A TEI Project

Interview of Walter Hopps

Contents

1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (October 11, 1987)

RATNER:

Today is Sunday, October 11, 1987. We're in West Hollywood, California, with Mr. Walter Hopps, director of the de Menil Collection in Houston, Texas. Before we begin our discussion on the Pasadena Art Museum, I was hoping you could tell me a little bit about your background.

HOPPS:

Well, I was born in Eagle Rock, California, May 3, 1932, around eleven o'clock in the morning. [laughter] So I'm a native, as were all but one of my grandparents. I think I am, by way of great-grandparents, a fourth generation. Both sides of the family came here in 1850. They were shipwrights and gold miners. By the 1890s, they had entered into medicine. My great-grandmother, I think, was the first woman trained as a surgeon in the state. My grandfather, my grandmother, my father, and my mother, and other relatives, were all physicians and surgeons, so there wasn't even a question of what I was going to be. It wasn't even discussed. My maternal grandfather helped found the town of Eagle Rock, which, in the infamous water wars of the heinous Otis clan, was dragged into the city of Los Angeles. My paternal grandfather helped finance dynamiting of the Mulholland aqueduct to keep agricultural lands wet in the Owens Valley. I take Bob [Robert] Towne's Chinatown as God's truth. Although it is set in a different decade, it is as clear a metaphor of the twists and turns and inexplicable history of this part of the country as any of my peers have created. I dropped out of school in the third grade. Interest in art probably

begins on the second floor of the family house in Eagle Rock, where I was given a dark room, since I wasn't really allowed to perambulate much. I was diagnosed as having rheumatic fever, so I was in and out of school—mostly out—but in and out until my freshman year in college, or the last two years of high school, actually. So I read, and I learned how to work in photography. I was limited to doing something that is fashionable in the 1980s, taking pictures of pictures, often when there wasn't anything else to photograph in a room, or a still life. Having dropped out of Eagle Rock Elementary School, a public school, in the third grade, I had a moment of being back for a little bit of the fifth in progressive education by a woman named Cole. She was a leader in—this was the last of the progressive, post-Dewey spirit of the thirties—problem students: the slow, the dyslexic, the dropouts, the sociopathic, I suppose, were all put in an experimental fifth-grade class where the arts were to kind of soothe our ways. I think I was being punished, because the school system resented that my parents were indifferent to the rules of public education. Anyway, that was the arts in a very free-form, expressive—dance, clay-making, painting, spontaneous stream-of-consciousness writing. It seemed silly to me, but I liked it. I went to the prep school called the Polytechnic School in Pasadena as a sort of scholarship student. You went there for two reasons: you were either rich or you passed tests sufficiently high. Those of us in the latter category immediately identified ourselves, but I was there seventh and eight grade, and part of the ninth, before I was confined one last time. They graduated me, nonetheless. That was a rigorous training, and students from there were often expected to go to Caltech [California Institute of Technology]. It's a coeducational adjunct, in a way, of the university. I insisted on going to public high school, which was Eagle Rock High School. I proposed that because I had missed the everyday life: boys, girls, cars, ordinary things. And by one way or another, I was studying towards science, and did well, I guess, and loved the arts as a kind of private passion, very separate from my parents. It became a secret world. It's in that context I met Walter and Louise Arensberg. I first met Marcel Duchamp in the forties, as a teenager. It became, as I say, a secret world and separate, special, apart from anything to do with my own family. I have nothing but the most interrupted college career, and no college degree. I was supposed to go to Yale [University]. My teachers wanted me to go to Caltech. My parents wanted me to go to Yale, where I was accepted, and then a last-minute compromise was Stanford [University]. I went through the freshman year and really broke with my parents and financed my own way thereafter. UCLA was manageable, so the next two and a half years were spent at UCLA. Then I was in the army six months and twelve days. And then I—the second serious young woman in my life led me to the University of Chicago, where under the sort of patronage of the late Joshua Taylor, I was a non-enrolled,

bootleg student in graduate art history, where I was being urged, under the old [Robert Maynard] Hutchins system, to take the graduate entrance exams, skip the B. A., and go there. I've had nothing but a bastard career. I mean, I had tutors as an invalid. I went to a hand-grooming prep school. I loved public high school. I hated Stanford. Its bigotry and conservatism of the year 1950 was appalling. I had—anyway, I can get too deeply into background and personal motivations that led me to what I did. I had a wing master at the freshman dormitory whom I despised. He's currently president of Harvard University, Derek Bok. He's a fool. I watched what I believed in and loved in art in Southern California crumble. The regent—I guess chairman of the [Board of] Regents of the University of California—[Edward A.] Dickson, was the final, killing force behind keeping the [Walter and Louise] Arensberg Collection from being settled in Southern California. I was to learn a few years later that it had even—there was a moment where it could have gone to the Pasadena Art Museum. But it was scorned out here. Dickson, who hated modern art—I find it still a bitter—I take it personally. It's a bitter pill to me that art facilities are named after him to this day at UCLA. I still have a fantasy that I'll live long enough to do something about that. I had access to the Arensbergs through my senior year. Their health was such after I came back—I stayed away from Southern California mostly my freshman year—that their health was failing and they were soon to die. They were wrapped up in the arrangements as to where their collection would go. I might mention, as I'm sure every piece of oral history you get should emphasize, that that collection as we know it in Philadelphia now, plus the Ruth Maitland Collection—broken up and sold—and the Galka Scheyer [Blue Four] Collection—which had been after her death taken in as enemy, alien property—were all to have been together, three units of the whole that would have founded a modern museum here in Southern California with comparable holdings to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, every bit as significant, and taking a very different view, another base of structure as to what twentieth century art was. There was no single mind other than perhaps that it had an alternative other than Alfred [H.] Barr [Jr.]'s view. But it was sufficiently important, and a great loss. The contact with working contemporary artists came during my school years. One artist, actually from the same hometown, that was to play a part in it all as early as '51-2 was Craig Kauffman. Robert Craig Kauffman was a classmate. He had a sister in the arts at USC [University of Southern California]. So he was in the forties. A lot of the university literature on contemporary art and events was available to us. It didn't exist in the public school system then. I loved the high school and championed Kauffman's art even then. I don't know, I was a class officer and so on, and made him the designer of school designs and so on, which were the kind of style of streamlined—Juan Gris perhaps, and got in a great row with the

principal over these modernistic designs for high school graduation and so forth. But we prevailed. It became my first key experience in the mix between elitist presumption on the one hand, and populist resolution on the other. Much to the school authorities' dismay, I arranged to take our designs in petition form to every member of the class and every teacher in the high school that we were subject to, and laid it on the principal's desk that the majority was for it, and what was his problem? He said something about parents, and I said, "Well then, I guess I better start seeing the parents of all the classmates." And he gave up. The background of that was that it was in my senior year that the terrible grip of Cold War psychology was being showcased in my own city through the entertainment industry, and it was reflecting through the educational system right down to the public system. And that was a key factor in my motivation. The first contemporary art curator [James Byrnes], or modern art curator, of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in Exposition Park, where it existed, the entire facility was a miniature Smithsonian, and, of course, where my grandparents had known art exhibits clear back at the moment of its founding—my grandparents tending to be a little more involved with art than my immediate parents. So I had chances to see all the museums, from the Huntington [Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens], the Southwest Museum, and the County, etc. I knew what they were, and they all were interesting. But I discovered that the very exciting art of my own time, for example, a [Pablo] Picasso or [René] Magritte painting—this came later. I knew that curator there [at the County Museum]. I finally came to know him in 1950 a little. He was ordered to take them down by Jean Delacour, an ornithologist, his director, because of the communist affiliation of both Picasso and Magritte. Somehow, even then, I knew Magritte was not involved with political events. I watched the most extraordinary gallery of William Copley, which existed in the '48-'49 season in Beverly Hills, disappear. It lasted one year. I think I saw three of its six exhibitions. It showed—I don't know the order, but—Man Ray—who lived in the city, whom I did get to see at one point and admired, even though he was terribly crotchety, not the least interested in "boys"—Man Ray, [Joseph] Cornell, [Roberto] Matta [Echaurren], Magritte, Max Ernst. I saw Ernst and Cornell and Man Ray there. Even before 1951 I was conscious of, in the old [Los Angeles] Daily News, where the art was written about more interestingly than in the [Los Angeles] Times—we had the critic Arthur Millier in the Times who berated anything he thought was modern. Occasionally something a little more disposed was in Manchester Boddy's paper, the Daily News. Anyway, it was strange coming back here in 1951, getting settled into UCLA, and see how much was gone, was lost, and had been shut down. As I say, after UCLA, the University of Chicago, and back at UCLA with my then wife. Living in Cambridge [Massachusetts] while she

was in graduate studies at Harvard and I worked in a scientific laboratory and would sit in on classes at Harvard. By '52, I was determined to somehow make exhibitions. The artists that I knew, the poets and writers and a kind of consciousness of what is identified as the beat world, was such that I wanted to somehow on my own do that while going to school. So I worked, I did that, and I went to school—three things, usually at once. I had no idea until—I don't think I made a decision to go full time, really want to go full time into museum work until about '58. And that was very clear in my mind then. Gibson Danes, a dean of the art department at UCLA, and I hit it off very well, and then his successor, Frederick Wight, as well. I thought they were nice men, and supportive. I thought they were of mediocre stature in a kind of arrogant, young way. And some of my classmates at the university then, at UCLA, felt the same. My wife, Shirley [Neilsen Hopps, now Shirley Blum], was in art history. She had done Netherlandish work with Karl [M.] Birkmeyer, an ex-Nazi officer, art historian, brought in with the World War II treasures. [He was] repatriated, eventually. [He was] found in the salt mines—[General George] Patton's army, I believe—and repatriated. He was a good art historian, a sort of tragic alcoholic, retired now. But Wight gave us great license. Shirley and I did go striding for his work, helped with him, and I owe him a lot. He kept encouraging me to get out of the sciences and somehow or another get back to UCLA in graduate school. All right. The Pasadena Art Museum, just east of my family seat there in Eagle Rock, and with family ties to Pasadena as well, was known. It was curious. I was conscious that it had done, even before, oh, I don't know, before the mid-fifties, late forties, mid-fifties, I was conscious of its little Man Ray show, which meant a lot. Why it was there and not at the "big" museum [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] I didn't understand, why someone of Man Ray's obvious stature was getting second billing. I was conscious of Lorser Feitelson's work there. Later I was conscious that the Scheyer estate, through a series of flukes—and I know how that all happened now, but at the time it was a surprise that it was there and whatever, and I didn't understand, but good. And I became really interested when W. Joseph Fulton was director, and his wife, Teresa, was teaching. I didn't really get to know them, but I admired what he did a lot. I think the third time the eastern new art, with Alfred Burkholz and new American painting, abstract expressionist art, appeared there for the third time, really, in Southern California—perhaps the first time was at the Frank Perls Gallery, a kind of offhand thing by Frank that Bob [Robert] Motherwell talked him into doing. I think the second time was a strange show that Sam Kootz, a dealer who used to hustle Picassos that he had managed to get a hold of during and after the war and bring in through Beverly Hills and sell off here and take them on to New York, or to New York and try and sell some here. The major dealer, Samuel Kootz, he helped put together a

show that was, in effect, the New York school people, as young as Larry Rivers, [Jackson] Pollock, and [Hans] Hofmann, et al.—as old as Hofmann; as young as Larry Rivers—including [Philip] Guston, Motherwell. Pretty much the whole gang, an interesting panoply, appeared at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in '53, perhaps '52. Very important show, viciously attacked in the Times by Arthur Millier. Headlines: "Scotch and Burgundy Don't Mix Well. " That was the name—"Scotch and Burgundy"—of one of Hofmann's very great paintings of the time. It appeared in an annual that Jim [James] Byrnes [did], who was forced to quit when he had to take his Picasso and Magritte off the wall for communistic reasons, but nonetheless he had a very important Pollock and a [Mark] Rothko. Certain things appear in some annual, invitational surveys. And Joe Fulton did a beautiful show at Pasadena, I suspect late '53 or early '54, that included work of highest quality by Pollock, the best known perhaps, and Enrico Donati is the least known. In between there was [Ad] Reinhardt, I believe Rothko, and I think [Franz] Kline, [Bradley Walker] Tomlin. It was a smaller show, but a choice show. One of the very greatest works that Jackson Pollock ever did was in that show, Number 12, 1952, later, just after the show in Pasadena, bought by Nelson Rockefeller and destroyed in the fire at the governor's mansion when he was governor of New York. Years later I'm checking the files and see that Pasadena could have bought that for, I think, around $3, 800. Maybe it was $5, 200. It's just—I could spend our entire time giving you an index of missed opportunities out here. There are anywhere, in the first or second half of the twentieth century. But the degree to which they have been missed here is perhaps one of the key driving forces of my own generation, that were concerned. I had heard that Fulton was an alcoholic. I heard he was in trouble. I later heard that he was taken away to the tank, the mental hospital, whatever. I just want to give you a sense of background as to why I and a couple of poets and others felt that we were citizens of this region and we were concerned with the arts, and what we didn't see being done we were going to try to do. Whether we were nineteen years old, whether we had less than one thousand dollars, it didn't matter. We just would do it. Sometimes my only role was to convince people to keep trying, no matter that we were negative in resources. We were below zero. So anyway, that gets into the other—the gallery activity and activity with artists went on from the Syndell Studio through four different galleries, sometimes two or three at a time. Everyone subsumes it all in the phrase "Ferus Gallery." There were four, really five enterprises, all of which went on with a complicated cast of characters both in San Francisco and Los Angeles between '52 and, for me, 1962, when I went full time at Pasadena. Prior to '62, the spring, when I assumed the curatorship there with Tom [Thomas W.] Leavitt, I had guest-curated shows for Pasadena. The ones I recall right now were the Hassel Smith exhibition. I'm guessing that

might have been '61. I'm not sure. 'Sixty-two? No, '60 or '61; maybe '59, somewhere in there. I worked with Tom Leavitt on his Richard Diebenkorn retrospective. And I, with Bates Lowry as I recall, worked on the Richards Ruben survey. And for Tom Leavitt, I just did alone one of my favorite shows there, which was drawings by Richard Diebenkorn and Frank Lobdell ["Drawings by Diebenkorn and Lobdell"]. There is no publication for that one, unfortunately. We just did it on a shoestring, but it was one of the best drawing shows, I think, Diebenkorn—who is better known than Frank Lobdell—has had. But they both were delighted to be there together. Is it that I mentioned I worked some with him some on his Motherwell exhibit?

RATNER:

No, you didn't say that.

HOPPS:

I worked on the Robert Motherwell exhibit with Leavitt over there as well. By '58, in the stages of the most tumultuous of all the galleries, the first version of Ferus on the east side of La Cienega [Boulevard], with Ed [Edward] Kienholz, it became clear to me I wanted to just put that Ferus Gallery in safe harbor and get somehow back to school, at least get an M. A. somehow. I have all these credits in physics, and then biological science, laying on as much art history and English literature and other, related humanities courses as I could, just dragging it out forever. My dream was, single-mindedly, to go to the first modern museum in the west, the San Francisco Modern [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art], Grace Morley's museum. I was clear—I knew Jerry MacAgy, the late Dr. Jermayne MacAgy's work at the [California Palace of the] Legion of Honor, etc. That's a whole story. She was a major influence. Byrnes, the curator at L. A. County; Jermayne MacAgy, Palace of the Legion of Honor, for a moment head of education at San Francisco Modern; Dr. Morley's work; and MacAgy's husband, Douglas MacAgy, running the California School of Fine Arts, then in the GI Bill program; those were the institutional models for me. The weight was in San Francisco, and I wanted to become a curator at the San Francisco Modern, figuring—knowing nothing of its trustees, or politics, or structure, I just figured, well, I would somehow sort my life out, get back in school, and I? d be there. Now, the making of a corporation for Ferus Gallery in '59, buying out Kienholz and all the trauma of that, setting up a corporation, finding an investor, engaging Irving Blum, was trying to put it in safe harbor. It meant that there could be a professional, remunerative career for those artists that were the core of that gallery, and so that all of our effort, which was scarcely profit-making up to that point, would be for something and especially would give the artists a base. It had long since been clear to me that the vanguard developments in California were, in quality, the equal of, I felt, those in New York, if smaller in number, and that it

deserved its place, and part of it was having at least one other gallery that could support such activity. So somehow, out of the blue, having just guested with Tom Leavitt, after Fulton, there was a kind of interregnum where I think Eudorah Moore on the board and others managed in their bumbling way, their very, kind of, provincial but reasonably good-hearted and energetic way, somewhat to carry on. But they did get—you know, I guess it had gone from John Palmer Leeper, who went on to San Antonio, Texas, and then Joe Fulton. And then this terrible, little interregnum, and then Thomas Leavitt, who wasn't so much older but had a—well, he was older. He is older. He had a Ph.D. program at Harvard, nineteenth-century American art, and had a tough taste of Cold War bullshit through the [Dwight D.] Eisenhower people-to-people program. I don't know if he was at the Frick [Collection] a moment or not. But anyway, I'm not sure. Then he was here. They found him somehow in standard recruiting. And, as I say, I really liked and admired him. He was fully professional in his way: an intelligent, empathetic man, and he had great interest and curiosity with all the current developments, and a quiet, laissez-faire style, but focused. So, as I say, it was a pleasure to work a little bit with him. But one could see that the staff of this place was pitiful. You know, there were maybe five paid people for the entire museum, counting the director. So it was a surprise to me when I heard he was going to get—decided he wanted to find a curator. And I still was involved with everything. I don't know whether he broached it to me, or I to him, but it came up in conversation one day. He said, "Well, why don't you think about it here?" or whatever. It intrigued me. We talked about what it could be. The plan was this: we were very open about my completely disjunctive, broken, and bastard academic credentials at that point. But I said, "You know, it's something I want to talk over with Fred Wight." The plan was quickly settled, I think, late in '61 or very early—yeah, late '61, early '62. Probably none of this is reflected in the minutes—Leavitt wasn't great on board minutes—that I would join the staff as a full-time curator. All he could offer was $6, 000 a year, but he said, "This would have the advantage—you talk about going back to graduate school, and so on. Why don't we work that out?" And I talked to Fred Wight, and I just was going to go on the fast track, that he could push around the papers and I was going to do an M. A. thesis on Edward Hopper, whom he had known and had done a show on, and I loved Hopper's work. It seemed just right for Wight, because he was all goofy on abstract art, really. He painted himself, you know, and was a representational painter. I mean, we used to just try and take dramamine when we'd talk about Mark Rothko and the image of the coldness and the refrigerator forms and be serious about it, and the fact that he had known [Joan] Miro and thought the work was trivial. The more he looked, the more trivial it became. We just couldn't take him seriously. And that [he thought] the greatest geniuses

were people like Max Beckmann, and the American, Max Weber, etc., and so on. And his own style fit that. That seemed nonsense to us. When I say "us," I mean myself, Shirley Nielson, Henry Hopkins (someone who had preceded us at UCLA), Martin Friedman, Hal Glicksman, James Demetrion, Gretchen Taylor [later, Glicksman], this was the crowd. Laura Lee Sterns. This was pretty much our insolent "gang" at UCLA. It is surprising how many museum people came out of that. Anyway, so also I could teach. I had been doing extension teaching for UCLA that Wight arranged. So any and all sort of academic side pursuits that I could take on to earn money, or find my way back to a graduate program with Wight, was how it was set up, and that seemed to make sense. And I said, "Okay. This is a start." I was still looking to San Francisco, but this was great. What's so crazy is that I guess I began full time in February, perhaps, in '62. I had no idea of Tom Leavitt's personal life. Within a year, [there is] a crisis in his marriage. He suddenly resigns, and I'm acting director. Any plan—you know, my first year, or season, at Pasadena was going to be getting my feet on the ground and then looking toward getting things straight with UCLA. I continued to do some teaching. I taught my first summer, a summer session up at the—a little art history survey for what by then was called the San Francisco Art Institute, in the art school there, which I loved. I think I had Ron Davis, or people of that generation, as students. It is also where I met John [R.] Coplans and where *Artforum* was put together. So I was involved with that. Leavitt talked about—we talked very openly about something I felt instinctively, the very separate worlds of commercial and non-profit. So it was rather like taking vows. As soon as I was full time there at Pasadena, I took my shares of stock in Ferus Gallery, and in one day, to just get it over with quickly, signed them and gave them to Irving Blum, who couldn't believe I had left a commercial enterprise, and what was I doing with this broke-down and two-bit thing. But I'm glad I did that in the beginning. If I was—the temptations for profit-making in the art of our time are so extreme, and I've learned how violated it is in my own profession, so that there was only one thing to do: just get out totally at the first move and not be involved. The shares' interest in Ferus Gallery and its inventory made Irving Blum a millionaire. I expect him to comparably donate and reward to an institution where I'm settled down. I think the de Menil Collection would be appropriate. Anyway, Leavitt is very good on the subject of ethics, professionally. Problems in his personal life made him fly out of town, but he was great on the other score. The chance to do exhibits—I worked on what was there. Oh, also, there was no registrar, of course, in the museum, and he asked if I knew what registration was. It took two sentences to explain. He handed me the Museum of Modern Art manual, and so I was a combination registrar and curator there for him in the beginning. After he left, one of the things I insisted on was, step-

by-step, trying to professionalize that pathetic place. They had no endowment worth a damn. They had no policy or program worth a damn. They had the extraordinary legacy of Scheyer. They had an old vault in the building, it being the [Grace] Nicholson emporium of Far Eastern art during the great, palmy days of the twenties, that lapsed into nothingness in the crash of the thirties. It was kept—but I'm probably way off your outline, here. Yes, "perception of PAM [Pasadena Art Museum]"—

RATNER:

It's fine. Just go ahead.

HOPPS:

All right. That staff, as of '62, as I say, was Leavitt, director; a slovenly slattern as his personal secretary, whom I quickly—being very savvy to the world of narcotics through all ray artist and poet friends—realized was stoned half the time. He was kind of oblivious to it. Maybe had a little thing with her, I don't know. We had, I think, an escaped Nazi, Carl Pomgrantz, as a guard and custodian, who I swear was of fascist sentiments. And I think the very right-wing interests, somehow, of Eudorah Moore and her husband, Denny [Anson C. Moore], [laughter] may have been oblivious to the fact they had a hide-out Nazi as guard and custodian of the museum. There was a funny, part-time woman as membership secretary. There was a volunteer taking care of the print collection. There was a nice lady—I forget her name—who was the receptionist, whose brother was director of the Carnegie briefly. Mousey, nice lady. And myself. And that's the staff. We had the Junior Art Workshop educational programs, and a very nice, mild-mannered artist named Ralph [Robert M.] Ellis who sort of headed up the education and teaching of children, and some adult programs in the back, so that there were part-time, little contract things with, you know, interested ladies, as well as some pretty good artists that Leavitt stimulated getting in there. On the board, the sophisticate from the community was Robert [A.] Rowan, his wife, Carolyn Peck Rowan. Gifford Phillips was encouraged to become involved because of Leavitt, and an artist, such as Emerson Woelffer—no, Leonard Edmondson, one of the contemporary artists who lived in the Pasadena area. So Leavitt had made a point of a couple—three artists being on the board, just in principle. It was manageable and workable. I thought of another show I did before I was on the staff full time, by the way, too, that was very important: the first museum show of Edward Kienholz. And there was also the first serious museum show of Robert Irwin. And there's the extreme polarity of my generation. There were the kinds of extreme poles that characterized the deep roots of art in Southern California.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (October 11, 1987)

RATNER:

Before we flipped the tape, you were talking about some of the other shows you thought you had done.

HOPPS:

Yeah, it's just—I know I worked on them; it's a question of timing. You may be quite right that the John Mason exhibit ["John Mason Ceramics"] took place before I was full time, officially a curator. [I was] kind of guest-curating and helping prior to that. And I think [we had] Peter Voulkos as well in some show or another. Again, I want to emphasize a point, that Leavitt was so gentle about this and demanded nothing, he just would ask questions: "Well, what do you think about your engagement with the Ferus Gallery at this time?" And he responded just perfectly mildly when I felt that the kind of artists that I chose to be in the various commercial gallery enterprises—because that's the only way, by the way. Existentially, you had independence. Barnett Newman said himself that the true role of determining the course of American art was in the absurd position of the dealers, both for the better as well as problematically. And it was clear that you could be responsible, make your own choices, in a way that no institutional affiliation could, especially when you are in your early twenties. Anyway, it was clear that I had chosen those artists because I thought of their importance, not as a way to make money for myself. So to not have—they were some of the very same artists I wanted to see as part of the program of what would happen in the museum. The conflict was important to sever so that I wasn't going to be accused [laughs] of using the institution to profit. The artists, historically—one of the artists I loved most in the earlier part of the twentieth century that was represented in the Scheyer Collection, or in the permanent holdings of Pasadena, was Kurt Schwitters. So I wasn't there a minute but what I determined I wanted to do something. And Leavitt and I discovered the Museum of Modern Art was circulating a small set, or a set of Kurt Schwitters from what Barr had bought there. And he was totally responsive that we should book it and set a date. This was the first major thing I worked on, apart from just helping Leavitt take care of—I did the installations and hanging. My own personal life, married to Shirley Nielson, was quite free-form. And I was long used to working night or day—it didn't matter—to survive. So I'd do preparatorial work through the night and paperwork during the day over there. And Leavitt was quite laissez-faire about me finding artists I'd pay a couple of bucks an hour to, or just ask for favors, to come in and help. So I had my own cadres of artists volunteer, help to get things done in the beginning. But the great Ben Talbert, friends of his—oh, I can't remember all their names now, but there were six or eight artists, not the better-known names, that were invaluable in literally getting jobs done at the museum. And Leavitt was just passive and grateful. So, Schwitters. I had met, in the course of

this high school exposure to the arts, Dr. Elmer Belt, his [Belt] Library of Vinciana [UCLA], and, most significantly, his chief librarian, Kate Steinetz, of course, from Hanover, Germany, and a close, working colleague, friend of Kurt Schwitters. And I had known of Kurt Schwitters's work since the forties, and loved it. So the chance to borrow what Kate Steinetz had, the occasion of getting involved with her for a great work to be purchased by L.A. County Museum, Die Eldefreuen, which went through there—the policies after 1953 of the County Museum, through the remainder of the fifties, were so backward involving twentieth-century art and contemporary art, it's appalling, Jim [James] Elliott not withstanding, who is a fine man in many ways, and a generous host to most contemporary artists living and working out in the western part of the city. But you look at the record and it's astounding what they didn't do and weren't able to do. This was a boon for Pasadena, by the way, as I'll come to. So without even thinking about it, Leavitt just gave me free rein to put together what turned out to be the first real retrospective of Schwitters in a museum ever in this country, or certainly the largest one up to the time. We did a little catalog on a shoestring. I had great help from Bob Ellis, the artist who worked in the education department. I found a wonderful, idealistic, kind of socialist theosophist who ran a press in Alhambra, Henry Geiger—I think deceased now—who they used to have do some printing. But I discovered he was an incredible idealist and interested in the arts, and loved Henry Miller and knew Kenneth Patchen and so on. So we could work intimately for peanuts in a local printing shop who would experiment with anything. So some of our—the Schwitters was a classic example of where a poster folded to become covers. We did color that was all tipped in by volunteers, the little staff at the museum. It's a collector's item now. And a beautiful show ["Kurt Schwitters: A Retrospective Exhibition"]. And at the same time with it, I did a survey of collage in California as a companion piece. Now, Leavitt and I had talked through a policy. He did little, regional-survey shows and had guest people do a—oh, I think Constance Perkins from Occidental College used up quite an amazing budget on something called "[A] Pacific Profile [of Young West Coast Painters"]. It was a kind of wimpy, pathetic endeavor that made no distinction between some of the most extraordinarily talented artists here in Southern California and those who were just less than so-so. I challenged Leavitt on that and some of the policy of occasionally showing contemporaries from Southern California in little spaces up front, or minor rooms. And he—we formulated a policy where there would be, whenever we could afford it, historical, twentieth-century shows. I mean, I talked to Leavitt, even though he kept trying to say, "But, but—" as though the whole museum really were a twentieth-century museum. He loved master prints. He knew there were people lurking out in the shadows of San Marino

that wanted to put oriental art upon us. But on the other side of his mind, he knew that, what could we be, given the Scheyer legacy, other than just be a little, twentieth-century museum? So again, in a kind of passive way, starting in the beginning of the sixties, really, late fifties, he saw it. After, you know—it's in the middle—it was around '56, I think, when the Scheyer collection finally comes in there.

RATNER:

Right.

HOPPS:

It was really with Fulton. And it was—by the way, to give you a sense of the lack of professionalism, in that vault was stored, in the back, boxed and wrapped copies of catalogs, because there were shelves in there. And this Carl Pomgrantz had stored an unbelievably precious trove of Paul Klees, etc., right next to where the refuse garbage cans were in the back room of the museum. There was—it was easy—you know, Leavitt didn't have the time nor the aggressiveness to look into it. How absurdly things were handled physically in the main. I mean, he knew better, and it just was always sort of desperate. So I can remember the first confrontation was getting junk out of the vault, and the Galka Scheyer collection into it, what wouldn't be on view. Anyway, as to policy. Yes, twentieth century. When we could organize something—and I was going to use Schwitters as a model; that was historical twentieth century—we'd do it. Just as he was very much an easterner, we would take the major shows and be aggressive about taking what the [Museum of] Modern [Art] was sending out on tour, or the Whitney [Museum of American Art], or the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum]. Yes, fine. But when it came to living and working artists that I wanted to see furthered, no distinction [would be] made between who was east, or west, or European, and that, without stating it publicly, for every non-Californian we'd do, there would, without any fanfare, be a comparable California show. Seeing this mix—and I remember he raised his eyebrows a bit when I made a point that I didn't think we were going to get away with making a lot of noise about this with the art committee of the board. It just needed to be done. And it was. He had worked up some kind of a [Georges] Braque show from local collections ["Georges Braque"]. He was perfectly happy then for me to counter with this Schwitters. If there was going to be the great Robert Motherwell survey, the major one up to that time, then [Richard] Diebenkorn absolutely would be given the same treatment. And so it went. That became the kind of rationale as to why Emerson Woelffer would get a show ["Emerson Woelffer: Work from 1946 to 1962"] and catalog, and there would be Jasper Johns. And so it went. We tried to cross the period, keep that in balance. As long as I was there, that carried on. We had this sideshow of California Design activity that Eudorah Moore ran. This was the greatest sore

point between Leavitt and myself. Now, I had been aware of the great John Entenza and his Arts and Architecture magazine from my high school days, and his superb critics, and his showcasing of the most important architecture from this region: the work of Esther McCoy; all of the work of Charles and Ray Eames, etc. That we should be sponsoring what I considered a rather tawdry, low-level of indifferent—and, for the most part, some of it perfectly nice, but often indifferent—level of design produced here in Southern California, seemed to me appalling. It was, at best, a trade show. It didn't reflect any serious museology toward that. He kept laying on me that it was a sacred cow, lived its own life, and to not wade in there. Occasionally we would spar over that. Over the years I was there, I think I managed to get along pretty well with Moore, "Eudie" as she was known. But there was tension between us. She saw herself as a kind of populist and looked at the vanguard art that obviously interested me as kind of elite and arcane. I don't think she knew the meaning of the word "populism." But, anyway, that was one built-in tension in the museum. Leavitt didn't really subscribe to her love, that design program, either. He just figured, well, you'd eat it and write it off and let it go because that was too big a part of the financial infrastructure of the museum somehow.

RATNER:

Let me just ask you to back up a minute. So when you're saying that you had this unwritten policy of a one-for-one type of thing, the board—how involved was the board in approving exhibition schedules?

HOPPS:

There were only three or four people on the entire board—and Martha [B.] Padve was not one of them, nor was the Art Alliance [of the Pasadena Art Museum]—that knew anything about art whatsoever. These were gracious people, and upper middle-class or very wealthy people, or they were the kind of San Marino and Pasadena versions of yuppie matrons of their time. But they didn't have any real background, and they didn't know. They had no idea what was really going on in the country or what the stakes were. They saw it as wholesome and fun and the right thing to do. They were the kind of people who felt that it was important to teach children how to make art. They developed a docent corps where they would hear what Leavitt had to say and, later, what I had to say, and do guided tours, and so on. And they were wholesome, good-hearted people, regular people, in the main, helping for the museum. My notions of the problem that they represent in the cultural structure in America was grounded in that experience. For example, for the first time in my life, in my own institution now, the Menil Foundation Collection in Houston, there are no volunteers whatsoever. There is no education department. Tours are conducted by paid people within the staff, from the lowest to the highest. Mrs. [Dominique] de Menil, as chairman of the board, will take her turn, all the way

down to the custodians. That the ordinary public, especially secondary school children or grammar school children, should see that middle-class matrons are the role models that should inform them of appreciating this stuff, I find pernicious. And I have expunged it from any activity I'll ever be associated with. As fond as I am of many of them and their good works, I found it a pernicious element. And I formulated those views even while with Leavitt, but it wasn't anything that he was going to be responsive to. We left it alone. Anyway, as I say, as to forming policy, there were, as I say, a tiny minority of that board—they all looked to Robert Rowan as the cultivated one, the well-educated one, the collector, the person who knew something about twentieth-century art. And he was not president of the board when I went in. I think Eudorah Moore may have been. I forget. Rowan—yes, I'm sorry, Rowan was president. And then—

RATNER:

Harold Jurgensen, I think, was when you first came in.

HOPPS:

Very quickly, yes.

RATNER:

And then—

HOPPS:

Rowan came later. Rowan was the key player on the board, although he wasn't president. Harold Jurgensen happened to be. I'll come to him. That's exactly right. But Rowan was the one looked to, and he took the position of a kind of very well-to-do amateur and dandy. He was casual and expected his own whims and interests to be followed, and fancied himself, as he was, very current and engaged and wasn't especially interested in, by style really, even in the kind of labored, parliamentary procedures of the Art Alliance and other groups that organized themselves in their own clubbish, parliamentary way, which was fine, if you're going to have them at all. But that all bored him, I know, from my personal relationship with him. He was an old boy. He'd walk in and say, "Well, what do you like to do? What shall we do? What's fun? What's exciting that we can do?" And he had his eyes on horizons well beyond immediate Pasadena/San Marino as to what mattered. And as long as it wasn't wildly controversial or expensive, it was fun and could be indulged. So Rowan was no problem in terms of the policy. He was interested in the art around here. He came to be. I mean, he had been a client at Ferus Gallery and interested in all of that. He had missed the boat in the twenties out here when he saw what some of the earlier, pioneering galleries had, and didn't make a move. And [he was] often kidding and chastising himself: why didn't he buy more [Wassily] Kandinskys? And, "Gosh, I was dumb," as only intelligent, wealthy men can refer to themselves as being "dumb" for not buying those Paul Klees, etc. Well,

he wasn't going to miss the boat with Diebenkorn, etc., etc. So he was excited about mid-century, American modernist art. And bought. And so was Gifford Phillips. Phillips had been far earlier engaged. You know, he was the nephew of Duncan Phillips—

RATNER:

Right.

HOPPS:

—and had that lyric taste. And here he was. And he was involved. He was also a progressive, humane man. A Democrat. Frontier magazine, Carey McWilliams, et al., had Gerald Nordland, who was one of the only two critics—Jules Langsner on the one hand, and Gerald Nordland, the younger, to come to a little later on, the other—who was all that really had anything to say, or had any broad thoughts about the art of their time out here. We saw others, of course, through Arts and Architecture magazine: James Fitzsimmons, Otto Gage, Dore Ashton. In music, Peter Yates. I mean, extraordinary people. Langsner would occasionally publish there. But Rowan didn't even bother to read any of that. It was the salon, the gallery, the other collectors traveling around the world. The high spots. Leonard Edmondson—I'm blocking on the name of another artist who was on that board, a nice—another artist in Pasadena. People like that, the policy was no problem. Occasionally, interestingly, it was often Edmondson and the other artists who raised more issues and got contentious a bit about some of the policies. It's hard. I believe in artists being on boards of museums if you're going to have a larger board. It's painful when you have artists who are not of primary stature. I'm very open on that. Some people will ask me, "How many artists do you think alive today really matter?" And I'll quickly say "Three thousand." They say, "Three thousand?" And I said, "Do you want me to name them?" I said, "The real contenders in the whole infrastructure of people who are working at a superb level, in a country as big as America," I said, "it's not less than three thousand." "No, no, no, no." At any given moment, you know, it's a number in the thousands. Maybe it's more today. But that being said—so I think I'm fairly eclectic and take a broader view than some of my elders—Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg, Tom [Thomas B.] Hess—the likes of those kind of views who see what matters is much smaller in their number. Nonetheless, when you're sitting with artists that you know are of secondary stature, and you're trying to make the discussion and distinction as to what really matters, it's hard. I hate rankings. I hate hierarchies. Choices, nonetheless, have to be made, and sometimes it's painful to be talking with people who are really serious and hardworking, up to a point, and their creative efforts are not part of the discussion. I've often found that to be the case. I think Leavitt felt it too, but he didn't like to talk about it. So it's curious. That's a separate issue from the

factionalism, where it is that apes and giraffes just cannot enter into dialogue. A zoologist can love both. If I had a role model as to how to work in a museum, and a youthful one, it was to proceed as Dr. Doolittle. [laughter] If I've had a more sophisticated role stance that came early on—and even in the Pasadena days, as I got to know Michael Fried, he would curse me, saying, "You just aren't part of the profession at all. You're a damned anthropologist." And I would say, "You're damned right I am." In other words, a more sophisticated view of how to try to relate to the different kinds of artists was a functional ethnologist who was going to understand the mores of very different, antithetical, tribal people, with very different languages and very different values. And you can slice that pretty thinly. It's as thin as Robert Irwin, who in some later years, because of my loyalty to Richard Diebenkorn, when he found out it was as passionate as it was toward him, wanted to crush my face, wanted to physically destroy me. Diebenkorn, on the other hand, in terms of certain interests in my life, would find it harder to get together with me if I were associated with something he couldn't stand at the same time that I wanted to talk to him. An awful lot of curators try and proceed as obliviously to all of this as they can. I choose not to. Leavitt was pretty good about that. He understood the problems. But he never was there to deal with it. I think he was sensitive to it, and I think that was one of the reasons he, as a major figure—and he's played an important role in the cultural history of America. I mean, the entire museum program of the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts], under the pitifully lame-brained Nancy Hanks—no one understands how dumb Nancy Hanks was and how other people did all of her work. And there are brilliant women. I'm not a total misogynist, but she was pathetic, anyway. Leavitt really conceived the way the NEA could support exhibition programs and museums. And that was, for obvious reasons, a major contribution hatching some years later. Of course, we had none of that then. People forget. There were no foundations giving to Pasadena. There was no NEA. Your money came from endowment, membership, or just the patronage of trustees. Well, the Schwitters show was the first time Pasadena had really organized a show that was then to tour. Having heard that went on, I pursued it. Actually, it came up with Duncan Phillips. I was trying to borrow to enrich, to make a serious show. The Phillips collection that I loved had some Schwitters that I borrowed. Duncan Phillips himself heard about the show coming and said, would we like to take it? I talked to Leavitt, even though they had never done that, and Phillips then suggested the Currier Gallery in New Hampshire. So it was several things at once. It was not only the first serious show for me, it was the first, I think, major twentieth-century historical show organized in Southern California that would then tour elsewhere in the country. I hadn't known of any others prior to that, really. Well, Leavitt let me begin to increase staff. That was the most

important thing: hiring a registrar, Gretchen Taylor [later Glicksman], from UCLA; getting Hal Glicksman as a preparator, who was sweeping floors at Stanford and had been involved with the very early days of the Merry Pranksters; eventually getting Jim Demetrion to guest-curate on the [Alexei von] Jawlensky survey ["Alexei von Jawlensky: A Centennial Exhibition"] and talking him to come to the staff as chief curator; and at the very end of the time I was there I was trying to get John Coplans, whom I had known. We pretty much had it arranged to get Coplans to come in as what we were going to—he was burned out with *Artforum*. We were going to give him the odd title, Demetrion and I, as sort of curator of publications. Get him out of the *Artforum* world and bits and pieces of teaching, and just work in a museum to kind of see a more organized, an assertive publication program come. The job description: as curators, as I say, it was curator, registration, choosing stuff from the permanent collection, hanging it, hanging shows. It was everything. It began on a card table next to an addressograph machine in what they called the library—a very congested place. I had less room than we are sitting in. It was fine. When Leavitt suddenly was gone—what opened the door to an amazing opportunity for exhibits was that Harold Jurgensen, whose son I had gone to prep school with at Polytechnic and who was in my freshman class at Stanford, and I knew him, called me. It was a shock. It was just before the annual meeting, and Leavitt really didn't let anyone much know at all. It was a last minute shock the day that we—the tradition of Pasadena was to have, I guess, in the late spring, early summer, this annual members' luncheon. A report was given by the chairman of the board, and committees, and the director, etc., and a lot of members who paid a little money came to a big lunch spread out in the galleries. Fine. Leavitt announced to Jurgensen he was definitely quitting just before this. So it was a shock and a mess. Jurgensen called me in, took me aside, and he was—he reminded me of—he had the Henry Ford II style, the Lyndon Johnson style. He was a totally self-made man, like Lyndon Johnson. He came in; he said, "Listen, Hopps." He said, "We've got a mess here. But let's get one thing straight. Are you ready to be acting director? Because Leavitt is quitting." And I said, "Sure, okay." I think I may have heard from Jurgensen before I even heard from Tom. And he said, "Okay, I'm chairman. You're the new acting director." He said, "Let's get one thing straight. You don't know a pissant about a balance sheet or anything to do with business, right?" I said, "Yes, sir."

RATNER:

[laughter]

HOPPS:

And he said, "I don't know a Ming tea bowl from a Bangkok whorehouse. So you're going to be in charge of the art, right?" I said, "Right." So that has

become legendary: "Don't know a Ming tea bowl from a Bangkok whorehouse." [laughter] So while Leavitt was there, some of the extraordinary shows—we had controversy right away. Schwitters was wonderful. No problem. But next to it, "Collage: A Survey from California" or sometimes known as "Selections from California." ["Directions in Collage"] We ran out of energy and money. We blew it all on the Schwitters catalog. So there was nothing but mimeographed sheets and lists buried in Norton Simon's files. The idea was to pick 100—it was actually about 120—artists, all the way from the Muir Woods to the Mexican border. We did works in assemblage collage, that hangs on a wall. We decided to feature three. I wanted to do, a la MacAgy, a stunning, dramatic installation on nothing. The dark room, wood-paneled, featured three: [George] Herms here, William Dole there, and a man named—not Robert. His name slips away. He did big, billboard things, a kind of abstract expressionist collage, big, over in that corner. A little assemblage, a set of William Dole's delicate, Schwittersesque here, and the new, radical, poetic, imagistic beat assemblage-collage, Herms, here, featured. That seemed to bracket the positions. The wall you went in—what would have been the west wall when you enter through a doorway—floor to ceiling, wall to wall, arranged geographically, the northerns at the north, the southerns to the south. Oh, like, you had Paul Beattie and weird, north-of-San-Francisco people up there, and the first time John Baldessari was seen in the city, living down in Daly City on the southern edge, and everyone in between, on that west wall. So you didn't see it. You walked into a darkened room, just three bits of art here. You turn around, and it's a complete wallpaper, a collage of collage, if you will. They were hung edge to edge. And the way the label was done was like a little map, so you could ferret them out. But we were hit with everything. You, I guess, know some of this. The great William Copley—artist, connoisseur, collector, ex-gallery dealer—was hit by the vice and health department because he had a collage with a hypodermic syringe. So it was taken away and impounded by the police, eventually health department. Fred Martin—Fred of Sam Francis and a key player in the vanguard of Berkeley, San Francisco, Oakland, a kind of intellectual artist—had a collage entitled The Shit's River Way. Bruce Conner had lots of pubic hair in his. But the worst of all, there was the real American flag in one of Herms's pieces. So we were picketed overtly by the John Birch Society over the flag—Herms issue, in '62 then. And Minute Men that we learned worked for the postal department—there was a whole cell of the more radical-right Minute Men inside of the postal system in that part of the city. And we had those coming at us. On the board was a wonderful, old attorney who was a real First Amendment conservative. He saved the show and Leavitt's job and my job and everything else. We prevailed, and the show went on. The museum was broken into, the Herms piece vandalized. [tape recorder

off] So, that tumult and notoriety, and one of the great, old ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] lawyers—[Robert W.] Kenny, I believe, from the [Joseph] McCarthy-era battles here in Southern California a decade prior—got into the fray. And there were all sorts of appeals. So it started off with a bang. We weren't looking for it, but those incidents, and the strength, the inclusiveness of that show, which was calculated—I wanted to just as quickly as possible find some way that as many artists as I felt were worthwhile could participate. Plus [there was] the quality of the Schwitters, not that there wasn't quality in the collage show. There were many wonderful things. And the tumult was critical to set a style that kept going. The pairing of shows I did for the fall was in one of the larger galleries. It was the show that was called "New Painting of Common Objects," which was the first pop art show in a museum. It had certainly been, in the spring, all over New York. And those of us scouting around had known that kind of work had been there for several years. We saw it there even before, say, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein had even met. And through a kind of gay connection, infrastructure, through Irving Blum, he and I had managed to meet, much to our amazement, Andy Warhol in 1960, before any of that pop work was shown, and brought it to Ferus Gallery, etc. So Warhol, [Wayne] Thiebaud, Jim Dine, Roy Lichtenstein, Ed [Edward] Ruscha, Joe Goode, Robert O'Dowd and Philip Hefferton—those latter two had come from Detroit through San Francisco to Southern California; Goode and Ruscha, Oklahoma to Southern California; Thiebaud, Northern California, etc. Ed Ruscha did the poster on it, and our curious catalog, which you'd have a hell of a time finding, was an envelope all done up with mimeographed prints and xeroxed copies, or Thermofax, I guess, Verifax copies of just handwritten line notes. We had no money to do it. Warhol made extraordinary mimeograph prints for that. The original stencil should be in the collection. They've disappeared. That was a success. Next to that was a nice survey of abstract expressionist painters ["U.S. Abstract Expressionism"] east and west. I wanted to juxtapose them just right there to see, since we had no—we did not have rooms to keep up even the few things we had by way of collection. If I might just digress for a moment. All the museum could do, in a kind of square, donut configuration, was to—and we got that going—always keep up good selections of Scheyer. Prior to that, there were times when it would languish and never be on view. So I was all for always keeping up Scheyer, keeping up nineteenth- and twentieth-century prints, as a kind of core, modern selection, have a couple of tiny galleries where we could do very small shows of whatever nature, usually graphic. It could be a vanguard beat, like Ben Talbert woodcuts. It could be a little set of Rembrandts, whatever—print shows that were special. And in the back, the back galleries, just keep them rolling with temporary shows. Sometimes a temporary show would be a collection, augmented

collection, selection, you know. So here was the pop art show, so to speak. And I didn't want to use that word deliberately. The main graphic for it was an Ed Ruscha-designed poster that he phoned in, like a fight poster or a rock music poster to come big and loud. And next to it would have been [Arshile] Gorky, [Willem] de Kooning, Sam Francis, Diebenkorn, etc., the eastern and western abstract expressionists, which this other came dialectically in reaction to. No Johns or [Robert] Rauschenberg. Their work wasn't around. That all came later. Leavitt one day suggested, before I went off to San Francisco that summer, he said, "You know Jasper Johns. Don't you think he's a terrific artist?" "Sure." He said, "Why don't you do a show?" It was his idea. I countered with my great desire to do Duchamp. He said, "Well, fine. I don't know how you can, but fine." So Duchamp ["Marcel Duchamp Retrospective"] was pursued first. As it turned out, The Jewish Museum went ahead with Alan Solomon and did a Jasper Johns show. And then he was in the Venice Biennale in '64. And his show came in '65. Duchamp, through Copley and the old meeting wherein my very first moments I just began percolating on that—I think the total budget for doing that show was inside $15,000. That's shipping, catalog, and poster. I probably overran the budget. It may have hit under $25,000. It was quite extraordinary what you could do for nothing, as late as the sixties, if you just were resourceful. So Leavitt was gone that spring, summer. The Duchamp and all the other shows came after he was there. He made me very conscious of the circumstances of the Scheyer bequest and so on, and we kept after that. Thus, either originating the "Jawlensky [Centennial]," working with the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum] on the Paul Klee show that finally came ["Paul Klee 1879-1949: A Retrospective Exhibition"], taking the Kandinsky from the Guggenheim ["Wassily Kandinsky 1866-1944: A Retrospective Exhibition"], working on [Lionel] Feininger, we went through the principal artists of the Blue Four, which were the core, the major figures in the Scheyer bequest. We were able to bring in Magritte when that show toured in the sixties. We were able to bring in [Kenneth] Noland. Just the extremities of our people who were engaged in the [inaudible] ethic. Gerald Norland, a critic, stepped out of that role and was terribly helpful with the Emerson Woelffer retrospective.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (October 11, 1987)

RATNER:

Okay, we've just flipped the tape, and we were talking about some of the shows that you had worked on.

HOPPS:

Right. I want to just double back and look at your prepared outline here, item three. I've talked some about the—. [laughter] There was no defined job

description for curator there. It was invented, day by day, in an exchange between [Thomas W.] Leavitt and myself. You have an idea that it was all-purpose, ranging from preparation, registration and matters with the collection, getting along with other members of the staff. Leavitt and I would talk about—he was a little loathe to talk about my views of the other staff people. He wanted to leave people alone. He did not like hiring, and he was not comfortable about letting people go. And so, as crazy as the staffing pattern was, I backed away from that. Let me be very clear. No one on the board took any interest in who was working in that museum in the lesser capacities whatsoever, beyond the volunteers who were part of their social infrastructure. It was absurd. Security was grotesque. The break-in at the time of the "Collage in California" ["Directions in Collage"] demonstrated that. At another time, I arranged the theft of a Paul Klee—I've done that later in my life, too—documented and so on. Leavitt was not too annoyed; trustees were real annoyed. But it demon-strated that there had to be someone known as a guard during public hours. And we were able to get someone, first time. I think Leavitt was still there when I threw this bogus Paul Klee theft, which was a trick to show them that a masterwork can walk right out the door of this stupid place. I think that was my first kind of irascible move in their eyes. And I think that happened before the collage show ["Directions in Collage"]—the [Kurt] Schwitters period ["Kurt Schwitters: A Retrospective Exhibition"], by the way, or around that time. So we did get a guard. It's surprising how little I can remember about—I don't recall—this is strange. During the time Leavitt and I were there together, from February '62, when I came—I'm trying to remember that—I don't think that it was—it was not summer of '62 when he resigned; it was summer of '63. That spring of '63. It's about a year later. Yeah, it is late—

RATNER:

I thought he didn't leave until '64, actually.

HOPPS:

No. Wrong. Late spring, '63, is when Leavitt drops the bombshell. Why did he leave? He was having an affair with somebody, some married woman in Pasadena. His very straight wife [Jane Ayer Leavitt] found out, and it was put to him that if they were going to stay together—which didn't turn out, anyway—they would get out of town. She was very much a New Englander. I don't think there was pressure from the board for him to get out of town because of a scandal; I think it was from his wife. He didn't talk to me about it at all. I learned it from friends of the woman. And I don't know who it is to this day—don't remember—that he was involved with. But it was [snaps fingers] instantaneous. They had young children, and his wife was not that involved with affairs of the museum or the art world. So there was strain in that marriage. I had a completely abnormal marriage, myself, and didn't pay much

attention to those kind of things. So I was surprised. Shirley [Neilsen Hopps; now, Shirley Blum] and I by then lived quite separate lives, although we had purchased a house there in Pasadena, which I still own and love. She was busy teaching out at Pomona [College]. So, as I say, I just didn't pay attention to people's personal lives at all. So it was a shock. The two key things that came up—well, the only key things that we shared: my request to do Schwitters. Yes, fine. "New Painting of Common Objects," the collage, the little abstract expressionist show juxtaposed to the pop, yeah; the idea of "Jasper Johns," which he [Leavitt] proposed, and I said, "Great!", which took a while to get on with; and my proposal, ["Marcel] Duchamp [Retrospective"], which he said, "Fine, if we can figure out a way to do it." Then he was gone. There were other, smaller endeavors filtered around, but those were the main things that even came up while he was there. So he was gone before Duchamp or any of the other things came. Openings: It was interesting that right off the bat, at the time of that Schwitters and collage juxtaposition, they had an art world attendance and artists I don't think that the museum had only seen really twice. The ["Robert] Motherwell [Retrospective"] opening was extraordinary. He was a very popular artist in the fifties in Southern California, so a kind of beginning of what you think of as a new-collector establishment here poured in, and dealers and lots of artists. When Motherwell, who had just married [Helen] Frankenthaler, came out to lecture in our auditorium up top for the evening, it was a super-overflow crowd. We had to rig loudspeakers down into the galleries, and it was a very moving evening. Motherwell, who can get emotional, wept over seeing some of his paintings he hadn't seen in years, and being full of highly charged emotion, just having married Helen, and showed slides of their honeymoon trip through Europe as part of what he believed in as the artist's life and delectation and so forth. It was an extraordinary evening. I think that set—the Motherwell would have been '58 or '59—and that set the course of what openings, really, art-world-oriented openings, would be there. It began to be the point. This was probably the greatest educational, if you will, indoctrination for our volunteers. They saw suddenly themselves in the minority, with a working, hard-boiled dealer and professional art world turning up in the majority—all shapes, sizes, and styles. This didn't put [Robert A.] Rowan and some of his social peers off. A certain amount of them found it amusing, entertaining, and exciting. It might had been otherwise, but it wasn't. Openings were fun. It was the first time, starting in the late fifties, that the really engaged collectors, dealers, and the artists themselves, all tended to center in the western part of the city. There were very few artists in old downtown. Interestingly, [Robert] O'Dowd and [Philip] Hefferton worked in, like, the bowels of downtown L.A., which goes on all the time now. The Otis [Art Institute of Parsons School of Design], central Wilshire district, was

moribund at that point. There was no working art scene around the L.A. [Los Angeles] County [Museum of Art]. Chouinard [Art Institute]? Yes. In that neighborhood, yes. But most of it was in the west, all the way to Venice, Hollywood Hills to Venice, over. Collectors? Beverly Hills, Bel Air, Brentwood, Santa Monica. And they, in the late fifties, really started crossing the town for the openings you would see. One of the early tensions that came up while Leavitt was there was the whole Jewish question and anti-Semitism. There were no Jews on the Pasadena board. And the state of old Pasadena and San Marino was rather closed, because the entertainment industry in the center and western parts of the city of the collectors, cultural leaders, philanthropists, tended to be Jewish. This became a real, apparent issue rather quickly. Ironically, of course, Leavitt himself was Jewish—never thought of him that way. He didn't—I mean, he didn't seem so—he didn't seem so, like many might. Key people that I knew the importance of their collection had been involved with—Norton and Lucille Simon; Sayde Moss, who was Lucille Simon's friend, who was the investor, third and silent partner—a great, motherly, wonderful woman—for Ferus Gallery in its later, corporate stage; Norton's sister and brother-in-law, Fred [Frederick] and Marcia Weisman; the young [Max] Factor heir, Donald Factor, and his wife Lynn. These were key people going through a whole age spectrum towards younger that were indeed Jewish and whom we wanted very much involved with the museum. Leavitt was great on that point. He helped. He did some key work paving the way. I proposed the ideas without raising the Jewish issue first. How do we get people like Fred Weisman on the board? Or Marcia, and so on? Taft Schrieber I should mention too, the MCA behemoth, who was always looking over the shoulder of Norton Simon, who was phasing out. Simon early on, by the way, did buy some mid-century American: a [Willem] de Kooning here, a [Arshile] Gorky there, a [Hans] Hofmann there. That was more his first wife Lucille's interest. He wasn't very fond of any of it, but he bought it because it was cheap. Anyway, Schrieber, looking over his shoulder, became very engaged in that. You know, the classic case was [Jackson Pollock's] Number 1 (1949), a painting that had been with a man named Senatore and then, later, Ileana Sonnabend and Leo Castelli, when they were married, bought it. And I was trying to get anyone I could in Southern California to buy it for $125,000. Rowan kept trying. He couldn't quite get the money together. Ed [Edward] Janss almost bought it. He was new to collecting. And that's a crazy story. I tried to get it sold to Norton Simon. And when Taft Schrieber heard that, he bought it. So there it is in that family to this day. A kind of grotesquely overbalanced chip in the fate of MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art] is whether that painting is going to come to them or not. I hope it does. Anyway, Leavitt did push with all of that, and subtly, and worked on Bob Rowan, who certainly knew any number of

Jewish people, but there was a strain. He wasn't comfortable with it. But it did come to pass, the obvious economics of it. I think the fact that Bob was tight with money helped override his sensibility. And Fred Weisman came on the board, and Donald Factor. Leavitt was still there when we had a bit of a crisis. An uncle of Donald Factor was John Factor, who had served as part of the Mafia. There are a good many very brilliant Jews in organized crime in this country, and his uncle, John Factor, known professionally as "Jake the Barber," partner of Roger "the Terrible" Tewey was let out of, I think it was Leavenworth, having served a long time. When Tewey got out, he was gunned down immediately. Jake the Barber had a great, black-tie coming-out party in Bel Air that we were all invited to. When I say "we," I'm now thinking of the more elegant end of the later Ferus. You know, Brooke and my old friend Dennis Hopper, Brooke Hayward Hopper, and Don and Lynn Factor, and Irving [Blum] and all of his various, colorful, gay world of decoration in the industry. So that was quite a party. Anyway, Don, knowing we needed money, sitting on the Pasadena board, knowing that his uncle was now out of prison and had paid his debt to society and is living in Bel Air, was in a position to get from uncle John the biggest gift of cash that anyone would have ever given the museum. It was four or five hundred thousand dollars. And it was a real setback that Rowan wouldn't back the notion of going through the motions of soliciting and accepting it. It was an accomplished fact, I think we would have—I think the money ended up going to Children's Hospital [of Los Angeles]. But Leavitt helped argue the case that, "Look, this man is a free man. He has paid his debt to society. Why should we turn down this gift that young Don Factor on our board wants to bring to us?" Etc. Anyway, that was a lost cause. Another great contribution—I'm mentioning things that were in the relationship with Leavitt, and what I think were worthwhile lessons. A lot of these things don't involve matters I didn't feel or know, but it was important to see them brought to practice by your boss. That's a different order of lesson. And I mention it because it's rare. There was a certain kind of way of operating that was very open, very fair-minded, and very moral, that was at the center of that man. And how quickly those values in our trade can get lost, or covered up, or obscured, or neglected. The perception of the museum by '62—and it had started in the late fifties—was that it was the modern museum for Southern California. And that was operative for a good fifteen years, I would say, right up to the end.

RATNER:

Nationally, as well?

HOPPS:

Yes. What happened was that I discovered very quickly, just taking it for granted, that yes, in that when you take the exhibits and somehow find the money to pay for it and bother to commit, that it being a base—it was, sadly, a

moribund time for the San Francisco [Museum of] Modern [Art] too, what John Coplans has described as the "dead hand of George Culler's," who was, I don't know, from the east, Philadelphia. They took a cipher as director after [Grace McCann] Morley retired up there. George Culler went on later to the Philadelphia College of Design or something, and was not particularly responsive to taking anything. He just kind of showed up for work, didn't initiate much, didn't participate with shows being organized in the East. This was not a time in the country, interestingly, where you had the completely decentralized plethora of exhibits organized all over. We pushed the Pasadena quite consciously, and I used to say—I started saying it. I would say it to staff and all of our people. This was right on the heels of Leavitt. Once Leavitt was gone, I just dug in and was ready to go for broke, kissed goodbye the idea of ever going back to school, and rode with it. [Harold] Jurgensen and I got along terrifically. But here was the perception that I think worked and we helped propagandize. Well, apart from, you know, the major museums—either departments, or exclusively involved with modern art in New York—and wonderful things like the Phillips collection in Washington, D. C., or a department like [the Art Institute of] Chicago or Philadelphia [Museum of Art]—they're not doing much; they are sending anything out in the world—we're one of this new breed. There is the Albright-Knox [Art Gallery], the Seymour Knox, Gordon Smith development up there in Buffalo. They've got the great collection. Then there's—The Walker Art Center is brought back to life with Martin Friedman. They're really organized. They have a real administrative machine. But we are the ones really pioneering in exhibits. So we've cast ourselves as Albright-Knox/Walker Art Center/Pasadena, that we just sort of—so that was a national perception, I think, that was there and which we all fostered. And it flew in New York in that any time a major show comes out of [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum], or [Museum of] Modern [Art]—Whitney [Museum of American Art] wasn't that active. Lloyd Goodrich and John Baur were extraordinary men, but there wasn't that much, in the sense we know it now, that they were generating. And literally, there wasn't a show put on the road by either the Modern or the Guggenheim—and the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art] was doing nothing to speak of. We hadn't quite reached even the [Henry] Geldzahler days. And even as we had that, he didn't organize shows to send out either, take them or send them. Geldzahler was a walking salon of the new art. It's surprising how little he actually did. So what is astounding is that no registrar from major eastern institutions ever came, never inspected the premises. There were no security reports. Leavitt was enough of a figure—Ph.D., Harvard [University], and so on. Anyway, whatever minimal paperwork went on—and we had insurance and so forth. But one guard—are you kidding? I mean, a [Wassily] Kandinsky retrospective

["Wassily Kandinsky 1866-1944: A Retrospective Exhibition"] in a building that had one guard. That Ifm having dope-addict, contemporary artists come in and work through the night, everybody high on speed. But I must say, in the most irregular practices, I've rarely found preparators in totally professional circumstances any more careful, any more caring. I don't know why. Leavitt, again, helped, instilling values and then trusting that in some freakish way you'd carry it out. So in one sense, we got away with murder. Here's the L.A. County [Museum of Art] down there, trying to do it all by the book. And when they take the Museum of Modern Art's art nouveau show, with expensive designers and installation and so on, a whole case of [Josef] Hoffmann and [Louis Comfort] Tiffany material falls off the wall. I mean, they're straining to do everything by the book and they have one of the classic disasters. We never had any damage, in terms of packing or shipping, of any consequence. It was great luck and faith and [laughter] total remission on the part of those museums that sent work to know any better, in a way. Considering that from the 1890s on, perhaps 1880s on, in California there was brilliant architecture and design, and plenty of it lying all over Pasadena, that we had such a travesty of a trade show under that epithet is just horrible. Very late in the game, some of the people associated with that program, the [Art] Alliance [of the Pasadena Art Museum] and so forth, begin to wake up to the efforts of Charles and Henry Greene, etc., etc. It wasn't thanks to them. I mean, there were the good architectural historians: David Gebhard at UCSB [University of California, Santa Barbara] and the terrific historian over at Occidental College. I can't think of his name right now.

RATNER:

[Robert] Winter, I think.

HOPPS:

Yes, indeed, Winter. Etc. But too late and too little. So acting director from '63 on, and they put my salary at $12,000. I wonder if it ever got up beyond $15,000. I don't know. I don't know what I was paid at the end. The key thing after Leavitt departed was talking Jim [James T.] Demetrion out of—to leave Pomona [College], where he taught, and where he should have been working on his dissertation on Egon Schiele, which he never completed, but to talk him into museum work, to talk him into coming. The ["Alexei von] Jawlensky [—A Centennial Exhibition"] and working on it was sort of the carrot. He's a real meat-and-potatoes midwesterner, and he kept asking why I really wanted him to do it. So there were two sides to the answer. One was that I felt that he was never going to be a great professor, but was a born museum person. "Well, what do you mean? How do you know?" "I know." That wasn't good enough. I said, "Look, if I ever leave here, either under my own steam or else go down in an airplane, whatever, what's going on here matters, and I want someone of

your honesty, Jim, to be in place." I said, "I'm choosing you as a replacement." For some reason, he believed me, and I think that helped convince him. I don't know. So he came, and his title was chief curator. I wanted him to be involved with, ideally, the scholarly apparatus of trying to deal with things coming into the collection, accessioning procedure, such research, working on more historical shows. Other than that, anything. As chief curator, it was kind of de facto assistant director in practice. I'm sure he felt he was cleaning up after whatever I got involved with. He was not that engaged with working contemporary artists. He knew full well that he got the brunt of it as I was running around, seeing what's going on here and here and here and here. He would pick up the kind of day-to-day administration of the museum. So there was a lot of that. And he was good at it. On a scholarly level, our fourth and major figure—well, not the most major, but for us perhaps the most important of the Blue Four in terms of our holdings—was Klee, because we were shy on Kandinsky, which was his [Demetrion's] work. And he had leave to go work in Europe and get involved with Tom [Thomas] Messer and work with the Guggenheim. We jointly produced the Paul Klee retrospective ["Paul Klee 1879-1949: A Retrospective Exhibition"]. As it turned out, we were kind of burned in that Messer conceived version A which would open at the Guggenheim and go to Europe, and version B which would simultaneously open at Pasadena and tour the United States. Demetrion took real annoyed offence at that, and I was stung a little bit. But what the hell? Guggenheim—we are what we are. Also, Klee is so prolific that what Messer conceived as the B version, second choice on everything, was really, in many cases, just as good, if the equal. You can do that with Klee. You can do it with Picasso, too, give or take half a dozen pictures, maybe. Fewer than that. Well, no more than half a dozen. So it worked okay. So Demetrion worked on those things. [Lionel] Feininger was the major endeavor with him. He's older than I am. We were classmates. He was a steady, day-to-day person, and spent—it wasn't that I wasn't interested or knowledgeable about the same area too; it's just that he liked it, and that's where he went, and that satisfied him. It's interesting that when he went on to Des Moines, his strong point was he completely, as director of Des Moines [Art Center], eschewed any kind of curatorial work in the exhibit sense and became a tiger in choosing and collecting post-war art, primarily American. So it's as though what he had been seeing and going through, he finally put into practice back there. He's doing a similar kind of thing at the Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden] and facing far more serious administrative responsibility than he ever dreamed of. It was a very quiet situation in Des Moines, and a crazy learning experience for him at Pasadena. We had the kind of strength and guts of Demetrion, a kind of stubborn unbendingness came up in a couple of crises. Before we get to the

building program, we took from the Jewish Museum Sam Hunter's vast Larry Rivers retrospective. And I was due to go off to work on the Sao Paolo Biennale ["Exhibition of the United States of America VIII Bienal de Sao Paulo, Brazil"]. So Demetrion and I worked on laying it out, and he was going to quickly carry on through with it. Rowan came by the evening we were spotting and installing, caught the fact that one of the paintings, subject matter Napoleon, was called, The Second Greatest Homosexual, and suddenly took me aside and said, "You can't hang that painting." This whole routine, his complete homophobic nature just erupted and blossomed all out of proportion. Robert Rowan is heterosexual? He has a certain fascination, both an attraction and aversion, extreme aversion, to matters gay. A private interest; a public aversion. Demetrion couldn't believe it. Now, here was Rowan blowing it out of proportion, and Demetrion getting wildly stubborn. Demetrion said that if I took that painting out of the show, he was going to put it safely in the storeroom and leave the museum and never set foot in it again. It was a really incredible, nasty go-around. I had never known Jim to be so stubborn. Anyway, the way I resolved it was that I thought Rowan was pretty crazy. And he, by then, was chairman [of the board of the museum]. And I wanted to leave to get on with the first trip, the exploratory trip, on the southern international. I couldn't lose Jim. So the thing that I came up with, that they both bought—neither of them being happy—is that there would be no labels on the wall, just numbers referring to the number in the catalog, a stupid resolution, but they both saved face in accepting it. A second thing came up with Rowan, and I think that just about sealed the day. At that point, I think, Demetrion made up his mind he wasn't going to stay. Sooner or later he was going to be looking for a way out. We had a chance to show The Stations of the Cross by [Barnett] Newman, and Rowan objected because there would be clergymen and parishioners and so on. Not he, of course, but too many of his country club friends and so on would find—he all but said, "A Jew like Barnett Newman putting up these blank, nonobjective paintings"—which he, of course, understood, because he bought. He says, "Well, you know, I bought this great Newman that you boys steered me to." I had, actually, the painting Tundra that his wife Carolyn bought. So that went all the way to the art committee, and Rowan manipulated the art committee. We couldn't do the Newman Stations of the Cross. I watched Jim take the measure, a pretty cynical view, of how trustees really were. I think he had not the best sampling to gauge it. The building was the most horrendous issue of all. One of the things that preyed on Leavitt, and was underway when I was there, was that they had engaged Edward Durrell Stone quite arbitrarily to design a new museum for Carmelita Park. Now, in the twenties, when the museum was founded, it was in an old frame house in Carmelita Park. It was wood. It was a fire hazard. Presumably,

it's long since torn down. But when, in the thirties, when Grace Nicholson's enterprise had failed and the city somehow, for taxes or whatever, took possession of the house, the museum moved over to it. And there it was in this kind of Chinese townhouse reconstruction. But there was a strange contract with the city of Pasadena, so they still had a lien if, within fifty years or whatever, they could reclaim all the land, several acres of the Carmelita Park, which for years had been a little pitch-and-putt golf course and kind of public park—charming, plenty of landscaping, a kind of rolling bit of land. The idea was to reclaim it and get built. Now, the real motive was that—as we fleshed out—Rowan and many of the other Pasadena trustees were embarrassed by the kind of threadbare, center-city Pasadena, which had declined steadily since the thirties and somewhat precipitously after the war. Now, what they didn't understand was that there wasn't a shard of embarrassment, nothing but surprise and pleasure for any of the sophisticated easterners that came out. By the time that Duchamp exhibit hit, we had a New York and international barrage of visitors. Duchamp himself found the [Nicholson] building perfectly charming, liked it, was delighted to have his show there. And to dealers and collectors who came in from the East, it was fine. If you look at a European perspective—odd and antique buildings that are exhibit halls, and so forth—it was no problem. The city wasn't a skid row around it. It wasn't dangerous. But it was somehow an embarrassment to them. And so this, I think, was masked, this idea, "We must reclaim this land." They could have negotiated with the city to extend into the future when the funds—anyway, the debate became with Jurgensen, whom I say I liked, that we ought to be putting our money into staff and art. Never mind building the building now. Now is a great time to buy art. He wasn't interested in that at all. The second argument that Leavitt had not been able to get anywhere with was that Stone is a terrible architect now. This is a travesty of a building.

RATNER:

Well, who chose him in the first place?

HOPPS:

He was chosen by the trustees because there was an absent, always absent, rarely-attending-a-meeting, wealthy trustee named Wesley [I.] Dumm, who was the principal, I guess, owner/proprietor of something called Stuarts Chemicals, or Pharmaceuticals, up in Altadena [California Regional Broadcasting Corporation]. He was a mysterious man not involved with modern art at all—no kind of art that I know. A very private man, very willful. And he had chosen Stone, who had a kind of society following in the fifties. You know, I mean, he was far from the thirties modern style of MOMA [Museum of Modern Art]. So, to get Dumm's money, everyone felt they had to use Stone. That since he liked Stone, he would contribute, since he had the

money, a big chunk of dough to get the Stone building built. Jurgensen began to find out that it was a little dubious whether Dumm was ever going to kick through that money. He wouldn't really make a concrete pledge. My argument that it was crazy to have an eastern architect who was probably going to cost more per square foot than if we got a local architect—Jurgensen being a local, self-made man—that argument carried the day. The fact that we got along well, and he's hearing from everyone, me leading the way, what a terrible piece of architecture it was, how nice the park was, how we could really respect it more—fine—and get a local person for a lot less money, then why have to pay this guy plane fare and all this? Let's spend the money here. That won. And he just grabbed the phone, one day; he said, "Yeah, you're right. Let's just get him on the phone and fire him." It's not clear to me how much board preparation had gone on prior to that firing. They had board meetings where, in a lot of occasions, the director was not invited to attend. So I was never—I guess there was some discussion at board meetings. But in a kind of muzzy, back-and-forth, no clear decision. He just decided, "Well, let's do it", and fired him. I think some $90, 000 had been expended on plans and models up to that time, and he said, "Let's just write it off." I mean, he had that kind of buccaneer business spirit. "Let's just cut losses and go on." I remember I asked him, "What should we do with the model?" And he looked at me, he said, "Burn it. You want it? Burn it." So what had been agonizing for Leavitt, who really didn't like the Stone proposal either, is that he would get involved with Eudorah Moore and this faction and that—Jurgensen just took a kind of authoritarian, pragmatic stance and got rid of it. He bought my idea that there should be proposals submitted by several good Southern California architects. [Richard] Neutra and [Robert] Alexander, John Lautner, [Charles] Eames, Craig Ellwood—whom I hoped would win. I think that was it. And at the last minute, I thought, I said, "Who is that architect here in Pasadena?" I asked a staff member, "Who was that architect here in Pasadena who did the cafe down in Newport [Beach], or—what is his name?" Thornton Ladd, something. I think Demetrion or somebody looked into it and says, "That's Thornton Ladd, Ladd and [John] Kelsey." And I said, "Well, they're not so awful. Let's just put someone from Pasadena on the list." That list could have gone in without Ladd's name on it. It's just insane. As that went forward—now, prior to that happening, there was a moment when we pushed really hard for Jurgensen to buy the hotel next door—

RATNER:

To the Nicholson building?

HOPPS:

Yes. To the north of the Nicholson building, and the parking lot to the south. And just hang in there and negotiate with the city and forestall building. Let's

work up staff, get endowment together, buy art. Let's just carry on. In fact, I don't recall what architect or who drew it up, but there were renderings and some plans as to how that was feasible. The idea was to put storage and offices, education, everything in the little hotel structure to the north—it's torn down now, three or four stories—and keep the Nicholson building strictly as exhibits, public activities. And the parking lot that we rented and used, just get that on the south and control the land. I don't know what has happened to those drawings, and I can't remember who did them. They were done up and that was explored, and it was dismissed very quickly. Then the idea of the architect's submission came. When Jurgensen found out—the idea was that they would present proposals. We would look at them, the board would review it. What a nice exhibit it would be to show some plans by all these interesting people. Then the board would make a decision whom they wanted to go further with. He found out—and this became the whole basis of the subsequent, my involvement in the great lawsuit later—that Thornton Ladd's mother was a wealthy woman. He had no idea, but he quickly added that up and he settled the issue that there wouldn't be any review, that it was smart to just use Ladd.

RATNER:

And the board just went along with that?

HOPPS:

One on one. Yes, yes. What it had de-evolved to, with Wesley Dumm now out of the picture because we had dismissed Stone—everyone figured, forget him, we probably are not going to get money from him. Even though Factor and Weisman were on that board, they were still Jews and they were from the Westside of the city. You know, there is an old saying in the industry—by that I mean the entertainment industry, movie and all—that you don't go east of Western Avenue except by plane or train. The only exception, Santa Anita racetrack. So there is this traditional estrangement. They were outsiders on that board, so no one was looking to them for major money.

1.4. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (October 11, 1987)

RATNER:

Okay, we were talking about—

HOPPS:

Yeah, what's hard to—I'm sorry I don't have a whole board roster in front of me. I'm going to describe the situation that was the case by '65, let's say, '64 or '-5. It's such a grotesque experience in my life, the whole business with the new building and all, I fuzz out on the dates. But I think it is—I think Demetrion is there by '64, and I think it all begins by then. Okay. So '64-'65, that season, here's what we're looking at. You've got, roughly, a thirty-member board.

Factor, Weisman, and Gifford Phillips—all from the west, and business, cultural, social, philanthropic engagement far-flung other than Pasadena—just couldn't really be convinced to be real players in the fate of the museum's future. There is always the lurking question, like, "What's the L.A. County Museum really going to be? Can this museum, clear over in the old east side, really be it as our modern museum?" It's functioning as such. They love to come to it as such. They'll donate some art and get money, etc., but they're estranged. Then you have the kind of old, wealthy Pasadena—what's left of it—San Marino types and so on, where you have only one person out of all of them in any way sophisticated with the affairs of the museum, its programs, its art: Bob Rowan and his wife. And that's a tough marriage there, destined to end fairly soon anyway. You have Rowan's own business interest languishing. [R. A.] Rowan and Company [Real Estate and Property Management] was deeply and traditionally in old, downtown real estate. And he's seeing his fortune going down. His pride is hurt because his wife, who is full of Orange County money, is wealthier than he is, for practical purposes. He is reaching that time in life where he is having a certain kind of crisis anyway. But he's the only one. He's aloof from, and not a kind of real leader to pull his peers—who are less knowledgeable of the, you know, substantive affairs of the museum—along. The only other really strong person—there are two other strong people. There is Eudorah Moore, who is kind of engaged with old Pasadena but is kind of new, and an odd person and very curiously committed. I mean, she would have made an extraordinary feminist leader, but I don't think she believes in it at all. She's kind of socio-politically right of center and totally involved with her California Design and fascinated by contemporary art, or modern art, but strangely disengaged from it. She'll support it and believe in it, kind of, but doesn't want to know too much about it. Her very curious brother [Albert R. Morse], an eccentric businessman in the Midwest, a kind of Albert Barnes-type figure, had the largest private collection of Salvador Dali in the world. I'm sorry, I'm blocking on his name. He's a legendary character. That collection has now moved somewhere down in Florida. He had amassed, next to his little manufacturing unit in—was it Indiana or Ohio?; outside Cleveland, I think—this extraordinary, vast collection of Salvador Dali's work, from early right up, and was a special patron of Dali. But it was locked up in a gallery adjunct to his factory. And he was paranoid and only let certain people see. His name was Morris, maybe. Her husband [Anson C. Moore] was Moore; her family name, I think, was Morris. Anyway, she had a strange awe about this brother. I'd sometimes talk to her, "Gee, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could borrow?" Not one of my favorite surrealists was Dali, because of his fascist, pro-Hitler engagement and why he was thrown out of the movement by [Andre] Breton and some of the others. But still, historical Dali, okay. And he'd gone from

crypto—well, overt fascist, to a kind of strange, Christian conversion. So in the surrealist pantheon, Dali had become persona non grata. But still, I'd say, "Gee, it would be interesting if we could borrow from your brother." "Oh, no, no, no, no. He's—don't." Like it was—she didn't even want to talk about—so the one great contribution she could have—obviously, it would have been a very interesting show and brought in quite a strong attendance. No, she is in a curious place. Here is Jurgensen, the self-made man, who really wants bricks and mortar. He doesn't know from art, but from having a building built and something that everyone can look to with pride. I mean, he developed from being the son of a butcher at the old Model Grocery company to the proprietor of the distinguished Jurgensen gourmet market chain, and he sent his children to the best schools. So he wants to see something that he understands, like somewhere on that cornerstone, "Harold Jurgensen, Building Committee," or "Chairman," or whatever. He didn't have the money to do it single-handedly, nor did Rowan really have the money he was going to commit to do it single-handedly. And they were the only two strong-willed people who could fund-raise. As much as it turns out they really disliked each other, they had to work together. Eudorah Moore really thought Rowan was silly—a fop, probably—thought him less than a man. She never said, "gay" or "queer" or "weird," but she did everything but say that. So it's the damnedest bad-karma triangle of people. Mutual suspicion, distrust, alienation, from the three people who really had the leadership potential to make something happen, and none of them allowing in what is very clear. Look at recent history. It was the leadership pool on the Westside of the city that could make something happen. The money came from membership, a pitifully small endowment. I think the endowment was less than $3 million too, some of that earmarked for building. They're into severely testing everyone, as it turns out, for the building campaign. The building finally, as it turns out, was to be pegged at, I think, nine, nine and a half million. Then it gets to be fifteen. Then it's grotesquely overrun. With all the so-called inaccuracies in the famous John Coplans *Artforum* article ["Pasadena's Collapse and the Simon Takeover, Diary of a Disaster"], I think you can trust it pretty well. There are no horrible errors, as best I can tell, in what he had to say there. So the other, passive members of the board—what I'll call just metaphorically now all the Martha [B.] Padves—they couldn't do it. There are dues and—in terms of the fiscal or capital position vis-a-vis anything with the museum, they were a small part, significant but small. They really looked to Harold or Bob or Eudie. So Jurgensen's style, who's going to challenge it? How and why? They want him to keep trying something. He was the one who supposedly had the contact with Dumm, either he or Eudie; not Rowan. When he sees Dumm fading—so, one on one with me, the famous incident that cost me thousands of dollars, so I say it again at risk. I was alone

with him in a room, and he said, "Look, I know this idea of yours, the architects, etc., or MOMA." And he would say things like, "Blah-blah. I'm responsible for getting this building built. Thornton Ladd's mother has money. I've talked to her. She's going to contribute a multiple of his architectural fee if he's chosen. Walter, he's just been chosen." That may be a better quote than they got in *Artforum*. And I was stunned. He just told me. He got up and he said, "Remember the pact we made?" Now, this is a man who knew nothing about modern art and never challenged or censored a single thing. With picketing attack, with break-ins, with, you know—only at the time of Duchamp, a bunch of Art Alliance women had, like, raised their eyebrows and, "Da-da-da-da," because I had let people in to look at the installation. And they were all tongue-clucking about Marcel Duchamp and."Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it strange?" you know. It's sort of titillating. They don't know what it really means as far as stature, not that they would need to know. But it was more fun and games for them. And then they began to get more and more serious, anyway. Some of them come in and they see The Fountain, the urinal, sitting there, and they go nattering to Harold Jurgensen. He comes in to me and he says, "Walter, come here." He points at it, he says, "I want to know your statement. Is that art? Yes or no." And I remembered what he had said, I said, "Mr. Jurgensen, that is art." He said, "Fine. That settles it."

RATNER:

[laughter]

HOPPS:

And he went back to them, and he said, "Get out of here. Leave him alone." Now, what's the—you see the Faustian dilemma. I have never had more support and faith, however arbitrary it was. I call it art. I would say, "It's what we are going to do." Total support. The most sophisticated people I've worked with. I haven't seen that at the Museum of Modern Art, because I've guested and worked there. Nowhere in the Smithsonian [Institution]. Not in Washington. Not even in the Menil Collection now. I don't expect to ever see that again. So when he tells me the competition is over, Thornton Ladd has just won, and for these reasons, it took the starch out of countering him right at that moment. That was my weakness. That was the very moment when I should have made the decision to challenge him. But I knew what it was to go to Eudorah Moore and start with this. And the evenings at Rowan's. It would have been at a terrible price. And I sold out. I knew perfectly well what it would have entailed. And I might have failed. So in talking it over with Demetrion—and everyone is saying, "Jesus Christ," and so forth and so on. And then you begin to rationalize. And then there is the further discussion with him, the kind of ambivalent discussion: "Well, that's not great." You know, "Neutra's older, about to die." And he soon did die, I guess. "But Alexander is great, and

Ellwood is an extraordinary architect." You know, the weak response. No, no. That's not the response. Jurgensen is saying, "The smooth look. I know I'm giving him to you, but you boys can really work with him, you and your boys." It's funny the sexism that was in there. Years after Rowan and I hadn't spoken and I had been forced to resign, and when we finally at Sally—not Sally Lilienthal's—but a society party in San Francisco, six or seven years after the fact of my resignation, he walked forward. We saw each other in this dinner. He walked up and stuck out his hand and said, "Well, Walter. You and your boys were right all along. This was the way." It was as though there were no Gretchen Taylor Glicksman or Barbara Berman or—I don't know. That's just a footnote. Just by the way, the role of some extraordinarily tenacious and suffering women, and bright and resourceful women, in the history of even my little part of vanguard activity in Southern California. The women don't get any play. So to that generation it was "Me and my boys." They weren't all boys. But the SOP [standard operating procedure] was we would work with him. It all turned out to be a lie.

RATNER:

Do you think he knew that at the time?

HOPPS:

He didn't care. He didn't care. He did not care. He might have even half believed, well, "Who knows what he's going to do?" I'm sure you could—the tenacity of Ladd and Kelsey, who were just terrible men, perfidious liars, worse than second-rate architects, as it turned out, was beyond what he imagined. He's probably suffered the worst. It's sad. I'd like to talk to him again before he dies. What went on in between, in a kind of ghastly way, is chronicled reasonably by Coplans in the—what is it?—February '74—

RATNER:

'Seventy-five, actually.

HOPPS:

—'75 issue of *Artforum*. So I don't want to rehash all of that. It did—the strains of that process, in terms of also what was going on, I think added to the end—speeded the demise of my first marriage. It probably was a marriage that wouldn't have lasted forever, but it speeded it up, put an extra strain on it. You never know. It may have made it easier. There may have been more—Shirley and I cared very much for it, but we were more like professional colleagues than a married couple, and that often happens. She was ambitious with her own art historical work, and removed, in a way, from most of contemporary art. Fascinated, she fancied herself a fan, but really distant from it. She didn't want to get right down in the trenches, and has never done any serious work, historically, with twentieth century, either. Some, but not really. The complication in the midst of that was having fallen in love with a high school

classmate of Barbara Rose, Helen Goldberg, a brilliant younger woman, who was studying ethnology at Columbia [University]. Her extreme political radicalism—she was one step away from being with Kathy Boudin and Weather Underground [Organization] people. I met her at an Andy Warhol Factory party, which she was very loathe to go to. But, as I say, she had known Barbara Rose, who is from Washington, as was she. She was brilliant. And that added a lot of complication. In the same context of all of this going on, Pasadena was being chosen to do the [Exhibition of the United States of America VIII] Bienal de Sao Paulo, taking leave for that. Now, that was still in the big money of the sixties, by the way. How was I chosen? How did that work? It's a stepchild. We have no minister of culture in the United States, working a lot with France and abroad in subsequent years. The awkward position of the United States to become engaged culturally, internationally, it's just crazy. Anyway, what the situation was is that the United States Information Agency [USIA] would be turned to—well, first, requests to participate in any biennial abroad, Venice or Sao Paulo, the request would come to the State Department and go to a cultural affairs officer. Usually they were political hacks. I mean, some of the worst. The cultural affairs division of State is an opaque swamp of nonentities. They then would pass it right over to the United States Information Agency, which had become more involved. [Dwight D.] Eisenhower years, [John F.] Kennedy years, it's gearing up, gearing up; it's a major propaganda arm, and it's an interesting cover for all sorts of CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] operatives. And they like it to be active and busy. People I've known from college and subsequently that work—I have friends in the agency now and have had to deal with some. I've even used them for art errands. Some of them are terrific, real resourceful types. But my own politics is very much left of center, and that was part of the attraction to Helen—an area that, in the midst of Pasadena, had been quite neglected. It was a matter of tension between Demetrion and myself, by the way. He saw an I.F. Stone newsletter once on my desk, and this was early on, and I'm grousing about—post-Kennedy's death—what's going on with Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam. And he took the most conservative kind of—like, "How can you—who are you to say you know? They've got to know what's going—it's got to be right," kind of argument. It's funny. It was one of the few moments of personal tension between Demetrion and myself. We just set it aside. We never talked about it again. To this day, we just don't get into politics because we have a lot of regard and respect. Anyway, getting involved with Helen Goldberg, and back and forth, and the vicissitudes of her life, which was a tremendous strain. By that time, the third special show that matters most to me—having ["Kurt] Schwitters[: a Retrospective Exhibition"], then ["Marcel] Duchamp [Retrospective"], and now ["Joseph] Cornell [Retrospective"], which sort of

completed a cycle of something I had in mind—was well underway. He was the toughest nut of all. Schwitters was a piece of cake. You choose work; he's gone. Duchamp was also a piece of cake. I have never worked with any artist, young or older living artist, who was more intelligent—that should be obvious—but more resourcefully cooperative. No one. No exception. He made everything possible and easy and had an extraordinary organizational mind. Simplicity, clarity, efficiency. He couldn't have been—I mean he came out, lived at the Hotel Green, watched on things, was deferential to the lowest member of the staff and would modestly help and offer little suggestions. An extraordinary man. I mean, just as a man, beyond any piece of art he made. I hold back on talking a lot about him. The issue came up about the Archives of American Art. Bill [William] Woolfenden was hard on my case, like, wouldn't I be the person to do an American—? I asked Marcel, and he put it this way: he said his privacy was very, very special and very extreme. It's perverse that a young couple in—not that young—in France are trying to chronicle a man who never wanted a biography. They're doing this bizarre work of chronicling what went on every single day of his life. Just a mad obsession. I don't know if you know of that bit of—I don't know. Anyway, when the matter of the Archives in its early days with Bill Woolfenden came up about Marcel, I asked him what he felt. He said, "Can't you think of things you'd rather do?" And I said, "Yeah, actually I can." He said, "Fine. Let's do other things." I mean, if I really pressed him, he would have. But his sort of quietly stated choice was to not go through—he chose with Pierre Cabanne in French to do that one thing—somebody who wasn't involved with the art world, did not know much about it. It was a very distant situation. And he did a little bit for KPFK when he was here. And Andrew Kopkind, working for Time-Life—at the moment he's still trying to find his notes from '63 for me. We're still hunting for Kopkind's extraordinary notes. I don't know if you know of him as a reporter. You know Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne? Well, he's the maestro.

RATNER:

I see.

HOPPS:

He is the brilliant one in that whole league. I know Joan and John. Kopkind, who came out of the closet as gay, went through a crisis. Anyway, he's back working for the Nation. He is a knockout. Anyway, just the crazy things that came to—he also was on the radical left for a while, put out—I don't know if you ever read Alexander Cockburn or Jim [James] Ridgeway. He's in that world. He happened to be working for Time-Life at the time and had some of the most—he took good reporter shorthand notes. He has resurfaced in the last few years, and we're really trying to find what he wrote when he did a Duchamp article. Anyway, never mind. Back on the building. Helen and I—oh,

I'm sorry. I'm off on Lyndon Johnson and the money. The middle-sixties under Johnson meant huge amounts of money were put at the disposal of the United States Information Agency to allow our participation in the biennials. In '63, Martin Friedman—and a system got set up where a commissioner would be chosen, and you would be given a State Department commissionership, which meant you were subject to their rules of the game, but you'd have a huge budget. So how a sequence gets rolling. Prior to that, it was catch as catch can, often with the State Department passing it to MOMA, or sometimes the Whitney. So Friedman was chosen to do Sao Paolo in '63. He did an Adolph Gottlieb retrospective and a set of new American sculptors. Big budget knockout: [George] Segal, [Mark] di Suvero, whatever, you know. Gottlieb won the grand international prize, whatever, and it's a big deal. This way that the USIA operatives—there was a very spooky woman named Lois Bingham and her lesbian sidekick, Peg Cogswell—I'm dwelling on these things a little because they should be noted somewhere, because it leads to other smarmy things that, in some cases, people can research one day, if they like. So anyway, Ms. Bingham is the op inside the Washington USIA branch. And then there are USIS [United States Information Service] field offices all over, usually connected with embassies and consulates, and just full of CIA ops under cultural affairs cover with lots of money to help you get anything done. No heavy propagandizing vis-a-vis the art; just that our presence should be big and strong. It's from ambassadors' wives and funny people who are not part of the propaganda apparatus, per se, that we get weird takes on the kind of art we should show. It's interesting. I never saw—I've been pretty close to agency propaganda people, and they did not lean on you to try and not show vanguard or this or that, whatever. They bought it all. Max Kozloff converted later in life to a kind of neo-Marxist position and the kind of Rockefeller-cum-Museum of Modern Art role of using the new American painting in Cold War propaganda. He didn't get it quite right. They didn't care what kind of art. It's just that, "Now is the time to have big, high visibility, American presence." And the good thing about it was that for whatever end, they allowed for an enormous amount of free expression, unhindered expression. [tape recorder off] Anyway, I should stay with the part that's relevant. Friedman does his show, and the way they had it set up, he would nominate three people he thought would be good to do Venice the following year. Sao Paolo was in the odd year, Venice in the even. Documenta, over in Kassel, Germany, was no factor yet. It's interesting why it started in the fifties. Venice goes back before the turn of the century. Sao Paolo was started postwar to take in this sort of "America's New World." The Latin American countries never got to Europe much. Germany is part of the propagandizing, the miracle of the new Germany. And also, it's interesting, because the Third Reich had so busted a whole generation of having any

cognizance of modern art. Germany wanted to reintroduce its own country. And the first Documenta shows weren't super-vanguard at all; they were catching up on doing nice, museum-like surveys in the name of the nation, of the enteigneten Kunst, like here are the German expressionists, and let's get up to date with Henry Moore, etc. So all the Documentas, they didn't hit [snaps fingers] as, like, wild, new vanguard until—and they came about every four years—until '72, like they had done across the sixties, late fifties. The sixties sort of theoretically brought the country up to—anyway, so Friedman would nominate, say, three people, and the USIA, in their inscrutable way, would choose one. They ended up, from his nominees, choosing Alan Solomon of the exhibit hall, Jewish Museum, for contemporary art in New York. And he did this extraordinary show of [Robert] Rauschenberg, Johns, [Jim] Dine, [Claes] Oldenberg on the one hand; and Morris Louis, Ken Noland, Frank Stella, a little, tiny bit of John Chamberlain, on the other. A blockbuster for [the] Venice [Biennial] in '64. I was there and helped with that a little bit. He stole away a little red-haired secretary we had had at Ferus Gallery to be his assistant, Sondra Hunt. He was always involved with a complicated personal life for one reason or another. Ed [Edward] Janss and I—who was a great friend and patron, personally, a collector, and a wonderful man—he and I were touring. We dropped in there, and I had a nice little role in hand—messing with some of that, get my feet wet, anyway. Rauschenberg won the grand prize that year. That was the high-water mark. There were enormous budgets then, relatively. To give you an idea, I think his working budget was like half a million, which was a lot of money then. It was at least $400, 000. You add everything up, from my Sao Paolo in '65. Anyway, Solomon nominated some people. I was one of them, much to my surprise, and I was somehow chosen. So ops come out from USIA, creep around the museum, chat with trustees, and so on, and try to soothe them that they are just sort of taking me away for a while. It wasn't done quickly in those days. They made a real production of it. So, in effect, I needed a kind of couple of leaves of absence to carry this whole thing off. You know, I chose as my star a small retrospective of Barnett Newman. And then, from the West, [Robert] Irwin, [Billy Al] Bengston, and Bell; and from the east, Stella, [Donald] Judd and [Larry] Poons, as a younger generation that had some general tenets with what Newman had pioneered. And that was terrific. Demetrion would run the museum in my absence. Also, having him there meant I could run off on European junkets with Ed Janss, who never, by the way, wanted to be on the Pasadena board. He's not a board player; he's a behind-the-scenes man. He had put his brother, William Janss, on the Pasadena board to kind of represent the Janss family interests. And Bill was a very nice man, and collected. Again, too far-flung, too peripatetic, not ready to make a move to really help with the new thing. Later, that adventure, spending time in

Washington in '64, in early '65—it finally came, you know, fall of '65, I guess, their summer, when it hit in Sao Paolo. So, if I remember the date—I developed a friendship with fellows and people in the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D. C., which is the, I suppose, most significant left-wing think tank we had affinities with. In the course of it, I fall in love with Helen Goldberg, who was Barbara Rose's friend, who also knew all of those people. So that added an extra complication, working and then carrying along with Cornell. It was jumping a lot of worlds. It was a complicated time in my relationship with Jasper Johns and Susan Sontag, whom I—she went to North Hollywood High School, so we had seen each other. I can't say we really knew each other, but we knew of each other's presence because we had been in various scholarship competitions, she in the humanities, I had won things in math-science. Some of those odd high school programs are what led me to extracurricular enrichment programs that led me to the Arensbergs [Walter and Louise]. But that's another story. So I was overloaded and couldn't handle the inevitable disaster of that museum coming. Take away anyone, it probably would have made it for me, maybe. I had been—this is the hard part. I had been addicted to drugs, to amphetamines, at an earlier time in my life and had sort of fought it off. It was very much part of—one kind of drug or another was part of the culture in the early fifties, right on through, in the kind of jazz underground world. It had dampened down once I was there in Pasadena. It was hit and miss. I pretended I wasn't an addict. That is, I didn't take it every day, every day, and just keep it in the blood. But by the time we're at the later sixties, middle sixties, the time of that biennial, with all that was going on, it didn't help that Helen was an addict as well. The final strain was sending her off to Brazil. She was going to do some work. I had been going through a very intensive session with Joe [Joseph] Cornell and getting the last pieces straight with him before the show. There was some time ahead. It was summer, spring even, and the show wasn't going to come until December, but I had to come back for the unveiling of the Ladd and Kelsey model. That was the end, in that I had a lapse in the airport. I couldn't—I mean, I broke down. I couldn't leave the airport. I had a kind of psychotic break where—because I hadn't slept in days normally, and I couldn't—I had already rationalized I was going to go right on through with the museum against every grain, except for this disaster of what you see sitting over there [Ladd and Kelsey model of Pasadena Art Museum], and was due and had everything lined up to be right there at the annual meeting. Rowan and I would have unveiled the model. It's crazy the degree to which everyone internalized it. Some of them closer to the—my own brother, Dennis Hopper—we've known each other, you know, since the earlier fifties—in his palmier days he had been the emcee and general style setter for a crazy, color television pilot we did on the new museum. We were both stoned as skunks, and there

was somebody on the board who was a minor functionary with ABC [American Broadcasting Company] television. A nice man; I forget his name [Rowe Giesen]. The big, new color cameras were there and the ABC affiliate. So he got time for us to do a color taping, which was rare in those days, which would be a showpiece on the museum and the model and everything. So it was—there are 16 millimeter films. Dennis and I have been trying, and will continue to try, to get our hands on one of these promo pieces for the Ladd and Kelsey/Rowan museum production that he and I did with objects and collection [inaudible]—

RATNER:

[laughter]

HOPPS:

We sat stoned out of our minds, hating the whole thing, but just—I don't know. It's very hard to describe the absolutely contradictory aspects of almost everything going on then. I mean, I'm working in a milieu—I have an absolutely extreme-leftist girlfriend, and I'm working with colleagues at the IPS. On the other hand, I'm working on this big show in Brazil where about every third person I have to deal with is a CIA undercover. It wasn't that the art was the propaganda thing so much, it was just presence. But the whole operation is a cover for all kinds of miserable agency activity and operations. So it was a terrible strain. You cannot imagine. I mean, I was first in Brazil just after the tanks had rolled and the generals put out—not Goulart. I'm trying to remember Joao Goulart, their socialist president. I mean, the coup is happening just as we go into Brazil. Frank Stella made the greatest crack of all. Newman, a famous quote. I ended up on three kinds of shit lists for signing anti-Franco petitions down there and getting all involved with an artist group. And, of course, they're left-wing. Frank Stella came down with a Bobby [Robert F.] Kennedy entourage with Henry Geldzahler. I must say, from every side of the political spectrum, people did live wild and free and high in those days. So when Frank was interviewed, some—they hadn't shut all the press down to the degree it is. They said, what did he think of politics in Brazil, since he was traveling with Mr. Kennedy?—Bobby in this case. He said, "I like the two-party system in Brazil." And they said, "Two-party system?" He said, "Yes. You've got the 'Yes' Party and the 'Yes-sir' Party."

RATNER:

[1aughter]

HOPPS:

And that went all over. Newman was confronted as to the meaning of his paintings in a heavy press conference. He was becoming celebrated in Brazil because the first person he wanted to see was Pele And they hit it off. You know, I mean he knew just how to—if they weren't going to understand his art, he was going to be a grand figure. So the reporters say, finally, "Look, please

address the question of meaning in your art." You know, they're asking, "What is this?" He's deflecting. "Will you say, in effect, anything?" He said, "Now, that's a good question." He said, "When all of state capitalism—" And he goes through this list that sounds left-wing as hell. He speaks from the old artist-anarchist position; they see it as nothing but left. "When all of this is crumbled and fallen, and all the shackles, etc., you'll find the meaning of my art will be clear." And I thought every damned State Department person was going to fall off anyway. There were wonderful moments and there were terrible moments in my life at that time. But I couldn't leave the airport. I got an artist friend on the phone. I had dug, when I was in college—I had worked for the great Judd Marmor. I had worked for him and knew him as a collector. Somehow, a friend got me to Marmor. I'm in the hospital. Now.

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (October 11, 1987)

RATNER:

Okay. So you were in the hospital, you were just saying.

HOPPS:

Yeah. One thing I want to say is that I was also teaching a twentieth-century survey class at the [University of California] Irvine campus in the midst of all of this. Now, if I hadn't had this break, sensible trustees would have called me thoroughly to account for overcommitment, if not had me for overcommitment—if not had committed me for being involved with quite so much in that set of years there. I can see on your outline I should make some summary remarks. In the hospital—[Judd] Marmor arranged for me to go there, arranged for a good psychiatrist. I had never had such an episode or anything really like this at all. Part of it was just R and R [rest and relaxation], some semblance of detox [detoxification]. So it was an acute situation. I was out of there in, what, six weeks? Inside that, perhaps. While I was there, the reactions were extraordinary. I learned subsequently on visits that [Robert A.] Rowan felt completely betrayed and humiliated that I wasn't at the meeting. But beyond that—he goes through the whole show and everything carries forward. But the major issue was, I learned, that in the big Rowan house on the Arroyo in Pasadena, his mother was psychotic in this archaic way. She had, what, been married previously—I don't know. She was titled somehow. They called her the countess or the duchess or whatever [Princess Laura Orsini]. This is absolutely like out of, what, Charlotte Bronte or something. The poor woman, who was apparently quite beautiful, elderly, and mad, was kept, was never institutionalized—and not under normal psychiatric care, really—but was kept in a kind of attic in the whole chamber of the big house until she died. I heard extraordinary stories later of doctors who attended her, had to come when there

was a crisis. He was absolutely in terror of mental illness, that the minute any aspect of that should come up in anyone's life, he was finished with them. And he was very slow to admit that, or would never admit it, per se. But people close to him and so on, that played out, as I learned. But he—no call, no comment or anything. As soon as I was in there, [Harold] Jurgensen, who was head of the building committee, was on the phone like a shot. "What's going on? What do they have you in there for? Are you okay? Are they treating you all right? Listen, it's a bitch you weren't at the meeting. Never mind that now. We've got a budget to get out. Can I talk to—" You know, I'm trying to give you a clue. "Can I talk to some doctor there? I mean, who is in charge of this place where they have you? We've got to keep you working. It's the end of the year. We've got a budget to project. You've got some reports I would like. Can I talk to somebody so I can set it up? Who do you want in there? Do you want Barbara Berman? Your secretary? Both? Can you get a little office vacant?" [laughter] You know, he was fantastic. Which were probably the most cheerful and supportive remarks I had. I said, "Sure." Marmor's fantastic, so forth and so on. It was all arranged. So I had a little visiting room off where, probably, I suspect it was one of the more calm environments and focused situations I had had to do expenditure summaries on the activities and project the budget for the coming year. So it's a very progressive psychiatric unit at Cedars-Sinai [Medical Center] where I was, where Marmor arranged it and so forth. I had worked in one at UCLA, so I knew it from the other side of the fence, so to speak, which doesn't necessarily help when you're a patient. But a lot of tranquilizer and walking around the day room, etc., and everything worked out okay. I also got a good psychiatrist recommended by Marmor that I saw and so forth, although it's shaking. I also had a nurse in plain clothes that would drive me down to my class. I think I only missed one class at Irvine. So I would go in and teach. Maybe I missed two, I don't know. But I carried on out my semester, and everything came off. Jurgensen was supportive. I'm back at the museum, and Rowan is absolutely freaked out. We had been on a very personal relationship, both before I was on the museum staff and later. Socially as well. I would visit his house up in Santa Barbara. We spent a lot of time together. I mean, I had a privileged position. It's strange. He didn't involve himself much with many other members of the staff, but for some reason we hit it off. I learned later that he was terrified that I might get in some homosexual relationship. He was forever afraid—he both adored Nick [Nicholas] Wilder, who was a gay art dealer here, and he bought a lot of art from him—was charmed by Irving Blum, liked Irving Blum around, who was charming with Carolyn [Peck Rowan], his wife—but he was terrified of Nick as well. Dennis Hopper and I have suffered more under people having suppositions that there were worse things going on in our lives than actually were at any given time.

All of these phantoms began coming out of Rowan. And he said, "You know, Walter, you just have to resign." "Why?" You know, "Can we talk about it? I know about—Bob, I'd like you to talk to Judd Marmor and my psychiatrist, Ernest White. They think that I can carry on with this. And we talk about it, and I think I can. I mean, if you want." "No. No way." So I said, "Well, I've got to think about that." And he said, "Well, I don't know what you believe there is to think about." I said, "Shouldn't the board be talking about this?" "Well, no. I'm asking for it." All right. So I left his house that night. I talked with the Weismans [Frederick and Marcia], everybody. Now, my most powerful ally in all of this would have been Fred Weisman, from well outside. Do you know the story of what happened to him? The very day I'm going into Cedars-Sinai with this break, Weisman, the evening before, had been hit over the head with a big glass ashtray by Frank Sinatra in the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Not by one of Frank's men, by Frank, in this terrible altercation. He's down there with the father of the bride-to-be of his son. They're meeting for the first time. The men had gone down the hill from Angelo's to have a little talk in the Polo Lounge. Fred is essentially a teetotaler. He hates foul language. He's trying to get these guys to stop saying "motherfucker" at the next table. It's Frank and the Rat Pack. What a bad break. So he's with a terrible concussion. So part of my support group was Helen [Goldberg], back from Brazil, and Marcia, meeting in the visitors lounge. So Fred is out of it for some time to come. And Rowan, whatever his aversions to Fred Weisman and so on, is, in the final chips, counting on something there. So they're just seeing crisis at every turn. I think that really played a factor in it. None of the business about Frank Sinatra could come out. One can speak of it now because Kitty Kelly says something about it in her book. I wrote a resignation addressed to Bob and had called for a meeting with Harold Jurgensen. It was a long meeting. He told me how little he regarded Bob, and so on and so forth, and was very supportive. He took it and said he would think about it. Anyway, what it came down to is that Jurgensen was left with a choice whether to go to the board and carry on with me, make it an open issue, or support me, or just decide to tear up the resignation and challenge Bob, or to mail it. It was addressed to Rowan. In an odd way, I felt I owed it to Jurgensen to make that call, because they were in a very delicate situation, really. You lose Weisman—and he was, for our purposes, lost—you're going to see Don [Donald] Factor slip away. I mean, some of the newer support is just going to fade away. [John R.] Coplans, who was just phasing into the staff—John was never director. He was to come in as a special kind of publications person, and some curatorial activity. He had a little contact with Rowan and was playing a kind of ambivalent role in there. John, quote, "loved me like a brother," but I know perfectly well he was interested in tumult and wanted to see how he would come out if I was gone. I

never called him on it. I just knew it. Anyway, I don't know how many days went by—a week or two weeks, I can't remember—and Jurgensen called me back to his office. It was over a gas station behind the flagship Pasadena Jurgensen's. And again, a long story, staring out the window. I mean, [Theodore] Dreiser stuff about his having to haul meat over to the Rowans' house and so on. Bob's a foppish little boy and sent off to English schools and so forth. And finally—I knew he made his decision. He opens his drawer, pulls out a checkbook, and says, "How much money do you want?" I said, "You can't give me the kind of money—" He said, "If I take it to the board and you stay, I'm going to lose Bob Rowan and I won't get to build my building." And he said, "How much money do you want?" He said, "I have to mail that letter." And I knew he hated to do it, because he talked about how little Rowan meant to him. All right. The real tragedy is you end up with a building where it proved out that it couldn't be built for what they [thought it would] cost. It's a disaster for any kind of flexible museum. Harold Jurgensen's name is not on anything, and they were all thrown off and effectively fired anyway. They were fired in a way that was less redeemable than mine, which is all very sad. I was offered another museum position. I had all sorts of nice responses, once I was out of there, from other quarters, but I chose to accept an offer to go to that Institute for Policy Studies in Washington. I thought I would be back in Southern California, where I'd been run off the ranch, about a year or two later. It took longer to get West. Let me jump to your very end. Well, the [Norton] Simon takeover. I think, that's pretty well chronicled in *Artforum*. There were extraordinary aspects of it. Simon is brilliant, and, in his prime, shrewd beyond anyone's—I mean, people would say, "Yeah, he's really shrewd. You've got to watch out for what he's going to do." And yet, I'll give him every credit. As forewarned as they thought—they were forewarned. But he could just outsmart anyone he has ever played with. And I don't really want to comment at this time on what he has done with the museum or how he runs it. I have a very complicated regard and knowledge both of and for the man. And since I am currently involved in my current professional capacity in matters that are with him, I just wouldn't want to say anything anyway, one way or the other. In terms of his current major concerns, there is very little that he has actually wanted that he hasn't been able to get. And he's not over yet. His major bit of business involves the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum]. I think you know that his gift to UCLA of the collection was not a gift, and it is not going to happen. I don't know, has that been in the papers?

RATNER:

No, but I think people pretty much suspect that.

HOPPS:

Yeah. Anyway, let's see. From at least—I actually believe that the founders of the Pasadena Art Museum in the twenties—you know, I want to say something. There are the real facts of what went on that I doubt, I really doubt, can ever be accurately reconstructed in most cases. Clearly, in terms of the history of what went on with the founding even of the Pasadena Art Museum, there will be no Leon Edel, the great biographer of Henry James, to give the right kind of history of complicated lives and situation. There will be no one of that stature being able to reconstruct what really went on there. There's no one alive who can tell you. No one. Mistrust most of all Eudorah Moore. There's no one in Pasadena that can explain. Could [Robert] Winter, if he really wanted to? I mean, if Winter were young and he wanted to make it his doctoral dissertation and really devote himself to what went on between its founding and the Second World War, maybe. But he isn't about to. On the other hand, there become operative myths that have a real reality of their own. And so I subscribe to either the reality or myth. It doesn't matter to me. I mean, in one sense it does, but in another, I think it is beside the point. With the types around Caltech [California Institute of Technology], like the great Robert Beverly Hale and some of the others, who had a hand in saying, "Yes, let's have a museum in our area," there was a sense that it was to address matters of its time, just as they started the forefront of exploration with their activity at the institute. It was part of what went into the founding of the place. Had it not been for the Depression, who knows what it might have more organically grown to be. Not much input. A lot of museums went into being just at the moment of the Depression: Joslyn [Art] Museum, Omaha, Nebraska; Museum of Modern Art, New York. There are any number. The great boom, the truly—there have been two significant booms in museum building in this country. What we see going on now is nothing compared to the two great booms. The first came, really, in the 1870s, within the last quarter of the nineteenth century: Boston [Museum of Fine Art], Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art], Chicago [Art Institute of Chicago], etc. The whole pattern of what we think of as "the big museum" comes then. The next one was in the twenties, middle-later twenties. If you look at the record, about sixty American cities—Houston, Omaha, Cincinnati, MOMA [Museum of Modern Art]—all kinds of museums. Interesting that the Los Angeles—the original [Los Angeles] County Museum [of Art] down there slips in just ahead. It's a teens—

RATNER:

Right. 'Eighteen [1918], I think.

HOPPS:

That's right. But there is a great boom in museums built in the twenties, in the sort of second tier of cities, in some large—well, you know. And Pasadena was part of that. That the golden age of the industry, the enormous, instantaneous

expansion of the entertainment industry—I think that's very significant here—should boom (that was a growing, highly profitable industry, one of the few during the Depression years that was a new industry, relatively newer), that the other side of the city, no further east than the Western Avenue, you know, Echo Park area where [D. W.] Griffith's old set was, kept moving out and beyond. And a very different kind of cultural, social constituency grows. I think that's why this thing over here was so disconnected, that old—the newest part of the old way didn't stand a chance in terms of what was happening over there. From a postmodernist perspective, whether we're scholars addressing Jasper Johns or A and R producers in rock and roll, we are all part of the entertainment industry in American society. Steve Ross, head of Warner Communications, Dominique de Menil, chairman of the Menil Foundation, it's all the same from a postmodernist perspective. I think that Los Angeles was hit by its cultural life being a tiny, little shadow of the real event growing. Its high art was just a kind of pitiful, little—became suddenly, in its early maturity, a pitiful, little side branch of the main event of the broader media industry at the very time it should have been catching hold. I think that's the larger picture. Now, that aside, for how long—what would we say—in its rebirth, at least across the fifties and the sixties into the, what, middle seventies—it's all over in '74—we got about a twenty-five-year run where, arguably—nevermind population. But [it is] the second most important urban center in America in terms of its both time and future, for all the activity. Not the capital. Not Chicago, you know, the inventor of twentieth-century architecture. You know, Chicago is a world-class city because of a fire, and [William LeBaron] Jenny, and [Daniel] Burnham, and [John] Root, and Louis Sullivan and his workshop, and Frank Lloyd Wright, etc. It is a world-class city going on beyond the twentieth, well up into the twenty-first century. But, setting that aside, this is the second most important urban area in America in the twentieth century. For twenty-five years of that, Pasadena was its base for modern art. That's of consequence. I do believe that it set—you can hear people talk on and on about what Vincent Price tried to do in little faints to further the Arensberg [collection] thing, and other funny notions of Beverly Hills. What's more significant was that, with all that resource, they didn't do anything. Never mind what they tried. I can't give them hero—Vincent Price is a wonderful man and played a great role, especially supporting students, having a collection and being very open to students. And he was a supporter and a cultivated man. So was Charles Laughton. So was George Gershwin. So was Edward G. Robinson. What has it all come to? They seem to lose their collections like rock stars lose their riches. Anyway, in terms of what is going on now in the dynamics of it all, MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art] is the peculiar offspring of what Arensberg wanted, what Pasadena assumed, and now we have. MOCA is really a

consequence of Marcia and Fred Weisman, and I had hoped to have had a shot at that directorship. One thing led to another, and I kept hanging on and staying affiliated in Washington, but I wanted to get back West here. If you want to take a couple of more moments, has anyone ever talked to you about Arts Foundation Los Angeles? Here's a melodrama for you. And you really ought to get back to some other principals in this. From here on out, when I say "us", I mean myself, [Henry] Hopkins, and [James T.] Demetrion as a core group who went through the wars here at a particular moment. [Thomas W.] Leavitt was gone too quickly, so I won't include him so much in this. And yet, I think he would share some of the same views. The most sophisticated artist, the most worldly, sophisticated artist, who knows strategically and in grand design careers, museums, and so on, on a world basis, who came back to California in '62, is Sam Francis. Well, he was back in '61, kind of appears here and bases in '62. So Sam Francis knows of what I'm speaking now. He is one of the critical grey eminences, and with the greatest vision as to what MOCA should have been. The sustaining wise elder and philanthropist among us is Edward Janss, another long, third-generation Californian. Now it's fourth—fifth. Bill [William] Copley knows, as a worldly man, and watchful, and doesn't want to talk about it. After I resigned from Pasadena, where Copley had hoped his collection would go—no formal pledge or anything. He was just waiting to see how it was all going to come out, and felt affluent enough so that he would have given it all. He knew what it meant, the Arensberg [collection] going away and all. One of the more colorful gestures was that, since he was kind of an alcoholic—no longer—he said, "We've got to go out and get drunk." He happened through Los Angeles, and he said, "We've got to drink a lot." So anyway, we drank. And I didn't know why he was emphasizing beer so much. The whole point of it was he wanted to make a great ritual of going over and pissing on the building, which he did—

RATNER:

[laughter]

HOPPS:

—in the middle of the night over there. And he yelled at the sky, you know, the moon and devils as his witness, that this was to formally declare that he would not be giving his collection to the institution, [laughter] Anyway, so I go east for a year's fellowship at the Institute for Policy Studies [IPS]. Hopkins is a kind of functionary, curator down in the morass of the County Museum. Rick [Richard] Brown was dynamic. He got it built. He wanted a [Louis] Kahn building. Failed. The moriahs of the County—[Edward] Carter, [Norton] Simon—the factions and strife in the board of the County Museum you must think of as the industry model of the boardroom fights and shifting management within an industry corporation. It plays out down there. Now that

it is more settled down, it will be both more successful and more ignored. The great potential days of the County were when Simon and his brother-in-law, Weisman, were in the more dynamic fights, and the great battles couldn't be won. You get [William] Pereira, not [Louis] Kahn, and so on. But Rick Brown did lead it out of its mini-Smithsonian context to a good place and a new building. It just didn't work. Of course, he gets his moment in the sun with Kimball [Kimball Art Museum] in [Fort Worth] Texas. And then, finally, relaxing. Although our younger generation, except for Henry, tended to fight with him all the time. He then was very gracious and put us all on the Association of Art Museum Directors in a swoop. Anyway, while I was in Washington at IPS, and just as I went—and Henry is still there at the County, and dissatisfied. He generated the most curious way. In talks with Henry and myself and Sam Francis, we decided that this would have been—let's put a year on it. I doubt anyone has talked to you about this. So in 1967, late '66, beginning of '67, the following plan was laid, that with such debacles of museum building and all of that, and this sort of stasis of curatorial activity still at County, even though Maurice Tuchman had come in—and yes, they did a wonderful, big [Edward] Kienholz show and so forth, but that isn't the whole answer—there was still a little bit of sixties idealism here. The idea would be to form a very streamlined administrative-curatorial unit that was virtually office-based here in Southern California and would have its own little board, raise its money, and work tactically organizing exhibits and projects, both publically—you know, outdoors, sited work, what have you—and art from here headed off to other institutions in the country and the world and bringing guest curating and lobbying to bring things in. To work in a very, you know, substantially funded enough, but in a totally tactical, guerilla way, the idea being that Hopkins and I would be co-directors of it and be on its board. Sam Francis would be on the board. Each of us would be responsible to bring in a patron. So I'm—my patron-benefactor, Ed Janss. Sam Francis brings in Betty Freeman—this is Stanley Freeman. And Henry Hopkins brings in Bart Litton, Home Savings and Loan, with whom we all knew, but he had some special rapport. He was the man who tore down Garden of Allah and built Home Savings and Loan and backed John Kennedy, etc. Legendary figure out of the mists. Bart Litton wanders in one day from Vegas and there's a savings and loan tycoon within a decade or whatever. A man of legend. And he pioneered a kind of nice, benign corporate art sponsorship role up there with Home Savings. Or, Litton Savings and Loan, not Home. That was Howard Ahmanson. Very different. Another one of the giants in the wars of L.A. County board, and someone who hated most modern art. Not Litton; he was interested. So we formed a board. We had a counsel. That was the starting board. Hopkins was—Janss was going to more than cover salaries for a couple of years for Hopkins

and myself, plus staff, etc. Freeman would put in programmatic money. And Litton, what was his contribution? The diadem, the symbol of it all. One of our favorite architects, another master from the great master's workshop, Louis Sullivan's, was Irving Gill. And over on Kings Road was the great Irving Gill house that Litton had bought. He was donating that house and those grounds as the base and offices for what was called Arts Foundation Los Angeles. It was one of the landmarks of modernist architecture—maybe the earliest, you know, post-Greene brothers—native to this area. I'm trying to remember the name of the house. It has a name.

RATNER:

The Dodge House?

HOPPS:

Dodge. Did you ever see it?

RATNER:

Just in pictures.

HOPPS:

Oh, it was wonderful. It was a humane, human, beautifully articulated version of what—it's the closest thing we would have had in America to [Le] Corbusier's Savoye Pavilion, only native here. So, as miniaturized, perfect displays and meetings and offices and wonderful grounds, etc., it was perfect. So back and forth I would commute from Washington, and any number of meetings went on—very open, free-form, sixties sessions as to programming—. [tape recorder off] Such a phantom. A kind of phantom and nightmare. It came and went like a dream, as you'll see. The people—it just doesn't get talked about. Well, Betty Freeman is very removed and not wont to talk a lot about what she's been involved with. I think Henry represses it. Sam isn't available. So anyway, I think it's worth bringing up. I'm trying to remember. Our attorney was Larry Spector. Corporate papers were done. I mean, this was really underway. I was planning to come back after my year's fellowship in Washington, and Henry would leave the L.A. County museum, and there we were. Ed Janss was really behind this. What happened broke everyone's heart. Unknown—now, it's a delicately balanced thing, I suppose, between Litton's place—and it meant so much to both me and Henry and anyone involved with architecture. Betty Freeman is a bit skittish and complex in terms of her involvement, but she was committed. Sam is always there, but he's many places in his activity in the world. Henry is looking for a career survival. I'm more than ready for it, but I really feel the whole combination is necessary. Indeed, it all holds together. It's a good, core start, I suppose I was leery at that point of any less. Well, unknown to any of us, the whole Bart Litton Savings and Loan was built on sand. And I got this just devastating phone call from Henry one day, about nine months into the year. I forget the precise time. I mean, I have

plans that I save to this day of the Dodge House and all that. We were working up our prospectus. We were not going to make it a heavily bureaucratized thing. It's going to be hit quick and tactical. Some artists, now, as I say from sessions—Betty Freeman loved to have salons at her house in the open session where people would come and talk about what such a thing might do. Occasionally I would get in for those. So Henry calls. Litton has just shot himself—

RATNER:

Oh, no.

HOPPS:

—and his entire S and L was on sand, and everything has been grabbed by bank examiners and, ultimately, creditors. And, no, nothing had been done about transferring the Dodge House, and we've lost it. It's gone. Well, we wanted more than just the house from Litton. And it absolutely shattered Henry. He kind of retreated. That was his contribution to it. And at that point, he accepted the directorship of the Fort Worth Museum which was being offered and just, I think, was—the whole events of the mid-sixties heading toward the end, they were pretty nerve-wracking, and he took that and got on and was ready to stay with that. It was chilling for Betty Freeman. The whole thing just evaporated with Bart, step by step, with Bart having shot himself. Janss, who had gone on the board, taken an interest in IPS, gone on the board, said, "Why don't you really stay with that? I mean, it's so crazy in L.A. It's just one more nightmare. Let's not struggle. What are we going to do if, you know—do you really want to struggle and carry on with that?" But, as I say, Robert Towne got the metaphor right for how things go out here. Had that happened, I mean, I think the whole picture of how museums and things were working here would have been very different indeed. We would have had something growing and in place for the art of our time, operating in a way I think the [J. Paul] Getty Trust should be operated, on a world-wide scale for the art of all time. Some of us are deeply concerned and disappointed with the programs of the Getty Trust. It could be one of the most powerful, tactical, effective, flexible operations in terms of art of many cultures. Leave it just in the West, if you will. You don't even have to quite take it as far as Angkor Vat, but I would like to see it go that far for extraordinary works in the world. Anyway, my own notion of how I think the Getty should work world-wide is based on what we had hoped to do just with current art with this other thing.

1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (October 11, 1987)

HOPPS:

"Personalities," I see here. "Influence and abilities of various board and staff members." Rowan I've commented about.

RATNER:

Right. Just one quick thing about Rowan, because it's a question that so many other people have asked in other interviews I've read, is why he ultimately didn't donate a large part of his collection to the Pasadena Art Museum. And I wondered what you thought about that.

HOPPS:

Yes, in his character, Rowan is a very bright and affable and generous man, and a gentleman. By nature, he is wounded. He has deep psychological wounds from his family and his own personal life. It tragically makes him cowardly. He is a forthright man who has the contradictory characteristic of cowardice. This overreaching desire to engage, participate, and help, set against a kind of fear that it's all going to go to ruin, makes him very ambivalent. So he is—I mean this sincerely—he is truly a generous person, but he is afraid of it being lost. His father bought real estate and he was left things, and its value was taken away. He is pessimistic about how things can go well in business. He is genuinely a Compson who sees it—and I mean that in the Faulknerian sense—living in a world that he is seeing become Snopesian. And he feels that—I mean, it's the quality—his sense—it was built into his personality that there was a doomness, or it was in the enterprise at Pasadena. Somewhere in his heart he was forever holding back for a better moment where it was safer. He's too intelligent to have not known how badly funded the place was, how terribly managed it was. And another side of him is the kind of—I think I must have another cigarette here. I feel like Joseph Cotten—

RATNER:

[laughter]

HOPPS:

—in Citizen Kane: "One more cigar for the old man." Also, various insecurities. It devolves through a lot of—difficult to comment on. One can't—personal characteristics. It had to have been hell for him to take fully to heart a cultural institution where he and Harold Jurgensen and Eudorah Moore, I'm telling you, were the story. Neither of those other two were his kind. Each by each by each. Now, Rowan was in the position to have, contribute, own what would have been its very tissue, its flesh: the art. I had out a great Edvard Munch Girl Before Apple Tree. I mean, the core for our place would have been, thanks to [the Galka] Scheyer [Blue Four Collection], German expressionist art. A Gauguin print. A little van Gogh print. Okay. Now, roots of expressionism. Jesus Christ, one of the great James Ensor paintings to turn up I found in Frumpkin. I bought his belief in its obscure reference in literature, accepted it as genuine, and got it out here. There was no money in the museum

to buy it. I got Rowan to buy what's called Fireworks by James Ensor. If we can't have a van Gogh, we can't have a Gauguin, you know, etc., it was still possible. And I fought to find and did find that Ensor. It turned up. I wanted it in this area. This was even before I was over there full time. I got it through—and there wasn't an ounce of profit in it for the Ferus Gallery—got Rowan to buy it. I know he's with Pasadena. That's a German expressionist collection. He never gave it; he sold it. It's in the Albright-Knox now, one of their star pieces. Likewise, I got a contact on the Girl Before Apple Tree by Edvard Munch. I have it hanging in the museum when I am explaining to Bob—by that time, the Ensor's there and I borrowed it from him; it mostly hung in the museum—I'm trying to get him to buy it. We're talking less than $150, 000, for heaven's sake. It's one of the major ones in the country. I helped convince Norton Simon to buy the Munch, in another context, The Girls on the Bridge, which I think he has sold off now. It's crazy. He doesn't need the money for that painting. I mean, with Simon it's action—larger, more complicated games. I don't want to get into him. But anyway, Rowan. I couldn't get him to buy it. That's in the Carnegie [Institute] in Pittsburgh. Those were ray, at least, two major painting building blocks to underpin the kind of expressionist art in the Germanic tradition and in the other. At the time of [Marcel] Duchamp, working very closely with Marcel, we tickled out—it's a complicated story—one of his painting masterpieces called The Network of Stoppages, a big, horizontal painting. Short of—in conventional oil-painting terms, after the nudes, etc., etc., then there is it and then there is Tum. That's Catherine Dreier, Yale [University Art Gallery]. Those are landmarks now. And The Network of Stoppages had damned well disappeared. And we tickled it out of Pierre Matisse. Marcel couldn't even talk to Pierre. It's complicated. When Marcel left for Buenos Aires in 1918, a lot of his stuff in his studio, in the secret studio that [Walter] Arensberg provided him in New York on West Sixty-seventh [Street], was turned over to Joseph Stella for storage—one of his American cronies you'll know from the literature there. Anyway, Stella was—Marcel was not back in this country to kind of collect up what had gone on. Now, his sense of time—Marcel keeps track—pinpoints. Jesus, from 1909 to the end of his life, I mean, he, if a failing, expected others to be similar. Well, you know, Stella died in the thirties. His life was chaos. He lost track of it. He ended up taking Matisse's wife, who was so abused by Pierre—that's the son of Henri—the dealer, and Tinie became Marcel's wife. And he took his stepchildren, the three kids, and was a very good stepfather, by the way. One doesn't think of Marcel as a father at all. These were grown-up children. He's complicated. He has one daughter at large in the world, a mother, never to be mentioned, who lives a life and doesn't want to even be associated with Marcel. She's an artist. Anyway, it's complicated. He took pretty good care of her, a child out of marriage, but

especially good care of—anyway, it was hard to get it. That was in our show. It hadn't been seen anywhere ever. Photographs of it existed. [Robert] Lebel had it, Marcel did. We got it from Pierre. I think it was $18,000 in '63, maybe $28, 000. It was something with an eight, $18,000, $28,000, $38,000. No more than $38, 000. I couldn't get anyone here to buy it. Now little collages of Marcel, done much later, sell for $300, 000, $400,000. I don't know what price I would put on that painting today: $3 million, $4 million, I don't know. You can't put a price on the ten most important Picassos. They're not for sale in the world. But secondary, you know, maybe they're in the top one hundred. People don't understand. They think something is unique just because it is at auction with that van Gogh. We live in a world where ten, fifteen, twenty million dollar prices are paid privately on art works. Twenty million dollars. For a long time now, the whole profile—I say a long time. Inside the last ten years, they don't reach the public. Anyway, that's very sad, as to Rowan and collecting. Bob Rowan's tastes are lyric. Nothing in structure, art, or anything conceptual. It's sad. It's very sad for me. It was very important and it was part of his due and heritage that he should be on the board of MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art]. He belonged there. It was his due. It was his right. He is an elder statesman that does feel, care, and know about art. Whatever his feints and ambivalences and insecurities are, he is a major contributor here, and was shocked, and had had no chance to compete with Simon when the semblance of the old Pasadena board was removed. And he's completely isolated. His efforts to try and fight the deaccessioning policy of Simon were right, from Rowan's point of view. And he had no chance. I don't want to argue it from Simon's. Simon is within the law. He has won his case fair and square. It's sad that Rowan now has resigned from the MOCA board. [Donald] MacMillan, the business manager that Harold Jurgensen brought in, even Harold Jurgensen knew he was incompetent. He wasn't competent. Jurgensen, in the rough days, sort of wanted someone there who could keep track of things, however semi-competent, just to report to him. I don't blame him. The man in no way belonged there. He had no idea what was going on and I think even disappointed Jurgensen. The whole Art Alliance [of the Pasadena Art Museum] activity, vis-a-vis a view of docents and volunteers, other than my own personal one, they were terrific. They were a tight Junior League, a clubbish cadre that swung with the punches, hung in there, were at least devoted, and entertained fans of all that went on in the museum, and have carried on since. I think they come out of this marvellously. And the Fellows [of Contemporary Art] that were established, that whole group, originally men—then it sort of became men and women. You had the docent, or the Art Alliance, who were women, and then you have the Fellows that were initially men. That all sort of blends together. I think you end up with two factions: the junior art programs

[Pasadena Art Workshops] that are going to somehow carry on in Pasadena. Glad to hear it. Adults were in it too. I might mention that one of the sort of heroes of mine is a physicist named Dick [Richard] Feynman, who affected this sort of Marlon Brandoish style among physicists. When he won his Nobel Prize, it was for a theory that had a great name called "strangeness." I mean, he was the physicist of my generation. He, and then followed by Murray Gell-Mann, who developed the "eightfold way." The metaphors of their theory titles just seem perfect for fifties, sixties sensibility. Feynman studied art at Pasadena classes. He wanted to learn to draw. That program cut across, at least in the region over there, all sorts of children to interesting people. And it was a little extra work for artists who needed to pick up money. I must say that Leavitt did really further the idea that, whether it was John Altoon, Paul Sarkisian, any good available artist, one that will pick up work, they were made welcome and encouraged. I must say, too, that the performance—and even on a tiny scale, Leavitt encouraged good chamber music, and some of it we just picked right up—one of my heroes had been Peter Yates, founder of "Evenings on the Roof," and Sayde Moss and her husband, the Monday Evening Concerts successor. That was an important part of the cultural life here. And on the one hand, classically, the Coleman Chamber Music Association. And the opportunity to bring in John Cage, [Morton] Feldman, LaMonte Young, and all of that, was a great pleasure. The audiences could be incredible. I'll never forget having Clyfford Still turn up, needing to be with him one evening when it was the very evening we were doing the John Cage concert. I thought I was—I said, "You know, I cannot—" Everyone else was excited. I can remember Barbara Berman saying, "Oh, what a wonderful day. Not only do we have John Cage tonight, but Mr. Still has arrived. Isn't that amazing? I've never seen him." I said, "Yeah, Barbara, of course you've never seen him. He is rarer than, you know, a pterodactyl." She said, "Why do you look so upset?" I said, "I'm dying. Don't you understand? There is no way these two men can be under the same roof." The ingenuousness of the staff was very supportive. I had a staff, except for Demetrion, who were fearless, ready to tackle anything, and didn't have the good sense to worry about most—anyway, Clyfford Still, hearing that there was Cage, much to my amazement said that, well, he would—perhaps I had to stay with the concert. I suggested he have dinner with Bob Rowan. Fine. So he had dinner. But he chose to come back to the concert. I couldn't believe it. He did. We sat together in the back, grimly. You know, this is a man who loves great pianists like [Sviatoslav] Richter and Beethoven and all. And Cage was doing some of the—I mean, he—on the bill was something called Zero Minutes, Zero-Zero Seconds. Now what that is is one of the more hellacious works. It was the era of heavy contact miking. Cage takes a Waring blender, all

contact-miked with heavy amplification, and blends carrots and cucumbers and so on.

RATNER:

[laughter]

HOPPS:

It was hell. Mr. Still is just sitting there, grim as death. [laughter] And it was a pretty devoted, hardcore audience to show up for this and sit through it. His throat is contacted. The second movement of the piece is him drinking this concoction, contact-miked all the way down. [laughter] It was thunderous, roaring, gastrointestinal activity. All right, it's that kind of evening, right? At the end, Still hasn't said a word, not one word through the whole concert. And he gets up and he said, "Mr. Hopps," he said, "Please don't bother. You must spend time with the composer, the musicians." He would refer to them that way. He said, "I can find my way to your office. I'll call for a taxi. It's been very interesting being here." We had part of the day together, in any event. And he said, "Will you please convey my compliments to Mr. Cage, even though we are committed to the mutual destruction of our aesthetics." [laughter] Which, some phrase like that, I repeated to John. And he said, "Oh? Was Clyfford Still here?" And I said, "Yes. And I have to tell you, he conveys his compliments, even though you two are committed to the mutual destruction of each other's aesthetics." He said, "Oh, does he really think that?" [laughter] The difference between those two men was just something. But those were—in my office, by the way, there were two works hanging. Demetrion commented recently on this. On loan from Jasper [Johns], trying to acquire it, was a forty-inch, red-yellow-blue Target. On the other wall was a 1948 Clyfford Still painting, something that Hassel Smith owned. I couldn't get anywhere with anyone, including Bob Rowan, buying either, for very small prices. But Jasper on the one hand and Hassel on the other just let them hang there, waiting for maybe someone to come to their senses. Deaccessioning policy.

RATNER:

We are probably going to have to wrap this up pretty soon.

HOPPS:

Yes. Oh, it's late. Okay. Almost not at all. All of the massive deaccessioning—Leavitt liked the things that didn't fit in the collection: El Shimius that he acquired, Childe Hassam, bits of Americana. Neither Demetrion nor I saw any problem about just hanging onto that, pending whatever the future would involve. Coplans was disastrous and ruthless, allowing massive deaccessioning to raise money. Adele Watson, one of the pioneering, strange, sort of, you know, early twentieth-century symbolists of genteel persuasion, but far out in her way. All obscure things. The Peter Krasnow work that's obscure, that's hard to find. There was lots of stuff, long before any question of what Norton Simon

was doing, that was part of, at the very least, cultural history that should have been kept, and it was lost. Oriental wing? That family—what is it? I'm trying to remember their name. That was another tragedy of Harold Jurgensen figuring that from the—not Samsons.

RATNER:

The [Henry] Steeles?

HOPPS:

The Steeles. Henry Steele and that branch, figuring that that would mean something. It didn't mean much. It also dovetailed with the interests of Thornton Ladd's mother. That's enough. I think a really interesting person to talk to would be Theresa Fulton, if she's alive. And, although he's so removed from it, at some point [John Palmer] Leeper. You haven't talked to him, have you?

RATNER:

Well, we are, though. He has agreed to, and I think we will in November.

HOPPS:

Good. All right.

RATNER:

Okay. Well, thank you very much. And, as you can tell, it would be good to have another session with you. But thank you for your time today.

Date: