

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

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The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley

SFMOMA 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:

TOM MARIONI

Conceptual Artist

Interview conducted by  
Jess Rigelhaupt  
in 2008

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**Interview #1: June 4, 2008**

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Rigelhaupt: To start, I would like to ask if you could describe your first visit to SFMOMA.

01-00:00:24

Marioni: It was in 1959, when I first moved to San Francisco. I don't remember what the show was, but that same year I entered a juried exhibition and was accepted into it. It was a drawings show. It was a big deal. I was just out of art school.

Rigelhaupt: This exhibition in 1959 that the jury selected one of your drawings—Well, I don't know if it was only—

01-00:01:00

Marioni: It's a drawing, one drawing.

Rigelhaupt: I didn't know if it's only one drawing, but was this the Art Association's Annual?

01-00:01:11

Marioni: It wasn't the Art Institute annuals. I was in one of those later, in the sixties. In '65, I think. This was a juried exhibition that the museum did. In those days, a lot of museums did more juried shows. That was more common than it is today. It was usually the way artists had their first showings, in juried shows in the museums. Richmond Art Center did it too and they were famous for that, for discovering the big local artists.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember anything about the opening at the museum for the juried exhibition you were in in 1959?

01-00:02:04

Marioni: I'm talking almost fifty years ago. No, no. I remember many openings there, but I don't remember that one.

Rigelhaupt: Then the Art Association Annual that you were in in 1965, was that also exhibited at SFMOMA?

01-00:02:23

Marioni: Yes.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember anything about that opening?

01-00:02:26

Marioni: Don Potts congratulated me on my sculpture in the show. I remember how much fun it was to walk around in the show, but I don't remember who the juror was. They were usually a curator, sometimes an artist and a curator. One year it was Carl Andre and Maurice Tuchman, I think, came up from L. A. and juried it. Carl Andre accepted everything, and then the museum rejected

it, rejected Carl Andre's decision. That was a scandal because they're supposed to accept whatever each one of the juries accepted. That was at the de Young Museum, anyway, that one, but it was part of the Art Association or the Art Institute, which was called, I guess, the Art Association then.

Rigelhaupt: Well, staying in 1959 with your first exhibition at SFMOMA as part of this juried exhibition, how would you characterize the relationship between artists in the Bay Area and the museum at that time?

01-00:03:48

Marioni: Well, you see, I was only here for one year and then I got drafted into the army. Then I came back in '63. So my recollection of the museum in '59, it's not very good. It was over down on Van Ness Avenue. I really don't have much recollection. It was just a lot of strangers. I wasn't part of a community. I was from out of town. I'd just moved here, I didn't know anybody. There were basically no galleries, except for the Dilexi Gallery, in 1959, in San Francisco. Contemporary galleries, I mean. There was no art scene except the Art Institute. I wasn't connected there. I didn't go to school there, so I was really an outsider. The relationship with the museum and artists in those days, from the time I came here or through the sixties, was pretty much provincial, a provincial museum. They collected mostly Bay Area artists. They missed the whole Pop art, minimal art era, in terms of collecting and showing here, in those early sixties.

Rigelhaupt: You came here more or less straight out of art school? It was in Cincinnati, correct?

01-00:05:26

Marioni: Cincinnati Art Academy.

Rigelhaupt: What brought you to San Francisco?

01-00:05:31

Marioni: The beat culture. I was naïve to think I could come to San Francisco and have an art career because there was no art scene that I was aware of. There was the Bay Area figurative painters, and it was actually an art center, the only other art center besides New York, but it was a very small art center because there was no support system, really, no galleries or anything much. *Artforum* then started at that time in San Francisco, and only lasted a couple of years and then moved to L. A. But in the sixties, the museum—for instance, Suzanne Foley, who was a curator there, gave me a membership. She gave artists memberships to the museum. Like the Museum of Modern Art in New York, if you're in their collection, they give you a lifetime membership to the museum. It's something this museum could do again. It would be a good idea, I think. Well, I'm getting off the subject now. I'll stop there.

Rigelhaupt: When you're talking about giving a lifelong membership, why? What's the impetus?

01-00:07:03

Marioni:

The reason they gave artists memberships—and I was not in the collection of this museum till I was fifty years old, so I wasn't in the collection in those days. But Sue Foley wanted to have artists involved and coming to the openings and everything. The openings were, they didn't have different levels of openings, like they do now. There's the high-level opening for the high-level forum, Collectors Forum, and then there's another opening for high-level contributors and members, and then there's the regular-members openings, then there's the public opening. They basically have four openings for a lot of their exhibitions. In the sixties, they had big openings that the community came to. They *wanted* artists to be at the openings. The openings were for the members, for the board, for the trustees. They were great affairs. They had live music and food and dancing, and they were great. They were great openings.

Rigelhaupt:

The way you're describing those openings, that was rather consistent throughout the sixties, in that artists, community members, trustees were all at the same opening.

01-00:08:35

Marioni:

Yes, everybody was together. They didn't divide it up into A-list, B-list, so on like that.

Rigelhaupt:

When did you notice the transition to different openings for different sets of people?

01-00:08:53

Marioni:

Pretty much when they moved to the museum they're in now, the building they're in now. That's when the museum changed to become more international, more connected to the gallery system, and more collectors were developed, with the help of Jack Lane and John Caldwell, who started that whole business of the Collectors Forum idea. Before that, there was just the SECA [Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art], that was the group that organized their annual juried show. The museum just let them do it, and they were basically lay people. Then that all changed when they moved here to this museum, and then the curators took charge of that and didn't let the lay people organize the shows.

Rigelhaupt:

So going backward, did you immediately come back to San Francisco after you left the service in '63?

01-00:10:09

Marioni:

I was two years in Germany in the army, in '60 and '61. I mean '61, '62. In '63 I got out of the army and moved back to San Francisco. There was still not much of an art scene. Wanda Hansen started a gallery, Jim Newman still had his Dilexi Gallery. Those were the two best galleries. Then there was another gallery on Fillmore Street that Bruce Conner and Bob Hudson and different people used to show in [Batman Gallery]. That lasted a couple years. But

basically, it was just Wanda Hansen and Jim Newman, were the two galleries. There was no art magazines. After *Artforum* moved to L. A., it was a long time before *Artweek* was founded, which was, I think, 1969 or 1970, around then. It was pretty local, whereas *Artforum* was more national. Since then, we haven't had an art magazine that was not a local thing.

Rigelhaupt: Were there any exhibitions in the sixties that you found particularly memorable or influential, or affected your work?

01-00:11:50

Marioni:

When Gerald Nordland was the director, he did a lot of color-field painting exhibitions. He liked the Washington school. I don't know where he came from, maybe Washington, D.C., was the job he had before he was here. So he liked all the—they were after the abstract expressionists, the color-field painters, the post-abstract expressionists, or post-painterly abstraction, I think it was called. Morris Louis and all those people. There was a lot of color-field painting shows [during] Gerald Nordland, because that was his interest. Then around 1970 or '71, he did a Paul Jenkins show. Paul Jenkins was like the Leroy Nieman of his time. I think that's probably why he got fired, if he did get fired, or why he got let go, because that show, the community thought was like—well, it'd be like having a Leroy Nieman show in the museum, to have the Paul Jenkins show. Then he went to UCLA. and became director of that gallery. Then in between him and Henry Hopkins, I mailed out an announcement announcing that I was director of the museum. Did you hear about that or know about this?

Rigelhaupt: Well, if you could talk about it. It's one of the questions I was going to get to, but please.

01-00:13:25

Marioni:

Well, they had been waiting a year and a half to hire a director. I thought it would be a funny idea to send out an announcement that looked like the real thing. Because I had been a curator at the Richmond Art Center from '68 till '71. In 1970 I started my own Museum of Conceptual Art, so this was three years after that, and it was actually believable that I could have been hired as director of the museum at that time. I mailed out these cards to the community and to some of the people that had even applied for the job, that I heard about, in L. A.

Henry Hopkins, I think, was one of them. I remember Irving Blum was one of them who was being interviewed for the job. The trustees, of course, were upset by this and would tell each other, I heard later, "Why didn't you tell me before you went ahead and hired somebody?" Alfred Frankenstein, who was the art critic for the *Chronicle* at that time said there ought to be a limit to the pranks conceptual artists can pull. I sent it to *Museum News*, and they actually published it under "New Appointments" in the magazine, that I was appointed director. In any case, then six months later, they hired Henry Hopkins. He

actually never forgave me for that prank. Then in I think it was the fiftieth anniversary of the San Francisco museum, Henry Hopkins organized a big exhibition for the anniversary, like I guess they're planning now for seventy-five. He organized the show, and it was like a whole history of California art. At the opening, or the day of the opening, Douglas Davis, who was the art critic for *Newsweek* magazine, came out here to review the show for the *Newsweek* magazine. It was like a few days before the opening I guess, before it had opened, the show was up. Then the day the show opened, *Newsweek* magazine came out with a review, and Douglas Davis mentioned the notable artists in the exhibition and included my name in it. But I wasn't in the exhibition. So at the opening, Henry Hopkins said to me, "Gee, I'm sorry I didn't invite you to be in the exhibition, even though *Newsweek* magazine thinks you were in it." That was the first I heard about it. So a week later, I sent him the announcement card that said I was director, from two or three years before. I said, "It's not too late. You can put this card in the exhibition." He did. He had it framed and it went in the exhibition. It traveled to Washington, D.C., the exhibition. Then, like twenty years later, Bob Bransten, who's no longer with us, bought this card from me. But he actually got one in the mail at the time, but I guess he didn't save it. He bought one from me and he gave it to the museum. It's now in the collection, and it was included in an exhibition a couple years ago that Janet Bishop organized called "Fake Art," or something about fake.

Rigelhaupt: Well, it sounds as though some of the administrative staff, Henry Hopkins and then the trustees, may not have liked your short-lived directorship of the museum. If you can recall, what was some of the response from other artists in the Bay Area?

01-00:17:25

Marioni: Bill Wiley, when he heard about it—he got it in the mail, because I sent out, I don't know, a few hundred of them. Bill Wiley got one, and he told my brother, who he knew, who lived out in Marin County at the time, that he thought this would be great for San Francisco, for me to be the director of the museum. My brother told him that he didn't think so, because he knew me better than that. He didn't think it was true. Larry Bell told me he was driving in a car with Maurice Tuchman in L. A., and he told him about it. He said they almost had an accident, he was laughing so hard. Some people, mainly artists, admired me doing that because they thought it was—what's the word? Not reckless, but Larry Bell told me he thought it was one of the bravest things he'd ever heard of because it could have ruined my chances as an artist. At least with this museum.

Rigelhaupt: Did your relationship with the museum or curators change after that? Maybe in part of answering that question, you could talk about how you viewed the museum in the seventies, after Henry Hopkins began his official directorship.

01-00:19:00

Marioni:

Well, I had a special problem with Henry Hopkins. I won't go into it, but other events happened. In 1979, Suzanne Foley organized a show called "Space, Time, Sound," that I was in. There was a catalogue that came out a year later. The show was a lot of big photographs, but there were installations, too. I did one, and a few other artists did one. But a lot of it was more like documentation, information show, more like that. The board hated it, Henry Hopkins hated it. I think Sue Foley was let go because of that show. Even two board members who supported it, gave money for the exhibition, were really angry when they found out that it wasn't the usual sixties artists, which would be the funk artists like Hudson, Wiley, Joan Brown, [Robert] Arneson—all the sixties Bay Area funk artists that followed the figurative artists.

In the seventies, the artists were the conceptual artists. A lot of them were centered around and part of my Museum of Conceptual Art. That's pretty much what the show that Sue Foley did was, mostly pretty much to a man or a woman, artists who had shown in my Museum of Conceptual Art. The whole time that I had the Museum of Conceptual Art, Henry Hopkins never set foot in it. That was like ten years. The thing is, it was on the wrong side of the railroad tracks. But the funny thing is, it was like next door to where the museum is now. But this was the wrong side of the railroad tracks, South of Market. Nobody went there. By nobody, I mean the art establishment. It was a skid row, really, neighborhood. It was the first museum in this neighborhood. Now this has become the museum neighborhood.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, before "Space, Time, Sound" in '79, if you would talk about a few of the important exhibitions that you did in the Museum of Conceptual Art.

01-00:21:44

Marioni:

Oh, I thought you were going to ask me about the shows I saw at the San Francisco museum, which reminds me, if I could—

Rigelhaupt:

Well, yeah, if you could, that'd be fine to go there.

01-00:21:52

Marioni:

One of the most stunning things I ever saw in the Museum of Modern Art was they hired Don Potts to build a Tony Smith sculpture out of veneered plywood, and he painted it flat black. It was in the big central space in the museum, the one on Van Ness Avenue. It was *really* big. It took up the whole space. It was just stunning. It was this giant black—like a Stealth Bomber in there or something. It was like that. That was the effect of it. That was one of the best things that was there. There was a show that Henry Hopkins did of Issey Miyake, the fashion designer. They had mannequins hanging from the ceiling with the clothes on it. That, I thought, was the equivalent of Gerald Nordland's Paul Jenkins show. It was like, give a show to a fashion designer in the Museum of Modern Art was—it wasn't cool. Now the Guggenheim did Armani a couple of years ago, but Armani paid for it. It was too commercial an idea at the time. Anyway, then right after that, I think, is when Henry

Hopkins left, and he became director of the UCLA galleries. He followed Gerry Nordland by going from here to there, to that job. But your question was the things that happened in my Museum of Conceptual Art?

Rigelhaupt: Yes, if there were a couple of exhibitions you could talk about from the seventies.

01-00:23:47

Marioni:

The first one was “Sound Sculpture As.” It might have been the first sound art show anywhere. It was performances by sculptors, making sound art. Then probably the best show was called “All Night Sculptures.” Nine artists made works that existed for night viewing, from sunset to sunrise the next day. It was a very specialized sculpture/action museum, where all the shows, basically, were made by sculptors. For the first five years, it was basically a performance art space, except it didn’t have anything to do with theater or dance or any of the performing arts; it was actions by sculptors. It was a museum for action, conceptual art, kind of. Those were maybe the two most important exhibitions. But then there were others. The first Vito Acconci show in California was there. First body works show. The first video art show in California was there, in 1970. There were a lot of firsts that happened in that. I closed it in 1984. It was the end of an era. The building was condemned and so it was given to me by the Redevelopment Agency.

01-00:25:24

My first studio was on the exact site where the Museum of Modern Art is now, at 151 Third Street. Then I moved up to the next corner, and that’s where I founded my Museum of Conceptual Art in 1970, beginning of 1970. Then it evolved. It took a long time. First, this neighborhood was all like skid-row hotels and bars, porno theaters, laundromats, stuff like that. Pawn shops. More like Sixth Street became, or was, or still is. Back then. Herb Caen wrote a book called *Three Street*, back in the fifties. Because in the forties, it was a real late night—it was like North Beach, Third Street, back in the forties. Anyway, then they tore down all the buildings, and then they put up parking lots. Then for like twenty years, it was parking lots. The Redevelopment Agency slowly started to build the Yerba Buena Center, and then the museum—I was on the committee for the Redevelopment Agency. At that time, they decided they were going to put the Asian Art Museum where the Museum of Modern Art is now. That didn’t happen, and then the Museum of Modern Art decided to move here. Some of the trustees were not happy about that because they still had this image of, this is the wrong side of the railroad tracks; this is not a culture center, Third Street. Third and Mission was considered a bad part of town. But in 1906, on the corner of Third and Mission, was the opera house that Caruso sang in the night before the earthquake in 1906 here. It’s an important intersection.

Rigelhaupt: It sounds like at least in the first half of the seventies, that conceptual art is really making a foothold in the Bay Area, and it’s a central part of the art scene in the Bay Area. Your Museum of Conceptual Art pretty clearly playing

a central role in the—how would you talk about how you viewed the relationship between conceptual artists and the Museum of Modern Art in the seventies?

01-00:27:56

Marioni:

I approached Gerald Nordland in 1970 about showing the work that I have become most known for. It's called *The Act of Drinking Beer With Friends Is the Highest Form of Art*. That was the beginning of my ongoing weekly salon, whatever you want to call it, club. He said, "We don't show anything that's not at least five years old." That was the rule of the museum. Or it was his rule, anyway. I ended up doing it at the Oakland Museum [of California]. That became a piece that I have become known for. One of the things I have become known for. So when Henry Hopkins came in as director, he had come from L. A. by way of Texas, before he came here. He was at the L. A. County Museum, a curator in the sixties. He wrote a book called *West Coast Art*. It only included California art; it didn't have any other West Coast, Oregon or Seattle. There's not a big art scene there anyway, not then. But still, the book was called *West Coast Art*. It had no conceptual art in it at all. The closest conceptual art in it was Ed Ruscha, who was considered more a Pop artist than a conceptual artist, but he's a crossover. Anyway, so it was clear that Henry Hopkins wasn't about to buy into the current avant-garde, which was, in the seventies—this was like the mid-seventies or something. So already, conceptual art was—like the Pop art was in the sixties, conceptual art was to the seventies. Anyway. The museum didn't end up ever showing or buying any work from my generation at that time. Then when Henry Hopkins left—I probably shouldn't be so critical of the museum, but this is all in the past. I'm not critical of the museum now. But anyway. A great thing Neal Benezra did was to hire Gary Garrels back to be the curator. You heard about that? It was just in the paper, a week ago or something.

Rigelhaupt:

No, I didn't know that.

01-00:30:39

Marioni:

Well, Gary Garrels was the curator with David Ross. Then he went to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, then he went to the Hammer Museum in L. A. Then now, Neal Benezra is replacing Madeleine Grynsztejn, who went to become director of the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, with Gary Garrels. He called him up and asked him if he would come back and take his old job. He accepted, and he's coming back. He did really good things, Gary Garrels, when he was here. That's really a good move. I have a lot of respect for Neal Benezra for doing that. So he's doing okay.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, at some point—

01-00:31:23

Marioni:

Yeah, I keep jumping around too much.

Rigelhaupt: No, that's okay. But part of what I will ask is some thoughts on the directors. I'll get there in one minute, but I wanted to go back to your discussion of conceptual art in the seventies and ask you why you think it flourished so much in the Bay Area.

01-00:31:47

Marioni: Well, one of the reasons is that there was no market here. Conceptual art was not a very marketable movement. There were a lot of artist-run spaces that were started, so it was really like a center for alternative art spaces, in San Francisco. My Museum of Conceptual Art probably was the first alternative art space in the country. Then it all flourished in the seventies. Then by the eighties, alternative art spaces were founded by wealthy people and set up more like formal institutions. But in the seventies, that was the definition of an alternative art space, was an artist-run space that showed alternative art. Alternative art was art that was not commercial, not being shown in the museums and sold in the galleries. It was like underground art. That's what an alternative art space was about. So many of them started in San Francisco, maybe because of my example. Because my space was successful and known in Europe and in the world in general as a new idea, a new thing. The Bay Area became known for performance art and body art and this conceptual art, experiential. Because we live in a body culture in California. It was the center for that, and it was not commercial. I got NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grants, and so then it became a movement.

Rigelhaupt: Do you think—this is just a hypothetical, but—if there had been the same number of galleries and collectors as, say, in New York, in the Bay Area in the seventies, do you think conceptual art would have flourished in the way that it did?

01-00:34:06

Marioni: Well, it flourished in New York, too. But it's a different conceptual art in New York, because in New York it was more language and systems conceptual art, because San Francisco was more experiential and more action art. The thing is, in New York the artists were—because it's New York, because it has a support system. There's no support system to speak of here. By support system, I mean a market, a big market and publications, critics and art magazines and things like that, that support whatever the new art is.

Rigelhaupt: This may have changed over time, but I'll ask the question and if you want to talk about it in different time periods, that's fine. But how would you characterize SFMOMA in relation to other museums in California?

01-00:35:24

Marioni: In which period? In which era?

Rigelhaupt: Maybe as you first began visiting SFMOMA, and then how it's changed since then.

01-00:35:31

Marioni:

Well, my impression was that it was very provincial in the sixties. Then in the seventies, was more oriented towards L. A., because Henry Hopkins came from L. A. He did some good things, like Robert Irwin and Ed Ruscha retrospectives that were big shows. But then in the eighties, when Jack Lane came with John Caldwell, his curator, they both came from the Carnegie Institute, and he brought his curator with him. Then they pretty much jumped from the Bay Area to New York and Germany. There was even a condition when Jack Lane came here that before they would hire him, he was able to buy a major Richter work. It's the same with the Schnabel, too. That was part of the deal when they hired him. Jack Lane was a gentleman—I mean still is; he's still around, but I think he just retired from Dallas, Texas. He was respectful of artists. Most of the stuff that I have been telling you about the museum, there's a whole chapter in my book called *Beer, Art and Philosophy*. It was published at Crown Point Press. It's a memoir, and it's all about—a lot of the stuff I'm telling you today is in my book. They sell it in the museum bookstore and everything. I'm critical of the history of the museum in my book. That's something that, I don't know, if they read the book they'll find out this stuff, but I'm telling it to you here. Let's see. Okay, I forget the question already.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, maybe to shift a little bit, how would you characterize the mission of SFMOMA, in the sense of its role? Is it educational? Is it to support local artists? Is it to bring in national and international shows? How you view that, and perhaps where you think the museum has been most successful.

01-00:38:05

Marioni:

Well, when I was most critical of the museum, when they were so locked into the gallery system in New York and what was hot and everything, instead of having like Gerald Nordland's rule, that the art has to be at least five years old before they would show it, then it became it had to be brand new, because it was all about the market and everything like that. The mission of any museum is an educational institution, and to collect and interpret and preserve and all those basic issues, which they do all that. They own several of my works now, and I'm happy about that. But a lot of the artists I know in the community now, like the artists that they collected mostly in the sixties, are not very happy with the museum because they have filled up their collections with a lot of work by the artists of the sixties, and then they forgot about them. So now they don't have shows very much by local artists. They have the SECA show, but generally, the artists that they were showing a lot back in those days, they don't show those artists anymore. The local artists are a little bit turned off by the museum. When the museum opened here, they had a gallery just for Bay Area art that was in the collection. At first I thought, that's a little bit weird. They had two of my works in it, and it was up for a whole year. It was a little bit weird like, these are the natives. It was like aborigines in Australia or something, showing the native artists in this one little room with a low ceiling, in the permanent collection. At the end of the year, then they took them out,

and they haven't put them back. They use that gallery that they used for local art, now for whatever, for their collection, because they have a lot of stuff. They have been buying a lot ever since they created more collectors who buy works and contribute money and buy works for the museum. Then the collectors end up being very much in control of the museum. It's not just in this museum, but in a lot of museums, the trustees and the people that support the museum want the museum to show the artists that they collect, because that makes their collection more valuable because it's the seal of approval on the work. That's how it works in most museums.

Rigelhaupt: Well, it sounds like—and you can correct me if I'm putting any words in your mouth—that the museum has had to try and strike a balance between continuing to show the local artists and then, as you said, in the sixties, being thought of as more provincial, and at the same time, trying to bring in international shows and collect nationally and internationally. I'm wondering if you could talk about how successful you think the museum has been in striking that balance, and if there are any exhibitions that have been large and international that have come in that you have thought have been particularly well received or influential among artists in the region.

01-00:42:03  
Marioni:

Well, they bring in blockbuster shows because they need the gate, the money that comes from the gate. Everybody understands that, that they have to, in order to survive. But the thing is that when Neal Benezra came in, all of a sudden we were in a recession and they didn't have a lot of money. David Ross spent a lot of money, and they didn't like that. But he got really some good stuff, important stuff, during the time he was director. They brought Neal Benezra in, and he's a modest guy and a really nice guy, and a good director and everything. Then they announced that, well, they were going to start showing more local art now because they don't have a lot of money to show the more expensive stuff. That was weird too, but that was promising. Then they did the big Robert Bechtle show. He's a very prominent local artist, one of my best friends. They put him on the board. And L. A. MOCA did that with Robert Irwin. When they opened MOCA in L. A., they put Robert Irwin on the board to have an artist on the board, to try to get—they're trying to reach out to the local art community by putting a local artist on the board. So we'll see. We'll see what happens. If they get more—what's the word?—local-friendly or something.

Many times, the museum brings in curators and directors from out of town, usually the East Coast. They ignore the community they're in because they become like an arm of the government, or like they take their orders from central headquarters, which is in New York. It's almost like this is a San Francisco branch of the New York—They even decided to be closed on Wednesdays, just like the one in New York is. It's like not taking enough initiative on their own, with organizing traveling shows by artists from here, rather than taking all the shows, the packaged shows from out of town and

bringing them in here. I think they should take more initiative and send shows out, rather than only take shows in.

Rigelhaupt: Now, Bob Bechtle hasn't been on the board for that long now.

01-00:45:35

Marioni: No, only six months, or a year at the most.

Rigelhaupt: As I said, I was going to ask you about the directors. You said that Henry Hopkins never came to the Museum of Conceptual Art when he was there. Were there any curators that came?

01-00:46:03

Marioni: Sue Foley came a couple of times. Peter Selz came; he was director of the Berkeley [Art] Museum. But pretty much, not from this museum. Too local. I don't know, I think in those days—you weren't around then, but—You were born, but you weren't going around. In those days, conceptual art was very suspect. The public wasn't even aware of it because it was underground, but the people that support the Museum of Modern Art were very suspicious of it. They didn't come, even though it was free and open. They didn't come because they thought conceptual artists were trying to make fools out of them, trying to trick them, trying to con them. They were afraid they would go there and they wouldn't get it and they would be embarrassed. A lot of reasons like that. I heard later, those things from people. I'd have openings and hundreds of people would come, but they would be mostly artists and friends of artists. They were not the establishment. The establishment never came. Even the artists of the generation before me didn't come either, because they were threatened by it. Because conceptual artists were replacing the funk artists the same way the funk artists replaced the figurative artists. Like each decade comes a new crop of artists, next generation. They reject their teachers or reject the ideas. It was the avant-garde, and it was just a mystery that people thought was all negative.

Rigelhaupt: Well, you mentioned that part of a museum's mission—education, collection, conservation—but also interpretation. I don't know if it's fair to characterize "Space, Time and Sound" as a culmination, that conceptual art was now going to be a part of SFMOMA. But if that's roughly how it was, how would you describe the job that SFMOMA did with that exhibition as an interpretation to the broader public of conceptual art?

01-00:48:48

Marioni: Well, in the first place, they hated it. Sue Foley was fired because of it. The catalogue came out a year later and they sold it in the bookstore for about, I don't know, a month or something, and then they put it in storage. They didn't even carry the catalogue in the bookstore. The thing is that it was the end of an era. Conceptual art was the movement of the seventies. This was '79; the catalogue came out in '80. It was supposed to be like a summation of that decade in San Francisco. They didn't get it. Or they didn't like it, either.

That's all changed now. Now we have neoconceptual art in the nineties, and now, too. We're still in the neo period, ever since 1980, really. It's neo-everything.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember how critics and artists responded to "Space, Time and Sound"?

01-00:50:06

Marioni:

We didn't have a lot of critics. We always only had one critic, maybe two. The *Chronicle* had two art critics, Thomas Albright and Alfred Frankenstein. And Alfred Frankenstein pretty much covered the museum shows, and Thomas Albright pretty much covered the gallery shows. I don't remember that it got very—it didn't get a very good review. I think Thomas Albright wrote about it, but it wasn't written up nationally. It didn't get reviewed in the *Artforum* or any of the New York art magazines or anything like that. I don't know what else to say about it. [pause] I made some notes that I wanted to make sure I got in here. I knew about Grace Morley, who worked there until 1958. It was the first museum to show Jackson Pollock.

Rigelhaupt: How would you talk about having known Grace McCann Morley? Also her lasting impact in the Bay Area art scene.

01-00:51:24

Marioni:

Well, she left the year before I moved here. But I wish I'd been here during that period, because the Art Institute in the forties and the fifties was really important. Douglas MacAgy was the director at the Art Institute, and his wife was a curator out at the [California Palace of the] Legion of Honor Museum. They did this famous forum with Frank Lloyd Wright and Marcel Duchamp in 1949 at the Art Institute. Then they organized another conference that was at the museum, that was with [Claus] Oldenburg and Frank Stella and people like that. Wayne Thiebaud was on that panel discussion. It's a conference. I wish they'd do more things like that. But the museum did that in the sixties, sometime in the sixties.

Grace Morley had a great reputation. A woman started the Richmond Art Center, too. The Richmond Art Center was really important, and it was around the same time. I don't know when the museum started. '37 or something like that, or '35, something like that. And 1936 is when the Richmond Art Center was founded in the home of a woman. Hazel Salmi was her name. The Richmond Art Center then moved into the Civic Center in the early fifties. Then they had juried shows and they discovered artists, and the local artists always had their first shows there. I carried on that same tradition, and I ended up getting fired from the Richmond Art Center because the shows I was doing were too interesting, I think. Anyway, I was carrying on a tradition; it was only because the administration changed.

The Richmond Art Center discovered artists. It was very local friendly. The same with the museum and the Art Institute. But it was also provincial because of that reason. That all changed later. But the thing is that we're really a small town here in San Francisco, less than a million people. It's so famous that people assume we're a big city, but it's really a small town here. The art community's small, everything's small, just because of numbers. So now the museum is ready to—they have got a great new media curator now, Rudolf Frieling, and he's doing a show that's going to get a lot of attention at the end of the year, called "The Art of Participation." They're going to build a bar and give away beer on my behalf in that exhibition, because it's participation, interactive audience participation art. Social art. It's a big show with a lot of great artists. Hans Haacke, Marina Abramovic, Yoko Ono. It's going to be a great show. Now with Gary Garrels coming back, he's going to do great things, too.

Rigelhaupt: So what lasting impact do you think Grace McCann Morley had on art in the Bay Area?

01-00:55:09

Marioni: Well, it was so important that she gave Jackson Pollock his first show, and it was the first museum to buy a Jackson Pollock painting, too. Out here in San Francisco. It was 1945. That was very forward looking. Apparently, she did really good things, so she was really a forward thinking person. I don't remember George Culler; he was the director after her. I was here when he was here, but I never met him or I wasn't involved enough. I was just a kid. Then not till Gerald Nordland did I actually know the museum directors, so I followed their careers closely after Nordland. Once I was in a show at the rental gallery. It used to be in the museum before it was down in Fort Mason. I made a sign that said, "Rented by Gerald Nordland." They showed it in their rental gallery show, and so that I thought that people would think that actually, Gerald Nordland had rented my picture and then they put a sign up in place of where it had hung. Like a tag.

[Begin Audio File 2 06-04-2008.mp3]

Rigelhaupt: You mentioned that you wanted to talk a little bit about George Neubert, and I had asked you about humor in art.

02-00:00:21

Marioni: George Neubert was at the Oakland Museum, and then he was brought in by Henry Hopkins to be the curator at the museum, and then Graham Beal followed him. George Neubert organized a show, had this idea, which I think would be a good idea, like the Whitney Annual, to do a biennial. George Neubert did the first one. He was curator; new then. He did a show that was just sculpture. They were going to alternate painting and sculpture. One year they were going to have the sculpture biennial, and then two years later they'd

have a painting biennial and so on. They only ended up doing one of each, and I'm sorry that they stopped it because it was really a good thing to do.

I was in it and Bill Wiley was in it, and several other San Francisco artists, and some L. A. artists and a lot of New York artists. It was international or national, and local. It was like putting some artists from here in the same context, because they're on the same level, in terms of their career and artistically as the more recognized artists. That was a way to do both, in that context. Then George Neubert left after a couple years, and then Graham Beal came in as curator. He's now director of the museum in Detroit [Detroit Art Institute]. He did the painting annual. That was good, interesting. The same thing, some local people and then Europeans. He was English, so he was more connected to Europe. I always think it's a good idea that—every time they were going to hire a new curator, I'd say, "Oh, I hope they hire a European." Because if they hire a New Yorker, a person who comes from a museum in New York comes here and then they just continue to show New York artists, and they don't pay any attention to the local scene. That's been the case not just with the San Francisco museum, the Berkeley museum and other museums, too.

02-00:02:52

The other question was about humor. In the sixties, the critics in New York were critical of the Bay Area because they referred to it as sophomoric humor. Especially with Bob Arneson, who did these funny ceramic sculptures of figures, people. It was a whimsical thing in the Bay Area art. The funk art was whimsical. It was funky, it was whimsical. Conceptual art was very serious. Except my work was funny, and there was humor in a lot of the artists in the Bay Area, because it was more like our life and there's humor in life. But sometimes artists aren't taken so seriously if there's humor, because they think, oh, they're not serious artists. That's a problem. But nowadays, there're more and more artists who use humor in their art. Like Richard Prince, for instance. He writes jokes on his paintings.

Rigelhaupt:

The painting you mentioned, *Rented by Gerald Nordland* that was in the rental gallery, was that one of the first pieces that you had had in the rental gallery? Or were there exhibitions that you'd done earlier than that?

02-00:04:33

Marioni:

The rental gallery would put up a show like every six months or something. Or maybe every three months, I don't remember. But I'd been in a couple of other rental gallery shows before that, and they had their own curator, and they were given a small space, a small gallery in the museum. This wasn't a painting, this was more like a drawing. It had press-down letters. It was like a conceptual art language piece. It just said, "Rented by Gerald Nordland," really neat type like a poster or something.

Rigelhaupt:

You know Allon Schoener.

02-00:05:17

Marioni: He was my teacher in Cincinnati.

Rigelhaupt: He had also directed a television show with SFMOMA in the forties and fifties. I'm wondering if you two ever talked about that.

02-00:05:32

Marioni: Well, I knew that he worked for KQED before he came to Cincinnati. When he came to Cincinnati, he was a curator at the Contemporary Arts Center. I worked for him; I was a preparator. I hung the shows with him. It was just him, and I was his assistant, kind of, while I was a student. It was in a basement gallery of the Cincinnati Art Museum, in those days, the Contemporary Arts Center. He also taught an art history class. When I moved to San Francisco, he wrote me letters of recommendation to people out here to help me get a job. I did get a job with the Flax's art supply store because of a letter from Allon Schoener. I admired him a lot, and he was a big help to me. Then he became head of the New York State Council on the Arts after that. But he was in Cincinnati for years after that. But he was only twenty-six years old when he came to Cincinnati, and I was nineteen or twenty and in art school. Do you know Allon Schoener? Or how did you know that I knew him?

Rigelhaupt: Well, it was noted that you'd written about him in your memoir.

02-00:06:56

Marioni: Ah, I see.

Rigelhaupt: Also, one of my colleagues has interviewed him about his time at SFMOMA.

02-00:07:01

Marioni: Oh, so somebody read my memoir. Good.

Rigelhaupt: Did he talk to you much about what the art scene was like in San Francisco? Did he give you an impression of it before you came out here?

02-00:07:16

Marioni: Not really. He wrote a letter of recommendation to the curator of the Achenbach Foundation, which was out at the Legion of Honor museum, and I went and visited him, showed him my work. Then he wrote a letter to the owner of the Flax art supply store, and he wrote a letter to a graphic designer, and I went and met all three of those people that he wrote me letters of. I knew that he worked for KQED in San Francisco, but he didn't talk about what he did in the museum or with the museum or anything. I didn't even know about that. I did a show on KQED in the seventies called *Actions by Sculptors for the Home Audience*. It was part of my MOCA show, but they gave me air time and did this show with four artists.

Rigelhaupt: Could you tell me a little bit more about it?

02-00:08:14

Marioni:

It was Howard Fried, Terry Fox, Linda Montano, and my MOCA Ensemble group, a music group. We went and each did little short pieces; it was a half-hour show. In those days, they were becoming socially conscious, just like the museum was, and they were giving shows, airtime to local groups, mostly, groups that had grievances, different minorities. I approached them and said, “I represent a minority group. That’s the conceptual artists.” They didn’t know what that was, so they said, “Okay, we’ll give it a go.” I went and did the show. Later, in ’79, Rolando Castellón was a curator at the museum. He was hired to be curator for Third World, I don’t know, alternative art, multicultural, I guess. He was like multicultural curator or whatever. It was a new idea in 1979. So he organized a series of shows of the alternative art spaces. There was maybe three or four of them. I think mine was the first one. It was called “The Museum of Conceptual Art at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.” In that show, I had two galleries. They expected it was going to be a lot of documentation, lots of texts, photographs. In other words, records of the shows the alternative art spaces had done. Lynn Hirschman started something called the Floating Museum. Then there was Site, Inc. and there was 80 Langdon Street and The Farm, Bonnie Sherk’s Farm, and then there was Project Artaud. Anyway, there were quite a few at that time, by the end of the seventies.

In one gallery I had photographs that Paul Hoffman took of all the interior space of my museum, which was just here at Third and Mission Street. Then the other gallery, I got Fritz Maytag to donate Anchor Steam Beer. They had my refrigerator and a table and chairs, and shelves that they built for me all around the gallery. The gallery was painted gray, and there were two yellow light bulbs hanging down. It felt like a combination church and café. There was free beer every day. It said free beer on the refrigerator door. A piece of that now is in the collection of the museum, and it’s called *Free Beer*. That’s also going to be in the show in November that Rudolf Frieling’s organizing. That show went up and it opened exactly the same night as Judy Chicago’s premiere, *The Dinner Party* show. It was really amusing because in this gallery was my free beer, and the next gallery was *The Dinner Party*, the ceramic plate pieces of Judy Chicago’s. So all the feminist women were in Judy Chicago’s piece, and then in my piece, it was more like—mine was for men and hers was for women. It was really funny, the juxtaposition of that at that time. That show was up for a month, or maybe even more than a month. Fritz Maytag donated all the beer, like 2,500 bottles I think, something like that, and the shelves got filled up. It was a great show. Henry Hopkins hated it, of course. That was another problem for Henry Hopkins.

Rigelhaupt:

Now, your [piece], *The Act of Drinking Beer With Friends Is the Highest Form of Art*, could you talk about where that began? Because I understand it’s been up at different times and in different places. If you could talk about how it first evolved and where it was first exhibited.

02-00:12:33

Marioni:

It was first done at the Oakland Museum. George Neubert was the curator at that time. Then three years later, I started it in my museum, which was known as MOCA—before L. A. MOCA was opened. I started hanging out—I sent out announcements, invited people to come every Wednesday afternoon, and I had free beer. The refrigerator had that free beer sign on it. I showed artist videos. It was beer and TV kind of, like what I did in art school. I'd have parties and people would come over and we'd watch a movie on TV and we'd drink beer. It's a college thing to do. I just continued that idea of that art school thing into my art later. Then I did that in '73 and '74, and then in '76, I moved downstairs to the bar which was downstairs from me, which is Breen's Bar. The booth that I'm sitting in now came from Breen's Bar. That was the front booth that I used to meet in every Wednesday. I sent out announcements that said, "Café Society, two to four every Wednesday." So people started coming and it became an artists' bar, artist scene. I created a scene like that in the bar. People bought their own at the bar; it wasn't free beer then, when it was in the bar. It became like my Wednesday office, in a way. Then '79, that closed and I moved next door to Jerry and Johnny's Bar, and I called it the Academy of MOCA at that time. It was like the academy in the ancient sense, like in the time of Aristotle, where people sat around and drank and talked. That was the first academy. By that time, conceptual art had become academic, so I had the Academy of the Museum of Conceptual Art. I did that for many years. It's ongoing. I have been doing it more than thirty years now, every Wednesday. Then I moved into this building in 1990, after the earthquake. Then I started inviting people to be the bartenders, built a bar in my studio. It's been going on in my studio since 1990, every Wednesday. But in the meantime, the work got known and I was invited to recreate this piece. I have done it in the Baltimore Museum, I have done it in L. A. MOCA, I have done it in Austria, I have done it in several cities in Germany, I did it twice in France, I have done it in Tokyo, Japan; Stockholm, Sweden, in shows where I go and they build a bar and they have the beer. Sometimes it's a one time event, sometimes it's once a week, sometimes it's every day. It's mostly been once a week. That's how it's going to be in the museum, it's going to be every Thursday night because that's when they're open. I'll discontinue my Wednesdays here and change it to Thursdays at the museum, and it will be for the public. It can't be public in my studio, so it's more like an artists club in my studio. I did it in New York twice, in "artist's space", and in a gallery in Chelsea last year. It's like a series. It's an ongoing work. I refer to it as my social work. Sometimes people call it social sculpture, because that's a Joseph Beuys term. But in his case, it was free university, and in my case it's more like really social.

Rigelhaupt:

How was it initially received at the Oakland Museum?

02-00:16:49

Marioni:

Alfred Frankenstein wrote a review of it. The heading said, "Art to Make One Foam at the Mouth," I think. Or I think that was the heading of the one at the

San Francisco museum in '79. Herb Caen wrote about it, put it in his column. Frankenstein, he put it down pretty bad. Like it's not art, basically. It turns out it's maybe, if not the first, one of the first works of this kind. It's become a movement now. It's called relational aesthetics. A French critic and curator wrote a book called *Relational Aesthetics*. It turns out there's artists in practically every civilized country that do similar works, where they have—Like Rikrit [Tiravanija], who does food in the galleries; and other people, they build bars and they do similar things to my *Beer With Friends*. The beer bottle shelf, one of the beer bottle shelves that was from this museum, was bought by the Orange County Museum, and it's being borrowed by the Guggenheim [Museum]. Next January, they're doing a show called "The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989." It's the fiftieth anniversary of the Guggenheim, and it's a hundred years of American art influenced by that. They're going to have my shelf with the beer bottles—it's called *An Aid to Communication*—and another work, a drawing.

Rigelhaupt: How do you think some of the meanings of that exhibition change across time?

02-00:18:48

Marioni:

Well, in my case, my work, it's gotten more formal. Because when I did it in the Oakland Museum, the debris—in other words, the empty everything—was left on the floor. Sixteen artists got drunk in the museum on a day that the museum was closed, so that the only thing the public saw was the evidence of this beer party, basically. But now my work is more formal, because I design the bar and it's got basic elements. It's got yellow light, jazz music, a refrigerator and a bar, bartender, table and chairs. It's all designed to be user friendly. It's evolved like that.

Rigelhaupt: Have you had discussion with any curators or people involved with SFMOMA about how it was received? I thought it was given again in '99; is that right?

02-00:20:01

Marioni:

'99. Maybe that's when they acquired the installation. I can't remember.

Rigelhaupt: Was it exhibited again?

02-00:20:11

Marioni:

But it wasn't functioning. See, the piece consists of my old refrigerator, shelf with the empty beer bottles, a yellow light, and a print that has the words "MOCA" and "Café Society" in the print. That's the piece. It's going to be in the show as another part of the show, as the one that will be active. It's like a work that's active and live, until it gets in the collection; then it becomes dead because it doesn't function anymore the same way.

Rigelhaupt: The meaning does change.

02-00:20:53

Marioni: Well, it's like a relic now, that piece. If it was still active, then it would be alive, not a relic.

Rigelhaupt: With the one you said you're going to do later this year, is that one going to be live and—

02-00:21:08

Marioni: There'll be two pieces.

Rigelhaupt: It'll be the one that the museum owns.

02-00:21:11

Marioni: The one the museum owns, which will be in the galleries on the fourth floor. In the Koret Center, they have given me a corner and they're building a bar just like this one here. They're going to have a refrigerator and a table and chairs, and some of the pictures; and a video, flat-screen video that I made, a video piece with just beer on the screen, filling up; and then the shelf for the empty bottles, and the yellow light and jazz music and everything. Every Thursday night, it'll be like a bar.

Rigelhaupt: So part of the educational mission of the Koret Center.

02-00:21:48

Marioni: Right, right. I'm going to ask Neal Benezra to be one of the bartenders on one of the Thursdays. It's a way for him to serve the community another way. Because every week will be a different bartender. Then there'll be readings, too, ten-minute readings—which I do here. I have a series that I do here on Wednesday nights, too. I invite people to read for ten minutes.

Rigelhaupt: If you could talk a little bit about some of your other work in the permanent collection at SFMOMA. *The Germans* and *The Italians*.

02-00:22:34

Marioni: That was Anne McDonald, who was a collector. She had an alternative art space here called Artists Space. Ann Hatch, at the same time, had her Capp Street Project. The two Anns, I used to call them, the two Anns. Ann Hatch bought one of my works. I told Anne McDonald one time, we were talking about the museum—she was on the board at that time, Anne McDonald. I said, "I have lived here since 1959. I am fifty years old, and the museum here doesn't even own any of my work." She said, "Oh, okay, I'll fix that." So she said, "Well, I'll give one of your works to the museum." I proposed that she buy my piece called *Room for Interpretation*. It's a small installation. So she went to Graham Beal and said, "I'm going to give a work of Marioni's to the museum." Graham Beal said, "Well, I want *The Germans* and *The Italians*." Because he'd seen it in a show I had. That was what they wanted; that was okay. That was okay with me. So she bought *The Germans* and *The Italians*, and then it went in the collection. Then when John Caldwell and Jack Lane came in—this was right after that—John Caldwell went and put up *The*

*Germans*, didn't put up *The Italians*. Said, "Well, I didn't have room to put *The Italians*. But it's a diptych, and it's complicated because they're meant to go together, because it's like opposites. Germans and the Italians, I see as male and female, gold and silver, sound and vision, north and south—all those opposites, I see the German culture and Italian culture. Because I have done a lot of installations about different cultures, the Germans and so on, and the Japanese and other—Beijing and so on. Anyway, so Caldwell put *The Germans* up without me knowing it. He basically only put up half of the piece. Then when the museum opened here—and Gary Garrels was the curator by then, I think—they were only going to put *The Germans* up again. I wrote a letter and explained why these two pieces go together and everything. They did, they put up both pieces. They were up for about a year then. That was '95, and they haven't been put up since then. That's that piece.

02-00:25:47

Gary Garrels bought my Edinburgh drawing, *Drawing a Line As Far As I Can Reach*, out of the "Out of Actions" show that opened in L. A., L. A. MOCA. Then it traveled and they bought it. Then it traveled and got damaged in Spain, and then it was sent back and it didn't travel anymore in the show, and never went to Japan. The museum restored it. They consulted with me. It's on thin paper, and it's a very long sheet, comes down the wall and goes across the floor. It's on tracing paper mounted to other paper. Or it's against other paper. Anyway, they restored it with little irons and little eyedroppers and stuff, painstakingly. Because it was rolled up and all wrinkled. Anyway, so they restored it. But they never showed that drawing. He bought another couple little drawings of mine. Then, I don't know, they own a couple of prints.

[interruption]

Rigelhaupt: You were talking a little bit more about *Drawing A Line As Far As I Can Reach*.

02-00:27:04

Marioni: Oh, right. They restored it and they have it. I had a show in 1999 at Mills College, and they loaned it to that show. They sent somebody to hang it and everything, so they're really good about taking care of their collection. *The Germans* and *The Italians* were loaned to a survey show in Cincinnati at the Contemporary Arts Center. They loaned *The Germans* and *The Italians* to that show there, it was shipped out there. They own a couple of prints of mine, and they own—I can't remember. I think that's all. Then that card that I told you about, that announcement card.

Rigelhaupt: *Drawing a Line As Far As I Can Reach*, how would you talk about it in relationship to performative art? In the sense it does seem to capture, or have a performative sense, and that seems to be a very important part of your work in conceptual art.

02-00:28:31

Marioni:

Well, that was done in a gallery in Edinburgh, and there were people in the gallery when I did it. The other one, the first *Drawing A Line*—That's a series, too. The first one I did, I had done in the Reese Palley Gallery in San Francisco. That was in a show where I lived in the gallery for a week, and that was the day of the week that the Bible said there were trees and vegetation. Then '89, I did a series of shadowboxes based on the days of the week from Genesis, and three of those are going to be in the opening of the new Jewish Museum over here on Mission Street. I'm real happy about that. Anyway, the *Drawing a Line As Far As I Can Reach*, that's what it was about, growth, measurement. My graphic art, a lot of it, is about making a drawing in front of an audience. The drum brush drawings, I do those, and also now I'm drawing circles. I'm going to draw one in the Guggenheim show in January, too, right on the wall. And walking drawings and flying drawings. They're almost like doing yoga holding a pencil, or this might be some relation to—some people might think that the flying drawings are more like dance. A leap, and then you make marks as you're leaping. I did it in '72, when I did the *Drawing A Line Work* in the Reese Palley show. Then I have done it since then with other people. *Flying With Friends*, it's called. There's one hanging out in the lobby when we came in here. I have done that several times, where I have had other people do it for me. Once recently in a show, I had a lot of students run and jump. It was in Tennessee and they had a bluegrass band playing while they were running and jumping with colored pencils. It's lots of colored lines streaking across a big piece of paper on the wall. It's a record of flight. The *Line As Far As I Can Reach* is a record of my reach, and the walking drawings, a record of walking and so on like that. They're all body oriented, performative.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, you just mentioned students. I'm wondering if you have a sense of how connected SFMOMA is with art students in the region, and if there's been ebbs and flows in that connection over the time period you have lived in the Bay Area.

02-00:31:40

Marioni:

I don't really know. People bring their students to the museum, I know. But I don't know what they do, in terms of with students or not.

Rigelhaupt:

Maybe the SECA exhibitions or—

02-00:31:59

Marioni:

Well, the SECA exhibitions, I think that they don't ever give the thing, the award to a student. They're just out of school, usually. They're young artists. With the SECA exhibitions, the first one they gave was, I think, in '68. It was to Mel Henderson, who was part of my conceptual art circle or scene. Then after that, they never gave it to any conceptual artists all during the seventies. Usually the artists that they were giving it to were artists that you never heard of again. Because they were chosen by lay people who didn't really know what was what. They came and looked at my work a couple of times.

Rigelhaupt: Your Café Wednesdays. How would you describe its relationship with the broader artist community in San Francisco and the Bay Area?

02-00:33:05

Marioni: Well, I have a newsletter or something, and it says that this—it's now called the Society of Independent Artists, the SIA for short, and was called Café Wednesday before that. Then before that, it was called the Archives of MOCA; and then before that, it was called the Academy of MOCA; and then before that, it was called Café Society, so it's evolved. The name's changing, but it's been basically the same. But of course, the setting is different so the character's a little bit different. Anyway, it evolved like that.

Rigelhaupt: Well, I had a note that Kent Roberts, SFMOMA's exhibitions design manager, [is a] long-time attendee.

02-00:34:02

Marioni: Yes, he's a friend of mine. People become members—oh, I know what I was going to say. The newsletter, it says that this is a group. People meet every Wednesday in my studio, and it consists of conceptual artists, photographers and some others; and then it says, "and some painters," because I consider a conceptual artist is free to work in any medium except painting. Anybody who knows me knows that I like to make fun of painting as being obsolete and old fashioned, and I left all that behind; and the artists of my generation, when they decided to be conceptual artists, that was all about anti-materialism and so on; that painting is something that is a quaint, nineteenth-century craft, like that. I get in trouble with people. But I do it in a lighthearted way so I don't get in trouble with it. Because Bob Bechtle, one of my best friends, is certainly a painter. He's a painter's painter. But I'd like to keep this antagonism going on for 500 years, between painters and sculptors, because I'm basically a sculptor and a conceptual artist. I consider most conceptual artists really to be coming out of sculpture, not out of painting. It's much more rare for a conceptual artist to drop painting and become a conceptual artist. Because for me, it's more of an extension of sculpture, the whole conceptual art idea.

Rigelhaupt: Has Kent ever brought over artists that were in some of his shows at SFMOMA?

02-00:35:58

Marioni: Oh, all the time. All the time, yeah. Of course, I know and knew Kiki Smith and Chuck Close before, but they were both here at the same time once, when they were both having a show in the museum. That was exciting, to have Kiki Smith and Chuck Close here at the same time on a Wednesday night, because they have become like the king and queen of the New York art world.

Rigelhaupt: You said when you came here in '59, and it still held true when you came back in '63, [there were] not a lot of galleries in San Francisco.

02-00:36:49

Marioni: No, a couple galleries.

Rigelhaupt: Now, I know there's more than a couple; but certainly, it's not on par with New York or L. A., but—

02-00:36:56

Marioni: I'm talking about early 1960s, there was only a couple galleries.

Rigelhaupt: So my question was, how would you characterize the expansion of galleries in San Francisco?

02-00:37:07

Marioni: Oh, well, for the size of the city, there's a lot of galleries now. There's a hundred, I guess. There's a hundred galleries that show contemporary art. But it's still not that much of a marketplace. The big collectors in San Francisco—and there are quite a few of them now, considering—they go to New York to buy their art. They even go to New York to buy art by San Francisco artists. If they buy art by a San Francisco artist, they buy it in New York, the same way people used to go to Paris to buy their clothes a hundred years ago or fifty years ago. It's like that. It has to be in New York before they would buy it. The galleries here, they get by, but it's not a big market town for art. Even though there are rich collectors here, they don't necessarily support the galleries here.

Rigelhaupt: Well, I have heard that in the early eighties, with the expansion of galleries—well, actually, I'm not sure if my time period's right, but certainly, the galleries that played a role in driving up the price of art and making it difficult—

02-00:38:27

Marioni: You mean in San Francisco or in New York?

Rigelhaupt: Well, actually, if you could talk about a difference, it would be fine; but where my question was going was about if you could describe the dynamic between galleries and museums, and how they affect one another.

02-00:38:47

Marioni: Well, I think this is the way it works. In the fifties, art critics, especially [Clement] Greenberg, controlled the art scene. He was like the interpreter of the new art. Or [Harold] Rosenberg and Greenberg were the two big art critics. They were the ones who had the most control over the art world. That changed later. Then it became the art magazines, because the galleries would advertise in the magazines, the artists, and they were, in a way—it was all connected—the galleries and the art magazines and the press, I mean. So now the galleries sell the art to the museums. The galleries have become very powerful. They have lots of money.

Rigelhaupt: I think part of my question was just how the galleries affect what a museum is able [to] collect or not, and if it shapes the types of exhibitions they're able to do, and if you had thoughts on it.

02-00:40:25

Marioni: Well, the collectors, like I said before, pretty much control, run the museum. They hire the director and the director is their employee, and it's their private country club. I'm talking generally now, not just about SFMOMA. So a lot of times, the private museums—which this is a private museum—are controlled by the collectors. The collectors buy the art from the art galleries. Then they want to promote the artists that they own, so they put pressure on the museum somehow or other, because they give money to the museum, to show the artists that they collect, because it's about money. Art was about money in the sixties, and in the seventies it wasn't; we were in a recession. The eighties, art was about money again. It goes back and forth like that depending on the economy and so on. It's all strategy, marketing strategy. The museum will buy work and show work by artists, and that drives the auction prices up. It's a circular sucking system, basically.

Rigelhaupt: How would you characterize how SFMOMA's perceived locally, nationally, internationally? Is it innovative? Unorthodox?

02-00:42:11

Marioni: Like a lot of museums in this country, they don't have much European art, except for the German painters of the eighties. There are a lot of great, important, innovative artists in other countries besides Germany that the museums in this country don't show or own works. This museum, this is pretty much the same in that regard. Mostly, when Europeans come to this country, they see the same works in every museum. You go to Dallas, you go to Minneapolis, you see the same. It's changing now, but going back ten or twenty years, they'd have like two Frank Stellas and so on. David Ross and Gary Garrels got Phyllis Wattis to give a lot of great works to the collection. That brought the esteem of this museum up a lot. They got the *Erased de Kooning* from [Robert] Rauschenberg; the study for [Marcel] Duchamp's *Large Glass*; they got one of the last paintings that [Piet] Mondrian did. They got several works like that in the last ten years that have made people take this museum more seriously.

Rigelhaupt: So as I mentioned, the museum's approaching its seventy-fifth anniversary in 2010. Thinking twenty-five years forward from that, where would you like to see SFMOMA at its hundredth anniversary?

02-00:44:13

Marioni: Oh, twenty-five years later, I'll be dead. I can't imagine. On its hundredth anniversary, they'll probably do a retrospective of my work and they'll say, well, see? He was always supported. I don't know. I'm just joking. Is that a question you have asked other people? Where do you see the museum on its hundredth anniversary?

Rigelhaupt: Yes, where would you like to see it? Not everyone. Sometimes I have had a chance, sometimes I haven't.

02-00:45:14

Marioni: Well conceptual art's history now, but in a hundred years it'll *really* be history. But people now can't understand why people didn't accept impressionism or cubism or anything, because anybody can see that there's nothing wrong with it. What's so radical about it? But it looked radical at the time. In a hundred years, everything's going to look different. It's going to have cracks in it, and it's going to have soot on it, and it's going to be aged, and it's going to be precious.

[End of Interview]

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