

Regional Oral History Office  
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University of California  
Berkeley, California

SFMOMA 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

JACK STAUFFACHER  
Printmaker  
Founder, Greenwood Press

Interviews conducted by  
Lisa Rubens  
in 2006

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



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**Jack Stauffacher**

**Interviewed by Lisa Rubens, ROHO**

**Interview #1: March 2, 2006**

[Begin Audiofile 1]

01-00:00:00

Rubens: How is it that you came to choose this cover for the first catalogue of “Art in Cinema”? “Art in Cinema,” of course, we’ll get to in a little bit, was your brother Frank’s great contribution to SFMOMA.

01-00:00:30

Stauffacher: Well, this was designed by another person; I did not design it, I printed it. It was the formal cover for it, which I think people remember the catalogue from it.

Rubens:

But this was an artist, Ethel L. Schotz, who you said was a friend of—

01-00:00:57

Stauffacher: Very close friend of Henry Miller. They worked some interesting portfolios and projects together. Actually, in the archives of the museum, there must be some report of the opening of that show at the museum. It tied together within that period. Henry Miller wrote the introduction to this. We were very close to him. So it was all part of that moment of a very fresh and creative environment for young people.

Rubens:

Was it your brother who really, in association with Henry Miller, had Schotz do this cover?

Stauffacher:

Yes.

Rubens:

You said Frank himself drew the eye.

01-00:01:53

Stauffacher: Yes, Frank did the eye. There’s a slight collaboration here.

Rubens:

But when was it that you redesigned the cover?

01-00:02:01

Stauffacher: Well, this was, I think, just during the period after the catalogue was released and sold. I had, oh, maybe fifty copies, without any covers on them. So it was bound, sewed up, but no cover. So I said, “Well, I never liked this cover too much, so I’ll do my own cover.” I never *sold* this, I gave them away to friends. This is a very special, in-house little intrigue.

Rubens:

To me, much more beautifully designed.

01-00:02:38

Stauffacher: Well, I think it also, if you look at the design which I designed, it has a modern, sans serif look to it. It's the feelings that we were all creating. I felt this was just more appropriate.

01-00:03:21

Rubens: I had noticed that in your book, in *A Typographic Journey: The history of the Greenwood Press*, you have that cover exhibited. I'm wondering how you personally, Jack, became interested in printing.

01-00:04:34

Stauffacher: Well, there's one little space there, I do give you some hints of how I started to become a printer. When you're young, you have all sorts of, not options so much; it's just you're bombarded by all kinds of things when you're twelve. Can you imagine when you were twelve, your mind, looking and searching? I think it's a lot to do with the environment in which you are raised in. I happen to have been raised in a very suburban, San Mateo upbringing, with a very fine family, and I had my big brother Frank, six years older than I, who was really my teacher in the arts because he was so well read. He had a library. He shared this with me as a young man. I was very influenced by him.

But the printing comes in at a different moment in time. You know how kids do, how they fall into situations. It's not planned, it's just unplanned. I used to take the *Popular Mechanics* magazine. In the thirties, that was the magazine young men and women—I guess women did look at those *Popular Mechanics*.

Rubens:

Not too many.

01-00:05:10

Stauffacher: I was flipping through the leaves of the back. There was an advertisement, a little column. There was a picture of a man. I'll never forget him. He had his finger pointing out of the page. He says, "You want to be a printer?" Boy, that looked challenging. So hey, why not? "You can learn how to be a printer, and you'll have a full printing press, you can have type, you can have little tweezers, you can have all these things, for fifteen dollars." At that time, I had a paper route, so I threw papers and saved my money so I could buy it. So I did buy it. That's the beginning. It's those little moments in time, as you become curious, you pick up the little press—a little, teeny press—just do business cards. You'd fumble with your fingers and learn, you get the ink going in, and that became the whole history of my life. That was it, that's what clicked. So it's part curiosity, and part love.

Rubens:

So how about jumping to, then, another moment of time. You build what is named Greenwood Press, for the street you live on.

01-00:06:54

Stauffacher: The Greenwood, yes.

Rubens: In 1935, the San Francisco Arts Association is formed. You have spoken about the camaraderie and excitement and intellectual curiosity that your brother evidenced, and he's moving you in that direction. What was it like for you? Did you associate with the Arts Association? When do you enter?

01-00:07:31

Stauffacher: When I enter is maybe eighteen, seventeen. I'd come up from San Mateo, and I was very interested in film. I would go to these documentary films that were being made in the thirties, which were just outstanding, very beautifully done, like Robert Flaherty, Pare Lorentz, *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, music by Copland and so forth. It was very stirring. It was a social focus. It wasn't just romantic and it had some political, social meaning to me. I just grabbed onto that. It was so beautifully done. It just moved me. That's where I would actually would go, to the museums, to see those very special documentaries. That was before Frank.

01-00:08:39

Rubens: Literally, you would to Van Ness?

Stauffacher: Oh, yes.

Rubens: This is where they were being showing?

Stauffacher: Yes.

Rubens: Did you know Grace McCann Morley?

01-00:08:49

Stauffacher: I got to know her through my brother, with "Art in Cinema."

Rubens: A little bit later on.

01-00:08:56

Stauffacher: I just went there. Maybe my brother told me about these films. He had seen the films down in Los Angeles. It was in the air. This was just at the eve of the Second World War.

01-00:09:11

Rubens: Would you say you constituted part of an arts crowd, avant garde?

01-00:09:19

Stauffacher: Well, no. Printers are not arty.

Rubens: Well, there's going to be the big debate when you teach at the Art Institute.

01-00:09:30

Stauffacher: That's the problem. Applied art against fine art.

Rubens: I read about your conflict there.

01-00:09:36

Stauffacher: It's a ridiculous polemic. Now, I don't want to bore you with that.

Rubens:

Well, so you were going to the museum primarily for the films.

01-00:09:53

Stauffacher: Films, yes. Then you look at a painting on the wall, and there's a Braque or a Picasso, and, "Oooh!" So you know, it rubs off.

Rubens:

There were the artists annuals, there were some of the dances that the Labor School was putting on.

01-00:10:08

Stauffacher: My future wife used to go to the California Labor School. You know, commie place, but she took dancing. Dancing was the big thing. For the girls. But it spilled from the museum to people all around here. [Morley] was, I think, doing some very preliminary work in showing modern art. The older museums were old masterpieces, and this was new. So when you were young, you were seeking out new things, new images, new ideas. The Museum of Modern Art played that role. Very important, I think, for that generation.

01-00:11:05

Rubens: So the war becomes more of a dividing ground then?

01-00:11:09

Stauffacher: Yes, it's a strong dividing ground, I think.

Rubens:

You met Lee Mullican in the war, is that right?

01-00:11:14

Stauffacher: I met him in Paris, Texas, of all places, when we were in the army.

Rubens:

Were you drafted into the army?

Stauffacher:

Yes, I was drafted.

Rubens:

Your brother, too?

01-00:11:24

Stauffacher: I believe so, yes.

Rubens:

You met Mullican in Paris, Texas?

01-00:11:29

Stauffacher: Paris, Texas. We became friends. By that time, he was a young hopeful painter, an artist. By the time I was twenty-one, I had read books, I had been a devoted printer of the old historical backgrounds of the—it's so rich, the history of printing. I read Updike, *Printing Types*. So I was focused on the technical, as well as the aesthetic about books. It's all mixed together. But not done with any plan. But I could speak the so-called art lingo. But very natural.

There weren't any isms I was trying to bring about. But it was nice friendship. I said to him, "Hey, when the war's over, come over and live with me. I have a little studio. A little studio in San Mateo. You know, you're from Chickasha." I said, "Where in the hell is Chickasha?" Oklahoma. Even in Oklahoma, it's a strange sounding name. He did come. I think that was opening his life to the West Coast here, which was full of activity.

01-00:13:01

Rubens: '49 will be the first year that you publish a catalogue, a sixteen-page, 800-issue run. So that happens pretty quickly. I just, as an historian, I just can't help but ask, where were you, in the army?

01-00:13:18

Stauffacher: I didn't go anywhere. I became a corporal, the lowest rank. But they did take me to, after basic training, to learn map making at the University of Wisconsin. No, Kentucky, in Lexington. There, I learned how to make maps, in six weeks, army style. Then I ended up in a battalion, a topographical battalion in Paris, Texas. That's where I met Lee.

Rubens: They put your skills to work. So it must have been quite an extraordinary time, after the war. San Francisco, it's the heyday of the Labor School, the community college system is burgeoning, particularly my understanding from the history of cinema is that the documentary, avant-garde, experimental films are being shown during the war. It's your brother who, in '46, forms this Art in Cinema association, and the series with the museum. He asks you, wants you to print the catalogue and the broadsides.

01-00:14:51

Stauffacher: Oh, yes. I didn't print. The only thing I printed was the cover. The rest was printed down the street.

Rubens: But you designed—

01-00:15:02

Stauffacher: I designed it.

Rubens: Were you an influence on him, in terms of developing the series?

01-00:15:13

Stauffacher: Well, I don't know about that.

Rubens: Where did this come from in him?

01-00:15:17

Stauffacher: Well, he was just innately— He grew up as a very talented man.

Rubens: He had made some films before the war, right?

01-00:15:25

Stauffacher:

He's made some minor films. It's now historical, early history of America film. He did a film, which, it's rather surreal. I wrote a book on bicycle polo. No one's heard of this game. I also played horse polo at one time, during my horse life, in the thirties. Frank had a camera, and he was always doing things with it, I asked him, "Why don't you make a little documentary of our bicycle polo games?" He said, "Sure." So he did it. Now this is one of his first pieces of film that he did. He edited it. It's very slight, but it's very interesting.

01-00:16:42

Then he did one with a more dramatic background. He almost was in love with architecture. There was this very beautiful chateau in Hillsborough called the Carolands. This was a magnet for his imagination. He likes spatial, beautiful things. There's a fragment of the Carolands, which is quite interesting. But it's very short. But these are rare documents.

01-00:17:4

Rubens:

There's a book about to come out called *Art in Cinema: Documents Towards a History of the Film Society*. Scott MacDonald, who has interviewed you about your brother, is the author. Temple Press will publish it, March 2006. He says that this was a pioneering endeavor in the country. That really, it set a national trend. When Cinema 16 in New York was formed, Vogel, the head of that, called Frank and talked to him about how did he organize this.

01-00:18:15

Stauffacher:

I was reading some of the things yesterday, about Vogel. How really, Vogel came in in the second moment, level, because he learned so much from Frank. because Frank started the thing earlier.

Rubens:

So the museum, then, was really a magnet, was a site for the proliferation of this?

01-00:18:39

Stauffacher:

Now, in the commemoration of the magazine, the museum recently—you know, that big fancy book, you have seen that one? Near the front of it, there's a big picture of the audience of "Art in Cinema," at this moment of real interest, enthusiasm. Must have been 500 people there. All the fellows had ties, the girls had nice dresses, and boy—these radical poets and painters had their little ties. It was before the Beats.

Rubens:

600, I hear there's 600, 700 people.

01-00:19:24

Stauffacher:

Yes, yes, it was just amazing. That picture does tell the story that it was really attended to by young people. Not filmmakers, there could be writers, poets, painters, dance, or anyone interested in the arts. That was a real focus that didn't end, really, till Frank got sick.

Rubens: So let's focus just a little bit more, then, on that, what the character or quality of that life was. Was there any relationship to the UN, by the way? The UN is meeting here.

01-00:20:08

Stauffacher: Well, I remember the UN. In what way are you trying to address that?

Rubens:

Oh, I know that the Labor School put on parties and hosted things and there was just this sense of internationalism and playfulness.

01-00:20:33

Stauffacher: Oh, yes. Well, a—not a scary—I'm walking down an alley; all of a sudden, a march. A whole army of Russian soldiers with their guns. Like this. It was dramatic. Those are the things that I remember. I do remember all these dignitaries coming out of the Opera House. But I never got in there.

Rubens:

Tell me just a little about your memories of Grace.

01-00:21:04

Stauffacher: Well, I never really was close to her, but my brother was much closer to her. She always seemed a very gracious lady, very civilized and poised. Sensitive, not like the directors of museums these days. Most of them are businessmen out looking for money. But she was just the opposite. She was a, really, connoisseur, pushing for modern art and bringing the modern art to San Francisco. I think she was very important.

Rubens:

But Frank felt supported by her?

01-00:21:47

Stauffacher: Oh, yes.

Rubens:

I notice that her name is on the film series in the beginning, and then his name comes afterward.

01-00:21:56

Stauffacher: Well, she writes here in the introduction, before Miller, the forward. She was very instrumental in allowing this thing to happen.

Rubens:

They called her the film curator in '46, and then Frank comes in '47.

Stauffacher:

Yes.

Rubens:

And Frank does it till, I guess, '54.

Stauffacher:

Yes.

Rubens:

Which I will ask you about him particularly because that must have been just a tragedy of immense measure. Is there anything else to say particularly about the museum as a site, as a focus?

01:00:22:49

Stauffacher: I think there's another component we should not forget. The San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, with Pierre Monteux conducting the concerts, and the flow of that music, and the art museum, it all had a very heady environment for young people. I'm not saying all the "Art in Cinema" people went to the symphony. But it was there. It was available, and it didn't cost that much as it does today.

Rubens: Well, let's follow Frank just a bit, and then we'll come back to you. Frank puts this on until '55. By the way, I understand that in Berkeley, there's an art in film extension course. So it's really becoming Bay Area. He then has a brain tumor operation, and then—

01:00:24:03

Stauffacher: Well, no, it was gradual, step-by-step. I think it was 1951, when he was diagnosed.

Rubens: When he was first sick.

01:00:24:14

Stauffacher: I think that you should also interview—maybe you have—Bobbie Stauffacher.

Rubens: I have not, and there's some questions I have about.

Stauffacher: I think she can bring other things that I don't know about.

Rubens: He marries in—?

01:00:24:40

Stauffacher: He married just after I got married, in maybe '49 or '50.

Rubens: After the war.

Stauffacher: I can't remember those dates.

Rubens: I was going to ask you about that later. Because I was wondering if she studied with you know, because she did typography for a while.

01:00:24:55

Stauffacher: Her interest in graphics came from another direction. We have been close at certain times in our lives, but as one grows over the years, you have different priorities.

Rubens: Well, when he died, didn't she move to Paris?

01:00:25:19

Stauffacher: I'm not clear on that.

Rubens: I have noticed also now, this is a little out of order—but I noticed that—is it her daughter, or it may be a daughter of yours; is it Fran? There's a young woman's name, who is listed in some of your publications.

01-00:25:38

Stauffacher: Francesca.

Rubens: Francesca, yes.

Stauffacher: Yes, this is my youngest daughter.

Rubens: That's your daughter.

Stauffacher: Yes.

Rubens: Did you have any other children that were involved?

01-00:25:48

Stauffacher: I have another daughter, and I have a son. But they're middle-age now.

Rubens: But Francesca is the only one who joined the business?

Stauffacher: She got interested here. Now, see I'm a printer and a technician. I hate the word *technician*; a craftsman is a better word. But they're just two worlds. The metal world and the computer world. I was just in that moment in time where the transfer of the technology revolution of the computer began. It was gradually, then by the time the tabletop in the '80s came, everybody had their little—

Rubens: Their own personal computer?

Stauffacher: Yes. It was a really rich period. Then I did consult with the Adobe people.

Rubens: So all right. But Frank's death had to have been just a—

01-00:27:10

Stauffacher: Well, it was a very— You know, when you are at the height of your career.

Rubens: How old was he?

Stauffacher: Thirty-eight. To die of a brain tumor. He was real, you know, very heroic, but it did him in. I'm eighty-five. When I think about him, he did so much in his time. Most of us are quite lazy and incompetent, and he did so much. I remembered him in his friendships with other people. When you think of some of these people that he brought to New York, to San Francisco. Brought Maya Derin from New York. Oskar Fischinger. He brought all these people. They all came. We went down to Hollywood. I went with my brother to have

an interview with Buñuel and Man Ray. They were all so giving. He was liked by these people, and they were supportive of him.

01-00:28:44

I think that he just had that particular chemistry that made things happen, just because you wanted to be part of this creative thing. These artists, a lot of these were refugees from Germany, and they were just stuck in Hollywood. They were ignored. These real artists. Frank gave them an opportunity and an audience, a real audience to look at their work. So that was a lot of that. Hans Richter. God, he was an amazing guy. So all that was part of the—how would you call?—the collage of the richness of that period. It was very open. The poet could talk to the painter; the painter could talk to the sculptor. You go to these art schools now, they all are, “Don’t talk to the painter.” Or, “I’m a painter, I don’t talk to the sculptor.” You know, this rigid classification. But in that time, we all had the same dialogue, the same curiosity, the same—We shared the books and, “Oh, you have to read this book, it’s great!”

Rubens:

But where did this literally happen? I mean, there would be showings at the museum. But then would you come to each other’s studios?

01-00:30:13

Stauffacher: Well, then What’s-his-name copied us. He used to hang out at the place on Columbus.

Rubens:

Café Trieste?

Stauffacher:

No, not the Trieste. This is before the Trieste. It’s the one where all the locals hang out now.

Rubens:

Is this a coffee house you’re talking about?

01-00:30:59

Stauffacher: Yes, it’s famous! I just can’t—[Toscia].

Rubens:

Yes, well, I can’t either. None of us can do it.

Stauffacher:

All right, well, those were the places we’d come out after the show. We wouldn’t stay down near the Civic. We’d come to North Beach. There was Little Joe’s, up the street. There was Vanessi’s. This was the spirit. You could have a studio for twenty bucks a month! So artists and writers could hang out. Sawdust on the floor. A little bottle of wine included with the dinner, which cost a dollar and a half. You could take your girlfriend out. You can’t do that anymore. You have to be a upper-middle-class dude.

Rubens:

Did this yeastiness spill over, then, to your own work? Because it’s in ’49, I think, that is your first catalogue. Well, ’41 is when you publish the Washington Irving; ’46, *Art in Cinema*; ’47, there’s another catalogue you design.

01-00:32:20

Stauffacher: Oh, I want to show you this one. This is the Dynaton show at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

Rubens:

That's '51. I wanted to do a few before then, yes.

01-00:32:30

Stauffacher: Well, I did one with Lee Mullican. I thought I had it here, but I couldn't find it.

Rubens:

I have a Xerox of it.

01-00:32:44

Stauffacher: Yes, this is it, yes. That's it.

Rubens:

Yes. That's '49.

01-00:32:47

Stauffacher: Yes, that's it, yes. See, that flows over.

Rubens:

How did the Mullican show come about? Did you suggest him?

01-00:32:59

Stauffacher: No, well, see, I opened the door for him to the culture and art world of San Francisco. I met Gordon Onslow Ford's wife on a Greyhound bus. Now, this is how things start. No plan. I'm taking a bus from San Mateo to San Francisco. In those days, people took the Greyhound bus to get around. They didn't have cars. I sat next to this beautiful woman. We started talking. She just came up from Mexico. She said "Oh, I want you to meet my husband, the painter. We'll invite you." They'd just come and they had a nice place up in Telegraph Hill. I met them, and we hit it off beautifully. Then Lee comes, and I introduce them to Lee. So here's a picture where you see all of them there, see? There is the one I met on the Greyhound bus.

Rubens:

Then do you bring them to the museum?

01-00:34:21

Stauffacher: Oh, I think, no, they were pretty sophisticated people. Jacqueline. They contacted him, they knew all the people there.

Rubens:

But it's natural that you would then be the publisher of the catalogue.

01-00:34:36

Stauffacher: Well, they wanted me to do it. I'm not the publisher, the museum published it.

Rubens:

That's right, you're the designer and the printer. Just to finish into the fifties: '47, *Art in Cinema*; '48, *Towards a New Subject of Painting*, that's the Gordon Onslow Ford exhibit.

01-00:35:08

Stauffacher: Yes, that's the one. I was looking for it, I couldn't find it.

Rubens: I did see it in the museum. Then '49, the Lee Mullican; '51 is the Dynaton. Then Frank dies in '55. I notice that you get a—

01-00:35:29

Stauffacher: I get a Fulbright.

Rubens: A Fulbright to go to Italy.

Stauffacher: Yes.

Rubens: That had to have been such a juncture in your life.

01-00:35:41

Stauffacher: By that time, I had two kids. Well, my wife had two kids, I didn't have them.

Rubens: What is your wife's name?

01-00:35:54

Stauffacher: Josephine.

Rubens: This is the one who had dance?

Stauffacher: Yes, yes.

Rubens: So your whole family goes to Italy?

01-00:36:01

Stauffacher: I met her in the Opera House. Isn't that romantic?

Rubens: Yes, very.

Stauffacher: Well, I actually met her at the museum.

Rubens: Did you? Oh, now tell that story. Yes.

01-00:36:13

Stauffacher: Yes, now, I hadn't personally met her, but she gave me a program of a symphony. I'd walked by her with my friend. I said, "Oh, God, she's so beautiful!" Then I just took the program and went, and then just remembered. Then maybe a year or so later, a painter friend of mine invited me to an opening at the museum. There I saw her with her father and mother. She's Italian. So she was always chaperoned. So somehow, she comes over and we talk. That is the beginning of the romance. In a year, we got married. North Beach plays a very important part in that romance. Because there's where we go to the café that we can't remember the name. It's right on my lip. She was

driven there by her father and mother. Somehow, we lost contact. So finally, we met at New Joe's and had a hamburger.

Rubens: Oh, so the museum was a place where people came and went?

Stauffacher: Yes.

Rubens: Young people felt they could associate?

01-00:37:57

Stauffacher: It was very open.

Rubens: A magnet.

Stauffacher: Yes. It's not like the museums today. A little different.

Rubens: When these shows opened, when Mullican's show opened—

01-00:38:09

Stauffacher: Yes, they were very modest, but very nice, and very well attended.

Rubens: You're in Italy in '55.

01-00:38:22

Stauffacher: '55 till '58.

Rubens: '58. '58, you then are at Carnegie.

01-00:38:37

Stauffacher: Yes. I got an appointment as assistant professor of typographic design. But you're talking about the culture of San Francisco, specifically of my world. The printing of fine books has had a great tradition here. We have John Henry Nash, we have the Grabhorns, we have many fine craftsmen, bookbinders. That's rather unique. Because San Francisco was a very important place for many, many craftsmen a little after the Gold Rush. Remember the marvelous lithographic stone works with labels and color? These were very fine craftsmen. So there was a real group of people who did beautiful things. But the Grabhorns and the John Henry Nashes were the masters when I was very young.

01-00:39:53

That's why I came to San Francisco, to pick up and smell the art of the book. So through the book, and then through my brother's interest in more visual things and visual arts. But book designing is also visual, very visual, but much more micro. It's not macro. That was part of also the culture of San Francisco. It was not just the museums, it was the different languages, the food, the immigrants and the Italians and all, that just made this whole area special. Down there was the stomach of San Francisco, where the real old market was. The printers were all in one part. All the blue collar workers were all centered

all together. So there was a solidarity of people there. They were not all in business suits.

Rubens: Then you're gone for a while, but you come back.

01-00:41:05

Stauffacher: Yes.

Rubens: You come back, and you have an appointment at Stanford. Is that what really brought you back, or were you ready to come back?

01-00:41:13

Stauffacher: Well, there's a little more complicated reasons, but I think the most basic reason— Since I was born, my mother was born in San Francisco, I enjoyed Pittsburgh. A lot of people would say, "How could you, from Florence, Italy, go to live in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania?" I said, "Now, wait a minute. You don't know what you're talking about." You know, I can live anywhere where I have good friends. I had some great friends in Pittsburgh, but I had a longing to come back. California, since you're born here, there's just certain things you just yearn for. So I thought, after five years, I would.

01-00:42:01

I took this job as art director of the Stanford University Press. But that was a little idealistic. I could design books, but I wanted to be in the world of the scholar, the philosopher, the university, and just have a great time. I was going there also for the university. But little did I know that the university was, oh man, very difficult, in terms of how people—the power bases and the intrigues. Behind the scenes, it was not all idealistic. I got a little bit disappointed. See, I'm a little naïve.

Rubens: Well, so what I noticed is during that time, that you then came and taught a course at the Institute.

01-00:42:56

Stauffacher: Yes, the Art Institute.

Rubens: And got all caught up in the intrigue and all. But you had some wonderful students.

01-00:43:01

Stauffacher: Oh, *great* students.

Rubens: There, you're really teaching your skill. Which I assume you didn't do at Stanford.

01-00:43:10

Stauffacher: One of my top students, I helped get one of those— What do you call those?

Rubens: MacArthur?

Stauffacher: MacArthurs. So many of my other students, I have still good friends, I had them go for their graduate work, to Switzerland, or at Yale. I knew the directors of those schools. So I was constantly interested in communicating and teaching young students.

Rubens: During that period, then, from when you're back. You come to Stanford, '63, I think. Then do you take up again any association with the museum? Because I don't notice a publication coming out of the things at the museum.

01-00:44:02

Stauffacher: My association was purely to go and look at the shows, and the different directors, I knew some of them. There was one fellow—what was his name, Henry Hopkins?

Rubens: Hopkins?

Stauffacher: Yes. Recently, I went down there, a month ago.

Rubens: In Los Angeles, when you did the Mullican?

01-00:44:31

Stauffacher: Yes, the Getty, at the Getty. He was there. I hadn't seen him for a long time. He was a big influence. Not on me, but on the museum.

Rubens: Did you find the vitality of the museum in the sixties?

01-00:44:50

Stauffacher: Well, I *liked* it. There was one guy who, at the end of that period, when they were going to close it and rebuild it, rebuild the—not rebuild, but you know, create—

Rubens: Create the new building?

01-00:45:0f4

Stauffacher: I forget his name, but he was selecting the worst art. I just boycotted the place for a while.

Rubens: Do we want to say anything particularly about the '67 catalogue? The librarian at the San Francisco Museum said that it is among one of the most requested archival—

01-00:45:33

Stauffacher: Which one?

Rubens: This one right here.

Stauffacher: Really?

Rubens: Yes. People are writing from all over. I think they're interested in the show.

01-00:45:43

Stauffacher: But why would they? It's just a pretty straight—

Rubens: Standard catalogue. Yes, exactly.

01-00:45:47

Stauffacher: I think what it is, is the particular artists at that particular moment. Because this is a pivotal moment. These artists then had influence on other artists, I think.

Rubens: de Kooning, Richard Diebenkorn, di Suvero. How is it that you came to print this catalogue?

01-00:46:11

Stauffacher: Oh, I don't know, maybe friends. I have no idea. Robert Irwin, I have done a catalogue with him years later.

Rubens: Later.'85, I know that.

01-00:46:20

Stauffacher: But there's one fellow here that really—if he's here; it's Clyfford Still. Is he in there?

Rubens: Well, actually, he's not in this particular one. But just go on with your memory about him.

01-00:46:31

Stauffacher: Well, Clyfford Still, I met way back, at the Art Institute. I didn't know him very well. Same with Diebenkorn. I knew Diebenkorn. Of course, they're the same generation as I am. Clyfford Still, when I was teaching at Carnegie Tech, he called me up, not from here, but from New York, and said, "I want you to do my catalogue for the Albright Gallery." I said, "Fine." So I did this catalogue. I don't even have a copy. It's so rare. I got a rather bad Xerox of the cover. I tried to do it in the Clyfford Still style, you know. It's very simple, but it has a little of this, but it's not quite that.

Rubens: Well, *Robert Irwin, Being and Circumstance*.

Stauffacher: Yes, I did that.

Rubens: The Lapis Press in conjunction with Pace Gallery. Does Irwin ask you to do it? I'm wondering how this comes about?

01-00:47:45

Stauffacher: By that time, I'd been an old friend of Sam Francis. We went to school together in San Mateo. Grammar school. By accident over the years, I hadn't seen him for a long time, but by that time, he was becoming quite a name in painting, American painting. I met him in an airport, going to Los Angeles.

We hit it off great, and he says, "I want you to help me, Jack. I'm creating this Lapis Press. Actually, Lapis Press was created right here.

Rubens: In this space?

01-00:48:24

Stauffacher: Right in this space. He had a list of people that he was going to work with, and Robert Irwin, I met him through Sam.

Rubens: Because it says, "Lapis Press, in conjunction with the Pace Gallery and SFMOMA."

Stauffacher: Yes.

Rubens: What we haven't talked about—MOMA does have an exhibition in '78 of hand bookbinders of California.

01-00:48:52

Stauffacher: Yes, I did that. Did you see it?

Rubens: I did not see it. Hopkins is the head of the museum at the time.

01-00:49:07

Stauffacher: Now, that was a neat catalogue, I liked that.

Rubens: They didn't have it.

Stauffacher: I have it here somewhere. I'll show it to you—yes.

Rubens: Then the exhibit was literally of your work and other?

01-00:49:21

Stauffacher: No, it wasn't.

Rubens: It wasn't?

Stauffacher: It was just bookbinding.

Rubens: Just bookbinding.

Stauffacher: French, beautiful hand tooled, leathered. I just designed the book.

Rubens: When is your exhibit of works from 800—?

Stauffacher: 300 Broadway?

Rubens: 300 Broadway, yes.

01-00:49:43

Stauffacher: I forget the date. It was in '80? '99?

Rubens: Oh, I have it. '98. '98.

Stauffacher: I'm not sure. You'll have to check that.

Rubens: Is that the first time that your own work was exhibited at the museum?

01-00:50:00

Stauffacher: How that grew and became a possibility to have that, those block wooden letters there, it's a process of time. Some of my friends had seen some of my work, which I call it closet printing of my wooden letters.

Rubens: Closet?

01-00:50:27

Stauffacher: Closet. You know, I'm a closet guy. You know, I don't go and advertise myself. So I had in the closet, all these wooden letters that were given to me when I entered this building in 1966. The Williams Printing Company. They were fading out, their whole old poster, wooden poster business. In those days, the posters were very vernacular. You know, they were very simple. Political posters, names. They look now, they have a their own people's honesty art. I mean, it's not art, but the graphic artists take to it. They just love it.

Rubens: Well, yes, the whole Fillmore scene.

Stauffacher: Yes, yes.

Rubens: Pop.

01-00:51:25

Stauffacher: No, I'm talking about the more primitive period. The wooden letters were just announced the dates of the events. They'd slap them on walls, they'd put them everywhere. They were phasing out that business here. So I went down. He said, "Here, you want some of the letters, Jack?" "Sure." So I took those letters and brought them up here, and they have been here ever since. Out of that, I started to play with them. That is the—if you could call it—I don't like to call it *art*, I like to call it *craft*, a sensibility of color and form and shape. If you want to call it art, ok, that's fine, I'm not going to argue with it, but I'm not an artist in that sense. I'm a craftsman, I'm a typographer, a printer.

01-00:52:21

I must keep that identity, because if people say, because they're still puzzled. They say, "What do you do, Mr. Stauffacher?" "I'm a typographer." "What's that?" "I'm also a book designer." "Books get designed?" Now, people are just so dumbed down by not thinking. Everything, everything we have, even if

it's bad, somebody human has to make a decision. I'm not going to say it's always good.

Rubens: Sure. So how did the decision come about to exhibit your work?

Stauffacher: My brother was also a very fine painter, illustrator.

Rubens: I didn't know that.

01-00:53:18

Stauffacher: That sketch of the polo players of San Mateo, I think it's just *beautiful*. Anyway, getting back.

Rubens: About how the exhibit came about, in '98.

01-00:53:49

Stauffacher: First I had a show at San Jose State College. My friend Chuck Byrne was very instrumental in having this particular show of my so-called "artistic" book design and wooden letters. This was beautifully put together. I have never had a more beautiful show in my life. That stirred up some interest. Then I started to work on the first show that was at the Museum of Modern Art. They came to see the show at a little gallery I had up in North Beach. They liked it. They purchased the portfolio. And unknown to me, they had a show of me, of my work.

Rubens: That's the '98.

01-00:54:48

Stauffacher: Then they had another group show a year or two ago that I had some of my work in, which is a different sequence.

[Begin Audiofile 2]

02-00:00:01

Rubens: I saw that you did several things for the Fine Arts Museum.

Stauffacher: Oh, yes, I did.

Rubens: Were they more like to have you do catalogues than the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art?

Stauffacher: Yes, I did more for them. The big and most important was the impressionist. Because that's big time. Then I did other ones, a little more minor than that. The more recent one was the one on the book. Did you see that? That I'm very proud of. It's...

Rubens: Artist Books from the Modern Era?

02-00:01:20

Stauffacher: Yes, just pull that out.

Rubens: Oh. Oh, that's beautiful.

02-00:01:24

Stauffacher: Now, that, I'm *very* proud of that one.

Rubens: Oh, from the Reva and Logan exhibit. Did they have more money? Are they interested in more finely designed and printed catalogues?

02-00:01:48

Stauffacher: Well, I can't answer that. I think each one has their own priorities and their focus. I can't tell you.

Rubens: Yes. We have to focus on the modern for now. Then there was a second show. I don't have the dates of that. I have '98 was the show of just your wooden blocks.

02-00:02:12

Stauffacher: Yes, and then there was a show more recently... 2004, I believe, at the museum. It was a group show about the letter. The love of, the beauty of the letter. Did you see that one at all?

Rubens: I didn't. I didn't see that one.

02-00:02:37

Stauffacher: I was given the best place to show my work. As you walked up the stairs, the department of architecture and design is on the second floor, I believe. You walk up, I have got a beautiful picture here of it. There you see all along that one wall. In the meantime, they have a documentary film on the Greenwood Press. This is a must that you must see.

Rubens: Of course! I would have seen it, if they had told me about it.

02-00:03:23

Stauffacher: So they have it there, and if you ask them, they'll show it to you, because it's right back of that main wall. They have films on art, and they'll show them to you.

Rubens: How did that show come about? The show on letters.

02-00:03:46

Stauffacher: They invited me.

Rubens: They invited you. Good. So I mentioned Francesca. Because I saw she did the Irwin book with you. She did a couple of books.

02-00:03:58

Stauffacher: Yes, she set the type on the computer.

Rubens: Then the Judy Dater *Cycles*, '94.

Stauffacher: Have you seen that book?

Rubens: I have seen that book, yes.

Rubens: Is there anything else you'd like to say about what you have enjoyed about the museum?

02-00:05:1

Stauffacher: Well, I think it was a place where like spirits came together and shared their particular focuses on art. In the true creative sense. It was so alive. When I go to the new museum, there is a different aliveness. I'm an older man, so I tend to keep my memories in full view because those were moments when I met so many marvelous people, who no longer are here. So it's all in flux. I can maybe count the amount of people that can still remember that in a lively way. They're no longer here.

02-00:06:49

Darrin, who's my friend there at the department of architecture and design, has found my work interesting. So it's come back into my world. Now at the end, my very abstract things tell a story about my own aesthetic as a typographer. I think it really resonates, I think, at why the museum has not forgotten me. That's why I have these younger people who like my work.

02-00:07:42

They'll put it, and have a show. They bought my portfolios, they have bought monoprints. So they are in the archive there, and they're in their collection, so I'm very proud—and my brother would be very proud—that I have that there, because he's part of that, too. It's a legacy, the history of our involvement with the museum. Much more than the other ones that would—I think they're more aloof. I mean, they'll consider my work not art. *Craft*. That's ok. Fine.

[End of Interview]