Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Joseph Pulitzer, 1985 July 9

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Joseph Pulitzer, Jr. on July 9, 1985. The interview took place in St. Louis, Missouri, and was conducted by Sue Ann Kendall for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[Tape 1, side A]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Mr. Pulitzer, in your last interview with the Archives, you spoke of the discipline and the connoisseurship of your training at Harvard. You said that that led you to wait until pieces were—I think you used the word, "settled in"—and accepted before you purchased them. In your more recent collecting, though, you have bought and commissioned works by relatively young artists. What brought about the change in your collecting?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, when I was developing this acreage in St. Louis County, and had built a house, designed by William Adair Bernoudy, and a garden which he also designed, it was quite clear to me that this would be an ideal setting for outdoor sculpture. And so I had met and liked and admired Andrea Cascella, the Italian sculptor who lives in Milan, and I arranged through another friend, Beatrice Monti, who was the director of the Galleria del Ariete in Milan to have him do a fairly large scale stone piece for the property and that worked out very nicely. It was a commission and one that I have enjoyed greatly, and it was the beginning, then, of a trend toward perhaps more contemporary artists that came along in due course. But I should remind you that the other artists of the more established and historic position, such as Maillol, Rodin, Matisse and Lipchitz, were already coming into the collection and had already been installed in the country, and so it was really an extension of that process that led into the more contemporary. My wife, Emily, who had been the curator—the curator, very funny—of the St. Louis Art Museum—which now has I think five or six curators, but that was a number of years ago—was very interested in the more contemporary things, and through her I met Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Richard Serra, and Mark diSuvero, either directly or indirectly through my wife. And that led to the moving of the collection as a whole into a more contemporary mode. Now when I say "settled," I'm not sure I ever used the word "settled," but what I think I meant, and what I certainly do think today, is that I like art that has stood the test of time and been around a while, and I liked the feeling that it can get into the mainstream of art and be comfortable, as an expression that is not so unconventional or so totally at odds with the art that one has become accustomed to that one can't relate it to the art of the past. I think that all of these things that have emerged on our property have and can easily be related, through formal contemplation and through style, through the artist's perception and his expression of form and his intent. Those things are not radical to me, and I don't believe they are really radical in the sense of being out of place with the more established art of the past; it's simply that they are new forms that took me a little longer to get acquainted with.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Is it their formal characteristics that you related to works of the past?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I believe that. . . . There's no question that the formal character of these works has a great deal of interest to me, but then of course there are the other, the humanistic, I mean, and the perception of the artist, in his interest in space or in whatever his particular interest is, whatever his focus is, that I think I also understand and appreciate—or try to understand and appreciate, right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you feel that you're collecting what you would call definitive works from say the sixties and seventies and even into the eighties?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think the. . . . I believe that the objects that we have fit quite comfortably into the criterion of being well-expressed examples of what the artist was striving to do. I think our examples are good examples. And I think those examples are—to the extent that one can use the word—accomplished, in that they accomplish what the artist intended. There's nothing tentative or particularly unsettling about the examples we have; they seem to have a definitive, finite and final . . . a finality that is very, I think, consistent in this collection as a whole. I think that the collection as a whole has achieved a rather finished and final and realized expression. And I believe these contemporary things do fit into that quite comfortably.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. You also said in the previous interview, and I can quote this one, "I hoped that I would be able to assemble a few things that would have quite a relevance to what was emerging as a twentieth-century School of Paris." And that was back in the thirties when you were beginning. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, yes, when I was in school.

SUE ANN KENDALL: . . . to put into your collection the School of Paris works. How do you define relevance today in regard to the works that you are collecting?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, the whole Minimalist experience in the sixties is very well expressed, I think, in the. . . . Or even later than that: Serra certainly, in Kelly, in Judd. And these are very disciplined works, very reduced, very simplified, but at the same time extremely expressive works of art. I find that that phase of art is much closer in its overtones to classic art than it is to Expressionism. I believe that this collection as a whole is not as involved in Expressionism as it is in the more resolved and classic and composed works. And the Minimalists, of course in my perception have achieved a composure and a stability and an authority that is quite dramatic and positive and has a good deal of force and persuasion to it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What led you in that direction, although I think maybe you've just answered some of that question, but [what—Ed.] led you in that direction rather than some of the manifestations of art that exist today, or have existed since, in the sixties, seventies.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I don't know that there's any (chuckles) deliberate sort of scheme. I've never been systematic at all. I've never tried to fill gaps and cover everything and be sort of encyclopedic. That wouldn't have been my style, and nor would I have had the resources always to do that sort of thing, which maybe museums do. But I bought things that appealed to me and attracted me but which, again, had received enough critical evaluation and enough judgments had been made that I could read a bit and know something about the artist's intent—and often met them. In fact, the people who have done the commissions here were all well known to us and then became friends, so there was no problem in that respect. But as to expressionism as a whole, I think that this collection—and romanticism as a whole—this collection rather leans toward classicism in the sense of the repose and the finality and the stability and the classic sense of order rather than the dramatic and the disorder of expressionism—on which I can go on at considerable length if you like (chuckles), but I think we'll hold that for later.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (chuckles) All right. How are the Minimalists' and the Conceptualists' work today. . . . How do you relate their work to life today?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well. . . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: In other words, how do you relate the work to its time? To the culture that exists, to its zeitgeist, if you will?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, you mean the Minimalists?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, the Minimalists, Conceptualists. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, now it seems to me that this art is now so well established that it doesn't need any sort of a defense from me. I think that what is taking its place gives me a considerable amount of angst, or anxiety (chuckles), because I frankly do not like, and did not like, the sort of Expressionistic or Neo-Expressionistic things that have been coming out of the shows recently. I was very unhappy about the Whitney Annual this year, because it seemed to me that the artists were thrashing desperately to find something new, when in fact a great deal of the expressionism that they were using had already been achieved in the early part of the century by the Germans and by the Fauves in France. And it's rather ironic that recently we bought a Derain [Andre—Ed.] of 1905, done in Collioure when he was working alongside Matisse, that is a very sparkling, very colorful, very Fauvist, a harbor scene, that has a lot of the same force and vitality as the new, the Neo-Expressionists, but, again, has stood the test of time. Some of the new boys I'm not so sure about.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That was one of my next questions (laughter), was going to be your opinion of the neo-expressionist school that seems to be emerging.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I'm not so crazy. . . . I can recommend Robert Hughes's recent article in Time Magazine [July __, 1985—Ed.].

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yes, I read that.

JOSEPH PULITZER: . . . that is very entertaining, and very tart, spicy, when it comes to his discussion of some of the new, neo-expressionist people. And I find. . . . I'm not going to libel anybody, but it doesn't interest me very much. I think it won't endure too well. I think it's not well fabricated; I don't think it's well made. With a few rare exceptions, I don't believe it'll stand up to the original expressionists in Europe. Anselm Kiefer is an artist that I respect very much, and of course he's in Germany, but. . . . And I don't believe, no, would not have been shown at the Whitney, but that's a very interesting artist that I think has found his own way and has an emotional character and feeling of almost despair about humanity and the environment that we live in that is very touching and remarkable. But I find so much of it—the other people—so empty.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So, when you are say choosing an artist, or choosing a work, that you want to have or to commission, is your process of selection pretty much the same that it was when you began collecting?

JOSEPH PULITZER: [Thoughtful pause—Ed.] I believe it is very much the same. I've always been drawn to one or another artistic expression, and then usually read about it a little bit and made an effort to find out about it. And if the people who do it are around and can be met, it's interesting to talk with them and find out what their character and personalities are and what their interests are, and you can learn a great deal. When I was first starting up collecting, of course, it was much different because the artists. . . . I mean, the gap in age which is now reversed: I'm older than the artists; in those days the artists were older than me, so much older in fact that I would have been considered a terrible upstart if I'd invaded the privacy of their studios. (chuckles)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ah hah, so things have switched in that regard.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Things have switched a bit.

SUE ANN KENDALL: There's so much more criticism—art criticism—and reporting being done on art now that artists seem to find their place in history more rapidly than previously. Does that affect your collecting? Has that made it easier for you to collect more contemporary works?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, basically I don't believe the pace of our collecting has changed materially. It. . . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Not about collecting, but I was thinking more of the artists, who now so often seem to find a niche in art history earlier than they did previously.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I'm quite patient. I'm willing to wait a while and let them settle down and see how it works out. I'm not so anxious to be on the bandwagon and to get everything hot off the griddle and all that sort of thing. Again, that's part of my temperament. I like the art to be around a while and settle in and be seen in exhibitions and begin to relate. That's what I think I meant earlier by saying I like it to feel comfortable in the stream of art history and seem to belong and be comfortable, and then I will try to find a good example.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So the accelerated pace of the art market and the plethora of publications and so on doesn't really affect you personally that much.

JOSEPH PULITZER: I don't believe it does. Although I recognize that a great many people are able to make their minds up very quickly and rapidly buy the work of almost unknown artists who just get gaining any sort of recognition or reputation. But I'm more leisurely; I wait a bit and hope that I'm not missing the boat completely. (chuckles) It gets rather expensive if you wait too long.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JOSEPH PULITZER: On the other hand, I'm not a gambler and I don't care about trying to beat the crowd and anything like that. I'm much more interested in the quality of the collection and the spirit and character that it has as a whole, and if the new people fit in, that's wonderful—and often they do—but I'm willing to wait a bit and see how that works out.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It seems that a discerning collector like yourself is really a critic, and I've got some questions I'd like to ask you about art criticism. What do you perceive its role to be?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, that's a very . . . a good question. I don't like a great deal of the writing that comes out of contemporary magazines and publications because it is often so highfalutin and obscurantist and precious or whatever. And I believe that the criticism that stands up the best is that which illuminates. I don't believe you can illuminate if you're so involved in the complicated expression that some of the writers have. I find that instead of illuminating, that just obscures, makes it more complicated, and so I'm not very happy about a great deal of the criticism that is coming out. However, it seems to have a market (chuckles) and it doesn't. . . . I mean, I'm not trying to suppress it or denounce it or do anything that would be unconstitutional about it, but it doesn't happen to appeal greatly to me. I think that if a critic can illuminate the character of a work for someone who has not seen it and has not experienced it, that that's an important service.
[Interruption to answer phone]

JOSEPH PULITZER: . . . would be a wonderful service that he or she could perform. But very often when I read contemporary criticism, I'm slightly annoyed by the convoluted and Byzantine (chuckles) complications of the language. And after all, language is supposed to be transparent so that you understand it. I guess I'm a born journalist in that sense, that I don't like obscurity in newspapers, and I think you can have clarity and eloquence too, but you don't have to have this terribly turgid Byzantine stuff that is coming out in some of our publications.

SUE ANN KENDALL: How do you distinguish between the role of the journalist in the art world and the role of the

critic, the art historian critic?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think the art historian critic has a different objective. I mean, theirs is to do an historical appraisal of an artist in much greater depth than a daily critic could possibly do. And yet the daily critic has a responsibility to be reasonable, to be fair, to be informed, and to be just and accurate, even though he's writing on a matter that would involve a lot of subjective feelings. However, the art historian has time. He can assemble over a long period of time the facts and the interpretation, whereas the critic is usually, I suppose, up against some sort of a deadline, and so the roles are a bit different. They're not antithetical and they're not in opposition to each other; it's just that the time element is so different and I think the discipline is indeed somewhat different.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It seems, though, that event-oriented or sensational kinds of art-making get more press because of the nature of journalism, and, having been a critic myself for a daily newspaper. . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, the press likes to sell newspapers and sensation is one of its weaknesses, let's call it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JOSEPH PULITZER: I know what you mean. I don't like sensationalism at all; I think it's entirely wrong, but it is used. And the daily press—and the art press—is competitive and they want to be noticed and talked about, so they go for rather extravagant coverage sometimes and sensational sometimes, but. . . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's aimed at a general public, though, rather that your art world people specifically, as a rule.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think that the whole coverage of art has been accelerated, as you say, to a point where it's almost dizzying in how quickly the reputation of a new artist is skyrocketed by all this hype. And I think that's the pace of the world we live in maybe, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the skyrocket won't fizzle out.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. Another question. With the proliferation of the kinds of art being made—there's performance art, there's earthworks, there are a lot of different manifestations now; it's not just painting and sculpture. Can one critic—or a collector—use the same criteria for evaluating all these different kinds of manifestations?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I can't. (chuckles) I can't keep up with video and these things; I mean, that's perhaps not my taste or my field or my instinct. But I doubt that. . . . I think you can assign to intelligent curators, or intelligent and informed people, to do a show for you if you're in a museum situation that would be very interesting. But I don't think a collector can digest everything. Ican't, and I don't think many individuals do—or can. Museums have a somewhat different responsibility. They have to cover a broad range and that's part of their obligation to the public, to be able to show everything. We don't make any pretense of doing that, and are not systematic, as I said. I'm the least systematic person in the world. As so I just don't try to tangle with things that don't have a lot of meaning to me.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, it seems that if you. . . .

[Tape 1, side B]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Given the plethora of styles in the art world now, and the kinds of things being done, do you think it's possible for a critic to be a Clement Greenberg-type person who takes on one way of dealing with art, or do you think people are forced into becoming more eclectic?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I believe the critic has a terrible time with this very problem, of the multiplicity of expressions, and the multiplicity of media, and the whole avalanche of art coming out of the galleries and so forth. It's very, very difficult. I guess that a critic has to resolve in his own mind what he thinks is excellence—that's a tough assignment—and go for excellence. I think the same of a collector. I think you have to make a decision as to what is frivolous or meretricious or whatever—and against what is enduring and serious creative work. That's a terribly hard role to play if you're a daily newspaper critic, certainly, and equally difficult, I suppose, in magazine publications—almost, although they may have a little more time. But that is the very reason why I like to wait. I want to see if Elizabeth Murray is something important. I don't have Elizabeth Murray; I don't like her work. But that isn't to say I might not learn to. Now I do not have Julian Schnabel, will not have him, I predict, and will not regret that I don't have him, I predict. (both chuckle) But there are those who are fascinated by his facility and youthful verve and so forth. I find it terribly empty and not at all my taste. But after all, I'm a private collector; what difference does it make?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Except that do you not think that the collectors who do buy Schnabel are putting him on the map? Are they not playing a role in that?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, of course. Yes, of course. And the dealers and the magazines and everybody else. I mean, he's a skyrocket. Now, that we mentioned earlier. I don't know if this is going to be important work. I don't like it. I don't feel that it's important. I don't feel that it has core. It's surface facility and bravura and dashing about and agony and all these emotional things, but I wonder if it's really based on a deep philosophical [base—Ed.], or perception of humanity or life. Now I think Anselm Kiefer is someone I'm going to watch very, very carefully. I respect his things. I think there's a tragic overtone there that is based on a realization that humanity is in a bad way; we're having a tough time. And there's some real threats in the world, not only looking backward to the horrors of the Hitler era in Germany, but looking to the awful hostilities in this world that are making survival a real question.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. I want to move on in a little bit different direction, but a related direction—regarding connoisseurship, which has always been based on recognizing the hand of the artist, or the nuances of the brush stroke, that kind of thing. But once again, manifestations and expressions in art have changed so. . . . For instance, when you take a Richard Serra piece, you don't have a brush stroke to look at. Therefore, does connoisseurship also change as you deal with more conceptual work?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I believe connoisseurship changes, because within the oeuvre of every artist, including Serra, will be very distinct gradations of success, of achievement level, of quality. And I think the connoisseur who is really familiar with the work of an artist instinctively knows—and often the artist himself knows—when the thing came off and when it didn't. So it seems to me if it comes off well and if the individual is close to the artist and to his work, as observed over a reasonably extended period, that enables him to instinctively go for the excellent and for the successful piece, and that's also the fun of the game in collecting. And the fun of the game is to find quality. That's the real fun of the whole quest, not to amass a huge number of things, but to find excellence. And that's the fun I get.
[Interruption in taping]

SUE ANN KENDALL: It sounds as though you're talking a bit about the artist's intention in evaluating an artist's work. Is that correct? In other words, you're taking what the artist is trying to do and within that trying to choose those pieces where the artist has accomplished what he or she wants to.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, that's no different than it has ever been. If you talk about nineteenth century work in France, you have to go to the objective of what Impressionism—let's take that, take Impressionism—what were the objectives of those artists? The public didn't know. At the outset they were reviled, you know. Any new thing, of course, is always reviled—by some. But you have to know the purpose, I think, and then see how well it was achieved. Now we all, I mean, Impressionism is on every postcard, on every schoolbook. But it wasn't in those days, and they met great hostility, as you know. And the struggle to be exhibited in Paris, getting away from the academy, and getting away from the official exhibition forced them to establish their own. That's an example of having to understand what they were trying to do before you can really appreciated what their struggle was.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now that you're collecting people that you know, personally, I'm assuming they express to you their intentions and so on, which. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, you know, artists love to be obscure. And they are very philosophical often, and like to be contrary also—and often like to tease and not be serious. But putting it all together, of course it makes a lot of difference to know the artist, because you begin to see through the chinks in the armor and you find out that there are various points of view that may not be verbally brought way out in the front of the stage, but there are things in the background and you learn about it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What role does intuition play in your collecting, would you say?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I'm a great believer in it. (chuckles) I think intuition is very good. And I believe in having a certain license and liberty, whatever, to play hunches. Yeah, I think a hunch is very good. I mean, I wouldn't put that ahead of everything, but some sort of instinctive response is often marvelous. I mean, if it hits you very, very strong—and it usually hits you after you've seen other examples of the work elsewhere—then you know—or I know, at least—that my intuition, or instinct, is giving me a nudge to go ahead and try to seriously think of acquiring whatever the object is.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you still feel that the core of your collection is in the Cubism and the School of Paris? Or do think as time has gone on and you've acquired more other kinds of work, that that's no longer the case?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I think it's true, that one of the great strengths of the collection is the depth of, well, not necessarily School of Paris, but Cubism and its related formal developments, yes; I think that is a strength. I don't try to define, you know, its strength, against something else. I think, taken as a whole, it's fairly representative of most of the major sort of "isms." We live in an age of isms, (chuckles) and I think quite a lot of these isms are represented, but not all. And often sadly because of not having had the opportunity. I mean, I would like very much to have a beautiful and important Mondrian, but try to find a beautiful and important

Mondrian. They're very rare and tremendously costly and I haven't found one that I can handle.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You mentioned gaps in your collection in the last interview with us.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, gaps. . . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: And it seems to me that that's one of them.

JOSEPH PULITZER: That's a gap, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's a gap. What other ones do you perceive?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, now I'll give you a gap that I'm not so sure I really have to fill, and that's Kandinsky. That's an artist that obviously is of international stature and importance—in history. But in history, that's one thing, but is he, or is the oeuvre as a whole, of such compelling magnificence? I often find the things cold, particularly the late works, and calculating and rather dry and lacking in charm or in seductiveness. They're very dry and cold. But, you know, it's clear that that same character, that you might say dry and cold, if Newman [Barnett—Ed.] does it, I don't find dry and cold. I find that that has grandeur, discipline, authority, presence. And irrespective of not having what you called earlier the hand of the artist, and it's absolute neutrality—and also this is true of Kelly—the absolute neutrality has a kind of dignity and grandeur that I find very exciting. I mean, they're wonderfully strong statements, totally self-contained, with no reference to the environment around them, and yet this separation, this escape from recordkeeping, is a very, very noble expression, I believe. Both artists I think are splendid.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What about Johns or Rauschenberg? Do you have. . . . I know you don't have. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, we have some Johns prints, yes. And I do respect those very much. I think. . . . They get into the trouble area for me.

SUE ANN KENDALL: How so?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, they're getting into the Expressionist business. And while my wife doesn't agree with me at all, I find that I have to push myself pretty hard to really like a Rauschenberg. I mean, I respect it without liking it. And so we don't have Rauschenberg. It'd be nice to have one, but we don't. (laughs) I think you can wait too long, and that's another artist that. . . . That would be a gap.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh. Any others that you think about?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, one thinks about everything [said with a smile—Ed.], but since it's impossible, you just dismiss that and you sort of go along and do the best you can and find things. And then, you know, you have to. . . . If you're an individual, you can buy for a certain bit, and then there comes a pause and you reflect and relax and enjoy your decisions—or bewail them if you are sorry later. I don't usually bewail, but every now and then if a very happy, gregarious lunch, washed down by white wine, gets me enthused, I might buy something sort of impulsively that I might later think, "Well, I should have reflected a bit longer on that decision." (chuckles)

SUE ANN KENDALL: I was going to ask you if you have any stories about pieces you wished that you had acquired but didn't.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, there is one incredible picture that I could have bought, but didn't think I could, and that's the Les Demoiselles d'Avignon by Picasso, in the Museum of Modern Art. That was showed to me by, I think it was Rene Seligmann. The Seligmann brothers had a gallery then, and I think it was Rene who was then living. He showed me this picture. He'd just come over from Paris. I thought I couldn't afford it. It turned out I could, but I just didn't have the courage to do anything that brash at my age then, which was very young. (laughs)

SUE ANN KENDALL: When was that?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, I'm guessing I was probably about 21 when the picture came over from Europe. But, you know, that's just an anecdote. It is a fact that I've always loved the picture, and it's a wonderful painting, but it belongs in the public domain. And I have a strong feeling that private collections end up in the public domain, so I don't feel that I'm doing anything a bit selfish at all. I hope, I do believe, this collection will end up in the public domain; it's intended to. So you really, you act as a custodian or guardian for a while of things that are not necessarily always exhibited publicly. But most of our pictures go into the museum at various times of the year, and often are exhibited. And are often exhibited in loan shows, although loan shows have gotten to be quite a problem, because of the difficulty of handling, and insurance, and all these questions. It gets to be a rather difficult thing. And the shows are so long and prolonged. They go from city to city. And these are getting to be difficulties that I think are causing us to feel that lending is not just as easy a decision as it used to be.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What do you envision as the eventual disposition of the collection?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I believe that according to our present intentions it will be divided between Harvard University, the Fogg Art Museum, or as they call it now, the Harvard Museums—they've got enough of them—and the St. Louis Art Museum, divided. I believe that's how we have it arranged, and I don't see any particular reason to change that. I think that's. . . . I learned about art at Harvard and I have been in St. Louis—all our life, born here—and it's my professional home, it's my real home, it's my legal home—I vote here. Why shouldn't the museum enjoy some of the things—or half of them, at least—that I have accumulated?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yes, well, it's a lucky museum.
[Interruption in taping]

SUE ANN KENDALL: What attracted you to Pop Art, when you started buying things like Oldenburg and Warhol?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I was led into that by a friend—a dealer—Joe Helman, who is also a friend of my wife, Emmy. And I think their enthusiasm was contagious. I looked at these things and suddenly realized that this was an interesting expression. Why not? So we started with a very impressive example, which is that Temple of Apollo [1964—Ed.]—I think that was one of the earliest things I bought—by Lichtenstein. And I think that was one of the earliest things we bought, but it's a very, very powerful _____ expression and something different. I'd been aware of these things, but not as much aware as I became when I began to really look at them in the galleries—particularly in the Helman Gallery, first in St. Louis, and then when he moved it as the [Blum-Helman] Gallery in New York. And I guess I responded. It was a little educational service that was rendered to me by Joe and Emmy.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It seems quite different, though, than the conceptual work, that you have. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, completely! But, as I say, I'm not isolated into any. . . . I've missed a lot of things, but I'm not isolated, and if these objects, which are really related to contemporary life, or the perception of contemporary life, through postcards or printing techniques, or whatever. . . . If these things are the world that are around us, I can accept that, if it has a certain order. Now notice that the objects that we've bought that are Pop Art are in themselves very controlled, very disciplined objects. And that is where the contrast, I think, in my temperament is revealed, as compared to the Neo-Expressionists, that I find totally lacking in discipline and very apt to be accidental in their handling.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I have another question. How important do you view Duchamp and his work in the history of art in the twentieth century? Marcel Duchamp.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Marcel Duchamp—and the whole Surrealist movement?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, not Surrealism so much now, as Duchamp and his statement that the art was in the idea?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Or Dada?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Dada some, but more specifically Duchamp and his work.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I don't have a great deal of knowledge, really, on that subject, and we don't have him in our collection. But obviously he was an intellectual of great importance. And if my history is right, he was in the Dada and Surrealist, he was in that school, Marcel Duchamp.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Not Surrealism so much, I wouldn't say as Dada, yes.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah, Dada, well, all right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: He did, right.

JOSEPH PULITZER: But Surrealism comes out of Dada, so okay. So in the twenties, arising after World WarI and running through the twenties and so forth. Well, you know of course there are wonderful examples in Philadelphia.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JOSEPH PULITZER: And that's a great place to see these things. I think they're fascinating. I just don't have one and, you know, you don't find them. They don't come up.

SUE ANN KENDALL: They don't pop up on the street corner, do they?

JOSEPH PULITZER: But I don't have any doctrinaire reason not to have one.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I guess I asked the question because in his use of language and his emphasis on the idea rather than even the execution of that idea, he seems to be, in a way, grandfather, perhaps, of some of the more conceptual work in the sixties.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah, well, that could well be, the historic trend of that. Of course, Miro' also had used writing a lot, as you know. And we have. . . . This painting here ["48", by Miro'—Ed.] is an example of figuration involved on an abstract basis. But when it comes to conceptual art and writing per se that is something that has escaped my enthusiasm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: In your collecting you have tried to get pieces that are very resolved—and you've mentioned that several times—and that are definitive works and so on. Are there other collectors that you feel are doing the same thing? Are many of them now, as we've mentioned, buying things more rapidly, buying what seems to be fashionable? Or do you think there are still a lot of collectors around. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, well, I think there are indeed collectors who are motivated by that same. . . . The Saatchi collection, while it is a new collection, I think has extremely good examples of more recent works. Now I don't like everything in their collection, at all, but the things that I've seen—they were kind enough to invite us to their house in London—were really superb examples of the things that they had bought. Some of the artists I don't agree with, for instance, Schnabel, but on the conceptual end, or the Minimalist end, they had wonderful examples that I did appreciate very much. So then there are indeed collectors who are very concerned with accumulating things that have real quality or merit or excellence. Yeah, indeed there are. I can't right off the bat. . . . Louise Smith [Mrs. Bertram Smith—Ed.] in New York has wonderful things. And I think she's been well advised, but that didn't stop her from going forward with great taste, and those things I suppose will eventually be in the Museum of Modern Art. Henry McIlhenny has always been a collector who went for the top, top quality thing, and has a wonderful eye, and a man of great taste and determination and character, and he went for the excellent. And his collection is superb. That'll all probably go to the Philadelphia Museum. These things end up in the public domain. I guess our tax laws make that inevitable.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. (both chuckle) You said in the last interview that you were aiming for your collection to have a certain coherence and personality. How would you define the coherence and personality?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I think you've pretty well defined it. That we are interested in good examples, and that we've gravitated toward that. I think we've—I hope we've succeeded. That's a rather awkward thing for me to be saying, but certainly it was the intent: was to buy good things, that would well express the artist at his peak of performance, and well express his intention—be realized, in the French sense.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So it isn't a particular style or a particular intellectual thread that goes through at all, but it's really this quality of excellence. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: I think so.

SUE ANN KENDALL: . . . which I certainly see in the collection, and that's what you've wanted. When did you begin collecting African and pre-Columbian pieces?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, from quite early on, because of the relationship, basically originally to Klee and to Picasso.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's what I wondered, yeah.

JOSEPH PULITZER: And I felt that these things were obviously such influences that we ought to have a few examples. And I've never done it in any very determined or systematic way—in fact, even less systematic than anything else. But we have a few good examples, and I think they are interesting to see. . . .

[Tape 2, side A]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you make it a point to try to collect local artists in the St. Louis area?

JOSEPH PULITZER: If we have friends whose work we like, yes, we will do that. And sometimes, occasionally, we'll buy a piece by someone we don't know. But usually it turns out to be someone we do know. And again, it's not systematic. There's no doctrine or dogma or any particular rules; it's just a matter of our response to people that are artists that we like, whose work we like.

SUE ANN KENDALL: How does your collecting influence other collectors in the St. Louis area?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I can't answer that with any degree of real authority. I think people enjoy seeing our things, and I think it has helped to be of influence in the city and with people who would like to do something for the museum and so forth, I think so.

SUE ANN KENDALL: By example. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: But it's very hard to pin that down; it's just a feeling that. . . . I don't think it's hurt, put it that way.

SUE ANN KENDALL: In other words, as an example.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You've been an example for others to do the same, perhaps.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah, I think so.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Were you involved at all in the Serra piece that's down by the Arch?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I was involved with the support of that project, which my wife was really responsible for, as the principal St. Louis representative on the board that made the selection, and she would tell you about that, but it was a national board and it got the support of the National Endowment for the Arts. [EP was on the selection panel—Ed.] And it became a very controversial thing, but it was also recognized very widely—certainly in the press—as an important contribution to St. Louis. And the Post-Dispatch was very supportive of it. The Globe Democrat, oddly, supported it financially through its ownership, but was very hostile to it in its coverage.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Is that right? (both chuckle) And I assume. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: But however, the thing got wide coverage; it is controversial. But I think that in time that it will be recognized as a major sculpture, certainly as it has been in Europe, when the same artist is represented in Germany, Holland, Spain, France.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, but it does seem to take time.

JOSEPH PULITZER: It does take time, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, that's true. You once said that—I think this was in a talk that you gave that I zeroed in on—"a significant work reveals a truth unknown up until then, intensifies the perception of the human condition, or provides a sign or symbol for a deeper comprehension of contemporary experience." And I'm curious to know how you relate that statement to the more recent things that you have commissioned, and the things you have in _____.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, if we are trying to surmount chaos, then minimal art is a pretty good disciplined way to restore order, visual order, to the environment—it seems to me. I mean, art always has a philosophical base, and you have to seek it out, I guess. But I don't believe that's inconsistent. I don't know where I said that; I rather like that statement. (laughs)

SUE ANN KENDALL: It is a lovely statement. I think it was in. . . . It was either in one of the interviews with Rosamond Bernier, or it may have been a talk that you gave. I would have to look back in my notes.
You also have mentioned that you liked relating something about nineteenth century works, let's say, to contemporary works. I think that was in the Bernier interview that you mentioned that. I wondered how you related your grounds here and the sculpture on it to anything in the nineteenth century or earlier twentieth century.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think the layout of the more established pieces—I mean, such as having a circle of space with trees and hedges and so on, and putting Maillol very obviously right in the center—that's a very classic way of decorating your garden—you see it all over the world—and those ideas float around, and you try and you work it out as best you can. The idea of placement is very important, I think. And I believe that sculpture out of doors is even more impressive often than it is in a museum situation or in an enclosed space. Because there it has air and light—changing light, shadows—and it can be perceived as a displacement of space. It presents itself, in space, and has a three-dimensionality that I think is often more palpable than it would be in artificial-lighted galleries. So I pay a lot of attention to where things are placed, and I think it's a good exercise in planning or landscaping to try things out and move them around—and even put up mockups of paper or wood that would represent the piece so that you get the impact of its presence in a landscape setting. We do a lot of that, and have done a lot of that. It helps a great deal to place things.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Can you give examples of which pieces you've done that with?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, we've done it with Arp, with Maillol, with a recent Kelly that we installed here. That was moved around, the artist came, he helped us with it and we put up a paper—or a cardboard. . . . What was it? I suppose a wallboard [foam core—Ed.]—cutout, exactly of the same dimensions. And we moved that around and

tried it in different positions and got it so that it related to the surrounding trees and became very comfortable, also. That was very deliberate; I mean, we just worked at it and moved it around until we were satisfied.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well I notice a lot of sensitivity in the placement of the pieces.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I hope so. But anyway, we work at this, and I think it enhances the works and it also is, of course, very attractive for decorating a space like this.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's nice to be surrounded by that—also, for you I am sure. Do you relate it at all, the outdoor pieces, to anything in nineteenth century romanticism?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I'm not aware of it specifically. I believe that having traveled around a bit in Europe and so forth and looked at gardens, you know, it gets to be sort of unconscious or subliminal or whatever. You don't really remember where you saw what. But certain ideas of placement, allees and space and how plantings themselves are treated as creating depth perception and recessions and this and that. All these ideas sort of soak in, and then you sort of, from experience, play with it. At least that's how we weigh things.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you have personal favorites in your collection?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well now, I don't think one should do that. (chuckles) I think that's very bad. It's like having a personal favorite among children. Each one has his own personality and I think you just shouldn't do that. I think that's very demeaning to the others. Each piece will have its own character, but I don't think you do that. I mean, maybe if there was a fire, you'd take out something first, but I don't like to think in terms of priorities.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I can understand that.
[Interruption in taping]

SUE ANN KENDALL: I'd like now to move on to some more specific information about the more recent acquisitions you've made. And one general question I have is to ask if you relate what I would call the intellectual rigor of the Minimalists', Conceptualists' work to that of Cubism? The rigor of that movement?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I'm not sure that they're related in any design sense or structural sense. I think that there's a certain discipline involved in both.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Because Minimalism, because of its very name, is tremendously demanding, or becomes an empty nothing. And so therefore the man working in a very reduced formal style with materials very anomalous and unexpressive has to have a sense of volume and space and weight and measure, proportion, and so forth. All these things adding together create the discipline, which in turn creates the satisfaction derived from the piece. Well, Cubism is of course an entirely different discipline, but I'm sure as exacting and demanding of the artists of its era, but I don't see that the two styles are related.

SUE ANN KENDALL: No, no.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Effort and the concentration and the discipline involved are somewhat related.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you feel that there's less discipline involved in, let's say, Fauvism or German Expressionism or Abstract Expressionism—as a whole?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, discipline is what these other artists are trying to evade.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh.

JOSEPH PULITZER: And so therefore flair and intuition and taste and willingness to take a chance—all these—and gamble and risk and all that—that's what gives the excitement to expressionism in [all art]. When it works—and sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't—I think it's a different temperament and it's a different objective. One is trying to capture the excitement, movement, freedom, flow, and emotion, perhaps, of a scene or of a memory, and the other is really trying to suppress emotion, but to restate, as in Minimalism, an equivalent dignity and formal authority to take the place of an emotion. I think the two are different, entirely different styles. One is classic, one is romantic. And that's refreshing to have that difference. Where excess doesn't come in. Now excess is a matter of subjective judgment. And that's where I fall down in quite a bit of the Neo-Expressionists, because I find it's rather unconvincing.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But I was thinking more of say German Expressionism or Abstract Expressionism.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, in the early original.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah, well, it's the same thing, of course, it's emotion and expression and the romantic thread versus the classical thread.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Is it true that you began collecting—I think it is true, but I'll ask you—is it true that you began collecting the Minimalists before you married Emily Rauh? And could you talk about that a little bit, and then what her influence has been?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I think the Judd probably was entered into as a commission before our marriage. I haven't looked up the date of it, but I think so. And that was a response to a very interesting exhibit which she had organized at the St. Louis Art Museum, a sculpture show called "Seven for '67." The year was 1967, and there were seven artists in the show. One of them was Judd. And at a rather delightful party after the opening, where a great many artists assembled in the loft of a St. Louis artist and his wife [Howard and Wi Jones—Ed.], both of them artists—lots of artists involved in it. Judd was there and I got to talking to him and we had quite an interesting discussion about how far into infinity could a stack of his stacked aluminum pieces go, if there were no limits to the structural problems or the financial problems. And he thought I was kidding or teasing or putting him down or whatever, but out of that began to grow quite a nice relationship of understanding, and from that rather strange beginning came the idea of having him do a piece of original work for this place. And that was furthered and advanced by my friend, Joe Helman, who's the art dealer now in New York, but then in St. Louis. He was running his own gallery here before he moved to New York. And he arranged for that commission. And, well, it was fabricated here in St. Louis. There was a mockup first made to try it out on the land, and Judd, who was born in Missouri, was very interested in sort of coming home and doing something on his own native soil, and so he really threw himself into it and did a very interesting proposal—two proposals which were submitted. I chose one that I thought was more appropriate and more related to the landscape and to the house behind the sculpture—which is a converted stable that used to be for riding horses—and the proportions and so forth, and that's the one we went with.

SUE ANN KENDALL: How far would his stack go, if it were not constrained by walls?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, we thought it, I thought it could go into infinity, and I think it annoyed him to be teased in this manner. But however, it was a nice conversation. Like all good conversations, washed down by a considerable amount of wine. . . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh. (chuckles)

JOSEPH PULITZER: . . . and rather inconclusive, as I remember, in the end.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I see.

JOSEPH PULITZER: But it got at least this commission, was the impetus for this commission.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, well, it's a lovely piece that came about as a result.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Thank you.

SUE ANN KENDALL: DiSuvero formally doesn't seem to quite fit into the same category as say Serra and Judd and so on.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah, it's a little more playful, and a little more expressionistic. It is more volatile. It has motion in it. The central beam is strung on cable, so that it will seesaw, in effect; it [will] rise and fall somewhat like a seesaw. And "playful" is a word that people use. I'm not sure of "playful." But certainly more levity, more lightness. And the piece, while it is made of very, very heavy steel beams, is constructed in such a way that it gives the impression of a very light, floating apparition, almost—some sort of butterfly, or some sort of living creature that has alighted on this lot. It's not a heavy ponderous thing. It has the lightness of a rising creature, and all of this movement and so forth makes it a great attraction for the children of the neighborhood, who enjoy coming in, invited or uninvited, to inspect it and to ride the seesaw.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. I imagine the word spread fast once the first child discovered it. (laughs)

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's a marvelous swing. What about Burton's work? The [Chaise Longue—Ed.].

JOSEPH PULITZER: Scott Burton?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah.

JOSEPH PULITZER: That's one of the newest things that we've acquired, and. . . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: What attracts you to that?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I had seen his things at the Whitney Museum, I'd seen things at Max Protetch Gallery, and I'd seen things illustrated, and I found it rather interesting that an artist could take some mundane, everyday object of furniture—in this case he calls it Chaise Longue. But he took this piece of furniture which he then, I suppose, sublimated or whatever you call it, and made out of it this very austere and very solid polished granite object that is on the lawn and near our summerhouse. And it has a wonderful presence: a clarity and simplicity that is quite elegant. I think he's an interesting artist and it's nice to have the metamorphosis of an everyday thing turn into a work of art that still has enough references and recall of the original impetus. I find it very delightful. It's witty, but at the same time it's elegant, and we like it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's lovely in the setting that you have it in.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, thank you. I think it looks well there. We moved it around. We made a mockup, again, out of paper, and we carried that around with us; put it in different areas and waited to see the right light, and I think we worked it out quite well. The light in the evening, the setting sun falls across it in a very attractive way and gives attractive shadows and brings the color of the granite out, and it's got enough air around it that it isn't crowded and it doesn't compete or diminish anything else. It seems quite comfortable there.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, it's a very simple but strong form at the same time.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, I think it is; thank you.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I think it's wonderful. A person that comes to my mind, in thinking about the pieces that you have, is Robert Smithson, whose work I like very much.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Now, I don't know his work too well.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, of course he's no longer here; you couldn't commission him.

JOSEPH PULITZER: No, that's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But I wonder if you were interested in acquiring his work.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think I was aware of his. . . . Wasn't it in Salt Lake, that spiral. . . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, the Spiral Jetty.

JOSEPH PULITZER: And I've seen some of his things in exhibits. I think there was one in Chicago, at the Contemporary. . . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: The Museum of Contemporary of Art?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, the Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art. I've seen his work. Yes, I think it was very inventive. We don't have him, don't have anything by him, but I realize that he was a great deal respected artist. He died much too young.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yes.

JOSEPH PULITZER: And had a strong influence on Serra and was very much in the avant garde then. That was a little bit earlier than my submission, if that's the word (chuckles), to these things, but I was aware of it. But we didn't take any action on that at that time.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well then, now of course they're. . . . I don't know what's still available of his work.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Not very much.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Probably not a lot. His writings are also, I think, very important and they're interesting. What about David Smith? Another _____.

JOSEPH PULITZER: The only thing we have of David Smith is a nice drawing that is done with India ink on paper and very splashy, very Oriental, and vertical sort of forms that look like they were sort of studies for his early pieces in iron or metal, not the polished Cubis, but the earlier ones. It's a nice drawing and it's an artist we'd like to have. Yes, definitely. Important artist, and it's one of the omissions or holes in the collection. Maybe David'll take care of that one day. Hope so.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Also I think of a person. . . . Well, there are two more people that come to my mind. Robert Morris is one, and Anthony Caro.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Anthony Caro, we have an example of his work, in the art museum in St. Louis. Again, a piece that we tried all kinds of different places—hard to place. It was a horizontal metal—Table Piece [CLIV (1973)—Ed.], he calls it, with a Roman numeral that I can't possibly remember—but anyway, a big Roman numeral. So it must have been one of a series. And we had it in different places. At the moment it's at the museum.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And Robert Morris. . . . Is he a person too that you know?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Robert Morris I don't have much information on. We haven't caught up with him—or I didn't catch up with him. I think I would leave that to Emmy. I think she would be able to give you a more informed opinion on that.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, so many of those were—and are—very verbal artists. I think of Robert Morris—and both diSuvero and Judd majored in philosophy and have done a lot of writing. Do the writings interest you, as well as the works?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I'm not very attuned to philosophy in the really disciplined sense of reading it. I mean, I like it as a conversation piece, let's put it that way. But I haven't read seriously the philosophy that has influenced a diSuvero. Although perhaps when I retire I'll have time to do that sort of thing; it would be a nice thing to do on a slow boat to China.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. (laughs) Unless it gets too convoluted, as some of Robert Morris's writing certainly did.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes, yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Then it's not all that easy. To get back to your wife, and her influence, which we left behind there somewhere, do you still make all the decisions for your own collection?

JOSEPH PULITZER: No, I'd say that very largely they are joint.

[Tape 2, side B]

JOSEPH PULITZER: Our decisions, we try to make them joint, and we try to agree—and almost always do. Sometimes there might be, oh, an object that I would like, or that she would like, that the other would not respond to. And usually in those cases, we wait a while and think about it. Often that's a good red flag; if we don't agree, there's usually some hidden hand that's pulling one of us back. And perhaps that's a good thing. But I don't believe that any collection has to be bound by such rules and regulations. I mean, this is sort of a moral agreement, familial agreement, and it's very nice to have it that way, and that's the way it should be. But I don't think, if there's a tremendous reason why one or the other should have something, that that shouldn't be granted. I can't think of an example, but I believe that we have not agreed on Clyfford Still. I like him more than my wife, and we've sort of been deflected from that by not always agreeing on the same picture. But we do agree that one day, we'll find the right one, and not rushing at all, but it'll come along, and we'll have one, a painting by Clyfford Still.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. Another artist that I should have mentioned a minute ago is Michael Heizer. There's a large piece at the museum that I believe is or was yours; you may have given it to the museum, a large _____ painting. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes. I bought two big canvases, much too big to go in any house that we own. And one we gave to the art museum [St. Louis—Ed.], and the other we kept. And they're both from the same year, and are very imposing, off-white and black compositions.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yes.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Very strong, and I like them very much, and they're very interesting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Have you considered having him get on a bulldozer out here somewhere on your property and start pushing dirt?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, that's a possibility. We are running out of places to put things, but I think that's a possibility. Yeah.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It is a person whose work you're interested in?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, yes, yes, very much.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh yes. And my wife has a drawing, a very good drawing, by him that she'd bought before we were married. And then we have the two big oils, one of which I gave to the museum. But sooner or later, everything will go, as I said earlier, to the public, and so it's perfectly sensible if you can't hang things, once in a while to put them in a museum or make a gift. And we can enjoy them from time to time there, and it seems to work out all right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I'd like to move on now to your relationship with dealers.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Dealers.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Some of the earlier people that you worked with.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, you know, when I was looking over my list, I find that we've been buying all over the map. I mean, I don't have one. . . . I've bought a lot from Joe Helman, a friend, that I mentioned before. But there are a lot of other dealers. I mean, there are people in Europe that we buy from. And I think the dealers are very informative people; I mean, they know a great deal. And I remember when I was in school, Paul Sachs, who probably taught more museum directors than anybody of that generation, was at Harvard. He always gave letters of introduction to his students who were going to Europe for the summer, and inevitably dealers would be prominent among those letters of introduction. And he believed that they knew more and were closer to the artist, often, than individuals, and certainly very influential in arousing the interest of curators in museums, and in arousing the interest of individual private collectors. So we have a lot of friends in that field, and. . . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Who are some of the dealers that you buy from?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, lately I've been buying again. . . . Over the years I've bought from Gene Thaw, Eugene Thaw in New York. And I've bought from Zurich, Marianne Feilchenfeldt. I bought from. . . . I've just. . . . I've bought a Ferdinand Hodler from Peter Nathan in Zurich. And that Hodler has been sort of haunting us for years. In Switzerland, much better known in Europe than in this country. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if you couldn't get, couldn't find half a dozen Hodler paintings in America, I don't believe. The dealer said he didn't think there were more than three. And I know there are drawings by Hodler at the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard, but I don't believe a painting. And we'd been sort of haunted by these views of mountains and lakes in Switzerland and wanted for a long time to have a landscape. And so during a ski-break in March of—where are we?—'85, we went to Nathan, and he had this beautiful late work dated 1918 and all the right provenance and all the right sort of pedigree and that business. And we were able to work it out and bring it back to America, after having it wonderfully examined by a Swiss organization that does nothing but examine pictures for condition and authenticity and the soundness of the stretcher and the soundness of the canvas, and they give you a very full written report on that, which is quite impressive. And then, when you get it, you check it with your own conservator—at the St. Louis Art Museum—and he found it to be in mint condition, never revarnished and never relined and almost its whole existence in a private collection. So, now that tells you a little bit about the dealers.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Now dealers are wonderful. They tip you off on all kinds of situations and are very knowledgeable people. We've always had friends in that profession.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Is there a dealer locally, right now, that you work with?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes, Ronnie Greenberg is a close friend. And we've bought quite a lot from him. He runs the Greenberg Gallery in St. Louis. And he's all over the world. He's in Europe every ten minutes, and on the telephone if he's not in Europe, and he'll telephone everywhere around the world. But he's very active and a very successful dealer of the international recognized artists, rather than people of less reputation. I think that that's the way his business is directed, and it's a very interesting gallery to visit.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So mostly your purchases have been through dealers then, not at auction?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Most have been through dealers. Occasionally from private owners, just on a person-to-person basis. Occasionally at auction, but not as a general rule. I mean, no. I would say usually through dealers rather than auction.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And Si Newhouse, is that someone you have dealt with also?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I deal with him frequently as journalist and as a publisher. He is the owner of the, or was the owner of the St. Louis Globe Democrat, which was sold about a year ago, so we've had a relationship for a

number of years, and I know him quite well and respect his collection enormously. He has very, very fine things. A little more in the current vein than mine, a little more avant garde than mine, but a splendid selection and a great pleasure to visit. He's extremely demanding of himself on this and will never buy things that he can't show, so that there's a rather big turnover going on, and in the process of one of those turns-over or turnovers, I was able to acquire a very beautiful Rothko that had belonged to him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, you acquired the Rothko from him?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So occasionally that happens between collectors?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Let's not say that a dealer didn't have a finger in it, because one did, but it was a finger.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So occasionally collectors do deal with other collectors, right?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah, yeah. Aided and assisted always by someone to help them out—like a dealer. [said with a smile—Ed.]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Like a dealer. (laughs)

JOSEPH PULITZER: And you can't blame the dealer. Why not?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, right.

JOSEPH PULITZER: It's his profession.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It sounds like you remain quite independent, which I think is a real strength for you, in terms of your relationship to dealers, to artists, and so on, that you wait and make up your own mind. Is that correct?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I think that's a reasonable assessment.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Even maybe. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: I mean, I'm always happy to hear the point of a scholar or dealer, museum people—I have lots of friends in that field—but in the end, sure, we make our own decisions. But it's awfully nice to get advice and to get counsel and opinions. But I don't buy things because someone tells me that I must buy it. I never acquired anything on that basis. It has to be something that is meaningful. And I think my wife shares that. We don't buy things because someone says that we should do it, as that's too remote, I think, and it makes it too. . . . I don't know, it robs it of the sort of sentiment and the joy that really goes into selecting and working toward achieving something and getting something, the whole sense of the quest of something, and finally succeeding in it; that is more fun if it's self-generated, rather than just following the advice of someone on the outside—for me. At least that's my temperament.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, you control what you get that way, also. After all, it is your collection.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So that's understandable.

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... *May 19, 2003*