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Oral history interview with Joseph Pulitzer, 1978 Jan. 11

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Joseph Pulitzer, Jr.on January 11, 1978. The interview took place in St. Louis, Missouri, and was conducted by Dennis Barrie for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[Tape 1, side A]

JOSEPH PULITZER: Behind me at the moment is a portrait, bronze, by Rodin of my grandfather, and shortly to be returned will be a John Singer Sargent oil portrait done in 1905 of my grandfather, which has been on exhibition, I think in a show of American art of the turn of the century organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art—I believe—and in any event recently shown at the St. Louis Art Museum. So perhaps in my blood is an interest that I inherited. I know that my grandfather was deeply interested in music. He had died, of course, before I was born, but I am quite aware of all these things from family histories and biographies of his life. So in a way it seems quite natural that I would carry on an interest both in art and music—which I am actively involved in as a commissioner of the St. Louis Art Museum and as a chairman of the visiting committee for fine arts at Harvard—where I am also an overseer—and as a member of the board of directors and executive committee of the St. Louis Symphony Society. So it's in my blood.

DENNIS BARRIE: Now you say it's in your blood. Was your family—your parent's—home one filled with art? I know that, reading some biographical information, as a child you were exposed to Audubon prints, Currier & Ives, and things like that. Was your family particularly artistically oriented?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I would say that my father, who had very bad eyesight—which is also an inherited weakness apparently—wasn't particularly attuned to painting and sculpture, although he had always a very good sense of taste—good taste in furniture and in prints and in the way the houses were organized and arranged. So I think I could say that there were graphics around and there were nice things, and I certainly probably responded to them as a child.

DENNIS BARRIE: Were you particularly interested in artistic things as a child, or of becoming an artist, or any of that sort of thing?

JOSEPH PULITZER: No, I don't believe I ever took that line at all. I had always more or less believed that carrying on a family tradition as a journalist would undoubtedly be the way my education would lead, but I also knew rather early in the game—I mean by that certainly in late school, before going to college—that I was very much interested in the arts and perhaps began showing a little bit of precocious interest in collecting by collecting cigar bands—which are not exactly art, but. . . . Then I collected Tobler chocolate seals at St. Mark's School.

DENNIS BARRIE: That I don't know.

JOSEPH PULITZER: That was a Swiss chocolate. I guess I must have had quite an acquisitive instinct because I think I almost cornered the market in Tobler chocolate seals, a collection at St. Mark's School, except for another rival from Detroit whose family also had been very interested in art, the Newberry family.

DENNIS BARRIE: Oh yes.

JOSEPH PULITZER: This was a brother of John Newberry; it was Camman Newberry, and then we finaly merged and we had a monopoly.

DENNIS BARRIE: A great collection.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Right.

DENNIS BARRIE: Who do you think was most influential in your childhood—or say your teen years—in developing an interest in art? Any particular persons stand out?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think it was a gradual thing. I had been at St. Mark's School. I had been interested in music; I played a bit of music. I had been interested in reproductions of art. I suddenly found that they made very, very good color reproductions of nineteenth and twentieth century art, usually that came out of Germany in those days, and they were really quite remarkably bright, and on a gray New England day a bright Van Gogh or a Matisse reproduction was quite a nice thing to have in one's room at school. Then as I got into college, I was

very much interested in Harvard in taking art courses, and I sort of gravitated in that direction.

DENNIS BARRIE: Well, let's talk about Harvard then. You did take a considerable number of art history courses, I got the impression you had no intention of going into the field? It was just an interest?

JOSEPH PULITZER: No, I didn't expect to go into the field but I was very interested and I majored in fine arts at Harvard, as they called it in those days "majored" and "fine arts" I suppose ought to be defined as being art history. Most places fine arts implies a school, academy, of learning how to paint or draw. But in any event, I discovered rather early that I could have an avocation of art and have a vocation of journalism which would carry on a family tradition. So I have been very comfortable with those two parallel tracks in my life, particularly since one is very current and one is very leisurely, and they are quite nice complementary activities.

DENNIS BARRIE: You didn't study journalism at Harvard?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I studied history, of course, and government, but I didn't take journalism courses. My father believed that the way to learn was to practice and to get started, and he was not at that time enthused over journalism schools, even though his father had founded the School of Journalism at Columbia University in New York. He thought that the way to do it was to start and to go into the field and be a reporter and then be exposed to all the problems and all the tasks and all the techniques that a working newspaper man would be exposed to, rather than doing it academically.

DENNIS BARRIE: I can understand that. While at Harvard, you worked with Arthur Pope, you studied under Arthur Pope. Would you describe the training with Pope?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, it was a course all [freshmen had to take?—Ed.], which I'm sure was called 1-A [one-A—Ed.] in those days, and they've been arguing about it ever since, trying to get it reconstituted and reactivated. And I think it has to a considerable extent been reactivated in the Carpenter Center, at Harvard, which is called by the mysterious name Visual and Environmental Studies. Well, it has nothing to do with ecology or smoke or water, but it is in the building designed by Corbusier right next to the Fogg Art Museum, and in it are now carried on very active programs involving theory of design, photography, film, painting, color charts, values, perception, and so forth and so forth, many of which were the type of training in observation—and in practice—that Arthur Pope advocated in the thirties, and so I did take his course. I was very clumsy at putting pen to paper and in reproducing color values, but nevertheless it was a very good discipline to go into because it helped enormously, I think, in later months or years in developing some sense of connoisseurship as to quality, because it made you look very hard and it made you try to imitate or to copy a Japanese print or a Chinese painting, which I think introduces you very early in the game to the fact that abstraction is enormous, even in the rendering of visible and recognizable objects.

DENNIS BARRIE: So you actually had to reproduce a work of art?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes, that was part of his course. In a modest way, I mean. We did sections and we did. . . . I mean, we would take a textile and reproduce it in watercolor, but in the process it would cause you to be extremely exacting in trying to get the color and texture.

DENNIS BARRIE: _____.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah, um hmm.

DENNIS BARRIE: Did you excel in reproducing?

JOSEPH PULITZER: No, I was very clumsy, like I said. I was terrible. But I greatly enjoyed the course, and I think it was very stimulating, and I know the other people in it all felt the same way. It was a very, very stimulating experience to suddenly learn by trying to follow the path of an artist—how he created a work in various media—and it was very challenging and beneficial, I think.

DENNIS BARRIE: What areas did you become particularly interested in, in terms of _____.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think I had instinctively, as many young people do, a strong feeling for the art of our own time. And while I studied a broad range of art history—including perhaps obscure Indian sculpture, because it happened to come at a very convenient time of day (chuckles) or something of that nature—nevertheless gradually I began moving toward contemporary art and a feeling of wanting to, certainly, get deeply into the nineteenth century and hopefully into the twentieth century, which at that time was only beginning to be taught in any systematic way at Harvard. Subsequently, of course, it now ranks, as I guess the most popular course in the Fine Arts Department—I mean the contemporary field—but then it was in its beginnings.

DENNIS BARRIE: Had you had courses in it?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, we had courses which wound up with Picasso and Matisse, but the courses were not structured then so much as to twentieth century art, but merely to introduce you to it, and then a great deal of the reading and so forth, followed informally without classroom instruction—as I remember. You know, you pinned me down, and that was quite a few years ago.

DENNIS BARRIE: Sorry.

JOSEPH PULITZER: 1936, to be exact.

DENNIS BARRIE: That is true; I can't remember just a few years ago. What about people like Edward Forbes and Paul Sachs? What effect did they have on you? [You, they] did have some [connection].

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah. Well, I did take courses from Paul Sachs, and I knew Edward Forbes. I didn't take his course at that time. I think I wasn't eligible for it; I think it was a graduate course and I was an undergraduate. But Paul Sachs was a very strong influence on a great many people who later became, as you know, museum directors in this country. I suppose his museum training course was the most influential experience that someone aspiring to museum work could take. His enthusiasm, his connoisseurship, his knowledge, his very dynamic and very committed attitude toward art as a human experience, had a profound influence on students, and I was one of those. I was pleased to also become acquainted with the family, and I would go to his supper parties at Shady Hill, which is a lovely house—eighteenth century as I remember—and there would be very lively conversations, and it was a very stimulating experience for an undergraduate to be in that atmosphere. So I'd say Paul Sachs was perhaps the leading influence that I had in those early formative years.

DENNIS BARRIE: And even with that, again, you never thought of art. . . ?

JOSEPH PULITZER: No, I had always assumed that I would want to continue the paper and the family journalistic tradition. No, I had never thought seriously of going into art as a vocation, but I certainly was very aware of its attraction to me and, as I said earlier, I think I began to discern that a vocation and an avocation could parallel each other, and that is really how it has worked out.

DENNIS BARRIE: Perry Rathbone said—this is a quote now—your "tastes were shaped at Harvard." Do you believe that to be the case?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes, I think that's fair. I think they were indeed. They were shaped at Harvard, but I think as Agnes Mongan points out in the introduction to the third volume of our catalogue, which was published by Harvard, that taste didn't stop at the point where I left college. I mean it continued to grow and to expand and to be very curious about many things that weren't even in existence at the time that I was in college. But certainly the discipline and the connoisseurship, which has always been the great emphasis at Harvard, made a very strong impression and perhaps by "shaped," certainly I owe a great debt to my education there, in that it got me off on the right footing. And I think I've been leisurely and cautious, in a sense, often waiting for new forms to be developed and settled down and become kind of accepted, or at least fit in and become compatible with traditional art, or classical art—or modern works which we now regard as classical—before I would jump in and buy just for the sake of buying a novelty or some new avant garde expression; I would wait usually. I think I'm—it isn't always true; I have commissioned things that are by very youthful artists—but by and large, I have waited, and I think that also is a reflection of Harvard's rather leisurely, academic, long-term, long-range whatever you call it—moving with deliberate speed, as they say.

DENNIS BARRIE: I knew you were going to say that.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yeah.

DENNIS BARRIE: While at Harvard, you purchased your first painting, I believe, a Modigliani [Amedeo Modigliani, Elvira Resting at a Table, 1919]. What prompted you to do this?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think it isn't quite accurate to say it was my first painting. I had bought very tentative things even when I was quite a bit younger. But it was the first important painting that I ever bought. I remember very well before I did it I had become aware that collecting was an activity that Sachs and a lot of the teachers. . . . Dectatell, who was my tutor, was a collector. I mean, I became aware that collecting was a way of testing your taste, you acumen, your judgment. It was also a way of enriching one's own life and finding a great deal of pleasure. And I did take the risk. But I went to see Paul Sachs. I remember trembling into his office with a reproduction of this picture, and he asked me if I could afford it, and I said, "Yes, I think I can." He said, "Well then, by all means buy it." (laughs) So I did. It's a fine picture that now belongs to the St. Louis Art Museum.

DENNIS BARRIE: So when you purchased it you were consciously thinking of starting to collect?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think I was. As I've said, I had acquisitive instincts. I had collected first editions a little

bit, cigar bands, Tobler seals, for a minute stamps, for a minute coins, for a minute, first editions. I think I was good raw material to be turned into a collector, but it had never crystallized until I got so involved in art history that I began to suddenly see that this was the avenue I would like to pursue rather than the hobby avenues or other things that I've mentioned.

DENNIS BARRIE: Why do you think. . . . Why did you purchase the Modigliani? I mean, what prompted you to purchase that particular painting? Were you [confident]?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I thought it combined a great many things that interested me at that time. It was certainly obvious that it had African influence in it—in the masklike quality of the face. It was a form of art which interested, of course, Picasso and Klee; I knew that. But it also had in it a very considerable amount of Italian influence. After all, Modigliani was Italian, and the painting in its rich strong red reds and hot colors can be traced all the way back to Byzantine or Italo-Byzantine paintings of the eleventh, twelfth century. It also has a very linear character that it seems to me you could relate either to Sienese painting, in its very linear outlines, or to Florentine painting of the fourteenth century. So it had a lot of things in it. It had a Cezannesque treatment of paint handling, rather squarely placed patches of color, which I think definitely showed that he'd observed Cezanne. So here in one picture were several threads or strands that could be woven together to very much interest a young person who had been studying art history at that time.

DENNIS BARRIE: Had you decided at that point that. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: I don't think I was as self-conscious about it then as I am now, but at least that I think is a fairly good rationale of what was going on in my mind at that time.

DENNIS BARRIE: I think it makes sense. Had you decided at that point that you were going to look for and collect works done by twentieth century masters? I guess there were masters at that time.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I guess they were getting to be masters. They may not have achieved quite the heights that—at least certainly not commercially; that's for sure. But, yes, 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, I guess they called it in those days. And so Picasso was early in the game, and Braque was early in the game, and. . . . Of course, this is all listed in our catalogue. But, yes, I think I more or less consciously wanted to bring together a few examples that would have some meaning as a collection of twentieth century artists then in their reputations at their peak at that time. I'm sure that "reputations," that's not a very good way of stating it. I think I've always wanted to buy creative art that would have a validity and vitality that would transcend fashion, and I wanted to do it seriously, not just frivolously, so I would naturally go to the people to whom I had been exposed in college courses and about whom I had been reading. So these were the names that at that time in the thirties were on the ascendancy, and I was then, of course, attracted to the people that were getting then the critical acknowledgement and acclaim. That's what I mean by "reputation."

DENNIS BARRIE: I understand. Your sources: did you essentially buy in New York? Or did you go to Europe, or. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I did begin to buy in Europe, that's true; in London and in Paris, and New York, and. . . . Yes, that's quite true. Then in St. Louis there were no formal galleries at that time, but dealers would come here. Ted Schempp is an old friend of mine. I bought a very fine, I think, early painting by Georges Rouault. And that recently I gave to the Fogg Art Museum. They didn't have one and they seemed to feel it fills an opening for them. They are very appreciative of that. And so I did; then I began to go to Europe a bit, I mean on vacations, not with the idea of making a deliberate sort of systematic quest or search but always being aware and sort of looking a bit—not in any systematic way. I'm not systematic, I might add.

DENNIS BARRIE: Neither am I. I've lost my thought here, speaking of not being systematic.
[Interruption in taping]

DENNIS BARRIE: In 1939 you purchased a rather important painting, and I thought we could discuss it now: Matisse's Bathers [Henri Matisse, Bathers with a Turtle]. How did that all come about?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I was on my wedding trip with my late wife Louise Vauclain Pulitzer and we were in Europe. And at that time, the art from German museums was being sold by the Nazis in Lucerne. So since we were in the vicinity we thought we'd have a look, see what it was all about. This art was considered degenerate by the German government of that time. It became quite obvious when one looked at the things that they were the most creative works of then-existing artists of that period. So I was able to make arrangements through Pierre Matisse, who was then a friend—the son of the painter, and the director of the Matisse Gallery in New York—and he and I agreed that the Bathers, which I immediately was tremendously impressed by, would be a wonderful thing to try to get. There was no way of guessing what kind of competition there would be, but we were able to do this with a really very modest amount of cash outlay at that time—$2,400.

DENNIS BARRIE: _____, that's amazing.

JOSEPH PULITZER: So then in addition to that I did buy a Lehmbruck terra cotta at that time, and I also bought an Otto Mueller German Expressionist oil. And some months later then a Beckmann, a Beckmann portrait, which another friend, Curt Valentin, who was at the auction, had bought. So in a sense I had four objects that came out of German hands through this sale in Lucerne. The Matisse, of course, is a classic and is reproduced in all of the literature and is now the property of the St. Louis Art Museum. I gave it to them in 1965. I suppose, oh, ten or fifteen years ago. It is, of course, a splendid thing and I always enjoy it enormously when I go and see it. I remember my wife [Emily Rauh Pulitzer—Ed.] told me lately that it was given the year that she and Charles Buckley both arrived—she as curator and he as director of the art museum—at the time they had just gotten into the jobs and they were very happy that such an important picture then was coming into the collection.

DENNIS BARRIE: Did you realize its importance when you first saw it?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes. No! I mean, how do you realize importance? I knew that it was a tremendously affecting and dynamic dramatic expression. I knew that it related very closely to some of the major early works of Matisse, and I sensed, of course, that this was a great opportunity—as it's turned out to be.

DENNIS BARRIE: When you purchased. . . . Well, Matisse sort of fits into the quote "the School of Paris," but some of the other things do not. Was there a point at which you decided your collection was going to go beyond those artists working in Paris in the early twentieth century, such as Picasso and. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: I think I recognized that I would love to have owned important Impressionist paintings, but that they were so extravagantly expensive by the time I was in a position to even look at them that I had to limit myself—or did limit myself—to a very few, I think examples of high quality that would represent very well the spirit of that period, without having to document it with every single artist or with a broad representation. And I have also been able, I think, to follow that trend a bit by buying drawings by artists of the nineteenth century that were of very fine quality but therefore accessible and pictures that one could afford without a tremendous fortune. And so the drawings and the paintings sort of led backwards and were the base on which so much of the art of the period that interested me primarily was based. And then subsequently I went in the other direction and began to move up into the more contemporary things that had been done, particularly in America after World WarII and when really the focus, I think, or the dynamics of art, moved away from Europe a bit and began to emerge in New York as the center of creative activity. So we have gone in both directions. But I think our Cubist paintings and the things of the early years of this century really are still the core of this collection. But it ranges both backwards a bit and forwards a bit, and hopefully continue in this process filling out gaps. . . .

DENNIS BARRIE: Are you still trying?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I'm looking all the time for a Mondrian. In case somebody finds a Mondrian that anyone can afford, let me know. All right.

DENNIS BARRIE: We'll let you know. Paul Klee was one of your first—how shall I put it?—again, "non-School of Paris" purchases. What interested you about Klee, to move in that direction?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, well, I think the fantasy and, oh, the humor and the originality and the fragile quality of his work. But also specifically, I think, it's fair to say that Curt Valentin, who became a very good friend, always emphasized very much the work of Paul Klee and I got, of course, to see it more in that way. So that I would say Curt Valentin had a very strong influence on me in my post-college years. And Perry Rathbone also, who of course is a very good friend, who was then the director of the St. Louis Art Museum. He and Curt had been introduced to St. Louis heat one summer and we'd spent the afternoon drinking Tom Collinses which, I think, was the first time Curt had been introduced to that drink, and we had a marvelous time and we became very simpatico and it was a lasting friendship among all of us. And through that—Perry being interested in the German Expressionists, and Curt being very interested in not only School of Paris, but also what had gone on in his own native country—Germany—that's what led me, I think, away from Paris into that sector of modern art. I wish it had led me a little further toward Russia and so on, but I will leave that to the academicians and the eclectic people who cover all fields. I haven't been systematic about it, and there are gaps that ought to be—it would be great to fill them, be fun to fill them and perhaps from time to time I can do that.

DENNIS BARRIE: How did your collecting go over here in St. Louis? Now you're obviously one of the few people out here at that time—I'm talking about the forties now, let's say—collecting contemporary work, or what was then contemporary work. Was there much public knowledge or reaction in the art world to what you were doing?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I think it was a very private sort of activity in those days. There were, of course, a number of people who gave me a lot of encouragement. They included architects. They included Vladimir Golschmann, particularly, who was then the conductor of the St. Louis Symphony and himself a collector, and a very lively, delightful man who always bought very adventuresome new things by Picasso and brought them back from his

summer trips to Europe. So that was very stimulating. The museum people, of course, were very supportive, starting as early as when I first got back from college. Meyric Rogers, then director, was very supportive and understanding and wished there were more people moving into this field. So that while it was a somewhat lonely activity, it was supported by people who were then older than I was, and I was very grateful for that endorsement or support or cooperation. It was very helpful if I was on a knife's edge about a thing; I might get a little advice that would just push me one way or the other, which would have been helpful.

DENNIS BARRIE: Later on were you involved with the other individuals who began collecting in the city? There are a number of collections in the city devoted to contemporary art.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh yes, very much so. Of course, as it began to grow a bit. Naturally we all got together and we were competitive and had a lot of fun and so forth. I think Morton May was certainly extremely perceptive in going into German Expressionists as early as he did and making that the focal point of his first collection. But really he's had, I suppose, well, certainly three collections. He's had pre-Columbian of very high quality, he's had Oceanic art of very high quality, and African, and his German Expressionist paintings. His activity always interested all of us, and I was very delighted that we would go to each other's houses and kid around and try to buy each other's things and so forth—without much success, I might add.

DENNIS BARRIE: There's one episode we've kind of glossed over, and I thought it was rather interesting. I've read that when you first returned to St. Louis, or shortly after you returned to St. Louis, you designed a special room for the works of art, a special living area more compatible to your works.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, yes, I guess that is somewhat the way it went. I was living at home then, at my father's house, and I wanted something that I could sort of seal off, as it were, and have a quite different environment than English furniture and chintz and flowers and Turkish rugs and Audubons, and you name it. So I did a very simple room which Charles Nagel, who later became the director of the St. Louis Art Museum, but then was a practicing architect, and Frederick Dunn. . . . They had a practice, Noggle and Dunn, and they were the architects who remodeled completely a nice-sized bedroom which had a dressing room and a separate entrance and so on. And that was where I did hang some of the pictures before I was married. To make it even more fun, Victor Proetz, who was a distinguished St. Louis designer who had gone on to New York and made quite a name for himself as a designer of furniture, did the furnishings. So it was a very harmonious room, very muted, and then really the basic colors came from the paintings. All of us involved in it had a lot of fun—except, I think, my father was rather disturbed by the austerity of the architecture in comparison with the liveliness of his environment.

DENNIS BARRIE: How did your first wife respond to your collecting?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, she was, of course, very supportive and very understanding and very helpful. I think she didn't try to veto things. If she knew that I was really seriously interested, she would give her view, but she wouldn't veto. And very often she would come around to things that at first seemed rather difficult and really like—often that happened. I mean, an example would be Beckmann. When Max Beckmann was in St. Louis teaching at Washington University. . . . We all thought it was pretty strong stuff when he first came here, but we admired him and liked him and we were very fond of him and his wife as friends, in that sense. One day he asked my wife if he could make a few sketches and she agreed, and the next thing we knew, he was making a portrait and the portrait was shown at Curt Valentin's Gallery in New York. So I was a little bit surprised by seeing a portrait—L.P., it was called, Louise Pulitzer, L.P.—and I said, "Well, I don't know that I want this picture to end up on somebody else's wall. I wonder whether you would let me borrow it for a while and we'll see how it is." So, of course, he did. It wasn't many weeks before I realized, and I think my wife also then realized, that we had a very excellent painting. I mean, a fine portrait and a very strong example of Max Beckmann's portrait style and something that I really admire enormously. So we were delighted that it all worked out; if we hadn't liked it, I don't know what would have happened.

DENNIS BARRIE: What you would have done with it, rather difficult. So essentially your wife played a supportive role. Did she ever suggest things to you as far as acquisitions go? Or was that left pretty much to you?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think we did a great deal of it together, as I recall. I don't believe that Lulu went. . . . I mean, she wouldn't go independently to a contemporary show and then come back and say, "Now, you've got to go and buy this." But we would often go together, and it seemed to me that it worked rather naturally that way. I mean she had no pretensions of being scholarly in the field, but had the good judgment, I think, to caution. If something wasn't really first-rate, now she would sense it out and be very helpful in that respect and in calming down my enthusiasm. She would quite be able to make me more deliberate if I was too elated over some prospective purchase or had had a good lunch in Paris with a little too much white wine. I mean she would be able to steer me toward a more deliberate decision, let's call it.

DENNIS BARRIE: You've mentioned Curt Valentin, you mentioned Perry Rathbone, and now your first wife as in a

sense being influences. Who else do you think were influences on your collecting in those days? Or advising you?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, of course, that was thing I was very, very careful about. I never bought anything that I didn't have complete confidence in. I'm not a speculator at all, and I didn't want to start doing that. I would rather wait, as I said earlier, and let it mature a bit. I was very late in buying Rothko, for instance. But to go back to your question, I think in those early days Bill and Gertrude Bernoudy were definitely enthusiasts whose involvement with art I enjoyed and respected. And Bill did the design of our summer house, in St. Louis County, that has stood up marvelously as an example of summer architecture, light.

DENNIS BARRIE: Yes, it's nice.

JOSEPH PULITZER: It's a summer house, really, not a full-season affair, but that was sort of a nucleus then of a sculpture garden. Then there were a lot of people in St. Louis who got involved. Always, of course, the museum personalities. And then private collectors began to become more active. I think Buster May may have started the trend—I mean, coming along—and Golschmann being early, and then the Steinberg family, the Schoenbergs were buying important paintings, and it became very exciting. There was a lot of very good art coming into St. Louis—and often shown at the museum, which was a good civic gesture on the part of the museum, and I think self-interest showed there also because they would naturally stimulate other people, and by the natural law of human affairs, a lot of those things would finally find their way to the museum as extended loans or even gifts or bequests. So the museum was actively supporting collecting in St. Louis. I think Charles Buckley did a splendid job of setting an example and also advising people. He would help form collections; I mean, the Warren [McK.] Shapleigh collection is extremely selective and distinguished. That is American art, nineteenth century—and twentieth century—and Charles Buckley had a very strong influence in helping them make decisions and reach a level of quality that is very high and admirable. I have been, I think, well, perhaps cautious about too much influence. If I bought something I had to be convinced that it was for me, not for somebody else. I mean, I wasn't buying for a museum; I was buying for me. I was buying things that were meaningful to me and hoping that in that manner that there would be a certain character, coherence, or personality to the collection—which I think perhaps there is. Other observers seem to feel that there is a coherence and I think that that wouldn't have been so true if I had gone around seeking counsel and advice from so many different sources that it would have sort of neutralized, that it would have become blander and less personal than it has been.

DENNIS BARRIE: That is an interesting point. What do you think the coherent factors are in the collection?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I've read a lot of comments. I guess there's a sort of classical sense, that the examples are pretty definitive. I mean, they've come to rest. They are examples where the artist has achieved, he's realized, he's found his solution. It's like an architectural plan; it's a solution to a problem. My present wife has had obviously a very strong influence in opening my eyes to art which was newer for me than for her because of her being younger and also being very much involved in the art immediately being produced; whereas, as I've said, my tendency has been to wait until the dust settles and then see how it lives in competition with more established art. Well, in this process, of course I've been greatly aided and assisted and helped and encouraged and have had my eyes opened. I think she's helped me enormously to find—I mean, let's take [Claes—Ed.] Oldenburg, for instance. I really think I understand Oldenburg much better after Emily and I have talked about it and looked at his work and visited exhibitions that I might have shied away from a bit on the grond that Pop Art originally didn't interest me—if you call him a Pop artist—but it's obviously so clearly a creative element of our time that to overlook it would be crazy, and she had a beautiful drawing [Claes Oldenburg, Sketch for Dormeyer Mixer, 1965] in her possession before we were married, and that drawing now occupies a very important place in our drawing collection. It looks wonderful with the drawings that I had earlier and is completely compatible and fits in marvelously and is harmonious and I like it very much. So I wouldn't have perhaps woken up to Oldenburg quite as soon if she hadn't helped me.

DENNIS BARRIE: Fascinating. Just a little bit more on this theme. Someone has described much of your collecting as dealing with artists in their formal periods, or with formalism rather than naturalism. Would you say that's a quality you'd look for?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I don't think I would put it exactly that way. I think the way I'd put it is finding art which is resolved and has achieved its objective rather than transitional art or experimental art. And I find this very true in Picasso; for instance, when I've bought a Picasso, it's always been one of the pictures that has wound up, usually it's a picture that has wound up a search of his, or an experimentation of his, rather than one of the transitional pieces that may have been more exciting and more expressionistic but less resolved. So I think the resolution of puzzles and problems and the sort of finality of a work of art, which then usually gets called classical, is what has attracted me. You can't generalize, I guess, always, because if you go into expressionism, it has to be pretty strong stuff and pretty powerful or it won't hold up. But even in expressionism, in its various manifestations in expressionism, I think you will find in our collection—if we have an example, and we have—that they are usually quite finished, quite resolved. I mean, you don't want to change it. It doesn't make you restless. You understand it. It's a complete statement. It's a final statement.

DENNIS BARRIE: Would you say in the artists you collect that you've tended toward those artists who—how shall I put it—intellectually may have spoken with more authority than other artists, that there is a great intellectual base in what they have done artistically?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I believe that at the level of commissioning I think you're getting close, yes. I think that the things that we've commissioned for our place in the country is reflective of—well, if you call. . . . [Interruption in taping]

DENNIS BARRIE: But again, continuing with this idea then; you were mentioning that the people you've commissioned perhaps. . . .

JOSEPH PULITZER: . . . would qualify on the formal side.

DENNIS BARRIE: Yes.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, let's take a look at that. The sculptors that we have commissioned works from in our place in St. Louis County would include Don Judd, Mark diSuvero, Dan Flavin, and Richard Serra. All right. There seems to be no question that these are all artists who have very strong, positive ideas first, so that they. . . . Oh, and, well, Kelly is included but that was not a commission. All right, all of these artists are very minimal, and therefore, it has to depend on a disciplined mind and a mind that is concerned with structure and with analysis of space, analysis of form. So whether you call it minimal or whether you call it conceptual I don't believe makes very much difference. But these works of art have a very sparse and bony and muscular, let's call it, a disciplined character, and perhaps in that way if—you asked me earlier—they might relate to what generally people think of as classical. I think that diSuvero would not fall quite as neatly into that category because his work is obviously much more delightful and emotional and playful. But even in that mode, when you see what he did for us in the country, he made a piece that has such a powerful statement of placement, of the displacement of space, the design of a structure in the setting, its relationship to the trees, its relationship to the surrounding area, that it again is, of course, an architectural statement, in a sense. It fits an architectural need. It is, in addition, a very emotional and delightful thing, moving—and by that I don't mean dramatically emotive, but actual moving parts—it swings, it seesaws up and down, it has a lot of potential movement. And that, again, I think ties quite well to the other pieces in that it's a positive, final statement, very well resolved for that position, for that place.

DENNIS BARRIE: We'll take a break.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes.

[Tape 1, side B?]

DENNIS BARRIE: Let us talk in a different direction for a while. Let's discuss your relationship with the St. Louis Museum of Art and also with the Fogg. I think it's only natural to deal with St. Louis first. When did you become active in the museum, and what sort of role did you play?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I was always active in a private sense. I was never on their board. It took me a long time to reach the conclusion that I could do that without compromising the news and editorial independence of the paper, but I was able to satisfy myself that there was really no conflict because if there ever were a very serious conflict where my presence on that board would be embarrassing or inhibiting to the newspaper I could get off that board. I mean, there would be no problem there. And that situation has never come up in the three or four years that I've been on that board. So rather late in the game I did join it, although I was invited often to go on it and declined earlier. But separating the two has not been a problem and the paper has always given very good coverage to cultural events in St. Louis, including the museum, so that there was no departure from past practice, or any kind of embarrassment, and there has been no conflict as to public policy. The museum is tax-supported, and it is on land that belongs to the park, which in turn belongs to the city, but there's has been no conflict that we have been able to see that would in any way cause the paper to take a hostile view—or want to take a hostile view—toward the museum and its financing and support. We've been supportive, on the other hand, long before I became a commissioner, so that makes it a perfectly comfortable setup. As far as the commissioners are concerned, we, of course, are like a board of directors. I mean, we are the people who must vote legally the budget and all of the decisions made by that institution and the selection of the director and so on. I was on the selection committee for our present director, James Nowell Wood—Jim Wood—who came to us from the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo. And we are very, very pleased and very enthusiastic about him. He has our strong support, and it's been a very good period of growth and expansion for the museum. I think we have a bit of financing still to go, but that is in sight and I don't see any serious problem there. I think we're well on our way, and indeed the staff will be returning within a year to a new building that's being built on the south side of the present museum, and that will bring the staff back under one roof. What had happened was the staff was taken over to a rented building about ten minutes away.

DENNIS BARRIE: Yes, I've been there.

JOSEPH PULITZER: You've been there. That was a temporary thing during the reconstruction of the building; we had a remodeling of the building. But now that the building is remodeled, with the spaces that had been offices devoted to new galleries, there's a considerable expanesion in exhibition space. But now we must build this building to bring the staff back, and that's in the works. The ground is broken for it; it's on the way, and I hope within a year that it will be finished.

DENNIS BARRIE: In the days before you were a trustee, what kind of role did you play? You obviously gave things to the museum.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes. Well, I had been very friendly always with the directors, I mean on a private basis, and we had always had a very active role in museum affairs. My late wife was very active as a friend of the museum in the friends organization, and my present wife was the curator of the museum for ten years. So I feel quite at home in the museum and I feel very comfortable there.

DENNIS BARRIE: Did you work to help develop the department of contemporary art or modern art? Did you work in that sense?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, not in any specific sense, no. When Charles Buckley began to develop the curatorial staff, it became quite clear that under the old order it was simply not possible for one person, as my wife had done, to try to carry the whole load. Charles Buckley developed a staff of five curators—which is the numerical order that prevails today—and one of those five was twentieth century art, which Jack Cowart [William J. Cowart, III—Ed.] is curating at present. He, as you know, was partly responsible for the Matisse cutouts show that has been receiving such important notices, such good notices. And the catalogue is fine; I've read it and it's excellent. Jack and his colleague in Detroit—is it John Neff?. . . .

DENNIS BARRIE: John Neff.

JOSEPH PULITZER: . . . did a splendid job. That show will open here on the 28th of January.

DENNIS BARRIE: About how early did you begin giving any of your own works to the museum?

JOSEPH PULITZER: That dates back to the early fifties, anyway. I began to give works of art away a number of years ago and have done that quite consistently for the Fogg Art Museum and the Washington University Steinberg Gallery and our own museum for many years. It seems to be quite a sensible thing to do. It not only helps the public, but it also helps the tax return.

DENNIS BARRIE: Did you ever buy specifically for the museum? Was any of your collecting ever done with the museum directly in mind? Or any museum directly in mind?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, that would never have been a primary motive, no. I would certainly give to museums, thoughtfully as possible, trying to give them objects which would supplement or balance their holdings, but I have never gone out deliberately to buy object A, B, or C—or X, Y, Z—knowing that that was something the museum wanted. I haven't done it that way. I've tried to balance out my own collection and then from it withdraw things that would fit into the public collections.

DENNIS BARRIE: You've worked with almost every director of the St. Louis museum in a close personal way. Of the ones you've worked with, who would you say was the most influential in your own collecting?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I would think, taking it all across the board, that probably Perry Rathbone, who was closer to me in age than any of the others and a long-time friend. . . . But I've certainly had a very close give-and-take relationship with the directors of the St. Louis Art Museum, well, at many different levels. I mean, Charles Nagel was the architect of my first attempt at creating my own environment, and it went right along in a very friendly way. I mean, there was never any falling-out or anything of that kind. I think that probably Perry was here longer than the others and therefore that would account partly for that answer.

DENNIS BARRIE: Perry was very active in creating the other collectors in the city, wasn't he?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes, Perry was a great enthusiast—still is, as you know—and he had a big impact and was a great influence on Mrs. Steinberg's collecting. She bought with real taste and enthusiasm and he was nudging her on very much and gave her very good advice. I think it was very good; it was a good supportive activity, and I believe it paid wonderfully to the public, because Mrs. Steinberg left first-rate, absolutely fine things—nineteenth century Impressionist works—to the St. Louis Art Museum, left them as a bequest _____.

DENNIS BARRIE: Did they draw upon you to lend support in a situation in the sense of encouraging the activities of others?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think not in any crude way, but I'd sort of [be?] in the background if needed, right.

DENNIS BARRIE: You are on the acquisitions committee, are you not?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes, I'm the chairman of it.

DENNIS BARRIE: How long have you been in that role?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I've been in that role, let's say, three years, three to four years. We're, I suppose, somewhat limited in the sense that we have the responsibility for the whole range of art history and therefore can't really be as specialized as the Museum of Modern Art acquisitions committee, which would have a narrower field of interest. But our responsibility, of course, is to the board, and ultimately to the public, to be very thoughtful about accepting or acquiring through purchase things that will belong to the public. I mean, the museum is a public museum, as you know, and so there is a real sense of responsibility. The curators give us very conscientious and careful evaluations, as does, of course, the director, all of whom attend our acquisitions meetings. There have been times when lack of enthusiasm has caused something to be set aside or deferred or delayed, and a few times things have been turned down where there would be a divided vote. But I would say that, by and large, if the acquisitions committee does its job. . . . It's job is to perceive that the curators have been conscientious and done their scholarly work, and they do come up with extremely thoughtful presentations of the merit of every individual item that goes into the collections. So we're aided by that, and of course the director gives it his stamp of approval. There's quite a bit of preliminary work done on these things before it even gets to the acquisitions committee. I mean, it has to satisfy the requirements of the curator of that particular department—whatever the object falls in—and then it has to satisfy the director, and then it has to fit the financial requirements of that given period of time, and then it will come to us when they feel that the thing is suitable from all points of view.

DENNIS BARRIE: Have they drawn the members of the acquisitions committee because of particular expertise in certain areas, for example?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Most of the people on the committee have collecting histories in one field or another. I would say certainly at least four of us are actively collecting, so that while it's usually in the nineteenth or twentieth century, at least the people are attuned to what art is all about. In fact, it's more than four. I would say that the big majority of those people are buying works of art in one form or another. It would either be graphics, it could be paintings, sculpture. . . . But all are collectors, yes.

DENNIS BARRIE: Now you also maintain a role at the Fogg Museum at Harvard and also at the Steinberg [Gallery—Ed.]. Would you go into some discussion on what you are doing and have been doing at the Fogg and in what capacity you serve them?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Yes. I was elected an overseer two years ago. I was aware that I would have to chair a committee, a visiting committee, at Harvard, and I was hopeful that I would get into the museum field or the fine arts department. And that worked out quite well. I was appointed chairman of the fine arts department committee, and I was appointed vice-chairman of the museum's committee. They have two committees, co-equal, that meet jointly. I'm not sure that that structure is the best, but it's the way it has evolved. The two committees confer and often meet jointly, and always meet jointly at least one of the two days that we spend at Harvard each year. So there is very close collaboration. And then as chairman, I must report to the overseers to record what had happened at the meeting, and what the problems of the department are, and what solutions are in sight, and to make recommendations—or at least to record the recommendations made by the members of the committee. So I will make my report in February. Under the new arrangements that are now coming into being, the chairman of the department, whose name is Oleg Grabar—Professor Grabar—will also be present at a meeting of the arts and humanities committee of the board of overseers and will have a chance to make his comments on my report, which I think is a very healthy way of getting both sides of a report out on the table. It's new, and I anticipate that at this same meeting the museum's committee will be reported on by Charlie Cunningham—Charles E. Cunningham, Jr., and whose father, by the way, was a colleague during my last year at Harvard and has been a distinguished museum director in his own right. And now his son is chairing the museum's committee. And probably the same principle will apply: that Seymour Slive, the director of the Fogg, will be present and give his views on the progress of the museum drive, which is a major drive to restore and rehabilitate a building which is now fifty years old and needs expansion.

DENNIS BARRIE: What problems or types of things are you normally confronted with on this committee?

JOSEPH PULITZER: It ranges all the way from curriculum to faculty retirements, appointments that need to be considered, strengthening fields, such as, two years ago Chinese art was not taught at Harvard in any consistent way; now it is. Modern art was very much in need of strengthening; that has been done. So we're into the whole question of faculty, curriculum, and support for activities that perhaps don't come down through the Harvard administration. An example would be the conservation department, which is very active and very sophisticated

and advanced and has been in a leadership position training younger conservators for the university museums in this country. They need support, and all visiting committees, I think, are the first primary source of support which does not come down through the faculty of arts and sciences. So it's a very important role that these committees play as support groups at Harvard. We are now debating a bit—debating may be too strong a word—but at least "discussing" how often those committees should meet. The overseers seem to lean now toward a meeting every three years, and the members of the committees that I am on feel that that is too infrequent and that continuity and commitment will be lost if they don't meet annually. Now perhaps there will be a resolution of that. I hope so.

DENNIS BARRIE: Do you find it taxing to be involved?

JOSEPH PULITZER: No, no. It's very stimulating and fun. I enjoy it greatly. It takes some time and effort, but it's very rewarding and you feel that you're into the current events of the art world. . . .

DENNIS BARRIE: Very much so?

JOSEPH PULITZER: . . . very much, and in education, and then helping to shape the future of students at Harvard is a real challenge and something that I enjoy greatly.

DENNIS BARRIE: It's very important. Just a few more thoughts on the Fogg and we'll end with that today. When was your initial involvement at the Fogg? I mean, after you had been a student, when did you again become active working with them?

JOSEPH PULITZER: Oh, that goes back for many years. I was on the visiting committee as a member on and off for years. I have more red boxes saying, "Thanks," or "In gratitude for service to Harvard," that I would receive as a token of appreciation after rotating off of a committee and then I would be rotated back, so I can supply cigarette boxes in red leather, in Harvard crimson, to any number of tables in our house.

DENNIS BARRIE: One for every room. How did the idea evolve that you would show your collection as benefit for the Fogg; that was in 1957.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, that was in 1957.

DENNIS BARRIE: Right, yes.

JOSEPH PULITZER: Well, I think the idea just sort of evolved. I can't remember who first presented the idea, but it did seem like something a little bit unusual. It was the first time that I had ever gotten involved in really showing what we had done, and I was very enthused about having a chance to do that in a nice setting. Knoedler put it on in a very handsome manner, and then it went to Harvard. I think over $10,000—which is 1957 dollars; it would be quite a considerable sum of money—was raised by that exhibition—the admissions, you know. So that was a constructive thing, and it got extremely good notices, which were interesting to read. I thought it was a very nice occasion all around.

DENNIS BARRIE: Was that a first for the Fogg?

JOSEPH PULITZER: I don't know whether it was a first, but certainly it must have been among the earliest ones that had been done. And it started the whole procedure of cataloguing private collections, which has now continued. Harvard has put out now a number of catalogues of private collections —through the Fogg's mechanism, but Harvard is the publisher. In that way, they are making a record of what's going on over the years in this country in acquisitions and in the scholarly documentation of works of art in private hands, that ultimately many of them go into public hands.

DENNIS BARRIE: How long did they work on the cataloguing of your own collection? It must have been an extensive amount of time.

JOSEPH PULITZER: It took them a year of preparation, as well as I can recall. Charles Chetham, who is the director of the Smith College Museum [of Art—Ed.] now, at that time was a graduate assistant on the faculty at Harvard. He did volume one, and then the next year we did a second volume, which took about a year, and then about, oh, I suppose twelve years passed, and then a third volume was also done by Charlie—to which, I might add, people contributed; that is, writers, critics, art historians would be invited to write an essay on an artist that was particularly close to them—or whose work they understood closely, I should say. Those essays we did in a bit of a haphazard way. But on the other hand, looking back at it, it's quite an interesting cross section, because you get a critical viewpoint of various minds working at different levels or with different approaches, and I think it's a good cross section of what artistic criticism was at the time the book was published. I think if there is a fourth volume ever, we will do that a bit in a more organized and premeditated manner—I mean, select carefully the people ahead of time and not have it quite as informal as it has been, but try to draw that together as more

of a point to be made, that here is art criticism as it exists in 19xx, whatever date.

END OF INTERVIEW

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