

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Oral History Project

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley

SFMOMA 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

HENRY HOPKINS

SFMOMA Director, 1966-1972

Interviews conducted by  
Lisa Rubens and Richard Cándida Smith  
in 2007

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Rubens: Well, Henry, why don't we start formally? It's a pleasure to be here in your home today. Thank you for inviting me in. I'm interviewing you for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art about your years as director.

01-00:03:47

[material deleted]

Rubens: Now, if you would tell me, in just the most brief way, had you been to the San Francisco Museum of Art, as it was called, before you became the director?

01-00:04:59

Hopkins: Yes. I had been there a number of times.

Rubens: How would it be that you would come? You were with LACMA, and of course, you went to Texas.

01-00:05:09

Hopkins: Yes, I came from Texas, from Fort Worth's Art Center Museum, to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. I had been in Texas for five years, after leaving LACMA, but I wanted to return to the West. A team of people from San Francisco—David Robinson and others—came down to interview me for that job. I came out to San Francisco and we chatted back and forth for a period of time. They called and said, "Would you be interested in coming?" I said yes.

So in 1973, I went. That was that. But you asked about being there before. I had been there before on a number of occasions. It's very interesting because we had just built the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1965, a big, new building; supposedly a general museum, without undue emphasis on modern and contemporary art; in fact, a very conservative board. But when you would go to San Francisco to see, let's say, a Diebenkorn show or the annual exhibition which they would do from time to time, every time I would look at it I would think, you know, "If this museum just had a little bit of money to paint their walls white, to do this, to do that, to buy a few key works of art and so forth and so on, it would really be a wonderful place." It had an attachment, in all of our minds, as a place that had done, in the past, wonderful things, and was still struggling. But it was struggling a lot because of financial difficulties.

Rubens: Let me ask you one other question. In your oral history with UCLA, you mentioned that Thomas Albright, the art critic, art historian, also

happened to be in Texas, had some kind of encouragement for you coming to the museum.

01-00:06:55

Hopkins: Oh, no, that wasn't Tom. That was his mentor, Alfred Frankenstein.

Rubens: Oh, Alfred Frankenstein.

01-00:07:03

Hopkins: Alfred Frankenstein. This gets long, but at the very beginning of my career, I did an exhibition of Los Angeles artists which came to San Francisco, to the museum in San Francisco. He liked my writing and what have you, and we met and we talked. Alfred was a wonderful old guy. He, in fact, two or three times, put my name in the hopper, I guess in different ways. So he was a factor in that. Right, he played a role.

Rubens: I'll ask you about your exhibit later. How long did it show in San Francisco?

01-00:07:43

Hopkins: Well, it was a normal time; I would say probably about eight weeks. It was a phenomenal thing. It was the first time in the history of universities that a graduate student was allowed to do, for his dissertation, an exhibition rather than a dissertation. I won't go into all the long detail, but I did it under the mentorship of my leader, Frederick Wight, who was the head of the art galleries at that time, at UCLA. He then helped me circulate it. So it actually went to Forth Worth, to the Amon Carter Museum; it went to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; it was shown at the UCLA Art Galleries. And so here, as a graduate student, I had this exhibition that was on the road and being written about and talked about. That's how my job at the L.A. County Museum came about.

Rubens: And for the record, the title of that show was?

01-00:08:36

Hopkins: A very pragmatic title: "Thirty-seven Painters from Los Angeles."  
[laughs]

Rubens: You come to San Francisco in 1973. You do pretty much right off the bat, three dramatic changes. I'd like to unpack those a little.

01-00:09:01

Hopkins: All right, fine. Whatever they are, we'll unpack them, then.

Rubens: I may have them wrong, in order. How soon did you decide to insert the name "modern" into the museum?

01-00:09:11

Hopkins:

Fairly quickly. I would say probably within a year of that time. I went to the board. And new people had come on, like Eugene Trefethen for example; and Evie Haas was very active on the board; Gay Bradley, very active on the board. I just explained the fact that even I, when I came to San Francisco, with a title like the San Francisco Museum of Art, if I came to see Renaissance painting and came to that building, I would be disappointed. And many people were. It was simply the name that they came to. And de Young Museum meant nothing to anybody. That wasn't identifying areas or what have you. So unless you knew—the board, which was common at that time, felt that if they put the word “modern” in the title, that it would impact their fundraising. They obviously were not in great financial shape, and so they were very concerned about the possibility of doing that. But nonetheless, they agreed. So it became SFMOMA at that time and has remained that ever since.

Rubens:

Did you have to pitch very hard?

01-00:10:20

Hopkins:

Well, it was a pitch. It certainly was a pitch. And with the justifications that I've just told you—

Rubens:

Yes, of course. Big opposition?

01-00:10:28

Hopkins:

No, there was not a big opposition. In fact, there were certain people on the board that recognized that that had always, since Grace McCann Morley's days, had been the purpose of the museum. It *was* a modern museum. Very little nineteenth-century material, almost all twentieth-century material. Born by Grace McCann Morley in the mode of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. A factor was that the board was in transition and was changing. New people were coming on the board who had a great interest, really, in modern and contemporary art.

Rubens:

The second thing—I don't know the order—that you did was change the entrance of the museum from the side on McAllister to [Van Ness].

01-00:11:20

Hopkins:

That's correct, yes.

Rubens:

How did that come to your mind? And how did you sell that? How soon did it happen?

01-00:11:27

Hopkins:

Well, it came, again, within the first two or three years. The issue was because you came in that side entryway and went up stairways, or you came over to the elevator or what have you. It was a very complex arrangement, as you know, the building, because the veterans, World

War I, World War II veterans, had the first three floors of the building, and the museum had the fourth. The idea was that as we lived in peace in the future, then the veterans would disappear and the museum would slowly get bigger and bigger and bigger; and that's exactly what happened. We were able to move down to the third floor, so we actually had the third and the fourth floors of that building. Working with what was called the War Memorial Board, we managed to convince them that the lobby should be more like an art museum lobby, if that was at all possible. David Robinson did the work on that. Then we put the bookstore in the corner and the entryway. Which made a difference, obviously, because you could walk right into the elevator and go on up.

Rubens: Were you pretty hands on with the architecture? You knew you wanted a front entrance, you wanted the public face to the bookstore down below; were these your suggestions?

01-00:12:43

Hopkins: Well certainly, the idea of expanding the bookstore was important. That was right at the beginning of those ideas where, in fact, bookstores made money for museums and were important to their financial well-being. Again, based on the MoMA bookstore. We had good management. So that was a factor. The building, of course, was defined. I mean, it's here; it's this grand old Beaux-Arts building, and with this very strange, but quite beautiful stone in the whole lobby, a kind of reddish stone. So essentially, that was a cleanup job, is what it amounted to. David Robinson, who was the architect on all of the projects while I was there, recognized that he wanted to keep the sense of the building as it was, but at the same time, create more modern and open spaces. So it worked out very well, I think.

Rubens: So it was a good working relationship that you had with him?

01-00:13:44

Hopkins: Very good, yes.

Rubens: Where did he come from?

01-00:13:46

Hopkins: He's right there. He lives in Mill Valley, an architect in Mill Valley, and had been on the museum board, as well. He was on the museum board.

Rubens: So it wasn't what today might be considered a conflict of interest, it was an almost, probably a contribution?

01-00:14:05

Hopkins:

Well, yes, I could say almost pro bono. You know, a very gratifying kind of thing. Since he had done some of the earlier expansions, it made perfect sense.

Rubens:

Plus, his vision matched.

01-00:14:19

Hopkins:

Yes, it did. And also, he and his wife Mary were major collectors of modern and contemporary art in San Francisco. So they were not just active in terms of the sense of serving as an architect on the board, but actually had a very deep interest in the arts of the area.

Rubens:

Well, I wanted to turn to—which I think is really worth unpacking and talking about, the third really significant—I'm not saying only significant, but immediate pieces of the transformation that you put into place. That is the Collectors Forum. I'm wondering if you would talk about that.

01-00:15:01

Hopkins:

Well, I had been instrumental in starting, here in Los Angeles, what they call the Docent Council, which has become one of the major—Every museum has copied it, you know, ever since that time. Education was a very important part of my background. In fact, my degree from the Art Institute is in art education. Then I also, at Los Angeles County Museum, and again in Fort Worth, instituted travel programs, so that one could get people on the board to travel and to see more things. So the impetus behind this— It was Brooks Walker's wife at that time, Peggy, who unfortunately has passed away, but kind of in memoriam, we established the Collectors Forum [1977]. I don't remember what it cost to belong; I'll say \$1,000 a couple. The principle was twofold. One, we will, with our so-called expertise, take you on trips to New York, to Boston, to Texas, to Chicago, to Documenta in Germany, to the Venice Biennale, to this, that, so forth and so on. You, in return, with the money that you pay to be a member, will sponsor every two years, a biennial exhibition. That biennial exhibition will try to show some of the best that's being done at that moment in time. Like, for example, the Carnegie Biennial and other things of the type. We will buy from that, with your money—You will fund that exhibition, but we'll buy from that a work of art for the collection each time. So that was the whole premise. Well, it worked so well—again, it's been copied by many museums since that time—but it worked so well that many of the board members, in their travels, got to know the major dealers, got to feel much more comfortable about going and looking for art, began to purchase art; and in fact, were solicited to be on the boards of museums like the Whitney Museum and the National Gallery and others. So it was one of those things where it was almost too successful.

Rubens: Who were those, specifically? Can you call up those names? We have them in your UCLA oral history. Who went to the Whitney; who went to the Walker?

01-00:17:15

Hopkins: Well, I think Don Fisher, for example, went to the National Gallery, if I'm not wrong. I think Glen Janss, I know was on the Whitney board for a period of time. There are number of them, as a matter of fact.

Rubens: Along with the Collectors Forum, were there regular meetings then, that would have constituted a study group or a presentation?

01-00:17:39

Hopkins: Yes. We would meet. We would meet two or three times a year and would bring in speakers, for example, that would talk about various topics. Sometimes they would speak with the Collectors Forum and then do a public performance after that time. On occasion, I would do a class. Just a basic class in modern art or things of that kind. So yes, there was an educational aspect, but the travel was the main—Travel, and getting to know the important players in the art world were the important things.

Rubens: Did you always go on those trips?

01-00:18:16

Hopkins: I always went, yes.

Rubens: In that vein, what I want to talk about a little is the sensibility and knowledge you had about the national and international modern art scene that you brought to San Francisco. It's a big question that needs to be unpacked. But firstly, while you were at Forth Worth, you were connected to the Venice Biennale.

01-00:18:48

Hopkins: When I was in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, my primary mentor was Jim Elliott, who was the curator of modern art. I began working with him, went into education, then went into administration. When I went to Forth Worth, the idea was to make the Art Center Museum into a contemporary museum, to play off against the Kimbell Museum, which was art history, and the Amon Carter Museum, which is the history of American art. So there was an open door there. Very complex. But nonetheless, that's what it was. I had done some exhibitions at the L.A. County Museum, I had worked on the Man Ray exhibition, had worked on the Rico Lebrun exhibition, had presented various artists. I was a moderately known person on the contemporary scene. They asked me, in fact, at one moment, to come and be the head of education at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. So I was building a network of good friends, actually, in this whole area. They

asked me in 1970 to be the director of the United States representation at the Venice Biennale.

Rubens: Who asks?

01-00:20:01

Hopkins:

At that time, it was the National Endowment [for] the Arts. That has a long and scattered history, but essentially, that's what it amounted to at that time. It was a terrible year. By that I mean, it was right in the middle of the Vietnam crisis, none of the artists wanted to show, they all thought it was government sponsored; it was a big mess. But nonetheless, it was a wonderful opportunity. So I made a lot of good friends, a lot of enemies. At the same time, when I was in Forth Worth, I managed that the museum, though it was relatively small, to become a member of AAMD, the American Association of Art Museum Directors, which has as its membership, the directors of the 150 leading museums in the United States. So that was a factor. Now, another thing that related, certainly, to what we're talking about is that when I was asked to come to San Francisco, one of the reasons that I was very interested in coming to San Francisco was not necessarily San Francisco itself, but because I knew that in Los Angeles, two things were happening: the board of the County Museum was becoming increasingly more conservative, doing fewer and fewer exhibitions of modern and contemporary art, and the attempt to build a museum in Pasadena, the Pasadena Contemporary Museum, was failing. Later, as you know, it became the Norton Simon Museum. But knowing that Los Angeles would be doing less things—

Rubens: Well, you had met people by doing the—

01-00:22:02

Hopkins:

Well, by doing the Venice Biennale. But then I was talking about the recognition that the Los Angeles scene was becoming very conservative and if we played our cards right in San Francisco, we would have access to all of the exhibitions that are being developed by the Museum of Modern Art, by the Chicago Art Institute, by the Whitney, what have you, that they would circulate from one place to another.

Rubens: Let me interrupt you to ask you quickly, were you tempted to go to New York to be the head of the education department?

01-00:22:34

Hopkins:

Of course, it was a temptation. But at the same time, I was established in Los Angeles. I was married at that time, I had two young children. I went to New York to stay in a very comfortable hotel in the middle of February, took cabs down to the Museum of Modern Art, chatted with René d'Harnoncourt, one of the great men in all of our history. Came

back to the hotel, and that black soot was coming down on the windows in the middle of a semi-snowstorm. I said, “Now, if I came here, I’d have to live out in Queens, I’d have to be taking the subway. I wouldn’t be taking cabs down to the museum. It wasn’t worth it. But the temptation was simply that in those days, MoMA was the king. That’s all there was to it, so—

Rubens: I’d like to just have you reflect on one other sort of assertion that I make, that establishes you as having really national and international contacts and being really vitally in the center of things. When you were asked to interview to be the director of San Francisco, some of your friends were also asked at the same time.

01-00:22:47

Hopkins: Yes, of course. They were . . .

Rubens: And these friends were also cohort. You had gone to school with them or come up with them. What’s the school? The group that Jack Lane comes out of? Williams?

01-00:24:04

Hopkins: Yes, the Williams gang. Yes, right, exactly.

Rubens: But I wondered if you would just dip back and say who the gang was that came out of UCLA, because they were quite amazing.

01-00:24:12

Hopkins: Yes, it is amazing, and it’s never been truly recognized, as such. But it was very early, in the beginning of the art history program at UCLA. There were a number of us involved in that program, the art history program at UCLA, that then went on, instead of going into academic life, went into museum life. It’s very hard to exactly know how that happened, but I really think it was our mentor, Fred Wight, who was a museum man at heart. But Martin Friedman, who became the director of the Walker [Art Center] museum, one of our great people; Jim Demetrion, who went on to be the director of the Hirshhorn Museum—a number of others in between, but the Hirshhorn Museum; Walter Hopps, who went on to be the director of Pasadena, then the Corcoran, and then the de Menil Collection in Houston; myself. So of a group of us at that time—

Now, actually, the people that I was competing with for the job in San Francisco, as I understood it, though they don’t always give you all that information, was Irving Blum, who was actually a gallery person, not a museum person at all, and not really an art historian, but a very interesting and flamboyant character. But also, quite controversial. You know, he would have been a great figurehead, I guess you’d say.

Rubens: He had run the Ferus Gallery.

01-00:25:41

Hopkins: That's correct. Correct. With Walter Hopps, that's correct. When I had my little gallery. So Irving was one of the contenders. But I think the primary contender was Jim Demetrion. My feeling was that probably they would have preferred Jim to me, as a matter of fact, and may well have approached him before they approached me. Jim and I have never really talked about that, though we're very good friends. But he didn't like San Francisco. It had nothing to do with the museum, he just didn't like San Francisco. He preferred a smaller kind of environment.

Rubens: Smaller?

01-00:26:19

Hopkins: Well, he was in the Midwest at that time, and doing a very good job. And stayed there, and was happy there.

But it is interesting that there was that moment on the West Coast where a lot of young people were very much involved in the educational aspects of modern, contemporary art. It was our very clear purpose, absolutely stated a number of times amongst us, that our job was to build an audience for this art of this century. I think that's another thing we've overdone, because anywhere you go now, it's jammed.

Rubens: I want to dip back a minute so we don't lose it, and just ask you what you had known of, and then how did you come to meet Grace McCann Morley.

01-00:27:24

Hopkins: Well, I knew Grace Morley because, again, my dissertation topic at UCLA essentially was the art of California; primarily Los Angeles, but the art of California. None of my mentors, my serious art history professors, thought that was worth a nickel and they didn't want me to do it. Fred Wight again stepped in and gave me support and allowed me to work in that field. So it was normal, as I was working on this exhibition-dissertation, to see a by-play between San Francisco and Los Angeles. I came to understand very quickly that one would always react to the other. And as long as they didn't both fall asleep at the same time, things would continue to grow. If we built a museum in Los Angeles, they'd build a museum in San Francisco; if they built a museum in Los Angeles, they'd build a building—And that's exactly what has happened.

Rubens: But did you consult with her for the dissertation? Did you go up and talk to her?

01-00:28:24

Hopkins:

No, I did not. I only met Grace McCann Morley one time. She had left the country, she was in India, involved with all the United Nations activity that began in San Francisco years before that time. I was extremely pleased to meet her because she was an extraordinary woman, just in terms of what she did in her career, as one of the early women museum directors, as a matter of fact. Now there are many, but in those days, it was rare.

Rubens:

And how is it you literally met her? She came back?

01-00:28:56

Hopkins:

No, she was just coming through San Francisco on her way to India, coming back from Washington on her way to India, and stopped over for a day or so.

Rubens:

What was your impression? You were director. Did you walk through any of the collection?

01-00:29:09

Hopkins:

Yes, we walked through the museum, and we had a very enjoyable conversation. She was a wonderful kind of heavy-set, semi-dowdy, gray-haired lady. You know, well advanced in her years. In fact, she died two or three years after that time. [GMM 1900-1985]

Rubens:

It was common gossip, or part of the knowing what people know about people, that she did live with another woman.

01-00:29:43

Hopkins:

I think that's absolutely true. I mean, she was a very strong persona. Let's get into that, first of all. Had very strong ideas about art, was very knowledgeable, was tied in, I'd say, to the thing. My own impression—this is my own impression—is that the board at that time was not a terribly strong board and not really terribly well informed, as far as that's concerned. Art and society were all mixed up.

Rubens:

High society.

01-00:30:19

Hopkins:

Yes, right. I think probably the fact that she was a lesbian and— Although I have never heard that she was flamboyant or anything else of that kind, but I think just simply the fact that she was, at that point in time, was enough to throw things into question in the minds of some board members; and that's what happened. Now also, on the other side, which often happens to museum directors, is that they become too popular, and board members begin to take offense that the museum becomes more recognized for the person who's running it, or the curators or whatever it might be, than the board. So that happens sometimes.

Rubens: May have been an issue.

01-00:31:04

Hopkins: Yes.

Rubens: I wanted to just link back to how well tied in you were. You had these seven people who you knew and who then go on. Did you have a touchstone? Was New York the touchstone for how you wanted to develop this museum?

01-00:31:36

Hopkins: No, it was not. Having made that decision in my past, to not go to the Museum of Modern Art, and having as my scholastic record, working with the arts of California, primarily, I had always felt, and continue to feel, that the United States is a gigantic physical plot. There's New York, which is Eurocentric and on the East Coast, and here we are, Asia-centric, or Pacific Rim-centric on the West Coast. People that live in California are not New Yorkers; people who live in New York are not Californians, though they are mixing more rapidly now all the time; more people are coming west. But the idea was essentially to build our own identity, to bring California into context. And that's the life work of many of us.

Rubens: There's this interesting little twist here, in the sense that sometimes that leads people to say, "Oh, that's regionalism and it's limited."

01-00:32:46

Hopkins: Yes.

Rubens: And yet, you point out that some of the first shows that you had—Rauschenberg, Ruscha, Still—

01-00:32:57

Hopkins: Guston, Johns. Yes, right.

Rubens: Motherwell.

01-00:33:00

Hopkins: Yes.

Rubens: I don't know where Johns comes in. But these are westerners, who become some of the leading artists in the whole country.

01-00:33:10

Hopkins: Well—

Rubens: Promoting themselves as westerners.

01-00:33:12

Hopkins:

Well, no. They didn't ever promote themselves as westerners. Specifically, let's talk about, for a moment, Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko, for example, who were brought out to San Francisco by Douglas MacAgy at the California School of Fine Arts, to teach, and had a tremendous influence on the students at the Art Institute. It was a transition from nature, figurative, which San Francisco was at that time, to abstraction. Many of the artists followed very much on the heels of these grand mentors. But also, the fact that Clyfford Still was born in North Dakota, but lived in Washington State, and then came to San Francisco, worked in the shipyards during the war. Mark Rothko was essentially raised in Oregon; Philip Guston was raised in Los Angeles; Jackson Pollock was raised in Los Angeles—Cody, Wyoming, then Los Angeles. They were all essentially western people that had to go to New York, because that was the center of commercial art activity. So to call this whole thing the New York School, I always thought was just nonsense. So my ambition in many of the exhibitions that I did, and much of the collecting of that time, was to bring these western international people into a greater focus. So when this Clyfford Still gift was made, that was major; when the Philip Guston gift was made, that was major. A few Rothkos were given to us at that time. And so there was a purpose. It was a true desire to state clearly to the nation that these artists had a role to play, and were part of this whole evolving scene on the West Coast. It had nothing to do with regionalism. The only way that I would define that in talks I'd say, "Look, in the Renaissance, there was Florence, there was Rome, there was Venice. Each of them producing works of art of international renown, but each very different in their own thing, because of where they were physically located. That's exactly what this is here."

Rubens:

And yet New York remained the market.

01-00:35:35

Hopkins:

Well, New York still remains the market. But increasingly, increasingly—and things that were predicted long ago by us—California is the center point now, because of its schools, it's producing more younger artists, recognized internationally, more younger artists than anywhere else. You rarely hear of a new young New York artist. The California people are producing, and staying home, and being seen in Austrian museums, German museums, French museums, British museums, all over the country, are being recognized by being put into these giant shows like Documenta and the Venice Biennale. You mentioned Ed Ruscha's name, for example, who will be the representative this year at the Venice Biennale. He's lived all of his life in California, his mature life in California. So we are creating a balance. The balance is, in the future, in history, clearly it's going to benefit the West Coast, as Asia becomes even more prolific and

profound as it comes along. But the important aspect in all of this is that for years, all of publishing was centered in New York. The only variation from that was *Artforum* magazine, for a short period of time, here on the West Coast, which gained a national reputation, because it was a very well presented and published magazine, under Phil Leider. The only California artists that people knew were the people that appeared in *Artforum*—Sam Francis, Robert Irwin, Billy Al Bengston. A few names. But you could, at that time, name on one hand the artists of international, or at least national character, who lived in California. But now you can't do it on five hands. So it is changing. The shift is dramatic. Because the information world no longer relies exclusively on publications, on magazines, as it did in those days—Now with the internet and what have you, the information is much more balanced than it used to be.

Rubens: How involved were you with *Artforum*? It began in—

01-00:37:49

Hopkins: Well, I don't know exactly when it began, but I'll say about 1957, '58, somewhere in that time, in San Francisco. [*Artforum* est. 1962]

Rubens: Then went to L.A. [Moved to L.A. in 1965]

01-00:37:57

Hopkins: Then moved to L.A. for a period of only about two years, under the ownership of Charlie Cowles; then went off to New York [in 1967], and has been in New York ever since.

Rubens: So it was in New York by the time you came to—

01-00:38:08

Hopkins: No, it was actually in Los Angeles when I was beginning at the County Museum, yes.

Rubens: No, no, I'm sorry, when you came to San Francisco.

01-00:38:14

Hopkins: When I came to San Francisco, it was already in New York, yes, that's correct.

Rubens: But you wrote for *Artforum*.

01-00:38:24

Hopkins: I did. In the early days, yes.

Rubens: Schools. You mentioned the role of schools. When you came to San Francisco, of course, the California School of Fine Arts had had a long history.

01-00:38:38  
Hopkins:

Yes, no question.

Rubens:

And UC Berkeley's art department.

01-00:38:45  
Hopkins:

Yes, it did have—

Rubens:

Would you explain that to me?

01-00:38:47  
Hopkins:

Well, essentially, what became the San Francisco Art Institute and exists as that, was a very important school, because of just the things we've been talking about. It brought people from the East Coast to the West Coast, mixed them up. I should really spend some time talking about just that because this idea of artists from the east who came west and spent time with the western artists; friendships developed in Los Angeles and in San Francisco. That made all the difference in the world, that we weren't anymore a region or an isolated place.

Rubens:

Could you give me an example of that?

01-00:39:24  
Hopkins:

Well, I can give you a thousand examples of that, as a matter of fact. But Bob Rauschenberg, for example, and Jasper Johns always felt just as comfortable on the West Coast as they did on the East Coast, though they were clearly New York artists; and had come from the East Coast. Artists like Robert Irwin and Sam Francis were equally comfortable on the East Coast as they were on the West Coast. But it was the mixing of all of this that happened in the late fifties and the sixties and what have you that could bring somebody like a Diebenkorn to national prominence, international prominence now. Yet in those days, they were regional artists, because nobody knew them, because there weren't the publications talking about them.

Rubens:

And the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art did have a formal relationship with the San Francisco Art Institute.

01-00:40:18  
Hopkins:

Well, they did have, but it was a very, very slim one. It was more philosophical than any realistic thing. But also, we can't forget, or shouldn't forget, the California School of Fine Arts—I'm sorry, California College of Arts and Crafts [California College of Arts] because that produced one of the mainstreams of California's contribution to the international art world, and that was the whole issue of clay and ceramics and what have you, under people like Peter Voulkos, for example, and others of that kind.

Rubens:

And Berkeley. What about UC Berkeley?

01-00:40:51

Hopkins:

Well, UC Berkeley was, for me, the painting that was produced there was more or less like the painting produced, let's say, at UCLA, cleaner, clearer, academic, you know, interesting ideas, theories, so forth and so on, but it didn't have the contemporary punch that was coming out of the Art Institute or California College of Arts and Crafts. Very few of the people who have become prominent in more recent years came out of Berkeley. This is not a negative, it's just the fact that it's an academic institution, is what it amounts to, yes.

Rubens:

Was Hans Hofmann still teaching there when—

01-00:41:29

Hopkins:

Well, Hans Hofmann did come there to teach, that's true.

Rubens:

When you were there?

01-00:41:33

Hopkins:

No, this was long before I was there, yes. But that was the connection between Peter Selz and Hans Hofmann, when Peter Selz became the director at the Berkeley [Art] Museum, he convinced the Hofmann estate that they should leave certain things there. And that's also the reason that Clyfford Still was interested in leaving things to us.

Rubens:

That was my next question, going to be about Selz. Would you have meetings with—Would there be a way in which the various schools and museums would talk with each other? There was the Oakland Museum [of California], that had been struggling for about ten years to get a California identity, specifically.

01-00:42:11

Hopkins:

That's correct, yes.

Rubens:

I'm just wondering, what was your connection to all of those?

01-00:42:18

Hopkins:

Well, certainly, there was a connection. More often than not, it was an informal connection, which means that I would go over there and give a talk, or somebody from there would come over and give a talk or something. Our main collaborative meetings, let's say with somebody like Peter Selz, was through the College Art Association, which is the group of university professors and university-related people, of which I was a member, he was a member, and we were good friends during that time. That was also a great meeting ground. Then from the museum side, AAMD, the Art Museum Directors Association, and then the much broader Association of Art Museums, which is history, science and art museums. And so meeting with those different groups over the years, being on panels, being on discussion groups and things, yes, we had pretty much good discourse, yes. We also tried, at a

time—and it was effective during the time that I was there, I felt—the Oakland Museum was committed absolutely to the art of California, from the earliest times up to the present, and was part of a larger institution. They were doing their thing without a great amount of money, but good people, and did good exhibitions and things of that kind.

My main pleasant conflict was with Ian White, who was the director of the de Young Museum at that time. They kept trying to encroach into the modern area. You know, in the twentieth century and twenty-first century. So I would get, not really upset, but it sounded upset [to] Ian. I said, “Look, if you can’t find something from cave painting through the nineteenth century that’s interesting enough to draw an audience, then I really feel sorry for you.” They stayed out of our hair at that time, but now the de Young is very competitive with the Modern, in terms of modern and contemporary.

Rubens: Just in terms of one more affiliation or meeting ground, where there is exchange, you mentioned to me that the director of the museum, of the modern art museum, and also the de Young, becomes a member in the Bohemian Club.

01-00:44:34

Hopkins: That’s correct, yes.

Rubens: Would you continue some of these conversations with Ian White at the Bohemian Club?

01-00:44:46

Hopkins: Well, no, I have to be honest and say I’m not sure that I ever ran into Ian at the Bohemian Club. Not to say he wasn’t a member or I was a member. The benefit of the Bohemian Club was simply the fact that one could go there, could take there somebody who was here from out of town or whatever it might be, have a very pleasant lunch; or at the end of a long day, you could go and sit in a nice leather chair and read the current *New Yorker* magazine and have a drink and have a bite to eat. Because of the reputation of the Bohemian Club, and the fact that it has U.S. presidents among its membership and all of those different things, it was a very prestigious thing. But it was a men’s club. I certainly enjoyed it. But it was not something you talked about very much, because after all, my life is a life that is supposed to be all inclusive, not *exclusive*.

01-00:46:06

[material deleted]

01-00:46:22

Hopkins:

So much of what I had to say relies heavily on networking and people that have been valuable and helpful along the line.

Rubens:

And we're going to point to, later on—I don't know if we'll even get to it today, but museums [have] become an industry, museums.

01-00:46:45

Hopkins:

It *is* an industry now, yes.

Rubens:

Having a building and a marketing system, a development plan. The scale at which things operated, after you left, it was dramatic.

01-00:47:00

Hopkins:

Yes, it was. I, of course, feel very fortunate that my career was one where I could still, on occasion, serve as a curator; actually do exhibitions. I could be an educator; I could travel with my people. The transition of a museum director becoming an administrator more than an art historian was well on its way. In fact, a number of institutions, like the Chicago Art Institute and others, tried to have two directors; one who was essentially administrative, and one who was this and that. I didn't ever have to deal with that, though it was a factor in—where bottom line became more important than the exhibitions that one was presenting. When we developed a powerful board, which we did in San Francisco, some of the leading business lights that were there, some of them very interested in the arts, some not that interested in the arts, but obviously, all in business, therefore, all interested in the bottom line. It made board meetings sometimes very tense, when you were saying, "Alright, we've got to do this, we've got to do this," or I would be saying that, from an art perspective, they'd be saying, "Yes, but can we afford it?"

Well, we did have, because of that board, we became much more effective in our fundraising activities. We became much more effective in doing exhibitions which, though no exhibition makes a profit, that at least paid their nut, in the process. We were able to send our exhibitions—which is a very important factor for the West Coast—send our exhibitions to the Whitney Museum or to the Chicago Art Institute or other museums around the country, and share costs, which made them possible. But on the other side, when you're talking about art as an industry, there's absolutely no question about the fact that in the seventies, eighties, nineties, and now it's reached the point of unbelievable whatever that might be. But if you think back in time when Alfred Barr, in the 1930s and the 1940s, did a catalogue that changed the art world, let's say on dada and surrealism, you look at that catalogue now, it's fifty pages long, the reproductions are black and white. Maybe one out of ten things is reproduced in the catalogue. And now, you have to produce a catalogue of 400 pages, full of color,

because everybody who lends a work of art wants their work in the catalogue, and they want it to be illustrated in color. And that becomes hideously expensive to produce. As the art market changes—I can remember when Norton Simon bought his Rembrandt painting for a million dollars, and everybody at Sotheby's that night stood up and applauded. A million dollars is nothing now. So all of this incredible increase in costs to run a museum, mainly to do changing exhibitions, just has forced it into a business environment, no question about it.

Rubens: So we'll unpack that in a minute, just a tiny bit more. But I want to speak about an exhibit of yours, "War Babies." [1961]

01-00:50:19

Hopkins: Heavens, that's going way back into my past, isn't it?

Rubens: It's going back in your past, but then what I want to link it to is one of the first exhibits you did do in San Francisco was an anti-war exhibit. I just want to get a little sense of the political sensibility. I want to flip the side, but tell us quickly about "War Babies."

01-00:50:37

Hopkins: Well, "War Babies" was an exhibition that—I had, for a short period of time, just a little bit less than a year, actually, a gallery on La Cienega Boulevard, just before I started working for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, while I was still a graduate student at UCLA. It was across the street from the famous Ferus Gallery.

Rubens: This was the Huysman [pronounced Heisman].

01-00:50:57

Hopkins: The Huysman Gallery, yes. Well, it was originally supposed to be Huysman [pronounced Huisman]—

Rubens: Huysman.

01-00:51:00

Hopkins: —after the nineteenth century Belgian surrealist writer/poet, but nobody ever called it that, so it was called Heisman.

Rubens: Because I asked Lynn Kienholz, "How do you pronounce it?"

01-00:51:09

Hopkins: Yes. Everybody says Heisman, that's right. But anyway, the principle at that time, Ferus was showing one generation of Los Angeles artists who were choosing to stay and live in Los Angeles, rather than going off to New York. It was a big point. My role was to take the second generation, which were artists like Ed Ruscha and Joe Goode and Larry Bell, and others that have come to national prominence, who were students at Chouinard at that time, and keep a second generation

at home. Essentially, that's what it amounted to. That was the principle. So we instituted an exhibition called "War Babies." They named the title, I think it was Joe Goode who actually thought of the name, because they were all born in about 1936. It happened that one of them was black, one was Asian, one was Catholic, and one was Jewish, in the exhibition. So Jerry McMillan, who was a good friend of theirs, and a very good photographer, did a poster which had an American flag draped over a table, the four of them sitting around the table, with crumbs on it, and each of them eating the cliché thing of their environment. So that Eddie Bereal, the black, was eating a watermelon; Joe Goode, the Catholic, was eating a mackerel; Ron Miyashiro, the Asian, was eating with chopsticks; and Larry Bell, being Jewish, was eating a bagel. And the poster, it's become now apocryphal; it's reproduced everywhere. Because at that time, the John Birch Society, this extreme right wing society, was in effect, and they sent death threats our way. And of course, the Left was very upset that we were using these cliché environments, what have you. But it was the first—excluding women, which is a terrible thing to say—but other than that, the fully integrated exhibition of recognizing that art was not just a white man's occupation.

Rubens: And you got a reputation. You had that sensibility.

01-00:52:23

Hopkins: Yes.

Rubens: So when you came to San Francisco, '73, '74, we're talking about the height of the antiwar movement.

01-00:53:31

Hopkins: Correct.

Rubens: There'd been a rise of identity politics.

01-00:53:35

Hopkins: Yes.

Rubens: Did you have a sense that you wanted to be able to act on—

01-00:53:43

Hopkins: Well, the vision was changing at that time, too. I think the answer to your question is that abstract expressionism, pure abstraction, nonobjective art, whatever you want to call it, had run its course. The heroes were there; they will always be recognized. But the whole sense of the art world was changing at that moment, because of the very events that you just mentioned. Many of the artists were, if not turning back to figuration, were making political statements. Many of those artists were Chicano or Black or Latino or whatever. There was

beginning to be a population factor in California; along, of course, with feminism, which was the biggest movement at that time. So we referred to it as the democratization of the art world, which it was, in the 1970s. That was a big transition factor. So that was simply a court, for lack anything else. But it also, of course, fit into my own personal sensibilities, so that was fine.

Rubens: Did you find San Francisco easy to work with in that way?

01-00:54:51

Hopkins: San Francisco, it's funny, because we talked about Grace McCann Morley perhaps being let go because she was a lesbian. San Francisco environment probably is one of the best in the country. I would also put Los Angeles in that mix. We don't ever think about censorship. There are exhibitions that are done that they *won't show* in Philadelphia, they won't show in Texas, they won't show in different places, because they are concerned about issues of sexuality or things of that kind. But as a general rule, San Francisco is open to new things. They're critical, but they're not going to get into issues of censorship and things.

Rubens: Not at the museum, anyway.

01-00:55:36

Hopkins: Not at the museum. Well, not in the museum, anyway. Yes. Exactly right.

Rubens: Yes. Nevertheless, the board remained pretty white male or upper social class. I meant to ask you this. This is going to segue. There was an artist on the board, and not particularly representative of California.

01-00:55:59

Hopkins: Frank Hamilton?

Rubens: Yes. You even mentioned that his partner was probably a better painter. But I could not find—I asked, and tried to look back. Was there a commitment on the part of Morley? When did it start, that an artist would serve on the board? Was it done elsewhere?

01-00:56:18

Hopkins: Well, it's always raised as an issue.

Rubens: I know MOCA later—

01-00:56:22

Hopkins: Yes, almost wherever you go, you get the idea that an artist should be represented on the board.

Rubens: Prior to this democratization.

01-00:56:29

Hopkins:

Yes, absolutely. And it's a terrible thing for an artist to be on the board, because that means that all the artists in the community that have a gripe go to that board member. Who has time to deal with that, when you're a practicing artist? It's just ridiculous, as far as that's concerned. Frank Hamilton and Mason Wells were not only artists, but they were members of the social set of San Francisco; they were, you know, well-to-do people, old family. So it was quite a different thing than, say, having—[pause] Well, I was going to say Joan Brown on the board, or Manuel Neri or somebody else of that kind. Because they could give, and they did. In fact, they donated wonderful things to the museum. But that was, to a certain extent, a factor. And the board, all the boards that I worked on, went through those things of the token Black or the token Latino, or the token women, in some cases. Though our board had a number of women. Good, strong working women. But it certainly was predominantly white, there's no question about that.

Rubens:

And moneyed, the old—

01-00:57:44

Hopkins:

Yes, and moneyed, absolutely.

Rubens:

Right. We've been speaking very generally. Do you think there is a disproportionate number of Jewish people who are interested in the arts?

01-00:58:06

Hopkins:

Well, that—that's a funny way of phrasing it.

Rubens:

Yes.

01-00:58:11

Hopkins:

No, I think that there is no question about the fact that the Jewish community has a number of people who are seriously interested and devoted to the arts. Everywhere.

Rubens:

Everywhere, yes. because everybody claims—

01-00:58:26

Hopkins:

I can specifically say that in Los Angeles, when Rick Brown came to be the director of LACMA, in about 1957, 1958, [he] appointed two or three Jews to the board. It's the first time in the history of the Los Angeles Museum that there had ever *been* a Jewish member of the board. Two or three of the old San Marino—old family whites, or Christians, or whatever you want to call them, WASPs, left the board, in irritation and frustration. So—

Rubens:

Whereas San Francisco has a long history of a kind of—

01-00:59:06

Hopkins:

Well, of course, the Haas family and everybody else. They have a different kind of sophistication, because in Los Angeles, a lot of it is new money. I would say that, certainly, a board of trustees anywhere these days that doesn't have one or more Jewish members—ridiculous to even think that. Now, when you say “disproportionate,” I would say that if you take the Jewish population as a whole, there are probably more people interested in art than there are in the WASP area. But that's history.

Rubens:

Yes, that's numbers.

01-00:59:49

Hopkins:

Yes.

Rubens:

Fisher and Gerson Bakar, two new members [were] on the board.

01-00:59:56

Hopkins:

That's correct, yes.

Rubens:

[Trefethen] was not—

01-00:60:00

Hopkins:

No, [Trefethen] wasn't Jewish, no. No. Well now, I have to be honest and say it's not something that—it's not even in my conscious mind. Toby Schreiber, certainly, because I knew his dad down here in L. A., who was one of the first Jewish members of the board of the Los Angeles Museum. And then Toby became a board member there in San Francisco. The Haas family itself, obviously, with Elise and Evie and everybody else that was involved. I have to be very careful when I say this; within the Jewish community, there are stricter reservations about who should and who shouldn't than there are between the WASP and the Jewish communities.

Rubens:

Okay.

01-00:60:47

Hopkins:

All right.

Rubens:

Kind of policing our own.

01-00:60:48

Hopkins:

Yes, right. Exactly right, yes.

[Begin Audio File 2 02-06-2007.mp3]

02-00:00:00

Rubens:

Van Deren Coke. Wonderful hire.

02-00:00:44

Hopkins: Yes.

Rubens: How did that come about?

02-00:00:46

Hopkins: That came about primarily because Van Deren Coke was a person that I had known from different times along the line. We had met and talked, and he was very closely tied in with the photo community nationally, what have you. He was in Arizona, I think, New Mexico, at the time. I was looking for a curator to replace John Humphrey, who had been the curator of photography for a long period of time. Now, the San Francisco Museum was one of the very few museums interested in collecting photography as art. Chicago Art Institute had a collection, MoMA had a collection, but that was about it. Since that time, of course, it's burgeoned all over everywhere. Somebody suggested the possibility of Van Deren Coke; I didn't think he would even be interested, but he came up, we interviewed, we chatted.

Rubens: Humphrey had left on his own?

02-00:01:50

Hopkins: Humphrey died.

Rubens: Died, yes, of course. Right.

02-00:01:51

Hopkins: Yes. Van came and we sat down and we talked, and I found out that his sensibilities were very much like my own. His ambition was to establish on the West Coast, a center for photography that would rival the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In other words, pure competition, you know. He began, right out of the basket, doing exhibitions, very good ones, that traveled to other places, and established the reputation of the museum as a major institution for the collection of photography and the other things of that kind. So it was very good. But yes, it was a very fortuitous hire, in that sense, because I didn't think for a minute he would be available. But because he was so anxious to have a platform, that he came and did that.

Rubens: I had read that you had learned photography during the war.

02-00:02:57

Hopkins: I was drafted in the Army during the Korean War. I was sent to Fort Lewis, Washington, where they did a number of this and that and tests and so forth and so on. They assigned me to the Signal Corps, which I thought, this is not a place for me, this is not even my interest, whatsoever. They assigned me to cryptography school, to become a code breaker. Then at a given moment, they cancelled the school. Alright, well, so here I was there, and a private, and with no anything

whatsoever. They called me and they said, “Hopkins,” they said, “They’ve cancelled cryptography school, so what do you want to do?” I said, “Well, what *can* I do?” And they said, “Well, you could be a pole lineman, you could be a clerk stenographer, you could be a this, that, a radio operator.” All of which just sounded horrible to me. And hanging on the wall in this office were photographs. I said, “Where do those come from?” And they said, “Well, that’s part of the Signal Corps.” I said, “Fine, I’ll be a photographer. Thank you very much.” So they sent me to photo school, and then, bless their heart, they sent me to Germany, rather than Korea. So I was two years in Munich, just outside Munich, and it was a wonderful part of my life, as a matter of fact.

Rubens: Good art education. I just didn’t know if you had a particular interest in photography.

02-00:04:14

Hopkins: Well, I then, of course, became knowledgeable. When I came back and finished my work at the Art Institute of Chicago and taught down in San Diego at Grossmont Union High School, I taught photography, along with design and art, as well. But it was not a compelling passion, as far as that was concerned. But at least it certainly made me conscious—I was very conscious of photography in the hands of artists like Man Ray, for example, and the whole photomontage movement in Germany in the twenties and the thirties. So photography was not an area of no interest, but it was not a primary—

Rubens: Well, would you have considered replacing Humphrey at any point?

02-00:04:58

Hopkins: Me? You mean as a person?

Rubens: Yes.

02-00:05:00

Hopkins: No.

Rubens: As a director. Would you have—I mean, Humphrey was—

02-00:05:03

Hopkins: Oh, you mean—

Rubens: —doing well enough as a—

02-00:05:06

Hopkins: You mean replacing *him*, you mean.

Rubens: Yes, as—

02-00:05:08

Hopkins:

Well, John was essentially an amateur. He just had a committed interest in photography and was there. I guess you'd say that's another thing about my personality. Some museum directors, when they go from one place to another, do a major makeover of the staff and change over. I've never done that. I get there, I meet the people, I work with the people, what have you. Then gradually, things change and people leave and new people come. But that's just not my thing, to can somebody when they're doing an adequate job.

Rubens:

I see. Okay. So fate took a—

02-00:05:43

Hopkins:

Took a hand? That's correct. Yes.

Rubens:

Van Deren then went on to Arizona.

02-00:05:50

Hopkins:

Arizona, right. He has now since passed away, unfortunately.

Rubens:

Now, there was a decision made to get rid of the nineteenth-century photography that SFMOMA had. I think the de Young bought it. Is that right?

02-00:06:07

Hopkins:

Well, that was—

Rubens:

Were you part of that? Was that—

02-00:06:10

Hopkins:

No, I was not part of that. But it's interesting that you say that.

Rubens:

Ok.

02-00:06:14

Hopkins:

Because we did have various discussions about roles of the museums. I've always felt it was important that each museum in its city have a designated area; and ours was the twentieth and twenty-first century. But we did put on loan at the [California Palace of the] Legion of Honor, the two or three paintings from the nineteenth century, a wonderful Monet, for example, and some other things that were there, because they sat better in relationship to their collection than they did ours.

Rubens:

Maybe that happened later.

02-00:06:52

Hopkins:

Well, it could've happened at that time, yes. It could've happened at that—

Rubens: You say in your oral history that you were lucky that you never had an exhibition committee that you had to deal with. But you did have an accessions committee you had to deal with.

02-00:07:10

Hopkins: I did, yes.

Rubens: What was the role, was there any relationship, not formally, I suppose, between the accessions committee and the Collectors Forum? Might it be that some of the members of the Collectors Forum would sit on the accessions committee?

02-00:07:26

Hopkins: I'll explain that as well as I can. When you go to a new job there are several things that come into conversation during the time you're being checked out. I made it as clear as I could make it, three different things. One, that I would not have an exhibition committee. The reason that I felt so strongly, and still feel very strongly about that, is that if I am at a meeting with my museum associates in New York, and they're talking about having an Ed Ruscha exhibition or something of that kind, if I don't say, "Yes, I want to do that!" at that moment, in that time, and I make a commitment to do it, I'm going to have a chance to do it. It gives you the freedom to act and get things going.

Accessions, because in fact, those become the property of the institution, as much as I would prefer not to have an accessions committee, it's inevitable that you do. The complexity of that is that as more people who are involved on the board become collectors, they are interested in your having in the collection works of art that they buy. That's, again, part of this shift in museums. But during that time, and through most of my career in San Francisco, the issues that would come up essentially were, "Is this important to the collection? How does it fit in?" And the big one, obviously, money to buy it. But I would say that it did impact the council, because when they put their money in at the beginning of the year, one of the ideas was to buy a piece of work out of this biennial exhibition that we did. So deciding which one to buy and what to buy and so on. But that generally went fairly smoothly. There were times when a trustee would stand up adamantly and say, "Why are you buying that terrible thing? Why do we want this?" It happened very frequently in photography, which a lot of the board members didn't understand, where Van would propose buying a photograph for \$10,000, and they just couldn't believe that that was, you know, money for value. But that's a normal process of working in a museum.

Rubens: Looking at the history of the accessions committee during your reign at SFMOMA, you asked for a six-month pause, in '78, to allow the

staff to really evaluate the collection and identify the priorities for acquisition.

02-00:10:13

Hopkins:

Right.

Rubens:

And there are some times when you say there were missed opportunities. So you come up with an assessment of what you thought were first rate, what areas it is that you needed to—

02-00:10:31

Hopkins:

Yes. I had a very—nothing is absolute, obviously, but I had a very specific collecting philosophy, which I don't think I truly shared with the board, in that sense. But it was to deal with artists like Clyfford Still and Guston and Rothko, others that had a West Coast—Pollock—West Coast heritage as much as we could, to bring them into the collection. Motherwell being another one of those, of the original New York School. Because that was an established international *pushover*, or what have you. Then I wanted to play off against that, to hit what I considered to be the three avenues of art: The expressionists, in terms of the Abstract Expressionists, New York School; then the purists, like artists like Joseph Albers—and we built a very wonderful collection of Joseph Albers while I was there; and then the third, which had some impact in California, was the whole area of assemblage. And that meant Joseph Cornell. So I was trying to visualize an audience coming to the museum and seeing that art wasn't this, and it wasn't this, and it wasn't this; it was each of these different things at different times, with different degrees of importance and pendulum swing and what have you. So that was my own philosophical thing. So to build in those areas, where it was possible, was what I like to do most.

Rubens:

How did you communicate this? I mean, would you have talks with them?

02-00:12:06

Hopkins:

Yes, as board meetings. We would talk at great length, and make a decision. We made a decision, for example, to pursue Motherwell. Then we did pursue Motherwell, and we went back and spent some time with him. Jerry Nordland [Editor's note: Nordland went by Jerry with a "J"], who was the director before I came there, had bought two or three Motherwells, as a matter of fact, but they were later ones, and we wanted to get some of the earlier things in the collection. It just didn't pan out. We lost interest, is what it amounted to.

Rubens:

When you say “we—”

02-00:12:37

Hopkins:

Well, myself and a couple of board members. I know Toby Schreiber went with me to see Motherwell one time, and we spent time there. It just didn't seem as important. Since we had the Stills, we had the Gustons, the other thing didn't seem that critical. By that time, the earlier things that Motherwell had become known for were so expensive and so difficult.

Rubens:

Yes. I see there were study sessions.

02-00:13:05

Hopkins:

Yes, correct.

Rubens:

What did that mean? Would you lead? Or would you have a curator?

02-00:13:11

Hopkins:

All of us would—depending on the curator or whatever else it was. We did have, also, two or three retreats, where we would spend three days talking about the museum, where it was going, how it was working. Those became more important, and to a certain extent more frequent, as we recognized the board [was] much more powerful; a lot of people in the community [were] very much involved in the museum; attendance [was] very good; people [were] responding to everything else, that we had to have more space. We had to expand, to compete with Los Angeles. Not necessarily New York, but Los Angeles. So as we began to discuss those things, whether it was going to be a new building or whether we'd stay in the old building, those were all very tense meetings, as a matter of fact.

Rubens:

Well, because you're anticipating the fiftieth anniversary in 1985.

02-00:14:10

Hopkins:

Yes.

Rubens:

We should just finish out that thread about that tenseness over the issue. Do you think that that came to dominate more, what was our space going to be, than what was our collection going to be?

02-00:14:26

Hopkins:

Well, no question, because when we had our fiftieth anniversary, the exhibition that we presented was our collection. I had intentionally not done exhibitions of just the collection. There were always parts of it up here, parts of it up there. But I knew that we had more than many people thought we did.

02-00:15:03

Rubens:

There was a new chair of accessions, Glenn Janss.

02-00:15:11

Hopkins:

Janss. Yes, right. What it really amounts to is the fact that as we came to the fiftieth anniversary and hung the exhibition, several things happened concurrently. I happened to be the president of the Art Museum Directors Association at that time. We met in San Francisco, which brought the leaders of 150 of the major museums to San Francisco at that moment in time. To see the collection. Everybody was absolutely flabbergasted, because of the Stills, because of the Gustons, because of all kinds of different things, and how it had grown. It was beautifully presented, there's no question about it. Many people on the board, more conservative members of the board at that time said, "We should have this up all the time." We shouldn't just put little bits and pieces up, we should have it up all the time. But obviously, a museum—A museum in this day and age lives on exhibitions. You don't draw enough audience to pay your rent by just simply showing the permanent collection. Unfortunately, that's true. Unless you're incredibly well endowed, which of course, we weren't.

Rubens:

You had quadrupled the contributions and the budget.

02-00:16:36

Hopkins:

That is correct. But even at that, you couldn't do it in the physical space, because it took the whole museum to show the collection in an intelligent way. So clearly, we had to have more space. We began then to look at different places in San Francisco, close by, where we could either store a lot of things and use storage space for exhibition space, or where we could just simply build a new building, or would we try to take over the old building? So this is where the conversation we had about Gerson [Bakar], for example, Gerson was charged with seeing if there was some way that we could get more space in the building. He worked very valiantly and worked very hard at it, and we ran into conflict with the War Memorial Board.

Rubens:

That was your fondest hope, to take over the whole building?

02-00:17:23

Hopkins:

My fondest hope was to stay right in that location. I liked the physical location. The neighborhood had changed because of us. And not just simply the fact that they had built a new symphony hall, which was a major factor, but the ballet was there, we knew the Asian Museum would come. Then over in the Civic Center court, we did exhibitions. Two or three very good restaurants had moved into the environment. So it just seemed to me the best thing we could possibly do. But it didn't happen. It also was at a moment in my life where I was thinking, "Alright, I've been here long enough; it's time for a change." So when I left, there was no issue, necessarily, of animosity, as nearly as I know.

Rubens:

"I decided to go"?

02-00:18:18

Hopkins: Yes.

Rubens: And you had this great opportunity to go to the Weisman—

02-00:18:21

Hopkins: The Weisman Foundation, yes, exactly.

Rubens: You stated you wanted to get back to your own art.

02-00:18:25

Hopkins: Yes, that's true.

Rubens: But perhaps you saw the writing on the wall, that there was a young generation of board members who were going to be more assertive?

02-00:18:33

Hopkins: Well, no question. And the fact that when I came to the museum, I'd made certain points. One point was that I would receive a letter from them saying that my appointment as director was a unanimous vote. Which they did. The longer you're there, year after year after year, it becomes less unanimous. You make dear, dear friends, and you make a certain amount of enemies. Other people, because they became more intelligent and more national and more international in their knowledge and their interest, began to see other museums that they thought perhaps they could emulate or whatever else it might be. So it was the ideal time to go on to do something else. Also the fact that if they were going to get into a new building situation, they needed to have somebody they hired, that full board at that time, that they hired, that they could say unanimously, all right, we support this person. Their decision was to bring in Jack Lane.

Rubens: We happened to be talking [before the interview] about the current exhibit at MOCA in Los Angeles, "Skin and Architecture." You commented that you thought it was too large, and I agreed with you. Could you say something about that? I mean, do you have a sense of what is a—

02-00:20:00

Hopkins: Perfect exhibition? [laughs]

Rubens: Yes, but also exhibition space. I mean why taking over the whole Veterans Building would've been adequate.

02-00:20:09

Hopkins: If we had the whole Veterans Building and had been able to remove or reconstruct or deconstruct the Herbst Theater, I think that would have given the physical space necessary to maintain the museum for an extended period of time.

Rubens: Do you think there's an ideal size?

02-00:20:33

Hopkins: When I go to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, I don't go to the museum, I go specifically to see this thing or this thing, or to look at this collection, or to study Greek and Roman art, or to look at the Etruscan things that I haven't seen for a while. But that's a massive general museum. I do think that in large part, curatorial aspects have changed, because almost everything that is produced has to have the illusory quality of being a blockbuster. So that you bring people in in great numbers, so you can pay for this horribly expensive exhibition. But I, from my own personal point of view, think that everybody would be better served if a carefully selected forty works by an artist were presented to you and you could spend the time looking at those forty works and make intelligent things about them, and then eight weeks later, look at another forty works by somebody else. That would be my ideal.

Rubens: During the seventies—I think later in the seventies, I don't have the date—the American Association of Museums did come out with some new guidelines about what they thought was—

02-00:21:57

Hopkins: An ideal? Yes. Well, we talk about that all the time. Or did talk about that all the time.

Rubens: Did you?

02-00:22:03

Hopkins: Yes. Because those were the issues. Being a museum director now is like being a football coach. You might be there three years, you might get canned, depending on how many you win and how many you lose and so forth. It's not the profession it was when I was in it. Loyalties get thrown out the window, in many different ways. So all of these issues become major issues in terms of how we proceed and how we manage the museums to fulfill the role of collecting, saving, and educating about works of art. That's our mandate. Has nothing to do with money.

Rubens: Did you architect it to have the Association of Museum Directors meet in San Francisco?

02-00:22:59

Hopkins: It was fortuitous. Much of my life has been serendipitous. But in this case, when you are the vice-president of the organization, usually the next year, you've moved up to be the president. I happened to be the vice-president in, whenever it was, 1984, and moved up to president in 1985. It was a fortuitous circumstance.

Rubens: You didn't anticipate it, or couldn't kind of—

02-00:23:32

Hopkins: No. But it was very good.

Rubens: Great. You specifically said in the oral history at UCLA that there were a few acquisitions that really you missed. Not you, but you could not get the committee to agree to. Could you speak to not who blocked it, but what would you have liked to have seen? What would you have liked to add to the collection?

02-00:23:58

Hopkins: It's a little more difficult for me to be specific at this moment. But there were times when they just felt, "Well, we can't spend that much money on this," or "We can't do this, or we can't do that," or something else. I had a very difficult time, for example, when we bought, I think it was seven Joseph Cornells, an amazing thing, for \$100,000. Well, \$100,000, in those days, was not peanuts in our acquisition fund. It was very difficult to get them to agree to that—they finally did—because many of them didn't know or didn't care for Joseph Cornell. But they did buy what I would finally say. You mentioned at one time in our conversation about the big Sam Francis, which Phyllis Wattis did pay for. But she never did like it, you know. I don't think they've ever shown it since the time that we had it up in the rotunda, where it looked extraordinary. It filled the whole wall of the rotunda, beautifully. So, you know, there are those disappointments. I think probably an early Motherwell was one, initially, that came into conversation, that didn't get purchased because of this or that. But I think that at that time, all things considered, they did a pretty good job of going along with the staff—myself, primarily, and George Neubert for a while, who was my curator; and Van, of course, in photography, yes.

Rubens: Alright, last area. The soapbox derby. Judy Chicago. This knotted bed sheet, that we talked about. These were all your initiatives, weren't they?

02-00:26:06

Hopkins: Soapbox derby was not my initiative. The person most active behind that is a woman named Margy Boyd. Margy Boyd was very prominent in the Women's Committee, which was a very strong part of the museum in the early days. In fact, I minimized that when I put in Collectors Forum, because I thought it had too much power, as a matter of fact, and it was too social. But nonetheless, they did things like Christmas decorations at the holidays to raise money for the museum, on a small scale. So it was actually Margy and a group of artists that suggested to me, came to my office, sat down and suggested the idea of doing this soapbox derby, which stunned me.

When I say stunned me, I'd come from Los Angeles and Texas, where I had built kind of a community of artists that I loved, and they liked me. But it was never like it was in San Francisco. In San Francisco, the artists—a large number of the artists in San Francisco are really very close cronies. They are supportive of things that go on there. They would support the museum. They would do silly things, you know, for the museum, to benefit it and give it weight, which I wasn't that much used to. And so I thought, "Well, this is an interesting idea."

We did it the first year [1975]. It was hugely successful. It was written up in *Sports Illustrated*, even. I think the first major art exhibition ever in *Sports Illustrated*. All the artists did these wonderful cars, without motors, to run down this hill, which they did. Everybody absolutely loved it. So we did it a second time [1978]. The first time, we had nearly an accident, where we nearly killed a reporter. Which was his fault, but that's beside the point. So I was a little leery about doing it a second time. The second time when we did it, these things began to appear with motors in them and everything else, and I thought, "No, we simply can't do that anymore. Maybe we'll do a regatta next time [laughs] or something else." But it was a huge success because it brought the artists together. The artists, first of all, did their cars. Other artists, who didn't do cars, did trophies, so that the most ridiculous, the most beautiful, the fastest, the slowest, would win a trophy made by other artists in the community. So it was a great bringing together. It was very helpful to me at that time, being quite new at the museum, to get to know all these people much better in a whole different context. It was very helpful to bringing the museum back into civic prominence. Nothing like that has ever happened since that time, to the best of my knowledge.

Rubens: Outside the walls of the museum and in the community. But the Judy Chicago?

02-00:29:13  
Hopkins:

Well, Judy Chicago, I have known Judy Chicago since the time she was a graduate student at UCLA. She was married, at that time, to another very good artist named Lloyd Hamrol. I was teaching in my extension classes at UCLA, and would see them at night over there. She was always a tough little feisty person, in terms of her art. The L.A. art scene at that time was, no question about it, totally male dominated. You know, a woman had a very hard role in the area at the time. But she fought that consistently. She became a good artist, she became recognized. She was in a number of good exhibitions. She wasn't set aside, like she would like to make you think she was; but nonetheless, she felt she was. She began this big project called *The Dinner Party*, and asked me to come to her Santa Monica studio and see it, which I did. I was absolutely knocked out. I could not believe

that here is this one person who was gathering all of these people together to work on this massive cooperative project dealing with thirty-nine place settings at a dinner party; 10,000 names on the floor, of other women; all these different aspects. And of course, feminism was a big thing, and she was one of the founders of that whole—she and Miriam Shapiro were essentially the founders of the Women’s House [Womanhouse, 1972] and all those things in California. So I said, “Okay, Judy,” I said, “When this gets to a point where it’s almost ready for presentation, I would like to show it at the museum.” We talked about what kind of space it would take. It worked beautifully in the rotunda. A lot of museums wouldn’t have the space to do that, but I honestly thought at that time that it may never come to fruition. It was just too expensive, too much, too complex. All of these different things. But by golly, she did it. So I worked with the Seattle [Art] Museum, and I worked with a museum in Rochester to show *The Dinner Party*.

Once it became known what this was, these plates that represented women, that had kind of vaginal forms on them, both Seattle and Rochester dropped out. So we did show it. I think at that moment, it was the biggest attendance we had ever had at the museum. Lines of people coming in every day. People very deeply involved in the arts, people involved in ceramics, people involved in fabric work and things, with the runners on the table, feminists. But there was a big male audience, as well. Events outside the museum of people protesting, and giving support, and it went on and on. It saved our budget that year, as a matter of fact. The attendance was such that we probably—We would’ve been behind that year. I must say with great pride, I never, ever didn’t make a budget. But that was—So we did it. Then it was talked about, it was badly criticized by the Los Angeles paper, badly criticized by the San Francisco paper. She really felt that she’d been thwarted in all these efforts. Then just slowly, it began to take on new steam, and was seen in Chicago, was seen in Houston, was seen in the Brooklyn Museum, was seen in New Zealand, was seen in Australia, was seen in London, was seen other places. And as it was shown, it gathered more steam, and women would dress up in the costumes of the women at the table, there would be all these events. So now it’s reached a point where, in fact, it will be permanently installed at the Brooklyn Museum, just this March coming up.

Rubens:

And you’ll go back for that?

02-00:33:13

Hopkins:

I will go back, yes. I have felt, you know, for a long time that if one wanted to point to one particular work of art—and that was always the big argument; is this a social statement, or is it a work of art?—that represented the kind of beginnings or maturity—beginning of the maturity of the feminist movement, that was it, you know. And now,

as it turns out, you can't open a general art history book, going all the way from cave painting to contemporary, that doesn't have *The Dinner Party* in it. So it's proven itself, and she's proven herself.

Rubens: Great story.

02-00:33:49

Hopkins: Yes, it is a great story.

Rubens: Clyfford Still. Was that your idea?

02-00:34:22

Hopkins: Well—

Rubens: We don't need you explaining how difficult it was.

02-00:34:27

Hopkins: Complex. Complex, if not difficult. Well—

Rubens: But just about how it came about.

02-00:34:32

Hopkins: Well, no, it's very specific. We were creeping up on the bicentennial year. 1976. I wanted to do two things that year. I wanted to do an exhibition of California modernism, which we did. I wanted to do a Clyfford Still exhibition, because he was still the hero in the minds of many of the artists in the Bay Area—and in Los Angeles. These were floating in my mind. By pure fluke—again, serendipity, circumstances—one of the guards came down one day and said, “There's a man up in the gallery who says he would like to talk to you. Do you mind, you know, going up and seeing him?” I went upstairs, and there was Clyfford Still. I had never met him before in my life. He was standing in front of the big Still painting that Hunk [Harry] and Moo [Mary Margaret] Anderson had given us. And just by miracle, it was up, which it could very well not have been. It was hung beautifully, lit beautifully. There he was, standing in front of it. We chatted for a little while and said it was nice to meet each other and blah-blah-blah. I said, “Well, Mr. Still, if you have a few minutes, come down to my office and have a cup of coffee. I'd like to talk to you about something.” Which gave me a chance to talk about an exhibition. We chatted for a while.

After we'd chatted for a while, he looked at me and said, “Hopkins,” which he always called me, said, “Hopkins,” he said, “I'm not interested in an exhibition. Not something I want to do. It's something I don't feel that needs to be done, but,” he said, “I have a thought in mind that maybe, because you have this one big painting, it might be nice if you had two or three others from a different period of time.”

Well, that's how it all began. And it ended up, what? Thirty-nine paintings, I think is what it was. We had to build a special gallery for it—which again, David Robinson did—so we could open and close doors and panels. It was very complex and very difficult, but it certainly was a pleasure, through the whole thing. Again, the board accepted all of that. It was one of the great moments. No question. But it was *his* idea. [laughs] The funniest thing about the whole thing, of course, is that I had thought, “Well, he said two or three.” I thought, “Maybe if we had one from kind of each period, like five, wouldn't that be nice?” So I went back to New Windsor and sat with him and Pat, and we talked about it. Then he'd come back and [say], “Well, I think probably thirteen would do it better, if we do [laughs] this and this.” It just kept growing and growing and growing. That was his way of being sure that he would not be forgotten.

Rubens: He had all these conditions.

02-00:37:46

Hopkins: Yes, exactly. Just the fact that he was there, and part of the permanent collection. He did it later with the Metropolitan Museum. Interestingly enough, I think back on that, because I forget what; I think one of his paintings sold the other day at auction for something like \$17 million, something like that. That's a gift. That was given to us. Thirty-seven paintings, at \$17 million apiece, you know. I don't think the board ever truly understood or appreciated that. Same with Philip Guston, God!

Rubens: How did the Guston come about?

02-00:38:19

Hopkins: Guston came about, actually, through Hunk Anderson. I had known Philip Guston for some time. They did a retrospective of his work at the Los Angeles County Museum, traveling from the Guggenheim. I installed the exhibition, and I got to know Philip at that time. He was a person of extraordinary memory and remembered me at different moments along the line. I had always admired him and his work, as he moved from figurative to nonfigurative and kind of back to figurative again. He was very much on my mind because of Californians that had reached international status. Hunk had gone back to his studio, had seen a painting that he very much liked. Philip had said something. He said, “Oh, yes,” he said, “Hopkins,” he said, “I remember him. Yes, he did my show in Los Angeles, and I really liked it.” He said, “Maybe we can talk about having an exhibition.” Hunk told me that and put me in contact again with Philip. Then I essentially curated that show. We had in our collection already, given to us by Betty Freeman, a painting called *White Painting* [*White Painting I*], which is one of the early abstractions. We had one other later Guston in the collection, as well.

He then gave us a dozen other pictures to make the history, which was incredible.

Rubens: Absolutely. You mentioned that—There were two wings in the sort of side galleries of the museum, and you always felt like the building was shifting to the left, as opposed to the right [Hopkins laughs] because one was attended and one was not.

02-00:40:14

Hopkins: Well, it's interesting you say that now, in context, because we had an exhibition of a well-known photographer. I'll say Cartier-Bresson; I don't remember who it was [Ansel Adams]. And we had that on one side of the building. And on the other side, we had a Robert Motherwell exhibition [1984]. One of the things that turned us off of Motherwell is the fact that the audience—On that side, you could float, and the audience on the Cartier-Bresson side was just weighing the building into the ground. Whenever there was a photography exhibition, whenever there was an exhibition of architecture, a whole different audience would turn up. A whole big, different audience. That was, again, one of the things that we developed with the board. They have not done as much with that, but we did, for example, a major Issey Miyake exhibition [1983], which was extraordinarily well received. A woman named Frances Bowes, who was very interested in that area, was on our board. It was a recognition on my part that art was many, many things other than paintings and sculpture. It was also photography, it was architecture, it was fashion, it was this, it was that.

Rubens: I think Bob Whyte talks about having an architectural series lectures.

02-00:41:40

Hopkins: That's correct. Yes, that is correct, we did that. Because we recognized that it brought not only more people, but brought a whole different group of people into the museum than normally would be there.

Rubens: Lawrence Halprin had an exhibit there, as well [1986].

02-00:41:54

Hopkins: Yes, he did. And Anna [Halprin] did a dance performance.

Rubens: The French knotted sheets story. We don't have her name, and we'll insert the—

02-00:42:07

Hopkins: Well, in a funny way, it's almost nicer that she remains anonymous. This is a thing that occasionally, the staff would get rather irritated with me about, is that somebody would come into my office and present an idea or what have you, and I'd be taken with it, and it would take not much space, and so I'd say, "Well, no reason not to go ahead

and do it. This person's been working very hard for all these years. They deserve a little bit of recognition," or whatever. This was one of those. And she came, and a friend, and presented this *wonderful* tapestry—bed sheet, as you're calling it—which was an amazing production, large in scale, maybe twelve feet across and eight feet long, something like that. I visualized the fact, that it would fit very nicely right outside the elevator walls; why not? So we did it.

Rubens: It hung a month, two months—

02-00:43:06

Hopkins: Well, our average show length was about eight weeks, yes, so that probably was there for eight weeks.

Rubens: I believe what I read about it—had been given a bed sheet by the WPA—

02-00:43:20

Hopkins: Very possible.

Rubens: And just started French knotting it, spent thirty years making this tapestry.

02-00:43:27

Hopkins: Well, there are those wonderful, wonderful stories. And fortunately, as I say, I can't speak for anybody else, but occasionally, you're touched by something like that, you know? And how can you ignore it?

Rubens: The M. I. X. program was also something that started under you.

02-00:43:44

Hopkins: It actually began a little before me. The key person in that was a curator named Rolando Castellón. The idea was to bring into the context, again, more Latino, Chicano works of art. He would occasionally come forth at our curatorial meetings and propose doing an idea, and he would do that. But it was organized before I came there. I think Sally Lilienthal would certainly have been involved in that, because Sally was—and I'm sorry I haven't mentioned her name—an extraordinary person who had a lot of social, you know, concerns and considerations.

Rubens: I think it was hooked up also with the Neighborhood Arts Program.

02-00:44:40

Hopkins: Yes, that's correct. Yes. It's all part of the City Arts Commission and things of that kind.

[material deleted]

02-00:45:05

Hopkins:

Well, [Castellón] became quite an interesting artist in his own right. He was the prime mover behind that.

Rubens:

But would we say that you never really experienced, you know, a revolution from outside. I mean, there was, it seemed to me, the Mexican Museum is getting generated; there's the mural—

02-00:45:33

Hopkins:

Project. Yes. Sure.

Rubens:

—the San Francisco muralists; there's the women's museum—not museum, it was called the women's—the women's house [Womanhouse] down there. There was a women's museum building. And so there is this splintering of the artistic communities—

02-00:45:47

Hopkins:

That was all transpiring, and part of this whole thing that we talked about before, the democratization of art, which was both a very positive thing, and in many minds, including my own from time to time, sometimes negative, in the general belief that it's like K to twelve education. You set these certain standards, and then the level all goes down to meet a lower standard, and then you hope that out of that big morass, something pops out that becomes extraordinary and carries you on to the next decade or whatever else it might be. That's exactly what that was about. It was a shifting—it was literally learning to see through new eyes. Because we'd been looking at white men's art for generations. Suddenly, here we are confronted by the art of women, we're confronted by the art of Latinos and Chicanos and African Americans and Asians, all coming from the different aesthetic heritage and background. So we had to do a lot of eye adjustment. Anybody who was seriously interested in looking at the art had to kind of see through different things. About the only way you could do that was to get some sense of it. But we were helpful in every instance, in trying to help to stimulate the Mexican Museum, to help to stimulate the women's museums. We always, either myself or somebody else at the museum, was always involved in those activities. There's nothing that was negative about it. It was desirable, in fact, if it could happen, so—

Rubens:

When you said earlier, though, “sometimes to the detriment of art,” is that what you meant, that—

02-00:47:34

Hopkins:

Well, I'm just talking about, again, which was the major shift from what we used to call fine art, then later was called high art; and then suddenly, museums started showing things that were not considered to be high art, but were low art, you know, and kitsch and all of those

different things that were there. So it was taking what had been this high idealistic power, essentially, and imploding it and things.

Rubens: Did we see that at the museum, under your tenure?

02-00:48:08

Hopkins: Well, you saw—

Rubens: Judy Chicago was accused of that?

02-00:48:11

Hopkins: Yes, well.

Rubens: But you're claiming, and I think rightly, that it was not kitsch or low or—

02-00:48:16

Hopkins: No. Well, no. Because what—you know, [chuckles] what is low becomes high; what is high becomes low, you know? It's all a difference of attitude. A lot of that, through that period of time, was influenced by the Vietnam War and all of the different issues, political and social issues that were going on. Artists became much more dedicated to presenting art to society that, in fact, dealt with these social and political issues, rather than the pure abstraction of the generation before that time. San Francisco, as much as anyone—perhaps more, as a matter of fact—because of its long history of labor movements and all of the different things that go with it, and its very mixed community, was probably more of the center of that, more a focal point of that, than other places, yes.

Rubens: But I don't see the museum being ripped apart by controversy.

02-00:49:09

Hopkins: Oh, no, no. There were times, obviously, when we were put in a situation where we had to defend our position. That's what should happen. But it was usually based on the fact that we, in the mind of some young artist, forgot to put them in an exhibition, and they got upset and would protest in front of the building. There were moments when the staff itself struck because they felt they needed more healthcare or something.

Rubens: Oh, that's right, that was the union.

02-00:49:42

Hopkins: Yes, right, exactly. But these are all San Francisco things. During the time that I was there, there were obviously highs and lows and minuses and plusses, like there are anywhere you might be. But I certainly never felt that the museum itself was in any way threatened by any of this activity.

Rubens: Part of your diversification of the board was to have L.A. people. You had Marcia Weisman and—

02-00:50:25

Hopkins: Well, not even just L.A. people, but Marcia Weisman certainly was a key factor. The fact that she had to come to San Francisco to see contemporary exhibitions is one of the things that led to MOCA in Southern California, because she didn't like to keep coming to San Francisco all the time for these special shows, and wondered why they weren't getting to Los Angeles. It was a true factor in that. And Glenn Janss, who essentially was a Los Angeleno. I'd worked with her at the Los Angeles County Museum. But she was living in Sun Valley at that time. We also had Virginia Wright from Seattle.

Rubens: No one from Fort Worth?

02-00:51:19

Hopkins: No one from Forth Worth, no. It was mainly West Coast. The idea was to expand our web, up and down the coast, to broaden our base and broaden our other interests.

Rubens: So it wouldn't be that someone would come from New York?

02-00:51:33

Hopkins: No.

Rubens: We need to end with the story about you inviting the editor of *ArtNews* to come to San Francisco.

02-00:51:41

Hopkins: Well, it wasn't the editor of *ArtNews*, it was the editor of *Art in America*. We were doing a series of panels. Again, it's exactly what we're talking about. It was expanding our web, is really what it amounted to, and making people conscious of us more in other places. Elizabeth Baker, Betsy Baker, was the head of *Art in America* for a long, long period of time. We invited her to come and be on a panel, and I realized that, in fact, she had never been on the West Coast. Here is one of the major art publications, the key honcho in that publication, that had never been to the West Coast. And this was in probably the 1980s, as a matter of fact. Unbelievable.

Rubens: Unbelievable. How did you, by the time you left, peg yourself, or peg the museum, to what was going on throughout the nation?

02-00:52:40

Hopkins: Well, there's no question about the fact that it had raised its profile in a very significant kind of way. Not only from the standpoint of the exhibitions that were brought in and showed for the public in San Francisco, but the fact that we were actually originating shows and

sending them other places. Van Deren Coke's photography shows were going everywhere. We had raised our profile to a point where Los Angeles felt they had to respond by doing MOCA. It is really literally true, that's a true factual situation, where I sat with Marcia Weisman at a dinner one night, with the artist Ed Moses and some other people, and she was talking about getting something started in Los Angeles. I said, "Look, Marcia, all you have to do is commit your collection and it'll get going." So we helped on that, and it's good. We can never be the Museum of Modern Art because we don't have the historical collection; that's just not possible. But my ambition was, and the ambition still here now, with museums like the Hammer Museum and MOCA, is that all new art becomes old at a given moment in time. If we can be astute in our collecting and exhibitions and things over the next fifty years, suddenly, it's old art and new art, so we can compete, and we are competing. The thing that, to me, is exciting about what's happened in California in general, but I'll just say specifically Los Angeles in this moment, almost everything we're talking about has happened since 1965. That's when the Los Angeles County Museum [of Art] was built. And think what's happened: the new museum in San Francisco, the new de Young Museum in San Francisco, the Getty Museum here, the Norton Simon Museum here, the MOCA here.

Rubens: MOCA opened when?

02-00:54:41

Hopkins: Well, roughly 1986, '87, '88, in that period of time, yes, right [1979].

Rubens: San Francisco, would we say it was the second modern museum of art in the country?

02-00:54:56

Hopkins: Well, it was the third in the world, is what it was.

Rubens: Third in the world.

02-00:55:00

Hopkins: There's one in Poland that was before, even the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where the Red Army would come down to the train station and plant a flag and declare it to be a museum of modern art. It was in Krakow, Poland, as a matter of fact.

Rubens: I don't even mean historically, I meant as important. It was an important museum.

02-00:55:18

Hopkins: It reached a point where, when I left, Jack Lane was appointed to be the director; but one of the people who was interviewed and rejected

was Tom Krens, the person who has taken the Guggenheim off on this international adventure. Jack Lane had come from the Carnegie Museum, which—you know, one of the great old East Coast institutions, with a major biennial. So yes, we'd reached a new plateau. A nice plateau, yes.

**Interview #2: April 10, 2007—San Francisco**

[Begin Audio File 3 04-10-2007.mp3]

03-00:00:27

Rubens: We're going to pick up from some of the things we talked about when I was with you in L.A. When I saw you, you were anticipating, and subsequently have gone to Brooklyn to see the Judy Chicago *The Dinner Party* installed permanently. That must've been quite a thrill for you.

03-00:01:21

Hopkins: It was exciting, as a matter of fact, and of course, it was exciting for Judy. They've done a beautiful job of presentation, installation. Because as you know, Mrs. Sackler has opened a whole feminist area in the Brooklyn Museum, of which the Judy Chicago piece is just one part. A big part, and it will be there permanently, and the rest of it will be changing exhibitions over time, but dedicated, committed to the ideas of feminist art. So to have *The Dinner Party* there as a ballast for the whole thing was great. Great turnout. I would say there were many thousands of people there that night. They had a dinner party for 300 of us in a big room in the museum, and they set it all up just like the *The Dinner Party*, a triangulated table, and we all sat around the edges. So it was good fun.

Rubens: Did people wear a name tag?

03-00:02:20

Hopkins: Well, there were a lot of name tags, of course.

Rubens: Well, I meant did each person assume an identity?

03-00:02:24

Hopkins: No. They did that on occasion, when it traveled, I know, to New Zealand and other places; women would dress up as these people at the plate. But no, that was not the case. It was just a nice gregarious crowd, as a matter of fact. Because as you know, *The Dinner Party*, from the first time it was shown here at the San Francisco Museum, was a very controversial piece. Some people loved it, obviously, and some people hated it. But as time has gone by now, it has gathered this kind of feeling or sensibility, that even the reviews in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, where it used to be very negative about it—even *Time* magazine, for example—very flattering reviews of the piece, and recognizing that it is undoubtedly the kind of key feminist piece of the seventies, that will remain permanently as an icon for that idea.

Rubens: Did you speak?

03-00:03:20

Hopkins:

I spoke the morning after, with a group of about a hundred people that worked on the project and others along the line, a number of whom I'd met over time. But they were very flattering; they gave me a standing ovation and clapped. But Judy's always very nicely referred to me as the Father of *The Dinner Party*. So that was [laughs] very nice. And I said, "*Through the Flower*, Judy; I've always known you since you were a bud, but a bud with thorns." [laughs]

Rubens:

By the way, one thing I had neglected to ask you when we talked about how you had gone down to her studio and seen it and then arranged for it, was she teaching at the time at UCLA?

03-00:04:09

Hopkins:

She was not.

Rubens:

I didn't think so.

03-00:04:10

Hopkins:

No. She taught at CalArts, and she taught in the Women's Center. She also taught in Fresno, but that would've been about the time of her CalArts teaching, as a matter of fact, but she never taught at UCLA. She was a student there. She got her MA degree there.

Rubens:

I thought I saw her picture at UCLA recently. Did she teach recently at UCLA?

03-00:04:41

Hopkins:

No, no. She may have come and lectured.

Rubens:

And does she have a husband who teaches at UCLA?

03-00:04:48

Hopkins:

No. She was married to an artist named Lloyd Hamrol. And Lloyd Hamrol was a graduate student when she was, and that's when they married. They were married for, oh, quite a long time; I'll say twelve, fifteen years. She's now remarried, but Lloyd is out of the picture, certainly.

Rubens:

When I was doing background research regarding your tenure here, and we did talk about the Sam Francis mural installation [Editor's note: the commission was not a mural but a five-panel painting] and that you had commissioned him. To your knowledge, was he ill at the time? Or was he ever in an iron lung?

03-00:05:49

Hopkins:

Well, that was much earlier on in his career. He was in the service; he was a flier. He was not, I don't think, wounded, but he had this pleurisy condition, which was very severe. They put him in the

hospital, veteran's hospital here in San Francisco. He was born in San Mateo, just down the road—Palo Alto, I guess. And he was in an iron lung. That's when he began to paint. He submitted a painting to the San Francisco juried exhibition, which happened every year. This is back in Grace McCann Morley's days. And he was given a prize. There's a picture of him somewhere in the old *Chronicle*, of him in an iron lung, with the picture being held by Grace. His teacher was David Park. David Park would go to the veteran's hospital and teach on occasion. So that's how that all began. But later, when we commissioned the piece here, yes, he was in the beginnings of what would've been the cancer that killed him, as a matter of fact. But he was such a—what do I want to say?—he was such a believer in new medicine, new wave medicine and things, that he would go to Mexico or he would do this or do that, not pay attention to serious MDs, as such. And it flamed up, and he then died. But when he did the commission for us, it was for me. Phyllis Wattis did pay for that. I think it was \$100,000, if I'm not wrong. It was kind of a bringing things around into a full circle, because of this first little painting that he had won a prize for, way back in the forties.

Rubens: And the commission—I can look up the date; I don't have it right here [1985-86]—was it for a special occasion, or it was to—

03-00:08:04

Hopkins: Well, it was around the time of the fiftieth anniversary. So about 1985.

Rubens: And it was for the rotunda. Had the museum acquired other Sam Francis's before?

03-00:08:19

Hopkins: It had other Francis's. Sam, in fact, gave the museum some paintings. I know there's a wonderful Joan Mitchell that's up right now, as a matter of fact, that he gave to us at that time, when I was director. But we did not have a lot of Sam Francis, and it was important that we have him because he was a local hero, like many other artists at that time.

Rubens: Was there any controversy over his selection? I don't mean publicly, I meant within the board or—

03-00:08:49

Hopkins: You mean about having that?

Rubens: About you choosing him and—

03-00:08:51

Hopkins: Well, I think a number of people did not particularly care for it. It's a giant painting, and it is a very good one. I don't know whether it's ever

been up in this museum or not, because it was made specifically for that area in the rotunda. I don't even know where it would necessarily fit here. But of his late paintings, it was really quite an extraordinary work. It looked beautiful in the rotunda. It looked great.

Rubens: Its subject was?

03-00:09:19

Hopkins: Its subject was typical Sam Francis—colors, basic red, yellow, blue, greens, what have you, spattered and poured and thrown. But Sam was always a controversial figure. Many people liked his work; many people didn't like his work. It's still the same, as a matter of fact, even after his death.

Rubens: Oh, really? When did he die? [1994]

03-00:09:47

Hopkins: He's highly regarded, highly respected, and in many, many major collections, and in most major museum collections. The work was so beautiful that a lot of people thought of it as being decorative, and therefore not having enough pizzazz or something. Silly, but that's what it was.

Rubens: Would this be used against you later by trustees or—

03-00:10:11

Hopkins: No. Not to the best of my knowledge. Could've been, but not to the best of my knowledge.

Rubens: We said that we would talk about a couple of collections and artists, and you wanted to talk about Joseph Cornell.

03-00:10:26

Hopkins: Well, yes, Joseph Cornell, there was a situation where I was trying, at that time, in building the collection—We had worked the Clyfford Still gift. We had worked out the Josef Albers gift. So I said, "Okay, we've got Clyfford Still over here, with a big body of his work. Okay. We have Josef Albers over here, with a reasonable body of his work. The two extremes of the poll, the expressionist stream and the intellectual stream. Another area of great importance, in California, in particular, was this whole movement called assemblage, which had to do with artists like Edward Kienholz in the south and Bruce Conner up here, north, and others. The key perpetrator of all of that was Joseph Cornell. He was the little box maker before the rest of them ever came along. We did not have any Cornell. So fortunately, I had an association with a man named James Corcoran, who was handling the estate, and I was able to purchase five of them, including two extraordinary ones that

are on view right now. I think—I can't remember now, but—the price was \$100,000, something like that.

Rubens: What would they be worth today?

03-00:11:50

Hopkins: Well, a lot more. [laughs] A lot more.

Rubens: Cornell was dead at the time?

03-00:11:54

Hopkins: Cornell was dead at that time, yes. He had not been dead too long [d. 1972], but this group had become the purveyors of the estate.

Rubens: James Corcoran.

03-00:12:08

Hopkins: Corcoran, he was a dealer in Los Angeles.

Rubens: You had known him from your L.A. days?

03-00:12:12

Hopkins: I'd known him from there and here, and still do.

Rubens: Was it much of a sell to the trustees, to the acquisition—

03-00:12:23

Hopkins: Well, actually, by that time, it wasn't. When I bought a Cornell—a *beautiful* Cornell, one of the very best Cornells—for the Fort Worth Museum, when I first went there in 1968, and paid \$15,000, they were very upset that one would spend that kind of money on this funny little thing. Well now, it's one of the major objects, obviously, in the collection. It's a beautiful piece. But by the time that we had done the purchases here, Cornell had elevated considerably, in terms of his national reputation. So that was a fairly easy sell, as a matter of fact. Especially since there were so many, for such a small price.

Rubens: I don't think we did talk about the Albers, so maybe we ought to. But you're saying on the one hand, you're putting Clyfford Still in which camp?

03-00:13:25

Hopkins: Well, he's obviously the expressionist camp. The big sloppy painter camp, for lack of another word; and Josef Albers into the kind of purely intellectual color camp; and Cornell in the assemblage camp. So that a young person coming to the museum, not broadly educated in the arts, could see that there are these extremes—kind of variations, I guess you'd say—all of which are art, all of which are acceptable, all of which are wonderful, but in fact, very different from one another.

But the Albers situation was one—When I first came here, there were two Albers in the collection; one early one, and another one. I had struck up a friendship with Albers. I'd written about him quite a bit, and we, in fact, were friends, up to a certain point. And then—Well, I'll just tell you the story, just very quickly. Again in Fort Worth, when I was there—and one of the mistakes of my career—I wrote to him, after becoming a very good friend of his, very close; I would go visit him at Yale, and we'd chat in the house, he and Anni, and so forth and so on. But I wrote to him and said, "Now I'm in Fort Worth, and I'm trying to work on building the collection. I have just bought a Clyfford Still painting and I've just bought a Mark Rothko painting, I would love to have an Albers in the collection. I believe it's important, with your work, to have more than one. If we bought one, would you be at all interested in perhaps giving us a second one?" He never spoke to me the rest of his life. Because I had bought a Clyfford Still before I bought an Albers. [laughs] So that was very simple. But then Anni Albers remained a good friend. When Josef died, then she gave the gift here, of eight more Albers paintings. So I was most appreciative of that.

Rubens: Did you initiate that, in the sense of—

03-00:15:27

Hopkins: Yes, certainly.

Rubens: He dies, you say, "I'm sorry"?

03-00:15:31

Hopkins: Well, no, I tried to keep in touch with him through Anni, over that period of time. But you know, he was a wonderful Germanic type; unrelenting in his belief that he was the only artist living in the world.

Rubens: And was Anni a painter herself?

03-00:15:50

Hopkins: Anni was a painter, and a very good painter, also a fabric designer. Came out of the Bauhaus, just like Josef, and has always held a reasonable reputation. You know, you can find her paintings on the market occasionally now. Not as valuable as Josef's, but they're very nice paintings. She also worked in weaving. In fabric and things.

Rubens: So you kept in touch with her. And then, would you attend his funeral, for instance?

03-00:16:20

Hopkins: No. I did not attend his funeral, no. There was no fuss about that at all.

Rubens: And then how much after his death, when the paintings arrived?

03-00:16:29

Hopkins:

I would say within probably four years after his death. Once they got the foundation set up and ready to go.

Rubens:

So they came while you were here?

03-00:16:41

Hopkins:

Oh, yes, they did. I would say it was 1982, probably, something like that. Eight paintings. All the same size, twenty-four by twenty-four inches.

Rubens:

So you have the Albers, you have the Clyfford Still, and then you do the Cornell.

03-00:17:04

Hopkins:

So that was one aspect. Just this kind of thing of, again, a broad, simple, educated possibility. Then the other thing—and we've mentioned this, I think, in my conversation—was that trying to create as much as I could of artists who lived and worked on the West Coast who were always called New York abstract artists. Of which there was Jackson Pollock. We had, of course, the great early Pollock [*Guardians of the Secret* (1943)], and you couldn't possibly buy another one. They didn't exist, and they were too expensive. But we had the great one in the collection. Philip Guston. He and Pollock were students together in Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. Robert Motherwell, who lived in Washington state and San Francisco. Mark Rothko, who lived in Oregon. So here are all these people that essentially were New York school people, but really on the West Coast. So we tried to build that area. It worked out beautifully with Philip; not so well with Motherwell. But one of the people who was most dedicated to Motherwell was Jerry Nordland, the director before me, as a matter of fact.

Rubens:

You also told me the story about Rothko—what happened? A couple less than was promised?

03-00:18:32

Hopkins:

Again, it's a foundation story. We had very good associations, and it seemed like they were going to give us quite an important gift. We brought several works out—I'll say ten—and hung them in the little gallery of the estate. Then one of the part-time guards did some graffiti on the bottom of one of them, and it became a newspaper article and a story. The foundation was upset. So they weren't as generous. But nonetheless, we have good Rothkos now here at the museum.

Rubens:

Then you wanted to talk also about Klee, the Klee gift.

03-00:19:13

Hopkins:

Carl Djerassi—who I met, I would say, probably in about 1980, roughly, that period of time—his daughter had committed suicide, and he was starting a foundation in her name, which still exists, mainly for sculpture, because she was a sculptress. Students come and work there. They are kept and paid a little bit, and their food is taken care of, and their housing is taken care of, and they have nice studio space in which to work.

Rubens:

Where was this, literally?

03-00:19:53

Hopkins:

It's right here, just south of South San Francisco, further down. A great location. But he also became, at some point in his life, addicted to Paul Klee. He just really liked Paul Klee and started to purchase. This is when I got to know him, and we were chatting about it. I was down one weekend, and we were talking about his collection. It grew into a conversation of their being here. In the old museum, we had a room—I'll say a small gallery, maybe twenty-by-fifteen feet, something like that, not much larger, but a very pleasant space. The agreement was that if we would use that as a study center for Paul Klee, that he would be interested in giving his things there. I noticed today, in fact, that there's a gallery almost the same size. Not only are the Djerassi Klees—some of the Djerassi Klees, because he has many of them, and it still is a long term loan—but also, you know, drawings by Mondrian, drawings by other people. Kind of a study center. That's what he wanted, so it's great. It's worked out very well.

Rubens:

Now, was there a significant Klee donation when you were director?

03-00:21:11

Hopkins:

I think the Klees from Carl Djerassi are still listed as a loan, but they are an absolute promised gift to the museum. That happened during my time.

Rubens:

When you say, "I went down there," where did he live?

03-00:21:28

Hopkins:

He lived right on this same ranch area, south of San Francisco.

Rubens:

That suggests to move to another topic—I don't know if we actually talked about specific board members you worked with. And I'm not asking you to say strengths and weaknesses. [Hopkins laughs]

03-00:21:54

Hopkins:

Not unless you ask them about me. [laughs]

Rubens:

I have a list of the board members, but maybe—

03-00:22:00

Hopkins: I certainly cannot remember them all.

Rubens: Yes, well, they were big boards.

03-00:22:06

Hopkins: I didn't have close associations with some of them. Probably, my favorite, I guess you'd have to say, of all of them was a man named Gene Trefethen, Eugene Trefethen, who was an old Kaiser head, as a matter of fact. Evie Haas and some other people who were on our board convinced him to become a board member for us

Rubens: Did you convince him to come on?

03-00:22:37

Hopkins: No, they convinced him to come on. I thought this would be wonderful. They convinced him to come on. And there was something—I'm not going to even remember what it was. But something was going on in Kaiser, some question about funding. Is he the right person? Well, he turned out to be brilliant, obviously.

Rubens: What was so good about him?

03-00:22:56

Hopkins: He was a great fundraiser and had great contacts with a lot of funding agencies. He and I would get on the plane and fly to Minneapolis and convince people to give us money. So it didn't all come from here, you know, another thing.

Rubens: Well, say that. What's in Minneapolis?

03-00:23:13

Hopkins: Well, I'm not sure I remember.

Rubens: He had contacts.

03-00:23:16

Hopkins: He had contacts, right. We had very successful fundraisers. So that was very good. And obviously, the Haas family connection. Elise was on the board. You know, the grande dame, wonderful person. And then Evie, and others of the family have been on the board. And Evie was board president during the eighties, around the time that I left. Byron Meyer, who was a very open collector in the area, very nice person. Frank Hamilton, who was essentially the artist representative on our board.

Rubens: Nobody has been able to find when it was specified there should be an artist on the board. I asked you your opinion about what you—

03-00:24:05

Hopkins: It would've been before my time.

Rubens: Yes, it's true, because he inherited—

03-00:24:08

Hopkins: But he somehow, instead of it's being rotating, which if you're going to do it at all, it should be rotating. He was just simply there year after year. David Robinson, the architect who did a lot of the work in the old museum, was on the board, and a major collector in the area. He now, unfortunately, is suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease, which is too bad.

Rubens: Did he specialize in a certain kind of collection?

03-00:24:36

Hopkins: Mainly California. Mainly even, in fact, San Francisco, but a few other things. And of course, then—Heavens, how can I forget René de Rosa, with his great collection of San Francisco artists and great commitment to the artists of the area. Now he has his own foundation, out toward Napa. Gerson Bakar, a very solid board member, worked very hard for the group. Actually tried to gain possession of the old San Francisco Museum space. It didn't work, but he was good about that.

Rubens: He shared that commitment you had to try and stay there.

03-00:25:19

Hopkins: And then Gay Bradley, just a wonderful person. Not terribly committed to the arts, but just a very solid, good person.

Rubens: What was her background?

03-00:25:38

Hopkins: Well, her background was really just brightness and being a part of the old San Francisco history, the families. She was just a good person. Mary Keesling.

Rubens: Who just died last year.

03-00:25:53

Hopkins: Oh, is that true? Oh, my.

Rubens: Yes, she did. Right before we were set to interview her.

03-00:25:58

Hopkins: Oh, my. Well, Mary was a very complex person. I felt—and I'm sure that other directors will say the same thing—that she would've loved to have been the director of the museum. Or a curator. She was helpful, she was supportive, gave interesting gatherings and parties, knew a lot

of the artists, was very close to a lot of the artists; but was a—what do you want to say? Micromanager, I guess you'd say, something of that kind. And then, other people like Charles Schwab and Brooks Walker. I'm going to forget a number of them.

Rubens: Did Fisher come on?

03-00:26:47

Hopkins:

Yes, Don Fisher, of course, from the Gap. A lot of new money power, actually, that came on the board during the time that I was here. Certainly, they were responsible for putting together the package that eventually merged into the new museum. But they were also, as big boards are now—When you have a board of forty people, it's very difficult for a director to deal with all of those people and keep personal relationships. You're bound to offend some; you're bound to have some that adore you. We also expanded the board to bring in people from out of the city. We brought in Gini Wright, Virginia Wright from Seattle, a major, major collector in that area, a great person.

Rubens: Did she have a specialty that she collected?

03-00:27:47

Hopkins:

Modern. Well, contemporary. And a good collection. Glenn Janss, who was essentially from Los Angeles, but lived in Sun Valley, in that area. Marcia Weisman, from Southern California. And Bob Rowan, for a period of time, from Southern California was on the board. So it was big, cumbersome, complex. Arguments and so forth and so on. But in general, it was, for museum boards of that kind, it was okay. Finally, they realized that we had reached the point that either we had to take over the whole old San Francisco museum building—which I was in favor of, and I made no bones about that—or build a new structure. So that's when I decided to go to Los Angeles. You were asking me about that before. I know it's a terrible thing to say in San Francisco, but I've always had a personal affinity for Southern California. A lot of things were going on at that moment. They were opening the MOCA, the new Museum of Contemporary Art. I was asked to head the Fred Weisman Foundation, who was interested in building a museum at that time.

Rubens: Just say one sentence about Fred Weisman.

03-00:29:11

Hopkins:

Fred Weisman was essentially—Well, his money came from Toyota. He was one of the first people to be involved in selling Toyotas in the United States, and he became a big distributor, and he became very, very wealthy because of it. He was deeply committed to buying modern and contemporary art. I'll say modern starting with Pollock

and Kline and de Kooning, people like that, and on up to Lichtenstein and Warhol. One of the most important collectors in that area, and he had a foundation. That was the foundation that I headed. We circulated his exhibitions around the world and did a variety of other things. Then he died.

Rubens: Well, maybe we'll pick up a little what you did after that, too. The narrowest short version of this, Marcia Weisman, when she was on the board, were they already divorced?

03-00:30:08

Hopkins: They were divorced at that time.

Rubens: Her main focus in L.A. was MOCA? She had her own collection.

03-00:30:19

Hopkins: She had her own collection. She and Fred split their collections. They actually flipped a coin. They both had marvelous, marvelous collections. He continued to collect, Marcia not so much. She was on our board here. She was controversial because she was a very noisy, wonderful noisy lady, and she was pushing the L.A. button, whatever; and that would offend certain people in San Francisco. But she, in my mind, was the primary mover behind MOCA; that she, and her ideas and her thoughts, are the things that kept pressing, that because we, here in San Francisco, at SFMOMA, were becoming so active, we were getting all of the best exhibitions, not only that we were originating here, but that we were borrowing—the Jasper Johns exhibition [1978], the Rauschenberg exhibition [1977 and 1986], all of those different things—that people in Los Angeles were getting really very upset that everybody had come up here to see something, because the board at LACMA, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, had become very conservative. She started pushing, actually, at the time that she was on our board here, for MOCA in Southern California. It eventually happened, and she herself, as I say, as far as I'm concerned, she was the most important earth-mover in that.

Rubens: And we got to talking about Marcia because you brought her on as a board [member]; and of course, then you go to the Weisman Foundation when you leave. But when you were talking about the four people that you brought on who were not from San Francisco, did you ever consider someone from the East Coast?

03-00:32:11

Hopkins: Well, no, really, we didn't. It's interesting you say that. There's no reason why that couldn't have happened. Probably, that had a lot to do with my own personality. I think I told you that way back years ago, I was offered the position of being head of education at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I made a decision not to go. I said, "My life

is going to be in the West.” Whatever that is. I feel very strongly about that, because we’ve been battling for our position. In many ways, we’ve won our position now, and that’s great.

Rubens: Why do you say that, “In many ways, we’ve won”?

03-00:32:51

Hopkins: I just think that if you look at the current situation in the country, New York is clearly still the mercantile center. It still is the publishing center. Though now we have emails and everything under the sun, bloggers and what have you. It has some wonderful museums, much, much older than the West Coast museums, and larger collections. But it’s just generally agreed now that, especially in Southern California, that the most important younger artists are coming out of California. So in a way, we’ve become more the creative center, while they’ve become the mercantile center.

Rubens: Name a couple of the names.

03-00:33:33

Hopkins: You mean of artists of importance? Chris Burden, Charlie Ray, Larry Pittman; of the older generation, Robert Irwin, Ed Moses, Sam Francis.

Rubens: So having said that, I want to remind you that we did talk about last time, that you brought the critic from *Art in America*, isn’t that right, who had never been to San Francisco.

03-00:34:05

Hopkins: Yes. Who had never been to the West Coast.

Rubens: Who had never been to the West Coast, that’s right. And of course, with the fiftieth, I tried to ask you how much you architected it, but you said this—

03-00:34:19

Hopkins: The fiftieth anniversary?

Rubens: That the national convention of the museum director’s association [be] in San Francisco at that time. You said you didn’t.

03-00:34:29

Hopkins: Actually, I didn’t. Within that group of the Association of Art Museum Directors, which essentially, membership is made up of the 150 most important museums in the country. It’s a tremendously valuable source for any museum director to have that interaction, new exhibitions that are coming up, things that are happening. We meet in different cities all the way around the country. It’s a collegial phenomenon. Happily, I was respected in that organization. I was due to become the president of that, and their system was always that you would be vice-president

one year, or whatever it was called, and then you become the president the next year. So that was ordained. So I suggested that they come to San Francisco, because that was the case. And they did come. So it was very nice. It happened to be our fiftieth anniversary, so it's very fortunate. We had a good time. People still, in the museum profession, talk about that gathering. Always, when we get together on the first night, it's a black tie affair. The museum directors have a black tie affair, and they're entertained by the host institution. We had fifty gay tap dancers that night. [laughs] And they still remember that as a highlight of the museum life.

Rubens: That was at—

03-00:36:08

Hopkins: Here, right here in the rotunda of the old museum.

Rubens: Of the old museum. A lot of the artists who came out of L.A., and of course, many up here, were gay. There's a history of gayness in art, of course.

03-00:36:40

Hopkins: Almost as many as engineers and lawyers.

Rubens: I just wondered if there's anything to be said that at the time—mid-seventies—it's just starting to become a movement, where people are out about it. I guess I'm simply asking if there's anything, even looking back now at the art, that evinces, evidences a gay sensibility.

03-00:37:10

Hopkins: No. I would not say so.

Rubens: I don't know anyone who argues that.

03-00:37:15

Hopkins: I'm sure that if you sat down and spent a great deal of time researching, you might find a thread in there that would, one way or another, identify this particular work or that particular work as having a gay context. Now, I'm talking about back in the seventies. Now it's a different story.

Rubens: Yes, absolutely. There are some identified—

03-00:37:38

Hopkins: Now, but in those days, the majority of gay people, men and women, were closeted. They weren't out in the open. It did not mean that not everybody knew what it was, but it just wasn't talked about. You know, it just was not there. So you have the wonderful people like Rauschenberg, who was, I guess, bisexual, and Johns and Warhol and others. That was a time when people were saying—which is

interesting—that, “Well, you know the artists, a lot of them are gay.” Well, there’s a lot of gayness in a lot of the other enterprises, just as much as there is in the art world as such. But now that’s a more modern concept. In the 1990s, an artist like Larry Pittman very openly presented gay subject matter, the gay idea. So it’s quite a different thing now. We talked briefly, for example, about the grand old director here, Grace McCann Morley, who was a lesbian—not talked about in that time, but it [had] an impact on her career. She was let go. But if that was the only reason or not, it certainly was one of them.

Rubens: Fifty gay tap dancers.

03-00:38:57

Hopkins: There are a lot of gay people in San Francisco.

Rubens: San Francisco was more open and tolerant of gayness, I think, than other cities, earlier.

03-00:39:08

Hopkins: No question. I think, no question. I think that’s always been San Francisco’s reputation, when you talk about the hippie movement or the women’s movement. Any of those things, any of those aspects of things. I think probably a lot of it has to do with the fact that San Francisco has that rebellious tradition, going way back to the Gay Nineties.

Rubens: Ambrose Bierce.

03-00:39:35

Hopkins: You’ve always had wonderful individuals like Emperor Norton and others that have always—like the twins [Marian and Vivian Brown] that are still here in the city, that appear everywhere, and everybody still shakes their hand whenever they see them.

Rubens: You mean those two women?

03-00:39:47

Hopkins: Yes, right. Exactly right. So San Francisco has that tradition. But it also, I think, was a—you know, it’s also very pleasant weather, it’s also the West Coast, it’s a city that is interested in aspects of elegance of design. There’s no reason that they wouldn’t be drawn here, you know. And the acceptance. So that’s a big difference.

Rubens: So the fiftieth anniversary, that’s ’85, and the gay tap dancers. But it reminds me of the Harvey Milk assassination and the Moscone assassination. We have not talked about how that impacted you and the museum. And then the subsequent controversy over the Arneson piece.

03-00:40:34

Hopkins:

The [Robert] Arneson piece. Well, it did affect—I was here when he was shot. And we were—

Rubens:

It's ['78]?

03-00:40:44

Hopkins:

Was it that late? I guess it was. Yes, I guess.

Rubens:

It was shortly after Jim Jones, right?

03-00:40:52

Hopkins:

Yes, it's true. I thought certainly, there were two or three times when he came to events for the museum.

Rubens:

He, meaning?

03-00:41:03

Hopkins:

Mayor Moscone. A very nice, open person, and I think everybody appreciated him, except the person who shot him. So when it happened, it was a shock. It was really a shock. To her great credit, when Dianne [Feinstein] stood in, she was kind of the [Rudy] Giuliani of the time, she quieted things, kept it calm, very reasoned, very sensible. It would be an overstatement to say she became a good friend of the museum, but she certainly was—In terms of hotel tax and things of that kind, she was very supportive. Of course, he had been, too. We were commissioned for the—When I say, “We were commissioned,” a group of us were asked to be jurors at the new Moscone Center, which was being named after the mayor, to commission works of art that would be in the building. Amongst the works of art that we were to commission was to be a bust of George Moscone. We as a jury—and I've forgotten who else was on it at the time—thought that Robert Arneson would be an ideal person for that, because he worked in clay, he'd done a lot of portraits, and they were good, because they weren't just bland bronze busts of one kind of another, but in fact, they had character.

Rubens:

Did SFMOMA have any at that point?

03-00:42:52

Hopkins:

Arnesons? Yes, it did. Yes, it had a couple of major Arnesons in the collection. So our group said unanimously, “Yes, let's have Robert Arneson do this piece.” Which he did. And it's a brilliant piece. The head of Moscone is a wonderful characterization of Moscone. He would've loved it. I'm sure he would've loved it. But he also put it on a base, a pedestal—column, essentially. And around the column, put events of Moscone's life *and* death, including an imprint in the clay of a gun, recognizing the fact that he had been assassinated. I don't think any of us know exactly what the whole thing was, but from our point

of view and the Moscone Center point of view, it was Dianne Feinstein that said, "We don't want this." She said that she was reflecting the wishes of the widow. None of us ever really knew if that was true or not, but they decided against it.

Rubens: Somehow, Dianne Feinstein as mayor has veto, because the Moscone Center is a city—

03-00:44:09

Hopkins: Sure. Absolutely, sure. Well, and it's a sensitive issue. Just like everything that happens all the time. Like the stuff going on with Don Imus at the moment, for example. So anyway, Arneson took the piece back, didn't charge the city for the work, and then later sold it privately to somebody else. I forget what the occasion was, but we showed it here after the controversy. But it was still controversial, and a lot of people came to see it because it was controversial.

Rubens: I did.

03-00:44:48

Hopkins: And it was unanimously agreed that this was a silly action that the city didn't accept it, that it should've been there. Our hope always has been that it would be back there at some time.

Rubens: So did you initiate that with Arneson, though? Having it exhibited here?

03-00:45:09

Hopkins: Here? Yes, here, for sure.

Rubens: Yes, because you knew him.

03-00:45:11

Hopkins: Yes, for sure.

Rubens: You and Arneson, at the same time, were given an award, later on. You were given an honorary degree.

03-00:45:24

Hopkins: I was given an honorary degree at the San Francisco Art Institute. Was Arneson that same year? I guess it was.

Rubens: Yes, it's the two of you.

03-00:45:37

Hopkins: That would've been about 1984, '84, '85, right in that period of time. I was also given an honorary degree by the California College of Arts and Crafts. Then in fact, two years after that time, I convinced Clyfford Still that he should accept an honorary degree from the San

Francisco Art Institute. He never did things like that, but he came out and accepted the award.

Rubens: How nice. Had you known Harvey Milk?

03-00:46:19

Hopkins: No, I never did meet Harvey Milk.

Rubens: I don't know that we said this, but it seemed to me that the issue of if someone were gay or not gay here at the museum, under your tenure, had no—

03-00:46:40

Hopkins: Were there some gay—? [laughs]

Rubens: So it had no significance?

03-00:46:44

Hopkins: It has nothing to do with—I'm not saying, "Good for you Henry!" I just have never been very conscious of that one way or the other, and certainly, it would not have had any bearing on anything.

03-00:47:00

Rubens: This is stepping back. Let's see if I can pose it succinctly. Having come from L.A., and having a certain sensibility of what was happening there, and bringing so many exhibits—your exhibition schedule is intense, and such important exhibits were coming, year after year.

03-00:47:29

Hopkins: Well, it's true. We had a good run, there's no question about it.

Rubens: I also want to ask you about, firstly—I'm not getting a neat segue into it, but—the Davis scene, how you would characterize the Bay Area or San Francisco scene to L.A., and then to Davis.

03-00:47:53

Hopkins: The Davis group, as such, and the Sacramento group, including Wayne Thiebaud and other people like that—There were a lot of artists generally considered to be major San Francisco artists who spent most of their time several miles away from San Francisco. In fact, a lot of them live in Cotati, a lot of them live here, a lot of them live there. Not too many in San Francisco proper, because it's terribly expensive to live here, as we all know. But here in Northern California, there were always enclaves, places where a number of artists lived. And were good friends and were associates. I must say that I have not in my lifetime, whether in Fort Worth or in Los Angeles or anywhere else, being around, seen the kind of positive interaction amongst artists as I saw here.

Probably the best way to typify that was when we did what they called the soapbox derby. I think we talked about that. Some of the most important artists in town made vehicles for the derby. If they didn't make a vehicle, they made an award trophy to give to somebody else. That kind of thing just doesn't exist in other [places]. I've often wondered why. I think a lot of it has to do with a situation which, unfortunately, still exists, and that's the fact that so many of the artists in this region have a strong local reputation, but not a national reputation. They're all doing okay, many of them teaching, some actually [earning a living from selling] their works of art. But nobody has really popped out and become extraordinary. Well, there are some examples. Diebenkorn, obviously, now; Wayne Thiebaud now, and other people of that kind. But as a general principal, everybody was kind of eating off the same plate, I guess is what I would say, which made it a very enjoyable scene for, let's say a museum opening or whatever else might occur. That's one aspect. The other aspect is that artists here, because they had a critic, Tom Albright, on the paper, who—and I'm going to say a negative thing—couldn't see beyond the city limit of San Francisco; art, for him, was entirely here, and it should've been here, and extremely—

Rubens:

Chauvinist.

03-00:50:45

Hopkins:

He was an interesting writer, a good writer, but a very narrow vision. I don't want to say provincial, but a very narrow vision. He was always on our back. Perhaps less on mine, but on Jerry's and other people, of doing more and more for the Bay Area artists. Like, we should be showing more of them. Most museum people, including myself, feel we have two obligations. One is to the artists of your community—and we did many shows; like the Arneson show [1974], or like the Peter Voulkos show [1978], or like the Roy De Forest show [1974]. We could go on. The William Wiley show [1980 and 1986], a number of others that in fact, we managed to travel away from here, to even a museum like the Whitney Museum. So we helped to build some local reputations.

But on the other side, it's necessary to bring in other [shows] to broaden the vision, not just of the artistic community, but of the broader community, as well, and to feel that you're part of a national phenomenon, you're not isolated. You asked me about this earlier—my association with institutions like the Oakland Museum, let's say, and UC Berkeley. The Oakland Museum, of course, completely dedicated—It's not a totally art museum, but the art aspect of the museum is devoted exclusively to California art, and it is maintaining its strength and vigor. UC Berkeley, which was—The building was put together under Peter Selz, who is still here, bless his heart. He received

a major gift of Hans Hofmann paintings early on. It is a university gallery, and therefore, theoretically, can show anything, because that's what university galleries do, with some obligations to faculty. But during the latter part of my tenure, my original boss, Jim Elliott, James Elliott, was the director of the Berkeley Museum. When I first started working at the Los Angeles County Museum, he hired me to work there. So we had a—they were all friendly relationships; we all knew one another. We were conscious of each other's exhibitions, because we didn't want to compete. We did want the combination of exhibitions to give a full spectrum of interesting things for the area, and I think we did a good job.

Rubens: Wouldn't there have been some natural competition between Berkeley and you? Did this place have Hofmanns at the time?

03-00:53:57

Hopkins: Pardon me?

Rubens: Did you have Hofmanns?

03-00:53:58

Hopkins: No. I don't think—Do we have now? I don't think we do. Off hand, I can't remember.

Rubens: Joan Brown and—

03-00:54:06

Hopkins: Well, Joan Brown, certainly. No, those things— We acquired more. They weren't really an acquiring museum, in that sense. They were more an exhibition museum. Occasionally, an exhibition would come up that they would get that we would like to have; or we would get that they would like to have. Certainly, when Jim got here, there was competition in fundraising. So if somebody was somewhat disgruntled with the museum for one reason or another, they might give money to Berkeley. Or people like Phyllis Wattis would give money to both.

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04-00:00:09

Rubens: You're giving a nice view—why not?—of how Berkeley and you worked. Because there had to be some element of competition, but they weren't acquiring.

04-00:00:54

Hopkins: If there was competition, it was the fact that when Jim Elliott came, he was more aggressive in his approach, in terms of getting more community involved going; and he did some interesting exhibitions, like the Mapplethorpe show. There was not competition in terms of what we did or how we did it, but clearly, he would've liked to have

had more of my supporters giving funding to the Berkeley Museum, which is perfectly understandable. If we had competition, it was with the de Young Museum, the Fine Arts Museums, and their desire, seeing that we were drawing very big audiences for exhibitions and different things of that kind and they were not, that they wanted to move more into the modern field, the twentieth century, which was our area. I think I said to you before that I would go to Ian White and say, “Look, if you can’t find something from cave painting to the end of the nineteenth century that’s interesting, too bad. But please stay out of our territory.” And essentially, he did, during his tenure. Now they’re more active, of course, in those areas.

Rubens: You know, that might be a transition for me to ask you a little bit more about Van Deren Coke and the photography department. Because at this very moment, I can’t remember under whose tenure the nineteenth century of photography did go to the de Young.

04-00:02:38

Hopkins: Well, that was a different story, because it was nineteenth century. Though the interesting thing is that here at the San Francisco Museum, though it was not necessarily a department or something of that kind, but the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art had collected photography ever since the 1930s. One of the very few institutions that did. Chicago Art Institute did, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York did. But essentially, photography was not considered an art aspect of things for museums. Until John Humphrey, who was an amateur, in the best sense of the word, did a lot of collecting of photography for us here. When John passed away, unfortunately, we brought in Van Deren Coke, who was a renowned person in the photography field.

Rubens: Where had he come from?

04-00:03:40

Hopkins: He’d been in Arizona. He went back to Arizona. He was ambitious, properly ambitious. And he, like myself, wanted to fight this battle of East Coast/West Coast. So he brought to the photo collection here a sensibility that didn’t exist in the Museum of Modern Art collection as much. Now, it would be very hard for me to define that, but he had some very particular tastes, and began to fight for recognition. During his tenure, the two institutions that were given national credibility, in terms of photo handling and presentation were the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the San Francisco Museum. I would just say that in addition to that, which was broadening the base of the museum, there were times when we would have an exhibition of painting on one side and photography on the other side, and the photography side would be like sinking a ship; listing in that direction. We also

introduced during my tenure—and I'm very happy to see that expanding now—design, the idea of architecture and design. Because whenever we would do an architecture exhibition, again, we would have a very big audience. I was always fascinated by the fact that there were so many people who would come here, especially young students and things of that kind, for exhibitions of architecture. A person who was very helpful in that area was Frances Bowes. She was on our board, a very strong personality, very social in her views and attitudes.

Rubens: Social, meaning?

04-00:05:26

Hopkins: Meaning social in the best sense of that, in the fact that she had a lot of good contacts, and very busy, very active; she could convince people to do certain things. She pushed me, as a matter of fact, to do an Issey Miyake exhibition, which was a huge success. It was really a huge success.

Rubens: You mean the fashion designer.

04-00:05:48

Hopkins: The fashion designer, yes, absolutely. It was a beautiful, beautiful exhibition in the rotunda, with these wonderful Miyake floating figures.

Rubens: And you're saying she pushed you to do it?

04-00:05:58

Hopkins: She did. There's absolutely no question about the fact. She knew of him, had seen an exhibition, and said, "We really should do this." I met Issey, and we talked, and we did it. He was extremely happy with it. He became a big thing in San Francisco.

Rubens: Do you remember the year?

04-00:06:18

Hopkins: Well, it would've been '84,'85 [1983]. Probably about '85, I would guess. But that helped to convince, because of the popularity of that area, some of the other board members that we should really get into design. That was a factor.

Rubens: Good, interesting story.

04-00:06:41

Hopkins: You wanted me to talk a little bit, too, about Davis. The general understanding of Davis is that Davis was the home of ceramics for Northern California. That was the primary thing. People like Richard Shaw, for example, and, well, Roy De Forest, who was not that, Arneson, others, that all taught at one time or another in Davis.

Rubens: Roy De Forest is a painter, but he's part of the Davis group. Wasn't there another, a kind of Pop artist?

04-00:07:16

Hopkins: Well, I don't know which one you might mean, but yes, they had a very active art program. And of course, they had no exhibition area or what have you, and so they were linked to San Francisco and the San Francisco artists. But I think probably if we can say that there are several movements that have had importance in California generally, that are directly related to California, California lifestyle, one of the most important, which is the clay movement—which would be Robert Arneson, over at California College of Arts and Crafts, that began in Southern California; Robert Arneson, Richard Shaw, others, Ron Nagle, for example; who brought clay out of the realm of craft, and brought it into the realm of art. We always think of that as the Davis contribution.

[material deleted]

Rubens: I have a note to ask you, did Annie Sprinkle show here under you?

04-00:09:12

Hopkins: She did not. She was coming into prominence at that time, but it was really after my time. When we did the Judy Chicago show—and there were other people, very strong feminists, like Lynn Hershman, for example, and others that were here, that we certainly gave recognition to and respected as artists. But the kind of performance art aspect was a little after my time here in San Francisco.

[material deleted]

Rubens: [I want] to ask, also, about Kathan Brown and Crown Point Press. She and her husband started in Richmond, then they were in Oakland.

04-00:11:24

Hopkins: Well, it's very important. Because at that time—again, which would be roughly the seventies and eighties, the eighties primarily—two areas were hard at work in California; one in Southern California, a group named Gemini, that was essentially a lithography workshop, and printed all the major artists, not just West Coast, but East Coast as well—Rauschenberg, Johns, Oldenburg. Kathan did the same thing here in Northern California, but with etching and engraving. The techniques were different. She was so good at her production that a lot of national artists worked here. John Cage, for example, I know did prints here.

Rubens: Apparently, there was an eightieth birthday party for John Cage at her place.

Rubens: There was another lithography—or was it a print workshop in L.A., that I can't think of.

04-00:12:42

Hopkins: Tamarind, which was actually the start of the whole thing, because that was June Wayne, who got funding from the Ford Foundation to revive lithography in the United States, is what it amounted to. And do it the way they did it in Europe, using master printers and other things of that kind. Then that bled into Gemini.

Rubens: Surely, Kathan had to look at those as models.

04-00:13:05

Hopkins: Well, I would say yes and no, because her sensitivity and the artists that she worked with, it's a very different sensibility. But she, like the people at Gemini, was an extremely good technician, and she worked brilliantly with the artists. That was the main thing.

Rubens: What is your point about the sensitivity being different? What do you mean? In what way?

04-00:13:28

Hopkins: In Gemini, you're talking about big, lavish color prints of Jasper Johns or Claes Oldenburg; and here, you're talking about twelve-by-fourteen-inch etchings and things of that kind that are very fine and precise in the way that they're done.

Rubens: But apparently, Diebenkorn, she would have—

04-00:13:53

Hopkins: Yes. Diebenkorn loved printmaking, and he was a good printmaker. Thiebaud is a good printmaker.

Rubens: When you say print, you're talking about etching and engraving.

04-00:14:03

Hopkins: Actually, I'm talking about etching. And of course, that—again, rooting around in my memory—that goes clear back to, again, Southern California; a teacher at UCLA named John Paul Jones, who was a brilliant etcher. When Diebenkorn came to Southern California, he would work always in that UCLA print lab. I'd see him in there all the time, working on prints, and then he printed with Kathan up here.

Rubens: Would you go to her gallery? Would that draw you? Because she came to make a name for herself.

04-00:14:39

Hopkins: Sure. We would go frequently to the gallery. It was a special thing, there's no question. Kathan Brown's shop was a special thing. The

artists would work there. You would go, and certain things would be up in a gallery, available for sale or what have you, and by artists of reputation, that you could afford to buy, that were not million dollar paintings. People like Evie Haas, who loved art but was not a great collector, as such, it did become a Mecca for people like that, it's true.

Rubens: And then what was the relationship to the museum?

04-00:16:17

Hopkins: None.

Rubens: There was never any? So some of those exhibits didn't show here, it's just that Diebenkorn and Thiebaud became—

04-00:16:24

Hopkins: Sure, they became famous. When they would do a retrospective show, then prints that were done at Kathan's would be in the broader exhibition. But there was no direct association between the museum and Kathan's press.

Rubens: We did talk a little in the first interview, and you certainly elaborate, I think very interestingly, in the UCLA interview, about galleries really driving up the price of art in the eighties.

04-00:17:02

Hopkins: No question.

Rubens: And you speak about five major galleries that largely, are New York based; some L.A. And I just wondered if Brown's—it's a press, but it also is a gallery—if it's fitting into that.

04-00:17:17

Hopkins: No. Because Kathan—My impression—yes, she's there to do good work; yes, she's there to make a living. But she is not there to convince people to pay higher and higher and higher and higher prices, which is the thing that's happening in these major galleries, I think. The material that they were handling was, in those days, was \$50,000, \$100,000 material. Kathan's were \$2,000, \$3,000. It's not in the same ballpark.

Rubens: From '74 to '86, you're really seeing the price of art—?

04-00:18:11

Hopkins: Accelerate. Well, I'll give you a classic case in point. Clyfford Still gave the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art twenty-eight paintings. At a Christie's auction not too long ago, a Clyfford Still painting sold for \$74 million. Now, calculate whether I paid my way at this museum or not, based on 28 times 74,000,000. It's that kind of insanity. Now,

there's a Mark Rothko painting that they thought might go for even more than a \$100 [million] recently.

Rubens: This is the one Rockefeller is—

04-00:18:51

Hopkins:

Yes, selling. That's correct. So there is no relationship between the art and the money that's being asked for it. That's going to be, fifty years down the road, a hundred years down the road, we'll figure out which were the important artists and which were not the important artists, of this era. And already, you see certain ones disappearing from the walls of museums, and others coming back on the walls of the museums. In this profession, in the museum profession, you try as little as possible not to think about the monetary aspect. Except, you have to get gifts that come into the museum; you have to buy, if you have any money to be able to buy it. Most museums can't afford to buy anything anymore; they rely entirely on their donors and board members, and people who've bought paintings and they've increased enough in value to give them for tax purposes, to the institution. But during the eighties, there's absolutely no question about the fact that it became a commercial enterprise.

The news you hear on the television now is more entertainment than it is news. Art is part of entertainment. I go to a gallery now in Los Angeles, or to this museum today, I didn't run into a single person that I knew here today. All right, now granted, it's the middle of the week, but a lot of people are in the building. I will go to an opening in Los Angeles, and I would typify 80 percent of the audience as being what you call "suits." That means, wealthy young men of the new generation who have more money than they know what to do with. Art has become part of their life, not in a meaningful way, but a part of their life in terms of the social standing. It's a different world. I was in and out at exactly the right time.

Rubens: The gallery that you worked the most closely with here would've been?

04-00:21:37

Hopkins:

Probably Berggruen. John Berggruen. Because John showed a large number of the artists. But also, there were many others at that time that were showing the Bay Area artists, as well. We always went to their openings, they always came to these openings. When you say "work most closely with," I'll just say it's a misstatement, because we rarely bought something from any gallery. We tried to be supportive, always, of the artists, by going to their exhibitions, doing exhibitions of their work here. And they would revolve. Many of the artists showed at three or four different galleries, during the time that I was here. But

just from the standpoint of a personal friendship, yes, John was a good friend. As was Rena Bransten.

Rubens: You mentioned, in the UCLA interview about the Ant Farm and the experimental artists collectives. How was this received in the museum world?

04-00:23:05

Hopkins: Well, they lived here. They were based in San Francisco. There was a phase in art in the 1970s, after abstract expressionism had made American art interesting, after Pop art had brought it into the international commercial world, that a lot of artists felt strongly—and especially in the Bay Area; that’s another characteristic of the Bay Area—that the world was becoming too mercantile, that art was becoming a commodity, and how do we avoid this? So they began to do things that were not really sellable; you couldn’t buy them. Earth art was one configuration, where artists would go out and dig up fifteen acres of land or fifty acres of land, or turn a volcano into something else, like Jim Turrell. Performance art, which you have to work out a deal to pay to have it performed, so it became almost like theater, more like theater than it did as an art object that you bought. Ant Farm was a classic case, an early classic case, of art playing the role in the public domain, more than in the museum. So the institution became, to them, less important, though we did exhibitions and things.

Rubens: You did exhibitions of—?

04-00:24:35

Hopkins: Well, we showed Ant Farm things, yes. Because they were important. They were taking art in a different direction, all of their own, which was kind of peripheral, off on the edges. You could make a big argument it was an extension of assemblage or something of that kind, but it was really a whole new kind of vision. Now we have digital photography, now we have video, we have all kinds of things that kind of came out of the Ant Farm experience. And also aspects of politics. You asked me about Fox. Terry Fox is his name, as a matter of fact. And this was an introduction into a period of time, along with feminism, along with art that served a social public purpose, which abstract expressionism is a pure spiritual act. And that’s the difference, I guess.

Rubens: I forgot to mention when we were talking about Kathan Brown, that she was married to Tom Marioni, wasn’t she?

04-00:25:49

Hopkins: Correct. yes, Tom Marioni is another one, and an important one of that period of time, who took art out of the museum and took it out into the

streets. He would have free beer nights, for example, and declare it to be a performance piece. So that's what happened.

Rubens: When I interviewed Inge-Lise Eckmann, she was talking about the whole history of conservation.

04-00:26:21

Hopkins: Oh, yes, well. [laughs]

Rubens: When you speak about these things that are dirt, I mean, this is exactly what she's saying. The kind of materials used. It just revolutionizes what a conservationist has to do.

04-00:26:36

Hopkins: Oh, it's absolutely true.

Rubens: I didn't ask you, I left off—You mentioned Thomas Albright a little bit. The other critic of the time was Charles Shere?

04-00:26:47

Hopkins: Well, yes, of that period. The classic old critic, of course, was Alfred Frankenstein.

Rubens: Yes. Did you know him?

04-00:26:54

Hopkins: Oh, very well. In fact, Alfred Frankenstein was instrumental in my career. Tom was at the *Chronicle*, and Charles Shere wrote for the Oakland paper. Charles Shere was married to the wonderful chefette in Oakland. I'm going to forget the name of their restaurant, which became so famous.

Rubens: In Oakland? Not the Bay Wolf. A famous—

04-00:27:20

Hopkins: Really famous. Charles was a very good and sensitive writer. I liked him.

Rubens: Did you cultivate any of them?

04-00:27:43

Hopkins: Well, you don't cultivate the press. [laughs] I knew them. I would sit down and have a drink with them. We would chat. Or in a particular instance, if they wanted to interview about let's say Clyfford Still, that was fine. But I learned early on that the press does what it does, you do what you do; that's it. It's the old Barnum thing; as long as they mention your name, or the name of your institution, that's all that matters.

Rubens: Here is a question from the staff. When you were here, you had a policy of holding small, single-gallery shows by single artists. And slowly, that was phased out. You have a 1980 long range plan, that says you want to move towards larger exhibits. I guess they're trying to get at, if you're moving from single galleries, small shows, to a long range plan that says we have to have larger exhibitions, is that going to eclipse the local artists?

04-00:29:14

Hopkins: First of all, it's a misstatement. I say that only from a very personal point of view. It's always been my interest, and in my interest, to give recognition, within a reasonable amount, within the exhibition time that you have, to the artists of the area. I think if you look at the record, you'll find that that's true. Some are big shows, and some are small shows, and some are pieces in other bigger shows. However, just as we discussed this issue of galleries pushing the prices of art up, running museums became increasingly more expensive. We've talked a little bit about that. We're now, just like the Picasso exhibition, people who lend to those exhibitions want their work reproduced in color. They want a big catalogue to go along with it. They want to be able to take it home. They want to improve the price of the painting that they own, because it's reproduced this way.

It's reached the point now where if you can send three paintings on one airplane, that's about as much as you can do. You know, because of the high price of the painting that you're shipping, insurance on all of that. Printing, publishing, publicity. Keeping the museum alive. So an exhibition that used to cost \$50,000 now costs \$3 million. It's ridiculous, all right? I mean, that's just what it is; it's not anything else. So you work out as well as you can work it out, to share with other institutions the costs of doing shows. Three or four of you working together to do that, if you can. Secondly, you need to have, in the process of a year's time, there's usually a time, usually around April, when the majority of members join. If you can time an exhibition that is somewhat more popular to the time when people join the institution, that keeps your membership up, which is another very important part of an institution. Your membership is going to [run] out, so now suddenly, here you have this wonderful exhibition, you better join again or you're going to miss it. Those funds then, in the best of all circumstances, some of that is used to do exhibitions which are not so popular, that are not going to draw that big of an audience, but are important to the advancement of the idea of art. It's a constant daily problem for every museum administrator. That's what it amounts to. But yes, it's absolutely true that the concept of the blockbuster exhibition, so-called blockbuster exhibition, came into vogue in the late seventies, due to the high cost of developing shows.

Rubens: It was funny what you were saying to me about the de Young moving into—

04-00:32:16

Hopkins: Contemporary.

Rubens: And being jealous of your exhibition success. Because it seemed to me the first blockbuster I ever saw was there, the King Tut.

04-00:32:28

Hopkins: Well, exactly. But that's a classic case in point. Here is a wonderful exhibition, a wonderful audience. It's not adding anything new to the literature or the lore or anything else. But you can go and ooh and ah at the thing.

Rubens: And buy lots of—

04-00:32:42

Hopkins: Yes, beautiful things. And buy a lot in the bookstore, yes.

Rubens: That's what I mean.

04-00:32:47

Hopkins: Yes, no question about that. So that's a classic case of an exhibition that benefits the institution by helping to improve their membership, by drawing a big audience, selling things in the bookstore. But well, I think we said that. I started today talking about Judy Chicago. That when we did *The Dinner Party* here, the audience was so big for that exhibition that it balanced our budget that year, which we wouldn't have done otherwise. But who could guess that that would be a blockbuster?

Rubens: Maybe to wrap it up, you say you got out at the right time.

04-00:33:36

Hopkins: In and out. [laughs]

Rubens: In and out at the right time. I want to just do one little push on you. Did you get any resistance to putting Southern California people on the board?

04-00:33:51

Hopkins: A number of people on our board here in San Francisco did not like Marcia [Weisman]. That's just very simple. She was a very brassy lady, very aggressive. She hit a number of people in strange ways. Now, I don't want this misunderstood in any way whatsoever. But you have the old line, old family, distinguished Haas family, who are Jewish. You have Marcia, who is also Jewish, but she's another kind of Jewish person. So there's as much conflict from Jew to Jew as there

is from Gentile to Jew or Jew to Gentile or whatever else there might be.

Rubens: So when you left, did that—?

04-00:34:42

Hopkins: When I left, Gini Wright, from Seattle, left. Glenn Janss left, Ann Walker left. I was not here; I was the person who got them here. I think Marcia was asked not to come back, as a matter of fact, when her term ran out.

Rubens: I know that you had an institutional and strategic reason for having them; but was it also personal, too? Did you feel you'd get support from them?

04-00:35:25

Hopkins: Well, they were people who could certainly support. I mean, they would—

Rubens: I don't even mean financially.

04-00:35:30

Hopkins: No. Because they were all knowledgeable.

Rubens: People you knew, yes.

04-00:35:34

Hopkins: Well, not just that I knew, but they were also well known nationally and were important collectors. It was simply to broaden the base, to make people more conscious of the San Francisco museum, in areas other than San Francisco.

Rubens: I told you that I'm going to go see Nordland. I'm leaving tomorrow. But you had mentioned, he had—It's not like he left one day, and you came in. There was a little bit of—

04-00:36:08

Hopkins: There was a time span.

Rubens: Similarly, when you left, there was—

04-00:36:13

Hopkins: Well, actually, not a lot. Because when I left, I announced that I was going to go, and I told my board that I would stay for—I forgot now how long; I'll say three months or six months. But essentially, until they had a chance to scout a director so there would not be a hiatus. Now, there was a short one, but it was a planned hiatus, and that was not anything major.

Rubens: And was that true when you came in?

04-00:36:42

Hopkins: Well, I was here when they interviewed Jack [Lane], for example; I was here when they interviewed the director of the Guggenheim Museum. I was present; I was not involved in the interview process. Obviously, very interested in what happened. Now, when I was brought here, Jerry had left. I had been out here for a Museum Association meeting, as a matter of fact. They were beginning to look for a director, and somebody suggested the possibility that I might be interested. They sent a contingent, headed by David Robinson, down to Fort Worth, where I was. They were interviewing myself, Jim Demetrian, a dealer named Irving Blum, who was thinking of going into the museum business at that time. As I'm very honest about it, I think they probably would've preferred to have Jim Demetrian, but Jim didn't want to be in San Francisco. So they called and said, "Will you come?" But yes, it was quite a lengthy time between Gerry's leaving, physically leaving, and my coming in.

Rubens: And you said to me a couple of things that would be worth asking Jerry about, and you pointed out about his role as a critic in L.A.

04-00:38:11

Hopkins: Well, he was involved in two or three different things. But he originally wrote for a magazine called *Frontier*, which was funded by Gifford Phillips, a major collector in Southern California. The magazine was not widely circulated, but it was essentially a kind of leftist document, dealing with politics, and dealing with this and that in New York. He was also a part of the development of *Artforum* magazine, which still goes pell-mell, as you know. But he was very active in the administration of *Artforum* magazine in its early stages, as well. So his critical voice was an important part of his evolution into a museum person. He began as a critic, and then moved into the museum.

Rubens: If you could've interviewed him before you started this job, was there anything you might've asked?

04-00:39:25

Hopkins: Well, probably not, as a matter of fact, because, I have made it a point in my lifetime to accept what the situation is as you go there. In other words, I don't walk in and suddenly fire everybody and hire new people and what have you. I don't want to know why the person before me left, or what the circumstances were, or who loves who, or who hates who. That's just silly, that's all nonsense. Though people ask you, "Do you want to be on the board, as the director of the museum?" I've always said, "No, I don't want to be on the board." If it comes down to my vote, I don't want that to be the issue. So I've not done that. And though Jerry and I have known each other over the years—

Rubens: Did you know him in L.A., when he was starting out?

04-00:40:13

Hopkins: Oh, yes, sure. He must be about my age, seventy-eight. I don't know how old Jerry is.

Rubens: He's a little older.

04-00:40:21

Hopkins: He could be a little older.

Rubens: Did you know that he was at Chouinard?

04-00:40:33

Hopkins: Chouinard, yes, sure. Exactly.

Rubens: Were you involved, ever, with CalArts? Were you an advisor when that got going?

04-00:40:41

Hopkins: No. CalArts came into focus at about exactly the same time that I was leaving the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, about '68, going to Forth Worth. Though I was involved in a lot of discussions, you know, at that time, with Miriam Schapiro and people that were involved in putting—Paul Braque. You might ask Jerry about Paul Braque, who was the main intellect behind getting CalArts going.

Rubens: Well, why don't you just tell us, so it would be an overview. The UCLA interview is more in depth about what happens to you afterwards. But you go to head the Weisman Foundation. You're there for how long?

04-00:41:30

Hopkins: I made a contract with them for five years. I fulfilled that contract, almost to the day. I was asked to come and do a couple of graduate seminars at UCLA.

Rubens: Your alma mater, graduate alma mater.

04-00:41:47

Hopkins: The dean at that time, whose name I have forgotten, liked them, and asked if I would come and be a visiting professor, which means I would just come and teach one class at a time. Then they were looking for a chair for the art department, and they asked me to interview for that, and I was given the position. So I chaired the art department at UCLA for two or three years; I'll say three years. Then we got into the negotiation, Chancellor Chuck Young and myself and Andrea [Rich], who then became the director of Los Angeles County Museum, in taking over the Hammer Museum. So when we got that negotiating

done, they asked me if I would be the director of that museum, because I was already the director of the galleries on campus, as well as the chair. And so I did. After I had done that for a year, I realized that being director of this new big museum and chair was just too much. So I then stayed at the museum for four years. I was going to be there for two, stayed for four. To get it started. I hired Annie Philbin to come in. She's doing a brilliant job. Then I went back teaching for a couple of years, until seventy-one, and retired.

[material deleted]

Rubens: Oh, I see. Wow. What a career. What a career you've had!

04-00:43:56

Hopkins: Yes, it's been a good career.

Rubens: It's been a great career. What was the Hammer Museum before it was taken over? It became a museum of UCLA?

04-00:44:08

Hopkins: What it amounted to is that Armand Hammer, a very complex and difficult person, had been buying works of art over an extended period of time, which everybody thought would go to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In fact, they thought that was an absolute. He, at a given moment, said, "All right. I will give my collection, but only if you name this after me, and you do this, and you do that." They couldn't do it. They have other rules, that they just couldn't do it. He got mad and said, "All right, I'm going to take my stuff away and build my own museum." He was the head of Occidental Petroleum, and Occidental Petroleum has a big building over in Westwood, the tallest building at that time in Westwood. He hired an architect, Ed Barnes, who did the Walker Art Center, another museum, to do design for a museum on his property, which used to be a gas station. At the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Westwood Boulevard. His stockholders in Occidental Petroleum got wind of this and said, "Hey, Mr. Hammer, Dr. Hammer, whose money are you spending to do this?" He obviously was spending a reasonable amount of their money.

He went before the stockholders of Occidental Petroleum and said, "Look, you don't understand. I am going to make this a profit-making institution." Impossible. Couldn't humanly be done. Total fiction, total lie. But he said, "I'm going to do exhibitions that are going to be so popular that people are going to come by the thousands to see them." He began by doing two or three really quite extraordinary exhibitions. He did a beautiful Malevich exhibition, because he had all these connections with Russia. Then he did a very beautiful exhibition about the czars in Russia, with carriages and fabrics and costumes and so

forth and so on. And reasonable audiences, but certainly not enough to keep the museum going. His stockholders said, “No, Armand, you can only spend so much money on this project; that’s it. That’s the end of it.” He spent it all. He died two years later. Occidental Petroleum suddenly was stuck with a museum in which they had absolutely no interest whatsoever. They didn’t know what to do. So when I had heard the rumor that they were thinking of some kind of an affiliation with UCLA, [I suggested to] our chancellor at that time that we should sit down and chat with them, which we did. And over two years, we negotiated the deal. So it’s a UCLA facility.

Rubens: And was the Disney exhibit—

04-00:47:52

Hopkins: Disney exhibit was there when I was there, yes, that’s correct.

Rubens: Was that one of your initiatives?

04-00:47:57

Hopkins: Well, you would say that, yes. It was exhibition that was to travel. It was a great show. A blockbuster.

Rubens: I didn’t ask about all your staff.

04-00:48:19

Hopkins: Lovely people. There were some lovely people. Absolutely no question about it.

Rubens: Karen Tsujimoto.

04-00:48:25

Hopkins: She’s gone on to be brilliant, obviously. And Kathy Holland, has gone on to be brilliant; and Genie Candau, the librarian, as you told me, has just retired [Candau retired in 2001].

Rubens: Suzanne Foley, did you know her?

04-00:48:35

Hopkins: Suzanne Foley, of course. Yes, Suzanne was there. She left before I left. But she was a curator. Then I brought in George Neubert, who had been at the Oakland Museum. After George, who went on to the Midwest, I brought in—Oh, God, what’s his name? Anyway, he’s now the director at the Detroit Museum. [Graham Beal]

Rubens: Suzanne Foley, why did she leave?

04-00:49:07

Hopkins: We did not always agree. I didn’t fire her, but she decided that the time was—

Rubens: Well, just what were the issues?

04-00:49:18

Hopkins: We did not have as big a staff as there is now, and she was in charge of exhibitions. I felt that her vision wasn't broad enough, I guess.

Rubens: Were you involved with the reopening of the rental gallery?

04-00:49:39

Hopkins: Yes.

Rubens: It had closed in '73, but then it reopened in '78. We talked about Lilienthal, Sally Lilienthal.

04-00:49:48

Hopkins: Sally is a wonderful person, and she was very much engaged in that. That was her project.

Rubens: And you were—?

04-00:49:56

Hopkins: Supportive, of course. When it reopened, of course, it reopened down at the pier in Fort Mason. It was very exciting—Now, there're two things that I've always felt are desirable, if you have the space and can do them, or somebody like Sally, who's committed to that kind of idea: an art rental gallery that allows you to be involved with a lot of young artists who you won't necessarily be showing in major exhibitions, but beginning to help to build their careers and things of that kind; and then the other thing I've always believed very strongly in is travel programs, that all museums should have a travel program. And education.

[material deleted]

Rubens: Do you have a favorite new couple of museums that you like going to?

04-00:57:03

Hopkins: Actually, it's interesting, because the older I get, the more I like smaller institutions. I like the little new museum dealing with the Austrian artists Klimt and Schiele, in New York, the Neue Galerie. I love going to the Frick. They are revitalizing the New [Museum] in New York, and that's exciting, a prominent role dealing with very contemporary art. And then of course, the Hammer Museum, with Annie. I like what's going on there.

**Interview 3: April 11, 2007—Conducted in SFMOMA galleries, second floor**

**Interviewed by Professor Richard Cándida Smith, and Lisa Rubens, ROHO**

[Begin Audio File 5 04-11-2007.mp3]

05-00:01:40

Cándida Smith: My first question for you has to do with going back to 1974, you arrive in the museum as the director. You're starting to look at the collection with this new set of responsibilities in mind. In addition to discovering some old friends, were there any surprises that you saw? Were there any secret treasures in the collection?

05-00:02:25

Hopkins: Well, it's interesting you even say that, because I know when I was in Los Angeles, we would come up occasionally for the old annual exhibition and things of that kind, and come to the old museum, which was just on the fourth floor at that time, and look at things like [Richard] Diebenkorn and [Elmer] Bischoff and other artists of that type that were there. As I would look around at the museum, I would think, "God, if somebody would give them a million dollars and they'd paint the walls and do this and do that, that would really be a great place." So it was a place on my mind, when I actually got here. I knew a great deal about Grace McCann Morley and her great history, in terms of museums. So coming here was a treat. And the hope, obviously, on the part of anybody who comes into museum management, is to begin to develop the collection a little further than it was.

I know that some of the first things that came—because it happened in kind of a chronological sequence—we had the wonderful little Georgia O'Keefe, we had the wonderful Arthur Dove, and the [Alfred] Stieglitz circle was vaguely represented. Then, all of a sudden, we were given this wonderful Charles Sheeler painting [*Aerial Gyration*s (1953)], which is really one of the very best of his kind of double exposure paintings, dealing with industry, but so-called American Precisionist. So here we have this great painting standing kind of all by itself as a symbol. I was in New York, and Ralston Crawford was still alive. I went to his studio and spent some time and talked with him. He agreed to sell us this painting [*Vertical Building* (1934)] for a very modest amount of money. So it gave us a little sense of this aspect of American art history, which was a very important one. It was in the 1930s, other artists like [Charles] Demuth and others; but dealing with the idea of industry as a positive thing, because it was in the middle of the Depression. We were supposed to find our way out of it, and this is their way of saying, "We find our way out of this through American industry," as opposed to other artists who were talking about social issues, like Ben Shahn. So it was a great treat to get this painting [the

Sheeler]. And then to be able to buy this one [the Crawford], really was a double treat, as a matter of fact.

Cándida Smith: Were you interested in getting any of Sheeler's photographs?

05-00:05:00

Hopkins: Well, the photography question is a very interesting one because the San Francisco museum under John Humphrey, who was not a great photo historian, but a very great amateur in that area—Very few museums were interested in photography at all. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, of course, Chicago Art Institute, and the San Francisco Museum were about the only ones even thinking of photography as art at that time. But it was for us, and remained for us, through Van Deren Coke's time, an independent area. We didn't have Sheeler photographs, and then Sheeler photographs became hideously expensive. But I would love to have had them. Yes, I loved *Rolling Power* and the other great photographs that he did, because he was one of the innovators in that area.

Cándida Smith: And these two paintings, are there formal aspects of it that you particularly appreciated that you could point out?

05-00:06:00

Hopkins: Well, I think if we're talking about sensibilities, I know when I was an art student at the Art Institute of Chicago, these were artists that I admired for their precise handling of the pigment and what have you. Also, the modernity, for lack of a better word. This was in the days before Jackson Pollock and abstraction, in terms of my own study. So these were my favorite artists at that time; the American Precisionists were really my favorites. I still remain very fond of them. But as I say, the Sheeler is really one of the very best known paintings from this period. Anybody who teaches, teaches that painting at one time or another.

Cándida Smith: And next to the Crawford are four of the [Josef] Albers that you acquired [Upper left: *Study for Homage to the Square: In May* (1960); Upper right: *Homage to the Square* (1969); Lower right: *Homage to the Square: Confident* (1954); Lower left: *Study for Homage to the Square* (1972)].

05-00:06:50

Hopkins: Well, yes, that's another interesting story, because we'll be looking a little later at the Clyfford Stills. In a broader educational sense, I thought, all right, if we have these paintings by Clyfford Still that represent this abstract expressionist movement, this great splashy sensibility, then if we have the exact other end of the spectrum, like Josef Albers, working with his color theories and his color ideas, and very classic in terms of their form, then a person who's not very well

informed about art could say, “All right, that’s art and that’s art. There must be a million things in between that are art, as well.” So it seemed a logical thing to have it. When I came here, we had two Albers paintings. We had one early one, which is not up right now, which was not a square on square, and another one. During my lifetime, early in my career, I had written a lot about Josef Albers. Again, you can see that precisionist sensibility carried over into pure abstraction, and why I liked it. So that in that sense, I got to know Josef very well. We’d go up and visit him in New Haven.

Unfortunately, when I was the director at the Fort Worth art Museum, I wrote to Josef, after I’d been there for about a year, and I told him that I had bought for the museum a Clyfford Still painting, and I was very excited about that. I had bought a Rothko painting, I was very excited about that. And now I would like to have an Albers in the collection. He didn’t speak to me the rest of his life. Because I had bought a Still painting and not an Albers painting before that. That was it; it was done. But Anni Albers and I remained good friends. We corresponded. And so when I came here, and when Josef had died, then Anni left to us eight paintings of this scale. So, like we have the twenty-eight paintings of Still, we have about ten paintings of Josef Albers. One of the other things we’ll chat about are the Joseph Cornells. These different aesthetics I thought were interesting to have in the museum.

[interruption]

05-00:09:13

Hopkins:

I guess my answer to that is, as would always be the case with most trustees, when somebody’s offering you a gift, and it’s a well known artist, and the paintings are lovely, you don’t have much trouble. But if I went out and said, “Look, I want to buy eight of these paintings at \$100,000 apiece,” I probably would have a much harder time with it. But no, there were people that were fond of Albers. Albers’ reputation goes up and down and up and down. It’s up a little bit again now. But just simply to have several of them, I think is very important, because clearly, the format is exactly the same—almost the same, at least—in every painting. But it’s the gradation of color, the variations of color and what have you that makes each one unique and special in its own way. So it’s a treat to have them. I love the little gray one [*Study for Homage to the Square: In May* (1960)]. That’s always been one of my favorites.

Cándida Smith: So part of what you were trying to do was to disrupt an idea that modern art is this or modern art is that or—?

05-00:10:20

Hopkins:

Yes. I guess I'd say at the most basic level, to recognize that the majority of people that come to museums don't have a broad—at least in America—don't have a broad art education. So something that, at least in their minds, says, "All right, the museum thinks this is art, and we also think that that is art; so let's see what else there might be?" Kind of an inquisitive thing.

Cándida Smith:

One of your predecessors, George Culler, had a very clear articulated idea that the most important goal of the museum should be to document the School of Paris, the School of New York, that kind of trajectory.

05-00:10:58

Hopkins:

Well, that's always a big issue, because from the beginning, obviously, with Grace McCann Morley, for a period of time, she challenged Alfred Barr and the Museum of Modern Art. She did the first Clyfford Still exhibition, the first Jackson Pollock exhibition. She clearly saw herself as being a West Coast Museum of Modern Art counterpart. Unfortunately, MoMA had all the money, and San Francisco didn't have all the money. But that was certainly her ambition. So you could see where someone like George Culler, coming in on the tails of that, would have that same kind of sense of the new pride in American art, arising of abstract expressionism and Pollock and [Franz] Kline; and also, School of Paris, which was very popular at that time. My own interests have been much more fundamentally, I guess you'd say American, in the broadest sense, and the West Coast, rather intensely so. That's where I felt I could make my contribution. Shortly after my tenure, when Jack Lane came in, I know he was very excited about the things going on in Germany, the new German painting. So each person who comes into the institution brings with them their own baggage; but they usually bring it in the context of saying, "All right, now, we have this; we can add this. We have this; we can add that." So museums that have multiple directors really, in the long run, get a better cross-section, I guess you'd say, of what would be art history, because we all approach it differently.

Cándida Smith:

Since you spoke of your focus on West Coast art, let's talk about this [Knud] Merrild here [*Equilibrium* (1938)].

05-00:12:45

Hopkins:

The Knud Merrild. Well—

Rubens:

Let's pause for a minute. Did you say one of these is your favorite?

05-00:12:54

Hopkins:

The little gray one.

Rubens: Would you just say why that's your favorite, just for the sound?

05-00:13:13

Hopkins: Out of the ten Albers paintings, this little one [*Study for Homage to the Square: In May* (1960)], for some reason, has always been my favorite. Obviously, other people would pick other ones, based on their own color sensibility. But that just always has a kind of wonderful kind of softness. And each of the shapes seems to float in a three-dimensional space. I always enjoy looking at it.

Cándida Smith: Back to Knud Merrild, whose work I like a lot, but I didn't think anybody outside of Los Angeles had ever heard of him—

05-00:13:47

Hopkins: Well, I was surprised—pleased, in fact—to come into the museum and see it on the wall, because it is one of his more unique pieces. Knud Merrild was a Dane who came over to the United States prior to World War II, when a lot of expatriates came here. He was painting in Los Angeles, and he's best known for a series of paintings that he called flux paintings. And the flux paintings essentially were early Jackson Pollock. It meant that he had a canvas or had a piece of cardboard, and he poured paint on it and dripped and spilled. People have speculated ever since that time, "Well, did Pollock see those paintings by Knud Merrild? He was popular at the time. Is that how Pollock got the idea of doing drip paintings, from these things?" It's a nice thing to speculate about, but the thing I liked about Knud Merrild when I was first in school in Chicago, one of the first exhibitions I saw of really modern and contemporary art was the Arensberg Collection, the great Arensberg Collection, which was built in Los Angeles. And along with [Joan] Miró and [Paul] Klee and Pablo Picasso and [Georges] Braque and [Giorgio] de Chirico and endless, endless wonderful, wonderful things, there was a Knud Merrild in the collection.

I thought it was always so strange that there's this funny little offbeat young Danish-American artist that was there. It was a piece like this one, which is obviously much more constructivist, but constructivist and surreal all at the same time, with it's funny relationship to [Piet] Mondrian and the purists, but also the kind of surrealist phallic symbols and the other things that are there. So it is nice to see him remembered. A treat.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: At the time you were director, what was the status of *Femme au Chapeau* [1905], the famous [Henri] Matisse painting?

05-00:15:55

Hopkins:

The status was that it belonged to Elise Haas, that was the status. But certainly, one of the things that I liked about the museum—and I must say, love now, in the fact of the expansion, with the sculpture and the other things—is that we did have in the collection a number of small, early, early Matisse, truly fauve paintings, which were rare to have in a museum collection. In fact, this little grouping [*Portrait de Michael Stein, 1916; Portrait de Sarah Stein, 1916*] is probably amongst the best of any museum that I know. It came from the association with Gertrude Stein and the Stein family, and Elise Haas's relationship with that, and the fact that Stein had come from Oakland, and occasionally would come here and hock paintings and other things of that kind. During that time and that friendship, Elise purchased *Femme au Chapeau*, one of the great 1905 fauve paintings by Matisse. Certainly, any director—I'm sure George Culler before me, and Jerry Nordland—would've loved to have had it in the collection. I know when I was here and Elise was still on the board, as was Evie, and we would talk about the collection, Elise was always saying, "Yes, the collection will come. Yes, the collection will come. Yes, the collection will come."

Then I found out one day that the director of the National Gallery had been out, and spending the day, and having tea with Elise. And of course, he, Mr. Brown, was an extraordinary personality. He could probably get, I don't know, oil out of a pearl or something. I don't know what. But in any event, Carter was clearly convincing Elise that she should leave her things to the National Gallery. And Evie called me one day and said, "She's beginning to bend. She's beginning to take that all seriously." So we ran over to the house and sat down with Elise. [laughs] And finally, it ended up here. This is exactly where it should be, and now it's right where it should be, on the wall. But it is an extraordinary painting. Again, to a certain extent, like the Sheeler and other things, it was a groundbreaking painting, because it represents fauve as well as it could be represented, with all of the strange colorations—the green face, the loose painting of the background, the flamboyant nature of the costume; using color for pure color, but putting it still in the framework of realistic subject matter—a portrait, in essence. So, great to have it here.

[interruption]

05-00:19:04

Hopkins:

I knew [Douglas MacAgy] fleetingly in the sixties, when I was down at the Los Angeles County Museum, and he was up here in the Bay Area, getting [Clyfford] Still and [Mark] Rothko to work at the Art Institute. Then he went to become the director of the Dallas Museum, and they fired him for doing an Oldenburg show, which was too avant-

garde for them at that time. And so I did get to know him. And then we spent some time, because as I mentioned before when we were talking about the Albers, I had bought a Clyfford Still for the museum. And there was no date, so I couldn't figure it out. And Doug came down to visit, and looked at it, he said, "Oh, yes," he said, "That's a—" I forget the date now, but I'll say that was 1963. And I said, "Why was it 1963?" He says, "It was exactly seven feet high, and his studio was seven-foot-two-inches high, and that's—[laughs] All the paintings that year were that size, and that simple. So those things impact life. But he was a very good person. I liked him a lot.

Rubens: Douglas MacAgy?

05-00:20:13

Hopkins: Yes, Douglas MacAgy.

Cándida Smith: He had both the California and the Texas connections. A very influential person.

05-00:20:33

Hopkins: No question.

Cándida Smith: So when we were talking about the Albers, one of the things that I had thought of was Still was notorious for being a difficult painter to work with. So you could have easily made the reverse mistake of alienating Still.

05-00:21:06

Hopkins: I think there's absolutely no question about that. It doesn't matter how you paint or what you do, you are the only artist in the world, that's what the ego dictates. That's exactly what it is. Certainly, Still had that, and certainly, Albers had that. Still, throughout his entire lifetime, and then carried on by his widow, in fact, after that. But the amazing thing that transpired here, because in the sixties, Douglas MacAgy, who was the head of the [California] School of Fine Arts, which is now the San Francisco Art Institute, hired Clyfford Still to come out and teach painting. He had a great impact on a lot of the artists here in the Bay Area. His kind of abstraction did spread a lot. He also had Mark Rothko out to teach. Still had a true San Francisco connection. Plus the fact that he, during World War II, he was not in the service, but he worked in the San Francisco shipyards. So it was a place that he did have an affinity for. One had hoped that one would have a great Still painting. In fact, we did have a great Still painting given to us by Harry Anderson, Hunk Anderson.

Shortly after I had come here, in about 1974, 1975, I was sitting in my office and a guard came down and said, "There's a man up in the galleries that would like to see you." I said, "Well, who is that?" And

he said, “Well, he said his name is Mr. Still.” So I ran up the stairs, and it was Clyfford Still. I had met him before. We began to chat a little bit, and I said, “Well, come down to my office and we’ll have a cup of coffee.” Interestingly enough, I had been thinking for the bicentennial, 1976, that it would be an interesting idea to have a Clyfford Still exhibition, because of his association with East/West, everything else. So I thought, “What a wonderful opportunity for me to say that.”

So just as he was getting ready to leave, I said, “Mr. Still, one of the things I’ve been thinking about is doing an exhibition of your work for the bicentennial.” And he said, “Hopkins, absolutely not. I’m not interested in doing any of those things. That’s just not what I do, and I’m sure you’ll understand.” I swallowed my disappointment and was following him out the door. He turned around and said, “But,” he said, “I might have an idea that might be interesting to you.” And then he said, “Do you ever come east?” I said yes. So he arranged that I would visit him in New Windsor, Maryland. We sat down. Fortunately, that Hunk Anderson painting was hanging on the wall, beautifully lit, because very often the permanent collection wasn’t up. If he’d come another day, it wouldn’t have been there, maybe nothing would’ve happened. Who knows? You can’t even guess. He would’ve been angry, for all I know. But anyway, so he talked to me about giving three paintings to the museum, which of course excited me.

Over the next year-and-a-half as we talked and we talked, every time we would talk, he would add three more. Like, “Well, maybe six would be better. Well, maybe we could tell the story with eight. Well, we can’t really tell the story with eight; it probably would take nine or ten to really tell the whole spectrum.” He was an absolute deep believer in the fact that the museum experience was a terrible experience. You’d go and see one Rembrandt, one Matisse, one this, one that; you’d have no idea about the good parts of them, the bad parts, the struggles, all of those things. So having a number of works was the big issue with him. So we ended up with an outright gift of twenty-eight Clyfford Still paintings, of which this big red one [*Untitled* (1951-52)] is one of the prime examples, though there are actually many in the collection. He gave a group to the Albright-Knox Museum; he gave this group to us; he gave a group to the Metropolitan Museum. So he is well represented. Many of us feared that his reputation would begin to disappear, because there’ve been very few exhibitions of his work since he died. Pat Still, his widow, was determined to have it that way. But finally, Jim Demetrian did a show at the Hirshhorn Museum, and I noticed the other day at Christie’s or Sotheby’s that a Still painting was selling for something like \$70 million, I don’t know what. But we don’t have to worry about his reputation, so it’s great.

Cándida Smith: And who selected the paintings?

05-00:25:35

Hopkins: Still selected the paintings.

Cándida Smith: Exclusively? Or did you have some input?

05-00:25:41

Hopkins: Well, no, I had a little bit of input. But the thing about Still is that the majority of his paintings, when I went to his studio, were not out on view. You can't put that many big paintings out on view. They were all rolled up in rolls. And so I would look at a roll, which would have little sketches that he made on the outside, saying, "These ten paintings are in this roll." I would look at them, and I would say something like, "I would really like to have a black painting," for example. Or, "I would really like to have one of the red paintings." But he, in essence— We had, of course, the gift that had been given to us before, over here. And that stimulated the whole kind of giving process.

Rubens: Oh, his first, his early exhibition [in 1943].

05-00:26:27

Hopkins: Yes, the early one, exactly. Then we had one other early one, as well. So he was represented in the collection. But he knew almost exclusively what it was he wanted to give us, is what it amounts to. The grouping is a beautiful selection that covers all phases of his existence, from the very earliest, up to very close to the time that he died. But I know when we were installing, when he came out, we had to stretch everything, put them back on the stretcher bars and get them all up on the wall. He would look. He'd stand there and look at them, say, "Well, that needs a little touchup." I thought, Oh, God. What are we going to do about this? So he would go down to the local art store and buy two tubes of oil pigment and three little brushes, and he would come in and touch up this little section, touch up those. I would sit there with my head in my hands, hoping that the conservator wouldn't see all of this activity. And so I said, "Well, they seem to be in very good condition." "Oh," he said, "These tough old bastards," he said, "They'll last forever." I said, "That's fantastic." We looked a little longer, and he turned to me and he said, "Hopkins," which he always called me. He said, "Hopkins, you know that these paintings have the power to kill." And I shivered. [laughs] Needless to say. Thinking, "I have to take care of them for the next fifty years?" So that's where we are, anyway. And they are here, and it's great.

Rubens: What did he mean by that?

05-00:27:56

Hopkins:

He just meant that he had put so much intensity into those paintings, and it was such a major thing in his existence, this whole spiritual aspect of what he was about; and that he was the most important and most wonderful painter in the world. He just wanted you to know that you were dealing with history, not, not playing games, I can tell you that.

Cándida Smith:

Well, this painting behind you [*Untitled* (1951-52)], what is it about it that you find moving?

05-00:28:27

Hopkins:

Well, I think probably as much as anything else, that among the paintings in the collection, it represents what most people think of as being the strong Still statement. That's what it amounts to. This combination of the multiple reds, for example, the blacks, the other things. There was another story that he told me, and it relates to this painting and almost every Still painting. You see in the painting somewhere, always, like this red strip that's coming down here from the top, which he referred to as a lifeline. Now, you can see it very faintly in the black painting over there [*Untitled* (1951)]. I asked him one time, I said, "What is this thing about the lifeline?" And he said, "Well, when I was a little kid up in Canada, when my father was farming on very, very bad land, they were digging a well, and they dug this well down, twenty, thirty feet, something like that. They needed to get somebody down there to see if they'd gotten as far as the water, if there's water in there. So they tied a rope around my ankle and dropped me down the well slot, head first, so I could reach down and see if there was water down at the bottom. They pulled me out and," he said, "It was such a dramatic experience, and it remained with me all of my life." So whenever I see that lifeline, I think of Clyfford hanging by his ankles down the well. But just the intensity of the reds, the multiplicity of the color, the thinness of one part and the thickness of another part. People are always associating them with landscape, which he never liked. He always said absolutely not. He said, "It's what I feel, it's what I sense, it's what I am." And so you simply have to accept that. But it's a good one.

Cándida Smith:

What's the significance of the yellow dot in the upper left corner?

05-00:30:35

Hopkins:

I guess if I were going to answer a question like that, I'd have to turn way back to academic art education, where I think—Well, I'll tell you a story, which relates, in my mind. There's a story about the artist [James Abbot McNeill] Whistler, who was working on his paintings, and there was one critic that absolutely loved every single thing that he did. He just would have an orgasm every time he would think about how good Whistler was. He came to Whistler's studio one day, when

Whistler was there with friends, and the critic saw a new painting on the easel. He looked at, he thought, "Oh, my God!" He said, "It's perfect. Absolutely. You could not do one single thing that would make that painting any better. It's just absolutely gorgeous." Whistler went over to his palette and put his brush in a little bit of red paint and came over and touched right in the corner of an eye. The critic practically fell over with the exultation of, "You did it. You did it. It's incredible." Whistler patted him on the back and shoved him out the door, and came back and wiped it off and went on his way. So something like that. When you see it in a painting, you just think you can visualize the artist standing there saying, "Now, this needs just a little something over here." Just a little something to draw your eye in that direction, and to flatten it all out and get it going. So I think that's a good example of it. It's a little like a fried egg.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: Three years after it was painted, this triptych, [Philip Guston: left to right, *Red Sea, 1975; The Swell, 1975; Blue Light, 1975*] you organized a [Philip] Guston show a little later than that.

05-00:35:25

Hopkins:

Well, I was just trying to remember the exact date. I'd say probably about '83, '84. I would guess close to '84, as a matter of fact. In fact, I would say '84 [1980] is about right.

Cándida Smith: So you had developed an attachment to late Guston [works] in particular?

05-00:35:49

Hopkins:

Actually, Guston in general. Because when his first retrospective was done by the Guggenheim Museum, it circulated to Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. I was just a new employee there, but I was doing installation. I got to know him at that time, and he liked the way I installed. He was a man of amazing memory. I didn't see him for a long time after that; ran into him on the front steps of the Louvre museum one day, and he called me by name. So I thought, that's really remarkable. But I had been interested in Guston for a long time because he and Jackson Pollock went to school together at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. They were both kicked out for God knows what infractions. Pollock went back and finished; Guston never did. But Guston studied with one of the great old heroes of Los Angeles painting, named Lorser Feitelson, at that time, and was painting rather realistic, figurative, social related paintings. There was a very conservative government in place at that time, and he was doing Ku Klux Klan figures, way back in the 1940s, as a matter of fact, as a statement against this kind of repressive government. So then he went

into his mode of abstract impressionism, which everybody loved. He became a national hero, along with Pollock and Kline and [Willem] de Kooning and all of the others. Then suddenly in the seventies, he reverted back to his figurative early years. So for me, that was a great and interesting change, because other people think of that as the major work. I think of that as an aberration, and this kind of work as being really what Guston was about.

When he was a student at Manual Arts, he actually did a comic strip in the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper, a child's comic strip. His name at that time was Goldstein, not Guston. Philip Goldstein did this comic strip. But it clearly came right out of Krazy Kat, out of the Krazy Kat cartoons, which he loved the drawing of and what have you. You find those kind of symbologies through all of these later paintings, like this sun coming down; or, in the last panel, the rain and the clouds and the sky and the other thing; all of these feet sticking out of the thing; the kind of attack on the mouse by Krazy Kat, and the other things. Very often, you see a light bulb—you know, the idea light bulb—showing up. You see a curtain hanger over here, or a blind pull that you can pull down and close off the whole painting. So when he started doing that, in the 1970s, [he] had a show of his work at the Marlborough Gallery. Everybody was absolutely shocked and stunned at what it was, because they didn't know about the early, early work. His great friend de Kooning wrote him off and said, you know, "Phil, you've sold out. You've gone back to figurative, instead of continuing with abstraction." But interestingly, the younger audience, the people who were then art students at that time, picked up on it. They brought Guston back to be a true revolutionary hero, in fact, in the art. So I think these works represent it.

05-00:39:19

Well, you asked the question about our exhibition. I was trying, at that time, to bring as many of these West Coast artists who were considered to be New York School artists, or abstract expressionists, back into focus. We had received the Still gift. Obviously, that was major, major, major. When we did the Guston exhibition, he was also a West Coaster, as I've already mentioned. Then we added another eight or ten paintings of Philip Guston to our collection, which was wonderful. We had a negotiation with the Mark Rothko Foundation, and they ended up giving us one or two works. So it's just interesting. The fact that Robert Motherwell, who was one of Jerry Nordland's favorites—Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock, and Philip Guston all essentially had strong California heritages. And yet, suddenly they were the New York School. In fact, Robert Motherwell is the one that gave it that name. I just thought that was always amusing, and I thought we should have, in our West Coast museums, as much representation of these artists as we could. Here in

San Francisco, we were very fortunate, with both Still and Guston, especially.

Cándida Smith: Given that every artist, particularly in that generation, is very much of an individual, how do you define what a West Coast sensibility might be, and its effect on the work?

05-00:40:55

Hopkins:

Well, actually, it's very interesting you say that, because I've always thought that Northern California painting, primarily, without getting into sculpture and other aspects of that, did borrow a great deal from a number of painters at the turn of the century—there's the Oakland Six and other people of that kind—with rather impasto, and thick pigment, and rich pigment. You had this natural landscape environment that was there. That continued into abstraction, with influence by Still, for example; and Guston, who obviously—His paint application is really remarkable, in that sense. I've always thought of the Southern California aesthetic as being more the kind of clean, hard-edge, by-the-side-of-the-ocean thing that came out of surf boards and motorcycle tanks and other things of that kind. It's a simplistic association. But rich painting I've always associated with the Bay Area. It doesn't matter if you're talking about Richard Diebenkorn, or even [Wayne] Thiebaud, in his own way, and Joan Brown and others like that. So I see a difference. Whether it's true or not is another question.

Cándida Smith: And you see it to some degree in these late Gustons.

05-00:42:13

Hopkins:

Well, in the Guston, the thing that's interesting, because Guston had no association with Northern California at all, to speak of. Yet when he left his light-colored, impressionist abstract painting and came back to the figure, as he got older and his angst increased about life and the various things that happened to him, his painting style didn't necessarily change. But this is truly Bay Area painting, as far as I'm concerned. It might be a Sonia Gechtoff, for that matter, or Jay DeFeo, in terms of the kind of richness of surface, but brilliant application of pigment. I remember when we did the exhibition. I think most people remember the fact that the exhibition had opened here and had been on for about a week, when Philip Guston died, which was a tragic event, though he had been ill. But we did have the chance, at the installation thing, to walk through all of these different paintings, I did with him. And we got to about this point in his career, and he looked at me and he said, "Henry," he said, "You know, this isn't an exhibition, this is a life." It's a little like the Still comment; just sends shivers down you, to recognize how passionately these people feel about their work.

Rubens: Can I just ask you, what are you pointing to that says Northern California sensibility?

05-00:43:51

Hopkins: The thickness of the pigment, the way it's applied.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: So this is an earlier Guston [*The Tormentors* (1947-48)].

05-00:45:30

Hopkins: 1948, yes.

Cándida Smith: 1948. And it was acquired—?

05-00:45:36

Hopkins: It was given to us when he did his exhibition. Which I see on here, looks like it was about 1982 instead of '84.

Cándida Smith: Did you select the painting? Or did he, again, like Still, select what he wanted to—

05-00:44:49

Hopkins: Well, we were talking about looking at that later painting. But I wanted to look at this one especially, as an early one, because it's one of the paintings that Philip gave us at the time of the exhibition. It's called *The Tormentors*. The thing that's interesting about it to me, since I knew about his earlier work, which was very kind of naturalistic figures, like Ben Shahn, in many ways. But here you can see all of these elements. You see the horn, for example, the tuba; you see the shoeprint, with the nails in the back of it; you see all of these elements that appear in those 1978 paintings that people had totally forgotten. So when he made the gift, he made the gift very much like Still. Though in the case of Guston, he and I walked through, and he would say, "How about this one? Or how about this one?" I'd say, "Well, that's great!" This is one I particularly wanted, because it's, in my mind, for Guston, quite a different thing, but it would be like Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the transition out of pure figurative into what becomes pure abstraction very soon after that. It's a good one.

[interruption]

05-00:47:29

Hopkins: I think in the gift, *The Tormentors* was the earliest figurative. Most of the other early, early figurative paintings were already in other collections of one kind or another. Guston was a well-known painter in the 1950s. He had a good solid reputation, in terms of what he was doing; there's no need for him, necessarily, to change into that kind of

abstract style. But it was a big thing that was in the air, obviously, and what was going on. So this painting called *White Painting* [*White Painting I*, 1951], which actually historically turns out to be, in the context of Guston, interesting, because this is one of the very first paintings that he did when he broke away from that semi-figurative style or figurative style, into pure abstraction. So you have to look at this the way you would sense—I guess you’d say you see all of these old guys, Pollock and the rest of them, are sitting in the Cedars Bar, and Guston with them, talking about these new ideas about painting and the new freedoms and what have you. So suddenly, to see that Guston shifts his view so radically into this kind of work. When we were talking about it, he explained to me, he said, “Well, what I always did,” he said, “I had my brushes, and they were long handled brushes. I would sit on a stool, and I would look at the canvas. I would then walk to it, to a certain point, and then with my brush, I would attack it, so that you see everything as kind of a centralized image that gradually spreads out toward the periphery, the way your vision works, in terms of focusing in a certain area and then letting it spread out beyond that.” But this is extremely loose, and a rather amazing painting, I think, at that period of time. He went on from this, of course, to produce those incredibly beautiful, pinky, yellow, bluey, beautiful big paintings, as a matter of fact. But he never, even in the context of abstraction—His cronies would refer to him as an abstract impressionist, rather than an abstract expressionist, because it didn’t have a lot of emotion; it had a lot of beauty, sense of inner beauty. But then I was delighted when he went back to what he did later on.

Cándida Smith: Since one of your goals has been to complicate the story of modern art, when you refocus the story of what happened in New York in the 1940s on a figure like Guston, how does that story change?

05-00:50:01

Hopkins:

As we look now, you mean? Well, of course, it’s always so fascinating what does transpire, I guess you’d say, through an artist’s lifetime. Guston was one of the brightest, well-read men that I ever met, though he never finished high school and never went back to school after that time. He taught in a number of university settings over the years, but he loved poetry, extremely sensitive. And troubled. Later on in his life, he was very troubled. So if one was going to do a *Lust for Life* book on, say, Phil Guston or Jackson Pollock, it would be a very interesting kind of exercise. I keep wondering why those books haven’t happened, as a matter of fact. But in rewriting history, I think when it gets to what comes down in the textbooks, I think what’s going to come down in the textbooks for Guston is the late work, not the early work.

Rubens: How long did Guston live in L.A.?

05-00:51:14

Hopkins: Through the thirties.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: Tell us about why this [Franz] Kline [*Lehigh V Span* (1959-1960)] is so appealing to you.

05-00:53:27

Hopkins: Well, the Kline is appealing to me for two or three different reasons. One, the fact that we have it in the collection, which is great. Because on the West Coast, we simply did not have the opportunity to buy the full spectrum of abstract expressionist artists at the time. The prices had gotten to a point where it was impossible for us to buy, so we had to rely on gifts. This painting was in the collection of Frank Hamilton and Mason Wells, well-known figures in San Francisco. In fact, Frank was on the board of the museum for a long, long period of time. It was always a painting that I had hoped would come into the collection and lusted for. Because we had the great early Pollock [*Guardians of the Secret*, 1943]; now we had the Stills, then we got the Gustons. Kline had no association with the West Coast, as such, but this was a very good example of what he was doing. The apocryphal story is that when he first showed these paintings to a group of his friends at the Cedar Bar or wherever, on a slide projector, they were only telephone-book size; they were small. When he projected them on the wall, he realized what an impact they had. You know, this kind of structural steel situation that was going on. That's what kicked him off in that direction. But I've just always thought this was one of the better examples of pure physical abstract expressionism of a type different than Still, different than Guston. And because of its intensity and anxiety and angularity. And primarily black and white. Though people think of it as black and white, you can see a lot of color floating in—the blue and the green and the other things that are there. So it's not as simplistic as one might think.

Rubens: Do you know how they acquired it?

05-00:55:36

Hopkins: I don't know how they acquired it. Both Mason Wells and Frank Hamilton were painters. Quite good painters, as a matter of fact. But they didn't show that much. They were well to do. It was not a big issue, one way or the other. But they did acquire a number of fine objects for their own personal appreciation and collection. I don't really know how it got into their hands; but I was delighted that it came on to the museum locally.

Cándida Smith: The blue and the green, is that unusual for Kline?

05-00:56:12

Hopkins:

No, it's really not. I'm not going to say blue or green, but having color tonalities in the painting along with the black and white is not that unusual. We were talking before a little bit about the kind of trauma of being an artist at that time. You have to remember that all of these guys probably didn't have a dime in their pocket till they were fifty years old. Then suddenly the critics and the other things all got onto what they were doing. It became very exciting, and they began to live the high life. Then they all got caught in—many of them, anyway—got caught in a situation where they had to keep producing the same thing that they'd been producing, because that's what people wanted, and they couldn't move on and they couldn't change. Yet they wanted to change. In Kline's case, it was a matter of adding color. Toward the end of his life, in fact, the paintings got quite colorful, before he unfortunately, died at an early age, because of the condition I was just talking about. So bringing this in at this time, it would be interesting, as a matter of fact, to look at Kline—not in reproduction, but some of the actual paintings—and see if in fact, they start off pure black and white, and then color began to find its way into the painting. I suspect that may be true.

[Begin Audio File 6 04-11-2007.mp3]

06-00:00:00

Cándida Smith:

So here we have a painting by Joan Mitchell [*Untitled* (ca. 1960)]. Perhaps you could walk us through the painting. What is it about this painting that—?

06-00:00:20

Hopkins:

Well, again, I guess the answer is multiple. One had to do with the painting itself; but another one has to do with how the painting got here; and another one has to do with Joan Mitchell herself. Joan Mitchell was one of those women who was a painter at the time of the first wave of abstract expressionism, along with Lee Krasner, and a little later, Helen Frankenthaler, who essentially were wiped out by virtue of the art scene being a very macho art scene at that time. They weren't given the same kind of significance or the same kind of gallery treatment or other things like that. But Joan Mitchell was always a very good and solid painter in that arena of abstract expressionism. Very different than Kline, very different than Rothko, very different than de Kooning; purely expressive, but in a very different thing. You certainly couldn't call it feminist or a woman's painting. In my mind, you wouldn't know one way or the other. But actually, it's a painting that she gave to Sam Francis, in exchange for one of his paintings, at a time. You can see why that would be an affinity of interest. Then during my tenure here, Sam gave it to us as a painting. At that moment in time, Mitchell's reputation had pretty much disappeared, I guess you would say. But now, just in this last five, six, seven years, she's

come very much back into prominence. Perhaps because of the feminist movement, but I think actually, just because the paintings are strong enough to justify their existence.

It's interesting looking at it, for example, in relationship to the Kline, where you have that big, kind of muscular angularity; and here, you obviously have smaller brushes, or whatever she's using to drag this pigment. It looks like palette knives, everything under the sun. But a big meshing of interactive colors and shapes and forms. When you see a Joan Mitchell, you recognize it as Joan Mitchell; you know it's not somebody else. It has its own sense and character. I guess one of the things that's so difficult for people when American painting made this transition from social realism into pure abstraction, we just didn't know how that happened. How could it have transpired? What was the thing that made that occur? But more than anything else, it clearly was a situation where a group of people would sit down and spend time together, recognize the fact that at that moment in time, nobody was buying American painting at all. They could do whatever they wanted to do; it was a moment of absolute freedom. It's like the beginning of the beat generation, or later, the hippie thing. But I think it was the interaction amongst them that just kept forcing this thing, and pushing each other to go a little further and a little further and a little bit further. Now it's finally, of course, gained its ascendancy, which is great. But this is actually, in my mind, closer to the Guston configuration, kind of working toward the center and moving out from the center, as opposed to these big muscle things of Kline, or the big sweep of color in the case of somebody like Still, or the smoothness of Rothko.

Cándida Smith: You said that you could look at this painting and know instantly that it was a Mitchell. So perhaps you could explain what it is in the painting that identifies it to you as a Mitchell.

06-00:03:58

Hopkins:

Well, thank heaven, that's one of the wonderful things about art and painting. Some things simply are not explainable. Unless you wanted to sit down and do an analysis, like you would on a Renaissance painting, about the sweep of this and the sweep of that, and repetition of forms and repetitions of color. But it's just simply that throughout her body of work, whether it's a big painting or small, you have the feeling you know that's who—I mean, once you know it's Joan Mitchell, then you know it's another Joan Mitchell painting. But that can only be, as I say, based on the shapes and the forms that are in there.

Cándida Smith: Now, when you were director, you were at the heyday of the feminist movement. Of course, you did the Judy Chicago show—

06-00:04:49

Hopkins: *The Dinner Party.*

Cándida Smith: —in '79. Were you also going out to collect some of the women abstract painters that you've mentioned today—Frankenthaler or Joan Brown or DeFeo?

06-00:05:00

Hopkins: Frankenthaler is well represented in the collection. Her paintings are not now up on the wall; but fairly early on, in fact, before I got here, we had already purchased a nice Frankenthaler painting. Joan Brown, we were always supportive of Joan Brown. And Jay DeFeo and Sonia Gechtoff and the well known women painters. I don't think that we gave much thought—except in a case like Judy Chicago, who clearly was an intensely feminist arbitrator—that we thought about it much in terms of male or female. Because by the 1970s, 1980s, and certainly now in the 2000s, if you're going to make a list of the hundred most important artists, probably fifty of them would be women now. That's a very different thing than it was back in the days of Joan Mitchell, for example, and other artists who were fighting for their life. None of them really gained, including Lee Krasner, any degree of reputation, until their male counterparts were all dead and gone. Then slowly, critics like Barbara Rose—women again—brought them out of the woodwork and brought them to our attention again.

Cándida Smith: Were you also collecting Sam Francis when you were director?

06-00:06:18

Hopkins: Sam, we commissioned him to do a major three-part painting that filled the whole end wall of the rotunda in the old museum. I don't know if it could even be installed here, as a matter of fact. It was very high and very flamboyant. And Phyllis Wattis bought it at that time. I was delighted to have it, because when you go to a number of the European museums, you see a Sam Francis in a major location, and looking great. But he was never quite as accepted here as he was there, because Sam was born and raised in the Bay Area, lived a long time in Europe, then he lived a long time in Japan, ended his life in Santa Monica, in Southern California. He was kind of an artist without a residence, I guess is what it amounted to. Which somehow does impact your visibility, I don't know why that is. I don't think the big painting has been up ever since they've moved to the new museum, to the best of my knowledge.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: [Joseph] Cornell's aesthetic, he has historic importance, but in terms of his aesthetic, maybe you could talk a little bit about what it is that makes Cornell so special.

06-00:07:55

Hopkins:

I can, in the sense of both how he's special, and therefore, special to me. We talked before about having these two kinds of ends of the spectrum, Josef Albers, on this kind of clear classical end, and Clyfford Still on the abstract expressionist end. I'd always admired Cornell's work, wherever I saw it, and felt we really should have in the collection, Cornell. For two reasons. One, because one of the major California movements, Northern and Southern California, was of course, assemblage, with people like Bruce Conner up here, and George Herms in the south. They came directly out of Cornell, as later versions of that. So that association. And thirdly, the fact that it represented a kind of art totally different from the paintings of Still or the paintings of Albers. It's just another foot on a stool, I guess you'd say, for somebody looking at art to say, "Well, that could be art, that could be art, that could be art." But in this case—one of the rare cases, actually, of a purchase rather than a gift—we had the opportunity to meet with the Cornell Foundation, just after Joseph died. This little one [*Untitled (Pink Palace)* (ca. 1946-48)], which has been shown in almost every possible Cornell exhibition, was available to us. We actually arranged to have—I don't remember exactly, but I think we got six, if I'm not wrong, including *Little Sandbox* over here [*Untitled (from the Sandbox Series)* (ca. 1950)]. But it gives us a nice balance.

You can see that I like the idea of collecting in depth. I guess probably Still was the person who instilled that in me, saying that if you're going to look at an artist's work, you have to see more than one thing to get a certain feel and sensibility to it. But the aesthetic of Cornell is just simply this idea of a hand-held object, an object that you have to look at from a foot or two feet away, that sets up this wonderful, fantastic, mysterious little world—different ones, depending on what the situation was. So he's essentially a naïve artist. He's essentially an untrained, untutored artist, as opposed to those that have gone through the academies and the schools; and found his own method of representation. I just think they have a miraculous little poetic quality that I have always admired.

Cándida Smith: And very theatrical, sort of contrary to what [Clement] Greenberg and Michael Fried—

06-00:10:28

Hopkins:

Oh, very contrary. Very contrary, yes. You wouldn't catch them dealing with that as an issue. I'm sure you'd get them looking and enjoying. But I guess I would also have to say that for some strange reason, Cornell has a big following on the West Coast. I don't know how that all happened; there've not been all that many shows of

Cornell. Nonetheless, a lot of people truly do like the work. So that's a little beauty. I was really happy to be able to get that one.

Cándida Smith: And again, did you choose the ones that you—?

06-00:11:05

Hopkins: Yes, I did choose. I did have a chance to choose the ones. That was very good. And that one. In fact, it's a nice combination. The *Window Façade* [*Untitled (Window Façade)* (1950-53)] is such a different one. That's game playing, turn of the century, wonderful things out of illustration. And this has to do with the geometrics of the window, plus your reflection in it. Which is an old [Robert] Rauschenberg trick, of using mirrors, that says, "All right, it'll never date itself in time, because whoever is looking at it will represent that given moment that is right there." And so there you have it on the façade.

Cándida Smith: In terms of presentation, oftentimes I see—I think more typically, I see—a wall of Cornells. So there'll be a dozen boxes. The individual works, in some ways, are subsumed into a larger sense.

06-00:12:02

Hopkins: Well, I think that does happen. As I say, it's not too often you get a lot together. There are two or three very good collections of Cornell, in terms of numbers of quality and everything else. But it is true that when you are surrounded by them, you can feel the aura, rather than the individual work. I think that's absolutely true. But these are enough different, I think, where you have to spend some time with them.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: So perhaps we end today with School of Paris.

06-00:13:33

Hopkins: It looks like it.

Cándida Smith: A Miró that you acquired. Of course, we're always interested in how you got to acquire it, but first, I think it would be just wonderful to hear you talk about what this painting [Joan Miró, *Peinture (Painting)*, (1926)] is doing; what it is, what it means, why you needed to have it.

06-00:14:06

Hopkins: Well, I think in the case of Miró, and as you said, School of Paris—and I suppose, to a certain extent, he does represent that. I was not collecting that much in that area at the time. A certain amount, of course, which we couldn't afford. But Miró is important, in my mind,

to American art, because he is a direct link to Arshile Gorky; and Arshile Gorky is a direct link to de Kooning, to Pollock and the abstract expressionists. A major surrealist artist, very different in his context than an artist like, say, [Salvador] Dalí, who paints realistically, or [Max] Ernst, that paints in a totally different vein. Miró's work came essentially out of two things. It came out of child art—he was very fond of the simplicity of children's art, and carries that on in his tradition; and secondly, out of what you would call naïve art, untutored art, or untrained art. Then also, out of some of the rock drawings, the old prehistoric rock drawings that are in that particular area of Catalonia, out of Barcelona, which he used a lot. So we had the painting behind me [Joan Miró, *L'aube parfumée par la pluie d'or* (*Dawn perfumed by a shower of gold* (1954)] in the collection, which had been given some time before, by Miró [Editor's note: actually given by Wilbur D. May in 1964]; which is very typically Miró, in terms of kind of sexual innuendos and the other things of that kind; and the red, yellow and blue; and a very good example. But when Joseph Branston had this painting [*Peinture* (1926)] , I just had always liked it, because of an extreme simplicity, and it seemed to me to show, I don't know, as much of the childlike nature of art that expresses itself from time to time in history. So you have this kind of little—almost like a balloon floating up from a lead weight holding it down; and this definition of a room, chamber; and his favorite little symbol up here, of planetary movement, kind of a sun and the moon all at the same time. So when Joseph suggested that he give it, I was absolutely delighted, because we can always use more of these great artists that are here. We didn't have a lot of Miró, so that was fantastic.

Cándida Smith: Do you see Miró having an influence on West Coast modern art?

06-00:16:26

Hopkins:

Well, yes, I do. As I say, if you take the chain and say, "Alright, Miró influenced Gorky; Gorky influenced all of these East Coast artists." But also, people who were influenced by Gorky came to the West Coast, and did teach in these different areas. I think you could make an association fairly, between the group that used to be called Dynatons, for example, up here—Gordon Onslow Ford and Lee Mullican and others—as having a Miróesque kind of sensibility, as opposed to some of the other things that went on. In Southern California, a number of people who were influenced. I think so.

Cándida Smith: When you came to this museum, you had the idea that this was going to be *the* modern contemporary art museum for the West Coast.

06-00:17:20

Hopkins:

Yes, of course. I always have that feeling, wherever I—

Cándida Smith: Wherever you are. That it really was going to reflect a West Coast sensibility, a Western U.S. sensibility of the modern art tradition.

06-00:17:35

Hopkins: Essentially, that is correct. As I said, my emphasis and interest was fundamentally American, and certainly relating to the West Coast, in terms of exhibitions that we did, and many of the things that we acquired, in fact, for the collection, a number of which are not up at the present time. I can say specifically that mainly because of the exhibition program during the time that I was here— When I came in 1973, I knew that the new attempt at a contemporary museum in Pasadena was failing. I knew that the board of trustees at the [Los Angeles] County Museum [of Art] was becoming very conservative. I knew that there's an opening for us to benefit by that; to be able to borrow exhibitions from the Whitney, from the Museum of Modern Art, as well as instituting our own and sending them back. That actually all worked out in time. We did get strong enough to where in essence, we forced Los Angeles into building a contemporary museum, which they wouldn't have done. They admit that, so that's fine. Whatever it was, we had some success.

Cándida Smith: You knew many of the artists who were living here. As you settled in, in the seventies and eighties, how did you evaluate the contemporary art scene, as it had developed here in the Bay Area?

06-00:19:09

Hopkins: Well, it's a very interesting story, from any perspective, but in my perspective, because—Well, it's very interesting to me that the artists of the Bay Area, in general, have a very great rapport with one another. Much more so than Los Angeles or New York or what have you. Very few enemies among them. I've thought that that was because all of them were almost on the equal step on the ladder. Now, some have—like Diebenkorn, for example, or Thiebaud—have popped way off the top of that ladder. But in principle, everybody was in the same boat, eating off the same plate. I found that really very rewarding and refreshing. I also found the artists tremendously interested in not just the museum, but activities. You may remember that we did a thing called the Soap Box Derby years ago [1975 and 1978]. Some of the most important artists in the city—not neophytes and kids in school, but some of the most important artists in the city—made cars to drive down a hill on the Presidio [actually in McLaren Park], to have a great afternoon of fun and games together. So it is truly kind of an art community. Now, as far as movements are concerned, you know, what was considered to be the California figurative moment, that Peter Selz introduced, going back to David Park and Elmer Bischoff and Diebenkorn, during their figurative phases, that's one aspect of the work that's here. California clay is another area. Assemblage is

another area. But as I say, the thick-painted impasto paintings represent the Bay Area, perhaps as much as anything else. I've always wondered why, though someone like William Wiley, with his fun things, is now being seen in New York on a regular basis and getting more regard, but you think of somebody like Nate Oliveira, for example. I think an extraordinary artist, that should have a much bigger reputation than he has. Somehow, it's never gotten away from the Bay Area. I hope that will happen in time.

[End of Interview]

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