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PASADENA ART MUSEUM: THOMAS W. LEAVITT

Interviewed by Joanne L. Ratner

Completed under the auspices  
of the  
Oral History Program  
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Los Angeles

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

### PERSONAL HISTORY:

**Born:** January 8, 1930, Boston, Massachusetts.

**Education:** A.B., Middlebury College; M.A., Boston University; Ph.D., Harvard University.

**Spouse:** Jane Ayer Leavitt, 1951-69; Lloyd Carter Leavitt, 1978-85; three children.

### CAREER HISTORY:

Assistant to director, William Hayes Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, 1954-56.

Executive director, fine arts committee, People to People Program, 1957.

Director, Pasadena Art Museum, 1957-63.

Director, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1963-68.

Lecturer, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1963-68.

Director, Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, 1968-73.

Director, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 1973-present.

Professor, Cornell University, 1968-present.

Director, museum program, National Endowment for the Arts, 1971-72.

### AFFILIATIONS:

Western Association of Art Museum Directors, president, 1967-68.

National Endowment for the Arts Museum Panel, 1972-75.

American Federation of Arts, trustee, 1972-present; Museum Services Committee, 1987-present.

Council on Museums and Education in Visual Arts, vice-chairman, 1972-76.

Northeast Museums Conference, board of governors, 1973-76.

Association of Art Museum Directors, treasurer, 1973-76; vice president, 1976-77; president, 1977-78; trustee, 1978-80.

New York State Council on the Arts, museum aid panel, 1975-78; 1980-82.

American Art Alliance, board of directors, 1976-82.

American Association of Museums, council, 1976-80; vice president, 1980-82; president, 1982-85; executive committee, 1985-88; honors committee, 1985-88; nominating committee, 1987-88; ethics committee, 1987 to present.

Tompkins County Arts Council, president, 1978-79; board member, 1977-83.

Williamstown Regional Art Conservation Laboratory, board of trustees, 1979 to present; president, 1984-87; long range planning committee, 1985 to present; search committee, director, 1988 to present.

Independent Sector, board of directors, 1980-84.

Association of College and University Museums and Galleries, nominating committee, 1987-88.

National Air and Space Museum, art program committee, 1988.

College Art Association.

#### PUBLICATIONS:

**The Evolution of Watercolor Painting in America**, exhibition catalog, William Hayes Fogg Art Museum, 1954.

**New Renaissance in Italy**, exhibition catalog, Pasadena Art Museum, 1958.

**A Decade in the Contemporary Galleries**, exhibition catalog, Pasadena Art Museum, 1959.

**American Painting in the Nineteenth Century**, exhibition catalog, Pasadena Art Museum, 1960.

**The Photograph as Poetry**, exhibition catalog, Pasadena Art Museum, 1961.

**German Expressionism**, exhibition catalog, Pasadena Art Museum, 1962.

**Arts of New Guinea**, exhibition catalog, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1964.

**Albert Bierstadt**, exhibition catalog, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1964.

**Some Paintings to Consider**, exhibition catalog, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1964.

**Piet Mondrian**, exhibition catalog, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1965.

**American Primitive Painting**, exhibition catalog, Fine Arts Gallery of Newport Beach, 1965.

**American Portraits in California Collections**, exhibition catalog, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1966.

**American Masters**, exhibition catalog, California Arts Commission, 1966.

**Three Young Collections**, exhibition catalog, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1967.

**Brucke**, exhibition catalog, Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, 1970.

**Colin Greenly**, exhibition catalog, Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, 1972.

**George Kolbe**, exhibition catalog, Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, 1972.

**George Loring Brown**, exhibition catalog, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1973.

**Seymour Lipton**, exhibition catalog, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1973.

**Gary Wojcik**, exhibition catalog, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1975.



**Richards Ruben**, exhibition catalog, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1976.

**Walter Askin**, exhibition catalog, Ericson Gallery, 1978.

**Painting Up Front**, exhibition catalog, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1981.

**Handbook of the Collections**, exhibition catalog, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1982.

**One Man's Nature: Works on Paper by Steven Barbash**, exhibition catalog, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1986.

## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### INTERVIEWER:

Joanne L. Ratner, Researcher/Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., American Studies/Art History, Scripps College; M.A., Art History/Museum Studies, University of Southern California.

### TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

**Place:** Four Seasons Hotel, Beverly Hills, California.

**Dates, length of sessions:** January 19, 1988 (107 minutes); January 20, 1988 (76).

**Total number of recorded hours:** 3

**Persons present during interview:** Leavitt and Ratner.

### CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series related to the history of the Pasadena Art Museum.

Ratner reviewed a variety of materials directly related to the Pasadena Art Museum, including minutes of the executive committee from 1958 to 1974, calendars of events, exhibition catalogs and reviews, scrapbooks, newspaper and magazine articles, California Design files, and essays, brochures, and speeches pertaining to the museum's early history. In addition, Ratner read relevant interviews conducted by the UCLA Oral History Program for its Los Angeles Art Community: Group Portrait series.

The interview follows a thematic outline, but within each subject area the discussion proceeds somewhat chronologically. Individuals discussed include director Walter Hopps and trustees Robert A. Rowan and Eudorah Moore. Leavitt discussed the board of trustees, the museum's volunteer organizations, exhibition and acquisition programs, and early fund-raising efforts for the new building constructed at Colorado and Orange Grove boulevards.

#### EDITING:

Virginia Carew, assistant editor, edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

The edited transcript was sent to Leavitt in May 1989. He made some corrections and additions, verified proper names, and returned the manuscript in July 1989.

Richard Cándida Smith, principal editor, prepared the table of contents. Richard Martínez, editorial assistant, prepared the biographical summary. Alex Cline, assistant editor, prepared the interview history. Lisa White, editorial assistant, prepared the index.

#### SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 19, 1988

RATNER: Before we begin our discussion of the Pasadena Art Museum, I was hoping you could tell me a little bit about your family background, where you grew up, that sort of thing.

LEAVITT: Well, I'm a native of Boston and grew up in Wellesley Hills, which is a suburb, and went to high school there, and then off to Middlebury College in Vermont, where I graduated with an A.B. in 1951. Then I went on to Boston University, after getting married, for a year of graduate work and received a master's degree in art history from there. Then I went on to Harvard, where it took me really about five years to get a Ph.D.--two years of residency, two years of working at the Fogg Art Museum as assistant to the director, and then a year off for working on the thesis. Then, let's see, in the spring of 1957, before receiving my doctorate, I went to Washington to work as the executive director of the Fine Arts Committee of the People to People Program. This was a program started by President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower to encourage exchange between Americans and people of other countries on a personal level, not an institutional, governmental level, and the program was to involve exchanging scholars, museum people, artists, and some exhibitions perhaps. Since it was to be

nongovernmental, of course we had to find money for it, and most of my time was spent just trying to write grant proposals for the Ford Foundation and other people. It gave me valuable time to work on my thesis because it really wasn't a full-time job at that point, and I did manage to finish writing it and then soon decided that I really didn't like this kind of work and that I really wanted to be back in a museum. I had a choice of being a lecturer at the Frick Museum in New York City or an administrative aide at the Cincinnati Art Museum or an assistant director at the Honolulu Academy, which is the art museum in Hawaii, which was very hard to pass up, but I eventually was offered the directorship at the Pasadena [Art Museum], so I went there instead. That was in the fall of 1957.

RATNER: What was your thesis on?

LEAVITT: On the nineteenth-century American landscape painter George Loring Brown, who was a very interesting character, although not a very great painter I'm afraid. He was born in the romantic age, in 1814, and actually knew Washington Allston, who was one of the great romantic painters in America, and then he went to Europe for twenty years and learned to paint really in Europe and developed his own personal style in Italy. [He] then came back to this country to set the art scene on its ear and really had

some success for a few years, but then the Civil War came and nobody was buying paintings, and after that the Barbizon School influence on the one hand and the Pre-Raphaelite influence in England on the other sort of eclipsed his style of painting. The remaining years of his life up to his death in 1889 were spent rather bitterly complaining about his position, but he spanned the whole period from romanticism to impressionism, so he was a very interesting person to study.

RATNER: How did your interest in the arts develop?

LEAVITT: There was a lot of talk and concern about art in my family. My grandfather--maternal grandfather--was a sculptor in Boston when people were commissioning large monuments, so he was quite successful. My father [Richard C. Leavitt] was a painter, a watercolor painter, but more by avocation than by vocation. He was an advertising artist by profession. So there was quite a bit of art in the family, and discussion about it, and I had studied art for a while at Middlebury, but soon found that I was more interested in what other people were doing than what I was doing, so it seemed natural that I go on and be an art historian.

RATNER: In some of the information that I was looking at to prepare for this series of interviews it said that you were assistant director at the Fogg before you came to the Pasadena.

LEAVITT: Well, yes, except they left out the preposition "to." I was assistant to the director, which is a very different thing from assistant director. It was my first museum job and quite unexpected. I was just drawn out of an examination and asked to report to the director, and I was really dumbfounded when he offered me the position. I stayed there two years and learned a great deal and met a great many people in the museum field at that time. So that's what really set me on the road to being a museum director rather than a teacher.

RATNER: Then how did you hear about the job in Pasadena?

LEAVITT: I sent my résumé out and they invited me out for an interview, so I flew out--first time I'd been to California--and talked to members of the board and was wined and dined and shown around the museum a bit. I later heard of some of the discussions they had about it.

[laughter] Eventually they offered me the position. And so I drove out in my Volkswagen with my dog while my wife [then Jane Ayer Leavitt] and two kids [Katherine and Nancy Leavitt] came later by plane.

RATNER: What did you know about the museum before you accepted the position?

LEAVITT: Well, I didn't really know too much about the museum. I knew that they did not have a director and that they'd been without one for some time, actually at least

six months, maybe longer. What sold me on the position was going into a storage room and seeing the Galka Scheyer [Blue Four] Collection there, which was just staggering. To find such fine paintings in a closet in Pasadena was just astounding for me. So it was something to work with, and it seemed also a museum where they were looking for some direction. Later of course I found out a lot more about the history of the museum, [laughter] but I still would have taken it.

RATNER: What was your job description?

LEAVITT: Well, I suppose it's pretty much what all museums want, that is, museum trustees want--which is to lead the institution, to put on fine exhibitions, to help raise funds, and be the spiritual leader of the museum. It turned out I don't think that's exactly what they wanted, but that was something else.

RATNER: What was the composition of the staff in '57?

LEAVITT: I can't remember exactly. There was a well-formed education program with an education director; there was I think virtually no curatorial staff; there was a secretary who had been there for a long time, and a registrar--a combination I think of a registrar/accountant person; and a custodian who had been there for a long time, Carl Pongratz, a wonderful man who was also the preparator and actually did everything physical in the building. And



I think that was about it. There may have one or two more. There was a membership secretary. I can't remember her name, but she was quite imposing.

RATNER: So beyond the Galka Scheyer collection, which of course is wonderful, how would you characterize the rest of the permanent collection at that point?

LEAVITT: Well, very miscellaneous. There were some good things in it--I suppose all of them are gone by now--but there were a few good oriental things, a very fine Tang dynasty horse, very large. There were a number of older paintings, old master paintings, and American paintings, but not enough to really call a collection. There were just individual pieces. And there were quite a few contemporary works, mainly by Los Angeles artists, some of which had been purchased from the annuals that were held at the museum.

When I arrived, as I mentioned, they had been without a director for some time, and the history had been rather checkered. They had had a number of directors, the most effective of whom I guess was-- Well, the earliest that I knew about was Kenneth Ross, who later became director of the [City of Los Angeles] Municipal Arts Department. He was there for a while, and not-- I don't know why they let him go, but the parting was not all amicable I understand. And then John Palmer Leeper went there, and he

was the one who negotiated the Galka Scheyer collection coming to the museum. It had been in limbo for about eight years, since Galka Scheyer's death, and he was the one who finally persuaded the executors to deposit the collection in Pasadena. I think he was quite successful and went on to become director of the Marion Koogler McNay [Art] Museum in San Antonio, and is still there. Then Joe [Joseph] Fulton was director for a while and had problems and was let go, and then they didn't have a director for a while but would get in guest curators to organize exhibitions, like a large show of the Galka Scheyer collection, and also a [Marc] Chagall show ["Chagall Seventieth Anniversary Exhibition"] that everybody was very proud of at the museum.

But the museum, for the past six months at least, really had been run by the Art Alliance [of the Pasadena Art Museum], a formidable group of then young women who were quite wonderful and full of energy and strength and knew, or felt they knew, just what the museum should be and do. The trustees were very grateful I think to have them around because they did provide the energy. The trustees were rather a staid lot who, however, by the time I arrived had been sort of coopted by the [Art] Alliance, and the leadership was coming from that group rather than from the old-timers on the board of trustees. That was the

situation when I arrived. It was a lot for a twenty-seven-year-old to cope with. I had a couple of years of really kind of a rough time learning--what to do and how to sort of grab the leadership of the museum and direct it. But there wasn't any ill will. I don't think anybody was trying to take over or run things. It was more just a matter of the tremendous energy that some people in the group had and the need to express it and maybe a lack of patience with me learning the ropes at that stage. Nevertheless, we had a pretty good time and a good program. For the first nine months my family and I lived in the museum itself.

RATNER: Oh, really?

LEAVITT: The upstairs in the Grace Nicholson building, where the museum was located on Los Robles Avenue, was an apartment. Part of it was an apartment. The education department was up there, and some offices, but about one quarter of it was a rather sumptuous apartment if you had the right furniture. Of course I had no furniture and it was pretty sparse. Also it was a little difficult to have a family there--two young kids and a big golden retriever. But it was fun in a way, and we survived nine months there and then moved out to a little house in the Arroyo. What would you like to know about there?

RATNER: Could you tell me if you had a sense of what the perception of the museum was within the art community at

that time?

LEAVITT: It was really quite small, and the budget was small. I think it was just about a hundred thousand a year, if that. The exhibitions--there had been a couple of major exhibitions as I had mentioned, and they had given the museum some visibility in the Los Angeles community by the time I arrived. There was also an annual exhibition of Los Angeles and Pasadena area artists, which was an ongoing tradition, as well as a very newly conceived California Design program which had begun under Clifford Nelson. So the museum had some reputation, but it wasn't really focused on contemporary art very much, and there wasn't-- It was kind of a miscellaneous, small institution at the time.

What I did was to focus it more toward the contemporary, because it was what interested me, and also some exhibitions in that area we could afford a little more easily. I think the first exhibition of any size that we did was a national print competition. I felt that this would give us some nationwide notice as well as local notice, and so we advertised nationally and received, I forget how many, but a great many entries from all over the country. Then we got very good jurors: Lessing Rosenwald; A. Hyatt Mayor, curator of prints at the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] came one time; Fred [Frederick] Grunwald,

whose collection is at UCLA--now, he wasn't involved there then, but he was a collector in Los Angeles at the time--I forget, but some very big names in the print field were acting as jurors. We raised quite a bit of prize money, so we purchased quite a number of the prints for the collection and it was I think quite successful. We also had a historical section of the exhibition, which included old master printmakers from [Albrecht] Dürer and Japanese prints to Rembrandt and a wide range of things which we obtained from New York City dealers partly, and made sure people knew they were available to purchase, trying to stimulate collectors in prints. So that was the first effort. I think that was in the spring of '58 I guess, if I remember right.

And then the next sort of large exhibition was a show that I put together in the fall of '58 called "The New Renaissance in Italy." That was quite an ambitious undertaking for a little museum such as ours, and I went to New York and talked to dealers and museums to get them to lend to us works by Italian artists from the time of the futurists before the First World War right up to the present, with the idea of highlighting what seemed at that time to be a rather exciting new development in the course of art. I think it never really blossomed to the extent that it seemed to be at that time, but it was a show that

got national attention, and also brought me I think to the attention of the museum profession more. It was after that show that Rick [Richard F.] Brown, who was director of the Los Angeles County Museum [of Art] at the time, got me into the Association of Art Museum Directors as I think the youngest person ever to be admitted at that time. I'm sure there have been younger members since. So it was quite an exciting start and sort of set the direction of the museum.

RATNER: How supportive was the board of this new contemporary direction?

LEAVITT: Well, the Art Alliance people were really quite supportive of it. I think some of the older members of the board grumbled a bit about it, but it was clear that the Art Alliance had the power and were the ones who were actively raising funds and so on. So they were happy with it. I forget just who, but some of them and some of the trustees wanted me next to do a Georges Braque exhibition, and I didn't really want to do it because I thought it would be very difficult to do, and as it turned out it was very difficult to do. We did put together an exhibition and borrowed some fine paintings, but it really wasn't a first-class show. Museums wouldn't lend major works; Braque was just too important an artist for them to lend important paintings. So it was okay, but it sort of jelled in my mind the idea that I wouldn't put on exhibitions that

I didn't want to put on. It just didn't work very well. And I've tried also since that time not to force curators to organize shows that they really don't have their hearts in. It just isn't a good way of operating I think. But by and large, the board was very supportive. The board was headed at the time by Eudorah Moore, who was a very powerful powerhouse of a woman and was leader of the Art Alliance and went from there to be chairman of the board or president of the board. She was really quite wonderfully supportive on the one hand, but also very difficult to work with and trying on the other. Impatient I guess-- She knew just how things ought to be done, and if I wasn't doing them that way she had no hesitation in telling me so. And so we had lots of times of tension in those years, but they certainly were basically supportive, including Eudie Moore.

RATNER: What was the general composition of the board at that time in terms of diversified interests and capabilities, that sort of thing?

LEAVITT: Well, there were old lawyers, Bob [Robert] Dunlap and Dana Smith, and then some other younger people, manufacturers who had made a name--I can't remember all of their names right now--good and loyal people--new wealth--who were willing to help the museum, and a few sort of old Pasadena ladies of the stereotype sort, and then a whole other group of young Art Alliance graduates who supported

the new ideas. There was also an artist, Leonard Edmondson, on the board at that time, who was a good friend and ally in many a struggle. It was probably a pretty good board, but not a high-powered board. They weren't used to raising large sums of money. They had ideas about moving to Carmelita Park, but it wasn't until I'd been there four or five years that they really got moving toward the project of building a new museum.

RATNER: I'll want to go ahead and ask a little bit more about that in a few minutes, but I just wanted to ask you a few more questions about the board itself. How would you characterize the ability to raise money in Pasadena at that time?

LEAVITT: Well, there were some old families--Mrs. [Elizabeth] Crossett and a few other people who had old money, and they occasionally came through splendidly. But they were not people who had earned the money and they were essentially clipping coupons, and so it was I think difficult to expect them to give large sums of money. Also there were the lawyers I mentioned and businessmen, Harold Jurgensen among them, who had considerable amounts of money and again were not used to giving at a very high level but were more optimistic about raising the funds and getting other people to. And then there were younger men of high-tech firms who were an unknown quantity, but it was



expected that they would perhaps contribute quite handsomely to the museum one way or another. There was some feeling that the museum should keep its existing property and simply expand into the parking lot next door, but the lure of a new situation was too much, especially since the land at Carmelita Park was available. So I'd say that their fund-raising capacity was adequate for the operation of the old museum. They really had pretty much a balanced budget for most of the years that I was there, but the program wasn't as ambitious as it later became.

RATNER: You mentioned that Leonard Edmondson had been on the board at that time, and then at another point, I think maybe while you were there, Emerson Woelffer was also on the board, and I think an art critic, Jules Langsner, was also on.

LEAVITT: Well, Jules had been the person that the board, really the Art Alliance, had hired to do the Chagall exhibition and the Blue Four exhibition. He was a wonderful man, an art critic of real scope and ability, but a terrible administrator, so they knew they didn't want him to be the director of the museum. I can't remember if he was actually on the board. He may have been.

RATNER: Maybe it was earlier, maybe it was before you were there.

LEAVITT: It might have been. If he was on the board when

I was there, he didn't come to meetings. Don [Donald] Goodall was on the board at the time. He was an art historian and chairman of the art department at USC [University of Southern California] and I think very influential with the Art Alliance people at the time, and usually on the right side of things from my point of view.

RATNER: What kind of effort was made to continue having an artist sit on the board?

LEAVITT: Well, I felt that it would be a very good thing to have an artist on the board, at least one or two, who could help make the pitch for contemporary art when some of the people wanted to do things that were more broadly appealing at the time. And also some of the things we did weren't so palatable for large numbers. We got into trouble a number of times with various exhibitions, with various groups in the community, and so it would help to have artists around to explain things. We also had a very active art committee who considered acquisitions and exhibitions, and other artists were on that group, particularly Richards Ruben, who was very helpful at that time.

RATNER: I haven't come across anything about that committee really.

LEAVITT: It was very important. It was there that the decisions were made which exhibitions would be held. We

didn't really have funds to acquire very much, but as far as it went we consulted that group.

RATNER: Did you have to go back to the board with the exhibition schedule? Or it was decided within that group?

LEAVITT: It was pretty much pro forma. When the art committee had decided, then the whole group would approve it. I don't think they ever raised any serious question unless it was one of money or something.

RATNER: And who decided who was on that art committee?

LEAVITT: I can't remember how they were selected. I think essentially Eudie Moore and I just talked it over and put up their names and the board approved them.

RATNER: Did that same committee discuss deaccessioning? Or was that just an acquisition committee?

LEAVITT: They would have discussed it. I don't think we did much of any deaccessioning at the time when I was there. We still had plenty of room in storage and were looking to build a collection rather than refine it at that time.

RATNER: So in terms of autonomy with your day-to-day decisions as to how you were to run the museum, I guess what you're saying is that the major influence came from the Art Alliance rather than the board of directors.

LEAVITT: The main energy of the museum was supplied by the Art Alliance, that's right.

RATNER: So how--I don't want to say interfere--how much guidance did they give you in terms of day-to-day decisions? Or were you fairly autonomous in that regard?

LEAVITT: Not many of them interfered very much. There were different committees on which some of them served so that decisions would have been made. I guess my main problem with them was in terms of social things, both in terms of what I should be doing, although they were pretty good about that. My wife didn't like to entertain and really didn't like to socialize very much, and so I didn't have to do a lot of it although I knew that they wanted me to do more. But on the other hand, the socializing at the museum was a real problem. They had an annual ball which seemed to many members of the Art Alliance, at least from my perspective, to be the most important thing the museum did. And it had raised some money, but in years when I was there, and I think just before, it really would be lucky to break even, because they were so carried away by preparations for the ball that there wasn't much money left over at the end of it. A tremendous amount of energy and time--of my time--went into the preparations of that--that and a yearly treasure sale [Treasure Chest]. I can't remember exactly what it was called--

RATNER: I think it was called the treasure sale, the Treasure Chest sale.

LEAVITT: Something of that sort. It took up large amounts of the exhibition schedule because it was held in the museum, and also took a lot of staff time, and as far as I was concerned distracted from what we were really there to do. And so there was some friction about that. But they won. I wasn't about to challenge them on it, but it was a source of difficulty for a number of years.

I think gradually my position got stronger and stronger in relation to the Art Alliance, and although there were lingering dissatisfactions I think with the social end of things, they seemed to accept more and more the direction that I saw for the museum and the emphasis on contemporary art and so on that we established. It wasn't all contemporary though. We did some earlier things too. It wasn't official policy that it was a museum of contemporary art at that time at all. In fact, some of the paintings I liked best were earlier things that were in the collection. We did a fine exhibition of a collection of the Hudson River School owned by George McMurray of Glendale; it was one of the year's major exhibitions. That must have been somewhere around '60 or '61 I guess.

RATNER: What was the official policy during those early years?

LEAVITT: There really wasn't one. There wasn't one that was stated as far as I remember. We had essentially a

series of one-person shows, which did not have a catalog unfortunately. But those included avant-garde art, people that were just beginning to get known. We did early exhibitions of Robert Irwin, Ed [Edward] Kienholz, Llyn Foulkes, Peter Voulkos, and some older artists: Peter Krasnow--

RATNER: So, local people?

LEAVITT: But Los Angeles people. We considered Southern California our main focus, although we did have a major [Richard] Diebenkorn exhibition early on, also a Sam Francis show at that time. Other important exhibitions I guess were the German expressionist show ["Major German Expressionism Exhibition"], which was in keeping with the Galka Scheyer collection. We borrowed a great many works from museums and dealers throughout the country. We also did an exhibition of "A Decade in the Contemporary Galleries" at the museum, which was a kind of summary of the one-person shows to date. And every year, at least until near the end of my stay there, we did the annual of the Los Angeles region.

RATNER: How did you feel about that type of exhibition?

LEAVITT: Well, we saw the writing on the wall I think. The Los Angeles County Museum also had one, and they stopped it a few years before we did I think. The day of the effective competitive exhibition seemed to be about over. The main artists, the really top-notch artists

wouldn't submit, and since you had to turn down eight or ten artists for every one you accepted, you made eight or ten enemies for every friend. [laughter] It didn't seem to mean much to the artists after a while, so we eventually discontinued it.

RATNER: While you were there it was discontinued?

LEAVITT: I can't remember exactly when it was. I don't remember it in the last years that I was there.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

JANUARY 19, 1988

RATNER: Which of the exhibitions that you organized, or more than one, were your favorites?

LEAVITT: Well, it's hard to say. I guess the "New Renaissance in Italy" remains a kind of favorite of mine because I think it was a very good show, even though history didn't bear out its importance perhaps. But we were able to get remarkable things, and I still remember the elation when we would find a new artist of real importance and succeed in getting some paintings by him or her. I remember a number of the shows.

Shortly after I arrived, we did an exhibition of the work of William Millarc, who was a Los Angeles artist, or at least Southern California artist, who had been kind of a renegade I guess. He painted in a strange kind of cubist style, almost futurist I guess, and was a very disturbed individual. Eventually he committed suicide and had done so a few years [before the exhibition]. But we acquired a major work of his, *The Tiger*. I don't know whether that's still there. Probably not. But he was very highly regarded by artists in Los Angeles and a kind of a cult figure. So we did an exhibition, and I guess this was the first time I sort of got into trouble. Some enterprising reporter for the Pasadena paper went around to all the



churches in town and asked the ministers what they thought of a painting of the crucified Christ. Well, it was a futuristic painting with several pairs of eyes and several heads and arms. Then the results of all his interviews were printed. [laughter] We had some heat on that. The least understanding was a Methodist minister I think, maybe Baptist, I'm not sure, I won't say for sure. But in any case, he liked the version of Christ by a painter named Richard Kaufman, which is a very saccharine view of Christ with a very effeminate little beard and eyes imploring heaven and so forth. He felt that it was a sacrilege to allow such work as Millarc's to be shown, although he felt we had the right to do it but that it was really bad. And the most understanding was a Catholic priest who simply said that Christ had been shown in a number of ways by artists of every era, and this was a contemporary artist showing it from today's perspective. He guessed that some of the agony of Christ might be shown by the multiple eyes and the forms. So it caused a furor for a few days but it quieted down. They went right by futuristic views of people making love hanging right next to it--never caught that one. I guess they didn't recognize them.

I remember one time when I was giving a tour of an exhibition--I think it was one of the annual shows--to ladies from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, a group

of docents or council members from the county museum. I was talking to them and all of a sudden this two-year-old girl came running in without any clothes on and jumped up and said "Daddy!" and broke everybody up. This was when we were living upstairs in the museum. She had gotten out and was happy to find me there. There were some good times.

We also got in trouble a little bit with the early Kienholz exhibition because there was a piece in that called The Bad Cop, which was an evocation of the then police chief of Los Angeles [William Parker], who was a rather tough individual noted for his hard treatment of poor people and so on, or people who were arrested without adequate means to protect themselves. It had a little radio in it which was turned to the police channel, and we had some faint murmurings of discontent from the police chief but nothing ever came of it. That was all right, although another piece of Kienholz's I sort of objected to afterwards. I didn't realize at the time what it was. One of the pieces was a sawed-off back of a car, just the trunk, and you opened the trunk and it was filled with lollipops. He wanted all the children who saw the exhibition to take the lollipops, which they did. Whenever it got low he'd bring in another batch of lollipops and fill it up again. After the exhibition we took it apart, took the show apart, and took the lollipops out and found that at the bottom of the

trunk was a jar of decayed teeth in formaldehyde.

[laughter]

In those days, when you did an exhibition you didn't have to make such a production of it as you do nowadays. We would organize exhibitions on a very low budget, and the artists were cooperative and helpful and generally we had no problems with it. We could operate on that small a budget. We just couldn't do it now. It's not only inflation, it's also that the expectations are so much higher. We did have problems sometimes with timing because the artists were changing so quickly. An artist named Bob [Robert] Ransome--I've lost track of him, I don't know where he is now--but he was having a one-man show and was doing abstract painting, and I thought that was what we were getting in the exhibition until he came to me about a week before the exhibition opened and wondered "how to treat the pubic hair." That was the first indication I had that it was anything but abstract painting in the show. It turned out that he had changed completely and was doing mannequins that he humanized by padding here and there and adding pubic hair in tableaux. But we went ahead and did it. It worked out all right.

The art scene here then was really quite understandable. It wasn't very big. There were at most half a dozen galleries that one looked to to find works by

contemporary artists. I would come in to Los Angeles from Pasadena at least once a week or so and talk with artists, visit artists in the studios, or with dealers, and find out what was happening. It was a lot of fun in those days when the director could be a curator too. We didn't have a curator at the museum for the first five years I was there. And then Bob [Robert A.] Rowan came on the board, which was a really big step for the museum because he was already an active collector and interested in Pasadena from his family background, very dedicated to the museum and interested in upgrading the exhibitions and the collection. So it was he who suggested the possibility of getting Walter ["Chico"] Hopps on to the staff as a curator. When I sounded out Walter he was happy to do it. He had been the cofounder of the Ferus Gallery and had been very successful with it, but I think by that time he was wanting a bigger theater for his activities, and one that was nonprofit so that he could get a little more of an audience for the exhibitions he was planning.

RATNER: Had you been interested in hiring a curator prior to that?

LEAVITT: Well, I'd thought about it from time to time because it was getting to be a little much to handle. We did have very good volunteer helpers from the Art Alliance and the docent group and other volunteers--the San Marino

League helped with the education program for many years, and I thought about it, but I really hadn't seen how we could afford it and so I hadn't really proposed it. I probably wouldn't have thought of Walter, not because I didn't know him and like him and respect his work, but just because I didn't know he would be interested. As far as I knew he was making a lot more money as a dealer. He probably was. But I guess we should say something about the education program.

RATNER: Can I just ask you, while we're talking about Walter Hopps, how would you rate his curatorial abilities once he was at the museum?

LEAVITT: Well, we got along very well, and I really think he was fine, he was gifted in terms of his perception and his understanding of art. He did have his quirks; he preferred to work at night instead of at daytime, but we could do that because we were a small museum and there was a minimum of red tape. And he would usually show up when I needed him, and particularly to-- But other times he would disappear for a while, and he'd be working at other times of day, or at night, or at home. I just didn't keep very close tabs on him as long as he produced. And he did. He was very eager, had the contacts, and produced some fine exhibitions while I was there. [pause] I think I was also at a stage where I felt that I should spend a little more

time administering the museum and not so much on exhibitions, so it worked out well. I still did my shows and he did his. But I didn't have to do them all, which was a relief.

RATNER: So how did you divide that up?

LEAVITT: Well, he took, generally, the large contemporary shows and I would still do some of the smaller one-person shows and any historical exhibitions that we attempted. Some of the staff were a little exasperated with him from time to time because he would work at times when they weren't there, and they would try to reach him and he wasn't available and so on. But on the whole I think it was very satisfactory, and I think he had a good time too. I hope so. I of course had known him for years and had high regard for the Ferus Gallery, although at times they tended to act as though it was the only show in town, and I did think that there were artists of interest other than the ones that were handled by Ferus. So I guess I was somewhat broader in my reading of the Los Angeles art scene than Chico was. But we did respect each other and I think complemented each other pretty well. And also he kept better tabs on the national and international avant-garde scene than I was doing at that time. I think his being there also elevated the scale of exhibition that we began to become involved with, beginning with--what was it

called?--the "New Art of the Common Object."

RATNER: I think "The New Painting of Common Objects."

LEAVITT: I'm not sure of the exact title. But it was a very good exhibition and quite exciting at the time because it was the first large-scale exposure of pop art in the Los Angeles area. And it involved two sections. Equal space was given to New York artists and California artists. Each had its own look and its own direction, but almost all of the important New York people were there, so it was quite a significant event I think. Unfortunately, again no catalog.

RATNER: Why was that?

LEAVITT: I can't remember, except we must not have had enough money for it. Also I suspect that it was organized sort of at the last minute without much time to put things together. Walter was not a writer. He really didn't write much, and I guess at the time he was married to Shirley Hopps, later Blum, who would do some writing with him I think and would help him a lot in his professional career at the beginning. She has a Ph.D. in art history, had been a student at UCLA, was teaching I think at Riverside at the time. I'm not quite sure of the timing but I know she did teach there. Before I left he had begun work on the large Marcel Duchamp exhibition ["Marcel Duchamp Retrospective"]. And that was pretty far along when I left, just before it

opened.

RATNER: Oh, I wasn't sure whether you were still there when they had mounted that or not.

LEAVITT: I don't think so. I think I had just gone to Santa Barbara.

RATNER: One of the other things that I had come across--I wasn't sure whether it was an exhibition or just a program based on one of those annuals--it was called the "Director's Choice," where you were able to purchase a work out of a-- Was that a specific show that was held each year?

LEAVITT: We did that several times. The idea was to go to dealers, mostly in New York, sometimes in Los Angeles, and pick out a few works that we would like to acquire and then try to get board members or others in the community interested in buying them for us. We did acquire a few things that way but it wasn't a tremendous success.

RATNER: What I particularly liked about it-- I ran across this in one of their calendar of events; they described it. It said that the director selected a work for the collection based on aesthetic merit, not decorative or popular appeal. So I guess that must have been a big thing for them maybe to move into that area, to purchase it for those reasons.

LEAVITT: I guess. I can't remember what it was at that



stage.

RATNER: So did that happen with any regularity? Or was it just kind of a--?

LEAVITT: I think maybe three or four times, total.

RATNER: The other thing that the museum was famous for, in addition to its exhibitions it seems, were its openings. Do any stand out in your mind as particularly memorable?

LEAVITT: There were great social events at the museum. That was one thing the Art Alliance really did well. Every major show had a big bash of some kind. One of the exhibitions though--I remember the opening most vividly--was one of paintings by Herman Cherry and sculpture by David Slivka. Herman Cherry at the time was in California. He's a New York artist, still alive, very good painter. He's one of the original abstract expressionist artists and is highly regarded by artists but never really became very famous. At any rate, he was in the San Francisco area and came down--was coming down for the opening, and in talking with Don Goodall, Don asked him if there was anything we could do for him and he said, well, he wanted a girl supplied for him while he was in Pasadena! So Don was somewhat flustered at that and didn't quite know how to arrange this, and he talked to Eudie Moore and some of her friends and they got a store mannequin--it had green hair--they painted the hair green

and sat it next to him at the dinner table. Fortunately he took it in good spirit. It was a big event for a long time.

There were other things that happened. It was a time when there was-- Not everything was dead serious. You could do things and if they didn't all work out it wasn't the end of the world. You could do an exhibition and if it wasn't 100 percent successful you went on to the next one and didn't worry about it. So in that sense it was a very lively and happy time rather than one that was fraught with great anxiety, although, as I mentioned, there were tensions of a different nature. I left the museum in the summer of '63, not '64.

RATNER: We had mentioned the Galka Scheyer collection. I just wanted to ask you about that. How would you assess the museum's commitment to cataloging and publishing and exhibiting that collection?

LEAVITT: Well, I think it was sincere enough, but we didn't have resources really to do it properly. I think it was kept in the vault, the parts of it that were not on view, kept together very safely. It was not in good condition. We had to have conservation work done on the pieces. It was not of much interest to the Art Alliance and that crowd as a whole. It wasn't something that was always on view or always in their minds as a great asset to

the museum because it had been there so long I think. People took it for granted. We began doing more when I was in touch with [Lette] Valeska, who was Galka Scheyer's close friend and confidante. Valeska was a great force for moving ahead with the project. She had the dream of doing it herself. She had a lot of correspondence. We lent her some of the correspondence from the Galka Scheyer holdings, but it was just too big a project for her. And although I'd studied some German in college, I really wasn't up to it and we didn't have the resources for it. So it never really got off the ground in terms of really publishing it and documenting it. But we did understand the value of the collection and were very careful and always showed it at some point during the year, some portion of it. But a lot of the gallery space was devoted to temporary exhibitions. We tried to keep maybe two or three galleries for the permanent collection at all times and usually succeeded, but not always. But it was on the exhibition schedule that the reputation really began to be more and more based in those years. [pause] I'd say it looks as though from this list that about a third of the exhibitions were taken from other museums on a rental basis and two-thirds were put together by us. It's about that ratio.

RATNER: So that's a lot that were you doing on a small budget with a very small staff.

LEAVITT: It was a very active program. It kept everybody moving fast, but we had, as I say, good volunteers and also Bob [Robert M.] Ellis, our education curator, helped with exhibitions too from time to time. There were so many people involved that I sometimes have trouble remembering the names, but they were very important at the time, in terms of helping as volunteers or even a couple of them really as almost professional assistants with exhibitions. They also worked in fund-raising and other events too. It's hard sometimes to remember the exact year of some of these shows, or the exact dates. It's interesting to see when they actually were done.

RATNER: I'm sorry that it's not a complete list.

LEAVITT: I don't know whether they have archives in the Norton Simon Museum or not.

RATNER: Well, they have some, but they're a little touchy about letting anybody look at certain materials, so that's why it's not complete. Unless you had something specific you wanted to add about another exhibition I thought maybe we'd go ahead and talk about the design program.

LEAVITT: Okay. Some of the exhibitions I think are ones that I'm very happy to have done. The Hassel Smith exhibition was a very successful one. I would like to do another exhibition of his work someday if I can. He has been living in England for the past twenty years and is

still working actively. He's another fine artist that is often omitted from the California history of years in Northern California.

RATNER: I think there was a catalog for that show. I think I remember seeing that.

LEAVITT: I think so. Robert Irwin of course was doing abstract expressionist paintings at the time, very different from what he's known for more recently. I may be able to add a few shows to this list eventually.

California Design--

RATNER: That program--actually, I don't think it started out with the title "California Design"--but I think it began under Joe Fulton in around 1954. They had design shows then annually until 1962, when it became a triennial. How relevant did you feel the design program was to the museum's emphasis?

LEAVITT: I guess this was one of the areas of friction between me and Eudie Moore in that I could see the popularity-- The real reason for its being an annual event was its popularity, and it was extremely popular, even though it was a really demanding exhibition every year with lots and lots of time devoted to it. We at first hired people to put it together, and then Eudie Moore eventually took it over herself. But Eudie was always very much involved with it; it was really her baby right from the

beginning. She and Cliff Nelson would fight about lots of things, with good reason sometimes on her part. But for me it was more of a distraction and a lot of attention being given to something that was almost on the borderline of commercial. In the early years there was no real distinction between the commercial part of it and the fine art part. It was not like the good design program at the Museum of Modern Art or something. It really was what people were doing--there were different parts, there was a craft part and then the industrial design part. And Eudie I think saw it as a promotional event, to get support from the county and from the city and interest people in the museum and what it was doing. I guess for me it sort of exemplified the axiom that if you want to get a crowd of people to a museum, you have to do something that isn't art, that isn't aesthetic. And so it was-- It distracted a lot of energy, time, and attention from what we might be doing I felt, although I recognize that it was popular and that it did help bring in people. But Eudie was indefatigable in promoting it and working on it. She really knocked herself out for it and sometimes vowed she'd never do it again but always came back to carry it forward. And I would try of course to be cooperative. But it was hard to see so much of the museum's staff and time going toward it each year. But it did eventually gain a

kind of national attention and get good press.

RATNER: Oh, it did? I wasn't sure what the press was on it.

LEAVITT: It was really pretty good. They managed to get feature articles in the **Los Angeles Times**, and I think even in the **New York Times** or somewhere it would be mentioned and get some notice. Probably it did help the industry here. But it wasn't my favorite.

RATNER: What were Mrs. Moore's qualifications that she became appointed curator of design?

LEAVITT: Boundless enthusiasm. I don't think she had, as far as I know, any academic credentials in the area, but she was very, very bright and learned fast and was a powerhouse of energy and just wouldn't let any obstacle stand in her way. She became, over the years of her involvement with the show, really quite knowledgeable about design in California.

RATNER: How did you feel about the fact that she was both a staff member and a member of the board of trustees?

LEAVITT: Well, we handled it a little differently. We didn't really treat her as a staff member. She was like a guest curator. So she wasn't a regular employee, at least in my mind. I think it did get increasingly difficult because of her increased involvement with that. It clarified things a lot in '63 when she left the presidency

of the board. But I remember, it was at the annual meeting where she was retiring from the presidency that I announced that I was leaving the museum, in June of '63. She was the only president that I knew when I was director there. She was really a-- Had tremendous force. I remember she started a second family. She had two children and then with the same husband a second round of children when she was in her forties. So she was a mother of very young children at the time she was doing all this work on California Design and acting as president of the museum. But she was also extremely nervous and high-strung. I guess she just had to keep moving all the time. [pause]

I'm trying to see if we did some other design-- Well, we did "Beatrice Woods Ceramics" and some other craft shows I think, some of which are not in here, other than California Design. Of course the Peter Voulkos exhibition in '58 was a fine show. He had just turned to large scale sculpture at the time, in ceramic medium, and had a kiln in Glendale that he and John Mason shared. They almost burned the building down a couple of times with this huge kiln that they had built to fire these big pieces. He was already very prominent as a teacher, but it was his massive force that kept that whole direction in sculpture--in ceramic sculpture--going. He initiated it. It was very exciting to go and visit him in his studio at the time, to



see the works that he was producing. John Mason was just about as exciting and doing also very large scale ceramic works. I'd forgotten that it was as early as '58 that we had the Voulkos exhibition.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 19, 1988

RATNER: Before we switched tapes you were talking a little bit about John Mason and Peter Voulkos. Did you want to add anything else about that?

LEAVITT: Well, it's just that they were--particularly Peter, who was already kind of a legend at that time, but he had never had an exhibition of a major sort, and this show really I think helped him get underway. He was still teaching at, not Chouinard, but the other school here--

RATNER: Otis [Art Institute, now Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design]?

LEAVITT: Otis.

RATNER: I think maybe later they started doing more design shows in addition to the California Design series.

LEAVITT: Yes, well, I suspect that my lack of enthusiasm for it showed, and when I left there was another vacuum for a while before they settled on Walter Hopps as the next director. I suspect they might have gotten some design shows in there. Some of the exhibitions that were done after I left were already of course under way.

RATNER: Right, that's another reason why I added those extras, because I wasn't exactly sure when in '64 you had left.

LEAVITT: Well, I left in July of '63, but the [Emil] Nolde

exhibition was already just about completed. It came from Berkeley, I think. No, maybe we put that together, I'm not sure. But the Marcel Duchamp show ["Marcel Duchamp Retrospective"] was well along, the John McLaughlin, and the Alberto Burri exhibition was already contracted for.

RATNER: How often did you travel your shows?

LEAVITT: Not so frequently. The "New Renaissance in Italy" didn't go anywhere, nor did the "Contemporary Dutch Prints" show we put together. That may have gone to another museum. It wasn't really done so frequently in those days. "Georges Braque" I don't think went anywhere. No, I would say most of them were just Pasadena. I think the Nolde show went on. I think ["Major] German Expressionism [Exhibition"] went up to Berkeley after. There was a major Klee exhibition in there somewhere, too. Paul Klee.

RATNER: Really? That seems funny that that's not on here. I think there was a Klee show that was done--I can't remember now if it was Klee or [Alexei von] Jawlensky that was done later with the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum]. But there was one while you were there?

LEAVITT: I think it may have been just after I left. We had done most of the work for it. I think the Klee exhibition was organized at Berkeley, if I remember

rightly, and then came down to Pasadena. Let's see. I think there were quite a number of one-person shows that are not reflected here. I don't know where I could find those unless that decade show catalog would have some of them I think. Do you have that?

RATNER: I don't know if I do, but I have seen that somewhere.

LEAVITT: It's a major catalog, at least for that time.

RATNER: Martha [B.] Padve, I don't know if you knew her, she gave a big box of catalogs to the Museum of Contemporary Art [MOCA]. So I went through those and I think maybe I saw that there.

LEAVITT: I can't remember which year it was.

RATNER: But other people have talked about that as well. It's familiar to me.

LEAVITT: Well, that would give a summary of the one-person shows to that time, whenever that was. I think it was called "A Decade in the Contemporary Galleries," if I remember right. It must have been '62 maybe.

RATNER: Something like that. I have a list of those. I'll check to see what was in that box that she had given to MOCA. Let me ask you one final question about the exhibition policy. When a museum is privately funded, as Pasadena was, to whom is it responsible in terms of issues such as exhibition policy?

LEAVITT: It depends on how it's chartered. The Pasadena Art Museum was a private museum, although it was occupying city property. The city put in some money toward it each year--not much. I think it was \$30,000 or something. So they had an interest in the museum, but the board of trustees considered itself, and I think was, legally responsible for the content of the exhibitions and the collections. They ultimately are responsible to the people, but I don't think there's any system in California as there is in New York where the board of regents is responsible for the operation of museums within the state. On the whole the board was always quite supportive of our exhibition policy.

We did have one occasion at the time of "The Art of Assemblage" in which one day shortly after it opened I had a call to come downstairs because there were two gentlemen from the American Legion there. I went down and told Walter Hopps about it, and we went down and talked with them. Walter explained that this work, an assemblage by George Herms, was a nostalgic evocation of the 1930s, which had part of a tractor wheel and an ax handle I think, something like that, and a tattered American flag was part of the composition, and that it was not meant in any way as disrespectful to the American flag. He hadn't mutilated the flag. It was found that way and it was incorporated

into the composition to evoke that period in American life. They listened carefully and they agreed that it was quite all right but other people wouldn't think so, so we had better take it down. [laughter] So then we said, "Well, the artist intended it; we can't really just take it down." But I had to bring it up before an emergency session of the board and they were very worried about it, and it hit the Los Angeles Times the next morning. And for about three or four days after that it was on the front page. Big news. Other groups came in, Veterans of Foreign Wars and other patriotic groups, and I got threatening phone calls. Our stand was that if it was illegal, then we would take it down because we didn't want to be involved in breaking the law. But if it was not illegal, the artist had the right to expression and we would keep it up.

Finally our lawyer, Bob [Robert] Dunlap, on the trustees found a section of the New York veterans code which states that it's illegal to attach something to an American flag. Well, it's a question first whether it's an American flag in that condition, because it was only a remnant, and secondly whether something was attached to the flag or the flag was attached to something. But the trustees said that was enough and we had to take it down. So we sent out another news release and were going to take it down, but that night somebody broke into the museum

supposedly and ripped the flag off the assemblage and scrawled on a note next to it, "I did what had to be done." The next morning the newspapers were out with our decision to take down the piece, but the following day of course it had the headline about the vandalism. And it made really good editorials for us, because the point was that in the due course of things the museum had acted responsibly and was going to remove it, and somebody took the law into their own hands and it was a violation and so on. I always suspected Walter of doing it [laughter] but I don't know if he did or not. I never asked him.

It was an interesting episode and also led to the confiscation of another piece in the show by William Copley, who had made an assemblage with a hypodermic needle in it which had been filled with glue so it was inoperative. But the police confiscated it and took it to police headquarters and were going to destroy it. We had to go over and say, "Well, the piece is insured; the artist is going to collect from the insurance company. You'll be sued by the insurance company for willful destruction." Then finally we asked, "Does this have anything to do with the American flag incident?" He said, yes, unofficially. So they had gone through the exhibition very carefully to see if there was anything they could nab us for. So we finally got it back. It was an interesting time.

There were lots of characters then too--some older artists that I suppose are all gone now, but they were characters that should be remembered. Peter Krasnow, Rico Lebrun, Hans Burkhardt and others who were old-time artists that were pretty good. I think it was that first print exhibition and then others that followed that really stimulated my interest in old master prints. That's an interest that's continued in other museums where I've been since then. There were some good print dealers in Los Angeles at the time, particularly O. [Orrel] P. Reed and Jake [Jacob] Zeitlin, who helped a lot with some of the shows we did at that time. So it wasn't just contemporary art then.

I think the reason that I left was partly I guess due to sort of the unresolved frictions about California Design and other things, but also the Santa Barbara [Museum of Art] had a much better American collection, and that was sort of my field. It was also a somewhat larger museum with a better collection. It seemed to be ideally suited to my background and interests at the time, so I decided to move up there. But it was not easy, because I'd put a lot of time and energy into this museum and was really very much attached to it and to some of the people.

Well, there are other things we could talk about. One would be some of the personalities involved with the



museum, which I'd be happy to do if I could remember names. Another is the education program, which was quite important I think there.

RATNER: And I also will want to talk about the decision to go ahead with the new building. I don't want to take too much of your time today, but maybe the education department would be a manageable thing to discuss now, and then we could talk about some of the personalities, which I'd like to hear about, and the new building program tomorrow.

LEAVITT: Sure, that sounds fine. The education program was already flourishing when I arrived. I think it had been begun by Susanna Mueller, who in a strange way carried on a tradition that had been really begun by Galka Scheyer, not at the Pasadena museum, but in Oakland, and involved an approach which was quite unusual at the time of letting children express themselves through the material. The idea was that you gave them material, gave them a notion to start with, some kind of focus or idea, but really let them go at it. At the time it was quite unusual for this and resulted in some wonderful things, because the teachers were all inculcated with this approach and were very supportive of whatever the children did. Bob [Robert M.] Ellis was the head of the education program while I was there and really brought it along very well. There were classes in painting and ceramics and sculpture as well as

some idea classes for older kids.

It was very expensive, was losing money consistently, and was supported for quite a few years--originally I think it was started by the Junior League. They were very much involved, but gradually they withdrew and it was being supported by the San Marino League, which was a group of ladies somewhat older than the Art Alliance people for the most part, but extremely dedicated and contributing not only money but also volunteer time to the program. There were some very good teachers, and the reputation of the education program was quite wide. There came to be pressures brought by the board to make it more self-supporting, which was difficult. It was reduced in scale at one point because they felt that the museum just couldn't stand the loss. The San Marino League helped, but I think gradually withdrew, and eventually Bob Ellis left to go on to the University of New Mexico, where he still is.

It then I think went into something of a decline at that point, but it was still for a time the most adventurous art program for children in Southern California. Its approach led to the founding of a children's museum, indirectly I think, the children's program at Barnsdall Park, whatever it's called [the Junior Arts Center]. The influence went I think way beyond

Pasadena, to a number of other institutions. I think one of the problems was that it gets very expensive, because you're spending a lot of resources on relatively few children. And the children characteristically aren't from the poorer parts of town, and so you are spending a good deal of money to reach relatively few well-to-do families. It just seemed less important to do that after a while. The impulse, though, I think was very good. The excitement about it was genuine.

We would have exhibitions up in the children's gallery area, but we didn't believe in prizes or a lot of publicity about children's art because the experience was that if you reward too much in a material way the work of kids they get easily sort of satisfied with what they're doing and stop adventuring into new things, those that are successful. And those that aren't successful get discouraged and stop working, so we tried to make sure that there was equal attention paid to everybody's work, even though some of them were much more exciting than others. It was very close to the ideas that Galka Scheyer brought to her teaching in the very early days. I think Susanna Mueller might have been directly inspired by Galka Scheyer, although I don't know what the actual connection was.

Bob Ellis, who is a very good painter, I guess must be not too far from retirement now in the University of New

Mexico. His painting changed greatly after he left Pasadena, from an abstract expressionist style to an extreme sort of photorealism, realism utilizing photographs. I haven't been in touch with him lately, but he's always an interesting artist. Well, maybe we should leave it there and continue tomorrow.

RATNER: Okay, we'll pick up again tomorrow. Great. Thank you very much.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 20, 1988

RATNER: Before we continue with our discussion of the Pasadena Art Museum, in listening to the tapes I had a couple of follow-up questions that I wanted to ask you. When we were talking about the director's job and I was asking you what the job description was, you said that the board was apparently looking for somebody who could be a leader and a fund-raiser and someone who could mount fine exhibitions. But then you said later you realized that they were probably looking for something else. What did you mean by that?

LEAVITT: I guess I meant that they were looking for someone who would fit into the social scene of Pasadena, an asset that way as well as in running the museum. It seemed sometimes that the quality of the parties was more important than the quality of the exhibitions, but not all the time. There were a number of people among the Art Alliance [of the Pasadena Art Museum] people, and also the [board of] trustees, who really understood quality and value of the range of exhibitions that we could do there. But for some, I think, in those days the social part of it was much more important.

RATNER: Also when we were speaking about Walter Hopps you said that you had begun to feel a need for a curator

sometime prior to his being hired but that you were concerned about how the museum would be able to finance such a position. Then Robert [A.] Rowan suggested that Hopps be hired for this position. Where did you come up with the money to pay for him?

LEAVITT: As I remember--and I might be wrong on this--but as I remember, Mr. Rowan took care of his salary, or gave the museum an equivalent amount for a period of time so that we could afford to have him. It was not a large salary in those days, but it seemed to be adequate to attract him, and actually I think the exhibitions that Walter organized justified the expense in the minds of the trustees so that in subsequent years they were happy--or the subsequent year they were happy--to cover his salary. I can't remember just what the size of the budget was in those days, but I'm pretty sure it was under \$100,000 for the whole year's operation.

RATNER: Did that allow Mr. Rowan any extra influence in terms of the types of exhibitions or that sort of thing?

LEAVITT: Well, he was always very modest in any kind of influence on the museum in terms of what kinds of shows we would do, or what acquisitions we had. He didn't consider himself an expert in those days and was more than willing to listen to Walter and to me about what we felt was important. He was a great support on the board of trustees

for that reason. He was sort of on our side in most of the issues that came up.

RATNER: And then finally about Hopps. How would you explain the hesitation in hiring him as director? You said there was a lapse of time before they decided that he would be the director.

LEAVITT: As I remember, they conducted a national search and I guess didn't come up with anybody that seemed a natural successor to me, so they eventually settled on Walter--I think reluctantly because he had had no museum experience except his work at the Pasadena museum. He had no administrative experience at all except as head of a gallery. So I think there was great hesitation about his ability to cope with all the business aspects of the museum's operation. This is all supposition on my part because I wasn't really there when they were doing this, but I imagine that's what the concern was. I think they decided to give him strong administrative support so that he could focus more on the aesthetic side of things.

RATNER: And finally regarding our discussions yesterday when we were talking about the California Design program and the hiring of Eudorah Moore as curator, I know you said she was hired because of her "boundless enthusiasm," but who appointed her to that position? Or was it self-appointed?

LEAVITT: Well, I don't think she actually was president of the board while she was hired. I think she left the presidency of the board in June of '63 and was made paid director of the California Design show after that, so there was no direct conflict. I suppose the board appointed her. Probably with her encouragement.

RATNER: So how much say did you have in that whole situation?

LEAVITT: Very little. Very little. As I remember, I was really gone by the time she was actually paid. Do you know when the first exhibition was that she directed?

RATNER: I thought it was '62. No, she did '62 on a volunteer basis, that's right.

LEAVITT: That's right, in '62 she was a volunteer. And she did it, I mean, it was her show in '62, but we didn't pay her. And so the next one was three years later presumably, and so that would have been quite a while after I had left.

RATNER: So how much say did you have in deciding that there should be such a position on the museum staff instead of just hiring guest curators?

LEAVITT: I wasn't very enthusiastic about it, and maybe that's why they waited until after I left to appoint her. It seemed to me that an inordinate amount of time and energy went into that exhibition as opposed to the other



shows on the schedule. And particularly, given my feeling that design was more of a marginal interest, or should be a marginal interest of the museum rather than a central one, I wasn't very enthusiastic. So I guess I didn't have very much to say about it except that they couldn't do it until I left.

RATNER: Okay, great. Thank you.

I thought we would go ahead and start today on the topic of the new building program. I believe that the plans to return to Carmelita Park, which was the original site of the museum, actually got underway while you were the director. What were the reasons given for going ahead with a relocation?

LEAVITT: It became obvious that the building we had was too small for the kind of operation we were becoming. We needed more gallery space. We wanted to have better storage facilities. It was part of what we thought would be a natural growth pattern. Furthermore, we had to exercise our right to reclaim that site for the museum by a certain date or we would risk losing it. And so we felt we had to act rather speedily to reserve that Carmelita Park site. I'm trying to remember the exact year that things really got underway. It must have been in late '59 or '60 that we really began getting serious about fund-raising for a new museum and getting a design. Originally as I

remember, we hired Pereira, William Pereira, the architect, to do a kind of site study. Or [Charles] Luckman-- No, I guess it was Luckman and Pereira, there was a combined team. And it was Luckman that we used to design a sort of general site plan for Carmelita Park to house the new museum. He did some work; we didn't like it very much and rejected it on the basis that it really destroyed too much of the site. It was a very beautiful sloping park with a Pitch and Putt golf course on it and lovely trees, large specimen trees, and we wanted to have a design that would preserve a lot of that as a public park while at the same time incorporating what we needed for the museum. Luckman's first plan really didn't do that very well.

Meanwhile we hired a fund-raising firm whose name I can't quite remember now. I remember the man who was assigned to us was Jim Broadhead, but I can't remember the name of the firm. At any rate, they were not raising the funds themselves of course, but organizing the board to raise funds. They created a kind of structure that we should expect to follow if we wanted to raise the money for the new museum. So that got underway, and Wesley [I.] Dumm made his pledge quite early, but it was nowhere near what we had hoped to get from him. That set things back a bit, because the rest of the trustees really weren't prepared to come in with very large sums. Harold Jurgensen

was sort of the head person on this drive, although he was not yet president of the board. He spearheaded it. Art [Arthur] Hanisch was a member of the board, and he was a great friend of Edward Durrell Stone and had hired Stone to design a building for him, for his firm. So he made a pledge contingent on using Edward Durrell Stone as the architect. So Stone was hired, but again I think Hanisch didn't come through with the funds that we quite expected from him, and so we were still way short.

Nevertheless, it was felt it was important to have a design for which we could raise funds, so we went ahead with Stone and for the next two years really worked with him to develop a design for a building on the site. He had been in contention at the same time for the design of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Ric [Richard F.] Brown, who was a very close friend of mine, told me how they drove Stone around Los Angeles to show him all the hamburger joints that had grills on them so that Stone would get away from his habit of putting grills around buildings, which was a very big thing in those days. When Stone came to design our building, he didn't put a grill around it. In fact it was a very modest-looking building, but I think quite effective.

I think it would have been a very good design. There were some engineering problems on the early drawings, such

as a bearing wall without any support underneath it and some things like that which had to be cleared up, but it was kind of a wonderful large space with a huge library that Bob Rowan was interested in because it would house, we hoped, the murals of Mark Rothko that had been intended for the Four Seasons restaurant in New York and then rejected. So he had these large paintings on hand, in fact several sets of them. We went to see Rothko in New York, and he was prepared to give us the four really large wall murals for about \$50,000, which would have been a wonderful coup. And he liked the idea that they would be in a library, which is a used room, rather than in a gallery.

But then, let's see, I think it was just after I had left, when they were still in the midst of fund-raising, that the preliminary estimates of the cost of the Stone design came in, and they were way over what we had hoped to raise. I never heard the exact details of it, but in any case, ultimately Stone's design was rejected. They'd spent already \$60,000 or \$70,000 on drawings, but I guess it came in so high that they felt they couldn't raise the rest. There may have been some other factors that I'm not aware of in rejecting that design. Also, I should say, Stone's design did preserve the trees in the park and the slope of the land. There was a parking area down below,

but I thought it was basically very respectful of the park site. But the trustees rejected that and eventually settled on Thornton Ladd, who is a Pasadena architect, to design the building, but that was really later and came while Walter was director. At the time Thornton Ladd was relatively young and hadn't designed any museums. I think he had designed supermarkets and some other office buildings and homes around Pasadena and Los Angeles and was undoubtedly a very gifted architect. He apparently wasn't apprised of the requirements to preserve the site, and so the new design sprawled out over the whole park and really obliterated the quality of Carmelita Park.

Meanwhile, I guess the fund-raising didn't progress as rapidly as they had hoped, so they ended up borrowing money to complete the building, and that I think was the beginning of the end of the Pasadena museum. But my involvement really ended-- Well, when I left, Stone was still the architect, the fund-raising was progressing slowly but still going ahead, and there had been some major disappointments, particularly with the contributions of some of the trustees that we had hoped would be larger. There was no thought at that time, while I was still there, of making it into a Los Angeles contemporary art museum. It was still strictly a Pasadena effort, although we did hope that some of our supporters from Los Angeles, of whom

there were quite a few, would contribute to it. But that really didn't happen.

There were also efforts to improve the collections in those days too. We signed a contract really with Fred [Frederick] Weisman to buy a number of his paintings which he wanted to dispose of. Some of the paintings were quite good, and we paid sort of bargain prices for them, but we wouldn't have done it unless he had sweetened the pot somehow to make it really worthwhile. So part of the deal was that he would--if we did this--he would give us at some point a very major Kandinsky painting that he owned which at the time was worth maybe close to a hundred thousand dollars. And that's what made the whole deal worthwhile for the museum. Then later, after I'd left, I guess he changed his mind about wanting to give that painting, and so there was quite a lot of turmoil about that. I think they eventually did get it. They didn't get it?

RATNER: I don't think so. I think actually-- Well, I'm not exactly sure, but I think Norton Simon actually ended up suing him for the painting. I think that's what happened.

LEAVITT: Well, he had a basis. I mean, it was signed that he would do this. But of course what had happened in the meantime was that the value of the Kandinsky had skyrocketed so that it was worth many times the amount that he had thought to give us. That was an unfortunate

incident.

While I was there, we really didn't deaccession anything, but I guess after I left some works were sold off, and particularly when it was decided that it would be a museum of contemporary art. Some of the older works were sold, which was okay I guess. It clarified the mission of the museum. I think they held onto the prints. We had a pretty good old master print collection that I had been interested in developing. It wasn't until Norton Simon came along that those were deaccessioned. I don't know whether he got rid of all of them or just some of them. It was still really quite a small operation at the time I left, but soon it got much bigger. But from then on I heard about things really only from a distance in Santa Barbara.

RATNER: Part of the plan for moving back to Carmelita Park, from my understanding initially, was that there would be a whole cultural center. What do you remember about that?

LEAVITT: I think it was hoped that that part of town would support a number of buildings that would be culturally related. At the time, the Pasadena theater, I can't remember the exact name of it, but Pasadena had a repertory theater that was really quite good.

RATNER: Playhouse, I think it's called.

LEAVITT: Pasadena Playhouse, right. And it was hoped that they might build there, make an addition, and it was in its time a very avant-garde, active, and popular center in Pasadena. It had two parts to it: a more popular playhouse, the Mainstage, in which they really had to have plays that would draw large numbers of people just to survive, and then a more experimental theater [the Playbox] which some of the trustees of the theater anyway felt was equally important. Some of the Art Alliance people in fact became very involved with that avant-garde part of the Playhouse. Again I'm trying to remember the name of it, can't quite, but they had a very fine director--his name was Barney Ross, something like that, [Barney Brown] who had really vitalized the place. People were working for it and it was up and coming and then he suddenly died of a heart condition that he had known about but hadn't thought would come to a head so quickly. That sort of took the wind out of the sails at that experimental theater, and so that never really developed, and then I guess the Pasadena Playhouse itself went under a while later.

Also the Chamber Music Society in Pasadena was very strong, and it was hoped that they would develop a theater or a concert hall near there to complement the museum. I guess the used car lots won out. There was a lot of energy



at one time there in building Pasadena as a cultural center. But at the same time this was going on, the population was changing and the downtown area was becoming less and less desirable and stores were moving out, so that you had at the same time dreams of building and a decay at the center of the city which lasted for a number of years. Some of our trustees and volunteers were involved in those other efforts, but there was never, as far as I remember, a coordinated effort to produce the buildings that would create a cultural center.

RATNER: In 1960, I have as a note that Dudley Wright was appointed general chair of the Carmelita Center Fund-raising Drive. Now, I don't know if that was just for the museum--

LEAVITT: That was for the museum.

RATNER: It was just for the museum. Okay. How supportive was the board in general of the idea of doing a whole cultural center?

LEAVITT: I don't think they were very concerned with it as a unified effort. I think they would like to take advantage of it to increase the numbers of people involved and the excitement that it generated, but I don't think, as far as I can remember, that there was ever a concerted, united drive to create it.

The relationship of the Pasadena Art Museum to Los

Angeles is a rather interesting one, because that changed a lot over the years, and when I came, except for [Donald] Don Goodall, who lived I think in Pasadena but was on the faculty at USC [University of Southern California], and maybe one or two others, the whole board was completely Pasadena and the support was focused there. But over the years I got to know a lot of the collectors in Los Angeles, and they became interested in what we were doing, and we got some gifts from Max Zurier and other Los Angeles collectors who took an interest in what we were doing out there. It was never really major financial support, but in terms of occasionally giving a painting or object to the museum, or in coming to our social events and lending to exhibitions and that sort of thing, they were very cooperative.

But then I guess with Bob Rowan's coming onto the board and maybe one or two others, there came to be an interest in trying to entice more of the Los Angeles people to Pasadena in terms of their allegiance. The Los Angeles County Museum [of Art] at the time was having its own problems and was not really doing very much in the contemporary field. And so we found a vacuum which we were able to fill for a time. I think really after I left, the drive to involve Los Angeles collectors increased, and in fact I think the thinking of the trustees became dependent

on Los Angeles assistance. They dreamt of becoming the museum of contemporary art for the whole of Southern California and assumed that major financial support would be forthcoming from the Beverly Hills collectors. Unfortunately that never materialized. Los Angeles collectors began getting dreams of their own as far as contemporary art goes. I don't know just where the misjudgment came in, but at some point I think the Pasadena board became unrealistic in their expectations of what would happen with the new museum.

It's hard to see exactly what they could have done differently to make it work. Perhaps if they had been a little more modest in the building that they eventually erected and more realistic about the budget and what would be required to operate the new building they could have maintained it indefinitely. But I guess times were getting hard for a great many people, and the financial base just wasn't there in Pasadena to do what they dreamed of doing, although the museum, when it was moved to the new site, and particularly with Jim [James T.] Demetrion and Bill [William C.] Agee later on, did reach real heights in quality and scale of exhibitions. They did major shows that they could certainly be proud of. It's just unfortunate that the support mechanism wasn't really in place.

RATNER: I'm curious to know what you thought about the--  
Part of the original plan for the new building was an  
oriental wing. How did you feel about that?

LEAVITT: Well, that was artificial from the beginning. It  
reflected the interests of one donor who had a good  
collection of Chinese porcelains I think, Virginia [Steele]  
Scott. And as I understand it, it was a superb collection,  
not large but of absolutely top-notch quality. And so the  
idea was that with her support, which would be substantial,  
there would be an Asian gallery or wing, and that this  
would be an integral part of the new Pasadena Art Museum.  
In a way it was appropriate because the old building was  
Chinese in concept and design and a lot of people felt very  
sentimental about the Asian component of the old collection  
and building. As I mentioned last time, we had some very  
fine Asian things in the collection. But obviously an  
Asian wing or collection in the new building was running  
against the tide of our increasingly contemporary  
program. I think that's what ultimately led to its  
abandonment and perhaps the formation of the Pacific Culture  
Foundation which occupied the old building of the museum,  
which was of course after I had left. But I think the  
disaffected people in Pasadena who treasured the idea of an  
Asian wing or gallery came to the support of that new  
effort [the Pacific Asia Museum] and made it work. But it

probably really didn't make much sense to have an Asian gallery in the new building because it just didn't have anything to do with the major thrust of the museum.

I suppose if that thrust hadn't been there, if the idea of becoming a contemporary museum exclusively hadn't been so strong, there might have been a number of supporters of old-time Pasadena who would have come in in a much greater way, people like Mrs. [Elizabeth] Crossett and others who really had no use for contemporary art at all but believed in the museum and had given generously in the past to it. Of course, in that area we had the competition from the Huntington Gallery [Huntington Library, Art Collection and Botanical Gardens], which was devoted to older art, and the Crossett collection of old master prints had already been given there. I don't know whether we might have gotten a portion or all of it if we had made a greater play for it in the early years. But it was a magnificent collection that she owned. Even though I was instrumental I think in sort of pushing the museum toward a contemporary program and tried to do things that were of interest today and avant-garde in concept, I never really completely accepted the idea myself of the museum becoming exclusively contemporary. I enjoyed a full range of exhibitions, and I think that's one of the things that tempted me in Santa Barbara: that although they had an

active contemporary program, they really were glad to consider historical exhibitions and acquisitions too.

Some of the artists that were in Pasadena at the time were interesting. I mentioned Leonard Edmondson and Richards Ruben who lived nearby, but there were others. Walter Askin was a very fine artist whose humorous work was of very high quality I thought. And we also had a number of artists up in the hills, "Jerry" [Jirayr] Zorthian and [Robert] Ransome, whom I mentioned yesterday, lived in the foothills of Altadena, and quite a few others around there who were instrumental in advising us on the exhibitions committee or just as interested friends in the community. I think most of the shows and publications that document the history of art in Southern California are really rather skewed to feature the artists that were in just a few galleries, two or three galleries, but there was a lot more going on. Someday it would be nice to see an exhibition that would recapture the real flavor of that time without rewriting history to make certain artists seem more important than they were at the time. I don't know who could do that.

RATNER: Right. A lot slipped through the cracks I imagine.

LEAVITT: There are artists who are not remembered today, like [William] Millarc, who at the time were really quite significant to the people who were living then, even if

history hasn't designated a place of importance for the artists. But instead I think the Ferus Gallery people in particular, but also a couple of others, are awarded a dominant place that they didn't really have at the time. There was also of course a lot of bad painting then, as always, and some of the bad painters were among the most influential, and they too are more or less forgotten unless they're still around influencing things.

Also the contributions of some of the volunteers who worked at the Art Alliance I think should somehow be preserved and recorded. I don't know how that could be done either, but Fran [Frances] Jeffries [Esberg] and her husband [Alfred Esberg]-- He was on the board for a time, and she was more active earlier as a volunteer at the Art Alliance. Priscilla O'Grady, who won the membership contest award one year, was very active. Priscilla Allen, who was one of the people I encouraged to help with exhibitions, was really professional in her ability to organize the correspondence and so forth for exhibitions. Without these people we just couldn't have functioned as well as we did on such a tiny budget.

RATNER: Well, those are names I haven't come across at all, since I'm--

LEAVITT: I'm sure they wouldn't be because they were not involved in the big decisions, and yet they were awfully

important. There are many others who I'm sure I've forgotten. Not forgotten, but just would have to think about a while. Barbara Smith, who later became a well-known performance artist in Southern California, was, when I was there at the museum, a volunteer, very much a suburban housewife with kids and all of the usual burdens and advantages of a volunteer wife. I suppose in those days too there were a lot more women who did not work, and so were highly educated and had time on their hands and were more than eager to help out at the museum. It made a huge difference in the quality of the activity at the museum at the time.

RATNER: I'm going to flip the tape while you're thinking of names.



TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

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RATNER: Before I flipped the tape you were talking about some of the volunteers. It would have been good if I could have brought a list of people who had been in the Art Alliance then. That, I'm sure I could get somewhere.

LEAVITT: Yes, that would be interesting, because many whose names I may not be able to remember just offhand were quite important at the time. You mentioned Martha [B.] Padve; she was one who was very active and helpful in the early days. It's hard to imagine now the power that the Art Alliance had in determining the course of that museum's progress over a period of time, but it really was the key to the growth of the museum for quite a period. The board of trustees was much less powerful--until later. When the big decisions had to be made, then the board was there, when talking about the growth of the new museum and so on. But I think it was also the energy of the Art Alliance that got them thinking about a new museum and the need for a new structure. Of course, the fact that Eudie Moore was so active in the Art Alliance reinforced their impact on the trustees. Elizabeth Hanson is another one who was extremely active and helpful in many ways. She and Eudie were great buddies and worked together on a lot of projects. She was a very special person too in those early

days particularly.

RATNER: Why do you feel it happened that the Art Alliance assumed such a dominant position over the board of trustees? I mean, that's so unusual.

LEAVITT: I don't know. It happened before I got there. I think it was rising to emergencies. These women were then very young, some of them, and just settling into comfortable suburban life, and found a "cause."

Interestingly, although I'm sure new people came into the Art Alliance, it was that original group that stuck with it right throughout-- In fact, I guess there are still some of them involved who were there at the beginning. The group gradually gained more experience and aged and became even more powerful in their influence over the board I think. But how they really got started I'm not sure, except I suspect that it was Eudie Moore and her powers of organization and enthusiasm that got it going. It's also possible that the board was quite weak in the early days and that there wasn't much energy there and it really-- If it was going to be invigorated it would have had to come from the outside, and this is what maybe the Art Alliance supplied at that point.

RATNER: How influential were you in encouraging the board to invite more people who were more committed to art and collecting art onto the board?

LEAVITT: Well, I certainly did encourage that and tried to point out the advantages of having more collectors and people who were involved with the arts on the board, but that really didn't meet with any opposition. I think that board members themselves felt that the board needed new blood and new vigor and more knowledge. And as the budget grew and the problems grew too, it became more and more important to get really active, solid people on the board. Bill [William] and Clara Burgess were another couple who were really quite active and helpful on the board--or he was on the board, she was in the Art Alliance. He was of a younger, management/business school type, and he cut through a lot of nonsense in trying to get the museum operating on a kind of solid basis financially and I think was very helpful in that way. Dudley Wright was more mercurial, with strong enthusiasms and rather elaborate flourishes of support. But in terms of a year-in-and-year-out dedication, it was not quite there, or at least it wasn't as constant. There was always an artist on the board. Emerson Woelffer was very good. He was very articulate and a good speaker, but he wouldn't speak up much in the board meetings, except once in a while to complain about something which he felt demeaned the artist or was wrong in terms of his ethical perception of what museums should be doing in relation to artists.

RATNER: Do you know who invited Robert Rowan onto the board?

LEAVITT: I don't know who first made contact with him. Somebody recommended that I go and visit him, and I did. I got to know him and to like him. I'm not sure whether it was Eudie or someone else on the board who actually made the approach to him to join, but--

RATNER: But it was after you had established a relationship?

LEAVITT: Well, it was at the same time, sort of. We got to know each other somewhat, and he was willing to come on the board and help with the ideas that I was developing. But I can't remember exactly how it happened that he was asked.

In the latter years, particularly while I was there, I had a pretty free hand in terms of determining the exhibition schedule and acquisitions. Even though there were more interested collectors on the board, they really didn't question very much the exhibition schedule particularly and they were more concerned about acquisitions, as they should be. But we didn't have any money to buy anything with anyway, so it was usually whether we should accept a gift or not. We usually did. But for the most part they were quite enthusiastic about the exhibitions I think, although there were always

factions who felt that anything contemporary was not something that we should be so deeply involved with. When I first came to Pasadena in '57, I remember one of the first groups to whom I spoke was the Optimists Club. And I loaded the station wagon--the museum at that time had a big red station wagon that the Taylors [Reese H. and Margaret C.] had given to the museum--with contemporary paintings and took it over to where the Optimists were meeting. They really were quite a bunch of pessimists. I don't know how many I convinced about modern art. Also I was very different in those early years. I was, after all, twenty-seven and extremely shy and not used to public speaking, not used to being in the spotlight. It was very difficult for me for a couple of years just to speak up at the board meetings and figure out how to run a museum. Probably a lot of the misgivings of some of the board members and concerns about my awkwardness were very well-founded at that time. But eventually I became more at home with things, and things worked better. I remember when I left being rather proud that I was only the second director of the museum who had left honorably in the history in the museum, John [Palmer] Leeper being the other.

RATNER: It's interesting, although you did stay about-- I guess you were there--

LEAVITT: Six years.

RATNER: Six years? So that was considerably longer actually than all your successors. But still--

LEAVITT: And all my predecessors, I might say.

RATNER: Yes. But still, that's not an extensive amount of time. Why do you feel that the museum consistently attracted very brilliant staff but nobody stayed an exceptionally long period of time? Why do you feel that happened?

LEAVITT: Well, I think it was a pretty tough place to be because of the financial pressures and, when I was there, because of the strength of the Art Alliance and particularly Eudie Moore in those days. I really had a love-hate relationship with her. I respected her a great deal and I still do, and I think she really had more to do with pushing the museum ahead than anybody. But at the same time, it was very difficult to work with her and to have to justify all positions and actions at such a detailed level. She was in the museum every day, and it was not a question of a board member standing away and coming in when needed. She was right there working all the time, or a lot of it anyway. Too much so it seemed--at least that's the way I remember it. I think near the end of my stay she did not come in quite as frequently and let me alone a little bit more, partly because she was having a new family of her own by that time, that is, her two

younger children. It was tough, it was hard, and I think the problems changed after I left and other characters were involved and other problems, but it was both rewarding and at the same time difficult.

For me one of the best things was getting to know the Los Angeles artists and being able to operate in that sphere and learn about the collectors and about the dealers in Los Angeles. I would spend at least one or possibly two days a week going into L.A. and working out loans and exhibitions and possible acquisitions. I even got one trip to Europe while I was there, which was very nice. It was a buying trip in a way, and I was going to auctions in Stuttgart, and I bid for the museum and also for a few collectors, buying relatively small things, but acquiring three or four works for the museum, including a very nice [Karl] Schmidt-Rotluff painting for, if I remember right, about \$14,000 or something, maybe less than that even. But now of course it would be worth a lot more. So I took that opportunity to go on to Italy and to explore in France a bit before coming home. That was I guess a highlight of the time there. But otherwise I didn't get to travel very much while there, although I did get to become active in the Western Association of Art Museums and the Association of Art Museum Directors and to go to their meetings.

I guess Pasadena was a strange place in that there was

not quite a critical mass to develop a large museum there after all, and a small museum could have been supported. Probably in retrospect it might have been just as well to build a new wing on the old building, to maintain the quality of that building, which was really quite wonderful, and yet to have more modern storage and exhibition facilities by expanding into the parking lot. That they could have done with the funds they had available, but they would have had to give up the dream of moving to Carmelita Park, and that they just couldn't do. They probably could have traded their rights on Carmelita for the parking lot next door, which I think was city operated. They also would have been right downtown, which would have been nice, although there's plenty of parking at the new museum. In fact it takes up a good deal of what was once a beautiful park there.

RATNER: How supportive was the community itself towards the end of your stay in terms of coming to the exhibitions?

LEAVITT: Attendance was pretty good and increasing.

Membership was increasing. The interest may have been sparked by some of the talk about a new museum and so on, but we attracted good crowds for the shows, not only from Pasadena but also from Los Angeles. And of course we didn't charge admission in those days, and the bookstore was very small. It didn't bring in much of an income. But



we could see that we could expand, that we should expand, that the building was getting crowded and there really wasn't enough space to do everything we wanted to do. So some kind of expansion was probably called for, and fairly soon, but maybe not quite at the scale that eventually happened. That's one thing you might consider doing sometime: getting some of the old actors together and letting them talk among themselves about it and seeing how a collective memory works--

RATNER: That would be interesting.

LEAVITT: --as well as doing them individually. That would be kind of nice to get a discussion that way.

RATNER: Well, so although you'd been gone for a number of years prior to Norton Simon running the museum, what would you say the primary factors were that led to the demise of the Pasadena Art Museum as a contemporary showcase?

LEAVITT: Well, I don't know firsthand. I was looking at the situation from the outside, but it seems to me to have been that there was an expectation of major support from sources that just couldn't come through. Whether under some different circumstances those sources might have produced more income I don't know. But without people like Fred Weisman, Gifford Phillips, Taft Schreiber, and a number of Los Angeles collectors rallying to the support of the museum, there would be no way that they could maintain

the operating expenses of the new building I think, particularly with the ambitious shows that they scheduled. In a sense it was a management problem in that the budgets were allowed to get out of hand, but that partly was due to the big loan payments that they had to make on the building still. Whether there might have been something they could do to gain new support for the museum I just don't know. But it seemed from the outside that their ambition just wasn't realizable, that the resources just weren't there for that big a museum with that kind of purpose and program. They might have retreated to a more general museum and it would be interesting to see if support could have been raised locally for that, but that would have diminished the national importance of the museum. They had hoped that it would be a regional museum for all of Southern California, but apparently Southern California wasn't ready for that in Pasadena. They had to wait until MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art] came along to find such a project that would get that support. I think, as I understand it, they were quite desperate to find a solution before Norton Simon came along and offered the museum to the Los Angeles County Museum, to be operated as an annex or branch, but were turned down. It probably took someone like Norton Simon, who could write off the expenses and put it on a solid basis, to bring it back. There are

others who could have done it in the contemporary area; Fred Weisman I suppose could have done it, or Marcia [Weisman], but perhaps they were already--at least Marcia was dreaming of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles by that time. It's possible that the whole project was doomed from the time the new building was built, that it just was too big for the situation. But I don't know that for sure.

RATNER: Why do you feel they weren't able to really garner the support of the Westside?

LEAVITT: I think part of it's geographical. It's a long way to come and difficult to give your support to a different community. It's somehow not as appealing as having it in your own backyard so to speak. And Pasadena really is small potatoes compared to Los Angeles. It's like the football teams moving out to Anaheim or something. It's somehow disappointing in spite of the fact that you'd like to support the team, but it's different--Anaheim Rams or whatever.

RATNER: It's interesting. As you say, Pasadena is relatively small potatoes, and according to so many of the stereotypes it's really a bastion of conservatism, yet a very avant-garde museum flourished there for a long time. How do you think that was able to happen?

LEAVITT: Well, in some ways it was an anomaly I think

because of the old families--some of whom were still there, some still are--that had the money, but they were not the ones likely to be interested in an avant-garde museum. I guess it's the momentum that we created in the early years being carried on by the enthusiasm of the Art Alliance and some members of the board which pushed it in that direction along with the curators and directors who were also involved in that area. Although Jim Demetrion was not particularly a contemporary art person--more earlier twentieth century--but by that time the momentum was so strong I think there was no way of reversing it. There are and were families like Mrs. Crossett, the Steeles, and Baldwin Baldwin and some other people who had the resources that could easily have put up a substantial museum in Pasadena, but I don't think they were particularly attracted by the avant-garde program and so they just wouldn't do it. So it may have been a misjudgment. But on the other hand, it was a grand experiment, and a lot of good things were accomplished there and a lot of major exhibitions were created there. So it was certainly not a total loss.

RATNER: No, not at all. It certainly contributed very significantly to the cultural life here.

LEAVITT: And it kept things going until the Museum of Contemporary Art could be realized in Los Angeles. In a way it was the failure of the Pasadena museum of

contemporary art that made--gave the impetus to the formation of MOCA I think, along with several steps in between. Let's see. I wonder-- It's hard to create another scenario of what might have happened in retrospect. But it is conceivable that if it had been a more general museum, or a museum that was more widely representative of a history of art, that other people in Pasadena would have come to its assistance.

RATNER: I've wondered that a lot too.

LEAVITT: That Virginia Steele [Scott] would have come in in a really major way, that Mrs. Crossett would have been more involved. I don't know about Baldwin Baldwin, he was pretty much concerned with his own collection and his own interests, but he might have been brought along to contribute. He had a great Toulouse-Lautrec collection that contained almost all of Toulouse-Lautrec's posters plus a couple of paintings and watercolors. It would have been a very fine thing for a general museum to have but not a museum that's devoted to contemporary art. But then it might have been just one more general museum operating in a suburb of Los Angeles. It might not have had nearly the impact that it did have on the culture of the area. I don't know.

RATNER: Well, we've talked at length about your involvement at Pasadena, but would you mind telling me a

little bit about what you've been doing since you left Pasadena? I know you went on to Santa Barbara.

LEAVITT: Santa Barbara. The Santa Barbara [Museum of Art] is a great little museum, right in downtown, in the city, and it's had a general art focus, everything from classical Greek and Roman art and a whole two galleries devoted to Asian art and a smaller gallery of old master paintings, and then a wing of nineteenth-century, or eighteenth- and nineteenth-, early twentieth-century American art, which was my special field, as well as galleries for exhibitions. So I had a good time there, lively. It had some of the same problems that I found in Pasadena, in that people seemed to be more interested in the parties than the exhibitions. We did some pretty good exhibitions there: Albert Bierstadt, the nineteenth-century American landscape painter, and a [Piet] Mondrian exhibition was quite important, and a number of other shows, some of which were very contemporary. On the whole I was quite happy there, but after about a little over three years I was approached by Cornell [University] with the fact that Herbert F. Johnson had made a pledge of almost five million dollars to build a new museum on campus at Cornell and that I could be in on it from the beginning.

So here was a chance without fund-raising, which I was pretty tired of by that time, to help select the architect, plan a program for a new building, and actually begin

working with the architect in developing it. That was too much to pass up, and I decided in the early fall of '67 that I was going to go there, but stayed on in Santa Barbara until January of '68, or a little after, and meanwhile went back and forth a couple of times to Ithaca. Then in the spring I still had a teaching obligation at UCSB [University of California, Santa Barbara], and so I stayed on through the spring semester just teaching the one course and working on the program for the Cornell museum on the beach in Isla Vista. It was quite a wonderful time in some ways. In other ways it wasn't so good, in that my marriage was breaking up and I was leaving my family in Santa Barbara while moving to the East. It was a complete change, and I drove across country--again in a Volkswagen, the way I came (but without a dog)--and began work in July of '68 in Ithaca, where I was for five years director of the Andrew Dickson White Museum [of Art] (which was in the presidential mansion on campus, an old Victorian building--charming, but not really adequate for a museum) while we went through the design and construction phases of the new building, which took about five years all in all.

We began doing exhibitions there, including one of the early exhibitions of Earth Art early in '69, which proved to be a very seminal exhibition. A lot of artists who

later became important were represented in it, like Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Hans Haacke, Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Long, Jan Dibbets, Robert Morris, and Neil Jenny. We brought the artists to Ithaca in the middle of the winter, and they did pieces all over the city and town as well as in the museum. It was a good time and established a direction of the museum at Cornell featuring contemporary and pretty avant-garde pieces. So every year or two we'll do a show of that type. One of the more recent ones was the "Lagoon Cycle" of Helen and Newton Harrison, which was recently shown at the Los Angeles County Museum here.

Another show that we organized that's coming to Los Angeles is the Frank Lloyd Wright designs for the Johnson Wax Company Building, which will be at Barnsdall Park starting on February 5 [1988]. We're just about finished organizing a retrospective exhibition of Joan Mitchell's paintings, which will be on view in San Francisco later this spring and then in La Jolla [Museum of Contemporary Art] in the fall. It's opening at the Corcoran Gallery [of Art] next month. A lot of the exhibitions we do, although they originate from a little town in upstate New York, get around to other museums throughout the country. So I'm still very much involved with contemporary art, still excited by painting and sculpture as well as some of the more avant-garde forms of expression. However, I am



working at a museum where we cover the whole history of art and so can do some more historical shows as well.

I will have been there in Ithaca now twenty years; it's almost twenty years since I left California. It doesn't seem that long. I'm still more involved with things that are coming up than remembering the past. But this is a good exercise too. It's too bad that I've lost touch with what's going on in California to the degree that I have. I do try to get back here once in a while, still have family here, but I like to see what's going on, and I don't feel that I'm really knowledgeable anymore about the California scene. But I do like a lot that I've come into contact with while I'm here. And I'm glad that Los Angeles finally has the Museum of Contemporary Art, which I did go through a couple months ago and really enjoyed enormously. I think it's a wonderful asset. And if it couldn't be in Pasadena, it's probably well to have it in Los Angeles.

RATNER: Those are really all the questions I have unless you have anything else that you'd like to add.

LEAVITT: No, I'll probably think of a lot of things when I leave, but I think that covers it pretty well.

RATNER: All right. Thank you very much on behalf of UCLA, and I really enjoyed speaking to you also.

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