying to say was, you know, "Watch out." It was quite emotional, on both sides. I realized I had to do something, so I called Ann Temkin up, because Ann and I had to have a called conversation about end-of-century -- I said, jokingly, "Tell Rob I'm really sorry I didn't take that job." The next thing Rob was on the phone. He said, "You know, I actually

have not filled this position. Now it's a competition." The competition, in that case, happened to be one outside candidate, I think four of Roz [Rosalind] Kraus's protégés. Roz, I think, has been my mortal enemy for quite some time. So it was a very complicated situation, but in the end I did get this job. But it's not what I expected to be doing. When I worked at the Modern I said to myself, "I'm going to do this for five years, and take a five-year check." I got to the end of that period, and I said, "Okay. I can now do another five years, and I will take my own pulse, and see." Well, by the time I got to the end of the second five years, things were really desperate. I would not have stayed longer, probably, if things had not been the way they were. But a combination, I think, of näive hope on my part that one could make a difference, and a sense of loyalty to Kirk was that I decided to ride it out. Had I not done that, what I would have done is looked actively for a job in an art school, and gone back to teaching in an art-school context, to make a living, then go back to making paintings and so on. But there was no such position available when I had to go, so I took what there was.

SZ: Well, it's not over.

RS: It's not over. But that whole transition was, in a sense, a very lucky thing. Many people interpreted my leaving as a choice for the academy. They would say, "Doesn't it feel great to go back to the academy?" And I said, "Well, first of all, I've never been there," so I wasn't going back. It was not much of a return. I had taught, but I had never been in that. I didn't have that experience and didn't look for it. Secondly, that was not the choice. The choice was not to move to a realm of purity to a realm of impurity (I preferred impurity, if it was tolerable). Now I'm sort of trying to figure out different combinations of things that will make life interesting.

SZ: This is just an aside. Did you have any input into the new contemporary galleries for the new Museum? Is this going to have your stamp and Kirk's stamp, or has this somehow been lost?

RS: That's very hard to say. Certainly, I was actively involved in those discussions, although one of the bureaucratic strategies that went into place was (and it's a standard-issue, corporate-takeover thing), you announce that everybody will now be part of the process. You diminish the power of the people who are at the top of the heap, who might in fact be a reasonable challenge. You don't, in fact, make people part of the process, except that you require them to go to endless meetings where nothing gets done. I was invited to half of the endless meetings, and poor Kirk had to go to all the endless meetings, but it's very clear to me how much of what went into those meetings will ever come out as anything resembling what we intended. To Tanaguchi's great credit (and I think it was difficult for him to do), he listened very hard to curatorial input. He accepted suggestions that were made that he was not inclined toward. He had basically never built a building with a big, variably installed collection; he had always built showcases with small collections. So we had to educate him on how to build a space which had fewer grand vistas and fewer permanent architectural statements, in order to make the most flexible box.

The discussion we had a lot and also carried on in small rooms was to do a fixed and variable installation, so-called, which would be a version of the history of modern art, like the old procession that Bill Rubin had done but, first of all, not as long; second, with points of entry mid-term, so you didn't sort of set off in 1880 and come out in 1960 or '70, or whatever. The new terminus date would be 2000, but you would be able to dip in and dip out. But there would be a kind of narrative, and the great classic works of art would be on more or less permanent view in that way, and then the variable things would be off to the side but in the same progression. There were be rooms where you could do focus shows. For example, the Modern just sold one of its key [Giorgio] De Chiricos." You could have done an entire De Chirico room as a sidebar to the one De Chirico painting that was in the Surrealist room; or, you could do something interesting with a variety of Latin American art. You could bring photography into galleries where they would no longer be confined to just the

photography collection. You could do the same with drawings, the same with prints and so on. That idea did not happen.

SZ: Much more akin to Alfred Barr's vision.

RS: Much more so, but Alfred Barr's vision was being expunged, actively, when it was going on. I think it's possible, still, to take the box that has been built and do some of that, but it's going to take very determined people with a clear mandate from the trustees to make that happen. Because now the departments have regrouped around territories and been driven back, essentially. I think Peter's tolerance for a lot of the stuff has been worn out, because he's been fairly collaborative in situations where he got less at the end of the day than he was promised. We should have had a black-box space, and Mary Lea Bandy, with all the power that she has, and with all her reason, she was beaten back on that. So they built this grand new museum, and there's no performance space -- or, no space for video, or multi-purpose installation, or whatever.

SZ: Well, the question is, of course, oftentimes the excuse is money. But it's probably a combination.

RS: Well, this is not publicly discussed at all, but it is certainly -- There will be less room for the permanent collection than there was before, and for the permanent collection up until the old stopping point. So, first of all, at the rate they're deaccessioning things, we're going to have fewer Picassos, fewer Pollocks, and fewer everythings. There were be less room to show the collection than there was before, which, after you've spent over $1 billion, seems nuts.

One other thing -- just to talk a little bit about acquisitions, because I think acquisitions is an important issue, structurally, and in terms of good faith, due process, due diligence -- whatever you want. The basic setup at the Modern when I was there -- and, I believe, for the years before I was there -- was that the trustees

and the patrons and the committee members are essentially a jury, and the artists -- the curators are essentially the lawyers who represent, first of all, artists they feel should be in collections, and secondarily, specific works of art. The curators negotiate the deals with the artists or their dealers, or with the collectors from whom they may buy things already in collections. The thing is, the collection is, first of all, a growing entity. It is intended to grow. It is not exactly encyclopedic, but it's supposed to be broad-based; it's supposed to be about modern art where it happened, or how it happens, and for those purposes the old Barr museum collected much more broadly than Bill's did, and under Kirk and me and others, it opened it up again; photography, prints, drawings have, generally speaking been broader than P&S, but all together, the expansive idea of collecting was part of what we were doing.

The decisions about what actually entered the collections were made by curators. Under Kirk the rules changed in the sense that rather than having priorities announced by our department -- which still goes on in many other departments, and once went on in P&S that we were allowed to come to the table with anything we thought of acquiring, to make the case to our colleagues; that there would be a meeting within the department that Kirk would chair, in which all the curators were asked to say exactly what they thought was being proposed to other curators; but we did not take a vote, and we did not arrive at consensus half the time. Kirk's brief was that if you thought something was really worthwhile, you could take it to the full committee on your own hook, and sometimes, if the committee members asked what did the department think? Kirk would report that they agreed or, if there was disagreement -- and sometimes the person who disagreed would actually speak up -- but there was no kind of mandated kind of acquisitions, from the department head down, but, rather, an across-the-board thing. There are many things that I acquired that were not terribly popular with the people, or some of the people, anyway, but that found favor with the committee. I think this is true across the board.

What's important is that, first of all, Kirk did not assign us to buy things. Secondly, that the trustees did not tell us what to buy, and on a number of occasions I turned things down from very powerful trustees. It was understood that that was our job, in fact, and one has to be diplomatic about it but there's a widespread view in the outside world that curators essentially take dictation, either from their bosses or from rich folks. This did not happen, and there were some times when it was expensive, in a sense, socially and diplomatically expensive, to say no. But we were empowered to and we did, on more than a few occasions, and certainly with some very potent people in the Museum. Furthermore, the director did not decide what we bought. Priorities were not set from the directors. Dick was, of course, not a collector, and not a curator, either, so he didn't do it, either. The initial understanding was that this would be true under the new regime; that somebody who was not an expert in modern contemporary art would simply not play a role in this. This did not turn out to be the case, and there was a great deal of manipulation, and a great deal of negotiation with other dealers who were instigated without curatorial knowledge, without curatorial approval. Awkward situations developed where I had to run interference with artists who were under the impression that they were entering the collection, and we had not, in fact, initiated this at all. Dealers had to be dissuaded. Dealers were left hanging with works that they were not selling to other people because they were under the impression from the same source that this was going to be done. In other cases, things did get acquired which were not necessary, but not what we would necessarily done if we'd had our druthers, but there was pressure to do it.

So the whole process changed, and I think part of the acquisition issue was connected to the same thing; that Michael Asher, for example, for the Kynaston show *The Museum as Muse* put together this booklet, which was kind of a pastiche on PASIT MoMA, and it was not the list of what we owned but the list of things we'd let go. I think when Michael started that he was expecting to find many huge errors and lots of movement, and the truth of the matter is it's a very thin volume. There are

some, but not many, and it was not what he thought it was going to be. Since then, the Museum has made some very serious mistakes, and I think that the impetus behind this is, as I said, the fear of going to collectors and pressuring them hard to acquire works of art; a lack of imagination after all, the Stein collection was acquired by going to a group of patrons and saying, "You divvy this up amongst yourselves. You buy it, you keep it in your houses as long as you wish, and then you make sure it comes to the Museum." Then Jasper's [inaudible] was something that both Kirk and I wanted badly. I was very close to Sally Ganz. She and I had talked about it, Kirk had talked about it with her; Kirk was very friendly with Sally, and Sally really respected him. It was never expected to be as expensive as it finally became, but that's exactly the kind of work that could have been bought by any number of top-level trustees, even at the exorbitant price that was finally paid for it, without selling off the collection. The idea that two [inaudible] Picassos is too many is crazy. That single de-acquisition is probably the worst decision that's been made in recent memory.

SZ: Which one?

RS: The “Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro," painting of Picasso. But there have been others. So what's going on now is that the collection is being used as [inaudible] – and the job of people in high office there is to hold collector's feet to the fire and say, "If you want this, you have to pay for it, because the Museum is a collection, it's not a rotating portfolio." Many things in the Museum are not shown frequently, but that is not the issue. It's like getting rid of books at the library because somebody hasn't checked them out for five years. You have a resource that you maintain. The Frida Kahlos, if they had been de-accessioned when she was unpopular -- which was anytime up until about 1980 -- we could never afford to buy now. Those were paintings that the Museum got essentially because she was Diego Rivera's wife. But those were examples of really important works of art that sat for years, collecting dust in storage, and now seem entirely different to our eyes. There are tons of other

things in the collection which will have the same status, as long as they're not de-accessioned. But what's going on now really cuts to the very heart of what that institution is, and it's a disastrous policy. I think it's surprising that it has not come in for more comment, but it's a very, very interesting thing. But the principal thing I wanted to say was that, in terms of acquisitions, it was not something that patrons dictated; it was not something that directors dictated. In our department, it was not something that the curators dictated, and our job was to go and make the best case we could.

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