PASADENA ART MUSEUM: THOMAS G. TERBELL, JR.

Interviewed by Joanne L. Ratner

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: October 22, 1938, New York City.

Education: B.A., Stanford University; M.B.A., Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration.

Spouse: Melinda Farris Wortz, married 1960, divorced 1972; three children. Yolanda Mezey Terbell, married 1972; two children.

CAREER HISTORY:

General manager and part owner, Jack Built Toys, Burbank, California, 1962-64.

Corporate banker, Security First National Bank, 1964-69.

Director, Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California, 1969-71.

Principal, Fine Arts Investments and Artists' Financial Management, Terbell Associates, Pasadena, California, 1971-72.

Corporate banker, Security Pacific National Bank, 1972-75.

International banker, Security Pacific National Bank, Hong Kong, Tokyo, London, 1975-82; Security Pacific International Bank, Chicago, 1982-84.

Corporate and merchant banker, Security Pacific Midwest, Inc., Chicago, 1983-84; Security Pacific National Bank, San Francisco, 1984-87; Security Pacific Merchant Bank, Los Angeles, 1987-88.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Hong Kong Bankers Association, 1975-76.

Security Pacific Finance, Ltd., Hong Kong, board member, 1975-76.

America-Japan Society, 1976-80.

Japan-California Association, 1976-80.

Japan Security Pacific Finance Company, 1976-80.

Security Pacific Trust, Ltd., Reading, England, board member, 1980-82.

California Bankers Association, 1984-87.

COMMUNITY SERVICE:

All Saints Episcopal Church, Pasadena, California.

American School in Japan, Tokyo, board of trustees.

Art Institute of Chicago, Society for Contemporary Art.

Montessori Schools, Inc., Pasadena, California, treasurer; board of trustees.

Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California, vice president; board of trustees; founder and chairman, Men's Committee; founding member, Fellows of Contemporary Art.

Republican State Central Committee of California, alternate member.

San Mateo County Junior Hockey Association, treasurer.

Sequoyah School, Pasadena, California, board of trustees.

United Way, San Francisco and Los Angeles, committee member, corporate giving campaign.

OTHER AFFILIATIONS:

American Chamber of Commerce, Hong Kong.

American Chamber of Commerce, Tokyo.

Beach Club, Santa Monica, California.

Committee for Art at Stanford.

Delta Kappa Epsilon.

Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan.

Friends of Photography, San Francisco.

Hong Kong American Club.

Honolulu Academy of Art.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).

Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles.

Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.

Museum Society, San Francisco.

Pen and Quill, London.

Royal Automobile Club, London.

Royal Historical Society, England.

Tokyo American Club.

Valley Hunt Club.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

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

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Tape I, Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA. Tapes II and III, Holiday Inn, Pasadena, California.

Dates, length of sessions: April 8, 1987 (87 minutes); May 22, 1987 (96).

Total number of recorded hours: 3

Persons present during interview: Terbell and Ratner.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

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

Ratner reviewed a variety of materials directly related to the Pasadena Art Museum, including minutes of the board of trustees from 1965 to 1974, minutes of the executive committee from 1958 to 1974, calendars of events, exhibition catalogs and reviews, scrapbooks, newspaper and magazine articles, California Design files, and essays, brochures and speeches pertaining to the museum's early history. In addition, Ratner read relevant interviews conducted by the UCLA Oral History Program for its Los Angeles Art Community: Group Portrait series.

The interview follows a thematic outline, but within each subject area the discussion generally proceeds chronologically. Individuals discussed include director James T. Demetrion, curators John R. Coplans and Walter Hopps, trustees Robert A. Rowan, Harold Jurgensen, Eudorah Moore, and Martha B. Padve. Terbell also discussed the museum's fiscal policies, the influence and level of commitment of the board of trustees and the many volunteer organizations, the exhibition and acquisition programs, and the design of the new building

constructed at Colorado and Orange Grove boulevards.

EDITING:

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

The edited transcript was sent to Terbell in December 1987. He verified proper names, made minor corrections and additions, and returned the transcript in spring 1988.

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

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

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

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

APRIL 8, 1987

RATNER: Before we begin our discussion of the Pasadena Art Museum, I was hoping you might tell me something about your background, when and where you were born.

TERBELL: Thank you. It's nice to be here. I was born in New York City in 1938, and my mother had the good sense to allow us to escape from New York in 1947. I essentially grew up on the San Francisco peninsula, where I am presently living. My educational background was boarding school in Connecticut at the Hotchkiss School. And then I did my undergraduate work in economics at Stanford [University] and my M.B.A. at Harvard Business School, from which I was graduated in 1962.

RATNER: After you graduated, you came back to California?

TERBELL: Yes. It was kind of fun. I did one interview while I was at the Harvard Business School and discovered somebody would offer me a job. So I said, "Thank you. Now I know somebody will give me a job." And I went to Los Angeles. I was married before I went to business school, and when we got to Los Angeles I spent some time with a man named Alfred Esberg and looked for a company for me to buy. So I went into the toy manufacturing business with the assistance of Mr. Esberg, who figures in my life off and on. After about a year of that, in that business, my

associates and I had managed to agree on only one thing, and that was to sell the company to somebody else, which we did. So I called Alfie and said, "Guess what? I sold my interest in the toy company. What should I do now?" Alfie said, "Well, why don't you try your hand at banking for a little while?" So he introduced me to what was then Security First National Bank, and I went to work there, quote, "temporarily." Altogether, I've worked there since 1964, with the exception of the time I was at the Pasadena Art Museum.

RATNER: How did you know Mr. Esberg?

TERBELL: Family friend of my first wife [Melinda Farris Wortz]'s family.

RATNER: How did your interest in the arts develop?

TERBELL: In the most wonderful way. I have no formal training in the arts at all. I went to Europe, as many young people do. The first time I went with my family. I was nineteen; it was 1958. After visiting one or two museums, I was in love with art. So every city we visited--and we were gone for an entire summer--I did not go to visit the museum for ten minutes and then to play for twenty-four hours. I spent hours and days in the European museums, absolutely loving what I saw. It awakened me to something I knew nothing about. That interest was shared by the person who became my wife in 1960. We also then went to Europe and visited a lot of museums, came back, and

went up to Seattle for the World's Fair. There, the American exhibition of fine arts was largely the New York school, and I fell in love with a black painting by Ad Reinhardt and spent hours looking at it. That took me from the old masters smack dab into the art of my own time. From then on, it was my passionate avocation.

RATNER: When did you begin collecting?

TERBELL: The first thing we bought was a Picasso print. I'm laughing because it was a forgery. [laughter] And then we still liked it. Finally, what it was was a photo-reproduction of a print.

RATNER: Oh, no.

TERBELL: And some character had put some numbers on the bottom. The numbers probably should have been in the tens or hundreds of thousands. But it didn't matter. It was a nice print. When we were in California after finishing school, we-- Well, I'm jumping ahead a bit. My mother-in-law was a member of the Art Alliance of the Pasadena Art Museum, and my wife became a member of that group also. Through my interest, through my then wife's very passionate interest and involvement, we spent time in the museum, spent time in the galleries, and away we went. It was not certainly anything that was planned, it just happened. We just loved being surrounded by things we enjoyed.

RATNER: I want to move on now and talk a little bit about

your involvement with the Pasadena Art Museum. What was your perception of the museum before you actually became involved with it?

TERBELL: My perception was it was an institution with very high standards of scholarship and an institution which showed what was going on, mostly right now, but also very influential movements in the history of modern and contemporary art. A place where really exciting, dramatic things were happening. That was the impression. Very, very favorable impression of an institution that was moving and shaking, as it were, in the staid Pasadena-- Kind of fun.

RATNER: So what year did you actually become involved, participating in the museum?

TERBELL: That's got to be about 1965. As a husband of an Art Alliance member, I remember doing my share of bartending and carrying boxes and doing things for the Art Alliance often which raised a lot of money for the museum, and through that met people with very similar interests in seeing the museum succeed. My involvement just seemed to grow all by itself. I found over time that I was spending more time involved in the museum than I was at my job. Being a willing body, people always found a way to put that willing body to work. One of the first of the then most active kinds of things I was asked to do was to try to form

a group of men who would support the museum in a similar sort of way, though not as deeply, but in a similar sort of way to the Art Alliance volunteer programs. That was a lot of fun. There were just a handful of us at first, then it grew and grew.

RATNER: So specifically, what kinds of things-- Was it called the Men's Committee, I think?

TERBELL: Yes. We never came up with a fancy name, just the Men's Committee. It seems to me we raised a little bit of money by bartending at openings, and then-- Later on, when it was getting to be time for the new museum, we went a little further afield and commissioned [Joan] Miró to do a lithograph to commemorate the opening of the museum and to raise some money for the museum. Said project was wildly successful, I'm happy to say.

RATNER: Whose idea was that?

TERBELL: You know, I wish I knew exactly.

RATNER: It's a pretty big undertaking.

TERBELL: It was, but I don't think we knew that. I'm sure someone else can fill you in on who specifically came up with the idea. It just seems to me, as in so many things that transpired at the museum, all of a sudden, there was the idea and a bunch of people willing to pitch in: "Let's go do that."

RATNER: How did you become involved with the board of

directors?

TERBELL: Well, as the operations committee. Another fellow named Allen Smith and myself started to kind of take a more active and involved look at the operation of the museum as a couple of businessmen who had a real interest in the arts, but who were not professional in the arts at all. As I recall, we were asked by Bob [Robert A.] Rowan, then president of the board--and very often president of the board it seems to me--to form a little group of just the two of us, or others if we needed to, to examine the internal workings of the museum. Nothing whatsoever to do with the artistic standards or acquisitions or anything to do with exhibitions or collections, but more the nuts and bolts kinds of things to see if we could make things work a little more smoothly. It was through that involvement that I then was headed toward becoming a member of the board. Interestingly, Allen Smith and I were elected to the board on the same day, but just after the board had voted on the contract for the new building.

RATNER: Oh.

TERBELL: It was at the same meeting, but the business of the meeting concerning the new building was concluded by the time Allen and I were elected to the board. So I now know forever and ever what day it was that I got elected to the board. [laughter] I couldn't tell you chronologically,

but I know what else happened that day.

RATNER: So let me just ask you a minute about this operations committee that you were involved in. Was there a feeling by Mr. Rowan or other people that there were some fairly serious problems with the nuts and bolts, as you say?

TERBELL: Well, I can't speak for Bob, but from my point of view and Allen's, it seemed to us there were possibilities at that time to-- Streamline is the only word I can think of. What we really had in mind was somehow a smoother flow of things. I think that we perceived that, you know, the function of renewing memberships and other areas of that sort was enormously labor intensive, and there ought to be an easier way. It was just that kind of feeling that because nobody had ever really had the time or the inclination to examine how the office, as it were, worked, maybe that's something we could do. We did, in that process, become aware that there were some considerable differences of opinion among the staff members and the board. Everybody had in mind excellence for the museum, but, as in all endeavors, there were differences of opinion, and we thought maybe we could help in some way to resolve differences and smooth the flow.

RATNER: I understand now. Okay.

TERBELL: I also think maybe some of the people who had

been involved in the museum for a long time saw new eager beavers in Tom Terbell and Allen Smith and said, you know, let's harness that energy in some way, and if they actually demonstrate that they're, you know, really willing to pitch in, then maybe we can invite them to the board. I think it was part that, too.

RATNER: So, naturally, you were delighted to be asked onto the board.

TERBELL: Oh, yes. I thought, here's an institution doing things that are exciting, and if I can be useful, I'd love to be. It seems to me I also said I'd give them some money. I think that was [laughter] a part of it. As it should be for members of boards of charitable institutions, they ought not only give time and energy, but if they have the financial means, they should assist there as well. I believe in working board members.

RATNER: Well, I want to ask you a little bit more about that in a minute. But regarding your initial involvement with the board, I know there were a number of different standing committees of the board. Which other committees were you involved in?

TERBELL: You know, I-- It seems to me I was involved in a lot of different things, but I don't specifically recall any name. In other words, there was this sort of operating committee. My inclination, because of my background in

finance, was to see if I could assist in some way in books and records and, you know, where the money was, or wasn't, as was often the case later on, particularly. Just a financial kind of a look at things.

But I-- I think maybe this is a time when I ought to mention I've known Bob Rowan for, even at that time, quite a few years, and I gravitated toward Bob. If Bob wanted me to look at something or be involved in x or y, I was more than willing to do so. For, outside of the museum, I was his alternate on the Republican State Central Committee of California. So there were, you know, common things. I would go get his pledge for All Saint's Episcopal Church in Pasadena. I don't think he asked for mine, but he might have. But it was that kind of thing. So often I did things along with others, but at Bob's suggestion.

Then, around the time of my joining the board, and the museum's contract having been signed for the new building, Jim [James T.] Demetrion, then director, was offered a marvelous position at Des Moines Art Center in Iowa. I'm sure he breathed a sigh of relief and said, "I don't have to deal with--" In fact, he mentioned to me one time that he did not have to worry about the early stages of the new building. So he left us and went on to, I hope, a really happy experience in Iowa. Then I was nominated to try to find a new director for the museum. So that's when I

became involved in the director's search. I'm not sure.

RATNER: Do you remember why it was that you were selected to do that?

TERBELL: I probably volunteered. It wouldn't be difficult-- As I mentioned, I found myself spending more and more time involved with the museum, and less and less time with the bank. And God bless the bank, because the bank was very understanding and quite willing to allow me the latitude and the time necessary to do anything I could for the museum.

RATNER: Jim Demetrion, as you mentioned, resigned. That was in February of 1969. Many of the candidates, I guess, that you were interested in, or interviewed, happened to be in New York. I know I read in some board minutes that you made a trip to New York to interview some candidates.

TERBELL: Indeed I did.

RATNER: Do you remember who you interviewed and what you thought of them?

TERBELL: Gosh. You know, what I ought to do is get my notes out. I remember seeing quite a few people, including Bill [William C.] Agee, who comes up later on. I can see the man's face, but I cannot put a name to it. He helped organize the opening exhibition.

RATNER: Alan Solomon?

TERBELL: Talked to Alan. Then then there was another fellow. There were several people whom I thought, you know, had the potential, but they really were a little afraid of the new building. A lot of the people who are involved in the arts in New York thought of California as the other side of the moon in terms of, you know, where the action was, where the money was, where all of those possibilities were, so we really didn't get any live interest.

RATNER: In addition to the board's own search committee--I'm not exactly sure how far along, but they did decide to go ahead and hire a company called Economic Research Associates to help as well in the search to find a director. Did you think that was necessary?

TERBELL: You know, I don't even remember that. [laughter]

RATNER: [laughter] Okay, they did--

TERBELL: I'm sure it happened, I just don't remember it.

RATNER: Because, in fact, they paid them a fair amount of money. Well, $7,500, which I guess for then, and considering the financial status of the museum, probably was a considerable amount of money. So, as this whole process was going along in search of a new director, at what point did you realize that you were interested in the position?

TERBELL: Well, let's put it this way. Toward the end of

that spring, I think, in 1969, it was pretty clear to me that we had no live director candidate, and somebody had to do the job full time and not divide time between this and that, that we had too much going on. So I sought permission from the bank to take a leave of absence to temporarily step in and, at least, try to see that things would not go off the track altogether. So it was essentially by default that I became acting director. I found, in that, that I was of the board and not of the staff.

RATNER: At that point?

TERBELL: At that point in time. I started to learn that in not just this museum but lots of cultural institutions, there are the board members and there is the professional staff, and they are in many ways separate. They may have the same objectives, and often do. Certainly in the case of Pasadena, I think all the hundreds of people who were involved minimally or a great deal wanted to see the best. We just had twelve hundred different opinions at various times. [laughter]

RATNER: How much autonomy did you have? Or possibly that changed once you were director, but you were talking about that relationship between the staff and the board. How would you characterize the Pasadena board to its staff in terms of how involved it was in the day-to-day running of the museum?

TERBELL: Well, the board-- Several members of the board were very active indeed in terms of not only offering suggestions, but rolling up their sleeves and getting to work in a very positive and constructive way. There were other members of the board who were very good at raising money.

Now, as an aside, we ought to put in a little economic time frame. What transpired from the time the contract was signed for the new building and the completion of that building was an economic downturn in this country of very substantial terms, and the stock market went down very dramatically. So people who had adequate resources and pledged sizable sums of money toward the building or the endowment, or both, and agreed to give it over a period of time found it necessary to give it over a longer period of time, or perhaps not to give it at all, because their shares of stock which may have been worth one hundred dollars were worth thirty dollars. So there were those kinds of economic problems in not just Pasadena, California, but around the world. So we had that kind of a problem.

We were talking about how active were members of the board in terms of the fund-raising side of things. Harold Jurgensen was deeply involved in the raising of funds for the building and the endowment, and interfered not at all,

or became not involved at all, in the exhibition policy, in any of the fine arts aspect of it. It was the raising of funds for the benefit of the community through the new Pasadena Museum. Bob Rowan was deeply involved in the exhibition schedule and policy in trying to ensure that the high level of scholarship, which was always exhibited, was maintained, that Pasadena was the Museum of Modern Art West, which its reputation was. I think, during the time period we're talking about, it maintained that standard.

RATNER: Did you have a different sense about their level of involvement from when you were a board member, as opposed to when you became director?

TERBELL: Now, let's go to the-- The nuts and bolts of that question really is what happened between the time I was the acting director, with the intention of going back to being a banker and remaining a board member, to getting in with both feet. It appeared to me that I could be most useful by devoting all of my time to being the person in the middle, not of the board, and not of the professional staff. I'm totally unqualified to be part of the professional staff, and that would be the wrong place for me. But in some ways, I thought I could be a translator and stand in the middle. But one of the things I learned was the person standing in the middle gets shot at from both sides. But it-- I thought that if I were no longer a

part of the board, that I might be a more effective leader of things. It also was time for me to advise the bank that, you know, we haven't solved any of the problems that we had when I took a leave of absence to try to help solve them, that they were growing because of the economy and because the building was coming along. So I said good-bye. There were some legal things that banks have to worry about, and so I had to officially resign from there and become the full-time director with the intention of trying to make things run more harmoniously. Since I felt I could perceive all of the different points of view, I thought maybe I could marry them all up and have the result be a positive one. I think that, you know, we succeeded a lot more than we did not.

RATNER: As long as you mentioned the new building, I think I want to jump back a minute and talk about that, if that's okay.

TERBELL: Sure.

RATNER: As you mentioned, the first board meeting that you were invited to, they had already signed the contract. But you were involved with the museum, even though you weren't on the board, as the whole process to go ahead with the new building was going on. What was your understanding of the primary reasons for going ahead and returning to the Carmelita site?

TERBELL: What my understanding--and it is just that, my understanding--is that that site was available if the museum decided to build a new buiding within fifty years of the time that the site was given, and those fifty years were running out. At the end of fifty years, that site simply became the property of the city of Pasadena, and that was that. So my understanding was they had to build on the site or lose it.

RATNER: Did you think that was a good enough reason to go ahead and build?

TERBELL: Well, yes. It's a much more complicated question than that. Having been part of the bucket brigade over at the old building--meaning when it rained, the roof leaked--I used to run around, along with others, making sure that the pots and pans that were catching the drips didn't overflow and that the rain wasn't coming in on any of the works of art. So in terms of did we need other space to proceed, absolutely, and there was land available for virtually nothing. Two marvelous reasons to proceed. So from that point of view, absolutely, that was the time to do it. Now, what kind of a building did we need? There I might differ with what was agreed to.

RATNER: The architects that built the museum were Thornton Ladd and John Kelsey--

TERBELL: Yes.

RATNER: --of Pasadena, although Edward Stone, a man named Edward Durrell Stone, had originally been hired. He was dismissed, and--

TERBELL: [laughter] You know all of this; I really have no first-hand knowledge of that.

RATNER: But by the time you were involved, Ladd and Kelsey were the architects on the project.

TERBELL: Yes. The building was pretty much set as to what it was going to be, what it was going to look like, how big it was. All of that was done.

RATNER: Do you know who was involved in those decisions? Did the board have a very substantial hand in--and the staff itself--in making those kinds of decisions?

TERBELL: Well, my understanding was that the staff was not involved. I'm quite sure that's factual. Now, that may have been because the staff didn't want to be involved, didn't have time to, or any of a dozen other reasons. I don't know the whys. I do know that they were really not involved. The reason I know that is that when we got closer to the time to open the building, it was apparent that the lighting inside the building was not going to work for the exhibitions of the kinds of art that that museum was intended to be involved with, and was certainly what we were going to do. So it was go ask Bob for some more money--Bob Rowan. I wrote a few checks myself at the time

to build in new lighting that would be adequate for what we were going to do. Also, the art of that time frame was very large indeed, and the wall space was not very large. We ended up building walls which blocked out windows so that we would be able to show the paintings which were part of the exhibitions intended for the opening. So it seems to me unlikely that the professional staff, had they been deeply involved in the design of the building, would have designed a building with walls which are marvelous for small works of art and lighting which used a lot of natural light, which is great for smaller works of art, again. But when you're displaying a canvas that's forty-five feet long, you need a forty-five-foot-long wall and the right kind of light.

RATNER: Who ultimately accepted responsibility for these errors, because they were very costly? I know that the lighting situation that you're talking about ended up, at least from what I read in the board minutes, costing like $35,000 to rectify, just weeks prior to the opening.

TERBELL: Well, I don't recall being concerned with who did what to whom or why. It was "What do we need to do to get the job done so that we could open?" I mean, it was one more thing. [laughter] I have to laugh just to put it in some kind of perspective.

One day I turned up, and the painters, who worked for

the building contractor, were on their way out on strike because we had a non-union painter. I couldn't quite figure what that was all about. The non-union painter was an artist who was doing some painting. And we had to mollify the union. So, you know-- In fact, it was kind of silly. We had to put on the staff a union painter to be beside the artist. So you see, we did a lot of very silly things, or so it would seem to me. But the idea was let's get it open; let's get on with it and make it as grand, wonderful, exciting, dramatic as we can. So who ultimately accepts the responsibility? Is there any ultimate responsibility, or should there be?

But, you know, that's a marvelous building. It may not have been what I would have wanted if I had been doing my own building for a museum of modern and contemporary art. Mine would have been more like the new MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art], or the Temporary Contemporary, even, just walls and some light.

RATNER: Do you remember what the reaction of the local community was to the building itself?

TERBELL: I do, indeed. The reaction was as varied as there are people. Lots of people absolutely adored it. Others thought it was rather avant-garde for Pasadena, across the street from the Elks Club. There was a varied opinion, which is perfect in my view. The museum itself

was always about controversy. If we didn't get people talking, we were not doing part of our job. If they'll just look, use their senses, enjoy. I mean, that's why I had sailboat races in the reflecting pool on a Sunday afternoon. Get the kids up there, get the community involved, let's have fun. Museums, it seemed to me, were often very scary places, where you had to talk very quietly and where, if you had fun, it was naughty. You know, there was that kind of a feeling about some museums. I thought, you know, museums are about life and people and enjoyment and just a lot of activity going on. That's why I loved the education department. All those kids and adults drew me in. I'd watch from the director's office window and these very clean, tidy kids would come in after school, kind of serious about what they were doing, and they would come out painted maybe green and blue and carrying the most wonderful big things they had made. That was their only cultural experience, often. And the big smiles on their faces, not only of the children, but of the parents-- It lit them up. And that's what it was about to me.

RATNER: This is a good place to stop and flip the tape.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

APRIL 8, 1987

RATNER: Before we flipped the tape, we were talking a little bit about the new building and the response of the local community to it. I just wanted to talk about that a little bit more before we go back to talking about your role as the director. You were mentioning what the economic situation was at the time, so that might have something to do with my next question. That is, I know that construction began without the endowment being in place. In fact, probably not even just the endowment, but, I guess, even all the money to complete the construction of the building. I know that a company, I think the G. A. Brakely Company, had been hired. They were professional fund-raisers, and they did say, I think, that it was safe to go ahead, that you would be able to get the money, even though much of it was only pledged at that time. How did you feel about that whole thing?

TERBELL: Well, the banker in me felt very worried about it. The part of me that said let's do something excellent in Pasadena said go ahead. I was really of two minds. Perfect hindsight tells me it was a terrible idea, but at the time the level of enthusiasm which did exist among those who were very active made it seem possible. It also seemed to me that if all of us on the board went to the

limit, individually, we could get the thing done. So it was-- But that was really more me in that I found myself so wrapped up in the museum that it was very difficult to tell where Tom Terbell, private citizen, ended and Tom Terbell, museum person, began. I ended up to my neck and beyond. So it seemed possible, although the sensible, economic being said, "Not a very good time to start building."

RATNER: Was it a decision of the board to go ahead and do that ultimately?

TERBELL: Gee, I assume so, because, as I say, the contract was signed that day.

RATNER: That's right. The main people involved in what was called the building and fund committee were Harold Jurgensen, Martha [B.] Padve and Margaret [Peggy] Phelps. How would you rate their effectiveness?

TERBELL: Gee, I thought they were all three very effective in different ways. I mean, Harold seemed to have brought the museum a lot of the funds which were raised before I was involved at all. It seemed to me that Harold had brought in quite a large sum of money from various people-- a small number, but a substantial amount of money; that Martha, with boundless energy, was very, very good, indeed, at organizing the fund-raising activities. Peggy had the same boundless energy, too, and a lot of very good connections. So, in terms of fund-raising efforts for a

Pasadena institution, those were the right people. Perhaps what we did not think about until somewhat later on, what we really were about, was an all-Southern California activity, not just Pasadena, that we needed the resources of a wider audience and a wider list of donors. I think when we went seeking donations from people on the west side of town, sizable donations, we were a bit late. You know, the building was already up, the shell, and then we would say, "We'd like you to be a founding donor." It isn't the way you do that.

RATNER: One of the pledges that didn't materialize, in fact, was from a man named Wesley [I.] Dumm. I think that came up at the same board meeting that the lighting crisis was announced. That must have been some board meeting. Was it normal for pledges just to be a verbal pledge, not to be--because this man's pledge wasn't in writing, I guess. Was that normal, just to have a verbal pledge?

TERBELL: I don't think so. I believe mine was in writing. But, you know, I know very little about that. I never met Mr. Dumm, but I was certainly aware that his was a cornerstone pledge. I think he was going to give $500,000. That, for what we were up to, was a lot of money. He had given $50,000, I think. I don't know whether he ever gave any more, but it was really a worry when it did not seem to be coming in. There were several

others who, you know, didn't know the man, didn't know the circumstances of his pledge or the nature of it, or whether it was signed or was oral or written. The plain fact of the matter was the man had not given money, and it was expected. As I mentioned, the economic times were tough, and I could never imagine a charitable, public institution, you know, sending a bill collector out to someone who has offered to give money. So it seemed to me it was immaterial whether anyone's pledge was written or oral, because if the person is going to give and does at that time-- If not, what else does one do, except say, "please"?

RATNER: Well, I did notice in some subsequent minutes that there was talk of taking legal action against him. So I just wondered whether anything happened with that.

TERBELL: Well, I suspect that it was a time that was pretty scary for all of us and, you know, none of us individually goes around not paying our bills. Here we are building a museum, and how are we going to pay the contractor? I mean, those are things that people get very hot under the collar about. A board meeting would be the place where you get hot under the collar, I suppose. Of course, we had at least one, if not more than one, lawyer on the board. So I would guess a responsible person would have to raise the question, can we sue, should we sue? At least, what is the legal status of a pledge? Not being a

lawyer, I still don't know the answer to that.

RATNER: Okay, and I guess they never did get the money.

TERBELL: Well, I was going to ask if they ever did. I remember that Eudie [Eudorah] Moore was going to go see Mr. Dumm and determine his intentions. I guess that-- I don't recall anyone determining from him of what his intentions were, but, evidently, they were that he was not going to give more money.

RATNER: Well, regardless of that, the museum did go ahead and open in November of 1969.

TERBELL: It surely did.

RATNER: Will you tell me something about the dedication day ceremonies? Who was involved with that?

TERBELL: Well, it seems to me we had a three-ring circus going on. Certainly we had the city of Pasadena leaders, we had the donors, we had the artists, we had a lot-- The idea was let's involve as many people as we can in the celebration of this new enterprise. It was not in anybody's interest to go moaning around about we haven't got any money. Let's celebrate that we're-- Here we are. We're hopefully here to do some very good things for the community and the various communities, the art community, the artists' community, et al. It seems to me I remember there were at least three different openings. It all kind of flows together in a really very happy time.

RATNER: I know I came across one letter that had been written to then Governor [Ronald] Reagan, asking him to speak at the opening day ceremonies. But he had to decline, and I didn't know who had eventually taken his place, I guess, as the main dignitary.

TERBELL: You know, I don't remember either. Isn't that terrible? Part of that was because I was very nervous myself. You know, what if the plumbing doesn't work kind of nervousness. I mean, nobody knew whether or not the parking lot could hold as many cars as were coming. I was terribly involved in what I would refer to as the nuts and bolts, and I think I was called upon from time to time to say something, and that always makes me nervous, anyway. So I was probably much more concerned that the lights didn't go out, the air-conditioning remained on, that, you know, there wasn't a fire in some corner somewhere. So that's what I remember, being very busy, very happy, and absolutely exhausted when it was all over. [laughter]

RATNER: I know from everything I've read and from everybody I've talked to so far, I know that the Pasadena was really renowned for its openings of its exhibitions, anyway. They were, apparently, really great parties.

TERBELL: Great fun.

RATNER: So I imagine for the opening of the new building that the actual openings for the exhibitions-- I did read

that it was three consecutive nights. Do you remember anything specific about those particular openings?

TERBELL: Maybe just that there were a lot of people in town from other museums and supporters of other museums and a number of the artists, several of whom had donated works of art to the permanent collection as a celebration of this new institution, or old institution in a new house. My memory, as I mentioned, is really one of just a lot of joy and happiness that here we are, like opening night at a play. I knew where some light switches were, but I wasn't sure I knew where they all were. So many of my memories are of people having a good time. A lot of the openings in those days were like costume parties, and when we had-- I guess one of the evenings was black tie, and that was very attractive and very nice. But I think what was more fun was when the artists were there and everybody was dressed as if for a costume party. It also seems to me that there were all these people in my home twenty-four hours a day, so it was a merry-go-round.

RATNER: [laughter] The opening exhibitions for the new museum were not the ones that had originally been intended. When I was reading in some of the board minutes, it said that in July of 1968, the art committee--and I think you were a member of the art committee--they met and they decided to go ahead with an impressionist exhibition

for the inaugural show. They felt that that would be--

TERBELL: That was certainly prior to my time. The idea of an impressionist exhibition I never knew anything about.

RATNER: Okay. In fact, I thought it said that the meeting was at your house, but maybe not. But at any rate, they initially did want to have an impressionist exhibition. They felt that that would be something that, at that time, had rarely been seen on the West Coast, and that it was a natural for a museum whose emphasis was, even though contemporary, modern stretching into contemporary, that it was really the beginning of the modern era to have an impressionist exhibition. Then they suggested some other alternatives in case that couldn't be worked out, because it was too costly, or they couldn't borrow, you know, enough of the correct paintings. So that's in July of '68. Then, by February of 1969, which is the same month that Jim Demetrion announced his resignation, I read in the board minutes that the opening exhibitions--and I'm quoting here from what it said--"would be the Brundage Show," which was "The Avery Brundage Collection[: Recent Acquisitions"], "New York paintings of the forties and fifties, our print collection, and ten or eleven California artists' work." None of these were the ones that had been mentioned as the alternatives to the impressionist exhibition. So I just wondered if you had any idea what

happened in those intervening months, or how it--

TERBELL: [laughter] I'm as bewildered as you are. My recollection is it really begins with the let's get the New York school exhibition together, and how do we do that? Do we get people outside the staff? Our own staff could not do it, and so it became absolutely essential to go outside, because we simply didn't have the people power to put it together. There just weren't enough warm bodies. I think, in the end, John [R.] Coplans put most of the exhibition together, anyway. But it was, we've got to get more professional help. But, you know, in answer to your question, relative to any questions on how the exhibitions were planned, I'm absolutely at a loss.

RATNER: What was the reason for deciding to go with the show of New York painting?

TERBELL: Well, in post-World War II art, the action was all centered in New York. That's where most of the important things that happened did happen. That was the perfectly logical kind of an exhibition to do. I also remember that the occasion, the opening of this new building, was probably the only time we would be able to borrow the kinds of works that we wanted to show. I can tell you where I was coming from. I was very involved in the West Coast scene, so I thought it was important that we do the best of what's going on in California and the best

of what was going on and had gone on earlier in New York and give them equal weight, and that, in large measure, that's what the museum was about. Then, as we were fortunate in getting donations of works of art from artists and others-- As I recall, I was told I had to be first. So I gave a Frank Stella painting to kick off the drive for donations to the permanent collection. We were rather successful, I think, all things considered. Obviously, that became an exhibition in and of itself. Those kind of happened as exhibitions rather than as part of a long-term plan.

RATNER: How do you think the rest of the-- Getting back to what you said, that it was your feeling that it should be a balance of West Coast and New York painting, how did the rest of the board feel about that? I'm just wondering. I was quoting exactly how it was in those board minutes, and, of course, that could have just been how somebody was writing it down. But it very much seems like the California thing is thrown in as an afterthought, "and ten or eleven California artists' works."

TERBELL: That may well be just how it was written. You know, so much of this time period I can be very specific only about me, personally, what was I thinking. My perception of things obviously is colored by me, what I was thinking. A good part of the reason why I was involved at

all was I believed that the Pasadena Museum should continue what it had always done, and that was to give young artists an opportunity to show their work to the critical world and to the public. Because a young man or a young woman working away with no place to show doesn't seem right to me. It seemed that we should always, and we certainly did in the old building, show what was going on within, you know, our radius.

RATNER: What kind of press reaction did you get to the opening exhibitions?

TERBELL: Well, I think we got everything from soup to nuts. I think that, you know, though there were those who thought we were out of our minds in building a new building, and anything that we might do in it was probably crazy anyway. There was that sort of school of thought out there. There were those who felt that we were really trying to do what we thought we were doing, which was to be the Museum of Modern Art West and provide a lively art scene. There were those who got rather more specific about the content of exhibitions, the building itself. I think that those ranged from favorable to unfavorable, which, once again, I think that's what a museum that's doing its thing really is all about. If everybody loved what we did, then we were clearly doing something wrong. If everybody hated everything we did, we were clearly doing something

wrong. But if we were out at least stirring up opinion, getting people's minds working, that was our job. I remember being terrified that some reporter would come along with a microphone and ask me questions that I would not know the answer to, as I'm probably the only museum director around who has no museum training, no art training. I'm just a weird sort of volunteer gone wild. As you know, I was paid a salary by the museum, but I always gave it all back and then some. So it was a very interesting, quote, "job."

RATNER: Was there a specific philosophy for the inaugural year, for the series of exhibitions done for the inaugural year?

TERBELL: A specific-- I think it's, once again, a continuation of the philosophy of showing the best and most challenging of what has recently gone on or is now going on. One exhibition sticks in mind, and that's the "Richard Serra." Richard is an absolutely brilliant artist, and one of the things that a museum like a Pasadena is about is to say to an artist of the stature and inclination of Richard, "Richard, here is some space. It's yours to do with as you wish," and let him challenge himself and all of us with that. And, I must say, it was a challenging exhibition. But I must also say it really said a great deal to a lot of people and got a lot of people very angry, which is just

fine, too.

RATNER: Will you tell me exactly what it was that he did?

TERBELL: Well, in addition to the very large steel pieces with which more of us were familiar, he took one of the very large galleries and in it stacked very, very large tree trunks. The room, with white walls and marble floor, with these incredible redwood tree trunks stacked as if they were on a very large rock said a lot of different things all at the same time. But one of the things it said to me was how awful it was to cut down very large trees, that you and I could not possibly make-- Hundreds and hundreds of years were necessary to grow them. Richard required that the tree trunks used were those that were already cut down somewhere. Nothing could be cut down for it. It gave one a totally different perspective on things. The visual challenge in itself was amazing. I mean, I believe that spoke volumes about what the museum was supposed to do. It's not like a movie theater where people go to have a good time and like what it is. It's there to challenge as well as to provide joy and provide all kinds of emotional reactions.

RATNER: Were there any other exhibitions from that opening year that particularly struck you?

TERBELL: I was trying to think. During the course of the first year, it seems to me we did a marvelous photo

exhibition of the photographs of Alvarez Bravo ["Manuel Alvarez Bravo"], a fantastic Mexican photographer. I remember that was very, very meaningful, because one of the thrusts many of us felt the museum should be involved in is fine art photography. To show the caliber of work of an Alvarez Bravo, which were then given to the museum, was a pretty remarkable thing to do. The juxtaposition in time of the works of Richard Serra and Alvarez Bravo may seem very strange indeed, but they are not. They're both expressing excellence, and that's what it's all about.

RATNER: So in addition to all these very contemporary forms of art that were being shown, the new building, at least initially, was supposed to have an oriental wing. All the PR material talked about this oriental wing. But it never materialized. What exactly happened with that? And at what point, was there a concrete point that--?

TERBELL: You know, I cannot tell you where the idea for an oriental wing came from. It certainly was not a part of the old building. (The old building was kind of an oriental-Mexican-Spanish building.) The idea of having an oriental wing, including having a show of the Avery Brundage Collection for the opening, that sort of just went on. From my own point of view, there were so many challenges to be met that if we were going to have one wing with oriental art, fine. I love art of all periods and all

times. But I'm totally mystified, even to this day, as to why there was, quote, "an oriental wing." I've no idea. We certainly never had a curator of oriental art. We certainly had no one trained in that field at all. So it was a-- I don't know. Maybe somebody else can tell you where that came from. I was relieved that since we were going to have an exhibition of oriental art, that it was all pre-packaged, and you unwrapped it and there it was.

RATNER: But I don't think there were any oriental exhibitions after the Avery Brundage show.

TERBELL: Yes, there was one of Chinese works from a Japanese museum. I can tell you why I remember that so well. Those works were in the museum at the time of the large earthquake in early '71. A very small mirror was broken in the earthquake, and I thought, "Now that's all I need. I mean, part of the building is coming down on my head, and I don't even know whether we're going to have another earthquake and I don't know whether my own house is still standing, and what am I doing here in the museum when I should be home?" But, I thought, "Lord, what happens now? I don't know what the protocol is." It turned out that the Japanese museum said, "We have earthquakes, too, so please don't worry about it." What a marvelous and human attitude. I loved it. So I know we had at least one more.

RATNER: I think after that it must have fallen by the wayside, and just naturally there was no decision made--that you weren't going to go ahead with this. It just sort of happened that way?

TERBELL: Yes. In other words, I don't recall any meetings in which exhibitions of oriental art were proposed.

RATNER: Okay. So the building is now open. Opens November '69, and you're acting director and--

TERBELL: And we learned fascinating things, like it's got so many exits that we have to have a guard staff we can't afford. Things like that [laughter] you can only learn, I think, by experience.

RATNER: Anything else like that which was a big surprise?

TERBELL: Oh, I think the first bill for the air-conditioning was a big surprise. The system was absolutely fabulous, first-rate kind of machinery. But it cost thousands of dollars to operate because it was too sensitive for a museum that was going to be showing contemporary art. So we had a Rolls Royce of a building where a Ford probably would have done nicely. It was that kind of-- I think we were all shocked at how expensive it was to operate. We also learned that if we ran a three-ring circus--wonderful exhibitions, very expensive ones, lots of people coming in--at the end of every month we were just as broke as we were if we had exhibitions that were

less well attended, that it all came out to roughly the same at the end of the month. So why not do it as well as we could, with as much as excitement and fanfare and do an Andy Warhol exhibition, which, of course, we did. We thought perhaps by generating lots of excitement, we could also generate some additional pledges. We did do some to a very limited extent, but never the kinds and amounts of money that we probably really needed.

RATNER: Okay. I'll want to get back to those financial concerns in a little bit. But, just proceeding a little bit chronologically after the building has opened, you're still acting director at this point. I know from some minutes, the minutes from January 1970, there was a lot of concern about deaccessioning. So that was a big issue for you to deal with before you're actually even director. Just briefly, from my understanding of what happened, is I guess some objects were deaccessioned at--and this is a quote from the board minutes as one board member said--"and they were sold at distressed prices to a local dealer." Paul Kantor. Then he, in turn, sold the whole lot to the Maxwell Gallery in San Francisco. They immediately resold the works for a very significant profit. I guess a lot of board members were really upset about this, particularly because of the increasingly precarious financial state of the museum. There was concern that works of art should be

sold to upgrade the collection, I guess, and not sold to pay off operating expenses, which is what you needed to do at that point. How did you feel about all of that?

TERBELL: I'm having to refresh my memory on the specific items and about Paul Kantor, and that's not going well. I know that my feelings overall were that the basis of the museum's collection, of course, is the Galka Scheyer bequest [The Galka Scheyer Blue Four Collection], which in no way belonged to the museum, anyway. It was in trust for the people of California forever. But over the much longer history of the museum, which goes back years and years and years, the museum evidently was quite willing to accept anything anybody wanted to give it, whether it had anything to do with what the museum was about or not. Oftentimes things were given with the intention of the donor that they be sold and the proceeds used for whatever, with a tax deduction for the donor. Works of art which were given expressly to the museum, and the museum accepted and accessioned them to the collection, should never be sold at all, except in the most extraordinary circumstances to upgrade. In other words, if by chance the museum had two prints from the same series, it would be quite acceptable, and, if handled properly, to sell one to acquire something else. So it's a very clear distinction in my mind between that which is the museum's collection, which is inviolate,

and those things which were given to the museum for other than its permanent collection. A museum has, for example, an obligation not to accept a work of art that doesn't belong, isn't a part of its focus, and should, in fact, steer the donor to a museum where such things were acceptable. So there is a kind of a fuzzy line which should not be fuzzy; it should be very clearly spelled out. I think this was one of those fuzzies.

RATNER: Also, at that same board meeting--it must have been another really interesting one--there was another deaccessioning issue, a very serious one, it seems, about a group of oriental objects that were shipped off to [Sotheby] Parke-Bernet in New York. I don't believe the works were ever actually deaccessioned. You, from what I read, had been told that they, I think, probably were deaccessioned, or something, that they weren't very important works of art, and that it was okay that this happened. But, in fact, they were valuable and they never were deaccessioned. Do you remember that incident and what was involved with that?

TERBELL: I remember that there was a problem. I'm aware that there was something going on, but I'm bewildered about what. They were oriental works, you say?

RATNER: I'm pretty certain that it was a group of oriental objects. It might have been some other things, but I know

that one piece that was supposedly not very valuable was, once it was returned to the museum and later sold, I guess through the proper channels, brought in a considerable sum of money, like $40,000 or something like that.

TERBELL: I wish I had the benefit of the minutes. That would refresh my memory, because I have drawn a total blank.

RATNER: Okay. Maybe I could dig those up for the next time--

TERBELL: That's a great idea.

RATNER: --we get together. Okay. I'm going to stop the tape here. It's a good spot.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

MAY 22, 1987

RATNER: I'd like to continue our discussion on the Pasadena Art Museum with some questions about the board of directors. We talked about that a little bit, but I have a few more questions. What kind of profile did the board have during your involvement with the museum in terms of diversified interests and capabilities, that sort of thing?

TERBELL: It seems to me we had a really rather diverse board, and one which, even though some of the players changed, the diversity did not. We had those who were especially interested in doing something for the overall Pasadena/San Marino community, whose interests may have been more of a civic nature than in the arts. We had those who were a mixture of both the civic interest and the interest in the arts. Then we had those, more like myself, who were interested in the art. Certainly not denying Pasadena or anywhere, but our interest was more in having a place to allow the public to enjoy, examine, dislike, hate, or whatever, contemporary and modern art. So it was quite a cross section.

RATNER: During our first interview, you said, "If all of us on the board had gone to the limit individually, we could have gotten it done," it being the building. But in light of that general attitude, how would you characterize

the board's commitment to raising and/or donating money?

TERBELL: Well, I think that a number of us, putting myself in the "us" category, too, wanted to see the thing done. But, for all of us, we were looking at an awful lot of money, finally, and some were better able to give than others, of course. It is always true. Those who were less able to give always worked much harder, it seemed to me, in trying to raise funds than those who had a little deeper pockets. Although that wasn't always the case, either. I mean, Bob [Robert A.] Rowan worked very hard and gave a lot of money, too. So it's that kind of thing. I think perhaps in that there were such diverse interests that perhaps we didn't have one focus toward which we could say, "Here is our absolute objective in what we're doing in building a new building, in our exhibitions programming, our collections." Perhaps with a single-minded purpose, we might have been more successful in raising money. But if we were riding several horses at the same time, as we were sometimes, it's more difficult to get the kind of commitment that would have been necessary.

RATNER: How would you characterize the ability to raise money in Pasadena?

TERBELL: Well, you know, the board voted to start with the new building. We did have pledges for quite a lot of money. If the stock market had not taken a nosedive and

the economy turned down, I think a lot of things would have been much easier. But with that as a background, having been pretty successful initially, it became very hard to go back to say we've got to almost start all over raising money. It is a very difficult thing to regenerate enthusiasm to raise money this sort of second or third time around. So we were trying to raise money in Pasadena when what we were doing was an all-West-Coast, perhaps, certainly a Southern California, endeavor. The focus on trying to get Pasadena to pay for something that's for a broader audience is a little hard to do. It does put a considerable strain on the resources of the community. That having been said, we got a tremendous amount of support from Pasadena. I think for those who were involved, it was a stretch. And that's what it was about.

RATNER: What kind of difference do you feel it might have made in terms of raising money if the museum's focus had been--if it had been a more general museum, or if its focus had been more broadly on the entire modern period, instead of so specifically focused on the contemporary?

TERBELL: I think it's always easier to raise funds for that which is a little less controversial. So from that point of view, I think it would have been simpler to raise the necessary funds. However, that wasn't what we were about, at least from my point of view, and from the point

of view of the staff, certainly, and from those who were involved in the arts point of view. So the question is, yes, we probably could have raised some more money, but to what end? That wasn't what we were about.

Now, hindsight being the wonderful thing that it is, we should have really started with corporate sponsorship and gotten the leadership from some of the major Southern California-based banks, insurance companies, industrial companies, oil companies, and gotten that group involved very early on. In part, I think that what's now happening in downtown Los Angeles is going well because a lot of the same people who were involved in Pasadena from the art point of view are there. But there are sizable amounts of money from corporate sponsors, and in this country and in this age, this age being the twentieth century, I think that's what we should have done. But I don't think any of us were sophisticated enough to know that. Corporate sponsorship of the arts was really in its infancy. But, as I say, hindsight is wonderful.

RATNER: Okay. By the mid-sixties, the museum was renowned, both nationally and internationally, for the [Galka Scheyer] Blue Four Collection and for its vanguard exhibitions. What steps were taken by the board to maintain that reputation in terms of increasing the size and quality of the permanent collection?

TERBELL: Well, at the time in question, I frankly believe the focus of the board was more toward survival than toward building the permanent collection. It was not possible to raise funds, particularly for acquisition, except through the efforts of people involved in things like the Fellows [of Contemporary Art] and the Men's Committee, whose purpose in life was not operating budgets, was not building construction, but was helping with the collection. That's why they were formed in the first place, of course. So was the board dealing with the collection? I don't think the board dealt particularly with the collection. It was there. What a marvelous thing. How lucky we are to have the donations from artists and others in honor of the opening--were viewed as being absolutely fabulous. But until the building and the operating situation was really resolved, focus on those painful areas had to come first. Much more fun to try to raise money to buy a Jackson Pollock, but we needed money for, you know, towels and toilet paper and soap and water. Not very interesting. Nobody likes to give money for that.

RATNER: Whose idea was it to mount the campaign to really solicit works for the opening of the new museum?

TERBELL: That idea was, God bless him, John [R.] Coplans's. Absolutely wonderful idea. I remember John walking into my office one morning back in the old building, saying, "I've

got an idea." He said, "But it's going to be very expensive for you." I said, "Well, what do you mean, John?" He said, "Well, you have to give the first painting." I said, "Well, all right, what do you have in mind?", praying that it wasn't what I thought it would be. And he said, "Well, the [Frank] Stella, of course." So I said, "Okay, John. Let's go with it." But it was John's idea entirely, and John did most of the work in getting the things that were given to be given. A wonderful thing to have happen for us. I loved that exhibition because it covered a lot of territory and showed a lot of good will.

RATNER: The reason, of course, there are all these questions about the board's commitment in terms of raising funds and that sort of thing is that, as we've discussed before, the financial situation became increasingly perilous, I guess, and they plagued the museum for many years, particularly during the construction, and then following the completion of the new building. More than once, you and others paid off the deficit and covered bank loans.

TERBELL: Right. It was a very expensive avocation.

RATNER: [laughter] But I'm wondering what your opinion is on how and why the financial management of the museum got so out of hand.

TERBELL: Well, I think I would view that a little differently. I don't believe any of us realized how expensive a building we were building, what it cost simply to open the doors. We had not done the kind of a study which we probably should have, but I don't think any of us had any idea of what we were dealing with. Just to turn on the air-conditioning was a monumental expense. I think few of us realized how complicated the air-conditioning was. Many of us were of the view we did not need anything that elaborate, because the kind of works of art we were dealing with often did not require that temperature sensitivity and humidity sensitivity control. So, from an operating point of view, I think basically it just came as a shock to us how expensive it was. Even if we had had the kind of endowment originally envisioned, it would not have been a comfortable, easy way to go, either. It would always have been a struggle, which is fine. I don't complain about that. But we just didn't know that it was that expensive. So it wasn't a financial management thing. We didn't have any finances to manage. It was a hand-to-mouth sort of a thing. If all of the pledges had been solid, what normally would happen when a building is underway with a sound financial underpinning, is that others come along and say, "I'd like to get on your prosperous-looking bandwagon." But if you go saying, "We're in trouble, we

need your help," it's harder to raise money. So I don't think I can fault anyone's financial management. I mean, money didn't disappear mysteriously. It wasn't spent on frivolous things. There just wasn't enough of it, and we were building a first-quality building, no question. But it may have been a little more first than we perhaps needed. That entailed very high expenditures just to run it. The staff was larger, you know, janitorial, guard staff was considerably larger than anybody envisioned, because it had more doors that, by fire law, had to be open, and things like that, which somehow were not known. Probably my fault as much as anyone else's. But I had never built a building, and I think very few of us ever had, either. It never occurred to us that we had to be concerned about how many guards there were per door.

RATNER: So how involved was the board itself in terms of a lot of these decisions regarding the building? Or who was that left up to?

TERBELL: Well, you know, this is before my time, so it's a little bit-- No, it's more than a little bit, it's almost impossible to be very accurate. But let me try to tell you what I think happened. When the Pasadena firm of Ladd and Kelsey was chosen to be the architects for the building, it was intended that some members of the board, together with Ladd and Kelsey, together with the museum professional

staff, particularly in the person of Walter Hopps, would meet regularly and work out all of the operating details--meaning what the museum would be like when it was operating: what kind of lights, how much air-conditioning, that sort of thing. My understanding is that Walter finally didn't want to have very much, if anything, to do with the new building. So there was little, if any, input from the professional side of things. Jim [James T.] Demetrion, in my view, did his best to get the professional's point of view across, but, by then, the architects were kind of off and running, building what they perceived was wanted. So they proceeded to build what they thought was the best under the circumstances. What is our end result? I think the building is terribly successful. The air-conditioning, and all of that, is terribly useful for the Norton Simon collection, which requires that kind of thing. Less so for the Blue Four [collection] or the works that came along after that. Classic case of a committee trying to design a horse and ending up with a camel.

RATNER: Okay. Let's go on and talk a little bit about your term as director, which, again, we partially covered when we last met. In July of 1969, while you were still acting director, you wrote a letter to the board in an effort to end rumors which said that you had a financial interest in the Irving Blum Gallery and possibly others. I

wondered what that was all about?

TERBELL: There evidently were rumors to that effect, that what I was doing in the museum was trying to feather my own nest in some fashion or other. Being the kind of person I am, I wanted everybody to know exactly where I stood, and that certainly wasn't the case. I can't remember why I wrote that. I believe it was at the suggestion of one or more of the members of the board to clear the air.

RATNER: Did that relate to what was being exhibited or something? How did that even come-- Do you remember how it even came up?

TERBELL: No, I don't. But, I mean, the facts were very simple. I spent a lot of time with Irving. I bought a lot of art from Irving and, therefore, from Leo Castelli in New York, because Irving dealt a lot with Leo. Irving and Shirley [Blum] were instrumental in trying to help me do what I thought and they thought would be best to get the museum going in the right kinds of directions. Because, as I've said before, I was not a professional at all. I just loved art, you know. You get some businessman, banker type, and he needs the help of those more professionally qualified. So that's why I spent a lot of time there. I did, of course, lend Irving the money to get his gallery going in the first place. I mean, he'd been in business, and then he dissolved the partnership, but I've done that

with people who were building buildings. I'm currently doing it with someone who is an electrical contractor, and I never make any money out of it. That's not the name of the game. The name of the game is nice people who have an idea and need a break. That's all. But I guess people were saying, "Well, he's doing this because it's going to make his paintings more valuable." I don't know how you would ever do that. But [laughter] anyway, for me that was never an issue. But I don't like people thinking the wrong thing.

RATNER: Okay. That makes a lot of sense. Okay. So several months later, in February of 1970, you were unanimously voted director of the museum by the board of trustees. I wondered what your conditions were for accepting that position?

TERBELL: Well, I don't know if I had any. What was going on in my own head was, I had to, by that time, submit my resignation to the bank, because of pension law. I could not be on a leave of absence at that time beyond six or nine months. I've forgotten what the exact law was. I had felt in my own mind I had to be officially something or other. So that's the very bottom underpinning of it all. Then I felt that someone who was an acting something is just that, acting. If I were no longer acting, but for real, maybe I could get more done. Maybe I would then be

more in the middle, as it were. As I mentioned before, I sort of saw myself as the buffer. But if one is acting, one is sort of more of the board than of the staff. So I thought, well, now let's see how it will work if I'm more of the staff. So that was what was going on. So the whole idea was, let's make this thing work against all odds. Hindsight shows me I was an impossible optimist. But we were about trying to do some worthwhile things, and so I wouldn't trade it anyway.

RATNER: Okay. I know we did discuss that a little bit last time. But, I guess one of the things I had come across--and I was just wondering whether there was anything else--was that because, as you said, you were either of the board or of the staff, you felt that you were going to be of the staff. So you submitted your resignation to the board. You felt that it was wrong, anyway, for somebody to--I believe you felt that was wrong--for somebody to be both a board member and a staff member. That affected Eudorah Moore, because she was as well the curator of California Design, but she was on the board of trustees. So I think she had to resign at the same-- She was asked to resign at the same time as well. What do you remember about that?

TERBELL: You know, I remember very little about that. Eudorah Moore, Eudie, being a very special individual and

special case. If I had a view--and I'm only saying if, because I don't remember, my view would have been that her position and mine were totally different--that without Eudie, for many years, Lord, I don't think there would have been a museum at all. That's a very special individual. Her focus on California Design was marvelous. My concern was keeping the place from falling apart. So to finish that thought, if I had a view, and it certainly is in hindsight, my view would have been Eudie really belongs on the board and should always be there. My own case, I was someone trying to do something quite different.

RATNER: Okay. Apparently, though, in this whole thing, she was asked or forced to resign as well, because I have in some minutes that this was brought up--something about that no other staff member be a board member. And nobody on the board voiced any objection to this. Not so much maybe that she was forced to resign, but she then became trustee emerita. I don't know if that had any significance or not.

TERBELL: It may or may-- I admit, all of it sounds rather familiar, that there was that going on. Where it came from, why it was there, I don't know. I don't remember a lot of that. I really wish I had the minutes around. But there were lots of tempests in teapots, according to what the minutes were. What was really going on very often was

not in the minutes of the meetings. Not that the minutes were inaccurate from a legal or structural or whatever else, but all the little byplays that are going on constantly in any volunteer organization were all present.

RATNER: Of course.

TERBELL: That's why I got my very first answering machine. Our phone would ring twenty-four hours a day. Well-meaning people with good ideas. But I dearly like to get some sleep sometimes myself. Hence, the very first answering machine.

RATNER: Okay. So once you are director-- As you have mentioned, you didn't have any formal art historical training. So the position in some ways, which is more common now, was split between--I think it was split this way--in terms of you handling the financial concerns, and then John Coplans handled the--

TERBELL: Absolutely.

RATNER: How did everybody feel about that split? Were people comfortable with that split?

TERBELL: No, I don't know whether anybody was comfortable about anything at that time period. I, of course, was comfortable, since that really was my idea. Now, when we talk about people, if we are talking about the very small professional staff of the museum, I think they thought that it was neat, just fine. I think those interested and

involved in matters financial liked that idea, because I did know what numbers were, and I could work my way around the cash flow. What those on pretty much the outside thought, I don't think they had any idea or necessarily would care very much. Those who knew me knew I was passionate about art, but also had a financial background. So I think it all made kind of sense. At least I hope so. As you say, it does appear in some places to be more prevalent these days. I think that kind of a structure perhaps is the very best way to operate an institution of this sort, because there finally are just too many people to be concerned with, and to do a good job you need two heads.

RATNER: At that February 1970 board meeting where you became the official director, John Coplans submitted his resignation. What were the circumstances surrounding that?

TERBELL: Oh, dear. I don't know. I don't remember.

RATNER: Do you remember at what-- Do you remember why he decided to resign? I guess that's really what I'm asking you.

TERBELL: Well, John wanted to resign quite often, including while I was still on the board, so, I mean, that wasn't anything new. I don't have a vivid recollection of John submitting a formal resignation, but it wouldn't surprise me. One part of my role I always thought was to

see if I could make life bearable for John to get on with his work, because John's brilliance did not lie in being a diplomat. I thought maybe I could be his diplomat. So I think John often thought things were just much too hard, that we weren't getting where we wanted to go, and that he would probably be more useful elsewhere. That was not an unusual point of view for John, and I understood it. One large part of me always was in total agreement with him, but I didn't want him to go, so I tried to prevent that however I could. So I don't think he resigned, did he? At that point, formally.

RATNER: Okay, I thought that that was about right when he left.

TERBELL: Oh.

RATNER: But, at any rate, how did people on the board feel about him and--?

TERBELL: Well, I don't think there was anybody on the board who doubted that John was very bright and that he did create for us some extraordinary things. I think there were quite a few of them who felt that if we did use John without having him necessarily having to be hog-tied by being in the museum environment all the time, that maybe that would be the most comfortable way to go. That may have been what was happening at that time. So, I mean, his formal resignation may well have happened about then. But

as I say, John's resigning was not new. It happened all the time. At least once a day. I don't make light of that in that the effect on the museum would have been terrible had he left. But it was just that life was not easy for him there. So from what John could, would, and did do for the museum, the board thought it was fabulous. They wished he would stop being quite as vociferous at the wrong time and in the wrong place. Part of that gave John such pleasure that, what do you do? I'd try to stand there as a wall between, but it didn't always work. So it was never a matter of qualifications, brilliance, or anything of the sort. It was more a matter of social manners or something. As you know, John is absolutely charming, or very gruff and abrupt. He doesn't mean anything by it. It's just a part of him.

RATNER: How did the rest of the staff get along with him?

TERBELL: Oh, about the same way everybody else did. Absolutely on wonderful terms with him for one minute, and the next minute not so easy to get along with. In the overall, we took to him, tried, talked about it. They were all for him.

RATNER: How did the staff feel about it when he finally left?

TERBELL: Well, when he finally left, he was still very involved in putting together the Andy Warhol exhibition,

which is what John would have done had he stayed in the museum. What he would otherwise have done is sort of been the overseer of other activities that Barbara [Haskell] might have been doing, or a guest curator, that kind of a thing. So John was still doing what John did and did best. I'm not aware that the official-- John is not formally on the staff anymore but is doing this and is being compensated for it, made any difference. It was all fine. But, gee whiz, maybe you'd better ask Barbara and Maggie [Hargreaves] and others what they thought.

RATNER: Okay. I will. Regarding your relationship to the board while you were the director, how did your opinion of their effectiveness change while you were director?

TERBELL: Well, now I don't know that my opinion, my deep-down-inside-me opinion, changed very much from one time to another. But since I was no longer on the board, I think I could then say to myself out loud, perhaps they're not doing as much as they might. Because now it's they and not we. That's a funny sort of a psychological thing going on. But once again, you have better access than I. In fact, I don't remember when we got Alfred Esberg on the board, exactly when we did that.

RATNER: I think like seventy--

TERBELL: But I was eager to have someone like Alfie on the board. I wanted Terry [Thomas E.] Inch on the board. I

wanted Alfie, from the tough-minded businessman point of view, on the board because I thought he could be very helpful in pulling together some of the financial needs. You know, I've known him a long time. I wanted Terry Inch on the board because Terry had similar interests in art of the moment, and I thought he could also represent another generation of people and bring their involvement as well. He was a businessman, and that, I thought, would be useful, too. Again, we were all, board and non-board, facing an impossible task, an impossible dream, although I think I probably didn't know it yet. More wise ones on the board probably were aware that we were really swimming upstream with a lot of very large rocks in the way, and were often frustrated in what in the world can we do. You see, I still am the kind of person who says there is a rainbow out there, and there's going to be something that will come along and solve the problem if we can just keep the level of excitement going, keep people coming into the door, people writing things about us. Good, bad, or indifferent--at least write about us! But I think some of the board began to get a little discouraged and a little scared. It was, what do we do if we really don't make it? Because few of them, and certainly I, had had any experience in things that were not making it financially. We kind of didn't know what to do in that category. We'd

never been there before. I think that was pretty frightening. So there was a little of the "let's circle the wagons and see what we can hold onto." I am not really able to say, "Is that board being an effective board?" I mean, maybe that's the most effective anybody can be under the adverse circumstances in which we all were trying to get our job done. A miracle there wasn't.

RATNER: I think this is a good place to flip the tape.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

MAY 22, 1987

RATNER: Before we flipped the tape, we were talking about the effectiveness of the board. Did you have anything else you wanted to add on that?

TERBELL: No, not at this--

RATNER: Okay. In April of 1970, Don [Donald] McMillan, who had been the museum's business administrator for many years-- I think he came on during Walter Hopps's time to help with financial matters then. He went off the payroll, and then his precise position was not replaced, possibly because of your background in finance. How effective a manager was he?

TERBELL: Oh, I think he was effective as a manager. At that point, what his essential role was was monitoring and seeing that the funds which did come in from pledges for the building didn't get lost and that sort of thing. I think that the real day-to-day looking after the books was done by the business manager, Helen Regal. I mean, Don was the retired manager of the city of Pasadena, and certainly in that capacity was very useful in knowing how in the world you get a building permit to do x, y, and z because he knew the ropes.

RATNER: So how did you feel about the fact that his position wasn't replaced?

TERBELL: Just fine. The thing for me was, of course, there wasn't any money to manage. I felt, now that I look at it more carefully and think about it, we had more staff in the sort of business, management part of the thing, and more salary in that area than I felt necessary, and not enough in the professional, fine arts side of things. So I think that's perhaps why I would-- I think probably I recommended that we did not replace Don. In fact, it entered into my mind that there was probably a less expensive way of handling receipts and disbursements. If we're short on funds, let's put them to where they can do the most good.

RATNER: Okay, one position that was replaced, of course, was when John Coplans resigned and William [C.] Agee came on board as director of exhibitions and collections. How was he selected?

TERBELL: Well, we go back quite a while, back when I was still in the bank and was casting about for someone to run the museum. Bill was one of the people I talked to, wanted to have come out at that time. It was wrong for him at that moment. So Bill was always there as someone we'd dearly love to have with us. I mean, I had known what Bill was up to in the [Museum of] Modern [Art] and had seen him in New York from time to time. Others knew him also. That's why I considered him an excellent choice.

RATNER: How aware was he of the gravity of the financial situation when he came on board?

TERBELL: Well, as aware as I could make him. Now, I don't know how-- You know, from my point of view, I thought I put him in the picture. Well, how thoroughly that was received by Bill, initially-- Hindsight tells me it was not as thoroughly understood as I thought it was. So he probably was not as aware of the precariousness of things as I thought he was.

RATNER: How would you assess his overall performance?

TERBELL: Gee, I thought he did a fine job. Under what became increasingly difficult circumstances, I thought he performed admirably.

RATNER: Okay, I'd like to go on and talk a little bit about exhibition policy. When a museum is privately funded, as the Pasadena was, to whom is it responsible regarding issues such as exhibition policy?

TERBELL: Goodness, it's responsible to an intangible quality. So it's not responsible to the city fathers. It's not responsible to the people who put up the money. It's responsible to somehow a higher standard of--really, that is quality scholarship. Its duty is to preserve for posterity that which is entrusted to it, which also means not locking it up forever, but showing the world what it is, so that it's preserved in that sense. It's also as a

museum that has changing exhibitions: it's responsible to show the best of what's going on right now, if it's in the field we were in, and to try to show, to the extent it can, what led up to this moment. It is responsible to give the artists' community an opportunity to see what each other is up to. Now, as we had a music program, that too was a part of its responsibility. You know, the most wonderful, new, whatever is going on to be absorbed, thought about, chewed over by those who wish to come to hear or see. So its responsibility is to give exposure to what it thinks is the best of what is going on, no matter whether it is pleasing or unpleasing or whatever. It's just what's going on. That's another part of its job, so it's not responsible to an audience. It's more responsible to make available for any audience, which is a very convoluted way of saying it's responsible to sort of sift through and come out with the best quality of whatever it's involved in, and dealing with that in as professional a way as possible, and making it available.

RATNER: So in light of that, how should, if at all, the local community's dissatisfaction with the museum's contemporary emphasis been addressed?

TERBELL: Well, it depends on what local community we're really talking about. As you say, it's a private--well, was a private museum. Nobody had to come to it. Nobody's

taxes supported it. It was not out to offend anybody, but it was there to be available. If there were people who did not like what happened to be on the walls at any given time, or on the floors or on the ceiling or on the outside walls or in the gardens, we're very sorry about that. Come back and see what we're doing next time around. Maybe you'll like that. But responsibility to make-- I mean, we're not in the movie business. We're not the local "come see the Academy Award winner." None of that is what it's about.

RATNER: Okay. In doing research for this project, I read other interviews. One of the questions that's asked frequently is whether or not the board had undue influence in determining the exhibition policy. Because it was felt by some people, apparently, that some people's collections were promoted by the exhibitions which were held. I just wondered what the exhibition policy was in terms of who decided what exhibitions were held, and when.

TERBELL: Well, the manner in which that worked was always that exhibitions were proposed by the staff, with budgets attached and dealt with, not the other way around. The board did not propose, suggest, recommend exhibitions at all. So what was going on in terms of exhibition policy was the professional staff (their counterparts in New York, or Minneapolis, or London, or Eindhoven, around the world,

were thinking in like ways quite often) came up with ideas for exhibitions with a little flesh on the bones of the idea, and then, when I was around, working with me, they tried to come up with a financial plan for that exhibition. How much would it cost to get works shipped from x to y? What's the insurance? Do we do a full catalog? Do we do a small catalog? How much does that cost? How many people would come to see it? Can we get anybody to help in the insurance coverage? Or whatever, whatever, whatever. Then we had to put it all together to present to the art committee to be presented onward to the board? That's the way it all transpired. That some people in this community and others also owned works of art by artists being exhibited is only logical. Hindsight would also tell you that our exhibition policy was, in fact, about showing the works of art of the finest of what was going on in the day, because they are still highly regarded. So that's how it worked. There probably always would be some form of criticism from someone whose favorite artists didn't get shown. Now, what are the circumstances behind that? Maybe that artist was being shown elsewhere. Maybe there was insufficient work available. Or maybe simply the professional staff felt that artist was not of the caliber that they wished to show. Any one of a combination, but, Lord, it was the staff presenting the

exhibitions, not the other way around.

RATNER: Okay. As a museum of contemporary art, it seems to me that the Pasadena saw itself first and foremost as a museum of contemporary art, not a museum of West Coast art.

TERBELL: Right. It had global aspirations, with a peanut butter and jelly budget.

RATNER: [laughter] But I wondered, since it was located on the West Coast, what kind of policy was there, if any, towards having a specific number of exhibitions which represented activity on the West Coast, or that sort of thing?

TERBELL: Now, whether it was ever a formal board policy I don't know and rather doubt. As an informal policy, at least during the time I was active, it was our obligation in doing this thing about quality and giving artists a chance, that we would try always to have going on the best of what was happening in our immediate neighborhood. That was not because what we thought was happening in the immediate neighborhood was any less good than what was happening in London or New York or elsewhere. It was often that these people were not yet known well enough, and it was up to us to at least give them a chance to be shown. So the informal policy was to always have the local art scene represented in the museum, and preferably to have the first-ever show of whoever, like Jim [James] Turrell or

someone like that. But, I have to underline, we thought these were world-class young people, or if not chronologically young, then at least the exposure to their work was new. That was what it was about.

RATNER: One of the other firsts, really, that the museum was involved in was--I believe it was one of the very first museums outside of New York, at any rate--to focus on contemporary photography. Whose idea was that?

TERBELL: You'll have to give that, again, to John Coplans. I don't know where John's ideas came from, but they made a lot of sense to me and to many other members of the board. Fine art photography certainly was a force in this time frame and there was a wonderful opportunity to show some other side of what was going on in the field of contemporary art. Then you add to that, generally speaking, an exhibition of photography is less expensive to put together; when you are really strapped, without sacrificing quality ever, you can do some pretty wonderful things. So it was exciting to present some things that were pretty much on the forefront of superb quality and to discover there's quite an audience for that. So once again, we have to say John had the idea. John found Fred [R.] Parker, and when we had Fred on board, we were off and running.

RATNER: Okay, I have one final question about exhibition

policy, and that's related to the "California Design" series which we mentioned a few minutes ago. I wondered how relevant you felt the design component was to a contemporary art museum?

TERBELL: Well, I certainly think that design is an important component of a contemporary museum. Whether it necessarily had to focus on California would have been a philosophical question. It was a philosophical question for me. Whether the quality of everything that was being shown would always be of the first order-- Now, I'm in no way qualified to judge whether at any time it was or wasn't. I know I always loved those exhibitions, personally, felt there were marvelous things in them. I was not able to judge whether this was a first-rate thing or wasn't. Whether or not we ought to be focusing only on California was always in my mind; why didn't we do a worldwide design program? Now, maybe if we had the time and money, that's what we would have done. But to give California designers a showcase certainly was another thing which would fit in with what we were doing. I guess my question would be, to be answered by others, did the quality of all that was shown meet the standard that this is world quality? I can't answer that. But that was a question that always needed to be addressed.

RATNER: How were those exhibitions received by the public

and the art or design press?

TERBELL: Well, the public, by turning out in droves-- Obviously, the public received it very well. The press, I don't know. I can't tell you about that.

RATNER: How did the staff feel about it?

TERBELL: Well, the majority of the-- My goodness, it was such a small staff, how could you refer to the majority of it at all; other than Eudie's part of the staff, they really were not involved. From their point of view, the museum was being used for something else other than what they were about. It was time for them to do their own work, whatever, for what was coming along. So it was sort of not part of the program as they perceived it. I mean, it was a separate entity.

RATNER: This happened, of course, after you were no longer director. But in 1973, California Design severed its ties with the museum. I wondered how you felt about that?

TERBELL: Well, given what you and I have been talking about, how precarious the financial situation was, I can certainly see the logic of that. With the uncertainty of where it would be able to do its exhibitions, I think it probably made a lot of sense.

RATNER: How would you rate Eudorah Moore as a curator?

TERBELL: I wouldn't know how to do that. Fabulous human being, individual. Of energy beyond belief. Of great

moral and other support to me. But her work as a curator, I thought-- I mean, she was a director in all senses of that program, and that program, it seems to me, was a fabulous success. Terrific, but-- Oh, she's much more than a curator. I guess my problem is you cannot rate just a part of Eudorah Moore. She's too many parts. You put them all together and it comes out as bigger than one, so it's this fabulous person.

RATNER: Okay. I thought we'd move on and talk a little bit about some of the various personalities involved with the museum. Of course, we've touched on that a little already. We have mentioned Bob Rowan throughout our discussions. What kind of an impact would you say he had on the museum?

TERBELL: I think he had an absolutely number one impact in terms of the fine arts activities of that museum. In other words, the reason for which there was a museum. Bob's love of art, absolute passion for it, his willingness to be helpful financially, in every kind of a way; to get things rolling, to keep them going, to write a check when things got tough. His impact was immeasurable. In terms of the building itself, minimal. So we've got to separate the "what is the museum doing" from the structure. So Bob is on the "what's the museum doing" side, and a real force there.

RATNER: As I mentioned, I read a lot of articles and interviews to prepare for this. The most frequently asked question in reference to Bob Rowan is why he didn't donate a large part of his collection to the museum, both, I think, as a sign of faith in the museum, and then as an example to other donors. What is your opinion on that?

TERBELL: Well, I think I have a little more information that-- I don't know whether it belongs here or not. So maybe I won't answer that, or we can break off for a minute. I think there has been some misunderstanding over time. A great deal of the Rowan collection, in fact, belonged to his then wife, Carolyn [Peck Rowan], and did not belong to Bob. I think a lot of people thought it was Bob's, but it was really Carolyn's. Carolyn was very generous. I frankly don't think anybody asked her to give her collection to the museum. I'll give you a little anecdote. For my thirtieth birthday, I asked Carolyn for $25,000, which she gave, not to me of course, but to the museum. Frankly, I don't know that I knew the collection was Carolyn's rather than Bob's. I mean, Bob certainly had some, but I don't think I knew that. With all that the Rowans were doing, it never occurred to me to ask them for anything more.

RATNER: Okay. Earlier on, in fact, in the first interview, we discussed James Demetrion and his

departure. But I really didn't have a chance to ask you how you would rate his performance.

TERBELL: Oh, gosh, Jim did some really great work in the old building, and, you know, he did a lot to open my eyes in the early days. Exciting. Gosh, I think Jim did a wonderful job. I wonder what things would have been like had Jim stayed on. Perhaps not very different. [laughter] I don't think any of us could have found the pot of gold at the end of that rainbow.

RATNER: The other person that we mentioned briefly was Walter Hopps, and, of course, he left in 1966. But you were involved with the museum while he was still director, initially. I think you were on the Men's Committee at that point. How would you--?

TERBELL: Walter is an absolutely brilliant guy. Perhaps not an administrator, and perhaps not involved--or should not be involved--in public relations kinds of things, but to just get on with dealing with arts and in the exhibitions and artists. So, you know, I did not know Walter particularly really well at all. I admire him a lot. If the artist is a director, or the director is an artist, that's one kind of a way to go. But I don't think of Walter as an administrator.

RATNER: Why was he asked to resign?

TERBELL: I did not know that he was. My knowledge level

there is zero. I thought he left.

RATNER: You know, I've heard it both ways. Sorry, I wondered what you knew about that.

TERBELL: I just thought he left.

RATNER: Did you have any sense of why he left?

TERBELL: Oh, that perhaps he was smarter than all of us. He foresaw the chaos that was coming.

RATNER: What was the reaction to his departure?

TERBELL: My long pause is-- It seemed, again, I think I expected it to happen. Because it seems to me that Walter sort of disappeared. Walter wasn't around. Then he sort of formally resigned. The way I thought of it was it would have been wonderful to have that kind of a mind focused on what he does best. Absolutely be marvelous if we could have had Walter, or if we could have had Walter and John and Jim and Bill Agee, you know, all of the minds who've been involved, in a financially stable situation. Let me kind of worry about the books. As long as there's enough money in the books, wow, we would have had a lot of fun. I admire all of those people.

RATNER: Okay, before we go ahead and talk about the [Norton] Simon takeover-- I know that you were no longer the director by that point. But I'm sure you have an opinion on it. But I wondered if you could talk a little bit about your resignation and why you decided to resign.

TERBELL: Oh, sure. That's easy. My entire life was falling apart in large chunks at the time. What really was going on is there had been considerable discussion, negotiations, with the county of Los Angeles for it to assume the financial responsibility for the museum. I was and still am opposed to that as an idea. To anyone who wanted to hear it, they heard that from me. When the county voted against taking on the burden, I think the board was sufficiently angry about the whole thing, or those who were strongly in favor of getting rid of the burden, and thought I was not a member of the team. They thought maybe I ought to go do something else, and I agreed with them. So that's how that came about.

RATNER: Why were you opposed to county funding?

TERBELL: Because I believe that the county, any county, has an obligation to its citizens to provide a wide array of services. In the fine arts field, it was doing so with the Los Angeles County Museum [of Art], which is an extraordinarily fine institution. I frankly didn't think it needed any more burdens financially. I didn't think it was fair to put that on taxpayers. I felt it really was a private-enterprise-supported institution. I just kind of hated to spend everybody's money for-- I mean, yes, you provide a general purpose museum, and they get the best you can with county funds. But if you want to do another

museum within the county, do it with private funds. That's really where it came from.

RATNER: So what were some of the other options that should have been explored to salvage the museum?

TERBELL: Well, to salvage the museum, oh, I wonder if all options may not have been explored. You know, in looking back, the only thing I can think that we did not do in the beginning was to obtain sufficient corporate-funded philanthropy. We did not work on that for the ongoing budget either. So I think that, you know, if we had obtained a challenge grant from the Bank of America Foundation or the Transamerica Insurance [Company] or ARCO or somebody--several of those--and gotten some of their professionals involved early on, I think that might have been it. Very few people are interested in the salvation of something. I think we all learned and can learn from the Pasadena Playhouse. I mean, it's on its third or fourth renaissance. I hope this one works. But once something's looking like it's pretty sick financially, it's very hard to resuscitate it. So it's sort of about going back, starting all over again, which has been done now.

RATNER: How did you feel about Norton Simon coming in to run the museum?

TERBELL: You know, I finally think that that was a better

use for the building than what was possible with no money. In other words, you just have a building sitting there doing nothing without the tremendous help of a Norton Simon Foundation. How did I feel? It took me something over two years before I could walk in the building at all. A part of me died in that building. That's just the way it was. But the building provided a place for people to see things of fine quality. It kind of gives me the feeling that that did happen, rather than having it turned into a--I don't know, a supermarket or something. I was glad I was away.

RATNER: So what would you say were the major factors that led to the demise of the museum as a contemporary showcase?

TERBELL: The decision to build the new building in the first place undoubtedly killed off the museum. When it was in its former home, and during all of the years of its existence back in the early part of the century, it was very little concerned with buildings. That should have remained its role in life. It maybe never should have had a permanent home, finally. Any warehouse, which could be for some period of time converted into exhibition space, should perhaps have been its home. Now, it obviously needed a safe, secure place for the Blue Four [collection] and the rest of its collection, but it did not need Fort Knox. It needed a safe, fireproof kind of a vault. There

are in fact, you know, public vaults that you can rent. In other words, I think what it's about, or what I think it really should have been about, was scholarship: print like mad, lots of publications; lots of changing exhibitions, exhibitions revolving around its collection; its fund-raising efforts dedicated to raising funds to fill out the Galka Scheyer bequest, to focus on what its trustees and professional staff determine is the focus for the new collection. Building on its strengths, but no land and no building. So its demise was the building.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

MAY 22, 1987

RATNER: Before I changed the tape, we were talking about the primary factors for the demise of the museum as a contemporary showcase, and you were talking about the building. Did you want to add anything else about that?

TERBELL: Just that there really are two quite separate things that were always going on. One was the building, and the other was the purpose of the museum. When they got tangled up with each other is when we had our problems. That's really all.

RATNER: Okay. Why or how did this institution, which eventually had a very respected stature both nationally and internationally as a contemporary art museum, happen in Pasadena which, at least according to the stereotype, is an extremely conservative community?

TERBELL: Well, I think that goes back to the early part of the century. Pasadena was a place where people who could afford it, educated people interested in the arts, came for the winter. Quite a thriving community of people, culturally-minded, came out and brought with them an interest in the arts. That's really where it started. That was its seed. I think that the community still has a tremendous interest in the arts, in things contemporary. I mean, goodness, it's the home of Caltech [California

Institute of Technology]! What more logical place for people to be interested in the new? I did enjoy the support from lots of the faculty and students from Caltech. They really loved involvement in the museum, and, my goodness, I enjoyed meeting those minds. But if the community has a reputation for being conservative, that is not at odds with being interested in what's going on now, being interested in the pursuit of excellence. Now, contemporary arts taken as a whole, as a group--music, dance, theater, fine arts or whatever--are always a little difficult to take at the moment for some. But those who are interested in what's going on don't mind that they don't like whatever it is; they want to support it and be interested in it. So a very logical place.

RATNER: Despite its ultimate fate, the Pasadena Art Museum did contribute very significantly to the life of Southern California, the cultural life in particular. I wonder how you would summarize those contributions.

TERBELL: Well, I can say very frankly it's when I think back on that that the pain and suffering that it inflicted upon a lot of us was all worth it. What the museum did was what it was supposed to do: it challenged the minds of the area; it presented what appeared to be the best of what was going on; it took upon itself the role of dealing with quality and showing that to the community, and then in its

traveling exhibitions--the few it was able to organize--it shared with other communities around the world what was going on. It opened a lot of eyes. It made those who were involved even to the smallest degree, such as coming once a year, it enriched their lives. It enriched all of our lives. So it really did fulfill its purpose for the time. It made life more vibrant. It put some color where, in some cases, color wasn't.

I think back on looking out of the window of the director's office at these clean, tidy kids coming in from all over the community, especially when we were able to have funding from some of the staid, old, conservative organizations. We were able to have a multiracial program of a lot of kids from disadvantaged homes, but still coming in, looking very sort of scared and tidy and clean, and coming out painted every color under the rainbow, having been up in the galleries, having looked at the best of what's going on and then making something in the workshops. If one of those thousands of kids got something out of it on a given day, the whole thing was worthwhile. So I can feel--do feel--good about the time period. That museum did a heck of a job for all of us. Even if it was not intended to survive financially, it left something that nobody can erase. That makes it all worthwhile.

RATNER: Okay. Well, we've talked at length about your

relationship with the museum. I wonder if you'd tell me a little bit about what you've been involved with since then.

TERBELL: Oh, I've been an international banker, which is something that, well, I was doing before I got to the museum and took up after, again, with a vengeance, and traveled and lived in Asia and Europe.

Now, from the point of view of what have I been doing relative to the arts, I've been enjoying them without immersing myself in them financially or in terms of hours spent trying to keep them afloat. I've been the spectator, loving every minute of that role, learning as much as I could about contemporary Japanese art, which is a lot of fun to learn, but at the same time learning about the much older time periods of Japanese art and craft. And then the joy of being in London, which is like an old home. But to see what is going on in the contemporary world there, as well as going to look at some old favorites there and on the Continent. So art is truly an avocation now. I'm now able to separate in a fairly logical way what I do for twenty-four hours a day to put bread on the table from my enjoyment of the arts. Because what I was doing at the museum certainly didn't put any bread on our table, but, I think, took quite a lot of it all. I'm back to where I can be someone who enjoys it. Not that I didn't enjoy art then, because I surely did, but I guess I burned out. I

gave all I could then. Now I just enjoy it, absorb like a sponge, very quietly.

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

TERBELL: No, except I surely enjoyed doing this. You're very good at pulling out those old files in the back of my head and dusting them off. I was a little apprehensive--a little?--I was very apprehensive about doing this, and you've made it very easy for me. And I do thank you.

RATNER: Well, thank you. And thank you on behalf of UCLA and the project, as well. It's been a pleasure.

TERBELL: Great. Thanks.

INDEX