

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

NATHAN OLIVEIRA

Painter and Sculptor

Interview conducted by  
Jess Rigelhaupt  
in 2007

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**Interview #1: May 11, 2007**

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01-00:00:07

Rigelhaupt: If we could begin, if I could ask you about the first time you visited the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

01-00:00:22

Oliveira: That was a very long time ago. It had to be in, probably, somewhere around 1949. I can't tell you exactly when, but anyway, I went there. And like having gone to the Legion of Honor when I moved to San Francisco from the country, I was overwhelmed by the fact that there was a big place like that, that would have all these incredibly wonderful paintings, and they're there for me to just enjoy. As a young art student, it was very important, because they're references to all the things that I liked, and also influences. So it had to be about '49, and I was a student at the California College of Arts and Crafts.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember any pieces or paintings or sculptures—

01-00:01:27

Oliveira: That stuck out? There was that one. Was it the Pollock, *Guardians of the Secret*? Was that the painting? The one that they swapped for something else. I remember that clearly. And there's Matisse, there was Picasso. Not, you know, everything in high quality, because San Francisco at that time was kind of the end of the country, it dropped off into the ocean. So the Museum of Modern Art was very unique, in that a person like Grace McCann Morley brought in whatever she could acquire. Mostly gifts, I think, from people. So there weren't great numbers of pictures. But I remember that one, the *Guardians of the Secret*.

There was a beautiful, beautiful Beckmann, I think. That was impressive. Very impressive. *Anything* that I saw at that time was new and impressive. I was incredibly enthused by the whole thing, because you know, here was a place that belonged to me, in a sense, as an artist. I've always felt that feeling about MOMA, because it seemed to belong to us, the artists. It was poorly attended. I think every time we went to the museum, San Francisco Museum of Art then, I think you were lucky to find twelve people in the museum. And usually out of those twelve people, you'd find another couple of artists like myself. And so it was beautiful.

Rigelhaupt: Are there other pieces in the permanent collection that have been particularly influential to you?

01-00:03:45

Oliveira: As it exists now? Or then?

Rigelhaupt: Over the years.

01-00:03:53

Oliveira:

Well, I think being interested in expressionism, that it wasn't too high on expressionist paintings. But any painting that was charged with energy and contemporary, I was very, very impressed with. For instance, there wasn't a de Kooning, there wasn't a Pollock that—Well, I'm still confused if that painting was the *Guardians of the Secret*. I think it was. Do you know?

Rigelhaupt:

I don't know.

01-00:04:33

Oliveira:

That was a very important painting to me. It just seemed to create a world that I hadn't been familiar with at all, you know. Where most of the other paintings were fairly traditional paintings. But post-impressionist, early modernist paintings that were fine, you know. But this one painting was very strong.

Rigelhaupt:

Have there been any pieces you've seen at the museum that have been influential on your work?

01-00:05:14

Oliveira:

Over the years, there've been many. Many. At MOMA, I think that the first Diebenkorn show that I saw, and I became familiar with all the Berkeley and New Mexican paintings that he did. It affected a lot of us young artists in the area. That was one, certainly. There were retrospectives and/or traveling shows that would occasionally come. They were usually made up of pretty impressive art. The San Francisco museum had only one [competitor], in terms of modern painting, and that was the de Young Museum. The de Young Museum had some very *powerful* painting shows. They had three retrospectives that were very important to me. I don't mean to digress; I'm just giving you the information. For painting that really was influential, I got those from the de Young. There were three, as I said, retrospectives; one by Edvard Munch; one exhibition by Oskar Kokoschka, and the other one was—Oh, God. I'm fading. Max Beckmann. Incredible. Those three powerful exhibitions reached into me, and helped form my own identity as a painter. I felt stronger about those European figurative painters than I did about figurative painting that was happening in the United States. But as far as [SF] MOMA went, they had some pretty impressive exhibitions, too. But right offhand, I can't remember any specific. But certainly, the Diebenkorn show was among them.

The big thing about MOMA, or San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, was one of three museums in the Bay Area that provided annual exhibitions for local artists. Competitive exhibitions. That's where we all went and submitted paintings—or drawings, if it was a drawing show. Or sculpture, if it was a drawing and sculpture show. Graphics. We'd take our paintings and stand in line and have them accepted by the museum. Then there would be a jury. I was on that jury several times. Anyway, it had a jury that would select paintings out of this mass of local artists, and then the show would be formed

from that jury. Some prizes would be awarded—\$100, \$200, [chuckles] whatever the case would be. You would bump into everybody that you knew as a painter, in those days. Diebenkorn or Louis Siegrist or whoever. It was a big event for us. Even then, even a larger event would be the opening of that exhibition. There, we'd all go to see what was selected by our colleagues on the jury. We'd socialize, and the artists would gather. We'd steal our ideas from everyone and become very critical about other artists. But that was one of the major issues with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. It was repeated at the Oakland Museum. They had similar competitive exhibitions for local artists. And the Richmond Art Center. But the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, or San Francisco Museum of Art, was the major show.

Rigelhaupt: How would you characterize the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, in relation to other museums in San Francisco?

01-00:09:57

Oliveira:

Well, it certainly is the modern museum. It always has been. I said the de Young had those three major exhibitions, but it was due to the fact that they had a curator who was in tune with modern painting and would have modern painting shows at times. I mean, aside from those three big exhibitions she had, there was a Hyman Bloom exhibition, who was a Boston artist, and other contemporary artists. But it was not the general case; these happened periodically at that museum. But the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, for the most part, was devoted to current art. It had something to do with a small history of modern painting, is what they could show you. And so it was the modern museum. In many ways. I mean, not only in terms of what it showed, but the way it looked and all of that.

I've had two, three shows there over the years. A lot of friends of mine had similar exhibitions, one-man shows. It was the museum that you could count on to exhibit occasionally these local solo shows, or a significant group exhibition of modern art of sorts, local or otherwise. You could count on it. And we as painters, it became a home, in a sense, a place that belonged to us. In those days, no one bought paintings. You were very fortunate to be able to paint, you know, in a modern way, or paint however you wanted to paint. No one bought paintings. No one, for the most part, really cared. Grace McCann Morley was a tower. She was incredible. She was the guiding light for contemporary modern painting, modern art in the West Coast. It was *the* museum. And it remained that way through time. I remember having a show, a very big drawing show there, retrospective, on the day of my mother's funeral. It was very difficult for me to do. I had to be there. So you know, it was home. That's about all I can say about that.

Rigelhaupt: How do you think the museum is perceived in the Bay Area?

01-00:13:08

Oliveira: Today? The old museum, or the new one?

Rigelhaupt: Well, if you could talk about both, actually.

01-00:13:15

Oliveira: Well, as I said, the older Museum of Modern Art was exactly as I explained to you. It became a sanctuary for our local painters. It became the place to discuss art, to discuss what was going on in the world. It collected as much contemporary art as it could. It had, certainly, benefactors that were very important to the community, that sustained it. It was not terribly concerned about a particular popular art at that moment. It gave you a view of what was available, what was happening, and then showed you a variety of different kinds of artists that were less— visible— [pause].

I'll have to work into this. It simply gave you broader issues about what modern painting was about, whether it was European, whether it was Asian, whether it was American. MOMA now is a current museum. It deals only with current issues. I think after a certain point at MOMA, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, after Jerry Nordland and after a number of curators started to [lead] the museum; after those curators, somehow it became more concerned with a broader direction, a linear direction of art. There's very little tolerance for issues that were, say, not acceptable in New York; or the popular idea, the current idea, the cutting edge. If you're not in the cutting edge, you're not, in spite of who you were locally or otherwise, you somehow seemed to be pushed aside. It became less of a provincial museum than an American museum.

It started MOMA, *current* MOMA—and then, although they've considered me and have honored me in many ways, but it became more concerned with the broad or the specific issue of current things that are happening. It's different. It's a different museum. I know many people on the board; they're all wonderful people. But there is one room in San Francisco MOMA now, current, or one small area, that has a focus on Bay Area art. And you have to realize that in the fifties and sixties, San Francisco artists, Bay Area artists led the United States in contemporary art. We were significant in terms of American art. But that's been reduced to a little place over in the corner in this new museum. The Museum is more concerned with the immediate issue, what is new or current, popular.

Though, I must say, I've seen some pretty spectacular shows there. The Anselm Kiefer show, for instance. Incredible show. Just an *amazing* show. He's a great artist. So it isn't that it's all totally negative; it isn't. And it isn't even negative, it is just what the museum is about now. It isn't about its own place. It's about world art, American, New York art. They want to be like every other museum in the United States. They want to be MoMA, New York. They want to be MOMA, San Francisco. It wasn't that way before.

Rigelhaupt: Could you say a little bit more about the Anselm Kiefer show, and any other recent shows that you thought were particularly influential.

01-00:18:38

Oliveira: Strong. Two shows. One was a beautiful de Kooning show, a drawing show. Incredible. Just an amazing, wonderful show by a great American modern artist, that now seems to be becoming kind of traditional artist, in a sense. But I mean, it gave a broad view of who he was as a graphic drawing artist. Very influential to me, and a lot of other artists that are in the Bay Area.

To start with, with the Germans, I was so happy about the Germans. Who are they? They're Kiefer, they are—I can't even remember any of the others' names. But they're big and impressive artists. When I went to the Kiefer show, I wasn't prepared for the content that he represented. He just bowled me over. It was a unique experience, based on painting. Because a lot of modern art today is moving away from painting. It's dealing with conceptual ideas, it's dealing with video, or dealing with whatever, computers. But in this case, I walked into the museum and the galleries, and I was really bowled over by a painter. But a traditional painter that has taken it one step higher. Maybe in scale and size of his paintings, but more in terms of the content. [He has] a visual identity that reached out, and I was capable of interacting with [it]. A very impressive artist. It was a positive experience overall, because you know, I've gotten used to a detached kind of identity to cutting edge art. You know, I just don't respond to it, because of my age, or because I'm not part of that linear line. But no, I found an identity—I was invited into it, into Kiefer's world. Powerful. Unique art. I was impressed, and I was very pleased that the museum had that show. More pleased that people like Donald and Doris Fisher own some of those Kiefers.

Rigelhaupt: Was the Kiefer show, or any other recent exhibitions, influential on your work?

01-00:21:44

Oliveira: Kiefer gave me a shot of energy. First off, I'm very fond of German expressionism. And that goes back. I worked with Max Beckmann before he died. I loved the expressionist prints and the rest of that, in the beginning, probably more so than the French art in the early part of the century. So I have a fondness for German power, expression. But as an influence, what he did to me, for me, was that I'd just gone through a terrible time, where my wife of fifty-six years passed away. I was the primary care giver for a year-and-a-half, so I hadn't painted. I had been out of the world, in a sense. And so she passed on. The Kiefer show came, oh, I forgot what month it was. But it was some months back. I was, naturally, emotionally down after that period. But I walked into the museum, I suddenly got a surge of energy. It captured my interest and attention pretty quickly. So if there's any influence, it had something to do with really giving me energy and vitality to go ahead and resume my own work again, because I'd stopped working during that time.

There are certain common concerns that I have that relate to him. And so I find that happening. Now I've been working on a series of paintings for about seventeen years, and they're very large. Not as large as those big, huge ones of Kiefer's, but certainly, they deal with universal issues. So I found a common spirit, in a sense. What it did is it simply made me want to paint. I think, like all good paintings, for an artist, when you see great paintings, it isn't so much a matter of intellectually absorbing what is there, or visually looking at how he manipulates this or that, but what it does is, you're taken by the rush of energy and your identity to it. It gives you a charge. I'm working again, thanks to Mr. Kiefer.

Rigelhaupt: Is that one of the positive things that the museum's been able to do since it expanded, is that it can bring in international shows?

01-00:25:05

Oliveira:

I think that's one of the responsibilities. I believe it does show you what's happening throughout the world. I think that's a big responsibility. What I don't think is the responsibility is to see every current quirk of what's happening in the current art world. That gets rather boring after a while, at least for myself and others that I know. It is pretty independent in San Francisco, as a community, not necessarily interested in a lot of things that aren't totally relevant to us. I believe the museum has a responsibility in bringing shows like Kiefer. And other different kinds of shows. I don't mind cutting edge, but when it becomes rather exclusive, then it becomes a bore. I think with our new director at the Museum of Modern Art—Neal Benezra [pause] He's a friend of mine; he graduated here at Stanford.

Rigelhaupt: Neal Benezra.

01-00:26:18

Oliveira:

I think Neal's going to be a big positive plus for us. He already has shown interest in being a different kind of museum. I'm looking forward to that. I don't know if he was responsible in bringing the Kiefer show, but certainly, it was under his call, under his time. But also, we had Robert Bechtle, which is one of the few local artists that I've seen have a one-man show there. I think probably, Neal was in part responsible for that. So I look forward to good things happening at MOMA, San Francisco. I'm hoping that we can broaden out and embrace more what happens here, with all the good artists that we do have on the West Coast. All of the artists that have contributed to American art. That's my concern. It's that it embraces everything, in a sense. And not neglect current and immediate concerns, but put things in proportion. A better proportion. That's pretty much it.

Rigelhaupt: How would you describe the role of the museum in relationship to artists?

01-00:28:16

Oliveira:

Well, there's many ways. For me, to me, first it became a vehicle for introducing me to art. I came from the country, Fremont. As I said, the first

paintings I'd ever seen in a museum were at the Legion of Honor. That was a great experience. I was just overwhelmed with that. My introduction to modern art was through the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, or San Francisco Museum [of Art]. One of the responsibilities is, one, to make available the broader issues of what modern painting is about—modern art, sculpture, photography—and to introduce as much of that as possible, make it available. The computer is doing a pretty wonderful job of that.

I think it's possible to go to a museum now and—I don't know what they call that, where you can look at the history of certain artists and such. So it's more available in a general way. That's very important to educate young artists. It's their responsibility to show the cutting edge, but to not make it the exclusive issue, not make it a popularity contest, but to—Well, the issue for artists is to give as much in total as possible, because this is the place where one is introduced to ideas and— The ideas are multi-layered, and they're not exclusively in a line. They're broad, they're big, they embrace many things. They should encourage everything. That's pretty much it.

But I don't think it can be the home for us artists, as it was in the fifties and forties. It can't be that wonderful place where we all gathered as artists and had our local shows. I don't know if that's possible anymore. Though it might not be a bad idea to restore a local competitive exhibition to show what is happening. An opportunity. Those exhibits gave opportunity to people like myself, a young artist, to show, to have a piece of work in a museum, along with other young people all wanting to be in those shows. Then as a whole, it gave the community a chance to see what was happening in their community. You enlarge that, it could give an opportunity for the whole country to see what's happening in San Francisco, locally. A great catalogue could be produced, films or whatever. Shows that show what's happening and give the opportunity for those few people that are going to be very good, give them an audience and an opportunity to reach people. I don't see how it could do much more. I don't know if the museum's a place to show decorative wares, or automobiles, motorcycles, or, you know. [pause]

I believe the museum is the home of art. Painting, visual art. It's the home of what happens between an artist and a canvas, or in some cases, a computer or whatever it is. But to describe a style of the thirties or— That's another story, for another place.

Rigelhaupt:

The Art Association annuals, could you just describe [what happened] in the forties and fifties. Did they continue into the sixties?

01-00:33:26

Oliveira:

You know, I can't remember. I think they started shutting down in the fifties or sixties. They came less. In all of the three museums. Richmond Art Center was probably the least supported, had the least amount of money, farthest out on the periphery of the museums. I think they stayed as long as possible

providing those shows. As far as I know, they may still have them, in some way. That was a community museum. That was incredible. In my case, it was the Richmond Art Center that connected me with New York City in 1957. There was an exhibition that Richmond put together, a show of current Bay Area art, selected by Bay Area artists. So there was a number of artists that were chosen through a process of writing, and the highest numbers got to be in the show. So that, you know, all the top-level artists were there. They put together one of the first little catalogues I had ever seen for the museum. This happened in '56, I guess. It was through that that a dealer in New York, my dealer Charles Alan, saw a piece of my work, and then made contact with me. So you know, it was wonderful. I mean, it was incredible. It was the beginning of my career. But that museum did provide that wonderful opportunity, not only to me, but to everybody else. I'd like to see more of that. Today, there are so many young artists, and not necessarily always cutting edge, but so many young artists who just won't have an opportunity to be seen. And there should be an opportunity for that.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have a sense as to why there was a decrease in the promotion of Bay Area artists in the 1960s at the museum?

01-00:36:01

Oliveira: An increase or decrease, did you say?

Rigelhaupt: It was a decrease.

01-00:36:05

Oliveira: It had something to do with bringing in curators and directors that were probably more national figures, people with issues that were not necessarily compatible to the area. They certainly didn't draw from the area. They were concerned with international art, they were concerned with the cutting edge art. I think this happened nationally. I think even today, even in my own work, there was always an ongoing group of major shows throughout the country that brought American artists together in these exhibitions that they had. There became fewer of those kind of shows. Or if there were those shows, it was then exclusively related to a very specific kind of art. So I think it has something to do with the personnel in the museums. All of which, I think, seemingly want to become known, to have an identity as important key figures in aesthetic control. And that's it.

I think there's a lot of us older artists today that are— Well, I don't worry about any of that as it pertains to me anymore, because I'm seventy-eight, and my career has been long. It's been a good career. For me, it couldn't have been in a finer time period, in terms of the museums. A lot of my friends that I respect and enjoy had similar careers in time. And so for me, I'm not terribly concerned. I mean, those people know who I am, know me as either viewers or collectors. Museums become less important to me, in a way. For myself.

Some years ago, you know, you'd have a stack of catalogues from big museum shows. Well, there aren't those catalogues now. My own concern is just to simply continue to paint, and try to paint as meaningfully as I can. Time is limited, and it's been an incredible career. It's provided well for me. It's done so for good artists that I know and— don't know if that answers your question, because I forgot the question.

Rigelhaupt: How would you describe SFMOMA's role in the conversation between artist communities on the East Coast and the West Coast?

01-00:39:46

Oliveira:

Well, it's clear to me, if I understand the question, that there is constant kind of communication between East Coast/West Coast. But it's almost as if East Coast becomes so dominant that the West Coast somehow tends to become part of *that* identity. It's pretty much the same thing I was just discussing. There are a lot of collections out here now that are East Coast collections. They're not concerned about West Coast artists, or maybe specific certain ones. But it's made out of the aesthetics of what is important, or what is considered important by MoMA and the dealers in the art world of New York. New York dominates. And New York is a dominating city; it's an incredible city, you know. But it also dominates in ways that really don't support the rest of the country. They somehow assume that everybody has to go along with them. But I go to New York, and I don't think there's a better museum than the Metropolitan or the Frick or any number of other things that happen in that great city. It's incredible. So that kind of communication remains and is stable. And it's beautiful.

Contemporary conversations that are going on are different. They're moving up and down and dominating, and it's a power struggle. I think economics get into the whole thing, and importance, identity. Everyone wants to be well known, as private collectors or a collection. Frankly, I think that most of the museum collections in the country are probably trying so hard to be what New York is that when you go through the country, you see the same collection. There isn't a flavor that is based on the provincial nature of a particular place. It's fairly common. I don't think that's what art is about. I think Florence and, you know, the Renaissance was important. And it was provincial. Anyway.

Rigelhaupt: The question of New York dominating, as you just said, I wonder if you could talk about if that was different or if there were any differences as you were beginning your art career and coming out of art school in the 1950s. And maybe even into the sixties.

01-00:43:30

Oliveira:

You know, the art world didn't exist when I was coming out. New York was a powerful place. But given the time when I started showing in New York, in '56, '57, there weren't as many galleries, there weren't as many artists. MoMA was there, the Whitney, the rest of it. But the art world really hadn't

started, as we know it. It was just beginning at that time. I was fortunate enough to be a young artist that somehow was simply taken by New York, in a way. New York had a broader ability to embrace more things that were happening. When you looked at large exhibitions, you not only saw the same American exhibitions— There were not only artists from New York, there were artists from throughout the country. Artists were content with living in the West Coast or Southwest or wherever they were from. New York was quite willing to accept that. It was broad. It was broader.

It was also forming an identity at that time, New York was. It was struggling. The paintings started to sell; they weren't selling that well before. When you talked about abstract expressionists, they didn't really take off until the mid-fifties. So that, you know, when I was there in '57, '58, I was kind of right behind them. So was Dick Diebenkorn. You could buy a painting of Diebenkorn's for \$2,000, a de Kooning for \$10,000. This was like the beginning. Then, like most things in a powerful dynamic culture like this culture, this whole thing was seized on by people that had special interests in ways and made it into this greater world. So that now paintings are worth millions, and New York is the center. Whatever it is. You know, it's become what it is. Culturally, I think, the whole country was different at that time

Rigelhaupt: How would you describe the conversations between the art worlds in Los Angeles and San Francisco and the Bay Area?

01-00:46:53

Oliveira: How do I describe the differences between the art worlds of San Francisco, Los Angeles? Not New York. Oh, there was always a difference. L.A. was always a kind of hip place, you know. [laughs] They had some fine artists there. And in the fifties, I showed down in L.A. quite a bit, and got to know quite a few of those people. But there wasn't any struggle. This brings up an issue. There wasn't really any competition. You know, today, there is a competitiveness. Artists are struggling to find and keep and maintain their own places. They are standoffish. I wasn't aware of that when I first went to New York, except with certain artists.

I met Larry Rivers; he was standoffish. But I became pretty good friends with Bill de Kooning and [Philip] Guston and [Yves] Klein. Well, those people were really talented artists, and they were not competitive. They weren't worried about me. We became friends. Rothko. They weren't curious about what I was doing, as I was just a young kid. I remember once in the— I guess it was around 1960, Bill de Kooning came out here. Diebenkorn had a party for him, because he wanted to meet certain artists. And it was Frank Lobdell and myself, and maybe Elmer Bischoff. We were all talking. Everybody got along very well together. We were all painters, talking about painting. Later, things changed. And the change was recognized by de Kooning. He came out and was talking about New York, and how things were going, and how difficult it was. It was getting difficult. He said he remembered he was at the

Cedar Bar, and he was talking and he got into an argument with a young artist. He became somewhat aggressive; he wanted to fight. De Kooning said he didn't want to fight, he was an older man. Whatever his name was, Jack or John, he said, "But I'll meet you here tomorrow. And if you want to fight then, we'll fight. I'll meet you here at two o'clock," [laughs] he said. It was sort of like OK Corral. The competitiveness was starting to happen. So de Kooning said he had to show up. So he did show up, and he was standing in the doorway. This kid came walking across the street. He called the guy, he said, "Hey, here I am, over here. Come on, let's go and get a cup'a coffee and talk," you know. And so they didn't, they didn't fight.

But today you can go to New York, and it's sort of a very hostile place, when you start dealing with artists. Everybody's protecting their territory. The only territory that's really worth protecting is being good. You know, good art. It has nothing to do with individual identity. So in L.A. and San Francisco, there wasn't a competition, I don't think. I think we thought we were better than they were. We were provincial in painting. You had Dick Diebenkorn and David Park painting figurative; I was doing different figures. Pete Voulkos was doing something else. Down there, they were all kind of hip, doing something else, you know. But I don't think there was a competition. Unless it was that I didn't know about it.

Rigelhaupt: Could you describe how you think the museum has impacted the Bay Area's art community since it's moved into its new building, maybe over the last dozen years?

01-00:51:40  
Oliveira:

Well, it's brought the city into the museum. That's one thing that's really been incredible. When they do have shows and they're important, you know, you see *lines* of people waiting to go into the museum. It's impacted it in that respect. It's taken on a role where it feels that it is providing something that's essential. What it's providing, that's another question. But people are curious, people are wanting to interact with the visual arts. MOMA's made it possible for that to happen.

Also, about where it's situated, too, in the city; that's another important fact. That didn't exist before. Like I said, you know, you were lucky to go into a museum, a San Francisco museum in the forties or fifties and find a dozen people. [laughs] Now, there are people going to the museum. That's good. That's very positive. I don't know about the museum becoming a facility that sells objects and food and all of that. I don't know how important all that is.

But it's nice to have a sandwich place that you can take time off, run back and look at work. But bookstores and objects and trinkets, it might be part of the economy, I don't know. I'm an old man. I don't know how essential that is. But it has impacted the city. It's brought a luster to the city, the sparkly new building. The big thing is the willingness of the people that supported the

museum to come forth and put the money down for that. How that money went and where it goes now— In due time, things may change. Art will change. But it's there now. The building is.

Rigelhaupt: How do you like the building?

01-00:53:59

Oliveira:

Not especially. I don't know, it's a little hard. [pause] I don't know, it's— It's hard. It's just hard. The galleries are nice, there're some beautiful spaces. I think the spaces where Kiefer was is very nice. But the exterior, the kind of big, heavy, heavy building— I like museums that are lighter, just for my own sake. I'm not too keen on— well, what's his name? [Frank] Gehry. You know, the architect, Gehry. I don't like objects as museums. I think engineers should design museums. I think museums should become invisible, if possible. There's a wonderful Portuguese architect by the name of Siza. He designed a museum in Porto. It's beautiful. Just very simple. Spaces are just incredible, the light is incredible. The museum itself becomes invisible; the work becomes visible. I'm a painter; that's what I want. I don't like objects as museums. And I think MOMA verges on that. Just opinion.

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02-00:00:08

Rigelhaupt:

I'm wondering if you could describe a little bit what it was like, and some of your memories of participating in the Art Association annuals in the 1950s.

02-00:00:19

Oliveira:

They were great because the world was very small then in those days. Certainly, there would be an anticipation that the shows would be coming up, you'd have to prepare for it, pick out your best work, whatever it was going to be; make sure you got your entry blank, got it filled out properly, sent in. Then everyone would show up with their paintings in hand and leave them there. Then you'd wait. Then the show would be determined, good or bad, depending on whether you got in the show or not. [laughs]

So you'd see a friend, "You get in the show?" "No, I didn't get in the show. The show's going to be terrible."

Anyway, then the night of the opening would come, and you'd see people that you hadn't seen in a long while, because the Bay Area, unlike New York, is spread out. So here you saw old friends, you saw enemies, you saw people that you liked. We all went around looking at shows, the work. And a little paper cup of cheap wine. [laughs] It was a great social event for artists, you know. It was a wonderful thing. I think all of them were pretty much that. They were a nice place for artists to gather, and people that were interested.

There weren't many collectors in those days. But people that loved art would come together. We'd all get an opportunity to talk and enjoy the interaction, and see the paintings. You'd steal whatever you could from your friends, what you liked, in terms of the work; take it back home and put it in your own studio, use it. [laughs] I think that's the way it was. That's why it was good. And you influenced each other, motivated each other. That was a beautiful thing. It wasn't trying to come up with the best idea. It was just people painted whatever their ideas were. But you know, the ones that were good, boy, that was great. They'd enthuse you and make you want to do it.

Nothing makes an artist, I think, at least in my time, want to paint, except seeing another piece of work or an important piece of work. I saw Philip Guston before he died. We were talking about how young artists don't seem to know about painting. They're off doing these things again. Which, again, is okay. This may be just nothing more than drivel coming from old artists. But we were talking about it, and he said, "You know, today young people don't even know about painting." He said, "When you and I were going to school, there was this whole list of artists, throughout the world." Then we spent, a lot of us, spent our time going to find those masterpieces. Whether it was the Eisenheim Altarpiece in Colmar by [Matthias] Grünewald, or whether it was *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* of El Greco, or whether it was a Rembrandt, *The Night Watch*; Van Gogh. There's a whole series of paintings that artists, at a certain time, had great reverence for. So many of us were so taken by it that we had to find them. And being way out in the West Coast, it's very difficult to do that. But I pretty much did, you know. I saw almost all of them. And now I've forgotten the question. What was it?

Rigelhaupt: Just about the Art Association annuals in the fifties.

02-00:04:37

Oliveira: Oh. Well, the Art Association annuals, again—I don't know how I got onto Guston and talking about artists. Well, just to conclude with that, I think there was a kind of value that everyone related to and agreed upon. Today, that isn't so much that. But those annuals were really, really important. They did, as I said, provide the place where we could all gather together and interact, exchange ideas, laugh and tell jokes. The art world was a lot less uptight then than it is now. It was pretty nice.

Rigelhaupt: What do you remember about your 1963 solo exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art?

02-00:05:42

Oliveira: '63, was it? I'll be darned. Painting. Drawing. [pause]

Rigelhaupt: No, I think it was painting.

02-00:05:58

Oliveira:

Well, because I've had two. One was a drawing show. Well, what I remember about them was that— You know, you paint in a kind of solitary world. When you have a show, it's the only time you come out, you're at the gallery, and then you have a crowd of people that come out to see you. But at museums, one thing I remember, the place was packed. Which was very nice. Oh, it was a great moment, because it gave me an opportunity to see my world, my world at a certain place. It wasn't a retrospective show, it was a survey, really. It gave an opportunity to see where you were in all the points; all the weak points, all the—you know, those things that are better and such. And it gives you a chance to talk to good friends about it. It's amazing when you have a show like that, that a lot of your artist friends come and bring up issues that are helpful to you. They're supportive. But that was a great, wonderful social event in my life. I was very happy about it. Yeah. Not everyone has had those shows, and I felt very grateful that I could have them.

Rigelhaupt:

Do you remember if you had a voice in how the paintings were hung, the lighting style, the exhibition style?

02-00:08:10

Oliveira:

Oh, I didn't have much to say about that. Tom Garver was the curator. He had pretty much say on it, and I went along. I'm not very good in arranging things. Light was always an issue at San Francisco Museum of Art, because it wasn't really meant to be an art gallery, and it didn't have great modern kinds of lighting. It was dark. There was nothing you could do about that.

But we were talking about museums before, and you know, you have opinions about looking at things in spaces. And I do. That's why I said, well, you know, Gehry, he's a remarkable sculptor. He makes beautiful, big, huge, massive objects, you know? I saw Siza's museum in Porto, in Portugal. There are certain artists that can see space and define it, you know, for looking at things. Another one of those kinds of spaces is at the de Menil in Houston, where they built a museum for Cy Twombly. The architect there is Renzo Piano. It's the most remarkable, beautiful, modest building. You know, just very clean. But the big issue is, the whole ceiling is skylight, flat light, with louvers. The louvers somehow are all automatically timed with the computer, so that it keeps the light even during the whole course of the day. The light starts early, and it fades. You know, natural light. That's just incredible. That's a museum space that I think is worthy of showing art. But we've concluded that whole thing about the MOMA. It's a good building, our building; it's just too heavy and massive, I think. I like light buildings.

Rigelhaupt:

You mentioned Thomas Garver. He was the curator in your 1984 survey exhibition. Could you talk about how you began working with him?

02-00:11:04

Oliveira:

Tom, I met him earlier. I met him at the University of Illinois, in 1961 or '60, where I was artist in residence. The University of Illinois had a gallery. When

they had their visiting artists, it also went along with having a show. Tom Garver put that show up. So that's when I met him. Certainly, way before the exhibition in San Francisco. So that's how we met. Then we maintained a friendship—we still do. So Tom did the gallery, did the show, did the catalogue. He was before these curators that somehow became removed from the real world. The kind of super-curators. [laughs] I don't know what to call them.

Rigelhaupt: Well, do you have other memories about the exhibition in 1984?

02-00:12:21

Oliveira:

Well, again, these shows, when they're put together, they show your weaknesses more—and your strengths. The things are usually not as even as you would like them. Another thing, too is, when a curator selects a show, they have a view of what they consider to be important, not necessarily what *you* consider to be important. There were things in the show that I didn't want, but you have to go along with that.

We were talking about the show in '63. That was the drawing show. That was curated by— Oh, gosh, what was his name? John Humphrey. He was a photographer. Oh, dear, he was a dear friend. But anyway, that's when the opening happened, the day of my mother's funeral, and we couldn't avoid either one of those things. We had to do it all. All I can remember about that show, the opening of it, was a massive group of people at the museum. I was totally kind of in a daze. It was hard to talk to people because of what we'd just gone through. But the museum did a wonderful job, I believe, putting together this big drawing show; it was large.

Then we go to Tom Garver in '83, and he did a good show as well. But on the other hand, there were things in that exhibit that, if I were to choose the show today, I wouldn't have had them in there. The same applied to this last big retrospective at San José. Peter Selz did that one. Peter and I have known each other for many years. He's a dear friend, but sometimes, again, the tastes, it's just— I think if I were to have that show, choose that show, I'd have condensed it down in half from what it was. I would've selected different paintings. Not *all* different, but other paintings, and eliminated some paintings. But that's pretty much the way it goes, I think.

Rigelhaupt: So also in 1984, could you talk about what you remember about working with some of the other curators? Karen Tsujimoto?

02-00:15:02

Oliveira:

Well, Karen was good. She was excellent. She's over in Oakland [Museum of California]. She was very supportive. Again, a person that didn't have international ambitions. She's a person that realized where she was and what she was dealing with, the spaces that she had, who I was, who she was. She's quite good.

Rigelhaupt: The other assistant curator was Michael Schwager?

02-00:15:37

Oliveira: Michael was excellent, too. He was just very supportive, and very similar to Karen. I've been very fortunate with those kinds of curators. The last one was Susan Landauer in San Jose. She was excellent. Again, a person who could focus her attention on something that she was dealing with and not the huge art world out there.

Rigelhaupt: How would you describe the effects of those two shows on your career?

02-00:16:29

Oliveira: I don't know. I never thought of that. They meant, to me personally, [they] gave me a kind of schedule, in terms of my total career. You know, the first one was in '63, drawing; '83; then what was it, ninety-something-or other at San José? It was simply indicating to me that time was growing short. You know, that you're getting older. [laughs]

And it was interesting, because some paintings were in that show in San José that were in the show in San Francisco. Susan eliminated some of those paintings that I didn't like, but also put some other ones in [laughs] that— Or not Susan, but Peter Selz. On the career, well, I don't know. I think they produced a book. A book that was stronger than that catalogue I had at San Francisco MOMA in '83. I don't know. I think maybe I'd like to start over and do it all over again. [laughs] If I could only start where I am now and do it; have another career, that would be great. But artists don't get a chance to do that. I've been very fortunate personally over the years, because like I said, so many artists, good artists, never got a chance to show. I did. I had all the chances to show in so many different places, including MOMA here, and numerous other places.

Rigelhaupt: You've been a part of many group shows at SFMOMA. Are there any that stand out?

02-00:19:00

Oliveira: At MOMA? Well, not necessarily. There are other shows that stand out. The Peter Selz show, "Images of Man," at Museum of Modern Art, New York. Then during those times, there were such big, major shows. Many of them do stand out, but I can't really recall. You know, but when you put groups of international artists together that are relating to a given kind of objective— Incredible. I ran across a catalogue the other day of a show that was held in 1963 in Madrid, Spain, called *The Arts of America and Spain*. In there, there was a whole section of American artists and a whole section of Spanish artists. There were artists from South America, Central America, all that. I looked down through the list, just curious. I saw myself, and suddenly I saw—this is '63 —Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, myself—I forget the other ones. A few other American artists, and that's it. There were pictures of us, and we were all very young, you know. [laughs] And we're not the figures that we

were then. It's not too much different than a painting that I just did ten years ago. But it was nice to have those shows, those kind of big shows, and to be part of it.

Those maybe were substituted by these big art fairs that they have now, which I started going to, being part of. Those are hard to understand. Because the first one I went to and was in was in Basel, Switzerland. I didn't know what I was getting into, except I was being represented by a German dealer, Veith Turske. I went, showed up for it, and couldn't *believe* there was that much art, you know, going on at the same time. They had a *huge* building. I mean, what appeared to be ten floors or whatever it was. Art booths and—God, it was incredible. I got a bit panicked and wanted to run away.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have a sense, or how would you assess the relationship between the San Francisco Art Association and the museum, and how it's changed over the years?

02-00:22:22

Oliveira: Does the Art Association still exist? I don't know.

Rigelhaupt: I mean, at one point, they ran the museum.

02-00:22:31

Oliveira: At one point, they ran the museum. But I don't know what happened. I'm completely not aware of what—I know the board of the museum now is much different than it was originally. The Art Association sponsored those exhibitions that I told you about. You know, I don't think it exists. It'd be nice to know.

Rigelhaupt: I'd like to switch gears just a little bit and talk about the directors that you've interacted with. So starting with Grace McCann Morley.

02-00:23:13

Oliveira: She was a wonder. You know, in 1958, I got the Guggenheim Fellowship. I was very naïve, because I'd heard about this big fellowship, and I got the entry blanks, I filled them all out. I had to have letters of recommendation. I went to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and knocked on her door. I went in. She kind of knew who I was. I said, "Miss Morley, I'm applying for this grant. Would you write me a letter?" She said, "Sure." I walked out, that was it. She was, I think, very supportive of many artists. I got the Guggenheim, of all things. But certainly, I think she might've helped, with her letter. There were a few other people. I think she started the museum, she guided it as far as she could guide the museum. She cared about artists. She was— [pause] You know, she supported them. That was important. It was a different art world in those days. Who were the others?

Rigelhaupt: Well, what do you remember about Grace McCann Morley's departure from the museum?

02-00:24:41

Oliveira: I don't remember. I think she retired. And who was it, Nordland, Jerry Nordland came next?

Rigelhaupt: Well, I think she left in '58, and worked on the National Museum in India.

02-00:25:04

Oliveira: Well, she could've. But I don't know anything about that.

Rigelhaupt: And then George Culler was there for a while.

02-00:25:10

Oliveira: George Culler. Yeah, I don't know much about him, either. I don't think he was one that connected very clearly with the community. He didn't last very long.

Rigelhaupt: Well then, Jerry Nordland.

02-00:25:26

Oliveira: Jerry Nordland, I became very friendly with. I knew him in Los Angeles, before he became director of the San Francisco museum. I think he was one of the fine, fine directors of our museum. I think he was one that had an idea of where he wanted it to go, an idea of what was valid, in terms of the art that he wanted to show. He was good. He's celebrating his eightieth birthday here shortly, and I've been invited. I haven't replied, but we have been friends, we remain friends. I think he was an excellent director. It's too bad that he couldn't have stayed. I wish he had. I think from when Jerry left, that museum directors became more and more removed from what the museum really was about. That's my opinion.

Rigelhaupt: And so that would be the case with Henry Hopkins, the next director?

02-00:26:38

Oliveira: No, Henry was not— He was okay. Henry was good in many ways, but not the vital kind of figure that Jerry was. Again, I think Henry might have been becoming a different kind of director. And then the rest—

Rigelhaupt: Jack Lane was next.

02-00:27:04

Oliveira: No. [laughs] I had nothing to do with him. Well, for me, I didn't like him at all. Jack Lane is one of those individuals that— I was asked to be on a panel at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, on art dealers and artists. This is just before I was about ready to have my retrospective in San Francisco MOMA. It's certainly before he came to California. At the very end, they had questions and answers. Somebody knew that I was going to have a show, and they wanted to know why it wasn't coming east. Jack Lane said, "Well, it is coming east. It's going as far as St. Louis. That's east, isn't it?" You know, something like that. [laughs] Some smart-aleck kind of reply. Kind of

unnecessary, you know. Certainly not concerned about— Well, certainly not very concerned about me. But then he became the director, and I think it all went kind of down hill, in a way, for me. For me personally.

Rigelhaupt: And then there was David Ross.

02-00:28:37

Oliveira: Well, I had a hard time with him, too. I say a hard time; I found there was a detachment between myself and a lot of the artists that I knew that are friends of mine and David Ross, and Jack Lane. Then now we have Benezra. I think they made a good choice. I think Neal has a broader kind of intelligence than the rest of those fellows had. I think he's going to be fine. He was part of a group that came out of Stanford as I was teaching there. Kirk Varnedoe and Steven Nash and Benezra. All three of those guys were very good.

Rigelhaupt: Well, to switch gears again just a little bit, I'll throw out the names of some curators, and any impressions you have, or descriptions, memories.

02-00:29:45

Oliveira: [chuckles] Can I tear them apart? No, no. Go ahead.

Rigelhaupt: Well, one of the—

02-00:29:50

Oliveira: I may not know some of them, too.

Rigelhaupt: John Humphrey.

02-00:29:55

Oliveira: Great. He was my great friend. He was the one that curated my drawing show. '63, I think it was. Or '60, '70. That drawing show I had. He was quite wonderful. Simple minded, simple kind of person. He was intelligent, don't misunderstand. I mean, he had a kind of clarity to him. He loved photography. He liked people. We became good friends for a long while.

Rigelhaupt: Did you work together on other group shows or any other solo exhibitions?

02-00:30:35

Oliveira: No, we had that solo exhibition of my drawings, and I'd help him whenever he needed my help, whatever it was; I participated in whatever he wanted me to participate in.

Rigelhaupt: What about George Neubert?

02-00:30:54

Oliveira: George, good man. He was at Oakland. Came out of the ranks of the artists. He was a sculptor. George is still a friend. He moved. He went down to Texas. Now he's moved to a place in Nebraska or someplace, I don't know, somewhere in the Midwest, a little town. I think he's curating a collection of

some sort. You know, I had some contact with him a few years back. George, he's rough and tough, and not part of that new group.

Rigelhaupt: And Suzanne Foley?

02-00:31:54

Oliveira: Suzanne Foley, I don't know her that well. I know her and I don't know her. I can't say much.

Rigelhaupt: Graham Beal?

02-00:32:06

Oliveira: These are people I've had some contact with but nothing very extensive. Well, they were perfectly fine; I never had any problems with them.

Rigelhaupt: And what about Gary Garrels?

02-00:32:21

Oliveira: Mm-mm. He's a difficult person. Mainly, again, for the positions that he took. But I had nothing to do with him. That was the whole point, I think, with him and Jack Lane. We had nothing to do with them, because we had no common interests.

Rigelhaupt: So when you're saying the positions they took, is that in reference to de-emphasizing Bay Area art?

02-00:32:53

Oliveira: De-emphasizing, emphasizing what they wanted. What *they* wanted, essentially.

Rigelhaupt: And Janet Bishop?

02-00:33:04

Oliveira: Don't know her.

Rigelhaupt: And then Madeleine Grynsztejn?

02-00:33:10

Oliveira: Don't know [her].

Rigelhaupt: Well, do you have memories about how your piece, *Adolescent by the Bed* was acquired in 1967?

02-00:33:20

Oliveira: I think it was a gift, I'm not quite sure. I think it might've been a gift of someone that bought it in New York. But I don't know who that person might be. It's in some record. Is anybody there that—?

Rigelhaupt: I don't have it handy. I'm wondering if you have had relationships with other people associated with SFMOMA? Anyone on the board of trustees? I know you mentioned—

02-00:33:57

Oliveira: Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure that there've been, over the years, numbers of people that I've known that were members of the board. But I can't, right at this moment, say. I know Don Fisher, for instance, and McKeon, Elaine McKeon. And others, but I just— The board and I are just— you know, they're so far apart. The museum's been very good to me over the years. I'm talking about the whole structure, the San Francisco Museum, Museum of Modern Art. I mean, they've been kind. Just in terms of the art, it goes in a different place sometimes. But it's fine.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember interactions with members of the Women's Board when it was— back many years, when it was active?

02-00:34:56

Oliveira: Do you have any names?

Rigelhaupt: I'm going to blank on the first name, but Mrs. Haas was one—

02-00:35:04

Oliveira: Oh. Peter Haas? Or Evvie Haas?

Rigelhaupt: It would've been Evvie on the Women's Board.

02-00:35:12

Oliveira: The Haas family was incredible. I was a closer friend to Mimi Haas, who was Peter Haas' wife. She bought a number of things of mine, and we're friends. We still are, I guess. Evvie Haas, also very nice. The Haas family has been responsible, culturally, to the Bay Area. Madeleine Russell Haas, she was the grand dame, in a way. I don't know, I don't think she had anything to do with the museum, though. I don't know.

Rigelhaupt: In your memory, do you have a sense of how the board members or trustees had an effect on the directions the museum took?

02-00:36:19

Oliveira: I'm sure they have, actually. You know, especially now, currently. The museum board, it takes the museum in the direction that they want it to go. The museum board finds the directors and the curators. So they found Jack Lane, they found what's-his-name.

Rigelhaupt: David Ross?

02-00:36:43

Oliveira: Davis Ross. But now they also found Neal Benezra, and I congratulate them on that. But they're the people that steer the vote. And the board now, I think,

the community as a whole, those wealthy people have now contributed very well to the museum, whether you agree with the museum or not.

Rigelhaupt: You've had a very long career teaching.

02-00:37:31

Oliveira: Yes. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: I'm wondering if you could talk about if there was any way in which the directions going on at the museum, particular exhibitions impacted your teaching and your relationship with students here.

02-00:37:47

Oliveira: At Stanford, or—?

Rigelhaupt: At Stanford or anywhere else.

02-00:37:53

Oliveira: Well, as a young printmaker, I taught at [the California School of] Arts and Crafts, and I taught at the [San Francisco] Art Institute. The de Young used to have these graphic shows from Europe and back east. Those always had an impact on what my prints were about or what I taught. I can't say much more than that. Certainly, as a younger artist, I used to go to the museum all the time and bring back whatever I want, you know, that I saw. Or I would take my students. They were always available. That was very good.

Rigelhaupt: In any conversations you had with your students, did you get a sense or hear that they had a similar experience that you had as a young art student going to the museum, with any of the exhibitions or pieces at SFMOMA?

02-00:39:12

Oliveira: Yes, sure. We talked about the Kiefer show, we talked about the de Kooning show, we talked about other things, not positively. [laughs] That usually happens, you know. But now I've been retired from teaching for ten years. So I have a few students that I still see, and one who was just here. She was with me for a couple weeks. Going to be a good artist. We talk about things that she saw here. But she's living in New York. Museums are very important.

I think the big issue with teachers and students is that the teachers make the issue of the museum important to the student. So we've done that pretty well, and certainly, with this young lady. In fact, we were talking about Goya, and she still remains enthused about him as much as we were when I was teaching her. Museums are very important institutions. As Stanford is as an institution, as a study collection. They try to give as much as they can to the student. Inevitably, museums are big and they're prepared to really show a lot of stuff. Like the Met back east. There are so many wonderful museums that are crucial to young people. I think those museums teach more than a lot of the current museums of what's happening in the world right now.

Rigelhaupt: Is that part of the role of the museum, to educate art students?

02-00:41:25

Oliveira: I think so. Support the art students, show them great art. I didn't see a painting till I was seventeen or eighteen years old. I was raised out in Niles and Fremont. It was wonderful, but they don't have many Rembrandts there.

So when I finally saw and came in contact with the museum, I fell in love with it. Maybe that's when I felt that MOMA San Francisco, the San Francisco Museum of Art became mine, belonged to me, because I could go and look at things that I wanted to see. The whole idea of the museum was built there for me. When I went back east, it was because I wanted to go and see the great eastern museums. This all started at the San Francisco Museum, and the de Young, and the Legion of Honor. Those are very important things, issues for young students hopefully. It introduces them to museums, it provides them with a rich view of the world. The world of art, or the world in general. If I go to New York, it's usually I go there to see the Met. I'm there for a week, and I spend two or three days at the Met. They usually have a new, important exhibit. There are certain things that I just like to see there. I go to the Frick. I go to the library. What's the name of the— Oh, God. I never remember that. But anyway, I go to MoMA there. I liked the old MoMA in New York more than I like the new MoMA. The new MoMA is so huge. So big, so massive, and it's so unimportant. You know, it becomes less important because of its size. It reduces great paintings to postage stamps, where the other one had a nice proportion to it. It could've just added onto that a little bit and I'd have been happy. But the Met is— Whew! It's great. Then that led me on to all the European museums, too, which I think are really important. The Tate [London] and all the museums in Europe are incredible.

Rigelhaupt: How would you describe the relationship between the museum and San Francisco galleries and critics, and how they've influenced one another?

02-00:44:45

Oliveira: Museums?

Rigelhaupt: Galleries.

02-00:44:48

Oliveira: Galleries?

Rigelhaupt: And critics.

02-00:44:50

Oliveira: Critics. In San Francisco? In the fifties, forties?

Rigelhaupt: Well, starting with the fifties.

02-00:44:57

Oliveira:

Well, first off, there were few galleries in San Francisco. There were only two galleries, maybe a student gallery besides. We had one critic, Al Frankenstein. He stayed that way for a long time. He was always very good, because you got a view, you know, from a professional of sorts. It wasn't in the school. It was somebody that knew about things and could accept it or he didn't accept it. What was the other one? Critics? Galleries? We have covered both of those. But when we're talking about the fifties, there weren't that many galleries in New York, either. There were more, but compared to what there is today, there were just so few. Museums, critics, and what was the other part?

Rigelhaupt:

And galleries. Museums, critics and galleries. Just the dynamic between them.

02-00:45:56

Oliveira:

The museums were what they were at that time, and they were just starting up and trying to hang on, whether it was in Oakland or whether it was in San Francisco. The culture and the communities simply didn't care that much about visual art. But the museum people cared, and they hung on. Now it's the same thing.

Critics, I'm not too keen on. I think they've become so esoteric, so self-indulgent, so thin and cerebral. That's whether you're talking about [Kenneth] Baker or any number of them. Critics. Museums. Museums can be party palaces, places to have parties for the wealthy. They should be places for paintings. If you make money from a museum, that's fine I guess, but—Galleries. Just too many places that have put up a placard, "Art Gallery." When I started, my dealer in New York was a very intelligent guy, who knew what he was doing. He was trained by Edith Halpert, who was the grand dame of New York dealers. He had a responsibility. He was trained to do certain things, and develop young artists, and develop identities. Today, none of that happens. It's mostly a sales place. Everybody feels they can sell art. So, you know, it's a different place.

Rigelhaupt:

Do you have a sense of the relationship between SFMOMA and some of the big collectors in the Bay Area?

02-00:48:19

Oliveira:

There's a good number of big collectors that are associated with it. Sure. It is our museum, and they are the collectors. And there, you know, they will eventually, hopefully, with the good collections—like the Anderson Collection, it's a big collection. I hope it goes to San Francisco MOMA, because I think that's what they need. The collectors are what supplies— You know, there are individual gifts, but we're talking about big collections that really should go into institutions. I hope that these collectors are responsible.

Rigelhaupt:

And is your work part of some of the big collections in the Bay Area that—

02-00:49:11

Oliveira:

I guess, yes. And the works of other artists that I know. We were here. This is our home. But my work is in collections in a lot of museums, so— But I'm most proud of the ones that are here. San Francisco MOMA doesn't have many. I don't think they have many things of many of us. Hopefully, in due time, as people die, there'll be more.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, I know they definitely have lithographs of yours. If you want to peek at that. Maybe you can talk about some of the pieces that are part of the permanent collection.

02-00:50:58

Oliveira:

Lithographs. [Mrs. [Nell Sinton?], a collector of lithographs here, gave— She was a real benefactor for, and a supporter of so many of us local artists. She was special. Special, special person. Very wealthy family, wealthy woman, whose husband used to give her money to run the household, but she would put it in a little jar, and she'd buy prints with it instead. [laughs] So her husband probably didn't eat as well as he should've. She was great. There're quite a few of these that are from her. You see, there's many from her.

Mrs. Bagley Wright gave this *Nude in Environment* painting, which is a pretty good painting. Bagley Wright, I thought, was from Los Angeles. I think that might be a collector from L.A. And then there's this terrible painting *Shaman Woman*, gift of the Modern Art Council. I don't know why they bought it; it's not a very good painting. I'm also critical of myself; I'm not critical of everybody else only. Because I know what I did that's good, and also I know what's not so good.

There are two other lithographs here that are quite good, one from {Peggy?} Kirby Walker, who was a student friend of mine in high school. A very lovely, beautiful woman. {*Winning?*}. There's some work here that was given by people that— When I got the Guggenheim, I was going to go to New York and Europe after that. The Guggenheim amounted to \$3,000. We had two children. We were ambitious, we were going to go. So what I did, I had a lot of art, lithograph proofs. I went to the Art Institute one day, and I put them out in the front, on the cement. I sold them for fifty-cents apiece, a dollar, two dollars apiece. That helped me get to Europe. They don't have my best. But they do have things. But I think better paintings will come in time. As people pass away and make gifts. So how're we doing?

Rigelhaupt:

Well, those are largely my questions. The way I like to end is to ask if there's anything I should've asked, or anything that I didn't ask, or if there's anything you'd like to add.

02-00:53:57

Oliveira:

Sometimes I wonder, being a young man in this area, that if I was born and raised in New York, somewhere near a major collection, if that would've—you know, museum collection—if that would've made me any

better or not. But I have no answer to that at all. I know that our museums are still pretty limited to what we have in them. I try to encourage people to give to the museums. My wife and I gave, over a period of years, a collection of prints, graphics that we bought—some beautiful prints—to Stanford, because it's important. I'd like to see more people give more quality work to museums, and that's pretty much it. But no matter how we try, we're not going to provide in the museums what the Art Institute of Chicago has, for instance, the major impressionist paintings and the great print and drawing collections that they have.

I'm not a museum person, but I think about the museums that are interesting; and ours, as we get west, become less interesting, because we have less to show. So it's just wanting to see more stuff and less frivolous things. Maybe a broader range of art that is brought into the museums. We should have the biggest collection of Bay Area Figurative painting in the entire country. But we don't. Oakland has a lot of it, but San Francisco should have quite a big collection of it, but it doesn't. You know, David Park and Dick Diebenkorn and Theophilus Brown, Paul Wonner, all of us that were part of that group. We're important, but you know, you don't see much of it. You have to go to Oakland, maybe, to see more.

[End of Interview]

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