

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

JACK LANE  
SFMOMA Director, 1987—1997

[Part of the manuscript has been sealed by the narrator until 2035.]

Interviews conducted by  
Lisa Rubens, Richard Cândida Smith, and Peter Samis  
in 2006

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Funding for the Oral History Project provided in part by Koret Foundation.



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**Interview #1: March 15, 2006**

[Begin Audio File 1]

[material deleted]

Rubens: I'm just daunted by the amount of administrative tasks and realms of activity that, as the director, you had to supervise, be aware of, be connected to. I mean, from the vision, to the politics, to the actual administration, to the scholarship. There was a story I heard that seemed to speak to one of those details. I want to know if this is true. The *Examiner*, at the time that you came, did not have an art critic, and you and Harry Parker went together to talk to Will Hearst and said, "Why don't you have an art critic?" That's when Benetti was hired. Do you remember this?

01-00:04:21

Lane: I don't recall, did we do that?

Rubens: Is it something you could've done?

01-00:04:26

Lane: Maybe, yes. We actually knew Will. He'd recently come back to San Francisco and was taking an active role in the *Examiner*. We knew him in social life, and his then wife was somewhat involved with the museum. We were wishing that she would be more involved. It's possible we made the call.

Rubens: I wonder if the absence reflected a decline in the stature, the role of art in the community, which would change dramatically during your tenure. So to formally begin now: Is it true that when you were first contacted about whether you'd be interested in assuming the directorship of the museum, you asked, "Are they going to build a building?"

01-00:05:35

Lane: Yes, that is actually the case. The executive search person, the headhunter was a man named Morgan Harris from Korn/Ferry in [the] Los Angeles office. He was really a person of culture. I think he did an enormous good service to the SFMOMA and to me. Because in 1986 he called me up—I was working at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh—and they knew about me, I suppose, because we had successfully done a big Carnegie International exhibition of contemporary art in 1985, and it had been well received, and my profile went up because of that.

01-00:06:17

Morgan asked me if I were interested. I said, "Well, I've been to San Francisco a number of times, I've seen the facility; it seems like it's been totally outgrown by the program, and you can't fit the collection in when you're doing an exhibition; what are the plans to address that?" He said, "I regret to say, I think there are none." I said, "Oh? Okay, well, in that case, let me give you some names of people who might be appropriate under the current circumstances." I don't know what happened after that. Some time

passed, and Morgan called me up. He said, "Jack, something extraordinary has happened. The board of trustees has given a lot of thought to concerns that have been raised by you, and perhaps by others. They have decided that they will make a commitment to solve the building problem, in association with their next director. Would you be interested?" And I said, "Right."

01-00:07:21

Rubens:

So without actually money in the bank, and no public announcement—because apparently, they waited, though rumors were going that money was being collected—there were promises. You came out.

01-00:07:34

Lane:

They had made some significant advances. Gerson Bakar, a trustee leader who had been, I think, frustrated and possibly even embarrassed by the demise of the scheme to get the veterans out of the old building and to take over the whole building. It was an unhappy political outcome. He was really committed to finding a solution for the museum, and he began thinking about the South of Market area. When I came to talk with the search committee, they had made a tentative arrangement with Olympia and York, which was building a tower on Market Street. There was a very handsome Willis Polk beaux-arts abandoned PG&E substation, which is just behind it, that was to be part of the package. The [Contemporary] Jewish Museum is going to use this as their façade for their facility.

01-00:08:38

We would be able to occupy a number of floors in the new tower and the renovated substation. So that was the deal, as I understood it, when I came out. The typical San Francisco politics intervened, and Olympia and York first was dragging its heels; they didn't think the market was right to build. We were wondering, are they ever going to get going on this, and sign the contract with us? In the meantime, we were doing a study. It was led by Marcy Goodwin, who was a specialist in architectural selection processes and in building programming. She and David Robinson, an architect in town who was friendly to the museum undertook a space study plan, within the framework of the Olympia and York tower. They were coming back and saying to us, "This is not going to end up being first class exhibition space." So we were starting to get nervous about that. Suddenly, Olympia and York took a different read of the marketplace and said, "We're going to build that tower tomorrow." They ran into trouble because the addition of the museum's five floors made the building tall enough so that for fifteen seconds on one day of the year, there would be a shadow on Union Square. And you know this was going to be trouble.

At that point, Olympia and York and the Redevelopment Agency, I guess, got together. They offered the SFMOMA the site that we are currently occupying, which had been named in the master plan as a place for a cultural facility, and had, I think, originally been offered to the Asian [Art Museum of San Francisco]. The terms of it were that you got the land for a dollar, but you had

to raise all the money and build the building and support the building yourself; the city wasn't going to take care of that. The Asian wasn't able to pull that off. I think that the Redevelopment Agency and O&Y were really surprised when we just said, "Right. We're on it." [laughs] Because we'd figured out that the Market Street place, although the geography was excellent, wasn't going to work as a first-class art museum. They never built that tower.

Rubens: I believe they went bankrupt.

Lane: They did, yes.

Rubens: I will talk to Helen Sause also, eventually, when we get on and do a larger study.

01-00:11:46

Lane: There was another head of the Redevelopment Agency, a man who came up from Los Angeles and had been involved with MOCA's building, Ed [?].

Rubens: So there was no question about the building being part of your vision. When you came, you assumed there would become a building. What else was a part of your vision, once you know that there was a commitment to, and the building was going to go ahead?

01-00:12:25

Lane: Well, the museum had been, in my view, an underachiever. It had not developed its exhibitions and education programs and its collections in as vigorous a way as I would have wished myself. It was fine, but it was regional.

01-00:12:52

I knew the history of the institution, that it had been the first museum of modern art on the West Coast, and that there had been chapters in its life when it had been indisputably *the* player on the West Coast, especially during its first decade or decade-and-a-half, when it was partnered up with the MoMA in New York and there was no competition in Los Angeles. But I was looking at what was going on at, especially at, the Museum of Contemporary Art, which was, at that point, a brand new institution in Los Angeles—and at the Los Angeles County Museum [of Art]—and thinking that Southern California was simply going to totally eclipse San Francisco if something really electrifying didn't occur here soon.

01-00:10:34

It was an interesting and complicated, and not entirely pleasant task, to try and change the culture within the museum staff, and some trustees, to raise the bar of aspiration. It was a troubling couple of years. It cost me a dear colleague, who was our deputy director, who had come on with me from Pittsburgh, and was doing a lot of the, how you say, "dirty work." She took so many hits that finally, she needed to move on, because she had been the instrument for a lot of the change.

- 01-00:14:31  
 Rubens: It's often easier to target the second in command than the person in command, as well?
- 01-00:14:35  
 Lane: Well, yes, she was in the firing line for a lot of them.
- Rubens: What was her name?
- Lane: Her name is Barbara Phillips. She's still a dear friend, and she performed a great service for this museum. But it cost her a lot.
- 01-00:14:55  
 So, creating a culture of excellence, encouraging experimentation, raising standards, raising expectations, that was our challenge, and I think it was successfully accomplished. I am so privileged to have served with the curators that I invited to come and be on our staff. First, and most importantly, John Caldwell, who had been my colleague in Pittsburgh and who came here about a year and a half after I arrived. Sandy Phillips, curator of photography, who I had the chance to name, because her predecessor, Van Deren Coke, was retiring, and who in fact, suggested Sandy's name as his successor.
- 01-00:15:57  
 David Ross, who ended up being my successor but was then the director of the Whitney, said, "Jack, I've worked out there in California, in Northern California. The best artists in the Bay Area are in the media area." He said, "Check it out when you get there." So I did, and I think David was right, along with industrial design and graphic design—I think those were the two really great areas, in my time. We thought maybe we should start a department. David even suggested a former staff member of his, Bob Riley, who came on and founded the media arts department. He did a fantastic job.
- Rubens: Riley founded that.
- 01-00:16:43  
 Lane: Yes, he did.
- Rubens: And then Paolo [Polledri] came in—
- 01-00:16:45  
 Lane: No, that was the architecture and design department.
- Rubens: Okay, and Caldwell became—
- Lane: John Caldwell was painting and sculpture, and the wondrous Janet Bishop, who remains on staff, was John's assistant curator and has risen to, you know, glory. The other department, which had been conceived and funded in advance of my arrival here, but it hadn't been staffed, was architecture and design. The founding curator for that was Paolo Polledri. After several years, he resigned, and Aaron Betsky came on, one of the most remarkable,

energetic, visionary curators that I've been around. He was one of those few curators who really has a huge impact on a city, outside the walls of the museum.

01-00:17:53

I think that the flourishing of good architecture in San Francisco in the 1990s has a lot to do with Aaron's hard work and his vision that he took out into the broader San Francisco community. I mean, the buildings here got a whole lot better in the late nineties and the early two thousands. I think that's part of his legacy.

There's one other department I really want to emphasize, too, and that is the education department. For a long time in museum life, the education departments and the curatorial or collection departments had really not cooperated. That was not unique to San Francisco. It was universal in the profession. I was determined that there be as seamless as possible a relationship between the two so that we would be better able to interpret the works of art and serve our audiences.

One of the really important things that Inge-Lise Eckmann did during her deputy directorship was to hold out from making a precipitous appointment. There was an enormous amount of board pressure to get the curator of education—whatever that person might be—onto staff. She held out on our behalf, until we found somebody who would be embraced by his colleagues in the curatorial departments, and that was John Weber. I think that he took this museum miles and miles and miles towards being a significant education center, and ended up doing something I would never have imagined, which was—but I was accepting of it—which was embracing new technologies, and the appointment of Peter Samis to head that operation resulted in SFMOMA being one of the instrumental institutions in developing new technologies and employing them for educational purposes.

01-00:20:19

Rubens: And now busloads of kids just come almost every day, because it's a very extensive—

01-00:20:27

Lane: It's become a very, very good department, and it is connected to the collection curators. They talk to each other. That was the point. That was a situation that did not pertain in very many art museums, especially museums of modern art, fifteen years ago.

Rubens:

You're very generous—in your writings, and now in talking—you're generous to the people that you work with: the trustees, your staff. But I do want to go back to one thing. It's you who are known for having such great taste and great capacity for who you hire. You were known for that at the Carnegie. That you had brought in good people, as well as made spot-on decisions about the collection. So you clearly had honed those skills, or had a

vision that you wanted these people to be talking to each other and to be a united staff, and work towards a certain vision of what the museum could be.

01:00:21:31

Lane: Well, you're kind to say that.

Rubens:

But you've said it in a certain way, also. Let me ask you about a general statement. You wrote in the introduction to *The Making of SFMOMA [The Making of a Modern Museum: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1995]*. You state that you were able to accomplish a radical physical change with the building. The collection, I assume, is also meant—while remaining true to the founding concepts of Morley. And you say that she was committed to fostering diversity of cultures and media from which new art arises. I want to ask you, what did that actually mean to you? How did you interpret that, in terms of acting on it as a goal?

01:00:22:26

Lane: I think that maybe what I was getting at is that Grace McCann Morley did not privilege painting and sculpture. If you look at the history of the grandest museum of modern art in the world, the MoMA [New York], you'll see that it has been largely dominated by the painting and sculpture department. The person who was head of the painting and sculpture department was, for decades and decades, the de facto director of the museum, even though he didn't have that title. The interesting thing in San Francisco is that it's really photography that has been this city's great gift to modernism. Fifty years, seventy-five years before an artist like Richard Diebenkorn began to put Northern California painting on a national level—give it national credibility, extraordinary photographers like Carleton Watkins and Edward Muybridge were creating the new medium, and defining what modernism was through it.

01:00:23:52

There's an unbroken chain of photographic experimentation, excellence, and collecting that has been part of Bay Area culture. Grace McCann Morley allowed a department to start here.

Rubens:

Sandra Phillips says that was the one department that was intact. You picked her, hired her, but then let her alone to develop it.

01:00:24:21

Lane: Yes, right.

Rubens:

She raves about your support for her—what was the name of the exhibit? The Westward—

01:00:24:28

Lane: Oh, "Crossing the Frontier" [1996]? Oh, I loved that, you know? I'm a—I'm a westerner. [laughs]

Rubens: Well, that's what she said. She said you gave her things to read, and allowed her to travel throughout the west.

Lane: That was a great show. She has done such brilliant work for this museum, and has kept the tradition of a great photography contribution going here and built the collection even beyond the highly important state in which she found it. And gotten lots of collectors going, too.

Rubens: I see about the diversity of cultures in media—

01:00:25:05

Lane: I think it was kind of code for—

Rubens: Film, as well. I mean, the film festival, the Art in Cinema that [Morley] and Frank Stauffacher started, apparently, one year before it started in New York, and then [Amos] Vogel turns to Stauffacher, and calls him and says, “How’d you do this?

01:00:25:24

Lane: It didn’t really stick here. It ended up sort of disappearing. But there it was. They, early on, had done architecture and design shows, too, although they didn’t make a department. And of course, when you see the word diversity, you know that’s also code for the culture wars that were so much—I mean, this—this city was a real hotbed of contentiousness, over issues of inclusion and of diversity. And of course the museum wanted to be a responsible, responsive part of the evolution of our American cultural thinking, and we were very much involved in that.

01:00:26:18

But we were, at the same time, a big institution. We were the target for anyone who thought that large institutions were inherently evil. So that was part of the particular times.

Rubens:

I know that Sally Lilienthal said that from her experience with working on the San Francisco Art Commission and then being involved with the M. I. X. program, she was making early efforts to really connect to the other constituencies, Hispanic and African American. You particularly had an interest in Mexican modernism, isn’t that right?

01:00:27:01

Lane:

Well, San Francisco had a big interest in Mexican modernism, which I thought fit into our program. Of course, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo spent time here, and the museum has the first painting that Frida Kahlo regarded as a professional work, as opposed to part of her previous amateur career: the double portrait with Diego [*Frida and Diego*, 1931]. One of the founders of the SFMOMA, Albert Bender, had befriended them, and I think he was part of the group that invited Rivera to do the mural at the San Francisco Art Institute.

01:00:27:48      So there was this history. Rivera had had a big impact on Bay Area artists. There were a lot of muralists here who were working during the 1930s, who were influenced by him. So it seemed reasonable. Plus, there was a significant Latino community in San Francisco. I have a great friend named Bob Littman, who was the director of a museum in Mexico City [Tamayo Museum], and he looked after Natasha Gelman, who owned an extraordinary collection of Mexican modernism that had many, many Kahlos and Riveras and other important Mexican modernists. We presented it for the first time in North America.

Rubens:      I understand the museum even had some before, and they just weren't being shown.

01:00:28:45      Lane:      We did bring those out. I'm not sure. I think those were shown. The trouble with the museum, as I said earlier, is that no matter how much you admired its collection, you couldn't show it.

Rubens:      Because of the space.

01:00:29:00      Lane:      Because of the space, and when the museum was humming with special exhibitions, all that was left was the corridors of the third floor, outside the offices, in which to hang Jackson Pollock's early masterpiece [*The Guardians of the Secret*, 1943].

Rubens:      I'm asking you about goals, visions for the museum. Here's one more. You said of Morley that she believed in the idea that modern and contemporary art is a source of aesthetic pleasure and enlightened learning for a broadly defined public. What does this mean to you, and how you might restate it, or how did you interpret it, in terms of your administration?

01:00:29:48      Lane:      Oh, I think that my sense of Grace McCann Morley is that she was not an elitist; she was an enthusiast and a proselytizer who wanted to bring modern art to a very broad audience. I thought that was an admirable goal.

Rubens:      How would you say that that was manifested in the new museum structure? Certainly, the education department.

01:00:30:19      Lane:      Yes. And we invested in marketing, so that the message of the museum would be taken to the wider community. We had, I think, an attitude of openness and receptivity to the art—from diverse artists and diverse sources.

Rubens:      How does one measure what are the greatest achievements? An absolutely critical and magnificent achievement was the development of the collection. And the collection involved also the education of the collectors. I mean, you

raised the bar in the collecting, just the way you were talking about your architectural curator raising the bar, in terms of what was being built in the city. There was, of course, the “New Work” series; there was the travel that you made with people to see exhibits..

01:00:31:31

Lane:

Maybe just to say, in the beginning, for me, the heart and the soul of a great art museum is its collection. That is, for me, always the foundation, core value. After all the exhibitions are gone and after all the parties are done, it is the thing that remains and stands for how the community values its institution. So that was the essential belief that I came here with. I also came knowing that San Francisco is a city that did not have much of a tradition as a city of collectors.

01:00:32:27

If you go to the Asian Art Museum, or you go to the Legion [The California Palace of the Legion of Honor], or to the de Young [Museum], you will see that the great collections in those places came from people outside of San Francisco. The Rockefeller American collections and now the Friede Collection of Pacific Islands arts in the new de Young are from New York, the Asian Art Museum’s Brundage collection is from Chicago. Looking across the cultural landscape of the Bay Area, when I was coming out here, there was only one collection of national or international stature, and that was Hunk [Harry] and Moo [Mary Margaret] Anderson’s contemporary collection.

But bringing a conviction about the importance of collection, and looking at what was going on here, there were a number of trustees who were in the prime of their lives—they were in their fifties and their sixties, at that moment—who had begun to be interested in collecting contemporary art. I think it’d be fair to say that they were—quantitatively active but, however many things they had in their collection, they hadn’t really found their way internationally. They’d found their way to New York, but the contemporary art world had become extremely international by the time I came to San Francisco.

01:00:34:20

So there were at that moment, Mimi and Peter Haas, Doris and Don Fisher, Helen and Chuck Schwab, Pat and Bill Wilson, Norah and Norman Stone, and Phyllis Wattis. And, while they’re not associated with the museum anymore, they were key to its advancement, Frances and John Bowes. All these people were interested, motivated. I think that the conviction that I had, and then when John Caldwell arrived here, the profound charisma of his way of communicating about art, I think that it helped these individuals to get focused on artists of great stature, whether they were American, whether they were international. I think that we helped them get connected to the greatest art dealers in the world, connected to our colleagues who were museum officials,

curators, working in America and abroad, at the highest level of contemporary art exhibition making and collection making.

01:00:35:53 I think we smoothed the way, facilitated their engagement with and access to the artists and the dealers, and got them positioned so that they would be first in line to get great things. And then I think we just kept up, you know, the cheerleading. But it was very rewarding to me that after we had transferred the knowledge that John and I had from the Carnegie Internationals, which were an amazing learning experience, and just were the most fantastic connection that any Americans had at that point to the international contemporary art world, after we transferred that info, all these people became independent, and worked out their own ways of functioning in the market. They were, I think, very interested in what the museum was doing. In some cases, they took the lead that the museum made, but in many cases, they were off on their own.

01:00:37:07 Some of them engaged counselors. Like a great friend of John Caldwell's was Thea Westreich. Thea was instrumental in developing the Kramlich collection, which is certainly the greatest private collection of media arts in the world. Bob Riley was part of that too, and Thea was key to it. I think she still is the counselor to Norah and Norman Stone. That was one of those international art world connections that we had made in San Francisco that really panned out.

01:00:37:47 There were a number of these collectors who became very independent. In the case of, say, Mimi Haas, she worked very closely with the museum. I think that her wonderful collection is, because of her intelligence and her interest in acquiring things that would be, in the end, important for the art museum. I think that Phyllis Wattis, who liked her art although she was not personally a passionate private collector, but she was so intellectually engaged, and she enjoyed acquiring things for SFMOMA. But she didn't have the bug to collect. She liked ideas even more than she liked the tangible objects, but of course, she acquired many things that she enjoyed in her apartment and then came to the museum. They had been, in large part, acquired in consultation with John Caldwell, and then after John's death, Gary Garrels came on, in consultation with Gary.

01:00:39:00 I should say that Gary, besides having been a wonderful curatorial colleague, is one of the great art shoppers on earth. It was after I had stepped down that Phyllis started really opening up the wallet. I think it was well over \$100 million that she put into the development of the museum's collection, and that was done in concert with Gary Garrels.

I think it fair to say that it was the happy outcome of a great many cocktail hours that John Caldwell had had with Phyllis, and some that I had had with Phyllis and that Elaine McKeon had with Phyllis and that Gary Garrels had had with Phyllis that cultivated that relationship and ended up convincing Phyllis that the highest need of the museum, after the building opened and

people recognized that the collection was, well, modest, that she could make a huge difference. She was so astute about what the institution needed, and she came forward with staggeringly generous support to allow that to occur.

01:00:30:36

Rubens: I was going to ask you if most of this was done on an individual basis, or in seminars?

Lane: Well, all these persons who became such great art collectors sat on the acquisition committee. Which was a fractious, contentious experience. But a lot of information, and a lot of opinion got exchanged there.

Rubens: Now, this was one of the key elements of your administration, by the way, also, that there was an accessions committee, with a fund. Was it you who insisted that you created that?

01:00:41:18

Lane: I did. When I was in Pittsburgh, there were actually endowed acquisitions funds. When I came onto San Francisco, I said that it seemed to me impossible to have a collecting program, if there weren't some resources that were known to be there. Otherwise, everything was on speculation, you know? You would have to raise money for every object. I said I didn't think that was going to work, especially if you were trying to acquire things that were tough, and we were going to be doing that.

Rubens: So it's something you had negotiated before?

01:00:42:03

Lane: I suggested to them that they pop \$10 million into an art acquisitions endowment fund. This was not embraced, but the leadership trustees thought very, very seriously about it, because they knew that it was, as far as I was concerned, essential. The notion emerged that everyone who sat on the acquisitions committee would make a contribution. I think at that point, it was \$25,000.

Rubens: That's what I read.

01:00:42:34

Lane: It put together a pot of about half a million dollars a year, which in the late eighties, was enough to make the museum a player. It allowed the museum to acquire things that were maybe more difficult, or less domesticatable than the work that the collectors were getting for their own personal holdings. I think it was a very complementary arrangement.

Rubens: Did it get dicey at times, about is the museum getting it, or are the collectors getting it and then giving it to the museum?

01:00:43:10

Lane: No, I don't think so.

- Rubens: No?
- Lane: No, I always felt that there was a lot of good will. The museum, in the eyes of the collectors, always came first. If the museum wanted it, the collectors would step aside, but we often would know of great objects that were becoming available and we wouldn't be able to afford them. Or we knew that they would fit into one of the collector's holdings, and we would encourage that. With the idea that, in the long run, they'd do the right thing, and those collections would end up, in part or in whole, given to the SFMOMA.
- Rubens: We'll talk later about the accessions committee.
- 01-00:44:06  
Lane: I've mentioned the power players.
- Rubens: How often would you meet?
- 01-00:44:17  
Lane: I guess it was five or six times a year.
- Rubens: But these were extensive meetings, these were not—
- 01-00:44:26  
Lane: I suppose they were two- or three-hour meetings.
- Rubens: Just prior to your arrival, didn't the Carnegie—or a portion of it, come to the San Francisco Modern, before you actually took the directorship?
- 01-00:44:45  
Lane: No, part of the Carnegie International in the middle 1930s traveled to—what was then called the San Francisco Museum of Art.
- Rubens: I was referring to Your International—
- Lane: No. It never traveled.
- Rubens: I see.
- 01-00:45:09  
Lane: But we looted it.
- Rubens: Well, maybe that was what I really meant. A couple of early pieces came.
- 01-00:45:16  
Lane: Well, what happened was, John Caldwell and I had done the '85 show in Pittsburgh and begun working on the '88 show. I came to San Francisco to be the museum director in 1987 and invited John to join us. We agreed that he needed to finish the Carnegie show. He came after that. In Pittsburgh, we had,

as I said, some endowed money, and other resources. We would pre-select works from the exhibition to go into the Carnegie collection.

01:00:45:50 I encouraged John to make those selections, get that out of the way, and then we would get as much of the rest that we wanted for San Francisco. There was a war party of San Francisco collectors who went to the opening of the Carnegie show. It included the Bowes and the Haases and the Fishers, maybe some others. The big acquisitions were done by those three collectors, and by the museum. One of the things we did is to acquire the work that I regard, and I know John Caldwell regarded, and maybe Gary would even regard, as the most important work to come into this museum in the late twentieth century, which was Sigmar Polke's great cycle of five paintings called *The Spirits That [Lend Strength] Are Invisible* [1988].

In Pittsburgh, that was one of the things that we made a deal with the dealer for Sigmar Polke to acquire for San Francisco. One painting, the museum bought; Doris and Don Fisher acquired two, which they later made fractional gifts of; and Mimi and Peter Haas bought a fourth, which is committed to the museum; and the Bowes bought a fifth, which they did not end up giving to the museum, the museum ended up having to buy it from them.

Rubens: Fractional gift means—?

01:00:47:38 Lane: An undivided partial interest in it, so the work is co-owned by the collector and the museum.

Rubens: This is an example of traveling with collectors?

01:00:47:54 Lane: We had a *great* time doing that, and the ringleader for that sort of thing was Frances Bowes, who whipped up one wonderful art trip after another. She was instrumental in taking the SFMOMA from being fourth in line in San Francisco cultural institutions, in terms of its social and artistic prestige, to making it *the* board on which to serve. These fantastic trips were one of the tools that she used to accomplish that.

Rubens: These were international trips?

Lane: They were.

Rubens: I would imagine you went to Germany.

01:00:48:40 Lane: We did. We did one great city after another.

Rubens: What was your own strategy, regarding collecting and exhibiting? We've gone over this some, but—how you characterize the art, really.

01:00:49:07

Lane: I was keen that we be working at the highest and most sophisticated international level, regardless of where the artists were from. There'd been a long history of nurturing Northern California artists at the SFMOMA, which was laudable, but it made the program a little regional. I felt that we needed to be playing on the big stage. That would be how we would be appropriately competitive with Los Angeles or Chicago or New York, or Cologne, or London, or Paris.

Rubens: These are the stages that you're among the big players.

Lane: I think we did conceive of a exhibitions program that did all those things.

Rubens: So the strategy was to fill in, as well as move ahead?

01:00:50:20

Lane: We even cancelled some shows that were on the books and replaced them with exhibitions that we thought were of more compelling importance. For instance, a Gerhard Richter exhibition [1989], his first American retrospective. Part of the bounty of that is that San Francisco is now one of the great centers on earth for this extraordinarily important German painter. Later, it put SFMOMA in the position to secure MoMA's Richter show, the largest, most significant retrospective of his work yet, well after my time here—in the early 2000s [2002].

Rubens: Yes, just a couple years ago.

01:00:51:09

Lane: Something like that, right.

Lane: Absolutely terrific works of art in San Francisco collections. So anyway, the strategy was not only to try and either organize or to participate in tours of the exhibitions of the artists that we thought were of the greatest consequence of our time, but also to use those exhibitions as a tool and incentive and a resource for developing the museum's collection and developing the collections of the private collectors who were in the orbit in a friendly way around the institution.

Rubens: That's a wonderful phrase. I wondered if you're speaking about who sets the bar. You know, New York, Paris, Germany, Chicago.

01:00:52:14

Lane: During those years, I think San Francisco set the bar. John Caldwell's exhibition of Jeff Koons [1992]. John Caldwell's exhibition of Luciano Fabro [1992]. John Caldwell's Polke [1990] show remains the only retrospective of Sigmar Polke to have occurred in North America.

Rubens: Oh, I don't remember which art critic said it was the most significant show anywhere in the country in the 1990s.

01-00:52:56

Lane: I would agree about that. Martin Kippenberger, another artist that John Caldwell was very enthusiastic about. Martin totally transformed the rotunda of the old building [1991]. It was an extraordinary experience. Unhappily he died young, but he has emerged as the key artist of his generation in Germany, which is the generation that's younger than Polke, Richter, and [Anselm] Kiefer.

Rubens: Where do you actually draw the line between modern and contemporary?

01-00:53:39

Lane: Well, it keeps moving.

Rubens: Yes, it does. of course.

Lane: When I came to San Francisco, in the mid-eighties, I think you would've said abstract expressionism was still included in contemporary. Now I'm of a mind, in Dallas, as we consider reinstalling our permanent collection, of moving abstract expressionism into the historical category, and beginning contemporary with Pop art and minimalism.

Rubens: And of course, at SF, you acquired the Warhol, that great *Marilyn Monroe* [1962] Warhol here.

01-00:54:14

Lane: Gary Garrels, that was one of his great acquisitions.

Rubens: Well, let me get back to you for a minute, then. You became known to the art world for your work on Stuart Davis.

Lane: You mean as an historical—

Rubens: As a scholar.

Lane: —of American modernism, yes.

01-00:54:33

Rubens: Where did your passion for modern art come from? You were part of that great Williams crowd.

01-00:54:43

Lane: I was. There was a wonderful professor—happily, still alive, in his late nineties—named Lane Faison, who was charismatic and who seduced a lot of young men who might otherwise have been attorneys or bankers into a life in the arts. When I think about my happiest moment in Lane Faison's classes, I think of his teaching of Matisse in the first couple of decades of the twentieth

century. That still is, for me, a very happy place to go in my mind, thinking about those lectures and about looking at the screen of those beautiful paintings, which then we could down to New York, at the Modern [MoMA], and actually see. Then when I got to San Francisco, the wonderful paintings that came from the Elise Haas Collection, which came on my watch. I really had nothing to do with them coming; they were long committed. I suppose I could've screwed it up, but I didn't. They were intended for SFMOMA, and they're now the early glories of the SFMOMA historical painting collection.

Rubens: So you just became enlivened by these lectures, seeing the images, seeing them in person? You go to business school—we'll stretch some of this out later—but then you go back to your main love. By then, was it a love of modern art that you harbored?

01-00:56:41

Lane:

Well, when I went to Harvard, I knew that I was probably going to do a dissertation topic in American art, but I didn't know that it would be modern. It might've been nineteenth century. I was very interested in nineteenth-century American painting. The director of the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard, who was also my thesis adviser, said to me one day, "Jack, you got a problem, I got a problem. Let's fix this." He said, "My problem is that the widow of Stuart Davis has given some 10,000 pages of unread manuscript by the artist to Harvard. We agreed that we would index them and make them available for scholarly usage. I need somebody to do that." He said, "And you need a dissertation topic."

01-00:57:32

So that was how I ended up with Stuart Davis. It was great for me because it gave me at least the foundations in modernism that provided a basis on which to build some kind of understanding about contemporary art.

[Begin Audio File 2]

Rubens: About how you figure out what is the best, most important.

02-00:01:47

Lane:

There is a lot of relativism that pervades our culture. At times, the word "quality" has been taken as an inappropriate word. In my view, it's the job of museums to get the best. It's the job of museum curators and museum directors to figure out what the best is. It's heartening for me when the two we now look back on as the two greatest artists of their moment, [Pablo] Picasso and [Henri] Matisse, had each other figured out as being the best. I guess the logical conclusion is that if you work at it, maybe you can figure it out, too.

Rubens:

When we broke for a moment, we were talking about how you came to write about Stuart Davis. What I love about your book is it's become an education for me. I had no idea that he was such a prolific writer and that he had theory behind him.

02-00:02:48

Lane: So you saw the Brooklyn [Museum of Art] catalogue [*Stuart Davis: American Painter, 1991*].

Rubens: Yes.

02-00:02:51

Lane: There was a big show that was organized by the Metropolitan. San Francisco was the other venue for it. That happened during my years here. It was a chance for me to be the curator, the onsite curator, and to hang it, which was a pleasure, and contribute to the catalogue.

Rubens: Did you come to just love Davis?

02-00:03:19

Lane: I came to enormously respect Davis. I think that, actually, his work is just slightly too brittle to really, really, really love, but to profoundly respect it, yes.

Rubens: I suppose it's like asking what's your favorite child, but were there a few paintings here that just absolutely thrilled you?

Lane: In the SFMOMA collection?

Rubens: Once they were acquired, yes. In your whole tenure.

02-00:03:53

Lane: Well, to start with, long before I came here, Grace McCann Morley did something heroic, which is that she gave Jackson Pollock his first one-person museum show [1945]. She had the great wit to acquire one of Pollock's key early paintings from that, *The Guardians of the Secret* [1943]. I think I would say that before the recent couple of decades of collection building have brought many great things to San Francisco, that was the one painting that I would travel from around the world to San Francisco to see. It set very, very high standards for us. Things that are, for me, most important in my recollections of objects we acquired for SFMOMA during my tenure were the Anselm Kiefer painting of *Osiris and Isis* [1985-87]. I've already mentioned the Sigmar Polke *Spirits* cycle. The Jeff Koons *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* [1988].

02-00:05:15

When I was at Sotheby's—I guess it was two years ago—when the Manilow Chicago collection edition of the *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* was going to be put at auction, and it went for, I don't know, \$3.5 or \$4 million, one of the Sotheby's persons said to me, "Well, how do you feel about that sculpture going for so much money?" I said, "Well, I guess I feel smart." It was John Caldwell's acquisition, but I was very enthusiastic about it. I think that it was not universally embraced in San Francisco. Some members of the board of trustees were deeply distressed about Jeff Koons.

02-00:06:07

Another work that I have a great fondness for is the splashing piece by Richard Serra [*Gutter Corner Splash: Night Shift, 1969/1995*] that was given to us by Jasper Johns, and that is sometimes on view and sometimes not on view. It's a site-specific piece, which is a little problematic, I admit, for an art museum. I guess we thought that Richard Serra was arguably the greatest artist to come out of the San Francisco Bay Area in the second half of the twentieth century and that making a commitment to him of space like that would be okay. Perhaps my successors are saying, "That was a terrible miscalculation," but I love the piece and I think it's a great artwork.

Rubens:

You speak of these as important acquisitions for the museum and putting the museum at a higher standard. But I was asking, actually, if there was any one piece you just loved, that just excited you. Are these also pieces that you love?

02-00:07:14

Lane:

Oh, those are, for me, the total killers.

Rubens:

I came across a wonderful document here [in the SFMOMA Archives], *U.S. News and World Report* asking museum directors what were some of their favorites. They would give you a choice of five, and sometimes you write things in. You did write in Richard Serra as one of the greatest living artists and there's a *wonderful* video making the—

Lane:

Throwing—

Rubens:

—casting the lead.

02-00:07:45

Lane:

It was a Loving Hands at Home video, made, I think, by Kent Roberts on our staff when [Serra] was doing the installation here. This is another instance of how we were able to bring information to the collector community here, and then they ran with it. There was, I think, maybe no Richard Serra in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1987. Now it's one of the great concentrations anywhere. And appropriately so.

Rubens:

You keep giving so much credit to Caldwell. But you hired Caldwell, and you must've been in constant communication.

02-00:08:42

Lane:

We were, but he was the visionary curator.

Rubens:

It must've been such a blow when he died [d. 1993]. Was it out of the blue?

Lane:

It was a terrible blow. He was in his early fifties. He had a heart attack and died. He was beloved in the artists' communities.

Rubens: I haven't read the edited volume that you did of his works, which I will do before I see you again [*This is about who we are: the collected writings of John Caldwell, 1996*].

02-00:09:18

Lane: Thea Westreich, the art counselor who helped the Stones and used to help the Kramlichs, was the actual editor of that book. I was, nominally, the co-editor, but Thea did the heavy lifting.

Rubens: You were speaking about your original assistant who left because she was in the line of fire. [Caldwell] must've taken a lot of hits, too.

02-00:09:51

Lane: No, no, it was not his role to, how you say, clean the house. He was here to advance the program, and he did it mightily.

Rubens: There weren't people who objected to some of the shows that were being put on by him?

02-00:10:13

Lane: In the community of people who were really dedicated Bay Area art enthusiasts, there was a lot of discontent with the direction that the museum took, because it was perceived as being disrespectful to the local community. I guess I took a more cosmopolitan view, that the biggest contribution that the SFMOMA could make to the Northern California art scene, including its artists, was to bring the best art in the world to be shown here.

Rubens: And this was international work, and this was controversial work, and disturbing work at times. And all of that worked together. Couple more things maybe we should say. The actual building itself, did you sit on the architectural committee?

02-00:11:09

Lane: I did. You've probably had some other conversations about this. It was one of those projects that was just destined to be perfect. Not whether the building is perfect or not, but the process, it was so harmonious and so professional.

Rubens: You were part of that unanimity? Botta had just seemed the one to have?

02-00:11:41

Lane: Well, I didn't regard it as my role to choose the architect. I thought that was the trustees' role. I recall being in the parking lot at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, and I was packing up my office stuff and getting ready to get on the road for San Francisco. My dearest friend there, Lea Simonds, was an architectural enthusiast; she had been thinking about building a house for years and not being able to choose an architect, but she really knew the field. As I got in the car to go to California, she whispered in my ear, "Mario Botta." I don't think I had anything to do with fixing that. I think that came as

part of a process. Botta was a name that was very much on the international architectural stage, at that point.

02-00:12:36 There were six architects that were on a short list. There'd been thirty that had been on a long list. I had an opportunity to express my thoughts about the architects, but I never said, "This is the one." I thought that the job of the staff, which was Marcy Goodwin and me, was to offer up a process that would be orderly and that would result in a handful of architects, any one of which we would've been privileged and happy to work with. I think it came out that way.

The absolute short list was Frank Gehry and Tom Beebe, who's a Chicago architect, and Mario. The trustees who were on the selection committee—that was very democratic, too—all you had to do was be a million-dollar donor and you could be on the selection committee.

02-00:13:50 We visited the studios and built works of each of the three architects. Botta's was the third. We were in Lugano, Switzerland. I remember standing with the Fishers, and Brooks Walker, and the Bowes, and Mimi Haas, and Gerson Bakar, standing in front of the Banco del Gottardo, which was no doubt a very grand money-laundering institution in southern Switzerland, and them just looking at that and saying, "This is it." Don Fisher, I don't think he had a cell phone, but it was the equivalent of the cell phone, actually, you know, whipping it out. I think he ran across the street and put his calling card into the phone booth and called back to San Francisco and said, "We found the architect."

Rubens: Oh, that sounds thrilling.

02-00:14:43 Lane: It was thrilling. It was thrilling.

02-00:14:47 Joe Esherick was an advisor to the selection committee and was on that trip, as well.

Rubens: Very important in the Bay Area—

02-00:15:01 Lane: And a great architect We were looking for somebody who had in his or her bones the spirit of Louis Kahn. Joe had actually finished, his firm, had finished the theological seminary in Berkeley after Kahn's death.

02-00:15:23 So he was appropriate. The other person who was an adviser was not on the trip but had been participating in the conversations, was Jim Wood, who was my colleague and the director of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Rubens: Oh, yes. Oh, I read that. I see. So you had outside—

02-00:15:39

Lane:

We did. Jim Wood. I think it was just the three of us. And maybe Tom Swift was involved in that process. We winnowed the big, long list down, going from thirty architects to less than ten; [this] was the job of the professional advisory committee.

02-00:16:14

Then the process was—and we did that in the company of the members of the selection committee, so that they would understand what we were getting at, in terms of finding an architect who could make a functioning museum and an architect who could build an architecturally, artistically significant design. Then after that step in the process, then the choice of the last half dozen was passed on, I think appropriately, to the trustees, who would be making the choice, because they'd be the final selectors in the process.

Rubens: Speaking of Louis Kahn, you wrote in that introduction to the making of the fiftieth anniversary piece of the Modern—

02-00:17:14

Lane:

Well, it was about modernism, but it was modernism inflected by a deep respect and knowledge of the classical past and a sense that buildings were not just about high design but also about the human spirit and the human experience. That is what gave Kahn's buildings, I think, their—it's why we love them so much.

Rubens: Translate that into this building, in terms of the high-minded, uplifting ideal, and at the same time, the humanistic spirit. I mean, what is it literally that you see?

02-00:18:00

Lane:

Mario Botta was a student of Carlo Scarpa, who was a humanistic modernist, teaching in Venice. Botta had a year in Le Corbusier's studio, but even more importantly, he had a year in Kahn's studio when Kahn was doing designs for an un-built congress hall or convention center in Venice. There was a deep regard on the part of Mario for the work of Louis Kahn, and, obviously, Le Corbusier. And, obviously, Roman architecture. And those things are all in this building.

Rubens:

There's a wonderful interview with you, a little spot, upon the opening of the museum, where you're speaking about the grand atrium, and then the camera steps back. So there's that very uplifting, grand scale, and at the same time, very intimate, but more than intimate gallery space. It really has got the combination of magisterial and uplifting.

02-00:19:25

Lane:

I find it still an inspiring experience to be in this building. I think it's both elegant and warm. The combination of those banded stones and this beautiful birch paneling. The sky up above. I think it's both grand and intimate.

Rubens: Apparently, you had quite a bit to do with designing what size the galleries should be.

02-00:20:16

Lane: Well, it was my responsibility. The board of trustees deputized four people to do the building, and by and large, didn't interfere much with that process. The four members of the committee were Brooks Walker, who was the chairman of our board and was chairman of the capital campaign committee, and was chairman for the building committee. And a better museum leader, trustee leader, I have never known. And Gerson Bakar, who was the real estate visionary. Tom Swift then was a trustee and the West Coast partner for Gerald D. Hines Interests, which is a Houston-based developer that had an MO of working with great design architects to build very, very, very high-class office buildings. Tom had a MBA from Penn [University of Pennsylvania], from the Wharton, and he had taken classes in the Penn architecture school, where Louis Kahn was the man. He had been involved with the development of the Kahn Library at Exeter Academy, where he'd gone to prep school. Tom was very sophisticated about architecture and about knowing how to work with a person who is an artist, an architect who is an artist, and not working with, you know, a typical commercial architect, who just is happy to make the client perfectly happy, but working with a design architect who had a different set of values and integrity that needed to be taken into account.

02-00:22:14

The fourth person was myself. I guess I would be regarded as the client for the museum as a functioning entity. It was Marcy Goodwin, again, the person who helped orchestrate the architect selection process, who was also the project manager for writing the program for the museum. But that was under my direction, and it had the engagement of a multitude of staff members, because we wanted to have in that program as much as we could precisely say of what we wanted from the architect. Whatever the building looked like, it would contain the functioning parts that would be necessary to make a good working museum.

02-00:23:11

You can walk around to any number of handsomely designed art museums at the time—and we did, at the time that we were developing the new SFMOMA—and some of them were really architecturally exhilarating, but they were *awful* places in which to show art, hard places in which to work. We wanted both. We wanted it all. We wanted a good design, a *beautiful* but also a wonderfully functional museum.

I don't know whether you've ever seen the program book Marcy produced. It's about that thick. I personally don't think Mario ever read it.

Rubens: Why?

02-00:23:57

Lane: I think maybe his assistant read it, but I don't think Mario read it.

Rubens: Well, he probably doesn't know English, right? He doesn't speak English, but maybe he can read it?

02-00:2405

Lane: I don't think he had one of his associates sit there and translate it for him. I think he designed the museum that he wanted and then the special efficacy of having gone through the discipline of writing that program was that we were able to see whether the things we wanted fit into it. So it had a high purpose, even if I am correct that it hadn't exactly informed the architect's design adventure.

Rubens: I saw a wonderful list of yours. I don't know if it was supposed to be confidential, but it was just about a set of qualities that you wanted in the museum. There were the words "gracious," "character," and "quality of space." I know you went through an enormous process of just polling people.

02-00:25:07

Lane: A lot of that was Marcy. She was fantastic at doing this kind of work.

Rubens: I am struck with, and I don't know when this starts, in the eighties? There are specialists for all sorts of things. There is a headhunter that's hired for you here that's critical, there's someone that Brooks Walker talks about that was a specialist in how to solicit money from people, there's Marcy Goodwin.

02-00:25:33

Lane: Well, yes, that was Chris Hest. He was, at that point, a young capital campaign consultant just beginning his business. He'd had a success working on a project with one of our trustees in another capital campaign. I think it might've been Mimi Haas, I'm not sure. That was how his name came to the museum's attention. He was sheer genius. We had a very, very, very successful campaign. It went over the goal. That is in part due to Chris's excellent strategic counsel, and also due to amazing generosity. Also, wonderful leadership from the trustees who were on the capital campaign committee.

Rubens: Brooks says that he was given feedback, but he had kind of a closed style, and there were certain off-putting characteristics of his leadership, and so he decided that he would change that around. I thought that was to his credit.

02-00:26:38

Lane: Brooks, what an admirable human being. You're exactly correct in describing his demeanor when he became the board chair in the mid-eighties [1985]. It was not embracing. It was rather stiff. It's wonderful to watch a person with enormous integrity and great capability grow and change. By the time that his ten years or so of being the chair of the board had elapsed, he was a markedly different, more human, open, generous person. That just added to the extraordinary regard I would have had for him at the beginning of his tenure.

Rubens: When you started—there was a reference to this, and I was going to segue to it more elegantly—there were two other new directors in the area. I think the year before Harry Parker had taken over the—

02-00:28:04

Lane: Harry came on at almost the same moment as I did, just a few months afterwards, at the Fine Arts Museums [of San Francisco].

Rubens: And is it Castile—?

02-00:28:12

Lane: Rand Castile became the director of the Asian Art Museum.

Rubens: I really don't know much about their backgrounds. Harry had come from Dallas.

02-00:28:24

Lane: Harry had come from Dallas, and he did a sensational job in Dallas [Dallas Museum of Art]. He retired this year. We wanted to honor him for his accomplishments in Dallas, and my trustees named him our director emeritus. We had a big party for him, just at the end of January. It was really nice.

Rubens: My point is, here are three new directors—I don't know, relatively, your ages, Harry's and Castile's.

02-00:28:54

Lane: Well, Rand has been retired for some years. Harry is mid-sixties, and he just retired this year. I'm a few years younger than Harry, not very many.

Rubens: Three new players in town. The de Young, a long history. The Asian, great ambitions. You're quoted as saying, even vis-à-vis L.A., that you think competition is good, that the more the arts are developed, the more quality and interest that's developed. Did you find yourself, particularly, trying to go after the same pots of money? Or did people segue into special interests pretty naturally?

02-00:29:51

Lane: I think that museums are inherently competitive with one another. The situation as I found it when I came to San Francisco was that the turf had been divided up. The Asian Art Museum would be in the Asian arena, obviously. The de Young and the Legion of Honor would be the art history museums. The SFMOMA would be the modern, contemporary museum. Harry came to town, and we were friends. We weren't close friends, but [we'd] known one another professionally and personally. We were out walking around Russian Hill one day, and he said, "Well, Jack, you know, there was an *entente cordiale* in this city about collecting turf. I just want to put you on notice that we're going to be collecting modern and contemporary art." I said, "Okay, Harry. Come on." I think that the SFMOMA's trustees and its curatorial staff were pretty successful in keeping the momentum at this institution in modern

and contemporary art. I don't think that the kind of progress that they might have wished for at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco actually occurred.

Rubens: Well, they didn't have their buildings. The de Young's just opened.

02-00:31:46

Lane: Well, that's such a testament to Harry's determination and skill, to have accomplished the restorations of and additions to the Legion, and then, even more, to have actually accomplished taking down the old de Young and putting up this magnificent new building. I mean, it's heroic, what he did. But it doesn't change the modern and contemporary art game in San Francisco.

Rubens: You have spoken about the tension of a museum, between being a social space and being a private refuge. I wondered if you could comment on that. We certainly have talked about your tenure here and the effort to reach out into the community and then to develop an international community. But what is this notion of private refuge?

02-00:32:54

Lane: Maybe the best way to think about that is the attention that museum staff and the architect invested in making the galleries, so that they would be beautifully proportioned spaces, that they would have access to top-lit natural lighting, that they would be clean in their design, and be happy homes for a variety of works of art in some contrast to the lively public spaces in the museum. One could retreat to the galleries and have intimate, contemplative experiences with our works of art.

Rubens: When you were leaving, you spoke to Kenneth Baker about the particular culture of California and the SF Bay Area region. You said, "Because there are differences in the nature of support for institutions, the community of artists, and the issues that are prominent for us, like closeness to Asia and the high visibility and importance of design in this community, have to be considered." You're really speaking about who's going to follow you and what must they think about. Ten years later, thinking back, do you have something to say about the particular culture of California and the Bay Area region as a significant factor in shaping an internationally ambitious institution?

02-00:34:58

Lane: The idea that was contained in that statement is that, in my view, there is no such thing as a good generic museum of modern art. Each one, if it's going to be good, needs to be particular to its community and to its culture. I think I was underlining aspects that seemed to me to be particular and special to the San Francisco Bay Area. I have not been close enough to the art scene here to know whether any of those conditions have changed. I think the most conspicuous change isn't an actual change; I think it's more of a realization—namely that Los Angeles has become arguably the greatest creative community on the planet. The Bay Area has many excellent artists, and it has

great universities, but it is, I think in the end, more like Chicago or Boston than it is to a New York or Los Angeles, in terms of the sheer energy of what comes up out of having a huge and incredibly distinguished art community. Not being disrespectful to that which is here, but I think it's even more obvious now, the place that Los Angeles plays in world culture. I think that is probably a challenge for this museum, and for any contemporary art activity organization in Northern California.

Rubens: I'd love to hear about what your interaction must've been like with the city government. Willie Brown and—

02-00:37:31

Lane: Didn't have any.

Rubens: No? Oh, really?

Lane: No.

Rubens: Not too interested?

Lane: No.

02-00:37:37

Lane: I have very limited interest in engaging in city politics. Harry Parker, he did that. We had money from the hotel tax and that was it. Our intense involvements with the city were largely with the Redevelopment Agency over the development of this building. Happily, we were not in front of City Council and not part of the city budget and not beholden.

Rubens: Now, is there anything you'd like to say.

02-00:38:13

Lane: I would really like to say something about the extraordinary trustee leadership that this museum enjoyed during my service here. I came to San Francisco with the promise that the building problem would be dealt with. Some other commitments were made, too. We were talking about the acquisitions fund. When you do that, you don't have a formal contract that they're going to deliver on what they said. I've had always in my professional life, if nothing else, at least a reasonably good instinct for when people were actually telling you what they wanted to accomplish and a sense of whether they were capable of delivering on it. The things that Brooks told me he thought were possible for this museum all came true. I think maybe he and I would agree that it came out a whole lot better than we would even ever have imagined. He was a terrific leader, in a community where trusteeship and boards tend to be fractious and undisciplined. He maintained a very even hand, and he kept everything always going in a positive direction. He was supported, during the time of his chairmanship, by Elaine McKeon, who was the president and who had all of the warm, embracing qualities that Brooks might not have been

famous for. She became a generous and inclusive face for the institution. Then she became his successor, as well.

Tom Swift, I've already mentioned. I don't know when he got his work done for Gerald D. Hines Interests, because he was full-time doing our building. And that it came in on time and maybe fifteen dollars under budget, is a testament to his management skills. Mimi Haas, who was the head of the acquisition committee for most of the time that I was here, was always very, very supportive. Frances Bowes, who—Well, that's a big story, which maybe you'll get one of these days. But Frances, despite the unhappy sundering of SFMOMA and the Bowes that occurred after I left, was really instrumental in the advancement of this museum, and she should be part of its history, even if the final chapter was not a happy one.

02-00:41:48

I should also say that I was blessed with some extraordinarily dedicated and able senior staff. When Graham Beale, our chief curator, left the museum to go to be a museum director in Omaha [Joslyn Museum of Art], he recommended to me that Inge-Lise Eckmann be his interim successor while we searched for a new person. She was fabulous, I've got to say, and I offered her the position permanently.

[JL added in editing: Inge-Lise was beyond the exceptional as SFMOMA's Elise S. Haas Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs because she is so committed to the welfare of works of art, because she possesses such a deep love of looking at, thinking about, and interpreting works of art, and because, beyond being a consummate conservation and museum professional, she is a masterful student of individuals and how they interact in groups. These passions and skills made her the best manager of creative persons—especially, in our case, curatorial personalities—that I have ever encountered. A truly gifted herder of cats. At SFMOMA she forged a team of curators, educators, conservators, and collection, exhibition, and publication support specialists that was for a time virtually flawless in its execution of the artistic program and in the high-minded and productive goodwill it exuded.

One of Inge-Lise's specific achievements was the masterful planning and supervising of the move of SFMOMA's entire art collection, staff, files, furniture, and equipment from the old facility in Civic Center to the new Botta building. Not a single art work suffered in deinstallation, transit, or the elaborate reinstallation in the new galleries. Under her direction, a highly detailed and potentially numbing process was informed by high spirits (the team leaders, all female staff members, called themselves "The Dolly Movers" and, on the occasion of the actual transit, they issued a t-shirt to every employee decorated with the Museum's handsome new logo designed by Catherine Mills and the text "SFMOMA: A MOVING EXPERIENCE").

Because Inge-Lise was so capable and utterly determined to make everything right, I know that I and the Museum asked her to take on more than any single

person could possibly bear for the long term, but for the several critical years that surrounded the opening of the new building, it was she as Deputy Director who held the staff together as a highly functioning team determined to realize at the highest possible level the astounding institutional transformation that was the new SFMOMA.]

Ginny Rubin, who was the director of development and really a key member of the team that made all this to happen. She worked closely with Chris Hest in the capital campaign. David Resnicow, a public relations consultant in New York, was the museum's counselor on its presentation of the SFMOMA to the world. I think we had one of the most vibrant rollouts of any "new museum."

Rubens: How was he picked?

02-00:43:25

Lane: He was somebody that I knew.

Rubens: You've continuously been generous to your staff, to your associates, to your donors. Frances Bowes says of you, "John got everybody collecting artists they didn't know." Just wonderful statements about you.

02-00:43:53

Lane: You did talk to Frances.

Rubens: I have not.

Lane: Oh.

Rubens: This, I took from—

02-00:43:57

Lane: Will she talk to you?

Rubens: I don't know. I don't know.

Lane: It would be fantastic for the history of this museum if you did. I don't know what she'd say, but it'd be great to have it on record.

[End of Interview]

**Interview #2: February 22, 2007**

[Begin Audio File 3 02-22-2007.mp3]

[material deleted]

03-00:05:21

Lane:

When I went out to talk to the search committee for the museum, the executive search person, the headhunter, had already said to me that the board was willing to address the building problem, which had been my first concern. When I'd been originally contacted by the headhunter, I'd said, "Well, what are they going to do about the building?" He said, "Nothing, I don't think." I said, "Well, I don't think it's for me then, because I don't think we can get it right." He got back to me, it was a number of months later, and he told me that the board had acknowledged that they needed to address this and they were willing to make that commitment to their next director.

So I went out to see them in San Francisco, and we had interesting conversations. I remember one of the members of the search committee saying to me, "Well, you know, Jack, it'd be great for you to come out here. This is such a beautiful place. We have so many good restaurants." I said, "You know, really, stop. I appreciate all that about San Francisco, but what I really want to know is, what do you want to do with your museum?" It was on the basis of that kind of discussion that a commitment to the building, which was essential, was made. It seemed to me that the SFMOMA needed to do a lot of other things in order to reposition itself on the West Coast. It was my perception that the museum and the city were about to be marginalized by Los Angeles as a visual arts center for contemporary art on the West Coast, a place that San Francisco had liked to pride itself in occupying since the museum had been opened in the middle thirties [1935].

There were things I thought were under my control as a museum professional. I mean, you can work on the exhibitions program, you can work on the education program. There are some things that you don't really have control over, that are expensive. One of those things is collection development. At the Carnegie, I had the resource of endowed acquisition funds. I said to the trustee leadership at SFMOMA that it was critical, as far as I was concerned in making a decision about whether to serve this museum, that there would be a more or less guaranteed source of significant funds, in order to have the museum be a partner in the communal building the collection. I thought, "Maybe somebody will make a nice endowment." At that point—it sounds like very little money these days, given where the art market has gone—but [what] I had in mind was spending about a half a million dollars a year.

Rubens:

For the total?

03-00:08:57

Lane: On an annual basis. That did a fair amount of business in 1987. I thought maybe one trustee would like to make a \$10 million endowment. That was laughed off. But they did do something which was interesting and, in a way, creative: the idea of having those people who were serving on the committee for the collections, [the] acquisitions committee, to all make a contribution to the acquisitions fund. We raised that amount of money by doing that. That was something that Brooks Walker and Don Fisher conceived. I also said that I thought it would be helpful, as an inaugural gesture, if I were able to acquire an important work of art that would give a signal about where the institution hoped it might be going. There had been a deaccessioning of a Giacometti *Seated Woman, 1947*, so there was a pot of money sitting there.

Rubens: You had not been part of that.

03-00:10:28

Lane: I had not been part of that. I can't remember the circumstances of it. At that moment in time, I thought that a big impact could be made by acquiring a painting by Anselm Kiefer. We had access, through Marian Goodman Gallery, which was, at that point, his primary dealer, to a very grand picture that was also going to be in the forthcoming documenta, so it would have a kind of international presence, especially if it had the SFMOMA credit line on it. So those funds were allocated to this purpose.

Rubens: This is all happening in this initial meeting. I'm trying to establish the grounds on which you're going to go forward. Was there opposition to the painting?

03-00:11:35

Lane: I think the core of the board leadership was enthusiastic about it. I don't know about the entire Bay Area community. I believe that there was some concern about this because there'd been a certain sense that the museum was mostly about Bay Area art.

Rubens: About the particular painting that you specified, I think they were talking about getting [René] Magritte, and here we're talking about a post-war German. So on the one hand, you're proposing a specific painting that would be a signal. The second was the division about becoming international and really changing the profile of the museum. Was there robust discussion about that, at that very meeting?

03-00:12:32

Lane: Well, this is not one meeting, this is a series of conversations that went on over a couple of months. I think the board leadership recognized that the SFMOMA was stuck. It was doing perfectly good programs. It was okay. It just wasn't going anywhere. The perspective that informed its acquisitions program and informed its exhibition program was not international at the most informed level of that term. But I don't mean to exclude Bay Area or the United States, but just that where the best art was being made, that was what

the SFMOMA, in my view, should've been about. A painting like the Kiefer, which was called *Osiris und Isis*, was a signal that we were entering into a dialogue with that international art community operating at the very highest levels because it was a major painting. There are a lot of museums that wanted to have that painting, and we had access to it.

Rubens: Because of your role at Carnegie, because of the gallery.

03-00:14:11

Lane: Because of my relationship with the artist.

Rubens: Specifically because of it, yes.

03-00:14:15

Lane: Well, only in part. Because also, the relationship with the gallery.

Rubens: Was that a hard sell?

03-00:14:25

Lane: It was not a hard sell. One needs to understand that when a museum is wanting to make a big step forward, trying to go to the next level, and the trustees have found a person that they think can help them get to that next place, and the prospective director is also simpatico, it's a love affair. There's a lot of chemistry going on there. Nobody's going to say no. It's the time to do the things that need to be done, to put the things in place that are required in order for the years that ensue to be on track.

Rubens: Sure, but you're introducing people to a new genre, to a new world. Having followed your leadership, they see very quickly the import of what you're doing?

03-00:15:28

Lane: At the most informed level of the collectors group, who were also the trustees of the SFMOMA at that time, they may not have been themselves personally collecting this kind of work, but they wanted to. They knew that the San Francisco collections, including the SFMOMA's, were not working at that level, and they wanted to be there. One of the things that I think that John Caldwell and I gave to the collecting community was a sense of who those artists were, who their dealers were, where are the other great museums to go look at this, and who the important curators and directors were to talk to about this. For a couple of years, I think that the museum staff—myself, and especially John Caldwell—had a big impact on the direction that private collections in San Francisco took. Then, happily, these were informed, intelligent, widely traveled, proactive people, and they took those introductions and made their own relationships, and made up their own minds about things that they'd acquire in the future. But going back to that Kiefer painting, it was a signal for not only the museum, but also as what the collectors community might aspire to. Today, there wouldn't be a place on

earth that has, both in the museum and with the private collectors, a great body of important works by Anselm Kiefer. Not that he's the only artist, but that's one of the strengths.

Rubens: You talked a little bit about, in a pre-meeting that we had, about the culture that you inherited. The work ethic and the organization. I'm wondering if you'd reflect on that. Henry Hopkins was a charming fellow, and he had actually made some pretty important acquisitions, as well. He brought the museum up to a certain level. He introduced the word "modern." But he basically resigned. The writing was on the wall, I think, for him. He also had a good offer. I don't know if there's an inner story. I haven't found an inner story. But without being critical of your colleague, it's also important to make a distinction. I'd heard one joke among staff people that said that you had been calling in to have some discussions and that you could never get anyone on the phone. I think this was in reference to that there was a "party culture," that people weren't engaged at a professional level. Inge-Lise, as the head conservator, was half-time.

03-00:18:58

Lane: Henry and I are both Idahoans. Our mothers knew each other. The SFMOMA director's chair, I thought of it as the affirmative action sinecure for Idaho boys. He did many, many great things for the SFMOMA.

Rubens: Oh, yes. He was a whole generation older than you.

03-00:19:23

Lane: He was. He didn't have the same set of experiences that I had just had, working at the Carnegie and being involved in these two big international exhibitions. The interests of the institution programmatically were going to be different under my direction than they were under my predecessor's. But there was something else about the institution that I felt urgently needed to be changed and that was the institutional culture of the staff. There were many exceptionally good staff members there. A number of them are still serving the museum and doing it in a terrific way. There were also a lot of people for whom the museum was [pause] not an urgent commitment and who liked the way that it was run, which was very relaxed. I guess I was a tight ship captain. I looked at the museum as a service organization. Not exactly ecclesiastical, but in some ways, like a church. There was a joke that we used to say about those of us, gender nonspecific, who worked there, we were all nuns for art.

I set about trying to encourage an environment of commitment. There were some people who were completely welcoming of that notion and wanted to be involved in pressing something forward, hard and fast. There were others who were threatened by that idea of change. Feedback came to me that I wasn't understanding about the culture of the museum and that I needed to understand that the museum and community were so fortunate to have this particular staff. That was, to me, exactly the opposite of the way I looked at it.

I thought we were so fortunate to have this opportunity to serve this institution, to serve our community, and to serve the advancement of culture. That was the perspective that I wanted to inculcate into this institution. It took a couple years. There was a lot of staff turnover. In the end, we had a highly expert, vital, vitalized curatorial department and education department, and we had a terrific senior management team. But there was a lot of turnover to accomplish that.

Rubens: You had mentioned in an earlier interview that Barbara Phillips had been the heavy lifter.

03-00:22:55

Lane: Barbara had been the assistant director in Pittsburgh with me. She came to San Francisco in a similar role. A lot of the internal problems, challenges, people resisting change, ended up being situations that she had to tackle. She did it with great commitment. I really am deeply in her debt for the advances that we made. In the end, there was so much change that her role became less than functional because she had been the person who had to foment so much of it.

Rubens: When you talk about an environment of commitment and inculcating a new set of values, part of it is a professionalization. Is that right?

03-00:23:05

Lane: I think that's fair. I think that many people who were on the SFMOMA staff when I joined it were consummate professionals, but there also were quite a number of people who had a very relaxed notion of what that term meant.

Rubens: Here you're trying to educate the board, and specifically the acquisitions committee, about the direction of where the centers of art are that are really new and exciting. But you're working with your staff at the same time. I know you end up having, within two years, very skilled, incredibly creative, energetic senior curators. What else did you do, though, to establish that environment and commitment? Were you meeting with the staff pretty regularly?

03-00:25:01

Lane: Yes, and I was working with them to retool the exhibitions program.

Rubens: In fact, I think you stopped a couple that were coming in. There were some exhibits that were coming in, you said, "Let's not do these now."

03-00:25:18

Lane: I did. Let's do something else that, culturally, may be of greater consequence, and that, again, as a signal to where we're going, would create a perception that the museum was on a different path.

[Begin Audio File 4 02-22-2007.mp3]

04-00:00:27

Rubens: I wanted to know about how active were you in the Museum Directors Association [Association of Art Museum Directors].

04-00:00:34

Lane: Active. Not inordinately so. I made a practice of trying to have the annual meeting at each museum I served. We did it in Pittsburgh, when we thought we looked good. We had the AAMD meeting in San Francisco not too long after the new building opened. I was active. I got to most of the meetings, I valued the professional associations and the chance to catch up with my colleagues.

Rubens: If you need to, you're on the phone or at some point the email? I think you're bringing computer systems in under your tenure, too.

04-00:01:26

Lane: We were computer friendly early.

Rubens: So these are at least yearly things that you're attending while you were in San Francisco, it came only once to—

04-00:01:43

Lane: I went to one in San Francisco when Henry Hopkins was the director. I remember this fantastic dinner entertainment that Henry laid on for us. It was kind of a male/female Rockettes kick team. Were they on roller skates? They might've been. I can't remember. It was impressive.

Rubens: Fun?

04-00:02:11

Lane: Well, Henry could give a good party.

Rubens: Had you, by the way, come to San Francisco for any significant reason, or for a show, or had you been in the city before you were being considered for the—

04-00:02:31

Lane: Yes. That's how I knew what the state of the museum was.

Rubens: Because it would just be a place that you wanted to see what's there? Or did you come for a particular show?

04-00:02:44

Lane: Well, I have to say, I didn't go very often because of a particular show.

Rubens: But you came. You had seen it. It's not just something one does when they're in that world, in the art world, at some points, go to San Francisco. Would you go more to L.A.?

04-00:03:02

Lane: I would've gone more to L.A. than I went to San Francisco.

Rubens:

I was very impressed in our first interview that you really had a feeling for and a respect for Grace McCann Morley. You, I would think, didn't know much of her until you came to be the head of the institution. Or am I wrong? Once you became the head of SFMOMA, did that make you want to know its roots and—? Or had you known of her before?

04-00:03:31

Lane: I read the history of the museum at the time that I was having conversations with the search committee because I wanted to know what it was about. It was then that I had this eye-opening new information about what she had accomplished there in the first ten or twelve years of her tenure.

Rubens:

I wanted to ask if you had known of her before. But obviously not. She's someone who gets eclipsed.

04-00:04:22

Lane: Well, she was gone.

Rubens:

There's a new book out on the history of the film program [*Art in Cinema: documents toward a history of the film society, 2006*], Frank Stauffacher.

04-00:04:40

Lane:

I tried to cover some of that, and we tried to cover some of that when we published the book that accompanied the opening of the new museum [*The Making of a Modern Museum: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1995*]. There was an essay in there that dealt with the various decades of the institution's life. I hope it gave a deep genuflection to Grace McCann Morley's work, her pioneering achievements. I think that for whatever reasons, she was distracted—her partner was not living in San Francisco, I don't know what—but it appears that, by the late forties, her zest and her vision has been dimmed some. In the last years of her directorship, which were, in a way, part-time; she was living part-time maybe even in India, I'm not sure. She had an interesting deal with the museum, which didn't have her in the office all that much. So anyway, for the last decade or so of her directorship, not that much happened. In the first decade and a half of her directorship, an enormous amount happened. It was, I thought, the foundation on which one could posit the notion that the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art could once again assume a true leadership role in the life of international contemporary art, in having nailed abstract expressionism with giving the first shows to [Mark] Rothko [1946] and to [Clyfford] Still [1943] and to [Jackson] Pollock [1945] and [Arshile] Gorky [1941]. It was an amazing thing that she did. Having presented Alfred Barr's two seminal exhibitions, "Cubism and Abstract Art" [1936], and "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism," [1937] in the late 1930s. To largely no effect on the San

Francisco collecting community. But still, that was part of the institution's history. It was amazing.

Rubens: When we changed the tape, we had been talking about professional associations. The other one is the College—

04-00:07:15

Lane: College Art Association? That organization is dominated by academic art historians and by artists who work in studio arts programs at colleges and universities. There is some modest involvement of museum people, mostly curators. It isn't an organization that has had a lot of draw for museum directors.

Rubens: And with your Stuart Davis book, you must've made presentations there.

04-00:08:11

Lane: With Stuart Davis? Made presentations? No. Well, it's published. Doesn't mean you have to go to meetings with the university colleagues.

Rubens: So in terms of any other kind of international meetings, were you part of any other networks formally?

04-00:08:42

Lane: No.

Rubens: So did you have something you were about to tell me?

04-00:08:48

Lane: Well, you wanted to talk about marketing, I think. So I'd say there were a couple of directions. One is that Don Fisher did the museum a very great turn when he recommended Irma Zigas in the early nineties to be the head of the museum store. Irma had been the head of the Banana Republic's travel book retail program, and they were going to phase that out. Don said, "There's this remarkably talented person. The museum needs a new head of store. I commend her to you." And she was fantastic. She did remarkable things with the little store that was on the ground floor of the War Memorial Building, but she planned the store for the new SFMOMA. We put a lot of retail space in. We put it right on Third Street so it had great windows. She populated it with fabulous merchandise, just terrific design merchandise. I was so *proud* to go in that store! I loved our logo ware. I loved the books we were publishing. I loved the outside merchandise that she had in there. And the place was an economic *goldmine*! She was a merchandising genius. That store was netting an incredible amount, that went into the service of supporting the museum's programs and operations. So much so that a few years ago, they expanded the amount of space dedicated to the store because it was a terrific economic engine. I think that she should be very, very proud of what she did. I think she was the most inventive, most stylish museum retailer in the country.

- Rubens: Is she still alive?
- 04-00:11:31 Lane: She is. She's retired, and she lives in San Francisco. This was definitely a good turn that the Gap did, and Don Fisher, in recommending her.
- Rubens: Then also, we mentioned that you knew somebody who was in charge of the rollout, the marketing for the new museum.
- 04-00:11:52 Lane: When you do a new museum—at least in the context of the eighties and the early nineties—you wanted to maximize the impact that you had on not only the media in your community, but also the national and the international media, and there were several consultants who specialized in this.
- Rubens: This was just a phenomenon now that was happening.
- 04-00:12:29 Lane: Well, there was a lot of museum building going on. Some of it was being done by architects who were very much in the public eye. One of the things that people think about when they choose an architect for a museum is, "Is it going to be a high-profile outcome, both for the architect and for the client?" If you're aspiring to that—and we were—then you want to, of course, tell the world about it. I met David Resnicow, who with his partner Fred Schroeder, had a firm called Resnicow Schroeder Associates.
- Rubens: New York?
- 04-00:13:16 Lane: New York, yes. They helped us orchestrate the presentation of this building to the public. Not just the building, but also the whole transformation of the institution, its collection-development aspirations, its exhibition programming, its staff, its board of trustees, the museum's place in San Francisco, in California, in the United States, and in the world. I think they did a great job of it.
- Rubens: What did that literally mean? Did he come out and spend time?
- 04-00:13:54 Lane: Sure, they were strategic advisors. They also have the connections with journalists and with the media and with art and architectural critics. They provided a kind of intermediary for bringing the museum's message to those who might care.
- Rubens: How early did he come on?
- 04-00:14:23 Lane: We had another firm that helped us when we announced the name of the architect. We changed after that, to Resnicow. It would've been in the early

nineties. I have a feeling that Marcy Goodwin knew David and introduced me to him, I'm not sure.

Rubens: I was wondering if you knew another campaign he had done, particularly.

04-00:14:50

Lane: He had worked on other buildings. I can't remember which ones they were, but he'd done others. At that point, they were new in their business, very enthusiastic, willing to throw a lot of commitment and energy behind presenting the SFMOMA properly.

Rubens: And it was a brilliant campaign?

04-00:15:11

Lane: It was. We also hired the museum's first serious marketing director during those years, recognizing that you needed to go beyond public relations, which was a kind of relationship just with the media, and take the effort to tell the museum's story, to present the museum in a marketing direction, which meant advertising, which meant sponsorships, as well as the traditional press releases.

Rubens: Now, that's not Lori Fogarty?

04-00:16:07

Lane: No, it wasn't. First it was Sandy Stumbaugh. Later, it was Chelsea Brown. As we discovered when we got into the new building, we were suddenly a magnet for visitation. We could influence the size of that visitation through our marketing efforts. I'm not sure that was so easy to do in the old Civic Center location.

Rubens: So the marketing, you're saying, it's completely different from development, from PR, from education, its operating. And marketing oversaw the store, I imagine, finally.

04-00:17:00

Lane: No, Irma Zigas was her own place. But the public relations and marketing was organizationally in one place. Later, I believe that it was reorganized and it was included in what they probably called a deputy director for external affairs. That would've been development and public relations and marketing. We had all these merchant princes who were serving as trustees of the board, and they were highly conscious of the value of this aspect of an organization's activities. So whether it's the Gap, or Williams-Sonoma, or Charles Schwab, or Levi's, all these people were genius marketers. The museum benefited from their expertise and their encouragement in this area.

Rubens: Hopkins talks about how social life was in San Francisco, that there were always these black-tie events. Since he left San Francisco, he hasn't worn his tux. Was life pretty social? You had your friends; there were all these trips,

association meetings, professional associations. But did it seem like it required a lot of—?

04-00:18:38

Lane: There were a lot of nights out.

Rubens:

Yes, entertaining. Do you feel the museum had more black tie events than places you've been subsequently, or what you were aware of elsewhere?

04-00:18:56

Lane: Well, black tie events are more traditionally associated with encyclopedic museums. SFMOMA had its share of them. Because it was dealing with contemporary art and with contemporary artists, who generally don't like to wear black tie, lots of our events were not black tie. We still had lots of events, they just weren't as formal.

Rubens:

Yerba Buena Center [for the Arts] as an arts center, was that ever a threat? No, is the answer. But I mean, was there any quid pro quo that was established with them? You never really had an end run from a contemporary museum, isn't that correct?

04-00:19:47

Lane: You mean *another* contemporary museum.

Rubens:

Correct. You were able to at least stake out the ground.

04-00:19:53

Lane: Well, the Yerba Buena Center had a different mission. On the performing arts side, it was a house, and anybody could rent it. It also had a mandate to provide a venue for diverse voices in San Francisco. The Yerba Buena Center Art Gallery had a similar mission. It never had the resources to do a seriously ambitious national or international exhibitions program. So no. They were neighbors. It was too bad that the design of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts had been developed before the idea of siting the SFMOMA where it is, because if they'd faced each other, there might've been a better connection between the two of them, just visually. As a piece of urban planning, they showed us their butt. [laughs] It never, I don't think, turned out to be a really highly synergistic relationship. It's very different from the way it's worked in Dallas, with the Art Museum and the Nasher Sculpture Center, which were conceived to relate to each other. It was an opportunity lost, but it wasn't the fault of Yerba Buena Gardens. The idea that the museum was going to be across the street just wasn't part of their planning process because we weren't going to be there. We were going to be on Market Street.

Rubens:

I don't know if that was part of Lawrence Halprin's scheme, but there was going to be a bridge that crossed Third Street.

04-00:21:55

Lane: I think we were lucky to get a stop light.

Rubens: And then board development. When I was talking about, “Do you have any real challenge from any contemporary groups?,” Hopkins brought up people from L.A. to be on the board. He had Marcia Weisman on the board for a while, and I forgot who else.

04-00:22:22

Lane: Glenn Janss from Sun Valley and Gini [Virginia] Wright from Seattle.

Rubens:

Did you have any idea that you would want someone from another region?

04-00:22:31

Lane: I didn’t. Why would I want them knowing what we were going to do in San Francisco? We were competing with Los Angeles. Marcia wasn’t on the board when I arrived, but she was “them,” not “us.” My wish was to keep the San Franciscans feeling like this was their museum. They were responsible for it; it was going to flourish only if they cared enough. We didn’t need to validate ourselves by having persons from outside town serving on our board, because in fact, as the SFMOMA collectors and trustees became more sophisticated, more involved with the broader art world, they became large figures in the international art world. Why would we want to have somebody from some other town? This was our thing. I think they served very well. I think that the sea change in board leadership that occurred before I came—it happened two or three years before I came—that resulted in Brooks Walker being the chairman and people like the Bowes and the Fishers and the Schwabs and Mimi Haas becoming very, very involved with the museum, in addition to great people like Phyllis Wattis, who’d been there for a long time, but had never really had a leadership role, that was underway.

Gerson Bakar, Doris and Don Fisher, the Haas family, and Phyllis Wattis had all committed \$5 million in—perhaps as you’d put it in real estate terms—“earnest money,” to show that they were serious about moving forward with this new building project. So I knew that before things started, there was already \$20 million there that had been pledged. I think that the essential thing of a board coming together, finding great leadership—and Brooks Walker was a great, great, great chairman—finding their voice, finding their leader, and being willing to seriously commit to the advancement of their institution, those are all things that I looked for when I would have an interview with an institution that I might be invited to serve. And they had it.

Rubens:

It’s under your administration also that then the board literally diversifies. I think five African-Americans come on. I just can’t say the guy’s name. It’s maybe Steve Oliver who starts proposing them. I can’t think of the name right now. That was new. There had never been that. I wondered if you had a position about an artist being on the board. Hopkins speaks about a change. Well, Thiebaud’s been on the board. But I can’t find how early—

04-00:26:15

Lane: Wayne Thiebaud’s been on the board of the SFMOMA?

Rubens: Am I wrong? Is it not Thiebaud? [Editor's note: Not Thiebaud; Robert Bechtle is presently on the board.]

04-00:26:18

Lane: I don't know.

Rubens: I wondered if you had a position on it, and was there an artist during your tenure? I have them here, but I just can't remember.

04-00:26:28

Lane: I know the argument for it. I think that in some instances, it can be helpful. Artists were an important part of the founding board of the MOCA in Los Angeles, and I think that it's informed that museum's relationship with artists. A person like John Baldessari, who is a giant, now a senior giant, in the Los Angeles art scene, I think has been a great adviser to a number of museums. I'm not sure that it changes anything. I think that if you have curators who are artist friendly, then the artist's voice is being heard in the museum. I don't have a strong view about it. What I think museums need especially is people who care a lot about the institution, who care about the artistic program, and who are rich. And willing to share. I think that's what institutions need, along with a great sense of institution leadership.

Rubens: I couldn't find where the history developed that there would be an artist on the board. It was during Hopkins's time.

04-00:27:51

Lane: Well, there were people who had artistic inclinations, but I wouldn't say that at the time that I was at SFMOMA, we had an artist on the board. But it wasn't because of anything; it just didn't seem like it was critical to the course of the museum's work. We were a very, very, very art friendly curatorial staff. One other person that I would love to be on the record about, and that is—Our capital campaign was a success beyond anybody's reasonable expectation. We actually had to raise the goal. Or we actually *got* to raise the goal, because if we hadn't, we would've left money sitting on the table that could've come to the museum. That is in part because we had extraordinary trustee leadership of that capital campaign. Again, Brooks Walker worked very, very hard on that.

But we had such an adept, such a sympathetic, such a politic professional consultant helping us with it, in the person of Chris Hest, who was really the master strategist of that campaign, along with the trustees who sat on the capital campaign cabinet. You know, if you haven't talked to anybody about the capital campaign cabinet, that would be maybe a part of the history of the museum that would be interesting for you to explore. I can't remember everybody who was there, but Brooks was the chair, and Gerson sat on it, and Mimi and Peter Haas sat on it.

In fact, there was a memorable moment at one of those campaign meetings. We were going to do the Jeff Koons show. Did I tell you this when we had our

first conversation? There was a lot of publicity about Jeff. You may remember, he'd had an exhibition at the Sonnebend Gallery in New York called "Made in Heaven," which was essentially images of Jeff and his wife, a politician and former exotic dancer/performance artist, having sex—in photographs and in sculptures and da-da-da-da. Well, it caused a real media stir, even in New York. John Caldwell was organizing this Jeff Koons mid-career survey [1992] for the SFMOMA. I'm sitting in the capital campaign meeting, and Gerson Baker says, "I've been reading about this Jeff Koons controversy in New York," and he said, "I know that we're planning to do an exhibition of his work in San Francisco." He said, "You know, Jack, I would never, ever want to interfere with the vision for the artistic program, but how can you possibly even be thinking about doing this, when we're trying to raise \$90 million?" I said to myself, "Uh-oh, here goes the Jeff Koons show. I know how much it means to John Caldwell, and I know it means an awful lot to me, too. I think it's the right thing for us to do." I'm saying this to myself. So I said, "Oh, Gerson, gee, I'm not sure that I understand exactly what the concern is. These are a Caucasian husband and wife having marital intercourse missionary style. What is so distressing about that?" There was sort of silence in the room. Peter Haas said, "I can get behind *that*." [laughs] So thank God for Peter Haas. The Jeff Koons show was saved. The capital campaign went fine anyway.

Rubens: That's funny, that's a great story.

04-00:32:13

Lane: I think we all had a pretty good sense of humor about it afterwards, but there was a lot of distress about that show.

Rubens: Oh, I bet.

04-00:32:23

Lane: Evie Haas was the head of the membership program, and she'd gotten a call from Arthur Rock, who was a significant donor to the capital campaign. He had maybe written her or me; anyway, he expressed his concern about this exhibition, which he thought was pornography, that was going to be happening. And Evie got in touch with him and she said, "Well, Arthur, please, don't make up your mind based on what you read in the newspaper. Come see the exhibition. Come to the opening. I'll be there." So Arthur dutifully arrived, and he went through the show, including this room that we had; it was kind of an X-rated room. It was where the "Made in Heaven" material was. There was a warning in front of it: "Sensitive people shouldn't go in here." Anyway, Arthur Rock made the visit through, and he came out and he said to Evie Haas, "I'm shocked." She said, "Oh, come on, Arthur. You're a big boy."

Rubens: And that was it?

04-00:33:36

Lane: That was it. We had the show at the same time as a Richard Diebenkorn paintings retrospective [1992]. It was a perfect match. There was something there for everyone. There were two different audiences that were drawn. There was the younger crowd that was coming because Jeff Koons was an artist who spoke to them. There was the more traditional California abstract artist enthusiasts who were coming to see the grand master, Richard Diebenkorn. The crowds intermixed, and they saw each other's shows. It was one of the most exciting, rewarding times that I remember in the old building of the SFMOMA; this confluence of interests, and people, I think, basically going away having had a great time in both those exhibitions.

Rubens: And then that capital campaign just kept going.

04-00:34:39

Lane: Capital campaign just kept going. It was a great success. The architects of it were a great committee of trustees, Chris Hest as the consultant, and Ginny Rubin, who was the director of development, and a consummate professional.

Rubens: Hest had come through—

04-00:34:59

Lane: Mimi Haas knew him from a capital campaign that he had helped advise for— maybe it was a day school in San Francisco.

[End of Interview 2]

**Interview #3: February 23, 2007**

[Begin Audio File 5 02-23-2007.mp3]

Rubens: Let me ask you one prior question, because there was one piece, when we were talking about really having to create a new program, bring in new people, one piece I think in your restructuring—two pieces, that weren't mentioned. One was integrating conservation into the curatorial processes. It had been always a money-making and work entity that wasn't seen as integral to the curatorial departments. I asked Inge-Lise if that was her idea, and she said it was really your idea. She had thought about it, it had been something that people in the field had been talking about. That seemed a significant reorganization.

05-00:01:33

Lane: I guess so, I hadn't thought about that, but I was trained, I did my doctorate at Harvard. The conservation laboratory at the Fogg Art Museum was very much a part of the life of the museum in general. As a graduate student, you could take courses that would give you an introduction to some of the issues and processes of arts conservation. The conservators were very evident in the activities of the museum and the department of fine arts. So I had a nice introduction to the importance of the contribution that professional conservators could make to not only attending to the welfare of works of art, but also to their study and their explication. My next stop was at the Brooklyn Museum. And the conservation department there was run by Sue Sack [whose brother-in-law [Paul Sack], coincidentally, is one of the major collector donator's to SFMOMA's photography department]. She inherited the laboratory from the Kecks, and the Kecks invented the American school of conservation. Inge-Lise was a student of Caroline and Sheldon Keck in Cooperstown, at the State University of New York program.

Rubens: This was natural to you.

05-00:03:13

Lane: Sue Sack also had these views that the conservator was not a work person, a craftsman sitting in a distant laboratory, but was really part of the museum's life. I arrived in San Francisco. Well, we started a laboratory in Pittsburgh at the Carnegie, because I thought conservation was a priority. But when I came to San Francisco, there was a lab with several people in it, including Inge-Lise, who was a distinguished person in the field. It had been set up to be self-sustaining, to do enough outside work—which was roughly half and half—that it would financially support itself and not be a drain on the museum's operating resources; and at the same time, provide a conservation resource for the museum. I think what was happening was that the demands of the museum, through its exhibitions program and the growth of its collection, were such that there was a lot of pressure on the conservators to both generate this outside income and to attend to the needs of the museum. We figured out

how to change that balance and to have the lab become a full-time operation for the benefit of the museum.

Rubens: The other thing is that we didn't talk about was functioning committees on the board. I really didn't quite understand that there was little more than an acquisitions committee. Well, I suppose that wasn't even a board committee, was it? You had a huge board, and then you architected, literally, a building committee, a conservation committee. I don't have a list of all the committees.

05-00:05:20

Lane: Actually, those committees existed.

Rubens: They did exist. The conservation committee?

05-00:05:25

Lane: I can't remember. Maybe you would have a conservation committee. It's not standard. There was certainly all the committees that one would expect in an art museum: the acquisitions committee, the budget committee, the development committee. There was a buildings and grounds committee for the old building. We did make a new committee for the execution of the new building. We made a capital campaign committee not to do the annual fundraising, but the capital fundraising for the building and the endowment. The committee structure was there. There was an executive committee. That was where the live action occurred. The board was so large that when you had a meeting of the board, it was more of a reporting set of circumstances. The work of the institution got done in the committees, and the committees reported to the full board. Under Brooks Walker, it was functioning, when I arrived.

Rubens: Those were my background pick-ups. I think today we were going to talk about exhibitions.

05-00:06:55

Lane: Sure, I'll be happy to share what I thought were my favorites, or the ones I thought were the most important for the advancement of the museum. I suppose the first one that was of a new perspective of an artist who I thought was very great, but who had not had any recognition in San Francisco. This was the exhibition of Robert Ryman's [1988] commission of a set of paintings done for the dining room of Gerry Elliott, a Chicago collector, that was first shown at the Art Institute of Chicago. Neal Benezra, who's now the SFMOMA director [2002]—was the curator at Chicago who worked with Gerry Elliott to present these works. Happily for the Art Institute of Chicago, Elliott later gave them to the museum. But we showed them in San Francisco. I don't think that work that was that radically abstract had been seen in the Bay Area. I looked at it as an opportunity to begin encouraging the collectors there to take this artist seriously. Over the course of time, San Francisco got a really extraordinary holding of Ryman's work, some of it still in private collections, other parts of it already committed to the museum. We later, in the

early nineties, presented Ryman's full scale retrospective [1994] that had been organized by the Tate Gallery and by the Museum of Modern Art. [pause] I think the most important exhibition that I actively worked to put onto the program early in my tenure at SFMOMA was the Gerhard Richter retrospective [1989] that was organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto and the contemporary art museum in Chicago. From my perspective, a giant in later twentieth-century art, and again, an artist who had little or no presence in San Francisco collections or in the art knowledge of the Bay Area.

Rubens: Had he been shown at MoMA in New York?

05-00:09:44

Lane: No. No, they were behind the curve, too.

Rubens: Art Gallery of Ontario and—?

05-00:09:55

Lane: And the contemporary art museum of Chicago [MOCA]. Gerhard came on to San Francisco and worked with chief curator Graham Beal to install the exhibition. It was, I think, the beginning of a great affair with him, because San Francisco, again through its private collectors, is one of the great places on earth if you want to know about Gerhard Richter; fantastic collections of his work.

Rubens: It was a very exciting show.

05-00:10:29

Lane: That show. Well, I think you're talking about the one that the MoMA [NY] later organized, that Rob Storr organized at the MoMA and that had as one of its venues the SFMOMA [2002]. It would never, ever have been possible for the SFMOMA to be the venue for that exhibition, had it not been for the avid collecting that went on in the city of Richter's work. Maybe the precursor was having done the early retrospective that came from Toronto and Chicago. The MoMA show was a high-prestige project, and there were a lot of museums who would want to have had the Richter retrospective that the MoMA was organizing, because by the late nineties, the world had caught up. What we knew already in the eighties and were conveying to our friends in San Francisco was that this person was a giant. By the late nineties, the world knew he was a giant, but San Francisco had the leverage, through all these great collections and through its history of engagement with the artist, to make itself important for the organizer to have the exhibition go to San Francisco.

Rubens: Let me just review how this happened. You knew Richter was someone you wanted shown and that he was someone to be collected. How do you find out that Ontario and Chicago are organizing this? Is this part of your network?

05-00:12:11

Lane: Part of the network.

Rubens: And you say, "There we are. Let's get in on this."

05-00:12:14

Lane: "Let's get it." They were happy, at that point, to have another partner, because in the late eighties, generally speaking, the American museum establishment didn't know him. Another show that we didn't organize but that we presented in San Francisco, that I thought was of exceptional interest, was Walter Hopps's survey of the early work of Robert Rauschenberg [1992]. It was a lot of fun to have Rauschenberg arrive in San Francisco. He's such a creative force and such a character. His only demands were that there be a limo for his use and a case of Black Jack Daniels. He was friends with Bob Weir, a famous musician from the Grateful Dead. They had gotten together over saving the rainforest in the Amazon basin. So Bob Weir came to Rauschenberg's opening event, and it was a lot of fun. It was a fantastic exhibition. As Jasper Johns said about Robert Rauschenberg, he is the most creative artist to have come on the scene since Pablo Picasso. I think that for the late forties and the 1950s, early sixties, that's probably true.

Rubens: There had been a retrospective of Rauschenberg when Hopkins had begun.

05-00:14:14

Lane: Did it come under Gerry Nordland's directorship or Henry Hopkins? Anyway, it would've been in the seventies [Hopkins, 1977].

Rubens: I think it was well received, but this was a much bigger one. Did Jasper Johns contribute some Rauschenbergs to the museum?

05-00:14:39

Lane: He has them on loan. They're on loan now. Jasper has loans to quite a number of museums. Places that he feels a special connection with.

Rubens: So that was successful, and you were pleased with that.

05-00:14:59

Lane: Then we presented the Stuart Davis retrospective [1992] that was organized by Lowry Sims at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I'd done my doctoral dissertation on the artist and was a contributor to the Met's catalogue. While I didn't do very much hands-on curating at SFMOMA, it was a particular personal pleasure for me to install that exhibition, to be able to talk about this historically important artist. Another project that I was very happy about was working with Natasha Gelman and with Bob Littman, who was the director and caretaker of her collection. Jacques and Natasha Gelman made one of the two great collections of Mexican modernists. The holdings in Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo were very deep, and a number of other artists who were part of the art history of twentieth-century Mexican modernism. We showed in San Francisco, for the first time in the United States, the Gelman Collection [1996]. San Francisco had a great relationship with both Diego Rivera and with Frida Kahlo. There are those four Rivera murals in San Francisco; there's

SFMOMA's wonderful matrimonial painting of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera that is the first professional painting by her [*Frida and Diego, 1931*]. It was her introduction to life as a professional artist, rather than as an amateur.

Rubens: He also painted, I think, a terrific mural, or certainly, an important mural, on Treasure Island during the 1940 World's Fair, which then got boxed up and is at the City College of San Francisco. It was Tim Pflueger's arrangement. I never thought about actually if we had any knowledge about Morley's relationship with Rivera, if she actually knew him.

05-00:17:31

Lane: Yes, but I think the real relationship was with—

Rubens: Al [Alfred] Bender.

05-00:17:36

Lane: —Mr. Bender. Maybe a little bit with Mr. [William] Gerstle, who were both SFMOMA founders. That was back in the days when what is now called the San Francisco Art Institute was the California School of Fine Arts. And those two, the SFMOMA and the California School of Fine Arts, were under one umbrella board of trustees. So as the founders and the volunteer leaders of both organizations. And that's how the wonderful mural [came to be] at the San Francisco Art Institute, a really great, great thing.

Rubens: Inge-Lise worked on the restoration. Did you actually like that period of art? I mean personally, not its importance.

05-00:18:32

Lane: It's what I did my doctoral work on. My studies were the first forty years or so of the twentieth century. Mexican modernism is very much a part of the story of American modernism. Rivera and [David Alfaro] Siqueiros and [José Clemente] Orozco were all enormously influential on American artists in the twenties and thirties, and they did some of their most famous work in the United States. I never got to see the show in San Francisco, but I was very much part of the arrangements for the Calder retrospective that was organized by the National Gallery of Art, coming to SFMOMA[1998]. It was the highest attendance show that the museum has ever presented, even going beyond those extraordinary opening days in 1995, when the museum threw open its doors for the first time in its new building. That project was very hard for San Francisco to get because there just seemed to be no incentive to travel the show. My college roommate, Rusty Powell, who's the director of the National Gallery, I was talking to him about getting it. He said, "You know, I support it, but I can't seem to really make it happen, because the family has so much control over the artworks, and they're reluctant to lend beyond one venue." He said, "But if somehow you can massage this, we certainly will be [in] support of it."

So Don Fisher was doing a lot of business with the Pace Gallery, and knew Arnie Glimcher, who was the director and owner of Pace Gallery and the dealer for the Calder estate. Don, I think, put a fair amount of pressure on Glimcher to help the museum move itself into a more favorable position with the family, that would allow consideration of San Francisco to be included in the tour. Because it was just going to be the National Gallery. San Francisco was the only other place for it. I did a lot of work in trying to figure out what the persuasive argument to the family would be. It was, in part, the relationship that Calder had had with San Francisco, because his father had been the head of the Fine Arts program for the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition. He'd been a schoolboy in San Francisco. So there was that relationship. More recently, there was very active collecting of Calder's work by the Fisher family. Eventually, happily, with the support of the National Gallery, with Arnie Glimcher intervening on our behalf with the family, with the family's emissary coming to San Francisco, and my meeting with him and curators meeting with him and persuading him to make the case, and with Don Fisher's encouragement, it all happened.

Rubens: And I assume, Mr. Powell's encouragement, as well.

05-00:22:41

Lane: Well, as I said, Rusty said to me, "If you can get the family to be in a cooperative mode, the National Gallery is definitely behind sending the show to San Francisco." In a way, it was a gift to me, but I wasn't there to enjoy it. My successor got to enjoy it. I was gone in '97. But I stayed in San Francisco until the spring of '98, and it hadn't happened by then. Maybe it was that summer that it happened.

Rubens: At that point, you weren't going to come back to see it.

05-00:23:28

Lane: I didn't go back.

Rubens: Had you seen it in D.C.?

05-00:23:37

Lane: Yes.

Rubens: Why would the family be so concerned? Was it the wear and tear on the material, in shipping it, sending it?

05-00:23:51

Lane: I really don't know. The family was very complicated. It took a lot of persuading. The other project that I did not stay to see realized, but that was initiated during my time at the museum was the presentation of the Anderson Collection. This is an interesting, convoluted story, some of which, perhaps, ought not to be told until after whatever resolution is made of the Anderson Collection.

Rubens: Let's tell it and then seal it. Maybe set the stage just a little bit, with the Andersons.

[The next twenty-six minutes of the interview are sealed by the narrator until 2035]

Rubens: Could the Anderson collection even come to Dallas?

05-00:51:34

Lane: Really, I don't believe in poaching. The history of the Carnegie Institute—I mean, Pittsburgh was one of the richest places on earth, you know, 1890 to 1920. The great collections that hemorrhaged out of that town and left it with a really meager museum collection just is shocking. In San Francisco, it was like a crusade for me to keep everybody who was a collector in the fold of the museum, with the hope that, eventually, they would do the right thing and their art would end up being part of the cultural assets of San Francisco. We worked really hard to keep that happening. I don't really think that—unless the Andersons were to come to me and say, "Jack, we are absolutely not interested in anything in San Francisco anymore. We want to make an arrangement with the Dallas Museum of Art, and we want to do it on your terms rather than our terms," I'd be happy to talk to them, of course. But I don't believe in poaching.

Rubens: You had spoken to me—I don't think it's on tape—when I was asking you when, under Hopkins, there were some aspirations on the part of some board members to operate in a national scene. For instance, Don Fisher did go to the National Gallery.

05-00:53:18

Lane: But on the collectors committee, not as a trustee. Doris was—maybe still is—for years, the co-chair of the national committee. That's the group that gives—I don't know what it is—\$25,000 a year, \$50,000 a year, something, that they use as their fund for buying contemporary art.

Rubens: That didn't seem threatening to you, in fact?

05-00:53:44

Lane: No, my concern would not so much be about money donations elsewhere but, rather, what is to become of the Fisher Collection? Will it, in due course, become part of the SFMOMA?

Rubens: You tried to, while you were there in San Francisco, communicate this idea about loyalty to an institution and a city, and making it the greatest. You had one other comment, you had said—it was a great phrase and so I was wondering if we could get it in—one of your goals originally for the board was to save them from oblivion.

05-00:54:28

Lane: I don't think I would've used *that* word. I think I would've used the word "marginalization."

Rubens: There was something else regarding where they were going to contribute, but you were never seriously concerned that under your tenure, that they were going to give it anywhere else.

[The next five and a half minutes of the interview are sealed by the narrator until 2035]

[material deleted]

[All but the last few minutes of Audio File 6 are sealed by the narrator until 2035]

06-00:07:33

Lane: [Re: Don Van Vliet exhibition, 1998] When I got to San Francisco, people said, "Well, you know Jack, you're just not interested enough in Northern California art." So I thought, "Well, OK, we'll do something that's about Northern California artists that I am interested in." Ever heard of Captain Beefheart? Don Van Vliet. Same person. He was an amazingly inventive rock and blues musician. He was also kind of a self taught, interesting, expressionist painter, who lived up in Trinidad, near the Oregon border. You know where that is? We did the show, and *God!* I mean, the things Ken Baker said about that exhibition! I mean, they were so wonderfully mean. The local art community said, "Well, why did you do that show? It's terrible. We hate this work." I said, "Well, you know, you were begging me to do something with Northern California." And they said, "Well, you don't understand. That isn't Northern California." What they meant was the little circle around the San Francisco Bay Area. It was so navel-gazing. I got a geography lesson over that show.

[Begin Audio File 7 09-23-2004.mp3]

07-00:00:03

Rubens: When did you get computers?

07-00:00:12

Lane: I got my first machine, which was a Kaypro—I *loved* the Kaypro.

Rubens: The design was wonderful.

07-00:00:18

Lane: It was *fabulous*. It was like a perfect Volkswagen. I had that when I was still in Pittsburgh so I guess it must've been in the middle eighties. I loved it. I've always loved the computer.

Rubens: How computerized [was the museum] when you started? Fogarty has a story about going down to L.A., and they're trying to get someone to put up money for a computer system at SFMOMA.

07-00:01:12

Lane: Well, the museum was more or less advanced, compared to the rest of the museum world, in getting computers on almost everybody's desk. We weren't advanced in comparison to places like Detroit [Institute of the Arts] or the Met that had gone on these highly ambitious programs of cataloguing their collections on mainframe computers. But we were, by the second half of the 1990s, on the bleeding edge of using new media for educational purposes. But I don't think the SFMOMA was really in the vanguard except it was in using the new media for education that the SFMOMA made its mark. Otherwise, I think it was just sort of moving along with the rest of the museum industry

Rubens: You yourself took to it pretty quickly. Did you go Apple or did you go PC?

07-00:02:17

Lane: Kaypro was CPM, and then I was on a DOS machine. SFMOMA went Apple, and it was a beautiful day. After I left SFMOMA, I had to go back to the dark side.

Rubens: How about critics?

07-00:02:43

Lane: Well, San Francisco was blessed with two serious daily newspapers. Ken Baker had been, for quite a long time, the critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He's a distinguished person and a person whose view one takes very seriously. David Bonetti was appointed by the *Examiner* to be its critic. He was more unpredictable; in some ways more supportive, in some ways less so. He was a more emotional kind of critic. Ken has a very measured approach to writing about art. I know he's got a hot coal in his heart, but it's not the way that he expresses himself. David was more passionate about his expression. So it was a nice contrast. It was great to have two informed, literate people covering the visual arts scene in the San Francisco Bay Area. It was a treat. Then of course, after my time, the *Examiner* imploded and was taken over by the *Chronicle*, and they only had room for one art critic. They're lucky they have one. Most of us don't have one anymore.

Rubens: There'd been a story that you had gone with a couple of other people to the *Examiner* and said, "Let's get somebody." They didn't have someone for a brief while. But you said you didn't remember that.

07-00:04:40

Lane: I might have.

Rubens: Yes. And what might the relationship be? Would they come up to you at an event? Would you ever just call them up and say, "Hey, what do you mean?"

07-00:04:54

Lane: Well, some people love to engage the media. I don't. My experience has been that if someone says something you don't like in the newspaper or on television or whatever, unless it's wildly inaccurate, you don't contest it.

Rubens: So that wasn't something you did with that. You didn't chew that over with them. Maybe you saw them at an occasional—

07-00:05:31

Lane: No. I liked to have the museum taken for its merits. If we deserved to be socked on the chin for something we did, fine. If we deserved to enjoy the critics' approbation, then I wallowed in that.

Rubens: And would this apply also to Allan Temko and Thomas Albright? I wondered if you had anything particularly personal to say about them.

07-00:06:02

Lane: Well, Allan Temko was an architecture critic. We were concerned about how he was going to feel about the choice of the architect and the design that Mario Botta would come up with. That was more concerning. There was nothing you could do about it, but it was concerning because it could throw a cold, wet dish towel over your capital campaign. But happily, Allan seemed to like the building, and he seemed to like Mario Botta. He was a very opinionated, often contentious, extremely bright, very interesting person, and fun to read. I actually had more conversations with him than I did with the art critics, because, well, the art critics were covering what was our program. Building a new museum is not your program, it's a once in a lifetime thing. Allan and I had more conversations about the state of architecture in San Francisco. He was very interested in the department of architecture and design that the museum was establishing. So a really interesting person, and a loss.

Rubens: And Albright? He had done that big book on California artists.

07-00:07:35

Lane: I may have met him, but I don't really have a vivid recollection. Didn't he die? I don't think I knew him.

Rubens: The Bohemian Club, did the directorship come with an automatic membership?

07-00:08:06

Lane: No. But a number of my trustees were members of the Bohemian Club and enjoyed their experiences at the Grove. Brooks Walker was a member. He invited me to come, and I gave a talk at the lakeside at the Grove, about the future of the SFMOMA. He invited me to join. I said, "I am very complimented, and in any other circumstance, I would immediately say yes, but I am concerned about the perception of the museum's director being in an organization that is largely Caucasian and entirely male." In a climate that existed in San Francisco in the late 1980s, when there was a lot of concern about these sorts of institutions. I said, "I'd like to confer with my colleagues, Harry Parker and Rand Castile, and see what they're thinking about this and whether this would be—" I said, "I know it'd be a wonderful thing for me personally, but I'm not sure it's the right thing for the institution." So I called

up Harry and Rand, and I said, "What do you think about my instincts on this?" They both said, "Oh, Jack, you're exactly right. You shouldn't do this." So I said to Brooks, "Thank you, I think I shouldn't." That was the end of that. Then Harry and Rand both joined. I don't regret. I would've had a lot of fun, I would've met a lot of interesting people, but I do think it would've been the incorrect message for the director of the Museum of Modern Art to send to the body politic.

Rubens: That's a good story, and I think very revealing about you. Very interesting. Alright, so we come to—

07-00:11:51

Lane: The end game? [laughs]

Rubens: Yes. What happened?

07-00:11:55

Lane: Well, we opened in January of 1995, on the museum's sixtieth anniversary.

Rubens: I suppose I should just ask this. Were you pleased with the book? The book was wonderful. It was a beautiful book, that attended the opening.

07-00:12:16

Lane: Of course, I loved the book. I was the executive editor. Of course I like the book.

Rubens: Was there anything else that you wanted to say about the book?

07-00:12:38

Lane: A lot of talented people worked on that book. We had a great publications department.

There was a big contingent of Williams College museum directors who came to that opening. Elaine McKeon was the architect of all the celebrations, and she was sensational. My great friend Rusty Powell, who had been the director of the Los Angeles County Museum, had gone on to be the director of the National Gallery in Washington, was at this event. He said to me, "Jackson, a word from the wise. The building's done, the opening's happened. Get out of there." I knew he was right, because there is this new museum building syndrome that doesn't invariably, but in an alarming number of instances, results in a departure of a museum director. I knew that I should be thinking about this. As the months went on after the opening, I really realized that my best contribution to the SFMOMA had been made, and that I was a person who liked to make a transformational difference to a place that is ready to go to the next level; and I'm not the kind of person who likes to maintain. It's two different personalities. I was more interested in the dynamics than I was in the continuity of excellent programming.

Rubens: Besides dynamics, would you use the word “vision”?

07-00:14:43

Lane: Well, I had a vision. The board of trustees and I had a vision in 1987, when I started. When the museum opened in 1995, we had worked through that vision. I didn't have a vision anymore. I found myself bored. As time went on, I found myself getting kind of depressed, because so many of my colleagues on the senior management team were doing what happens after these new buildings open; they were moving on, or in some cases, they were falling by the wayside. A year out, I was the last member of the senior management team left at the museum. I was not in a particularly good frame of mind. I didn't feel like I was doing a lot of good for the museum. I didn't feel like I was doing *bad*; I thought it was running OK, but I could sense that the trustees were wishing that something would happen to that museum that wasn't happening. I didn't know exactly what it was or how to make it occur.

Rubens: You had brought in Resnicow earlier, with marketing, and you had brought in all sorts of consultants. You were thinking—

07-00:16:15

Lane: Well, the way it really happened is, after the new building opened up, I think the trustees and the curatorial staff and the senior management team were in a state of mutual exhaustion. Exhilaration, but exhaustion. New ideas were not terribly welcome. [chuckles] It was Lori Fogarty who became the deputy director after Inge-Lise stepped down. Before, Lori was a senior member of the development staff. Lori was agitating and agitating and agitating for a new long-range plan because she needed it in order to show it to corporations and foundations and other donors who wanted to know what the museum's intentions were for the future. She really had the energy to force the issue. She and Elaine McKeon were quite close, and they talked about this a lot. Lori talked to me a lot about it. Elaine bought into the idea of needing to do this. I agreed we needed to do it, I just didn't want to have to do it, because I was tired. We were very comfortable with David Resnicow. We thought he had a lot of ideas that were germane to the directions that the museum ought to be going. He was asked to be a kind of facilitator and codifier of a long-range planning process. We went on a retreat with the board.

Rubens: The executive committee?

07-00:18:11

Lane: I can't remember. It would not have been the whole board, it was select leaders. It was a couple of days. It was very interesting, but I have to say, I could feel then that I didn't really have the ideas that were going to be singing for the future. At the same time that I sensed that this chapter in the museum's development was, as far as I was concerned, over. However, no museums opened up. Nothing that would be interesting for me to go on and be the director of came available. You know, they come in waves. And by staying at the SFMOMA to ensure the opening, I had missed a couple of good waves.

Rubens: I was going to ask you that.

07-00:19:10

Lane: I was approached a number of times by really terrific opportunities, which I turned aside because I felt committed to the realization of what we had all decided we wanted to do with the SFMOMA. So there I was, I was stuck.

Rubens: Do you want to say what they were? Or do you want to leave it alone?

07-00:19:33

Lane: I think no, it's just as well not to say it.

Rubens: But there you are.

07-00:19:39

Lane: So there I was, I was stuck. There was nothing coming along. I wasn't feeling too good about myself. I was feeling that the trustees were disappointed. I hadn't had a kind word in a year.

Rubens: Meaning since the opening?

07-00:20:00

Lane: I would say about within six months of the opening. Elaine, who I really love, and she has been a dear friend and I enjoyed working with her, she did not have the same power that Brooks Walker did to protect me from other members of the board. I found myself often in a defensive situation. This was uncomfortable. I'd asked David Resnicow if he would talk to some of the trustees and see whether we needed to affect some kind of separation here, because I was unhappy and they were unhappy.

Rubens: At this meeting, you asked that.

07-00:22:07

Lane: No, this was well after that. This happened in, I guess, the early part of 1997. The retreat must've been sometime in the middle of 1996. Maybe even 1995. He reported back to me that, yes, it was really not good. So with the help of some other consultants, a mutually agreeable resignation was orchestrated.

Rubens: Did you actually have a contract that would've continued longer? I never asked how long your contract was.

07-00:22:05

Lane: No, there was not a contract. It was a letter of agreement.

Rubens: At that retreat, does anything actually come out of the retreat, or do you—?

07-00:22:16

Lane: There was a new long-range plan that had some very sensible things in it.

Rubens: You were all kicking around ideas?

07-00:22:27

Lane: I'd just say that at that retreat, I didn't feel like *I* had the ideas. Ten years before, *I* had the ideas about where the museum should be going. It was obvious that the chapter for me had come towards its end, and it was a question of how the end was going to happen. Is some museum going to pop up with a great position that would be intriguing to me and I would go on and have the next step in my professional career? Or was I going to feel like I wasn't fulfilling the board's aspirations, and not feel good about that, not feel good about myself? Or would it be better, given that another museum position didn't come up, to step down and let them get on with whatever it was that they wanted to do with the museum next?

Rubens: But you're not ready to do that at that meeting.

07-00:23:34

Lane: No. That took—I don't know, you'd need to see when that retreat was, whether—it isn't a period of time that I'm happy to think about, because even though the program was going fine and the collection was going fine, it was not a happy time at the museum.

Rubens: And you talked to David, and he said yes.

07-00:23:59

Lane: I thought it was just best for the museum, and best for me personally, to step down. It was done, I think, without damage to the institution.

Rubens: Well, the press is all pretty clean. You'd accomplished your goals.

07-00:24:33

Lane: I had accomplished my goals. I think I was interested in not feeling—

Rubens: The way you felt.

07-00:24:41

Lane: Yes.

Rubens: I'm quite astounded at your candidness. I find myself stuttering a bit that you would feel that way.

07-00:24:53

Lane: Well, I cared so much about that institution that I wouldn't want to be impeding its future.

Rubens: Yes, but you feel personally depressed and that you weren't being recognized. In '89, you're quoted in an *ARTNews* article. It's called "Gloom at the Top." I think that's the story. You come in at the end, but it's all about '89. You know, forty positions that had been filled within that year, nineteen that were still open; how things have dramatically changed; and what was the requirement of a museum director; how people were completely burned out,

exhausted. I thought, "Well gee, but Jack's not here." And then at the end of the article, you're on the ascendant.

07-00:25:38

Lane: It was such a great time, because the board and the staff were all on the same page. We were all going towards the same goal, which was this wonderful museum, and the enrichment of it with great program and with great collection. Really, part of the story is not just the dispersal of the senior management team after the building opened, or the eventual departure of the museum director after the opening, but the coalition of the trustees began to fracture.

Rubens: Let's go on, and then we'll pick your own story up. Because I think you did want to talk about the ways in which the vision that you did have wasn't maintained. Why was there a coalition? You're actually quoted also, in '95, as saying, "Something miraculous happened here." The public spiritedness, the contribution to the public weal, was just like no other you had seen, and that you thought perhaps could not happen in another city in the same way.

07-00:27:04

Lane: Happily, it's happened in Dallas, too, now.

Rubens: That's what you had said in '95.

07-00:27:11

Lane: In 1995, it was totally true.

Rubens: And you're saying the coalition does start to shatter among the trustees?

07-00:27:38

Lane: Fracture, not shatter. There was not really a shared vision on the part of the board anymore. I know that there were several trustees who were very keen to have a new director. There were a lot of trustees who knew nothing about this wish to have a new director and who were surprised and maybe even upset that there had been a change.

Rubens: You end up—and I want to get to that—doing quite well.

[The next eleven minutes of the interview are sealed by the narrator until 2035]

07-00:39:20

Lane: Well, I feel great about the eventual outcome, but it was not an easy thing for me to find my next museum. The things I like to do, and the things I think that I've been reasonably good, reasonably successful at, whether it was in Pittsburgh or San Francisco or in Dallas, is coming to a museum that has enormous upside potential, unrealized upside potential, and helping the board of trustees and the community to get their institution to the next place it ought to be. And after that, it should be somebody else's turn.

Rubens: So about San Francisco, was there a way in which you want to say a kind of moment, and also a level of achievement, came to an end? Were you going to say something in general just about direction? Well, they've had two directors since you, and times in between. Do you think that cutting edge is there, or could be gotten again?

07-00:40:54

Lane: Well, the hope I had with the SFMOMA, and all that I and my colleagues on the staff invested in that museum, was towards the goal of ruling the West Coast in modern and contemporary art, being the clearly dominant institution. I think that all of the elements were in place in 1995, and that there was enormous promise for the future. For whatever reasons—trustee leadership, professional leadership, the dot-com bubble bust, the peculiar social and political dynamics of San Francisco—I think that the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has not actually realized that place of being dominant. I think it's a strong, significant institution, but the idea was for it to steamroller the MOCA in Los Angeles, and that has not happened.

Rubens: So MOCA was competition, but in fact, you were keeping SF ahead of it. Do you think, was there a point—We were talking a little about how MOCA's kind of flat right now. It never really was collecting; it was doing wonderful exhibitions.

07-00:42:56

Lane: The strategy for the SFMOMA was to create such a powerful, such a compelling collection that pretty much anything that we wanted to do in San Francisco, we would have first choice on the West Coast for exhibitions, as well as developing an important art collection. It was the development of the collectors and the collections that were going to provide the magnet that would allow the museum to have greater leverage and greater magnetism for the exhibitions program that it wanted to orchestrate. I think that as we talked about before, I think that the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles has been a bigger and more significant presenter of exhibitions than the SFMOMA was under my directorship, or since my directorship.

Rubens: And the director there was?

07-00:44:12

Lane: It was Richard Koshalek.

Rubens: And did he go to an art institute?

07-00:44:22

Lane: He's the president of the Art Center College of Design. He left the MOCA in, I guess it was 1998.

Rubens: Do you think it's largely attributable to him, that it was just putting out these exhibitions?

07-00:44:45

Lane: He was terrific.

Rubens:

That's what I hear, yes. And in general, we were talking about a kind of flatness in L.A., flatness in San Francisco.

07-00:45:01

Lane: Well, we were saying that at this particular moment in time, it seems like the MOCA is not in ascendancy. It's good. I think that the SFMOMA is an excellent place, but I don't think that it is a place that is throwing off electric sparks. It has a very solid program, a very serious program. It continues to do excellent work, and it has a big audience, and in lots of ways, it seems to be doing fine. Maybe my gauge for these things is too much in the collecting world. San Francisco used to be the hot spot destination for all the great art dealers in contemporary art, and I think now it's more of a side station, a sideshow.

Rubens:

So where are the sparks? Let's talk about where we're sitting.

07-00:46:12

Lane: Well, Dallas right now has that.

Rubens:

Let's talk about it. And to just quickly get there, you were without a job when you resigned.

07-00:46:21

Lane: I was. I suppose that should be regarded as either a foolhardy or a courageous thing. One could've extended the agony, but it didn't seem like it was good for either me or for the museum.

Rubens:

Resnicow knew you were available. I mean, people knew you were available.

07-00:46:39

Lane: Well, yes, the headhunters knew I was available, but the situation that seems to be right for me are museums that want to go to the next place, that have the resources to get to the next place, but don't have a clue about how to do it. It's what I do. I guess I'm a fix-it guy or a turn-around guy. And to have the right one of those come along is, well, they're few and far between. I looked at a number of different opportunities. The MOCA was open in Los Angeles, the contemporary museum in Chicago was open, the Whitney was open. None of those were the right fit for me. Or for the trustees who were hiring. It was a great piece of good fortune for me that the Dallas search committee came looking.

Rubens:

At the time, at the immediate time, it wasn't open. Who was the director of Dallas right before you?

07-00:47:47

Lane: Jay Gates. He stepped down in the spring of 1998, to become the director of the Phillips Collection in Washington.

Rubens: They had a search committee, and they came to you. Did you talk to Parker at all about it? [Parker was director in Dallas 1975-1987.]

07-00:48:04

Lane: Oh, *sure*, it was really important to me to have his perspective. I know there are lots of people who never check in with their predecessors.

Rubens: Well, and especially because you were fierce competitors at one point, in San Francisco.

[material deleted]

07-00:48:35

Lane: Well, as soon as I wasn't the director in San Francisco, Harry and I made up and we had our nice friendship again.

Rubens: Oh, really? Oh, well, you're a big person.

07-00:48:48

Lane: Harry knew exactly what had happened in San Francisco because the same thing happened to him in Dallas. There was disappointment in him, after the new building opened in Dallas.

Rubens: I was going to ask you why he went to San Francisco. Was that a higher position, or—

07-00:49:16

Lane: I think at the time that he went to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, you might have called it a step up from the Dallas Museum of Art. Today, I don't think that would be the case. I think that actually, when Harry left the Dallas Museum, its collections might already have been greater than the collections of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. In the time that's come since then, they've gotten even better. San Francisco, because of its huge tourism base, can attract some kinds of exhibitions we can't in Dallas. In the exhibitions business, it might have a higher profile, but the collections in Dallas are stronger, the education program is stronger, and it's a very healthy place.

Rubens: And how does it feel for you to be head of an encyclopedia—

07-00:50:20

Lane: Oh, I love it!

Rubens: Do you? Speak about that. Let me just check the time. Is it different than—

07-00:50:42

Lane: Well, it is. It's different. But because it has a unique history, in that the museum actually is two museums under one roof, in the abstract way, it's the historic, encyclopedic museum of Dallas. But in 1963, the Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts was merged with what was then called the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. The resulting institution is today known as the Dallas Museum of Art. So there's a very strong institutional history and commitment to modern and contemporary art that is contained within this encyclopedic institution. If you looked at our programming profile in comparison to other encyclopedic museums—say the Met, or the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, or the Los Angeles County Museum, or the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco—you'd say that there's more or less half-and-half between modern, contemporary and traditional programming.

For me, that was very attractive because a lot of the leadership of the board here are contemporary art collectors. It's where a lot of the energy for the board is. They wanted to have a museum director who knew about the contemporary world, and how contemporary museums work, and to help put Dallas on the map in its rightful place in that area, as well as continuing on vigorously to enrich and program the traditional side of the museum. It was great for me. It was also great to come to an encyclopedic museum. I've learned so much about things that I knew nothing about. So it's enriched my artistic interests and my traveling life a lot. I've learned how much artists like to have their work shown and do projects in encyclopedic museums, where they're not just with their peers or their near term historical predecessors, but with the whole history of art, the whole continuum of human creative endeavor.

[material deleted]

Rubens:

One quick question. Was there a to-do over getting rid of a Matisse, a deaccessioned—

07-00:54:32

Lane:

No, there was a to-do over a Monet [*The Seine at Argenteuil*]. It was a picture that Helen Crocker Russell had left to the museum. It was a very good Monet. It was from 1875. The museum's mission statement says it was a museum of twentieth century art. So it was sitting in storage. Actually, it was on the wall at the Fine Arts Museums.

Rubens:

It was loaned.

07-00:55:02

Lane:

It was on loan to the Fine Arts Museums, because it had no place in our collection. We quietly withdrew the loan, because I thought as long as it was over there, it was going to be provoking an issue if we ever decided to deaccession it and redeploy the funds. Harry Parker was angry about that. He thought we should give it to them. We brought it back to the SFMOMA, we

recommended to the accessions committee to deaccession it. The proposal was torpedoed because there was—Well, it was actually family politics. We just set it aside, kept it in storage. It kept getting more and more valuable. It was one of the last things that happened during my directorship, the successful deaccession of it. We sold it. It was, like, \$8 million. It was excellent. It was at an excellent place in the market. Gary Garrels, after I left, I think brilliantly redeployed the funds. Now SFMOMA has one of the great Rothkos [*No. 14, 1960*] anywhere. It's sort of a fitting conclusion to a lot of unhappy stories that involve Rothko. Have you heard those?

Rubens: No.

07-00:56:51

Lane: Okay, quickly. The second director of the museum [George Culler] deaccessioned Rothko's surrealist period masterpiece [*Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea, 1944*], in exchange for a decidedly boring sort of classic work of the early 1950s. It was a truly unfortunate decision. Now, of course, that painting, which used to hang in San Francisco, next to the great early Jackson Pollock, hangs at the Museum of Modern Art. It's a burr under my saddle every time I go in the gallery in New York. But since Rothko had this connection with the San Francisco Art Institute in the late forties—he was teaching there in the summers—and the show that Grace McCann Morley had given him in the middle forties [1946], he had warm feelings about it. The foundation, after it was set up, honored those feelings. SFMOMA was going to be one of the principal beneficiaries of a donation from the foundation. A guard damaged a painting. The foundation didn't hear about it from the museum. The foundation read about it in the *New York Times*, and thus ended the big gift from the Rothko Foundation to the SFMOMA.

Rubens: I didn't know that pre-piece, though, of having sold the—

07-00:58:29

Lane: They didn't sell it, they traded it back to the artist, at the artist's request.

Rubens: The piece ended up in MoMA.

07-00:58:40

Lane: The piece that ended up in MoMA was traded back to the artist, at the artist's request, sometime in the late fifties or early sixties.

Rubens: Yes, and so that's the irony of selling the Monet and getting the—

07-00:58:57

Lane: Well, it's the happy outcome of the Monet, because it was the SFMOMA's single most valuable, unutilized asset. I think the outcome for SFMOMA was excellent.

[Begin Audio File 8 02-23-2007.mp3]

08-00:00:25

Lane:

The exhibitions that were organized by SFMOMA during my tenure there, that I feel most enthusiastic about, I guess first and foremost, Sigmar Polke's first American retrospective [1990], which was done by John Caldwell. He's my favorite living artist, as well. The history of San Francisco's Polke collecting was that John Caldwell was completing the 1988 Carnegie International, after I had come to San Francisco. He and I knew he was going to be moving to San Francisco after that show was done. I said to him, "Choose the things that the Carnegie wants, and that you have enough money for, for the Pittsburgh collection, and earmark those things. And then after that," I said, "I'm bringing our gang to Pittsburgh, and we're going to loot the show." Pittsburgh already had an important Polke. The five paintings, the *Spirits* paintings were, I thought, the greatest objects in the '88 International. We had a pact with the Fishers and the Bowes, and with Mimi and Peter Haas, to acquire the whole group of five of them, one being bought by the museum, the other four being acquired by the other collectors, but as promised gifts to the museum. That was, I suppose, the introduction of Sigmar Polke to San Francisco and the beginning of a great relationship. John Caldwell had enormous fun working with the artist, and I had enormous fun working with the artist. It was a landmark.

Then other projects that John did that were extraordinary, the Jeff Koons mid-career survey [1992], the Luciano Fabro retrospective [1992], the concentrated exhibitions on new work by Martin Kippenberger [1991], Christopher Wool [1989], Matthew Barney [1991], the show that Gary Garrels did with Andrea Zittel [1995], when the trailers came inside the building, the William Wurster retrospective [1995] that was organized by Mark Treib, who's a professor at UC Berkeley, for the greatest of all the Bay Area modernists, and one of America's great architects, Bob Riley's exhibition of just a handful of early works by Nam June Paik [1989], which was one the most moving media arts shows I have ever experienced. Sandy Phillips is such a creative and energetic curator; there are lots of shows that she did that were wonderful. But I loved the one called "Crossing the Frontier," [1996] because it dealt so much with things that were close to my heart—the Western landscape, railroads.

08-00:05:32

The Polke show went to the Brooklyn Museum; it was at the contemporary art museum in Chicago; went to the Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden]. The Koons went to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. It was too courageous, too advanced a show. No museum in New York would touch it. They were scared of it. The Fabro show did not travel; a great sadness. The others that I mentioned, The Kippenberger, the Wool, the Zittel, and the Barney, were not large scale exhibitions.

08-00:06:13

I would say that in a number of ways, the SFMOMA was outperforming the MoMA in the adventurousness of its exhibition program. I don't mean just the things that John Caldwell was doing, or that Gary Garrels would do, but our media arts program, under Bob Riley, was a lot more interesting, and especially on the collecting side. The architecture and design program, after Aaron Betsky came, was so conspicuously at a higher, more significant place than MoMA's. I think that Sandy Phillips has been running circles around the photography department at the MoMA.

Rubens:

Would you go back to MoMA? Were you friends with the director?

08-00:07:19

Lane:

Sure. Sure, Glenn Lowry? Yes. Another one of us from Williams College. I could tell from those openings that—at not every other museum, because some of them also got it the way we got it, as being institutions that were there for the artists. But a number of museums, the MoMA being the classic example, they seemed to be there for the trustees and the staff and not for the artist. And to hear the speeches that were given for the opening of the Polke drawings retrospective at the MoMA, or for the Ryman show, you would think that the artist wasn't in the room. Our wish was always to make the artists feel like they were the center, because they were. I think that that attitude was one that helped the SFMOMA be a place that was so attractive for artists to work. It enabled us to prevail in a number of situations in working with some of the greatest artists that some grander institutions might have aspired to, because we had the right attitude. Maybe I could just name the artists that the museum established relationships with that I think seemed especially fertile: Sigmar Polke, Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, Ellsworth Kelly (that was really Gary Garrels' work, the Kelly), Richard Serra.

Rubens:

Who you think is the most important American artists, Richard Serra?

08-00:10:46

Lane:

Well, I can imagine myself having said that. He *certainly* is the greatest artist, the greatest *senior* artist, to have ever come out of the San Francisco Bay Area. It's amazing. He and Mark di Suvero grew up across the street, in the Sunset. I mean, it's astonishing. How does this a coincidence like this *happen*? Richard's Bay Area connections are very deep. So I think I would say that Richard Serra is the greatest artist ever to have come out of the San Francisco Bay Area. Matthew Barney was born in San Francisco. It isn't clear yet where his star will be. But Richard Serra, who starred in one of Matthew's *Cremaster* films, said about Matthew that all art that had happened from the 1960s to around 1990 had been, in one way or other, informed by Pop or by minimalism or post-minimalism, and that Matthew Barney was the first fresh voice, was actually something different to come along. So I don't know, I think maybe a great senior master and a great younger master. But Matthew was born in San Francisco. He was raised in Boise, Idaho. So, you know, he's one of mine; he's an Idahoan.

Richard Serra is just a giant. When John Caldwell and I washed ashore in the San Francisco Bay, there was no Richard Serra in that community. Now I'm very happy that it's one of the places that's very rich in his work. Collectors were willing to take note of what was being suggested, and then make up their own minds. But happily, they made up their minds in spades collecting Richard Serra.

Rubens: There's a wonderful video of him laying molten lead.

08-00:13:29

Lane: Yes, that work that was given to the museum by Jasper Johns, the splashing piece [*Gutter Corner Splash: Night Shift, 1969/95*].

Rubens: The splashing. And that was given by Jasper?

08-00:13:36

Lane: That was given by Jasper Johns, courtesy of Douglas Baxter at the Pace Gallery in New York. He wasn't the dealer of, but he was a close friend of Jasper Johns. Douglas is also a great friend of Frances Bowes. Douglas was doing a lot of business in San Francisco, with the Bowes and the Fishers, with the Haases and with others. At that point, Richard Serra was working with Pace. Jasper was selling his studio in lower Manhattan. He mentioned to Douglas that this piece was there, and that he didn't know what to do with it, and would Douglas make a suggestion? Douglas said, "Well, you want to give it to a museum?" Jasper said okay. Douglas got to choose the museum, and it was the SFMOMA because of the great interest that had been manifested in the late eighties and early nineties for Richard Serra.

[material deleted]

Rubens: Does anyone ever talk about, does it matter at all, does it ever show up, that gay artists were so important to contemporary art? Was it ever something that would be mentioned?

08-00:17:45

Lane: Well, the AIDS crisis was not just focused on San Francisco, although it took a terrible, terrible, terrible toll there. If you're asking did the museum do anything, well, there was this remarkable artist consortium called General Idea, that was based in Toronto, and that Bob Riley knew a lot about. We presented, I think, a deeply moving exhibition of their work. One member of the trio is healthy and survives, but the other two were—I can't remember, at the time of the opening, whether they were terribly ill or whether they'd already died. But that was about as powerful a statement, artistic statement about the AIDS crisis as I could imagine. General Idea. I think the artistic program view of the SFMOMA was not about social and political causes. The artistic program view of the SFMOMA was about great art. And it came from all different directions. Sometimes it fitted with some people's political agendas, whether they were feminists or whether they were gay, lesbian, or

they were from minority communities, and sometimes it didn't. But mostly, the idea was about showing art that we really believed in.

**Interview #4: September 6, 2007****Interviewed by Richard Cándida Smith, ROHO, Peter Samis, SFMOMA**

[Begin Audio File 9 09-06-2007.mp3]

Cándida Smith: Here we are with the Jackson Pollock in the collection, *Guardians of the Secret* [1943] Why don't we start out by asking you what you thought about this work as you became responsible for it. As you took over the collection, what did this work in particular mean to you?

09-00:00:51

Lane: Well, it was even more important to me before I came to San Francisco because, in fact, this was, in my view, the only painting in this museum's collection that was worth coming from around the world to see. So I intuitively appreciated its importance for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. But I don't think that I had a clue about how totally integral it was to this museum's history and to its development. After I became the museum director, and after I became a little more knowledgeable about the institution's history and learned about the *astoundingly* great first museum director, Grace McCann Morley [1935-58], and the run that she had had in the thirties and the forties in programming and collecting for this institution—In the thirties, she had a big connection to the Museum of Modern Art [NY], and brought two of Alfred Barr's greatest shows, the Surrealism show [1937] and the Cubism show [1936], to San Francisco—to actually, no discernible impact, as far as I can tell. But she did have a huge impact in her contemporary art program in the 1940s, when she gave the first one-person museum exhibitions to Clyfford Still [1943] and to Arshile Gorky [1941] and to Mark Rothko [1946] and Jackson Pollock [1945], and acquired works of art for the museum's collection from each of those exhibitions. All the works that she acquired ended up being masterpieces. The *Guardians of the Secret* was the greatest masterpiece. The lesson that I learned from that appreciation of Morley's contribution was that the SFMOMA could be on the absolute leading edge of defining contemporary visual culture and that it could use its exhibitions program as a vehicle for building its collection astutely, with younger artists at the moment that they were just coming into their full artistic voice.

Cándida Smith: Well, maybe you could take a minute or two and tell us a little bit about what you see in the painting and why you see it as important. For the average viewer, it's not the typical Pollock painting; it's not what they would expect. So maybe you could help an average museum goer who's not terribly knowledgeable in modern art history to understand why this painting is as significant as you think it is.

09-00:03:41

Lane: Well, as you suggested, it is not a so-called classic drip painting, the works that came from 1947 to 1950 or 1951. But it's just the moment before, and it's pregnant with what was about to occur, and for Pollock to be what I think he

is, in the case of his drip paintings, the first American artist who had actually led the whole of the Western art world in creative invention. This painting still has a touch with Pollock's interest in, from the late thirties into the early forties, surrealism. He was part of the gallery of Peggy Guggenheim in New York. Peggy Guggenheim had been married to Max Ernst. She had a circle of friends who were in the surrealist world, who were Europeans who were émigrés during the World War II era. He learned a lot from that. But he was also very interested in what Miró was doing and what Mondrian was doing. Sounds like totally opposite artists, except that in both cases, they were trying to enliven the entirety of the picture plane, making every square inch of equal visual interest. Pollock is beginning to figure out how to do that in this painting. He's incorporated, on the two sides here and here, guardian figures, which are totemic. Maybe they are related to North American Indian iconography. There's a dog or a wolf down here, which is a third guardian figure. Again, probably from those Native American sources. Then there's this "aquarium" full of the entire confusion and fog of human life, of the angst of modern existence. So you have, formally, in this painting an aspiration to increase the scale, you have the wish to make every part of the surface visually interesting, and you have the incipient mush of subconscious abstract expressionism going on. Everything is here. It's beautifully realized. It is, I think, the great Jackson Pollock before the drip paintings come, a couple of years later.

Cándida Smith: Did you have the ambition of getting a drip painting?

09-00:06:44

Lane: Oh, yes! Of course. Hunk [Harry] and Moo [Mary Margaret] Anderson have *Lucifer*, which is a 1947 painting. It resides in Atherton, California. The museum gave a magnificent exhibition to the Anderson Collection five or six years ago [Twenty]. One hopes, as a museum director, even if it's twenty years down the road or thirty years down the road, that that painting might some day come to the SFMOMA and be the perfect compliment to this picture.

Cándida Smith: On the two sides of the Pollock [left and right] are two Philip Gustons, which both Jerry Nordland and Henry Hopkins actually spent a lot of time in their interview talking about, because for them, they were extremely important paintings for the collection. I wonder if you might share with us any thoughts you might have on Guston and his paintings in this collection, and how one might take—I don't know if it's fair to call him a secondary figure, but a not brand-name figure like Pollock or [Mark] Rothko, how do you include them in the story of American art in the 1940s and fifties and beyond?

09-00:08:38

Lane: The astonishing thing about Jackson Pollock and Philip Guston, and about Richard Serra and Mark di Suvero, is that they were all California boys—Guston and Pollock from Los Angeles, and di Suvero and Serra from San

Francisco—whose lives were, in their early artistic years, totally connected. Serra and di Suvero grew up across the street from each other, in the Sunset District of San Francisco. Pollock and Guston went to the same high school in Los Angeles. I don't remember exactly how this worked out, but they talked each other into going to New York. They came out of that milieu in L.A., where there was still a lot of influence of and presence of Mexican muralists of the 1930s, a kind of socially conscious public art program. Guston stuck with that interest longer than Pollock. Guston, up until the end of the 1940s, was still a figurative artist, and his works were imbued with a social conscience. I think it's extremely interesting to have a mid-1940s Pollock, in the form of the *Guardians of the Secret*, and to have actually a whole array of the whole career of Guston, magnificently represented here, thanks to Henry Hopkins, who had been a friend of Guston and gave him his great lifetime retrospective [1980]. To have those two artists, who were so closely associated as young men in Los Angeles, impacted by the life of culture in the Western United States, before they made what ended up being very, very grand careers in New York.

Samis: I'm mindful of your dissertation work on Stuart Davis and abstraction in New York in the twenties and thirties. These Angelenos coming to New York and arriving, trying to form their own vocabulary of abstraction. Could you talk a little bit about kind of the intergenerational impacts and influences, and how this kind of evolved out of or in contrast to what was already happening there?

09-00:11:24

Lane: Well, in the case of Pollock, he had, as far as I can tell, little or no connection to that older generation of abstractionists that Stuart Davis would represent. The older generation didn't truck with surrealism. They weren't interested in the European émigrés who came to New York, with the exception of Mondrian and [Jean] Hélion, both of whom were more geometric abstractionists. The surrealist part was not embraced by the Stuart Davis crowd. Pollock was in a different circle. Stuart Davis didn't spend time at the Peggy Guggenheim gallery. They wouldn't have had an intersection. Davis probably wouldn't have had an impact on Pollock.

09-00:12:22

In the case of Guston, I don't know that much about it. But Davis and a number of his colleagues, even as they were painting in an abstract way, had a deep sense of social commitment. So that may have had some resonance with Guston. The interesting thing in New York that happens in the late '30s, with the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, with the invasion of Poland, with the show trials under Stalin, is a kind of schism in leftward-thinking creative community between those who decided no matter what, they were going to stick with communist dictates, and others, like Davis, who were appalled by what they learned. They still had a social conscience, but divorced themselves from putting their art in the service of social progress, and returned to the artistic ivory tower. I think that Pollock was probably—This was something that Davis had in common with the emerging abstract expressionists, is that

they were very concerned about their art, formally. Guston, it appears, through the war years, remained in his heart a person who was not only committed to social progress, but to depicting concerns about the state of the world. Guston, of course, in this collection, is beautifully represented with his abstract period, which—He was an *extremely* gifted abstract expressionist. But Richard, you were saying maybe he was a secondary-level artist. I think as an abstract expressionist, he was not on the totally A+ list. He was on the A list, but not the A+ list. But in the late sixties, he brought back figuration into his work. And it was shocking. He was the opprobrium of the New York art world. Everyone thought that he had become an apostate of everything that they believed in, which was abstract expressionism. His show in, I guess it's 1969, with new figuration, with imagery that was clearly socially critical and at the same time, highly personal, and painted in the most ravishing abstract expressionist brush technique—it set the art world's teeth on edge. Or it sent it off in a new direction. In a lot of ways, Philip Guston was one of the most influential artists on the planet during the 1970s, because younger artists said, "Oh, my God! There *is* a future for painting." There is a way of getting around what then seemed to be a very tired vocabulary of abstract painting.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: So the idea is to talk about working with Botta on the design of the permanent galleries.

Samis: Which, it might be worth saying that in the old building, all the masterworks were consigned to the corridors, right? And most of them to storage, right? So this was an opportunity.

09-00:19:16

Lane: When we were choosing an architect and then designing the new SFMOMA, we were in a period in which there was both a kind of traditional high modernism, as an architectural style, and there was also a lot of hot new postmodernism on the architectural market. The museum, I think, wanted to stick with the modernist style; it was more the artistic heritage of the internal part of the museum's collection and program. We were very, very concerned that we get beautifully proportioned galleries and that the environment be very friendly to art and artists. That was even more important to us that the outward manifestation of the building's design. Mario Botta was charged with creating a number of different kinds of spaces, highly flexible spaces that could be used for changing exhibitions and for what were increasingly large scale art objects created during the late seventies, the eighties, and then into the nineties. He was also charged with dealing with the museum's specific collections, like the photography collection, which had light level issues, and with the historical modernist collection, which we're standing in now—works of the first fifty or sixty years of the twentieth century. I think he gave us what we wanted. I think one of the real delights of his design was this particular

suite of galleries on the second floor, in which he incorporated a classic European picture gallery *enfilade* of spaces for the traditional art collection.

Samis: What did it mean to SFMOMA finally to be able to showcase these key works and this kind of historic view into the century, through its own collection, for the first time in this way, in an ongoing, durable way?

09-00:21:46

Lane: A lot of us trooped to San Francisco in 1985 for the museum's fiftieth anniversary. Henry Hopkins and staff had populated the entirety of the third and fourth floors of the old War Memorial Building with the collection, and with promised gifts to the collection. I think it was a real eye-opener to a lot of people in the art world that the SFMOMA didn't have a great collection, but it sure had a whole lot more of an important collection than you would've thought, because the War Memorial facility was so limited. In fact, the historical part of the collection was mostly shown on the third floor, which was actually an office floor. So these works were hung in the corridors. But the nice thing—one I must say that I miss in this new building—about the War Memorial was that on the fourth floor, which had been designed originally as a museum and had this gorgeous central sky-lit atrium, surrounded by rather beaux-arts looking, classically proportioned rectangular galleries. But then there were all these little eccentric spaces that had been designed, as well. They were like little pockets of a [Francesco] Borromini church. Artists loved to work in these little nests. That's one thing that's not part of the vocabulary of modernism, that I miss, the eccentricity of those spaces and the provocation and sort of the contest between artists and those spaces, as they worked in the old SFMOMA.

[interruption]

09-00:23:35

Lane: We were looking at Botta's plans for the fourth floor, and John Caldwell said, "Gee, those are twenty-five-foot ceilings. Those are too high." I said, "Oh, John, just go with the flow." He said, "No, I won't." [laughs] And so he insisted. I ended up thinking, he's right. Then we had a showdown with the architect and with the building committee.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith:

It's the [Henri Matisse] *Femme au chapeau* [1905], perhaps we might start with your talking about how you see this painting, what it means to you. It's clearly one of the most famous paintings in the collection. How do you feel about it as a work of art?

09-00:24:36

Lane: When I was an undergraduate at Williams College, taking my first art history course, this image was flashed up on the screen, and I was rocked. It seemed so beautiful to me. I'm reminded of a lecture that James Turrell gave about

growing up in Los Angeles and not having been to New York and not really having seen that much art, but having been in an art history class and seeing slide projections of Mark Rothko's paintings and saying this had changed his life. He just *loved* the way that those looked. I'm thinking to myself, yes, that's exactly how I felt about the way that the *Femme au chapeau* appeared to me in an introductory class to modern art in, I don't know, 1963 or something.

When I actually saw the painting, I was shocked. It's not really a very pretty painting. It's actually now 102 years old, and it is as provocative and harsh and challenging and un-sumptuous—And that was exactly not what I saw in the projected image, when it was all flattened. So I think that when I encountered this painting for the first time in real life, which was when I was working at this museum, and Elise Haas passed away and her collection came to us, and we showed it for the first time in 1991, the collection in its entirety. The lesson for me was to try to learn why this painting was so great. Being a pretty picture isn't enough, being one of those Matisses that you just wallow in. This is one that changed the direction of artistic culture. She has got some of the attributes of a traditional society portrait, including the fancy hat, but all the rest of the painting—the colors and the very kind of dryish way that the paint has been put on—none of that is the least bit ingratiating. It has nothing to do with being a sycophantic, flattering, traditional portrait. This is an image of a human being who exists in the modern world. It's a painting that caused a very great deal of trouble in French artistic circles in 1905. It was in a room at the autumn salon, which was an art fair. One of the critics, one of the many critics of the show, labeled these artists—it was [Maurice] Vlaminck and André Derain and Matisse and others—the Wild Beasts, or the Fauves. He singled out this particular picture for opprobrium. I think it's fantastic that 102 years later, it still is so tough and still is so challenging.

For a museum like the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, what a lesson. Go for the very best, the very most provocative things that are happening in your particular moment in time. Get them into your institution. In the case of this painting, which has a wonderful San Francisco Bay Area history, it represents the only *great* connection that San Francisco has had with the evolution of early European modernism, namely the Stein family living in Paris, and Gertrude and her brother Leo, and her brother Michael, and Michael's wife Sarah being the great early patrons of [Pablo] Picasso and of Matisse, and of other artists. That is an indelible chapter in the history of modern art. And that Sarah and Michael Stein brought their Matisses back to San Francisco, and that when they needed to cash them in, their friend Elise Stern Haas was there, knowing that these things were important and acquiring them for herself, and then making her great legacy to San Francisco. The Haas family has been central and essential to the history of the SFMOMA, and continues to be. This is their grandest contribution, but I'm sure there'll be other great ones in the future.

Cándida Smith: Did you know Mrs. Haas well?

09-00:29:56

Lane: I never met Mrs. Haas. She was infirm by the time I came to San Francisco. My wife met her.

Rubens: Do you know anything about the framing of that painting? I asked Inge-Lise, but she didn't really—

09-00:30:10

Lane: I don't, but I'm very happy that it is a simple frame. A lot of Matisses of this period are junked up in sort of late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century rococo frames that people wrongly put around impressionism, too.

Rubens: In the Matisse show that originated at Dallas, isn't there a piece that Inge-Lise worked on? Something that's sort of a companion to this, but it's a much more lively piece?

09-00:30:49

Lane: There's the little study for the *Joie de Vivre*. That was in Elise Haas's collection, as well.

Samis: As a director, there are certain gifts that you cultivate because you know the patrons and the collectors, and others that you receive due to luck.

09-00:31:28

Lane: What you're really saying, Peter, is did I have anything to do with the Elise S. Haas bequest? No. I could've messed it up. But by being cordially receptive, it was just my good fortune to be the museum director when this extraordinary legacy came to the SFMOMA.

Samis: Do you use it as leverage, in some way, as a model for other living trustees, the younger generation, when something like this comes your way?

09-00:32:10

Lane: Well, in 1991, when we had this new enrichment for the museum, we organized an exhibition called "Toward a New Museum." In that show, the Elise S. Haas Collection was presented in its entirety for the first time. At the same moment, we took the opportunity to build on the 1985 fiftieth-anniversary exhibition and show what the museum had acquired by other means than the Haas bequest in its painting and sculpture collection. I think that that was revelatory to this community, the level of ambition that had overtaken the institution, its internationalism in contemporary art, the scale of the objects, the generosity of the donors.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: Well, you came here and, "Boy, I could do what Morley did in the forties," in terms of pinpointing some important developments in contemporary art and really give it the support and build a collection. So here you are, 1986.

09-00:34:09

Lane: '87.

Cándida Smith: '87. What are the priorities for you, in terms of the kind of contemporary collection that you want to build? What are the criteria that are going through your mind? Before we discuss individual artists.

09-00:34:28

Lane: The core of my value system associated with being a museum professional is that the collection is the heart of the institution. It is what defines the museum. In the end, by the sternest judges, the quality of that collection is how you best measure the significance of the museum. There are lots of other things that art museums do that are also critically important—their exhibition and education programs, their community engagement, their libraries, their archives, their social life. But the collection is, for me, the essence of it, and the thing that I feel best about at the SFMOMA and at the two other institutions that I've served as director. The SFMOMA, when I came on to serve here, was a museum that had a long and sometimes distinguished history. It was, in the middle 1980s, in the process of becoming marginalized on the West Coast, because of the fluorescence of smart and ambitious contemporary art activity in institutions in Southern California. So the SFMOMA was looked at as being a contributor, but not really on the edge of contemporary art, and not pushing that hard. Part of that was because the facilities didn't allow it.

09-00:36:28

The collecting program here was largely national and California artists. It did not have, on the contemporary side, very much of an international profile. That isn't entirely true, but it's basically true. So when I came, I had this extraordinary experience of working in Pittsburgh and being involved in two of the Carnegie's great triennial international contemporary art exhibitions. It was from those experiences that I had a broader appreciation for things that were happening in Europe, as well as in America. An appreciation for those artists that were American that the Europeans were extremely interested in, that we weren't so interested in, in the United States. So there was rather a different list of artists who were my priorities than would have been for my predecessors and for the acquisitions committee that was working at the museum in the first half of the 1980s.

09-00:37:51

It was my goal to create in San Francisco a great contemporary art collection. You can do that if you have enough money and you have enough will and you make the right choices. It's not possible to readily create an historical collection, but you can do it on the contemporary side. And not just do it with the museum, but to try and persuade and encourage those people who were art collectors in San Francisco to get involved and get ambitious, as well. The

institution, working together with the collectors, it was my view that we could, coming together, make something that is truly great here. I think that—I'm still very optimistic that that will be the eventual outcome, as a number of the great San Francisco art collectors eventually, I hope, do the right thing for this institution. I have every reason to believe that they will.

09-00:38:57

In the area of earlier twentieth century modernism, whether it's abstract expressionism or whether it's going back to cubism and other early twentieth-century movements, I saw relatively little opportunity for the museum itself, proactively, to build a collection there. We simply didn't have the resources. In fact, that wasn't the critical mass of the collection. It still is a fairly limited collection. The SFMOMA collection gets strong after World War II. Before World War II, it has representative works. So it seemed to me that the only way to enrich that part of the collection was to do everything possible to encourage those few collectors in the Bay Area who did have historical modernism collections to be thinking about this museum as the appropriate end site for their artistic holdings.

Cándida Smith:

But then your personal acquisitions priorities is going to be contemporary art. And perhaps controversial contemporary art? Is that one of the things that you were going to be looking for?

09-00:40:13

Lane:

Well, it wasn't intended to be controversial. But of course, any time you're on the leading edge of defining culture, it is controversial. A lot of times, the curators and the museum directors don't get it right. So there are a lot of people who have opinions, and they frequently have better insight.

09-00:40:47

The other thing I thought about for the SFMOMA was that it did not have a very structured curatorial department. This is true of many museums that are involved with contemporary art; there isn't a department of this and a department of that. I think that the museums that have been the most successful as collecting entities have gone the departmental route. One reason is that it gives you specialists, curatorial specialists. Another reason is that in the collecting community, collectors tend to specialize. If you have curators who are engaged with the same issues and the same field of artistic interest, it's easier to hope that they come together. That's crucial to museum collection development, because there're very few museums that have enough money to, themselves, build a great collection. The multiplier effect of the power of a community of private collectors, it's enormous.

09-00:42:07

So in looking at the organizational structure of the museum and thinking about it as a collecting entity, it seemed to me that we needed to departmentalize a little bit more. These things were in the winds, anyway. There was a very strong photography department existent. In fact, you could argue that that was the great collection at the SFMOMA. There was money to begin a department of architecture and design. There had not been a curator named for it, and

there hadn't been a program defined for it yet, so that was one of my opportunities. David Ross, who ended up being my successor here—was then the director of the Whitney [Museum of American Art], but had spent a lot of time in the Bay Area, as a curator at the Berkeley Art Museum at Cal [UC Berkeley]—said, "Jack, oh, boy, Bay Area, check out what's going on in the world of media arts there." He said, "I think it's where the action is." So I did, when I got here. David was certainly right. It was a much more innovative, energetic scene than the traditional painting and sculpture scene. So Graham Beal, who was our chief curator then, and I talked a lot about this. We thought, we think we should start a department for this. It should be, because it's a support system for what seemed to be some of the most interesting, creative minds working in our region. That's one of our responsibilities. Of course, the traditional painting and sculpture people thought we were betraying the legacy of Bay Area art. I think we were respectful of it, but we were looking for where the innovation was occurring. We hired Bob Riley, who had worked with David Ross when David had been the director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

[Begin Audio File 10 09-06-2007.mp3]

Cándida Smith: Are there practical reasons that make it difficult to collect European or Asian or Latin American modern or contemporary work?

10-00:00:18

Lane: Well, the conditions that seemed to pertain in the United States in the sixties and the seventies in the gallery world, the art criticism world, and to a great extent, in the collector and museum world, was that we were myopic about what was going on in Europe. We were also totally myopic about what was happening in Latin America and in Asia and Africa, but that's a different story. At this point, the American and European art worlds were almost totally separate. Europeans knew what was going on in the United States; the Americans didn't know what was going on in Europe. We were under the sway of Clement Greenberg, the great art critic of abstract expressionism, and of his legions of artistic and curatorial and critical followers. So museums in America and collectors in America were largely acquiring abstract color-field painting, which in retrospect—although some of it's very good—looks pretty thin compared to the other things that were happening in the 1960s and the 1970s. The SFMOMA was no different from most other museums, in what it was interested in and what its trustees and what its collectors were interested in. It was only by the good fortune that I had of being involved in this Carnegie International project that I got engaged with the European museum officials, dealers, artists, and had some sense of what was occurring there, and some sense of what they thought was important in America, which was minimalism, post-minimalism, not color-field abstract painting. So [pause] Ask me that question again, so I don't lose my focus.

Cândida Smith: Well, it's a two-part. Part of it is, are there practical considerations, in terms of if one wants to collect broadly? So let's say besides [Sigmar] Polke and [Anselm] Kiefer, you might also want [Christian] Boltanski, you might want Japanese artists, you might want [ Hélio] Oiticica, from Brazil.

10-00:03:11

Lane: The barrier to entry in the 1980s in the United States was simply an absence of information. Once collectors were informed about what the panoply of other offerings were, they could see where the energy was. And they moved on. In San Francisco they moved on *amazingly* fast from a state in the middle eighties of being in the groove of what other American museums were doing to being the vanguard, in terms of collecting. It was about inviting those who cared in this community about art collecting to meet the great dealers of what we thought was the most important work. The artists were anxious to meet, as well. Going to Europe, going to the museums, going to the galleries there, and just making the introductions. The San Francisco collectors figured it out really fast, and they became quite independent within a couple of years. The download of information that John Caldwell and I brought from the Pittsburgh experience was transforming to the way this museum thought about its collecting, and, I think, to how our close supporters thought about it. I think it opened up a world of joy, pleasure, satisfaction to them that was far broader than the acquaintances that they had in the Bay Area art scene, or maybe going to New York once in a while and going to the galleries. And we all had incredibly great experiences, and I think, a lot of fun having that world open up.

Cândida Smith: The second side of it is the question of providing historical depth to international contemporary art that you're bringing in to the collection. So to what degree is it possible for an institution like this to still collect [Joseph] Beuys, or Arte Povera, or the Nouveaux Réalistes or any of the other movements that might, in fact, be important if you're going to contextualize contemporary European painting or contemporary European art?

10-00:05:38

Lane: At the time that we began this in San Francisco, it was still possible to go back to the 1960s and pick up. You left off with [Alberto] Giacometti and Picasso. It was possible to go back and pick up with Joseph Beuys and with Mario Merz, so you know what was happening in Italy, what was happening in the Germanic countries, what was happening with Gilbert and George in the United Kingdom. You could still go back and do that. The art market a couple of decades later is a different place. The information has been out there now for twenty years, and smart collectors and museums have been snapping up, so it's not as readily possible now. Then, twenty years ago, ten years ago, it was still possible. I think that there are a number of really important instances in which San Francisco collectors did go back into the 1960s and the 1970s and get key works that provide that kind of historical context for what is going

on, particularly today, even as the museum has continued to try and stay on the leading edge.

Samis: I have a quick follow-up question. How long did it take other museums and other collectors to tune into what was going on internationally. You said standing in that documenta room, you could feel that San Francisco was a part of something that was—We had arrived, in a certain way, on the international art scene. We were making a place for that in San Francisco. You had said we were kind of in the vanguard, in many ways because of the information download that you brought with John from the Carnegie. Now, of course, there are collectors from every museum circling the globe and going to all the major art fairs with their acquisition lists. How long did it take for that transition to take place?

10:00:07:49

Lane: I think SFMOMA was the most interesting contemporary art-collecting institution in America in the late eighties and for the first half of the 1990s. I think by that time, other places had caught up, figured it out, and it was more challenging for the collecting crowd in San Francisco and for the museum's staff to have that leg up. It was just a particular moment in history that existed in the early and middle 1980s, when there was really this dearth of information and connection in the United States about what was going on abroad, and what people abroad thought was going on in the United States. San Francisco really capitalized on that particular—how do you want to put it? It was an artistic investment opportunity.

Rubens: The follow-up I wanted to have is, it seems extraordinary, the power that Clement Greenberg seemed to have.

10:00:09:19

Lane: When I was a graduate student at Harvard, one of the important people on faculty was Michael Fried, who was probably the smartest and most articulate of all of the Greenberg-style younger critics. He was highly influential there. The other person on the faculty who was a modernist was a man named Daniel Robbins, who was a cubist scholar, as well as a contemporary art enthusiast. He had, in his own thinking about Cubism, gone beyond the Roger Fry, Clement Greenberg kind of formal analysis of the progressive nature of abstract art in the twentieth century. He'd gone back and looked at these paintings and said, "What are these things *about*?" He was learning and figuring out what the content, the subject matter of cubism was. This was a wholly, entirely different angle for a student like myself to see this rigorous formal analysis on the side of Michael Fried done brilliantly, and seeing this utterly fascinating plunge into content, into context, that Danny Robbins was proposing as also an equally important aspect of artistic and art historical endeavor. I guess I came out of that being open. I would just be a modest intellectual in that area. There were lots of people devoting their lives to

thinking about these issues who were also challenging the hegemony of the kind of Greenbergian appreciation for the progressive course of modern art.

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: You've selected [a chair by Shiro Kurumata, *Miss Blanche*, 1988] as one of the key acquisitions of your period. So it seems to fit into this international focus that you brought to the museum. Perhaps you could start a little bit about why the piece is so compelling to you, and then how it came to be in the collection.

10-00:01:57

Lane: This remarkable object called *Miss Blanche* was acquired for the museum on the recommendation of Paolo Polledri, who was the curator of architecture and design. He was deeply interested in all things contemporary in Japan, very knowledgeable about it, and as a strategy, was making a collection for SFMOMA of works that were from the Pacific Rim. This is, I think, the most astounding, most extraordinary, most wonderful piece amongst many fine things that Paolo brought into our collection. It is, of course, utterly modernist in its geometries and in the modernity of its materials, the metal and the plastic. At the same time, it's hopelessly romantic and postmodernist in its content. And how rare it is that a chair is something that carries on its shoulders, poetry and literature, thought. Of course, *Miss Blanche* is associated with the Tennessee Williams play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It's not very often that a chair, something you sit in, is also something that is a commentary on a great work of literature.

Kuramata, alas, died too young, but he was one of the great, great designers of the late twentieth century. These are now incredibly valuable. We acquired it for—I'm thinking it was like \$12,000, but this is now one of the grand design arts icons of its time. It is, for me, emblematic of at least an aspect of the architecture and design collection that I hoped would be formed. Both Aaron Betsky and Paolo Polledri, and I'm sure, their successors are saying, "You've got to make it very broad. It's got to be a lot of process things in here. It's a different, messier world than the world of fine arts." I always thought, you have to have killer objects to be representative of what the broader collecting strategy was about. This one is one of the objects that I rejoice in, that it came into this collection during my time. The SFMOMA did a retrospective of Kuramata's design work. Was it in the late nineties? [1997] There was an enormous poster done of this. Gorgeous. Green. An electric green background, with the chair on the front of it, and an SFMOMA label. We have that framed, and we have that in our house. We love it.

Samis: I have a quick question about this. Jack, when you see this, do you see this as a chair for sitting? Or as almost like a sculpture with a story, or a portrait?

10-00:15:46

Lane: I think it's both. And I think that's—if it were just precious—Of course, we can't sit in it; it's a museum object now. But you could sit in it. But to have it just be precious, then it would be sculpture. And would it be good enough to be sculpture? I think it's more powerful, more resonant that it is a functional object that also carries with it layers of cultural information.

Cándida Smith: I'd like to talk about Matthew Barney now, because I think you took notice of him when he was quite young, still, perhaps before he had become—

[interruption]

10-00:16:37

Lane: Matthew Barney is perhaps the most important thing that San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has done in a number of years, in terms of artistic discovery. The story of it is that he was born here. He spent his youth in Boise, Idaho, my home state, where he was a football hero. Then he went to Yale, studied art. He was going to play football. The mythology says that the Ivy League had rules against people who were cashing in on their appearances not being able to play on the athletic teams. Matthew was totally gorgeous, and he was a J. Crew model, making money doing this. He had to choose between his art and football. He stuck with art. His early work—and I guess you would say everything he's done since—has been highly informed by athleticism. He was discovered, if you will, by Clarissa Dalrymple, an English expatriate living in New York, who had a very, very, very great nose for interesting young artists. She was involved with helping to represent Matthew's studio mate, and he said, "You should come take a look at this guy." She did, and she was going to offer him a show. Then the gallery that she was working for folded, and she told her friend Barbara Gladstone about Matthew Barney. Barbara also has a great nose for fantastic younger artists. She went to see him, and she immediately offered him an exhibition. That happened in New York, I think, in 1990 or '91. Matthew was very young then; he was in his early twenties.

Barbara's son and her daughter-in-law had a gallery in Los Angeles called Regan Projects. Actually they did the first show, because Gladstone Gallery had near-term scheduling conflicts, and the second happened in New York. Anyway, it was the Barbara Gladstone co-prosperity sphere that resulted in the exhibition happening. John Caldwell went to Los Angeles for the opening. Stuart Regan and Shaun Caley were very close to us at SFMOMA. We were really interested in what they were doing down there. John came back—I've just never seen him so excited about an artist. [laughs] It was appealing to him on levels of Matthew being a bad boy, and Matthew living out the fantasies of being a great athlete, and also being wildly ambitious as an artist, and also being incredibly handsome, and the work being so extraordinarily odd, eccentric, in terms of the materials that he was using, and the storylines that he

was using. John said to me, “*We have got to show this guy right now!*” [laughs] So we made a commitment to acquire the work from the show.

My recollection is that Norah and Norman Stone also made a commitment, because there was a part that was the icebox that Matthew Barney climbs around inside, and there was also a video part of it. The museum and the Stones acquired this together. It was Matthew Barney’s first museum exhibition [1991]. It was his first museum acquisition. And he was from here, he was a person of the West. And San Francisco had afforded him this platform. And he went on to validate every dream of accomplishment for him that we might’ve had.

10:00:21:26 Bob Riley was very involved in the project, too. Bob and Matthew got along very well. Bob wrote an essay for the catalogue. John wrote an essay for the catalogue. It was too close to being right, and Matthew suppressed it. [laughs] But you can read parts of it in the book of John’s collected essays that were posthumously published. He really got very, very close to the essence. Anyway, Matthew went on to do the *Cremaster Cycle*, which is certainly the most wildly ambitious, and I think in lots of ways, artistically exhilarating art object made in the last decade of the twentieth century. As he continues now, he’s in his early maturity—he’s forty or something now—he continues to do work of, in my view, great, great, great quality and inventiveness. His institutional platform began in San Francisco. It was about media arts. It was about a Western sensibility. It was about a museum that wanted to be on the edge of trying to discern and then afford opportunities for public dissemination of the very best young art that was being made in the world.

Cándida Smith: Did you have any opposition from anybody on the board of trustees, who might have viewed his work as inappropriate?

10:00:23:10 Lane: There was some tittering.

Samis: Maybe you can go back and tell us again what happened. You were saying when you were off camera. When you presented this to the accessions committee, how did you do it? And what was their response?

10:00:23:23 Lane: Well, we presented the idea of the piece to the accessions committee. I don’t think we had the refrigerated box. I think what we had was the video. The video’s actually more difficult than the refrigerated box. The refrigerated box just makes you sort of scratch your head and say, “Are these legitimate artistic forms? Is it okay to have basically a freezer, and to have what looks like a blocking dummy inside, that’s made out of Vaseline? And it has to be in the freezing state, otherwise it goes from sculpture to liquid.” That was just part of—Robert Rauschenberg helps you answer that question. But the video of Matthew, buck naked except for his climbing belt with his ice screws and his

carabiners dangling off of it, doing a climb inside this refrigerated box, with his privates exposed, that caused some tittering. But as a young man, he was so physically beautiful that I think that people got beyond the sort of carnality of it, and into the sheer gorgeousness of this young, athletic form. It became more like a kouros boy as a piece of Greek statuary, except animated.

Cándida Smith: The other controversial thing of Barney, besides the sexuality, which is controversial for some people, but there are a considerable number of people in the contemporary art world who still might be taking a post-Michael Fried position and don't like theatricality, particularly, that would prefer much more for the museum to showing things such as the Serra. The question of how the theatricality of what Barney is doing pushes the boundaries of what American art has been.

10-00:25:55

Lane: Well, I would take the view that the *Cremaster Cycle* of five projects united into one entity is America's Ring. The artistic achievement aspires—it's too soon to know whether it achieves—but it aspires to the level of Richard Wagner. A lot of the use of mythology, of literary text, of storyline, of supernatural beings, and a very inventive formal language is not dissimilar to the accomplishments of Wagner in the late nineteenth century. Richard Serra said, "All of us who have been working since the 1960s have been dealing either with the forebears of minimalism or of Pop art until Matthew Barney came along and invented something entirely new." Now, you asked would people prefer to have the museum be dealing with works like Richard Serra? Which, when they were invented in the 1960s, were pretty radical. I'd say, well, no. What you should be doing is trying to understand what is the most interesting thing that's on the leading edge. How about it, if the greatest living sculptor, who also participated in one of Matthew Barney's projects as a star actor, in the *Cremaster 3*, is saying this is the most interesting person out there of the next generation? I call that some kind of really fantastic validation.

Samis: Especially if he starts slinging petroleum jelly in the Guggenheim, as part of his role.

10-00:28:15

Lane: Well, of course, the slinging of the petroleum jelly is exactly about Richard Serra.

Samis: Maybe we should segue into the Richard Serra, speaking of slinging of petroleum jelly.

10-00:28:27

Lane: [Referring to "The Cloud Club" by Barney owned by the Dallas Museum of Art.] That piece is a baby grand. The top is propped up, and over the strings has been poured in concrete and stuff. That looks like Joseph Beuys. Of course, the piano is about Joseph Beuys. Then leaning against the front of it like this is a big rectangular sheet of prosthetic plastic that bars you from

getting to the piano keys. And that is, of course, Richard Serra, a prop piece. This object is kind of like Matthew Barney's diploma piece. It's, these are my two forebears that were most important to me, Joseph Beuys and Richard Serra, and now I'm making an art object that is all about that, but is going beyond them. I mean, it's all there.

Cándida Smith: So in terms of Richard Serra, how long have you been involved with Richard Serra?

10-00:30:05

Lane: I first met Richard Serra, I suppose it was 1983 or 1984. It was the time that he was having terrible legal difficulties with the piece called *Tilted Arc*, which was in front of federal building in downtown Manhattan. The piece was actually being removed from its site. In Richard's mind, it was site specific, and it destroyed the piece to do that. He was, well, extremely angry and highly litigious. It was a very difficult moment for him because the art world was divided about whether he was right or not. Patrons were scratching their heads wondering, what does this "site-specific" stuff mean? You mean if we acquire a work from an artist, he has rights to the end of time, and we can never move it, even if we don't like it? It was a highly problematic and unsettled situation. Serra had enormous regard in the European art world. He'd done some of his most important work in Germany and in Holland. The advisers that we had at the Carnegie for the International exhibition that was going to come up in 1985 strongly advocated his inclusion in that exhibition. I was also enthusiastic, and John Caldwell was enthusiastic about it. John had even written about Richard Serra when he was writing as an art critic for the *New York Times*. So I had a fantastic trustee named Bill Rush, who was the president of United States Steel Corporation, Pittsburgh's grandest corporation, in those days. I went to him and we asked him if US Steel would support the 1985 Carnegie show. He said he would work that out for us, which he did, but then he got a brain tumor and died.

Richard Serra was one of the leading artists on our list of people. We knew that if we wanted to have him properly represented, we needed to [do] something that was big and monumental. I went to Bill Rush's widow, Jane Rush, and suggested that this man of steel might be able to make something that would be an appropriate commemoration of her husband's life as a heavy metals man and as a patron of the arts, and that Richard had worked in the Kaiser steel mill in the East Bay, and that Bill Rush had been, at one point, the head of that steel company. These connections were coming together. So we invited Richard to come to Pittsburgh. He met Mrs. Rush and met with us. Contrary to what everyone said about him at that time, which was that he was impossible, he was wonderful. He loved the idea of being in Andrew Carnegie's city. He loved the idea of having the opportunity to build a big steel sculpture in front of the institution that Andrew Carnegie founded. He loved the idea that Bill Rush had been a patron of the arts, and his wife was a patron of the arts, and that this would be done for a guy who was a great

businessman, and also a wonderful civic leader, and just a fabulous human being. We never had any trouble at all with Richard Serra. It was a total sweetheart, honey of a ride, when he made the sculpture that unveiled at the opening of the 1985 Carnegie International. He and Anselm Kiefer that year won the Carnegie Prizes, as well. That was my introduction to Richard Serra.

10-00:34:33

At that point, I had no clue I'd be coming to California. Two years later, here I was. I knew his history. He was from the Sunset District of San Francisco. He grew up across the street from Mark di Suvero. Amazing. It's actually staggering, when you think about who the great sculptors are of the post-minimalist gang, and that they were all, a lot of them, around the Bay Area. Not only Mark and Richard, but also Bruce Nauman was here. Walter De Maria grew up in the East Bay. I'm probably missing some others who were—I don't know, did Michael Heizer come from here, too? Maybe. I'm not sure. But the situation I found in San Francisco was that there wasn't any Richard Serra work in the San Francisco Bay Area. Maybe there were one or two or something, but they were invisible. And the artist was not on anybody's list. It seemed to me, my God! Everybody's saying we should be celebrating the culture of Northern California. I'm thinking, well, what about the greatest living sculptor? And so it's one of the satisfactions that I have, and I think that if John Caldwell were alive, he would have it as well, that now by the advocacy of the SFMOMA and the receptive generosity and patronage of the Bay Area collectors, there's probably as great a concentration of important works by Richard Serra in San Francisco as anywhere in the world.

10-00:36:21

Because we had been actively advocating his work to collectors in the community and because the museum had acquired an early prop piece, we were on the radar screen in the art world for Serra. Douglas Baxter, who was, or is, the president of Pace-Wildenstein New York, who then represented Richard, was a great friend of Frances Bowes. A good [friend] of John Caldwell's and myself, but really a great friend of Frances Bowes. He wanted to do something nice for San Francisco because of the patronage that his gallery had enjoyed and the fun he'd had when he was visiting out here. Jasper Johns was a close friend of Douglas Baxter. Jasper was closing his studio in SoHo, and he had a piece that Richard had executed in the studio, a splashing piece. There was really nothing you could do with it. I mean it was for that particular location. You couldn't move it or something, it was stuck. But the concept wasn't stuck. So Jasper was saying, "What can we do about this?" Douglas talked with Richard, and they decided that the piece could be given, as a concept. Douglas orchestrated that it be given to the SFMOMA, Richard's hometown. We were thrilled by the generosity of a great artist, Jasper Johns. We were also thrilled at the prospect of being able to do something with the artist.

10-00:38:24

We set aside a space in the new building. I must say, I'm personally very leery of doing site-specific pieces because it really ties the hands of your successors. I guess that in this instance, I thought, well, he's so great; he's

from the Bay Area; the provenance is astounding. If we can find a place in the museum where it could be installed that wouldn't be too intrusive and that you could work around if you needed to, maybe I will be forgiven by my successors for the lack of flexibility that they might have at some moments. So Richard came out and installed this splashing piece [*Gutter Corner Splash: Night Shift*, (1969/1995)]. There are terrific photographs. Kent Roberts, who's head of installations now, was the chief photographer. There's Richard, with his gas mask on and his ladle, throwing lead to make these things. He looks like the antique sculpture of Poseidon. I think the work is a masterpiece. It's not only about Richard Serra as throwing hot metal, dangerous kinds of things, but it's also about Richard Serra and Jackson Pollock. As I look at the rows of congealed, molded lead, as they're presented, they look to me like the perfect landscape of sets of waves coming in at sunset at Ocean Beach in San Francisco, which was his home place. That's just a speculation. But that's kind of the saga of how that piece came to this museum.

Cándida Smith: Finally, I'd like to take a look at the two photographs that you selected.

[interruption]

10-00:41:02

Lane:

Long before painting culture in California became important, long before, say, Richard Diebenkorn put the West Coast on the map as a painter of international distinction, the San Francisco Bay Area was the home, since the second half of the nineteenth century, for some of the most audaciously experimental and wondrously accomplished photographers to ever pick up the camera. It's, I think, one of the glories of this museum than when it [was] founded in the middle 1930s, it immediately initiated a photography program that was a fine arts program. There was only, I think, one other museum in America that was doing that, and that was the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It seemed so perfect and so indigenous that this regard was being afforded to the artists who've made a great contribution to the history of photography, and to the history of modernism, all of whom were based in Monterey, San Francisco, the East Bay. There were collectors from the very beginning. There were shows from the very beginning. There was an active collecting program for the museum. When I joined the staff in 1987, by a long way, the most important part of this museum's collection, not only quantitatively but qualitatively, was its collection of photography. Unlike the rest of the museum's artistic program, which is focused on, I guess you'd say 1900 to the present, the photography program had, whether intuitively or explicitly, argued that the camera is a modernist instrument, the photograph is a modernist art artifact, and that we should be going back to the dawn of photography in the early part of the nineteenth century, and carrying a historical collection, all the way up to the present. This was helped by the prejudice that existed in the art world, in which until really, only the last twenty years or so, that photography—well, even if you acknowledged that it was a fine art, it wasn't really as fine as painting. I think today we say, well,

that really isn't true. A great photograph is an equally great artistic accomplishment as a great painting. But because of this prejudice photographs were cheap. Discriminating curators, which this museum has had since the very beginning, have been able to capitalize on that. It's been easy to build a big and very great collection of photography. Sandy Phillips has really rounded it out and carried it forward in an extraordinary way, at a time in which information about early photography has grown a lot. She's capitalized on that.

10-00:44:41

So the photograph by William Henry Jackson of the Garden of the Gods [*Garden of the Gods*, ca.1870s], which is a prominent tourist site in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is one of these objects that Sandy Phillips acquired to build out the museum's collection of nineteenth century photography, especially of grand, sublime landscape photography. I wanted to stand in front of this because I'm crazy about this photograph. It has personal resonance for me. I went to prep school in Colorado Springs, so that view, with Pikes Peak in the background is part of my youth. And I'm also—I like trains too much. William Henry Jackson was the court photographer to General Palmer, who was the owner of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad. So this photograph was probably taken as part of Jackson's commissions on behalf of General Palmer to not only document the lines of the D&RGW, but also to promote the touristic beauty sites along its rails.

10-00:46:14

The other photograph that I would enjoy having a word about is this red ceiling by William Eggleston [*Untitled, Greenwood, Mississippi (Red Ceiling)* (1993)]. Of all the photographs that Sandy acquired during my tenure as museum director here, this is the one that is visually most indelible for me, and I think is the object that changed my understanding about what photography could be and what its ambitions might be. I am not, by a long way, the first person to have this perception. But William Eggleston was making these photographs in the 1970s. Younger artists saw them. Color photography before Eggleston had tended to be dullish and timid-ish, because the technologies for color printing were so fleeting. Photographers who were concerned about legacy were using black and white, because they couldn't trust the dyes and the processes. Eggleston was on the frontier of new technology. He was also on the frontier of being able to heat up the colors so that they were perhaps beyond anything that the camera was actually capturing. His work was highly esteemed in relatively small circles of younger photographers looking at it and saying to themselves, gee, the subject matter of these things is fascinating. I work in Dallas now; it's part of the South. This is a southern picture. It feels redolent of Mississippi, where I think it was taken. There's a very nasty pornographic set of little posters in the background. I think this house was the house of Eggleston's dentist, who was kind of a pornographer, as well as being a tooth puller. It has a kind of formal power, and it has this amazing new technology of the printing, and it has this sort of lewd, louche content that is very much part of Eggleston's circles, even

though he's a perfect gentleman. Perfect southern gentleman. But there is this sort of dark side of him, as well, and there's a kind of dark side to the South.

I loved the photograph for what it was, but I also loved it for helping me to understand what was happening with Richard Prince or with Cindy Sherman or with Thomas Struth or with Jeff Wall or with Tony Hernandez, and the ability of younger artists using photography to think of themselves as playing in the big arena that was formerly occupied only by painting and sculpture, and to have their photographs be as ambitious in their content and in terms of their formal aspirations as what the highest art of all times was. Eggleston is, I think, if not the exclusive father of this, one of the really important progenitors of it. SFMOMA has vigorously pursued a collection of contemporary large scale color photography by both Americans and by Germans, where the two big sources for it are. And this is kind of the grandfather.

Samis: So in a sense, you made the case for this being the lynchpin that enabled that new generation to take on the full scope. But for someone looking at this photograph, unto itself, without thinking about the artists of the nineties or today, I can imagine a lot of people have a response of, what's that about? Why take a photograph of that? You talked about how it kind of created a new understanding for you, it helped gel the new understanding for you, of what a photograph could be.

10-00:51:14

Lane: As John Caldwell would've said—and he was a son of the South—this is the real thing. It is real life. Artistically enhanced.

[interruption]

10-00:51:52

Lane: Jeff Koons's gigantic porcelain of *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* [1988] is, in my view, the great acquisition that John Caldwell individually made for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and I think the one with which his heart was most closely associated. We got to know Jeff's work in preparation for the 1988 Carnegie show in Pittsburgh. I came on to San Francisco and simply remained part of the Pittsburgh advisory committee. John stayed and finished the project before coming to San Francisco to be the curator of painting and sculpture. He was totally enchanted by Jeff and asked Jeff if SFMOMA could work with him to make Jeff's first mid-career retrospective, which we did do [1992]. It was, by a long way, the most controversial project that I experienced in my years as director here. Also, in a lot of ways, the most rewarding. There was such a need for balance, artistically. There were trustee concerns, especially that the artist was in the national news for having done what some people called a pornographic exhibition at his gallery in New York. We were in the middle of a capital campaign, and there was nervousness that we would lose support if we were doing this kind of work.

My job as director was to support the curatorial vision—one which I totally believed in, as well. So we mounted the show. It was a big success. We also put on a Richard Diebenkorn retrospective at exactly the same moment [1992]. It was really interesting to see the young crowd, which had all come to see the Koons, and the more senior enthusiasts of traditional abstract painting coming to see the Diebenkorn, and then getting mixed up and seeing both shows. I think a lot of people came away doubly enriched, because of it.

10-00:54:18

Jeff has an MO of pushing the frontiers of technological capability in the realization of his works. This porcelain was, we were told, the largest firing ever attempted in a single piece. When we had the exhibition and when we presented the work to the collections committee, proposing it for acquisition, we didn't actually have the porcelain. They hadn't solved the technological problems yet. We had a thing that was paste. It was a painted plaster version, it was a full scale model for it. Happily, the technology ended up working, and the final piece was even more gorgeous and refined than the plaster paste study we had. Of course, people like to talk about this work in terms of the fame of Michael Jackson, the concerns about race in America. Why is he appearing in white face? Why has he had all this facial surgery that makes him look closer to a white female? All these things are, of course, crucial and interesting things to talk about.

Janet Bishop, who is the Mellon Curator of Painting and Sculpture here, in a little essay that she did on this piece in an SFMOMA catalogue, talked about it in a different way, though. She talked about it as Michael Jackson, a man we can never know. The face is not really that of Michael Jackson anymore. You can't penetrate him. And so the Etruscan tomb statuary, race in America, all that is interesting. But for me, the thing that is so essential about this is, I would even put forward the idea that the Michael Jackson figure is almost a portrait of Jeff Koons. Not because it looks like Jeff Koons, but because Jeff is, I think, the artist that no one can ever know. I'm not even sure that Jeff Koons knows who lives down inside there. I think it's why he is such an amazing channeler of what is American culture. Jeff says, "I just want to make people happy. My joy is other people's joy. I'm trying to give people what they want." He gave a talk in the green room of the old SFMOMA at the time of his exhibition. Somebody asked him the question, "Well, what is your art really all about?" He gave the most bipolar answer that you can imagine. I don't think I can quote it, but the essence of it was, "All I'm trying to do is make people happy. Everything about this is the dark side." Jeff doesn't talk about the dark side anymore. But back when this work was made and when his iconic objects that were coming in the 1980s and the early 1990s were being made, there was that Andy Warhol aspect to it, that he also, in the most facile of ways, the most sort of opaque ways, would refer to. It was, I think, real clear to us at the time that we did the retrospective or the mid-career survey with him, that he was the proper legacy of Andy Warhol. And boy, that is the dark side of American culture. As well as all that Jeff says about joy and happiness. So as I said, I don't even know—Jeff seems so naïve and so

genuine in all of his presentations. I think that he *believes* that it's about happiness. Except that in SFMOMA, he also told us, in an oblique way, about the other part of it. And so I think that maybe Michael Jackson is, in fact, a surrogate for the man. You could never know Jeff Koons.

Samis: And I think you also just channeled some John Caldwell.

10-00:59:32

Lane: Of course. Of course.

[Begin Audio File 11 09-06-2007.mp3]

11-00:00:17

Lane: If I were going to wager how whatever legacy I might have left at the SFMOMA might read in a hundred years, I would suggest that John Caldwell's acquisition of the Jeff Koons of *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* would be his most important contribution. I would say that for me, personally, the acquisition of the suite of five paintings on American Indian topics by Sigmar Polke was my best contribution. And maybe the best thing, in terms of a collection addition, of my museum career.

Cándida Smith: How did the Polke acquisition come about?

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Lane: Sigmar Polke was invited to participate in the 1988 Carnegie International exhibition in Pittsburgh. He had not enjoyed, in America, the same kind of accolades as Anselm Kiefer had. Well, he and [Gerhard] Richter, who emerged as being the two most important German painters of the late twentieth century, were at that point, eclipsed by Kiefer's star. He's a very competitive artist, and he does his best work when there's a lot of pressure for a major event—a Venice Biennale, for instance, or his next big gallery show. In this case, the Carnegie International. He took on this extremely ambitious project of five *enormous* abstract paintings, and he wanted to do something that was specific to America. Each of the five paintings in this suite, which is surrounded by the idea of North American Indian spirituality, has something about it that's specifically American. One of them has embedded in it an Indian arrowhead. Another has meteorite dust, cosmic matter that was found in a crater in Latin America. The painting that's behind me [Sigmar Polke, *The Spirits that Lend Strength Are Invisible, III* (1988)] has nickel scattered in it, a metal that, at least in Polke's mind, who's kind of an alchemist, is associated with the Americas because Europeans didn't like nickel. It was regarded as inferior to silver, which of course, it is. But in America, the nickel was afforded greater respect. Anyway, that was his rationalization.

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The story of this acquisition is that these paintings were going to be presented in the Carnegie International exhibition. I was the director in San Francisco; John Caldwell was still the curator in Pittsburgh. I knew how it worked in Pittsburgh. I'm an honorable person. They had a certain amount of

acquisitions money to buy from the show, because Mr. Carnegie had said that he wanted the Carnegie International exhibition—he said this back in 1895; it was a great strategy—he said he wanted this exhibition to be the vehicle for the Carnegie to build its collection, by buying from it. He wanted to make a collection of the old masters of tomorrow. I said to John, “I’m not going to say a word about San Francisco. You decide how you want to spend the money that Pittsburgh has. You make the choices of the things, and then I’ll bring the gang in from San Francisco and we’ll pick up the rest.” [laughs]

We’d bought what I think is either the first or the second Polke painting in an American museum for Pittsburgh already. That was already covered. The Carnegie did not choose to go for this suite of paintings. We came on strong. Mimi and Peter Haas came to Pittsburgh, Frances and John Bowes, Doris and Don Fisher, and others. I took Helen Van der Meij aside. She was, at that point, the agent for Sigmar Polke. I said, “How about it?” I said, “I think that no matter how much you want to charge for these paintings, that we can put together the war chest, between the SFMOMA’s acquisition funds and having the collector trustees acquire work and make binding promises to the Museum that, eventually, they would come to it.” That all worked out. In fact, we really looted the Carnegie International. There was a lot of work that joined the SFMOMA collection from that show. John and I were thrilled, because it was a huge step forward in the development of the museum’s collections in San Francisco; but also the trustee collectors were very active in shopping from that show. That’s how these paintings got to San Francisco. They were shown soon after the closing of the Carnegie International at SFMOMA, as a group of five, before four of them disappeared into their respective private residences.

One of the paintings, the one that Mimi and Peter Haas acquired, was made with a photo emulsion. So when they acquired it, it just looked like a white rectangle. The artist said, “Well, don’t worry. Exposed to light, it’ll take on its own life and brushstrokes.” But at that moment, believe me, it just looked like a piece of white Formica. Frances Bowes went up, before the opening of this little party, and she took a pen and she added the line on the text credit line. She said, “Keep believing, Peter.” [laughs] On the Haas’ painting. In fact, they did keep believing. I’ve seen the painting hanging in Mimi Haas’ house now, and it’s totally gorgeous. Sigmar was right, it would develop. But at that moment—[laughs]

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The acquisition of these works did a lot, I think, for the museum and for San Francisco. It was a huge commitment that was made to the artist, in terms of scale, and it was a big financial transaction, as well. But it demonstrated the seriousness and the ambition of the emerging San Francisco collectors, as well as of this institution. It also put us in the position to invite the artist to have his first, and still only, North American retrospective, which John Caldwell organized, and which opened in 1991. Still, I think, one of the landmark exhibitions of the late twentieth century. This acquisition also opened the

doors for San Francisco collectors to acquire a whole diverse range of Polke's works. So I don't think that there's any other city in the Western Hemisphere that has anything like the holdings here of this great artist. It was, as an acquisition, a collaborative effort between the museum and its patrons. I think it was demonstrating the power that can occur when a museum can open doors and can collaborate with and work with its trustee collectors to enrich the institution, to enrich their lives, and in the end, to enrich the community.

Cándida Smith: Did you have to educate the patrons, as to the importance of Polke?

11:00:09:43

Lane: He is not as easy to explain as, say, Anselm Kiefer or Gerhard Richter. He is far more ephemeral. He is, as a personality, sprightly, unpredictable, bad in a very good way. He is, I think, the most inventive painter alive. When people keep saying that painting is dead, which they've been saying for fifty years, one artist after another has proved that isn't true. But in the case of Polke, it would be hard to imagine anybody who's been more imaginative about incorporating new materials, incorporating new strategies. And even now as a senior artist—he's now in his mid-sixties—just as fecund, just as experimental as he was when he was a young man.

Cándida Smith: For an average museum goer, not one terribly educated in these things, what would you want that person to see in this painting behind you? What would you want to bring their attention to? His or her attention.

11:00:11:10

Lane: I think Polke's work is all over the map. A lot of it is Pop art derived. A lot of it has imagery in it, it has specific content. You may not be able to figure out exactly what it is, but you know that there's some kind of story or something that's going on here. But he also is a magnificent abstract painter. I think that this painting and the other four pictures that go with it in the suite is one of the most awesome, sublime outings of what the possibilities that were invented by abstract expressionism could be. But it's done with different kinds of materials, and it's done with different kinds of intents than what Jackson Pollock would've done or what Mark Rothko would've done. But the visual impact is at the same level as the greatest of their paintings.

Samis: Could you specify a little bit the differences, as well as the similarities? What materials Sigmar chooses to use. It's all very unorthodox, like the resins or the dust and things like that. And also maybe what you understand of his intents, because they do they feel different.

11:00:12:34

Lane: Well, Rothko and Pollock were painters, in the classic sense that they were using traditional oil paints, or commercial paints. Polke is using fluid resins that he is pouring across the surface of the stretched canvas. He's not applying them with a brush. He may be having some kind of weird instrument that he sashes it around with, but it's not that the painting is standing before you and

he's sort of dabbing away at it. He has a big table out in front of his studio, on which the support fabric lies horizontally, and he pours the stuff on the surface and tilts it to control the flow. It isn't like color field painting staining—it isn't like Morris Louis. It seems much more complex than that. Morris Louis seems more like traditional painting to me. And then Polke throws in all these other oddball materials. I mean besides the resins—the stardust and—The materials are very inventive, unorthodox. I think that the content of this painting, this suite of paintings that it belongs in, maybe you could argue that it has a relationship with Jackson Pollock and the *Guardians of the Secret*. The North American Indian connection, the spirituality that those two persons of Western culture were imagining existed in the life of Native Americans, and their wishing to channel into the power of that spirituality. So in this particular suite of paintings, you might say that it is an appropriate legacy of aspects of Abstract Expressionism, in its kind of sublimity, in its awe, in its grandeur. Although there is this other side of Sigmar Polke which dredges the bottom of the toilet, too. [laughs] He's a very diverse, unpredictable and extraordinarily inventive individual. I think it means a lot to me because I've had a special personal relationship with him. That has been something that I've rejoiced in, and it's also been something wonderful for both the Carnegie, for San Francisco, and for my new museum in Dallas, where we've done major projects with him, as well, and made major acquisitions.

Cándida Smith: So you imagine someday that we'll be able to walk through the galleries and all five paintings will be up at the same time, in relationship to each other?

11-00:15:51

Lane: I trust that'll be the case. The Fishers own two of the paintings, in concert with the museum. They made a fractional gift. Also the Haases, their painting. The Bowes painting was sold back to the SFMOMA. So the SFMOMA owns this one and the Bowes picture outright.

[End of Interview]

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