

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

KATHAN BROWN  
Founder, Crown Point Press

Interviews conducted by  
Jess Rigelhaupt  
in 2007

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**Interview #1: March 29, 2007**

[Begin Audio File 1 03-29-2007.mp3]

01-00:00:07

Rigelhaupt:

Ok, it's March 29, 2007. I'm in San Francisco doing an oral history interview with Kathan Brown. We were going to begin with you talking a little bit about the background of the Crown Point Press.

01-00:00:20

Brown:

Well, I started Crown Point Press in 1962. It was really a workshop for myself and my friends. And I, with my husband at the time, Jeryl Parker, we got a storefront in Richmond. We had an open studio with a press, and artists could come and work there, who already knew something about it. We had been in the Bay Area for some time and had relationships, really friendships, with several printmakers already. So it was just a way of having a place to work. We were running a life drawing session at the press at the time. Every week we would have a live model come in, and all of us would draw right on the copper plate. So it was the early sixties, '62. I was very interested in the idea of the figurative work that had been started, really inspired by Diebenkorn, Richard Diebenkorn, going from his abstract work into figurative work. And there were a lot of these figure workshops around the Bay Area, but ours was the only one where people were really drawing on metal. I was very surprised and excited one day to get a telephone call from Richard Diebenkorn, saying that he had heard that I had the situation where people could draw on metal, for etching, and he would like to try that. And I said, "Sure, great." He wanted to know if he could join. [laughs] So he showed up, and he came quite a lot, quite a while there, doing it every week. But he only really wanted one print, and he was hopeless at printing them. I tried to teach him how to print, and he'd just make a big mess. And he only wanted one anyway. It turned out the reason for it was that he felt like he was maybe a little facile, in a way—he was a wonderful draftsman, actually—and that the resistance of the metal was an obstacle. It was the obstacle that was interesting to him. Eventually, I started printing them. Then he would see something at home or—He used the etching as a kind of a crutch or a process that helped him to think. And sometimes if he got stuck with a painting, he would take a copper plate and copy the painting on there—the profile, the figure that was in there and so on—because it would change it into this other medium. It gets it into the bones of the work, as he said, when you worked with this process, which is directly carving into the metal. And that's really all he was doing. He was not using acid, he was using drypoint, which is just simply taking the tool and making a scratch on the metal, with all the resistance of the metal. With etching, you don't have to worry so much about the resistance of the metal, because the acid does the work. Do you want me to stop once in a while, or—[laughs]

01-00:03:53

So he did a lot of plates, both in his own studio, from plates that he had taken there, and at Crown Point. Eventually, there were more than a hundred of them there, and no one had done anything with them, except I'd printed one or two for him to look at. So I said, "You know, we should really publish this." So that was my first publication. He whittled it down to forty-one. *41 Etchings Drypoints*, it was called. By that time, I had talked him into trying etching and using the acid, so we had both of them in there. He put them in a sequence that he liked. It was a bound book. We printed half the edition, which was twenty-five, as loose prints, a portfolio, because we figured that would be the way people might prefer to buy them. But to him and to me, the bound book was really the artwork, because it was all about the way he put it together, and the formal sequence, really, of the book. As you page through it, the experience builds.

01-00:05:14

Then while I was still working on his book, I thought, this is such a great idea, that we can have these projects, we could have these things that we're making, you know. I had just seen a show in San Francisco at the Art Unlimited Gallery, which was the same gallery I was in, Wanda Hansen had. And it was Wayne Thiebaud. I hadn't heard of him; I don't think very many people had. This was in '64, I think. So I invited him. I just called him up and invited him to come and work, to do a project with etchings that the Crown Point Press would publish. And so he did. That's another story. I learned so much from Diebenkorn and Thiebaud. I was very, very lucky to start out with them. These two stories, I've told in my books and other places, because I really learned how to make a workshop of this type, where the artists are using the piece of metal as a piece of paper, really; using it because of the energy it has, to do work that's completely original. With Diebenkorn, there were certain ways or attitudes he had about how to work in the studio and what role I should have, which was not what they call collaboration, which is a word that's often used in this printmaking world. To him, that was not really it. He wanted it completely to be his work. He just wanted my help, that's all. because it was something he couldn't do. He tried to print, and he couldn't do it. So I always took that attitude from then on in, with everybody. I think the artists really do appreciate it. With Thiebaud, he really didn't want any comments. He made that very clear. He didn't want anybody saying, "Well, that's great," while he was working or anything, because it throws you off, he says. You know, you've just got to think it through yourself. So I, since then, always teach my printers, never comment that's good or bad. Obviously, you're not going to comment that it's bad, so don't say anything good either, unless they ask you. [chuckles] So those two artists really did set the framework for how Crown Point Press grew. Eventually, we did have a book of Thiebaud's and a book of Diebenkorn's. Both of them were half in bound prints and half in books. Then I realized, uh-oh, if you're going to publish something, you've got to try to sell it. The selling of it was what was really tough. Making it was great, and fun and exciting; but when I actually went out to try to sell it, that's where the museums come in. So that was really the very start of the press.

01-00:08:27

Since then, you probably know, we've grown and we moved to Oakland into a larger place, at some point. I also worked for other publishers doing what we call job printing during the seventies, because I did find it so difficult to sell things—I couldn't make a go of publishing. I was supporting the press by teaching and having workshops in the studio that people would pay to come to. And at some point, with some publishers, I never got paid for the work that I was doing in printing for them. I was supporting a young child; I was a single mother at that point. I was ready to give it up. Then by accident, I got connected with—that's another whole story, which I don't know if you want. [chuckles]

Rigelhaupt:

Please.

01-00:09:24

Brown:

The big change, which came in, I believe it was seventy—I guess it was the early seventies. '72 was when we first worked with Sol LeWitt. I can never remember dates. I've never been able to. But it may've been '71 or '72, probably '71. So that would mean that it would've been late sixties, '69 or '70, that Wayne Thiebaud was contacted by Bob Feldman of Parasol Press, a publisher in New York, print publisher. First of all, you have to know the difference between printing and publishing. When you print something, you have a workshop, and you make it possible for the artists to do it, and help them, and produce the plates, and print the edition. But you don't usually invite the artist. The publisher gets the artist, and pays. Then they take care of selling it, and it's their problem whether they sell it or not, because they just pay you what you charge for your time. Thiebaud had a project that he wanted to do with a publisher in New York. At the time, really nobody—Etching was just considered to be these little scratchy lines on copper plates. Nobody liked etching. Tamarind Workshop was just starting out—that was supported by the Ford Foundation—and there was a lot of emphasis on lithography, publicity for Tamarind and so on. And other artists were doing lithography because of Tamarind. Everybody thought etching was dead, I think. Or a lot of people did. It was still alive in a few schools. So when Parasol, Bob Feldman asked Thiebaud to do this project, he said, "We want you to do lithographs and silkscreens." Thiebaud said, no, he really wanted to have everything in the portfolio. He wanted to do woodcut, too, and etching. So he did this big portfolio with prints from all four processes, and he asked that I do the etchings. But Feldman insisted that these be in color. He felt he couldn't sell anything unless it was in color. So we set out, Thiebaud and I, to do a large color print in etching. And we did. It was tough to do, because I didn't know how to steel face plates at that time, and it was very tough to keep the colors clear. It's a technical problem that happens with this medium. But we did two—several. It may've been more than two, but there were at least two big color etchings in the group. Feldman was just bowled over. He had never seen etchings that looked like that. He didn't have any idea they could. He liked them better than all the other prints that Thiebaud had done for the portfolio with the other mediums. This isn't actually surprising, because etching really

does look better, when you put it up against any other thing, a woodcut or a lithograph. There's a real physical reason. Every kind of printing that exists is a surface against a surface, except intaglio printing, which is what etching is, where it prints from the downside of the mark you've made. You've actually carved out your plate, and you're filling the grooves of the plate with ink. Then the paper is molded down into that to print it. You pull it off, and the paper and the print are integral to each other from that time on. So there is an energy there, and a precision, that is not possible in any other way of printing. Etching is more time consuming, it's true; but it sure does look better. So it wasn't surprising, once Feldman got all these prints of Thiebaud's together for this portfolio, he liked the etchings best. So he thought it was me. Maybe to a small extent, it was, [chuckles] but it was probably the process. Anyhow, he started to send New York artists out. He wanted me to do it. He paid me for my time, but he published the work. This worked out really well, because I met some wonderful artists. Sol LeWitt was the first one. They weren't really well known at that time, as they are now. But they did become some of the major artists of that generation. It was Robert Ryman, Chuck Close, Brice Marden and others. So I was able to get connected to the real New York art world.

01-00:14:33

The other thing that happened about that time, in the late seventies, I was doing publishing of my own some. I never really let it go completely. I was mostly working for Parasol during the seventies, but I did do a few of my own projects. I did a project with Bruce Conner. Local people. And more with Diebenkorn. And a project with Fred Martin and a project with Tom Marioni. I invited those people as local artists who were really good and respected. Sometimes I found out that they were respected outside our own world here. For instance, I discovered Tom Marioni because Sol LeWitt suggested that Lucy Lippard come and see me when she was in town. She had just been to his studio. She's a famous art critic from New York. She wasn't famous then, but she had just been to his studio. I hadn't heard of him. He's a conceptual artist, and had been in San Francisco a long time. She said, oh, she was very surprised. And she said, "That's the most interesting work being done out here." So I did try to find him, and I did invite him to work at the press. Then eventually, we got together and we got married, and so he is my husband now. A lot of the attitudes that I had about conceptual art have come from some advice or other from him. But he's always been completely separate from the press. So history, if we're just going to run through quickly the whole section—

Rigelhaupt:

Well, can I jump backwards a little bit? That first book you made with Diebenkorn. I'm trying to visually picture the size, because some were bound and some were loose. How big was—

01-00:16:38

Brown:

Well, the sheet was the same all the way through. They were about that big.

Rigelhaupt: So a large coffee table size book.

01-00:16:45

Brown:

Yeah, it looked like that. I had the idea from the beginning that I wanted to do books, because that was something I was interested in in my own work, and I had already actually done one of my own, and some others. Because when I learned etching, I was in London. I studied at the Central School of Art in London, where I learned etching. I had actually been to Antioch College for my undergraduate, but I went to London as one of those kind of like year abroad things. Then I went back, after I graduated, for more etching. So anyway, when I was studying in London, I lived near the British Museum, and I would, on the way home, walk through there and usually stop in the print room, where all the students had a pass, and get out, ask for a book, old books. I was very enamored with old books with prints in them. So the book idea was mine, and then the artists got interested in this sequential thing. It was almost like a filmstrip to them. Most of them didn't want a text, but they were very interested in the idea of the sequence. So that's where that came from. Later on, I decided I *wasn't* interested in books of that sort—like you said, a large coffee table book—because it seemed like people, they didn't know what to do with it. It was too precious for the coffee table, and it was too big [laughs] for the book shelf. And you know, you'd just look at it once and put it away, if you had it. Then some people wanted to cut it up and take pages out because they wanted to frame them, and then they felt bad about that. It just didn't seem like a form that was really practical. Then I started, in terms of my own work, to think more about doing some kind of a book that would just be a book that wouldn't be expensive. Anyway, that's another story. [comments between them; recording stops, re-starts]

Rigelhaupt:

So you were describing, just a minute ago, the early on, very close connections to publishing, as well.

01-00:19:32

Brown:

Yes, the idea of publishing and trying to sell things.

Rigelhaupt:

Can you talk a little bit about who you were working with? You said it was a publisher in New York?

01-00:19:44

Brown:

Yes, in New York, and that was in the seventies. But there was a whole decade that I ran the press and did publish the Diebenkorn and the Thiebaud books and a couple of others before I got hooked up with Parasol Press. I never completely stopped publishing, even when I was working mainly for Parasol. But then in '77, I made a decision that I wanted to publish more seriously. Part of it was because Bob Feldman—He and I had a very good relationship, but I never suggested any artists to him. He got his own artists, and he had his own idea. But I did want to work with Diebenkorn again. He had moved down to Southern California by then, and he had become more well-known. At that time, that whole early time, he was not known, really,

outside California, by anybody much. But when Brice Marden came out, he was eager to meet Diebenkorn, and I introduced him. I also introduced Thiebaud and Diebenkorn to each other. They did not know each other before they met at Crown Point. So Diebenkorn, the people that knew his work, many of them really appreciated it. But the ones who didn't appreciate it, didn't. And Bob Feldman was one of the ones who didn't. So even though I suggested that he might want to publish him, he didn't want to. And I did. I had to get him to come back up here from Southern California to work with me, which he eventually did in '77, and helped me, really, to start—That project started a different frame of mind. It wasn't that I totally stopped working for Parasol, but I did really seriously sit down and try to conceive how to make a publishing program that would work, and to think about it as a business for the first time, in a way. My husband, my first husband Jeryl Parker, he and I had the press at the very beginning in Richmond, in the storefront; but he didn't really do much for the press, because he was teaching at California College of Arts and Crafts [now California College of Arts]. It was my baby from the start. But eventually he left and we split up. Then he came back and he wanted a job. He wanted to work at Crown Point at that point, and so we did that. [We were] separated at that time. Then he moved to New York and wanted to set up his own press. So I kind of gave him Parasol Press. I said, "I don't want to do so much work for Parasol anymore; you want to start your own press in New York." So that's what happened. So although I was doing a little bit of finishing things with Parasol, most of their projects were going, at that point, to Jeryl. I really jumped into the deep water and tried to start a serious business of publishing at that point. I had had enough experience with trying to sell the earlier prints that I'd done that I knew that I couldn't do it. So I hired somebody as a salesperson. That's the first person I had hired, except I had had printers, mostly people that I had trained at the Art Institute when I was teaching there. They were students, earlier than that. But now I started to seriously train master printers, and I started to seriously build the business. I took a couple of seminars in how you start a business and how you do it and all that. So that was when—'77 was kind of the—

01-00:23:51

Then in '78, a friend of mine from San Francisco—I still didn't have the salesperson at that time; I hadn't hired anybody, but I'd planned to. But it was just a friend of mine from San Francisco, Helene Fried, and my son, who was about—I don't know how old he was, twelve, thirteen. We went over to the European art fairs, and we had a booth in Basel, [laughs] the big art fair. I knew a lot of people through Parasol and through the artists that I'd worked with for Feldman, so I was able to finagle that. That was '78. We presented a very quiet group of people. It was Pat Steir, John Cage, Tom Marioni, and Richard Diebenkorn. And it was, well, not exactly a big hit, because those were people that people didn't really know. But they did like the printing, and there was a tremendous energy just about being at Basel. So that was the kind of start. We had a sponge. It was, you know, one of those flat ones, compressed. You could buy them from advertising suppliers. And they had a little legend on it. It said something like, "Dip in water, watch the action."

And then you printed your name and address underneath. So it said that, and it was flat, like a calling card sponge; it says, “Dip in water, watch the action,” and then, “Crown Point Press.” That was symbolic of how we expected to grow. So that was the beginning of the program that you see here now as the fruition. We’re in 2007 now, so it has become a big thing. And I’m very happy about that.

Rigelhaupt: So from early on, were artists that had come and print here, were they showing their prints around in galleries, museums?

01-00:26:14

Brown: Well, if you’re publishing, the publisher tries to get shows, if you can. We did that, and Bob Feldman did that for his group. But I don’t know now, at this point. We aren’t cultivating lots of little shows. We have small editions. This system I’ve got really is small editions, and we sell them directly to people; and we also sell them to galleries at a discount, and they then make some money when they resell it. But they only buy the things that they want to buy, naturally. So we do need to build our own audience. That was part of the idea.

Rigelhaupt: And so that’s starting in ’77, is that about right?

01-00:27:13

Brown: I think that’s when I started to seriously do that, yes. The museums, it’s a complicated thing. I know you’re interested in the relationship with the museum, and we could go into that. Early on—I guess I have to tell you this story about the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. You know, I’ve told it before. This was when I first did the Diebenkorn and the Thiebaud projects. We’d published those, both of them, in 1965. I didn’t know what to do. [laughs] Well, we had to sell them, so the first thing I did was to go around to the museums with them. The Achenbach Foundation [for Graphic Arts] did buy them. The Oakland Museum [of California] did too, as I recall. But the San Francisco Museum—They were a hundred dollars apiece, the prints in them. Well, the Diebenkorns, there were forty-one of them. So it was like three-thousand or something like that for the whole thing, because there were forty-one of them in there. And with Thiebaud, there were seventeen, so it was like fifteen-hundred dollars or something like that. But when we sold the individuals, we tried to sell them for a hundred dollars apiece. We couldn’t. No one would—I mean, they were very hard to sell at a hundred dollars apiece, at that time. But I offered them to the museums for a lot less, because I wanted them in the collection there, and I thought that would be a good way to start. I think that it was something like the Thiebaud book, which was seventeen etchings—I could check this, but I think it was \$300 that I offered it to the San Francisco Museum for. That’s what the Oakland Museum paid, and the Achenbach. The San Francisco Museum said they didn’t want it, because I had printed them. They only wanted prints that the artists had printed. So [laughs] you know. So they didn’t get those. But the reason was because they had a board member who was a print collector. He had very high principles

about that the artists had to touch the plate and the artists had to print it. There still is a sort of a movement along those lines in this world, in this print world now, although it's pretty well collapsed by now. But at the time, it was very strong. I confess that I could've been easily a part of that at a certain point, because I was definitely a printmaker myself. But the way ours were done were so much about the artists doing all the drawing on the plate, and my assistance, basically, in order to get it done, including the printing. I think another reason for it—I don't blame the museum. I think in its sophistication, the guy was more sophisticated, in a way, about printmaking than the other people, in a certain way. Although I guess the Achenbach was the most sophisticated, because they'd gone completely beyond that, and understood the two streams. But anyway, I think that the problem was, at that time, that really, most people didn't think prints were really art. They were worried that they were getting ripped off in some way, because there were a lot of prints out there done by galleries down in Fisherman's Wharf, of Dali, for instance, where he signed the paper before anybody even printed anything on it, and then they printed a reproduction of a [Salvador] Dali work on there and sold it for a lot of money. That still does happen, I think, occasionally, but it's pretty easy to spot it now. Maybe it wasn't so easy then. But I couldn't convince them, even though I showed them how we did it and everything. So the museum missed out on that one.

Rigelhaupt: Well, if we stay with the museum for a second, do you remember the first time you went to the museum, and what your impressions were?

01-00:31:40

Brown:

You mean here, the San Francisco Museum? Sure. They used to do the annuals for the [San Francisco] Art Institute. It was over in the Civic Center, and they had some wonderful paintings, and we used to go there. There was a print collector there, Anneliese Hoyer. She was the one that wanted to buy these things. She was a great, nice lady, you know. She was very welcoming and interested and so on. They had a little bit of a print collection, I think. But I can't remember seeing anything there. We used to go the Achenbach for the prints. Günter Troche was the print person there. They were very supportive. He was very supportive of Crown Point when we first started, as was Therese Heyman in Oakland, as I said. They bought the early things. That gave me a really good push, a really good feeling, you know. I'm happy that they were doing that. Then later, Sue Foley, Suzanne Foley was a supporter of ours, and bought some things for the San Francisco Museum. She was interested in what we were doing, and involved with that. But then at a certain point—I think it was when Van Deren Coke got there as the photography curator—they had—He wanted more room for the photographs, and he wanted more storage room and drawers. So there was a movement afoot to give all their prints, or somehow dispose of all their prints to the Achenbach, because the argument was that they should only do what they could really do well, and that they shouldn't bother with prints since they didn't have that many. Suzanne Foley, she was sort of a general curator, but she had the prints by default somehow.

But she liked them. She had bought some good ones, not only from us, but from other good publishers in New York and so on. She didn't really want them to do that. So she asked Henry Hopkins if he would see me, to try to make a case that they shouldn't give up their print collection, which I did. They didn't. I don't know if there were other people that argued it, too; probably, there were. But what I said—and I believe this very much, and I think it's coming to pass—is that you can use prints. You don't have to just only have print shows and put all the prints in a little row in the hallway. You can put a print in a main show with a—Maybe you don't happen to have a work by a particular artist, a major work by them, but you want to include them in a show that has some historical purpose or that has some connection. I've seen it [laughs] in New York museums; the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] has always done that. At the time, our museum didn't but they do it now, here at the museum. I notice that every once in a while you see a print included in a show with drawings, or drawings and paintings, as a work that the artist did. It's small, usually, but it's there, and it can represent that artist very nicely. That's why you shouldn't give up your print collection, if you've got a good one. You've got a lot of stuff there that you can keep in drawers. Anyway, that was my argument.

Rigelhaupt: Well, what was your impression of the role the museum was playing, say in the early to mid seventies, in relationship to artists in the Bay Area?

01-00:36:01

Brown: You know, I'm so bad at dates, I can never frame exact dates of anything. But the feeling that I have about the San Francisco Museum was that when Gerald Nordland was there, it was very much about San Francisco artists, and when Henry Hopkins was there it was about L.A., and San Francisco in a certain way. But when Peter Selz came out here from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, he discovered the group of artists he called Funk artists, which was [William] Wiley and [Robert] Hudson and Manuel Neri and Joan Brown. They were doing something really pretty nifty, where they were working with this—It was very anti-New York. It had humor, which nobody in New York was allowed at that time. I knew that, because I'd been working with these minimal artists, [laughs] you know. They didn't, any of them, have much humor in their work, although they might've had it in their person. In fact, they really—Mel Bochner was very adamant that you couldn't possibly have humor in art. He made a big argument about how it could damage art [laughs] to have anything humorous in it. I remember him and Tom Marioni having a big argument about it, because Tom's work was always based in humor. Anyway, there was humor always in the Bay Area, and the Funk artists were part of it. That was what was emphasized from Henry. But there was really something else going on here that was vital, and as Lucy Lippard pointed out, that was really new, and seen by other people in the art world, in Europe especially, with Tom. He and his circle—There were a number of others. Terry Fox, Howard Fried and Paul Kos are ones who come to mind, and Bonnie Sherk, Linda Montano—there were a couple of women involved in

that group. Tom went over to the Edinburgh Festival. It was the Richard DeMarco Gallery. When I first met Tom that was what he was doing. He was invited back to many festivals at the time, for the kind of conceptual art that he was doing, which also had to do with humor, actually. He extended that. But the San Francisco Museum would have nothing to do with that. They really didn't want to know. [laughs] So there was always a little bit of a—Because I had gotten friendly with Tom at that point, I was a little annoyed with that, too. But then Sue Foley, because she came over to see the prints—And through the prints, in some way, she got to know Tom's work. Then she realized what was going on. And so she did a show called "Space, Time, Sound: The Seventies" [*Space/Time/Sound—1970s: A Decade in the Bay Area, 1979*]. It was sort of at the end of the seventies. She documented all these alternative art space kind of things. Tom's was the first. He had developed the Museum of Conceptual Art; in 1970, he founded it here. Then there were others that kind of sprung off from it, and a lot of the performance work in that catalogue, in that show. Hopkins actually fired her, as I understand it. Anyway, she left right after that show. They were furious. The board didn't like it. So there was not an attempt to understand something really home grown—Because there was conceptual art in the East Coast. Very important. But it was mainly language. And systems. I mean, Sol LeWitt defined conceptual art. I had worked with him, I knew him. Tom knew him, too. He would come here frequently. He came quite a lot, to do projects for Parasol at that time. He was my first New York artist. Still a really, really close friend. So it was clear to me. I knew what that was. And Mel Bochner and a lot of the [work] called conceptual.

01-00:40:53

Tom's definition of the way conceptual art laid out in those days was that there were three approaches: language, systems, and action. Language was pretty much in England (that was its main center), and also in New York, with [Joseph] Kosuth and so on. And Robert Barry. We did, actually, prints with Robert Barry early on. And then systems was LeWitt and others like Hans Haacke centered in New York. And action was developed here in San Francisco, using real time and without theatrics. The action part of it in New York was not really so strong. They had something called happenings, which Tom doesn't really think of as conceptual art, because it mixed with dance and theater. There was the Fluxus group, which was in Europe and came out of Dada. But all these things were interlaced. It was the time. It was the foundation of a lot of the young art that you're seeing today. That's where it started. Tom and the people here were instrumental. He had done this piece in 1970 at the Oakland Museum called *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art*. That was what the art critic on the paper said was, "Art to make one foam at the mouth." And [laughs] they really did. The San Francisco Museum foamed at the mouth about it. They really hated it. But it had a tremendous influence. There's a whole social interaction genre of art that's come along since. In every big international show these days, some young artist builds a bar. He was really the first one to do it. So later on, it became clear. But Hopkins himself just didn't see it. I think that was part of it.

I guess the trustees found it upsetting. Also, Tom also pulled what was called a prank [laughs] in 1973, when Nordland left. They couldn't find a new director for a long time. I don't know, a year? They were looking for a director and looking for a director. Tom had started the Museum of Conceptual Art in 1970, which he had in a big open space. It would do shows, which turned out to be important shows. One was called "Sound Sculpture As," which was probably the first sound sculpture show ever. And "All Night Sculptures," which was performances that went on all night. Things like that were historic shows, going on in his museum. It was the first alternative art space in the country. That's been documented now. But he called it a museum, because he had this grand idea about having this new kind of a museum that would be involved with art that was concept based. So when the SF Museum was looking and looking for a new director for so long, he sent out a card, saying that, "The San Francisco Museum is pleased to announce the appointment of Thomas Marioni as director." Anybody should've been able to guess that it wasn't the museum's card, because [laughs] it was a little bit funky. But they didn't. Apparently there were a lot of people upset about it. The card is now in the collection of the San Francisco Museum, so they've gotten over it now. But at the time, I think it upset them. [laughs]

01-00:44:32

I mean, my business with Crown Point Press was always entirely separate. But I was connected to Tom. I was also connected to these artists, these minimal and conceptual artists in New York, that the SF Museum didn't care about at the time. I liked Wiley, too. We published Wiley in 1978. Wiley appreciated Tom a lot always, from the beginning. The two of them still are good friends. Anyway, eventually the museum did get a new director, Henry Hopkins. Then there was a whole cycle of directors who were always coming from outside. They hired people from outside the community here, from the East Coast. It swung completely to the opposite. From being a very local museum, where they had local shows, mostly by one group of artists, to an international museum that showed all the artists that everybody in New York and other places were showing and almost completely neglected local artists. So there was a big feeling for a long time that local artists were being neglected. I think they did neglect us, too, and still do. Museum people coming from outside the Bay Area don't generally make much effort—I mean, they don't visit the galleries much so far as I can tell.

Rigelhaupt:

Just so I'm clear on language, when you say publish, does that mean a run of prints, or also in a book?

01-00:46:21

Brown:

Well, it does mean both things. But in the case of Crown Point Press, what we're known for is publishing etchings. With us, the way it works is that we invite an artist to come here. They spend two weeks; it's a residency program, as some people have described it. I never thought of that word until pretty recently, when somebody described it that way, because all these nonprofits have this language. But yes, that's what it is. We bring them here, we put

them up. And they come from all over the world, really. For example, we brought Günther Brus, who is an Austrian artist, to San Francisco in 1978. Anyway, so we did start right early on with our publishing program, bringing somebody from overseas, as well as doing a couple of local people and a couple from New York. But, yes, publishing means you invite them, they come and they work in the studio, they do whatever amount of work is appropriate for the amount of time and their idea. Sometimes we have to bring them back to finish something, but usually we manage to fit it into the time. Then after that, we sell it. That means doing maybe a book about it or a brochure. Usually, we've done something. We did interviews called *View* for a long time, which have been kind of important, I think, in the art world because they're really in depth interviews with the artists about their work. Then we stopped that and started doing the *Overview*, which is an essay about the work, and color pictures of the prints. It's a little more focused on the prints. The *Views* were more general, talking about their work overall. So those, we've also published. But the chief thing was to publish the prints, and then the other things were supportive works. We've also published some books. We published a book of John Cage's prints, with a text by me that talked about how he set them up and how he did them. I've always had this kind of mission to make prints—[pause] You know, make them useful for people, understandable for people. Of course, I've always wanted to promote the artists that I have invited. I think hard about who they should be, and then once I take them on, I do everything I can for them—to let other people know about them, more than anything, just because I'm so excited about and enthusiastic about their work. One thing that I have tried to do is, for each artist, to see the position of that artist in the world, in the world art scene. I never invite an artist just because the work is pretty or nice. I think even with people that are very young or just starting out, I still think I see that they fit in somewhere in the big picture. So it's kind of seeing that whole picture. So that you do need to have some words, to let people know that. It's good to put the pictures out, but whenever we've been able to afford it, we've done supporting words, which means publishing a book or a brochure or something, or a magazine. We did a magazine called *Vision*, which was really Tom Marioni's project, that he edited and put together, but Crown Point published. But it included the work of a lot of the artists that we've worked with, and so I kind of justified it that way. But he did it his way. That was an important thing in the art scene, too. So yes, we've done two kinds of publishing. But the main thing is the etchings, and that's what we're known for.

Rigelhaupt: The books, then, they also make the artist, and some of the images from the etchings, more accessible.

01-00:50:43

Brown: Yes, that's right. We've included the etchings along with their other work, which is part of the mission I have is that, yes, these are real artworks, and you can see them side by side. So sometimes we've done that. But more recently, our overview is focused on presenting the particular project that we

did, which is just the prints. Once in a while we'll do something different, that'll include other works of the artist.

Rigelhaupt: So going back to talking a little bit more about conceptual art and the relationship to the Museum of Modern Art here in San Francisco, do you remember about when and how that artwork became more accepted, more a part of the collection of the museum?

01-00:51:36

Brown:

Well, as I said, you should really talk to Tom about that, because [laughs] he knows all of it. He's got a very clear—And he wrote a book, which we published, called *Beer, Art and Philosophy*. DAP, D-A-P, distributed it, but Crown Point actually published it. He talks about the museum and the story of conceptual art in the museum at that time, in that book. But I don't know, you know. I really do think it came backwards from the curators appreciating the conceptual art of, first, New York, and then maybe Europe, and then they realized that this had existed here. I don't know what ever happened to all those catalogues of that "Space, Time, Sound" show that Sue Foley did. They were never seen in the museum bookstore, [laughs] after the show closed. Crown Point bought a bunch of them, and we actually still have a few. We've been selling them in our bookstore ever since. But I guess the museum bookstore must've thrown them out, I don't know. They're around, but they're rare and hard to find. Actually, they sell for a lot of money now. But that did document something that really happened here. The art the museum shows still is mostly coming from the East Coast. It's easier to deal with, actually, because it's got more press. Good stuff. I mean, the LeWitt show they had, for instance, was great. That wouldn't have been possible before it happened. By the time that happened, they were ready for it. Brice Marden is just having a show now. When I worked with him, it was 1972, and this is 2007. So they're just starting to catch up, [laughs] you know? The only reason they took that is because it was such a big thing in New York. The same thing with Richard Tuttle. You know, it went to all the best museums in the country. It was a wonderful show, really exciting. I think it's great that they did it. But I don't know if it was entirely without criticism, to do those shows, even the Marden. I noticed they paired it with Picasso, so they could get some business. So there is a little bit different premise or different attitude in museums than in galleries. Galleries are in the forefront. They have to, they want to. The whole idea with us was to go out and see what's really happening in the world, and try to make sense of it early. I know that many of the museum curators want to do that. I'm sure, because I know some of them. They're very smart people, and they really do want to do that. But I don't think it's easy to package in a big organization like that, where you have to make a lot of money from a lot of people coming in. See, we don't have to—We only have to cover our expenses. That's the way I've always run it. I've never tried to make money with it; I've always been happy to cover the expenses of the press. And so far, so good. But I think it's a whole different thing for a museum, and it must be tough for a curator who's smart and interested, like Sue Foley, who got fired.

Or even Madeleine [Grynsztejn], who's doing such a great job. I have no idea, I've never talked to her about this, but I would imagine that doing a show like the Richard Tuttle show must've been a bit of a hard sell. I mean, she did it, obviously, and it came out well. But I just can imagine that. So imagine doing a show of Tom Marioni. That would be harder. I mean, that would be impossible to sell, even here, where he started out, because the work is not—there isn't a big coffee table book about it. If somebody in New York started a show, then maybe they would take it. I don't know if they would. Maybe not. Probably not, actually, because that world, the museum people, people that support the museum are somewhere in the behind. They're just always going to be behind. They almost have to be. I don't know. I'm not sure why, but I think they probably have to be.

[Begin Audio File 2 03-29-2007.mp3]

Rigelhaupt: So just before we paused, we were talking about the relationship between the museum and Bay Area artists.

02-00:00:14

Brown: And the local people, and we were talking about Henry Hopkins. Then I said, after that there was a period when they were pretty much focused on the outside world. With Jack Lane—I like Jack Lane a lot, a nice man. He did come around the press quite a lot. I don't really have any complaints, for myself. I don't think there was ever any expectation that they would do anything with prints, particularly. But Jack Lane was very—He went around to galleries, people in the gallery world liked him and so on. But between him and the chief curator, as is normal with the relationship between the director and curators in museums, the curator had a lot to say about the shows. But it seemed like Lane and his curator came into the art world kind of late, in a way. They, like a lot of people, started to recognize new stuff with pop art. Pop art, they felt, was really new and exciting and modern. By that time, we were long gone from pop art, [laughs] the people who were really involved in art. But in the museums, everything was from the East Coast that would count. It seemed not to occur to them that there were some local artists who may be making some kind of an impact. The East Coast developed another sort of attitude about performance art, which is really more about theater, and display, and doing little plays. That's kind of gone on into the photos, big photos which are so prevalent now, where a lot of it is—everything's made up, you can't tell what's real and what's made up. That kind of an attitude in some of the art, the kind of flamboyant performance art which was considered so avant-garde, was coming out of the East Coast. So that's all been collected here. But the action art from here was the opposite, in that it was about real time and real actions. Then there was the big [Sigmar] Polke show, and Anselm Kiefer. The Germans were really big, and became big in the international scene. It was almost like, OK, what's the next thing? Oh, the next thing is the Germans. So then they collected a lot of Germans. That was interesting for us to see here. I was delighted, in a way, to be able to see the

real stuff. We had complained before that we never got to see the real stuff, we only got to see the local stuff; and now we were seeing things that were written up in the art magazines, and making our own judgments about them. But still, the feeling was that the curators had come from another world, or from completely outside our world, without any feeling that actually, a real world could exist here, a world that really was connected, and that had a premise and an idea and a logic. I don't think there was a real, in a way, resentment about that. We just kind of felt that what we had here was kind of almost underground, and that's just the way it was going to be. In a way, it's still that way.

02-00:04:39

Then with David Ross, he knew this world. But he really had been somewhere else in the meantime, and I think it was too hard to sell, probably, to actually do shows from the Bay Area art of the seventies. But he did know about it. Now with Neal Benezra and Madeleine, I think they don't probably know about it very much. Somehow, Neal Benezra was from here originally, but I don't think he ever understood or knew about that scene, as far as I can tell. He's a nice man. I think they're doing a really lot of good things. I do think that they are doing local shows. They did a wonderful big show of Robert Bechtle, which was long overdue, and I think was great to have that. That, I know, was an idea that probably was to do a local show of some magnitude, because they hadn't before, for a long time. But I'm glad they did that. But it's still only one, and it's not tremendously experimental at this point. But they're only just bringing in Brice Marden at this point, so that's about where they are, from back in the seventies right now. Except for this odd sort of posing theatrical art, which is all over the magazines now. So they want to be in on that, the big photographs and the performance things, the throwing things around. You know, the way performance art has evolved now to be theater. I don't want to deny that that exists. I just don't find it so interesting myself, because I guess that I've grown up with the attitude of art being different from theater and that it's actual touching and real stuff. So it's just not my taste, a lot of that kind of art. Also, I think it's a little bit depressing, and not necessarily giving back something positive to the world, which I really do believe that there is art out there that's doing that. I think the museums are often emphasizing the opposite, which is okay to a degree. But for myself, I'm not—The thing is, there's a big difference between any nonprofit organization and what I do, because what I'm doing, I can do. I can decide myself. I don't think it's really about taste. Sol LeWitt broke me of the idea of doing stuff by your taste. It was one of the maxims of that time, was that you should—and John Cage, too—detach yourself from that. So I don't think that what I'm doing is about taste; but I do think it's about trying to see some sense in what's going on, what the artist is doing, where they fit, and what positive force it is. I'm just not going to choose somebody that's going to be just full of sadness and decay. Well, I did choose Bruce Conner, [laughs] it's true. But at the time, that was the right thing. I don't think it's the right thing now. But we'll see. I mean, I think it's gone. I think it's over. I think it's been done. You know, the first one, when it was new, when Bruce Conner did it—All this

dada and surrealism that's going on now, why do it again? They did it. All the dadaists and the surrealists did that. I don't see it right now. But that's OK, they get to do that. They are doing some younger artists, mostly along that vein. And that's fine. But I think that it does make a big difference if you have to get supporters and you have to talk them into stuff. Just like the story I told you about not buying the Thiebauds for a hundred dollars apiece at the museum, because they had a board member who was so vocal about this particular idea he had that a print was no good if it was printed by somebody else than the artist. They didn't buy that because you're doing things by committee. You have to take into account the feelings of your board members. The curator at that time really wanted those prints and really understood them. But she was not allowed to buy them because of this board member. She told me that herself. So that probably still is happening. It's always going to; it's just part of the nature of the beast. You adjust for them to do whatever they can do, and give us a peek into what's going on somewhere else, and maybe show us occasionally, an artist from here. I don't know.

02-00:10:19

You know, though, in thinking about that, it seems to me, just looking at it from afar, that Paul Schimmel, down in Los Angeles at the L.A. MOCA, has actually done something really great for Los Angeles, by giving shows to somebody like Laura Owens, who's a young Los Angeles artist. A big major show, with a catalogue. It's not just a little New York show, it's—And she's just starting out. I don't know if that's always going to be appropriate for museums, but—I think he gave a big push—Chris Burden, he's done stuff with him. He's done a lot of stuff with the Los Angeles artists in the scene, and he's built that. He's also encouraged his collectors to buy that work. I don't see—You know, it seems like when they go on buying trips for the museum, they always go to New York, here. That's always been the case. It's very hard for dealers here, because there's not very much support from the museums for them. I don't know if there's anything that could be done about this, actually, and I'm not saying it's the museum's fault. It just occurred to me that Paul Schimmel seemed to have broken through that particular thing. But because of the way the whole art world is set up, and you have to get on somebody's list to get the really hot work in New York, and so you have to go to that dealer and buy; and the curator and the patron have to be admired by that dealer, and on their list, and they cultivate each other. That's just how it works. So they can't really buy something from a local artist very well. I mean, a local dealer. They hardly ever do, as far as I understand it, because they really want to save this collector, who's going to buy something for the museum, for the big time, and so they take him to New York. They have to cultivate the big dealers there. So the whole system, it's just the way it works. I think it makes it very tough for an art scene here. That's okay, because the artists can create their own scene. Then at a certain point, they could use a little bit of help. But it's just the way it has happened here over the years. The artists have still done things. If the museum puts in something like this New York thing that they have over there, that's good. They do local artists, they do the SECA thing with local artists; and sometimes they get some good ones,

and sometimes they don't. But at least they're doing it, and I think all that's to the benefit.

Rigelhaupt: Now, when you say art dealers, do they typically have galleries as well?

02-00:13:30

Brown: Yeah, galleries, I mean. When I said art dealers, I meant galleries. I meant somebody like Paule Anglim Gallery or John Berggruen or Cheryl Haines. Those people are all showing artists from here and artists from other places, both.

Rigelhaupt: Well, what galleries would you talk about in San Francisco that you think have had perhaps the largest impact?

02-00:13:59

Brown: Those ones, I think, over the years. I think all three of those are very important galleries. And Jack Hanley has been an important gallery and impact here, too, although I'm not crazy about a lot of the art that he shows. But he's there, and it's youthful art. I mean, he's produced some kind of stars outside San Francisco, or he's shown them, like Chris Johanson and that group. I think the museum shows Chris Johanson, also. So yeah, there are a few galleries here. There's others, too. Catherine Clark Gallery. There's galleries. I'm not the best one to ask. Valerie Wade, who's my director here at Crown Point now, is much more in touch with the gallery scene. She goes to the art dealers meetings and goes around the galleries a lot more than I do, at this point. I used to be more in touch with it, but I just haven't had enough time to do everything lately.

Rigelhaupt: Were there galleries that you recall were cultivating work from Crown Point?

02-00:15:17

Brown: No, not really. Who *sold* it? No. Mostly, dealers, regular art galleries don't care too much about prints. Not anywhere. Like one of them said to me, "It costs just as much to sell a drawing or a painting, for us, [as] to sell a print. And we get a lot more for those." So they always want to emphasize the artist's primary work. I can't blame them for that. You know, they have a hard enough time managing it. They might take a few of the prints to have in the back room, but we actually don't even like them to do that, because it doesn't give them as much respect as we'd like, to have sort of a few prints in a bin somewhere. If we loan something to a gallery for a show, we want it to be included in the show, on the wall, in a frame. Otherwise, we won't give them anything on consignment; they have to buy it. If they're going to buy it outright, they're going to buy the Wayne Thiebauds, they're not going to buy Brad Brown. Even if they'd been showing Brad Brown in their gallery, actually. They don't buy the prints, because they have plenty of other Brad Browns. [laughs] They have drawings and paintings. So we have to build our world some other way. I knew that right from the beginning. It's just the way it is.

Rigelhaupt: Do you know which prints that were done here are part of the collection at SFMOMA?

02-00:17:05

Brown: No, I don't. They have a number of early ones, because Sue Foley bought them. And they're good. They've shown them once in a while. I don't know, though. Can't remember. Wouldn't be so hard to find out. They haven't bought any—Well, yes. They bought a Chris Burden print from us, at some point recently. An old one. We found an old one we thought was sold out, actually, and for some reason, they wanted that particular one. I do think they're starting to think of them that way, as well: We need this particular thing from this particular artist. To fill in or whatever, for a show, or for whatever reason. I don't think they buy prints otherwise.

Rigelhaupt: Which curators do you remember working most closely with?

02-00:18:04

Brown: The only curator I've ever really known very well and liked is Sue Foley, over there. And Anneliese Hoyer, who was the printmaking curator when I first came to San Francisco. I liked her. But I mean, I like Madeleine. She comes over here quite a bit to shows, and comes to openings. I like it that she likes to come in and see the prints. I don't really expect that she's going to buy them or sell them or show them or anything. I think she just likes to see them, which is wonderful. I love curators who like to see art, [laughs] who like looking at art and want to go out and look at it. I see her socially a little bit, too, and I think she's very good. But I rarely see Neal Benezra over here. But I don't blame him for that, because I think he must be really busy, and it's probably a little bit off his radar screen, in terms of—Because you know, they're not the major thing. I think they have other fish to fry, and they're busy. I think if they're doing a good job for their community in whatever they're doing, it's fine. If they do come over here, it's probably just for their own interest and bene—You know, if we happen to have a show that intrigues them for some reason. It's not really to keep up with what we're doing or what prints are doing.

Rigelhaupt: Would you characterize SFMOMA across the decades—and maybe there's been some change across the decades—as more orthodox or more unorthodox, as far as the exhibits they've put together?

02-00:20:23

Brown: More orthodox than what?

Rigelhaupt: Well, let's say in relationship to MoMA in New York.

02-00:20:30

Brown: Oh, I'd say much more. Much more orthodox than MoMA in New York.

Rigelhaupt: And would you say that's true internationally, as well?

02-00:20:41

Brown: Yeah. Yeah. They're pretty conservative here. They follow somebody else's lead. Always have.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have an opinion as to why that's formed the way it has?

02-00:20:57

Brown: I don't know. I guess because we're out here in the sticks. [laughs] We bring somebody in who's from a major museum from somewhere else, and they think they're going to the sticks anyway, so—I think it's—[pause] It must be that. Well, MoMA New York, we even supplied some. I mean, Gary Garrels went there, you know? I'm not sure what he did there. I don't know if he did anything with any artists that he might've run into here. Usually, they have their favorite artists. It doesn't have very much to do with any particular place. Anybody can only have so much in their consciousness. So it's hard to know. But it was interesting, though, when from the *New York Times*, Michael Kimmelman the critic, gave a talk over here at the [California] College of Arts that used to be CCAC, somebody asked him about the museum here, in the questioning, or San Francisco. Maybe it was even what did he find interesting in San Francisco. He said, "San Francisco's great. It's so lively. And they had the Eva Hesse show, and it wasn't in New York. And they're doing all these things." He listed all the things from New York artists that the San Francisco museum was showing. He was kind of talking about the art scene here in San Francisco as being so great, because of New York shows that weren't in New York, that were shown here. So maybe we are more adventurous, in terms of his mind and that we did those. But he didn't know or see that there might've been any show from here. I mean, the Bechtle show, he didn't mention that, for instance. He could've. He could've said, "Oh, and yes, there was this—" He only mentioned the New York shows, [laughs] which was interesting, I thought.

But that's alright. We're one big international art scene now. It's just that the artists here, because there aren't really any critics and so on, they don't get the kind of time in the limelight that they maybe deserve. So they all move to New York, and then we don't have the scene here. But somehow, we do have a scene here. We've always had a scene here anyways. Because, you know, when I graduated from college, from Antioch, everybody in the art department, which was small, but everybody was going to either the East Coast or the West Coast. And they were either going to move to New York, or they were going to move to San Francisco or Los Angeles. But mainly San Francisco, I think. It occurred to me at the time—I think I even wrote it somewhere—that all the people who were really ambitious and career oriented were moving to New York; and all the people who were searching their souls or trying to find their place in the world went to San Francisco. And there [were] the beatniks out here, and that was all about trying to find out where you were and who you were. And those people all moved this direction. And those people are still here. And they're just not going to go out there and

promote themselves. The museums pick it up once in a while. They picked it up with Wiley's group. So that was okay, you know? They can't do everything.

Rigelhaupt: Well, how would you compare, say, the art scene and the museum, perhaps, to what's going on in Los Angeles?

02-00:26:22

Brown: It seems very lively in Los Angeles, doesn't it? But I hardly ever go down there, so I don't really know. I just notice that the L.A. MOCA is doing a lot of things that I like, artists that I like.

Rigelhaupt: But do you gather there's a sense that there's more galleries?

02-00:26:44

Brown: Yes. Definitely, a lot more galleries down there, and they're promoting it. There seems to be an energy among artists. They're not leaving Los Angeles anymore. At least that, according to Laura Owens, who we worked with from there and whom I like very much. I think she's a very good artist, an important artist in that, you know, she's developed something that's original and could be a stream. But she says that there is an energetic interaction among artists of her generation, and that there's no need to leave. That they are being noticed outside, which we know is true. She just got one of those Berlin grants, so she and her husband, who is an artist too, have moved to Berlin for a little while. But I got my report of Los Angeles from her. It does seem as though there's really something going on. [pause] I guess there is here, too, that sort of centers on the Jack Hanley Gallery. I don't know the people involved with that, really, but I think there is something. But whether it makes it kind of into the big time is the question.

Rigelhaupt: So I asked you about which prints are in SFMOMA. Are there Crown Point prints in other big museums?

02-00:28:24

Brown: Oh, yeah. Everywhere. The Achenbach Foundation at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco has our archive. They have one of each of everything we've printed or published. So they have all those Mardens and Rymans and everything, and [Claes] Oldenburgs, from the old days, and then all these new ones, too. They don't show them, really, very often, but they have them. Someday they'll show them. They do occasionally; I shouldn't complain. But mostly, it's just like all the others. They really want to show the Jasper Johns more than they want to show—I didn't ever work with Jasper Johns. Then when they do show them, they mainly want to emphasize Diebenkorn and Thiebaud, which is fine by me. They're great artists, and I appreciate them. But there's a lot of raw material there that they haven't used yet.

Then the Oakland Museum has quite a good collection from the old days, because they did support us early on. They sort of ran out of money. I know

that they would've liked—the people over there are very—First Therese Heyman and then Karen Tsujimoto have been interested in trying to collect things. But I think they just don't have any money. So those local museums have major Crown Point collections, or major print collections generally. I mean, actually, the Achenbach's a huge print collection. And you know, the National Gallery [of Art] has our archive, too. And New York MoMA has quite a lot of prints they've bought of ours. But over the years, not as much, because they do depend a lot on donations, which we don't do. But they buy things once in a while. They have a lot of prints from earlier days. So yes, they're in museums. And other museums buy them. They buy them from time to time. Anybody making a serious print collection. The Portland [Art] Museum has a lot of them. They have a print curator up there, a really serious print collection in Portland. But anybody who has a serious print collection is going to have our prints.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have collectors that have shown a particular interest in work coming out of Crown Point?

02-00:31:02

Brown: There are a few people who are print collectors. Right now, it comes to mind, is Jordan Schnitzer, who lives in Portland, actually. Collects a lot of prints from all over, from everyone. He has a huge print collection. Lois Torf in Boston, long ago, was a big—they created terrific print holdings, including ours and a lot of other print publishers. But you know, there's not that many people who stick to prints. Mostly, our customers are people that—Or Valerie would like to say *clients*, not customers. But they're people who just like to—They're little people. You know, they can't afford big paintings. They know the art and they like it, and they want work to hang up in their house. Because these are prints, they're reasonable in price. But they're real art, and we have a lot of people that buy for themselves.

We started so many people out in buying art that they then later buy other things. But this is the beginning, because it's less expensive. They're just regular people. Like, not really wealthy people, generally. The really wealthy people, they say, "Oh, I don't buy prints." Even if they like us and come to our parties and so on, which we appreciate, they often say that. "I don't buy prints." That's because they have so much money they can afford to buy other things. But there are a few people that buy both. Valerie would know them better than me. But there's still a—it's very hard to break it down. They just don't know that it's the real thing; they think it's somehow less. So they're going to buy the most important art. But that's okay. I mean, it's part of—I really like being in that position of supplying the work to the little people. [chuckles] If there's some that collect major, major paintings and also buy major prints, then that's all the better. And there are a few. I can't remember right now. I wish I could. I haven't been connected very much with clients for some years now. I did at first. I've always had someone working with me that has done the work with the clients.

I've worked with the artists in developing the press. Now I'm working more with the books and developing the educational part of it. That seems to be what I do best. So it's better to have someone else do the client parts. I can't tell you our clients' names, but I know they're there and I love to see them. When they come I say hello and all that. Because they love it. They love the work so much. There's real personal enthusiasm and excitement that you can see when they come in. That's always very rewarding.

Rigelhaupt: Well, I certainly had heard that there were a couple of members on the board of trustees at SFMOMA that had collected Crown Point prints. So I was just curious—

02-00:34:47

Brown: Yeah, who they would be. Well, Byron Meyer comes around quite a lot. He's a nice man, and we enjoy having his company. But I can't recall that he's ever bought anything. Maybe once or twice.

Rigelhaupt: I think the names that I heard mentioned were Mary Keesling—

02-00:35:05

Brown: Oh, well, Mary Keesling, yes. She was always a fan. I mean, she's out of the picture now for a long time, but yes, Mary Keesling was a nice friend of ours. She also would bring people, which is great.

Rigelhaupt: And I don't know which Haas first name.

02-00:35:30

Brown: Whose?

Rigelhaupt: One of the Haases.

02-00:35:32

Brown: One of the Haases, yeah.

Rigelhaupt: There were a number on the—

02-00:35:38

Brown: Mrs. Haas, yeah, maybe. Valerie would know that. You know who was our really wonderful fan is Phyllis Wattis. And her grandson is still a client, Paul. He comes. She introduced him to us, and he still buys things and comes over, and seems to really enjoy the prints. Phyllis Wattis was great. She even took one of our workshops, where she learned to print herself. She made a plate and printed some and gave them out to her children. They still have them hanging up in their house, Phyllis' print.

Rigelhaupt: OK, so just before we pause—Well, let's shift gears after the pause, actually. What was your impression of how the museum changed when it moved into its new space?

02-00:36:29

Brown:

Into the new space. Well, it's wonderful to have them here in the neighborhood. We're right around the corner. We actually were here first, which is so nice. It's been very beneficial for us commercially, because people make a trip to the museum and here at the same time. So I'm very happy about that. Also, we have a nice restaurant downstairs in our building, that people use sometimes when they're in this area and they're making a little day of it. It's so nice to be in the area. I love the museum. I love to go over there. I'm pleased to be able to see shows of important, you know, important shows, New York shows. And glad they did the ones we talked about, the Richard Tuttle, the Brice Marden. It was just thrilling. Kiki Smith. Some of those were just great to have. And the Bechtle and—I like pretty much all the shows. I like the way they put up the permanent collection, and to be able to see some of those good pieces that they have. So it's a terrific boon to the community to have it there. I like that they brought the New Work idea back. So, you know, I think they're—I don't want to seem like I'm complaining about them when I've said that there's lacks in this or that, or there's not—Because I think they do what's in front of them to do. And by the nature of them, they have the people that work with them, and it's wonderful that they do; they need to have the support of people to build it. So I don't know. [laughs] I mean, if I were organizing the show, I might have some different show, but that's not here nor there, you know. I can do my thing and do what I want, and I'm happy to go and see what they're doing. [pause]

Rigelhaupt:

Do you think—

02-00:39:03

Brown:

I think the new building is great. I think it's terrific to have it there.

Rigelhaupt:

Did it change the focus to a more international art than local?

02-00:39:12

Brown:

I don't know. Maybe, because there was more room, probably. But I don't know if it was the museum that changed the focus; I think it was the director, when Jack Lane came in. That was before we had this museum, he changed that focus. That's actually to the good. Being able to have the shows. I just hope they do continue to do the kind of—well, the Eva Hesse show is a good example—the kind of a little bit—you know, for the major, big, whole community, they may not understand some of the things, like the Tuttle or the Eva Hesse. But it's really important to do that, and I'm very pleased that they do. I know there may be—Because it's a private museum, it's easier for them to do it than, say, out at the de Young.

Rigelhaupt:

What do you think of the blockbuster exhibits that they've done, like the Calder exhibit?

02-00:40:22

Brown:

Well, those are potboilers. So you may need to do some to make money and bring in the crowds. They're perfectly fine. I mean, the Calder show was a nice show; it was fun to see once. But it didn't make any difference to anybody, really. I mean, maybe it did to some of the general public that came in, and that's probably a perfectly okay function. But I just hope the potboilers don't overtake the more adventurous ones. But I do think probably there has to be a balance like that, because they've got to stay alive. They've got an ambitious setup now, that's expensive, in the new building, so they probably have to do something like that sometimes. Just as long as they don't sacrifice the others. You know, only do that or mainly do that.

Rigelhaupt:

Did they do big shows like that in the seventies and the eighties, in your memory?

02-00:41:27

Brown:

Well, they had a couple potboilers, for sure. There was a big fashion show, as I remember, of somebody. Dior or I can't remember who it was. [laughs] That was a little embarrassing, but—And I'm sure they were doing them, yeah. [pause] Oh, it was Issey Miyake, I think. That's who it was. He paid for it too, I think. They shouldn't sell the shows like that. Like if the designer is going to have a big show, and they give the museum a big donation. Like, they did at the Guggenheim, as I understand it. I think that there was at least one show in the old museum that was like that. But I don't think that's something they would do now, from my vantage point. How would I know? They do tend to show, I guess—everybody thinks that they tend to show the artists that their board collects. But again, I think that's very common among museums. It's just that we hope that they'll be collecting people who will last, and not just the hottest thing of the moment.

Rigelhaupt:

So is that a common relationship, as far as exhibits and museums, that there is a close dynamic with museum boards and their collections?

02-00:43:07

Brown:

I have no inside knowledge about that, but it's commonly thought that that's the case.

Rigelhaupt:

But there hasn't been discussion among Bay Area artists that SFMOMA does that any more than any other large museum.

02-00:43:22

Brown:

I don't think any more than anybody else, but I think it's accepted on the street that that's what happens and that that's where it is. I don't know if you can avoid it. It's a kind of a wheel, you know. Naturally, you hire the curator because they have an idea of what they feel is important. They're hired for their expertise, right? So therefore, they believe that these things are important, so they're going to communicate that to the board members. You would want the board members to take their advice and buy something from

those artists, so that it would go into the collection, if it really is important. And so it becomes a kind of a circle. So finally, it probably gets down to who you hire. If it all works correctly. If you don't hire the best people, then you get a little bit less strong collection for the long run. But nobody can really tell that until the long run.

Rigelhaupt: So it sounds as though part of the role of curators and directors is to educate the board as to what to collect.

02-00:44:42

Brown: I think that's what they do, don't you? I mean, it's pretty obvious. They certainly think that's part of their role. I think it would be nice, actually, if somehow, the board required new people that come into the Bay Area to work for them to bone up a little bit on the history of Bay Area art, and how it might be seen by other people in the world; that if there's catalogues or books out there by other people about Bay Area artists, maybe somebody could give them that material and they could read it, so that they can see that it's not just local stuff that isn't of any importance. Even if the artists that are here have reached the star status that some have, it took much longer. Diebenkorn and Thiebaud are both big stars now, but it took a really long time for them to reach that point. Much, much longer than you would've imagined if they'd been in the East Coast. But that's because we don't have the PR system. You know, museum, magazine, mainly, all that. And so it just takes longer. Even Ed Ruscha in Los Angeles, it took a long time for him to reach—And he's everybody's favorite now, but—They had a retrospective of his at the San Francisco Museum early on, which was great that they did that, before he was really—That was one of Henry's things, I think. So that was good.

But something like that, it would be nice if they might look around and see what's going on. Not necessarily only at the young artists. Just to see that there really has been a continuous scene. And I think it really is continuous. There's not that many artists around here. It's like New York was in the seventies; everybody knew everybody. So for instance, Tom Marioni's center of gravity was the conceptual world. Bill Wiley's center of gravity is this funk art world. Diebenkorn is Diebenkorn and the whole Bay Area figurative thing. Thiebaud is not really a pop artist, but somewhat connected there, has more that kind of a vision. Robert Bechtle is a realist, and one of the very first absolutely primal realists, a photorealist. And with Tom Marioni, he was more of a social realist. His was really what he called real social realism. So anyway, these are our major artists, major historic artists from this whole period. Bruce Conner is in the dada-surrealist-funk.

Okay, there they are. There's a big array here. And look how different they all are. Each one of them has a little satellite of other artists that are working in that area. Not necessarily followers, but all quite independent and quite good. So this is a real scene. It's got to be. It's not some Podunk kind of thing. It seems like a lot of the curators that come in, I think, don't see that. They don't

see that there's been really important—Because it's not so cohesive. It doesn't look very cohesive from the outside. I just named all these different styles. But these were all people who were doing these styles in the forefront of these styles; not copying them later, but forming them, developing them. The idea of doing figurative work after abstract expressionism. It took a little while for New York to catch up, but Diebenkorn really did start that. The same thing with the conceptual art. [It] came out, in a way, of the combination of the Bay Area figurative and the Bay Area funk, which was—The Bay Area funk was a kind of a joke on Diebenkorn, in a way; it's like a thumbing their noses at it. It was making it funny, but still keeping it kind of rough. And it still had to do with figuration. And then the conceptual art that Tom did also had to do with something that appeared at first glance to be slight, light and funny, which was in reaction to New York, which was against the heavy, heavy abstract expressionist, the sort of divine or, you know, sublime, all that sort of thing that was going on. And the pop art in New York was, of course, a reaction to that. But the conceptual art idea of also using the figure—because it was *really* using the figure in a performance, with the conceptual people—came out of the Bay Area figurative, in a way, and came out of Funk in a way, because everything was very low tech.

They did interact with each other. And they all know each other. Each built on the others and then another whole stream developed. There's not so much antagonism, really, as there is in New York. It's a kind of a—And then Bechtle is a really—he hangs out at Tom's Wednesday interaction things. And he's a painter and a realist. But I think that he came out of the Diebenkorn stream, too, with the realism idea; but he had to do something different, so he got the idea to use the camera. Because you have to break away from—you have to thumb your nose, in a way, at what's gone before. But this whole scene is a whole circle. There's an energy that's been going on for a long time. Each thing is feeding the other thing, and they're all there and important. There's a lot of the young artists, like Charles Linder, and even Chris Johanson has been to the Wednesday meetings with Tom Marioni. So I'm just saying it's not [that] nothing's going on.

Rigelhaupt:

Is that one of the things—and maybe this'll be the last question for today—one of the things that's exciting about Crown Point, is that you get to work with young artists?

02-00:52:06

Brown:

I get to work with a lot of different artists. We can do young artists once in a while. Because there's really no market for them, and it has to be completely developed from scratch, you have to be very cautious that there's a possibility to develop a market, even if it isn't there. You have to kind of balance it out with some other projects. I mean, all these things have to play into my consciousness, which don't, maybe, in the museum. They have a different kind of worry about that, with those kinds of trustee things, which is worse. But anyway, I like working with our young artists. But we're very selective about that. Maybe we can do as much as we would like to. There's so few that

I think are really—I think it's got to have a lot of potential to last. The only way I can see to figure out whether it'll last is to see if I can make any sense of it, in terms of the stream, the kind of thing I was talking about. My biggest pleasure is working with artists young and old. I like just finding out new ideas, and finding out what they're about, and seeing how they approach things, and having a chance to talk to them about art. We can hang out and throw around the ideas. You see there really are ideas and it's not just coming in and making something pretty, you know? It really is an attempt to make sense of the world. That's what I'd like to do, and they sure do help me with that.

Rigelhaupt: I think that's a great place to end for today.

02-00:54:00

Brown: [laughs] OK.

[End of Interview]

**Interview #2: May 15, 2007**

[Begin Audio File 3 05-15-2007.mp3]

03-00:00:05

Rigelhaupt: I'd like to begin today if you could talk about the press's move to San Francisco from Oakland.

03-00:00:22

[material deleted]

03-00:02:19

We decided to make the move to San Francisco in 1986. It was a wonderful studio in Oakland, and we had our way of working there. We had a gallery downstairs that people would come to, although it was a little difficult for them to get over to Oakland. But they came. I didn't actually have any real ambitions to move, but the University of California owned the building, which was an artist's building, [with] a lot of artist studios in there, besides us. They decided that they needed to make more money, and they raised the rents on everybody, really a lot. I figured if we were going to be paying that much rent, we might as well be in San Francisco. So we moved. So did everyone else. It was lucky for us that it happened, because the move to San Francisco was really terrific for us. We found a place at 871 Folsom Street, which is a loft building, an old brick building. It was the most beautiful etching studio you could ever imagine. In fact, even though we've had really beautiful studios always, each in its own way, the one on Folsom Street was just a dream. It was more beautiful even than this one, which is hard to imagine, because this is so nice. There was just something about it; it was just a lovely space. Skylights and windows. On the top floor, and then we later took the floor below for offices. We loved Oakland, actually. The artists loved going to Oakland, as a matter of fact. But San Francisco is another notch up, and it has been great, also.

Rigelhaupt:

Before I started recording, you were talking about the expansion of gallery space in New York.

03-00:04:43

Brown:

In New York. We had done that the year before. We had done that in '85, the year before we moved the studio to San Francisco. I had hired Karen McCready, who was absolutely wonderful, and a great help and partner to me for, not technically a partner, but in the sense that she really created the audience, the New York audience for Crown Point Press. It was a tremendous step, when I hired her in '83. She had been working out of a small little upstairs gallery, shared with Margarete Roeder for her little gallery called Margarete Roeder Fine Arts, because we really were small and couldn't afford anything, but she wanted to just see if she could build a New York audience. At that time, in '85, we did take a very big step, in that she found a wonderful space in a building on the corner of Prince and Broadway, just starting to be a gallery building and later became a famous gallery building. She was really

one of the first ones there. The great achievement of it is not only putting Crown Point Press into the New York consciousness, but putting prints there; because there really was not, and really has never been what I called a freestanding print gallery, except for one that was done by a consortium of print dealers for a very brief time, maybe seven or eight years earlier, called Prints on Prince Street. But this was a real gallery, in a gallery building, that was dedicated just to prints. It's Crown Point Press Gallery, and it was mostly Crown Point Press work. But Karen often did group shows of various kinds that included other prints. So it was a very exciting development for this world. She made it work. It lasted for ten years.

Rigelhaupt: Could you talk a little bit about which artists were most memorable that you worked with during the 1980s?

03-00:07:50

Brown:

I don't know if having a gallery there made that much difference, but I had been really interested in conceptual art, partly because of Tom Marioni, my husband. You asked about the artists that we worked with in the eighties. The Japan project had quite a big influence there, because that was a different concept from—I had concentrated on etching for so long, and it was coming up to the twentieth anniversary. Somehow it seemed like it would be good to try something else. But I didn't want to do litho, because I didn't know anything about it, and never really liked the way it looked very much. But I had made a trip to Japan, for another reason, and I had the notion that—They had this old process of woodcut there that no one seemed—The old masters seemed to know how to do it, but not young people. It's not the same as the Western-style woodcut. It's using watercolor, and it's very layered. It's the same style that [Kitagawa] Utamaro and [Ando] Hiroshige used. We were able to find—Because I had a printer who was born in Kyoto and had come over to the Art Institute in San Francisco to study when I was teaching there. I hired him as a printer, Takada, Hidekatsu Takada. He was able to get a green card and stay. He still lives here, he has a gallery here in San Francisco. Because of his living in Kyoto and having contacts there, we were able to get an artist there, who we established a working relationship. Shoichi Ida, he was very helpful. We had a master, an absolute master woodcut artist, a printer, Tadashi Toda, whose family had printed for Hiroshige. It had been handed down.

We started taking our artists to Japan to do work with him. That was a wonderful interlude. It lasted for ten years, and we took two or three artists a year. So because there was a novelty of going to Japan—Most of the artists I invited were very well known artists, but they hadn't ever had an opportunity to go to Japan at that time. Now everybody goes to Japan all the time, but in the early eighties, that wasn't the case. So Al Held and Alex Katz and Eric Fischl and David Salle were all really important names in New York. They might not have thought they wanted to come out to San Francisco at first, but they did want to go to Japan. So we did work with [them]. Then later, they

wanted to come to San Francisco. Well, not Fischl and Salle; I never did get  
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them back. But Al Held became a regular, and we made some fantastic work with him. There were others, too. We also took a lot of the artists that we'd worked with before to those places. Francesco Clemente and Pat Stier were early participants in the Japan project. So in our galleries we started to mix the two mediums, the woodcut and the etching, about that time.

Rigelhaupt: And in your memory, did you get a sense that there was an expanding art market in the 1980s, versus the 1970s?

03-00:12:34

Brown:

Oh, yes, absolutely. Of course. That's why we were able to do a gallery in New York. Everything changed in the early eighties. That's why we were able to do the Japan project, too, we could pay for that, because it was not cheap. Japan costs were *huge* at that time. But because there was this wonderful art market, which mostly was for paintings, but lifted all boats, as they say, [laughs] we were able to do a lot better. In the seventies, you might as well do the conceptual artists, who were so interesting. We brought Jannis Kounellis over here to do prints in '78, I believe it was. It was before he'd ever done anything much in this country. Also Daniel Buren. So we brought European artists. We didn't actually have much anticipation of selling them, and we didn't sell them very well *then*. Later we did. But it didn't matter almost, because you couldn't sell much of anything. [laughs] You just had to figure out, you know, a way to make it work, and balance it. Like all galleries do, you have some who sell more and some who you know aren't going to sell, but you want to do it. So you balance it that way.

03-00:13:49

Anyway, there was a little bit of a shift because of the market in the eighties, that we were able to get artists that we could sell for more money, and we could certainly sell.

Rigelhaupt: Why do you think the art market expanded in the 1980s?

03-00:14:31

Brown:

Well, I don't know. Things happened in the economy, right? We were in a recession and we had a huge inflation in the seventies. There were a lot of problems in the economy generally. It probably affects us. But in a funny way, something like this, a business like this isn't affected as much as, say, the hardware store, in a recession. I guess because the people that buy from us generally have money. But the people that buy prints don't have as much money as the people who buy paintings; so that is much more true for the art market in general. In the print market, we're in the middle there, between the hardware store customers [laughs] and the painting gallery customers. Then the eighties, things changed in the economy. They just did. It went up and up, just dizzyingly, and then collapsed at the end of the eighties. Dramatically.

Rigelhaupt: Could you say more about the collapse?

03-00:15:50

Brown: Well, just everything fell out for everybody, right? '90, '91, that was a recessionary time in this country. It certainly affected the art market. But the art market went crazy first. It's sort of happening again now, the art market's starting to go crazy like that. So I'm hoping the same result doesn't happen afterwards. Some people are saying there's going to be a recession. I don't know. I did see it happen then. It may be different now, I don't know.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have a sense of what role galleries were playing in creating price increases in art during the early eighties?

03-00:16:40

Brown: It seemed like, to me, that was when there were big-time—You know, [Leo] Castelli was the big time one then, like [Larry] Gagosian is now. They could be king makers. But you know what's different, Castelli had a lot of artists that he was very loyal to, that didn't make very much money. It strikes me that Gagosian is not like that, but I don't have any firsthand information about that. I've never been that much involved with the sales part of it, because Karen McCready was running the sales program then. Valerie Wade runs it now. They're both much more astute about that sort of thing than me. So I kind of just paid attention because of connecting—you know, trying to see how we could manage the business and having talks with whoever was, then and now—Unfortunately, Karen McCready died a few years ago. She had cancer. But she really did a terrific job for us. We closed the gallery in New York just before that, as a matter of fact, because we just couldn't afford to keep it open anymore in the sag that happened in the early nineties.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have a sense of what dynamic was going on with SFMOMA, in the expansion of the art market in the early eighties?

03-00:18:37

Brown: No, I don't think I have any sense of that. Somehow, people complain a lot about the museum supporters being really only interested in the art that everybody else is interested in, and that there's the same—You go around the country, and you see the same artists in every museum, because they're the ones who somehow got chosen. But those are not all necessarily the ones that are selling so well. It's very curious, because there are some smart curators who see somebody like Kovnellis's influence, and would buy something of his. I believe we have something over at our museum which we don't see very often anymore, because it's been replaced by more current things. But you know, really, it's hard to know. It's really hard to know. I think that as you get younger and younger curators coming in, sometimes they don't—Especially in this country; in Europe, they're very scholarly. But often there isn't the same sort of knowledge here of who did what first. So you look at a collection, and sometimes you think, "Oh, well, that artist is just copying so-and-so." And then it seems that the curator never heard of so-and-so, you

know? So it's a funny kind of—A lot of it just depends on who happens to be being promoted by powerful galleries.

You want me to tell you a little theory about it? I think I may have done this before, on your other program, about the Bay Area, in that kind of scene, that my idea, from being around here a long time, is that artists have been very interested in figuration, or the idea of the body or the figure, for a long time. Diebenkorn probably had something to do with that, and David Park and the group of people around him—[Elmer] Bischoff—when Diebenkorn switched over to that. But then the funk artists took that and played with it and turned it upside-down. Because Peter Selz came in here from New York MoMA and showed that work and gave it a name, at the UC Berkeley [Art] Museum, the outside world got to know about it. And it was good, it was good art. That was what the SFMOMA was mostly collecting. Wiley and Hudson and [Roy] De Forest were their main people at that time. Still based on the figure, in a way. Just a funny turning upside-down of that. But there was another art that was going on at the same time, really, just coming in a tiny bit later—it started around 1970—which was the Bay Area conceptual art, which is also based on the figure and the body; but it was the actual body. I think that one of the essays that Tom Marioni wrote about it at that time was called “Real Social Realism,” where you actually had a person. You know, you had a performance, and it was all about not having an object. So it was ephemeral. His museum started in 1970. He set it up, a little bit tongue-in-cheek, as a—But a museum, because he felt that that's what was needed, was museum support. He was able to get a little bit of a grant from—

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He applied to the NEA at that time for a museum grant for it. They wanted to support it, but they didn't want to call it a museum. So they invented a new category, as I understand it, called alternative art spaces, to give him a grant for it when he first started it. They were small grants. \$5,000, something like that, he got for two or three years there. I mean, it was not funding, the way they talk about it these days. But it was in his own studio, and he did a number of important shows, which no one at the museum here went to. Or noticed. One of them called “Sound Sculpture As” which was in 1970, when he first started; it was the first show. But anyway, that was probably the first sound show ever. Sound as sculpture. He did one called “All Night Sculptures,” where people did actions or sort of tableaux. But there were bodies, instead of paintings of bodies. All night. The museum was open all night, and anyone could come in at any time during that night. That was it for the show; it was only that one night. A number of important things like that, for that time. But really it wasn't noticed, aside from his small world. Then, Suzanne Foley did that exhibition called “Space, Time, Sound” at the museum. Made a little catalogue for it, and documented a lot of alternative art spaces that had grown up in the meantime. A lot of material is in that catalogue about that scene, that I still think that most of the people at the SF Museum don't know about. Someone came in recently, who was just recently hired at the California College of the Arts, a new curator, and wanted to buy that book, because we

have a few copies. We're the only ones that still have it, I think, because I bought a bunch of them at the time, and they were down in the basement. But they said someone had told them that this scene happened, and they really didn't know about it. I doubt, I wonder, has anybody over [at the museum] actually read that book? I'm not sure. I think they don't realize how important this scene was, to people outside, even.

I may have said this; I'm sure I said it before, in a different way, but this is where I think these gaps are. At the time, they were concentrating so hard on funk, which was fine; but they just never could make a leap to something else. But there was an actually very logical leap that artists picked up. I don't know what's gone since then. I guess the next thing has been the kind of Chris Johanson thing, which is a kind of funny art again, storytelling and cartoons and so on. It also might fit in the long line of figurative art from the Bay Area. Those are very young artists. Anyway, it does seem that a lot of the curators, when they're hired from outside, come in with the notion, with the thought that nothing really important could've occurred here. It used to be that the museum *only* showed that Funk Art; but now there's not a trace of it anywhere. I was just over there at the permanent collection, and there's no Wiley or any of those people on display right now. It changes; there has been. But there's nothing up right now from anybody, really, from around here, that I could see. I know they don't have much room. They want to show the newest things they buy, and they've bought some good newer things, like Kiki Smith and so on.

Rigelhaupt:

You said that a lot of the museums have a lot of similarities with one another in what they're showing. In thinking about the years you've been in the Bay Area, has that always been true at SFMOMA, that it has shown similarities with other museums in the US?

03-00:28:24

Brown:

Oh, it's probably been always true. I think of the time of Henry Hopkins as much more supporting of local people. His own local people. Not the ones I was talking about, the conceptual people, but a lot of people from Los Angeles and from here. Curiously, they were being collected outside too, because there was a little bit of a push from this area. When you get a curator from outside here and they don't take any trouble to find out what really might seriously have been happening over years here, they segregate the work. It's the same feeling about prints. It's something extra and special, something you kind of want to give a little time of day to, so you put a little special room that says The Print Room or—It's usually in the back, or it's a corridor or something. It's the same kind of thing, you have a Bay Area Room. They did have one room where they had a lot of Bay Area art when they opened the museum, and it was segregated. I don't think there's even a Thiebaud up right now. But of course, at a certain point, with Thiebaud and Diebenkorn, they know they're very popular, so they want to have those out there. But back when I first started to work with them, and for a long time afterwards, that

wasn't the case. They would've been segregated right in with the others. But I do think that when a museum does really get behind it—And it has to be somebody who not only just picks out new work. They do this show, which is great, and they have a little committee and they have collectors go around to studios. They pick out some art they like. So it's like, "Oh, that's nice." You know, "I think we'll pick that." Then they show it, and maybe it's good and maybe it's not so good. But it's a little bit isolated. There's no attempt to place it into an art history context, or a real world context, or a whole world context. There's no attempt to make sense of why anybody's doing anything as they're doing it, here; why it's different here from anywhere else. Maybe it isn't anymore, because the world has gotten so small; but once it was.

Rigelhaupt: Have there been moments that SFMOMA did a better job highlighting Bay Area work? Or in your experience, has it always had its own sort of separate room, as you were describing?

03-00:31:07

Brown: Oh, everybody does whatever they can do, you know. When you hire people, they do what they're interested in. That's what they should do, because that's what they know. Maybe, I would say, they should go out to galleries and try to make some sense of the context that they're in, as well. But I don't know. You know, I don't think that—[pause] I think they do it to some extent; but I don't know that there's been a—I just think it's human nature, it's a natural thing. If somebody who was the director actually said to them, "Here's some books you have to—" Like, everybody ought to be required to read "Space, Time, Sound." Everybody ought to be required to read the Diebenkorn, or at least *look at* the Diebenkorn and the Thiebaud catalogues, and the funk art catalogues, you know; and really, when they first come here, see the history of the place in an art way. Because then they would at least be able to temper what they see outside by what they would be able to understand, actually, has been a vibrant and whole and ongoing art scene.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have any favorite hidden gems in SFMOMA's permanent collection?

03-00:32:43

Brown: Hidden gems? [laughs] Oh, you know, there's things that I like, but I don't really know; it's hard to bring things up. It's funny, I can't visualize anything right now. [laughs] So I don't think that question's going to be a good one. I'm just saying the same things over again I said the first time, I have this horrible feeling.

Rigelhaupt: What about the world of critics? What's been the dynamic you've experienced in working with critics in some of the promotions, perhaps, of Crown Point? And if you could also speak to their relationship to SFMOMA.

03-00:33:32

Brown: Well, critics do make a difference, especially the critic for the newspaper; and usually, there's only one. Once we had a couple or three, you know. When

Thomas Albright was alive, there was him. Then we had David Bonetti for a while, as well as [Kenneth] Baker. That was great, because we had two papers. But now we only have one paper and one critic. So it makes a big difference to artists, if he pays attention to them at all. Baker does try to make some historic ongoing connections. But he is one of the ones that should read these books I've been telling you about, because even though he's been here for maybe fifteen years, he comes from the East Coast, and he writes always from an East Coast viewpoint. He often writes little asides that indicate that he doesn't think there really could be anything seriously great going on here. So I have mixed feelings about him. But everybody has their own personal take on whatever they're doing, and from wherever they came from. But if there were a really great writer, great critic, who did try to understand the scene here, I think the story would be different about how many people know about it outside here.

But again, I think that the critics generally take the same kind of approach I've said about the curators, and they really, deep down, don't think there's anything that's of world importance that's happening here. So just when they do something about local work, it's sort of a matter of wandering around and saying, "Oh, yeah, I think that's pretty," or "I like that." Baker usually says, "Oh, it resembles so-and-so, but it's like Sol LeWitt," or "It resembles David {Salle?}," or it resembles whatever, and pull some example and then make a comment which may or may not—[laughs] You know. Which is true. I mean, I guess almost all art that's done resembles something. Most of the art that's out there isn't going to last and isn't going to be very important. So that's probably the only way you can do it. But if you really did think that there was something important going on in this community, and you searched for a thread—I know Baker doesn't like to hang out with artists, or know artists, or see artists, or talk to artists, because he's afraid he might get influenced somehow. I think a lot of critics have a kind of an arrogant feeling that it matters a lot what they say, and so they don't want to—You know, it's like they're trying to be fair and balanced. In fact, in the long run, it probably doesn't matter that much. Except that if there were somebody who was really good and really connected, like Dave Hickey was in L.A. for a while—He was living there and he was really writing wonderful stuff about the L.A. artists, that got in a lot of the national magazines, and placing them in some kind of a real context. And that, I think, helped a lot with the resurgence of L.A. right now.

Rigelhaupt: What about the journal *ArtForum*?

03-00:37:10

Brown: *ArtForum* started here. I remember. I was here. But they went off. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: Did *ArtForum* play a role in promoting Crown Point or SFMOMA?

03-00:37:25

Brown:

I think so. They wrote up some things that we did back then. Yeah. It was great that they were here when they started. But we are small potatoes to them, you know? Prints probably always have been small potatoes, but ours have been nice small potatoes. We've given opportunities to a lot of artists. You know, this is another idea that isn't original with me, that comes from Tom Marioni, that California—San Francisco especially invented new ideas, from the Black Panthers, and the Free Speech Movement, and gay rights, a lot of new ideas that have spread from here into the culture in general, in this country. Because it's an exciting social situation here, it's a good fertile place for artists. The artists have been connected to these ideas. But a lot of the times, other places outside this area don't recognize that a lot of these things did start here. There are art movements that started here. But you know, once they get out there in the rest of the world, they think they invented them themselves.

Rigelhaupt:

Do you think SFMOMA's been good about picking up the things that have started here? Are they—

03-00:39:06

Brown:

I don't know.

Rigelhaupt:

—kind of late to get on the bandwagon?

03-00:39:07

Brown:

Yeah, they wait. They're an institution. It just takes one person who wants to think and see, you know, to make something—Like Paul Schimmel did in L.A. I think I mentioned that I think he's really done a lot to put L.A. on the scene.

Rigelhaupt:

Do you have a sense, then, as to why you think SFMOMA was leading, in a lot of ways, in showing Matthew Barney when he was young, and Doris Salcedo? Why do you think they got shown at SFMOMA early in their careers?

03-00:39:53

Brown:

Because they happened to get a curator who knew about them. That's how it works. And that's great. I mean, that's good for our reputation, that we were able to reach out, that somebody could see that and could show them early. I think that's good. I wouldn't say that they should *not* do that kind of thing. That's what I've tried to do with Crown Point, too, is to try to see something out—You know, there's a big picture, how people fit, who's out there that's making a difference? All you can do is pick one or two; you can't handle everything. Consequently, you can't handle everything here. You can't just be a local museum, like we were when Henry Hopkins was here. I mean, that was very nice. But because we weren't in a context, showing important—you know, or we didn't have that reputation for taking risky things. I know that we got some points for showing Eva Hesse early, you know, when that show was

around, because it was a difficult show. Even the Kiki Smith. They've taken some great risks in taking some of this fragile material and interesting material, material that's not going to necessarily appeal to the masses. Even the Brice Marden show, it's curiously not traveling everywhere. You know, it only really came here, as I understand it, and one other place, I think, besides New York. In New York, there was some mumbling in the street that that was boring or old fashioned. I don't think so. But it still didn't bring in the crowds, you know, even though it was "old fashioned." So what can you do? You know, you want to bring in crowds, but this administration right now is doing a pretty nice job of hitting a balance.

Rigelhaupt: Have you ever heard discussions about who does the framing for SFMOMA?

03-00:42:13

Brown: No.

Rigelhaupt: And what about at Crown Point?

03-00:42:16

Brown: We've always had someone doing framing for us. At one point in Oakland, we had a frame shop in our premises, and we did most of it. But since we moved to San Francisco, we've mostly sent it out.

Rigelhaupt: I wanted to ask you a couple questions about other presses. If you would reflect on Parasol Press?

03-00:42:44

Brown: Oh, well, Parasol Press was wonderful. I mean, Bob Feldman, I like very much. He put me on the map. He talked about how great we were. And the story I've told many times about Sol LeWitt being my first New York artist, he was sent by Parasol to me. Then after that, Feldman sent me a lot of New York artists that I really loved. I was able to work with Brice Marden in '73, and Chuck Close, and Robert Ryman, and Dorothea Rockburne and Bob Mangold, later, Sylvia Mangold, through Parasol Press. But the way he did it, actually, was the right way, in terms of getting artists. He got one or two good ones, and then he got recommendations, and all the group started to come. They told their friends that they liked me, and they liked working at Crown Point, they liked the work that came out of it. So they were willing to come. So yes, Bob Feldman. He is a kind of a nut, but he was always honest, and he didn't interfere with what we were doing. I think I helped put *him* on the map, but he certainly was very helpful to me as well. He had this interesting different look than anybody else's prints because of what we were able to do. He certainly provided great artists for us early on. It was a great start.

Rigelhaupt: What about Gemini Press?

03-00:44:21

Brown:

Gemini's very good. They're nice people. They've always been very friendly and supportive. I think they're very good fabricators and lithographers. Except for a couple of periods where they hired an etcher that I trained, they have not been able to do etching well, and some of the etchings they have published are a little bit of an embarrassment; technically, not so good. But they have done many great, important fabrication projects, like the one that Rauschenberg did in China.

Rigelhaupt:

What about Tamarind?

03-00:45:27

Brown:

Well, Tamarind—Actually, soon after I started Crown Point, I heard about Tamarind. June Wayne started it with a Ford Foundation grant, so it was really a different kind of thing from what I was doing. But I did go and asked if I could see her and see the place. She explained to me what she was doing and told me I should go ahead and do what I was doing. It was great that she was generous with her time and helpful to me. In a way, I didn't *really* find it helpful, because it was so completely different in format. And June Wayne is not a printer herself. But I think that it's been a big force in helping to put lithography on the map and to let people know how to do lithography and so on. So I have only respect for that.

Rigelhaupt:

Do you have recollections of the impact that the UC Davis's art department had in the 1970s?

03-00:46:38

Brown:

Oh, yeah, they really had a big impact, because Thiebaud has always been so articulate and interested in teaching. Then they got in Wiley and all those people. So there was definitely an impact. I didn't know Bruce Nauman when he was around here. He was Wiley's student. But it did have a big impact.

Rigelhaupt:

Would you reflect on other important galleries in San Francisco?

03-00:48:35

Brown:

Well, I was living over in the East Bay, and I had my hands full raising a child by myself and teaching and running the press. I did come over and go to shows at the museum and galleries, but I didn't hang out in San Francisco. I went to the Dilexi Gallery, because I knew the artists who were in there. There were some other ones. Like Bruce Conner was showing in one; I can't remember the name of it. There was another one that Tom [Marioni] told me he had the first show in. So there were things. There were things like that going on at the time. But I didn't know Tom then, so I didn't know about those more far out ones. [laughs] So I can't remember. Of course, Art Unlimited, which I was in when it started, which was called Art Unlimited, which is a sort of strange name, but that was Wanda Hansen. That was great. She showed a lot of people. Just everybody. Including me. It was terrific. But she never really was able to make a living out of it, I guess; and then she had a

partner, Diana Fuller, who was a force. That was a good gallery. An important gallery in the history here.

Rigelhaupt: What about the Campbell Gallery?

03-00:50:05

Brown: Oh, it was a wonderful gallery under Charles Campbell. I have respect for that. It used to be a frame shop. My ex-husband worked there, actually as a framer in that building before it was a gallery. That must've been before Charlie Campbell took it over. I do remember that he showed a lot of neat things, pre-Columbian things. Everything he liked. He's a very wonderful person, eye. He had some shows, drawings and things, of some of the people I liked, like Thiebaud and Diebenkorn, so I definitely went there. But I don't think it was there when I first came to town. I think it came on at some point. [pause] I don't know. Tom would be a lot better on all that stuff, because he's a big—He goes to every show, you know; he always has. He could tell you everything about what went on back then in all the galleries. I'm less attentive to it.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have a sense of how SFMOMA, moving into their new building affected its relationship with Bay Area artists?

03-00:51:30

Brown: No, I don't think I do. I like having them in the neighborhood. I think it was a wonderful, courageous thing to move South of Market.

Rigelhaupt: But with the new building and the bigger space, did it change the museum's focus to more national and international art? Or was that a trajectory that had begun even before the move South of Market?

03-00:51:56

Brown: I don't know. You could probably tell easily by looking at the collection. But I still don't think it's the building, I think it's the people. Just in general. It's always people.

Rigelhaupt: And in your memory, are there any curators that stand out as particularly strong or influential at SFMOMA?

03-00:52:25

Brown: Well, you know, I remember Anneliese Hoyer, who was a print curator, along when I first came. I liked her; she was great. She had some interesting print shows. I used to go, I always liked to see them. And oh, in the galleries, Ray Lewis, of course, for the prints. Very important. Everybody liked to go and see all the shows he had of old prints, and hear him talk about them. He was a very big influence and a good source for me to see things, and old things, and just get recharged, recharge your batteries. I know the print people. Günter Troche, out at the Achenbach was the old guy, before [Robert] Johnson came in. Troche was a real pro, and also open to new things.

Rigelhaupt: Well, those were largely my questions. And the way I typically end is, is there anything I should've asked that I didn't ask? [Brown laughs] Or is there anything you'd like to add?

03-00:54:04

Brown: Oh, I think this is totally extensive. I think I've said way more than I could imagine; probably too much. So I don't know.

Just in terms of Crown Point's history, I should mention that after we had to let go of the Japan program, because it became just too expensive in the exchange rate and so on, and even going there and staying in a hotel was almost prohibitive, at a certain point. And so, because we'd done the Japan program, we were able to start one in China for a little while. That was very exciting, and early on, before people could really go to China, when everybody was wearing their blue clothes. It's been a big change seeing what China looks like now, it's opened up since then. But that was also very wonderful.

But the idea of building on something that you've done before, and each step. Like Parasol came along, and I was able to build on that to do my own publishing; and then was able to get Karen McCready to join me, and then to build something in New York; and then because of having done that, to be able to build something in Japan; and because of having done that, to be able to build something in China, and trying to keep this going, too. But that's what's fun and exciting about the whole thing. But it's really about people and who you have. I was able to do the China program because I ran into a man at UC Berkeley, actually, who was a China scholar and had contacts there. And he had seen an exhibition we had at the UC Berkeley museum, of the woodcuts, and came and talked to me and said, "You know, I think I could arrange you to do something similar to this in China." I thought, "Wow! That would be fabulous." And we actually were able to do that.

So there are networks. A lot of it has to do with the museums and the whole community of—You know, they show something, even if it's just a little show; somebody sees it; it hits a bell, and something else can happen. I think that it is really all about chance and timing, personal relationships. Not only relationships, but people who are on the alert. Some people are not just looking out for something they think is nice, or pretty, or someone else might like, or it might be good to show that because it'll bring in more people or something like that. But there are some people who are really trying to make sense out of things that are going on. Those are the gems. Those are the great people.

Rigelhaupt: It's a nice place to end. Thank you.

[End of Interview]

**Jess Rigelhaupt** is an assistant professor of history and American studies at the University of Mary Washington. At the time of this interview he was a postdoctoral research specialist in the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) at the University of California, Berkeley. He received his Ph.D. from the Program in American Culture at the University of Michigan. His research focuses on California politics and culture. He is writing a book on mid-twentieth century progressive social movements and politics in the San Francisco Bay Area.