THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **RICHARD ZEISLER (SZ)**

INTERVIEWER: **WENDY JEFFERS (WJ)**

DATE: **MAY 15, 1998**

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

WJ: I wonder if you could give me a little bit of family background. Did your parents collect art?

RZ: My mother and father were interested in painting and sculpture but they did not collect it. My father had one or two old masters that he inherited from his father, but I don't think it amounted to very much.

WJ: But as a child you went to museums and looked at exhibitions?

RZ: Well, I've forgotten the first exhibition I looked at but yes, I remember going to London once and seeing the National Gallery, with my father, but I don't get a great sense that much elapsed.

WJ: In that, yes. Did you come from a large family? Were there many brothers and sisters?

RZ: I had two brothers, so it was a family of five.

WJ: And did either of your brothers collect, as well?

RZ: No. One of my brothers, who lived in Chicago, was interested in the Art Institute and bought a few things, but it wasn't anything very substantial.

WJ: Modernist things, or older things?

RZ: Yes. Modern.

WJ: You originally are from Chicago, is that right?

RZ: Yes, I am.

WJ: And at what point did you come to New York?

RZ: Well, I guess the date of arrival . . . I don't know exactly, probably 1948.

WJ: Well, you went to Amherst College.

RZ: Yes, I did.

WJ: And you graduated in 1937.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: But you didn't come straight to New York.

RZ: No, I went abroad and did other things for about ten years. Then around 1948, I guess, I landed in New York.

WJ: And at what point did you start collecting art? In other words, were you collecting art when you first arrived, or were you here for several years first?

RZ: Well, I can tell you the whole story, because I've told it several times. I had some friends abroad who were painters, and one of them was Marc Chagall. The first paintings I bought were by Marc Chagall and this man . . .

WJ: [Georges] Rouault?

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Yes. Okay. You knew them then in Paris?

RZ: No. I met Marc Chagall. I can't really remember the place that I met him, but I remember the interests of those artists.

WJ: And you actually met them and bought the work from them, as opposed to through a dealer?

RZ: No.

WJ: You had a chance to talk with them and understand their ideas, etc.

RZ: A great artist is not a man you can talk to very easily, so I didn't try.

WJ: You went to their studios?

RZ: Well, I don't know that I did that, but I met them and . . . there were some things I did with them, together.

WJ: So those were purchased before you came to New York; you had already begun to collect by the time you got here.

RZ: Yes, that's right. I went to a painter's dealer, to look at his paintings there, and I found a couple, which I no longer have. But that was the order of things.

WJ: When you first came here Curt Valentin, J.B. Neumann and those people were very much in business.

RZ: I knew them both.

WJ: You did? Would those have been the sort of dealers you were looking at? You were looking at European art mostly.

RZ: Yes. They were very good dealers, and they took pride in their accomplishments. In other words, they wanted the prospective buyer to know they had good things.

WJ: Did they spend the time to talk with you about art?

RZ: No, I think there were one or two dealers whose advice I relied on in the early days. One of them was Pierre Matisse and one of them was Rose Fried. Did you ever meet her?

WJ: I never did, but her name keeps coming up.

RZ: Well, she was a great little person. She died too early, and she had many friends among artists and exchanged ideas with them that she later transferred on to her collectors. There was a woman in this building who was a great friend of hers, a collector.

WJ: Lydia Winston [Malbin]?

RZ: Yes.

WJ: She lived in this building? That's interesting. Did you know Lydia Winston very well?

RZ: Yes, I knew her very well.

WJ: That's a rather interesting collection, as well.

RZ: There was a collector who had something to do with my collection. It was Louis Stern. Does that ring a bell?

WJ: It does, but could you talk a little bit about him?

RZ: Well, he was a great friend of people I knew abroad. When I came back to this country I came to see him, and it was a profitable meeting, I think.

WJ: What sort of things did he collect?

RZ: Oh, he collected [Amedeo] Modigliani and, 20th century established painters.

WJ: Early 20th, yes. So you would say that your formation as a collector was shaped by a number of different people, over those early years?

RZ: Well, I went to look at paintings in the presence of some dealers, and I would not say I learned from them. There are people who give their total experience, in the beginning stages of collecting, as an experience with dealers. I did not have that. Nevertheless, I had those I went to and saw and I never underestimated a dealer. I think that was the proper attitude.

WJ: Do you remember the sort of motivating forces behind how you began to collect? Was it that early relationship with Chagall and Rouault?

RZ: Well, I started early, with Chagall, and I bought Rouault. I knew Chagall, and he turned out to be a much greater man than when I knew him.

WJ: In other words, you had a friendship with Chagall.

RZ: No, I wouldn't say that. I simply knew him and he knew me.

WJ: And did you meet other artists through Chagall?

RZ: No, I don't think so. I met other artists through dealers and other accoutrements of collecting.

WJ: Through your life you have maintained a number of friendships with artists. Is that not true?

RZ: Oh, yes. I have lots of friends who are artists.

WJ: That also is somewhat unusual in today's world, because collectors don't know the artists.

RZ: You may have found that to be true. It seems to me that one of the privileges of collecting is to be able to know the person whose works you're collecting. Absolutely. Every painting has a different story, and as I went around buying paintings stories developed.

WJ: If you bought a painting from a dealer, if you had the opportunity, would you bring the artist back to your house to show him the painting?

RZ: No.

WJ: Do you own anything by [Lucien] Freud?

RZ: No, I don't, but I would like to and I have tried on one or two occasions to own a Freud. One or two people I know collect Freud.

WJ: Interesting. And Francis Bacon?

RZ: I knew him, and I know his dealer. I have great admiration for him also. I guess I would regard him as a friend.

WJ: I gather he was not that easy to get to know, so you're very fortunate.

RZ: Well, I didn't try to get to know him. He tried to get to know me, I think, and I sort of dodged him in a way.

WJ: I don't mean to jump around here but I'm just looking at a list. [Fernando] Botero?

RZ: I was a good friend of Botero's, but I don't own any. I liked his work very much in the early days. I bought five or six important Boteros, but I no longer have them.

WJ: Can I ask you a little bit about that? Does your collection evolve and you sort of sell or give things away over the years because your taste changes?

RZ: Well, again, that principle prevails. It's a different story for each painter. I would say the collection evolved, yes. What else can it do?

WJ: Well, interestingly enough, Lydia Winston was interviewed and she said she never sold anything, she only gave things away. But for the most part the collection remained intact.

RZ: Yes, my collection is largely intact.

WJ: Is it? Good. What about [Joan] Miró? Did you know him?

RZ: I didn't know Miró, but I admired him lavishly for a long time, and I have a few good works by him.

WJ: You certainly do. And what about [Gino] Severini, did you ever meet him?

RZ: No, but I met his daughter. She's married to an artist and lives in Rome. I know that a relationship was established and I have remained a friend of hers for many years.

WJ: Do you recall how you met her?

RZ: Well, I was in Rome for a few weeks and largely inhabited the world of artists there.

WJ: So someone introduced you.

RZ: An Italian artist I knew quite well was sort of an introductory factor to various Italian artists.

WJ: I noticed you don't have any [Marino] Marini and I was thinking about our Curt Valentin conversation. How well did you know Curt Valentin?

RZ: Not very well, but I have a Marini. You can see it if you look carefully.

WJ: Oh, I just saw that.

RZ: A good one, too.

WJ: Is it right in front of me and I don't see it? Give me a hint.

RZ: Isn't it over there, at the head of Stravinsky?

WJ: Oh, that's Marini? Oh, that's extraordinary.

RZ: That's Marini, all right.

WJ: Well, to go back to the artists with whom you've had friendships, what about someone like Will Barnet?

RZ: Oh, I know him quite well.

WJ: And do you own any of his work?

RZ: I never wanted to acquire anything by him, but he's a good fellow and he has a certain kind of standing among fellow artists. I belong to a club he belongs to, so we keep on good terms. I see him in the summer. He goes out to Long Island, where I go, too.

WJ: I know lots of artists out there. Do you collect any of those artists?

RZ: No.

WJ: You just know them.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: What was it like in the early days of the '50s or so in New York, in terms of looking at galleries? When you went into a gallery were there a lot of other people there, or did you more or less have the gallery to yourself?

RZ: I don't know. I wouldn't say that there were a lot of other people at galleries, but it wasn't empty, either.

WJ: Did you find the galleries to be sort of a gathering place, or was most of the discussion done outside the gallery, in terms of meeting other people?

RZ: A gallery was clearly a gathering place.

WJ: It was. Oh, good.

RZ: When you went into a gallery you would expect to meet other artists and other collectors there. Sometimes one could be friendly with collectors and sometimes you could not be. So there was a strong difference, especially based on the point of view that you had, or what the other collector had.

WJ: When did you first get involved with The Museum of Modern Art? I have the dates when you joined the International Council and what not, but I also found, in looking through the registrar's files, the first record of a loan you made to the Museum was 1951. You joined the International Council in 1959, and you became a trustee of MoMA in 1979. So the segue here is, talking to other collectors, and I was just thinking about the association with The Museum of Modern Art, which would have been a place where you would have talked to other collectors, as well. Yes?

RZ: Yes. The biggest thing about The Museum of Modern Art is to talk to the other professionals in the field, whom you would meet there at meetings and dinners and lunches or something like that. They were, very often, very secure leads to other painters.

WJ: I notice that you served on a number of different committees there, once you became a trustee, including acquisitions committees (they don't call it that now; they call it Painting and Sculpture committee) and exhibitions committee. In the acquisitions committee meetings, this would have been painting and sculpture, I assume.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Would that have been a venue where you would have expressed a point of view about an artist or a work of art?

RZ: Oh, sure.

WJ: Because those minutes of those meetings are closed to the public, I wonder if you could perhaps expound a little bit on what took place in a meeting like that.

RZ: Well, nothing less than you would expect. You would meet, and the director of the department would turn your mind in a certain direction; say that the Museum was considering a certain work, and wanted to know what you thought of that work; wanted to know if you thought favorably of the artist. Both those things came together very often, but it was very easy to keep them apart.

WJ: I was going to say, suppose you didn't like the artist and didn't like the work, and there seemed to be a mix of opinion. Would the curators generally carry the day?

RZ: Yes, they would. But we knew that they didn't have to. The members of the committee were always ready for a mixture of ideas, going into a committee meeting. There was no outright disagreement, or enmity caused by any disagreement. Sometimes after a meeting I would run into a member of the committee in the hall or somewhere and he would say, "that was a terrible idea with the XYZ painter we had the other day. We should have turned him down." That would happen every so often.

WJ: And would you go back and talk to the curator afterwards?

RZ: No, but the reverse happened. Certain members of the committee would talk to the director of the department after the meeting. I can think of one member in particular who liked to do that. You would hear about her in various ways. Dick Oldenburg once said to me, "You know, So-and-So called me after the meeting the other day and told me what she thought, etc." There is a certain kind of monastic attribution

that goes with being a member of the committee, and you learn not to tamper with that unless you absolutely have to.

WJ: Unless you feel very strongly about something.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Did you know ahead of time what you were going to be discussing, or was it completely a surprise?

RZ: No, you don't know ahead of time.

WJ: So you had to think on your feet.

RZ: That was one of the purposes of the meeting; to have people thinking spontaneously.

WJ: It must have been quite exciting, actually.

RZ: Oh, I wouldn’t say it was exciting but . . . Yes.

WJ: Challenging. Were certain directors of departments more likely to take you in a more extreme direction than others, or did you begin to expect certain types of work from certain departments?

RZ: I wouldn't say "beginning to expect" ever happened. That's a little bit too strong, but you were not surprised when a director of a department came up with a certain kind of work.

WJ: Well, suppose a work had been turned down that he had proposed the previous year. Wouldn't he then make an attempt with yet another work of the same artist at a later date?

RZ: No. At The Museum of Modern Art (I say that, I'll tell you why in a minute), if an artist was turned down he was turned down permanently. You didn't expect to see his work again. At the Whitney, for example. I was on the acquisitions committee there, and they would specialize in turning down a work and then the director of the department would bring it up again--soon. Not right away, but soon, and put it into a meeting where it was discussed. He considered that to be his duty, and it was an unnerving experience. That wasn't anything I particularly liked. I liked the way The Museum of Modern Art did things, generally speaking, and one of the things they did was rely upon the members of the committee to tell them what to do. As I say, I would say it was violated in the case of MoMA, but I would not say that if a director of a department, in front of the committee, would say that this work has to be included in the Museum's collection, that it would not be, on the advice of the committee, and there are countless examples of that happening.

WJ: They would make a good argument for the inclusion of the work because of its place in the collection?

RZ: Yes.

WJ: I have seen a few of these minutes of committee meetings, and what I find rather interesting is how the presentations are summarized in terms of the work of art. I think it's very clearly very carefully thought out.

RZ: I don't think you could detect that from the minutes of the meetings.

WJ: Interesting. Did you have much contact with people like Alfred Barr?

RZ: Sure.

WJ: What was he like?

RZ: He was a very fine fellow. A very intellectual type of man.

WJ: Did you find him approachable and easy to talk with?

RZ: Sure.

WJ: I think perhaps that's because he respected you. I've heard other people say he was the opposite. In other words, if he respects you, he'll talk with you.

RZ: Well, that's probably true.

WJ: Did you have much contact with René d'Harnoncourt?

RZ: No. Not on that level. René was an overall "master of ceremonies," so to speak, and you knew when something happened to René it was an important matter. I don't think René d'Harnoncourt was the sine qua non with the acquisition of paintings. The director of the department always was. Kirk Varnedoe is now a key element in the acquisition process. I don't think if Kirk Varnedoe said he didn't like a picture that anybody would think of buying it. On the other hand, if Kirk Varnedoe said he did like a picture it was an important matter in that picture's history.

WJ: And Bill Rubin also played that same role at one point, would you say?

RZ: Yes. Bill Rubin was a great authority, in my opinion, and he still is.

WJ: With any of these people that we've discussed, would you consider seeking their opinion about something you were considering buying or not?

RZ: Personally?

WJ: Yes.

RZ: No.

WJ: Why not?

RZ: I didn't want their advice.

WJ: That's what I wanted to hear. Did you learn of artists through some of these committee meetings, that you perhaps were not aware of?

RZ: Yes. Sure.

WJ: Artists which you might have later purchased or knew?

RZ: No. I wouldn't tread on the assets of the committee by buying anything that came through the committee.

WJ: I'm sorry. I didn't mean it quite that directly. I meant would an artist come to your attention and would you then . . .

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

WJ: Did you have much contact with Dorothy Miller?

RZ: No, but we all knew she was a great friend of Alfred Barr's. And Barr was responsible for bringing her up in a way. He trusted her advice, and we knew that she had sort of a touch with the members of the committee.

WJ: People respected her point of view as well.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: What about Monroe Wheeler?

RZ: Very much the same thing. Monroe was a colossal figure from the point of view of what he thought. He did some important exhibitions. There was an exhibition at the Jewish Museum that he would have had something to do with. He did a [Chaim] Soutine show at The Museum of Modern Art. There were friends and collectors who were close to him, who relied upon him. That was one of the characteristics of The Museum of Modern Art. I may not have said so specifically, but what the trustees and members of the committee thought in most cases meant a great deal to the curators, particularly who were presenting works for acquisition. That's the way it's done. The curator comes to a meeting and "declared himself" for an acquisition meeting by hearing himself against a critical view from the committee. I was never on a list of Monroe Wheeler advisors, but I learned to respect his opinion.

WJ: Who would you say you were closest to over the years, at the Museum? In terms of staff.

RZ: Everybody.

WJ: Could you compare that to some of the other institutions you've been involved with? You made an interesting analogy about the Whitney acquisitions meetings.

RZ: I didn't approve of the Whitney's approach to things at all. It was very amateurish I thought. They were not willing to expose themselves to a committee's opinion, and in some cases they had to.

WJ: You were a trustee there for a certain number of years?

RZ: I was not a trustee there.

WJ: I see. And you've also been involved with Amherst College. Have you helped them form their collection?

RZ: Well, I wish I could say that but I can't. Amherst College . . . Well, I've also been close to Mt. Holyoke College, with their collection. I don't think I would ever be accused of having influence at Holyoke or Amherst with their acquisitions.

WJ: Did they have similar sorts of committees?

RZ: Well, I guess they do. Good question.

WJ: In terms of other collectors whom you felt you respected--not necessarily people who collected the same kinds of things that you do, but people whose eye you've respected--can you name a few?

RZ: Sure. There was a man named Henry Perlman. Do you know him?

WJ: Yes.

RZ: He was a great collector of Soutine. I would go out on Saturday mornings to look at paintings, and he would come up to me and we would have a cup of coffee somewhere. We would share thoughts. He was a great man in many ways. He had good ideas.

WJ: So you would routinely look at exhibitions on Saturday mornings?

RZ: We wouldn't look at exhibitions, actually. We would look at paintings.

WJ: In the back room, in other words.

RZ: No. No, in the front room.

WJ: Who else comes to mind as being a collector that you had a great deal of respect for?

RZ: There is a man in Zurich named Weinberg. Ten paintings from his collection were just sold at Sotheby's. I used to go see him in Zurich. He is always such a great authority on everything that I didn't dare interfere with his thinking. But I like to know what other collectors are doing.

WJ: What about some of the Chicago collectors? Were there any there that interested you?

RZ: There were quite a few who did.

WJ: Did you maintain contact?

RZ: Yes. My father's cousin. Her name was Claire Zeisler who was a sculptor and collector, and she was close to the museums' activities. She was also on the board of a museum of modern art in Chicago. I would always be interested in what Claire was doing, but after a while she became sick and I couldn't see her anymore.

WJ: What kinds of things did she collect?

RZ: Oh, many of the same things that I do. She had very good Klee's.

WJ: And did she collect about the same period that you did?

RZ: She was still collecting when I was in the middle of it. I influenced her and her husband to buy a few pictures, one or two pictures to be more exact, and they wanted to know what I thought. I told them where a certain painting could be acquired and who had good paintings by that artist. Claire has died since then. Did you know her?

WJ: I did not. I understand the collection went to the Art Institute?

RZ: Not entirely, no. Some of it was sold so it was up for sale. But you're not far off.

WJ: It was a fairly large collection then?

RZ: Very large. I wouldn't say it was anything like this, but it was a large collection.

WJ: I'm interested in some of the women who collected. Do any come to mind, particularly, that you respected?

RZ: I can't think of any . . .

WJ: Well, Lydia Winston is one I'm thinking of. And what about Aline Liebman. Did you know her? Aline Liebman? She's dropped off the horizon. Interesting collection, yes. She's dead some years now.

RZ: No, I didn't know her.

WJ: No, I was actually asking if you could tell me some names of some important women collectors.

RZ: Chicago would be a good place for women collectors. There were quite a few around, so to speak, who collected very well.

WJ: I think of people like Blanchette Rockefeller, for example, in New York, who came to the Museum and, perhaps, really educated herself very quickly but clearly had her own point of view, separate and distinct from her husband. Can you think of anyone in your . . .

RZ: Well, there isn't anybody like Blanchette Rockefeller, particularly, because she is one example of a trustee who relied very heavily on the curators and what they thought. She was, I suppose, a brave woman.

WJ: Interesting. She didn't pretend to be an expert.

RZ: No.

WJ: Interesting. What about Nathan Cummings? Was he a collector that you knew?

RZ: Well, I knew him, sure. I wouldn't say that anybody around me would pay much attention to Nathan Cummings, even though if they lived in Chicago they probably would.

WJ: I see. Okay. Interesting. I'm going to go back to artists now, and I'm going to jump around a bit. What about Max Bill? This is someone you had a longstanding friendship with? Max Bill. The artist. Did you have a longstanding friendship with him?

RZ: Yes, I did.

WJ: What sort of man was he?

RZ: A terrific person. Very strong. Very Swiss in his point of view. He was a great man, I think. On the Zurich art scene, he was predominant.

WJ: Now The Museum of Modern Art does not own a work by him?

RZ: Oh, I think they do. How do you know that?

WJ: I'm asking, actually. I'm not certain.

RZ: I should know that, I suppose.

WJ: Well, there was a show that went through the '60s, to Albright, it didn't come here, and at that time there was nothing owned by the Museum.

RZ: I'm sure that's true.

WJ: Do you think it was a particularly European sensibility?

RZ: Well, I think that what Max thought was good was not necessarily what the Museum would think was good. Because he had such a strong point of view . . . well, Max was a special case. People in Zurich thought he was a special case, too, I think. I remember going with him to a collector's house, a collector who lived in Zurich, and showing him a painting by an artist he would know something about. He showed me that that painting was not by that artist, and he was right. That's the sort of thing you would respect Max for.

WJ: He had an eye.

RZ: Not only an eye, but he had a history of the artist.

WJ: Interesting. Interesting. So you had a close friendship with him.

RZ: Yes. He was here once for lunch. I cooked lunch for him and his wife, then we went around and looked at pictures. I saw him often in Zurich.

WJ: I would like to talk to you a little bit about your pictures, but I'll just try to sort of go through my list for a while, if you don't mind.

[Interruption]

WJ: Could you name some of the individuals you felt were influential in forming your taste? You've mentioned some of the collectors, for example, whom you had a great deal of respect for.

RZ: Well, those collectors would be dealers as well. There was a man named Sam Salz. Did you ever hear about him?

WJ: Let's talk about him for a minute. Can we talk about him further? He was a collector?

RZ: No, he was a dealer.

WJ: Really

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Here in New York?

RZ: Yes, he lived not far from here. Right over on one of the adjoining streets.

WJ: And he had a gallery?

RZ: No, not a gallery. He had a private home. He would invite you to his home. When you met him on the street he would say, "What are you doing now?" You would say, "Nothing. What did you have in mind?" or something, and he would show you one or two paintings. Masterpieces, actually.

WJ: For example.

RZ: Well, he knew a lot about [Pierre] Bonnard and [Jean-Édouard] Vuillard.

WJ: And these would have been paintings he had bought in Europe?

RZ: Yes. In Paris.

WJ: And would he call you when he got something in?

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Primarily early 20th century school of Paris?

RZ: Well, I guess so. Sure.

WJ: And what did you find particularly special about him?

RZ: Well, he knew a lot about pictures. And if you were a country bumpkin, like I was, you learned to respect that.

WJ: Who else did you feel was very influential?

RZ: Well, I had a whole school. Pierre Matisse, Rose Fried. Those were the dealers, I think.

WJ: Lydia Winston was quoted as saying that Rose Fried encouraged her to meet the artists; to go directly to the artists when she could.

RZ: Well, I'm sure that's true.

WJ: What sort of things did you buy through Rose Fried, or what are your memories of Rose Fried?

RZ: Well, I suppose we could look around here and see some things from Rose Fried.

WJ: Did you ever go to the Downtown Gallery, which was primarily American paintings?

RZ: Once in a while. Maybe twice during my lifetime.

WJ: Your interest then, primarily, was European paintings.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Did you buy regularly in Europe, or did you usually buy here?

RZ: Both.

WJ: Both. And was it difficult to bring things in after you had purchased them?

RZ: No.

WJ: So that period had passed of difficulties getting through customs with modern art.

RZ: Well, I wouldn't say it had passed, particularly, because one or two pictures I didn't get past customs very easily. That picture by [Paul] Delvaux, *Les Mains*, was one of them.

WJ: And why?

RZ: Well, because it was a lascivious picture. Delvaux is pictured on the left side holding a brush in his hand.

WJ: That's a beautiful painting. I've seen it in reproduction many times. It's a beautiful, beautiful painting.

RZ: It's a marvelous picture.

WJ: And where did you buy that? In Paris?

RZ: I bought it in Belgium. Actually, I got it through George Staempfli, the dealer. But I had to cover the situation very carefully before I got it from him. I knew he had it and I knew I wanted it.

WJ: Can I ask you, typically, when you went in to buy a painting such as this, was it a long, protracted negotiation or was it usually spontaneous?

RZ: The best acquisitions were spontaneous.

WJ: Interesting. In this particular case, you knew the painting was there, you knew he had it.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Did you correspond about it ahead of time?

RZ: No. He lived across the street.

WJ: Yes, I know. But you said the painting was in Europe. You actually had not seen the painting in Europe.

RZ: I had seen the painting in Europe. It was in an exhibition of Belgian paintings that the World's Fair in Belgium had. It was the only Delvaux, I think, that they had. I could pull out my file on that picture. The Belgians have become much more interested in Delvaux since that time.

WJ: I'm asking more in a generalized way, in terms of how you would go about buying anything, actually. Did people send you photographs, and did you . . .

RZ: No, none of that sort of thing. You saw the picture and you liked it. You knew it was good, you had enough authority on the artist's work behind you so you didn't spend too much time considering it. You had to do that because paintings were going out into collections very quickly.

WJ: That's exactly sort of what I'm trying to get to here. So by the time you were buying these paintings you felt you had some experience behind you in terms of your own collecting abilities and your own knowledge; that you felt sure enough to walk in and purchase something quickly.

RZ: Yes. That's happened on a number of occasions. Each picture has its own story.

WJ: Yes. Interesting. Have you had changes of heart about certain artists? In other words, you mentioned that you bought Botero for example, and you no longer own them. Does it have more to do with the context of how they fit in the collection?

RZ: Did I mention Botero? What did I say about him?

WJ: You said you knew him, he was friendly, and you owned several of his works but no longer do.

RZ: I changed my view about Botero and I can't exactly tell you why. I liked his work very much. I used to see him in Paris, also.

WJ: Did you have paintings or sculpture or both?

RZ: I had paintings. I knew him because of his paintings.

WJ: Have you felt that over the years your collection has evolved from that early, say, the 1940s, when you first started collecting, until today? Has it changed direction dramatically?

RZ: No, I don't think so.

WJ: Could we talk a little bit about your experiences on the International Council? You were treasurer there for four years or so, but you were active for quite a long time.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Did you find that it was useful in terms of . . . Well, could you just talk about it? I don't want to put words in your mouth.

RZ: Well, I didn't think of the International Council as being particularly useful. Perhaps I should have.

WJ: Maybe if you were not a New Yorker it would have been a slightly different experience.

RZ: Probably true.

WJ: It was a way for the Museum to cast a wider net; to get more people involved.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: And that, I think, has been successful.

RZ: I'm still in close touch with the members of the International Council, and I like to listen to what they say and what they do.

WJ: I notice that you were on something called the Exhibitions Committee.

RZ: Of what?

WJ: Of The Museum of Modern Art.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: What was that?

RZ: Well, I guess that's pretty much what it was.

WJ: It would have been overall Museum policy?

RZ: Yes.

WJ: So directors of departments would come in and propose exhibitions, and your committee would discuss them?

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Was this a sort of a governing body that would set a direction for the Museum's exhibition policy?

RZ: Well, I think that's right. It would set a direction, based on what the various curators thought.

WJ: What about Ernst Beyeler, the Swiss dealer? Do you know him very well?

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Was he one of these people you would put into that category who were important to you in your collecting?

RZ: Well, I think he was, though I didn't really see him too often. I used to go over there to Basel from Zurich, whenever I was in Zurich, and spend a day there. Something like that. That would also be very informative and instructive for me.

WJ: What about Sidney Janis?

RZ: Well, Sidney was another man, like the others I think of in New York, who was a great authority on something and you learned to respect it.

WJ: What about J.B. Neumann?

RZ: He was good, too.

WJ: Did you purchase things from these people?

RZ: I didn't purchase anything from J.B. Neumann. I should have, I think.

WJ: Were there many that got away, in the course of your collecting career?

RZ: Sure.

WJ: Did you ever have a second chance?

RZ: No.

WJ: Could you talk a little bit about Porter McCray?

RZ: What would you like to know about him?

WJ: Well, he's a very unusual person in that he came from outside the Museum to run this international program, and I gather he did it with great diplomacy. But I would like you to talk about what you thought his contribution was.

RZ: Well, he was a splendid director of the International Council. He knew that work quite well, and he knew the various curators whom he would rely upon for helping him. I used to see him as often as I could. I enjoyed him very much. He was a good friend, I think.

WJ: So that's something good that did come out of the International Council for you.

RZ: Yes. I guess it was, yes.

WJ: He was also a famous friend of Dorothy Miller's.

RZ: He was. Well, that would fit in quite well with what Dorothy was interested in, I think.

WJ: What about Jim Soby? We haven't talked about him at all.

RZ: Well, in the early days I had great store in what Jim Soby thought. I knew he was active as a curator and developer of ideas. Later in life he went to Southampton, and I'd see him in action at Southampton.

WJ: In some ways your collections were somewhat related, I think.

RZ: Yes.

WJ: Did you share things, or was his collection more or less formed by the time you met him?

RZ: Well, I don't think his collection was ever formed, because things used to come in and go out, and it was a constant turmoil as far as his collection was concerned, I believe.

WJ: You wouldn't characterize your collection as being that way at all? In other words, the things that have gone out have been relatively minor.

RZ: Yes that’s true.

END INTERVIEW